

Retrieval, no. 12 (March–April 1973), p. 724, which erroneously said that the Coranderrk people had died out. I would like to thank Daniel O'Donovan who took me on my first visit to Coranderrk.

- 18 Trinity College graduate Gray, the leader of the Convention, was one of the most interesting Irish migrants in Victoria in these decades. He had been a member of O'Connell's Repeal Association and Duffy's Tenant League, and was judged by historian Eugene Doyle to be "a man of uncommon virtue".
- 19 Doyle, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
- 20 Stephen H Roberts, *History of Australia's Land Settlement Acts 1788–1920*, Melbourne, Macmillan and MUP, 1924.
- 21 CMH Clark, *A history of Australia, volume IV*, Melbourne University Press, 1978, pp 122–4.
- 22 John Ireland, 'The Victorian Land Act of 1862 revisited', MA thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1992, pp. 26–38; Doyle, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–73.
- 23 Roberts, *op. cit.*; Ireland, *op. cit.*; Leslie Clement Duly, 'Land selection acts of Victoria 1859 to 1869', MA thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1959.
- 24 *Geelong Advertiser*, 17 September 1862, cited in Ireland, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 25 Duly, *op. cit.*, p. 267. Leslie Clement Duly, author of an astute thesis on the Duffy, Grant and other land acts, concluded that the program of the Land Convention was gradually implemented even if the members of parliament did not realise that was so.
- 26 Margaret Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday: A Social History of the Western District of Victoria 1834–1890*, Melbourne University Press, 1967 (revised edition), first published 1961.
- 27 J E Senyard, 'Glass, Hugh (1817–1871)', *ADB*, vol. 4, pp. 254–255. Tony Dingle, *The Victorians: settling*, Fairfax, Sydney 1984, p. 62.
- 28 Doyle, *op. cit.*, p. 66, 94–5.
- 29 Bob Reece, 'The Irish and the Aborigines', *Irish-Australian studies: papers at the Ninth Irish-Australian Conference, Galway 1997*, Sydney, Crossing Press, 2000, pp. 192–204.
- 30 Broome, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
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- 32 Stephen Knowlton, 'The enigma of Charles Gavan Duffy: looking for clues in Australia', *Eire-Ireland*, 1996 no 3 (3 & 4), pp 189–208.
- 33 Drury, *op cit*, p 201. Compare Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, (2006), 8 (4), December, pp 387–409.

- 34 Wayne Atkinson, 'Yorta Yorta elder and Guinness descendant take a trip to Ireland', *Táin*, no. 43 (September–November 2006), pp. 20–22; and 'Searching for the origins of reserves through the lenses of Cummeragunja: the Irish connection', unpublished paper for the Fifth Galway Conference on Colonialism, National University of Ireland, Galway, June 2007.



The Walmsley House at Royal Park: La Trobe's "Other" Cottage

By Simon Reeves

Over a recent coffee and chat with Simon Reeves about his current work as an architectural historian with Heritage Alliance, I was fascinated to learn that he had researched the origins of an 1850s prefabricated house in Melbourne. The fruits of his research are reproduced below in the following lively and engaging article.

For many decades, a modest corrugated iron shed on the south-eastern edge of Melbourne's Royal Park has been a source of endless fascination for local residents, park visitors and casual passersby alike. A small metal plaque on one wall, which attests to the fact that the building was manufactured by 'Walmsley' of London Road, London, has given it the nickname of the *Walmsley House*. To identify the elusive Mr Walmsley, and unravel why a small iron house bearing his name and address might have found its way to the other side of the globe, one must go back to Melbourne's earliest days under Lieutenant Governor Charles La Trobe.



Figure 6 This battered metal plaque provides the only clues to the origins of a prefabricated iron cottage that has stood on the edge of Royal Park for almost 150 years. Photograph: Simon Reeves, 2008

A perennial problem during La Trobe's superintendency was the provision of adequate and cost-effective mass housing, and prefabrication was an early and obvious solution. Even La Trobe himself was initially

accommodated in a prefabricated timber dwelling, which had been brought out from England with him and his family in 1839. More than a decade later, when faced with the issue of housing the increasing number of public servants in the new colony, La Trobe accepted the recommendation of his Colonial Architect, Henry Ginn, to obtain some prefabricated iron houses from England. In 1853, Ginn prepared plans and specifications for a four-roomed cottage, measuring 32 feet (9.75 metres) by 28 feet (8.5 metres), and an order for 36 units was duly dispatched to the Colonial Agent in London. In June of that year, the British building press reported that a local manufacturer, one John Walker, was then in the process of manufacturing 36 iron houses 'for the residences of emigrants sent out by Government to Australia'.³⁵ Directories confirm that an iron worker of that name had a factory at Millwall on the Isle of Dogs in London's east. Indeed, the nameplate of John Walker – identified as a manufacturer of Millwall, Poplar – can be seen on the few iron houses in Australia that miraculously survive from La Trobe's order. However, the example at Royal Park, although identical in size, plan form and detailing, is clearly attributable to a competitor, one Mr Walmsley. It can only be assumed that the original contractor, John Walker, subcontracted a portion of La Trobe's order to a third party.³⁶

Who, then, was Walmsley? Dr Miles Lewis of the University of Melbourne, a world authority on nineteenth century prefabricated housing, described Walmsley in 1985 as 'a very mysterious figure', and little else has been revealed of him since.³⁷ At one point, he was presumed to be related to one A T Walmsley, author of a treatise on iron roofing published in 1884. Bibliographic research, however, shows that this book was in fact written by Arthur Thomas *Walmisley*, whose surname is spelt slightly differently.³⁸ A check of London directories confirms at least that Benjamin Walmsley, retail ironmonger, occupied premises at 127 London Road, Southwark by 1850 – one of a row of three residential shops that had been built only a few years earlier.³⁹ By 1851, Walmsley's business had expanded to take over the adjacent No 126 as well.⁴⁰ The 1851 census confirms that Benjamin Walmsley, ironmonger, lived at 126-127 London Road, and further reveals that he was then 39 years of age and was born in Middle Rotherhithe.⁴¹ This places the year of his birth as around 1812, and indicates that he not only worked but was also born within the Borough of Southwark, in London's southeast.

He is surely the same Benjamin Walmsley who, according to civil registration records, was born on 5 November 1812 and christened on 28 April 1813 at the Jamaica Row Independent Church at Bermondsey, also in Southwark. Walmsley's long association with London's south-east – born in Rotherhithe, christened in Bermondsey and working in Southwark – may well suggest a prior connection with iron house manufacturer John Walker, whose father's ironworks was originally located in Rotherhithe and later moved to Bermondsey.⁴²

The 1851 census also identified three other occupants at 126-127 London Road, who presumably comprised Walmsley's staff: 22-year-old shopman Alfred Holland, 17-year old cashier George Neutor, and 36-year-old housekeeper Cherry Glanville.⁴³ Although the last named was married in 1853 and presumably left Walmsley's employ, his ironmongery business otherwise expanded and, by 1856, finally occupied all three shopfronts at Nos 126, 127 and 128. However, Walmsley's business disappears entirely from the directory listings after 1858. His former premises in London Road (and perhaps also the business itself) had been taken over by two other ironmongery firms: Hodd & Gill at No 127, and Thomas Henry Fairhall & Company at No 128. The third shop, at No 126, became occupied by linen draper John Young.⁴⁴

The subsequent whereabouts of Benjamin Walmsley are revealed by the 1861 census, which records that the former ironmonger, late of Rotherhithe and now 49 years of age, was residing at No 2 Park Villa in the Parish of East Budleigh, County Devon. A local directory, the *Morris & Company's Commercial Directory & Gazetteer for 1870*, confirms that Benjamin Walmsley lived at Park Villa, citing its location more accurately as Little Knowle – a street on the north-western outskirts of Budleigh Salterton. This small town on England's south coast, then with population of around 2,000, was described in the gazetteer as 'a place rapidly and deservedly increasing in size and popularity'. It remains unclear, however, why a London-based ironmonger suddenly moved to a coastal village, although ill health may have been a factor. What is certain is that he was no longer employed as an ironmonger; not only was his name absent from the local directory's commercial listings, but the census listed his profession as 'proprietor of house' in 1861 and then as 'no occupation' in 1871. In the interim, Walmsley had married and had a child – his wife, Isabella, and seven-year-old son Henry

both being recorded in the 1871 census as co-occupants of No 2 Park Villa. Walmsley was still living at that address at the time of his death on 4 November 1880, one day before his 68th birthday. While nothing else is currently known of Walmsley and his professional activities as an iron house supplier, the triple shopfront that his firm occupied in London Road miraculously still stands – albeit now renumbered as Nos 218-223, in a streetscape dominated by twentieth century buildings.



Figure 7 Benjamin Walmsley's former premises in London Road, London. Although now known as Nos 218-223, rondels at each end of the first floor level still indicate the original numbering of 126 to 128. Photograph: Simon Reeves, 2008.

While much detail of Benjamin Walmsley's life has been brought to light, it remains unclear how one of his iron houses found its way to Royal Park in Melbourne. Research to date has failed to identify the original locations of La Trobe's 36 prefabricated dwellings. When they arrived in Melbourne in 1854, ten were sent to the Police Depot at Richmond, two more to William Street for the Colonial Surgeon and the Registrar General, and an unspecified number of others for use by the Steam Navigation Board – location unknown. Those at the Richmond Police Depot, which stood on the south-western corner of Punt Road and Victoria Parade, are the most well-documented, with a fragile sheet of drawings and a typewritten specification that miraculously survive in police archives held by the Public Record Office. This rare drawing depicts a small four-roomed iron cottage that is absolutely identical to the one now standing at the edge of Royal Park.

What is still unclear, though, is whether the Walmsley House was actually relocated to its present site from Richmond. The fate of the iron houses at the police barracks is largely undocumented, although a few remained there when the barracks was sold for subdivision in 1881, as a newspaper advert at that

time specifically listed three iron houses "by Walmsley of London" amongst the items for sale.⁴⁵ One was evidently sold prior to the auction, as it was not mentioned when an updated advert was re-published two weeks later. Although the auction itself was later reported in the local press, the purchasers of the two remaining Walmsley houses were never identified.⁴⁶ It has been suggested that an iron house from the Richmond barracks found its way to a rural sheep station at Inverleigh, near Geelong, where it remains to this day – although this now semi-ruinous structure bears the nameplate of original contractor, Walker of Millwall, rather than that of Walmsley of Southwark. By odd contrast, a prefabricated iron building of rather more elongated form – yet still bearing Walmsley's distinctive nameplate – survives today in the nursery complex at the Royal Botanical Gardens. Although Dr Lewis once surmised that it might also have been relocated there from the Richmond depot, he has since proposed that it was probably originally part of the Immigration Depot that once stood nearby in what is now the Alexandra Gardens.⁴⁷

Although the original location of the Walmsley House at Royal Park cannot be confirmed with any certainty, it clearly arrived there between 1855 (when surveyor Kearney prepared his detailed map of the inner suburbs, on which the house does not appear) and early 1862 (when the house is first referred to in official documents). A search of the Victorian Government Gazette for the interim period, however, has failed to locate any tender notice relating to either the construction of the house or its relocation from elsewhere. Ironically, the gazette contains references to many other government buildings built in Royal Park during that time – a police barrack (1855), buildings at the Model Farm (1858), a powder magazine (1860), camel sheds associated with the Burke & Wills expedition (1860), and a keeper's quarters (1861) and sentry platform (1862) at the powder magazine. Confusingly, the police barrack is known to have been a prefabricated iron building of standard government type – although this was located elsewhere, on the corner of Royal Parade and Park Street, and was recorded as being demolished in 1889. Adding to the confusion, a third prefabricated iron building appeared in the park in 1868 in the form of a 'temporary' guard house erected alongside the powder magazine keeper's house. Again, this was not located anywhere near the present-day Walmsley House, and, in any case, was razed in 1930.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the existence of three different prefabricated iron houses in Royal Park has led to some confusion regarding the original function of the sole survivor at the park's south-eastern edge. Writing of the building in 1923, an *Argus* journalist stated that 'when Royal Park was bushland, the Lodge was utilised as barracks for mounted troopers in charge of gold exports'.⁴⁹ Some years later, local historian W A Sanderson asserted that the building was originally a 'soldier's depot'.⁵⁰ More recently, it has been claimed that the building was a police lock-up.⁵¹ While it is certainly possible that a prefabricated iron building of this type may well have served any or all of those official purposes, none of the authors cited any documentary evidence to support their respective claims, and none has come to light since. The only clue to the building's original function is provided by the aforementioned reference from 1862, which represents the earliest documentary record of the Walmsley House. This was uncovered in the minute books of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria, a body founded in 1857 for the preservation and exhibition of exotic animals – the antecedent of the modern zoological gardens. This society had established a small menagerie near the Yarra River at Richmond, which, in early 1862, was relocated to the under-utilised government reserve at Royal Park. The society hoped to take over most of the existing buildings in the reserve, including the police barracks (which had been vacated that same year), the powder magazine and camel sheds. At the inaugural meeting of the Royal Park Trustees on 28 March 1862, it was resolved

That the small iron cottage at the NE entrance to the Royal Park may be rendered available for one of the keepers of the zoological gardens.

That the Crown Lands Department may be requested to permit the Superintendent of the Zoological Gardens to occupy the iron cottage at the SE entrance on or before June 1st next.⁵²

Clearly, these two statements refer respectively to the former police barracks, and the building now known as the Walmsley House. As it turned out, the scheme to adapt the latter as the superintendent's residence was abandoned when it was resolved instead to erect a new purpose-built dwelling closer to the zoological gardens.

There was no further mention of the south-eastern cottage until September 1862, when the minutes recorded that 'the Lodge at the

Park had been vacated by Mr Scott, and the Superintendent had, as a temporary measure, placed the carter Francis Meaker in it'.⁵³ Unfortunately, the identity of Mr Scott – the only clue to the original purpose of erecting this prefabricated iron house at Royal Park – has not been established. The fact that he is not recorded in either rate books or directories might indicate that he was a public servant temporarily accommodated in the house. He is perhaps the same R D Scott who, as per the *Victorian Government Gazette*, was appointed by the Crown Lands & Survey Department as an "Appraiser of Crown Lands" in November 1860.⁵⁴ While little is known of the responsibilities of this position, and whether one was required to live in Royal Park, the common link with the Crown Lands Department (which maintained the park until 1862) makes the evidence compelling.

Fortunately, the identity of "Mr Meaker" – who succeeded Scott as tenant of the Walmsley House in September 1862 – is much clearer. Francis Meaker (1837-1910) and his wife Jane (1839-1900) had arrived in Melbourne in July 1859, the former gaining employ at the then recently-established Model Farm in the grounds of Royal Park. The farm's closure in 1862 (following a parliamentary inquiry) coincided with the establishment of the Acclimatisation Society, and Meaker simply transferred to the latter's payroll. He was first recorded in the minute books in August 1862, named as one of three men 'employed at the park'.⁵⁵ Another early source identifies the other two as brothers Andrew and David Wilkie who, with Meaker, were the three original members of staff at the new Zoological Gardens under its founding director, Albert Le Souef.⁵⁶

In 1870, Meaker was appointed Ranger of Royal Park – a title created in August 1862 to empower an existing park employee 'to prosecute any person infringing on the rules established by the Trustees of the Park'.⁵⁷ This more or less honorary position, which carried no further remuneration, was originally held by the first Superintendent of the Zoological Gardens, W Smith, and subsequently by George Sprigg and Eugene Lissignol, both one-time secretaries to the Acclimatisation Society. In June 1870 the minute books recorded:

I am desired to recommend to you the appointment of Francis Meaker as Crown Land Ranger of the Park, since Lissignol has left the colony. The object of the desired appointment being merely to invest one of the

employees with the authority to uphold the rules and regulations; no salary or emolument will be attached.⁵⁸

In 1872, Meaker's title was changed from Park Ranger to Crown Lands Bailiff, but little else is known of his role.⁵⁹ One recollection described him as 'a well-known figure in the Park during his long term of office, especially when riding his horse; and many a boy has found it prudent to keep out of his way to save the confiscation of a shanghai'.⁶⁰ Another source records that he befriended the park's native inhabitants, who camped and held corroborees there at that time.⁶¹ Some of these were reputedly entertained in Meaker's iron cottage, which, in the words of still another early observer, 'became famed for its hospitality to tribes of black-fellows who were camped on what is now Royal Park'.⁶²

More is known of Meaker's professional activities in connection with the Zoological Garden. One source alludes to his skill as a horseman, relating how he assisted in the breaking in of a hybrid donkey-zebra that proved a little unruly:

A celebrated horse-breaker, who boasted that he could tame anything on four legs, undertook for the love of the thing to break the gentleman in to harness. He brought enough gearing with him to break in an elephant. Mr Meaker knew as much as anyone about breaking in horses, and he was quite sure the man had undertaken to perform the impossible, but he was willing to render any necessary assistance in the venture, and was most curious to discover the outcome of it.⁶³

After three days, both men conceded defeat, and the hybrid – whose more docile half-brother took children on donkey rides around the zoo grounds – was 'given up as a useless burden on the payroll'. The same could never be said of Meaker himself, who, in 1895, was presented with the annual Silver Medal of the Acclimatisation Society as a tribute to someone who, as Alfred Le Souef himself stated, had been 'in every way a reliable and trustworthy man' for more than thirty years.⁶⁴

Meaker's modest four-roomed iron cottage evidently underwent little change. In 1871, minute books record that both cottages on the park's eastern boundary 'should be provided with raised wooden roofs, to protect the inmates against the intolerable heat generated during the Summer months'.⁶⁵ A subsequent annual review of works reveals that these renovations simply involved re-cladding the corrugated iron roofs with timber palings.⁶⁶ Both lodges were

repainted in 1872 and subject to unspecified flooring repairs in 1874.⁶⁷ A year later, Meaker's property was further improved by the erection of a new fence.⁶⁸ It would appear that no further works were undertaken for some years, as it was minuted in 1883 that 'the lodge has become so dilapidated that it was almost uninhabitable – all the floors were perfectly rotten'.⁶⁹ The MMBW plan for the property, prepared in the late 1890s, reveals the extent of changes made by that time. A small addition had been erected to the rear of the cottage, and there were also two outbuildings that opened off an enclosed yard.

Even when thus extended by a rear addition and outbuildings, it is difficult to envisage how Meaker's iron cottage accommodated a family that included his wife and no fewer than twelve children (of which half reached adulthood) born there between 1860 and 1885. While the official history of Melbourne Zoo states only that 'the Meaker family undertook various tasks at the zoo', this belies the extent of their involvement over many decades.⁷⁰ Minute books show that Mrs Jane Meaker assisted in the rearing of animals as early as 1871, when her efforts at helping to rear fifty 'strong healthy birds, principally Silver Pheasants' were praised by the Acclimatisation Society.

The rearing of these birds in confinement requires the most unremitting attention and much of our success is due to Mrs Meaker, the wife of the keeper, who looked after them most carefully until they gained a little strength. I would suggest a small gratuity to her would be very well expended as it would make her take an increased interest next season, and indeed she deserves some recognition for the care and trouble which she has taken.⁷¹

The animal-rearing efforts of Frank Meaker and his eldest son, Charles, were also recalled in a brief article about the cottage published in the *Argus* in 1923.

Both men made the rearing of young lions their hobby. The animals, which were born at the Zoo, were taken to the Lodge, where they roamed around the rooms and yards. Mr [Charles] Meaker relates the story of a young lion which had been reared by a woman member of the household, and later sold to a travelling circus. After three years the circus revisited Melbourne and the young woman startled the crowd of spectators by fondling her old pet, which had instantly



recognised her.⁷²

Figure 8 The Walmsley House as it appears after its recent restoration by the Melbourne City Council, showing its two most intact original elevations. Photograph: Simon Reeves, 2008

While this story has yet to be verified in any primary sources, a curiously similar account is contained within the book *Almost Human*, based on the recollections of early zoo employee Andrew Wilkie:

A fine young lioness was born at the Gardens one day and one of the keepers, an old bachelor who had quarters in the grounds, decided to try the experiment of rearing if on a bottle like a human being.

At night, she took up a position at the foot of her friend's bed and if anyone ever passed along the gravel path outside there was an ominous growl from a tireless watcher within. It would have been sudden death for anyone, friend or foe, to have attempted to enter that house during the hours of darkness, for the creature would have sprung first and listened to explanations later.⁷³

Charles Meaker's own association with the zoo dates back to 1881, when, at the age of eighteen, he was employed to sell tickets.⁷⁴ Two years later, minute books record that one of Meaker's sons – probably Charles' younger brother, Edward – had been appointed to tend the zoo's new elephant, then only recently arrived from Siam.

During the 1890s, Meaker's family began to diminish with the successive marriages of his three surviving daughters and the death of his own wife in 1900. Frank remained living in the iron cottage with his three sons until 1905, when he retired and moved elsewhere, leaving his eldest son Charles to succeed him in the position of Crown Lands Bailiff. The younger Meaker married that same year, and he and his wife Alice (1876-1939) resided in the Walmsley House for another three decades. His professional status changed in early 1934 when the management of Royal Park was transferred

from the Department of Lands & Survey to the Melbourne City Council. The new position of 'District Foreman' was created to administer the park, with one Evan Smith as its first incumbent. Council minute books record that the services of Charles Meaker were briefly retained 'to enable him to collaborate with Weston regarding the details necessary for the working of the park'.⁷⁶ The question of Meaker leaving the old iron house was, as noted in the minutes, left in the hands of the park's curator. Charles and Alice finally vacated the property in mid-1934, thereby ending his family's remarkable seven decade tenancy in the iron cottage. The couple moved to Essendon, where Charles died a year later.

The departure of Charles Meaker and other resident staff rendered their respective dwellings surplus to council requirements. It was initially suggested that 'these cottages be offered to Council's employees in the park at a small rental in return for necessary duties to be performed after working hours'.⁷⁷ Of the five staff houses that remained within the park's boundaries, four were described as habitable and, of those, only three were sewered. Towards the end of 1934, the iron cottage formerly occupied by the Meakers was inspected by council's Building Surveyor, who noted that

The Foreman's Cottage [sic] at the corner of Gatehouse Street and The Avenue, Royal Park, is a very old structure, the walls and floors being out of plumb and alignment, and the question of rebuilding throughout should be considered.⁷⁸

However, it was deemed that 'rebuilding throughout' would not be a satisfactory solution, and that a purpose-built residence should be provided for the new District Foreman. Plans for this new dwelling, in the currently fashionable Tudor Revival style, were completed in 1935. Although two of the old staff houses in the park were demolished that same year, the old iron cottage was miraculously retained and the new District Foreman's house simply erected alongside. The cottage, now slated for adaptation as a council depot for the City Engineer's Department, was gutted of flooring and internal walls, with one entire external wall removed to permit the storage of vehicles and equipment. Seven decades later – by which time its cultural significance had been firmly acknowledged – this humble house has been subject to refurbishment as a new amenities block of Royal Park staff. With its original metalwork and windows restored,

and a new side wall added in a sympathetic style, the house now stands at this prominent corner of Royal Park as a unique reminder not only of the complex history of the park itself, but of government occupation in early Melbourne and the administration of Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe.

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