

UNIVERSITY *of*  
TASMANIA

**SELF-SERVING OR ACTING FOR  
THE COMMON GOOD?**

**THE INDEPENDENCE OF GEORGE MEREDITH  
(1778-1856) IN VAN DIEMEN'S LAND**

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## ABSTRACT

The period between 1820 and 1850 was one of the most febrile, controversial and dynamic periods in Tasmanian history. It was a time of increased occupation by Europeans, with the consequent escalating clash with the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, bringing about the 'Black War' and the work of George Augustus Robinson. Transportation of convicts to the colony grew and their management evolved from assignment to the probation system until ultimately, the 'Anti-Transportation' movement arose. Institutions such as administrative independence for the colony and a Supreme Court were achieved, and calls for others, such as a free press, trial by jury and a house of assembly, were made periodically by disaffected settlers.

In 1821, former Lieutenant of Marines George Meredith arrived into this environment to carve out a new life for himself and his family. He brought with him a desire to be unconfined in his endeavours and to resist any limitation on his advancement, particularly from government. He used the term 'independent' to describe himself in a number of contexts, such as the editorial in his *Colonist* newspaper that stated '[Meredith's] principles are those of freedom and independence'; another time, he declared himself politically independent. This independence was a manifestation of a broader, self-serving attitude that drove him to publicly campaign on all the issues named above. According to his rhetoric, these campaigns were for the colonists' benefit, the 'common good', but on closer examination are found to have been waged by Meredith primarily for his own, self-serving advancement.

Meredith had a positive relationship with his first Lieutenant-Governor, William Sorell, who accommodated the settler's free-wheeling ways, especially in his accumulation of land, prized by Meredith above all. On the other hand, the punctilious and authoritarian George



Arthur, leading the newly independent colony (which came about after the Meredith-led independence campaign), restricted Meredith's ability to do as he pleased. The settler soon began a war of attrition against him, fought out both in letters and in public campaigns, designed to weaken the Lieutenant-Governor's rule. Each inflicted wounds on the other, but Arthur maintained the upper hand.

This thesis, by close examination of abundant primary sources, including many hundreds of George Meredith's letters to his family, government, business associates and friends, presents a first biography of Meredith from his birth in Birmingham in 1788 to his death in Swansea in 1856, the year Tasmania became a self-governing colony. It examines his involvement in the press, socio-political campaigns, whaling, agriculture, his relationships with his family and interactions with Aboriginal people and bushrangers, all put into context by discussion and analysis of historical and thematic literature published from the 1830s to the present.

The popular construction of Meredith as only an 'extirpationist' of the indigenous people is punctured by this thesis and it will demonstrate that he was more central to many of the campaigns for socio-political change than he has been given credit for. In other campaigns, where he had lesser impact, it is argued that he held back because he was unable to drive his personal agenda. The thesis adds to the knowledge and understanding of Tasmanian history during a crucial period and challenges some interpretations that have found their way into the literature. Meredith's personal letters comprise an extraordinary record of his love and passion for his wife and the analysis of these letters here will add to the literature on colonial family relationships and epistolary studies in general.

Meredith's legacy survives in Tasmania's social, political, cultural and built environment to an extent and breadth that few other settlers of the period can lay claim to.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## STYLE AND SPELLING

Where quotations are used from letters and diaries, spelling will be as per the original, and in these, [sic] is used only when there may be some ambiguity. The notation [sic] is also used when words are added by me in a citation or quote, either where there is no title to the material cited, or to clarify the content. Underlining and other emphasis in quotations will be as per the original text. Sometimes only part of a word is underlined in the original and in these cases, the full word is underlined in the quote.

The sentence structure in George Meredith's letters was often difficult to follow, especially in respect of punctuation. His letters often contained very long sentences sprinkled with many words with a capitalised first letter and various marks on the page which might have intended to be commas, full stops or dashes. Quoted text has been punctuated by me to make it more easily readable, while preserving the meaning, as best I could interpret.

Long book references are abbreviated in the footnotes, for instance, terminated at a colon or with '...', unless the full title is necessary to convey the topic. Where certain archival references are repetitive in a chapter, their source and title are not repeated in footnotes after the first use, with only the numerical reference and page numbers given subsequently. In all cases, full citations are given in the bibliography.



## FRONTISPIECE



George Meredith by Thomas Bock, nd, but possibly 1838.

Reproduced with permission of the East Coast Heritage Museum, Swansea.

Commentary: Emancipist Thomas Bock became a 'society portraitist' in the 1830s and 1840s. The pair of crayon and opaque white on paper portraits of Meredith and his wife (see Chapter 4) may have been done in 1838, the only year known for sure that Mary visited Hobart following their arrival in 1821. Queen Museum and Art Gallery, *Thomas Bock: Convict engraver, society portraitist* (Launceston, 1991), pp. 3 and 43; Louisa Meredith to Mary Meredith, 12 April 1838, *Louisa Bell (1808-1890). Letters to Mary Ann Meredith. 6 letters. 3 Apr 1834-7 May 1841*, NS123/1/28, Tasmanian Archives.

## INTRODUCTION

### AIMS AND CONTEXTS OF THE STUDY

George Meredith (1778-1856) was a prominent and combative settler in Van Diemen's Land for over thirty years following his arrival in 1821. This was a critical time, especially following the 1823 reports into the colony of New South Wales (including Van Diemen's Land) by Commissioner John Thomas Bigge that strongly influenced colonial policy for years to come.<sup>1</sup> Historian Michael Roe argued: 'the real birth of the colony was in the twenties, with Bigge its midwife. The settlers responded to this situation, taking the initiative in every field. That they did so in politics, not hesitating to adopt a radical stand where necessary, still further constricted other groups'.<sup>2</sup>

Meredith was in the colony through the latter part of William Sorell's Lieutenant-Governorship, all the contentious administration of George Arthur (including the 'Black Line') and several administrations thereafter; he saw the change from assignment to the probation system of convict management and finally the 'Anti-Transportation' movement. The social and political evolution of Van Diemen's Land up to 1856, when it was re-named Tasmania, was turbulent and uneven. There was no doubt that the main concern of the colony up to the mid-nineteenth century was, as Harper and Constantine explained, to house, punish and, if possible, reform the tens of thousands of convicts sent from Britain.<sup>3</sup> Superimposed on the penal colony were settlers, who comprised a changing mix of freed convicts, tradesmen, merchants and capital-rich settlers seeking land and the trappings of

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<sup>1</sup> L Robson, *A history of Tasmania: Vol. I Van Diemen's Land from the earliest times to 1855* (Melbourne, 1983), pp. 139-141.

<sup>2</sup> M Roe, *Quest for authority in eastern Australia 1835-1851* (Melbourne, 1965), p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> M Harper and S Constantine, *Migration and empire* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 41-48.

a colonial gentry. As Connell and Irving argued: 'By the 1810s and 1820s ... increasing numbers of moneyed newcomers ... went directly into the pastoral industry. By the 1830s, something approaching a regional ruling class had formed in the countryside of Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales'.<sup>4</sup>

Meredith was the kind of settler historian Geoffrey Bolton described as a member of the post-Napoleonic War 'upper class' with ambitions to form part of that new colonial class.<sup>5</sup> He was certainly not part of a group of what an early writer described as 'temporary sojourners', who intended to repatriate themselves and their new-found wealth from the colony back to England.<sup>6</sup> He was emigrating permanently to the New World and to take advantage of all it offered. Nadel stated baldly that settlers of Meredith's era 'rarely permitted themselves the illusion that they had come out to plant an empire', but this notion is arguable in the case of Meredith, at least in his public pronouncements.<sup>7</sup> Connell and Irving were closer to the mark in arguing the obvious that 'the British state was not simply transplanted into Australia ... it [had to be] constructed, or reconstructed in the new conditions'.<sup>8</sup>

James Boyce looked at the European settlement of Van Diemen's Land from the perspective of the influence of the environment on both convicts and the free settlers. He found the island colony a 'veritable Eden' compared to New South Wales in respect to the abundance of water, game and accessible grasslands.<sup>9</sup> George Meredith certainly benefited from this condition, walking onto a wide swath of free (to him), arable land and

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<sup>4</sup> R Connell and T Irving, *Class structure in Australian history* (Melbourne, 1980), p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> GC Bolton, 'The idea of a colonial gentry', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 51 (October, 1968), p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> A Marjoribanks quoted in G Nadel, *Australia's colonial culture* (Melbourne, 1957), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Nadel, *Colonial culture*, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Connell and Irving, *Class structure*, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> J Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land* (Melbourne, 2008), p. 4.

with the additional benefit of whaling from the adjacent waters. He grew prosperous in spite of the neglect of his farm through his long absences and adverse court outcomes, as will be recounted later. Meredith's experiences with the indigenous people also sits comfortably with Boyce's thesis that the settlers and the Aboriginal people existed relatively harmoniously until the settler expansionism became fully evident to the Aboriginal people in the late 1820s. Lastly, although just a detail, Boyce's observations on the Aboriginal people's desire to have and use dogs brought by settlers is supported by Meredith's experience.<sup>10</sup> In his reply to the Aboriginal Committee questionnaire (see Chapter 5 for discussion) concerning why attacks on 'Whites' had occurred in his area, Meredith replied in part 'The chief originating cause in such appeared to be a desire on their part for the possession of dogs although in the latter [killing] other property was plundered'.<sup>11</sup>

Meredith played an active public role in many of the key political and social campaigns up to the mid-1830s and his farms were involved in the escalating conflict between Europeans and the indigenous people in the 1820s and early 1830s. Most historians writing on the period have portrayed him merely as a noisy antagonist to the government and/or an 'extirpationist' in respect to Aboriginal people.<sup>12</sup> This thesis is a first biography of Meredith

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>11</sup> Colonial Secretary's Office, *General Correspondence*, CSO1/1/323, TA, pp. 355-358; see also Appendix 2 of this work for a complete transcription. That said, several errors in Boyce's work in respect to Meredith should be noted. On p. 155 the source of his end-note 46 does not appear to be backed up by any primary source; on p. 190 his end-note 12 regarding arming his stockmen against Aboriginal people is sourced from FitzSymons' book, not Amos' diary. FitzSymons' book is also the source for end-note 13, p. 190 and in both cases Meredith is mostly talking about bushrangers, not Aboriginal people and the letter should be read in the context of Meredith expressing a grievance to Arthur. Boyce's citing of Louisa Anne Meredith's *My Home in Tasmania*, p. 76, supposedly saying that she never saw a black swan at Great Swan Port (supporting Boyce's contention of damage done to the ecosystems) is incorrect. In fact, she wrote of how she observed and described their habitats.

<sup>12</sup> For example, NJB Plomley, (ed.), *Friendly mission The Tasmanian journals and papers of George Augustus Robinson*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Launceston, 2008), p. 117.

and will demonstrate that his activities and influences in respect of the settlement were greater than previously detailed. His private papers reveal facets of his life and personality beyond the public sphere and he deserves closer study to deepen and clarify our understanding of his contribution to the socio-political evolution of Tasmania in the first half of the nineteenth century and, where the evidence allows, to understand his motivations.

A key aim of the thesis will be to illustrate and animate his public life, and in doing this, to determine what motivated him to become so involved in issues such as ‘independence of Van Diemen’s Land from New South Wales’, ‘freedom of the press’, ‘trial by jury’ and the ‘establishment of a House of Assembly’. The thesis will argue that his involvement in these campaigns was not for some ‘common good’—that is, for the benefit of his fellow colonists, as he often claimed—but rather that he acted mostly in a self-serving way, using the public campaigns to advance his own interests. As Nicholas Shakespeare wrote of Meredith and his ally, Anthony Fenn Kemp, ‘They championed political liberalism and representative politics just so long as it was their interests being represented’.<sup>13</sup> Alex Low, writing from a legal history perspective, described Kemp and Meredith as having ‘liberal pretensions’ but in reality ‘wanted to discredit Arthur’.<sup>14</sup> Another characteristic of Meredith was that he strove to be ‘independent’ in many regards—free from neighbours, from government interference and free from being dependent on ship owners and others who might impede his interests. He also claimed to be politically ‘independent’.<sup>15</sup> To exercise his

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<sup>13</sup> N Shakespeare, *In Tasmania* (Milsons Point, 2004), p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> A Low, ‘Sir Alfred Stephen and the jury question in Van Diemen’s Land’, *University of Tasmania Law Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2002), p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> *Tasmanian Advertiser*, 14 April 1826, p. 3.

independence, he needed to be financially sound and that meant acquiring as much land as he could in his adopted colony.

What is meant by the expression 'the common good' here? It is a topic that has been well ventilated in the literature.<sup>16</sup> Noble looked at it from the perspective of reform in nineteenth-century Leicester and noted that changing public attitudes introduced ideals for government to bring utility to as many members of a community as possible. 'The ability to claim to be acting for the common good', he argued, 'remains a necessary part of legitimising any agent in terms of public authority'.<sup>17</sup> Jaede observed that the notion of the common good may imply the existence of a 'community' with shared moral values, as opposed to a pluralistic 'society' and this idea impinges here.<sup>18</sup> If Meredith was, in his heart, acting for a 'common good', what would have been his commonality? Probably not the large convict population nor George Arthur's administrative elite. Rather, the common good would be thought by him in terms of how free settlers could be freed from the restrictions Arthur had placed on them.

It can be legitimately argued that almost all who came to the colonies, including the leadership, were 'in it for themselves'. Self-interest was a powerful driver of the development of the new colonies in legitimate and non-legitimate ways. Politically, in New South Wales, the New South Wales 'Rum' Corps were ruthless in the preservation of their privileges and power and were prepared to usurp the Governor to maintain them. Another Governor, Macquarie, was eventually driven from office after promoting the interests of

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, PN Miller, *Defining the common good: Empire, religion and philosophy in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994) takes the concept from Cicero to just prior to Meredith's adulthood.

<sup>17</sup> M Noble, 'The common good and borough reform: Leicester c. 1820-50', *Midland History*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2016), p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> M Jaede, 'The concept of the common good', University of Edinburgh working paper, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Jaede.pdf>.

emancipists in his colony, which brought him against the powerful interests of the Macarthur family and other members of the elite. This was the same style of political opposition employed by the remnants of the Arthur regime (Montagu, Forster and others) employed against Lieutenant-Governor Franklin when they perceived their power was being eroded by the influence of Lady Franklin (Chapter 9). Self-interest shaped most aspects of colonial society and politics, but that does not negate the need to look closely at individuals who stood on broad platforms against ‘tyranny’ and adopting the libertarian slogans such as a ‘free press’, to see if their rhetoric matched their real intent.

Personal independence is a concept that has been examined in the literature, particularly in the context of late eighteenth, early nineteenth century Britain. Michael McCormack established that ‘independence’ did not have the same meaning in Georgian English as it does today.<sup>19</sup> It connoted not just autonomy but also where self-mastery and conscience could be exercised and so the individual becomes ‘disinterested, incorruptible and impartial’. It was said to be a very ‘English’ characteristic. Nineteenth-century author Edward Bulwer-Lytton addressed the subject, in which he related independence to selfishness, a characteristic that will be demonstrated in Meredith’s personal relationships:

It is an old maxim enough amongst [the English] that we possess the sturdy sense of independence; we value ourselves on it;—yet the sense of independence is often but the want of sympathy with others.

There was a certain merchant sojourning at an inn, whom the boots by mistake called betimes in the morning. “Sir,” quoth the boots, “the day’s breaking.” The merchant turned round with a grim look—“Let it break,” growled he, “it owes me nothing!”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> M McCormack, *The independent man: Citizenship and gender politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005) treats the subject thoroughly.

<sup>20</sup> HL Bulwer-Lytton, *England and the English* (New York, 1874), p. 23.

Be it as it may that the English were by nature independent, not many of Meredith's fellow emigrants went so far out of their way to act out, display and declare their independence as much as he did. Chapter 1 will introduce the speculation that the teenage Meredith was exposed to Dissenter or even Radical thinking in the 1790s. After joining the Marines, he came face to face with the 1797 Navy mutiny, which probably originated in Dissenter thinking. By the time he returned from the Napoleonic Wars in 1806, a reform movement had been revived in England and government corruption was seen to be fought by 'independent men'.<sup>21</sup> How much Meredith was directly exposed to the debates and ideas of the reform movement while he was on his farms for the fourteen years prior to his emigration is unknown, but it is unlikely that he would have been ignorant of it entirely.

His preparations for emigration, and actions in his first few years in Van Diemen's Land, revealed a number of aspects of his determination to be personally independent. He made prior arrangements to be supplied with stock on arrival, so as not to be at the mercy of unknown local suppliers; he trained medically to have some autonomy in that field; he co-charted his vessel to the colony, so as not to be reliant on the whims of a vessel-master; he settled away from existing settlements, so as not to have neighbours who might hem him in.<sup>22</sup>

After Meredith was settled in Van Diemen's Land, he used the word 'independent' directly a number of times and in a number of contexts. In 1826 at a 'Sorell Dinner', he described himself 'an Independent man, for he was neither a Government appendant, nor the

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<sup>21</sup> McCormack, *Independent man*, p. 156.

<sup>22</sup> These are all described in detail in later chapters.



partizan of a faction'.<sup>23</sup> He again described himself as independent in a political sense in a letter to Colonial Secretary John Burnett in 1828.<sup>24</sup> After a dispute with the government concerning shipping to Great Swan Port about 1830, he named a new vessel 'Independent'.<sup>25</sup> In a letter to his wife in 1832, he wrote that he had 'struggled hard through life to achieve something like independence'.<sup>26</sup> Finally, in 1833, his *Colonist* newspaper, which was later described by him as being established on 'independent' principles, published an editorial, probably written by Meredith himself, stating '[Meredith's] principles are those of freedom and independence'.<sup>27</sup> His description of himself as politically independent, together with his campaigns aimed against Arthur and his administration, fit neatly into McCormack's definitions of 'the independent man' in the early nineteenth century, as one who was outside the establishment and 'who could resist the lure of patronage and speak his mind in the cause of truth'.<sup>28</sup> Meredith's *Colonist* frequently railed against government patronage, seeking the 'truth'.<sup>29</sup>

McCormack argued that the primary idea behind the 'independent man' of the time was political, but in Meredith's case, it was clearly broader than that, as his actions in respect of his vessel, his land selection and other issues demonstrate. In her study of

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<sup>23</sup> *Tasmanian Advertiser*, 14 April 1826, p. 3. In a letter to his wife, he referred to this as his 'independent speech', Meredith to his wife, 22 April 1826, *George Meredith Letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith*. 113 letters, NS123/1/1 #22, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter TA). Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/1 series will be omitted but full citations are given in the bibliography.

<sup>24</sup> Meredith to Burnett, 30 December 1828, Colonial Secretary's Office, *General Correspondence*, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 51. Henceforth the title of the CSO1 series will be omitted but full citations are given in the bibliography.

<sup>25</sup> E Meredith, *Memoir of the late George Meredith* (Masterton, 1897), p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Meredith to his wife, 1 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #310, TA.

<sup>27</sup> Meredith, September 1836, 'Certificate' re *Colonist* newspaper, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, Individuals A-K*, CO280/88, p. 439, Australian Joint Copying Project microfilm #284, TA; *Colonist*, 16 July 1833, p. 2. At the time the *Colonist* had no defined editor, and Meredith was probably the sole proprietor—see Appendix 5.

<sup>28</sup> McCormack, *Independent man*, p. 163.

<sup>29</sup> For instance, *Colonist*, 14 May 1833, p. 2, 16 July 1833, p. 2, 13 May 1834, p. 4.

independence, manners and manliness in colonial Australia, Karen Downing noted that 'claims for independence' were a traditional foundation of adult manhood and put forward reasons why claims for personal independence and displays of manners sat uneasily in colonial society. She noted that was no 'consensus' as to what immigrants to the colonies meant by the term 'independence', citing a number of different ways men sought to be independent.<sup>30</sup> Downing seemed troubled by these differences, describing them as a 'dilemma' and that men 'struggled with competing imperatives', but surely they were just a manifestation of different circumstances of the immigrants.<sup>31</sup> Even within his own range of circumstances, Meredith sought independence in many and varied forms associated both with his emigration and after his arrival, and this will be demonstrated in later chapters.

Looking more broadly on the concept of 'independence', in the nineteenth century Australia it connoted masculinity, manhood, self-control and excluded women.<sup>32</sup> This manly independence also brought forth frontier violence against Aboriginal people, discussed at length in Woollacott's Chapter 6 which made the salient observation that the British male, striding the new Australian continent as part of the Empire expansion across the world, was actually responsible for the violence against the native peoples, rather than their convict servants, as usually portrayed (including in this work):

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<sup>30</sup> K Downing, 'William Henty stands on his legs in front of Governor Gipps. Independence, manners and manliness in colonial Australia', *History Australia*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2013), pp. 76-79. Both Downing and McCormack approached their subject in part from looking at the role of gender in history and in society.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> A Woollacott, *Settler society in the Australian colonies: Self-government and imperial culture* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 124-125 and 152. That said, Woollacott was herself able to tease out a number of instances of women's independence, albeit in the middle part of the century: pp. 139, 145.

Connecting the dots between frontier history, political history, and gender history suggests that we need to consider the ways in which violence may have shaped ideas of masculinity, conceptions of political authority in the Australian colonies, and hence settler colonialism on a larger scale.<sup>33</sup>

In a similar vein, Downing framed the argument that men were *restless* in pursuit of land (a key attribute of their independence) and they projected their unsettledness on the indigenous people, thus weakening the latter's claims and opening the way for European occupation of the continent.<sup>34</sup>

Both of these themes can be applied to George Meredith. He was restless—as Chapter 1 will detail, he moved from the Marines to Berkshire, then Wales and onto the New World, and when there, was seemingly unable to settle down on his land. His restlessness, and the consequential frequent long absences from his farm, has blurred the extent of his culpability in the killings and harassment of the indigenous people who occupied the land he chose to settle on, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

If 'independence' is bound to the possession of land, then the strength of that independence will be linked to the strength of the ownership or occupation of that land. Lisa Ford in *Settler Sovereignty* examined the nature of a settler's strength of 'title' in the context of the nature of the route to dispossession of the land's original occupiers.<sup>35</sup> This is discussed in more detail below.

Meredith's engagement with bushrangers and the Tasmanian Aboriginal people invites reflection on the nature of settler colonialism in Van Diemen's Land and the other

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 176.

<sup>34</sup> K Downing, *Restless men: Masculinity and Robinson Crusoe, 1788-1840* (London, 2014), p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> L Ford, *Settler sovereignty: Jurisdiction and indigenous people in America and Australia, 1788–1836* (Harvard, 2010), pp. 75-84, 103-104.

Australian colonies during his time there, from 1821 to 1856, which Woollacott found to be a 'foundational period in Australian history, arguably at least as important as Federation'.<sup>36</sup> Woollacott challenged the model of a simple migration of Britons to the Australian colonies (be it free or transported) and painted a picture of a mobile population, calling on networks of family in various parts of the continent, while at the same time, the settlers as a whole were displacing the Aboriginal people and asserting their 'rights' under the expansion of the British Empire. Whilst Meredith was not mobile within the Australian colonies and didn't rely on any family network, he was very much of the other polity described by Woollacott:

a culture based on land grants, the exploitation of convict labour, the dispossession of Indigenous people, and the establishment of the pastoral industry, as well as whaling and sealing; a culture shaped through adaptation to the Australian landscape, coastline, climate, and topography.<sup>37</sup>

A number of authors have examined the culpability of settler landholders in the active killing and driving-out of indigenous people from their land. Woollacott argued that 'respectable men' seeking the distinction of self-government turned a 'blind eye' to the frontier violence, but, as noted above, were nevertheless responsible.<sup>38</sup> Whether Meredith had such a blind eye is discussed in Chapter 5.

Elbourne also wrote on the 'virtue' that the settlers felt over their superior use of the land which justified them dispossessing the indigenous people of it and reiterated the awkward question, if colonial settlers were British citizens, should not the indigenous people also be

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<sup>36</sup> Woollacott, *Settler society*, p. 2. See L Veracini, *Settler colonialism a theoretical overview* (London, 2010) for a wide discourse on the subject and T Rowse, 'Indigenous heterogeneity', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 45 (2014), pp. 297-310 for rebuttal of the principles espoused by Veracini and Veracini's reply: L Veracini, 'Defending settler colonial studies', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 45 (2014), pp. 311-316.

<sup>37</sup> Woollacott, *Settler society*, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 153-154.

citizens, and subject to the protection of British law?<sup>39</sup> While noting the evangelical nature of the 1835-36 Select Committee on Aborigines, held in London, Elbourne did not bring into her discussion arguably the most religiously inclined administrator in the Australian colonies, George Arthur, whose own morality tempered his attitude to the rising violence in his own colony through the 1820s (Chapter 5). On the other hand, Carey's recent monograph, *Empire of Hell*, considering the role of religion in the context of convict transportation to Van Diemen's Land and the British Empire generally, devoted a chapter to George Arthur's tenure in Van Diemen's Land.<sup>40</sup> Arthur's high paternalism towards his indigenous charges only went so far, and as a discourse on the question of the moral and religious transformation of convicts, Carey does not venture on its apparent failings, where the impact of convict stockmen and escapees on the indigenous population is considered.<sup>41</sup>

Reynolds examined the opposition amongst individuals and groups of settlers against settler colonialism and the concomitant loss of the indigenous peoples' land, arguing that they were hearing a 'whispering in their hearts' about the nature of Australian settlement.<sup>42</sup> It is unlikely Meredith heard any of these whispers, but as noted in Chapter 5, his friend Thomas George Gregson did rail against the treatment of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

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<sup>39</sup> E Elbourne, 'The sin of the settler: The 1835-36 Select Committee on Aborigines and debates over virtue and conquest in the early nineteenth-century British white settler empire', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2003), Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/cch.2004.0003. No page numbers are given in the on-line presentation.

<sup>40</sup> HM Carey, *Empire of hell: Religion and the campaign to end convict transportation in the British Empire, 1788-1875* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 54.

<sup>41</sup> As an aside, Carey's point on p. 22 that Quakers in Van Diemen's Land were not against transportation but rather wished for reformation and religious instruction of those transported, is supported by the finding in this work where the Quaker Francis Cotton signed a pro-transportation petition—see Chapter 9.

<sup>42</sup> H Reynolds, 'Action and anxiety: The long history of settler protest about the nature of Australian colonization', *Settler Colonial Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2014), p. 334.

Ford argued that in Georgia and New South Wales prior to the early 1820s, the settlers and the indigenous people acted in a framework of adversarial conduct or war that allowed both sides onto the 'playing field'. Thereafter, the settlers' desire for certainty of occupation of their increasingly large and valuable agricultural concerns required the removal or elimination of the local people so the settlers could exert uncontested sovereignty over the land.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the settlers played a higher card to delegitimise the original inhabitants and remove them from the landscape. Smandych recapitulated those arguments.<sup>44</sup> Ford's dating of the break in the style of settler/indigenous interaction in Georgia and New South Wales interestingly coincides with the break c1823 that Plomley identified as a change in the conflict between settlers in Van Diemen's Land and the Tasmanian Aboriginal people—an initial 'preliminary' period and then the 'Black War' period from 1824.<sup>45</sup> Plomley identified the reasons for the change differently from Ford, as did Ryan.<sup>46</sup> They ascribed the escalation in the conflict during the 1820s to the indigenous people, as a matter of survival, rather than the settlers pre-emptively clearing the field. Chapter 5 here traces George Meredith's own journey from a personal benign attitude to the indigenous people, to a violently opposed one from c1828.

Mar and Edmonds found much the same course of settler/Aboriginal collision as others—an uneasy tension and sporadic fighting up to the mid-1820s replaced afterwards with more violent guerrilla-type warfare by the indigenous people in reaction to the swarming of settlers across their lands, which was met with violent retaliation by settlers. This

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<sup>43</sup> Ford, *Settler sovereignty*, especially pp. 13-29 and 183-203.

<sup>44</sup> R Smandych, 'Colonialism, settler colonialism, and law: Settler revolutions and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples through law in the long nineteenth century', *Settler Colonial Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2013), pp. 82-101.

<sup>45</sup> NJB Plomley, *The Aboriginal / settler clash in Van Diemen's Land 1803-1831* (Hobart, 1992), pp. 13-14.

<sup>46</sup> L Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines: A History since 1803* (Sydney, 2008), pp. 66-68.

prompted a more aggressive stance from the administrators, Arthur in the case of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>47</sup>

Settler colonial attitudes were alive and well within even the second generation of the Meredith family in Van Diemen's Land. Meredith's niece and daughter-in-law, the writer, artist and poet Louisa Anne Meredith used her book *My Home in Tasmania* to claim an uncontested right of her family and people to occupy and develop the lands they chose, to the exclusion of the indigenous people. Her writings challenge the narratives by some researchers that women tended to be sympathetic to indigenous peoples and be part of the subjugated cohort within the patriarchal settler society, as noted by Grimshaw and Standish.<sup>48</sup> Louisa Anne Meredith wrote freely and unashamedly on her taming of the Van Diemen's Land landscape to become her substitute of the England she left behind and also of the fault and brutality of the native peoples in the uneven contest between the races.<sup>49</sup>

In his private life, Meredith was passionate and assertive. The large archive of his personal and private letters has allowed the argument of self-interest over a common good to be extended to his personal life. His first marriage may have been more for property than love and Meredith took the family nurse as a mistress. When his first wife died, he later asserted that the chief consideration in choosing his mistress as his second wife was to look after the children of his first marriage and he implied that his first marriage was loveless. Notwithstanding his reasons, the second marriage certainly was full of love and passion as

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<sup>47</sup> TB Mar and P Edmonds, 'Indigenous and settler relations', in A Bashford and S Macintyre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Australia Volume 1 Indigenous and Colonial Australia*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Melbourne, 2013), pp. 346-348.

<sup>48</sup> P Grimshaw and A Standish, 'Making Tasmania home: Louisa Meredith's "Colonizing Prose"', *Frontiers: A Journal of women studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1/2 (2007), p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> LA Meredith *My Home in Tasmania during a residence of nine years, Vol. 1 and 2*, first published 1852 in London, facsimile edition (Swansea, 2003); landscape: pp. 155-157, 239, 273; native peoples: pp. 192-193, 218 and elsewhere.

attested by Meredith's letters. He indulged his daughters, but drove his sons very hard and two became estranged from him.

In addition to the government and his family, over the decade after his arrival, Meredith concerned himself both with bushrangers and the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. It was a period of dramatic race conflict, concluding with the 'Black Line' and his own 'Freycinet Line'. In closely examining his letters and actions during this time, the thesis will argue that the popularly held view of Meredith as an 'extirpationist' and a heartless opponent of indigenous people is not an accurate portrayal and that his attitude to Aboriginal people changed over the decade from 1821. Whilst ending with an expression of 'annihilation', for the most part Meredith seemed ambivalent about the threat from Aboriginal people, and a degree of sympathy for them early on might be discerned from closer analysis of his writings.

If the aims of this study are fulfilled, we will have not only an illustration of the contribution that this substantial land holder made to the political and social development of Van Diemen's Land during the period 1821 to his death in 1856, but also what may have driven him to make those interventions and whether his private life was also shaped in a similar fashion. This will add a new dimension to the overall study of the development of Tasmania, one which is under-represented in the literature and it may open fresh avenues for investigation.



## THE THESIS AS A BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE MEREDITH

Author and biographer Jacqueline Kent put forward several reasons why subjects are chosen for biography, but noted that a personal connection was important.<sup>50</sup> My first encounter with George Meredith was soon after I became the lead researcher and writer for a proposed book on colonial buildings and properties in the former Glamorgan municipality, on the east coast of Tasmania.<sup>51</sup> Meredith was the largest landholder and responsible for several of the most iconic houses described in the book, so he was a point of extensive research. As the research continued, I realised that not only was he a multi-faceted character and that the archival record concerning him was extensive, but also that he seemed to have been placed into an inappropriate pigeon-hole by the literature. Thus, the idea of a biographical study of George Meredith came about.

This thesis will be by genre a first biography of George Meredith and will draw on many and varied resources to define the man, his actions and his motives. It will bring the various threads of his campaigns and interests together to explain not only why he acted as he did, but to demonstrate his wider influence on the socio-political evolution of the colony. As Lee contended: 'Biography is never just the personal story of one life. It always has political and social implications', and this is certainly the case with Meredith.<sup>52</sup> As Fletcher wrote of biographies, 'the more that is known about the men and women who form society the greater will be our understanding of society itself'.<sup>53</sup> By looking at George Meredith in detail, and his influence over a colony ruled by a Lieutenant-Governor appointed from

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<sup>50</sup> J Kent, 'The pleasures and perils of writing biography', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (December, 2015), p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> M Ward, MM Ferris and T Brookes, *Houses & estates of old Glamorgan* (Swansea, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> H Lee, *Biography: A very short introduction* (Oxford, 2009), p. 63.

<sup>53</sup> BH Fletcher, 'Biography and the history of New South Wales', *Teaching History*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (July, 1981), p. 22.

London, we can learn much about that colony and the factors that can shape evolving societies in general, including that erstwhile populist protest leaders may not be as altruistic as they may wish to have been seen.

In reviewing the changing shape and style of biography, particularly in respect of Australian figures and authors, historian Jill Roe ventured that 'Biography is not for the faint hearted', and in particular:

While it is true enough that biography today is a house of many mansions, and we expect it to be, it is also true that we expect to learn from it, and think that it should be reliable, convey the available contextual knowledge, and be complete.<sup>54</sup>

Barbara Caine wrote a well-considered piece on the benefits of a biography placing the subject in the context of their society and the need of the writer to understand that society and its links to the subject.<sup>55</sup> This thesis will look at Meredith from his childhood, through his several careers prior to emigration, his personal life and his turbulent colonial times, until his death in 1856, and will place Meredith squarely in the context of the society he inhabited, supported by investigations into the particular issues on foot at the time.

An aspect of a good biography is for the writer to convey some sense of the subject's 'true' character. For subjects in the past, this can largely be achieved by studying the personal writings by them, and what their contemporaries wrote about them, particularly in private. In the case of Meredith, we are fortunate to have a substantial archive of letters by him to his wife, friends, lawyers and business associates and many of their replies, not to mention the large number of letters he wrote to government figures and newspapers. His most

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<sup>54</sup> J Roe, 'Biography today: A commentary', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2012), p. 116.

<sup>55</sup> B Caine, *Biography and history* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 116-121.

private writings—his letters to his wife and his diaries—are perhaps the most revealing about his personality and drives. Unlike Meredith’s colonial contemporary Captain Charles Swanston, whose recent biographer Eleanor Robin lamented had left a paucity of personal letters—as did Jacqueline Fox on her subject, Chief Justice John Lewes Pedder—Meredith has left us a wealth of primary material, where colourful insights into his character and motives can be gained.<sup>56</sup>

In public, Meredith was sometimes mocked as ‘the King of Oyster Bay’.<sup>57</sup> Whilst this was used by pro-Arthur newspaper figures to belittle him, it begs the question as to how substantial a figure Meredith was. Historian Alan Atkinson distinguished between ‘great’ and ‘small’ gentlemen on the land, with the differentiation being mainly a function of size of the estate and the quality of political connections.<sup>58</sup> By their landholding, status and impact on the colony, the Macarthurs were undoubtedly ‘great gentlemen’ of Camden, the area Atkinson was studying, and indeed of New South Wales. The description does not appear to work well in the case of Meredith, at least if ‘political connections’ is applied in a positive sense. As the newspaper sobriquets implied, Meredith was a ‘great gentleman’ at Great Swan Port in the sense of Atkinson, but in the overall colonial setting he may have been a ‘small gentleman’. He was by far the most substantial landholder on the east coast, and one of the top twenty landholders in the colony by the mid-1830s.<sup>59</sup> Yet his relationship with Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and his administrative elite was dysfunctional and sometimes poisonous, so he probably also failed Edward Gibbon

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<sup>56</sup> ED Robin, ‘Captain Charles Swanston ‘Man of the world’ and Van Diemen’s Land merchant statesman’, PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2017, p. 8; J Fox, *Bound by every tie of duty: John Lewes Pedder, Chief Justice of Van Diemen’s Land* (Melbourne, 2018), p. 237.

<sup>57</sup> *Colonial Times*, 13 July 1827, p. 2; *Hobart Town Courier*, 1 August 1829, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> A Atkinson, *Camden* (Melbourne, 1988), pp. 67-68.

<sup>59</sup> *Bent’s News*, 2 April 1836, p. 4.

Wakefield's definition of colonial 'respectability' — 'always dining with the Governor'.<sup>60</sup> He fared little better with succeeding Lieutenant-Governors, but for different reasons. He did have networks with some of the legal elite, such as Solicitor-General Alfred Stephen in Hobart and lawyer Frederick Garland in Sydney, but these were more by way of professional relationships.

As far as the private opinions of others about Meredith are concerned, these are rarely preserved. Public servant and diarist George WTB Boyes mentioned Meredith only once in his diaries, in 1832, as follows:

The Governor [Arthur] after his health had been drunk, rose and made a speech about Friends and Enemies, delicately allusive to the manner in which some few of his hearers had been in the habit of treating him. I must note here that *Meredith* of Oyster bay [sic] and his daughter were there ...'.<sup>61</sup>

In this short note Boyes, part of Arthur's administration, placed Meredith as a mere provincial figure and a known enemy of Arthur. Rev. Robert Knopwood mentioned Meredith a few times in his diary, mainly in social contexts without commentary, notwithstanding Meredith's close association with Thomas Gregson, who Knopwood knew well.<sup>62</sup>

In writing political biography, historian Rae Wear noted how the opinion of the writer of the subject may influence the study; if the opinion is not kept in check, the work may develop either into a hagiography or a 'hatchet-job'.<sup>63</sup> Although this thesis is not strictly

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<sup>60</sup> EG Wakefield, *A letter from Sydney, and other writings* (London, 1929), p. 22.

<sup>61</sup> GTWB Boyes, *The diaries and letters of GTWB Boyes, Vol. 1 1820-1832*, P Chapman (ed.) (Melbourne, 1985), p. 543; 'Diary of GTWB Boyes', RS25/2, UTAS S&R.

<sup>62</sup> Rev. Robert Knopwood, *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, first Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1838* (CD version, 2015), M Nicholls (ed.) (Hobart, 1977), *passim*.

<sup>63</sup> R Wear, 'Writing political biography', in: *Australian political lives: Chronicling political careers and administrative histories*, T Arklay, J Nethercote and J Wanna (eds.) (Canberra, 2006), p. 73.

speaking a political biography, over the course of the study I found myself both admiring and recoiling from George Meredith. Admiring him because he was a forward thinker, an achiever and was not afraid to take on the powerful interests of the colony; recoiling from him because he was a bully, sometimes cruel to his wife and gave little thought to sweeping aside anyone who stood in his way—be they neighbouring settlers, competing whalers or, ultimately, Aboriginal people defending their land.

An issue in writing on a forthright subject of the early nineteenth century such as Meredith, is that some of his views and writings are today undoubtedly abhorrent. His final suggestion of the ‘annihilation’ of the Aboriginal people is difficult to place into a text without the author needing to somehow disavow it, especially if then its context is explained as just another facet of the subject’s sweeping away any opposition.<sup>64</sup> Although the work then may run the risk of being seen as excusing ‘extirpationist’ views, the author needs to keep his opinions and feelings away from the text and let the reader judge the subject, placed into appropriate context.<sup>65</sup>

Both Roe and Kent touched on the issue of ‘missing’ portions of a subject’s life—either because the historical subject or someone else had disposed of certain papers, for instance, love letters, or, for living subjects, because the subject and/or friends were uncooperative.<sup>66</sup> Although the record for Meredith is far from complete, a significant quantity of his own, his family’s and his associates’ papers have survived, including letters, diaries, accounts and memoranda. The collection is not comprehensive, however; some

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<sup>64</sup> For Meredith and the ‘annihilation’ of Aboriginal people, see CSO1/1/323/7578 (Vol. 8), TA, pp. 355-358 and this work Chapter 5.

<sup>65</sup> For Plomley’s view on the submissions where Meredith’s comment appeared, see Plomley, *Friendly Mission*, p. 117.

<sup>66</sup> Kent, ‘Writing biography’, p. 4.

years are unrepresented by letters, while others have numerous examples. A story recounted by a Meredith family descendant that another family member removed certain papers of George Meredith from a collection donated to the Tasmanian Archives appears not to be true.<sup>67</sup> The Tasmanian Archives holds abundant letters to obtain a good picture of Meredith and his family. Meredith's letters to his wife, for example, contain, along with instructions on how to run the farm in his absence, abundant sexual innuendo, including to gates, flower blooms and gardening, not unlike the writings of Jane Austen in the decade prior.<sup>68</sup> Meredith's writings, being private, are more forthright.

Beyond family histories, such as Neil Chick on the Archer family, few biographies have been published about settlers of Meredith's time who were not in government service, or a family member.<sup>69</sup> Some of Meredith's contemporaries have been the subject of the biographical genre, but their formative years are generally not thoroughly presented. Alison Alexander has written on the lives of Edward Lord (with Maria Riseley) and Roderic O'Connor, but both of these works begin almost at the time of the subject's arrival in the colony so are not true biographies that examine the whole person, but to be fair, they do not claim to be.<sup>70</sup> Joan Woodberry began her examination of printer and Meredith 'liberty of the press' ally Andrew Bent with Bent's arrival in the colony and later had a paragraph

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<sup>67</sup> C Homer, Manager, State Library and Archive Service, Libraries Tasmania, telephone call, 20 July 2018, after reviewing the accession files for the Meredith collections NS123 and NS615. Ms Homer later wrote: 'The Meredith family letters were initially numbered in sequence from number one onwards. Later on, the correspondence was 'split' into groups based on particular family members. This means that within the groupings there may appear to be number gaps e.g. item NS123/1/1 ... begins at letter 14 but previous numbered letters may be found in NS123/1/13, C Homer e-mail to M Ward, 15 April 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Meredith's letters to his wife are mainly in the file: NS123/1/1, TA; for Austen, see J Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the ha-ha: Bawdy humour and body politics in Jane Austen's novels', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2000), pp. 309-339.

<sup>69</sup> N Chick, *The Archer heritage: Being an account of William Archer of Hertford & Van Diemen's Land, his ancestors & descendants* (Longford, 2016).

<sup>70</sup> A Alexander, *Corruption and skullduggery: Edward Lord, Maria Riseley and Hobart's tempestuous beginnings* (Dydneyrne, 2015); A Alexander, *The O'Connors of Connorville a great Australian story* (Hobart, 2017).

on him before his arrival.<sup>71</sup> Robert Brain, in an unsubmitted MA thesis on Meredith's 'radical' fellow-traveller Thomas Gregson, dealt with Gregson's life pre-emigration in two pages.<sup>72</sup>

Even works on prominent government figures, which seek to illustrate the subject's contributions in public life, often fail to present an overall picture of the person. For instance, Leonie Mickleborough dealt with Sorell's life pre-Van Diemen's Land in a handful of pages.<sup>73</sup>

There are some true biographies of semi-equivalent figures to Meredith. Patricia Ratcliff's book on John West did capture the whole person and is a rare exception to the dearth of biographies of non-governmental figures of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Robin's biography of 'merchant-statesman' Charles Swanston analysed her subject's life and career before his arrival in Van Diemen's Land to obtain an insight into Swanston's activities after immigration, as this study will do for Meredith.<sup>75</sup> This thesis will compliment these works and will argue that Meredith's life and experiences pre-emigration shaped his attitudes and life in the colony.

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<sup>71</sup> J Woodberry, *Andrew Bent and the freedom of the press in Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> RJ Brain, 'Thomas Gregson: A Tasmanian radical', draft and unsubmitted MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1955, pp. 1-2, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania.

<sup>73</sup> L Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land: Lieutenant Governor 1817-24* (Hobart, 2004), pp. 5-10.

<sup>74</sup> PF Ratcliff, *The usefulness of John West* (Launceston, 2003).

<sup>75</sup> ED Robin, *Swanston merchant statesman* (North Melbourne, 2018).

## SOURCES

This study will call on the abundant and diverse primary sources concerning George Meredith, his family and associates that are held in a range of private and public collections.

The most important primary sources are the large collections of the Meredith family's papers, dating from the late eighteenth century, held at the Tasmanian Archives and the University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections, all of which were donated by later family members. These comprise many hundreds of pages of letters, diaries, accounts, plans and notes written by and to Meredith and by his family, friends and business associates. These are key in understanding Meredith's activities, thoughts and temperament. Smaller collections of like papers are held by the Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society, the East Coast Heritage Museum (both at Swansea, Tasmania) and in various private collections of almost a dozen descendants of the Meredith, Amos and Archer families. While some of the public and private material has been utilised by some writers in the past, much of it has not been discussed in the literature before. One key private collection has not been previously accessed by researchers at all and no published work has attempted to bring together the entire array of primary sources and to allow it to bring all the various facets of Meredith into sharp focus.<sup>76</sup>

Sources of information on Meredith's life pre-emigration and thus influences on his later character and personality are mainly held in the United Kingdom. His early life and activities of his father and siblings are documented in material mostly held in the archive section of

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<sup>76</sup> Ms M McFadden has told the author that her collection has previously not been shared with any prior researcher—personal comment, 14 August 2018.



the Birmingham Library. The UK National Archives in London hold the logs and musters of the ships of Meredith's decade-long naval career; the Berkshire Record Office holds deeds and other documents relating to Meredith's first landholdings and his activities after his first marriage; Pembrokeshire Archives hold similar material covering his time in Wales. All these repositories have been visited and interrogated for research material and undoubtedly have yielded some resources never previously assessed by others in the context of Meredith's life.

In addition to material specifically on Meredith and his family, the Tasmanian Archives, the University of Tasmania Special and Rare Collections and the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales in Sydney have abundant relevant material concerning the colonial governments, administrators and other settlers, which have been reviewed and included in the analysis of Meredith and his activities.

On-line resources have proved also to be a rich source of relevant information. The digital collection of Australian colonial newspapers on *Trove*, and the ability to search them on-line yielded much detail on the conflicts Meredith fought out in the press.<sup>77</sup> A number of otherwise obscure historical legal and genealogical records were accessed from free or subscription databases such as *Ancestry* and *Find My Past*.<sup>78</sup>

All of these largely primary sources will form a strong foundation for the thesis and construct a full and accurate understanding of Meredith and his activities. They help to

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<sup>77</sup> *Trove*: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ancestry*: <https://www.ancestry.com.au/>; *Find My Past*: <https://www.findmypast.com.au/>.

reveal in what sense his actions were self-serving as opposed to being for the common good.

Secondary sources will be important in placing figures other than Meredith in context and to understand how others have viewed Meredith. The major literature relevant to Meredith will be reviewed in the following section.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE MEREDITH

Meredith has been mentioned in most of the mainstream works of history on Tasmania, from West and Fenton in the nineteenth century, through to Giblin, Clark and more recently, Reynolds.<sup>79</sup> How these works have treated Meredith will be amplified later in this introduction, but for now it can be briefly observed that Meredith was for the most part treated as a marginal player—a petition-signer and letter-writer. The sources used in the literature have been often repetitive and obvious—the contemporary newspaper reports and some key texts from the British Colonial Office and the New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land Colonial Secretary's Offices. Very few authors have attempted to analyse the motives of Meredith, nor have they linked together many of the other 'headline' players in the campaigns, such as Thomas Gregson and John Kerr. These two were fellow immigrants with Meredith in 1821 and later part of the 'Patriotic Six' of the Legislative Council, who campaigned against the way the probation system was proposed to be financed locally.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, Meredith's contemporary, Henry Melville does not mention him in: *The history of the island of Van Diemen's Land, from the year 1824 to 1835 inclusive* (London, 1835), although a later editor of that history, George Mackaness (Sydney, 1965), did, via a number of footnotes.

<sup>80</sup> For the 'Patriotic Six', see WA Townsley, *The struggle for self-government in Tasmania, 1842-1856* (Hobart, 1951), pp. 80-86.

Writers of more specialised histories, focussing variously on the Lieutenant-Governors themselves, the press, land or the convict system, brought a wider analysis of Meredith into their arguments.<sup>81</sup> However, none of these specialised works have sought to bring all of Meredith's influences and characteristics together to see in what ways he affected the colony overall through the several decades he was active.

The earliest general historical work on Van Diemen's Land was by Henry Melville, covering from 1824 to 1835, originally published in 1836, but more usefully as edited by Mackaness and published in 1965.<sup>82</sup> Melville arrived in the colony in 1827 or 1828, purchased the *Colonial Times* newspaper from Andrew Bent in 1830 and conducted it to 1839.<sup>83</sup> He was also a printer-publisher of the *Tasmanian* newspaper during the 1830s. In 1835, he was gaoled for contempt after publishing a critical piece on the 'Bryan Case' heard in the Supreme Court.<sup>84</sup> Melville spent only a short time in gaol, but during that time completed his history, which was first published that year.<sup>85</sup>

Melville's work begins seemingly as an even-handed appraisal of Lieutenant-Governor Arthur's rule, giving due credit to reforms such as the discipline and use of convicts and noting that it was difficult to follow a populist such as Sorell. Melville soon moved on to a wide-ranging critique of Arthur's performance via a review of the issues that would become an oft-repeated list by later writers—freedom of the press, the judiciary, Aboriginal people among others. As far as George Meredith is concerned, Melville was interesting not for

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<sup>81</sup> For example, MCI Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A colonial benevolent despot* (Melbourne, 1953) and EM Miller, *Pressmen and governors: Australian editors and writers in early Tasmania*, facsimile ed. (Sydney, 1952).

<sup>82</sup> Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*.

<sup>83</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, p. 43.

<sup>84</sup> *Colonial Times*, 3 November 1835, p. 4; *Tasmanian*, 20 November 1835, pp. 7-8.

<sup>85</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, p. 44.

what he said about him, but for the fact that he failed to mention him at all, even when Meredith was one of the central people in the events being described.<sup>86</sup> Meredith was not alone; those who moved in his circle, such as Gregson, Kemp and Bethune and many other prominent persons were not named in Melville's text. Mackaness filled in the gaps with copious footnotes.<sup>87</sup>

Following not long after Melville wrote his history was John West's *The History of Tasmania*, published in 1852.<sup>88</sup> This work benefited later from the expert editorial work of Alan Shaw, who incorporated many of West's footnotes into the text and corrected some of the errors in the first edition.<sup>89</sup> West was a Congregationalist minister who arrived in the colony in 1838. In 1842, he co-founded the *Examiner* newspaper in Launceston and had roles in founding a number of educational institutions. His main impact on the colony, however, was as an anti-transportationist.<sup>90</sup> West published his history in 1852, so it was written at the height of the campaign against transportation and this issue consumed a large proportion of the book. Arthur was dealt with reasonably sympathetically, but in spite of this, those campaigning against him were not cast negatively. George Meredith's roles in the public meeting regarding Arthur's laws restricting the freedom of the press in 1828, wanting reforms to the court and legislature in 1831 and his being threatened with loss of

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<sup>86</sup> For instance, the April 1824 meeting on independence from New South Wales was opened by Meredith and he was one of the consequent Committee members, yet Meredith is not named. Melville, *History of Tasmania*, p. 20.

<sup>87</sup> Sitting in his gaol cell, Melville may have been careful to avoid 'implicating' others involved in on-going anti-Arthur activities.

<sup>88</sup> J West, *The History of Tasmania*, Vol. I (Launceston, 1852).

<sup>89</sup> J West, *The History of Tasmania with copious information respecting the colonies of New South Wales Victoria South Australia*, AGL Shaw, (ed.) (Sydney, 1981).

<sup>90</sup> Ratcliff, *John West*, for example, pp. 299-312 and elsewhere.

convict labour in 1834 were duly noted and evenly discussed, although the sentiment of the text remained well-disposed to Arthur.<sup>91</sup>

The next work appearing as a wide-ranging history of the state was James Fenton's, published in 1884.<sup>92</sup> Fenton, like Melville, was not a traditional historian. He farmed and produced timber, only writing his history after he retired in 1879.<sup>93</sup> Fenton's history cantered through the early years of the colony noting the important issues and developments and devoting a number of sympathetic pages to the Aboriginal people, but was more detailed in the years after 1850, so George Meredith was only mentioned in passing.

Ronald Giblin was a surveyor in Tasmania and Thailand but from 1911 worked as an officer in the Tasmanian Agent-General's office in London.<sup>94</sup> He acquired a deep knowledge of the history of his native state and published Volume 1 (covering 1642-1804) in 1928. He died before completing Volume 2 (1804-1836) and his manuscript was edited by librarian James Collier and published in 1939. Giblin saw the early settlers in somewhat heroic terms, facing both the hardships of settling new land and the active threats of bushrangers and native inhabitants, while at the same time being subject to some capricious rule from Hobart Town. The first settler chosen for a profile in chapter XII, 'Some Pioneers', was George

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<sup>91</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, pp. 89, 125 and 139 respectively.

<sup>92</sup> J Fenton, *A history of Tasmania from its discovery in 1642 to the present time* (Hobart, 1884).

<sup>93</sup> FC Green, 'Fenton, James (1820–1901)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University (hereafter, ADB), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fenton-james-3509/text5263>, published first in hardcopy 1972, accessed online 1 August 2017.

<sup>94</sup> I Pearce, 'Giblin, Ronald Worthy (1863–1936)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/giblin-ronald-worthy-6304/text10813>, published first in hardcopy 1981, accessed online 23 July 2017.

Meredith, although Collier stated that Giblin's notes made it apparent that others were intended for this section so we do not know what order Giblin may have used.<sup>95</sup>

Although sources other than a few footnotes by Collier were not given, it is apparent that Giblin relied extensively on Meredith's own diaries and writings by his family, which were hardly uncritical sources.<sup>96</sup> The majority of Giblin's discussion related to events prior to 1830 and mostly Meredith's personal affairs. Only in the last paragraph did Giblin allude to Meredith's public campaigns, framed in terms of gaining recognition of the rights of British citizens to free institutions. Elsewhere in his work, Giblin trod the customary path of naming Meredith as being one of the leading speakers in an April 1824 meeting promoting independence from New South Wales, and a signatory to the March 1827 letter leading to a petition to the King regarding trial by jury, amongst other matters.<sup>97</sup>

In addition to Tasmanian-based historians, Meredith captured some attention from historians based outside the island state. Within his wide ranging *A History of Australia, Vol. II* (first published in 1968), Manning Clark found room for Meredith on several occasions.<sup>98</sup> We find Meredith accurately mentioned as the co-charterer of the *Emerald* with Joseph Archer, and both having trouble with Arthur over convict supply. Meredith's experience at having his convict labour restricted by Arthur in 1834 was identified as a reason for Meredith's growing campaigning against the Lieutenant-Governor, including via participation in press ownership. Here, Clark had looked behind the headlines of the newspaper reports, which he footnoted. Meredith's participation in the later public

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<sup>95</sup> RW Giblin, *The early history of Tasmania Vol. II*, J Collier, (ed.) (Melbourne, 1939), p. 299.

<sup>96</sup> For instance, G Meredith, [Diary of George Meredith during two voyages to Oyster Bay in 1821], RS34/1, UTAS S&R. Also: E Meredith, *Memoir of the late George Meredith* (Masterton, 1897).

<sup>97</sup> Giblin, *Early history*, pp. 369, 602-603.

<sup>98</sup> CMH Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. II: New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1822-1838* (Melbourne, 1968).

meetings regarding trial by jury etc were noted, but Gregson and others were given prominence as the main speakers. Clark clearly had accessed primary sources to a greater extent than most of his predecessors, but still omitted some important connections, such as between Gregson and Meredith, and did not drill deeply to establish Meredith's possible motivations.

Historian Lloyd Robson, raised in Tasmania, lectured in Australian history at the University of Melbourne. He published his *A History of Tasmania* in two volumes, the first in 1983.<sup>99</sup> Robson's history was compiled with an increased use of primary documents over the works cited above, particularly those then available in Britain. His view of the early colony was that it was largely uncivilised, self-serving and brutal towards the Aboriginal peoples. He most likely would not have approved of the likes of George Meredith, if Robson chose to look at him closely, but he did not. Meredith was only 'sighted' in the crowd at public meetings held to protest the policies of Arthur.<sup>100</sup> Robson did connect Gregson and Meredith as being 'activists' in respect of the campaign for a free press, but then failed to identify Meredith as being one of the owners of the *Colonist* newspaper while Gilbert Robertson was editor and during its campaign against Arthur.

Several of George Meredith's particular interests have been the subject of detailed thematic histories, namely, on Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, the press, land ownership and Aboriginal people. Michael Levy wrote favourably on Lieutenant-Governor Arthur in

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<sup>99</sup> Robson, *A history of Tasmania*.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 296, 302-303, 308.

1953.<sup>101</sup> The work excoriated Meredith in every issue where the settler was found, for instance:

George Meredith, the “King of Great Swan Port”, was an infinitely proud, domineering, quarrelsome man. Testy and unforgiving, he was easily provoked to querulous resentment, and given to pin-pricking revenge. Obstinate and implacable in opposition ... inordinately land and power hungry, ...<sup>102</sup>

As Meredith was a constant thorn in Arthur’s side, it is not surprising that Levy would investigate Meredith in some detail. For the first time in a significant history of the period, Meredith’s involvement in the whaling industry was mentioned, albeit in passing, while the background and consequences of the 1834 withdrawal of convict labour from Meredith was discussed in some detail and linked to the Bryan libel case.<sup>103</sup> That discussion was critical in tone, but not inaccurate. That said, Levy later discussed the group of Arthur opponents including Gregson, Meredith, Kemp and Gellibrand in such derogatory terms it cast questions over the fairness of his arguments on these opponents elsewhere in the book.<sup>104</sup> Later still, Gregson and Meredith were portrayed as puppet-masters of printer and publisher Andrew Bent and Gilbert Robertson’s editorship of the *Colonial Times*.<sup>105</sup> Levy revealed a little more about Meredith than had appeared in general histories, but the author’s style sometimes mirrored that of the Arthur antagonists of whom he was so critical and this detracted from the book’s usefulness.

The biography of George Arthur by Alan Shaw published in 1980 contrasted with Levy’s work in several ways, including providing a more temperate appraisal of the various

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<sup>101</sup> Levy, *Governor George Arthur*.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 170.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 231 and 170 respectively. The Bryan case will be discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p. 311.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, p. 342.



personalities arrayed against Arthur, and a near absence of any discussion on Meredith.<sup>106</sup>

Meredith did take his place in Shaw's first chapter on Arthur in Van Diemen's Land, where Shaw discussed the Lieutenant-Governor's management of convicts. Shaw observed, as Arthur did, that in the 1834 incident where Meredith was not allowed further convict servants, Arthur was easier on Meredith than he was obliged to be. Meredith was also given a passing mention in the next chapter, on Arthur's 'wearisome' task of dealing with many issues and many dissatisfied free settlers.

A detailed work by William Forsyth on how Lieutenant-Governor Arthur remodelled and operated the convict system in Van Diemen's Land was published in 1970.<sup>107</sup> Not surprisingly, where Meredith was concerned, Forsyth highlighted Arthur's threat to restrict or remove his convict labour and Meredith's subsequent published '*Correspondence*'.<sup>108</sup> Perceptively, Forsyth footnoted that '... Meredith's self-importance is very irritating and probably a significant factor in the whole matter ...'.<sup>109</sup>

Morris Miller's *Pressmen and Governors*, published in 1952, reviewed both the chronology of publishing in the colony to about 1850 and the personalities involved, many of which were strong and divisive. It is not surprising therefore that George Meredith appeared prominently in Miller's book up to about 1840.<sup>110</sup> The well-known campaign calling for Van Diemen's Land independence, associations with Thomas Gregson in various campaigns and Gilbert Robertson in respect to the *Colonist*, and his opposition to Lieutenant-Governor

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<sup>106</sup> AGL Shaw, *Sir George Arthur, Bart, 1784-1854* (Melbourne, 1980).

<sup>107</sup> WD Forsyth, *Governor Arthur's convict system: Van Diemen's Land 1824-36 a study in colonisation* (Sydney, 1970).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 107-108, 112; G Meredith, *Correspondence between the local government of Van Diemen's Land and George Meredith Esq.* (Hobart, 1834).

<sup>109</sup> Forsyth, *Arthur's convict system*, p. 112.

<sup>110</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, *passim*.

Arthur in general, were all discussed.<sup>111</sup> In addition, there was discussion of Meredith's legal and newspaper clashes with Robert William Lathrop Murray. Murray was an Arthur enemy-turned-ally, and editor of several newspapers of the time, including the *Tasmanian* and *Austral-Asiatic Review*. A short biography of Meredith was given by Miller in which he noted the subject was '... prominent in public affairs until his death in 1856 ...'.<sup>112</sup> Miller's primary sources were obvious, given his topic, and he had apparently conducted research on Meredith beyond newspapers and like publications, although none were cited. However, as with almost all the other writers, Miller did not try to explain why Meredith as a rural landholder was so active in colonial affairs and the *Colonist* newspaper.

As previously mentioned, Joan Woodberry wrote in more detail on the newspaper printer and publisher Andrew Bent.<sup>113</sup> Woodberry made some useful observations on Meredith's character, such as, 'there were few within the colony with the exception of Gregson and Meredith with [RL Murray's] political insight' and 'politics made cronies of Bent, Kemp, Gregson and Meredith, but not friends'.<sup>114</sup> A short biography was provided in the Appendix, but for all that, no new ground was covered by Woodberry as far as Meredith was concerned.

Sharon Morgan's 1992 book on land settlement in the colony was a useful addition to the literature that discussed Meredith, in that Morgan had accessed some of Meredith's letters to his wife.<sup>115</sup> Although the extracts used were purely in relation to how Meredith instructed his wife to run aspects of the farm while he was absent in Hobart Town, that

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6, 24-25, 56, 75.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>113</sup> Woodberry, *Andrew Bent*.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 127-128. It is argued in this study that Meredith and Gregson did become friends.

<sup>115</sup> S Morgan, *Land settlement in early Tasmania: Creating an antipodean England* (Cambridge, 1992). The letters were accessioned to the Tasmanian Archives in 1960.

research allowed Morgan to publish a journal article, where she explored the relationship between Meredith and his second wife Mary in the context of the times.<sup>116</sup> Morgan noted how passionate sections in his letters could glide effortlessly to criticisms of Mary's writing style and other minor indiscretions, but a connection between the personal reproofs and Meredith's public persona was not drawn. Although this was a pioneering article on Meredith and his character, it was restricted to Meredith's letters at the Tasmanian Archives. Many more letters, both to and from Meredith, plus other personal papers exist in other repositories, private and public. Taken as a whole, these will be used in this thesis to gain greater insight into Meredith's character and personality.

The final areas where Meredith came to some prominence in colonial affairs were his interaction with the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and bushrangers. The latter were mentioned incidentally in a number of works, but discussion of Meredith's attitudes to and contact with Aboriginal people has recently been given some prominence.<sup>117</sup> Graeme Calder noted that Meredith had a convict servant killed in an attack involving 'Musquito' and that his whaling stations and farm had been subject to repeated attacks.<sup>118</sup> He named Meredith as the instigator of a 'Line' implemented at the Freycinet Peninsula in 1831, a follow-up to the main campaign. No particular view on Meredith's personal attitude to Aboriginal people was expressed by Calder.

Michael Powell formed a more succinct and adverse opinion of Meredith: '[Oyster Bay] took on all the attributes of a sea frontier with sealing, whaling and the inevitable attacks

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<sup>116</sup> S Morgan, 'George and Mary Meredith: the role of the colonial wife', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (September, 1989), pp. 125-129.

<sup>117</sup> Beginning with Morgan, *Land settlement*, p. 129.

<sup>118</sup> G Calder, *Levee, line and martial law: A history of the dispossession of the Mairremmener people of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1832* (Launceston, 2010), pp. 152, 174, 178.

on Aboriginal bands. George Meredith pioneered both the settlement and the subsequent violence, dabbling as he did in sealing and whaling'.<sup>119</sup> Powell's work is flawed, in that he wrongly attributed comments of Meredith's son to Meredith and this probably coloured the adjacent text.<sup>120</sup> No references were given by Powell for the claim of 'pioneering violence'.<sup>121</sup>

Nicholas Shakespeare, in his popular biography of Anthony Fenn Kemp, discussed Meredith in several contexts. He described Kemp as the 'ringleader of a group of radicals, such as George Meredith, a cantankerous land owner on the east coast'. Most of Shakespeare's treatment of Meredith was in respect of Aboriginal people. He revealed in his writing that he had read at least some of Meredith's letters to his wife, in which Meredith initially mentioned Aboriginal people in somewhat good-natured terms, but later lamented that they may need to be 'dispersed'.<sup>122</sup> Later on, Meredith was correctly portrayed by Shakespeare as the leader and instigator of the follow-up to the 'Black Line' at the Freycinet Peninsula in 1831.<sup>123</sup> Stoddart also wrote about what she called 'The Freycinet Line', and Meredith's role in it.<sup>124</sup> Clements covered much the same ground.<sup>125</sup>

In conclusion on the Meredith historiography, it is clear that he was a figure who has come to the attention of almost every substantial writer on either general or specialised Tasmanian histories. Almost every author has picked out individual episodes where

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<sup>119</sup> M Powell, *Musquito brutality and exile: Aboriginal resistance in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart, 2016), pp. 141-142. Meredith did more than 'dabble'—he became one of the leading shore-based whalers up to 1830; this will be discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 142 and 160. The comments were made by Charles Meredith.

<sup>121</sup> The Meredith family's involvement with Aboriginal people will be discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>122</sup> Shakespeare, *In Tasmania*, pp. 163-164. Meredith's use of 'dispersed' will be discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 178-180.

<sup>124</sup> E Stoddart, *The Freycinet line, 1831* (Coles Bay, 2003).

<sup>125</sup> N Clements, *The Black War: Fear, sex and resistance in Tasmania* (St Lucia, 2014), pp. 166-168.

Meredith has appeared in the context of their narrative, but none have linked together the various episodes or sought to understand why Meredith, the landholder of Great Oyster Bay, kept appearing in the courts, at public meetings, in petitions and in actions such as the Freycinet Line. This work will bring all these aspects together to reveal a greater whole than the pieces and look at how that whole came to be and will examine why Meredith acted as he did.

## THESIS STRUCTURE AND CHAPTER SYNOPSES

### **PART 1            FOUNDATIONS: UPBRINGING, LAND, ENTERPRISE AND FAMILY**

Part 1 of the thesis lays the groundwork for later discussion and analysis of Meredith's public life in Van Diemen's Land. It will do this by looking first at his early life in England, then his initial years in the colony—an aggressive pursuit of land, his farming and whaling enterprises and lastly his familial relationships. Two themes will emerge from this section. First, he strove for 'independence'—from government especially, but also from neighbours, and he sought economic self-sufficiency. Second, an attitude of self-interest begins to emerge even in his personal relationships and this argument will become more prominent in the second part of the thesis.

**Chapter 1: Early life and influences** provides a detailed account of Meredith's life until about 1818, when he was about to leave his farm in Wales, in preparation for emigration to Van Diemen's Land. It will place Meredith first in a privileged, middle class upbringing in Birmingham with some aristocratic pretensions and possibly with some influence of 'Dissenter' teachings during his early-mid teenage years. From there, his ten-year career in the Royal Marines will be documented in detail, including his presence during the 1797 Royal Navy mutiny at Spithead. Both these phases contribute to the understanding of

Meredith's attitudes and personality in Van Diemen's Land. After the Marines, his two attempts at farming—first in Berkshire and then in Wales—and the course of his first marriage will be described, and again, his experiences there will be seen as partial templates for some of his behaviours after emigration.

**Chapter 2: Seeking independence: A new life in the colonies** examines the nature and growth of free emigration to Van Diemen's Land up to 1823, to put Meredith's own plans and arrangements in context. His preparations were interrupted by the death of his first wife, which then led to the hastily arranged marriage to the family nurse, who was also his mistress, a week before departure. His foresight and planning skills are demonstrated in the detailed arrangements he made before leaving, including his co-chartering of the vessel used. These and other events are produced as evidence of his 'independent' nature. Several of the characters encountered later in this thesis are introduced here, including Thomas Gregson and John Kerr, both of whom later went into the Legislative Council. Gregson and Meredith would become allies in fierce campaigns against Arthur. Lastly, the chapter will dissect Meredith's initial years in Van Diemen's Land, which were marked by legal battles and a fierce contest for land at Great Swan Port. Here, some of Meredith's experiences in his early phase of life begin to emerge as characteristics that marked him out later in his contests with Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, such as bullying, disdain for colonial authority and a determination to have his own way.

**Chapter 3: Becoming economically independent** describes Meredith's building of an economic base by his farming and whaling activities, after some initial setbacks. His introduction of merino sheep was potentially very important, but Meredith seemed to fail to capitalise on them. In whaling, Meredith was in his element. Experienced on the sea

from his decade in the Marines, he first sponsored sealing and whaling expeditions, then grew his own small fleet of whalers and crew to become one of the leading shore-based whalers in the colony by 1830. It was largely through whaling, not farming, that Meredith achieved financial independence by the early to mid-1830s. This enabled him to attack Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur with renewed intensity both in letters and in the press.

**Chapter 4: Selfishness begins at home? Meredith's familial relationships** examines in detail Meredith's correspondence with his family members and especially his second wife. It will explore his relationship with them through the lens of about one hundred and sixty personal letters. Meredith's frankness in his letters to his wives and children allows a remarkable insight into the man. The chapter will explore what was driving Meredith in his various relationships and will argue that, while he was undoubtedly passionate to his wives and loved his many children, his second marriage especially was viewed by him as a means to achieve personal success and the founding of his colonial dynasty.

## **PART 2        EXPRESSING INDEPENDENCE**

The second part of the thesis examines Meredith's public life, engagement with the government and interactions with bushrangers and Tasmanian Aboriginal people, until his death in 1856. His public life was consumed by a number of campaigns on political/social issues, which could be interpreted as him acting for the good of the colony—certainly he portrayed himself in this light. His most successful campaign was for independence of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales, which came about at the end of William Sorell's term as Lieutenant-Governor. Meredith then had an on-going antagonistic relationship with Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, who ironically benefited from the colonial independence that Meredith helped bring about. Meredith's motives for undertaking the

campaigns and being constantly hostile to Arthur will be analysed and the argument will be advanced that he was largely motivated by self-interest, rather than to advance the common good of the colony.

**Chapter 5: Hostile forces: Aboriginal people and bushrangers** mainly addresses the period from his arrival in 1821 up to 1831, when Meredith organised the 'Freycinet Line' as an echo of the earlier 'Black Line' and discusses the activities of his son, George, who abused Aboriginal women in the early 1830s. Meredith senior has been commented on unfavourably by several recent writers on the clash between European settlers and Aboriginal people, but most writing has focused solely on the latter years when the conflict was at its height. The chapter will trace the evolution of contact between the two groups along the east coast of Tasmania, noting changing attitudes of the settlers at Great Swan Port to the perceived threats from both bushrangers and Aboriginal people. Meredith's early letters to his family and government, through to his submission to the 'Aborigines Committee' in 1830 and onto the Freycinet Line, taken together, paint a different picture of attitudes from that usually described. A perspective from the settler 'front line', using their letters and diaries more thoroughly, will better inform the overall debate and discussion about this contentious time of settlement and dispossession.

On bushrangers, Meredith's experience was similar to many colonists. There was one celebrated attack on his huts by the Brady gang, which was well documented in the press at the time, but a private letter revealed an exchange between Meredith and Brady, in the gaol-house.

In this chapter, another side of Meredith may be perceived, albeit with some caution. A purely self-serving Meredith, using his customary blunt and out-spoken approach would



have been expected to call for and use brutal and direct actions to rid his farm of competition and threat from indigenous people. Meredith's writings indicate that he was not overly agitated by these threats for a number of years, and consistently perceived greater danger from bushrangers. Some of his writings could be interpreted as expressing some sympathy with the Aboriginal people, although after the violence between the races rose in the late 1820s, Meredith's attitude changed and he joined those calling for the native peoples to be captured, and if that failed, 'annihilated'.

**Chapter 6: Campaigns for the common good? Independence, trial by jury and a House of Assembly.** This chapter first details George Meredith's involvement with the campaign to achieve Van Diemen's Land independence from New South Wales, conducted during William Sorell's time as Lieutenant-Governor. He was one of the leaders of this ultimately successful campaign and it will be argued that he was probably motivated by his desire to have land and judicial matters dealt with locally, where he had more influence, rather than in Sydney, where he had a deflating experience over three months in 1823. The wish for 'independence' was a trait found in Meredith in many circumstances, and, although in this campaign he showed some 'statesman-like' characteristics in his public appearances, it appeared to be pursued more for his better personal benefit than a general desire to 'liberate' Van Diemen's Land.

Late in 1827, the public of Van Diemen's Land followed New South Wales in beginning their campaign for 'trial by jury' and the establishment of better representation, via a House of Assembly. Curiously, Meredith did not wholly support the first petition for trial by jury, arguably because Meredith's enemy Edward Lord was leading that campaign. Meredith preferred to lead and be in control and, if he could not, the issue receded in his priorities,

notwithstanding that by this time Meredith had a poisonous relationship with Arthur and would have otherwise gleefully used ‘trial by jury’ in his fight with Arthur. The issue arose again in 1834, when Meredith was at his most hostile to Arthur and this time Meredith was more to the forefront. In these campaigns, Meredith professed to be fighting for the rights of an ‘English gentleman’. The chapter will argue that his participation was a way to attack Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and his administration, to weaken it and hopefully see the back of a ruler antithetic to Meredith’s ambitions in the colony.

**Chapter 7: Manipulator or defender of the Van Diemen’s Land press?** commences with a comparison of the Sorell and Arthur administrations and, in particular, how the second was more punctilious and thus affected Meredith’s ability to conduct his affairs more or less as he wished, as he had under Sorell. Arthur saw the colony first and foremost as a penal station, and so the settlers were denied some of the freedoms enjoyed in England, such as a free press—albeit licenced. Printer Andrew Bent first felt Arthur’s odium when he threw off his government censor at the *Hobart Town Gazette*. Meredith and some of his allies then became involved in Bent’s press and some subsequent libel cases against him. The chapter will review the various attempts in Van Diemen’s Land and New South Wales to curb press freedoms, London’s reactions to these initiatives and the protests and petitions raised in Hobart Town by Meredith and others. Meredith and Thomas Gregson began the *Colonist* newspaper in 1832 and ran it in a somewhat chaotic way until 1834. Its chief targets were Arthur’s administration and rival newspapers and their editors.

The chapter questions why Meredith should take up the issue of ‘freedom of the press’ so vigorously as an early issue and why he and Gregson would invest so much time and money into the risky venture of newspaper ownership. Was the *Colonist* actually as it described

itself: 'the Journal of the People'?<sup>126</sup> Or was it, and Meredith's earlier involvement with Bent's press, merely a means to attack and destabilise Arthur, to weaken his administration at worst and have him recalled at best?

#### **Chapter 8: 'The fate of one may be the fate of many!' Meredith, Arthur and convict labour**

first examines the nature of convict labour and the legal basis of assignment in Van Diemen's Land as context for the actions of Lieutenant-Governor Arthur in withdrawing and withholding convict labour from settlers who either broke the regulations, or otherwise displeased him. By the early 1830s Meredith was a serial complainant to and about the Government and a plan by him to discredit the local magistrate backfired, causing him to have new convict assignments blocked by Arthur. This led Meredith to greater heights of attack on Arthur, which continued until Arthur left the colony. These attacks were framed in the context of Arthur being a tyrannical despot and a threat to the citizens' freedoms and liberties, but once again the primacy of Meredith's self-interest can be discerned.

**Chapter 9: The Post-Arthur period** describes Meredith taking a more relaxed attitude to government once Arthur had left, and when he occupied his grand house *Cambria* at Great Swan Port. His removal to more comfortable lodgings away from Hobart Town no doubt contributed to his lower public profile, but there were still important public debates being carried out, particularly the replacement of assignment with the probation system for convict management and the rise of the Anti-Transportation movement. The abolition of assignment, and hence Meredith losing his convict workforce was a *fait accompli* directed from London. There was little point in appealing locally, so he joined the voices complaining

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<sup>126</sup> *Colonist*, 6 July 1832, p. 1.

to the Colonial Office about the cost of probation, but with little of his former fire. After that, he was unsighted on either side of the anti- transportation issue. Without having access to convicts to work his farm, and hence no self-interest, he kept aloof from the heated debates about convict transportation. His last fiery confrontation was in 1853-54 with his son Charles, whom he denied an inheritance of *Cambria*, when it was sold preemptively to another son, John. George Meredith died in 1856.

**Conclusions and legacy** brings together the facts, analysis and interpretations of the thesis. Meredith's independence was expressed in many ways prior to his emigration, during his preparations for it, and subsequently. Not only did he seek independence, as was common in settlers, but in addition he pointedly described himself as such in speeches, letters and in the name of one of his ships. His independence brought about a selfish attitude to both his personal and public life. His marriages appeared to be more for tangible benefits rather than love. His campaigns for independence for Van Diemen's Land, 'freedom of the press', 'trial by jury' and 'an elected House of Assembly' can be seen to be primarily motivated by his own interests. Self-interest was almost universal in the colony, but again, Meredith differentiated himself by his oft-made expressions of acting for the common good. For all that, Meredith has left an enduring legacy in Tasmania, through his campaigns for free institutions (whatever his personal motivations), his family and their achievements, and the built environment.

## **PART 1    FOUNDATIONS**

**UPBRINGING, LAND,  
ENTERPRISE AND FAMILY**

## CHAPTER 1: EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the story of George Meredith begins with his birth and upbringing in Warwickshire, England, and progresses through a decade in the Marines, marriage and farming in Berkshire and then more farming in Wales. His formative years in Birmingham and the Marines influenced his later life and helped develop his characteristics as a settler in Van Diemen's Land, such as independence, scepticism of authority, selfishness and a determination to have his own way.

### BIRTH AND UPBRINGING

George Meredith's father, John Meredith (1742-1790), was an attorney practicing from Old Square in Birmingham, having obtained his articles of clerkship in 1759.<sup>1</sup> He was the first solicitor for the Birmingham Canal Navigation Company (established in 1767), and with his partner William Smith, was clerk to the Birmingham Town Commissioners and law agent to the Gooch Estates, owned by the Gooch Baronets of *Benacre Hall*, Suffolk.<sup>2</sup>

John Meredith married Sally Turner 28 August 1767 at St Philip's church in Birmingham against long standing opposition from her father.<sup>3</sup> Louisa Anne Meredith's biographer Vivienne Rae-Ellis described John Meredith as 'determined' in his courtship of Sally, and that John had 'a dogged determination to have his own way'. This will be a characteristic that his son, George, inherited, as will be demonstrated in later chapters here. John and

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<sup>1</sup> Court of Common Pleas, *Register of Articles of clerkship and affidavits of due execution, 1756-1867*, CP 71/1, The National Archives (hereafter TNA).

<sup>2</sup> J Hill and RK Dent, *Memorials of the Old Square* (Birmingham, 1897), p. 81; Birmingham Canal Navigation Company, *Minutes and Reports, 1776-1771*, RAIL 810/1, TNA.

<sup>3</sup> V Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith: A Tigress in Exile* (Hobart, 1990), pp. 15-16. The letters Rae-Ellis cited in respect of John and Sally's courtship were not available for this study.

Sally began a family that would eventually number six children, of whom five survived to adulthood.<sup>4</sup> The first born was Louisa Anne (1769), who married Thomas Twamley. She was the mother of Louisa Anne, who married George's son Charles Meredith and became a well-known colonial writer and artist. John Meredith's first two boys, John and Charles, became lawyers in Birmingham like their father, and were articled to him in 1787 and 1790 respectively.<sup>5</sup> Henry became a gun manufacturer in Birmingham and Ann lived unmarried in that city. Sally junior died soon after birth<sup>6</sup> The youngest of the family was George Meredith, born 13 February 1778.<sup>7</sup> He was not baptised at St Philip's until 23 April 1791, aged thirteen, and the reason for this delay is unclear, as his siblings were all baptised within a year or two of their birth.

Rae-Ellis wrote that between 1785 and 1791, the Meredith family lived at *Castle Bromwich Hall*, a red brick Jacobean mansion east of Birmingham built in the late 1500s by Sir Edward Devereux.<sup>8</sup> The source cited by Rae-Ellis did not mention the Merediths by name and it merely implied that the mansion was unoccupied by its hereditary owners between 1762 and 1794.<sup>9</sup> That the Merediths did occupy *Castle Bromwich Hall* about that time, is not in doubt, however, with several contemporary and later family sources noting the

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<sup>4</sup> St Philip's, Birmingham, parish records, marriages, August 1767, family history section, Library of Birmingham; *Diaries, photograph albums and associated records relating to Jessie, Fanny and John Meredith* (henceforth cited as '*Notes on the Meredith family*'), NS615/1/20, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter, TA).

<sup>5</sup> Court of Common Pleas, *Articles of clerkship and affidavits of due execution 1785-1867*, CP 71/2, TNA.

<sup>6</sup> *Notes on the Meredith family*, NS615/1/20, TA.

<sup>7</sup> St Philip's, Birmingham, parish records, baptisms, April 1791, family history section, Library of Birmingham. The birth year of 1778 is noted on the baptism record, therefore the birth year given as 1777 in: D Hodgson, 'Meredith, George (1777-1856)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University (hereafter ADB), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/meredith-george-2449/text3269>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 20 June 2017, is an error and this is acknowledged by Mr Hodgson (D Hodgson, personal comment 10 April 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith*, p. 17; G Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses* (Guildford, 1994), pp. 39-41.

<sup>9</sup> L Weaver, 'Homes and gardens old and new: Castle Bromwich Hall', *Country Life*, Vol. XXXII (1912), pp. 228-235.

residence.<sup>10</sup> For instance, the rent book of Henry Bridgeman, Bart., shows John Meredith as the tenant of *Castle Bromwich Hall* in 1786, but Meredith appeared to have sub-let at least parts of the property after that. In 1780 John Rotton was the tenant, but records have not survived between then and 1786.<sup>11</sup> Gamekeeper records noted John Meredith as the 'lessee of the Manor and Royalty of Castle Bromwich' in 1783 and he was still of that location when he made out his will in 1790.<sup>12</sup> In their discussion of middle-class England in the late eighteenth century, Davidoff and Hall wrote that owning land sometimes took the form of an investment to enhance a business.<sup>13</sup> Meredith senior appeared not to own agricultural land but acquired the name of a 'great house', which would have enhanced his position in society.

*Castle Bromwich Hall* was a grand house with extensive landscaped surrounds and the Meredith children no doubt absorbed its grandeur when they lived there and perhaps believed that this was their station in life. Later, although not titled himself, George Meredith may have thought himself an equal at least to the colonial Lieutenant-Governors who ruled over him and certainly of superior social rank to most in the colony of Van Diemen's Land.

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<sup>10</sup> C Meredith, *The Honorable Chas. Meredith MHA, Orford 1879*, B736, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (hereafter ML, SLNSW); *Warwickshire game keepers records*, entry for 15 July 1783, QS12, Worcestershire County Records Office.

<sup>11</sup> *Rent account of Henry Bowman receiver for Sir Henry Bridgeman's estates 1786 onwards*, D1287/1/29 (G/97), Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Office (hereafter SSTA0); *Land account for the Castle Bromwich estate*, D1287/3/14 (G/377), SSTA0. See also AED Tucker, 'Castle Bromwich Hall in the reign of King George III', *North Arden Local History Society Occasional Paper* (1977), pp. 15-18.

<sup>12</sup> Warwickshire gamekeepers records, *Gamekeepers deputations*, entry for 15 July 1783, QS12, Worcestershire County Records Office; Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions (hereafter, Prerogative Court of Canterbury), *Will of John Meredith, Gentleman of Castle Bromwich, Warwickshire*, PROB 11/119/159, TNA.

<sup>13</sup> L Davidoff and C Hall, *Family fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850* (London, 1987), p. 20.





**Figure 1-1** *Castle Bromwich Hall, 2018.*

Source: Malcolm Ward.

A family legend also persisted that the Merediths were descended from the royal family of Wales and this would have reinforced a sense of entitlement if a Meredith wished to believe it. The legend was put into print by George's son Edwin in his memoir of his father, in which Edwin reproduced an 1881 letter from his cousin Samuel (brother of John Meredith who initially accompanied George Meredith to the colonies in 1821) in Birmingham. In the letter, Samuel wrote:

We have the honour of descent from the old Kings of Wales, from whom are descended the subsequent Kings and Queens of England and I am happy in presenting to you the History of the Princes of South Wales.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> E Meredith, *Memoir of the late George Meredith* (Masterton, 1897), p. 27.

The *History of the Princes of South Wales* indeed traced the Kings of southern Wales from the ninth century (when Wales was united into a single kingdom by Roderick the Great) to the conquest of Wales by King Edward I in the late thirteenth century, when Welsh independent rule ceased, and then the book continued to define the lineages into the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The name of Meredith first appeared in the lineage in the late tenth century and continued until the fourteenth century. However, the name does not appear in the several subsequent descendant family trees presented. The connection between the Merediths of Birmingham in the eighteenth century, and the royal family of South Wales is unproven on this evidence.

John Meredith senior died on 30 April 1790 aged only forty-eight and was buried at St Philip's, Birmingham.<sup>16</sup> He left a will in which he bequeathed some cash for his wife, but otherwise divided his estate equally between his children.<sup>17</sup> He signed his will with a mark on 17 April 1790, only two weeks before his death, possibly indicating an advanced state of ill health.

With his father's death and consequent strain on family finances, George's higher education and career path were in doubt. According to Rae-Ellis, Sally Meredith remained at *Castle Bromwich Hall* until 1791, when George would have been thirteen.<sup>18</sup> This was the same year that he was baptised.

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<sup>15</sup> GT Bridgeman, *History of the Princes of South Wales* (Wigan, 1876), *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous, 'Deaths', *The European magazine and London Review* (1790), p. 399; St Philip's, Birmingham, parish records, burials, 7 May 1790, family history section, Library of Birmingham.

<sup>17</sup> Prerogative Court of Canterbury, *Will of John Meredith, Gentleman of Castle Bromwich, Warwickshire*, PROB 11/1199/159, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> Rae-Ellis, *Louise Anne Meredith*, p. 17.

George sent a letter to his mother from New York in 1800 when he was twenty-two and serving in the Marines.<sup>19</sup> In it, he acknowledged his mother's efforts to obtain his commission in the service and hinted that this rescued him from 'the very improper ideas I had adopted and which on most occasions ruled my conduct'. The nature of Meredith's waywardness can only be speculated upon, but the 1790s were a time of ferment in Birmingham, and elsewhere. The movement in England and Wales of Protestants to oppose State involvement in their religion and so worship outside of the established church began in the sixteenth century and adherents became known broadly as 'Dissenters' but included Anabaptists, Separatists, Unitarians and other groups. Later, Dissenters became known as Nonconformists.<sup>20</sup> In early eighteenth century, the Unitarians included the Priestley family and one son, Joseph Priestley, became a theologian, chemist and a 'vigorous advocate of unitarianism [sic] and of liberal reform of government, education, and theology'.<sup>21</sup> In 1780 he became a Unitarian minister in Birmingham and published a number of provocative theological tracts. He was a supporter of the French Revolution—the Bastille was stormed in 1789. The 'Priestley Riots' occurred in Birmingham in mid-1791 involving 'Church and King' mob attacks against the Dissenters and the destruction of buildings and property. Priestley then fled the city.<sup>22</sup> The Dissenters continued afterwards in Birmingham, with their ally the Radicals. Davidoff and Hall began their discussion on the English middle class with an introduction to James Luckcock, a Radical Birmingham jeweller and follower of Priestley.<sup>23</sup> Birmingham at this time was not the gritty industrial city that it

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<sup>19</sup> Typed transcript, Meredith to his mother, 11 March 1800, Hodgson collection.

<sup>20</sup> MR Watts, *The Dissenters: From the reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> RE Schofield, 'Priestly, Joseph (1773-1804)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.utas.edu.au/10.1093/ref:odnb/22788>, accessed online 20 November 2019.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* For a discussion of the Priestley Riots, see J Atherton, 'Nothing but a Birmingham jury can save them': Prosecuting rioters in late eighteenth-century Britain', *Midland History*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring, 2014), pp. 90-109.

<sup>23</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family fortunes*, p. 15.

became by 1850, but industrialisation was progressing; the population doubled between 1740 and 1780 and again by 1800.<sup>24</sup> With Meredith's father death in 1790, it is possible that the young Meredith came under the influence of Dissenter or Radical thinking in his teenage years, but it appears that whatever 'improper ideas' he held, his mother 'rescued' him and got him into the Marines. It is arguable that Meredith retained some of the Dissenter philosophy into adulthood, but without the religious overlay.

## THE MARINES

The relevant file of Marine officer service records at the UK National Archives is incomplete and Meredith's service record has not been found.<sup>25</sup> Another record revealed that George Meredith was commissioned Second Lieutenant, 75<sup>th</sup> Company, Portsmouth Division on 9 August 1796.<sup>26</sup> He was apparently onshore at Portsmouth until 7 May 1797 when he entered the muster roll of HMS *Hind* as the sole Marine officer on the vessel, under Captain John Bazely.<sup>27</sup>

HMS *Hind* was a sixth-rate warship of the British Navy and so was small, being thirty-six metres long and slightly more than ten metres across the beam. She carried a complement of one hundred and ninety-five (including twenty Marines) and had as her main armament twenty-four 'nine pounder' guns (being the weight of shot fired). This was the time of the Napoleonic Wars and, although the *Hind* would not have been expected to participate in

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Admiralty Officers Seniority Lists, *Royal Marine Officers, 1793-1837*, ADM 196/58, TNA. They would not be styled as the Royal Marines until 1802 after campaigning by Admiral Jervis: B Lavery, *Nelson's navy: The ships, men, and organisation, 1793-1815* (London, 2012), p. 146.

<sup>26</sup> Admiralty Marine Officers, *Register of Marine officers' commissions, including warrants to Marine Surgeons, Agents 1755-1814*, ADM 6/406, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> Admiralty Ships' Musters, *HMS Hind Ship's muster 1 November 1796-31 October 1797*, ADM 36/13271, TNA.

fleet actions, in the early 1790s she had captured a number of French merchantmen and privateers in the English Channel.<sup>28</sup>

The French monarchy was abolished in 1792 and France declared war first on Britain and other nations of the 'First Coalition' in February 1793 and then on Spain in March that year. By the end of 1795, France had entered into treaties with both Holland (Batavian Republic) and Spain, and Britain began war with those nations before the end of 1796. Significant setbacks for the British occurred that year and in early 1797 the French landed some troops on the Welsh coast and, although easily neutralised, there was a brief run on the banks.<sup>29</sup>

This was the environment into which Meredith joined the Marines. As well as being a time of several decisive fleet actions (Battle of St Vincent in February 1797 and Camperdown in October that year) it was a time of intense ferment in the Royal Navy. In response to the threat from France and her allies, between 1793 and 1797 manpower had almost doubled to 120,000 via a combination of impressment, forced recruitment and the *Quota Act*, which allowed local authorities to find volunteers to join. Pay had not increased since 1652 and by 1797 seasoned hands found that they were being paid less than some volunteers.<sup>30</sup> The conditions on naval vessels were very bad and the food was worse:

Navy dried peas, after boiling for hours, rattled like shot in the eating tub. Cheese was a rare treat and the suppliers who adulterated it were virtuosi. Without suspicion of cream, it furnished olfactory clues to kitchen scourgings, beeswax, rancid fat, glue and yellow ochre colouring.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> R Winfield, *British warships in the age of sail, 1714-1792* (St. Paul, 2007), p. 240.

<sup>29</sup> NA Rodger and National Maritime Museum (Great Britain), *The command of the ocean: A naval history of Britain 1649-1815* (London, 2000), p. 438.

<sup>30</sup> D Davies, *Nelson's navy: English fighting ships 1793-1815* (Mechanicsburg, 1996), pp. 72-96; J Dugan, *The great mutiny* (London, 1966), p. 62.

<sup>31</sup> Dugan, *Great mutiny*, p. 57.

The *Quota Act* men brought with them some education better than most of the traditional navy intake and naval historian James Dugan argued that a number of these men were imbued with the spirit of the French Revolution and Priestley's *Rights of Man*.<sup>32</sup> In February 1797, some Quota men on board the *Queen Charlotte*, anchored at Spithead, Portsmouth, drew up a petition complaining about their pay and directed it to the recently retired Fleet Admiral, Lord Howe.<sup>33</sup> Other ships' companies copied and also forwarded the petition. The petitions were initially ignored by the fleet commanders and by mid-April, the crews of a number of ships were openly discussing refusing duty if the petitions were not acted on. Soon after, a 'parliament' of ships' crew (two, called Delegates, from each vessel) had been convened aboard the *Queen Charlotte*.<sup>34</sup> At Easter 1797, the Admiralty began to respond to the first petition and contemporaneously a second petition was raised, widening the stated grievances to include the food, care of the sick and wounded, and shore leave. A demand for a Royal pardon for all concerned was added later.<sup>35</sup>

For the next two weeks, the authorities ground through the mechanics of conceding the mutineers' demands, and an Act of Parliament was drafted to give effect to the concessions. During this time, the seamen grew impatient, wondering if they had been betrayed. By 5 May 1797, the Delegates of the Channel Fleet again became active and ships' crews seized control of a number of vessels at Spithead and began sending their officers ashore. Admiral John Colpoys on the *London* resisted the Delegates coming aboard and, after calming the crew, locked them below deck. When the crew began a struggle to go topside, the officers fired on them, killing several and wounding others. As the crew

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 103-104.

began pouring from the hatches, the Admiral ordered the Marines to fire, but they instead downed their weapons.<sup>36</sup>

George Meredith would have been well aware of the grave situation when he boarded the *Hind* on 7 May 1797, and the next day he came face to face with it. The Captain's log of the vessel of 8 May recorded first that Admiral Colpoys' flagship, HMS *London* had struck her 'flag' and a red ensign was hoisted in lieu—this was a sign that a ship was under control of mutineers.<sup>37</sup> The *Hind's* log went onto record that Delegates from HMS *Mars* came aboard and assembled the ship's crew, and the log then recorded: 'The ship in a state of mutiny'. The crew of the *Hind* armed themselves, disarmed the officers, and presented them with a note:

Gentlemen, It is the request of the ship's company that you leave the ship precisely at eight o'clock. As it is unanimously agreed ... we would wish you to leave it peaceable or desperate measures will be taken.<sup>38</sup>

The ship's log of 9 May 1797 confirmed that Captain John Bazely, two Lieutenants, two Master's Mates, the Gunner and the Purser left the ship.<sup>39</sup> It appears George Meredith was not amongst those sent ashore, there being two naval Lieutenants as part of the ship's naval complement. Being new he was unlikely to have offended the crew, and disarmed and aged only nineteen, he may have been deemed harmless.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 141-143.

<sup>37</sup> Admiralty Captain's Logs, *A journal of the proceedings of His Majesty's ship Hind between the 20<sup>th</sup> November 1795 to the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1797, kept by Captain John Bazely*, ADM 51/1171, TNA (henceforth references in this series will be cited '*Hind* captain's log' with the relevant period and archive reference, but will be cited in full in the bibliography); Davies, *Nelson's navy*, p. 62.

<sup>38</sup> Dugan, *Great mutiny*, p. 144.

<sup>39</sup> *Hind captains log, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1795 to the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1797*, ADM 51/1171, TNA.

With the escalation of the mutiny, Parliament acted with great haste to pass the Act that secured the funding for all the reforms and Lord Howe personally delivered the information to the Delegates at Spithead. He then negotiated the list of one hundred and five officers and non-commissioned men who would be permanently removed from their ships, including eight officers of Marines.<sup>40</sup>

Admiral Colpoys was relieved of his command (he had prudently requested to be relieved beforehand).<sup>41</sup> Captain Bazely of the *Hind* was also replaced a few days after the mutiny was settled, but this may not have been as a result of mutineer's demands. Dugan named the four Captains removed because of the mutiny and Bazely was not amongst them.<sup>42</sup> Whatever the reason for his transfer, the incident did not appear to affect Bazely's career overall, as he was immediately posted as flag-Captain of the larger HMS *Overysse* and eventually rose to the rank of (superannuated) Rear Admiral.<sup>43</sup> Dugan argued that most of the officer replacements from mutineer's demands were due to expediency and that the Admiralty did not accept that the commanders on the whole had done anything wrong. Equally, the mutineers at Spithead were pardoned to a man.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond the Marines refusing to fire on the seamen on the *London*, the role of Marines in the mutiny has not received much published analysis. The *London* Marines' passive action was in the face of almost certainly being overwhelmed by the crew. Did the rank-and-file Marines generally support the naval officers and attempt discipline, as was their role, or

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<sup>40</sup> J Barrow, *The Life of Richard Earl Howe: Admiral of the Fleet and General of Marines* (London, 1838), p. 338.

<sup>41</sup> JK Laughton, revised by T Wareham, 'Colpoys, Sir John (c.1742–1821)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5985>, accessed 12 June 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Dugan, *Great mutiny*, p. 170.

<sup>43</sup> J Marshall, *Royal Naval biography ...* (London, 1827), pp. 27-28.

<sup>44</sup> Davies, *Nelson's navy*, p. 54.



were they on the side of the mutineers, their fellows below deck? Mutiny historian Conrad Gill briefly addressed the issue, noting that the non-commissioned Marines, in general, 'took the oath [of mutiny] together with the seamen' and quoted Admiral of the Channel Fleet Bridport, in a letter written on 17 April: 'The Marines of this ship, and I suppose all others of the fleet have taken a decided part in favour of the seamen, and been forced to take the oath to that purpose'.<sup>45</sup> There appears little doubt that the Marines were firmly in the seaman's camp when the Delegates' petitions and Admiralty letters reproduced in mid-nineteenth century mutiny historian William Neale's analysis of the mutiny are considered.<sup>46</sup> A Delegates' grievance letter of 18 April grouped the Marines with the seamen as having poor pay. When the Admiralty's reply failed to mention the Marines, the seamen in turn replied:

... and as a further proof of our moderation, and that we are actuated by a true spirit of benevolence towards our brethren, the marines, who are not noticed in your lordships' answer, we humbly propose that their pay be augmented, while serving on board, in the same proportion as ordinary seamen.<sup>47</sup>

A mutiny, possibly including his own men, cannot but have made a deep impression on Second Lieutenant George Meredith. He would have been humiliated at being rendered ineffective after just a day on board. He very likely would have deplored the effective surrender of the Admiralty to the mutineer's every demand, and the lack of punishment of the ringleaders. He may have formed the view that he should never again put himself in the position of suffering under 'weak' leadership or not being able to control events around him.

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<sup>45</sup> C Gill, *The naval mutinies of 1797* (Manchester, 1913), p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> WJ Neale, *History of the mutiny at Spithead and the Nore ...* (London 1842), pp. 24-34.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

The new commander of HMS *Hind* from 17 May 1797 was Joseph Larcom, who had a family tradition of service at sea, and a Larcom family history published in 1883 holds an account regarding the *Hind*.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, a number of errors in respect of both place and date, compared to the captain's log, renders the account unreliable.<sup>49</sup> About 10 days after Larcom went aboard, the *Hind* left Spithead to escort a convoy to Quebec. The convoy sailed into the Atlantic on Wednesday 7 June 1797, with HMS *Euridyce*, also a sixth rate, bringing up the rear.<sup>50</sup> George Meredith finally had the opportunity to command.

The crossing was not uneventful. 'Great gun' exercises on 17 June were followed the next day by an encounter with the Portuguese brig *Carmo el San Jofe* under capture by French privateer *L'Adventure* and therefore an enemy craft. Some musket fire brought the brig under control. She was boarded and sent to England as a prize.<sup>51</sup> George Meredith would certainly have been involved in this, the Marines being the armed contingent on the vessel. If the prize was accepted as legitimate by the Admiralty, 'prize money' on a somewhat standard scale would be payable to the Admiral commanding the station and the ship's company. The Admiral would receive one eighth; the Captain two eighths, the Lieutenants, master, surgeon and Marine Captain shared one eighth, and so on.<sup>52</sup> Although there was no Marine Captain on the *Hind*, Meredith as Second Lieutenant was the senior Marine officer, so he probably did relatively well out of the prize money. A notice in the *London Gazette* in 1800 announced that the *Hind's* complement would receive 'the net proceeds of the salvage on said brig ... on-board [the *Hind*] at Spithead'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> M Burrows, *History of the Families of Larcom, Hollis and McKinley* (Oxford, 1883), pp. 36-37.

<sup>49</sup> *Hind captain's log, 17 May 1797 to 17 May 1798*, ADM 51/1248, TNA.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> D Pope, *Life in Nelson's navy* (London, 1981), pp. 233-234.

<sup>53</sup> *London Gazette*, No. 15276, 15 to 19 July 1800, pp. 816-817.

During the rest of the voyage the *Hind* 'made chace [sic]' of a number of 'strange vessels' — some were lost in weather, others proving to be friendly, or neutral. The *Hind* anchored in the St Lawrence River on 9 August 1797 with its convoy intact. It returned to England with another convoy, arriving Spithead on 29 October.<sup>54</sup>

The next voyage was to Bermuda and the Bahamas, taking new Governors to their respective colonies. Sir George Beckwith was bound for Bermuda to take over the governorship from Henry Tucker. Lieutenant-General William Dowdeswell was on board to become the governor of the Bahamas. As the Marine officer, Meredith would have been charged with their security on board and may have dined with the Governors from time to time. Bermuda was reached in February 1798 and Governor Beckwith left the vessel, with an eleven-gun salute.<sup>55</sup> The Bahamas was reached ten days later and Governor Dowdeswell was farewelled in the same manner. Having delivered the vice regal parties to their destinations, the *Hind* spent the next sixteen months cruising between Nova Scotia and the Caribbean, including stops at the ports of Halifax, Virginia (Chesapeake Bay), Bermuda, the Bahamas, New York and Jamaica, with long periods at sea off Nova Scotia and Bermuda.<sup>56</sup>

The voyages saw numerous encounters with 'strange sails' most days (sometimes up to four in a day) and often there was a subsequent 'chace'. Most were allies or neutrals but occasionally vessels were picked up and taken to a British harbour by a prize-crew. A Spanish privateer, the *L'Amiable Juana* was taken on 22 April 1798 and sent to Halifax.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Hind captain's log, 17 May 1797 to 17 May 1798*, ADM 51/1248, TNA.

<sup>55</sup> *Royal Gazette*, 24 February 1798, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Hind captain's logs covering the period 17 May 1797 to 17 May 1801*, ADM 51/1248, 1296, 1304 and 1349, TNA; Admiralty Ships' Musters, *HMS Hind Ship's Muster 1 November 1796 – 30 June 1800*, ADM 36/13271-13273, TNA.

<sup>57</sup> *London Gazette*, No. 15040, 10 to 14 July 1798, p. 650.

On 18 April 1800, they took the Spanish brig *Angel del Guardo* as a prize and took her to the Bahamas.<sup>58</sup>

After returning to Spithead in July 1800, the *Hind* departed for its next mission to Ireland with a convoy, then to Madeira, Barbados, Martinique, Jamaica, Virginia and Halifax. On 5 January 1801, having just left Port Royal, Jamaica, the *Hind* took the Spanish packet *La Reyna Louisa* as a prize and took her crew on board as prisoners. The ship returned to Spithead in March 1801.<sup>59</sup> Whilst at Portsmouth this time, the complement of Marines on board the *Hind* increased from twenty to thirty in preparation for the next voyage. This was a brief one, departing Spithead with the *Eurydice* and a convoy of twenty-three ships to Quebec on 22 April 1801 and returning on 10 August.<sup>60</sup>

The muster book of HMS *Hind* covering 10 May 1801 to 28 June (at sea, with thirty Marines mustered) recorded George Meredith as Second Lieutenant. The next, from 5 July 1801 (also at sea with thirty Marines), to 30 August (at Falmouth) recorded Meredith as First Lieutenant.<sup>61</sup> The Royal Marines (as they then were by then) *Seniority List* published in January 1803 gave the date of Meredith's promotion to First Lieutenant as 1 October 1801 (by which time Meredith was back at sea).<sup>62</sup> Perhaps there was a 'field promotion' for Meredith (if so, the reason is unclear) and it was ratified by the Admiralty a few months later.

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<sup>58</sup> *Hind* captain's logs from 17 May 1797 to 17 May 1801, ADM 51/1248, 51/1296, 51/1304 and 51/1349, TNA; Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Hind* Ship's Musters 1 November 1796 – 30 June 1800, ADM 36/13271, 36/13272 and 36/13273, TNA.

<sup>59</sup> *Hind* captain's log 18 May 1800 to 17 May 1801 ADM 51/1349, TNA; *The Naval Chronicle for 1801*, Vol. V, p. 347.

<sup>60</sup> Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Hind* Ship's Muster 1 July 1801 to 30 September 1802, ADM 36/14386, TNA.

<sup>61</sup> Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Hind* Ship's Muster 1 July 1800 to 30 June 1801, ADM 36/14385, TNA.

<sup>62</sup> Admiralty Officers Seniority lists, *A List of the Officers of his Majesty's Royal Marine Forces, 1803*, ADM 118/260, p. 50, TNA.

HMS *Hind* with First Lieutenant George Meredith on board sailed for a final time from Spithead on 27 August 1801, bound for the Mediterranean with thirty Marines on board. The ship arrived off Alexandria, Egypt on 5 December 1801 and would stay for about 230 days, until 24 June 1802.<sup>63</sup> The tedium of being in port perhaps would have been increased when news of the Peace of Amiens dated 25 March 1802 reached Alexandria. This brought about a cessation of hostilities between Britain and her foes France, Spain and Holland. Now the *Hind* was a warship without a war.

Edwin Meredith's memoir of his father recounted a dashing episode in his father's life around this time.<sup>64</sup> Edwin's account, in brief, was that upon arriving at Alexandria, it was observed that a French symbol, known as the 'Cap of Liberty', remained atop a Roman column called Pompey's Pillar. Meredith was given permission by the Governor of Alexandria to remove it. After arranging a rope over the column, Meredith climbed one hundred feet, hand over hand, and liberated the Cap. The Governor offered to exchange the trophy for as much coined silver as it would hold, but Meredith declined, according to Edwin Meredith's story. Edwin supported his account by quoting much the same from an undated edition of 'Martin's Colonial Magazine', whose account, true or false, may have been told by George Meredith himself.<sup>65</sup>

The Cap of Liberty was said by Edwin Meredith to have been given to the Birmingham Museum.<sup>66</sup> The Birmingham Museum was contacted for this study and Curator of History

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<sup>63</sup> Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Hind* Ship's Muster 1 July 1801 to 30 September 1802 ADM 36/14386; *Hind* captain's log 18 May 1801 to 23 September 1802 ADM 51/1419, TNA.

<sup>64</sup> Meredith, *Memoir*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>65</sup> Found to be: Anonymous, 'Van Diemen's Land', in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, Vol. V, May-August, R Martin, (ed.) (1841), p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> JE Calder in an article 'Tasmanian History', *Mercury*, 19 August 1873, p. 3 first makes the claim, which is repeated in Meredith, *Memoir*, p. 7.

J-A Curtis advised that they have no record of the object and also that the institution was established well after the incident in question.<sup>67</sup> In an account by Louisa Anne Meredith, her uncle presented the 'Cap' to the British Museum.<sup>68</sup> The British Museum advise that it was donated by Lord Elgin on an unspecified date, but also that it can no longer be located in their Egyptian collection.<sup>69</sup> Yet another version, supported by contemporary evidence, is that Meredith passed the Cap to his sister, Louisa Anne Twamley, who in turn gave it to Lord Dartmouth on some unspecified date.<sup>70</sup> Elgin may have acquired it from Dartmouth. A history of the Museum supports the 'Cap' as having once been on display.<sup>71</sup>

Whilst at Alexandria, the musters of HMS *Hind* record George Meredith as a First Lieutenant up to and including 25 April 1802. In the next muster book, commencing 9 May 1802, he is listed as plain 'Lieutenant' and in the following muster, commencing 4 July, he is listed as Second Lieutenant and he retained that rank until the ship returned to Spithead in September.<sup>72</sup> The reason for this demotion is unclear. Under the *Naval Discipline Act*, all Marines on board ship were under the discipline of the Captain or his second in command. Therefore, Captain Larcom could demote Meredith, without any need to consult or refer to the separate Marine chain of command.<sup>73</sup> The Marine complement remained at thirty, so it was not any lessening of responsibility that caused the demotion and the Captain's log recorded nothing out of the ordinary during the period prior to the demotion.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> E-mail from J-A Curtis, Curator of History, Birmingham Museum Trust to M Ward, 10 October 2017.

<sup>68</sup> LA Meredith, *Poems* (London, 1835), pp. 173-174.

<sup>69</sup> E-mail from P Usick, Egyptian Section, British Museum to M Ward, 8 February 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Typed transcript, Lord Dartmouth to Louisa Anne Twamley, 17 September 1821, Meredith McFadden collection.

<sup>71</sup> DM Wilson *The British Museum: A history* (London, 2002), p. 61.

<sup>72</sup> Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Hind* Ship's Muster 1 July 1801 to 30 September 1802, ADM 36/14386, TNA.

<sup>73</sup> R Brooks and M Little, *Tracing your Royal Marine ancestors* (Barnsley, 2008), p. 22.

<sup>74</sup> *Hind* captain's log 18 May 1801 to 23 September 1802, ADM 51/1419, TNA.

The *Hind* left Alexandria for Spithead on 24 July 1802 and arrived on 10 September. From the Captain's log, the journey passed uneventfully and perhaps in a somewhat relaxed state; there are regular entries for 'broached a cask of wine, answered contents'.<sup>75</sup> On 23 September, after a week in home port, the final entry in the Captains log stated: '... the Officer of the Yard came on board to see if the ship was in a proper state to be paid off. At noon, paid the ships company and discharged them'.<sup>76</sup>

On the date of discharge, Captain Larcom wrote a reference for Meredith, addressed to the 'Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty'.<sup>77</sup> No dissatisfaction of his service was noted that may have explained Meredith going back to Second Lieutenant. Meredith went onto half pay and for the period 24 September to 31 December 1802, he received £11 11/- .<sup>78</sup>

The peace with France did not last. Hostilities began again in May 1803 with the Dutch and Spanish again allied with the French. Meredith was recalled to the active list on 1 July 1803 and went on board HMS *Northumberland* on 25 October 1803 as First Lieutenant.<sup>79</sup> The *Northumberland* was a 74-gun 'third rate' (so significantly larger than the *Hind*) and was part of the Channel Fleet blockading Ferrol and the Galician coast, north-west Spain.<sup>80</sup> In September 1804, the *Northumberland* and HMS *Illustrious* were anchored at Ferrol Bay, and Meredith was exchanged for Lieutenant Hugh Mitchell and transferred across to the

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, various dates.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 23 September 1802. The *Hind* was subsequently refitted and re-commissioned in 1805. She was finally broken up at Deptford in 1811: Winfield, *British warships*, p. 240.

<sup>77</sup> Hand-written copy: Captain J Larcom, reference for George Meredith, 23 September 1802, Meredith McFadden collection.

<sup>78</sup> Admiralty Marine Officers, *Royal Marines Pay Office: Half pay cash book 1797-1802*, pp. 164-165, ADM 96/89, TNA.

<sup>79</sup> Admiralty Royal Marines Pay Office, *Officers' Commission and Subsistence Book, 1797-1803*, ADM 96/496, TNA; Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Northumberland* Ship's Muster 1 July 1803 to 28 February 1804, ADM 36/16526, TNA.

<sup>80</sup> *Northumberland* captain's log 1 July 1803 to 6 May 1804, ADM 51/1452, TNA.

*Illustrious* 'per order of R Adm<sup>l</sup> Cochrane'.<sup>81</sup> The *Illustrious* also served in the Channel Fleet off the Galacian coast, Spain, until it returned to English and French waters in early 1805 before arriving in Portsmouth on 15 April 1805 where the crew were paid off.<sup>82</sup> On 26 April 1805, Meredith was transferred to headquarters by order of Admiral Montague, the Commander at Portsmouth.<sup>83</sup>

Notwithstanding that the ships' musters referenced above show Meredith as First Lieutenant already, he received a formal commission as First Lieutenant on 5 May 1805 in the 77<sup>th</sup> Company of Marines.<sup>84</sup>

His movements within the service over the year from May 1805 are unknown, except that on 28 March 1806 he wrote a letter to an un-identified officer, stating that he had served in the blockade of Ferrol, and that, due to the re-occurrence of an eye injury, Admiral Cochrane had allowed him to return to port. He was seeking a shore-based staff position as a result.<sup>85</sup> The Marines' 'Casualty book' was searched for Meredith during 1804-1805, but an entry for him was not found.<sup>86</sup> His promotion to First Lieutenant in May 1805, referenced above, implied that he was active in some capacity, but that has not been

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<sup>81</sup> Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Northumberland* Ship's muster 1 March 1804 to 31 October 1804, ADM 36/16527, TNA. Admiral Thomas Cochrane was in charge of the Channel Fleet squadron off Ferrol, whose movements at the time can be found in: W James, *The naval history of Great Britain: During the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, Vol. 3, 1800-1805*, new introductions by A Lambert, first published 1837 in London (London 2002), pp. 280 and 322.

<sup>82</sup> Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Illustrious*, Ship's musters 1 May 1804 – 31 October 1805, ADM 36/16016-16018; HMS *Illustrious* captain's log 8 November 1803 to 23 April 1805, ADM 51/1476, TNA.

<sup>83</sup> Admiralty Ships' Musters, HMS *Illustrious*, Ship's muster 1 May 1805 – 31 October 1805, ADM 36/16018, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> Hand-written copy, King George III: Meredith's commission as First Lieutenant, 1 May 1805, Meredith McFadden collection; Admiralty Marine Officers, *Registers of Marine Officer's Commissions 1755-1814*, ADM 6/406, TNA.

<sup>85</sup> Hand-written copy, Meredith to his Marines commanders, 28 March 1806, Meredith McFadden collection.

<sup>86</sup> Admiralty Royal Marines Pay Office, *Casualty Book, Plymouth, 1803-1808*, ADM 96/510, TNA.



identified. Meredith's request for a shore position in April 1806 was apparently declined, as Meredith left the service shortly afterwards, retiring on full pay.<sup>87</sup>

## MARRIAGE AND FARMING

George Meredith married Sarah Westall Hicks at St Helen's, Abingdon, Berkshire on 16 September 1805.<sup>88</sup> At this stage, Meredith was still in the Marines, and, according to his son Edwin, he was 'recruiting'.<sup>89</sup> St Helen's church, on the banks of the Thames, once in northern Berkshire but now in southern Oxfordshire, was begun in the late 1100s.<sup>90</sup> The reason this church and location were chosen for the marriage is unknown, as it is the opposite end of the former Berkshire country from where the Hicks family lived and also far from Birmingham.

Sarah Hicks was the daughter of Thomas and Catherine Hicks of Newbury, Berkshire and was born 8 April 1788 and baptised at St Nicholas, Newbury on 24 October that year.<sup>91</sup> An account of Sarah Hicks and what transpired after the marriage is contained in the notes written by George and Sarah's son Charles, dated 1879:

My mother was an heiress in her own right at the time of her marriage, having certain buildings and lands worth some £20,000 and adjoining the property of Lord Craven in Berkshire where she married my father. She did so without a marriage settlement, so my father sold my mother's properties in Berkshire and with the proceeds purchased an estate in Wales, "Rhyndaston".<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Admiralty Officers Seniority Lists, *A List of the Officers of his Majesty's Royal Marine Forces*, 1805 [with annotations for 1806], ADM 118/263, TNA.

<sup>88</sup> *The Naval Chronicle for 1805*, Vol. XIV, July-December 1805, p. 350; *Oxford Journal*, 12 October 1805, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> Meredith, *Memoir*, p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Anonymous, 'St Helen's Church, Abingdon: A short guide and tour' (Abingdon, nd).

<sup>91</sup> Parish Records, *St Nicholas, Newbury, baptism registers*, D/P 89/1/6-6A, Berkshire Record Office, (hereafter BRO).

<sup>92</sup> Meredith, *The Honorable Chas. Meredith*, B736, ML, SLNSW, p. 1.

A conveyance of land from Thomas Hicks to George Meredith dated 7 May 1809 detailed how Meredith came into the land in Berkshire.<sup>93</sup> Sarah's mother Catherine died in 1790 and via her will, according to the conveyance, she bequeathed half her estate (mainly land) to her daughter Sarah and the other half to her husband Thomas. The land consisted of over twenty separate parcels of land in the parishes of Enborne, Speen and elsewhere in southern Berkshire, totalling about one hundred and twenty-five acres.<sup>94</sup> The conveyance itself was of Thomas Hicks selling his share of his deceased wife's land to George Meredith, for £4,765. Although Catherine Hicks' will has not been found, it is likely that George Meredith would have assumed control and possession of Sarah's half portion of her mother's land when they married, and, with the purchase of Thomas Hicks' half, he then controlled all that land.

Thomas Hicks married his second wife Mary Payne at Enborne, Berkshire, on 25 March 1805.<sup>95</sup> He appeared to have been a successful farmer, as by 1802 he was residing, probably as a tenant, at *Cope Hall*, one of the oldest houses of the gentry in the district.<sup>96</sup> He died in 1817 and in his will he left the majority of his estate (mainly consisting of farming lands in Berkshire) to an illegitimate son, Eugene, and the remainder to his two daughters from his second wife Mary.<sup>97</sup> Sarah received nothing from her father's will other than £100 'for mourning', nor from the estate of her uncle Henry Wilkins Hicks (a wealthy bachelor

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<sup>93</sup> Deeds and Agreements, *Conveyance of messuage, barn, outhouses, orchards, stables near the Wash in Newbury, and about 100 acres (with abutments) dispersed in the common fields (known as Northcroft, Eastfield and Westfield), in Newbury, and messuage, outhouses, barns and just over 10 acres of land (specified) in Enborne*, D/EX 1041/1, BRO.

<sup>94</sup> The largest single block of land was twenty-five acres at Wash Common, south-west of Newbury in Berkshire.

<sup>95</sup> Parish Records, *St Michaels and All Angels church, Enborne, baptism registers*, D/P 51/1/2, BRO.

<sup>96</sup> P Stokes, *Enborne and Wash Common an illustrated history* (Newbury, 2011), p. 52.

<sup>97</sup> Prerogative Court of Canterbury, *Will of Thomas Hicks, Gentleman of Enborne, Berkshire*, PROB 11/1602/22, TNA.

Major in the East India Company) or any other immediate relative, except her grandmother, Mary, who left her £300 in 1806.<sup>98</sup> Therefore the land Sarah received from her mother appears to be the extent of her personal holdings and Charles Meredith's estimation of its value quite inaccurate.

In the 1809 deed of conveyance referenced above, George Meredith is referred to as being 'late of the Royal Marines, now of Speen', a parish in southern Berkshire. This is the only indication of where the Merediths were living after their marriage in 1805 and is the location of some of the lands George Meredith acquired. No relevant land or other tax records are available at the Berkshire Record Office to locate their residence. Meredith, apparently having little capital after a decade in the Marines, married to acquire his land as a stepping-stone to his prosperity. Not only that, he had the good fortune to marry into an established farming family, where both skill and perhaps some loaned capital might be available to help him in his new enterprise. Having secured the Berkshire properties from his father-in-law in April 1809, it appears Meredith immediately began to rent them out to others, as Abnor Clarkson took some of Meredith's land in Speenhamland (part of the Speen parish) in May 1809.<sup>99</sup>

After a career in the Marines and now settling down to rural life in Berkshire, what kind of a man had Meredith become? As a boy and in his early teens, he grew up in a comfortable middle-class home with some pretensions of aristocracy. Then, losing his father at thirteen, he was at least exposed to, and may have for a time embraced, the teachings and attitudes

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<sup>98</sup> Prerogative Court of Canterbury, *Will of Henry Wilkins Hicks, Major in the Service of the Honorable [sic] East India Company*, PROB 11/1536/183; *Will of John Hicks, Mason of Speen, Berkshire*, PROB 11/942/410; *Will of Mary Hicks, Widow of Enborne, Berkshire*, PROB 11/1444/291, TNA.

<sup>99</sup> Deeds and Agreements, *Covenant and agreement between George Meredith, Abnor Clarkson and others, 27 May 1809*, D/EX 422/1, BRO.

of the Dissenters and Unitarians in Birmingham for up to five years, before his mother pulled him into line and put him in the Marines. There is no indication in the Marines or in Berkshire that Meredith continued to embrace Dissent, if he ever did, and he needed to work hard and grasp every opportunity to rise up in his rural situation to achieve the comfortable lifestyle that he yearned for in the letter to his mother, years before. Meredith the young man was still a work in progress, but seemed to be following the progress of an independent middle-class male, perhaps at this time in the 'lower rank', as described by Davidoff and Hall.<sup>100</sup>

George and Sarah's first child, George Meredith junior, was baptised at Newbury, Berkshire on 9 July 1806.<sup>101</sup> The next two children, Sarah (1807) and Louisa (1808) could not be located in the Berkshire parishes associated with the Meredith and Hicks families.<sup>102</sup> The reason for this is that Meredith had moved to his family's ancestral land, Wales, notwithstanding the location given in the deeds referred to above. By April 1807, Meredith was in Neath, southern Wales, preparing a cottage for his family to move into, while Sarah and George junior were still in Berkshire. In a letter to Sarah he requested some clothes to be sent over and gave an insight into his social attitudes and the role he saw for his wife, which will be reflected after he emigrated with his second wife to Van Diemen's Land fifteen years later:

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<sup>100</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family fortunes*, *passim* and p. 24 for 'lower rank'.

<sup>101</sup> Parish Records, *St Nicholas, Newbury, baptism registers*, D/P 89/1/6-6A, BRO.

<sup>102</sup> Parish baptism registers checked at the BRO between 1804 and 1812 were St Mary, Speen D/P 116/1/6-7, St Nicholas, Newbury D/P 89/1/6-6A, St Michael and All Saints, Enborne D/P 51/1/2, St Mary, Hampstead Marshall, D/P 61/1-3, St Mary, Shaw cum Donnington, D/P 106/1/2, All Saints, Binfield, D/P 18/1/12, St Helen's, Abingdon, D/P 1/6, plus Newbury Congregational D/N 32/8/1/1 and Newbury Non-conformist MF598.

I have already been introduced to some of the neighbouring Gentry & have reason to believe you may establish a pleasant formal Society – I understand they are beginning to be a little curious about Mrs. Meredith.

You must therefore begin to withdraw your thoughts from idle gossiping & childish occurrences, and make yourself more the Woman of Consequence & the independent being. We will set an example to the Natives of this County that you are a Wife praised for her Matronly and Domestic Qualities - and myself as a Husband who knows the value of such a Wife - and this Sarah I trust we may see realised.<sup>103</sup>

His ability to change from loving husband to a scolding one is evidenced by the next paragraph and this behaviour too will be seen in him later in the colony:

I am impatient for a letter from you, with some account of how you are going on & after the receipt of this, I shall certainly expect a letter every other day - You did not comply with my wishes in that respect when I was in Town - but I do hope I shall not again have cause to think you have feel greater pleasure in giving that time to others, which an absent husband had thought you would have devoted to him. Every other day, therefore, give me the particulars of every transaction - with your own opinions fully on each.<sup>104</sup>

His family soon joined him in Wales. Sarah Westall Meredith was born on 31 October 1807 and baptised the same year at Llantrisant, north-west of Cardiff in southern Wales.<sup>105</sup> Louisa was born 30 November 1808 and baptised at Llantrisant on 26 December 1808.<sup>106</sup> Why Llantrisant, 40 miles from Neath, was chosen for the baptism is a mystery. Could both the marriage in Abingdon and the baptisms in Llantrisant be a sign, indicated in his letter (and in later ones in Van Diemen's Land) that he did not think his wife 'up to' the niceties of Meredith's own circle?

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<sup>103</sup> Typed transcript, Meredith to his wife, 30 April 1807, Hodgson Collection.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Birth dates from a loose sheet inserted into *Meredith family Bible*, NS615/1/49, TA; baptism from [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), 'Wales births and baptisms 1541-1907' Church of Latter Day Saints database, film 104938, accessed 20 June 2018.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

The family was not long at Neath. For reasons unknown, but possibly related to Meredith having disposed of his Berkshire holdings in full or part in 1809 (referred to above) and therefore raising capital, Meredith moved the family to Pembrokeshire, in western Wales. It appears his first residence was a house called *Poyston* in Rudbaxton parish, about four kilometres north-west of the regional town of Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.<sup>107</sup>

Wales at this time was in the midst of the industrial revolution, which began to expand in about 1790 but thereafter was a 'long, slow and complex' process.<sup>108</sup> Iron led the way and, while coal was mined in Wales from at least 1700, its production began to surge from about 1800 and the expansion of rail and ports facilitated a boom from the mid-1830s. The lowlands around Haverfordwest, however, remained largely agricultural.<sup>109</sup> In his survey of Dissenters in early nineteenth-century Wales, after finding that they had a greater influence in Wales than England, Watts produced a table that showed an uneven distribution of Presbyterians, Independents, Particular Baptists and Quakers within the various counties in Wales.<sup>110</sup> From Watts' table, it could not be concluded that Pembrokeshire was a particular haven for Dissenters and there is no evidence that the religious environment was a reason for Meredith settling in Pembrokeshire. Jenkins described Haverfordwest as 'ever-difficult' for the authorities around 1800 and was garrisoned.<sup>111</sup>

Meredith's third daughter Sabina was born 8 February 1810 and baptised at Rudbaxton parish on 22 February that year. Second son Charles was born there 29 May 1811, baptised

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<sup>107</sup> Agreements and Indentures, *Agreement between George Meredith and Henry Grant 2nd April 1811*, HDX/747/24 17-E-10, Pembrokeshire Archives and Local Studies (hereafter PA).

<sup>108</sup> P Jenkins, *A history of modern Wales 1536-1990* (London, 1992), pp. 219, 211.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 219-226.

<sup>110</sup> Watts, *Dissenters*, pp. 3 and 510.

<sup>111</sup> Jenkins, *Modern Wales*, p. 261.

on 1 July 1811.<sup>112</sup> Charles did not forget his birthplace and in 1846 named his house at Port Sorell, Tasmania, *Poyston*.<sup>113</sup>

Rudbaxton land tax assessments for the period list over thirty properties in the parish, but George Meredith is not listed as owner or occupier of any. *Poyston* is a large if not grand residence (see Figure 1-2) and at the time was owned and occupied by Thomas Picton and it attracted the second highest tax assessment in the parish.<sup>114</sup> It is possible that Meredith and his young family occupied a portion of the house while he sought a farm of his own.



**Figure 1-2** *Poyston*, Rudbaxton parish, Wales, nd.

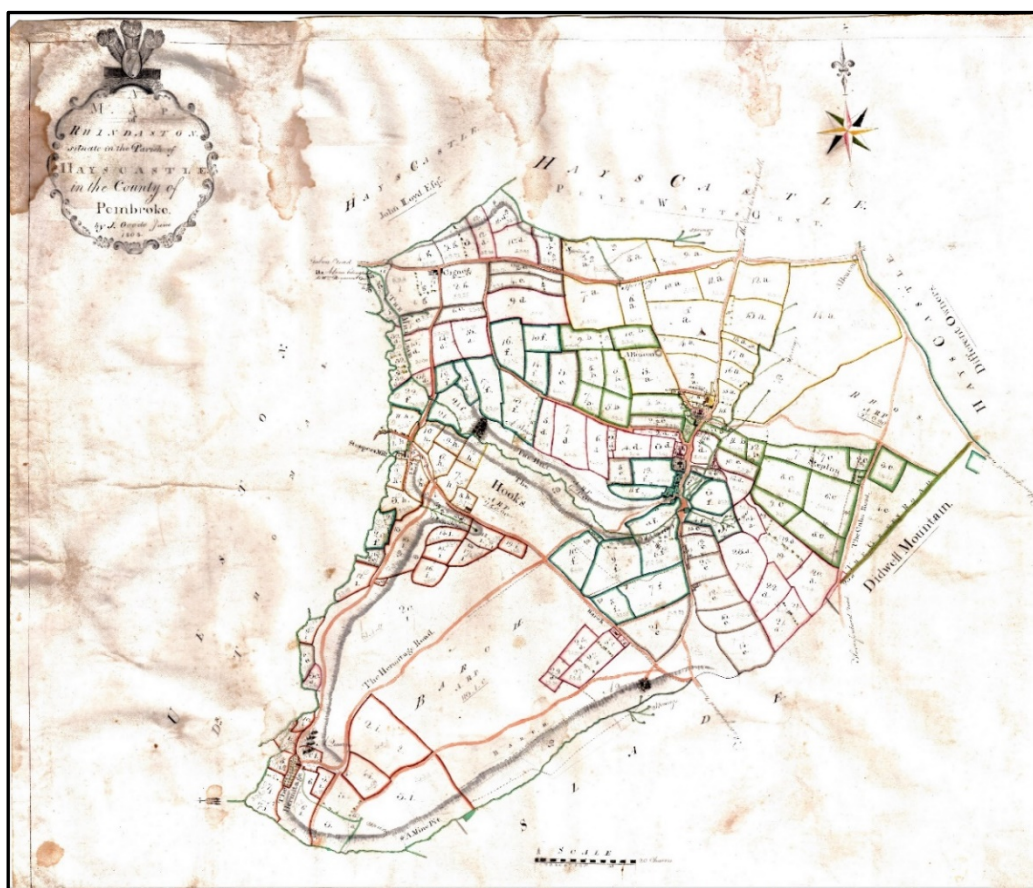
Source: D/EE/28/23, 3/F/6, Pembrokeshire Archives and Local Studies.

<sup>112</sup> *Meredith family Bible*, NS615/1/49, TA for births; Parish Records, *Rudbaxton parish registers of 1806-1816*, HPR/8, PA for baptisms.

<sup>113</sup> Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>114</sup> Land Tax Assessments, *Land tax assessments, Dungleddy*, PQ/RT/DE/1813-1820, PA.

After a year or so at *Poyston*, Meredith acquired *Rhyndaston* farm in Hayscastle parish, a few miles to the north-west, in sight of the Irish Sea. It is likely that Meredith had by this time fully disposed of his Berkshire land, thus obtaining some capital for the purchase. According to land tax records, up to and including May 1809, *Rhyndaston*, comprising eight separately occupied tenements, was owned by Julia Rooke.<sup>115</sup> An 1808 plan, and accompanying table, also showed by colour, the division into eight lots, totalling nine hundred and twenty-four acres (Figures 1-3 and 1-4).<sup>116</sup>



**Figure 1-3** Map of *Rhyndaston*, by J Goode, June 1803. Prior to Meredith's purchase there were eight tenancies (colour coded here) spread over numerous small fields. Meredith consolidated it into two tenancies and the majority for his own occupation.

Source: Amos family, Glen Gala collection.

<sup>115</sup> Land Tax Assessments, *Land tax assessments, Dewsland, Hayscastle parish*, PQ/RT/DE/1804-1812, PA.

<sup>116</sup> *Map of Rhyndaston by J Goode, 1808* [with accompanying table of lots], Amos family, Glen Gala Collection.





**Figure 1-4** Detail from above map showing farmsteads and labelling of fields.  
Source: Amos family, Glen Gala collection.

In May 1810 George Meredith is listed on land tax records as the owner of *Rhyndaston* and he had consolidated a couple of the tenancies for his own occupancy; however, documents relating Meredith's actual purchase and later sale of the property (see below) show that land tax records are not a good indicator of the date of 'vacant possession', so he may not have occupied the farm until a year later, agreeing more with the baptism records. The following year *Rhyndaston* was broken into three parts—one occupied by Meredith himself (the majority, judging by amount of tax levied), and two with tenants. Meredith was also occupying a church tenement called 'The Tenth', most likely with its origins in tithed land.<sup>117</sup> At the time, most land in Wales was owned by the landed elites and occupied by tenants. Sir John Owen of *Orielton* estate was a significant local landowner. Even by 1887, 89 percent of cultivated land in Wales was occupied by a tenant, so only about 10 percent

<sup>117</sup> Land Tax Assessments, *Land tax assessments, Dewsland, Haycastle parish, PQ/RT/DE/1804-1812, PA.*

was owner-occupied.<sup>118</sup> Therefore Meredith's situation was something of an anomaly; he evidently wished to conduct some farming himself.

On 2 April 1811, George Meredith 'of Poyston' signed a contract with Henry Grant of London for the purchase of certain lands.<sup>119</sup> A geographical description is not given, but from the purchase price (£6,300, of which £1,260 was paid up-front), various place names in the document and other evidence, this appears to be the *Rhyndaston* farm or farms. Meredith's method of financing the farms at the time is not clear from available documents, but he very likely took out a mortgage with Henry Davis to supplement the sale proceeds from Berkshire. Henry Davis appeared to be a local 'financier', with documents evidencing both payment of interest on bonds issued and loans made.<sup>120</sup> One such document noted that Meredith had exchanged two annuities, value £3,213 and £3,699, for a mortgage of £6,682 from Davis in about June 1815.<sup>121</sup>

In 1812, elections were held in Pembrokeshire and George Meredith voted for the Tory candidate, John Owen, of the *Orielton* estate.<sup>122</sup> John Owen was originally John Lord, a barrister practicing in south Wales but changed his name to Owen after inheriting the *Orielton* property (but no title) from a distant relation, Sir Hugh Owen, Baronet, whose family had held the seat on-and-off for over a hundred years. John Owen was created a Baronet in 1817.<sup>123</sup> John Owen/Lord's brother was Edward Lord, a Marine officer who was a member of David Collins' expedition that founded Hobart Town and he subsequently

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<sup>118</sup> Jenkins, *Modern Wales*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>119</sup> Agreements and Indentures, *Agreement between George Meredith and Henry Grant, 2 April 1811*, HDX/747/24 17-E-10, PA.

<sup>120</sup> Agreements and Indentures, *Henry Davis*, D/EE/1/78, PA.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> RG Thorne, 'The Pembrokeshire elections of 1807 and 1812', *The Pembrokeshire Historian*, No. 6 (1979), p. 20.

<sup>123</sup> F Jones, 'Owens of Orielton', *The Pembrokeshire Historian*, No. 5 (1974), p. 30.

became a significant merchant and figure there.<sup>124</sup> Some years later, Meredith wrote that he first became aware of Edward Lord through ‘the medium of Captain Jeffries intended publication in manuscript’.<sup>125</sup> Lord and Meredith would meet in Wales and entered into an agreement that would later prove disastrous for Meredith—this will be described in Chapter 2.

In about 1812, Meredith began an affair with Mary Evans, the seventeen-year-old daughter of the local midwife, Martha Evans.<sup>126</sup> On 14 May 1813, Meredith began a journey to north Wales and Scotland and Mary may have accompanied him on it.<sup>127</sup> Meredith kept a diary on the trip and at the back he made notes on some farms he either visited or read about in newspapers, and their terms of sale or rent.<sup>128</sup> Amongst the names listed was ‘Adam Amos, Herriot Mill, Middleton’. Middleton was only about twenty kilometres south-east of Edinburgh, where Meredith spent two weeks in July, so he may have visited the farm.

Brothers Adam and John Amos were the sons of James and Helen Amos, who came to lease a farm at Heriot Mill in Scotland in 1776.<sup>129</sup> By the time Adam was seventeen and John fourteen, both of their parents were dead, and it appears that Adam took over the running

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<sup>124</sup> T Rienits, ‘Lord, Edward (1781–1859)’, ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lord-edward-2370/text3113>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 24 August 2017. A Alexander, *Corruption and Skulduggery: Edward Lord, Maria Riseley and Hobart’s tempestuous beginnings* (Dyynnyrne, 2015), p. 100.

<sup>125</sup> Lord and Meredith reference, nd (but probably 1824), *Papers relating to legal cases involving George Meredith, including his dispute with Edward Lord and the libel case RL Murray. 90 papers*, NS123/1/5, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/5 series will be omitted. ‘Captain Jeffries’ was Lieutenant Charles Jeffreys who published *Geographical and descriptive delineations of the island of Van Dieman’s* [sic] *Land* (London, 1820). Edward Lord is mentioned a number of times, both as a Marine and an extensive landholder. Lord and Jeffreys held adjacent land grants at Pittwater, near Hobart Town: JCH Gill, ‘Lieut. Charles Jeffreys, R.N. The last buccaneer?’, *Royal Historical Society of Queensland, Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1978/9), pp. 116–117.

<sup>126</sup> Meredith to his wife, 25 February 1827, *George Meredith letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith. 113 letters*, NS123/1/1 # 28, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/1 series will be omitted.

<sup>127</sup> Meredith to his wife, 5 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #288, TA.

<sup>128</sup> G Meredith, [Diary of a trip to north Wales and Scotland, with notes on farms], 1813, Meredith McFadden Collection.

<sup>129</sup> *Heriot Mill rent receipt book*, Amos family, Glen Gala Collection.

of the farm. He married in 1804, aged twenty-five and three years later, John was also married.<sup>130</sup>

Although by all accounts diligent farmers, the depression that began in Britain about 1812 limited any prosperity that the Amos brothers could have hoped for at *Heriot Farm*.<sup>131</sup> It appears George Meredith invited Adam Amos to come to Pembrokeshire and join him at *Rhyndaston*, as almost immediately after the time Meredith was in the Edinburgh area, Amos had asked a friend, 'A Pringle', to inspect a farm of 300 acres that Meredith had proposed a partnership on. Pringle cautioned: 'I have no doubt that it is in a wild part of the country but you may get ground [there] ... and make a good living'. Later he added:

I perfectly understand you in regard to what you say concerning the profit of the partnership but I would much rather that if you could agree with the Squire for to rent the 300 acres you speak of, as I do not think it would answer for a gentleman & a farmer to lay out a Joint Stock in farming for you must know [the] gentleman is a little whimsical [sic] (at least I do).<sup>132</sup>

The report was apparently favourable enough such that in 1814 the Amoses gave up the lease on *Heriot Farm* and with their families, travelled to Wales.<sup>133</sup>

Adam Amos is not named on land tax records of *Rhyndaston*, although they name only the 'proprietor' (Meredith) and primary occupier of the three tenements (Meredith himself, Isaac David and John Evan) so Amos probably became a sub-tenant of Meredith's.<sup>134</sup> The Amos' surviving account from May to July 1816 tabulated over £200 of wheat and oat sales

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<sup>130</sup> A Evans, RD Evans, and CR Landels, *The Amos family: A story of Tasmanian pioneers* (Auckland, 1997), pp. 10-14.

<sup>131</sup> R Prothero, *English farming past and present* (London, 1917), Chapter XV, 'Agricultural depression and the poor law, 1813-1837', pp. 316-331.

<sup>132</sup> A Pringle to A Amos, 28th July 1813, Amos family, Glen Gala Collection.

<sup>133</sup> M Amos [account of her early life], nd, Amos family, Glen Gala Collection.

<sup>134</sup> Land Tax Assessments, Haycastle, PQ/RT/DE/1813-1820, PA.

to various people in the area and also a sale of potatoes to George Meredith.<sup>135</sup> Adam Amos at least was doing well on the land. During this time, John Amos worked as a carpenter.<sup>136</sup>

## FIRST PREPARATIONS FOR EMIGRATION

The circumstances of the next few years are unclear from available primary sources. Nevertheless, it appears that, although Adam Amos may have been doing reasonably well on the land, Meredith as a whole was not. The end of the Napoleonic Wars hit Welsh industry hard, with its reliance on the munitions industry to consume its industrial products.<sup>137</sup> Prices for agricultural commodities dropped while the cost base remained high—this will be discussed further in Chapter 2. In addition, Louisa Anne Meredith in her *Reminiscences*, wrote

A very large portion of my dear Aunt George's [Sarah, George's wife] fortune was by this time spent; my Uncle, besides his purchase of a large estate of mostly barren land in Pembrokeshire, Rhyndaston, had flung away thousands in clearing off gorse, and planting trees on soil that would not grow them.<sup>138</sup>

The first indication that Meredith wanted to leave *Rhyndaston* is an account in early 1817 from his lawyer at Alexander & Holme: '1817, Feby 1st. Attending Mr Burt when he shewed us the different securities which he proposed to give for your property and explained to us the consideration he gave for the same & writing to you thereon ....6/- 8d'.<sup>139</sup> In mid-1818, Meredith started to unwind the mortgage he had with Davis.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> [A Amos farm accounts (partial)], 1816, Amos family, Glen Gala Collection.

<sup>136</sup> *Haycastle baptisms 1816-1819*, HPR/17, PA.

<sup>137</sup> Jenkins, *Modern Wales*, p. 261.

<sup>138</sup> Typed transcript, *Reminiscences* [by] Louisa Ann [sic] Meredith, Wren's Nest, Hobart, April 24 [18]92, Hodgson collection, p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> [Statement of fees from Alexander & Holme, lawyers], NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>140</sup> George Meredith Esqr Dr to Henry Davis, D/EE/1/78, PA.

During 1819, Meredith was living in London and had left Adam Amos in charge of supervising the valuation, winding up and sale of the property to Andrew Burt and they corresponded frequently by letter.<sup>141</sup> This shows the trust that Meredith placed in Amos and was a first manifestation of Meredith's propensity not to live on his farm but to direct activities from afar.

For a period during 1819 it appears that Meredith's family, and his servant and lover, Mary Evans, were located at Binfield in Berkshire, probably on their way to Birmingham. Meredith had installed her mother, Martha, that same year as one of the tenants on *Rhyndaston*.<sup>142</sup>

A letter from Mary Evans to Meredith in April that year indicates a high degree of literacy and in it she expressed her opinion on a proposal that Meredith had apparently mentioned, to establish an inn.<sup>143</sup> She commented that she would be happy to help in any way she could and that there would be advantages and disadvantages to such a business, the latter being high initial capital and running expenses. Her mother would be useful as she was previously 'in that line'. The letter indicates a level of 'familiarity' more than would be normal between a nursemaid and master and Meredith's apparent solicitation of her thoughts on his proposed operating of an inn must be considered unusual. Several letters written by Adam Amos to Meredith in April and May 1819 were also addressed to Binfield, but were re-addressed to Holborn, London.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> A Amos to Meredith, various dates 1819, *Papers and correspondence with variety of people, including Joseph Archer, Adam Amos, George Frankland, Lieut. Colonel Sorell, T.D. Lord and others. 150 letters*, NS123/1/4, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/4 series will be omitted.

<sup>142</sup> Land Tax Assessments, Haycastle, PQ/RT/DE/1813-1820, PA.

<sup>143</sup> Mary Evans to Meredith, 15 April 1819, Mary Ann Meredith (nee Evans), *Letters to her husband George Meredith (and 1 letter from George to his wife Mary). 13 letters*, NS123/1/13, TA.

<sup>144</sup> Adam Amos to Meredith, 28 April and 30 May 1819, NS123/1/4, TA.

Probably in 1818, George Meredith made Mary Evans pregnant and she was sent to Bristol to give birth.<sup>145</sup> This child grew up as Henry Meredith, but George Meredith maintained in some letters that Henry was adopted and was given his surname for convenience. In 1830, Mary, by then his wife, was distressed that stories about Henry's illegitimate birth had reached her from England. Meredith wrote to her, reminding her of the 'facts'—that Henry was adopted, by way of an obligation to the father, who was 'illegally married' and that a certificate of baptism existed. This was likely done so Mary could show the letter to others as 'proof' of the adoption story.<sup>146</sup> Louisa Anne Meredith wrote that her mother (George's sister, Louisa Anne) was not deceived by this story and 'the child was too like Molly [Mary] for a doubt to remain'.<sup>147</sup>

Relations between Meredith and the *Rhyndaston* purchaser Burt appear to have soured by this time and Burt appointed a Mr Wrathall as bailiff on the property. In successive letters from April 1819, Adam Amos wrote to Meredith, expressing his concern at the behaviour of Wrathall, such as placing locks on barns, selling crops and farm equipment, subverting the valuation process, demanding rent off tenants and in one case, 'abused Mrs Evans & you he called all the bad names – swindlers & Hoare masters & threatened to put the Nurse in prison ... calling Nurse a Hoare before two witnesses'.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Typed transcript, *Reminiscences*, Hodgson collection, p. 11. Many years later Meredith described getting Mary pregnant for the first time and from that text, she may have had an abortion: Meredith to his wife, 5 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #288, TA.

<sup>146</sup> Meredith to his wife, 11 July 1830, NS123/1/1 #59, TA. Henry is not listed amongst the births of the children to George Meredith in the Meredith family Bible referenced earlier. Henry died in January 1837 and his burial record gives an age of 19, indicating a birth year of 1818—'Burials at Campbell Town 1838', RGD34/1/1 number 5656, TA.

<sup>147</sup> Typed transcript, *Reminiscences*, Hodgson collection, p. 11.

<sup>148</sup> Adam Amos to Meredith, 28 April 1819, NS123/1/4, TA.

A valuation in July brought about another confrontation with Wrathall and his lawyer, but a figure of £423 for stock, crops and equipment was eventually yielded and passed onto Meredith.<sup>149</sup> Problems with Burt continued. Alexander and Holme's next itemised account of legal fees, covering June 1819 to June 1820 shows that Andrew Burt was being unsuccessfully pursued for payment of a bill for £1,000 drawn on a Mr Wilkinson. For instance, an item from Michaelmas Term 1819: 'Attending several times at Staple Inn endeavouring to obtain a sight of Mr Burt but his Chambers were always closed shut ... 6/- 8d'.<sup>150</sup> In September 1820, on the eve of Meredith's sailing to Van Diemen's Land, Holme presented him with an invoice that was 'so large' the lawyer had to confine it to the 'strict charges' only.<sup>151</sup> Eventually a suit on the Kings Bench was initiated, but apparently never came to a hearing, as no mention of either Meredith or Burt appears in the Reports of Cases for the period.<sup>152</sup>

In March 1819, Meredith gave a lease to John Evans on a property in Trinity Street London, adjacent to a wharf on the Thames and containing a number of warehouses and tenements.<sup>153</sup> Evans was the agent of Henry Davis, who had previously given Meredith a mortgage to purchase *Rhyndaston*. It appears from this, and other attached legal documents, that Meredith had renegotiated the mortgage over *Rhyndaston* and had offered the London properties, and their income, as security and interest payment for the mortgage of £6,978 13/3d.

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<sup>149</sup> Adam Amos to Meredith, 23 July 1819, *ibid*.

<sup>150</sup> Statement of fees from Alexander & Holme, lawyers, 1819, NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>151</sup> Holme to Meredith, 4 September 1820, NS123/1/4, TA.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*; Richard Barnewall and Edward Alderson, *Reports of Cases argued and determined in the Court of the King's Bench Vol III 1819, 1820* (London, 1820).

<sup>153</sup> *Indenture between George Meredith and John Evans*, 24 March 1819, D/EE/1/19 3/D/7, PA.



This arrangement may or may not have been as a result of a failure to obtain timely settlement with Burt on *Rhyndaston* (land tax records show that Burt ultimately did occupy the property), but in any event, appears to have been a way for Meredith to conserve his cash.<sup>154</sup> The reason for wanting to have cash is that he had been planning the next phase of his life, emigration to a foreign colony to begin a new landholding life, on a grander scale than was available to him in Britain.

## CONCLUSION

George Meredith had a comfortable up-bringing, with his father an attorney to the Gooch family baronetcy and he lived on a large estate for most of his teenage years. A story of the family being descended from the Welsh royal family was likely passed onto him. Although not titled, it is likely that he would have felt being a member of, if not the aristocracy, then close to it, and this probably coloured his attitude to those around him, especially those he felt his inferiors. In his teens, and without the influence of his father, Meredith may have been exposed to the teachings and philosophy of the Dissenters. There is no evidence that he ever embraced the religious aspect of Dissent, but some of his attitudes in later life against authority may indicate that he retained some of its oppositionist ideas.

In the *Marines*, his first experience as an officer on board was of a mutiny, where the ship's crew took over the ship and sent the Navy officers ashore, with the possible acquiescence of his own *Marines*. It would have been galling for Second Lieutenant Meredith, not only to be subject to the humiliation of disempowerment by the ordinary seamen, but then to

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<sup>154</sup> Land Tax Assessments, Haycastle, PQ/RT/DE/1813-1820, PA.

have the Admiralty not punish the mutineers. It is likely that this experience would have made him determined to control events around him and not to give quarter when opposed.

Meredith married reasonably well, gaining a wife who had inherited land. Meredith sold that land to buy an estate in Wales, but this was not a success and he decided to emigrate to the colonies and sold *Rhyndaston*, probably at a loss and after running up considerable legal fees. Several events in Wales came to influence his life and experiences in Van Diemen's Land—he met Edward Lord, who would later sue Meredith and cost him a great deal, and he met and commenced an affair with Mary Evans, who would become his second wife and travel with him to the colonies.

Meredith's life in Van Diemen's Land was marked in many respects by his upbringing in Warwickshire, early career in the Marines and his brief farming episode in Wales.

## CHAPTER 2:       SEEKING INDEPENDENCE: A NEW LIFE IN THE COLONIES

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will firstly examine the preparations George Meredith made for his family's immigration to Van Diemen's Land and the significant events in his family life that immediately preceded it. His second marriage and starting of a new family would have an immense impact on the eventual fate of the Meredith dynasty in Tasmania and its consequences reached into Tasmanian politics and society late into the nineteenth century. Meredith's preparations showed careful attention to detail and, with such things as arranging a private charter of an emigration vessel, an intention to be self-sufficient, in control of his own destiny and not reliant on others. In a word, to be 'independent'. This is a characteristic that will be seen time and again in Meredith and, while not unique to him, the extent to which he sought and expressed his independence in Van Diemen's Land was marked.

The chapter will secondly study Meredith's first three or four years in the colony and how under Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell he accumulated much more land than he was entitled to. An independent frame of mind quickly manifested itself by his going to the central east coast of the colony to settle, an area previously unoccupied by Europeans. Soon after his arrival, he was immersed in several legal and administrative contests that were largely of his own making and ultimately proved very expensive in terms of money and resources over at least four years. His dispute with powerful Hobart Town merchant Edward Lord was the costliest. Over the same period, he had several disputes over land, but these were ultimately won and set him up to establish a large estate at Great Swan

Port on the east coast of Van Diemen's Land. In the course of these contests, Meredith showed himself to be an inveterate—but not necessarily successful—networker, relentless in the pursuit of his own interests and indications of a disdain for colonial authorities emerge here. Additionally, Meredith is shown to have a keen interest in agriculture, particularly crops, and to be a strategic and forward thinker.

This phase of Meredith's life was crucial in settling him up with the land bank that underpinned his ability to grow economically and in his standing in the colony. Even though it would not have been planned as such, his land also gave him the economic power to be assertive against Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, when the latter began to constrict Meredith's entrepreneurial activities, as opposed to the freedom that Meredith experienced under Sorell.

## THE NATURE AND GROWTH OF FREE SETTLERS DIRECT TO VAN DIEMEN'S LAND UP TO 1823

The origins of the settlement of Van Diemen's Land are well known and will only be recounted here sufficient to frame the establishment and growth of settlers who came free and direct to the colony, independent of government or military service, up to 1823.

Governor King in Sydney became concerned about possible French and American whaling interest in the southern areas of New South Wales. King first dispatched Lieutenant Robbins in 1802 to raise the British flag on King Island to counter French Commander Baudin's interest in the area. The following year, he sent Lieutenant John Bowen to form a small settlement on the Derwent River in southern Van Diemen's Land.<sup>1</sup> Economic

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<sup>1</sup> RW Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania*, Vol. II (Melbourne, 1928), pp. 12, 642. See also L Robson, *A History of Tasmania: Vol. I Van Diemen's Land from the earliest times to 1855* (Melbourne, 1983), pp. 32-35 for

activities such as timber and crop-growing were also contemplated, and some free settlers accompanied Bowen's expedition. They were allowed some small town lots and were promised more later, provided with some convict labour and livestock, and permitted to live off government stores for a year.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, King had also convinced London that a settlement to the south of Sydney was desirable and Colonel David Collins was sent in 1803 to establish a colony at Port Phillip.<sup>3</sup> Collins did not find conditions there suitable and in 1804 moved his expedition to the Derwent, absorbing Bowen's settlement, which had struggled. Collins brought with him no free settlers (and four out of the five free settlers Bowen brought with him quit the colony) but did have a full contingent of Marines, including Edward Lord, and a civil establishment. A second expedition from Sydney settled at Port Dalrymple in the north of Van Diemen's Land in late 1804, led by Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson. This party consisted mainly of convicts and Marines, but also a few free settlers.<sup>4</sup>

Both settlements struggled in the initial years, mainly because of inadequate food and hence were not an attractive place for new free settlers.<sup>5</sup> Bushranging took hold in the colony during the difficult early years and continued as a material deterrent to new settlers well past 1820.<sup>6</sup>

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discussion about King and his reaction to the prospect of French landings in Van Diemen's Land; for Bowen see P Tardif, *John Bowen's Hobart: The beginning of European settlement in Tasmania* (Sandy Bay, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Robson, *History of Tasmania Vol. I*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> For Collins, see J Currey, *David Collins: A colonial life* (Melbourne, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> CMH Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. I: From the earliest times to the age of Macquarie* (Melbourne, 1999), pp. 194-195.

<sup>5</sup> Robson, *History of Tasmania, Vol. I*, pp. 52-60.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, *History of Australia Vol. I*, p. 283.

In the early 1810s, many of the free males in the colony not on the civil list or military were emancipists and entitled to obtain grants of land.<sup>7</sup> In 1813 the non-emancipist settler numbers were swelled by those of the disbanded Marine contingent who chose to stay and receive land grants.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there was a disproportionately high number of settlers from the 'less desirable' classes, nearly all of whom lacked capital to properly develop their land.

Historian Sharon Morgan analysed 1,463 land grants made from 1804 to 1823. Although the date of grants lagged the date of arrival and also lagged the date of occupation of the land in question, which was not analysed by Morgan, the figures and patterns are instructive.<sup>9</sup> Up to 1813, land grants were small in number and area—an average of less than two hundred acres each. In 1813, three hundred and fifty-six grants were made, mainly to relocated Norfolk Island settlers, at an average of less than one hundred acres per grant. The years 1814-16 again saw low numbers of grants, but the average size had increased to over five hundred acres. Most larger grants went to government officials and/or their families, with emancipists still receiving small allotments. A few settlers came from 'mainland' New South Wales and obtained substantial grants of land, such as James Cox, who established *Clarendon* in the north around 1816, but they were in the minority.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Governor Phillip's instructions, 25 April 1787, F Watson, (ed.), *Historical Records of Australia, Series I, Governors' despatches to and from England, Vol. I 1788-1796* (Sydney, 1914). p. 14. Henceforth this series will be cited in the format HRA [series], Vol. [number], [page number(s)] irrespective of general editor. Full citations will be given in the bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see M Ward, *The Royal Marine and the convict* (Orford, 2016), p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> S Morgan, *Land settlement in early Tasmania* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 13 *et seq.* The table on p. 24 of L Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land: Lieutenant Governor 1817-24* (Hobart, 2004) differs a little from Morgan's. In Morgan's analysis, 50% of grants were made more than four years after the grantee's arrival, although this analysis is skewed by the fact that grantees who were former convicts had their time as prisoners included in their wait time.

<sup>10</sup> JC Warrillow-Williams, 'Cox, James (1790–1866)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University (hereafter ADB), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cox-james-1931/text2305>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 10 October 2017.

From 1817, the year of Lieutenant-Governor Sorell's arrival, to 1823, the final year included in Morgan's analysis, the size and number of grants made annually continued to vary significantly, but 1823 saw by far the greatest in number of grants (1,027), total acreage (441,871) and number of grants over five hundred acres (276).<sup>11</sup> The significant increase in the size of grants after 1817 reflected the increasing number of free settlers arriving with capital intending to be broadacre farmers, as opposed to becoming town merchants or tradesmen. There were exceptions of course—three of the six grants made in 1819 were to Lieutenant-Governor Sorell, 3,000 acres in total.<sup>12</sup> George Meredith's interest in Van Diemen's Land germinated during this period and his and his family's grants fell into the 1823 group of Morgan, two years after their first occupation, or at least claim, of the land.

The increase in settlers arriving in Van Diemen's Land with capital directly from Britain can be traced back to Governor Macquarie's visit to the colony in 1811.<sup>13</sup> In spite of the colony's earlier privations, following his visit, Macquarie reported to London favourably on its condition and this met with approval of Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Earl Bathurst.<sup>14</sup> Macquarie noted that encouragement would be a good thing and that grants should be made to settlers having a 'Certain Degree of Property'.

A system evolved whereby intending settlers would apply to the Secretary of State for permission to emigrate and the Under-Secretary would prepare a form letter to the Governor in Sydney (until June 1820, and then to the Lieutenant-Governor in Hobart Town for Van Diemen's Land settlers), stating that permission had been granted and asking that

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<sup>11</sup> Morgan, *Land settlement*, pp. 165-169.

<sup>12</sup> Mickleborough, *William Sorell*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> L Macquarie, *Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales: Journals of his tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1810-1822* (Sydney, 1979), pp. 45-88.

<sup>14</sup> Bathurst to Macquarie, 3 February 1814, HRA I, Vol. VIII, p. 125.

the settler be given a grant of land in proportion to the settler's 'means'.<sup>15</sup> A common way for settlers to increase their grants was to bring goods to be sold on arrival, thus increasing their capital and, proportionally, their entitlement to land.<sup>16</sup> Joseph Archer, who emigrated with Meredith in 1821 (see below) found problems in this type of scheme. In a letter to his father a year after arriving, he lamented that some of the goods he brought were unsuitable for the market, some might only realise half of what was hoped, there were delays in getting paid and that 'Every import reduces the profit on subsequent ones'.<sup>17</sup> That said, Archer ventured that 'if well laid in & sold by retail I think [goods] will pay well'.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to pull factors, such as the availability of land and cheap convict labour, was the general push factor of the deterioration of the economy in Britain after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. During the wars, agricultural prices advanced at an 'unprecedented rate' and in spite of high taxes and some poor harvest years, such as 1811-12, real incomes of farmers increased.<sup>19</sup> After the war, prices fell and farmers were squeezed between lower income and, at least for a few years, continuing high taxes and rents. Agricultural historian Rowland Prothero argued that the agricultural and commercial depression was at its worst from 1815 to 1821 when the value of crops and tenancies fell,

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<sup>15</sup> Robson, *History of Tasmania*, Vol. I, p. 114. The colony of New South Wales, including its dependency, Van Diemen's Land, was not open to anyone to settle within, although that concept was challenged by New South Wales Judge Advocate Ellis Bent in 1815. Bent contended to Governor Macquarie that a 'free British subject' may move to any part of the King's dominions and reside there: Bent to Macquarie, enclosed in Macquarie to Bathurst, 24 February 1815, HRA I, Vol. VIII, pp. 401-402. This opinion did not prevail.

<sup>16</sup> This applied at least up to July 1821, after Macquarie tightened the regulations as to what was permitted as 'Property' when considering an application for a grant of land. In November 1821 Macquarie excluded anything not related to land improvement and profits from the sale of goods on arrival. Macquarie to Sorell, enclosed in Macquarie to Bathurst, 28 November 1821, HRA I, Vol. X, pp. 569-570.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Archer to his father William, 10 July 1822, 'Extracts of a letter received by William Archer from Joseph Archer', Archer collection, *Brickendon*.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph's brother Thomas was already in Van Diemen's Land so Joseph should have had a reasonable idea of conditions. N Chick, *The Archer heritage* (Longford, 2016), pp. 84, 87.

<sup>19</sup> PK O'Brien, 'The impact of the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815, on the long-run growth of the British economy', *Review*, No. 12 (1989), p. 357.



while the cost base that had crept up during the war years remained.<sup>20</sup> Eric Evans noted the compounding impacts on the post-war farming economy of falling prices, social dissatisfaction caused by the 'Corn Law', a poor harvest in 1816, a trade depression and a labour force glutted by the demobilisation of some 300,000 soldiers and sailors.<sup>21</sup> In Wales, the end of the war particularly affected the iron industry; protests and a strike began in Merthyr, north of Cardiff in 1816 and unrest spread along 'the valleys'.<sup>22</sup> With the collapse in agricultural prices, the lowlands would not have been exempt from unrest. Historian Ronald Giblin pointed out that the effects of unemployment were felt immediately amongst the manual-labouring classes, but in time the 'higher orders' were affected by systemic flaws in the economy together with high taxes and other restrictions.<sup>23</sup> Meredith, on his farm in western Wales, would have been observing all this with grave concern.

Social unrest in England increased after the war and between 1816 and 1819 a number of protest marches took place, some of which were put down harshly by the authorities, including the 'Peterloo Massacre' at Manchester, where eleven people were killed and hundreds injured when cavalry charged into a crowd of thousands protesting for constitutional reform.<sup>24</sup> In Meredith's home city of Birmingham, mass gatherings began in early 1817 to discuss issues such as political corruption and reform of the economy and the House of Commons.<sup>25</sup> Evans argued that the unrest simmering in the factories and towns

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<sup>20</sup> R Prothero, *English farming past and present* (London, 1917), pp. 317, 322.

<sup>21</sup> EJ Evans, *The forging of the modern state: Early industrial Britain, 1783-c.1870*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (London, 2019), pp. 242-243.

<sup>22</sup> P Jenkins, *A history of modern Wales 1536-1990* (London, 1992), p. 261.

<sup>23</sup> Giblin, *Early history*, Vol. II, pp. 193-194.

<sup>24</sup> R Evans, '19 June 1822 Creating 'an object of real terror': The tabling of the first Bigge Report', in M Crotty and D Roberts, (eds.), *Turning points in Australian history* (Sydney, 2009), pp. 49-50.

<sup>25</sup> C Gill, *History of Birmingham*, Vol. I (London, 1952), pp. 201-202.

at the time would have turned into a more substantial movement against the authorities had the local leaders been able to turn rhetoric into practicality.<sup>26</sup>

The period 1816-19 was the time when George Meredith would have been turning his mind to alternatives to farming in Wales. He had bought his farm *Rhyndaston* in about 1811 during the time of war-backed agricultural prosperity. The economic downturn after the end of the Napoleonic Wars would likely have impacted him in western Wales as it did farmers in most of the rest of Britain. By 1818 he was often away in London and during that year he moved his family back to Birmingham to facilitate the sale of the farm.<sup>27</sup> From his decade commanding in the Marines and his 'establishment' background (tending to aristocracy in his own mind), Meredith would likely have been disturbed by the embryonic uprisings of the lower classes. As a thoughtful man, he was likely weighing his options both in terms of economic advancement after Wales, and the general social and economic environment of Britain at the time.

During this time, the New South Wales colony was attracting interest and discussion in London on several fronts. Exploration achievements such as the crossing of the Blue Mountains were being discussed in the press and dissatisfaction was emerging in Parliament with the performance of Governor Lachlan Macquarie and the effectiveness of transportation as a punishment.<sup>28</sup> Clark argued that the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Earl Bathurst, believed that by 1817, New South Wales, rather than being a place to punish criminals, had become 'an object to all who desired to leave their native country

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<sup>26</sup> Evans, *Forging of the modern state*, p. 244.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Meredith (senior) to Mary Evans, 18 [July] 1818, *Meredith family papers deposited by Mrs WVG Johnson 1962 & 1964 G4/104*, University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections (hereafter UTAS S&R). Henceforth the title of the G4 series will be omitted.

<sup>28</sup> Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. I*, pp. 331-332.

and had capital to apply to the improvement of the land'.<sup>29</sup> Commissioner John Thomas Bigge was appointed as a result of these various concerns, to report into various aspects of the state of the colony.<sup>30</sup>

At some point, Meredith's mind turned to emigration and he carefully considered where he might go. His niece, Louisa Anne Meredith *nee* Twamley, later wrote: 'My Uncle was then reading works giving information as to countries to which it was desirable to emigrate ... the Cape seemed most in favour'.<sup>31</sup> Norfolk Island was another place considered.<sup>32</sup> About the same time, Thomas Henty was mulling over the pros and cons of New South Wales or Van Diemen's Land as a place to re-settle in reaction to the deteriorating English economy.<sup>33</sup> Thomas' son James, looking forward to a new home, wrote a few years later:

Our situation as compared with [family friend John Street] will be vastly superior we go out with 12 or 13 times the amount of capital he did, our name is already well known in the Colony, and immediately we get there we shall be placed in the first Rank in Society, a circumstance which must not be overlooked as it will tend most materially to our comfort and future advantage.<sup>34</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine the same thoughts entering George Meredith's head.

Edward Lord, described in more detail later in this chapter, had established himself as a merchant and large landowner in Van Diemen's Land, having arrived with Collins as a Lieutenant of Marines in 1804. He returned to England several times, on each occasion

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 334.

<sup>30</sup> Bathurst to Macquarie, 30 January 1819, HRA I, Vol. X, pp. 2-11—this includes Bathurst to Bigge, 6 January 1819 that includes the well-known 'Object of real Terror' remark, *ibid*, p. 7; AGL Shaw, *Convicts and the colonies* (London, 1966), p. 102. See also discussion in L Ford and D Roberts, 'Expansion, 1820-1850', in A Bashford and S Macintyre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Australia Volume 1 Indigenous and Colonial Australia*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Melbourne, 2013), pp. 122-123.

<sup>31</sup> Typed transcript, 'Reminiscences [by] Louisa Ann [sic] Meredith,' Wren's Nest, Hobart, April 24 [18]92, Hodgson collection, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> E Meredith, *Memoir of the Late George Meredith* (Masterton, 1897), p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> M Bassett, *The Hentys: An Australian colonial tapestry* (Melbourne, 1962), pp. 29, 34.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

bringing back cargoes to be sold. One time was 1820, subsequent to meeting George Meredith in Wales, when he returned to the colony in his own ship the *Caroline*. He brought spirits, foodstuffs and clothes which were disposed of via his own store and network of buyers.<sup>35</sup> In planning his next home, George Meredith could not but have admired his fellow former Marine's success in not only obtaining a large amount of land in the colony, but also his commercial success by having his own vessel to take paying passengers and freight there.

On the same day the *Caroline* arrived, the *Skelton*, under Captain James Dixon, anchored in the Derwent. It was the first vessel to sail with passengers and cargo direct from Scotland to the Australian colonies.<sup>36</sup> Dixon later published an account of the voyage and began it as follows:

The gloomy prospects which the commencement of the year 1820 held out for men who had to depend on mercantile pursuits alone, made it necessary for many to endeavour to provide for themselves and families, without becoming burdens on their friends, and induced a number of persons to emigrate with this view to the settlements in Van-Diemans [sic] Land, and New South Wales.<sup>37</sup>

The enterprise was a variation of the 'owner-shipper' model used by Lord.<sup>38</sup> The family of Captain Dixon, owners of the *Skelton*, decided to fit out the ship as a custom vessel for free immigrants to New South Wales, and cargoes were solicited from Edinburgh merchants. On arrival in Hobart and then Sydney, the cargo was advertised and sold.<sup>39</sup> The voyage was

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<sup>35</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 2 December 1820, p. 2; A Alexander, *Corruption and Skulduggery: Edward Lord, Maria Riseley and Hobart's tempestuous beginnings* (Dydneyrne, 2015), pp. 220-221.

<sup>36</sup> M Nix, 'Silk gloves and cast iron boilers: A study of cargoes from Scotland to Australia, 1820-1824', *Australian Historical Archaeology*, No. 23 (2005), p. 25. On board were seventy-eight paying passengers, seventeen crew, and cargo.

<sup>37</sup> J Dixon, *Narrative of a voyage to New South Wales and Van Dieman's [sic] Land in the ship Skelton during the year 1820* (Edinburgh, 1822), p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Nix, 'Silk gloves', p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 2 December 1820, p. 2.

a commercial success, and ten more vessels sailed from Leith with passengers and cargo between 1820 and 1824.<sup>40</sup>

Although some had appeared before, from 1819 regular advertisements appeared in the *Times* of London announcing the sailing of ships for Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales (usually in that order), soliciting both freight and passengers.<sup>41</sup> Momentum for the emigration of free settlers direct to Van Diemen's Land, perhaps with cargo to sell on arrival, was growing.

## A NEW LIFE IN THE COLONIES

### Preparations in England and the voyage to Van Diemen's Land

George Meredith had decided to move away from the farm at *Rhyndaston* by about 1817 when he initiated the sale of the property to Andrew Burt, as described in the previous chapter. A letter from Meredith's wife Sarah to the family nurse, Mary Evans, in mid-1818, indicated that Sarah was establishing a new home in New Hall Street, Birmingham, and, although Evans was minding the children at *Rhyndaston*, they were about to be sent to 'Newtown'.<sup>42</sup> Sarah was pregnant at the time, but the baby was lost.<sup>43</sup> A further letter from George's daughter Sarah to her mother revealed that the children had been sent to 'Mr Eginton's school' at *Meertown House*, Newport (not Newtown), near Birmingham.<sup>44</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mary Evans gave birth to Meredith's illegitimate son Henry about 1819. Meredith was in London often during that time and visited the farm in

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<sup>40</sup> Nix, 'Silk gloves', p. 30.

<sup>41</sup> For instance, *The Times*, 18 June 1819, p. 1 (*Pimandra*), 24 June 1820, p. 1 (*Chalton*), and 23 August 1820, p. 1 (*Jessie*).

<sup>42</sup> Sarah Meredith (senior) to Mary Evans, 18 [July] 1818, G4/104, UTAS S&R.

<sup>43</sup> Meredith, 'Reminiscences', p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Meredith (junior) to her mother, 3 August 1818, Meredith McFadden collection.

Wales to inspect the progress of the intended sale from time to time.<sup>45</sup> This was a very unsettled period for Meredith, and his family.

The point when Meredith decided to emigrate was likely in early 1819. Louisa Anne Meredith, in her *Reminiscences*, wrote that during 1819, she and her mother stayed with the Meredith family while they were all visiting London, while George was researching emigration destinations. His wife apparently stated that she would visit Florence 'while [Meredith] went travelling in wild countries'.<sup>46</sup> The same year, William Wentworth had published his review of the colony of New South Wales, including Van Diemen's Land, and his effusive praise for the fine harbours of the southern colony area may have caught the former Marine Meredith's eye.<sup>47</sup> In the end, becoming aware that large grants of land were also available at Van Diemen's Land, he decided to make the family's new home there. As Janet Doust discussed in her examination of English migrants to eastern Australia (but excluding Van Diemen's Land), prospective migrants hoped to improve their situation, whether they were working class, middle class or even junior gentry. Land was important to them; it was a symbol of wealth and status in Britain and would be so in the new homeland.<sup>48</sup> Grant agreed: '... it is difficult to overestimate the importance of land in the English consciousness during the first half of the nineteenth-century'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Adam Amos to Meredith, 28 April and 30 May 1819, *Papers and correspondence with variety of people, including Joseph Archer, Adam Amos, George Frankland, Lieut. Colonel Sorell, T.D. Lord and others. 150 letters*, NS123/1/4, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter TA). Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/4 series will be omitted.

<sup>46</sup> Meredith, 'Reminiscences', p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> W Wentworth, *Statistical, historical, and political description of the colony of New South Wales* (London, 1819), p. 118. For a review of the genre of publications describing a life and opportunities in the colonies, see RD Grant, *Representations of British Emigration, colonisation and settlement: Imagining empire, 1800-1860* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 57-78.

<sup>48</sup> J Doust, 'English migrants to eastern Australia 1815-1860', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2004, pp. 292-293. See also JL Doust, 'Two English immigrant families in Australia in the 19th century', *History of the family*, Vol. 13 (2008), pp. 2-25.

<sup>49</sup> Grant, *Representations*, p. 104.

In 1819 Sarah Meredith became pregnant again. She may have become aware of her husband's infidelity and his intention to travel, so allowed herself to become pregnant to bind herself closer to him. Tragically, Sarah died in childbirth at *Rhyndaston* on 16 February 1820. In her *Reminiscences*, Louisa-Anne Meredith wrote:

Old Mrs John Amos, who as well as Nurse Evans, Molly's [Mary's] mother, was with her, more than hinted to my husband [Charles Meredith] that Molly was guilty of her death.<sup>50</sup>

Shocking, if true. Charles Meredith remained bitter about his stepmother 'Molly', writing disparagingly of her in 1879 as the 'ex scullery girl'.<sup>51</sup>

Sarah was buried at Roch church in an adjoining parish on 24 February 1820. At the time of her death, Sarah's sons George and Charles were at Reverend James Lindsay's school at Grove Hall, Bow, London, and Sarah's gravestone sadly recorded 'she left an affected husband and five absent children'.<sup>52</sup>

After his wife's death, George Meredith continued to prepare for his family's emigration. He had obtained the manuscript for Captain Charles Jeffreys' book describing the Van Diemen's Land colony and this appears to have been one of his major points of reference, as well as fellow Marine and established Hobart Town settler Edward Lord, who was in London at the time.<sup>53</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Lord knew Meredith via Lord's

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<sup>50</sup> Meredith, 'Reminiscences', p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> C Meredith, *The Honorable Chas. Meredith, MHA, Orford 1879*, B736, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (hereafter ML, SLNSW), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous, transcription of Sarah Meredith's headstone at Roch church, nd, Meredith McFadden collection; [no reference allocated], Roch parish register, burials, February 1820, Pembrokeshire Archives (hereafter PA).

<sup>53</sup> C Jeffreys, *Geographical and Descriptive Delineations of the Island of Van Dieman's [sic] Land* (London, 1820). That Meredith had seen the manuscript: 'Lord and Meredith Reference', *Papers relating to legal cases involving George Meredith, including his dispute with Edward Lord and the libel case R.L. Murray. 90 papers, NS123/1/5*, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/5 series will be omitted.

brother, John Owen (Meredith's local Member of Parliament in Wales) and Lord had previously visited Meredith's farm in Wales.<sup>54</sup> On 8 July 1820, Meredith and Lord entered into an agreement whereby, after Meredith arrived in the colony, Lord would sell to him a favourable selection of sheep, cattle and horses, on defined terms.<sup>55</sup> On signing, Meredith made a down-payment to Lord of £1,500, including a £1,000 commercial bill. The witnesses to the agreement were Mary Evans and George Meredith junior, then fourteen years old.

Meredith wrote to Secretary of State Earl Bathurst on 21 May 1820 seeking the usual letter of recommendation required by emigrants to the colonies. He noted the going rate of land grants as being half an acre per pound sterling taken, and that his capital was £5,000.<sup>56</sup> The letter is notated at the bottom 'usual answer'. Meredith then wrote on 3 June 1820 to Bathurst's Under-Secretary Henry Goulburn, seeking land grants for Adam Amos, John Amos and Mary Evans.<sup>57</sup> Against Mary Evans, Meredith noted 'experienced in dairy farming, wishes to accompany my family and to secure a little patrimony for a fatherless son'. Meredith also noted that intending settlers who had been in 'His Majesty's service' may be entitled to passage on a government transport. The receiver's notation on this letter stated that, if the three other settlers have means to support themselves, then grants of land were possible, but no government transport for Meredith would be offered. In reply, Meredith noted that he was hoping for a grant of 3,000 acres, 'offering a fair field for the future exertions of myself & descendants'. The notation at the bottom of this letter instructs a reply that a recommendation of the larger than normal grant cannot be given,

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> 'Articles of Agreement', 8 July 1820, NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>56</sup> Meredith to Bathurst, 21 May 1820, Colonial Office, *New South Wales, Original Correspondence, Individuals, etc*, CO201/102, p. 217, Australian Joint Copying Project (henceforth AJCP) microfilm #51, TA.

<sup>57</sup> Meredith to Goulburn, 3 June 1820, *ibid*, pp. 221-224.



and that Meredith should take it up with the Governor in the colony on arrival.<sup>58</sup> On 10 July 1820 George Meredith obtained from Downing Street his copy of the standard letter of recommendation as settler.<sup>59</sup>

Another aspect of Meredith's preparation for his emigration was to undertake some medical training in London, recognising the isolated nature of the colony and where they proposed to settle. In a memoir of his father, Edwin Meredith recounted how his father attended lectures and 'assisted in surgical operations at hospitals'.<sup>60</sup> Whilst this may or may not have been true, it would have been typical of the forethought and preparation that Meredith senior often exhibited.

A key component in Meredith's plan to emigrate was the vessel on which they would travel. In the end, Meredith co-chartered the *Emerald* with Joseph Archer and in doing so, he made himself independent of the limitations of being a paying passenger on a commercial vessel. He was free, subject to the agreement with Archer (see below), to take whoever and whatever he chose to the colonies with him. Some of the relationships established in the voyage would last for the rest of Meredith's life. Joseph Archer was born in 1795, the son of William and Martha Archer, farmers of Hertfordshire and the brother of Thomas Archer who had already settled in Van Diemen's Land.<sup>61</sup> How Joseph and Meredith met is unknown, but most likely they were simply introduced by a shipping agent as two

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<sup>58</sup> George Meredith to unstated (presumably Henry Goulburn), 13 June 1820, *ibid*, p. 225.

<sup>59</sup> Recommendations of settlers 1820, nd, HRA III, Vol. III, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Meredith, *Memoir*, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> GT Stilwell, 'Archer, Joseph (1795–1853)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/archer-joseph-1479/text1865>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 2 September 2017.

seemingly well-to-do agriculturalists who wished to emigrate. Archer had been in the United States from 1817-19.<sup>62</sup>

On 15 September 1820, with minor amendments made on 30 October and witnessed by John Kerr (see below), Meredith and Archer signed an agreement that governed the charter of the *Emerald*.<sup>63</sup> The key terms were:

- George Meredith would pay £620 for the passage of his children, 'Miss Evans' (as she was at that time) and the two Amos families, plus twelve merino sheep—six for himself and two each for the Amos brothers and Mary Evans; he would also pay for £180 worth of goods and additional for freight and passage of 'strangers';
- Joseph Archer would pay £100 for his passage with twelve merinos plus £450 worth of goods and extra again for any freight and passage of 'strangers';
- The cost of fitting out the vessel, plus 'sea-stores' etc would be shared equally between the two;
- The charter would not be between Meredith and Archer and the ship's owner, but rather between the two and Nathaniel Thornton, who had the primary lease on the vessel;
- Thornton would be loaned £800, split between the two and also advanced the cost of shipping two hundred tons of freight at £6 5/- per ton, all to be repaid when the vessel arrived in the colony;
- At the end of the voyage the accounts would be settled and any profit or loss split evenly between the two;
- George Meredith to have three cabins for his family, the bachelor Archer one and the Amos families to share the fore cabin.

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<sup>62</sup> Chick, *Archer heritage*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>63</sup> [Agreement between Meredith and Archer for the charter of the *Emerald*], 15 September 1820, MS0358, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. This is a copy of the original: 'Memorandum of agreement between George Meredith and Joseph Archer for chartering a ship to proceed to the colonies, 15 September 1820', BA72/2, Archer collection, *Brickendon*, together two earlier drafts, including BA72/4, 30 October 1820.

Another document, dated the same day and signed by 'F Whiston', is not materially different from the executed copy, but notes that the agreement was based on the 'terms on each party were to have proceeded on the *Jessie*'.<sup>64</sup> The *Jessie* sailed from England in early September, apparently too early for the Meredith/Archer party.<sup>65</sup> Joseph Archer obtained his letter of recommendation as a settler from Downing Street on 14 August 1820.<sup>66</sup>

By this time it was a common practice of vessels intending to sail to the colonies to advertise for passengers and freight in the newspapers.<sup>67</sup> Sure enough, an advertisement appeared in the *Times* on 11 September 1820 for passengers and freight for the *Emerald* 'chartered by a private party of agriculturalists'.<sup>68</sup> Another notice appeared in early October advertising the sailing of the *Joseph Green* 'to succeed the *Emerald*' and to carry passengers 'who could not be ready for the *Emerald*'.<sup>69</sup>

As noted above, Meredith and Archer chartered the *Emerald* from Nathaniel Thornton, but the owner was Charles Nockels, sometimes written as Nockells.<sup>70</sup> Thornton entered into a charter agreement with Nockels in May 1821, for one year, or longer if required. Both Thornton, his wife and Nockels were passengers on the *Emerald* when it sailed.<sup>71</sup> Thornton

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<sup>64</sup> [Copy of agreement re *Emerald* with witness recollections], 'Correspondence' file, 'George Meredith', TA.

<sup>65</sup> *The Times*, 23 August 1820, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Recommendations of settlers 1820, nd, HRA III, Vol. III, p. 1. Interestingly, Joseph's brother William junior obtained his letter eleven days earlier, leading to the possibility that William junior was intending to emigrate with his brother. William junior emigrated in 1823: Chick, *Archer heritage*, p. 100.

<sup>67</sup> E Desailly, 'The *Emerald*: The ship that sailed on an earlier tide', BA (Hons) thesis, University of Tasmania, 2016, pp. 46-47.

<sup>68</sup> The agent was Francis Whiston, the same man who witnessed the draft Meredith-Archer charter agreement four days later.

<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, 23 October 1820, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> An un-related legal action after the *Emerald* returned to England explained the arrangements: Edward Younge and John Jervis, *Reports of cases argued and determined in the courts exchequer & exchequer chamber at law, in equity and in error...* (London, 1829), p. 306.

<sup>71</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 17 March 1821, p. 2.

and Meredith/Archer would be involved in litigation over his passage on the *Emerald* soon after arriving in Van Diemen's Land, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. Data from Desailly's work on the *Emerald* passengers has been compiled into Table 2-1.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Desailly, *Emerald*, *passim*. The dates of the respective letters of recommendation do not necessarily indicate the order in which the individual or group joined the *Emerald* party. For instance, the Amos families, always part of the scheme, were some of the later ones. They had remained at *Rhyndaston* in Wales until quite late, supervising the sale and transition to the new owner, Andrew Burt. They eventually sailed around the coast to arrive in London in about August 1820: M Amos, [account of her early life], nd, Amos family, Glen Gala collection.

**Table 2-1.** Passengers of the Emerald<sup>73</sup>

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Date of letter of recommendation from the Secretary of State</b>
Meredith, George and family	Co-charterer; six in the family group	10 July 1820 (Goulburn to Sorell, HRA III, Vol. IV p. 440)
Archer, Joseph	Co-charterer	14 August 1820
Amos, Adam and family	With Meredith	13 October 1820
Amos, John and family	With Meredith	13 October 1820
Baker, William and family		
Banks, Mr		
Charlton, Mr		
Christie, John		
Compton, Ralph	Mrs Gregson's uncle	
Cooper, Mr		
Decelly (Desailles), Dr Francis		14 August 1820
Dryden, Mr		
Farnely, Mr		
Gimm, Mr		
Gregson, Thomas & Mrs Elizabeth		15 October 1820
Kerr, John and family		25 September 1820
Meredith, John	George Meredith's cousin	30 August 1820
Nockels, Charles	Owner	
Peavor, John and family		27 October 1820
Thompson, Charles and family		28 July 1820
Thom(p)son, Adam		
Thornton, Nathaniel and wife	Primary charterer	
Tolman, James		
Watson, Robert & family		6 September 1820

<sup>73</sup> As identified in Desailly, *Emerald*, Appendix 1.

Of the non-family *Emerald* passengers, only the Amoses were known to Meredith beforehand, but the voyage forged a number of continuing business and some political relationships in Hobart Town. The most significant were:

**Amos families.** They were sub-tenants and worked for Meredith in Wales, as discussed previously. On arrival, they took land to the north of Meredith at Great Swan Port and the families were in regular contact with each other for decades.

**Joseph Archer.** No connection between Meredith and Archer prior to their charter of the *Emerald* has been found and their coming together is regarded as opportunistic. They were probably introduced by the shipping agent, Francis Whiston. After arrival, they appeared to have been in contact only occasionally, for a few years.<sup>74</sup> Even then, most contact seemed to be over the litigation that ensued after the charter.

**Thomas George Gregson.** Gregson came from a well-to-do family in Northumbria and no evidence has been found to link him with either Archer or Meredith prior to the voyage.<sup>75</sup> He became the only individual who can be readily identified as being a personal friend of George Meredith in the colony, and was often his co-agitator in various political causes during the Sorell and Arthur governments.<sup>76</sup> Meredith's letters to his wife show that the families were frequent guests at each other's houses and they often dined together in Hobart.<sup>77</sup> When Gregson was on trial in

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<sup>74</sup> Meredith to his wife, 6 February 1822, G4/1, UTAS S&R.

<sup>75</sup> RJ Brain, 'Thomas Gregson, a Tasmanian Radical,' draft and unsubmitted MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1955, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania. No mention is made of Meredith in the pre-emigration letters of Gregson preserved at: *Thomas George Gregson correspondence, etc., 1818-1886*, A245, ML, SLNSW.

<sup>76</sup> Their activities in the colony will be discussed extensively in later chapters.

<sup>77</sup> Examples are: Meredith to his wife, 6 February 1822, G4/1, UTAS S&R; Meredith to his wife, 24 April 1825, *George Meredith letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith. 113 letters, 16 March 1823 - 3 December 1837*,

1832 and was facing gaol, Meredith stayed to support his friend.<sup>78</sup> After something of a falling out towards the end of the *Colonist* newspaper venture, Gregson reached out to Meredith and the latter wrote: 'He now wishes to re-establish the long-standing intimacy subsisting between him & me & avows himself to be sensible that in me, he ever possessed a real friend'.<sup>79</sup> Later, Thomas Gregson entered the Legislative Council and became one of the 'Patriotic Six' (this will be discussed in Chapter 9), and later still, Premier of Tasmania briefly in 1857.<sup>80</sup>

**John Kerr.** Again, no prior connection with either Meredith or Archer has been found.<sup>81</sup> Kerr became a Hobart merchant, travelling to and from England for goods to sell, and was Meredith's town agent and confidant for some time.<sup>82</sup> Like Gregson, he became a Legislative Councillor and one of the 'Patriotic Six'.

**John Meredith.** He was the son of George's uncle James Meredith and obtained land grants near Swansea and Jericho. He returned to England in December 1822 and there assisted George's claims against William Talbot over land.<sup>83</sup>

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NS123/1/1 #14, TA; nd but probably 1828, NS123/1/1 #35; 2 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #48; 16 July 1830, NS123/1/1 #60, *ibid*. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/1 series will be omitted.

<sup>78</sup> Meredith to his wife, 25 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #314, TA.

<sup>79</sup> Meredith to his wife, 21 March 1835, NS123/1/1 #319, TA.

<sup>80</sup> FC Green, 'Gregson, Thomas George (1796–1874)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gregson-thomas-george-2124/text2689>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 1 August 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Kerr later claimed to have, prior to immigration: 'A knowledge of the Practice of Banking, combined with many years' Experience in Mercantile Affairs, in the City of London': *Hobart Town Gazette*, 24 June 1825, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 21 April 1821, p. 2, 26 May 1821, p. 2, 20 February 1824, p. 4; for relationship, Meredith to Kerr, 19 June 1824, NS123/1/5, TA; Kerr to Meredith, 25 October 1825, NS123/1/4, TA.

<sup>83</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 7 December 1822, p. 2.

An undated letter, but likely to have been written late in 1820, was sent by Mary Evans to Meredith, who was at the time in Birmingham.<sup>84</sup> The letter's date is indicated by Mary in several places referring to the packing of trunks for their departure to the colonies, the level of familiarity from Mary to Meredith and the general content. In Meredith's absence, Mary wrote, she had met with a number of people wishing to see him and passed on their messages. A nurse maid would not be doing this in the ordinary course of a household. All things considered, it is likely that Sarah Meredith was dead by the time of this letter and Mary had taken control of the packing while George was saying his farewells to family in Birmingham. The letter also revealed that the 'Archer brothers' had called to see Meredith, that 'Mr Amos' had 'failed' with an agent regarding his farm's value, and that Mrs Twamley was about to visit. The Archer brothers were undoubtedly Joseph and William. Louisa Twamley was George's sister. With the date of sailing fast approaching, Meredith made some late arrangements with Joseph Archer. They were scrambling to get a licence 'for the sheep'; the medicine chest was packed but a cask of water was needed for the deck, and some pint bottles for milk.<sup>85</sup>

George Meredith then married his mistress and children's nurse Mary Evans at St Andrew's, Holborn, London, on 30 October 1820, less than a week before sailing for Van Diemen's Land.<sup>86</sup> The witnesses to the marriage were George's brother John, his sister Louisa Anne Twamley and a cousin, Ann Johnston. St Andrews was very close to the two addresses that Meredith used in 1819—Chancery Lane and Middle Row.<sup>87</sup> Over a decade

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<sup>84</sup> Mary Evans to Meredith, n.d. but probably October 1820, *Mary Ann Meredith. Letters to her husband George Meredith (and 1 letter from George to his wife Mary). 13 letters*, NS123/1/13, TA.

<sup>85</sup> Meredith to Joseph Archer, 'Sunday morn' [a few days before sailing], BA72/1, Archer collection, Brickendon.

<sup>86</sup> *St Andrew Holborn, Register of marriages, 1820-21*, P96/AND2/A/01MS6672/4, Guildhall Archives, London.

<sup>87</sup> Adam Amos to Meredith throughout 1819, NS123/1/4, TA.



later, Meredith recounted to his wife some the somewhat clinical thought process that led to his second betrothment:

Hence it was that our union originated in and was influenced by considerations involving the future well-being of my children rather than mere individual comfort & wishes. And so far from being preceded by those little personal attentions & preliminary understandings expected & usual on such occasions, the very first intimation you received of even intention on my part to offer myself to your acceptance was conveyed by letter only a few days previous to our marriage. But abrupt and unexpected as the offer was to you, the subject had been often and deeply weighed in my mind; nor were you the only female presented to my thoughts and whose qualifications were also considered ere that letter was written. Amongst the number was another tried friend of the family, good M<sup>rs</sup> F, but it was evident to me that her physical powers were no longer equal to the various duties my wife would be called upon to perform & although others might possess in a superior degree the adventitious recommendations of birth, fortune or fashionable acquirements, not only were their qualifications untried but calling to mind as I did the impressive lesson of the gentleman and the basket maker and contemplating all the circumstances likely to attend my future destiny, I no longer hesitated in my choice although it was not until the very day my proposal was written that I finally made up my mind to the expediency and propriety of our union before leaving England.<sup>88</sup>

This again illustrates Meredith's planning and strategic thinking, even in the most personal of circumstances, to a point of cynicism. It could be argued that Meredith was seeking not a love match, but to be free of, or independent from, the demands of tending to a clutch of young children.

George and Mary's illegitimate son Henry was brought down the river from Chelsea, under the name of Henry Moody and the other children were called in from their school to Meredith's rooms at Chancery Lane.<sup>89</sup> On a bitterly cold night, 4 November 1820, they all

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<sup>88</sup> Meredith to his wife, 30 October 1831, NS123/1/1 #61, TA. 'Good Mrs F' was Mrs Flaherty, a family retainer in the house in Birmingham. Spelling and emphasis such as underlining in quotes from hand-written letters and diaries will be as per the original text; punctuation has been adjusted to assist readability. See 'Style and spelling' in the introductory pages for a fuller explanation of how quotes are dealt with.

<sup>89</sup> Meredith, *Hon. Chas. Meredith*, B736, ML, SLNSW, pp. 1-3.

went down the Thames on a 'Gravesend smack' to meet the *Emerald*, then sailed on it from Gravesend to Deal the next day, ultimately departing for Van Diemen's Land on 8 November under Captain Elliott.<sup>90</sup>

En-route, they stopped at Teneriffe, off Spain, and went past St Helena in the South Atlantic, where Napoleon Bonaparte was confined.<sup>91</sup> Near there, they had an encounter with a pirate before stopping at the Cape of Good Hope. They left there on 26 January 1821 and arrived at Hobart Town 13 March, being delayed in dropping anchor for a few days due to unfavourable winds.<sup>92</sup>

Meredith and Archer's experience with chartering a vessel and bringing passengers and freight of their own and others did not work out as well as expected, at least from Archer's perspective, as noted above. He cautioned his father, who was going to emigrate, 'do not charter' and rather than house frames or 'a steam engine and brewing apparatus', his father should bring 'slops' (clothing).<sup>93</sup>

### Arrival, initial exploration at Great Swan Port and land grants

On 3 March 1821, while still off the coast of Van Diemen's Land, George Meredith made an agreement with John Amos.<sup>94</sup> John was the less prosperous of the Amos brothers and had no capital, meaning he would not have been entitled to a grant of land on arrival. The

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p. '3a' Charles Meredith had the wrong dates of both departure and arrival in his account. Accurate dates and the Captain's name are given in *Morning Post*, 8 November 1820, p. 4 and *Hobart Town Gazette*, 17 March 1821, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Meredith, *Hon. Chas. Meredith*, p. '3a'.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*; Meredith to his brother John, 2 April 1821, *Meredith family papers*, RS34/2, UTAS S&R. Henceforth the title of the RS34 series will be omitted.

<sup>93</sup> Joseph Archer to his father William, 10 July 1822, 'Extracts of a letter received by William Archer from Joseph Archer', 10 July 1822, Archer collection, *Brickendon*.

<sup>94</sup> 'Ship Emerald at sea', 3 March 1821, Colonial Secretary's Office, *General correspondence*, CSO1/1/884/18765, TA, pp. 163-166.

effect of the agreement—the first part unstated but clearly understood—was that Meredith would allow Amos to represent some of Meredith’s capital as his own, thereby obtaining a grant of land of not less than three hundred acres. Meredith would stock and provide equipment for the farm. In exchange, after eight years, Amos would make over the land to Meredith’s full control and Meredith would make a gift of one hundred acres to Amos. In addition, Amos was to provide carpentry and other services to him for the eight years.<sup>95</sup>

When at last the ship docked in Hobart Town, Edward Lord, who had already arrived on his vessel *Caroline*, arranged for Meredith’s family to be put up at a house in New Town, owned by Lieutenant George Gunning. Meredith wrote that, although basic, it was superior to the accommodation any of the *Emerald*’s other passengers had found.<sup>96</sup>

By 2 April, Meredith had met with ‘privately’ and also dined with Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell and had presented not only the usual letter of recommendation he had brought with him from Earl Bathurst, but also a ‘private’ letter from the Secretary of State.<sup>97</sup> Meredith had initially intended to take land on the south-west coast, ‘up one of the newly discovered harbours of Port Davey and McQuarrie’, but was persuaded by Sorell to look at the east coast, which also fitted Meredith’s criteria of being unoccupied by

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<sup>95</sup> Much later, Meredith wrote to John Amos referring to ‘the original agreement between us, recording the conditions, and circumstances under which yourself and family accompanied me out to this colony’, Meredith to John Amos, 25 February 1836, Amos Family, *Inventory of purchases made by James Amos*, NS6264/1/1, TA. The attached agreement has not survived but is likely to be the same agreement as was signed on the *Emerald*. In this letter, Meredith reminded Amos of the obligations he had entered into, including on behalf of his family—this, fifteen years after the *Emerald* agreement.

<sup>96</sup> Meredith to his brother John, 2 April 1821, RS34/2, UTAS S&R.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

settlers.<sup>98</sup> He laid his settlement philosophy plainly in a letter to his brother, noting that the country between Hobart Town and Port Dalrymple:

... still affords many desirable situations for a settlement, except as to the distance from either Port and Market nothing of any extent being vacant within less than 20 to 30 miles from water carriage which is a great objection, independently of a Settlement in that line of country bringing me in contact with residents of an inferior and perhaps not very moral Class.

Now if I do fix for the Eastern Coast which the Lt. Governor is desirous to have respectably settled I do not doubt being followed by succeeding immigrants from England, and I have already come to a satisfactory understanding with the Lt.G. on that subject ...<sup>99</sup>

Here Meredith again demonstrated strategic planning in recognising the need for adequate transport lines to get his produce to market and also a desire to be free of neighbours, a situation likely to maximise his opportunity to get additional land. As Doust found in a more general survey, Meredith in his first letter home discussed local prices—he found horses locally to be £50 compared to £20 in England.<sup>100</sup> There was no sign in this letter of any looking back to England, or regrets or trepidation, merely statements about the situation he found in Van Diemen's Land and ideas on how to enhance his experience—contrasting with Karen Downing's findings in many other letters of the type, such as misgivings and trepidation at having severed the link with home.<sup>101</sup> Grant noted the frequency of

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<sup>98</sup> In recommending the east coast to Meredith, Talbot and others, Sorell would have been influenced by the report of Henry Rice, who, with two other men named Watson and Campbell, explored the land between what became Orford and Bicheno, and then inland to Avoca, in January 1821. This was intended to gain information for Lieutenant-Governor Sorell, who intended to take a tour of the district: Giblin, *History of Tasmania*, Vol. II p. 179. Rice described well-watered, 'beautiful country' around 'Big Swan Port': enclosed in Sorell to Bigge, 26 January 1821, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 645-647. Henry Rice was a convict who arrived on board the *Calcutta* in 1804 (Convict Department, *Comprehensive registers of convicts 1 January 1804 - 31 December 1853*, 'Register M-Z', CON22/1/2 p. 257, TA). In 1818 he was in the service of former Marine George Weston Gunning (HRA III, Vol. IV, note 156, p. 889).

<sup>99</sup> Meredith to his brother John, 2 April 1821, RS34/2, UTAS S&R.

<sup>100</sup> Doust, 'English migrants', p. 299; Meredith to his brother John, 2 April 1821, RS34/2, UTAS S&R.

<sup>101</sup> K Downing, *Restless men: Masculinity and Robinson Crusoe, 1788-1840* (London, 2014), p. 49.

melancholic references to the sounds of English birds and other nostalgia in letters by immigrants to Australia.<sup>102</sup> There is none of this in the more than one hundred preserved personal letters written by Meredith. Doust also wrote of immigrants returning to England, some after a short time, others 'retiring' there after a longer sojourn, but there was a sense, she wrote, that 'they were seeking wealth and increased social status'. Meredith was undoubtedly with them in that regard but was in Van Diemen's Land to stay.<sup>103</sup>

On a separate subject, prompted by a letter from his then friend Edward Lord, Meredith had apparently intended to establish a distillery in Hobart Town.<sup>104</sup> In June 1820, he wrote a long, somewhat philosophical note, apparently to himself, laying out the reasons why 'distillation' was not allowed in the colony, where the priority was to use grain to make bread, and the pros and cons of a distillery industry in 'an infant colony'.<sup>105</sup> In the letter to his brother written immediately after his arrival and noted above, Meredith told him to make the two stills he had ordered to be sent out as forty gallons volume, the minimum allowed, rather than thirty gallons, and also that distillation would be permitted to commence in August 1822.<sup>106</sup> Although that was what happened, there is no evidence that Meredith became a distiller.<sup>107</sup> Again, we see Meredith's forward thinking at work here.

Not losing a moment after arriving, on 5 April 1821 Meredith and six others rowed a whaleboat from Hobart, bound for Great Swan Port.<sup>108</sup> After exploring up the coast and the head of Great Oyster Bay, they arrived at what would later be named the Meredith

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<sup>102</sup> Grant, *Representations*, p. 67.

<sup>103</sup> Doust, 'English migrants', pp. 3-4.

<sup>104</sup> Edward Lord to Meredith, 27 June 1820, NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>105</sup> G Meredith, 'On the expediency of encouraging distillation in the Settlements of New South Wales', 24 June 1820, NS123/1/4, TA.

<sup>106</sup> Meredith to his brother John, 2 April 1821, RS34/2, UTAS S&R.

<sup>107</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 August 1822, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> G Meredith, [Diary of George Meredith during two voyages to Oyster Bay in 1821], RS34/1, UTAS S&R.

River on 18 April. Having explored for a day, Meredith noted in his diary '[subject to further inspection] I intend to fix our grants here and across to the GSP [Swan] River'. They returned on 21 April, arriving at Hobart Town on 24 April, the day Governor Macquarie arrived on the *Midas*, and they heard the gun battery's salute to the Governor-in-Chief.<sup>109</sup>

Meredith wasted no time and secured a meeting with Macquarie in which he pressed his case for the grant of an additional 1,000 acres, beyond the standard 2,000 he was reasonably assured of. This was apparently agreed to by Macquarie, who made no mention of Meredith in his journal of his 1821 tour of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>110</sup> Meanwhile, Meredith had already arranged for friends to write to the Secretary of State, Earl Bathurst, asking that he be granted an extra 2,000 acres. Bathurst wrote to Sorell on 20 December 1821 agreeing that Meredith should be 'reserved' an additional 2,000 acres, conditional on the settler adequately improving his original grant.<sup>111</sup>

Meredith wrote to Deputy Surveyor-General George Evans on 2 June 1821 giving notice of his intention to settle at Great Swan Port, along with his cousin, John Meredith and the Amos brothers.<sup>112</sup> During June, Meredith met William Talbot, who had recently arrived with the intention of settling, also at Great Swan Port.<sup>113</sup> This would set in train a bitter dispute that would last for years and that would ultimately be decided in London. After seeing Meredith, Talbot met the Lieutenant-Governor, stating his intention to settle at Great Swan Port and during that meeting, he asked if a hut was built on the land claimed, would that defeat any other competing claim, specifically that of Meredith. Sorell

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Sorell to Goulburn, 8 June 1822, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 54-55; Macquarie, *Journals*, pp. 169-202.

<sup>111</sup> Bathurst to Sorell, 20 December 1821, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 45-46.

<sup>112</sup> Meredith to Evans, enclosed in Meredith to Bathurst, 2 December 1822, *ibid*, p. 440.

<sup>113</sup> Bathurst to Arthur, 29 November 1823, *ibid*, p. 94.

apparently agreed that it would and added to the effect that Meredith could not expect everyone else to wait for him.<sup>114</sup>

On 6 July, Lieutenant-Governor Sorell advised Deputy Surveyor-General Evans that Meredith was authorised to occupy, and to have 'priority of claim' to 2,000 acres at Great Oyster Bay—see Figure 2-1.<sup>115</sup> The same day, Sorell issued William Talbot a Location Order with the same wording and priority. Talbot was aware that Meredith had been given the same wording, but Meredith was not aware of Talbot's letter.

Sorell later expressed that he thought at the time that there was plenty of land at Great Swan Port and hoped that a 'collision' between Meredith and Talbot would not occur.<sup>116</sup> William Talbot immediately went to Great Swan Port, apparently guided by two Ticket-of-Leave men who went with Meredith on his first expedition, erected some huts and ploughed some land.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>115</sup> Sorell to Evans, 6 July 1821, [Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell's instructions regarding a land allocation order to George Meredith], 6 July 1821, Meredith McFadden collection.

<sup>116</sup> Bathurst to Arthur, 29 November 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 95-96. Arthur would later write to the Secretary of State that under Sorell 'the whole system of government was almost entirely carried on by the verbal instructions of the Lieutenant Governor', Arthur to Murray, 5 November 1828, HRA III, Vol. VII, p. 640.

<sup>117</sup> Meredith to Goulburn, enclosed in Meredith to Bathurst, 2 December 1822, HRA III, Vol. IV, p. 455; Bathurst to Arthur 29 November 1823, *ibid*, p. 97.

By William Sorell Esquire  
 Lieut. Governor of His Majesty's  
 Settlement on Van Diemen's Land

Go. Go. Go.

Mr. G. Meredith has my authority to occupy  
 Two Thousand Acres of Land, (the same being  
 ordered in Grant to him) in the vicinity of  
 Port Arthur or Ryster Bay; subject to the said  
 location by the Deputy Surveyor when that Tract  
 of Country shall be surveyed. This authority to  
 be considered as giving priority of claim to the  
 particular Land on which Mr. G. Meredith  
 may fix himself. Except the Reserves required  
 for the Custom shall interfere.

Government Office.

6<sup>th</sup> July 1821.

W. Sorell.  
 J. Gao.

Memo { Contents of State Letter to Lieut Governor delegating to  
 him the power to order Grants. 24<sup>th</sup> July 1820.

**Figure 2-1.** Lieutenant-Governor Sorell's instructions regarding a land allocation order to George Meredith, 6 July 1821.

Source: Meredith McFadden collection.



On 23 September 1821, Meredith set out again for Great Swan Port, this time taking two whaleboats.<sup>118</sup> On 29 September, they arrived at 'Meredith's Creek' (later the Meredith River) where they found that 'Mr Amos had built a small hut'. This is difficult to interpret. Had Amos stayed behind after the initial visit? It seems unlikely. Having observed that Talbot had arrived before him, was Meredith attempting to begin his case for priority? Meredith made no mention of Talbot in his diary, although Talbot was certainly there. Perhaps Meredith had the foresight and cunning not to initiate evidence of Talbot's prior presence, anticipating a dispute? Talbot's presence was noted in the summary of the situation by Bathurst sent to Arthur subsequently and a sketch of the situation appears in a letter of appeal sent by Meredith to Earl Bathurst on 2 December 1822.<sup>119</sup> Meredith appealed to Bathurst for priority at Great Swan Port and enclosed copies of all his prior correspondence.

On the days following their arrival, the Meredith party felled timber and began building a store house.<sup>120</sup> One of the boats was sent back to collect further stores, including sixty cattle and these arrived on 5 October. Adam Amos, his son James and a 'Mr Stansfield' were sent south on foot to meet sheep being driven up while Meredith explored the countryside. By late October they had planted potatoes. The party returned to Hobart Town in November. In the foregoing, Meredith was indelibly setting his mark on 'his' land.

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<sup>118</sup> Entry for 23 September 1821, [Diary of George Meredith during two voyages to Oyster Bay in 1821], RS34/1, UTAS S&R.

<sup>119</sup> Meredith to Bathurst, 2 December 1822, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 438-459. The map is not reproduced in the HRA version, but is found at Colonial Office, *New South Wales, Original Correspondence, Miscellaneous*, CO201/111, p. 463, AJCP microfilm #100, TA. Interestingly, this map shows 'Mr Meredith's intended new house and garden' near the place and with the outline of *Cambria*, commenced only in 1832. Meredith planned well ahead.

<sup>120</sup> Entries for 30 September to 3 October 1821, [Diary of George Meredith during two voyages to Oyster Bay in 1821], RS34/1 UTAS S&R.

There was to be no ambiguity as to the permanence of his claim and no evidence in his diary that anyone else was in the area.

Immediately on returning from Great Swan Port, Meredith wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor in response to Sorell advising that he would be asking the Governor-in-Chief Thomas Brisbane to make a determination regarding Talbot.<sup>121</sup> Meredith recounted Sorell's earlier direction for Meredith and his party to settle on the east, rather than the west coast of the colony and that he (Meredith) would have priority of occupation there. His cousin, John Meredith later gave a detailed account.<sup>122</sup>

In early 1822, Meredith received authority from Sorell to occupy 2,000 acres at Great Swan Port until it could be measured by the surveyors. However, on 20 February, Surveyor-General John Oxley in Sydney wrote to Colonial Secretary Frederick Goulburn unequivocally stating that Meredith did not have first claim, due to Talbot's prior occupancy, but he also thought both may be accommodated in the area.<sup>123</sup>

Meredith took his family and the Amos families, plus convict servants, to Great Swan Port to settle in March 1822.<sup>124</sup> Soon after, he wrote a letter addressed from 'Creek Hut', a small structure with sod walls and a thatched roof on the south side of the Meredith River.<sup>125</sup> A successor structure, also called *Creek Hut*, is now derelict on the site.<sup>126</sup> Thus, it appears

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<sup>121</sup> Meredith to Sorell, enclosed in Meredith to Bathurst, 2 December 1822, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 441-442.

<sup>122</sup> 'Oath of John Meredith' 22 October 1823, Colonial Office, *New South Wales, Original Correspondence, Individuals etc.*, M-Z, CO201/147, pp. 151-154, AJCP microfilm #130, TA. Meredith gives another account: Meredith to his brother Charles, 18 April 1823, *ibid*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>123</sup> Oxley to Goulburn, enclosed in Meredith to Bathurst, 2 December 1822, HRA III, Vol. IV, p. 443. From a letter from Meredith to his brother Charles in England, it appears that Charles knew Frederick Goulburn: Meredith to his brother Charles, 18 April 1823, Colonial Office, *New South Wales, Original Correspondence, Individuals etc.*, M-Z, CO201/147, pp. 155-156, AJCP microfilm #130, TA.

<sup>124</sup> [Hand written notes by Charles Meredith], *Typescript material, notes and correspondence relating to the history of the Meredith family*, nd, NS123/1/157, TA.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*; Meredith to Talbot, enclosed in Talbot to Horton, 26 September 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, p. 521.

<sup>126</sup> M Ward, MM Ferris, and T Brookes, *Houses & Estates of Old Glamorgan* (Swansea, 2017), pp. 106-107.

that Meredith was occupying the south side of the river during the stand-off with Talbot, who was a little way north.

### The Talbot and Honner land disputes

Meredith was informed of Oxley's judgement from Sydney on 4 June 1822 and immediately lodged a protest, questioning Oxley's competence to judge the matter.<sup>127</sup> Oxley's decision was confirmed by Governor Brisbane and a division of land sent to the parties in September (see Figure 2-2). Meredith immediately gave notice that he would appeal to the 'British Government or King in Council'. In a letter to Sorell dated 25 November 1822, Meredith announced that one of his party—his cousin, John Meredith—would be returning to England to lay Meredith's case before 'Lord Bathurst and the British Government'.<sup>128</sup>

During this time, Talbot was also communicating with Sorell, putting his side of the story and his claim, which centred on being first on-the-ground at Great Swan Port. Talbot's letters to Sorell were decidedly more querulous than Meredith's and by mid-1822, Sorell's tone in reply to Talbot was chilly.<sup>129</sup> By early 1823, both parties were pressing their claims in London; Talbot via his brother Robert to Under-Secretary Robert Horton at the Colonial Office, and Meredith via his cousin John to Secretary of State Bathurst. On 12 March 1823, Meredith arrived in Sydney with his dispute with Talbot being one of his reasons for the journey.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Meredith to Robinson, enclosed in Meredith to Bathurst, 2 December 1822, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 444-447.

<sup>128</sup> Meredith to Sorell, enclosed in Meredith to Bathurst, 2 December 1822, *ibid*, p. 452.

<sup>129</sup> Sorell to Talbot, 13, 19 and 23 November 1821, included in Talbot to Horton, 26 September 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 498-504.

<sup>130</sup> [Diary of George Meredith's visit to Sydney, 8 March 1823 to 22 May 1823], NS123/1/11, TA.

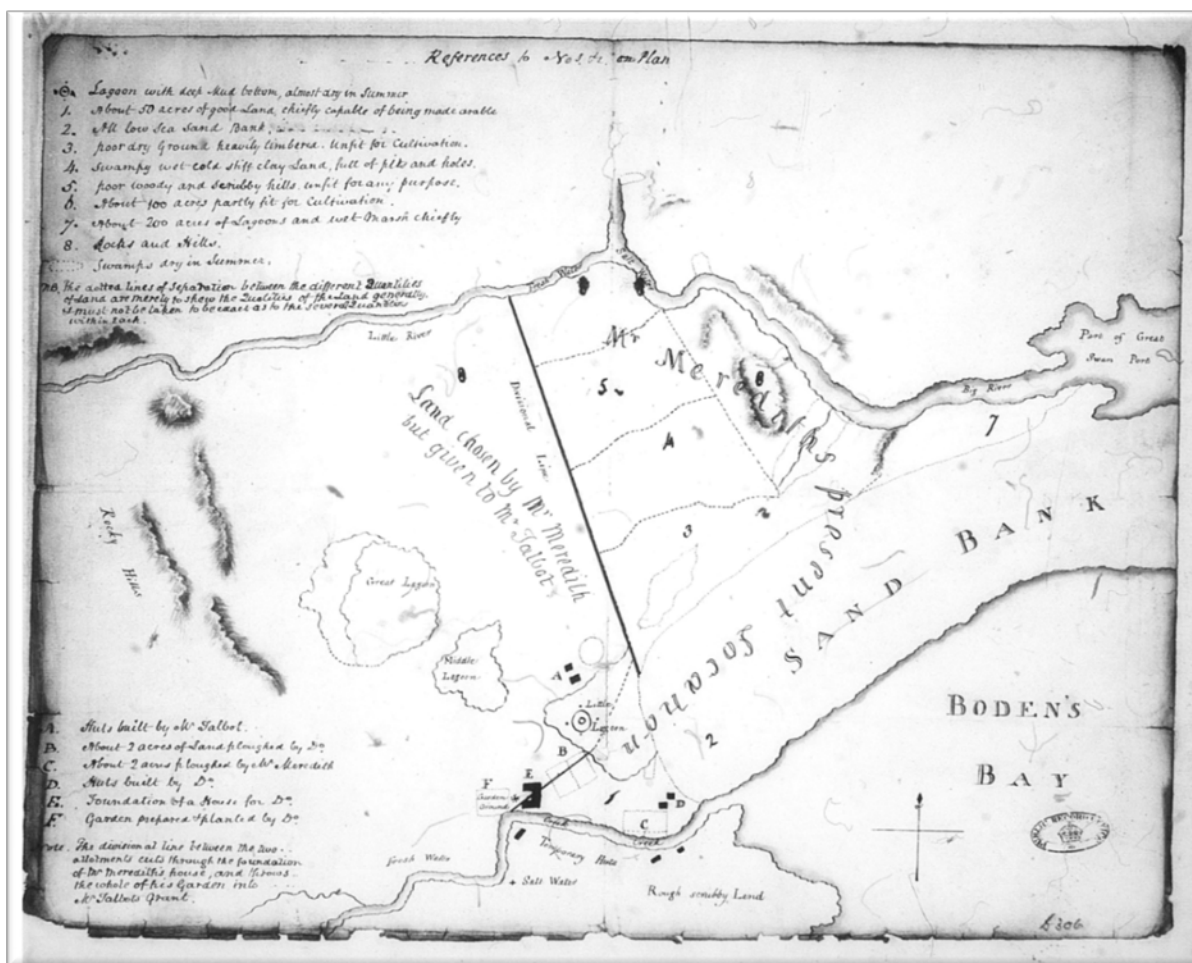


Figure 2-2. 'Great Swan Port Settlement, 1822'.

Source: Colonial Office, *Maps extracted from other files*, MPG1/306 (extracted from CO201/147), AJCP microfilm #1546, TA.

Commentary: This appears to be based on the map sent in Meredith's 2 December 1822 correspondence to Earl Bathurst, which is given as Figure 2-3. In this version, a number of additional huts are shown along the Meredith River, which runs along the bottom of the map. 'Boden's [sic—Baudin's] Bay' is today Great Oyster Bay. The location of 'Huts built by Mr Talbot' at 'A', to the left of the south end of the straight line, is corroborated by other maps (see Figure 2-4). This building became Meredith's *Belmont* homestead. 'Foundation of a house' at 'E' on the north bank of the Meredith River represents *Cambria*, that was built about ten years later, a little further to the west than portrayed.



**Figure 2-3.** Map sent in Meredith's December 1822 correspondence to London.

Source: Colonial Office, *New South Wales, Original Correspondence, Miscellaneous*, CO201/111, p. 463, AJCP microfilm #100, TA.

Commentary: Note similarity to the map shown as Figure 2-2 but also the lack of structures along the river to the south.

Ultimately, Meredith prevailed in respect of Talbot, with the decision of Bathurst sent from Downing Street to the new Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur dated 29 November 1823, albeit containing some leeway delegated to Arthur if the Lieutenant-Governor should require it.<sup>131</sup> After his own investigation, Arthur replied in August 1824, writing that Talbot had agreed to move away and would be given an additional 1,000 acres as compensation. Meredith was also claiming compensation for his delay on settling on his land, but Arthur had none of that and this was one of the foundations of Meredith's long antagonism to Arthur.<sup>132</sup>

Talbot moved to the Fingal area and established a new estate, *Malahide*, there. George Meredith promptly moved into the house Talbot had built on the edge of a lagoon just north of the Meredith River at Great Swan Port (see Figures 2-2 and 2-3) and re-named it *Belmont*. Adam Amos, who had been appointed a District Constable, was required to value the homestead as part of the compensation package and described it as:

... built of logs & shingles, five rooms & a store room. Bound doors & glass windows. Dairy underground floored and shelved. A farm yard & milking shed which has been used as a Barn, a threshing floor on it.<sup>133</sup>

Another land dispute was on foot during this time. Major Robert Honner (sometimes spelled Honnor) arrived in Van Diemen's Land in November 1821 on board the *Mariner*.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Bathurst to Arthur, 29 November 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 92-100.

<sup>132</sup> Arthur to Bathurst, 10 August 1824, *ibid*, p. 160.

<sup>133</sup> Entry for 12 January 1825, A Amos, diary, 1822-1825, file 689A, Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society (hereafter GSBHS).

<sup>134</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 November 1821, p. 2.

He was originally intending to settle inland near Hamilton, but changed his mind and went to Great Swan Port.<sup>135</sup> He received the standard 2,000-acre Location Order and in January 1822 took this up immediately to the north of where Meredith and Talbot were proposing to settle, calling his property *Edenglassie*. Meredith lent him money and promised to supply him with provisions at Hobart Town prices. However, Meredith, while still sorting out the issue with Talbot, had apparently decided he wanted Honner's land and during 1822 he turned hostile on his unfortunate neighbour by calling in Honner's debts. Meredith suggested that he should take Honner's land as his 'reserve' and Honner should get a new grant from the government in exchange.<sup>136</sup> In January 1823 Honner contracted with Nathaniel Thornton (primary charterer of the *Emerald*) to swap 1,500 acres for a pair of two hundred acre blocks near Hobart Town.<sup>137</sup> This scheme was disallowed by Lieutenant-Governor Sorell, so Meredith obtained his land and Honner left the district in June 1823. Meredith added 2,000 acres that was *Edenglassie* to his granted estate and re-named it *Riversdale*.<sup>138</sup>

This episode showed a ruthless streak to Meredith. How much of the episode with Honner was premeditated by Meredith is impossible to tell, but, given Meredith's somewhat precarious financial position at the time, it is not impossible that he decided to lend a little money to Honner anticipating there would be a rich reward. If this was the case, then yet

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<sup>135</sup> K McCallum, *Notes regarding Major Robert Honner and his family in Ireland, Ceylon, Tasmania, Portugal, France and England* (unpublished) (Rankin Park, 2015), p. 14.

<sup>136</sup> Honner to Goulburn, 9 November 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 528-529. In the end, the 'reserve' was a separate block, to the north of Honner's land – see Figure 2-4.

<sup>137</sup> [Agreement between Honner and Thornton], Colonial Secretary's Office, *General Correspondence*, CSO1/1/120/3026, TA, pp. 67-69.

<sup>138</sup> Ward *et al*, *Houses & estates*, p. 78.

again we see Meredith able to strategically plan ahead and his continuing wish to be 'independent' of neighbours at Great Swan Port.

At the end of the Talbot and Honner sagas, Meredith had his 2,000 acres of prime ground and the right to an extra 2,000 acres granted by Governor Macquarie as a 'reserve' (Figure 2-4). The former Honner land added another 2,000 acres. George Meredith junior had taken 500 acres immediately south of the Meredith River, the site of *Creek Hut*, and another 500 acres inland near Jericho. Cousin John Meredith had a 1,000 acre block a small way north of Meredith's and an additional block near Jericho, but as he had returned to England in 1822, George Meredith was in control of those.<sup>139</sup> So, within several years of arriving, George Meredith controlled about 8,000 acres of land.

Several lessons can be learnt at this point. First, Meredith was fiercely determined to obtain the land he believed he was entitled to, and that he had a strategic mind in determining where it should be best located. Second, he did not hesitate to use a network of high officials to press his case (this will be demonstrated further in the next section). Lastly, and possibly most importantly in respect of Meredith's later behaviour towards Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, Meredith had little regard for local colonial officials and had no hesitation in vaulting over even the Governor-in-Chief in Sydney to the authorities in London to get his way.

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<sup>139</sup> Arthur to Bathurst, 1 September 1826, 'Schedule of land granted to, and occupied by Mr George Meredith and family at Great Swan Port and Jericho Van Diemen's Land', Governor's Office, *Duplicate despatches*, GO33/1/1, TA, p. 865.





**Figure 2-4.** 'Sketch of the lands occupied by Mr George Meredith and his relatives' by Edward Dumaesq, 28 August 1826. It accompanied Lieutenant-Governor Arthur's letter to Bathurst, 1 September 1826, describing the extent of Meredith's land occupation.

Source: Governor's Office, *Governor's Duplicate Despatches received by the Colonial Office, duplicate despatches 12 February 1825-20 December 1826*, GO33/1/1, TA, p. 863.

Commentary: Talbot's former land claim is in orange, Meredith and his family's in red. The map shows 'Talbot's huts' in the same location as Figure 2-2 (at the northern point of the small lagoon on the south-east of the orange block), and a 'house' to the south of the Meredith River (the southern-most watercourse) on George Meredith junior's land. That house was *Creek Hut* where Meredith lived during the land dispute. The 2000 acre 'reserve' noted west of the Swan River and north of Talbot's claim was originally Robert Honner's land, acquired by Meredith in lieu of debt and formalised by Macquarie. The block in red at the top left between the watercourses was 1,000 acres granted to John Meredith but which that George Meredith took control of. At the extreme top left is the beginning of the Amos families' land.

## Early legal battles

As recounted above, before he left England, Meredith had contracted with Edward Lord to be supplied with a selection of choice livestock on his arrival in the colony. Lord was advanced £1,500 for this.<sup>140</sup> Lord arrived back in the colony in late 1820 on his vessel the *Caroline* and Meredith arrived in March 1821 on the *Emerald*. After quickly establishing his land, he called upon the agreement with Lord, but found that Lord had, in the meantime, sold his best stock to others, including Talbot. In mid-September Meredith wrote to Lord baldly stating that Lord had failed to fulfil his agreement and asking for compensation.<sup>141</sup> Lord retorted sharply that he was 'so utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning of your letter that I am obliged to ask you for some explanation of it'. He followed this up in early November by advising Meredith that a bill for £1,000 pounds that Meredith had used as the majority of the advance to Lord under the stock Agreement, had been 'dishonoured'.<sup>142</sup> A letter from Meredith's agent in London written in June 1822 stated that the bill had 'long since been paid', but was not paid when due, as the agent had difficulty in obtaining payment from Andrew Burt in respect of his purchase of *Rhyndaston*.<sup>143</sup>

At this stage Meredith appeared to have sensed that Lord was not one to whom he might apply his usual bullying tactics and who in fact may be quite dangerous to cross.<sup>144</sup> In mid-November he wrote to Lord in a conciliatory fashion, excusing his failure to provide 'an explanation' earlier and noting he had seen Lord's 'solicitor' Robert Lathrop Murray and

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<sup>140</sup> Articles of Agreement [Lord and Meredith livestock agreement], 8 July 1820, NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>141</sup> Meredith to Lord, 18 September 1821, *ibid*.

<sup>142</sup> Lord to Meredith, 21 September and 16 November 1821, *ibid*.

<sup>143</sup> Trown to Meredith, 7 June 1822, *Accounts, receipts and associated papers, including stock accounts and Colonial Bank passbook, 9 October 1820-27 December 1843*, NS123/1/8, TA.

<sup>144</sup> For Lord, see ER Henry, 'Edward Lord: The John Macarthur of Van Diemen's Land', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 20 (1973), also Alexander, *Corruption and Skullduggery*, *passim*.

had explained a number of things.<sup>145</sup> His next letter, a few weeks later, showed that Lord was taking Meredith to court in Sydney and Meredith then recounted his grievances against Lord in respect of the livestock agreement. Lord then cut off direct communication, directing Meredith to communicate via his solicitor. Meredith, contrite again, did so, in a long, rambling letter to Murray, where he noted Lord's power and influence as 'more than the Governor', and suggested the dispute be settled via arbitration. Other letters followed.<sup>146</sup>

In December 1821, Lord's agents Maria Lord and Thomas Wells sent a letter to John Meredith which agreed to settle an account from him for £266/0/6d, after deducting £238/12/9d they claimed that were owed by George Meredith.<sup>147</sup> By February 1822 the situation was such that Meredith told his wife in a letter that he feared being 'taken'—meaning, arrested—by order of Murray, that Lord was Murray's 'vindictive and contemptible' employer and that he was keeping his doors locked and had to be careful with his movements.<sup>148</sup>

On 12 March 1822 a plaint was lodged at the Supreme Court in Sydney against George Meredith by solicitor William Henry Moore on behalf of Edward Lord, essentially citing Meredith for not paying over £2,000 for livestock supplied.<sup>149</sup> A year later, Meredith

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<sup>145</sup> Meredith would have a number of antagonistic dealings with Robert Lathrop Murray in subsequent years, which will be detailed in later chapters. For Murray, see: CR Murray, 'Murray, Robert William (1777–1850)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/murray-robert-william-2497/text3367>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 9 October 2017.

<sup>146</sup> Various letters to and from Meredith, Lord and Murray, NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>147</sup> Maria Lord and Thomas Wells to John Meredith, 13 December 1821, Correspondence, Letterbooks, Documents and Newspapers Collected by Dr Craig, *Letterbook of Edward Lord*, NS473/1/8, TA.

<sup>148</sup> Meredith to his wife, 8 February 1822, G4/2, UTAS S&R.

<sup>149</sup> Lord Esq<sup>r</sup> ag<sup>t</sup> Meredith Esq<sup>r</sup> 'Copy Plaint', NS123/1/5, TA.

arrived in Sydney for a lengthy stay to attend to the Lord and other matters.<sup>150</sup> Meredith's activities during most of the time he was in Sydney are known via his daily diary.<sup>151</sup> The diary makes clear that by this time, Meredith was contesting three legal actions against him—from Lord, Robert Honner and Nathaniel Thornton.

Meredith and Archer chartered the *Emerald* from Thornton and Thornton sailed to Hobart Town with them, paying for his own freight. On arrival, Thornton found that a number of barrels of spirits he had brought with him had leaked, and sued Meredith and Archer for his loss, claimed at 4,000 gallons.<sup>152</sup> The Captain, Elliott, gave evidence that Thornton's casks were in bad condition, but stowed properly. This dispute was settled by arbitration and Thornton was paid only £9 and had to bear his own costs.<sup>153</sup> A further dispute with Thornton arose when he and Meredith agreed that Meredith would sell Thornton's cargo in Hobart to recover the shipping fee, then would remit to Thornton the balance. The latter apparently did not occur. Thornton transferred Meredith's debt to Lord in mid-1822, so as far as Meredith was concerned, Thornton's matter was closed.<sup>154</sup> One can perceive the hand of Edward Lord in Thornton's action, compounding Meredith's woes by accumulating his debt. Meredith's solicitor in Sydney was Frederick Garling, with whom he also

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<sup>150</sup> Immediately before he left for Sydney, Meredith wrote a long and detailed letter to his wife which included the news that after their Sydney solicitor 'Mr Rowe' visited and gave them unencouraging news regarding the Lord action, Meredith had written strongly to an opposing, un-named, solicitor. That solicitor, thinking that Meredith's then solicitor Cartwright was behind it, 'call<sup>d</sup> him [Cartwright] out and they exchanged shots at 5 am the following morning'. Meredith reported that 'no blood was shed': Meredith to his wife, 2 March 1823, G4/2, UTAS S&R.

<sup>151</sup> [Diary of George Meredith's visit to Sydney, 8 March 1823 to 22 May 1823], NS123/1/11, TA.

<sup>152</sup> 'Extracts of a letter received by William Archer from Joseph Archer', 10 July 1822, Archer collection, *Brickendon*.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Entry for 18 April 1823, [Diary of George Meredith's visit to Sydney, 8 March 1823 to 22 May 1823], NS123/1/11, TA.

socialised. Lord and Thornton, and perhaps Honner were represented by William Henry Moore.<sup>155</sup>

Thornton issued Meredith a summons seeking £1,450 on 24 March 1823 and the most substantive meeting with Moore appears to have occurred on 1 April, where Meredith offered £200 plus costs as a settlement of Thornton's action; this was declined by Moore. At all times Meredith attempted to get Lord and Thornton's actions out of the court and Moore appeared to be obfuscating and delaying, including in respect of whether Meredith was obliged to post bail in Hobart Town to avoid being 'detained'. The tone of subsequent correspondence rose such that Meredith threatened to prosecute Moore for perjury and accused him of having a vindictive mind and to have written several 'untruths'.<sup>156</sup>

Meredith's diary showed that he believed Thornton's action was discharged in Sydney, but in March 1825 Thornton's solicitor in Hobart Town, Thomas Young, wrote to Meredith's representative there, Gamaliel Butler, proposing a 'compromise' whereby Meredith would pay Thornton £50 plus costs in return for a discharge of Thornton's action. This was rejected outright by Meredith.<sup>157</sup> The next and final stanza in this dispute appeared to be a suit of *assumpsit* (an action to recover damages for someone failing to perform an obligation) by Thornton against Meredith after a Supreme Court judgement in New South

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<sup>155</sup> Garling and Moore were London solicitors who were selected by the authorities to go to Sydney in 1814 to become resident solicitors, untainted by being emancipated convicts. Of the two, Moore appeared to live closer to the riskier side of the practice. For Garling see J McIntyre, 'Garling, Frederick (1775–1848)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/garling-frederick-2079/text2603>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 25 September 2017. For Moore see RJ McKay, 'Moore, William Henry (1788–1854)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/moore-william-henry-2477/text3327>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 25 September 2017.

<sup>156</sup> Various letters between Meredith and Moore, NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>157</sup> Meredith to Butler, 9 October 1825, *ibid.*

Wales.<sup>158</sup> The Hobart Town action was non-suited due to 'not being able to prove the handwriting of [New South Wales] Chief Justice Forbes'.<sup>159</sup>

Back in Sydney in 1823, the New South Wales Supreme Court ordered on 23 May that the Meredith-Lord dispute be referred to arbitration.<sup>160</sup> However, by mid-1824, the Sydney Supreme Court action had been abandoned in favour of arbitration under the newly constituted Van Diemen's Land Supreme Court, suggested by the Lord side and agreed to by Meredith as he 'had no alternative'.<sup>161</sup>

The Van Diemen's Land arbitration was formally recorded by court registrar William Sorell junior in August 1824 with the Master of the Supreme Court, Joseph Hone, being the arbitrator.<sup>162</sup> Hone's formal decision has not been preserved and the matter appears to have been kept out of the newspapers. However, from a few letters from 1825, it appears that the arbitration went in Lord's favour and at least part of the settlement was in the form of Meredith providing Lord, via his agent Dr Hood, meat or livestock—some thousands of pounds weight in one case, according to a letter.<sup>163</sup> This would have severely retarded Meredith's ability to advance his interests in the colony for some years, at least until mid-1826, when Meredith reported to his wife that the 'final award' against them by Lord had been reduced from £4,000 to about £600.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Although no trace of the court determination has been found, a letter from Van Diemen's Land Solicitor General (and private practitioner) Alfred Stephen to Meredith, 17 September 1825, reinforced that the Sydney court found against Meredith and for Thornton, NS123/1/4, TA.

<sup>159</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 1 December 1826, p. 4.

<sup>160</sup> Copy of Supreme Court order re arbitration, NS123/1/5, TA. For the arbitrators, see entry for 14 April 1823, [Diary of George Meredith's visit to Sydney, 8 March 1823 to 22 May 1823], NS123/1/11, TA.

<sup>161</sup> Meredith to his son Henry, 29 June 1824, *George Meredith letters to his children, Sarah, Charles and John. 40 letters mainly to John while farming at Mount Gambier. Also a letter from his son Henry. 16 February 1816 - 19 July 1854*, NS123/1/2, TA.

<sup>162</sup> [Order of Reference by William Sorell junior, 25 August 1824], NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>163</sup> Cartwright and Paterson (solicitors) to Meredith, 9 March 1825, *ibid*.

<sup>164</sup> Meredith to his wife, 22 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #22, TA.

The other matter clearly on Meredith's mind in Sydney in March and April 1823 was the land dispute with Talbot, which at that time had been decided by Governor Brisbane in favour of Talbot. Meredith had already referred his case to the government in London, but was obviously intent on lobbying at the highest levels in Sydney as well. On his second day in the town, he called on Colonial Secretary Major Frederic Goulburn, who he found to be a 'pleasant and gentlemanly man' but with little interest in the Talbot dispute. Another early call was on Surveyor-General John Oxley, who had earlier ruled in favour of Talbot in the land dispute. Meredith led himself to believe that this meeting went well. Meredith wrote to Goulburn on the strength of the meeting, but several weeks later he still found Goulburn unsympathetic.<sup>165</sup>

Meredith first mentions the 'Governor-in-Chief' Sir Thomas Brisbane in his diary on 23 April 1823, the King's birthday; he noted disapprovingly that there was only a poor turn-out of troops and that the Governor, rather than holding a *soiree* in celebration (as the previous Governor did), had returned to Parramatta to dine 'without even these merest forms of respect to either his Sovereign or the inhabitants'.<sup>166</sup> More disdain for authority. A few days later, Meredith rode to Parramatta and met Brisbane. On Meredith's account, the meeting went well and 'we parted better friends than we had met'.<sup>167</sup> He was to be disappointed at their next-meeting in Sydney two days later, when the Governor stated that his hands were tied as the case had been referred by Meredith to London. Not to be denied, Meredith pressed on and asked if he might present the case that he sent to London. The Governor, perhaps wearily, agreed and invited Meredith to Government House at

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<sup>165</sup> Entries between 20 March and 22 April 1823, [Diary of George Meredith's visit to Sydney, 8 March 1823 to 22 May 1823], NS123/1/11, TA.

<sup>166</sup> Entry for 23 April 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Entry for 26 April 1823. *ibid.*

Parramatta and Meredith concluded that they again ‘parted friends’. This may have been optimistic; attending an appointment in Sydney on 14 May, Meredith found Brisbane absent and was later told by the Governor’s aid-de-camp that Brisbane did not wish to see him and could do nothing because Meredith had referred the case to London.<sup>168</sup> Undeterred, Meredith again rode to Parramatta a few days later with a letter he asked to hand deliver to the Governor—a meeting was again declined but the letter was taken with the message that he would get a reply ‘through the Colonial Office’.<sup>169</sup> Meredith had outstayed his welcome through his doggedness to press his case.

Besides such determination, Meredith’s daily diary in Sydney revealed other things about him. For instance, he was a regular walker—usually before breakfast in the morning and again in the evening. He also spent a great deal of time writing—his diary revealed a number of days devoted only to writing, letters presumably, but also notes to himself; most evenings were devoted to some correspondence.<sup>170</sup>

The extent of Meredith’s networking is revealed in the diary. Within a week of his arrival in Sydney, besides his and his opposing solicitors, he had dined with Judge Advocate John Wylde, met Judge Barron Field of the Supreme Court, New South Wales Colonial Secretary Frederick Goulburn, and several members of the military establishment. By the following week he had seen Surveyor-General Oxley (the first of several meetings), more military men, merchant Edward Wollstonecraft whose home he later visited on the north shore, Thomas Walker, the Deputy Assistant Commissary General and the Colonial Secretary again. Later, Meredith had at least four meetings with Governor Brisbane both in Sydney

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<sup>168</sup> Entry for 14 May 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Entry for 16 May 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> For example, entries for 16, 18, 22 March and 3, 5, 6 April 1823, *ibid.*



and Paramatta, visited Samuel Marsden at his house to discuss New Zealand flax and met with further military personnel.<sup>171</sup>

Finally, Meredith revealed himself to be keenly interested in plants. He visited several plant nurseries and took a selection of fruit trees back with him to Van Diemen's Land; he took a great interest in New Zealand flax and bought some after he had consulted several people on its propagation and use; he was a frequent visitor to the Botanical Gardens and obtained forty packages of seeds on one occasion. He also purchased silk and other cloth for his family.<sup>172</sup>

Overall, Meredith was an observant and curious man, always on the lookout for anything that could further his interests.

## CONCLUSION

Meredith's act of emigration was one to free himself from England's struggling economy after the end of the Napoleonic War and to be able to acquire substantial new land for wealth and status. His choice of a private charter vessel also showed him unwilling to be confined to being at the whim and direction of others for the important first step. Before leaving, he made deliberate preparations to be as self-sufficient or independent as possible in the colony, from taking some medical training, to carefully choosing a new wife to look after his young children. His plan to have a good supply of stock on arrival backfired, but nevertheless it was a good plan. His considering Norfolk Island, and then the south-west of

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<sup>171</sup> Wylde: entries for 14 March 1823; Goulburn: 14, 18, 26 March 1823 and 11 April 1823; Oxley: 27 March 1823 and 12, 19, 30 April 1823; Wollstonecraft: 24 March 1823 and 5, 6, 17, 30 April 1823; Walker: 23, 25 March 1823 and 2, 5, 27 April 1823; Brisbane: 26, 28 April 1823 and 10 May 1823; Marsden: 26 April 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Plant nurseries: entries for 27 April 1823 and 8-10, 19 May 1823; flax: 21, 23, 26 April 1823 and 1, 19 May 1823; silk cloth: 25, 27 March 1823, *ibid.*

Van Diemen's Land, showed him wishing to be free of neighbours, other than those of his choosing. He chose the Amos brothers to be his fellow-settlers, knowing them to be dependable and hard workers from their time with him in Wales. On arrival, he allowed himself to be dissuaded from his initial location objectives, but still chose a place away from other settlers to maximise his freedom. Most of all, Meredith sought land. He was entitled to a grant of 2,000 acres, but soon controlled about 8,000 acres, a phenomenal feat for someone who likely did not have much ready capital when he arrived. Land was important to Meredith, as it was a measure of standing in the colony and was the basis for a farming enterprise that would see him financially secure. Robert Grant, in his study of British emigration, suggested that independence might be gained by 'investment of capital, freeholding of land, freedom from the wage-nexus' and he underlined the importance of land ownership in the consciousness of the English middle class in the early nineteenth century.<sup>173</sup> Meredith falls easily into Grant's characterisation, but less easily into one of Downing's, when she noted that a family toiling together, such as the Hentys, could be more successful than one working alone: 'Where individual men struggled with competing imperatives, as a family [the Hentys] could combine them all'.<sup>174</sup> Although Meredith initially had his cousin John for support, John left the colony not long after arriving and even the Amos brothers were not always allies to Meredith. Thomas Gregson became a friend and fellow warrior against Arthur's regime, but that was in Hobart Town. There is little evidence that Meredith and fellow *Emerald* charterer and agriculturalist Joseph

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<sup>173</sup> Grant, *Representations*, pp. 100-101. Grant at the same location noted how colonial promoters also touted 'independence' in their writing, the latter interpreted by him as framing devices for the, in reality, less ordered aspects of colonial life.

<sup>174</sup> Downing, 'William Henty', p. 80.

Archer had much to do with each other after the first few years, after they had settled the Thornton law-suit. Meredith toiled alone, for his own benefit.

This chapter, together with the previous one, has defined an important aspect of Meredith's personality. It was one of seeking to be independent and to make his own way, free of constraints of fellow settlers. He was not afraid to doggedly pursue his objectives and to pull every string at his disposal to win the day. His land was key to his independence; it eventually allowed him some financial independence and gave him standing amongst colonists. Joseph Townsend wrote in the 1840s about conditions in New South Wales that, if a settler had established a cottage, garden, had a modest acreage of crops plus livestock in which he was self-sufficient and he was free of debt, then 'he is perfectly independent, and may set the world at defiance'.<sup>175</sup> Meredith had established himself on the land, with all the other attributes listed by Townsend, except he was not yet free of debt. Part II of this thesis will discuss how Meredith took his independent personality with his foundation of abundant land into the colony's political sphere, especially against the policies of George Arthur, whose administration and style were the antithesis of what Meredith enjoyed under William Sorell. He would set, if not the world, then Arthur, at defiance. The next chapter will describe how his enterprises on the land and sea added to the foundation of his land bank and allowed some financial independence.

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<sup>175</sup> J Townsend, *Rambles and observations in New South Wales ...* (London, 1849), p. 16.

## CHAPTER 3: BECOMING ECONOMICALLY INDEPENDENT

### INTRODUCTION

As noted in the previous chapter, George Meredith was successful in accumulating a great deal of land in the Great Swan Port area and this was fully in his occupation by the late 1820s. He had a successful shore-based whaling and sealing enterprise from 1824 to about 1834. Once he had settled most of his legal battles, these assets allowed him to stabilise and then grow economically and fortified the base from which he later took the fight up to Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur.

This chapter will examine how Meredith ran his farming and whaling enterprises, including via a series of letters to his wife. His letters reveal a great deal, as do other contemporary records produced by Meredith and others. He undoubtedly spent a great deal of time away from his farm—sometimes months at a time—and during these times he relied on his wife and eldest sons, all inexperienced in farming and isolated in the new colony, to manage the estate using predominantly a convict workforce for labour.

### AGRICULTURE

#### Initial activities on the land

George Meredith farmed in Berkshire and in Wales for almost fifteen years prior to his voyage to the colonies, as discussed in Chapter 1, and his economic performance on the land there is questionable. Nevertheless, he was an intelligent and methodical man and would have approached life on the land in Van Diemen's Land with confidence.

In July 1820, in preparation for emigration, he signed an agreement with Edward Lord for the supply in the colony of 6 bulls, 50 cows, 100 oxen, 15 horses and 1,200 'merino cross

sheep'.<sup>1</sup> Further, according to his agreement with Joseph Archer for the charter of the *Emerald*, in addition to his 'freight', Meredith was to take six merinos on board plus two each for the Amos brothers and 'Miss Evans'. Joseph Archer would also take twelve merinos. Other stock such as pigs and poultry were also on board, as provisions on the journey.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to 1820, only a few merino sheep had been brought to Van Diemen's Land and most of the up to 170,000 sheep in the colony in 1819 were of the 'Teeswater' or 'Leicester' breeds.<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Sorell recognised that the flock needed improvement and discussed this with Governor Macquarie, who, in turn, consulted John McArthur, who was successfully breeding Spanish merinos in New South Wales.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, McArthur supplied three hundred 'improved' merinos rams (not pure breed), and the little over two hundred that survived the voyage landed in Hobart in March 1820.<sup>5</sup> Of these, one hundred and eighty-one were sold to various settler landholders in September that year.<sup>6</sup> From these dates and figures it can be deduced that Lord had no way of satisfying his agreement earlier

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<sup>1</sup> 'Articles of Agreement', 8 July 1820, *Papers relating to legal cases involving George Meredith, including his dispute with Edward Lord and the libel case R.L. Murray. 90 papers*, NS123/1/5, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter TA). Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/5 series will be omitted.

<sup>2</sup> [Agreement between Meredith and Archer for the charter of the *Emerald*], 15 September 1820, MS0358, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. This is a copy of the original: 'Memorandum of agreement between George Meredith and Joseph Archer for chartering a ship to proceed to the colonies, 15 September 1830', BA72/2, Archer collection, *Brickendon*, together with two earlier drafts.

<sup>3</sup> RW Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania, Vol. II*, J Collier, (ed.) (Melbourne, 1939), p. 212; JT Bigge, *Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry, on the state of agriculture and trade in the colony of New South Wales* (London, 1823), p. 18. See also IC Heazlewood, *Old sheep for new pastures: A story of British sheep in the hands of Tasmanian colonial shepherds* (Launceston, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 July 1819, p. 2; for McArthur see: M Steven, 'Macarthur, John (1767–1834)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, (hereafter, ADB) <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macarthur-john-2390/text3153>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 3 April 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Bigge, *Agriculture report*, p. 18; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 1 April 1820, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Sorell to Bigge, 22 September 1820, Frederick Watson, (ed.), *Historical Records of Australia, Series III, Despatches and papers relating to the settlement of the states, Vol. III Tasmania: January-December 1820* (Sydney, 1921), pp. 682–685 (henceforth this series will be cited in the format HRA, [series number], Vol. [number], page [number(s)]), irrespective of general editor; full citations are given in the bibliography.

that year to supply Meredith over 1,000 'merino cross' sheep, although he did receive eighteen merino rams in Sorell's sale, many more than the next highest recipient, with ten.

On his arrival in Van Diemen's Land, the agreement with Lord resulted in the supply to Meredith of only some poorer livestock, and a legal dispute ensued, as discussed in Chapter 2. Meredith was also held back from fully occupying and thus developing his initial grant of 2,000 acres at Great Swan Port for several years, due to the dispute with William Talbot, also described in Chapter 2. Further, because of his various legal disputes and other causes, he spent a great deal of time away from his land, sometimes for months at a time. It can be reasonably concluded that the development of his livestock holdings and crops would have been slower than that, say, of his fellow immigrant and colonial landholder, Joseph Archer, who had no such calling away from his land.<sup>7</sup>

On 1 January 1822 a meeting was held to establish an Agricultural Society and Edward Lord was elected its President.<sup>8</sup> An early report of the meeting noted that Meredith had joined the committee, but an almost identical subsequent report omitted his name and he was not named in connection with the Agricultural Society again.<sup>9</sup> By this time, Meredith was in legal dispute with Lord over their livestock agreement. Perhaps Meredith's name was 'put up' by another attendee, such as Thomas Gregson, but Meredith declined, unable to work with Lord.

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<sup>7</sup> For Archer, see N Chick, *The Archer heritage* (Longford, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 5 January 1822, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 26 January 1822, p. 1.

## Development of Meredith's farm estate

All through the 1820s, Meredith was spending extended periods away from his land and so the day to day running of the estate was superintended by his wife Mary. The use of an overseer was an 'indispensable condition' of obtaining and holding land when the grantee was not in personal residence.<sup>10</sup> There are several mentions of overseers being used on Meredith's outlying farms, for instance John Close described himself as overseer on *Belmont* farm in 1827 and similarly by Meredith in a letter to a magistrate the following year.<sup>11</sup> Edward Tilley was overseer at *Riversdale* in the early 1830s.<sup>12</sup> There is no indication of an overseer being used on the core 2,000 acre *Cambria* farm in letters between Meredith and his wife, where they frequently discussed farm management.<sup>13</sup> If Meredith did operate his main farm without an overseer, and his wife Mary was responsible for the farm management during Meredith's frequent absences, then the situation has echoes with Elizabeth Macarthur, who managed the family estates at *Elizabeth Farm* and *Camden Park* west of Sydney for years after her husband John was sent to England for his part in the

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<sup>10</sup> 'Government Order. Regulations for the granting and sale of land' enclosed in Arthur to Huskisson, 18 April 1827, HRA III, Vol. VII, p. 198.

<sup>11</sup> Statement of John Close, Colonial Secretary's Office, *General Correspondence*, CSO1/1/58/1217, TA, p. 27. Henceforth the title of the CSO1 series will be omitted. Close was a convict, having arrived on the *Medway* in 1821 on a sentence of life: John Close, conduct record, Convict Department, 'Conduct Registers of Male Convicts arriving in the Period of the Assignment System', *Convict surnames beginning with C*, CON31/1/6, TA; Meredith to Lascelles, 16 January 1828, *Tasmanian police letters, 1827-1829*, DLADD 573, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

<sup>12</sup> Statement of Constable Taylor in Lord to Aubin, 1 January 1831, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 146. Tilley also arrived as a convict: Edward Tilley, conduct record, Convict Department, 'Conduct Registers of Male Convicts arriving in the Period of the Assignment System', *Convict surnames beginning with T (1810 - Jan 1830) U (1810 - Jan 1830) and V (1810 - Jan 1830)*, CON31/1/42, TA; Aubin to Burnett, 8 March 1831, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 164; Elizabeth Tilley to Meredith, 5 January 1836, CSO1/1/638/14367 (Vol. 2), TA p. 190; Board of Assignment 'memorandum', 6 February 1836, CSO1/1/638/17789, TA, p. 208. Note that file number 17789 is filed out of sequence.

<sup>13</sup> These letters are in the series *George Meredith Letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith. 113 letters*, NS123/1/1 and *Mary Ann Meredith. Letters to her husband George Meredith (and 1 letter from George to his wife Mary), 13 letters*, NS123/1/13, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/1 and NS123/1/13 series will be omitted.

mutiny against Governor William Bligh.<sup>14</sup> As Elizabeth Macarthur's biographer Michelle Tucker noted, Elizabeth had peers in running farms in their husbands' absence, but her social standing set her apart.<sup>15</sup> The comparison with Mary Meredith cannot be taken too far—even though her husband was away for longer, Elizabeth Macarthur's farm was well established by the time he left, and it was not as isolated. There was even a military establishment nearby, which helped when Irish convicts rebelled.<sup>16</sup> Mary Meredith, former family nurse and new wife, was forced to manage a farm that was newly formed out of the bush, with neighbours miles away and no military to assist with the threat from bushrangers and Aboriginal people.

Meredith's young sons from his first marriage, aged sixteen and eleven in 1822, would have been helping when they were not away later at the whale fishery, but the main labour force would have been largely unskilled free men and convict servants. Where the boys were to be used, Mary decided and assigned their tasks, taking her cue from George's letters.<sup>17</sup> The obstacles faced by this largely unskilled group were enormous and included disease of the crops, stock and farm workers, injury to them, unfamiliarity with the seasons, attacks by bushrangers and Aboriginal people, to name just the main ones.<sup>18</sup>

After a year or so of occupation, the farm appeared to have been progressing. Meredith's wife wrote in March 1823 that there were seventeen or eighteen cattle in 'prime condition'

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<sup>14</sup> For Elizabeth Macarthur, see: J Conway, 'Macarthur, Elizabeth (1766–1850)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macarthur-elizabeth-2387/text3147>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 22 April 2019; also EM Onslow, *Some early records of the Macarthurs of Camden* (Sydney, 1914).

<sup>15</sup> MS Tucker, *Elizabeth Macarthur: A life at the edge of the world* (Melbourne, 2018), p. 136.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 144–148.

<sup>17</sup> Meredith to his wife, 24 April 1825, NS123/1/1 #14, TA.

<sup>18</sup> A Alexander, 'Drought, bushrangers, blight and more: the horrors of early farming', *Papers & Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2009), pp. 170–177 discusses this topic in more detail.



suitable for the store, that the sheep were doing 'uncommonly well' and that the 'merino flock' had been brought in to keep them separate from the others.<sup>19</sup> Meredith's merino flock would persist, as will be discussed later.

While in Sydney for several months during early 1823, Meredith purchased a number of fruit trees for his properties and also some New Zealand flax.<sup>20</sup> In Sydney he met merchant Edward Wollstonecraft and by 1824 Meredith was sending potatoes to him for sale, and Wollstonecraft was requesting seed potatoes.<sup>21</sup> An account of the colony, published in 1824 noted that 'One of these persons [from Oyster Bay] has already been enabled to send to England two years shearings of his flocks'.<sup>22</sup> This could only be referring to Meredith, however it may have only been an exaggerated claim by him.

Letters from Meredith to his wife through the mid-1820s contain various directives on running the farm—where to place ditches, reminders to wash the sheep, to have 'old Waddell' pick and sort the fleeces, regarding planting potatoes, barley, wheat etc, as well as his hopes for improving the cattle and dairy herds:

John Rayner should well look over all the hills far & near his place for stray sheep as George will do around Hartes & our side as it will not do to harrass [sic] the sheep by yarding & driving now they are lambing etc as to ascertain their exact numbers. The New Bull will be kept with the house heard & all inferior cows sent away so that we may improve our breed at home for milk & beauty.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Meredith to her husband, 6 March 1823, *Meredith Family Papers*, G4/4, UTAS S&R. Henceforth the title of the G4 series will be omitted.

<sup>20</sup> Meredith to his wife, 28 March 1823, G4/5, UTAS S&R; [Diary of George Meredith's visit to Sydney, 8 March 1823-22 May 1823], NS123/1/11, TA.

<sup>21</sup> Wollstonecraft to Meredith, 12 May 1824, George Meredith, *Papers and correspondence with variety of people, including Joseph Archer, Adam Amos, George Frankland, Lieut. Colonel Sorell, T.D. Lord and others. 150 letters. 1801, 15 May 1819-30, Apr 1847, 12 Jan 1852*, NS123/1/4, TA.

<sup>22</sup> E Curr, *An account of the colony of Van Diemen's Land principally for the use of emigrants* (London, 1824), p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> Meredith to his wife, 15 April 1825, *fc Meredith*, GSBHS; Meredith to his wife, 24 April 1825, NS123/1/1 #14, TA; Meredith to his wife, 2 March 1823, 339gg GSBHS; quote: Meredith to his wife, 29 June 1825,

Horses were in short supply and highly valued, and Meredith was careful in minutely instructing Mary on their care:

As to the horses, I need not tell you to have them taking care of, their backs dress<sup>d</sup> and plenty of straw & food given to them & I hope they will find the straw yard an attraction sufficient to keep them near home and in the yard at night along with the Black Horse. There cannot be any need to ride after cattle at this season and therefore the horses I hope may again pick up flesh.<sup>24</sup>

By 1826 Meredith had won good title to his land claim and could begin long term planning. The site of the future grand house *Cambria* had apparently been decided as far back as 1822 (see Figure 2-2) and a walled garden and orchard were established there, tended to by Mary Meredith and the younger children.<sup>25</sup> George Meredith chaired the public meeting that formed the Tasmanian Game Association in April 1826 and he went onto the committee tasked with developing plans and regulations for the Association.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever progress had been made by 1828, the Land Commissioners were unimpressed during their tour of inspection in December, noting the lack of improvement of the land, livestock unfenced, marshes undrained and farm facilities ill-equipped. They wrote acidly:

M<sup>r</sup> Meredith is a Great Man, at least he wishes to be thought so, we are apt therefore to look perhaps more minutely into all his operations. We expected to behold wonders, we were miserably disappointed.<sup>27</sup>

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NS123/1/1 #18, TA. Spelling and emphasis such as underlining in quotes from hand-written letters and diaries will be as per the original text; punctuation has been adjusted to assist readability. See 'Style and spelling' in the introductory pages for a fuller explanation of how quotes are dealt with.

<sup>24</sup> Meredith to his wife, 23 June 1823, G4/6 (2), UTAS S&R.

<sup>25</sup> E Meredith, *Reminiscences and experiences of an early colonist* (Masterton, 1898), p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Colonial Times*, 21 April 1826, p. 1. The Association does not appear to have had a long life. The last mention in newspapers was in September 1826, when a meeting was called with the object of importing some game from England *Hobart Town Gazette*, 2 September 1826, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> A McKay, (ed.), *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land 1826-28* (Hobart, 1962), pp. 93-94. Part of the Commissioner's antipathy to Meredith may have been due to the fact that one of them, Roderic O'Connor, was an ally of Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and therefore would have been antagonistic to

By 1830 Meredith had title or control of almost 10,000 acres of land, including the contiguous properties known as *Cambria*, *Riversdale*, *Belmont* and *Woburn* at Great Swan Port, and had leases over government land for several thousand more.<sup>28</sup>

Tallies of Meredith's sheep showed that in 1833 and 1834 he had between 3,700 and 4,000 head in his flocks, although less than two dozen were merinos. In 1833 at least, he regularly sent between one to three dozen bags or bales of wool, each about two hundred and twenty pounds weight, to Hobart Town or Sydney for a total that year of about eighty bales (although the surviving records are probably incomplete).<sup>29</sup> By comparison, Roderic O'Connor, who had equally extensive and arguably better grazing land in the north of the colony, had a flock of about 4,200 sheep in 1836 and despatched about seventy bales. Most of those were merino and O'Connor restricted himself mainly to grazing cattle and sheep.<sup>30</sup> Meredith on the other hand was a diversified farmer, possibly reflecting the nature of his land but also his lack of focus over the past decade. As well as sheep and cattle (and, up to about 1834, whaling), he was growing and selling potatoes, oats, barley and two varieties of wheat. In March 1833 he sent 50 bushels of oats, 323 bushels of white wheat and 374 bushels of red wheat to his agent Charles Thomas Smith, having sent slightly more wheat to Smith the January before.<sup>31</sup>

An issue for Meredith, and all the settlers at Great Swan Port, was the poor overland access. A foot and horse track existed from Hobart to Waterloo Point that went via

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Meredith. For O'Connor see A Alexander, *The O'Connors of Connorville a great Australian story* (Hobart, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> M Ward and MM Ferris, *A historical study of Cambria Estate* (Swansea, 2016), unpublished report by GSBHS (Swansea, 2016), pp. 11-17.

<sup>29</sup> 20 January, 30 January, 26 March, 3 April, 10 May 1833, *Accounts, receipts and associated papers, including stock accounts and Colonial Bank passbook*, NS123/1/8, TA; *Hobart Town Chronicle*, 28 May 1833, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander, *O'Connors*, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> Receipt of Smith to Meredith, 30 January, 26 March 1833, NS123/1/8, TA.

Prosser's Plains and Little Swan Port by 1822 when William Hollyoak took it on his fateful journey to being killed at Grindstone Bay (Chapter 5). This was probably similar to the route first traversed by Henry Rice in January 1821 and the one taken by the Land Commissioners on their tour in 1828.<sup>32</sup> The most commonly used route for bringing livestock up to the area was via Jericho in the midlands and the 'Eastern Marshes', which came out on the coast at Little Swan Port. This was most likely the route used by John Lyne to bring up a flock of sheep in 1826.<sup>33</sup> This track also became the first way to bring carts into Little Swan Port and onwards up to Great Swan Port, but even in 1842, when Louisa Anne Meredith was brought in with her family on a gig, it was a very rough journey.<sup>34</sup>

Owing to the poor overland access, and in line with his original planning, much of Meredith's produce was sent away, and stores brought in, via coastal traders.<sup>35</sup> Many vessels trading between Hobart Town, Port Dalrymple and Sydney would call into Great Oyster Bay. Edwin Meredith wrote much later that in about 1830, after Meredith's vessel *Black Swan* was lost, Lieutenant-Governor Arthur introduced a regulation that banned traders going to Great Swan Port, on the pretext of preventing smuggling. In response, Meredith then built and operated the *Independent*, as his own goods shipper and named as an obvious statement of his attitude to Arthur's interference.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> McKay, *Journals*, map.

<sup>33</sup> J Lyne, *Reminiscences of John Lyne MHA*, NS854/1/1, TA.

<sup>34</sup> LA Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania during a residence of nine years Vol. 1 and 2*, first published 1852 in London, facsimile edition. (Swansea, 2003), p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> Various receipts and shipping bills of lading in NS123/1/8, TA.

<sup>36</sup> E Meredith, *Memoir of the Late George Meredith* (Masterton, 1897), p. 19.

## WHALING AND SEALING

### The whale and seal industry off the east coast of Van Diemen's Land

François Peron recorded abundant seals and whales in the vicinity of Maria Island during Nicolas Baudin's voyage down the east coast of Tasmania in early 1802.<sup>37</sup> When John Bowen sailed to the Derwent to establish the first colony in Van Diemen's Land in 1803, one of his vessels was the English whaler *Albion*, under Captain Eber Bunker. Having seen many whales when he sailed along the Van Diemen's Land coast towards New South Wales on the convict transport *William and Ann* in 1791, Bunker imposed a condition on the 1803 voyage that he may hunt whales en route to the Derwent. An opportunity arose at 'Oyster Bay' and three sperm whales were taken.<sup>38</sup>

After Hobart Town was settled the following year, the abundance of whales in the Derwent estuary was attested to early on by Rev. Knopwood, who noted in his diary on 1 July 1804 'We passed so many whales that it was dangerous for the boat to go up the river unless you kept very near the shore'.<sup>39</sup> Whales were taken from the Derwent that year and a whaling station set up at Droughty Point in 1805. Up to 1810, English whaling ships dominated the local catch of whales and seals, but after that, smaller vessels from Sydney and Van Diemen's Land gradually displaced them as the abundance of seals declined due to overkilling.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> F Peron, *A voyage of discovery to the southern hemisphere ...* (London, 1809), p. 234.

<sup>38</sup> TW Sharpe, 'Whaling', unpublished paper for the Royal Society of Tasmania, Northern Branch, 1967, *fc whaling and sealing*, Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society (hereafter GSBHS); Bunker to King, 5 October 1803, F Bladen, (ed.), *Historical Records of New South Wales, Vol. V – King 1803, 1804, 1805* (Sydney, 1897), p. 231. It is unclear if the 'Oyster Bay' referred to is what today is known as Great Oyster Bay, or the Oyster Bay of Maria Island, now called Shoal Bay. The two are close geographically.

<sup>39</sup> M Nicholls, (ed.), *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1838* (CD version, 2015), p. 55.

<sup>40</sup> M Nash, *The bay whalers Tasmania's shore-based whaling Industry* (Woden, 2003), pp. 36-39.

Captain James Kelly undertook an expedition to the south-west of Van Diemen's Land and returned via the Furneaux Islands off the north-east of the colony. He and his crew went sealing there and exchanged seal meat for kangaroo skins with Aboriginal people in friendly trade over a number of days. On the voyage south to Hobart, they stopped at 'White Rock' (Ile des Phoques or Seal Island – see Figure 3-1) between Schouten Island and Maria Island for further sealing.<sup>41</sup>

The first Van Diemen's Land-based vessel in the whaling trade was the *Sophia*, commanded by Charles Feen and later by James Kelly, when it was owned by Thomas Birch.<sup>42</sup> Birch and Kelly gave evidence to the Bigge inquiry into the economic state of the colony in 1820. Both highlighted the high duties on whale oil shipped to England and the high local costs of equipment, casks and government charges, all of which discouraged the development of the industry locally.<sup>43</sup> For instance, foreign whalers paid a duty in England of £26 12/- per tun (effectively, an imperial ton) of whale oil and £95 per ton of whale bone as against 1/- and £1 respectively for English whalers.<sup>44</sup> Following the publication of the Bigge reports in 1823, duties in England and locally were reduced, and as a result, the industry became less attractive for English whalers and more so for local enterprise.<sup>45</sup> Kelly also noted the presence of whales in 'Oyster Bay', but said he had never fished there.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> J Kelly, *First discovery of Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour* (c. early 1800s), RS99/1, University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections (hereafter UTAS S&R). Ile des Phoques ('Island of Seals') was named during Baudin's expedition to the area in early 1802, <https://www.placenames.tas.gov.au/#p1>, *Ile des Phoques*, nomenclature number 8173R, accessed online 28 March 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Nash, *Bay whalers*, p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Birch and Kelly evidence to Bigge, HRA III, Vol. III, pp. 354-358 and 458-466.

<sup>44</sup> GM Parker, *'Some records of Great Swan Port and the municipality of Glamorgan 1820-1920'*, unpublished manuscript, 1950, P1/6, UTAS S&R, p. H2.

<sup>45</sup> Nash, *Bay whalers*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>46</sup> J Kelly evidence to Bigge, HRA III, Vol. III, p. 461; Sorell to Macquarie, 14 August 1820, *ibid*, pp. 42-44, stated that whalers were at Oyster Bay that year, but this appears to be a mis-statement of Kelly's evidence.



**Figure 3-1.** Map of the central east coast of Tasmania, showing areas of interest relevant to George Meredith.

Source: Original map by Diane Bricknell.

### Meredith's entry into the shore-based whaling and sealing industry

George Meredith was well experienced on the sea—he spent ten years as a Royal Marine, sailing across the Atlantic several times, and he would, no doubt, have observed and interacted with whalers and sealers operating down the east coast of North America. When he and his party sailed in their small vessels from Hobart twice up and back to Great Swan Port in 1821 during the whale migration season, they probably saw and heard whales in the sea and observed the large number of seals on the rocks on the way, especially on Ile

des Phoques (Figure 3-1). As there was nothing more than a rough track between Hobart Town and Great Swan Port for many years, most trips by Meredith were made by sea, and the potential for this 'free resource' was not missed by him.

Bay whaling was a cheap industry to enter and it was conducted in Van Diemen's Land between 1820 and 1840, ending when whales became scarcer and avoided the hunting areas.<sup>47</sup> East coast historian George Musgrave Parker, in an unpublished manuscript, reported the presence of a shore-based whale fishery on Schouten Island in 1821, but no other writer on the topic has repeated this.<sup>48</sup> Mary Meredith wrote to her husband in June 1822 that a 'Captain Greydon' had killed a whale and it had washed up on a nearby beach. Their neighbour, Major Honner and several of his men rendered a cask of oil from it.<sup>49</sup> The *Thalia* was whaling at Oyster Bay in May 1824, calling in en-route to America.<sup>50</sup>

The earliest authoritative record of George Meredith entering the whaling industry is a note by Meredith documenting that a 'Mr Bishop' was late in delivering a whaling boat he was building, in May 1824.<sup>51</sup> A 'Memo of outfit for whaling 1824' which included two boats 'average £30 each, one in hand' and two 'coils whale line 145 fathoms', for a total value or expenditure of £244 10/- illustrated how the boats were to be fitted out.<sup>52</sup> On the back were several lists of potential crew, including ticket-of-leave men, some known to Meredith's current employees and several off other vessels such as the *Duke of York*. Meredith had established his 'fishery' base at Coles Bay by 1824, as several convicts were

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<sup>47</sup> RM Hartwell, *The economic development of Van Diemen's Land 1820-1850* (Melbourne, 1954), p. 141.

<sup>48</sup> Parker, *Records of Great Swan Port*, p. H/5. Nash, *Bay whalers*, pp. 156-158, surveyed the Schouten Island whale stations and dated none of them prior to 1830.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Meredith to Meredith, 25 June 1822, NS123/1/13, TA.

<sup>50</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 14 May 1824, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> [Untitled note about late boat delivery], May 1824, NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>52</sup> 'Memo of outfit for whaling 1824', *George Meredith Agreements with the crews of his sealing and whaling boats and associated papers*, NS123/1/7, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/7 series will be omitted.



recorded as having absconded from it that year.<sup>53</sup> He was granted the right to occupy this site in May 1828 when the Surveyor-General wrote: 'Mr Meredith is hereby authorised to occupy Schouten Main [the Freycinet Peninsula](where his present Fishery works are)'.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, Meredith was supplying boats for others to take seals in Bass Strait. In September 1824 he agreed to supply Messrs Sharpe, Baker and Whishert with the vessels *Experiment*, *Mary* (a 'new whale boat') and *Vixen*, with Meredith taking one-third of the seal skins, swan skins and feathers as his commission.<sup>55</sup> In February 1825 he signed a similar agreement with Baker for the hire of the *Comet*.<sup>56</sup>

George Meredith spent much time in Hobart Town and frequently wrote to his wife. Although there are no letters between them surviving from 1824, in April 1825 it is clear that the whale fishing effort was well under way. John Sherbord had been recruited as 'headsman' (crew leader) and John Sharpe, who had undertaken the 1824 sealing expeditions, was to make daily sealing trips across to the 'Shootens' (Freycinet Peninsula), notwithstanding that he was frequently observed to be drunk.<sup>57</sup> Fifteen men were assigned to the whaling and sealing effort, a new whale boat had been built and Meredith gave

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<sup>53</sup> Nash, *Bay whalers*, p. 46, quoting Adam Amos to Meredith 'NS123/1', TA.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in K Evans, *Shore-based whaling in Tasmania historical research project: Vol. 2 site histories* (Hobart, 1993), p. 45. Evans cited LSD1/1/72/34, TA, but this record could not be located.

<sup>55</sup> [Agreement for sealing vessels and voyage], 1 September 1824, NS123/1/7, TA.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* This is probably John or 'Black' Baker who later appeared in George Augustus Robinson's journals in several places as a stealer of Aboriginal women—for instance in 1829 where he wrote that three women from 'Brune Island' were taken by Baker, a 'man of colour', to Kangaroo Island: NJB Plomley, (ed.), *Friendly mission The Tasmanian journals and papers of George Augustus Robinson*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Launceston, 2008), pp. 91. Later, according to researcher John Robertson, Baker took the name of John Anderson and was involved with George Meredith junior in activities against Aboriginal people off the South Australian coast: e-mail 'Meredith jnr' J Robertson to M Ward, 20 May 2019. Anderson and Meredith's activities are documented in J Rintoul, *Esperance yesterday and today* (Perth, 1964), pp. 13-19.

<sup>57</sup> Sherbord was a member of the party that was at Grindstone Bay in November 1818 seeking seals and swans for feathers and skins. One of the party, John Kemp, was speared and killed by Aboriginal people—see Chapter 5. Sharpe: Meredith to his wife, 15 April 1825, *fc Meredith*, GSBHS.

precise instructions on how to build 'blubber holes' at the whaling station. The *Comet* was still in service and Meredith had hired another boat off Sherbord's sister for £10.<sup>58</sup>

In April 1826, Meredith wrote to his wife mentioning another boat was to be launched in Hobart for him and that George Scringer was to be the headsman of the whaling station at the 'Shootens'.<sup>59</sup> Three boats were to be employed for the whole season and Meredith expressed confidence of success. His oldest son, George, then twenty, was tasked with the responsibility of organising the men and the distribution of 'slops' (clothing), provisions and tobacco.<sup>60</sup> Meredith's accounts show that he secured his men in March and April, paying advances of between one and three pounds to each per head. At the end of the season, sixteen men were paid out a total of £97 3/- 4d. Headman George Scringer was paid £24, well in excess of the next highest.<sup>61</sup> By October 1826, Meredith was expressing frustration that vessels were not available to transport his whale oil from Great Swan Port to Hobart Town in order to pay some of his bills.<sup>62</sup> During the year, he had bought supplies including casks, clothing, rope, calico, tea, flour, sugar and saucepans for his men, from merchants including Bethune, Wood, Williams, Dean and Maycock. Fred Champion appeared to be his principal supplier and agent in Hobart.<sup>63</sup>

Swan skins were another sideline. Meredith shipped one hundred and eighty skins to Calcutta in 1826 in the care of John Reddall.<sup>64</sup> At least two whales were taken by June 1826

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<sup>58</sup> Meredith to his wife, 24 April 1825, NS123/1/1 #14, TA.

<sup>59</sup> George Scringer was later a whaler and master of coastal trading vessels: *Hobart Town Courier*, 27 October 1827, p. 2, *Colonial Times*, 5 May 1840, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Meredith to his wife, 22 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #22, TA.

<sup>61</sup> 'Names and amounts paid to the whaling crew, 18 August 1826', also receipts to various parties from Meredith during 1826, NS123/1/8, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/8 series will be omitted.

<sup>62</sup> Meredith to his wife, 10 October 1826, NS123/1/1 #25, TA.

<sup>63</sup> [Various invoices and receipts], 1826, NS123/1/8, TA.

<sup>64</sup> [Receipt from Reddell to Meredith], 6 April 1824, NS123/1/8, TA.

and in January 1827 Meredith sent ninety-nine casks of oil, fifteen bales of wool and over a ton of whale bone to Hobart.<sup>65</sup> In early 1827, Meredith wrote to his wife of how many of his bills—for casks, Huon pine, iron, as well as the usual legal accounts—were to be settled by income from the whale oil, whale bone, seal skins and wool he was sending to England. He seemed optimistic that, with a good approaching whale season, they may be able to pay off their remaining debts in England (about £1,000) and then they might be able to start planning their house ‘set up something like an establishment befitting a gentleman and his family’.<sup>66</sup>

At some time, Meredith established a whaling presence on Maria Island. Whaling historian Michael Nash noted that some whaling activity may have been undertaken there as early as 1825, but Meredith was certainly there in 1826, when ‘whaling apparatus’ was delivered for him.<sup>67</sup> In April 1827, a boat was lost at Maria Island, possibly the *Cygnets* that he built.<sup>68</sup>

The 1827 season was a good one; by August, they had taken eight whales and had to stop operations due to a shortage of whale oil casks. This was relieved the next month when he received five tons of casks.<sup>69</sup> In mid-1827 he applied to purchase some Huon pine to build two whale boats. He apparently obtained a log, but when payment of £6 had not been made four months later, government engineer and architect John Lee Archer made a complaint to the Colonial Secretary.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Colonial Times*, 9 June 1826, p. 3; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 20 January 1827, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Meredith to his wife, 22 February 1827, NS123/1/1 #27, TA.

<sup>67</sup> IH Nicholson, *Shipping arrivals and departures, Tasmania. Vol. 1, 1803-1833* (Canberra, 1983), p. 115.

<sup>68</sup> Nash, *Bay whalers*, p. 51; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 31 March 1827, p. 4, 7 April 1826, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Colonial Times*, 10 August 1827, p. 2; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 29 September 1827, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> [Various letters June to October 1827], CSO1/1/120/3206, TA.

In 1828, a new vessel, the *Black Swan* of about forty tons, had been built for Meredith and was seen as a safe, albeit slow sailer.<sup>71</sup> The newspapers reported that, notwithstanding the 'glut' of whale oil from Greenland in the English markets, the price for Van Diemen's Land oil had held, or even improved a little. Meredith's crews had taken four whales by the end of June and were again short of casks. Their end-of-year tally was eleven.<sup>72</sup> Clearly, Meredith was doing well in the whale industry, and sealing would have continued apace. A report from 1832 noted that about sixty tuns of whale oil were shipped from Oyster Bay in 1830, valued at about £900.<sup>73</sup> Most of this would have been Meredith's. In 1833 Meredith produced ninety tuns of whale oil, although if this was reported from Meredith himself, it may not necessarily have been accurate.<sup>74</sup>

Nash named Meredith as one of the top four shore-based whalers in the colony by 1827, the others being Walter Bethune, Kemp and Company and Thomas Lucas.<sup>75</sup> Economically, it would have allowed Meredith to recover from his legal set-backs against Lord and others and to pay off whatever debts remained in England. Besides the cash, it would also have enhanced his profile and networks in Hobart Town, important when he was still immersed in his various battles against Governor Arthur, as discussed in other chapters.

There were also setbacks for Meredith in his whaling and sealing in the second half of the 1820s, as competition emerged. In 1826 he complained about an English whaler *Sisters*, under local charter, taking whales in Great Oyster Bay.<sup>76</sup> William Maycock moved to set up a competing whale fishery base at Refuge Island (then called Hazard's Island—see Figure

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<sup>71</sup> Meredith to his wife, 24 March 1828, NS123/1/1 #36, TA; *Hobart Town Courier*, 10 May 1828, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Tasmanian*, 27 June 1828, p. 3; *Colonial Advocate*, 1 July 1828, p. 47, 1 October 1828, p. 43.

<sup>73</sup> CM Goodridge, *Statistical view of Van Diemen's Land* ... (London, 1832), p. 217.

<sup>74</sup> *Colonial Times*, 29 October 1833, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Nash, *Bay whalers*, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Meredith to Hamilton, 31 July 1826 and accompanying note, CSO1/1/117/2931, TA, (no page numbers).

3-1), off the Freycinet Peninsula in 1828, which Meredith contested.<sup>77</sup> In typical Meredith style, he aggressively resisted any other person sharing ground he believed to have the right to occupy, and resisted attempts by the Surveyor-General to mediate. In the end, the island continued to be a Reserve of the Crown, to be used by all-comers.<sup>78</sup>

The 1829 season started in April as usual, with Meredith's schooner sailing with a crew of thirty. Six of these were lost not long after, when a small boat they were in capsized and all drowned.<sup>79</sup> In early 1830 his prized *Black Swan* schooner was wrecked on Prime Seal Island, off Flinders Island, where it had gone sealing during the whaling off-season.<sup>80</sup> George Meredith junior may have been master of the vessel at the time of the wreck.<sup>81</sup> Edwin Meredith in a later memoir noted that by 1836, Meredith had lost four vessels in all, including two he had built himself.<sup>82</sup>

An episode in 1831 reminds us that Meredith, in his whaling and agricultural endeavours, was still able to feel persecuted by Arthur's administration. On 11 June 1831, the *Amelia*, a seventeen-ton schooner carrying empty whale oil casks for Meredith amongst her cargo, sprang a leak and capsized off the Tasman Peninsula. Two of her crew drowned, but Captain Leard survived and the vessel was towed into Wedge Bay.<sup>83</sup> Two days later Meredith wrote to Captain Jackson of the government cutter the *Charlotte*, then at Hobart Town, if the *Charlotte* might call into Wedge Bay on its way past and retrieved some of his

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<sup>77</sup> Maycock to Surveyor General, May 1828, quoted in Evans, *Shore-based whaling*, Vol. 2, pp. 47-48.

<sup>78</sup> McKay, *Journals*, p. 93; Evans, *Shore-based whaling*. In 1827, Meredith complained when a shipwright he had employed to build a boat left to build a boat for some-one 'of bad character': Meredith to Burnett, 26 March and 15 June 1827, CSO1/1/136/3338, TA, p. 149.

<sup>79</sup> *Cornwall Press*, 21 April 1829, p. 4; *Hobart Town Courier* 6 June 1829, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Colonial Times*, 12 March 1830, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> G Broxam and M Nash, *Tasmanian shipwrecks*, Vol. 1 1797-1899 (Hobart, 2012), p. 17.

<sup>82</sup> Meredith, *Memoir*, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> Broxam and Nash, *Tasmanian shipwrecks*, p. 29.

cargo, as no other vessel was available. The letter was referred up to the Lieutenant-Governor and a negative answer given.<sup>84</sup> Meredith sent several more requests, but all were refused. Meredith published his letters, and the replies he received, later the same month in a newspaper and again in 1836, in his book documenting his grievances against the Arthur administration.<sup>85</sup>

Irrespective of those set-backs, Meredith's whaling activities continued and expanded into the 1830s. In 1831 George Meredith junior acquired a block at Windlass Bay near the entrance to Spring Bay and established a base there.<sup>86</sup> It was sold sometime before 1838 to Kerr, Alexander and Company.<sup>87</sup> The Maria Island convict settlement was closed in 1832 and Meredith then leased the island for a year.<sup>88</sup> Meredith's son Charles oversaw the operations there until 1834, when others took over the lease. Charles wrote to his stepmother from Maria Island in 1833, reporting they had caught four 'good large whales' and were in need of casks.<sup>89</sup>

Newspapers continued to report on Meredith's whale catches, but also on other operators around south-east Tasmania who, by numbers, were becoming more successful.<sup>90</sup> In November 1832, Meredith shipped 174 casks of oil and 140 bundles of whale bone to London.<sup>91</sup> There are several mentions in newspapers of Meredith being involved in the whale industry in 1833, but none have been found after that, notwithstanding the industry

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<sup>84</sup> *Colonial Times*, 29 June 1831, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*; George Meredith, *Correspondence between the local government of Van Diemen's Land and George Meredith Esq.* (Hobart, 1836), pp. 130-134. Henceforth the title of the LSD1 series will be omitted.

<sup>86</sup> MacLaine to Frankland, 14 May 1831, LSD1/1/1, TA, p. 821.

<sup>87</sup> Cartwright and Allport to the Surveyor General, 30 March 1838, LSD1/1/2, p. 701, TA.

<sup>88</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 26 October 1832, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Meredith to Mary Meredith, 6 August 1833, G4/24, UTAS S&R.

<sup>90</sup> *Colonist*, 24 August 1832, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Tasmanian*, 2 November 1832, p. 6.

and total Tasmanian catch was still growing year-on-year.<sup>92</sup> As noted above, Meredith gave up his lease on Maria Island in 1834 and it is likely that he exited the whaling industry either in 1834 or 1835. The reason for this is unclear; no documentation of it has been found. Possibly, competition from other whalers, perhaps with larger and better ships, made the industry unprofitable for him. A compilation of annual returns from whaling in the Great Swan Port area in the 1830s shows a dramatic decline from 1831 to 1833 in boats employed, whales taken and the value of oil.<sup>93</sup> Meredith may have sensed the decline and decided to exit. Furthermore, his eldest son George fell-out with him and moved away in about 1832 or 1833, doing his own sealing in Bass Strait.<sup>94</sup> His next eldest son, Charles, who was heavily involved in the whaling operation, moved to NSW to pursue his own pastoral activities in 1834.<sup>95</sup> The next son, Henry, was only sixteen in 1834 and of course would be helping on the farm. Supervising the whaling operation, with no family 'on the ground' in the outlying stations may have become too much for Meredith, especially as he was embarking on his next major project—the building of his grand house *Cambria*, which was begun about 1832 and finished in 1836 (Chapter 9).<sup>96</sup>

Notwithstanding that Meredith had all but exited the whaling business in the mid-1830s, in 1842 he applied for a grant of twenty acres at 'the Fisheries'—his original whaling base, at Coles Bay. His agent, Henry Wilkinson, wrote to dispute the proposed grant's

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<sup>92</sup> *Colonial Times*, 29 October 1833, p. 3; Nash, *Bay whalers*, p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> Evans, *Shore-based whaling*, Vol. 2, pp. 41-42. The catch and financial returns increased dramatically from 1834 to 1840, however these were mainly from large whaling ships, not via the smaller shore-whalers.

<sup>94</sup> V Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith: A tigress in exile* (Hobart, 1979), p. 58 puts George junior's departure as 1832, taking his father's schooner *Defiance* to Sydney without permission. In a letter to his cousin in 1832, George junior stated that he was about to depart for New Zealand: George Meredith junior to Louisa Anne Twamley, 13 July 1832, Hodgson Collection.

<sup>95</sup> Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith*, p. 57.

<sup>96</sup> Ward and Ferris, *Cambria Estate*, pp. 31-32; Chapter 9 of this thesis improves on the dates of that report.

description.<sup>97</sup> A map from the 1850s showed that the block was granted to Charles Meredith.<sup>98</sup>

## CONCLUSION

George Meredith was unusual as a substantial landholder in the 1820s in that he spent a good deal of time away from his farm on other pursuits, leaving his wife, young family and convict servants to manage and work the land during its initial development, sometimes for months at a time. Meredith's legal dispute with Edward Lord in particular, meant that there would have been little surplus cash at first to fund the development of the land. Meredith and his farm came under criticism from the Land Commissioners in 1828, but at least some of that was possibly due to Roderic O'Connor's personal antipathy to Meredith, being an 'Arthur man'. It was a mixed farm, with a variety of crops plus sheep for meat and wool, and cattle.

Meredith's involvement in the whaling and sealing industries from 1824 to about 1834 was crucial to his prosperity and ability to involve himself in activities beyond his farm. It almost certainly enabled him to clear many of his debts in England and Wales and some of those incurred in early legal disputes in the colony. Whaling would have also brought him additional 'respectability' in Hobart Town and increased his network of business contacts. Meredith did not let financial insecurity prevent him from attacking George Arthur in the mid-1820s, but the increasing financial security he gained from whaling in particular allowed him to devote time and some resources to keep up the attacks on Arthur and his administration, such as the *Colonist* newspaper, which will be detailed in Chapter 7.

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<sup>97</sup> Wilkinson to Burnett, 29 January 1842, Lands and Surveys Department, LSD1/1/53/461, TA.

<sup>98</sup> Evans, *Shore-based whaling*, Vol. 2, p. 12.



## CHAPTER 4: SELFISHNESS BEGINS AT HOME? MEREDITH'S FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

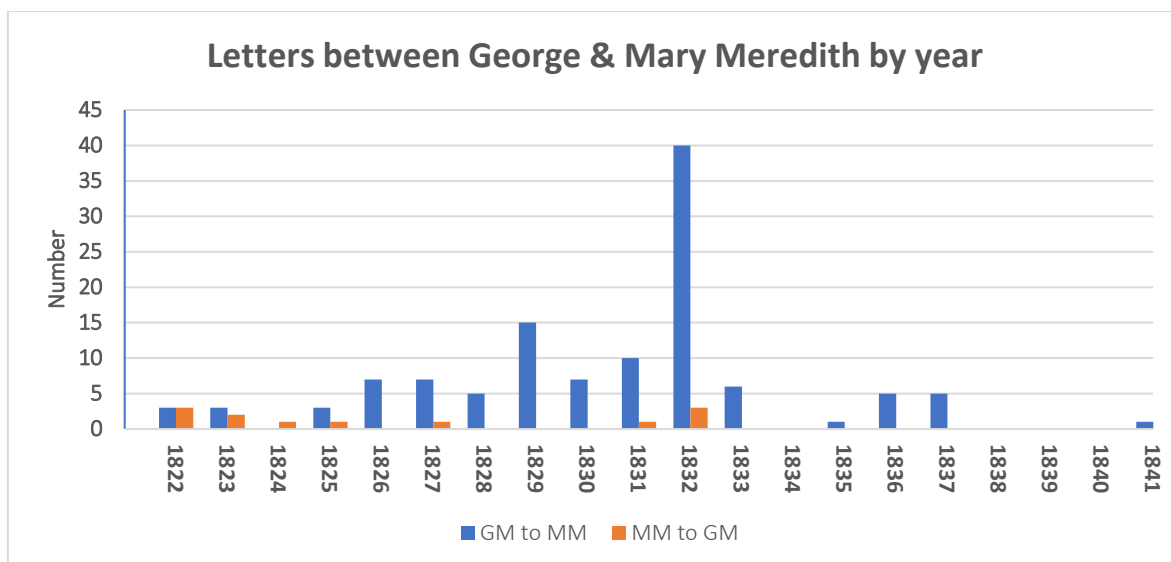
### INTRODUCTION

Before venturing to study his public life, an examination of Meredith's family relationships is warranted, as his family was part of the foundation upon which he stood to carry out his attacks on Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur and his administration. During the lengthy periods Meredith spent away from his home and family, he kept up an enthusiastic letter-writing regime to his second wife. This chapter will draw on the numerous letters between Meredith, his second wife, family members and others in Van Diemen's Land to attempt to see if Meredith's personal relationships and private world, in summation, can be related to what is known about him in public life and to better understand his actions there.

One hundred and eighteen letters from Meredith to his second wife Mary, and twelve from her to him are available to study. In addition, approximately one hundred letters to, from and between his children, his first wife and others have been examined, as well as personal narratives of several of Meredith's children. The imbalance between letters written by Meredith and those by his second wife Mary especially puts a substantial bias in the interpretation of his relationships. In his letters, he often tells Mary not only what she has written, but also what she has felt, and 'no doubt' what she would think and do in response to something he has suggested. This was a form of paternalistic control of his wife's thinking. Her perspective of the marriage unfortunately cannot be told—there can be no 'wife story' here.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the opposite situation and a discussion of 'wife stories', see P Russell, 'Wife stories: Narrating marriage and self in the life of Jane Franklin', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 35-57.



**Figure 4-1** Letters between Meredith and his second wife Mary, by year.<sup>2</sup>

Meredith summed up how he saw his fundamental relationship with his second wife in several letters to her:

The husband is of right the head of & also supports the family. He therefore provides & command; the one is his duty, the other his right. The wife again dispenses those means which he has provided & likewise bears rule under his authority & within the family - although he may be the supreme power, she is the active one. His rule by authority, although undisputed, generally gives way to her rule by love ... the weaker power bears sway & ... the husband rules "de jure" the wife "de facto".<sup>3</sup>

I will ... add that a prudent reflecting wife owes it to herself & her own happiness to render herself by all & every means the sole & most attractive object to her husband & by a constant study of his wishes, and the practice of those little inexpressible misteries [sic] of love, to give a zest to the pleasure & embrace those blissful enjoyments so as to make him return to her embrace with increased delight, even should he be guilty of momentary incontinence.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The reason for the abundance of letters in 1832 over other years may be because in previous years, he wrote just as often, but often combined the various days' writings over about a week into a single envelope. It might also be due to chance preservation.

<sup>3</sup> Meredith to his wife, 3 November 1829, *George Meredith (1778-1856). Letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith*, NS123/1/1 #49, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter TA). Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/1 series will be omitted. Spelling and emphasis such as underlining in quotes from hand-written letters and diaries will be as per the original text; punctuation has been adjusted to assist readability. See 'Style and spelling' in the introductory pages for a fuller explanation of how quotes are dealt with.

<sup>4</sup> Meredith to his wife, 21 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #21, TA.

The first part above appears to be an affirmation of Davidoff and Hall's view of middle class marriages of the time and the 'legal' responsibility taken by the husband: 'Marriage was the economic and social building block of the middle class; it was the basis of a new family unit. On marriage men assumed economic and jural responsibility for their wives and the expected brood of children'.<sup>5</sup> The second is more the classical patriarchal view of the relationship which Foyster traced and defined up to the eighteenth century, but it contained some of the more overt allusions to Mary's duties in the bed-chamber, as will be further explored later in this chapter.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will employ numerous quotes from George Meredith's letters to his wives. It is by his precise words that his thoughts and, if they are to be believed, his sometimes extraordinary actions, can be properly and fully appreciated.

## A PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH?

That historians have been reluctant to embrace psychoanalysis in their works, particularly biographies, has been well documented, at least by those who promote its greater use. It has been oft-questioned whether twentieth-century psychoanalytical theory and interpretation can be accurately transferred to the thoughts and writings of early nineteenth-century characters.<sup>7</sup> The opening sentence of a collection of essays devoted to the promotion of psychoanalysis in history hailed the belief of its worth: 'Psychoanalysis,

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<sup>5</sup> L Davidoff and C Hall, *Family fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850* (London, 1987), p. 322.

<sup>6</sup> EA Foyster, *Manhood in early modern England* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 2-4, 22.

<sup>7</sup> TG Ashplant, 'Psychoanalysis in historical writing', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 26 (1988), p. 105. In his review of psychoanalysis in historical writing, Ashplant raised the question 'which dimensions or levels of the unconscious, as theorised by psychoanalysis, can be treated as constant for the purposes of history?'

wrote Joseph Schwartz, is “arguably the single most important intellectual development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>8</sup> That claim certainly is contestable.

Peter Gay tackled head-on arguments against using psychology in history, debunked many of the arguments so used, and devoted his final chapter to the one objection most often quoted, that ‘you can’t psychoanalyse the dead’. One of his driving arguments against historians’ defences was:

... the professional historian has always been a psychologist – an amateur psychologist. When he knows it or not, he operates with a theory of human nature; he attributes motives, studies passions, analyses irrationality, and constructs his work on the tacit conviction that human beings display certain stable and discernible traits, certain predictable, or at least discoverable, modes of coping with their experience.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Schwartz, it is hard to argue against Gay in this. Judith Brett made many similar arguments in addressing the use of psychoanalysis in political biography, noting that biographers usually want to ‘convey something of what their subject felt about the key events and conflicts and the passing of moments of their life’.<sup>10</sup> This is certainly true as far as this thesis is concerned, but what Brett and other contributors on the subject failed to address was how a historian, not formally trained in the discipline, should apply psychoanalysis. In arguing for its use, these authors often treated ‘psychoanalysis’ as one, over-arching discipline, but, in their supporting arguments, the various authors (including others in the Damousi and Reynolds compilation) reveal the reality that the subject is rent

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<sup>8</sup> Schwartz was quoted in J Damousi and R Reynolds, ‘Introduction: psychoanalysis, histories and identities’, in: *History on the couch: Essays in history and psychoanalysis*, J Damousi and R Reynolds, (eds.) (Melbourne, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> P Gay, *Freud for historians* (New York, 1985), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> J Brett, ‘The task of political biography’, in Damousi and Reynolds, (eds.), *History on the couch*, p. 75.

with many, often divergent theories and approaches.<sup>11</sup> For instance, Freud's theories may or may not be embraced by various practitioners, and, as Brett contended: 'of course, in some aspects of a subject's life they may simply be of their times. As Freud said, "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar"'.<sup>12</sup>

As will be detailed below, much that Meredith wrote to his second wife in 'private' letters concerned dreams and he used the garden as a metaphor for their intimate relationship. This would appear readily to invite at least the invocation of Freud's 'language of flowers' in his *Interpretation of dreams*.<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding, it simply remains that such technical use of psychoanalysis is beyond the scope of this thesis and a technical psychological approach will not be adopted. Fortunately, there is abundant material and in a number of places Meredith spells out, belabours and/or repeats a point such that its meaning is unmistakable.

## EPISTOLARY STUDIES

A number of studies of correspondence between husbands and wives appear in the literature, with most focussing on the Victorian period and/or between couples known from English or American literature, the arts or politics.<sup>14</sup> Studies of Australian colonial letters, and particularly between couples are less common. *The Oxford Book of Australian Letters* presented a broad spectrum of isolated colonial letters, but gave little analysis of

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<sup>11</sup> See especially CE Forth, 'Health, hygiene and the phallic body: Thoughts on psychoanalysis and history', in Damousi and Reynolds, (eds.), *History on the couch*, pp. 106-116.

<sup>12</sup> Brett, 'The task of political biography', p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> S Freud, *The Interpretation of dreams* (London, 1900), p. 315, quoted in BS Rocah, 'The language of flowers', *The psychoanalytic study of the child*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (2002), p. 384. At least using Rocah's analysis, Freud's interpretation of the flowers metaphor would be quite mis-aligned with Meredith's use of it, Freud's being an expression of violence and domination, as opposed to Meredith's more playful and loving expressions.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, MA Favret, *Romantic correspondence: Women, politics and the fiction of letters* (Cambridge, 1993).

their style or content. One of Meredith's letters to his wife appeared in this work.<sup>15</sup> Although not a 'study' of the letters, Chapman's publication of colonial auditor GTWB Boyes' letters to his wife between 1820 (from London) to 1832 (from Van Diemen's Land) reveals Boyes frequently covered similar subjects to Meredith—goings on in the capital (mercantile and political), social gossip, gifts sent and expected, regret at offence caused, advice for home management etc.<sup>16</sup> What they do not contain is the passion and ardour expressed by Meredith for his considerably younger wife.

Richard Holmes, writing on the letters and diaries of soldiers of the First World War, claimed that such correspondence gave a way to finding out 'how people really felt'.<sup>17</sup> Summerfield, in her analysis of how historians have used narratives such as letters and diaries, argued that activities such as separations of courtship and conjugality, migration and war were some of the main prompts to serial letter writing.<sup>18</sup> Summerfield also noted that such letter collections have tended to be lop-sided, with letters sent by the traveller home being more frequently preserved than those received by the person travelling. This is the situation with letters between Meredith and his second wife, although the reason here is possibly not the same, because Meredith actively destroyed his wife's letters over time, as will be discussed below. It was also a similar situation between GTWB Boyes and his wife; in that case, his wife's letters were burned by a descendent in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> Another historical cause of bias in letter collections and their analysis has been a paucity

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<sup>15</sup> B Niall and J Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford book of Australian letters* (Melbourne, 1998), pp. 23-26. In a comment on this letter, Niall and Thompson ascribe a comment by Meredith about 'Sarah' as concerning his first wife, but it was almost certainly referring to his daughter, Sarah.

<sup>16</sup> GTWB Boyes, *The diaries and letters of GTWB Boyes, Vol. 1 1820-1832*, P Chapman, (ed.) (Melbourne, 1985), *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> R Holmes, *Tommy. The British soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London, 2005), p. xxiv.

<sup>18</sup> P Summerfield, *Histories of the self; Personal narratives and historical practice* (Abingdon, 2019), p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> P Chapman, editor of Boyes' letters and diaries, personal comment, 24 April 2020.

of letters by women, which has historically been ascribed to a lack of female literacy, although Summerfield noted a number of studies where this was not the case.<sup>20</sup> Mary Meredith was undoubtedly literate, with her earliest preserved letter dating from 1820 when she was still a twenty-five year old house maid with a rural upbringing.<sup>21</sup>

A study of gender relations in letters somewhat relevant to this discussion has been published by Kate Barclay, who examined letters between Scottish men travelling away from their home, and their wives, between 1650 and 1850. The Meredith letters are consistent with Barclay's finding that nineteenth-century letters between wives and their absent husbands were constructs to produce a binding from afar by portraying domestic situations—intimacy in the case of Meredith, and family and farm life for his wife.<sup>22</sup>

A number of authors have examined the issue of 'private' versus 'public' letters. Both Barclay and Lyons noted that letters between individuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were often written anticipating, or with the expectation, that they would be read aloud or circulated amongst family and friends.<sup>23</sup> George Meredith's letters back to his mother in England were carried about by her and read to her friends.<sup>24</sup> Meredith was a practitioner of writing 'private' letters to his wife, occasionally labelling them as such, as well as public or what he called 'general' ones. The private contained his most intimate

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<sup>20</sup> DA Gerber, 'Epistolary ethics: Personal correspondence and the culture of emigration in the nineteenth century', *Journal of American ethnic history*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer, 2000), p. 9; Summerfield, *Histories of the self*, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Evans to Meredith, probably October 1820, *Mary Ann Meredith. Letters to her husband George Meredith (and 1 letter from George to his wife Mary)*, NS123/1/13, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/13 series will be omitted.

<sup>22</sup> K Barclay, *Love, intimacy and power; marriage and patriarchy in Scotland 1650 – 1850* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 136-143.

<sup>23</sup> Barclay, *Love, intimacy and power*, p. 28; M Lyons, 'Love letters and writing practices: On *ecritures intimes* in the nineteenth century', *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1999), p. 234; Gerber, 'Epistolary ethics', p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Typed transcript 'Reminiscences [by] Louisa Ann [sic] Meredith', Wren's Nest, Hobart, 24 April 1892, Hodgson collection, pp. 11-12.

thoughts towards her and occasional financial items, whilst the general ones contained instructions to be shared amongst his family on the farm and could be shown to others if needs be. His letter of 24 April 1825 with instructions and details on his whaling operations was clearly a public letter, which he concluded with instructions to be passed onto the head whaler.<sup>25</sup> A passionate letter of his labelled 'Private' began 'My very dear & naughty M'.<sup>26</sup> Occasionally he had to remind Mary to keep her private and public writings separate.<sup>27</sup> He obviously adhered to the practice himself, writing at one time to his wife that, having written two long 'private letters' to her, he was now onto his 'general' one.<sup>28</sup> Yet he did sometimes mix intimate writing with general instructions and thus reinforced the difficulty in classifying letters routinely into 'private' and 'public', as Earle noted in her introduction to a series of essays exploring the epistolary self.<sup>29</sup>

'Private' they may have been, but were Meredith's letters 'love letters'? Teo noted the common archival reference to 'courtship, marriage, emotional attachment, and intimate disclosure of the self and sexual feelings' in classifying texts as 'love letters'—which she put another way, 'romantic love', as opposed to the love between, say, other family members.<sup>30</sup> Many of Meredith's letters to his wife were very definitely love letters and show a side of him in contrast to his public side, although as deeper analysis of his letters show, his private letters and his public persona did converge to a certain extent.

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<sup>25</sup> Meredith to his wife, 24 April 1825, NS123/1/1 #14, TA.

<sup>26</sup> Meredith to his wife, 5 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #306, TA. The letter to which this refers has not been preserved.

<sup>27</sup> Meredith to his wife, 27 November 1831, NS123/1/1 #67, TA. In his letter Meredith to his wife, 23 January 1832, NS123/1/1 #276, TA, he acknowledged receipt of both 'private' and 'general' letters.

<sup>28</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #287, TA.

<sup>29</sup> R Earle, 'Introduction: letters, writers and the historian', in: R Earle, (ed.), *Epistolary selves; letters and letter-writers 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> H-M Teo, 'Love writes: Gender and romantic love in Australian love letters, 1860-1960', *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 48 (November 2005), p. 344.



## MEREDITH'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH HIS FAMILY

### His first wife, Sarah Hicks

In September 1805, Meredith married his first wife, Sarah Hicks, the daughter of a farming family with interests in southern Berkshire.<sup>31</sup> She had inherited a half share of her mother's own farming interest, with her father having the other half, which George later purchased. The circumstances of George and Sarah's meeting are not clear—he had recently been promoted to First Lieutenant and was on-shore due to an eye injury and was 'recruiting' when they met.<sup>32</sup> With her half share of a farm estate, Sarah brought some capital to the marriage, perhaps compensating for George's lack of it, expressed earlier in a letter to his mother where he regretted being omitted from his God-mother's will.<sup>33</sup>

As discussed earlier, the Merediths were married at St Helen's church in Abingdon, northern Berkshire and this location may have indicated a reluctance by him to 'display' his rural-born betrothed to his family in Birmingham. Many years later, when coaching his second wife to improve herself, he wrote:

[the habit of writing notes from books she read] was your predecessors most efficient mode of improving herself and I doubt not will also prove yours. She, dearest M, needed improvement at the period of her marriage even more than yourself when we were united.<sup>34</sup>

This perhaps again indicated some concern about Sarah's 'suitability' in public, something he would repeat later in respect of his second wife.

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<sup>31</sup> Chapter 1.

<sup>32</sup> E Meredith, *Memoir of the late George Meredith* (Masterton, 1897), p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Typed transcript Meredith to his mother, 11 March 1800, Hodgson collection.

<sup>34</sup> Meredith to his wife, 28 April 1832, NS123/1/1 #286, TA.



**Figure 4-2.** Sarah Westall Meredith, nd.

Source: Photocopy, Meredith McFadden collection.

Commentary: This likeness has been attributed to a copy by Louisa Anne Meredith of an original miniature painted by (Thomas) Peat. V Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith: A tigress in exile* (Hobart, 1979), image opposite p. 33.

George settled his wife and family at *Rhyndaston*, south-western Wales, in 1810 after a few years elsewhere and in about 1813 George had begun an intimate relationship with the family housemaid and nurse, Mary Evans. This was probably unknown to Sarah at least through 1818, at which time Sarah wrote to Mary in very friendly terms, notwithstanding that Mary was about to give birth to Henry, fathered by George.<sup>35</sup>

In a letter to his second wife Mary some years later, employing the metaphor for their relationship of the 'Baron & Myra', George stated that the Baron (that is, himself) 'never really loved any other woman' than Myra (ie Mary).<sup>36</sup> Again, in another letter, the Baron (George) 'became sensible that he was in love [with Myra/Mary] and that he had, in reality, never loved before ... He had married but not loved ...'.<sup>37</sup> This may have merely been the

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<sup>35</sup> Chapter 1.

<sup>36</sup> Meredith to his wife, NS123/1/1 #41, 24 April 1829. Discussion of the 'Baron and Maria' metaphor will follow, below.

<sup>37</sup> Meredith to his wife, 19 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #313, TA.

expression of a superior affection for his second wife, but it may also be George confessing that his first marriage had been a mistake, possibly loveless from an early stage but almost certainly after he started his affair with Mary Evans. No doubt the main attraction of Sarah was that she brought property to the marriage. Much later, George Meredith wrote to his son Charles that his wife's dowry was worth £5,466 10/- 7d.<sup>38</sup>

### His second wife, Mary Evans

When Meredith began thinking of immigration in 1819, he had intended to set up his mistress Mary Evans in an inn, and she approved of that idea.<sup>39</sup> After Sarah's death in early 1820, Mary became a greater part of the Meredith household, writing to family friends about Sarah's death and getting things packed ready for travel.<sup>40</sup> By June, Meredith had decided to take Mary Evans with him in some capacity to the colonies, and included her in his list of intending immigrants sent to Lord Bathurst.<sup>41</sup>

Meredith married Mary Evans in London a week before the *Emerald* sailed to Van Diemen's Land, and much later he matter-of-factly explained to her the circumstances of their marriage:

In any case however, to have emigrated with a young family like mine, beyond the reach of kindred or friends, without the watchful care of female protection or a domestic guardian in whom to confide during probable absence & in the event of possible death, would have been a gross dereliction of self acknowledged & imperative duty. Hence it was that our union originated in and was influenced by considerations involving the future well-being of my children rather than mere

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<sup>38</sup> Meredith to Charles Meredith, 'No. 4', 1 November 1853, *George Meredith (1778-1856). Letters to his children, Sarah, Charles and John. 40 letters mainly to John while farming at Mount Gambier. Also a letter from his son Henry*, NS123/1/2, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/2 series will be omitted.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Evans to Meredith, 2 April 1819, NS123/1/13, TA.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Evans to Mrs Flaherty, 20 April 1820, *Mary Ann Meredith (1795-1843). Mrs George Meredith (nee Evans). Mary Ann Meredith. Letters received*, NS123/1/15 #110, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/15 series will be omitted. Mary Evans to Meredith, probably July 1820, NS123/1/13 #111, TA.

<sup>41</sup> Meredith to Lord Bathurst, 3 June 1820, CO201/102, *New South Wales, Original Correspondence, Individuals, etc*, Australian Joint Copying Project microfilm #51, TA, pp. 221-224.

individual comfort & wishes. And so far from being preceded by those little personal attentions & preliminary understandings expected & usual on such occasions, the very first intimation you received of even intention on my part to offer myself to your acceptance was conveyed by letter only a few days previous to our marriage. But abrupt and unexpected as the offer was to you, that subject had been often and deeply weighed in my mind; nor were you the only female presented to my thoughts and whose qualifications were also considered ere that letter was written.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, in spite of their affair lasting over seven years, and the birth of their illegitimate son Henry, Meredith's stated motivation for marrying Mary was chiefly to provide a mother and home guardian for the children of his earlier marriage. Remarriage to obtain a substitute parent for the children of a lost spouse was not uncommon of course, as Davidoff and Hall discussed in their chapter on family structure and relationships.<sup>43</sup> In Meredith, the haste and circumstances of his second marriage suggests a degree of self-serving cynicism and selfishness on his part.

Only a few letters from Mary Meredith to her husband have survived, so this study of the couple's relationship is largely from his perspective only. Of those letters of hers that do survive, most are early (1822-23) and contain questions and reports of activities on the farm, interspersed with promises to serve him to the best of her ability and thanks for his affectionate letters.<sup>44</sup> They are only her 'public' letters—there are none with the passion with which Meredith wrote to his wife as we will see, nor what he noted he had received from her. He probably destroyed her 'private' writings (see discussion below). Later letters from her in 1832 contain material similar to the earlier ones—having to supervise farm matters and hoping that she is not doing wrong, progress of the children, farm, crops and

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<sup>42</sup> Meredith to his wife, 30 October 1831, NS123/1/1 #61, TA

<sup>43</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family fortunes*, p. 325.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Meredith to Meredith, 22 June 1822 and 24 December 1822, NS123/1/13, TA.

stock, and hoping for his return.<sup>45</sup> Although in his letters in reply he frequently noted her feelings and wants, like many things to do with George Meredith, these cannot be taken at face value, as often they appear to be more instructions on how she should feel or want, rather than reflecting what she had actually written to him.

Three themes dominated Meredith's letters to his wife written after immigration. He usually opened his letters with an apology to her for sending a letter rather than arriving back from Hobart Town as he had previously promised. This was often turned into a positive by him by observing that the 'pain' of separation reinforced their mutual love and desire for each other.<sup>46</sup> The second was his coaching and criticism of her on the quality of her letters and writing and the third, almost universal theme, was the expression of his love and passion for her. It was not uncommon for severe criticism of her letters to follow seamlessly from a page of romantic and intimate writing.<sup>47</sup>

### Meredith's criticisms of his wife's letters

Meredith very often criticised Mary's letters and gave her instructions, for instance, to write neatly, to write notes during the day about interesting things she had read that she might incorporate in her letters, to write two or three drafts of each letter, to use a dictionary, and so on.<sup>48</sup> His admonitions are common over the period 1823 to 1829 and were not mere fleeting annoyances as he wrote his replies. Many of his letters were 'serial' in nature—written over several days or nights, each section labelled with the day—and

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<sup>45</sup> Mary Meredith to Meredith, 14 April 1832, NS123/1/13, TA.

<sup>46</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 March 1823, Box ED1, 339gg, Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society (hereafter GSBHS); Meredith to his wife, 26 April 1832, NS123/1/1 # 285, TA.

<sup>47</sup> For instance, Meredith to his wife, 9 December 1827, NS123/1/1 #31, TA.

<sup>48</sup> Meredith to his wife, 23 June 1823, G4/6 (2), UTAS S&R; Meredith to his wife, 21 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #21 and 9 December 1827, NS123/1/1 #31, TA.

often his criticism of her letters will continue from one day's text into the next.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, he did praise her when he saw improvement.<sup>50</sup> Meredith saw his wife's poor writing and letter composition as disrespectful to himself:

I am utterly at a loss to account for your indifference in this respect and it is with pain I make comparisons between your writing & that of the girls so much to your disadvantage. It is the only point in which you wilfully disappoint my hopes & wishes.<sup>51</sup>

Meredith likened her poorly written letters to him as her displaying a 'mental disfigurement' to him:

Suppose I say you should, in looking in your glass reflector, behold your person disfigured as your letter reflector presents your mental self before me ...<sup>52</sup>

... or you never could have supposed for one moment that I should associate or compare your person with such an object. No! No! It was a mere phantom of the brain, conjured up by that unseemly letter, teeming with faults, blemishes & disfigurations, almost as gross as the disgusting figure it engendered in my distempered mind - which was, in fact, the personification of the letter - the deformities of one being embodied in the semblance of the other.<sup>53</sup>

Faced with such 'disfiguration', on a number of occasions Meredith told his wife bluntly that he has burned a particular letter, or a series of letters.<sup>54</sup> The cruelty of these comments can only be wondered at.

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<sup>49</sup> For instance, Meredith to his wife, 10 October 1829, NS123/1/1 #44, 14 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #50 and 29 April 1830, NS123/1/1 #55, TA. In the letter dated 10 October, his admonitions and criticisms continued over Saturday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, occupying most of the 3,000 words of the letter. He called her spelling 'disgraceful even to a child of ten years of age'.

<sup>50</sup> Meredith to his wife, 14 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #50, TA.

<sup>51</sup> Meredith to his wife, 9 December 1827, NS123/1/1 #31, TA.

<sup>52</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #48, TA.

<sup>53</sup> Meredith to his wife, 14 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #50, TA. 'Distempered' is an archaic term meaning crazed or confused.

<sup>54</sup> Meredith to his wife, 10 October 1829, NS123/1/1 #44, TA.



**Figure 4-3.** Mary Meredith, nd.

Source: Photocopy, Meredith McFadden collection.

Commentary: Meredith referred to carrying Mary's miniature in 1823, Meredith to his wife, 2 March 1823, Box ED1, 339gg, GSBHS.

Perhaps surprisingly, sparse evidence has survived that Meredith ever suggested his wife use one of the 'letter writing manuals' that arose in the eighteenth century but continued in vogue into the nineteenth.<sup>55</sup> In 1822 he encouraged Mary to read 'all our best and most instructive books'.<sup>56</sup> Besides that, he did keep her well supplied with books, noting on several occasions that he had purchased them for her.<sup>57</sup>

In a two-week period in late 1829, Meredith sent his wife four letters, three of which contained harsh and sustained criticisms of her letters and her perceived attitude to him as a result of those deficiencies.<sup>58</sup> Meredith's unrelenting criticism of his wife, who he had

<sup>55</sup> V Myers, 'Model letters, moral living: letter-writing manuals by Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 3/4 (2003), p. 373; RW Bailey, *Nineteenth-century English* (Ann Arbor, 1996), p. 13; Bailey termed the manuals 'conduct books'. See also F Austin, 'A thousand years of model letter-writers', *Filologica e Linguistica*, No. 25 (2007), pp. 2-20.

<sup>56</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 March 1823, Box ED1, 339gg, GSBHS.

<sup>57</sup> Meredith to his wife, 14 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #50 and 29 April 1830, NS123/1/1 #55, TA.

<sup>58</sup> Meredith to his wife, 30 October, 3 November and 14 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #47, #49 and #50, TA.

left to manage the farm, workmen and two sets of children, can only be described as cruel, heartless and an extreme example of selfishness in their relationship.

### Mary's need to improve herself

A recurring theme in Meredith's letters is a desire for Mary to improve herself so she could take her appropriate 'station in life' as 'Mrs Meredith' and a 'Lady'. He was unstinting in his praise for her talents and natural abilities but urged her to improve:

My only wish is to rouse your ambition and to make you sensible of the truth that you do possess sufficient natural talent and powers of mind to become all you can yourself desire; all that I wish & expect. Buonaparte used to say that "A nation to be free had only to will it." The same may be applied to the human mind and to you. To be learned & mentally accomplished you only have to will it and every days nay every hours practice, study and reflectin [sic] will be one step towards a speedy completion of your own determination & my dearest wish.<sup>59</sup>

Wishing to be able to present Mary to Hobart Town society, he wrote: 'I would have my Maria perfect in everything. The Ladies in Hobart Town must be envious of your personal superiority. I wish them to be made sensible of your mental attainment also'.<sup>60</sup>

As with his attitude to his first wife, his letters to his second wife confirm his desire that his wife should be an ornament to himself and not an embarrassment:

... before sealing your letters, examine them closely, consulting a dictionary in all & every case where you have the least doubt. One single mispelt [sic] word in the letter of a Lady or a Gentleman excites remarks and frequently leads to enquiries of who & what the party have been - their connexions, education & former situation of life. Need I say more.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Meredith to his wife, 25 February 1827, NS123/1/1 #28, TA.

<sup>60</sup> Meredith to his wife, 21 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #21, TA. Meredith often referred to his wife as Maria—reflecting their correspondence in metaphor via 'the Captain and Maria' (see below).

<sup>61</sup> Meredith to his wife, 14 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #50, TA.



Meredith thought that his wife's 'common' upbringing could be identified by her letters and that that would reflect on him. An anxiety about the perception of the background of a colonist or their spouse was not uncommon in the colonies, where the ability to re-invent oneself away from the homeland was recognised and those of genuine middle to upper class were watchful for pretenders.<sup>62</sup> Meredith's niece and daughter-in-law Louisa Anne was still bemoaning the fact in the 1850s that 'Nowhere are all particulars and incidents of persons' past lives more minutely and rigidly canvassed, than in the "higher circles" of this little community ...'.<sup>63</sup> In American letters from the Victorian era, Lystra found that love letters disclosed 'their "true" self' and indicated good breeding—or not, so Meredith's caution was well founded.<sup>64</sup>

Meredith's insistence that his wife should improve her writing and improve herself in general seems to stem from his desire that she should not embarrass him in public whenever he chose to 'exhibit' her. Yet there is no evidence in his letters to 1837 that Mary went to Hobart Town after first arriving in 1821 (although of course if they were together, there would be no need for correspondence). Meredith excused this in the early period by telling her that there was no accommodation suitable for someone 'befitting her rank and station in society'.<sup>65</sup> Mary visited Hobart Town in early 1838, at least, evidenced by her step-daughter Louisa having written to her expressing relief at Mary's safe return to *Cambria*.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> K McKenzie, *Scandal in the colonies* (Melbourne, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> LA Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania during a residence of nine years Vol. 1 and 2*, first published 1852 in London, facsimile edition. (Swansea, 2003), p. 36.

<sup>64</sup> K Lystra, *Searching the heart: Women, men and romantic love in nineteenth-century America* (New York, 1989), p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Meredith to his wife, 22 February 1827, NS123/1/1 #27, TA.

<sup>66</sup> Louisa Meredith to Mary Meredith, 12 April 1838, *Louisa Bell (1808-1890). Letters to Mary Ann Meredith. 6 letters. 3 Apr 1834-7 May 1841*, NS123/1/28, TA.

## Meredith's love for his wife

There can be no doubt that Meredith loved his second wife intensely. Even when displeased at her writing or having perceived some disrespect to him, he maintained his love and devotion to her but with an unmistakable sexual edge:

Your fond endearments & personal proofs of the most devoted love draws me to your dear soft embrace - keeps me ever delighted upon your faithful bosom, fixes me to your sweet healing lips and I still fold my devoted Maria to my heart with a rapture no other woman on earth could yield me.<sup>67</sup>

Teo noted the rise of the use of romantic love poetry in nineteenth century love letters, and Meredith quoted some of the great poets, including Milton: 'grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye & in every gesture, dignity & love'.<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere, he quoted Milton again, Alexander Pope, William Pringle, Matthew Prior, Sir Walter Scott and William Cowper.<sup>69</sup> He sent her a poem of his own entitled 'True Love' and also a 'Matrimonial duet', that had a gardening theme.<sup>70</sup>

Teo also described the use of romantic allusions: 'Love in these letters is also always a quotation or an allusion; variations of the words 'I love you, I miss you, I need you, I can't wait to be with you ...'.<sup>71</sup> The use of extended metaphor in intimate letters as used by Meredith is less commonly noted in the literature. In her extensive survey of Victorian romantic letters from the United States, Lystra noted only one case similar to Meredith's—

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<sup>67</sup> Meredith to his wife, 25 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #23, TA.

<sup>68</sup> Teo, 'Love writes', p. 344; Meredith to his wife, 21 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #21, TA; 'Grace was in all her steps ...' is from J Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 8 (Holborn, 1821), p. 241.

<sup>69</sup> Milton: Meredith to his wife, 11 June 1832, NS123/1/1 #298, TA; Pope: Meredith to his wife, 9 December 1827, NS123/1/1 #31, and 30 October 1829, NS123/1/1 #47, TA; Pringle: Meredith to his wife, 31 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #294, TA; Prior: Meredith to his wife, 30 March 1833, G4/19, UTAS S&R; Scott: Meredith to his wife, 7 December 1829, NS123/1/1 #53, TA; Cowper: Meredith to his wife, 14 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #50, TA.

<sup>70</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #287 and 30 October 1831, NS123/1/1 #61, TA.

<sup>71</sup> Teo, 'Love writes', p. 344.

where the husband created several characters to articulate his wife's personality, including 'Little Girl'.<sup>72</sup> Meredith employed three distinct styles of extended metaphor in his letters to his wife to describe his love for and physical desires for her, as well as incidentally calling her 'my dear girl'. The first metaphor style was the 'fictional' history of 'The Captain and Maria' (that later evolved into 'The Baron and Myra'), which was used by them both to recount their early relationship. The second was the metaphor of the garden, used for discussion of their on-going intimate relationship with its bower, flowers, buds, seeds and planting. The third was a dream metaphor, which again is used to discuss intimate subjects, sometimes using the garden metaphor within a dream context.

A subtle expression of Meredith's love for his wife was on his personal seal (Figure 4-4), which from about 1830 featured an ivy leaf (representing fidelity and strong attachment) and the French motto 'Je ne change qu'en mourant'.<sup>73</sup> This can be translated, variously, as 'I will remain the same unto death' or 'I only change when I die'. While this could be taken as a statement of defiance—independence, even—it is more likely to be a statement of Meredith's life-long devotion to his wife. Meredith may have seen the poem by the American churchman George Washington Doane, written c1825:<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lystra, *Searching the heart*, p. 94.

<sup>73</sup> Meredith's seal remains on a number of envelopes preserved in the file NS123/1/1, TA. Prior to 1830, his seal has the profile of the head of a man, somewhat resembling a classical Roman.

<sup>74</sup> 'Songs by the way: The poetical writings of the Right Rev. George Washington Doane', [www.archive.org/stream/songspoetic00doan/songspoetic00doan\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/songspoetic00doan/songspoetic00doan_djvu.txt), accessed 5 October 2020.

### LINES ON A SEAL

The device, a leaf.

The motto, "Je ne change, qu'en mourant".

In bower and garden, rich and rare,

There's many a cherished flower,

Whose beauty fades, whose fragrance flits,

Within the flitting hour.

Not so the simple forest leaf,

Unprized, unnoted lying,

The same, thro' all its little life,

It changes, but in dying.



**Figure 4-4.** George Meredith's seal on a letter from 1837.

Source: NS123/1/1, TA.

### The Captain and Maria

Writing on the epistolary form, MacArthur wrote that people 'construct personae for themselves as they write'.<sup>75</sup> Meredith and Mary over a number of years appear to have

<sup>75</sup> E MacArthur, *Extravagant narratives: closure and dynamics in the epistolary form* (Princeton, 1990), p. 19.

reconstructed their personae via two so-called fictional characters to recount their earliest relationships. 'The Captain and Maria' first appeared in their surviving letters in 1826, but it appears that it had been on foot for some time before that.<sup>76</sup> Within a year the 'Captain' had evolved into the 'Baron' and shortly after, Maria became 'Myra De Vanes'. The essence of this 'fictional historical tale' was that the married Baron, in some continental country, schemed and took advantage of the sweet and innocent Myra who, despite guarding her virtue and making a strong resistance to the Baron's charms, fell pregnant to him when just 'sweet seventeen' and became his wife 'in all but name'.<sup>77</sup> Meredith explicitly told Mary to frame the story upon their own experiences:

There is so much in this history like unto our own that if you would but take pains in the composition and give all the tender scene with truth & a woman's feeling ✕ [kiss], I should keep it by me to refer to when absent from you, to remind me of all we have experienced in former days.<sup>78</sup>

His encouragement of Mary to write her side of the tale appeared to be a mechanism to get her to write titillating letters to him, recounting their earlier, more youthful love lives. It was also another form of control over his wife's thoughts and writings. That the story is a direct metaphor for their own relationship can be little doubted; a letter in 1832 in particular described the 'tale' much in terms of the known details of their own relationship's development, including when they began their affair when she was seventeen.<sup>79</sup> Further, in the two final surviving letters regarding the 'tale', George asked

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<sup>76</sup> Meredith to his wife, 21 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #21, TA. The 'Captain' was likely a reference to Meredith's former nautical career.

<sup>77</sup> The Baron and Myra are mentioned in many letters, but Meredith to his wife, 16 July 1830, NS123/1/1 #60, 23 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #292, 31 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #294 and 19 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #313, are the most extensive.

<sup>78</sup> Meredith to his wife, undated but likely 10 December 1827, NS123/1/1 #33, TA.

<sup>79</sup> Meredith to his wife, 23 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #292, TA. In a following letter, he recounted that his only criticism of 'Myra' is her failure to 'expand her mind' and practice her writing, exactly the faults he found in Mary, Meredith to his wife, 31 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #294, TA.

Mary if she would like to be called 'Myra' and then addressed a later letter 'Dear Myra'.<sup>80</sup>

Outside of the story, he frequently addressed Mary as 'Maria' in letters.<sup>81</sup>

That Meredith and his wife used their letters to produce the skeleton of a romantic historical novel is a reverse of the genre of epistolary novels that reached their peak in the seventeenth century—such as Richardson's *Pamela*.<sup>82</sup> Del Lungo Camiciotti discussed the published letters of Dorothy Osborne and others and concluded that 'on the one hand [the letters] show features similar to those of epistolary novels in that they express a sentimental autobiography ... on the other, novels use letters to confer reality and truth to their stories'.<sup>83</sup>

### Use of garden and dream metaphors

Thomas Bridgeman's '*Flowering plants*' was an undoubted serious work on the cultivation of the English garden, with its catalogues of double dahlias and instructions on how to manage greenhouses.<sup>84</sup> In the final section, titled 'The Matrimonial garden', he innocently used the care of the garden as a metaphor for happiness in marriage:

Happiness never existed but in the heads of visionaries. If you are desirous that this garden shall yield you all the bliss of which it is capable, you must take with you that excellent flower called Good Humour, which, of all the flowers of nature, is the most delicious and delicate.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Meredith to his wife, 19 October 1836, NS123/1/1 #325, and (no day) December 1837, NS123/1/1 # 330, TA.

<sup>81</sup> For instance, Meredith to his wife, 25 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #23, and 22 February 1827, NS123/1/1 #27, TA.

<sup>82</sup> S Richardson, *Pamela*, Volume 1 (London, 1914).

<sup>83</sup> G Del Lungo Camiciotti, 'Letters and letter writing in early modern culture: An introduction', *Journal of early modern studies*, No. 3 (2014), p. 27.

<sup>84</sup> T Bridgeman, *Flowering plants, of different classes ...* (London, 1847), pp. 77, 97.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.

On the other hand, the garden, and the rose in particular, has been the symbol of choice for romantic and sexual encounters, fictional and non-fictional, in the literature since perhaps *Roman de la Rose*, composed in the thirteenth century.<sup>86</sup> As Gay put it: 'many of the [nineteenth century] writers on sexuality ransacked the plant and animal worlds as a rich source of artful introductions' for their material.<sup>87</sup> Meredith referred numerous times to the 'fruits' he enjoyed in Mary's company and made the rose (sometimes 'double crimson roses') central in many of his descriptions of encounters between them: '[The Baron—ie Meredith] had plucked the Virgin roses from nature's fairest stem, had pressed the blushing maid, had revel<sup>d</sup> in her budding charm & tasted all the sweets of first possession'.<sup>88</sup>

Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (first published in 1814) is well recognised for its use of garden sexual allusion with its locked (and unlocked) gates, spikes, torn gowns and missing keys.<sup>89</sup> Gould was in no doubt that Austen intended the sexual allusions for what they were; Chandler took the subject further.<sup>90</sup> Use of a garden metaphor to describe their intimate life and George's desires punctuated the majority of the surviving letters from him to his wife and it was often used in combination with a dream metaphor. There is no doubt

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<sup>86</sup> See: M Lauria, *A reader's guide to the Roman de la Rose* (Hamden, 1982), in particular pp. 36-47 and 103-118.

<sup>87</sup> P Gay, *The bourgeois experience: Victoria to Freud, Vol. II, The tender passion* (Oxford, 1986), p. 273.

<sup>88</sup> Fruits: Meredith to his wife, 14 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #50, 24 April 1830, NS123/1/1 #54 and 14 April 1832, NS123/1/1 #283 to name but a few; roses: Meredith to his wife, 10 December 1827, NS123/1/1 #33, 3 June 1832, NS123/1/1 #295 (2), 13 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #312 and 2 April 1836, NS123/1/1 #324, TA.

<sup>89</sup> J Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London, 1906) pp. 88, 94, 98, 101, 104; J Heydt-Stevenson, 'Slipping into the ha-ha: Bawdy humour and body politics in Jane Austen's novels', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2000), pp. 323-332.

<sup>90</sup> GL Gould, 'The gate scene at Sotherton in *Mansfield Park*', *Literature and Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1970), pp. 75-78; A Chandler, 'A fine pair of eyes: Jane Austen's treatment of sex', *Studies of the novel*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 93-94.

that Meredith used the garden metaphor to conceal his true meaning from others should the letters be accidentally seen by them:

... you will soon find that you can plan out & transcribe many & many a delightful intended ramble & garden excursion which, though of simple meaning if by chance read by others, would convey to my feelings all that yours can prompt ...<sup>91</sup>

and also, to represent past and anticipated passion with his wife:

It may appear wicked nonsense to talk as I often do of flowers, shrubs & fruit ... but you who know me so well cannot & will not misconstrue what I write. I refer to them as emblems of our love towards each other ...<sup>92</sup>

‘The Bower’ is almost always the setting of their intimacy and no doubt refers to their bed or bed chamber:

I fancy you by my side whilst I explore & range over the whole garden, dwelling on those spots where my notice proves most grateful. I am then gently lead towards the Bower, my favourite flowers are placed in my bosom, a pendent bud raised to my lips and as you press me still closer within your encircling embrace, your eyes awhile beaming with conjugal love.<sup>93</sup>

The ‘bower’ as a setting for love and lovemaking has been used in literature and art since at least medieval times. As noted above, Meredith was familiar with Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, so it is likely he was aware of Milton’s placing Adam and Eve in a bower for their intimacy.<sup>94</sup>

Mary’s breasts were described by Meredith in terms of flowers:

A sudden movement of yours disclosed to my view one of my favourite flowers protruding from your dress which had until now concealed it from view. ... and anxious to give you a little time to recover yourself, I bent forward to enjoy its

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<sup>91</sup> Meredith to his wife, 24 April 1829, NS123/1/1 #41, TA.

<sup>92</sup> Meredith to his wife, 3 June 1832, NS123/1/1 #295, TA.

<sup>93</sup> Meredith to his wife, 5 December 1831, NS123/1/1 #68, TA.

<sup>94</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, p. 121.



fragrance & was amusing myself in vain endeavours to draw forth a sweet little virgin bud which alternatively invited and escaped the presence of my lips.<sup>95</sup>

Sexual intercourse was described in terms of 'planting'. In a letter to Mary in early May 1832, Meredith graphically described how their first sexual encounter came about, when she was a seventeen-year-old house maid at *Rhyndaston*. He opened the retelling by mentioning how she had mentioned it first:

That subject which you have so agreeably treated in your last letter Gardening & Planting etc etc. You say that it is now nineteen years since you were first initiated into the mysteries and experimental knowledge of the science of gardening in all its various branches, including the most important of all "Planting".<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Meredith to his wife, 4 October 1829, NS123/1/1 #43, TA.

<sup>96</sup> Meredith to his wife, 5 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #288, TA. From other evidence, we know that their affair began in 1813.



**Figure 4-5.** Mary Meredith, by Thomas Bock, nd but possibly 1838.

Source: East Coast Heritage Museum, Swansea.

Commentary: Emancipist Thomas Bock was a 'society portraitist' in Hobart Town in the 1830s and 1840s. This work, in crayon and opaque white on paper, may have been done in 1838, the only year known for sure that Mary visited Hobart after their arrival in 1821. It is paired with a drawing of her husband George (Frontispiece). Queen Museum and Art Gallery, *Thomas Bock: Convict engraver, society portraitist* (Launceston, 1991), pp. 3 and 43; Louisa Meredith to Mary Meredith, 12 April 1838, NS123/1/28, TA.

Meredith described how Mary at first resisted his advances and that she said she would rather return to her hometown of Boulston than give in to him. He planned for a time when they would be alone and his writing implied that she eventually consented to a relationship, as long as he was careful not to make her pregnant:

... you had a kind of pleasure garden of your own in which certain very beautiful flowers, delicate shrubs & a little private seed bed occupied the best part, and from the latter of which were to be excluded all Farming Plant seeds whatever, as it was agreed by me to be kept sacred for your own little experiments & amusement to sew just what you pleased only.<sup>97</sup>

He then described that he employed a 'stratagem' of his over time to have sex with her and when it occurred, it sounded very much like rape, or at the very least, coerced:

... whilst [in your letter] you acknowledged your own perverse opposition to all [my] first endeavours in [sic] your behalf, express [sic] your gratitude for being forced as it were, to become what you are against your will. For who, let me ask, could have shown more reluctance to learn than you did and it was only when you could no longer help yourself that you became obedient & took a proper interest in the proceedings.

Indeed, Meredith added later in the same letter 'Added to all which was the reflection that [Mary] must now become a planter without having the merit of voluntary consent – my poor dear girl, I can fancy I see your woeful countenance now before me, lovely midst its tears & interesting more than ever.'

He described Mary's surprise and upset at the pregnancy, and the resulting abortion as follows:

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<sup>97</sup> Meredith to his wife, 5 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #288, TA.

The seeds were mix<sup>d</sup> without your knowledge & unconsciously planted together as afterwards proved ... the soil was too rich & sheltered to keep them long in a dormant state. I was the first to discover the symptoms of their growth and unless an early flood came to wash them out of the ground again, .... there were one of the choicest of the farm plants rooting & spreading itself in all directions to the utter confusion of the non planting Lady and a grand fuss was made about it. ... my little plant was growing away in fine luxuriousness all the time. What was to be done. To attempt its removal until the proper season for transplanting was out of the question and even then, what havoc would be made with the little seed bed, the delicate shrub and beauteous flowers whose roots being injured thereby would droop & fade. ... After spring planting was over you were to be included in the trip to Scotland & whilst absent the “bone of contention”, “forbidden fruit” or whatever else it should be term<sup>d</sup>, the annoying plant was to be removed, the flower garden etc etc to be put to rights ...<sup>98</sup>

Servant girls falling prey to masters of households was far from an unusual occurrence. Jill Barber made a study of sexual harassment of female servants in west Wales during the period in question and found that the rate of illegitimate births in Cardiganshire, the county immediately north of Meredith's Pembrokeshire, was the highest in England and Wales.<sup>99</sup> The relationship between Mary and Meredith fitted almost exactly the situation described by Barber for many victims of sexual harassment in Wales at the time—a rural setting with little alternative employment, a young girl, distant from home and alone in the house.

Although the comments above were written by Meredith many years later, together with others in a similar vein, his making light of Mary's illegitimate and first pregnancy, terminated with an abortion, reads as yet another selfish recounting of his sexual domination of her, and probable rape, when she was only seventeen.

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<sup>98</sup> Meredith to his wife, 5 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #288, TA. Meredith did take a trip to Scotland in 1813, described in Chapter 1, where he first met the Amos brothers.

<sup>99</sup> J Barber, '“Stolen Goods”: The sexual harassment of female servants in west Wales during the nineteenth century', *Rural History*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1993), p. 123 and note 3, p. 133. Not just in rural areas. A study of women in service in London in the nineteenth century found that in every decade, domestic servants made by far the greatest contribution to the numbers presenting at the London Foundling Hospital with their babies—up to seven times the next category, the clothing trade: JR Gillis, 'Servants, sexual relations, and the risks of illegitimacy in London, 1801-1900', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1979), pp. 142-173.

Meredith made extensive use of the extended metaphor of the dream to tell Mary his feelings towards her, and anticipation of future encounters. He used it to construct some of his most intimate descriptions and used the garden metaphor within his dreams:

You seem<sup>d</sup> all animation to give to this long anticipated meeting unmixed pleasure, no drawback was permitted to interfere with its full enjoyment. I was in the act of completing the final delivery of my offering whilst you were pressing me to share with you the last and therefore the sweetest of yours. My feelings became excited & in attempting some little expected act of gallantry the effect awoke me and though it was at once evident I was no longer in the Bower ...<sup>100</sup>

## Beyond metaphors

Beyond the use of metaphors to describe his love and passion for Mary, he used some straightforward prose of intimacy:

... when you took cold, it drove the milk from your right Bt and I had scarcely embraced you and imprinted a ※ [kiss] when the milk began to flow from that Bt, absolutely in a stream, so much so, that you scarcely knew what to do and I made myself a baby on the occasion ...<sup>101</sup>

With sensuality on occasion:

Thus, through the day you move the Mother & Mistress of the family but retired within the sacred precinct of our chamber of love the studied demeanour of the dignified matron gives way to all the feelings & fondness of the wife. Of a wife enjoying all the fulness of a doating [sic] husbands love and whose every thought & wish is to prove to him how dearly she prizes it - skreen<sup>d</sup> [sic] from view whilst over your person falls the limped water & then enfolded in a snow white robe, forth you come like another Venus from the waves & then you hasten to our humble couch, there to receive & bless the partner of your bed & heart. No maiden coyness now restrains your love but knowing every wish & thought of mine you prove yourself all that a lovely wife should be, my queen of love ...<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Meredith to his wife, 11 June 1832, NS123/1/1 #298, TA. 'Act of gallantry' may have also have been a metaphor for sexual intercourse.

<sup>101</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 March 1823, Box ED1, 339gg, GSBHS.

<sup>102</sup> Meredith to his wife, 21 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #21, TA.

... accompany you in your animating endeavours to gratify my wishes and to attend all your little movements from the very margin of the surroundings [sic] shrubs to the inmost recesses of the Bower till I receive the well known signal of success and then to assist in bringing forward the hidden treasure, each pressing the other to enjoy the fullest share & bringing out the feast of love then ere we part, to exchange the soft kiss of mutual acknowledgement...<sup>103</sup>

This and other expressions of their sexual contact, using the garden and dream metaphors, contrasts with what Teo described as the usual limitation of nineteenth-century romantic letters to expressions of touching of hair, hugs and kisses.<sup>104</sup>

Meredith's letters abound in his observations on the nature of love, between himself and Mary in particular, often contrasting it with that between others:

It is this, this happy intercourse, this communion of soul & body together unalloy<sup>d</sup> by gross unruly passion which proves the sincerity and purity of our love for each other and I do really think that we are as close a resemblance in our conjugal life to Adam & Eve as can be found on the earth. We seem to be love of each other's love & flesh of each other's flesh and when lock<sup>d</sup> in each others embrace would, if we could, resolve ourselves into one substance & one nature. Let those who have only animal passions to gratify most of their evanescent pleasures & those who live but for themselves, enjoy their selfish indulgences.<sup>105</sup>

Lystra wrote of love letters in America being taken as a physical extension of their lover:

'When alone, they kissed their love letters, carried them to bed...'.<sup>106</sup> Teo noted that Australians did the same thing.<sup>107</sup> Meredith practiced at least the taking of his wife's letters to his bed: 'your long affectionate & interesting letter which reached me late on Sunday

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<sup>103</sup> Meredith to his wife, 20 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #290, TA.

<sup>104</sup> Teo, 'Love writes', p. 356.

<sup>105</sup> Meredith to his wife, 25 February 1827, NS123/1/1 #28, TA.

<sup>106</sup> Lystra, *Searching the heart*, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> Teo, 'Love writes', p. 346.

night and which I immediately took to bed with me and there read over & thought over with unalloyed pleasure'.<sup>108</sup>

Given the passion in their life, it is perhaps not surprising that Meredith, being seventeen years older than his second wife, became worried about his advancing age, and the effect it may have on their relationship. After he turned fifty, in matters of love and sex he encouraged her to take the lead, as exemplified by this first expression, in 1829 when he was fifty-one:

This much I will venture to promise on my own part that inclination shall not be wanting and when ability fails why as the old saying goes you must ere take "the will for the deed" & act yourself according to circumstances. You may recollect that I have long since & frequently prepared you to expect a falling off in my gardening powers although I might still delight in these little excursions as much as ever in your company & I shall have to rely more & more up on your forbearance & good nature year after year and if you find me more apt to recline in the Bower amusing myself with the overspreading flowers or surrounding shrubs instead of busying myself with cultivation and planting so much as formerly, I know you will always feel happy to receive such assistance as I can give & will take care to make the time pass agreeably ...<sup>109</sup>

He called Mary the 'Mistress of the Ceremonies', an expression he first used in 1825 and continued through to 1836.<sup>110</sup> Mary was to be under no illusion that she was responsible for satisfying George sexually when he returned home. So not only was she under pressure when he returned, she had to contend with worrying about the event for weeks beforehand.

Mary herself apparently introduced a fear that she was 'losing her figure' to age and childbirth. In reply to an unpreserved letter from her, George wrote: 'you speak of the poor

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<sup>108</sup> Meredith to his wife, 25 April 1826, NS123/1/1 #23 TA.

<sup>109</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 November 1829, NS123/1/1 #48, TA.

<sup>110</sup> Meredith to his wife, 19 October 1836, NS123/1/1 #325, TA.

drooping flowers as though they were no longer worthy of my admiration and that if you did not know before, you should almost fear they had ceased to interest me'.<sup>111</sup> Meredith is often at pains to reassure Mary that her figure still held great attraction for him:

I should have rather found myself amongst my old favourites ... notwithstanding they are represented to be so faded & drooping in your various letters, but I engage to make them raise their heads to welcome their old admirer & to yield their sweets.<sup>112</sup>

Meredith professed to respect his wife and numerous times would encourage her to state her opinion on matters, at least in 1832, when they had commenced the construction of their grand house *Cambria* and he was contemplating spending more time at home, and with her, away from it:

... I hope we have still years of comfort & happiness to come in living together as man & wife ought to do and as we ever desired to do. My mind is often & anxiously devoted to study & plan how best to accomplish this object. Give your best thoughts to the same subject and when we meet we will compare our ideas & try to arrange for the permanent accomplishment of our mutual wishes.<sup>113</sup>

We have no indication of whether George paid any attention to what, if anything, Mary dared to venture as 'her thoughts'.

## Mary's complaints

It is obvious from Meredith's letters that Mary complained to him on a number of subjects, mostly, it seems, about being left without him at Great Swan Port:

I will candidly say that notwithstanding you regret, but will not complain, of being left alone and solitary, I admit you have both just reason & right to complain of your

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<sup>111</sup> Meredith to his wife, 9 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #289, TA. At this stage Mary was thirty-seven and had borne six children.

<sup>112</sup> Meredith to his wife, 3 June 1832, NS123/1/1 #295, TA.

<sup>113</sup> Meredith to his wife, 20 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #290, TA.



present state of solitude & desertion and which believe me has occasioned me many anxious thoughts, for though you do not urge your regrets in words, I know you cannot but feel your situation painfully.<sup>114</sup>

Russell reflected on an analogous situation in South Australia where a colonial wife rebuked a journal editor for implying that women on the land were complaining, 'creaking hinges', retorting that it was not the hardships and isolation on the land that were the problem, but the nature of the rewards afterwards and the want of society; there was 'no respite from cattle and sheep, surveys and politics'.<sup>115</sup> Another colonial woman left to fend for herself on a large farm was Elizabeth Macarthur, after New South Wales woolgrower John Macarthur left for England with two of their children, initially for at least a year, but which turned into many years.<sup>116</sup> Compared to Mary Meredith, Elizabeth Macarthur was older, more experienced, had greater resources at her command and was far from being isolated at Parramatta, so her husband's absence was possibly not so dire. On the other hand, Mary's situation was also not the same as that experienced by Polly Hardy, whose husband was also frequently absent for long periods, seeking to advance the family interests like George Meredith. Wilson Hardy's letters revealed him quite unmoved by letters from Polly and their children about his absence.<sup>117</sup>

Meredith acknowledged Mary's isolation in his letters. Nevertheless, he often pointed out that he missed her too, notwithstanding that he was in Hobart Town at liberty whereas she

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<sup>114</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #287, TA.

<sup>115</sup> P Russell, 'Gender and colonial society', in A Bashford and S Macintyre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Australia Volume 1 Indigenous and Colonial Australia*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Melbourne, 2013), p. 481.

<sup>116</sup> MS Tucker, *Elizabeth McArthur: A life at the edge of the world* (Melbourne, 2018), pp. 134-151.

<sup>117</sup> P Russell, *Savage or civilised? Manners in colonial Australia* (Sydney, 2010), pp. 240-253.

was confined around the house and a young and growing family.<sup>118</sup> She sometimes regretted her complaints, but George was forgiving:

As to your letters being always filled with complaints at your present deserted state and my repeated and lengthened separations from you, such complaints can need no apologies, for truly you have had but too much cause to appeal & remonstrate against their frequency & duration, and such bewailing, so far from needing pardon, is the truest testimony of what our feelings are towards each other.<sup>119</sup>

In conclusion on Mary Meredith, we may deduce that George saw his marriage as being something of a convenience at first; Mary would be someone to rear and care for his children from his first marriage while he attended to business. Marrying his house-maid mistress would have been socially unacceptable had they remained in England. He took a last-minute, calculated decision to marry her on the eve of their departure for the colonies, making a virtue of necessity of their being confined for months in several small cabins on the *Emerald* and hoping to leave the history of their relationship behind when they reached Van Diemen's Land. After arrival, Mary was installed on the farm and kept pregnant for most of the next decade, providing a convenient excuse for George not having to present her to 'society' in Hobart Town. He was conscious of her lack of 'gentility' and endeavoured to have her 'raise herself up' to an acceptable standard and it was only in the mid-1830s that he began to consider that she may be suitable to bring to Hobart Town. If we accept one of Foyster's arguments, then Meredith's keeping Mary isolated was a form of sexual control and maintenance of his 'honourable manhood'.<sup>120</sup> Against that premise is the fact that Meredith appears to have had complete trust in young Mary's faithfulness, isolated

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<sup>118</sup> Meredith to his wife, 8 March 1832 NS123/1/1 #277, TA.

<sup>119</sup> Meredith to his wife, 20 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #290, TA.

<sup>120</sup> Foyster, *Manhood*, p. 93.

on the farm with many men around her, including transient sailors. In surviving letters, he only once cautioned her:

... whenever you have occasion to walk out to the people I urge, nay command your remembrance of my oft repeated desire that one of the girls accompany you on such excursions. I consider it proper during my absence. Attend to this.<sup>121</sup>

It appears it was only in 1838 that she returned to Hobart Town, possibly for the first time after arriving there in 1821. There is no doubt he loved her passionately and they had an intense physical relationship, but nevertheless his public image and standing in the society of Hobart necessitated that she be kept under wraps. Mary's attitude is more difficult to discern; her letters are few and it is unlikely she would have expressed herself very forthrightly in them. Her complaints we know of mainly through Meredith's acknowledgment of them in his own letters.

### Meredith's relationships with his children

When they were young, Meredith's sons and daughters from his first marriage obtained some classroom schooling in England.<sup>122</sup> When they were aged variously between five and ten, their father wrote to them from London thanking the eldest for a letter they had written.<sup>123</sup> As this was the first he had received, he wrote that he would overlook the faults in this letter, but he would not in future letters. This was probably a reproof to their mother, but nevertheless showed that he intended to be a parent who would brook no nonsense from his children. The children's formal schooling ended on their immigration to

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<sup>121</sup> Meredith to his wife, 20 June 1831, NS123/1/1 #63, TA.

<sup>122</sup> Sarah Meredith junior to her mother, 3 August 1818, *Sarah Westall Poynter (1807-1869, nee Meredith). Letters to step-mother Mary Ann Meredith and letter to mother Sarah Meredith*, NS123/1/19, TA; Mrs Flaherty to George Meredith junior, 10 April 1818, *George Meredith Jnr (1806-1836). Letter from A.M. Flaherty, Merediths governess in England*, NS123/1/17, TA; C Meredith, *The Honorable Chas. Meredith, MHA, Orford 1879* [notes on his early life], p. 2b, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

<sup>123</sup> Meredith to his children, 6 February 1816, NS123/1/2 #112, TA.

the colonies. Their stepmother Mary no doubt attempted to give them some schooling in their rough huts at Great Swan Port, but for the most part, the boys at least were employed running the farm and later the whaling business, especially during their father's long absences.

The eldest child, George, received a grant of five hundred acres bordering his father's land.<sup>124</sup> Notwithstanding that, his first duty would have been to assist his father in clearing and improving the main family grant. Judging by an account given respecting his five-years-younger brother Charles' experiences at the hands of his father (see below), George would likely have been driven hard by his father, taking on much responsibility during George senior's frequent absences.<sup>125</sup> The children of Meredith's first marriage did not enjoy a good relationship with their stepmother, formerly their housemaid and nurse, and being the eldest, George junior probably felt most estranged.<sup>126</sup> His father first began expressing concern about him in 1826 (the son then aged twenty), writing to his wife: 'I am anxiously looking out for a family here in which to place George if only for a few months to acquire those habits of propriety & gentlemanlike demeanor [sic] which he seems determined not to learn or practice'.<sup>127</sup> George junior was on his own land in his own hut from at least 1829 and the following year, then twenty-four, had apparently developed his own independent streak causing his father to comment: '[if] George had been like Charles & proved the support & assistant to me and considered the general interests of the family as I had once hoped, my separations from you and absences from my home affairs would neither have

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<sup>124</sup> Land grant to George Meredith junior, Lands and Survey Department, *Copies of land grants issued*, LSD354/1/8, TA, p. 143.

<sup>125</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 March 1823, Box ED1, 339gg, GSBHS; Meredith to his wife, 29 June 1825, NS123/1/1 #18, TA.

<sup>126</sup> Mary Meredith to Meredith, 26 December 1822, NS123/1/13, TA.

<sup>127</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 April 1826, G4/1, UTAS S&R.

been so frequent or lengthened'.<sup>128</sup> The lack of respect the father perceived in the son may have been taken by George senior as reflecting on his ability to control his household; to be an 'honourable householder' as Foyster put it.<sup>129</sup>

By March 1832 things had come to a head, with the son planning to leave the colony. George senior wrote: 'George as it now but too plainly appears, having made up his mind to wrong the family by converting all his property to his own use & then leave the colony' and 'I have no feelings towards George but those of a father, an insulted, wrong<sup>d</sup> & grieved father it is true...'.<sup>130</sup> These ill feelings do not appear to have been reciprocated by his son. In July 1832, on the eve of his departure, George junior wrote to his cousin, Louisa-Anne Twamley, with praise for his father's achievements in the colony and no sign of adverse relations can be found in the letter.<sup>131</sup> George junior left the colony only to meet his death violently in about 1836, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. The fact that George senior's greatest rage was over the loss of his son's land from the family portfolio does not reflect well on the father—any love for his son appears to have been dissolved by the prospect of loss of land.

George Meredith's daughters from his first marriage, aged in their early teens when they arrived in the colony, also did not get on well with their stepmother. Mary referred to unpleasantness between her and the girls and her 'scolding' of them, in a letter to her husband in 1822.<sup>132</sup> In his letters home, Meredith was generally indulgent of his daughters and their behaviour, and by 1825 he was treating them to excursions to Hobart Town by

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<sup>128</sup> Meredith to his wife, 17 July 1830, NS123/1/1 #60, TA.

<sup>129</sup> Foyster, *Manhood*, p. 91.

<sup>130</sup> Meredith to his wife, 11 March 1832, NS123/1/1 #279, TA.

<sup>131</sup> Typed transcript George Meredith junior to Louisa Anne Twamley, 13 July 1832, Hodgson collection.

<sup>132</sup> Mary Meredith to Meredith, 26 December 1822, NS123/1/13, TA.

water.<sup>133</sup> There was sympathy for Mary over the teenagers' behaviour to her: 'The girls are thoughtless at times & from a foolish pride of wishing to be considered entirely ladies or rather from an improper & mistaken notion of just what are the real attributes & duties of a Lady in Vandiemensland [sic]'.<sup>134</sup> From about 1828, his daughters Sarah, Louisa and Sabina were spending periods in Hobart Town and, when their father was not with them, stayed with Thomas Gregson and his wife, at *Restdown*, near today's Risdon.<sup>135</sup> In April 1829, Sarah and Sabina, aged twenty-one and nineteen respectively, attended the ball at Government House, escorted by their father, where they danced until 3am.<sup>136</sup> Social visits to Government House were important to being received into 'respectable' society, not only for the girls but likely also for Meredith, given his fractious relationship with Lieutenant-Governor Arthur.<sup>137</sup> In 1832 Meredith wrote to his wife: 'I fear the girls will never again reconcile themselves to return to Swan Port' and about this time they were living with the Emmett family in Hobart Town.<sup>138</sup> Allowing his near-adult daughters to stay in Hobart Town, rather than to assist Mary at home when she was still managing the farm and raising her own young children, was another selfish act of Meredith towards his wife.

Charles was Meredith's youngest child from his first marriage. Louisa Anne Meredith in *Tasmanian Friends and Foes* wrote of her husband Charles' upbringing via the allegorical story of the Mertons. According to the story, 'Mr Merton' (Charles) told how his father had

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<sup>133</sup> Meredith to his wife 28 March 1823, G4/5, UTAS S&R and 24 April 1825, NS123/1/1 #14, TA.

<sup>134</sup> Meredith to his wife, 9 December 1827, NS123/1/1 #31, no date 1828, NS123/1/1 #35, TA.

<sup>135</sup> For instance, Meredith to his wife 24 April 1829, NS123/1/1 #41, 9 April 1829, NS123/1/1 #39, 14 November 1829 NS123/1/1 #50 and Meredith to his wife, 14 December 1829, G4/109, TAS S&R.

<sup>136</sup> Meredith to his wife, 24 March 1836, NS123/1/1 #36 and 24 April 1829, NS123/1/1 #41, TA. For more discussion of Sarah, Sabina and Louisa's social life in Hobart in the 1830s, see: WH Hudspeth, 'Hobart Town society in the thirties', unpublished manuscript, nd, RS3/4 (5), UTAS S&R.

<sup>137</sup> McKenzie, *Scandal*, p. 52.

<sup>138</sup> Meredith to his wife, 26 April 1832, NS123/1/1 #285, TA. This was the same Emmett who was involved in the colonial press with Meredith—see Chapter 7.

sent him kangaroo hunting when he was only eleven, notwithstanding that there were convict workers who could have undertaken the task.<sup>139</sup> He went on to tell of life alone in the bush for up to a week at a time, tending flocks of sheep, mostly living off the land and sometimes not eating for days. His brother George would have shared this life and may have had a harder time of it, being older. In his letters to his wife, George Meredith commanded that Charles should be deputed to do various tasks around and off the farm—even from age twelve.<sup>140</sup> From at least age sixteen, Charles was assisting his father's whaling operations.<sup>141</sup> The boys' banishment from the family home, such as it was, might be interpreted as George wishing to develop his sons masculinity and independence and perhaps was a projection of his own.

Charles' wife, Louisa-Anne, did not share her husband's admiration for George senior, possibly at any stage. As a developing artist and poet in England in 1833, she replied with barely concealed surprise and indignation to a letter from George (her uncle), where he had apparently invited her to emigrate, to become a governess to his children:

... where would my literature be in VDL? Writing sonnets to whales and porpoises, canzonets to kangaroos, madrigals to "prime merinos" and dirges to Black Swans, illustrated by portraits of the engaging and lovely natives, semi-human natives I mean. ... Where would be all the literary papers periodicals, new music, new engravings etc etc etc with which I am now enlivened, amused and excited to "go and do likewise".<sup>142</sup>

After she emigrated, having married Charles in 1839, they settled on Meredith's estate, living at *Riversdale* in the early 1840s, before building their own home *Spring Vale* to the

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<sup>139</sup> LA Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes* (Hobart Town, 1880), pp. 81-82; see also pp. 88-93.

<sup>140</sup> Meredith to his wife, 23 June 1823, G4/6 (2), UTAS S&R.

<sup>141</sup> Meredith to his wife, probably November 1827, NS123/1/1 #37, TA.

<sup>142</sup> Louisa Anne Twamley to Meredith, 18 May 1833, RS33/3, UTAS S&R.

north of Meredith senior's *Cambria*, in 1842.<sup>143</sup> In the early 1850s, Charles and Louisa Anne would have anticipated moving into the grand house *Cambria* on George's death, Charles being the eldest surviving son. As we will see in Chapter 9, these hopes were dashed in 1853, when John, the oldest son of the second marriage, returned from South Australia and made a pre-emptive offer to buy *Cambria*, which George immediately accepted.<sup>144</sup> A terse exchange of letters with Charles followed.<sup>145</sup> George also made a pointed reference to Louisa Anne, 'so often passing [*Cambria's*] door'. In later 'memoranda' and letters justifying his decision, he made it clear that he had been disappointed in Charles' choices as regards his future, the son having ignored his advice at key points. He had also compiled an extraordinary log, by date, of the occasions he felt Louisa Anne had snubbed him at *Cambria*, when she and Charles were living up the road at *Spring Vale* and Louisa Anne had failed to stop while passing.<sup>146</sup> Charles and Louisa Anne left the district, with Charles later entering parliament in 1855 as Legislative Council member for Glamorgan and becoming a minister in the governments of his father's friend Thomas Gregson in 1857, James Whyte in 1863 and others.<sup>147</sup>

In spite of being driven hard as a boy, and being excluded from *Cambria* in adulthood, Charles remained loyal to his father in later life, at least with his character in *Tasmanian*

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<sup>143</sup> M Ward, MM Ferris, and T Brookes, *Houses & estates of old Glamorgan* (Swansea, 2017), pp. 78, 62.

<sup>144</sup> 'No. 2, Explanatory statement in reference to GM's note of 13<sup>th</sup> inst', NS123/1/2, TA.

<sup>145</sup> He was, at the time, seventy-five years old. His will stipulated that on his death, his executors should defer selling the property to provide for his various family members' legacies, to allow time for one of the family to buy the property. In selling to John, he saw his main wish for after his death, realised early – 'No. 2, Explanatory statement...', NS123/1/2, TA.

<sup>146</sup> 'No. 7. Facts and circumstances in reference to Mrs Charles Meredith's self-alienation from the house & family of her father-in-law Mr Meredith of *Cambria*, noted down from his own dictation for private family inspection', NS123/1/2, TA.

<sup>147</sup> S and B Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament 1851-1960* (Canberra 1980), p. 115; MS Krone, *The Cyclopaedia of Tasmania* (Hobart, 1900), pp. 61-62. More details on Charles Meredith's political career are found in W Fowler, 'Prophetic or reactionary? Charles and Louisa Anne Meredith's Tasmania', BA (Hons) thesis, University of Tasmania, 2006, pp. 37-42.



*Friends and Foes* praising Meredith 'as brave a man as ever lived, naturally noble, kind, and generous'.<sup>148</sup>

Meredith's children from his second marriage, all born in the colony, received some schooling in Hobart. The eldest, illegitimate Henry, born in England, was helping around the home until early 1832.<sup>149</sup> In mid-year, aged about fourteen, he had made his own way across country from Swan Port to Hobart to attend school at Robert W Giblin's 'Academy' at New Town.<sup>150</sup> Meredith wrote that Henry 'likes his school where I trust a year's residence may render him a good assistant at home'.<sup>151</sup> The following year John and Edwin were also at school.<sup>152</sup> In 1834, at sixteen, it appears that Henry's schooling had ended, as he wrote from Hobart Town about his running errands for his father and reporting various goings-on in the family affairs in town.<sup>153</sup> He was named as working on the farm up to December 1836 when he died after being thrown from a horse.<sup>154</sup>

John Meredith, the first son born after the second marriage, shared in the running of *Cambria* when he gained his majority and in 1847, when aged 25, his father offered him a percentage of the net proceeds of the farm, encouraging him to work hard.<sup>155</sup> In the same letter, George criticised his son for his living habits. That year, perhaps resenting the criticism from his father and siblings, John went to South Australia to look at squatting

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<sup>148</sup> Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes*, p. 82.

<sup>149</sup> Meredith to his wife, 4 March 1832, G4/15, UTAS S&R.

<sup>150</sup> Meredith to his wife, 14 September 1832, G4/14, UTAS S&R, Henry Meredith to his mother, 28 November 1832, G4/36, UTAS S&R. Robert W Giblin, a former teacher at the King's Orphan School at New Town, opened his 'Academy for young gentlemen' in January 1831 *Colonial Times*, 21 January 1831, p. 1. For a discussion on colonial schooling around this time, see K Downing, *Restless men: Masculinity and Robinson Crusoe, 1788-1840* (London, 2014), pp. 60-63.

<sup>151</sup> Meredith to his wife, 1 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #310, TA.

<sup>152</sup> Henry Meredith to his parents, 17 June 1833, G4/37, UTAS S&R; Henry Meredith to his mother, 8 September 1833, G4/38, UTAS S&R.

<sup>153</sup> Henry Meredith to his father, 5 December 1834, G4/39, UTAS S&R.

<sup>154</sup> E Meredith, *Reminiscences and experiences of an early colonist* (Masterton, 1898), p. 18.

<sup>155</sup> Meredith to his son John, 26 February 1847, NS123/1/2 #241, TA.

opportunities.<sup>156</sup> There he made a greater success than anyone imagined and was able to return to *Cambria* and make an offer to buy the property off his father, outright, as outlined above. George and John thereafter had a good relationship—John had the family estate and George had a successful farmer son upon it.

In her study of upper-middle-class families in eastern Australia 1840-1900, Helen Pfeil included John Meredith and his wife Maria as one of her case studies, using their letters in much the same way as this study has done for John's parents.<sup>157</sup> It is remarkable how similar John's attitude and relationship to Maria was to that between George and Mary, yet some obvious differences are also apparent. John was also away from home for extended periods and, like his father, he did not see his absence as being detrimental to the children but felt obliged to lecture his wife on their care on occasion. Like Mary, Maria complained about her husband's absences in her letters to him and rarely travelled away from the home.<sup>158</sup> Some differences in their letters were the frequent references to God in the latter generation's letters, and absence of overt sexuality, perhaps reflecting the High Victorian values of their time.<sup>159</sup>

Maria, the eldest girl of the second family, was sent to 'Mrs Bett's' school in Macquarie Street Hobart in at least 1836, aged twelve, and may have been at school much earlier. In 1832 her father wrote of her music being compromised if she was sent home from Hobart.<sup>160</sup> Her younger sisters Fanny and Clara were also at Mrs Bett's school from 1837

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<sup>156</sup> Meredith to Charles Meredith, 1 November 1853, NS123/1/2, TA; Meredith to Bishop Nixon, 28 February 1854, NS123/1/2, TA.

<sup>157</sup> H Pfeil, 'Raising colonial families: The upper-middle-class in eastern Australia 1840-1900', PhD thesis, the Australian National University, 2009, *passim*. Pfeil, p. 178 noted that only John's side of the correspondence for certain periods has survived, much like that between George and Mary.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 166-167, 177-178.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39 for discussion on religion in the letters.

<sup>160</sup> Meredith to his wife, 7 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #307, TA.

aged eight and six and Mrs Betts wrote to their mother in 1839 complaining that they were 'most tiresome in their manners'.<sup>161</sup> As with Meredith's children from his first marriage, the girls joining the boys in formal schooling appears contrary to the argument of Tosh that male children only were sent away for schooling to avoid the feminine influence of their mother, although he was looking at a slightly later period in England.<sup>162</sup> The youngest son, Edwin, was sent to 'Mr Ring's' school at Campania when he was about nine or ten.<sup>163</sup> Later, Edwin attended Theophilus Swift(e)'s school at Campbell Town aged twelve or thirteen and then was sent to the new Queen's School in Hobart in 1840 where he did well.<sup>164</sup> Edwin later wrote of his extreme happiness as a child, be it at home with his mother, in the bush around his home, or at school in Hobart. He ended his schooling in 1843, aged sixteen or seventeen and was then assisted in the running of *Cambria* and then *Riversdale*.<sup>165</sup> In his later life Edwin wrote a hagiography of his father.<sup>166</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Most writers on nineteenth-century masculinity have looked at the Victorian period. Roper and Tosh argued that from the 1830s especially, emphasis was placed on moral courage, sexual purity, athleticism and stoicism.<sup>167</sup> Meredith, in this pre-Victorian period, arguably did not meet any of those criteria. Clearly, he was not sexually pure and there was little

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<sup>161</sup> Mrs Betts to Mr and Mrs Meredith, 26 September 1839, G4/93-97 UTAS S&R; Mrs Betts to Mary Meredith 26 September 1839, NS123/1/15, TA.

<sup>162</sup> J Tosh, *A man's place: Masculinity and the middle-class home in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>163</sup> Meredith, *Reminiscences*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21. For Swift(e), see *Launceston Courier*, 16 January 1843, p. 2. Queen's School was established in 1840 by Rev. Philip Gell, who had studied under Thomas Arnold at Rugby. It closed in 1845. FJ Woodward, 'Gell, John Philip (1816-1898)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gell-john-philip-2087/text2619>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 3 January 2020.

<sup>165</sup> Meredith, *Reminiscences*, p. 24.

<sup>166</sup> Meredith, *Memoir*.

<sup>167</sup> M Roper and J Tosh, (eds.), *Manful assertions masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991), p. 2.

that was stoic about him; the only two depictions of him in middle age show him to be corpulent and this thesis has argued that his actions were often self-serving rather than courageous.<sup>168</sup> This difference supports their argument that masculinity 'is subject to change and varied in its forms'.<sup>169</sup>

Judged in their entirety, the letters of George Meredith to his family do not paint a very flattering picture of the man, especially judged from a modern perspective. He regarded his wives in general as ornaments and aides for himself. In the case of his first wife it was also to boost his capital, and who, by his own written implication, he never loved. His second wife, formerly his mistress, he seemed to have married on impulse to have her look after the children from his first marriage, as he judged she had the necessary attributes, although other choices were considered. Although his second marriage was one of great passion, Meredith was embarrassed by the lack of social graces of Mary and only allowed her to accompany him to Hobart seventeen years after she first arrived in the colony. In the meantime, she was left isolated on the farm for months at a time amidst hostilities of bushrangers and Aboriginal people, to raise their children, plus those of his first marriage, and to superintend the running of the farm—an extraordinarily selfish arrangement by any measure. His repeated and lengthy scolding of her about her letters was cruel and heartless and his light-hearted recounting of what may have been her rape when she was his seventeen-year-old housemaid is shocking in today's context.

Meredith no doubt loved his children but, as with his wives, appeared to see his sons at least as human capital to advance his own interests on the farm and in whaling. His oldest

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<sup>168</sup> For the images, see *Frontispiece*, this work, and M Nash, *The bay whalers: Tasmania's shore-based whaling industry* (Woden, 2003), p. 49 for a sketch of him probably in his late 40s.

<sup>169</sup> Roper and Tosh, *Manful assertions*, p. 1.

son, George junior, having his own land grant, appears to have estranged his father by wishing to have an independent existence and perhaps by planning to sell his land rather than keep it within the family concern. The rage of the father in his letters and actions against young George contrasted strongly with the equanimity of the son about his father at the same time. The next eldest, Charles, also moved away for a while and, having returned, disappointed his father and was excluded from the family estate, *Cambria*, by its sudden sale to his stepbrother John, with George faulting Charles' wife, Louisa Anne, for contributing to the break-down by what he saw as her not paying due deference to him.

The daughters from the first marriage were somewhat indulged even through their rancorous relationship with their step-mother and were even allowed to move away to Hobart Town as soon as practicable, notwithstanding that they would have been assistance to Mary in the household and their arrangements in the town were not settled. The second family had more schooling than the first and the sons all grew up with a positive attitude to their father—unlike those of the first. The daughters from the second marriage were indulged, like those from the first.

From this, we can discern an equivalence in his family relationships to that of his public persona, which will be discussed in the following chapters. If he had a problem or an issue, he drove straight towards a solution, oblivious to the consequences—he obtained capital via a marriage; intimate relief when that marriage had lost its love by turning to a mistress; a new carer for his motherless children by marrying the mistress just before emigration; a socially acceptable new wife by incessant coaching and criticism of her letter-writing; satisfaction when away from home by writing to her and requesting back titillating tales of past and anticipated sexual encounters; developing his farm and whaling interests while

he was absent by driving the boys relentlessly, and so on. Meredith, although not lacking love, was ruthless in prosecuting his personal relationships, most of which were directed to advancing his interests. If there was any 'greater good' involved, it was for the greater good of ensuring the progress of a Meredith dynasty at Great Swan Port.

## **PART 2    EXPRESSING INDEPENDENCE**

## CHAPTER 5: HOSTILE FORCES: ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND BUSHRANGERS

### INTRODUCTION

The period covered by this thesis includes one of the most controversial stages in Tasmanian and indeed Australian history—the escalating conflict between the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and European settlers in the 1820s and early 1830s. In locating his farm at Great Swan Port, George Meredith unwittingly placed himself on the annual migration path of the ‘Oyster Bay tribe’ and hence was squarely involved in the later violence between the Aboriginal people and the Europeans, which became characterised as warfare.<sup>1</sup> Meredith was the organiser of the so-called ‘Freycinet Line’, the last of the three ‘lines’ of 1830-31 that attempted to capture or contain Aboriginal people, and this confrontation may have been a factor in the capitulation of the Oyster Bay tribe to George Augustus Robinson’s conciliation efforts not long after.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the activities of the settlers’ stockmen and hut-keepers in probably initiating and provoking the hostilities will likely never be properly brought to light. Clements estimated that between 1824 and 1831, two hundred and sixty Aboriginal people were reportedly killed by settlers in eastern Van Diemen’s Land and argued that the figure was probably close to six hundred, with two hundred and nineteen colonists killed in the same period.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur to Murray, 12 September 1829, P Chapman and T Jetson, (eds.), *Historical records of Australia, resumed Series III, despatches and papers relating to the history of Tasmania, Vol. VIII, Tasmania, January-December 1829* (Canberra, 2003), p. 607. Henceforth this series will be cited in the format HRA [series], Vol. [number], [page number(s)], irrespective of general editor; the bibliography will give full citations. NJB Plomley, *The Aboriginal / settler clash in Van Diemen's Land 1803-1831* (Hobart, 1992), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> G Calder, *Levéé, line and martial Law: A history of the dispossession of the Mairremmener people of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1832* (Launceston, 2010), pp. 192-198.

<sup>3</sup> N Clements, *The Black War: Fear, sex and resistance in Tasmania* (St Lucia, 2014), p. 2.



The settlers at Great Swan Port probably suffered no more than those in other districts from raids by bushrangers. Of greater interest for this thesis is the relative level of threat perceived by Meredith and others between bushrangers and Aboriginal people and this is found to some degree in letters between Meredith and his wife, an unusually revealing source on such matters. Meredith's neighbour Adam Amos kept a daily diary and, together with Meredith's own writings and contributions to public debate, a reasonable picture of these settlers' involvement with, and attitudes to, Aboriginal people through this time can be ascertained.

George Meredith was a prominent settler, who liked his opinions to be known, and has come to the unfavourable attention of many recent authors on the clashes between settlers and Aboriginal people in Van Diemen's Land.<sup>4</sup> Close examination of his writings show that his attitude changed over the decade of the 1820s and he was not always abjectly hostile to the Aboriginal people, as has been portrayed in some of the literature. It was only after years of escalating attacks by both bushrangers and indigenous people that Meredith took one of the more extreme publicly expressed views in respect of how to deal with the 'Aboriginal problem'. If Meredith was 'true to his form' in respect of the Aboriginal people, he would have written and acted to have them dealt with summarily, and violently, to have his way. That he did not may reveal that his attitude to them was not characteristically 'self-serving', but initially possibly empathetic.

This chapter will examine the escalation of the settler-Aboriginal peoples' interaction and clashes in central-eastern Van Diemen's Land, where Meredith settled, and also Meredith's

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, M Powell, *Musquito brutality and exile: Aboriginal resistance in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart, 2016). Powell judged Meredith harshly—this will be discussed later in this chapter.

experiences with the Brady bushranger gang. Through examination of contemporary writings by the settlers concerned and also government decisions, it will attempt to explain how the situation at least in eastern Van Diemen's Land reached the stage it did, and also the final, extreme, attitude of George Meredith.<sup>5</sup>

## THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

### Early encounters in the district

One of the earliest accounts of Europeans encountering Tasmanian Aboriginal people along the east coast of Van Diemen's Land was given by George Mortimer, on board the brig *Mercury* when it anchored off Maria Island in July 1789 (see Figure 5-1 for a map of locations mentioned in this chapter). This contact was described in terms of mutual curiosity.<sup>6</sup> In 1802, French explorer François Peron, under the command of Nicolas Baudin, had several encounters with Aboriginal people, beginning with curious engagement and ending in some distrust and threatening behaviour by the indigenous people, according to the Frenchman.<sup>7</sup>

In the journal of his voyage around Van Diemen's Land in 1815-16, Captain James Kelly recounted a stay with Aboriginal people in the Furneaux group of islands off the colony's north-east, with friendly encounters and the trading of seal meat for kangaroo. During their passage down the east coast, however, Kelly and his crew feared being attacked by the

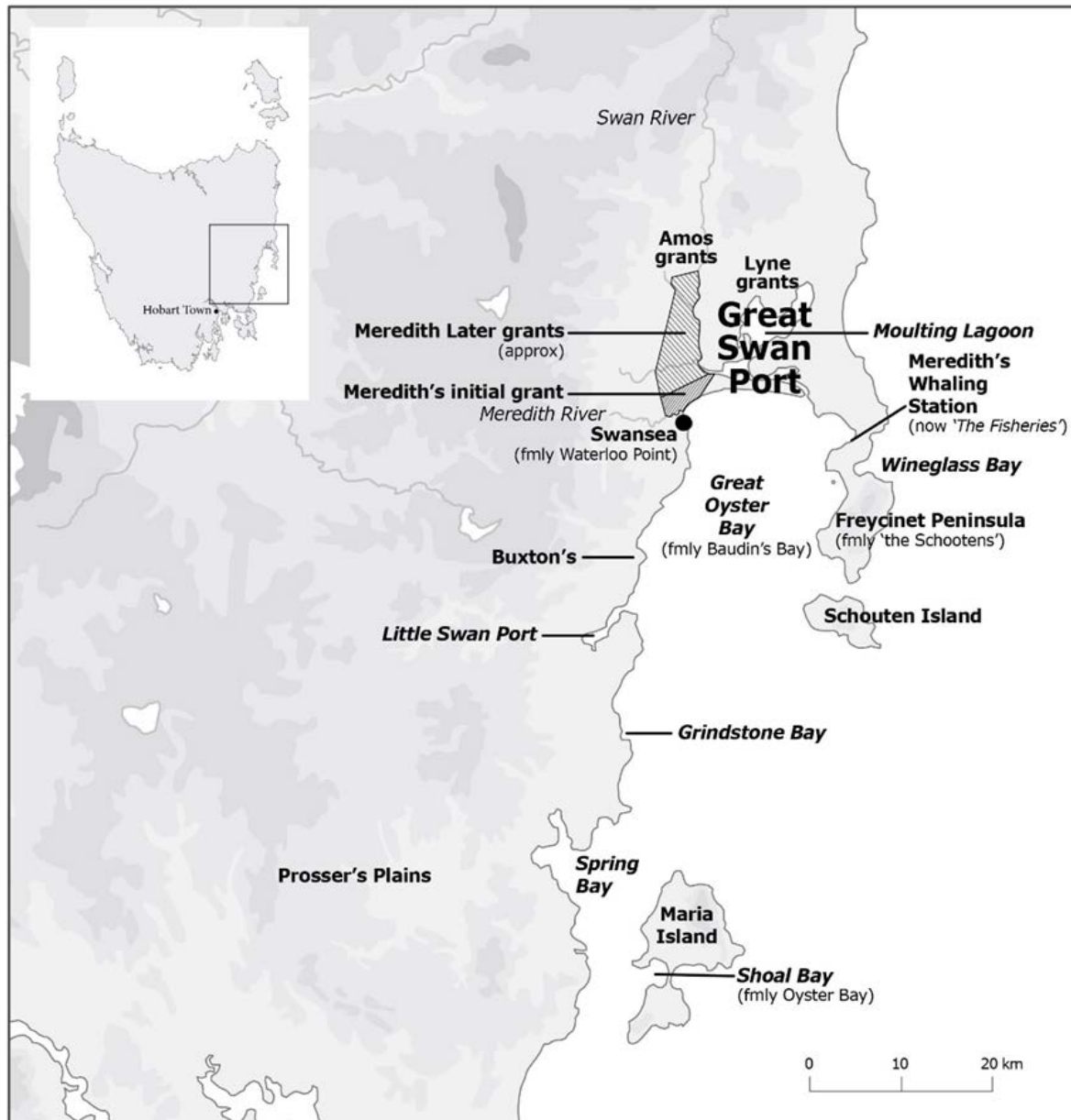
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<sup>5</sup> An early draft of this chapter was published as: M Ward, 'The clash between Aboriginal people and settlers in Van Diemen's Land—the experience of George Meredith of Great Swan Port', *Papers & Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (August, 2019), pp. 19-41.

<sup>6</sup> G Mortimer, *Observations and remarks made during a voyage to the islands of Teneriffe, Amsterdam, Maria's Islands near Van Diemen's Land ...* (London, 1791), pp. 17-21.

<sup>7</sup> F Peron, *A voyage of discovery to the southern hemisphere ...* (London, 1809), pp. 216-223. For a general account, see NJB Plomley, *The Baudin expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines 1802* (Hobart 1983).

indigenous people living in the vicinity of Maria Island, demonstrating perhaps even then, that the Aboriginal people of the east coast were hostile to the Europeans.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 5-1.** Some locations mentioned in this chapter.

Source: Original map by Diane Bricknell

<sup>8</sup> J Kelly, 'First discovery of Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour', Royal Society collection, RS99/1, University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections (hereafter UTAS S&R).

The first reported fatality in contact between Europeans and Aboriginal people anywhere in Tasmania occurred in 1772, when French explorer Marc-Joseph Marion du Fresne landed at Frederic Henry Bay, in the south-east. After what appears to have been a misunderstanding, the Aboriginal people attacked with spears and stones, and the French then fired, killing at least one Aboriginal person.<sup>9</sup> The first fatality of a European on the east coast occurred in 1818 at Grindstone Bay, where John Kemp was found speared by his fellow sealers on their return after a day trip away.<sup>10</sup> The provocation for this attack is not known, but east coast historian George Musgrave Parker noted that the sealers who worked the coast at this time were 'drawn in most cases from the lowest and most depraved classes'.<sup>11</sup> Amongst other historians of the nineteenth century, James Fenton agreed, laying the blame for the rise of Aboriginal hostilities towards the settlers firmly at the feet of the latter, due to the inhumane acts perpetrated by them, and/or their convict servants, on the indigenous people.<sup>12</sup>

After a man was speared in the Oyster Bay district in March 1819, the *Hobart Town Gazette* reported:

The tribe which frequents Oyster Bay should be particularly guarded against, as they seem to have such a strong and rooted animosity towards the white people. It is well known that some time before Kemp was killed, a native man was shot in the woods by some of the stockmen to the Eastward, and that the women have been also deprived of their children in that quarter.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> HL Roth, (trans.), *Crozet's voyage to Tasmania, New Zealand and the Ladrone Islands, and the Philippines in the years 1771-1772* (London, 1891), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 28 November 1818, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> GM Parker, 'Some records of Great Swan Port and the municipality of Glamorgan 1820-1920', unpublished manuscript, 1950, *Parker Papers*, P1/6, UTAS S&R, p. F2.

<sup>12</sup> J Fenton, *A history of Tasmania from its discovery in 1642 to the present time* (Hobart, 1884), p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 20 March 1819, p. 2.

## George Meredith's experiences

Having been steered by Lieutenant-Governor Sorell to settle on the east coast of the colony, Meredith wrote to his brother very soon after arriving in Hobart Town in 1821 expressing some apprehension about the local Aboriginal people: 'They are the most wretched of all Aborigines I have ever yet seen or heard of. Cowardly but treacherous I understand and several persons have been recently speared by them for want of due precaution'.<sup>14</sup> In his diary entries for his first two visits to Great Oyster Bay in 1821, covering about five weeks on site, Meredith recorded only one encounter with Aboriginal people, on 2 November 1821, as follows:

... took dinner and set off about 3 pm over the hills with my son, Mr. Amos and a man to carry rug and tea kettle, etc - came up the middle of the Marsh at about four miles distance (having fallen in with two separate mobs of natives, who ran from their fires on our approach).<sup>15</sup>

A settler to the south of Meredith, Thomas Buxton, wrote in September 1821, not long after he arrived in the colony: 'Natives are very treacherous especially this tribe at our settlement'.<sup>16</sup> He went on to describe how he had shot and wounded one of several Aboriginal people after a chance encounter and could have shot either of them dead, but chose to make them run away. Notwithstanding those comments, he went on to say: 'I am now so accustomed to the Natives that one man should never fear travelling from one side of the Island to the other'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Meredith to his brother John, 2 April 1821, Royal Society collection, *Meredith family papers*, RS34/2, UTAS S&R.

<sup>15</sup> G Meredith, [Diary of George Meredith during two voyages to Oyster Bay in 1821], Royal Society collection, *Meredith family papers*, RS34/1, UTAS S&R.

<sup>16</sup> Buxton to his family, 21 September 1821, MS902, National Library of Australia.

<sup>17</sup> A similar situation was found by Boyce for the few years up to 1820: J Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land* (Melbourne, 2008), p. 67.

Therefore, in the experiences of these early settlers ‘on the ground’, there was little to fear from the presence of Aboriginal people at this time, in spite of the stories told about them at the time of the settlers’ arrival.

By early 1823, Meredith and his young family were in rudimentary huts on their land, north of present-day Swansea. Meredith was frequently in Hobart and wrote regularly to his wife. In March 1823, he mentioned an encounter with Aboriginal women during a whaleboat trip south to Hobart, when they had to land and take shelter ashore after a storm:

... and there we were honoured by the visit of six Black Ladies to breakfast next morning who caught us craw fish and mutton fish in abundance in return for bread we gave them – you would be much amused to see them swim & dive although I do not think you w<sup>d</sup> easily reconcile yourself to the open display they make of their charms. Poor things they are innocent & unconscious of any impropriety or indelicacy. They were chiefly young & two or three [were] well proportioned & comparatively well-looking. So you see, had I fancied a Black wife I had both opportunity and choice.<sup>18</sup>

Stronach and Adair described this passage as being written in appreciative terms, ‘even evincing empathy’, which is consistent with the interpretation here of Meredith’s early attitude.<sup>19</sup> In an unrelated aside later in the same letter, while directing his wife in respect of the farm management, he commented ‘The Natives I fear must now be dispursed [sic] whenever they make their appearances without stopping to shake the Ladies’.<sup>20</sup> So, after

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<sup>18</sup> Meredith to his wife Mary, 2 March 1823, Box ED1, 339gg, Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society (hereafter GSBHS). Spelling and emphasis such as underlining in quotes from hand-written letters and diaries will be as per the original text; punctuation has been adjusted to assist readability. See ‘Style and spelling’ in the introductory pages for a fuller explanation of how quotes are dealt with.

<sup>19</sup> M Stronach and D Adair, ‘Swimming for their lives: *palawa* women of *Iutruwita* (Van Diemen’s Land)’, *Sporting traditions*, forthcoming 2020.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Dispersal’ became a euphemism for killing Aboriginal people, although mainly elsewhere in the Australian colonies, and somewhat later than this letter—for instance: R Kimber, ‘Genocide or not? The situation in Central Australia 1860-1895’, pp. 40, 43 in *Genocide perspectives I Essays in comparative genocide*, (C Tatz, ed.) (Sydney, 1997). Shooting entire clans in Queensland was sometimes referred to ‘permanent dispersal’ H Baldry, A McKeon and S McDougall, ‘Queensland’s frontier killing times – facing up to genocide’, *QUT Law Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2015), p. 101. It is not considered that Meredith used ‘dispursed’ in the euphemistic sense in his letter as his wife likely would not have understood it and Meredith would more likely have given

only a year or so on the land, Meredith had concluded that the Aboriginal people were some threat to his farming interests, but was not advocating overt violence nor even cautioning his wife against them. A few days later, possibly without having seen her husband's letter, Mary Meredith wrote:

[I] most sincerely wish that you and George [their son] were returned, the natives are daily coming nearer & nearer to this place, and we have only one gun. Last night we saw their fires quite plain from the Hut and from the distance should imagine they were somewhere in the neighbourhood of the [illegible] or Stoney Creek, and the whole country for miles around is in one intense blaze, there is not [illegible] [illegible] on John Meredith's farm but what they have burnt as well was part of the fence I think he got made. ... All my fear is that they will set fire to the farm, and burn the Hut, as they come by night to Mr Amos. I do not see why they should not come here also.<sup>21</sup>

Being in an isolated place with a young family, and with only some convicts and a gun to protect themselves, the fear in Mary Meredith's letter is obvious.<sup>22</sup>

Adam Amos settled nearby Meredith; he became a district constable and maintained a diary. The encounters he recorded with Aboriginal people were likely typical of the time:

May 3<sup>rd</sup> [1823]. I was redly to go off to meet the prisoners at my Brothers when my House was surrounded by natives. One a woman came to the door, I made signes for hir to go away. She did and in a short time about six made their apearence amongst the brush in the river closs to my Hut. I fired small shot at about 50 yards distance they run off I fired another pice loaded with ball over their heads to lete them know that I had more pices than one - I durst not live the House and none of my oldest

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a plainly worded directive, had he wanted anyone shot or attacked. Most likely Meredith meant the word in the sense of 'scattered'.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Meredith to her husband, 6 March 1823, *Meredith family papers deposited by Mrs WVG Johnson 1962 & 1964*, G4/4, UTAS S&R. Henceforth the title of the series G4 will not be given. The areas described by Mary Meredith appear to be very broad—John Meredith's farm, later *Spring Vale*, was about 10 km north of the Meredith farm and Stoney Creek, between *Coswell* and *Piermont*, is about 6 km south.

<sup>22</sup> The fear engendered in colonists by the attacks and other behaviours of the Aboriginal people, plus some new statistical data on the attacks on the settlers has been explored and presented by N Clements and A Gregg, 'I am frightened out of my life': Black war, white fear, *Settler colonial studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2017), pp. 221-240.

sones were at home nor my servant man - so I sent my little boy Adam to the muster the natives made no more apearance.<sup>23</sup>

Amos clearly had no wish for the indigenous people to be around his farm. He may have been more concerned with theft than violence, as he sent his son Adam, then aged about sixteen, through the bush and possibly alone, to the muster.<sup>24</sup> In Chapter 4, it was noted that Louisa Anne Meredith recounted a story about her husband in terms of another family in which the character (Charles) told of how, when he was eleven—in about 1822—he was sent alone into the bush by his father for up to a week at a time to hunt kangaroos.<sup>25</sup> The story may have been enhanced, but it conveyed that there was no sense of fear of Aboriginal people at the time.

The first reliably recorded incident of violence between Aboriginal people and Europeans after the latter's permanent settlement in the Great Oyster Bay district occurred in November 1823. It involved one of George Meredith's men, William Hollyoak (sometimes spelled Holyoak) and again occurred at Grindstone Bay. Adam Amos recorded:

20th [November 1823]. I have heard that a large moab of natives has killed one of Mr Gatehouses men at Grindston Bay and allso William Holyoak a man belonging to Mr Meredith, who was on his way here from the Hospital & wounded another who got from them and fled to Pitwater. His master & some of his men came after them to Mr Talbots where they found them last night & fired on them when they all scattered A native of Sidney Muskety as he is called was with them & got off too who is a dangerous fellow as he is ackwainted with fire arms and has the natives at his command. One of his wives stoped & went with Mr Gatehouse home to show where the dead boddys are hid.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Entry for 3 May 1823, A Amos, *Diary 1822-1825*, 689A, GSBHS.

<sup>24</sup> For the Amos children: AG Amos and P Benson Walker, *Family history of Adam Amos of "Glen Gala" and William Lyne of "Apsley"* (Hobart, 1963), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> LA Meredith, *Tasmanian Friends and Foes* (Hobart Town, 1880), pp. 81 and 90.

<sup>26</sup> Amos, *Diary*, 689A, GSBHS. The person Amos identified as 'Muskety' was better known by the settlers as 'Musquito', who was indigenous to New South Wales. For an account of Musquito's life see Powell, *Musquito*.



In his work on 'Musquito', Powell took a negative view of Meredith, for instance on page 142; however, his work is flawed, as in several places, he wrongly attributed to George Meredith comments made either by Louisa Anne Meredith, or by his son Charles and quoted by Louisa.<sup>27</sup> Although Louisa Anne quoted 'Mr Meredith', the quotes on Powell's page 160 are clearly the words of Charles Meredith.

George Meredith's son Charles wrote down and recounted his experiences with Aboriginal people for his wife, author Louisa Anne Meredith, who in turn published them in *My Home in Tasmania* in 1852.<sup>28</sup> He clearly blamed the Aboriginal people for perpetrating the first act of overt violence between them and the settlers in the area. However, Charles, being only twelve at the time, would hardly have been in a position to know this authoritatively. Years later, Charles Meredith still maintained that the hostility of the Aboriginal people was not related to the way the Aboriginal women, in particular, were treated by the Europeans.<sup>29</sup>

In July 1824, Robert Gay, a convict servant stockman of Meredith's, was killed by Aboriginal people near Moulting Lagoon.<sup>30</sup> Meredith wrote to Arthur immediately following this, and it is instructive that at this time his first concern was still about threats from bushrangers, which occupied the first four paragraphs of the letter. He then went on:

So long as their [Aborigines'] wanton acts were confined to attacks upon my stock, although any loss both in cattle and sheep was stated to be considerable, I would not allow the offences to be visited personally upon their heads, but when I had one servant most dangerously wounded in the very act of doing them all the kindness in

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<sup>27</sup> Powell, *Musquito*, pp. 142 and 160; LA Meredith *My Home in Tasmania during a residence of nine years, Vol. 1 and 2*, first published 1852 in London, facsimile edition (Swansea, 2003), pp. 194-215.

<sup>28</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, Minutes of the August 1873 meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania, *Papers and Proceedings, Royal Society of Tasmania* (1873), p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Amos, *Diary*, entries for 6-10 July 1824, 689A, GSBHS.

his power, and another barbarously murdered in cold blood, together with an associate ... and further depredations were committed upon the stock ... it seemed indispensable to keep them at a distance, otherwise neither life or property could be considered safe.<sup>31</sup>

This ordering of concerns clearly demonstrated the relativities of the threats that Meredith perceived from the two groups in 1824 and he was not advocating violence towards the indigenous people, merely to 'keep them at a safe distance'. This contrasts with his exhortations to the government on other matters, which called for prompt and direct action.

A puzzling account was provided in late 1825 by Private Robert McNally, part of the military contingent sent to Great Swan Port in pursuit of bushrangers in September. He wrote in a diary of his journey between Little Swan Port and the Swan River: 'through this wild track of Desert the only Guide we had to Direct our steps was the Skulls of the natives nailed on Stumps of trees to Direct the weary [or wary] traveller the way'.<sup>32</sup> What is puzzling is the 'desert' described by McNally does not match the area, which was hilly and well wooded, and there are other geographical oddities in McNally's text. The diary was probably compiled sometime after the event, so it is possible that some of McNally's geography became confused.

### Escalation of hostilities

The rise of incidents involving Aboriginal people in general occurred just after a significant rise in the number of attacks by escaped convicts, or bushrangers, on the east coast and

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<sup>31</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 26 July 1824, originally CSO1/1/15, TA, reproduced in: E FitzSymonds, [J Dally], (ed.) *A looking-glass for Tasmania: letters petitions and other manuscripts relating to Van Diemen's Land 1808-1845* (Adelaide, 1983), pp. 35-36.

<sup>32</sup> Entry for 24 September 1825, 'Diary of an Unidentified Soldier 1815-36', National Library of Ireland MSS 13264, Robert McNally Memoir Project in progress by Professor Pamela Sharpe.

this may have led to an atmosphere of siege perceived by the Merediths.<sup>33</sup> Matthew Brady and James McCabe raided Meredith's house in September 1825 (bushranging will be discussed specifically later in this chapter).<sup>34</sup> Meredith apparently contemplated moving at least his house from the area following the increased attacks.<sup>35</sup>

There were relatively few reported incidents involving Aboriginal people in 1825, but things escalated during 1826 and 1827, with a number of attacks and deaths of settlers at the hands of the 'Oyster Bay tribe' (and doubtless of the latter at the hands of the settlers).<sup>36</sup> William Lyne and his family settled at *Apsley*, near Moulting Lagoon to the north-east of the Amos and Meredith farms, late in 1826.<sup>37</sup> His son, John Lyne, wrote in his *Reminiscences*, how from the beginning of their settlement, the family, when outside, was always armed against attacks by either bushrangers or Aboriginal people and they mortared the outside of their hut against fire attack. One of Lyne's young sisters was struck unconscious in 1828.<sup>38</sup> He wrote, as did others, that the attacks were provoked by the settlers:

The Blacks at this time from 1826 to 1831 were never known to give quarter – no doubt they had much reason to be exasperated for it was said that before the arrival of Governor Arthur in 1824 the convicts stock keepers were known to entice the black gins away from their tribes and if their husbands went to seek them they the men were often shot.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See H Melville, *The history of Van Diemen's Land from the year 1824 to 1835 inclusive, during the administration of Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur*, G Mackaness, (ed.) (Sydney, 1965), pp. 48-55.

<sup>34</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 15 October 1825, p. 2. The attack appears to have occurred sometime before the newspaper report – Compton to Meredith, 14 September 1825, *Papers and correspondence with variety of people, including Joseph Archer, Adam Amos, George Frankland, Lieut. Colonel Sorell, T.D. Lord and others. 150 letters. 1801, 15 May 1819-30, Apr 1847, 12 Jan 1852*, NS123/1/4, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter TA). Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/4 series will be omitted.

<sup>35</sup> Kerr to Meredith, 25 October 1825, *ibid*.

<sup>36</sup> Calder, *Levéé*, line, pp. 167-168. See also *Introduction*, this work, on Ford and Plomley's separate treatment of changes in the nature of settler/Aboriginal conflict in the mid-1820s.

<sup>37</sup> L Nyman, *The Lyne family history* (Hobart, 1976), pp. 12-13.

<sup>38</sup> J Lyne, *Reminiscences of John Lyne MHA*, 14 August 1896, NS854/1/1, TA, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

Following advice from the Executive Council, the government published a notice dated 29 November 1826 setting out procedures in the event of suspected or actual ‘felonies’ committed by Aboriginal people and this included authorising ‘any person’ who had witnessed such a felony to ‘pursue and seize offenders by all such means as a Constable may use’.<sup>40</sup>

Yet in late 1826, Meredith was still more concerned with bushrangers than Aboriginal people. In a letter to his wife in October of that year, Meredith cautioned her against bushrangers and not to go any distance from the house unarmed; he wrote that he was urging the government to offer emancipation to any convict who ‘takes a bushranger with arms in his hand’.<sup>41</sup> There is no mention of the danger from Aboriginal people in his letter. This is in stark contrast with the near hysterical attitude of the Hobart Town press at the time, with the *Colonial Times* editorialising:

We make no pompous display of Philanthropy — we say unequivocally, SELF DEFENCE IS THE FIRST LAW OF NATURE. THE GOVERNMENT MUST REMOVE THE NATIVES — IF NOT, THEY WILL BE HUNTED DOWN LIKE WILD BEASTS, AND DESTROYED!<sup>42</sup>

Other settlers also saw the relative dangers between bushrangers and Aboriginal people differently from Meredith. William Bryan, a settler in the north, wrote to the local

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<sup>40</sup> Executive Council, *Draft minutes of proceedings of the Executive Council*, 27 November 1826, EC3/1/1, TA; Henceforth the title of the EC3 and EC4 series will be omitted; Government Notice 29 November 1826, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 2 December 1826, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Meredith to his wife Mary, 10 October 1826, *Letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith. 113 letters*, NS123/1/1, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/1 series will be omitted.

<sup>42</sup> *Colonial Times*, 1 December 1826, p. 2, capitals in the original.

authorities in 1827 about the 'terror' of the Aboriginal people burning his house: 'the fury of these Black Monsters exceeded anything I have yet encountered'.<sup>43</sup>

The Executive Council in December 1827 again considered the 'outrages committed by the Aboriginal natives'. Arthur reported that attacks had escalated and that the Aboriginal people 'unexpectedly and suddenly attacking defenceless settlers, seems to indicate a plan of offensive operations, resulting from deliberative and concerted plans of attack'. Notwithstanding that, he felt that the white stockkeepers were to blame for these attacks, which were a way of seeking revenge.<sup>44</sup>

In the face of rising public concern about the violence between settlers and the Aboriginal people, Arthur wrote a dispatch to Secretary of State Goderich in January 1828, noting the rising violence and advising that, while some steps to halt it had been made, further measures may be necessary. Arthur again clearly blamed the settlers for both the origin and the escalation of the attacks by Aboriginal people and added that 'much ought be endured in return, before the Blacks are treated as an open and accredited enemy by the Government'.<sup>45</sup>

Violent conflict in the Great Swan Port district peaked during 1828. Calder named nine locations on the east coast where settlers' farms were attacked that year.<sup>46</sup> He also wrote that 'George Meredith, in particular, was subject to repeated attacks'. Surprisingly, Meredith's letters to his wife and others during 1827-28 made no mention of Aboriginal people, but attacks on and involving his convict servants and employees certainly did

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<sup>43</sup> Bryan to Smith, 10 November 1827, Colonial Secretary's Office, *General correspondence*, CSO1/1/316/4072 p. 59. Henceforth the title of the CSO1 series will be omitted.

<sup>44</sup> Executive Council, 14 December 1827, EC3/1/1, TA.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur to Goderich, 10 January 1828, HRA III, Vol. VII, pp. 26-29.

<sup>46</sup> Calder, *Levéé*, line, p. 174.

occur.<sup>47</sup> Appendix 1 tabulates the thirteen documented incidents between Aboriginal people and people associated with Meredith between 1821 and 1830. Attacks by Meredith's men on the Aboriginal people, and casualties sustained by the latter, are largely undocumented in primary sources.

That attacks on the Aboriginal people by the stock-keepers, other settlers and their convicts and employees were occurring is undeniable. In 1828 Chief Justice John Lewes Pedder wrote to Arthur in response to a draft Proclamation setting out the belief that stock-keepers were retaliating on primary attacks by Aboriginal people:

I must say it is not a true picture of the existing state of things according to my belief. A stranger reading it would imagine that the natives were the first to commit aggression and that the barbarities of the stock keepers were only acts of retaliation. The truth I believe to be exactly the reverse.<sup>48</sup>

Arthur issued his 'Proclamation of the settled districts' a few days later, on 15 April 1828 following recommendations from his Executive Council.<sup>49</sup> In this, Arthur attempted to order that Aboriginal people would be restricted to outside some un-defined 'settled districts', but may be issued a 'passport' to traverse settled districts to the coast. It was largely ridiculed at the time.<sup>50</sup> Biographer of Chief Justice Pedder, Jacqueline Fox, noted that there was some precedent for the type of approach within the British Empire and that

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<sup>47</sup> For the letters, see NS123/1/1 and NS123/1/4, TA. For the attacks, see Appendix 1.

<sup>48</sup> Pedder to Arthur, 13 April 1828, Papers of Sir George Arthur, Vol. 9, *Letters of Chief Justice Pedder (1)*, ZA2169, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (hereafter ML, SLNSW).

<sup>49</sup> Executive Council, 10 April 1828, EC4/1/1, TA. Arthur had read to the Executive Council a memorandum of some thirty incidents that had occurred in the preceding nine months. Proclamation, 15 April 1828 in: House of Commons, *Copies of all correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the subject of the military operations lately carried out on against the aboriginal inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land* (London, 1831) (henceforth cited as '*Copies of all correspondence*'), pp. 5-7.

<sup>50</sup> Reproduced in a footnote in Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 72-74. Melville wrote on p. 73 'a greater piece of absurdity can scarcely be imagined'.

John West had a favourable view.<sup>51</sup> The 'Report of the Aborigines Committee 1830' perversely later described the proclamation as being:

issued for the protection of the Aboriginal Natives against the acts of aggression, violence, and cruelty committed on them by the Stock keepers and others His Majesty's Subjects, and for the purpose of causing the Natives to retire from the settled districts of the Island, in consideration of their continuing to perpetrate frequent unprovoked outrages on the persons and property of the Settlers, and to commit repeated and barbarous murders and other crimes.<sup>52</sup>

As the conflict continued, on 1 November 1828, and soon after the Gough murders, Arthur proclaimed martial law over an area that Calder pointed out was effectively only that of the *Mairremmener* Oyster Bay and Big River tribes.<sup>53</sup> Armed civilian 'roving parties', in part manned by convicts, were authorised to go out and take Aboriginal people by force.<sup>54</sup> These, and others that formed later, were largely unsuccessful and during 1829 clashes and deaths on both sides continued unabated, especially in *Mairremmener* country and around the Meredith land at Great Oyster Bay.<sup>55</sup> By September, Arthur reported the situation to London in terms of 'warfare'.<sup>56</sup> Meredith was in the thick of it.

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<sup>51</sup> J Fox, *Bound by every tie of duty: John Lewes Pedder, Chief Justice of Van Diemen's Land* (Melbourne, 2018), p. 219; J West, *The history of Tasmania with copious information respecting the colonies of New South Wales Victoria South Australia &c., &c., &c.*, AGL Shaw, (ed.) (Sydney, 1981), p. 278. For more on Pedder, see JM Bennett, *Sir John Pedder: First Chief Justice of Tasmania 1824-1854* (Sydney, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> 'Report of the Aborigines Committee, 1830', DL Spencer 429, ML, SLNSW, p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Gough was an overseer for Meredith at his Jericho landholdings. His wife, daughter and Mrs Mortimer, a neighbour, died after attacks by Aboriginal people in October 1828. *Tasmanian*, 17 October 1828, p. 3; *Hobart Town Courier*, 18 October 1828, p. 1; Calder, *Levéé*, line, p. 172. An original can be found at: Papers of Sir George Arthur, Vol. 28, *Aborigines*, ZA2188, ML, SLNSW.

<sup>54</sup> For a contemporary account, see NJB Plomley, (ed.), *Jorgen Jorgenson and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land* (Sandy Bay, 1991), pp. 81-96. Gilbert Robertson, noted elsewhere in this thesis for his involvement in the press, antipathy to George Meredith and being a victim of Arthur's policy on withdrawing convict servants, led one of the first roving parties, in part aided by Oyster Bay man Kickerterpoller who, despite a history of violence against settlers, had a compliant relationship with Robertson and probably influenced Robertson's sympathetic attitude to the indigenous people: C Pybus, 'A self-made man' in *Reading Robinson companion essays to Friendly Mission*, A Johnston and M Rolls, (eds.) (Hobart, 2008), pp. 99-100.

<sup>55</sup> Calder, *Levéé*, line, p. 178; L Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (St Leonards, 1996), p. 102.

<sup>56</sup> Arthur to Murray, 12 September 1829, HRA III, Vol. VIII, p. 607.

## The Aborigines Committee

The next significant measure Arthur implemented was the establishment of a committee in November 1829 to report on the suitability of Bruny Island as a permanent settlement for Aboriginal people.<sup>57</sup> The committee was later charged with collecting information on the general state of affairs between the settlers and Aboriginal people and, amongst other things, to suggest ways to reconcile the two groups. It was led by Archdeacon William Broughton and became known as the 'Aborigines Committee'.<sup>58</sup> Evidence was taken from sixteen individuals, mostly settlers on the land but included Gilbert Robertson, Reverend Knopwood and some merchants. The committee's report, with nine recommendations, was dated 19 March 1830.<sup>59</sup> Plomley referred to the report as a whitewash of the settlers and government and those that gave evidence were 'extirpationists almost to a man'.<sup>60</sup> He gave no evidence for this contention and the minutes of evidence given to the committee do not support it.<sup>61</sup>

During the deliberations of the committee, the idea of sending out a questionnaire or 'queries' to 'Gentlemen of experience and long standing in the colony' was acted upon.<sup>62</sup> George Meredith was one of fourteen respondents and his replies to the questions, dated

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<sup>57</sup> George Augustus Robinson was appointed to lead the settlement on Bruny Island. For Robinson, see Anonymous, 'Robinson, George Augustus (1791–1866)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University (hereafter ADB), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/robinson-george-augustus-2596/text3565>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 3 February 2018; also P Brantlinger 'King Billy's bones: Colonial knowledge production in nineteenth-century Tasmania' in *Reading Robinson companion essays to Friendly Mission*, A Johnston and M Rolls, (eds.) (Hobart, 2008), pp. 45-57.

<sup>58</sup> Note 140, HRA III, Vol. IX, p. 764 and note 225, p. 819. These notes also explain other aspects that were to be reported on by the committee, and public reaction to it.

<sup>59</sup> Original at: DL SPENCER 429, ML, SLNSW and reproduced, with minutes of evidence, in: House of Commons, *Copies of all correspondence*, pp. 35-55.

<sup>60</sup> NJB Plomley, (ed.), *Friendly mission The Tasmanian journals and papers of George Augustus Robinson*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Launceston, 2008), p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> Committee for the care and treatment of the captured Aborigines, *Minutes, 17 February 1830 to 16 September 1833*, CBE1/1/1, TA.

<sup>62</sup> Appendix 14, HRA III, Vol. IX, p. 1053.



24 April 1830, are given in Appendix 2.<sup>63</sup> Meredith clearly blamed the local administration for failing to take measures to counter what he saw as the rising threat to his livelihood from the Aboriginal people (this blaming was entirely in character), and largely exonerated the settlers from fault. He saw nothing but hostility and threat from the Aboriginal people at the time. As to what the solution might be, Meredith advocated a 'Native Embassy' for the groups of Aboriginal people in the north-west and on the Bass Strait islands who could understand some English and communicate to others what the government desired. If that failed, Meredith advocated that the Aboriginal people should be captured with the assistance of blood hounds—to track, not attack, the people—and if that failed, as a last resort, 'annihilation'.<sup>64</sup>

That type of answer may have been what Plomley had in mind when he said that those who gave evidence to the Aborigines Committee were 'extirpationists almost to a man', but, as Windschuttle concluded after his analysis of the answers from each respondent, Meredith's was the most extreme of a range of views, many of which still urged conciliation.<sup>65</sup> If nothing else, Meredith's final view can be described as typical Meredith, where any obstruction to his successful enterprise on the land was to be met with full force, be it in the courts, in the press, or, if necessary, at the point of a gun.

While the Aborigines Committee was still deliberating, in January 1831 George Augustus Robinson led some Aboriginal people down the east coast of the colony. On 9 and 10 January they passed through Meredith's land and heard from nearby resident William Lyne

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<sup>63</sup> He refers to writing his answers several days prior in a letter: Meredith to his wife, 29 April 1830, NS123/1/1 #55, TA.

<sup>64</sup> See Appendix 2, answer nine.

<sup>65</sup> K Windschuttle, *The fabrication of Aboriginal history Vol. one Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847* (Sydney, 2002), pp. 326-350.

a story of cruelty inflicted on the Aboriginal people by Meredith's stock-keepers.<sup>66</sup> A son of Meredith's visited Robinson, but not Meredith himself. On a return trip in March, Robinson's party received sixty and then two hundred pounds of meat from George Meredith, who may have appreciated what Robinson had set out to do.<sup>67</sup> Robinson made no comment about Meredith in his journals at the time and no letters from Meredith survive from this period so we do not know Meredith's opinions on Robinson. Levy grouped Meredith with the 'opposition' against the Robinson 'scheme', but his evidence for this is unconvincing.<sup>68</sup>

### Legislative Council meetings and the 'Black Line'

Although the government reaction to the Aborigines Committee report was muted, with the continuing attacks on settlers in the middle of the year, the press and settlers began calling for more strenuous action by the government.<sup>69</sup> Here, the Legislative Council would become a key driver of policy. Historian Peter Chapman wrote: '... it is not fanciful to see

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<sup>66</sup> Plomley, *Friendly mission*, pp. 344-345.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 353, 355.

<sup>68</sup> MCI Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A colonial benevolent despot* (Melbourne, 1953), p. 119. Here, Levy purported to quote Meredith and Kemp who 'assailed the Government for countenancing such a wild and dangerous scheme', that is, Robinson's 'mission'. Levy quoted: "'We strongly raise our voice ... against *their civilisation*'", then continued: 'these were the same people who urged: "Let them have enough of Redcoats and bullet fare. For every man they murder, hunt them down and drop ten of them. This is our specific—try it!"' Levy's footnote at this point is to C Turnbull, *Black War the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines* (Melbourne, 1974), pp. 80 and 136. Turnbull, on p. 80, footnoted the '... Try it!' quote to J Bonwick, *The last of the Tasmanians* (London, 1870), pp. 66-67. Bonwick did not source the quote. Levy's other reference to '... Try it!', p. 136 of Turnbull, is discussion by Turnbull of Meredith and Kemp blaming Arthur for the hostility between the settlers and the Aboriginal people and does not contain the quote alluded to. Further, the quote by Levy on p. 119 noted above: 'We strongly raise our voice ... against *their civilisation*. The natives are not to be trusted and the lives of all engaged in the mistaken policy of conciliation are never safe for a moment.' appears to have been taken from an editorial of the *Launceston Advertiser*, 26 September 1831, p. 301, except 'conciliation' was used in the original, rather than 'civilization', a few words were omitted without changing the context, and he added the emphasis. In short, Levy's cited sources for condemning Meredith and Kemp for inciting violence against the Aboriginal people fail to support what was written.

<sup>69</sup> Calder, *Levéé, line*, pp. 180-181. Calder reports fifty attacks between June and August 1830, including six murders of settlers.

the Executive Council becoming, during February and March 1831, an arena for the great race relations debate of early colonial Australia ...'.<sup>70</sup>

On 27 August 1830, the Lieutenant-Governor read a letter to the Executive Council from Thomas Anstey, Police Magistrate at Oatlands, about the situation in the Midlands. Arthur quoted Anstey: '...the Aborigines are now irreclaimable, and that the ensuing Spring will be the most bloody that we have yet experienced unless sufficient Military protections should be afforded'.<sup>71</sup> A report from the Aborigines Committee was read, and this concluded that there was malevolence on the part of Aboriginal people in instigating recent attacks, and recommended that the government 'adopt the most vigorous measures, and to repel the Aborigines from the Settled Districts by every means that could be devised, both on the part of the Government, and the Community'. The Executive Council concluded that 'warfare' by the Aboriginal people was underway, that previous attempts to negotiate had failed and that Arthur instigate the action that later became known as the Black Line, or else a 'war of extermination' would ensue.<sup>72</sup>

This apparently finally overcame Arthur's reticence to move with a heavy hand against the Aboriginal people. In Government Order 9, published 9 September 1830, Arthur launched the 'Black Line', where the military, supported by settler volunteers, would form lines to sweep across the south-eastern portion of the colony to capture the Aboriginal people and/or herd them into the Tasman Peninsula.<sup>73</sup> Government Order 11, 22 September 1830, gave more detail and at point eight directed:

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<sup>70</sup> P Chapman, 'Introduction', HRA III, Vol. X, p. xxviii.

<sup>71</sup> Executive Council, 28 August 1830, EC4/1/1, TA, p. 566. The portion of the Minutes in respect of Aboriginal people is transcribed in Appendix 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 570.

<sup>73</sup> Enclosure number 4 in House of Commons, *Copies of all correspondence*, pp. 64-66.

Between the 7th and the 12th of October, Lieutenant Aubin will thoroughly examine the tier extending from the head of the Swan River, north, down to Spring Bay, the southern extremity of his district, in which duty he will be aided, in addition to the military parties stationed at Spring Bay and Little Swan Port, by Captains MacLaine and Leard, Messrs. Meredith, Hawkins, Gatehouse, Buxton, Harte, Amos, Allen, King, Lyne, and all settlers in that district, and by Captain Glover and Lieutenant Steele, with whatever force can be collected at the Carlton and at Sorell by the police magistrate of that district.<sup>74</sup>

Fenton recorded a similar list of surnames of those settlers who 'aided the expedition but were unable to take the field by reason of their age or from other causes'.<sup>75</sup> This surely must be an error. It would be hard to imagine the most prominent settlers in the Great Swan Port district failing to participate in the field, in one form or another. Henry James Emmett, son of HJ Emmett who was offered the editorship of the *Colonist* by Meredith and later became friends with him, wrote an account of his participation in the Black Line but was not near Great Swan Port.<sup>76</sup> In the manuscript he noted two episodes of attacks by Aboriginal people recorded by 'Mr Meredith' (probably Charles Meredith), but this does not add to what was already known elsewhere.<sup>77</sup>

A public meeting was held in Hobart Town on 22 September 1830 with the stated intent of forming a town guard to preserve the town peace while the military and able citizens responded to the Government Orders in respect of the Black Line. The opinions expressed in the meeting were harsh and a quotation illustrates the extent of feeling. Assistant Colonial Surgeon Dr Adam Turnbull was quoted as saying:

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<sup>74</sup> Enclosure number 5 in *ibid*, pp. 66-70. The settlement at Carlton River was known as 'the Carlton'.

<sup>75</sup> Fenton, *History of Tasmania*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>76</sup> HJ Emmett, *Reminiscences of the Black War in Tasmania*, NS1216/1/1, TA.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5 (written on margin). Emmett's account was dictated to his brother in about 1870, according to an introductory statement.

It has been said by Mr Kemp that to us only is this an exterminating state of warfare. But that does not alter the existing state of things. The war would be a war of extermination. It is so already, and a movement upon a large scale as at present proposed, is infinitely preferable to a lingering warfare. ... The present plan will strike them with dismay – they will either be taken or destroyed, or driven into some of the recesses of the interior.<sup>78</sup>

The Black Line—Arthur's act of containment and 'rounding up'—effectively concluded by the end of November when the settlers were released from duty.<sup>79</sup> The exercise is usually regarded as a failure, with only two individuals captured. However, both Ryan and Calder have more recently looked at Arthur's *coup de main* in a more positive light in respect to outcomes, seeing some 'success' in breaking the will of the Aboriginal people and advancing 'conciliator' George Robinson's work in bringing the Aboriginal people into managed locations.<sup>80</sup> Reynolds made the same point.<sup>81</sup>

A meeting held at Waterloo Point (Swansea) in January 1831 of 'Landed proprietors and others' sent an address of thanks to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur expressing gratitude for the Black Line and noting that the district had been free of attack since the operation. Most of the prominent settlers signed the address, but George Meredith did not, although his son, George junior, did sign.<sup>82</sup>

Meredith's opinion of the Black Line is undocumented, but his general nature and failure to sign the address of appreciation in early 1831 may indicate that he might have been

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<sup>78</sup> *Colonial Times*, 24 September 1830, p. 3. At this meeting, former Attorney-General Joseph Gellibrand argued for a more compassionate approach to the indiscriminate killing of the Aboriginal people, but he had little if any support in this view. The same edition of the newspaper reported an attack on Meredith's farm, with two killed, including a soldier, *ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Government Order 13 of 26 November 1830, quoted in Calder, *Levée, line*, p. 186.

<sup>80</sup> L Ryan, 'The Black Line in Van Diemen's Land: success or failure?', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2013), pp. 13-14 and Calder, *Levée, Line*, pp. 187-189.

<sup>81</sup> H Reynolds, *Fate of a free people*, revised edition (Camberwell, 2004), p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> 'Address of the landed Proprietors and others of the District of Great Swan Port' (nd), Papers of Sir George Arthur, Vol. 28, *Aborigines*, ZA2188, ML, SLNSW.

sceptical of the plan's success at the outset and had his contempt for the government deepened by its failure. This ambiguous attitude can be contrasted with that of his erstwhile ally Thomas Gregson, who disapproved of aggression against the indigenous people and thought that the latter were the original owners of the land and had been 'usurped by the British crown'.<sup>83</sup> According to Robert Brain, Gregson refused to serve in the Black Line and did not allow his servants to participate.<sup>84</sup> A public meeting was convened in Hobart in December 1830 to thank Arthur for his efforts in organising and implementing the Black Line and to carry a number of resolutions about the on-going dangers posed by the Aboriginal people and how they might be brought to an end. Towards the end, Gregson spoke with satirical force against the general sentiment of the meeting, and in respect of Arthur's efforts, said:

The vote is for his Excellency's personal exertions. I do not attempt to deny them; but there is such a thing as being actively mischievous. A man may go to the top of Mount Wellington with a harpoon in his hand, to kill a whale; but would not such be absurd!<sup>85</sup>

The Executive Council met on 23 February 1831 to discuss what actions to take following the lack of success with the Black Line.<sup>86</sup> Most discussion concerned Robinson's efforts to conciliate the Aboriginal people and ideas of adapting various islands for their habitation.

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<sup>83</sup> J. Bonwick, *The Lost Tasmanian Race* (London, 1884), p. 87.

<sup>84</sup> RJ Brain, 'Thomas Gregson: A Tasmanian radical', draft and unsubmitted MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1955, p. 28, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania. A transcription of what may have been notes by Gregson indicated little respect of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and noted a number of ways that they and the settlers may have avoided a 'collision', none of which had the Aboriginal people remaining on their traditional lands, although the writer appears to be describing purported actions of the Government, rather than their own advocacy. Transcript of 'Notes found amongst the papers of the late TG Gregson', Allport Family Papers, *Historical notes Tasmania: no. 1. Volume of typescript and original manuscript notes including extracts from Lt. Govt. Collins' order book re Sullivan Bay (Port Phillip); extracts from Rev. Knopwood's sermon and letter book*, ALL14/1/9, TA.

<sup>85</sup> *Colonial Times*, 31 December 1830, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Executive Council, 23 February 1831, EC4/1/1, TA, pp. 622-629. The portion of the Minutes in respect of Aboriginal people is transcribed in HRA III, Vol. X, pp. 463-468.

Robinson was present at the meeting and expressed the view that this was feasible. Chief Justice Pedder queried this, asking if the Aboriginal people might 'pine away when they found their situation one of hopeless imprisonment', essentially arguing for the liberty of the Aboriginal people to pursue their traditional lifestyle.<sup>87</sup> Pedder then asked if a form of treaty could be entered into, with European 'agents' residing with the Aboriginal people, to facilitate movement and to be an avenue for complaint. Historian Jacqueline Fox noted that Pedder was likely mindful of the colonial government's obligations under 'international' law and was proposing a solution other than local 'black letter' law.<sup>88</sup>

Although Arthur dismissed this notion in the following meeting, he did come to realise soon thereafter that 'It was a fatal error in the first settlement of Van Diemen's Land that a treaty was not entered into with the natives' and suggested that the lessons of the colony should be noted for the settlement elsewhere in Australia. His correspondence may have been influential in bringing about the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand in 1840.<sup>89</sup> Arthur advised his new policy of removing Aboriginal people to offshore islands, facilitated by GA Robinson, in a despatch to Secretary of State Murray in April 1831.<sup>90</sup>

A public meeting was convened in Hobart Town on 23 May 1831, ostensibly to put forward an Address to the new King on his succession to the throne, but in the event a range of grievances were added to the proceedings. The grievances were mainly concerning land,

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<sup>87</sup> West quoted Robinson using the same expression: 'They pine away: more than one half have died, not from any positive disease, but from a disease they (physicians) call *'home sickness'*', West, *History of Tasmania*, p. 316.

<sup>88</sup> Fox, *Bound by every tie of duty*, pp. 234-5.

<sup>89</sup> H Reynolds, 'The John West Memorial Lecture' [lecture title], Launceston Historical Society, *1989 Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 1, pp. 2-27; Reynolds, *Free people*, p. 122.

<sup>90</sup> Arthur to Murray, 4 April 1831, HRA III, Vol. X, pp. 460-463.

usury, taxes and representation.<sup>91</sup> The eleventh resolution, on a seemingly unrelated issue, was put by George Meredith:

That upon the accession of the present Colonial administration to the government of this Colony in 1824, the feeling of the native and white population towards each other was as free from excitement and intercourse indulged in between them with as much confidence, generally speaking, as was natural to their relative situations and circumstances, few instances having then occurred of hostile collision, terminating either in loss of life or property to the Colonists; that since that period, a lamentable change has progressively taken place in their mutual feelings and relations, involving a frightful sacrifice of human life, terminating in a system of continued and indiscriminate murder and rapine on the part of the natives, and contemplated military exertion by the Executive Government, no efficient measures having been timely adopted to conciliate or enlighten the Aborigines, or to prevent such excesses.

On one hand this resolution by Meredith, complaining against the administration of Arthur, was in character, but of all the issues he could have chosen, it is interesting that he selected the deterioration of relations between the indigenous people and the settlers. Perhaps he perceived that Aboriginal policy was a weak point of Arthur's. Meredith's letter to his wife the day before the meeting demonstrated his involvement in its organisation and his particular interest in two topics:

[re the meeting] knowing as you do that much of the burthen & still more of the responsibility is thrown upon me on such occasions. It is true that Mess<sup>rs</sup> Horne & Gellibrand are, in this matter, taking an active part, but they are professional men and never even contemplated embracing either the usury question or that connected with the Aborigines and which I must take care occupy a prominent place in our petition home.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Colonial Times*, 25 May 1831, p. 3, *Hobart Town Courier*, 28 May 1831, p. 2. William IV acceded to the throne in June 1830, so the purported reason for calling the meeting appears to have been a smokescreen.

<sup>92</sup> Meredith to his wife, 22 May 1831, NS123/1/1 #62, TA.



## The Freycinet Line

After the completion of the Black Line, no incidents were reported in the Great Swan Port or adjacent east coast areas until October 1831.<sup>93</sup> Then, on 13 October, the hut of Alexander Reid was robbed. He reported this to District Constable Adam Amos and a search was undertaken, without success.<sup>94</sup> A key event occurred a few days later that led to the formation of what has been termed the 'Freycinet Line'.<sup>95</sup> George Meredith wrote to Arthur reporting that 'a tribe' had re-appeared on 'the neck' between his whale fishery and Schouten Passage, at the southern end of what is now known as the Freycinet Peninsula, but then generally known as 'the Shootens'.<sup>96</sup> Meredith's local whale fishery was at the location today known as 'The Fisheries', adjacent to the town of Coles Bay, and 'the neck' was described later by participant John Lyne as being 'from the head of Oyster Bay to Wine Glass Bay'.<sup>97</sup>

In his lengthy letter, Meredith explained the sequence of events, although his urgent message regarding assistance is mixed with criticisms of the local Police Magistrate at Waterloo Point, Francis Aubin. He stated that two days after the raid on Alexander Reid (noted above), he sent notice of it to Aubin, with a request that the magistrate send a party to his fishery in preparation for the arrival of the Aboriginal people. No-one was sent, so Meredith dispatched his son, Charles, to the fishery to prepare a signal to advise if the Aboriginal people had arrived. A signal was received, and a message sent to Aubin, but only

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<sup>93</sup> Compilation in Plomley, *Aboriginal / settler clash*, pp. 96-99.

<sup>94</sup> Examination of Alexander Reid, Colonial Secretary's Office, CSO1/1/316/7578 (Vol.1), TA, pp. 990-991.

<sup>95</sup> E Stoddart, *The Freycinet line, 1831* (Coles Bay, 2003); Calder, *Levéé, line*, p. 192. Ryan, *Black Line* at pp. 13-14, called it the 'Third Line'.

<sup>96</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 21 October 1831, with two 'notes', Colonial Secretary's Office, CSO1/1/316/7578 (Vol. 1), TA, pp. 1001-1014, although several copies of the same letter are included there. They are reproduced in more readable form in *Colonist*, 28 December 1832, pp. 2-3.

<sup>97</sup> Lyne, *Reminiscences*, NS854/1/1, TA, p. 23.

a sergeant was present. The sergeant sent a small party, as did Meredith and Amos, each via boat. The sergeant's party had returned to Waterloo Point after only a day, so Meredith sent notes to District Constable Amos and 'the person in charge' at Waterloo Point requesting assistance. A party of fourteen was sent by Amos, and Meredith reinforced his contingent.<sup>98</sup>

Colonial Secretary Burnett acted on Meredith's letter to Arthur by writing 'immediate and urgent' to James Gordon, the Police Magistrate at Richmond and also Francis Aubin at Waterloo Point, commanding them to act with 'utmost promptitude' and to use 'every possible exertion' using 'the Civil and Military force of your district' to capture the Aboriginal people reported by Meredith.<sup>99</sup>

On 24 October Meredith sent Arthur an update, reporting that between seventy and eighty people had formed a sentry line at the 'Schooten peninsula' and that up to one hundred would be there the following day. Apparently unable to help himself, Meredith included a sniping remark about the lack of military/police support.<sup>100</sup>

A final letter from Meredith, a few days later, reported the failure of the line in capturing or containing any Aboriginal people, with the latter having rushed through the line on the evening of 25 October, between two stations manned by the military, due to a 'culpable

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<sup>98</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 21 October 1831, Colonial Secretary's Office, CSO1/1/316/7578 (Vol.1), TA, pp. 1001-1014. Note that Meredith is maintaining here at least the pretence of wanting only government officials to directly confront the Aboriginal people. This attitude would change.

<sup>99</sup> Burnett to Gordon and Aubin, 26 October 1831, Colonial Secretary's Office, *Letterbooks of Correspondence Addressed to District Police Magistrates, 11 March 1831 to 24 March 1835*, CSO41/1/2, TA, pp. 85-86. Aubin was also asked for an explanation of his absence from Waterloo Point.

<sup>100</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 24 October 1831, reprinted in *Colonist*, 28 December 1832, p. 2.

neglect of duty' by one or more of the soldiers.<sup>101</sup> He questioned why more official resources were not on hand, and ended his letter:

I must beg with deference to submit, that the Local Government has too long delayed those energetic and efficient measures, which can alone be relied upon under existing circumstances; and, although the happy alternative is no longer an option, that of securing and removing the Aborigines without effusions of blood, their atrocities may be checked by a generally organized plan, and due encouragement held out to those, who from habit and experience are competent to the peculiar service required; and for which the military are not calculated, otherwise, than as auxiliaries. Trusting to the importance of the subject, as a justification of this obtrusion of my unsolicited sentiment.<sup>102</sup>

The inference is fairly clear—at the end of a long 'guerrilla' type campaign by Aboriginal people, and with the failure of the Black Line and his own Freycinet Line, Meredith suggested that certain of the civilian population be authorised to hunt down and kill the Aboriginal people, with 'auxiliary' support from the military. Clements drew the same conclusion.<sup>103</sup> In reply, Colonial Secretary Burnett was dismissive.<sup>104</sup>

As a postscript to this event, it might be noted that historian Nick Brodie in a recent revision of the nature of the conflict between European settlers and Aboriginal people, began his discussion of the above incident with 'That October Arthur also discretely launched another military campaign'.<sup>105</sup> This was in keeping with his overall argument that the conflict between the settlers and the Aboriginal people was covertly orchestrated and fought by the authorities as a hostile military campaign. It can be seen that the 'Freycinet Line', or

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<sup>101</sup> John Lyne gave the number as about two hundred and groups of three men were spaced about one hundred yards apart. Lyne supports Meredith re the military, writing that a soldier gave an alarm as Aboriginal people rushed past, but no-one was seen: Lyne, *Reminiscences*, NS854/1/1, TA, pp. 23-24.

<sup>102</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 27 October 1831, reprinted in *Colonist*, 28 December 1832, pp. 2-3. This letter does not appear in Colonial Secretary's Office, CSO1/1/316/7578, TA, with the related correspondence.

<sup>103</sup> Clements, *Black War*, p. 167.

<sup>104</sup> Burnett to Meredith, 3 November 1831, reprinted in *The Colonist*, 28 December 1832, p. 3. This letter also does not appear in CSO1/1/316/7578, TA, with the related correspondence.

<sup>105</sup> N Brodie, *The Vandemonian war* (Richmond, 2017), p. 363.

the 'Schoutens Operation' as Brodie labelled it, was decidedly a local initiative, not a government one. With Aubin's absence, the local authorities were unprepared for it and only regrouped for a later offensive after complaints from Meredith.

### George Meredith junior

George Meredith's first son, George junior, was entitled to receive a land grant on arrival in the colony and took five hundred acres to the south of what became known as the Meredith River after the Amos clan abandoned the area to take all their land to the north.<sup>106</sup> The break-down in the relationship between Meredith and his eldest son in the early 1830s was discussed in Chapter 4. Mary Meredith wrote to George junior in February 1832, noting that 'you may for a time at least quit Swan Port'.<sup>107</sup> In September 1833, George junior was in Sydney, where he took the *Defiance*, a twenty-five-ton schooner, on a voyage to trade with sealers along the south coast of mainland Australia. He was intending to go on to the Swan River colony (Western Australia), but was wrecked off Cape Howe, on the New South Wales south coast. He then made his way to Kangaroo Island in a whale boat with several others, arriving in early 1834.<sup>108</sup> They established themselves there and built a house for Meredith 'and his native wife'.<sup>109</sup>

George Augustus Robinson later recorded witnesses claiming that George Meredith junior stole Aboriginal women and traded them amongst the sealers along the South Australian and Victorian coasts.<sup>110</sup> Robinson heard from 'Matilda' on 23 July 1836 that she was present

<sup>106</sup> Lands and Surveys Department, *Copies of land grants issued*, LSD354/1/5, TA, p. 210; M Ward, MM Ferris and T Brookes, *Houses & estates of old Glamorgan* (Swansea, 2017), p. 102.

<sup>107</sup> Mary Meredith to George Meredith junior, *Mary Ann Meredith (1795-1843). Mrs George Meredith (nee Evans). Mary Ann Meredith. Letters to George Merediths children. 3 letters*, NS123/1/14, TA.

<sup>108</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 30 September 1833, p. 2; J Rintoul, *Esperance yesterday and today* (Perth, 1964), p. 13.

<sup>109</sup> *Perth Gazette*, 3 October 1835, p. 575.

<sup>110</sup> NJB Plomley, *Weep in silence: A history of the Flinders Island Aboriginal establishment, with the Flinders Island journal of George Augustus Robinson 1835-1839* (Hobart, 1987), pp. 353, 366, 402, 405, 414-415, 670-

when Meredith junior was killed by Aboriginal people; the date is unknown but was estimated by Plomley to be in 1835 or as late as April 1836.<sup>111</sup> Robinson commented:

George Meredith [junior] was speared by the natives on the coast of New Holland, no doubt in retaliation for the injuries he had done to them. This was a just retribution. Many aggressions had been committed by the Merediths on the natives at Oyster Bay.<sup>112</sup>

Robinson added that 'The New Holland women were the same that had been stolen from their country adjacent to Kangaroo Island by George Meredith jnr'.<sup>113</sup>

George Meredith senior only learned of his son's presence at Kangaroo Island in early April 1836, from a sighting someone made sixteen months previously and he proposed opening a line of communication to his son via a third party.<sup>114</sup> It must have been devastating then for him to learn shortly afterwards of his death—it was announced in the Hobart Town papers the same month as Meredith first heard.<sup>115</sup> Eight years later, some additional details were reported in the South Australian press, to the effect that Meredith junior had an Aboriginal 'wife' called Sal at Kangaroo Island, and several young Aboriginal men as servants. One day when visiting Yankalilla Bay, on the mainland, he was killed with a tomahawk by one of two young men, who had desired Sal.<sup>116</sup>

Conclusions in respect of Meredith's relationship with Aboriginal people will be made in the 'Conclusions' section of this chapter.

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671, 677; NJB Plomley, and K Henley, 'The sealers of Bass Strait and Cape Barren Island community', *Papers & Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 37, No. 2-3 (June, 1990), p. 90.

<sup>111</sup> Plomley, *Weep in silence*, pp. 366, 964.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, diary entry for 9 May 1836, p. 353.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, diary entry for 23 July 1836, p. 366.

<sup>114</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 April 1836, NS123/1/1 #324, TA.

<sup>115</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 22 April 1836, p. 3.

<sup>116</sup> *Southern Australian*, 24 September 1844, p. 2.

## BUSHRANGERS

### Background

The phenomenon of ‘bushrangers’—escaped convicts and others who had taken to the bush and supported themselves by robberies of settlers and government alike—was well established in New South Wales even before any colony in Van Diemen’s Land was established. John ‘Black’ Caesar arrived with the First Fleet in 1788 and roamed the bush around Port Jackson until he was killed in 1796.<sup>117</sup>

In Van Diemen’s Land, the origins of bushranging as a significant imposition on society can be traced to the hardships of lack of adequate food and poor conditions in the colony soon after its establishment. Giblin quoted Robert Knopwood’s diary of 1806 recording the lack of wheat and other basic foodstuffs and harsh conditions prevailing.<sup>118</sup> Knopwood went on to note that convict servants, sent out into the bush to hunt kangaroo, soon discovered that they could survive there on that nutritious food source and whatever else they could catch, without the need to return to the privations of the settlement. David Collins acknowledged an on-going problem with escapees when he issued a ‘General order’ on 30 November 1807, whereby the ‘dangerous miscreants’ at large could surrender themselves without being ‘proceeded against’ for crimes committed since their absconding.<sup>119</sup> Committing robberies of settlers and of general stores for ‘luxuries’ such as sugar and tobacco, these absconders became ‘bushrangers’, or ‘banditti’ as they were called in despatches.<sup>120</sup> Giblin also attributed the rise of bushranging during the Lieutenant-

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<sup>117</sup> ‘Capture of John or Black Caesar’, NRS906, reel 6037, New South Wales State Archives.

<sup>118</sup> RW Giblin, *The early history of Tasmania, Vol. II*, J Collier, (ed.) (Melbourne, 1939), pp. 52-53.

<sup>119</sup> D Collins, ‘General and garrison orders, 1803-08’, A341, microfilm CY1151, ML, SLNSW.

<sup>120</sup> Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, pp. 51-52.

Governorship of Thomas Davey to the lack of a local court of criminal jurisdiction, which resulted in time and expense of sending prisoners to Sydney and hence many cases were not judged at all, except for local summary justice.<sup>121</sup> Stefan Petrow expanded this argument to include the period of all Lieutenant-Governors up to Arthur with the soldiers and convict constables contributing to the problem by virtue of their small numbers and poor training.<sup>122</sup> The activities of bushrangers were described by Fenton as:

... armed bushrangers, who organised themselves into bands, and overran the island in every direction ... They burned wheat stacks and barns, slaughtered the sheep and cattle of the settlers, pillaged their houses, took away horses, robbed from the person, committed the most barbarous cruelties, not excepting murder in cold blood.<sup>123</sup>

John West, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, also noted that the colony was severely taxed by the violence of bushrangers. He commented that some settlers, of 'the lowest class', stock-keepers and others either acquiesced in the bushrangers' ways or actively cooperated with them, either out of sympathy or having little other option, protection by authorities being almost non-existent.<sup>124</sup> Carlo Canteri was the first to explore a possible relationship between prominent settler Edward Lord and notorious bushranger Michael Howe.<sup>125</sup> James Boyce developed this theme, and went further, arguing that Lord was in 'probable partnership' with Howe, evidencing that Lord's extensive land-holdings were never attacked by Howe or his gang.<sup>126</sup> Writing on Lord in particular, Alison Alexander

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130.

<sup>122</sup> S Petrow, 'Military police', bushrangers and the struggle for order in Van Diemen's Land 1803-1826', *Law & History: Journal of the Australia & New Zealand Law and History Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2014), p. 87.

<sup>123</sup> Fenton, *History of Tasmania*, p. 41.

<sup>124</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, p. 358.

<sup>125</sup> C Canteri, 'The origins of Australian social banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805-1818', BLitt thesis, University of Oxford, 1975, pp. 78, 123.

<sup>126</sup> PJ Boyce, 'An environmental history of British settlement in Van Diemen's Land: The making of a distinct people', PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2006, pp. 148-149. For Howe, see: KR Von Stieglitz, 'Howe,

produced further evidence of Lord's collusion with Howe in the period around 1816.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, prominent settlers who were targeted by the likes of Howe often faced ruin for the several years up to 1818, as argued by Boyce.<sup>128</sup>

Maxwell-Stewart argued that the means of the colonial authorities to control bushranging in the early 1810s was limited. After an initial policy of pardons for convicts who returned proved ineffective, an escalation in 1813 led to use of the gibbet on Hunter Island (where the body was displayed for some days) and lashes numbered in the hundreds.<sup>129</sup> In May 1814, Governor Macquarie issued a proclamation from Sydney that twenty-nine named bushrangers would be pardoned if they surrendered by the following December. This had the consequence that a sustained outbreak of 'indemnified' violence and robbery occurred up to December and then many of those that surrendered and were pardoned took to the bush again.<sup>130</sup> Petrow recorded the small numbers of bushrangers actually caught and punished, including eighteen executed and twenty-seven re-transported.<sup>131</sup>

In Van Diemen's Land, Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey's next substantial measure was to declare martial law on 25 April 1815, advised to Macquarie in a despatch a few days later.<sup>132</sup> Macquarie replied immediately, censuring Davey for exceeding his authority, but

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Michael (1787–1818)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/howe-michael-2206/text2857>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 1 May 2018.

<sup>127</sup> A Alexander, *Corruption and skullduggery: Edward Lord, Maria Riseley and Hobart's tempestuous beginnings* (Dunnsyde, 2015), pp. 171–172.

<sup>128</sup> Boyce, 'Environmental history', pp. 149–150.

<sup>129</sup> H Maxwell-Stewart, 'I could not blame the Rangers ...' Tasmanian bushranging, convicts and convict management', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (September, 1995), p. 116.

<sup>130</sup> Proclamation relating to bushrangers, 28 May 1814, HRA I, Vol. VIII, p. 264; Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, p. 133.

<sup>131</sup> Petrow, 'Military police', p. 90.

<sup>132</sup> Davey to Macquarie, 30 April 1815, enclosed in Macquarie to Bathurst, 24 June 1815, HRA I, Vol. VIII, pp. 566–568.



did not revoke, or order the revocation of, Davey's proclamation.<sup>133</sup> Giblin noted that the martial law succeeded in reducing the incidence of bushrangers' crimes until it was eventually revoked by Macquarie later in the year.<sup>134</sup>

William Sorell replaced Davey in April 1817 and his over-riding task was control of bushrangers and in particular Michael Howe and his gang. Sorell raised a public subscription to incentivise the military and civilians to combat bushranging, and this had success, with near-contemporary historian John West noting that 'in less than three months the greater proportion of the bushrangers were destroyed or captured'.<sup>135</sup> Howe was eventually killed in the bush in October 1818 and then followed a period of relative tranquillity in respect of attacks by bushrangers.<sup>136</sup>

### Meredith's experiences with bushrangers

George Meredith observed and disapproved of the state of law in the colony early on. In a letter to his wife in February 1822, he wrote:

To any person calling on you – speak of the Law as it stands in the colony as a reproach to those who have had the power to alter it – and the application of it as a disgrace to all parties concerned in enforcing it. Principals and attorneys etc.<sup>137</sup>

His concerns notwithstanding, Meredith's first few years in the colony were a period of relative quiescence in respect of bushranging, but the rise of Matthew Brady would change that. Brady was convicted of stealing at Lancashire Quarter Sessions in April 1820 and

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<sup>133</sup> Macquarie to Davey, 25 May 1815, HRA III, Vol. II, pp. 110-111.

<sup>134</sup> Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, p. 135.

<sup>135</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, p. 58.

<sup>136</sup> Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, p. 156; Petrow, 'Military police', p. 94.

<sup>137</sup> Meredith to his wife, 6 February 1822, G4/1, UTAS S&R.

transported on the *Juliana*. In 1823 he was sent to Macquarie Harbour, but escaped the following year, sailed to the Derwent and thereafter took up bushranging.<sup>138</sup>

During this time, District Constable Adam Amos had recorded in his diary the activities of bushrangers in the Great Swan Port area, where he and Meredith had settled.<sup>139</sup> Amos wrote numerous times of receiving warrants for bushrangers and pursuing them during 1822 and 1823.<sup>140</sup> On 24 June 1824, Amos made a prescient entry in his diary:

24<sup>th</sup> Constable David Beck arrived express from Hobart Town with a packet containing nottage that fourteen convicts had made thier escape from Macquarrie Harbour & had landed from ane oppen boat, on the north side of the river Derwent, that they committed several depredations on thier way up the river, that it was suspected thier intention was to pennetrate to the interiour and desired me to give nottage to the inhabitants of my district to prevent them from having any fire arms or ammunition should they proceed in this direction and to give notice to the whaling partys in the neighbourhood of Oyster Bay.<sup>141</sup>

This of course referred to the original escape of Brady and during the following week Amos reported a party of bushrangers in his area. None were captured or identified, but it appears that Amos believed them to be the Macquarie Harbour escapees. Additional soldiers and police arrived the following week and searches continued throughout August, led by Lieutenant William Gunn.<sup>142</sup>

Petrow described the arrival of George Arthur as Lieutenant-Governor in May 1824 as 'a turning point in the struggle for law and order and more support for the military both internally and externally'.<sup>143</sup> Meredith wrote to Arthur in late July 1824 on his concern

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<sup>138</sup> L Robson, *A history of Tasmania: Vol. I Van Diemen's Land from the earliest times to 1855* (Melbourne, 1983), pp. 141-142.

<sup>139</sup> Amos, *Diary*, 689A, GSBHS.

<sup>140</sup> For example, *ibid*, entry for 22 April 1823.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, entry for 24 June 1824.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, entries through August 1824.

<sup>143</sup> Petrow, 'Military police', p. 97.

about bushrangers, particularly those who had escaped from Macquarie Harbour and he noted that bushranger activities at Great Swan Port would have been greater, except for the work of Gunn.<sup>144</sup> In October 1824, bushranging again increased in the region, mainly to the south of where Meredith lived, in the vicinity of Little Swan Port, around the properties of Thomas Buxton and John Harte. Bushranger James McCabe was apprehended on 31 October on Buxton's farm, but he escaped while being taken to Hobart. McCabe returned to Little Swan Port in late November and was pursued for several days by Amos in early December.<sup>145</sup>

On 8 October 1825 bushranging came to Meredith's door when Matthew Brady, James McCabe and their gang attacked George Meredith's huts, which at that time would have been *Creek Hut* on the south bank of the Meredith River.<sup>146</sup> Amos recorded it as follows:

8<sup>th</sup>. My brothers son came to us this afternoon about 5 o'clock to inform us that a party of Bushrangers had that day about eleven forenoon come to plunder Mr Meredith, that Mr M wase from home, that a man on horseback wase sent after Lieut Gunn and party who it seems had left Mr Ms hut a few hourers befor that. Mr Charles Meredith who had come away from home after seeing the roobers take the boat oars to the boat &c. had informed one of the stock keepers so and that David Rayner was on his way to us, who would inform further. He arived about sunsett, and only repeated what I had befor heard. ... I heard after dark that they bushrangers had left the place about five oclock and made a full suipe gon in a Boat and that Hunt one of Mr Merediths men had gon off with them that the Boat went towards Scrutton Hills [very likely meaning the 'Shooten Hills', the Freycinet Peninsula].<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 26 July 1824, Colonial Secretary's Office, CSO1/1/15, TA. In this letter, Meredith prioritised his concerns about bushrangers ahead of those about Aboriginal people.

<sup>145</sup> Amos, *Diary*, entries through October 1824, 7 November and 1-3 December 1824, 689A, GSBHS.

<sup>146</sup> Ward, *et al*, *Houses & estates*, p. 102.

<sup>147</sup> Amos, *Diary*, entry for 8 and 9 October 1825, 689A, GSBHS. Lieutenant William Gunn led the military detachment that was stationed at the time at Great Swan Port.

Meredith was absent at the time of the attack, which was well reported in the newspapers.<sup>148</sup>

Meredith wrote to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur the day following the attack, noting that, while his wife and daughters had been treated with courtesy, almost everything of value had been stolen or destroyed. Meredith directly blamed Arthur for the situation, noting that no military or police had been stationed in the area, in spite of him having approached Arthur and others in his administration for such help.<sup>149</sup> In fact, Lieutenant Gunn and a small party of soldiers had been stationed at Meredith's for some days prior to the attack, and Superintendent of Police Adolarius WH Humphrey wrote to him informing him as much.<sup>150</sup>

After Arthur's reply (not preserved), Meredith wrote again with a long complaint about the lack of a Police Magistrate locally and stated that Sorell had promised one when he granted Meredith and Amos their land. He emphasised the dangers from bushrangers and also added the deaths of his men at the hands of Aboriginal people.<sup>151</sup> Yet another letter followed, this time to Arthur's secretary John Montagu, in which he complained about several specific military personnel in the district and how they would not take his orders.<sup>152</sup> It goes without saying that this continual hectoring of the government would have merely served to act against Meredith's own interests but it was entirely in character for him. The attack by Brady on Meredith's home, and Meredith's blaming Arthur's administration for

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<sup>148</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 15 October 1825, p. 2, 22 October 1825, p. 2 and 29 October 1825, p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 9 October 1825, Colonial Secretary's Office, CSO1/1/896/19043, TA.

<sup>150</sup> E FitzSymonds, [J Dally] (ed.), *Brady, McCabe, Dunne ... Bushrangers in Van Diemen's Land 1824-1827* (Adelaide, 1979), p. 59. This was a reproduction of Calder's series of articles in the *Mercury* newspaper in 1873, with supplemental material. The part concerning Meredith was reported at: *Mercury*, 19 August 1873, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 22 November 1825, Colonial Secretary's Office, CSO1/1/896/19043, TA, pp. 170-173.

<sup>152</sup> Meredith to Montagu, 25 December 1825, *ibid*, pp. 174-179.

it was one of their earlier points of disagreement and set the tone for their relationship until Arthur departed, over a decade later.

A letter from Meredith to his wife in early April 1826 after he had interviewed Brady in gaol after his capture yields some insights into both Brady and Meredith and the relevant section is transcribed in full in Appendix 4.

At first he denied that he had any prejudice against me or that they should have hurt me but afterwards frankly admitted that it was well for me that I was not at home. He states that they received no information from any one previously to their arrival at the place, that they arrived the previous day before & intended to have attacked us on that day at 12 o'clock & took their station in the morning on the Bathing House rock but taking out a glass got a sight of Gunn and knew there must be a party with us. ... They again watched the following morning & saw the party leave about 10 o'clock & after a sufficient lapse of time came down to the attack. He declares he neither knew or cared whether I was at home or not adding what could have I done against them alone or with a single man or so to assist me. I was truly amazed at this statement which I now believe to be true & could not help exclaiming that I would gladly give a hundred guineas to have them make their attack again even if I had but one man to assist me & knew of them coming. He very coolly replied it was no use me boasting now that it would have been all the same. Had I been at home & fired upon them they would have surrounded and fired the hut.<sup>153</sup>

This is a useful insight into the careful *modus operandi* of the Brady gang and Meredith's self-confidence against armed bushrangers—at least with them behind bars. Elsewhere in the letter, Meredith revealed that, contrary to what was later written by James Calder, Brady told him that his convict servant Henry Hunt had not been killed by a drunken McCabe: 'so far from killing or quarrelling with him they gave him money & a watch & that he went either to England or the Straits' for his help in operating their get-away boat.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 April 1826, G4/11, UTAS S&R.

<sup>154</sup> FitzSymonds, *Brady*, p. 62. FitzSymonds noted that Calder produced no authority for his assertion that Hunt was shot dead, but Meredith's letter revealed that it was a story being put around at the time. Henry Hunt was transported on the *Medway* in 1820 and was assigned to Meredith. His conduct record revealed that he received 50 lashes for neglect of duty, insolence and disobedience of orders of his master in 1821,

The last thing of relevance the letter revealed is that Meredith thanked Brady for his 'decorous & respectful conduct' to his wife and daughters, confirming Brady's reputation as not usually being threatening to women.<sup>155</sup> The attack appears to have shaken Meredith, as his friend John Kerr wrote in late October 1825 sympathising with Meredith contemplating 'removing' from his present residence.<sup>156</sup> Meredith's attorney George Cartwright wrote sympathetically not long after, suggesting that the Lieutenant-Governor should not only make Meredith a magistrate, but put a military force under him. Also, he gave the news that McCabe had been taken, and was in prison.<sup>157</sup>

Matthew Brady was wounded and captured by John Batman in early March 1826, near Launceston.<sup>158</sup> He was tried and executed in Hobart in early May.<sup>159</sup> After 1826, bushranging continued, but no leaders emerged and no wanton acts of violence were reported for a number of years.<sup>160</sup> On the east coast, sporadic attacks occurred through the years to the 1850s, but no significant incidents and no specific attacks on the Meredith farm are recorded.<sup>161</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In bushrangers and Aboriginal people, George Meredith faced opposition unlike any other he had or would confront in the government, and his reaction was similarly atypical. The

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but it contains no detail after that: Convict Department, *Convict surnames beginning with H*, CON31/1/18, TA, p. 98.

<sup>155</sup> J Bonwick, *The bushrangers; illustrating the early days of Van Diemen's Land*, first published in Melbourne in 1856, facsimile ed. (Hobart, 1967), p. 68. Bonwick labelled Brady 'The prince of bushrangers'.

<sup>156</sup> Kerr to Meredith, 25 October 1825, NS123/1/4, TA.

<sup>157</sup> Cartwright to Meredith, 7 November 1825, *ibid*. Meredith was never made a magistrate or entered into the Commission of the Peace.

<sup>158</sup> *Colonial Times*, 17 March 1826, p. 3; Arthur to Bathurst, 11 April 1826; HRA III, Vol. V, p. 138-139.

<sup>159</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 May 1826, p. 3.

<sup>160</sup> M Korbell, 'Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1824-1834', BA (Hons) thesis, University of Tasmania, 1973, pp. 35-42.

<sup>161</sup> Parker, 'Some records of Great Swan Port', pp. G6-G8.

bushranging threat passed relatively quickly, but it was the cause of Meredith's first substantial disagreement with Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, over the lack of protection for his house and family. Meredith understood bushranging as an evil that needed direct confrontation by the police and military and the governments perceived lack of action gave him a grievance, one of many to come.

When he first got onto his land, the situation in respect of danger from Aboriginal people was more benign than the stories he had heard on arrival in the colony. On the evidence of his writings that have been preserved, Meredith did not feel very threatened by Aboriginal people for most of the 1820s, and at least until 1826 he prioritised the danger from bushrangers ahead of that posed by the indigenous people. If we can believe what he wrote in 1824, he held back from blaming the attacks on his livestock 'personally upon their heads' and even after the fatality of one of his men, he merely wanted the Aboriginal people to be kept away. The attacks on the settlers increased through the 1820s, for reasons likely to be related to early and continuing indiscriminate attacks on the Aboriginal people and the stealing of women by convict servants, stock hut-keepers and sealers.

Meredith habitually wrote to his wife privately, and to the government semi-publicly, expressing exactly what he thought and demanded in respect of many and varied situations—he rarely held back. Yet as attacks by Aboriginal people escalated during the 1820s, we see no evidence in any of his writing of the hysteria and advocacy of direct violence against the indigenous people that other settlers were urging in their letters to the government and that was being advocated in public meetings in Hobart Town.

Throughout this time, Meredith left his young wife and family on his isolated farm, supported by a number of convict servants and other workmen, while he undertook

business in Hobart Town and elsewhere. This seems to demonstrate either a genuine lack of concern or an extraordinary complacency. Was Meredith so obsessed with his business and campaigns in Hobart Town that he left his wife and family in harm's way? Did he not appreciate the possible danger? Or did he think that the danger was not substantial? We have no evidence as to his attitude to the 'roving parties' or to George Robinson's conciliation efforts, although Meredith may have approved of both if they lessened the threat to his farm.

After the peak of violence in 1828, Meredith changed his previous apparent attitude. His submission to the Aborigines Committee in early 1830 was characteristically critical of the government, but he finally concluded that if all else failed, then the indigenous people had to be 'annihilated'. He was also characteristically critical of the Black Line insofar as it was an Arthurian initiative. After the failure of his own Freycinet Line, he went further than before, suggesting that private settlers be allowed to shoot the Aboriginal people.

This final position of his might be regarded as 'typical Meredith', in that he directly advocated the elimination of an obstacle and risk to his livelihood. Yet he was very late coming to that position, well after many other settlers and townspeople. If so, then that was uncharacteristic. There is some weak evidence that Meredith may have felt some empathy for the indigenous people at first, perhaps for reasons of honour or paternalism, or he may simply have not been attuned to the dangers, spending so much time as he did, away from his farm.

Put in a wider context, Meredith was a relatively small player in a circumstance that today might be seen as inevitable from the time the British Government embarked on the somewhat *ad-hoc* settlement of Van Diemen's Land in response to a perceived colonisation



threat from France. The development of a substantial convict colony soon followed, together with free settlers who were encouraged to take both land and convict servants to work it. The survivalist administration of Collins was followed by the somewhat chaotic one of Davey and then the benevolence of Sorell. When Arthur arrived in 1824, he found a colony with an ever-expanding free settler base pushing out into the lands of the Aboriginal people, with most of the 'front line' manned by the 'lower classes' of the society with little supervision and probably little care as to how they interacted with the Aboriginal people. As the clashes escalated, most in authority, and especially Arthur, realised and openly stated that the deteriorating situation between the races was the fault of the Europeans. The administrators were caught in a dilemma of their own making. They granted land to the settlers and required them to take convicts, while at the same time being self-appointed protectors of the indigenous people who were being attacked and displaced. Arthur's personal morality held out hope that a fair solution could be found, but by 1828 the situation was out of control. The antipathy towards Arthur by many settlers such as Meredith did not incline them to help the government solve any problem, including finding a way for the settlers and Aboriginal people to live harmoniously together. Finally, the course of events to 1831 gave Meredith further reasons for finding fault with Arthur's administration. In the 1830 questionnaire, he squarely blamed Arthur for the level of hostility in the Aboriginal people, and for failing to act decisively to that point. He may have found some grim satisfaction in the failure of the Black Line.

## CHAPTER 6: CAMPAIGNS FOR THE COMMON GOOD? INDEPENDENCE, TRIAL BY JURY AND A HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

### INTRODUCTION

Earlier chapters, describing George Meredith's upbringing, emigration and initial activities in Van Diemen's Land, concluded that he was driven by a wish to be 'independent', unfettered by neighbours and not be reliant on others. He was also shown to have a dogged determination to have his own way and to 'take the fight' up to individuals who opposed him. He was a good networker, but he had little time for the local administration. In his personal relationships, evidence emerged that his motivation in many interactions with his family was for his personal success, rather than familial love.

This chapter examines Meredith's first ventures into the public sphere and will show that he was prepared to work with others of like mind to achieve an objective, but often with a different motivation.<sup>1</sup> On all these issues—independence from New South Wales, 'trial by jury' and an elected House of Assembly—we find Meredith on the public stage, seeming to be campaigning for the betterment of his new home and the 'rights of Englishmen'—the common good. Yet, as with the love professed for his family, it will be argued that his campaigning was essentially self-serving, first to be able to 'get a better deal' from an independent, local administration and Supreme Court, and then to have points of attack on Arthur, whom he fought to destabilise and arguably to have replaced.

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<sup>1</sup> His campaigns regarding the press began early but will be treated with later ones in the following chapter.

## THE CALL FOR INDEPENDENCE FROM NEW SOUTH WALES

The seeds of independence of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales were first sown with the appointment of John Thomas Bigge to report on conditions in New South Wales (including its dependency, Van Diemen's Land) in January 1819.<sup>2</sup> Bigge arrived in Hobart Town in February 1820 and began interviewing administrators and settlers and observing the workings of the colony.

Bigge found a number of differences between how Van Diemen's Land was administered under Sorell and the policies enacted by Governor Macquarie around Sydney, and also noted a number of specific areas where 'rule from Sydney' was inconvenient, impractical, or felt as unjust by those in Van Diemen's Land. Bigge cited several such cases in a letter to Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Earl Bathurst, namely the administration of land and land grants, the need to travel to Sydney for certain higher court cases, and the distribution of stores and convicts.<sup>3</sup> These were all issues that directly affected Meredith after he arrived. In the same letter to Bathurst, Bigge canvassed the possibility of the administrative separation of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales.

Bigge's three reports were published in June 1822, February 1823 and March 1823 respectively, and they reached Hobart Town later the same years.<sup>4</sup> Bigge's work led to the *New South Wales Act* 4 Geo. IV c. 96 being proclaimed on 19 July 1823, with clauses allowing, amongst other things, a Legislative Council in New South Wales, the eventual

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<sup>2</sup> Commission of John Thomas Bigge, 6 January 1819, F Watson, (ed.), *Historical records of Australia, Series I, Governors' despatches to and from England, Vol. X January 1819-December 1822* (Sydney, 1917), pp. 3-4. Henceforth this series will be cited in the format HRA [series], Vol. [number], [page number(s)], irrespective of general editor; full citations are given in the bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> Bigge to Bathurst, 11 February 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 696-697.

<sup>4</sup> The first on the 'State of the Colony of New South Wales' (including Van Diemen's Land); the second on the 'Judicial establishments of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land' and the third on 'The state of Agriculture and Trade ... in New South Wales' (including Van Diemen's Land).

independence of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales, the creation of Supreme Courts in the two colonies, and the attendant appointment of Chief Justices in both.<sup>5</sup>

Lieutenant-Governor Sorell's position had been undermined by his effective abandonment of his wife and family in England and living with his mistress, Louisa Kent, at Government House in Hobart.<sup>6</sup> This was taken as reprehensible by the 'polite society' of the colony. Bigge was also asked to investigate Sorell's domestic situation and he subsequently told Bathurst that he had refused to be hosted by Sorell at Government House during his visit.<sup>7</sup>

Around the same time, George Arthur, the Superintendent of British Honduras, was in England waiting and hoping for a new appointment, not only for financial reasons, but also to restore his standing, which he felt was undermined by several incidents in Honduras.<sup>8</sup> One issue which damaged Arthur was his contest against slavers. Arthur's morality found him opposed to the practices of the slavers, but the laws in place were complex, in parts arcane, and were found not to necessarily support Arthur's position. In the slave-owners, he was against a powerful force who actively agitated against him both locally and in London. As he would later in Van Diemen's Land, he blamed 'a few discontented settlers' for acting against him—rather than slavers, in the new colony these would be the likes of Meredith and his ally, Thomas Gregson.<sup>9</sup> Arthur became ill and went to England to recover in 1822, with his future under a cloud.

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<sup>5</sup> RW Giblin, *The early history of Tasmania, Vol. II*, J Collier, (ed.) (Melbourne, 1928), p. 357 *et. seq.*; the Royal Warrant for the Charter of the Supreme Court of Van Diemen's Land is given in HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 478-490.

<sup>6</sup> A Alexander, *Governors' ladies: The wives and mistresses of Van Diemen's Land Governors* (Sandy Bay, 1987), pp. 70-80.

<sup>7</sup> Bigge to Bathurst, 18 August 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, p. 684.

<sup>8</sup> AGL Shaw, *Sir George Arthur, Bart, 1784-1854: Superintendent of British Honduras, Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land and of Upper Canada, Governor of the Bombay Presidency* (Melbourne, 1980), p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54. Shaw details the slave-owners and other issues in detail on pp. 45-60.

In early July 1823, Bathurst offered Arthur the position of Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land. Writing later to Governor Brisbane, Bathurst noted that Arthur would have far more extensive powers and administrative independence from New South Wales than his predecessor, and that the growing prosperity of Van Diemen's Land presaged full independence in future.<sup>10</sup> Within a few weeks, Arthur had written to Under-Secretary of State Robert Horton with a number of observations and suggestions.<sup>11</sup> A number of these were along the lines already suggested by Bigge, such as increased powers for the Lieutenant-Governor, and as far as possible, administrative independence from New South Wales.

In August 1823, Bathurst wrote to Sorell formally advising of his recall, but Sorell appears to have heard about the decision in October before the official letter was received.<sup>12</sup> By the end of October, the recall was widely known publicly and a public meeting held on 30 October expressed strong support for the Lieutenant-Governor.<sup>13</sup> Only Anthony Fenn Kemp and Thomas Archer were named as being present in the newspaper reports, but it would be in character if Meredith attended.

Pursuant to the *New South Wales Act* 1823, a Legislative Council for New South Wales was established in Sydney on 1 December 1823. On 15 March 1824, John Pedder and Joseph Tice Gellibrand arrived in Hobart Town on the *Hibernia* to take up the positions of Chief Justice and Attorney-General of Van Diemen's Land, respectively.<sup>14</sup> They brought with them the Royal Charter of Justice that established the Van Diemen's Land Supreme Court.

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<sup>10</sup> Bathurst to Brisbane, 28 August 1823, HRA I, Vol. XI, pp. 109-113.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur to Horton, 28 July 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 78-82.

<sup>12</sup> Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, p. 373.

<sup>13</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 8 November 1823, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 19 March 1824, p. 2.

The arrival of the last two Bigge reports in late 1823, the *New South Wales Act* 1823 and the arrival of the Charter of Justice appear to have galvanised the population of at least Hobart Town to call for full independence from New South Wales. In mid-April 1824, the Provost-Marshal John Beamont published a notice requisitioning a public meeting to convey to the King thanks for establishing the local higher court and requesting implementation of independence from New South Wales as contemplated in the *New South Wales Act* 1823. The first two names on the requisition were George Meredith and Thomas Gregson.<sup>15</sup> Edward Lord was in London at this time, and none of his ten co-signatories of his August 1823 letter to Bathurst seeking a Van Diemen's Land legislature were amongst those who called for the 1824 meeting and subscriptions to the cause.

The meeting was held at the Court House in Hobart Town on 27 April 1824 and historian Ronald Giblin called it the most important public meeting yet held in the colony.<sup>16</sup> George Meredith 'opened proceedings' and spoke for the requisition. The *Hobart Town Gazette* reported Meredith's comments at length; they appear considered and worldly, not critical of any particular aspect of the rule from New South Wales, but broadly illustrating the need for independence and praising Bigge and Sorell in particular. For instance:

He dwelt with satisfaction upon the great consideration given to the interest of these Colonies by His Majesty's Ministers, from the earliest moment when their growing importance brought them into notice and eulogized the wise policy which originated the appointment of a Commissioner to visit their distant shores, in order that their real wants and true interests might be rightfully understood, and he complimented them as much upon the impartial and unquestionable choice they had made of the Individual, as upon the anxious solicitude they had shewn to act promptly and efficiently upon his Report and recommendation ...<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 16 April 1824, p. 1. The others were Anstey, Gordon, Wood, Gunning, Thomson, Sutherland, Macleod, Willis, Hill, Patterson, Butcher, Lascelles, Jamieson, Bromley, Scott, Kemp, Bethune, Kermode, Westbrook, Cartwright, Champion, Dawes, Ross, Barker, Clark, Margetts and Beamont.

<sup>16</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 30 April 1824, p. 1, Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, p. 368.

<sup>17</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 30 April 1824, p. 1.

and further:

Indeed, it was not necessary to refer to any *specific disadvantages*, as a ground for our Independence – rather let us generalize the question and build our hopes upon a broader basis. He then took a hasty view of the original formation of the Colony – its progressive improvements – large acquisition of capital – and influx of respectable population, which had so decidedly changed its moral and physical character – its daily increasing importance – and prospective advancements; and on *these* grounds, he would take his stand, as the Advocate of its Independence, and looking back to the time and state of the Country when Lieutenant Governor SORELL was first appointed to its administration.

The meeting passed six resolutions, essentially calling for independence for Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales, the compiling of a petition to the King to this effect and the appointment of a committee to pursue the petition. Twelve people were elected to the committee, including Meredith and Gregson, with Anthony Fenn Kemp its Chairman.<sup>18</sup>

Kemp was a merchant in Hobart Town and former soldier, who arrived in New South Wales in 1793. Since that time he had led a colourful career mostly at odds with the authorities, not the least of which was his opposition to Governors King and Bligh in New South Wales and participation in the 'rum rebellion' by the New South Wales Corps against Bligh in 1808.<sup>19</sup> In Van Diemen's Land he had chaired the meeting called in praise and support of Lieutenant-Governor Sorell in 1823, in spite of being long hostile to him.<sup>20</sup> He had no obvious connection to Meredith and Gregson up to that time, but would join them on a number of their later, and more serious, campaigns.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> MC Kemp and TB Kemp, 'Captain Anthony Fenn Kemp', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 51 (1965), pp. 11-14. For Kemp, see also N Shakespeare, *In Tasmania* (Milsons Point, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Robson noted that Sorell 'designated [Kemp] as the most seditious, mischievous and least deserving [of] favour or indulgence of any kind in the entire settlement': L Robson, *A history of Tasmania: Vol. I Van Diemen's Land from the earliest times to 1855* (Melbourne, 1983), p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> Both Kemp and Meredith were masons. Whilst Kemp was active, there is no information on Meredith practicing as a mason while in Van Diemen's Land. He joined while in Canada as a Marine: E Meredith, *Memoir of the late George Meredith* (Masterton, 1897), p. 31. For Kemp, see Shakespeare, *In Tasmania*, p. 49.

Why would Meredith have decided to take a prominent position on the issue of independence from New South Wales? In April 1824 he was still involved in Sydney-based litigation with Edward Lord and in the preceding year had had to travel to Sydney for three months to defend himself in several cases. He also felt he had been badly dealt with by the Sydney-based administration in his land disputes.<sup>22</sup> It had been an expensive and unproductive time and it is likely that Meredith thought a local, independent administration would be cheaper to deal with and more likely to be open to his influence.

The calling of the 'independence' meeting provoked the ire of former convict, journalist and sometime legal agent to Edward Lord, Robert Lathrop Murray, who wrote to the *Hobart Town Gazette* urging citizens to withhold their subscriptions, noting that he had in mind other ways to obtain independence in a more 'manly, open, fair and *liberal* manner'.<sup>23</sup> His letter was immediately replied to by a letter signed 'Committee Room', in which Murray's character and motives were excoriated:

When he can show that his former character, and the circumstances under which he came to these Colonies, entitle him to dictate to an honourable—moral—and unstigmatized community—then let him raise his voice; but until then, he is advised to consider well his real standing in society, and to turn from the envious misrepresentation of the acts of those above him—to a retrospect of his own—and if his memory requires any assistance, those who sanction these observations refer him to the public records\* of his past life, which if they do not make a due impression on his mind, cannot fail to prove highly instructive to others.

\* Vide Satyrlist, Scourge, &c. &c. &c.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Chapter 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 23 April 1824, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 30 April 1824, p. 3.



A draft of this letter in George Meredith's writing, found in a private collection, gives little doubt as to its composer, unless Meredith was taking someone else's dictation.<sup>25</sup> Murray was Edward Lord's attorney in Hobart Town during the initial stages of Lord's suit against Meredith the previous year, and this may have flavoured the entire 'Committee Room' versus Murray affair.

Murray reacted to the new reply by issuing a writ for libel against, in order, Messrs Meredith, Kemp, Scott, Kermode, Underwood, McLeod, Bethune, Grant, Cartwright and Dawes.<sup>26</sup> The case was heard in the Supreme Court before Chief Justice Pedder on 9 and 11 June 1824.<sup>27</sup> Meredith represented himself and his meticulous preparation and extensive research on the law and Murray, plus his systematic building of his defence, was evident in the notes he prepared, titled, in Latin, '*nemo me impune lacessit*' (no-one attacks me with impunity).<sup>28</sup> This heading may indicate that this affair was 'personal' between Murray and Meredith. Meredith was found guilty, but no sentence was entered into the relevant record.<sup>29</sup> A week after winning the case, Murray published a long letter in the *Hobart Town Gazette* explaining his approach to independence. He wrote that in the new Charter of Justice, the Supreme Court, and the wisdom of Arthur, the colony had effective independence, and that the requirement to refer appeals to Sydney was an asset.<sup>30</sup> Not

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<sup>25</sup> Draft, in George Meredith's writing, of a letter signed 'Committee Room' dated 26 April 1823 [later published in the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 30 April 1823, p. 3], Meredith McFadden collection.

<sup>26</sup> Writ issued by Robert Lathrop Murray against George Meredith and others, 1 June 1824, *Papers relating to legal cases involving George Meredith, including his dispute with Edward Lord and the libel case R.L. Murray. 90 papers*, NS123/1/5, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter TA). Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/5 series will be omitted.

<sup>27</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 11 June 1824, p. 2 and 18 June 1824, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Notes by Meredith titled '*nemo me impune lacessit*', nd, NS123/1/5, TA.

<sup>29</sup> Tasmania Supreme Court alphabetical register of people tried, 1821-1832, DL Spencer 96, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (hereafter ML, SLNSW); Supreme Court, *Registers of prisoners tried in criminal cases*, SC41/1/1, TA.

<sup>30</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 18 June 1824, p. 2.

content, a few days later Meredith penned another letter on behalf of 'Committee Room,' dated 21 June 1824, in which he acknowledged the verdict against him and others, but attempted to justify the earlier letter. He also noted that a copy of the address and Petition to the King was by then in the care of the recalled and departing Sorell, bound for London.<sup>31</sup> This letter appears not to have been published.

Sorell duly forwarded the citizen's petition to Earl Bathurst with a cover letter dated 28 November 1824.<sup>32</sup> Sorell noted that, while he initially discouraged the petition and its contents, on seeing the extended powers granted to his successor, he now supported it and made several recommendations regarding Van Diemen's Land dealing more directly with the administration in London. The petition itself was signed by one hundred and two men from southern, central and northern parts of the colony. The scholar and press historian Morris Miller credited Meredith with its preparation.<sup>33</sup>

The creation of Van Diemen's Land as a separate colony from New South Wales was foreshadowed in the *New South Wales Act 1823*, as discussed earlier in this chapter. At that time, Bathurst wrote to Governor Brisbane that it was not 'expedient' to make the separation then.<sup>34</sup> Separation was ultimately effected via an Order in Council by the King on 14 June 1825, which was transmitted to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur by Bathurst in a letter dated 28 July 1825.<sup>35</sup> The incoming Governor of New South Wales, Lieutenant-General Ralph Darling, arrived in Hobart Town on 24 November 1825 *en-route* to Sydney,

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<sup>31</sup> Draft letter for 'Committee Room' re earlier public meeting, letters and libel case, 21 June 1824, NS123/1/5, TA. Sorell was recalled via a letter from Bathurst 26 August 1823, HRA III, Vol. IV, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> Sorell to Bathurst, 26 November 1824, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 576-580.

<sup>33</sup> EM Miller, *Pressmen and governors: Australian editors and writers in early Tasmania ...* (Sydney, 1952), p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Bathurst to Brisbane, 28 August 1823, HRA I, Vol. XI, p. 109.

<sup>35</sup> Bathurst to Arthur, 28 July 1825, HRA III, Vol. IV, p. 303.

bringing with him the proclamation establishing Van Diemen's Land's independence from New South Wales, which was read on 3 December.<sup>36</sup> Darling was made Governor of the colony (hence Arthur remained Lieutenant-Governor), as well as that of New South Wales. He further announced the establishment of an appointed Van Diemen's Land Legislative Council and an Executive Council.

How crucial was Meredith in bringing about independence? He was not Chairman of the Committee for Independence, which was Anthony Fenn Kemp, but he was one of the Committee's leaders, as evidenced by the speech reproduced in the local newspapers.<sup>37</sup> Murray made Meredith the primary target of his libel action against the 'Committee Room' and he was identified as its leader in newspaper reporting of the case. Giblin wrote, concerning the petition: '[in combination with the letter sent by Lord and others] this memorial, so sincere and sober in tone, had considerable influence upon the Colonial Office and helped bring about the desired change at an early date'.<sup>38</sup> Clark disappointingly wrote of no particular settler involved in the independence campaign and implied that it simply was granted from London—although he did note that Murray was a lone voice against it.<sup>39</sup> Robson gave the matter less attention—simply noting that 'Following pleas from merchants and others', Van Diemen's Land was 'administratively separated from New

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<sup>36</sup> H Melville, *The history of Van Diemen's Land from the year 1824 to 1835 inclusive, during the administration of Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur*, first published in Hobart 1835, G Mackaness, (ed.) (Sydney, 1965), pp. 51-52. Darling was a senior army officer who had been military commander at Mauritius prior to his appointment as Governor of New South Wales. He earned a reputation as being harsh and tyrannical, but as with Arthur, these qualities were promoted by political enemies with access to the press. See B Fletcher, *Ralph Darling: A Governor maligned* (Melbourne, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> Shakespeare in *In Tasmania* makes a number of references to Kemp as being the 'Father of Tasmania'. This sobriquet is repeated in other places and is generally thought to be a reference to Kemp's having eighteen children.

<sup>38</sup> Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, p. 370.

<sup>39</sup> CMH Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. II: New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1822-1838* (Melbourne, 1968), pp. 122-123.

South Wales'. Robson appeared to give as much credit to Arthur for the southern colony's independence, as to the colonists, a skewed view of the issue.<sup>40</sup>

A similar, but if anything, thinner discussion of Van Diemen's Land independence from New South Wales is present in West's original Volume I. After briefly mentioning some petitioning and meeting by settlers (with RL Murray the sole dissident), a few pages later he discussed the beginnings of the Supreme Court without mentioning that this was brought about because Van Diemen's Land had been granted independence from New South Wales.<sup>41</sup> Given the powers that Arthur gained from independence and his subsequent impact on the colonists and the colony's development and the presence of a local Supreme Court and local Chief Justice, the absence of substantive discussion in these comprehensive works on how the junior colony's independence came about appear to be unfortunate omissions.

There is no document directly noting Meredith's influence in published correspondence of the London, Sydney or Hobart Town administrations, but, based on the discussion above, if a small group of settlers should be named as being influential in bringing about the independence of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales in 1825, then Meredith would have to be amongst them. His motivation for campaigning for Van Diemen's Land independence was likely to have been for personal reasons, making it cheaper and convenient to go to a local court and a local administration to make his case on various issues.

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<sup>40</sup> Robson, *History of Tasmania: Vol. I*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>41</sup> J West, *The history of Tasmania*, Vol. I (Launceston, 1852), pp. 87-88, 98. The mention of Murray's opposition to independence is in West's original volume but was edited out by Shaw in his later edition: J West, *The history of Tasmania with copious information respecting the colonies of New South Wales Victoria South Australia &c., &c., &c.*, AGL Shaw (ed.) (Sydney, 1981), text absent from p. 82.

## GEORGE ARTHUR AND MEREDITH'S CAMPAIGNS AGAINST HIM

### Arthur's arrival in Van Diemen's Land

When he arrived to become Lieutenant-Governor in 1824, George Arthur brought with him an entirely different style of administration and personal conduct compared to his predecessor. William Sorell's administration and the man himself were relaxed, perhaps to the point of maladministration in some aspects.<sup>42</sup> Arthur later noted in a letter to Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Sir George Murray: 'the whole system of government was almost entirely carried on by the verbal instructions of the Lieutenant Governor'.<sup>43</sup>

Sorell was undoubtedly popular amongst the citizenry:

He was accustomed to linger about the gate of government house, chatting with passers by, and a slight excuse entitled the humblest ranks to prefer their solicitations. ... He was a dispenser of crown favours, and when compelled to refuse an immoderate suitor, he would refer his request to the governor-in-chief.<sup>44</sup>

Sorell's style suited Meredith's entrepreneurial, land-accumulating ways and the settler had few quibbles with him—he was guided by the Lieutenant-Governor to settle in an area that exactly suited his needs and his first negative outcome with Talbot over land arose with a decision taken in Sydney. Meredith was a leading speaker at the second 'Sorell Anniversary dinner' held in April 1826 to laud and celebrate the departed Lieutenant-

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<sup>42</sup> Mickleborough argued that Sorell administered appropriately for the times, succeeding as he did the disastrous administration of Thomas Davey. He brought the bushranging crisis under some control and realised settler prosperity was important, so granted as many settler requests as he could. L Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land: Lieutenant Governor 1817-24* (Hobart, 2004), pp. 113-116.

<sup>43</sup> Arthur to Murray, 5 November 1828, HRA III, Vol. VII, p. 640.

<sup>44</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, AGL Shaw, (ed.), p. 75.

Governor.<sup>45</sup> The report on that dinner presaged much of what was to follow in respect of Meredith and others' relations with Lieutenant-Governor Arthur:

The Colony [Meredith] considered was, as it were, standing still upon its hinges. At the time of the accession of the present Government, he had great expectations; this Island was considered at home a pet Colony. It was considered a feather in the cap of the Crown. But he felt bound to state, that from the period of Colonel Sorell's departure, nothing in the shape of amelioration or advancement had taken place. He believed the present Lieutenant Governor meant well, but when we look at intentions (said Mr. Meredith with great emphasis) we must also look at effects. He saw nothing at present put forward for the improvement and advancement of the Colony. He said so as an independent man, for he was neither a Government appendant, nor the partizan of a faction. He felt satisfied, that had Colonel Sorell possessed the same powers and the same means with which Colonel Arthur is now invested, that the Colony would have been in a very different state.<sup>46</sup>

Here we see Meredith labelling himself as politically independent, although he was not, as far as his attitude to Arthur was concerned.

Forsyth described Arthur most broadly, using terms such as 'experienced soldier and administrator', 'brusque and energetic', 'the most efficient administrator the transportation system ever had', 'accustomed to obedience' and 'absolutism was his conception of good government'.<sup>47</sup> All these characteristics of a Lieutenant-Governor who, courtesy of the independence of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales and the

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<sup>45</sup> The first was held on 7 April 1825 and was reported in the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 15 April 1825, p. 2. Meredith is not mentioned as a speaker but may have been present. Letters placing him in Hobart are dated early-mid April, for instance: Meredith to his wife, 15 April 1825, Meredith family papers, *Meredith family papers deposited by Mrs WVG Johnson 1962 & 1964* (henceforth *Meredith Family Papers*), University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections (hereafter UTAS S&R), G4/9. 'Liberty of the Press' was an early toast at the first dinner. Later, Thomas Gregson gave an impassioned speech on the virtues of Sorell, then moved on to the subject of the liberty of the press, to extended cheering. This subject was a later toast, which was replied to by Evan Henry Thomas, editor of Andrew Bent's *Hobart Town Gazette*. Robert L Murray gave a speech, also alluding to the deterioration of conditions after Sorell, having been introduced with the toast to 'The Colonist'.

<sup>46</sup> *Colonial Times*, 14 April 1826, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> WD Forsyth, *Governor Arthur's convict system: Van Diemen's Land 1824-36 a study in colonisation* (Sydney, 1970), pp. 1-6, under the chapter titled 'Autocracy'. For contrasting other descriptions of Arthur and his administration, see Shaw, *Sir George Arthur*, and MCI Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A colonial benevolent despot* (Melbourne, 1953).

structure of the Executive and Legislative Councils, had almost unfettered power in the colony. His punctilious ways and tight administration restricted Meredith's free-wheeling proclivities, especially in his fiefdom at Great Swan Port, and they were all the more felt after the freer administration of Sorell. After a number of preliminary skirmishes, such as over protection from bushrangers recounted in Chapter 5, the resentment from Meredith against Arthur built to personal vindictiveness and a tireless campaign against the Lieutenant-Governor and his administration.

### Trial by jury and a House of Assembly

In 1824, the question arose of whether civilian or military juries should be empanelled for the new Quarter Session courts in New South Wales.<sup>48</sup> After local magistrates objected, the issue was decided by Chief Justice Francis Forbes in favour of civilian juries in *R v Magistrates of Sydney*.<sup>49</sup> The Van Diemen's Land Attorney-General, Alfred Stephens, decided to run the same case in Hobart Town, *R v Magistrates of Hobart Town*, but this time, local Chief Justice John Lewes Pedder ruled against, and military juries continued.<sup>50</sup>

Within a month of Governor Darling arriving in Sydney in late 1825, an Address was presented to him from the local citizens requesting, amongst other things, trial by jury for higher courts, and Darling sent this onto London.<sup>51</sup> In Hobart, the *Colonial Times* reprinted

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<sup>48</sup> For further background to the history of the jury question in New South Wales, see D Neal, *The rule of law in a penal colony: Law and power in early New South Wales* (Oakleigh, 1991), pp. 171-184 and JM Bennett, 'The establishment of jury trial in New South Wales', *Sydney Law Review*, Vol. 3 (1961), pp. 463-485.

<sup>49</sup> A Low, 'Sir Alfred Stephen and the jury question in Van Diemen's Land', *University of Tasmania Law Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2002), pp. 85-87.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87; 'R. v. Magistrates of Hobart Town [1825]', Macquarie University, Division of Law, and the University of Tasmania, School of History and Classics, *Decisions of the Nineteenth Century Tasmanian Superior Courts* [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/tas/cases/case\\_index/1825/r\\_v\\_magistrates\\_of\\_hobart\\_town/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/tas/cases/case_index/1825/r_v_magistrates_of_hobart_town/), accessed online 21 January 2019. For Alfred Stephen see JM Bennett, *Sir Alfred Stephen: Third Chief Justice of New South Wales 1844-1873* (Sydney, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Darling to Bathurst, 1 February 1826, HRA I, Vol. XII, pp. 144-148.

an address to Darling by William Wentworth, together with Darling's non-committal reply issued a few days later, and the newspaper foreshadowed a possible similar address to be made to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur.<sup>52</sup> This did not occur until early March 1827, when a notice appeared in Hobart Town asking for a public meeting to be called to petition the King and the British Parliament for trial by jury and a House of Assembly for Van Diemen's Land.<sup>53</sup> The notice, signed by twenty-five men, was led by Edward Lord and contained a few of the names associated with the 'independence' public meeting, including Kemp, Underwood, Grant, Bethune and, towards the end, Meredith and Gregson. The meeting was held on 13 March, with two hundred in attendance.<sup>54</sup> The opening speech, and mover of the petition, was William Gellibrand.<sup>55</sup> Edward Lord seconded the motion. George Meredith spoke, suggesting that the petition be more widely circulated around the colony, to garner further signatures, but this was rejected by the meeting. A committee was formed to present the petition to the Lieutenant-Governor comprising Edward Lord, David Lord, Anthony Fenn Kemp, William Bethune, Samuel Hood and the Sheriff, Dudley Fereday.<sup>56</sup>

Some weeks later, Meredith wrote to the *Hobart Town Gazette* to clarify his role in the meeting. He noted that he was in favour of a '*modified jury*'.<sup>57</sup> This phrase drew pointed criticism from the *Colonial Times*, which was edited by Robert Murray.<sup>58</sup> In a subsequent

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<sup>52</sup> *Colonial Times*, 10 February 1826, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Colonial Times*, 9 March 1827, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 March 1827, p. 3; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 17 March 1827, p. 2. Lord was paying a visit to Van Diemen's Land, being mainly based in England at the time. He and Arthur were probably not have been on good terms, given Lord's domestic arrangements in both England and the colony. See: A Alexander, *Corruption and skullduggery: Edward Lord, Maria Riseley and Hobart's tempestuous beginnings* (Dyynnyrne, 2015), pp. 291-293.

<sup>55</sup> William Gellibrand was the father of the former Attorney-General Joseph Tice Gellibrand, who was removed from that post for misconduct by Lieutenant-Governor Arthur in early 1826, in part because of his association with Robert L Murray—see later in this chapter.

<sup>56</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 March 1827, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 12 May 1827, p. 4. Emphasis in original.

<sup>58</sup> *Colonial Times*, 18 May 1827, p. 2; Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, p. 177.



letter to the *Hobart Town Gazette*, Meredith clarified what he meant by ‘*modified jury*’.<sup>59</sup> He desired that criminal cases (except libel) should continue to use a military jury and civil cases use a jury of their peers. Meredith claimed he was concerned about the time and inconvenience of settlers if required to fill juries for both criminal and civil cases.

Why should Meredith want to fall out with his peers on the issue of composition of juries for criminal matters? He did not indicate why, although he did mention in subsequent letters that he found the petition to the King to have already been ‘privately prepared’ in advance when he attended the meeting. It may be that Meredith, seeing that Edward Lord was one the principals of the meeting, and that the petition itself was prepared beforehand without his input, may have contrived a reason for not supporting it. For Meredith, being in control was important and if he was not at the centre, then the issue lost some importance.

The petition was due to be presented to Arthur by a deputation led by William Gellibrand on 19 March 1827. Giblin described what followed as a farce, and he detailed the events in forensic detail.<sup>60</sup> The usually punctual Arthur failed to meet the deputation at the appointed hour and the deputation, taking offence, declined to meet with him later. Legal scholar Alex Castles noted: ‘To Arthur, the demand for any liberalisations of the jury system was heresy enough. But to join this with a call for the Legislative Council to consist of elected representatives could almost be regarded as treason’.<sup>61</sup> The petition did not reach the floor of Parliament until May of the following year and possibly because of the

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<sup>59</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 14 July 1827, p. 2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>60</sup> Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, pp. 603-620.

<sup>61</sup> AC Castles, *Lawless harvests or God save the judges: Van Diemen’s Land 1803-55, a legal history* (North Melbourne, 2007), p. 193.

squabbling reported from Hobart Town, and the disapproval of Arthur, the petition gained no material traction.<sup>62</sup>

The *New South Wales Act* of 1823 was limited in operation to 1 July 1827, at which time the effect and operation of the Act were to be revised.<sup>63</sup> Arthur had attempted to pre-empt any undesirable amendments of the 1823 Act by having his Solicitor-General review how the statute had performed.<sup>64</sup> Arthur wrote to Under-Secretary Hay in late 1826 with his comments and was particularly focussed on the matter of trial by jury:

It is not my province to consider which has been the correct determination upon this Clause [concerning juries]; but I must unhesitatingly declare it to be my opinion that this Colony is in no way prepared for the unlimited admission of Trial by Jury, and that it would be very injurious and dangerous to disturb the existing system.<sup>65</sup>

In New South Wales, Chief Justice Forbes had also considered the future of the 1823 Act and drafted some suggested amendments, forwarding them to Under-Secretary Horton in October 1826.<sup>66</sup> The Bill, as drafted in London in 1827, was very similar to Forbes' draft but it did not reach the Parliament in a final form in time for it to be passed that year, so an interim Bill was enacted.<sup>67</sup> A draft Bill reached Governor Darling later in 1827 and he commented on it in letters to Hay and also to James Stephen, the senior legal adviser in the

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<sup>62</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, AGL Shaw, (ed.), on p. 95 noted that Sir John Owen, member for Pembrokeshire and brother of Edward Lord, 'presented [the petition] to the Commons without a word'. It was presented to the House of Commons on 2 May 1828: House of Commons, *Journals of the House of Commons*, Vol. 83 (London, 1828), p. 305; Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, pp. 619-620.

<sup>63</sup> 4 Geo. IV, Cap. XCVI 'An Act to provide, until the First Day of July, 1827, and until the End of the next Session of Parliament, for the better Administration of Justice in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, and for the more effectual Government thereof; and for other purposes relating thereto'.

<sup>64</sup> Attorney-General JT Gellibrand was not involved here as in September 1825, Arthur began an investigation of him in February 1826, in part for his association with Arthur enemy and critic RL Murray. See later in this chapter for a discussion of Gellibrand's removal.

<sup>65</sup> Arthur to Hay, 15 November 1826, HRA III, Vol. V, p. 421.

<sup>66</sup> Forbes to Horton, 10 October 1826, HRA IV, Vol. I, pp. 642-643.

<sup>67</sup> Forbes to Hay, 12 November 1827, HRA IV, Vol. I, p. 745. Neither the petition from Sydney in January 1828 nor the later one from Van Diemen's Land would have been received by this time; AC Melbourne, *Early constitutional development in Australia: New South Wales 1788-1856* (London, 1934), p. 142.

Colonial Office. Amongst the issues raised were strong objections to establishing a House of Assembly in New South Wales.<sup>68</sup> Darling sent Henry Dumaresq to London to lobby on behalf of the colonial government.<sup>69</sup>

It appears that in Van Diemen's Land, Arthur was left out of this stage of commentary and discussion of the new Act. The 'amendments and continuance' of the 1823 Act as passed by Parliament were eventually sent to him by Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, George Murray, in a despatch dated 31 July 1828.<sup>70</sup> However, a 'leaked' copy of a Bill was obtained by Arthur in early July, and he immediately asked the Attorney-General, Thomas McClelland, to review it.<sup>71</sup> The Bill, as seen by Arthur and McClelland, was apparently the 1827 version, based on the draft provided by Forbes in 1826. It provided for an expansion of the Legislative Council, including the allowance of non-government members to be appointed to it, the necessity for the Legislative Council to approve laws proposed by the Lieutenant-Governor, trial by jury in civil cases allowable by the Supreme Court on application from just one of the parties in a case, the future establishment of trial by a jury by the Lieutenant-Governor and Legislative Council after being given authority by the King in Council, and a provision for the establishment of an elected House of Assembly.<sup>72</sup>

Like Darling the previous year, both Arthur and McClelland were alarmed at what the Bill contained, especially the introduction of trial by jury and a House of Assembly. Arthur sent

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<sup>68</sup> Darling to Stephens, enclosed in Darling to Hay, HRA I, Vol. XII, p. 657.

<sup>69</sup> Melbourne, *Early constitutional development*, p. 146. See also pp. 144-145 of this work for discussion on how John Macarthur junior was also in London, lobbying Stephen and Hay against the establishment of 'liberal institutions'.

<sup>70</sup> Murray to Arthur, 31 July 1828, HRA III, Vol. VII, pp. 450-462.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas McClelland succeeded JT Gellibrand as Attorney-General, but only held the office for a short time due to a combination of ill-health (which was soon recovered) and a replacement, Algernon Montagu, being sent. See Note 83 of HRA III, Vol. VII, pp. 713-714.

<sup>72</sup> Neal, *Rule of law*, p. 184.

McClelland's review to William Huskisson, Murray's predecessor on 5 July, with a cover letter, and the Lieutenant-Governor sent a separate letter, with the same date, canvassing the same issue.<sup>73</sup> In these letters, Arthur expressed his opposition to 'trial by jury' and the establishment of a House of Assembly very strongly, mainly referring to the youth and under-development of Van Diemen's Land, and its function as a penal colony. McClelland, on the clause regarding the future establishment of a House of Assembly, wrote: 'So far as regards V.D. Land the introduction of this clause appears, if I may venture to say so, inexpedient and unwise'.<sup>74</sup>

In his later letter to Arthur, Murray walked the Lieutenant-Governor through various clauses of the Bill, which had become the *Australian Courts Act 1828*, 9 Geo. IV, Cap. LXXXIII, which received Royal Assent on 25 July 1828.<sup>75</sup> There was no mention of a House of Assembly in this discussion and indeed there was no mention in the Bill as published.<sup>76</sup> Huskisson, on bringing on the Bill in the House of Commons on 1 April 1828, noted in respect of juries:

From the peculiar situation in which the population of those colonies were placed, about two-thirds of the inhabitants having forfeited their civil rights, it was difficult to have the law administered in the manner which prevailed in this country, by means of grand and petty juries. It had been found necessary, therefore, to suspend the system pursued in this country, and provide a jury of a peculiar description, suited to the nature of the population.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Arthur to Huskisson, 5 July 1828, HRA III, Vol. VII, pp. 413-434 and pp. 434-438.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 423.

<sup>75</sup> Melbourne, *Early constitutional development*, p. 151. There were some last-minute attempts to insert clauses to allow immediate trial by jury by Sir James Mackintosh, but the motions were disallowed—House of Commons, *Journals of the House of Commons*, Vol. 83 (London 1828), p. 458.

<sup>76</sup> The Law Journal, *Public General Acts of the United Kingdom 9 Geo. IV*, Vol. VI (London, 1828), pp. 143-150.

<sup>77</sup> House of Commons Hansard for 1 April 1828 on-line at [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1828/apr/01/administration-of-justice-in-new-south#S2V0018P0\\_18280401\\_HOC\\_22](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1828/apr/01/administration-of-justice-in-new-south#S2V0018P0_18280401_HOC_22), accessed online 12 January 2018.

So, what had happened from the 1827 draft Bill, to the one that was ultimately passed in mid-1828? Melbourne put the drafting of the 1828 Bill firmly in the hands of James Stephen.<sup>78</sup> It appears that the lobbying from the New South Wales government against a House of Assembly had been effective, and the push for it by Forbes and the colonists largely unsuccessful, although the doors were opened for trial by jury in the future.<sup>79</sup> The issue of a House of Assembly made it only briefly into the 1827 draft, which some-how must have escaped Stephen's attention. One thing the 1828 Act did not encompass was a law that Arthur could use to further restrict the 'liberty of the press'. Murray specifically noted this in his commentary to Arthur.<sup>80</sup>

What 'credit' can be assigned to George Meredith in respect of the small gains in liberties won in the 1828 Act? Overwhelmingly, any gains should largely be placed at the feet of Chief Justice Forbes in New South Wales, and to a lesser extent, Wentworth and others who formed and sent their original petition to London. The Van Diemen's Land petition probably contributed to the sentiment in London that some relaxation on the trial by jury question should be made. Significantly, in explaining how the Act came about, Murray told Arthur: 'Your despatches have suggested various amendments, and others have been derived from communication with persons connected with the different classes of Society

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<sup>78</sup> Melbourne, *Early constitutional development*, pp. 147-150. This also becomes obvious from: [Memo by James Stephen describing amendments to the NSW Act 1823, with annotations on the original Act], 4 March 1828, Colonial Office, *New South Wales Original Correspondence, Individuals, etc, A – K*, CO201/95, p. 337, Australian Joint Copying Project microfilm #163, TA.

<sup>79</sup> Chief Justice of New South Wales Francis Forbes' actions in New South Wales have been alluded to throughout this text but are not a key argument here. Suffice to say that he was more independent of his Governors, especially Brisbane and Darling, than Pedder was of Arthur. For instance, he disallowed Brisbane's proposed press laws in 1824 and together with Justice Stephen, gave an opinion against Governor Darling in respect of the 'Sudds-Thompson affair' and also disallowed some of Darling's press laws brought on by the press criticism about Sudds-Thompson. See CH Currey, *Sir Francis Forbes: the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales* (Sydney, 1968), Chapters 12 and 13. Sudds-Thompson will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

<sup>80</sup> Murray to Arthur, 31 July 1828, HRA III, Vol. VII, p. 461.

in the Colony'.<sup>81</sup> This was likely meant to convey to Arthur that the Colonial Office in London did take note of what the citizenry of the colony was saying and that their commentary did help mould the 1828 Act. Meredith, as one of the participants of the meeting that gave rise to the petition, may have gained some satisfaction that he was part of what the 1828 Act granted, but the fact that he did not put his full energies into the issue, unlike the 'independence' campaign, does suggest that he gave it a lower priority.

in 1830, Alfred Stephen prepared *An Act to Regulate the Constitution of Juries* which allowed trial by jury in civil cases and it passed the Legislative Council in April.<sup>82</sup> As Low argued, the issue was then in suspension for a few years, in spite of editorialising by the newspapers.<sup>83</sup> A public meeting on 23 May 1831 raised a number of resolutions, including security of title, duty on wines, usury and, by Meredith, one denouncing the way the government dealt with Aboriginal people.<sup>84</sup> While the issue of trial by jury was spoken about, no resolutions were raised for it.<sup>85</sup>

Dispute then arose over the number of members of a jury in criminal cases and the anti-Arthur forces used it as another wedge against the government.<sup>86</sup> A public meeting was requisitioned for 9 June 1834 in Hobart Town, following a proposal by Attorney-General

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Low, 'Sir Alfred Stephen', p. 92.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96. In New South Wales in 1833, Governor Bourke allowed that persons accused of serious criminal offences could have the choice of a traditional military jury, or a civil one. In Van Diemen's Land, Arthur introduced a more limited version of this, requiring the interest of a government official in the proceedings or outcome to bring on the option to choose a civil jury: Castles, *Lawless harvests*, p. 193. Castles also noted that those persons eligible for selection on civil juries were from a very restricted list, approved by Arthur and such that it was 'perilously close' to jury rigging.

<sup>84</sup> *Colonial Times*, 25 May 1831, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, AGL Shaw, (ed.), p. 125 stated that the object of 'the movement' was 'to bring under Royal notice ... trial by jury' but in fact the issue was not voted on. The eighth motion called for an elected body. The meeting was later referred to as the 'Glorious twenty-third of May': Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, p. 112.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Alfred Stephen that the number of persons on a jury would be reduced from twelve to seven under a new *Jury Act*, intelligence on which was gained from correspondence between Anthony Fenn Kemp and the Attorney-General.<sup>87</sup> George Meredith, not amongst the requestors, was present at the meeting. Although the jury reduction concerned a proposal to deal with insolvents, Stephen professed to prefer the lower number in general. At the meeting Kemp declared:

... any man that has English blood circulating in his veins, will support the old constitutional law of Trial by Jury of twelve, instead of Mr. Stephen's new method of seven ... Are our rights ever to be kept in abeyance, because we receive the degraded inhabitants of the Mother Country, the greater portion of whom are fed and clothed by our Colonists? If we look at the Sister Colony, we find there liberal institutions prevail — there, they have a Jury in criminal cases—and when an even number were for and against Trial by Jury in the Legislative Assembly, General Bourke gave his casting vote in favor [sic] of the people.<sup>88</sup>

Kemp moved a motion wishing for juries of larger number, selected from land-owning colonists. Meredith seconded the motion and it passed unanimously, together with two others. He was elected part of a deputation of twelve selected to present to resolutions to the Lieutenant-Governor.<sup>89</sup>

Arthur replied to the deputation in general terms, which was derided by the 'opposition' newspaper, Meredith's *Colonist*.<sup>90</sup> A few days later, the notorious *Bryan v Lyttleton* trial was underway, with comments from the Bench that a trial by jury could not be agreed to,

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<sup>87</sup> *Colonial Times*, 10 June 1834, p. 4; *Tasmanian*, 13 June 1834, p. 4. See Low, 'Sir Alfred Stephen', pp. 100-101. Stephen rationalised that as seven jurors were the number for civil cases, then the same should apply to criminal cases, as taking a larger number from the community would be disruptive. He had been corresponding with Arthur on the issue since February 1834.

<sup>88</sup> *Colonial Times*, 10 June 1834, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> A few days after the meeting, Alfred Stephen wrote a letter to a newspaper under the name 'Civis', arguing his case. It was derided by many replies to various newspapers. Henry Melville published a pamphlet canvassing all the public meetings, the 'Civis' letter and many of the letters in reply: H Melville, *Letters and proceedings of a public meeting relating to the jury question ...* (Hobart Town, 1834).

<sup>90</sup> *Colonist*, 24 June 1834, p. 2.

in part because of the public sentiment whipped up by the *Colonist* and the *Tasmanian*.<sup>91</sup> A few weeks later again, a second public meeting was held and raised a petition protesting the refusal of trial by jury and noting the conflict that the Chief Justice had in that case, being on the Executive Council that had already ruled against the defendant.<sup>92</sup> Meredith did not speak at the meeting, where town merchants dominated the resolutions, but was named as a member of the deputation of thirty-six to present the petition to the Lieutenant-Governor. The presentation to Arthur occurred on 21 July, in his office. After the petition was read, the Lieutenant-Governor replied with another dismissal of the issue.<sup>93</sup>

Notwithstanding Arthur's displeasure at the colonists' agitation, soon afterwards, Stephen drafted *An Act for the Extension of Trial by Jury and to Regulate the Constitution of Juries* 1834 and it became law in November.<sup>94</sup> Low described the Act as a compromise for all parties (but obviously satisfying Arthur most of all) and argued that the 'middle class'—which did not include the 'radicals', like Meredith—were reasonably satisfied. The issue of 'trial by jury' then largely receded from the public debate.

Meredith was present, but not dominant in the 1830s 'trial by jury' issue. There could be a number of reasons for this. Although there was no Edward Lord to be concerned about, and his usual allies Gregson and Kemp were present, it is possible that the involvement of

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<sup>91</sup> *Colonist*, 1 July 1834, p. 2, *Tasmanian*, 4 July 1834, p. 7. The Bryan affair will be discussed in Chapter 8, but in brief, a servant of pastoralist William Bryan, was tried for cattle stealing by magistrate William Lyttleton. The magistrate later publicly implied that the master should have been in the dock as well. After further machinations, Bryan brought an action against Lyttleton for defamation and conspiracy; Anonymous, 'Bryan, William (1801–1837)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bryan-william-1842/text2129>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 2 February 2020.

<sup>92</sup> *Tasmanian*, 18 July 1834, p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 22 July 1834, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Low, 'Sir Alfred Stephen', p. 110.



what Low argued was the 'middle class' may have diluted Meredith. This time, it was not the strident and the 'radicals' who were the spear-carriers, but the merchants of the towns who wanted free institutions, and not just a point of antagonism against Arthur. This issue, fought for the common good, was not the type of battle that inspired Meredith to rise to any height about, especially when, at the same time, he was fighting fires very close to his feet, in the debacle that was unfolding at his *Colonist* newspaper and Arthur's withdrawal of his convict supply.<sup>95</sup>

The call for the establishment of a House of Assembly had been paired to the trial by jury issue, but with the work of Stephen largely defusing the latter, especially for the non-'radical', middle class of the colony, attention turned to the issue of a House of Assembly. A meeting was held in Hobart Town in early August 1834, with resolutions specifically asking for a representative House.<sup>96</sup> Gregson was there, but Meredith was not. Although some further meetings on the subject were held over the next few years, with Arthur in command, the issue was effectively dead.<sup>97</sup>

### The investigation into Attorney-General Joseph Tice Gellibrand

The contest that arose in 1828 between Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and his Solicitor-General Alfred Stephen on one side, and the Attorney-General Joseph Tice Gellibrand on the other, was a significant event during Arthur's governorship. George Meredith was not directly involved, but the correspondence between him and Stephen at the time reveals

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<sup>95</sup> These issues will be discussed in following chapters.

<sup>96</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 August 1834, p. 3; *True Colonist* 5 August 1834, p. 1

<sup>97</sup> Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, p. 156 finishes his discussion on the subject at this point.

some of the extent of Meredith's networks at the upper echelons of the colony and casts a little more light on the affair.

Joseph Tice Gellibrand arrived in the colony in March 1824 to take up the position of Attorney-General.<sup>98</sup> Alfred Stephen, part of a legal family, arrived in Hobart Town on 24 January 1825 to take up a career in law. His cousin, James Stephen, was an influential and respected legal adviser at the Colonial Office in London and he will feature several more times in matters affecting George Meredith.<sup>99</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Arthur was by this time under attack from Robert Murray in the press, and, suspecting Gellibrand's relationship with Murray may have compromised his position as Attorney-General, Arthur appointed Alfred Stephen as Solicitor-General in April 1825 and Crown Solicitor the following month.<sup>100</sup>

Stephen quickly became unhappy with Gellibrand's activities and tendered his resignation to Arthur in August 1825, which Arthur refused. Soon after, lawyer Frederick Dawes gave Arthur evidence of Gellibrand's malpractice in associating with Murray and Arthur referred the matter to Chief Justice Pedder.<sup>101</sup> On 15 September 1825, a Commission of Enquiry had been called by Arthur with Chief Justice Pedder, Adolarius WH Humphrey and Jocelyn

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<sup>98</sup> For Gellibrand, see PC James, 'Gellibrand, Joseph Tice (1792–1837)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gellibrand-joseph-tice-2088/text2621>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 24 January 2018.

<sup>99</sup> Alfred Stephen's father John was Solicitor-General in 1824 and later a judge and acting Chief Justice in New South Wales: CH Currey, 'Stephen, John (1771–1833)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stephen-john-1292/text3775>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 21 January 2020.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 16–19. James Stephen had warned Arthur before he left England that Gellibrand was going to Van Diemen's Land to escape his creditors: Stephen to Arthur, 4 January 1824, Papers of Sir George Arthur, Vol. 4, *Correspondence with James Stephen 1823–54*, ZA2164, ML, SLNSW. Bennett in *Alfred Stephen*, Chapter 2, footnote 28, p. 449 dates this letter as 4 June 1824 but this appears to be an error.

<sup>101</sup> Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, p. 465.

Thomas acting as Commissioners.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, Gellibrand was charged by Stephen on various counts of professional misconduct and tried in the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Pedder found no legal wrong in what Gellibrand had been accused of, but made it clear that he personally did not approve.<sup>103</sup>

In the meantime, Stephen, already having made charges against Gellibrand, was seeking more evidence to support his case in the enquiry. Stephen wrote to George Meredith on 17 September 1825 explaining that he had heard that Meredith was present when Gellibrand had spoken against the government, and asked Meredith to recount what he said. If explicit enough, he wrote, it would forestall a 'personal appearance' at the enquiry. Stephen also asked about Gellibrand's actions in the case of *Thornton v Meredith and Archer* and also what he had heard about Thornton having assigned his effects to Gellibrand.<sup>104</sup> That judgement found for Thornton. Separately, in the same letter, Stephen noted that he had received the papers and judgement against Meredith from Sydney and asked whether Meredith wished him to act for him on this matter in Hobart in private

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<sup>102</sup> Arthur to Pedder, Humphrey and Thomas, 15 September 1825, HRA III, Vol. V, p. 62. Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II at footnote 9, p. 470, explains the dating of this letter. Humphrey was Superintendent of Police and Chief Magistrate and a member of the then newly created Legislative Council; Thomas was acting Colonial Treasurer and a member of the Legislative Council.

<sup>103</sup> See 'In re Gellibrand [1825]', Macquarie University, Division of Law, *Decisions of the Superior Courts of New South Wales, 1788-1899*, [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/tas/cases/case\\_index/1825/in\\_re\\_gellibrand/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/tas/cases/case_index/1825/in_re_gellibrand/), accessed online 30 January 2018.

<sup>104</sup> Stephen to Meredith, 17 September 1825, *Papers and correspondence with variety of people, including Joseph Archer, Adam Amos, George Frankland, Lieut. Colonel Sorell, T.D. Lord and others. 150 letters. 1801, 15 May 1819-30, Apr 1847, 12 Jan 1852* NS123/1/4, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/4 series will be omitted. The alleged assignment of Thornton's effects to Gellibrand was the fifth of Stephen's charges against Gellibrand, but was withdrawn, as Stephen was 'misinformed': HRA III, Vol. V, p. 78. As discussed in Chapter 2, Nathaniel Thornton, the primary lessee of the *Emerald* on her voyage from England in 1820, had sued Meredith and Joseph Archer in Sydney over the proceeds of sale of his goods on the vessel.

practice. If he did, then Stephen wrote that he ‘would not take steps against you’ and would ‘reject the proffered retainer against you’.<sup>105</sup>

Meredith’s reply was somewhat indignant; at first, he denied knowing about the alleged conversation, and asked who had informed Stephen that he had the information sought.<sup>106</sup> Later in the letter, Meredith softened his denial. In respect of Thornton, Meredith replied that he would like to retain Stephen, although Joseph Archer had retained Gellibrand (both the public officials could act in private practice). Meredith referred Stephen to his solicitor in Hobart, Gamaliel Butler, and also to John Kerr.<sup>107</sup> To further complicate things, Meredith noted that Attorney-General Gellibrand would also receive the Thornton judgement from Sydney, as representatives of London merchants Hopley and Lingham, notwithstanding that he had been retained by Archer.<sup>108</sup>

The final available letter in this exchange was written shortly afterwards by Stephen.<sup>109</sup> He stated that Meredith’s reply to Gellibrand regarding his receipt of Thornton’s effects was ‘highly satisfactory’ and that Meredith’s comments on the *Thornton v Meredith* case was ‘evidencable’ against Gellibrand. He asked if Meredith’s letter could be used by him. Stephen also admitted that he was wrong on *Thornton v Evans* (essentially the matter involving Hopley and Lingham, mentioned above) and that this has caused him to be accused

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<sup>105</sup> Stephens to Meredith, 17 September 1825, NS123/1/4, TA.

<sup>106</sup> Meredith to Stephen, 24 September 1825, *ibid*.

<sup>107</sup> John Kerr and his family were passengers on the *Emerald* in 1820-21. He became a merchant in Hobart and remained on friendly terms with Meredith and occasionally advised and took meetings for him: Kerr to Meredith, 25 October 1825, *ibid*.

<sup>108</sup> Thornton’s legal battles in England echoed for a number of years but were based on the fact that he was the primary charterer of the *Emerald* on her voyage back to England in 1821, carrying cargo. Both he and the owner, Charles Nockels, became involved in suits and cross-suits for on-board trespass and failing to fulfil contracts with several parties, including merchants Hopley and Lingham in London. A summary is presented in T Sergeant and J Lowber, (eds.), *Reports of cases argued and determined in the English Courts of Common law*, Vol. XV (Philadelphia, 1830), pp. 132-135.

<sup>109</sup> Stephen to Meredith, 1 October 1825, NS123/1/4, TA.

of having no grounds for making the charge, but Meredith's letter fully 'exculpates' him. Again, he asked if he could use Meredith's letter in his own defence. After this, Stephen reminded Meredith that he had charged the Attorney-General with a number of things, also that the Lieutenant-Governor had instigated a Commission of Enquiry, and that a full written reply would obviate the necessity of Meredith appearing before the enquiry in person.

Interestingly, in this letter, Stephen mentioned that he believed the alleged Meredith-Gellibrand conversation took place at Stodart's Hotel. While it could have been on any occasion there, there were two prominent events at Stodart's where the conversation might have taken place. The first 'Sorell Anniversary Dinner' took place there on 7 April 1825 and the King's birthday Dinner on 23 April.<sup>110</sup> Gellibrand was not at the Sorell Dinner, but, although not identified, both could have been at the King's Birthday dinner. Meredith alluded to his attendance there in a letter in 1828, where he stated that he was the only one not to stand when a toast was given to 'The Colonist'—the *nom de plume* of Robert Murray, then a severe critic of the government—and replied to by Murray.<sup>111</sup>

In a subsequent letter to his Hobart solicitor, Gamaliel Butler, Meredith mentioned the difficulty of having Gellibrand pursue him on the Sydney Thornton judgement, whilst being

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<sup>110</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette* 15 April 1825, p. 2, 29 April 1825, p. 2; Some names of those present are given in the newspaper reports and others at the Sorell Dinner are given by Evan Thomas in his evidence to the 'Gellibrand Enquiry': JT Gellibrand, *The proceedings in the case of His Majesty's Attorney-General, J.T. Gellibrand, Esq, ...* (Hobart, 1826), pp. 103-104.

<sup>111</sup> Meredith to Burnett, 30 December 1828, in: G Meredith, *Correspondence between the local government of Van Diemen's Land and George Meredith Esq.* (Hobart, 1834), p. 12. Meredith was definitely in Hobart at the time of the King's dinner and possibly for the Sorell dinner—Meredith to his wife, 24 April 1825, *George Meredith (1778-1856). Letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith. 113 letters*, NS123/1/1, #14, TA.

retained by Archer and him in the local case.<sup>112</sup> He went on, 'confidentially', to express surprise that Stephen would ask him to recount details of a private conversation. Meredith had a poor opinion of Gellibrand and had 'thrice declined an invitation to his house', but stated that he would not take 'advantage of a private conversation', thus all but saying that the conversation involving Gellibrand did occur. More broadly, Meredith wrote: 'I would scorn to lend myself to the attempt of any Govt. to found charges upon a conversation or the expression of sentiments in reference to it—measures however much at variance I might be with the suspected party'.<sup>113</sup> Given this was written to his lawyer, and not expected to be aired further, it would appear to be a *bona-fide* expression of Meredith's 'gentlemanly' outlook and sense of honour. Meredith concluded by asking Butler if he was 'bound in law' to appear before the enquiry, thus indicating that he would be not be responding to the Solicitor-General's written questions. The conclusion of this correspondence is not available.

Although the official 'Minutes of Evidence' of the Gellibrand enquiry, referred to by Arthur in a despatch to London, have not been located, Gellibrand's own transcription of the proceedings survive in his publication of correspondence related to, and evidence given to the enquiry.<sup>114</sup> Legal scholar Enid Campbell found that many of those whom Stephen

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<sup>112</sup> Meredith to Butler, 9 October 1825, NS123/1/5, TA. Gellibrand's taking commissions on both sides of a case became one of the charges against him (although not in respect of Meredith and Archer) in the Supreme Court action brought by Stephen.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Arthur to Bathurst, 17 January 1826, HRA III, Vol. V, p. 62. The Tasmanian Archives staff were requested to locate the official Minutes, but they were not found. In respect of Part 2 of the 'Proceedings of the Private Enquiry' *op cit*, Gellibrand noted that they were 'taken verbatim in short hand': Gellibrand, *Proceedings*, inside title page.

wanted to give evidence did not come forward, so it is not surprising that George Meredith also did not appear.<sup>115</sup>

From this episode, we learn that Meredith knew Alfred Stephen, having retained him as a private practitioner in the matter of Thornton's suit against him in Hobart Town. Archer and Meredith had retained Gellibrand, also as a private practitioner, in Thornton's case against them in Sydney. It appears Gellibrand had been indiscreet about his opinions on the government in the presence of Meredith, but, notwithstanding veiled threats by Stephen to make Meredith appear in front of the Commission of Enquiry against Gellibrand, Meredith would not 'give up' the latter. Whether this was just a matter of honour for Meredith, or an expression of some anti-government or libertarian feelings, is unclear, but his willingness to antagonise his own solicitor and protect a hostile one, may speak to the former possibility.

## THE POLITICAL ASSOCIATION

A Political Association was formed in Sydney at a meeting on 29 May 1835; it was soon styled the Australian Patriotic Association.<sup>116</sup> Amongst other things, it agitated for an elected Legislative Assembly and was designed to be a medium for grievances to be taken in an organised way to the Governor and to the attention of the House of Commons via an agent, parliamentarian Henry Lytton Bulwer.<sup>117</sup> A letter to the Editor of the *True Colonist*, signed 'An Old Colonist' in August that year encouraged the formation of an equivalent

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<sup>115</sup> E Campbell, 'Trial by commission: The case of Joseph Tice Gellibrand', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (September, 1987), p. 75.

<sup>116</sup> *Colonial Times*, 14 July 1835, p. 3; *Sydney Monitor*, 20 June 1835, p. 2. Its origins can be traced to the formation of the Birmingham Political Union in 1830, under reformer Thomas Attwood: C Behagg, 'Attwood, Thomas', *Oxford Dictionary of Biography*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.utas.edu.au/10.1093/ref:odnb/878>, accessed online 14 May 2020.

<sup>117</sup> For substantial discussion on the Australian Patriotic Association, see E Sweetman, *Australian constitutional development* (Melbourne, 1925), Chapter X, pp. 108-122.

association in Hobart Town, to defend the freedoms of the colonists and to form a united front against the local government in appeals to London.<sup>118</sup> Calls for such a 'Political Union' were not new, however; strong advocacy for one had come from Meredith's *Colonist* newspaper and the Launceston *Independent* from at least 1833.<sup>119</sup>

The first meeting of the Van Diemen's Land 'Political Union' was held in Hobart Town on 17 September 1835.<sup>120</sup> Robert Brain claimed that Thomas Gregson and George Meredith were among its foundation members, together with Anthony Fenn Kemp and the Gellibrands, but the newspaper article of the meeting cited by Brain does not mention Gregson or Meredith, and they were not among the twenty-five 'Political Councillors' designated to consider issues.<sup>121</sup> A parchment scroll containing about four hundred and sixty names of Association members was probably commenced at the 17 September meeting and does contain Meredith's name, at number four hundred and five, but not in his writing and it was likely added with others as a batch at some later stage.<sup>122</sup> Gregson's name is not the scroll; according to Brain, he was approached to become Secretary, but found the organisation too conservative.<sup>123</sup> Given this, and lack of contemporary reporting, it is unlikely Meredith was deeply involved in the Political Association, if at all, which may appear strange, as on the face of it, it was the type of organisation he could use and influence to achieve his stated objectives in respect of trial by jury and a House of Assembly.

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<sup>118</sup> *True Colonist*, 28 August 1835, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> *Colonist*, 4 June 1833, p. 2, *Independent*, 12 January 1833, p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> *True Colonist*, 18 September 1835, p. 8.

<sup>121</sup> RJ Brain, 'Thomas Gregson, a Tasmanian radical', draft and unsubmitted MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1955, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, pp. 40-41; Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 178-179. Curiously, J Gascoigne, *The enlightenment and the origins of European Australia* (New York, 2005), p. 52 has the Association being formed about 1832, under the leadership of attorney Thomas Horne, noting he was the nephew of English political and religious radical Horne Tooke.

<sup>122</sup> Political Association of Tasmania, *List of members*, NS467/1/1, TA.

<sup>123</sup> Brain, 'Thomas Gregson', p. 40.



Further consideration shows that his lack of engagement was entirely in character. It was led by attorney Thomas Horne, who was previously briefly engaged by Meredith and Gregson to edit the *Colonist* until they fell out, and the Association was run by the 'Political Council' with its twenty-five members, whose deliberations were not public.<sup>124</sup> There was little opportunity for Meredith to stand out and engage in personal attacks on Arthur.

The Association was ignored by Arthur and, after attempting to engage with Bulwer and his successor Charles Buller in London, it fell into dormancy after about a year, and didn't survive after the return of Arthur to London in 1836.<sup>125</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The campaign for 'independence from New South Wales' was conducted towards the end of Lieutenant-Governor Sorell's tenure and, although prosecuted without rancour, it occurred after a bruising lengthy stay by Meredith in Sydney before the courts and an unsympathetic administration. The arrival of George Arthur to replace Sorell saw a stricter, more interventionist and now independent local administration. Meredith began to find fault with the authorities, as noted in the previous chapter, and his opposition grew over time. He became one of the leaders in the largely successful campaign against Arthur's initial press laws, which will be discussed in the following chapter. He contributed also to the subsequent campaigns for 'trial by jury' and the 'establishment of a House of Assembly', but did not give them his full attention as he found their stages crowded with men who didn't share his personal enmity to Arthur. Meredith had a 'cameo' role in the episode

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<sup>124</sup> For involvement in the *Colonist*, see Chapter 7. For Horne, see RW Baker, 'The early judges in Tasmania', *Papers & Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (September, 1960), pp. 80-84, also *Bent's News*, 11 June 1836, p. 2 and *Colonial Times*, 15 March 1836, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> For Arthur: *True Colonist*, 27 November 1835, p. 6; for London engagement: *Bent's News*, 7 May 1836, p. 3, *True Colonist*, 2 September 1836, p. 278; for dormancy: *True Colonist*, 8 September 1837, p. 4.

where Arthur had his Attorney-General, Joseph Gellibrand, investigated for malpractice and from this we see that Meredith had several high-level contacts with government officials, acting in private capacities.

Meredith's involvement in public campaigns in the 1820s illuminate some more of his character and personality. He was capable of leading, and in fact liked to lead where he was involved, and he could be subtle and persuading when he chose to. Meredith's motivation in taking up the Van Diemen's Land independence issue would have been largely shaped by his experience in having to travel to Sydney in respect of his several legal and land disputes. Having a local administration and court, empowered to make decisions in Hobart Town, would give him the opportunity of influencing the outcomes of issues affecting his livelihood, rather than being at the mercy of unsympathetic strangers in Sydney. Therefore, it is argued that in this campaign, he was seeking mostly to enhance his own interests, rather than taking up the cause of the colony for its own sake. The 'win' on the independence issue, apparently showing that the colonists' voices were heard in London, would have emboldened Meredith to press on with other issues against Arthur.

In a following campaign in the 1820s, for 'trial by jury' and 'a House of Assembly', Meredith took more of a back seat and was at odds with the majority in that he did not support trial by jury in both civil and criminal cases. Edward Lord had taken the lead in this campaign, both in the calling and the conduct of the meeting, and the petition had been prepared in advance of it. Not being able to be front-and-centre at the meeting, and with his nemesis Edward Lord leading this cause, Meredith contrived to not fully support the concept being asked for, and so fell back into the crowd. The issue of 'trial by jury' arose again in 1834, at the time of the Bryan case, and Meredith was more involved, this time near the height of

his campaign against Arthur. However, the increasing involvement of a broad coalition of 'middle class' merchants on this issue acted to dull the issue as a fulcrum of attack by Meredith against Arthur, so he again failed to rise to leadership campaigning on the issue. His failure to engage with the Political Association reflected its broad, moderate base.

George Meredith's cameo role in the affair of Attorney-General Joseph Gellibrand's removal from office demonstrated his network with a number of senior law officers of the colony (not least because of their availability in private practice), and also that Meredith was capable of acting in a principled way, acting against the interests of someone who he may have needed assistance from.

Meredith's involvement in the several campaigns canvassed in this chapter after 'independence' is argued to have been primarily in pursuit of his personal hostilities against Arthur, following their beginnings over bushrangers. While Meredith may have believed in 'trial by jury' and 'a House of Assembly', no-where did he write, or was he quoted as speaking philosophically about those issues, unlike the 'independence' issue, which directly strengthened his interests. The trial by jury and a House of Assembly campaigns in Hobart Town were led either by his non-political enemies, or by 'moderates' in the community, so Meredith failed to engage fully with them.

## CHAPTER 7:       MANIPULATOR OR DEFENDER OF THE VAN DIEMEN'S LAND PRESS?

### INTRODUCTION

Neither New South Wales nor Van Diemen's Land were free societies in the 1820s and 1830s. Both were established as penal colonies and administered by variably autocratic rulers appointed from London. By 1824, however, New South Wales had evolved further than the junior colony in developing a non-convict society, at which time the latter was pulled more firmly into the penal model of colony with the arrival of Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur.<sup>1</sup>

At this time when there was no direct representation of free settlers in the decision-making forums, they had limited means to object to decisions of the ruling elite. Public meetings and public petitions were frequently used to complain about issues and to draw attention to settlers' grievances. Petitions were formalised by committees and forwarded to London, either by the petitioners or via the Lieutenant-Governor, in the case of Van Diemen's Land. Meredith participated in both these methods, as demonstrated in his campaign for independence of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales. Public meetings, however, could not be readily attended by those outside of the major towns, and petitions in particular could be easily countered by the Lieutenant-Governor in a covering letter home, nay-saying the colonists' arguments.

Local newspapers on the other hand, had broad circulation, even as far as London. When free of government control or censorship, they could be used by the proprietor and/or

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<sup>1</sup> For New South Wales, see J Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies: A history of early New South Wales* (Sydney, 1983).

editor to cast a lofty or a strident opinion, either in their own name, or that of their readers, or of the society in general. They could push contentious issues and criticisms of the government via letters, which could be anonymous. The 'free' press in Australia developed in the mid-1820s in both New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land and newspapers became important vehicles for criticising and even attacking the government, in the absence of elected representation of the people. In 1833, there were five newspapers published in Hobart Town in addition to the official *Gazette* and two in Launceston, such was the appetite for the population to express and consume views on the administration, and, of course, each other.<sup>2</sup>

In both colonies, newspapers up to the early 1820s were organs of the government and were presented if not always directly in 'Gazette' form of government notices and directives, then by a printer producing a masthead 'by authority', sometimes with a government-appointed editor.<sup>3</sup> The *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* was begun and edited by emancipist George Howe in 1803 and, although it professed to publish 'general news', as Michael Connor argued: 'When [Howe] published the *Gazette* it was scarcely relevant whether [he] was a Tory or a Whig', such was the neutral line he was obliged to tread.<sup>4</sup> Governor King personally reviewed and censored the paper.<sup>5</sup> In Van

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<sup>2</sup> EM Miller, *Pressmen and governors: Australian editors and writers in early Tasmania ...* (Sydney, 1952), pp. 177-178, namely the *Colonial Times*, *Tasmanian*, *Hobart Town Courier*, *Austral-Asiatic Review* and *Colonist* in Hobart Town, and the *Launceston Advertiser* and the *Independent* in Launceston. Considering the proportion of people who could read and afford to buy a paper in the already small population, these were remarkable numbers.

<sup>3</sup> J Woodberry, *Andrew Bent and the freedom of the press in Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart, 1972), pp. 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> M Connor, 'The Politics of Grievance: Society and political controversies in New South Wales 1819—1827', PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2002, p. 195; RB Walker, *The newspaper press in New South Wales, 1803-1920* (Sydney, 1976), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

Diemen's Land, Andrew Bent, also an emancipist, published the *Hobart Town Gazette* from 1816, later with a government-appointed editor, who also fulfilled the role of censor.<sup>6</sup>

This quasi-government monopoly changed in 1824 with the establishment of the *Australian* in Sydney and Andrew Bent's quiet revolution at the *Hobart Town Gazette*, which will be discussed later. In Sydney, the *Government Gazette* was then being published by George Howe's son Robert and he adapted to the new competitive environment by editorialising: 'We shall never cease to plead for the Free Representation of the People, and Trial by Jury, till we are put in possession of those noble and ennobling RIGHTS, which are become a constituent principle of our existence'.<sup>7</sup> The *Monitor*, later the *Sydney Monitor*, began in 1826.<sup>8</sup>

Notwithstanding the same year of commencement, the trajectories of the free press in the two colonies were quite different. The founders of the non-government newspapers in New South Wales were educated, free men, and Governor Thomas Brisbane was inclined towards the press being relatively unfettered, as was his successor, Ralph Darling, at least in his first year.<sup>9</sup> The 'free press' there at first was relatively benign. William Wentworth and Robert Wardell ran the *Australian* under local 'patriotic' principles. Edward Smith Hall, founder of the *Sydney Monitor*, although more aggressive and styling his paper as a 'prudent friend' to the 'injured and oppressed', wrote to his readers that 'we shall always

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<sup>6</sup> C Collins and S Bloomfield, 'Hobart Town 1816: Andrew Bent and fermenting change', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (April, 2017), p. 44; C Collins, 'Andrew Bent and the birth of the free press in the Australian colonies', in *Australian Media Traditions Conference* (Canberra 2005), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 1 November 1826, p. 2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, *Newspaper press*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> B Fletcher, *Ralph Darling: a Governor maligned* (Melbourne, 1984), pp. 239-241. This would change with the 'Sudds-Thompson affair', discussed later.

respect the representative of the monarchy'.<sup>10</sup> Contrasting with this, in Van Diemen's Land, Andrew Bent was an emancipated convict and Arthur was the antithesis of Brisbane in respect of tolerating a 'free press'.

George Meredith's involvement with the press in Van Diemen's Land comprised two main episodes. First, shortly after Lieutenant-Governor Arthur arrived, Meredith likely put money into Andrew Bent's printing business to facilitate Bent independently owning and operating his press. When Bent came under attack from Arthur, that support transformed into Meredith's active campaigning for the 'liberty of the press'. Then, in the early 1830s, Meredith and Thomas Gregson established the *Colonist* newspaper in conjunction with Gilbert Robertson as a vehicle to attack Arthur and other enemies.

## THE 1820s CAMPAIGN FOR 'FREEDOM OF THE PRESS'

As discussed in the previous chapter, the arrival of George Arthur as Lieutenant-Governor in 1824 brought about a dramatic change in style of the vice-regal representative. Historian Herbert Heaton, writing on the struggle for freedom in the early Tasmanian press, wrote:

The colonists did not welcome the new-comer, Sorell had been easy-going and affable. His rule had laid lightly on the free settlers, and he was no fastidious worshipper of elaborate organisation or regulation. On the other hand, Arthur's reputation was that of a stern soldier, with a high hand and an iron heel; a man keen on order, efficiency, and discipline; a man who, placed at the head of a colony which was a penal settlement as well as a home for free settlers, would rule it as a penal settlement, pure and simple.<sup>11</sup>

Soon after arriving in Van Diemen's Land, Arthur wrote to Governor Brisbane proposing licensing of the press, citing how unsatisfactory he found the conduct of the Andrew Bent-

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 241.

<sup>11</sup> H Heaton, 'The early Tasmanian press, and its struggle for freedom', *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* (1916), p. 14.

controlled *Hobart Town Gazette* and Bent's recent replacement of its government-appointed editor Henry Emmett.<sup>12</sup> A free press was at odds with Arthur's authoritarian control of the colony and especially one comprised chiefly of convicts.<sup>13</sup> Brisbane consulted with New South Wales Chief Justice Francis Forbes, who advised that the Governor had no power to make such laws and the matter was dropped.<sup>14</sup> In fact, early the following year, Brisbane decided to take a more liberal attitude to what was published in the press in Sydney and allowed William Wentworth and Robert Wardell to publish the *Australian* newspaper in October 1824 without government permission.<sup>15</sup> The new newspaper was in opposition to the official *Sydney Gazette* and at Howe's request Brisbane removed censorship from the *Gazette* as well, telling Earl Bathurst in early 1825: 'I considered it most expedient to try the experiment of the full latitude of the freedom of the Press'.<sup>16</sup>

In the editorial of the first issue of their Sydney newspaper, Wardell wrote on the importance of a free press.<sup>17</sup> After initially supporting the Governor, in late 1826 Wardell and Wentworth's *Australian* newspaper and also the *Sydney Monitor* waged a ferocious attack on Governor Darling over the so-called 'Sudds-Thompson affair', accusing the

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<sup>12</sup> Arthur to Horton, 14 September 1825, F Watson, (ed.), *Historical records of Australia, Series III, Despatches and papers relating to the settlement of the states, Vol. IV Tasmania: 1821 - December 1825* (Sydney, 1921), p. 367. Henceforth this series will be cited in the format HRA [series], Vol. [number], [page number(s)], irrespective of general editor; full citations are given in the bibliography; Forbes to Horton 27 May 1827, HRA IV, Vol. I, p. 719. Bent had earlier fought off an attempt by Arthur to claim his printing press as government property. Bent sent Evan Henry Thomas to see Brisbane to protest and to settle his claim, and this succeeded. For detailed discussion on this episode, and related, see Collins, 'Andrew Bent and the birth of the free press'.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur to Horton, 14 September 1825, HRA III, Vol. IV, pp. 366-371.

<sup>14</sup> RW Giblin, *The early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, J Collier, (ed.) (Melbourne, 1939), p. 432; see also Walker, *Newspaper press*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> A Melbourne, *William Charles Wentworth* (Brisbane, 1934), pp. 43-44. Wardell had been a barrister in London and met Wentworth in London in 1819 where Wardell had become editor of the *Statesman* newspaper there. They travelled to NSW together in 1824, with a printing press. After arriving, Wardell and Wentworth became the first two barristers admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court of NSW: J Spigelman, 'Foundations of the freedom of the press in Australia', *Australian Bar Review*, No. 23 (2003), pp. 91-92.

<sup>16</sup> Brisbane to Bathurst, 12 January 1825, HRA I, Vol. XI, pp. 470-471; Walker, *Newspaper press*, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Australian*, 14 October 1824, p. 2.



governor of acting cruelly and illegally. In November 1826, soldiers Joseph Sudds and Patrick Thompson contrived to make a theft in order to be convicted and sentenced to transportation, seeing it as a preferable fate than continued service in the military in New South Wales. They were duly so sentenced, but Darling intervened and 'commuted' their sentence to one much more severe, with the prisoners put in chains and iron neck collars and put to work in road-gangs. Sudds was already gravely ill and died a few days later.<sup>18</sup> Connor wrote: 'As the case developed, Darling learned about the powers of the new free press to choose political battlefronts, and their ability to threaten public and personal reputations'.<sup>19</sup> New South Wales newspaper historian Robin Walker wrote that Howe's *Sydney Gazette*, needing government patronage, and the printer in fear of being supplanted by an actual government publication, supported Darling in the Sudds-Thompson affair.<sup>20</sup> This was in 1826 and it is strange that Walker did not draw the obvious parallel to the fate of Andrew Bent, whose experience in not toeing the government line two years earlier likely completely informed Howe's actions. The Sudds-Thompson affair was reported negatively in Van Diemen's Land and would have informed the local debate, and Meredith, at that time.<sup>21</sup>

Arthur wrote to Bathurst shortly after Brisbane let his policy be known, expressing concern as to how it applied to Van Diemen's Land.<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, Bathurst became alarmed at

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<sup>18</sup> *Australian*, 29 November 1826, p. 1, 6 December 1826, p. 2 and 13 December 1826, p. 2. That said, both the *Australian* and the *Monitor* initially gave support to Darling's actions, before discovering that the Governor's action of commuting the soldier's sentence was illegal: Walker, *Newspaper press*, pp. 9-10. Spigelman, 'Foundations' and Fletcher, *Ralph Darling*, chapters 12 and 13 describe the Sudds-Thompson affair, the press reaction, and its impact on the evolution of the freedom of the press in Australia.

<sup>19</sup> Connor, 'The Politics of Grievance', p. 4. Connor also wrote extensively on the Sudds-Thompson case: *ibid*, pp. 206-301.

<sup>20</sup> Walker, *Newspaper press*, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Colonial Times*, 26 January 1827, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur to Bathurst, 12 February 1825, HRA III, Vol. IV, p. 237.

Brisbane's new 'liberal' policy and wrote in July 1825 instructing the incoming Governor Ralph Darling to bring forth a law to licence the press, and subject it to stamp duty.<sup>23</sup> This policy was not enacted at the time, and as a consequence, the Van Diemen's Land press was free to meet the full opprobrium of Arthur.

The central figure in the coming battle was Andrew Bent, who was born in London around 1791 and became apprenticed at newspapers there in the years up to 1810, when he was tried and convicted for selling stolen goods.<sup>24</sup> He arrived in Hobart Town via Sydney as a convict on board the *Ruby* in 1812, became printer for the government, and on 1 June 1816 began publication of the *Hobart Town Gazette*.<sup>25</sup> Three months later, he published his own conditional pardon.<sup>26</sup> In 1824 he moved into new government premises and early that year invited letters for publication.

In early June 1824, Henry James Emmett, appointed as editor (and effectively the Government censor) of the *Hobart Town Gazette* by Sorell, was replaced by Bent in favour of Evan Henry Thomas.<sup>27</sup> The lead-up to Emmett's sacking has been documented by legal historian Craig Collins and stemmed from Bent's ambition to be free of government oversight and censorship, which was an ambitious objective for a former convict in Arthur's Van Diemen's Land.<sup>28</sup> Emmett complained of his treatment to the Lieutenant-Governor in

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<sup>23</sup> Bathurst to Darling, 12 July 1825, HRA I, Vol. XII, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Collins and Bloomfield, 'Andrew Bent and fermenting change', pp. 33-37.

<sup>25</sup> This was the first 'regular' edition, as noted in Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, p. 81. Collins and Bloomfield, 'Andrew Bent and fermenting change', pp. 40-41, note the publication of a 'special edition' on 11 May 1816, concerning the voyage of a Lieutenant Jeffries.

<sup>26</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 7 September 1816, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Heaton, 'Early Tasmanian press', p. 12. See also J Woodberry, 'Andrew Bent and the proprietorship of the Hobart Town Gazette, 1824: An examination of some new letters', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (January, 1965), pp. 49-64.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, 'Andrew Bent and the birth of the free press' pp. 2-5. See correspondence between Bent and Emmett at Colonial Secretary's office, *General Correspondence*, CSO1/1/198/4725, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter, TA), from p. 225. Henceforth the title of the CSO1 series will be omitted.

a letter on 4 June 1824.<sup>29</sup> Arthur's reaction was in character. After frostily noting Bent's situation as an ex-convict and hearing from Sorell that Bent owned the press and type, he ousted Bent from his government office and on 25 June 1825 the government began publishing its own parallel *Hobart Town Gazette* with James Ross and George Terry Howe.<sup>30</sup> Nineteenth-century historian James Fenton noted that Meredith, Anthony Fenn Kemp, Thomas Gregson and others appealed to the Lieutenant-Governor against the piracy of the title.<sup>31</sup> Bent continued publishing his version until August 1825, when he changed the name to the *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*. Thomas had resigned as editor by this time and Robert Lathrop Murray became the first editor of the *Colonial Times*.<sup>32</sup>

In early 1824, Robert Murray, fresh from his libel win over Meredith and the 'Committee Room' (Chapter 6), began contributing letters to the *Hobart Town Gazette*, then still controlled by Bent, over the signature 'A Colonist'.<sup>33</sup> Up to April 1825, the subject and content of the letters were relatively mild. Murray publicly acknowledged himself as 'A Colonist' at the Sorell Dinner on 7 April that year. Subsequently, his letters were mostly directed to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and were more strident in their criticism of the

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<sup>29</sup> Emmett to Arthur, 4 June 1824, *ibid*, pp. 245-248.

<sup>30</sup> Bent was initially advanced £379/12/4 to buy a press and type, to be repaid in two six-monthly instalments: 'Statement of colonial revenue for the quarter ended 30 September 1823' *Hobart Town Gazette*, 13 February 1824, p. 1. No repayments were shown in published quarterly accounts until the loan was noted as being repaid in full in the June 1824 quarter: Supplement to the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 20 May 1825, (not paginated). Arthur to Montagu, 7 June 1824, Sorell to Arthur, 8 June 1824, CSO1/1/198/4725, TA; *Hobart Town Gazette* (Government version), 25 June 1825, p. 1. Andrew Bent researcher S Bloomfield speculates that the money to repay the loan may have come from Anthony Fenn Kemp, or Bent's bank (Bank of Van Diemen's Land): S Bloomfield, 'Bent & Co', e-mail, 22 October 2019. George Terry Howe was a son of George Howe of Sydney, who initiated the *Sydney Gazette*.

<sup>31</sup> J Fenton, *A history of Tasmania from its discovery in 1642 to the present time* (Hobart, 1884), p. 76.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 27 February 1824, p. 2.

administration. In the 20 May 1825 edition of Bent's *Gazette*, a harsh letter from Murray was accompanied by an editorial from Thomas, similarly critical of Arthur.<sup>34</sup>

Arthur's administration sued Bent in two separate actions in 1825 for libelling Arthur over various issues.<sup>35</sup> The first action, in July, included one of Murray's letters and an editorial piece using the phrase 'Gideonite of tyranny', seemingly referring to Arthur.<sup>36</sup> The main evidence was heard on 26 July 1825 and Anthony Fenn Kemp, Gregson and Meredith were called as witnesses. Kemp stated he did not understand the expression 'Gideonite of tyranny', while Gregson and Meredith conceded that, on reflection, they considered that it applied to Arthur.<sup>37</sup> It is unclear what was meant here. Were they saying that they thought that it was an accurate description of Arthur, supporting the defence, or that they recognised the public use of the expression, thereby adding weight to the prosecution? The former would be in character, but the latter appears to be the case.<sup>38</sup>

The choice of these three particular witnesses was interesting, in that other than Fenton's reference to their objection to the piracy of the *Hobart Town Gazette* masthead as noted above, they had no obvious connection to the newspaper nor had anything published in it that was the subject of the prosecution. Andrew Bent researcher Sally Bloomfield has

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<sup>34</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 20 May 1825, p. 2 and p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> See A Low, 'Sir Alfred Stephen and the jury question in Van Diemen's Land', *University of Tasmania Law Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2002), pp. 90-91 for a discussion of the trial in the context of the 'trial by jury' issue.

<sup>36</sup> The 'Gideonite of tyranny' phrase was published in the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 8 October 1824, p. 2 and its meaning proved elusive at the time. West, in his original text: John West, *The History of Tasmania*, Vol. I, (Launceston 1852), p. 108, used the word 'Gibeonite'. Shaw, editing West's history in the 1981 republication, changed it back to Gideonite, commenting that West had 'misprinted' the word: J West, *The history of Tasmania with copious information respecting the colonies of New South Wales Victoria South Australia &c., &c., &c.*, Shaw, AGL (ed.) (Sydney, 1981), p. 576. Low, 'Sir Alfred Stephen', p. 90 and CMH Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. II: New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1822-1838* (Melbourne, 1968), p. 188, also used 'Gibeonite of Tyranny'. Clark guessed Arthur's understanding of it as 'they hanged their enemies on the hill before the Lord', which is consistent with descriptions of the Gibeonites in the King James Bible, *Joshua 9-10*. Perhaps 'Gibeonite' was what the original writer of the piece (presumably Evan Henry Thomas) intended.

<sup>37</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 29 July 1825, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Woodberry, *Andrew Bent*, on p. 128 stated that Kemp, Meredith and Gregson 'offered Bent up' at his trials.

concluded that Meredith did have a pecuniary interest in Bent's press from an early stage, but the timing is unclear.<sup>39</sup> Further on the issue of Meredith's financial interest in Bent's press, Francis ED Browne was a convict employed in the Survey Department and also acted as a writer for Andrew Bent, against regulation.<sup>40</sup> In May 1828, he was about to be removed from his position of Clerk in the Survey Department due to his association with the printer, so he wrote a letter to Edward Dumaesq, previously Surveyor-General, appealing for help. In the letter, Browne told of his attempts to undermine the efforts of 'Mess<sup>rs</sup> Kemp Meredith JT Gellibrand W Gellibrand Murray and Bent' and claimed success against most, but not Kemp or Meredith 'of whom the madness of one and intemperance of the other' should have given Browne an advantage.<sup>41</sup> Browne noted that Bent was aided 'in a pecuniary way by [those] Gentlemen' and thus their influence was difficult to disrupt.<sup>42</sup> Although the military jury brought in a verdict of guilty against Bent, this trial was abandoned in December when the Chief Justice was not satisfied as to some technical issues.<sup>43</sup>

So, even in the early stages of Arthur's administration, Meredith and allies Gregson and Kemp were manoeuvring in the background of Andrew Bent and his press. All three probably recognised that a non-government-controlled press, or newspaper, would be of

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<sup>39</sup> S Bloomfield, 'Bent and Meredith', e-mail, 5 June 2018.

<sup>40</sup> For regulations pertaining to convicts and their being able to act as 'writers', see HRA III, Vol. X, Note 27, p. 951 and Note 29, p. 952.

<sup>41</sup> From the word order, it is assumed that Kemp was the 'mad' one and Meredith 'intemperate', and 'intemperate' was with the meaning of lacking some self-control rather than with an alcohol problem.

<sup>42</sup> Browne to Dumaesq, 28 May 1828, CSO1/1/281/6770, TA, reproduced in E FitzSymonds [J Dally], (ed.), *A looking-glass for Tasmania: Letters petitions and other manuscripts relating to Van Diemen's Land 1808-1845*, (Adelaide, 1983), pp. 143-146.

<sup>43</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 16 December 1825, p. 4.

assistance to them in opposing the new regime in Government House. That said, their reasons for wishing for this freedom may not have been shared by all three.

Bent's second trial for libel occurred in August 1825. He was found guilty by the military jury and sentenced to three months imprisonment and fines and sureties of £600.<sup>44</sup> The re-trial of the first libel prosecution occurred in April 1826. Gregson and Meredith, as prosecution witnesses this time, described the 'Gideonite of tyranny' phrase as 'brainless drivellings' (Gregson) and a 'jumble of nonsense' (Meredith), but again, they both said they regarded that the expression was referring to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur. Bent was found guilty of the charge involving the 'Gideonite of tyranny' phrase and sentenced to an additional three months gaol and an additional fine.<sup>45</sup> In his sentencing, Chief Justice Pedder concluded: 'I hope that this [sentence] will prevent your newspaper continuing to be the tool of a faction'.<sup>46</sup> Meredith noted the outcome in a letter to his wife: 'Bent you will see is fined £200 & imprisoned 3 months—and Murray I think will soon be attempted—he is a sharp thorn in the Government's side'.<sup>47</sup> Robert L Murray at the time was editor of the *Colonial Times*.

From 1826, the description of a grouping against Arthur was commonly referred to in terms of a 'faction'.<sup>48</sup> However, as Woodberry pointed out, there was no set or coherent

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<sup>44</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 5 August 1825, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Colonial Times*, 21 April 1826, p. 2 and 26 May 1826, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* The *Hobart Town Gazette*, 29 July 1825, p. 2, reported the words 'of the worst description.' to the end of those remarks.

<sup>47</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 April 1826, *Meredith family papers*, G4/11, University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections (hereafter, UTAS S&R). Henceforth the title of the G4 series will be omitted.

<sup>48</sup> In early 1825 the term 'faction' appeared in newspapers occasionally, in the sense of a complaining group, or even a 'public faction' *Hobart Town Gazette*, 4 March 1825, p. 3, 20 May 1825, p. 2. In November 1825, a group, including Kemp and Bethune but not Meredith or Gregson, sent a memorial to Arthur complaining about 'banditii' and the way the administration was dealing with them—reproduced in *Hobart Town Gazette*, 7 Jan 1826, p. 4. Arthur's reply blamed 'factions principles disseminated in the Colony, through the medium of a licentious Press,' *ibid.* Arthur wrote to Bathurst the same month describing 'systematic opposition by the faction who had command of [the Hobart Town Gazette]' HRA III, Vol. V, p 54. *The Hobart Town Gazette*, 11

membership of this group.<sup>49</sup> Woodberry believed that Gregson, Meredith and Kemp were key members of whatever group or faction was against Arthur as they 'were all called as witnesses and, although they denied implication, their being named at all was important'. Levy, harsh on opponents of Arthur as always, portrayed Bent and other newspaper figures as a 'dupe' of 'those constant troublemakers Kemp, Grant, Gregson, Meredith'.<sup>50</sup> Levy's discussion of these events is problematical. He referred to 'evidence of witnesses' and wrote: 'testimony indicated that these libels "were a joint product—gradually concocted by the Literary Club"', whose members were the aforementioned 'trouble makers'. Levy's footnote for 'evidence of witnesses', his only footnote in this part of his text, referred to the '*Hobart Town Gazette*' of 29 July and 1 August 1825. The government *Hobart Town Gazette* was not published on either of those days, and Bent's *Hobart Town Gazette and VDL Advertiser* was published only on 29 July. It does not contain the 'Literary Club' quote, nor does any Van Diemen's Land newspaper of a similar time.<sup>51</sup> More recent researchers of Andrew Bent present Bent as less the 'dupe' of some 'faction' and more as one truly seeking some freedom for his press, while taking support where he could find it—including from Meredith and others.<sup>52</sup>

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February 1826, p. 4 named 'Mr Kemp and his faction'. At the annual Sorell Dinner, Meredith denied being 'a faction man' *Colonial Times and VDL Advertiser*, 14 April 1826, p. 3. The term was then used in the Supreme Court in Bent's case *Hobart Town Gazette*, 27 May 1826, p. 2 and thereafter the *Colonial Times*, 2 June 1826, p. 2, 9 June 1826, p. 3 and 16 June 1826, p. 2 mocked the term.

<sup>49</sup> Woodberry, *Andrew Bent*, p. 27. Miller discusses use of the term in *Pressmen and Governors*, p. 192.

<sup>50</sup> MCI Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A colonial benevolent despot* (Melbourne, 1953), pp. 329-330. Fenton in *History of Tasmania*, p. 76 noted that Meredith, Gregson and Kemp were 'backers' of Bent in at least one appeal to the government.

<sup>51</sup> Levy, *George Arthur*, p. 330; a search on the Australian National Library's Trove web site of digitised newspapers was used to look for the 'Literary Club' phrase, along with others in the quote, [www.trove.nla.gov.au](http://www.trove.nla.gov.au), accessed 25 March 2019. The quote 'gradually concocted' appeared in *Hobart Town Gazette*, 22 April 1826 p. 2 and was spoken by Henry Evan Thomas in relation to the first libellous article, which he said was a 'joint production of some members of this literary club'. Thomas said that Kemp and also James Grant were amongst the most 'liberal' in furnishing raw material for the paper. The quotes were hotly contested by the *Colonial Times*, 28 April 1826, p. 2, describing the *Gazette's* report as 'a tissue of falsehoods'.

<sup>52</sup> Collins, and Bloomfield, 'Andrew Bent and fermenting change', pp. 30-55.

In March 1826 the Executive Council advised the government to pass legislation 'relative to the restriction of the public press' as advised by a despatch from Lord Bathurst dated 12 July 1825.<sup>53</sup> Bathurst again wrote to Arthur in April 1826, disapproving of the recent content of newspapers in Sydney and Hobart, and noted that English laws required the imposition of stamp duty on them and lodgement of bonds by the printers etc, but that these did not apply in the colonies.<sup>54</sup> He then instructed that the Van Diemen's Land Legislative Council should consider similar laws for the local press. Having consulted with Governor Darling in New South Wales, Arthur lost no time in having his Legislative Council pass laws for the regulation of the press, and for the imposition of stamp duty on newspapers.<sup>55</sup> Darling wrote from New South Wales supporting the law, while noting that nothing similar was needed in Sydney.<sup>56</sup> In his letter advising Bathurst of this, and also in the preamble to the law, Arthur made it clear that he regarded Van Diemen's Land first and foremost to be a penal colony, with the rights of settlers very much subservient to that undertaking and that little tolerance would be had for public dissent and criticism.<sup>57</sup>

*An Act To Regulate The Printing And Publishing Of Newspapers, And For The Prevention Of Blasphemous And Seditious Libels and An Act for imposing a Duty upon Newspapers, and, upon all Licenses to print and publish the same* were passed by the Legislative Council on

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<sup>53</sup> Executive Council, *Draft minutes of proceedings of the Executive Council, 3 December 1825-25 February 1828*, 9 March 1826, EC3/1/1, TA. Henceforth the title of the EC3 series will be omitted.

<sup>54</sup> Bathurst to Arthur, 2 April 1826, HRA III, Vol. V, pp. 130-131. See also Executive Council, 27 November 1826, EC3/1/1, TA, where the stamp duty was recommended.

<sup>55</sup> Arthur to Bathurst, 24 September 1827, HRA III, Vol. VI, pp. 247-248. For a discussion on how Brisbane and his Chief Justice, Francis Forbes, approached the issue, see JJ Eddy, *Britain and the Australian colonies 1818-1831* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 108-111 and Walker, *Newspaper press*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>56</sup> Darling to Arthur, 24 March 1826, *Papers of Sir George Arthur*, Vol. 7, Letters from Sir R Darling, ZA2167, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (hereafter, ML, SLNSW). The Sudds-Thompson affair was still some months off.

<sup>57</sup> See Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, pp. 624-625.



15 and 21 September 1827 respectively.<sup>58</sup> In late November, twenty-four settlers, led by Meredith and Gregson, wrote an Address to Arthur strongly protesting against these new restrictions on the press.<sup>59</sup> Arthur replied, noting one passage in the Address that was 'presumptuous and unjust'.<sup>60</sup> Arthur laid the Address and the Meredith correspondence before the Executive Council and enclosed the colonists' letter in a despatch to Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Viscount Goderich, dismissing it as follows:

I desire to add that the Address in question has been entirely got up by Mr Gregson and Mr Meredith, and that several of the Gentlemen who subscribed to it have since notified to the Government that they were importuned into the measure, and had subscribed their names without reflection.<sup>61</sup>

Arthur's reply to the letter-writers, also sent to Goderich, was entirely dismissive.<sup>62</sup> About twelve days after Arthur's reply, the colonists published their letter in the local press.<sup>63</sup> In early January 1828, Gregson, as 'Chairman of the Committee', forwarded a printed version of the petition and several other documents, including a cover letter to the new Secretary

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<sup>58</sup> [http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num\\_act/aatrtpaponaftpobasl8gin21155/](http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num_act/aatrtpaponaftpobasl8gin21155/) and [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num\\_act/aafiadunaualtpaps8gin3941/aafiadunaualtpaps8gin3941.pdf](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num_act/aafiadunaualtpaps8gin3941/aafiadunaualtpaps8gin3941.pdf), viewed online on 12 January 2018. In October 1827, Bent published his *Colonial Times* as an advertising broadsheet only and left blank the page where 'news' would be' and then applied for a licence. It was refused on the recommendation of the Executive Council: Executive Council, 31 October 1827, EC3/1/1, TA. Bent was charged with breaching the Act, fined and sent to gaol: Collins, 'Andrew Bent and the birth of the free press', pp. 13-14.

<sup>59</sup> Meredith and others to Arthur, 21 November 1827, HRA III, Vol. VI, pp. 352-357. Meredith and Gregson were at the top of the list signing the letter. William Gellibrand, Scott, Kemp, Bethune and Kermode are amongst the others.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 358; Executive Council, 14 December 1827, EC3/1/1, TA.

<sup>61</sup> Arthur to Goderich, HRA III, Vol. VI, pp. 351.

<sup>62</sup> Enclosed in Arthur to Goderich, 26 November 1827, HRA III, Vol. VI, pp. 357-358. Arthur had noted to his Executive Council that three magistrates including one 'Public Officer' had signed the Address (this was Dr Scott, the Colonial Surgeon) and that he intended to query Scott about his conduct and send the file to the Secretary of State for his advice: Executive Council, 14 December 1827, EC3/1/1, TA. While considering they had acted with 'great impropriety', Councillors Pedder and Thomas advised that 'no notice' be taken of the magistrates who signed the Address, but the Colonial Secretary opined that they should be sacked as magistrates. No decision was made in the meeting.

<sup>63</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 December 1827, p. 4.

of State for War and the Colonies, William Huskisson.<sup>64</sup> Although Gregson was named as the Chairman, all letters between the Lieutenant-Governor's office and the Committee were sent to and from Meredith. Historian Lloyd Robson wrote that the Colonial Office gave the petition little weight, considering the press a local matter, but this seems to go against other evidence, as presented below.<sup>65</sup>

The new Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Sir George Murray disallowed Arthur's press licencing Act as 'repugnant to the laws of England' and he communicated this to Arthur in a despatch in late July 1828.<sup>66</sup> Arthur published the disallowance soon after receipt in December 1828, together with a replacement Act that was only marginally less restrictive on the press, but did not have the earlier flaws.<sup>67</sup> He advised Murray of this in a despatch in early January, noting that the new Act would prevent emancipists from becoming editors of newspapers, blaming them for much of the trouble over 1825-26.<sup>68</sup> In describing this episode, Manning Clark failed to mention that Murray specifically disallowed Arthur's press law, implying that another piece of legislation passed in England in 1828, namely the *Australian Courts Act* 1828, 9 Geo. IV, Cap. LXXXIII made the change.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Gregson to Huskisson, 7 January 1828, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Offices and individuals*, CO280/18, pp. 325-334, Australian Joint Copying Project (hereafter, AJCP) microfilm #241, TA. A slightly damaged original of the printed petition and letters also exists at: *George Meredith (1778-1856). Printed Address to, and correspondence with his Excellency Lieut.-Governor Arthur upon the subject of the recent Colonial Acts, imposing a license upon the Free Press of Van Diemen's Land*, NS123/1/12, TA.

<sup>65</sup> L Robson, *A history of Tasmania: Vol. I Van Diemen's Land from the earliest times to 1855* (Melbourne, 1983), p. 303.

<sup>66</sup> Murray to Arthur, 31 July 1828, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Entry Books, Letters from Secretary of State, Despatches*, CO408/5, pp. 141-146, AJCP microfilm #289, TA. Murray absolved Arthur of any blame for enacting his law, recognising that he was following the instructions of Bathurst. See also HRA III, Vol. VII, pp. 462-463 and accompanying notes. Levy, in his staunchly pro-Arthur book, does not mention London's disallowance of the law, Levy, *George Arthur*, p. 332.

<sup>67</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 24 December 1828, pp. 225-238.

<sup>68</sup> Arthur to Murray, 2 Jan 1829, HRA III, Vol. VIII, pp. 4-16.

<sup>69</sup> This Act is discussed in Chapter 3; Clark, *History of Australia* Vol. II, pp. 132-133.

That new law covered a number of aspects, but Murray took the trouble to tell Arthur that it could not be used to restrict the 'liberty of the press'.<sup>70</sup>

In the meantime, in February 1827, Arthur again prepared to prosecute Andrew Bent for libel, this time for reprinting an article from the *Australian* in Sydney. This prompted even the semi-official *Hobart Town Gazette* to voice its concern, suggesting the author of the piece be prosecuted rather than Bent.<sup>71</sup> The prosecution was withdrawn. The following week, the *Hobart Town Gazette* became an organ for government business only and its former editor, James Ross, established the pro-government *Hobart Town Courier* about the same time.<sup>72</sup> Bent celebrated the repeal of the press licencing Act by publishing a rejuvenated *Colonial Times* in January 1829, which contained both an editorial on the 'liberty of the press' and a reprint of the letters between the Governor and Meredith on behalf of the colonists.<sup>73</sup>

It is difficult to be precise about how much bearing the protesting colonists, and George Meredith in particular, had on Murray's decision to overturn Arthur's press law. It may be easy to refer to the change in authority in London from Bathurst to Murray via Huskisson for the liberalisation, but Murray does not appear to have been naturally a 'liberal'.<sup>74</sup> In his despatch of disallowance to Arthur, Murray reported that it was the 'Law Officers of the

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<sup>70</sup> Murray to Arthur, 31 July 1828, HRA III, Vol. VII, p. 461.

<sup>71</sup> Heaton, 'Early Tasmanian press', p. 18; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 17 February 1827, p. 4. Soon afterwards, George Howe, the printer of the *Hobart Town Gazette*, sacked its editor, James Ross. Arthur refused to give Howe the position of Government Printer and retained Ross at the *Gazette*. Howe then formed the *Tasmanian* newspaper, with Joseph Gellibrand, the former Attorney-General, as its editor. See WD Forsyth, *Governor Arthur's convict system: Van Diemen's Land 1824-36 a study in colonisation* (Sydney, 1970), p. 184.

<sup>72</sup> Heaton, 'Early Tasmanian press', p. 20. It is worth noting at this point that the former harsh critic of Arthur, Robert L Murray had, in 1827, married the daughter of a 'respectable settler' and, at a similar time, changed his views on Arthur, as published in the *Tasmanian*. In early 1828 he began publishing and editing the *Austral-Asiatic Review* and continued in that as an ally of Arthur. See Clark, *History of Australia* Vol. II, pp. 130-133.

<sup>73</sup> *Colonial Times*, 2 January 1829, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> SPG Ward, 'Murray, Sir George (1772-1846)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed online at <https://doi-org.ezproxy.utas.edu.au/10.1093/ref:odnb/19608>, accessed online 5 January 2018.

Crown' who formed the view that the law was repugnant to the laws of England.<sup>75</sup> One of the most eminent of those law officers was James Stephen.<sup>76</sup> A friend of Arthur's, Stephen prepared the 1825 despatch proposing the licensing of newspapers and other impositions similar to those then current in Britain.<sup>77</sup> Historian Ronald Giblin argued that Stephen exercised considerable influence over policy in respect of Van Diemen's Land and supported Arthur's general desire to exercise tight controls over rights and liberties that may otherwise prevail in a 'free' society such as England.<sup>78</sup> In 1828 Stephen was still very much against liberalising the administration of the colony:

If it be enquired, why it was necessary in New South Wales alone to settle the constitution of the courts and the legislature by an Act of Parliament, instead of resorting, as in other Colonies, to the admitted prerogative and inherent powers of the crown, the answer is as follows:

The great anomaly in the condition of the Colony is, of course, its character as a penal settlement ... [Of a population of about 40,000] two thirds are convicts [either

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<sup>75</sup> Murray to Arthur, 31 July 1828, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Entry Books, Letters from Secretary of State, Despatches*, CO408/5, pp. 141-146, AJCP microfilm #289, TA.

<sup>76</sup> AGL Shaw, 'Stephen, Sir James (1789-1859)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, accessed online at <https://doi-org.ezproxy.utas.edu.au/10.1093/ref:odnb/26374>, accessed online 5 January 2018.

<sup>77</sup> Letters from Stephen to Arthur often began 'My dear friend' and concluded along the lines of 'I am, my dear sir, your very sincere and affectionate friend', for instance: Stephen to Arthur, 4 January 1824, 31 July 1824, 4 January 1825 and 9 April 1825, *Papers of Sir George Arthur*, Vol. 4, Correspondence with James Stephen 1823-54, ZA2164, ML, SLNSW; Eddy, *Britain and Australian colonies*, p. 13. According to Shaw, Stephen 'proposed and supported' restrictions on the press in the 1820, but by 1830 conceded that unless strictly necessary, they would be 'repugnant to the laws of England' AGL Shaw, 'James Stephen and colonial policy: The Australian experience', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1992), p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> Giblin, *Early history of Tasmania*, Vol. II, pp. 592-594. Giblin quoted Stephen to Hay, 4 July 1827, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, Offices*, CO280/14, pp. 109-106, AJCP microfilm #237, TA, in support of his argument. There, Stephen discussed Arthur's plan to appoint military officers to the commission of the peace and have authority over the civilian police. There was division in the Legislative Council about this (Chief Justice Pedder was against the plan). Stephen noted that Pedder's view applied to 'a state of society very different from that which exists in Van Diemen's Land. An evil, so enormous as that which appears to prevail in Van Diemen's Land, will, of course, require the temporary sacrifice of many principles of law which, under other circumstances can hardly be too scrupulously maintained. ... An act of the legislative Council was necessary ... however inconsistent with ... the general principles of English Law ... appears to me to afford complete justification for it.'

serving or have served]. Of course, a population so constituted could not be governed upon the same principles as an ordinary society.<sup>79</sup>

The force to overcome these views, or even to have instigated a thorough review of the freedom-of-the-press policy in mid-1828, must have been strong. There seems little doubt, by its good reasoning and the timing of both its receipt in London and Murray's despatch of disallowance, that Meredith and Gregson's petition of late 1827 was important in having Arthur's press licencing Act disallowed and hence delivered Arthur's first substantial setback. It would have also emboldened Meredith, Gregson and others to contest Arthur's policies more vigorously in the coming years, including the second 'freedom of the press' campaign in the 1830s and the period leading up to when Arthur might have been considered for a further term as Lieutenant-Governor.

This was a 'win' for Meredith, Gregson and their allies, but the reason why Meredith in particular should have taken up the cause of Bent, both financially and in toil, needs to be examined. Unlike most of the other players in the press in Van Diemen's Land at the time, he had no background in newspapers and had many other things to preoccupy him, such as the development of his farm and his whaling enterprise. Gregson on the other hand was by nature a 'radical' and opposing the government was not a great step for him.<sup>80</sup> Meredith was likely looking at a longer play, advancing someone (Bent) and something (the press) legitimately to criticise Arthur and his administration; to hopefully weaken him, defeat him on occasion and ultimately cause him to relent in his strict administration.

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<sup>79</sup> [Memo by James Stephen describing amendments to the NSW Act 1823, with annotations on the original Act], 4 March 1828, Colonial Office, *New South Wales Original Correspondence, Individuals, etc, A – K*, CO201/95, p. 337, AJCP microfilm #163, TA.

<sup>80</sup> See RJ Brain, 'Thomas Gregson, a Tasmanian radical', draft and unsubmitted MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1955, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania.

## THE *COLONIST*

As discussed in other chapters, by 1832 Meredith had done well out of his whaling enterprise and he had paid off most of his debt. The Aboriginal people were no longer a threat to him. So, why, in mid-1832, in this time of relative stability, did George Meredith, with his friend and fellow political agitator, Thomas George Gregson, decide to establish their own newspaper, the *Colonist*? In fact, the idea of the *Colonist* began the year before, apparently during Meredith's conflict with Aubin and other government figures noted previously. In early 1830, printer Andrew Bent was liquidating his assets after again suffering a number of losses in court.<sup>81</sup> He sold the *Colonial Times* to Henry Melville and later announced that he was retiring from printing.<sup>82</sup> The liquidation continued during the first half of 1831 when he advertised a printing press for sale and sold his property *Bentfield* to Joseph Hone.<sup>83</sup> In June Bent was slaughtering his herd and selling 'cheap beef'.<sup>84</sup> Yet by August 1831, Bent appeared to have a change of heart, as that month it was reported in Sydney that Bent had sent to London for a supply of materials to set up a new printing enterprise in Hobart Town. It would be offered in £5 shares and be called either the *Tasmanian Monitor*, the *Hobart Phoenix* or the *Colonial Advocate*.<sup>85</sup> The *Colonist* later reported that when the citizenry discovered that the *Colonial Times*, in the hands of its new

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<sup>81</sup> Bent had been the object of four libel suits in the 1820s and had been gaoled at least once. In early 1830, there were three more – see <https://andrew-bent.life/articles/>, accessed online 25 October 2019 for a list of Bent's court cases compiled by Bent researcher S Bloomfield. *Butler v Bent*, January 1830 was the first trial before a civil jury in Van Diemen's Land. Bent lost and was fined, see: 'Butler v. Bent [1830]', Macquarie University, Division of Law, and the University of Tasmania, School of History and Classics, *Decisions of the Nineteenth Century Tasmanian Superior Courts*, [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/tas/cases/case\\_index/1830/butler\\_v\\_bent/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/tas/cases/case_index/1830/butler_v_bent/), accessed online 10 January 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, pp. 43-44, *Sydney Monitor*, 8 September 1830, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Colonial Times*, 18 May 1831, p. 1; Land Tasmania, Registry of Deeds, deed of sale of *Bentfield* from Andrew Bent to Joseph Hone, 11 May 1831, 1/994.

<sup>84</sup> *Colonial Times*, 29 June 1831, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 10 August 1831, p. 3.

owner, Henry Melville, had 'changed its principles' and now supported the government, they requested Bent to send away for a press to re-commence business.<sup>86</sup> Those citizens would have included, or were perhaps only, Meredith and Gregson and this press produced their *Colonist* newspaper.

In his unsubmitted thesis on Thomas Gregson, Brain took the position that the establishment of the *Colonist* was Gregson's initiative:

Gregson was not satisfied with the mere advantage of a free press, and he maintained that the existing newspapers were not attacking Arthur with sufficient animosity. ... The only solution was to launch his own newspaper, and therefore in July 1823 [sic – 1832] the *Colonist* appeared, with Gilbert Robertson as editor, and financed chiefly by Gregson and Meredith, the co-proprietors, but with the intermittent support of interested friends.<sup>87</sup>

The *Colonist's* printer, Andrew Bent, on the other hand credited Meredith first and foremost. In 1836, the *Daily London Journal* was to be established with capital of 10,000 shares of £5 each and published by 'thorough reformers'.<sup>88</sup> *Bent's News* commented: 'This gigantic undertaking, in the rapid march of Newspapers, is somewhat similar to the patriotic plan Mr. Meredith, one of the Trustee Proprietors, intended to have established that highly popular Journal, *The* (defunct) *Colonist*'.<sup>89</sup>

A letter from Gregson to Mary Meredith, apologising for her husband being away from Swan Port for an extended time, also appears to indicate that Meredith was the instigator. He wrote: 'The fact is we can do nothing without him and the 'Colonist', the Journal of the

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<sup>86</sup> *Colonist*, 17 August 1832, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Brain, 'Thomas Gregson', p. 35.

<sup>88</sup> *Bent's News*, 8 October 1836, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* The words quoted are per the newspaper.

People, originated by Mr Meredith, must fall unless he now remains here for at all events, eight or ten days'.<sup>90</sup> Later, Meredith gave a statement which ran the 'public line':

I do certify that the Colonist Newspaper was originally established at the instance of numerous Gentlemen upon purely independent and patriotic principles, as the public organ of the people's voice, and under obligations by Trust Deeds, that all profits arising from its publication should be appropriated to charitable institutions.<sup>91</sup>

The *Colonist* first appeared on 6 July 1832 and led with its own 'Prospectus'. It noted that there were already five weekly papers in the colony, three of them in Hobart; the Launceston papers were dismissed as having 'local character'.<sup>92</sup>

The imprint of the first issue of the *Colonist* stated that it was 'printed and published' by Gilbert Robertson, at the offices of Andrew Bent.<sup>93</sup> Robertson was also the editor.<sup>94</sup> Robertson arrived in the colony in 1822 and obtained a grant in the Coal River valley.<sup>95</sup> Before long, he was at odds with his assigned convicts, magistrate George Gunning and his business partner, and was frequently in court. He was made superintendent of the government farm at New Town for a short while, but was soon at odds with the editor of the *Colonial Times* RL Murray and his own masters at the Engineers Office, which controlled the government farm.<sup>96</sup> He was made Chief Constable at Richmond and led the first 'roving party' against Aboriginal people in 1828, whilst holding a sympathetic view on their

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<sup>90</sup> Gregson to Mary Meredith, 13 March 1833, G4/114, UTAS S&R.

<sup>91</sup> Meredith certificate, September 1836, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, Individuals A-K*, CO280/88, p. 439, AJCP microfilm #284, TA.

<sup>92</sup> *Colonist*, 6 July 1832, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, p. 178.

<sup>95</sup> C Pybus, 'The colourful life of Gilbert Robertson; transcript of The Examiner-John West Memorial Lecture 2011', *2011 Papers and Proceedings*, Launceston Historical Society (October, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 2-3, also Chapter 5.



status.<sup>97</sup> Early in 1832, he had his convict labour withdrawn by Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and was criticised by Clerk of the Executive and Legislative Councils (later Colonial Secretary) John Montagu. Robertson was also an ally of James Gordon, who had been dismissed by Arthur as a police magistrate at Richmond in early 1832 for drinking.<sup>98</sup> So when Meredith and Gregson were putting together their newspaper, Robertson was primed to lead their attacks on the government.

Just who was the proprietor of the *Colonist* was a matter of speculation and some derision at the time. Initially, the newspaper, styling itself as the 'Journal of the People' stated: 'the Proprietors – whose name is LEGION, for WE are many'.<sup>99</sup> In June 1833, Robertson published in Robert Murray's *Austral-Asiatic Review*, the text of the original 'Memorandum of Agreement' between himself, Meredith and Gregson, which outlined their respective positions. Robertson was to be 'editor and reporter' on a salary and the other two 'trustee [sic] for the proprietors', who as stated were 'Legion'.<sup>100</sup>

Within a few weeks of first publication, the *Colonist* attracted legal action. On 27 July 1832, it published a piece for which Gregson was sued separately by Roderic O'Connor and Joseph Tice Gellibrand.<sup>101</sup> The imprint on the newspaper on the date of publication of the offending pieces named Robertson as the printer and publisher and the *Colonist* itself described Gregson as proprietor in its headline on its report of the case.<sup>102</sup> Gregson confirmed his status as proprietor by saying in court '[the prosecution counsel] says, that

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<sup>97</sup> See also C Pybus, 'A self-made man' in *Reading Robinson companion essays to Friendly Mission*, A Johnston and M Rolls, (eds.) (Hobart, 2008), pp. 97-109.

<sup>98</sup> Clark, *History of Australia* Vol. II, p. 264.

<sup>99</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 July 1832, p. 1. Emphasis in original.

<sup>100</sup> *Austral-Asiatic Review*, 4 June 1833, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Tasmanian*, 9 November 1832, p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> *Colonist*, 16 November 1832, p. 3.

we are all paid. I must tell you, that I am *not* paid as Proprietor of The Colonist'. Originally, it seemed that both Gregson and Meredith were to be targets of the suit, as reported in the *Colonist* in September: '[O'Connor] has ... directed Mr Gellibrand to prosecute Messrs Gregson and Meredith, as Proprietors of *The Colonist*, for penalties to the amount of TEN THOUSAND POUNDS!!'.<sup>103</sup> The authorship of the offending piece may have been the work of Gregson, as the same day as the publication of the last-mentioned piece, Meredith wrote to his wife that he was delayed in town due to a 'mad act of Gregson's'.<sup>104</sup> In a later letter, Meredith complained:

Whether [O'Connor and Gellibrand] will pursue it remains to be seen, but it is no very pleasant thing to have even the semblance of such proceedings before one and for me, who have struggled hard through life to achieve something like independence, to be placed so heedlessly in such situation by trusting to a friend and endeavouring to serve the public is something of a trial.<sup>105</sup>

On 4 October 1832, Gregson and Robertson swore an affidavit that Gregson was the proprietor and that Meredith was not. This way, Meredith avoided the legal action and he must have exerted considerable pressure on Gregson to stand alone in the dock.<sup>106</sup> Meredith told his wife that, being criminal prosecutions, Gregson risked gaol.<sup>107</sup> In anticipation of this, Meredith wrote:

He himself I know expects [gaol] and it is therefore that I feel I ought not to leave him, the danger in regard to informations for penalties being now at an end. I am again to appear as joint Proprietor of the Paper; indeed, should Gregson be bound under heavy penalties then I shall stand as nominal sole Proprietor in his place, but fear not my dear M, I will take care to place Mr Editor Robertson under such censorship as to guard against those heedless libels and offensive articles against

<sup>103</sup> *Colonist*, 21 September 1832, p. 2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>104</sup> Meredith to his wife, 21 September 1832, *George Meredith Letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith*. 113 letters, NS123/1/1 #302, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/1 series will be omitted.

<sup>105</sup> Meredith to his wife, 1 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #310, TA.

<sup>106</sup> Affidavit of Thomas George Gregson and Gilbert Robertson, Colonial Secretary's Office, *Register of Deeds and Other Documents Deposited with the Colonial Secretary*, CSO61/1/1, no. 102, TA, p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> Meredith to his wife, 25 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #314, TA.

individuals which have so much tended to bring the Journal into disrepute and the proprietors into peril.<sup>108</sup>

In the event, Gregson was found guilty on 12 November and fined £80.<sup>109</sup> On 17 November, Gregson signed an affidavit declaring that he was no longer proprietor of the *Colonist*.<sup>110</sup>

Robertson wrote his version of the sacking in a letter to the *Colonial Times* a week later.<sup>111</sup>

According to Robertson, when Meredith declined to be named as a proprietor of the *Colonist* in the affidavit, he told him that he thought Gregson 'was the only person who possessed public spirit and moral courage to stand forth in the perilous character of sole responsible Proprietor of the Peoples' Journal'.<sup>112</sup> Meredith and Robertson's relationship at the *Colonist* deteriorated after this and after the trial Gregson expressed a desire to withdraw from legal responsibility, fearing gaol for later transgressions.<sup>113</sup> Meredith then wrote a letter to Robertson, dated 19 November 1832, insisting on approving everything Robertson wrote 'to protect the respectability of the paper' and gave the editor an ultimatum to accept, or else be sacked.<sup>114</sup> A confrontation ensued at the Ship Inn, where Meredith and Gregson were playing billiards, and Robertson 'demanded of Mr. Meredith, if he wrote that note, and upon his avowing it, I applied to him the coarsest epithets, with which (considering that such only could characterise his conduct) the English language

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<sup>108</sup> Meredith to his wife, 9 November 1832, NS123/1/1 #316, TA.

<sup>109</sup> *Tasmanian*, 16 November 1832, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> [Sworn statement of Thomas Gregson], 23 November 1832, *Various documents collected by Sir William Dixon mostly consisting of correspondence from early colonial publishers of newspapers to authorities, 18 June 1831-1868*, DLADD 56, ML, SLNSW.

<sup>111</sup> *Colonial Times*, 27 November 1832, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Meredith to Robertson, 19 November 1833, published in the *Colonial Times*, 27 November 1833, p. 3.

could furnish me'. Robertson then appealed to Gregson, who he was still on friendly terms with, but Gregson supported Meredith.<sup>115</sup> Robertson was sacked shortly afterwards.

Years later, Robertson wrote another version of the circumstances of the sacking. After revealing that the 'Legion' who set up the paper consisted of himself, Gregson and Meredith, he noted that he, as editor, would receive £300 a year and one-third of the 'clear profits' and the balance would go to Gregson and Meredith for 'patriotic purposes'.<sup>116</sup> Robertson wrote that he had contested some evidence given to the 'Colonial Committee on Aborigines' by James Hobbs and this offended friends of his 'partners' and conditions were then made intolerable for him. He was shut out of the office and 'Messrs. Gregson and Meredith successively became responsible proprietors and editors'.<sup>117</sup>

The 23 November 1832 was a busy day for the *Colonist*. The imprint that day told readers that Robertson's services as editor had been 'dispensed with'.<sup>118</sup> The same day, Gregson swore a statement that he was repealing his affidavit of the prior week where he relinquished the proprietorship and declared that he again held that position, and also of printer and publisher, due to 'circumstances which make it necessary'.<sup>119</sup> He, together with William Morgan Orr and Thomas Hewitt entered into recognisances and put up pledges of £400, £200 and £200 respectively, and from the 23 November 1832 edition, until 24 March 1833, Gregson is named in the paper as publisher, printer, and proprietor.<sup>120</sup> This

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<sup>115</sup> Gregson to Robertson, 20 November 1832, *ibid*.

<sup>116</sup> *True Colonist*, 26 December 1844, Supplement.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>118</sup> *Colonist*, 23 November 1823, p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> [Sworn statement of Thomas Gregson], 23 November 1832, *Various documents collected by Sir William Dixon mostly consisting of correspondence from early colonial publishers of newspapers to authorities, 18 June 1831-1868*, DLADD 56, ML, SLNSW.

<sup>120</sup> Recognizances of Thomas George Gregson, William Morgan Orr and Thomas Hewitt, 23 November 1832, Supreme Court, *Recognizances entered into by newspaper publishers for the printing and publication of newspapers*, SC213/1/1, no. 14, TA. Gregson swore an affidavit on the same day that he was the printer,

notwithstanding his earlier desire—according to Robertson—to relinquish the proprietorship. Perhaps Meredith had persuaded or forced Gregson into taking legal responsibility solely by himself, especially if Gregson was the source of the O'Connor and Gellibrand libels.

This may have been merely a holding action or perhaps Gregson continued to fret about the responsibility. On 26 November 1832, Henry Emmett, once the government-appointed editor of the *Hobart Town Gazette*, who had been ousted by Bent in 1824 and was subsequently in the government's employ, wrote to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur saying that he had been offered the 'proprietorship and editorship' of the *Colonist*, but had declined, as he was grateful for the past support of the government to him and his family.<sup>121</sup>

At some point, Thomas Horne was appointed editor, but there is no evidence of the timing. Horne was a barrister, who arrived in Hobart Town with his family on the *William* in 1830. He was admitted to the Supreme Court and, although initially supporting Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, by 1833 had turned against him and the government.<sup>122</sup> This was probably his entrée into the editorship of the *Colonist*. The paper itself recorded nothing of

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publisher and sole proprietor of the paper: Colonial Secretary's Office, *Register of deeds and other documents deposited with the Colonial Secretary*, CSO61/1/1, no. 104, TA, p. 17. Orr and Hewitt were merchants, including shipping and were frequently named in newspapers on the same platform as Gregson and/or Meredith, for instance, a public meeting to call for a Legislative Assembly in Van Diemen's Land, *Colonial Times*, 5 August 1834, p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Emmett to Arthur, 26 November 1832, in: Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Despatches*, CO280/40, pp. 344-345, AJCP microfilm #254, TA. This was referred to in Executive Council, *Minutes of Proceedings of the Executive Council* (henceforth cited as *Executive Council minutes*), 3 December 1832, EC4/1/2, TA. In an earlier letter, Emmett to Montagu, 8 November 1832, *ibid*, Emmett had disavowed connection to a piece that appeared in the *Colonist* the week before, saying he had never written for any newspaper since Andrew Bent 'emancipating himself from the Government censorship' (that is, he sacked Emmett), 'beyond the merest trifle of an unimportant nature and that, alone, to Dr. Ross'.

<sup>122</sup> M Nicholls, 'Horne, Thomas (1800–1870)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University (hereafter, ADB), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/horne-thomas-3798/text6013>, published first in hardcopy 1972, accessed online 16 October 2019. He was one of the founders of the short-lived Van Diemen's Land 'Political Association' in 1835 that attempted to be an organised opposition to Arthur: *True Colonist*, 25 September 1835, p. 4.

his editorship, other than that, by 15 March, the un-named editor had departed.<sup>123</sup> According to the opposition *Austral-Asiatic Review*, Horne 'was dismissed, or resigned, or was in some way or other got rid of, Mr Gregson telling him that he "wrote too well" for the people here ... he could not degrade himself by ... "coarse blackguard attacks"'.<sup>124</sup> Horne was made Solicitor-General, acting Attorney-General and Puisne judge after Arthur left the colony.<sup>125</sup> Gregson precipitated Horne's departure from the *Colonist* in mid-March 1833, leading to Meredith writing to his wife the next week that 'the whole arrangements of which paper have suddenly devolved on me'.<sup>126</sup> A summary of instances where occupiers of various positions in the *Colonist* were named in various documents is presented in Appendix 5.<sup>127</sup>

The *Colonist* of 9 April 1833 was the last edition whose imprint showed Gregson in controlling positions in the paper.<sup>128</sup> Brain argued that Gregson found the newspaper to be a heavy financial burden and 'proposed to resign the whole of the property to the former editor, Gilbert Robertson. Meredith, however, was not willing to relinquish his share of the paper and he became sole proprietor until August 1834'. Brain's source for the statement

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<sup>123</sup> *Colonist*, 15 March 1833, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> *Austral-Asiatic Review*, 19 March 1833, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> Nicholls, 'Horne, Thomas'.

<sup>126</sup> Meredith to his wife, 22 March 1833, *Meredith, Mary Ann [nee Evans]. Letters to her husband George Meredith, (and 1 letter from George to his wife Mary). 13 letters*, NS123/1/13, TA.

<sup>127</sup> J Ferguson, *Bibliography of Australia*, Vol. II 1831-1838 (Sydney, 1945), p. 40 has the *Colonist* as number 1524a but is in error as far as the titles and terms of Gregson and Gellard are concerned.

<sup>128</sup> *Colonist*, 9 April 1833, p. 4. This edition does not appear on the 'Trove' web site but was located in the collection of the Allport Library, State Library of Tasmania. The Master of the Supreme Court, Joseph Hone, complained to Gregson of a libel in that edition, but noted that he was aware that at the time, Gregson had 'wholly retired from [the paper]': Hone to Gregson, 11 April 1833, CSO1/1/652/14635, TA, pp. 179-182.

regarding Gregson cannot be located.<sup>129</sup> Robertson, in a letter to the *Colonial Times* in December 1832, made the claim but this was refuted in the next edition of the *Colonist*.<sup>130</sup>

Meredith and Gregson cast around for a replacement for Robertson. As noted earlier in this chapter, Francis ED Browne was a convict, who arrived on the *Medway* in December 1825.<sup>131</sup> The year before, he was named as 'printer and publisher' of the *British and Indian Observer*, which appeared in London between December 1823 and July 1824.<sup>132</sup> A petition against Browne's conviction named him as editor of the paper.<sup>133</sup> In 1826 he was assigned to the office of the Surveyor-General in Hobart Town, working as a clerk for Edward Dumaresq and then George Frankland.<sup>134</sup> The same year he began working as a writer for printer Andrew Bent at the *Colonial Times*.<sup>135</sup> Browne fell afoul of an edict issued by Arthur in 1828 that forbade convicts from writing for the press and was sent to work in the police office at Great Swan Port.<sup>136</sup> There, he came into contact with George Meredith. Later, during the 'Hogarth Affair', the then clerk in the police office, William Hogarth, wrote that

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<sup>129</sup> Brain, 'Thomas Gregson', p. 38. Brain referenced the *Colonial Times*, 27 November 1834 for the first sentence, but the *Colonial Times* was not published on that day, either in 1833 or 1834 and the article could not be located using a search on the Trove web site <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/search?adv=y>.

<sup>130</sup> *Colonial Times*, 4 December 1832, p. 2, *Colonist*, 11 December 1832, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> Francis Browne, conduct record, Convict Department, *Conduct registers of male convicts arriving in the period of the assignment system*, CON31/1/1, TA.

<sup>132</sup> S Bloomfield, unpublished note '*British and Indian Observer*', nd. The paper was owned by former British army officer in India Captain William White and was run on principles of 'the public interest' but was not above printing libels and other scurrilous remarks, according to Bloomfield.

<sup>133</sup> Petition on behalf of Francis Edward Douglas Browne, Home Office, *Criminal petitions, petitions referenced Xh, Xk, Xl and Xm*, HO 7/117/65, UK National Archives.

<sup>134</sup> T Marshall, 'The short and unhappy life of Francis Edward Douglas Browne', unpublished manuscript, with annotations by S Bloomfield, c. 2019, 28 pp.; Frankland to Browne, 6 June 1836, CSO1/1/897/19083, TA, p. 231.

<sup>135</sup> Browne to Dumaresq, 28 May 1828, CSO1/1/281/6770, TA, reproduced in FitzSymonds, *A looking-glass for Tasmania*, pp. 143-146.

<sup>136</sup> Various letters and annotations between Arthur, Burnett and Frankland, 15 August-9 October 1828, CSO1/1/281/6770, TA, reproduced in *ibid*, pp. 152-153; Browne to Edward Dumaresq, 29 September 1828, Correspondence and associated Papers of the Dumaresq, Darling and Boissier Families, *Letters to Edward Dumaresq from Francis Edward Douglas Browne*, NS953/1/299, TA. For regulations pertaining to convicts and their being able to act as 'writers', see HRA III, Vol. X, Note 27, p. 951 and Note 29, p. 952.

Meredith had told him that his predecessor 'Brown'—meaning Francis Browne—had furnished Meredith with documents from the office.<sup>137</sup>

Browne obtained his conditional pardon in May 1831 and the following year was in Launceston, probably editing the pro-government *Launceston Advertiser*, published by Henry Dowling.<sup>138</sup> In a later memorial, Browne wrote that in 'early 1833' he was invited to edit the *Colonist*.<sup>139</sup> The position was unavailable when he arrived from Launceston, he stated, but he stayed on to write for the journal until its end in 1836. He later claimed that, when working for Andrew Bent, he wrote and acted as an advocate for the government—'Here then, I assumed the office of censor; and have cut out offensive matter by columns' and 'I might unite with earning a few shillings for myself the greater object of crushing the faction headed by Messrs Kemp & Meredith ... and I thereupon undertake the herculean task of reducing the principles of Mr Bent to something more like reason than they had ever appeared'.<sup>140</sup>

Henry James Emmett was also approached at this time to edit the *Colonist*, but this fell through. Meredith wrote in April 1833 '[when] I thought finally arranged for Emmett to take the whole charge of the Colonist upon himself ... I received the note from Emmett relinquishing the thing altogether'.<sup>141</sup> In a later letter, Meredith gave Emmett's proposed title as 'Editor in Chief' with himself as Emmett's 'political guardian'.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *Colonial Times*, 7 May 1833, p. 2. The 'Hogarth affair' will be discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>138</sup> Francis Browne, conduct record, Convict Department, *Conduct registers of male convicts arriving in the period of the assignment system*, CON31/1/1, TA; Marshall, annotated Bloomfield, 'Browne', p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> Browne to Arthur, 27 January 1836, CSO1/1/849/17945, p. 17.

<sup>140</sup> Browne to Dumaresq, 28 May 1828, CSO1/1/281/6770, TA, reproduced in FitzSymonds, *A looking-glass for Tasmania*, p. 144.

<sup>141</sup> Meredith to his wife, 3 April 1833, G4/20, UTAS S&R.

<sup>142</sup> Meredith to Glenelg, 14 October 1836, Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, *Individuals A-K*, Australian Joint Copying Project microfilm #284, CO280/88, TA, p. 357.



Emmett arrived in the colony with his family and capital in November 1819 on the *Regalia* and he received some land grants.<sup>143</sup> In 1820, Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell appointed him editor of the *Hobart Town Gazette* and chief clerk in the Colonial Secretary's office.<sup>144</sup> When Arthur arrived, the *Hobart Town Gazette* turned to attacking him, and Emmett was sacked by its printer and publisher, Andrew Bent, as discussed above. Andrew Bent researcher Sally Bloomfield has speculated that the same timing of Bent's repayment to the government of the debt to buy his press and Emmett's sacking, was not co-incidental and may have been connected with some financial contribution by Meredith and/or others.<sup>145</sup> If so, Emmett's ejection as editor may have been the reason for a testy letter from him to Meredith in 1826 in relation to solicitor Thomas Rowlands. Without Emmett's permission, Meredith had published a statement Emmett had made on Rowlands and was rebuked for it.<sup>146</sup> In the same letter, Emmett also acknowledged his gratitude to Meredith for providing him with monetary assistance when he needed it. Emmett's and Meredith's relationship eventually repaired fully, as in 1832 Meredith had placed several of his daughters in residence with the Emmett family in Hobart.<sup>147</sup>

The reason Emmett declined to take on the *Colonist* in 1833 was because Arthur had warned that, should he do so, Emmett's four sons, working as clerks in the government,

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<sup>143</sup> ET Emmett, 'Emmett, Henry James (1783–1848)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/emmett-henry-james-2025/text2493>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 9 October 2019.

<sup>144</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, pp. 177, 226. ET Emmett implies a later date, *ibid*. In January 1832 Emmett complained to Colonial Secretary John Burnett about the appointment of John Montagu in the role while Burnett took some leave. Emmett noted that the convention in England was that 'the second person in the office' should be asked to fill a temporary role. Burnett dismissed the suggestion: Emmett to Burnett, 20 January 1832 (and note of reply by Burnett), CSO1/1/591/13423, TA, pp. 130-131.

<sup>145</sup> Bloomfield, 'Bent and Meredith', e-mail, 5 June 2018.

<sup>146</sup> Emmett to Meredith, 24 November 1826, *Papers and correspondence with variety of people, including Joseph Archer, Adam Amos, George Frankland, Lieut. Colonel Sorell, TD Lord and others. 150 letters*, NS123/1/4, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/4 series will be omitted.

<sup>147</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #287, also 9 May 1832, NS123/1/1 #289, TA.

would lose their jobs.<sup>148</sup> Meredith complained about this in a letter to Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Lord Glenelg, in 1836 and claimed that, not having Emmett on board, had caused him to attract, and lose, legal actions brought by Major Charles Schaw and Roderic O'Connor for libel.<sup>149</sup> Responding to Glenelg in December 1837, Arthur admitted

... that I did suggest to Mr Emmett, whether, having four sons employed as clerks in the principal private offices, it was prudent for him, on their account, to undertake editorship of Mr Meredith's paper, which partook so largely of that person's habitual hostility of feeling and violence of expression against the Government.<sup>150</sup>

Several years later, Emmett gave statements in support of Meredith in relation to a dispute Meredith was having with solicitor Thomas Rowlands.<sup>151</sup>

After Emmett declined the offer of editor of the *Colonist* in April 1833, Meredith next turned to Thomas Allen Lascelles. Meredith wrote to his wife:

An express is now going away for Lascelles [sic] at Richmond to be here tonight, he having solicited the Editorship. Gregson asserts that he not only has pledged himself to reformation and a change of habits but that he firmly believes in such pledges. Be that as it may, someone must be appointed immediately that I may be relieved from further personal attendance here.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Emmett to Meredith, 3 September 1836, *Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, Individuals A-K*, Australian Joint Copying Project microfilm #284, CO280/88, TA, p. 437. Emmett recounted the meeting with Arthur, in the presence of Josiah Spode, in: Emmett to Glenelg, 28 January 1836, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, Individuals A-G*, CO280/71, pp. 427-435, AJCP microfilm #272, TA.

<sup>149</sup> Meredith to Glenelg, 14 October 1836, *Tasmania, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, Individuals A-K*, Australian Joint Copying Project microfilm #284, CO280/88, TA, p. 356a; Meredith, statement, *ibid*, p. 439.

<sup>150</sup> Arthur to Glenelg, 30 December 1837, Governor's Office, *Despatches received from the Secretary of State*, GO1/1/29, TA, p. 243.

<sup>151</sup> Emmett, statement, 2 April 1835, CSO1/1/637/14367, TA, p. 307.

<sup>152</sup> Meredith to his wife, 3 April 1833, G4/20 UTAS S&R.

Lascelles had arrived in Van Diemen's Land via New South Wales in 1813 as an officer in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Regiment and became private secretary to Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey. Michael Roe, in a biographical note on Lascelles, described him as litigious, corrupt and anti-social.<sup>153</sup> Lascelles went farming in the Coal River valley and in 1827 was appointed Police Magistrate at Richmond, but was sacked in 1829 for malpractice. Lascelles was a friend of Thomas Gregson's, although the first evidence of their contact in the Meredith sphere was when Gregson challenged Lascelles about repeating a private conversation he had had about Solicitor-General Alfred Stephen in 1826. That episode ended amicably.<sup>154</sup> In 1830 both Gregson and Lascelles visited Meredith at Great Swan Port.<sup>155</sup>

For whatever reason, Lascelles did not become editor at this time. In his 3 April 1833 letter to his wife, Meredith noted that advertisers wanted publication to be on a Tuesday, rather than Friday, so the next publishing day would be pushed back. The paper made its re-appearance on Tuesday 9 April with Gregson still named in the imprint as printer, publisher and proprietor. This seems to have been an error. Joseph Hone, the Master of the Supreme Court, wrote to Gregson concerning a libel he found in the 9 April edition, but noted that he had been told that Gregson had 'wholly retired from' the paper and that 'a circumstance, not foreseen nor capable of being prevented, had, contrary to your wish, occasioned ... the retention of your name on the imprint'.<sup>156</sup>

In the following edition, the 'printer and publisher' was named as George Henry Braune Gellard.<sup>157</sup> Newspaper historian Morris Miller named him as editor, as did the *Colonial*

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<sup>153</sup> M Roe, 'Lascelles, Thomas Allen (1783–1859)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lascelles-thomas-allen-2332/text3035>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 10 October 2019.

<sup>154</sup> Gregson to Stephen, 18 April 1826 and Gregson to Lascelles, 19 April 1826, NS123/1/4, TA.

<sup>155</sup> Meredith to his wife, 16/17 July 1830, NS123/1/1 #60.

<sup>156</sup> Hone to Gregson, 11 April 1833, CSO1/1/652/14635, TA, pp. 179–182.

<sup>157</sup> *Colonist*, 16 April 1833, p. 4.

*Times*, while naming Meredith as the sole proprietor, 'Mr Gregson having withdrawn his name as such from the Secretary's office'.<sup>158</sup> The *Colonist* reacted by naming 'public opinion' as its editor.<sup>159</sup>

Meanwhile, Robert Murray repeatedly attacked George Meredith from the ramparts of his *Austral-Asiatic Review*, often with Meredith's name in capital letters and italics. He claimed ownership of the *Colonist* by virtue of the original agreement, published a letter by 'Jus' directly attacking Meredith and ascribed the *Colonist's* words directly to Meredith amongst a number of pieces, which, even by the standard of virulent personal attacks at the time, were excessively vituperative.<sup>160</sup> It was shortly afterwards that Robertson published the original agreement between himself, Meredith and Gregson that established the *Colonist*.<sup>161</sup> A few days after that, Charles Meredith visited Robertson at his house and, after an exchange, assaulted him at his door. Charles Meredith was found guilty and fined £20.<sup>162</sup>

The *Tasmanian*, *Colonial Times* and *Austral-Asiatic Review* continued to publish attacks on the *Colonist*, Meredith and those connected with paper over the next few months. Four letters from 'No Mistake' were received by the *Tasmanian* over May and June, purporting to tell the history of the *Colonist*, but only the first, on FED Browne, was published.<sup>163</sup> In June, the *Tasmanian* published a letter from solicitor Thomas Rowlands revealing how Meredith had earlier asked him for the name of someone who would arrest his son, George

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<sup>158</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, pp. 178-179; *Colonial Times*, 23 April 1833, p. 2.

<sup>159</sup> *Colonist*, 30 April 1833, p. 2.

<sup>160</sup> *Austral-Asiatic Review*, 23 April 1833, p. 1; 30 April, 1833, p. 3, 7 May 1833, p. 2.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 21 May 1833, p. 3.

<sup>162</sup> *Colonial Times*, 28 May 1833, p. 2; *Tasmanian*, 5 July 1833, p. 5.

<sup>163</sup> *Tasmanian*, 31 May 1833, p. 5, 28 June 1833, p. 6.

junior.<sup>164</sup> This letter was damaging to Meredith, in that it was quoted by Lieutenant-Governor Arthur as evidence of Meredith's bad character when Arthur prevented Meredith from getting further convict servants.<sup>165</sup>

George Gellard had only recently arrived from England and had been 'connected with one of the London papers'.<sup>166</sup> It is not known how Gellard entered the *Colonist's* circle, but likely he was seen as a 'fresh face'. He was named officially as printer and publisher of the paper on 13 April 1833 when he and Meredith, who had no stated position, entered into recognisances for possible libels.<sup>167</sup>

The first editorial under Gellard's tenure, on 16 April 1833, concerned the 'freedom of the press' and recounted the experience of Emmett, not named, at the hands of Arthur, including the threat about Emmett's sons.<sup>168</sup> The editorial was followed immediately by a piece describing how 'a colonial subject – *an Englishman, expired under the lash!*'. This report was false. It was apparently taken from the *Colonial Times* of 9 April and was then repeated in the *Colonist* several times. The *Colonial Times* corrected itself, but the *Colonist* did not.<sup>169</sup> As a consequence, the Crown sued the piece's author, Browne, for libel in August 1833, but no witness from the *Colonist* could recall seeing the hand-written original; Gellard declared himself to be the publisher but not the editor of that edition and that he had heard the article read to him, but had not seen it written.<sup>170</sup> Browne was found not guilty, on the

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 14 June 1833, p. 4.

<sup>165</sup> Chapter 8.

<sup>166</sup> Marshall, annotated Bloomfield, 'Browne', p. 11; *Colonial Times*, 23 April 1833, p. 2.

<sup>167</sup> Recognizances of Gellard, Meredith and Hewitt, 13 April 1833, Supreme Court, *Recognizances entered into by newspaper publishers for the printing and publication of newspapers*, SC213/1/1, no. 18, TA.

<sup>168</sup> *Colonist*, 16 April 1833, p. 2.

<sup>169</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 April 1833, p. 2. Strangely, the original article does not appear in the *Colonial Times* edition of 'last week' which was the reference to the article to be corrected; *Austral-Asiatic Review*, 7 May 1833, p. 3.

<sup>170</sup> *Tasmanian*, 16 August 1833, p. 5.

technicality that no-one had seen the libel in Browne's own writing.<sup>171</sup> The Crown then turned on Gellard and prosecuted him for publishing the libel. He was found guilty of one of the four counts against him and fined £100 and sentenced to a year in gaol.<sup>172</sup> Gellard had walked into a nest of vipers and became a quick casualty.

During the tumultuous months of July to September 1833, while the editors and staff of the *Colonist* were in the dock, Meredith himself was also on trial, being sued by Roderic O'Connor and, separately, Major Charles Schaw for libel. O'Connor sued for a piece in the *Colonist* on 14 May 1833 and in this case Meredith admitted that he was printer, publisher and proprietor. Meredith was found guilty and had to pay £200 damages to O'Connor.<sup>173</sup> Schaw sued for a piece that was printed in the *Colonist* on 28 May 1833. Meredith lost four of the eight counts and received a fine of £50.<sup>174</sup> Edward Markham was a visitor to Hobart Town at the time of this trial and observed in his diary:

... to court to hear Meredith's case brought forward. NB this was a libel on Major Shore [sic] of the 21<sup>st</sup> ... it was a government measure against Meredith the responsible editor of the *Colonist* newspaper, and he was cast 50£, it excited a great interest in the island at the time. Major Shore [sic] was an old friend of Arthur in the West Indies.<sup>175</sup>

To add to Meredith's distractions, the 'Hogarth case' had also been running its course in the middle of the year, and by November, Meredith was complaining bitterly that the Lieutenant-Governor had ordered that he no longer receive assigned convicts.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> *Colonist*, 20 August 1833, p. 3.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 3 September 1833, p. 3.

<sup>173</sup> *Tasmanian*, 12 July 1833, p. 4.

<sup>174</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 19 July 1833, p. 3.

<sup>175</sup> E Markham, *Voyage to Van Diemen's Land in the ship Warrior [and residence in Tasmania] 17 March 1833 – 7 February 1834*, A578, reel CY1684, ML, SLNSW.

<sup>176</sup> Chapter 8.

Even before his trial, Gellard had been replaced as publisher of the *Colonist* by Thomas Lascelles. Lascelles published a notice in a rival newspaper on 5 August 1833 that the *Colonist* was his exclusive property and that the former Trust Deed had been revoked.<sup>177</sup> Through August, the *Colonist's* imprint showed Lascelles to be the printer and publisher. From 3 September 1833, until the last edition published on 22 July 1834, Lascelles was named in the imprint as the printer and publisher as well as the editor and proprietor.<sup>178</sup>

Gilbert Robertson wrote later that Lascelles was 'the only man whose principles accorded with' Meredith's and Gregson's.<sup>179</sup> When the 'famous Bryan case' occurred, Robertson wrote that Gregson persuaded him to 'take the *Colonist* out of the hands of Mr Lascelles'.<sup>180</sup> Robertson went on to state that he then ran the paper entirely at his own risk and responsibility, that Gregson supported him at the *Colonist* and, with others, Gregson contributed a small amount financially. Finally, he had to change the name of the mast-head when Lascelles claimed copyright of the title 'by virtue of his name having been put in the imprint by Messrs. Gregson and Meredith'.<sup>181</sup> It is difficult to determine the truth or otherwise of these assertions by Robertson, given the enmity he felt towards Meredith. They imply that Meredith and Gregson were still exerting some control after Lascelles's apparent take-over in August 1833. This contradicts the advertisement by Lascelles that he had complete control as of then, with the original trust deed revoked.

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<sup>177</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 August 1834, p. 11.

<sup>178</sup> *Colonist*, various dates September 1833-July 1834.

<sup>179</sup> *True Colonist*, 26 December 1844, Supplement.

<sup>180</sup> The 'Bryan case' is discussed in Chapter 8 and first appeared in the *Colonist*, 21 January 1834, p. 2 and continued to be reported in various degrees of sensationalism until the paper ended.

<sup>181</sup> *True Colonist*, 26 December 1844, Supplement.

The first edition of Robertson's *True Colonist* appeared on 5 August 1834.<sup>182</sup> It continued to be printed by Andrew Bent for a couple of weeks until Robertson defaulted on his payments to Bent, who then withdrew his services. Robertson then used Nathaniel Olding as his printer for the time being.<sup>183</sup>

A post-script to this time occurred in January 1835 when Meredith's solicitors, Cartwright & Allport, advised him that Francis Browne had been in contact, asking for settlement of an account of £14/16/6 for his work on the *Colonist*. Browne was being pursued by 'Captain Goodwin' and wished the funds to go to Goodwin.<sup>184</sup> The solicitors advised that it was difficult to claim outstanding debts on the *Colonist*, as Bent and Lascelles had 'culled the accounts to pay for printing and little but bad debts are left'.<sup>185</sup> In 1836, *Bent's News* reported that Meredith was £1,500 out-of-pocket to subscribers and advertisers.<sup>186</sup>

Charles Meredith wrote to his father in February 1835 that he had again been in contact with Browne, who, he said, was engaged to write for Gilbert Robertson at the *True Colonist* for £2 per week. Charles noted that this would 'not interfere with the Colonial Advocate'.<sup>187</sup> In October 1834, Browne had advertised that he was re-commencing the *Colonial Advocate*, which earlier had a short life as a monthly newspaper from March to October 1828.<sup>188</sup> Charles Meredith's letter hinted that the Merediths may have planned some involvement with the new *Colonial Advocate*, but the paper never re-eventuated. In his letter, Charles reported that Browne told him that Bent sold the type to James Ross to

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<sup>182</sup> *True Colonist*, 5 August 1834, p. 4.

<sup>183</sup> Lawyers to Meredith, 5 September 1834, NS123/1/4, TA; *True Colonist*, 16 September 1834, p. 4.

<sup>184</sup> Captain William Lushington Goodwin was proprietor of the Launceston *Independent* and later the *Cornwall Chronicle: Colonial Times*, 29 May 1838, p. 5.

<sup>185</sup> Cartwright & Allport to Meredith, 16 January 1835, G4/137, UTAS S&R.

<sup>186</sup> *Bent's News*, 8 October 1836, p. 2.

<sup>187</sup> Charles Meredith to Meredith, 13 February 1835, G4/29(1), UTAS S&R.

<sup>188</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 17 October 1834, p. 1; *Colonial Advocate*, various dates, 1828.



prevent it being used in the new venture. The other news in Charles' letter was that he was seeking to talk to Browne about the Hogarth case.<sup>189</sup>

Andrew Bent moved to Sydney in 1839 but became destitute there.<sup>190</sup> He launched an appeal booklet, but this only attracted modest support. George Meredith gave £1, perhaps indicating a lingering if not generous appreciation or obligation to Bent.<sup>191</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Campaigning for the press and then owning a newspaper at first seems a strange distraction for the ostensibly agriculturalist Meredith. It is argued here that he first became involved with Andrew Bent and his press as a means to attack Lieutenant-Governor Arthur by proxy. Arthur ran a much tighter administration than his predecessor Sorell and this limited Meredith's self-advancing ways in respect of land and other enterprises. Campaigning on the issue of 'liberty of the press' was a populist way to be able to attack Arthur in public and in London. Meredith principally sought to weaken Arthur on every front possible to destabilise him and to hopefully see him recalled. Meredith's ally Thomas Gregson probably acted out of a greater sense of wishing to advance the freedoms of settlers and it was a convenience that he and Meredith shared the same platform.

From the late 1820s, Meredith was again in conflict with Arthur's administration over innumerable issues, including the conduct of each local magistrate, a position that Meredith no doubt coveted.<sup>192</sup> By 1832, it appears that he and Gregson convinced Bent to

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<sup>189</sup> Shortly afterwards, Browne gave a sworn statement benefitting Meredith in his defence of using Hogarth when he was clerk in the police office at Swan Port: FED Browne, 'Statement', CSO1/1/637/14367, TA, p. 304.

<sup>190</sup> A Bent, *An appeal to the sympathies and benevolence of the Australasian public, for relief for Mr Andrew Bent ...* (Sydney, 1844), p. 4 *et seq.*

<sup>191</sup> *Colonial Times*, 21 July 1844, p. 2.

<sup>192</sup> Chapter 8.

change his mind about exiting the printing business and encouraged him to order a new press from England. Meredith at least was doing well out of his whaling business at this time and perhaps had some spare resources to put towards the venture. The *Colonist* was the result. The precise roles that Gregson and Meredith undertook in practice are not clear, but Gregson, being locally based, appeared to have been in active day-to-day activities and perhaps directly contributed more copy, whilst Meredith appeared to have been the better-organised manager of business, trouble-shooter, and probably contributed a greater share of funding.

The paper was a populist broadsheet in every sense of the word, but in fact falsely portrayed itself as being established by the 'Legion' ('we are many'). Meredith and Gregson pulled the strings and controlled who was editor. Miller, in his *Pressmen and Governors*, failed to identify the nature of Meredith and Gregson's roles in the press in the colony from the early days of Bent's 'independence' through to how the *Colonist* operated. In respect of the latter, Miller merely commented that they were 'prominent in conductorship'. Miller was more accurate in portraying the couple as heading 'the opposition party in 1832'.<sup>193</sup>

Were Meredith and Gregson acting for the common good of the colony by publishing the *Colonist* and attacking Arthur? There is reason to believe that Gregson did—such was consistent with his many other attitudes to issues of colonial import. With Meredith, the case is weaker. His war of attrition against Arthur since the late 1820s surely motivated him to team up with Gregson and establish an instrument to carry his personal vendetta against the Lieutenant-Governor, and along the way, settle some personal scores with the likes of

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<sup>193</sup> Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, pp. 178, 25.

Robert Lathrop Murray, an enemy from early on when Murray represented Edward Lord against Meredith in the stock-supply agreement dispute (Chapter 2).

The episode of the *Colonist* was revealing in several other ways. It highlighted the close relationship of Meredith and Gregson—it survived a number of crises in the paper and continued after it. A sense of their respective temperaments and skills is also obtained. Gregson was more impetuous and spontaneous, perhaps lacking in judgement in the public sphere.<sup>194</sup> Meredith seemed to have better organisational skills and was better in a crisis. He would have been happy to see the attacks carried to Arthur's administration and his personal enemies, but was careless in what was written about other prominent members of society such as O'Connor and Schaw. Meredith's involvement with the press did not go as smoothly as he had hoped, but it displayed his skills as a self-serving manipulator intent on exercising what power he could muster.

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<sup>194</sup> Not least evidenced by the episodes when horsewhipped Henry Arthur, a nephew of George Arthur and fought a duel with Henry Jellicoe, a strong supporter of the former Lieutenant-Governor: Brain, 'Gregson', pp. 52-55. Clark wrote of Gregson: 'Indeed his whole public career was one uninterrupted story of libelling, horsewhipping and pistolling', CMH Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. III: The beginning of Australian civilisation 1824-1851* (Melbourne, 1973), p. 325.

## CHAPTER 8: 'THE FATE OF ONE MAY BE THE FATE OF MANY!'<sup>1</sup>: MEREDITH, ARTHUR AND CONVICT LABOUR

### INTRODUCTION

Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur achieved a reputation for punishing his critics, especially those associated with the press, such as removing or withholding convict labour, otherwise known as 'assigned servants'.<sup>2</sup> Well-known cases were those of Gilbert Robertson and William Bryan, and George Meredith was another. This chapter will analyse the reasons why Arthur came to stop Meredith being assigned new assigned servants, Meredith's reaction to it, and his claims of acting in the public interest against Arthurian 'tyranny'. To put Arthur's actions in context, the chapter will first examine the nature of convict labour and assignment, what powers the Lieutenant-Governor had to withdraw or stop the assignment of convicts, and whether Arthur applied his power selectively and/or unfairly. It will be argued that Arthur certainly wielded this power as a deliberate economic weapon against at least some of his critics, that the process used was sometimes opaque and unfair, and that the sanctions applied to Meredith were not undeserved. Meredith's resultant campaign against Arthur, supposedly in defence of free colonists against a tyrannical ruler, will be argued to be part of his self-serving attack on the administration of Arthur, even though it was dressed up as a campaign of justice for free colonists.

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 15 June 1833, reprinted in *Colonist*, 2 July 1833, p. 2. This was Meredith's rallying-cry to fellow colonists against what he saw as Arthur's tyrannical rule.

<sup>2</sup> J West, *The history of Tasmania with copious information respecting the colonies of New South Wales Victoria South Australia &c., &c., &c.*, AGL Shaw, (ed.) (Sydney, 1981), pp. 128, 139; WD Forsyth, *Governor Arthur's convict system: Van Diemen's Land 1824-36 a study in colonisation* (Sydney, 1970), p. 5.

## CONVICT LABOUR AND ASSIGNMENT

In the 1820s and 1830s, of the three essential elements for a successful settler on the land in Van Diemen's Land—capital, land and labour—two had their supply controlled by the government. Land was readily obtainable in the 1820s via free grants, with the amount granted based *prima facie* on the amount of capital brought into the colony. There were other ways to obtain large additional grants and George Meredith exploited them. For instance, he obtained an additional two thousand acre 'reserve' grant by appealing to the Secretary of State in London.<sup>3</sup>

Having gained control of close to 10,000 acres of land by 1830, Meredith, like nearly all farmer-settlers, was critically dependent on cheap labour—first to clear the land, then to improve it, tend to stock and to sow and harvest broadacre crops.<sup>4</sup> Labour supply at this time was also mostly controlled by the government via the assignment system of convict management, but unlike land at this time, convict labour was in short supply. In April 1826 Arthur wrote to Bathurst that 'the applications for Convict labour by the Settlers infinitely exceeds supply'; the *Colonial Times* gave the backlog of applications that year as a thousand.<sup>5</sup> A Government Notice of July 1832 advised that no new applications for assignment would be accepted as there were already about a thousand applications registered and sufficient convicts to supply urgent cases only and replace those who received a ticket-of-leave.<sup>6</sup> That notice was repeated in April 1833 and Arthur was able to

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Bent's News*, 2 April 1836, p. 4; Chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur to Bathurst, 4 April 1826, F Watson, (ed.), *Historical records of Australia, Series III, Despatches and papers relating to the settlement of the states, Vol. V, Tasmania, December 1825 - March, 1827*, Northern Territory, 1823-1827, Western Port, Victoria, 1826 - 1827 (Sydney, 1922), p. 132. Henceforth this series will be cited in the format HRA [series], Vol. [number], [page number(s)], irrespective of general editor; full citations are given in the bibliography. *Colonial Times*, 26 May 1826, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Government Notice No. 168, 9 July 1832, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 13 July 1832, p. 378.

advise London that twice the number of convicts in the colony could be absorbed.<sup>7</sup> Most of the convict supply was untrained and the skilled convicts, or 'mechanics', were kept in government service or dispensed as acts of patronage.<sup>8</sup>

A number of writers have examined the evolution of the convict system in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, and the operation of the assignment system.<sup>9</sup> Many have framed the assignment system as being a coerced labour market, if not 'slavery'. Both Macquarie in New South Wales and Arthur of Van Diemen's Land at times described transportation as 'slavery', but mainly to emphasise the severity of the punishment, not as a direct analogy to, say, slavery in America.<sup>10</sup> In spite of New South Wales Chief Justice Francis Forbes repeatedly declining to identify assignment as slavery in evidence to the Select Committee on Transportation (the 'Molesworth Committee'), the report of the Committee noted: 'Transportation, though chiefly dreaded as exile, undoubtedly is much more than exile; it is slavery as well'.<sup>11</sup>

Historian Ken Dallas argued: 'that assignment meant slavery was frequently asserted by colonial Governors like Arthur, Darling, Gipps and Fitzroy, all of whom had had prior

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<sup>7</sup> Government Notice No. 89, 1 April 1833, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 5 April 1833, p. 160; Arthur in *Lord Papers*, 27 February 1833, quoted in Forsyth, *Arthur's convict system*, p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> R Tuffin, 'Assignment', in: A Alexander, (ed.), *The companion to Tasmanian History* (Hobart, 2005), p. 30; AGL Shaw, *Convicts and the colonies* (London, 1966), pp. 217-218.

<sup>9</sup> Amongst them: RM Hartwell, *The economic development of Van Diemen's Land 1820-1850* (Melbourne, 1954); Forsyth, *Arthur's convict system*; Shaw, *Convicts and the colonies*; SG Foster, 'Convict assignment in New South Wales in the 1830s', *Push from the Bush*, Vol. 15 (April, 1983), pp. 35-80.

<sup>10</sup> Macquarie: Shaw, *Convicts and the colonies*, p. 103. Arthur: House of Commons, *Report from the select committee on transportation* (London, 1837), question 4281, p. 286. The committee was chaired by Radical William Molesworth, with an anti-transportation agenda. See CM Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. II* (Melbourne, 1968), p. 331; J Ritchie, 'Towards ending an unclean thing', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 67 (1974), pp. 146-147.

<sup>11</sup> House of Commons, *Report from the select committee on transportation* (London, 1838), p. xx [as in, page 20]. For Forbes, see House of Commons, *Report*, 1837, question 1290, p. 83.

experience in colonies where other forms of slavery existed'.<sup>12</sup> Michael Dunn explicitly linked convictism and slavery and contended that settlers who had assigned convicts were 'slave owners'.<sup>13</sup> Economic historian Hartwell argued that convict labour was, in effect, slave labour, comparable to the African slaves on American plantations.<sup>14</sup> One may wonder if either Dunn or Hartwell had closely studied the conditions of assigned convicts, especially the aspects of limited working hours, paying them to work in 'their own time' and recourse to magistrates, not to mention that the government, and then master, had 'property in the services' of convicts for the period of their sentence (at most) and not lifetime ownership of the *corpus* of the convict. David Neal dismantled almost all the claims linking Australian convictism to slavery with a comparison of actual slavery to the situation in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land.<sup>15</sup> Nicholas favoured the 'coerced labour' tag, meaning the labour, sometimes very harsh, was obtained by threat or intimidation of even harsher treatment.<sup>16</sup> As Maxwell-Stewart and Atkinson pointed out, the language used to describe convicts—as 'servants' who were later free and 'emancipated'—reflected the language of American and Caribbean indentured workers, rather than slaves.<sup>17</sup> Of course in Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales in the 1820s and 1830s, at least, there was no single level of convict management. At one end there was assignment, possibly to a very lenient

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<sup>12</sup> KM Dallas, 'Slavery in Australia – convicts, emigrants, aborigines', *Papers & Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (September, 1968), p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> M Dunn, 'Early Australia: Wage labour or slave society?' in EL Wheelwright and K Buckley, (eds.), *Essays in the political economy of Australian capitalism*, Vol. 1 (Sydney, 1975), pp. 35, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Hartwell, *Economic development*, p. 64. JB Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies: A history of early New South Wales* (Sydney, 1983), p. 32, rebutted most of the arguments of Dunn and Hartwell, noting the actual conditions convicts under assignment acted but conceding that convict labour was forced.

<sup>15</sup> D Neal, *The rule of law in a penal colony: Law and power in early New South Wales* (Oakleigh, 1991), pp. 33-39.

<sup>16</sup> S Nicholas, 'The convict labour market', in S Nicholas, (ed.), *Convict workers: Reinterpreting Australia's past* (Melbourne, 1988), p. 113.

<sup>17</sup> A Atkinson, 'The free-born Englishman transported', *Past & Present*, No. 144 (August, 1994), p. 110; H Maxwell-Stewart, 'Convict labour extraction and transportation from Britain and Ireland, 1615-1870', in CG De Vito and A Lichtenstein (eds.), *Global convict labour* (Leiden, 2015), p. 177.

master, while at the other there were the chain gangs and penal stations where the conditions were very often brutal.<sup>18</sup>

### The legal basis of assignments of convicts

How convict transportation to the Australian colonies came about will not be reviewed here.<sup>19</sup> This section will review the evolution of assignment of convicts to put in context how it came to operate in Van Diemen's Land.

The *Transportation Act* 1784 governed the initial transportation of convicts to New South Wales, which was based on a previous 1717 statute.<sup>20</sup> These, with minor differences, vested a 'property in the service' of the offender being transported with the contractor hired to take the prisoners abroad, applying first to America and later to New South Wales.<sup>21</sup> Although the Acts covering transportation to New South Wales and America were similar, their operation was not.<sup>22</sup> In America, the operation of the statute followed its obvious intent—the 'property in the service' of a convict was assigned to the shipping contractor, who then re-assigned the property to local settlers for cash consideration for the term of the prisoner's sentence.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See R Tuffin, M Gibbs, D Roberts, H Maxwell-Stewart, D Roe, J Steele, S Hood and B Godfrey, 'Landscapes of production and punishment: Convict labour in the Australian context', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2017), pp. 53-57 for a discussion on how various authors have treated 'convict labour' in the Australian context, including use of 'coerced' and 'slavery' descriptors.

<sup>19</sup> See Shaw, *Convicts*, pp. 25-57 for an account.

<sup>20</sup> B Kercher, 'The law and convict transportation in the British Empire, 1700-1850', *Law and History Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Autumn, 2003), p. 568.

<sup>21</sup> Kercher, 'The law and convict transportation', p. 567. Atkinson in 'The free-born Englishman' p. 108 noted that contractors for transportation to New South Wales were then fully reimbursed by the government and their human 'cargo' was assigned to the Governor on arrival, so the contractors transferred their 'property in the services'.

<sup>22</sup> B Dyster, 'Public employment and assignment to private masters 1788-1821', in Nicholas, *Convict workers*, p. 128.

<sup>23</sup> Kercher, 'The law and convict transportation', p. 533.



According to Governor Hunter in 1795, it was ‘customary’ for the service of convicts who were transported to New South Wales to be assigned to him as Governor.<sup>24</sup> Alan Brooks in his thesis observed that no mechanism was documented for transferring the interest of the contractor to the Governor on arrival of the First Fleet and this aspect of Phillip’s expedition was poorly planned.<sup>25</sup> The Second and Third Fleets embarked with improved documentation that included indentures of ‘assignment and transfer to the contractors of the convicts embarked on board’ each vessel. The assignment of the convicts to the Governor of New South Wales in turn, was achieved by endorsements on each document. Later, from 1800, a ‘deed of assignment’ replaced the indenture as the instrument that gave the Governor ‘property in the services’ of convicts who arrived in New South Wales and this survived as the mechanism until Home Secretary Robert Peel’s 1824 Reform bill, an *Act for the Transportation of Offenders from Great Britain*.<sup>26</sup>

The use of naval vessels to transport convicts—such as HMS *Glatton* in 1802—meant that no ‘contractor’ would take the ‘property in the service’ of the convicts while on the seas. After the *Transportation Act* was passed in 1802 to cure this, it gave anyone nominated and appointed for the purpose, the right to acquire the property in the services of the convicts on board. The *Calcutta*, under David Collins, sailed to Port Phillip then onto the Derwent with this law in effect, in 1803.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Hunter to Portland, 25 October 1795, HRA I, Vol. I, p. 542.

<sup>25</sup> A Brooks, ‘Prisoners or servants? A history of the legal status of Britain’s transported convicts’, PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2016, pp. 181, 183, 192. Brooks considered convicts from England, Scotland and Ireland separately; the remainder of discussion here is from Brooks’ discussion on convicts from England.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 209, 216-219 and his Chapter 8. For discussion on Peel’s reforms and their ‘reception’ and effect on colonial legislation and practices, see L Ford and DA Roberts, ‘“Mr Peel’s amendments” in New South Wales: Imperial criminal reform in a distant penal colony’, *Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2016), pp. 198-214.

<sup>27</sup> Brooks, ‘Prisoners or servants?’, p. 226.

The Governors of New South Wales proclaimed local regulations and orders, including on how convicts were to be treated, their working hours and, in the case of Governor King, that they may be assigned to settlers to relieve the government of their cost.<sup>28</sup>

As convicts arrived in Van Diemen's Land, they initially came under the control of the Lieutenant-Governor, acting under the regulations and orders established in Sydney, as made clear by an order given by Collins in early 1805 re the 'situation of the Prisoners'.<sup>29</sup> Assigned convicts were under the control of their masters and absenteeism without their master's consent was treated the same as an escape from 'Public Labour'.<sup>30</sup>

According to evidence tendered to Commissioner Bigge by Adolarius Humphrey, Superintendent of Police and Chief Magistrate at Hobart Town, regulations concerning convicts were published by Lieutenant-Governor Davey in April 1816 and were updated by Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell.<sup>31</sup> By 1817, Humphrey had begun keeping detailed records on convicts' backgrounds, their trials, physical descriptions etc and by 1820 he was keeping a formal roll of convict assignments and movements. In other evidence, he gave information on the regulations governing how assigned convicts should be kept by settlers, their hours, payments, clothing and how they might be returned to the government, which required the permission of the Lieutenant-Governor. In July 1813, Macquarie issued a General Order that forbade settlers with convict servants to hire them out to others or to allow them to be employed on their own account, on pain of being 'entirely deprived of

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 336; Phillip to Nepean, 29 March 1792, HRA I, Vol. I, pp. 345-348; Hunter to Portland, 12 November 1796, *ibid*, p. 593; New South Wales, Governor, *New South Wales general standing orders* (Sydney, 1802), p. 48, quoted in Brooks, 'Prisoners or servants?', p. 337.

<sup>29</sup> General Orders, 7 January 1805, HRA III, Vol. I, p. 529. This order also addressed the 'legal status of natives'.

<sup>30</sup> General Order, 23 November 1806, *ibid*, p. 550.

<sup>31</sup> Humphrey's answers to Bigge, 11 and 13 March 1820, HRA III, Vol. III, p. 277-289.

the Services of such Government men and excluded from any further indulgence from Government'.<sup>32</sup>

A summary of previously issued regulations, from 1803 to June 1821, concerning duties of convicts, accompanied an undated explanation of the duties and obligations of convict masters.<sup>33</sup> The regulations in the summary forbade, from 1818, settlers to hire out their convicts, or to return them except in the event of complaint against them, each on pain of losing any further 'indulgence' (convict assignment) from the government.

When Brisbane arrived in New South Wales in 1821 to become Governor, he found an extraordinary amount of land had been promised by Macquarie to various settlers but not granted—some 340,000 acres.<sup>34</sup> In order to preserve some benefit to the Crown, he caused 'the insertion into each grant of an express stipulation that for every hundred acres, so to be granted, the Grantee shall maintain free of expence [sic] to the Crown one convict labourer'.<sup>35</sup> This obligation was written into the grant deeds of the land Meredith received and would be referred to by him later.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Enclosure in Arthur to Hay, 4 June 1826, HRA III, Vol. V, p. 280.

<sup>33</sup> For the summary see Colonial Secretary's Office, *General Correspondence*, CSO1/1/27/480, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter, TA), p. 10 and p. 18. Henceforth the title of the CSO1 series will be omitted. It was presumably compiled prior to October 1821, as it decreed that applications for assignments were to be made to the Lieutenant-Governor on Thursdays, a practice that was changed in October 1821: P Eldershaw, *Guide to the public records of Tasmania, section three, Convict Department*, first published in 1965 (Hobart, 2003), TA.

<sup>34</sup> Brisbane to Bathurst, 10 April 1822, HRA I, Vol. X, p. 630; a pro-forma deed of grant is at pp. 631-632. For discussion, see also L Ford and D Roberts, 'Expansion, 1820-1850', in A Bashford and S Macintyre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Australia Volume 1 Indigenous and Colonial Australia*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Melbourne, 2013), p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> New South Wales Government and General Orders, 11 July 1822, NRA 1048, *Proclamations, orders and notices, 1 December 1821 – 19 December 1825*, NSW Archives Resources Kit reel 6039, 4/424, pp. 74-79.

<sup>36</sup> For example, grant of two thousand acres to George Meredith, 30 June 1823, Lands and Survey Department, *Copies of land grants issued*, LSD354/1/8, TA, p. 142.

The first report of Commissioner Bigge in 1823 strengthened the case for convict assignment. He recommended that convicts with the best character be sent to the estates of settlers also with the best character to preserve a 'moral distinction'. Bigge further recommended that if a settler should receive a skilled convict, then he should also be obliged to take an unskilled convict.<sup>37</sup>

As noted above, the law relating to the transportation of convicts was revised in 1824 via the *Transportation Act*, which generally streamlined the administration of transportation.<sup>38</sup> It maintained that the government held 'property in the service' of a convict and this property would be automatically acquired by the colonial Governor on the convicts' arrival.<sup>39</sup> It also stated that the Governor had the right to assign their services to others, but Section VIII of that law appeared to nullify Macquarie's General Order of 1813 that prohibited settlers re-assigning convicts of their own accord.<sup>40</sup> After a considerable delay in receiving the text of the Act, Arthur wrote to London quoting Macquarie's regulation and noting: 'One of the most anxious duties in this Colony is the assignment of Prisoners to prevent their falling into improper hands'.<sup>41</sup> He would later use this reasoning to limit convicts assigned to the likes of George Meredith. Bathurst clarified that the new Act had been misinterpreted and:

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<sup>37</sup> JT Bigge, Report of the Commissioner of Inquiry into the state of the colony of New South Wales (London, 1823), pp. 157-158.

<sup>38</sup> Brooks, 'Prisoners or servants?', p. 357.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 365.

<sup>40</sup> Kercher, 'The law and convict transportation', p. 570. See Brooks, 'Prisoners or servants?', p. 360 for the pertinent wording, and discussion.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur to Hay, 4 June 1826, HRA III, Vol. V, p. 280. For New South Wales reaction, see 'Convict Assignment Opinion [1827]', Macquarie University, Division of Law, *Decisions of the Superior Courts of New South Wales, 1788-1899*, [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/nsw/cases/case\\_index/1827/convict\\_assignment\\_opinion/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/nsw/cases/case_index/1827/convict_assignment_opinion/), accessed online 29 January 2019.

The whole property in the Convict's Service is in the first Instance vested in the Governor; and the Governor, who is empowered to assign that Service, is fully competent to modify his Assignment in such manner, as Justice and good Policy may require.<sup>42</sup>

Before Bathurst's advice above would have been received, further uncertainty was introduced in New South Wales in early 1827 when Chief Justice Francis Forbes gave an opinion in the Executive Council to the effect that the Governor could only assign convicts to settlers, and afterwards had no control over the convict.<sup>43</sup>

Forbes also thought that the government had no authority to issue tickets-of-leave and said so in a letter to Under-Secretary Horton.<sup>44</sup> If found to be valid, Forbes' interpretation would be a critical wound to the whole system of transportation as a punishment for felons in Great Britain, as the government would either have to bear the entire expense of convicts' up-keep, or they would lose control of the convicts once assigned. Darling issued a Government Order in three parts in late July 1827 seeking to re-affirm the Government's ability to withdraw convict servants from their masters, under certain conditions, and also to be able to issue tickets-of-leave. The next day, Forbes wrote to Darling opining that all three edicts were either invalid or unenforceable.<sup>45</sup> He formalised his opinions locally in late 1827.<sup>46</sup> Darling was again forced to seek clarification from London and the problems introduced by Forbes were resolved with the *Australian Courts Act* of 1828, which amended

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<sup>42</sup> Hobhouse to Hay, 13 February 1827, enclosed in Bathurst to Darling, 19 February 1827, HRA I, Vol. XIII, p. 116; Bathurst to Arthur, 20 February 1827, HRA III, Vol. V, p. 525.

<sup>43</sup> Darling to Bathurst, 1 March 1827, HRA I, Vol. XIII, p. 139.

<sup>44</sup> Forbes to Horton, 6 March 1827, HRA IV, Vol. 1, pp. 688-717.

<sup>45</sup> CH Currey, *Sir Francis Forbes: The first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales* (Sydney, 1968), pp. 243-244 and more generally for Forbes, JM Bennett, *Sir Francis Forbes: First Chief Justice of New South Wales 1823-1837* (Annandale, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> 'Remarks on the present state of transportation laws', Forbes to Darling, 3 October 1827, enclosed in Darling to Goderich, 8 November 1827, HRA I, Vol. XIII, p. 607. For a discussion of Forbes' 'convict assignment opinion', see Kercher, 'The law and convict transportation', pp. 571-573.

the *New South Wales Act* 4 Geo. IV, c. 96.<sup>47</sup> Senior legal counsel in London, James Stephen, writing privately to his friend George Arthur in late 1828, referenced the new Act and the 'New South Wales affair' noting that he had advised Secretary of State William Huskisson to 'take the sceptre out of the lawyers' hands' and he compared lawyers unfavourably to soldiers (like Arthur), writing: 'the lawyer is the more mischievous man of the two, ten times told. He has weapons which there is no parrying, and derives unlimited influence from the virtuous prejudices and unavoidable ignorance of the rest of the world'.<sup>48</sup>

The text of Section VIII of the *Transportation Act* 5 Geo. IV c. 84 was published in the *Australian* in February 1827 with a story railing against the opaqueness of the rules and laws concerning the rights of the settlers and convicts in respect of convict assignment.<sup>49</sup> So far, this debate had not much impacted in Van Diemen's Land, but, with Hobart Town newspapers regularly reporting on cases in Sydney concerning this issue, there is little doubt that the general population in Van Diemen's Land could follow along.<sup>50</sup>

Chief Justice John Pedder weighed in on the subject of sub-assignment of convicts by settlers. In a letter to Arthur in early 1827, he wrote:

The last Transportation Act ... enables the Persons to whom Convicts are assigned by the Governor, to assign over to other persons and so on indefinitely. Hitherto the Settlers have not been aware that they are possessed of this right, and they have never questioned the power, which the Government has assumed (but to which I conceive it has no right) of recalling convicts at its pleasure from the masters to whom they have been assigned.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Darling to Bathurst, 8 November 1827, HRA I, Vol. XIII, p. 606; Murray to Darling 31 July 1828, HRA I, Vol. XIV, p. 270.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen to Arthur, 27 December 1828, Papers of Sir George Arthur, Vol. 4, *Correspondence with James Stephen 1823-54*, ZA2164, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (hereafter, ML, SLNSW).

<sup>49</sup> *Australian*, 27 February 1827, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> For instance, *Colonial Times*, 14 September 1827, p. 3 and 20 July 1827, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Pedder to Arthur, 10 March 1827, enclosed in Arthur to Hay, 23 March 1827, HRA III, Vol. V, pp. 683-686.

At the time of Pedder's opinion, Arthur would not have been in receipt of Bathurst's letter of February 1827 referred to above, so Pedder would have added to his concerns.

The New South Wales situation did impinge on Van Diemen's Land in 1829 when the 'Jane New case' arose. A Van Diemen's Land convict, Jane New, went to New South Wales with her free husband with the permission of Arthur. She committed a felony in New South Wales, which caused 'jurisdictional' issues about where she should be incarcerated, but as part of the various decisions, the New South Wales Supreme Court ruled that the Section IX of the *New South Wales Act* did not give the Governor the power to revoke an assignment, except to confer a ticket-of-leave.<sup>52</sup> Arthur wrote to London complaining about this ruling in June 1829.<sup>53</sup> He received the reply he surely had hoped for, that the Act had been framed with the 'distinct intention of conferring on the Governors of the Australian colonies an unlimited discretion to revoke the assignment of convicts'.<sup>54</sup> The Secretary of State directly criticised the New South Wales judges for the construction they had placed on the Act, and Chief Justice Forbes in particular.<sup>55</sup> To re-enforce the point, Murray included a paper from Horace Twiss, Under-Secretary of State and an eminent lawyer. Twiss put his opinion in clear terms:

The whole of the assumption, then, that the Settler has a *right* of property in the labour of the Convict, assigned to him either under the former or under the present system, is a mistake. What the Settler is now allowed by the law to enjoy is a mere *indulgence*: a temporary, revocable loan of services, for which he has given no consideration, and to which he has therefore no title but thro' favour of the Grantor; a benefit held at the pleasure of the Crown.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Currey, *Forbes*, pp. 341-347.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur to Twiss, 2 June 1829, HRA III, Vol. VIII, p. 392.

<sup>54</sup> Murray to Darling, 30 January 1830, HRA I, Vol. XV, p. 346; Murray to Arthur, 30 January 1830, HRA III, Vol. IX, p. 42.

<sup>55</sup> Murray to Darling, 30 January 1830, HRA I, Vol. XV, pp. 347-348.

<sup>56</sup> 'Mr Twiss's paper', 1 December 1829, enclosed in Murray to Darling, 30 January 1830, *ibid*, p. 351.

In summary, when Meredith arrived in Van Diemen's Land, settlers who obtained land grants were obliged to take some convict servants. Occasionally, these were removed from them for contraventions of regulations. Mainly through poor legal drafting in London and some over-reaching opinions of local Chief Justices, by 1827 doubt arose as to the ability of a Lieutenant-Governor to revoke a convict's assignment or to control the convict's movement after assignment. This was cured in 1828 with a new Act and thereafter it was certain that a Lieutenant-Governor could remove convicts from the service of settlers.

### Arthur's revoking or denying convict assignments

Before examining how George Meredith came to lose his access to new convict labour, it is pertinent to examine how widespread the practice was and to examine several prominent and arguably related cases.

The refusal or withdrawal of convict servants from settlers was not an uncommon event. To name just a few: Henry Jellico was not assigned new convicts after he returned one without permission and lent a second to another settler in 1827; Dun Ballantyne lent a convict out and so lost him and his others (1827); John Skinner did the same, with the same result (1829); Mrs Salter was refused servants because of her poor character (1828); Simeon Lord's convicts were found to be trading on their own account, and so all his convicts were withdrawn (1832); Temple Pearson was found to be intemperate and had no new convicts assigned (1832).<sup>57</sup> Anne McKay noted a number of other cases.<sup>58</sup> In spite of

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<sup>57</sup> Lakeland to Burnett, 23 June 1827, CSO1/1/134/3220, TA, p. 4; various letters, 1827, CSO1/1/170/4094, TA, from p. 231; various letters, 1829, CSO1/1/383/8659, TA from p. 92; various letters, 1828, CSO1/1/224/5434, TA from p. 75; various letters, 1832, CSO1/1/584/13232, TA from p. 184; various letters, 1832, CSO1/1/598/13671, TA from p. 139.

<sup>58</sup> A McKay, 'The assignment system of convict labour in Van Diemen's Land 1824-1842', MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1958, pp. 93-97 and 119-126.



the fact that the withdrawal of new or all assigned servants from settlers had been occurring for years, two cases became prominent towards the early-mid 1830s. Like Meredith, Gilbert Robertson and William Bryan were public critics of Arthur and his administration.

As discussed in Chapter 7, Gilbert Robertson was a farmer, district constable, later editor of the *Colonist* newspaper under Meredith's ownership, and a critic of Arthur.<sup>59</sup> In early 1832 he was found to have allowed his convict servants to drink alcohol and one died soon afterwards.<sup>60</sup> Clerk of the Executive and Legislative Councils John Montagu suggested that Arthur make 'an example of' Robertson to check similar conduct by other convict masters. Called on to explain himself, Robertson thoroughly rebutted the authorities' 'charges' and his arguments were similar to those later employed by Meredith.<sup>61</sup> After a meeting with Arthur a few days later Robertson wrote to him, without retracting any of his former statements and noting that the 'vengeance of power' was an attack on his livelihood and his family—another argument later adopted by Meredith.<sup>62</sup> Robertson continued that he was placing his farm and the care of his family 'in trust' to several men—Meredith, Gregson, James Gordon and Joseph Tice Gellibrand—and hoped this 'banishment from the bosom of my family' would satisfy the authorities. The facetiousness is hard to miss. In the event,

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<sup>59</sup> For Robertson see: E Morris Miller, *Pressmen and governors*, facsimile edition, Sydney, 1952, pp. 179-180; also M Godfrey, 'Robertson, Gilbert (1794-1851)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, (hereafter, ADB) <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/robertson-gilbert-2595/text3563>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 17 January 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Montagu to Arthur, 16 June 1832, Governor's Office, *Governor's duplicate despatches received by the Colonial Office*, GO33/1/16, TA, p. 295 Henceforth the title of the GO33 series will be omitted. This and the letters following are enclosed in a despatch from Arthur to Hay, 1 March 1834, *ibid*, p. 288.

<sup>61</sup> Robertson to Montagu, 18 June 1832, *ibid*, p. 298.

<sup>62</sup> Robertson to Arthur, 22 June 1832, *ibid*, p. 307.

Arthur did not withdraw his assigned servants, but did order that he should receive no more.<sup>63</sup>

The 'Bryan case' was a pivotal event in the recall of Arthur, or at least not having his term extended, a test of Arthur's authority to withdraw convict assignments, and it led to the second campaign for 'trial by jury', where Meredith was again involved.<sup>64</sup> William Bryan was a settler who arrived from Ireland in 1824. He had amassed a substantial amount of land by November 1833, when a convict servant of his, Samuel Arnold, was committed for trial by magistrate William Lyttleton for stealing cattle.<sup>65</sup> Arnold was found guilty and sentenced to death, but Judge Algernon Montagu also censured Bryan from the bench.<sup>66</sup> After depositions from Arnold regarding Bryan, rumours spread, and Bryan resigned as a magistrate. This was not accepted by Arthur and he sacked Bryan for not being a proper person to hold a magistracy.<sup>67</sup> He also had his twenty-two assigned servants withdrawn in the middle of harvest, ruining his crop and allowing livestock to escape.<sup>68</sup>

Bryan brought an action against Constable John Hortle who removed his convicts and against the magistrate Lyttleton for defamation.<sup>69</sup> In *Bryan v Lyttleton*, on 27 June 1834, and *Bryan v Hortle* on 20 June and 1 July, Bryan's barrister Joseph Tice Gellibrand asked for

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<sup>63</sup> Arthur to Hay, *ibid*, p. 288. Clark, *History of Australia Vol. II*, p. 280 stated that Arthur 'deprived Robertson of the right to have assigned servants', which was not quite the case.

<sup>64</sup> Clark, *History of Australia Vol. II*, pp. 281-284; AGL Shaw, *Sir George Arthur, Bart, 1784-1854* (Melbourne, 1980), pp. 162-165; West, *The history of Tasmania*, pp. 128-130.

<sup>65</sup> *Launceston Advertiser*, 14 November 1833, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, p. 128. For discussion of the related 'Lewis case', involving Lyttleton, and Judge Montagu's character, see S Petrow, 'Moving in an 'eccentric orbit'', in: BL Berger and AR Buck (eds.), *The grand experiment: Law and legal culture in British settler societies*, Vancouver (2008), pp. 156-175; also PA Howell, 'Montagu, Algernon Sidney (1802-1880)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/montagu-algernon-sidney-2470/text3311>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 17 January 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Burnett to Bryan, 29 November 1833, Bryan to Arthur, 30 November 1833, reprinted in *Colonist*, 3 December 1833, p. 4; Clark, *History of Australia Vol. II*, p. 282.

<sup>68</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, p. 128.

<sup>69</sup> After Bryan's trial, magistrate Lyttleton was reported to remark that Bryan was as guilty as Arnold, *Tasmanian*, 27 June 1834, p. 6.

a trial by jury. This was refused by Chief Justice Pedder and Judge Montagu on the grounds that the publicity the case had garnered in the press, particularly the *Colonist*, meant the jury could not be 'fair'. At this point, Bryan withdrew his cases and then departed for London to continue his protests against Arthur directly.<sup>70</sup>

In London, Bryan bombarded Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Baron Glenelg with letters and charges of corruption against Arthur, becoming more and more strident in complaint.<sup>71</sup> He eventually turned on Glenelg, accusing him of being 'ignorant of the duties attaching to your high ... situation'.<sup>72</sup> After Arthur's recall, Bryan himself fell mostly silent.

### Meredith, the magistracy and supply of convict servants

In early 1826, Meredith had reason to be optimistic on several fronts. His whaling was developing well and he had heard that not only were he and Joseph Archer to be included in the Commission of the Peace, but he was to dine with the Lieutenant-Governor and be elevated to the magistracy.<sup>73</sup> As the most 'respectable' settler in a growing district, Meredith probably assumed his appointment was a matter of right. Neither the elevations nor the dinner occurred, so in July, Meredith wrote to the Colonial Secretary asking that a magistrate be directed to visit Great Swan Port to address the 'lawlessness' in the district. This was discussed in the Executive Council meeting of 25 September that year. The Council

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<sup>70</sup> See 'Bryan v. Lyttleton [1834]', Macquarie University, Division of Law, and the University of Tasmania, School of History and Classics, *Decisions of the Nineteenth Century Tasmanian Superior Courts* [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/tas/cases/case\\_index/1834/bryan\\_v\\_lyttleton/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/tas/cases/case_index/1834/bryan_v_lyttleton/), accessed 11 January 2019 for coverage and commentary of both these cases, together with newspaper extracts.

<sup>71</sup> Glenelg to Arthur, 15 August 1835, Governor's Office, *Despatches received from the Secretary of State* GO1/1/19, TA, p. 171 Henceforth the title of the GO1 series will be omitted; Bryan to Glenelg, 5 November 1835, *ibid*, p. 405; Glenelg to Arthur, 16, 17 and 18 November, *ibid*, pp. 401, 407, 429.

<sup>72</sup> Bryan to Glenelg, 30 January 1836, GO1/1/21, TA, p. 182.

<sup>73</sup> Meredith to his wife, 2 April 1826, *Meredith family papers*, G4/11 University of Tasmania, Special and Rare Collections (hereafter, UTAS S&R), Meredith to his wife, 22 April 1826, *Letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith. 113 letters* NS123/1/1 #22, TA. Henceforth the titles of the G4 and NS123/1/1 series will be omitted.

advised that Meredith should not be appointed a magistrate because most of the settlers there were within Meredith's 'sphere', but they did advise that a military officer should be stationed at Waterloo Point, who should also be a Commissioner of the Peace to hear local complaints.<sup>74</sup> They also advised against Meredith's request to have Great Swan Port established as a 'port'. This would have added to the settler's general discontent, coming after the Lieutenant-Governor had refused him compensation for the loss of access to his land during the dispute with Talbot. After that episode, the Colonial Secretary took Meredith to task, fearing 'he has led Lord Bathurst into an error' by implying in a letter to London that he had an 'indemnity' against the loss.<sup>75</sup> Meredith continued to complain to the government on other issues, including 'illegal' boat building in the district and the refusal of a claim he made for compensation for hosting some military personnel on his property.<sup>76</sup>

The next year, 1827, also began with some optimism for Meredith. He wrote to his wife in February, noting that, although he had debts of about £1,000 each in the colony and in England, his whaling, meat and grain production were doing well and he might be able to pay off at least the English debts and then could look to building their house.<sup>77</sup> Later, he again requested that a magistrate be appointed to the Great Swan Port district, due to

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<sup>74</sup> Executive Council, *Draft Minutes of Proceedings of the Executive Council*, 25 September 1826, EC3/1/1, TA. Henceforth the title of the EC3 and EC4 series will be omitted. See also CSO1/1/117/2931, TA, no page numbers. In the back of Arthur and the Executive Councillor's minds might have been the performance of Meredith friend and fellow Arthur critic Thomas Gregson, who was made a magistrate by Sorell in 1822 and ultimately dismissed by Arthur in 1828 after prolonged dissatisfaction with his conduct: RJ Brain, 'Thomas Gregson, a Tasmanian radical', draft and unsubmitted MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1955, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, pp. 17-18.

<sup>75</sup> Hamilton – memo, 6 October 1826, CSO1/1/97/2309, TA, p. 283.

<sup>76</sup> Meredith to Burnett, 14 March 1827, CSO1/1/58/1217, TA, p. 2; Meredith to Burnett, 26 May 1827, CSO1/1/136/3338, TA, p. 149.

<sup>77</sup> Meredith to his wife, 23 February 1827, NS123/1/1 #27, TA.

continuing bushranging and other lawlessness.<sup>78</sup> In response, Arthur reported to the Executive Council that the appointment of an experienced officer at a permanent post would be desirable. The Lieutenant-Governor also noted that the previous objections to appointing Meredith as a magistrate remained, and as none of the other settlers were 'respectable enough', he was planning to appoint a military officer as magistrate; the Council agreed.<sup>79</sup>

Meredith's anguish at not being appointed a magistrate led him to repeated sniping at the local military commanders, appointed in lieu of a more suitable civilian magistrate, such as himself.<sup>80</sup> Meredith's background as a naval Marine may have also coloured his thinking in relation to army commandants. The tone of the exchanges escalated until Meredith transferred his complaints to Colonial Secretary Burnett, including one complaining of being subject to 'military domination'.<sup>81</sup> In response, Arthur penned a memorandum to instruct Burnett how to reply:

Mr Meredith's offensive observation respecting Military domination it is not necessary to enlarge upon - it is distressing that he cannot be at peace, and cease from expressing himself in terms calculated to renew excitement with the Government.<sup>82</sup>

From 1828, Meredith's complaints began to focus on his supply of convicts. He complained that he had not had carpenters or sawyers assigned to him for two years. The hardening attitude of the government towards Meredith is evidenced by a comment by Colonial

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<sup>78</sup> Meredith to Burnett, 15 June 1827, CSO1/1/136/3338, TA, p. 153. Another letter, dated 9 June 1827 with a more direct request, is referred to in Executive Council, 29 June 1827, EC3/1/1, TA.

<sup>79</sup> Executive Council, 29 June 1827, EC3/1/1, TA.

<sup>80</sup> Meredith to Burnett, various dates in 1829, CSO1/1/404/9133, TA. Other issues were Meredith placing a tannery above the local police's water supply and a proposal to alter the local line of road in Meredith's favour.

<sup>81</sup> Meredith to Burnett, 23 June 1829, *ibid*, TA, p. 258.

<sup>82</sup> Arthur, 'Memorandum', 31 July 1829, *ibid*, TA, p. 272.

Secretary Burnett on the back of one of the settler's letters 'I imagine that no further notice need be taken of this troublesome man'.<sup>83</sup> This, however, was merely the beginning of a campaign on assigned servants that lasted until Arthur's departure in 1836.

Meredith wrote a strong letter to the Colonial Secretary in October 1828, again complaining that he had not received replies to numerous requests for assigned servants, sent to a variety of government officers.<sup>84</sup> He had tried the patience of the government on many issues for several years and that patience was now running out. Burnett wrote a somewhat incautious reply to Meredith's complaint. He first stated that Meredith's many requests for assigned servants had been 'informal', so had not been addressed. He went on:

I am directed at the same time to intimate, that although no instruction has been given to deprive you of assigned servants, it is left to your consideration how far you can reasonably expect any particular interference on the part of the Lieutenant Governor to facilitate your wishes, whilst many respectable settlers, who have uniformly, by cordial co-operation, strengthened His Excellency's hands, in furtherance of such measures as have been deemed expedient in the administration of the affairs of the Colony, and in maintaining its internal tranquility [sic], have been no less desirous of convict assistance on their farms.<sup>85</sup>

In late December, Meredith wrote an important long and detailed letter of rebuttal to Burnett. He refuted the claim that his applications were 'informal' and then went to the matter of the policy of assigning convicts to settlers. He first contrasted his understanding that convicts would be assigned on the needs and wants of settlers, to 'the construction

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<sup>83</sup> Meredith to Dumaresq, 3 January 1828, CSO1/1/225/5456, TA, p. 30.

<sup>84</sup> Meredith to Burnett, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 44. This letter followed much other correspondence during the year where Meredith had complained about his assigned servants being called to Hobart for various matters and not being promptly returned and replying to complaints from the station on Maria Island about the quality of meat he was supplying. For the assigned servants, see Meredith to Attorney General, 30 June 1828, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 91; for the meat contract, see various dates, CSO1/1/306/7359, TA.

<sup>85</sup> Burnett to Meredith, 20 November 1828, copied in: G Meredith, *Correspondence between the local government of Van Diemen's Land and George Meredith Esq.* (Hobart, 1836), p. 3.

which the Governor for the time being may be pleased to put upon the *political* sentiments and conduct of such applicant'.<sup>86</sup> Meredith's chief point was that the:

... terms of the grants of land made by Sir Thomas Brisbane, and wherein the chief condition is expressed, that each grantee shall receive, maintain, and cloathe [sic] one convict for each hundred acres of land so granted, ... making it obligatory upon them to receive and employ such servants. ... it does appear to me, that were the Local Government of either Colony to change the system ... and instead of duly and impartially assigning and apportioning the convict labour according to the relative wants and *bona fide* claim of the agriculturists, ... to make such assignments matter of *personal favour*, and to select the eligible individual, whether from political or other feelings and consideration – it would, in my humble judgment, be the assumption of a power never originally contemplated by Government or emigrant, most invidious in the exercise, dangerous and injurious in its consequence ....<sup>87</sup>

Given that his land grant deeds did oblige him to take a convict for each one hundred acres granted, he had a point. Meredith then went on to address the implied accusation that he was hostile to the government. He recounted the numerous campaigns he had been involved in, from 'independence from New South Wales', 'trial by jury and a House of Assembly' and 'freedom of the press', and described them in terms of noble defence of the colony's well-being (the common good) rather than attacks on the government. Finally, he rejected in strong terms the implication that he had been 'inimical to ... maintaining [the colony's] internal tranquillity [sic]', noting a number of positive suggestions that he had made to Arthur's administration.<sup>88</sup> In this episode, Meredith firmly nailed his colours to the mast of being a servant of the people and acting in their interest for the common good. In reply to Meredith's letter, Arthur merely noted: 'This appears to be only an explanatory statement & does not, I believe, require any answer'.<sup>89</sup> Here Arthur weakened at least his

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<sup>86</sup> Meredith to Burnett, 30 December 1828, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 51. Emphasis in original.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, the letter was reproduced in printed form in Meredith, *Correspondence*, from p. 8. Emphasis in original.

<sup>88</sup> Meredith, *Correspondence*, pp. 10-15.

<sup>89</sup> Note at the end of Meredith to Burnett, 30 December 1828, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 68.

moral position in failing to refute Meredith's challenge of political interference in convict assignment and allowed the settler to maintain unchallenged his position of a fighter in the name of 'the people'.

Lieutenant Francis Aubin replaced Richard Lane as Assistant Police Magistrate at Waterloo Point on 28 April 1830.<sup>90</sup> On 3 January 1831 several convicts assigned to George Meredith junior were charged by Aubin with being drunk and disorderly in the hut of free man James Gunn. They pleaded not guilty and their master George Meredith junior supported them.<sup>91</sup> They were discharged, but Aubin wrote to the Lieutenant Governor stating he thought the master was at fault. Arthur replied that Aubin would have been justified in withdrawing all of 'Mr Meredith's servants, and a repeat would see this done'.<sup>92</sup> This was the second time that withdrawal of the Meredith family's convict servants was contemplated by the authorities.

George Meredith senior was also at loggerheads with magistrate Aubin at the time. Edwards Higgs and Luke Free were assigned servants of Meredith senior and were charged by Aubin for various offences. Meredith tried to mitigate the offences to minimise the potential for the assigned convicts to be withdrawn for their bad behaviour.<sup>93</sup> He wrote to Burnett laying a complaint against Aubin, including for 'partiality' against Meredith and his assigned servants.<sup>94</sup> On the same day, Aubin took the opportunity to inform Burnett that

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<sup>90</sup> Annotation by the Chief Police Magistrate at the end of: Meredith to Montagu, 15 May 1832, CSO1/1/638/17789, TA, p. 268; see also HRA III, Vol. IX, note 218, p. 817.

<sup>91</sup> Charge sheet, 3 January 1831, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 158.

<sup>92</sup> Note on the bottom of Aubin to Burnett, 4 January 1831, *ibid*, p. 156.

<sup>93</sup> Meredith to Aubin, various dates, *ibid*, pp. 119-141.

<sup>94</sup> Meredith to Burnett, 8 March 1831, *ibid*, p. 104.



Meredith had made Edward Tilley, a ticket-of-leave convict, overseer of Meredith's *Riversdale* farm, and in charge of other convicts, contrary to regulations.<sup>95</sup>

In May 1832, Meredith made another complaint, this time generally against the appointment of 'young, inexperienced military officers as Magistrates at Great Swan Port', and more particularly against Aubin's absences from the district.<sup>96</sup> Other complaints from Meredith to the Colonial Secretary and others—usually two or three a month—were on the subjects of duty on spirits supplied to whalers, his contract to supply meat to Port Arthur, and sheep stealing in the district.<sup>97</sup> Meredith's line of complaints against each of the local military magistrates in turn was arguably more about the fact that he had not been appointed as the local magistrate rather than a genuine dissatisfaction with their performance.

As an aside, the dynamic between Meredith, his convicts and the local magistrates contrasted with the 'convict revolt' investigated by Roberts at Castle Forbes in New South Wales, where a landholder and landholder/magistrates were eventually investigated for allegations of inappropriate treatment of and judgements concerning assigned convicts.<sup>98</sup> There is little hard evidence of convicts complaining about Meredith's treatment of them (if anything, Meredith had a somewhat paternalistic attitude to his convicts) and the main protagonists at Great Swan Port were the landholder Meredith and the local military

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<sup>95</sup> Aubin to Burnett, 8 March 1831, *ibid*, p. 164.

<sup>96</sup> Meredith to Montagu, 15 May 1832, CSO1/1/638/17789, TA, p. 268.

<sup>97</sup> CSO1/1/566/12657, TA for meat to Maria Island, CSO1/1/567/12734, TA for meat to Port Arthur and CSO1/1/597/13578, TA for duty on spirits whalers and CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, pp. 1-6 for sheep stealing.

<sup>98</sup> DA Roberts, 'Masters, magistrates and the management of complaint: The 1833 convict revolt at Castle Forbes and the failure of local governance', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, Vol. 19 (2017), pp. 57-86.

magistrates.<sup>99</sup> This situation supports Roberts' argument that 'Local governance in remote regions thus involved a system of managing complaint that was too capable of breeding feelings of disappointment and perceptions of oppression and corruption', except at Great Swan Port, it was the 'elite landholder' who complained of oppression and corruption, but not necessarily justifiably.<sup>100</sup>

### THE RAID ON FERGUSON'S HOTEL, HOGARTH AND 'THE FATE OF ONE ...'

After years of his sniping at the authorities and criticism of the local assistant police magistrates, the authorities finally decided to act on Meredith in 1833, after a blatant provocation. In early January that year, six convicts had escaped from a road party at Constitution Hill and made their way to meet John Nicholson, an assigned servant of George Meredith, as one of the escapees was formerly in Meredith's service. They sought Nicholson's help to rob Meredith's store and/or the hotel of John Ferguson at Waterloo Point, and then to take one of Meredith's whale boats to escape.<sup>101</sup> Nicholson reported this to Edward Tilley, the overseer, then to the police sergeant at Waterloo Point (Aubin, the magistrate, was away) and finally Meredith.

Meredith arranged with Nicholson that the whale boat would be ready for the taking to ensure, as Meredith recounted later, that the convicts made it to Waterloo Point, as he thought trying to capture them at the boatshed would risk them escaping, or a bloody fight ensuing.<sup>102</sup> That notwithstanding, there was little doubt that he was proposing to aid the escapees in their plan to rob Ferguson. The plan proceeded, and the escapees and

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<sup>99</sup> For paternalistic attitude, see Meredith's letters to his wife in the series NS123/1/1, TA and also Meredith to Montagu, 14 June 1835, CSO1/1/638/14367 (Vol. 2), TA, p. 162.

<sup>100</sup> Roberts, 'Masters, magistrates and the management of complaint', p. 64.

<sup>101</sup> Nicholson statement, 16 January 1833, CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, pp. 111-118.

<sup>102</sup> Nicholson statement, 1 April 1833, *ibid*, pp. 168-169.

Nicholson took Meredith's boat to Waterloo Point and went up to Ferguson's hotel. Immediately after they entered, soldiers and police sprung an ambush. A melee broke out, with shots fired; one of the bushrangers was killed and the others captured.<sup>103</sup>

A few days after the attack, Meredith was summoned to appear before magistrate Lord to give a statement regarding the theft of his boat. Meredith refused, saying that there was no need, as there was no felony committed because the boat had been purposely supplied. Meredith was then arrested by a convict constable and imprisoned at Waterloo Point overnight.<sup>104</sup> Arthur would later describe this as 'carrying [the magistrate's] powers a little too far'.<sup>105</sup> Meredith met with Arthur about this time and the meeting did not go well, according to Meredith:

I have had a long but certainly not satisfactory interview with Col<sup>l</sup> Arthur and from whom henceforth I am to expect nothing but enmity and annoyance through such creatures as Maj<sup>r</sup> Lord and the other willing agents of arbitrary power.<sup>106</sup>

The meeting is also alluded to in a report in the *Colonist*.<sup>107</sup> This was Meredith's paper and the report alleged that Meredith was told that, should he appeal to the authorities in London, the fact that he was 'connected' with the *Colonist* newspaper would be sufficient for his complaint to be dispensed with 'without one word from the Lieutenant Governor'. A few years later, Arthur would also describe the meeting. He was astonished to hear Meredith say that he could have captured the convicts at the boat shed, but 'neither he nor his son could be expected to render such assistance to the Government!'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Nicholson statement, *ibid*, p. 169.

<sup>104</sup> *Colonist*, 16 April 1833, p. 3; Meredith to Burnett, 25 January 1833, CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, p. 103.

<sup>105</sup> Arthur to Glenelg, 30 December 1837, GO1/1/29, TA, p. 262.

<sup>106</sup> Meredith to his wife Mary, 8 March 1833, G4/16, UTAS S&R.

<sup>107</sup> *Colonist*, 16 April 1833, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> Arthur to Glenelg, 30 December 1837, GO1/1/29, TA, p. 265.

The convicts were tried on 29 March in the Supreme Court in Hobart before Justice Montagu and a military jury.<sup>109</sup> The jury took only a few minutes to find the defendants guilty and the judge sentenced them to death. At the start of the trial, the conduct of Meredith in facilitating the taking of his boat was called into question by the Attorney-General, but this was deemed irrelevant by the judge.

Sometime before the trial, Meredith approached William Hogarth, a ticket-of-leave clerk at the police office at Waterloo Point, and obtained copies of the various depositions given for the trial.<sup>110</sup> This was discovered, and Hogarth was deprived of his ticket-of-leave and sent to Port Arthur. On 4 May, Forster sent papers to the Colonial Secretary, including a statement from Hogarth, 'showing the pains taken by Mr George Meredith of Swan Port to seduce the prisoner from a faithful discharge of his duty, and to disobey the orders he acted under as clerk in the police office'. After the various letters were read at the Executive Council, it gave a unanimous opinion that, unless Meredith could satisfactorily explain his behaviour, the 'assignment of convicts to his service be discontinued'.<sup>111</sup>

Confirmation that Meredith had approached Hogarth came from a letter by the convict to the *Colonial Times*, published in May. There, Hogarth stated that Meredith had told him that the previous Police Clerk, Francis ED Browne, has given him copies of documents, and Meredith would not ask anything of Hogarth that would cause problems.<sup>112</sup> The same story came from solicitor Thomas Rowlands, seemingly in spite, after Meredith chose another solicitor for his case against the Waterloo Point magistrates, as reported in the *Colonist*,

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<sup>109</sup> *Tasmanian*, 5 April 1833, p. 6.

<sup>110</sup> Trial notes for William Hogarth, 30 April 1833, CSO1/1/637/14367, TA, p. 231.

<sup>111</sup> Executive Council, 30 May 1833, EC4/1/2, TA.

<sup>112</sup> *Colonial Times*, 7 May 1833, p. 2.

Meredith's paper.<sup>113</sup> In reply to the *Colonist* article, Rowlands wrote to the *Tasmanian*, noting first that in the past Meredith had asked him for the name of someone who would arrest his son George junior and more recently had asked him to defend the convicts who held up Ferguson's hotel.<sup>114</sup> Rowlands put the request in terms of great self-interest by Meredith and as a means of showing magistrates Lord and Hepburn in the worst possible light.<sup>115</sup> Rowlands then described how Meredith entrapped Hogarth into supplying him with documents. It was a most damning letter, if not wholly unethical. In later acting against Meredith, and in correspondence with London, Arthur would repeatedly refer to this letter 'in the public prints' as part justification of his actions, asking, at one point, if Rowlands' accusations were untrue, why did Meredith not prosecute Rowlands for libel?<sup>116</sup>

On 8 June 1833, the Colonial Secretary wrote to Meredith informing him that no more assignments of convicts would be made to him until he satisfactorily explained his conduct in relation to Hogarth. Burnett added that they had heard from Waterloo Point that Meredith and Amos had been 'recently setting the Magistrates of the Territory at defiance', and that 'the removal of every convict in your service is not an improbable event'.<sup>117</sup>

Meredith made an extraordinary reply:

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<sup>113</sup> *Colonist*, 4 June 1833 p. 3; Charles Meredith to Meredith, 13 February 1835, G4/29(1), UTAS S&R. Later, Henry Emmett gave a statement for Meredith quoting Rowlands admitting the story, Statement of Henry Emmett, 2 April 1835, CSO1/1/637/14367, TA, p. 307. Emmett was a past editor of the *Colonist*.

<sup>114</sup> There appears to have been some truth in the statement about the arrest of Meredith's son. In a letter to his wife in March 1832, Meredith revealed that he had contemplated just that thing, over the dealings George junior planned for his land: Meredith to his wife, 11 March 1832, NS123/1/1 #277, TA.

<sup>115</sup> *Tasmanian*, 14 June 1833, p. 4.

<sup>116</sup> Arthur to Glenelg, 30 December 1837, GO1/1/29, TA, pp. 272-273. In fact, it was Meredith's solicitors who advised him against suing—suggesting that such would invite rival publisher RL Murray to enter the debate against Meredith, possibly bringing up the circumstances George Meredith junior's death at the hands of Aboriginal people in South Australia: Charles Meredith to Meredith, 13 February 1835, G4/29(1), UTAS S&R. In May 1835, Meredith also wrote an effective point by point rebuttal of Rowlands, for the government, but this appears to have been ignored: Meredith statement, May 1835, CSO1/1/637/14367, TA, p. 11.

<sup>117</sup> Burnett to Meredith, 8 June 1833, *ibid*, p. 250; reprinted in *Colonist*, 2 July 1833, p. 2.

I had received a letter from a gentleman in town, two days prior, *warning me*, that unless I abandoned all connexion [sic] with the “Colonist newspaper”, I must prepare myself for *annihilation*; but although, during my late interviews at Government-house, I “collected” sufficient to expect that Colonel Arthur would omit no possible opportunity of inflicting upon me, *individually*, the severest of official visitation. Not until the present denunciation of arbitrary power, could I have believed that destruction of the worldly prospects of my *whole family* would be also be attempted, and that by a man, himself a parent – a professing pattern of christian [sic] charity and forbearance<sup>118</sup>

Later he added:

If there is any defiance in this case, and I speak my sentiments with all due respect, I conceive it to be on the part of Colonel Arthur himself, in his character of Lieutenant Governor of this Colony, in setting aside, and therefore defying the laws of his Country, by interposing the authority of his office between an appeal to the legal tribunals and expected redress – by converting the judicial character into a public functionary – the Civil Magistrate into an official personage – by superseding the usual Administration of Justice through the medium of the Supreme Court of the Island – and erecting the Executive Council into a kind of Star Chamber in its place, taking upon himself a power above the law – pronouncing sentence, and threatening execution, without even the form of trial – the examination of witnesses – or affording opportunity for defence.

This letter was read to the Executive Council at its meeting on 26 June 1833 and described as having a ‘very offensive manner’, but no additional action was taken.<sup>119</sup> It was published in the *Colonist* on 2 July 1833 and, given its language and a poorly veiled accusation of judicial corruption against Arthur, Meredith could consider himself lucky not to be sued by Arthur. In his letter, Meredith introduced the phrase: ‘what is the fate of *one*, may be the fate of *many*’.<sup>120</sup> This rallying cry-to-arms was Meredith’s most strident appeal to represent

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<sup>118</sup> Meredith to Arthur, 15 June 1833, reprinted in *Colonist*, 2 July 1833, p. 2. Emphasis in original.

<sup>119</sup> Executive Council, 26 June 1833, EC4/1/3, TA.

<sup>120</sup> Emphasis in original.

the greater good, but it found no resonance beyond being taken up with alacrity by his newspaper, the *Colonist*, in editorials and one anonymous letter over the following year.<sup>121</sup>

In November, the case of Meredith suing Waterloo Point magistrates Lord and Hepburn for false imprisonment was heard. Meredith won this and damages of £50.<sup>122</sup> Several days later, Hogarth, who had been brought up from Port Arthur as a witness in the trial, petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor over his sentence, adding that he was 'the dupe of George Meredith who cared not about sacrificing the man as long as his own wicked ways were answered'.<sup>123</sup> It was recommended that Hogarth be allowed to work in an office for the remainder of his sentence.

On three occasions during November 1833, Meredith wrote to the Colonial Secretary, offering to attend to give an account of his actions, and noting the previous threat that he might be deprived of all his convict servants. He stressed the effect that such deprivation would have on his 'large family'. He complained that he had been 'the object of Official Visitation and denunciation grounded on ex parte statements and secret accusations, without being offered opportunity for defence'. He asked for redress before a 'higher tribunal'.<sup>124</sup> Arthur noted on the back 'I cannot be bound to answer such disrespectful letters', which may have been true, but he again ceded moral advantage, as, notwithstanding his abusive rhetoric, Meredith again had a point. The non-supply of convict servants, and the threat of complete withdrawal of them, would be a serious

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<sup>121</sup> Including: *Colonist*, 13 May 1834, p. 2, 15 July 1834, p. 2; for the letter: *Colonist*, 20 August 1833, p. 3, it was signed 'A Launceston legionary' and may have been penned by Meredith. Meredith's cry was supported only by one other newspaper, the *Launceston Independent*, 25 January 1834, p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Cartwright & Allport to Colonial Secretary, 19 September 1833, CSO1/1/637/14367, TA, p. 258; *Tasmanian*, 8 Nov 1833, p. 6; *Colonist*, 19 November 1833, p. 3.

<sup>123</sup> Petition of William Hogarth, 4 November 1833, CSO1/1/637/14367, (Vol. 1), TA, p. 263.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, Meredith to Burnett, 24 November 1833, CSO1/1/597/13578 TA, p. 247.

punishment for a broadacre farmer like Meredith, possibly ruinous. That he had no statutory forum to formally hear and be able to rebut allegations against him would seem to be a reasonable complaint.

In early January 1834, Arthur wrote to the Secretary of State to inform him of the circumstances of the Hogarth case and that he, on the advice of Council, had decided to assign no further convicts to Meredith, but he would be allowed to keep existing ones. It was a concession, he wrote, that he would not have made to Meredith 'were he not a violent opponent of the measures I have adopted in the administration of the colony, a circumstance which disposed me for obvious reasons rather to report the matter for your decision'.<sup>125</sup> Tellingly, Arthur added: 'It may be proper I should add that the refusal of convict labor [sic] to a settler places him under the necessity of employing free men on his farm at considerable expence [sic] and inconvenience'. The Secretary of State replied in August that he thought Arthur's action was appropriate.<sup>126</sup> Meredith's hostility to Arthur may have 'inoculated' him against the severest punishment Arthur could have inflicted, but Arthur was in no doubt as to the economic power he wielded in respect to the actual and threatened withdrawal of convict labour.

Another front opened between the authorities and Meredith in May 1834 when the Principal Superintendent of Convicts, Josiah Spode, wrote to Meredith querying why he had not recommended two convicts who were entitled to tickets-of-leave and who had petitioned for same. Meredith replied that one reason for not recommending them was

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<sup>125</sup> Arthur to Glenelg, 6 January 1834, Colonial Office, CO280/46, Australian Joint Copying Project (hereafter, AJCP) reel #257, TA, pp. 34-35.

<sup>126</sup> Spring Rice to Arthur, 22 August 1834, GO1/1/17, TA, p. 229.



that he was not confident that they would be replaced.<sup>127</sup> Meredith was advised by acting Colonial Secretary John Montagu in November that the Executive Council was considering the issue of tickets-of-leave being granted to some assigned servants without Meredith's recommending them.<sup>128</sup> Meredith's reply was described by Montagu as 'effrontery'.<sup>129</sup>

During 1835, correspondence continued to be exchanged between Meredith and Burnett and Montagu concerning convicts being granted tickets-of-leave by the authorities without Meredith's recommendation. In reply to why he was not recommending cases where the convict had been of good behaviour and was entitled to consideration, Meredith answered variously that the individual concerned had not been well behaved or that he could not recommend in the absence of their not being replaced.<sup>130</sup> In reviewing several specific cases, Arthur did criticise his officials for not returning to Meredith convicts who had been called away for various reasons, including hospitalisation and conviction—he noted the policy was no new convicts to be assigned, but temporarily removed ones should be returned.<sup>131</sup> Interestingly, Montagu's reply to Meredith, having seen Arthur's comments, made no concessions to Meredith about these cases, but referred back to Hogarth and the requirement for Meredith to explain his conduct.<sup>132</sup> From this, it appears that the

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<sup>127</sup> Spode to Meredith, 1 May 1834, CSO1/1/141/3493, TA, p. 194; Meredith to Spode 10 May 1834, *ibid*, p. 193. The process of the issuing of a ticket-of-leave to a convict was later explained in evidence to the 'Molesworth committee' on transportation. A ticket-of-leave was had by gaining a 'certificate' from a magistrate, on which the master affirmed time of service and good conduct. If the master withheld approving comments, the magistrate could himself certify the good conduct: Evidence of Sir Francis Forbes, House of Commons, *Report from the select committee* (1837), p. 10.

<sup>128</sup> Referred to in Meredith to Montagu, 26 November 1834, CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, p. 273.

<sup>129</sup> Meredith to Montagu, 26 November 1834, *ibid*, p. 273.

<sup>130</sup> Meredith to Spode, 9 February 1835, *ibid*, p. 111; Burnett to Meredith 12 March 1835, *ibid*, p. 322; Meredith to Montagu, 28 April 1835, CSO1/1/638/14367 (Vol. 2), TA, p. 115 and others in this series.

<sup>131</sup> Arthur, memorandum, 14 May 1835, *ibid*, p. 135.

<sup>132</sup> Montagu to Meredith, 29 May 1835, *ibid*, p. 138.

administration officials were carrying out Arthur's policy somewhat beyond what was intended.

Montagu also challenged Meredith's 'system of reformation' of convicts, noting their bad behaviour, which Meredith brought forward to argue against them being granted tickets-of-leave. Here, Montagu stated the reason why the local authorities were being charged with the decision about whether or not a ticket-of-leave should be granted, and not Meredith as master:

If every Master in the Colony bestowed the same pains you profess to take for the reformation of your convicts servants, and results of your system proved (which they do not) to be as beneficial as you wish to take credit for the extension of it generally, might be perhaps become desirable; but until that period has arrived, the Lieutenant Governor is fully justified by experience in considering a Police Office record to be, as a general measure, a more accurate criterion for judging of the propriety of granting indulgences to convicts.<sup>133</sup>

This appears to have provoked Meredith to greater rage and in late May he wrote a belligerent letter to Montagu.<sup>134</sup> He protested about notice being taken of Rowlands' letter, published by his enemy Murray, and that the authorities found these statements had been 'verified by the signature of the writer'. He also attempted to justify his actions in respect of 'setting up' the convicts at Waterloo Point rather than capturing them himself and in approaching Hogarth subsequently. As was common, Meredith called on much hyperbole, including 'May not this case be aptly assimilated to one of those we read of in accounts of the Spanish inquisition, substituting pecuniary sacrifices for bodily torture'. He explained why he had referred to 'Colonel Arthur' rather than Lieutenant-Governor, as 'it

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<sup>133</sup> Montagu to Meredith, 29 May 1835, *ibid*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>134</sup> Meredith to Montagu, May 1835 (received 10 June 1835), CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, p. 49, with a better copy at p. 28.

was more in unison with my conviction that I have been made to suffer rather from individual prejudice than official considerations' and '[my belief is] most consciously that His Excellency is and has long been my personal enemy'.<sup>135</sup> Meredith was not alone in taking Arthur to task in a strident way. Major Sholto Douglas, who by family and military service had greater standing than Meredith with Arthur, wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor in August 1835 with a blistering attack on his 'arbitrary and oppressive acts'.<sup>136</sup>

On 14 June 1835 Meredith penned another long letter to the Colonial Secretary about granting tickets-of-leave to his assigned convicts. This letter is interesting, as, besides the usual cant, Meredith canvassed his own 'system of [convict] reformation' in reply to the observations of the Colonial Secretary in his earlier letter. He explained it briefly as 'a bad man shall not leave my service unless under circumstances to make the instance a memorable exception'.<sup>137</sup> He contrasted his 'success' with the necessity of the government sending its prisoners to chain gangs and work houses, and those 'unreformed beings within those receptacles of crime as presenting a mournful picture of the results of the official system under the immediate direction of his Excellency'. Meredith took Montagu to task for an accusation of envy he made against Meredith with this slight:

... were I repelling the charge of any other personage than the political head of a colony, I should say that such an imputation could only emanate from one conscious of its influence within his own breast.<sup>138</sup>

Colonial Secretary Montagu prepared a summary memorandum of the entire Hogarth/Meredith saga, including summaries of letters exchanged. He described

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<sup>135</sup> Meredith to Montagu, *ibid*, pp. 35- 46.

<sup>136</sup> S Petrow, 'Persecutions of power: Arthur's rule in Van Diemen's Land', *Papers & Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (March, 2001), pp. 65-68.

<sup>137</sup> Meredith to Montagu, 14 June 1835, CSO1/1/638/14367 (Vol. 2), TA, p. 162.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p. 166.

Meredith's contributions variously as 'vituperative' and 'contemptuous'.<sup>139</sup> The memo was presented to the Executive Council on 14 December 1835, and the council decided that an explanation from Meredith of his conduct was still required.<sup>140</sup>

At the end of the year, another crisis was brewing for Meredith. Edward Tilley was a ticket-of-leave man who had arrived on the *Medway* (2) after being convicted of horse stealing in 1825.<sup>141</sup> In 1835 he was acting as overseer for Meredith on *Riversdale* farm when he had his ticket-of-leave withdrawn for twelve months in November 1835 for an assault.<sup>142</sup> The local police magistrate, Alexander Mackenzie, who Meredith had previously attacked, was suspicious about Tilley's status, especially that he appeared to have charge of other convicts, which was forbidden.<sup>143</sup> At precisely the same period, Arthur, perhaps in the face of Bryan's assault from London and possibly with an eye on sidelining controversial issues ahead of the time he might be re-appointed, decided to suspend the ban on Meredith receiving new assigned servants. A memo documented his justification, which was somewhat convoluted, and contrary to Executive Council recommendation.<sup>144</sup>

In the meantime, Mackenzie at Waterloo Point and Spode in Hobart were trying to prove the illegal arrangements between Tilley and Meredith—they suspected Tilley was operating *Riversdale* 'on the halves' and had control over some of Meredith's convicts.<sup>145</sup> With the revelation of the Tilley case, the authorities quickly realised that to restore

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<sup>139</sup> Montagu, memorandum, 17 August 1835, CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, p. 184.

<sup>140</sup> Executive Council, 14 December 1835, EC4/1/3, TA.

<sup>141</sup> Edward Tilley, conduct record, Convict Department, *Conduct registers of male convicts arriving in the period of the assignment system*, CON31/1/42, TA.

<sup>142</sup> Memorial of Andrew Halfpin [with administrative comments], 16 December 1835, CSO1/1/638/17789, TA, p. 218.

<sup>143</sup> Mackenzie to Spode, 31 December 1835, *ibid*, TA, p. 228.

<sup>144</sup> Arthur, memorandum, 7 January 1836, CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, p. 329.

<sup>145</sup> Mackenzie to Spode, 9 January 1836, CSO1/1/638/17789, TA, p. 251; Montagu, memorandum, 15 January 1836, *ibid*, p. 187. Meredith would allow Tilley to work some of his land and take half the profits or produce.

Meredith's convicts would be a mistake, and an internal memorandum in mid-January revealed their action: 'if your letter to Mr M respecting the [illegible] being taken off the appointment of servants to him has not been produced, [word in binding] it had better not be sent!'.<sup>146</sup> The letter to Meredith was not sent, although a draft is preserved in the file immediately after the memorandum.

Montagu wrote to Meredith in late March about Tilley and, although this letter does not appear to have been preserved in the file, Meredith's reply is present in the collection of Arthur's papers.<sup>147</sup> He denied improper arrangements with Tilley and then went on to again address each of the 'charges' against him in respect of the Hogarth affair, with a number of effective rebuttals. The most specific of these was that he has been subject to 'executive punishment' without being able to put his case in front of a 'tribunal'. He had supplied 'explanations', as required, but was not told why they were insufficient and again mentioned that the punishment inflicted on him affected his entire family, and this was unfair. With his usual hyperbole, he wrote: '... when the hand of power was raised to crush my innocent offspring'. By this time Meredith had lodged a formal complaint to Secretary of State Glenelg with Arthur's office, and he enquired as to whether it had been forwarded.

In early October 1836, yet another issue affecting Meredith's standing arose. As discussed in Chapter 2, on the voyage to Van Diemen's Land, Meredith entered into an agreement with John Amos to the effect that Amos could represent some of Meredith's capital as his own, to support Amos' application for a land grant.<sup>148</sup> This issue re-emerged just weeks

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<sup>146</sup> Burnett to Montagu, 19 February 1836, CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, p. 333.

<sup>147</sup> Meredith to Montagu, 26 March 1836, Papers of Sir George Arthur, Vol. 47, *The Case of George Meredith*, ZA2207, ML, SLNSW.

<sup>148</sup> Macdowell (Solicitor-General) to Turnbull (Lieutenant-Governor's private secretary), 12 October 1836, CSO1/1/884/18765, TA, p. 160; 'Ship Emerald at sea', [Meredith-Amos Agreement], 3 March 1821, *ibid*, p.

before Arthur's departure so a search was immediately instigated in the Colonial Secretary's and Surveyor-General's offices for the grant paperwork, but it could not be located.<sup>149</sup> The Crown Solicitor opined that there was 'no doubt of a fraud having been committed on the Government'.<sup>150</sup>

The ban on Meredith receiving assigned servants was not lifted by the time Arthur departed the colony on 29 October.<sup>151</sup> A letter from Meredith to Montagu in September continued his abuse almost until the end:

Had Lieutenant-Governor Arthur told me the sanctions would go the entire term of his rule, I would have sold my farm (with double loss as above), or gotten free servants from England, but in this immoral district, supervised by drunken felon police and where the Stipendiary Magistrate has been converted into an official agent, the seat of justice perverted for political purposes and the sabbath profaned for pecuniary purposes ...<sup>152</sup>

In late 1836 (probably October, prior to Arthur's departure), Meredith, through Henry Melville's press, published in booklet form a number of the letters exchanged with government officials dating from 1828.<sup>153</sup> Given Arthur's history of suing publishers for publishing libels, Arthur's restraint in not suing him and/or Meredith for publishing the letters, containing so much abuse, can only be wondered at, especially as Arthur had, very recently, enquired of his Executive Council about suing Thomas Gregson for libel.<sup>154</sup>

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163. The agreement came to light publicly when, surprisingly, Meredith produced it at the Caveat Board to block an application by Amos for a grant of his land.

<sup>149</sup> Arthur to Glenelg, 30 December 1837, GO1/1/29, TA, p. 291.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, p. 293.

<sup>151</sup> *True Colonist*, 27 May 1836, p. 164; *Tasmanian*, 27 May 1836, p. 7; Glenelg to Arthur, 10 January 1836, GO1/1/21, p. 10.

<sup>152</sup> Meredith to Montagu, 5 September 1836, CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, p. 365, TA; *Bent's News*, 29 October 1836, p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> Meredith, *Correspondence*.

<sup>154</sup> Executive Council, 24 September 1836, EC4/1/4, TA. This was over Gregson's publication of accusations of corruption by Arthur in his acquisition of Cottage Green from Rev. Knopwood.

Between Arthur's departure and Sir John Franklin's arrival as his replacement, Lieutenant-Colonel Kenneth Snodgrass acted as Administrator of Van Diemen's Land. Under appeal from Meredith, he lifted the ban on Meredith receiving assigned servants.<sup>155</sup> In Glenelg's final communication on the subject, to Franklin, he made his disapproval of that action plain and summarised the key justification for the removal of assigned servants from a settler: 'On the character of the master must naturally in a very great degree depend the good conduct and moral reformation of the convicts assigned to his charge'.<sup>156</sup>

## ARTHUR'S CONTROL OF HIS CRITICS

### The 'character test' of convict 'Masters'

From the discussion at the start of this chapter, it can be seen that by early 1830 the concept that a Lieutenant-Governor could assign a convict to private service, and then withdraw that convict, had been firmly established.<sup>157</sup> While the circumstances where withdrawal could take place were not so well defined, some were clear cut. In the remote areas, an issue for both Sorell and Arthur was convicts being at large attending stock, not under close supervision or control, therefore potentially able to fraternise with bushrangers. Arthur published a Government Notice in May 1828, where settlers who allowed their convicts to work without supervision of the settler or an overseer would have their assigned servants withdrawn promptly and the Surveyor-General could have the settler's land 'resumed'.<sup>158</sup> Arthur also tightened the ban on practices that allowed convicts

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<sup>155</sup> Franklin to Glenelg, 1 June 1837, GO33/1/26, TA, p. 977. The index of correspondence for the Snodgrass era is at *Index to general correspondence 1 November 1836 - 31 January 1837*, CSO4, TA, but no reference to a letter to or from Meredith is found there, so the original correspondence has not been located.

<sup>156</sup> Glenelg to Franklin, 28 February 1838, GO1/1/29, TA, p. 306.

<sup>157</sup> See also Brooks, 'Prisoners or servants?', p. 386.

<sup>158</sup> Government Order, 27 May 1828, in J Ross (printer), *Proclamations, government orders, and notices, issued by His Excellency Colonel George Arthur, Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land 1828* (Hobart, 1829), p. 55.

to profit by keeping stock 'on the thirds'—that is, an arrangement where they had their own allotment of land or to work for their own profit. A notice in 1826 read:

If, hereafter, it shall be ascertained that any Settler makes payment to Convict Servants in Live Stock – or apports to them land for their exclusive benefit – or suffers them to be employed in any other than his immediate service – every support and indulgence of the Crown will be withdrawn and thenceforth withheld'<sup>159</sup>

Even allowing convicts to damage road surfaces by dragging logs along them was punishable by the withdrawal of male convict servants.<sup>160</sup>

There appears never to have been an advertised condition or test of a master being judged a 'fit and proper person' to receive convicts or to have them taken away if that test was subsequently failed. Later, Arthur did state that great care was taken 'in order to prevent men being assigned to improper service', but there was silence in respect of what should happen when a master is found to be of bad character at some point later on.<sup>161</sup> The report from the Select Committee into Transportation set up in 1837 did not touch on the behaviour of convict masters to any great extent.<sup>162</sup> Arthur canvassed the subject in his well-known essay 'Observations upon secondary punishments', although it was not within

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<sup>159</sup> Government Notice, 30 September 1826, in J Ross, (printer), *Proclamations, government orders, and notices, issued by His Excellency Colonel George Arthur, Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land 1826* (Hobart, 1829), pp. 33-34.

<sup>160</sup> Government Notice, 1 April 1830, in J Ross, (printer), *Proclamations, government orders, and notices, issued by His Excellency Colonel George Arthur, Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land 1830* (Hobart, 1832), p. 62.

<sup>161</sup> Arthur, answering question 4265, House of Commons, *Report from the select committee, 1837*, p. 284. In New South Wales, Darling had published regulations in 1826 where assignment would be preferred to persons of 'moral character' and in 1831 smaller landholders had to have their suitability confirmed by a magistrate: Foster, 'Convict assignment', p. 57.

<sup>162</sup> House of Commons, *Report from the select committee, 1838*, pp. iii-xlvii.



the subject of his letter to the Archbishop of Dublin and was prior to the 'Bryan case' and indeed the 'Meredith case'.<sup>163</sup>

Using a quote from Arthur in a discussion of the issue of withdrawal of assigned convicts by the Governor or Lieutenant-Governor, Chapman noted that the 'reformatory overall right of the Governor to revoke or re-assign was as well stated by Arthur as anyone else'.<sup>164</sup> The quote from Arthur canvassed actual ill-treatment or specific ill-conduct by the master of the convict. Nothing was brought forward to justify the withdrawal of convict servants on the basis that the master is at some point judged to be of bad character and so *may* lead convicts into non-reformation. The threat of withdrawal of convicts should have been meaningful to settlers, as they were critical to the running of farms, especially large ones, like Meredith's. Meredith himself wrote 'the assignment of *Crown prisoners* to [farmers'] service, [is] the *only* available means of carrying on [farmers'] important avocation in life'.<sup>165</sup>

Arthur held near total control over the labour supply of the colony, down to the individual convict and settler. With his use of the 'character test' he had an easy weapon to intimidate and to punish critics, especially those who were landholders like Meredith. Arthur's successor Sir John Franklin observed later that Arthur could 'assign ... convict labour ... sufficient for him to make or mar the fortunes of any individual under his government'.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> G Arthur, *Observations upon secondary punishments, by Colonel George Arthur ...* (Hobart, 1833).

<sup>164</sup> HRA III, Vol. IX, Note 30, p. 726, on the 'Jane New Case'; Chapman then included a quote from Arthur.

<sup>165</sup> Meredith, *Correspondence*, p. iv. Emphasis in original. The quote is from an unattributed 'Introduction' but can be assumed, if not written by him, then it was written with his approval.

<sup>166</sup> J Franklin, *Narrative of some passages in the history of Van Diemen's Land* (London, 1845), p. 6.

## Did Arthur victimise his critics?

From the preceding, we see that by 1830, Arthur knew he held the unfettered right to assign convicts to settlers and to withdraw them if he chose. A long-standing question of the Arthur regime was whether he used this authority capriciously and in a victimising way against critics of the government.<sup>167</sup> There was a precedent for such behaviour, if it occurred. Governor Darling in New South Wales had attempted to impede a critical press when in 1829 he ended the assignments of convicts to the editors of 'opposition' newspapers the *Australian* and the *Monitor*.<sup>168</sup> For this, he was criticised by the government in London, as the removal was seen as being for solely political purposes and not for the reforming benefit of the convict.<sup>169</sup>

Two Van Diemen's Land cases achieved prominence largely because of the newspaper ownership of one of the 'victims', namely Meredith, and editorship of another, Robertson. The parallels with the New South Wales experience are therefore evident, but Arthur was able to perceive moral fault with the masters (who were therefore judged unsuitable to have and reform convicts), as well as direct contraventions of regulations. In respect of Bryan, the prominence of his case mainly arose through side issues and the agitation of Bryan in London, when the Secretary of State was considering whether to appoint Arthur for a further term.

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<sup>167</sup> CR Joel, *A tale of ambition and unrealised hope* (North Melbourne, 2011), p. 74.

<sup>168</sup> See 'In re Hayes [1828]', Macquarie University, Division of Law, *Decisions of the Superior Courts of New South Wales, 1788-1899*, [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/nsw/cases/case\\_index/1829/in\\_re\\_hayes/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/nsw/cases/case_index/1829/in_re_hayes/) accessed online 20 January 2019 and 'In re Tyler; R. v. Rossi and others [1828]', Macquarie University, Division of Law, *Decisions of the Superior Courts of New South Wales, 1788-1899*, [http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial\\_case\\_law/nsw/cases/case\\_index/1829/in\\_re\\_tyler\\_r\\_v\\_rossi\\_and\\_others/](http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/nsw/cases/case_index/1829/in_re_tyler_r_v_rossi_and_others/), accessed online 20 January 2019. In these cases, the New South Wales Supreme Court found for the editors, that the assigned servants had been wrongly removed.

<sup>169</sup> Murray to Darling, 3 May 1830, HRA I, Vol. XV, pp. 463-464.

In his finding of moral faults in convict masters, we might see at work Arthur the reformer, who viewed the island of Van Diemen's Land as the perfect place to carry out the reformation of convicts, where the good and the bad were sorted and separated out by their assigned masters, who carried a personal interest in obtaining profitable work from their worthy charges, and rejecting the others back to chain gangs.<sup>170</sup> A master incapable of sorting the good from the bad was a threat to Arthur's reformatory system and so had to be dealt with. In a letter to Archbishop Whately, Arthur noted 'the whole territory is one large penitentiary' and that by the establishment of a suitable police force, ranging over the settled areas, 'the obedient and respectful conduct of the servant, and his proper treatment by his master, are equally secured'.<sup>171</sup> Chapman observed that with this arrangement, the colony was an 'island panopticon' in an allusion to Bentham's penitentiary panopticon.<sup>172</sup>

It is likely that Arthur did see, and intend, his actions against Meredith after 1827 to be even handed, but no less disadvantageous towards this settler, found morally unsuitable for convict reformation. However, negative views and actions by Arthur in respect of Meredith would have been amplified in execution by his senior executives, namely Burnett, Montagu and Forster, each of whom were exposed, over years, to Meredith's letters of complaint and abuse. Their annoyance and frustration with the settler are evident from comments penned on the bottom of many of Meredith's letters. In at least one case, noted

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<sup>170</sup> Arthur to Goderich, 27 February 1833, Colonial Office, CO280/39, AJCP reel #254, p. 253.

<sup>171</sup> G Arthur, *Observations upon secondary punishments, by Colonel George Arthur ...* (Hobart, 1833), pp. 25 and 24.

<sup>172</sup> P Chapman, 'The island panopticon', *Historical Records of Australia: A documentary periodical ...*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1990), p. 9. Reformer Jeremy Bentham obtained his idea of an efficient penitentiary, with a central observation point looking out on those incarcerated arrayed around it, from an idea of his brother for the efficient observation of shipyard workers in Russia: Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, pp. 10-11. See also J Bentham, *The panopticon writings*, M Bozovic (ed.) (London 1995). Chapman expanded on the idea of Arthur the reformer, rather than an overbearing authoritarian figure, in 'Introduction', HRA III, Vol. VIII, pp. xvii-xlv.

above, Arthur rebuked them for not promptly returning Meredith's convicts who had been called away, showing that Arthur enforced the limits of his sanction, but no further. Burnett's letter to Meredith in 1828, referred to above, indicated an early attitude that Meredith in particular, could be punished for being, if not a critic, then a non-supporter of the government.

Arthur was also in no doubt that withdrawal of convict servants, or non-assignment of new ones when releasing servants under ticket-of-leave, was a severe economic burden on the settler concerned. He was imposing a substantial penalty on settlers his administration had found breached regulations or their unwritten code of good character.

Meredith, Bryan and Robertson all made similar complaints about their treatment, and many of these complaints were justifiable. They were given substantial penalties, but these were not set by a court or other mechanism, where they could be formally charged and present a defence; in many cases the judgement of character was arbitrary. Settlers given grants by Brisbane's decree were obliged to take convicts in proportion to their land and were entitled to rely on the wording of the grant deeds, issued by a higher authority than Arthur, unless formally rescinded. Arthur's repeated reliance on Rowlands' unethical letter against Meredith in the press, which exposed attorney-client discussions, certainly had the appearance of grasping at straws for an excuse to punish Meredith.

On the other hand, Meredith's transgressions in respect of Hogarth could not have been clearer and a truly vengeful government may have taken him to court. In his letters, Meredith clearly laid out fair claims of injustice, but his abusive and hectoring tone ensured that any legitimate points gained no traction. His letters attacking Arthur personally as well

as through his office, when published, surely would have led to a libel suit earlier in Arthur's tenure.

Arthur's unilateral decision to lift the ban on Meredith getting new assigned servants, in January 1836, was curious. His justification for it was circuitous—he essentially reasoned that Meredith's hostility was due to a 'misconception', so he would be given the benefit of the doubt—and Arthur went against the advice of his Executive Council.<sup>173</sup> With William Bryan presenting his case directly to Glenelg in London, perhaps Arthur was seeking to cauterise a source of complaint, looking towards the time when London would be considering his future.

The charge on Arthur that he used his authority to withdraw convict labour selectively to punish his public critics is difficult to sustain, as he applied the same punishment (or worse) to many settlers who broke regulations. His administration's officers, on the other hand, probably looked harder and longer at the activities of the likes of Meredith for infractions that might be sanctioned and sometimes took the punishment further than Arthur intended. Arthur was in no doubt of the severity of the punishment of withdrawing new, or all convict servants from a landholder, and given this severity, the lack of transparency in the process and opportunity for impartial redress was unfair. Levy in his usual fashion, found for Arthur: '[Arthur] did not use his giant's power ... unfairly towards anyone'. This misses the point made here—that in using his power, at least in the case of Meredith, he did it opaquely and did not render to those being punished the opportunity to contest the charges or case made against them, or even to have it presented to them.

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<sup>173</sup> Arthur – memorandum, 7 January 1839, CSO1/1/637/14367 (Vol. 1), TA, p. 329.

## CONCLUSION

George Meredith was a serial complainant against Lieutenant-Governor Arthur and his administration, down to the local magistrates, who occupied a position Meredith undoubtedly coveted and was repeatedly over-looked for. His abusive and hectoring tone in his letters to Arthur and his senior officials no doubt contributed to him sometimes receiving less than he deserved in respect of certain complaints, but equally seems to have inoculated him against receiving material punishments for obvious contraventions and libels, with Arthur holding back some of his punishment of a very public critic. Faced with the evidence—indeed, Meredith’s own admission—of Meredith assisting escapees to execute a crime in the raid on Ferguson’s hotel, Meredith received a sanction from Arthur which many others had received for lesser contraventions—the loss of new assigned servants. This drove Meredith to new heights of abuse and the settler draped himself with the mantle of the defender of free settler’s rights against a tyrannical ruler, who misused his power and set aside the laws of England. In adopting the slogan ‘the fate of one may be the fate of many’, Meredith posed as a martyr to the common good, especially in respect of the defence of freedoms of British subjects.

This self-imposed status cannot be sustained. His campaigns against every magistrate who came to Great Swan Port to about 1840 was transparently self-serving, as Meredith no doubt believed he deserved to occupy that position. His letter-writing and complaints to the press and government did not extend to any formal action by or with him to form a citizens’ movement for unseating the ‘despot’. Indeed, there was such a movement on foot—the Political Association was formed in 1835 (see Chapter 6), at the height of Meredith’s personal campaigns and angst, yet Meredith was not sighted at any of the

meetings. The fact that Arthur neutered the movement by essentially ignoring it could have been used by Meredith as a legitimate point of attack against Arthur, but he did not participate. His fight was personal.

The language used by Meredith was also used by his friend and ally Thomas Gregson, and, although not reaching Meredith's level of personal abuse, Gregson did exceed him in his public accusations of corruption on the part of Arthur.<sup>174</sup> Brain's words describing Gregson could well apply to Meredith:

Gregson's libellous attacks and his disregard for the veracity of all his charges, while deemed the best means of injuring the local government, were not the best means of achieving recognition of their aims by the Colonial Office and the British government.<sup>175</sup>

This is the nub of the argument here. Meredith indulged himself in his personal attacks against Arthur and the government. He did not attempt to use his undoubted skills as an organiser and writer to cogently argue either locally or to London that Arthur was exceeding his authority. Bryan travelled to the home country to take up his argument with the Secretary of State. Meredith sniped from the sidelines and in this can be seen to be merely self-serving—revenge of a frustrated settler not called to serve on the magistrate's bench and not for some greater good of the colony. With each new issue brought against the government, and each rebuff or retort in turn, Meredith was raised to higher levels of complaint and abuse. He did neither his own nor the colony's general cause any good in attacking the government in this way.

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<sup>174</sup> For instance, improper acquisition of the Rev. Knopwood's *Cottage Green* property: *True Colonist*, 1 July 1836, p. 204; *ibid*, 2 September 1836, p. 204. As noted above, Arthur sought the advice of the Executive Council whether he should sue Gregson, but the Council advised against it.

<sup>175</sup> Brain, 'Gregson', p. 50.

## CHAPTER 9: THE POST-ARTHUR PERIOD

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine George Meredith's participation in the Van Diemen's Land's affairs from George Arthur's departure in 1836 until Meredith's death in 1856 and also the construction of his *Cambria* mansion, first occupied in 1836. It will demonstrate a marked lessening of public engagement by Meredith following Arthur's departure, notwithstanding the existence of two major controversies that engulfed the colony—the development of the probation system of convict management and the rise of the anti-transportation movement. The episode that will be recounted later in this chapter of Meredith snubbing his son Charles over the *Cambria* property, and then writing animated letters to him about it, showed that, notwithstanding his lower public profile, Meredith senior had plenty of strong opinion left in him, even in the early 1850s.

Meredith's relative lack of engagement with the convict and transportation issues at this time can again be viewed as being due to the lack of self-interest in the issues. The move from assignment to the probation system of convict management was imposed from London over a period of time from Arthur's departure, into the early 1840s, and was not contestable by the colonists. Meredith, like others, lost his convict workmen and there was no Arthur to rail against for the injustice, but he did speak at a meeting seeking to delay the abolition of assignment until more non-convict labour could be procured. At a later meeting, Meredith gave a widely-praised speech in which he turned on the British Government for its 'breach of faith' in respect to convict labour. Up to this point the home parliament had been the bulwark of Meredith's faith in government, a last point of appeal against the tyranny of Arthur. When the anti-transportation movement began in the late



1840s, a strong contest of ideas arose in the colony with plenty of petitions, opinion and argument. This time, Meredith was mute. With no convicts, it is argued that Meredith simply had no self-interest and was thus ambivalent about the issue.

### *CAMBRIA*

Begun towards the end of the Arthur period and completed in 1836, Meredith's showpiece home *Cambria* (Figures 9-1 and 9-2) may appear emblematic of a calmer and more relaxed persona following Arthur's departure. It was the grandest house on the east coast of Van Diemen's Land and symbolised Meredith's view of himself as the local squire, or, as he had been unkindly and satirically called by some, 'the King of Oyster Bay'.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 9-1.** 'Swansea - "Cambria" - one time home of Louisa Ann [sic] Meredith' (1951)  
Source: Jack Thwaites and Family, NS3195/1/808, Tasmanian Archives.

<sup>1</sup> *Colonial Times*, 13 July 1827, p. 2; *Hobart Town Courier*, 1 August 1829, p. 4.



**Figure 9-2.** "Cambria" at Swansea - The old Meredith homestead' (1957).

Source: Jack Thwaites and Family, NS3195/1/1811, TA.

Commentary: The house was built into a levee bank. At the front (Figure 9-1), only one floor has openings. At the rear, this image, the main, 'front' floor is in the middle, with attic rooms above and servant's quarters, kitchens and storage below.

The planning for the house began well before building commenced in 1833. A drawing produced in 1822 for the Meredith-Talbot land dispute shows 'Foundation of a house for [Mr Meredith]' with a plan outline of *Cambria* much as was realised over a decade later, drawn very close to its eventual actual position (Figures 9-3 and 9-4). 'Foundation' is likely to be an exaggeration by Meredith to enhance the priority of his land claim, but it is remarkable that, only a year after arriving in the colony, he had decided on the location of his future house and anticipated its plan outline. This may indicate that he brought out with him a 'pattern' or design of some other house.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lucas and Joyce speculated that Meredith's time in the West Indies may have been an influence, but they presented no evidence to support this: C Lucas and R Joyce, *Australian country houses homesteads, farmsteads and rural retreats* (Willoughby, 1987), p. 18.



Meredith's youngest son, Edwin, recounted that years before the house was even begun in 1832, he and his mother had started a garden and orchard in an area that had been enclosed for the purpose.<sup>3</sup>

In 1831, the Merediths were still living at *Belmont*, the house/hut that William Talbot built and which Meredith acquired when he won the land dispute ('A' in Figure 9-3).<sup>4</sup> In June of that year, Meredith wrote to his wife that 'Bull' should begin to dress stone and this was the first indication that preparation for the construction of *Cambria* had begun.<sup>5</sup> 'Bull' was almost certainly William Bull, at that time a ticket-of-leave convict who had been tried in the Oxford Circuit of Assizes in 1808 on a charge of stealing silver.<sup>6</sup> On 30 March 1808 he was sentenced to death, commuted to life imprisonment, and was sent to the prison hulk *Captivity* at Gosport/Portsmouth until 27 June 1810, when he sailed on the *India* transport vessel to New South Wales.<sup>7</sup> He was stated to be twenty-two at the time of his trial, which would place his birth around 1786. A William Bull was baptised to Robert and Elizabeth Bull on 15 June 1781 at All Saints Leigh, Staffordshire.<sup>8</sup> This may be the correct William Bull, as people at the time often could not accurately state their true age. Later, in Van Diemen's

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<sup>3</sup> E Meredith, *Reminiscences and experiences of an early colonist* (Masterton, 1898), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> M Ward, MM Ferris, and T Brookes, *Houses & estates of old Glamorgan* (Swansea, 2017), pp. 84, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Meredith to his wife, 20 June 1831, *Letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith. 113 letters*, NS123/1/1 #63, Tasmanian Archives (hereafter, TA). Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/1 series will be omitted.

<sup>6</sup> *Oxford Circuit Assizes: Indictments, Staffordshire, Lent 1808*, ASSI 5/128/16, UK National Archives; *Crown Minute Book* ASSI 2/28, UK National Archives; *Lancaster Gazette*, 16 April 1808, p. 3. See M Ward and MM Ferris, 'William Bull, convict and colonial builder in Van Diemen's Land', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (December, 2019), pp. 63-73 for a fuller account of William Bull.

<sup>7</sup> Home Office, *Convict hulks moored at Portsmouth: Portland, Captivity, Leviathan: Register of prisoners*, HO 9/8, UK National Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Office, All Saints, Leigh, baptism register for 1781. Look-up and image courtesy J Lester.

Land, he stated an age which gave his birth year as 1785 and gave his 'native place' as Upper Leigh.<sup>9</sup>

The *India* arrived in Sydney on 16 December 1810.<sup>10</sup> What became of William Bull in the next eleven years is not known, but on 16 March 1822 he was convicted in the Sydney Criminal Court of discharging a musket at peace-officers to prevent apprehension.<sup>11</sup> He was again sentenced to 'life' and sent to Port Macquarie on board the *Sally*.<sup>12</sup> At this time he was described as a bricklayer. The following year he was sent to Macquarie Harbour, Van Diemen's Land, on the *Ann*, after trying to escape from Port Macquarie.<sup>13</sup>

At Macquarie Harbour, this serial offender appears to have found his vocation. As a bricklayer and mason, his services were described as 'indispensable' by commandant James Butler in a letter to the Colonial Secretary John Burnett in early 1828.<sup>14</sup> Bull had built a gaol, lime shed, the 'new' penitentiary, kitchens and other structures at the penal settlement and the commandant recommended him for a ticket-of-leave in nine months' time. William Bull was sent up to Hobart in mid-1829 and he obtained his ticket in September 1830.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Convict department, *Alphabetical registers of male convicts*, Surnames A-F, CON23/1/1, TA. TA's convict records appear to intermingle the information on two different William Bulls. From UK National Archives and New South Wales State Archives (hereafter, NSWSA), records, the William Bull who was 'Old Bull' with police number 1123 and convicted 1808 in Staffordshire, was transported to NSW on the *Indian* and from Sydney to Port Macquarie on the *Ann*. He was a bricklayer. A William Bull, a coachman, police number 796, was convicted in 1818 in London and was transported on the *Grenada* (1) and then the *Nereus* (CON31/1/1, TA). William Bull (#1123) has his ships listed as *Indian* and *Nereus*—the latter a mistake—in his conduct record at TA. The error is compounded in the CON23 record when the personal details for 'Old Bull' #1123 are listed under William Bull #786, and the details under William Bull #1123 are blank.

<sup>10</sup> C Baxter, (compiler), *Convicts to New South Wales: complete listing from the transportation records* (cd-rom, 2002), entry for William Bull.

<sup>11</sup> New South Wales Colonial Secretary's Papers (hereafter, NSW CSP) reel 6023, X820, NSWSA, p. 37; *Sydney Gazette*, 15 March 1822, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> 'List of prisoners transported to Port Macquarie on board the cutter Sally,' NSW CSP, reel 6009; 4/3505, NSWSA, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Goulburn to Sorell, 14 October 1823, NSW CSP, reel 6011, 4/3509, NSWSA, p. 419; Convict Department, *Assignment lists and associated Papers*, 'List of prisoners embarked on the brig Ann', CON13/1/2, TA, p. 529.

<sup>14</sup> Butler to Burnett, 8 April 1828, Colonial Secretary's Office, *General Correspondence*, CSO1/1/291/6986, TA, p. 149.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 18 September 1830, p. 259.

The same year, Bull was in the employ of Captain Maclaine of *Woodstock* on the east coast of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>16</sup> After that, there is no record to directly put 'William Bull' in the employ of George Meredith, but with 'Bull's' appearance as a builder/labourer at *Cambria* estate in 1831, it is easy to make the connection.

From 1832, Meredith began to address his letters as from *Cambria*, demonstrating that he had already adopted that name for his estate.<sup>17</sup> Bricks were being made by October 1832 and in March 1833 he announced that 'our grand new house' had begun.<sup>18</sup> 'Bull the mason' was in charge.<sup>19</sup> The house was finished in early 1836, at least to the extent that furniture was being shipped up to the site on Meredith's vessel the *Independent*.<sup>20</sup> By April that year the family had moved into the new, twenty-five-roomed house.<sup>21</sup>

Plans of *Cambria* have been preserved and show only minor differences from the house 'as built' (Figures 9-5 to 9-7). The floor plans for the three levels show thirty individual spaces, including a number of windowless storage and servant work areas in the basement.

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<sup>16</sup> 'List of convicts, Van Diemen's Land, 1830', HO 10/47, UK National Archives, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Meredith to his wife, numerous letters 1832, NS123/1/1, TA.

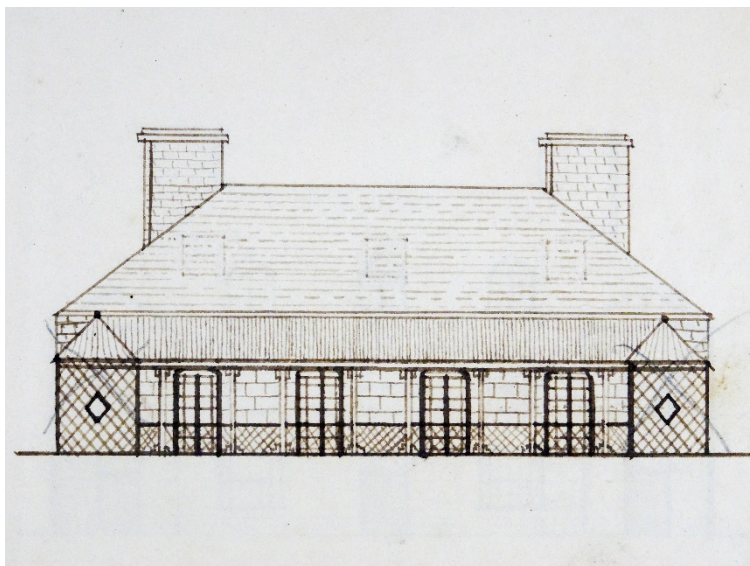
<sup>18</sup> Meredith to his wife, 7 October 1832, NS123/1/1 #307, TA and 24 March 1833, G4/17, UTAS Special and Rare Collections (hereafter, UTAS S&R).

<sup>19</sup> Meredith—memorandum, 27 June 1833, *George Meredith (1778-1856). Papers and correspondence with variety of people, including Joseph Archer, Adam Amos, George Frankland, Lieut. Colonel Sorell, T.D. Lord and others*, NS123/1/4, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/4 series will be omitted.

<sup>20</sup> Unknown to Meredith, 7 March 1836, NS123/1/4, TA.

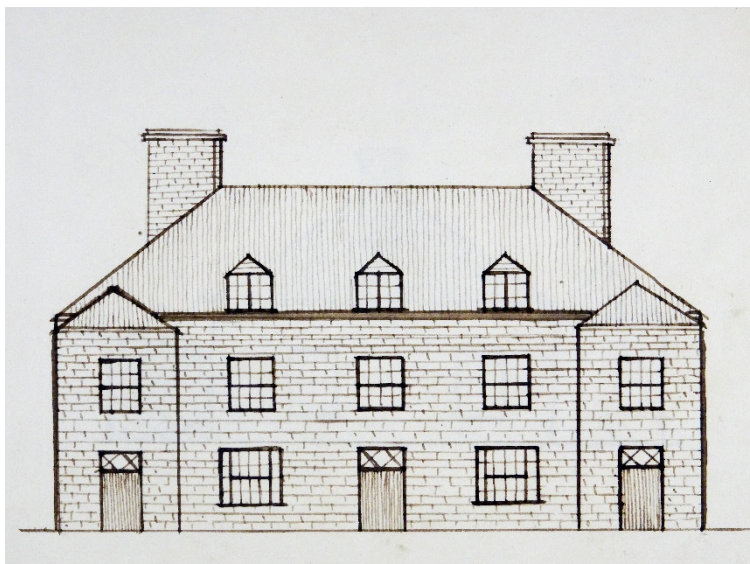
<sup>21</sup> Charles Meredith to Meredith, 16 April 1836, *Charles Meredith (1811-1880). Letter to his father George Meredith*, NS123/1/38, TA.





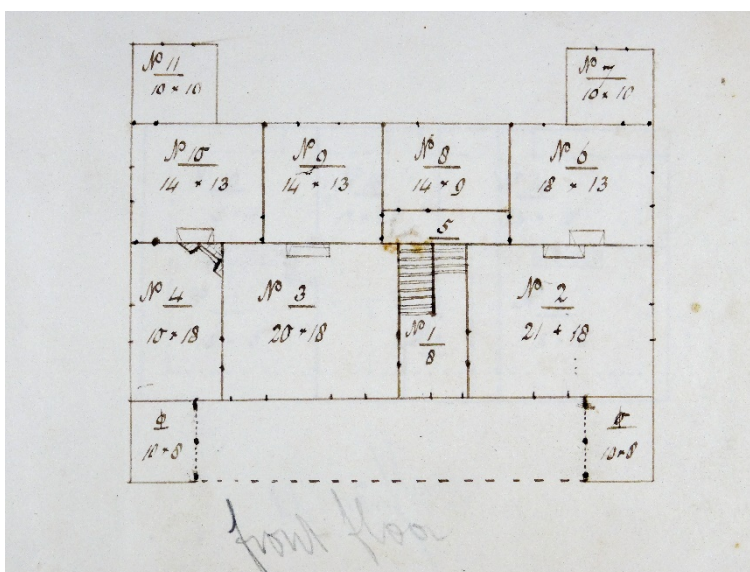
**Figure 9-5.** Front elevation of *Cambria*. The gazebos at either end of the veranda were not built (note cross-throughs) and the chimneys were constructed slightly differently. Compare to Figure 9-1.

Source: House plans, *Cambria*, nd, NS123/1/10, TA.



**Figure 9-6.** Rear elevation of *Cambria*. The house was built into a levee bank, so the lowest floor is not exposed at the front and the top, attic floor does not have front-opening windows. Compare to Figure 9-2.

Source: House plans, *Cambria*, nd, NS123/1/10, TA.



**Figure 9-7.** Plan of the 'middle' floor of the rear elevation, with the front of the house at the bottom. Front entrance hall is number 1, with stairways leading up to the mezzanine hosting rooms 6-11. Rooms 2, 3 and 4 are entertaining rooms, with an *enfilade* arrangement of doors linking them. Meredith's own bedroom was number 6.

Source: House plans, *Cambria*, nd, NS123/1/10, TA.

Having finished his grand house, and after Arthur had departed, Meredith appears to have focussed on the running of his farm and may not have liked what he saw. As early as 1839, Meredith discussed with Francis Cotton, of *Kelvedon*, the sale or lease of *Cambria*.<sup>22</sup> In 1841, Cotton wrote that most of Meredith's estate was 'second rate land'. Meredith did not pursue a sale then, but later in the year he included his Apsley lands in his offer, as his son Charles was moving to his own property rather than live at *Cambria*.<sup>23</sup> The deal with Cotton did not go further.

In order that after his death he might provide for his extensive family, especially his seven daughters, Meredith made a provision in his will that *Cambria* would be sold after his decease, but only after such a time to allow a family member to make an offer to buy it and thus keep it in the family.<sup>24</sup> By the early 1850s, his son John, then the oldest surviving son of his second marriage, had become a successful squatter in South Australia. As briefly touched on in Chapter 4, he visited *Cambria* in October 1853 and made a pre-emptive offer for the estate, which his father immediately accepted.<sup>25</sup> This arrangement estranged John and his father from the oldest surviving son from Meredith's first marriage, Charles, and Charles' wife Louisa Anne. Charles, who was living at *Cambria* and renting part of it at the time, claimed that not giving him the opportunity to also make an offer for all or part of the estate was unfair, particularly, because as he saw it, *Cambria* was developed with the capital his mother Sarah had initially brought to the marriage via her lands in Berkshire.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Francis Cotton to Meredith, 9 March 1841, *Cotton Papers*, DX19/C/109/1, UTAS S&R.

<sup>23</sup> Meredith to Dr Story, 3 May 1841, *Story Papers*, C7/146, UTAS S&R.

<sup>24</sup> 'Explanatory statement', October 1853, *George Meredith (1778-1856). Letters to his children, Sarah, Charles and John. 40 letters mainly to John while farming at Mount Gambier. Also a letter from his son*, NS123/1/2, TA. Henceforth the title of the NS123/1/2 series will be omitted.

<sup>25</sup> 'No. 2. Explanatory statement in reference to GM's note of 13<sup>th</sup> inst', October 1853, *ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Meredith to Meredith, 31 October 1853, *ibid*.



Meredith tartly replied that Charles' inheritance from him would easily exceed the entire value of his mother's dower.<sup>27</sup>

At *Cambria*, Meredith, and later, his son John, received visits from Lieutenant-Governors and other dignitaries, later earning the house the title, the 'Government House of the East Coast'.<sup>28</sup> Francis Russell Nixon arrived in Van Diemen's Land on 19 July 1843 to become the first Bishop of Van Diemen's Land.<sup>29</sup> He was an occasional visitor to *Cambria*, recorded as being there at least once in 1849 and 1852, and he produced several sketches of *Cambria* dated April and May 1853.<sup>30</sup> The Bishop was more than just a visitor; in early 1854, during the difficult time between Meredith and his son Charles after the sale of *Cambria* to John Meredith, Meredith wrote a long explanation of his reasoning to Bishop Nixon, who by that time had been made an executor of Meredith's will.<sup>31</sup>

## SIR JOHN FRANKLIN

Sir John Franklin arrived in the colony with his wife, Jane, on board the *Fairlie* in early January 1837, with many in the colony, probably including Meredith, hoping for a new dawn after the oppression they felt under Arthur.<sup>32</sup> Various sections of the colonial press had reacted with unrestrained glee and thanksgiving at the news of Arthur's recall.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Meredith to his son Charles, 1 November 1853, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 22 August 1928, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 21 July 1843, p. 2. This date of arrival is corroborated in several newspapers of the time. N Nixon in *The pioneer Bishop in VDL 1843-1863* (Hobart, 1953) in her introduction gives the date as the 18<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Meredith to his brother John, 22 March 1849, *Charles Meredith (1811-1880). Letters to John and Maria Meredith*, NS123/1/39 #268, TA; Charles Meredith to his brother John, 13 March 1852, NS123/1/2 #381, TA; *Sketches by Bishop Nixon of Cambria*, PH30/1/351, TA.

<sup>31</sup> Meredith to Bishop Nixon, 'No. 8', 28 February 1854, NS123/1/2, TA; Copies of Wills Recording Granting of Probate, *Will of George Meredith*, AD960/1/3, p. 974, TA.

<sup>32</sup> *Tasmanian*, 6 January 1837, p. 4, *True Colonist*, 6 January 1837, p. 423.

<sup>33</sup> *Bent's News*, 28 May 1836, p.2; *Colonial Times*, 31 May 1836, p. 6; *True Colonist*, 10 June 1836, p. 4.

Franklin had arrived at a time of change in London's attitude and policies in respect of convictism in the Australian penal colonies. Already, the 'Ripon Regulations' had been introduced in 1831, whereby land was to be sold to colonists, rather than being granted free, following the theories of Edward Gibbon Wakefield.<sup>34</sup> By 1834 an increase in free labour combined with the continuation of transportation resulted in a glut of non-convict labour in Hobart Town, although skilled convicts were still in short supply in the countryside.<sup>35</sup> Further, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Viscount Goderich also proposed a convict head tax on colonists who engaged them. This naturally was opposed by Arthur, who had meticulously constructed the convict assignment system to encourage the up-take of convicts by free settlers as part of his overall convict reformation plan.<sup>36</sup> The tax ultimately did not go ahead.<sup>37</sup>

In 1834, pressure on the assignment system was building elsewhere. New South Wales Governor Richard Bourke wrote of his misgivings with the system, including the negative effects he observed on settlers.<sup>38</sup> This reinforced the feelings in London that assignment was not acting as a deterrent to criminality in England.<sup>39</sup> In the final two years of Arthur's rule in Van Diemen's Land, changes of policy and outlook in London, coupled with the campaigns in New South Wales to become a free, rather than a penal society, led to an irreversible trajectory to end the assignment system.<sup>40</sup> Arthur was brought back to London

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<sup>34</sup> P Burroughs, *Britain and Australia 1831-1855: A study in imperial relations and Crown lands administration* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 17-19.

<sup>35</sup> RM Hartwell, *The economic development of Van Diemen's Land 1820-1850* (Melbourne, 1954), pp. 74-75.

<sup>36</sup> Arthur to Goderich, 28 June 1832, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Original correspondence, Secretary of State, Despatches*, CO280/34, p. 257, Australian Joint Copying Project (hereafter cited as AJCP) microfilm #251, TA.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur to Goderich, 31 July 1832, *ibid*, p. 326.

<sup>38</sup> H King, *Richard Bourke* (Melbourne, 1971), pp. 206-207.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>40</sup> CR Joel, *A tale of ambition and unrealised hope: John Montagu and Sir John Franklin* (North Melbourne, 2011), pp. 58-59.

in 1836 where the 'Molesworth' Select Committee on Transportation, convened in 1837-38, ultimately recommended the end of transportation to New South Wales and the settled districts of Van Diemen's Land, and also that the assignment system be abolished.<sup>41</sup>

Arriving in Van Diemen's Land in the midst of this policy turn-around, Franklin inherited an administration thoroughly penetrated and effectively controlled by relatives of Arthur by marriage, and others strongly aligned with his views.<sup>42</sup> John Montagu, Arthur's nephew-in-law, arrived with him in 1824 and he enjoyed Arthur's patronage in a number of senior posts. Legal historian Alex Castles described him as 'the ruthlessly efficient nephew of Arthur by marriage who continued to prosper financially under the patronage originally bestowed on him by Arthur'.<sup>43</sup> He was acting Colonial Secretary when the incumbent, John Burnett, was ill and he ultimately succeeded Burnett in August 1834.<sup>44</sup> In these roles, Montagu had frequently crossed swords with Meredith.<sup>45</sup> Matthew Forster was also a nephew-in-law of Arthur and arrived in the colony in 1831. He was made Chief Police Magistrate in 1833, appointed to the Legislative Council later the same year and then the Executive Council in 1836. Franklin made him Colonial Secretary during Montagu's leave of

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>42</sup> J West, *The history of Tasmania with copious information respecting the colonies of New South Wales Victoria South Australia &c., &c., &c.*, Shaw, AGL (ed.) (Sydney, 1981), p. 147.

<sup>43</sup> AC Castles, AC, *Lawless harvests or God save the judges: Van Diemen's Land 1803-55, a legal history* (North Melbourne, 2007), p. 167.

<sup>44</sup> Government Notice No. 186, *Hobart Town Courier*, 8 August 1834, p. 2, see also WA Newman, *Biographical memoir of John Montagu* (London, 1855), p. 14. Burnett was effectively dismissed by Arthur after he sold a land grant early, to Roderic O'Connor in 1831. Arthur discovered the transaction and in 1834 sent Burnett to London with a recommendation for a new post elsewhere, or a pension. He received neither: AGL Shaw, *Sir George Arthur, Bart, 1784-1854* (Melbourne, 1980), pp. 159-160; CMH Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. II* (Melbourne, 1968), p. 270.

<sup>45</sup> Joel, *A Tale of Ambition* at p. 74 places Montagu at the heart of the initial threats by the government to withhold Meredith's convict labour. In fact, the correspondence was carried out by Burnett, as discussed in Chapter 8.

absence in 1839-41.<sup>46</sup> He was closely involved in Meredith's disputes with Arthur over the assignment of convict servants and in particular the 'Hogarth affair'.<sup>47</sup>

When Franklin arrived in Hobart, he was well aware of Montagu and Forster's relationship with Arthur, their positions on the Legislative and Executive Councils and that 'their influence was very greatly felt'.<sup>48</sup> The press reflected misgivings colonists had about Franklin by portraying him as weak in the face of the Arthur clique. Montagu in turn and amongst other things, described Franklin as fearful of the influence of Thomas Gregson, who had previously had an interest with George Meredith in the *Colonist* newspaper.<sup>49</sup> Gregson had a history of violent antagonism towards the clique.<sup>50</sup>

George Meredith met Franklin for the first time in April 1837, about four months after the latter's arrival. His opinion of Franklin reflected that of many at the time:

He appears a plain strait [sic] forward man and met me with open hand. The only topic beyond general conversation touch<sup>d</sup> upon was our road to town, a subject he seem<sup>d</sup> to understand only theoretically, at least. I could not make him see it with a practical eye, simple as it is so far as we Swan Port folks are concern<sup>d</sup>. I fear from the little observation I had the opportunity to make that he is not exactly all that we hoped for. Time will show but he seems to yield himself up too much to the Council by whom apparently all his present movements are guided.<sup>51</sup>

In December 1837, Meredith referred somewhat archly to the 'Royal family' in a letter home and at the same time, his relationship with former enemy, Chief Police Magistrate

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<sup>46</sup> AGL Shaw, 'Forster, Matthew (1796–1846)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University (hereafter, ADB), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/forster-matthew-2058/text2559>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 19 June 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Chapter 8.

<sup>48</sup> Sir J Franklin, *Narrative of some passages in the history of Van Diemen's Land* (London, 1845), p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Writer on Franklin Kathleen Fitzpatrick described the claim that Franklin was terrified of Gregson as 'laughable': K Fitzpatrick, *Sir John Franklin in Tasmania, 1837-1843* (Melbourne, 1949), p. 146.

<sup>50</sup> RJ Brain, 'Thomas Gregson, a Tasmanian radical', draft and unsubmitted MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1955, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, pp. 52-55.

<sup>51</sup> Meredith to his wife, 28 April 1837, NS123/1/1 #328, TA.

Matthew Forster appears to have defrosted a little. When he visited Forster in late 1837, Meredith noted 'My visit being purely official and several persons in his office, nothing further passed between us but we now bow in the street'.<sup>52</sup>

In an undated letter, but possibly 1838, Meredith referred to Franklin as 'King Log' and he did so again in 1841.<sup>53</sup> This term first appeared in the local press in 1838 as a derisive term about Franklin, with Arthur and Montagu variously referred to as 'King Stork'.<sup>54</sup> In the 1841 letter, Meredith wrote that he had appealed to Franklin on some matter concerning land, but Franklin was relying on 'that sickening creature of all works' Adam Turnbull.<sup>55</sup>

Meredith's disillusionment with Franklin was shared by Thomas Gregson, who, in spite of being favoured by him, found him weak and incapable of countering the Montagu led Arthur 'faction'. Gregson described Franklin in the following terms in a letter to his wife: 'I am quite satisfied that Sir John is a fool, but I am far from being satisfied that he is a bad man at heart. He is, however, in my mind, quite unfit to govern this colony'.<sup>56</sup>

Franklin visited Waterloo Point in January 1838 and March 1840.<sup>57</sup> There is no specific record of his suite staying with Meredith at *Cambria* on those visits, but not to stay at least

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<sup>52</sup> Meredith to his wife, nd but December 1837 on envelope, NS123/1/1 #330, TA.

<sup>53</sup> Meredith to his wife, nd but possibly 1838, G4/22, UTAS S&R; 1 January 1841, G4/21, UTAS S&R.

<sup>54</sup> *True Colonist*, 16 February 1838, p. 7; The legend of King Log/King Stork was recounted in Aesop's Fables. The frogs wanted a king, so asked the Gods to send them one. Jupiter sent them a log, which the frogs soon discovered was ineffectual, and they climbed all over it. They asked Jupiter again to send them a king. Annoyed, Jupiter sent them a heron (sometimes referred to as a stork) who attacked and ate the frogs. <http://www.aesopfables.com/cgi/aesop1.cgi?srch&fabl/TheFrogsAskingforKing>, accessed online 21 June 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Turnbull filled various senior positions, sometimes temporarily, in the Arthur and Franklin administrations. In 1841 he was a member of the Caveat Board and would later be its Chairman for eight years: R Snell, 'The Caveat Board: An overview of a key colonial tribunal 1835/1859', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (December 1995), p. 201.

<sup>56</sup> Gregson to his wife, nd, Thomas George Gregson, *Thomas George Gregson correspondence, etc., 1818-1886*, A245, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (hereafter, ML, SLNSW).

<sup>57</sup> *Bent's News*, 13 January 1838, p. 2; *Colonial Times*, 10 March 1840, p. 6.

one night at the area's grandest house was highly improbable. Edwin Meredith recorded in his *Reminiscences* that 'Lady Franklin [had arrived] in a bullock dray, accompanied by Sir John on horseback'.<sup>58</sup> In the memoir of his father, Edwin stated that Franklin and party were the 'occasional welcome and honoured guests' at *Cambria*.<sup>59</sup>

A draft letter to Meredith, probably from the Colonial Secretary and likely to be 1840, revealed that, following Franklin's visit to Waterloo Point in 1838, Meredith had reminded him that his services as a Commissioner of the Peace had 'not been requested by his Excellency'.<sup>60</sup> The 1838 request was likely in response to the publication, on 20 October 1837, of a list of two hundred and twenty members of the 'Commission of the Peace', a greatly expanded cohort over the one hundred and forty-one that had been proclaimed the previous year.<sup>61</sup> That Franklin could not find room for Meredith in such an expanded list that included Meredith's sons-in-law James Peck Poynter and John Boyes, colleagues John Kerr and Walter Bethune, and fellow district farmers such as Peter Maclaine and Charles Shaw to name but a few of many, must have been galling to Meredith. The Colonial Secretary's reply to Meredith was that the Lieutenant-Governor had deliberately refrained from replying to the 1838 letter. As a major ally of George Arthur's, Montagu might have played some part in denying Meredith his commission out of revenge for past conflicts. If so, it was a very pointed slap in the face.

By the early 1840s, Franklin had satisfied neither the 'Arthur faction' nor the opposing side. The colony was losing capital and manpower to the new colony of Port Phillip. Even before

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<sup>58</sup> Meredith, *Reminiscences*, p. 30.

<sup>59</sup> E Meredith, *Memoir of the late George Meredith* (Masterton, 1897), p. 23.

<sup>60</sup> Unsigned to Meredith, Colonial Secretary's Office, *General Correspondence*, CSO5/1/235/5966, TA.

<sup>61</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 20 October 1837, pp. 1036-1037; West, *History of Tasmania*, p. 596, note 3.

Arthur had left, Van Diemen's Land had been forced to bear additional costs of the convict system, previously paid for by London.<sup>62</sup> Lord Russell, previously a member of the Molesworth Select Committee on Transportation, now Secretary of State for the Home Office, recommended the adoption of what was to be later termed the 'probation system', which was outlined in a dispatch sent to Governor Gipps and onto Franklin in May 1839. In addition, transportation to New South Wales was to cease.<sup>63</sup> At this time, Montagu asked for, and was eventually granted, leave to return to London. There, sensing the changed attitude to convictism, he made recommendations in 1840 that fell in with Russell's proposal and advocated a change in the way convicts were managed, whilst maintaining transportation.<sup>64</sup>

The probation system removed convicts as a source of cheap labour for free settlers and put them to work on government projects such as roads and buildings. The surge in the number of convicts needing close supervision became unmanageable. In September 1840, when Russell informed Franklin that a 'greater number' of convicts should be expected, Franklin pointed out the 'almost total absence' of suitable overseers.<sup>65</sup>

Losing his cherished convict labourers roused Meredith from his semi-retirement at Great Swan Port. A public meeting against the consequences of the abolition of assignment was held in Hobart Town on 29 April 1840. Meredith opened the meeting with:

For reasons unnecessary to specify, I had abandoned all idea of ever again attending a public meeting, but upon an occasion of this sort I should be wanting in my duty

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<sup>62</sup> Joel, *A Tale of Ambition*, pp. 115, 119.

<sup>63</sup> I Brand, *The convict probation system: Van Diemen's Land 1839-1854* (Hobart, 1990), pp. 13-14; *Hobart Town Courier*, 1 February 1839, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Joel, *A Tale of Ambition*, pp. 170-171, 176-177.

<sup>65</sup> Russell to Franklin, 10 September 1840 and Franklin to Russell, 18 November 1840, *British Parliamentary Papers, Crime and Punishment, Transportation*, Vol. 6 (Shannon, 1971), pp. 873-874 and 870-872.

as a member of the community - I should be guilty of deserting the post of danger, and betraying the interests of this the country of my adoption ...<sup>66</sup>

Other notables at the meeting were Kemp, Kermode, Orr, Gregson, Swanston and Turnbull. Some strange bed-fellows, but, as the *Colonial Times* noted, 'when the real and most important interests of the Colony are at stake, all petty personal considerations are forgotten'.<sup>67</sup>

The meeting was framed in terms of 'the labour question'. There were no resolutions in favour of the continuance of assignment, although one did call on the Lieutenant-Governor to 'suspend orders from home for the abolition of assignment' until enough free labour could be obtained to work the farms.<sup>68</sup> There was much feeling against the imperial government in the light of 'the slanders and misrepresentations circulated in the United Kingdom against the moral character of the colony, [we should] petition the Queen to appoint a Commission of Inquiry to Investigate the truth of the charges brought against the colonists'.<sup>69</sup> After making some criticisms of Franklin, albeit deferential and without the venom with which he had previously attacked Arthur, Meredith moved the first resolution:

Resolved, that the great dearth of labour caused by the recent changes in the system of transportation, added to the alarming prospect of still further changes with which we are threatened, whereby assignment to private service is altogether to cease, demand most imperatively that immediate measures be adopted to meet the emergency by an extensive importation of free emigrant labour.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 1 May 1840, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 May 1840, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 1 May 1840, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 May 1840, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 1 May 1840, p. 2.



He included an argument he had previously employed against Arthur when the Lieutenant-Governor had suspended the assignment of new convicts to him:

... another condition, not only understood at the time, but was subsequently made binding upon the emigrants by the terms of the grants of land issued by Sir Thomas Brisbane, and which made their titles subject to their maintaining and employing one assigned convict servant for each hundred acres of land granted. Thus the assignment system commenced simultaneously, with free emigration, and became officially interwoven with colonial agriculture. The settlers, being thus compelled to receive convict servants, and to depend upon their labour as an imperative condition. Should the Government now summarily suspend the operation of the assignment system, and before free emigrant labour is introduced to supersede it, without intending the slightest disrespect, I say, that it will be a direct breach of public faith ...<sup>71</sup>

Thomas Gregson made an impassioned speech from the floor against assignment, stating:

‘I for another denounce it - who can advocate the principle of white slavery - who can tolerate the profession of morality out of the mouth of malevolence?’.<sup>72</sup> In this stand, Gregson was in direct opposition to Meredith’s interests, although the issue was already lost. Franklin forwarded the resolutions and petition to London, together with his reply to the petitioners. He noted, amongst other things, that much of what was being requested was directly against the policy of the Colonial Office.<sup>73</sup>

Montagu returned to Van Diemen’s Land in early 1841 and a dinner was held to mark the occasion; interestingly, George Meredith’s name was on a list of persons published who ‘intimated’ their intention to attend.<sup>74</sup> Had Meredith mellowed, or did he recognise the

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<sup>71</sup> *True Colonist*, 15 May 1840, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 May 1840, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Franklin to Russell, 22 May 1840, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Original correspondence, Secretary of State, Despatches*, CO280/119, pp. 255-268, AJCP microfilm #492, TA.

<sup>74</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 23 February 1841, p. 3. There is no record of whether Meredith attended the dinner or not.

reality of where power lay in the administration and hoped to, if not curry favour, then begin a smoothing of relations? Recall the earlier defrosting of his relationship with Forster.

Franklin was forced to dismiss Montagu in 1842 over the 'Coverdale Affair' and an insulting letter Montagu wrote impugning the Lieutenant-Governor's memory.<sup>75</sup> In 1843, Montagu sent to Hobart Town for private circulation the so-called 'Montagu Book' containing correspondence damning of Franklin.<sup>76</sup> Thomas Gregson, although not on the private circulation list, became aware of the 'book' and warned Franklin of its contents.<sup>77</sup>

A significant blow to Meredith occurred on 21 November 1842 when his wife, Mary, died 'after a lingering and distressing illness'.<sup>78</sup> Meredith's last preserved letter to her was in May of that year where he relayed some family news from Hobart Town and that he had attended a 'levee' with Sir John Franklin.<sup>79</sup> Mary was buried on 29 November at All Saint's Swansea.<sup>80</sup> Mary's death no doubt hit Meredith hard and probably added to his reluctance to be in the public eye.

Montagu complained to Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Lord Stanley about his dismissal and Stanley found in his favour. He censured Franklin and then ordered him back to England.<sup>81</sup> Stanley sent a copy of Franklin's recall to Montagu, who forwarded it onto

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<sup>75</sup> Joel, *A Tale of Ambition*, pp. 230-243; West, *History of Tasmania*, pp. 172-173. Dr Coverdale was dismissed by Franklin as District Surgeon at Richmond after a local death, on the strong and repeated recommendation of Montagu. Despite confirming his decision several times, on appeal from Richmond residents, Franklin overturned his decision, in the face of strong opposition from Montagu. Affronted, Montagu instigated what amounted to a 'work to rule' and also took issue with Lady Franklin, who he accused of involvement, JE Eyre, 'The Franklin – Montagu dispute', MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1939, pp. 25-34.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> ED Robin, *Swanston merchant statesman* (North Melbourne, 2018), pp. 77-78.

<sup>78</sup> *Colonial Times*, 29 Nov 1842, p. 2,

<sup>79</sup> Meredith to his wife, 27 May 1842, *Meredith papers, presented by Mrs F Grant*, 1944, RS35/1, UTAS S&R.

<sup>80</sup> All Saints, Swansea, burial register, Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society.

<sup>81</sup> Reproduced in Franklin, *Narrative*, pp. 1-5.

friends in Hobart, before Franklin himself received it.<sup>82</sup> Franklin was further humiliated when a notice of his replacement by Sir John Eardley Eardley-Wilmot was received in Hobart, and then Eardley-Wilmot himself arrived in Hobart in August 1843 before Franklin had received his official notice of recall from Stanley.<sup>83</sup>

There is no indication of how Meredith or the wider Meredith family felt about these events. In 1843, Meredith was a sixty-five-year-old widower and could be excused for not wanting to court controversy. However, he did not retire entirely from public life. In March 1843 he was part of proposal to form a Land Loan Bank, which would borrow money in England at rates below what was available in the colony.<sup>84</sup> Charles Meredith brought his new wife, writer and poet Louisa Anne nee Twamley back from England in late 1839. Louisa Anne made only a passing reference to the Franklin imbroglio in her book *My Home in Tasmania*, published in 1852.<sup>85</sup> In letters by Meredith's daughter Sarah Westall Poynter, there are passing mentions of a dance put on by Lady Franklin and one concerning Lady Franklin's dourness—'worse than Mrs Arthur'—both in 1837, but other than that, correspondence between the family members to 1843 does not touch on politics.<sup>86</sup>

## SIR JOHN EARDLEY-WILMOT AND SIR WILLIAM DENISON

The years of the final two Lieutenant-Governors of Van Diemen's Land, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot (August 1843 – October 1846) and Sir William Denison (January 1847 – January 1855), were equally marked by relatively low levels of activity by George Meredith in the

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<sup>82</sup> West, *History of Tasmania*, pp. 174-175; Fitzpatrick, *Sir John Franklin*, pp. 335-339.

<sup>83</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Sir John Franklin*, pp. 360-361.

<sup>84</sup> *Colonial Times*, 10 January 1843, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> LA Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania during a residence of nine years, Vol. 1 and 2*, first published 1852 in London, facsimile edition (Swansea, 2003).

<sup>86</sup> Sarah W Meredith to Mary Meredith, 8 December 1837, G4/59, UTAS S&R; also family letters series NS123/1/2, NS123/1/21, NS123/1/38, NS123/1/39, TA.

public sphere, notwithstanding vigorous debates in the community on significant public issues.<sup>87</sup>

Sir John Eardley Eardley-Wilmot was a landholder from Warwickshire and had been a Member of the House of Commons from 1832 until he resigned in 1843 to take up the Lieutenant-Governorship.<sup>88</sup> He was legally-trained and had a deep interest in the interests of minority groups. After his election, this staunch anti-slaver clashed repeatedly with the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Lord Stanley, over Stanley's Abolition of Slavery Bill.<sup>89</sup> His appointment as Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land when the position called for someone to bed down the new convict probation system may have seemed odd, given that transportation had been portrayed as 'white slavery' during the Molesworth enquiry. On the other hand, his legal training, control of the Magistracy in Warwickshire and time in the House of Commons would be advantageous for a prospective vice-regal appointment. As Mickleborough pointed out, Eardley-Wilmot solicited the position in part due to his poor financial circumstances and perhaps Stanley wanted this critic 'out of the way'.<sup>90</sup>

Although Franklin had begun the transition to what he thought the probation system should look like, Stanley only formalised the structure of the new system in late 1842,

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<sup>87</sup> After his wife's death in 1842, the chief source of personal commentary are letters to and between his sons Charles and John, series NS123/1/2 and NS123/1/39, TA.

<sup>88</sup> M Roe, 'Eardley-Wilmot, Sir John Eardley (1783–1847)', ADB, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/eardley-wilmot-sir-john-eardley-2015/text2471>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 17 September 2019.

<sup>89</sup> LC Mickleborough, 'Victim of an "extraordinary conspiracy"? Sir John Eardley Eardley-Wilmot Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land 1843–46', PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2011, pp. 63–66. Amongst other things, Eardley-Wilmot believed that the 'compensation' to be given to slave owners in the Bill was too generous and that the 'apprenticeship' transitional arrangements would be open to abuse by landholders, *ibid*, p. 64.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78. Mickleborough noted that Stanley described Eardley-Wilmot to the Prime Minister at the time as a 'muddle-headed blockhead'.

advising both Gipps in Sydney and then Franklin in Hobart Town.<sup>91</sup> Eardley-Wilmot would thus enter the colony with the new convict system only weakly structured by his predecessor.

Franklin did not vacate Government House for some time after Wilmot's arrival, so the new Lieutenant-Governor took the opportunity to visit the midlands and east coast in December 1843. He paid a visit to Charles and Louisa Anne Meredith, at their new house, *Spring Vale*.<sup>92</sup> Louisa Anne, who, like Eardley-Wilmot, was from Warwickshire, would come to regard the Lieutenant-Governor as 'our kind friend'; Eardley-Wilmot offered Charles a police magistracy at a time when Charles needed the income and Louisa Anne appreciated the Lieutenant-Governor's interest in wildlife and its exhibition and preservation.<sup>93</sup> She defended Eardley-Wilmot and his honour during his tenure, after his dismissal, and long after his death.<sup>94</sup>

George Meredith missed the opportunity to meet Eardley-Wilmot personally at *Spring Vale*, being in Hobart Town. A public meeting was held on 18 December 1843, on the 'distressed state' of the colony and Meredith was reported in the *Colonial Times* to have given 'one of the best speeches we have heard in the colony, in which he most successfully exposed the breach of faith which the British Government had committed against the

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<sup>91</sup> Stanley to Franklin, 25 November 1842, *British Parliamentary Papers, Crime and Punishment, Transportation*, Vol. 7 (Shannon, 1971), pp. 107-117; Stanley to Gipps, 26 January 1843, F Watson, (ed.), *Historical records of Australia, Series I, Governors' despatches to and from England*, Vol. XXII April 1824-June 1843 (Sydney, 1924), p. 514.

<sup>92</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* Vol. 2, p. 83; Ward et al, *Houses & estates*, pp. 62-65.

<sup>93</sup> Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, Vol. 2, pp. 90, 196, Vol. 1, pp. 245, 265, 272.

<sup>94</sup> V Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith: A tigress in exile* (Hobart, 1990), pp. 144-145.

original emigrant settlers'.<sup>95</sup> The *Austral-Asiatic Review*, edited by Meredith's visceral foe from the 1830s, Robert L Murray, reported Meredith's speech as follows:

[Meredith gave] as able, temperate, and liberal a speech as we ever heard in Van Diemen's Land. He traced the progress of the colony from the commencement of the free emigration to its present condition. He detailed the inducements held out by the Secretary of State to emigrants of property and character to "settle" here. We regret that we have not space for a full report of his excellent address, which had the desirable quality of leaving an impression, by carrying with it the undivided attention of the hearers.<sup>96</sup>

Meredith did not join the committee to follow-up the meeting. It is notable that Meredith's target now was the home parliament, not the local administration. Since arriving in Van Diemen's Land, he had always regarded England and the Secretary of State as the highest court of appeal against local decisions that went against him. Seeing that the tide had turned, and that the local administration was powerless to overturn the decisions on convict management, he apparently decided that it was not worth the effort to join the campaign against the decision. Put another way, as there was nothing or very little in it for him, he withdrew.

George Meredith's spirit, already no doubt lowered with the death of his wife in 1842, must have been impacted again when news of the death of his oldest son George, at the hands of Aboriginal people in South Australia, reached the colony in late 1844.<sup>97</sup> By 1845, Meredith's eldest surviving son from his second marriage, John Meredith, had taken over the management of *Cambria* and his father was again resident in Hobart Town for long

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<sup>95</sup> *Colonial Times*, 19 December 1843, p. 3; *Courier*, 22 December 1843, p. 2. No record of the Meredith speech has been found.

<sup>96</sup> *Austral-Asiatic Review*, 22 December 1843, p. 3. An earlier report, of a meeting held of Great Swan Port landowners, also won praise from Murray as to one of the best speeches of the time, *Austral-Asiatic Review*, 8 December 1843, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 26 October 1844, p. 7.

periods and wrote periodically back to the farm.<sup>98</sup> Much of his writing was concerned with farm matters, giving both advice and instructions, whilst conveying any relevant news on supplies and markets in town. He noted in July 1845 that he had breakfasted with Eardley-Wilmot and discussed the workings of the 'Caveat Board', which Meredith believed should be abolished.<sup>99</sup> He met the Lieutenant-Governor in the street in August 'and walked with him for half an hour', again discussing the Caveat Board, including decisions from Franklin's time that went against Meredith.<sup>100</sup>

In August 1845, Meredith revealed that he was 'no friend of the Colonial Secretary' James Ebenezer Bicheno and that, although 'these are busy political days' in Hobart Town, he had not taken any part.<sup>101</sup> That was likely a reference to the agitation that had arisen in the Legislative Council concerning the cost of maintaining the increasing convict population that London had pushed into the island after the abolition of transportation to New South Wales in 1840. Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Lord Stanley told Eardley-Wilmot that the colony would have to keep paying for the convicts, especially the cost of police and gaols, notwithstanding the convicts were no longer available for work on colonist's farms and thus generate income for the colony.<sup>102</sup>

The Legislative Council, which since 1828 had six 'official' members, led by the Lieutenant-Governor, who had a deliberative as well as a casting vote, plus eight appointed 'unofficial' members, was the principal place of official debate over the effects of London and Eardley-

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<sup>98</sup> Meredith to his son John, various dates, NS123/1/2, TA.

<sup>99</sup> The Caveat Board had been reconstituted in 1835 and usually comprised at least one member who could be considered if not an enemy, then on the 'other side of the fence' than Meredith on many issues—for instance Roderic O'Connor and Adam Turnbull; Snell, 'The Caveat Board' pp. 197, 201.

<sup>100</sup> Meredith to his son John, 22 July 1845 and 5 August 1845, NS123/1/2, TA.

<sup>101</sup> Meredith to his son John, 5 August 1845, *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> AGL Shaw, *Convicts and the colonies* (London, 1966), p. 307.

Wilmot's policies on the colony.<sup>103</sup> Franklin had nominated a number of 'unofficial' members who were critics of Arthur, including Thomas Gregson and William Kermode, in an attempt to 'enlighten' its considerations and he opened its debates to the 'respectable' public.<sup>104</sup> George Meredith attended when it sat on 7 August 1845 and witnessed several of the 'unofficial' members, Gregson and Michael Fenton in particular, crossing swords with the government in respect of matters related to the government's taxation proposals.<sup>105</sup> Meredith noted in a letter that 'Gregson (whose offered hand I have taken) spoke very strongly upon the subject of taxation ...' and presciently added that he expected the atmosphere to heat up when the Estimates were debated.<sup>106</sup> The comment about taking Gregson's offered hand could imply that there had been a falling out, or at least a divergence of views between the two former firm friends.

On 28 October 1845, when the budget Estimates came before the Legislative Council, Richard Dry led a series of motions asking for detail about expenditures on convicts, and receipts from London. These were denied by the Lieutenant-Governor's casting vote.<sup>107</sup> Four members, Thomas Gregson, Richard Dry, William Kermode and Michael Fenton, left the chamber.<sup>108</sup> The Estimates were then passed. When the Council reconvened three days later, with all members present, debate began on the legality of Estimates having been voted on and passed without a majority of members present. Thwarted by the Lieutenant-

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<sup>103</sup> For the Legislative Council see: V Korobacz, 'The Legislative Council of Van Diemen's Land, 1825-1856' *Papers & Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March, 1974), pp. 7-21.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>105</sup> Meredith to his son John, 8 August 1845, NS123/1/2, TA; *Courier*, 9 August 1845, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>107</sup> *Observer*, 31 October 1845, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 29 October 1845, p. 5.



Governor's casting vote, six members, the four above plus Charles Swanston and John Kerr, walked out of the Council-chamber.<sup>109</sup>

The consequences of the walk-out by the 'Patriotic Six' is not germane to this discussion, but it is notable that of the six who walked out, three had links to George Meredith and a fourth had later ties. Gregson had become a friend and fellow-traveller in many political campaigns after he accompanied Meredith as a paying passenger on the *Emerald* in 1820-21. Kerr was also a passenger on the *Emerald* and became a business associate and confidant of Meredith's in Hobart (Chapter 2). William Kermode of *Mona Vale* was an occasional ally of George Meredith's in some of his campaigns (including a later one regarding the 'Land Bank') and became friends with Meredith's son Charles.<sup>110</sup> Meredith occasionally stayed with Kermode.<sup>111</sup> Richard Dry married Meredith's daughter Clara in 1853.<sup>112</sup>

In the mid-1840s, the local population became more and more concerned about the management of convicts and numerous stories and accounts had been reaching London about the moral failings of the probation system and the failings of Eardley-Wilmot.<sup>113</sup> In respect of the management of convicts, both the cost and the rumoured prevalence of homosexuality, called at the time 'unnatural crime', drew public outcries and the

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<sup>109</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 1 November 1845, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> C Meredith, *The Honorable Chas. Meredith, MHA, Orford 1879* [Notes on his early life and some early colonists], 'William Kermode', ML, SLNSW, pp. 14-17.

<sup>111</sup> Meredith to his son John, 26 August 1845, NS123/1/2, TA.

<sup>112</sup> AD Baker, *The life and times of Sir Richard Dry, the eminent Tasmanian statesman 1815-1869* (Hobart, 1951), p. 77. N Burch, *Our first hero: Premier Sir Richard Dry* (Launceston, 2019), pp. 204-207 described this marriage as 'strange' in that it appeared to have been arranged suddenly and perhaps without Clara's knowledge, while she was in New Zealand. Birch was unaware of: Meredith to John Meredith, March 1853, NS123/1/2, TA that shed more light on the matter, but the courtship, if any, was brief: N Burch, 'Sir Richard Dry/Merediths', e-mail to M Ward, 30 January 2020. A better interpretation might be that Meredith used strong encouragement to his daughter to make the marriage occur as soon as possible and likely advanced her case to Dry perhaps putting forward reasons why Dry should act quickly.

<sup>113</sup> CMH Clark, *A history of Australia Vol. III* (Melbourne 1973), pp. 322-330.

Lieutenant-Governor's rumoured lechery was the centre of Hobart Town gossip.<sup>114</sup> Eardley-Wilmot had earned a number of rebukes from London and the cumulative effect of these, plus the particular repugnance James Stephen felt about the reported amorality amongst both convicts and the Lieutenant-Governor, led him to recommend Eardley-Wilmot's dismissal to the new Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, William Gladstone.<sup>115</sup> Stanley sent a 'public' letter to Eardley-Wilmot dated 30 April 1846 dismissing him for maladministration and a private letter the same date noting disapproval of the latter's private affairs.<sup>116</sup>

Given the impossible circumstances that Eardley-Wilmot had inherited—a barely-functioning new system of convict management established by his predecessor largely in ignorance of what London actually wanted, increasing convict numbers following the abolition of transportation to New South Wales, too few supervisors of the increasing convict population and shrinking funding from London—it is not surprising that the Lieutenant-Governor struggled. Historian Alan Shaw reflected that much of this was due to the fault of others.<sup>117</sup>

In fact, by late 1843 and later in 1844, the Colonial Office's senior legal counsel, James Stephen and Under-Secretary of State for War and the Colonies George Hope were

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<sup>114</sup> In respect to 'unnatural crime', I Brand, *The convict probation system: Van Diemen's Land 1839-1854* (Hobart, 1990), pp. 36-37; in respect of Eardley-Wilmot, *ibid*, pp. 42-43, Clark, *History Vol. III*, p. 323 and A Alexander, *Governors' ladies: The wives and mistresses of Van Diemen's Land Governors* (Sandy Bay, 1987), pp. 121-127.

<sup>115</sup> Brand, *probation system*, pp. 39-40; Mickleborough, 'Victim of an "extraordinary conspiracy"?', pp. 283-284, 298-299.

<sup>116</sup> Official despatch - Stanley to Eardley-Wilmot, 30 April 1846, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Entry Books, Letters from Secretary of State, Despatches*, CO408/25, pp. 415-433, AJCP microfilm #885, TA. Private despatch - Stanley to Eardley-Wilmot, 30 April 1846, Colonial Office, *Tasmania, Entry Books, Letters from Secretary of State, Despatches*, CO280/196, pp. 554-557, AJCP microfilm #545, TA.

<sup>117</sup> AGL Shaw, 'Sir John Eardley-Wilmot and the probation system in Tasmania', *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (September, 1963), p. 5.

conceding that the assignment system was abandoned 'inadvisedly' and 'rashly, hastily and ignorantly'.<sup>118</sup>

Charles and Louisa Anne Meredith were visitors to Eardley-Wilmot's Government House, including a stay of three months at the end of 1845.<sup>119</sup> Louisa Anne greatly regretted his recall and rejected the accusations about his immoral behaviour.<sup>120</sup>

An article in the *Colonial Times* in November 1846 reported on a letter received from London, with its author not named.<sup>121</sup> The letter purported to list the senior government officers and eight new Legislative Councillors, amongst them George Meredith, Anthony Fenn Kemp and Joseph Archer, to be appointed by the in-coming Lieutenant-Governor, Sir William Denison. None of these appointments took place and no correspondence from Meredith survives from that time, so his reaction to the 'news' isn't known.

When James Stephen recommended Eardley-Wilmot's recall, he also advised that Charles La Trobe, then Superintendent at the Port Phillip settlement (administered by New South Wales) should be sent to Hobart Town as administrator until a new Lieutenant-Governor arrived.<sup>122</sup> Amongst La Trobe's instructions was one to investigate the state of the convict system in Van Diemen's Land and in particular the morality and 'revolting and depraved habits' of convicts in the probation gangs.<sup>123</sup> He arrived in Hobart Town on 13 October 1846.<sup>124</sup> La Trobe began inspecting and assessing the convict establishments and their

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<sup>118</sup> Shaw, *Convicts and the colonies*, p. 302.

<sup>119</sup> Rae-Ellis, *Louisa Anne Meredith*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>120</sup> Meredith, *My home in Tasmania*, Vol. 2, pp. 202-203.

<sup>121</sup> *Colonial Times*, 17 November 1846, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Sir James Stephen's diary, 1846, *Cambridge University Library - Miscellaneous collections held by Cambridge University Library relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, 1719-1932*, M2591, ML, SLNSW.

<sup>123</sup> Brand, *Probation system*, p. 63, quoting instructions from Stanley to La Trobe.

<sup>124</sup> *Colonial Times*, 13 October 1846, p. 2.

management and, in general, found many faults throughout the whole system. He was moved to dismiss a number of officials.<sup>125</sup> In December 1846 La Trobe and his assistant commissioners Dr George Meyers and George Courtenay visited the east coast, where Latrobe 'went up in the evening to see Mr Meredith because he had some pretty daughters'.<sup>126</sup>

La Trobe's report to the new Secretary of State, Earl Grey, was completed and sent to London in May 1847 and was damning: 'the Probation System, so called, has been a fatal experiment as far as it has proceeded, and the sooner it is put an end to the better, for the credit of the Nation and of humanity'.<sup>127</sup> He allowed that the assignment system, although flawed, produced better outcomes.<sup>128</sup>

When Sir William Denison arrived in January 1847, George Meredith was almost seventy years old. He was still in relatively good health, and remained so over the next few years on the reports of his sons, but activity was occasionally limited by problems with his legs.<sup>129</sup> When Denison was briefed on issues to be observed on his arrival in Van Diemen's Land, the most pressing, he was told, was the composition of the Legislative Council. The problem was that six replacements had been appointed in the place of the 'Patriotic Six' by Eardley-Wilmot, yet the Secretary of State and his legal counsel James Stephen had found little fault

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<sup>125</sup> Brand, *Probation system*, pp. 72-75.

<sup>126</sup> Courtenay to La Trobe, 9 March 1860, H15623, La Trobe Manuscripts Library, State Library of Victoria, quoted in J Barnes, 'More beautiful than Port Phillip': The La Trobe family in Van Diemen's Land', *The La Trobe Journal*, No. 80 (Spring, 2007), p. 68.

<sup>127</sup> La Trobe's report to Earl Grey, 31 May 1847, reproduced in Brand, *Probation system*, p. 129. See also the discussion in HM Carey, *Empire of hell: Religion and the campaign to end convict transportation in the British Empire, 1788-1875* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 210-214.

<sup>128</sup> Brand, *Probation system*, p. 80.

<sup>129</sup> Charles Meredith to his brother John, 22 January 1852, NS123/1/2 #375, TA; Meredith to his son John, 28 December 1846, *ibid*.

with the Six's actions. They hoped that a 'final six' could be found out of the twelve.<sup>130</sup> During Denison's attempt to resolve the impasse, Meredith and Kemp were again named in a letter to a newspaper as possible candidates if new members were to be sought.<sup>131</sup> Denison's attempted compromise failed, so he selected the original Six. The six replacement members refused to yield, but were ultimately dismissed from London.<sup>132</sup> In what was probably his last opportunity, the septuagenarian Meredith yet again failed to win a government post.

In mid-1847, Denison had received a despatch from the Secretary of State, Earl Grey, which appeared to indicate that 'transportation' was to end soon.<sup>133</sup> Denison also recognised growing opposition to transportation and convictism locally, driven in part by the glut of cheap labour supplied by freed convicts.<sup>134</sup> Using a questionnaire, he canvassed the opinion of magistrates, mostly landholders, on transportation and the probation system, at the same time making it clear he supported a modified form of transportation. Of those who replied, nearly all were opposed to the probation system, but support for transportation was evenly divided.<sup>135</sup> Perhaps prompted by Denison's questionnaire, a public meeting was held in Launceston in April 1847 about the transportation issue.<sup>136</sup> Prominent amongst those on the floor were Richard Dry, later George Meredith's son-in-law, and Joseph

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<sup>130</sup> JM Bennett, *Reluctant democrat: Sir William Denison in Australia 1847-1861* (Sydney, 2011), p. 28.

<sup>131</sup> *Colonial Times*, 16 March 1847, p. 4.

<sup>132</sup> Sir William Denison to Charlotte Denison, 7 March 1847, in Sir William Denison and Lady Denison, *Varieties of vice-regal life (Van Diemen's Land section)*, R Davis and S Petrow (eds.) (Hobart, 2004), p. 42; L Robson, *A history of Tasmania: Vol. 1 Van Diemen's Land from the earliest times to 1855* (Melbourne, 1983), p. 487.

<sup>133</sup> Bennett, *Reluctant democrat*, pp. 59, 62-66. It was actually not Grey's intention to convey that impression and Denison was later embarrassed by his initial moves to carry out what he thought was London's intentions.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, p. 484; Bennett, *Reluctant democrat*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>135</sup> D Huon, 'By moral means only: the origins of the Launceston Anti-transportation Leagues 1847-1849', *Papers & Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (June, 1997), p. 96.

<sup>136</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 7 April 1847, p. 6. See DA Roberts, 'Remembering 'Australia's glorious League': The historiography of anti-transportation', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, Vol. 14 (2012), pp. 205-215 for a discussion of the evolution of how 'anti-transportation' has been dealt with in the literature over time.

Archer, Meredith's co-charterer of the *Emerald*. A larger meeting, also opposing transportation, was held in Launceston in May.<sup>137</sup> This meeting was preceded by the publication in the *Examiner* of '39 Articles against the continuance of transportation to Van Diemen's Land', and on 17 April it printed part of a twenty-two page pamphlet, 'Commonsense: an inquiry into the influence of transportation on the Colony of Van Diemen's Land'. Congregationalist minister, and backer of the *Examiner*, John West, wrote all the articles.<sup>138</sup> West would become a driving force of the anti-transportation movement, writing editorials, his *History of Tasmania* published in 1852, and promoting the first intercolonial political association, the Australasian Anti-Transportation League.<sup>139</sup> Dan Huon was one of the first to pay close attention to how homophobia drove much of the anti-transportationist's arguments.<sup>140</sup> The supposed commonplace homosexuality amongst the probation gangs was couched in language such as 'moral evil', 'abomination', 'contamination', and 'degradation'.<sup>141</sup> A public meeting opposed to transportation was held in Hobart in May 1847 and was chaired by Anthony Fenn Kemp.<sup>142</sup> Meredith's friend Thomas George Gregson characteristically spoke passionately against transportation; George Meredith was not reported as being present.

There was a substantial pro-transportation movement as well, although many who were in the pro-transportation camp in 1839 became promoters of the Australasian Anti-Transportation League a decade later after the installation of the probation system, with

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<sup>137</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 12 May 1847, p. 3.

<sup>138</sup> Huon, 'By moral means only', p. 98.

<sup>139</sup> PF Ratcliff, 'West, John', in Alexander, A (ed.), *The companion to Tasmanian history* (Hobart, 2005), pp. 383-384. See also CS Blackton, 'The Australasian League, 1851-54', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (December, 1939), pp. 385-400.

<sup>140</sup> Huon, 'By moral means only', pp. 103-104.

<sup>141</sup> S Petrow, 'Saving Tasmania? The Anti-Transportation and Franklin River campaigns', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Vol. 14 (2009), p. 116.

<sup>142</sup> Editorial note, Denison, *Varieties*, pp. 44-46; *Courier*, 8 May 1847, p. 2.

its attendant alleged 'stain' of supposed rampant homosexuality amongst the convicts.<sup>143</sup> Although the pro-transportation group comprised many substantial landholders—as did the anti-transportation one—McLaughlin demonstrated that support for transportation was spread well beyond land-owners and even agriculturalists.<sup>144</sup> The issue divided the colony, not only on the strict issue of transportation. The tactics and sloganeering of the anti-transportationists were objected to by emancipists in the colony—even though many of them did not support the continuation of transportation—and by 'respectable citizens' who thought their own and the colony's reputation was being besmirched by the emphasis on the 'moral degradation' supposedly brought by the convicts. Leaders of each side regarded the other with disdain and contempt.<sup>145</sup> West's *Examiner* attacked Denison with venom.<sup>146</sup>

We have no direct record of George Meredith's attitude to the anti-transportation movement. His friend Thomas Gregson, a large user of convicts under the assignment system, was a passionate opponent of transportation, but he was always more idealistic than Meredith and consistent in his opposition.<sup>147</sup> A search of names on the various petitions circulated in 1851 and 1852 supporting the continuance of transportation failed to find George Meredith, or indeed, any Meredith listed.<sup>148</sup> An examination of Meredith's neighbours and contemporaries in the 1852 'pro' petition shows that just one of the Amos

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<sup>143</sup> A McLaughlin, 'Against the league: Fighting the "hated stain"', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1995-96), p. 81.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 86-89.

<sup>146</sup> Petrow, 'Saving Tasmania?', p. 114.

<sup>147</sup> See editorial note, Denison, *Varieties*, pp. 46-46. Gregson was later described as a 'vehement political opponent' of Denison, largely because of the latter's support for transportation: Bennett, *Reluctant democrat*, p. 89.

<sup>148</sup> Various letters, petitions and printed addresses, 1851-52, Colonial Secretary's Office, *General correspondence*, CSO24/1/215/8166 and 8178, TA.

family, John, signed, indicating splits across families.<sup>149</sup> All of the Lyne family men signed, as did Dr George Fordyce Story and his friend Quaker Francis Cotton of *Kelvedon*—contrary to what would be expected from a senior Quaker.<sup>150</sup> Charles Meredith was a member of the Midlands branch of the Australasian Anti-Transportation League.<sup>151</sup> His wife, Louisa Anne, on the other hand seemed to be a supporter of transportation with assignment:

Many persons here could and would, if required, give the same evidence which I now do; but I prefer adducing a few facts from my own knowledge, as proof that transportation to these colonies is—always excepting the probation system—productive of reformation to many who otherwise would, in all probability, have been utterly lost.<sup>152</sup>

‘Pro’ and ‘anti’ transportation stances within families and people with otherwise common interests are therefore difficult to predict. George Meredith’s attitude remains unknown. La Trobe’s visit to him, although brief, may have exposed him to some strong arguments against retaining the probation system. In any case, he refrained from a public position, unlike almost every associate of his in the colony, such as Archer, Gregson, Kemp and Kermode. It is argued that with assignment and his cheap convict labour force lost, there was no self-interest for Meredith to defend in whether the colony had convicts or not, so he was ambivalent about the continuance of transportation.

Denison visited Meredith at *Cambria* at least in March 1851, arriving on the *Bramble* and he stayed three days.<sup>153</sup> Edwin Meredith also reported this visit in his memoir of his father

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<sup>149</sup> This would be the son of the original immigrant, Adam Amos. Both Adam and his brother John had died by this time and there were about five Amos landholders—their sons—in the area at the time.

<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, in 1850 Francis Cotton wrote a letter to a newspaper commenting that he thought the time had been reached that transportation should stop: *Courier*, 1 May 1850, p. 4.

<sup>151</sup> *Colonial Times*, 1 August 1851, p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> Meredith, *My home in Tasmania*, Vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>153</sup> Denison, *Varieties*, p. 147; Maria Hammond to John Meredith, 5 August and 18 August 1851, G4/191 and G4/193, UTAS S&R.



and separately noted visits by Lieutenant-Governor Eardley-Wilmot and Governor Sir Henry Young, without giving particulars.<sup>154</sup> Denison was a supporter of continued transportation and held the Anti-Transportation League 'in great contempt'.<sup>155</sup>

The final vice regal party to visit *Cambria* during George Meredith's lifetime was Sir Henry Young, who was the first to bear the title Governor of Tasmania, after the colony obtained self-government in 1856 with a bicameral, largely elected parliament and a change of name. The Governor and his party visited in early April 1856, but the property was then described as the 'seat of John Meredith, Esq'.<sup>156</sup> George Meredith by this time was likely quite infirm, aged seventy-eight. He died at his residence on 21 June 1856 and was buried at the All Saints cemetery in Swansea.<sup>157</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Meredith's public activities after Arthur's departure showed a marked difference in tenor compared to those prior to 1837. It is possible that with the completion of his mansion *Cambria*, he decided to live a more contemplative life in the country, especially with his enemy Arthur gone. Yet he did not retire from public activities during Franklin's term and part of Eardley-Wilmot's, although he was much more muted in his speaking and he did not join 'issue' committees. In selling his farm to his son John, to the exclusion of his eldest son Charles, he showed he was still able to confront and even initiate divisive issues well past 1850 and put pen to paper in a direct way when he felt the need.

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<sup>154</sup> Meredith, *Memoir*, p. 61; Meredith wrongly recorded the date as 1850.

<sup>155</sup> Blackton, 'The Australasian League' p. 394.

<sup>156</sup> *Colonial Times*, 5 April 1856, p. 2.

<sup>157</sup> George Meredith, 'Deaths', Great Swan Port 1856, RGD35/1/25 #8, TA; *Courier*, 24 June 1856, p. 3.

It is more likely that Meredith, settled on his farm, did not see the need to exert or expose himself on the contentious issues of the probation system and then the proposed cessation of transportation, as there was little to be gained for him. If there were no convict labourers for him, then there was no need to care how they came and went for others. Even the issue where he did exert himself—the ownership of *Cambria*—was in the name of the continuation of his precious landed estate in the family, rather, for example, than be sold on the open market to maximise income for the beneficiaries of his will.

On his death, two newspapers carried more than just a notice. The *Tasmanian Daily News* in a few lines called him ‘one of the oldest and most respected colonists’.<sup>158</sup> The *Courier* carried an extended piece, generous in its remembrance of Meredith and noting his arrival with Thomas Gregson. There was no mention of the rancorous times, nor for that matter of Meredith’s achievements, other than that he ‘spent large amounts of money in trade for the benefit of the land of his adoption’.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *Tasmanian Daily News*, 28 June 1856, p. 4.

<sup>159</sup> *Courier*, 24 June 1856, p. 3.

## CONCLUSIONS AND LEGACY

### AN INDEPENDENT MAN

George Meredith's upbringing and experiences in Birmingham probably instilled a few personality traits that survived into his adulthood. A sense of superiority from reputedly being of Royal descent and a disdain for authority, perhaps due to some exposure to the teachings and philosophy of Dissenters during his wayward teenage years. That wayward phase would have precluded him from following his brothers into the law and the security and independence that would bring. He would need a different path to independence and Downing's concept of being a 'restless man' seems to fit. After joining the Marines, he saw dissent firsthand in the Navy and the capitulation of the authorities to the demands of the ordinary seamen in the mutiny at Portsmouth in 1797. Three years later, he wrote to his mother expressing a hope to be included in various relatives' wills to set himself up in life—to be able to live more independently. He failed with his hope for a legacy but managed to marry reasonably well—to a farmer's daughter with land in Berkshire, that he soon sold to buy an estate in his ancestral home, Wales. There, he raised a family, acquired a mistress and then suffered at the end of the Napoleonic Wars when the economy faltered, and his farm became unprofitable. Then began a new phase of restlessness to secure his independence and manhood—he turned his eyes to the new world and began methodical preparations for his new life.

His first target for settlement was Norfolk Island, truly isolated, but he ultimately decided on Van Diemen's Land. To get there, he co-charted his own vessel with Joseph Archer, to avoid reliance on others for this crucial first step. His wife died early in 1820 so he married his mistress immediately before sailing in order to have his children looked after, freeing

him from day-to-day responsibility. He planned to set himself and the Amos families—notional fellow-settlers but expected to render various skills and services—in an isolated area, where there was room to expand and he would be ‘independent’ of other colonists. Meredith was ultimately steered towards the central east coast of the colony by Lieutenant-Governor Sorell. This suited him as he would be the first there and he would have direct access to the sea, to ship his farm produce out to market. Before he left England, he had a plan to get established quickly by striking an agreement with fellow former marine, established colonist and merchant Edward Lord to supply him stock when he arrived in the colony. This ended in a costly legal dispute with Lord, but it was a sensible plan.

Meredith was able to gain considerable advantage in acquiring much more land than he was entitled to, in part by the administrative style of Lieutenant-Governor Sorell. This additional land was important for Meredith to become economically independent. He soon branched out into whaling and sealing, and these enterprises proved pivotal in his actual financial advancement—his land development was retarded by delays in getting full title to his core grant and a variety of matters which took him away to Sydney and Hobart Town. The need to travel to Sydney for the courts and to appeal to the Governor and others on issues important to him led Meredith to lead the successful campaign for administrative independence of Van Diemen’s Land from New South Wales. As it happens, this was not so much a mark of his ‘independent’ streak as a desire to have important issues dealt with locally, where it would serve his interests more directly and where he would be able to exert more influence on the amiable William Sorell.

When George Arthur became Lieutenant-Governor, the power of the new leader in the now independent colony became a problem for Meredith when Arthur failed to deliver the types of favours and opportunities Meredith had enjoyed under Sorell and this threatened his independence. Some colonists formed an informal opposition against Arthur in reaction to the Lieutenant-Governor's unsympathetic policies towards the free settlers and Meredith was at their forefront. With this, Meredith initially declared himself an 'independent man', not a 'partizan [sic] of a faction', although this was demonstrably untrue.<sup>1</sup> He became one of Arthur's harshest critics. After a disagreement with Arthur's administration of shipping, he pointedly named one of his own vessels the 'Independent' and he transported his goods from Great Swan Port to markets on his own vessels when he could.

Independence, in various forms of daily living, has been noted in the literature to be a common trait in male colonial Australians, from being free of government victualling, freedom of lifestyle and financial independence. In Meredith, 'independence' permeated almost every aspect of his life after emigration and some things prior to it. He wore 'independence' on his sleeve; he used the term in respect of himself in a number of contexts, over time. He wished to be free of neighbours, of government interference, of reliance on other service providers such as shippers and above all to be financially independent.

On a deeper level, his haranguing of his wives, the demands for sexual satisfaction from Mary and the harsh treatment of his older sons would seem to be manifestations of him seeking the independence of manliness and authority. Yet contrasting with this was his

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<sup>1</sup> *Colonial Times*, 14 April 1826, p. 3.

initial attitude to the local indigenous people. Rather than follow a route to ‘independence’ via frontier violence, as theorised by some recent writers on the subject, Meredith did not initially call for violence against the Aboriginal people—there was no encouragement of violence in his writing to either his family or to government, contrasting with what others were expressing at the same time. Whether he privately encouraged his stockmen to wage war against the Aboriginal people is unknown and probably will remain so. Towards the end of the 1820s, and some years after the tide turned for others, Meredith did espouse great violence in the field, but the timing and circumstances of this must lead to questions as to whether that was a manifestation of his independence, as it was well out of step with the others.

In his various ambitions he largely succeeded, but there were downsides. In being in an isolated area and eschewing ‘community’, except for the Amoses, the development of his farm lagged as he relied entirely on his wife, young children and convict workers to manage and work the land during his frequent absences. He did not appear to develop many friends, except fellow political campaigner Thomas Gregson. John Donne warned:

No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a *Clod* bee washed away by the *Sea*, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends* or of *thine owne* were.<sup>2</sup>

If he had read that passage, Meredith probably would have rejected Donne’s sentiments. He had no wish to be part of the mainstream, but to be independent, to make his own way, in his own style, unfettered by anyone.

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<sup>2</sup> J Donne, *Devotions upon emergent occasions*, J Sparrow (ed.), Norwood edition, (London, 1978) reprint of 1923 edition, p. 98. Emphasis in original text.

## A SELF-SERVING MAN

The aspect of Meredith's personality expressed as his 'independence' can be thought of as a manifestation of a deeper selfishness. Although he sometimes stated that he was acting for the rights of his fellow colonists, on closer examination, in most things his actions can be argued as being more self-serving than for any common good.

His first wife provided him with some capital, but he was not in love with her, at least after he began his affair with the family nurse, Mary Evans, which he probably began in a forced or coerced way. When his first wife died, he married his mistress to have someone closely care for his children in his impending emigration, or so he wrote. Although he loved his second wife with a passion, he often left her isolated, afraid of bushrangers and Aboriginal people, to manage his farm, convicts, whalers and others while he attended to other business in Hobart Town. As well as managing the farm, Mary had to manage and bring up Meredith's five children from his first marriage plus the son she already had with him and the new children that began to arrive the year after they reached Van Diemen's Land. George Meredith could be readily accused of being incredibly selfish in the way he treated his second wife, in particular, but he argued that becoming economically strong and independent from the government would benefit his family.

A similar tension between being self-serving or acting for the common good was evident in his public campaigns. Meredith's first venture on the public stage was his successful campaign to bring administrative independence to Van Diemen's Land. Although this could be viewed as being part of his 'independent' character, as noted above, his motivation was more likely to be to have William Sorell or his successors empowered to decide on land and other matters and for Meredith's advancement. This was a self-serving objective.

Unfortunately for Meredith, Lieutenant-Governor Sorell was soon replaced by the infinitely less pliable and unaccommodating George Arthur. Not only did Arthur see the free colonists merely as an adjunct to a well-functioning penal colony, he soon disappointed Meredith on several issues, such as compensation for the Talbot land dispute and the security of his farm and family against bushrangers, which immediately turned Meredith against Arthur. Meredith would have expected to have been made the local magistrate, but was disappointed when the Executive Council specifically decided that he was unsuitable and a succession of young army appointments then filled the role, rubbing salt into his wounded pride. He then waged a petty war of complaint against each local military magistrate in turn as either revenge or to highlight the inadequacies of Arthur's administration.

To attack Arthur more broadly, Meredith engaged with Thomas Gregson and Andrew Bent, initially to assist Bent to have a press free of government control and censorship. At first, there was probably some funds given to Bent, but Bent was then made to bear the brunt of several libel suits from Arthur as a result of his newly independent opinions. The free press in Van Diemen's Land had a much more difficult beginning than in New South Wales.

As the Lieutenant-Governor's grip on power, and the reach of that power increased via relatives in key positions, Meredith and others formed an informal opposition group, with Meredith one of the leaders. Meredith supposedly campaigned in the name of the rights of fellow colonists and the good of the colony on issues such as 'liberty of the press', 'trial by jury' and 'a House of Assembly', but for him it was a personal war of spite against Arthur more than for any greater good. If Arthur could be weakened and/or embarrassed, he may relax some of his tight policies or even be recalled to London and Meredith could then resume the free-wheeling ways he enjoyed prior to Arthur's arrival. Meredith's motivation



against Arthur was mostly self-serving, as opposed to that of his ally, Thomas Gregson, who was more inherently 'radical' and inclined to an open and free society for all settlers.

The height of Meredith's condemnation of Arthurian tyranny occurred after Arthur refused Meredith new assigned servants, a penalty Arthur had applied to a number of others previously. Here, Meredith presented himself as the defender of colonist's rights under a despotic ruler, using the martyr's rallying cry-to-arms 'the fate of one [Meredith] may be the fate of many!' Yet he did not avail himself of the Political Association, which had just been formed to take organised public concerns to the government. Meredith was more interested in abuse and his own grievances than advancing any common cause.

In the 1840s, when assignment was ordered from London to be abolished, Meredith rose out of his post-Arthurian public retirement to attend a public meeting to condemn London and appeal to the local administration that the transition time to a non-convict labour market be extended. Thereafter he did not participate either for or against the next great colonial movement—Anti-Transportation. This is argued as Meredith, no longer having assigned convicts, not caring whether convicts were transported to the colony or not. If there was no benefit for him personally, then he did not stir from his east coast fiefdom.

All of these examples demonstrate a personal agenda for Meredith in his public affairs—the self-serving advancement of his own interests rather than the common good, the benefit of the colony as a whole.

In his personal life, it is again argued that Meredith took a selfish course, especially with his second wife. She was married and taken to Van Diemen's Land to become mother to his existing children, not, from his writing, through any great love. In the colony, for weeks and

months at a time she was left isolated on the farm with teenagers from Meredith's first marriage and infants of her own, and was expected to superintend the workings of the farm and the men of the whale fishery, all the time while being heartlessly criticised for the quality of her letters and being exposed to attack from bushrangers and Aboriginal people. Mary kept her husband sexually satisfied, but when in his older years his interest and even performance waned, she was expected to take control as 'Mistress of the Ceremonies' and ensure the continuance of their 'love feast'. Even for the times, a more selfish relationship can scarcely be imagined.

Paganelli analysed Adam Smith's positions on self-interest in Smith's apparently contradictory books *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.<sup>3</sup> In the former, self-interest is seen as having an ability to benefit society at large even when sought individually. This may have been the case with Meredith; his choosing of free institutions as a self-serving issue to attack Arthur promoted those issues in the minds of the local society and brought new, more genuine voices to the cause. In respect of 'Moral Sentiments', Paganelli argued that self-interest also plays a positive role in helping develop the mechanisms where virtuous and moral behaviours are enforced.<sup>4</sup> On this the application to Meredith is less obvious. There were few in his peer group who provided feedback on his self-serving ways that it might be restrained and applied for the greater good.

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<sup>3</sup> MP Paganelli, 'The Adam Smith problem in reverse: Self-interest in *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*', *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2008), p. 368.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 370.

## LEGACY

In the socio-political evolution of Tasmania, it is perhaps paradoxical that George Meredith's greatest legacy may have been clearing the way for the efficient, ground-breaking but unpopular administration of George Arthur, courtesy of the newly won independence of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales. In his twelve-year term, Arthur rigidly ruled the colony like no other Lieutenant-Governor in the Van Diemen's Land era. Meredith's successful campaign for independence allowed Arthur to rule the colony absolutely, with little opportunity for aggrieved colonists like Meredith to appeal to Sydney. Appeals by them to London were usually easily deflected by Arthur.

Meredith's legacy in respect of other institutions such as a free press, trial by jury and a House of Assembly is more limited. He espoused 'liberty of the press' in the 1820s and had some success in having the first iteration of Arthur's press laws disallowed. Much of the heavy lifting was done by Andrew Bent, who suffered gaol for it. In the 1830s Meredith went further and established the *Colonist* newspaper with Thomas Gregson. It was a somewhat chaotic affair and was run more as a medium to vilify Arthur and rival newspaper figures who supported Arthur than to allow free debates and commentary on colonial issues. No newspaper or newspaper figure could be taken seriously when its daily fare was so vituperative. His campaigns for 'trial by jury' and 'House of Assembly' were less immediately successful, but, whatever his motivation, he was part of the movement that kept the issues in the view of the Vandiemonian public, and bureaucrats in London, and gradually progress towards those institutions was made. Overall, Meredith was a more substantial figure in the socio-political evolution of Tasmania than he has been previously given credit for in the literature. He was more than just a noisy antagonist of Arthur, but

rather a sometime leader of the loose opposition that nipped at Arthur's heels and engaged Arthur's administration on issues of the day. He could never bring the opposition together, however, as he was not seeking a change for the colony, but rather waged a personal vendetta to rid it of Arthur or at least weaken his grip on power. He eschewed the Political Association that was established to fight for the very institutions that Meredith professed to embrace, as it operated by broad consensus of the colony's 'middle class' and would have muffled his attacks on Arthur.

Meredith's attitude to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people appears to be contrary to the selfish one outlined above. At first, he appeared to tolerate the indigenous people, regarding them as a nuisance rather than a threat. A self-serving Meredith would have soon called for the elimination one way or another of any limitation to his farming livelihood, in the same way as he ruthlessly took up against any colonist who presumed to settle near to him at Great Swan Port. He did not do this in respect of the Aboriginal people, at least at first. Up to the middle of the 1820s, he consistently prioritised bushrangers as a greater threat to his family and farm and asked the government to specifically target them. There is even some limited evidence of him having some empathy with the indigenous people—for instance, he claimed that he held back from retaliating against attacks on his farm workers. Even as the inter-racial violence escalated through 1828, Meredith did not join many of his fellow colonists on the land and in the towns in calling for open violence against the Aboriginal people, which contrasted with the overtly hostile attitude he had against Arthur and his administration. Meredith's response to the 1829 questionnaire put out by the 'Aborigines Committee' demonstrated a change in his attitude. There, with the violence still escalating, Meredith finally proposed that, if alternative policies did not succeed in

countering the attacks by Aboriginal people, then ‘annihilation’ was the alternative. When the Black Line and his own Freycinet Line failed in 1830, Meredith then took the final, extreme position that settlers be authorised to go out and hunt down Aboriginal people.

A tangible legacy of George Meredith remains in the elegant houses *Cambria* and *Riversdale* on the east coast of Tasmania. *Cambria* remains the largest house in the region.

Of his family, his son Charles made the greatest mark in the public sphere. Unsuccessful on the land and excluded from a share of *Cambria* by his father’s actions, Charles entered the Tasmanian parliament, first representing Glamorgan in the House of Assembly in 1861 and then other districts until 1876. He held several ministries, including Treasurer under several Premiers, including his father’s friend Thomas Gregson.<sup>5</sup> Most likely under the influence of his wife, he was an advocate of wildlife protection. Louisa Anne Twamley married Charles in 1839 in England and at the time was already a poet and artist of growing respect. In Tasmania she flourished, publishing several books including collections of paintings and sketches of wildlife and plants which have marked her as a colonial artist and writer of renown.<sup>6</sup> Charles and Louisa Anne’s children, George and Owen, were explorers of Tasmania’s rugged west coast in the 1870s and 1880s and made a number of mineral discoveries. In 1910 they were recognised as being the first to report to the government

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<sup>5</sup> A recent work, N Burch, *Our first hero Premier Sir Richard Dry* (Launceston, 2019) is derisive and dismissive of Charles Meredith’s political career. See, for example, p. 237 ‘a monster in politics’ ... ‘a maniac and a bully’.

<sup>6</sup> S O’Neill, ‘Meredith, Charles (1811–1880) and Meredith, Louisa Ann’ (sic), Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/meredith-charles-4187/text6731>, published first in hardcopy 1974, accessed online 20 January 2020.

the discovery of gold on the west coast.<sup>7</sup> The Owen Meredith River, Mount Meredith, Meredith Range and the Meredith Granite bear the family name there.<sup>8</sup>

George Meredith (1788-1856) was a substantial figure in Tasmanian colonial history, but he was not a 'great gentleman' in the sense of Atkinson.<sup>9</sup> He might have been, had the single-mindedness of his drive for success and independence made his public campaigns less self-serving and more clearly directed at the common good of the colony. He had ambition and energy, was a strategic thinker and was a commanding public orator, but more often than not directed his efforts, including in the press when he controlled a masthead, towards personal agendas. In spite of his shortcomings, his legacies—socio-political, the built environment and his family—are real, and significant, in the colonial history of Tasmania.

## A WIDER VIEW

The case of George Meredith allows us to have a more complete understanding of the complexity of Australian colonial settlement in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. His departure from England cannot solely be categorised as being as a result of conditions prevailing at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. He left Berkshire for Wales for his emotional attachment to the family's ancestral home and his lack of success in farming there seems to have been as a result of inexperience and poor management, although he was caught in the post-war prices slump.

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<sup>7</sup> AM Hodgson, *Prospecting the Pieman: George Campbell Meredith's logbook November 1876 to March 1877* (Sandy Bay, 2009), p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, *passim*; Placenames Tasmania, [www.placenames.tas.gov.au](http://www.placenames.tas.gov.au).

<sup>9</sup> A Atkinson, *Camden* (Melbourne, 1988), pp. 67-68.

He did seem to be restless, at home and in his work endeavours. He acquired a mistress and could not settle down on the farm in Wales long enough to make it work. His restlessness eventually led him to emigrate in 1821, but he preceded the reforms brought about by the Bigge reports. As Desailly noted, the *Emerald* 'sailed on an earlier tide'.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, perhaps there is a cohort of settlers who might be regarded as 'in-betweeners'; not obviously pushed from Britain by the social and economic effects of the end of the wars with France, nor pulled by the attractions of the post-Bigge reforms. Perhaps that was another expression of independence—making the decision without overt forces that others reacted to.

After he arrived in the colony, he had before him a banquet table of opportunity—a compliant Lieutenant-Governor, new policies of encouragement of settlers just like him, an apparently open landscape free from constraints by neighbours and adjacent waters full of whales and seals for the taking. Selfishness and entitlement met opportunity at Great Oyster Bay, checked only for the first few years by the likes of Edward Lord, who if anything was more rapacious than Meredith.

Yet in spite of these advantages in Boyce's 'veritable Eden', plus the fact that he did not feel particularly threatened by Aboriginal people for most of the 1820s, he did not find happiness. He always felt he was entitled to more; not only more but more on his terms, no-one else's, least of all the Lieutenant-Governors. Unfortunately for Meredith, his ambition and drive to resist George Arthur led to him being distracted from his large farm

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<sup>10</sup> E Desailly, 'The Emerald: The ship that sailed on an earlier tide', BA (Hons) thesis, University of Tasmania, 2016, p. 3.

estate and so it failed to reach its potential and limited his personal wealth accumulation, surely a mistake that went on for over a decade, yet he never changed course.

Running in parallel with Meredith's public life was his private one and we are privileged to get a rare and deep insight into his personality and appetites via his letters to his wife. Without these letters, his passion-charged relationship with her and his erotic thoughts and imaginings would never be guessed at from his dour public persona. They indicate that there was a more colourful side to Van Diemen's Land society than the usual drab official accounts portray, and which complimented the excitable language of the newspapers of the time. Equally though, the letters reinforce the gendered nature of that society and the extreme paternalism of a husband who not only demanded sexual satisfaction from his wife, who he kept isolated on his farm, but instructed her how and what she should think, dress and behave. There can be few more explicit examples of such behaviours in colonial Australia of what many authors state in general to be a characteristic of settler society.

The small details of Meredith's letters inform and colour our understanding of daily colonial life, manners and trials and these are no less important in toto than the larger issues. Small courtesies from and to merchants, the pettiness of lawyers, gaiety of Government house balls, exasperation with business partners, exchanges with officials in the street, concern for convicts' domestic arrangements, operation of a whaling station, collecting fruit trees for the orchard, being sea sick during a three day journey by whale boat to Hobart Town to name but a few. These too are important data points which can anchor broader arguments about how society functioned.

George Arthur has been the most closely studied of the colonial Lieutenant-Governors, partly because of the radical way he restructured the colony's convict establishment but



also because of the way the free settlers reacted to him. This work has shown beyond doubt that the loud opposition emanating from George Meredith was due not to any wish to protect a free society or 'the rights of Britons' against a tyrannical ruler, but was merely a self-serving campaign to protect his own interests. His allies—Kemp, Gellibrand and others—were acting similarly. Gregson may have been an exception; he formed separate views on the use of convict labour and on the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and seemed more idealistic than the others. Arthur's opposition was a house of many mansions.

Meredith's attitude to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people has been exposed here by a detailed 'longitudinal study' over time and this granularity reveals an unexpected pattern which can help inform the national discussion over relations between the settlers and the indigenous people. Superficially, Meredith could be regarded as a 'typical' settler extirpationist, as indeed he has been portrayed by some. The society he arrived at in 1821 was already alarmed at the aggressiveness of the East Coast peoples, but this was not felt or reciprocated on the ground by him, or others in the district. There was no 'clash' at first, merely a mutual curiosity. By the middle of the decade, there were skirmishes and violence between the races but this too failed to excite Meredith into overt retaliatory action; as ever, the caveat has to be stated that his personal instructions to his stockmen are unknown, but this is mitigated to some extent by the lack of any instructions to violence in his letters, even in private ones to his wife and family. Even as respectable citizens in Hobart Town were baying for blood, Meredith did not join them and bushrangers were always the greater danger to him until they were subdued in the mid-late 1820s. Like Arthur, he eventually had to change his attitude and tactics towards the end of the decade, and he turned completely into the extirpationist camp.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis has highlighted the impact of one settler on the history and development of Tasmania during a crucial period of its growth and has found him to have made a more substantial contribution than previously understood. As noted in the Introduction, there is a paucity of biographical works of colonists who were not part of the administrative elite or their families, but who are often encountered in public affairs in the period 1820 to 1850 and beyond. One in particular was Meredith's friend and ally Thomas George Gregson. If anything, Gregson had a greater impact than Meredith, first as an appointee to the Legislative Council and then being elected to the newly constituted Tasmanian House of Assembly and rising briefly to the Premiership. Gregson was the subject of Robert Brain's unsubmitted Masters thesis in 1955, but Brain did not investigate Gregson prior to his immigration in any detail, and appeared not to have examined a significant collection of Gregson papers.<sup>11</sup> Those aspects, and the greater availability of researchers to look through newspapers of the time via the 'Trove' web-site, opens the opportunity for a much broader analysis of Gregson and his impact on the history of Tasmania. In a similar vein, much has been written about Gilbert Robertson, but a comprehensive biography has not yet been written. This too would be a valuable addition to the literature of Van Diemen's Land press, society and politics.

Meredith's letters were a substantial source of information for this thesis. They were looked at in respect of Meredith's relationships with family members and some contemporary news, but this was necessarily in over-view only, so abundant and wide-

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<sup>11</sup> RJ Brain, 'Thomas Gregson, a Tasmanian radical', draft and unsubmitted MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1955, Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania. The additional material is approximately five hundred pages of letters and notes at: 'Thomas George Gregson correspondence, etc., 1818-1886', A245, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

ranging is their content. Meredith's letters have the potential to yield fruitful study in several other fields, such as colonial or Georgian family relationships, epistolary studies of love letters, gender studies and especially, as alluded to in Chapter 4, examination with a psychological viewpoint.

This and other works have demonstrated the operation of various informal 'dissident' and economic networks in Hobart Town, that were often led by campaigners who have been studied such as Meredith, Anthony Fenn Kemp and Edward Lord. There was a 'second tier' of settlers, mainly merchants who populated rather than led the campaigns. How these networks formed, shifted and worked within the various causes and groups would shed useful light on how Vandemonian society functioned prior to 1850. Names in this category include John Kerr, William Kermode, William Bethune and Thomas Horne. There were also those more aligned with Edward Lord and an unpicking of the dynamics of these two groups would contribute to how public sentiment formed and was expressed, especially in the Arthur and Franklin eras.

George Meredith's 'independence' was a manifestation of a personal selfishness which led to his actions being self-serving, rather than for any common good. This study has found many more specific examples of Meredith expressing his independence and has demonstrated the drive with which he acted it out in public. As noted in the Introduction, being independent and seeking personal advantage was hardly uncommon amongst Meredith's cohort of settlers. A study of others, individually or collectively with the theme of 'independence' would build on the theme here and previously established elsewhere.

## APPENDICES

# APPENDIX 1 Documented incidents involving Aboriginal people and George Meredith or his men to 1830

Date	Incident	Source
2 November 1821	Meredith on his second visit to Great Swan Port notes the presence of several 'mobs' of Aboriginal people – no close contact.	Diary of George Meredith, entry for 2 November 1821, RS34/1, University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections (UTAS S&R).
2 March 1823	Meredith and shore party visited by a group of Aboriginal women, with food exchanged. In the same account, Meredith notes that 'the natives must now be dispursed [sic] whenever they make their appearance'.	Meredith to his wife Mary, 2 March 1823, <i>fc Meredith</i> , Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society (GSBHS).
6 March 1823	Meredith's wife wrote of fires lit by Aboriginal people in the district and that she fears them coming close to the house.	Mary Meredith to George Meredith, 6 March 1823, G4/4, UTAS S&R.
15 November 1823	Meredith man, William Hollyoak and one other killed, and another injured at Grindstone Bay, attack led by 'Musquito'.	<i>Diary of Adam Amos 1822-1825</i> , entry for 20 November 1823, 689A, GSBHS; Melville, <i>The History of Van Diemen's Land</i> , pp. 38-39, <i>Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser</i> , 3 December 1824, p. 3.

23 July 1824	Robert Gay, a convict servant of Meredith killed at Swan Port.	<i>Hobart Town Gazette</i> , 24 July 1824, p. 2; Meredith to Arthur, 24 July 1824, CSO1/1/15, Tasmanian Archives (TA); <i>Amos Diary</i> , entries for 6-10 July 1824, GSBHS.
31 October 1827	Attack on Meredith farmhouse ( <i>Belmont</i> ). One Aboriginal person killed. Not substantiated from primary sources and is discounted.	Lois Nyman, <i>The East Coasters</i> , (Launceston, 1990), pp. 71-72. This is based on an Archer-Taylor typed manuscript at NS123/1/157, TA and unsourced there. The event is not recorded in Plomley <i>The Aboriginal / Settler clash in Van Diemen's Land 1803-1831</i> (Hobart, 1992). <sup>1</sup>
February 1828	Convict servant beaten, hut burned.	Plomley, <i>Aboriginal/settler Clash</i> , p. 67, quoting CSO840 (17/1/31), Tasmanian Archives (TA).
early August 1828	Thomas Myres, a whaler employed by Meredith, and a surveyor killed at Schouten Island.	<i>Hobart Town Courier</i> , 16 August 1828, p. 2.
9 October 1828	Meredith overseer, Patrick Gough involved following the murders of Mrs Mortimer and others near Jericho.	<i>The Tasmanian</i> , 17 October 1828, p. 3.

<sup>1</sup> Some of the referencing in the Appendix of NJB Plomley, *The Aboriginal / Settler Clash in Van Diemen's Land 1803-1831* (Hobart, 1992) is out of date. He lists reported incidents between Aboriginal people and settlers from 1804 to 1831. Many of his references are in the format 'CSO 992 (19/10/31)' with CSO meaning 'Tasmanian State Archives Colonial Secretary's Archives'. His citation today would be referenced CSO1/1/316/7578, Tasmanian Archives, p. 992.

December 1828	Meredith's horses killed	<i>Hobart Town Courier</i> , 17 January 1829, p. 2, <i>Colonial Times</i> , 30 January 1829, p. 3, <i>Launceston Advertiser</i> , 9 February 1829, p. 2
January 1829	Meredith's huts robbed, and fence set on fire	<i>Colonial Times</i> , 30 January 1829, p. 3, <i>Launceston Advertiser</i> , 9 February 1829, p. 2
October 1829	Meredith's blacksmith speared.	<i>Colonial Times</i> , 18 September 1829, p. 4.
c1829	John Raynor, a servant of Meredith's attacked while hunting; he died of his wounds in Hobart Hospital.	Louisa Anne Meredith, <i>My Home in Tasmania</i> , p. 206.
September 1830	Report of an attack on Meredith's farm, with several killed, including a soldier.	<i>Colonial Times</i> , 24 September 1830, p. 2, <i>Hobart Town Courier</i> , 2 October 1830 p. 2.

## APPENDIX 2      George Meredith's responses to the Aboriginal Committee's questionnaire of 1830 (with questions added in)<sup>1</sup>

### **1            Have you a recollection of the present Lieutenant-Governor's assumption of the administration?**

The assumption of the administration of this colony by the present Lieutenant-Governor is indelibly impressed upon my memory.

### **2            What at that period was the general state of feeling and intercourse between the Native Population and the Settlers?**

That that time – with particular exceptions – I consider that the feeling had been as free from excitement and the intercourse indulged in with as much confidence on both sides – generally speaking – as was natural to the relative situations and circumstances of the parties.

### **3            Do you remember at that time the occurrence of treachery or hostility on the part of the former or which shewed a spirit of mischief subsisting among them?**

Two instances the one of hostility the other of treachery on the part of the Natives - and forming the particular exceptions alluded to in the preceding answer – came under my knowledge.

### **4            If any such instances occurred do you conceive them to have originated in any provocation offered by the Whites, or to what cause do you attribute them?**

The first of these arose out of an accidental meeting with one of my own shepherds now recently killed by them and incidental circumstances connected therewith. The second was when two men were murdered and one speared at Grindstone Bay by Mosquito's Mob and doubtless at his instigation. In neither case was provocation given by the whites – on the contrary kindness and good feeling towards the Natives was manifested & in the latter instance for several successive days. The chief originating cause in such appeared to be a desire on their part for the possession of dogs although in the latter other property was plundered.

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<sup>1</sup> Colonial Secretary's Office, *General Correspondence*, CSO1/1/323, TA, pp. 355-358.



- 5        What is the present state of the Natives in your neighbourhood with respect of their feeling toward the White Population, and what instances of violence or depredation committed by them upon the Whites, or by the Whites upon them, have fallen within your knowledge during the past Six Years?**

The present feeling of the Natives in my neighbourhood towards the white population is and for a considerable time has been that of avowed and unequivocal hostility. Several persons have been murdered by them and still more wounded and attacked – very many instances of outlying premises being robbed can be aduced [sic] and some few of others well situate for protection. One particularly so where the attack was made hours after night fall with two men at home.

- 6        What is your opinion as to the Natives of the Transactions of the past year as compared with the preceding?**

The transactions of the last year as compared with those preceding it must prove to the entire conviction of every observant & reflecting mind that the hostile spirit and feelings of the Natives is now become general and fixed and that their present object is most determinately the Death of every Victim which may unhappily fall within their presence without respect to sex or age.

- 7        To what causes would you attribute the rise and progress of the hostility displayed by the Natives?**

Whatever consequences may attend the honest and conscientious ... declaration of my opinion upon this truly momentous subject – I do not hesitate to say that I attribute the rise and progress of the present spirit of hostility on the part of the Natives to the impolicy of some measures adopted towards them by the local Government and to the want of others anticipatory of results which I have all along both foreseen and predicted.

- 8        Do you conceive the latter to be aware of the disposition subsisting on the part of the Government & the respectable Settlers to treat them kindly, & live with them on amicable terms?**

I have never heard of any efficient means being employed to make them acquainted with the favourable disposition of the Government towards them nor do I believe they have ever been aware of it.

**9        What measures are in your opinion proper to be adopted for attaining the last mentioned Purpose, or if prove unattainable for protecting the Lives & property of the Community against attacks of the Savages?**

The time and opportunity has been suffered to go by for adopting conciliatory measures with any thing like the same probability of success as heretofore. Now it can alone be attempted through the medium of Native Embassy and for this purpose there remains only those who are domiciled as it were in the Straits with the Sealing Gangs an[d] other characters who are permitted to congregate there and they possess like the Native females who used formerly to haunt the different Locations - the advantages of some knowledge of the English language which as it will enable them to comprehend & also to convey to others the present views & wishes of the Government. As these individuals occasionally although under restrictions communicate with the Tribes on the Northern and Eastern Coast and as the latter are presumed to have some less in contact with the Natives & not to partake the same degree of excitement with those frequenting the located part of the colony. It is at that end of the Island the conciliatory attempt should be made and progressively towards the interior in case success attended the first efforts. But should the object prove now unattainable and indeed without waiting the issue I most decidedly recommend the earliest possible importation of Blood Hounds – Dogs which I ever thought might have been sent for at the first appearance of 'Bush Ranging' and in the meantime the training of Colonial Dogs - not to hunt and destroy the Natives but to be attached to each field party to be used in hand and thus to track unerringly and either ensure their capture or if indeed the alternative must be resorted to – their annihilation. Unless some more decisive steps are speedily taken and that corresponding results follow their adoption there is but too much reason to fear that the consequences may be found and that at no distant period awful beyond what seems to be apprehended.

Hobart Town 24 April 1830

[signed] Geo Meredith

### APPENDIX 3      Minutes of the Executive Council of Van Diemen's Land meeting of 27 August, 1830 in respect of 'Measures respecting the Natives'<sup>1</sup>

The Lieutenant-Governor informed the Council that letters had this week been received from Major Douglas, Captn Vicary, and Mr. Anstey, reporting various outrages committed by the Natives in the Oatlands and Bothwell Police Districts, and that Mr. Anstey had enclosed a letter from the jury on the inquest over the body of James Hooper, who had been murdered, expressive of their alarm in consequence of two Government Notices published in last week's Gazette, by which it was announced that Captain Welsh and Mr. G. A. Robinson had succeeded in opening a friendly intercourse with some of the Natives, and by which the settlers were urged to use every endeavour to conciliate, whenever the Aborigines should appear without evincing a hostile feeling, and all persons employed under the Government were ordered to offer no violence or restraint to the inoffensive Natives in the remote and unsettled parts of the territory, and by which it was intimated that if any wanton attack or aggression were committed against them, the offenders would be immediately brought to justice and punished. The writers of this letter concluded by entreating that some measures should be adopted to relieve the settlers from their perilous condition. His Excellency read Mr. Anstey's communication in which this letter was forwarded, and in which he had taken occasion to express his firm opinion, that the Aborigines are now irreclaimable, and that the ensuing spring will be the most bloody that we have yet experienced, unless sufficient military protection should be afforded.

The Lieutenant-Governor stated that feeling extreme anxiety from the state of alarm in which the settlers were thrown, and the great responsibility he should incur, in consequence of instructions he had lately received from the Secretary of State, if further offensive measures were resorted to against the Natives, he had assembled the Aborigines' Committee, and referred to them the reports received during the week. Read the Report of the Committee, who stated, they were unwillingly compelled to conclude, after mature deliberation, that the whole of the Aborigines who had lately appeared in and near the settled districts, with only two exceptions, were actuated by the love of plunder, joined

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Council, *Minutes of Proceedings of the Executive Council*, 28 August 1830, EC4/1/1, TA, pp. 566-570.

with the most rancorous animosity, and that therefore it had become essentially necessary to adopt the most vigorous measures, and to repel the Aborigines from the settled districts by every means that could be devised, both on the part of the Government and the community, as all efforts to conciliate the hostile tribes had proved quite ineffectual.<sup>2</sup>

Read Sir George Murray's dispatch containing the instructions before alluded to, in which, after referring to a letter from the under Secretary of State which called for a report of the circumstances of a murder alleged to have been perpetrated upon a Native by one of the people of the Van Diemen's Land Company and requiring His Excellency further to report what steps had been taken for bringing to trial the persons implicated in that affair, Sir George Murray called His Excellency's attention to the importance of enforcing upon every class and description of settlers a course of conciliation and of making it distinctly understood that every person instrumental in the death of a Native should be brought before a Court of Justice, in order that all persons might be made duly aware of the serious consequences which would result to those who should be prosecuted unless they should be enabled to prove that it was either in self defence or in the protection of their property, that they caused the Native's death.<sup>3</sup>

Under the circumstances the Lieutenant-Governor requested the advice of the Council as to the measure which it would be desirable to adopt to afford further protection to the settlers, and their opinion as to the promulgation of Sir George Murray's instructions.

The Council, after fully deliberating upon the subject, is of the opinion that to act upon the instructions which His Excellency has received would at the present juncture be exceedingly impolitic and would lead to the most unhappy result.

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<sup>2</sup> The reference to the Secretary of State was omitted from the version published in: House of Commons, *Copies of all correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the subject of the military operations lately carried out on against the aboriginal inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land* (London, 1831). The issue of editing and/or omitting material submitted by Arthur but deemed 'sensitive' by the Colonial Office is discussed in: P Chapman and T Jetson, (eds.), *Historical Records of Australia, Resumed Series III, Despatches and papers relating to the History of Tasmania, Vol. IX, Tasmania, January-December 1830* (Melbourne, 2006), Appendix 13, pp. 1046-1052.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph was omitted from the House of Commons version. The next three paragraphs were combined and heavily edited to remove references to Murray's letter and the Council's reaction and advice.

All the events which have happened since the Council advised His Excellency to proclaim Martial Law, and to drive the Aboriginal Natives out of Settled Districts have only tended to confirm the Council in its opinion of the actual necessity of such a measure, and it regrets that the force which has hitherto been at His Excellency's disposal for that purpose has not been sufficient to effect it.

Of the necessity of such a measure the Council apprehends no doubt can be entertained, when the nature and character of the attacks made by the Natives, and the manner in which they are made, and the situation of the settlers who are exposed to them, are considered.

It appears to the Council now, as it did nearly two years ago, that the wanton and barbarous murders committed by the Natives indiscriminately, as well on those who could not as on those who might have given them provocation, on men armed and unarmed, and on defenceless women and children, can be considered in no other light than as acts of warfare against the settlers generally, and that a warfare of the most dreadful description, for they have seldom spared the lives of any who have fallen into their power, and the love of plunder has of late much increased amongst them, yet they are equally if not chiefly actuated by a love of murder. The manner in which these attacks are made are such as no ordinary prudence can long guard against. The Council cannot but remember the repeated proofs it has had before it of the skill with which the Natives have availed themselves of the facilities presented to them by the natives of the country, to make their hostile approaches unperceived, of their patience in watching for days the habitation of those whom they design to attack, and of the frightful celerity with which they avail themselves of any unguarded moment to fall upon the inmates, and put them to a cruel death. Nor can it forget those instances in which they have effected their purpose by means of the most consummate and deliberate treachery, by sending some of their people, sometimes women, sometimes unarmed men, who have approached huts with apparently the most friendly disposition, and have succeeded in engaging the attention of the inmates, or in alluring some of them to a distance, and thus enabling their armed confederates to fall suddenly upon their unsuspecting victims and destroy them.

The Council conceive that these facts are sufficient to shew how dangerous an enemy it is whom we have to contend with and how possible it is to rely upon any demonstrations they may make of a friendly nature and how absolutely necessary it is that the Settled Districts at least should be freed from their presence.

Formerly their attacks were confined to the remote huts of Stock Keepers and Sawyers, but now when they have ventured to carry them into the heart of the settled country it appears to the Council that the settlers should be told that they are to be made liable to a criminal prosecution in any case in which they cause the death of a Native and to be executed as Murderers, unless they can prove with that strictness which a court of law requires that such a death was occasioned by necessity in self-defence, they will be driven to absolute despair. Great numbers of them, the Council is persuaded, must either abandon their farms altogether or they must suspend for an indefinite time all their labours and occupations, and with their families and servants keep a continual watch under Arms round their Dwellings. In either case their ruin is inevitable.<sup>4</sup>

The Council beg leave to refer to the advice which it has offered on former occasions when this distressing subject has been before it, as a proof of the desire which it has felt, and does still feel, to put a stop to this unhappy state of things, if possible, by negotiation and by conciliatory measures, a desire which it well knows to have been shared by His Excellency, and by the most respectable classes of the community. But all endeavours to conciliate the Natives have failed. The Council still wish that conciliation may be attempted wherever practicable, but it cannot conceal from His Excellency its opinion that little can be hoped from attempts to negotiate with or to conciliate a people in so rude and savage a state as the Aboriginal Natives of this island, who live in tribes independent of each other, and who appear to be without government of any kind, and who not only are without sense of the obligation of promises, but appear to be insensible to acts of kindness, as has been clearly evinced by the commission of wanton murder almost immediately after they have quitted settlers by whom they have been fed and treated with the utmost kindness.

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<sup>4</sup> This paragraph was also omitted from the House of Commons printed account.

In such a state of things, so far from acting upon the instructions of the right Hon<sup>ble</sup> Secretary of State it appears to the Council that the time is now arrived when it has become absolutely necessary that some vigorous effort, upon a more extended scale than has hitherto been practicable, should be made for expelling these miserable people forthwith from the Settled Districts. The Settlers appear to be generally so impressed with a sense of the danger of their situation, that the Council doubts not that His Excellency may rely upon having their hearty cooperation, and it trusts that the volunteers which they may be expected to furnish, joined to the troops which the late increase of the strength of the garrisons will enable His Excellency to employ in the held, will form a force sufficient for the accomplishment of this most necessary measure. In advising His Excellency to adopt such a measure, the Council is well aware of the responsibility it incurs, and of the painful situation in which its advice, if followed, may tend to place His Excellency. But the Council sees no alternative. It hopes and believes that if a sufficient force can be thus collected, the expulsion of the Natives may be effected at the expense of little bloodshed, and even if it should cost more lives than the Council anticipates, it is a measure dictated not less by humanity than by necessity, since it is calculated to bring to a decisive issue a state of warfare which there seems no hope of ending by any other means, and which, if much longer continued, the Council fears will become a war of extermination.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The reference to the Secretary of State at the start of this paragraph was omitted from the House of Commons published version.

## APPENDIX 4      Meredith's account of his meeting with Matthew Brady in a letter to his wife, 2 April 1826<sup>1</sup>

*Note: Some punctuation has been changed to assist readability. Original spellings have been maintained, but [square brackets] used to add letters or words to assist meaning.*

... Bird and Tilley two of the remaining four Bushrangers are secured; the former being killed on the spot & the latter taken.<sup>2</sup> We met Lieut. Robertson on Friday morning as we rode out coming to town with the intelligence.

It appears indeed it is known these two men had been sometime abt the Coal River & their capture was daily expected when on Thursday eve two Crown servants came, one to Butcher & one to Gunning, with notice that they [the bushrangers] had been at a hut at the Natives Corner & would again return there in the morning. Robertson & a small party therefore went to lay in ambush, whilst three Crown Prisoners also planted themselves at a little distance to receive them first. About the appointed, time the deluded villains made their appearance & were rec<sup>d</sup> by their three friends with a discharge from their muskets but which proved of no effect & Bird returned the fire with his piece. They then ran for it, but I conjecture first reloading as Bird was shot in the back as he made off by a man named Kelly & fell, however he afterwards fired one or two pistols but a man named Clarke ran up & fired two balls into his head. On hearing the first shot Robertson & his party made up & met Tilley running towards them when he threw down his arms and gave himself up.

Dunne & Cody<sup>3</sup> are still out but cannot escape much longer and I do not despair of still seeing them all swing before leaving town & which would afford me greater satisfaction than attending the Sorell Dinner but rest assured that neither the one or other should delay

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith Family Papers, G4/11, University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections.

<sup>2</sup> Josiah Bird and William Tilley, see *Hobart Town Gazette* 4 March 1826, p. 1, *Colonial Times*, 7 April 1826, p. 3 and *Hobart Town Gazette*, 8 April 1826, p. 2. Bird and perhaps Tilley were present at the Sorell raid: K Von Stieglitz, *Matthew Brady Van Diemen's Land bushranger* (Hobart, 1964), Introduction, quoting a statement by William Bunster (who was present at the Sorell raid), 28 November 1825. It is therefore likely that one or both of them were at the raid on Meredith's house, and Meredith's commentary appears to confirm that. Von Stieglitz wrongly places Meredith's house at the time at *Cambria*, as that name was not used until the 1830s.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Dunn and Michael Cody, *Hobart Town Gazette*, 4 March 1826, p. 1. Dunne and Cody were also at the Sorell raid: Von Stieglitz, *Matthew Brady*, *op cit.* so, together with Meredith's commentary, were also likely to have been at Meredith's.



the infinitely greater pleasure of hastening down, my dearest M, to rejoin you & my family should I be allowed to do so before either appointed day. I think I told you in my last that I had seen Captain Brady or was it that I merely repeated Sharpe's statement of what Tilley stated near Georges Town. Be it as it may, I will run the hazard of repetition by saying I got into the jail yard ready to give him the meeting when he, Goodwin and Bryant were brought in together with the monster Jeffries<sup>4</sup> & his companion.

Brady had been wounded in the leg & was carried in although my opinion is that he makes himself worse than he really is in order to get relief from his irons & by possibility obtain a chance to escape. His face is not exactly what I had expected to see but much more deeply lined & characteristic of his late conduct. He is quite cool & apparently candid, possessing or assuming good spirits. When he was placed in the cell I had a short conversation with him & a longer one the second day afterwards of which the following is the substance. At first he denied that they had any prejudice against me or that they should have hurt me but afterwards frankly admitted that it was well for me I was not at home. He states that they received no information from anyone previously to their arrival at the plain, that they arrived the day before & intended to have attack<sup>d</sup> us on that day at 12 o'clock & took their station in the morning on the bathing house rock but taking out a glass got a sight of Gunn<sup>5</sup> and knew there must be a party with us. They then watch<sup>d</sup> the roads for some of the people & afterwards went up to the river to sleep that night. They again watch<sup>d</sup> the following morning & saw the party leave about 10 o'clock & after a sufficient lapse of time came down to the attack. He declares they neither knew nor cared whether I was at home or not adding what could I have done against them alone or with a single man or so to assist me. I was truly amazed at this statement (which I now believe to be true) & could not help exclaiming that I would gladly give a hundred guineas to have them make their attack again even if I had but one man to assist me & knew of their coming. He very coolly replied it was no use boasting now, that it would have been all the same. Had I been at home & fired upon them they would have surrounded & fired the hut. I told him that was what they

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Jeffries was one of the most savage bushrangers and frequently called a 'monster'; his crimes included murder, cannibalism and infanticide: *General correspondence*, CSO1/1/254/6085, TA; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 28 January 1826, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant William Gunn arrived in the colony in 1822 and obtained land in the Sorell district. He led parties of soldiers in pursuit of the Brady gang, including at Great Swan Port at Meredith's residence.

never could have done had I known of their coming as I would myself have drop<sup>d</sup> half their numbers before they could have reach<sup>d</sup> the first hut.

As to Hunt<sup>6</sup> he says they never saw Hunt until he came to the creek side but that so far from killing or quarrelling with him, they gave him money & a watch & that he went either to England or the Straits. He behaved like a man to them, Brady says, wishing to take the boat to an island when she proved leaky but which Brady objected to. M<sup>c</sup>Cabe's intoxication occasion<sup>d</sup> them putting on shore when the boat swamped & Hunt swam ashore & got the boat in. He afterwards continued with them 3 or 4 days & then left them as already stated, having £15 and a watch given to him.

I have enquired about your watch, my eye glass telescope etc which Bray [sic] says are still in the bush but we shall never get them again. I have thank<sup>d</sup> him for his decorous & respectful conduct to yourself & the girls & hope by further converse to obtain more satisfactory information. The other men being in the same cell it is useless to expect different answers from them to what I have received from Brady but if Dunne & Cody come in whilst I am here I hope to get something more from them. At least I shall judge of the truth or falsehood of Brady's statement when I have heard theirs separately.

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Hunt, a convict servant of Meredith: Entry for 8 December 1825, and earlier, Adam Amos, *Diary 1822-1825*, 689A, Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society.

## APPENDIX 5      Indications of holders of positions of the *Colonist* newspaper

See notes at the bottom of the table for explanations of abbreviations, sources etc

Date	Source	Printer and publisher	Editor	Proprietor
20 June 1832	<i>Austral-Asiatic Review</i> , 11 June 1833, p. 4	Gilbert Robertson published the 'Memorandum of Agreement' between himself, Meredith and TG Gregson to found the <i>Colonist</i> . Robertson 'editor and reporter' and the other two 'trustee proprietors'		
6 July 1832 First edition	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	G Robertson	G Robertson	
18 July 1832	SC213/1/1 no. 13, TA	G Robertson named as printer and publisher in a recognizance		
21 Sept. 1832	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 2			Named TG Gregson and Meredith in respect of prospective O'Connor libel suit
4 Oct. 1832	CSO1/1/ p. 17	Robertson named in an affidavit		TG Gregson named, Meredith <i>not</i> a proprietor in an affidavit
3 Nov. 1832	<i>Colonist</i> , pp. 3, 4	G Robertson		Named TG Gregson in respect of Gellibrand libel suit
9 Nov. 1832	<i>Tasmanian</i> , p. 5	Named TG Gregson in respect of O'Connor libel suit		

9 Nov. 1832	NS123/1/1 #316			GM to MM: TG Gregson
16 Nov. 1832	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	G Robertson		
17 Nov. 1832	DLADD56			Swore an affidavit that he relinquished to proprietorship of the <i>Colonist</i> , before TA Lascelles, JP
23 Nov. 1832	DLADD56	Circumstances changed since affidavit of 17 November, and TG Gregson now printer and publisher and sole proprietor of the <i>Colonist</i>		
23 Nov. 1832	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	TG Gregson	'dispensed with services of G Robertson as editor'	TG Gregson
23 Nov. 1832	SC213/1/1/ no. 14 Also DLADD 56	TG Gregson named in a recognisance		
23 Nov. 1832	CSO61/1/1 p. 17	TG Gregson named in an affidavit		TG Gregson sole proprietor named in an affidavit
26 Nov. 1832	CO280/40 pp. 344-345	Emmett to Arthur saying that he had been offered the 'proprietorship and editorship' of the <i>Colonist</i> , but declined, in gratitude to past support from government		
30 Nov. 1832	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	TG Gregson		TG Gregson

1 March 1833	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	TG Gregson		TG Gregson
13 March 1833	G4/47	TG Gregson to MM: Meredith essential to the <i>Colonist</i> ; 'without him, it will fail'		
(no date)	ADB on Horne		T Horne was editor until March 1833	
15 March 1833	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 2		T Horne (un-named) no longer editor	
19 March 1833	<i>Australian-Asiatic Review</i> , p. 2		Reported that T Horne resigned or was dismissed by TG Gregson	
22 March 1833	NS123/1/13	GM to MM: 'the <i>Colonist</i> the whole arrangements of which paper have suddenly devolved on me'		
29 March 1833 Final Friday edition	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	TG Gregson (final)		TG Gregson (final)
'early 1833'	CSO1/1/849/17945, pp. 17-18	Memorial of FED Browne: Invited to edit <i>Colonist</i> . Not needed in that position but stayed on to write articles until the 'cessation of the journal'. Claims he wrote the majority of articles, sometimes under direction		
	CO280/88, p. 356, 439	GM to Glenelg 1836: Complained that his attempt to appoint Emmett as 'Editor in Chief' with GM as his 'political guardian' was foiled by Arthur. At the time, Meredith said, he was temporarily the 'nominal legal proprietor' and editor		

3 April 1833	G4/20	GM to MM: '[when] I thought finally arranged for Emmett to take the whole charge of the Colonist upon himself ... I received the note from Emmett relinquishing the thing altogether' 'An express is now going away for Lascelles at Richmond to be here tonight, he having solicited the Editorship'		
5 April 1833 Friday		<i>Colonist</i> not published		
5 April 1833	<i>Tasmanian</i> , p. 6		Named Horne as (prior) principal editor; J Jorgensen 'a sort of sub-editor'	
9 April 1833 First Tuesday edition	CSO1/1/652/14635 Original in Allport Library collection	Joseph Hone complained of a libel on p. 2 of this edition. TG Gregson is named as printer, publisher and proprietor on the imprint on p. 4, but Hone wrote that he had been told that TG Gregson had relinquished those positions and the imprint was an error		
18 April 1833	ML A245	Gregson in a letter to Hone's solicitor Pitcairn he similarly declared he was not involved		
12 April 1833	<i>Tasmanian</i> , 19 July 1833			Reported that an affidavit records Meredith
13 April 1833	SC213/1/1 no. 18	GBH Gellard named in a recognizance		
16 April 1833	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	GHB Gellard		

16 April 1833	<i>Austral-Asiatic Review</i> , p. 2		Named J Jorgenson, T Lascelles and FED Browne as approached to be editor at some point	Named Meredith as 'sole proprietor'
16 April 1833	<i>Colonial Times</i> , p. 2		Named Jorgenson as the '9 <sup>th</sup> editor of the Colonist'	
12 July 1833	<i>Tasmanian</i> , p. 4	Report that Meredith admitted in court (O'Connor libel) that 'he was the proprietor of the paper, and that it was printed and published by him'		
19 July 1833	<i>Tasmanian</i> , p. 6	Report of court proceedings (Schaw libel) stated that Meredith was the 'registered proprietor'		
30 July 1833	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	GHB Gellard (final)		
2 Aug. 1833	<i>Tasmanian</i> , p. 4		Named FED Browne and Meredith as 'joint editors', with Meredith the 'real editor'	
5 Aug. 1833	<i>Colonial Times</i> , p. 11	Notice that the <i>Colonist</i> is now the exclusive property of [TA Lascelles]. Former Trust Deed has been revoked		
6 Aug. 1833	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	TA Lascelles		
7 Aug. 1833	SC213/1/1	TA Lascelles named in a recognizance		

27 Aug. 1833	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	TA Lascelles		
22 July 1834 Last edition	<i>Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	TA Lascelles	TA Lascelles	TA Lascelles
5 Aug. 1834 First edition	<i>True Colonist</i> , p. 4 imprint	G Robertson re-birthed the <i>Colonist</i> as the <i>True Colonist</i> , still printed by Bent		G Robertson
15 Aug. 1834	G4/25	CM to GM: 'I saw Lascelles yesterday – he looks miserable and says he will not be able to get his <i>Colonist</i> published'		
5 Sept. 1834	NS123/1/4	Lawyers to GM: G Robertson has defaulted on payment to his printer, Bent, who left and Nathaniel Olding became printer of the <i>True Colonist</i> (this appears to have become effective around 16 September: <i>True Colonist</i> , 16 September 1834, p. 4; <i>Tasmanian</i> , 19 September 1834, p. 3)		

### Notes:

The *Colonist* was Meredith and Gregson's paper, so its reports on ownership cannot be taken at face value.

The *Tasmanian*, *Colonial Times* and *Austral-Asiatic Review* were hostile to Meredith and the *Colonist*, so their reports can also not be considered necessarily accurate.

GM – George Meredith

MM – Mary Meredith



CM – Charles Meredith

NS123, SC213, CSO1, CSO61 and EC4 references are from the Tasmanian Archives

DLADD 56 reference is from the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

ML A245 reference is from the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

G4 references are from the University of Tasmania, Special & Rare Collections

CO280 references are from microfilms of Colonial Office records of the Australian Joint Copying Project held at Tasmanian Archives

ADB – Australian Dictionary of Biography on-line for Thomas Horne: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/horne-thomas-3798>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

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##### A. Official/Public

##### BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE, READING

###### *Deeds and Agreements*

- |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| D/EX 422/1  | Covenant and agreement between George Meredith, Abnor Clarkson and others, 27 May 1809.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| D/EX 1041/1 | Conveyance of messuage, barn, outhouses, orchards, stables near the Wash in Newbury, and about 100 acres (with abuttals) dispersed in the common fields (known as Northcroft, Eastfield and Westfield), in Newbury, and messuage, outhouses, barns and just over 10 acres of land (specified) in Enborne. |

###### *Parish Records*

- |               |                                                        |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| D/P 18/1/12   | All Saints, Binfield, baptism registers.               |
| D/P 1/6       | St Helen's, Abingdon, baptism registers.               |
| D/P 51/1/2    | St Michael and All Angels, Enborne, baptism registers. |
| D/P 61/1-3    | St Mary, Hampstead Marshall, baptism registers.        |
| D/P 89/1/6-6A | St Nicholas, Newbury baptism registers.                |
| D/P 106/1/2   | St Mary, Shaw cum Donnington, baptism registers.       |
| D/P 116/1/6-7 | St Mary, Speen, baptism registers.                     |
| D/N 32/8/1/1  | Newbury Congregational, baptism registers.             |
| MF598         | Newbury Non-conformist, baptism registers.             |

##### GLAMORGAN SPRING BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, SWANSEA

- |                    |                                                        |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| no reference given | All Saints, Swansea burial register.                   |
| fc Meredith        | Papers relating to the Meredith family.                |
| Box ED1, 339gg     | Letter from George Meredith to his wife, 2 March 1823. |
| 689A               | Adam Amos Diary 1822-1825.                             |

GUILDHALL ARCHIVES, LONDON*Parish Records*

P96/AND2/A/01MS6672/4 St Andrew Holborn, Register of marriages, 1820-21.

LIBRARY OF BIRMINGHAM, BIRMINGHAM*Family History Section*

St Philips' Birmingham parish records, marriages, August 1767.

St Philips' Birmingham parish records, baptisms, April 1791.

St Philips' Birmingham parish records, burials, May 1790.

MITCHELL LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY*Miscellaneous*

- |                |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A245           | Thomas George Gregson correspondence, etc., 1818-1886.                                                                                                               |
| A341           | Collins, D, 'General and garrison orders, 1803-08', reel CY1151.                                                                                                     |
| A578           | Markham, E, <i>Voyage to Van Diemen's Land in the ship Warrior 17 March 1833-7 February 1834</i> , reel CY1684.                                                      |
| B736           | Meredith, C, <i>The Honorable Chas. Meredith, MHA, Orford 1879</i> .                                                                                                 |
| DLADD 56       | Various documents collected by Sir William Dixon mostly consisting of correspondence from early colonial publishers of newspapers to authorities, 18 June 1831-1868. |
| DLADD 573      | Tasmanian police letters, 1827-1829.                                                                                                                                 |
| DL Spencer 96  | Tasmania Supreme Court register of people tried, 1821 - 1832.                                                                                                        |
| DL Spencer 429 | Report of the Aborigines Committee, 1830.                                                                                                                            |
| M2591          | Cambridge University Library - Miscellaneous collections held by Cambridge University Library relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, 1719-1932.         |

*Papers of Sir George Arthur*

- |        |                                                    |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------|
| ZA2164 | Vol. 4, Correspondence with James Stephen 1823-54. |
| ZA2167 | Vol. 7, Letters from Sir R Darling.                |
| ZA2169 | Vol. 9, Letters of Chief Justice Pedder (1).       |
| ZA2188 | Vol. 28, Aborigines.                               |
| ZA2207 | Vol. 47, Case of G Meredith.                       |

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA

MS902 Letter, Thomas Buxton to his family, 21 September 1821.

NEW SOUTH WALES STATE ARCHIVES, SYDNEY*Colonial Secretary's Papers*

Reel 6023, X820 Reports of prisoners tried at Court of Criminal Jurisdiction.

Reel 6009, 4/3505 List of prisoners transported to Port Macquarie on board the cutter Sally.

Reel 6011, 4/3509 Runaway from Port Macquarie in Sydney Gaol. To be embarked on the Ann for Hobart.

*Other*

NRS906 Capture of John or Black Caesar, reel 6037.

PEMBROKESHIRE ARCHIVES, HAVERFORDWEST, WALES*Agreements and Indentures*

HDX/747/24 17-E-10 Agreement between George Meredith and Henry Grant, 2 April 1811.

D/EE/1/78 Henry Davis.

D/EE/1/19 3/D/7 Indenture between George Meredith and John Evans, 24 March 1819.

*Images*

D/EE/28/23 Poyston, Rudbaxton parish, Wales, nd.

*Land Tax Assessments*

PQ/RT/DE/1804-1812 Land tax assessments, Dewsland.

PQ/RT/DE/1813-1820 Land tax assessments, Dungleddy.

PQ/RT/DE/1813-1820 Land tax assessments, Haycastle.

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HPR/8 Rudbaxton parish registers of 1806-1816.

HPR/17 Haycastle baptisms 1816-1819.

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MS0358 [Agreement between Meredith and Joseph Archer for the charter of the *Emerald*], 15 September 1820.

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D1287/1/29 (G/97) Rent account of Henry Bowman receiver for Sir Henry Bridgeman's estates 1786 onwards.

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No reference Leigh baptism registers

TASMANIAN ARCHIVES, HOBART*Allport Family Papers*

ALL14/1/9 Transcript of 'Notes found amongst the papers of the late TG Gregson', Historical notes Tasmania: No. 1. Volume of typescript and original manuscript notes including extracts from Lt. Govt. Collins' order book re Sullivan Bay (Port Phillip); extracts from Rev. Knopwood's sermon and letter book.

*Amos Family*

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- CSO61/1/1 Register of deeds and other documents deposited with the Colonial Secretary.

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- CBE1/1/1 Minutes, 17 February 1830 to 16 September 1833, reel Z2744.

*Convict Department*

- CON13/1/2 Assignment lists and associated Papers, 'List of prisoners embarked on the brig Ann'.
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*Correspondence and Associated Papers of George Meredith and Family*

- NS123/1/1 George Meredith letters to his wife, Mary Ann Meredith. 113 letters, 16 March 1823-3 December 1837.
- NS123/1/2 George Meredith letters to his children, Sarah, Charles and John. 40 letters mainly to John while farming at Mount Gambier. Also a letter from his son Henry. 16 February 1816-19 July 1854.
- NS123/1/4 Papers and correspondence with variety of people, including Joseph Archer, Adam Amos, George Frankland, Lieut. Colonel Sorell, TD Lord and others. 150 letters, 1 January 1801-12 January 1852.
- NS123/1/5 Papers relating to legal cases involving George Meredith, including his dispute with Edward Lord and the libel case RL Murray. 90 papers, 28 August 1819-8 September 1845.
- NS123/1/7 Agreements with the crews of his sealing and whaling boats and associated papers, 1 January 1824-20 May 1826.



- NS123/1/8 Accounts, receipts and associated papers, including stock accounts and Colonial Bank passbook, 9 October 1820-27 December 1843.
- NS123/1/10 House plans, Cambria, nd.
- NS123/1/11 [Diary of George Meredith's visit to Sydney, 8 March 1823-22 May 1823].
- NS123/1/12 Printed Address to, and correspondence with his Excellency Lieut.-Governor Arthur upon the subject of the recent Colonial Acts, imposing a license upon the Free Press of Van Diemen's Land, 1 January 1827-31 December 1827.
- NS123/1/13 Meredith, Mary Ann (nee Evans). Letters to her husband George Meredith, (and 1 letter from George to his wife Mary). 13 letters, 20 April 1819-14 April 1832.
- NS123/1/14 Mary Ann Meredith (1795-1843). Mrs George Meredith (nee Evans). Mary Ann Meredith. Letters to George Meredith's children. 3 letters.
- NS123/1/15 Mary Ann Meredith (1795-1843). Mrs George Meredith (nee Evans). Mary Ann Meredith. Letters received. 4 letters.
- NS123/1/17 George Meredith Jnr (1806-1836). Letter from A.M. Flaherty, Meredith's governess in England.
- NS123/1/19 Sarah Westall Poynter (1807-1869, nee Meredith). Letters to step-mother Mary Ann Meredith and letter to mother Sarah Meredith.
- NS123/1/21 James Peck Poynter (1790-1947). Letters outward. 5 letters.
- NS123/1/28 Louisa Bell (1808-1890). Letters to Mary Ann Meredith. 6 letters. 3 Apr 1834-7 May 1841.
- NS123/1/38 Charles Meredith (1811-1880). Letter to his father George Meredith.
- NS123/1/39 Charles Meredith (1811-1880). Letters to John and Maria Meredith. 13 letters.
- NS123/1/157 Typescript material, notes and correspondence relating to the history of the Meredith family, nd.

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*Correspondence and Associated Papers of the Dumaresq, Darling and Boissier Families*

- NS953/1/299 Letters to Edward Dumaresq from Francis Edward Douglas Browne.

*Correspondence, Letterbooks, Documents and Newspapers Collected by Dr Craig*

- NS473/1/8 Letterbook of Edward Lord.

*Diaries, Photograph Albums and Associated Records Relating to Jessie, Fanny and John Meredith*

- NS615/1/20 Diaries, photograph albums and associated records relating to Jessie, Fanny and John Meredith, nd.
- NS615/1/49 Meredith family Bible, 1 December 1874.

*Executive Council*

- EC3/1/1 Draft minutes of proceedings of the Executive Council, 3 December 1825-25 February 1828.
- EC4/1/1 Minutes of proceedings of the Executive Council, 3 December 1825-6 June 1831.
- EC4/1/2 Minutes of proceedings of the Executive Council, 13 June 1831-10 June 1833.
- EC4/1/3 Minutes of proceedings of the Executive Council, 10 June 1833-29 July 1836.
- EC4/1/4 Minutes of proceedings of the Executive Council, 29 July 1836-15 July 1837.

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- GO1/1/17 Despatches received from the Secretary of State, Vol. No. 26; received date, 30 June 1834-28 August 1835.
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- GO1/1/29 Despatches received from the Secretary of State, Vol. No. 42; received date, 28 June 1838-28 September 1838.
- GO33/1/1 Governor's Duplicate Despatches received by the Colonial Office, duplicate despatches 12 February 1825-20 December 1826.
- GO33/1/16 Governor's Duplicate Despatches received by the Colonial Office, duplicate despatches 1 January 1834-30 April 1834.
- GO33/1/26 Governor's Duplicate Despatches received by the Colonial Office, duplicate despatches 12 January 1837-29 August 1837.

*Henry James Emmett*

- NS1216/1/1 Reminiscences of the Black War in Tasmania.

*Jack Thwaites and Family*

NS3195/1/808      Photograph - Swansea - "Cambria" - one time home of Louisa Ann [sic] Meredith.

NS3195/1/1811      Photograph - "Cambria" at Swansea - the old Meredith homestead.

*John Lyne*

NS854/1/1      Reminiscences of John Lyne MHA, 14 August 1896.

*Land Tasmania*

1/994      Registry of deeds, deed of sale of Bentfield from Andrew Bent to Joseph Hone, 11 May 1831.

*Lands and Survey Department*

LSD1/1/1      General Correspondence, series A, B and other, 1 January 1822-31 December 1964, reels Z1642 and Z1643.

LSD1/1/2      General Correspondence, series A, B and other, 1 January 1822-31 December 1964, reel Z1643.

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LSD354/1/5      Copies of land grants issued.

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*Miscellaneous Collection of Photographs*

PH30/1/351      Photographs of sketches by Bishop Nixon of Cambria, Swansea.

*Parish Records*

RGD34/1/1      Burials at Campbell Town 1838.

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*Political Association of Tasmania*

NS467/1/1      List of members.

*Supreme Court*

SC41/1/1      Registers of prisoners tried in criminal cases, reel 1561.

SC213/1/1      Recognizances entered into by newspaper publishers for the printing and publication of newspapers.

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AD960/1/3      Copies of Wills Recording Granting of Probate, 'Probate book 3 files 362-671' (will of George Meredith, page 974).

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- ADM 51/1171 A journal of the proceedings of His Majesty's ship *Hind* between the 20<sup>th</sup> November 1795 to the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1797, kept by Captain John Bazely.
- ADM 51/1248 Journal of proceedings on board His Majesty's Ship *Hind* from the seventeenth day of May 1797 to the seventeenth day of May 1798, commanded by Joseph Larcom Esq<sup>r</sup>.
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- ADM 51/1304 A journal of the proceedings of His Majesty's ship *Hind* from 17 May 1799 to 17 May 1800, by Joseph Larcom Esq<sup>r</sup> Commander.
- ADM 51/1349 *Hind* Captain J<sup>s</sup> Larcom 18 May 1800 17 d<sup>o</sup> 1801.
- ADM 51/1419 Journal of the proceedings on board His Majesty's Ship *Hind* Captain Larcom from the 18 May 1801 to 23 Sept 1802.
- ADM 51/1452 Journal of the proceedings on board His Majesty's Ship *Northumberland* from the 1 July 1803 to 6 May 1804.
- ADM 51/1476 Journal of the proceedings on board His Majesty's Ship *Illustrious* from the 8 November 1803 to 23 April 1805.

*Admiralty Marine Officers*

- ADM 6/406 Register of Marine officers' commissions, including warrants to Marine Surgeons, Agents, 1755-1814.

*Admiralty Officers Seniority Lists*

- ADM 118/260 A List of the Officers of his Majesty's Royal Marine Forces, 1803.
- ADM 118/263 A List of the Officers of his Majesty's Royal Marine Forces, 1805 [with annotations for 1806].
- ADM 196/58 Royal Marine Officers, 1793-1837.

*Admiralty Royal Marines Pay Office*

- ADM 96/89 Royal Marines Pay Office: Half pay cash book, 1797-1802.
- ADM 96/496 Officers' Commission and Subsistence Book, 1797-1803.
- ADM 96/510 Casualty Book, Plymouth, 1803-1808.

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ADM 36/13271	HMS <i>Hind</i> Ship's muster 1 November 1796 - 31 October 1797.
ADM 36/13272	HMS <i>Hind</i> Ship's muster 1 November 1797 - 31 December 1798.
ADM 36/13273	HMS <i>Hind</i> Ship's muster 1 January 1799 - 30 June 1800.
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ADM 36/16016	HMS <i>Illustrious</i> Ship's muster, 1 May 1804 to 30 November 1804.
ADM 36/16017	HMS <i>Illustrious</i> Ship's muster, 1 December 1804 to 31 April 1805.
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*Assizes*

ASSI 2/28	Crown Minute Book.
ASSI 5/128/16	Oxford Circuit Assizes: Indictments, Staffordshire, Lent 1808.

*Birmingham Canal Navigation Company*

RAIL 810/1	Minutes and Reports, 1767-1771.
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*Court of Common Pleas*

CP 71/1	Register of Articles of clerkship and affidavits of due execution, 1756 - 1867.
CP 71/2	Articles of clerkship and affidavits of due execution, 1785 - 1867.

*Home Office*

HO 7/117/68	Petition on behalf of Francis Edward Douglas Browne, Criminal petitions, petitions referenced Xh, Xk, Xl and Xm.
HO 9/8	Convict hulks moored at Portsmouth: Portland, Captivity, Leviathan: Register of prisoners.
HO 10/47	List of convicts, Van Diemen's Land 1830.

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*The Naval Chronicle for 1801, Vol. V.*

*The Naval Chronicle for 1805, Vol. XIV.*

*Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions*

- PROB 11/942/410 Will of John Hicks, Mason of Speen, Berkshire.
- PROB 11/1199/159 Will of John Meredith, Gentleman of Castle Bromwich, Warwickshire.
- PROB 11/1444/291 Will of Mary Hicks, Widow of Enborne, Berkshire.
- PROB 11/1536/183 Will of Henry Wilkins Hicks, Major in the Service of the Honorable [sic] East India Company.
- PROB 11/1602/22 Will of Thomas Hicks, Gentleman of Enborne, Berkshire.

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

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UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA, SPECIAL & RARE COLLECTIONS, SANDY BAY*Meredith Family Papers*

- G4 Meredith family papers deposited by Mrs WVG Johnson 1962 & 1964.

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