Sex, Money, Art and Death: A Biography of my Grandparents, Edith Birks and Basil Burdett with a Family History of the Birks - Napier - McDougall Dynasty.

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Vol1 Main Work and Vol 2 Exegesis

Vol 1 Main Work – The biography - Table of Contents

Vol 2 Exegesis - Table of Contents

Abstract

The thesis is in the form of a creative non-fiction book with exegesis. The main work is a combined biography and social and intellectual history. I trace the lives and family backgrounds of my grandparents Edith Birks and Basil Burdett who were both avantgarde writers, artists and cultural activists for Modernism in Australia in the 1920s and 30s. Using hybrid methodologies of Social History, the History of Emotions and Genealogy, I trace their family backgrounds in order to understand the provenance of the Modernist, liberal, feminist ideology they both championed.

I describe Basil Burdett's relationship with the Modernists and intellectuals gathered around the journal Art in Australia and I examine in detail Edith Birks' family, a network of intensely engaged religious and political activists including Northern English landed gentry, Manchester industrialists, London Methodist intellectuals, Women's suffragists and Utopian Christian Communists.

The work contributes to knowledge of the intimate cultures of the politically and culturally activist groups and classes in the British imperial dominions in the period immediately preceding and after the First world war, and to an understanding of how the processes of economic transformation, class formation, migration, and imperial expansion operated at the local level of emotions, intimacy and filial relations.

The Exegesis describes the motivation, sources, methodologies and scholarly literature used in the research programme and a summary of its contribution to scholarship.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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Signed: Michael Heim, 20 February 2023.

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Sex, Money, Art and Death

A Biography of my Grandparents, Edith Birks and Basil Burdett

with a Family History of the

Birks - Napier - McDougall Dynasty

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm

William Cowper (1731 -1800).
From the poem *Light shining out of the darkness,* written in 1773
following his attempted suicide by drowning.

The Biography

Introduction

Edith Birks was an intellectual, a feminist, an organiser, an advocate of the avant-garde, and an artist and adventurer. Born on the 9th of June 1900, she was the granddaughter of Charles Birks, founder of the fashionable Adelaide department store Charles Birks and Co., and step granddaughter of Rose Birks, the suffragette and Christian social purity advocate who was instrumental in making South Australia the first place in the world where women could both vote and stand for election to Parliament.

Basil Burdett was a gay, illegitimate, working-class boy from Enoggera on the outskirts of Brisbane. In the nineteen twenties and thirties, through a process of rigorous self-creation and strategic relationship-building, he was able to construct a place for himself in the highest echelons of the Australian social and cultural hierarchy, as a writer and art critic championing Australian and European Modernism, and as the close friend and art advisor to the proprietor of the Melbourne newspaper *The Herald*, Keith Murdoch. He was a personal friend and champion of significant Australian artists including Lloyd Rees, Blamire Young, Elioth Gruner, Margaret Preston, Danila Vassilieff, Thea Proctor, Horace Trennery and many others.

In 1925, Burdett and Birks married, only to almost immediately divorce in 1929, when Birks reconnected with her childhood sweetheart, Tommy Cutlack, a cousin and an eccentric roustabout from the Riverland fruit-blocks. The divorce was forbidden by Birks' father on threat of disinheritance. Birks chose love over money and this decision precipitated a chain of tragic and catastrophic consequences, ending in death, madness, social isolation and the destruction of a widespread and powerful family and commercial network that had been 200 years in the making.

This biography is about the relationship between the macrocosm of the social world – approached through analytical categories like class, gender and ideology - and the microcosm of the private world of domestic relationships and emotions, approached through evidence of the protagonists' experience of family, religion and sex. It is about emotions, and the

ideological value systems that occasion them; about the experience of gender and sexuality, and the systems of ideas and language and institutions in which they are enacted; about class as a construction and class as a livelihood.[1]

There was a time when it would have been incumbent upon me as a historian to do everything I could to erase all trace of my personal involvement in the history, in the interests of critical distance and empirical validity. These imperatives remain, but any such attempt is not going to succeed. It is not possible to erase personal interests from scientific investigations. The best that can be done is to identify them, to acknowledge them and manage them. In fact, in the discipline of history, the personal engagement of the historian is a legitimate aspect, even an indispensable aspect of the investigation of the history itself.[2]

I grew up with a very particular family background and a very particular ideological system to go with it. On the most broad-brushed level, I grew up with the ideology of a liberal Modernist feminist egalitarian middle class.[3] We were anti-colonial, anti-racist, class conscious (to a certain degree), sexual liberationists, rationalists, pacifists, environmentalists, agnostic in religious temper, believers in arts and literature, and most fervent advocates of the power of education to change the world for the better.

The ideological sensitivities of my generation were sharpened by the experience of watching the Vietnam War unfold on our TV screens every night. That experience was governed, for men of my age, by the very real possibility that we might be drafted and have to either go there and participate in that psychotic blood-ritual or go on the run. I have a photograph of my cousin at the age of 19 in 1967, full battle gear on, straps of gleaming bullets

[1] Gerder Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
[2] Gerder Lerner. *Fireweed: A Political Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Jaume Aurell and Rocio G. Davis, "History and autobiography: The logics of convergence". *Life writing* Vol 16 No. 4, (2019).
[3] I derived the phrase reading Barbara Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury: A Biography of the Strachey family* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2005). I might be Dr Caines phrase, but I can't find it in the work.

draped over his little shoulders and a gigantic canon in his arms, and a stupid teenage smile on his face, in Vietnam.

The other sobering factor was the ever present and ever-increasing possibility of an all-out nuclear war. These material realities concentrated the mind in particular ways. We lived an everyday bodily insecurity. But in some ways what was more disconcerting was the ideological discourse that justified these atrocities. The most sordid, vicious, brutal expressions of "man's inhumanity to man" were justified as functions of the purest and highest social ideals, the ideals of democracy, of the family and of sacral duties derived from religious traditions. The incongruity of this juxtaposition of banal savagery with the tender expressions of the best of human sentiments and the most noble of human ambitions was not lost on us. The concept of contradiction was not a playful intellectual abstraction, but a constant lived experience. These were general aspects of political and intellectual life for my generation.

There were other incongruities specific to my situation that infuse my motivations for understanding history and for undertaking this particular study.

I live in and grew up in a colonial settler society.[4] This society has spent so much energy attempting to erase and ignore all trace of the Indigenous inhabitation of the landscape it now occupies, that it is now thoroughly scarred and distorted by those attempts. The ideals of Christian ethical communitarianism, of enlightenment rational democracy that the settlers of South Australia drew upon for their ethics and justification, are, in the physical reality of South Australia, built upon a foundation of land appropriation and expulsion of the pre-existing population. The profound and admirable scientific curiosity of the Enlightenment was enacted

[4] I mean by this term a type of colonial practice in which the indigenous population is completely displaced by a settler community and all aspects of the indigenous culture and law are erased. This is distinct from situations in which the colonial power either installs a small governing group from the colonial homeland to manage the indigenous population or co-opts sectors of the indigenous population as a comprador class to manage the colonial interests. See Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington. *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, Identity and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Donald Denoon. "Understanding settler societies". *Historical Studies* 18: (1979) 511-527.; Lorezno Verancini, *Settler colonialism: A theoretical overview* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010)

in a performance of wilful ignorance of the material and social realities of the inhabited landscape.

The fact that Australia was in fact a fully functioning and complex civilisation of immense antiquity, far exceeding that of the intellectual and cultural antecedents of the English in Greece, Egypt and Mesopotamia, was completely lost on the colonists. Let me immediately contradict that notion. It was not lost on them. That is a myth that has been developed late in the piece to cloud the fact that the settlers were happy to erase anything that would compromise their self-asserted ethical purity, or that might constrain them as they enacted a demographic and cultural genocide upon the fully functioning society they confronted. They saw the stone-built villages, they saw the fish traps, they saw the "wide pathways showing dense populations".[5] They confronted, and immediately ignored, the highly sophisticated management systems of material culture, codified in cultural symbol systems and material relations as complex and self-referential as any other, including industrial capitalism. It is a foundational irony of the place that the settlers valued most highly the ordered structures of a political economy; systems of ownership, obligation, mutuality, authority, religion, natural philosophy, law ethics and justice, history and ideology and hierarchy, but they were unable and unwilling to recognise these qualities in the society they were overwhelming. They would not see it as a contemporary society that had of necessity been subject to material forces of social evolution as stringent and effective as any other contemporary society.

This central contradiction marks a profound and uncomfortable discontinuity within the ideology of Australian, and South Australian identity.[6] The problem of trying to resolve those contradictions and construct a coherent national identity has been one of the main jobs of the

[5] Graham Jenkin, *Conquest of the Ngarrindjeri* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1979); Charles Sturt, *Two Expeditions into the Interior of Southern Australia, During the Years 1828, 1829, 1830, and 1831: with Observations on the Soil, Climate and General Resources of the Colony of New South Wales* (London: Smith Elder, 1834)

[6] An extremely interesting and fruitful interpretation of this conundrum has been developed by Jane Lydon in her discussion of the relationship between Wakefield's systematic colonisation theories and the abolition of slavery. Jane Lydon, "'Mr Wakefield's speaking trumpets': Abolishing slavery and colonising systematically". *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History.*Vol. 50 No. 1, (2022)

local intelligentsia. The specific relevance of this for my thesis is this: Much of that process was specifically and consciously undertaken by a collection of mercantile bourgeoise retailers - drapers, grocers and haberdashers; and an associated group of intellectuals and artisans - printers, writers, journalists and artists; and it is they who are the protagonists of this story, exactly such people as Edith Birks, Basil Burdett, Napier Kyffin Birks and Keith Murdoch.

A second major incongruity shaped my historical consciousness. I grew up in a society in which the highest ideals of masculinity were expressed on the football field; that is, in ritualised collective male violence. Brutality was celebrated at every level, in a continuum that stretched and still stretches, from the school yard to the battlefield. [7]

But I grew up in a family dominated by women. And not just any women; transgressive, physically powerful, competent women who consciously and unconsciously sought to reject many of the performative rituals of femininity. They dressed in slacks and shirts of a military cut, in colours of beige and fawn (not even black), flat shoes suitable for the garden or the workshop. They wore no makeup, no jewellery, except sometimes my grandmother wore a flat, square gold trimmed mother of pearl brooch. Her favourite soap was Pear's translucent that came in clear brown oval blocks covered on plain brown paper and smelling of mild antiseptic. She drove an old red Ford utility truck, that she maintained herself. She played billiards and drank good whiskey in large quantities.

It turns out that this is not simply a contingent personal phenomenon, though it is that in part. It is also part of a broader social phenomenon, of middle-class women adventurers probing the borderlands of masculinity and femininity through the nineteenth century, but in particular in the early decades of the twentieth century as my grandmother came of age. Aloha

[7] Lois Bryson, ""Sport and the maintenance of masculine hegemony". *Women's Studies International Forum.* Volume 10, Issue 4,(1987) 349-360; Deborah Agnew and Murray Drummond, "Australian football, masculinity, and the acceptance of pain and injury as a career norm". *International Journal of Sport and Society.* 6 (1) (December 2015); Burgess, I., Edwards, A. and Skinner J. "Football Culture in an Australian School Setting: The Construction of Masculine Identity". *Sport, Education and Society.* 8(2) (October 2003)

Wanderwell, explorer, filmmaker and aviatrix; Elli Beinhorn, Raymonde de la Roche and Harriet Quimby, flyers; Clarinore Stinnes, car racer and adventurer; these women were celebrities as my grandmother Edith Birks grew up. They represent a certain stream of feminism which tried to challenge sex-based stereotypes in terms of who could perform roles rather than interrogating the structure and function of the roles themselves. The "masculine", as a performance, was identified as a source of power. The path to liberation for such women was to usurp the various codes of costume and behaviour that comprised that performance for themselves. The masculine ideals of technological competence, physical strength, adventurous, innovative and entrepreneurial spirit, and social leadership were accepted by women like Edith Birks. Their revolutionary ambition was to disentangle those performances from their connection to biological sex. Women would achieve personal and social power by emulating the personal and socially powerful performance modes of men.[8]

This contrasts with a type of feminism that was practised by Edith's grandmother, the suffragist Rose Birks. That framework drew on an essentialist ethical notion of "womanhood", in which women were naturally pure, spiritual, nurturing, steadfast. The notion of ethical purity populates two ideologies that seem to be on the surface in contradiction to one another, and which are both salient in the immediate ideological background of Edith Birks' family. On the one hand, the ideology of the Calvinist English dissenting religions (Methodist, Congregationalist and Baptist) which dominated the religious affiliations, and incidentally the commercial affiliations, of the families of this study, the Birks, Napier, McDougall, Armstrong and Thomas families. Secondly the strange melange of utopian socialism and virulent racialist nationalism propagated by the late-nineteenth-century utopian socialist William Lane and adopted with immense and tragic enthusiasm by Edith Birks' great uncle George Birks and his wife Helen Thomas.

[8] Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (New York: Berg. 1988)

When I began investigating the history of this family of transgressors, feminists, Utopians, socialists, arts and crafts idealists, I assumed that I would find a history of … well just that. I expected to trace a continuum, step by step, back in time one generation inheriting the social values of the preceding, perhaps Fabian socialists, rationalist journalists and artists, perhaps back to the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, the traditions of Mary Wollstonecraft, the romantic wilderness poets, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. I expected to be able to trace a rational unfolding of historical dynamics, of which I and my modernist, socialist, liberationist allies were the just and proud inheritors.

Instead, I discovered something rather different: Religious evangelicals, sexual puritans, cotton tyrants, alcoholics and bankrupts and embezzlers, grifters and charlatans, vicious white supremacists, proto-fascists ... you can imagine my surprise! And yet! … Once I got over the shock, I began to realise that these traditions were entirely congruent. The evangelical tradition WAS imbued with a powerful rationalist strain. A Christian egalitarian utopian idealism WAS a critical and integral part of the British imperial project and its intrinsic racism. The women's suffrage movement WAS driven (in large part) by partisans of a savagely patriarchal monotheism. The consanguinity of such Christian utopian idealism as that of George Birks and Helen Thomas with a completely sordid brand of violently anti-Chinese white supremacy such as William Lanes is NOT a fundamental contradiction; they are both utopian, essentialist, ethical ideologies, both founded in Romanticism. These all seem like contradictions, and they are. But a contradiction is not an impossibility. Instead, in biographical trajectories, and in social histories, it seems to be an inevitability. The material and lived consequences of those contradictions for the protagonists, my grandparents Edith Birks and Basil Burdett, their families and their associates, are the subject of this biography.

Part 1. Identity, class and self-creation.

Edith Birks, Basil Burdett and Tom Cutlack

Chapter 1. Edith Birks

Edith Birks "singing to herself" 1901
Inscribed by her mother Lucy McDougall

Edith in about 1916

Edith on her motorbike, a James 6hp

Edith in formal mode about 1925

Edith Birks was socially rebellious, physically strong, competent with machines, a good cook and a good gardener. She liked to create a sensation; as a teenager she smoked a pipe and rode a motorbike to school. She was a naturally committed feminist with an opinion, received from her family's religious ideology and reinforced by her personal experience, that men were intrinsically weak, that a woman must be self-reliant, if not dominant. The early photographs of Edith show her filled with joie de vivre. There is a wonderful photograph of her at the age of about sixteen standing in a garden with her hands clasped casually in front of her, laughing uproariously.

Edith was extremely short sighted, but for some reason this wasn't discovered until she was in her teens, in a drawing class, where she had to sit very close to the model and the teacher thought it odd and asked her why. She said she thought everyone saw like that and was startled and a little disconcerted to finally see the world through glasses.[9]

The first public mention of her is at the age of five in a newspaper article about the prizegiving night at her school, where she was awarded a prize for drawing. The Dryburgh House School was progressive with a particular emphasis on the education of women to realise their full potential. It was run originally by a Reverend William Harcus and Mrs Harcus, and then by their daughter Mrs Kelsey in a house that now forms part of St Peter's College in Adelaide.[10]

The governing philosophy for the school was "Froebelism", the philosophy behind the Kindergarten Movement. Friedrich Froebel was a radical education theorist of the mid-nineteenth century.[11] His pedagogy was directed to developing children's self-awareness and social skills through play, learning by doing and by recognising the strong link between the intellect and creativity. He strongly encouraged women to become educators because of their

[9] Story told to the author as a child by Edith Birks
[10] Elizabeth Warburton, *St Peters: A Suburban Town* (Adelaide: Corporation of St Peters, 1983)

experience in nurturing children in the domestic setting. He established his first school or "child's garden", The Play and Activity Institute, in Thuringia in 1837, with a programme based around artistic and social activities such as singing, storytelling, clay modelling, paper cutting and weaving. His mystical idealist philosophy was in direct opposition to prevailing notions of education, especially in militarised states like Prussia, where education was a matter of imposing harsh discipline to instil obedience and time management in workers. In 1851, Kindergartens were banned in Prussia on the grounds that they were being used to spread socialism and atheism. However, German immigrant women re-established the movement in the United States and Britain. Mrs Kelsey's Principal's Report of 1905 expresses the aims with some elegance:

> The children are taught to see with intelligent and observant eyes by means of observation lessons, nature lessons, picture lessons and games which require them to notice the facts of ordinary life. They are taught to do by means of the Kindergarten "gifts", clay modelling, paper weaving, free-arm drawing and brushwork. They are taught to feel by means of stories based on truth. They are taught to know by means of conversational lessons on insects, animals, trees, flowers, clouds, rain, the seasons …[12]

Froebel strongly influenced both Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf education movement.

As it turns out, there was also a family network connection to the school. Mrs Kelsey, Eliza Oliver Harcus, the principal and daughter of the founder Eliza Harcus nee Oliver, was a great friend of Maisie Archer Smith, and accompanied her on the voyage from England to South Australia aboard the Arcadia in 1898. Maisie then married Evan Kyffin Thomas, the

[12] "Dryburgh House School,"*Chronicle*, December 23, 1905, 41

brother of Edith Birks' grandmothers, Mary Maria Thomas and Rosie Thomas.[13] That network of friends, family and associates included Lucy Morice, niece of Catherine Helen Spence and founder of the Kindergarten movement in South Australia in 1909, and of the School for Mothers. The latter became the Mothers' and Babies' Health Association of which Edith's mother Lucy Birks was President from the 1920s through to the 1940s.

On reading Maisie Thomas' diaries it would be hard to ascribe to her anything approaching a radical social or political consciousness. Her interests are in family relationships, identifying and conforming to codes of behaviour, fashion and food, and the experience of religion, all of which she approaches with considerable gusto and insight. But she was in no sense a passive recipient of that culture. However, she did actively claim for herself those experiences, even as she exhibited a moral conservatism and severe consciousness of social status. She also claimed for herself a level of emotional and sexual autonomy that relied on the radical impulses of her class. Her sexual autonomy extended to her involvement as a respondent in a divorce case, though she was shielded from scandal by reference to her as "Mrs X".[14] Many of the ideological bonds that infuse this story are cemented by family relationships and network connections. For all its contradictions, the social class into which Edith was born had an outward-looking, experimental and progressive cast of mind.

Edith Birks grew up in a household buffeted by intense and contradictory emotional and ideological influences. Her parents were at best in state of armed truce, and of deeply conflicting characters and proclivities. Her father, Napier Birks was an impatient and demanding patriarch, contemptuous of weakness or of any opposition, deeply embedded in a masculinised world view, familiar with the machinery of power within a profoundly patriarchal society. On the other hand, the household in which Napier himself grew up was radically

[13] Edith's grandfather Charles Birks married first Mary Maria Thomas and then after her early death, her sister Rosetta Jane "Rose" Thomas. I will generally refer to Rose as Edith's grandmother in order to avoid the clumsy term "step grandmother".
[14] Joan Willington, *Maisie, her life, her loves, her letters* (Kent Town, SA.: Wakefield Press, 1994)

feminised, and highly politicised, with numerous strong, opinionated, activist women like Rose Birks, Helen Birks, and Jemima Crooks constantly present, arguing and organising around the dinner table. The whole family, Napier's father Charles Birks and his brothers, his step-mother Rose and her sisters, were all driven by a passionate religiosity in which one's personal behaviour and inner thoughts were subject to relentless Calvinist surveillance, both in terms of the cosmology of Heaven and Hell in which they were participants, (indeed active agents for one or the other side in the cosmic drama) and in terms of the moral surveillance of their peers. Charles was a Deacon in the Baptist Church which required that he be "sound in faith and life … unwavering in his commitment to the true gospel … in a clear conscience" , not "double tongued", not "greedy for gain", "blameless", with a "godly wife", a "spiritual leader of his wife and children".[15] This is the paternal grand-father's house – religious, political, moral, millenarian.

A hearty and strict religiosity also percolated from the family of Edith's mother, Lucy McDougall. Her father John McDougall, in his capacity as a member, and later Chairman, of the London County Council, carried on a protracted campaign to suppress "vice" in London of the 1890s. The practical measures of this campaign involved the closing down of several London music halls, for which he became deeply unpopular with working-class Londoners, a group of whom at one stage attacked his house and tore the gates from their hinges.[16] McDougall's first wife, Lucy's mother Lucy Armstrong, was also a religious enthusiast. They had met while teaching in the Methodists "Ragged Schools". Her uncle John Napier was known as the "father of Methodism in Manchester" for his religious philanthropy. McDougall's second wife, Ellen Lidgett, was likewise a committed evangelist and an activist for the Christian Social Purity movement. Lucy McDougall, Edith's mother, was never a public figure in the way of

[15] Benjamin Merkle, "The authority of deacons in Pauline Churches". *Journal of the evangelical theological society.* Vol 64. No. 2 (2021) 309-325.

[16] And equally unpopular with a young Winston Churchill who led a gang of young aristocrats in an attack with their umbrellas on the awnings McDougall and his group had put up at the Empire Theatre to hide the prostitutes form the public gaze. J. Donohue, *Fantasies of Empire: The Empire Theatre of Varieties and the licensing controversy of 1894* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005).

her father and stepmother. She was more self-effacing, preferred to divert attention from herself toward her good works.[17] This does not imply that she was not a fierce advocate and defender of her own or her children's interests.

The Birks children grew up in an atmosphere of conjugal tension, and continual power gambits between her parents. Edith formed her most powerful relations with her father, with whom she shared an appetite for business and for risk and sensation seeking. Her two brothers more closely attached to their mother. She was a nurturing and protective refuge from a man who could at least be unforgiving, and by some accounts genuinely brutal.

At the same time, all of the children participated in a highly masculinised culture of adventure and physical bravery. All three were adepts of the novel technologies of cars and machines. Norman became a decorated flying ace. Leslie participated in two long hazardous car journeys through the outback, studied automotive engineering at Adelaide University and also began to learn to fly. Edith knew cars, liked speed and was confident to hitch a ride on the mail plane to Sydney. Her chosen sport at Girton House school, when she was in her teens, was rowing.

Femininity and masculinity were highly contested fields within the family culture. For Napier and Lucy Birks and their children, however, that contest did not find any emotional or political resolution. In fact every step seems to have been dogged by bad luck, and by the weight of social and personal contradictions.

Edith's initial response to the limitations placed on her behaviour was a common one on the part of middle-class women in Europe, America and Australia. In facing the contradictions and constraints of configurations of patriarchal power, they identified the attributes of traditional femininity as a core determinant of their subjugation. Where the Christian evangelists of her grandparents generation had seen femininity as embodying an essence of a certain type of spirituality – goodness, graciousness, purity, nurturing – in contrast,

[17] "Mothering mothers: A great work quietly done". *The Register,* February 19, 1924, 6

the developing ideologies of the modernist avant-garde, preoccupied as they were with machines, with revolutionising self-perception and psychology, indeed the very boundaries of reality, saw the opportunities for female emancipation would lie primarily in breaking down the behavioural boundaries between men and women. They understood viscerally that gendered behaviours did indeed operate according to differentials of power, and they wanted to appropriate for women the social power associated with the male behaviours of technological adeptness, physical strength, personal leadership, and bravery.

Revolutionary ideologies of gender have been a consistent theme of revolutionary periods since at least the Enlightenment. The French Revolution, the 1848 upheavals, the 1890s, the post-World War One revolutionary decades of the twenties and thirties, in all of these moments a dominant and leading role was played by revolutionary women. Of course, continual profound technological and economic change is accompanied by ideological crisis, and the primary ideologies revolve around the family, and the gender roles assigned within that domestic and industrial dispensation. Political revolution always implies a revolutionary moment in gender ideology.

Edith drove a car, and she drove fast and aggressively, acquiring several speeding fines before she was 20 years old. She frightened the pianist Wilhelm Backhaus when she drove him from Sydney to Norman Lindsay's house in the Blue Mountains. Backhaus had promised to play for Lindsay, but

> …on arrival he was too nervy after a fast car ride. Mrs Burdett (Edith Birks) drove him up and she was an excellent driver, but Backhaus hated speed. "She passed everything on the road", he said. His wife said "He'll be a wreck for days".[18]

She famously raced her father's speedboat *Lady Sid* to second place in a Brisbane boat race in 1925, bringing home a spectacular silver trophy engraved with the epithet "First Lady Driver".

[18] Rose Lindsay, *A model life* (Bungendore, NSW: Odana Editions, 2001)

That year, she hitched a ride on the mail plane to Sydney, which flipped on landing in Hay. She was quite sanguine about the experience.

> "Oh, I always do things on my own" she admitted. She knew that her family might object. "Mother is so nervous about aeroplanes". So she packed her light luggage, took a ticket by the air to Sydney, and slipped off without her parents knowing anything about it. "Oh I left a note telling my mother where I was going. She would find it when she missed me. No, my people wouldn't be worried about me. And I'm going straight into Sydney now to send them telegrams to say that I'm here. Though what I most want is lunch". [19]

Through the early 1920s, we can track Edith in the social pages – the record of the dances, theatrical shows, engagements, weddings, funerals holidays and general comings and goings of the mercantile bourgeoisie as they cemented their social network relations.

By the middle of the decade, she had become something of a public figure as an adventurous, unconventional and entrepreneurial woman. She had travelled to England immediately after the war to recruit staff for her art school from among the leaders of modernist art education.[20] She negotiated with such men as Arthur Streeton and Hans Heysen to become the advisory board of the school. She undertook dangerous adventures, and was a newsworthy participant in the social events of the cultural elite.

Somewhere in there she decided she was a radical; radical in her opinions on art, on marriage, somewhat reckless in her relation with machines and men. In 1925, she married Basil Burdett.

[19] *The Advertiser,* May 1, 1925, 14

[20] Unfortunately, despite searches in the South Australian Archives (ArchivesSA), the State Library of South Australia and the Art Gallery of South Australia, I have found no documentation around the establishment of the school. I assume that the papers were lost or deliberately destroyed at some stage of Edith's tumultuous traversing of the country.

Chapter 2. Basil Burdett

Basil Burdett's grandparents
Hannah Large and Thomas Gray

Basil's mother Lillie Jane Gray
Known as Lottie

Portrait of Basil aged 21 by Lloyd Rees

1935 portrait of Basil by Randolph Schwabe who said "it has a quality I thought I had lost"

Basils military service photo as he was about to embark for South-East Asia in 1939

Basil Burdett was born illegitimate into a churchgoing working class immigrant family in Brisbane in 1897. Through a process of active strategic self-creation he was able to achieve a position of significant cultural influence in Australia. Emerging from service as a stretcher bearer in Flanders at the age of 23, with ambitions in art and literature, he was able to cultivate a network of relations among the Modernist art intelligentsia, the group of men and women who saw themselves as activists in a process of cultural generation that looked both back to an idealised European past and forward to a regenerated version of that past in a new geographical setting. He found a niche in the group of intellectuals who gathered around the Society of Artists, and the cultural magazine *Art in Australia*, and from that position he sought to drive the adoption in Australia of the aesthetic revelations of European Modernism. In this task, he formed a personal and intellectual alliance with Keith Murdoch, the deeply Presbyterian proprietor of the *Melbourne Herald*. Murdoch had engaged since 1915 in a mission to establish a national ideology that would maintain Australia as a force within the global dispensation that followed the structural, technological and geopolitical disintegrations of the First World War. To complement that alliance, Burdett married into a wealthy, socially activist family from South Australia whose roots lay in the evangelical traditions of the Northern English mercantile classes.

As we have seen, the woman he married was an intriguing case of self-creation in her own right. Edith Napier Birks was a highly energised, innovative intellectual who, at the age of nineteen travelled to England, negotiated with the senior ranks of the arts establishment and the modernist movement, engaged their sympathy and allegiance, and returned to Adelaide to establish a School of Art in South Australia. She also saw Art through a redemptive framework, a means of re-establishing the elements of civilisation – beauty, communal aesthetic activity, regeneration – following the destructive cataclysm of the First World War. She was motivated by humanising principles of artistic practice that had been inculcated into her at an early age in the schools, chosen by her mother, that she attended. She was the inheritor of a family tradition

of social engagement and ideological activism, and the complex network of feminist and religious ideas that had motivated the suffragist movement. Three years younger than Burdett, she was reaching adulthood in the midst of the social and ideological ferment that followed the end of the war. She and Burdett formed a partnership for the purposes of furthering these transformational goals.

Until the very end of this research in 2022 we didn't know who Basil Burdett's father was. The family story is that his mother was "seduced by a bounder named Hunt, with a family in New Zealand, who then ran away to South Africa where he died from blackwater fever".[21] Richard Haese in his entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* asserts that he was the son of "William Burdett, clerk and Lillie Jane Gray".[22] This appears to be incorrect. The only William Burdetts that appear in the record at the appropriate times are ruled out by virtue of other circumstances – geography, marriage, age.

Burdett's birth was registered in South Street, Ipswich on 23 July 1897, and records him as illegitimate. It is possible that the Ipswich address was either a distant relative of the Gray family (a sister Daisy married a man named Webb in Ipswich) or a boarding house dedicated to allowing unwed mothers to bear their babies in a safe and incognito environment. His baptism, however, which took place in Sydney on the 10 September 1897, records a father as William Burdett, Surveyor. There are surveyors with the surname Burdett in the Brisbane area at the time, but a thorough search has shown that these families do not fit the story either in terms of names or dates. As there was no need for the parent to be present for the baptism, this entry was most likely simply on the say-so of the mother, Lillie. Edith and Basil's daughter Jane reports the story she learned from her own mother:

> Lily (sic) met William Hunt, a young clerk with a trading company, who had deserted a wife and children in New Zealand. They fell in love and

[21] Jane Burdett, *Recollections* (Unpublished manuscript in possession of the author)
[22] Richard Haese, "Basil Burdett". *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

> lived together as man and wife probably because Lily became pregnant. …
>
> William Hunt was sent to Africa for his company where shortly afterwards he died of black-water fever. Lily took the old family name Burdett. Lily's family did not disown her, they took her in but because of the shame she had caused them she needed punishment. She therefore became the family drudge – housekeeper they would have said. Lily's mother was a Christian and very devout.[23]

Lillie, known to the family as Lottie, was a renowned card cheat and confabulator.[24] No Burdett has been found in the Gray or Large family history (Large is Lillie's mother's maiden name). No trace has been found of a William Hunt who might have been a handsome young man at the relevant time either in Brisbane or in New Zealand.

There is one intriguing potential candidate, a William Burdett Hunt who did abandon a family in New Zealand, was sued for desertion in Brisbane in 1903,[25] and absconded to Argentina in 1909,[26] but he doesn't really fit the role of handsome young businessman. He was born in 1853, which would have made him 44 in the year of Basil Burdett's birth, and rather than being a businessman, or clerk or surveyor, he was freezer-man in a meat packing works. For the desertion, he is forced to pay maintenance to Jenny Hunt at thirty shillings a week for twelve months. He buries an infant son in 1898.[27] *Late note: Since time of writing the author has taken an Ancestry DNA test. The results are that a number of close matches all have*

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[23] Jane Burdett, *Recollections.*

[24] Reports of Lottie as a gleeful liar come from both Jane Burdett and Lottie's great niece Lynell. Lynell Gallagher, phone conversation with author, 2021.

[25] "Wife desertion", *The Telegraph,* Brisbane, January 7, 1901, 2

[26] Rebecca Hunt, email to author, 2020

[27] "Funeral Notice", *The Telegraph,* Brisbane, September 28, 1898. Is Basil's father William Burdett Hunt? William Burdett Hunt did abandon a family in New Zealand, was sued for desertion in Brisbane in 1903, and absconded to Argentina in 1909. In 1898, 27 April, Victor Bowen Hunt was born to mother Jenny Herwin and father William Burdett Hunt, but died 23 September 1899. A genealogical record shows a William Burdett Hunt born in 1853, son of William and Sophia Hunt, and husband of Jenny Herwen. They married in 1878 in New Zealand. A family researcher in New Zealand provided information about her great, great grandfather William Burdett Hunt to the effect that his children and grandchildren did not know what happened to him and her great grandmother "did not speak of the tragedy". She did nevertheless discover that he was born in 1856 at Drayton, Northamptonshire, his parents being William Hunt, son of William Hunt and Jane Newman, and Sophia, daughter of William Warmington and Mary Birdett. These two emigrated to New Zealand aboard the "Harkaway" in 1858.

William Burdett Hunt's father in their family trees. This is strong evidence that the William Burdett Hunt we have traced is indeed Basil's father.

Basil Burdett's mother, Lily Jane Gray, was the second child and eldest girl in a family of nine children who emigrated from Southampton to Brisbane aboard the *Jumna* in 1887. Her parents were Thomas Gray, a ships block maker, and Hannah Sarah Large, who at the age of 16 in 1861 was living as a servant in the house of William Henry Newman, a Southampton solicitor, and his French wife Mary, along with numerous small children. Hannah's role was under-nurse, and she took her place alongside a governess, a nurse, a cook and a housemaid. Hannah Large's mother had been born Sarah King and she had married James Kerely on April Fool's Day 1827, when she was twenty-two. In 1837, Sarah Kerely was a widow and on 13 July, she married George Large in the town of Eling, Hampshire. He was a widower and a servant, twenty years her senior, and by 1851 he was "out of employment", with a six-year-old daughter, Hannah Sarah, scholar, living in Banister St. Southampton.

Thomas and Hannah Gray married in 1866 and Lillie Jane, known as Lottie, was born on 21 June 1870. They lived in Lower Canal Walk, a working-class district in Southampton. By 1881 they had moved to Bank Cottages. It is possible she worked as a matron in an orphanage and emigrated as part of a programme of importing respectable domestic labour into Queensland.

The family emigrated in 1887. They were respectable working class, devout Anglicans and by 1900 they were affluent enough to buy land and build a house in Laurel Street Enoggera on the northern outskirts of Brisbane. They were educated, religious and imparted a sense of restrained ambition in their children. A ship's block maker is a skilled or at least semi-skilled artisan woodworker. According to Jane Burdett, the father Thomas Gray was sufficiently skilled to build the Enoggera house, "by his own hands … he was an excellent craftsman. The house was sturdy and lined with dark cedar wood". [28]

[28] Jane Burdett, *Recollections.*

Richard Haese, using information from Burdett's friend, the artist Lloyd Rees, has a slightly more malevolent take, suggesting that the house represented "Australian *petit-bourgeois* philistinism at its meanest level" with a "rigidly puritanical and narrow-minded atmosphere … where Burdett's two unmarried aunts also lived … (after leaving) it is doubtful he ever returned." [29]

Jane Burdett's recollections were not nearly so severe. She recalls that one of those aunts, Agnes, lived there with her lover Enid and her teenaged daughter, Elaine. This story is supported by Lynell Gallagher, granddaughter of Lottie's brother Arthur Gray.[30] The electoral rolls confirm that Enid lived there from at least 1936 to at least 1943, although of course the exact nature of the relationship is not specified in the official documents.[31] Jane Burdett relates that the house was always filled with people, the children and their spouses, and that although there was an undoubted sense of conventional morality, Haese's portrayal of such tensions seems overstated. The relationship between Burdett and his mother remained close and affectionate throughout, and she remained at the Enoggera house throughout her very long life, along with her sister Agnes, who remained unmarried. These two sisters share a gravestone at the Lutwyche cemetery. They died within a few years of each other, Agnes in 1960 and Lottie in 1962.

Lynell Gallagher recalls Lottie as a vibrant woman with a wicked sense of humour and a propensity to cheat at cards and tell outrageous lies. It is hard to square this with the picture of emotional and psychological constriction drawn by Rees. Upon Basil's return home from his experiences as a stretcher bearer in Flanders, with all the trauma associated, his grandfather

[29] Richard Haese, *Rebels and precursors: the revolutionary years of Australian Art* (Ringwood, Vic.: Allen Lane, 1981) 95

[30] Lynell Gallagher, telephone conversation, 2019.

[31] This was Enid May Pentreath Flett. She was born in Ireland in 1898 or 99, but by age 3 her family had moved to St Giles, Oxfordshire. Her father was Alfred Gilbert, "living on his own means", born in Ireland and aged 30 in 1901, thus born about 1870. Her mother was Mary Pentreath. Born in Stoke-Mandeville, Buckinghamshire, she was 26 in 1901, so born about 1875. Pentreath appears to be a Cornish name. In 1901 they were living at 49 Chalfont Road St Giles, Oxfordshire with two sisters in law in the household. Annie Pentreath, aged 24 and Edith Pentreath, 23. In 1921, June 18, she married Vivian Herbert Flett, and their daughter Elaine Mary (or May) Flett was born 30 September 1922. The daughter married Eric Thomas Watts on 6 February 1947 in Brisbane and she died 31 January 1998 at Nambour. Enid died in Bundaberg in 1971.

is supposed to have commented "Well, I thought a least it would make you a gentleman", a comment that was "shattering" for Burdett and which he "neither forgave nor forgot".[32]

It is worth investigating this recollection a little further. What was the cultural implication of a term like "gentleman" in 1920? A gentleman is officer class, a distinction that was still reinforced and enforced by social convention and legal sanction in the 1920s. It denoted a class relationship that became strongly salient during the war as the "officer class" drove a working-class soldiery to battle. Masters and Servants Acts remained in force across Australia. The political and economic constraints of this distinction constituted one of the major ideological components of the social upheavals about to commence in the aftermath of the war as the revolutionary ideologies of the 1920s and 30s began to unfold. I wonder in what sense a working-class man born in the middle of the nineteenth century, however "Calvinist" in temper, might use this term against his grandson, on the grandson's return from that war?

In fact Burdett was engaged in exactly that process of self-transformation that would enable him to (partially) transcend his class background, which was strictly not *petit bourgeois* but artisan working class, and gain acceptance into exactly that class of mercantile gentry that formed the higher echelons of the class structure in Australia. He was specifically and self-consciously engaged in the process of becoming a "gentleman".

The motivation to make this transformation may have come in large part from his mother. She taught him French, she taught him piano. She evinced immense pride in his achievements throughout her life. We can speculate that she invested her own genteel ambitions for herself into her beloved only son. Further, why would we assume that the grand-parents held such retrograde attitudes? That they were also self-willed and innovative is evidenced by the fact of their emigration. Terms like "petit bourgeois" and "philistine" are an anachronistic reference from the 1970s, when such condemnations lay at the core of the popular discourse of social dissent. It is also true that such class-ridden language reflects the high

[32] Richard Haese, *Rebels and precursors.* 95

bourgeois pretensions of such social and sexual libertarian groups as gathered around the philanthropists John and Sunday Reed at "Heidi", their artists retreat in the countryside outside of Melbourne in the 1940s and 50s, when bourgeois radicals tried to distance themselves from Menzian suburban fantasies of middle class domesticity. [33]

If Burdett was engaged in a project of writing a part for himself as a native inhabitant of the high mercantile bourgeoisie, he was successful, for the time being. It was only five years after this purported interchange with his grandfather that he married Edith Birks, the eldest daughter of the South Australian retail and media family. Her grandfathers were Sir John McDougall, of the flour milling family, and Charles Birks, proprietor of the largest department store in South Australia. Her grandmother, Mary Maria Thomas, was the eldest daughter of William Kyffin Thomas, proprietor of the Register, the leading newspaper in South Australia for half a century. It is worth noting that even the Birks family, for all their wealth, were regarded with some level of disdain by the slightly more established landed bourgeoisie of the South Australia. "New money" and "mere drapers" were the disparagements cast.[34] In fact, as we will see, the Birks family could, through the Wasteneys, trace a lineage back into the highest levels of ancient aristocracy, although of course this knowledge was largely lost to these generations. However, for Burdett, something, whether his experiences or his resolve, precisely *had* begun to "make him a gentleman", although the limitations and contradictions involved in the class transition would infuse and complicate his social and personal life in multiple ways.

No doubt here were many sources of conflict between the ambitious young writer and his grandparents. No doubt he was struggling to escape the constrictions of a suburban middle-class existence, and we might imagine that there were severe contradictions between the values and expectations of the grandfather, a working-class man born in the 1840s, and those of his

[33] Harding, L. and Morgan, K. *Modern love: The lives of John and Sunday Reed* (Carlton: Miegunyah Press. 2015)
[34] Joan Willington, *Maisie,* 1994

grandson emerging from the world war and facing the completely novel social and economic dispensations that that cataclysm had opened up in the social fabric. Perhaps this is indeed the form of language that might be used by an older man existing on the liminal regions of the artisan class, trying to reinforce his sense of propriety amid deepening social and ideological instability, when confronting a youthful, transgressive offspring who is in the process of a radical rejection of the past and of his own background.

Burdett did well at school, spending two years "at the highest level" before taking a job as an office boy at a Brisbane newspaper.[35] In 1915, at the age of 18, Burdett enlisted in the AIF. He left Australia in January 1916 for Somalia and almost immediately transferred to the first field ambulance division. Both his daughter and Lloyd Rees suggest that he did this for reasons of conscientious objection to "killing and fighting". His training only took a month and by 30 March 1916, he was disembarking at Marseille on his way to the fighting in Flanders. There is a reference to him in the diary of a Chaplain, the Reverend Cecil Edwards, attending a service on Christmas Day 1916 in the town of Abelle near Ypres amidst some artillery bombardment.[36] He doesn't seem to have been there however when the major battles were being fought. Lloyd Rees says he was deeply traumatised by his experiences as an ambulance attendant, as one can imagine he would be. In March 1917, he was promoted to Corporal and transferred to Divisional Headquarters, but in December, he reverted to a private at his own request. It has been suggested by my cousin Peter Gallagher, an amateur military historian, that the job Burdett was promoted into was a desk job, and that he may have had moral reasons for requesting to return to the front, to share the risk of men who had become comrades.[37]

The armistice was signed in November of 1918 and in December, Burdett was granted leave to visit Rome. Historian Jan Minchin says that he took the opportunity to travel on the continent and visit some of the major European galleries. It seems at least that he committed

[35] Jane Burdett *Reminiscences*
[36] *Basil Burdett Service Record,* National Archives
[37] Peter Gallagher, email to author, 2020

himself to a programme of self-education, taking the opportunity to immerse himself in the classical art traditions of Europe. He was also given leave with pay to attend George William College, a YMCA college in the Tottenham Court Road, as a commerce student. He spent from May to September 1919 in London before returning to Australia aboard the "Euripides". On demobilisation, he took a position as a cadet journalist with the *Brisbane Daily Mail*.[38]

Between May and November 1919, a few articles on art appear in Brisbane newspapers that seem similar to his later recognisable style. In particular, there is a review on 9 May of an exhibition by his friend Lloyd Rees at the showrooms of R. Exton and Co.; a review of Art in Australia, for which he would soon be writing, in the *Brisbane Courier* on 11 October; a review of a Queensland Art Society Exhibition on 5 November; and a short survey of Australian art books, again in the *Brisbane Courier* on 3 April 1920. However, it is unclear from the record whether he was actually in Brisbane at this time. One source says he returned to Australia on 26 September 1919, another that he embarked on the "Euripides" on 25 October 1919 arriving in December. He was formally discharged from the AIF on 17 December 1919.[39]

By 1920, Burdett had met Lloyd Rees. This early friendship signified Burdett's entry into the art world as a writer and an advocate for Australian painting and for Modernism. Rees recalls "In about 1920, … we were lucky enough to rent our house at Waverton. Basil Burdett, whom I had met through Wal Taylor, came down from Brisbane to live with us".[40] Wal Taylor was an etcher and bookbinder from Brisbane with whom Rees shared a flat above Cremorne Wharf in 1919, along with Peter Templeton.[41]

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[38] Jan Minchin, "Basil Burdett" *Art and Australia.* No. 17 (1979/80)369-373; Jan Gerraty, *Basil Burdett: Critic and entrepreneur* (Honours thesis, Monash University, 1978) 2

[39] *Basil Burdett Service Record,* National Archives of Australia

[40] Lloyd Rees, *Peaks and valleys: An autobiography* (Sydney: Collins,1985) 112

[41] Art Gallery of NSW https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/179.2000/#about accessed 25/08/22. According to Jean Campbell, daughter of John Young, Burdett's partner in Macquarie Galleries, Wal Taylor was Burdett's partner in the Grosvenor Galleries in 1923, which partnership was dissolved in 1924. This information is contradicted however by Heather Johnson who says the Grosvenor Galleries was started by Sydney Albert Parker who employed first Burdett, then Rubery Bennett, then Wal Taylor as managers Campbell, J. *Early Sydney moderns: John Young and the Macquarie Galleries 1916-1946* (Roseville, NSW.: Craftsman House, 1988), 23. Heather Johnson, *The Sydney art patronage system 1890* – 1940 (Gray's Point NSW: Bungoona Technologies, 1997). Wal Taylor is identified as also gay by Stephen Miller in Deborah Edwards, *Margaret Preston* (Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW. 2005), 174.

Burdett entered into the circle of serious-minded young aesthetes who gathered around the printing firm of Smith and Julius. It was fortuitous position for a person with Burdett's apparent ambitions. The network included men of high influence and reputation in Australian art such as Arthur Streeton and Julian Ashton, as well as a collection of innovative minded young artists, such as Margaret Preston, energised by the novel ideological possibilities and social experimentation opening up in the immediate post war years. Their energy was fuelled both by the emotional conflicts, tensions and traumas of the war years, now finding their release rather dumbfoundedly in the peace, and by the economic boom times of the early twenties that saw art as a luxury good under high demand.

Fortuitous as well was the presence of the politically savvy young graphic artist and marketing genius Sydney Ure Smith, who took many of these young creatives under his wing, using his publications *Art in Australia* and *Home* to promote both the artists and the idea of art as a social good.[42] Ure Smith understood the zeitgeist well; an additional layer of entrepreneurs also saw art as a worthwhile investment, not simply in financial terms but in terms of creating a social model and ideological commonality. Men like Charles Lloyd Jones and Keith Murdoch were not just industrious and single-minded advocates; they were also wealthy and connected into the social networks of power at the highest levels. Murdoch, from 1916, owned his own newspaper, the Melbourne *Herald*.

Murdoch was not just possessed of wealth and power and a more than dilettante interest in and knowledge of figurative art. He was one of the prime motivators and inventors of the very idea of "Australian culture", including the Australian foundation myth of glorious military defeat that was Gallipoli. The creation of the Gallipoli story as a fountainhead of national feeling – and national power – is itself a fascinating insight into the relationship between ideology and material reality.

[42] Nancy Underhill, *Making Australian art, 1916-49. Sydney Ure Smith, Patron and Publisher* (Melbourne; Oxford University Press Australia, 1991)

There was however a problem with this myth. It was based on a concept of Australia that was almost instantly out of date, the concept of a pastoral Arcadia, populated by a prosperous peasant class, clean, white, racially pure, insular, ethical and physically strong. The world that was developing in the wake of World War I was something altogether more complex and sophisticated: industrialised, urban, expansive, and engaged in multilayered power plays at a global level as the old imperial dispensation that had been in existence since the end of the Napoleonic wars was dissolved. The Gallipoli myth was designed to motivate an individualistic colonial population toward a centralised nationhood. It had struck a chord. The nation was in existence, the seeds of a national ideology implanted. However, in order to function as a nation on the global stage – and Australia by its economic nature as a supplier of raw materials to the Empire was entirely dependent on maintaining its place on the global stage – that national ideology needed to have certain characteristics that the reactionary vision of a rural arcadia could not provide. It needed an industrial outlook, a technological sophistication, a level of scientific literacy in the population, in fact an urban cultural sophistication of a European cut, in order to be able to develop as a culture and as an economy that would be able to support and sustain the geopolitical ambitions of the new urban capitalists represented by Murdoch and his network.

If Australian pastoralism, the source of economic power in the nineteenth century, found its perfect expression in Australian Impressionism and the Heidelberg School –Arthur Streeton's *The purple noon's transparent might* of 1896, or *Golden summer, Eaglemont,* or Tom Roberts *Breakaway* of 1891 are famous examples – then the urban technocratic economy of the twentieth century needed a different sort of art; and there was a form of art, seeded in the new fluidity and instability of post war Europe, which Keith Murdoch almost immediately identified as the right vehicle for the cultural ambitions that underlay his political ambitions for Australia. And that form of art was Modernism.

"Modernist" can be used to describe purely intellectual movements that consciously adopt the term in their process of self-definition; or it can be used even more narrowly to speak of something that pertains only to the visual, literary and performing arts. Alternatively, the term can be broadened to evoke ideological responses to social changes, or to material conditions of technology, demography and economics; or even more broadly to describe those material conditions in their own right. Debates on this flow around distinctions between Modernism and Modernity.

I will argue that we can allow ourselves to be fairly fluid in the usage of the term. It can be used to describe the specifics of artistic practice, and aesthetic motivations; or it can be used to evoke states of social consciousness, such as socialism, that arise in response to the conditions of Modernity – industrialisation, urbanisation, rapid technological transformation, an expanded geographical outlook, and the incorporation of a scientific vocabulary into everyday discourse.

Keith Murdoch identified Modernist art as a useful vehicle for the sort of ideological development he wanted to see, for the ideological trajectory he thought Australian culture needed to undertake in order for the country to be able to engage successfully with the trajectory of economic expansion that he understood would be likely to occur globally in the course of the mid twentieth century. He was not unusual among the mercantile bourgeoisie in this understanding. They were, as a class, technologically literate, indeed technologically engaged, optimistic for the outlook for an industrial society, and keen to invest in new technologies. Napier Birks, later Burdett's father-in-law, made a significant investment in automobile retailing in 1911, with the establishment of Motors Limited in Adelaide. His children were flyers of aeroplanes and drivers of motor cars, adepts of the new. They understood, as a class, that the success of their social enterprise was dependent on a technologically literate population, both as workers and as consumers, and not just in terms of familiarity with machines, but literate in a technological culture, in the broadest sense of the word. Such cultural

literacy implied having somehow imbibed the rhythms and cadences of industrial technological life into the subconscious processes of everyday living. And this, as Modernists like Murdoch and Burdett understood, is the function of art. It is the means by which human beings can engage at the interface between their subjective inner states of emotion, affect and arousal, and the objective material world. To make art on the one hand, as an artist; and to see art, experience art, to absorb and be absorbed by art as an audience, as connoisseur, however briefly, is to interact with the material world in conditions of intimacy.[43]

The Modernists saw that material world in terms of science and machines and underlying structures that ran counter to the intuitions, specifically the visual intuitions, and the learnt iconography of the pre-industrial world. Where nineteenth century English art critic John Ruskin, for example, a late Romantic, saw the material world in terms of nature as a spiritual or moral presence, that could be evoked and reified by Art,[44] Modernists saw the material world as an effect - of geometry, of optics, of the new physics of the literally incomprehensible behaviour of subatomic world – and that the role of Art was to delve beneath those effects, beneath ordinary conscious experience, to structural truths that were not necessarily accessible to appearance. This form of aesthetics could and would equally be utilised by strict materialists and deep mystics, by Marxists and Christians alike, something that seems to have remained unrecognised by the aesthetic conservatives such as the Lindsay brothers and Robert Menzies in their battle against the "cultural degeneracy" that they saw the Moderns as ushering in.[45]

The connoisseurs, artists and arts activists that gathered in Australia in the 1920's and thirties understood art in this way. They were committed to propagandising and advocating for art so understood in the broader community. It took on something of the character of a mission

[43] See for example Herbert Read, *A concise history of modern painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974 (1959))
[44] John Ruskin, "Characteristics of nature" in *Selections from the writings of John Ruskin: Second Series 1860-1888* London: G. Allen, 1893)
[45] Joanne Mendelsohn, *Lionel Lindsay: An artist and his family* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988)

and Basil Burdett was one of its most accomplished missionaries – not least because he had experienced the redemptive and transformational properties of art for himself. It was art that was finally the means for him to transcend the intellectual and emotional limitations of his background and emerge from the streets of Enoggera, lined with its wooden houses on stilts, the culture of a small parish community in the outer suburbs of a small colonial city, to engage at the heart of the empire directly with the sinews and drivers of the imperial ideology. It was this personal transformation that gave him the energy and tenacity and wilfulness to train himself, to understand the novel codes of the new dispensation and of the new class to which he aspired, and to become adept at those codes, that was so characteristic of him as a man. And it was those characteristics that attracted the community of creative minds who were engaged in the same process.

Chapter 3. Lucy McDougall and Napier Birks

Lucy McDougall in the 1890's

Napier Kyffin Birks on his wedding day 1899.

Lucy McDougall with her brothers and sisters, John Napier, Jane, Florence and Norman

Lucy Birks in 1937 aged 69

Napier Birks at Goolwa in 1938

Basil Burdett was marrying into a family of cultural innovators, though perhaps not in the sense that the Sydney avant-garde might have recognised. Edith's parents were both determined reformers, each in their own right, and they were both inheritors of a patrimony of religious and political dissent that reached back into the eighteenth century.

The Birks, McDougall and Napier families formed a tightly knit filial, commercial and religious network, bonded together by cross-marriages over several generations. Edith's parents were cousins, their great-grandmothers being the sisters Hannah and Elizabeth Napier. Another Napier sister, Charlotte, married her cousin William Sturdy Hanson, the son of her mother's brother William Hanson. William Hanson's wife Isabel Sturdy was in turn the daughter of the Napier siblings' great aunt Jane Lumley, sister to their grandmother Catherine Lumley.[46]

The primary ideological thread weaving these family structures together was of Non-conforming evangelical Christianity. Members of the family had been close to the centres of power of those movements since the 1790s or even before, with the ancestral family names of Bell and Lumley registered as Quakers in Thirsk in North Yorkshire as early as the 1690s.[47]

In the generation of Napier's father Charles, born in the 1830s and 40s, the Birks family were a close knit and devoutly religious clan. George Napier Birks, the eldest, born 1838, Alfred James, William Hanson, Charles Napier, John Napier, and the twins Walter Richard, and Emily Hannah, born 1849, all lived close, married close, attended to each other's business, led each other to religion, and engaged in furious and heartfelt debate around each other's dining tables. George and Charles between them married three sisters, Helen, Mary Maria and Rose Thomas, and the twins Walter Richard and Emily Hannah married the sister and brother Jemima and Alexander Crooks.[48] George Birks, Napier's uncle, married Helen Rosetta Thomas after having fallen in love with her when she was just 12 and

[46] Appendix 3. Family tree 6.
[47] Quaker monthly meetings, Thirsk. Found on Ancestry.
[48] Appendix 3. Family tree 2

he was 19.[49] They were forbidden contact until she turned sixteen, upon which they immediately married. His father Charles first married Helen's older sister Mary Maria Thomas. When she died in 1878, having born six children, five girls and a boy (Napier), he immediately married her sister Rose, at 23 only ten years older than Charles' oldest daughter.

The Birks households were dominated by women, and specifically Christian feminist women, who were energised by religion and personal temperament to living their feminism to the fullest extent that their considerable material and psychological resources would allow. [50] The first thing Simon Chartier, my third cousin and George Birks great-great-great grandson proclaimed to me on meeting was "It's a matriarchy!"

Charles' mother (Napier's grandmother) Hannah was a strong figure, devoutly religious, and it was she who had kept the family intact through the upheaval entailed by their father's early death. She was incidentally a financial lynchpin of the entire extended family by virtue of her link to her brother John Napier, the immensely wealthy "cotton tyrant" and Methodist religious activist of Bradford and Manchester. He had made his fortune through the firm Napier and Goodair, the largest cotton spinning business in the north of England in the 1830's. After the 1840s he had withdrawn from business to devote himself to advancing Methodism and to assisting his brothers and sisters and their children in their various projects utopian and commercial.

Rose Birks (nee Thomas) was a powerful, charismatic personality, and she conducted much of her political socialising, from the social purity movement to women's suffrage activism to the YWCA, from the drawing room and gardens of Knutsford, the large house they had at Glenelg. She was also among the first cohort of women admitted to study at the University of Adelaide.[51]

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[49] Jon Napier, *The Birks Family History* (Unpublished manuscript).

[50] The Oxford English Dictionary cites the concept of women's political rights entering social debate in the late eighteenth century, but first use of the word "feminism" in this sense is dated to 1895 which Is contemporary with the history I am discussing

[51] 1877 University of Adelaide Calendar, 10. She is mentioned as a non-matriculating candidate for 1876 when she would have been 20 years old.

Charles' older brother George had married a third Thomas sister Helen Rosetta, a determined, autonomous and indefatigable worker, thinker, housekeeper and social revolutionary. After a series of tumultuous dalliances with several different political/religious movements, including the evangelism of Hugh Gilmour and a powerful attachment to the single tax movement of Henry George, in 1893 the couple threw in their lot wholeheartedly with the novelist, unionist, political idealist, utopian socialist and racial purity warrior William Lane in his attempt to establish a functioning commune for white men in South America.[52] In the decade prior to that misadventure the couple were an active political and ideological presence in the Birks household. George was an intense, voluble and emotive person. His letters to his children and grandchildren from Cosme in South America are very long, very frequent, and very detailed and emotive.[53] The last several were written as he was dying of tuberculosis of the bowel in 1895.

A younger Birks brother, Walter Richard Birks married Jemima Crooks, a woman of a similar energetic and politically driven cast of mind. She also was a Christian feminist, a utopian and willing to invest everything in the social experiments demanded by her religion and her politics. The couple invested all of their capital, together with yet another brother John Napier Birks, again unsuccessfully, in a utopian communist experiment at Murtho on the River Murray, not too far from the Chaffey Brothers cooperative irrigation settlements at Renmark where Tom Cutlack's family had settled. Jemima's husband Alexander Crooks was jailed for eight years for embezzlement in the course of the collapse of the Commercial Bank of South Australia in 1886, where he was a manager. He had some fame for having made a

[52] Hugh Gilmour was a Christian socialist and Primitive Methodist preacher in South Australia in the 1890's. He was a strident critic of capitalism and an advocate of the American socialist economist Henry George's Single Tax proposals. For William Lane see Humphrey McQueen, *A new Britannia: an argument concerning the social origins of Australian radicalism and nationalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976); David Crouch, *Colonial Psychosocial: Reading William Lane* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2014); and particularly William Lane, *White or yellow? White or yellow: The Race War of 1908 AD* (Sydney: Little Darling, 2011)

[53] Jon Napier, *A Birks Family History*. (Unpublished manuscript). Many of George's letters are in the State Library of South Australia among the papers of his daughter Helen Mary Chartier with the PRG number 263.

"spectacular boundary catch" to dismiss W.G. Grace for six runs. I speculate as to whether the embezzled money might have been used to support the Murtho settlement?[54]

Charles Birks household at Knutsford (their house at Glenelg, named after their hometown outside of Manchester) was through the 1880's and 90's a centre of indefatigable social and political activity. But Charles Birks, though he may have been a religious enthusiast, was of a more restrained demeanour, and he devoted his own energy to that other Christian virtue, getting rich. His confreres in that project were men, and the fact that it was his youngest child Napier, the only boy, rather than any of the numerous and almost certainly adequately intelligent and energetic girls, who was inculcated with the ideological and psychological apparatus of the business world shows that there were definite limits, on both a social and a personal/emotional level, to the "radicalisation of manliness" that these utopian experiments might have implied.[55]

It was into this conflagration of politics, religion, sexuality and personal extremes that Napier Birks, father of Edith Birks, was born on 26 October 1876. He was the youngest child and the only son, growing up with five older sisters, the eldest, Mary Frances, ten years older than him, born in 1866. When Napier was born in 1876, Charles was already on the way to his eventual substantial fortune and his solid reputation among a social network based around the Flinders Street Baptist Church. He was known as a diligent, honourable, quietly spoken but highly focussed businessman, and a devout and committed evangelist.

Charles great granddaughter Jane Burdett, Edith Birk's daughter, describes Charles Birks as "a hard man". However, she relates that "His eight daughters were educated, the story goes, at German universities, but this may be a fairy tale."[56]

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[54] The information about Alexander Crooks comes unreferenced from the website Adelaide AZ. https://adelaideaz.com/articles/alexander-crooks--who--caught-w-g--grace---caught-in-collapse--of-commercial-bank- The story is certainly mentioned in a number of places, but I haven't checked the details. I think it is interesting enough to be included here with a caveat.

[55] The phrase is from Mellissa Bellanta, "The Manliness of Radical Sentiment: The Case of George Napier Birks". *Australian Historical Studies,* vol 39. No 3. (2008) 322-327

[56] Jane Burdett, *Recollections*, 46

Napier did his early schooling in England, in Exeter and Warwick according to a later Who's Who entry.[57] The Exeter School, at that time Exeter Grammar School has a motto in Greek that translates as "Gold is not worth more than virtue" which fits the family ideology perfectly, if ironically, but I cannot confirm whether Birks attended that school. If he started school at five years old, that would be 1881 or 82. It is possible that Napier's parents stayed in England for his education, but records of the Baptist church show that Charles was personally attending the church in Adelaide in December 1885 and in August of 1886.[58] This is not to say that they were not travelling back and forth. That journey had become much faster and more comfortable with the replacement of sailing ships by steamers in the 1860's and 70's.

Alternatively, there are several relatives who may have supervised the young boy at the time. His father's uncle John Napier, the overall benefactor of the family, was still alive until 1890, and his descendants were in London, including his grandson Arthur Sampson Napier, a philologist, an antiquarian book-collector, and an Oxford don. Charles' cousin Lucy Armstrong (daughter of his mother's sister Elizabeth Napier) had married John McDougall and they had moved with their family to Greenwich, where they were deeply involved in a strange amalgam of radical and religious politics. Lucy died in 1880, but a family of five children remained, still closely tied to the Napier family. John McDougall remarried in 1882, to an equally family-minded religious enthusiast, Ellen Mary Lidgett. Charles and Rose Birks were in the habit of staying with this family on their numerous trips to England.

In 1887, the whole Birks family, including Master Napier Birks aged 10 and his six sisters, Daisy, Kitty, Edith, Helen, Mary F., Lottie, are recorded as returning from London aboard the Garonne in 1887. By 1889, when he was 12, Birks was definitely back in Adelaide attending Whinham College in Jeffcott Street, North Adelaide, a private school for the sons

[57] "Napier Birks" *Who's Who,* 1942.
[58] *Minutes of the Baptist Church* State Library of South Australia SRG 465

of merchants and pastoralists with a boarding school. It occupied the buildings on Jeffcott St North Adelaide that were later taken over by the Anglican Seminary. From the photographs held in the State Library of South Australia, the place looks purely masculine and uncompromising.[59] This impression is supported by Napier's granddaughter's evidence that he was brutalised at school. The photo labelled as Birks shows a puny kid. There is no record found of his academic or sporting ability, though he did matriculate for both Adelaide and Melbourne universities.

In March of 1890, then aged 13, Birks took the preliminary exams for admission to the University of Adelaide, along with Robert Henry Pulleine from St Peters College, another interesting member of the Adelaide bourgeoisie. Pulleine's daughter Eugenie would become engaged to Birks' son Leslie in 1928. In 1893, Birks joined his father's firm, Charles Birks and Co. as an apprentice, aged 16.

From 1896 to 1899, Birks returned to England to undertake an apprenticeship with Gorringes department store.[60] Gorringes was opened as a small drapery store in Buckingham Palace Road, London, in 1858 by the silk mercer Frederick Gorringe, and by the time of Birks apprenticeship the shop had developed into a major high end department store drawing patronage from the aristocracy, including the household of Queen Victoria. Photos of the interior of the store from the 1910s, as well as the layout of advertising show similarities with Charles Birks and Co's approach to the presentation developed by Napier Birks when he took over management of the operation in the 1910's.

Jane Burdett describes this time as traumatic for Birks.

> Napier, destined for managing Chas Birks and Co, was sent to London as a lad of 10 or 12 to learn the ropes from the bottom. He was apprenticed to a big department store, led a miserable life, unloved, overworked and living in a boarding house with

[59] State library of South Australia photograph B10034. Whinham College Boarders.
[60] "Napier Birks" *Who's Who in Australia* 1950

the other apprentices. [61]

It appears though that she has conflated time at school in England with the later apprenticeship. In 1896, Birks would have been 19.

Over this period, while living in London, Birks became engaged to Lucy McDougall. She was his cousin by virtue of the fact that his grandmother Hannah Napier and her grandmother Elizabeth Napier were sisters. It is possible that he had first met her when he was doing his early schooling. The engagement was announced in the local Adelaide press in *Anglo-Colonial Notes* (from our correspondent in London) in January of 1899:

> I learn that Mr Napier Birks, son of Mr Charles Birks, of Glenelg, is engaged to be married to his cousin, Miss McDougall, daughter of a well-known member of the London County Council. Miss McDougall is a young lady of very exceptional attainments, and if she goes to live in Adelaide ought to be an acquisition to the intellectual life of the place.[62]

Lucy McDougall was the eldest child of Sir John McDougall, one of the heirs of the McDougall's food and chemicals fortune, and an activist Methodist puritan.[63] Born in Chorlton in the summer of 1868, she was intelligent, religiously devoted, an accomplished pianist, and there is a small mystery as to why she remained unmarried until the age of thirty-one. Was there no suitable young man willing or available in *fin de siècle* London, where they had moved by the 1890s?

The marriage between her parents John McDougall and Lucy Armstrong seems to have been a devoted one, and their children were born into a warm and nurturing household which valued intellectual and artistic achievement, encouraged strong social engagement, and

[61] Jane Burdett, *Recollections.* P47
[62] "Anglo-Colonial Notes", *The Register,* September 14, 1899.
[63] John McDougall's father Alexander established the business in the 1850's based on the invention of self-raising flour and a useable sheep dip. The business was eventually incorporated in the global food conglomerate Premier Foods.

demanded ethical considerations of human behaviour in the context of an intimately understood divine dispensation.

The McDougall's had five children between 1868 and 1876: Lucy, Jane, Florence, John Napier and Norman. A photograph of about 1890 shows them posed grandly, gathered in a posse of mutual solidarity and family pride around the powerful figure of Lucy. She radiates energy and self-confidence, insouciantly commanding attention, seated sideways in her carved armchair and glancing to her left out of the picture frame with a slight smile. The other siblings all look straight ahead with serious expressions, as if they were the bodyguard of a gang leader.

All of the children except Florence moved to South Australia. Florence, represented in the family photograph as a scholar and an intellectual, wearing glasses and holding a sheaf of notes, also married quite late in life, in 1903 at the age of thirty two. She married a Methodist divine named John Jenkins, and they spent their famously happy life serving the Welsh parish of Beddgellert, a picturesque spa town where her father had also bought a chateau. Their happiness lasted until 1939 when John Jenkins died suddenly of pneumonia. Florence soon after moved to Appleton le Moors in Yorkshire where she spent the remainder of her life with her half sister, the environmentalist Kitty McDougall. Jane McDougall moved to Adelaide and remained unmarried. Norman married Napier Birks' sister Katherine, but then took up land at Renmark, and left his wife and child in London.

On 17 June 1880, the mother Lucy Armstrong died, possibly on the twelfth birthday of her eldest daughter Lucy. There is an apocryphal story that she died after being struck in the head by a cricket ball. This is contradicted by a family history privately published by Ellen Lidgett in 1923, which states that Lucy Armstrong was sick for a year with a lingering disease that left her blind and bedridden. It seems likely that emotional responsibility for the family immediately fell upon the oldest girl Lucy, to provide some sort of stability for her

younger brothers and sisters, and incidentally to her father, with whom she had a close and loving relationship.[64] This in itself might provide a partial explanation of her late marriage.

Lucy McDougall married her cousin Napier Birks in 1899 and moved to South Australia. There are some unusual aspects to this engagement. The family lore has it that Lucy McDougall was extremely reluctant to agree to the marriage, but that he was determined and persisted until she gave in. On the other hand, there is a photo of him at the time of their marriage inscribed by Lucy "To my beloved husband". Several potential sources of discontent are immediately apparent. He was a sensualist, she was a religious puritan. Her father had made himself famous as a proponent of the Methodist social purity movement in an anti-vice crusade to close down the music halls of London. She was a cosmopolitan, a wealthy intellectual and a musician, brought up in, and well connected to the political and artistic society of the capital city of a great and ancient imperial culture. He was a provincial from the farthest outposts of that empire, a sportsman with a passion for business, for cars and for fishing. He was a highly masculinised and dominating personality who demanded acquiescence from those around him. She was quiet, private and self-contained, though hardly self-effacing. She was a good deal older than him. When they married on the 14 September 1899, in his father's house "Knutsford", she was 32 and he was 23. Their relationship was a power struggle from the start.

Lucy McDougall was immediately pregnant and their first child was born 269 days, or 38 weeks and 3 days later, at Norwood on Saturday 9 June 1900. It was early winter, four days before the full moon (which would be in eclipse), and the child was a daughter, Edith Napier Birks. The weather was frosty, but fine and clear with clouds building up later in the day coming up along the coast from the west. A depression had been threatening but it had swerved away to the South.

[64] Jane Burdett, conversation with the author, 1970

According to Jane Burdett, it became immediately apparent that Birks was a philanderer, but of course there is no documentary evidence of this, until much later: "Lucy proved to be too ethereal and intellectual for Napier. … He started having girl-friends from the first week of marriage…. Lucy retired into books and music."
His attitude to her is illustrated in an anecdote from granddaughter Jane Burdett. "He is reputed to have arrived home from work with a bunch of white roses one day and to Lucy's smiling anticipation of the gift replied "They are not for you. I am going out."[65]
The couple had three more children over the next six years, all of them boys, of whom the first, Allan died at the age of two weeks. Leslie was born on the last day of 1904 and Norman a year and a half later in September 1906.

Having been made a junior partner of Charles Birks and Co in the year of Edith's birth, 1900, Birks devoted his energy to establishing his skills and reputation as a businessman. In 1901, while living at Norwood, he owned a seven room house called Seaford on Jetty Road, Glenelg which he advertised to be let out. By 1903 he had moved to Robe Terrace, Medindie, while still retaining the house at Norwood.

In September of 1903, the Birks' first son was born. He was named Allan, but he survived only two weeks. The odd thing is that it was only two weeks later, in October of 1903, that Napier left Adelaide and took off on a four-month holiday to England with his mate Bertie Barr Smith. The Barr Smith family were landowners and significant philanthropists in South Australia. They donated the Barr Smith Library to the University of Adelaide. The two friends returned in February of 1904, and in December of that year, Lucy gave birth to another son, Leslie.
In 1903, Napier Birks began his long-standing relationship with automobiles when he and Bertie Barr Smith started the Automobile Club of South Australia, which still exists as the RAA. In 1905 he was its President and organised the first legal hill climb in Australia, in

[65] Jane Burdett *Recollections 48*

which he raced his De Dion 10 HP up the hills escarpment at a breathtaking ten miles an hour. By 1908, the family had moved to the grand bluestone mansion "Braestead" in Parkside, where they stayed until 1925. By 1909, he had acquired property at Goolwa, a place that he would adopt as a getaway as his relationship with his wife decayed.

Birks had an odd and disturbing experience in 1909 when he discovered the body of a suicide. Captain John Wallace, the master of a riverboat and well known among the river settlements of the Lower Murray, had "become unhinged by the suicide of his own son David a week earlier: the jovial skipper, one of the happiest-natured and good-hearted men, popular everywhere, and beloved by all who knew him intimately, had in grief lost his reason and destroyed himself".[66] It was this body, with its throat cut, that Birks discovered among the reeds that fill the margins of the Goolwa waterways.

> "Napier Kyffin Birks, draper, of Adelaide, said :— I arrived back from Ram Island, from a fishing excursion with Mr. Newell yesterday,12th inst. While we were passing Mr. Newells house I noticed a boat stranded at the side of the river. When we arrived at the wharf Mr. Newell asked Mr. Ewens what the boat was doing near his home. Mr. Ewens told us deceased was missing and supposed to have taken that boat. When we went back to Mr. Newell's house I suggested we should look at the boat. As we were walking away I noticed something in the water at the edge of the channel. I said to Mr. Newell, "I'll go and see what that is.'" I found it was the body of the deceased, and Mr. Newell went to report it to the police."

His account of the incident is characteristically clearheaded, assertive and businesslike though it must have been a traumatic moment.

1909 was also the year that Lucy Birks' half-brother Frank Lidgett McDougall arrived in South Australia, soon to be joined by their brothers John Napier and Norman and their sister Jane. Frank was to become a significant public figure in his own right, a close confidant

[66] "River Tragedies", *Southern Argus* February 18, 1909, 3

of Australian Prime Minister S. M. Bruce, his representative in Europe, and a driving force behind the establishment of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation

Frank McDougall moved to Renmark, the Riverland town established by the Chaffey Brothers as a model settlement, and there he established a relationship with Frank William Cutlack, the Secretary of the Fruit Packers Union, as the Renmark fruitgrowers cooperative was called (not an industrial trades union!). The two joined forces to became activists for cooperative fruit-growing in Australia. Frank married Cutlack's daughter Joyce in 1915.

F.W. Cutlack was also in some sort of business relationship, or potential business relationship with Napier Birks. Unfortunately, this central moment for this story has remained beyond the reach of my research. In 1912, Cutlack travelled from Adelaide to Renmark via the Barossa Valley in Birks' car. He was reportedly "immensely taken by the country passed … the vineyards and orchards he says were looking remarkably well. The run through was done in seven hours, fifty miles an hour being reached in one place". It is not clear whether Birks was also in the car.[67] He may well have lent Cutlack the car with chauffer. In either case, it is an act of some level of intimacy, commercial or filial. In 1915, Cutlack's daughter Joyce married Birks' brother-in-law Frank McDougall.

Two significant events occurred as a result of the association between the McDougalls, the Birks and the Cutlacks. The first was that Joyce Cutlack's younger brother Tom met Frank McDougall's niece Edith, Napier Birks' daughter, when Edith was about 13. He was two years older. Tom and Edith established some sort of romance. This was discouraged or forbidden by both families when it was discovered. The second event was that Napier Birks lent money to the Cutlacks. How much and to what purpose is unknown. These two events would lie in wait for Edith Birks.

A question which remains unanswered due to lack of any discovered documentation is: what was the accomplished Lucy McDougall doing between the ages of 21 and 32 when

[67] "Personal", *Renmark Pioneer* December 13, 1912, 4

she married Napier Birks? She was clearly getting educated, in music and literature and art, and in the ethics of public service and religious idealism. Her father was a member of the Progressive Party, so she would have been associating with the social circle around that collection of Liberals, trade unionists, religious non-conformists and Fabian socialists. Her brother Norman McDougall exchanged letters with Rebecca West when he was in Australia in 1923. There is an enigmatic and intimate example in the State Library of South Australia.[68]

Both her father, John McDougall, her uncle Alexander, and her step-mother Ellen Lidgett were committed religious activists,. It is safe to assume that people of those groupings would have been household intimates in both Manchester and London, where the family moved in the early 1880s.

However, when Lucy arrived in South Australia to marry Napier in 1899, she does not seem to have engaged with the Methodist community here, nor with the Baptists among whom her father-in-law Charles Birks was a respected elder.

Rather than attaching herself to established religions, she developed a more private and personal esoteric spiritualism. Her library contained books by the Theosophists G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky, and her daughter Edith continued to pursue an interest in Theosophy all her life.[69] Lucy herself was an associate and possibly a friend of Lucy Morice, one of the driving forces behind the Kindergarten Union, who was also a Theosophist. Whether Lucy Birks brought that interest with her when she came to Australia in 1900 or developed it while she was here is unknown. However, it was a philosophy with some currency among the London intellectual elite. Lucy's letter to Hans Heysen in 1938 speaks of her "knowledge of the life in spirit", a Theosophist phrase used by Rudolf Steiner.

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[68] Rebecca West, Letter to Mr McDougall SLSA D 8830 L. The text of the letter runs in part "I hope this will reach you. The address seems brief. I would like to tell you that I am very grateful for your kind note that tells me that you have understood what I tried to say – and added to it by the kind of person you evidently are. I am sure you have made me who has gone to make her house tidy very happy while she was here. My good wishes to you – to you both I might say"

[69] Theosophy was a system of occult religious thought that developed in Europe and America in the late nineteenth century which attempted to draw together elements of European and Eastern spiritual practices.

Lucy's inheritance from both her parents' families of Methodism and the belief in the absolute reality of intense religious experience must have played a part in the way she embraced her spiritual belief systems. Her daughter Edith retained an interest in Theosophy, but there is little evidence that she saw it in other than intellectual terms. Her son Steven goes so far as to claim that Edith rejected all such ideas as "nonsense". However, she kept the books and recommended and gifted them to others, including her son in law, Fred Heim, for whom they came as a revelation in coping with his own experience as a refugee and a Holocaust survivor.

Lucy is mentioned in a Royal Society memoir of Hedley Marston, the eccentric and controversial biochemist who was instrumental in the discovery of trace element deficiencies in South Australia's South East pastoral lands. [70] Marston was a talented draughtsman and attended Edith Birks' art school in the early 1920s. According to the report of Shirley Allen, Edith "took Hedley home to meet her mother", who immediately developed the opinion that "Hedley had a brain where most people had nothing". Hedley

> "became a frequent visitor to the home (Braestead at Parkside) and made friends with both Edith's brothers and her father Napier Kyffin Birks, but it was to Mrs Birks and the world of painting, music and letters to which she introduced him that he was most attracted".

Indeed, through this connection, Marston made connection into the Modernist arts coterie, first by way of his close friendship with Elioth Gruner whom he met at the Birks, and then through Gruner and Basil Burdett, he met the Lindsay's, Hans Heysen, William Dobell and others.

These connections seem to indicate that Edith's connection into the art world was established through her mother's associations. A letter from Lucy to Hans Heysen grieving

[70] R.M.L.Synge *Hedley Ralph Marston 1900 – 1965* (Royal Society Publishing, 1967) https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/pdf/10.1098/rsbm.1967.0014 accessed 16/02/2023

his daughter Josephine's death in childbirth in 1938 begins "My dear" and ends "Your old friend". It is emotional and heartfelt, the words of an intimate and loving friend of long standing, and it appears they may have made acquaintance soon after she arrived in 1899.[71]

Lucy took leading administrative roles in the progressive education movement in South Australia. Lynne Trethewey suggests that in 1909 Lucy Morice was inspired to found the School for Mothers "by an address on the St. Pancras School for Mothers that Englishman Mr. McDougall delivered before a small gathering of women whilst visiting his sister, Rose Birks."[72] In fact, Rose Birks was Rose Thomas, the wife of Charles Birks, Lucy's father-in-law. This Mr McDougall was Lucy's half-brother Frank Lidgett McDougall who did arrive in Adelaide in 1909. He had grown up in an intensely religious family and he himself had a penchant for philosophy. He had read Henry George and flirted with the idea of Socialism. Wendy Way's biography suggests that

> "He made no formal commitment to left-wing politics, but as a young man of twenty-three saw much in his own world needing change and, without any sense of direction, he wanted to help. He thought that 'the social question' (a euphemism for prostitution) was in truth much wider, perceiving evils in domestic service, in 'Society' living in idleness on the work of others, in obsession with material possessions, and even smoke pollution'" [73]

This was precisely the mixture of mystical inspiration and a materialist social conscience that drove Lucy Morice in her Christian Socialism. She proclaimed "the simple, beautiful Socialism of the Gospels", declaring that "as a matter of fact Socialism is only this - an effort to put into practical politics the teaching of them".[74] This identification of Lucy Morice's

[71] "Letter from Lucy Birks", October 26, 1938. MS 5073 Item 1/4394. Papers of Hans Heysen National Library of Australia.
[72] Trethewey, Lynne. "Lucy Spence Morice: working towards a just society via the education of citizens and socialist feminist collective action" *Vitae Scholasticae.* Vol 26, No. 1 (Spring 2009)
[73] Wendy Way, *A new idea each morning: How food and agriculture came together in one international organisation*, (Canberra: ANU Press, 2013)
[74] Lynne Trethewey, "Lucy Morice"

inspirational Mr McDougall with Frank McDougall is confirmed in an article in The Advertiser in 1936 charting the origins of the School for Mothers.[75]

Lucy Birks as we have seen was moved by similar principles. She became active in both the School for Mothers and the Kindergarten Union along with Helen Mayo, Lucy Morice and Lillian de Lissa. In 1911, she was President of The Babies Aid Society. By 1915 she is recorded in a newspaper report as attending the annual meeting of the School for Mothers in December, and being in a position to second the motion for the re-election of office bearers.[76] It was not until 1918 however that she was nominated to the Committee of the School for Mothers, where her sisters-in-law Helen Birks (Mrs Hedley Fisher) and Edith Vause Birks (Mrs Charles Reissman) and their aunt Amelia Bowen (Lady Thomas) had been active since its beginnings in 1909. Lucy was President from 1924 and remained in that post for many years, at least until 1941.[77]

In 1926, the South Australian Government asked her to represent them at the Save the Children Congress in Geneva. Lucy arrived too late for the Congress but she was requested to address a meeting and "was amazed to find about 200 delegates from many Committees assembled in the building where she was to speak." [78] The government that asked her to represent them was the Labor Government of John Gunn, elected on 16 April 1924 and lasting until 28 August 1926. Gunn had been a unionist and organised the successful 1910 Drivers Strike. He entered parliament in 1915 under the Labor government of Crawford

[75] "Early days of School for Mothers", *The Advertiser,* April 29, 1936, 8
[76] "School for Mothers", *The Advertiser* December 15, 1915, 10.
[77] "Caring for the state's mothers and babies", *The Advertiser,* November 11, 1941, 4.
[78] "Child Welfare: Investigations by Mrs Birks", *The Advertiser*, February 3, 1926, 3. The government would have been the Labour Government of John Gunn, 16 April 1924 – 28 August 1926. Gunn had been a unionist and organised the successful 1910 Drivers Strike. He entered parliament in 1915 under the Labor government of Crawford Vaughan. He was elected Leader in 1918 at the age of 32. He became Premier when Labor won the 1924 election. He embarked on a series of progressive reforms including establishing the State Bank of South Australia, improving Public Service working conditions, and increasing spending on welfare housing and education ADB. – Save the Children was founded in 1919 by the English social reformer and feminist Eglantyne Jebb. She brought her draft of a Declaration of the rights of the Child to the Geneva meeting and it was adopted by the League of nations in the same year. Clare Mulley, *The woman who saved the children: a biography of Eglantyne Jebb founder of Save the Children* (Oxford: Oneworld. 2009)

Vaughn. (Mrs Crawford Vaughn, Evelyn Goode, had been an ally of Lucy Birks in the School for Mothers in 1915). He was elected Leader in 1918 at the age of 32. He became Premier when Labor won the 1924 election. He embarked on a series of progressive reforms including establishing the State Bank of South Australia, improving Public Service working conditions, and increasing spending on welfare housing and education.

I would speculate that it might have been the suggestion of Evelyn Goode, Mrs Crawford Vaughan, Lucy's associate from the School for Mothers and the Kindergarten Union, to ask Lucy Birks to represent South Australia in Geneva. Crawford Vaughn had been Labour premier in 1915. Lucy's network of friends and associates was what would now be called the progressive liberal left, social reformers, feminists, trade unionists and enthusiasts for education.

There is a deeper vein of research to be undertaken on these points. It was through such organisations as the Kindergarten Union and the Mothers and Babies Health Association, where Lucy Birks was President, and through activists such as Dr Helen Mayo, that scientific concepts of public health indicators – such as birth weight of children – became incorporated into government policies and programmes. These types of concepts were at the heart of social democratic and scientific socialist political programmes throughout the nineteenth century. South Australia in the 1970's cultivated a reputation for being at the heart of progressive and experimental political movements, and this history from the early decades of the twentieth century seems to reinforce this view.

Lucy Birks was not only interested in social reform. She was also devoted to art, and she possessed a broad intellectual and religious curiosity. As early as 1908, she organised an exhibition of the English Impressionist painter George Boyle, in conjunction with her father in London.[79] The exhibition was held in the rooms of the May Club. The May Club was

[79] George Boyle 1826 – 1899 was a British Impressionist landscape painter influenced by Corot and the Barbizon school. He lived and worked in London.

something of an institution in its own right, and perhaps characteristic of Adelaide's progressive and radical middle-class culture. The Women's Non-Party Association which was inaugurated by the feminist and pacifist Vida Goldstein in 1909 held regular meetings in the May Club rooms. This is a tradition that is subject to a certain amount of wry contempt in contemporary Australia, but it should be remembered that the seminal moment of granting votes to women did not come out of nowhere. It was not an aberration. This is yet another example of the place Adelaide held in a powerful tradition of progressive and feminist culture.

The May Club was started around 1900 by the artist Mabel Boothby and her sister as a "depot" for women who lived at Mt Lofty could have a place to rest and leave their belongings in town, where members could sell their work, and a centre "for literary and debating circles".[80] In 1910, they formed the local branch of the Alliance Francais. It was thus a hub in the social geography of the Adelaide mercantile middle class, whose geography encompassed Mt Lofty, Mitcham, Unley, Glenelg, Medindie and Walkerville as well as the city, and for holidays, Goolwa and Victor Harbor.

Lucy was a long time friend of Hans Heysen and wrote a very moving letter to him when his daughter Josephine died in childbirth in 1938. I think it is worth quoting this letter in full as it reveals something of Lucy's character.

> "My dear I cannot say how grieved I am for you and Mrs Heysen - To lose your lovely Josephine in such a tragic way – Our children mean so much to us. The parting is almost unbearable.
>
> My knowledge of the life in spirit makes it less difficult to go on working and living here; but it takes all one's courage and faith.
>
> Be sure your dear girl will soon be happy and (…*indecipherable* …) to help others in her new life. She will be often with you, deeply interested in her little daughter.

[80] "Miss Mabel F. Boothby. An artist of originality", *The Mail,* October 28, 1922.

My love to you.

You are good and brave: You will forgive me for writing so plainly. Your old friend,

Lucy Birks"

Of course, in 1938 Lucy Birks was well able to commiserate in Heysen's grief in losing a child, having lost her own son Leslie in 1929, and now partially estranged from her daughter, Edith. Her engagement with immediate and real perceptions of a living spirit world is striking, as is her ability and willingness to express her deep affection for the Heysens.

In the meantime, Napier Birks, Edith's father, was seeking further investment opportunities. In 1911 he established Motors Limited, a car dealership with luxury brands such as Hudson and Essex. This was an adventurous gambit into novel technologies. It was only thirty odd years since the first viable cars had been invented and only three years since Henry Ford began to produce the Model T in 1908. It appears that the Birks family clearly identified the significance of auto manufacturing because the Birks sons both entered into motor engineering degrees.

In 1913, by which time he was managing director of Charles Birks and Co, Napier Birks signed the agreement to purchase from the South Australian Company, for one hundred and ten thousand pounds, the parcel of land on Rundle Street between Stephens and Gawler Place on which he would build the high-end department store that Charles Birks and Co. was to become.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the Birks boys Leslie and Norman were too young to be involved. Leslie was only nine and Norman just turned eight in September. In May of 1914, they were both at school, at Kyre College in Mitcham, one of the precursors to Scotch College.[81] Tom Cutlack was also there in 1915, five years older than Norman, though Norman was beating him hands down in athletics. However, Norman left that school in

[81] The elite Protestant private boys schools in Adelaide were Scotch College, Kings College, Prince Alfred College and St Peters College.

December of 1915, presumably with Leslie. It is likely that the whole family followed their father to France.

In July of 1915, Napier Birks, aged 38 enlisted as a private soldier with the AIF. He attended an NCO school and emerged as a sergeant on 25 August 1915.[82] He was promoted to second lieutenant in May of 1916, after having had influenza in February. In July, he was appointed quartermaster and promoted to lieutenant in August. He was in France during this period.

In 1916, both Edith and her mother travelled from Australia to France to be with her father. In December of 1917, he was attached to the Lewis Gun School at Le Toquet, and it is from there that Birks began his campaign to be discharged and returned to Australia.

Most evidence, both anecdotal and documentary, suggests that Napier Birks found that a position of authority, whether in the company or in the family, suited both his inclinations and his natural capacities. One of the few points where we can hear his voice directly is in the letter he wrote when his initial attempt to extricate himself from his military enlistment in 1917 was overruled by a middle ranking official. The tone is impatient and magisterial, and backed up by the support of an array of senior military and civic officials from his network who he marshalled successfully to his cause. It is worth quoting his letter at some length, including his underlining:

> I hereby apply to return to Australia for business reasons. In my two businesses in which I employ <u>300 workpeople</u>, I have in use, beside my own capital, <u>over 140,000 pounds belonging to other people</u> … it is imperative that my immediate personal attention be given to the various charges that have arisen during my absence. <u>In business of this magnitude it is obvious that managers have limitations and cannot successfully deal with legal issues ... a rearrangement of my affairs is absolutely</u>

[82] Napier Birks Service Record, Aust National Archives

necessary … Finally, I might state that I should not, if in Australia, be subject to conscription under the proposed scheme.

Birks application was supported by letters from Major -General E. G. Sinclair – MacLagan, the British commander of the 4th Australian Division, and from Brigadier -General F. W. Glasgow, Commander of the 13th Australian Infantry Brigade. Birks, though only a lieutenant, confronted the army apparatus directly and forcefully; his application is a demand, not a request. He is confident in approaching as an equal the most senior ranks of the military for support, and getting it.

The question that arises is why Birks enlisted in the military in the first place. He was 38 in 1915. Was he succumbing to social pressure? Did he see it as a worthwhile adventure? Did he see to as an opportunity to enhance his commercial and social network? Was he genuinely moved by a sense of loyalty to country and empire? His enlistment is reported in several newspapers with admiration for his courage and patriotism.

Napier Birks seems to have been a man given to bonhomie, well networked, with a taste for sports, cars and sex. If the purchasing and advertising policy of the company is any guide, he was well attuned to the aspirations for life and luxury of his middle-class constituency. His employees loved him and he was known to them as "The Chief". To his family he was "Granddad" and to some of them "The old bastard". Perhaps contrary to the expectations raised by this vision, he was technologically incompetent. It was Lucy who did the odd jobs and repairs around the house, and she had a beautiful case of inlaid wood made for her to hold her household tools, hammer, and screwdrivers. Their grandson remembers Napier calling him out of the garden: "You, boy. Do you know how to change a tire?".

He had at some stage come up with a medicinal concoction known as "Grandad's stuff" that he kept in a brown glass bottle with a handwritten label. The grandchildren remained mystified and slightly fearful of its properties and uses. He employed a gardener, John Peter Fuller, a needlewoman, Mrs Dorothy Luce, to each of whom he left 500 pounds in

his will, and a chauffeur. He later altered his will to reduce the 500 pounds for the gardener to 100 pounds. The gardener became the main person the grandchildren would hang about with later on, in the 1940s, when Mrs Birks had taken to her bed, Mr Birks had taken to his secretary, and a cold, malicious silence had settled permanently over the house.[83]

Napier had a great fondness for animals and made an attempt in the 1940's to breed Gouldian finches at his Goolwa retreat. His grandson Nicholas recalls finding a wounded magpie on the side of the road on a trip down from Adelaide one weekend. Birks stopped the car and rescued the bird, taking it with them down to the Goolwa house where he fed it, nursed it back to health and then released it.

The picture we have of the household in which Edith Birks grew up is a contradictory one. Her father was a powerful and domineering masculine presence. Yet his relationship with his daughter was strong and affectionate. Of the three surviving children, it seems clear that Edith was the most vibrant, the most determined, the cleverest and the most like her father. If photographs can convey any sense of an inner life, both of the boys appear to be, if not exactly weak, then melancholy. Leslie was partially deaf in one ear. He grew himself an ill-fitting moustache. However, another photograph shows him in more relaxed mode, out bush in 1926, and here he presents as handsome and confident, with a six day growth and arms crossed leaning against a truck with a warm wicked smile. He also liked dancing.

Norman, the second son, developed a particular bond with animals, to the extent that his relationship with the Adelaide zoo's leopard made the papers. He was on furlough from the airforce in 1945 when he visited the zoo and was photographed in an affectionate interaction with the cat. Norman's son tells the story that one of his mates, having celebrated through the afternoon, thought he might have a go too and climbed into the leopard's cage, getting a nasty gash on his arm from the indignant cat for his troubles.

[83] Jane Burdett, *Recollections*

Norman also became an excellent and decorated aeroplane pilot and participated in an early air race across the Pacific. He ditched his plane into the Port River while executing a flamboyant welcome to his parents arriving on a ship. He survived that.

There was a bond of devotion between the boys and their mother, and a perception that they were disappointments to the father. If we can read his photograph, taken at the time of his marriage, Napier Birks was a rakish, elegant, self-possessed and somewhat cold man. Through the sequence of photos taken through his long life, he presents himself as authoritative, well dressed, a man of power and of decision. When he finds the body of a suicide, one of his neighbours at Goolwa, in 1909, his behaviour is controlled, decisive, and competent. He was not equipped or prepared or inclined to give quarter, to have regard for the emotional consequences of his own actions on others. In the face of such a man, such an impressive psychological force, the boys might well have wilted.

If the utopian Christian socialist ethic was a powerful influence in the family, especially among Napier's parents' generation, in Napier's generation there was a decided shift towards a more military imperial ethic. We saw that Napier Birks himself enlisted in 1915 at the age of 38, apparently to fulfil a patriotic community duty, or perhaps in order to be seen to fulfil it. Napier's sister Margaret married Walter Fowler-Brownsworth in 1913.

Brownsworth's grandfather had been a sailor who had gained notoriety running contraband to the Confederate forces in the American Civil War.[84] He served jail time for that. His father rejected that tradition to become an artist, but Walter had an attraction to military life and attempted to enlist for the Boer War in 1899. By accident he ended up in Egypt rather than South Africa, as a clerk with the Army Service Corps, essentially the supplies and logistics branch. He taught himself Arabic and ended up spending a year in

[84] Ronald Hopkins, "Adventure was in my bones: The remarkable life of Walter Fowler Brownsworth 1881 - 1973" *Sabretache: Journal and proceedings of the Military Historical Society of Australia.* Vol. 25, No. 4. (1984).

Cairo. While there he volunteered to go to Khartoum in the Sudan, which had just a decade earlier been the centre of an Islamist uprising against British rule in which the garrison led by General George Gordon was besieged, and Gordon himself killed.

Brownsworth left the army in 1907 with the aim of going to Oxford university, but his plans were derailed when he lost all his money in the crash of an Egyptian bank. He found a job almost immediately with a British engineering company, recruiting and managing "native labour", and that led him to a job with the Kordofan Trading Company which held concession of 100,000 hectares of forest and rubber plantations in the Belgian Congo. His job was to recruit porters then travel, first by river boat and then eight hundred kilometres on foot to inspect the concessions. He managed to bring back a cargo of ivory. On the strength of this colonial adventuring, a friend advised him to go and take up land in New Zealand and he was sailing to the South Seas to do that when he met his wife, Margaret Birks (then aged 39), daughter of Charles and sister of Napier. Charles Birks actually wrote to him advising him to come to Adelaide instead, which he did, and set himself up as an insurance broker before the First World War broke out. He went on to fight at Gallipoli and Belgium. He was mentioned in dispatches three times and won both the Military Cross and the Belgian Croix de Guerre in Flanders.

Napier Birks himself had been travelling in the Sudan at the same time as Brownsworth was doing his adventuring, and he sent a letter back from there which was published in his uncle's paper the *Register* with the fruity title "Among the crocodiles". It is worth quoting.

> I am realising slowly that there is something that might be named "The Call of the Soudan". There is something more than hospitality about every white man attached to the Soudan. It is like a big brotherhood where every man has his hand stretched out to help. Twice we have had white men within a few minutes of acquaintance compel us to examine our stores to make sure the list was complete. In each case

they found something missing and compelled us to make good from their own supplies. The casual way they did it made us ashamed.[85]

The military strain was reinforced when another of Napier's nieces, Norah, also an artist, married another military man Ronald Hopkins. He eventually became director of the Festival of Arts and in that capacity he removed from the programme the Alan Seymour play *The One Day of the Year*, a critical satire on the Anzac tradition.

The confluence of high artistic and intellectual culture, mercantile rigour, and a military and imperialist and thoroughly racist value system seems puzzling to one who has grown up in the 1970s when art was practiced as a form of dissident, anti-establishment culture. But that is a recent phenomenon, or at least it is a phenomenon that is contingent upon other cultural threads that developed in response to war, both the First World War, which gave rise to the great revolutionary movements of late Modernism, and the Vietnam War when threads of anti-colonialism and feminism became drawn into the matrix of cultural dissent.

I would so dearly love to be able to pursue Lucy Birks social network much further here. Evidence is emerging that she was integrated into a network of significant progressive minded social activists in Britain and Australia. These women – like Lucy Morice, Helen Mayo, Violet Plummer, Vida Goldstein, – were instrumental in developing and propagating the fundamental program of modern social democracy. That programme was built around the concepts of "scientific" social welfare, a programme based on the primacy of education, of the economic autonomy of women, of economic justice in the workplace, and of the principles of the social determinants of wellbeing and the need for a state sponsored response to social problems in public housing, public health and public education. The nature of their relations with each other, with their menfolk and with the societies in which they operated is a matter for ongoing research. While Lucy Birks might have played the role of a self-effacing

[85] "Among Crocodiles: Australians in Africa". *The Register,* April 13, 1912, 15

woman devoted to helping others, the evidence is that she may actually have been the driving intellectual and artistic force within the family, and behind her daughter's aspirations.

The background of both of Edith Birks' parents then was evangelical, feminist, utopian, highly political. The clannish intensity was magnified by intermarriages of brothers and sisters with brothers and sisters, and the triple imperatives to spiritual salvation, social activism and the acquisition of wealth.

Chapter 4. Tessie Veronica Murphy

In the afternoon of a mild autumn day in 1919, Napier Birks was seen walking in Adelaide town with a young Tessie Veronica Bickford. They were trundling west along Grenfell Street towards West Terrace, where a Mrs Byrnes kept a house in which a comfortable room could be had for the night at a quite reasonable rate.

Tessie Veronica Murphy, as she had been, was a working-class Irish Catholic girl from Melbourne. In 1915, at the Melbourne Cup, she was introduced to Harold Bickford of the Bickfords chemicals company. Napier Birks had known Harold Bickford since they were children. They were both part of the incestuous circle of the Adelaide colonial, Protestant, mercantile bourgeoisie, and both habitues of the Commercial Traveller's Club, the haunt of sportsmen, lone travellers and men of business, a place where they could drink together, play billiards together and plan ventures and adventures.

In March of the following year, 1916, Harold and Tess were married, first in a Catholic ceremony in the bride's neighbourhood, and the next day in an Anglican rite at St Martins Church of England at Hawksbury, between South Yarra and Toorak, near the railway line. They honeymooned in Sydney and returned to Adelaide to live in Bickford's substantial house at Glenelg. In 1918, on April 25, Tessie Bickford bore a son, Ronald Ferguson Bickford. The Bickford marriage then collapsed.

By 1920, Tessie Bickford had entirely disentangled herself from any emotional or physical responsibility toward Harold and was living an apparently separate life. In particular she was liaising with Napier Birks on a regular basis, meeting him at the Adelaide railway station and staying with him at numerous locations around Adelaide including the house on West Terrace run by Mrs Byrne, at the Grand Orient Hotel in the city and in the Alexandra Flats on Mosely St at Glenelg.

Mr and Mrs Harold Bickford stopped being an item in the social pages in 1921, and in July 1922, he sued for divorce, citing as co-respondents Napier Birks, Brigadier-General John

Anthill, war hero and commander of the Keswick Barracks (also infamous for failing to prevent a disastrous attack on Gallipoli that resulted in the death of 141 soldiers), the vigneron Frank T. Hamilton, and a commercial traveller named Nathan Fryberg.

It was a newspaperman's dream. Minute by minute accounts of liaisons and seductions, dressings and undressings, are recreated word for word, appearing each day in multiple newspapers across the nation from July to September of that year.

The decree nisi was granted on September 2 1922. The son Reginald was parted from the mother (Bickford's mother was awarded legal guardianship) and the case disappeared from the sensationalist tabloids, bar a couple of mentions, couched in acid snidery, when Harold Bickford remarried a very sensible middle-aged woman, and on a second occasion when the *Truth* journalist claimed to have discovered a much reduced Tessie Veronica Murphy, now Mrs Maloney, being thrown out of there in a drunken and abusive state.

The history of Tessie Murphy is a conundrum, but one which provides information even in the face of its mysteries. It is possible to track Edith Birks on an almost day to day basis in the social pages of the South Australian popular press. We know about the clothes she wore, the cars she drove, who she associated with, what her opinions were, to the point of quoted words. We know the schools she went to and who she associated with at those schools. We can accompany her to concerts and exhibition openings, along with her mother and her brothers and her friends.

Basil Burdett is less apparent until he moves to Sydney and joins the clans of the bourgeois avant-garde. After that, people write about him, paint him, publish caricatures of him, feature him in the gossip columns. After he dies they reminisce about him, and pass judgement on him, grant him accolades and immortality, a place in the culture.

Tessie Murphy as a historical figure remains in a fog. There are traces, but those traces are confused, by the structure of historical records, by journalistic invention, by self-invention, by a series of prejudices and preconceptions that conceptualise and identify her not

as an autonomous individual, but as a type, a caricature, a moment in which a set of ideological preoccupations can be embodied, and the body then cast aside. Rather than being a transgressor in her own right, a subject crossing the borders of social definition, she is a transgression, the instrument of the transgressing of others.

An Irish navvy's daughter – Tess Murphy

Tessie Murphy grew up in Footscray in inner city Melbourne in the first decades of the twentieth century. Born in 1896, she was four years older than Edith Birks and two years older than Basil Burdett and Tom Cutlack. Where Edith was the eldest child with two younger brothers, and Basil an only child, Tessie was the youngest in her family, with sisters a decade older than her, and no brothers. Like Edith, her grandparents were immigrants in the middle of the nineteenth century who had originally settled in South Australia.

Tessie's parents were Terence Murphy and Kate Crotty, and they were married in St Patrick's Catholic Cathedral in Adelaide in 1884 when he was 24 and she was 28. In 1885 they were living at Tailem Bend, a railway town 60 miles to the South East of Adelaide on a bend of the River Murray, on the road and the railway line to Melbourne. The railway had been put through in 1884 and the town of Tailem Bend started as a camp for the railway gang, set up among the native pines on the sandstone cliffs above the river. Terrence Murphy may have been a fireman on the railways, or he may have been an itinerant labourer.

In August of 1885, the *Mt Barker Courier and Onkaparinga and Gumeracha Advertiser* carried a short article reporting that: "Last week a navvy's wife presented her lord and master with triplets – girls. One of them unfortunately soon died, but I am glad to hear the remaining two are doing well". The triplets were all girls, Kate, Mary and Margaret. Kate was the sister who died immediately. Margaret died a day later, leaving just Mary May to

survive to adulthood. Terence and Kate might have been living and bearing their children in that very railway camp among the pines above the river.

By 1888, the family had moved to Footscray in Victoria. Here four more children were born: Bridget in 1888, Kate in 1889, Nellie in 1891, and Teresa Margaret in 1896, along with another sister Celia.

By 1912, Terence and Kate were living at 240 Nicholson St. It is possible that a move to "Marvellous Melbourne" was a step up from the desultory mallee and saltbush country of Tailem Bend, but Footscray was an industrial working-class suburb quite comparable with the noxious English industrial slums that Napier Birks' grandfather George had escaped a half century earlier. It was dominated by animal industries concentrated along the banks of the Maribyrnong River, boiling down works, tanneries, wool washers, slaughterhouses, and "inhabited by people from the lowest echelons of society".[86] A letter to the *Williamstown Chronicle* in 1879 describes:

> the abominable effluvia which rose on every hand. When the wind was from one direction the stink was wafted over the river from the Boiling Down Works … so rich and full of all that was abominable that the inhabitants of the place risked their lives in trying to avoid breathing … When it was from another quarter the concentrated essence of all that was vile was borne in upon us from the northern piggeries, and when it came from the south the lower district had its sea breeze laden with the nauseating odours emanating from a certain manure factory.

Nevertheless, by 1914, the Murphy's were living in a house called "Kia Ora", the name coming from a Maori greeting, common in the Australian suburban culture of the time to symbolise relaxation, friendliness and fair weather such as may be expected in the South Pacific. In 1914, the family announced in the papers the engagement of their youngest

[86]Quoted in https://tomelbourne.com.au/history-footscray/ accessed 20 May 2021

daughter Tessie to the son of another family, the Nesbits, in another house with a name, "Maroona", in the affluent suburb of Canterbury Park. William Nesbit was a commercial traveller. This liaison obviously didn't take, because just a year later Tess, now 19 and working as a typist for a college lecturer, Mr Stell, earning two pounds and two shillings a week, met and married Harold Bickford

It was certainly a contrast in types. Harold was an accountant, managing director and heir to the Bickfords food and chemicals company and 21 years her senior. He had been best man at least three weddings through the nineteen teens and twenties but had failed so far to find a suitable match for himself. The Adelaide gossip columnists must have had good fun choosing their words. "Have you heard of the latest engagement?" enthused Lady Kitty:

> Mr Harold Bickford of Glenelg, Adelaide, to Miss Tess Murphy, Footscray, Melbourne. Seems so odd to write of him as "Harold" for to his friends and acquaintances he is intimately known as "Tup", and being the best of good fellows that circle is an enormous one. Miss Murphy is quite one of our very pretty girls, and as she intends to visit Adelaide shortly, you will see that for yourselves. The marriage is fixed for February. [87]

The very conjunction of Glenelg, a pleasant, breezy coastal enclave of pines and seafront mansions (possibly the grandest of which was the Bickford pile "Alvington", right on the seafront) and Footscray would convey all the information required by anyone even mildly in the know. Beneath the playfulness, all of the portents were immediately obvious.

Napier Birks met Tess Bickford in 1919. They were introduced by Herbert "Buckie" McFarlane, the Managing Director of Birks' company Motors Limited and an old-time boon companion of his. Birks and McFarlane had both attended Whinham College. It appears they

[87] Lady Kitty of Melbourne was a society gossip column that ran in various papers in Melbourne and Adelaide from the 1880's to the 1930's. Journalists included Kathleen McKain and Elizabeth Aird. https://www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1477

were also the best of good fellows. When their friend Harry Harley was killed fighting in France in 1916, the Melbourne Winner recorded

> "What habitue of the Commercial Traveller's Club did not know of the dauntless three - Buckie McFarlane, Napier Birks and Harry Harley?"

Among his friends Birks was known as "Johnny" or "Gordy". Harley was a committee member of the SA Amateur Billiards Association, and Napier Birks was a keen billiards player, passing that skill onto his daughter Edith. She even played against Walter Lindrum when he visited Braestead, the Birks house in Parkside.[88] Edith's response to any sort of sport was "There are only two sports worth playing; chess and billiards" (not snooker, which was "vulgar").

McFarlane had first met Tess when she was trying to start her car by hand and he offered her assistance. He said that he had introduced Mrs Bickford to Birks on two occasions and that "Mrs Bickford had lunched at the Grand Central with Mr and Mrs Birks and myself". Tess also testified that she had been introduced to both Miss and Mrs Birks. So Tess had met Lucy McDougall and Edith.

Harold finally went to court in 1922. There is a good deal of confusion in the divorce narrative. Most of the information is drawn from the court proceedings, where every witness denies their involvement and their fault.[89] As noted in the transcripts, most of the letters between Harold and Tess seem to have been written "under the supervision of lawyers". However, it is worth trying to piece together the circumstances.

[88] Walter Lindrum was World professional Billiards champion from 1933 to 1950. His grandfather, his father and his brother were all champion professional billiards players.

[89]This information is drawn from daily newspaper reports starting with the Advertiser, Thursday, 6 July, 1922 ,9

The Bickford divorce

The essence of the case was that Harold accused Tess of adultery with four different men – Brigadier John "The Bullant" Antill, Napier Birks, the vigneron Frank Eric Hamilton, and the commercial traveller Nathan Fryberg. The petition specifies numerous occasions, including visits to a house on West Terrace "situated between Waymouth and Currie Streets"; "at or near Adelaide" after "leaving South Terrace going along Glen Osmond Road in a southerly direction"; at the Grand Central Hotel in Adelaide; "at a place the petitioner was unable to specify": at Hamilton's house near Brighton; at the Pier Hotel, Glenelg "after 11 o'clock on the night of May 9, 1921; in Antill's flat at the Alexandra Apartments, Mosley Terrace, Glenelg; at Bickford's residence at Glenelg; and "divers other occasions that the petitioner cannot specify at present". It was an interesting and perhaps exhausting 18 months for Mrs Bickford through 1920 and 1921. And indeed, she did get sick.

Tess responded by denying the adultery but, "if she had committed adultery, the petitioner had condoned such adultery". This seems a strange construction to my ears, but it amounts to a legal notification that Harold was condoning the adultery and that precluded a divorce. Tess also alleged that Harold had been guilty of cruelty towards her, in that he had assaulted her and "repeatedly insisted on her using certain measures to avoid the conception of children, which insistence, together with his manner and conduct towards her, caused her great pain and affected her bodily and mental health". The second thing she accused him of was that he "continually induced and allowed the respondent (Tess) to go out alone during the day and night and refused or neglected to accompany her … and by neglect, insult and coldness both whilst she was alone and also in the presence of others, so treated her and so conducted himself that she was left without the care and protection of her husband".

This culminated on April 25 1921, her son's 3rd birthday, when "he refused her admittance to his home and told her she could not return". Finally, in extenuation, she alleged

that “the petitioner, knowing the respondent was in the habit of being in the company of the co-respondents, and believing that adultery had and was about to take place, took no step to prevent the respondent, but was willing that the respondent should commit adultery.”

The scene was set by an exchange of letters in which the various accusations are put forward and denied. In amongst all of these legal gambits of accusations and counteraccusations, is to possible to divine what is really going on?

There are two deeply contradictory accounts of this relationship in the divorce testimony. From Harold, a story of a dutiful and loving husband giving perhaps too much lenience to his wayward, headstrong and childlike wife. From Tess, a story of a manipulative, bored and resentful husband, alternating unpredictably between negligence and cruelty and given to bouts of drunken violence.

The relationship between Tess and Harold soured quickly. He wanted to stay at home, and he wanted her to stay home with him. She wanted to experience this life of luxury and expansive sociable urbane people. She clearly had some cachet with the fast set, the sporting men and men of business encroaching into their own middle age, with staid and crumbling home lives and expensive children. As much as Adelaide liked to present itself as centre of moral purity, “the city of churches”, there was philandering aplenty going on.

Tess Murphy of Footscray was worldly enough to see this immediately, and innocent enough to believe that what is good for the goose is good for the gander. A good-natured old soldier like John “The Bullant” Antill,[90] or a man like Napier Birks, wealthy, handsome, urbane, clever and virile with a fatherly mien and choice of fast cars to whip you

[90] Major- General John Macquarie Antill (1866 – 1937) was an Australian soldier in the Boer War and the First World War. His entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography states that he was “Tall, spare and wiry, brusque in manner and speech, Antill was recognized throughout his career as a courageous soldier, an able leader, a stern disciplinarian and a shrewd judge of men, with a flair for moulding those under his command to his ideal of what a soldier should be. He was famous for refusing a request to cancel a futile attack at The Nek on Gallipoli in 1915 in which “out of around 500 men committed to the attack, more than half became casualties, with 234 being killed and 138 wounded”. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Antill_(general)

off for an adventure in the Adelaide Hills might well have been a flattering offer, as an antidote to a stifling Saturday night watching Harold read the racing news.

By the middle of 1920, Tess "went out a good deal in the evenings without her husband, saying she was going to places he was not asked". The Brisbane *Daily Mail* reported that Harold's "first doubts as to his wife's chastity was when a man named King Roberts came to his office and told him something. It was then he heard what made him suspect his wife of having committed misconduct with Napier Birks".[91] King Roberts was a billiards player who was beaten, along with Angelo Demodena, the reigning local champion, in the final rounds of the Commercial Travellers Tournament of 1920. Nathan Fryberg was a commercial traveller, (as was Nesbit to whom Tessie was engaged in 1915, just before she met Bickford). Birks and Buckie McFarlane were, as already noted, habitues of the Commercial Travelers Club.

In August 1920, Bickford "taxed the respondent, (that is Tess), about her meetings with Birks and she denied them. She went to Melbourne in October and on November 12 he went to meet her at the station and found Birks waiting there as well. He said he was there to meet his son who was sick, but Bickford said he never saw any sign of the son.

Evidence was given that at the end of 1920 and beginning of 1921, three times Birks and Tessie went alone to a house on West Terrace and rented a bedroom. This was the house kept by Mrs Byrne.[92] On cross examination by Francis Villaneuve -Smith for Tess, Mrs Byrne described Tess as arriving with Birks in a bottle green dress made of satin faced cloth with a hat. She wore no veil and made no attempt at concealment. When she heard that a married woman had come to the house with Birks she resented it. Had she known she would not have permitted it.

[91] *Daily Mail* Brisbane 10 July 1922, 4
[92] In trying to track down who is this Mrs Byrne running a house on West Terrace, there does appear, in 1913 and in 1923, a *Sergeant* Byrne, police officer owning a house on West Terrace.

Harold had also questioned Tess about General Antill. He said "You invite General Antill to my home. A man with the reputation he's got. I'm sorry to know you were in his company." She replied "I'll ask him as often as I like". Bickfords petition claimed that Tess had committed adultery with Antill at his flat in the Alexandra Terrace at Mosley Street in Glenelg. A private detective testified that he had burst into the flat to find Tessie sitting on the bed wearing nothing but an unbuttoned blouse with the General's medals dangling from her neck. In a report in the Melbourne Herald entitled "Quick Change Artist", Antill's batman Stanley Cosgrove, under questioning from Villaneuve-Smith, explained how he was standing beside the wardrobe in the corridor when Tess began to take the General's uniforms out, a blue uniform first then a khaki one. She said to him "Come into the bedroom. I'm going to put the General's uniforms on". She began to undress and "had her dress off to the waist" when he left the room. A little later she came into the kitchen wearing the blue uniform; pants, big boots, tunic and straps. She asked him to come to the bedroom to help her pull the big boots off her feet. He said she walked into the dining room, then up and down the corridor twice. She did a bit of a skip there and laughed. Smith asked

Did she wave to you? - No.

Did she kiss you? – No.

What was she wearing? - Knickers.

What do you mean by knickers? Bloomers or women's ordinary

white underwear? – Bloomers.

This strange scene of uncomfortable intimacy was made utterly surreal by the next exchange:

What happened next? – Mrs Cosgrove came in.

Had she been looking through the window? – Yes.

Cosgrove's wife had been watching it all from the window.

Smith suggested that there was an ulterior motive at play. Cosgrove denied that he had ever said "I have had a row with the Bull. I'll get even and get him into the basket", or "I'll blow the gaff on some of the women he has been with" or "I have enough up my sleeve to get a hundred out of him".

But Harold Bickford did give him a job, as a storeman. [93]

There is some evidence that the involvement of Antill was a ruse. Birks' grandson said that Birks bought him off. His granddaughter wrote that Birks was "renowned for having, with a group of his friends, paid an impoverished army colonel (or some such) to take all the blame".[94] Stanley Cosgrove testified that Antill told him "They are watching her. They think she is going with me. I am only clearing the way for Birks. They are only waiting for such time as they may be together".

Harold began to notice that Tessie was drinking a lot, the levels in the family decanters being "considerably reduced" when he sat down to dinner at night. He had said to her "Do not drink so much. It will do you no good. It is absolutely degrading." After Christmas 1921, they stopped sleeping together and she stayed in the spare room with her friend (Mrs Bennett) who had come to stay from Melbourne. He heard a telephone conversation in which she was very excited, laughing. He testified that she said "I have so much to tell you. Same time, same place. I'll be there". Soon after she was dressed for going out. He said "Where are you off to?". She said "No business of yours". She went out more often and came home later and later. He told her he'd lock her out if she kept it up.[95]

Tess provided a very different version of events. The paper reports her testimony verbatim.

"During the first four months they were very happy, and at the end of that time she found herself in a certain condition. Her husband bought her some pills but she

[93] *The Herald*, July 27, 1922, 23
[94] Jane Burdett Recollections p 50
[95] "A divorce case" *The Advertiser*, July 6, 1922, 11

wouldn't take them at first. One night she was at Mrs Bonython's and became very ill. Dr Dawson attended her and she remained in bed for ten days. Some time after her illness her husband brought home an instrument. Witness didn't use it at first because she always wanted to have a baby".

They did produce a baby, Ronald Fergusson Bickford born on 25 April 1917. However "After the birth of Ronald something was done to prevent the birth of more children at her husband's wish. Subsequent to this she fell into bad health." [96] Harold was sceptical. Dr Dawson had advised an operation, but Harold "said she wasn't to have an operation as she was well and it would be too much expense. He told her to go out more, "go out as often as she wished so as not to be lonely".

By 1919, things took a more sinister turn. Harold insinuated she was trying to poison him and said he was going to have scraps from a dinner she had cooked "analysed".

On Christmas Eve, 1920, Harold turned nasty:

"When her husband came home he was intoxicated. … She handed him a bathing costume as a Christmas gift. He opened the parcel and said "You have no right to spend money on such things" and threw the articles at her. During dinner she asked him why he was so late. He said "Mind your own business. You can do what you like and go where you like" and added "You have been motored home". Witness said she came home in the train and he called her a ___ liar. She retorted "I won't stand you talking to me like this". He followed her with clenched fists, took her by the neck and pushed her through the dining room. He followed her up in the passage, swearing and said "I'll smash your spirit and drag you in the gutter" … She went around the back into the baby's room. Her husband came in and took the boy from her. He then went out in his motor car and returned an hour later more intoxicated. He came into the bedroom and taking her by the hand pulled her out of the room and told

[96] "The Bickering Bickfords". *Truth,* August 6, 1922, 4

her never to come back there any more. That night she slept on the floor in the spare room. [97]

In May of 1921, Harold employed a private detective to watch Tess. The man he chose was Dudley Samuel Foy. Foy had been a private soldier in the war and before that worked on the railways. He became a store keeper at Kurralta, a suburb on the fringe of the city on the main road and rail-line to the middle class coastal enclave of Glenelg, and then he set up as a private detective and he may have already worked on the Hyland divorce case. He had a brother named "Bronzer" and a sister named Phyllis, "the prettiest girl in Adelaide. She won Mackintosh's beauty competition".[98]

The flavour of Foy's work, and of his competence, comes through in his evidence. On 24 May 1921 he saw Mrs Bickford with Birks on South Terrace in his Hudson 6. Mrs Bickford and Mrs Bennett (the friend who was staying with her) got off the train at South Terrace railway station. Foy:

> went into the parklands and got into a drain and crawled up to a fence. Birks was standing by his car with a friend. Mrs Bickford came up to Birks and said "Foy is about". He said "don't stand there. Get into the car." They did so and drove off.

Questions were raised during the trial as to his reliability, and his questionable handling of evidence. Certainly, he struggles under cross examination from Tessie's lawyer Villaneuve - Smith. Foy produced as evidence a handkerchief he found at Glenelg Jetty on May 9. He denies Bickford gave him the handkerchief or said "This may be useful to you".

Villaneuve-Smith for Tess:

"We all know how names can be put on by private detectives who become storekeepers".

Harold's lawyer, A. W. Piper (later to become a supreme court judge) objected strongly.

Villaneuve-Smith: "There is no need for tears".

[97] The bickering Bickfords
[98] The bickering Bickfords

Piper: “Your honour I am very indignant”.

His honour chimed in with solicitation for the law: “Nothing must be said that might prejudice the jury”.

Smith: “Nothing was further from my thoughts.”

As a foil to Foy in terms of high culture, incisive intellect and gravitas, Francis Villaneuve-Smith, K.C., is almost a stock vaudeville character. Tall, patrician, Catholic, a linguist and art connoisseur, he wore a pince-nez as a means of psychological intimidation.

Ultimately, and inevitably, the divorce proceedings concluded in Harold Bickford’s favour. Brigadier General Antill was forced to pay costs. There is no finding against Napier Birks and Nathan Fryberg is dismissed as an irrelevancy. Any remaining civility between Birks and Mrs Birks was dead and gone. His granddaughter recalled the silence of the household as late as the 1940s, the antagonists seated at the far ends of a very long dining table and all conversation conducted through the butler - “Please ask Mr Birks to pass the salt” – and the old man wiping his mouth and disappearing upstairs immediately, perhaps followed by the sound of a powerful car disappearing down the long driveway.[99] In 1926, Harold Bickford remarried, a far more suitable match in Miss Ethel E. Villiers, representing the return to order after the disorderly class transgression and divorce, with a wedding for completeness and the transgressors all cast out or dead.

Was Tess simply a naïve young woman enthralled, as anyone might be, by the possibilities of escaping the banal drudgery of life in stinking Footscray for a life of wealth beside the sea in sunny Glenelg in the company of a gentle and loving older man? Or was she, as witness Wickstead opined, the “cleverest crook he had ever seen”, a small time grifter and prostitute, a manipulator and gold-digger who may have bitten off more than she could chew?

[99] Jane Burdett, conversation with the author, 1975.

Her objective social position as the wife of Harold Bickford meant she began moving in the circles of the cultured bourgeoisie. As a typist, she was literate. She had been associating with a lecturer at the Working Men's College. She obviously had the potential to slide fairly seamlessly into these social networks. She may even have had some exotic cachet as a working class Irish girl if she chose to join the avant-garde. She attended the social scene throughout 1916 -1920; Mr and Mrs Harold Bickford at the theatre, at the Red Cross Tea for the Light Horse, staying at Pipiriki at Victor Harbor, a fashionable and respectable resort hotel, along with the Bonythons, the Vercos, the Misses Muecke,[100] traversing the geography of the Adelaide mercantile bourgeoisie – and, clearly with considerable success! There is a poignant entry in *The Mail* of 18 August 1917 headlined "Tonight at the Theatre". The social elite attended a performance of "Turn to the right", among them Mr and Mrs Harold Bickford, Mr and Mrs Penfold-Hyland and Mrs Evan Kyffin Thomas. Mrs Evan Kyffin Thomas is Maisie Archer Smith, sister-in-law of Napier Birks' mother Mary Maria Kyffin Thomas. Maisie was named as a co-respondent (disguised as Mrs X) in the Penfold-Hylands divorce in 1919.[101] These gentile Adelaide churchgoers, seated together at the theatre, were all cuckolding one another.

There is a sense of inevitability about the outcome of the case, the victory of the husband, the removal of the child from the mother, the removal of the mother from the scene, and the silence that fell almost immediately. But if it was a silence that was intended to erase memory and allow a reconstitution of some sort of status quo ante, that was an impossibility. Instead it was a silence that *retained* its memory, a silence that permeated into the salons and breakfast rooms and marriages of the protagonists, leaving all their griefs and frustrations and unspoken rage intact.

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[100] The Bonythons, the Vercos and the Mueckes are significant families of the Adelaide mercantile bourgeoisie. The Bonythons have interests in newspapers, mining and arts philanthropy and are linked by marriage to the Thomas family. John Langdon Bonython married Minnie Hope Rutherford, whose sister Ngaroma married Rendel Kyffin Thomas who was the son of Maisie Archer Smith and Evan Kyffin Thomas, brother of Mary and Rose Thomas, Edith Birks' grandmothers.

[101] Joan Willington, *Maisie,* 1994

Chapter 5. Edith marries Basil

In 1925, Edith was beginning to make her way in the world as an independent public figure. She had received an excellent liberal education at Dryburgh House, at Southfield School and at Girton House. She was a good musician and showed promise of being an excellent artist. She was wealthy and well connected, and possessed of an entrepreneurial spirit, a taste for adventure, a fearless temperament, and a searching intellect.

At the age of 19 Birks, in conjunction with her mother Lucy, had gathered a network of influential artists including Arthur Streeton and Hans Heysen to back her project for a new school of art and design in Adelaide, motivated by a desire to regenerate a culture of beauty and aesthetic devotion.

She was the inheritor of a family tradition of indomitable feminism in the Christian tradition, and now in the aftermath of the First World War, she was ready and primed to engage in the revolutionary social ferment of a new global cultural structures that were emerging from the profound dislocations of the war. She liked cars and was a good driver. She and her brothers were adventurous and immediately comfortable with the new technologies of speed and flight. Socially, intellectually and materially they were Modernists.

Social revolutions are inevitably, structurally, revolutions in gender roles, and there was in the nineteen twenties a proliferation of young middle class women undertaking adventures in cars and planes. Edith's brothers were of a similarly expansive temperament. Leslie spent two years travelling in Europe and America, including being briefly imprisoned in the US for having no visa. In 1926 he made a long arduous expedition taking an Essex 6 touring car from Adelaide to Darwin and back through Queensland, where he had to be hospitalised in Cloncurry with Dengue Fever. In 1928 he joined the Michael Terry expedition to outback Western Australia. The youngest brother Norman, though no intellectual, was a gifted athlete and gymnast, and later he would become something of a flying ace.

Edith had met Basil Burdett at some time in the early twenties. It seems clear that they were temperamentally well suited to each other, each ambitious, transgressive, entrepreneurial, intellectual, Modernist in outlook and temperament. They could each be useful to each other, and they liked each other. Edith, for all her family heritage of feminism, was still embedded in a social system that demanded that a woman should be under the rule of her father until she married and came under the rule of her husband. Edith was not of a mind to submit to any such rule and Napier's domineering personality must have been something she wanted and needed to escape from. Though her mother was more tactical in her influence, Edith needed no less – perhaps even more – to escape from her filial power.

She had very early in life developed a genuine emotional attachment to a boy, her cousin Tommy Cutlack (actually her uncle by marriage), a mercurial, eccentric, very masculine soldier boy from Renmark. But this alliance had been forbidden, and Tom had gone first to war and then to the Pacific. The other boys in her social circle were of the species of conventional Adelaide mercantile bourgeois, sharebrokers, businessmen, their tastes running to horseracing and fishing, and with a deep cultural contempt for women. Adelaide in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, "City of Churches" notwithstanding, was said to have one of the highest rates of prostitution in Australia.[102]

Edith's father provided a model of masculinity that would have been at least ambiguous in its attractions, and her parents' marriage was no more than a public performance. The great example of passionate and utopian devotion displayed by her great aunt and uncle George and Helen Birks had ended in catastrophe.[103] Her uncle Norman McDougall had a wife and child left in London while he adventured in Renmark (and in France with novelist Rebecca West).

[102] Lee Hammond, *Making Place: Maps and memories in the creation of the West End of Adelaide.* Thesis 2007. Quoted in Liz Walsh "Real life sex in the city", *Sunday Mail,* May 8, 2011.

[103] Charles Birks' brother George and his wife Helen Thomas had joined the ill-fated utopian escapade of New Australia, run by the hare-brained and dictatorial William Lane in Paraguay in the 1890's. George had died there.

The very notion of romantic sexual attraction or indeed of emotional attachment of any species must have been at least of questionable worth for this young woman.

Perhaps Edith felt very lucky indeed to have discovered a pragmatic and comfortable partner in Burdett, and she must have got to the point in 1925 where she saw a marriage to him as the best and easiest way to solve a tedious problem.

Burdett, on the other hand, faced a different issue; his sexuality. He had, by dint of a focussed and diligent act of self-creation, found what seemed like a home among the bourgeois intelligentsia of 1920's Australia. He was sophisticated, witty, well dressed, quite the dandy indeed, as can be seen from a caricature of him published in 1925. He had found a mode of acceptance among the beau monde, and in particular he had found powerful protection in his patron Keith Murdoch. Nevertheless, his sexuality was still a very dangerous proposition in 1920's Australia, deeply unacceptable even among his friends. Darryl Lindsay, one of his closest friends, referred to Burdett's homosexuality as "a certain weakness of character that I don't like". [104] A marriage to a woman he liked and could laugh with and converse with would solve a dangerous social problem for him. It would also, fortuitously, provide him with financial backing for his entry into the expensive world of art dealing.

For her part, as a question of business, he must have seemed like an excellent investment; a man of taste and education, connected to the highest echelons of the art market, and with a burgeoning cultural influence as his relationship deepened with Ure Smith's *Art in Australia* magazine, and then with Murdoch's *Herald* and his mission of national cultural renovation. If Edith had wanted to make an impact on the culture, her art school in Adelaide might have seemed like a provincial apprenticeship compared with the instruments of ideological and cultural influence that Burdett seemed have in his grasp. The partnership would have found approval with Edith's father, Napier Birks. His own family, through his mother

[104] Richard Haese, *Rebels and precursors,* 1988, 99. On the other hand, the contempt for women expressed by men such as Lindsay is a window onto the sexual contradictions of that culture.

Mary Thomas were newspapermen, and they were part of the same financial and patronage networks as the Murdoch's, with whom Burdett was a favourite. The match made good business sense.

It is hard to think that Edith was unaware of Basil's sexuality before they married, but it is not impossible. For all her modernist worldliness, she displayed extraordinary naivety on many occasions. The conflict between her parents – between the refined and disgusted puritanism of her mother and the flagrant philandering of her sensualist father, might well have left her regarding the whole subject as best left unexamined, as so much "nonsense" (one of her favourite words). She had been overtaken by a powerful passion as a young teenager (with Tommy Cutlack), and the destruction of that flowering impulse must have been intolerably painful; the evidence is that she decided to lock such adolescent fantasies away and concentrate her energies on more pragmatic and manageable pursuits. She seems to have thought of marriage in entirely instrumental terms, something irrelevant to emotions, phenomena which anyway she treated with the utmost suspicion. She later advised her daughter Jane that the secret to a successful marriage was to have a packed suitcase under the bed, ready for a quick getaway. A marriage to a gay man might have presented itself as a great benefit, with the dangers of passion and sexual attraction, shown to be so unreliable, transient and filled with pain, taken out of the equation altogether. In the end, the match with Burdett, with its combination of conviviality, the possibility of settling family disquiet, and mutual self-interest was compelling.

There is surprisingly little information available about how Edith and Basil met. Basil had returned from France in 1919 and was living with the Brisbane painter and etcher Lloyd Rees on Sydney harbour by 1920. Edith set up her Adelaide art school in 1919. The real connection between the Birks family and the art world seems to have been through Edith's mother Lucy Birks. She had apparently been intimate friends with Hans Heysen. She and her father had organised an exhibition in Adelaide of paintings by the British Impressionist George

Boyle in 1915, and there is evidence (her association with Hedley Marsden and Elioth Gruner) which suggests that she played a role in encouraging young artists and intellectuals. The earliest evidence of a direct connection between Basil and the Birks family is a book that he presented to Lucy in July of 1924, inscribed with terms of affection and gratitude suitable to a possible future son-in-law.[105] Edith Birks and Basil Burdett married in the Registry Office in Melbourne on 22 December 1925.

Mr and Mrs Burdett now tried to settle into a life together. According to Jan Gerraty, Edith had already in 1925 financed Basil's entry into partnership with John Young and the foundation of the Macquarie Galleries.[106] They lived in Jersey Road, Elizabeth Bay, and then in 1926 they commissioned their friend, the artist and architect John Moore, to design a "simple attractive modern home" which they built "on a block of land that John Young (Basil's business partner) had purchased earlier" in Wahroonga in the leafy hinterland of Sydney's North Shore. There is a feature spread about it in the *Home and Australian Quarterly*. The lines are sparse and clean, with a circular rosewood table in the dining room, on oiled and waxed Golden Tallowwood floors, with Chinese rugs, large, light-filled windows and two Hiroshige prints on the walls. This is where their daughter, my mother, Jane (Lucy Jane Napier Burdett) was born in August of 1927.[107]

There is an interesting incongruity in this story. My mother's story was that they had sex only once, a short conversation that produced her. She was born in August of 1927, so that event must have happened in November of 1926, a year after the marriage. This gives credence to the idea that it was indeed a marriage of convenience. In which case why did they have sex at all? Maybe they got drunk one night and had a surge of affection for each other? Maybe my mother's story wasn't true? These are the dangers of family history.

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[105] The inscription, on the flyleaf of Vihjalmur Stefansson's travel memoir *Hunters of the great North* reads "To dear Mrs. Birks, with grateful memories of a stay in Adelaide. July 1924. From Basil Burdett. Lucy has also inserted her personal bookplate on the page opposite.

[106] Jan Gerraty *Basil Burdett* 1978 3

[107] Joan Campbell, *Early Sydney Moderns.* 1988, 65; *Home and Australian Quarterly,* October 1, 1929

They travelled together. The *Sydney Sun* reported in September of 1926 that they were leaving Sydney "for Adelaide where they will be the guest of Mr and Mrs Napier Birks". They stayed with Norman Lindsay in the Blue Mountains.

Basil got on well with the artists and became close friends with many of them. A good part of his personal collection was comprised of works acquired on the strength of that personal relationship, with painters such as Horace Trenerry, Rupert Bunny, Lloyd Rees and Elioth Gruner. The women among them especially trusted him. Margaret Preston angrily insisted that she would not deal with anyone else in the boy's club:

> I feel that the men of Australia can't think too much in the respecting line of women …. You can run my shows in future and I have a suggestion to make – I write my own criticism and pay for them – one can do it for a patent medicine so why not Art - I really mean it… [108]

I think the thing was that he took their work seriously, in a way that is that movers and shakers like Sydney Ure Smith or Lionel Lindsay seemed incapable of. Ure Smith wrote of Preston in 1938, apparently without irony

> It's as well the male part of the Society of Artists selection committee were non-aggressive because we've had to put up with Mrs Preston and Thea Proctor … they are "personal" at all times and most dogmatic. They cannot be impersonal as most men can.

In the same year, Lionel Lindsay, one of Basil's most intimate friends and supporters wrote of Preston: "She is the most envious thing I know; a raging creature who burns her work when it doesn't sell. Hasn't one ounce of gratitude in her carcase". Even Lloyd Rees, normally a quite restrained if ironic commentator recalled of Preston in 1977 that "She was the most naturally conceited person I ever knew" [109]

[108] Joan Campbell, *Early Australian moderns,*11 and 145
[109] All quoted in Deborah Edwards, *Margaret Preston,* (Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW. 2005)

Basil took the women in his circle seriously, as he took his whole project seriously, not simply as a marketing exercise but because he was genuinely entranced by the cultural possibilities that he (and Edith) saw emerging in Australia for art, for sex and sexuality, for a rejuvenated European culture generally. In 1929 he reviewed *Ultima Thule,* the final volume of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* by his close friend Henry Handel Richardson:

> That Australia was a place of exile, that its landscape was unsympathetic to him should be easily understood. Sixty and seventy years ago no sentiment for the visual characteristics of this country existed in a general sense. Two generations of native landscape painters had not laboured to show us that the gum tree could be beautiful in its particular way even as the oak, the ash and the elm are in theirs. … Art is a powerful medium in the creation of national sentiment, and it is not so long, after all, since the art of Australia became emancipated to its own true realm. [110]

Burdett and Birks clearly shared significant philosophical and even emotional territory. But even the revolutionary avant-garde remained in a tight patriarchal embrace. Basil's sexual transgressions as a gay man, however disgusting to the likes of the Lindsay brothers (both Norman and Lionel had sympathies for forms of cultural and sexual mysticism that were not too far from those motivating German fascism) were less frowned upon than the transgression of being an assertive woman.

[110] *The Australian Quarterly.* Vol 1, No. 2 (June 1929) 105-110

Chapter 6. How can Death brag. Leslie Birks

In 1928 Edith's brother Leslie in Adelaide became engaged to Eugenie "Itty" Pulleine. She was the daughter of Robert Pulleine, a physician and a naturalist who had come to Adelaide in 1881 from New Zealand where his father Frederick Arthur Pulleine had been a farmer, or a "gentleman".[111] As well as being a respected medical specialist (eye, ear nose and throat), he trained himself in anthropology, strongly arguing against the prevailing derogatory assumptions of the day about the Indigenous people of Australia. Robert Pulleine belonged to eighteen learned societies and was president of six of them. His significant collection of indigenous artefacts was sold to Scandinavian collectors in the 1920s. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* records him as "a tall, strong man with a moustache who read widely, sang, entertained, and was gentle and kindly but firm; he could appear forbidding".[112] He was steeped in the tradition of rational idealists that forms a theme of this story.

Pulliene's son, Itty's brother, also named Robert, became a painter in a conservative Modernist tradition, painting pleasant, pastel shaded still-lifes and flower studies. He was a friend of Horace Trenerry's and Basil Burdett wrote about him in *Art in Australia*. The inscription on his gravestone at Mitcham cemetery describes him as an "Artist and bon vivant". Itty herself was comfortable as a socialite, allowing herself and her baby son to be photographed for feature articles illustrating the middle-class ideals of the competent, self-possessed modern woman. As a family, they formed part of the network of the liberal modernist intelligentsia that played such a role in the social geography of the Adelaide eastern suburbs mercantile bourgeoisie.

In the following year, 1929, Leslie Birks decided that he would learn to fly. There was a problem. It turned out he was deaf in one ear and that meant he was inclined to lose his

[111] Jim Smith *A Pulleine family story* (Touros Head NSW: J. Smith. 2000)
[112] "Robert Henry Pulleine" Australian Dictionary of biography http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pulleine-robert-henry-8129 accessed 13/01/2021

balance; and that meant he would not be able get his pilot's licence. It was his fiancé's father, Dr Robert Pulleine, who was the family doctor who noted the disability. And yet, in June of 1929, there he was, taking off on a solo flight in a Tiger Moth from Parafield aerodrome just north of Adelaide. It is possible that Napier Birks pulled some favours with his contacts to over-ride the safety management protocols of the Department of Aviation to allow his eldest son to take his flying lessons. It would be in character.

On the afternoon of 14 July 1929, Leslie made a solo flight and returned. At 4:30 pm – it gets dark around six in the evening at that time of year – he took off for a second solo flight:

> He was flying away from the aerodrome about 300 feet up when the machine took a sharp turn to the right, got into a spin, dropped sharply, and spun into the ground … Mr Birks was unconscious and shockingly injured when released from the plane, and died a few minutes later.[113]

A large crowd gathered that had to be controlled by two policemen. A report says his body was brought back to the City morgue in a Police Ambulance. Edith told her grandchildren that his body was brought back to their house at Parkside, carried in and placed on a sofa, and that was the first she and her mother knew of the accident. "You have no idea", she told my brother, "what it's like to lose the only person you have ever loved."[114]

Leslie's funeral procession was more than half a mile long, with "scores of cars drawn up on West Terrace as it passed into the cemetery". Four planes piloted by members of the Aero Club flew overhead, and the employees of Motors Limited formed a guard on either side of the road. A fortnight later, Napier asked to be taken on a flight over the spot where Leslie had crashed. The newspaper report states that it was a gesture of confidence in flying and in the club. This seems odd, to say the least, but it is difficult to second guess the emotions of this man as he contemplated the death of his eldest son. The emotional impact on Lucy are also

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[113] *The Register News Pictorial*, Monday July 15, 1929.

[114] Geoffrey Heim, conversation with the author 1980. This was the only report I ever had of her commenting on personal emotions

undocumented, but one can only imagine, given Edith's casual comment regarding her mother's nervousness about flying when *Edith's* plane had flipped over in 1925, and especially in the light of information that was revealed in the inquest. In that forum Robert Pulleine, clearly outraged, said that he had

> examined Birks in about 1926 and found him deaf in the left ear. He had also lost all sense of balance in that ear. In his opinion, if Birks flew, something would happen sooner or later.

It was on a visit to Melbourne that Leslie was examined by two other doctors and on the strength of that the Department of Civil Aviation recommended that he could be trained as a pilot.

Itty Pulleine waited a year before becoming engaged to another flyer, Flight Lieutenant Cecil Hyatt "Beery" Noble, and moved with him to Egypt from where she published observations on the life of the expatriate English.

Chapter 7. No man put asunder.

Edith divorces Basil

By 1929, four years of marriage was enough for Edith Birks. Perhaps the catastrophe of her brother's death brought things into perspective. In December of 1930, Basil left for England, "having arranged that her mother should live in their home with his wife, and then his mother when she found time".[115]

She wrote to him and cabled him to tell him that she had reattached to Tom Cutlack. The cable read "You understand my letter and will arrange future by mutual agreement … Jane splendid and sends love daddy. Twinkle."[116]The letter which arrived in England a week later seems entirely in the spirit of good friends resolving a common problem together. Edith's main problem is not the divorce, but the breach it entailed with her mother.

> "My dear Buck,
>
> When you have had time to think I want you to write to me about what you want to do concerning our domestic problems. Mother left here, but I have had a serious row with her over Tom who has been staying here too."

It does seem slightly bizarre that that they should all three have been sharing the house; Edith, mother Lucy, and Tom, who was of course the brother-in-law of Lucy's own brother Frank. This is Lucy Birks, nee McDougall, daughter of puritan anti-vice campaigner John McDougall. It's a heroic sort of optimism, I suppose, on Edith's part. She goes on:

> It's strange to think that I have at last done what you have so often urged me to do – definitely broken away from mother's influence and opposed her wishes. …Tom and I have decided that the best thing we can do is to stick together now and let the families howl. … I wish I had foreseen this before you left, but when you spoke half in

[115] "Wahroonga man freed by divorce" *Sydney Truth* July 5, 1931, 24

[116] I have to note my complete amazement at the idea that anyone ever called my severe and humourless grandmother "Twinkle"!

> earnest about me going off with Tom, I was too upset about you to think seriously of trying to make a happy life for myself.

She tried to explain things to her mother but was met with rage – "selfish, wicked, cruel, heartless, causing a scandal". She discusses briefly the actual nature of their relationship:

> You see Mum has no idea of what a rotten time it has been for you as well as for me since I found that I could not live intimately with you…. She has no idea of the torture you have gone through … she can't realise that you and I know that we can't possibly make any sort of life together.

She discusses the technicalities of marriage and divorce entirely dispassionately, as if these were issues they had discussed philosophically and were in agreement on:

> As for the question of divorce, if we can decide to do it in a way that will cause no unnecessary distress to the child later on, so much the better…. I think there are several ways of doing it quietly… I suppose if the families get very concerned I will marry Tom, but I don't want to. Neither he nor I care very much about that sort of tie.

She seems to have a secure assumption that they are both rational and reasonable and that irrelevant emotions need not intrude into a technical arrangement.

> I hope you can see that the most important thing to me is that you understand how I feel about you, and that I do not want you to cut yourself off from me. Just because of a silly legal arrangement, we should not feel any different.

Edith's understanding of the situation did not correspond with Basil's. In March of 1931, Basil received the letter while staying with Randolph Schwabe in England. Schwabe records Basil's response: "Basil Burdett came … made farewells. He is going back to Australia sooner than he

wished, as things there are even worse than he thought … and talks as if he is completely ruined."[117]

When he arrived home from Europe, finding Tom still in the house, he immediately took on the role of the aggrieved husband. Basil told Tom to leave but he refused, saying he would only go if Edith instructed him to. She told Tom to stay. Later Basil and Lionel Lindsay returned to the house and this time, Tom refused to let him see the daughter, saying "you'd better get that straight". Basil was tall but he was no fighter. Not in a physical sense. Legally, however, Edith, as the adulterer, had no leg to stand on. The judge felt the need to point out to Edith's lawyer that the custody of the little girl would naturally go to the father. Did she understand this in any way before she started? She seems to have been under the mistaken idea that these things could and would be sorted with the least fuss, and without hurt. The newspaper report of the divorce court proceedings concludes with sentences heavy with a terrible ironic prescience:

> Burdett was then granted a decree nisi, setting him on the road to his freedom, and he was also granted the custody of little Jane… With Lindsay and others, the husband left the court: and the woman will now be given the opportunity to find the happiness she sought for so long.

[117] Randolph Schwabe, "Diary entry for March 18, 1931" Clarke, Gil. (ed) *The diaries of Randolph Schwabe: British Art 1930 – 1948.* Bristol: Sansome and Co. 2016.

Chapter 8. A good soldier

Tom Cutlack

Tom Cutlack was born in Renmark in 1899, youngest son of Frank William Cutlack and Elizabeth Swanwick Hall. The family had come out from the East Anglia three years earlier to take up an irrigated fruit block as part of a grand scheme of making the desert hinterland of the middle reaches of the Murray River into a yeoman's paradise and food-basket of the British Empire.

The Cutlack's like to think of themselves as being descended from a seventh-century hermit monk named Guthlac, a Mercian soldier and nobleman who retired to the Island of Croyland in the Norfolk Fens in order to deal with the devil. His strategy was a programme of prolonged self-flagellation with a three thonged whip. St Bartholomew, the Apostle who was flayed alive and thus has three flaying knives as his insignia, was his mentor.

A better documented genealogy involves drapers, butchers, carpenters, minor administrators, and small landowners from around Norwich, Northrepps and Littleport in Norfolk, and these can be traced in manorial court rolls, parish registers, and litigations from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries.

The irrigation settlements on the River Murray at Renmark in South Australia and Mildura in Victoria were set up by two Canadian businessmen, George and William Chaffey in a deal with the Australian governments, which gave them control of half a million acres of desert country and some hundreds of miles of river frontage. These two men were contemporaries of Charles Birks and of John McDougall. They were born to a shipbuilding and banking family in Ontario, Canada, and trained as designers and engineers. In 1878, the brothers moved to California to participate in the irrigation settlements on the Santa Ana River in the arid chaparral country outside of Los Angeles. They developed a scheme of buying up

large blocks of land with water rights and dividing them into ten-acre allotments, for sale to settlers, with a cooperative irrigation scheme for the distribution of water. As well as the engineering innovations, such as concrete pipes to combat seepage, the settlements were based on a social improvement ideology involving social institutes, planned towns and the prohibition of liquor. [118]

The irrigation settlements embodied a particular aspect of imperial ideology. The individual yeoman farmer was organically connected to the land and his community and they were all bound together by institutions and values of social cooperation among equals, inspired and vindicated by a religious cosmology. Chaffey supporter and orator Judge R.M. Widney proclaimed in California in the 1880's that "Water will be brought in pipes from distant mountain streams and cause this valley to blossom as the garden of the Lord".[119]

This attitude fitted perfectly into the narrative of colonial ethics that had created South Australia in the first place. John Morphett, propagandising for the Wakefield settlement scheme in 1836 spoke of the Adelaide Plain that "in many places reminded me strongly of the Delta of the Nile and other rich plains in Egypt".[120] Likewise, Sir Henry Young, the first civilian governor of South Australia eulogised the mission of the settler in the colonial landscape:

> To us South Australians has been reserved the distinction of vindicating the rights of rational men as lords of creation, to make the waters no less than the land subservient to our common humanity … to breathe the aspiration that as waste after waste of the wilderness shall become the populous scene of useful productions … will dispel moral darkness. [121]

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[118] Peter Westcott. "George Chaffey 1848 -1932" *Australian Dictionary of Biography.*

[119] Jennifer Hamilton-McKenzie, "Utops? A consideration of the life of irrigationist George Chaffey". *Australasian Journal of American Studies*. Vol. 32, No. 2 (December 2013), 63-80

[120] John Morphett, *The latest Information from This Colony, contained in a Letter written by Mr. Morphett, Dated Nov. 25th, 1836.* Facsimile edition (Adelaide: Public Library of South Australia,1962)

[121] Quoted from J.Allen Jnr "Journal of an experimental trip by the Lady Augusta on the River Murray, 1853. Linn, R. *A diverse land: A history of the Lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong* (Meningie: Meningie Historical Society, 1988)

A discourse of morality and religiosity pervades the activities of this part of the family network on both a social/historical and a personal/emotional level. It is in this context that the McDougall, Birks and Cutlack families connect their networks. The vision of a Christian yeomanry interrogating the wilderness to reveal the Godly plan underlying has a counterpart in other radical traditions of a more secular and socialist bent. Edith's uncle George Birks became inflamed, first with Henry George and then with William Lane. Henry George's most popular work carried this epigraph, from Emile de Laveleye:

> There is in human affairs one order which is best. That order is not always the one which exists; but it is the order which should exist for the for the greatest good of humanity. God knows it and God wills it: man's duty it is to discover and establish it.[122]

This is almost exactly the tenor of the Social Gospel Methodism propounded by the Reverend John Scott Lidgett, cousin to Lucy McDougall's stepmother Ellen Lidgett.

There is a family tradition of swash and buckle around the Cutlacks. The story as received from Jane Burdett was that they regarded themselves as some species of landed gentry. This notion is reinforced by Wendy Way when she discusses the people who took up Irrigation blocks in the 1890s:[123]

> Most first-generation settlers at Renmark were genteel middle-class English families, with little knowledge of horticulture. They were attracted by illustrations of river scenes and by tales of healthy outdoor life and easy profits.

The tradition of middling burghers, sheriffs and lower gentry was not dissimilar to the background of Edith's forebears, the Thomas's, who three quarters of a century earlier had seen their colonial venture as a way of consolidating their material fortunes as landholding lower gentry.

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[122] Epigraph to Henry George, *Social problems* (London: Henry George Foundation of Great Britain,1932)
[123] Wendy Way, *A new idea each morning: How food and agriculture came together in one international organisation* (ANU Press: Canberra, 2013).

The Birks on the other hand were trade, regarded as such by these aspirational gentry, and by themselves. They held to political and religious ideologies that glorified the values of thrift, industry, fiscal good sense and religious devotion. The Cutlacks inhabited a different ethical framework. They were gamblers, and they regarded it as a point of honour to satisfy gambling debts above those of "a mere draper". Maisie Thomas expressed a parallel sense of ethical superiority: "(Mrs Thomas's) eldest daughter married Charles Birks, the draper, a sad but undeniable fact…" [124]

The Cutlacks were gamblers and they were adventurers and they cultivated a family culture of rakish eccentricity. The claim persists even today, for example, that they employed Breaker Morant as a jackeroo and horseman on their fruit block, though there is no evidence to support this, nor any reason to employ a flamboyant horseman on a fruit block. It is a sort of colourful spectacle to decorate the family identity as a clan. Strangely, it is a claim made by several landholders in the Riverland. This sort of extravagance clearly appealed to Edith Birks, whose family were grave in manner, restrained in social and public interactions, sexually puritanical and extremely conscious of social etiquette and respectability. Edith was a highly intelligent, rebellious, creative and fearless girl, who smoked a pipe and rode a motor bike to school. Tom Cutlack was handsome, vibrant, loquacious, charismatic and possessed personal physical courage in spades. He was also self-possessed and extremely determined. It must have been hard to resist, if Edith had wanted to resist.

When he was just 22, in 1919, Tom Cutlack took a job in the Solomon Islands as manager of a copra plantation. His letters home to his mother reveal a strange combination of urbanity and intellectual curiosity and a vicious and violent racist contempt for the plantation workers. He writes to thank her for sending him books on art and speculates about the development of an Australian civilisation. At the same time he describes in great detail and with relish how he singled out an "insolent coon" who had refused to abase himself

[124] Joan Willington *Maisie* 250

sufficiently, and how he organised to ambush this man and then almost beat him to death with his own bare hands.

I think this is worth quoting in some detail as it speaks to the strange melange of a violently enforced racial hierarchy embedded in an ideology of sentimental idealism that frames this liberal Modernist middle class in it's thought and actions. The scene is set in Tom's first interview, with a Mr Fulton at Dalton House in Sydney.

> Sydney 23/8/19
>
> Mr Fulton reminded me of a white Jack Johnson [125]– face like a brick wall … He sat still for 5 minutes without moving an eyelash or taking his eyes off mine… Then he started. I was much too young. The natives were red-headed devils, worse than mules to rule. … Still I kept on the staring match… Then he calmly said "You will be taken on as an assistant at Tenaru Estate" … He transformed in about half a second from wall-faced bloodthirsty employer to kind-hearted jovial human being. [126]

Tom Cutlack finally embarked on the *SS Mindini* on the first of October 1919. He liked the place and settled in fairly quickly, working very long hours, getting up at four in the morning to be at work at five. As he was being shown around,

> I happened on a mound of earth around which had been placed four logs, making a rectangular grave arrangement; and Mr G said 'Oh that's Bluey's grave'. Bluey, they told me, was a notorious boy, who decided that, before returning to his passage (they call their country that) he'd have a white man's head; but things happened otherwise. A powerful white manager blocked him one day with an axe intended for the white man's head; and one punch and a kick, he is finished. Mr G my manager witnessed it all.

On the strength of these warnings, Cutlack was preparing himself.

[125] Jack Johnson was the first black American world heavyweight boxing champion
[126] Tom Cutlack, *Letters home from the Solomon Islands 1919-21*. Letters, collection of the author's family

> I am expecting my 'tryout' any day now, because I have been making myself felt with the black labour lately. I thought it had come yesterday morning. I said to one copra cutter 'How many bags you cut him finish?' He answered me with his pipe in his mouth. 'Here you bluddy makers pipe belonger you, he come out or close up I make you die finish'. He hesitated, but as I raised my stick (which weighs about 3 lb) his pipe dropped. I fully expected him to buck, and was quite prepared for it. But I'm still alive and ready for the next show.

It is interesting that even in the midst of this purposeful seeking out of a racial confrontation, he was able to speak expressions of egalitarian fairness. He takes issue with those who told him that it was impossible for a white man to know a black man.

> It's wrong. The only real difference is the colour and the customs. They feel and think just the same as the white man. The white man will tell you that gratitude is unknown among niggers. I know differently _ if you treat them fairly they will treat you fairly. I believe in punishing them hard (such things as bricks are nothing) when they deserve it, and giving them a word of encouragement when they deserve that.

Eventually, Tom Cutlack did organise his desired confrontation with an "insolent coon", a middle-aged man who had looked at him without the required level of subordination. He stalked him as if he was stalking an animal, cajoling and insulting him and prodding and provoking him to make a false move, and when he finally did, took to him and beat him so badly with his bare hands and a rifle butt that he nearly died. He described the altercation with great pride and relish in a letter to his mother, in between expressions of gratitude for the art books she had sent him and meditations on the great destiny awaiting the Australian nation in the Pacific. [127]

[127] Unfortunately, between reading and recording that passage from the letters, and writing this text, my copy of the original document has been lost, and the original is no longer accessible.

By 1922, Cutlack had been to war, returned largely unscathed, experienced the moral and material realities of the colonial management of labour, in all of its brutality, and then returned to the family landholdings in the Riverland. In that year he bought eight acres and fourteen perches of riverfront land together with water rights with a mortgage to the Minister for Repatriation, as part of a soldier settlement land scheme. [128]

Tom's land lay in a flat scrubby country with a big sky and low treeline. The river is not visible until you are right upon it. It is a dry savannah landscape. There is cause to wonder at the imagination of the Frank Cutlacks and Frank McDougalls of this world who contemplated this desultory landscape and conjured a centre for the development of a national culture and an economic hub for imperial food production.

More than that, it brings to the forefront the significance, in emotional terms, of the decision that Edith Birks finally made to abandon her very secure place among the chic urban literati of Sydney, Melbourne and London in favour of this landscape, and the human culture that grew upon it. The cottage she and Burdett had built on the leafy Sydney North Shore hinterland, designed by their friend the artist and architect John Moore, was peak designer Modernism. Sparely furnished, straight lines, timber furniture, Japanese prints and a Persian carpet, it was nestled among large shady trees on a large block a half hours drive to Burdett's gallery premises in the heart of Sydney's financial district.

Edith Birks sought and craved unconformity and personal liberty. She thought she would find it among the avant-garde intelligentsia. She found that they treated her with contempt from the start. In April of 1926, the dancer Anna Pavlova opened an exhibition of paintings by Blamire Young at the Macquarie Galleries. The temper of the evening can be taken from the report of the "great stir" when "little Pavlova came along" to open the exhibition.

[128] SAILIS South Australian Integrated Land Information System

> Sitting gracefully upright on a straight chair, she listened with an air of great wisdom to the praises … sung in her own favour. When they were finished she looked bewildered, blinked the dark eyes, stood up, dropped two deep quick bows to the assemblage, said "thank you, thank you" and then moved off to look at the limpid beauty called The Goldfish.

The Bulletin reported that "The show introduced Mrs Basil Burdett to art in Sydney". In fact, by this time Edith Birks was already an experienced art administrator with well-established national and international contacts in the Modernist art world. It was her money that financed the Macquarie Galleries operation.[129]

In contrast to the brittle constructions of the Sydney art scene, Edith found in Tom an easy familiarity, likely discovered in childhood in Renmark, and now rediscovered as she realised that her marriage to Burdett was untenable, and the clannish loyalties of the local intelligentsia took the side of Basil, as they inevitably would; those relationships also had been formed in the traumatic circumstances of the war its aftermath. When she contravened their own stringent codes of moral behaviour by divorcing Basil and decamping with this uncouth country bumkin soldier boy, they took their vengeance cold. Cutlack's reported appearance in his bizarre costume outside the divorce courts may well have been, not a startling display of gauche eccentricity, but a calculated piece of signalling that a form of personal liberty, so distinct from "all that nonsense",[130] underpinned by love and loyalty, was within her grasp if she had the courage to take it. Of course, such romanticism has its own rewards; as it is said, no good deed goes unpunished.

[129] "A woman's letter", *The Bulletin,* Vol 47 No 2410, April 22,1926

[130] "all that nonsense" was a favourite phrase of Edith and the Cutlack clan to indicate their contempt for anything that smacked of fashion or social norms they regarded as trivial and demeaning.

Chapter 9. The bosom of the family

If Edith thought the divorce should be a clean, rational process which was obviously to everybody's benefit, she was soon proven to be quite wrong. It was not merely the conventional social disapproval of divorce that she had to contend with, not just filial loyalty and patriarchal power, but fundamental clashes of value systems and ideologies. It is unsettling to imagine how the personal behaviours of individuals are embedded in deep socio-emotional structures of ancient lineage, that mitigate against personal power and agency. In acting on the imperative of her own hard-won value system of independence and rationalism, Edith had unwittingly transgressed lines of absolute power and placed the structures of her patrimony in jeopardy – patrimony in the guardianship of her father.

Edith was already three months pregnant when the decree nisi was granted for her divorce from Burdett. Their son Stephen Swanwick Cutlack was born on 13 December 1931. They packed themselves into a Morris Buckboard, and with Stephen sleeping in a suitcase on the tray and they drove to Adelaide. Custody of Edith's daughter Jane was granted to Basil. and although they had an agreement that she could stay with her mother, in the meantime she was sent to Brisbane to stay with her paternal grandmother in the Enoggera house for a few weeks. That few weeks turned into four years.

Edith suffered her pregnancies. She was continually weak and sick. The conflict with her mother over the morality of her actions might have been manageable. When that conflict deepened to include her father, it was not just moral but material implications that were at issue.

The family story, as passed down by Birks' granddaughter Jane Burdett, is that the impetus for Napier Birks to intervene in his daughter's decision was his own involvement in the Bickford divorce seven years earlier. Having endured the social humiliation of such

exposure in the tabloid press, a further divorce proceeding in the family would be intolerable, and possibly damaging to the business.

As the story was passed down, Birks attempted to coerce his daughter with financial consequences.

Napier Birks: I forbid it

Edith: Don't be ridiculous, you can't forbid it.

Napier: I'll cut you off without a penny

Edith: You can stick your money

Napier: Sign here, here and here

And she did.

The reality of course was more subtle, more difficult and contradictory, more pedestrian and more painful. She signed though. Why? She didn't have to. That would have been a transgression indeed, to not sign, to disobey and refuse to take the consequences. All her actions until then had been based on a steadfast morality, on notions of love and reason, and on not being a hypocrite. Her family traditions were profoundly utopian. Her identity had been grown in an atmosphere of moral steadfastness. Now she confronted bodily the ethical and ideological contradictions in the very structure of her life, in her family, in her emotional relationships. The step she was taking was in effect to cut through those ethical relationships and their contradictions by an act of ethical willpower. To shilly-shally around about money would be a betrayal of the entire project. She was asserting her autonomy as a woman and as a daughter, against all the sacral power of the family, of the church, of the state and of the network of social power to which she was born.

There is a family story that she had no understanding of money, that she conducted all her transactions by cheques drawn on her father's accounts, that she didn't realise that there had to be something backing them. So the possibility of her taking a clear headed, hard headed

strategic decision was crowded out by conditions, imperatives, pressures structural, ethical, emotional, practical.

Until this point Edith was living the life of a public figure and even fine details of her life can be tracked in newspaper reports and reminiscences of other members of the avantgarde intelligentsia. Her divorce signalled a radical break with that network. The image of Basil, accompanied by Lionel Lindsay and his friends departing the courtroom as a group leaving Edith, three months pregnant and now marked as an adulterer, to manage the eccentricities of her lover is compelling.

She was propelled into an emotional and ideational landscape that was strange, unfamiliar, isolated and materially diminished. The house on the north shore was erased with great suddenness and replaced with an entirely different physical and emotional geography. Tom, on the other hand, was in familiar territory. He took up a fruit block in the desert wastes of Riverland South Australia, just outside of Renmark. Edith's uncles and an aunt Frank, Norman and Jane McDougall all held land there too.

If Edith had miscalculated the nature of her relationship with Basil, she now discovered that she had also misjudged the strength of her family bonds. Her parents were deeply estranged by sexual and emotional incompatibility. They were unable to find the emotional resources required to reconcile with their wayward daughter. All of the family were traumatised by the death of the eldest son and brother, the lively, intelligent Leslie Birks. There is some evidence that his death was at least partly the responsibility of the father Napier Birks.

The Birks and Cutlack families were estranged from each other and that estrangement had deep social and historical roots. The families represented conflicting cultures, psychological and emotional landscapes, codes of behaviour and value systems that had been in conflict for generations, throughout the industrialising and imperial processes of the modern world. One ethical system was built on the remnants of an inherited agrarian political economy, the other on the energies of a newly hatched industrial world of discretion, industriousness,

religious devotion, conformity, intellectual capacity, strategic agility. These second are the codes that Basil Burdett devoted himself so successfully to learning, the codes that Napier Birks recognised and valued and at which he was an adept, but which the Cutlack's, and Tommy specifically, failed to respect, and which Birks' daughter Edith contravened, both in her own recklessness (which was forgivable), and in her disobedience and … I've just realised … *treachery* in eventually divorcing Burdett and marrying Cutlack …. which was *not* forgivable. And nor was it forgiven.

Part 2. Sex, Money, and Religion

The family origins and ideology of Edith Birks' parents

This section investigates the emotional and religious inheritance of Edith's parents; Lucy McDougall, through the family of her father, the philanthropist and Methodist agitator for social purity Sir John McDougall and his second wife, the writer Ellen Lidgett; and Napier Birks, through his father Charles Birks and his siblings, particularly the oldest brother George Birks. Ellen Lidgett brought a complicated set of intellectual and ideological networks to the family, including the influential Social Gospel activist the Rev John Scott Lidgett and the South African Communist Party founder Sydney Bunting, with his forbears including the Methodist intellectual Percy Bunting and the original Methodist leader and ally of John Wesley, Jabez Bunting.

The Birks family have a more complicated inheritance again. Their story traverses unexpected and precarious territory on the borders of the Northern English landed gentry with their ancient patronage relationships, and the modernising elites of the Industrial Revolution.[131]

[131] A number of Family trees can be found in Appendix 3 to assist in untangling these admittedly complicated networks

Chapter 10. Social Purity. Lucy McDougall's parents

John McDougall and Ellen Mary Lidgett[132]

Edith's maternal grandfather, John McDougall was one of four sons of Alexander McDougall. McDougall senior had been a Congregationalist, originally from Coldstream in the Scottish borders. His grandfather had been born in Berwick-upon-Tweed, possibly also the origin of the Napier family. Alexander was a chemical engineer, who had been taught by the pioneering chemist John Dalton and he had invented both self-raising flour and a useable sheep dip and in the process amassed a great fortune. [133]

There was conflict between the father and the sons over the management of the business. According to Ellen McDougall, "he could not endure their more independent attitude as they grew up … He was an absolute autocrat and refused to recognise that they ought to have a share in the business".[134] This was eventually resolved in an agreement by which the sons bought the business from the father on terms that required the sons to work off the thirty six thousand pound price at the rate of three thousand a year for twelve years, for which he charged them interest if they fell behind in their payments. As Ellen McDougall puts it, "All five sons lived like clerks and worked like horses … and vowed that until their father was paid out they would neither drink nor smoke, nor draw out more than three hundred pounds per annum each". Among the brothers, the eldest, Alexander was the leader and had the final say in the business.

The family seem to have adopted themselves into the Methodist religion in the 1850s, precipitated by the house next door being taken as a Minister's residence by the Circuit

[132] See Family Tree 3 McDougall- Lidgett-Scott- Bunting in Appendix 3.
[133] John Dalton (1766 – 1844) was an English chemist and populariser of science. He was born into a Quaker family and worked at the dissenting Manchester Academy. His great contribution was to introduce atomic theory into chemistry
[134] Ellen, Lady McDougall *The children of Alexander McDougall* (London: Private publication,1923). Ellen McDougall, nee Lidgett, was the second wife of John McDougall, and Lucy McDougall's stepmother. She was the daughter of shipping and insurance magnate, and Methodist social purity campaigner George Lidgett.

Stewards of the Methodists, and inhabited by the Rev James Loutit. His wife was of a nervous disposition, and "asked for the loan of two boys to sleep in the house" when her husband was away. By 1860, Alexander was training to be a preacher and all the other children were attending religious instruction, John was learning French, Greek, Latin and algebra, and they were all enthusiastic workers at the Ragged Schools.

Alexander's religiosity seems to have been the most keenly expressed. He became a lay preacher and Ellen McDougall recounts an anecdote in which he and a friend "entered a low dancing hall where drink and degradation reigned supreme. Having paid for their entrance they went into a corner of the hall in full view of the dancers, and kneeled down and prayed, first one then the other … The two young men came repeatedly to this hall … The place soon emptied of its usual clientele and was presently turned into a Mission hall".[135] Much later, in 1888, Alexander McDougall and John Napier (ancestor of Napier Birks) are listed together as attending "the annual convention of Christians interested in various branches of mission work and religious and philanthropic institutions".[136]

The religious association brought John McDougall into contact with the family of John Napier, who had retired from business to devote his fortune to good works, teaching and evangelising.[137] In particular, he met John Napier's niece, Lucy Armstrong, daughter of the grocer James Armstrong and John Napier's sister Elizabeth Napier. She was working, as had her mother and father before her in the 1820s, as a teacher at one of the Methodist Sunday Schools. They were born in the same year, 1844, and they married in 1867. Their first child, a daughter Lucy was born in 1868. This is the Lucy McDougall who was the mother of Edith Birks. Four other children were born before the mother died of a lingering disease that kept her bedridden and blind for a year before she died in 1880 aged thirty-six.

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[135] Ellen Lady McDougall *The children of Alexander McDougall* 1923 17
[136] *Manchester Courier,* September 26, 1888
[137] H.I. Dutton and J. E. King, "The Limits of Paternalism: The Cotton Tyrants of North Lancashire, 1836-54". *Social History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January1982) 59-74

Two years later in 1882, John McDougall married Ellen Mary Lidgett, the daughter of his political associate, the shipping and marine insurance magnate and fellow anti-vice campaigner George Lidgett from Hull. Ellen McDougall was highly energetic and strategically intelligent writer, educator, agitator and fierce advocate for what would now be called a fundamentalist evangelical view of the world. She wrote a short *History of the World from the Creation*, and a history of religious music starting from King David. Her writing style gives a strong impression of her character and attitudes:

> Let us tell the stories of the brave men and women who, in the midst of war and persecution, suffering and isolation, wrote the hymns that have helped others to face the hardships of life and the venture of death. These old hymns are links connecting us with the historic past; they give us a grand sense of belonging to the Church militant here on earth, of being a contingent of the army of the living God. This blessed sense of magnitude, with its vision down the ages and up towards the great future … these words rise from the vaults of memory as succour to a besieged camp, and help the soul in sore straights, and prepare the way of the Lord.[138]

She revelled in the title bestowed on the couple by Edward VII, referring to herself as Ellen, Lady McDougall. They lived in Clifton House, a grand suburban mansion in Blackheath, one of the new garden suburbs outside of London, near Greenwich.

Ellen Lidgett's cousins were prominent political and ethical leaders. One was the Wesleyan divine the Reverend John Scott Lidgett, the son of her father's brother John Jacob Lidgett and his wife Maria Elizabeth Scott, and a proponent of the Social Gospel. Social Gospel was a post-millennialist liberal theology based on the belief that the Second Coming could not occur until humanity had reformed itself of its social evils by its own efforts. It was

[138] Ellen McDougall, *Songs of the Church with the stories of their writers* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1903); *The beginnings of history.* (London: C.H. Kelly, 1912)

associated in both the UK and America with the Progressive Movement and the Labour Movement. The Progressive Movement was also linked with both the temperance movement and eugenics, as attempts at "social hygiene". In the UK, the Party was linked to the Fabian society and writers like George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and Rebecca West. Progressive they may have been but they were also committed imperialists. They gained some purchase as a sort of halfway house between liberals and socialists before the Labour party was formed, and they took control of the London County Council for several years around the turn of the century.

A more surprising link to this branch of the family is to Sidney Bunting, one of the founders of the Communist Party of South Africa. Born in 1873, he was the son of Sir Percy William Bunting, a scholar, activist and editor of the liberal Methodist political journal *Contemporary Review*. The Methodist feminist activist Sarah Amos was his cousin. Their grandfather was Jabez Bunting, the powerful Wesleyan Methodist who took over the running of the church on the death of John Wesley in 1791. Percy Bunting married Mary Hyett Lidgett, the sister of George Lidgett and thus Ellen McDougall's aunt. Mary Hyett Lidgett's other brother John Jacob Lidgett was the father of the Rev John Scott Lidgett, mentioned above. Thus Ellen McDougal, Sidney Bunting and Rev John Scott Lidgett were all first cousins.

Sidney Bunting began as a promising musician, playing the cello, but set up in professional life as a lawyer. In 1900, he served in the Boer War and then decided to stay in Africa. With other family members, he tried to set up a farm producing willow charcoal, but became increasingly distressed at the treatment of labour in the Province. He devoted himself to work as a trade union lawyer, became a pacifist, and helped to form the International Socialist League. This group later became part of the Communist Party of South Africa. Bunting went to St Petersburg in 1923 to attend the Congress of the Communist International where he saw both Lenin and Trotsky speak, but he was not able to meet them because South

Africa was considered to be a low priority. He was elected Party Chairman of the CPSA in 1924, but fell out with the organisation and was eventually expelled from the Party in 1931. Unable to work anymore as a lawyer, he became a viola player in the Johannesburg Orchestra until a stroke paralysed his fingers. He continued to write until his death in 1936.[139]

The family tradition of both of Edith's parents, Lucy McDougall and Napier Birks, then was a potent combination of religious fervour, ambitious intellectualism, social activism and sexual puritanism. By the end of the nineteenth century, and the birth of both Edith and Basil, and in the lead up to the conflagration of the First World War, those attributes had achieved a particularly concentrated form, expressed in the revolutionary utopian politics of Napier's uncles and aunts, George Birks and Helen Thomas, Walter Birks and Jemima Crooks and equally in the internecine puritan brawling of John McDougall back in London. Of a less inflammatory temper, but still driven to engage with full throated fervour in the cultural transformations of women's rights, colonial evangelism and the retail trade, Napier's father and stepmother Charles and Rose Birks generated a cash income stream that was invested at least partly in the political ferment.

But all of these activities and political traditions were already embedded in a longer term historical engagement. Charles and George Birks didn't construct their fortunes out of nothing. They already had access to capital that was sourced deep in the political, economic and religious traditions of the English industrial revolution, and also, as it turns out, in a patronage system that had roots even further back.

The immediate source of capital for the adventures of Charles and George Birks, so sharply contrasted with each other in temper and in outcome, came through their mother Hannah Napier, from her brother, John Napier. His fortune was in turn carved out of a

[139] Alison Drew. *Between empire and revolution: A life of Sidney Bunting*; (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007); "Sydney Percival Bunting", *South African History Online*. accessed 4/2/2018.

ferment of religion, aspiration and capital formation among the artisans, petty merchants and small landholders of North Yorkshire in the last half of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 11. Drapers, haberdashers, grocers

The Napier family[140]

Napier is a family name that is carried by all grandchildren of Edith Napier Birks, as well as being the Christian name of Edith's father – my great grandfather - Napier Kyffin Birks. The name Napier comes from Edith Birks' great grandmother, Hannah Napier, a colonist in South Australia who arrived with her husband George Vause Birks and seven children, and pregnant with an eighth in 1856.

Hannah's grandfather was William Napier, linen draper of Thirsk, North Yorkshire. It is with William Napier and his wife Catherine Lumley that I discovered the first progenitors of the family, and it is with these two that I began my genealogical investigations.

On 18 September 1761, William Napier married Catherine Lumley in Topcliffe by Thirsk. They lived at a critical point in English history. William and Catherine were contemporaries of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and Tom Paine, Enlightenment philosophers and activists and founding fathers of the United States. They were contemporaries of James Watt, inventor of the steam engine, of Joseph Priestley inventor, chemist and Unitarian religious philosopher, and Emmanuel Kant, German transcendentalist philosopher. William Blake, the poet, mystic and printmaker was a little younger than them, and Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge were a generation younger again.

By the time of the French Revolution in 1789, William and Catherine Napier were no longer in the flames of youth. William Wordsworth watched in youthful amazement as the French Revolution of 1789 unfolded, and he could proclaim "Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven", while William and Catherine Napier were middle aged, in their 50s. They were however of exactly that class of literate merchants and artisans,

[140] See Family Trees 1 and 6 Appendix 3 for the Napier and Lumley families

right at the borders between the "lower orders" and the gentry, who were the driving force behind the revolution. How did they participate in the social and philosophical tumult of those transitional times?

William Napier belonged to a class of artisans and petty merchants confronting the beginnings of the technological and economic changes of the industrial revolution.[141] Many of that class were impoverished by those transformations and responded by developing a working-class ideology and political organisations of resistance and revolutionary change, through the beginnings of trade unionism and the labour movement. On the other hand, another section of that "proto class" of cloth sellers, haberdashers, grocers and small farmers was able, through inventive luck, good marriages and access to some capital, to shift their social and economic status upwards. William Napier was an example of such a transitional figure.

William Napier's profession, linen draper, is noted on at least five different occasions in the parish mortality records that mention him. This profession carried implications of some social and economic power and status. The Linen Drapers Guild was influential at the highest levels of British financial and political activities, especially with respect to the conduct of foreign relations.[142] This influence was built upon both the linen trade networks into the Netherlands, Flanders and France, and on the importance of the cloth to British military supply chains. It is of course true that this power was concentrated on London rather than a regional entrepot like Thirsk. Nevertheless, a significant network link was available to Napier which had the potential to connect him into sources of capital and commercial contacts of value to his children and grandchildren, especially as the cloth industry began to effervesce in the early nineteenth century in Lancashire.

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[141] E.P.Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (Harmonsdsworth: Penguin Books. 1979).
[142] A.J. Warden, *The linen trade, ancient and modern* (London: Longman, Roberts and Green,1864); N.Harte and K. Ponting, (eds), *Textile history and economic history: Essays in honour of Miss Julia de Lacy Mann* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973)

William Napier is listed in the Universal Directory of British Trade and Industry in the 1790s, taking his place amongst a surprising diversity of traders and small-scale merchants in the market centre of Thirsk.[143] The directory lists four surgeons, three attorneys, no fewer than eleven drapers/grocers/haberdashers, along with hatters, hair dressers, tailors, bridle-cutters, clockmakers, gunsmiths, ironmongers, printers and stationers, brewers, bakers, cordwainers, and eleven pubs including the still existing Three Tuns, all these gathered together in the market centre of the town. One group of traders, Suggitt, Oastler and Meeks had set up as a bank, drawing upon the Lombard Street (London) firm of Smith Page and Smith (who lasted until 1902, being absorbed finally into the current banking conglomerate of NatWest). This trading community formed an intimate network. There was another draper in the town square by the name of John Pick, who married Ann Lumley, sister of Catherine Lumley, wife of William Napier. The two drapers were brothers-in-law. The social historian Hannah Barker noted a similar confluence of small-scale merchants and manufacturers at the centre of Manchester at a similar time and suggests that it was the clustering of these social groups geographically, economically and ideologically that formed the seed of the "British middle class".[144]

The market town of Thirsk appears was a thriving entrepot for the entire Vale of York and Vale of Mowbray. It was on the carriage route from York to Newcastle, and on to Edinburgh, and to Carlisle on the West coast, via Richmond. Mail from both London and the North arrived daily. The fare to London, 200 miles and a week of uncomfortable travelling away, was three pound 10 shillings and 8 pence inside and one pound 13 shillings and 4 pence outside. An inflation calculator translates that to nearly five hundred pounds inside and two hundred and fifty pounds outside in 2020, which seems steep. Such a coach could travel

[143] P. Barfoot, *The Universal British directory of trade, commerce and manufacture* (Aldgate: Champante and Whitrow, 1791).
[144] Hannah Barker 'A grocer's tale: Gender, family and class in early nineteenth century Manchester'. *Gender and History.* Vol. 21, No. 2, (August 2009) 340-3

about 60 miles in a day, suggesting that the two-hundred-and-fifty-mile journey to London would take about five days.

Thirsk had become the market town from around the sixteenth century, but the traditional parish centre, since the eleventh century at least, was Topcliffe, two miles southwest, a strategic, defensible hill on a bend of the River Swale, where the ruins of a Mott and Baily castle showed where the Percy family, "Kings of the North", had held a manor.

It is not completely clear who William Napier's immediate forebears were. His grandson John Napier suggested in his diaries written in the 1880s that he came from Scotland. However, there is a family that fits the time frame and the geography. The genealogy has this form. William Napier of Thirsk married Catherine Lumley, daughter of Benjamin Lumley, a yeoman farmer of Dalton near Thirsk on 18 August 1761. Catherine was born in 1735, aged 26 on her marriage. Assuming William Napier was of a similar age, we can project backwards and assume that his father was in his twenties when William was born, and that allows us to deduce a birth date in the first decade or so of the eighteenth century. Geographically, no Napiers are found in the records of Thirsk or in the Vale of York or its Northern extensions towards Middlesborough and the River Tees, although we do find concentrations of Lumley's right along this trajectory and towards Berwick-upon-Tweed.

In Berwick-upon-Tweed, however, the name Napier is again found (in one circumstance in marriage with a Lumley). A tentative identification can be made, on chronological grounds, of William's father with another William Napier, who was born in Berwick on 14 December 1707. This William Napier had five sisters, Grace, Sarah, Elizabeth, Hannah and Jane, born between 1705 and 1717, and these children were born to a third William Napier, the putative grandfather of our progenitor. These names are all common names for the period, but they do recur in the following generations of the Napier family (for example in the linen draper's daughter Jane and granddaughters Elizabeth and Hannah). This William Napier was born in 1678, again in Berwick; and he and his siblings –

Elenor, Elisabeth, Cicily, Thomas, Fardinando or Edward, and Grace - born between 1668 and 1680, were the progeny of one Fardinandoe Napier, who married Grace Allam in Berwick-upon-Tweed on 18 June 1667.

Fardinandoe, anglicised as Ferdinand, or in the case of his son as Edward, is a name of Spanish, Italian or Portuguese origin. The surname Napier refers to the linen trade. The North of England, from Edinburgh through to York was through the Middle Ages highly integrated into the North Sea trade routes leading to the Netherlands, the Hanseatic ports of the Baltic, and the Volga trade route to Constantinople on the one hand; and the Channel ports and the Atlantic seaboard of Europe, including Portugal and Spain, to the Mediterranean on the other.[145] It is plausible that Fardinandoe Napier came to the North of England through associations with that trading network, associations that may well have traced their origins well into Medieval times and beyond. (A recently discovered bronze age site in the Norfolk fens of a linen manufacturing village, including beads of Mediterranean origin, shows the antiquity of the associations of the north-east coast of Britain with the continental cloth trade).

This genealogy, while tentative in some aspects, definitely identifies an artisan/ petty mercantile family established on the route between York and Edinburgh since at least the seventeenth century. As linen drapers, they would have had access to some capital, would have been connected to trading networks and associated "cognitive capital", such as literacy and numeracy, as well as a geographical understanding extending beyond the local, certainly to London, at least to Europe and probably the Mediterranean and or the Baltic.[146]

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[145] Archibald Lewis, *The northern seas: shipping and commerce in northern Europe, A.D. 300-1100* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1958); See also website *Freemen of Berwick-upon-Tweed* https://freemenofberwick.org.uk/

[146] "capital" refers to infrastructure used in producing economic goods. In the 1980's the term was extended to include "intellectual capital", the learning and cultural endowments that people bring to the production process. The term "cognitive capital" is a further extension to include the culturally shared cognitive frameworks that people and communities bring to the process, such as mathematical literacy, a particular sense of geography, a cosmology of the way the world works.

Catherine Lumley, the wife of William Napier, was a daughter of Benjamin Lumley, a farmer of Dalton, a village just to the south of Thirsk, and Izable Bell of Fawdington, a little way further south right on the banks of the River Swale. Ben's sister Jane also married Izable's brother Thomas.

The land around Dalton is rich farmland indeed, and standing in midsummer on a corner of one of the many tiny lanes that criss-cross the landscape, gazing across a fifty acre field of plump, golden, ripening wheat is a striking and uplifting experience for an Australian eye, with a childhood spent on a the red and grey dust limestone steppe - lands of, say, the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia, stretching out mile after salty mile to the north, toward the desert. The ground underfoot is soft, deep soil in Yorkshire, and the skies, while wide and breathtaking as those of the Australian plains, are mild, grey, cornflower blue, compared to the startling and threatening ultramarine and cobalt intensity of an Australian summer sky.

A yeoman owns at least a hundred acres of land, and has the right and the obligation to serve in local administrative capacities such as sheriff. A hundred acres of this land makes you rich, and so we know that Ben Lumley was at least well to do, and by inference so too was William Napier, in that he was an appropriate suitor to the Lumley daughter.

Catherine Lumley was born 20 August 1735 and baptised in Topcliffe-by-Thirsk. She was 26 when she married William Napier on 18 September 1761. Catherine's sister Mary Lumley married the grocer John Pick just 2 days later on 20 August 1761. Another Lumley sister, Ann had married gentleman farmer Cor Wise in 1748, and a third sister, Jane, had married William Sturdy, a butcher of Leeds in 1757.[147]

Cornelius "Cor" Wise, whose signature graces Catherine and William's marriage certificate as a witness, was from the village of Colton, some thirty miles away to the south, in the parish of Bolton Percy on the Wharfe River near Selby. He had married Catherine's

[147] The daughter of that match, Isabel Sturdy, would marry Catherine and William's daughter-in-law Mary Hanson's brother William Hanson in 1797. Then their son William Sturdy Hanson would marry Mary and John Napier's daughter Charlotte Napier, William Napier's granddaughter, unhappily apparently, in 1824.

sister Ann in 1748. He was born in 1718, she in 1723. Cor's father, John Wise, was baptised on October 27, 1695,

This family were also from the stock of wealthy and entrepreneurial yeomanry. John Wise married Margaret Read in 1715. He called himself a yeoman at the time of Cor's birth in 1718 as had his father, George. By the time of his death in 1751, he was referred to as a "gentleman". John Wise and Margaret Read sold a parcel of land in Yorktown, Virginia to Col Digges in 1726. Col Digges was the scion of the influential Digges family who provided several senior administrators including a governor to the colony and who backed the monarchy in the revolution. His house in Yorktown is preserved. I have not been able to establish the provenance of the parcel of land that was sold, although a Read family is recorded in Virginia Company records in the middle of the seventeenth century.[148]

Catherine Lumley and William Napier's grandchildren, all born around the turn of the nineteenth century, and coming of age in the 1820s and 30s, were the generation that established the substantial core of the commercial family network, along with its religious ideology, around which this story is woven. The two most significant developments were linked; the move across the Pennines to Manchester and the adoption by the family of a dissenting religion, first as Quakers in the late seventeenth century, then as Methodists

William and Catherine's daughter Isabel remained in Thirsk as a milliner and was still there in 1826. A milliner is one of those trades, like grocers, who act as a respectable interface between the intimate and increasingly isolated domestic sphere, and the wider social world.[149] Their links to trade networks enable them to translate unfamiliar and exotic goods into language and iconography that is acceptable. They need to be trustworthy, but they need to be cunning. They are double agents – of the domestic in the world, and of the world *to* the

[148] Susan Kingsbury (ed.) *The records of the Virginia Company of London* (Washington: Government Printer, 1906)

[149] Hannah Barker, 'A grocer's tale: Gender, family and class in early nineteenth century Manchester'. *Gender and History.* Vol. 21, No. 2 (August 2009) 340-3; Maxine Berg, *Luxury and pleasure in 18th century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jon Stobart, *Sugar and spice: Grocers and groceries in provincial England 1650 –1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

domestic. They are intrinsically transgressive in their structural function, and this position creates a context for the development of transgressive ideologies – like Methodism.

Isabel's brother John did not remain in Thirsk. He moved to Huddersfield, entering into the great demographic drift towards large cities, and from those cities out into the burgeoning imperial geography. In 1796 he married Mary Hanson of Kirkburton in a Non-Conformist rite.

Thirsk had a significant history of nonconforming religiosity. Lumleys and Bells had been Quakers there in the 1660s, though that association seems to have fallen away by the end of the seventeenth century.[150] Later at the end of the eighteenth century, John Wesley established a strong personal following in the town, particularly with the banker and cloth trader Robert Oastler, whose infant son Wesley kissed and blessed in 1789 or 90. The records of Suggit, Oastler and Meeks have been lost, so we don't know whether the Napier family conducted their business there. We do know however that by 1796, John Napier had become a Methodist and married Mary Hanson in a Non-conforming church.

Mary's immediate forbears appear to be William Hanson of Upper Bridge, Cartworth, and Bettye Boothe of Honely Hagg. It is not known what William's profession was, but Bettye Booth was probably illiterate as she signed her marriage certificate with an X in 1756. Mary's brother, however, another William, was a grocer, and it might be reasonable to suppose that their father was also. In Huddersfield John and Mary Napier produced, according to John Napier jnr, fifteen children. It has been possible to trace five of these, four daughters and a son: Elizabeth, Hannah, Charlotte, Mary Ann and John.

These five formed the progenitor generation of our family; their children and grandchildren form the core of the mercantile and industrial bourgeois, imbued with strong evangelical non-Conformist political energies, an outward-looking and globalised geographical identity, and a feminist and egalitarian impulse, from which the central

[150] Quaker attendance books of Thirsk

characters and events of this story emerged. They also transmitted the family name through to subsequent generations who then used it as a signifier of continuity and network identification. They clearly understood when naming their children that this name Napier carried important and beneficial cultural information that needed to be carried through across the small fragments of time represented by single lifetimes.[151]

[151] Both the Annales and the Microhistory stream of historiography placed high significance on the role of names as a point of confluence of "the lines that converge …. and diverge … creating a kind of closely woven web, (that) provide for the observer a graphic image of the network of social relationships into which the individual is inserted". Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni "The name and the game: Unequal exchange and the historiographic marketplace" in Edward Muir (ed) *Microhistory and the lost peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 6.

Chapter 12. Cotton Tyrant

John Napier

The oldest child of John Napier and Mary Hanson was also John Napier. He was born in 1801 and was grandson to William Napier and Catherine Lumley. He was the brother of both Hannah Napier and Elizabeth Napier, great-grandmothers to Edith Birks, through each of her parents respectively. In 1817, at the age of 16, John Napier, the younger, moved to Manchester. He came with his father and entire family. He and his sister (probably Elizabeth) immediately began teaching in the Wesleyan Sunday School conducted at the Chancery Lane Chapel in Ardwick.[152] Seven years later, in 1824 he was rich enough and respectable enough to marry a gentleman's daughter, George Ann Hodgson, daughter of Thomas Hodgson and Ann Wright. In 1833, his sister Elizabeth married James Armstrong of Newton le Willows just out of Manchester. The Armstrong's were socially active grocers and tea merchants who would also be an influential link in the family network over the next century.

In 1836 there is a notification of the dissolution of a partnership in a dyeing business between John Napier and Richard Mayer, with Mayer holding the debt. By the 1840s John Napier was a partner with John Goodair in the company Napier and Goodair, one of the largest cotton spinning concerns in the north. By the 1841 census, John and George Ann Napier were living in Chorlton-upon Medlock and had four children; George, aged 16 (so born 1826), Charlotte, aged 12 (1829), Mary (Mary Ann), aged 9 (1832) and John aged 1, (1840). In 1851, George Ann Napier died at the age of 52 years, and in the census of that year, John Napier was registered as a widower, aged 49, by profession a spinner and manufacturer, living at 55 Rumford St Chorlton Upon Medlock, with his children Charlotte

[152] J.T. Slugg. *Reminiscences of old Manchester 50 years ago* (Manchester: Simpkin Marshall and Co. 1881)

Napier, 26, Mary Jane Napier, 19, Fred Parker Napier son, 13, and a single servant Mary Ann Bigg.

In the following year, 1852, John Napier married again. John Napier's second wife was Isabella Russell. She was the widow of Thomas Bateman, who she married on the 8 May 1828. He was a leather manufacturer, the son of William Bateman, Esq. of Pendleton. They both were associated with the patronage of the Deaf and Dumb School and Henshaw's Blind Asylum in the 1830s, along with a Thomas Armstrong who may be associated with our Armstrongs.

It is worthwhile to follow this line of the family network for a moment.[153] It shows in microcosm the beginnings of many of the occupational relationships and ideological tendencies that were important later, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Isabella Russell was the daughter of Samuel Russell, a printer and publisher, notably of ballads, and Isabella Ainsworth of Blackburn. They married on the fourth of January 1798 in the presence of James Ainsworth, probably her father. This may be the James Ainsworth who was practising as a gentleman surgeon in Manchester in the 1820s. They had at least 6 children: Laurence, born 15 May 1799; Ann, born 27 April 1800; Elizabeth, born 10 February 1802 (we have her signature of her sister's wedding certificate in 1828, so not married by then); Samuel, born 21 September 1803; Joseph, born 4 October 1805; and Isabella, born 28 August 1807. These children are contemporaries, and siblings-in-law of the Napier siblings John, Elisabeth, Mary Ann, Charlotte and Hannah.

Samuel Russell, the father, was born in 1765 and died aged 46 in 1817. He was a prosperous and successful entrepreneur in printing and publishing. The trustees of his estate sold his house at auction in 1819. The house is described as

> a substantial, modern and well built Messuage or Dwelling House, together with stable, coach house and other outbuildings, together with a spacious garden stocked

[153] For these relationships see Family tree 7 Napier family with Russells Appendix 3

with fruit trees near Cheetham Hill. … dining, drawing and main rooms, kitchen and suitable offices and good lodging rooms, pleasantly situated on an eminence commanding a most extensive prospect, the site about 5,400 square yards … along with two well secured perpetual ground rents of 20 pounds and 6 pounds. [154]

Samuel was a member of a class of artisans, activists and entrepreneurs who were inter-related by profession, by economic bonds and by marriage, relationships that remained in place and carried political significance across generations.

Even the more distant relatives are significant in the development of the ideology of the family. For example, Samuel was in partnership with Thomas Sowler in the printing firm Sowler and Russell. Thomas Sowler was born in Durham 1765, the son of George Sowler, a letter-press printer. Thomas Sowler was in turn married to Mary Ainsworth. It is a fair assumption that she is cousin to Isabella Ainsworth. In that case the partners were also cousins by marriage. There is a marriage certificate for Thomas Sowler, printer of Durham, and Molly Ainsworth of Blackburn in 1786, August 21. Isabella married 12 years later in 1798. Thomas Sowler jnr's obituary in 1802 says Mary Ainsworth was born at Deanesgate in July 1759.

Thomas Sowler and Mary Ainsworth were parents to a second Thomas Sowler. This one was publisher, from 1825, of the *Manchester Courier*, described as an organ for the Conservative Party, anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish. He married Helen Slack, daughter of the engraver John Slack in 1814. John Slack created some pieces that still exist: an allegorical illustration of Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man, printed about 1805 on furnishing fabric; a Prospect of the City of Dublin as a paper print; an 1825 allegory of Culture printed on cloth and featuring Arcadian rural scenes; and most notably a wood engraving of the Peterloo

[154] "To be sold by auction" *Manchester Mercury*, April 6, 1819

massacre printed on a commemorative handkerchief design to be carried by supporters of reform as a badge and a memorial of the attack on the demonstration.[155]

These associations show that John Napier was a part of a social network that formed a nascent intelligentsia. Not just writers, journalists, scholars, printers and artists, but drapers, milliners, haberdashers and grocers were gathering, discussing, contesting and producing a set of images, cultural tropes, value statements, identities and useful objects. They were producing the ideological framework by which the "middling classes" of imperial England could situate themselves in relation to the power structures they inhabited, the objects and commodities they used and consumed, and the landscapes and populations they were encountering in the British imperial expansion, as well as those they were transforming domestically in their own towns and farms. They were developing the ideology of liberal modernism.

The Peterloo massacre

In 1817, two years before the Peterloo massacre, a meeting was called by Joseph Green, Esq., boroughreeve of Manchester, and the police office, of Boroughreeves and constables and other inhabitants of Manchester and Salford, "for the purpose of taking into consideration the necessity of adopting additional measures for the maintenance of the PUBLIC PEACE!" in order to "combat incessant efforts by designing and mischievous individuals throughout the Kingdom … to produce insubordination and tumult amongst the labouring classes … to strengthen the Civil Power thorough the appointment of additional Constables…" The report of this meeting includes a list of over a thousand names of volunteers for this voluntary Constabulary.[156] The resulting militias have been variously described as "the fawning dependents of the great, with a few fools and a greater proportion of coxcombs, who imagine they acquire considerable importance by wearing regimental" …

[155] Appendix 3 Family tree 7

[156] *Manchester Mercury* Jan 21, 1817

"exclusively cheesemongers, ironmongers and newly enriched manufacturers, (who) the people of Manchester .. thought .. a joke" and "the local business mafia on horseback". [157] Within this list are found names of interest to this study. There is a James Slack, a Robert Hindley, a Thomas Hodgson, a Thomas Hardman, a Robert Peel, a John Bill, a James Leigh, a Thomas Ainsworth, a Robert Armstrong, a John Slack.

It remains a subject of ongoing research as to whether these names are associated with their namesakes in the family network. Whether these individuals are specifically connected to this study, this at least must suggest that the lines between Reformists and Conservatives were blurred and contradictory. Under what circumstances might the John Slack who printed the commemorative handkerchief of the Massacre be the same John Slack who attended the meeting calling for the establishment of the Yeoman Cavalry? It is perfectly possible to imagine that a bourgeois entrepreneur entertained Reformist sentiments but feared the radical inclinations of the working-class crowds who also inhabited that broad ideological space. Such a man might well see himself as concerned to maintain civic order while supporting a highly democratic philosophy in staunch opposition to the Tory exclusivity of the government of the time. If he then witnessed at first hand the loss of control of the police forces, and the ensuing savagery, his sympathies might easily be swayed towards greater radicalism, and as printer and a propagandist, the printing of the handkerchief would have been both an ideological and a business opportunity.

Even by the 1830's then, John Napier had situated himself geographically in the heart of the world's economic production process in Manchester, socio-economically in the heart of the burgeoning intellectual and ideological engine-room of the mercantile middle classes, the artisan-mercantile intelligentsia, and ideologically in the heart of the theological and

[157] Reginald White. *Waterloo to Peterloo* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1957) 151

philosophical exposition of a celebration of that middle class in its domesticity, in its self-conscious "Englishness" and its radical religiosity.

Before he had fully established himself however, his sisters were marrying into the same outward-looking, ambitious, morally and religiously steadfast community. In 1833 Elizabeth Napier married James Armstrong, a successful grocer and tea merchant from Newton le Willows, just out of Manchester. They lived with James sister Luceia, who signed their Bible with a flourishing hand in 1819. In 1844 they produced a daughter Lucy. That daughter, Lucy Armstrong, became a Methodist Sunday school teacher, and in that capacity she met and married John McDougall, and these two were Edith Birks' grandparents.

Charlotte Napier married her cousin William Sturdy Hanson with dismal results. Mary Ann married late, at the age of nearly 50 to Hugh McKirdy, a Chester carpenter, possibly in account of network contacts through the Armstrong family.[158] They emigrated to South Australia where their son William McKirdy started a grain business and employed their nephew, the young Charles Birks. Hannah married George Vause Birks, a doctor and a devout Methodist, in Chorlton, a suburb of Manchester in 1837. They emigrated to South Australia with their seven children in 1856. Their son Charles Birks would establish a successful retail department store there, and marry Mary Maria Thomas, the daughter of William Kyffin Thomas, proprietor of several influential newspapers. [159]

When George Vause Birks married Hannah Napier in 1837, he was already embarked on a difficult religious re-assessment. He had been baptised in a Non-Conformist church, but in his late teens he underwent an emotional and spiritual crisis that led him to restate and re-double his religious commitments.

The family histories refer to George's relations with his father in dark and mysterious terms, describing him as a "troublesome father". The otherwise effusive and affectionate

[158] James Armstrong and John Napier were both witnesses to the marriage.
[159] See Appendix 3 Family trees – Napier children and their spouses

letters home from the antipodes by his grandchildren never mention him. There is much difficult and conflicting emotional territory to be covered in this part of the story.

Chapter 13. Landed gentry

The Birks family from Braithwell

The Birks family originated in the borderlands of Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire.[160] There is a very early reference in the Wakefield Manor court rolls to Richard del Birks involved in a land dispute in 1229, and a mayor of Doncaster who died in 1590 was named Robert Byrkes, and known as Robin of Doncaster. There is also a reference to a "Chaunty" Birks who was said to be able to "hallo a hound five miles off", a vocal characteristic that has been handed down the ages. A family history identified Joshua Birks, a landowner in the Doncaster area who died in 1769 as a progenitor of Edith Birks' line.[161]

Joshua Birks' grandson John Birks, in 1784 married Mary Wasteneys, daughter of Simon Wasteneys of Edlington and Mary Jubb of Headon. John and Mary Birks' son Simon Wasteneys Birks was Edith Birks' great-great grandfather.[162]

Simon Wasteneys of Edlington appears in the records of the Wakefield Session in 1743 where he is appointed by Lady Viscountess Mary Molesworth as gamekeeper to the Manor and Lordship of Edlington. A decade earlier, a similar appointment is made for a John Wasteneys as gamekeeper, with a specific task of apprehending a poacher named Guus. Another reference in the Sessions, this time in 1766, has Simon Wasteneys, yeoman, along with William Heywood, also a yeoman, fined ten shillings apiece for failing to appear before the court. In 1782, tax records show Simon Wasteneys occupying land at Edlington owned by Viscount Nassau Molesworth (who was the 4th Viscount, and son of Richard Molesworth and Mary Ussher), and also acting as tax collector. In 1785, Simon Wasteneys is still in

[160] See Family tree 2 Appendix 3 for the Birks family, including some photographs of Charles' generation.
[161] Jon Napier, *A Birks family history* (Unpublished. Typeset by Jack Birks, Warradale, South Australia).
[162] Remember that Simon Wasteneys Birks' son George Vause Birks married Hannah Napier, sister of John Napier of Manchester, and that couple emigrated to South Australia where their son Charles Birks became a successful retailer and department store proprietor. He was Edith's grandfather.

occupation but now the tax assessment is signed by none other than John Birks, Simon Wasteneys son-in-law. The Birks family history has some detailed information about these relationships, but some of that information is contradicted by other documentation. It is worth an effort to try and disentangle this narrative.

According to the family history, comprising largely of interviews with Edith Mary Birks:

> The Wasteneys were gentry having considerable landholdings in the Braithwell area, and at Edlington, a town slightly to the north of Braithwell. The family seat of Mary's father, Lambcote Grange, is situated midway between Braithwell and Maltby. It was owned by the Wasteneys until 1883. [163]

Edith Mary Birks visited in 1911 and wrote

> This was Mary Birks own property and she and John Birks lived there from the time of their marriage and all their numerous family, including Simon and (his brother) Paul were born there.[164]

Lambcote Grange is a substantial holding with a provenance going back to the twelfth century. The Pastgate website of British village local history website tells us that

> Lambcote Grange is first mentioned in 1186 when it was given to Roche Abbey by Richard de Bulli. The main part of the present house is dated 1747, the rear wing is earlier and was probably built in the late 16th-early 17th century. [165]

However, information from the local history website of Stainton village throws doubt on the suggestion of a Wasteneys "family seat" at Lambcote Grange. It seems to have passed to the Wasteney's from a family called Purslove.

George Purslove died in 1783, but his wife Mary survived until 1800. The

[163] Edith Mary Birks was granddaughter of John Birks and Mary Wasteneys, and niece of Simon Wasteneys Birks, daughter of his brother Paul Jubb Birks.
[164] Jon Napier, *Birks Family History*, 5
[165]"Lambcote Grange" https://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=319050 accessed 30/5/2020

> ownership of the farm then passed through the female line by marriage to a member of the Wasteney family of Edlington, and their oldest son was christened George Purslove Wasteney. [166]

It appears the Purslove family lived at Lambcote Grange since at least the 1690s when it was the address of Matthew Purslove, gentleman, who lived from 1680 to 1736. He married Elizabeth Gilberthorpe, and they had a son George. This is the George Purslove mentioned in the story on the local history site. The Mary mentioned was his sister. I visited Lambcote Grange in the summer of 2022 and saw a slab of stone about half a metre square, much decayed, with the initials GP carved into it in elaborate curlicues. The owner showed me some strange inconsistencies in the size of some of the walls and told me of local legends that secret passages and tunnels connected the house to Roche Abbey. That is a distance of some four kilometres. Perhaps the tunnels in the house led out to paths in the forests and fields?

Both George and Mary Purslove died without children. However, they had another brother. He was the Rev. Joseph Pursglove, born in 1724, and he in turn had a daughter Mary Mirfin Purslove, who was born in 1754. It was this Mary Mirfin Purslove who in 1777 married William Wasteneys (1743 – 1818), a "gentleman". He was the son of Simon Wasteneys. It was his sister Mary Wasteneys who married John Birks in 1784. Rather than a Birks family seat, the Birks are connected to Lambcote Grange through the Pursloves. The Pursloves in turn are gentry going back to the fifteenth century when Alice Pursglove married Edward Eyre of Holme Hall. His great granddaughter Jane Eyre married Sir Hardolph Wasteneys, 1st Baronet Wasteneys. Of this more later.

There is a substantial house that does count as the Birks' family seat and that is The Old Hall at Brampton-en-le-Morthen, about five kilometres south of Lambcote Grange.

[166] https://www.staintonvillage.org/thehistoryofstainton.htm accessed 30/5/2020.

According to this history then, the "Wasteneys" name in Simon Wasteneys Birks, indeed the Birks name itself, indicates a patrimony not of aspirational artisans, but of landholding gentry.

This is a puzzle, because the *received* family story – the *mythology*, if you like – is very much of a rise in social status from the artisan working class by dint of hard work, cleverness, religious conviction, stringent application of necessary brutality and good luck. This is in turn part of a broader political ideology that derived the emergence of the English middle classes, with their religion and ideology of thrift and morals, from just that strata of merchants and artisans that are so well illustrated by William Napier and Catherine Lumley and their grandchildren. This formulation essentially considers the middle class as just a lucky or well-endowed fraction of the working class, who by good luck and good management managed to avoid falling into the desperate pit of grimy despair that was offered to so many of that class by the Industrial Revolution. So the nature of these families class status has a question mark over it.

The fact is however that it was still possible, with a lapse in all that luck and management, to fall precipitously backwards from the treasured gentility and die in Dickensian conditions, separated from family, friends, "connexions" and patrimony, in a Manchester workhouse. This was the fate of Edith's great-great grandfather Simon Wasteneys Birks. This story is a touchstone of the social and emotional precarity underlying all of the family's confidence and outgoingness. The fact that this was *forgotten*, apparently wilfully, speaks to a thread of self-delusion that permeates the emotionality and self-concept of family members, something that I believe is intrinsic to the ideology and religiosity with which they surrounded themselves. But before we speak of that fall, we need to investigate something else, something that I have touched on with the Purslove – Birks – Wasteneys nexus, but which was altogether unexpected.

At this stage in my investigations, I came across an intriguing oddity of a document. In 1887, in the *London Morning Post* of the third of August, a certain William Wasteneys, an English barrister practising in New Zealand published this advertisement.

> Whereas Sir Hardolf Wasteneys, fourth baronet, great grandson of the first mentioned baronet (Hardolf Wasteneys of Headon, granted the title by James I in December 1622) died without male issue, and all other collateral male issue being extinct, the title vested in the cousin and heir-at-law of the said fourth baronet, that is to say of Simon Wasteneys of Edlington in the county of York who was also the direct male issue of the grantee of the title. And whereas the said Simon left one son only, William, who left one son only, William (deceased), who had two sons and no more, William Parslove and Hardolf, whereof the elder William Parslove is dead, leaving me, William Wasteneys, his only son and heir-at-law surviving ….

Now I can admit that for all my socialism and egalitarianism and rationalism, I am by no means immune to the allure of the possibilities of an aristocratic heritage. Like everybody else I spent my childhood listening at my mother's knee to the fairy tales, Jack and the Beanstalk, Puss in Boots, Dick Whittington and his cat, telling of lowly millers' sons discovering, by dint of rat cunning, or magical intervention, that they are the rightful heirs to leagues of forests and corn fields worked by a deferential peasantry, and the hand of a fair princess to boot. Puss in Boots was my particular favourite, with Puss cajoling the ogre into transmuting himself first into a lion, causing Puss to retire to the safety of a tree, and then into a mouse for Puss to gobble up immediately, thus removing the last impediment for his master to morph in reality into his assumed identity of the Marquis of Carabas.

Chapter 14. "Connexions" and an ancient patronage network

The Wasteneys family

Sir Hardolphe Wasteneys of Headon Nottinghamshire, Esq. was created a baronet by King James I on 18 December 1622 and was Sheriff of Nottingham in 1635-6.[167] He was the son of Gervase Wasteneys of Headon and Jane Reresby, daughter of Lionel Reresby of Thrybergh near Sheffield, Nottingham and Doncaster. The Reresbys had been a dominant family in Thrybergh since the early fourteenth century. Hardolphe Wasteneys was born in 1578 and he married Jane Eyre, daughter of Gervase Eyre of Kiveton. He died in 1649. His son, also Sir Hardolphe, inherited the Baronetcy but died without male issue in 1673, whereupon the title passed to his brother John's son Edmund, the third baronet. Edmund's son, again Sir Hardolphe Wasteneys, inherited the title on his father's death in 1678, but he also had no male children and this time the title became extinct when he died in 1742. This is the point that William Wasteneys in 1887 begins to build his own claim.

The Wasteneys family, if the nineteenth century antiquarians can be taken at their word, could trace their descent back to companions of William the Conquerer.[168]An 1817 "Topographical and historical description of the parish of Tixall" (in Staffordshire) states that this parish was their possession.

> This name of Wasteneys, or Gasteneys, is found among the list of Normans of distinction who came over with the Conquerer … It (Tixall parish) continued in possession of the family until the reign of Richard II when Roger de Wasteneys had an only daughter, Rose, who inheriting her father's estates married Sir John Merston, Knt; and they having no issue, in the year 1469 sold the reversion of Tixtall

[167] G.E. Cockayne, *The complete peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom, extant, extinct, or dormant* (London: St Catherines Press. 1910-98)

[168] Whether the 18th century antiquarians can in fact be trusted is a thesis of its own. In the interim I am prepared to allow that this information is at least plausible.

to Sir Thomas Littleton … the famous lawyer whose "Treatise on Tenures" is so justly celebrated. [169]

The Black Book of the Exchequer contains reference to brothers William and Galfredus de Wasteneys holding two knight's fees and one and a half knight's fees respectively, for the purpose of levies for the marriage of Matilda, daughter of Henry II in 1166. [170]Not only could they purportedly trace the lineage back to the Conqueror, but beyond that even, to landowners in the districts around Orleans, and thus in all likelihood into the Frankish aristocracy and the transitional upheavals surrounding the decline of the Pax Romana.[171]

By the fourteenth century the Wasteneys were in possession of the manor of Headon-cum-Upton in Nottinghamshire, just ten kilometres south-east of Lambcote Grange and the villages of Brampton, Rotherham and Maltby. Thoroton in 1812 reports that the lordship contains about three thousand acres of land which "chiefly belongs to A.H. Eyre, Esq., of Grove, who possesses it through his mother, the heiress of the Wasteneys". The surrounding villages of Maltby, Edlington, Thrybergh, Braithwell are all home towns to the Birks and Wasteneys families.

The parish records show Wasteneys as patrons of the Rectorship at Headon since at least the 1370s.[172] In 1409, William Wasteneys was arraigned for violent and lawless conduct when his servants Ralph and Thruston Puncherdon "did lie in wait on the high road of our lord the king near Headon Cross and there they did encounter one Robert de Beghton, a

[169] Robert Thoroton. *Topographical and historical description of the parish of Tixall* (Paris, M. Nouzou. 1817)
[170] Niger Leber, The black book or register in the exchequer is the name of an ancient book kept in the English exchequer, containing a collection of treaties, conventions, charters, etc. dating back to the 13th century.
[171] Of course it is a truism that if we are here now, then someone was there then, somewhere in the mix. The present is the most solid proof of the validity of the concept of a historical past. While the specifics of that past are notoriously difficult to unpack, nd every historical assertion must be couched around in declarations of uncertainty, nevertheless there is a past, and it seems safe to argue that it is populated by people with whom we share not just a biology but a kinship relationship, languages, social practices, humours, cosmologies, emotions and fates in common. This is a basic assumption that enables any historical investigation, or any act of historical imagination. Certainly all those things are subject to change, but those changes leave marks, and those marks we can read and interpret. That is the discipline of history.
[172] Parish Records of Headon cum Upton.

tenant of our lord the king and did assault him as if they purposed to have killed or murdered him, and so they would have done if it had not been that by the grace of God the said Robert perceived where Dame Katherine Hercy stood on her watchtower in that part, and he fled to her presence for help, and so was rescued and delivered out of their hands." [173]

The aristocratic lineage of the Wasteneys family comes as a surprise. However it is well documented. What is less clear is the relationship between Sir Hardolphe Wasteneys, baronet, and Simon Wasteneys, gamekeeper and ancestor of Edith Birks, and apparently of the New Zealand attorney William Wasteneys. [174]

The link is through the Molesworth family. Simon Wasteneys was employed by Lady Viscountess Molesworth in 1742.[175] There are two possible candidates for Lady Viscountess Molesworth. Mary Jenney Ussher was born in 1728 and married Richard Molesworth, 3rd Viscount Molesworth at the age of 15, when he was 64.[176] He was the brother of the 2nd Viscount Molesworth, and they were both sons of the 1st Viscount Robert Molesworth of Swords, in the Irish peerage. The second possibility is Mary Middleton, wife of the second Viscount. The Molesworth family had bought the Edlington estate with Blow Hall manor in the late seventeenth century. Blow Hall was demolished in the mid nineteenth century, but Edlington Wood still exists and I went for a very pleasant walk there in 2022. It was famous for a slightly ghoulish story by which the first Viscount, returning from the gardens, went to open the door of a garden shed and was prevented from doing so by his snow-white greyhound. He asked one of his gardeners to open the door instead, and the servant was promptly shot dead by an intruder. The Viscount raised an elaborate marble monument to the

[173] https://southwellchurches.nottingham.ac.uk/headon-cum-upton/hhistory.php accessed 29 Nov 2020
[174] To assist with this very complicated network of filial and patronage relationships see Family Trees 4 and 5 Appendix 3.
[175] *Wakefield Sessions* 22 July 1742
[176] Richard Molesworth was famous for saving the life of the Duke of Marlborough at the battle of Ramillies when Marlborough fell from his own horse. Molesworth offered Marlborough his own horse and then plunged into the melee and recovered Marlborough's horse.

faithful dog (though not to the servant), consisting of a marble urn and a bas-relief of the dog with a long inscription in Latin.[177]

Lady Viscountess Molesworth also employed a John Wasteneys in 1733, again as a gamekeeper specifically to catch the poacher Guus.[178] I had originally thought that this relationship might have just been an ordinary employment transaction, an aristocrat employing a servant, only made unusual by the fact that the servant's son then married into the gentry at Lambcote Grange. It was this class transition that I thought notable. It was also an interesting piece of evidence for my general thesis of class transition during the industrial revolution.

However the Wasteneys aristocratic lineage suggests a significant reframing. The relationship between the Molesworths and the Wasteneys appears to be a long-standing patronage relationship established several generations earlier. I ask forbearance with the complexities of this story.[179]

Richard Molesworth, 3rd Viscount was the younger son of the 1st Viscount, Robert Molesworth. He, Robert, in turn was in 1706-08 MP for the parliamentary seat of East Retford. His companion in the two member electorate was none other than Sir Hardolphe Wasteneys, the 4th (and last) Baronet Wasteneys.[180] These electorates were patronage gifts in the control of senior aristocratic magnates. This electorate, East Retford, covering the area around Rotherham near Doncaster, was in the patronage gift of the Duke of Newcastle. As MPs, both Molesworth and Wasteneys were thus his clients.

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[177] *"Stay, traveller, Nor wonder that a lamented Dog is thus interred with funeral honour. But ah, what a dog ! His beautiful form and snow-white colour, Pleasing manners and sportful playfulness, Affection, obedience, and fidelity, Made him the delight of his master, To whose side he closely adhered. With his eager companions of the chase, He delighted in attending him. Whenever the mind of his lord was depressed, He would assume fresh spirit and animation. A master, not ungrateful for his merits, Has here in tears deposited his remains In this marble urn."* From Molesworth family newsletter Vol 1 No 1 December 1999 https://web.archive.org/web/20091015113242/http://www.molesworth.id.au/downloads/dec1999.PDF

[178] Wakefield Sessions 1733. Again there is confusion in the documentation which refers to Lady Mary Viscountess Molesworth. Mary Ussher married the 3rd Viscount in 1743. The previous Viscountess was named Jane Lucas. But the 2nd Viscount's wife was Mary Middleton, so it is likely she who is referred to here.

[179] For the genealogical and patronage relationships, see Appendix 3 Family tree 4

[180] https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org accessed 27/01/2022

The Duke of Newcastle was John Holles, who in addition to being the Duke of Newcastle was also 4th Earl of Clare. That title had been granted a century earlier to his great grandfather, the 1st Earl of Clare, also named John Holles. *He* had acquired his aristocratic title by buying it wholesale for fifteen thousand pounds (ten for enoblement, five for the Earldom) from James I's favourite, the Duke of Buckingham.[181] This John Holles, 1st earl of Clare was patron and friend and "Cozen" to the *first* Baronet Wasteneys, Sir Hardolphe Wasteneys, great, great uncle of the 4th Baronet Wasteneys (also Sir Hardolphe)

The Holles family were mercantile. They had risen to fortune and fame as wool mercers in the reign of Elizabeth when the 1st Earl's grandfather, William Holles, a commoner and mercers apprentice, became rich enough to become Lord mayor of London in 1539. William Holles the Lord Mayor amassed wealth, but on realising that his eldest son Thomas was a "wastrel" settled his fortune on his second son Sir William Holles. This Holles certainly carried himself with significant swagger.

> 'But Thomas dissipated his inheritance, whereas the younger brother, Sir William, became a man of vast wealth and lived here at Haughton in great splendour. "He began his Christmas at All Hallowtide and continued it until Candlemas, during which any man was permitted to stay three days without being asked whence he came or what he was." An ox was roasted whole on each of twelve successive days when Sir William kept Christmas at Haughton. He was known as "Good Sir William." He refused to marry his daughter to the Earl of Cumberland because he, a commoner, refused to have a son-in-law before whom he would be expected to stand cap in hand. He attended the coronation of King Edward VI. with fifty retainers in blue coats and badges in his retinue and be never went to the Sessions at Retford without thirty "proper fellows" at his heels. He kept his own company of actors to amuse him with plays and masques in the long winter evenings at Haughton. In the summer

[181] "Holles family" *Burkes Peerage* 1831

they toured the country as "strolling players." Good Sir William enjoyed life here at Haughton for over half a century after he bought the estate, and dying 18th January, 1590, was buried in this chapel. His grandson, John Holles, became Earl of Clare. From the Holles's, Haughton passed by female descent to the Pelhams and then to the Clintons, Dukes of Newcastle-under-Lyme." [182]

It was his grandson, John Holles, who entered the aristocracy as the 1st earl of Clare. He was an industrious manager, a tireless networker, an acquirer and distributor of patronage, and also a prolific letter writer. His letters show him interceding several times on behalf of his client and "Cozen", Hardolphe Wasteneys. On several occasions he writes to, for example, Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, Lord High Treasurer, Sir Francis Bacon, and the Duke of Lennox, cousin to James I. This is high level lobbying and networking indeed! Holles is asking that Wasteneys be kept off the lists for selection of Sheriff of Nottingham because "this gentleman's living is small, a wyfe and 8 children". Holles makes these sorts of representations on behalf of Wasteneys over the space of several years from 1616 through the 1620's. By 1635 Hardolphe Wasteneys does end up getting appointed Sheriff of Nottingham. Perhaps he was finally rich enough?

Holles several times refers to Wasteneys as "my Cosen". Does this mean he is actually related or is it just some sort of honorific? Holles certainly uses Wasteneys as his commissioner several times, once to hunt down a Catholic recusant, another time to chase up some rents in arrears. On another occasion Holles went with Hardolph Wasteneys to visit George Markham, another relation, to buy a horse "which he valeweth at 20 pounds, and a handsum horse, gallops, and paces well" .[183] Two friends, relatives, travelling together to buy

[182] Thomas M. Blagg *Haughton Hall* Transactions of the Thoroton Society XXXV 1931 *http://www.nottshistory.org.uk/articles/tts/tts1931/haughtonhall.htm accessed 5/12/20*

[183] P. R. Seddon, ed. *Letters of John Holles 1587 – 1637* Thoroton Society record Series XXXV (Nottingham: Thoroton Society, 1983)

a horse from a third friend indicates a level of easy intimacy and an equality of social status between Holles and Wasteneys.

The relationships of rank, patronage and ancestry are fluid and complex. Hardolphe Wasteneys, for all his aristocratic ancestry, was a client of John Holles. Such a relationship, such a "connexion", represented both a mutuality and an intimacy which was not dependent on direct kinship, but kinship would reinforce it. The importance of "connexions" to a family's dynastic fortunes were paramount.

So far then, we have the first baronet Wasteneys a client of the 1st Earl of Clare in the 1620's. Then, three generations later, we have the 4th baronet Watseneys *and* the 1st Viscount Molesworth *both* clients of the 4th Earl of Clare (who is also by now the first Duke of Newcastle) in 1706-8. Then in the 1730's and 40's we see a further relationship between the Molesworth family, in the person of the Lady Mary Molesworth, and the yeoman and gamekeeper Simon Wasteneys.

What meaning might be attached to the Earl of Clare's use of the term Cozen" in relation to Sir Hardolphe Wasteneys in the 1620's? I have identified a specific if distant link between them. The link is via the Frescheville and Eyre families, both aristocratic lineages of long standing, going back to the 11th and 12th centuries in Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire and Yorkshire. It was eventually the Eyre family who inherited the Wasteneys estates through the 4th baronet's granddaughter Judith Bury upon the extinction of the male line of the Wasteneys Baronetcy in the 1740s.

The 1st Earl of Clare's uncle, Sir Gervase Holles, who died in 1627, married Frances Frescheville. Her brother John Frescheville, married Barbara Eyre, daughter of Gervase Eyre of Loughten en le Morthern and Kiveton. Her sister Jane Eyre in turn married Hardolphe Wasteneys, the first Baronet. That is to say that Hardolphe Watseneys' sister-in-law was also the sister-in-law of John Holles, Earl of Clare's uncle's wife. Cozen.

The link might seem distant from the perspective of twenty first century society where the material significance of filial mutuality has been subsumed by other networks. However, this patronage network is certain and remained effective even at such genealogical distances. If this indeed was the only kinship link, nevertheless the patronage relationship between Hardolphe Wasteneys and the 1st Earl of Clare, John Holles, is extensively documented and is under no question, nor is it ambiguous.

Simon Wasteneys and (perhaps) his father were clients of the Molesworth family in the 1730s and 40s. Both the Molesworths and the Wasteneys were in turn clients of the Holles family a generation earlier in 1706. But four generations earlier in the 1620's, the Wasteneys were direct clients of the Holles family. And a century earlier than that again the Wasteneys were of higher status than the Holles, as Lords of Tickhill and Headon, while the Holles were still commoners in the mercer's trade.

The discovery of this "connexion" caused me to radically re-evaluate the frameworks I was using to understand my story. I now had two theoretical frameworks operating. I think they complement rather than contradict each other. There is a class framework, which operates on the large scale of social dynamics, under parameters of economic, technological and demographic changes. Under this theory, the families under study originated as artisans, petty merchants and yeoman farmers, and rode the economic, demographic and ideological transformations of the Industrial Revolution into positions of wealth and influence among the new middle classes of industrial Britain, and of the new Imperial diaspora, in the nineteenth century. The trajectory is rising, transformational, even revolutionary. This is the trajectory of the Napier family.

However, these class relationships are strongly mediated by other more intimate personal factors; domestic and family relationships, relationships of loyalty derived from ancient social forms of kinship, fealty and locality; personal relationships of obligation and emotion, and patronage relations. Under this second hypothesis (which complements and

does not negate the first one), the family dynamics take place within a long-standing class/patronage relationship between families of quite stable gentry status. Even as estates and titles pass to other families, and individuals such as Simon Wasteneys or John Birks take on roles of gamekeeper or tax assessor, their social status as gentry is stabilised and maintained by their "connexions", that is their inherited set of mutual rights and obligations within patron/client networks which transcend the underlying social tumult. Thus Simon Wasteneys can find a position as a senior manager within the corporate structure of the manorial estate of the Molesworth family on the strength of client relationships established more than a century earlier, between the Holles family and the Molesworth family on the one hand and between the Holles family and the Wasteneys family on the other hand.

In 1749, the Wasteneys baronetcy expired with the death of Sir Hardolphe Wasteneys the 4th baronet. His sister Catherine had married a military man Edward Hutchinson, and their daughter, another Catherine, married John Bury of Nottingham. Their daughter, and the heiress of the estates, Judith Letitia Bury married a cousin Anthony Eyre of Grove - a descendant of the Anthony Eyre whose sister had married the 1st baronet Wasteneys a century before - whereby the Wasteneys estates at Headon passed to the Eyre family. At the same time as that transfer of estates was happening, Simon Wasteneys was installing himself as a manager, gamekeeper, and tax collector on the Molesworth estate just a few miles away at Edlington.

The role of gamekeeper might have placed Simon Wasteneys in a precarious and politically charged liminal social position. Gamekeepers were servants, but their role was in the policing of the seigneurial rights of gentry landholders. If Simon Wasteneys was not himself gentry, this would have alienated him from his community, for whom poaching was a way of contesting privilege and maintaining ancient common rights to hunt game, activities the gamekeepers were required to police and eradicate. On the other hand, the position did

not necessarily grant him any claim to the allegiance or even the protection of the landowners whose game he was charged to protect.

It could, however, be a well-paid position carrying some influence and some possibility of granting patronage in its own right. Indeed in 1705, Robert Viscount Molesworth (the 1st Viscount Molesworth, the MP for East Retford) ordered that his newly hired gamekeeper be given the same wages and conditions as the butler. The butler was the senior management position in a rural country household.

At the other end of the scale, a gamekeeper supplying small game for the seigneurial table at piece rates might be of very low status indeed. In the words of one analyst, "where such arrangements existed (providing game by piece for the table) the gamekeepers position was only slightly higher than that of the local rat-catcher."[184] Was Simon Wasteneys a high status manager, or was he a rat catcher? It is intriguing to consider a possible case of a working-class man marrying into the gentry, perhaps representing a specific case of the breaking down of ancient class barriers under the pressure of the economic and demographic transformations of the industrial Revolution. There is also something romantic in the idea. However, the weight of evidence seems to be against rat-catcher, and tending towards a longstanding set of patronage relationships *within* the gentry, notwithstanding the ebb and flow of fortunes and the increasing precarity of status amidst the tumult of the industrial Revolution.

What *is* definitely known is that Simon Wasteneys' son William Wasteneys married the heiress of Lambcote Grange, Mary Mirfin Purslove. We also know the Eyres were related to the Pursloves because in 1517 Edward Eyre of Holm Hall had married Robert Purslove's daughter Alice.[185] His first wife had been Elizabeth Reresby of Thrybergh (daughter of Ralph Reresby), and her cousin Jane Reresby (daughter of Lionel Reresby) was Hardolphe

[184] Munsche, P. B. "The gamekeeper in English rural society 1660 – 1830". *Journal of British Studies,* Vol. 20 No. 2 (Spring 1981) 82- 105.
[185] Burke's Gentry

Wasteney's mother. Simon Wasteneys, and his children William Wasteneys and Mary Birks remain within the gentry, and his grandchildren grow up on the ancient estate of Lambcote Grange.

However, there is now a blip, indeed a catastrophe, in the family fortunes. The resolution of that catastrophe does not lie in a reversion to the aristocratic land-based networks and fortunes of the Wasteneys and Pursloves, but on the new industrial networks and fortunes, mediated by dissident and Nonconformist religions, of the Napier family. Simon Wasteneys Birks, the son of Mary Wasteneys and her husband John Birks, was engulfed in the turbulent waters at the confluence of two different social classes, and the tempestuous conditions of the industrial revolution, propelled by transgressions both personal and financial, into penury and disgrace. His son, George Vause Birks, though, survived the turbulence, married Hannah Napier, sister of the cotton magnate John Napier, and transported himself and his family to distant and stranger waters.

Chapter 15. Credit and Sobriety.

The fate of Simon Wasteneys Birks

Simon Wasteneys Birks married Elizabeth Vause some time before 1814. She was the daughter of Alexander Vause, a publican and victualer, proprietor of The Tankard in Sheffield. His brother Thomas was also a publican, holding The White Hart in Thorne (which is still there). An article in the *London Gazette* of 1827 states that Simon Wasteneys Birks was the son in law of Elizabeth Outram, who died in 1826, which would make her the wife of Alexander Vause.

Simon Birks, like William Napier, was a linen draper. He and Elizabeth Vause produced eight children between 1815 and 1828, George Vause Birks, great grandfather of Edith Birks, being the eldest. Caroline, the youngest was born 22 February 1828. She married the Irish bookseller Charles Eason in 1851. William Henry, Samuel John, and Sarah Ann each married but none had children. Elizabeth, Hannah and Charles Alexander never married. Three were baptised in the Doncaster Wesleyan Methodist chapel, so apparently by 1825 they had converted to Methodism.[186]

By 1821, Simon Birks was a bankrupt, described in the documents as a "mercer, draper, grocer, dealer and chapman". He claimed later that he lost "two thousand five hundred and fifty pounds of good money of my own" (equivalent to about three hundred thousand pounds today). The bankruptcy forced the sale of his goods and furniture "including all that the Extensive and Valuable stock in trade of a Mercer, Draper and Grocer together with the valuable Fixtures, Household Furniture and other Effects comprising every requisite for carrying in the said business … most eligibly situated at Thorne." [187] John Wilson, who

[186] Jon Napier, *Birks Family History*.
[187] *Hull Advertiser and Exchange Gazette*, April 6, 1821.

seems to have been the business partner of Birks' mother-in-law, is named as the person to apply to for "particulars and to treat for the purchase".

Birks tried again in 1827, when he took over the grocers, drapers and mercers business, with debts and obligations, of his mother in law Elizabeth Outram (wife of Alexander Vause, and mother of Elizabeth Vause) and her business partner John Wilson. In 1829 he is listed in Piggott's Directory for Thorne as a grocer and tea dealer, as well as a linen and wool merchant in Market Place. His brother William is also listed as a grocer and tea dealer but at a different address, in Hatfield Street.

The family moved to Manchester some time after 1830 and soon made contact with the Armstrong family. Simon's brother William Henry Birks was in partnership with James Armstrong, great grandfather of Edith Birks through her mother Lucy McDougall, in a draper's business by 1841. They reported a break in and burglary at their store in Great Ancoats Street in that year. In 1842 that partnership was dissolved by mutual consent. William Henry Birks remained an object of affection for his nephew George's family. They pass their regards on to him in letters from Australia in the 1850s.[188]

Simon, on the other hand, suffered both a decline in his material fortunes and an estrangement from his family. The family history describes him as a "troublesome" father, without any details as to what that might mean. Virtually no mention is registered in the otherwise fulsome and affectionate letters from George Vause Birks with a single exception in which George addresses his mother Elizabeth: "I send in this two tickets to the public baths in Manchester which you may send by James to SWB if no-one else wishes to have them".[189] However, by extraordinary good fortune, we do possess a newspaper report of his verbatim words when he was a witness in a forgery trial in 1853, and this gives an inkling of both his status, the network of people he was involved with, and some sense of his character.[190]

[188] "Letter from a Birks child in Australia". In the collection of the author.
[189] Jon Napier, *Birks Family History* 7.
[190] "Charge of uttering a forged Bill of exchange", *Halifax Guardian,* December 24, 1853.

Joshua Crampton had presented a bill worth seventy pounds to Thackrah Mills, a cotton warp manufacturer of Halifax, for fifty warps of cotton, purporting to be drawn by John Coe, a cap-maker, and accepted by S.W. Birks. (A bill of exchange or a promissory note is a written order to a person requiring them to make a specified payment to the signatory). It appears that Simon Birks had signed that he was good for seventy pounds (around eight thousand in today's money).

In order to establish the veracity of the bill, Mills had asked Crampton "Who is this John Coe" and "Who is this Mr. Birks", and on receiving an answer that Crampton had done much business with both, had accepted the bill in payment, while insisting that he would go up to Manchester to check. When he did so some weeks later, he couldn't find either Coe or Birks and took the complaint to the magistrates. The magistrate's investigation discovered that Crampton was a bankrupt who had been in business in Leeds and Bradford. The constables went to the Stansfield Arms in Idle, a village just out of Leeds and Bradford to arrest him, but he ran. "It was a thick foggy night", the constable testified. "I ran against a cart and lost all trace of him." They tracked him down a couple of weeks later and took him into custody. That pub still stands, dating back to 1543, the Stansfield Arms.

Simon is introduced in the article as "Simon Wasteneys Birks, an old man". In December 1853, he is 62. There is some wrangling over whether he should see the note in question. They get him to write his name on a blank piece of paper.

> While rubbing his spectacles for that purpose he said he was an unfortunate tradesman now residing in Union Street, Manchester: He could not tell the number. He was there every day but lodged in Poland Street, No 18. … A woman of the name of Hopkinson keeps the lodgings. If anyone asks me for my address I always give them Union Street. I know a man of the name of John Coe. He is a cap-maker in Turner Street, but I do not know where he lives…. I have seen John Coe write something on a bill which I wrote on afterwards across. That is John Coe's writing on the foot of the bill and

also the signature on the back of the bill. The signature across the face of the bill – "S. W. Birks", together with the acceptance all written in red ink – is my handwriting. As John Coe is a cap-maker he will have to deal in cloth.

Cross examined, he continues. "I have no account at Smith, Payne and Co. Formerly I had a bank account at Rotherham from 1813 to 1820 where I lost 2550 pounds good money of my own; and then at Doncaster from 1820 to 1833; and I have kept no banking account since 1833. I have been living in Manchester these 20 years; but as I have been a lodger for 17 years my name would not appear in the Directory. My son allowed me 3s. 6p. a week but is now gone to Australia in the *Leonidas* which sailed from Southampton on the 8th of August.

He goes on to list his lodgings; in Poland Street for six months, in Dych Street, in Addington Street, where he forgets the name of the woman who kept the house. He has "lived in a great number of places" for seventeen years, and now he has been in the workhouse for seven weeks. He is in Union Street every day though "I have no place of business there. I go to the Little Robin Hood, a beer shop, in Union Street. The police don't know me at all. And I don't pass by any other name to my knowledge than Simon Wasteneys Birks".

That was the end of the cross-examination. Another witness was called, Benjamin Clegg, a "commissioning agent" by his own account and "another of the 'unwashed' of Manchester", by the account of the journalist. In the end they decided not to commit Crampton, but they warned him that "he had escaped very narrowly indeed" and that he had "either from habit or misfortune been led into the society of a most discreditable set and who, if he continued to associate with them very much longer would give him a good chance of being carried very much further than the bankruptcy court". No more mention is made of Birks.

So there we have a small portrait. An old man, "unwashed", slightly addled in his manner, no bank account, no income, spending his day in a beer shop, drifting from one set of lodgings to another, signing off on dud checks when asked, dependent on a tiny allowance from a son who has now gone to Australia, a bankrupt and a money loser and part of a "most discreditable" set. It's quite a fall for a man who grew up in Lambcote Grange. The depth of his decline, his apparent financial incompetence, his estrangement from his family, and the fact that he spent his days in a beer shop suggest that he may have been an alcoholic, a suspicion reinforced by the fact that his wife's family were publicans. He died in the New Bridge Street Workhouse in Manchester on March 26 1859 of "senile catarrh", a condition in which "the lungs are deluged in watery mucus".[191]

What does this mean? Simon Wasteneys Birks is bankrupt in 1821 and has had no bank account since 1833, 20 years earlier. He has been a lodger for 17 years, that is since 1836, and has been living on an allowance of 3s 6d from his son, from whom we know him to be estranged, and who has since gone to Australia, leaving him with no income and living in the workhouse. He spends his days in a beer shop. He was lodging in Dych St in the infamous Angel Meadow slum, which none other than Friedrich Engels visited in the 1840s describing it as a Hell on Earth, and in Addington St nearby.[192]

[191] George Hume Weatherhead, *A Practical Treatise on the Principal Diseases of the Lungs* (London: John Churchill, 1837)
[192] Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958)

Chapter 16. Goodbye to Angel Meadow.

George Vause Birks and Hannah Napier sail to the colonies

Such relentless social precarity and the consequences of transgression of ethical codes must have impressed itself with great force on the minds of Simon Wasteneys Birks' immediate family, his son George Vause Birks and his grandsons. The eldest, George Napier Birks, was 15 when they left for Australia, and Charles was 11; old enough to have been aware of their grandfather while they grew up in the Manchester whose slums were "a chaos of one roomed huts", their inhabitants "a physically degenerate race robbed of all humanity" existing in a "dark tide of misery and wretchedness". [193] These were not moral abstractions for the Birks family but immediate ethical and emotional lived experience embodied in a close blood relative. Did the children have direct contact with their grandfather? Could they observe, see, touch, *smell* him, his surroundings, his habitation, his confreres in that underclass, the "scuttlers" and the prostitutes and petty gangsters? His son almost certainly did. How much of the puritan ideology that Birks' descendants adopted was in response to a direct consciousness of such personal and social conditions? These conditions also bring stark images to our historical imagination of the contrast between this "damp, dark Labyrinth" and the Arcadian visions of South Australia as a pure and sundrenched new arena for the relationship between a benevolent agricultural deity and a loyal and devout yeomanry, half a world removed from the harsh, filthy, class ridden old Britannia. The decision to leave Manchester and Britain for a colonial frontier, though full of risk, may not have been a difficult one.

Although the family appear to have joined the Wesleyan Methodists in the 1820s George Vause Birks seems to have had a more intimate religious experience of his own in his

[193] Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class.*

late teens. The family history refers to a “handwritten religious covenant, pledged by him on his twentieth birthday (7 December 1835), and renewed in August the following year”, and his courting of Hannah Napier included a letter dated 1836 which was ”mainly a sermon for Hannah’s benefit” though a second letter a month later is a “love letter”.[194] The Napier family were and remained devout Methodist activists. George had a vocation to be a preacher, but a throat ailment prevented this and he took up medicine.

Hannah Birks bore seven children and she was pregnant with an eighth before they emigrated to South Australia in 1851. Hannah’s sister Mary Ann McKirdy was already there. They stayed with the McKirdy’s on arrival in Port Adelaide, where the baby was given a name Edmund Webb Birks, but died almost immediately.

The family moved to Angaston in the Barossa Valley where George took a position as a surgeon and they began to build his practice, including setting up a small store to sell medicines and other items, staffed by their children. The Barossa Valley is an area of lovely rolling hills and fertile soils about a hundred kilometres north of the city of Adelaide, watered by the Gawler River and its tributaries. It has now become famous as a wine growing region.

On 30 January 1858, George rode out to attend a patient. He failed to return. Several hours later he was found wandering in a confused state with a severe head injury, having fallen from his horse. He died later that day. The family were immediately thrown into severe economic jeopardy. Hannah’s response was to turn to her own family tradition of small traders and set up shop as a haberdasher, assisted by her children. This venture was successful enough to maintain them and promising enough for the son Charles to be sent to Adelaide in an apprenticeship arrangement with his uncle McKirdy who had set up a seed merchant business in Rundle street. From this platform, Charles went into business on his own account in partnership with David Robin, another evangelically minded draper.

[194] Jon Napier, *Birks Family History* 9

By the 1860's, Charles Birks had transferred his religious allegiances from Methodism to the nascent Baptist Church in South Australia, and through this he made an association with William Kyffin Thomas. Thomas was the grandson of the pioneer newspaper publisher Robert Thomas who had arrived with the first settler fleet in 1836 as the government printer. In 1866, Charles Birks married William Kyffin Thomas's daughter Mary Maria Thomas.

The marriage of Charles Birks to Mary Maria Thomas in 1866 was a transitional moment for the Birks family. Although they had wealthy relatives in the UK, such as John Napier of Manchester, their social status and material wealth in South Australia was much less significant. Hannah's brother-in-law Hugh McKirdy became a Postmaster in country towns; respectable, certainly, in a small-town sort of way, but hardly mercantile bourgeoisie. As a medical man George Birks had cachet. That was a profession that was regarded as "decent", a transitional ranking in the UK through the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As a doctor, one might be invited to tea with lower-level landed gentry, mix socially and if one accrued enough wealth, marriage into those same lower ranking gentry was not out of the realms of possibility, especially if the gentry were impoverished.[195] A portrait of George Birks shows him as a mild-eyed, well dressed young man with mutton chop sideburns and a velvet collar.

But George Birks was dead. Hannah Birks was clever, financially savvy, and the inheritor of a tradition of provisioning that allowed her to understand not just the material systems of retailing but the psychological dimensions as well. Hannah Birks knew how to present herself and she was highly regarded in the young colony for preserving the respectability of her family in her tragic and straitened widowhood, and ensuring the education of her sons and the placement of her children in good marriages. Not only a good

[195] Ann Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 1998).

marriage but a further intensification of religious devotion turned on the marriage of Charles Birks and Mary Maria Thomas in 1868.

Chapter 17. Settler colonialists.

The Thomas family.

The Thomas family had arrived in South Australia on the first fleet of settlers in 1836. Robert Thomas was printer, journalist and newspaper proprietor. His father had been a yeoman farmer with land in Wales. His wife Mary Harris was a poet and diarist with a significant flair for publicity. Her father was a Southampton publican and later a retailer of glassware and porcelain, and wealthy enough to own "two sizeable villas with a garden and … land attached" by the time he died.[196] The couple married on 8 January 1818 and moved to London to live in an apartment above Robert's business premises at 203 Fleet St. Their family of six children, born between 1818 and 1827 were all baptised in the local Anglican Church of St Dunstan's.

They first heard about the South Australian colonial proposal late in the process in 1835.[197] The original idea was formulated by E. G. Wakefield in his prison cell in 1827, where he was ensconced for three years for abducting the fifteen year old heiress Ellen Turner, one of Wakefield's many unsuccessful attempts to establish a secure and respectable fortune for himself.[198] The colonisation problem had been the subject of discussion for a considerable time among a wide range of intellectuals, economists, social reformers, imperial strategists and aspirational entrepreneurs.[199] One of the central problems was to establish a functional balance of capital and labour, which essentially meant setting the price of land high so that there was an economic barrier to the acquisition of land for the immigrant

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[196] Beth Duncan, *Mary Thomas: Founding mother: The life and times of a South Australian* pioneer (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2007)
[197] Duncan, *Founding Mother* p 14.
[198] Edward Garnett, *Edward Gibbon Wakefield: The Colonization of South Australia and New Zealand* (London: Longmans, Green & Company. 1898).
https://archive.org/details/edwardgibbonwak00garngoog/page/n64/mode/2up
accessed 19 August 2022.
[199] Lionel Robbins, *Robert Torrens and the evolution of classical economics* (London: Macmillan,1958)

workforce. At the same time the aim was to ensure a reasonable copy of the hierarchical authority and social order that prevailed in the mother country.[200]

Wakefield's "scientific colonisation" plan of charging market values for land (rather than simply granting land) and using the proceeds to finance infrastructure and a supply of adequate labour satisfied both the rationalist impulses of the entrepreneurial class and the unwillingness of the English state to take on any financial responsibility for the venture. Wakefield's personal charm, and his solid social network, which included such names as the economist and liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill, enabled him to assemble an impressive array of supporters including MP's, journalists and economists. Wakefield had taken a publicity tour through the countryside in 1833 and 1834 and advertised the project with feature articles in newspapers in London, Oxford, Berkshire, Northampton, Hull and Waterford in Ireland. It was claimed that two and a half thousand people attended the meeting at Exeter Hall in July of 1834, when "many elegantly dressed ladies graced the platform and the front seats".[201]

An investment was not cheap even apart from the intrinsic risk of such a move for a family like the Thomases. It is famously impossible to express comparative monetary values across historical epochs. An inflation calculator translates the eighty pounds the Thomas's spent in 1835 to about ten thousand pounds today. On the other hand, Torrens, in calculating the price for land in SA assumed a labourer's wage to be 40 shillings or two pounds per year. A labourers wage currently is about 50,000 dollars, which would make the 80 pounds worth two million dollars. Neither of these calculations seems to capture the value. Nevertheless the asset gained for the 80 pounds was sizable in terms of landholding, 134 acres of farm land plus an acre in the principle town – none of which of course existed at the time of purchase.

[200] The practice of colonisation should be "like the transplanting of a fully grown tree … removed whole and uninjured such that its several parts are established in the same relative situation as they occupied before." Wakefield, *The new British province,* 1834 quoted in Duncan, *Founding Mother,* 85.
[201] *Berkshire Chronicle*, July 5 1834, 4.

Robert and Mary Thomas were savvy enough and well connected enough to plan beyond being mere immigrants among the other aspirant bourgeois of the new colony. The couple undertook a programme of networking among the colonists at the Adelphi meeting rooms in the Strand and at the Converzatione Club.[202] Their efforts were rewarded by a partnership agreement with the newspaperman George Stevenson, who was also happened to be the private secretary to Governor John Hindmarch. Their partnership would establish the printing and publishing firm R. Thomas and Co. which would publish the colony's first newspaper *The South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register.* Thus they immediately secured for themselves a position of power and influence in the nascent colony and, fortuitously, the contract as government printers. Their partner George Stevenson was a flamboyant adventurer, son of a gentleman farmer in Berwick-upon-Tweed, who went to sea after his father died when George was twelve.[203] He saw himself as an activist journalist in the tradition of an enlightenment intelligentsia.

The colony of South Australia and its estates did not yet exist. They would have to be carved out of the domains of a socioeconomic system that did exist, that of the Indigenous society that inhabited the territory of "South Australia" and had inhabited it for the past 20 - 50,000 years. There were some permutations that needed to be introduced into the liberal ideology of middle-class English society in order to transform this appropriation into a morally sustainable Christian benefice. These intellectual underpinnings had been established at the very beginning of the colonialist process in the seventeenth century with the designation of "waste lands" and "wilderness" by Locke and the designation of inhabitants of those lands as "savages", lacking law, society and, consequently, sovereignty.[204] Robert and

[202] Beth Duncan, *Founding mother*, 15

[203] Australian Dictionary of Biography, "George Stephenson" https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stevenson-george-2699/text3785, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 12 August 2022.

[204] John Locke, a foundational philosopher of liberal ideology, had postulated that societies were initially formed when individuals (by assumption males), already fully endowed with reason and creativity, embarked into an unformed and valueless "wilderness" and on the basis of their individual genius began to make useful commodities and property and to engage in contractual relations with other fully endowed individuals they

Mary Thomas expressed the position perfectly eloquently in a letter to the Parliamentary undersecretary for the colonies George Grey in January 1836, objecting to any delay in the colonisation process due to consideration of the rights of the inhabitants:

> "… the natives consist of wandering tribes …without any fixed habitation … I conceive these wandering propensities … be sufficient reason why the millions of fertile acres over which they tread, like the beasts of the earth, unconscious of their value and ignorant of their use, may be taken possession of by a colony of civilised people … They will be treated with kindness and compassion and their wants, as far as practicable, relieved." [205]

It seems clear, however, that the Thomas's were not primarily motivated by any ideological passion, but by a straightforward desire for economic wealth and social status. Mary Thomas rarely engages in philosophical speculation of any kind in her diaries. These are devoted to the pragmatics of life, economic advancement, and the factional feuding among the colony's administrative elite. Her commonplace book is filled with recipes and practical household tips for surviving the stringent colonial conditions while retaining the self-respect of an Englishwoman.[206] On the other hand, she was sensitive to the emotional effects of transplanting herself and her family into an entirely alien landscape, and expressed this warmly in a poem of 1840 entitled "Lines written on finding an English Corn Poppy which accidentally grew in my garden in South Australia".

> Welcome flower of my own dear land
> Like me a stranger, and for that more dear
> My heart throbs while I take thee in my hand
> My little scarlet friend, how cam'st thou here?[207]

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encountered along the way. John Locke. *Second treatise on government.* 1690. *An essay concerning human understanding with the second treatise on government.* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2014)

[205] Duncan, *Founding Mother* 20

[206] *Commonplace book of Mary Thomas* SLSA PRG 1160/7

[207] Private collection of the Chartier family

The Thomases were already wealthy enough to make a significant investment, with the prospect of very high returns on land speculation. In 1840 they held four town acres in Adelaide, on Rundle Street and Hindley Street, and three in North Adelaide, on Mills Street overlooking the parklands, on Buxton Street and on Brougham Place.[208] Their hopes were realised in full, including the sale of a quarter acre for two hundred guineas when they had paid ten pounds for the whole acre 18 months earlier.[209] They were already well connected enough to engineer themselves into a position of high influence in the colonial administration, though that gambit was less successful in the medium term. Mary Thomas herself visualised that they would use the colonial exercise to make their fortune – "make their pile", as the colonialist administrator and white supremacist novelist John Buchan phrased it - and return to a genteel retirement in the hills around Southampton.

One of the motivations for the move to South Australia was a fear for the prospects of their son William. There is some indication that William was not the focussed, sociable and incisive business brain that his parents may have hoped for. He features infrequently in Mary's diaries, remaining a shadowy presence living with the apprentices in a back room of their cottage, in contrast to the many mentions of her accomplished and lively daughters with their musical, theatrical and literary interests. His participation in the running of the paper was in the technical printing aspects rather than the editorial. His entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* suggests that "as overseer of the printing office (from 1837 to '42) he was 'very useful and industrious'". His funeral oration, given by the Rev Silas Mead, a man conscious of his own rhetorical and intellectual skills, concentrates on William's moral rather than his intellectual qualities: "He was not indeed a fluent speaker. Nor was he, I believe, much given to the writing of original matter for the Press. There can be no doubt, however, of his good judgement and high moral convictions..." [210]

[208] *Plan of Adelaide 1842*. SLSA C194a
[209] Letter from Mary Thomas to her brother 1838 quoted in Beth Duncan *Founding Mother* 71
[210] "Funeral of the late Mr W. K. Thomas" *Evening Journal*, July 8, 1878, 3.

On the other hand he could write with a good deal of gentleness, feeling and elegance. A letter survives that he wrote to his daughter Helen, who had fallen in love with George Birks at a young age and married him on turning 16. The letter was written in 1863 on her eighteenth birthday.

> My dear child Helen
>
> We are remembering, and have been all day, that this is your birthday and that you have arrived today at the mature and matronly years of 18. And this is the first time you have been so far away and so inaccessible to us on such an occasion.
>
> My dear Child, accept our heartfelt wishes for your happiness both temporal and spiritual on this your birthday. Imagine you as accepting from us numberless kisses and good wishes …[211]

William Kyffin Thomas married May Jane Good on 28 January 1843. She was the daughter of John Good, a publican, proprietor of the Great Northern Hotel on the Great North Road at Hampstead. John Good seems to have been a rather violent and troublesome man who was in and out of court in cases that featured fighting, verbal abuse, wrongfully holding cattle, and in one case a stabbing. His brother was stabbed while trying to protect him during a pub brawl. They arrived in the colony in 1839, aboard the Cleveland from Plymouth: John Good and wife, and 5 children, Mary Jane, John Thomas, James, Caroline, Stephen.

Mary Jane Good was seventeen when she married William Kyffin Thomas and immediately began producing the twelve children they would have over the next twenty years between 1843 and 1865. When his parents lost their printing and newspaper business in 1842 William Thomas took to farming in Prospect, an area of flat, dry, fertile land on a northern spur of one of the escarpments that form the underlying geography of Adelaide. On a summer's day the outlook to the north is towards dusty savannah, semidesert and salt plains, but to the south and east are the fertile and well-watered Adelaide Hills. An attempt to trace

[211] William Kyffin Thomas, *Letter to Helen Thomas,1863.* Private collection of the Chartier family

the land William farmed through a comparison of current and contemporary maps was rewarded by the discovery of Thomas Street in Prospect leading east from North Road. It is likely here that he met his wife, as her father's hotel was at the corner of North Road and Regency Road, just a mile north.

In the early 1850s, William went to the Victorian goldfields. It is unclear whether he made any money. There is a record of a small gold shipment in the name of Thomas. He returned in 1853 (aged now 32), and by May he was in a position to pay 500 pounds for a share in a new syndicate controlling *The Register*.[212] Whether these funds were a result of success at the diggings, or part of his patrimony is unknown. The Thomas family had suffered financial reverses, but they did have significant landholdings to draw upon.[213]

William Kyffin Thomas underwent some form of religious transformation in the late 1850s. He was "won to Christ" by the Rev. Thomas Binney twenty years before he died in July 1878. The period between eighteen fifty seven and eighteen fifty nine was the time of a worldwide Christian revival movement, the Third Great Awakening, following upon the late eighteenth century phenomenon that produced the Methodist Church, and a further explosion of public religious fervour in the 1820s. The 1850's revival began in Canada and moved through the United States and then the British Commonwealth.

Thomas Binney, born in 1798 (and thus of William's parents' generation) was a highly popular Congregationalist orator and an anti-slavery activist, known as the "Archbishop of Non-Conformity" for his advocacy against the idea of a state Church. He wrote the popular hymn "Eternal light, eternal light". He travelled through the Australian colonies in 1858 and 1859 and preached his first sermon in Adelaide on August 16, 1858 at the Congregational Chapel in Freeman St (now part of Gawler Place) to a "a dense crowd of persons … with not a single standing place unoccupied … while hundreds went away unable

[212] Duncan *Founding mother* p 184
[213] A contemporary map shows the Thomas family holding numerous town acres along North Terrace and Hindley Street

to obtain admittance".[214]A collection after the sermon brought in forty-nine pounds. The review by the Register correspondent is rather lukewarm, and it seems likely that Binney was ill. "One could not help feeling that his intellect .. was merely 'airing' itself; that its great powers were at rest for a while.."

Yet Thomas himself was apparently moved. Under Binney's influence, William initially joined the Congregationalists, but "after study of the New Testament" he turned to the Baptists, and was "immersed" by the Rev. George Stonehouse in the old Lefevre Terrace Church on November 13, 1859. In July 1861, he became a foundation member of the Flinders Street Baptist Church, a venture in partnership with George Fife Angas.[215] His two daughters underwent an immersion ceremony in their own house some time later. These would have most likely been Mary Maria and Helen Rosetta, who would have been 16 and 14 years of age respectively in 1859.

It was at this time that the Birks and Thomas families become entwined in a complicated set of liaisons, both in terms of family structure and ideology. It appears that the motivating force drawing the two families together was a characteristic combination of religious and sexual enthusiasm. George Vause Birks had fervently adopted Methodism while still in Manchester, and his children were possessed of a similarly powerful religious inclination. Both George and Charles had joined the Congregational Church. A later letter from Charles seems to suggest that their mother Hannah was also a member of that congregation. In November 1860 William Kyffin Thomas and George Fife Angas, among others, had founded a Congregational Baptist Church in Adelaide and in 1861 invited Silas Mead to become their Pastor.

[214] "The Rev Thomas Binney", *The South Australian Register* August 16, 1858, 2
[215] George Fife Angas was one of the founders and probably the major financial supporter of the South Australian colonial venture. His company, The South Australian Company, invested heavily buying large acreages when the project was in danger of failing due to low subscriptions.

Mead was clearly a charismatic and impressive speaker and personality. Through 1861 and 1862 there was stream of people moving from the Congregational Church that had been established in the colony under Thomas Stow as early as 1837, into the Baptist fellowship. Charles Birks made the move in January 1861, and his brother George followed a month later in February. Frances Thomas, third daughter of William Kyffin Thomas, in the same year wrote a plaintive letter to Silas Mead expressing spiritual angst, the comfort she had received from his sermon, and a request to join the congregation.

By 1866, Charles (aged just 22) was writing letters of recommendation for new applicants to join the fellowship, and clearly had the trust of Mead. The letters have a tone of confidence and gravitas, an impression reinforced by the handwriting, which is fluent and well-formed without being overly ornamental, the hand of a confident businessman. In October 1867, a new venue for Baptist services was established at the Town Hall in Norwood. Silas Mead officiated at the first service in November, and Charles Birks was named among the attendees, 23 years old and already a "well-known name".[216]

The Birks and Thomas families' social connections went beyond the confraternity of the Baptist Church. A family tradition has it that in the year 1858 Charles Birks' elder brother George, then 19, fell in love with William Kyffin Thomas's second daughter, the 12 year old Helen Rosetta.[217] Her father refused permission for him to visit "until she turned sixteen", but apparently the affection was solid and reciprocated because they married in February 1862, just after she turned 16. Helen Birks became an energetic and active intellectual and social reformer in her own right, though with a much less noticeable public profile than her sister Rose, with a strong "commitment to cooperative socialism" combined with a "religious

[216] Henry Hughes *Our first hundred years: The Baptist Church of South Australia* (Adelaide: South Australian Baptist Union, 1937). A strange anomaly in his obituary suggests that he joined the Flinders St Baptist Church formally only in 1868. Charles Birks obituary in the Baptist Record 1924.
[217]Jon Napier, *Birks Family History* 17

integrity".[218] She seems to have been a driving force in the decision of the couple to throw in their lot with William Lane's New Australia in the 1880s.

In 1866, George's younger brother Charles married Helen's sister Mary Maria Thomas at her father's house in Glenelg in a ceremony conducted by Silas Mead. That union produced six children between 1866 and 1876. The youngest child was the only son, Napier Kyffin Birks, the father of Edith Birks, born October 26, 1876. Mary Thomas died just eighteen months later on March 18, 1878. But just short of a year later, on 8 March 1879, when he was thirty five, Charles married Mary's twenty three year old sister Rosetta Jane Thomas, known as Rosie. Rose Birks would become a significant activist for women's suffrage in South Australia, as well as driving force in the Young Women's Christian Association both locally and internationally.

The Thomas sisters, Helen and Rose, were both vibrant, autonomous and indefatigable personalities with highly developed social instincts, and notable, even extraordinary organising capabilities. Rose Birks was a highly energetic, charismatic, disciplined social organiser who inspired love and devotion in her friends and colleagues. She was also an unshakeable fundamentalist Christian, and a strict disciplinarian. Her political trajectory had taken her from the social purity movement, dedicated to eradicating prostitution and raising the age of consent for girls, to the women's suffrage movement for which she was a powerful organiser and fundraiser, to the Presidency of the YWCA. She was deeply attached to the young women of the organisation, an attachment that was reciprocated. She devoted her time, her financial resources and her political energies to their cause. The YWCA's tribute to her referred to the relationship between Birks and the girls she helped:

> "Their love for her was a most genuine and touching thing. Her interest in them was one of the finest expressions of her noble sympathies – it was just mutual love … a

[218] Melissa Bellanta "The Manliness of Radical Sentiment" 336

> sweet and gracious lady, she has left with the girls the influence of a dignified and zealous womanliness."[219]

These characteristics must have come into their own when the 23 year old took on the role of mother to her sister's five daughters, the eldest of whom was just ten years her junior.

The eulogies for Rose Birks at the time of her early death in 1911, aged just 55, are fulsome.

> We can scarcely realise the extent of our great and grievous loss and we cannot contemplate what it will be to carry on the work without her" …"Her entire absence of anything that was small and mean was simply beautiful and her devotion to her own work was an example to all" …."A noble and good woman, and never weary of well-doing " …"A great and glorious friend who had a beautiful face and a sweet and attractive personality".[220]

Of course, such panegyrics must be taken with a grain of salt, but there is no evidence that these were gross falsifications.

Rosie's husband Charles Birks by contrast was a quiet and private man, but one of equally steely determination. Even at the early age of 23, he was an impressive and respected public figure. In the year of his son Napier's birth, 1876, he dissolved his partnership with fellow Baptist David Robin and moved his premises from Hindley Street to Rundle Street as Charles Birks and Co Ltd, where began the development of his drapery shop into a large and successful department store catering to the aspiring decent middle classes and their desires for a replica in the colonies of luxury and European taste.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Birks – Thomas family were established as a respectable and vibrant faction among the elite of the colonial society. They were commercially successful businessmen and seriously engaged religious and political activists,

[219]"A Great and Glorious Friend", *Evening Journal*, October 6, 1911, 2.
[220] Esther Anderson, "Death of Mrs Charles Birks", *The Register*, October 4, 1911, 7

with a revolutionary strain suitable to their non-Conformist inheritance. In this they were attuned to the progressive movements within European political culture and they engaged with energy and determination with the serious social and economic transformations that were gathering pace toward the storm of the First World War and the coming revolutionary upheavals in political power, in economic structures and in the social relations of sex and art and consciousness in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Part 3 – Sex, class and agency.

The divorce of Edith Birks and Basil Burdett was not simply a personal crisis. It also proved to be a pivot point in the dynastic and historical trajectories of the families.

By the end of the nineteenth century both of Edith Birks' parents had been bred and raised in an atmosphere of progressive Modernism, Christian feminism, social puritanism, and religious activism. The families were highly networked, wealthy, culturally progressive, artistically inclined and well-integrated into an international network of like-minded mercantile bourgeois intent on confronting the coming century fully armed with righteousness and entrepreneurial spirit. Within fifty years, by the nineteen thirties, the conditions of their moral and economic certainty had almost entirely unravelled. The disruptions of the First World War had transformed the imperial dispensation and the patriarchal social structures that succoured the families in their commerce and in their emotional lives. However, it was not the War that would provide the catalyst for the destruction of the family, but much longer-term contradictions of power and value systems that were embedded deeply in the family patrimony, and the emotional values that the family held supreme.

Chapter 18. Paris in the Springtime

Basil in Europe

After the acrimony of his own divorce, Basil continued to develop his writing career for a while. In December of 1931, he became Associate Editor of *Art in Australia*, where Keith Murdoch had now become a Director. In the same month he joined the staff of Murdoch's Melbourne *Herald*. However, by 1933, perhaps emotionally exhausted, and deprived of the financial backing of Edith's family money, and probably at the point that Edith regained custody of their daughter Jane, he cut his losses. He withdrew from his partnership with John Young in the Macquarie Galleries. There is some indication that this relationship was in trouble anyway, with the two men holding conflicting attitudes towards both art and business.[221] Basil took leave without pay from the *Herald*, sold up his by now impressive collection of art and antiques, and took off for Spain.

Between January of 1934 and December of 1935, Basil travelled in Spain, in France and England, and in a strange and uncomfortable episode in 1936 he accompanied fellow *Herald* journalist Frederick Howard to Russia, on one of the tours organised by the Soviet cultural organisation VOKS, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. That Society was set up by the Russian government in 1925 to develop cultural contacts between Russian and international artists and intellectuals. [222] The *Herald* published a long series of feature articles by Howard describing this tour, but nothing by Basil. The tours hosts were highly suspicious of the two journalists, bearing as they did an introduction from the *Herald* which upon investigation they were told was "an extremely conservative newspaper

[221] Jean Campbell *Early Sydney Moderns*
[222] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VOKS accessed 18/01/2021

that had published anti-Soviet material". Sheila Fitzpatrick suggests that both journalists were "so antagonistic and unreceptive that they angered their fellow tourists as well as the guides."[223] This is incongruous with every other available description of Basil, who was renowned as a man who was faultlessly polite and civil in all his interactions, a behaviour that he had trained himself to from an early age. Certainly, Frederick Howard's descriptions of ordinary family life in 1935 Russia are gloomy indeed, so perhaps the attitudes of the two men have been conflated.

Basil's trip through Spain, by contrast, was a revelation to him. He was in his element, and his writing glows with a sensual joy at the art, the history, the warm sunshine, and the wine. He began his pilgrimage in Morocco in May of 1934.[224] He was in Seville for Holy week and described with the warmth and curiosity of a genuine aesthete the religious ceremonies, the parades of icons and statuary through the streets, the clothing and demeanour of the people involved. [225] In June, he was in Granada, the old Moorish capital, expounding on the Alhambra, on Persian influences on Spanish history. [226] He was enthralled, educating himself as he went and immediately passing on his new knowledge in his articles. Spain was in the throes of revolutionary transformation itself and was soon to disintegrate into a bitter civil war and victory of Fascist forces. In Madrid in October of 1934, Basil witnessed first-hand an armed rebellion of a coalition of Liberals and Communists against a local fascist government. Less than a month later he was eating lobster in Mallorca.

In England as well, he found genial companionship, and philosophical sympathy with artists like Randolph Schwabe, with whom he stayed through January and February of 1935. Schwabe made several excellent and sensitive portraits of him in pencil and claimed that one of them was "one of my best drawings. Happens to have some quality which I used to have,

[223] Sheila Fitzpatrick and C. Rasmussen, *Political tourists: Travellers from Australia to the Soviet Union in the 1920's – 1940's* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008) *6 -14*
[224] Basil Burdett, "Fez The Mysterious", *Herald,* May 5, 1934, 32
[225] Basil Burdett, "The Pageantry of Old Seville", *Herald,* May 19, 1934, 31
[226] Basil Burdett, "A Palace of Dreams", *Herald,* June 16, 1934, 31

and thought I had lost."[227] The Schwabe household led an energetic social life with constant dinners, openings, art shows and visits. Basil met Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant while there, as well as Augustus John, from whom he bought a painting on Murdoch's behalf

Basil had taken a year off without pay from the *Herald,* and now two jobs came up for which he was well qualified enough and well connected enough to have a serious chance of getting. The first was the job of buyer for the Felton Bequest. The second was Director of the National Gallery of Victoria. He didn't get either of these jobs.

He was probably never really in contention for the National Gallery of Victoria job. His mentor Keith Murdoch was a trustee, and Basil no doubt figured in his strategic thinking regarding the post. But it was a key administrative post, and a major strategic asset in a complicated culture war and there were numerous more senior figures to Basil, both allies and opponents of Murdoch who were vying for the job. Basil was strategic and cautious in his thinking. Later when the job of Director of the National Gallery of New South Wales became vacant, John Young's daughter Joan Campbell reports that

> Basil, on his return to Australia in 1936, determined to apply for the directorship of the National Gallery of NSW, vacated by J. S. McDonald when he took up the directorship (of the NGV) in Melbourne. He asked John what he thought of his chances, and when he heard that Will Ashton, who had many friends among the trustees was applying for the post he decided against the idea. "It doesn't do to apply and get turned down too often" he wrote.[228]

The Victorian vacancy was created by the death of the long-time incumbent Bernard Hall in 1935. He had held the position since 1891. Immense political complexities surrounded the

[227] Randolph Schwabe, Diary entry 10 March 1935.
[228] Joan Campbell, *Young Sydney Moderns,* 216

appointment of a new director in the middle of the deep political and cultural crises of the 1930s. W.B. McInnes, who had been running the Gallery's drawing school since Frederick McCubbin's death in 1918 acted in the position for nearly a year, but he was a painter and a teacher, and he was relieved when the position was temporarily given to P. M. Carew-Smith. But Ponsonby Carew-Smith was also a teacher, in this case of technical drawing. These were clearly holding strategies while the real bureaucratic battles were fought out. The Board of Trustees in August recommended the appointment of the architect and painter William Hardy Wilson. This decision was almost immediately over-ridden by the State government, who appointed J.S. McDonald. He remained director until 1941, when Daryl Lindsay took the job.

W. Hardy Wilson was a successful architect who was also an active champion of Fascist Germany and Italy and a vocal anti-semite. He had been under surveillance by the security services.[229] When his appointment was overruled by the State Executive, one of the Trustees, the anthropologist Frederick Wood Jones, resigned in protest. He attacked the interference by "a party of politicians, temporarily in office and lacking any qualifications for the undertaking" that they should dictate to cultural institutions regarding "the State's artistic literary and scientific treasures" demanded "a serious protest". He called for "nothing short of a re-constitution of the board of trustees and the perfect freedom of the re-constituted board from all political control".[230] The State executive responded with equanimity. The Chief Secretary, Henry Bailey, had received "representations from men whose opinions I could not disregard….If Professor Wood-Jones feels he must resign that is his affair, I am not disturbed". No other Board members resigned.[231] This chaos in the supposedly staid and controlled halls of the nascent art institutions of the new nation illustrates the febrile and

[229] David Bird, *Nazi dreamtime* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing. 2012) 127
[230] *West Australian* August 24, 1936, 16; *Kalgoorlie Miner*, October 5, 1936, 3
[231] Henry Stephen Bailey was a Catholic Labour politician who held the rural seat of Port Fairy and Warnambool from 1914 to 1932. He was expelled from the party over responses to the Great Depression. He then joined the Country Party and became a Minister in a Labour supported coalition government and eventually became Attorney General in 1938. L.J. Louis, "Bailey, Henry Stephen (1876-1962), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Accessed 22 June 2021.

interwoven political and cultural environment in which Basil was trying to operate. His status as an art critic and a public intellectual were under constant pressure of factional wars

The successful candidate J. S. McDonald was a recalcitrant anti-Modernist. He characterised Murdoch's Herald Exhibition of 1939 as comprised of "exceedingly wretched paintings … putrid meat … the product of degenerates and perverts … filth". He also championed what Geoffrey Serle called "a weirdly extreme racial nationalism" praising Arthur Streeton's work for revealing "the way in which life should be lived in Australia, with the maximum of flocks and the minimum of factories … If we so choose, we can yet be the elect of the world, the last of the pastoralists, the thoroughbred Aryans in all their nobility". [232] His appointment seems to indicate a significant defeat for Keith Murdoch. On the other hand, the Gallery did purchase paintings by van Gogh, Valloton and Derain from the Herald Exhibition.

The Felton Bequest buyers job was a more likely gambit for Basil, with his extensive European network and his experience as both a dealer in his own right and as Keith Murdoch's consultant and buyer, but Basil also missed out here. The job went to Sydney Cockerell who held the directorship of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the arts and antiquities museum of the University of Cambridge, and one the most significant collections in Europe. He had been William Morris' private secretary and literary executor to Thomas Hardy. Basil was outgunned on every level.

In 1938, Murdoch had another job for Basil, and this was to curate an exhibition of British and French Contemporary Art. There had been a small precursor to the Murdoch project. Clarice Zander had curated an exhibition of British contemporary art in 1933. The National Gallery of NSW was also simultaneously planning a similar exhibition that they planned to put on in 1940.[233] The Herald Exhibition was launched in 1939, to a great fanfare,

[232] Geoffrey Serle "McDonald, James Stuart (Jimmy) (1878 - 1962", *Australian Dictionary of Biography.*
[233] Clarice Zander (1893 – 1958) was an English designer and gallery manager who spent time in Melbourne in the 1920's and 30's. Trove, People.

a rush of public interest, and a considerable amount of nasty skirmishing among the partisans of both Conservatism and Modernism.[234] It is strange that the objects of revulsion by critics like Jim McDonald were paintings by such artists as Gauguin. Australian culture wars were being fought over post-Impressionism – an artistic movement of the 1880s - while the conceptual revolutions that had been fought out in the US and Europe by such radical innovators as Marcel Duchamp were even then decades old. Then in 1939, the paintings, and the cultural conflicts they symbolised were put into storage as the outbreak of the Second World War made returning the hundred or so pieces to their owners on the Continent impossible.

[234] The story of the Herald Exhibition is told comprehensively in Eileen Chanin and Stephen Miller, *Degenerates and Perverts: The 1939 Herald exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* (Carlton, Vic.: The Meigunyah Press, 2005)

Chapter 19. In which thing start to go haywire

It may be that Edith had genuinely expected that she could untangle the tensions and contradictions that had bedevilled her life with a quick transition from the urbane Mrs Burdett to the agrarian Mrs Cutlack. But she had calculated wrong. Tom Cutlack's braggadocio and panache, which had seemed so charming in contrast to the tightly manicured urbanity of her parents and the arty set of Basil's friends, began to assume a more disturbing form. It became clear that he was suffering from a debilitating mental illness. Edith had been expelled from the art scene. Her father, bound around by his traditionalist insistence on his fatherly authority and his genuine concern to maintain the family patrimony away from the reach of the despised Cutlack clan, refused to back down in the face of her distress and need. Her mother similarly was trapped in circle of grief that she was unable to break out from. The loss of her beloved son, the estrangement from her daughter, the social shame of the divorce left her little energy or perhaps little inclination to come to the emotional rescue of her recalcitrant daughter. Edith began to retreat into an intellectual and emotional isolation from which she would never really find a way out.

Now the unplanned realities of Edith's new life began to make themselves felt. Her pregnancies debilitated her. She and Tom returned to South Australia, setting up at Mount Lofty where Tom was reported as living as a fruitgrower in 1935.[235] Although Edith and Tom were able to attend the wedding of her brother Norman in 1932, they appeared far down the list of attendees in the newspaper report.[236] The relationship with her father proved recalcitrant. Some nerve had been struck in him that made it impossible for him to retreat even in the face of his favourite daughter's distressed circumstances.

[235] "Pioneer of Renmark", *Adelaide News.* 20 February, 1935
[236] "Birks-Bruce wedding", *Adelaide Advertiser*, 29 June 1932

Her mother retreated to her bed. In the space of a decade her life had been completely transformed by forces utterly alien to her moral and social framework, and outside her capacity to control them. Her marriage, always a tightly drawn parody of the social ideal, let alone of the Christian puritan ideals she was brought up with, had been splashed across the national and international newspapers. Where she had been a model wife and an accoutrement to colonial society, accomplished, beautiful, a paragon of middle-class morality and achievement, now she was an object of scandal, gossip, ridicule and pity, and very likely no longer a welcome dinner guest at the tables of the likes of the Pulleine family, or indeed her relations the Thomases. Her son, upon whom she had doted and poured out her otherwise thwarted emotional energies, was dead, and very likely at least in part due to the connivance and negligence of the very husband who had betrayed her so profoundly. Now her daughter brought further shame to her doorstep, the last threads of her filial relationship shattered around her.

If Edith had done any sort of strategic calculation that her emotional circumstances might be secure enough to withstand the loss of the Sydney art world and the strain of standing up to her own family, because she would have Tom to surround her with a protective aura of love, she soon discovered that this had been a radical miscalculation as well. Tom's exuberance, his charming eccentricity, his bravado, his cheerful relish in throwing off those chains of convention that had haunted her so, these very characteristics that had drawn her to him and bound her to him now began to take on a more sinister aspect.

Tom began to exhibit the symptoms of schizophrenia. The most terrifying anecdote is of when the family, Edith, Tom and three little children – so this must have been in the mid to late 1930's - took the train to Melbourne, and Tom became possessed of the idea that the children must at all costs be thrown from the moving train. Edith, herself sick, was forced to stand guard as Tom wandered the carriages agitatedly looking for doors that could open and trying to steal and cajole the children out from Edith's protection.

My mother Jane Burdett said that he had insulin shock treatment. This was a treatment for schizophrenia first popularised in the US in 1927 which involved increasing doses of insulin that put the patient into a coma for an hour at a time, during in which they writhed and struggled with seizures, "tossing, rolling, moaning, twitching, spasming or thrashing around". These treatments continued six days a week for about two months. The treatment was used through to the late 1950's when a paper was published that demonstrated that randomised trials showed no definable therapeutic response to the treatment.[237]

In 1939, Edith was taken to court for an unpaid bill of one hundred and thirty five pounds for nursing services for her husband. This was an imprisonable offense of obtaining credit by misrepresentation, essentially fraud. She argued and presented evidence that she "fully expected the account to be paid by her father, who had settled other accounts on her behalf".[238] She was not imprisoned, but she had to pay off the bill at two pounds a week.

By 1939, then, Tom was exhausted and unstable, still requiring expensive nursing care, and Edith was still having to negotiate her precarious relationship with her father event by event, with no certainty that he would respond. She had a twelve-year-old, an eight-year-old and twin five-year-olds to school, house and feed.

Nevertheless, the pressure was not completely unrelenting. There are photographs of the family at Renmark with the Cutlack grandparents around this time, in which both Tom and Edith look cheerful and relaxed. She clearly retained a profound love for her children. Her daughter Jane recalls with real warmth the quiet times they spent together, Edith helping her with essays and French homework, drinking cocoa around the fire. Often these moments would turn into long evenings of conversation. But equally often Edith would turn to darker topics about her relations with her father:

My mother comes in and sits on my bed and talks to me. At this time of night she

[237] Reported in Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insulin_shock_therapy accessed 16 January 2021.
[238] "Trouble over unpaid hospital bill", *The Advertiser*, August 15, 1939.

> always talks about her father … his meanness … his secretary - a coarse women she loathes. She needs me to talk to about this, and when she's got it off her chest, she takes some aspirin and goes to bed to sleep a couple of hours, before she has to get up and write down her nightmares. I can only listen and feel helpless. [239]

The younger children were obstreperous and wild. Edith would stop the car so she could hit them to stop them from fighting. Once Stephen rolled Jocelyn up in a large Persian carpet and propped it in a corner and left her there. Jane reports a Saturday night when she went to the pictures with a boyfriend and then afterwards settled down for a cuddle on the beach:

> Just as we lean back to get comfortable, we are disturbed by hooting noises just behind us. My brothers are there watching, and they start throwing pebbles. Why aren't they home in bed? They lead a separate life my mother knows nothing about. She sends them to bed, turns the light out and shuts the door and thinks they go to sleep. But they are up and out the window in no time. [240]

[239] Jane Burdett *Recollections*
[240] Jane Burdett *Recollections*

Chapter 20. The war comes to the South

Tom Cutlack and Basil Burdett went to war in 1940. Basil didn't go into the military. He was appointed to a civilian position as Red Cross Commissioner for South-East Asia. He turned out to be extremely good at this job. He had excellent organising skills and a compassionate and humane way of dealing with everybody. As the Japanese army advanced rapidly down the Malay Peninsula through 1941, Basil was based in Singapore. From there he was continually flying up to the front lines organising Red Cross activities, and the transport of their supplies and personnel away from the fighting.

Tom in fact enlisted twice, the first time in July of 1940, giving his birth date as 1900. His actual birth date was 1898. He was then discharged in October. In November he enlisted again, this time giving a birth date of 28 October 1905. He also gave his locality as Walucera, S.A. but I can't find any reference to this place. These are mysteries that I haven't got to the bottom of. There is a Willochra in south Australia, near Quorn in the Mid-North. I don't think that is the reference.

On 9 June 1941, he was detached to 2/10 Battalion in the Middle East – at some stage in both Tobruk and El Alamein.[241] On 29 June, during the battle of the Salient he was wounded in action with a shrapnel wound to the upper left arm. He returned to his unit on the 3 July but was almost immediately returned to hospital with urticaria (hives) on the 6th. He rejoined the unit on the 16 July.

Meanwhile, in the Far East, through Christmas of 1941 and January of 1942 Japanese military forces moved quickly and with little opposition down the Malay Peninsula toward the key British colonial base in Singapore. On 31 January 1942, Commonwealth forces withdrew across the causeway from Jahore to the island of Singapore and destroyed the causeway behind them. On 1 February, 1942, as the Japanese intensified their bombing and artillery

[241] letter of recommendation from Col. J.H Watson re land settlement scheme September 1944 SA State Archives).

bombardment, Basil boarded a flight on either an American or a Dutch plane heading for the Pekanbaroe allied base aerodrome in Sumatra. The plane skidded off the runway on landing. Basil was killed. There is some suggestion that he survived for some hours before dying of his injuries. He was just 43 years old. Edith's diary for 1942 records this in a single sentence that expresses nothing and expresses everything: "Koornong begins. Jokey, hat shoes socks. Wire from Gran Jane re Basil killed Singapore." The entry for the following day is "Bag, stockings, brown-out lights, shoes, jumpers. Chemist two pound two and one." There is no further mention until October 22 1942 when the entry reads "Dad says Keith Murdoch says J stay Gran Jane Melbourne" – that is to say that their daughter Jane could stay with her grandmother Lillie Burdett with the Murdochs. That is incidentally the only direct evidence I have found so far of a personal relationship between Napier Birks and Keith Murdoch, though it seems reasonable to infer that there was such an ongoing relationship.

There is one further strange circumstance surrounding Basil's death. No will was discovered. The Victorian probate commissioner testified that a thorough search had been made, unsuccessfully. Basil's main asset, his personal art collection was auctioned off and the proceeds, amounting to some 600 pounds, went to his daughter Jane. Joanna Mendelsohn, the biographer of Lionel Lindsay, reports that he had given the Wahroonga house to Lionel Lindsay in repayment for debt on the occasion of his divorce from Edith.[242]

I don't remember Edith ever mentioning Basil.

Tom returned to Australia in July of 1943, and immediately embarked for Milne Bay in New Guinea. In October, he was evacuated to hospital with malaria, and was then diagnosed with a "deep abscess of the arm". He was in hospital until January of 1944, and he was sent

[242] Title deeds for the Wahroonga property show that Basil bought the property on 30 April 1928, and in July 1928 a mortgage was provided by Lionel Lindsay. On 1 March 1932, Basil provided an Encumbrance – that is some sort of right or interest - to Edith, and that this was discharged in January of 1937. Then in April of 1937, Basil transferred the property to John Young's wife Eva. Then in January of 1940, she transferred it to Lionel Lindsay. My gratitude to Trish Thomson of the Kurringai Historical Society for ferreting out this information.

back to Brisbane on the 22nd of February.[243] He was granted proficiency pay in July and then discharged "at his own request on compassionate grounds" on the 29 August 1944.

[243] He must have been one of the early beneficiaries of the mass production of penicillin.

Chapter 21. Soldier Settler

Tom Cutlack survived the war, barely. The question now was what was he to do with himself? He'd been a good soldier, but what did that mean? Physically strong, disciplined in his habits, good company among men, willing to take and give orders. But he was also of an independent and eccentric temperament. He'd grown up on the land, with a contempt for the rhythms and cadences of city life, of crowds and offices and the sort of strange confluence of enforced intimacy and emotional alienation that was the key to urban sociability. He was like an embodiment of Banjo Patterson's Clancy of the Overflow - "and the bush hath friends to meet him and their kindly voices greet him in the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars" – and as such he was in a sense on the wrong side of that long historical trajectory that we have been tracing. He was the opposite of Basil Burdett, who had found his identity in exactly that environment of brittle relationships, merciless power struggles, form over substance, of intellectual repartee, of a tightly constructed and maintained surface persona which could hide anything of substance that needed hiding. Basil had loved "the fiendish rattle of the tramways and the buses making hurry down the street". They represented to him a liberation, not just from the streets of Enoggera, but from the worn-out romanticism of a mythical Arcadia that had lain (however embedded in commercial cynicism) at the heart of the art of Streeton, Roberts and the Heidelberg School that he was now working to revolutionise. Basil's meditations on Melbourne at night show his love for the city, his easy familiarity with its landscape of humane artifice.

> In a swift hour the city has been transmuted by the magic of gas lamp and electric light. It is no longer the same city whose streets I walked in the broad sunshine of a splendid day with a blue sky throbbing overhead. It is a new world, more glamourous, more mysterious, more sinister, more beautiful, perhaps a world of echoes and shadows and suggestions…. [244]

[244] Basil Burdett, *Melbourne nocturne* (Sydney: Sidney Ure Smith, Art in Australia Ltd., 1934)

While he still loved and respected the power of landscape painting - he was close friends with Elioth Gruner[245] - his analytical temperament, and the imperatives of the Modernist project led him to champion the approach to landscape of Grace Cossington Smith or Horace Trenerry, where the subject matter was not some embodiment of a mystical or spiritual essence (such as a Romantic like Ruskin had insisted upon) but formal, painterly relationships that inhabited the border between human sensibility and a rather starker material world; that is, to an independent human agency in the world, to a genuine humanism. If these categories can still resonate, Basil was a genuine Classicist, and Tom Cutlack turned out to be the most hopeless of hopeless Romantics.

Tom Cutlack had grown up a farmer, or rather a horticulturalist, a fruit-grower. Now he turned his attention to securing a block of land. Once again, a central puzzle of this phase of the story comes to into question. Why wouldn't Napier Birks bankroll him in this ambition? It would have been small potatoes for this very rich and entrepreneurial magnate. Instead, Napier Birks continued with a flat out refusal to admit Tom to the family, three grandchildren and a formerly favoured daughter notwithstanding, not to mention the Burdett grandchild who was excluded along with the rest. Although he allowed Jane Burdett an account at Birks' department store to buy clothes, he made sure that Basil's estate was fully billed for the extravagance.

Perhaps part of the puzzle lies in exactly that phrase "a favoured daughter". Whatever the objective dynastic considerations that Napier held, whatever the need to preserve the long-nurtured patrimony of the Birks – Napier – McDougall ascendancy, perhaps it still came down to a personal betrayal.; a complex refractory betrayal that reinvigorated itself through multiple

[245] Ellioth Gruner (1882 -1939) – A lyrical landscape painter in a sort of transitional style between the Arcadian Australiana of the Heidelberg School and the more simplified formal and structural methodology of the emerging Australian Modernism of the 1920's.

iterations in each of their relationships; the father and daughter with each other, with the mother and wife Lucy, with the dead brother and son.

Tom Cutlack's solution to this dilemma was to apply, on 15 December 1945, for a soldier settlement grant in the grey-green expanses of the Mallee country in the South East of South Australia.[246] He was supported by a rather lukewarm reference from a Mr H. Howie, a fruit-grower who was a neighbour in Renmark who attested that Tom was indeed a fruit-grower, and a more effusive reference from A.D. Chapman, Assistant Branch Inspector for the State Bank of South Australia, who wrote that he had known the family for 19 years and that they were "all exceptionally intelligent and respected gentlefolk", that Tom was "the ideal 'blocker'; intelligent, industrious and frugal", that "being exceptionally strong he is the ideal type for any type of land settlement". He even finished with a flourish of nationalist fervour: "I strongly recommend him as a settler: in fact I am so convinced he is the ideal type that it is my duty to the country to do what I can to help him".

Tom's military commander in the Middle East, Brigadier J.H. Watson, was full of affection:

> I have had many opportunities of studying the men of the unit, both in battle and during rest periods… I was particularly impressed by your soldierly bearing and knowledge of your work. Your behaviour whilst a member of the platoon has been commented on most favourably and you have reason to be proud of your service in Tobruk. The work performed by you at Alamein was most important and carried out very efficiently. I am sorry to learn that your war injuries have necessitated your severance from the unit in which we were both proud to be members. [247]

[246] The Murray Mallee refers to the low canopied semidesert Eucalyptus forest that had spread unbroken from the eastern flank of the Mt Lofty Ranges for some thousand kilometres to the Great Dividing Range in Victoria. This habitat was cleared quickly, efficiently and mercilessly for farmland over a period of about thirty years form the 1930's. At time of writing it is decaying to a salt desert.

[247] All these letters are in Department of Lands, South Australia. *Files for T.S.H. Cutlack, 1945 – 49*, War Service Land Settlement Files, Archives SA

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One unexplained aspect of his application is that he nominates only three children as his dependents, his natural children Stephen aged 15 and the twins Meredith and Jocelyn aged 12, but doesn't mention his stepdaughter Jane who would have been 18 at the time. He also specifies that he was "married – but not living with my wife". Jane went to Koornong School in 1942 aged 14 – she had just arrived when she got the news of Basil's death.[248] In 1943, aged 16 she was living with her mother at Seacliff.[249] She married when she was 20, in 1947. So in 1945, with no independent income, she was Tom Cutlack's dependent.

It took three months for the Land settlement committee to tell Tom that they "cannot proceed with your application until you furnish the following information..." – information about insurance, dependants and land ownership. This set the tone for Tom's interactions with the department; his enthusiasm and impatience, their slow, polite, impersonal, measured mechanical responses. He did, however, receive a classification as eligible for the scheme on the strength of this application.

In August of 1946, Tom wrote to the Committee explaining that although he had originally asked to be considered for an irrigation property because of his background in the Riverland, he now wanted to change his application to be considered for agricultural and animal husbandry land in the South East. This proved to be a miscalculation. It dragged him back into the tortuous application process. He would have to be interviewed again and provide more supporting evidence of his knowledge and capacities, and more references. The very fact of changing his mind sowed doubt. The hand-written notes of his interview reveal a scepticism about both his experience and his personal demeanour.

… at Renmark for 9 years. … Was he <u>successful</u> ? ..

…imagine he will be very self-assured and friendly …

[248] Koornong was a progressive experimental school at Warrandyte in Victoria run on principles of student freedom and democracy. Its motto was "A new school for young citizens of the modern world". ADB entry for Joseph Clive Nield. Accessed 18/6/21

[249] Jane Burdett *Reminiscences*

… although references are good, would prefer to see them from practical growers

… states that he should have the experience, not that he has the experience ..

…interview should prove interesting. It would be surprising if he lacks self-assurance. Is non-committal on Capital position"[250]

Did he have any notion that he was being judged in this way? Had he mistaken his fluency in writing and urgency of intent for something this committee would value?

He appeared before the committee in Adelaide, with Edith present, in April of 1946, and again in Penola in October of 1946. In November of 1946 he got his reply.

> Dear Sir
>
> The Committee has considered your application for classification for land settlement and is of the opinion that you should have further practical experience under South-East conditions before you could be classified as qualified. It will be necessary for you to make your own arrangements to secure this knowledge. Subject to your arranging as aforesaid, you could again apply to the committee at a later date. It is desired to make clear, however, that no definite assurance can be given at this stage, that a property would be available for you.

This is a no. It was also pointed out to him that he only had five years from 15 August 1945 to make his application. He had already spent a year and a half in difficult negotiations, in a process which clearly played against his temperament, to get to a point of having to start again. He seems to have written a letter questioning the decision, because in May of 1947, not just the Department of Lands, but the Minister himself replied to him with a detailed

[250] Department of Lands, South Australia. *Files for T.S.H. Cutlack, 1945 – 49*, War Service Land Settlement Files, Archives SA

explanation of the policies governing the scheme. The letter explains that the scheme that was established after the First World War resulted in a lot of failures, and that as a result, it was decided that qualifications were essential. The Classification Committees were established to

> …investigate the suitability of all applicants. This you will no doubt agree is in the interests of all concerned, and particularly those of the ex-serviceman himself. These committees comprise men with a wide and varied experience both practical and administrative of land settlement problems, and my Government having appointed them because of their outstanding knowledge in this direction does not wish to interfere in any way with their deliberation or influence their decisions.

The letter then discusses the recommendation that Tom acquire twelve months practical experience:

> Personally speaking I consider that it will be very beneficial if a person can obtain some knowledge of the conditions prevailing in the South-East as there is no doubt that special knowledge of farming operations in those areas is necessary.

He goes on to say that he "regrets very much that you were not able to see me during your visit to Adelaide as I feel that a personal chat on such questions as raised in your letter is far more satisfactory". A "personal chat" would give the Minister a chance to assess him under conditions of the Ministers choosing, and where the Minister would have the initiative, and be in a position to use his no doubt refined skills of assessing people. Tom was offered a second opportunity for a meeting. We know he was still in the mix because, though it may have been pro forma, they did invite him to reaffirm his interest in acquiring land if it became available. But he had certainly put himself on the back foot.

What is apparent from these exchanges is the disjunction between Tom's thought processes and the tempo and imperatives of the bureaucratic world. If he could have read it right, that letter from the Minster was full of a heavy irony. The minster was fully aware, if Tom was not, that Tom's intentions, his goodwill, his physical strength and his ready

assumptions of being able to adapt his fruit-growers knowledge to dry land sheep grazing, were not to his advantage in the bureaucratic mind. Instead, they represented a real risk, a risk that was powerfully exacerbated by his failure to attend a planned meeting with the Minister.

Basil Burdett would have understood this. Such naivete on Tom's part represents a genuine tragedy. He was dealing with forces which had absolute power over him, and he was completely unaware of their existence, let alone the prerogatives that drove them. He thought that his rational persuasiveness, his "self-assurance", and his imagination would carry him through when in fact the forces that were actually deciding his fate had no imagination, were entirely rule driven, hierarchical and contemptuous of imagination, and personal affect, notwithstanding the generous and friendly tone with which the Minister reproved him. Tom's letters are in a style and a handwriting that betrays a rush of thoughts, an intense focus, and a hope that his will and personal energies can shift a process that would respond better to calm consideration and a rewrite in a legible hand.

Finally, an arrangement was made for the Committee to see him at Penola in January of 1948. He told them he had been working in the South-East for Mr Hanna and had "gained considerable knowledge of conditions existing in this district." He was interviewed again in April of 1948. He had continued working with Mr Gardiner at Nangwarry Station, who ran "12,000 sheep and 200 to 300 Hereford cattle … My health is quite alright. My wife is quite keen with the idea. It is our intention that our children should remain at school in Adelaide for the time being." On 27 April of 1948, Tom received a letter from the Department of Lands.

> I desire to inform you that the Classification Committee has investigated your qualifications and is satisfied that you are an eligible person … It must be clearly understood that this advice does not in any way guarantee that you will be allotted a property.

Two years of hard grind and he was back where he was in April of 1946.

Nangwarry Station is near the town of Penola, a grain town in the middle of the Murray Mallee, 400 km from Adelaide and the same distance from Melbourne, and sixty kilometres inland from the ocean at Beachport. Mallee is a type of dry savannah forest landscape that used to stretch right across the southern margins of the Australian continent from Perth in the West to the Great Dividing Range in the East. The geology is ancient seabed with a light sandy soil. The Mallee gum is a small eucalypt with a large root lump and the understory contains grasstrees, and native sages. This forest was all taken out by a system of land clearance in which two bulldozers dragged a heavy chain between them cutting 20 metre swathes of bushland which was then piled up and burnt.

A taste of life in Penola in the 1940s can be gleaned from entries in the report book of the Penola police station . Here are a few selections:

> "June 1949. 3rd Fri. Patrol duty of streets day and evening. Attention to Ball in Local Institute in evening. Hotels visited in day and evening.
>
> 4th Sat. examined Hugh Lynch for a practical drivers test. Attention to football match in afternoon. Visited local hotels during day and evening. 6/10 pm arrested David Wallace of Penola behaving in offensive manner in Alfred St. Detected James Alexander Jaffney of Coonawarra speeding with a pillion passenger.
>
> 10th Fri. At 9/15 received accident report of accident between truck driven by Sydney Colin Wilson of Penola and dog on Church St Penola. Patrol duty of streets. Attended to cinema entertainment at night.
>
> Saturday 11th. Received report of accident between motor cycle ridden by Sydney Mustard of Penola and cow in Penola. At 10,15 am received report of accident between motor car driven by Patrick King Douglas O'Malley and cow on Penola to Mt Gambier road. Visited football match on oval during afternoon. At 12 noon patrolled Mt Gambier Penola Rd re straying stock on roadway causing accidents. Detected Leslie Frank Jones, 16 years of Penola, riding bicycle without lights. Visited

cinema entertainment 8pm and 9pm. Left and patrolled to Coonawarra re dance.

Returned 12 midnight. All correct.

This is all happening in the centre of town, this melange of cars and dogs and cows and bicycles without lights and Institute dances. Tom was living twenty kilometers further into the Mallee, at Nangwarry Station. We can imagine that the nights were very quiet indeed in Tom's quarters.

There is an anecdote that has come through unusual channels that bears recounting here. In 1963, Tom's stepdaughter Jane was working as a teacher when she met fellow teacher Bernie Bill. Before he became a history teacher, Bernie had worked for the Lands Department in the mid 1950s. Part of his job had been to sort through and cull some of the old soldier settlement files. He said they were stored haphazardly in bales tied up with string in the basement. He and his mates used to lie on those bales at lunchtimes and read through the old files. He found the stories fascinating and moving. When he met Jane and heard the name Cutlack, he remembered it. Tom Cutlack had been one of those stories. The report he had read was from one of the inspectors, and it was a warning about Tom's mental state. He was unkempt and manic. He hadn't washed properly, and he had been washing fertiliser bags in the bath. That was the image that stayed with Bernie, the fertiliser bags in the bath, as an image of the banality of his deterioration. The inspector was recommending that Tom was a risk. He needed checking up on.[251] A search has been made in State Archives for this report. There are other bundles of reports from such inspections, but those for Tom's region are lost

Meanwhile, Tom's own personal affiliations had become even more unstable. By March of 1948, he was "not living with his wife". At this stage his address was c/- Mr P Gardiner, Nangwarry Station, Penola. However, then in April of 1948 there is a further note saying "Marital status changed – 'wife now co-operative and keen with the idea of going on the land'. Alter forms accordingly".

[251] Bernard Bill, conversation with the author, December 2019

On 25 April 1948, Tom wrote to the Committee with what seems a strange request, although perhaps not so strange when you consider that rationing was still in place.

> Dear Sir, My wife has told me in a recent letter that she would like to visit Penola with the 3 children during their holidays but lacks the fuel for our car. … You will I am sure support with your recommendations an appeal to the Fuel Board, the mileage covered should not exceed 900.

Then in May of 1948 the following text appears as an enclosure to the file. It contains the first close description of Ediths' attitudes and understanding of the situation. It bears quoting in full.

> Mrs. Cutlack called on the 5th instant and stated that her husband is very worried lest the fact that she and the family are not residing in the South-East will militate against his application for land.
>
> Mrs Cutlack is not willing to reside in the South-East until her family's education has been completed. There are other very great difficulties in the way which, though very confidential, she disclosed to me. They are firstly that her father Mr Napier Birks, senior, and her husband do not 'get on', so much so that her father has provided the house in which she and the family are now living and insists that the husband shall not reside there, but shall establish himself in some way in his own initiative.
>
> Mrs Cutlack stated that there is no trouble between herself and her husband which prevents them living together, but she appears to be in mortal dread of offending her father for fear that her children may suffer by being excluded from any benefits under the father's will. I gathered that Mr Napier Birks is a most difficult and obstinate old man, and has always resented her marriage into the Cutlack family. On the other hand, the Cutlack family seem to resent the marriage to a Napier Birks.
>
> Mrs Cutlack stated that it all seemed extremely silly, but there was no denying the fact that she was caught between two loyalties and had to look after the interests of

the children.

I informed Mrs Cutlack that her husband had recently been granted classification and that residence by him on the block was essential. I further stated that provided he could live on the land and work it to the satisfaction of the Department, the Department would not insist on the wife and family residing.

Mrs Cutlack stated that she was very anxious to see her husband settled on the land as he is a very hard worker and sincerely keen on following a land career as this is the only thing for which he is suited. She stated that her husband is making available to her and the children three pounds a week out of his training allowance and that the children are being educated by her father.

The air of desperation is unmistakeable. The very fact that Edith felt compelled to make these personal and "very confidential" representations speaks of it, and her revelation that "a land career … is the only thing to which he is suited" is a marker of a dead end. Did the urbane and intellectual Edith Birks really imagine that she and her children would ever withdraw from the city to set up as a homesteader with Tom Cutlack in the far expanses of the Mallee? She has covered a lot of ground to be contemplating this as a genuine possibility.

At this stage, the notes of another interview with the department state that Tom intended to keep working with Gardiner until land is available and that he "appears to apply himself very closely to the job and very eager to learn – alive mentally and enthusiastic". He was given 49 points out of 60 for experience and 33 out of 40 for personal, a total of 82 out of 100. In May of 1948 his classification was officially changed from "obtain further practical experience" to "approved for sheep and fat lamb production." This is some hard won victory. However, there is no record that he was ever allocated land.

In January 1949, Tom notified the Department of a change of address to Young Street Seacliff. Something had changed to allow him to live in the house with the family. The next entry of the file is dated 15 June 1949. It is the last entry, a tiny cutting from the newspaper,

pasted directly onto a blank white sheet of paper. It reads "Cutlack. – On June 12, at Meningie, Thomas Spenser Hall Cutlack, son of Frank W. Cutlack." It was his only death notice. He was forty nine years old.

This is the depressing part of the story. This is the part of the story where people are at their weakest and their worst: petty, vindictive, cruel, foolish, incompetent- overwhelmed by circumstances of their own making. There is no real historical meaning here, just personal meaning that is hard to divine because it doesn't run according to a logic, but to the incomprehensible turbulence of the microcosm, where people respond to large impersonal forces in irrational ways, suffering chaotically without cause, without relent and without resolution. Decisions, whether personal or bureaucratic, are made for reasons that might have nothing to do with the immediate dynamics of the circumstances, but for other reasons entirely. Tom Cutlack may be worthy and moral, but his plaintive letters, desperately trying to hide his rage and impotence, to make his simple ambitions fit to the organisational goals of the Minster's second advisor's middle management team are almost entirely irrelevant (except by blind luck, a mercurial substance that evaded Tom Cutlack) to the organisational and political battles for resources and prestige that drive bureaucratic decision making. Edith's intervention evokes pity in the officer. Pity is the most dangerous and dehumanising of emotions, to evoke and to experience. Pity is the signal of the most profound loss of agency.

A series of questions arises and remains unanswered. Why was that tiny sentence the only death notice? He had brothers, sisters … wife. What was he doing in Meningie? It's a small, bleak town on the southern shores of Lake Alexandrina, not really on the way to anywhere, 300 miles from Penola, where he was supposed to be living, and 150 miles from Adelaide where his family were living, at a time of fuel shortages and rationing. He had requested a ration of fuel for Edith to drive down to see him some weeks before. Did she make that trip? She and he are at pains to insist that their relationship was on good terms, but for the "silly" business of the father, but how true is that? She was notorious for her impatience with

incompetence, and he had shown a decent amount of that at crucial moments. Had he actually been allocated a soldier settler block? Some of the commentary suggests he may have, but his name doesn't appear on any of the lists of allocations, and there is no document in his file that shows that he was specifically awarded a block. Nor does ownership of such a block appear in any search of lands titles.

How did he die? The family story is that he had a stroke as result of shrapnel embedded in his chest from the wounds he received at El Alamein. But army records show that his war wounds were not to his chest, but to his arm, and there is no mention of shrapnel remaining in his body. He was wounded while in the Middle East, but recovered from that wound and resumed battle field duties in New Guinea. He was not invalided out of the army but requested a discharge for personal, business and domestic reasons. His main health concern was not shrapnel but malaria. The death certificate gives the cause of death vaguely as "probably heart disease", but it is not signed by any doctor or even police officer, but by the funeral director. The space for the signature of an "authorised person" is blank. The place of death is given as "Waltowa". This is barely a town, more a desolate stretch of road that runs close down to the waters edge of Lake Albert, five miles out of Meningie.

He was in the middle of a long drawn out bureaucratic struggle which he was not winning. He was living alone away out in the Mallee, isolated from his family, in conflict with his wife, facing deep hostility from his wife's family and ostracised by his own family. He has a history of severe mental illness. The volume of the report book of the Meningie police is missing for the relevant dates. The records of the Meningie Hospital have been lost or destroyed.

Chapter 22. After the Deluge

However he died, Tom did die, and for Edith, a last significant emotional connection to another adult was severed. Her father and her mother had locked themselves into their separate rooms; he with his business, his billiards cronies and his mistresses, she with her hypochondria and mysticism. Edith's beloved brother, Leslie – "the only person you have ever loved" – had been dead now for 20 years. The second brother Norman, never close to her anyway, had only just died that February, from an undiagnosed brain tumour. Her first husband, Basil, a like-minded friend and companion and the father of her daughter, who had become a poisonous enemy because of their marriage and divorce, was dead. She was ostracised and betrayed by her circle of acquaintances from the art world, friends of Basil. There seems to have been no relationship at all with the extended family, the Birks and the McDougalls and the Thomases who had been her companions in her childhood and young adulthood.

She seems to have maintained relations with a couple of people from the art scene, the most isolated and eccentric of them, such as Horace Trennery. My mother remembered in the 1940's driving

> to the hills to see a strange artist friend of my mother's; they were at art school together. He paints beautiful, haunting landscapes, but he's not only very ill, he's mad as well. … My mother is one of the few people who know he is still alive; he barely exists; he's ragged; the shorts he's wearing have only a front, like an apron, and you can see his bare bottom when he turns around. He wears hobnail boots without sox. He is thin and dirty and surrounded by stacks and stacks of paintings that no-one appreciates except my mother. When we go, she leaves him some food and he says "Christ, what's this? I don't want bloody charity!"; but the food stays and we drive away. [252]

[252] Jane Burdett *Recollections*

Edith was also friends with the actor Gaston Mervale (the son of the more famous father who had died in 1934). He visited her at Seacliff in the 1940s and 50s, and helped her build a wall.

There was another friend, who we always knew as Mrs P. My mother recalls her and Edith

> sitting in shabby armchairs each side of the fire, drinking champagne for their headaches … My mother (Edith) has recently bought a small black pipe … she fills it with tobacco and lights it with rapid, vigorous puffs. Mrs P. lights a "ciggy" with shaking hands. They don't converse, but talk about completely different subjects, throwing remarks into the air at no-one in particular… But mainly there is silence.

When I knew my grandmother, she was not the iconic grandmotherly presence of the popular imagination. To me, she was cold; distant, concealed, isolated, hard. She had a disciplinary procedure for a small boy called a "horsepinch". She would make you sit still and then with her thumb and forefinger she would grip your leg just above the knee and squeeze – hard. It was agonising in itself, and the slow deliberate manner with which she administered it was terrifying.

Although it was clear, from her bookshelves filled with philosophical works, her beautiful black Lipp piano, and the stories from my mother, that she had been an intellectual, the two friends of hers that I knew were clearly not from that tradition. They were physical and temperamental contrasts. Mrs P. was very, very thin, nervous and frenetic, chain-smoking, endlessly talking from the edge of a yellow velvet armchair with carved wooden arms, but not, as far as I could tell, talking about anything, or to anyone. My grandmother would walk in and out of the room going about her business looking intensely irritated. They would seem to not interact. I still don't know who Mrs P. was, what her last name was, or how she came into my grandmother's life, except that she somehow went back to "the Mt Lofty days" which means

the fifties and sixties , after Tommy Cutlack died, when my grandmother lived in a large stone villa at Stirling called "Dunolly". [253]

Edith's second friend, Frida, was an opposite presence, slow-moving, expressionless and silent, clad in a pencil skirt with her hair in a tight silver bun, and unblinking eyes behind silver rimmed spectacles. She never sat down, but stood in the kitchen, watching. My aunty and cousins always expressed great affection for Frida, to a level of effusion that I always found puzzling. They would declare that they loved her, as if she was some favourite aunt who might slip them sweeties on the sly. However, the actual relationship was something different. "Frida was a lovely person" Stephen Cutlack recalls, "whom Mum stole from a girls' college where she worked. She worked for us at the Seacliff house as well and of course became a very good friend to us all." [254]

It's a revealing piece of doggerel. A "friend" is a person attached by virtue of personal, intimate, emotional associations and affiliations, renewed on each interaction by a treaty of equal powers. Frida was not a "friend". Frida was an employee. This is not to deny the existence of genuine emotional attachments. These are points of emotional unsettlement and ambiguity in the relationship and in the ideology in which it is framed. It is one of the structural functions of ideology to obscure the underlying material relationship. The harsh truths are mystified and obfuscated by a misidentification, a *misnaming*, of a relationship, so that reality can become tolerable. Of course, it is also true that from the perspective of the employer, and perhaps of the employee too, the orderliness and certainty provided by that material structure might be welcome. No need for constantly negotiating the shifting terrain of two independent personalities, each with their own particular id and their own particular superego, and their own particular strange motivations. The relationship is clear from the start. The rigorous material structure may allow a certain freedom to express, or not express, emotional/psychological

[253] Stephen Cutlack, email to author, 2021
[254] Stephen Cutlack, email to author, 2021

states without the fear of consequences of a false move. And after all, Edith Birks knew a great deal about the consequences of false moves and unconstrained emotional responses.

Who knows what silent Frida thought of the relationship? In the material scheme of things it doesn't matter what she thought. She had neither material nor emotional power, and no ideological status in the relationship. The employers were free to identify her as a "friend"; she was not free to express an opinion without endangering her situation of material dependence. My uncle went on to describe relations between my grandmother and the staff of her father after she was expelled from the family network: "My mother socialised with a lot of people. During the war when petrol was very scarce she had a cohort of people from whom she bludged petrol tickets. During the Charles Birks days she used to have many friends among the staff". It is an indicator of the extremity of my grandmother's social isolation that her son, seeking examples of her socialisation, should have to resort to "people from whom she bludged petrol tickets". Did she have "many friends among the staff"? What power does a staff member have in defining the parameters of a "friendship" with the daughter of their owner?

The transition of my grandmother's social status from a highly networked motivator, of entrepreneurial and ideological dynamism, secure enough in her material and class status to be able to habitually challenge deeply embedded social norms of ethical behaviour, to the constrained, socially and emotionally isolated – I would say bereft – figure I knew in my childhood, is a deep and disturbing conundrum.

I think my grandmother had come to some sort of an impasse. She had experienced the deepest of traumas, a number of them in sequence, but she had no resources left, intellectual or emotional or social to draw on to cope with them or find her way through them. Although she had grown up with a certain recklessness, energy and courage, these had not developed out of any intimacy with the material realities. She had been sheltered and privileged, without any understanding of that reality. She had no sense of the abyss that she had so joyously flung herself into when she took up with Tom Cutlack. Of course, she didn't know that he was

mentally ill, and she didn't know that he was going to die. But even apart from those incalculable disasters, she took a gamble without being able to calculate the risks she was opening herself up to.

This is the depressing part of the story. This is the part of the story that lacks moral coherence, or a satisfying intellectual framework. It becomes difficult to keep thinking in terms of social or historical dynamics. It's just the vicissitudes of one person's life, a person who is bewildered by it, and all the derring-do and surefootedness of her childhood has been definitively swept away. She disliked men, she disliked youthfulness, she disliked art and intellect. She still listened to music, Beethoven and Bach, on her old collection of 78's. She was physically unwell. She would eventually die of cancer and cirrhosis of the liver in 1975, aged 75. She specified that no-one except her four children should attend her funeral, which should be carried out with no ceremony at all, the coffin carried in an ordinary brown station wagon, and that no-one should know where her ashes were put.

Napier Birks led a strange combination of a charmed and traumatised life. Hs mother of course died when he was very young, but it also seems that his step mother/aunt Rosie and his sisters managed to retain a nurturing family life, certainly one that was networked, energised activated and engaged with life. He was wealthy from the start and he could afford to fully engage with anything he wanted to. He was handsome and energetic and clearly charismatic in his determination and decisiveness.

But he lost many friends to tragic early deaths. His best mate Bertie Barr Smith, with whom he travelled after the death of his first child, died in a drunken fall down some stairs. Harry Hartley was killed in the First World War. His eldest son Leslie died in a plane crash that may have been at least partly Napier's fault. He was estranged from his favourite daughter, in a pointless clash of wills driven by pressures and circumstances that were far beyond the control of either of them. He lost his second son to cancer in 1949. And of course he was from the start alienated from his wife, the beautiful and intense cousin Lucy McDougall. She

finally died in 1951, leaving him to his own private funeral without fanfare when he died in 1952. We don't know if Edith, also by this time bereft of her closest friends and intimates, even attended.

There does seem to have been one person to whom Napier did have a stable attachment, and that is his secretary Joan Handby. According to Birks granddaughter Jane, Edith "loathed her" as "coarse", one of Edith's favourite expressions of disdain, along with "common". She would often be the one to pick up Nicholas Birks, or Jane Burdett, from school and drive down to Birks Harbour near Goolwa where she stayed with them for the weekend. Jane Burdett thought that he used her as a cover to spend time with Handby.

The story from the family was that for propriety's sake he married her off to a compliant employee. This was Major Wilfred Pritchard, and they announced their engagement on 7 February 1944. In December 1950, Napier was on a ship with her, the "Stratheden", embarking in London bound for Sydney. In fact, they arrived back in Australia just three weeks before Lucy died. He was living in Rundle St. Lucy was living at Mt Lofty. Joan was living at Oldham St, Glenelg.

I found her grave, or at least her memorial. It's in the North-East Rose Garden of the Centennial Park Cemetery in Adelaide, a pleasant open patch of lawn with trees scattered and a view down over the city. Her plaque, right next to her husband Wilf's reads

"In loving memory of Joan Elizabeth Pritchard

19. 11. 1911 – 6. 5. 2001

Beloved wife of Wilf

Loved and always remembered by her many friends"

Wilf died in 1961. Napier, thirty years older than Joan, died in 1952, so she outlived him by fifty years. He left her a thousand pounds, a thousand shares in Motors Limited and 300 shares in Kingsway Ltd. That is approaching 100,000 dollars in today's money. When I found her

grave, I felt a very strong sense of … well, joy … that she at least had done well, had a beloved husband and many friends, as well as useful amount of money from Napier Birks.

Chapter 23. What happened to Tess Murphy

What happened to Tessie Murphy, the Irish beauty brought low by her hubris in daring to transgress her God-given boundaries of sex and class, and whose transgressions rippled out into the cosmos disturbing good order and the rightful dispensations of the family lives of Napier Birks and Edith Birks?

In 1924, a *Truth* journalist claims to have discovered her as an abusive drunk being thrown out of a Sydney courtroom where "Louis Sterling, international crook and William MacDonald, gun-artist" were on trial. A "well dressed, mysterious figure … sitting half sprawled in one of the seats at the rear of the crowded court" had "hissed out her denunciation – "Sterling, you yellow mongrel!", for which she was bundled out by "two or three burly policemen".[255] The article identifies this woman as Mrs F.V. Maloney, formerly Mrs Harold Bickford nee Tessie Veronica Murphy, and states that she was in the process of suing her new husband Maloney, a publican, for maintenance.

I am interested in the construction of the women in this story, and here is a case in point. Tessie Murphy, having been publicly disgraced, removed from her child and ejected from the social world of the high mercantile bourgeoisie, disappears from public view. This construction of her as a dissolute, abusive drunk consorting with the criminal classes has all the qualities of a Victorian morality tale. She transgressed in the first place by asserting her social autonomy in seducing the respectable Harold Bickford; in the second place by asserting her sexual autonomy in her relations with the men of the Adelaide establishment, creating discord in their family regimes. Now she is fallen and suffering her just deserts. Even among the dissolute crowd of crooks, gun-artists and publicans, she is an unstable and threatening presence

[255] "The Lady of the Cough" *Truth,* September 21,1924, 13

requiring two or three burly policemen to manage her. Even here she cannot hold a marriage together.

I have identified the Maloney marriage. It took place on 5 July 1923, in the Methodist Manse on South Terrace in Adelaide. That building still stands. Maloney is Harry Murgoo Maloney, born 1894, the son of the Western Australian pastoralist Harry Mostyn Maloney, owner of Murgoo Station out of Murcheson. Both partners are identified in the marriage record as being "divorced or deserted for seven years". This accounts for two Catholics being married in the Methodist manse, as the Catholic Church at the time would not recognise divorce and did not allow divorced people to remarry.

The Maloneys are descendants of a minor Irish aristocrat with Jacobite tendencies, John Maloney of Cragg in County Clare Ireland.[256] The older brother of Henry Mostyn Maloney, Patrick John Moloney, was the heir, holding 618 acres at Tulla, County Clare in 1870.[257] The two younger brothers emigrated to Australia, one to Queensland and the other to Western Australia. Henry Mostyn Molony, the father of Harry Moloney, and proprietor of the West Australian pastoral lease "Murgoo" appeared as a character witness for a fellow pastoralist who was on trial, briefly, for the murder of an indigenous man he had chained to a tree, beaten, and then left there to die. [258]

Harry Molony's previous marriage was to Miss Nadine Lydia Neilson of Adelaide in the Sacred Heart Church at Highgate in Perth, on June 16, 1919. The ceremony was conducted according to the Catholic rite by Father John O'Reilly and Rev. T. Crowley. By 1918, Nadine Moloney was the proprietor of the Duke of York hotel in Adelaide. She was summonsed (twice) to answer for offenses of leaving the door to the bar unlocked after 6pm, for which she received a warning. This tallies with the story in *Truth* that Moloney was a publican, and in

[256] B. Burke and A. Fox-Davies, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Ireland* (Pall Mall: Harrison and Sons, 1912).
[257] Landed Estates Database http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=2050 accessed 3 March 2020.
[258] *Geraldton Advertiser,* July 10, 1896, 3

fact in the following years he went into business as a hotel broker in Sydney. By March of 1921, however, Nadine was suing for restitution of conjugal rights, and in August 1921 a decree nisi was issued for the dissolution of the marriage on the grounds of desertion. The decree absolute was issued on 14 June 1922, just a month before the Bickford divorce hit the papers.

Tessie, having been expelled from the social circle of Bickford, Birks and Antill, and having had her son removed from her, moved quickly to remarry. I wonder about the mutual expectations of these two, each with tenuous connections to wealth and status, each seeking a means of reinforcing or creating something out of nothing. However, this marriage quickly failed. In August of 1924, Harry Moloney was living in a boarding house, Wykeham House in Bayswater Road in Sydney, and advertising that he will no longer be responsible for debts incurred without written authority. In September 1924, the story of The Lady with the Cough appeared in *Truth*, and at this point a sense of dismal inevitability hangs over the story. Tessie Veronica Murphy has stepped beyond her station, as a woman, as a working-class woman and a Catholic working-class woman to boot; and now she is returning to the degradation from which she sprang, from that Irish navvy spawning triplets in the desultory confines of the semi-desert colonial outpost of Tailem Bend. The universe would appear to be ordered and ethical according to the ruling standards of the ruling class which she had the temerity to invade for a short time.

But that was not what happened to Tessie Murphy. All the protagonists of this story were men and women driven by powerful internal energies to rail and connive and strategise and act against the limitations placed upon them by class and gender and circumstance and personality. Of her generation, in the end it was Tessie Murphy who survived, and survived well, with her autonomy intact, her wit undiminished, and a nice house on Sydney's North shore held freehold, even in the face of a final nasty ironic twist in the tale. But that's another story.

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Appendix 1 Photos

Section 1. Edith Birks

Edith Birks "singing to herself" 1901
Inscribed by her mother Lucy McDougall

Edith on the beach 1907

Edith on her motorbike, a James 6hp, about 1915

Edith about 1916

Edith in formal mode about 1925

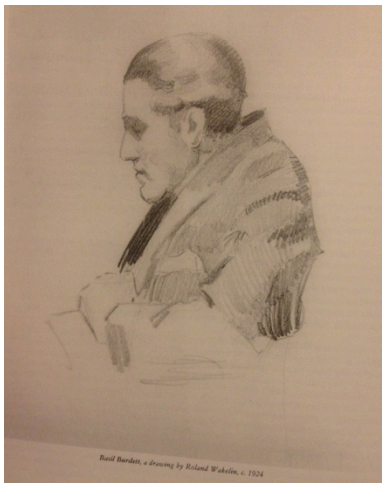
Section 2. Basil Burdett

Basil Burdett's grandparents Thomas Gray and Hannah Large

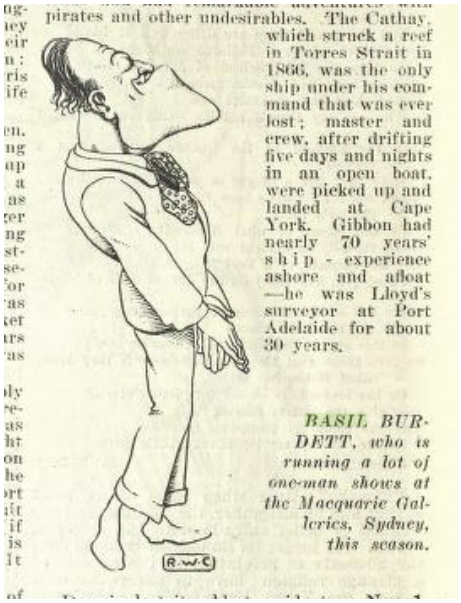
Basil's mother Lillie Jane Gray, known as Lottie

Basil as a child, ~1912

Portrait of Basil aged 21 by Lloyd Rees



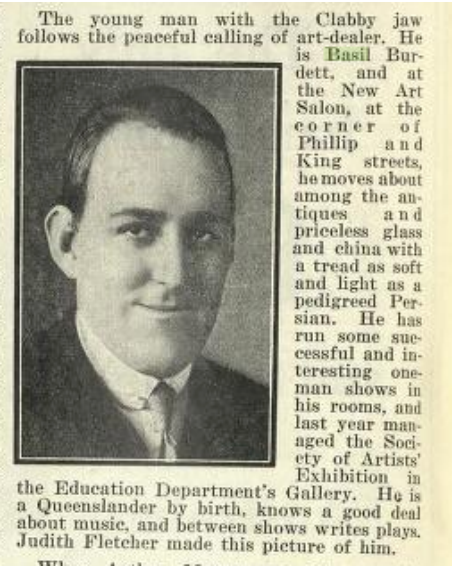
Portrait by Roland Wakelin 1924



pirates and other undesirables. The Cathay, which struck a reef in Torres Strait in 1866, was the only ship under his command that was ever lost; master and crew, after drifting five days and nights in an open boat, were picked up and landed at Cape York. Gibbon had nearly 70 years' ship-experience ashore and afloat—he was Lloyd's surveyor at Port Adelaide for about 30 years.

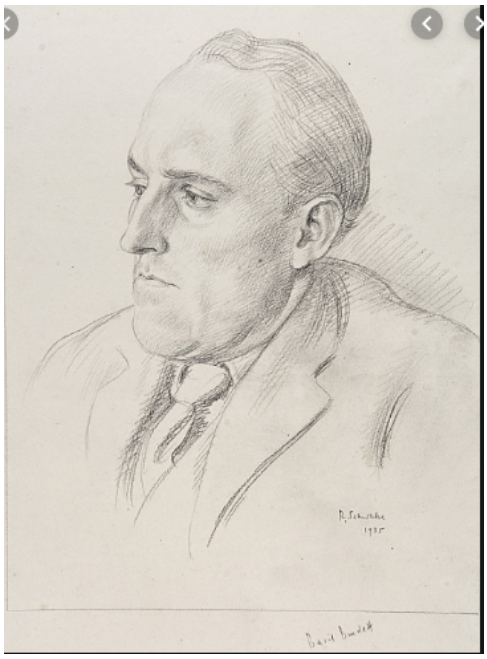
BASIL BURDETT, who is running a lot of one-man shows at the Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, this season.

Caricature of Basil in The Bulletin as he launched Macquarie Galleries in 1925



The young man with the Clabby jaw follows the peaceful calling of art-dealer. He is Basil Burdett, and at the New Art Salon, at the corner of Phillip and King streets, he moves about among the antiques and priceless glass and china with a tread as soft and light as a pedigreed Persian. He has run some successful and interesting one-man shows in his rooms, and last year managed the Society of Artists' Exhibition in the Education Department's Gallery. He is a Queenslander by birth, knows a good deal about music, and between shows writes plays. Judith Fletcher made this picture of him.

Photo of a young and confident Basil taken by Judith Fletcher in the early 20's with a suggestion that he is writing plays



1935 portrait of Basil by Randolph Schwabe who said of it "it has a quality I thought I had lost"

Basil with Ellioth Gruner about 1930

Basil's military service photo as he was about to embark for South East Asia in 1939

Section 3. Tom Cutlack

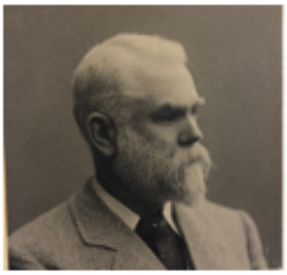
Tom Cutlack in 1919 about to leave for the Solomon Islands

Section 4. The Birks family

John Napier in about 1880. "Cotton Tyrant" and the "Father of Methodism in Manchester". Brother of Edith's great grandmother Hannah Birks (nee Napier) and benefactor of the family.

The Birks brothers and sisters

Charles Birks m Mary Maria Thomas
1844 – 1924



George Birks m H R Thomas
1838 – 1896?

Alfred James m K Salter
1840 -

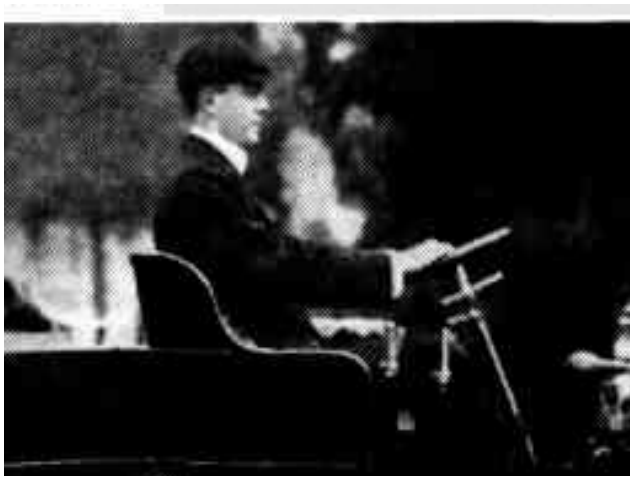
William Hanson m A Raymond
1841 -

John Napier m S Roberts
1845 -

Walter Rch'd m J Crooks
1849 -

Emily H m A Crooks
1849 –

Napier Kyffin Birks dressed to the nines. Maybe on his wedding day 1899? The photo is inscribed "my beloved husband".



Napier Birks at the wheel of his 6 hp De Dion in 1906

Napier Birks in the 1930's

Napier Birks at Goolwa in 1938

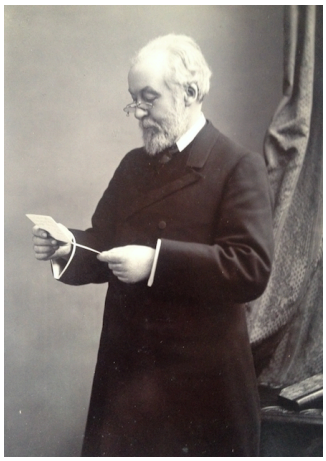
Edith's beloved brother Leslie on expedition in Western Australia in 1926

Section 5. The McDougall family

Lucy Armstrong, mother of Lucy McDougall and Edith's grandmother taken not long before her death in 1882

A very young John McDougall in the 1850's

John McDougall the Victorian man of business



Replicating the pose 30 years later

John McDougall receiving his knighthood in 1906. He had a sense of the ridiculous.

Lucy McDougall in the 1890's

About the time of her marriage to her cousin Napier Birks in 1899

Lucy McDougall surrounded by her brothers and sisters, John Napier, Jane, Florence and Norman. These are the children by John McDougall's first marriage to Lucy Armstrong

Lucy McDougall on her wedding day 1899

Lucy Birks in furs and plumed hat about the time of Edith's divorce, 1931

MRS. NAPIER BIRKS, who has been president of the Mothers and Babies' Health Association for the past twelve years.—Rembrandt portrait.

Lucy Birks in 1937 aged 69 (source Adelaide Uni, Advertiser 13 October 1937)

Mary Jane Thomas nee Good
Wife of William Kyffin Thomas and
Edith's great grandmother

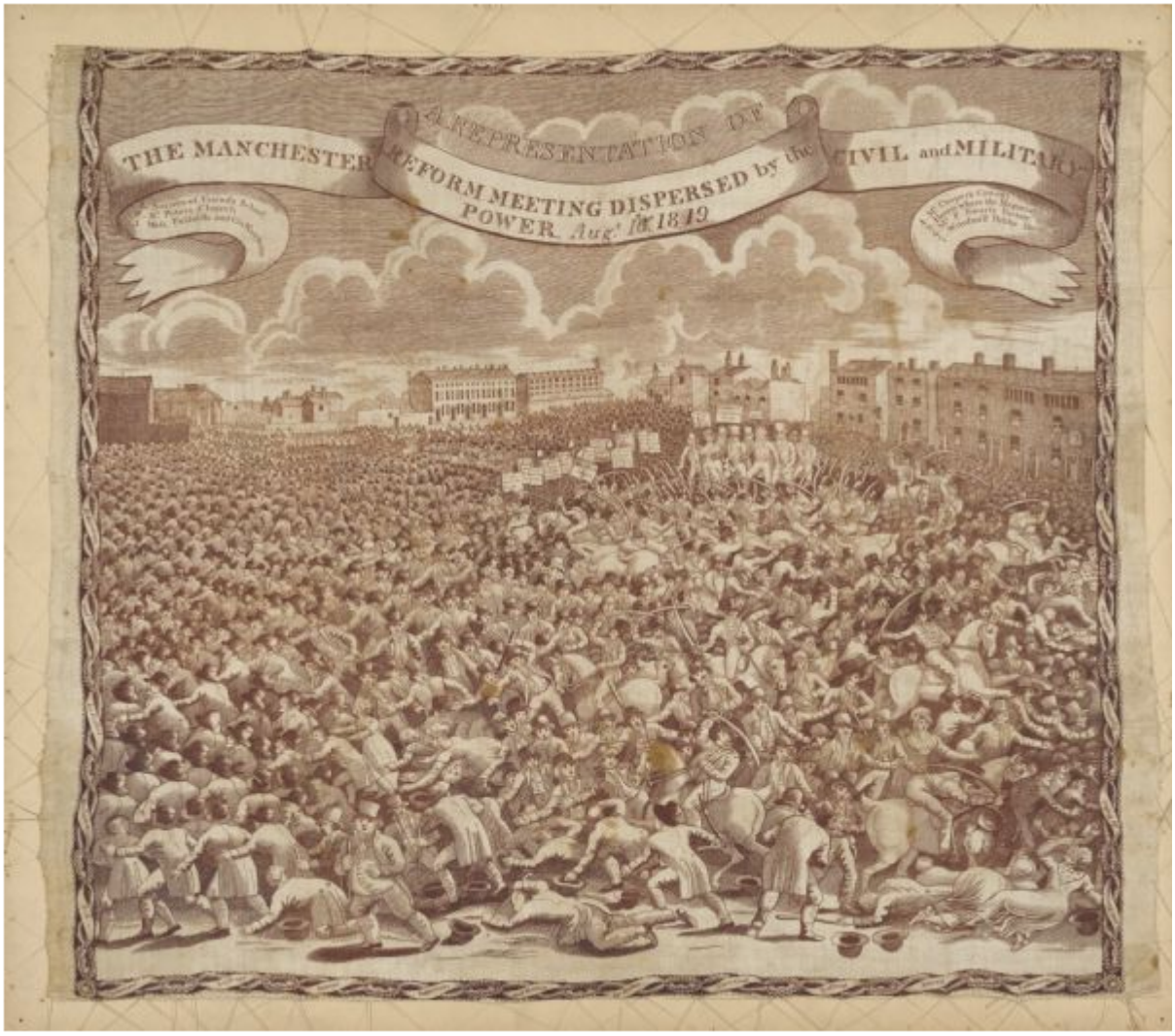
William Kyffin Thomas
Son of Robert and Mary Thomas
Edith's great grandfather

Rosie Thomas, daughter of William Kyffin Thomas, married Charles Birks, widower of her sister Mary Maria. She was a highly efficient social purity and women's suffrage activist

Helen Rosetta Thomas fell in love with George Birks when she was 13 and he was 19. They were forbidden to see each other until she turned 16, when they immediately married. They threw their lot in with the revolutionary William Lane in his doomed New Australia project in Paraguay, where George died of tuberculosis of the bowel in 1893 (Chartier collection)

Matching lockets of George Birks and Helen Rosetta Thomas

Section 7. Other images



Commemorative handkerchief of Peterloo Massacre by John Slack. John Slack was the father of Helen Slack who married Thomas Sowler who was the son of Mary Ainsworth who was the sister of Isabella Ainsworth who was the mother of Isabella Russell who was the second wife of John Napier. He was brother of Hannah Napier, Edith Birks' great grandmother. This family tree shows the relationships

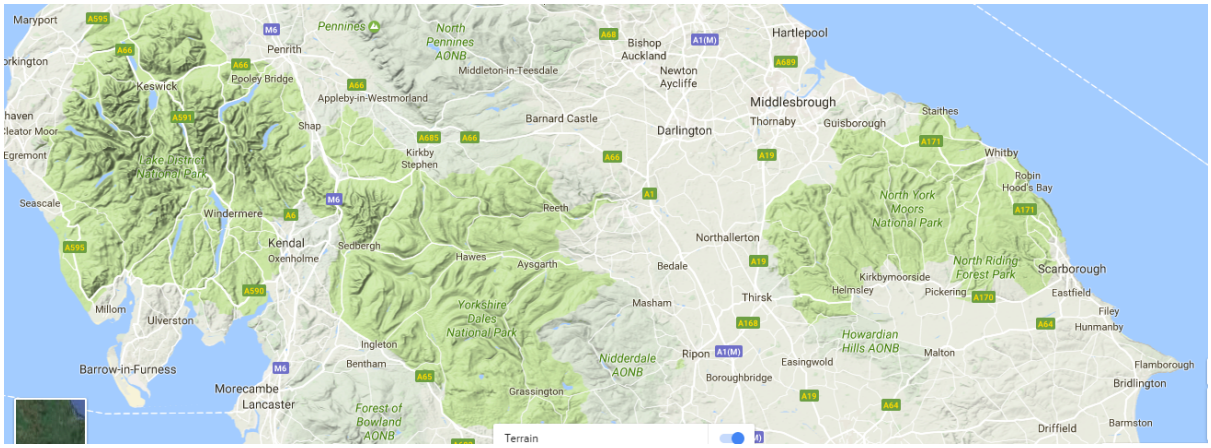
John Slack — Mary Ainsworth — sis Isabella Ainsworth
|
Helen Slack m. Thomas Sowler — Isabella Russell m. John Napier — bro Hannah Napier
|
Charles Birks
|
Napier Birks
|
Edith Birks

Source: https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM85166

Appendix 2a Maps

Thirsk and environs

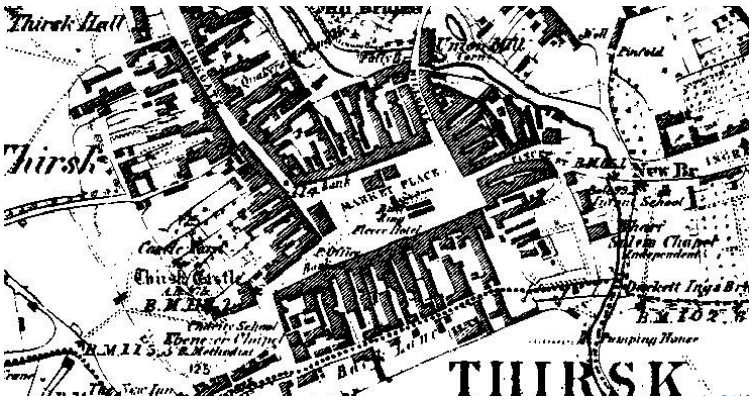
This map shows Thirsk in relation to York, Sheffield and Manchester. The area between the North York Moors and the Yorkshire Dales is the Vale of Mowbray. The Napiers started in Thirsk with the linen draper William Napier and his wife Catherine Lumley. The Birks and Wasteneys originated around Sheffield and Doncaster. They all gravitated towards Manchester following the economic opportunities and the religious networks to the centre of the world's cloth manufacturing.



Topographic map showing Thirsk in the Vale of Mowbray, with the Moors to the right and the Dales to the left.

Summer farmland in the Vale of Mowbray near Dalton 2022 (photo by the author)

Panorama of the Vale of York and Mowbray south-east to north-east looking from Roulston Scar. Thirsk is down there somewhere (photo by the author)



1826 Ordinance Survey Map of Thirsk [259]

[259] https://www.british-history.ac.uk/os-1-to-10560/yorkshire/087

Thirsk Market Square in 1919

Thirsk market Square 2019

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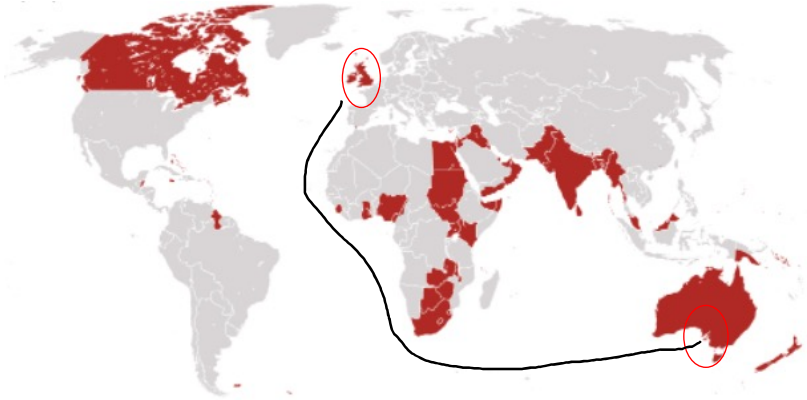
Appendix 2b Maps

Adelaide



The shipping route Southampton to Adelaide before the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869

Adelaide on the coast of St Vincent Gulf. Renmark, 300 kilometres from Adelaide where Tom Cutlack grew up. Waltowa on the bottom left where Tom died on the shores of Lake Albert. North of there, Tailem Bend where Tess Murphy's triplet sisters were born, before the family moved to Melbourne. Goolwa at the mouth of the River Murray where Napier Birks kept his boat and entertained friends. North-East of Adelaide is the Barossa Valley where George Vause Birks and Hannah Napier first settled in 1856.

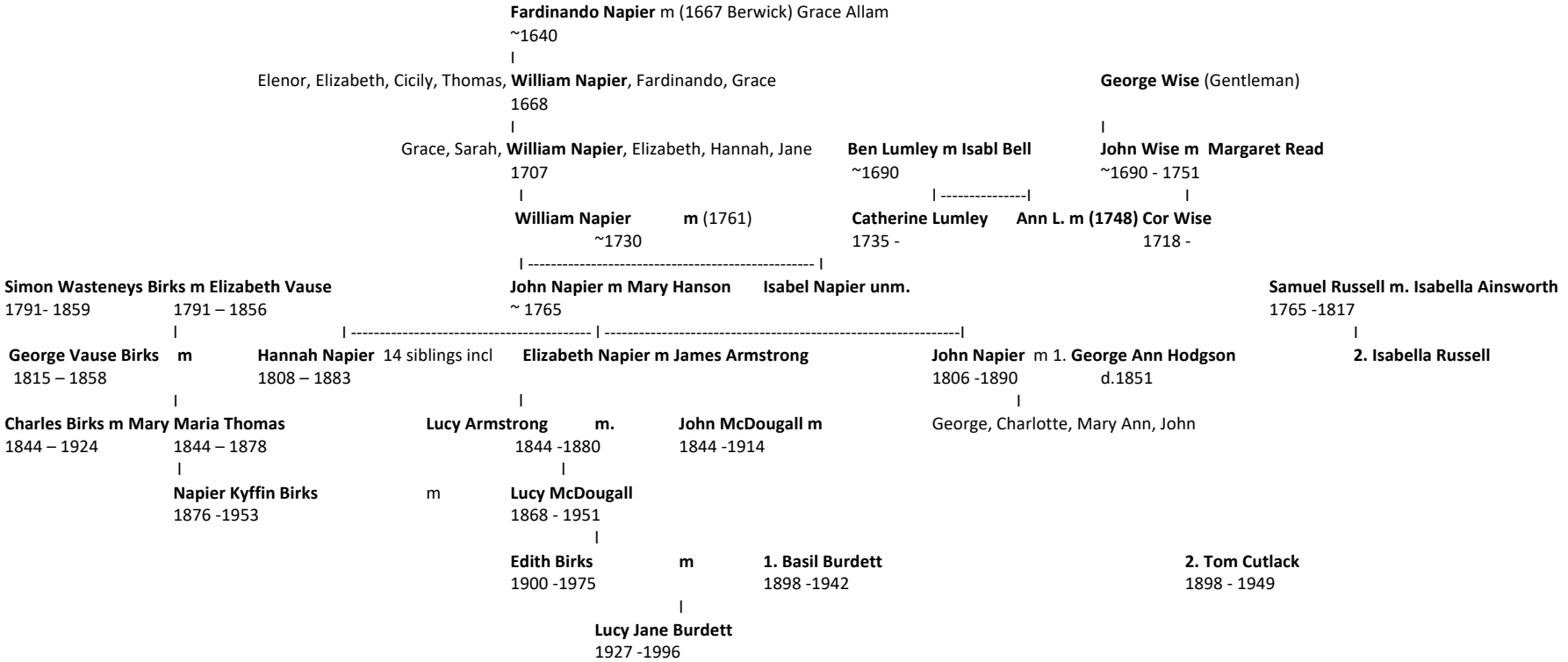
A view of Adelaide from above the Adelaide Hills from the South East. The first European settlers arrived at Glenelg in 1836. Charles and Rose Birks had their house *Knutsford* in Glenelg and it was from there that they organised their religious politics. That house was a centre for the Social Purity and Women's Suffrage movements. Edith Birks was born in Norwood in 1900. Lucy Birks had her cottage in Mt Lofty.

Appendix 3 Family Trees

Family tree 1.

Edith Birks to William Napier (Linen Draper, Thirsk) to Fardinando Napier

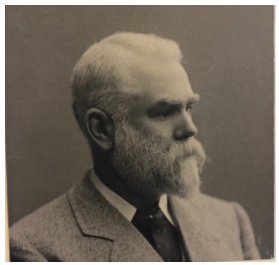
This maps Edith Birks' genealogy to the merchants and yeoman farmers of the North from the 17th century

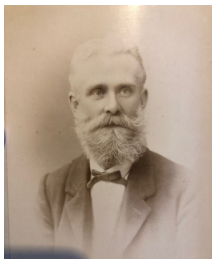


Family tree 2.

Birks Family Tree

Joshua Birks m Mary ???
1708? – 1761 1708? – 1790?
I
Joshua Birks II m Gartrude Birks | John Birks I | Peter Birks I | Mary Thompson | Elizabeth Glossop | Ann Matthewman | Gertrude Spurr
1732 – 1810 1734 - 1781 | d 1800 | 1738 -1801
I
John Birks II m Mary Wasteneys | Sarah Birks m Richard Sanderson
1760 – 1821 1761 – 1830 | Joshua Sanderson
I
Simon Wasteneys Birks m Elizabeth Vause | Joshua | Thomas | William Wastenys | Mary | Ann | Peter Birks II | Paul Jubb Birks
1790-1859 | one child | | d 1873 Grocer | m R'd Haworth | m Mtw Belt | | Alexander Vause Birks m Mary Barlow 1870
Of Kingston on Hull | | | d 1914
Edith Mary Birks
I
George Vause Birks m Hannah Napier | Caroline m Charles Eason | William Henry | Samuel John | Sarah Ann | Elizabeth | Hannah | Charles Alexander
1815 – 1858 | 1828 – 1905 | no issue | no issue | no issue | unmarried | unmarried
Caroline Vause Eason (beneficiary of will) 1855 - 1934
Brother? John Charles Malcom Eason?
I
Charles Birks m Mary Maria Thomas | George Birks m H R Thomas | Alfred James m K Salter | William Hanson m A Raymond | John Napier m S Roberts | Walter Rch'd m J Crooks | Emily H m A Crooks
1844 – 1924 | 1838 – 1896? | 1840 - | 1841 - | 1845 - | 1849 - | 1849 –

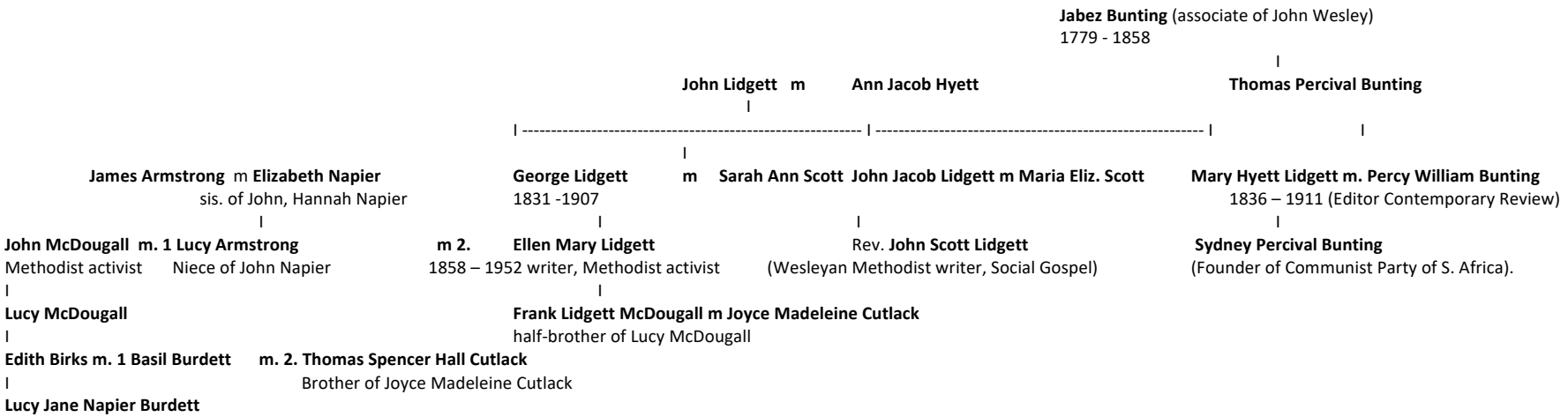



Family tree 3.

McDougall - Lidgett - Scott - Bunting Family tree

This maps the link from the Birks family to the Social Gospel Methodist activists and intellectuals of Manchester and London



Family tree 4.

Wasteneys, Molesworths, Holles Family tree and patronage associations

The green text maps the client- patron network of the Holles family

Robert Swift m Ann Taylor
I
George Wasteneys **Lionel Reresby m Ann Swift** **Sir William Holles**
1515 - 1509 – 1591
Gervase Wasteneys **m Jane Reresby** **Agnes Wasteneys m John Laughton of Throapum 1550** **Denzil Holles m ---???**
1510 – 1589? I----------I 1538 -90
Danyell Wasteneys **H'phe Wasteneys** 1st bt Sh'f Nott 1635-6 *John Holles I patron. Cozen H'phe Wast I 1620's* **John Holles** 1st Earl Clare
1584 – 1664 1578 -1649 I----------I 1564 -1637
unknown **H'phe Wasteneys** 2nd bt **John Wasteneys** *H'phe Wast II Steward of East Retford*
1612 – 1673 d 1670
unknown **Edmund Wasteneys** 3rd bt **John Holles** 2nd Earl Clare
d.1678 1595 -1666
I I
Gilbert Holles 3rd Earl Clare
I 1633 -1689
HW IV and RW I MPs East Retford 1706-8 I
H'lphe Wasteneys 4th bt **Robert Molesworth** 1st VsC m **Letitia Coote** *John Holles IV patron East Retford 1706-8* **John Holles** 1st Duke N'castle
d.1742 1656 – 1725 1662 – 1711
John Wasteneys **Richard M'sworth** 3rd VsC m **Mary Ussher** **John M'sworth** 2nd VsC m **Mary Middleton**
1680 – 1758 (m. 1744) 1728 – 1763 1679 – 1726
Simon Wasteneys **m** **Mary Jubb of Headon** ***Mary Molesworth employs Simon Wasteneys 1743***
1720 – 1785 1750 1731 -
I ----------I
William Wasteneys **m** **Mary Mirfin Purslove of Lambcote Grange** **Mary Wasteneys m John Birks** *John Birks, tenant and tax assessor of Molesworth 1783*
1753 - 1777 1754 I
Simon Wasteneys Birks m Elizabeth Vause
I
George Vause Birks m Hannah Napier
1815 – 1858 1808 – 1883

Family tree 5.

Wasteneys, Holles, Freshevilles, Eyres Family tree

This maps the "cozen" relationship between the Wasteneys and the Holles families

Lionel Reresby m Ann Swift
Of Rotherham

Gervase Wasteneys m Jane Reresby — **Gervase Eyre** — **Peter Frescheville** — **Sir William Holles**

d. 1589 — 1509 - 1591

Danyell Wasteneys m Ann Howton — **Hardolphe Wasteneys** 1st bt m **Jane Eyre** — **Barbara Eyre m Jn Frescheville** — **Frances Frescheville** — **m Gervase Holles** — **Denzil Holles m ---???**

1584 – 1664 — 1578 -1649 — 1538 -90

unknown

Hardolphe Wasteneys 2nd bt — **John Wasteneys**

1612 – 1673 — d 1670

unknown

Edmund Wasteneys 3rd bt

d.1678

unknown

Hardolphe Wasteneys 4th bt

d.1742

John Wastenys

Simon Wasteneys m Mary Jubb of Headon

1720 – 1785 — 1731 -

John Birks m Mary Wasteneys

Simon Wasteneys Birks m Elizabeth Vause

George Vause Birks m Hannah Napier

1815 – 1858 — 1808 – 1883

John Holles 1st Earl Clare
1564 -1637

John Holles 2nd Earl Clare
1595 -1666

Gilbert Holles 3rd Earl Clare
1633 -1689

John Holles 1st Duke N'castle
1662 - 1711

Family tree 6.

Napiers with Lumleys and Sturdys

Fardinando Napier m (1667 Berwick) Grace Allam
~1640
|
Elenor, Elizabeth, Cicily, Thomas, **William Napier**, Fardinando, Grace
1668
|
Grace, Sarah, **William Napier**, Elizabeth, Hannah, Jane
1707
|
William Napier **m** (1761) **Catherine Lumley**
~1730 1735 -
|

Ben Lumley m Isabl Bell
~1690 ~1690 - 1751
|
Ann L. **m**

George Wise (Gentleman)
|
John Wise m Margaret Read
|
Cor Wise

Jane Lumley m Wm Sturdy
1718 -
|
Isabell Sturdy m William Hanson
(bro of Mary Hanson)
|
William Sturdy Hanson m . Charlotte Napier 1815 –

Simon Wasteneys Birks m Elizabeth Vause
1791- 1859 1791 – 1856
|
George Vause Birks **m**
1858 1808 – 1883
|
Charles Birks m Mary Maria Thomas
1844 – 1924 1844 – 1878
|
Napier Kyffin Birks m
1876 -1953
|
Edith Birks m
1900 -1975
|
Lucy Jane Burdett
1927 -1996

John Napier m Mary Hanson
~ 1765
|
Hannah Napier 14 siblings incl
|
Lucy McDougall
1868 – 1951

Isabel Napier unm.

Elizabeth Napier m James Armstrong
1806 -1890
|
Lucy Armstrong m. John McDougall
1844 -1880 1844 -1914
|
1. Basil Burdett
1898 -1942

2. Tom Cutlack
1898 - 1949

John Napier m 1. **George Ann Hodgson** **m 2. Isabella Russell**
d.1851
|
George, Charlotte, Mary Ann, John

Samuel Russell m. Isblla Ainsworth
1765 -1817