

The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter



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SOME PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE COOLANGATTA WEEKEND

Thanks to Carmel Nestor

On the weekend from 29th-31st May over fifty members of the Australian Brontë Association and the NSW Dickens Society, had an exciting weekend at the Coolangatta Estate near Berry. We enjoyed many interesting talks, drank and purchased the excellent wines from the estate, and engaged in many convivial conversations with one another.

The talks and activities centred around life in colonial NSW, especially in the Shoalhaven area, and the connections with Dickens, the Brontës and Mary Shelley.



Mr Berry's Bush Banquet in the Great Hall



Marloesje Valkenburg, Catherine & David Barker,
Annette Harman, Chester Porter



Marlene Ardito, Joan Brandon, Elisabeth Cooper, Jean Warner



Christopher Cooper, Michael Links,
Lyn Brompton



Jean Porter, Patricia Stebbings-Moore

MY ANCESTORS FROM SHOALHAVEN

Rodney Pyne

If you stand on the southern side of the buildings at Coolangatta Estate and look almost due west and rather far into the distance, you are looking towards what is now the twin city of Bomaderry – Nowra. 150 years ago, you would have been looking towards the Greenhills Estate. Separating Coolangatta and Greenhills is the Shoalhaven River. Alexander Berry settled the Coolangatta Estate on the northern side of this large river from about 1822. My great great great grandfather, William Graham, settled a grant seven years later, in 1829, on the southern side, originally called Butler's Grant, which was to grow into the larger Greenhills Estate. This property also backed onto the upper edge of the catchment of the Crookhaven River, further south still. The land was a mixture of levee banks, swampy ground and a ridge of firmer ground on the western boundary leading to what is today the City of Nowra.

William's son, James Graham, brother of my great great great grandmother, Jane Graham, who was married first as Jane Mays and then again as Jane Monaghan, went on to make the Greenhills Estate every bit the equal of the Coolangatta Estate and he, James Graham, would eventually be elected Mayor of the Nowra Municipality in 1860.

James Graham had a large house built on the Greenhills Estate in 1864 and it still stands today in the streets of Nowra, as Graham Lodge. It is a 2-storey late Georgian house with an upstairs veranda, built with bricks made on the property. All the doors, windows and architraves are made of local cedar. Some sections were demolished in 1999 and what was left became the Visitor's Information Centre.

Another strand of my family has connections with the Shoalhaven and, we believe, with the Coolangatta Estate. My great great great grandfather, Dennis Collins,

on my father's side, was transported from Ireland to Sydney in 1835 and was given life for stealing sheep in County Kerry. He was sent to the Illawarra on a ticket of leave after working eight years in the Kangaroo Valley and the Appin district, west of Wollongong. He and his sons are buried in the Jamberoo Catholic Cemetery up in the hilly dairy country behind Kiama. He is variously described as "horse trainer" or "dairy farmer" and even as "Billiard Champion of NSW". My father thought he worked on the Coolangatta Estate as a horse trainer, though possibly this was one of Dennis's sons or grandsons.

Another of my ancestors married the convict Thomas Mays who worked on Berry's Coolangatta estate. She was given a grant of land on the southern side of the Shoalhaven, which she named Mayfield, the same name given as middle name to Dad's mother.

From its settlement in 1829, life on the Greenhills Estate was a constant struggle against the forces of nature. For instance, there were the ants. Food could not be left anywhere. There was a food safe, with its four legs in water-filled jam tins. A leg of ham or bacon would be hung from hooks attached to overhead beams but eventually the ants would find it.

One day, Lofty Graham knocked the base out of two vinegar bottles, re-corked them, upended them, half-filled them with water and ran the wire holding up the ham through the corks, through the upended bottles to hook it all over the rafter. Hundreds of ants made the pilgrimage up the wire, then down the wire to the bottles, fell into the water or tried to move back up against the oncoming tide of brother ants descending the wire. Not one ant reached the ham from then on.

A simple water-wheel was set up on a small creek and tipped small amounts of water into a wooden sluice, from where it emptied into a house water-butt behind the back door. A large hole was dug near the butt, lined with a Hessian bag and covered over with a piece of tin. This hole kept butter, milk and cream cool. The device had been observed in Scotland by Lofty before he left there.

1838 was an interesting year. There was dreadful drought, following a very dry 1837. On Greenhills, there was no stored fodder left and the waterholes were shrinking. 1838 saw the colony's 50th birthday. In Sydney there were great celebrations on 26th January, Anniversary Day. Queen Victoria had just ascended the throne and the colony was alive with talk of scrapping the convict system. However, even the waterwheel on Greenhills had stopped. Buckets were filled with the trickles found in small streams. Inland, cattle and sheep died in their thousands. In Sydney, Darling Harbour slaughter yards sent a wave of stench all over Sydney. Natural streams that usually washed away the waste weren't running. Sydney's newly installed piped water supply was failing and public standpipes began to run dry.

On 2nd November 1838 Governor George Gipps declared a day of fasting and

prayer for rain. God was punishing the colony for its many sins, especially drunkenness. On Greenhills, all the neighbourhood gathered to pray. Recent squabbles over whose livestock had knocked down whose fence and destroyed whose crops were forgotten for the day. Three weeks later the drought broke.

But another storm, this time financial, was about to strike the colony. When the wool market collapsed in England, many Sydney traders had taken out loans with the Australia Bank. Major defaults led to a run on the bank, which became insolvent. Many a fine business shared the fate of the extravagant and profligate. A relentless cycle of debts, bankruptcies and crumbling fortunes brought Sydney to its knees.

Greenhills and Mayfield, however, were not much affected. People there didn't think of banks as places to borrow money. Every farmer had a secret hoard, usually of English half-crowns, Spanish holey dollars and assorted gold and silver coinage. On Greenhills, this hiding place was the chicken yard, where newly-turned earth wouldn't look unusual. Others buried their savings in the potato patch. James Graham, future Mayor of Nowra, put his in the Bank of New South Wales, which came through the crisis virtually unscathed.

WHAT TOBY HALL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF MISSION AUSTRALIA, IS READING (from Spectrum in the Sydney Morning Herald 13th June 2009)

My favourites have always been social-history classics. Old English books like those of the Brontë sisters are wonderful because they capture the 19th century European world where things were so different. I just finished reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë. It's a love story but it was also this

radical feminist novel at the time. When Brontë first wrote this book, she was slated by male critics because she was pointing out all these things that men were doing wrong. She had quite a cavalier disregard for men and for me this was exciting to read, as it showed her rebellious depths of thinking.

DAVID MALOUF FINDS LITERATURE THROUGH THE BRONTËS

A newspaper report claims that David Malouf was awakened to the joys of literature when he was a boy of 12 on his summer holidays when he read *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.

THE GHOST OF THE GLEN

At the Coolangatta Weekend we were to have had a session of ghost stories in the Great Hall during the bush banquet, but the lively music and dancing frightened the ghosts away. On the Sunday, Christine Alexander read Charlotte's "ghost story" about Napoleon and the Spectre. This is another story, claimed to be a true story, about a ghost associated with the Coolangatta Estate.

A century ago, the Illawarra bush, particularly that portion of it extending from Dapto to Shoalhaven, or its northern boundaries, was frequented by cedar-getters, or, as they were called in those days and for long years after 'sawyers'. At that time these men were the true pioneers of European civilization. Long years before the farmer or the grazier had set foot in that bush, years prior to the novelty of 'clearing-off' or 'fencing-in', the tent of the sawyer was familiar to the local tribe of blacks. Of course, with very few exceptions, the first cedar-getters were ticket-of-leave men, and employed by timber-speculators and others. (It may be here noted that Alexander Berry contracted with Governor Brisbane to maintain one hundred convicts free of expense to the Government, providing he gave him a grant of ten thousand acres on the banks of the Shoalhaven River. The offer was accepted and in May 1822 Mr Berry took his first batch of assigned servants to his grant on the Shoalhaven.)

We are told that many of the blackest-dyed ruffians of their time were to be found in the ranks of the Illawarra sawyers. If rocks and trees could have spoken they might have been able to tell tales. But the few cases of crime that came to light independent of supernatural agency were diabolical enough to shock the not-oversensitive colonial society of the time. For instance, as the *Inky Wayfarer* points out, the murder which gave birth to the legend of 'Ghost Glen' was, in plot and perpetration, of a most satanic character.

A young migrant – 'new chum' – stayed for a night at Kiama, then a very small settlement, on his way to Mr Berry's at Shoalhaven. He had some money about him of which he made too frequent display. 'Most likely he was excited by drink, a

supposition that is strengthened by the story that his Kiama host sold grog on the sly.' A great brindled sheep-dog accompanied him. Two men – characters with the brand of ruffian stamped on their features, drank spirits at his expense, plied him with conversation in which the word 'mate' was uppermost, and finally started away with him, ostensibly to guide him to his destination by a short cut. The unlucky 'new chum' never turned up again. His companions, who were known to be sawyers of the very worst class, and whose camp was supposed to be in the neighbourhood of Kiama, suddenly disappeared from the district. They left no clue that would point to their whereabouts nor did it appear that they were ever traced out.

But some months after their hurried departure, one of Alexander Berry's assigned servants lost his way in the bush, near where Gerringong stands today, and during the time camped for two nights in an isolated glen close to a narrow sea-creek. From his statement of what he heard and saw there originated the legend now under review.

The man was lost for several days. A little tobacco, a pipe and a flint and steel were the only things he had about him, consequently, when he was picked up, on the fourth or fifth day, he was half-starved. 'The delirium of hunger may have been the cause of the apparition by which he swore he was visited on the second and third nights of his stay in the bush.' The startling fact, however, that the burnt bones of a human being were subsequently found in the glen described by him gave weight to his story, and raised the whole thing into a popular tradition.

The first night of the vision was set in rainy valley. A cold sea-wind was blowing, and the wanderer had to build a gunyah to ensure some protection from it. By means of flint and steel he got a fire but, of

course, he was supper-less. A quid of tobacco, however, sufficed to allay his hunger-pangs, and in time, the poor fellow managed to get to sleep. How long the slumber lasted he could never tell. Perhaps a couple of hours, mayhap, longer. He was awakened by the faint sounds like the distant gratings of a 'cross-cut' saw. At that moment he was tapped on the shoulder. Looking round he saw a bloody hand and part of an arm thrust through the grass close to his neck. When he turned the apparition disappeared. The grating sound ceased at the same time. Trembling with cold and fright he got up and replenished the fire. The light and warmth of the latter were hardly sufficient to restore his nerves to their normal condition. But after a while he inclined to the belief that he had a vivid nightmare, and towards morning he went off to sleep again.

He was awakened from his second sleep by a cry – a distant cry from some human being in agony. The grating of the saw was renewed, but this time the sounds appeared to come from a spot not a hundred yards off. He looked in the indicated direction. He saw – just for a second only – the faint blurred figures of two men. The feet of one were over the head of the other. The lower shape seemed to be standing in a shallow pit. The other was evidently supported by a platform raised a few feet from the ground.

The day broke fine and continued so, but the wanderer was too weak to leave the glen. He managed, however, to crawl about half-a-mile in the direction of the sea. Here he made choice of another camping-place. As night drew on a heavy thunderstorm gathered up from the west. It was followed by a gale which lasted into the middle of next day. The traveller, not being able to keep up a fire, took refuge in a large hollow log. Weariness and cold soon blunted the impressions of the previous night, and the result was sound slumber.

The first apparition came this time in one of the wildest fits of the gale. The sleeper was aroused by a terrific clap of thunder. His opening eyes were met by the

appearance of a gashed blood-dabbed face staring at him through the further cavity of the log. About fifty feet from the remains of his fire there was a kind of black heap over which a dog was apparently lying. The voices of men and the loud noise of a saw in full work were heard in the first pause of the wind. A slight movement on the part of the spectator caused face, dog and heap to disappear. But the sawing and talking continued. Almost crazed with terror the man got up and went out into the rain. He was greeted by a demoniac laugh and the pelting of a pitiless shower. But the supernatural sounds immediately ceased.

The last apparition found him in a vague state half-way between sleep and a fear-stricken wakefulness. A gurgling voice, the voice of a man in intense agony said to him: 'For God's sake tell the Sydney people of this.' A doubled-up body, a masked moaning body, lay at the opening of the log; a great-limbed but wasted sheep-dog licked the dead battered face; distinct in the darkness there appeared a saw-pit, logs, cross-pieces and all. Two sawyers – huge, rough-bearded men – were working in a ring of ghastly light. To the right of the pit lay the smouldering remains of a camp-fire. Diabolical curses, mingled with shrieks, seemed to come from every corner of the compass. The terrified traveller remained motionless. In one of the breaks of the storm he heard a man say: 'Take the money; take everything, but let me go.' A savage reply was broken by a sudden burst of thunder. The dog howled piteously in the darkness. Then a coarse cursing voice shouted out: 'Let's pitch the bastard on the fire' and 'Cut the bloody cur's throat.' A second of silence followed by a piercing yell and a vivid flash of lightning, and the pit and its occupants disappeared as if by magic. Dog and body were not to be seen. The only noises abroad were those of the gale. But just before daybreak a dead, waxy face appeared at the opening of the log. The first words were indistinct, but the listener caught the most of the rest. They were these: 'I did my best but Loney will never know it. They have

slaughtered poor old Shep too. That cursed saw-pit. Write to Sydney Loney' The traveller moved his arm and the apparition disappeared. That was the last of the alleged supernatural visitation.

A search party from Mr Berry's station fell in with the lost servant on the fourth or fifth day of his wanderings. He was very much exhausted, but he appeared to be sane. Nothing indicative of delirium could be discovered in his conversation or manner. Want of food and shelter made him weak and nervous but no other effects were evident. His story was told in a clear, consecutive way, and all his later versions of it agreed in detail with the first.

The people resident near the glen asserted that the awful spectacle seen by Berry's man was to be seen at intervals any

stormy night. They swore that the grating of the saw was often heard by the neighbouring farmers. The story is immortalised in the following words.

*Over a pitfall, the moon dew is thawing,
And with never a body, two shadows stand
sawing.*

*The wraiths of two sawyers (step under and
under),*

*Who did a foul murder and were blackened
with thunder.*

*And whenever a storm-wind comes driven
and driving*

*Through the blood-spattered timber you may
see the saw striving—*

*You may see the saw heaving, and falling and
heaving*

*Whenever the Sea Creek is chafing and
grieving.'*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hi, I am writing to let you know of www.crossref-it.info – it is a free English Literature website, containing complete and interactive text guides (such as the *Jane Eyre* text guide) for A-Level students (or anybody who is interested) and loads of background material (such as the extensive “World of Victorian writers” section).

It's completely free of charge and high quality – the material was written by university professors who want to address an apparent gap in student's understanding of the cultural background on which a lot of English literature is based.

I would very much appreciate if you were able to link to our site. I do believe that it is an incredibly useful site! Any feedback would also be welcome. :-)

Thank you and best regards,
Robin Staple

Dear Australian Bronte Association
I wonder if I might draw your attention to my publication : *Branwell Bronte's Creation*, please, which came out in October 2007. It is sold by many concerns, including Amazon, The Good Book Guide and the Brontë Parsonage Bookshop. I came to Adelaide when I was working in

education in England. It was all very exciting and I loved Australia.

I have a little website containing details of what I have done:

www.wendybardsley.supanet.com

I am now concentrating on writing, and enjoy writing literary fiction. My present project is a novel about William Wordsworth.

I loved writing the novel about Branwell and had longed to do it all my life, but I thought the project beyond me. I am delighted I completed it in the end, after much research, and it took three years. Reviews have been excellent, and a recent personal Review on Amazon by someone gave me great pleasure, and was exactly what I had hoped for. The book is selling well, and I would be very happy if you could look at it. It is available from Gardners Books, the UK's largest wholesaler, and their number is 01323 521 555. I believe it is necessary to open an account with them to obtain books, though I am sure you will be aware of that detail. Many thanks for your time and 'warmest' wishes for Christmas to you all over there! It is very cold here in England, and we have had lots of snow, much to the delight of the children.

Wendy Bardsley

THE PHOTOGRAPH SEEMED TO SAY “BUY ME”.

posted on www.brontebolg.blogspot.com

The Independent gives more details about the anonymous buyer of the photograph of Patrick Brontë recently auctioned and who will donate it to the Parsonage:

A portrait of Patrick Brontë, whose daughters Emily, Charlotte and Anne wrote some of the most celebrated novels in the English literary canon, is to be returned to its rightful place in the family's former home after going missing for more than a century. Four weeks ago, *The Independent* reported that the rare picture, which had not been seen since being sold by the Museum of Brontë Relics in 1898, was discovered in a cardboard box at a Midlands antique fair, in its original gilt frame.

On Wednesday, it was sold by an auction house in Surrey for £1,476 – more than double its estimated value. The buyer, who called in her bids by phone and saw off competition from a London antique dealer, is from the south of England, and she had read about the portrait in *The Independent*.

She has decided to donate it to the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, west Yorkshire, after reading that its directors could not afford to bid themselves. The

woman, an office worker in her early 60s, wished to remain anonymous, but in an email to this newspaper she explained her motivations for buying the portrait.

“My husband saw the article in *The Independent* initially and, knowing my interest in the Brontës, drew it to my attention,” she wrote. “Having read the

article, which I found very interesting, the photograph seemed to say ‘buy me’, and I just thought it would be nice to own a piece of Brontë memorabilia – if I could afford it.

“I am a Brontë fan, particularly of Charlotte, but I'm not manic about it. I then checked [the auction house] website and the more I thought about it, the more it seemed wrong for the photograph to be in private hands, it should be back at the Parsonage where it belonged, so I decided that if I were successful, I would donate it to the museum.

“I must say that I was pushed to my financial limit to get the photograph, but the surprise and delight of the lady to whom I spoke at the museum was well worth it.” The woman added that she hoped to return the portrait to the museum in a few weeks. Andrew McCarthy, the museum's director, said he was “absolutely delighted” to hear it would soon be hanging in its rightful place in the Parsonage.

“We do get a lot of support from people in a lot of different ways, but usually it's from members of the Brontë Society who we know care about the family's heritage,” he said. “When this kind of thing happens it's particularly gratifying, because it's an act of kindness from someone who just read about this picture and realised they could do something to

help us, and she's really made a big difference.”

Elizabeth Gaskell, in her 1857 biography of Charlotte Brontë, described the Rev Brontë as a ‘strange’ and ‘half-mad’ man who was “not naturally fond of children”. In the portrait he is gazing into the distance with haughty austerity.



BRONTË PARSONAGE MUSEUM RECEIVES £50,000 FROM HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND TO SUPPORT NEW DEVELOPMENT


The Brontë Parsonage Museum has been awarded a grant of £50,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to support a program of exciting new developments. The museum has ambitious plans to completely refurbish the historic interiors of the Parsonage over the next two years. This will involve researching and introducing a new decorative scheme to the Parsonage rooms, the renewal of interpretation giving visitors of all ages information about the house and the family, and installing new object cases and displays. The project will also seek to create a greater focus in the museum on Haworth's history and the social-historical context in which the Brontës lived. As part of this initiative there will be a program of community activity to involve local people in the project. The Heritage Lottery Fund grant will fund stage 1 of the project which will involve the introduction of new interpretation, object


cases and displays and the community program of events.

The museum recently completed a major refurbishment to its permanent exhibition space located in an extension to the original Brontë house. The refurbishment was the first major development at the museum in over twenty years and the new exhibition space, *Genius: The Brontë Story*, which includes the treasures of the museum's collection as well as fun interactive displays for children, has proved a big hit with visitors. This latest project will see further improvements to the museum.


Fiona Spiers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Yorkshire and the Humber Region, said "This fantastic project will really bring the museum's collections to life for everyone to explore. HLF is dedicated to supporting projects that open up our heritage for locals and visitors to learn about and enjoy."

PROGRAM FOR THE REST OF 2009

Meetings indicated by  are held at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt St Sydney (just around the corner from Town Hall station), with a meeting charge of \$4. We are currently meeting on the 5th floor, but sometimes they move us to another floor. Just check with the sign near the lift on the ground floor. Meetings officially begin at 10:30am but we serve morning tea before the meeting as well as afterwards.

 Sat 1st AUGUST: Carmel NESTOR: MARIA BRONTË AND ELIZABETH BRANWELL
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<p>Maria, the mother of the Brontës, died not long after giving birth to Anne, and her sister Elizabeth Branwell, came to look after the six children. Judging by her letters to Patrick (in one she referred to him as "my dear saucy Pat") Maria had a lively mind and a skill with words. What might she have thought of the literary success of her daughters had she lived?</p>
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 Sat 14th NOVEMBER: SCENES FROM <i>SHIRLEY</i>

<p>Pamela Whalan has written and directed many plays, both in Sydney and in Newcastle. She will be adapting a couple of scenes from <i>Shirley</i> and will be bringing a couple of actors from Newcastle to perform them. Hopefully this will inspire much discussion and there'll be opportunity for us all to talk about our impressions of the novel. This is the nearest thing we've had to a "book of the year" and you'll get a lot more out of the performance and discussion if you've read the book beforehand.</p>

Sat 5th DECEMBER: JOINT CHRISTMAS LUNCH WITH THE NSW DICKENS SOCIETY Details to be announced later.
