

A man of many dreams:

**John George Knight, a life of fortune and misfortune in Victoria and
the Northern Territory, 1851-1892**



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A thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

College of Indigenous Futures, Arts and Society

Charles Darwin University

2018

Front cover: John George Knight, Carole Winter Collection

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged.

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Julie Mastin

10 November 2016

Abstract

John George Knight migrated from England to Australia in 1851 as a young qualified architect and engineer. Knight was successful in his professional work in Melbourne, where he became a leading figure. In 1873 he sought work as a civil servant in South Australia's remote Northern Territory. This move has never been satisfactorily explained. Knight worked in various positions in the Territory in the ensuing years and ended up holding the highest post in the administration: government resident. In 1892 Knight died in office.

In this thesis I examine Knight's professional, social and personal life, his achievements and also his shortcomings. Little has been written about Knight and he remains today a little known figure. Hopefully this thesis will help rectify this situation.

Acknowledgments

The journey to complete my PhD has been one of sheer enjoyment. It commenced with undertaking an excavation of a site known in Darwin as Knight's Folly. For several reasons a different direction for my project was decided upon, for my interest was not only in the excavation, but more in John George Knight himself, the man who designed the house that had stood on this site. It was one of my supervisors, Dr Clayton Fredericksen, who suggested I write a biography of Knight and to me this was the right choice. Knight was an intriguing character and the more I researched, the more interested I became.

My dear companion Ron Ninnis continually encouraged and supported me. His clear and sound thinking brought me back to earth on many an occasion. I am grateful to have received continued support from not only my many friends and family, but also from several archivists in Melbourne, Adelaide and Darwin. I would especially like to thank Françoise Barr and Emily Pritchard from the Northern Territory Archives Service who took time to assist me with a variety of requests.

Knight's descendants, with whom I have become good friends, welcomed me unselfishly and were willing to share all their known information. In turn, I passed information onto them and as in many families I found a skeleton or two in the cupboard. I never visit Melbourne without meeting for lunch with Lawre McCaffrey, Knight's great-granddaughter, and Carole Winter, Knight's great-great niece. I am also regularly in contact with the New Zealand connection: Knight's great-grandson Garth Jenkins. These three people and their spouses have become a surrogate family to me.

I am grateful to Charles Darwin University for the study facilities that I have enjoyed over the years. I have met many people at the university and it has been an important component in my life. My final acknowledgements must go to my supervisors, Emeritus Professor David Carment and Dr Clayton Fredericksen, who have assisted me over the years. For the past two years, my principal supervisor Dr Steven Farram has met with me regularly and assiduously guided me through this journey to its completion. He has gone above and beyond this role and I am eternally grateful.

Julie Mastin.

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Abbreviations

ABRC	Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle
BAT	British Australian Telegraph
CAO	Colonial Architect's Office
CoW	Clerk of Works
MME	Melbourne Mining Exchange
NT	Northern Territory
NTAS	Northern Territory Archives Service
NTRS	Northern Territory Records Service
NTTG	Northern Territory Times and Gazette
PROV	Public Record Office Victoria
PWD	Public Works Department
SA	South Australia
SAA	South Australian Advertiser
SACWM	South Australia Chronicle and Weekly Mail
SAPP	South Australian Parliamentary Papers
SAR	South Australian Register
SRSA	State Records of South Australia
VEAS	Victorian Emigrants' Assistance Society
VIA	Victorian Institute of Architects

Imperial currency, weights, volumes and measures

All terms for currency, weights, volumes and measures in the text are given as for the time Knight lived during the pre-decimal, pre-metric nineteenth century. The figures below give the modern equivalents.

Currency

1 guinea = \$2.10

1 sovereign = \$2.00

£ (1 pound) = \$2.00

1s (1 shilling) = 10c

6d (sixpence) = 5c

1d (penny) = 1c

Weight

1 ton = 1.02 tonnes

1 pound = 0.453592 kilograms

1 ounce = 28.35 grams

Volume

1 gallon = 4.55 litres

Measure

1 mile = 1.61 kilometres

1 acre = 0.405 hectares

1 yard = 0.914 metres

1 foot = 30.5 centimetres

1 inch = 25.4 millimetres

Chapter One

Introduction

Prior to leaving England in 1851 as a young qualified architect and engineer, John George Knight may have expected to make his fortune at the current gold rush in Victoria. This was not to be, but he lived in Australia for over forty years and was employed in numerous and varied positions. Knight has justifiably earned his place in the history of both Victoria and the Northern Territory (NT) and the material researched for this thesis reveals a man considered outstanding in the eyes of his peers from both Melbourne and Palmerston.¹

Knight appears to have enjoyed a satisfactory life as an architect in Melbourne when working with the Board of Works and later in private practice, and he and his colleagues designed several substantial government buildings, churches and private homes. He was given the opportunity together with Peter Kerr to design the Houses of Parliament and supervise the initial stages of construction. By 1861 he was no longer working as an architect and dabbled in several fields before being offered the position of organising the Victorian Exhibition (1861); he then became secretary to the commissioners for the London Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1862. It was in this field of organisation that Knight's entrepreneurial skills were recognised as he later organised Victoria's exhibits for Dublin (1865), Paris (1867) and Sydney (1873).²

Apparently seldom doubting his own judgment, Knight frequently distrusted that of officialdom, especially when he resided in the Northern Territory. Journalist William Sowden, who was part of a parliamentary party trip to the Territory in 1882, proffered a description of how Knight related to people. Sowden saw Knight in action as host and tour guide and was aware of his contribution to the Territory,

¹ Palmerston was the capital of the Northern Territory until the name officially changed to Darwin from 1911.

² Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War*, 2001, p. 283.

calling him ‘the father, brother, uncle, aunt, and numerous other watchful relatives of the place’.³

In spite of possessing visible qualities for success, Knight failed in financial matters, an established career, and his marriage. In Melbourne he had earned excellent money, but was unable to capitalise on it. Research has shown Knight was a risk taker, venturing into less predictable fields including the share market, but through ill judgment or misinformation he was financially unsuccessful. Knight married a year after arriving in Melbourne. He and his wife Alice had nine children, eventually becoming estranged in 1873. Knight moved to the NT at this time and within three years, Alice had taken four of the children to England.

It appeared to be in desperation that in 1872, and 1873, Knight applied to the South Australian (SA) government for work in the NT (then under the jurisdiction of SA), being content to accept any civil servant position that suited his experience.⁴ Indeed, this move north by Knight has been considered incomprehensible by historians who wonder why he left Victoria. He seemed to have had a reasonably predictable future in Melbourne, and he had been involved with a society where intellectual thought was expounded. So why move, leaving his family, to journey north to the fledgling settlement of Palmerston that had only been developed since the arrival of surveyor George Woodroffe Goyder in 1869? Some possible explanations for what made him take this drastic step can be read in the body of the thesis.

Even before receiving confirmation of his appointment for the position of secretary to the government resident, Knight and his thirteen-year-old son Augustus Edward had sailed for the NT in September 1873.⁵ Although Knight appears to have taken advantage of all opportunities to be innovative in his professional activities in Melbourne, it was during his last almost nineteen years in the Territory that he felt the freedom to push bureaucracy as far as possible, taking upon himself a liberty to

³ William J. Sowden, *The Northern Territory As It Is: A Narrative of the South Australian Parliamentary Party's Trip and Full Description of the Northern Territory, its Settlements and Industries*, p. 129.

⁴ State Records of South Australia Letters received, annual single number series – Office of the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, Adelaide, [hereafter SRSA GRS/1/year/no], SRSA GRS/1/1872/1326, Letter 11 September 1872. Knight to Henry Ayers, Chief Secretary; SRSA GRS/1/1873/203, Letter 2 August 1873. Knight to Thomas Reynolds, Commissioner of Crown Land.

⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1873/256, Letter 1 September 1873. Knight to Thomas Reynolds,

do almost anything he thought would improve the common good. For these actions, he was only occasionally reprimanded.

When in the goldfields, according to Timothy Jones, ‘it was Knight who restored order to mining administration and brought back respect to his office and the law’.⁶ He established a hospital and personally treated the sick who presented with a variety of ailments, thus saving many lives. During his years in Palmerston, in which he held a variety of civil servant positions, Knight showed concern for the Chinese and Aboriginal people. Later, using prison labour he built sea baths below Fort Hill that gave the residents a safe swimming facility without worry from sharks and crocodiles.

In Palmerston, he promoted ideas for the future of the Territory with regard to the transcontinental railway. He again displayed his ability in organising the exhibits from the NT at two inter-colonial exhibitions. When as deputy sheriff he saw the merit in the local Aboriginal male prisoners’ drawings, he organised an exhibition of their work in the 1888 Centennial International Exhibition in Melbourne.⁷ Not only was this the first exhibition of Aboriginal art in Australia, but in the world.

Knight enjoyed company and organised various social events, being involved in a variety of plays, he also sang at dinners, arranged picnics, attended regattas and was involved in other sporting events, although not as a participant. During the latter part of his life in the Territory, he was joined by another of his sons, Walter, who worked for the British Australian Telegraph Company (BAT) office in Palmerston.

Working in the Territory was frustrating, not only for Knight but all civil servants because of ‘South Australia’s incompetence in managing its northern province [which] created many unnecessary difficulties for the early Territorians’.⁸ Kathy De La Rue considers this was due to the administration’s ‘inexperience [and] lack of a

⁶ Timothy Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory. The history of mining in the Northern Territory of Australia, 1873-1946*, p. 24.

⁷ Anita Angel, ‘Northern Territory “Gaol Art” in the Late Nineteenth Century’, pp. 26-41.

⁸ Kathy De La Rue, ‘Ruled by Remote Control: The Commonwealth’s Role in the History of Darwin’, p. 84.

consistent policy for the north and vacillations brought about by the frequent changes of government in Adelaide'.⁹

In 1890, Knight accepted the position of government resident, the highest office in the Territory. Unfortunately, this was at a time when the economic boom had waned and money was further restrained from SA. This economic depression affected all of Australia.¹⁰ He may have achieved more, but on 10 January 1892, after a bout of bronchitis and influenza, John George Knight died at the Government Residence. This was the only time a government resident (today known as the administrator) has died in office.

The thesis

The thesis is a continuous narrative proceeding in a chronological framework drawing from, and expanding on, previously written works and introducing newly researched material to offer the reader a greater explanation of Knight's life. The study places a special emphasis on the man as a person and how he approached life and his family rather than simply trying to find his place in history. While the thesis does not pretend to be the definitive account of the political, economic and social history of the places and times in which Knight lived, it is seen as an adjunct to the work of several earlier historians, such as Geoffrey Serle's excellent coverage of Melbourne in *The Golden Age: A history of the colony of Victoria, 1851-1861*, and Andrew Brown-May's in-depth study of Melbourne street life in *Melbourne Street Life: The Itinerary of Our Days*. For the NT's history, the thesis complements the work of Jack Cross who covers both SA and its dependency, the NT, in *Great Central State: The Foundation of the Northern Territory*. Meanwhile, Alan Powell's *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*, encompasses many similar elements of the history of the Territory, although Knight receives only a brief mention. P.F. Donovan's *A Land Full of Possibilities: A History of South Australia's Northern Territory* is another great record of the early history of the Territory.

⁹ De La Rue, 'Ruled by Remote Control', p. 84.

¹⁰ David Carment, Helen J. Wilson and Barbara James, *Territorian: The Life and Work of John George Knight*, p. 56.

Practically nothing is known of Knight's early life in London other than some genealogical material compiled in 1998 by descendants of Knight's brother, George William Knight. Several discrepancies were noted in this genealogical material, which is only used here if the information is backed by a reliable source.

Knight was a prolific letter writer, but with few personal or extended family papers extant, much of his and his family's lives remain unknown. Newspaper articles have been relied upon to tell an appreciable part of Knight's story, but regrettably there is little in these relating to his wife or children. It must also be recalled that reliance on newspapers does not guarantee that what is written is actually the truth.

A considerable amount of Knight's history is missing due to the lack of personal documents. The official records show only the public face of this man, but it was possible to gain some insight into Knight's thoughts by the tone of the writing, as at times he did not conform to the orthodox approach used by most civil servants to their superiors.

During the research for this thesis, there has been considerable difficulty in locating primary sources; when material was located on microfilm, it was often difficult to read the documents as some were illegible. With the advent of Trove¹¹ the ease of researching newspapers proved a blessing. Earlier writers did not have the benefit of this luxury.

Biography as history

This thesis is a critical biography, written in a narrative form, and is a thoroughly researched and realistic account of my subject's life. History, as described by Barbara Caine, comes alive and is better understood when a biographical approach is taken and the subject is placed in a known context and the importance of his or her life during those times is explained and explored.¹² Nevertheless, biography has been dismissed by some scholars as a lesser history or 'as an unsatisfactory medium for the historian'.¹³ As a contested field of history, biography is considered by some 'as

¹¹ The digitised newspaper portal of the National Library of Australia.

¹² Barbara Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 1.

¹³ Barbara Caine, 'Review of Susan Magarey and Kerrie Round's *Living History: Essays on History and Biography*', p. 24.1.

a form of historical writing' that does not have the 'same capacity to provide a full and sophisticated interpretation of the past as do other forms of historical writing'.¹⁴

Caine explains that this is not a recent debate as:

questions about the similarities and differences between biography and history and the appropriate relationship between them have been debated over thousands of years from classical times to the present.¹⁵

Paul Kendall considers that biography is:

one of the oldest forms of literary expression, it seeks to re-create in words the life of a human being – as understood from the historical or personal perspective of the author – by drawing upon all available evidence, including that retained in memory as well as written, oral, and pictorial material.¹⁶

Biography is further defined by Birgitte Possing as encompassing 'more than a pure life depiction', as it is 'both the events of a life, the narrative of a life, and the interpretation of it's [sic] characteristics'.¹⁷ Historical biographies have existed since antiquity in the west being first written by the Greeks and Romans and nearly always of 'great men'.¹⁸

During the Greek and Roman eras, history was considered of high status because of its concern with the 'important legal, political and military deeds and actions' of the particular historic period.¹⁹ At this time, biography was also of considerable importance, as it illuminated 'the lives of very significant public men'.²⁰ One notable early Greek biographer, Plutarch, points out what he considered to be the difference between history and biography with the following words:

For I am writing biography, not history, and the truth is that the most brilliant exploits often tell us nothing of the virtues or vices of the men who performed them, while on the other hand a chance remark or a joke may reveal far more of a man's character than the mere feat of winning battle in which thousands fall, or of marshalling great armies, or laying siege to cities.²¹

Caine considers Plutarch's approach, with its emphasis on the character of the individual, as relegating biography to a lower status than history. Unfortunately, this

¹⁴ Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Paul Murray Kendall, 'Biography', p. 1.

¹⁷ Birgitte Possing, 'Biography: Historical', p. 2.

¹⁸ Possing, 'Biography: Historical', p. 2.

¹⁹ Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 7.

²⁰ Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 8.

²¹ John Paul Adams, 'Plutarch on Biography', p. 1.

distinction between history and biography was ‘generally accepted up until the end of the sixteenth century’,²² and has persisted in some quarters until modern times. Nevertheless, many scholars today understand the importance of a biography (such as this thesis) that covers the subject’s private and public life and also ties it in with other historical events and times.

Before the demise of the early Greek and Roman writing of biographies, a tradition of hagiography began from the second century.²³ This over-praising of the subject was particularly prevalent during the Middle Ages with the emergence of martyr biographies glorifying the lives of saints. The saints’ lives were held up by the Church as moral examples to be followed and:

it was customary to read aloud at divine office and in the monastic refectory ... biographies of the principal saints on their feast days.²⁴

Hagiography is defined in most dictionaries as the study of the lives of saints, but the word has come to have the additional meaning of an uncritical biography that treats its subject with undue reverence. Obviously, no self-respecting biographer today would wish their work to be labelled hagiography. This matter is discussed further below.

Meanwhile, a change occurred during the Renaissance (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries) when a secular approach of ‘liberal individualism in society’ began.²⁵ The early seventeenth century saw Francis Bacon argue the importance of individual lives being within, and not distinct from, history. The appeal of Bacon’s approach was more widely accepted in the eighteenth century.²⁶ During that century, Samuel Johnson and other writers distinguished between an accurate biography and one of lesser value that was written along hagiographical lines.²⁷ In 1791, James Boswell wrote *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, which was a ‘pioneering biography of the era’:

as it was based on empirical material in the form of letters, private papers, conversations, interviews and personal observation of Samuel Johnson’s comportment. This was the first

²² Caine, *Biography and History*, pp. 8-9.

²³ ‘Hagiography’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

²⁴ ‘Hagiography’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

²⁵ Possing, ‘Biography: Historical’, p. 3.

²⁶ Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 9.

²⁷ Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 31.

biography to construct a nuanced, candid personality focusing on the character of the protagonist.²⁸

Nevertheless, the development of biography was an uneven affair. Writing of the late eighteenth century, Posing says that ‘in the historical biography of the time, the history of human achievement was fundamentally the story of imposing male heroes’.²⁹ Thomas Carlyle’s lectures in 1841, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, and other writings of the nineteenth century, are considered by Posing as continuing the pattern for biographical books to be written on the lives of ‘great men’. Of the differences between Carlyle and Boswell and Johnson’s interpretation, Posing writes of Carlyle:

He claimed historical biography as essentially the chronicle of an individual’s life journey whereas Boswell and Johnson had claimed it an art of human portraiture. This difference of perception illustrates the eternal question on history versus biography that has hung over historical biography from antiquity to the present days.³⁰

In Benjamin Disraeli’s semi-autobiographical work written in 1832, *Contarini* (Disraeli’s father) advises his son to do the following:

Rise early and regularly, and read for three hours. Read the memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz ... read works of that kind. Read no history—nothing but biography for that is life without theory.³¹

It is a strong statement clearly implying that biography is more important than history. However, when Disraeli mentioned ‘theory’ it is impossible to know what particular theory he had in mind, but presumably it was not the ‘Great Man Theory’ supported by Carlyle, as Contarini appears to be advising his son to read about ‘really great men’. In fact, most biographies of this period belonged to this genre – where the lives of great men were the moral example to be followed.

From the late eighteenth century several different theories came to have a greater impact on the development and writing of historical biographies. One of the most influential theories was that of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, with their main hypothesis being ‘the importance of class struggle within history’.³² Marx was vehement that man himself had no bearing on his thoughts, but that this only

²⁸ Posing, ‘Biography: Historical’, p. 3.

²⁹ Posing, ‘Biography: Historical’, p. 3.

³⁰ Posing, ‘Biography: Historical,’ pp. 3-4.

³¹ Benjamin Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming: An Autobiography*, p. 34.

³² Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 17.

occurred through his existence in society. As Caine says, ‘Marxism directed attention away from the study of individuals and from biography’ and ‘Marx rejected absolutely the kind of “great man” approach to history articulated by Carlyle’.³³ Strong adherence to this approach would have meant the death of biography, but that did not happen. It did not even signal the demise of the ‘great man’ and, in fact, the situation may have even got worse. Many biographies of famous men were written during the early twentieth century, and many of those could best be classed as hagiographies, especially those about heroes of the British Empire, including explorers, and military and political figures. These biographies glorified their subjects: personal flaws were concealed, and public discussion of controversy was not entertained.

Another important theorist for the development of biography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Sigmund Freud. The psychological theories and interpretations he popularised have been used by several biographers as tools to expose their subjects’ personalities and behaviour.³⁴ No ‘Freudian analysis’ of Knight has been employed in this thesis, but Freud’s ideas on psychoanalysis were only one aspect of the wider changes that modernism had on society. In literature, some ‘modernist’ authors experimented with ‘works [that] rejected chronological and narrative continuity’, which was a break with traditional ways of writing.³⁵ It was also a style of writing at odds with the characteristics of academic historical biography as generally understood today.

Nevertheless, Leon Edel, one of the most prominent biographers and theorists of the mid-twentieth century, is described by Caine as a ‘modernist’. His approach, she says, is characterised by an:

insistence on scepticism from the researcher ... to find the untruths and evasions which would reveal the hidden truth about his subject.³⁶

Edel’s model does not seem to vary much from general academic historical research, and rightly so. In this thesis, the aim is always to tell the ‘real’ story as far as possible. Knight is neither excused for his deficiencies nor over-praised for his

³³ Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 17.

³⁴ Kendall, ‘Biography’, p. 3.

³⁵ ‘Modernism’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

³⁶ Caine, *Biography and History*, p. 87.

achievements. He is not treated as a ‘great man’ as per the Carlyle or British Empire examples discussed above, but the question remains, when does an historical personage become ‘great’ and cease to be ‘ordinary’?

The influential Annales School of French historians ‘promoted a new form of history’ in the first half of the twentieth century:

replacing the study of leaders with the lives of ordinary people and replacing examination of politics, diplomacy, and wars with inquiries into climate, demography, agriculture, commerce, technology, transportation, and communication, as well as social groups and mentalities.³⁷

The Annales School historians also broadened the range of history and pioneered a number of approaches:

They ... wrote about problems over ‘the long term’ ... They also insisted on breaking down barriers between disciplines, and consciously drew on the methodologies of other disciplines, in particular: geography, social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, economics, and psychology, and also linguistics.³⁸

The approach of the Annales School of historians was a wide-ranging one indeed. While it cannot be claimed that the current thesis is written in strict accord with the teachings of the school, it has been informed by the general lesson to take all relevant factors into account wherever possible. Meanwhile, in consideration of the Annales School’s desire to ‘replac[e] the study of leaders with the lives of ordinary people’ it must be acknowledged that Knight achieved the highest post in the Northern Territory hierarchy and he must be considered a ‘leader’ of sorts. But he was, in many ways, also an ‘ordinary’ man. He was certainly subject to the whims and wiles of his superiors throughout his career.

In 2013, Mirjana Knežević described how the biographical tradition had spanned the ages and emerged in the twenty-first century. There is, she says, a:

new school of biography featuring iconoclasts, scientific analysts and fictional biographers. The form of biography has also consistently changed parallel to its role and function within society, reflecting its status as a genre among other literary forms.³⁹

Where does this leave critical historical biography? Possing states that:

³⁷ ‘Annales school’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

³⁸ David Moon, ‘Fernand Braudel and the Annales School’, p. 1.

³⁹ Mirjana M. Knežević, ‘Postmodernist Approach to Biography: The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde by Peter Ackroyd’, p. 47.

already during the 20th century, historical biography as a field of interest had developed from a conscious mythologisation of prominent, historical figures to critical, manifold storytelling of public, national, transnational, and anonymous historical lives.⁴⁰

Historical biographies actually became extremely popular with the general public in the early twenty-first century. Possing considers this to be because:

the historical biography became part of the democratic project in an increasingly globalised community. Historical biography expresses interest in the individual, and it's [sic] place in culture and society.⁴¹

David Ellis writes that biography 'can sometimes offer an inspiring example of how life ought to be lived'. Interestingly, he further states that 'at a time when the triumph of "Theory" in the universities has widened the gap between the academic world and the rest of society, biographies represent one of the few remaining points of interaction'.⁴² As with the earlier example provided by Disraeli, one is left wondering just what 'theory' Ellis was thinking about. Few universities teach how to write historical biographies or offer 'specific training in the all-round study of biography' at universities or higher educational institutions.⁴³ Academic historians and biographers do not necessarily rely on overt use of theory in their writing, but they certainly should uphold the standards of the discipline of history in relation to thorough research, considered interpretation of sources, full referencing and so on.

How true is this for the many popular biographies to be found in bookshops, newsstands and on the internet today (many of which contain no bibliographies or other references), and how many of the popular biographers have received the training of a professional academic historian? It is easy to believe that the lingering disdain for biography held by a (hopefully, diminishing) number of academic historians is due to the belief that a great majority of the biographical publications available today are simply sub-standard. This is unfair to the writer of any genuine academic biography.

⁴⁰ Possing, 'Biography: Historical', p. 7.

⁴¹ Possing, 'Biography: Historical', p. 9.

⁴² David Ellis, *Literary Lives: Biography and the Search for Understanding*, p. 1.

⁴³ Possing, 'Biography: Historical', p. 8. The Australian National University has a National Centre for Biography and there are likely to be other examples, but these are exceptions.

Stanley Wolpert argues that hagiography is possibly the hardest trap for a biographer to avoid as the subject is usually selected because they are admired by the author.⁴⁴ This may not be true for all popular biographers, who appear in many cases to write to fulfil the demands of others, yet the results still often resemble hagiography. On the other hand, another genre of popular biography takes the opposite approach where the author latches onto any hint of scandal and sensation related to their subject. Autobiographies, in the meantime, are no less popular than biographies. Autobiographers can presumably relate their own stories better than anyone else, but there may be instances where the description of an incident, or the explanation offered for a particular decision, are not truthful ones. In writing a biography and ‘consulting the contemporary record’ it can sometimes be found that what had been written in an autobiography was indeed a lie.⁴⁵

Today, when writing about a living subject the author could be tempted to take a hagiographical approach, thus endeavouring to please and flatter their subject. Hagiography can also readily apply to someone long since dead (such as Knight), especially where flattering material abounds, so the author must be steadfast in their resolve not to eulogise. In my case, when reading accounts of Knight in newspapers, the reports portray him as a popular and outstanding man, being lauded by people. This continual praise made it difficult not to fall into the trap of writing a hagiographical account. The risk was heightened because, as Ann Curthoys declares, ‘[m]any biographers ... fall in love with their subjects’.⁴⁶ Hagiography is possibly the easiest writing to adopt, as the reading of one’s protagonist being continually acclaimed can become the normal writing mode. It is important that at all times, the writer remains critical of their subject.

In some concluding remarks on the subject of biography as history, it is interesting to compare my thesis with other biographies that have dealt with people who held similar positions in the Northern Territory as did my protagonist, Knight. The three biographies I consider are those of John Anderson Gilruth, the first administrator of the NT under Commonwealth rule (1912-1919); C.L.A. (Aubrey) Abbott, administrator (1937-1946); and Hilda Abbott, the influential wife of Aubrey Abbott.

⁴⁴ Stanley Wolpert, ‘Biography as History: A Personal Reflection’ , p. 410.

⁴⁵ Ellis, *Literary Lives*, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁶ Ann Curthoys, *How to write history that people want to read*, p. 189.

Gilruth: A Complex Man. John Anderson Gilruth, First Commonwealth Administrator of the Northern Territory, 1912-1919, is a recent publication written by Ted Egan, who is himself an ex-administrator (2003-2007), albeit one who possessed none of the governmental powers of his subject. The book is a comprehensively researched study of Gilruth, but Egan states that there were very few personal sources available, as none of the principals in his story kept diaries, wrote revealing letters or compiled memoirs. This is similar to my own experience in writing on Knight. However, while there was little in the way of personal papers concerning Gilruth, Egan seems to have uncovered a considerable amount of information to analyse and comment on; another similarity with my experience.

One curious point is that in the title Egan refers to Gilruth as a complex man, but in the text there is no explanation as to Gilruth's complexity. Perhaps Egan is referring to Gilruth's well-known tendency to behave autocratically. In an almost apology, Egan argues that Gilruth's style of leadership was not suited to Darwin in those troubled times; however, he emphasises that Gilruth was highly respected throughout his many years in veterinary science, and as chief of the division of animal health at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR the precursor to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, or CSIRO).

Although Egan has a Master of Arts degree in history, he states several times in his book that he considers himself to be 'a social commentator rather than a historian'.⁴⁷ This seems to be an odd stance to take, but Egan may have reasoned that it would free him from the usual restraints of the discipline. Other historians have noted Gilruth's arrogance, insensitivity and autocratic style,⁴⁸ but Egan downplays these matters in his book. Egan's writing clearly shows his admiration for Gilruth and offers a type of deference to him even though there is no obvious over-laudatory wording. For example, throughout the book, Egan in the main refers to his subject as 'Dr Gilruth' or 'Professor Gilruth', whereas the name 'Gilruth' would have sufficed. It is obvious that Egan holds Gilruth in high esteem and takes pains to offer

⁴⁷ For example, Egan, *Gilruth*, p. 12.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Alan Powell, *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*, pp. 144-145, 155; David Carment, *Looking At Darwin's Past: Material Evidence of European Settlement in Tropical Australia*, p. 11; and Steven Farram, *Charles James Kirkland: The Life and Times of a Pioneer Newspaperman in the Top End of Australia*, pp. 61, 73.

accolades where he thinks they are warranted, and at times he writes in Gilruth's defence. Egan's work verges on the panegyric throughout, and in this regard is highly differentiated from my own study, in which impartiality and objectivity have been adhered to at all times, as should be the case in an academic study.

A stark contrast to Egan's study of Gilruth is the PhD thesis written by Peter Elder, 'Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott: Countryman or Colonial Governor?' It is quite obvious from the tone of the writing throughout the thesis that Elder does not particularly like, admire, or in any way respect Abbott. Nevertheless, this is a scholarly biography in which Elder tries to explain Abbott's conduct and his responses to the times he lived in. Elder looks at Abbott's mental outlook, which he says was shaped by his family background among the squatters; the upper middle class. Abbott's attitude, says Elder, was aloof, rigidly conservative and was that of a one-eyed surrogate Englishman in regard to Chinese and Aboriginal people.

Elder refers to the categories of 'countryman' and 'colonial governor' to describe the roles that Abbott took on, which were more like play acting. Abbott arranged the evacuation of people from all over the Northern Territory in his role of fellow citizen, but he acted like a colonial governor when he exerted power in breaking a strike. He also dressed for the roles. In Elder's opinion Abbott was an unremarkable man who was promoted beyond his ability. He could also be arrogant and insensitive. Elder rarely offers any accolades for Abbott, but he does give him credit for setting mechanisms in place for the future path leading to Northern Territory self-government. There is definitely not a trace of hagiographical writing in Elder's work, as I hope can truthfully be said of my own study of Knight, but it seems clear that Elder was never at risk of 'falling in love' with Abbott.

Perhaps sitting between the two above-mentioned biographies is the recently published book, *The Intrepid Hilda Abbott: Author, Designer, Red Cross Officer, Political Wife, 1890-1984* by Pamela Oliver. Oliver had access to an abundance of research material that included: diaries, letters, official and personal correspondence, books by Hilda Abbott (published and unpublished), newspaper articles and a semi-autobiography that includes fictitious people and events. Abbott was not only the wife of a Northern Territory administrator, but a talented and strong working woman in her own right, as the title of the book purports.

Although Oliver displays a mainly critical and balanced approach in her writing on Hilda Abbott, the majority of the book offers very positive aspects of her life and is possibly a little rose-coloured here and there. It is clear that Oliver has enormous respect for Abbott for her capacity to have undertaken extremely arduous tasks throughout her working life. In a similar way, I developed respect for Knight for his ability to take on a variety of diverse tasks. But Hilda Abbott had to deal with different problems to Knight.

Hilda's daughter once described her mother as 'a strong and forceful character but basically kind and understanding', whereas her husband's private secretary recalled her as both formidable and cold.⁴⁹ Oliver acknowledges that as a well-educated, knowledgeable, upper middle-class and formidable woman Hilda Abbot was seen by many as a snob. The same was true for her husband and Alan Powell argues that the Abbotts 'never lost sight of their own social eminence in the northern community',⁵⁰ which probably contributed to a negative perception by others. It is mainly in the conclusion that Oliver offers her opinion that both Hilda and Aubrey Abbott had been ill-judged by the majority of people both in Darwin and elsewhere. In this regard, she appears to be on similar ground to Egan in relation to Gilruth. However, Gilruth has had few other champions, but other historians have agreed with Oliver that the Abbotts may have been harshly judged by Darwin residents on occasions.⁵¹

To return to my own thesis, there is evidence that various cliques existed in Palmerston (Darwin) during Knight's time there, but he generally seems to have avoided incurring any long-term enemies. As related in the following section, Knight's life has to date received limited attention from other scholars. Whereas Egan and Oliver found themselves having to take a position which looks like a defence of their subject, this was rarely so in relation to my study of Knight, because, as stated earlier, most contemporary reports of Knight are flattering. If anything, my battle has been to constantly look beyond the positive statements about my subject and to endeavour to maintain objectivity and balance. It is only through rigorous adherence to such principles (amongst others) that we can assure that the biography presented can also be accepted as history.

⁴⁹ Alan Powell, *The Shadow's Edge: Australia's Northern War*, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Powell, *The Shadow's Edge*, p. 13.

⁵¹ Powell, *The Shadow's Edge*, p. 89.

Literature review

Knight has been of interest to several historians, especially in the NT, as he was one of the best-known inhabitants in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Jack Cross, in *Great Central State*, refers to Knight as ‘perhaps the most brilliant official’ in the NT.⁵² Two other books dealing with the history of the NT that mention Knight are Ernestine Hill’s *The Territory* and Douglas Lockwood’s *The Front Door: Darwin, 1869-1969*. These books cover a hundred years of NT history. While entertaining, they in part fancifully relate various episodes of the early Territory life and are certainly not strictly factual. Both books were written by journalists and not historians. What they relate of Knight is not always literally correct, so neither book could be considered a suitable academic source. Moreover, neither provides references or a bibliography.

Knight receives a chapter in Kathy De La Rue’s *The Evolution of Darwin, 1869-1911: A history of the Northern Territory’s capital city during the years of South Australian administration*. This book is scholarly researched and chronologically engages the reader in a brief outline of how the settlement of Palmerston came to be, then details each of the ten government residents’ terms of office and how they approached their responsibility including the various stages of Territory growth and development with the occasional backward slide. The majority of this book was of great importance to my work as it gave an overview of the Territory and how civil servants were expected to work under rather arduous circumstances while being governed from nearly two thousand miles away. In the twelve pages devoted to Knight, De La Rue delivers a condensed story of Knight, ignoring most of his early years in Melbourne to concentrate on his days in the Territory. The chapter offers an excellent understanding of important aspects of Knight as a civil servant and briefly as government resident.

Three works on Knight by David Carment, Helen Wilson and Barbara James were completed in the early 1990s: the unpublished heritage report ‘John George Knight: A Biography and Architectural Assessment’; the book *Territorian: The Life and Work of John George Knight* and the published paper *The Father, Brother, Uncle*,

⁵² Cross, *Great Central State*, p. 323.

Aunt and numerous other watchful relatives of the place. At times the three works overlap by incorporating very similar text, although they do cover different times of Knight's life.

With reference to only one of the three – 'John George Knight' – it can be said that Knight's Melbourne years are well researched and the report offers an invaluable, although brief overview of Knight's life in chapter one. The second chapter is a more in-depth study of Knight's years when he left Melbourne to journey to the NT and covers the numerous positions and what he achieved until his demise in January 1892. Both chapters offered me the opportunity to build upon these authors' research.

Another book by the same authors (this time acting as compilers), *The Real Live Resident: The annotated letters of John George Knight 1889-1892*, is devoted to nine family letters, which are all that are known at this stage to have survived. Even though few in number, the personal letters were vital as they conveyed a brief insight to the man himself.

A publication purportedly on the history of the famed Athenæum Club of which Knight was the first proprietor was written by journalists John Pacini and Graeme Adamson.⁵³ This was read in anticipation of learning more about Knight's role in the club, but unfortunately the contents of this book are not referenced and Pacini and Adamson admit they wove an unknown history into fanciful stories. The book is of limited use for academic purposes.

In contrast, Paul de Serville's *Athenæum Club Melbourne: A new history of the early years 1868-1918*, offers comprehensive background material that was useful for the thesis as Knight is given considerable coverage being an integral part of the early story. De Serville gives a factual account of Knight's many ventures in Melbourne, and although much of his writing is not referenced, it agreed with my researched data. De Serville brings in the social history of early Melbourne and the important role Knight played in setting up this institution.

⁵³ John Pacini and Graeme Adamson, *Windows on Collins Street: A History of the Athenæum Club, Melbourne.*

Early Melbourne society comes to life with de Serville's *Pounds and Pedigrees: The Upper Class in Victoria 1850-80*. This was good background material for Melbourne's upper class: a society Knight would have occasionally interacted with.

Knight's work as an architect has been included in two theses. The first by Donald Lyall⁵⁴ presents a good overview of the architectural profession including details of each architect for the first twenty-five years in Melbourne including eight years of Knight's time in this field. Lyall's description of how the Public Works Department (PWD) operated offers an understanding into the structure of such an early organisation and Knight's various roles including when he was in private practice. Lyall gives an honest account of Knight's involvement in the formation of the Victorian Institute of Architects (VIA). The other thesis by Nicholas Chlebnikowski⁵⁵ briefly also tells of Knight's involvement in the PWD and in private practice. He then recounts Knight and Kerr's engagement in the early stages of the construction of the houses of parliament up to 1860 when the government decided not to proceed any further. This work was useful, although poorly referenced.

Knight is mentioned briefly in several other books relating to architecture and when he established the VIA. J.M. Freeland's *The Making of a Profession: a History of the Growth and Work of the Architectural Institutes in Australia*, gives an in depth account of the first six years of the VIA with Knight as president. This was important information that guided me through Knight's input into the many facets of building regulations and the papers he presented and eventually the indifference of members.

Knight himself compiled several articles in books and pamphlets, which included the following: *A few particulars supplementary to the catalogue of the products of the Colony of Victoria, Australia*, 1862; *A Treatise on Australian building stones*, 1864; *The Australasian Colonies at the International Exhibition, London, 1862. Extracts from the reports of the jurors and other information taken from official sources*, 1865; *Companion to the Official Catalogue: Guide to the International Exhibition of 1866*, 1866; *Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia, Melbourne, 1866-67: Official Record, containing Introduction, Catalogues, Reports and awards of the Jurors and*

⁵⁴ Donald Sutherland Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession in Melbourne 1835 to 1860'.

⁵⁵ Nicholas Chlebnikowski, 'The historic development of the building of Parliament House, Melbourne'.

Essays and Statistics on the Social and Economic Resources of the Australian Colonies, 1867; *Description of the natural and industrial products of Queensland*, 1867; *Narrative of the visit of His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh to the colony of Victoria, Australia*, 1868; *Victoria at the Intercolonial Exhibition of New South Wales 1873: extracts from the Sydney press, summary of the objects exhibited, and awards of the jurors*, 1873; *The Northern Territory of South Australia*, 1880, and finally a brief outline of the Territory in, *South Australia in 1887: a handbook for the Adelaide Jubilee International Exhibition*, 1887.

Knight's engagement with exhibitions is evident in these writings. It was of interest to note what awards in various categories had been received by Knight and his brother William. In the book, *The Northern Territory of South Australia* edited by Knight, he displays his thorough understanding of the Territory by offering a rough sketch of physical landscape and all that entailed, the history of the settlement, the flora and fauna, building materials and of course the goldfields, in addition to studies by others. These descriptions were extremely useful as the work appears to be an honest appraisal of the Territory.⁵⁶

As Knight's greatest expertise was possibly in organising exhibits, he was given good exposure in Peter Hoffenberg's *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibition from the Crystal Palace to the Great War*. This book was of significant importance in writing about Knight's role as an organiser of exhibitions. Hoffenberg describes the importance of these grand exhibitions of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Knight considered this was the most practical way of advertising the products of various colonies.

Research

A few South Australian parliamentary papers and debates were sourced from the Mortlock Library, but it was the State Records of South Australia, the State Records of Victoria, the State Library of Victoria and the Northern Territory Archives that were the main sources of information. Other than written accounts of Knight by other authors, the most heavily relied upon material for the narrative has been extracted

⁵⁶ J.G. Knight (ed.), *The Northern Territory of South Australia*.

from various newspaper accounts of the day in Victoria, NT and SA. More information was found in on-line websites and databases.

Some information has been gleaned from three of Knight's descendants, although practically nothing in the way of documentation was known, which was unfortunate. Thankfully, a few important pieces of memorabilia, gifts to Knight and his wife from the Duke of Edinburgh during his 1867-1868 visit to Melbourne, are still in the possession of a descendant in New Zealand. Photographs of these gifts are shown in the thesis.

Thesis structure

The chapters following the Introduction are arranged chronologically and at times are arranged by theme within the chapter. There are three chapters covering Knight's time in Melbourne. Perhaps the most complexing question is that no-one previously had been able to offer a satisfactory explanation for Knight leaving Melbourne to live so far away in the Northern Territory. This thesis can offer both arguments and answers to this question and many others. Where possible throughout all chapters, Knight's family is mentioned. Knight occupied many positions in the Northern Territory and six chapters address these. The conclusion follows.

Chapter synopsis

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two 1852-1860 briefly covers the little known history of Knight's early years in England together with a possible motive for immigrating to Australia in 1851. Melbourne was on the verge of becoming one of the wealthiest places in the world through the gold rush so offered opportunities to anyone willing to work. Knight adjusted well from Victorian England to colonial life in Melbourne, arriving as a mature young man, leaving behind family problems where he possibly played second fiddle to his favoured older brother. Without family restraints, he was able to later display elements of a latent entrepreneurial talent in several areas. He quickly found his niche in the PWD as a young clerk of works, rising through the ranks to being given the responsibility of architect and supervisor for building the Houses of Parliament.

Before this eventuated he combined being a public servant and a partner in a successful private architectural practice. Among his other enterprises at this particular time was establishing an institution of architects. There were many social events in Melbourne in which Knight was involved, as money flowed from gold discoveries and people lived well.

Chapter Three 1861-1867 introduces his personal life and recounts his leaving the architectural field. Even though Knight's brother George had arrived in Melbourne in 1857, he is only briefly mentioned in this chapter. Knight became involved in national and international exhibitions where his entrepreneurial skills were well appreciated. He travelled to England with his family to take charge of the Victorian Exhibition and remained in England for three years and became involved in an emigration society. On returning to Australia, Knight dabbled with various inventions and commercial business ventures before being called upon once more to organise the exhibits for the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866, with some exhibits intended for the World Fair in Paris in 1867. An event that would have impacted greatly on him and his family was that his brother-in-law, a young Sydney dentist, had murdered his mistress's husband. Additional to this family tragedy was the brief imprisonment of his wife's stepfather for insolvency.

Knight's final years in Melbourne are recorded in Chapter Four 1867-1873. These years were rather fragmented for Knight and his family, undoubtedly still dealing with the murder and its ramifications. Perhaps because he was only indirectly linked to these episodes, Knight had not been initially excluded in the business world and he was offered part-time work at the University of Melbourne and given the role of agent to the Royal Commission for the preparation of the 1868 visit of Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria. In the following year he compiled a book from newspaper accounts on the prince's visit.

Some city businessmen then invited Knight to become the proprietor of a gentlemen's club. Knight was involved with the Athenæum Club for about three years, but sold the business in 1871. This may have been the result of him becoming an insolvent in the same year. Luckily, Knight was again appointed secretary for the 1873 Intercolonial Exhibition in Sydney. After undertaking several more ventures, he wrote to the SA government for a position in the NT. Being unsuccessful the first

time, he applied once more and was given the role of secretary and accountant to the government resident and supervisor of works.

Chapter Five 1873-1876 gives a brief overview of the formation of the NT and the early settlement of Palmerston. Knight sailed to the Territory together with his oldest son, arriving shortly before the new government resident. Soon after Knight's arrival, the first commercial newspaper began printing.

The Territory was decidedly different to Melbourne, but Knight quickly adapted to SA's expectations and took a stand when he thought it was required. He offered his opinion in lengthy and comprehensive reports on buildings and made a contribution to the administration and architectural development in those early days. Knight was given the job of gathering material from the Territory to be part of the SA Exhibition for the Melbourne Intercolonial in 1875. Regrettably, by 1875 the government had decided to amalgamate various positions and cut salaries. Knight was asked to accept a reduced salary and retain the position of secretary and accountant. He refused and travelled south to Melbourne, then on to Adelaide where he looked for employment. Finding the vacancy for warden of the goldfields, Knight applied, was appointed, and sailed back to the Territory.

The years 1876-1879 are dealt with in Chapter Six. This is an account of Knight's time as warden of the goldfields, where he reportedly restored order to the mining administration.⁵⁷ Back in the 1860s Knight had written a treatise on building stones and had considerable knowledge of minerals. Knight became correspondent for the Territory's newspaper, the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, covering the happenings in the many mining districts. He also wrote under the non-de-plume of Alonzo Brown, relating personal tales and amusing anecdotes.

Aware of the lack of medical care in the goldfields, Knight had the government buy an old hotel, which he turned into a hospital, diligently attending personally to sick men with a variety of illnesses. While in the country, and adding to his workload, Knight became a special magistrate to deal with legal matters in the goldfields. By 1879 Knight was weary and requested leave, which was granted and he travelled

⁵⁷ T.G. Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory: The history of mining in the Northern Territory of Australia, 1873-1946*.

south, returning to the Territory still as chief warden but no longer living in the goldfields.

Chapter Seven 1880-1883 opens with the return of Knight to Palmerston while still retaining his office as chief warden, which he continued to hold until 1886. Knight accepted various other posts, these being deputy-sheriff, government statistician, clerk of the licensing bench, clerk of the local court, curator of the property of prisoners in and for the NT and later crown prosecutor.

This dramatically increased his workload but as deputy sheriff, he was permitted to use prison labour, allowing him to create architectural achievements such as safe swimming sea baths and the terracing of the Government Residence. Around this time, he was organising the social and sporting scene and was involved in many events. Palmerston town was growing and becoming more prosperous. Knight was asked to design and construct a town hall that was opened in 1883. Knight's own accommodation was crumbling around him, so he requested money to build a house on crown land.

Chapter Eight 1884-1886 reveals how Government Resident James Langdon Parsons arrived in Palmerston while Knight continued all his civil servant positions as described in the previous chapter. Knight did some architectural work in the private sector and was supervisor of a commodious bank building; then he and surveyor McMinn worked on the courthouse verandah. Other buildings were erected at this time but it is not clear how much involvement Knight had in them. One building he is known to have designed and supervised was that of the Fannie Bay gaol infirmary. Money was granted to Knight for the construction of his own house, which was undertaken using prison labour. His style was distinctive, deliberately designing his house (the first two storey one in Palmerston) to suit the tropical climate. The social scene continued to be of importance to Knight and the local residents.

Knight was called upon to work for the Adelaide Jubilee in 1887 and the Melbourne Centennial in 1888. Chapter Nine 1887-1889 describes Knight's involvement in these exhibitions, this being work he well understood and excelled in. For a considerable time in Adelaide, he was unwell suffering from erysipelas although this did not stop him from the continual organising of the exhibits. Knight himself

exhibited several rock and building materials with some bricks from the early settlement of Port Essington. The Adelaide newspapers praised Knight for the design of the Northern Territory's novelty court and the exhibits.

Knight travelled to Melbourne in July 1888 to take charge of the Territory Court. In Melbourne, he organised drawings by prisoners from Fannie Bay gaol to be displayed. This was the first public exhibition of Australian Aboriginal art anywhere in the world. Knight had throughout his time in the Northern Territory demonstrated 'an interest and concern for, *all* the inhabitants of the Northern Territory, and this extended to the Aborigines'.⁵⁸

Chapter Ten 1890-1892 covers Knight's final years. Although he had considered retirement, this was not to be. He eventually accepted the role of acting government resident together with that of judge, when they were made vacant in 1890. When both positions became permanent, Knight accepted because the inducement of more money would have been impossible to refuse, and the status of being government resident would have been exceedingly difficult for a man like Knight to decline.

Knight settled well into being government resident, enjoying redecorating the Residence and even paying for decorations and furniture from his own pocket. He was a generous host, entertaining a variety of people but he was well aware he was spending money he did not have, as he had accepted both posts at a reduced salary. Knight continued to have a considerable interest in mining and had several shares, mostly in companies that continued to fail.

When Knight produced his first report as government resident, he expressed concern for what should be the future undertakings, offering ideas on how to improve matters in the Territory.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, he had little time to achieve much, as a recession had hit Australia and the government in Adelaide requested him to cut costs and arrange the retrenchment of men. With very little money allocated for spending in the Territory, Knight's effectiveness was dramatically curtailed.

⁵⁸ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 100.

⁵⁹ South Australian Parliamentary Papers [hereafter SAPP], Knight, *Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory*, No. 28, 1891.

Walter, Knight's youngest son, arrived in Port Darwin in 1891. Walter worked as an operator at the cable office, and quickly joined several social organisations. Father and son regrettably had but a short time together. Knight became quite sick when an influenza epidemic swept through Australia including Palmerston. He rallied and then sadly died on 10 January 1892. Condolences came from many parts of Australia and tributes flowed in from major southern newspapers. In Palmerston flags flew at half-mast, offices closed and the largest group of mourners ever seen in Palmerston followed the cortege to the cemetery.

The thesis ends with the conclusion in Chapter Eleven as a study of Knight's life in Australia. A summary of some of the significant events of his forty years are related in the chapter and how Knight adapted to the numerous positions he held, moving through colonial Australia undertaking several varied careers, going through bankruptcy and still reaching high office. The chapter ends with a consideration of his contributions to Melbourne and the Northern Territory.

Chapter Two

The Melbourne years, 1852-1860

Melbourne in 1852 was experiencing a mining boom which brought enormous wealth to the fledgling colony. Knight was a relatively young professional man arriving in a growing city in a new country who needed to establish himself in his field as a trained civil engineer and architect, after a largely unknown apprenticeship in England. The areas explored here are Knight's initial eight hectic years in Melbourne. These were important years for Knight, covering his engineering, building and architectural influence. He is credited with designing many notable and culturally important buildings in Melbourne, thus leaving his mark on that city.

Knight certainly proved to be a competent person in many areas, which may well be a reflection of how much his earlier experience working for his father in England as superintendent of the building part of the business had influenced him. His engineering and architectural work during this time suggests these years were some of Knight's most stable and productive. If indeed he did impress, in what areas did this occur? Knight will be compared to other Melbourne architects, some of whom were very talented men who went on to erect outstanding public buildings.

Knight's early life

Knight was born at 10.00 a.m. on 13 February 1825 in Limehouse, Middlesex, England⁶⁰ and baptised at St. Anne's Church, Limehouse, together with his younger sister Elizabeth on 22 April 1829.⁶¹ Knight was the second son and one of seven children born to John Knight and Elizabeth Maria Knight (nee Ashton). Knight's father John, born in Scotland, was a stone and marble mason who employed over 500 men on contracts in an established stone masonry and contractual building business.⁶²

⁶⁰ Register, from Joan Hodgson's compiled genealogical record 1983. Copy provided to the author from the collection of Knight's descendant Carole Winter, Melbourne.

⁶¹ Baptism Record of John George Knight, Carole Winter collection.

⁶² 'Pioneers and All', *Bendigo Independent*, 19 June 1913.

Knight's childhood and adolescent years remain a mystery. Knight's schooling is unknown, but his younger brother George William was educated at Professor Fitzgerald's school.⁶³ There is a possibility John also attended this school. Both brothers spent some years studying architecture at Somerset House⁶⁴ and according to Freeland, studying architecture was for Knight 'to satisfy an inner drive for beautiful buildings'.⁶⁵ Knight was articled to Henry Daniel Martin, a dock and railway engineer, and in consequence, later became superintendent of works in the family business.⁶⁶

At some stage of his life, Knight's father lost a hand and was blind in one eye.⁶⁷ Whether this played a part in Knight senior handing over the family business to his eldest son James is not known, but as second son, John, at the age of 25 did not appear to have been recognised as a partner in his father's business. The singular word 'son' appears in two newspaper advertisements, which read, 'John Knight and Son, Contracts and Pile Drivers, Salmon's Lane, Limehouse'.⁶⁸ Knight's father's preference for James is again borne out in his will, which reads in part '... and bequeath all the residue and remainder of my personal estate and all my real estate of every kind unto my said wife and my son James Knight'.⁶⁹

Knight's decision to emigrate

This slight to the younger son may have caused tension in the family. It is impossible to ascertain the true reason for Knight's decision to emigrate, but Carment, Wilson and James state that John had a disagreement with his elder brother James and this was why he sailed to Australia.⁷⁰ Knight's younger brother George mentioned he had a dispute with an older brother and that was his reason for departing England for Australia five years later.⁷¹

⁶³ David Dunstan, 'Knight, George William (1831-1923)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁶⁴ 'The engineer who found fame in a garden', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 18 May 1985.

⁶⁵ J.M. Freeland, *The Making of a Profession: A History of the Growth and Work of the Architectural Institutes in Australia*, p. 29.

⁶⁶ Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 29.

⁶⁷ Joan Hodgson, 'The Knight Family', Carole Winter collection.

⁶⁸ 'To proprietors of water-side premises', *Builder*, Vol. XIII, No.363, 19 January 1850; 'To the Editor of the Times', *The Times*, 10 August 1850.

⁶⁹ Last Will and Testament of John Knight, Carole Winter collection.

⁷⁰ Carment, Wilson and James, *Territorian: The Life and Work of John George Knight*, p. 3.

⁷¹ 'The engineer who found fame in a garden', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 18 May 1985.

Knight appeared a risk taker, so sailing to another country where it is unlikely he had relatives waiting to welcome him might not have been such a daunting task for him. He was twenty-six years old and possibly felt the need to move out of the family home and make his own way in life. It may have been the lure of gold, or the dispute he had with James that was enough to force him abroad. Conceivably, he selected Melbourne to settle, knowing it was Victoria which offered an attractive proposition and where a mining boom was happening. He may well have known of the vast amount of gold shipped to England in 1851 from Victoria, which may have also influenced him to make the decision to emigrate.⁷²

Knight was not alone in this exodus from Britain and Ireland. The British government was open to migration as it was aware of the colonies' need for labour, 'so the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission recruited certain types of migrants for the Australian colonies and paid for their passages from the sale of colonial crown lands'.⁷³ In the nine years 1852-1860, 290,000 people migrated to Victoria, or fifty-five per cent of the 'British migration to Australia and New Zealand'.⁷⁴

Surprisingly, about 200,000 of the migrants were unassisted by government aid.⁷⁵ Paying their own passage meant these people had ready money. They would have been a mix of the respectable poor, middle or upper class people. The majority of the emigrants were young single men 'in their twenties or late 'teens'.⁷⁶ Conditions for the poor in Britain were extremely bleak with 'nearly one million paupers in the country'. Up to the 1850s, the majority of the British people did not move far from home, but new industries made people more mobile and less fearful of the prospects of emigration that offered a change of surroundings and occupation.⁷⁷

Throughout his early working life in Melbourne, Knight earned high wages, but with a leaning towards speculative investments, he regrettably lost more than he won. Was it the thrill of speculating that fascinated him? It appears he dabbled in share

⁷² Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things*, p. 66.

⁷³ Geoffrey, Serle, *The Golden Age: The history of the colony of Victoria, 1851-1861*, p. 44.

⁷⁴ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 44.

⁷⁵ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 44.

⁷⁶ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 48.

⁷⁷ Serle, *The Golden Age*, pp. 44-45.

speculation long before he immigrated to Australia. In an interesting newspaper account that appeared not long after Knight's demise, the writer stated that he had shared many 'pleasant little yarns with him [Knight] over his sharebroking'. Apparently Knight enjoyed the 'sparkle and excitement of share speculation' and the writer recounted one particular story that Knight had told him, that after reading a prospectus in England, together with a few friends Knight invested in a mountain of ore. Upon further investigation, they discovered that they had indeed invested in a mountain but it happened to be in Switzerland with access via a swamp that would take five years to cut a way through.⁷⁸

Moving from England to Australia could have been the solution for many problems, both familial and financial. If going off to the goldfields and finding gold did not eventuate, Knight still had his qualifications as an accomplished civil engineer and architect to fall back on. According to Knight, during his early working life he had had practical experience in several areas of construction that included, 'road drainage works, Docks, Wharfage, Gas & Water Works, Quarrying, & other engineering operations under the direction of his father'.⁷⁹

It is reasonable to accept reports that in 1852 Knight did initially spend a period at the goldfields, although the duration varies with different writers. There are at least three references that allude to the story of Knight journeying first to the goldfields on his arrival. Chlebnikowski believes that Knight first came from Adelaide, then travelled to the Victorian goldfields and one week later arrived in Melbourne,⁸⁰ while De La Rue writes that Knight was there for a few weeks.⁸¹ A slightly different version of his arrival appeared in a South Australian newspaper and perhaps answers the question of whether Knight knew gold had been discovered in Victoria. The article states that Knight, being aware of the gold rush that was happening in Victoria, and 'somewhat migratory in his habits ... proceeded to the goldfields where he remained for a week, having speedily discovered that it was one thing to boss

⁷⁸ 'Reminiscent [sic] of the late Mr. Knight', *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* [hereafter *NTTG*], 22 January 1892.

⁷⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1873/203, Letter 2 August 1873. Knight to Commissioner of Crown Lands.

⁸⁰ Chlebnikowski, 'The historic development of the building of Parliament House, Melbourne', p. 16.

⁸¹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin 1869-1922*, p. 91.

other people's diggings, and quite a different thing to dig oneself'.⁸² The newspaper shipping report confirms he arrived in Melbourne and not Adelaide.⁸³ Knight's first employment was seven weeks after his arrival, thus giving him ample time to join the frenetic rush to the goldfields.

Knight's arrival in Victoria

Knight departed London 17 October 1851 aboard the *Lady Peel* and arrived in Port Phillip, Melbourne, Victoria on 3 February 1852.⁸⁴ Arriving in Melbourne as a qualified person at an economic boom time, he was able to demonstrate in many areas that he had forward thinking ideas. He was well educated and in later life was a prolific letter writer demonstrating 'a wide knowledge of the arts and sciences'.⁸⁵

The city of Melbourne in the early 1850s

Being first established as a settlement in 1835, Queen Victoria declared Melbourne a city on 25 June 1847 and it became the capital of the separate colony of Victoria on 1 July 1851.⁸⁶ Originally Melbourne had been a small pioneer colonial town with surrounding areas of pastoral land mainly for the production of wool.⁸⁷ In the 1840s, Melbourne 'was in principle no more than a country town and a convenient port; the squatters were the power in the land'.⁸⁸

The Melbourne where Knight was coming to live was a rather primitive place. Although gold brought wealth to the colony, in the early 1850s this was still a city where streets were unpaved and sewerage was being collected by night-carts from privies that often leaked and over-flowed and where rubbish was thrown into the street or left in backyards to rot and of course smell.⁸⁹ Melbourne became known as 'Smelbourne', mainly because of the raw sewerage, and that situation did not change until the 1880s.⁹⁰ In 1855 Knight wrote a letter to the editor of the *Argus* newspaper

⁸² 'Mr. J.G. Knight, S.M. Commissioner for the Northern Territory', *Adelaide Observer*, 24 September 1887.

⁸³ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 3 February 1852.

⁸⁴ Manifest *Lady Peel* 6 October 1851, bound for Port Phillip. Carole Winter collection.

⁸⁵ Carment, Wilson and James, *Territorian: The Life and Work of John George Knight*, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Don Garden, *Victoria: A History*, p. 68.

⁸⁷ Garden, *Victoria*, p.39.

⁸⁸ Miles Bannatyne Lewis, 'Tradition and Innovation in Victorian Building 1801-1865', p. 17.

⁸⁹ Garden, *Victoria*, p. 97.

⁹⁰ Garden, *Victoria*, p. 97.

on the lack of sewers and the use of open drains. He decried the lack of a proper abattoir, with butchers washing their filth down open drains. His solution to the problem was to have carts collect stagnant water containing entrails and such from these open drains and have the contents taken to market gardens for use as a fertiliser.⁹¹

During the 1850s, animals including cattle and horses were still being driven through the city, which occasionally caused havoc. A by-law in 1857 limited this practice 'to the hours between midnight and 6 a.m.'⁹² Conditions did improve from 1854 onwards with streets being 'properly formed and paved'.⁹³ Meanwhile, the basic commodity of water was not available in the city. A cart collected water from the Yarra River and delivered this to barrels in houses. Water in pails was also peddled in the streets and sold at excessive prices.⁹⁴ It was not until 1857 that water was conveyed to Melbourne via pipe and aqueduct from the Plenty River at Yan Yean.⁹⁵ Melbourne was a city of darkness until whale oil was used in early street lighting from 1852 and in 1857 gas became the main means of street lighting.⁹⁶

Scarcity of housing

Even before the massive increase in population due to the discovery of gold, there was a scarcity of housing and building materials. With an extra three thousand people pouring into overcrowded Melbourne weekly, 'house accommodation was absolutely unobtainable'.⁹⁷ The local building industry could not erect buildings fast enough to cope with the influx of these people, so hundreds lived in tents. In the early 1850s, the population of this canvas town had risen to 8,000.⁹⁸ Numbers of people living in tents continued to rise and by 1857 there were 140,892 persons out of a total population of 410,766 living in tents.⁹⁹ For those who acquired rental

⁹¹ 'Sanitary negligence', *Argus*, 26 April 1855.

⁹² Andrew Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life: The Itinerary of Our Days*, p. 66.

⁹³ Garden, *Victoria*, p. 97.

⁹⁴ Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life*, p. 145.

⁹⁵ Granville Wilson and Peter Sands, *Building a City: 100 Years of Melbourne Architecture*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Garden, *Victoria*, p. 97.

⁹⁷ Henry Gyles Turner, *A History of the Colony of Victoria from its discovery to its absorption into the Commonwealth of Australia: in two volumes*, p. 367.

⁹⁸ Lewis, 'Tradition and Innovation in Victorian Building 1801-1865', p. 36.

⁹⁹ William Henry Archer, 'The Colony of Victoria,' in *Catalogue of the Victorian Exhibition, 1861: With Prefatory Essays, indicating the progress, resources, and physical characteristics of the colony*, p. 40.

accommodation, the rate was very high. In 1852 in South Melbourne ‘wretched hovels’ constructed of weatherboard were snapped up for £4 per week.¹⁰⁰

With people becoming wealthier (many from lucky gold strikes) and more settled, the earlier pre-fabricated frame houses and wooden huts were replaced by more substantial brick houses.¹⁰¹ Quality stone was available and of course a brick manufacturing industry, so erecting substantial houses offered a permanency in the landscape.

In the first half of 1853 over one thousand buildings, many of stone, were constructed in the city alone. Thousands more in the suburbs were thrown together of any and every material — rough planks or corrugated iron — for bricks and stone could not be supplied fast enough.¹⁰²

Over half of Melbourne’s urban industrial ventures were in sawmills, quarries and brickyards.¹⁰³ By 1854 there was a burst of activity with materials and men more readily available, and more contractors ready to undertake work on substantial stores and mansions.¹⁰⁴

The impact of the discovery of gold

Gold was known before 1851, but British law ‘prohibited private mining without government approval. Another factor was fear among those who controlled the wealth and power in the community that gold would disrupt the social balance’.¹⁰⁵

The gold discovered in Victoria in 1851 was mainly in the northwest of Melbourne. Within ten years Melbourne had become a proud city recording an urban growth of four times its former population.¹⁰⁶ This in turn created an economic boom peaking in the 1880s. ‘Melbourne, rather than Victoria, was to have a boom in the later eighties which defied all comparisons’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, ‘Tradition and Innovation in Victorian Building 1801-1865’, p. 34.

¹⁰¹ James Grant and Geoffrey Serle, *The Melbourne Scene 1803-1956*, p. 78.

¹⁰² Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 120.

¹⁰³ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, ‘Tradition and Innovation’, p. 39, *Builder* (UK), Vol. XII, No.579, 11 March 1854, p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ Garden, *Victoria*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ Graeme Davison, ‘Gold-Rush Melbourne,’ in Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves (eds.), *Gold: Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁷ Geoffrey Serle, *The Rush to be Rich: A history of the colony of Victoria, 1883-1889*, p. 46.

The lure of gold enticed not only newcomers to Victoria going off to the goldfields, but impacted on a relatively settled society with many servants leaving households, together with shopkeepers, policemen, pastoralists and professional men, all deserting their businesses and places of work and often their wives and families.¹⁰⁸ The civil service was seriously affected by the discovery of gold. So, to forestall more civil servants leaving for the goldfields, Governor La Trobe increased salaries by fifty per cent but on condition that men remain at their post and any man who left 'without permission would not be re-employed'.¹⁰⁹

On hearing the news of the gold discoveries, there was a surge of people from Europe wanting to visit the Victorian goldfields. This in turn generated more cargo with ships 'arriving in the Port of Melbourne at a rate of two or three a day and in Port Phillip Bay there were often as many as 300 ships anchored at one time'.¹¹⁰ Geographically, Melbourne was ideally placed on the main route for sailing ships from Europe that ventured around the Cape of Good Hope.¹¹¹ Graeme Davison describes a city bursting with a hope of prosperity:

At the peak of the gold rush, Melbourne was more a way-station than a settled community, more a flooding river than a placid lake ... the flotilla of ships jamming the lower reaches of the Yarra, the cluster of privately owned wharves and warehouses below Queen's wharf, and the jumble of wooden houses and more permanent public buildings of the city's crowded western end. The thousands of newcomers who poured in during the previous few months were largely housed in the overcrowded pubs, boarding houses and cottages of the city grid. But signs of progress are also apparent in the newly opened Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway - the first in the colonies - joining the city to its ocean port, in the line of posts carrying the electric telegraph to the government observatory at Williamstown.¹¹²

The growth of the population and wealth through the discovery of gold increased British manufacturing and shipping to Australia. Victorians now had money to spend on goods they had never previously been able to afford. New ships needed to be built to export these goods and transport more people to Australia. Shipping had gone through a depressed state during the first fifty years of the nineteenth century but now gained a momentum, taking 'advantage of technological advances such as steam and the use of steel in producing bigger, better and faster ships'.¹¹³ The flow-on

¹⁰⁸ Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees: The Upper Class in Victoria 1850-80*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 22.

¹¹⁰ Davison, 'Gold-Rush Melbourne', p. 54.

¹¹¹ Davison, 'Gold-Rush Melbourne', pp. 53-54.

¹¹² Davison, 'Gold-Rush Melbourne', p. 54.

¹¹³ Jill Blee, *Gold*, p. 73.

effect of gold opened up new areas of industry that became self-sufficient. Money helped to establish places of learning and refinement to cater for the ‘increasing sophisticated population’.¹¹⁴

The effect of the gold rush drastically affected Melbourne in other ways. This runaway growth in population impacted all at once on the city with problems for housing, sanitation, water, food and public order.¹¹⁵ Extra shipping and cargo meant more merchants and this in turn meant more buildings and architects for both private and government works. Melbourne had never been a convict settlement, with the majority of people originally coming as settlers and requiring land for sheep and cattle.

Apart from the possibility of making a fortune, another aspect of the gold rush that was to have an influence on many facets of Melbourne’s society, was the mix of British immigrants who came to Victoria from all classes of society. From these people, Melbourne received an influx of professional and well-educated men who ‘laid a brilliant veneer on her cultural and intellectual life’.¹¹⁶

Changes to Victorian society

Before the gold rush, in some respects Australian society followed the class system of Britain. Britain was highly structured, the upper class comprising ladies and gentleman who supposedly had good breeding and manners. There were people of wealth, but also people not having the wealth but the breeding. Then there was a middle class of professional men and women, storekeepers and publicans, followed by the poor, often the servants of the wealthy and the middle class. The main reason free migrants came to Australia was for a better lifestyle as there were opportunities here that were not available in Britain. At the start of the 1850s Australia’s class system was not quite that of Britain. In Britain it was common that people had inherited wealth, while in Australia they often worked to make their money. Paul de Serville argues that society in Victorian Melbourne at this particular time comprised of

¹¹⁴ Blee, *Gold*, p. 72.

¹¹⁵ Blee, *Gold*, p. 53.

¹¹⁶ Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene 1803-1956*, p. 83.

three upper classes in the colony: the gentlemen who made up polite society; the rich (merchants, bankers, agents, entrepreneurs and others); and the pastoralists. The first had the breeding, the second the money, and the third the broad acres. At times allies, at others rivals, the three groups shared interests and had overlapping membership, but each regarded itself as the social leader of the colony, thus increasing the state of confusion.¹¹⁷

The gold rush in many cases totally upended the settled society as men from all walks of life went to the goldfields to seek their fortune. The early rush saw many diggers amass fortunes with some sensibly managing their new economic status, while others recklessly squandered their money on drink and women. Even in the pre-gold rush days there had been a belief in equality, which was strengthened with ‘the arrival of diggers from Britain, America, and Europe, imbued with Chartist or liberal ideas’.¹¹⁸ The gold rush changed Australian society forever, levelling society by establishing a new class of wealth. This was not just manners and breeding, but attitudes. Through the wealthy diggers ‘a numerous new rich class emerged and announced its good fortune in a loud manner’, becoming ‘merchants, shopkeepers, contractors, craftsmen, hoteliers, provisioners, and speculators’.¹¹⁹ After the gold rush in 1857, all men in Victoria over the age of twenty-one were given the right to vote,¹²⁰ while in Britain only men of means were permitted voting rights.

By the end of 1854 Victorians were gradually passing from the upheaval of the discovery of gold into a more ordered people and lifestyle. The majority of the residents had been living less than three years in the colony with most assuming they would quickly become wealthy through the discovery of gold. These were a people who came from structured English class society. The new rich followed the path of the earlier gentry by building larger houses in the suburbs, but theirs were ‘more ornate than those of the old upper class’.¹²¹ The size of the house announced the success of the owner.

It is quite a natural human trait for people to settle down rather quickly and so form the semblance of a community. It was also quickly realised that a man must work hard and not be indolent to make his mark in this new country. An extract from the *Age* describes how men in the early 1850s should conduct themselves:

¹¹⁷ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. x.

¹¹⁸ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 18.

¹¹⁹ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 19.

¹²⁰ Australian Electoral Commission, ‘Events in Australian electoral history, Timeline: 1788-1899’.

¹²¹ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 19.

They [men] find themselves compelled to allot a much longer time to making their fortunes than they at first deemed requisite. Circumstances induce them to enter on undertakings of a more extensive and complex kind than they had at first proposed to themselves. The result is, that enterprise is stimulated; new projects of public utility and private profit are started, and an immense amount of capital is invested in them; and the interests of men are every day becoming more closely intertwined,—in other words, the law of social consolidation is manifesting its power in Victoria.¹²²

From the immigrants who came during the gold rush years, voluntary organisations developed, one being the Philosophical Society and also the ‘music world flourished’.¹²³ These were positive developments, which gave rise to Melbourne being known as the cultural centre of Australia.

How the suburb denoted wealth

In the beginning of settlement, people had lived in and around Melbourne, with the wealthy mainly moving to the seaside suburb of Brighton or the village of Heidelberg.¹²⁴ As society settled its wealth, families moved to other suburban areas such as St. Kilda where ‘judges, barristers, professional men, and pastoralists [were] attracted by its sea air’.¹²⁵ Close by the city, South Yarra drew the well-to-do. Doctors tended to stay in the city, together with journalists, politicians, some merchants and other professional men who favoured living on the city fringe. Inner suburbs on the high grounds, such as Jolimont and East Melbourne retained their social status.¹²⁶ Wealthy men went further afield and had mansions built in suburbs such as Camberwell, Hawthorn, Essendon, Kew and Toorak.

In the majority of European cities people lived in the city, but Melbourne took on a different orientation in that the people visited the city for meetings, commerce, clubs, shops and dining, but they lived in the suburbs.¹²⁷ Eventually, most of Melbourne’s inner suburbs, such as Carlton, Richmond, South Melbourne, Fitzroy and Collingwood became the suburbs for housing the lower working class. Today it is the reverse and these inner city areas have become the suburbs for the well-to-do young

¹²² ‘Social Condition of Victoria’, *Age*, 18 October 1854. The title page of this issue of the *Age* is dated Thursday 19 October, but the page on which this article appears is dated Wednesday 18 October.

¹²³ Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, p. 83.

¹²⁴ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 145.

¹²⁵ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 146.

¹²⁶ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 145.

¹²⁷ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, pp. 148-149.

entrepreneurs who want to live on the fringe of Melbourne's city centre. They do not want the large house on a large allotment, but are happy in renovated old terraced houses.

Knight's working life in Melbourne

Sydney was founded forty-seven years before Melbourne, so had many well-established buildings and architects. By 1850 Sydney had approximately eighteen architects and twenty years later the number had only risen to thirty.¹²⁸ This number gradually climbed until it reached 180 in 1890.¹²⁹ With the advent of the discovery of gold, Melbourne's architects were joined by some highly recommended people 'thoroughly trained and extremely able practitioners' that included John Knight, Albert Purchas, John Clark and William Wardell.¹³⁰ Between the beginning of Melbourne in 1835 and 1860 'over one hundred architects came to Melbourne, some to stay, others to remain only briefly'.¹³¹ Melbourne had almost double the number of architects compared to Sydney up to 1890.

The usual step for a young man to become an architect was by being indentured to a senior architect. 'Either surveying or engineering was considered the proper grounding upon which to train an architect. Initially surveying was the more common but engineering gradually became the accepted starting point ... engineering-architecture training continued to be the most common sort until the turn of the century'.¹³²

On 10 March 1852, Knight wrote to Lieutenant-Governor Charles Joseph La Trobe applying to be appointed a civil engineer. On La Trobe's direction, his private secretary Edward Ball wrote to the colonial architect Henry Ginn.¹³³ Consequently, Knight was interviewed by Ginn who considered Knight was an engineer and 'not a practical Clerk of Works competent to conduct the works of large buildings' but

¹²⁸ Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 16.

¹²⁹ Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 16.

¹³⁰ J.M. Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History*, p. 125.

¹³¹ Donald Sutherland Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession in Melbourne 1835 to 1860', p. 1.

¹³² Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 205.

¹³³ Public Record Office Victoria, Victorian Public Record Service 956 Minute Book (Colonial Architect 1851-1854, Colonial Engineer 1854) [hereafter PROV, VPRS 956/P1] PROV, VPRS 956/P1, Letter 19 March 1852. Ball to Ginn.

recommended Knight without a fixed trial period, ‘as acting draftsman at this department at a rate of 8/- per diem with the allowance of 30 per cent’.¹³⁴

Knight wrote to Ginn in 1853 reportedly stating he was an Associate of the Institution of Civil Engineers in England.¹³⁵ If Knight did make this statement, it was undoubtedly a lie. The question of why Knight had never taken the opportunity when living in England to join the Institution of Civil Engineers can be answered in notes written by Charles Kerr, the grandson of Knight’s later business partner Peter Kerr. Kerr was compiling the history of the building of Parliament House so an inscription could be written on a National Trust plaque commemorating that history.¹³⁶

Kerr detailed both his grandfather’s and Knight’s involvement in business and together in the history of the building. In briefly outlining Knight’s early career, Kerr states that after Knight had finished his articles in civil engineering with H.D. Martin, he immediately went to work for his father instead of following the obligatory five years in engineering employment. By taking this course of action, Knight was ineligible to become a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers.¹³⁷ Subsequently, Knight did become a member of the Institution, but this was not until 1864 while on tour in London with the Victorian Exhibition.¹³⁸ Knight is also listed in 1862 as a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects.¹³⁹

As an experienced civil engineer with administration skills, Knight’s first city employment in 1852 was most likely in the Colonial Architect’s Office (CAO) as records attest him in the role of ‘Acting Clerk of Works and Draftsman from 25 March [until the] 8 August 1852, [and] Acting Clerk of Works New Military Barracks from 9 August’.¹⁴⁰ There is a further reference to him in a newspaper article which reads ‘Mr. J.G. Knight, Civil Engineer, the gentleman who successfully

¹³⁴ PROV, VPRS 956/P1, Letter 22 March 1852. Ginn to Ball.

¹³⁵ Lyall, ‘The Architectural Profession in Melbourne’, p. 50.

¹³⁶ Charles Kerr, ‘The Victorian Houses of Parliament, a brief summary of events in the history of its design and construction’, Carole Winter collection.

¹³⁷ Charles Kerr, ‘The Victorian Houses of Parliament’, Carole Winter collection.

¹³⁸ James Forrest (ed.), *Minutes of Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers with Abstracts of the Discussions*, Institution of Civil Engineers, London, 1864, p. 375.

¹³⁹ Institution of Civil Engineers, ‘UK, Civil Engineer Lists, 1818-1930’.

¹⁴⁰ Public Record Office Victoria, Victorian Public Record Service 46/P2, Outward Letter Books (Clerk of Works 1847-1851, Colonial Architect 1851-1854, Colonial Engineer 1854-1855) [hereafter PROV, VPRS 46/P2], Letter February 1853. Ginn to Knight. Knight received instructions from the Colonial Architect Henry Ginn to get costing estimates for various painting jobs at the Barracks.

constructed the Iron Military Barracks for the 40th Regiment'.¹⁴¹ Knight obtained the position of chief clerk of works (CoW) on 1 June 1853.¹⁴²

According to Donald Lyall who wrote on the architectural profession in early Melbourne, the position CoW meant several things:

On the larger work at Melbourne a foreman was usually appointed, and an architect (at this time Knight) inspected the works from time to time, as well as preparing some drawings and carrying out administrative work in connection with the contracts – but his title was still Clerk of Works.¹⁴³

Knight before a select committee on Sewerage and Supply of Water for Melbourne

Within seven months of his employment at the CAO, Knight was called before a select committee enquiring into the possibility of a sewerage and water supply for Melbourne. On 5 October 1852, he was questioned by the chairman and examined on thirty-five questions. Knight acknowledged that as a civil engineer in England he had superintended various sewerage works and had laid down miles of different sized tubular systems of drains. He stated he had never used iron pipes as they were liable to corrode unless they had been galvanised which was very expensive.¹⁴⁴

Knight was rigorously cross-examined further on tubular drain size, the quality of the clay in the manufacture of the pottery drains and whether Victoria possessed quality clay and bricks to manufacture the tubes. Knight said the quality of the colony's bricks were inferior and suggested that the sewers and hydraulic works in Victoria be constructed using English bricks manufactured by the following process:

London bricks being formed of a mixture of clay, loam, sand, chalk, and "breeze" (cinder ashes) thoroughly incorporated in a washing mill, and afterwards "tempered" and "pugged,"

¹⁴¹ 'The Birthday Ball', *Argus*, 26 May 1853. 'News from Melbourne', *Builder Illustrated Weekly Magazine*, 26 February 1853, p. 135.

¹⁴² Chlebnikowski, 'The historic development of the building of Parliament House, Melbourne', p. 161.

¹⁴³ Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession', p. 20.

¹⁴⁴ Victoria. Legislative Council. Select Committee on the Sewerage and Supply of Water for Melbourne, et al., *Sewerage & Water Supply: Report From the Select Committee On the Sewerage of and Supply of Water for Melbourne: Together With the Minutes of Evidence*, 1853, pp. 42-44.

when burnt, become a perfectly vitrified mass ... the result is the production of a sound brick fitted for permanent Engineering works.¹⁴⁵

Knight proposed a plan for importing the main sewers from England 'ready or nearly ready made' according to his submitted sketch and mentioned he hoped shortly to receive 'a drain making machine from England'. He submitted a detailed costing of English-made bricks and shipping costs which were cheaper than those produced in Australia.¹⁴⁶ The select committee report clearly illustrated Knight's depth of engineering knowledge and understanding of sewerage and water works and associated costs. This appears one of the few times his engineering skill was put to the test, but was unfortunately not successful in that particular venture.

Knight appears before a select committee on the public works

On 23 September 1853, within four months of his chief CoW appointment, Knight was called before another select committee enquiring into the conduct of the colony's public works. It appears this enquiry came about because the attraction of the goldfields had been more alluring to the labour force than staying and working in the city. Now men had returned to Melbourne and were willing to undertake 'works of any magnitude', but contract work was not being sought by the CAO. Money owed to tenderers was being withheld by the public works. The men who tendered for work knew they would be waiting some time for their payments, so they tended to inflate prices to cover these eventualities.¹⁴⁷

Eighty-six questions were put to Knight at this enquiry. He was asked what his duties were to which he revealingly replied, 'My duties consist principally in a general superintendence of the Public Building - to see that they are properly constructed, in

¹⁴⁵ Victoria. Legislative Council. Select Committee on the Sewerage and Supply of Water for Melbourne, *Sewerage & Water Supply: Report From the Select Committee On the Sewerage of and Supply of Water for Melbourne*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁶ Victorian Legislative Council. Select Committee on the Sewerage and Supply of Water for Melbourne, *Sewerage & Water Supply: Report from the Select Committee on the Sewerage of and Supply of Water for Melbourne*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁷ Victoria. Legislative Council. Select Committee on Public Works, et al. *Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on Public Works: together with the proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix*, 1854, pp. 12-16.

accordance with the plans and conditions, and that proper materials are used'.¹⁴⁸ Knight also had charge of the entire financial supervision of works in Melbourne.¹⁴⁹

Knight's opinion was at odds with the select committee on using contracts in the construction of buildings. He considered, '[construction] would be better carried out by any other means than by contract, for there are in Melbourne, at this time, but few contractors of importance capable of carrying out large Public Works within the requisite time'.¹⁵⁰

In private practice

Working as an architect, Knight went into private practice with Thomas Kemp, but both men still retained their positions with the CAO. At this particular time the Victorian public service permitted professional men to be involved in private ventures. In 1853 Knight and Kemp had the 'architectural field pretty much to themselves' and reportedly engaged Joseph Reed, an architect who had recently arrived from England to assist in a design competition for the new Government House.¹⁵¹ Whether this is true or not, as the newspaper account was written twenty-seven years after the event, the article stated that it was through Reed's effort the firm in question won the first prize, but owing to circumstances the building 'was never proceeded with'.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Victoria. Legislative Council. Select Committee on Public Works, *Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on Public Works*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁹ Victoria. Legislative Council. Select Committee on Public Works, *Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on Public Works*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁰ Victoria. Legislative Council, Select Committee on Public Works.

¹⁵¹ 'Mr. Reed, Architect', *Illustrated Australian News*, 9 October 1880.

¹⁵² 'Mr. Reed, Architect', *Illustrated Australian News*, 9 October 1880.



Figure 1. New Government House.

Reed's name is not mentioned in other articles as being part of the design team when Knight together with Kemp won first prize for a drawing and design of the new Government House.¹⁵³ This first premium win for the new Government House was prize money of £500.¹⁵⁴ This flamboyant design was never implemented. The official version according to a newspaper account as to why this design for Government House was not carried out was the high cost.¹⁵⁵ There is no further mention of Reed's name in Knight and Kemp's other business transactions, but Reed did go on to be a distinguished architect in Victoria. To become the architect for most major buildings, the person was required to submit their design in an open competition.¹⁵⁶

While Knight was still in the employ of the CAO, La Trobe hosted a ball in May 1853, but at that particular time in Melbourne there was no ballroom. The government architects were given seven days to erect a building that could accommodate 1,500 people, plus a band and attendants. Within this time span the architects constructed a building of wood with a corrugated iron roof. The acting colonial architect James Balmain directed the work but the 'practical detail and

¹⁵³ Ray Wright, *A Blended House: The Legislative Council of Victoria 1851-1856*, p. 76.

¹⁵⁴ Sally O'Neill, 'Knight, John George (1826-1892)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁵ 'Death of Mr. J.G. Knight. S.M.', *South Australian Register* [hereafter SAR], 11 January 1892.

¹⁵⁶ Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, p. 55.

execution of the work were entrusted to Mr. J.G. Knight, Civil Engineer'. This building was built to stand for 'ten years without repair'.¹⁵⁷ Both Knight and his new wife attended the ball.¹⁵⁸

Melbourne's social scene

The social life for the young colony of Victoria varied with the social year that many would have known in London. Here the 'most important dates in the social calendar were the Governor's Levee, the military parade and the Birthday Ball'. This ball was held around the time of Queen Victoria's birthday, 24 May, where young girls made their debut.¹⁵⁹ Although Knight had only been in the colony a few months, he was one among a couple of hundred men who attended the levee at Government House in May 1852.¹⁶⁰

Knight's architectural involvement in Melbourne

Knight's private business arrangements would have varied to those that he undertook when working in the CAO. As mentioned previously, Knight was at odds with the select committee in using contractual arrangements for public works. In his private practice there were building procedures that he would have carried out. After the client had selected Knight as the architect to prepare plans and specifications the next step was for Knight to advertise in the press calling for tenders for the particular project. The builder/s who applied to this advertisement would then work out the quotes for undertaking the assignment. On receiving the various tenders, the architect mostly selected the lowest quote. It was the builder who signed the contract with the client. The architect then supervised the construction of the building and issued particular certificates to the builder to pass on to the client for payment and saw that 'the terms of the contract [are] observed by both parties'.¹⁶¹

Knight's architectural and engineering skills were many and varied. He was in partnership with Thomas Kemp between 1853 and 1856; this was followed by Knight, Kemp and Kerr (1854-1855); and later Knight and Kerr (1857-1858). With

¹⁵⁷ 'The Birthday Ball', *Argus*, 26 May 1853.

¹⁵⁸ 'The Birthday Ball', *Argus*, 26 May 1853.

¹⁵⁹ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 135.

¹⁶⁰ 'Her Majesty's Birthday', *Argus*, 25 May 1852.

¹⁶¹ Oscar Gimsey, *Built from nothing: A history of the building industry in Australia*, p. 44.

regard to the partnership of Knight and Kerr, Chlebnikowski considers that it was Knight himself who was able to procure the bulk of the work for their practice, saying Kerr could not compete with Knight's 'dynamic personality', having 'neither the drive nor the eloquence ... as far as administration and organisation were concerned'. Kerr was a quiet man 'producing works of art for Knight to sell to the politicians ... and sell they did'.¹⁶²

Private house designed by Knight and Kerr

In 1858 Knight and Kerr advertised for tenders for the erection of 'a large stone house in Kew for Sir William Stawell'.¹⁶³ The house designed in the classic revival style is a two-storey mansion named 'D'Estaville'. This was originally built on what was a large rural site overlooking the Yarra River. The home had fourteen rooms and was 'constructed of Footscray basalt ... finely bracketed eaves and imposing pedimented portico'. The mansion still exists and is listed on the Register of the National Estate.¹⁶⁴ Knight never wavered in his belief that buildings were required to be durable, functional and preferably of stone. He had enormous faith in stone as a building material.

¹⁶² Chlebnikowski, 'The historic development of the building of Parliament House, Melbourne', p. 57.

¹⁶³ 'Tenders are invited for Building a large Stone House', *Argus*, 17 February 1858.

¹⁶⁴ Australian Heritage Database, 'D'Estaville'.



Figure 2. D'Estaville. John T. Collins, 'D'Estaville' Barry Street, Kew.

Two churches and a synagogue

Knight, Kemp and Kerr advertised for tenders to erect an imported iron church at Sandridge (now Port Melbourne) in 1855.¹⁶⁵ The Holy Trinity Anglican church was prefabricated and imported from England in 1854. This Heming iron construction was to stand for forty-odd years until a memorial stone for a new church was laid in 1898.¹⁶⁶ Due to destructive winds in September of 1908, the church was reduced 'to mere wreckage'.¹⁶⁷ The church was rebuilt and the site is recognised today for being continuously associated with the Church of England.

The oldest surviving public building in Essendon is a brick church that Knight and Kerr designed calling for tenders in 1857.¹⁶⁸ St Thomas' Church of England foundation stone was laid in 1857 and the church was 'opened for worship in 1859,

¹⁶⁵ 'Tenders required for Erecting an Imported Iron Church', *Argus*, 6 August 1855; see 'Tenders', *Australian Builder and Land Advertiser*, 9 August 1855, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ 'New Church at Port Melbourne', *Argus*, 23 June 1898.

¹⁶⁷ 'General News', *Argus*, 7 June 1909.

¹⁶⁸ 'Tenders required for erecting a Church, *Argus*, 30 June 1857.

and consecrated in 1862, by which date it was free of debt'.¹⁶⁹ The church is still in use today.



Figure 3. St. Thomas' Anglican Church, Moonee Ponds

A Jewish school and Mickveh Yisrael Synagogue, designed by Knight and Kerr was erected in Stephen Street (now Exhibition Street), Melbourne between 1859 and 1860 with the foundation stone laid down on 28 December 1859.¹⁷⁰ The building is conservative classical in style with projecting pediments similar to those used at 'D'Estaville' in Kew. This surviving synagogue is one of the earliest in Victoria and is classified as historic and listed on the Register of the National Estate. The building has been many things, beginning with a combined synagogue and school, then a state school. Of historical significance is the building's 'associations with the early provision of social welfare in Victoria'. Under the management of the Salvation Army in 1892, it was initially a free labour bureau, then a men's industrial home and later a women's shelter. The Methodist Central Mission was the occupant from 1909 and provided bible classes and services and a free kindergarten for poor families.¹⁷¹ Besides this Jewish school, Knight and Kerr designed another city school in

¹⁶⁹ Anglican Parish of St Thomas, Moonee Ponds, 'History of our church'.

¹⁷⁰ 'Laying the Foundation-Stone of a New Jewish School', *Argus*, 30 December 1859.

¹⁷¹ Victorian Heritage Database, 'Former Mickveh Yisrael Synagogue and School'.

Lonsdale Street.¹⁷² Whether this was a government or religious school is not mentioned.

Mechanics Institute at Emerald Hill now South Melbourne

The Mechanics Institute which is still standing today was built in 1857 to Knight and Kerr's design. This is a large two-storey building, constructed of bluestone with a slate roof and comprises a library, assembly room, two classrooms and a reading room.¹⁷³ The building is significant for its link in the early development of local government in South Melbourne's history. 'Further ... the building is of great significance in the development of Mechanics Institutes in the state of Victoria, and in particular as an important and early example.'¹⁷⁴ Up until 1980 the building was used for the Italian Club Cavour.

Kong Meng and Company, Courthouse

A courthouse to facilitate the settlement of disputes between Chinese men was designed by Knight and Kerr in 1861 for Kong Meng and Co.¹⁷⁵ Lowe Kong Meng was one of the leaders of the Chinese community at the time and contributor to the building. The building is still standing and intact and considered 'architecturally significant as a distinctive example of a Classical style building with Chinese influences'. The building is recognised as being 'of historical significance for housing the earliest known surviving Chinese shrine in Australia' and 'as the earliest surviving Chinese community building in Victoria'. It is listed on the Register of the National Estate and now known as the Num Pon Soon Society Building.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² 'Tenders invited for Building a School', *Argus*, 1 July 1859.

¹⁷³ 'Emerald-Hill Mechanics' Institute', *Argus*, 20 January 1857.

¹⁷⁴ Victorian Heritage Database, 'Italian Club Cavour'.

¹⁷⁵ *Argus*, 25 July 1861. This article only mentions Knight, see 'Erratum', *Argus*, 1 August 1861, which draws attention to the fact that Kerr's name had been omitted in the previous article.

¹⁷⁶ Victorian Heritage Database, 'Num Pon Soon'.



Figure 4. Num Pon Soon Society Building, 200-202 Little Bourke St, Melbourne.

Hotels

Possibly one of Knight and Kemp's first projects was the new Royal Hotel. In several of their early advertisements when they were undoubtedly trying to become established, it is mentioned that they were the architects for the Royal Hotel,¹⁷⁷ but the locality is not known. The second hotel was designed when Kerr had joined the partnership in 1854. This was to be built in suburban 'Hawthorne' [sic] which is approximately four miles from the city.¹⁷⁸ Again, no further information is known of the actual location of the hotel, nor the name. Knight and Kerr designed their final nameless hotel in 1860. Its only address was Flinders Street, Melbourne.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ 'A card - Messrs Knight and Kemp', *Argus*, 19 September 1853.

¹⁷⁸ 'New Advertisements', *Argus*, 22 September 1854. The 'e' is now deleted from the suburb's name.

¹⁷⁹ 'Tenders required for Masons and Bricklayers Work', *Argus*, 9 November 1860.

Colonial Architect's Office

In 1852 La Trobe requested permission to resign but it was not until 1854 that Sir Charles Hotham replaced him.¹⁸⁰ The Colonial Office in London was concerned that there was far too much expenditure in Victoria so a stronger man than La Trobe was required or else the colony would be ruined.¹⁸¹ There was clearly a discrepancy between revenue and finance:

Financial returns at this time clearly showed that the government was running into trouble ... it was not until the quarterly returns were made just before Hotham arrived that the crisis was revealed. The estimates had been drawn up with glorious optimism on the assumption that the boom of 1853 would continue, but the actual revenue for the first half of the year was £500,000 short of the estimate. Land revenue had fallen off as speculation declined.¹⁸²

Changes occurred on the 1 January 1854 under Charles Pasley, the colonial engineer, 'when the Colonial Architect's Office was absorbed into that of the Colonial Engineer ... but operated from different offices'.¹⁸³ Later, in 1854 under Governor Hotham, retrenchment and reform in the PWD meant a departmental order prohibiting undertaking private practice while working in this department. In August of 1854 both Knight and Kemp resigned.¹⁸⁴

Drastic cuts were made on the civil service staff.¹⁸⁵ In 1855 Hotham suspended all public works, which led to further unemployment 'just when it seemed that Victoria was climbing out of the slump'.¹⁸⁶ By 1856 more intensive public works had commenced due to an increase in population so more buildings were required. As there had been a decline in the mining industry, the public works programme could sustain many of the unemployed.¹⁸⁷

Change of architectural direction for Knight into other business ventures

To notify the public of Melbourne of Knight and Kemp's resignation, an advertisement appeared in the *Argus* reporting the following:

¹⁸⁰ Serle, *The Golden Age 1851-1861*, p. 152.

¹⁸¹ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 155.

¹⁸² Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 159.

¹⁸³ Trethowan, 'The Public Works Department of Victoria – 1851-1900', p. 17.

¹⁸⁴ Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession', p. 28.

¹⁸⁵ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 160.

¹⁸⁶ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 191.

¹⁸⁷ Trethowan, 'The Public Works Department of Victoria', p. 23.

Notice - Messrs, Knight and Kemp beg leave to inform their friends and the public that, with a view to the more effectual execution of several important architectural works now entrusted to their care, they have been induced to resign their appointments on the staff of the Colonial Engineer. They will in future be enabled to devote their undivided attention and study to promote the interests of those gentlemen who may honor them with their patronage. With the advantage of the services of their new partner, Mr. Kerr ... Messrs Knight and Kemp trust that their united experience will enable them to comprehend and carry out any architectural or engineering works entrusted to their charge.¹⁸⁸

In the same newspaper another advertisement stated that Knight, Kemp and Kerr, being 'Architects, Civil Engineers, and Surveyors,' have moved to new premises and 'intend to annex the business of Land and Estate Agents'. Their qualifications 'combine a thorough knowledge of the real cost of building, and an intimate acquaintance with the value and capabilities town and suburban land ... No charge will be made until an actual sale is effected'.¹⁸⁹ In December, the partnership was advertising the sale of a Brick Tile and Pipe Works.¹⁹⁰

The Collingwood Equitable Mutual Building Association was established to encourage people interested in building or purchasing an affordable house to become shareholders. Very high rents were being demanded at this time in Melbourne because of the rise in population. By becoming a shareholder, it would be possible for a person to be owner of the property after about five years. Knight and Kemp appeared as the building surveyors and architects on the prospectus.¹⁹¹

In 1853 Knight and Kemp were involved in an unsuccessful venture that required people to invest in shares in the Upper Yarra Steam-Gondola Company that plied the Yarra River. Within just over a year this failed as many shareholders neglected to pay for shares. These businessmen intended to raise £10,000 by selling 2,000 shares at £5 each. The money was to be used in the construction of a steamer.¹⁹² Many people commuted by boat using the Yarra River for recreational and business use, so possibly this company could not compete against their opposition. How long Knight was involved is uncertain, as his name does not appear in later advertisements. Here is another speculation that was unsuccessful.

¹⁸⁸ 'Notice-Messrs. Knight and Kemp beg leave to inform their friends', *Argus*, 9 October 1854.

¹⁸⁹ 'New Advertisements', *Argus*, 9 October 1854.

¹⁹⁰ 'Valuable Brick, Tile, and Pipe Works for Sale', *Argus*, 19 December 1854.

¹⁹¹ 'Collingwood Equitable Mutual Building Association', *Argus*, 7 May 1853.

¹⁹² 'Steam Gondola Company', *Argus*, 3 October 1853. For further information see 'New advertisement', *Argus*, 4 November 1853; 'Original correspondence', *Argus*, 6 July 1854; 'Original correspondence', *Argus*, 7 July 1854; 'Old Court', *Argus*, 18 November 1854; 'Sale by auction', *Argus*, 16 April 1855; 'Steam-ship advertisements', *Argus*, 30 May 1855.

Another architectural drawing win

Melbourne ports were very congested in those gold rush years, with lighters having to transport cargo from anchored ships in Port Phillip Bay before proceeding up the very narrow and shallow Yarra River. A competition was held in 1854 for the design of the proposed Melbourne Ship Canal and Docks. Knight, in company with Robert Adams entered and won first prize of £300.¹⁹³ Unluckily, although they won the premium they did not win the contract.

Knight involved in designing the Customs House

In 1836 a weatherboard cabin transported from Sydney acted as the first customs office in Melbourne. In 1837 plans were prepared for a new customs office which was eventually completed in 1841; this was Melbourne's first stone building.¹⁹⁴ Knight, Kemp and Kerr were the architects for the design of a new Customs House in 1855. Building was stopped in 1859 and left unfinished because of a shortage of government funds due to an economic decline, but business was still being transacted there.¹⁹⁵

In an advertisement for the construction of the new building, the architects asked for samples of local stones and other building materials as they intended to use local materials including bluestone (basalt) as against imported stone. They concluded that:

We sincerely trust that this measure will be the means of giving an impetus to colonial enterprise and manufactures, and thereby prevent the necessity of importing so much of what can be better produced within the province.¹⁹⁶

The Customs House was directly opposite the ports and looked 'out across Queen's wharf' at the centre of a bustling maritime precinct.¹⁹⁷ This impressive edifice was distinctive in that it was so designed that even the 'rear and side elevations are as

¹⁹³ 'Advice from Melbourne', *Builder* (UK), Vol. XIII, No.628, 17 February 1855, p. 77.

¹⁹⁴ C.M. Teague, 'Early history and restoration of the old Customs House Melbourne', *Architecture in Australia*, 62, 1973, p. 51.

¹⁹⁵ Australian Heritage Database, 'Old Customs House, 400-424 Flinders Street, Melbourne, VIC, Australia'.

¹⁹⁶ 'Domestic Intelligence', *Argus*, 7 February 1855.

¹⁹⁷ Wilson and Sands, *Building a City: 100 years of Melbourne Architecture*, p. 39.

carefully worked as the front'.¹⁹⁸ Architect J.J. Clark, who changed some of the original work, completed the building between 1873 and 1876 to a very high standard. It is worth noting that Peter Kerr, to a lesser degree than Clark, is also associated with the architectural design for the completion of this building. This was one of the most imposing public buildings inspired by the gold-borne wealth of the colony. The gold rush in the 1850s brought a dramatic increase in trade and a constant flow of immigrants. The customs department was the Victorian government's own gold mine. The Long Room – which was the heart of trade for over 100 years – is regarded as one of Melbourne's grandest interiors and is the result of combining both the architectural designs of Knight, Kemp and Kerr and that of Clark.¹⁹⁹

Interestingly, an archaeological excavation has been conducted on part of this site and remnants including several walls of the earlier 1841 building were revealed. The walls had been 'made of sandstone base with a brick superstructure'. The archaeological finds have been preserved and are significant in that they offer one of only a few traces of early 1840s buildings in Melbourne.²⁰⁰ Today the Customs House is still standing in Melbourne and is presently occupied by the Immigration Museum.

¹⁹⁸ Wilson and Sands, *Building a City*, p. 42.

¹⁹⁹ Victorian Heritage Database, 'Former Customs House'.

²⁰⁰ Museum Victoria, 'Old Customs House - Melbourne'.



Figure 5. The Customs House, Melbourne.

Changes for Knight

The firm of Knight, Kemp and Kerr was dissolved by mutual consent on the 13 December 1855 and the business continued to be conducted by Kemp and Kerr. The reason given for the dissolution was that Knight needed to withdraw from the business in order ‘to superintend the erection of the new Houses of Parliament’.²⁰¹

Tenders for buildings and repairs continued to be advertised in the *Argus* by Kemp and Kerr. Although Carment, Wilson and James state that Kemp left the partnership and returned to England in the latter part of 1855,²⁰² the business name of Kemp and Kerr continued until October 1856. Peter Kerr said Kemp left Australia due to his wife’s ill health and died at a young age in 1856.²⁰³ The Victorian outward shipping passenger list show a Mr and Mrs Kemp left Melbourne on the *Sussex* bound for London in February 1855.²⁰⁴ This date does not satisfactorily fit with other business dealings that mention both Kemp and Kerr. It is quite probable the Kemp’s name

²⁰¹ ‘Public Notices’, *Argus*, 13, 15, 17 and 18 December 1855.

²⁰² David Carment, Helen Wilson and Barbara James, *Territorian: Life and Work of John George Knight*, p. 5.

²⁰³ ‘The late Mr J.G. Knight and the Houses of Parliament’, *Argus*, 15 January 1892.

²⁰⁴ Public Record Office Victoria, ‘Index to Outward Passengers to Interstate, UK, NZ and Foreign Ports 1852-1923’.

remained part of the business name and was only deleted when Knight and Kerr resumed their business together and possibly after Kemp's death.

Even though Knight was working for the PWD, he went back into partnership with Peter Kerr. Knight and Kerr were successful businessmen. An insightful anecdote on these business partners was made by Raymond Wright, stating:

Kerr and Knight made an intriguing pair, Knight was an unpretentious architect whose easy charm and social ambitions had already pushed him from drawing board to manager's office, where his real talent lay. He moved easily in the complex building world of plans, contracts, ledgers and site management, in the details, tensions and tolerances of construction administration. Kerr, by contract, was quieter, not without confidence, but thoroughly absorbed by the technical and aesthetic challenges of architecture.²⁰⁵

Peter Kerr later became Knight's brother-in-law by marrying Knight's wife Alice's younger sister, Harriette.

Parliament House

In late 1851, steps were taken to erect a Parliament House for Victoria. The then colonial engineer, Captain Pasley, prepared a design of the building which was initially accepted, then not proceeded with.²⁰⁶ A competition was arranged, people submitted their work, some winning a premium but nothing became of their actual work.²⁰⁷ In 1855 Knight and Kemp's designs of the Legislative Council Chamber were 'approved and selected by the Government'.²⁰⁸

The PWD Blue Book for 1859 shows Knight took the position of CoW, Houses of Parliament on 1 November 1855. However, Knight's name is not recorded in the civil establishment lists between 1855 and 1857.²⁰⁹ It is important to mention here that over this entire period, the position of CoW (or architect) to the Houses of Parliament was never regarded as permanent. Knight had been contracted 'at a salary rather than a commission, with the right to private practice'.²¹⁰ In January 1856 Charles Pasley became the commissioner of public works and appointed Knight to the temporary position for the erection of parliament house. Pasley must have

²⁰⁵ Raymond Wright, *A People's Counsel: A History of the Parliament of Victoria 1856-1990*, p. 23.

²⁰⁶ Geo. H. Jenkins, *A short history and description of the Parliament House, Melbourne*, p. 12.

²⁰⁷ Jenkins, *A short history and description of the Parliament House*, p. 12.

²⁰⁸ 'Advice from Melbourne', *Builder* (UK), XIII, No.628, 17 February 1855, p. 78.

²⁰⁹ Trethowan, 'The Public Works Department of Victoria', p. 23.

²¹⁰ Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession', p. 34.

considered Knight possessed a high ability as an architect/engineer to entrust him with the execution of this building.

Kerr soon joined Knight in working on refining the drawings of the Houses of Parliament. Knight had a substantial input into these drawings but later undertook a more supervisory role, with Kerr taking over solely from the 1860s. Although Pasley dallied around with the plans, Wright points out:

Knight in turn passed on the assignment to his partner and fellow office worker, Peter Kerr, who proceeded to refine and then dramatically transform Pasley's attempts (which Kerr thought looked 'not unlike some unsatisfactory chapels').²¹¹

Knight in reply to an editorial in the *Argus* said that the style of the building was defined by Captain Pasley and for the architectural details Knight obtained the services of his former partner Peter Kerr, adding: 'I trust that our united efforts will be successful in raising an edifice which, when complete, will be satisfactory to the public at large'.²¹²

As CoW, Knight was responsible for the building's construction. He would have submitted the plans for government approval which, 'it must be assumed was granted',²¹³ as by the end of December 1856 the foundation of the Assembly chamber was laid. Knight's plans for the Legislative Council were considered 'very beautiful, such as indeed does not exist in any of these colonies'.²¹⁴ Within twelve months 'both Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly rooms were usable'.²¹⁵ Not only was Knight responsible for construction of the actual building, but also for the tendering for internal fixtures and fittings. An example of this is a reply by another CoW, James Balmain advising Knight that a tender for a particular part for the hot water apparatus had been accepted.²¹⁶ Further correspondence in 1857 shows Knight was given authority to expend money for various fittings such as venetian blinds, partitioning off a corner for a messenger's writing room, constructing a wooden verandah, furniture for the refreshment room, bookcases for the library and

²¹¹ Wright, *A People's Counsel*, p. 23.

²¹² 'Honors Divided', *Argus*, 19 April 1856.

²¹³ Wright, *A Blended House*, p. 119.

²¹⁴ 'The New Houses of Parliament', *Argus*, 17 April 1856.

²¹⁵ Wright, *A People's Counsel*, p. 25.

²¹⁶ Public Record Office, Victorian Record Public Service, 975/P1, Outward Correspondence 1856-1915 [hereafter PROV, VPRS 975/P1] PROV, VPRS 975/P, Letter 30 August 1856, James Balmain to Knight.

furniture for apartments.²¹⁷ During this time, Knight also accepted tenders for the foundations of the library basement and dealt with claims for extra work by the builder, William Cornish.²¹⁸

There was a Commission of Inquiry, of which Knight was a member, established to investigate which building stone would be suitable. The commission examined small blocks of stone ‘to ascertain their physical and mechanical properties before submitting them to chemical analysis’.²¹⁹ Stone from Darley, near Bacchus Marsh in Victoria, was eventually selected.²²⁰ After construction, a very small number of the stone blocks were found to be flawed with the evidence pointing towards the presence of salt.²²¹ The Darley sandstone was replaced with stone from a quarry at Stawell in north-eastern Victoria. ‘This also gave trouble, and further repairs were made using Sydney sandstone.’²²² The bluestone foundation was almost the height of a full storey. Both the Council and Assembly chambers are bluestone walls initially used without a formal façade, because bluestone was considered ‘too gloomy’.²²³

Knight wished to have the western façade faced with Italian marble which was a similar cost to freestone, but local contractors were against it.²²⁴ A public meeting was held in January 1859 and attended by about 500 people. There were men from all trades and each expressed their view on Victoria purchasing marble from Italy for use in public buildings. They considered Parliament House an important Australian building, with materials locally sourced and employing local people. A. Eaves spoke of a board having been set up to examine materials and after eighteen months agreeing that good local stone could be sourced from Bacchus Marsh and from Mount Sturgeon. Eaves elaborated further saying that Knight had built a model using material that looked like marble and used it to induce the government to purchase

²¹⁷ PROV, VPRS 975/P1, Correspondence 5 October 1857; 5 November 1857; 11 December 1857; 14 December 1857; 23 December 1857; 15 February 1858, Knight given permission to purchase fittings for Parliament House.

²¹⁸ PROV, VPRS 975/P1, 6 November 1857; 30 December 1857, Knight receiving tenders.

²¹⁹ ‘The Stone of the Houses of Parliament’, *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 25 February 1860, p. 49.

²²⁰ Jenkins, *A short history and description of the Parliament House, Melbourne*, p. 14.

²²¹ ‘The Stone of the Houses of Parliament’, *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 26 February 1860, p. 49.

²²² Henry Cowan, *From Wattle & Daub to Concrete & Steel: The Engineering Heritage of Australia's Buildings*, p. 49.

²²³ Cowan, *From Wattle & Daub to Concrete & Steel*, p. 48.

²²⁴ ‘The late J.G. Knight’, *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

marble from Italy. In conclusion, Eaves stated that the government could lease stone quarries in Tasmania and New South Wales.²²⁵

In fact, several tons of South Australian marble was shipped to Melbourne for the project.²²⁶ In February 1859, Pasley and Knight submitted a joint paper on the merits of building stones to the joint committee of both Houses of Parliament. The report concluded that if the Italian Carrara marble cost outweighed the durability and beauty of the material, then the choice would be between the English Portland stone and the Victorian Darley stone.²²⁷ The argument to use the Italian marble was lost, but *Melbourne Punch* took an opportunity to depict Knight in a cartoon as an Italian boy hawking a marble edifice weighted on his head.

²²⁵ 'Importation of marble for the new Houses of Parliament', *Argus*, 11 January 1859.

²²⁶ 'Export of marble', *Argus*, 27 September 1858.

²²⁷ 'Building stones for the Houses of Parliament', *Argus*, 18 February 1859.

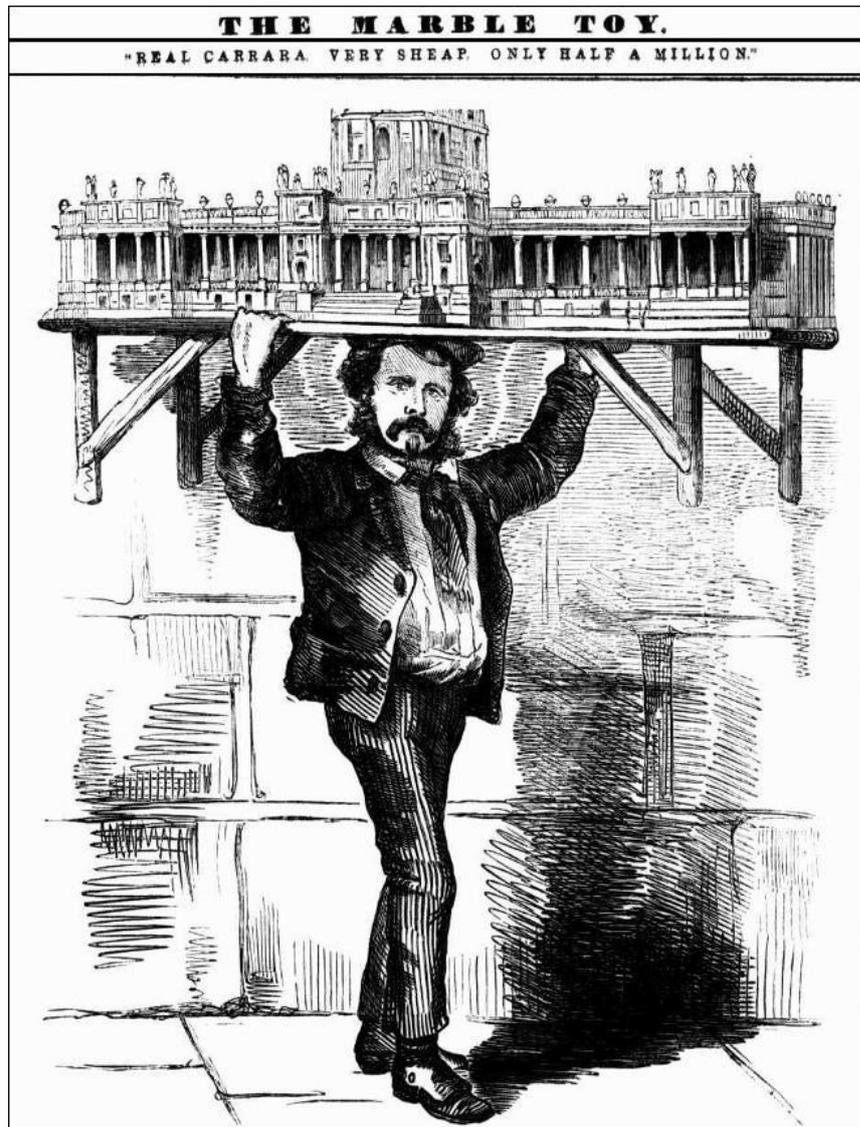


Figure 6. N. Chevalier, 'The marble toy', *Melbourne Punch*, 13 January 1859.

Melbourne's Parliament House is regarded as one of Australia's grandest and most palatial buildings. It is based on the layout of the Houses of Parliament at Westminster, England. The similarity can be seen in Knight's model of the structure sent to John Gill, which depicted a massive tower similar to that of the British Houses of Parliament.²²⁸ Gill was a practicing architect in Melbourne from 1846 to 1860.²²⁹ Before immigrating to Australia, Peter Kerr worked for Sir Charles Barry the architect who rebuilt the Palace of Westminster from 1840 after fire ravaged the

²²⁸ Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession', p. 35(a).

²²⁹ Lyall. 'The Architectural Profession', p. 122.

palace in 1834.²³⁰ Kerr quite possibly also worked on these drawings and could have conceivably adapted his knowledge of the design to the drawing of Melbourne's Parliament House. The grand hall is practically 'the exact size of the House of Commons'.²³¹ From 1860 to 1877 very little progress was made, but after various commissions and committees it was agreed to complete the building and in 1877 Peter Kerr was appointed the architect.²³² Kerr worked on the Houses of Parliament until the building's completion.

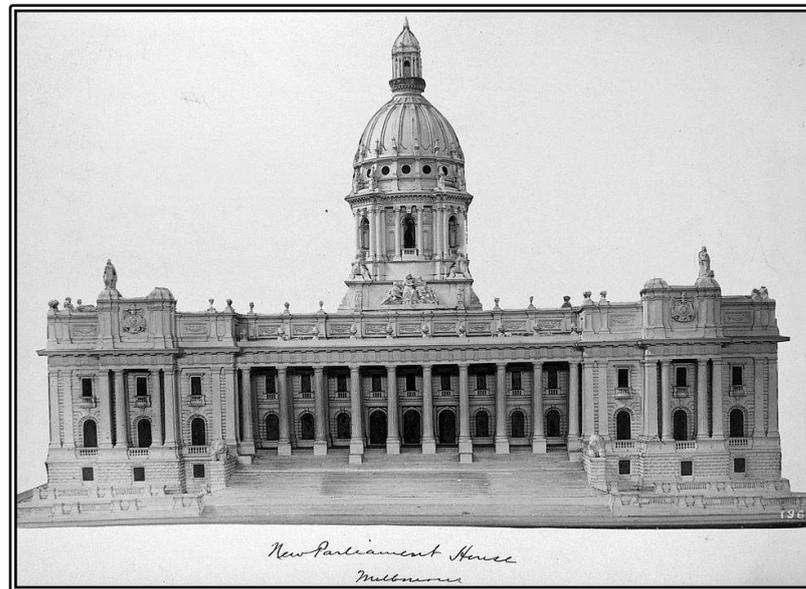


Figure 7. Knight's model of the House of Parliament 1859

Strategically sited high on Eastern Hill, the building commands a view over the city. The design and craftsmanship displayed are of the highest standard, there being several areas of significance. Of importance is that 'Parliament House was built on the site of a traditional ceremonial ground and meeting place for the five Aboriginal tribes of the Port Phillip region, which together formed a confederacy known as the Kulin'.²³³ The front of this massive structure was designed to 'have a colonnade four

²³⁰ UK Parliament Website, 'Palace of Westminster records'.

²³¹ Jenkins, *A short history and description of the Parliament House Melbourne*, p. 18.

²³² Jenkins, *A short history and description of the Parliament House Melbourne*, p. 18.

²³³ Victorian Heritage Database, 'Parliament House (including Grounds, Works and Fences)'.

hundred feet in length, each column being thirty-two feet in height, and four feet in diameter. The columns will be of Roman Doric order.’²³⁴

Knight’s engineering skill was required when designing an innovative ventilation system for the Legislative Assembly chamber. This 1856 ventilating system is described in the *Argus* by the following:

Ventilation is provided through some thousands of holes bored through the enrichments in the ceiling. Fresh air will be supplied from the corridor in the basement, the stone floors of which will be always kept watered during warm weather in order to cool the air, and absorb any dust held in suspension before it passes into the Legislative Chamber.²³⁵

During January 1860 Knight was ‘engaged in applying a new scheme of ventilation to the Legislative Chambers’ of Parliament House. A brief outline follows:

The plan suggested in the principle now being carried out, is to supply the air in such an imperceptible manner that the ordinary draughts, in place of being attended with currents, shall be immediately diffused, and so serve to correct the atmospheric impurity.²³⁶

The ventilation proved to be fraught with ongoing problems. Draughts continued to impact upon members of the Legislative Assembly and Colonel Smith requested that Lloyd Tayler, an architect and surveyor, be brought in to be examined ‘on his ventilation scheme’.²³⁷ Tayler had devised a novel system of ventilation for the National Bank, and succeeded by providing fresh air without draughts into the large banking chamber.²³⁸ The Parliamentary Buildings Committee met with Tayler who ‘intimated that he was thoroughly confident that his scheme was practicable, and that he would be able to stop the draughts complained of by the hon. members’.²³⁹

The question over Knight’s involvement in the Houses of Parliament is answered substantially in a testimonial that Knight received in March 1864 from Charles Pasley. Part of what Pasley wrote states:

With the exception of the general arrangement and dimensions of the various apartments, which were settled in the Public Works Office, the whole charge of the design and execution of the works was entrusted to you, subject to my general control as Commissioner of Public Works ... Mr. Kerr is entitled to share with you the credit of the design, but the successful

²³⁴ ‘The New Houses of Parliament’, *Argus*, 19 November 1856.

²³⁵ ‘The New Houses of Parliament’, *Argus*, 19 November 1856.

²³⁶ ‘Ventilating the Legislative Assembly’, *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 21 January 1860, p. 11.

²³⁷ *Argus*, 14 July 1886.

²³⁸ ‘A new system of ventilation’, *Argus*, 19 March 1884.

²³⁹ *Argus*, 15 July 1886.

execution, and the excellence of the material and workmanship, are in my opinion due to you.²⁴⁰



Figure 8. Parliament House, Melbourne, postcard, ca. 1906

Public Works Department

Trethowan states that in June 1858, G.W. Vivian was dismissed and Knight, by taking his position, became a permanent staff member with the PWD on a salary of £2,000. This salary was equal to that of Pasley.²⁴¹ However, Trethowan contradicts himself by saying that Knight being a ‘private architect engaged for a special building ... was paid by a salary in lieu of commission and could not be considered a permanent staff member’.²⁴² It appears that sometime in 1859, both Pasley (then inspector-general PWD),²⁴³ and Knight (CoW Parliament House) had their salaries reduced to £1,200, with William Wardell, the chief architect and inspecting CoW, on £1,000.²⁴⁴

In December 1859, the government announced its intention to reduce the civil service and provide no further funds for public work except ‘what was in the course

²⁴⁰ SRSA GRS/1/1873/213, Testimonial 8 March 1864. Charles Pasley to Knight.

²⁴¹ Trethowan, ‘The Public Works Department of Victoria’, p. 32.

²⁴² Trethowan, ‘The Public Works Department of Victoria’, p. 39.

²⁴³ Trethowan, ‘The Public Works Department of Victoria’, p. 37.

²⁴⁴ Trethowan, ‘The Public Works Department of Victoria’, pp. 37-39.

of erection and actually required'. Work on Parliament House 'was to cease after the completion of existing contracts'.²⁴⁵ Construction of the east wing, containing a library and refreshment rooms, was commenced in January 1858 and completed in 1860, but 'the interiors were finalised a year later'.²⁴⁶ Around this time, Knight was ordered to hand over all documents belonging to the PWD. The select committee recommended that work re-commence on Parliament House and in 1877 Kerr was appointed architect in charge.²⁴⁷

On completion of the Parliament House library in 1860, the Knight-Kerr partnership was finished, but it was not until 18 May 1866 that the business was formally dissolved.²⁴⁸ In 1861 severe retrenchments in the PWD saw Knight depart. He was offered £300 in compensation which he rejected, claiming £5000. Lyall considers Knight's reason for retiring from architecture was the state of building at that time and his disgust at the government over his treatment as an architect, his retrenchment and the amount of compensation he had been offered.²⁴⁹

The importance of Parliament House today is that it is 'architecturally and aesthetically significant as an embodiment of the ideals of nineteenth century civic architecture, employing a classical architectural vocabulary to symbolize its function'.²⁵⁰ Although there is controversy over the exact influence Knight had on the design of this building, Apperly considers this to be:

Australia's finest example of the Victorian Academic Classical style ... Its architects, Peter Kerr and J.G. Knight, created a building which is both large in scale and rich in detail. Its grand cascade of steps and monumental colonnade allow it to dominate its surrounds effortlessly – even without the huge central dome shown on the original design but never built.²⁵¹

This is not a view shared by the well-known Australian historian Manning Clark, who describes the building as being brought together in one massive pile of 'Roman arches, Greek columns, Venetian and Florentine interior decorations, Italianate floor

²⁴⁵ Trethowan, 'The Public Works Department of Victoria', p. 51.

²⁴⁶ Wright, *A People's Counsel*, p. 40.

²⁴⁷ Victoria. Public Works Dept. *Parliament House, Victoria. Vol. 1., History and existing conditions: House Committee Report*, p. 10.

²⁴⁸ Wright, *A People's Counsel*, p. 41

²⁴⁹ Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession', p. 38. Knight was later awarded damages for £1,800 following a Legislative Council meeting in June 1862. *Argus*, 4 June 1862.

²⁵⁰ Victorian Heritage Database, 'Parliament House (Including Grounds, Work and Fences)'.

²⁵¹ Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, p. 52.

tiles, and a front to the whole building which breathed the spirit of the British bulldog'.²⁵² He further suggests the architecture echoed the old world the architects knew, and did not convey the spirit of their new colonial life.²⁵³

There have been various opinions concerning how much input Knight had in the building of Parliament House. Miles Lewis considers Knight had a more supervisory role and not that of a designer of this building.²⁵⁴ Trethowan agrees with Lewis in that Knight's architectural input was probably strictly limited, but further states that Knight had taken full responsibility for the buildings and witnessed the contracts Kerr had signed for two library detail drawings around 1860. However, Trethowan stresses that very few of the early drawings for Parliament House were signed by the person who drew them. W.H. Ellerker, who worked in Knight's office, traced several drawings.²⁵⁵

A comment by Charles Kerr in a brief summary of events in the history of Parliament House was:

Irrespective of whatever share Knight has in the conception of the design of The House of Parliament actually erected ... he actively associated himself with the efforts to render Pasley's design acceptable and his persistence and foresight found a partner who was able to assist him eventually to accomplish the ideal.²⁵⁶

In 1973 in recognition of their invaluable contribution to the building of Parliament House, a commemorative plaque for Knight and Kerr was mounted on a column of the west façade of the building.²⁵⁷ A further acknowledgement and recognition of the contribution by both architects 'in the initial development of the design and building of Parliament House, Melbourne' was made on 28 June 2011 when the president of the Legislative Council officially opened the Knight Kerr Room.²⁵⁸

An interest in emigration

Not long after his arrival in Melbourne, Knight appeared interested in emigration. An article appeared in a London magazine describing conditions for emigrants coming

²⁵² C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia IV: The Earth Abideth For Ever 1851-1888*, p. 224.

²⁵³ Clark, *A History of Australia IV*, p. 224.

²⁵⁴ Miles Lewis, 'Tradition and Innovation', p. 67.

²⁵⁵ Trethowan, 'The Public Works Department of Victoria', p. 42.

²⁵⁶ Charles Kerr, 'The Victorian Houses of Parliament', Carole Winter collection.

²⁵⁷ Wright, *A People's Counsel*, p. 208.

²⁵⁸ Architecture Media Pty Ltd, 'The Knight Kerr Room opens at Parliament House'.

ashore in Melbourne as primitive: they were provided with tents ‘of a wretched description, and only sufficient to hold the wives and children’, luggage being left outside and having to be guarded by the husbands. The article further described how a man and his wife had arrived from England on a ship chartered by the ‘Family Colonization Society’ and two hours after landing Knight arrived to greet these immigrants and generously offered this man and his wife an empty room, apparently in the military barracks.²⁵⁹

An article written by Knight about Melbourne appeared in a British magazine in 1855. It noted the difficulties facing immigrants upon their arrival in Melbourne. Wages for many working class people had fallen by half. Knight criticised the Melbourne *Argus* newspaper for not being totally truthful in the actual reality of available work in Melbourne and the government for not releasing more Crown Land onto the market, possibly reducing the right of a person to purchase land. By not releasing land, people could not build which in turn increased unemployment. Knight described the possibility of a depression. He also encouraged people to think twice before embarking on the long trip to Australia because of the unemployment situation, encouraging people already in steady employment not to give this up. If people were determined to emigrate, Knight’s advice to them was:

come with a stout heart: don’t grumble if at the outset you have to endure similar trials to those you suffered in England. Remember that Victoria comprises a vast extent of country, and that little has yet been done to develop its various resources.²⁶⁰

In England in 1863, the Victorian Emigrants Assistance Society was formed under the auspices of Hugh Childers M.P. and Knight, who at that stage was commissioner of the colony of Victoria for the London International Exhibition.²⁶¹

Involvement in other societies

Knight’s other involvements included being a member of the Victorian Institute for the Advancement of Science (1854), a member of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria (1857-1859) and a member of the Royal Society of Victoria (1860).²⁶²

²⁵⁹ ‘News from Melbourne The Chisholm Emigration’, *Builder*, Vol. XI, No.525, 26 February 1853, p. 135.

²⁶⁰ ‘Advice from Melbourne’, *Builder*, Vol. XIII, No.628, 17 February 1855, p. 77.

²⁶¹ *Argus*, 17 July 1863.

²⁶² Royal Society of Victoria, ‘Science and the making of Victoria, Alphabetical List of members’.

These were places where well educated professional men with shared interests could meet.

Magazine editors possibly appreciated Knight's journalistic skills. He regularly contributed as an unpaid contributor to *Australian Builder and Practical Mechanic* and the English equivalent, *Builder*.²⁶³

Formation of an Architects' Association

In May 1851 the first Victorian Architects' Association was formed with Henry Ginn elected as president. This association met infrequently and became 'narrower in its interests and legalistic in its attitudes'.²⁶⁴ Two years later the association had another chairman then faded away in 1856.²⁶⁵ By March 1855 there was already a well organised group called the Geelong Society of Architects, Civil Engineers and Surveyors. Geelong, situated on Corio Bay, was closer to the goldfields than Melbourne and grew rapidly as a town.²⁶⁶ From the initiative of Melbourne architects Thomas Watts and T.J. Crouch, an architectural association was formed in July 1856. From the first meeting at which seven local architects attended, including Knight and Kerr, a provisional committee was formed under the chairmanship of Knight to draw up draft rules.²⁶⁷

Later that month another meeting was held, to which a further eighteen architects had been invited. At this meeting, Knight presented his committee's proposed rule and then moved 'That an Association of Architects be formed, having for its objects "The cultivation of friendly intercourse between the members of the profession, the protection and advancement of its interests and the elevation of Architecture as an Art"'.²⁶⁸ Men who had not practised in architecture for twelve months were offered associate membership, including Knight's brother George.²⁶⁹ At the 14 August meeting it was agreed that the association would be called the Victorian Institute of Architects (VIA) and at the following meeting on 28 August Knight was elected

²⁶³ Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession', p. 91.

²⁶⁴ Freeland, *Making of a Profession*, p. 26.

²⁶⁵ Freeland, *Making of a Profession*, p. 26.

²⁶⁶ Freeland, *Making of a Profession*, p. 24.

²⁶⁷ Freeland, *Making of a Profession*, p. 26.

²⁶⁸ VIA Minute Book, 14 August 1856. Cited by Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession', p. 56.

Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 26.

²⁶⁹ Lyall, 'The Architectural Profession', p. 60.

president,²⁷⁰ an office he held from 1856 until 1861. Patron of the VIA was Charles Pasley.²⁷¹

Knight in his inaugural address as president of the VIA on 9 October 1856, pointed out the absurdities of the Building Act that was presently being implemented. One of the irrationalities was that government could ‘erect buildings of a class which are forbidden to private individuals. Why should there be one law for the Government, and another for the public?’²⁷² Further to this remark, Knight suggested ‘the nomination of a Board or Commission of Public Improvements’, for what today would be town planning for the city and suburbs. This would encompass ‘sanitary; as well as architectural improvements’.²⁷³ Knight wanted a set of building regulations not only for Melbourne but for the entire colony of Victoria—‘an up-to-date and effective Building Act’. He also appealed to his fellow architects ‘to strive to improve themselves ... and thereby raise their profession to the heights’.²⁷⁴

Knight’s address, occupied one and half hours and was delivered to a very large audience that included architects, the press and members of the Philosophical Institute. It was ‘listened to throughout with the profoundest attention, occasionally applauded, and rapturously so at its conclusion’.²⁷⁵ Lewis proffers the thought that ‘Knight’s thinking on urban renewal was somewhat more sophisticated than that which prevails in high places today’.²⁷⁶ The *Melbourne Punch* clearly agreed with this argument, as it suggested Knight visit Naples to ‘perfect his celebrated and excellent scheme for appointing a commission to pull Melbourne down, and build it up again upon improved principles’.²⁷⁷

Members read eleven papers over five years, of which Knight gave five. The subjects were varied and of a practical nature and of interest to him. In May 1857 he spoke on ‘The Necessity of Providing Public Conveniences’, in November of the same year,

²⁷⁰ Freeland, *Making of a Profession*, p. 27.

²⁷¹ ‘Victorian Institute of Architects’, *Argus*, 6 October 1856.

²⁷² ‘The Building Act’, *Australian Builder and Practical Mechanic*, 16 October 1856, p. 268.

²⁷³ ‘Meeting of the Victorian Institute of Architects’, *Australian Builder and Practical Mechanic*, 16 October 1856, p. 277.

²⁷⁴ Freeland, *Making of a Profession*, p. 28.

²⁷⁵ ‘Meeting of the Victorian Institute of Architects’, *Australian Builder and Practical Mechanic*, 16 October 1856, p. 271.

²⁷⁶ Lewis, ‘Tradition and Innovation’, p. 43.

²⁷⁷ ‘Punch’s visits to remarkable places, Vesuvius’, *Melbourne Punch*, 23 October 1856.

he presented ‘The Necessity for Providing a Museum for Listing the Value and Quality of the Building Materials of the Colony’. At a conversazione in October 1867, Knight delivered ‘A treatise on Street Architecture’ and in January 1859 and April 1860 two talks on ‘Building Materials of the Colony’.²⁷⁸ Knight had a special interest in and great knowledge of colonial building stones and presented his treatise in a series of lectures. This treatise was serialised over several weeks in the *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*.²⁷⁹

Knight was not only concerned with the architecture of Melbourne and building materials, but through his paper on public conveniences showed anxiety for the intrepid traveller, who upon arriving in Melbourne found a city without public toilets. Below is an excerpt wherein he emphasised the fact that all residents deserved such an establishment on the grounds of the following:

though we affect to be too delicate to name, we can neither control nor supersede, and which in the absence of suitable arrangements, must either be checked at the risk of our health or indulged in at the peril of our morality.²⁸⁰

Knight did point out that he was aware of an absence of efficient sewers, but considered it prudent to suggest that the city council establish three conveniences, two for males and one for females in Bourke, Swanston and Collins Streets. It is interesting to note that Melbourne did not call for tenders to erect a urinal in the city, in Bourke Street, until 1859.²⁸¹ Brown-May attests to the probability that it was Knight’s original paper that ‘had some bearing on this decision’.²⁸² The first ‘public urinals were placed directly over the street channel’.²⁸³ It was much later that the waste was eventually connected into the sewerage system.

Years later in February 1862, at a dinner on the eve of Knight departing as agent for the Great Exhibition in England, the chairman of the evening, Benjamin Cowderoy, alluded to the fact that some years previously, Knight had presented before the water and sewerage commissioners ‘a complete scheme for the sewerage of the city—a

²⁷⁸ Lyall, ‘The Architectural Profession’, p. 58.

²⁷⁹ The first of these installments was titled, ‘Mr. Knight’s Paper on Colonial Building Stones’, *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 23 July 1859, pp. 225-227.

²⁸⁰ ‘Victorian Institute of Architects’, *Argus*, 2 June 1857.

²⁸¹ ‘Tenders, City of Melbourne’, *Argus*, 23 April 1859.

²⁸² Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life*, p. 96.

²⁸³ Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life*, p. 97.

scheme containing suggestions which, I doubt not, will yet be found to be of great value; and I further stated my belief that if he had been intrusted [sic] with the management of the Yan Yean water supply, the result might have been more satisfactory than it has been'.²⁸⁴

In his inaugural speech to the VIA in 1856, Knight had expressed a concern that architects devise a 'simple and workable plan by which our street architecture might be made worthy of the great metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere'. In November 1858, Knight presented a paper on street architecture and noted, that in his opinion, there had been no material change to the city as there was still a jumble of buildings, 'a mass of contradictions, an aggregate monument of obstinacy and egotism'. Knight first mooted an idea in his inaugural speech to the VIA of putting art back into buildings and proposed 'the formation [of] a Board of Commissioners of Public Improvements, to consist of three members, two being well qualified professional men'. Part of Knight's plan was to gradually buy up dilapidated houses, especially those on street corners, and for these to be replaced by buildings of architectural merit.²⁸⁵

Another concern for Knight was the quality of workmanship in buildings, conceiving an idea in 1858 for a building museum. In a paper presented to the VIA on Monday 18 July 1859, Knight stated that the Victorian government proved it was very interested in the importance of building materials and expertise in the building industry by voting for £3,000 to be set aside for the 'erection of a museum for testing and exhibiting materials'. He then proceeded to expound his knowledge of stones he had observed and experimented upon.²⁸⁶

The Building Museum was to be erected for the exhibition and testing of building materials, and more importantly to investigate the usefulness of various colonial stones compared to European stone.²⁸⁷ Knight experimented not only on colonial stones such as granite, basalt which is locally known as bluestone, clay-slate stone, sandstone, and limestone found in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and

²⁸⁴ 'Mr. Knight and the Yan Yean', *Argus*, 11 February 1862.

²⁸⁵ 'Victorian Institute of Architects', *Argus*, 23 November 1858.

²⁸⁶ 'Mr. Knight's Paper on Colonial Building Stones', *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 23 July 1859, p. 225.

²⁸⁷ 'The Building Museum', *Argus*, 11 May 1859.

Tasmania, but also limestone and sandstone from England, limestone from France, sandstone from Scotland and Italian marble. The testing of all stones was strenuous and exacting, including finding the crushing capacity of each stone. Knight experimented on three-inch blocks, weighing when dry, and the weight after immersion, then after exposure to a gentle heat for twenty-four hours then finally assessing how much moisture each stone still retained.²⁸⁸ Other experiments took several months of applying a constant exposure of water. ‘The aim of these experiments was to obtain the atmospheric influence of several years within the course of a few months’.²⁸⁹ The Building Museum in Queen Street was finished in 1859 at a cost of £3,605.²⁹⁰

Lyall stated that Knight was a man of high calibre who easily formed strong relationships with clients and builders alike. Lyall praised Knight’s knowledge with the following words:

a local sensibility was beginning to emerge, prompted mainly by John Knight, whose report on building stones, and initiation of the Building Museum were the outstanding assaults on a fairly widespread ignorance of the characteristics of local materials.²⁹¹

Although the museum displayed specimens of building materials from every colony and from overseas, it was not the material samples that were most significant, but, as Robin Boyd highlights, the building itself:

On one side were panels of dozens of different stone, from Adelaide marble to Normanby limestone. On the opposite side were stone pilasters and panels of bricks from every respectable manufacturer in the colony. The base was in bluestone, vermiculated in four different designs, finished in every conceivable way – tooled, picked, rock-faced and so on. The interior played up the different stucco finishes. The roof frame embodied European, American and Australian timbers.²⁹²

Early in the establishment of this museum concept, there was concern from contractors towards the Building Museum. As one contractor said, the labour cost of dressing each stone to a high degree added an additional ten per cent to the final cost

²⁸⁸ J.G. Knight, *A treatise on Australian building stones*, p. 33.

²⁸⁹ J.G. Knight, *A treatise on Australian building stones*, p. 32.

²⁹⁰ Trethowan, ‘The Public Works Department of Victoria’, p. 73.

²⁹¹ Lyall, ‘The Architectural Profession’, p. 95b.

²⁹² Robin Boyd, *Australia’s Home*, p. 110. Sixteen years after construction, an article in the *Argus*, dated 20 January 1875, stressed the value even then of the Building Museum’s outer walls, built to test the durability of assorted bricks and stone; also mentioned was that ‘to anyone not aware of the purpose of its ingenious designer, Mr. J.G. Knight, it looked as if it had been put up by a very mad architect’.

of construction.²⁹³ In answer to the contractor, Knight refuted this particular comment and stated that purchasers had a choice, as there were at least six samples of workmanship for each finish. Knight concluded his reply to the contractor, stating:

I will only add, that the exhibition of standard samples of workmanship is only one feature in the design of the Museum, the primary object being the practical testing of the principal materials used in building construction.²⁹⁴

Knight had set too high a standard on the quality of workmanship with the displayed samples being built far too well, so that no builder would sign a contract undertaking work to this degree.²⁹⁵ Unfortunately two politicians offered very objectionable remarks on the value of the Museum, one commenting ‘that the Museum was a farce, and was not likely to be of any public benefit;’ while another stated money had been thrown away on it, as it was ‘only fit for the tomb of a steam-hammer and mud-punts’.²⁹⁶ The government of the day had been persuaded by builders who recommended such a museum, now the present government was listening to ‘inexact and prejudiced statements which have been made against the Museum’²⁹⁷ from its members. Although there were only three or four detractors among parliamentarians, the adverse comments did not help in obtaining further monies for the Museum. The government neglected to place further sums in the supplemental estimates. It soon became apparent that contractors were not happy, and it was the pressure of the combined voices of building contractors and the government tightening of voted funds for the Museum that the government eventually handed the building over to the Board of Science and the Mining Commissioners.²⁹⁸ This did not deter Knight, who continued working on testing the durability of Victorian building stone, samples of which he eventually displayed in the Melbourne Exhibition in 1861.²⁹⁹

In a newspaper article in 1875 there was mention that the Building Museum was soon to be demolished, and those who were unaware of the purpose of the building

²⁹³ ‘Builders’ Museum’, *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 30 July 1859, p. 236.

²⁹⁴ ‘Museum for Building Materials’, *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 6 August 1859, p. 243.

²⁹⁵ Boyd, *Australia’s Home*, p. 110.

²⁹⁶ ‘Debate on the Builders’ Museum’, *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 3 March 1860, p. 57.

²⁹⁷ ‘Debate on the Builders’ Museum’, *Australian Builder and Railway Chronicle*, 3 March 1860, p. 57.

²⁹⁸ Lewis, ‘Tradition and Innovation’, pp. 69-70.

²⁹⁹ Lewis, ‘Tradition and Innovation’, p. 70.

may have thought it was ‘put up by a very mad architect’. At that particular time it housed the patent office and the new building to be constructed on the site was for that department. The thought some fifteen years after the Building Museum had been constructed was that it could still serve the useful purpose for which it had originally been built if it could conceivably be re-built on a less valuable site. Over all the years since the original construction, the article questioned ‘if any records had been kept of what has been observed in the materials it was designed to test’. Even in 1875 there was still division within Victoria as to the uncertainty of ‘durable building stone’. This particular article concludes with an appraisal of Knight:

Mr. Knight’s schemes, though always ingenious, were not invariably of a practically useful kind, but this building museum was an exception, and we ought to do him the credit of acknowledging his foresight by availing ourselves of all the benefits its result now holds out.³⁰⁰

The VIA was beginning to suffer indifference from members as the economy lapsed into depression following the boom of the early 50s and ‘conditions in the building industry were slack’. Not to be deterred, Knight battled without support from other members to keep this institution going. He ‘read two more papers’ and the last general meeting was held in September 1860.³⁰¹ In early 1861 Knight stood down as president of the VIA after holding the position for five years. The VIA continued with John Gill as president for a further three and a half years but ‘not one further meeting was held’.³⁰² The VIA was revived in 1871 with Joseph Reed as president.

Lewis emphasises that nearly all activities Knight was associated with only survived as long he was involved. When his interest waned, these organisations faded into oblivion.³⁰³ Thankfully, although those organisations Knight had been allied with wobbled and waned after he left, he must have had a reasonable framework in place for them to be re-established.

In the 1850s Knight mooted the idea of publishing a builders’ price book. This idea was eventually taken up by Charles Mayes who did include some of Knight’s data from the Building Museum. Originally titled the *Victorian Contractors’ and Builders’ Price-Book*, the book was well accepted, although a ‘more ambitious

³⁰⁰ *Argus*, 20 January 1875.

³⁰¹ Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 31.

³⁰² Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 31.

³⁰³ Lewis, ‘Tradition and Innovation’, p. 67.

edition appeared in three years' time as the *Australian Builders' Price-Book*, though it was entirely oriented to Victorian conditions'.³⁰⁴

At a farewell dinner given by members of the VIA to Knight shortly before his departure to England in December 1861, it was suggested that the VIA should once again formulate a School of Art in a building that had originally been built for that specific purpose. Knight stated that the promised building had instead been used as an office by the Mining Department.³⁰⁵

Knight's importance to the Melbourne architecture scene

Today, Knight's contribution to Melbourne architecture, apart from his buildings, is the John George Knight Award that is acknowledged in the yearly Victorian Architecture Awards as the premier award for heritage values.³⁰⁶ The award states:

Knight was devoted to the study of materials, workmanship and fine design. He was admired for his common sense and resource and was particularly renowned as an authority on building stones. Parliament House is one of his buildings which epitomises the lofty ideals of nineteenth century civic architecture.

This heritage category award has been given since 2003. The category Heritage Architecture 'is for any built conservation project or study developed in accordance with the Australian ICOMOS Burra Charter, or any adaptive reuse of a heritage structure'.³⁰⁷

Although material assessing the significance of Knight's architectural work is rather limited, Miles Lewis in his PhD thesis noted the overwhelming contribution Knight made. Lewis provided over 150 references to Knight. Other people who knew Knight, or knew of him, wrote that he was influential not just in the architectural field. Lewis praised Knight with the following words:

So far as the story of building in Victoria centres on any one man, it centres on John George Knight ... So far as there was an architectural profession in Melbourne in the fifties, as opposed to merely a few practicing architects, Knight must almost be said to be that

³⁰⁴ Lewis, 'Tradition and Innovation', p. 70

³⁰⁵ *Argus*, 18 December 1861.

³⁰⁶ '2005 Victorian Architecture Awards', *Age*, 23 July 2005.

³⁰⁷ Personal communication from Libby Richardson, Victorian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects, 15 December 2014.

profession. He was responsible for half the papers read before the Institute, and undoubtedly the better half of them.³⁰⁸

The above suggests that Knight's talents lay mainly in his ability to spread a greater awareness to the public and respective organisations of all matters relating to problems in building and associated areas. This does not mean that Knight stood out above others in architectural ability, merely that he was not just content to design various buildings, but was also interested in the materials and all matters relating to architecture. Throughout the 1850s there were several talented architects working in Victoria, most were Knight's contemporaries, but whether they were friends of Knight is not known. Some worked in private practice, others in the PWD. A few stood out as exceptional. These men included Joseph Reed, William Wilkinson Wardell, John James Clarke and Albert Purchas. The difference between Knight and these men was that they were apparently more single minded in their profession.

Reed was in private practice and possibly the leading Melbourne architect for three decades, designing many distinguished buildings with many surviving to this day. His designs included the Public Library, several churches including the Wesleyan Church, Scots' Church and the Collins Street Independent Church, the Menzies Hotel, the Bank of New South Wales, the ANZ Bank, Ormond College and Wilson Hall at Melbourne University, Melbourne Town Hall, Geelong Town Hall, and his major work, the Exhibition Building. One of the numerous private residences he designed was Rippon Lea,³⁰⁹ a mansion which is today managed by the Victorian National Trust. The well-known Australian architect Robin Boyd praises Reed's work with the following lines:

When all is said Reed's work remains to mock the modern critic, because it still has a generosity and a scale which are proportionately beyond the capacity of today's enterprise. And it may never be said that Reed failed to exploit his opportunities. His thinking was usually almost as big as the commissions he was given.³¹⁰

Although he became a very wealthy and powerful man, Reed lost almost everything, including his health in the economic disaster of the eighteen-nineties, becoming bankrupt and dying soon after.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Lewis, 'Tradition and Innovation', p. 66.

³⁰⁹ Australian Heritage Database, 'Joseph Reed, A city's greatest architect'.

³¹⁰ Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, p. 57.

³¹¹ Australian Heritage Database, 'Joseph Reed, A city's greatest architect'.

William Wardell's architectural ability lay mainly in church design for which he is considered as 'unsurpassed as a sensitive and scholarly interpreter of Gothic Revival'.³¹² Building at least thirty churches in England before arriving as a highly regarded architect in Melbourne in 1858,³¹³ Wardell soon became the superintending CoW and chief architect at the PWD. He was permitted to practice privately and had been contracted to design St. Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne.

Another architect of distinction was John Clark, who at the age of fourteen joined the PWD in 1852 as a draftsman, the same year as Knight. Clark remained with the PWD until 1878 when the Victorian government dismissed most civil servants. During those years, Clark designed many important public buildings including the Government Printing Office, the Treasury building, Royal Mint, Supreme Court, Titles Office and later in the early twentieth century, the City Baths, several hospitals and insane asylums.³¹⁴ Although Government House is attributed to William Wardell,³¹⁵ Clark undertook most of the drawings under the supervision of Wardell³¹⁶ who had become inspector-general of public works. Clark also designed numerous buildings in country Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and New Zealand.³¹⁷

Albert Purchas arrived in Melbourne in 1851 and began work as a contract surveyor to Surveyor-General Robert Hoddle. His contribution to Melbourne architecture was quite varied and like Knight, he was also a civil engineer. Purchas was architect and surveyor of the Melbourne General Cemetery designing the mortuary chapel, and also designed two cottages for the cemetery, and performed the landscaping for the grounds of both the Melbourne General and the Boroondara Cemeteries. He undertook the survey for the village of Hawthorn in 1852, designed several churches, prominent banks and hotels in both Melbourne and country Victorian. He designed barristers' chambers, mansions, the offices of the Northern Assurance Company and the Mutual Insurance Company in Melbourne. Purchas laid out the Zoological

³¹² D.I. McDonald, 'Biography-William Wilkinson Wardell', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

³¹³ Freeland, *Architecture in Australia*, p. 125.

³¹⁴ David Saunders, 'Biography-John-James Clark', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

³¹⁵ McDonald, 'Biography-William-Wilkinson Wardell', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

³¹⁶ Saunders, 'Biography-John-James Clark', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. See article on the death of Clark that attributes the design of Government House to him; 'Death of leading architect', *Argus*, 26 June 1915.

³¹⁷ Old Treasury Building Reserve Committee of Management Inc., 'JJ Clark's Buildings'.

Gardens in Royal Park and designed the Elephant House.³¹⁸ Purchas also produced one of the few published maps and compilations of the settled districts around Melbourne.³¹⁹

Besides working as surveyor and architect, Purchas was involved in similar interests to Knight. Both were in the Volunteer Corps where Purchas was captain of the Victorian Volunteer Force and Knight was honorary secretary. Purchas was on the VIA council when Knight was president. Several years later, Purchas served as VIA president from 1877-1878.³²⁰ Another interest they shared was in inventions and patents.³²¹ Knight was clearly an important Melbourne architect, but not the only one. Both are noted as attending the new governor Sir Henry Barkley's levee in January³²² and another in June of 1857.³²³ The levee was an early afternoon reception and ceremony held only for men.

Where Knight and his contemporaries fitted into Melbourne society

Knight's father was a successful contractor, so it is likely the family was quite comfortably middle class. The backgrounds of a few of Knight's associates appear to be similar. John Clark's father was a farmer and tailor who brought his family as unassisted migrants to Melbourne in 1852.³²⁴ Knight's business partner Peter Kerr's father was a Scottish shipmaster and leather merchant,³²⁵ but nothing is known of their other partner Thomas Kemp. Another associate was Joseph Reed, the son of an English landowner who 'had some status in the social order,' and was born in his parent's manor house Trenarth in Cornwall.³²⁶ Reed arrived in Melbourne in 1853. Another architect of note is William Wardell who arrived in Melbourne in 1858. His father had been a baker.³²⁷ These men were born in Britain; all must have been well educated and from lower or middle class working families, the exception being Reed, coming from a wealthy family. Having the advantage of a good education enabled

³¹⁸ Susan Zades, 'Biographical Family Report for Albert Purchas'.

³¹⁹ Albert Purchas, *Map of the settled districts around Melbourne in the Colony of Victoria*, 1855.

³²⁰ Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 48.

³²¹ 'Applications for Letters patent', *Victoria Government Gazette*, 2 August 1861.

³²² 'His Excellency's Levee', *Age*, 2 January 1857.

³²³ 'His Excellency's Levee', *Age*, 22 June 1857.

³²⁴ Saunders, 'Biography-John-James Clark', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

³²⁵ George Tibbits, 'Kerr, Peter (1820-1912)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

³²⁶ Australian Heritage Database, 'Joseph Reed, A city's greatest architect'.

³²⁷ McDonald, 'Biography-William-Wilkinson Wardell', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

them to become engineers and architects and excel in their field of expertise. Their place in the society of the day would be that of professional businessmen, possibly the same as they would have experienced had they stayed in Britain. The difference being there were more opportunities available in Melbourne.

Conclusion

Knight was fortuitous in arriving in Melbourne during its boom years of the 1850s when Melbourne offered many opportunities to young men who wanted a career in their chosen field of expertise. Some, like Knight, became prominent architects and their work still stands in testimony today.

The initial years in Melbourne proved Knight to be adaptable and successful, both professionally and socially. He succeeded in a variety of architectural works, in particular the co-design of the Houses of Parliament, and his supervision of their construction. His wide knowledge of engineering saw him interviewed by government select committees concerned with the establishment of water and sewerage infrastructure and another interview on the conduct of the public works. Knight's important role in the formation of the VIA demonstrates his belief in the value of professional associations, as he aimed to make architecture a profession with high standards. This was also shown by the variety of well-received papers he presented at VIA meetings, most of which were subsequently published. Knight's involvement in several societies, including ones concerning immigration, made him known to many. Although these early years augured well for Knight's future, fortune was not always on his side as will be described in later chapters.

The following chapter describes Knight's professional life after he dissolved his architectural partnership with Kerr in 1861. He continued to dabble occasionally in architecture over several years, but throughout the early and mid-1860s Knight was involved in a number of other ventures, both on his own account and working for others. The chapter will also deal with Knight's personal life, including his marriage and subsequent arrival of seven children. Matters relating to Knight's extended family that had an impact on his professional life are also discussed.

Chapter Three

Knight's creative yet controversial years, 1861-1867

During these Melbourne years, Knight encountered many changes both professionally and personally: their impact was both satisfying and traumatic. Two happenings profoundly influenced both his working and possibly his personal life, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Although it is true to that Knight was a successful man, he was not one of the most outstanding men in Victoria. There were other men in various fields during this period who were ingenious, inventive and resourceful, or like Sir Redmond Barry, justice of the High Court, 'a classicist and a traditionalist'. Barry was 'founder of the Melbourne Public Library', 'prime founder of the University of Melbourne of which he was first chancellor (1853)', a 'notable benefactor' and head of the Royal Commission for International Exhibitions.³²⁸ It was in the field of exhibitions that Knight was associated with Barry, as discussed later.

From the late 1850s and into the 1860s, Melbourne had 'rested on her wealth, the youth and vigour of her population and on her unbounded confidence and faith in the future, all of which stemmed directly from gold'.³²⁹ Through this wealth Melbourne had grown as a city with substantial buildings, some of which Knight had been the architect or had some other involvement with.

Melbourne also boasted railway lines, constructed by private companies, from the city to several established suburbs. Additional railway lines were not constructed for many years, but what had been established 'set the pattern for suburban expansion' in the 1860s. By '1861 Melbourne's population was 126,000, a five-fold increase in a decade'.³³⁰ Here was a Melbourne in which Knight played a significant role, and continued to do so for several years.

³²⁸ Peter Ryan, 'Barry, Sir Redmond (1813-1880)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

³²⁹ Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, p. 77.

³³⁰ Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, pp. 77-78.

Knight's domestic life

Knight married Alice Bertrand on 21 April 1853.³³¹ Alice was a fifteen-year-old English girl who had emigrated from England the previous year with her mother Miriam Bertrand, and two younger sisters Harriette and Josephine aboard the *Syria*, arriving in Melbourne in December 1852. Extensive research has revealed nothing of Alice's life prior to immigrating to Australia. It is not known if Alice and John knew of one another in London or met in Melbourne soon after her arrival.

Henry Bertrand, Alice's father, had been a London dentist. In an English newspaper advertisement, Bertrand stated he was the inventor of the 'Transparent Composition Teeth...being so very cool, that the most tender mouth can use them with comfort'.³³² Robert Travers wrote that Bertrand died in 1845 in the Royal Free Hospital in London of 'tremor of the brain'.³³³ The death of her husband may have been the reason Miriam decided to immigrate with three of her four children to Melbourne. The story of Miriam's fourth child, a boy named Henry Louis will appear later in this chapter.

Miriam's father Moses Mier was a merchant from Wales. Miriam remarried in Melbourne in 1853 to a surgeon dentist Louis Eskell and bore him three children. Their first child, a son, was born 25 December 1853.³³⁴ There is a possibility that Louis Eskell knew Miriam or her late husband in London.

The marriage of John George Knight and Alice Bertrand took place at the parish church of St Paul in 1853, which became a cathedral in 1891.³³⁵ Within six years of marriage she had five children. Admittedly Alice would have had a servant or two to help. This was the Victorian era when girls married very young, having little or no knowledge of birth control and were often continually pregnant. Alice was to bear her husband nine children over eighteen years with seven known to have survived beyond infancy, which would have been about typical of the times.

³³¹ Marriage certificate No.26155, Carole Winter collection.

³³² *Morning Post*, London, 3 May 1842.

³³³ Robert Travers, *The Amorous Dentist: A True Story*, p. 8.

³³⁴ 'Births', *Argus*, 28 December 1853.

³³⁵ W.H. Newnham, 'Nineteenth Century Melbourne', in *Historic Melbourne Sketchbook*, p. 26.

Alice's two sisters married Melbourne men. Harriette married Knight's business partner Peter Kerr in 1857 and had seven children. Knight held the wedding in his house for his other sister-in-law, sixteen-year-old Josephine Bertrand, to journalist Charles Bright in July 1859.³³⁶ Bright's journalistic ability allowed him to write for many newspapers, becoming editor of *Punch* in 1863, but as a religious free thinker investigating spiritualism he was converted to that doctrine.³³⁷

John and Alice Knight's first child was a son, George Melbourne, who was born on 25 March 1854 at Richmond³³⁸ and died 30 October 1854.³³⁹ The Knights must have thought highly of the city of Melbourne to have given this name to their son. Their second son George Arthur was born on 10 April 1855 at Collingwood and died on 6 July 1857 at Richmond. The death is thought to have been caused by hydrocephalus.³⁴⁰ Noted Victorian artist Charles Summers sculptured a marble bust depicting this child.

It is possible that coping with a sick child put a strain on this young woman and led Alice to place an advertisement in the newspaper requesting a nursemaid. Applicants were to apply to Mrs Knight at Evelyn House, Nicholson Street.³⁴¹ Five months later another advertisement appeared in the *Argus* wanting a good general servant and to apply to 'Mrs Knight, Bleak House, High Holborn-road [sic] Prahran'.³⁴²

Alice's mother and step-father sailed to England in 1855,³⁴³ which deprived Alice of the solace and support of her mother for she must have been devastated by the death of her first child at seven months, then her second son at just two years. Her mother sailed back to Melbourne with her husband, two children and fourteen-year-old Josephine, Alice's sister, in November 1857.³⁴⁴

³³⁶ 'Marriages', *Argus*, 8 July 1859.

³³⁷ F.B. Smith, 'Bright, Charles (1832-1903)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

³³⁸ 'Births', *Argus*, 27 March 1854.

³³⁹ 'Died', *Argus*, 1 November 1854.

³⁴⁰ Conversation with Carole Winter (great, great niece of John Knight), September 2006.

³⁴¹ 'Domestic Servants', *Argus*, 31 May 1856.

³⁴² 'Domestic Servants', *Argus*, 16 October 1856.

³⁴³ Public Record Office Victoria, 'Index to Outward Passengers to Interstate, UK, NZ and Foreign Ports 1852-1923'.

³⁴⁴ Public Record Office Victoria, 'Index to Unassisted Passenger Lists to Victoria 1852-1923'.

Alice gave birth to her third child, a daughter, Alice Laura on 27 January 1857 at Bleak House, Prahran.³⁴⁵ Just over a year later, Alice, travelling without her husband and accompanied by her one-year-old daughter and a servant, sailed to England. On board the steamship *Istanboul* four months out from Australia on 9 May 1858, Alice gave birth to a second daughter, Elizabeth Maria (Lizzie), off the coast of Ireland.³⁴⁶ It is hard to reason why Alice would even contemplate a harrowing ordeal of four months at sea being six months pregnant, unless she was leaving John because of frequent pregnancies or of constantly moving. After a few short months in England, Alice and the children sailed back to Melbourne on the *Prince Alfred*.³⁴⁷

It must have been with much trepidation that the Knights waited to see if their third son, Augustus Edward Ernest, born on 10 December 1859 at 41 Albert Street would survive.³⁴⁸ Another son, Frederick Arthur Herbert was born on 13 June 1861 at 4 Westbourne Terrace, St. Kilda.³⁴⁹ Both children lived well into adulthood.

The many addresses where Knight lived

Knight and his family moved house very often throughout his time in Melbourne — an example of this being that his children were born in six different suburbs. The Australian Electoral Rolls for 1856, list Knight as having two blocks of freehold land in Richmond Road, Richmond in St Stephens Division.³⁵⁰ This is the first reference found that alludes to him owning any property. In 1859 at a crown land sale, Knight purchased one rood, equal to one quarter of an acre of land for £21 at Sunbury and together with his brother George, bought another quarter of an acre for £36.³⁵¹ An entry in the Australian Electoral Rolls for 1856 showed Knight living at Evelyn House, Eastern Hill, occupation an architect and his salary was £100 and he was employed by the government.³⁵² It is stated earlier that Knight's salary was in fact £1,200.

³⁴⁵ 'Births', *Argus*, 28 January 1857.

³⁴⁶ 'Births', *Argus*, 11 August 1858.

³⁴⁷ Public Record Office Victoria, 'Index to Unassisted Passenger Lists to Victoria 1852-1923'.

³⁴⁸ 'Births', *Argus*, 12 December 1859.

³⁴⁹ 'Births', *Argus*, 14 June 1861.

³⁵⁰ Australian Electoral Commission, 'Victorian Electoral Roll 1856'.

³⁵¹ 'Crown Land Sale', *Argus*, 14 June 1859; 'Crown Land Sale', *Argus*, 15 June 1859.

³⁵² Australian Electoral Commission, 'Victorian Electoral Roll 1856'.

An advertisement under 'Houses and land to Let' in August 1860, describes a house presently occupied by J.G. Knight Esq., will be vacant within a month.³⁵³ Knight and his family lived in his friend Sali Cleve's homes, in both South Yarra and St Kilda. They appear not to have been the sole occupants, as information shows Knight living with his brother George who was also sharing Cleve's house at the time.

Usually people do not continually move house without reason. No family, especially with children would enjoy the frequent upheaval of moving. Not being settled in a house suggests Knight often had little money or did not invest wisely. In the previous chapter, there is mention that the suburb could denote one's wealth yet this appeared of little relevance to Knight, as he lived in wealthy suburbs and poorer ones.

Knight's brother George arrives in Melbourne

Knight's younger brother George William arrived in Melbourne with his wife and two children in 1857 aboard the *Swiftsure* from London.³⁵⁴ George stated that it was at his brother John's suggestion that he came to Australia saying there was plenty of work available.³⁵⁵ George, also an architect, had learned railway surveying and engineering in England and had an interest in horticulture.³⁵⁶ George was the engineer for the Williamstown Railway and construction of the main Bendigo (formerly called Sandhurst) line at Sunbury, supervising the Jackson Creek viaduct. George, who had always had an interest in horticulture and an understanding of soil, decided to plant a vineyard at Riddells Creek which proved not to be viable. He later returned to his profession of architecture in Sandhurst and became the city building surveyor: his work included being city inspector, valuer, inspector of nuisances and cattle for slaughter, abattoirs and health inspector. George Knight later developed four nurseries in the area, 'transforming barren, mining-affected land into horticultural showplaces'.³⁵⁷ In the 1860s, the Knight brothers traded together as wine merchants.

³⁵³ 'Houses and Land to Let', *Argus*, 7 August 1860.

³⁵⁴ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 11 March 1857.

³⁵⁵ 'Pioneers and all', *Bendigo Independent*, 19 June.

³⁵⁶ Personal correspondence from Carole Winter, 17 November 2004.

³⁵⁷ Dunstan, 'Knight, George William (1831-1923)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

A problem with an in-law

It was in late 1857 when the Eskell family arrived back in Melbourne after spending nearly three years in England.³⁵⁸ Louis Eskell resumed his profession of dentistry in Melbourne and a little over a year later he became an insolvent debtor.³⁵⁹ In July he was intending to apply for a certificate of discharge³⁶⁰ but failed to attend the insolvency court to obtain the certificate.³⁶¹ Eskell had not appeared in court as he was already in Sydney advertising that he was newly arrived from Melbourne and may now be consulted.³⁶² All did not go well for Eskell as unfavourable publicity followed him.³⁶³

The Victorian legal system eventually caught up with Eskell, for in 1862 he was granted an adjournment of one week to prepare ‘an affidavit showing the amount of his income received since his insolvency’.³⁶⁴ In July 1863, being unable to pay his creditors, Eskell had been confined at Darlinghurst gaol with liabilities amounting to £53.10.10 while his assets were £5.³⁶⁵ The following month he applied to the Chief Commission of Insolvent Estates for permission to have his estate released from ‘sequestration’.³⁶⁶ Eskell’s reputation was considerably tarnished by bad publicity and the insolvency. He possibly thought that by moving well away from Australia this shadow over him would eventually fade. On the 26 April 1864 Louis Eskell and family sailed from Sydney to London on board the *Liberator*.³⁶⁷

Knight leaves architecture

In March 1861 two advertisements appeared in the *Argus*: one advertising Knight and Kerr as architects, so apparently they were still business partners, and in the

³⁵⁸ ‘Public Notices’, *Argus*, 15 December 1857.

³⁵⁹ ‘Law Notices’, *Argus*, 17 May, 1859.

³⁶⁰ ‘Public Notices’, *Argus*, 22 July, 1859.

³⁶¹ ‘Insolvent Court’, *Argus*, 23 August 1859.

³⁶² ‘Teeth. Teeth. Teeth’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1859.

³⁶³ ‘Imposition-Caution to the Public’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 December 1860; ‘To the Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November 1861; ‘Notice’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 November 1861.

³⁶⁴ ‘Law Report’, *Argus*, 4 March 1862.

³⁶⁵ ‘Insolvency Court’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 July 1863.

³⁶⁶ ‘In the Supreme Court of New South Wales’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1863.

³⁶⁷ ‘Clearances’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1864.

other, Knight was advertising a patent agency office.³⁶⁸ In both these advertisements, business addresses were the same. On 14 August 1861, the business partnership between Knight and Kerr was dissolved by mutual consent. An advertisement stated, 'All outstanding accounts due to or by the late firm will be received and paid by Mr. Kerr'.³⁶⁹ Later that month, the Melbourne Exchange Company's balance sheet showed that £118.14 was owed to Knight and Kerr as commission.³⁷⁰

After the partnership finished, Kerr, his wife and four children sailed to New Zealand in December 1863.³⁷¹ The family returned to Melbourne in May 1865.³⁷² Chlebnikowski states that on Kerr's return to Melbourne he was engaged in land dealings in the Lilydale area and lost heavily.³⁷³

A new direction for Knight – a time for change

Knight's first nine years in Melbourne have been shown as a time of enormous activity: establishing himself as an architect of some repute and playing a very significant role in Melbourne in both architectural and other organisations, especially the VIA. If there had not been a freezing of funds for government buildings, Knight may have been able to prove his architectural skills if the original design was followed through for Parliament House.

Advertising the patent agency business clearly demonstrated Knight was venturing into other fields of work which were relatively different from that of architecture. Knight described the patent agency as a 'Repository for Inventions and Contractor's Exchange'. In between these other enterprises he undertook several architectural works, the last being in June 1870.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁸ 'Trade Addresses', *Argus*, 16 March 1861. A week later the same advertisement appears, 'Trade Addresses', *Argus*, 21 March 1861.

³⁶⁹ 'Public Notices', *Argus*, 17 August 1861.

³⁷⁰ 'Melbourne Exchange Company', *Argus*, 20 August 1861.

³⁷¹ Public Record Office Victoria, 'Index to Outward Passengers to Interstate, UK, NZ and Foreign Ports 1852-1923'.

³⁷² Public Record Office Victoria, 'Index to Unassisted Passenger Lists to Victoria 1852-1923'.

³⁷³ Chlebnikowski, 'The historic development of the building of Parliament House, Melbourne', p. 117.

³⁷⁴ 'Tenders Required', *Argus*, 29 June, 1870. This was for additions to a house in Kew.

The emergence of Knight's entrepreneurial skills

Knight appeared to have a leaning towards theatricals and was never one to stand back when the opportunity arose where he could sing at an evening soiree or dinner. In 1861 he consented to be on a committee for amateur performers.³⁷⁵ Melbourne offered its citizens other forms of entertainment. One of these was music and in 1861 Melbourne formed its first permanent opera company,³⁷⁶ not that Knight sang at these professional events.

Knight's working life varied dramatically. The colonial exhibitions were undoubtedly the most impressive and a highlight for the Melbourne population. Knight was to excel in the capacity as an organiser for the Victorian and international exhibitions. From 1860 to 1861 he was involved in obtaining exhibits for the Victorian Exhibition, then as secretary, focused on the London International Exhibition to be held in South Kensington, England in May 1862.³⁷⁷

Melbourne held its first industrial exhibition in 1854 in a newly-constructed building on a reserve in William Street. The building of glass and iron erected in 1853 was 'a miniature copy of the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park' and over many years was utilised for a variety of festivities including balls, 'lectures and public meetings'.³⁷⁸ The exhibition was a preliminary to the 1855 Paris Universal Exhibition.

Victoria, being a relatively new colony, had little to contribute to an international exhibition in the way of progressive manufacturing or 'applied arts', so the principal item sent to Paris was 'the spectacular collection of gold nuggets'.³⁷⁹ Chlebnikowski mistakenly wrote that Knight was involved with this exhibition.³⁸⁰ This belief also appeared in an obituary to Knight in 1892, where it mentioned that Knight 'reigned supreme' as the organiser of the first display of Victorian products held 'in a

³⁷⁵ 'Theatre Royal', *Argus*, 23 May, 1861.

³⁷⁶ Harold Love, *The Golden Age of Australian Opera: W.S. Lyster and his companies 1861-1880*, p. 3.

³⁷⁷ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 283.

³⁷⁸ Andrew Garran, (ed.), *Australia the First Hundred Years*, facsimile of *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, Vol.1 and 11, p. 228.

³⁷⁹ Gerard Hayes, 'London, Paris, Philadelphia ... Victoria at the Great Exhibitions', *La Trobe Library Journal*, 14, No.56, 1995, pp. 2-5.

³⁸⁰ Chlebnikowski, 'The historical development of the building of Parliament House, Melbourne', p. 18.

miniature Crystal Palace' in Melbourne in 1854.³⁸¹ Newspaper accounts of the day do not mention Knight's name in any capacity in regard to this exhibition,³⁸² nor is Knight's involvement mentioned in Peter H. Hoffenberg's comprehensive book covering Australian exhibitions.³⁸³ Knight, who by 1854 had only lived two years in Melbourne, appeared not to have had any affiliation to this early exhibition, but undoubtedly visited it and it possibly sparked an interest he later put into practice.

Knight must have realised he had some intuitive leaning towards exhibitions, for in 1857 he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Argus* newspaper with the suggestion that Victoria once more hold an exhibition to enlighten its inhabitants of its progressive improvement since the exhibition of 1854. He suggested that as Melbourne had an exhibition building this was a fine time to have another intercolonial exhibition over the ensuing year and he would be 'happy to assist in forming a provisional committee'.³⁸⁴ The exhibition did not take place the following year, but when it did occur three years later Knight was well prepared to take on this role.

The importance of exhibitions

Intercolonial and international exhibitions were a way the colonists could show with pride their achievements and commercial enterprise. Exhibitions were not only an industrial spectacle of a country, but a linking of colonial and imperial lands. 'Visitors were part of that extensive social drama, observing and, in turn, being observed'.³⁸⁵ Hoffenberg argues that:

Exhibitions were at the heart of imperial and national social and commercial enterprises during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. They were spectacles of tangible fantasy, in which participants forged nations and the Empire, both imaginary and material.³⁸⁶

As a prelude to the forthcoming Great Exhibition, Knight put forward a series of resolutions for an Australian exhibition at a monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Victoria in August 1860. After some discussion the following three resolutions were accepted:

³⁸¹ 'The late J.G. Knight', *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

³⁸² 'Public Notices', *Argus*, 10 October 1854.

³⁸³ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 283.

³⁸⁴ 'A Victorian Exhibition for 1858', *Argus*, 19 October 1858.

³⁸⁵ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. xix.

³⁸⁶ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. xv.

1. That it is desirable to hold an Australian Exhibition in the course of the ensuing year, in order to be prepared to forward a suitable collection of products to the proposed Great Exhibition in London, in 1862.
2. As the purpose of the Exhibition is to promote the general interests of the colony, the proposal deserves the support the Government and the public at large.
3. That a deputation be appointed to wait upon the hon. the Chief Secretary, to ascertain the amount of support the Government would be disposed to give to the proposed undertaking, and report the result to the society.³⁸⁷

Knight was appointed one of the seven deputation members to take these proposals to the government.

Victoria appointed commissioners who prepared various articles and products as a representation of Victoria for the London International Exhibition. ‘Exhibition commissioners were among the first generation of cultural bureaucrats; they applied administrative skills and scientific knowledge to the question of public culture and national education’.³⁸⁸ The commissioners expected ‘circulars and invitations posted on the walls of cities and towns’ to be adequate to gain contributions³⁸⁹ – but this was not the case. They hoped that by inviting producers and manufacturers to contribute their products for the exhibition, there would be a pride in the project. But the Victorian department had moved far too slowly in bringing together these articles and products of the colony. There was public apathy which may have been due to there not being an incentive of competitiveness that would have been witnessed in Europe between manufacturers and producers at such a time. To create appreciable interest, the commissioners appointed Knight to be the agent for the exhibition and he was ‘to devote his whole time to the duties of that office’.³⁹⁰

Knight’s appointment as agent was to take effect from Monday 8 July 1861. The commissioners agreed on a salary of £600 per annum, travelling expenses that would cover touring Victoria and a cabin passage to and from England.³⁹¹ The appointment meant Knight firstly required products to exhibit in the Victorian Exhibition. In 1861 when Victoria was invited to exhibit at the May 1862 London International

³⁸⁷ *Argus*, 7 August 1860.

³⁸⁸ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. xviii.

³⁸⁹ ‘Victoria and the Exhibition in 1862’, *Argus*, 25 July 1861.

³⁹⁰ *Argus*, 8 July 1861. Historian Barbara James wrote of Knight’s achievement as secretary and manager of the Melbourne Exhibition in *Darwin Star*, 20 October 1981.

³⁹¹ ‘Extract from the Minutes of Exhibition Commissioners’, 29 June 1869, MS8380, Box 600 1(c). Papers of Sir Redmond Barry, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Exhibition, a decision was made by the commissioners to gather all contributions in their own exhibition building as a preliminary.³⁹²

Knight as agent for the Exhibition

The entrepreneurial position was one in which Knight excelled. The opportunity given to Knight was one he grabbed enthusiastically, characteristically becoming totally absorbed in the work. He ‘applied his administrative and architectural skills to the oversight, transportation, and display of exhibits’ working ‘as Sir Redmond Barry’s official assistant in Europe, England, and various Australian colonies’.³⁹³ Sir Redmond’s credentials regarding exhibitions were:

Visiting Executive Commissioner for Victoria at London (1862), Dublin (1865), and Philadelphia (1876) Exhibitions; Executive Commissioner for Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition (1866-67); Commissioner, Local Executive Committee for Melbourne exhibitions, including Victoria (1861) and Intercolonial (1875).³⁹⁴

Commissioners selected exhibits they saw as outstanding to be forwarded as an official representation of the colony to international exhibitions.³⁹⁵

After canvassing contributions from across the colony, Knight quickly met with so much success that he never doubted he would have the exhibition building filled ‘with a splendid collection of colonial productions’.³⁹⁶ The contributions were as varied as paintings to water engines, from animal skins to guano, furniture to clocks and Knight’s own exhibit of building materials. His brother George ‘had invented and patented a self-discharging ballast wagon so cleverly arranged as to drop the bluestone metal in three separate parts of the line’³⁹⁷ and offered this and other railway improvements as exhibits. These articles were to be principally for the Victorian Exhibition and the outstanding exhibits would be shipped to England for the International Exhibition.

Organisation of this massive enterprise required Knight to travel widely and visit many country towns. In August, he was in Ballarat gaining co-operation from locals

³⁹² Alexander Sutherland, et al., *Victoria and its Metropolis Past and Present*, Vol. 1, p. 464.

³⁹³ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, pp. 42-43.

³⁹⁴ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 281.

³⁹⁵ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 11.

³⁹⁶ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, pp. 42-43.

³⁹⁷ Edward E. Pescott, ‘The Pioneers of Horticulture in Victoria’, *The Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. xviii, February 1940, No. 1, pp. 28-29.

who expected to be well represented at the exhibition. Other towns visited were Creswick and Clunes; he then headed north to Ovens and the goldfields of Sandhurst and Castlemaine.³⁹⁸ In the seven years since the exhibition of 1854, Victoria had developed to a stage that could not have been dreamt of by those people who had lived through the upheaval of society and impairment of industry following the discovery of gold. People had now settled back into accustomed ways in a more enlightened and skilful manner and the results were displayed in the Victorian Exhibition of 1861.³⁹⁹

The exhibition, held in the same William Street building as the 1854 Melbourne Metropolitan Exhibition, was formally opened on 1 October 1861 by Sir Henry Barkly and closed on 29 November 1861.⁴⁰⁰ During the formal opening of the exhibition, Sir Redmond Barry noted many attributes in the progress of Victoria. He stated that in 1851 Victoria had a population of 77,345 that had risen to 540,671; also export of gold from 1851 until 1861 was 25,985,044 ounces, with a value of £103,941,976. Barry mentioned the establishment of 1,504 miles of electric telegraph within Victoria that now connected to Adelaide, Hobart and Sydney. He went on to say: 'Victoria will appear to advantage, and the progress made by her during the last decade may rival that of any of the numerous possessions of Her Majesty'. He proceeded to tell the assembled people that because of the amount of exhibits they had received for this exhibition, they could not fit in the original building and required an extension. He then praised Knight, who within nine days had constructed an addition to the original building and made 'several alterations to improve the internal arrangements'.⁴⁰¹

Not only was Knight an agent of the commission, but an exhibitor too. Instead of showing samples and the relevant amount in figures of gold that Victoria had produced between 1 October 1851 and 1 October 1861, Knight ingeniously constructed a 10 feet square base, forty foot high solid pyramid of gilt plaster.⁴⁰² The

³⁹⁸ *Argus*, 31 August 1861.

³⁹⁹ W. H. Archer, et.al, 'Preface', in *Catalogue of the Victorian Exhibition 1861: With Prefatory Essays*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁰ Ian Morrison, 'The Accompaniments of European Civilization: Melbourne Exhibition 1854-1888', *La Trobe Library Journal*, 14, No. 56, 1995, pp. 6-10.

⁴⁰¹ Archer, 'The Colony of Victoria', in *Catalogue of the Victorian Exhibition 1861*, pp. 22, 28-29.

⁴⁰² *Argus*, 13 November 1861.

golden pyramid represented the amount of '800 tons of gold' Victoria had produced in the previous ten years at a value of £104,649,728.⁴⁰³ At this exhibition, Knight was awarded three First-Class Certificates for the following: the design of his gold pyramid, the design of the new Government House and for a comprehensive collection of building stones samples.⁴⁰⁴

As a further example of how far Victoria had advanced, not only in the field of manufacturing, but in wine growing and produce, a competitive vine-growers' dinner was held on Saturday 25 January 1862. The very successful dinner differed in the fact that all wines and food, including cheeses, had been produced locally in the Barrabool Hills area. The dinner was the result of a dispute between two friends, both wine growers, as to who possessed the best wine.⁴⁰⁵ Knight attended the gentlemen-only dinner at the Wheatsheaf Inn in the village of Ceres, in the Barrabool Hills outside of Geelong. This was the first time a public dinner in the colony supplied only colonial produced food and beverages.

Knight awarded accolades by contemporaries

Approximately thirty members of the VIA gave Knight a farewell dinner at the Duke of Rothsay Hotel on Tuesday 17 December 1861. Although the evening was to wish him well with the Victorian exhibits in the forthcoming exhibition, Knight was also warmly lauded for his activities when president of the institute.⁴⁰⁶ A complimentary dinner at the Criterion Hotel on Monday 27 January 1862 was held for Knight on the eve of his departure from Melbourne to England. In his acknowledgment to those present, Knight was reported as stating that:

owing to the many dear friends he had in the colony, his departure for England would be matter for regret, but he desired to do all that he could in order that Victoria might be properly represented at the Great Exhibition, and that he was anxious to be "posted up" in the many improvements and inventions which would there have exposition. He expressed the hope that while in the mother country he should be able to clear away a great deal of the darkness and doubt which existed in the English mind, not only with regard to the position of

⁴⁰³ 'The Industrial Exhibition', *Argus*, 24 December 1861.

⁴⁰⁴ Archer, 'The Colony of Victoria', in *Catalogue of the Victorian Exhibition 1861*, pp. 271, 286, 297. In this catalogue, T. Riley received a First Class Certificate for the execution of Knight's Design of the Pyramid, p. 299.

⁴⁰⁵ 'The vinegrowers' competitive dinner at the village of Ceres, Barrabool Hills', *Argus*, 28 January 1862.

⁴⁰⁶ *Argus*, 18 December 1861.

Victoria in the Australian group of colonies, but also with regard to its wants and the character of its people.⁴⁰⁷

Knight, together with Alice, four children and a servant boarded the steamship *Great Britain* that sailed in the early hours of 31 January 1862 for Liverpool, via the Cape of Good Hope.⁴⁰⁸ On the eve before departure, the popularity of Knight was apparent by a deputation of his friends visiting him on board the ship. In the ship's saloon, Benjamin Cowderoy, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, presented Knight with a purse of 140 sovereigns as a token of the esteem expressed by his friends.⁴⁰⁹

Outstanding success for Victoria at the Great Exhibition

Knight and his family were in England, living in London for nearly three years.⁴¹⁰ An address given at this time for Knight was 23 Scarsdale Villas, Kensington.⁴¹¹ Knight and his family arrived in Liverpool on the 8 April after the long trip from Australia, then catching the night train to London. After visiting the exhibition, Knight stated the majority of other exhibitors had for many months been setting up their displays, but for Victoria, no exhibits had yet arrived.⁴¹²

A letter written in satirical tone to the *Melbourne Punch*, supposedly from Sir Redmond Barry, described the frustration of the Victorian people only having an exhibition of empty exhibit spaces. Barry purportedly received word from Lord Palmerston who did not believe that the arrival of the gold pyramid would eventuate. Knight received a mention in Barry's letter, saying he (Knight) was in a melancholy mood as he waited for goods to arrive and 'having nothing better to show ... built up his bales of wool as nearly as possible like the admired Library Front of our Parliamentary buildings'.⁴¹³ Knight, frustrated with the wait for the Victorian exhibits, emphasised that the 'splendid position assigned to Victoria would not have been obtained, nor would the excuses made for our non-arrival have been accepted' had it not been for the 'perseverance and influence' of Hugh Childers, a man of

⁴⁰⁷ *Argus*, 28 January 1862.

⁴⁰⁸ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 30 January 1862.

⁴⁰⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1873/213. Testimonial 30 January 1862. B. Cowderoy to Knight.

⁴¹⁰ 'Assisted Emigration to Victoria', *Argus*, 21 May 1863.

⁴¹¹ 'Knight to Victorian Commissioners, International Exhibition: summary of liabilities', 25 March 1863, Box 604 3(c). Papers of Sir Redmond Barry, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

⁴¹² 'Victoria and the Great Exhibition', *Argus*, 11 July 1862.

⁴¹³ 'Victoria at the Great Exhibition', *Melbourne Punch*, 24 July 1862.

influence and high standing.⁴¹⁴ Childers had been a politician in the 1850s in Victoria and later became a member of British parliament, representing Pontefract in the House of Commons.⁴¹⁵ As exhibits eventually arrived, Knight was delighted that Victoria presented the best fine art gallery at the exhibition, drawing ‘more people than anything else in the colonial section’.⁴¹⁶

By August Knight reported that the exhibition was drawing in approximately 60,000 people on the first four days of each week when it was only one shilling for admission, but for Friday and Saturday admission rose to two shillings and sixpence — consequently fewer people visited on the weekends. He had compiled a pamphlet of eight pages describing the statistics and particulars of Victoria with 500 of these being distributed each day. Knight reminisced about visitors to the exhibition having no idea where Victoria was; people thought bales of wool were cotton and he daily received enquiries asking if he knew Mr or Mrs such-n-such in Australia. Having lived in Australia for ten years and greatly appreciative of the much warmer climes, Knight rather ironically remarked that in England, ‘the season, called summer by courtesy, is on the wane, and we are just launching upon a dismal autumn. After such a summer, I shudder at the contemplation of an English winter’.⁴¹⁷

Gold held status as a symbol of fortune and wealth. The prime position offered to Knight for the Victorian department exhibits allowed his ‘awe inspiring gold pyramid’ that had won praise at the Victorian Exhibition the previous year to be displayed ‘under the Eastern Dome ... at the apex of the British nave, thus forming a golden vanishing point when seen from the other end of the long central arcade’. The pyramid was ‘one of the most significant exhibits of the century’.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ ‘Victoria and the Great Exhibition’, *Argus*, 11 July 1862.

⁴¹⁵ H.L., Hall, Childers, ‘Hugh Culling Eardley (1827-1896)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁴¹⁶ ‘Victoria and the Great Exhibition’, *Argus*, 11 July 1862.

⁴¹⁷ ‘Victoria at the Exhibition’, *Argus*, 11 October 1862.

⁴¹⁸ London Stereoscopic and Photographic Company, ‘Gold of Victoria Exhibition’, 1862.



Figure 9. The gold pyramid at the International Exhibition, 1862. London Stereoscope and Photographic Company.

Writing in 1864 of the colony of Victoria, William Westgarth described the recent Great International Exhibition and conferred accolades on Barry and Knight for much of the success Victoria gained at the Exhibition.⁴¹⁹ He claimed the colonists had much to be proud of and applauded the contributions of products that covered all facets of industry and life.⁴²⁰ At the completion of his text on the Exhibition, Westgarth offered credit to Knight for the concept of the gold pyramid with the following words:

⁴¹⁹ William Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria: Its History, Commerce, and Goldmining; Its Social and Political Institutions; Down to the end of 1863*, p. 391.

⁴²⁰ Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria: Its History, Commerce, and Goldmining*, pp. 388-389.

Who has forgotten Victoria's glittering pyramid, rising conspicuous in the matchless scene, like a striking landmark in the radiant ocean of art and industry, and representing above one hundred millions' worth of gold ... from the soil of the colony?⁴²¹

The 1862 Exhibition was both an outstanding success for the colony of Victoria and for Knight in particular. Victoria held prominence with the biggest and most varied collection of artefacts from any British colony and was given 5,665 square feet of exhibiting floor space out of the possible 14,277 square feet for the entire colonies including New Zealand. From 322 awarded medals and 229 honourable mentions, Victoria dominated with 111 and 92 awards respectively.⁴²²

By December 1862, Knight, in what he stated was his last letter to the editor of the *Argus*, described the winding up of the exhibition including exhibits being shipped back to Victoria with other objects being given to institutions in Scotland, Ireland and England which he hoped would continue to advertise the colony of Victoria. Of particular interest was a box of valuable old Staffordshire pottery Knight had received from an ethnologist Dr Barnard Davis in exchange for 'an aboriginal skull'. Knight remarked that both he and the doctor were delighted with their exchange.⁴²³ In the 1800s the skulls and skeletons of Aboriginal Australians were keenly sought after. There was wide spread belief Aboriginal people were facing extinction and that skeletal remains held valuable information on these supposedly vanishing populations. The practice of taking Aboriginal remains continued for many more decades and, as Tom Griffiths has commented, cast a long shadow over museum collecting:

Collecting skulls of any age, particularly of Tasmanians, had long been a science obsession. Collecting skulls challenged the boundaries between scientific and crime, between the museum and the magistrate.⁴²⁴

Knight continued to be amazed by the general ignorance of the people of Britain with regard to Australia. He spoke of the renowned poet laureate and farmer, Alfred Tennyson being given some Victorian grain and Tennyson remarking 'It seems to have been grown in sunshine'. Knight wrote that he considered he would be ready to leave England by March 1863, but before that he would 'take the usual tourist's rush

⁴²¹ Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria: Its History, Commerce, and Goldmining*, p. 389.

⁴²² Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria: Its History, Commerce, and Goldmining*, p. 390.

⁴²³ 'Victoria Department of the International Exhibition', *Argus*, 16 February 1863.

⁴²⁴ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, p. 63.

over the continent, and then, not unwillingly, to return to my adopted Australian home'.⁴²⁵

The Victorian exhibits in Knight's opinion had visually demonstrated to the public the advance in manufacturing, mining, the arts and quality and variety of produce in the British colonies. The other idea in Knight's mind at the time was to promote the idea of emigration to the colonies and in particular Victoria. The Victorian section of the exhibition greatly impressed many of the English population. For the first time, many people had the opportunity to ask questions, make enquiries about this far off land and be given some idea of Australia and its vast resources and realise the benefits that could be attained by leaving their homeland.⁴²⁶ Knight hoped that the Exhibition's array of visible articles in the Victorian department and the descriptive pamphlets would clearly boost the imagination of many of the working population who wished 'to better their circumstances in a new country'.⁴²⁷

Emigration pursuits

As well as being secretary for Victoria at the International Exhibition, he was also emigration agent for the Victorian government and honorary secretary for the Victoria Emigrants' Assistance Society (VEAS). While extremely busy in the organisation of the Exhibition in August 1862, he still found time to attend a public meeting in Birmingham with the object of forming an emigration society in that town.⁴²⁸ A body was set up in 1862 in Birmingham called the National Colonial Emigration Society, which was formed from amalgamating two other organisations, the National Female Emigration Society and the Colonial Emigration Society of Birmingham.⁴²⁹ The National Emigration Society dealt with all the colonies of the British Empire and did not raise as much money as the VEAS, which concentrated on sending people to Victoria.⁴³⁰

The reason for the formation of an emigration society was that a shortage of cotton in England dramatically affected thousands of Britons working in cotton mills, mainly

⁴²⁵ 'Victoria Department of the International Exhibition', *Argus*, 16 February 1863.

⁴²⁶ 'Victoria at the Great Exhibition', *Star*, 13 October 1862.

⁴²⁷ *Argus*, 14 October 1862.

⁴²⁸ 'Victoria at the Great Exhibition', *Argus*, 11 October 1862.

⁴²⁹ *Argus*, 16 July 1863.

⁴³⁰ 'Emigration', *Argus*, 17 June 1863.

in the county of Lancashire. The Lancashire ‘cotton famine’ was greatly affected by the American Civil War. America’s President Abraham Lincoln ordered blockades of the American southern ports, thus stopping raw cotton being transported to England. Mills had closed and hundreds of thousands of people were out of work and suffering. The other added factor to the problem was excessive ‘over production and speculation in the late 1850s’ that would have led to a depression in any case.⁴³¹ Greedy merchants stored cotton in warehouses waiting for a higher price or to export overseas.⁴³²

Knight saw the plight of thousands of good working people in dire straits, out of work with no available employment and receiving very little in the way of government relief due to the cotton famine. He considered these people would be ideal candidates for migrating to Victoria. Knight in correspondence stated that ‘the majority of persons out of work by reason of the cotton famine would rather emigrate to any part of the globe than remain in their present abject, hopeless, and dependent condition’. He further wrote that in one month 12,000 people had applied to him seeking immigration to Australia.⁴³³

In March 1863 with the London Exhibition well and truly over, Knight took on the role of promoting emigration with zeal and dedication. The object of the VEAS was to impart information on the availability of the labour market in Victoria to intending emigrants, and the possibility of financially assisting them with a loan to make the journey to Australia.

Knight concentrated on forming an organised plan of action in London to get an emigration society formed. He wished that his committee be comprised of former Victorian residents now living in England, and gentlemen of influence not connected with Victoria. The aim was to obtain donations to enable the establishment of a society to assist people living in distressed areas to immigrate to Victoria. The funds would be in the form of a charity, both from colonial government and members of the society. Knight envisaged that the society would select suitable applicants – some would be able to pay for their own passage but for those unable to pay the total

⁴³¹ Manchester City Council, ‘1861-1865: Lancashire Cotton Famine’.

⁴³² Manchester City Council, ‘1861-1865: Lancashire Cotton Famine’.

⁴³³ ‘Mr. Childer’s Speech on Emigration to Victoria’, *Argus*, 12 September 1863.

amount, be financially assisted with the balance of money. Knight organised a private meeting on the 18 March 1863 at the London Tavern for those gentlemen interested, and for people who approved of forming a society but unable to attend the meeting, Knight asked that he be permitted to place their ‘name on the committee of management, in the event of the association being constituted ... [and] the amount you would be disposed to subscribe’.⁴³⁴ The VEAS was duly formed on 18 March ‘and a committee of management formed’ together with £800 being subscribed together with the £5,000 remitted to Knight from the government of Victoria.⁴³⁵

By April 1863 the VEAS had collected nearly £4,000 and was already disbursing money. Knight stated that it appeared the society would be a far ‘greater institution than its promoters anticipated’.⁴³⁶ He further commented that the committee was working well and that there was a National Emigration Society that had been in existence for ten years and dealt with all the colonies of the British Empire, but in all those years had not raised as much money as the VEAS. Several other smaller emigration societies had also been established in Manchester and Lancashire. Knight wrote that he fervently hoped that the oppressed people living in distressed areas would take advantage of moving to Victoria where ‘their labour would be better remunerated’.⁴³⁷

Knight established suitable premises for the VEAS in London that would act in a threefold capacity. Firstly, people with a curiosity for Australia with a possibility in mind of emigration, could call and collect pamphlets and other information on Victoria. Secondly, colonists visiting England would be able to collect letters from family and friends back in Victoria. Finally, the premises acted as a showcase for Victoria. On show would be ‘specimens of raw and manufactured produce, objects of art and mechanism, or anything suitable as illustrations’ of Victorian resources, a mini exhibition. These goods could be loaned to Knight and then if required be

⁴³⁴ ‘Assisted Emigration to Victoria’, *Argus*, 21 May 1863.

⁴³⁵ *Argus*, 18 May 1863. This was confirmed in a diary entry by Childers who chaired a meeting called by Knight to form the Victorian Emigrants’ Assistance Society. See Spencer Childers book on his father’s correspondence, *The Life and Correspondence of the right Hon. Hugh C.E. Childers*, p. 116.

⁴³⁶ ‘Emigration’, *Argus*, 17 June 1863.

⁴³⁷ ‘Emigration’, *Argus*, 17 June 1863.

handed over to relatives or friends in England.⁴³⁸ Perhaps this concept was the precursor to today's Australia House.

In May fifty married couples and their children sailed from Liverpool, and the following month 100 single females left Southampton, both ships bound for Melbourne.⁴³⁹ For the next year or more, Knight devoted himself to finding suitable emigrants to go to Victoria. He assiduously worked on emigration issues from many of the distressed areas in England where unemployment was rife. He knew that there were so many people who qualified to be emigrants, but available monies only allowed for so few.⁴⁴⁰

Knight was very upset that the Victorian government was sitting on its hands, promising to pass the Immigration Bill but nothing eventuated, saying that 'Victoria is still in the retail department and content to pick up' the occasional odd person. In July Knight visited Ireland hoping to get a selection of four to five hundred people to emigrate under the new bill. Money to the value of £2,600 had been subscribed from Melbourne for Irish emigration.⁴⁴¹ Already 720 people had been offered assisted passage to emigrate, and funds were available for another 800 to go.⁴⁴²

It had been Knight's intention to keep the Melbourne *Argus* newspaper readers informed of the happenings at the London Exhibition, and this he regularly did. It was not only regarding the events of the Exhibition that Knight enlightened his readers, but also his interest and role in helping people immigrate to Victoria. Keeping readers acquainted of the progress of both events, proved to be both beneficial for the reader and Knight. Even though he was in England for three years, he received considerable public exposure by people back home reading regular articles written by him, something he possibly enjoyed.

Knight's other pursuits in London 1862-1864

In between finalising his role of secretary of Victoria at the International Exhibition, and honorary secretary to the VEAS, Knight was socialising. In April 1863 the

⁴³⁸ 'A House of Call for Victorians in London', *Argus*, 19 June 1863.

⁴³⁹ 'Immigration', *Argus*, 24 June 1863.

⁴⁴⁰ 'The Mansion House Relief Committee Grant for Emigration', *Argus*, 17 June 1863.

⁴⁴¹ 'Mr. Knight's remonstrances', *Argus*, 11 September 1863.

⁴⁴² *Argus*, 15 March 1864.

Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, on behalf of his mother Queen Victoria held a reception at St. James's Palace. It was there that the Duke of Newcastle presented Knight to the prince.⁴⁴³ If Knight was operating in today's business world, this would be called networking.

Undoubtedly Knight was kept busy while in London, and although devoted to the emigration cause, he was also involved in other pursuits. One of his particular interests was wine. Seeing the potential for the export of Victorian wines to England, he sent a letter to the *Argus* encouraging Victorian vignerons to select an assortment of their very best wines and forward them to a Mr Keene of Her Majesty's Customs in London.⁴⁴⁴ Knight would ask Keene to lay down the wine in the Customs' cellar for at least twelve months before having them tested. In Knight's opinion, the Victorian wine industry was one of most important industries, and one that he admitted being an authority on.⁴⁴⁵

Another important diversion from emigration was that in March 1864 Knight decided to put his name forward to become an associate of the London based Institution of Civil Engineers. He was duly elected on 12 April of that year.⁴⁴⁶ A fact alluded to in Chapter Two was that Knight in correspondence with the then colonial architect dated 13 January 1853, stated that he was indeed already an associate of the Institute of Civil Engineers. The explanation by Charles Kerr mentioned in Chapter Two goes some way to clarify why Knight did not obtain membership in the London Institute of Civil Engineers, but it also demonstrates Knight's occasional lying when he thought this might advance his interests. Over the next few months before departing London, Knight pursued his role in emigration.

Pecuniary matters

Knight's official involvement with the commissioner of the London Exhibition came to an end in early 1863. This then poses the intriguing question of how Knight and his family survived while staying in England for another eighteen months. Of course

⁴⁴³ *Argus*, 17 April 1863.

⁴⁴⁴ 'Victoria Wines', *Argus*, 14 August 1863.

⁴⁴⁵ 'Victoria Wines', *Argus*, 14 August 1863.

⁴⁴⁶ Institution of Civil Engineers, *Minutes of Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers: with Abstracts of the Discussions*. Vol. 23, Session 1863-64, p. 375.

he had other family living there: his mother, three sisters and one brother. Apparently he did not stay with any of his family, as his Kensington address is at variance with any family member's address.⁴⁴⁷

His role with emigration was one of honorary secretary, which would have been unpaid, but he may have been able to claim travelling and food expenses. He was the Victorian government's acting emigration agent, which probably involved some remuneration. Hugh Childers' diary entry for the 21 February 1863, states that Knight called on him, and Childers wrote that Knight 'is being employed by the Government of Victoria'.⁴⁴⁸ This remark may have been directed at Knight being employed as the agent for the exhibition. Maybe it was the 140 sovereigns given to Knight by Benjamin Cowderoy on his departure to Britain in 1862 that helped sustain the family over this time.

Knight returns to Melbourne

In September 1864, Knight, his wife, children and two servants departed Liverpool for Melbourne on the *Great Victoria*, travelling saloon class and arriving in Melbourne on 28 November.⁴⁴⁹ An advertisement in August 1865, declared Knight was occupying a 'splendid villa residence' in Darling Street South Yarra.⁴⁵⁰ Before Knight went to London in 1862 he was living with Sali Cleve in Grey Street, St. Kilda. Possibly upon his return he and his family moved in to Cleve's South Yarra property.⁴⁵¹

Twenty-four years after returning to Melbourne from England, Knight was given a complimentary banquet in Melbourne in 1888 as commissioner for the Northern Territory of South Australia at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition. In responding to the toast, Knight stated that by staying in England and delaying his return until 1864, he had impoverished himself. According to Knight, he had been promised a

⁴⁴⁷ Joan Hodgson, 'The Knight Family', Carole Winter collection.

⁴⁴⁸ Spencer Childers, *The Life and Correspondence of The Right Hon. Hugh C.E. Childers 1827-1896*, p. 115.

⁴⁴⁹ 'Shipping Intelligence Hobson's Bay', *Argus*, 29 November 1864.

⁴⁵⁰ 'Sale by Auction', *Argus*, 3 August 1865.

⁴⁵¹ Please see mention in this chapter of staying at or sharing homes with Sali Cleve.

position of stipendiary magistrate, but on returning to Melbourne found the need for his services had been forgotten.⁴⁵²

Knight turns to inventions

On 23 and 28 December 1864, Knight applied for two invention patents. He is listed as a civil engineer, and the first invention was ‘for a Cask-cleansing machine, for cleaning the insides of casks without unheading’.⁴⁵³ In May 1865, Attorney General George Higginbotham advertised that Knight had had the cask-cleansing machine protection for the past six months, and had given him written notice of his intention to proceed with his application for letters patent. Higginbotham urged anyone opposing Knight’s application to leave any written objection in his office as he was hearing the application and any objections at a meeting on the 21 June.⁴⁵⁴ Knight’s second invention was for ‘illuminating fountains, water, or other fluids for ornamental display’.⁴⁵⁵ Knight exhibited the fountain at his premises in Collins Street in August 1865.⁴⁵⁶ In February 1865 he had conceived another idea for the ‘improvements in the methods of increasing the illuminating power of gas’.⁴⁵⁷ These inventions were in Knight’s temporary premises in Little La Trobe Street and were demonstrated to invited people from the *Argus* newspaper. The inventions, or as described in the article, ‘novelties’, he brought back from England.⁴⁵⁸ To obtain a patent on these objects, Knight must have adapted them in some way.

One important novelty ‘was a working apparatus for effecting economy in the consumption of gas’.⁴⁵⁹ From 1857 Melbourne streets were lit by gas,⁴⁶⁰ then in the 1860s and 1870s gas was extended to many suburbs for both houses and streets.⁴⁶¹ Electric light was first introduced into Melbourne in 1863. The illumination then comprised of one arc lamp sited at the Post Office, another at the Telegraph Office

⁴⁵² ‘Town News’, *Australasian*, 24 November 1888.

⁴⁵³ ‘Application for Patents for Inventions’, *Victorian Government Gazette*, 31 December 1864.

⁴⁵⁴ ‘Patent for an invention for a cask cleaning machine, for cleaning the insides of casks without unheading’, *Victorian Government Gazette*, 2 June 1865.

⁴⁵⁵ ‘Application for Patents for Inventions’, *Victorian Government Gazette*, 31 December 1864.

⁴⁵⁶ *Argus*, 5 August 1865.

⁴⁵⁷ ‘Application for Patents for Inventions’, *Victorian Government Gazette*, 3 March 1865.

⁴⁵⁸ ‘Scientific and Industrial Novelties’, *Argus*, 20 April 1865.

⁴⁵⁹ ‘Scientific and Industrial Novelties’, *Argus*, 20 April 1865.

⁴⁶⁰ Garden, *Victoria*, p. 97.

⁴⁶¹ Garden, *Victoria*, p. 177.

and a third at Parliament House. 'These lamps were supplied with current by chemical batteries adjacent to each lamp ... while beautiful and satisfying as an exhibition, did not emerge as a commercial enterprise'. Electricity did not come into its own until the 1880s.⁴⁶²

Using a burner made from lava instead of metal, as lava would not corrode, Knight was able to regulate the consumption of gas. Not only could people save on gas use, but also at the same time it offered clearer and better light. Knight undertook a practical demonstration in the composing room of the *Argus* newspaper office, which illustrated that the invention consumed less fuel and gave greater illumination than common gas lamps. The newspaper's engineer verified Knight's tests. Knight used a 'carburetting apparatus' where the gas was passed through and was 'purified and enriched to such a degree that its illuminating power is very considerably increased'.⁴⁶³

Knight operated a portable gas works on his property where he demonstrated the use of wood gas for country areas. The idea was 'that 12,000 cubic feet could be made from one ton of wood' at a low cost, with the interesting thing being the 'residual products were more valuable than the cost of making the gas'. Wood gas had small illuminating power but when passed through the carburettor the brilliance of light was increased dramatically.⁴⁶⁴ The apparatus for the cleaning of casks used a continual eccentric motion that was able to thoroughly clean 'every portion and crevice of the inner surface' and could be adapted 'to act as an amalgamater for gold'. The *Argus* newspaper article mentions that Knight had yet to unpack an artificial stone making apparatus that apparently made beautiful specimens from common sand.⁴⁶⁵

A variety of other ventures

In May 1865, Knight became secretary for the Accidental Injury and Death Insurance Company, Limited, an insurance company that operated along the lines of London

⁴⁶² E. Bate, 'One Hundred years of Engineering in Victoria 1834-1934. 14. Electricity Supply in Victoria', p. 396.

⁴⁶³ 'Scientific and Industrial Novelties', *Argus* 20 April 1865.

⁴⁶⁴ 'Scientific and Industrial Novelties', *Argus* 20 April 1865.

⁴⁶⁵ 'Scientific and Industrial Novelties', *Argus* 20 April 1865.

companies. This particular branch of insurance had not operated in Australia before. The idea was to indemnify its members ‘against pecuniary loss by accidents, causing death, or personal injury’. People could insure themselves against the risk of accidents in their particular profession, or while journeying by land or sea.⁴⁶⁶ December 1865 saw Knight still secretary of this business, although the number of directors had been reduced considerably and the name slightly changed.⁴⁶⁷ In 1866 he resigned as secretary of the company and became a director.⁴⁶⁸ How much time Knight spent engaged with the insurance company is unknown as later the company was wound up.

University appointment

The Melbourne University opened in 1855 with Sir Redmond Barry as chancellor and H.C.E. Childers as vice-chancellor. Childers later left Australia in 1857 and became a British member of parliament. It will be remembered that as a parliamentary member Childers was instrumental in seeing Knight’s earlier plan regarding emigration from England to Victoria become a reality. There is conjecture as to whether Knight was a lecturer or examiner at Melbourne University from 1865 when it can be seen in the Council Minutes a resolution was passed that Knight be on the Board of Examiners in Civil Engineering.⁴⁶⁹ In writing on how engineering education was first undertaken at Melbourne University, Wilfred Kernot stated that in 1861 a certificate course commenced and later Knight was appointed a lecturer in engineering subjects.⁴⁷⁰

Chlebnikowski wrote, citing the Blue Book 1865, that Knight’s appointment was at a salary of £100 with fees.⁴⁷¹ In January 1866 Knight was re-elected as a lecturer in civil engineering for 1866-1867,⁴⁷² and again in 1868,⁴⁷³ but was unsuccessful in

⁴⁶⁶ ‘The Accidental Injury and Death Insurance Company, Limited’, *Argus*, 11 May 1865.

⁴⁶⁷ ‘The Accidental Injury Annuity and Life Insurance Company of Australia (Limited)’, *Argus*, 2 December 1865.

⁴⁶⁸ *Argus*, 21 March 1866.

⁴⁶⁹ University of Melbourne Archives, Minutes of Proceedings of the Council of the University of Melbourne, No.258, 26 June 1865, p. 1.

⁴⁷⁰ Wilfred Kernot, ‘Engineering Education in Victoria’, p. 356.

⁴⁷¹ Chlebnikowski, ‘The historic development of the building of Parliament House, Melbourne’, p. 23.

⁴⁷² University of Melbourne Archives, Minutes of Proceedings of the Council of the University of Melbourne, No.268, 29 January 1866, p. 2.

⁴⁷³ University of Melbourne Archives, Minutes of Proceedings of the Council of the University of Melbourne, No.305, 27 January 1868, p. 2.

1869. The reason for this was the exceedingly low numbers of students attending lectures. In 1868 there were only three. The Professional Board questioned whether it was necessary to have two lecturers.⁴⁷⁴ Although Knight's name appeared in official University of Melbourne Council Minutes and in the Blue Book as a lecturer from 1865 to 1867⁴⁷⁵ Miles Lewis claims that Knight was an examiner only.⁴⁷⁶ J.M. Freeland contends that Knight was William Kernot's lecturer for the last two years of his engineering training, and had presented Kernot with the university's first certificate in engineering.⁴⁷⁷ Kernot was appointed part-time lecturer at the university in 1868, eventually spending over forty years there⁴⁷⁸ and becoming professor of engineering in 1883.⁴⁷⁹

In June an advertisement in the *Argus* stated Knight was conducting a 'Scientific and Industrial Art Agency' and appeared to be an agent for at least two overseas companies. He was advertising gas works lighting for private and public establishments, and his own patent apparatus for 'increasing the brilliancy and purity of coal gas'. The advertisement stated that he was an agent for gasaliers⁴⁸⁰ and paraffin lamps, gas meters, gas burners, flooring tiles, his patent apparatus of the cask cleaning machine, patent concrete stone, 'French and mediæval paper hangings of exquisite design' and ornamental iron work.⁴⁸¹

By August he was exhibiting the improved gas apparatus daily at the Agency.⁴⁸² Due to concerns expressed that Knight's economising gas lighting apparatus was fraught with considerable danger, a public test was carried out. The outcome of the test proved that instead of heightening 'the danger of using gas, it actually diminished it'.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁴ *Argus*, 27 January 1869.

⁴⁷⁵ Victoria. Registrar-General's Office, 'Blue book of the Colony of Victoria for the year 1867 ... compiled from official records in the Registrar-General's office', 1868, p. 16.

⁴⁷⁶ Miles Lewis, personal communication, 9 September 2004.

⁴⁷⁷ Freeland, *The Making of a Profession*, p. 206.

⁴⁷⁸ Kernot, 'Engineering Education in Victoria', p. 356.

⁴⁷⁹ S. Murray-Smith, 'Kernot, William Charles (1845-1909)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁴⁸⁰ A gasalier is a chandelier arranged to use gas. *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, 1913.

⁴⁸¹ 'Merchandise', *Argus*, 7 June 1865. In September Knight again advertised floor tiles 'cheap as flagging'; 'Building Materials', *Argus*, 18 September 1865.

⁴⁸² 'Merchandise', *Argus*, 9 August 1865. Additional advertisements for gas lighting appeared under 'Miscellaneous', *Argus*, 21 September 1865.

⁴⁸³ *Argus*, 5 October 1865.

Additional to the advertisement for the Scientific and Industrial Art Agency in that month of June, other advertisements appeared from Knight. One was him advertising drawing and dining room furniture for sale, made to order and imported by him,⁴⁸⁴ and another where his tender for supplying 1,000 enamel street-name plates was accepted by the Public Works Committee.⁴⁸⁵ Advertisements for flooring tiles and gas lighting continued through to October. There was also one where Knight advertised himself as an architect, giving his business address as 18 Collins Street and asking for tenders to erect a two storey bluestone house in St. Kilda.⁴⁸⁶

Knight offers a solution on sanitary reform

Always a prolific letter writer, Knight wrote to the *Argus* newspaper in October 1865 of his concern over the devastation of Asiatic cholera in the Middle East, and the possibility of this spreading throughout Europe. He stressed that sanitary reform was of vital importance to Melbourne to help prevent such diseases hitting the colony. Knight stated there were preventable measures that should be in place. He spoke of Melbourne and other towns being supplied with water but not underground drainage. Knight mentioned that he had traversed many miles of the underground sewers in London and Paris, and the odours he encountered there were no more offensive than smells emanating from the Elizabeth and Swanston streets channels in Melbourne. He further commented that Melbourne houses and business had an abundant supply of water, causing cesspits to overflow, so what was needed 'is a complete system of underground drainage ... as the largest of the required sewers could be executed in nine inch brickwork'.⁴⁸⁷

Knight's idea was to introduce a mixture of lime and water through 'three-inch pipes to the street channels, where it would freely mingle with the stream and disinfect it'. He related the story that some years before, the House of Commons had to suspend its sitting because of the noxious odour of effluence coming from the Thames River. This was rectified by hundreds of tons of lime being placed into the river.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁴ 'Furniture', *Argus*, 6 June 1865.

⁴⁸⁵ 'City Council', *Argus*, 13 June 1865.

⁴⁸⁶ 'Tenders', *Argus*, 10 October 1865.

⁴⁸⁷ 'A Sanitary Caution', *Argus*, 30 October 1865.

⁴⁸⁸ 'A Sanitary Caution', *Argus*, 30 October 1865.

Involvement in the Dublin International Exhibition of Arts and Manufactures

In 1865 Knight once again became involved in an international exhibition. Having proved his ability at the London International Exhibition, Knight was appointed honorary secretary to the board of commissioners for the Dublin International Exhibition of 1865.⁴⁸⁹ One of the appointed commissioners was Knight's former employer William Wardell from the Public Works Department.⁴⁹⁰ Knight was desirous that among the vast variety of exhibitions, gold should be included in the mineral collection to be sent to Dublin. Exhibitors were 'invited to communicate with Mr Knight, at the Public Library'.⁴⁹¹ The colony of Victoria had by far the most exhibits compared to the other Australian colonies. It was to be less overcrowded than the London Exhibition with the idea being that a good selection 'of types of our natural products and leading industries' would be collected in early March at the Exhibition building, then shipped to Great Britain by the middle of March.⁴⁹²

Although there appeared much less fanfare for the forthcoming Dublin Exhibition than for the Exhibition of 1862, it was quite understandable as it was to be on a far smaller scale, nevertheless, the enthusiasm was there among the colonists. These people had gathered together a varied collection of exhibits that clearly illustrated the wealth, energy and progress of the colony of Victoria. Time did not permit a public viewing of the exhibits before being shipped overseas. A model of Knight's gold pyramid exhibited at the London Exhibition had been designed, and as more gold (upwards of 223 tons) had been obtained from October 1861 to October 1864, this was represented as 'a base to the model of the original design'.⁴⁹³

The exhibition opened on 9 May 1865 and closed on 10 November 1865. The exhibited contributions from Victoria at Dublin were small, 'only to be regarded as a Cabinet Collection of Types of some of the Principal Industries of the Colony'.⁴⁹⁴ Among the honourable mentions awarded to the Victorian department, Knight received two. One honourable mention was for his model of the gold pyramid, and

⁴⁸⁹ 'News of the day', *Age*, 12 January 1865.

⁴⁹⁰ *Argus*, 7 January 1865.

⁴⁹¹ 'Contributions to the Dublin Exhibition', *Australian News for Home Readers*, 23 February 1865.

⁴⁹² *Argus*, 23 February 1865.

⁴⁹³ 'Victoria and the Dublin Exhibition', *Argus*, 14 March 1865.

⁴⁹⁴ International Exhibition (1865, Dublin, Ireland), 'Catalogue of Products from the Colony of Victoria, Australia, at the Dublin International Exhibition, 1865', p. 3.

the other for his collection of colonial building stones together with a treatise on the subject.⁴⁹⁵ De La Rue mistakenly notes that Knight went to Europe to take charge of the exhibits in both Dublin and later Paris.⁴⁹⁶ There is no record that Knight travelled to Dublin for this exhibition, as there are several newspaper accounts of him trading in various goods and being deeply involved with demonstrating his patents in Melbourne at the time written about in this chapter. The inaccuracy may have come about by a newspaper article written just after Knight died where it is stated that after representing Victoria at the London Exhibition, Knight once again represented Victoria ‘at the Great Paris Exhibition of 1867’.⁴⁹⁷

The fact is Knight did not go to Dublin nor did he travel to Paris. In the catalogue it is noted that Tyndall Bright was ‘Representative of the Board in Dublin’.⁴⁹⁸ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sir Redmond went as Visiting Executive Commissioner of Victoria. From the extract for the juror’s report, Knight writes the following:

These great periodical festivals of industry and progress are now understood to be the best mediums for giving world-wide celebrity to all useful productions. The life blood of success in trade, commerce, and the arts is publicity, and exhibitions are pre-eminently useful in imparting information in this most popular form ... National Exhibitions are gigantic illustrated advertisements, and advertising, if conducted with ordinary judgment, pays handsomely for the outlay incurred.⁴⁹⁹

A shattering calamity that does not appear to change Knight’s life

From the end of 1865 and throughout 1866 Knight was publicly being seen as totally involved firstly with the Dublin Exhibition, then organising the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition 1866-67. Towards the end of 1865, he and his wife’s peaceful life would have been shattered when his brother-in-law Henry Louis Bertrand was charged with murder on 29 November 1865.⁵⁰⁰ Bertrand had wilfully shot his mistress’ husband Henry Kinder on 2 October in Sydney. Kinder died not from the bullet wound, but a few days later after being administered a fatal dose of

⁴⁹⁵ ‘Dublin International Exhibition’, *Argus*, 23 November 1865.

⁴⁹⁶ De La Rue. *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 91.

⁴⁹⁷ ‘Summary for Europe’, *Argus*, 18 January 1892.

⁴⁹⁸ *Catalogue of Products from the Colony of Victoria, Australia, at the Dublin International Exhibition 1865*, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁹ J.G. Knight, (compiled by), *The Australasian Colonies at the International Exhibition, London, 1862: Extracts from the Reports of the Jurors and other Information taken from Official Sources*, 1866, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁰ Robert Travers, *The Amorous Dentist*, p. 83.

belladonna (the deadly nightshade poison) by Bertrand.⁵⁰¹ Bertrand, a young Sydney dentist, had committed such a heinous and bizarre crime that it was still spoken of thirty years later.⁵⁰² Bertrand practiced mesmerism on his patients, becoming popular with society ladies and their daughters who ‘eagerly sought treatment at this surgery’.⁵⁰³ Caught up in the awful tragedy was Alice’s sister Harriette Kerr (whose husband Peter was Knight’s former architectural business partner) who was staying with her brother and his wife in Sydney at this time.

It appears that although the murder made headlines and was thoroughly covered for several months in Sydney, New South Wales country districts and Brisbane newspapers, little was mentioned in the Melbourne press. None of the newspapers alluded to Bertrand being related to Knight, nor the other two brothers-in-law, Charles Bright and Peter Kerr, who had a standing in Melbourne at the time. Outwardly, the scandal seems not to have affected Knight business-wise or socially. This may have been because it was Knight’s wife’s family and not directly associated with Knight himself. On the other hand, Knight was living in Victorian-age Melbourne when such a crime would have caused enormous social stigma to all the immediate and extended family.

In December 1865, there were two advertisements on the same page of the *Argus*: one advertising the Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia mentioning Knight, and a little further on, a rather macabre advertisement of the entire report of the trial, together with four photographs for sale of Mr and Mrs Bertrand and Mr and Mrs Kinder.⁵⁰⁴

The murder led to one of Australia’s most sensational trials. Bertrand was initially found guilty of the crime, he appealed, and due to the brilliance of a young Sydney Jewish lawyer Julian Salomons who by ‘hard pleading persuaded the jury to recommend clemency, so that instead of the gallows the accused was sentenced to

⁵⁰¹ Travers, *The Amorous Dentist*, p. 49.

⁵⁰² Travers, *The Amorous Dentist*, p. 49.

⁵⁰³ Travers, *The Amorous Dentist*, p. 16.

⁵⁰⁴ ‘Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia’, *Argus*, 18 December 1865; on the same page was reference to the Bertrand murder, headed, ‘The Great Murder Case’.

penal servitude for life'.⁵⁰⁵ Salomons was later knighted and 'recognised as one of the most formidable legal minds of his generation'.⁵⁰⁶

The family involvement was not only that of his brother-in-law but also indirectly his step father-in-law Louis Eskell. Eskell, his wife and three children had moved to Sydney in 1864,⁵⁰⁷ where young Louis Bertrand had been apprenticed in dentistry to Eskell.

The Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia

During the running of the Dublin Exhibition, the idea of an Intercolonial Exhibition of Industry and Art was mooted by the Victorian James McCulloch government, and unanimously adopted in May 1865. The idea being that such an exhibition would promote friendly rivalry between the Australian colonies and New Zealand.⁵⁰⁸ Knight was selected as 'Executive Secretary and General Manager for the Melbourne Intercolonial'.⁵⁰⁹ A meeting held in April 1866 appointed Knight, but deferred his income and duration of employment until a future occasion.⁵¹⁰

In December 1865 Knight announced that the Intercolonial Exhibition to be held in Melbourne would open in August of 1866 and close at the end of September of that year.⁵¹¹ This did indeed change, with the actual opening date being 24 October 1866 and closing on 23 February 1867 with a gross number of admissions being 268,634 with cash receipts of £9,634.10.0.⁵¹²

The old exhibition building used for the 1861 preliminary exhibition was unsuitable for the new exhibition, so a new building was erected behind the public library at a cost of £25,000, 'but was so arranged that when the Exhibition was over, the building might serve as a museum in connection with the library until the colony could afford

⁵⁰⁵ Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: A thematic history. Volume One 1788-1945*, p. 378.

⁵⁰⁶ Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia*, p. 377. In a tribute to Salomons on his death, there was mention in the newspaper that it was the Bertrand murder trial where he gained recognition.

⁵⁰⁷ 'Clearances', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1864.

⁵⁰⁸ J.G. Knight, (compiled by), *Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia, Melbourne, 1866-67: Official Record, containing Introduction, Catalogues, Reports and Awards of the Jurors, Essays and Statistics on the Social and Economic Resources of the Australian Colonies*, p. vi.

⁵⁰⁹ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 283.

⁵¹⁰ 'Intercolonial Exhibition-Paris Exhibition', *Argus*, 28 April 1866.

⁵¹¹ 'Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia', *Argus*, 18 December 1865; 21 December 1865.

⁵¹² Knight, *Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia, Melbourne, 1866-67: Official Record*, p. xxv.

to complete that institution'.⁵¹³ The new building and courts offered nearly three times the area of the old exhibition building.⁵¹⁴ Architectural partners, Joseph Reed and Frederick Barnes, designed these buildings.

In July 1866 Knight was requesting architects to exhibit illustrations and original drawings especially of 'Australian mansions, villas and cottages specially adapted to the requirements of the country'. He said that an annual exhibition of drawings took place in England and the commissioners were hoping for a complete catalogue of industrial art for the Intercolonial Exhibition.⁵¹⁵

Knight and the Reverend Dr Bleasdale, visited Adelaide in April 1866 and were generously received by government and the most influential people in the colony. South Australia was asked to join with Victoria 'in forming one Australasian court at the Paris Exhibition' and also to contribute to the forthcoming Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne.⁵¹⁶ Bleasdale, a Catholic priest, was interested in medicine, chemistry, and mineralogy.⁵¹⁷ At this particular period, Bleasdale was an 'expert in viticulture and oenology [wine growing and wine tasting] and absorbing them with scientific knowledge of the subject, including the chemistry, then available'.⁵¹⁸ Securing the support of South Australia was not without considerable discussion and explanation, but they had the advantage of 'the cordial support of the press'.⁵¹⁹

On Monday 23 July 1866 Knight and Bleasdale proceeded by steamer to Sydney to persuade the New South Wales government to become involved in contributing to the Intercolonial and Paris Exhibitions.⁵²⁰ Both were successful in their mission as the government consented to formally appoint commissioners for the Intercolonial, and 'provide funds for both purposes'.⁵²¹ Knight mentioned that when visiting South Australia and New South Wales, both he and Bleasdale were received with a

⁵¹³ Sutherland, *Victoria and its Metropolis*, p. 464.

⁵¹⁴ J.G. Knight, *Companion to the Official Catalogue: Guide to the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866*, p. 6.

⁵¹⁵ 'Intercolonial Exhibition', *Argus*, 12 July 1866.

⁵¹⁶ 'Intercolonial Exhibition', *Argus*, 7 May 1866.

⁵¹⁷ J.R.J. Grigsby, 'Bleasdale, John Ignatius (1822-1884)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁵¹⁸ Keith Thomas Henry Farrer, *To feed a nation: a history of Australian food science and technology*, p. 92.

⁵¹⁹ 'Intercolonial Exhibition', *Argus*, 7 May 1866.

⁵²⁰ 'Saturday July 21 1866', *Argus*, 21 July 1866.

⁵²¹ 'Telegraphic Despatches', *Argus*, 8 August 1866.

coolness by some in authority, but from the communities were greeted with 'kind and warm feelings of regard for the people of Victoria'.⁵²²

Knight moves on in other ventures

Whether the Bertrand crime affected Knight is not possible to know as he continued on throughout his family's aberrations, absorbed in his affiliation with the exhibitions and, later, finding time in early in early 1866 to conceive the idea of a Connoisseur Club for influential men 'to advance to cause of the wine industry'.⁵²³ The Connoisseur Club held its inaugural meeting on 23 March 1866 and was never short of members. Knight, always in some managerial role, was honorary secretary. The club comprised principally of wine-growers interested in the development of the wine industry.⁵²⁴ At the June meeting of the club, Knight submitted to the members a plan he had drawn up where every member would be involved in adjudicating upon the general character of the wines. His proposal led to a discussion with the final outcome being that seven members would be selected as judges with all members 'at liberty to communicate their impressions to the judges'.⁵²⁵

The goods selected by Knight when he was in London were proving slow to move, so he instructed auctioneers to sell a large variety of goods, including chimney pieces, tiles, lamps, flooring tiles, ornamental castings and the gasaliers.⁵²⁶ Although involved in all manner of businesses throughout 1866, Knight still maintained an interest in gold for he produced a fine specimen from a new reef that had recently been discovered in South Australia.⁵²⁷ While Knight was in Sydney, his wife Alice gave birth to their third daughter, Ida Mabel Mary, at Darling Street, South Yarra on 29 July 1866.⁵²⁸

⁵²² Knight, *Companion to the Official Catalogue*, pp. 8-9.

⁵²³ David Dunstan, *Better than Pommard!*, p. 55.

⁵²⁴ *Argus*, 10 March 1866.

⁵²⁵ 'The Connoisseurs' Club', *Argus*, 9 June 1866.

⁵²⁶ 'Sales by Auction', *Argus*, 7 May 1866. Many of these items may not have moved at the first auction as they were advertised again in the *Argus*, 17 May 1866.

⁵²⁷ 'The Month', *Australian News for Home Readers*, 27 July 1866.

⁵²⁸ 'Births', *Argus*, 30 July 1866.

The Mayor's Fancy Dress Ball

Melbourne's upper class entertained itself in a similar manner to 'the better families of the English provincial towns' by enjoying balls, soirees, dinners, private dances, musicals, picnics, drives and rides.⁵²⁹ Before the opening of the Intercolonial Exhibition, the new exhibition building was the venue for the Mayor's Fancy Dress Ball on 21 September 1866. Melbourne people who had been invited eagerly awaited the event. 'In nineteenth-century Australia ... it was [the] seemingly respectable middle classes who took up the fancy-dress ball with such gusto'.⁵³⁰ The balls were a place where the individual could express his or her individuality by dressing in a fashion designed to make one as flamboyant or reserved as they so wished.

Less than two months after giving birth to her daughter, Alice Knight attended the gala evening at the new building where her husband had had a hand in the decorations for the ball.⁵³¹ Alice was dressed as a 'Soubrette of the time of Louis XV'. A soubrette can be a thespian 'displaying coquetry, pertness and intrigue'.⁵³² Wearing this costume may have revealed the inner Alice, who at age twenty-eight, had already given birth to seven children and had never had time to enjoy life as a young woman without responsibilities. On the other hand, her husband's costume stated an overt confidence.

Always one to attract attention, Knight's outfit was described in a newspaper article as being the 'most remarkable amongst the gentlemen' and received much attention 'on account of the wonderful head-dress and a device to represent the union of the Australian colonies in the forthcoming exhibition'.⁵³³ His flamboyant and richly attired dress was a 'costly and creative nationalistic costume'. The outfit represented Australasia, and is described as follows:

[the costume] resembled a short-skirted Roman military tunic with names of the Australasian colonies (including New Zealand) emblazoned on leather strips falling from his waistband, and with a headdress made from a lyrebird's tail feathers.⁵³⁴

⁵²⁹ Serle, *The Golden Age*, p. 364.

⁵³⁰ Anita Callaway, *Visual Ephemera: Theatrical Art in Nineteenth-Century Australia*. p. 86.

⁵³¹ 'The Mayor's Fancy Ball', *Argus*, 21 September 1866.

⁵³² *Macquarie Dictionary*, p. 1670.

⁵³³ 'The Mayor's Fancy Ball', *Argus*, 21 September 1866.

⁵³⁴ Callaway, *Visual Ephemera*, p. 97.



Figure 10. Knight in his remarkable costume at the Return Fancy Dress Ball (detail).

Peter Kerr, Knight's brother-in-law and former business partner, was dressed more conservatively as a Venetian gentleman.

The Return Fancy Dress Ball was held two weeks later at the same venue. Knight once again desired to be attired in his 'Australasia' costume, and Alice represented 'Nourmshal (maid of cashmere)'. The Return Ball was 'given by the citizens of Melbourne to the Mayor and Mrs. Bayles' as a thank you for the ball held the previous month.⁵³⁵ Alice Knight was adorned in an expensive dress as described below:

[Alice] wore a dress of white cashmere, trimmed with gold. The tunic consisted of rich amber silk, ornamented with silver lace and tassels, a robe of scarlet, trimmed with gold lace and fringe, a scarf of blue silk and gauze, ornamented with silver and pearls, a turban of green and white surmounted with moon and stars, ornamented with diamonds, pink coral, and turquoise.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ 'The Return Fancy Dress Ball', *Argus*, 5 October 1866.

⁵³⁶ 'The Return Fancy Dress Ball', *Argus*, 5 October 1866.

The Intercolonial Exhibition takes shape

Hoffenberg emphasised the importance of places such as Australia holding exhibitions as a significant way to illustrate to the rest of the world their progress in manufacture and commercial resources. The colonials took the opportunity to represent themselves as they no longer required English officials to represent them. Australian colonies now proved their suitability for new capital, and self-government.⁵³⁷

Although Victoria led with the number of exhibits, and many being received from within Australia, several other colonies also contributed their exhibits to the exhibition:

Victoria now supplied 1479 exhibitors; but in addition there were contributions from all the other colonies, as well as from New Caledonia, Mauritius, and the Dutch colonies of the East Indies. These raised the total number of exhibits to nearly 3000, and when C.E. Horsley, the musician, on the 23rd October 1866, brought down his baton at the opening ceremony to bid 300 performers join in the national anthem, the large audience, the effectiveness of the extensive display, the flutter of brilliant banners, the profusion of uniforms, all overtopped by the great pyramid representing the total weight of gold produced in Victoria, gave the exulting colonists of that date a pride they had not known before.⁵³⁸

An interesting aspect of the exhibition was exhibits of Aboriginal cultural work of opossum skin rugs, baskets and other articles, and also information on their history, customs, traditions and language.⁵³⁹ It was Sir Redmond Barry's idea to feature Aboriginal exhibits at this exhibition that also included photographic portraits of people from Coranderrk Mission and casts of some of these people.⁵⁴⁰ The commissioners had agreed there should be a collection of Aboriginal skulls from various tribes as these were thought to be of interest to people at the Paris exhibition.⁵⁴¹ The various indigenous displays were inappropriately placed throughout the exhibition. In one instance, they were 'between samples of clothing produced by convicts and colonial women'.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁷ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 139.

⁵³⁸ Sutherland, *Victoria and its metropolis*, p. 464.

⁵³⁹ 'Intercolonial Exhibition', *Argus*, 7 May 1866.

⁵⁴⁰ Des Cowley, 'Redeeming an Obligation: Aboriginal Culture at the 1866 Exhibition', *La Trobe Journal*, No. 73 Autumn 2004, pp. 112-120.

⁵⁴¹ 'Topics of the week', *Australasian*, 21 July 1866.

⁵⁴² Louise D'arcens, 'The last thing one might expect: The Mediaeval Court at the 1866 Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition', *La Trobe Journal*, No.81, 2008, pp. 26-39.

The Aboriginal displays were in marked contrast to the remarkable and rather incongruous exhibit of a mediaeval court within the exhibition. For an exhibition concentrating on manufacturing and products from a new colony, the court would have been the last thing a visitor expected to see. The court contained all relevant furnishings that would have been found in a mediaeval church, including statues. The quality of the glass stained windows offered a 'dim religious light' producing a remarkable effect. There was a chancel, which housed an altar table, and a painting of the Last Supper together with 'illuminated tablets of the commandments, creed, and Lord's Prayer'. Most of the furnishings belonged to the soon to be erected St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Episcopalian Church at Casterton.⁵⁴³

The exhibition proved an outstanding success and was exceedingly popular over its four month duration. There were many more ordinary than upper class people and no matter what the class, all the people of Melbourne went to and enjoyed exhibitions. The Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866-1867 was a place that almost everyone could visit and marvel at sights often not seen before. Over the four months 270,440 visitors attended.⁵⁴⁴ Many of the Intercolonial Exhibition exhibits were intended for the World Fair to be held in Paris in 1867, and once again Knight was organising Victoria's contributions.

A wish to be part of Melbourne's social elite may have been the motive that drove Knight to tirelessly promote himself, as it appeared he needed to be seen or read about in newspaper articles and to be involved in most things that drew attention to him. To achieve this ambition required the busiest of positions: this of course was that of secretary. On the other hand, David Dunstan refers to him as 'an all-round renaissance man'.⁵⁴⁵ Perhaps he was all of these things.

The publication of the official record of the Intercolonial Exhibition came out three and a half months after the close of the exhibition. The publication extended over 1,100 pages. An un-credited newspaper article, presumably written by the editor of the *Argus*, offered a critique on this publication Knight had partially written together with the exhibition judge's comments and awards. The unknown writer commented

⁵⁴³ Knight, *Companion to the official catalogue*, p. 19.

⁵⁴⁴ Knight, *Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia, Melbourne, 1866-6: Official Record*, p. xxxiv.

⁵⁴⁵ Dunstan, *Better than Pomard!*, p. 81.

that with the printing of the publication a new light was thrown on the exhibition. The book was censured because of the high printing cost of £550 for 750 copies for distribution.⁵⁴⁶ Knight listed the commissioners as present at the beginning. Part of the reason for publishing this weighty book was Knight letting these people know what a good job he had done, and so he could do it again. In all, Knight contributed forty-one pages for the introduction and eleven for the preface of the publication titled *Guide to the Exhibition*.

The unknown writer further criticised the contents of Knight's introduction, which he said was 'useful as a record' but 'incoherent and clumsily arranged'. The writer stated that other than as an official record, the book was not worth much and that several pieces of the book were made up of Knight's own clippings with accounts published in the newspapers and all 'thrown together without order or correction' and without taking the trouble of making it readable. It was also repetitious. The person further remonstrated that most of what Knight had said was printed in the *Argus* so it was a doubling up.⁵⁴⁷ This should not have been a problem to the reader, as the references were in quotation marks, but they added bulk to the book which must be the reason for including the newspaper articles.

Towards the end of this article, the writer offers Knight credit for portions of his writings which he said 'demonstrate the high qualities with which Mr. Knight is endowed' and further stated that a more able exhibition manager would be difficult to find. He was duly critical of Knight's remarks in the final words of the introduction, that it was 'unnecessary and out of place to attach *ultra-scientific* interest to these industrial gatherings'.⁵⁴⁸ Knight in truth said one thing and did another. Perhaps the writer did not realise that Knight took the final few paragraphs and numbered points from his *Guide to the Intercolonial Exhibition* that he wrote in December 1866 and transferred it word for word in the final of his introduction of the *Official Record* written at the end of the Exhibition in February 1867.

The writer was correct that this was indeed a doubling up and not acceptable. Of all the dozens of newspaper articles in which Knight had been mentioned over fourteen

⁵⁴⁶ 'Results of the late Intercolonial Exhibition', *Argus* 10 June 1867.

⁵⁴⁷ 'Results of the late Intercolonial Exhibition', *Argus* 10 June 1867.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Results of the late Intercolonial Exhibition', *Argus* 10 June 1867.

years, this was one of the very few times he was publicly criticised to this extent. There is reason to argue that this article held many truths. One could be kind and say Knight was tired as the work load had been heavy and his personal life had been impacted upon by serious family problems. Perhaps he had become a little blasé, but this undoubtedly had been a wake-up call as he was never censured regarding his written work again.

Knight, who wrote the preface of the *Guide to Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866*, concluded by stressing the principal significance of exhibitions:

The great aim of an Exhibition is to give the fullest possible notoriety to new manufacturers and processes, and bring the manufacturer and inventor more closely in contact with the merchant, speculator, and capitalist; and, by this most practical method of advertising, to enlarge the basis of trade.⁵⁴⁹

Conclusion

With a lack of Knight's personal letters or other evidence, it is only possible to speculate on Knight's character. He had a propensity to move from one area of interest to another, seeming not to be afraid of embarking in different areas of employment and accepting other opportunities when presented, but often these interests did not last long. Although this reads like the old adage 'the grass is always greener on the other side', he appeared to have the knack to succeed at times with most of the things he set out to do, then after a short duration once again take up another challenge.

Even though Knight's entrepreneurial skills were significant in the role of organising exhibits, for which he had received several accolades, the nature of this work was intermittent as exhibitions were often years apart. It could be argued Knight was of a restless disposition, or perhaps incapable of ongoing stability or had the need to be in the limelight.

Restlessness showed in Knight's domestic situation, as the family's living arrangements were one of impermanency, never owning a home and moving several times. This chapter showed that George Knight was a far more settled man than his

⁵⁴⁹ Knight, *Companion to the official catalogue*, p. 11.

brother. In a matter not mentioned before, George had built a substantial two storey home for his family within four years of arriving in Victoria.⁵⁵⁰

Conjecturally, Knight's brother-in-law's imprisonment appeared not to affect him. This was the Victorian era, and murder indeed left a stigma on anyone associated with it. Whether deliberately ignoring what society thought, Knight and his wife continued to socialise by attending balls and Knight had continued to find employment in varying fields.

The following chapter explains why not all of Knight's final years in Melbourne were particularly fortunate ones for him. Being apparently of a stoic disposition, he accepted employment in many often fragmentary positions until a possible realisation that a decision on his longer-term future was required. What he determined was quite possibly one of the bravest steps of his life.

⁵⁵⁰ Carole Winter, *George William Knight and Family*, p. 5.

Chapter Four

Knight's final years in Melbourne, 1867-1873

Although still working part time for the University of Melbourne, Knight was able to optimise his entrepreneurial skills when offered the role of agent to a Royal Commission for the preparation of the 1867 visit of Queen Victoria's second son, His Royal Highness, Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh.⁵⁵¹ Festivities were organised not only in the city of Melbourne, but in the suburbs and many country towns throughout Victoria.

In 1869 Knight became proprietor of a gentleman's club named the Athenæum Club. The club flourished, but as proprietor, Knight lost money. His joint involvement in the club catering business was dissolved and he became an insolvent as a result of a joint venture with his brother George in a wine business. The insolvency in 1869 proved to be the beginning of the end for Knight in Melbourne. Even though he quickly gained a certificate of discharge, he never found substantial full time employment in the city again. Without continual employment, Knight took the unusual step of applying for a position with the South Australian government in its Northern Territory.

The Duke of Edinburgh's visit to Victoria

The sons of wealthy British parents had undertaken the Grand Tour of Europe since the middle of the seventeenth century. This had been seen as almost an 'educational rite of passage' for these wealthy young men who were often away for a couple of years. With the advent of steamships and rail by the middle of the eighteenth century, more middle class young men travelled abroad, viewing the architecture, art and classical antiquity of continental Europe. They then returned to England presumably more mature, ready to take responsibility and possibly marry. European royalty sent their young princes on world tours, as 'this was thought as a sensible way of widening their education'; some visited the Australian colonies.⁵⁵² Several young Englishmen were sent to Australia, sometimes because of an unsuitable affair or

⁵⁵¹ 'Parliament. Legislative Assembly', *Argus*, 25 September 1867.

⁵⁵² De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 62.

unsuitable companions the young man was involved with. Although considered comparatively poor, Lord Alfred Churchill, the son of the Duke of Marlborough, arrived in his private yacht.⁵⁵³

Official word did not arrive in Melbourne until July 1867 that Prince Alfred in his first command of the frigate the HMSS *Galatea* was to visit the Australian colonies as part of a world tour. Prince Alfred, at twenty-three years of age, was an experienced seaman after several years in the Royal Navy. The visit to the colonies proved to be one of excitement and near calamity, for during the prince's trip to Sydney there was an assassination attempt on his life, which fortunately failed.⁵⁵⁴ Knight summed up the probable advantage of such a visit by royalty to the colonies with the following lines:

With regard to the beneficial effects which are likely to accrue to the several colonies in consequence of the royal visit, it is but reasonable that we should look to such a happy event as one of a series of means to render the Australian provinces better known and appreciated in England than they are at present.⁵⁵⁵

For the occasion, Melbourne streets were illuminated by gas light. Being home to most of the banks and principal places of business, Collins Street was the main scene of illumination that projected these buildings in prominent relief. Not only were the streets of the city 'a blaze of light', but several transparencies of mixed quality adorned city buildings. Those of Nicholas Chevalier's outshone the opposition and he displayed one which Knight described as a 'colossal portrait of the Queen ... in her Royal robes as on state occasions. The colouring was very beautifully done'.⁵⁵⁶

Having been informed by telegraph of the exact time the *Galatea* departed Port Adelaide, the reception committee were well prepared to meet Prince Alfred. A flotilla carrying approximately 6,000 people greeted the *Galatea* in Hobson's Bay on Saturday 23 November.⁵⁵⁷ The royal visit was very important in colonial history and involved by far the grandest celebrations in Melbourne's thirty-year history. The

⁵⁵³ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 61.

⁵⁵⁴ Dunstan, *Better than Pommard!*, p. 49.

⁵⁵⁵ J.G. Knight, *Narrative of the Visit of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh to the Colony of Victoria, Australia*, p. 6.

⁵⁵⁶ Knight, *Narrative of the Visit of His Royal Highness*, p. 78. Nicolas Chevalier was a Russian artist who came to Australia in 1855. Prince Alfred had noted Chevalier's transparencies and invited him to join the royal yacht back to London.

⁵⁵⁷ Knight, *Narrative of the Visit of His Royal Highness*, p. 34

following day, thousands of people cheered the prince when he came ashore and all along the route into the city of Melbourne were decorations of arches, flags, bunting and banners. Tens of thousands of people applauded and cheered as Prince Alfred passed by in his royal carriage. Several times the carriage and the following retinue stopped and the prince proceeded to a dais, there to be greeted by welcoming speeches from various dignitaries with the prince replying in return. Throughout the circuitous route through the city then out to Government House in Toorak, the people of Melbourne displayed their loyalty to Queen Victoria by giving her son a joyous reception – church bells pealed, children sang and the crowds erupted in patriotic fervour.⁵⁵⁸

The day after arriving on Victorian shores, Prince Alfred, his equerry Eliot Yorke and Viscount Newry dined with the chief commissioner of police, Frederick Charles Standish, at the Melbourne Club. Standish is described by de Serville as ‘one of the most aristocratic of 1850s immigrants’ leaving England under a cloud of mounting gambling debts.⁵⁵⁹ He became chief commissioner of police in 1858⁵⁶⁰ and moved in polite society. Standish was employed to be of service to Prince Alfred and knowing of the prince’s sexual appreciation for women, confidently took the three men to savour the delights of what Mrs Fraser could offer as owner of the ‘most sumptuous and well-appointed brothel in Melbourne’.⁵⁶¹

The Burke county coroner (later becoming Melbourne’s city coroner), Samuel Curtis Candler, was well aware, as were many others, that the prince, Newry and Yorke were rakes, nightly visiting Melbourne bordellos escorted by the police commissioner who, no doubt lingered along with them.⁵⁶² Opinions of such behaviour were noted by Candler, a diarist ‘who delighted in observing the oddities of colonial life among the upper classes’.⁵⁶³

A few days later the Royal Levee was held in the new exhibition building where a variety of Victoria’s gentlemen were presented to the prince, Knight being amongst

⁵⁵⁸ Knight, *Narrative of the Visit of His Royal Highness*, pp. 39-50.

⁵⁵⁹ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 42.

⁵⁶⁰ J.S. Legge, ‘Standish, Frederick Charles (1824-1883)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

⁵⁶¹ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 65.

⁵⁶² Keith Dunstan, *Wowsers*, p. 173.

⁵⁶³ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 22.

them. The first ball in honour of the prince's visit was held on the 27 November 1867. As there were no lists of those who attended, it can only be assumed Knight and Alice were there. Knight did receive accolades for organising the redecoration over many weeks of the building's interior for the Governor's Ball which was described as a 'glorious sight'.⁵⁶⁴

One of the main receptions for Prince Alfred was the civic fancy dress ball held in the exhibition building on 23 December. Over 2,500 people attended attired in splendidly rich costumes. Alice Knight was dressed as Madame de Récamier.⁵⁶⁵ Knight himself was disguised as Sir Thomas Clifford Allbutt.⁵⁶⁶ The prince appeared in his naval costume, danced with many women then retired after supper. Unbeknown to the vast majority of patrons, the prince reappeared in disguise dressed as a monk but unrecognised by most people and danced with Alice Knight.⁵⁶⁷

A scandal such as the imprisonment of Knight's brother-in-law would have been spoken of and quite possibly gossiped about in private society. So it can be imagined the thoughts of those in polite circles when Alice Knight was presented to the prince at the Civic Ball. Curtis Candler wrote in his diary that Alice, although the wife of architect J.G. Knight, was the sister of a convicted murderer, which alarmed him at the social impropriety for the royal party.⁵⁶⁸ Although few recognised the prince in disguise, one who did was Candler, whose diary entry for that night described the two together:

I knew him by the lady he was with, however, and not his appearance, for his get up was perfect. I saw Mrs K, standing tête à tête with a figure and passed the pair, looking straight into the eyes of the man bowing to the lady. I knew him then at once but made no sign of recognition. After I had passed I heard her say – 'he does not know you'.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁴ 'The Duke of Edinburgh in Melbourne, The Governor's Ball', *Argus*, 28 November 1867.

⁵⁶⁵ Madame de Récamier was a 'French hostess of great charm and wit whose salon attracted most of the important political and literary figures of early 19th-century Paris. Napoleon had her exiled from Paris in 1805 and she returned in 1815 after Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo. 'Madame de Récamier', *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

⁵⁶⁶ Possibly representing the British physician who invented the modern clinical thermometer. 'Sir Thomas Clifford Allbutt', *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

⁵⁶⁷ Knight, *Narrative of the Visit of His Royal Highness*, pp. 156-171.

⁵⁶⁸ 'Notes about Melbourne, and Diaries 1848-(19--)', Curtis Candler, MS9502, State Library of Victoria, Diary entry 20 December 1867, p. 334, also quoted in Anita Callaway, *Visual ephemera*, p. 108.

⁵⁶⁹ Curtis Candler, 'Notes about Melbourne', diary entry 23 December 1867, pp. 336-37, also quoted in Callaway, *Visual ephemera*, p. 110.

This was not the only time that Candler referred to the fact of Alice being presented to Prince Alfred. Candler wrote that three days later at another ball at Government House, the women present that evening were astonished and spoke strongly about Alice Knight being presented to Prince Alfred when her brother was a murderer. Candler noted it was Eliot Yorke who, not knowing of Alice's brother's crime, presented Alice to the prince when they were all guests at Government House.⁵⁷⁰ De Serville feels that Alice had indeed impressed the young prince as they were in the same party at the races and opera, 'where the Duke playfully suggested installing her in the vice-regal box'.⁵⁷¹ It is not possible to know if Candler wrote about many middle class woman such as Alice Knight, as regrettably the only record of his diary remaining is titled 'Addenda to Diary 1867'.⁵⁷² This was certainly double standard thinking on Candler's side. As for impropriety, Candler himself was not without an indiscretion of some note.⁵⁷³

A ball to aid the Sailors' Home took place on 31 December 1867, with Knight organising the bunting decorations within the building. He had lines of flags draped from all corners of the room to a flagstaff in the centre of the hall. Several ships had lent flags for the display including the *Galatea*. The flags, together with festoons of flowers formed the canopy of the hall for the 1,500 guests.⁵⁷⁴

In January 1868, Knight sat on the dais with the professors, lecturers and examiners of Melbourne University when it conferred an *ad eundem gradum* degree on the Duke of Edinburgh.⁵⁷⁵ The Duke had already received an honorary degree, becoming a 'doctor of laws of the University of Edinburgh' when visiting there in 1866.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁰ Curtis Candler, 23 December 1867, cited in de Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 13.

⁵⁷¹ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 15.

⁵⁷² De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 129.

⁵⁷³ Simon Cooke, 'Candler, Samuel Curtis (1827-1911)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Candler had kept a mistress, Laura Kennedy, and later during the years 1872-77 he fathered four children but did not marry the mother until 1882 in New South Wales. This news was never revealed in newspapers of the day and Candler never publicly acknowledged the existence of his family. For the rest of his life, Candler continued to live a bachelor's life in Melbourne.

⁵⁷⁴ Knight, *Narrative of the Visit of His Royal Highness*, p. 173.

⁵⁷⁵ 'The Duke of Edinburgh at the University of Melbourne', *Argus*, 4 January 1868. The Latin means 'to the same'. *Macquarie Dictionary* notes that 'the graduate from one university may be admitted without examination to an *ad eundem gradum* degree in the same subject at another university'.

⁵⁷⁶ 'The Duke of Edinburgh at the University of Melbourne', *Argus*, 4 January 1868.

Referring to excerpts from Candler's diary, de Serville concludes that Alice Knight must have indeed made an impression on the prince - for both Knight and his wife were observed with the prince and his circle of friends at the races and had apparently been invited to attend the royal departure from Melbourne in an escorting boat.⁵⁷⁷ After a few more days of entertainment, the prince ended his stay in Victoria and sailed for Tasmania on the 4 January 1868. Gifts from Prince Alfred of an inscribed pencil case, jewelled brooch and an everlasting calendar set in a sailor's hat were given to Knight and Alice during his visit to Melbourne.⁵⁷⁸



Figure 11. The Everlasting Calendar, gift from Prince Alfred, 1867.

⁵⁷⁷ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*. p. 15.

⁵⁷⁸ Photographs of the 'Everlasting Calendar' sent by Garth Jenkins to Julie Mastin 2008. The sailor's hat was kept by Alice, taken to New Zealand and bequeathed to her female descendants. Two of Knight's daughters, Laura and Lizzie married and settled in New Zealand. The everlasting calendar has passed from Alice and John's eldest daughter Alice Laura, possibly on or before the death of her mother. Alice Knight died while in New Zealand in 1905. From Alice's descendants the tradition of the gift going to the elder daughter is still retained today.



Figure 12. Jewelled brooch from Prince Alfred to Alice Knight.

A narrative of some 220 pages covering the visit of Prince Alfred was compiled by Knight, using the Melbourne, Victorian country and other leading colonial newspapers. Knight covered not only the Victorian visits, but also included sections of the duke's South Australian, New South Wales and Tasmanian activities.⁵⁷⁹ It is not known if this was part of his original role as agent to the royal commission to undertake such a work, or it was his own initiative that notes for such an historic visit should be collated for future generations. Whatever the reason, the narrative was published in 1868.

An abrupt change of career for Knight: The formation of the Athenæum Club

Up to 1868 there had been four gentlemen's clubs in Victoria. They were the Melbourne, Port Phillip, Victorian and the Union. Two had by then closed, but two new ones appeared that year. A rough identification of the divisions of society who joined particular clubs is designated by the following: 'membership of the Melbourne Club (birth), the Yorick (worth) ... the Union (wealth)' and the Athenæum 'a mixture of worth and wealth'.⁵⁸⁰ All the clubs were different yet similar, attracting men who belonged to one, two and sometimes all four. Unfortunately, from the enrolled members list for the Athenæum Club in 1868, no paperwork had survived

⁵⁷⁹ Knight, *Narrative of the Visit of His Royal Highness*, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁰ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 145.

until the 1873 list.⁵⁸¹ The social function of these men-only clubs followed a similar pattern to those of English clubs, but with a membership of a more mixed society than that of England.

In Melbourne the early immigrants were men from quite diverse backgrounds, nationality and religion, including quite a few sons of English, Irish or Scottish aristocracy. De Serville clearly defines what the agenda was for these clubs by stating ‘a fundamental principle, expressed in varying degrees, underlies the constitutions of all gentlemen’s clubs — namely, that members should be chosen for their congenial qualities, and should share tastes and opinions’.⁵⁸² Clubs had rules and regulations. The social function of some clubs catered more specifically to an interest in literature and other arts, while another club was more attuned to mercantile. The gentlemen’s club was a place to smoke, play cards or billiards, enjoy a well-stocked bar and reading room and meet with men of similar tastes and interests. Most offered a dining room and accommodation.

The first was the Melbourne Club, founded in December 1838 by twenty-three gentlemen from the upper class and based on the principles of a London club.⁵⁸³ The Melbourne Club was an expensive and exclusive club for men of society and standing. A purpose built clubhouse was built in the Victorian Renaissance style and still stands today as a significant building in Melbourne.⁵⁸⁴ Here was a club whose membership was comprised mainly of high society until many became bankrupt in the 1842 depression. It never closed and is still in existence today, although numbers dwindled for some time.

An affirmation of how the early colonists saw themselves as the pioneers is expressed by de Serville with the following words:

The existence of the Club in a raw and isolated settlement at the end of the world was a declaration of belief in gentility, an act of defiance against the very elements which undermined and white-anted attempts to introduce the civilization of England’s green and pleasant land to Port Phillip.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸¹ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 60.

⁵⁸² De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 251.

⁵⁸³ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁴ Victorian Heritage Database, ‘The Melbourne Club’.

⁵⁸⁵ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 253.

The Port Phillip Club was founded in 1841 ‘by professional men, civil servants, merchants, squatters,’ but ‘refused to admit men rejected by the Melbourne Club’.⁵⁸⁶ The Port Phillip lasted but a short time until 1843. When Victoria became a separate colony several educated men thought it time to form another club. The Victorian Club in the mid-1850s was formed for gentlemen who had not known each other before immigrating to Melbourne, having diverse interests but had integrity and now wished for a place to gather.⁵⁸⁷ By October 1856 the club had ‘between three to four hundred members’ and offered excellent food and satisfactory wines.⁵⁸⁸ Members included politicians, judges, professors, highly ranked civil servants, two newspaper proprietors, historians, two premiers, six knights and men from various religions.⁵⁸⁹

This club came to an end by 1859 after the manager had been charged with embezzlement and forgery, which led to his imprisonment.⁵⁹⁰ It was some six years later when the Union Club came into existence in late 1865, ‘the first club for solid moneyed men of Melbourne and other parts of the colony’.⁵⁹¹ Again, here was another club that did not last long, only three years. Even the press wondered why the merchants would give up their club and intimated that perhaps the reason was that the club was deserted after half past five until midnight.⁵⁹²

In 1868 two new clubs were formed, one being the Yorick, the other the Athenæum. The founder of the Yorick Club was thought to have been F.W. Haddon, editor of the *Australasian* and *Argus* newspapers.⁵⁹³ This club came into existence by Haddon holding Saturday night gatherings at his rooms, where journalists, artists, actors, poets and ‘literary freelances’ gathered to drink brandy, listen to good music, hear good stories and sing.⁵⁹⁴ So a literary club was formed which modelled itself on the Savage Club in London.⁵⁹⁵ Although poorer in monetary terms than the other clubs, the men from the Yorick Club brought to it a wealth of literary knowledge. After

⁵⁸⁶ Paul de Serville, ‘Port Phillip Club’, *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*.

⁵⁸⁷ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 352.

⁵⁸⁸ ‘The Victorian Club’, *Argus*, 29 October 1856.

⁵⁸⁹ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 353.

⁵⁹⁰ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 355.

⁵⁹¹ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 356.

⁵⁹² ‘The peripatetic philosopher’, *Australasian*, 2 January 1869.

⁵⁹³ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 360.

⁵⁹⁴ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 361, citing George Bell, *The Yorrick Club: its origin and development; May 1868 to December 1910*.

⁵⁹⁵ De Serville, *Pounds and Pedigrees*, p. 362

struggling to survive for many years, the club amalgamated in 1966 with the Melbourne Savage Club.⁵⁹⁶

Knight may have promoted the idea behind the setting up of another club, the Athenæum.⁵⁹⁷ Pacini and Adamson write that James Smith, a connoisseur of the arts, deputy editor of the *Age* newspaper and editor of *Melbourne Punch*, together with Robert Ellery a former medical doctor and an enthusiastic astronomer were the force behind the formation of this club with the backing of the then governor of Victoria, Sir John Manners-Sutton.⁵⁹⁸ Unfortunately, as suggested in Chapter One, none of Pacini and Adamson's work is referenced and most of their narrative appears fictive. When de Serville was commissioned to write a second history of the Athenæum Club, he found it very difficult and demanding as the club had preserved very little of the early records.⁵⁹⁹

For some time, there had been talk of the need for a club in Melbourne with modest fees, where talented, intellectual men of moderate means could meet. In May 1868 it was announced that the Athenæum Club in Melbourne's fashionable Collins Street, was to be established for the following reasons:

for the purpose of providing a suitable place of resort for gentlemen belonging to the various professions, the Civil Service, and those connected with trade and commerce, who are recognized as having literally or artistic acquirements, or who may be otherwise considered eligible as members of such an association.⁶⁰⁰

As proprietor, Knight's responsibilities were paying the rent, wages, cost of any refurbishments and any other accounts, make any alterations that could be required, and being responsible for the catering. On the plus side, Knight would retain all incoming monies from subscriptions and profits from liquor sales and catering.⁶⁰¹ According to the *Australasian*, the cost of joining the club was an entrance fee of £2.2s with an annual subscription of £3.3s.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁶ De Serville, 'Yorick Club'.

⁵⁹⁷ De Serville, *Athenæum Club Melbourne*, p. 10.

⁵⁹⁸ Pacini and Adamson, *Windows on Collins Street*, pp. 17-20.

⁵⁹⁹ Geoffrey Blainey, in the foreword of De Serville, *Athenæum Club Melbourne*, p. viii.

⁶⁰⁰ 'News of the day', *Age*, 1 May 1868, citing an extract from the Athenæum Club circular prospectus.

⁶⁰¹ Pacini and Adamson, *Windows on Collins Street*, p. 29.

⁶⁰² 'Town News', *Australasian*, 2 May 1868.

London's clubs in the eighteenth-century had been proprietary ones and the Athenæum was to be the first one in Melbourne to run along those lines. Being a proprietary club, 'the proprietor ran the household and received the subscriptions, while the members drew up the rules and controlled admission'. The original set of Athenæum rules spelt out the double management:

Whilst members will command the exclusiveness and advantages appertaining to the best organised club, they will be entirely free from the personal liability which commonly belongs to such undertakings, as in the present case all pecuniary risks and obligations will devolve solely upon Mr. J.G. Knight.⁶⁰³

Knight selected premises in the most desirable part of Collins Street, number twenty-six, which was between Swanston and Elizabeth Streets.⁶⁰⁴ He did not lease the entire building, but several apartments including the principal entrance to the building.⁶⁰⁵ Not only did Knight have to find a suitable venue to house the club, but he organised the re-decoration for the refurbishment of the rooms for this non-residential club. Knight advertised for men in various trades – plastering, roofing the kitchen, plumbing, painting, papering and French polishing.⁶⁰⁶ Between May to July he advertised for a variety of house staff, including a steward, office lad, a young man to keep books, a cook, head waiter, third waiter, a page and a competent bookkeeper.⁶⁰⁷

Knight commissioned the services of a well-known former Englishman, Edward La Trobe Bateman, talented as an artist and designer who had become a significant figure in Melbourne. Bateman, together with Knight designed the main dining room at the Athenæum. The walls were 'painted a "peculiarly delicate shade" of green, with an ornamental border at the cornice in mauve and red; cast-iron columns, each supporting four candelabra in white and gold, which illuminated round tables of eight; and an open-framed lantern roof, with ceiling beams decorated in red and gold'.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰³ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 17.

⁶⁰⁴ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 20.

⁶⁰⁵ 'The Athenæum Club', *Argus*, 29 June 1868.

⁶⁰⁶ 'Tenders', *Argus*, 1, 15, 16, 26, 27 June 1868.

⁶⁰⁷ 'Servants', *Argus*, 5 May 1868; 'Tutors, Governesses, Clerks & c', *Argus*, 20 May, 17 July 1868; 'Tenders', *Argus*, 26 June 1868.

⁶⁰⁸ Philip Goad and Julie Willis (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, pp. 70-72.

The club was directed by a committee elected annually, with rules based on ‘the best managed institutions of the kind’.⁶⁰⁹ To take on such a venture, Knight would have needed to outlay money to purchase various goods and chattels. At this particular time Knight was not affluent, as three men ‘stood surety for the sum of £1000’ with only one man known, being his brother George, who ‘advanced him £333 in cash’.⁶¹⁰

The first membership of 213 members was increased later in that year to some 316 members. This achievement in so short a time was far better than any of the former clubs. The answer may lie in the low subscription and the wide range of recruitment undertaken by Knight.⁶¹¹ It appears Knight had the capacity to attract men to join. Not only was the membership large, but also the members were of high standing in the community. Part of the early membership included representation from the two leading newspapers, the *Argus* and the *Age*, five judges, a few barristers and solicitors, medical doctors, literary men, parliamentarians, Melbourne University professors, some civil servants and pastoralists with the largest enrolments from the commercial establishments,⁶¹² together with ‘free traders and protectionists, conservatives and liberal-radicals and literary rivals’.⁶¹³ Interestingly, many men joined both the Yorick and Athenæum Clubs, some even the Melbourne Club as well. Knight was also a member of the Yorick Club as its admission being ‘limited to men with literary or scientific tastes’ suited him well.⁶¹⁴

Within three months of the opening, Knight sent an invitation to the governor of Victoria and his staff to become honorary members of his club. De Serville notes that although a shrewd move, Knight had placed the governor’s name at the head of the list of members thus misleading people into thinking the club was under vice-regal patronage.⁶¹⁵ Knight may have thought that people seeing the governor’s name assumed him to be a member and would also want to join. It is doubtful that this was an innocent action.

⁶⁰⁹ *Australasian*, 9 May 1868, p. 593.

⁶¹⁰ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 23.

⁶¹¹ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 60.

⁶¹² De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, pp. 59-64.

⁶¹³ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, pp. 59,60.

⁶¹⁴ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 57.

⁶¹⁵ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 51.

For the catering side of the business, Knight was in partnership with Achilles King. King for years had successfully run Melbourne's Café de Paris, but in August 1867 became insolvent,⁶¹⁶ and by December of the same year, the *Argus* noted there was a final dividend payable.⁶¹⁷ It is assumed that by 1868 King had cleared his debts to be able to go into business with Knight.

Things seemed to have been going well for Knight in the intervening months before he fell foul of the law in December 1868. Knight was summoned to the district court 'for contravening the by-laws of the local Board of Health'. Knight 'was mulcted in the sum of 17s. 6d. for having two pigs on his premises'.⁶¹⁸ Possibly he was raising these animals for eventual roast pork Christmas dinners.

The club received royal patronage when the Duke of Edinburgh briefly revisited Melbourne in March 1869. After visiting a theatrical performance, Prince Alfred and his equerry Yorke were entertained at a private supper at the Athenæum Club by eight Melbourne gentlemen including Knight.⁶¹⁹ Another person of note, writer Charles Dickens, had a long interest in Australia, with two of his sons living here in the late 1860s. It is unknown if Knight knew that Dickens' sons became members of the Athenæum Club in 1874. De Serville remarks that 'Knight would have been delighted in the Dickens connection'.⁶²⁰

Although being the owner of a busy club would appear to be what one would consider a full time occupation, Knight continued to be involved in other ventures during his proprietorship.

Knight ventures into the wine business

Before the opening of the Athenæum Club, Knight visited the Kyneton Mechanics Institute in rural Victoria in May 1868, to hear a lecture given by his brother George titled 'Vine and Wine-making'. The lecture was an account of how George had selected land that the Board of Agriculture had told him was an error of judgment –

⁶¹⁶ 'Insolvency', *Argus*, 24 August 1867. In August there was a sale of King's superior household furniture. 'Sales by auction', *Argus*, 8 August 1867.

⁶¹⁷ 'Public Notices', *Argus*, 21 December 1867.

⁶¹⁸ *Argus*, 5 December 1868.

⁶¹⁹ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 69, citing an extract from the diary of Captain Standish. Discreet account given in *Argus*, 5 March 1869.

⁶²⁰ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 99.

that a vineyard could not be established. Local people had met him with negativity, but he knew soil and trusted his own judgment and now over seven years had proved to be right by growing excellent crops. A newspaper correspondent said George had ‘exhibited a thorough mastery of his subject’ covering planting in different soils, espousing a knowledge of the climatic conditions of various towns and how cultivating his plants at Sunbury was not the same as what he did at Riddells Creek.⁶²¹ Reverend Bleasdale, another guest, presented a lecture on colonial wine. Between lectures, the audience was entertained with a variety of performances, one of these being John Knight ‘delighting the audience with some admirable singing’.⁶²²

In January 1869, Knight and his brother George notified the public that they had purchased the Australian Wine Company which was founded in 1859. Apparently by adding 20,000 gallons of matured wines to the present stock, they were then in a position to supply the public with a variety of quality wines.⁶²³ George Knight was an experienced and successful wine grower and his older brother John had the ‘recognised taste and judgment’ through his experience in European and colonial exhibitions.⁶²⁴ As noted in the previous chapter, Knight was involved with the Connoisseur’s Club and whilst at the Great Intercolonial Exhibition of 1862-64 he had written saying he enjoyed many a glass, or two. This fact is borne out by Captain Gill, formerly of the *EJ Spence* (the ship Knight sailed in to Darwin in 1873), who stated that Knight was one of the nicest passengers he had ever encountered. As there was a shortage of accommodation on board, Gill readily shared his cabin with him. Gill further adds that as his bathroom was well stocked with alcohol, they enjoyed drinks and convivial conversation each evening.⁶²⁵ Being the captain, Gill may have had a larger sized bathroom that even though stocked with alcohol still allowed room to wash.

The Knight Brothers continued to advertise the variety of their wines.⁶²⁶ It is understandable that Knight thought there was a future in the wine business at that

⁶²¹ ‘Mr Knight’s lecture on the vine and wine-making’, *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers* 13 June 1868.

⁶²² *Argus*, 29 May 1868, p. 5.

⁶²³ ‘Australian Wines’, *Argus*, 18 January 1869.

⁶²⁴ ‘Australian Wines’, *Argus*, 18 January 1869.

⁶²⁵ ‘Reminiscent [sic] of the late Mr. Knight’, *NTTG*, 22 January 1892, p. 223.

⁶²⁶ ‘Wines, Spirits, & c.’, *Argus*, 22 February, 3 April and 23 April 1869.

time. Many people had sailed to Victoria for the gold rush and some of those that made big money bought land and turned to grape growing and winemaking. Up to the 1880s, Victorian wines had looked as though they would dominate the other Australian colonies.⁶²⁷ George Knight commenced planting vineyards at Bald Hills and then moved to Riddells Creek near Sunbury. Dunstan, in his history of Victorian wines, considers that even though George chose the wrong site for the vineyard, he believed that with the contacts both brothers had they should not have had any problems selling each vintage.⁶²⁸

Other avenues to bring in revenue

In January 1870, Knight was advertising as an architect for tenders to paint the front of the *Melbourne Punch* office and in another advertisement a few days' later building additions to the rear of the office, giving his address as next door to the Athenæum Club.⁶²⁹ If the club was doing well financially, why was Knight working part time in architecture? Of course there is a possibility he was not kept busy enough in the club and had time to earn extra money in a profession he knew. The next tender advertisement is for a cedar counter with no mention of the word 'architect', but this counter may have been for the club.⁶³⁰

At the end of January Knight undertook a slightly different speculation when selection of land took place at Schnapper Point near the coastal township of Sorrento in Port Phillip Bay. There were only twenty-six allotments on sale and nearly 300 selectors who travelled by steamer or arrived on horseback quickly snapped these up. Of interest is the mention of the professions of the successful bidders, which included four doctors, three barristers, three solicitors, three ship owners and three ladies. The article then goes on to say 'When we add (as agents of progress and improvement) the names of Mr. J. G. Knight and Mr. Perry ... here is a company fit to found not a new township, but a new colony'. It is doubtful whether Knight retained this land, as the *Argus* article emphasised that it was necessary for a

⁶²⁷ Dunstan, *Better than Pommard!*, pp. x1-x2.

⁶²⁸ Dunstan, *Better than Pommard!*, p. 82.

⁶²⁹ 'Tenders', *Argus*, 6 January 1870; 'Tenders', *Argus*, 10 January 1870; 'Tenders', *Argus*, 12 January.

⁶³⁰ 'Tenders', *Argus*, 16 February 1870.

residence to be erected.⁶³¹ Knight may well have seen himself as a land speculator, but the reality was he did not have the capital to follow through.

Knight, always interested in the progress of colonial industries, intended to bring out a monthly journal, 'specially devoted to those engaged in scientific, artistic, and industrial pursuits, and the promotion of technical education amongst the operative classes'. The journal was to be titled the *Scientific Australian*. Knight had gathered a group of contributors 'of recognised ability in their respective profession and avocations'. The first edition was to appear on the 1 June 1870.⁶³² Regrettably this journal never eventuated, but a journal of the same name began in Melbourne in 1895.⁶³³

Knight placed an advertisement in the *Argus* stating that he had resumed his profession as an architect and surveyor, was the editor of the *Scientific Australian* and was setting up 'an agency for taking out patents for inventions and registering copyrights in designs'.⁶³⁴ The interesting part of this advertisement is that it refers to yet another office address, being 74 Temple Court – this made six office addresses in five years. In all probability, the club was not working out to be as profitable as Knight had intended and he required additional income, but how could he afford to rent an additional office? On one hand, he may have had excellent staff that competently ran the club business for him, allowing him time to pursue other ventures. On the other hand, surely it would have been impossible for even the entrepreneurial talents of Knight to successfully handle these different activities at the same time. After nearly two years with the club, was he feeling the urge to be involved in more ventures? At the same time as he is deciding to put out a journal, he is putting forward a suggestion for holding another inter-colonial exhibition in Melbourne.

His idea for this exhibition was quite novel. The government would not be asked to assist financially, but a temporary building would be erected by subscription so the

⁶³¹ *Argus*, 31 January 1870; 'A Land Scramble', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 1 February 1870.

⁶³² *Argus*, 27 April, 1870.

⁶³³ *Scientific Australian: a popular quarterly journal devoted to the arts and industries*, 1895.

⁶³⁴ 'Public Notices', *Argus*, 23 May 1870.

exhibition would be 'self-supporting'.⁶³⁵ Knight estimated that temporary buildings of wood, iron and glass could be constructed at a cost of not more than £3,000 as against the cost of the existing exhibition building, which had cost over £20,000. All building material would remain the property of the contractor. The exhibition would remain open for three months with working expenses calculated at £2,000. Knight suggested fifty subscribers with each contributing £100, and he was intending to apply to the Public Library Trustees for use of an unused 'reserve facing Russell-street'. If this failed, other avenues would be sought. The exhibitors themselves would be the managers, with a proposed opening for 1 November 1871. If objects were deemed to have 'special merit', they could be 'selected for transmission to the London and New York International Exhibition of 1871'.⁶³⁶

The day after the advertisement for the exhibition appeared in the *Argus*, several men met to discuss the establishment of such a venture, with many enrolling as guarantors for £100 each. The proposed Manufacturers and Producers Intercolonial Exhibition, with Knight having produced a prospectus, and as promoter of this venture, stated that the establishment of such an exhibition would be now more of a permanent nature.⁶³⁷ Knight's exhibition enterprise never came to fruition. One of the newspapers criticised him for not considering putting his project on before the Intercolonial Exhibition in Sydney which was to be held in August.⁶³⁸ Knight most likely had some inkling that he would not be selected as secretary for the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1870. He may have thought that establishing a permanent exhibition in Melbourne would keep his name visible. There appeared restlessness in Knight's activities.

As proprietor of the Athenæum, Knight would in reality have been unable to take on the challenge of being secretary for another exhibition. It is not known if he had been asked, but the agent appointed to represent Victoria at the Sydney Exhibition was George Collins Levey.⁶³⁹ Knight and Levey were quite similar in their interests and both were members of the Colonial Wines and Connoisseurs' Club,⁶⁴⁰ with Levey on

⁶³⁵ *Argus*, 31 May 1870.

⁶³⁶ *Argus*, 31 May 1870.

⁶³⁷ *Argus*, 2 June 1870.

⁶³⁸ 'The Month', *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 18 June 1870.

⁶³⁹ *Argus*, 25 June 1870.

⁶⁴⁰ 'Colonial Wines and the Connoisseurs' Club', *Argus*, 13 September 1867.

the original committee of the Athenæum Club.⁶⁴¹ Levey was a politician and journalist with an interest in gold who later became chief proprietor and editor of the *Herald*.⁶⁴² Being involved with the Acclimatisation Society was another interest of his.⁶⁴³

Not being involved in his favourite role as exhibition secretary, Knight fell back on his architecture qualifications. Further advertisements by Knight for tenders for additions to houses in Kew gave both his Temple Court and Collins Street addresses.⁶⁴⁴ A month later Knight put forward an idea on a method using creosote⁶⁴⁵ to preserve wood from insects and natural decay. Knight intended to patent these inexpensive methods of protecting timbers and hopefully take advantage for a future colonial export.⁶⁴⁶ In March the following year, Knight advertised for a gentleman with capital to invest in this business.⁶⁴⁷ Nothing appears to have resulted from this venture.

Socialising at the balls

Another reason Knight needed additional income was the lavish expense of ball gowns and tickets to attend balls. In August and September 1870, the Knights attended two balls, and Alice wore a different gown to each. These were not bought gowns, but hand-made and costly and accompanying each gown was expensive jewellery. For the Mayor's Fancy Dress Ball at the opening of the new Town Hall in early August, Alice dressed as Princess Charlotte.⁶⁴⁸ Possibly Alice copied a dress worn by Princess Charlotte, the only legitimate daughter of the Prince of Wales, later George IV. Alice's evening gown was described by the following:

It consisted of a white satin dress, very short waisted, trimmed half up the skirt front and round the body with white lace, white satin ribbon and pink rose buds. The sash and waistband were fastened with large buckles of pearls. Satin shoes with bows of white satin

⁶⁴¹ 'Colonial Wines and the Connoisseurs' Club', *Argus*, 13 September 1867.

⁶⁴² De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 30.

⁶⁴³ 'Acclimatisation', *Australasian*, 2 June 1866.

⁶⁴⁴ 'Tenders', *Argus*, 29 June 1870; 'Tenders', *Argus*, 4 July 1870.

⁶⁴⁵ Creosote is derived from coal tar to treat timber against dry rot and termites.

⁶⁴⁶ *Argus*, 19 July 1870.

⁶⁴⁷ 'Businesses', *Argus*, 6 March 1871.

⁶⁴⁸ 'Opening of the New Town-Hall, The Mayor's Fancy Ball', *Argus*, 12 August 1870.

and rosebuds, and gloves to the elbow trimmed to match the dress. The headdress was a plume of Prince of Wales feathers mounted with jewels.⁶⁴⁹

Knight was costumed as an Engineer Officer. It is not known who he was representing, but the costume was far more modest than his previous efforts. Two weeks later Knight and his wife attended the Return Fancy Dress Ball. Knight was attired in evening dress and Alice was dressed ‘as Zuleika (bride of veiled Prophet)’, wearing another glamorous gown.⁶⁵⁰

Her costume consisted of a white satin skirt with gauze tunic trimmed with gold; jacket with flowing sleeves to match; trousers of white satin, covered with gauze and spangled; a coronet mounted with peacock’s feathers and studded with gems; ornaments of diamonds and pearls.⁶⁵¹

A hotchpotch of final events

How the Athenæum was operating throughout the very early 1870s is open to speculation as there are neither surviving minutes, nor records of elections, resignations or annual reports. The club’s archives consist of ‘only two small pamphlets, containing rules (1871) and a membership list (1873)’.⁶⁵² During the next couple of months further advertisements appeared in the *Argus* by Knight as an architect requesting painting tenders and again the address is next door to the club.⁶⁵³ The next door premises were where Robert Byrne had auction rooms.⁶⁵⁴

In December 1870, three public notices appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* stating that Knight had been appointed the general manager of the Sydney great permanent exhibition and public hall, with mention that Knight was temporarily absent in Melbourne.⁶⁵⁵ In late December it was announced in the *Argus* that Knight was to undertake the general management of the Sydney Exhibition building, but Knight, saying his ‘business arrangements would not allow him to leave Melbourne’,

⁶⁴⁹ ‘Inauguration of the New Town Hall, Melbourne’, *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 10 September 1870.

⁶⁵⁰ ‘Opening of the New Town Hall, The Return Fancy Ball’, *Argus*, 26 August 1870.

⁶⁵¹ ‘Opening of the New Town Hall, The Return Fancy Ball’, *Argus*, 26 August 1870. According to legends of the Koran and Bible, Zuleika was the wife of Potiphar.

⁶⁵² De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 81.

⁶⁵³ ‘Tenders’, *Argus*, 26 October 1870; ‘Tenders’, *Argus*, 27 October 1870; ‘Tenders’, *Argus*, 31 October 1870; ‘Tenders’, *Argus*, 1 November 1870.

⁶⁵⁴ ‘Auctions’, *Argus*, 3 November 1870.

⁶⁵⁵ ‘Public Notices’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 December 1870; ‘Public Notices’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1870; ‘Public Notices’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 December 1870.

retracted this.⁶⁵⁶ It appears on his return to Melbourne, Knight must have re-assessed his business affairs and realised as proprietor of a club he could not simply walk away from his responsibilities. It is de Serville's opinion that these reports may have been heralding Knight's time as proprietor of the Athenæum Club coming to an end.⁶⁵⁷

Changes to Knight's world

The dawning of 1871 heralds what could have been called Knight's *annus horribilus*, although it started on a relatively positive note. On 24 January 1871, Knight's two sons, Edward and Frederick, enrolled at Wesley College, Melbourne. Information obtained from this school's entry book records details their previous schooling as having had tuition at home by their father and also a Mr Miller in St. Kilda. Their address was recorded as B[...]galow, Shipley Street, South Yarra.⁶⁵⁸ As noted previously, Knight had a solid and close friendship with Sali Cleve, having lived at various times in one of Cleve's properties. The friendship appears to have been taken to another level, when Cleve's name appears in the school entry book, though it is not obvious as to why his name was there.

A story passed down through the Knight family descendants may be the answer. The family believed Cleve paid for Knight's sons to be educated at Wesley College. If this is indeed fact, did Knight suffer humiliation because another man was paying his son's school fees, or did Knight and Cleve enjoy a remarkable friendship and Knight was intending to repay the debt or graciously accept Cleve's generosity? When Frederick Knight later married Emilie Falkiner, two of their three children received the name Cleve as their second given name.⁶⁵⁹ This gesture may well have been a grateful and sincere way of saying thank you to their father's benefactor.

In January and February, Knight was advertising to brewers to sell the patent for his cask-cleaning machine⁶⁶⁰ and Alice Knight was advertising for a needle woman to

⁶⁵⁶ *Argus*, 26 December 1870.

⁶⁵⁷ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 85.

⁶⁵⁸ Personal communication, Margot Vaughan, Wesley College archivist, 19 March 2012.

⁶⁵⁹ Conversation with Lawre McCaffrey, September 2006.

⁶⁶⁰ 'Machinery', *Argus*, 20 January 1871. 'Tradesmen', *Argus*, 2 February 1871.

make children's dresses.⁶⁶¹ These advertisements seem to be at odds with one another, as Knight was trying to obtain money while Alice's intention was to spend.

A failed business venture

Further troubles occurred in March 1871 when the catering partnership Knight had with Achilles King, trading under the name Knight and King and operating from the premises of 26 (Athenæum Club) and also 74 Collins Street, was dissolved on the 29 March. King 'will receive, discharge, and settle all debts due to and by the said co-partnership concern'.⁶⁶² Knight as club proprietor was responsible for all accounts. The premises at 74 Collins Street appear to be those partly occupied by the Yorick Club. King had applied for and been granted a publican's licence for these premises in April 1870.⁶⁶³ It seems Knight and King had been catering for two clubs. By February 1872, King was suffering from 'cerebral derangement' and sent to the Yarra Bend Asylum where he died in January 1873.⁶⁶⁴

Insolvency

Catastrophe enveloped Knight when he became an insolvent. This resulted from the failed venture in the Australian Wine Company. Knight's partnership with his brother George in the wine business may have shown signs of a collapse over a few bad seasons for lack of water, which yielded a light harvest of grapes. As a result, George sold his Sunbury vineyard.⁶⁶⁵ The wine business was indeed not faring too well. An auction business had received instruction from George to sell by public auction 2,700 gallons of 'very superior colonial wine'.⁶⁶⁶ By March George had notified the public that he had disposed of the Australian Wine Company and he would honour any outstanding moneys.⁶⁶⁷

Later that month John Knight became an insolvent. The cause given for the insolvency was Knight being sued and called upon to pay the debts of the wine company. He stated he retired from this company in May 1869 on the terms that his

⁶⁶¹ 'Tradesman', *Argus*, 2 February 1871.

⁶⁶² 'Public Notices', *Argus*, 31 March 1871.

⁶⁶³ 'Melbourne', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 April 1870.

⁶⁶⁴ *Argus*, 23 January 1873.

⁶⁶⁵ Dunstan, *Better than Pommard!*, p. 82.

⁶⁶⁶ 'Sale by Auction', *Argus*, 18 February 1871.

⁶⁶⁷ 'Public Notices', *Argus*, 16 March 1871.

brother George would take all assets and pay all liabilities - which he had neglected to do. Liabilities amounted to £3,647 2s 7d with assets of £196 which left a deficiency of £3,451 2s 7d.⁶⁶⁸

The following day, George submitted a public notice in the *Argus*, hotly disputing John's allegation. George Knight stated that his brother had 'never invested one penny of capital in my business, and has never paid one penny on account of it' but agreed that his brother retired from the business when he said so. George Knight did acknowledge that three creditors sued his brother for £300 for amounts due by him (George). He further stated that he was the only one to actually pay the £333 to help start his brother with the Athenæum Club. George stated he was 'startled at such an announcement ... having parted on the best of terms the day before, and I cannot but think he has been very ill-advised'.⁶⁶⁹

This news was picked up by a country newspaper that alluded to the insolvency as 'the failure of Mr. J. G. Knight' and that it 'occasioned some surprise in the city'.⁶⁷⁰ De Serville writes that many well-known men became bankrupt in a colony that 'had a history of boom or bust'.⁶⁷¹ Among these were the very wealthy entrepreneur Hugh Glass, who had debts amounting to £500,000. Well-known author Marcus Clark had been twice bankrupt and tea merchant Robert Bowman, a member of the Legislative Assembly, also became an insolvent.⁶⁷²

John Knight went before the Insolvency Court in April and was out of business with debts proved for £547.18.2.⁶⁷³ The *Victorian Government Gazette* noted there was a meeting of creditors for John Knight's estate on the 17 April 1871.⁶⁷⁴ Another notice on 7 July 1871 stated there would be a general meeting of Knight's creditors to resolve what furniture and wearing apparel belonging to Alice Knight and their children could be retained by them.⁶⁷⁵ Emotionally, an event such as this would have been devastating and socially embarrassing to both Knight and Alice and would have

⁶⁶⁸ 'New insolvents', *Argus*, 31 March 1871.

⁶⁶⁹ 'Public Notices', *Argus*, 1 April 1871.

⁶⁷⁰ 'Melbourne', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 31 March 1871.

⁶⁷¹ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 93.

⁶⁷² De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 93.

⁶⁷³ 'Law Report', *Argus*, 18 April 1871.

⁶⁷⁴ 'Insolvency Notices', *Victorian Government Gazette*, 24, 14 April 1871.

⁶⁷⁵ 'Insolvency Notices', *Victorian Government Gazette*, 27, 28 April 1871.

greatly affected their children. Alice was nearly eight months pregnant at this time. Seven weeks later on 16 June, Alice gave birth to twin boys, Alfred Arthur Percy and Walter Alfred Rupert.⁶⁷⁶ A few days later, Alice Knight advertised for a 'strong, healthy wet nurse'.⁶⁷⁷ It is easy to appreciate Alice needing a 'wet nurse' at this particular time. She would have been feeling rather delicate after giving birth, together with the humiliation both public and private of her husband's insolvency.

Knight applied to the Court of Insolvency for a certificate of discharge on the 31 July⁶⁷⁸ and two days later a certificate meeting was held. An affidavit was filed by Knight stating 'he was not able to pay his creditors 7s. 6d in the pound'. Another affidavit was filed from his creditors consenting to dispense 'with this condition in the act'. Without opposition the judge granted the certificate.⁶⁷⁹

In May 1871, the governor had held a levee to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday. Knight was not invited to the levee, which was regarded as one of the most important social dates, but the person who replaced him as secretary at colonial exhibitions, George Levey, was.⁶⁸⁰ As an insolvent, Knight would have been shunned by many in society and this was clearly the reason for not receiving an invitation. He would have been unquestionably embarrassed and shamed by events. By June, Knight as an insolvent had no option but to leave the Athenæum Club.

According to Pacini and Adamson, the proprietor was permitted to transfer the property to another with the committee's approval. This must have occurred, but there is no record.⁶⁸¹ During the short closure of ten days or so, new rules were adopted and 'a new club of the same name established'. On the 26 June 1871 the Athenæum reopened under the proprietorship of James Hay.⁶⁸² Interestingly, when the new club was formed, none of the original committee members were on the new committee and by 1872 two-thirds of the original membership had left.⁶⁸³ Would it be fanciful to think that some left when Knight departed, or had the club itself

⁶⁷⁶ 'Births', *Argus*, 21 June 1871.

⁶⁷⁷ 'Servants', *Argus*, 20 June 1871.

⁶⁷⁸ *Victorian Government Gazette*, 47, 7 July 1871, p. 1087; 'Supreme Court', *Argus*, 31 July 1871.

⁶⁷⁹ 'Law Report', *Argus*, 2 August 1871.

⁶⁸⁰ 'The Queen's Birthday', *Argus*, 25 May 1871.

⁶⁸¹ Pacini and Adamson, *Windows on Collins Street*, p. 75.

⁶⁸² De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 90.

⁶⁸³ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, p. 93.

changed? Over the past 170 years several clubs were established, but the oldest clubs of the nineteenth century, the Melbourne, Athenæum, Australian and the Savage continue to flourish.⁶⁸⁴

The question arises here as to why Knight, who must have realised the club was not making money, allowed the Athenæum to almost cease to exist and not take stock of the situation and seek advice? Perhaps he was spending too much time seeking other ventures as an avenue to get himself into some sort of financial security. The Athenæum had been the ideal place for Knight to make a considerable amount of money. He was proprietor for long enough to realise by increasing the annual membership fee, or encouraging more people to join the club there was money to be made, but once again he let money slip through his fingers.

Knight dabbling in shares and the mining game

Knight needed to re-evaluate his working life and decide where to go next. It appears he moved to the country near to where his brother George lived and once more became involved in mining speculation. Named as a shareholder, with his residential address given as Sandhurst, Knight had taken 1,000 shares in a newly registered mining company – Rothschild’s Quartz Mining Company at Back Creek. Knight was the owner of 1,000 shares at ten shillings each.⁶⁸⁵ It is to be wondered how he could procure £500 so soon after his insolvency two months previously when he could not pay his creditors.

One week later at the first meeting of directors, ‘Knight was elected chairman of the board of directors, and arrangements were made for sinking a trial shaft on the reef, which was said to show very promising indications’.⁶⁸⁶ Knight, together with James Hannan, applied for a gold mining lease in which they intended to invest £1,000 in manual labour and machinery if required. In this application Knight offers his address as the Niagara Hotel, Sandhurst.⁶⁸⁷ A few days later, Knight again took another 1,000 shares in the registered company known as the Sisters Reef Quartz

⁶⁸⁴ De Serville, *Athenæum Club*, pp. 396-387.

⁶⁸⁵ ‘Registration Notices’, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 12 October 1871.

⁶⁸⁶ ‘Mining Intelligence’, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 19 October 1871.

⁶⁸⁷ ‘Notice of Application for Gold Mining Lease’, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 21 October 1871.

Mining Company at Kangaroo Flat, this time giving his residence as Melbourne.⁶⁸⁸ The optimism of this man and the speed in which he bounced back from insolvency is astounding. The confidence of the gambler in Knight did not appear to diminish, for in such a remarkably short space of time he continued to invest in mining shares. There was an enormous risk in this speculation.

Whether these mining shares or leases paid dividends to Knight is unknown, but a couple of weeks later he and a John Wood established themselves as mining reporters. Over many years Knight had been a contributor to several newspapers and magazines so was quite qualified in this field. The idea was that they would undertake 'personal observations' and 'periodical inspections' of claims.

Their object is to furnish legal managers with reliable information as to the actual state of the works of which they are the indoor directors, and generally to co-operate with him in endeavoring to secure increased activity and diligence from the workmen engaged upon the mines.⁶⁸⁹

In a letter to the editor of the *Bendigo Advertiser*, Knight put forward a scheme where all mining companies would contribute samples of the ground they were working, including specimens of the reef itself. Each mining company would then submit descriptive particulars that included the following: their name, 'locality of the reef, the depth of the shaft, the nature of the sinking with illustrations, the length of drive with illustrations, the time the ground has been worked, the plant, the number of men employed, &c'. This information in the form of an exhibition, would then allow investors and speculators an insight into areas they could be interested in. It would also enlighten the general public in mining progress. After an interval, this exhibition would be transferred to Melbourne where interested parties would appreciate the information. Knight stated he would be very happy to meet with any gentleman 'disposed to give a practical form to the above scheme'.⁶⁹⁰ This appears to have been another scheme never implemented.

⁶⁸⁸ 'Registration Notices', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 25 October 1871.

⁶⁸⁹ 'Mining Reporters', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 November 1871.

⁶⁹⁰ 'A Mineral Exhibition', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 November 1871.

Around this time Knight applied for a position in mining in the Maryborough district in Victoria. The information is found in a letter to Knight from R. Brough Smythe, the engineering secretary for mines in Melbourne. Brough Smythe wrote:

Dear Sir, I am very glad to hear that you are likely to be permanently employed in connection with mining works in the Maryborough district. Your ability and perseverance and the close attention you bestow on every duty you undertake will in the end result I am quite sure in success.⁶⁹¹

Unfortunately no further correspondence relating to the outcome of the mining position in Maryborough has been located. Although people appreciated Knight's competency in each endeavour he undertook, it defies reason that he could not find a reliable position in one of the many fields he was skilled in. Knight's name appeared in lease inquiries for the Warden's Court in both December 1871 and January 1872.⁶⁹² The article does not explain if Knight was trying to purchase a lease or handing back a lease. Knight's 1871 investment in shares seemed not to have bought him a dividend. The venture did not pay off, for in February 1872, 1,000 of his shares were to be sold by auction for non-payment.⁶⁹³ Quite possibly Knight had a stock broker purchase the shares for him.⁶⁹⁴

In January 1872, Knight's name was put forward as being eligible for election as a building surveyor for the Melbourne City Council and on the same page of the *Argus* there was mention that a new club was to be established at 21-23 Collins Street with Knight undertaking the duties of secretary.⁶⁹⁵ The business management of the new City Club was to be handled by Mr. S. Packham, catering 'for gentlemen connected with trade and commerce, or the civil service', and a 'list of members already over 100'.⁶⁹⁶ By March the club appeared to make progress and recruited new members⁶⁹⁷ but by August 1872, the City Club became the City Club Hotel and opened to the public.⁶⁹⁸ In September the Young Men's Christian Association took over several

⁶⁹¹ SRSA GRS/1/1873/203, Letter dated 4 December 1871. Brough Smythe to Knight.

⁶⁹² 'Warden's Court', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 16 December 1871.

⁶⁹³ 'Auctions', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 24 February 1872.

⁶⁹⁴ Personal communication David Carment to author, 8 May 2015.

⁶⁹⁵ *Argus*, 15 January 1872. 'Summary of Events', *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 29 February 1872.

⁶⁹⁶ *Argus*, 15 February 1872.

⁶⁹⁷ *Argus*, 1 March 1872.

⁶⁹⁸ 'Hotels', *Argus*, 22 August 1872.

rooms in the City Hotel and Packham became the landlord.⁶⁹⁹ Knight's name had not been mentioned for some months in association with the City Club or City Hotel, so in all likelihood he had relinquished his role of club secretary for more involvement in other commerce.

The first general meeting of the Royal Standard Building and Investment Society was held in March 1872 with Knight nominated for the office of architect, but the election for the committee was scheduled for April.⁷⁰⁰ In early May Knight was listed in the balance sheet of the Hustler's Main Reef Company as being owed £1.3s.⁷⁰¹ A few weeks later, Knight was in the chair at a special shareholder's meeting of the Bullion Company in their Queen Street Melbourne office. The main business was 'for the purpose of considering the advisability of empowering the directors to let portions of the mine on tribute'.⁷⁰² The article does not say whether Knight being in the chair, represented the shareholders, or directors of the company. Knight was experiencing money problems once more when he went before the justice of the peace for a debt case in the Emerald Hill Police Court. Mr Lomas sued Knight for goods valued at £19 12s 2d. Lomas won with Knight paying costs of five shillings.⁷⁰³

Melbourne Mining Exchange – Secretary

The Melbourne Mining Exchange (MME) advertised for a secretary of the association in the middle of May 1872.⁷⁰⁴ Knight applied and obtained the position, which he held for several months until the exchange closed due to lack of business. In the meantime London held the International Exhibition at South Kensington continually from 1871 to 1874.⁷⁰⁵ The International Exhibition commissioners in Melbourne advertised for the appointment of a secretary for the 1873 London Exhibition. Thirty people had applied for the position. Knight may have been an applicant, but it was Levey who was the successful candidate.⁷⁰⁶ The Melbourne

⁶⁹⁹ *Argus*, 27 September 1872.

⁷⁰⁰ *Argus*, 28 March 1872.

⁷⁰¹ 'Hustlers Main Reef Company', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 3 May 1872.

⁷⁰² 'Mining Meeting', *Argus*, 31 May 1872.

⁷⁰³ 'Emerald Hill Police Court', *Record*, 16 May 1872.

⁷⁰⁴ 'Tutors, Governesses, Clerks', *Argus*, 15 May 1872.

⁷⁰⁵ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 387.

⁷⁰⁶ *Argus*, 20 June 1872.

Exhibition opened in early November as a preliminary for exhibition articles to be forwarded to London in December.⁷⁰⁷ Quite possibly Knight was content in his position as secretary in the MME and had not applied to the exhibition commissioners. He certainly had a deep interest in mining and speculating as well as flair in entrepreneurial pursuits. Whatever Knight was privately going through, at least he had regular income from his present employment.

While Knight was tracking through his many financial involvements, Melbourne itself changed forever on the second July 1872 when the first overseas telegraph message was received. Although Victoria had the electric telegraph in the 1850s to Hobart, Sydney and Adelaide, it was now less isolated from the rest of the world. News could be received in just seven hours instead of approximately 100 days with correspondence via ships from England to Australia. The arrival of the telegraph made an enormous difference to the commercial and social life of Melbourne. In 1872 Victoria was home to more than forty per cent of Australia's population, 'and Melbourne as the port for the colony, attracted a huge volume of trade'.⁷⁰⁸

Although Melbourne forged ahead, once again Knight experienced bad luck. According to newspaper accounts, Knight was still secretary to the MME at the end of October,⁷⁰⁹ but it appeared there was a down-turn in the mining industry at this time. At the quarterly meeting of the MME, a proposition was put forward to 'wind up the association'. The majority of members who would meet the following week to elect a new committee met the idea with opposition.⁷¹⁰

The new committee undoubtedly was appointed and possibly changed its name, as the MME name did not appear in future newspapers. Whatever befell this association, Knight was no longer part of it. In a testimonial from Francis Bell the former president of the MME, he explained that Knight held his position until funds were no longer available to pay him. Bell stated this was due to the 'dullness of

⁷⁰⁷ 'Opening of the International Exhibition', *Argus*, 6 November 1872.

⁷⁰⁸ Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, p. 133.

⁷⁰⁹ 'Commercial Intelligence', *Argus*, 31 October 1872.

⁷¹⁰ *Argus*, 19 November 1872.

mining generally'. He further wrote that Knight had 'discharged his duties in a thoroughly satisfactory manner'.⁷¹¹

Further ideas or pipe dreams?

Knight had another idea. He was gaining support for a project and had a prospectus available for the 'Society of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce'.⁷¹² Once again this was an idea that never came to fruition. It was unfortunate that the position at the Mining Exchange came to an end through no fault of Knight, as this may have turned out to be secure employment. Many of his former jobs were relatively short term. His only consistent work had been as an architect in his early years in Melbourne, but after several years this too had appeared to not hold the same interest for him. A new idea by Knight usually meant an article in a newspaper that may have held interest for a month or two, and then there was no further mention of it. The only employment that appeared to never be of a boring nature to him was his involvement with exhibitions. On the other hand, he must be given a little credit for perseverance in the diversity of the jobs he undertook.

Intercolonial Exhibition Sydney

Knight was approached by the exhibition commissioners and appointed secretary for the Victorian Department for the Intercolonial Exhibition to be held in Sydney in 1873.⁷¹³ Levey sailed in March to London in order to receive the Victorian exhibits for the London and Vienna exhibitions.⁷¹⁴ According to Hoffenberg, Levey 'lectured on Victoria's products and organized exchanges of exhibits at London (1873) and Philadelphia (1876)'.⁷¹⁵ With Levey on his way to England, Knight was the best, or possibly the only alternate choice for secretary and he may have had to swallow his pride to accept the position. Earlier in February, Knight was again snubbed by not being invited to the governor's levee.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹¹ SRSA GRS/1/1873/213, Testimonial 29 January 1873. Francis Bell to Knight.

⁷¹² *Argus*, 17 December 1872.

⁷¹³ *Argus*, 4 February 1873.

⁷¹⁴ 'Summary for Europe', *Argus*, 28 February 1873.

⁷¹⁵ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 285.

⁷¹⁶ 'The Governor's Levee', *Argus*, 28 February 1873.

The Agricultural Society of New South Wales organised the Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition. Such agricultural items exhibited were farm animals, machinery, wool, wine and sugar, and the non-agricultural items ranged from raw materials to fine arts.⁷¹⁷ Within a short space of time Knight was again in his element working with exhibits. He was confident that Victoria would easily more than fill its allotted space with a wide variety of animals and birds,⁷¹⁸ different artworks and have winegrowers sending off their wines early for the wine tasting.⁷¹⁹ Knight was critical of some people who exhibited in earlier exhibitions, had received medals or high recommendations at the event and did well from their awards and so were content to sit on their laurels and not bother to risk further competition. He considered these people ungrateful for not supporting the exhibition and re-exhibiting.⁷²⁰

Having gone to Sydney as the Victorian representative, Knight attended the annual dinner of the Agricultural Society of New South Wales.⁷²¹ As his representation for the exhibition neared completion, Knight, being in Sydney, wrote a short note to the prominent New South Wales politician Sir Henry Parkes requesting a free railway ticket for himself and one of his sons to tour the countryside.⁷²² There is no record of whether Knight did obtain free railway tickets.

On returning to Victoria, Knight compiled a fifty-page pamphlet on the recent Sydney Exhibition. Although Knight offered a summary of the exhibits, the importance of this work was his suggestions for improvements for future exhibitions. In closing, he claimed that people were made judges without the proper qualification in a particular class. He also stated that objects should be judged days before the opening so the person assessing the exhibit could do so without the public milling around and without interruption. Knight further added that he thought judges should be paid for their efforts and be required to submit a full report on the exhibit. His

⁷¹⁷ 'Agricultural Society of New South Wales', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January, 1873.

⁷¹⁸ *Argus*, 12 February 1873.

⁷¹⁹ *Argus*, 19 February 1873.

⁷²⁰ 'The Intercolonial Exhibition of New South Wales', *Argus*, 1 April 1873.

⁷²¹ 'Agricultural Society of New South Wales - Annual Dinner', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 April 1873.

⁷²² 'Sir Henry Parkes -Papers, 1833-1896', CYA 871-CYA 918, correspondence, Vol. 21, A891, Letter 13 May 1873, Knight to Sir Henry Parkes, pp. 47-48.

final thought was that medals should be dispensed with and in their place ‘Certificates of Merit’ be issued with a brief opinion from the judge. This, Knight opined, would lessen the ‘jealousies caused by the distinctive awards of gold, silver and bronze medals’.⁷²³

Knight displayed his knowledge of exhibitions so put himself forward as a candidate for further displays. He publicly took the opportunity to thank a particular person or company. In this case he wrote on behalf of the Victorian commissioners, thanking the Australasian Steam Navigation Company for carrying the Victorian exhibits freight free of charge back to Victoria.⁷²⁴

Knight seeks employment elsewhere

While in Sydney, Knight must have been reflecting on his next place of employment, by contemplating working in that city. He applied for the position of city architect. In June the Sydney City Council met and considered the fourteen candidates by ballot. Knight survived until the final six names and was then eliminated.⁷²⁵

Knight had been employed over the past twelve years mainly in short term positions, then had re-invented himself in another task, possibly not wanting to return to architecture in Melbourne. It appeared that for future exhibitions Levey would be offered the position of secretary. After Knight’s death on the 10 January 1892, a newspaper article alluded to the management of intercolonial exhibitions being transferred ‘to other hands’.⁷²⁶ The reason why the government was overlooking Knight is not clear, but possibly the insolvency had something to do with it, or his brother-in-law being a murderer may have played a part.

Being rejected for the architectural position in Sydney must have made Knight feel despondent, so he looked further afield. Working in the MME, Knight would have been well aware of gold having been found in the NT and the high expectations for the finds. In September 1872 when he was in the position of secretary to the MME, Knight wrote to Henry Ayers, chief secretary in the SA government offering his

⁷²³ ‘Victoria at the Intercolonial Exhibition’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 June 1873.

⁷²⁴ ‘The A.S.N. Company and the late Intercolonial Exhibition’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 1873.

⁷²⁵ ‘Municipal Council of Sydney’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 June 1873.

⁷²⁶ ‘The late J.G. Knight’, *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

services for employment in the NT. Knight stated he was interested in being involved in the new settlement and offered his ‘long and varied Colonial experience’ to the minister. Knight wrote of his employment in the PWD and his involvement in the Victorian Exhibition in 1861, and the London International Exhibition in 1862 and his employment in mining.⁷²⁷ Ayers forwarded the letter to the commissioner for crown lands and immigration, who replied that there were no vacancies that Knight could fill in the NT at that time. The commissioner offered surprise ‘that with such testimonials he [Knight] has not made good headway in Victoria or elsewhere since 1864’.⁷²⁸

In July of 1872, Knight’s brother George also wrote to the SA government expressing his wish to work in the NT, outlining his experience as a certificated surveyor and ‘making difficult underground surveys of deep mines & reefs in Bendigo’. George was willing to sacrifice his professional connections and his house to obtain employment, he was also refused work.⁷²⁹ Although George had not become an insolvent, having to close his wine business may have made his financial position precarious. Throughout April to July 1872 George advertised as an architect and surveyor in the *Bendigo Advertiser* asking for tenders for building projects.⁷³⁰ There is the possibility the building business was slow and he was short of ready money so had considered the dramatic move of selling his house and moving to the Territory. At this stage, George had eight children.

John Knight was well aware his forté was his entrepreneurial skills. His talent for organisation – especially intercolonial exhibitions – was as the *Argus* explained:

He combined so much good taste with inventiveness, adaptability, practical good sense, and a clear perception of the best methods of arriving at desirable results, that his nomination as the administrator of an exhibition or works of art and industry was a guarantee of its success.⁷³¹

⁷²⁷ SRSA GRG24/6, File 1326, Correspondence File - Colonial, later Chief Secretary’s Office, 1842-1984 [hereafter SRSA GRG24/6, File 1326] SRSA GRG24/6, File 1326, Letter 11 September 1872. Knight to Chief Secretary.

⁷²⁸ SRSA GRG24/6, File 1326, Cover note 23 September 1872, Comments by Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration.

⁷²⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1872/233, Letter 25 July 1872. George Knight to Chief Secretary.

⁷³⁰ ‘Tenders’, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 April, 1872; ‘Tenders’, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 19 April 1872; ‘Tenders’, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 5 July 1872.

⁷³¹ ‘The Late J.G. Knight’, *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

For a man who regularly received accolades and always having a job appearing when needed, Knight must have been discouraged by this period of inactivity and was likely fraught with anxiety for the future. By this stage he may have been desperate as to where or what he would do. Knowing that business people were aware of his insolvency and the possibility of never obtaining a suitable position in Melbourne in architecture, mining or exhibitions, may have caused him to look further afield in a different colony of Australia. No longer able to obtain a position for himself in Melbourne, it could be expected that Knight felt defeated by bureaucracy.

Having travelled to Adelaide with the Rev. Bleasdale in 1866 and made contacts there, Knight would have had entrée to a few men of standing. In all likelihood, with the lack of future appointments Knight did not see any alternative but to move away from Victoria and further afield to the new frontier town of Palmerston in the NT. Gold may have been an incentive for him to leave England in the first place and as it had already been found in the NT this may have also influenced his thinking and lured him north. Although he had applied to the SA government in August for a position in Palmerston, he would have known in May that thirty companies had registered in Adelaide to mine in the Territory.⁷³² It may not have been gold alone that was a lure to move north: he also had knowledge of the mining industry and had been associated with mining companies.

After rejection of the previous letter, Knight could have considered it far better to present himself in person and speak to someone in government who may well find a suitable position in the north for him. At the end of July 1873, Knight sailed to Adelaide⁷³³ and while staying at the Globe Hotel wrote a letter to the commissioner of crown lands offering his services in the Northern Territory as superintendent of works. Knight had contacts in Adelaide, so he must have known of this particular vacancy. He wrote of his varied engineering ability, with mining not being mentioned. He was selling himself as a man capable of achieving positive results by stating his ability to achieve any goal he was given.⁷³⁴ Several excellent testimonials of Knight's credentials accompanied the letter. Knight spent eleven days in Adelaide, undoubtedly seeking an audience with as many influential people as possible to assist

⁷³² Alan Powell, *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*, p. 93.

⁷³³ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 31 July 1873.

⁷³⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1873/203, Letter 2 August 1873. Knight to Commissioner of Crown Lands.

him in obtaining a position. Knight departed Adelaide on the *Corrong* on the 12 August⁷³⁵ arriving in Melbourne three days later.⁷³⁶

Whatever transpired between Knight and the person he saw in Adelaide must have been positive, for on his return to Melbourne he had just eighteen days in which to say goodbye to his wife and children (the youngest being twins just over two years of age) and to settle all family and business affairs before sailing north. Previously to travelling to Adelaide, had Knight and Alice discussed the possibility that he may obtain a position at Port Darwin with a regular income, or, was this a release from family responsibility, or a lack of finance for Knight? Was his moving away undertaken with a heavy heart with Alice refusing to accompany him, or did Alice just not care anymore? There are so many questions and much speculation as to why Knight decided to move north without his family, and so quickly. Possibly Knight's absence was seen as a form of contraception, as his wife had already borne him nine children. Another reason why Knight's family may have stayed in Melbourne was that the medical opinion of the day argued that a tropical climate did not suit white women and children at all, and even white men were limited with how much work they could undertake.

On the other hand, the notion that a tropical climate was unsuitable for Europeans was at odds with Harriet Douglas' experience. Harriet together with her parents, four sisters and two brothers lived in Palmerston from 1870; Harriet for seventeen months, and the rest of her family for three years. Harriet's father had been appointed the government resident in 1870. Harriet wrote of thoroughly enjoying the tropical weather and not finding it disagreeable or trying, although she preferred the wet season with its cool nights and hot days, to the dry season's cooler weather. Other than the destructive mould damaging almost everything during the wet, Harriet considered it a healthy climate.⁷³⁷

While Knight was optimistically sailing north to Port Darwin, controversy raged in the SA government over his nomination for the posting of secretary to the

⁷³⁵ 'Shipping News', *South Australian Advertiser* [hereafter SAA], 13 August 1873.

⁷³⁶ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 16 August 1873.

⁷³⁷ Harriet Daly, [Mrs Dominic D. Daly], *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia*, pp. 116-117.

government resident. Although noted in the Melbourne press of Knight's appointment on the 6 September,⁷³⁸ Adelaide papers did not begin printing his appointment until four days later. A furore erupted in the SA government when the Chief Secretary Arthur Blyth was asked if the appointment of secretary to the government resident had been made, who was it, and what was the salary? Blyth answered two of the questions but would not divulge Knight's name when most of the community already knew.⁷³⁹ The following day, it was reported that the reason Blyth did not divulge Knight's name was that the governor had not given his approval.⁷⁴⁰ Blyth was further questioned if Knight sailed before or after he was appointed.⁷⁴¹ In the House of Assembly on the 16 September, the chief secretary reported the following:

He [Blyth] had a personal statement to make in reference to the question asked ... on Thursday last as to whether the appointment had been promised to Mr Knight, and he thought the answer he gave was, "Not to my knowledge." An offer had been made to Mr Knight, and as probably that might be considered by some hon. members the same as a promise he took the earliest opportunity of correcting his statement. The formal appointment in Cabinet was dated September 8.⁷⁴²

Knight must have received at least an official verbal verification for the position, as he sailed to Port Darwin on the iron clipper barque *EJ Spence* on 3 September 1873.⁷⁴³ Blyth was further asked how many people had applied for the position – to which he replied there had been six applications with Knight being the most eligible.⁷⁴⁴ The question of Knight's appointment continued to be debated at length in parliament, as many members thought it a slight to the SA public service that a Victorian was appointed to the position.⁷⁴⁵

Away from the parliamentary debate, a local newspaper article clearly indicates that Knight was well known to many South Australians 'for his administrative and inventive genius ... [and] as a getter-up and conductor of exhibitions we have not his equal here'.⁷⁴⁶ There was little let-up from some parliamentarians who 'wanted to censure the government without going so far as to say they had no confidence in

⁷³⁸ *Argus*, 6 September 1873.

⁷³⁹ 'Our Summary', *SAA*, 10 September 1873.

⁷⁴⁰ 'Topics of the Day', *SAA*, 11 September 1873.

⁷⁴¹ 'The Parliament', *SAA*, 12 September 1873.

⁷⁴² 'House of Assembly', *SAR*, 17 September 1873.

⁷⁴³ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 3 September 1873.

⁷⁴⁴ 'House of Assembly', *SAR*, 17 September 1873.

⁷⁴⁵ 'Secretaryship to the Government Resident in the Northern Territory', *SAA*, 18 September 1873.

⁷⁴⁶ 'Victoria', *SAR*, 13 September 1873.

them'. Members of the House wished to make the point that the government must look at the SA Civil Service personnel first before going outside the colony. Members queried the fact that if Knight had such qualifications as described by Blyth as being 'excellent as a secretary, an accountant, an engineer, an architect, and a supervisor of works', why would he want to leave Victoria to go to the NT for a yearly salary of £500? The article further comments that the government 'picked up a tremendous bargain in Mr Knight ... all for the ridiculously small sum of £500 a year'.⁷⁴⁷ Not only was Knight a new appointment to NT, but also the person he was to work for was appointed at the same time. George Byng Scott was to be the new government resident.⁷⁴⁸

Knight accepted the position for £500 per annum, whereas in 1861 as agent for the Intercolonial Exhibition in London he was receiving £600. So in the intervening twelve years, his salary had reduced instead of increasing. This clearly demonstrates the desperation Knight was undergoing at that time. It must have appeared to many people quite surprising that this man with such apparent valuable talents and skills left the security of Melbourne, together with a society where intellectual thought was expounded, to apply to the SA government for a position in a remote part of the continent. This position was to take him, without his family, to the very isolated fledgling town of Palmerston in the Northern Territory.

Conclusion

Knight's final six working years in Melbourne were certainly quite diverse. He accepted the role of agent to the Royal Commission for the 1867 visit of Prince Alfred to Melbourne; mingling with the prince, his equerry and others at various functions. At the end of the visit, Knight compiled a comprehensive narrative of the royal visit which was printed in 1886.

A change in career saw Knight become proprietor of the Athenæum Club, but his proprietorship was short-lived and in less than two years he had left the club, possibly due to lack of available funds. He became insolvent for a short time,

⁷⁴⁷ 'No Confidence', *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail* [hereafter *SACWM*], 20 September 1873.

⁷⁴⁸ 'Appointments', *SAR*, 19 September 1873.

remarkably acquired money quite quickly and moved back into share speculation in the country area of Victoria. Probably due to the murder scandal and his insolvency, Knight was not asked again by government to represent Victoria in international exhibitions.

Although briefly undertaking work in the Melbourne Mining Exchange and unsuccessfully applying for an architect's position in Sydney, Knight must have realised he needed to move from Melbourne to find financial security, even if it meant moving away from his family. Having initially failed in a previous application to the South Australian government for a position in the Northern Territory, Knight re-applied in person in Adelaide in 1873, and receiving some assurance, travelled north with only his thirteen-year-old son. It is only possible to speculate, but he may have considered acquiring this position meant a permanent source of income. The people of Melbourne wondered why Knight would leave the Melbourne he knew so well for the unknown northern frontier, while the news of Knight's employment caused a debacle in the South Australian government.

The following chapter describes the newly formed settlement in an almost pristine area of Australia that had a very small population of European people, and an unknown number of Aboriginal people. Knight settled into his role as secretary to the government resident, but unfortunately, through the South Australian government's cost cutting and restructuring, his tenure was relatively brief.

Chapter Five

Knight in the Northern Territory, 1873-1876

The formation of the NT and the town of Palmerston (also referred to as Port Darwin in shipping reports) began to take shape under the SA government. Palmerston would prove to be a permanent British settlement, with the previous attempts at having a stronghold or presence on the northern shores of Australia failing miserably. Apart from Canberra, Palmerston was the last of the Australian capital cities to be established. The settlement of Palmerston did impact on local Aboriginal people and the early social life of the settlers. Knight undertook several roles in his new position including carrying out essential public works both in the town and countryside and ‘establishing the basic structure of the town’.⁷⁴⁹

South Australia’s Northern Territory

The NT was part of New South Wales until provisionally annexed to South Australia by Letters Patent on 6 July 1863 ‘revocable at Britain’s will’.⁷⁵⁰ The Northern Territory of South Australia became a dependency of that colony. The SA government saw this acquisition as a windfall as it was aware of its own colony having limited pastoral land and being arid in the northern section.

The NT would have to pay for itself. The plan was a modified version of E.G. Wakefield’s ‘Systematic Colonization’ plan which had laid the foundations of South Australia’. Alan Powell outlines how this was to be carried out:

Half a million acres of Territory lands were to be sold before settlement or survey. Buyers might purchase land orders for 160-acre agricultural blocks, as many as they wished. For the first 250 000 acres the price would be low, a mere 7s 6d per acre and a free half-acre town lot was to be thrown in with each country block. The second 250 000 acres was to sell at 12s per acre ... revenue raised from land sales would defray the cost, not of immigration to the new colony as Wakefield had laid down, but of its governance.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 92.

⁷⁵⁰ Powell, *Far Country*, p. 74.

⁷⁵¹ Powell, *Far Country*, p. 77.

Concern by some

The editorial that appeared in the *South Australian Advertiser* two weeks after the NT had been annexed to SA expressed very deep concern that as a very young colony SA was taking on a massive responsibility of a new province. The editor said there was much success to be gained, but stressed the importance of careful government regulations ‘for laying the foundations of this new colony, and the Parliament must weigh calmly and deliberately the policy of the Ministry before they agree to give it the force of law’.⁷⁵²

Finding a suitable site for a capital

After a failed attempt by the SA government to establish a principal settlement in the NT at Escape Cliffs, Surveyor-General for SA, George Woodroffe Goyder, was asked to do the job. Goyder selected a team of surveyors, a medical doctor and other skilled men in various fields, livestock, and equipment necessary for the task and sailed north on the *Moonta* in December 1868. Goyder was a very capable man, known as Little Energy, and the government left the choice of site for a capital in his hands.⁷⁵³ Powell claims that Goyder selected Port Darwin having read the writings of Stokes and others, so he headed directly there entering the harbour on 5 February 1869.⁷⁵⁴

Goyder’s survey was to incorporate the plan of a principal town and another three townships plus ‘roads and reserves’.⁷⁵⁵ For a landing site he selected the base of a hill he named Fort Hill, on the south eastern shore and there he made his camp. The housing was mainly canvas tents for the men, and some huts and stables constructed of wood with roofs of bark.⁷⁵⁶ The plateau above the camp was small in area and bordered on three sides by the sea with a narrower neck of land joining the peninsula to the hinterland and as such De La Rue surmises ‘Goyder had very little room to be creative’.⁷⁵⁷ Goyder then proceeded to the hinterland during the wet season, where ‘a

⁷⁵² SAA, 21 July 1863.

⁷⁵³ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 5

⁷⁵⁴ Powell, *Far Country*, p. 81.

⁷⁵⁵ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 9.

⁷⁵⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident Scott.

⁷⁵⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident Scott

preliminary examination of the interior ... convinced him of the richness of its soil and the luxuriance of its vegetation'.⁷⁵⁸

The Aboriginal people

The local Aboriginal people, the Larrakia, are custodians of the Port Darwin area. Initially there was distrust of the colonial intrusion on their land, added with suspicion and hostility on both sides. For the Larrakia, the intrusion by these strange white men resulted in measured caution and occasional skirmishes and sadly in Goyder's time, the spearing of two of his men with one dying from his injuries. From a positive perspective, Goyder did not seek retaliation and acknowledged the Europeans were trespassing on Larrakia country.⁷⁵⁹

The Larrakia and many other tribes were affected by the arrival of Goyder. The overland telegraph line and gold mining in 1872 brought many white people and camps and small towns were established. European acquisition of this northern land resulted in the alienation of Aboriginal people from their land and a total disruption of their traditional life.⁷⁶⁰

The settlement of the European was a permanent interruption upon the life of the Larrakia people resulting in drastically reducing ownership, power and freedom over their land. People were segregated here from the town's inception. The Larrakia, once deprived of their lands, began initially to live on the fringe near Goyder's Camp then later on the edge of the town itself atop the plateau or along Lameroo Beach. When the town became more settled, the white population took advantage of cheap Aboriginal labour. At first the Aboriginal women did washing and would carry wood in exchange for bread, which they called 'tom tom', but before working, negotiated the amount of bread they would receive.⁷⁶¹

Palmerston – the new settlement

Goyder had achieved the initial layout of the town, the telegraph line had been established and some of the goldfields were proving successful. It was hoped this

⁷⁵⁸ Bessie Threadgill, *South Australian Land Exploration 1856 to 1880*, p. 108.

⁷⁵⁹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 15.

⁷⁶⁰ Shirley Shepherd, 'The Significance of the Overland Telegraph Line, 1872-1901', pp. 41-46.

⁷⁶¹ 'Port Darwin', SAA, 5 December 1873.

infrastructure would encourage settlers to leave their southern homes, bringing their wives and children to be part of a new country and to make this their home. Travelling between Port Darwin and Adelaide by steamer took twenty-one days, and if in a sailing ship, seventy to eighty days.⁷⁶² If living in Melbourne and you wished to travel to Port Darwin, it required getting a boat to Adelaide or to Newcastle to catch the boat north.

The first government resident at Port Darwin, Captain William Bloomfield Douglas had been severely censured for allowing the Territory to become a totally disorganised and confused place. Douglas was a speculator like Knight and spent far too much time away from his administrative responsibilities by prospecting in the goldfields. The SA administration having heard disparaging reports had sent Thomas Reynolds, the commissioner for crown lands, to the Territory to investigate the situation. Douglas had allowed staff to obtain miners' rights and take up claims leaving their work to do so.⁷⁶³ To some extent Douglas was not entirely to blame for the dilemma, as the government had told Douglas that the civil servants were under his authority, but there was ambivalence in these instructions. An example concerns Sub-Inspector Paul Foelsche and his six troopers who were to be directed by Douglas, but Foelsche 'was by law, under the general control and management of the Commissioner of Police in Adelaide'. A similar state of affairs applied to the senior surveyor, George McLachlan.⁷⁶⁴ The post office personnel and the overland telegraph construction workers too remained outside the government resident's control.⁷⁶⁵

The early settlement of Palmerston was originally administered under extremely vague policy guidelines. During 1869 to 1892 there were nine SA parliaments and twenty-four ministers over this time in charge of the NT who dealt directly with the government resident. P.F. Donovan captures part of the administrative problems when he states:

The effectiveness of South Australian government control of this northern region depended upon the initiative of the successive ministers who were responsible for the region and who

⁷⁶² 'Mr Gore's lecture', SAA, 28 February 1873.

⁷⁶³ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁶⁴ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 23.

⁷⁶⁵ P.F. Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities: A History of South Australia's Northern Territory*, p. 115.

were in Adelaide, together with the cooperation of the government representatives in the north.⁷⁶⁶

In reality the government resident's role was little more than supervisory.

Palmerston becomes a community

The administration was in a shambles with Government Resident Douglas having to resign his post after having spent too much time in the goldfields to his own advantage. Douglas' replacement George Byng Scott had yet to arrive in Palmerston, so the colonial surgeon, Dr James Millner, continued as acting government resident.⁷⁶⁷ With the debacle of Douglas' administration over and a newly-formed SA government, there was reason to hope that there would be more co-operation and co-ordination between the two administrations. The SA government had created the ministry of justice and education which would also control all NT affairs, hopefully resulting in more focused attention being paid to the province.⁷⁶⁸

Knight arrives in Palmerston

John Knight had left Melbourne, which was then one of the world's leading cities, to travel to the tropical settlement of Palmerston, arriving in late September 1873 aboard the *EJ Spence*. His eldest son, thirteen-year-old Edward, accompanied him. Knight had stated in a letter to the commissioner of lands that his son was fifteen years old and had some experience in office routine, where in truth Edward did not turn fourteen until 10 December of that year, but I doubt Knight was concerned over his exact age nor was he interested in the boy returning to school. It appeared clear from the letter that Knight was hoping to have an official appointment waiting for him in Palmerston and that his son would be employed in some clerical position.⁷⁶⁹ It can well be imagined that upon arrival in Palmerston, Knight noted how the town presented an almost blank canvas and would have quickly assessed the buildings, the people and undoubtedly realised that this was a place where he would be able to bring together his considerable capabilities.

⁷⁶⁶ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, p. 112.

⁷⁶⁷ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 35

⁷⁶⁸ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 39.

⁷⁶⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1893/256, Letter 1 September 1893. Knight to Commissioner of Lands.

Knight had left the colony of Victoria that at the end of 1873 had a population of 790,492,⁷⁷⁰ and arrived in a very small settlement indeed. At the time of George Byng Scott's arrival in November 1873 as the new government resident, a journalist who travelled up on the *Gothenburg* with him thought there were about 300 people in Palmerston (not including Aborigines).⁷⁷¹ Scott later wrote there were about 1,700 Europeans in all of the Territory in 1873.⁷⁷² There appears a great discrepancy in figures, for by May 1875 there was an estimated 462 Europeans, and reportedly '170 coolies and Malays in the Territory'.⁷⁷³

Knight wrote to Scott in March 1874 that while waiting for his arrival he had been surprised at the lack of instructions from Millner regarding future public buildings and the apparent deficiency in his leadership.⁷⁷⁴ Millner had undoubtedly been a better medical man than acting government resident.

With Scott's imminent arrival, Knight must have been hoping for a more competent authority. Scott was given an official reception on the beach to which the *NTTG* stated there were two to three hundred people, comprised of 'Government officers, private settlers, police troopers, and aborigines'. Knight was given the task of reading Scott's commission, which was followed by a welcoming address by local lawyer Villeneuve Smith.⁷⁷⁵ Scott had been dismayed by the costume worn by Smith, which consisted of a pair of gaudy patterned pyjamas, a white jacket and pith helmet, thinking he [Smith] 'might have been the son of the Sultan of Borneo'.⁷⁷⁶

In October 1873, Scott received instructions on how to administer the Territory. Scott's commission of appointment in part stated that he was responsible for the peace, order and good government of the inhabitants. He was charged with 'the custody, care, control, and management of the waste lands of the Crown' and with

⁷⁷⁰ 'Population Statistics of Victoria for 1873', *Argus*, 13 June 1874.

⁷⁷¹ 'Port Darwin from our Special Reporter', *SAA*, 5 December 1873.

⁷⁷² De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 39.

⁷⁷³ *NTTG*, 22 May 1875.

⁷⁷⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1874/125, Letter 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁷⁷⁵ 'Arrival and Reception of the Government Resident', *NTTG*, 14 November 1873.

⁷⁷⁶ V.T. O'Brien, 'George Byng Scott, (1824-1886)', *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.1, p. 519.

‘command and control of the police force and of all peace officers in the Settlement’.⁷⁷⁷

Scott’s governance covered the administration of some forty officers and together with Knight ‘direct expenditure of some £23,750, which is to be appropriated for expenditure upon public work, surveys, administration of justice ... in the territory during 1874’. Interestingly, only £250 was allocated for the provision of Aboriginal people with the medical doctor (also known as the colonial surgeon) undertaking the role of ‘Protector of Aborigines’. The colonial surgeon was also directed to promote ‘a good understanding between the aboriginal inhabitants and the supplanting whites’.⁷⁷⁸ Although in theory this sounded ideal, the reality was often far from these sentiments.

As secretary and accountant to the government resident, Knight was given direct instructions from SA to assist Scott, meaning that he had to:

keep records of all the correspondence ... accounts of receipts and expenditure, and prepare the orders for payment of salaries, &c., for the Resident’s signature, and must take especial care that for every order drawn a pay-sheet or other account is duly rendered to the Crown Lands Office.⁷⁷⁹

Knight’s managerial skills would have greatly assisted Scott in re-organising the administration. On the day of his arrival, Scott spoke to the welcoming populace of the many necessary improvements he intended for the town with the assistance of Knight, which included a new jetty and gaol and a good road to the goldfields. But, said Scott, the power of the purse ‘was not in his hands’ and of course without money nothing could be done.⁷⁸⁰ This comment sounded as if Scott had an idea that some proposed projects may not eventuate.

History proved that Scott himself, although dutiful, ‘with a talent for organisation and method ... had very few skills in negotiation and compromise’. He appeared not to be a team player causing acrimony and disruption within the small community.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁷ ‘Northern Territory Government Resident’, *SAR*, 30 October 1873.

⁷⁷⁸ ‘South Australia, (From our own correspondent) Adelaide, Nov. 3’, *Argus*, 7 November 1873.

⁷⁷⁹ ‘Government of the Northern Territory’, *NTTG*, 9 January 1874.

⁷⁸⁰ ‘Arrival and reception of the government resident’, *NTTG*, 14 November 1873.

⁷⁸¹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 39.

Knight had certainly descended upon Palmerston at the right time for his creative mind to be kept busy. This was an exciting time in the Territory: a time when a man such as Knight could easily integrate himself in so many enterprises. A new colony, although an extension of South Australia, offered Knight a new beginning. After the establishment of the telegraph line, it was natural that the next step was for the Territory to introduce its own newspaper. An offer was made to the SA government to commence a *Government Gazette*⁷⁸² and the first edition of the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* appeared on 8 November 1873 with Scott printing the first copy.⁷⁸³ The newspaper had no difficulty filling its pages with articles and advertisements. The establishment of a newspaper was clearly another indication of settlement.

Early buildings and how Knight adapted these

Buildings, even of a basic construction, offer the permanence of a town. According to a newspaper report ‘houses were being erected, and allotments in the town leased for 12 months’.⁷⁸⁴ When Captain Douglas with his wife and seven children arrived in June 1870 there was scant accommodation available, so they camped for a few months in a galvanised iron hut with pressed mud floor and unbleached calico covering empty window frames.⁷⁸⁵

The building of the Residency for the Douglas family was begun in July 1870 atop the plateau offering the family panoramic views of the harbour. Harriet Douglas, later married to Dominic Daly, a surveyor with Goyder’s party, wrote that the style of the house was that of a bungalow with ‘one long centre room of stone, with bedrooms, bath-rooms and pantries, made of wood, opening off it on either side. The kitchen was detached and built of logs some little distance away’.⁷⁸⁶ The wood used was cypress pine collected from Indian Island in Bynoe Harbour.

Other houses in the town were much more basic. A correspondent in April 1871 wrote:

⁷⁸² ‘News of the week’, *SACWM*, 20 September 1873.

⁷⁸³ *NTTG*, 14 November 1873.

⁷⁸⁴ ‘Return of the Northern Territory Selectors’, *SAA*, 5 October 1870.

⁷⁸⁵ Daly, *Digging*, p. 50.

⁷⁸⁶ Daly, *Digging*, p. 110.

Ten houses have lately been erected on the town allotments – three Government buildings and seven private ones. They are all built in the old style – palings placed perpendicularly, with the exception of Mr. Beetson's which is built horizontally, and as long poles are getting scarce in the vicinity this is the cheaper plan, and certainly looks far neater than the others. The Telegraph Station and another are thatched; the others are roofed with bark. All the Government hands with the exception of the boat's crews, have for the last eight months been employed at the Government Resident's house which is being erected on the point above the Depot.⁷⁸⁷

Adelaide ministers were well aware of the lack of suitable accommodation in Palmerston, but they continued to send up civil servants. When it was announced that the new stipendiary magistrate, Edward Price, his wife and children were arriving, Knight, in a letter to Scott, generously offered his basic lodgings as accommodation for the Price family. Knight was willing to live in the old jury office until new accommodation had been constructed for the family. Even though this was an altruistic offer by Knight, he still let Scott know that his (Scott's) secretary and architect 'should not necessarily be the worst housed officer on the staff'.⁷⁸⁸ The accommodation was twenty-one feet long and fourteen feet wide and a wing of the old store. Knight had patched it up and made it watertight.⁷⁸⁹

Knight set to work renovating and making habitable the early buildings. In March 1874 he presented a detailed review to Scott on the original buildings and described what he had done to make them liveable. Knight explained that most of these buildings had been built by Goyder's men and constructed of wooden poles, roofed with bark and sometimes iron and often with a pole or clay lined floor. Six iron houses had been erected, later they were removed and the iron used in roofing. At the time of writing the account, Knight had moved into the old jury office, built in 1870 of a pole and pugged⁷⁹⁰ structure, which he had made watertight. It had a clay floor, iron roof, no windows and ten shutters, the size being twenty-two feet by fifteen feet. Interestingly, the government stables were paved with wooden blocks.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁷ 'Northern Territory', SAA, 4 July 1871.

⁷⁸⁸ Northern Territory Archives Service, Government Resident of the Northern Territory, NTRS 790, Inwards correspondence, 1870-1912, item. [hereafter NTAS, NTRS 790, item] NTAS, NTRS 790, item A181, Letter 1 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁷⁸⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁷⁹⁰ The term pug relates to the material used between upright poles to form a wall. The poles vary in distance from each other, some almost touching, others further apart, with the space between filled with mud, or clay and straw. See Ted Howard, *Mud and man: a history of earth buildings in Australia*.

⁷⁹¹ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

Knight commented that the telegraph buildings were the only buildings ‘in the Territory having any pretensions to permanence, and the only group of offices in Palmerston’. But he further reflected on the British Australian Telegraph Company buildings that ‘it is somewhat to be regretted that they have been made so severely plain externally’ and he commented that they could have been arranged differently for a better effect. The telegraph building, the residency, a police station comprising of two log huts, a two-cell gaol and an iron house for Sub-Inspector Foelsche were the only government buildings at this stage on the plateau. Several of the men living in various dwellings erected their own extensions or interior wall linings, or painted at their own expense.⁷⁹²

The Residency was another building in dire need of renovation. Knight explained that new work had been undertaken that included ‘repugging and coloring all the old walls’. Part of the old flat roof that had fallen in was repaired. He added another storey that included bedrooms and wide staircase. Downstairs Knight had replaced the canvas walls with corrugated iron and using portland cement laid over ‘a bed of iron stone gravel’ which produced a satisfactory verandah on all sides.⁷⁹³ In previous years coral had been used to make cement as it was located in quantities at low tide in the harbour,⁷⁹⁴ but it did not make quality lime. Later portland cement became available as it was being manufactured in Australia from the 1860s.⁷⁹⁵

Knight’s comprehensive report and recommendations covered not only all buildings, but also the progress of work on the new hospital, a new road and causeway, the supply of water and state of the wells. In the area of future buildings, Knight advocated they be constructed along the following lines:

All ground floors be formed on a stone rubble base about 18 inches high finished with a coating of Portland cement upon a layer of iron stone gravel. That walls be built either of rubble masonry or Brick, and that where circumstances will afford it they should be hollow with a space of from 6 to 12 inches between. That roofs be so formed as to facilitate a free current of air between the outer covering and the ceiling. The iron should be lapped and riveted with extra care, as I find it next to impossible to keep a roof water tight, the rain being blown horizontally – and often upwards, instead of falling downwards. The rooms of all good buildings should be 14 feet in height.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹² SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁷⁹³ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁷⁹⁴ Daly, *Digging*, p. 110.

⁷⁹⁵ Susan Macdonald, *The Investigation and Repair of Historic Concrete*, p. 4.

⁷⁹⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

Furthermore, his report covered the botanical gardens, country works, the condition of roads and explanatory notes on available local building materials. Knight quickly realised that local timbers were of little value in the Territory as they were attacked by white ants, which rendered them useless in a very short time, the exception being cypress pine and ironwood. One positive aspect of the ants was that the ant hills created by these creatures offered a ‘plastic earth’ that could be used ‘as a substitute for lime mortar ... but without setting properties’. Knight considered the clay beds at Port Darwin would make good pottery ware. Bricks were being manufactured at Southport,⁷⁹⁷ but not in Palmerston, so Knight had one made to his formula of ‘clay and ferruginous earth’ and allowed it to be sun dried. He considered it the best unburnt brick he had ever seen and asked that it be examined by the engineer in Adelaide.⁷⁹⁸

Knight wrote that ‘[Charles] Darwin would I think be disposed to say of the NT – that it was dedicated by Providence to the propagation of insects – and not to man. The earth almost heaves under Ant power.’⁷⁹⁹ Knight finally summed up his report by a profound paragraph:

I think I have adduced sufficient evidence to show that an Architect on his arrival in the NT must begin his studies anew. I have had twenty years experience of Australian Colonies but here I find it necessary to ignore much of my acquired knowledge, and to make a fresh and special study of my immediate surroundings.⁸⁰⁰

Progress of Palmerston

It is a valid argument that Palmerston expanded differently to other Australian urban centres. This is understandable given the massive distances between Palmerston and the other colonial cities, and the distances and isolation between Palmerston and the very few other settled towns. Once the telegraph line had been constructed, South Australia could not neglect its northern domain as some commerce would have been conducted from England and Europe via the overseas cable.

⁷⁹⁷ Southport was a river port, surveyed by Goyder and used as a jumping off point on the way to the goldfields.

⁷⁹⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁷⁹⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁸⁰⁰ SRSA GRS/1/1874/137, Report 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

The Chinese come to Palmerston

With the discovery of gold in 1872 men came from all around Australia and overseas to the Territory goldfields south of Palmerston. Former government resident Captain Douglas was selected to travel to Singapore in May 1874 to select able bodied men – Chinese ‘coolies’ (indentured labourers) – to be transported to the NT to work for mining companies where possible, and for useful public work ‘such as the formation of a bush road from Southport to the goldfields’. The tenure was to be for two years when they then had the choice to either return to Singapore or receive £5 as an inducement to stay in the Territory.⁸⁰¹ Douglas and 186 Chinese arrived back in Port Darwin in August where twenty-four were retained to work on the overland telegraph line and the other 162 were sent to various mining companies in the goldfields. Recognised as a very industrious people, the Chinese quickly constructed their own huts from a variety of natural materials, did their own cooking and their value was soon realised as willing and hardworking labourers.⁸⁰²

The Chinese began working their own claims; more Chinese workers came, many establishing much needed market gardens, and setting up various businesses in Palmerston in an area that later became known as Chinatown.⁸⁰³ As all mining gear was shipped to Southport and from there transported to the goldfields, the Chinese quickly established shops at Southport and transport businesses using bullocks.

Complexity of businesses in Palmerston

The SAA correspondent for the Territory offered a very informative and descriptive narration of what he found on arrival in the town. As well as an account of what shops were in existence, he commented that the town was progressing and that ‘[t]hree of the streets are assuming a uniform appearance, and tents are dotted round the bush in every direction’. The small settlement had eleven general stores, two bakers and two blacksmiths together with one chemist shop and talk of the opening of a butcher’s shop.⁸⁰⁴ A different correspondent in the same newspaper wrote of residents being able to leave valuables unguarded at night as robberies and thefts

⁸⁰¹ Timothy Jones, *The Chinese in the Northern Territory*, p. 5.

⁸⁰² Jones, *The Chinese in the Northern Territory*, p. 6.

⁸⁰³ Kathy De La Rue, ‘An Historical Geography of Darwin’, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁰⁴ ‘Port Darwin, from our Special Reporter’, SAA, 5 December 1873.

were rare. He concluded this was because there was no high rate of wage, poverty or want in the town,⁸⁰⁵ as the majority of people were in the same financial situation. One correspondent remarked on the lavish expenditure of money, but that no money was coming in from the Territory. The other writer with similar thoughts attributed the brightness of Palmerston 'to the simplicity, kindness, and generosity of the people of Adelaide and other parts of South Australia' as not a penny had been raised in the Territory.⁸⁰⁶ By the end of December 1873, the *NTTG* had advertised that all three hotels were offering a good stock of wines, spirits and beer.⁸⁰⁷

Southport

Most of the stores intended for the goldfields were off-loaded on the Blackmore River at Southport, twenty-two miles distant from Port Darwin across the harbour. This was a small town that soon had well-stocked stores, warehouses, businesses and two hotels, a large contingent of Chinese people and of course the Telegraph Office.⁸⁰⁸ The jetty constructed there did not always suit the excessive high tides of up to twenty-five feet (7.625 metres) experienced in these northern waters. On a visit to Southport, Scott told the local residents that he could see that a new wharf was required for the huge amount of goods to be landed there, and that Knight would make an estimate of the cost.⁸⁰⁹ By May the following year, a contract to complete the jetty had been given to R. Caldwell for the sum of £617.⁸¹⁰ As mentioned previously in Scott's initial address upon landing at Palmerston, he had remarked that there was a need for a new jetty for passengers and goods, but it was to be several years before a jetty was constructed at Port Darwin.

Government buildings

With the arrival of the government resident a degree of stability in official matters was achieved. Scott was soon organising inexpensive temporary wooden offices to be built in Palmerston 'for the transaction of public business'.⁸¹¹ The building was to

⁸⁰⁵ 'Port Darwin, from our Special Reporter', *SAA*, 5 December 1873.

⁸⁰⁶ 'Port Darwin, from our Special Reporter', *SAA*, 5 December 1873.

⁸⁰⁷ *NTTG*, 26 December 1873, p. 28.

⁸⁰⁸ Marge Duminski, *Southport Northern Territory 1869-2002*, p. 5.

⁸⁰⁹ *NTTG*, 21 November 1873.

⁸¹⁰ *NTTG*, 8 May 1874.

⁸¹¹ *NTTG*, 21 November 1873.

house the Local Court, the 'Land Department, the Goldfield's Warden, Government Resident's Secretary, and the Clerk of Courts'.⁸¹² There was criticism that some wooden buildings brought from Adelaide were definitely not suitable for the tropical climate, one being described as a 'badly ventilated box-like structure'. The *NTTG* pointed out, that wooden buildings should be imported from Singapore where they knew how to make buildings suitable for a tropical climate.⁸¹³

As with all new settlements, the subject of sanitary reform was one of public concern. Palmerston being on a plateau was suitably placed to be easily kept clean but was seen as a dirty town. The continual sun bearing down on rough cesspool conveniences and empty meat tins allowed disagreeable smells through the town.⁸¹⁴ There was a chronic need for a hospital for which thankfully the government in Adelaide offered an initial £250 and further money to the same value, if £500 could be raised from subscribers in Palmerston. The raising of capital for the erection of a hospital gradually took on momentum, with the hospital being built on cleared land near Peel's Well in Doctor's Gully. Aborigines cleared the scrub around the hospital site.⁸¹⁵ The hospital was completed in June 1874, with Knight and five other men appointed to the committee of management.⁸¹⁶ To be admitted to the hospital, the patient was asked to apply to one of the committee members.⁸¹⁷

Dissatisfaction in the town

In an article in the *NTTG* a person writing under the name Rambler expressed a critical view of the situation not being addressed by the SA government:

Most Governments strive to promote settlement in a new country by offering inducements, &c., but in the Northern Territory the very reverse is the case, and settlers who have bought capital to the place, together with the will and energy to work, now find the Government standing aloof, and the Treasury doors double locked, barred, and bolted against the just claims of the Territory ... On Looking around us, what do we see to represent the money that has been spent upon the place? Goyder's roads, a half-finished jetty, a miserable residence – certainly made habitable since Mr. Knight has been at work – the telegraph buildings, a few

⁸¹² *NTTG*, 21 November 1873.

⁸¹³ *NTTG*, 26 December 1873.

⁸¹⁴ *NTTG*, 21 November 1873.

⁸¹⁵ *NTTG*, 8 May 1874.

⁸¹⁶ 'Palmerston Hospital', *NTTG*, 19 June 1874.

⁸¹⁷ 'Government Gazette', *NTTG*, 22 August 1874.

wells – and that’s the sum total of the lot. This represents the effects of the administrative abilities of the South Australian Parliament.⁸¹⁸

The Territory had to fend for itself as it did not receive sufficient money for basic infrastructure, and experienced huge difficulties in getting any allocation of funds. Even though classified as part of South Australia, the residents could not claim any rights or privileges. If one lived in South Australia, the government saw to it that jetties and other necessary buildings such as hospitals were provided for their people if needed.⁸¹⁹ Suffice to say these indomitable settlers were not kindly disposed to the southern government.

As noted in the *NTTG*, Christmas of 1873 had been an unusually quiet one with few people celebrating or rejoicing. ‘No picnics, no driving or riding parties’ with only a few boats practicing for the forthcoming regatta though many people attended and enjoyed the Aboriginal sports day.⁸²⁰ New Year’s Day being a public holiday, a regatta was organised that involved various rowing boat races, swimming and diving competitions. Although the weather was squally, the races continued, but a difficulty arose when it was realised that nobody had considered the tides, and when the sailing boats should have been in deep water they were high and dry on the beach. People still enjoyed the day as they were entertained by other beach sports on the shore, together with plenty of food and amber fluid being available.⁸²¹ As Knight was listed as being on the regatta committee and had donated to the regatta subscriptions,⁸²² he was possibly among the many enthusiastic onlookers.

Knight’s working thoughts move forward

Within two months of settling into Palmerston, Knight appeared full of ideas for the future of this town. One of his schemes was demolishing Fort Hill and reclaiming the nearby mangroves to construct a circular jetty. His next idea was to quickly start on the building of an additional storey to the government residence.⁸²³ Within a few years a jetty was constructed, but the demolition of Fort Hill did not happen until the mid-twentieth century. Although part of Knight’s brief was also that of architect and

⁸¹⁸ ‘Town Talk. By Rambler’, *NTTG*, 16 January 1874.

⁸¹⁹ ‘Town Talk. By Rambler’, *NTTG*, 16 January 1874.

⁸²⁰ ‘Town Talk. By Rambler’, *NTTG*, 2 January 1874.

⁸²¹ ‘Port Darwin Regatta’, *NTTG*, 9 January 1874.

⁸²² ‘Port Darwin Regatta’, *NTTG*, 26 December 1873.

⁸²³ ‘The Northern Territory’, *SAR*, 6 December 1873.

supervisor of works that encompassed preparing plans, and estimates of public buildings, he clearly stated that his present daily duties left him no time to work as a professional on architectural plans.⁸²⁴ Knight's working day had been concentrating on renovating old buildings rather than new structures. He stressed he had gained local technical knowledge that would greatly assist in future saving of public funds for public works.⁸²⁵

Apparently, Knight had asked for an assistant, and interviewed a Mr Borradaile, but Knight found the applicant did not have the required clerical skills. Knight in a memo to Scott, stated that he was sorry to report that Borradaile was not suitable, although he had other qualifications of merit.⁸²⁶

By 1874 there was a call for establishing an institution of some type to house literature together with other acquisitions of interest. Having an institution with an attached library would offer the local person the opportunity to spend their evenings reading, as the government had many books and periodicals that could be utilised in this way. As Knight possessed a splendid collection of ores, fossils and quartz specimens from New South Wales and Victoria, these could be the basis for a museum in the institute where people could view these exhibits.⁸²⁷ Several years later Knight started a museum in part of the Lands Office.⁸²⁸ Later in 1890, he offered his former house as a repository for an assorted collection, but the authorities refused this. It was not only Knight who collected but Police Inspector Foelsche was also an avid collector, specialising in photographs.

In the first month of 1874, Knight was suffering from a leg ulcer, quite a common ailment in the tropics, but despite the complaint the medical officer assessed Knight

⁸²⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1874/125, Letter 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁸²⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1874/125, Letter 11 March 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁸²⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A142, Memo 30 December 1873. Knight to Government Resident. Little is known of E.S. Borradaile other than he joined T.H. Permain in Pine Creek on an ill-fated inland expedition to Port Essington in early 1874. Unfortunately the men did not arrive at their destination. Later a rescue party learned that the men had been murdered in the vicinity of Tor Rock. In the West Arnhem district there are two features, Mount Borradaile and Mount Permain, named after these men. See 'Mr. Permain's Expedition', *NTTG*, 26 September 1874; *NTTG*, 20 March 1875; and NT Place Names Register.

⁸²⁷ *NTTG*, 13 March 1874, p. 73.

⁸²⁸ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 24 July 1886.

as being fit for duty.⁸²⁹ He continued to work at his myriad jobs that often required him to accompany the government resident to various places. In April, he and Scott sailed to Indian Island to inspect the cypress pine growing there for the possibility of establishing a timber mill. Although cypress pine is good timber to use in the tropics because of its natural protection against the ravages of termites, the timber is slow growing and disappointingly, the portion of trees was small and not a viable proposition for their needs at the time.⁸³⁰

Scott was taking control and work was being accomplished. Knight had been busy on the architectural side: he designed the new police station which was shortly to be built, and made additions to the gaol. Work on the town roads had been undertaken, and a boat causeway was nearing completion. A dam over the creek at the Government Gardens had been constructed which helped preserve a water supply, and wells and springs attended to. Aborigines under supervision were clearing acres of scrub from the hospital site and cricket ground. The Esplanade was to be cleared and a new mail service was also on the agenda.⁸³¹

Mostly patriotic and loyal to the British throne, the good people of Palmerston enjoyed a holiday in May commemorating Queen Victoria's birthday. To ensure that Aboriginal people were integrated into these festivities, there was a distribution of blankets and flour, and the 'native sports' were supervised by troopers. The sports were similar to those that occurred on Boxing Day 1873, covering running, spear throwing and climbing a greasy pole.⁸³² Climbing the greasy pole was certainly never an activity that Aboriginal people in their natural environment ever needed to do.

The evening's entertainment, presided over by Scott, included recitations and of course singing. Several gentlemen were among the vocalists including Rudall, Clarkson and Richards who sang a part-song titled 'The Wreath'. 'Friar of Order Grey' was sung by Mr Dewhirst and 'The Englishman' by Mr Rudall. Knight always one to enjoy giving a performance, sang without accompaniment 'Ship on Fire',

⁸²⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A156, Acting Medical Officer's sick list January 1874. S. Ellison to Government Resident; NTAS, NTRS 790, item A161, Acting Medical Officer's sick list January 1874. S. Ellison to Government Resident.

⁸³⁰ *NTTG*, 24 April 1874.

⁸³¹ *NTTG*, 8 May 1874.

⁸³² 'Queen's Birthday', *NTTG*, 29 May 1874.

which was greeted with loud applause, and later ‘Madoline’ and ‘Widow Machree’. Although it was noted that a group of lady singers sang a favourite ‘Whose bells are those?’ Unlike the men, they were not mentioned by name, which seems like an unnecessary exclusion.⁸³³

Scott and Knight off to the reefs

By August and well into the dry season, Scott and Knight rode off to the goldfields to inspect the roads and see what improvements could be undertaken. They also needed to see what bridges were required before the next wet season began.⁸³⁴ These tracks carried a lot of cartage from Southport to the goldfields, which impacted on the state of the roads. The goldfields did not close down for the wet season, so it was important that there was a good road and bridge infrastructure in place to assist with getting men and equipment through when and wherever possible.

Being in the goldfields area afforded Scott and Knight the opportunity to attend an impromptu race meeting held at Sandy Creek. A few of the horses entered in the races had rather intriguing names – Telegram, Fairy, Hurryskurry, Ginger and Palmerston – with none of these being actual racehorses. Both men were enthusiastically welcomed by the crowd and Scott spoke briefly assuring the assembled men that he would attend to repairing the state of the roads and wished them well. The correspondent from the *NTTG* was clearly delighted with proceedings and said of Knight: ‘And as to Mr Knight, I am sure a more pleasant and agreeable gentleman one would not wish to meet’.⁸³⁵

Finances

Financial matters were never far from Knight’s thoughts as it was possible that he was still dabbling in stocks and shares. Knight was also sending an allowance for his wife and children.⁸³⁶ Never one to shy away for requesting additional funds, Knight wrote to Government Resident Scott stating that other officers on the permanent staff in the Territory were receiving a ration allowance and he would like to be included.

⁸³³ ‘Queen’s Birthday’, *NTTG*, 29 May 1874.

⁸³⁴ *NTTG*, 15 August 1874.

⁸³⁵ ‘Sandy Creek Races’, *NTTG*, 22 August 1874.

⁸³⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1876/54, Letter 15 February 1876. Alice Knight to Minister for Territory. This reference relates to money being deducted from Knight’s salary for his family in 1876.

Unable to take responsibility for such a decision, Scott had notified the minister for the Territory William Bunday in Adelaide. In October Scott received a reply from the minister who had approved the allowance to Knight and authorised back payment from 1 July. Bunday wrote, probably correctly, that ‘the grant of this request will only further ensure a cheerful and satisfactory performance of the duties dissolving upon this officer’.⁸³⁷

Reporting on public works

In his progress report to South Australia in November on the various public works, Knight was able to state that suitable timber had been found and the Southport jetty was completed, together with a police lock-up, a storeroom and a stable and the powder magazine situated between Tumbling Waters and Southport.⁸³⁸ Word was received in November that a small steamboat would be leaving Melbourne to ply between Southport and Port Darwin,⁸³⁹ thus cutting down the arduous travelling by roads between the towns.

Lack of interest by South Australia

People may very well have known of Knight in the NT, but Bunday in Adelaide had clearly forgotten him, even though it had been only two months since giving permission for Knight to be back paid a ration allowance. Bunday, while talking about the Territory estimates in the House of Assembly in Adelaide in early December, could not recall who the secretary and accountant to the government resident was and whether it was a permanent position or not. The minister thought that the ‘Clerk to the Chief Goldfields Warden’ performed these positions. Given that the appointment of Knight the previous year had almost brought down the government, this and other irrelevant details given by this minister were quite extraordinary,⁸⁴⁰ or perhaps he was being deliberately vague. The Territory could hardly blink without permission from Adelaide. In fact, throughout its history of having control of the NT, the SA government never established a special department

⁸³⁷ State Records of South Australia GRS/4/1 Volume 3, Letters sent, Office of the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, Adelaide, Letters sent 1874-1875 [hereafter SRSA GRS/4/1 Volume 3], SRSA GRS/4/1 Volume 3, Letter 30 October 1874. Minister to Government Resident.

⁸³⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1874/790, Report 28 November 1874. Knight to Government Resident.

⁸³⁹ *NTTG*, 28 November 1874.

⁸⁴⁰ *NTTG*, 12 December 1874.

to cover all Territory affairs. Over the years, the responsibility had been given to Education, Lands, and Public Works.⁸⁴¹

Back in Palmerston

Improvement in cleaning up the town around the telegraph offices on the Esplanade was undertaken by indentured Chinese labourers and supervised by the overland telegraph's Superintendent J.A.G. Little, with Knight supervising Chinese labourers in cleaning up around the BAT building.⁸⁴² The building that housed both the telegraph offices and the BAT office had a common wall with a hatch where BAT operators passed messages through to the OT officers.⁸⁴³ One Chinese man refused to obey Knight's lawful commands and was charged in court. His defence was that he wanted more money than he was entitled to so he refused to work. He was dismissed with a caution and was found to be then willing to work.⁸⁴⁴

In November 1874 Knight received instructions from the government resident to prepare plans to go to Adelaide for the construction of a substantial jetty at Port Darwin – to accommodate large vessels to berth at any time without having to rely upon tides. Concern was needed for the proper timber to resist marine worms, so jarrah wood from Western Australia was selected.⁸⁴⁵ Knight in his usual way of approaching an assignment, wrote in great detail to Scott the type of jetty he had designed and the field work undertaken. This included a survey of the area that included testing of the rock and coral, and how the wooden piles would be embedded into the sea floor. Following eight pages of precise detail, there were three pages of timber specifications. This letter was accompanied by incomplete tracings, but sufficient for someone to understand the general idea of what was to be undertaken.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴¹ Peter Elder, 'Northern Territory Charlie: Charles James Dashwood in Palmerston 1892-1905', p. 78.

⁸⁴² 'Town Talk', *NTTG*, 19 September 1874.

⁸⁴³ Personal communication from Kathy De La Rue, 3 June 2015.

⁸⁴⁴ 'Law Courts', *NTTG*, 7 November 1874.

⁸⁴⁵ *NTTG*, 28 November 1874.

⁸⁴⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1874/532, Letter 30 November 1874. Knight to Government Resident. The jetty was also mentioned in an Adelaide newspaper, 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 2 January 1874.

Public work continued to be carried out and supervised by Knight. Bridges designed by Knight and constructed by the government engineer were being erected along the road to the goldfields. One bridge, having a span of seventy-five feet was built over Bridge Creek.⁸⁴⁷ In January 1875 with the wet season settling in, Knight set forth in the second week of the month to travel from Southport to the Shackle in the Pine Creek district to reconnoitre the area to ascertain what infrastructure was required to make road-travelling to the goldfields for both men and wagons easier. On his return, he wrote an in-depth account of what urgent works were required to Scott, which was then forwarded to Adelaide. Most of Knight's concerns were with the state of the roads, the gradient of approaches and the material used on passageways over streams or rivers with many roads requiring widening.⁸⁴⁸

Knight considered the use of pitch over a bed of brushwood 'with six inch of metal' on top as a hardy structure, with some of the larger streams requiring log bases. Some fords and bridges erected earlier were now being replaced with more solid structures, which made easier access to the goldfields in all weathers. Knight had seen Chinese labourers working on the roads, so recommended that more of the healthier Chinese labourers be used on these works. His estimate for the bridge over the Adelaide River was £1,500, for ten miles of drained and metalled road for the Adelaide Plains £17,600, and repairs to boggy ground which amounted to a total of £35,600.⁸⁴⁹ The wet season was the most detrimental element to any road structures.

In January 1875, Price wrote to Scott requesting a drain be dug at the back and sides of the court house. During heavy rains, the water formed a stream which passed under the building and on to the veranda and office floor. Price told Scott that he had notified Knight in September the previous year, but his request had been ignored. Price noted that he had asked for rubbish to be removed but this had never been done and now the rubbish was a health hazard. Further complaints by Price were that the

⁸⁴⁷ *NTTG*, 28 November 1874.

⁸⁴⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1875/134, Letter 29 January 1875. Knight to Government Resident.

⁸⁴⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1875/134, Letter 29 January 1875. Knight to Government Resident. Many of the original 'coolies' brought to Palmerston by Captain Douglas, were ill and not suited to heavy labour. Many had been tailors, carpenters and house servants. 'Summary, The Coolies', *NTTG*, 22 April 1876.

public closet that both his family and public servants used was in a dangerous state.⁸⁵⁰

Later the same month, Price complained about Knight to Scott. It appeared Knight had sent a memo to Price stating that wet earth thrown down a closet was useless as a disinfectant and added to cleaning costs. According to Price, Knight stated that Scott had instructed him that all occupants of government houses must clear their own rubbish, but he would attend to the drainage problem. Clearly upset by what he considered Knight's inattention to his needs, Price wrote: 'I cannot receive such memos from the Government Architect my inferior officer, except when written by direction as your Secretary'.⁸⁵¹ Knight wrote to Scott saying that he had sent the memo to Price to avoid making a formal complaint against him, which was a more courteous act than Price had done 'against a brother officer' which Knight considered 'mean and contemptible' and hoped he would never degrade himself to do such a thing.⁸⁵²

Knight added further that he had undertaken many jobs Price had asked for without asking for Scott's permission, but in future he would follow the official rules. Knight acknowledged Scott as his supervisor, making him aware that it was impossible for him to carry out the many urgent things as there were only one or two carpenters on the staff to undertake the many jobs. Knight listed the outstanding work that was still to be completed such as the Residence floors, the roof of the police station, damaged cell doors, improvements to the hospital, the government gardener's quarters, the Gulnare causeway and a proper camp for the Chinese labourers.⁸⁵³ There was certainly animosity from Price towards Knight at this time, but later in 1876, Price became the government resident when Knight was chief warden in the goldfields, and the relationship between the two men appeared to be without rancour. By the time Price finished his tenure as government resident, the relationship actually became a friendship with Knight.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵⁰ NTAS NTRS 790, item A662, Letter 27 January 1875. Price to Government Resident.

⁸⁵¹ NTAS NTRS 790, item A664, Letter 28 January 1875. Price to Government Resident.

⁸⁵² NTAS NTRS 790, item A664, Letter 30 January 1875. Knight to Government Resident.

⁸⁵³ NTAS NTRS 790, item A664, Letter 30 January 1875. Knight to Government Resident.

⁸⁵⁴ 'Opening of the new town hall', *NTTG*, 10 March 1883.

Tragedy strikes Palmerston with the loss of the *Gothenburg*

Everyday matters paled into insignificance when news was received of the sinking of the steamship *Gothenburg* in cyclonic weather on the Great Barrier Reef off the coast near Bowen in Queensland on the 24 February 1875. The *Gothenburg* was contracted by the SA government in November 1874 to undertake ten round trips from Adelaide to Port Darwin. Many high profile public servants and dignitaries and their families were among those who perished. Only twenty-two men survived out of 134 men, women and children. Other passengers were gold miners and people of various occupations, and twenty-five of the thirty-seven crew, including the personable Captain Pearce died. Dr Millner, his wife and four children drowned, the French Vice Consul Eduard Durand died, as well as the retired premier of South Australia, Thomas Reynolds and his wife Anne. William Wearing, magistrate and circuit court judge drowned, leaving behind his wife and six children.⁸⁵⁵ It was not until 6 March that the people of Palmerston heard by telegram of the *Gothenburg* sinking.⁸⁵⁶ Feelings of great sadness were expressed for the fate of the women and children. In a heartfelt and moving obituary, the *NTTG*, whose former editor Richard Wells was another who perished, wrote that these people ‘inured to hardship and to our climate – the bone and sinew of the country; men whom we regretted to lose for a time, although confidently anticipating their ultimate return – have been lost to us for ever’.⁸⁵⁷

The loss of so many family members and friends united the people of the small community in their grief. Expressions of sympathy were received from every colony and immediately a relief fund was established for families of lost *Gothenburg* passengers. Palmerston hoped to raise £250 to be sent to a general fund in Adelaide. This amount was duly raised from donations within the town and from outlying goldfield towns. Knight donated two guineas; his young 16-year-old son working at the telegraph office in Pine Creek generously donated three guineas.⁸⁵⁸ Eventually this fund reached £11,000 with £3,000 being donated from Victoria.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁵ ‘Wreck of the *Gothenburg*’, *Brisbane Courier*, 6 March 1875.

⁸⁵⁶ *NTTG*, 6 March 1875.

⁸⁵⁷ ‘Obituary’, *NTTG*, 13 March 1875.

⁸⁵⁸ ‘*Gothenburg* Relief Fund Subscription List’, *NTTG*, 27 March 1875.

⁸⁵⁹ *NTTG*, 1 May 1875.

Alice is briefly in the picture

In February 1874 Knight and Gilbert McMinn, chief surveyor and former member of Goyder's expedition, were appointed justices of the peace in the Territory.⁸⁶⁰ While Knight was being appointed to the board of the Palmerston Hospital and the Licensing Bench in the Territory in mid-1875,⁸⁶¹ in Melbourne Alice Knight had returned from a sea voyage to Sydney travelling in saloon class on the *City of Adelaide*.⁸⁶² In July both Alice and her mother Miriam Eskell arrived on the same ship from Sydney, again in saloon class.⁸⁶³ Alice and her mother were possibly visiting Louis Bertrand in Sydney's Darlinghurst Gaol. Alice never sailed to Port Darwin to see her son and husband. Presumably, both father and son were corresponding with the rest of the family in Melbourne.⁸⁶⁴ Young Telegraph Department cadet A.A.E. Knight was due to be promoted on 1 July 1875 to sixth class.⁸⁶⁵

Back briefly into the field of exhibitions

Melbourne in 1875 was once more to host an Intercolonial Exhibition, the last one being in 1866-67. This new exhibition was a preparatory to the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in America. In May, Scott, appreciating Knight's expertise in this field, requested the people of the Territory to contribute with donations of natural history, minerals, metals, woods, indigenous productions and other objects, thus displaying what had been achieved in the NT. All the Territory's contributions were to be part of the SA Department.⁸⁶⁶

Before these materials were sent south, some were exhibited at the new police station and 'attracted considerable attention', especially the fine examples of useful and ornamental wood. There were displays of locally grown vegetables, including maize, sorghum, sugar cane, yams and sweet potatoes, together with a sample of local

⁸⁶⁰ 'Government Gazette', *NTTG*, 27 February 1875.

⁸⁶¹ 'Government Gazette', *NTTG*, 3 July 1875. 'Licensing Bench', *NTTG*, 3 July 1875.

⁸⁶² 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 11 June 1875.

⁸⁶³ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 10 July 1875.

⁸⁶⁴ No evidence has been located to substantiate that letters were written.

⁸⁶⁵ *NTTG*, 1 May 1875.

⁸⁶⁶ 'Government Gazette', *NTTG*, 15 May 1875.

trepang.⁸⁶⁷ Knight shipped nine packages of exhibits to Melbourne via the *Claud Hamilton*.⁸⁶⁸

Knight must have been elated to be once again involved with the gathering of materials for an exhibition. Although part of SA, the numerous and varied NT exhibits were displayed in a separate Northern Territory Court, but SA was not given its own exhibition space, as exhibits from SA ‘were not considered sufficient in number or importance to require a separate court for their exhibition’. Knight was likely pleased to see a reference to himself in the *Argus* which read ‘The collection of the exhibits is mainly owing to the energy and exertions of Mr J.G. Knight, who occupied a prominent position in previous international exhibitions.’⁸⁶⁹

The explanation for the separate NT exhibition court given in the *Argus* varies with one offered in the *South Australian Register*, which read that the secretary to the Victorian Commission, George Levey, had asked the Commission for the necessary extra space, as the NT exhibits had arrived after the compilation of the catalogue. Consequently, the NT exhibits were given a small court by themselves.⁸⁷⁰

Not displayed in Palmerston, but sent to Melbourne was an assortment of Aboriginal ‘native inventions and other rude handiwork’.⁸⁷¹ These items collected by Knight were in reality ‘aboriginal ornaments and weapons’⁸⁷² for which he won third prize.⁸⁷³ The Aboriginal exhibits were described in the *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers* as helping to enrich the NT collection.⁸⁷⁴ The collection of rocks, minerals and ores earned Knight a first prize.⁸⁷⁵ Another article in the *South Australia Chronicle and Weekly Mail* gave credit to Knight for compiling the

⁸⁶⁷ ‘Northern Territory Specimens for the Melbourne and Philadelphia Exhibitions’, *SAR*, 7 August 1875.

⁸⁶⁸ ‘Telegraphic Despatches’, *Argus*, 9 July 1875.

⁸⁶⁹ ‘The Northern Territory Court’, *Argus* 3 September 1875.

⁸⁷⁰ ‘The Philadelphia Commission’, *SAR*, 19 August 1875.

⁸⁷¹ *NTTG*, 10 July 1875.

⁸⁷² ‘The Northern Territory Court’, *Argus*, 3 September 1875.

⁸⁷³ ‘The Exhibition’, *Argus*, 14 September 1875.

⁸⁷⁴ ‘The Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition, South Australia-Northern Territory Court’, *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 3 November 1875.

⁸⁷⁵ ‘The Northern Territory at the Melbourne Exhibition’, *SAR*, 21 October 1875.

exhibits and stated that the Northern Territory displays were very interesting and warranted further examination.⁸⁷⁶

One exhibit received for the Victorian display was that of a shawl hand woven from Australian wool and sent in by Mrs J.G. Knight and valued at seventy-five guineas.⁸⁷⁷ For the shawl to warrant such extraordinary high value, the garment must have been beautifully woven of exquisitely fine wool. It would be assumed that Alice Knight had made this herself. Thousands attended the exhibition each day; possibly Alice and her children visited to see the shawl on display and may have wandered through the Northern Territory court.

Knight had compiled booklets relating to the Great London Exhibition in 1862 and again for the Sydney Exhibition in 1873. Once more he requested that he handle the manuscript for the recent Melbourne and Philadelphia exhibition. This was not to be. In a letter to the government resident from Minister Ebenezer Ward, Ward clearly stated that the manuscript of the recent exhibition would be handled by the editor of the handbook and issued in Adelaide.⁸⁷⁸

The Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition opened in May 1876. However, the bulk of the exhibits from Victoria, SA and Tasmania were sent via the *Skerryvore* and were not expected to be landed and in the exhibition before June. The choice of vessel had indeed been a bad one as Captain Stoddard deliberately tried to scuttle his ship off the Bahamas. The captain using an auger had bored a hole in the ship's side from the lazarette area (part of the ship's hold used for stores). Fortunately, the crew noticed that the ship was taking on water and when they examined the hold it had seven feet of water there. The crew organised a canvas sail under the ship's bottom to stop the water entering and in two days had pumped the water out.⁸⁷⁹ The water damage to the exhibits was less than anticipated. The captain left for England where he was arrested. The colonies' exhibits affected by being immersed in seawater for six

⁸⁷⁶ 'The Melbourne Exhibition', *SACWM*, 18 September 1875.

⁸⁷⁷ *Argus*, 16 September 1875.

⁸⁷⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1238, Letter 1 November 1875. Ward to Government Resident.

⁸⁷⁹ 'The Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia', *Argus*, 22 June 1876.

weeks claimed £2,000 for damages.⁸⁸⁰ The NT wooden exhibits were damaged by the saltwater.⁸⁸¹

The editor of the *Argus* stated that the commissioners were warned at the time not to trust such a large consignment to the *Skerryvore*.⁸⁸² It was not the ship that was the problem, but the character of the captain was never enquired into. Apparently many Melbourne people were aware of what type of man Stoddart was.⁸⁸³ It came to light during Stoddart's trial that many brokers had complained of the captain's overindulgence, being found drunk on many occasions. The marine board subsequently cancelled his certificate.⁸⁸⁴ *Melbourne Punch* wrote that Levey as the managing agent for an industrial exhibition could not be placed in the same league as Knight, further stating:

[Knight] whose fertility of resource, *savoir faire*, versatility and *verre* pre-eminently qualify him for the post which Mr. Levey is not adapted for. Mr. Knight would never have chartered the *Skerryvore*, nor have made the Victorian department of the Centennial the laughing-stock of the other colonies. He would have applied his ready-witted inventiveness, and his quick sense of what catches the public eye and arrests general attention, to devising methods of displaying the products of our staple industries so that they should attract the notice of every visitor, and at the same time become the subject of eulogistic paragraphs in all the American papers. His pleasant manner, ready speech, and general *bonhommie* [sic] would have made him a favourite with the officers of the Exhibition and with the representatives of the press; and he would have successfully exerted all his ingenuity and tact to accomplish the maximum of striking effect with the minimum of available means.⁸⁸⁵

Knight is made redundant

For some months 'vague and indistinct grumblings' had been heard. News was received that the SA government was reducing several government officers' salaries and reducing the number of employees and positions.⁸⁸⁶ After satisfactorily presenting an excellent representation of the Northern Territory at the Melbourne Exhibition, Knight may have felt his job was relatively safe. Unfortunately, this was not the case and his duties as architect and supervisor of works were being transferred to the surveyors. Knight was given the option of staying in the position of secretary and accountant, but at a reduced salary of £250 per annum, half of what he

⁸⁸⁰ 'The Skerryvore,' *Argus*, 24 July 1876.

⁸⁸¹ 'The Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia', *Argus*, 24 July 1876.

⁸⁸² *Argus*, 25 May 1876.

⁸⁸³ 'Philadelphia Exhibition, the story of the *Skerryvore*', *Argus*, 28 July 1876.

⁸⁸⁴ *Argus*, 17 November 1876.

⁸⁸⁵ 'November 1876 Vagabond', *Melbourne Punch*, 17 August 1876.

⁸⁸⁶ *NTTG*, 6 November 1875.

was already receiving. This was perceived by the local newspaper editorial as a 'premeditated insult' to Knight, as his initial appointment was so unpopular with the opposition of the then SA government in which Ward was a minister.⁸⁸⁷

In correspondence to Scott, Ward cited the 'present depressed state' of the Northern Territory as the reason behind the drastic cuts to employee numbers. Scott himself had the extra duty of acting as special magistrate as the office of stipendiary magistrate was being abolished. These were severe cuts that removed the entire customs' staff and harbour master and were to take effect from 30 November 1875. One consolatory concession was that any men whose positions were disposed of would receive payment up to 31 December and receive free passage back to Adelaide.⁸⁸⁸

Knight's relatively short time in the SA public service had come to an end. In a telegram from the government resident to Ebenezer Ward, Scott stated that Knight 'respectfully declines to accept the proposed reduced remuneration [and] begs to be allowed to draw his salary for december [sic] & compensation here as it would be a great convenience to him'.⁸⁸⁹

At the end of November, a complimentary dinner held at the Royal Hotel was given to Knight, Peachey and Cook who were leaving Palmerston because of the staff cuts. Toasts were proposed and the chairman said he had mixed feelings about the evening and hoped that one day the men would return, as the Territory would progress in spite of the government's action. Knight's response was that he had difficulty in finding the right words to express his gratification at the kindness of the assembled guests. Knight spoke of his regret at leaving and his belief in the NT:

He had hoped to have remained some time longer and watch the struggle of the Territory through ... he sincerely trusted that the time was close at hand when the present depression would pass away ... Although the Territory had suffered greatly, he firmly believed it had within it the elements to make a great and flourishing community, and he left the Northern Territory with very great regret. He had been in many parts of Australia, and had assisted in many undertakings connected with the development of the colonies, and in coming here had looked forward to the prospect of playing a not unimportant part in the advancement of the capital of the Northern Territory. He had endeavoured to do what had fallen to his share to the utmost of his abilities, and was proud of the manner in which his efforts in connection

⁸⁸⁷ *NTTG*, 6 November 1875.

⁸⁸⁸ SRSA GRS/4/1 Volume 3, Letter 3 November 1875. Government Resident to Ward.

⁸⁸⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1875/660, Telegram 13 November 1875. Government Resident to Ward.

with his official position and been regarded. It was an agreeable impression on the eve of his departure, after his two years' career here, to feel that he had not made any enemies, and to know that he had not wilfully offended the delicacy of any person with whom he had been brought in contact during that time. He must again thank them for the very kind way in which they had drunk his health.⁸⁹⁰

Knight had been a popular man and it must have been with sadness he boarded the *Claud Hamilton* and departed Port Darwin on 1 December for Adelaide.⁸⁹¹

In a valedictory letter to the local paper on the eve of his departure, Knight spoke once again on the small mindedness of many colonials from adjoining colonies. He asked, 'what is the use of talking about intercolonial free trade, federation, and bands of Australasian brotherhood, while at the same time we are cultivating and fomenting a spirit of intercolonial personal jealousy?' Knight said that for any particular job, he would appoint 'the best man, irrespective of his name, country, or the color of his hair'.⁸⁹² Knight himself had been a victim of intercolonial jealousy from some SA government MPs when appointed secretary.

Knight re-applies to work in the NT

It appears that Knight departed the ship in Melbourne, possibly spending Christmas with his family before boarding the *Tararua* on 29 December 1875 bound for Adelaide.⁸⁹³ Shortly after arriving in Adelaide, Knight wrote a letter to Ward stating his previous employment as an architect in Victoria and the multiple duties discharged by him in the Territory. He was now seeking a position in Adelaide in architecture or similar as he wished to settle there with his family.⁸⁹⁴

At the same time he applied for work in Adelaide, Knight requested passage money of £18 for his initial trip to Port Darwin in September 1873. He stated that he had sailed on the *EJ Spence* that left a month earlier and as soon as he landed at Palmerston he commenced work, and if he had waited and travelled on the *Gothenburg* he would have been paid for being idle on the boat for four weeks. Ward was quite amazed, that if this was a valid claim, why it had not been paid before.

⁸⁹⁰ 'Complimentary Dinner', *NTTG*, 27 November 1875.

⁸⁹¹ 'Shipping', *NTTG*, 4 December 1875.

⁸⁹² 'Valedictory', *NTTG*, 4 December 1875.

⁸⁹³ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 30 December 1875.

⁸⁹⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1876/17, Letter 7 January 1876. Knight to Ward.

Knight was requested to reply to the minister. His clarification was that as it would require a 'personal explanation' he had waited for the right opportunity.⁸⁹⁵

Still in Adelaide and looking for work and hearing that the position for warden of the goldfields in Northern Territory had not been filled, Knight wrote again on 11 January to the minister offering his services. He stated his ability in 'arbitration and the settlement of complicated disputes' as a positive attribute for the position. Two days later, the minister recommended that Knight be appointed to the position 'at the salary voted on the estimates'.⁸⁹⁶ It must be remembered that Knight had had extensive involvement in the mining industry, and was for a short time secretary of the Melbourne Mining Exchange so he was well qualified for the position.

It appears Knight never received his claim for £18, as a note written by the minister in late February read – 'Other arrangements have been made as to Mr Knight's position in the service, and his claim was consequently withdrawn'.⁸⁹⁷ More likely it was suggested to him that if he accepted the position as warden he should withdraw his claim for the eighteen pounds.

Only days earlier Knight was looking for employment in Adelaide where he could settle with his family. Although proven to be an adaptable person, he was now willing to take a position that placed him in a much more remote area than he had been when stationed in Palmerston. Without knowing the factual state of his family situation, it can only be surmised that Alice did not want to move to Adelaide. She had endured years of child bearing, she was still only a young woman of thirty-six years and the two years she had spent living without her husband may have been a time of relief from the worry of another pregnancy, or having a husband continually involved in outside matters. Possibly, Alice had time to reflect on her life and chose not to be with her husband.

This chapter has shown that Knight was resilient and adaptable and had not been forgotten in Victoria. He adjusted well to a difficult climate, efficiently carried out his work obligations and remained sociable and popular. He was reluctant to leave

⁸⁹⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1876/9, Letter 7 January 1876. Knight to Ward.

⁸⁹⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1876/13, Letter 11 January 1876. Knight to Ward.

⁸⁹⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1876/9, Letter 7 January 1876. Knight to Ward.

the NT and returning to even a more remote area of the Territory did not appear to daunt him. Perhaps even after a period of two years' absence from his wife, it did not perturb him greatly to continue his rather monastic life.

The alacrity with which Knight accepted the job of warden reinforced his words that he wanted to be part of the growing NT and remain there. Possibly he was also desperate for any kind of suitable paid work. An article in the *SACWM* states the choice of Knight as warden 'is about the best the Government could have made'. The writer elaborated by saying 'he understands the Territory, and possesses none of that pompous snobbery so common among minor Government officials. This latter qualification will of itself recommend him to the miners'.⁸⁹⁸

E.H. Hallack, who replaced Knight as secretary and accountant from 1 December 1875, received a yearly salary of £220 plus a daily allowance of three shillings. Knight, now employed as warden of the goldfields, was offered £300 per year plus a daily allowance of three shillings. He must have been relatively highly thought of because the minister approved that his services be counted as continuous from 1 October 1875.⁸⁹⁹ Knight sailed from Adelaide on the *Claud Hamilton* on 15 January 1876 for his new post in the goldfields at Yam Creek.⁹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Knight had arrived when Palmerston was a pioneer settlement still in its formative years. During Knight's initial employment in Palmerston, he had not been afraid to voice his concerns or project his ideas to his superiors in Adelaide. One of his submitted reports was his lengthy inventory on the state of the buildings, many in need of repair as they were remnants from Goyder's day. Knight was always thinking of how the NT could be advanced but was well aware of the limitation of funds the Territory received from the SA government. The cost-cutting continued as the government appeared anxious of over-investing in the Territory wondering if it would ever receive a return on its investment. For years the NT was considered SA's white elephant.

⁸⁹⁸ 'Port Darwin', *SACWM*, 18 March 1876.

⁸⁹⁹ State Records of South Australia GRS/4/1 Letters sent, Office of the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, Adelaide, Letters sent 1875-1877 [hereafter SRSA GRS/4/1 Volume], SRSA GRS/4/1 Volume 4, Letter 18 January 1876. Minister to Government Resident.

⁹⁰⁰ 'News of the week', *SACWM*, 22 January 1876.

Having encountered the relative mismanagement of the Territory by the SA government during the previous two years, Knight knew he could expect little in the way of backing in his next employment. The following chapter will show his versatility in undertaking the rather gruelling position of warden in the goldfields, often against difficult odds.

Chapter Six

Knight as warden of the goldfields, 1876-1879

Knight began his four years in the goldfields, briefly as warden in 1876, before becoming chief warden and living in the mining centre known as the Shackle.⁹⁰¹ The Shackle comprised of the warden's camp and court, a post and telegraph office called Yam Creek, a hotel, two general stores, 'a blacksmith's shop and a police station with two mounted troopers'.⁹⁰² Yam Creek was 'the government's administrative centre on the goldfields'.⁹⁰³

Gold specks were found in the NT in 1865, initially in the Finnis River. When searching for minerals a member of Goyder's surveying party found gold at Tumbling Waters,⁹⁰⁴ but there was little interest until coarse gold was found while digging a telegraph post hole for the Overland Telegraph Line. Resident Douglas in 1871 supported a surveyor's report 'that a payable goldfield existed in the Northern Territory' and possibly initiated the 'step in promoting the first gold rush'.⁹⁰⁵ Prospecting companies were floated, often backed by wealthy SA businessmen. One such company floated by some of Goyder's men was called the NT Gold Prospecting Company. To get interested parties to subscribe in such a venture was slow until 'financed by E.M. Bagot, a wealthy South Australian grazier'.⁹⁰⁶ The gold finds were nowhere near as productive in comparison to what had been yielded from the 1852 Victorian gold rush. In the first half of 1875, the sub-collector of customs, J.A.G. Little, reported that the NT exported '5,255 ounces of gold, valued at £18,394' and estimated that approximately '2,000 ounces was taken out privately'.⁹⁰⁷ This gold was taken to other parts of Australia and China but not declared.

The SA government had never provided clear cut administrative directions for the Territory. The lack of continuity of government together with vague guidelines did

⁹⁰¹ A shackle is 'composed of two porcelain insulators, held apart by two short iron straps ... and bolted to the telegraph pole'. The 'main telegraph line is cut and the ends bound to the insulators'. Kelsey, *The Shackle*, p. 53.

⁹⁰² Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 13.

⁹⁰³ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 93.

⁹⁰⁴ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁰⁵ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 3.

⁹⁰⁶ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 3.

⁹⁰⁷ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, p. 108.

not assist in good governance. It was the Blyth ministry that tried to reform the ‘inefficient northern administration’.⁹⁰⁸ By not understanding the underlying problem, no amount of reform could possibly ensure success. The NT was not like other parts of early colonial Australia where settlement meant success. This northern land suffered from isolation from other cities, extreme weather conditions and lack of manpower. Furthermore, as P.F. Donovan explains, nobody considered ‘whether or not nineteenth century European industries would succeed in the tropical north’. He further writes:

For most part, the difference between colonists’ expectations and achievements in the Northern Territory was determined by the colonists’ failure to appreciate the limitations of their technology. Many of those who were responsible for the Territory’s administration believed that the economic prosperity of the region was assured simply as a matter of course.⁹⁰⁹

The SA government required ongoing revenue from the NT to cover administration costs. The effectiveness of government control of this northern region depended upon the initiative of the successive ministers based in Adelaide, who were responsible for the region, together with the cooperation of the government representatives in the north. During Knight’s years in the NT, 1873 to 1892, he was responsible to eighteen ministers whose office included being in charge of the Territory, though two of these ministers served more than once in this capacity.⁹¹⁰

Although the initial mining was predominately for gold in Knight’s time, other minerals were sought and mined in the Territory, including copper, tin, silver and lead. Later, different minerals were discovered and mined that included wolfram, uranium and some of the old gold mines were re-opened. The main impediments of getting to the goldfields in this northern land were distance and weather. Weather was the difficulty, particularly in the wet season when one commodity, food, was hard to come by, as transporting goods was very difficult. The terrain was dramatically affected during the wet season when many areas became flood plains, making it almost impossible to navigate through swollen creeks, rivers and boggy mud. If maintenance had not occurred on roads and bridges with crossings washed away, it became impassable.

⁹⁰⁸ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, p. 112.

⁹⁰⁹ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, p. 113.

⁹¹⁰ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, Appendix A.

All of these things, together with high shipping and cartage charges and expensive labour, often influenced the success of a mine. Nearly all supplies were landed at Southport by boat from Port Darwin and then carried or carted by drays pulled by bullocks and sometimes horses to the mining destination. An example of the impact the wet season had on the countryside, is offered by De La Rue, who wrote that one particular party departing Southport in February 1872 carrying their stores and equipment took forty-one days to reach their destination; in the dry season it would usually take three.⁹¹¹ Added to this was the worry of possible attacks by Aborigines.

Knight's new venture into the goldfields

The previous chief warden, A. Plunkett, in 1875 refused to accept a £50 reduction in his salary and the loss of the title 'chief warden' so he resigned. This was the position now taken by Knight who was appointed warden of the goldfields from 12 January 1876.⁹¹² Knight showed courage by this complete change of career and sailed from Adelaide on the *Claud Hamilton* on 15 January arriving at Port Darwin on 7 February.⁹¹³ He was warmly welcomed back to the Territory and looked 'jollier than ever ... [and] none the worse for his voyage to the South and back again'.⁹¹⁴ According to Jack Cross, there were only ever a handful of people who had any intention of staying in the Territory, with Knight one of them.⁹¹⁵

Knight's area of work encompassed a large expanse of unsealed roads, often little more than very rough tracks. For example, the distance south from Palmerston to Yam Creek was around 120 miles and a further twenty-nine miles to Pine Creek by horse. Living at the Shackle, which was approximately two miles from Yam Creek, Knight acquired knowledge and an understanding of various problems encountered in such an environment where law and order was required and an ability to handle racial prejudices and disputes. As with other professions he undertook, he went above and beyond expectations. When living at the Shackle under very basic conditions, he adapted and accepted his life, making many friends along the way.

⁹¹¹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 33.

⁹¹² 'Appointments', *Government Gazette*, 22 January 1876.

⁹¹³ 'Shipping', *NTTG*, 12 February 1876.

⁹¹⁴ *NTTG*, 12 February 1876.

⁹¹⁵ Cross, *Great Central State*, p. 211.

Alice Knight moves abroad with family

Knight's fleeting visit to his family in Melbourne the previous December may not have endeared him to his wife. Judging by events shortly after his sojourn, it was quite probable that Alice was not interested in living in Adelaide, nor possibly with her husband and intended to return to London. This may well have been the reason why Knight gratefully accepted the position of warden at a greatly reduced salary and readily sailed back to Palmerston. For obtaining a position in Adelaide did not appear a possibility. It is to be remembered that by accepting the warden's position in the goldfields Knight would have been near his eldest son Edward who worked at the Pine Creek telegraph office and undoubtedly Knight met with him during visits to outlying mining areas.

It is only from February 1876 that evidence indicates that money was deducted from Knight's wages to maintain his wife and children. An initial payment of £16.17.0 was remitted to his family who were then living in the Melbourne suburb of South Yarra. Knight's youngest daughter Lizzie, who was almost eighteen at the time, in fact wrote a letter supposedly signed by Alice Knight acknowledging receipt of the draft.⁹¹⁶ This is borne out when a similar letter in the same handwriting was signed as Lizzie for the March draft, where the remittance had increased to £16.19.0.⁹¹⁷ For the next two months both Lizzie Knight and her brother Frederick wrote the letters on behalf of their mother and in the case of Lizzie she reverted to actually signing the letter as Alice. In May, a letter was written by Lizzie and when she started writing the signature, must have forgotten and started to sign L realised her mistake and tried to change the L into an A. It is very obvious that Alice Knight did not write these letters. In Frederick's letter which was signed by him, he requested that further payments be made to London as his mother was sailing there at the beginning of June.⁹¹⁸

In June, Alice Knight herself wrote to Mr De Mole, the secretary to the minister of agriculture and education in Adelaide, acknowledging the draft, but stated that the draft had been made out to E. Knight and that in future it be made out to her. It is

⁹¹⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1876/54, Letter 15 February 1876. Alice Knight to Minister's office re allowance.

⁹¹⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1876/123, Letter 13 March 1876. Lizzie to Minister's office re allowance.

⁹¹⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1876/243, Letters April/May 1876. Lizzie and Fred Knight to Minister's office.

feasible that the civil servant receiving the letter from Lizzie Knight did not realise what was happening, and assumed the name Lizzie was an abbreviated form of Elizabeth and made the draft out to E. Knight. It may also have made Alice appreciate that Lizzie was incriminating herself and should not be signing using her mother's name as the signatory. Alice did in fact sail on the *Northumberland* in June 1876, travelling in saloon class and taking with her the four-year-old twins Alfred and Walter, Ida at ten, eighteen-year-old Lizzie and nineteen-year-old Alice,⁹¹⁹ thus leaving fifteen-year-old Fred at home in Melbourne. Alice's half-sister Annie also sailed with them.⁹²⁰

In July, Knight forwarded a telegram from Yam Creek authorising Adelaide to draw £22 from his salary for Alice from July onwards.⁹²¹ It is not until December that year that an address where Alice Knight was staying in London was mentioned. The address was care of James Knight, Mile End, London.⁹²² James was Knight's older brother he reportedly argued with and the reason he sailed to Melbourne in 1851. Primary source documentation shows that in 1877, Alice was living for several months at Charles Cleve's home in Threadneedle Street, London. Charles Cleve was the brother of Knight's close Melbourne friend, Sali Cleve.⁹²³ Alice had visited the Office of the Agent General for SA in London in the hope that her proportion of Knight's salary could be paid there. The person who interviewed Alice wrote to de Mole in Adelaide asking if he would get his minister to sanction the request as it 'would really be a great boon to her'.⁹²⁴

Knight's yearly salary was £300 plus a daily allowance of three shillings,⁹²⁵ so paying £264 to his family was quite a considerable amount. Of course his expenses in the goldfields would have been low as he did not pay rent, but food was expensive. In mid-1876, Knight sent a letter to the minister requesting an increase in

⁹¹⁹ Public Record Office Victoria, 'Index to Outward Passengers to Interstate, UK, NZ and Foreign Ports 1852-1923'.

⁹²⁰ 'Shipping', *Australasian*, 17 June 1876.

⁹²¹ SRSA GRS/1/1876 /272, Telegram 3 July 1876, Knight to de Mole.

⁹²² SRSA GRS/4/1 Volume 4, Letter 2 December 1876. Minister's secretary de Mole to Alice Knight.

⁹²³ SRSA GRS/4/1 Volume 4, Letters 19 April 1877; 17 May 1877; 14 June 1877. De Mole to Alice Knight.

⁹²⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1877/389, Letter 29 June 1877. Office of Consul General for South Australia, London to de Mole.

⁹²⁵ SRSA GRS/4/1 Volume 4, Letter 18 January 1876. Appointment of Knight as warden of the goldfields.

his salary, which was denied. The minister's reason for rejecting the claim was that Knight had accepted the position of warden in full knowledge of a fixed salary of £300.⁹²⁶

While in England, Knight's younger daughter Lizzie at the age of eighteen married a physician and surgeon, Dr J.M. Warren, on 14 October 1876.⁹²⁷ It appears that shortly after their marriage, the Warrens moved to Wanganui in New Zealand to live.⁹²⁸ On the marriage certificate for occupation of the bride's father, the profession of architect appears, although Knight's occupation at that time was warden of the goldfields. Was it a calculated move that offered more status for Lizzie to write her father's profession as architect instead of warden?

Knight settles in as warden

With his wife and four of his children in England, Knight knew there was no question at all of his family ever moving to the Northern Territory. This possibly made it easier for him to put all his energy into making the position of warden tenable. Knight was no stranger to the goldfields, either in the NT or earlier when resident in Victoria. He had made many visits to goldfields during his employment as supervisor of works in Melbourne, or when collecting samples for his exhibition displays. He not only knew goldfields well but was rather an expert on various minerals and had written a treatise on stone, as he had experimented with different materials when sourcing building stone for work on Parliament House in Melbourne in the 1850s.

When Knight took over the role of warden, he needed to sort out the shambles that the 'administration of the mining industry and the mineral resources in the Territory were still in'.⁹²⁹ Jones writes that Knight 'was to exert a profound influence on

⁹²⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1687, Letter 24 August 1876. Minister to Government Resident.

⁹²⁷ Marriage Certificate, Garth Jenkins collection, New Zealand. Copy given to author in November 2014.

⁹²⁸ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 22 October 1878, p. 1. Garth Jenkins collection. Copy given to author November 2015.

⁹²⁹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 93.

Northern Territory affairs in general and mining in particular',⁹³⁰ and 'restored order to mining administration and brought back respect for his office and the law'.⁹³¹

Mining in the Territory goldfields was commonly called reef or quartz 'mining which involved digging deep tunnels, crushing the dirt and rock with stamper batteries and extracting the gold'.⁹³² Europeans mainly carried this out, while the Chinese miners were content with 'alluvial' mining, which entailed washing the surface dirt in creeks and watercourses to extract any gold which had been deposited there.⁹³³ Initially the Chinese did reef mining when working for the Europeans and later often worked their own claims, or worked for enterprising Chinese miners like Ping Que. To obtain an idea of the various geological components of the goldfields in the Territory, Knight had a letter published in the *NTTG*, in which he asked people engaged in mining to forward any 'fossils' or 'impressions' to him so he could prepare a geological sketch of the goldfields.⁹³⁴

Knight notified Government Resident Scott by telegram of his arrival at Yam Creek on 20 February. He inspected bridges on his way down and said all were in excellent condition except for Sandy Creek and that £25 was needed for temporary repairs or further 'damage may ensue'.⁹³⁵ In his first letter to Scott, Knight wrote of positive signs in the industry and that Yam Creek could possibly be the headquarters for alluvial mining.⁹³⁶

Previously, all decisions relating to mining issues had to be made in Adelaide until formulation of the NT Gold Mining Regulations, which were passed in 1873. These regulations empowered the warden 'to issue Miner's rights, to register claims and to approve transfers, amalgamations, business licences, suspension of work and other matters of detail'.⁹³⁷

In February, Scott pointed out to the minister that section No.50 in the Gold Mining Act of 1873 precluded Knight as warden from carrying out the business of leases

⁹³⁰ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 16.

⁹³¹ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 24

⁹³² De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, pp. 54-5

⁹³³ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 55.

⁹³⁴ 'Geological Sketch of the Goldfields', *NTTG*, 25 March 1876.

⁹³⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1418, Telegram 21 February 1876. Knight to Government Resident.

⁹³⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1430, Letter 26 February 1876. Knight to Government Resident.

⁹³⁷ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 13.

being forfeited in a court, because the chief warden could only undertake this. Scott then forwarded a request to the minister that Knight be made chief warden. The Attorney General's Department supported this suggestion and the governor of SA, Sir Anthony Musgrave, appointed Knight chief warden on 25 April 1876.⁹³⁸

By March 1876 Knight had visited Pine Creek and the Union mine, taking the trouble to go over all claims.⁹³⁹ While visiting several areas Knight noted with regret that although there were supposedly many men working on claims, only about half were actually working. He was determined to change this situation by supporting those who wished to work but would not condone men deserting their claims to go drinking. If Knight found men squandering their money, he would declare 'such ground forfeited'. A notice to this effect was posted at Sandy Creek and was approved of by the working miners.⁹⁴⁰ It was directed to Grieveson's Gully where new gold deposits had been found in January 1876,⁹⁴¹ but had petered out by May 1877.⁹⁴² The last two sentences of the notice stated:

He [the warden] cannot see the sense of two or three mates getting £20 worth of gold, and in a few days spending £25 to commemorate their luck. The Warden deems it his duty to give the above warning, which is done solely for the welfare and advantage of the mining community. Warden's office, Shackle, March 31, 1876.⁹⁴³

Taking his position and responsibility seriously, before becoming chief warden Knight requested from Scott copies of recent administration of justice legal documents that would apply in the NT and other 'Acts quoted in Daly's Manual' that have 'been altered or repealed since its publication'.⁹⁴⁴ Daly's manual appears to be an English legal reference document and was noted in two SA court cases, one in 1873 and another 1883.⁹⁴⁵ Knight further asked for a copy of court acts as nothing appeared in the mining act about allowing of fees in the hearing of cases. He wrote

⁹³⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1876/107, Letter 10 February 1876. Government Resident to Minister. Also official document of appointment 25 April 1876.

⁹³⁹ 'Country Correspondence', *NTTG*, 11 March 1876.

⁹⁴⁰ 'Country Correspondence', *NTTG*, 8 April 1876.

⁹⁴¹ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, p. 106.

⁹⁴² 'Northern Territory Gold-Fields', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June 1877.

⁹⁴³ 'Country Correspondence', *NTTG*, 8 April 1876.

⁹⁴⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1472, Letter dated 7 April 1876. Knight to Government Resident.

⁹⁴⁵ 'Law Courts', *Southern Argus*, 10 January 1873, and 'In Chambers', *SAR*, 12 September 1883.

that his predecessors had allowed costs, but he could not see on what basis. Knight finally asked for Scott's opinion on these matters.⁹⁴⁶

Some days before requesting the legal documents, Knight sent a telegram to Scott about a problem that had arisen where three miners had joined forces, but one had found a nugget without telling the other two. Knight asked Scott if keeping the nugget concealed until the partnership had expired, whether the guilty partner could be charged with felony and if the other two men could take civil action.⁹⁴⁷ Scott's reply to Knight was that in his opinion 'criminal law did not apply in this case'.⁹⁴⁸ By not receiving a more informative reply from Scott, it is understandable why Knight required the legal documents.

In April, Knight compiled an in-depth report on conditions and future prospects of the Northern Territory goldfields. This was a valued assessment of the workings for quartz mining. The report described the Telegraph Company at Pine Creek, the Prospectors' Company at the Union, the Extended Union Claim at Yam Creek, the Albion Company at the Howley and the Virginia Company at Stapleton. It noted that the lack of gold being mined was a result of a very wet season, which caused cave-ins at mines and impassable roads from the claims to the batteries. Being unable to cart in supplies was also a consequence of heavy rain and this meant the laying off of working men, reducing in one instance a mine that employed sixty Europeans and sixty 'coolies' to fifteen white men.⁹⁴⁹

In Knight's opinion judging by the geological strata, there was no reason why the reefs in the NT could not yield auriferous quartz reefs at great depths as in Victoria. But to achieve this, he said that 'gold cannot be winnowed from such depths without adequate labour, skill, patience, and perseverance; and to organize these forces in this Territory is a matter of no easy accomplishment'. To clarify any misunderstanding, Knight wrote 'I have seen enough of quartz mining in Victoria to lead me rather to the conclusion that *here* we have not yet *tried* the ground, let alone *mined* it'.⁹⁵⁰

⁹⁴⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1472, Letter dated 7 April 1876. Knight to Government Resident.

⁹⁴⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1463, Telegram 1 April 1876. Knight to Government Resident.

⁹⁴⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1463. Cover note 1 April 1876, Government Resident to Knight.

⁹⁴⁹ SAPP, Knight, Report on *Northern Territory Goldfields*, No. 106, 1876, p. 1.

⁹⁵⁰ SAPP, Knight, Report on *Northern Territory Goldfields*, No. 106, 1876, p. 2.

Gold recovered from mining

Knight stated in April 1876 the gold recovered over the past twelve months from Pine Creek, was worth approximately £10,000 which was absorbed in working expenses and in opening up the reefs.⁹⁵¹ If the NT was to be successful as a gold mining country it required an incentive. Knight considered that the SA government needed to promote the idea by offering a reward of £5,000 for the first discovery of a quartz reef at a depth of over 500 feet from the surface, returning ‘not less than 600 ounces of retorted gold from 200 tons of quartz’.⁹⁵² He further wrote: ‘I might be allowed to remark that large sums of money have been paid by other Australian Colonies for the development of valuable metals and minerals. It is impossible to give too much encouragement to open out the resources of any new country’.⁹⁵³ The SA government rejected the notion of a reward.

Knight demonstrated that he did not become dejected by these knock backs; he never stopped asking for the implementation of various ideas that could assist in opening up the Territory. Although Knight did not sway the government in his request for a reward for the finding of a quartz reef, it did offer a bonus of £5,000 to anyone that delivered the first 500 tons of sugar that was grown and manufactured in the NT.⁹⁵⁴

Knight as chief warden was required to operate court hearings and in many instances Chinese men were involved. Another part of his legal responsibilities was to take court proceedings on people to forfeit all unworked gold mining leases and advertising his intentions of this in notices in the *NTTG*.⁹⁵⁵ Being coroner in the goldfields meant Knight viewed the body, assessed whether the death was natural or suspicious and then placed a public notice in the *NTTG* stating he had made inquiries into the death and a decision on whether there was any necessity to hold an inquest or whether the body could be buried.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵¹ SAPP, Knight, Report on *Northern Territory Goldfield*, No. 106, 1876, p. 1.

⁹⁵² SAPP, Knight, Report on *Northern Territory Goldfield*, No. 106, 1876, p. 3.

⁹⁵³ SAPP, Knight, Report on *Northern Territory Goldfield*, No. 106, 1876, p. 2.

⁹⁵⁴ ‘Northern Territory of South Australia’, *Adelaide Observer*, 18 March 1876.

⁹⁵⁵ ‘Government Gazette’, *NTTG*, 26 August 1876, and every week until the end of September.

⁹⁵⁶ ‘Public Notice’, *NTTG*, 30 December 1876. There were several deaths on the goldfields while Knight was chief warden.

Pastoralism

Knight's mind was not only on the workings of the mines but he also had an interest in pastoral and agricultural ventures. He considered there was a huge potential for the pastoral industry as he had seen working bullocks in a skeletal condition put out to pasture for three months, returning fattened up and 'when killed made splendid beef'.⁹⁵⁷ But until the land regulations changed, people would not take up pastoral leases and with so few consumers in the Territory it would not be a viable proposition for someone to establish a cattle station.

One of the main concerns felt throughout the mining districts was the lack of provisions. When pack horses carrying supplies did arrive, the food prices were exceedingly expensive and unless someone was working a rich claim, food was difficult to pay for. It was preserved meats known as bouilli that were mostly required. Men were subsisting on the basic flour, tea and sugar. An example of the high price for food at Pine Creek in April 1876, was flour £80 a ton and a 2lb tin of meat 3s. 9d,⁹⁵⁸ whereas in Palmerston Abbott had advertised in March 1876 that by 1 April he would reduce the price of meat to between 9d and 1s per pound.⁹⁵⁹ At Joseph Skelton's Southport store in June 1876, 50lb bags of kiln dried flour were selling at the reduced price of 12s 6d,⁹⁶⁰ which equates to £28 a ton. This is an increase at Pine Creek of about 200% for flour and 3-400 % for meat.

Agriculture

Knight was critical of many of the inhabitants of Port Darwin and hotel owners on the road to the diggings for their lack of industry by not setting up vegetable gardens of familiar plants that thrived in the Territory. It was known that 'maize, sweet potatoes, yams, beans and the melon' flourished and required very little attention. Most people spoke of the scarcity of vegetables and Knight said this was because 'very few have energy enough – it may be more charitable to say – fixed ideas

⁹⁵⁷ 'Pastoral and Horticultural Pursuits', *NTTG*, 22 April 1876.

⁹⁵⁸ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 11 March 1876.

⁹⁵⁹ 'Reduction in the price of meat', *NTTG*, 4 March 1876.

⁹⁶⁰ 'To Storekeepers, Hotelkeepers and others', *NTTG*, 10 June 1876.

enough of settlement to put their hand to the spade' but relied upon the toils of Ah Tow, a Chinese market gardener for their supplies.⁹⁶¹

By June 1876 Knight had compiled a few thoughts as to how any man who held a miner's right could utilise wasteland for a garden. Knight suggested a change in the by-laws that would offer miners the opportunity to cultivate a garden, ranging in size from one quarter to four acres. He asked Scott the question of whether the mining board had the power to extend business licences and their residence sites pertaining to a particular clause. If this was not possible, Knight suggested repealing the present by-law and 'prepare a new regulation'. The new by-law would offer miners the right to take up any land for the purpose of cultivating a garden at a cost of ten shillings per acre payable in advance. The warden granting such a licence would determine all of this. If gold was suspected to be on the selected garden site, it could be mined, but the warden would determine what compensation would be paid to the land holder.⁹⁶²

A railway to the goldfields

Back in February 1876, an editorial in the *NTTG* claimed that the NT was being seriously retarded by the lack of a railway line through the Territory. Having a railroad from Palmerston down to the goldfields would alleviate the high cost of cartage. The known deposits of lead and copper could be mined, but having roads impassable for over four months of the year through incessant rain made cartage impossible. These costs severely impacted on mining companies and mines, which in turn meant that many mines were lying idle because there was not enough money to pay men.⁹⁶³ There needed to be a cheaper means of transport so that more of the gold-bearing reefs would be worked and more men would be employed. It was hoped that this line would eventually form a section of a transcontinental railway. The railroad to the goldfields did eventuate, but not until the mid-1880s.

Knight's interest in a transcontinental railroad

Although kept busy in the goldfields, Knight's mind as usual was full of ideas and one thought was the construction of a transcontinental railroad. A transcontinental

⁹⁶¹ 'Pastoral and Horticultural Pursuits', *NTTG*, 22 April 1876.

⁹⁶² NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1565, Memo dated 10 June 1876. Knight to Government Resident.

⁹⁶³ *NTTG*, 12 February 1876.

railway was discussed in the SA House of Assembly back in 1872 and in the latter part of 1873. SA's premier, Arthur Blyth, who also held the office of chief secretary, spoke in the House of Assembly on September 1873, stating that a bill should be introduced for the formation of a railway line to Port Darwin with an alteration to the original bill. The new proposal was that the company that was constructing a particular part of the railway line could retain all minerals found on their land, except for gold, which was reserved for the government. According to one report this was a weak amendment and one not likely to encourage companies to invest. The ulterior motive for a company to invest in the railway line was the possibility of gold being on the purchased land.⁹⁶⁴

In almost three years nothing had progressed towards the building of a transcontinental railway. Knight put forward a proposal to the minister in the form of a letter in April 1876 as to how his plan for a transcontinental railroad could be carried out and if constructed would offer 'prosperity and prestige' to all of SA and be of 'incalculable benefit to the Northern Territory'. He stated he did not wish to go over already discussed ideas, but briefly pointed out salient features of his proposition and that SA should initiate the work for the people.⁹⁶⁵

Knight noted five important steps, firstly, the land be surveyed with an estimate of the cost of the line, secondly the adjacent land be marked off in blocks of so many acres and designated a class and price that corresponded to the quality and position of the land. Thirdly, to finance such a proposal, Knight suggested 'scrip or certificates to be issued by the Government – (say £100 each) to the extent of the amount required to construct the whole or a portion of the Railway'. Knight's fourth step was to be an inducement to the investors, that they received a dividend from profits for a particular number of years. Finally, he considered that the construction and control of the railway be under a council nominated by the government and shareholders. As the main feature of his plan, Knight considered that offering a large

⁹⁶⁴ '111-Trans-continental Railway', SAA, 10 September 1873.

⁹⁶⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1876/ 236, Letter 19 April 1876. Knight to Minister, suggestions re trans-continental railway.

number of shares at a moderate price would attract many people and retain a strong local interest.⁹⁶⁶

His letter was well argued and presented, covering all the reasons why such a scheme would work. The official reply by the minister, William Everard, briefly mentioned on the cover note ‘Acknowledge with thanks – Say that at present this idea of a transcontinental line is quite at rest’. Quite possibly Knight did not receive this reply, as a month later there was a new minister in charge of the Territory, Ebenezer Ward, who offered a very curt answer by requesting that the reply to Knight be, ‘Simply acknowledge receipt’.⁹⁶⁷ In the House of Assembly in July 1876, Mr Rees moved that all of Knight’s correspondence on the subject of the transcontinental railway from 30 June 1875 ‘be laid on the table’.⁹⁶⁸ No further mention of the scheme appeared in any SA newspapers over the next five months. The transcontinental railway from Adelaide to Darwin (Palmerston) did come to fruition 128 years later.

The idea of any railway does not rest

Knight did not permit time to dampen his belief that the NT would flourish once the railway was constructed. He believed that the railway would be making of the Territory. Not only should the railway be across the continent, but one was needed from Palmerston to the goldfields. In his report to the government resident in January 1886, undaunted at being repetitive in his quest to get a railway, he again wrote of his concerns by the following:

My common saying, for the twelve years since I was lured hither, has been “a railway or *nothing*,” and every well-wisher of this part of the province must deplore that anything should have occurred to retard the commencement of what will prove to be the salvation of the country.⁹⁶⁹

Additional to Knight’s 1886 report to the government resident, he had attached a section of his earlier March 1878 report dealing with problems of not having a railway. It was the high cost of living in the Territory, he said, that impacted mostly

⁹⁶⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1876/ 236, Letter 19 April 1876. Knight to Minister, suggestions re trans-continental railway.

⁹⁶⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1876/236, Letter 19 April 1876. Knight to Minister, suggestions re trans-continental railway.

⁹⁶⁸ ‘The Parliament, House of Assembly’, *SAR*, 13 July 1876.

⁹⁶⁹ SAPP, Knight, ‘Report on Law Courts’, in *Quarterly Report on Northern Territory, Government Resident’s Report on Northern Territory*, No. 55, 1885, p. 23.

on the miners who had to pay inflated prices to storekeepers because cartage rates from Southport were exorbitant, especially during the wet season, when often it was impossible for any provisions to be obtained. During the wet season, wagons could not get through because of boggy roads, sometimes for four months making it impossible for places to go ahead or become prosperous. Knight wrote: 'during the wet season ... an ounce of gold is sometimes paid for a half cwt. of rice, 2s. 3d. per lb. for preserved meat, and 2s. per lb. for sugar'. Having a railway from Palmerston to the goldfields would mean food could be always obtainable at reasonable rates by means of railway carriages. Not having a railway meant 'the European miner cannot afford the outlay of from 40s. to 50s. per week merely for plain food'.⁹⁷⁰

In June 1878, surveyors McMinn and Stewart returned from a preliminary trip to inspect the countryside from Palmerston to Pine Creek as a possible route for a railway line. Ironically, it was almost the same as that recommended by McMinn years before. The route would have offered very few engineering difficulties, but nothing was to come from this; it had been just another expensive survey.⁹⁷¹

Inappropriate governing from South Australia

Although there was contested interest in the idea of a transcontinental railway to open up the continent, the southern administration had no real intention of spending any more money than was necessary for the Territory to scrape by on. Instead of putting essential infrastructure in right from the start, thirteen years on from Goyder's arrival, there was still not a good jetty, or suitable roads in place for the transport of produce from the land to the seaport, nor a suitable market to be had. This same issue of bad governance had been raised many times during the years through either lack of money spent on the Territory, or money flitted away with visiting ministerial parties that the Territory had to pay for.

For instance, the land act as it was in 1882 put forward many obstacles to someone wishing to purchase arable land. After selecting a particular parcel of land, a potential buyer sent an application to Adelaide and waited four or five months to see

⁹⁷⁰ SAPP, Knight, 'Report on Law Courts', in *Quarterly Report on Northern Territory, Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory*, No. 55, 1886, p. 23.

⁹⁷¹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 15 June 1878.

if it had been approved or refused. Then if the buyer was lucky and his application granted, the land had then to be surveyed at extra cost and often the survey would not occur until a further six to twelve months. This was not the fault of the Territory surveyors themselves, but of the SA government for not allocating enough money to employ more surveyors. Added to this, the price of land was dearer than any unsettled areas in the southern colonies. Local businessman Vaiben Louis Solomon, was more outspoken about how South Australia had been governing its Northern Territory, saying:

The system of Government which has hitherto characterized South Australia's effort at legislating for the Territory reminds me very forcibly of the anecdote of a noted English politician, who, whenever asked by his colleagues for an opinion as to what they should do with a difficult quest, invariably replied, 'Can't we leave it alone?' This happy way of getting out of a difficulty, however clever as an original joke, South Australian politicians have about exhausted.⁹⁷²

Government Resident Scott departs Palmerston

When De La Rue wrote about Government Resident Scott's administration, she stated that Scott was the right person to take over from the uninterested former government resident, Captain Douglas. But as Scott's term of office went by, Port Darwin residents became more assertive and more hostile to Scott and the manner of SA's governance. De La Rue wrote:

Scott's personality and attitude did not help the situation and the resentment against him and the government in Adelaide grew as the authorities there treated requests made by the populace with indifference, if not contempt, and continued to make inappropriate decisions affecting the Territory.⁹⁷³

Scott did bring about two changes in Palmerston: an improvement in social manners and dress. The shirt sleeve and pyjama age died out and more respectable dress was adopted by civil servants.⁹⁷⁴ At Scott's 'complimentary banquet', the chairman Joseph Skelton in welcoming Scott said he was surrounded by many friends except for an 'insignificant clique, who were conspicuous only by their absence'. Knight sent a letter apologising for his absence as at that time he was in the goldfields. Skelton further stated that Scott over the term of his administration had spent only fourteen thousand pounds that had gone on buildings, roads and bridges, adding it

⁹⁷² 'V.L. Solomon, How We are Governed, No. III. Our Land Laws', *NTTG*, 18 November 1882.

⁹⁷³ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 51.

⁹⁷⁴ 'Summary', *NTTG*, 8 July 1876.

was unfortunate that the SA government had not placed ‘more money at Mr. Scott’s disposal’. Scott addressed the assembled gentlemen saying that since his arrival there had been a vast improvement in buildings including a new court house, gaol and a jetty at Southport. He said people needed to think beyond gold and turn their attention to agriculture. Scott also mentioned the amount of time lost in land surveying and further time wasted when the matter was referred to Adelaide and hoped that the Act would be remedied.⁹⁷⁵

In reply to Scott’s address, Solomon spoke of his sincere interest in the Territory and was well aware of the drawbacks that included low population, the huge cost of cartage and boat passage for people coming up from the southern colonies and the lack of capital. He was of the opinion that gold mining would one day be successful and the Territory would ‘rank high on the list of rich gold producing countries’. Further into his speech, Solomon added that everyone knew that the country needed to be opened up for agriculture but, ‘it is to be regretted that the South Australian Government have not shown more interest in this important matter’.⁹⁷⁶

Government Resident Price

With Scott’s departure on 1 July 1876 on the *Claud Hamilton*,⁹⁷⁷ the new government resident, Edward William Price, also took on the role of special magistrate. Price, a former resident of Palmerston, had lost his entire family when the *Gothenburg* was wrecked in 1875. De La Rue points out that Price had a ‘genuine belief’ that there was an excellent future for the NT if it received enough capital and under ‘competent managers and with efficient transport, preferably in the form of a transcontinental railway, the dependency would eventually outstrip what was commonly referred to as “South Australia proper” in its revenue and its importance among the Australian colonies’.⁹⁷⁸ What a pity that Knight’s views on the transcontinental railway went to Scott just a few months before Price arrived. There may have been the possibility of Knight receiving extra backing from Price before the idea went to Adelaide to be rejected.

⁹⁷⁵ ‘Banquet to Mr. Scott’, *NTTG*, 1 July 1876.

⁹⁷⁶ ‘Banquet to Mr. Scott’, *NTTG*, 1 July 1876. V.L. Solomon’s reply to speech by Mr. Scott.

⁹⁷⁷ ‘Shipping’, *NTTG*, 15 July 1876.

⁹⁷⁸ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 53.

Knight becomes the correspondent for the goldfields

The rather gregarious Knight found an outlet for his fertile mind in being the goldfields' correspondent for the *NTTG*. In this position he was able to inform and engage the public in both Palmerston and the goldfields of the happenings with the various mines and the normal goings on in the camps. Having spent the first few months integrating himself into the job of managing the goldfields, it may be fair to say that Knight was not so overworked being warden, as he readily found time to correspond. With this time on his hands, Knight fell back on his mastery of words, writing substantial articles each week, which may have been time consuming but kept his mind active and partially free from boredom. Not residing in Palmerston, Knight, no longer being part of a robust social life, brought forth his enthusiasm for the written word and took on the role of the country correspondent. In his early articles there is no signature and the heading vaguely says 'from a correspondent'. It appears that Knight was the correspondent from both Yam Creek and the Union mining areas as this can be verified in a newspaper report offered by Knight 13 May 1876, where he speaks about a mistake he made when writing for a newspaper in Sandhurst, Victoria.⁹⁷⁹

His early reports covered the state of particular mines, how much material was crushed and how much gold was recovered and if a lucky person had struck a reef and what the possible yield may have been. In March 1876, Knight stated Grieveson's Gully was doing well with '20 miners ... actively employed'. To appeal to all community members, whether a miner or Palmerston resident, Knight told of people's illnesses, deaths, court business, the highs and lows of mining and frivolous happenings to bring a smile to someone's face.⁹⁸⁰ Even away from Palmerston celebrating particular events was recognised, such as St. Patrick's Day at the Miners' Arms Hotel at Yam Creek where the host William Ryan was kept busy quenching the thirst of his Irish countrymen.⁹⁸¹ Another story was about an unfortunate bullock that fell into a mining hole and it being impossible to get the beast out alive it had to be killed *in situ*, thus giving the men the luxury of a red meat meal, or as Knight

⁹⁷⁹ 'Country Correspondence. The Union', *NTTG*, 20 May 1876. Reference to being a reporter in Sandhurst, is found in 'Mining Reports', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 November 1871.

⁹⁸⁰ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 11 March 1876.

⁹⁸¹ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 25 March 1876.

expressed it, after asking the editor's indulgence, 'licking our *chops* at the prospect of having a *steak* in the Territory'.⁹⁸²

When things were quiet on the mining front, Knight would discuss how long it took for the mailman to get from Southport to Yam Creek with their mail and how a person had time to compose another letter home for return delivery. Knight stated that the mail courier, Mr Hopewell, made the journey from Southport to Yam Creek in thirteen hours, but Knight claims if he was the mail courier, it would have taken him three days.⁹⁸³ Receiving and replying to welcome letters was what kept most of these men sane in such isolated places. It was not only mail that was delivered but also parcels. One such item Knight received was labelled 'Medical Comforts' and as he wrote in his droll manner, that as 'he had been ailing from great faintness and exhaustion, he immediately put himself under treatment. The improvement has been astounding, and he now appears to be in excellent *spirits*'.⁹⁸⁴ Knight's 'medical comforts' would have been in the form of alcoholic beverages.

Not only was Knight writing a weekly review of the happenings in the goldfields, but also in one particular article he wrote of a novel way in which he retained a healthy body. He had recently received a letter from an old friend in Melbourne, who although an eminent solicitor was also a powerful athlete. Years before, this friend had told Knight about the value of mud baths and was now imparting further knowledge on how he considered maintaining good health in a hot climate by exposing the naked body to the early morning rays of the sun before it became too hot.⁹⁸⁵ Knight, wanting to share this information with his fellow Territorians described his daily ritual by the following:

I rise a little after 6, and start from my cottage with a minimum amount of clothing, and bare headed, to enjoy my morning breather. When I am fairly in the bush (we are not densely populated about here) I appear in the costume of Adam before the fall, and take a run for half a mile, followed by a brisk walk, which occupies about three quarters of an hour. When I get home I have a shower bath with a free use of soap, after which I stroll about and air myself till breakfast. I assure you that the operation imparts a feeling of bodily elasticity and lightness of spirits of a most pleasurable kind, only dispelled when conventionalities of society requires me to put on my ordinary clothing. I am so thoroughly satisfied of the sanitary value and economy of the system, "*In puris naturalibus.*" that I am half disposed to

⁹⁸² 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 25 March 1876.

⁹⁸³ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 29 April 1876.

⁹⁸⁴ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 29 April 1876.

⁹⁸⁵ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 13 May 1876.

form a society of “Anglo-aboriginals,” and apply to the Resident for a charter to adopt the *habits* of the natives.⁹⁸⁶

The above article was written with a feeling of well-being and heartiness. He even noted that on his rounds about five miles from Pine Creek ‘he saw two great crops of copper ore’ and immediately thought of the Burra copper mine in SA.⁹⁸⁷ In his next report a week later, the article echoed such negativity and melancholy that it is hard to believe the same person wrote it. Not only was mining at low ebb, but also Knight’s writing appeared rather desperate as he clearly summed up the situation in the following words:

To write any thing [sic] about the Union just now is not so difficult as it is disagreeable, for the simple reason that there is neither life nor activity in the place. Every day we have been falling lower and lower, and every day we have been buoying ourselves up with hope that there would soon be a change for the better – that there would soon come a reaction. If we are to descend any further in the scale of depression, the lights must be extinguished altogether and the doors closed ... The news that we receive from other districts is not much more cheering. Pine Creek is breathing and that is all. When the Chinamen go we might as well go with them.⁹⁸⁸

In the article Knight seriously thought that money should be readily invested in sinking shafts to a greater depth to ascertain what lay below. Investors were not taking this risk so men were laid off.⁹⁸⁹ On a cheerier note, the sight of five children passing through the Shackle gladdened Knight. Ordinarily, it would only be adults about, so seeing the children heartened his mood and made him think of his own family and feel a little less miserable.⁹⁹⁰

Mining did fluctuate. Knight was expecting men to take a gamble and he may well have been right, but he was thinking what he would do, as he had never stopped being a speculator. What would Knight have done in the goldfields if he had had money? It is a given he would have speculated, having a good eye and knowing his minerals he may have been lucky or on the other hand, he may not. At Sandy Creek a local prospecting association was formed and the miners voted for a management committee with Knight elected chairman. The association’s idea was to test the country around Sandy Creek. Initially miners would be limited to prospecting in the

⁹⁸⁶ ‘Yam Creek’, *NTTG*, 13 May 1876.

⁹⁸⁷ ‘Yam Creek’, *NTTG*, 13 May 1876.

⁹⁸⁸ ‘Country Correspondence, The Union’, *NTTG*, 20 May 1876.

⁹⁸⁹ ‘Country Correspondence, The Union’, *NTTG*, 20 May 1876.

⁹⁹⁰ ‘Yam Creek’, *NTTG*, 27 May, 1876.

area to five miles and when that area was tried extend a further five miles beyond. This would stop people scattering further afield.⁹⁹¹

Alonzo Brown makes an appearance

Later in July 1876 Knight signed off each newspaper article with the signature of Alonzo Brown. Being well-read, he would have known of Matthew Lewis' ballad 'Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogene'. Interestingly the Fremantle Amateur Dramatic Company performed this as a burlesque in October 1869.⁹⁹² The line 'Alonzo the Brave was the name of the Knight' offered Knight an admirable non-de-plume.⁹⁹³ The surname of Brown did not go down well with one of Knight's contemporaries in Palmerston. This person wrote an article in the *NTTG* under the heading 'The Cynic', and signed his name Diogenes. Diogenes said the fair Imogene would never have doted on her brave warrior Alonzo, nor visited from the spirit world if she had heard him addressed as Brown.⁹⁹⁴

Of course many people may have recognised that the correspondent was Knight, as several of his stories related to the goings on at the various diggings and personal tales. Timothy Jones however, was of the opinion that Alonzo Brown was written by Vaiben Solomon.⁹⁹⁵ Solomon was a young man who had arrived in Palmerston aged twenty-two in 1873, became involved in mining and agencies and had later bought the local newspaper and was a respected member of the town.⁹⁹⁶

Knight had been writing columns for many years and although that is not proof Alonzo and Knight were one, it can be said that the flow of his pen and the amusing turn of phrase cannot be anyone other than Knight. Additional proof that Alonzo was indeed Knight can be found in a few of his correspondent reports. An example is when the resident was intending to visit the goldfields and Knight using journalistic licence offered a light oration of a fictitious address that was to be presented to Price during his visit. At the end of the 'address', Alonzo gave a short list of 'humble

⁹⁹¹ 'Country Correspondence, Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 16 September 1876.

⁹⁹² 'Amateur Theatricals', *Herald* (Fremantle, WA), 30 October 1869.

⁹⁹³ Matthew Lewis, 'Alonzo The Brave And Fair Imogene'.

⁹⁹⁴ 'The Cynic', *NTTG*, 21 April 1877.

⁹⁹⁵ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 13.

⁹⁹⁶ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 35.

servants' and listed was the name 'A.E.E. Alonzo Brown, Jun',⁹⁹⁷ the initials being the same as his son who worked for the Telegraph Office at Pine Creek. In another article he talked of being at the Great Exhibition of London in 1862.⁹⁹⁸ It is known that Knight was secretary for Victoria at the exhibition and Solomon would have been eleven years old at the time.

In his first letter to the paper using the alias Alonzo and heralded as the Yam Creek correspondent, he discussed that there should be more stability of labour and that the batteries should be kept going. It appears he attended the Yam Creek races where he imbibed too much in lime-juice cordial and received a hangover for being tempted into the refreshment tents too many times leaving him with a headache. In the Hospital Cup, Knight's horse 'Scarecrow' came third.⁹⁹⁹

The articles by Alonzo were often interspersed with mention of the goldfields, but could be as obscure as the Northern Territory being considered a choice bounty sought by Europe in time of war against Great Britain. In this rather nonsensical episode, Knight had placed well-known Palmerston people in charge of strategic points around the northern coast to defend the Territory and deter the enemy. Knight devised an army of regulars and irregulars, troops would be billeted in public houses, with the surgeon attending the wounded supplied with 'handsaws, tomahawks and other surgical instruments for amputation'. The ladies of Palmerston would tend the sick like Florence Nightingale. If by chance Palmerston fell to the enemy, the victors would go to the goldfields and the chief warden would give them a gracious reception before visiting the goldmines.¹⁰⁰⁰

These columns became a newspaper fixture. The richness of the penmanship and the quantity of writings became almost a diary for Knight. Not having available private correspondence of his time in the goldfields, the articles offer a portrait of how Knight was thinking and feeling. This invaluable collection almost ceased when he left the goldfields. Sometimes his correspondence was weekly, sometimes fortnightly, the stories were always amusing and whimsical, playful and waggish,

⁹⁹⁷ 'Country correspondence', *NTTG*, 26 August 1876.

⁹⁹⁸ 'Country correspondence', *NTTG*, 15 March 1879.

⁹⁹⁹ 'Country correspondence', *NTTG*, 12 August 1876.

¹⁰⁰⁰ "'Gazette' Extraordinary Invasion of Port Darwin', *NTTG*, 6 January 1877.

rather critical of the facts whether dealing with mining, the government or people, ironic but never malicious. The editor of the SA newspaper the *Kapunda Herald*, likened Alonzo Brown to the famous American newspaper humourist Artemus Ward.¹⁰⁰¹

Chinese workers

When the tenure of the Chinese workers who arrived in Palmerston in August 1874 was up, they had the opportunity to stay and receive £5, or take the voyage back to Singapore. Some returned, but most stayed. As an unskilled group, the Chinese in the field of mining had mostly made a positive impression in the goldfields as hard working and willing to do chores the European would not do. Many of the mines would have collapsed without using the available Chinese miners' labour. Before departing from Singapore, many of the men had previously been employed as tailors, carpenters, servants and coffee and sugar plantation workers. Some had been branded or lost their pigtails, 'a sign of the lowest degradation in the Celestial Empire'.¹⁰⁰² To a Chinese man, the loss of his pigtail or queue was a mark of disgrace, but what had happened to them in Singapore or other places they lived before leaving for the NT is unknown. In 1874 a quite remarkable Chinese man, Ping Que, came to the Northern Territory and earned widespread respect and the goodwill of all people.

Ping Que

In 1876 Ping Que was in partnership with Lambert Smith. In May 1877, Knight wrote that Ping Que was informed, spoke English well and employed about fifteen Chinese labourers at the Union Reef. He raised more stone and worked harder 'than any other man on the reefs'.¹⁰⁰³ In fact, when Knight wrote his report to the SA government on the NT goldfields, he suggested that at least another 100 more Chinese labourers could be used and the best person to send to Singapore to select these men was Ping Que as he was the most enterprising miner in the Territory.¹⁰⁰⁴ Ping Que was by far the leading merchant.¹⁰⁰⁵ He was a store keeper, buying gold,

¹⁰⁰¹ 'Grand banquet to Mr. J. Dunnup O'Tomkins', *Kapunda Herald*, 13 June 1879.

¹⁰⁰² 'Summary, The Coolies', *NTTG*, 22 April 1876. This article was possibly written by Knight.

¹⁰⁰³ 'Mr. Brown's Letter Home', *NTTG*, 3 March 1877.

¹⁰⁰⁴ SAPP, Knight, *Report on Northern Territory Goldfields*, No. 72, 1877, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 51.

selling rations including rice wine and opium, mining equipment and providing a service to miners by loaning money ‘at a high rate of interest’, therefore binding them to him.¹⁰⁰⁶ In the eyes of the Chinese in the goldfields, Ping Que was revered and treated as superior. In October 1878, Knight observed Ping Que and J.W. Tennant, who shared a lease with him, move in the form of a procession to the Driffield mine, which was approximately forty miles from Pine Creek. Knight’s description of the procession may be slightly exaggerated, but is decidedly vivid:

On Monday morning (mail-day, too) hundreds of Chinamen could be observed flitting about from tent to tent, tying baggage up, securing water-bags, and making all things ready for their long journey. By twelve o’clock the cavalcade was ready, and the line of march commenced. First came twenty horses (more or less), heavily loaded with well-filled pack-saddles; next came one hundred Chinamen (more or less), in single file, carrying each 140lbs on their bamboo sticks; following these came the superior, or boss, well-mounted (Mr Ping Que), and, on his left ... J. W. Tennant – both surrounded with four servants, bearing umbrellas and cow-tails, and close in the rear a fife and drum band, consisting of a man and a boy, with a piccolo and drum. There was a solemnity about the procession almost funeral. The whole bore a strong resemblance to the departure of Burke and Wills, barring the camels. It’s to be hoped they have not gone to their deaths, and, by the brazen appearance of the atmosphere, they are not likely to be drowned for the next six weeks.¹⁰⁰⁷

Mixed views on the Chinese

Knight’s opinion of the Chinese was contradictory, as he appreciated how hard they could and did work, but was concerned that they could possibly overrun the country. He clearly admired Ping Que as a man, as he had shown that he and his fellow countrymen had made poor reefs pay. Knight wrote that there had been stirrings in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, New Zealand, Northern Territory and the Californian goldfields on the encroachment of Chinese and European miners were not well disposed to more arriving as they were looked upon as intruders and considered a nuisance. Knight did say that it was probably prejudice and uncharitable, but a ‘strong antipathy exists and will exist to the end of the chapter’.¹⁰⁰⁸ The question of the Chinese was from time to time discussed in newspaper articles.

One letter signed ‘a working miner’ criticised the newspaper editor who has argued that the Chinese had as much right be in the Northern Territory as the European. The author said the Chinese were ‘lazy vagabonds who don’t know the taste of a good

¹⁰⁰⁶ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁰⁷ ‘Union’, *NTTG*, 26 October 1878.

¹⁰⁰⁸ ‘Country correspondence. Yam Creek’, *NTTG*, 13 January 1877.

square meal'. He further added that the white workers needed four to five pounds a week to live, as they could not exist on rice alone. The writer continued saying that the newspaper was likely to find itself in opposition to a Chinese newspaper next door if the Chinese are not stopped, as every white man will leave the Territory.¹⁰⁰⁹ In reply to this, the editor stated there was nothing new in the miner's letter, saying that many white miners only worked three or four days a week and wasted a large portion of their money on drink. The Chinese saved their money by their temperate habits, never coming before the courts for drunkenness as opposed to the white man. If the Chinese had left California, the Americans were well aware they would not have anyone to buy their clothing and revolvers. Australia should be aware too, that if the Territory flourished in growing rice, sugar or tobacco it would be required to employ Chinese or foreign labour.¹⁰¹⁰

The welfare of the Northern Territory

Knight continued to send letters or telegrams to the minister in Adelaide via the government resident with ideas or suggestion on how things could be improved. Some undoubtedly were in his favour, as his ideas were in keeping with good management practice.

One of the many concerns Knight had was loss of revenue from licences. In a letter to Price, Knight stated that due to having no power to enforce people to take out miner's rights or business licences, most business licences were months in arrears. As warden he had no authority to force people to pay up, but if he was made representative for the commissioner of crown lands in an honorary capacity, he could under 'the 70th section ... of the NT Land Act ... stop future irregularities'.¹⁰¹¹ This request like all others was forwarded to Adelaide. Another idea of Knight's to save the government money was his suggestion to Price that he become a commissioner for taking affidavits. By doing this it would alleviate sending justices of the peace all the way from Palmerston, thus saving money and time. A limited court could be established at the Shackle to recover all debts under £20 and Corporal Montague

¹⁰⁰⁹ 'To the Editor of the N.T. Times and Gazette', *NTTG*, 8 March 1879.

¹⁰¹⁰ 'The Chinese Question', *NTTG*, 8 March 1879.

¹⁰¹¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1795, Letter 25 November 1876. Government Resident to Knight.

could become clerk of the court.¹⁰¹² The only evidence found relating to Montague is that Price appointed him inspector of public housing in May of 1877.¹⁰¹³ Knight was appointed a commissioner for taking affidavits in a supreme court, the notice appearing in the *Adelaide Observer* in January 1877.¹⁰¹⁴

The sick ward at the Shackle

It was around Christmas 1876 that Adelaide informed the government resident that 600 Chinese were heading to Port Darwin from Hong Kong.¹⁰¹⁵ Knight as coroner of the goldfields had been concerned by the occurrence of several deaths. He considered that the deaths were a result of poor nourishment and a lack of medical attention. Knight pointedly wrote that asking for a sick ward would be out of the question because of the present monetary restraints, but if there were an increase in population the suggestion would require consideration. It concerned Knight that several of the deaths could have been prevented. He had been conducting a type of dispensary where people requested medicine, but all he now had were empty bottles.¹⁰¹⁶

The medical officer, Mr Keall, was ill himself and the miners did not have any confidence in him. Knight's suggestion was that if it was not possible to get a medical man in the goldfields, the next best option was for the doctor in Palmerston to put together two medicine chests, one for Pine Creek and the Union and the other for the Shackle. Also required were a few practical medical books for 'fever, ague, and dysentery, and embrocation for wounds and sprains. A good tonic besides quinine and iron would be especially valuable'. Knight suggested patients make a payment for the medicines; the payment would then be used for the future supply of drugs.¹⁰¹⁷

To get some type of sick-ward started, the townsfolk subscribed liberally to a fund and raised £150 towards establishing such a building. Price lauded Knight in undertaking additional duties imposed on him and stated that 'this officer's duties are very arduous, and his conduct shows that he uses every endeavour to promote the

¹⁰¹² NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1818, Letter 16 December 1876. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰¹³ 'Public Notice', *NTTG*, 26 May 1877.

¹⁰¹⁴ 'Government Gazette', *Adelaide Observer*, 13 January 1877.

¹⁰¹⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1882, Letter 22 December 1876. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁰¹⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1915, Letter 13 January 1877. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰¹⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1915, Letter 13 January 1877. Knight to Government Resident.

interests of the Territory'.¹⁰¹⁸ In reply to a telegram from Price, Ward said he approved of the purchase of a house for a sick ward, and would forward two medicine chests with one being for Knight. Ward stated he could not sanction additional expenditure for maintenance of £200 per annum, as patients used the medicine they should be paying the cost of their accommodation.¹⁰¹⁹ In a telegram to Price in May 1877, Knight asked for authority to purchase Ryan's Hotel on good terms as it was likely to be sold that day.¹⁰²⁰ Authorisation must have been received because two days later Knight sent Price another telegram saying he had purchased the house at a bargain price of £50, but asked for a little extra money to put the place in order.¹⁰²¹ Price in turn notified Ward of the transaction and said seventy pounds would be required which the SA government agreed to.¹⁰²²

Knight took it upon himself to care and treat all patients to the best of his ability, whether they were European or Chinese, rich or poor. If unsure of a particular treatment, he would send a telegram to the medical officer in Palmerston asking for his advice. Regrettably some men died, but never from lack of attention. Cases included fevers, the removal of bullets, spear-heads and the setting of broken limbs. Knight was able to give these men their first hospital in the district and as a result 'was universally respected on the goldfields, almost to the point of reverence'.¹⁰²³ At times Montague and P.T. Rodda helped Knight attend to patients in the miners' hospital.¹⁰²⁴

A further report from Knight on the goldfields

Knight's May 1877 report on the Territory goldfields was more encouraging than the one in April 1876. An improvement in mining had taken place that led Knight to believe that the future prospects were the best since he had become warden. All mines and machinery were in the hands of local working proprietors. Another area of improvement was for the Chinese to which Knight stated: 'The much abused Coolies are here showing their worth as miners, and white men are not ashamed to work with

¹⁰¹⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1877/404, Letter 17 July 1877. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁰¹⁹ SRSA, GRS/4/1 Volume 4, Letter 12 April 1877. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁰²⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A2130, Telegram 23 May 1877. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰²¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A2141, Telegram 25 May 1877. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰²² SRSA GRS/1/1877/250, Telegram 25 May 1877, Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁰²³ Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory*, p. 25.

¹⁰²⁴ 'Country correspondence', *NTTG*, 6 October 1877.

them as mates. Coolie miners are now obtaining from £9 to £11 per month, while some of them are becoming wise enough to work ground on their own account'. A mineral sample examined by Knight that looked promising, was from a copper lode and he sent ten tons of this to Adelaide. With regard to alluvial gold, rich pockets were found with the best areas being Pine Creek, a district that Knight considered would be the principal source of obtaining alluvial gold for some time.¹⁰²⁵

Knight showed some optimism in the present mining situation, by suggesting to Ward that a moderate number of experienced miners could be profitably employed in the Territory. Men could take out claims on recently forfeited leased grounds and could do very well. Knight added that the men would need to be practical quartz miners with £20 or £30 on hand to buy provisions and to spend time on the reefs.¹⁰²⁶

In October 1877, Knight submitted another progress report. With regard to quartz mining, he said some of the forfeited leases at the Union were producing payable stone, while older claims continued to be profitable. Pine Creek continued to be gainful but Yam Creek was almost deserted. The Howley continued to offer payable 'stuff'. Stapleton was also getting payable stone and alluvial mining was at a standstill. An Afghan named Wahib was working a mine that had potential. The lack of water was affecting all these mines as batteries could not run without water. Knight was pleased that there was an additional forty-three people added to the populations including thirty miners from Cooktown. He wrote confidently that the fresh energy from those newcomers will see 'the foundation of a permanent settlement'.¹⁰²⁷

Knight asks to be a special magistrate

Once again Knight had the foresight to try and remedy small but important irregularities in the running of the goldfields. He requested that the minister make him a special magistrate on the goldfields. Knight offered examples. At the time there was only one justice of the peace, Johannes Noltenius, who had to travel from the Howley twenty miles to the Shackle to hear nonsense cases. One case was assault

¹⁰²⁵ SAPP, Knight, Report on Northern Territory Goldfields, No. 72, 1877, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰²⁶ SAPP, Knight, Report on Northern Territory Goldfields, No. 72, 1877, p. 2.

¹⁰²⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1877/544, Letter 6 October 1877. Knight to Government Resident.

between two Chinese men in which no-one could make sense of the evidence. In another case Noltenius was asked to give a judgment for fifteen shillings against a Chinese man for taking sweet potatoes. Conducting these cases also meant a magistrate had to be there too, meaning many miles of travel at his own expense for bed and meals and the need to feed his horse for five shillings a day. Knight philosophically stated: 'If I have not intelligence enough to deal with such matters single handed, I am not fit to be here at all'. The letter was forwarded to the chief secretary of cabinet with the recommendation that Knight be made a special magistrate. In November Knight received the commission.¹⁰²⁸

A letter revealing another side to Knight

In a letter to Sir Redmond Barry in October 1877, Knight called on Barry's influence to obtain a position for himself in London. In an effort to placate his wife, Knight had written to Barry in a grovelling manner. The wording was most unlike any other in his correspondence. In the letter he stated that his wife had informed him that Barry had taken 'a warm interest' in her efforts in getting a position for him in London.¹⁰²⁹

It appeared that some years previously, Knight had put forward a suggestion to Viscount Barry [not Sir Redmond Barry] in London, that a colonial museum be formed. Whether or not authorities heeded Knight's suggestion is unknown, but a museum had either been completed or was in the building stage. It was to this establishment that Knight directed his plea asking if Barry would consider speaking on his behalf as a suitable candidate for the office of superintendent or curator of the Australian and New Zealand department. Knight considered the right attributes for such positions included a practical knowledge of the countries' resources. He further added that the candidate should have influence in scientific and other areas that would enable him to obtain 'complete collections of minerals, animals & vegetable products, natural history, models of colonial inventions of special merit ... [and be] qualified by personal knowledge to speak upon, write about, or otherwise explain

¹⁰²⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1877/547, Letter 6 October 1877. Knight to Minister.

¹⁰²⁹ 'Knight to Sir Redmond Barry', 12 October 1877, MS8380, Box 600 2(c). Papers of Sir Redmond Barry, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

their practical value'. As referees, Knight stated that Arthur Blyth from the SA government and Mr Michie would support him.¹⁰³⁰

He further added four sentences that appear to be of anguish and showing his vulnerability. 'I can only throw myself on your mercy! It seems rather hard that I should rust away here'. The following sentences were in response to Barry having recently taken a grand tour, with Knight writing: 'How I envy you! I wonder if I shall ever see civilization again?'¹⁰³¹ Knight appeared sincere in his request to Barry for the position, as his description of what qualities a curator or superintendent should possess rings true. He appeared to be interested, but did he really want to leave the Territory? The four sentences quoted in this paragraph are fawning and insincere and appear to be totally out of character. Had he really felt when writing the letter that he had been abandoned in the wilderness?

There is something in Knight's letter to Barry that is at odds to all Knight's other correspondence. Was Knight's grovelling tone deliberate as to make Barry dismiss all thought of assisting him? It is possible that Knight had by late 1877 already mapped out where he wanted to be as a public servant in the Territory. In the latter part of this chapter it is shown that Knight requested leave and it will be seen in the following chapter, not only did he take his leave, but he embarked on a scheme never to return to the goldfields. So Knight could have been placating his wife by writing this unusual letter, expecting a reply of 'unable to assist'.

David Carment, Helen Wilson and Barbara James in reference to this letter argue that Knight, 'In spite of his almost constant public good cheer ... was sometimes privately most unhappy, yearning for the "civilized" life he had left behind in Victoria'.¹⁰³² Another view is that Knight enjoyed his time in the goldfields, being his own boss, having good relationships with the miners and working without the restrictions of a big city, although at times he must have occasionally pined for a civilised life.

¹⁰³⁰ 'Knight to Sir Redmond Barry', 12 October 1877, MS8380, Box 600 2(c). Papers of Sir Redmond Barry, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

¹⁰³¹ 'Knight to Sir Redmond Barry', 12 October 1877, MS8380, Box 600 2(c). Papers of Sir Redmond Barry, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

¹⁰³² Carment, Wilson and James, *Territorian: The life and work of John George Knight*, p. 37.

Crime in the goldfields

Over the years, there had been killings and many robberies of teamsters and miners. Fearful of an attack from Aborigines, Knight applied to Price for a rifle in January 1878. He expressed his concern about recent Aboriginal attacks, urgently requesting a double barrel breach loading gun and a good supply of assorted wire cartridges.¹⁰³³ An article in the *Adelaide Observer* written by Knight as the Yam Creek correspondent covered the ongoing problem of what he saw as ‘crime’ by Aborigines which had been brought to a head by the brutal killing of teamster James Ellis. Ellis had been a very popular man with the miners. Added to this killing was an attack on two Chinese men working in their garden. Both were speared, but not fatally. Price directed three troopers and one black tracker to pursue Ellis’ offenders. The tracker found the Aborigines’ camp and the plundered flour, sugar and wax matches, plus two of Ellis’ revolvers and some of his clothing. There was a hearing and the jury returned a verdict that unknown Aborigines had wilfully murdered Ellis.¹⁰³⁴

The Afghan Wahib, mentioned earlier, had been robbed four times but it was the killing of Ellis that galvanised the community into wanting something done about this unlawfulness. The feeling in the country was that the Aborigines had ‘been treated with too much forbearance’. One suggestion Knight put forward was that white men stop cohabiting with Aboriginal women and leave all the Indigenous people alone to avoid conflict. He proposed a ‘small force of native police; provide the police-stations at Yam Creek and Pine Creek with a good stock of firearms; then the niggers will keep out of harm’s way, and there will be no more bloodshed’. After reading this article in the *Adelaide Observer* and being furious by what he had read, Inspector Foelsche wrote to Price.

Foelsche pointed out that as the inspector of police in the Territory he was expected to know what the best protection for the people of the goldfields was. He inferred that Knight had not the slightest knowledge of how the police force operated. In his opinion, he thought that Knight’s idea of keeping firearms at the police stations to subdue the Aborigines would not be of any use, as this would lead to extra work and

¹⁰³³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A2693, Letter 25 January 1878. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰³⁴ ‘The outrages by blacks in the Northern Territory’, *Adelaide Observer*, 6 April 1878. A teamster had been killed by Aborigines on the 16 January, see ‘Yam Creek’, *NTTG*, 26 January 1878.

cost to maintain such firearms. Foelsche said that all people living and travelling in the goldfields should be armed and alert to the possibility of a crime and recommended that his troopers be armed with the best weapons. Finally, Foelsche asked that his letter be forwarded to the minister.¹⁰³⁵

Eleven days previously, Foelsche had sent a letter to Price on the subject of having a native police force. Foelsche considered Aborigines could not be relied upon; working as police they would have no moral control over Europeans. They would also be despised and hated by the Chinese. Although Foelsche was definitely against an Aboriginal police force, he was not against having three good Aboriginal trackers.¹⁰³⁶ Knight's article in the *Adelaide Observer* in April, together with Foelsche's letter must have displeased the government resident. A telegram was sent on 18 May from Knight to Price and today is mostly illegible. What can be read is Knight saying that Aborigines from Queensland and not local Aborigines should be used as trackers. Appreciating he had overstepped the mark in writing the controversial article, Knight stated he proposed to seek permission from the minister to write 'on non-political subjects' only.¹⁰³⁷

Knight appears to tire

After two and a half years without a holiday, Knight was beginning to feel a little used and frustrated. As Alonzo, he wrote that the warden had been very busy treating serious cases and tending to sick Chinese workers, obtaining payment for medicines where he could and hoping that the hospital could afford to run for another year. But sometimes the warden regretted he had ever started it.¹⁰³⁸ The following month, Knight was feeling he had been taken for granted for far too long with ongoing ministrations to the sick at the miners' hospital. Over the past year, he had unceasingly attended to people suffering from all manner of complaints that embraced not only fever and ague, tonics for various ailments, but gonorrhoea and dysentery. Sometimes with only his Chinese cook, Knight attended to the patients'

¹⁰³⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A2914. Letter 18 May 1878. Foelsche to Government Resident.

¹⁰³⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A2914, Letter 7 May 1878. Foelsche to Government Resident.

¹⁰³⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A2911, Telegram 18 May 1878. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰³⁸ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 15 June 1878.

dietary needs. All the nursing and medical work, which was often most unpleasant, fell mainly to him. Knight wrote the following:

I think I may say without boasting that I have been as successful as many a regular practitioner what I have lacked in skill I have made up in unremitting attention and I know from the testimony of patients that I have saved lives. I do not therefore suppose that you will consider me unreasonable when I ask you to recommend the Hon the Minister to make me some allowance for the medical work entailed on me.¹⁰³⁹

Knight's correspondence reports tell of little happening in the goldfields. There were a few small finds, but until something big was found Knight was filling his reports with small tidings because if nothing much was happening it was impossible to send regular reports. Knight seemed to have heard that in Palmerston the locals were having fine times attending balls and dancing the night away. He said the locals where he was living were quite happy staying at home, going to bed sober at nine o'clock and reading Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. In this report he mentioned that the Chinese were setting up stores in the goldfield, so Knight was thinking of learning Chinese swear words. In another little snippet, Knight said his trotting mare 'Antibilious' had gone missing, and he would pursue the thief to the end of the earth. Knight's social life had been enlivened that week by visits from the heads of the overland telegraph offices.¹⁰⁴⁰

By November there were many Chinese in the goldfields all waiting for the rain to arrive. Ping Que had set up his store with the Chinese workers being split into various areas. Approximately 100 were at Driffield, seventy each at the Union and the Extended Union, twenty at Ayliffe's old camp and over 200 'at the new diggings between the Union and Yam Creek'.¹⁰⁴¹ Later the same month, Knight wrote as if he was conducting a lecture to a monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Sandy Creek. He spoke of the lack of Europeans now in the Territory; when he first arrived at Palmerston in 1873 there were 'fifteen or eighteen hundred Europeans in the Territory, and no Chinamen'. He was alarmed that more people had been returning south than passengers arriving and called this a 'bleeding away of European population ... so that at the present moment there are less than one hundred and fifty European miners *at work* on the whole known area of our goldfields'. He concluded

¹⁰³⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1878/468, Letter 24 July 1878. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁴⁰ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 12 October 1878.

¹⁰⁴¹ 'Yam Creek', *NTTG*, 16 November 1878.

his ‘talk’ by referring to the inevitable railway but said the subject was now ‘worn threadbare’ and why would the SA government do anything about a railway when there were only about 400 white people in the Territory.¹⁰⁴²

Knight’s final months in the goldfields

Christmas 1878 passed without the celebratory roast that would have been enjoyed by many thousands in other parts of Australia. In Knight’s correspondence report in the *NTTG*, he said his Christmas Day feast was tinned soup, tinned meat, tinned peas and tinned potatoes all washed down with bottled beer. While reminiscing, Knight wrote that he remembered ‘with regret that he had at least one chance of settling down comfortably in life which he at the time neglected’. Further into the article, Knight pointed out how the tropical climate dealt with a raincoat he had recently purchased to keep himself dry during the wet season. When checking this garment, Knight found to his horror that it had come apart of its own accord. He described how the weather had played havoc with his macintosh, saying ‘the collar and sleeves have left the body, and the whole fabric is peeling off like an orange’.¹⁰⁴³

Later in the month Knight wrote of people living in Palmerston having the opportunity of feasting on all types of fish, poultry and meats brought in by steamers, while those living up country survived on bouilli. This he said was about to change when a site near Fountain Head was selected for a new pastoral station to be called ‘Glencoe’. He reasoned that within a few months the people in the goldfields would have the novel sensation of enjoying joints of roast beef. Knight saw genuine squatting as the start of making the NT a prosperous place one day. He further added:

Give us reasonably cheap and palatable food through the agency of squatters. Give us a railway, and therefore cheap appliances for working our reefs and alluvial. Give us a good ship jetty at Port Darwin – and then the White Elephant will be able to earn not only its own living, but to do some profitable work for the parent state.¹⁰⁴⁴

February had proved to be a very wet month with rivers and creeks rising and flooding batteries and stores being carried away. All the Chinese produce gardens had been destroyed and a Chinese gardener drowned. In consequence of this heavy rain, many people came down with fever and one man had a bad case of a prolapsed

¹⁰⁴² ‘Yam Creek’, *NTTG*, 23 November 1878.

¹⁰⁴³ ‘Yam Creek’, *NTTG*, 4 January 1879.

¹⁰⁴⁴ ‘Yam Creek’, *NTTG*, 25 January 1879.

anus, which Knight had to deal with. Making light of a serious situation, Knight said he remembered his knowledge of civil engineering and practical mechanics and devised a plan of how to relieve the patient 'from his torture'. The miners' hospital received flood damage and Knight was going to ask Price if he could remove some of the existing building and re-erect this on higher land.¹⁰⁴⁵

In March 1879 at Masson's hotel at the Shackle, Knight was presented with a collection of gold samples weighing 23½ ounces as a token of his services in managing the miners' hospital. Knight was applauded for his attention given to all sick miners whether European or Chinese. The list attached to the testimonial contained several Chinese names.¹⁰⁴⁶ The gold samples pleased Knight enormously. In his response to the chairman's address, he said he was unable to retain a purse of sovereigns long, but he would try and keep the gold intact to hand on to his family.¹⁰⁴⁷

Knight did not approve of Chinese practices in the goldfields. He said the Chinese miner did not prospect on new country, but followed in the steps of the white miner going over ground that had been previously mined. Knight offered an example of one particular mine called Fountain Head where two Europeans had mined and found gold; now in 1879, 1,500 Chinese were there. Knight wanted the mining act changed to cover that where ground yielding gold was discovered, it should be reserved for the benefit of Australian miners for two or three years and when abandoned the foreign miner could then go in and mine.¹⁰⁴⁸

Knight requests leave

In May 1879 Knight requested leave. In a letter to Price, Knight argued that as a public servant working in the Territory he should be permitted to have a holiday and return to his duties refreshed.¹⁰⁴⁹ Knight would have been pleased to hear that his

¹⁰⁴⁵ 'Country correspondence', *NTTG*, 8 March 1879.

¹⁰⁴⁶ 'Presentation to Mr J.G. Knight', *NTTG*, 8 March 1879.

¹⁰⁴⁷ 'Presentation to Mr J.G. Knight', *NTTG*, 8 March 1879.

¹⁰⁴⁸ 'Country correspondence', *NTTG*, 3 May 1879.

¹⁰⁴⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3470, Letter 19 May 1879. Knight to Government Resident.

leave of absence for two months was approved by the minister, together with the repayment of passage money to and from Port Adelaide.¹⁰⁵⁰

Just before he left Palmerston, Knight wrote to Price that he was not forwarding his annual report as he did not wish to trouble him [Price] because when he arrived in Adelaide he intended to see the minister and offer his insight into the affairs of the Territory.¹⁰⁵¹ Knight must have been thinking of how he could use this leave as a means of obtaining some other position as well as being chief warden. Having his annual report on hand gave him the opportunity he needed to meet with the minister. Paul Foelsche was appointed acting chief warden during Knight's absence.¹⁰⁵²

Conclusion

During the four years in this remote area of the NT Knight achieved a considerable amount. He undertook many positions, these being: chief warden, special magistrate, coroner and de facto medical officer. Knight read widely on medical complaints, and considering he had a basic knowledge of medicine, he pressured the government into acquiring an old hotel which he renovated and established as a hospital. As the quasi medical officer Knight treated both European and Chinese miners alike.

Knight had been cut off from society in Palmerston, but through his weekly journalistic contributions retained a sense of normality and humour as he related the varied episodes in the progress of the goldfields. In addition to the factual part of his correspondence, he was able to captivate his readers by entertaining them as a character named Alonzo Brown. As Brown, Knight related many an exaggerated, but possibly true tale of the happenings in the gold fields. In 1879 Knight took holiday leave and travelled to Melbourne and Adelaide.

Knight's actions during his leave of absence, as described in Chapter Seven, clearly show how he cleverly manipulated what his future would be on his return to Palmerston. One aspect was that he was still to be chief warden, but no longer living in the goldfields. The next few years were some of the most enterprising for Knight in the NT and he proved his versatility by undertaking a variety of positions.

¹⁰⁵⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3537, Letter 23 June 1879. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁵¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3662, Letter 10 October 1879. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁵² 'Appointment', *NTTG*, 11 October 1879.

Chapter Seven

Knight pursues a career in Palmerston, 1880-1883

Knight's leave was ostensibly to have been a break from his four years spent in the goldfields but after a brief stop-over in Melbourne he continued his travels to Adelaide. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Knight had notified Price that he would personally hand his annual report on mining to Thomas King, the minister handling the NT. This was to ensure he was on hand to answer any questions on the Territory the minister may have wished to ask.

Knight must have presented as an indispensable official as he obtained several new positions which he took up on his return to Palmerston a few months later. It appears he made a deliberate decision that he did not want to return to the goldfields, but wanted to be employed in responsible positions in the town and to enjoy society.

Knight goes on leave and plans future positions for himself

Knight arrived in Melbourne on the 4 November 1879. What he did or whom he saw is not known but presumably he met up with family and friends. On 14 November Knight sent a rather obscure telegram to Price requesting for his stores to be forwarded to Yam Creek. In all probability Knight had given Price's secretary Sam Reynolds a list of stores to be obtained by the agents P.R. Allen.¹⁰⁵³ Knight's Melbourne address on the telegram was 38 Flinders Lane. Was the telegram a ploy to make Price think Knight was returning to the goldfields? If unsuccessful in obtaining an alternative position in town, at least the stores would have been delivered to his home at Yam Creek.

The *NTTG* indicated in early December that Knight would not be returning on the *Atjeh* as his leave had been extended. The next sentence in the newspaper is a little confusing when mention was made that his presence in Sydney would convince people that the Territory is not an unhealthy place to live.¹⁰⁵⁴ The only shipping

¹⁰⁵³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3747, Telegram 14 November 1879. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁵⁴ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 6 December 1879.

record alluding to Knight being in Sydney was when he was returning to Port Darwin from Melbourne and his steamer called into Sydney in May 1880.¹⁰⁵⁵

Knight left Melbourne for Adelaide on 31 December aboard the *Victorian*¹⁰⁵⁶ and within a few days of arriving he is reported in the *South Australian Register* as preparing an exhaustive report connected with his work and expected to depart for the Territory in about two weeks. Added to the article is mention that Knight was 'looking exceedingly well'.¹⁰⁵⁷ Knight's meeting with King must have gone well, for the minister then notified Price that Knight's leave had been extended until the departure of the next steamer.¹⁰⁵⁸ The *NTTG* kept the locals informed as to when Knight was returning as they wrote his leave had been extended to 14 May.¹⁰⁵⁹ While Knight was in Adelaide the Sydney International Exhibition was on. Knight representing South Australia won a fourth class in the reefs and alluvial gold category.¹⁰⁶⁰

An article in the *SAR*, tells of Knight editing and publishing a small sketch on the Northern Territory. The work included extracts from various reports, records and official dispatches, including not only Knight's writings but also those of other authors. These included Mr H Marcus, who had written a handbook on the colony of South Australia, and descriptions of central Australia from the pen of J.A. Giles. The sketch offered potential new settlers to the Territory all the information they would require including legislation, 'the geographical situation, the climate, the pastoral, agricultural, and mineral capabilities'. The writer of the newspaper article does criticise Knight for not putting forward his views on how best to stimulate growth in the Territory, but assumes that Knight had possibly already communicated his views on this to the SA government. The article lightly states Knight closed his sketch on the Territory by suggesting 'that if South Australia is tired of her white elephant, she should dispose of it to "a friend of his in the city," who is ready to give a good price for the neglected creature, and to cultivate choice produce for its nourishment'.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁵⁵ 'Clearances', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 1880.

¹⁰⁵⁶ 'Shipping Intelligence', *Argus*, 1 January 1880.

¹⁰⁵⁷ 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 8 January 1880.

¹⁰⁵⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3838, Telegram 21 January 1880. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁵⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 31 January 1880.

¹⁰⁶⁰ 'Sydney International Exhibition', *Evening Journal*, 3 March 1880.

¹⁰⁶¹ 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 18 March 1880.

The whole idea of the handbook was to draw the public's attention for a plan to construct a transcontinental railway.¹⁰⁶² SA's governor, Sir William Jervois, in opening a new session of parliament in July 1881 spoke strongly on the need to forge ahead with settlement in the NT by offering grants of land to capitalists on the understanding that they construct a transcontinental railway. Jervois regarded the railway as being so important he urged the government to give it its earnest attention.¹⁰⁶³ The editor of the *NTTG* said he cared little as to how the scheme to get the railway was constructed, as long as the work was executed 'on the fairest basis to all concerned'. He then quoted from Knight's pamphlet written the previous year and agreed with Knight's words: 'ask the world to bid for our land in payment for the Railway, and let the highest bidder become the purchaser'.¹⁰⁶⁴

Later that year when Knight was back in Palmerston someone calling himself Slouchy Bill from Sunny Slope wrote a letter to the editor of the *NTTG*. It appears this person only wrote under that pseudonym twice. Slouchy Bill talked about the necessity of a railway, whether it be transcontinental or one from Port Darwin to Pine Creek. He rightly stated that 'roads bring traffic, traffic brings commerce, and commerce brings population': normally this happened in other parts of Australia but the Territory was different. He stated that first a bonus was required to encourage someone to find a payable goldfield and to get a railway people must assist Knight in his endeavours to obtain this. The author said Knight spent his holiday in Adelaide working on getting the South Australian ministers to listen to his ideas in implementing the railway and that Knight had done the ground work and now the Territory people needed to get behind him. He finished by saying: 'I stick to J.G.K. – he's got a pier in his head, a railway at heart, and a land scheme under foot'.¹⁰⁶⁵

There may have been a shortage of stipendiary magistrates as Knight, although on leave, is mentioned three times in the *SAR* as serving in this position in Glenelg.¹⁰⁶⁶ Later in March Knight telegraphed Price saying he was seeing minister King in a few

¹⁰⁶² 'Mr. Knight's pamphlet on the Territory', *SAR*, 29 March 1880.

¹⁰⁶³ 'The transcontinental railway once more!', *NTTG*, 2 July 1881.

¹⁰⁶⁴ 'The transcontinental railway once more!', *NTTG*, 2 July 1881.

¹⁰⁶⁵ 'Facts, figures, and failures', *NTTG*, 18 September 1880.

¹⁰⁶⁶ 'Law and criminal courts', *SAR*, 10 March 1880; 'Law and criminal courts', *SAR*, 31 March 1880; 'Law and criminal courts', *SAR*, 6 April 1880.

days and would let Price know when he was definitely returning.¹⁰⁶⁷ Having seen the minister, Knight notified Price that the minister suggested he should stay in Adelaide for the present because of parliamentary action with regard to Knight being able to assist with the railway policy.¹⁰⁶⁸

Knight returns to Palmerston and a different lifestyle

Confident that he was not returning to the goldfields, Knight departed Adelaide on 13 April aboard the *Aldinga*,¹⁰⁶⁹ giving him a few days in Melbourne before boarding the steamship *Atjeh* which left for Sydney on the twentieth and then sailed onto Port Darwin. He telegraphed Price on Saturday 24 April from Sydney saying he was leaving Tuesday for Port Darwin and asked if Price would organise transfer of his furniture, books and effects from the Shackle.¹⁰⁷⁰

The talks with King had proved fruitful for Knight. Once Knight had left for Port Darwin, King telegraphed Price to say that Knight was returning as chief warden and that the position of assistant warden at a reduced salary would be soon determined.¹⁰⁷¹ The *Atjeh* steamed into Port Darwin on the 11 May¹⁰⁷² with Knight on board having been appointed to four new positions. These being: deputy-sheriff, government statistician, clerk of the licensing bench and clerk of the local court which resulted from the resignation of Thomas Burt who then practiced in town as barrister and solicitor.¹⁰⁷³ King notified Price that Knight was appointed to those positions from 15 April receiving the same salary as Burt.¹⁰⁷⁴ Another position Knight was given while in Adelaide was that of ‘curator of the property of convicts in and for the Northern Territory’ which was gazetted on 20 May.¹⁰⁷⁵ The official

¹⁰⁶⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3922, Telegram 25 April 1880. Knight to Government Resident. The date appears to be incorrect as the cover note is dated 25 March 1880 and fits in with other information.

¹⁰⁶⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3932, Telegram 1 April 1880. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁶⁹ ‘Shipping News’, *SAA*, 14 April 1880.

¹⁰⁷⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3965, Telegram 24 April 1880. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁷¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A3966, Telegram 26 April 1880. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁷² ‘Shipping’, *NTTG*, 15 May 1880.

¹⁰⁷³ ‘General news’, *Adelaide Observer*, 17 April 1880.

¹⁰⁷⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A4029, Telegram 21 May 1880. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁷⁵ ‘Government Gazette’, *SACWM*, 22 May 1880.

letter from the minister said that the governor had appointed Knight to these various positions dated 5 August 1880, but not received by Price until 2 September 1880.¹⁰⁷⁶

Exhibitions never far from Knight's thoughts

During the trip home to Palmerston, Knight sent a letter to a friend in Melbourne who published an extract of this correspondence in the Melbourne newspaper the *Argus*. His friend Robert Wallen considered Knight's suggestions for the forthcoming Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880-1881 sound and worthy of consideration by the commissioners and the public. One of Knight's proposals was to exhibit all minerals in an underground gallery that would be about eight foot wide and seven feet high, with descending and ascending shafts being eight or ten feet square to allow several people at a time to descend. He further wrote:

The lifts being worked by steam or water power, and might embrace the newest devices in safety-cages. The gallery should be ... furnished as nearly as possible as in nature with the ores of silver, iron, lead, antimony, cinnabar, copper, coal, gold in quartz and drift ... built in veins and lodes, so as to form the walls of the gallery ... The shafts might be from 50ft. to 100ft. deep, and gallery from 50ft. to 100ft. long, according to the funds available. Lighted by gas, and occasionally by the electric light, such a subterranean exhibition would be both attractive and instructive.¹⁰⁷⁷

Knight said if he had control of a mineral gallery he would made it the 'lion' of the exhibition attracting thousands of people. He put forward another idea to Wallen, which was to display balls of metal from each colony and internationally. The metal balls from Victoria would be gold, lead and antimony, from Western Australia lead, South Australia would supply copper, California, silver, New Caledonia, nickel and so forth. Knight added that 'a portion of each sphere should be polished'. It does not appear his ideas were heeded. The Melbourne International Exhibition was successful and by 31 December 1880 a total of 570,124 people had attended,¹⁰⁷⁸ but there had been a lack of courtesy shown to overseas visitors by the organisers of the event's opening ceremony.

About two thousand of the best seats were reserved by the commissioners for their family and friends. There had been numerous complaints by visiting Europeans who had assumed they would have been offered good seating, as at the Paris Universal

¹⁰⁷⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A4165, Letter 5 August 1880. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁷⁷ 'The Melbourne exhibition-some practical suggestions', *Argus*, 22 May 1880.

¹⁰⁷⁸ 'Chronicle of the year 1880', *Argus*, 1 January 1881.

Exposition in 1878 visitors were honoured and given reserved seats. The problem for the commissioners was not only discourtesy in seating arrangements for foreign visitors, but in the allotted exhibiting space the largest area was given to Victoria, while the other Australian colonies and New Zealand were given smaller, badly designed areas and Europeans and Americans were at the remote end of the building. All of the Melbourne arrangements were contrary to how foreigners to France had been treated in Paris in 1878.¹⁰⁷⁹ The *Argus* newspaper wrote at length on this subject, with *Melbourne Punch* vigorously attacking the commissioners by saying they have ‘bullied sometimes, blustered other times, and bungled at all times’. One interesting line written in *Punch* was, ‘we cannot help thinking with regret of what might have been, had such a man as J.G. Knight been entrusted with the management of affairs’.¹⁰⁸⁰ Undoubtedly Knight thought the same.

Mining and a new warden

When Knight took his leave in 1879, Foelsche became acting warden but was replaced by George Montague from 23 December.¹⁰⁸¹ Montague did not last long in the position of acting warden as he resigned and the post was taken over by police troopers Adolph Fopp and C.W. Lees.¹⁰⁸² All of Knight’s temporary replacements possibly found that being warden was not quite the comfy job they assumed it to be.

In May 1880, miners were wondering when they were going to get another warden as having police in this role showed they did not make good wardens. Knight had requested from King a set of boring tools that could make up to 200 feet in length ‘for the purpose of testing ground for deep leads of gold’. On arrival these tools would be used by genuine miners for deep sinking.¹⁰⁸³ In a letter to the editor of the *NTTG* a miner signing himself Lynx, wrote how he and two mates missed Alonzo and his narrative of various goldfield stories. Although written by an articulate person who was not trying to emulate Knight in literary skills, Lynx wondered where mining was drifting to without the government supplying capital into the goldfields, saying that of the £50,000 spent annually on the Territory hardly any found its way

¹⁰⁷⁹ ‘Exhibition notes’, *Argus*, 14 September 1880; see also *Argus*, 15 September 1880, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸⁰ ‘How to make the exhibition a success’, *Melbourne Punch*, 30 September 1880.

¹⁰⁸¹ ‘Appointment’, *NTTG*, 20 December 1879.

¹⁰⁸² ‘Appointments’, *NTTG*, 27 March 1880.

¹⁰⁸³ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 29 May 1880.

to the mining areas. He suggested 'some tangible encouragement for prospecting'.¹⁰⁸⁴

In June, King notified Price that Charles Nash was appointed warden of the goldfields.¹⁰⁸⁵ But things were not improving by August, when another disgruntled miner wrote to the newspaper editor. The writer, William Mathers, wrote that all the miners had held Knight in high esteem and he had their confidence as he had been noted for his justice and impartiality and gave dignity to the bench. With regard to Warden Nash, Mathers said that although most miners respected him, he did not have the experience to command confidence in his judicial decisions. In cases of appeal, it was an expense for miners to go to Palmerston to see Knight and attend the local court. Mathers stated all the miners wanted was an experienced warden who was paid a good salary and had their confidence.¹⁰⁸⁶ A few newspaper articles claim Nash made such decisions that did not follow the letter of the law.¹⁰⁸⁷

Neglect on the goldfields

In July 1880, a man signing himself Observer offered a mining summary of the goldfields for the local paper. His observations on this tour were detailed, offering the names of the mines he visited, who the miners were and what was happening in their area. Observer visited Bridge Creek, Howley and on the way to John Bull saw deserted gardens that had been left by their Chinese workers who had rushed off to the good diggings at the Margaret. He then visited John Bull, the Gums, Fountain Head, Union and Mount Wells. Along the way, Observer called into the Shackle, and stated that the only place he sighted that was not in decay or desertion was that of the telegraph station. He wrote the following:

Since Mr Knight left here everything has gone to the dogs, or more literally speaking to the white ants. The Hospital, or the Miners' Ward, as it was called, one the greatest boons that the miners ever had here, has caved in, no one being found bold enough or humane enough to carry on the good work that Mr Knight so valiantly tackled and carried on so successfully for a long time. It is a shame to the leading merchants and miners up here to have allowed this place to lapse without one single effort to keep it in existence. Goodness knows when they are likely to have such another chance of establishing an [sic] hospital in their midst! Here is a district with a population of fifteen hundred or over (Chinese predominating of course)

¹⁰⁸⁴ 'Our difficulties', *NTTG*, 19 June 1880.

¹⁰⁸⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A4067, Telegram 18 June 1880. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁰⁸⁶ 'Mining judicature', *NTTG*, 7 August 1880.

¹⁰⁸⁷ 'Warden's decision', *NTTG*, 24 July 1880; 'Facts, figures and failures', *NTTG*, 11 September 1880.

within a radius of thirty miles, and where the germ of the future existence and prosperity of the Northern Territory is to be found, and the place of greatest danger to life and limb, and not a doctor within a hundred and forty-five miles of the place.¹⁰⁸⁸

Not having visited the goldfields since his return to Palmerston, it appears Knight requested some of his private drugs from the medical cabinet he had used at the Shackle. Price who was in the goldfields at the time, sent a curt telegram to his secretary Sam Reynolds to tell Knight that the drug list did not say what was private so the cabinet would remain in the goldfields for the purpose for which it was supplied.¹⁰⁸⁹ Over the following four years, Knight in reality did little work in the position of chief warden. At various times people alluded to the fact that he did not visit the mining communities. The only time he ventured to any of these places was when he travelled there with the ministerial party in early 1882, which is discussed later in the chapter.

Knight takes on his new positions and settles into Palmerston

Knight was appointed curator of intestate estates in the Northern Territory in April 1880,¹⁰⁹⁰ but this appointment was cancelled the following month.¹⁰⁹¹ Despite this, in June 1880 Knight was advertising in Palmerston under public notices as the curator of intestate estates.¹⁰⁹² According to newspaper notices, Knight continued acting in this role through the latter part of 1880, and in 1881 the wording of the notice changed to read 'Agent for the Curator of Intestate Estates'.¹⁰⁹³ Knight may have been unaware of the cancellation back in May 1880, but was later re-instated by the minister as agent only.

It appears Knight's decision to live in Palmerston was being in the right place at the right time. There was an upsurge in building that was helped by having cheap labour of both the Chinese and Europeans. De La Rue writes that 'the mood of optimism which prevailed during Price's term of office infected the South Australian government, and some serious money was at last expended on public work in the

¹⁰⁸⁸ 'Mining summary', *NTTG*, 3 July 1880.

¹⁰⁸⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A4106, Telegram 22 July 1880. Government Resident to Sam Reynolds.

¹⁰⁹⁰ 'The Government Gazette', *SAR*, 16 April 1880.

¹⁰⁹¹ 'Appointment cancelled', *SAR*, 21 May 1880.

¹⁰⁹² 'Public notice', *NTTG*, 12 June 1880.

¹⁰⁹³ 'Notice', *NTTG*, 12 March 1881.

Territory'.¹⁰⁹⁴ The buildings improved in quality, with two new structures being erected, one for the officers of the Overland Telegraph Department on the Esplanade and the other a shipping office in Mitchell Street.¹⁰⁹⁵ It was noted in the *NTTG* that Knight had quickly set about making improvements around the civil servants' quarters. Knight had the unsightly areas cleared, raked, and prepared for planting food-bearing trees such as carob, pomegranates, and olives, and for shade and colour, laurel and oleanders were planted.¹⁰⁹⁶

Knight's next project was to erect an enclosure for swimming baths at the base of Fort Hill. Under his direction and using prison labour, the area had been completely cleared of rocks and securely fenced. The fencing was vital because of crocodiles and sharks in the harbour. Allowing for the great variance of tides, the baths were designed to always have about seven feet of water to allow some bathing. These proved a very popular venue for both women, children and men, although men had to take their dip early or late, up to six thirty in the morning and after four thirty in the afternoon. The women and children had the use of the baths between these times. Knight was one of the early bathers together with Price, McMinn and Little.¹⁰⁹⁷

Family affairs

Knight possibly saw his eldest daughter Alice when visiting Melbourne earlier in the year, as much had happened during the three years since he had last seen his children. His wife and four of his children had travelled to England in 1876, where his daughter Lizzie married later that year, then left London to briefly live in Sydney. Knight first became a grandfather in 1878 and again in 1880 when Lizzie gave birth to two daughters.¹⁰⁹⁸ On 6 November 1880, Alice married Thomas Culpan by registrar in Melbourne.¹⁰⁹⁹ Alice was twenty-three at the time, and Thomas twenty-six. Culpan was from New Zealand and manager of the NZ Insurance Company in Melbourne. He was transferred to Launceston where they lived for a short time then

¹⁰⁹⁴ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁹⁵ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 28 August 1880.

¹⁰⁹⁶ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 3 July 1880.

¹⁰⁹⁷ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 2 October 1880.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Personal information given to author from Garth Jenkins, 2014.

¹⁰⁹⁹ 'Marriages', *Australasian*, 13 November 1880.

moved to Invercargill, New Zealand.¹¹⁰⁰ Alice had borne two sons, in 1881 and 1883. Later, both of Knight's daughters were living in New Zealand. Here was another of his children marrying and Knight not being there for the wedding; neither it seems was his wife. Knight's friendship with his old friend Sali Cleve had endured the years, for Alice had given the name Cleve as a second name for her first born. A letter acknowledging a draft from Knight's salary attests to Alice (Knight's wife) still being in London in December 1882.¹¹⁰¹

The Chinese question is raised once again

Although Knight had publicly been vocal with his views on the subject of vast numbers of Chinese coming into the Territory, he was certainly fair in his dealings with them in judicial matters. An example of this was when four Chinese men were charged by police with stealing gold from the post office and burying it in their garden at Southport. While looking for the gold the police had damaged the garden. The Chinese men were brought before Knight, who having heard the evidence discharged them. Having been held in custody for a week, Knight suggested to Price that the men deserved some compensation as he felt they had a legal claim against the government, and suggested they each be offered £2 for damage done to their property. He stated that 'it would be a small atonement for the wrong done to them by the authorities and would tend to show that the law, if not generous, was not unjust'.¹¹⁰²

In October 1880 word was received that 1,000 Chinese had left Hong Kong and were heading for Port Darwin. At the same time approximately thirty Europeans decided to return south. The problem appeared to be that not all of the Chinese heading to the goldfields would pay for their miners' rights. Some of the Chinese in Palmerston signed for three months work on the sugar plantation on Cox Peninsula, making a total of seventy Chinese and ten Europeans working there.¹¹⁰³

¹¹⁰⁰ Family records from descendant Garth Jenkins emailed 3 December 2015. A search of passenger shipping records has not revealed when the Culpans sailed to Launceston or New Zealand. Researched material has not indicated that Knight or his wife attended the wedding.

¹¹⁰¹ SRSA GRS/1/1882/39, Letter 1 December 1882. Alice Knight to Minister.

¹¹⁰² NTAS, NTRS 790, item A4277, Memo 15 August 1880. Knight to Government Resident.

¹¹⁰³ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 2 October 1880.

Two years later the Northern Territory was changing its views on the Chinese question. At the Chinese banquet held in honour of the visiting ministerial party in March 1882, the government resident paid tribute to the Chinese who had peacefully travelled to the goldfields and been law-abiding people. Initially he said, they did not pay tax, but with customs duties imposed they paid duty on gold equally with Europeans who did not have their flour taxed while the Chinese rice had been taxed. Price said the Chinese had been criticised for taking their gold back to China, but he stated that the European miner had also taken his gold with him when he departed the Northern Territory.¹¹⁰⁴

After a toast, the Chinese written response was read by Price. In this address the Chinese wrote that they respected the law of Australia and were a peaceable people and were pleased that the government had not restricted immigration to the Northern Territory. The Chinese claimed that if it had not been for their numbers coming into the Territory the situation in the mining fields would not be as prosperous as it was. They also considered the export duty on gold was an imposition and unfair. The Chinese expressed the fact that Australians considered them a migratory race, but they had not received any inducement to settle in the Territory, though many expressed they would like an opportunity of settling and working in agriculture.¹¹⁰⁵

Knight's professional life

For the 1880 Christmas festive season Knight was able to enjoy a far more sociable time in Palmerston than he had endured while working in the goldfields. Throughout 1881 Knight was busy carrying out his duties in the local court dealing with various crimes or disagreements, working as crown prosecutor, a position to which he was appointed in April,¹¹⁰⁶ or sitting on the licensing bench where people requested licences as publicans, storekeepers, or for a slaughtering. He worked as agent for the curator of intestate estates and of course as deputy sheriff. In the House of Assembly on 7 February 1884, Minister Parsons was asked by Mr Johnson how many offices Knight held in the Territory, to which Parsons replied: seven. Knight's salary was

¹¹⁰⁴ 'Banquet to the ministerial party by the Chinese residents of Port Darwin', *NTTG*, 25 March 1882.

¹¹⁰⁵ 'Banquet to the ministerial party by the Chinese residents of Port Darwin', *NTTG*, 25 March 1882.

¹¹⁰⁶ 'Appointments', *NTTG*, 30 April 1881.

£450 per annum with £64.15s in allowances and an additional £21 as crown prosecutor. In total, Knight received £535.15s.¹¹⁰⁷

He continued to do the administrative duties of chief warden and coroner and in May received a letter from Ping Que giving him an update on the state of mining in the goldfields. Ping Que said that water was very scarce and a reasonable amount of gold was being recovered from Saunders Rush. There were 172 Chinese men there, and 150 of them collectively found over 600 ounces in two weeks. Ping Que said there were now nearly 500 Chinese in the goldfields and if there was more water there would be room for a few hundred more people. Ping Que finished his letter by saying there were plenty of cheap provisions available and he believed that during the next wet season there would be a large population in the goldfields.¹¹⁰⁸

In a letter to the *NTTG*, Knight wrote of the interest there was then in the discovery of tin. Three years earlier he gave a licence to a miner to search for tin, but in reality this person was searching for gold. Miners could of course take out ordinary gold licences, wash out the gold in the tin sand but leave the tin behind. Several ounces of gold were taken from the tin sand, but the gold yield gradually subsided. Knight sent a sample of the sand to a friend, J. Cosmos Newberry, an eminent metallurgical chemist in Melbourne and the assay of the material gave 65 percentage of tin and gold at a rate of seventy three ounces per ton. Knight obtained other sand where a miner had obtained gold and this he also forward to Newberry where the assay on this tin sand was fifteen ounces and ten pennyweight of gold to the ton. The sand was worth £40 per ton. Knight had thought the possibility existed that some of the tin in the Territory contained gold and he was happy to receive samples of any stream or lode tin to ascertain if they did indeed contain gold.¹¹⁰⁹

The editor of the *NTTG* warned people to be careful about the tin finds, as it appeared over 200 people in Adelaide had applied for tin selections. He hoped that they would be able to stop any swindling happening in Adelaide in 1881, because they were not around in 1873 when swindling hurt many people.¹¹¹⁰ The SA

¹¹⁰⁷ 'House of Assembly', *SAR*, 8 February 1884.

¹¹⁰⁸ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 21 May 1881.

¹¹⁰⁹ 'Gold and tin', *NTTG*, 15 October 1881.

¹¹¹⁰ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 22 October 1881.

government had instructed the government resident to send an official party to visit and report on the tin discovery at Mount Wells.¹¹¹¹

Knight tests the timbers

Timber was sent to Port Darwin from SA for building purposes for quite some time. W.C. Davies from Adelaide sent Knight several timber samples from the Warrabarra forest to test their resilience against white ants. Among the timbers to be tested were Western Australian jarrah and karri and the Australian native pine together with a timber from Singapore known as gatty. The results from Knight's test were that all the timbers with the exception of the native pine and gatty were riddled by ants, thus proving that other than gatty, imported timbers were inappropriate building materials for the Northern Territory.¹¹¹²

Knight's social and everyday life

Knight always delighted in social events and in one successful theatrical performance received an encore, but what he actually did is not noted. Burt gave some recitations and Mayhew played the cornet. Mayhew was reported as playing with a 'softness and expression of musical feeling that we only remember to have heard from Koenig¹¹¹³ a very long time ago'.¹¹¹⁴ A couple of months later in August 1881, Knight participated in a concert in aid of a Palmerston church building fund held in a local hall. The government resident was in the chair, while both ladies and gentleman performed to a large receptive audience. Knight sang a duet with Mr Stow called 'All's Well' which he followed with a solo 'Oft in the Stilly Night' and concluded his appearance with a recit¹¹¹⁵ and air, 'Death of Nelson'. Instrumental selections from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pinafore*, were given by McMinn on violin, Mayhew on

¹¹¹¹ 'South Australia', *Australasian*, 22 October 1881.

¹¹¹² 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 2 July 1881.

¹¹¹³ The Koenig referred to is unknown. Possibly Mayhew had some knowledge of the French scientific instrument maker of that name who worked on the study of acoustics, but this seems unlikely. See University of Cambridge, 'Rudolph Koenig (1832-1901)'.

¹¹¹⁴ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 4 June 1881.

¹¹¹⁵ 'Recit' probably from the word 'recitative', meaning a style of vocal music between speaking and singing; *Macquarie Dictionary*, p. 1470.

cornet and Sackse on piano.¹¹¹⁶ Palmerston was a town with a very small European population, but produced considerable musical talent.

The Christmas festivities for 1882 had not truly abated, for a ball was given by the Palmerston police and held in a large marquee at the barracks. A band entertained while guests danced on the smooth cypress pine temporary floor until very late. Knight, in a toast for the evening, stated that the 'Police Ball had been one of the greatest successes ever witnessed in Palmerston'.¹¹¹⁷

Social life was important to these isolated people and in March 1883 interested parties formed an Amateur Dramatic and Musical Society with an annual subscription of one pound, one shilling.¹¹¹⁸ Previously in 1879 a similar group called the Palmerston Dramatic Club had been formed and gave a few performances during the year.¹¹¹⁹ The Palmerston Debating Society was created in November 1879 but was short lived, and with the consent of subscribers the Dramatic Club was resuscitated.¹¹²⁰ Most meetings of various associations were held at the court house. Knight was among five men elected to form a committee of the Palmerston Rifle Club¹¹²¹ and one of seven men on the management committee for the literary institute for the next fifteen months.¹¹²²

A ministerial party arrives from Adelaide to tour the interior of the NT

John Langdon Parsons, minister for the NT, sent a telegram to Price asking him to arrange for surveyor David Lindsay, Knight and Foelsche to accompany a ministerial party from Adelaide on a trip to the reefs. Price was also asked to arrange fourteen horses to be available.¹¹²³ Good food was never far from Knight's thoughts. Appropriately, he was put in charge of the commissariat department for this trip. The *NTTG* stated that it could not be placed in better hands.¹¹²⁴

¹¹¹⁶ 'Grand concert in aid of the building fund of the Palmerston church', *NTTG*, 13 August 1881.

¹¹¹⁷ 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 17 February 1883.

¹¹¹⁸ *NTTG*, 3 March 1883.

¹¹¹⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 15 February 1879.

¹¹²⁰ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 22 November 1879.

¹¹²¹ 'Palmerston rifle club', *NTTG*, 22 October 1881.

¹¹²² 'Palmerston institute', *NTTG*, 15 October 1881.

¹¹²³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A5243, Telegram 30 January 1882. Parsons to Government Resident.

¹¹²⁴ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 4 February 1882.

The Adelaide party led by Parsons, consisted of three other ministers, Bright, Furner and Bagster and one journalist William Sowden representing the *SAR* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, together with an expert on natural science from the University of Adelaide, Professor Ralph Tate. The party left Adelaide on 30 December 1881 arriving in Darwin 21 February 1882.

The men departed Port Darwin for Southport on 23 February, where they selected their horses, and with pack horses and drivers set off the following morning to the goldfields. It was probably the worst time of year to commence a tour of the interior, with blazing sun followed by heavy showers that turned tracks into quagmires and drenched everyone. This turned out to be a 350 mile round trip, visiting diggings, staying in local hotels and at one stage being entertained by five Chinese men at Bridge Creek. Back in Palmerston in mid-March, the party set out by boat to see the Daly River area, but due to very unfavourable weather the party returned to port setting out some days later to visit areas closer to Port Darwin.¹¹²⁵ Overall, the party was convinced that there would be a positive outcome for the NT and that a railway line to Pine Creek was a necessity. Parsons said he would recommend that at least 150 or 200 miles of railway should be constructed south from Port Darwin.¹¹²⁶

Sowden stayed on in the Territory for some weeks, riding out to visit local areas, sailing to other places and walking throughout Palmerston. He was impressed with some of the progress made, and in particular spoke highly of Knight's involvement in so many aspects of the town, dubbing him, 'the father, brother, uncle, aunt, and numerous other watchful relatives of the place'. Sowden later wrote a very comprehensive and graphic account of these travels.¹¹²⁷

Politicians do not keep their promises

While the ministerial party was in Palmerston, several local people took advantage of their presence by handing a memorial to Parsons on the subject of parliamentary representation for the Northern Territory. At that stage they were included in the district of Flinders which was 2000 miles away from any Territory voter. They asked

¹¹²⁵ William J, Sowden, *The Northern Territory As It Is*, pp. 6-164.

¹¹²⁶ 'Banquet to the ministerial party by the Chinese residents of Port Darwin', *NTTG*, 25 March 1882.

¹¹²⁷ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 18 March 1882.

the politicians for Territory inhabitants to be given a voice in government, as at that time they had no say in taxes and customs duties.¹¹²⁸ This subject was spoken of at the Chinese and European banquets and endorsed by Parsons, Bright, Furner and Bagster. Parsons stated that provision would be made in the new electoral bill for Territory representation and the electoral area would not be tacked onto another district.¹¹²⁹

In a letter to the editor of a South Australian newspaper in September 1882, a very disgruntled resident stated he and many Territory residents believed the politicians when they spoke at both the European and Chinese banquets in Palmerston that the Territory would gain independent representation. Giving faith to this promise, the people secured their own candidate.¹¹³⁰ Alas, politicians do not always practice what they preach. In 1883, the governor in council appointed Knight to be assisting returning officer for the electoral district of Flinders.¹¹³¹ It was not until 1888 that the Territory had its own member in the House of Assembly.¹¹³²

Tin mining

In April 1882 Knight received specimens of tin ore which he showed to the newspaper editor who considered it was silver-lead. Knight requested large quantities of two or three tons of this material so he could judge its worth.¹¹³³ A couple of months later Knight received a letter from a miner telling him of the news to hand of splendid specimens of gold from the Margaret claim which was southeast of Yam Creek.¹¹³⁴ In mining news in September, twenty-five tons of tin ore had been taken to Southport to await a steamer to Sydney, with another five tons still on the road. Hopes were that if mining continued to progress at this rate, three hundred tons could be shipped monthly.¹¹³⁵ In October 1882, Knight wrote to the minister for the Territory via Price requesting that Parsons consider that tin mining come under the

¹¹²⁸ 'Independent representation', *NTTG*, 25 March 1882.

¹¹²⁹ 'Banquet to the ministerial party by the Chinese residents of Port Darwin', *NTTG*, 25 March 1882.

¹¹³⁰ Disgusted Territorian, 'Parliamentary representation for the Northern Territory', *SAR*, 29 September 1882.

¹¹³¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6352, Telegram 25 October 1883. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹¹³² Dean Jaensch (ed.), *The Flinders history of South Australia: Political history*, p. 166.

¹¹³³ *NTTG*, 8 April 1882.

¹¹³⁴ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 22 July 1882.

¹¹³⁵ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 9 September 1882.

authority of the warden, and that limited tin claim areas be worked by miners along the same lines as applied to quartz and alluvial gold claims. 'Grants for lode tin being the same as for quartz, and stream tin being the same as for alluvial gold digging'.¹¹³⁶

A town hall for the people

The town was growing rapidly and it was an embarrassment not to have an appropriate building where social entertainment could take place. The residents would have been thrilled to hear a town hall was at last to be built. In March the previous year, the people of Palmerston were offered the opportunity to be entertained with a musical evening by the Carandini Operatic Company that was aboard the steamer *Meath* en route to Hong Kong. However there was not a suitable building to use as a venue, so the ship's captain generously placed the hurricane (upper) deck at the company's disposal and around 100 people enjoyed a very pleasant evening.¹¹³⁷

In July the district council resolved that Knight supervise the erection of a town hall and obtain the signatures of the contractors as per the specifications. The council expected all outside walls and roofing to be completed within six months and the entire interior to be completed and handed over to the council by 1 March 1883.¹¹³⁸ Like the Government Residence, the Town Hall was constructed of locally quarried porcellanite stone.

In the middle of August nearly all the people of Palmerston and beyond turned out to witness the government resident lay the foundation stone for the Town Hall. Knight was on hand to explain the building plans, then Victor Brown as chairman of the Palmerston District Council addressed the assembled people and introduced Government Resident Price who then mortared the foundation stone. Price in his address to the people said the Town Hall would be the first of its kind to be erected in Palmerston and was a sign of progress. All the relevant names and dates associated with this event were placed under the foundation stone. The information on the memento included the names of Price, Sir William Jervois, Knight, the contractors,

¹¹³⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1882/752, Goldfields warden report, 30 October 1882.

¹¹³⁷ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 12 March 1881.

¹¹³⁸ 'Palmerston district council', *NTTG*, 1 July 1882.

the council and the names of the very first council formed in 1874, together with a copy of the *NTTG*.¹¹³⁹

Life goes on in Palmerston

In the meantime, Knight continued working as crown prosecutor, sitting on the licensing bench, being deputy sheriff, chief warden and supervisor for the construction of the Town Hall. Along with Foelsche and Whitelaw he was then appointed to a board to examine and report on tenders for general supplies for government departments.¹¹⁴⁰ Judging by the number of advertisements in the *NTTG*, businesses were prospering. Three banks were operating, there were general stores, stone masons, merchants, importers, auctioneers, saddlers and publicans, a bread and biscuit factory, butchers and blacksmiths, with Chinese involved in some of these enterprises.¹¹⁴¹ Not only was business thriving, but larger premises were being built to house more fancy goods for the new partnership of Jolly and Luxton.¹¹⁴²

Toward the end of the year Knight received an ‘extra light allowance’ and together with Nash, an increase in salary.¹¹⁴³ Later in January 1883, Knight, along with thirty-nine other men listed in the *SAR*, was part of a group from which a quorum would be selected for rotation to be part of a court of marine enquiry.¹¹⁴⁴ It is assumed Knight was not selected as his name is not mentioned during the year in the *SAR*. In February 1883 he was offered another position from Adelaide. Price had been appointed special magistrate of the local court of insolvency and Knight, together with Edwin Sheppard, appointed clerk and messenger of the said court respectively. All these appointments were dated from 15 December 1881.¹¹⁴⁵

Knight asks for new accommodation

With buoyancy in building happening all around him, Knight wrote to Price with a request that he ask the minister for the Territory for a sum to be placed on the 1883-

¹¹³⁹ ‘Laying the foundation stone of the Palmerston Town Hall’, *NTTG*, 19 August 1882.

¹¹⁴⁰ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 24 June 1882.

¹¹⁴¹ ‘Business notices’, *NTTG*, 9 September 1882.

¹¹⁴² ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 2 October 1882.

¹¹⁴³ *SRSA GRS/1/1882/737*, Letter 30 October 1882. Government Resident to Minister.

¹¹⁴⁴ ‘Courts of marine enquiry’, *SAR*, 26 January 1883.

¹¹⁴⁵ *NTAS NTRS 790*, item A5917, Letter 14 February 1883. Attorney General’s Office to Government Resident.

1884 estimates to provide him a new residence. Knight's present dwelling was a wooden cottage sent up for use of the former chief warden, and now in a deplorable condition. Knight described the state of the house as follows:

My present dwelling consists of a sitting room, bed room, and small kitchen, the two latter are of wood so ant eaten as to be hanging in shreds. I have had to cover the gable end with a tarpaulin, to save the place from being blown away. I have fallen through the floor, which is over four feet from the ground, and bruised my ribs, and there is now only one board on either side of my bed on which one can safely walk.¹¹⁴⁶

Knight continued by saying the house he proposed to build would be closer to the road on a sloping bank. It would be two storey with a kitchen, store room, servants room and a bathroom down stairs, and bedroom upstairs with verandahs all round. The upstairs would be two feet above the road level to secure some sea breeze. The walls would be built of stone using prison labour and he would teach the Aborigines masonry skills. Knight considered £300 sufficient for the cost of the iron roof, verandah, timber, doors, windows and plastering work. Knight had conveniently worked out that as the prisoners working on the jetty could only do so at low tide, when the tide turned they could then work on his house. Knight received support from Price who emphasised in correspondence to Adelaide that the wood in Knight's present quarters was completely destroyed.¹¹⁴⁷

By April word had been received from Adelaide that provision for the erection of Knight's new quarters was to be made in the following year's estimates.¹¹⁴⁸ Judging by newspaper reports Knight started work on his new house in the latter part of 1883 as reference to this is made first in his letter to McMinn asking for new underground water tanks for the gaol, in which he suggested the walls be made of one foot thick concrete similar to his house.¹¹⁴⁹ Knight did come in for criticism from some of the public for using prison labour and for using a Chinese prisoner under a four year sentence for manslaughter as his cook and servant.¹¹⁵⁰

¹¹⁴⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1883/193, Letter 19 February 1883. Knight to Government Resident.

¹¹⁴⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1883/193, Letter 19 February 1883. Knight to Government Resident.

¹¹⁴⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6018, Letter 3 April 1883. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹¹⁴⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6320, Letter 1 October 1883. Knight to Acting Government Residence.

¹¹⁵⁰ 'Correspondence', *NTTG*, 20 October 1883.

Knight asks for remuneration for undertaking extra work

Even though Knight had recently received a salary increase, the continual drain on his money by paying Alice her monthly allocation must have reduced his finances. The previous year Knight may have been desperate for some ready cash as he had advertised his much-loved, white Timor pony for £14.¹¹⁵¹ Knight wrote to Price asking if he would oblige by forwarding a request to the minister for the Territory to see if he (Knight) could receive some recompense for taking on McMinn's role as acting supervisor of works when McMinn went on leave and on an exploratory trip in early 1882. Knight cited Foelsche having received compensation while acting warden when he went on leave in 1879, and Mr Cate when he acted as clerk of the court when Knight toured with the ministerial party. Knight received a favourable reply from South Australia, as cabinet approved £50 for special services both in the ministerial party and acting supervisor of works.¹¹⁵²

Lindsay, working under McMinn, wrote a letter to Price asking for him to reconsider whom he appointed acting supervisor of works during McMinn's leave of absence. McMinn had told Lindsay that Knight had been appointed to the post. Lindsay put forward his argument to Price that three years ago he had acted satisfactorily in that post when McMinn went south. Lindsay also pointed out that the rule of the service was that when an officer is away on leave the next officer was appointed.¹¹⁵³ Lindsay did not achieve his objective as Knight was officially appointed acting supervisor of works on 5 January.¹¹⁵⁴ Before McMinn's returned on 9 July,¹¹⁵⁵ Lindsay resigned from the public service and went into business for himself as a surveyor.¹¹⁵⁶

Town Hall is completed

As the Town Hall neared completion, Price telegraphed the minister for the Territory to notify him that a room in the hall had been rented from the council for the local court. Price requested that the Town Hall and new licensing bench be gazetted.¹¹⁵⁷

¹¹⁵¹ 'Public notices', *NTTG*, 9 September 1882.

¹¹⁵² *SRSA GRS/1/1883/227*, Letter 5 March 1883. Knight to Government Resident.

¹¹⁵³ *NTAS*, *NTRS* 790, item A5180, Letter 4 January 1882. Lindsay to Government Resident.

¹¹⁵⁴ 'Appointment', *NTTG*, 7 January 1882.

¹¹⁵⁵ 'Shipping', *NTTG*, 15 July 1882.

¹¹⁵⁶ *NTTG*, 6 May 1882.

¹¹⁵⁷ *SRSA GRS/1/1883/142*, Telegram 21 February 1883. Acting Government Resident to Minister.

Edward Price was leaving his position of government resident and Palmerston for a holiday in England. Before leaving Port Darwin, he performed the opening ceremony for the new town hall on 5 March 1883. Having laid the foundation stone the previous July, Price was handed the key to the completed building and ceremoniously unlocked the door. The party included Knight, McMinn, members of the council and of course most of the residents of Palmerston. After a toast of champagne to the government resident, Edward Price responded. He said it was with deep regret he was leaving Palmerston as he had spent many years amongst people who had been forgetful of his many faults and appreciative of his small virtues. Price said when he was offered the posting, Ebenezer Ward, who was then the minister for the Territory, said his stay would be short in Palmerston as the place would become deserted and be left in charge of the police.¹¹⁵⁸

On returning to Port Darwin in July 1876, Price said he noticed a great change, people had faith in the future of the Territory and had dealt with many difficulties, the climate, sickness and high prices for provisions. He further added that the gold yield had increased and many had prospered. Price even spoke of Sydney Harbour whose entrance is narrow in comparison to Darwin Harbour. A toast was made to Knight, and Knight in reply spoke of the friendship he and Price enjoyed. The government resident was then presented with a testimonial and a purse of sovereigns.¹¹⁵⁹ Price sailed south on the steamship *Bowen* on 6 March 1883.¹¹⁶⁰ With no successor to follow Price, McMinn became the acting government resident.

¹¹⁵⁸ 'Opening of the new town hall', *NTTG*, 10 March 1883.

¹¹⁵⁹ 'Opening of the new town hall', *NTTG*, 10 March 1883.

¹¹⁶⁰ 'Shipping', *NTTG*, 10 March 1883.

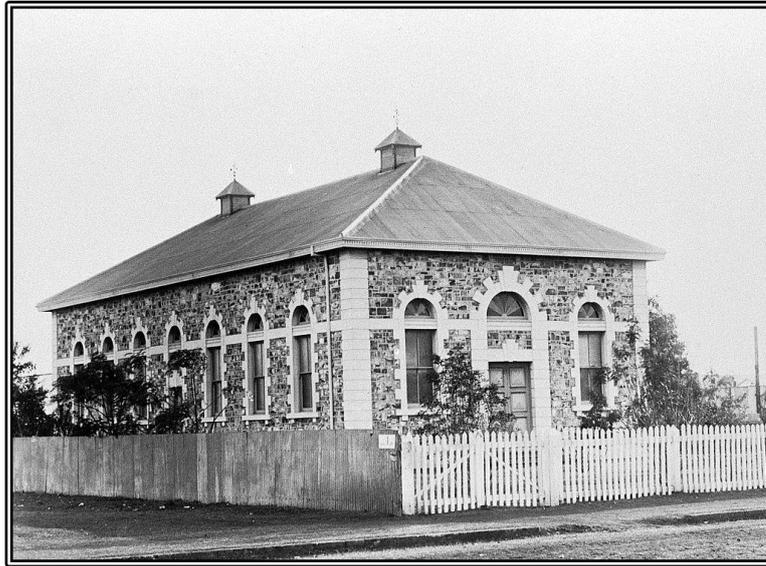


Figure 13. The Palmerston Town Hall, approximately 1895.

Having a permanent building such as their new town hall would have reinvigorated the town. Shortly after the hall opened, the Palmerston Dramatic and Choral Society approached the district council to see how much it was to hire the premises. The council set the price of three guineas, which was dearer by one guinea than having a political meeting in the Adelaide Town Hall.¹¹⁶¹ It is strange to think that the council would consider groups in Palmerston were more affluent than those in Adelaide.

Knight at odds with Foelsche

Over the many years Foelsche and Knight had been living in the NT there had been disputes between the two. In April 1883, a disagreement between them occurred because of a difference of interpretation of the law that required advice being sought from SA. The court case concerned Foelsche charging James Pratt and John Kite with unlawfully removing timber from leased waste ground without a valid licence or lawful authority. In court, Knight as stipendiary magistrate was asked by Solomon if he (Solomon) could appear for the defendant as he was the one who was interested in obtaining the timber. Foelsche objected to Solomon acting for the defendant saying he was not a qualified practitioner of the law. It appeared Foelsche had telegraphed Adelaide and was told it was illegal for anyone to appear in court if not

¹¹⁶¹ *NTTG*, 17 March 1883.

legally qualified. Knight said he would follow what his predecessor did who had allowed men ignorant of the law to have assistance and he therefore allowed Solomon to advise Pratt.¹¹⁶² Knight requested a ruling from Parsons¹¹⁶³ who further consulted Attorney General John Downer who ruled: 'It is at the magistrates discretion to allow nonprofessional persons to appear in Court to conduct cases and with the exercise of each discretion I do not feel inclined to interfere'.¹¹⁶⁴

In July there was another disagreement between Knight and Foelsche, when Knight refused to allow a police interpreter to interpret for a Chinese man. Foelsche immediately reported Knight to McMinn. The case concerned a Chinese man who tried to pass off fake gold to the manager of the Town and Country Bank, but the manager recognised the metal as fake. Knight's reason for not allowing the interpreter was that he was not going to subpoena the person in question.¹¹⁶⁵ Knight may have thought Foelsche was pedantic, but Foelsche undoubtedly thought himself as being correct.

New gaol at Fannie Bay

As well as in the general community, public works were progressing with the building of a gaol at Fannie Bay. Whether Knight was actually involved in drawing any of the early plans for the gaol is not documented but it is known that Knight later had installed underground rainwater tanks, and drew plans for the gaol infirmary. It appears that Oscar Reichardt, a government surveyor, prepared the plans for the gaol under the supervision of Gilbert McMinn,¹¹⁶⁶ who was then supervisor of works. The buildings were to have stone walls and use cypress pine timber.¹¹⁶⁷

The gaol site was on seventy-seven acres of government land in a prime position close by an elevated cliff overlooking Darwin Harbour, although the sixteen feet high perimeter walls 'built of galvanised iron and ironwood uprights and sawn rails' did not allow for any scenic views.¹¹⁶⁸ The prisoners were moved from the old town gaol

¹¹⁶² 'Law courts', *NTTG*, 14 April 1883.

¹¹⁶³ *SRSA GRS/1/1883/320*, Letter 10 April 1883. Knight to Minister.

¹¹⁶⁴ *SRSA GRS/1/1883/320*, Cover note 30 May 1883. Attorney General to Minister.

¹¹⁶⁵ *NTAS*, *NTRS* 790, item A6156, Letter 2 July 1883. Foelsche to Acting Government Resident.

¹¹⁶⁶ *NTAS*, *NTRS* 790, item 636, Letter 4 May 1889. Reichardt to F. Becker, Gaol Supervisor.

¹¹⁶⁷ 'Tenders', *NTTG*, 9 September 1882.

¹¹⁶⁸ *NTTG*, 3 March 1883.

to Fannie Bay on 20 September 1883. Moving the prisoners from the town conveniently separated them for the townspeople. The idea was for the gaol to be self-sufficient with prisoners growing most of their own food.¹¹⁶⁹ The old gaol was rudimentary in construction and what had not fallen down was removed. The twenty-one men in confinement comprised of nine Aborigines, one European, ten Chinese and one Filipino.¹¹⁷⁰

Knight receives criticism

There was some criticism that Knight did not employ unemployed men who could not work at the diggings because of the scarcity of water and who had applied to Knight for manual work. Being deputy sheriff at the time, Knight was using prison labour to improve the jetty at Fort Hill by driving in new piles. This work he left unfinished as the annual race meeting was to be held shortly and gave instructions for the prisoners to clear and improve the racecourse for this festive event. Locals saw the unusual sight of two buggy loads of prisoners being ferried out from town to the racecourse to beautify the course for the occasion. Knight was saving public funds by using prison labour on the jetty, but as it turned out the Racing Club had a balance of over £50 and it could have employed some of the unemployed men to clear the race track instead of using the available prison labour.¹¹⁷¹

Palmerston moved ahead in 1883

The year 1883 was a positive one for Palmerston. Substantial buildings had been constructed that included the court house, gaol, businesses and private houses. For a small town like Palmerston there must have been faith in the future for money to be invested in a second newspaper business commencing at the beginning of June. The editorial of the *North Australian* stated it was not just a newspaper but it was intended to be a paper where discussion of common interests could be expounded. Its main articles would deal with 'all questions of importance to the Territory, such as laws we live under and suggested reforms the progress of local industries and brief

¹¹⁶⁹ 'Departure of the convicts for Fannie Bay', *NTTG*, 22 September 1883.

¹¹⁷⁰ SRSA GRS/1/1884/385, Letter 23 May 1884. Knight to Government Resident.

¹¹⁷¹ 'Our Northern Territory letter', *SAA*, 17 September 1883.

outlines of important political movements in Europe and the colonies'. The editor stated he wished to work amicably with the *NTTG* for the good of the Territory.¹¹⁷²

The railway that Knight appeared to be consumed with was at last coming into being. Although not the transcontinental railway, it was at least a start by going from Palmerston to Pine Creek. The Railway Bill had been introduced in July in the House of Assembly for the first reading, the second and third in August and the first and second time in the Legislative Council, and became law on 4 September 1883. Parsons, having earlier in the year led the ministerial party in the Territory, was seen as the force behind the Bill being passed. Within two months the first party of surveyors arrived in Palmerston to undertake a survey for the line.¹¹⁷³ Later in August 1884 the Railway Loan Bill went close to being dismissed, and was only passed with a very small majority. Parsons who had been championing the Bill for the Northern Territory wrote in a telegram to McMinn: 'After long debate and severe opposition the Loan Bill authorising construction of Palmerston and Pine Creek railway and jetty at Port Darwin has been passed through all its stages in the House of Assembly'.¹¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

Knight's return to Palmerston and the work he undertook further contributed to the formation of the town. Added to his chief warden's position were four extra positions: deputy-sheriff, government statistician, clerk of the licensing bench and clerk of the local court. Although he was still chief warden, Knight did not venture to the goldfields again in this capacity, and the responsibility of warden was eventually given to Charles Nash. Although vocal in his concern about the numbers of Chinese living and arriving in Palmerston, Knight was fair on the Chinese in his judicial rulings. One instance was when some Chinese men were accused of stealing gold, when in fact it was a policeman. Some Chinese gardens were wrecked and Knight asked for compensation for the damage done to the gardens. Knight once more became involved in the local society and was part of a South Australian ministerial party visiting Palmerston and the mining areas.

¹¹⁷² 'Friday evening', *North Australian*, 1 June 1883.

¹¹⁷³ 'The Northern Territory in 1883', *NTTG*, 5 January 1884.

¹¹⁷⁴ 'Things and others', *North Australian*, 22 February 1884.

Businesses were thriving and he undertook the architectural drawing and supervision of a new town hall and was involved in the erection of several substantial buildings including sections of a new gaol. The Pine Creek railway line had been surveyed and was to become a reality. He was criticised as deputy sheriff for using prison labour for public works, but he had in fact saved money by not using government funds. He was also criticised for using prison labour to erect his own house on crown land just above the mud flats, but of course the house was not his personal property and would later be used by other public servants.

The following chapter covers Knight's next three years in Palmerston including the completion of his house, the commencement of the railway line to Pine Creek and continued architectural work, such as an infirmary at the gaol. Over these years Knight continued to be busy with his duties and involvement in social activities.

Chapter Eight

Knight continues to be ‘father, brother, uncle, aunt, and numerous other watchful relatives of the place’,¹¹⁷⁵ 1884-1886

During these years Knight retained his several civil servant positions, except that of chief warden, which he resigned in 1886. The work involved in the various areas did not diminish, nor did his social life. Acting in his legal capacity, Knight appears to have offered compassion to men and women who came before him, whether they were Chinese, Aborigines or European and assiduously fulfilled his other duties. Knight was openly spoken of by South Australians ‘as a badly-paid pluralist’.¹¹⁷⁶

In his personal domain, 1884 was a year to remember for Knight. At last, after all the years in the Territory, he had somewhere to call home with the construction of a house to his own design. Nevertheless during these years Knight received more criticism for his actions than at any other time in his public career. He may well have wondered many times whether deciding not to return to the goldfields was a bad choice. These matters will be discussed later in the chapter.

A permanent government resident appointed

The *North Australian* notified its readers on 15 February 1884 that it received a telegram from Adelaide alleging that James Langdon Parsons, the minister for the Territory, had been appointed government resident. The editor considered that having a gentleman such as Parsons, who as minister for the Territory had taken so much interest in various matters, would ensure that the country would go ahead under his leadership as government resident.¹¹⁷⁷ Another South Australian appointment to the Territory at the same time was that of Adelaide barrister Thomas Pater as stipendiary magistrate.¹¹⁷⁸

A day later the *NTTG* stated that McMinn, who was acting government resident at the time, had not received any news of his successor. The article further stated that if

¹¹⁷⁵ Sowden, *The Northern Territory As It Is*, p. 129.

¹¹⁷⁶ ‘Presentation to Mr. J.G. Knight’, *NTTG*, 7 May 1887.

¹¹⁷⁷ ‘Things and others’, *North Australian*, 15 February 1884.

¹¹⁷⁸ ‘Telegraphic news’, *North Australian*, 15 February 1884.

the current rumour was true and Parsons was replacing McMinn, the editors were disappointed. They considered that Parsons could do more for the Territory as its minister in Adelaide rather than being government resident in Palmerston. Similar thoughts applied to Pater. He was considered more important in Adelaide as a leading barrister than to be a stipendiary magistrate in Palmerston.¹¹⁷⁹ As the days passed and no official word was received that Parsons was indeed replacing McMinn, the rumour was considered false and the *NTTG* argued that if Parsons could retain his present portfolio he would not relinquish it for the posting of government resident.¹¹⁸⁰

By end of February 1884, when Parsons delivered his speech on the estimates of the Northern Territory in the House of Assembly he would have already been approached and accepted the position of government resident well before the official announcement. When preparing the estimates for the Northern Territory, Parsons had the boldness to ensure the increase of £500 to the yearly salary for the position. Previously the government resident had undertaken the role of magistrate, but the South Australian government felt it necessary that a legal man should hold the position. A salary of £1,000 was proposed for the stipendiary magistrate. A debate followed the presentation and all considered Parsons suitable for the position of government resident should he decide to take it.¹¹⁸¹

Edward Price, although on leave, officially held the position until 7 March 1884. In reply to a question from Ebenezer Ward regarding Price resuming his duties, Parsons said the government was in possession of Price's resignation.¹¹⁸² Parsons and Pater were officially appointed to their respective positions in the Northern Territory on 11 March 1884, and Edwin Smith became the new minister for the Territory.¹¹⁸³

The *Adelaide Observer* noted that Parsons had been appointed government resident and would depart Adelaide the following month in April. The newspaper offered accolades to Parsons for being an excellent speaker and 'an able and loyal

¹¹⁷⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 16 February 1884.

¹¹⁸⁰ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 23 February 1884.

¹¹⁸¹ 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 1 March 1884.

¹¹⁸² 'House of Assembly', *SAR*, 27 February 1884.

¹¹⁸³ 'Telegraphic news', *North Australian*, 14 March 1884.

colleague', who had advertised the Territory well to the outside world and it wished him well.¹¹⁸⁴

Parsons, his wife, three children and a governess arrived at Port Darwin on the *Menmuir* on 8 May 1884 together with Thomas Pater and his family.¹¹⁸⁵ The following morning at the court house Parsons was sworn in as the new government resident with an address from the district council read by Victor Voules Brown, to which Parsons delivered a lengthy response.¹¹⁸⁶ To welcome Parsons and Pater, Knight was one of five men selected to undertake arrangements for a banquet which was held in the Town Hall on Monday 12 May. The banquet was duly held, but it was noted in the *North Australian's* editorial that one of the drawbacks to the evening was a total lack of music and another was the absence of ladies. During his speech Parsons stated that as minister for the Territory, he had always felt that when he spoke of the Northern Territory there were 'a large number of men in South Australia whose ears I could never reach'.¹¹⁸⁷ Although they never visited the NT, most of the ministers from both sides of government considered that far too much money had been expended on the Territory already and it would continue to be a chain around the neck for SA.

The evening appeared to be one for toasting not only Parsons and Pater, but all the well-known residents of the town. Bank manager N.F. Christoe proposed the health of Knight, stating that Knight had 'discharged his multifarious duties with credit to himself and to the satisfaction of all concerned, and he had tempered his justice with mercy, and by his urbanity, and unfailing courtesy, had won golden opinions for himself from all with whom he had come in contact'. In reply, a flattered Knight said he was honoured by this introduction and further stated he never pretended to have legal knowledge, but during his two years as police magistrate 'he had been guided by his own common sense in the interpretation of acts of Parliament, on the supposition that they were founded on common sense'. He hoped everyone was satisfied by his judgments, but some that were languishing in Fannie Bay gaol might not agree. Knight finished by saying he was pleased by the recognition awarded him

¹¹⁸⁴ *Adelaide Observer*, 15 March 1884.

¹¹⁸⁵ 'Shipping', *North Australian*, 9 May 1884.

¹¹⁸⁶ 'Arrival of Mr J. Langdon Parsons', *North Australian*, 9 May 1884.

¹¹⁸⁷ 'Banquet to J.L. Parsons, Esq.', *North Australian*, 16 May 1884.

‘but he would not be averse to receiving a more substantial recognition and recompense from the Government’.¹¹⁸⁸ Between the toasts several men sang. Knight being one of the voices, sang ‘Tubal Caine’.¹¹⁸⁹

Government Residence

Parsons, of course had the Residency as his place of abode, while the government purchased Vaiben Solomon’s brick house on the Esplanade for the Pater family. Parsons was a popular choice for the majority of people in Palmerston, but Pater, who had been promised a judgeship if he came to the Territory, proved to be very unpopular shortly after arriving there. The local press wrote of Pater’s court manner as ‘impatient, hasty tempered, overbearing, and heartless’ and asked for an inquiry into his conduct. This was all aired at a public meeting of the Reform Association where eventually, after many resolutions and amendments, Solomon’s amendment ‘that a full and complete enquiry be held’ on Pater was carried.¹¹⁹⁰ De La Rue states that the South Australian government ‘as usual ignored the Territorians, and Pater became the “Judge of the Northern Territory” at the end of 1884’.¹¹⁹¹

Knight seen as pretentious by Leo

In March 1884 a poem was printed in the *North Australian* about Knight by Leo from Twelve Mile and titled ‘A Knightly Knock’:

There was a knight of Palmerston, and a great good knight was he,
He did rare deeds, so brave and good, so full of chivalry.
He would set free those felon birds that were in prison bound;
No man so full of holy love could in the world be found!
Those felon birds with him could ride and see the birthday races,
While honest fools applaud, and walk, with somewhat rueful faces,
He’d send them off to funerals, marching two and two,
And there, their sobs and crying showed their feelings good and true,

To see this knight, this good old knight, all armed capapie.
With cork helmet and silken veil, so glorious was he;
With riding switch and silver spurs, cuirass of calico,
Mounted on steed with arched neck at ambling pace he’d go.

To do those deeds, those gallant deeds—the deeds of “derringdo”
Which none but the brave, the utter brave, can ever hope to do;
He’d see the ladies, bow and smirk, and say “Tis warm to-day!”

¹¹⁸⁸ ‘Complimentary banquet to J.L. Parsons, Esq., Government Resident’, *NTTG*, 17 May 1884.

¹¹⁸⁹ ‘Banquet to J.L. Parsons, Esq.’, *North Australian*, 16 May 1884.

¹¹⁹⁰ ‘Meeting of the Northern Territory Reform Association’, *NTTG*, 20 September 1884.

¹¹⁹¹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, pp. 76-77.

Retire then on fresh laurels won from every such assay.

But on the high tribunal of blind justice there you'd see
Him in all his glory, clothed with truth and majesty;
Solomon's wisdom guided him through the slippery paths of guile,
Commit or let defendants off with gentle hint and smile.

This good old knight (majestic thought) was Warden of the Marches, too,
But the marchings that he did were short, and also very few;
So the "pigtail" wags would laugh and sing: "No more knightee see.
Knightee velly good man; him no more licensee."

But see him in his castle of mud, 'twas there he shone supreme
He'd swell with pride when showing you round the outcome of a scheme.
He planned the building all in all, the towers and dungeons deep,
The snuggerly where he had his nips, and sometimes took a sleep.

But, alas, now he's dead and gone, and we never more shall see
That portly form, that jovial face, that step of majesty;
All, all are gone. His faults, what e'er they were, we let them be.
Rest to his old bones (he wants it); so let him R.I.P.¹¹⁹²

To have written such a poem Knight must have indeed been of some interest to 'Leo', as in several lines he is being mocked. The mystery remains of why kill Knight off in the final verse?

Social life outside of work

Although not on the 1883 committee of the Palmerston Institute, it appeared Knight was a member. Along with twenty other members he attended its annual meeting in January 1884 and was elected to the committee.¹¹⁹³ The committee comprised eight men, which was more than sufficient to run such an organisation in a town with so few people, so he must have desired involvement and had not been coerced. In 1886 Knight was again elected to serve as a committee person at the institute.¹¹⁹⁴ Undoubtedly Knight valued the company of other well-read men and enjoyed those pleasant evenings.

In March, the Dramatic and Musical Society held what the *North Australian* considered the group's most successful musical evening yet to a crowded house. The programme commenced with Knight delivering a locally written prologue, followed

¹¹⁹² 'A Knightly Knock', *North Australian*, 28 March 1884.

¹¹⁹³ 'Palmerston Institute', *North Australian*, 18 January 1884.

¹¹⁹⁴ 'Palmerston Institute', *North Australian*, 16 January 1886.

by a piano duet from the comic opera *Chilperic*. Then a farce titled *Caught by the cuff* and a witty burlesque *Bombastes Furioso* were well received by all.¹¹⁹⁵

For the first time in the social calendar of Palmerston, a fancy dress ball was organised by Mrs Parsons and held at the Residency. Such an event required several weeks of preparation to arrange an inventive fancy dress. A very original costume was that of the government resident himself in the guise of the 'Northern Territory'. Parsons displayed the Territory's resources: 'Crowned with gold, girt with tin, and shod with copper boots ... bracelets of pearls, earthnuts and coffee-berries, a staff of sugarcane, surmounted by a flag of branches of cotton, indigo, coffee and arrowroot plants'.¹¹⁹⁶ Knight chose to dress as 'Lord Eldon'.¹¹⁹⁷

A benefit to raise money for the hospital was organised by the Dramatic and Musical Society in September 1885 at the Town Hall. Both women and men participated in a programme that was composed of both vocal and instrumental pieces. Knight was the fifth item and sang 'Widow Machree'. The audience was delighted with his rendition of this song, and his locally composed encore chorus intimated that Knight was a lecherous old man as the verse concluded with him inviting 'the Widow to take up quarters at the mud palace',¹¹⁹⁸ the mud palace being reference to his home.

A rather lavishly costumed theatrical entertainment was held at the residence in late October 1886. Before a large audience of invited guests, Knight, together with several other actors, performed 'in capital amateur fashion'. The newspaper article commented on the gentlemen's magnificent costumes, and stated that one costume in particular, 'exceeded fifteen guineas'.¹¹⁹⁹ The programme included a scene from the 'Beggar's Opera', and the sparkling comedietta 'The Knave of Hearts'.¹²⁰⁰ See image below of the performance in Figure 14.

¹¹⁹⁵ 'Entertainment at the town hall', *North Australian*, 21 March 1884.

¹¹⁹⁶ 'Fancy-Dress and Calico Ball', *NTTG*, 11 October 1883.

¹¹⁹⁷ Lord Chancellor of England. 'John Scott, 1st Earl of Eldon', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

¹¹⁹⁸ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 12 September 1885.

¹¹⁹⁹ 'Things and Other', *North Australian*, 5 November 1886.

¹²⁰⁰ *NTTG*, 6 November 1886.



Figure 14. Private theatrical at the Residence, November 1886. Knight is on the far left.

Knight's house completed

Work continued on Knight's house. According to an *NTTG* report in January 1884, the house was to be built of concrete on a sloping site of crown land below the Government Residence, as this was the only position available with a view of the sea. The building had double verandahs with massive piers and arches of concrete and a flat roof with an embattled parapet. The house measured sixty one feet in length and thirty eight feet wide with walls twenty eight feet high. Prison labour was used for the entire structure. For extra strength in the walls, the concrete was allowed to 'season' for some time before being used and was rammed and beaten down until 'thoroughly consolidated'.¹²⁰¹

Further mention was made in February when it was reported that the house was nearing completion. With the work being carried out in the wet season and with mud

¹²⁰¹ 'The Northern Territory in 1883, Improvements', *NTTG*, 5 January 1884.

in the construction, it was jokingly said that with rain coming down on mud bricks, Knight might find himself in pools of his own mud.¹²⁰²

By May 1883 Knight was anxious that he retain the labour of six prisoners to complete the concrete piers and arches for the verandah. In his letter to Parsons, Knight almost pleaded that work be allowed to continue, because if it ceased in its present partially constructed state he would look foolish:

Should this latter work be stopped in its present stage I shall occupy the most unfinished and unsightly structure in the Territory and my professional character, which is still dear to me, will be consequently degraded. I trust therefore that under any circumstances I may be allowed to finish my design, as I feel assured that most of the Buildings of the future will be after its model, so far as material is concerned.¹²⁰³

Knight retained the prisoners as workers on his house, but was confronted by a problem he had not foreseen, although in hindsight he should have remembered the turn of events that led to it. Knight had designed the upper storey to be of concrete piers and arches, but due to his best mason Edwin Ferguson leaving gaol in September 1884, there was not enough time for Ferguson to complete the work.¹²⁰⁴

In September 1880 Ferguson, a former policeman, had received seven years hard labour for stealing gold from the Southport post office. Hoping for a remission in his sentence, Ferguson wrote to Price in November 1882 saying he was filled with remorse and contrition for the crime he had committed. Added to Ferguson's letter was a petition from Knight as deputy sheriff, who said Ferguson had behaved in a most exemplary manner and had been his right hand man in carrying out works and improvements. Government Resident Price in March 1883 wrote to Adelaide with his letter being forwarded to the governor of South Australia stating that Ferguson was contrite and Price asked that the prisoner's sentence be reduced to four years. The governor agreed to this proposal in May 1883.¹²⁰⁵ In a letter to Parsons in August 1884, Knight wrote explaining that the upper storey verandah of his house would now be completed in timber and not concrete due to Ferguson leaving gaol. Knight sent an accompanying tender from a Chinese man, Ah See, to complete the

¹²⁰² 'Things and others', *North Australian*, 1 February 1884.

¹²⁰³ SRSA GRS/1/1884/385, Letter 23 May 1884. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁰⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7031, Letter 4 August 1884. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁰⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1882/198, Letter 24 November 1882. Ferguson to Price with notes from South Australian Governor to Mc Minn, who was acting Government Resident.

carpentry work on the verandah. Knight stated he thought the tender ‘fair and reasonable’ and hoped that Parsons would accept the offer.¹²⁰⁶

It was apparent Knight was in desperation to have the best man possible to finish some masonry work on his house. Ferguson had been released from gaol the previous day and was to leave the Territory the following week. Knight wrote to Parsons requesting Ferguson be employed to finish the stone steps of his house. Parsons approved Knight’s request the same day.¹²⁰⁷ These particular steps were excavated in 2006 and showed the quality work of the mason who built them. The steps and one pillar are all that remain today of the original building.¹²⁰⁸

The length of time it took for Knight’s house to be completed continued to be of amusement to some. One correspondent in a letter to the *North Australian* wondered when the house could be finished so the prisoners could be put to more beneficial work for the tax paying community. He asked, what if every government official could devise a scheme and use prison labour to carry it out?¹²⁰⁹

The opposition newspaper *NTTG* came to Knight’s defence on the subject of him using prison labour. A journalist wrote that people should seek ‘the truth before rushing to print’. Using prison labour had meant that the cost of the house had been kept to a minimum and would compare well with any government building in the Territory. The other remark on government officials building to suit themselves was, as the journalist stated ‘uncalled for’, as it should have been remembered that Knight had been overseer for public works for quite some time and was a qualified architect, so he had a right to design his own residence as long as the cost was not excessive. Knight was also entitled to live in a comfortable house as others did and in the past the prisoners’ main work was to cut timber for the civil servants’ use.¹²¹⁰

¹²⁰⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7031, Letter 4 August 1884. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁰⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7188, Letter 23 September 1884. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁰⁸ Prior to writing this biography, from 2004 to 2006 the author undertook an archaeological excavation of Knight’s former house site.

¹²⁰⁹ ‘Things and others’, *North Australian*, 22 August 1884.

¹²¹⁰ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 6 September 1884.



Figure 15. The author (right) in 2006 with Austin Ashe, (who lived in Knight’s former house as a child), at the stone steps built by Ferguson in 1884.

Not letting the matter rest, the following week the *North Australian* replied at considerable length to what it said were the *NTTG*’s inaccuracies and petty assertions. The *North Australian* claimed that in other colonies government buildings were erected by contractors and not prisoners who were kept at work inside gaols, or sometimes employed building roads outside. Another correction was that McMinn was the supervisor of works now and not Knight. The article finished with the question of the relative cost of the building, which was then unknown and the writer deemed it prudent to wait until the house was finished.¹²¹¹ The pettiness continued through the *North Australian*, when in May 1885, a published letter to the editor by a writer calling himself Junius the 2nd criticised the Territory government for

¹²¹¹ ‘Things and Others’, *North Australian*, 12 September 1884.

squandering money, on boats and public buildings, including ‘Knight’s Folly’, which Junius called an ‘expensive toy’.¹²¹²

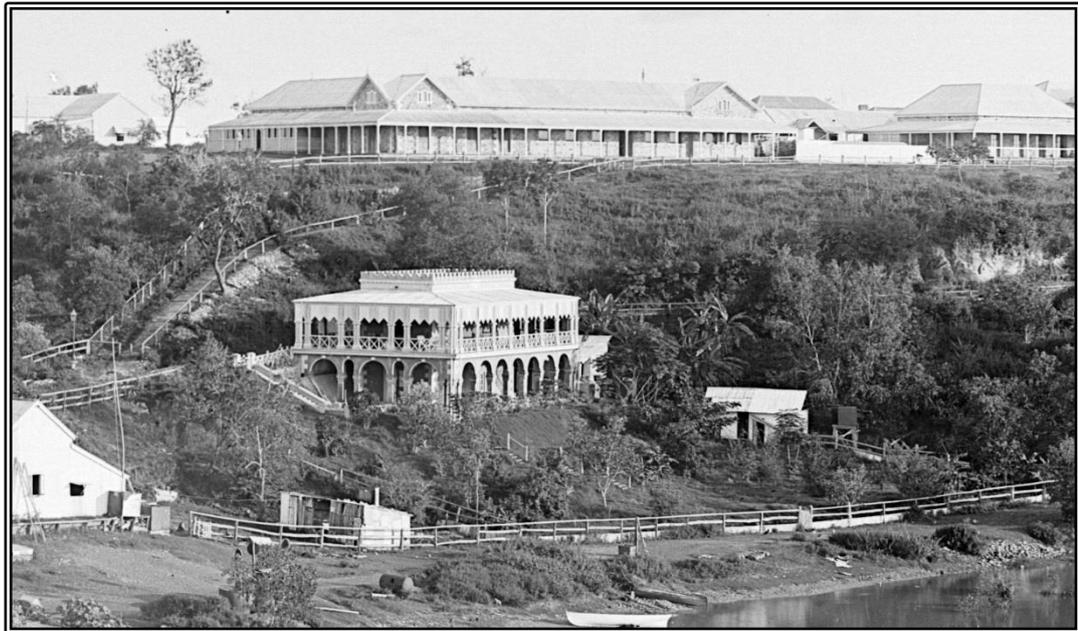


Figure 16. Knight’s house, Paul Foelsche (detail).

The building was completed in 1884. References to the impressive house being referred to as the Mud Hut or Knight’s Folly were rare, but became more common after Knight’s death in 1892. The few times there was reference to the house in the newspaper, it was written as ‘Mr. J.G. Knight’s house’.¹²¹³ The name Mudville on the Sea was used by Knight himself as his address on one of the letters to his daughter-in-law in 1889.¹²¹⁴ For a short period in the early 1900s, the house was known as Aspendale until it burned down in 1934. When Knight moved into the Residency, his former house became a home for public servants. Even though Knight had resided there for just a few years, the site today retains the name Knight’s Folly. Throughout his entire life Knight never owned a house. The joy to Knight of this house was that he was able to construct his residence to his own design. The design was very different to any other house in Palmerston as it was deliberately constructed to take advantage of any sea breeze using cross ventilation and surrounded on both

¹²¹² ‘Open column’, *North Australian*, 1 May 1885.

¹²¹³ ‘Palmerston District Council’, *Northern Australian*, 6 November 1885.

¹²¹⁴ Letter from Knight to Emilie, 31 December 1890, in Helen J. Wilson, Barbara James and David Carment, *The Real Live Resident: The annotated letters of John George Knight 1889-1892*, p. 17.

levels by large verandahs. The building revealed his ingenuity as one designed to suit the tropical climate.¹²¹⁵

Palmerston buildings undertaken by Knight

In 1883 Knight was the architect for the private residence of R.Y. Harvey in Mitchell Street. A large home designed to resemble the letter H, it had ‘two parallel wings, with gabled ends, connected by a hipped roof in the centre’. Mrs Harvey planned the layout of the rooms, and the house differed from other Palmerston homes in that it had spacious verandahs on three sides of the building.¹²¹⁶ The construction of the new Town and Country Bank in 1884 showed progressive strides in erecting grand buildings for Palmerston. Knight was supervisor for the construction of this commodious structure – the walls were seventeen feet high with a further nine feet to the roof top with the rooms not having ceilings. Knight had a passion for concrete, so he would have been pleased to see eighteen inch thick walls.¹²¹⁷ The 1880s was when Knight is noted by historians as using more of his architectural skills in Palmerston.

David Carment suggests that both Knight and McMinn were involved in the building of the new court house and police station on the Esplanade from 1879.¹²¹⁸ How much input from Knight went into the design is unknown, but Knight certainly received instructions from Parsons to erect a verandah at the back of the court house. To build the verandah material had to be brought through the back of Dr Morice’s land. There must have been some dispute, for Knight sent a formal letter to Morice explaining that there was no alternative to get the materials on site and hoped Morice would not interfere with the working men or place obstacles in Knight’s way.¹²¹⁹ The following day Morice replied to Knight, saying Knight appeared not to be in a quiet frame of mind to discuss the issue, so he was off to see Parsons.¹²²⁰ At this stage, Knight was

¹²¹⁵ Over 120 years later, an archaeological excavation was undertaken on the site of Knight’s house. Some of the located artefacts can possibly be linked to Knight.

¹²¹⁶ ‘Improvements’, *NTTG*, 5 January 1884.

¹²¹⁷ ‘The new Town and Country Bank building’, *North Australian*, 22 February 1884.

¹²¹⁸ David Carment, *Looking at Darwin’s Past*, p. 27.

¹²¹⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6944, Letter 20 June 1884. Knight to Colonial Surgeon.

¹²²⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6944, Letter dated 21 June 1884. Colonial Surgeon to Knight.

acting supervisor of works as McMinn was on two months leave.¹²²¹ The verandah of the court house was completed without further fuss.

A very large store for Solomon was completed in June 1885, and considered the finest stone store yet erected in the town. The frontage was thirty-three feet, with a depth of eighty-five feet, walls seventeen feet high and a hipped roof of thirteen feet making in all a total of thirty feet high from floor to ridge. It was situated opposite the Town Hall, and to harmonise with that building the front doors and windows were designed by Knight.¹²²² It is not known if Solomon was an architect, but he was certainly a builder who erected several houses in Palmerston.¹²²³ Knight may well have designed more than the doors and windows for Solomon's store, as architectural historian W.V. Mason reasons that the building 'seems to bear Knight's imprint'.¹²²⁴ Jenny Rich's history of Brown's Mart, which is what Solomon's store eventually became known as, claims the design of the building was attributed to Knight but there is uncertainty as to whether he designed the entire structure.¹²²⁵

Knight as deputy sheriff

Sheriff William Boothby, stationed in Adelaide, forwarded a set of procedures relating to the custody of Northern Territory gaols in April 1884. One of the items in the procedures was that as Fannie Bay gaol had been proclaimed all prisoners were under Knight's custody.¹²²⁶ Boothby considered that obtaining the governor's sanction for employing prisoners outside of the gaol may be difficult, so he suggested that the government gardens be proclaimed part of the prison reserve. Boothby also noted that as the gaol was now functioning, there was no excuse in not usefully employing prison labour outside the gaol, which was known to have been happening.¹²²⁷ No doubt Boothby was referring to Knight's use of prisoners in various areas including working on the construction of his house.

¹²²¹ *NTTG*, 7 June 1884.

¹²²² 'News and Notes', 27 June 1885.

¹²²³ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 63.

¹²²⁴ M.V. Mason, 'Documents on Australian Architecture: John George Knight, FRIBA', in *Architecture in Australia*, 57, no 3, 1968, pp. 479-485.

¹²²⁵ Jenny Rich, *Brown's Mart, Darwin: A History*, pp. 4-5.

¹²²⁶ SRSR GRS/1/1884/385, Letter 17 April 1884. Boothby to Acting Government Resident.

¹²²⁷ SRSR GRS/1/1884/385, Letter 17 April 1884. Boothby to Acting Government Resident.

In the following month of May, gaoler Frederick Becker, writing in reply to Knight's letter asking for his views on the gardens being proclaimed as part of the gaol reserve, said the situation would so complicate the present state of affairs as to be impracticable. Becker said if there were surplus prisoners they could work in the gardens under supervision, but as there was sufficient work to be done in the gaol he could employ thirty prisoners for the next year.¹²²⁸ It appears Becker would have been happier keeping the prisoners working inside the gaol than outside.

Knight also wrote to Maurice Holtze, the government gardener, asking for his opinion on the gardens being part of the gaol reserve. Holtze stated that the gardens were set up especially to demonstrate the adaptability of tropical agriculture in the Territory and open to the public. If making the gardens part of the gaol reserve restricted public access Holtze said he would not employ any prisoners. On the other hand, he wrote that if the gardens did not become part of the gaol and remain open to the public he was happy to employ prisoners under direct supervision of guards.¹²²⁹

At some time, Knight had been taken to task by Parsons for some breach of protocol regarding Boothby for he wrote to Parsons apologising for misunderstanding any of his functions as deputy sheriff and not consulting his superior as he highly respected Boothby both personally and officially. He further added that when the prisoners had completed work on his house, he wished to finish the improvements to the Gulnare Causeway and make a metalled road from the turnoff to the government garden. Knight hoped that his further comments did not appear to be boasting, but he wished to remind Boothby that he held credentials as a civil engineer and architect therefore enabling him to 'design and devise the work which the prisoners carry out'. Knight further explained that he had taught Ferguson to become a skilled mechanic who could on release 'earn £4 or £5 a week', and taught Aborigines to drive piles, measure and mix concrete and other labouring jobs. These skills Knight thought would be lost if they worked in the gardens under many supervisors – Holtze, Becker and the warders. Prisoners could escape far more easily working among sugar cane than they could on clear ground.¹²³⁰

¹²²⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1884/385, Letter 22 May 1884. Becker to Knight.

¹²²⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1884/385, Letter 21 May 1884. Holtze to Knight.

¹²³⁰ SRSA GRS/1/1884/385, Letter 23 May 1884. Knight to Government Resident.

In June 1884, an unsigned memo, possibly from the new minister, Richard Chaffey Baker, described relevant points to be decided upon regarding Knight's role as deputy sheriff and the prisoners. Under the second point in the memo, was for Knight 'to act independently of the government resident in dealing with the subordinates'? Another point, could the prisoners work at the gardens without the area 'being proclaimed a part of the prison reserve'? One that profoundly affected Knight was: should the prisoners be allowed to finish building his house? The final point read: 'With the exception of working in the gardens the prisoners should be kept strictly within the prison boundaries ... that is it is presumed after the Deputy Sheriff's house is finished'.¹²³¹

Knight was again censured in June 1885 for forwarding communications directly to his superior, the sheriff in Adelaide. In reply, Knight stated he was happy to comply with Parsons' instructions, but pointed out that some Acts should be altered to address particular questions. Knight also said that he had been appointed by the sheriff who could communicate directly with his deputy according to 'sections 3 and 4'.¹²³²

Parsons directed his secretary Whitelaw to reply to Knight stating that he considered sections 3 and 4 of the 1875 Act 'in no way affected the arrangement of all communications to go through him'. Parsons could not see why Knight was complaining that the jurors list had been sent from the sheriff to the minister then to Parsons and finally to Knight. He further added that if the sheriff wanted change he would have spoken to the minister.¹²³³

Although always respectful in his replies to Parsons, nonetheless Knight wrote in 1886 that he wished to have 'general authority', as he may need to take prisoners further afield than previously undertaken for useful work in road repairs or cutting timber. He suggested that Parsons read the detailed notes that he had sent to the minister for the Territory, John Alexander Cockburn.¹²³⁴ Parsons agreed, and replied

¹²³¹ SRSA GRS/1/1884/385, Letter 18 June 1884. Minister to Government Resident.

¹²³² NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8119, Letter 19 June 1885. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²³³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8119, Cover note 19 June 1885. Government Resident to Knight.

¹²³⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8849, Letter 19 February 1886. Knight to Government Resident.

on the cover note that action was necessary ‘for employment of prison labour at new garden’ and that he had sent a telegram to Cockburn.¹²³⁵

It became common knowledge that the prisoners were allowed to work further afield, so the *North Australian* asked if those prisoners would be cleaning up the Racing Club course to the detriment of paid work being given to Chinese labour. It was also suggested the bathing house could do with more improvements.¹²³⁶ The last time Knight used the prisoners to repair the baths he was reprimanded by Parsons, so as not to cause any upset, he approached the district council and asked if its labourer could assist in repairing the bathing enclosure. Knight’s request was granted.¹²³⁷

Public criticism of unqualified people undertaking legal roles

Every six months Knight was re-appointed to the position of crown prosecutor. South Australia apparently considered this preferable to making a permanent position. Baker sent a telegram to Parsons on 23 October 1884 to engage Knight ‘for the session at ten guineas’.¹²³⁸ In the same month, Baker appointed Knight via telegram as public trustee for the Northern Territory and Whitelaw was directed by Parsons to inform Knight of his appointment.¹²³⁹ Two weeks later, Baker wrote to Parsons saying the governor had appointed Knight to the position of public trustee, but without salary.¹²⁴⁰

For several years there had been the occasional muttering from Palmerston residents that all legal positions should be filled by properly qualified people. In an editorial in the *NTTG*, the writer acknowledged that the present court did its duty to the best of its ability, but questioned the absence of legal ability. The question posed was, if a clever lawyer raised a point which may be ‘right or wrong’, who was to decide the answer? Another area of concern was if a person was undefended and prosecuted by

¹²³⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8849, Cover note 19 February 1886. Government Resident to Minister.

¹²³⁶ ‘Things and others’, *North Australian*, 18 June 1886.

¹²³⁷ ‘Palmerston District Council’, *NTTG*, 17 July 1886.

¹²³⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7300, Telegram 23 October 1884. Minister to Government Resident.

¹²³⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7277, Telegram 24 October 1884. Minister to Government Resident.

¹²⁴⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7426, Letter 13 November 1884. Minister to Government Resident.

a lawyer, a judge required a legal understanding to know that the culprit had been given a fair deal.¹²⁴¹

Speaking of the present arrangements, the article stated that a prisoner was prosecuted by an architect, and the court was presided over by a surveyor. The writer emphatically stated the following:

Mr. Knight is a careful and painstaking magistrate, and we believe in every way qualified for the offices he holds in the community; Mr. McMinn, since he has been in the honourable position of Acting Government Resident has, we believe, given universal satisfaction in that capacity; but both gentlemen will excuse us for holding the opinion that their appointments every six months as Crown Prosecutor and Commissioner of the Circuit Court are mistakes; that none but lawyers are competent to deal with legal jargon and chicanery; and that the sooner legally competent men are appointed to the positions the better.¹²⁴²

During the following year, the matter of Knight as crown prosecutor was again raised in a letter to the editor of the *North Australian* by someone signing himself Friend or Foe. This person said that although he respected Knight, he never considered him right for the position. Friend or Foe argued that Parsons should step into this controversy and appoint a suitable person and not ‘tamper with the position by placing a man to uphold it who has but a worn-out stock of “bush lawyer” learning to recommend him’. Friend or Foe stated he did not wish to seem offensive, but felt the people of Palmerston were afraid to speak out in case it may effect ‘their business connections’.¹²⁴³

Knight was further criticised by the Palmerston correspondent for the *South Australian Advertiser*, who thought him ‘very weak with his examinations, and his helplessness was at times quite pitiable to witness’ during a murder trial.¹²⁴⁴ These comments were refuted by the *NTTG* editor who wrote that from his observations, the ‘fact that five persons accused of murder were found guilty is sufficient contradiction of the ill-natured stab at the Crown Prosecutor’.¹²⁴⁵

Parsons would have been well aware of the criticism in newspaper accounts of Knight’s work as crown prosecutor. It is clear that in forwarding a telegram to Baker, Parsons had faith in Knight’s ability by appointing him as crown prosecutor again

¹²⁴¹ *NTTG*, 19 January 1884.

¹²⁴² *NTTG*, 19 January 1884.

¹²⁴³ ‘To the Editor’, *North Australian*, 30 January 1885.

¹²⁴⁴ ‘Northern Territory’, *SAA*, 23 December 1884.

¹²⁴⁵ *NTTG*, 31 January 1885.

and recommending a fee of twenty guineas for Knight to personally conduct all sixteen cases. This would have been an affront to Knight's detractors.¹²⁴⁶ Of further irritation to many, Parsons informed Baker that Knight had told him he did not require assistance as prosecutor.¹²⁴⁷ As a result of this, Baker informed Parsons that lawyer R.D. Beresford was not to be employed for any government work.¹²⁴⁸

In April 1886, Knight notified Parsons that as there were not many sitting dates, he was willing to accept ten guineas as crown prosecutor.¹²⁴⁹ It was not until October that Cockburn approved Knight's ten guineas fee.¹²⁵⁰ Knight appealed to Parsons for instructions as to what to do with prisoners that were under sentence of death as the time for appeal had passed.¹²⁵¹ It appeared Parsons did not send a telegram to Adelaide for nearly two weeks until 6 July asking for advice.¹²⁵² In August the authorities decided that the death penalty for the four Aboriginal men awaiting execution be commuted to life imprisonment at the Adelaide stockade.¹²⁵³ In early December one of the men, Nango, developed beriberi and died in the Fannie Bay gaol.¹²⁵⁴ The other three men sailed on the *Changsha* but Agibwagnie died en route. The ship arrived in Adelaide 21 January 1887.¹²⁵⁵

Knight hits another barrier

Back in late 1880 Knight had erected a swimming enclosure at Fort Hill using prison labour. Over the years many people had enjoyed the baths, but by 1885 they were in need of repair. Knight wrote to Whitelaw with an explanation as to why he 'borrowed' six Chinese prisoners for five days to repair the swimming baths and that it had been on the understanding that Holtze could spare these fellows for that time from working in the government garden. Knight went on to say that when the tide

¹²⁴⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1885/549, Telegram 13 May 1885. Government Resident to Minister.

¹²⁴⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1885/597, Telegram 18 May 1885. Government Resident to Minister.

¹²⁴⁸ SRSA,GRS/1/1885/597, Cover note 18 May 1885. Minister to Government Resident.

¹²⁴⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8969, Letter 3 April 1886. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁵⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9483, Telegram 5 October 1886. Minister to Government Resident.

¹²⁵¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9172, Letter 24 June 1886. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁵² NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9172, Cover note 6 July 1886. Government Resident to Minister.

¹²⁵³ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 14 August 1886.

¹²⁵⁴ *NTTG*, 25 December 1886.

¹²⁵⁵ 'Telegraphic News', *North Australian*, 21 January 1887.

prevented the men working he used them to clear up ‘rubbish and weeds around his house and repairing dilapidated fencing’.¹²⁵⁶

Whitelaw was instructed by Parsons to inform Knight that he regarded the taking of prisoners into Palmerston totally unsuitable and believed that Minister Baker would agree. Parsons further added that he would report the incident and await Baker’s instructions.¹²⁵⁷ A contrite Knight replied to Whitelaw saying he had not appreciated the seriousness of his actions and deeply regretted doing it. Knight gave instructions that prisoners were not permitted into Palmerston.¹²⁵⁸

The *North Australian*, which in the past had seemed anti-Knight, defended him and thanked him for repairing the baths and castigated Parsons for censuring Knight for using prison labour. The paper further noted that Knight was head of his department and had been given discretion in ‘regard to all matters connected with the gaol’. It is clear from the article that Parsons was not a popular person with the newspaper and the writer considered him domineering and petty.¹²⁵⁹

Having a repaired enclosure around the swimming baths proved well justified for keeping out unwanted creatures when in October 1886 Knight held on to the inside fence while encountering a large shark holding on outside.¹²⁶⁰ Very few accidents had occurred at the baths, so it was ironical that it was Knight when having his usual morning dip who was stung quite severely by jellyfish. He suffered stings which caused burning pains and saw the doctor but was later able to attend to his circuit court duties.¹²⁶¹ Probably at that time in Palmerston, people were not aware jellyfish tended to be present over the wet season. Today there are notices along the cliff tops warning swimmers of the danger of jellyfish stings advising people not to enter the water between October and May.

¹²⁵⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7939, Letter 7 May 1885. Knight to Whitelaw.

¹²⁵⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7939, Letter 7 May 1885. Whitelaw to Knight.

¹²⁵⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7939, Letter 7 May 1885. Knight to Whitelaw.

¹²⁵⁹ *North Australian*, 26 June 1885.

¹²⁶⁰ ‘Things and others’, *North Australian*, 22 October 1886.

¹²⁶¹ *North Australian*, 5 March 1887.

Criticism of Knight as chief warden

In an article in the *Northern Australian* it was stated that the position of chief warden should be located in the goldfield and not, as Knight was, stationed in Palmerston, as he was of no assistance to men up country who wished to have a dispute heard. At that time if such a thing occurred, Warden Nash was unable to address the issue and those involved in the disagreement had to travel up to 200 miles to be interviewed by Knight, possibly losing several weeks of work. It was asserted, on the other hand, that Knight had only to travel 'from his mansion' to the court, hear the case and return home. The writer said he had received several letters from miners asking for help. Journalists tried to bring this to the attention of Parsons and his colleagues in South Australia, but were ignored, as were miners in the Territory. The writer spoke of Knight's salary and his various occupations and then stated that he did not care who the chief warden was, only that the person holding the position needed to live at the goldfields.¹²⁶² Possibly people forgot that Knight was not paid for this.

Although the opposition newspaper did not attempt to counter any of the claims made by the *North Australian*, one reader certainly did. This Knight supporter who signed himself Fairplay wondered why the *NTTG* allowed the 'spiteful and unfounded statements' 'to pass without comment'. In his rebuttal of the *North Australian*, Fairplay claimed that Knight had no more power than Warden Nash who could deal with all disputes on the goldfields. Fairplay stated that no one had ever come to Palmerston to appeal to Knight against a decision by Nash, but Knight did have more authority than Nash, as he could act 'as plaintiff in cases against owners of leased claims'.¹²⁶³

Apparently Knight had never paid a visit to the goldfields during the previous four years, 1880 to 1884. This in itself left room for criticism, but was explained in the previous paragraph. The article in the *North Australian* was quite disparaging about Knight, his other duties and salary. But the mention of his 'mansion' gives the reader a feeling there may have been some animosity underlining most of those remarks. The *North Australian* newspaper rarely gave Knight the accolades accorded to him by the *NTTG*.

¹²⁶² 'Things and others', *North Australian*, 9 January 1885.

¹²⁶³ 'The Chief Warden', *NTTG*, 17 January 1885.

Warden Nash failed to forward reports to Knight and bypassed him when he applied for leave by writing directly to Parsons, and only telegraphing Knight when his leave was about to commence. Knight wrote to Parsons in June 1885, saying he had felt ignored and was upset by Nash's attitude, adding that whenever Warden Nash had required anything he had had no hesitation in asking Knight for assistance. Knight stressed that as Nash's head of department, all communications must be transmitted through him.¹²⁶⁴ Parsons asked Whitelaw to inform Nash that everything must be sent through the chief warden.¹²⁶⁵ It is well documented that Nash sought help from Knight on several occasions and Knight had always assisted.

Being fully employed in many duties, Knight decided to resign from the position of chief warden in January 1886. Ridding himself of even one position would assist in relieving him of extra work.¹²⁶⁶ It appears Knight had not been asked to reconsider his resignation, as a notice that Charles Nash had been appointed chief warden was in the *Government Gazette* two days later.¹²⁶⁷ Later in July of that year, Knight wrote to Parsons saying that although he was no longer officially connected with the goldfields, he still held a strong interest in the Territory's mineral wealth and was concerned about the new bill for the Gold Mining Act being introduced by the government. Over several years Knight had put forward his views on how mining should be carried out in the Territory. He was against people taking out a licence to monopolise hundreds of acres of land for twelve months and never undertake any mining on the land. Knight urged Parsons to consider the importance of bringing all the mineral mining under the jurisdiction of the warden, 'who should be empowered to impose reasonable working clauses, and, so far as possible, to put a stop to the holding of great areas of ground for mere speculation purposes'. As things stood, such latitude stopped genuine mining and seriously retarded 'legitimate prospecting'. If the government had kept a tighter check on mining in the Territory, the industry in the 1880s would have been in a much better position than it was.¹²⁶⁸

¹²⁶⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8127, Letter 24 June 1885. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁶⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8127, Cover note 24 June 1885. Government Resident to Whitelaw.

¹²⁶⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8787, Letter dated 28 January 1886. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁶⁷ 'Government Gazette. Appointment', *NTTG*, 30 January 1886.

¹²⁶⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9189, Letter 21 July 1886. Knight to Government Resident.

Snippets in Knight's life

It was previously mentioned that Knight, while working as warden in the goldfields in 1876, pleaded with the then government resident, Edward Price, to grant him a white cook because he was slowly being starved by his Chinese one. This request was denied. Eight years later, Knight wrote to another government resident requesting that he be allowed to retain his Chinese servant Ah Fong, as he was being discharged from gaol. Knight had trained Ah Fong to understand his requirements so did not wish to employ another. He asked Parsons to grant him an allowance similar to other public servants to help him maintain Ah Fong. Additional to the government allowance, Knight was quite prepared to pay Ah Fong another pound or thirty shillings per month. Parson approved the request.¹²⁶⁹ It is known that Knight retained Ah Fong as a servant, but not if he received the allowance.

In July 1884, Baker wired a request through to Parsons for the number of Chinese engaged in gold mining, and how much had been received from their licence fees.¹²⁷⁰ In a reply to Parsons, Knight estimated there was eighteen hundred Chinese gold mining and of this number one hundred and sixty paid miners' rights at ten shillings each, totalling £80. Knight believed that of the eighteen hundred, twelve hundred were working on their own account.¹²⁷¹ Throughout the history of the men working in the Northern Territory goldfields, the payment of miners' rights had never appealed to most. The majority of Europeans begrudgingly paid the fee, but only a few Chinese did.

In October 1882 Palmerston was granted its own court of insolvency.¹²⁷² Surprisingly, for such a small community there were many insolvents. Knight, as clerk of court, was kept very busy meeting with insolvents to get disclosure of any estate or effects, then the creditors needed to prove the debts owed by the insolvent.¹²⁷³ Not only did Knight attend those court hearings, but all information pertaining to the cases was required to be lodged in the local newspapers. Although most notifications followed a similar format, there were variations. It is to be

¹²⁶⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6973. Letter 12 July 1884. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁷⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6977. Telegram 16 July 1884. Minister to Government Resident.

¹²⁷¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6977, Memo 17 July 1884. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁷² 'Local Court of Insolvency, Port Darwin', *NTTG*, 14 October 1882.

¹²⁷³ 'Local Court of Insolvency, Palmerston', *NTTG*, 29 November 1884.

wondered how Knight felt dealing with insolvents, as he had once been in such a predicament during the 1860s. It was Knight's hidden secret.

Knight appeared to bend the rules if he saw an opportunity to do so. Some of the ministers for the Territory may not have been concerned with receiving correspondence directly from him, but Baker was not one of those. In a letter to Parsons, Baker stated that Knight must send all communications through the government resident.¹²⁷⁴ This may also refer in part to Knight having sent court forms directly to the government printer in Adelaide without going through the proper channels.¹²⁷⁵

With regard to the position as assistant returning officer, Knight received a writ from Chief Secretary John Colton to have two men elected to represent the Territory in the House of Assembly in South Australia by 30 April 1885.¹²⁷⁶ Knight attended the court house at the appointed date and as expected there were no nominations from the Territory, as there did not appear to be any interest from the local population to serve in the Legislative Council.¹²⁷⁷ Voting for the northern division was undertaken with Knight officiating as returning officer and approximately forty votes were recorded.¹²⁷⁸

Personal

Nothing appeared to be transpiring in Knight's personal life, as there was never a hint of him being involved with another woman throughout his entire time in the Territory. Knight's son Edward (known locally as Ted), was transferred to Alice Springs in April 1880 and promoted to operator in August 1882, but resigned on 31 March 1883.¹²⁷⁹ If Edward had left Alice Springs and travelled to Palmerston at that time, one would expect that he may have spent the last seven months living with his father before leaving in October bound for Sydney.¹²⁸⁰

¹²⁷⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7425, Letter 13 November 1884. Minister to Government Resident.

¹²⁷⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7226. Letter 16 September 1884. Minister to Government Resident.

¹²⁷⁶ 'Government Gazette, Proclamation', *NTTG*, 25 April 1885.

¹²⁷⁷ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 2 May 1885.

¹²⁷⁸ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 16 May 1885.

¹²⁷⁹ Personal comments from Stuart Traynor, 2014.

¹²⁸⁰ 'Shipping', *North Australian*, 12 October 1883.

The *Woosung* arrived in Port Darwin on 23 May 1885 from the southern ports and on board were two adults and two children with the surname of Knight.¹²⁸¹ As there were other people in Palmerston with that surname it means in all likelihood they were not related to John Knight. But, departing on the *Guthrie* on 1 June 1885 for southern Australia was a family named Knight with two children, and the father had the initials of A.E.E. Knight.¹²⁸² Knight's son, Augustus Edward Ernest was by this time almost twenty-six years old. There is no correspondence confirming that Knight's son and family made a brief visit to Palmerston, and no other historian writing of Knight has mentioned this. Nevertheless, it is rather intriguing, as these were unusual initials.

Gaol

Knight wrote to Parsons in April 1885 of his concerns for the future of the present gaol. His disquiet was that when the railway finally got going there would be an increase in the population which in turn meant an increase in crime, so the gaol needed to be expanded to accommodate these people. Of importance was an infirmary that he would build outside the gaol walls. Becker, the gaoler, provided Knight with a rough sketch of another building and what was required. This included a female cell, a solitary cell, an office for the gaoler, a debtor's room and a storeroom. Whitelaw asked Knight for an estimate of costs, to which Knight replied he thought the supervisor of works should supply that information. McMinn calculated that building costs would amount to £1566 which included £100 to complete the underground water tanks.¹²⁸³ It was not until August 1885 that Knight was advised that the money for the tanks had been approved.¹²⁸⁴

Not only were tanks required, but Parsons approved the erection of a look-out tower at Fannie Bay gaol.¹²⁸⁵ In 1885 there were tensions between Russia and England, and a Russian ship was said to have left Japan bound for Australia. The local population was concerned for the safety of the overseas cable but the South Australian

¹²⁸¹ 'Shipping', *NTTG*, 29 May 1885.

¹²⁸² 'Shipping', *NTTG*, 6 June 1885.

¹²⁸³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A7911, Undated memo and other papers, April 1885. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁸⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A8335, Telegram 25 August 1885. Government Resident's Secretary Whitelaw to Minister.

¹²⁸⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1885/637, Telegram 30 May 1885. Government Resident to Minister.

government said ‘the Imperial Government would protect it’. One South Australian minister, Mr Moule, thought troops should be landed in the Territory ‘to prevent the enemy landing’. Added to the possibility of war between Russia and England, fighting was still raging between China and France.¹²⁸⁶ With newspaper reports of war, it was no wonder the people of Palmerston wanted a look-out tower from where enemy ships could be spotted and the information then relayed south.

A desperate need for an infirmary at the gaol became apparent in July 1886 when an epidemic of dysentery broke out with no appropriate accommodation for sick prisoners.¹²⁸⁷ Later that month Knight wrote to Parsons saying he strongly advised the erection of an infirmary that would fit in with future extension plans.¹²⁸⁸ The cover note sent to Adelaide included many messages. One that Knight wrote on 30 August stated that he and Dr Wood were considering the plan. Parsons requested Whitelaw to ask Knight to ‘fire off a rough plan of the gaol premises and indicate the position in which the infirmary is proposed to be placed and the character of the buildings’. Parsons further asked Whitelaw to forward the drawings to the minister via the *Catterthun*.¹²⁸⁹

In the Northern Territory estimates for 1886-1887, £400 was voted for the gaol infirmary.¹²⁹⁰ The gaol had been in operation since September 1883, so it was with relief that the building of the infirmary was to commence.¹²⁹¹ Building works moved very slowly in the Territory and it was not until February 1887 that the *NTTG* wrote a few lines on the subject saying the building was designed by Knight and was to be constructed of stone to a length of forty-two feet, a width of twenty-four feet and the height of the walls fourteen feet. The building would accommodate six beds, a wardman’s room and a dispensary. Knight had earlier mentioned to Parsons that the infirmary would be outside the present gaol walls and had been designed ‘to form a portion of any necessary future enlargements of the gaol’.¹²⁹² Mickey Dewar in her history of the gaol agrees that the infirmary was constructed outside the gaol and was

¹²⁸⁶ ‘War News’, *NTTG*, 2 May 1885.

¹²⁸⁷ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 31 July 1886.

¹²⁸⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9322, Letter 23 August 1886. Knight to Government Resident.

¹²⁸⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9322, Cover note 27 August 1886. Government Resident to Whitelaw.

¹²⁹⁰ ‘Northern Territory Estimates’, *North Australian*, 19 November 1886.

¹²⁹¹ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 4 December 1886.

¹²⁹² ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 12 February 1887.

‘probably correctly’ attributed to Knight’s design.¹²⁹³ The infirmary was constructed using porcellanite, the locally sourced rock. This same stone Knight used for the building of the Government Residence, Town Hall, court house, and his own house. Tenders were called in March 1887 for carpenters.¹²⁹⁴

Knight reports on his official duties.

When the government resident sent off his yearly report to Adelaide, he usually wrote the report and included extracts from the various departments. The report for the end of 1885 was different as Knight wrote his own account of his various duties. As clerk of the local and police courts he gave the number of sittings he attended as 112. There were two sittings of the circuit court and four persons passed through the insolvency court. As clerk of the licensing bench he had issued licences to twelve publicans, twenty-nine storekeepers and seven for slaughtering. Knight’s most time-consuming job was as deputy sheriff, having the responsibility of the prison that badly needed an infirmary and more cells, which he considered could be built using prison labour. Knight considered using prisoners for gardening a mistake, as they could be doing hard labour by making roads, which were needed in Palmerston.¹²⁹⁵

As crown prosecutor for the past five years he also made out all the briefs from the depositions. Knight wrote that he considered his most useful and beneficial post was that of public trustee for the Territory and had ‘fourteen intestate estates in the course of being wound up’. He commented that ‘dead men are almost the only ones who pay their accounts in full’. His final duty was that of assistant returning officer for the division and district of Flinders where he held revision courts quarterly, keeping registration books properly written up as most non-Aboriginal Territory residents were registered. Many men were disenfranchised because there was no facility for voting in the inland. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Knight had resigned from the position of chief warden in January 1886, but as he had been chief warden the previous year he wrote that his connection with the mining areas was limited to

¹²⁹³ Dewar, *Inside-Out: A Social History of Fannie Bay Gaol*, p. 9.

¹²⁹⁴ ‘To Carpenters’, *NTTG*, 12 March 1887.

¹²⁹⁵ SAPP, Knight, ‘Report on Law Courts’, in *Quarterly Report on Northern Territory, Government Resident’s Report on Northern Territory*, No. 55, 1885, p. 22.

correspondence. Knight acted as the town agent for Nash 'in transacting all leasing business with the lands office'.¹²⁹⁶

Fears of exotic diseases

In late 1883, an outbreak of cholera was reported in Hong Kong and there were epidemics in Egypt and India.¹²⁹⁷ There was fear in Palmerston that exotic diseases associated with the Chinese population would one day spread to Port Darwin as it was the first port of call for vessels coming from Hong Kong.¹²⁹⁸ It had been noticeable in the past that Aborigines from the Gulf coast had been infected with small-pox as their faces revealed scarring from the ravages of the disease. Transmission was thought to have been through trading with 'Malays'.¹²⁹⁹ Dr Morice, in the company of Dr Wood and J.A.V. Brown, clerk of the District Council, in January 1884 visited Chinese men in their homes and found two of them definitely had leprosy, and another missing man was known to Morice as a leper. Morice's concern was that although leprosy was not contagious in the sense that smallpox or scarlet fever were, it was still a loathsome disease and those inflicted with it should be removed from the Territory or isolated.¹³⁰⁰ Having received Morice's letter, McMinn, who was then acting government resident, was satisfied the men were suffering from leprosy and would arrange for them to be shipped back to Hong Kong.¹³⁰¹

In June of that year, Parsons, the senior surveyor and the harbour master visited Channel Island for the purpose of assessing its suitability as a quarantine station. The island, covering 270 acres, was situated in Darwin Harbour near East Arm. Parsons wrote that he found a well of fresh water and sandy beaches and thought it well-suited as a place for quarantine purposes. Accompanying his letter, Parsons forwarded plans of the island to the South Australian government.¹³⁰² The letter appeared to do the rounds of the ministers in Adelaide as the cover note described

¹²⁹⁶ SAPP Knight, 'Report on Law Courts', in *Quarterly Report on Northern Territory, Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory*, No. 55, 1885, p. 22.

¹²⁹⁷ 'Cholera in Hongkong', *NTTG*, 15 September 1883.

¹²⁹⁸ 'Cholera in Hongkong', *NTTG*, 15 September 1883.

¹²⁹⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 26 January 1884. Possibly it was Macassans and not Malays.

¹³⁰⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A6613, Letter 5 January 1884. Dr Morice to Acting Government Resident.

¹³⁰¹ 'District Council', *North Australian*, 11 January 1884.

¹³⁰² SRSA GRS/1/1884/571, Letter 2 June 1884. Government Resident to Minister.

many people having viewed the contents. Hulks were placed near Channel Island to house the people with infectious diseases and Dr Wood, the colonial surgeon, accompanied one Chinese leper to Channel Island where a tent was erected for his comfort and a boat visited every few days.¹³⁰³ In June 1885 Parsons notified James Bath, that five leprosy sufferers had been sent to China while one was quarantined on Channel Island and had subsequently died.¹³⁰⁴ Channel Island was proclaimed a specific place of quarantine by Sir William Robinson on 9 July 1884.¹³⁰⁵

In February 1887 a small-pox patient on Channel Island was recovering.¹³⁰⁶ By March 1887, Pater, then acting government resident, wrote a letter to Adelaide stating Dr Wood considered Channel Island unsuitable for quarantine purposes. Wood cited lack of natural water, the island becoming two islands at high tide, having a dense mangrove swamp, abounding in insect life and the soil of decomposing vegetable matter probably attributing to malaria.¹³⁰⁷ In May the Board of Health received a letter from Parsons who questioned whether the island was unsuitable and if hulks were used for quarantine purposes, would this 'not interfere with establishment of Port Darwin as Federal Quarantine Station'.¹³⁰⁸

By August there was an outbreak of smallpox among the Chinese and two were transported to Channel Island while the police set fire to a number of houses in the Chinese section of town.¹³⁰⁹ The European who contracted the disease was quarantined at Point Emery and a Chinese railway worker also with the disease was taken to Channel Island. Other Chinese smallpox sufferers who had been placed on the *Ellengowan* at Channel Island had been released.¹³¹⁰ The Board of Health urged the government to provide quarantine facilities in the form of a quarantine station on the mainland for Europeans and two buildings on Channel Island for all Asians.¹³¹¹ Building accommodation on the island commenced in December 1887.¹³¹²

¹³⁰³ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 31 January 1885.

¹³⁰⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1885/688, Telegram 15 June 1885. Government Resident to Bath.

¹³⁰⁵ 'Government Gazette Proclamation', *NTTG*, 29 January 1887.

¹³⁰⁶ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 5 February 1887.

¹³⁰⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1887/211, Wood's report 15 March 1887. Acting Government Resident to Minister.

¹³⁰⁸ 'Local Board of Health', *NTTG*, 7 May 1887.

¹³⁰⁹ 'Outbreak of small-pox in Port Darwin', *NTTG*, 6 August 1887.

¹³¹⁰ 'Small-pox at Port Darwin', *North Australian*, 27 August 1887.

¹³¹¹ 'Local Board of Health', *North Australian*, 8 October 1887.

¹³¹² 'A retrospect of 1887', *NTTG*, 31 December 1887.

In March 1890, Colonial Surgeon O'Flaherty diagnosed a Chinese man with leprosy and had him taken to the leper station on Mud Island in Darwin Harbour where there were two other Chinese leprosy patients.¹³¹³ Unfortunately, one of the patients died in April and his body cremated on the island by order of the medical officer Dr O'Flaherty.¹³¹⁴ At the end of May, an Aboriginal man from Katherine, 'much disfigured by the ravages of the disease' was taken to Mud Island and the following day Knight, as acting government resident, visited the island. With the additional person at the leper station, Knight noted improvements were required and 'decided therefore to build a second hut for their convenience'.¹³¹⁵ A few months later, Knight, well aware of the isolation of two Chinese men with leprosy on Mud Island, supplied them with picks and shovels and suggested they dig for gold on the island. After digging down about three feet and not discovering anything of value they threw in their picks.¹³¹⁶ Perhaps Knight thought digging may have been a distraction for them. In 1929 there was still mention of lepers on Mud Island living in inhumane conditions.¹³¹⁷ Channel Island became a quarantine station in 1914, then a leprosarium from 1931 until 1955.¹³¹⁸

Museum

A positive sign that a population is settled is the establishment of a museum. Suggestions for such a place had been mentioned spasmodically and attempts were made to set up such a venue for several years. In 1884 there was an established town hall and court house in which to exhibit such items as minerals, woods and other products from within the Territory.¹³¹⁹ A museum was later established in 1886 by Knight who organised for a portion of the Lands Office to be made available. It was hoped that country people would donate various specimens to the museum or for exhibition only.¹³²⁰

¹³¹³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1558, Letter 14 March 1890. Dr O'Flaherty to Acting Government Resident.

¹³¹⁴ 'Local Notes', *North Australian*, 18 April 1890.

¹³¹⁵ 'Local Notes', *North Australian*, 30 May 1890.

¹³¹⁶ 'Novel but not lasting', *NTTG*, 22 August 1890.

¹³¹⁷ 'The Administrator's report?', *Northern Standard*, 14 June 1929, p. 277.

¹³¹⁸ Department of Social Services, 'Channel Island Leprosarium (1931-1955)'.

¹³¹⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 29 November 1883.

¹³²⁰ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 24 July 1886.

Railway jetty

The people of Palmerston wondered if any railway would ever arrive as there had been several delays. In February 1885, William Wishart, the contractor for the Port Darwin railway jetty left Adelaide with skilled workman aboard the *Menmuir* bound for Port Darwin.¹³²¹ De La Rue writes that once building ‘materials arrived, work proceeded smoothly and the jetty was finally completed, at a cost of £39,817, in October 1886’.¹³²² Having at least the railway jetty finished offered confidence to Port Darwin residents that the Palmerston to Pine Creek line would eventuate.

The Pine Creek and transcontinental railway lines

Knight had always been a strong advocate for the establishment of the Pine Creek Railway, and especially for the transcontinental line from Palmerston to South Australia. In Palmerston and the mining areas there would have been jubilation among the residents that at last there were stirrings for the commencement of the long awaited up-country railway line from Palmerston to Pine Creek. In February 1886 it was announced that the first load of railway material was to arrive in March via the *Duke of Connaught*.¹³²³ There had been two tenders for the railway. Millar Brothers tender of £605,424 entailed employing part Chinese labour, while Robinson, Haig and Jesser’s tender of £691,068 included employing European labour only.¹³²⁴ Millar Brothers tender was accepted ‘and the contract was signed in May 1886’.¹³²⁵

There was considerable anti-Chinese sentiment throughout Australia so the feeling for most of the Palmerston’s European population was not one of joy at Millar Brothers securing and signing the contract. The locals saw this company’s only interest was in making a large profit by using Chinese labour, but hoped Millar Brothers were aware of public sentiment in the town and would consider employing equal numbers of whites and Chinese. Overall the public blamed the SA government

¹³²¹ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 14 February 1885.

¹³²² De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 78.

¹³²³ ‘Things and others’, *North Australian*, 26 February 1886.

¹³²⁴ ‘Colonial & Intercolonial’, *North Australian*, 7 May 1886.

¹³²⁵ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 78.

for its stinginess in accepting the lower tender as it was well aware of so many working class men out of work in many parts of Australia.¹³²⁶

Alternatively, it was widely thought that having the railway line built would indirectly bring more white people to the Territory to settle, eventually outnumbering the Chinese who would return to their own country.¹³²⁷ Many men had left South Australia and headed to the Kimberley goldfields hoping to strike it rich;¹³²⁸ this did not happen and now people were returning and stopping off in Palmerston on their way back to the southern colonies. By August 1886 there were many men in town seeking work as they had heard that the railway was in construction, but due to the procrastination by the government this was not so. Parsons was unable to help the out-of-work men, but everyone knew that if this same situation was happening in Adelaide, 'the Government would be forced to act promptly'.¹³²⁹

Some men arrived in Port Darwin the same day as a public meeting was held in the Town Hall on 28 August 1886 to discuss 'the proposed construction of the Transcontinental Railway line and other matters'. Without a parliamentary representative a public meeting was the town residents' only avenue of making their needs known. One of the main issues was to bring about the construction of the transcontinental railway. Having this national link, cargos from the Malayan archipelago could be offloaded in Port Darwin then distributed via the railway throughout Australia. Not only could goods be carried, but passenger traffic as well. The outcome of the meeting was that all resolutions be sent to the government resident to be then forwarded to the South Australian government.¹³³⁰ The first resolution was moved by W.E. Adcock:

That in the opinion of this meeting it is advisable to carry on the construction of the Transcontinental Railway line, and that it will be a wise and safe policy to grant capitalists willing to undertake its construction a sufficient subsidy in land in alternate blocks adjacent to the line to induce them to complete the line.¹³³¹

Another public meeting had been called at the Town Hall on 17 September 1886 as the town was now full of working men who could attend. It appeared that Millar

¹³²⁶ 'Friday evening', *North Australian*, 28 May 1886.

¹³²⁷ 'Friday evening', *North Australian*, 28 May 1886.

¹³²⁸ 'Colonial & Intercolonial', *North Australian*, 7 May 1886.

¹³²⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 14 August 1886.

¹³³⁰ 'Public meeting', *North Australian*, 3 September 1886.

¹³³¹ 'Public meeting', *North Australian*, 3 September 1886.

Brothers had ‘distinctly stated’ that ‘if their optional labour tender was accepted’ they would ‘employ two-thirds of Europeans’ on the railway line.¹³³² With many skilled labourers in town this company was able to employ nearly 200 Europeans.¹³³³ A week later the company had employed thirty Chinese. The expectation according to the *NTTG* was that all Europeans would eventually be replaced by the lower paid Chinese. It was thought that the Europeans were only working to earn enough money to pay for their passage to somewhere else.¹³³⁴ There were not enough labouring jobs available in Palmerston for very many men. Feelings were running high in town regarding the use of Chinese labour over the European.

In November 1886 the barque *SF Hersey* landed a locomotive.¹³³⁵ In the same month the *Armistice* unloaded ‘two stationary, and one 3000lb locomotive engine’.¹³³⁶ Three ships left Europe laden with railway material and by May 1887 had offloaded at Port Darwin.¹³³⁷ The same month locals heard for some distance a shrill whistle from a Baldwin engine while it worked on the stacking ground, thus bringing civilisation to what the *NTTG* referred to as ‘our Sleepy Hollow’.¹³³⁸ It was reported in the handbook for the Adelaide Exhibition that the Pine Creek line, which was at that time still under construction, would be 145 miles in length with a gauge of three feet six inches using steel sleepers. When the line was completed, the cost of cartage in the mineral fields was considerably lessened, thus assisting both the cost of production and living expenses.¹³³⁹

In June 1889 the last nut of the Palmerston to Pine Creek railway was screwed down. Work had been delayed due to several months of rain over two wet seasons.¹³⁴⁰ There was extra work required because the railway was not officially handed over to the government until October 1889.¹³⁴¹ The Pine Creek railway was now a reality, so thoughts turned to the transcontinental railway line, which remained a dream, but it

¹³³² ‘Public Meeting’, *North Australian*, 17 September 1886.

¹³³³ *NTTG*, 9 October 1886.

¹³³⁴ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 16 October 1886.

¹³³⁵ ‘Railway reference’, *North Australian*, 19 November 1886.

¹³³⁶ ‘Railway notes’, *NTTG*, 4 December 1886.

¹³³⁷ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 12 February 1887.

¹³³⁸ *NTTG*, 21 May 1887.

¹³³⁹ H.J. Scott, (compiled by), *South Australia in 1887: A handbook for the Adelaide Jubilee International Exhibition*, pp. 183-186.

¹³⁴⁰ ‘Railway Celebration’, *North Australian*, 22 June 1889.

¹³⁴¹ ‘Palmerston and Pine Creek Railway’, *NTTG*, 21 September 1889.

could be considered that the railway line from Palmerston to Pine Creek was the first section of this.

Chinese workers

The Chinese were seen by the majority of the town's people as being hard workers but it was alleged that they had no compunction in accepting work at much lower rates than those paid to Europeans. The other major concern was the Chinese would send their money back home, whereas the European would not only settle permanently in the community, but his money stayed there, thus creating wealth throughout the town.¹³⁴² This prophecy of where the money went proved to be quite untrue. Today in Darwin there are descendants of the many Chinese who stayed and made the Territory their home, while most of the Europeans moved on.

In April 1887, two Chinese high commissioners arrived in Port Darwin aboard the *Catterthun*. They were visiting Australia to enquire into the situation of Chinese settlers and in what manner Australian governments treated them. The visit was to extend to America and Holland. Also on board this ship were more than 100 Chinese, 'making over 300 arrivals from China since April 1st'. Knight was given the honour of showing the commissioners around government offices and visiting Fannie Bay gaol. The commissioners were treated to a banquet organised by prominent Chinese men, where the only representatives of the European population were Parsons and Pater. The following day the commissioners left for Sydney.¹³⁴³ By May they were in Sydney and were greatly impressed by the city, meeting with notable people such as Sir Henry Parkes, Lord Carrington and leading Chinese merchants.¹³⁴⁴

Conclusion

Over the previous three and a half years Knight had been involved in various architectural and supervisory works, but for most of that time his priorities were his judicial responsibilities. Knight had the luxury of living in a house of his own design and enjoyed an active social life. Although his dream for a transcontinental railway

¹³⁴² 'Public meeting', *North Australian*, 3 September 1886.

¹³⁴³ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 30 April 1887.

¹³⁴⁴ 'Telegraphic news', *North Australian*, 14 May 1887.

had not been realised, at least there had been the start of this line with the extension of the Port Darwin to Pine Creek railway.

The following chapter covers another three years of Knight's life. He was successful in his involvement as commissioner for the Northern Territory at the Adelaide Jubilee in 1887 and the Melbourne Centennial in 1888. Although there were frustrations and an illness, Knight again demonstrated his talent in a field in which he seemed to excel. In between his work with the exhibitions, Knight returned to Palmerston and resumed his former jobs. However, he was beginning to tire.

Chapter Nine

The energetic man from Port Darwin, 1887-1889

The period between 1887 and 1889 brought both satisfaction and sadness to Knight's life. He had the opportunity to be commissioner for the Adelaide Jubilee International Exhibition in 1887 and for the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition in 1888, roles where he excelled as in earlier exhibitions. The chapter expands upon Knight's involvement from selecting exhibits to designing unusual methods to best display a variety of specimens to advertise the Northern Territory's products to the people of both Adelaide and Melbourne.

Having several months leave in the south, although this included undertaking official Territory duties, offered Knight valued time to spend with his family and visit old friends. On returning to Palmerston on completion of the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition, Knight continued employment in his many government positions. He decided at the end of 1889, however, to retire from the civil service.

Over these years he experienced the death of his youngest son Alfred and the marriage of his second eldest son Fred. There is a possibility that his youngest daughter Ida may have died during this period as there is no mention of her.

Knight remembered in Melbourne

It is to be wondered what went through Knight's mind when he read an article in the *NTTG* alluding to his Melbourne days when working on the Houses of Parliament together with his then partner Peter Kerr. It may be remembered that Knight finished working on this project when money was stopped by the government on public buildings in the late 1850s. Now over twenty-six years later, sections of the building were again being erected. Knight received some accolades from a Melbourne newspaper, when it wrote of his pasteboard filigree model of the building featuring a dome, being in the lobby for thirty years. Now the design was coming to fruition but the dome was never constructed.¹³⁴⁵ On the occasion of the laying of the memorial stone of the Houses of Parliament on 1 October 1888, the editor of *NTTG*

¹³⁴⁵ *NTTG*, 18 September 1886.

commented he thought Knight would be sad to read that his former colleague Peter Kerr was working on completing this great building, while ‘he should be mouldering away in a place where architecture, as yet, has no existence’.¹³⁴⁶ Quite possibly Knight did have regrets of what could have been. But, had he stayed in Melbourne, he would never have had the opportunity of obtaining several positions in such diverse employment.

Palmerston 1887

Government Resident Parsons, together with Maurice Holtze, the curator of the botanical gardens, departed on the *Catterthun* in February 1887 for a government paid visit to Hong Kong, Batavia, Surabaya and Singapore. The intention of the trip was to note tropical agriculture and gain valuable information ‘when advising the Government as to the best means of promoting the settlement of agriculturalists in the Territory’.¹³⁴⁷ On returning to Palmerston, Holtze wrote a scientific report on the ‘relative value of the soil in the Territory and that of the tropical countries’. In Parsons’ temporary absence, Judge Pater was gazetted acting government resident.¹³⁴⁸

Returning briefly to Palmerston, Parsons departed again at the end of April 1887 to Adelaide to present several lectures on the recent overseas journey with the intention to promote the Northern Territory. He also attended the Northern Territory court at the Jubilee International Exhibition in Adelaide;¹³⁴⁹ Parsons delivered an eloquent lecture at the Adelaide Town Hall on 19 May. He spoke of the Northern Territory’s resources and prospects and openly attacked South Australian mistakes there. He expressed hope that the government appreciated the Territory’s importance and the duty it had towards it. Parsons then spoke of his recent trip to Java, Singapore and China.¹³⁵⁰

¹³⁴⁶ ‘Houses of Parliament’, *NTTG*, 25 December 1886.

¹³⁴⁷ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 12 February 1887.

¹³⁴⁸ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 12 February 1887.

¹³⁴⁹ ‘Arrival of the Government Resident of the Northern Territory’, *SAA*, 12 May 1887.

¹³⁵⁰ ‘Latest telegrams’, *NTTG*, 28 May 1887.

Eighteen eighty-seven was full of possibilities for Knight

It was probably a relief to Knight for 1886 to finish, as it had been a rather trying year for him. Undoubtedly he was looking forward to an eventful 1887. The working year began with Knight being asked by the Palmerston District Council to draw a plan for road work consisting of a footpath and kerbing from Mitchell Street to Beach Road, which was the road that passed his house.¹³⁵¹ For the first few months of 1887 Knight continued working at his various duties but was likely full of anticipation of his possible involvement in yet another exhibition.

Organising the forthcoming Exhibition

In February 1884, the Jubilee Exhibition commission that was formed the previous year in Adelaide met to discuss whether a new building should be erected or a temporary one attached to the present building be built. The Jubilee Exhibition in 1887 was to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign. A new building was voted for. One of the commissioners was Legislative Council member, W.A.E. West-Erskine, who considered neither plan acceptable as money was scarce and he thought it foolish to go ahead with an exhibition when the money could be used for further development, such as the northern railway.¹³⁵² Of course, he was out-voted, but the people of the Northern Territory would have been pleased to know there was at least one parliamentary member that thought of them.

One person who was pleased that the exhibition was going ahead in 1887 was Knight. Pater convened a meeting in Palmerston to consider if the Territory would be represented at the exhibition to be held from June 1887. Those who attended were well-known businessmen and government officials, including Solomon, Whitelaw, Mayhew, Beresford, Searcy, Little, James, Christoe, Symes, Adcock, Baines, Hillson, McKeddie, Hingston, Brown, Hawes, Jolly and Knight. Pater stated they had very few objects for the exhibition and all needed to work together to prevent their display 'becoming a complete fiasco'. It was then February and they had until 20 May to have their exhibits landed in Adelaide. So far steps had been taken to obtain fleeces from Herbert River, together with promises of 'woods, coffee, tapioca,

¹³⁵¹ 'Palmerston District Council', *North Australian*, 14 January 1887.

¹³⁵² 'Jubilee Exhibition Commission', *SAR*, 14 February 1885.

indigo, sago, ginger, nut oil etc.’ Mineral specimens of copper ore, silver ore, tin and golden quartz were wanted together with trepang, pearl shell and tortoise shell. Knight suggested displays of birds, butterflies and fish. As in previous years, Inspector Foelsche would send a collection of photographs. Knight had designed plans for a mineral display in the form of a large court. A working committee was formed of Pater as chairman, Knight as secretary, with other members being Foelsche, Beresford, Little, Solomon, Christoe, Brown and Searcy.¹³⁵³

Pater informed the minister for the Territory, J.A. Cockburn, that the allocated amount of £100 was totally inadequate. Cockburn wanted good representation from the Territory and agreed that if further money was required it would be provided.¹³⁵⁴

Knight’s design consisted of four brick pillars nine foot high and four foot square, with the roof constructed of locally grown bamboo. The pillars, coated in plaster of paris would be covered with samples of minerals. The working committee accepted the design. Foelsche’s photograph of it was distributed to mine owners to be used as a guide for the minerals required.¹³⁵⁵ Knight was asked to organise the Territory court. This was a line of work where he had few competitors, and knew he would once more excel.

In late February the *NTTG* informed its readers that Knight intended to apply for leave of absence from his official duties. The article said if the minister granted Knight leave he would represent the Territory at the forthcoming Adelaide Exhibition.¹³⁵⁶ On the other hand, the *North Australian* stated that although Knight was more suitable than any other man for the position, the committee had to be sure that it was necessary.¹³⁵⁷ The *NTTG* published this news fifteen days before Knight officially applied for leave.

It appears Knight did not apply for leave until early March 1887 as he would have wanted to be sure that he had the committee’s backing. In a letter to Pater, Knight requested four months leave of absence on full pay and passage money. Knight

¹³⁵³ ‘Jubilee Exhibition 1887’, *NTTG*, 26 February 1887.

¹³⁵⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9882, Telegram 22 February 1887. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹³⁵⁵ *North Australian*, 5 March 1887.

¹³⁵⁶ *NTTG*, 26 February 1887.

¹³⁵⁷ *North Australian*, 26 February 1887.

explained six years had passed since his last leave and that had been devoted to gaining public support for a transcontinental railway. Knight now wished to be in charge of the Territory exhibition and to superintend the building of his mineral exhibit which was to be the principal feature of the Territory court. He intended to make the exhibit in segments to be easily taken apart with minerals attached and be available if required for the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition in 1888.¹³⁵⁸

There was still no word in April that Knight was to be the representative. The *NTTG* thought that mine owners would not bother to go to the trouble to collect exhibits if there was not going to be a local representative. Added to this concern, was that the allotted space for the Territory had been taken away. The newspaper further argued that the Territory would not receive fair treatment so it was better to abandon the idea.¹³⁵⁹

On 1 April 1887, Cockburn telegraphed Pater asking if leave was to be granted to Knight, would his absence cause additional salary expenses.¹³⁶⁰ Pater must have wanted Knight to be the Territory representative, as both he and Whitelaw each took on one of Knight's duties without extra remuneration. In early April, Cockburn granted Knight's leave, which was due in part to Pater and Whitelaw's generosity. The position of clerk of the court still had to be filled. Cockburn asked Pater if there was a civil servant able to do the job.¹³⁶¹ Knight would have appreciated the charity of these men.

Knight's replacements

As the time neared for Knight to depart Palmerston, his various duties were allocated to three men for the duration of his leave. The *NTTG* announced the following appointments: Pater was appointed acting deputy sheriff, while solicitor John Symes was acting clerk of the local and police courts and the licensing bench. Parson's secretary Whitelaw was appointed acting public trustee for the Territory.¹³⁶² It is not clear who took over Knight's duty as public prosecutor (Cockburn assumed that it

¹³⁵⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9949, Letter 9 March 1887. Knight to Acting Government Resident.

¹³⁵⁹ *NTTG*, 2 April 1887.

¹³⁶⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9959, Telegram 1 April 1887. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹³⁶¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A9949, Telegram 4 April 1887. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹³⁶² 'Government Gazette Appointments', *NTTG*, 14 May 1887.

would be Knight's 'locum tenens'), but they would have received the same monetary terms as Knight had.¹³⁶³

Knight receives glad tidings

The *NTTG* printed the good news that Knight had been granted three months leave. Other news was that the exhibition building had been completed and the opening date for the exhibition was 21 June 1887.¹³⁶⁴ Knight's request for four months leave was officially granted on 19 May.¹³⁶⁵ Once the announcement of Knight being in charge was known there was a rush to collect exhibits. Mrs Pater consented to give Knight two cases of her butterfly and insect collection and there was Foelsche's photographic collection, as well as Aboriginal weapons and articles of clothing. Knight would take two bark canoes with him. Some Malay prisoners went diving and collected beautiful corals. Knight classified various geological strata of the Territory and collected a large quantity of native grasses together with half a ton of talc to be used in making the plinths and caps for the mineral display. Additional to these exhibits were bananas, pineapples, soursops, custard-apples and pawpaws.¹³⁶⁶

Both of the Palmerston newspapers were positive in their reporting that with Knight at the helm it was a guarantee that all would go well. This was expressed in the *NTTG* by the following:

Mr. Knight undertaking the entire supervision of our court is in itself a sufficient guarantee that the exhibits will be shown to the best advantage; a gentleman with more experience or better taste could not well have been chosen for the work. Mr. Knight's mission will not be all enjoyment, he will have plenty of work, worry, and annoyance in his efforts to suitably represent our little settlement, and the only way in which the people of the Territory can repay him, is by sparing no trouble to secure and forward specimens for the Exhibition.¹³⁶⁷

The Jubilee Exhibition received contributions not only from the other colonies, but England, Europe and America. By the end of April, Knight had 'forty-three cases of exhibits ready for shipment to Adelaide'.¹³⁶⁸

¹³⁶³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10005, Telegram 3 May 1887. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹³⁶⁴ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 9 April 1887.

¹³⁶⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10132, Letter 19 May 1887. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹³⁶⁶ 'Our Northern Territory Exhibits', *NTTG*, 16 April 1887.

¹³⁶⁷ 'Northern Territory Court at the Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition', *NTTG*, 16 April 1887.

¹³⁶⁸ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 30 April 1887.

Presentation to Knight from appreciative friends

Before departing Palmerston for Adelaide, Knight was given a presentation at the Town Hall by a large gathering of townsfolk on 4 May 1887. The *NTTG* reporter wrote that Pater as the chairman for the evening addressed the assembled crowd and extolled the respect he held for Knight as a friend and colleague. In court, he said Knight acted with a remarkable zeal and energy and would be missed. Another was that Knight ‘had a natural genius of exhibition management ... and if any man could make their court a success, it was Knight’. Pater added that Knight possessed ‘a great intellectual capacity, and the departure of anyone from their midst, so favoured, was ... a big loss to a place in which there were so few cultured minds’. Pater proceeded to present Knight with ‘a purse, beautifully embroidered by Mrs. Pater, containing 216 sovereigns’. Knight rose and asked the people there ‘to accept his heart-felt thanks for the magnificent present’ and he would ‘strain every nerve for the welfare and prosperity of the Territory’. He said he had been presented with gifts of sovereigns before, but was astounded that such a small community ‘had subscribed over £200’. Knight further stated that in his experience, ‘the Northern Territory would progress or retrograde on the strength of its mineral productions’.¹³⁶⁹

Interestingly, the *North Australian* in its report on the evening mentioned there were several leading Chinese storekeepers who attended the gathering.¹³⁷⁰ Once more the opportunity arose for Knight to be in charge of arranging a court for an exhibition. The presentation to him of a purse of sovereigns demonstrated the esteem in which he was held by the locals.

Jubilee Exhibition in Adelaide

The following day 5 May, Knight sailed south aboard the *Taiyuan*.¹³⁷¹ He arrived quite unwell in Adelaide on 23 May after a very rough voyage from Melbourne.¹³⁷² Although confined to bed suffering from erysipelas,¹³⁷³ he was able to give an interview in which he spoke of the variety of exhibits that would be shown. These

¹³⁶⁹ ‘Presentation to Mr. J.G. Knight’, *NTTG*, 7 May 1887.

¹³⁷⁰ ‘Presentation to Mr. J.G. Knight’, *North Australian*, 7 May 1887.

¹³⁷¹ ‘Shipping’, *NTTG*, 7 May 1887.

¹³⁷² ‘Arrival of the Northern Territory Commissioner’, *SAA*, 24 May 1887.

¹³⁷³ Erysipelas is an acute, infectious disease due to streptococcus and causes inflammation of the skin. *Macquarie Dictionary*, p. 59.

included minerals, specimens of gold, quartz, copper, silver ore, tin, native grasses and timbers, maize, cotton, gums, arrowroot, tapioca, rice, trepang, coral and building materials. Of course, his favourite items were his minerals, which he considered 'the finest collection ever seen'. Knight spoke briefly on other topics including the railway and the Chinese question, which he said had never been settled properly by the government. He considered that the Territory would never prosper until there were radical changes in the administration of the Territory's public affairs.¹³⁷⁴

By early June, Knight's health had improved and by negotiation he had space allotted to him at the eastern end of the promenade. Unfortunately he had to erect the Northern Territory court outside in the mud because of the recent rain, but the ground was firm and Cockburn agreed to pay for a verandah to be erected around the display to hold and protect all the Territory's exhibits.¹³⁷⁵ From the United Service Club Hotel in Adelaide, Knight wrote in reply to James Bath, Cockburn's secretary, that all the Northern Territory exhibitors had contributed to the exhibition in order to assist the government by showing what could be produced from the land. Knight further explained saying that, 'there was no rival manufacturers competing for medals like the exhibitors of wine, whiskey, pianos, cutlery ... and they cannot therefore be expected to stand taxation like great advertising establishments'.¹³⁷⁶

Before the Aboriginal weapons and handcrafts collected by Paul Foelsche were exhibited, they had been purchased by Lady Brassey (wife of Baron Brassey), but would not be passed over until after the close of the exhibition.¹³⁷⁷ Knight himself exhibited specimens of rocks and building materials that included bricks that had been made by the early settlers at Port Essington, Palmerston stone, white clay, brick clay, a sample of shell for making lime, lime that had been made from the shells and a sample of concrete he had used in building his own house. Additional to the rocks, Knight brought samples of various grasses, dressed rice and rice that was grown near Palmerston. As a novel way of exhibiting the computed eight tons of gold obtained in

¹³⁷⁴ 'The Northern Territory. An interview with Mr. J.G. Knight', *Express and Telegraph*, 25 May 1887.

¹³⁷⁵ 'Telegraphic news', *North Australian*, 11 June 1887.

¹³⁷⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1887/398, Note 6 June 1887. Knight to James Bath.

¹³⁷⁷ 'Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition', SAA, 7 June 1887.

the Territory, Knight had created a ball ‘forming a sphere 36.6 inches in diameter, measuring 14.855 cubic feet, and valued at £1,012,666 13s.4d’.¹³⁷⁸



Figure 17. Sphere exhibited at the Adelaide Jubilee International Exhibition 1887 representing the quantity of gold obtained in the Northern Territory.

As it neared the date for the opening of the exhibition on the 21 June, the minerals from the Territory had still not arrived, which was disappointing, as it had been stipulated that ‘no fresh exhibits will be admitted until the opening ceremony is completed’.¹³⁷⁹ For the opening of the exhibition, a free dinner at the old exhibition building had been organised by public subscription. Originally arranged only for the poor, 5,000 people attended, so dining was in relays. The SA governor, Sir William Robinson, gave a dinner for distinguished guests, including all the foreign and

¹³⁷⁸ Scott, *South Australia in 1887: A handbook for the Adelaide Jubilee International Exhibition*, pp. 253-255.

¹³⁷⁹ ‘Telegraphic news’, *NTTG*, 18 June 1887.

intercolonial exhibition commissioners, which Parsons also attended. Knight was waiting for the minerals to arrive, as he still had to complete the Territory's exhibit. Added to this concern was the fact that doctors were still treating him.¹³⁸⁰ The Territory exhibits were not the only ones incomplete, as all of Tasmania's exhibits arrived five days after the exhibition opened.¹³⁸¹

In early August the Northern Territory court was opened for the first time by J.C.F. Johnson, the new minister for education and the Northern Territory. Reporting on the opening speech, the *SAR* stated that:

The quantity and quality of the exhibits in the Northern Territory Court would be a surprise to a great number of South Australians who had been in the habit of talking of the Northern Territory as South Australia's white elephant. The Court afforded proof positive that it would not be a white elephant any more, or if it was it would be a producing elephant, and a credit to South Australia.¹³⁸²

The display designed by Knight was quite unique in that it was in a form of a complete pavilion. The pavilion form was octagonal with an inner width of sixteen feet and a total width of twenty two and a half feet at the eaves of the roof. 'There are eight pillars, each ten foot in height, formed by cylinders cast in cement concrete, which will be completely covered with specimens', two each of copper, silver, gold in quartz, and tin ore. Above the pillars was a fifteen inch deep fascia of bamboo lattice work and an eighteen foot high octagonal bark roof. The Palmerston gaol prisoners made the ceiling of 'eight triangular pieces of bamboo work neatly woven together'.¹³⁸³

In the photograph of the court below, Knight is the third person on the left.

¹³⁸⁰ 'Telegraphic news', *North Australian*, 25 June 1887.

¹³⁸¹ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 2 July 1887.

¹³⁸² 'The Jubilee Exhibition', *SAR*, 22 August 1887.

¹³⁸³ 'Our Northern Territory Exhibits', *NTTG*, 16 April 1887.



Figure 18. The Northern Territory Court, Adelaide Jubilee International Exhibition, 1887.

Although the court continued to attract attention, Knight sent several telegrams to Palmerston, asking if items had been sent and when they could be expected in Adelaide. He was waiting for samples of coffee, sugar and the ‘gold cake’, but stated he had shown the chief justice and Sir Samuel Davenport through the court and they were ‘greatly pleased’.¹³⁸⁴ Up to the end of August, 278,472 people had attended the exhibition. The opinion of some people was that the court was ‘worth as an advertisement over £500,000, to South Australia’.¹³⁸⁵ Although the display of bullion from the Eveleen Silver Mine was very late in arriving at the Northern Territory court, it so impressed investors that share prices rose from six shillings and sixpence to fifteen shillings.¹³⁸⁶

Knight wrote a brief outline of the Northern Territory for the South Australian handbook for the Jubilee International Exhibition giving the situation of Port Darwin

¹³⁸⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10310. Telegram 22 September 1887. Knight to Government Resident.

¹³⁸⁵ ‘Latest telegrams’, *NTTG*, 3 September 1887.

¹³⁸⁶ ‘The Northern Territory Court’, *NTTG*, 10 September 1887, and ‘Latest telegrams’, *NTTG*, 24 September 1887. The 10 September article states that ‘4 tons of silver bullion and a block of silver ore from the Eveleen Mine’ were to be displayed at the exhibition. It seems unlikely that the ‘bullion’ shown in the photograph above is the genuine article, but rather a replica of the type Knight had created for previous exhibitions.

in regard to latitude and longitude, descriptions of the harbour and the more than forty principal cattle stations each covering thousands of square miles. Knight also described the vast variety of agriculture including sugar-cane, ginger, bananas and mangoes. He wrote that the average rainfall was approximately sixty-five inches, the country was mineral rich with alluvial gold and gold bearing reefs, together with copper.¹³⁸⁷

Knight honoured by a banquet

Knight returned to Port Darwin on 28 November 1887.¹³⁸⁸ A day later a banquet for him was held at the Town Hall and attended by over forty men with Parsons as chairman and Pater as vice-chair. Knight, in response to the government resident's speech, said that seven months previously the people of Palmerston had been extremely generous to him, so being mindful of the trust the people had placed in him he worked for their good and that of the colony.¹³⁸⁹

Knight proposed a toast to the Territory's chief industry – mining. He spoke of continually worrying the minister for the Territory when he was chief warden for bonuses to encourage legitimate mining with little success, but he did achieve success with bonuses for alluvial fields. The mining industry had made great progress with prospects of tin, copper, silver and gold, which he said was mainly due to one man, V.L. Solomon. Of the eight pillars in the Territory court, Solomon had three, being copper, silver and tin. With the completion of the railway to Pine Creek, Knight considered that this would be when 'the real life of Port Darwin would begin'. Solomon was the next speaker who said he felt honoured to be called upon to respond to the toast for the mining industry. He further added that when Knight was chief warden and working in the goldfields he was 'a friend to every miner rich or poor, influential or obscure'. When a miner did well Knight encouraged him further, if in trouble he offered a kind word and if they were sick he nursed them. When Knight left the goldfields, all miners took a little something from their 'chamois

¹³⁸⁷ Scott, *A handbook for the Adelaide Jubilee*, pp. 184-187.

¹³⁸⁸ 'Shipping', *North Australian*, 3 December 1887.

¹³⁸⁹ 'Banquet to Mr J.G. Knight', *NTTG*, 3 December 1887.

leather bag' and happily gave towards a testimonial for Knight, 'a kind hearted old English gentleman', who often rose from his own bed to tend to the sick.¹³⁹⁰

Knight endures small town pettiness

In January 1888, Foelsche, displaying narrow mindedness, wrote to Parsons complaining that Knight as special magistrate had granted a permit to publican Charlie Haines to serve liquor from a booth at the Adelaide River races. Foelsche believed this illegal, which according to the strict letter of the law it was, in that the special magistrate had to be within fifteen miles. Knight was in Palmerston, and Adelaide River was more like eighty miles away.¹³⁹¹ A telegram sent to Parsons from Johnson said that although Foelsche was correct, considering the circumstances the objection was quite unnecessary.¹³⁹² The interference by police was reported in the *NTTG* who considered Foelsche lacked brainpower for he could not 'distinguish between evasions of the law, and a common-sense interpretation of its meaning'. Foelsche had sent a telegram to Haines threatening prosecution and his drinks seized by police. Unfortunately Haines capitulated and the racegoers were deprived of their refreshments.¹³⁹³

As Knight was the person under discussion, he forwarded a memo to Parsons explaining why he had granted the permit. He said there were no two justices or a special magistrate residing within fifteen miles of the venue and it would have imposed a great inconvenience upon the number of people who were travelling by train to Adelaide River if they could not enjoy refreshments on the racecourse. After studying the licensed victualler's act, Knight, using common sense, granted the licence. As it turned out nothing was gained, the *NTTG* was furious, the public were inconvenienced and the government did not receive any revenue from the unsold liquor. Knight then asked Parsons to forward the memo verbatim by telegraph to Johnson.¹³⁹⁴ At this time Johnson was travelling up to Palmerston for a visit and Thomas Playford, who was acting in his place, replied to Parsons' telegraphed message from Knight by saying he thought special magistrates 'might well be trusted

¹³⁹⁰ 'Banquet to Mr J.G. Knight', *NTTG*, 3 December 1887.

¹³⁹¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10555. Letter 3 January 1888. Foelsche to Government Resident.

¹³⁹² NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10565. Telegram 6 January 1888. Minister to Government Resident.

¹³⁹³ 'Police interference', *NTTG*, 31 December 1887.

¹³⁹⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10654, Memo 5 January 1888. Knight to Government Resident.

with power given in clause and police might be better employed than harassing persons who obtained SM's approval'.¹³⁹⁵ Playford's reply was a rebuttal to Foelsche.

In reply to more letters of complaint from Foelsche, Parsons reprimanded Knight. He said that Knight as deputy returning officer must follow procedures correctly and contact the heads of departments to arrange 'for services of subordinate officers', in this case, the inspector of police.¹³⁹⁶

According to Alan Powell, the positive side to Foelsche was that he was an extremely efficient police detective, thorough in his investigations and administrative work.¹³⁹⁷ Wilson considered 'Foelsche was sensitive to his official position,' even displaying petty tyranny and over several years had many disagreements with several men in high positions and bearing grudges against these people, thinking they were against him.¹³⁹⁸ These characteristics appeared to be those of a very insecure man. Foelsche may well have viewed Knight's more relaxed manner in dealing with situations as confronting.

Knight retaliates against alleged breach of instructions

Johnson reprimanded both Knight and Symes in their roles of clerk and acting clerk, for a breach of procedure in paying in monies. Knight was upset at being accused of disregarding instructions he had never seen. In a memo to Parsons, Knight stated that he had checked with the inspector of public houses and was informed that he too had never seen these instructions. He said he followed the course he 'had adopted for the past eight years without ever being found fault with'. Knight further remonstrated that if he followed the exact regulation making all remittances to the treasury instead of paying into the local banks he would be guilty of another breach of instruction. Knight finally wrote, 'what am I to do?'¹³⁹⁹ Parsons requested his secretary to advise

¹³⁹⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10791, Telegram 14 March 1888. Playford to Government Resident.

¹³⁹⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10965, Note 23 May 1888. Government Resident to Knight.

¹³⁹⁷ Powell, *Far Country*, p. 124.

¹³⁹⁸ Bill Wilson, 'Men with clay feet: the Territory's first police leaders', p. 67.

¹³⁹⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10924, Memo 16 May 1888. Knight to Government Resident.

the minister Knight had now been supplied with a copy of the instructions and to 'pay in the monies received at the end of each month'.¹⁴⁰⁰

Ministerial visit

The minister for the Northern Territory, wanting to see the place for himself, arrived in early March 1888. Johnson brought with him photographs of the Northern Territory court at the recent Jubilee Exhibition for Knight to distribute.¹⁴⁰¹ Although Knight was invited to be part of the 1881 ministerial party, for an unknown reason this was denied him in 1888. The much smaller party was comprised of Johnson, his private secretary Evans, Parsons and Foelsche.¹⁴⁰²

Initially the minister undertook tours of government departments, the government gardens, Fannie Bay gaol and then the party travelled up country visiting many of the mining areas.¹⁴⁰³ A special reporter accompanied the minister and over the following months wrote a series of articles for the South Australian newspapers covering the entire trip. The articles were headed appropriately, 'To See The White Elephant' and in Part Eleven, the author described a large dried up watercourse as Knight's Folly. The story told to the reporter was that on the first ministerial trip undertaken in 1881, Knight, who had accompanied the group had suggested camping at a particular creek, but on arrival it was found totally unsuitable and 'in thorough disgust the spot was named Knight's Folly'.¹⁴⁰⁴

On returning to Palmerston, a complimentary banquet was organised at the Town Hall for Johnson in early April. It is considered important to give a detailed account of this banquet, as it illustrates one of the rare occasions where a minister responsible for the Northern Territory interacted directly with officials and influential citizens in Palmerston. Parsons was the chairman for the evening with Pater as vice-chairman. There were several speeches. Johnson asserted that his government well represented its constituents and claimed 'that in speaking power the South Australian Parliament is not excelled in Australia'. Johnson spoke on giving the Territory direct

¹⁴⁰⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10924, Cover note 25 May 1888. Government Resident to Nicholas Holtze.

¹⁴⁰¹ *NTTG*, 17 March 1888.

¹⁴⁰² *North Australian*, 10 March 1888.

¹⁴⁰³ *North Australian*, 10 March 1888.

¹⁴⁰⁴ 'To see the white elephant. Part xi', *SAA*, 22 June 1888.

representation as it had been hoped that this legislation would be operative from April 1888 but was not certain it would pass. At the time, the Territory was represented by two members in SA and hopefully there would be two more representatives from northern Australia. Parsons proposed the toast of the evening and spoke of his having known Johnson for several years and knew that ‘flattery and belauding [sic] him would be distasteful’. Parsons further stated that Johnson was now aware of the value of the Territory’s mineral fields as he had a knowledge of minerals that made ‘him eminently suited to understand our requirements’.¹⁴⁰⁵

Johnson spoke of the areas he had travelled over and stated that there were so many outcrops of ‘gold, silver, tin, copper, manganese, and antimony, more numerous than in any other place he knew of’. Johnson spoke of positive things he would now implement, such as making ‘the pegging out of claims compulsory’, rewards for discovering minerals and further that ‘a miners right should be a permanent title’. The ‘Chinese question’ was discussed at length by Johnson who would have preferred that the Chinese did not come at all to Australia as their culture was so different to that of the European. If they continued to come, Australia must limit the numbers and dictate the terms of their admission. Finally Johnson spoke of the Melbourne Exhibition to be held later in the year, saying that the elegant Northern Territory court at the Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition, designed with the ‘taste and skill of their indefatigable friend Mr. Knight’, had attracted so many people, bringing the Territory to the attention of the public more than by any other adopted means.¹⁴⁰⁶ A later speaker, H.H. Adcock, said he hoped that the Territory would excel at the forthcoming Melbourne Centennial Exhibition and the government could do no better than to send Knight to Melbourne. Continuous applause greeted this statement.¹⁴⁰⁷

Family affairs

Knight learned of the death of one of his twin sons, Alfred, in February 1888. Alfred was born in June 1871 so was a young child of two years when Knight moved to the Territory in September 1873. Knight would have seen him with the rest of his family

¹⁴⁰⁵ ‘Banquet to the Minister controlling the Northern Territory’, *NTTG*, 7 April 1888.

¹⁴⁰⁶ ‘Banquet to the Minister controlling the Northern Territory’, *NTTG*, 7 April 1888.

¹⁴⁰⁷ ‘Banquet to the Minister of Education’, *NTTG*, 14 April 1888.

when visiting Melbourne in 1875. In 1876 Alice Knight took Alfred and three of her other children to England. The death was reported to have been at Moseley House, Buckingham Road, Aylesbury, England. Alfred was only sixteen years old.¹⁴⁰⁸ Alice Knight was to receive even more sad news. Although not as agonising as the loss of a child, Alice's seventy-two-year-old mother, Miriam Eskell, died on the 9 April 1888 at Queenscliff in country Victoria.¹⁴⁰⁹

On a happier note, Alice and John's second son Fred married Emilie Falkiner in June 1888.¹⁴¹⁰ Fred's father-in-law, Franc S. Falkiner, was the wealthy owner of Boonoke Station, a vast sheep station in southern New South Wales. Here again was another family ceremony that Knight was unable to attend. Later Knight formed a fond and special relationship with his daughter-in-law, affectionately referring to her in correspondence as 'Emmy' or 'Em'.

Lizzie, Knight's second daughter who had married Dr John Warren in England in 1876 had two girls, one born in 1878, and the other in 1880.¹⁴¹¹ Another of Knight's daughters, Alice, who had married Thomas Culpan in 1880, had borne three sons in 1881, 1883 and 1889.¹⁴¹² There were at least five grandchildren living that Knight may never have met.

No repairs to Knight's house and other neglected work

Knight was concerned that the fence dividing his property and that of his neighbour Howard, had rotted so much that horses and cattle could stray in and destroy his garden. He sent a requisition to Parsons in June 1888 asking that the fence be replaced and further added that his house needed repainting, including the verandah ironwork as it had not been attended to for four years.¹⁴¹³

Supervisor of works J.P. Hingston presented a report to Parsons in April 1887 informing him that he had examined all government buildings and set out a list with estimates of all general repairs. Among many buildings requiring work, Hingston had

¹⁴⁰⁸ 'Births Marriage & Deaths', *Bucks Herald*, 11 February 1888.

¹⁴⁰⁹ 'Deaths', *Argus*, 13 April 1888.

¹⁴¹⁰ 'Marriages', *Argus*, 4 July 1888.

¹⁴¹¹ Personal information given to author by Garth Jenkins, 2014.

¹⁴¹² Personal information given to author by Garth Jenkins, November 2015.

¹⁴¹³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A11097, Memo 18 June 1888. Knight to Government Resident.

listed Knight's quarters as requiring outside painting at a cost of £12. Altogether Hingston had estimated £1,120 to cover all listed work.¹⁴¹⁴ Johnson on the other hand, considered £850 to be sufficient.¹⁴¹⁵ It appears very obvious that several repairs were not completed including Knight's house that did not receive the anticipated new coat of paint. On what properties the money was spent is not known, but on Knight's arrival home in May 1889 he found his house in the same condition as he had left it.¹⁴¹⁶

Melbourne Centennial Exhibition

Parsons organised for a number of Palmerston's prominent men to meet at the Residency to consider representation at the Melbourne Exhibition. Parsons said he had received notification from Johnson that Knight should be ready to take charge of the Territory court in Melbourne. The meeting conferred the position of commissioner on Knight and voted in a working committee to organise exhibits.¹⁴¹⁷ Johnson telegraphed Parsons asking that Knight prepare to take charge of the court in Melbourne, obtain exhibits and travel down in early July.¹⁴¹⁸

Ever anxious to be involved in working on an exhibition, Knight informed Parsons that Pater had agreed to act for him as deputy sheriff and Alfred Searcy to act as public trustee and assistant returning officer. Symes, who acted previously for Knight as clerk of the court and licensing branch, now had a busy legal business and did not have the time. Knight asked Parsons to speak with Pater to see if there was a suitable person for the appointment.¹⁴¹⁹ Ernest Smith was appointed to act as clerk to the local and police courts and the licensing bench.¹⁴²⁰ Knight requested Parsons to wire Johnson and arrange through the Adelaide gem and stone companies for the provision of a variety of gem stones for the Territory section of the Melbourne Exhibition. He also requested to find out how much space was required so he could have a suitable secure case made for the display.¹⁴²¹ Knight's notes to Parsons were

¹⁴¹⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1887/507, Report 13 April 1887. Hingston to Government Resident.

¹⁴¹⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1887/507, Cover note 19 August 1887. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁴¹⁶ 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 19 June 1889.

¹⁴¹⁷ 'The N.T. at the Melbourne Exhibition', *North Australian*, 5 May 1888.

¹⁴¹⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10934, Telegram 3 May 1888. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁴¹⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10941, Letter 9 May 1888. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁴²⁰ 'Appointment', *NTTG*, 23 June 1888.

¹⁴²¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A10963, Note 14 May 1888. Knight to Government Resident.

now without the respectfulness that was previously there. For example, he had before used the words, 'I have the honor' and 'respectfully'. Knight, although polite, displayed a lack of high regard for Parsons in his correspondence from February 1888.

On the 24 June 1888, Knight, with sixty packages of exhibits, sailed on the *Catterthun* to Sydney¹⁴²² then caught the express train to Melbourne.¹⁴²³ Knight was required to make several alterations to the Territory court. Previously in Adelaide, it was placed outside but in Melbourne was given an inside position immediately to the rear of the entrance. Changes were made to the display of vegetable products, as they were all placed in glass jars and shown to a better advantage instead of using bags as displayed in Adelaide.¹⁴²⁴ As the mineral display was now being housed inside, the thirty-foot roof was not required. Knight made various alterations including gables on the columns. 'The upper portion of the structure is dressed over with pounded talc, gold leaf, bronze, and "flitter" in different colours, which give it a brilliant and glittering appearance, especially when lighted by electricity at night'.¹⁴²⁵

Dawn of Art collection

As deputy sheriff, Knight had contact with Aboriginal men in gaol and had noticed their sketches and drawings. He selected some to be taken to the Melbourne Exhibition and these he titled *The Dawn of Art*.¹⁴²⁶ This collection was the first to be exhibited as Aboriginal art in Australia, or, in fact, the world. Historian Philip Jones states that from a western cultural perspective at that time, Aboriginal art did not have sophistication so was not considered art at all.¹⁴²⁷ Jones mistakenly thought that Knight took the drawings to the Jubilee Exhibition in Adelaide in 1887. Jones was possibly misled by Thomas Worsnop's comprehensive book on Australian Aboriginal arts, works and weapons from 1897.

This collection of Aboriginal art from the Territory received mixed comments. A reporter for the *SAA* intimated that someone viewing the art would 'be enabled to get

¹⁴²² 'Shipping', *North Australian*, 30 June 1888.

¹⁴²³ 'Passengers by intercolonial trains', *Age*, 9 July 1888.

¹⁴²⁴ 'South Australian Notes', *Express and Telegraph*, 31 July 1888.

¹⁴²⁵ 'The Northern Territory Court at the Centennial International Exhibition, Melbourne', *NTTG*, 20 October 1888.

¹⁴²⁶ 'The Northern Territory at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition', *NTTG*, 23 June 1888.

¹⁴²⁷ Philip Jones, 'Perceptions of Aboriginal Art: A History', pp. 143-179.

nearly as much fun from them as he would from a copy of the *London Punch*'.¹⁴²⁸ The Melbourne *Argus* offered a more positive tone when the reporter said the crayon drawings indicated 'a singular knowledge of form and aptitude for the reproduction of natural objects, chiefly animals'.¹⁴²⁹ Another reporter from the *SAR* remarked that in parts of the exhibition building were works by famous painters, but in the Northern Territory court the Aboriginal artists' work made a stark contrast. The artists were men who had received no elementary lessons in western art, and worked only with three coloured pencils of blue, red and black and for which they were able to obtain 'tasteful contrasts'. This was undoubtedly the first time anyone had seen drawings on paper by Aboriginals. The reporter elaborated further:

Of course there are absurd eccentricities in shading. A shark is shown with a back marked out into square like a blue-and-red chess board, and a Kangaroo with a breast of blue and a tail of red; but what could even a cultured artist do with three poor pencils? The very faults of these pictures enhance their interest; and probably few other things will be so critically examined.¹⁴³⁰

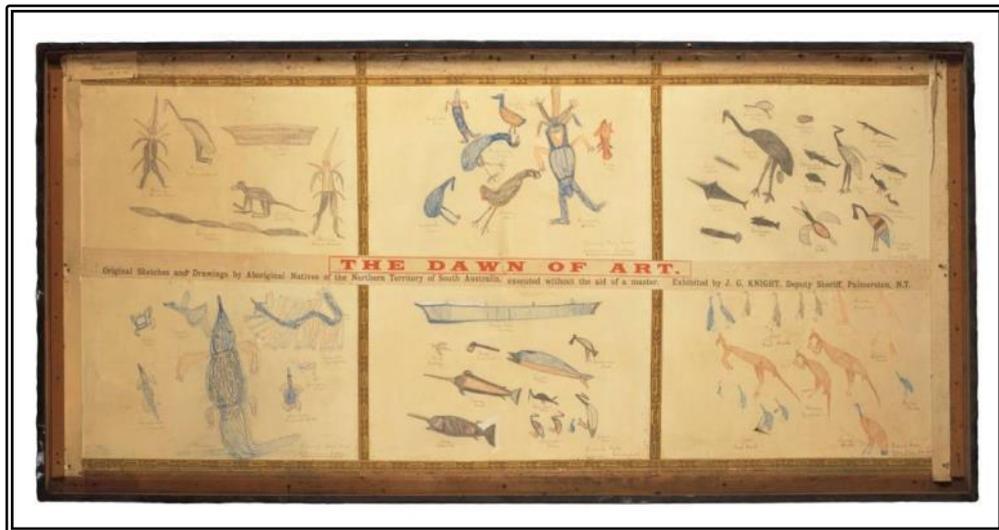


Figure 19. Pencil drawings from *The Dawn of Art* exhibition, 1888

The *NTTG* published a letter sent by Knight in Adelaide to H.H. Adcock in Palmerston apologising for the long delay in writing and to sincerely thank him for the excellent exhibits he had forwarded to Melbourne. Knight wrote of the many

¹⁴²⁸ 'The Melbourne Exhibition, the South Australian Court. No. 2', *SAA*, 31 July 1888.

¹⁴²⁹ 'The Fine Art Collection at the Exhibition, Pictures in the industrial courts', *Argus*, 2 August 1888.

¹⁴³⁰ 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 6 August 1888.

Territory exhibits in various areas and spoke of the drawings made by ‘Billamuc, Davey, Jemmy, Miller, Paddy, Wandy, and other native artists’ as these works had attracted ‘undue attention, especially from real artists’. Knight ‘had the sketches mounted, and put into six frames, each 6ft. by 2ft. 6in., with six pictures in a frame’.¹⁴³¹

At the close of the exhibition, four of these drawings were sent to the School of Mines and one to the Technological Museum in Adelaide and one to the Manchester and Liverpool Museum. The final one went to an English commissioner for Lancashire, J. Girdwood who had taken considerable interest in these sketches and had them photographed for display on lantern slides as he intended giving lectures on his return to England.¹⁴³² Some of the drawings are now kept at the South Australian Museum and ‘represent the earliest surviving examples of their kind from Northern Australia’ or anywhere.¹⁴³³

Mention of Knight in local newspaper

Melbourne Punch competently detailed Knight’s background in Melbourne and all the positions he held in Palmerston, but interestingly it did not mention anything detrimental such as his insolvency.¹⁴³⁴ The newspaper used a picture of Knight, which was the same one used in a South Australian paper the previous year. Alice Knight had returned at some stage from England¹⁴³⁵ as she accompanied her husband to the Mayor’s Ball at the Melbourne Town Hall on 22 August 1888. The Knights were among 1,500 other guests at the ball as described by the *Melbourne Punch*.¹⁴³⁶

Accolades from the exhibition

Knight appeared to have achieved more at the Melbourne Exhibition than in Adelaide the previous year. In terms of accolades, he gained a first order of merit for his mineral display and ball of Territory gold and a second order of merit for his joint

¹⁴³¹ ‘The Northern Territory Court at the Centennial International Exhibition, Melbourne’, *NTTG*, 20 October 1888.

¹⁴³² *SAA*, 28 March 1889.

¹⁴³³ Jones, ‘Perceptions of Aboriginal Art’, p. 166.

¹⁴³⁴ ‘People we know’, *Melbourne Punch*, 13 September 1888.

¹⁴³⁵ Alice Knight had probably returned to Melbourne after the death of her son earlier in the year.

¹⁴³⁶ ‘The Mayor’s Ball’, *Melbourne Punch*, 23 August 1888.

display with Pickford, Clarke and Haines for tin ore and sluiced tin.¹⁴³⁷ Both Holtze and Knight each received a gold medal for their exhibits, which were forwarded to Palmerston in a registered parcel in July 1890 by the minister for the Territory.¹⁴³⁸

Proposed mineral court for Paris

While in Melbourne, Knight envisaged another scheme to promote Australian minerals at the Paris Universal Exposition in the following year. Being astute and observant, he noticed that only about five per cent of exhibition visitors examined any of the raw materials, and to stimulate an interest and enquiry, the raw material should be sent to Paris. Knight's idea was that a subterranean mineral court should be constructed, which was similar to his previous idea back in 1880 when he suggested an underground gallery to exhibit minerals:

His proposal was that an Australasian subterranean mineral court should be formed, consisting of a descending and an ascending shaft about 50ft. deep and 10ft. square, connected by a tunnel 10ft. wide and 10ft. high, with an octagonal space in the centre for the display of the chosen minerals. From the tunnel drives could be put in to show special minerals, and if the scheme received sufficient support all the details of mining manipulation could be introduced. The tunnel would be constructed of cement concrete, and the walls would be inlaid with specimens of minerals.¹⁴³⁹

Many people listened to Knight's proposal and thought it practical as a feature at the Paris Universal. He already had the approval of Sir James Hector, who was the executive commissioner for New Zealand.¹⁴⁴⁰ Well-known prospector Wentworth D'Arcy Uhr wrote to the *Argus*¹⁴⁴¹ saying he thought Knight's idea for a mining exhibition was excellent. Uhr considered that much more interest would be taken if people knew how the riches of Australia appeared underground.¹⁴⁴² Another letter to the *Argus* some two days later, signed by Bananaboy, thought it a capital idea. Bananaboy considered it would be an attractive exhibit with a hint of danger and 'could make a little fortune'.¹⁴⁴³

Knight's scheme for Paris gained momentum when the *Age* published an article on the subject and reported that Knight had brought the project to the notice of the

¹⁴³⁷ 'Northern Territory Awards at the Melbourne Exhibition', *North Australia*, 23 February 1889.

¹⁴³⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1838, Letter 10 July 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁴³⁹ *Argus*, 17 October 1888.

¹⁴⁴⁰ *Argus*, 17 October 1888.

¹⁴⁴¹ F.H. Bauer, 'Uhr, Wentworth D'Arcy (1845-1907)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

¹⁴⁴² Uhr, 'The proposed subterranean mineral court at Paris', *Argus*, 12 November 1888.

¹⁴⁴³ Bananaboy, 'The proposed subterranean mineral court at Paris', *Argus*, 14 November 1888.

Victorian premier, Duncan Gillies. Knight was quoted as saying that if the Australian governments did not act in favour of his project then he was prepared to have it carried out as a private enterprise.¹⁴⁴⁴ A couple of days later, a ‘conversazione’ was held in the office of the South Australian commissioner at the exhibition to exchange ideas on the various classes of exhibits. Knight was asked to explain his project for the mineral exhibit for the Paris Universal and a motion was passed expressing approval.¹⁴⁴⁵

The agent-general for New South Wales in London, Sir Saul Samuel, after examining the general plan for the Paris Exhibition, informed his government he was in favour of using the allotted space of New Zealand and Victoria for the purpose of Knight’s mineral court.¹⁴⁴⁶ Monsieur Berger, the director-general of the Paris Exhibition informed both Samuel and Sir Graham Berry, the agent-general for Victoria, that outside space could be secured for the two colonies’ exhibits at a rental of £2,000 and the erection of an annex would be very costly.¹⁴⁴⁷ Knight’s dream was shattered when news was received by telegram from Berry informing the Victorian government it was impossible to construct a working gold mine underneath the Victorian court at the Paris Exhibition and that it was useless to apply for permission to do so.¹⁴⁴⁸

It was later revealed that the reason the subterranean mining gallery did not go ahead was the inability of the Victorian government to get the required space.¹⁴⁴⁹ But Berger had offered space, at a cost that Victoria apparently was not willing to pay. Perhaps the reason was the petty eternal rivalry between the colonies of Victoria and New South Wales. Another possibility was that Samuel was bitter Victoria lost its allotted space and not New South Wales. Knight commented that if he had applied for open ground and for gold mining from all the Australian colonies instead of

¹⁴⁴⁴ ‘The Paris Exhibition of 1889, Proposed Australian Mineral Court’, *Age*, 12 December 1888.

¹⁴⁴⁵ *Argus*, 15 December 1888.

¹⁴⁴⁶ ‘The Paris Exhibition’, *Evening Journal*, 24 December 1888.

¹⁴⁴⁷ ‘The Paris Exhibition’, *Adelaide Observer*, 29 December 1888.

¹⁴⁴⁸ ‘Special telegrams’, *Argus*, 22 December 1888.

¹⁴⁴⁹ ‘Colonial and Intercolonial, South Australia’, *NTTG*, 30 March 1889.

Victoria alone, he may have achieved his aim. His regret was that he did not offer the idea as a private speculation and charge for people descending the mine by lifts.¹⁴⁵⁰

Undaunted by his idea of the mining gallery being rejected, Knight's next scheme for the Paris Exhibition was a sphere, sixteen feet six inches in diameter supported on five columns of gold quartz representing 'the total value of gold raised in Victoria'. The interior of the richly gilded hollow cement sphere would house the valuable mineral specimens. Knight 'had ascertained from the Mining Department that the quantity of gold raised in the colony up to September last was ... 1,274 tons 7cwt. 2qr. 6lb., of the value of £208,149,115'.¹⁴⁵¹ Knight's gilded sphere design was not acted upon and it is not known if he proposed this idea to officialdom.

In the end the Territory was not part of South Australia's exhibit in Paris, nor was New South Wales represented.¹⁴⁵² It was only after an urgent appeal to the director-general of the Paris Exhibition that New Zealand and Victoria were given space, as all available space had been allocated.¹⁴⁵³ It appears that South Australia only had wine exhibits which 'excite[d] general admiration'.¹⁴⁵⁴ Of course, the greatest exhibit on view in Paris at that time was the recently constructed Eiffel tower which formed the entrance arch of the 1889 exposition.

Knight arrived back in Port Darwin on 20 May 1889 and was welcomed by several friends.¹⁴⁵⁵ The following day Dr Wood certified Knight as suffering from a swollen Achilles tendon and suggested he should rest.¹⁴⁵⁶

Back to reality – money matters

Whilst in Adelaide, Knight had been notified that all the time he had been absent from Palmerston, his ordinary allowance had been struck off his salary, which he presumed was a mistake. In a letter to Johnson he pointed out that the amount in question would not cover more than a sixth of his actual expenses and he thought no other exhibition representative would be allowed to be out of pocket while

¹⁴⁵⁰ *Express and Telegraph*, 28 March 1889.

¹⁴⁵¹ 'Another novelty for the Paris exhibition', *Adelaide Observer*, 5 January 1889.

¹⁴⁵² 'Local Notes', *North Australian*, 16 March 1889.

¹⁴⁵³ 'The Paris Exhibition'. *NTTG*, 26 January 1889.

¹⁴⁵⁴ 'English & Foreign', *North Australian*, 15 June 1889.

¹⁴⁵⁵ 'Local Notes', *North Australian*, 25 May 1889.

¹⁴⁵⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 711. Cover note 21 May 1889. Dr Wood certified Knight's illness.

undertaking official duties. He requested some entitlement to a special consideration beyond the amount that had been deducted. Knight also confessed to having been lured into some speculation while in Melbourne that did not pay. Johnson wrote on the cover note that he considered the Territory allowances to be part of Knight's salary and the amount be paid. Knight was informed of Johnson's decision on 29 March 1889.¹⁴⁵⁷

In April, Johnson wrote to Parsons informing him that Knight's request for his expenses of £49.16.1 and £23 for passage money was approved and had been paid to him.¹⁴⁵⁸ Perhaps Knight, being short of ready money in Melbourne, took an investment gamble thinking he might be lucky, but where money was concerned luck always appeared to avoid him. Enlightening Johnson of this folly was possibly not the most sensible thing to do.

Knight did have some capital tied up in the Territory. According to detailed lists of holders of mineral leases in the Territory in June 1888, Knight, his son Fred and his old friend Sali Cleave all owned mining leases there. Knight was listed as having fifty acres west of Union Reef. In March the same year, Cleve owned eighty acres north-west of Glencoe and both Cleve and Fred each owned forty acres south-west of Union Reefs. No renewal was noted and the list appeared to be annual.¹⁴⁵⁹ Whether Knight was part of other syndicates over the years is not known.

By the end of 1889 Knight was ready to retire, go south to be with his family and take a well-deserved rest after more than sixteen years in the Territory. His Achilles tendon problem was a symptom of his tiredness. His private feelings were uncharacteristically evident in a letter to Emilie in November, where he wrote that he was 'sick of this place, and as retrenchment is the order of the day I was disposed to leave of my own accord before the Powers requested me to do so'. He wrote of having a little money that was well invested. Whether this was in the Territory or Melbourne Knight did not elucidate. But by living in Melbourne and investing wisely under advice from his stockbroker son Fred, he thought he may have enough to live

¹⁴⁵⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1889/253. Letter 28 March 1889. Knight to Johnson.

¹⁴⁵⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A664, Letter 18 April 1889. Johnson to Government Resident.

¹⁴⁵⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1887/968, and SRSA GRS/1/1888/969. Surveyor General's Mineral licences lists for 1887 and 1888.

quietly a little way out of town. Knight further remarked that he would not live long anywhere and by staying in Palmerston he would, in his own words, 'go off like the snuff of a candle'.¹⁴⁶⁰ Sadly the latter remark proved prophetic. On a happier note, 1889 brought Knight two more grandchildren: Emmy and Fred had a daughter Emilie Cleve and his daughter Alice and her husband Thomas had another son, Kenneth Walter.

Prophecy

In April 1889, an article appeared in the South Australian newspaper *Kapunda Herald* written by a man who called himself A. Pencil. Pencil was full of accolades for Knight. He wrote that Knight, the 'ever-young but never green, genial, clever, popular, splendid fellow' should have been the government resident instead of Parsons. He further added that if the gossips were correct and Parsons was retiring later in the year then Knight should be his successor.¹⁴⁶¹

By October it was noted in the newspaper *Quiz* that a rumour was about that both Parsons and Pater were being removed from the Territory. The article hinted that there had been strained relations between the two men, which in turn affected the discipline in the Territory's public service. Knight was suggested as being capable enough to hold both positions as the future government resident and judge.¹⁴⁶² While in Melbourne, Knight was referred to as the government resident in a couple of Melbourne newspapers.¹⁴⁶³ Perhaps there is some truth in the power of the pen.

It came to pass

Judge Pater was leaving the Territory and thought to be entering parliament. De La Rue argues that the government wished to cut administrative costs and pressured Parsons into resigning, thus combining the positions of government resident and judge.¹⁴⁶⁴ Parsons requested terms for his retirement from the government to which it agreed, but expected him to remain in Palmerston until a temporary appointment for

¹⁴⁶⁰ Letter from Knight to Em, 19 November 1889, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁶¹ A. Pencil, 'Scratchings in the city', *Kapunda Herald*, 5 April 1889.

¹⁴⁶² 'Seasonable Saxon', *Quiz*, 19 October 1889.

¹⁴⁶³ *Table Talk*, 31 August 1888.

¹⁴⁶⁴ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 88.

the positions had been made.¹⁴⁶⁵ No word was received as to who was replacing Parsons and Pater.

Another shock was that Knight was contemplating retiring from the government service. The *NTTG* had always been a stalwart supporter of Knight and so the newspaper genuinely felt that all Territory settlers with whom Knight had contact would regret his leaving.¹⁴⁶⁶ A week later the *NTTG* brought readers up to date, stating that although it had ‘not yet been officially announced’, W.R. Wigley had ‘virtually been appointed to the position of Government Resident and Judge’. With regards to Knight, the paper said he had ‘applied for six months’ leave of absence, and permission to retire at the end of that term.¹⁴⁶⁷

Knight was ready to retire in 1889 and wished to return south. He sent a letter of resignation to the minister saying he may be standing for election in the South Australian parliament. However, it was mentioned in the House of Assembly in November that both Government Resident Parsons and Judge Pater were in the process of resigning and leaving the Territory to return to Adelaide. The idea of the government was to have a ‘legal man’ from Adelaide take the combined positions.¹⁴⁶⁸ There was consternation in Adelaide caused by Knight’s resignation, as both Pater and Parsons were leaving the Territory; Pater to take up another judicial role and Parsons to return to politics. Names of South Australian men were put forward, but no acceptances of the joint position were forthcoming, as it was thought to be a very low salary. Knight was possibly the most senior civil servant left in Palmerston so he was offered £250 to take the temporary appointment of acting government resident. The enticement was readily accepted and after some months he was offered the permanent position of government resident and judge.

Conclusion

The town was still being established with further permanency by way of footpaths and kerbing. Knight undertook the drawing of the plans for the gaol infirmary and supervision of its construction; it was a building desperately required. Both the

¹⁴⁶⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1233, Telegram 3 December 1889. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁴⁶⁶ *NTTG*, 20 December 1889.

¹⁴⁶⁷ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 27 December 1889.

¹⁴⁶⁸ ‘Latest Telegrams’, *NTTG*, 1 November 1889.

Northern Territory and Knight achieved considerable recognition from the well-received exhibits organised by Knight at both the Jubilee Exhibition in Adelaide and the Melbourne Centennial International. Knight had organised an art exhibit of several Fannie Bay Gaol Aboriginal inmates for the Melbourne Centennial. This was the first Aboriginal art display anywhere in the world.

Knight received a few trivial accusations: one from Foelsche, a reprimand from Parsons and another from Johnson. These small, relatively minor accusations against Knight appeared the final blow to him, as it soon became public knowledge that Knight was clearly thinking of retiring and returning to Melbourne. He had applied for six months leave and permission to retire at the end of that time. Unfortunately for Knight, his arrangements were not to be. As both the government resident and judge were leaving Palmerston at this particular time to return to Adelaide, and with no appropriate people available to fill the vacancies, Knight was asked to remain in Palmerston.

The following chapter for the years 1890 to 1892 illustrates how unpredictable life was for Knight. Instead of the rest and retirement he desired, there was more activity and frustration with bureaucracy. Much to his amazement, and that of the local population, he stayed in Palmerston, never to enjoy his leave of absence. The South Australian government had offered him an inducement that he could not refuse.

Chapter Ten

Government resident, 1890-1892

If life unfolded the way Knight had envisaged in the latter part of the previous year, 1890 would have seen him saying goodbye to his many friends and sailing south. Instead of retirement, the following two years for him became frenetic and at times frustrating. Knight retained his urbane style and coped to the best of his ability with the inevitable problems that arose. Many of the difficulties were caused by the ineptness of the South Australian government with its lack of forethought and continual cut backs for the Territory.

Knight was encouraged to enter parliament in late 1889. This did not eventuate, but he was offered the joint positions of acting judge and government resident, as Judge Pater and Government Resident Parsons had officially retired at the end of 1889. Knight accepted both positions, which later became permanent. In the beginning, he was thwarted by the incumbent Parsons who had decided to stand as a candidate for the representation of the Territory in the House of Assembly and remained in the Residency while campaigning for the South Australian election that was held in April 1890.¹⁴⁶⁹ Thus, he deliberately denied Knight access to the official Residency.

Knight chose to stay in Palmerston because he had little money on hand and required a continuing income. There also may have been some stubbornness to see if he could administer the Territory in a more beneficial way for the inhabitants than had previously been undertaken by the other government residents. He was more forthright in his approach to the minister for the Territory for various requirements, which often resulted in him receiving extra money.¹⁴⁷⁰ Unfortunately for him, this particular time in the Territory's history was one of stagnation, as the boom created by the railway construction ended in 1889 when many construction workers left town and the population was seriously reduced. Very few capitalists were interested in investing in the Territory then. This state of affairs not only affected this northern

¹⁴⁶⁹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Letter from Knight to Fred, 5 May 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 23.

land, but the entire continent underwent a depression in the 1890s.¹⁴⁷¹ Initially, the crisis was due to the collapse of ‘the great London banking house of Baring’ and as a consequence, ‘confidence in all colonial investments was shaken.’¹⁴⁷²

Throughout this narrative it has been seen that whenever Knight desired to speculate it was always the wrong time. These final years continued on this course and did not offer Knight the deserved respite to share with loved ones, except for his young son Walter who came to the Territory in July 1891 and was with his father for Knight’s final months.

Knight considers standing for parliament

Even though Knight had asked for six months leave of absence, something, or somebody must have sown the idea of standing as a Territory representative in the South Australian parliamentary election to be held in early 1890. On 1 January 1890, Knight, in reply to a letter from Parsons, initially thanked him for the kind words relating to his official roles and stated that even though he would be resigning from his postings, he would not cut himself off entirely from the Territory as he had a vested interest in the place. This remark may have meant the few small investments he had in Territory mining. Knight intimated that people of note had suggested he be nominated for parliament, but he did not wish to oppose either V.L. Solomon or H.H. Adcock but if either of those men were prevented from going to the polls he would stand for election.¹⁴⁷³ Knight’s letter to Parsons was one of perfunctory politeness.

A new government resident is required

In the newspaper the *Port Pirie Standard and Barrier Advertiser* on 1 January 1890, there appeared in a gossip column the following lines which tend to make a mockery of the position:

Wanted by the Ministry of South Australia a man of culture, tact, and energy, and of presentable appearance to act as Government Resident in the Northern Territory. Lawyers capable of acting also as judge preferred, salary £1,000 to £1,250 per annum and requisites.

¹⁴⁷¹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁷² Garden, *Victoria*, p. 204.

¹⁴⁷³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1276, Letter 1 January 1890. Knight to Government Resident. On cover note, 3 January 1890, Parliamentary probable candidature.

N.B.-According to the established rules governing appointments in this colony no really competent person need apply.¹⁴⁷⁴

The above words tend to make a mockery of the position. While SA spent a lot on the NT, Knight often found he had to deal with reduced spending from Adelaide.

Knight offered acting roles for the administration and judiciary of the Territory

Knight's leave of absence and resignation appeared to surprise government members, giving them some consternation as how to handle the matter. Over his many years in the Territory, Knight was one of the main stalwarts of the civil service, undertaking multifarious positions to a high standard and now he was leaving. He had become a fixture. On 2 January 1890 the ministers in cabinet decided to ask Knight to act in the dual role of government resident and judge until a permanent appointment for a new head of administration and the judiciary was made. It was argued by a reporter in the *Evening Journal* that it was not a wise move to combine the two positions as 'it is opposed to sound constitutional principle'.¹⁴⁷⁵

In December 1889 three potential names were put forward for this dual appointment. The positions had been offered to Henry Downer and C.J. Dashwood who both declined. Then the offer was made to W.R. Wigley.¹⁴⁷⁶ Wigley, being in ill health at the time, died early the following year.¹⁴⁷⁷ Downer briefly became attorney-general for South Australia in May 1890.¹⁴⁷⁸ In all probability, both Downer and Dashwood declined the position because of the inadequate salary offered. The salary was alluded to in an article that said it would be very difficult to get a person that could efficiently take on the roles of 'the two positions, and of such singular modesty as to be willing to accept the small salary attached to them'.¹⁴⁷⁹ According to the editor of the *NTTG*, combining the two positions saved the government at least £1,500 annually on administration expenditure.¹⁴⁸⁰

¹⁴⁷⁴ 'Adelaide gossip', *Port Pirie Standard and Barrier Advertiser*, 1 January 1890.

¹⁴⁷⁵ 'The Northern Territory', *Evening Journal*, 3 January 1890.

¹⁴⁷⁶ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 6 December 1889.

¹⁴⁷⁷ 'Death of Mr. W.R. Wigley. S.M.', *SAR*, 7 May 1890.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Patrick O'Neill, 'List of Australian Attorneys-General'.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Adelaide Observer*, 4 January 1890.

¹⁴⁸⁰ 'Mr. Knight's appointment', *NTTG*, 10 January 1890.

Things moved very quickly. James Bath, secretary to J.H. Gordon, telegraphed Parsons saying Knight's resignation had not been dealt with, nor had Knight been offered the appointment as acting government resident. Bath thought Knight might be given extra pay if Parsons left before a successor arrived so suggested that Parsons remain in the Territory until the elections took place.¹⁴⁸¹ On 3 January Gordon requested Parsons to ask Knight if he would withdraw his resignation and act as government resident until a permanent replacement was found. If Knight accepted he would receive an extra £250 per annum.¹⁴⁸² Undoubtedly Parsons responded to his minister's request and asked Knight,¹⁴⁸³ who replied by telegram to the government of his willingness to accept the temporary dual positions.¹⁴⁸⁴ Throughout January 1890, newspapers in both the NT and SA reported on Knight's suitability as a candidate for the temporary dual positions.

In July 1883 Bath was secretary to Parsons when he was minister for the Territory¹⁴⁸⁵ and had continued in that position serving the following four ministers. So it was perhaps not surprising that in a telegram to Parsons, Bath, in quite familiar terms, informed Parsons that public opinion was that Knight was equal to the position of government resident and judge, but Bath considered the latter appointment for Knight as 'ignorant nonsense'. The telegram contained not only reference to Knight but other material that Bath deduced would give Parsons a decision in guiding his reply to the minister.¹⁴⁸⁶ Was it from the previous friendship or loyalty that Bath was offering Parsons his own judgement and guidance? This is reminiscent of the British comedy 'Yes Prime Minister'.

Gordon was rather perplexed as to how Knight could be returning officer as he would need to resign the latter office if he decided to be a candidate for the forthcoming election. Gordon also asked Parsons when he was leaving the Territory.¹⁴⁸⁷ Parsons' reply is not known. At this stage Knight was already engaged in the legal work previously undertaken by Pater. Indubitably Knight had decided

¹⁴⁸¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1281, Telegram 1 January 1890. Bath to Government Resident.

¹⁴⁸² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1421, Telegram 3 January 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁴⁸³ Archival material relating to Parsons asking Knight was not located.

¹⁴⁸⁴ 'The Residency in the Northern Territory', *Evening Journal*, 4 January 1890.

¹⁴⁸⁵ 'Secretary to the Minister of Education', *Adelaide Observer*, 28 July 1883.

¹⁴⁸⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1428, Telegram 14 January 1890. Bath to Government Resident.

¹⁴⁸⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1530, Telegram 14 January 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

that standing for election as a Territory representative may not have suited him as members of parliament were mostly men of independent means. His financial situation was always uncertain. At least taking the offered positions of acting government resident and judge gave him more stability and a known remuneration including the extra £250.

Candidates for representation for the Northern Territory

In mid-February 1890 there were three candidates wishing to represent the Territory in the House of Assembly: Adcock, Beresford and Solomon.¹⁴⁸⁸ On the day Parsons retired, he tendered his name as the fourth candidate.¹⁴⁸⁹ Adcock reluctantly announced his retirement as a candidate because he was unable to find someone to replace him in his business.¹⁴⁹⁰ Within days of nominating his candidature, Parsons published an advertisement in the *North Australian* addressed 'To the Electors of the Northern Territory' attacking Knight's role as returning officer. Parsons claimed anomalies in the way Knight had compiled the rolls which 'may invalidate any election'. Parsons also advertised the letter he had sent to Knight which in part had the following lines:

As a candidate for the representation of the Northern Territory I beg to direct your attention to the state of the electoral roll for the district, and I have the honor to request that you will obtain immediately from the law offices of the Crown an authoritative declaration whether any member elected under it without violating the Electoral Acts himself could take and retain his seat.¹⁴⁹¹

A cloud over Knight's actions

Gordon was notified of Parsons' charges against Knight for neglect in relation to compilation of the electoral rolls and was awaiting the opinion of the crown law officers.¹⁴⁹² Adcock wrote a letter to the *North Australian* as he was quite irate that Parsons deliberately set out to discredit Knight, knowing Knight's government appointment disallowed him to enter into a newspaper controversy. Adcock further wrote damning evidence against Parsons saying that when he was in office, he would have known of all Knight's official correspondence as it had to pass through him. If

¹⁴⁸⁸ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 14 February 1890.

¹⁴⁸⁹ 'Local Notes', *North Australian*, 14 February 1890.

¹⁴⁹⁰ 'Mr. H.H. Adcock's retirement', *NTTG*, 21 March 1890.

¹⁴⁹¹ 'Election Notices', *Advertiser*, 18 February 1890.

¹⁴⁹² 'Electoral Rolls in the Northern Territory', *SAR*, 20 February 1890.

Parsons had thought there was any irregularity, why did he not rectify the situation at that time? Parsons not only tried to bring a slur on Knight but that of Solomon's electoral chances too, as it was his paper that printed the returning rolls.¹⁴⁹³ The editor of the *NTTG* was angry that Parsons opened his electoral campaign with an attack on Knight, reiterating Adcock's statement that Parsons was well aware there were some flaws in compiling the Territory rolls. The editor thought Parsons advertising the fact through the newspaper in the letter he had written to Knight about those minor flaws, was not the action of gentleman.¹⁴⁹⁴

Parsons, not content with advertising in the Territory newspapers, placed an advertisement in one of South Australia's newspapers, the *Advertiser*, which included the contents of the long letter he had sent to Knight. In the advertisement Parsons said he felt 'that the present condition of the electoral roll is most unsatisfactory, and may invalidate any election'. In the letter to Knight, Parsons stated 'I know you as deputy returning-officer entered the names of persons on the roll without their personal or written application'. Another of Parsons' complaints was that it was unsatisfactory for the rolls to be printed by the *NTTG* whose owner was an announced candidate, as this gave an unfair advantage against the *North Australian*.¹⁴⁹⁵

The editor of the *North Australian*, obviously on Parsons' side, said 'the wisdom of the step taken by Mr Parsons cannot be questioned' as a candidate had a right to know how matters stood. If there was any invalidity, the editor thought the Territory would be the laughing stock of the southern colonies. Surprisingly, the report said it was a mistake for any charge to be made against Knight as they knew he had gone out of his way to make a success of the election, but on the other hand said he was only human and could make mistakes.¹⁴⁹⁶ Knight's personal opinion of Parsons, mentioned earlier in this chapter, appears to be well founded judging by his underhand electioneering antics. An enquiry into the allegations made by Parsons was conducted and 'the law officers of the Crown and the Returning Officer'

¹⁴⁹³ 'The Electoral Rolls', *North Australian*, 21 February 1890.

¹⁴⁹⁴ 'The forthcoming election', *NTTG*, 21 February 1890.

¹⁴⁹⁵ 'To the electors of the Northern Territory', *Advertiser*, 18 February 1890.

¹⁴⁹⁶ 'Those Rolls', *North Australian*, 21 February 1890.

reported back to Gordon that they did not doubt the legality of the election ‘founded upon the electoral roll as it exists at present’. Parsons was informed of the results.¹⁴⁹⁷

Ballot Day

Ballot day was 18 April 1890 for the Territory elections and by 2 May the final results were known. Knight as returning officer read the individual results. Solomon had a resounding win, almost doubling Parsons’ vote, Beresford came third and thus out of contention as a representative. Knight at last had the opportunity to explain his actions in regard to the electoral roll in the newspaper. He stated that he had held responsible positions before, but being returning officer had given him more anxiety than any other. Knight considered that ‘instead of being blamed for his conduct with regard to the Roll he thought he deserved credit for the steps he took to make the election a success’.¹⁴⁹⁸ With the election and all the aspersions associated with it gone, the people of Palmerston settled back into their familiar ways and Knight was able to get on with organising the beginning of a new chapter in his life.

Knight hindered by Parsons

Parsons appeared complacent, as well he may, as he had received a telegram from Gordon saying his salary would be paid to the end of the financial year and he could leave when he wished as the government valued his services.¹⁴⁹⁹ Knight wrote to Parsons stating that when he was asked to accept the role of acting resident he assumed he would be taking up his ‘new duties without delay’ and so asked Parsons when he was proposing to retire.¹⁵⁰⁰ Regrettably, Knight was required to hold his personal arrangements in abeyance until Parsons announced that he would retire from office on 14 February.¹⁵⁰¹

Knight in charge causes one newspaper’s disagreement

Once it was known that Knight had accepted the acting roles of government resident and judge, the local newspapers each offered their points of view on the subject. The

¹⁴⁹⁷ ‘The Hon. J.L. Parsons and the N.T. Electoral Roll’, *Evening Journal*, 24 February 1890.

¹⁴⁹⁸ ‘The Election, Final Result’, *North Australian*, 2 May 1890.

¹⁴⁹⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1633, Telegram 22 January 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁵⁰⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1440, Letter 24 January 1890. Knight to Government Resident.

¹⁵⁰¹ ‘Local Notes’, *North Australian*, 7 February 1890.

opinion of the *North Australian* was that Knight was well qualified to act in the temporary role for both positions. But for the permanent positions, this should be undertaken by a person or persons from outside Palmerston, someone that was not involved in ‘local cliques and petty jealousies’. Its other concern was that when someone was selected from local ranks, there was often some bitterness. This situation would be avoided by an outsider who had not formed close friendships and was ‘a thorough master of the legal profession’.¹⁵⁰²

The *NTTG* took a slightly different line, reporting the appointment of Knight ‘gives general satisfaction to the people of the Territory’. The paper advocated Knight’s appointment to both roles, and with his many years of experience in the judiciary, could not see any difficulty in him performing this role. In fact, the article added: ‘He is a polished gentleman, a born diplomatist, and a calm, clear-headed, and good-hearted man, whose only desire would be ... to do common justice between man and man’.¹⁵⁰³

The local newspapers sided with either Parsons or Pater

The *NTTG* nearly always sided with Pater and the *North Australian* with Parsons. When both papers were alluding to Knight’s appointment, the *NTTG* said that both Parsons and Pater were to ‘retire together at the end of 1889 and the former to receive six months’ full pay’. The *NTTG* editor asked why now that Knight had been appointed was Parsons ‘still hanging on to the position like a “limpet to a rock.”’¹⁵⁰⁴

The *North Australian* opined that Pater never ‘cared much for the Territory’ until he was leaving. His friends did not give him a farewell dinner and his family departed Palmerston on 6 January 1890 on the *Chingtu*.¹⁵⁰⁵ Pater must have requested of Parsons that his horse and carriage be sent down to Adelaide. Gordon telegraphed Parsons to pay passage money for Pater, his family and household effects, but not the

¹⁵⁰² *North Australian*, 17 January 1890.

¹⁵⁰³ ‘Mr. Knight’s appointment’, *NTTG*, 10 January 1890.

¹⁵⁰⁴ *NTTG*, 17 January 1890.

¹⁵⁰⁵ ‘Local Notes’, *North Australian*, 10 January 1890.

horse or carriage and reiterated Bath's earlier comment that Knight's resignation had still not been decided upon.¹⁵⁰⁶

Knight embarked upon the highest administrative position in the Territory

The fourteenth of February 1890 was the day Knight assumed his new duties as acting government resident. He took on this role at a salary of £700,¹⁵⁰⁷ which was a drastic reduction from what Parsons received. In fact, it was less than half. When Parsons accepted the role of government resident in 1884, his salary was £1,500. At this time it was thought that the salary was commensurate with the demanding position.¹⁵⁰⁸ Pater's salary commenced at £1,000.¹⁵⁰⁹ Knight took on both roles for £700. He was heartily welcomed by the *NTTG* which wrote glowingly of his 'calmness and courtesy in his various official positions, and his innate love of truth and substantial justice' and declared that he would 'hold himself aloof from all party squabbles'. The editor gave Parsons credit for being the more fluent speaker and for writing 'such brilliantly misleading reports'.¹⁵¹⁰ In late March, Gordon notified Knight that he had asked Parsons to hand over the Residence to him.¹⁵¹¹ This did not happen then. In Palmerston there was also surprise that Parsons continued to occupy the Residency after resigning as resident.¹⁵¹² Not only did Parsons refuse to leave, he retained the government horse and buggy for his own use.¹⁵¹³

The *North Australian* defended Parsons staying in the Residence. It stated Parsons was on leave of absence and had every right to remain in his abode and Knight was not without shelter as he had a house to live in.¹⁵¹⁴ Back in February the same editor had written: 'The Resident steps out of office, but not out of house, and that the Acting will have to entertain for a time in the quaint and secluded castle down the hill'.¹⁵¹⁵ A reporter from the *Kapunda Herald* appeared to be on Knight's side,

¹⁵⁰⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1279, Telegram 2 January 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁵⁰⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1674, Telegram 13 May 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁰⁸ SAA, 22 February 1884.

¹⁵⁰⁹ 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 1 March 1884.

¹⁵¹⁰ 'Our Government Resident', *NTTG*, 14 February 1890.

¹⁵¹¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item A1564, Telegram 27 March 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵¹² 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 21 March 1890.

¹⁵¹³ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 28 February 1890.

¹⁵¹⁴ *North Australian*, 7 March 1890.

¹⁵¹⁵ 'It is said', *North Australian*, 7 February 1890.

writing that he considered Parsons still occupying the Residence was not the right thing to do.¹⁵¹⁶ Parsons had requested that he stay in the Residence until 9 April.¹⁵¹⁷

At last Parsons departed Palmerston aboard the *Chingtu* for a southern port on 17 April 1890.¹⁵¹⁸ This was over two months after his retirement. According to Knight, he left without saying goodbye and had stripped the Residence bare without offering Knight the opportunity to purchase. Knight was quite sure that now Parsons was elected, he would try to oust him from office, but knew Solomon would oppose this move.¹⁵¹⁹

In Knight's letter to his son Fred in December 1889, he made evident his dislike of Parsons had been of long duration. Knight wrote, 'He [Parsons] is a two faced, plausible, hypocritical liar and has been a secret enemy of mine throughout!'¹⁵²⁰ These were very strong comments and it could be wondered if Knight had confided his opinion of Parsons to many of his friends in the Territory, but in all likelihood Solomon was his confidant.¹⁵²¹ Although it was evident that Knight disliked Parsons, in June when he received the audit office's queries, he defended Parson's decision to send a druggist to Borroloola at the government's expense. Knight added 'half a Doctor was better than none at all. I think Mr Parsons could not have done better than pay his passage and thereby prevent his being a permanent charge on relief'.¹⁵²² This shows Knight could leave personal feelings aside and give credit where and when it was due.

A definite division in Palmerston

About twenty men met with Parsons on 20 February 1890 to wish him well and toast his health with champagne and regret his retirement. On the same morning, Knight received a deputation of local men to congratulate him on his appointment. H.H.

¹⁵¹⁶ 'Scratchings in the city', *Kapunda Herald*, 21 March 1890.

¹⁵¹⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1611, Telegram 3 April 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵¹⁸ 'Shipping', *North Australian*, 18 April 1890.

¹⁵¹⁹ Letter from Knight to Fred, 5 May 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 23.

¹⁵²⁰ Letter from Knight to Fred, 16 December 1889, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 21.

¹⁵²¹ Letter from Knight to Fred, 5 May 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 23.

¹⁵²² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1699, Audit queries 10 June 1890. Acting Government Resident to Audit Office.

Adcock hoped that Knight would be given the permanent position of government resident. Knight in reply thanked him, ‘and expressed the hope that – although his wings would unquestionably be clipped a good deal – he would do whatever he could to improve the interests of the place; and would give earnest attention to all matters of public importance which might be submitted to him’.¹⁵²³ Knight was well aware that most of his ideas would be curtailed and any monetary expenditure on his part would be kept well in check by the South Australian government.

In mid-March, the heads of various government departments met and presented Parsons with a gold watch and chain. Paul Foelsche, who stated that there had always been harmonious relations between the departments, read the address. Foelsche added that the watch had been selected in Adelaide by two of Parsons’ old friends, James Bath and Charles Todd.¹⁵²⁴ There was no mention of Knight, Solomon or Adcock being present.

Knight continuing his job of returning officer

A bill for the provision of a Northern Territory representative of the South Australian parliament was passed in 1888.¹⁵²⁵ With a general election taking place in 1890, Knight as district returning officer wrote a telegram to Boothby, suggesting that Adelaide could administer the southern Territory towns of Alice Springs, Charlotte Waters and Tennant Creek more readily than he could from Palmerston. Knight had made up a new roll of 626 registered electors and eighty-six for council. He had tenders for printing 100 copies of each roll for £6.10s and requested that he be advised if printing could be done in Palmerston.¹⁵²⁶

Another election for a Northern Territory seat 1891

Unfortunately for Solomon his company later became insolvent which meant he had to relinquish his place in the House of Assembly as a member for the Northern Territory, so his seat became vacant.¹⁵²⁷ Solomon had no other option but to resign

¹⁵²³ ‘Official matters’, *North Australian*, 21 February 1890.

¹⁵²⁴ ‘Presentation to the Hon. J. Langdon Parsons’, *North Australian*, 14 March 1890.

¹⁵²⁵ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, p. 163.

¹⁵²⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1357, Telegram January 1890. n.d. Knight to Boothby via Minister.

¹⁵²⁷ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 6 March 1891.

under the Constitutional Act.¹⁵²⁸ Undaunted, and after seeking legal advice, he later stood again as a candidate for the Territory¹⁵²⁹ and was backed by a supportive group of men in Palmerston.¹⁵³⁰ Out of a total of 210 votes, Solomon polled 134, a clear lead from over his opponents, Beresford 49, Hughes 23 and 4 informal votes.¹⁵³¹

Solomon was challenged by candidate R.D. Beresford who considered Solomon as an insolvent was ineligible to stand, so Solomon declined to take his seat in the House of Assembly until the matter was resolved. In SA, Beresford's father had tried to induce some parliamentarians to petition against Solomon's return, but this tactic failed.¹⁵³² The insolvency case was concluded and summed up favourably by Commissioner Russell and Solomon was granted a second-class certificate on 12 June.¹⁵³³ Solomon once more took his place as the Territory representative and 'was greeted with friendly cheers from both sides of the House'.¹⁵³⁴ Now clear of his insolvency woes, Solomon went into business in Adelaide 'as a mining, land and commission agent'.¹⁵³⁵

In July 1891 Parsons put forward the idea of introducing a parliamentary whip into the government. Whips had been part of the Westminster system of government for over 120 years, but this was the first time the position had been introduced into the South Australia parliamentary system. After considerable debate and slightly modified wording, the motion for appointing a whip was put to the vote, resulting in the ayes having 24 votes and the noes 21.¹⁵³⁶ Parsons nominated Solomon for the position of parliamentary 'whip', which was an honour for him. Solomon was quite popular in the House and as reported in the *NTTG* 'complimentary to the constituency which sent him to Parliament'.¹⁵³⁷

¹⁵²⁸ 'A nice legal point', *Evening Journal*, 15 June 1891. See 'Insolvent Act 1886'.

¹⁵²⁹ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 24 April 1891.

¹⁵³⁰ 'To the electors of the district of Northern Territory', *NTTG*, 27 March 1891.

¹⁵³¹ 'The elections', *SAR*, 6 June 1891.

¹⁵³² 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 19 June 1891.

¹⁵³³ 'Law courts', *South Australian Chronicle*, 20 June 1891.

¹⁵³⁴ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 19 June 1891.

¹⁵³⁵ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 21 August 1891.

¹⁵³⁶ 'Parliamentary whips', *SAR*, 2 July 1891.

¹⁵³⁷ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 28 August 1891.

Differing opinions between the local newspapers

Over many years, the two Palmerston newspapers had often taken differing views on many issues. For example, the *North Australian* saw no wrong with Parsons and quibbled about Pater. The opposite was the norm for the *NTTG*, which often criticised Parsons and was lenient with Pater. Things came to a head when Parsons awarded the government gazette to the *North Australian* beginning on 1 June 1889.¹⁵³⁸ This had previously been a lucrative source of income to the *NTTG*. The *NTTG* was upset by what it said was the unfair way the *North Australian* received the tender. According to the *NTTG* the government did not call for public tenders although it was ‘verbally bound by the agreement of the former Government, to give the Gazette work’ to the *NTTG* until a government printing office had been established in Palmerston.¹⁵³⁹

Local newspapers amalgamate

Before sailing south to take up his appointment, Solomon disposed of his entire interest in the *NTTG* to Walter Griffiths. Griffiths had previously been a partner ‘with Solomon in mining and importing ventures’.¹⁵⁴⁰ Griffiths, together with George Mayhew and Charles Kirkland, the proprietors of the *North Australian*, amalgamated the two newspapers retaining the name the *NTTG*.¹⁵⁴¹ Proprietors Mayhew, Kirkland and Griffiths formally wrote to Knight informing him of the amalgamation of the two newspapers from 1 June 1890 and wished ‘to continue the publication of the Government Gazette for the sum of £300 per annum for a term of three years’. The men pointed out that initially the *NTTG* had been paid £300 but for the previous three or four years this sum had dropped to £180 which had not covered costs.¹⁵⁴²

Confirmation was received from the government that it would pay £300 for one year.¹⁵⁴³ The proprietors of the *NTTG* were not happy to accept the government’s

¹⁵³⁸ ‘Local Notes’, *North Australian*, 25 May 1889.

¹⁵³⁹ ‘The ‘North Australian Gazette Contract’, *NTTG*, 8 June 1889.

¹⁵⁴⁰ ‘N.T. Times and Gazette Notice’, *NTTG*, 30 May 1890; see also Helen J. Wilson and Barbara James, ‘Griffiths, Walter (Grif)’, *NTDB*, p. 244.

¹⁵⁴¹ ‘N.T. Times and Gazette’, *NTTG*, 16 May 1890.

¹⁵⁴² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1680, Letter 20 May 1890, Mayhew, Kirkland and Griffiths to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁴³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1700, Telegram 2 June 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

terms of one year, stating that their offer was for three years.¹⁵⁴⁴ The government replied it could not agree for more than one year at £300 and if this offer was not acceptable other arrangement would be made.¹⁵⁴⁵ Being aware of the straitened circumstances the Territory was now in, the owners thinking some money was better than none, decided to accept the government's terms of one year for £300.¹⁵⁴⁶

International Exhibition of Mining and Metallurgy London 1890

Once again SA was to exhibit minerals in a mining and metallurgy exhibition to be held at the Crystal Palace, London in July 1890. Knight was directed by Gordon to immediately take steps to arrange a good collection of Territory minerals and forward it to the agent general.¹⁵⁴⁷ Knight wrote an article for the *NTTG* saying the Territory would be represented at the International Exhibition and requested samples from Territory residents of gold, tin, silver, copper and other minerals. He invited interested people to the Government Residence on 10 May for a viewing of exhibits. A party then followed.¹⁵⁴⁸ Receiving minerals from various people allowed Knight to send fifty-one cases of specimens to London.¹⁵⁴⁹

There were contributions of auriferous quartz from Pine Creek, samples from the Port Darwin Tin Mining Company at Mount Wells, and surface tin and quartz from the Howley district.¹⁵⁵⁰ Added to these were specimens from the Daly River Copper Mine.¹⁵⁵¹ Inspector of mines for SA, David Rosewarne, sailed to England in April 1890 accompanied by some sixty tons of mineral exhibits. Knight forwarded the minerals collected in the Territory from Port Darwin.¹⁵⁵² This exhibition of mining and metallurgy had been scheduled to have been opened on 7 July, but even two weeks after that date the executive committee was unable to locate a distinguished person to perform the opening ceremony. Although this was purported to be an

¹⁵⁴⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1701, Letter 4 June 1890. Mayhew, Kirkland and Griffiths to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁴⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1702, Telegram 5 June 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁴⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1727, Letter 7 June 1890. Mayhew, Kirkland and Griffiths to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁴⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1556, Telegram 13 March 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁴⁸ 'International Exhibition', *NTTG*, 21 March 1890.

¹⁵⁴⁹ 'Specimens for Exhibition', *NTTG*, 23 May 1890.

¹⁵⁵⁰ 'Contributions to Crystal Palace Mining Exhibition', *NTTG*, 25 April 1890.

¹⁵⁵¹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 13 June 1890.

¹⁵⁵² 'The week', *South Australian Chronicle*, 26 April 1890.

international exhibition and there were some other countries represented, it would have been ‘an utter fiasco’, according to the *Adelaide Observer*, without the South Australian court, which was the first to be completed, followed by a massive display of exhibits from New South Wales. Up until 18 July the exhibition was unadvertised.¹⁵⁵³

Solomon forwarded a report in pamphlet form on the exhibition which said that three Territory miners and one mining association received awards for their specimens and Knight gained an award for his ‘collective exhibit, and for specimens of building stone’. Noted on the pamphlet was that ‘The gold and tin exhibits were certainly the finest in the Exhibition’.¹⁵⁵⁴ The awards were indeed something to be proud of and the exhibition was an excellent way for those two Australian colonies to display their minerals.

Interest in mining and other shares

Having considerable interest in mining, Knight sailed with other people in the boat *Maggie* to a tin mine in Bynoe Harbour.¹⁵⁵⁵ In a letter to his son Fred, Knight pointed out that tin mining in the Territory would be the ‘leading mineral export’ and the Bynoe Harbour mine was ‘raising payable ore’. He had shares in several companies including Melbourne Trams, Broken Hill, the silver mines Flora Bell and New Eveleen, but was not doing well out of any.¹⁵⁵⁶ In a previous letter to Fred in December 1889, Knight clearly demonstrated considerable interest in the share market, but not having access to the latest stocks he had unfortunately tried to hold out for a higher price. The prices fell and he lost once more.¹⁵⁵⁷ The *NTTG* reported in March 1890 that the share market ‘was very much depressed’.¹⁵⁵⁸ By December of that year, Knight in writing to his daughter-in-law Emilie, whom he affectionately referred to as Em in his letters, said that it was ‘an awful blow’ to him that his shares in Melbourne Trams had fallen further, adding ‘there is nothing to choose between

¹⁵⁵³ ‘The international exhibition of mining and metallurgy’, *Adelaide Observer*, 30 August 1890.

¹⁵⁵⁴ ‘Notes of the Week’, *NTTG*, 22 May 1891.

¹⁵⁵⁵ ‘Local Notes’, *North Australian*, 30 May 1890.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Letter from Knight to Fred, 5 May 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁵⁷ Letter from Knight to Fred, 16 December 1889, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 21.

¹⁵⁵⁸ ‘Latest telegrams’, *NTTG*, 21 March 1890.

Investment and Speculative stock'.¹⁵⁵⁹ In his 1890 yearly report, Knight wrote of the collapse of the Eveleen and Flora Bell silver mines; he was a shareholder in both. He acknowledged other losses in the report, noting that his 'experience of tin mining' had come 'at a cost of some £300'.¹⁵⁶⁰

Knight enjoys society in his new home

At long last Knight was able to settle into the Residence and on 10 May 1891 he entertained nearly 100 guests there. In a letter to son Fred, Knight wrote that not having an allowance he was very concerned as to how much liquor would be consumed.¹⁵⁶¹ With his wife in England, Knight relied on other ladies to perform as hostess at official government functions. According to James, 'a favourite was Evlampi Holtze, popular and hospitable wife of the talented curator of the botanical gardens, Maurice Holtze'.¹⁵⁶² At this particular function, Mrs Adcock acted as hostess for the evening where approximately twenty ladies were among the guests. Knight arranged several exhibits of minerals, many from various parts of Australia and overseas. Some exhibits were of local specimens of 'gold, silver, tin and copper bearing ores' with several of these being exhibits for the forthcoming mineral exhibition to be held in London. Not only was the Residence glowing with minerals but it had been artistically decorated with flowers and greenery. Adding to the spectacular evening there was dancing and a display of Aboriginal art by a Larrakia man depicting ships and yachts. Combining an excellent exhibition and a dance was an ideal way to unite the locals.¹⁵⁶³

The *NTTG* printed catalogues of the exhibits for distribution to guests and Mayhew from the *North Australian* demonstrated type-setting and printing so guests were able to print souvenir cards for themselves. J.A.G. Little, superintendent of the overland telegraph office and deputy sheriff demonstrated the use of the telephone to the amusement of many. The *NTTG* wrote 'the whole entertainment was unanimously

¹⁵⁵⁹ Letter from Knight to Emilie, 31 December 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁶⁰ SAPP, Knight, *Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory*, No. 28, 1891.

¹⁵⁶¹ Letter from Knight to Fred, 5 May 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁶² Barbara James, *No Man's Land: Women of the Northern Territory*, p. 68.

¹⁵⁶³ 'Conversazione and Exhibition of Minerals', *North Australian*, 16 May 1890.

pronounced the most enjoyable and pleasant function ever held in the Government Residence'.¹⁵⁶⁴

Knight settled well into the Residence

Knight enjoyed living at the Residence. Back in 1881 as sheriff he had employed prison labour to convert the steep waste area at the rear of the Residence into attractive terraces.¹⁵⁶⁵ Now in 1890 he was free to continue with landscaping the garden. Writing to his daughter-in-law in August 1890, he mentioned he cleared overgrown vegetation and described the house as having a large verandah with a '180 ft frontage to the sea by 15ft wide ... half filled with ferns'. With regard to the interior, Knight employed a Japanese artist to decorate the dining and drawing rooms 'with painted panels in oil – the eternal stork will be shown in all stages from its cradle to its grave'. He stated there was a 'lawn tennis ground with a cement floor' where ladies played on Tuesday afternoons and were also served tea.¹⁵⁶⁶

Knight had work undertaken on the reception area, which was a large room fifty feet long by twenty feet wide with walls thirty-two feet high that included an open roof. There was panelling above the dado which was decorated by 'eighteen very handsome Japanese pictures in gold, silver and all sorts of colors ... they embrace beautiful birds, flowers and these airy sketchy nothings which the Japs know how to make attractive'. The same Japanese workers painted two pearl shells for Knight, one shell depicted his former abode and the other his present home.¹⁵⁶⁷ Knight furnished the reception room with ten fancy Chinese chairs, fourteen Austrian chairs along with lounging chairs and four sofas together with nine assorted wooden tables. Additional to this furniture, he added a piano, china-ware, tea-sets, books and photographs.¹⁵⁶⁸ He now felt ready to receive visitors.

¹⁵⁶⁴ 'Entertainment at the Government Residence', *NTTG*, 16 May 1890.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Sowden, *The Northern Territory As It Is*, p. 132,

¹⁵⁶⁶ Letter from Knight to Emilie, 18 August 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Letter from Knight to Emilie, 31 December 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 30. The pearl shells were returned to Government House, Darwin, by Knight's great-granddaughter, Lawre McCaffrey some years ago.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Letter from Knight to Emilie, 31 December 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 31.

In a letter to Emilie, Knight mentioned that he had designed the plan for a grandstand at the local racing track. In the middle of 1890, Knight organised with the prison gaoler and guards that a stand be constructed at the racecourse using prison labour. Knight was overseer of the project. The prisoners not only built the grandstand and arranged the course, but cleared and fenced the paddock. Although without a roof, the stand was structurally an outstanding success.¹⁵⁶⁹ Knight would have enjoyed using his architectural skills once more.

The Residence, the oldest stone structure in Palmerston, was constructed of porcellanite, a local sandstone that can wear away naturally; exposure to rain can also be detrimental to its surface. Knight noted in early 1891 that some of the exterior stone had diminished to almost half its original size. Cement was always a product Knight had faith in, so he had workmen cover the damaged areas with this material which in turn stopped further breakdown of the porcellanite and improved the Residence's appearance.¹⁵⁷⁰

A social life

Holding the highest office in the Territory meant Knight received and entertained visiting dignitaries and other tourists. This aspect of socialising would have been one of delight for him. Visiting naval ships often meant he entertained their officers. In June 1890 he invited the commanders and officers of the HMS *Penguin* and HMS *Goldfinch* to dinner.¹⁵⁷¹ When the Paters came to Palmerston for the judge to attend hearings, they were Knight's guests at the Residence.¹⁵⁷² In October Knight entertained the chief justice of the supreme court for China and Japan, Sir Richard Temple Rennie, and a friend from Shanghai, a Mr Wilkinson. Knight escorted the two gentlemen around the government gardens before dining at the Residence where several local people were also invited.¹⁵⁷³

In December 1890 Knight gave two small dinners, one for Sub-Collector Alfred Searcy who was leaving for Adelaide, and another for his 'dear friend' the lawyer

¹⁵⁶⁹ 'N.T. Racing Club', *NTTG*, 15 August 1890.

¹⁵⁷⁰ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 20 February 1891.

¹⁵⁷¹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 13 June 1890.

¹⁵⁷² 'Social', *NTTG*, 4 July 1890.

¹⁵⁷³ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 3 October 1890.

John Symes who was travelling to Japan to holiday. Knight explained that he ‘can dine twelve comfortably’.¹⁵⁷⁴ At this particular time, Knight had a lodger staying with him, a private surveyor Gustav Sabine.¹⁵⁷⁵ In the latter part of 1892, Knight entertained the daughter of William Stock, a South Australian parliamentarian, as she passed through Port Darwin on her way to be married in Shanghai.¹⁵⁷⁶

Knight greatly enjoyed fancy dress balls. In Melbourne he and his wife regularly attended these functions and their costumes were always noted in the newspapers. In October 1891, such a ball took place in Palmerston and was considered ‘the best thing of its kind ever held’. It must be remembered that the variety of drapery shops available in the southern cities did not apply here. Obstacles were overcome and people fashioned some costumes described by the *NTTG* as delightfully artistic. Knight, displaying his love of minerals, dressed as the ‘King of Diamonds’.¹⁵⁷⁷ Here was a time where he could be extravagantly flamboyant in dress, allowing his artistic ability to take over.

Export of cattle to eastern ports

The export of cattle offered good prospects for additional income for the Territory and pastoralists would have a market for their stock. H.W.H. Stevens wrote an in-depth letter outlining the proper construction of a steamer for the carrying of 200 cattle. The purpose-built decks would allow proper ventilation, water and forage and the easy handling of the stock. The idea was that the steamer’s contractor would take mail from Port Darwin and visit the main Territory rivers, collecting stock as they proceeded. The steamer would travel to various Asian ports, then Singapore, discharging cattle along the way, before returning to Port Darwin. Knight considered this an excellent venture and forwarded the letter on to David Bews (the latest minister in charge of the Northern Territory) with the following remarks:

It seems to me that the plan suggested by Mr Stevens is as perfect as could be made bearing in mind that the expense of the contract is to have a vessel built expertly for the particular

¹⁵⁷⁴ Letter from Knight to Em, 31 December 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 30.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Letter from Knight to Em, 31 December 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁷⁶ ‘Siftings, local and otherwise’, *NTTG*, 25 December 1891.

¹⁵⁷⁷ ‘Notes of the Week’, *NTTG*, 16 October 1891.

trade and owned by persons directly interested not in making the ship pay but in opening a market for their stock.¹⁵⁷⁸

Stevens received a reply from Bews and wrote another letter to Knight with answers to Bews' queries. Stevens stressed the importance of the steamers being entirely run by pastoralists because during the wet season they would be aware of what places would be inaccessible due to flooding. He also said that the vessel should only call once at a port during the trip. The round trip would be approximately twenty-four to twenty-seven days. The eastern ports, which were actually west of Palmerston, would be: 'Amboina, Soerabaia, Samarang, Batavia, Atjeh, and Singapore'.¹⁵⁷⁹ Stevens and Knight saw the potential for such a venture, expanding to the eastern ports and opening up markets along the way. Bews asked more questions on how Stevens proposed to go about collecting the cattle, in what order, who would decide on numbers for each trip and who would be supplying forage, the pastoralists or the ship owners. Stevens replied that such questions were impossible to answer as these details would be arranged by the pastoralists concerned. The ports with the better facilities and convenience to pastoralists would be selected and the shipper would arrange the forage for the cattle.¹⁵⁸⁰

The government prepared 'specifications for the proposed cattle steamer service from the Northern Territory to the east'.¹⁵⁸¹ The tender for the cattle contract closed in February 1891. Specifications for the particular vessel were the same as Stevens had originally suggested. The tender asked not less than ten round trips a year to the various eastern ports mentioned earlier with no more than three days at each port. The tender conditions were quite stringent and asked that the tenderer state the amount of subsidy required from the government. The subsidy would be paid on a certificate given by the government resident that the contract 'has been well and properly carried out to his satisfaction'.¹⁵⁸²

¹⁵⁷⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1915, Letter 26 September 1890. Stevens to Government Resident. Telegram 4 December 1890. Government Resident to Bews.

¹⁵⁷⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1918, Letter 4 October 1890. Stevens to Government Resident.

¹⁵⁸⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 2023, Note and reply 28 November 1890. Minister Bews' question and Steven's reply taken in dictation by Ward (Knight's secretary).

¹⁵⁸¹ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 3 October 1890.

¹⁵⁸² 'Cattle Steamer-Government Subsidy', *NTTG*, 16 January 1891.

Stevens was the only tenderer. His tender was accepted, with some alterations, and the bonus amounted 'to about £5,000 a year.'¹⁵⁸³ That same month, the chief secretary's office in Adelaide gave Stevens the provisional appointment of vice-consul for the Netherlands at Port Darwin.¹⁵⁸⁴ Later that year in 1891 when the minister for the Territory gave his budget speech, he stated that although there was a 'large deficiency of £71,000', he was hopeful that the financial position would change with the commencement of the cattle trade together with renewed interest in mining.¹⁵⁸⁵

The first voyage commenced from Adelaide River and 'uncovered some critical flaws in the original plan'. It was found that it would be too expensive to dredge the bars from river mouths for most of the loading points so an agreement was reached from both cattlemen and shippers that all stock would be loaded from Port Darwin.¹⁵⁸⁶ Before this occurred, by September 1892, 960 head of cattle were shipped to Singapore with steaming time of approximately eight-and-a-half days and now could be landed directly onto a site four miles from Singapore.¹⁵⁸⁷ On one trip the ship ran aground north of Flores. Only by throwing thirteen bullocks overboard could the vessel be freed and the ship required repairs in Singapore.¹⁵⁸⁸ Stevens gained entry into Java in late 1893 after securing 'a government contract to supply 750,000 pounds of beef annually for three years' with prices 'averaging £8 per beast'.¹⁵⁸⁹

Using the jetty at Port Darwin was difficult. Although encased in copper sheeting, the piles were riddled with teredo worms and considered unsafe. Beasts were unloaded from rail cattle trucks and with a noose over their horns winched over an embankment and into the water where they were towed to the steamer and hoisted on board.¹⁵⁹⁰ The cattle steamer market was fraught with problems due at various times to inaccessibility, lack of pastoral enterprise and not enough markets. Stevens had

¹⁵⁸³ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 17 April 1891.

¹⁵⁸⁴ 'Notice', *NTTG*, 15 May 1891.

¹⁵⁸⁵ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 11 December 1891.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Glen McLaren and William Cooper, *Distance, Drought and Dispossession*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁸⁷ 'Cattle export service to the East', *NTTG*, 16 September 1892.

¹⁵⁸⁸ *NTTG*, 24 February 1893.

¹⁵⁸⁹ McLaren and Cooper, *Distance, Drought and Dispossession*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁹⁰ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 6 March 1896.

relinquished his contract in 1896 and at the end of a five year subsidised contract, Goldsborough Mort abandoned the service in December 1897.¹⁵⁹¹

Knight asked to tighten spending

Within a couple of months in the role of acting government resident, Knight was asked to find ways of cutting costs. Firstly, Gordon requested Knight to make a reduction in the hospital staffing except for the matron and the nurse. Knight replied he would be happy if the hospital board enquired into the duties of those employees with an aim to reducing savings, as there were eight hospital staff members for only four patients.¹⁵⁹² The hospital board requested that no further retrenchments be undertaken and Gordon agreed to comply with their request.¹⁵⁹³ The rules and regulations of the hospital's six member board of management were published in the *NTTG*, discussing the matron's duties and that of the medical officer who had the 'power to engage temporarily extra assistance in cases of emergency'.¹⁵⁹⁴ The hospital continued to take in patients especially when the influenza epidemic hit in the later part of 1890. Staff were still required, for an advertisement appeared in the *NTTG* for the position of night wardman in December 1890 at a salary of £8 a month.¹⁵⁹⁵

Territory grown fodder

The high cost of sending forage north was another area of concern for Gordon, who asked Knight to see if maize could be grown in the Territory. Knight thought it 'a sad admission of the barrenness of the land to send a distance of 4,000 miles to get chaff'. Knight forwarded Gordon's request on to Foelsche for his opinion on this subject. Foelsche replied that the wet season drastically affected most grains causing them to become infested with weevils; sweet potatoes were cheaper but it was not good for horses to be fed on them constantly without corn. Only a few Chinese gardeners were growing maize and charged as much as the storekeepers. Both Foelsche and the telegraphic office considered that importing whole oats was the

¹⁵⁹¹ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, p. 133.

¹⁵⁹² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1564, Telegram 27 March 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁹³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1611, Telegram 3 April 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁹⁴ 'Palmerston Hospital. Rules and Regulations of the Board of Management', *NTTG*, 27 June 1890.

¹⁵⁹⁵ *NTTG*, 12 December 1890.

cheapest ‘for weevils do not attack them’ or alternately if sufficient forage was warranted, then it would perhaps be cheaper for this to be grown in the government garden.¹⁵⁹⁶

The notion of growing fodder in the Territory still appeared viable to Knight, as tenders were called in January 1891 for the erection of a fodder shed in the government gardens.¹⁵⁹⁷ In March 1891 local grasses from the government gardens were cut and hay made from these. It was noted that the scent and appearance of the hay stack was consistent to oaten hay from other areas.¹⁵⁹⁸ In January 1892, the Shoal Bay plantation was gathering fodder from maize and sorghum, and experimenting in sowing dhol (a species of Indian pea) that had been shown to thrive.¹⁵⁹⁹ By December 1892 Shoal Bay was once more cropped with seventy to eighty acres of maize.¹⁶⁰⁰ It appears that Foelsche and the telegraphic office were right in their considered opinions in 1890, for in 1894 things moved slowly and plantation work was entirely suspended and sugar cane was only grown ‘as an edible “delicacy” for humanity and as fodder for stock’.¹⁶⁰¹ Up to 1896 South Australia was still shipping compressed fodder to the Territory.¹⁶⁰²

Cost cutting and retrenchments continued

Knight was notified that due to financial restraints a stock inspector could not be employed and the work was to be undertaken by the policeman, Corporal Waters, at no additional salary.¹⁶⁰³ Foelsche was to act as crown prosecutor and there was to be no further payment for the clerk of arraigns.¹⁶⁰⁴ Although Ward retained the position of clerk of arraigns, solicitor Symes became crown prosecutor¹⁶⁰⁵ and later in the year another solicitor R.M. Stow attained the position.¹⁶⁰⁶ Andrew Holdaway was employed for £20 per annum as clerk of the local court.¹⁶⁰⁷ With water being the

¹⁵⁹⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1704, Letter 21 May 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁵⁹⁷ ‘Tenders’, *NTTG*, 9 January 1891.

¹⁵⁹⁸ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 6 March 1891.

¹⁵⁹⁹ ‘Notes of the Week’, *NTTG*, 29 January 1892.

¹⁶⁰⁰ ‘Siftings, local and otherwise’, *NTTG*, 23 December 1892.

¹⁶⁰¹ ‘Statistics for 1894’, *NTTG*, 11 January 1895.

¹⁶⁰² ‘Rundle Bros. & Co.’, *NTTG*, 19 June 1896.

¹⁶⁰³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1725, Letter 21 May 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶⁰⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1702, Telegram 5 June 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶⁰⁵ ‘Circuit Court’, *NTTG*, 11 July 1890.

¹⁶⁰⁶ ‘Circuit Court’, *NTTG*, 19 December 1890.

¹⁶⁰⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1716, Letter 21 May 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

most important of all commodities, Gordon relented and permitted Knight to expend £100 on sinking an experimental well.¹⁶⁰⁸

Being asked by Gordon to continually cut back on expenses and to retrench men must have been quite disagreeable to Knight. In July 1890 he was instructed to further cut costs by dismissing another man as Gordon considered four customs clerks too many and one boatman's position could be dispensed with.¹⁶⁰⁹ Alfred Searcy voiced his concern in a letter to Knight saying that the customs department could not function properly if there were retrenchments. Searcy stated that the men were so busy they often worked after hours to get work completed.¹⁶¹⁰

Customs was requested again to reduce staff in September 1891 when J.G. Jenkins, the next minister for the Territory, thought having two clerks at nine shillings unnecessary and asked if the service of one could be dispensed with. In the same telegram, Jenkins asked Knight if the law officers' messenger was still required.¹⁶¹¹ Receiving notification of staff reductions would have been quite frustrating for a department already stretched. Searcy, on receiving the latest news, sent a memo to Knight again stressing that customs could not continue if there was further reduction in staff.¹⁶¹² Three months previously in June, Knight was asked to reduce staff in the lands office.¹⁶¹³ Under the heading 'The promised retrenchment', the *NTTG* was quite nonplussed as to how the government was going to further cut annual costs. Retrenchment of people only saved a few hundred pounds, so how could this possibly assist when the Territory had a deficit of over £70,000? Instead, the government should be putting in a good system of public works that bought people into the Territory where having employment would keep them there. The article continued, stating:

The Minister must know the value to a young country of Government cash in circulation. At the present time it is the life blood of the European business of North Australia, and every time we reduce it we drive a nail into the coffin of local enterprise. Retrenchment should be

¹⁶⁰⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1702, Telegram 5 June 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident

¹⁶⁰⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1786, Telegram 14 July 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶¹⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1784, Letter 15 July 1890. Searcy to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶¹¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4770, Telegram 21 September 1891. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶¹² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4361, Memo 22 September 1891. Searcy to Government Resident.

¹⁶¹³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4429, Telegram 15 June 1891. Minister to Government Resident.

the very last thing to sanction, always provided, of course, that wanton waste is not being indulged in.¹⁶¹⁴

According to the 1891 census, there was only a population of 4,898 non-Aboriginal people,¹⁶¹⁵ 3,392 of whom were Chinese.¹⁶¹⁶ Most of the direct cost cutting and retrenchments impacted on the white man, but, as a matter of course, this in turn affected the Chinese, whether he was a miner or in business.

Throughout the incessant requests from Adelaide for reduction in staff and negativity in various areas, Knight never lost his humour. A good example of his disposition was recounted after his death in an Adelaide newspaper article taken from the *Public Service Journal* which concerned correspondence sent by Knight to J.V. Parkes, the inspector of mines who visited the Territory in June 1891. This little snippet shows a relaxed jocular being who liked people and wrote the following message:

Museum of Mining Products and Natural History of the Northern Territory, Port Darwin, October 8, 1891. My dear Mr.Parkes-I herewith appoint you 'Schnapper-in-chief' for the above institution. This highly honorable honorary office empowers [you] to enter all public museums and places containing specimens. Either by day or night, with or without a dark lantern and crowbar, and to acquire by loan or otherwise samples of such things as you may be able to lay hands on, either peacefully or with necessary violence. I further enjoin you not to grab things in my name and then sneak them off to your already over-gorged private collection. In witness whereof I have hereunto fixed my hand and seal, the day and year first above written. – (signed) J.G. Knight, Curator.¹⁶¹⁷

Knight, keen to have good infrastructure in place, requests money for urgent repairs

Having once been supervisor of works, Knight was well aware of the importance of good roadways. Although there was a railway line to Pine Creek, most mining and pastoral leases were way beyond the line and so roads needed to be maintained. He received several letters from concerned residents as to the state of roads. One letter was from Fred Pearce and other road users, including teamsters and the mailman, complained of the track between Pine Creek and Katherine. Pearce suggested that one of the teamsters spend a couple of weeks repairing some of the worst creek

¹⁶¹⁴ 'Notes of the Week, The promised retrenchment', *NTTG*, 11 December 1891.

¹⁶¹⁵ 'The census', *Adelaide Observer*, 24 October 1891.

¹⁶¹⁶ 'Desultory discussion in Parliament, The census return', *SAR*, 23 October 1891.

¹⁶¹⁷ 'The late N.T. Government Resident, A humorous letter', *Express and Telegraph*, 2 February 1892.

crossings.¹⁶¹⁸ Knight hoped that the telegraph line party could do some of these repairs, but Little said his party of men could not be spared.¹⁶¹⁹

In April 1890 a deputation consisting of Adcock, Solomon, McKeddie, Byrne and Mayhew, called on Knight and requested that urgent repairs be undertaken on the road between Pine Creek and Katherine, as the well-used road and crossings were in a deplorable state. Knight stated he was aware of dilapidated and dangerous roads and bridges but the funds for road repairs were nearly exhausted.¹⁶²⁰ Knight also explained he had received other requests for road repairs and only had £80 to carry on with. He agreed to notify the minister to see what could be done.¹⁶²¹

In June, Knight received a telegram from A.G.D. Beresford who was an auctioneer in Palmerston and had gold mining leases. Beresford stated that feelings were strong at the Union, Pine Creek and Burrundie regarding the state of the creek crossings and roads, saying they could be repaired in two weeks using four men.¹⁶²² Knight was undoubtedly as frustrated by the state of the roads as much as the people who were required to use them, but he could only spend the allocated money on these repairs.

Many European men were unemployed in these areas at this time and were very glad to take on work at a reasonable wage.¹⁶²³ The roads and crossings were areas where the government when first opening up the mining towns did not show any foresight by erecting permanent bridges. Hundreds of pounds would have been saved. Instead, ongoing funding was continually required for the annual repairs of the washed away crossings after each wet season.

Post and telegraph office

The Union residents asked for a post and telegraph office and handed Knight a petition with thirty signatures. Knight had seen in the past, the consequences of the lack of allocated funding to the Territory. Knight advised the mining deputation that

¹⁶¹⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1561, Letter 17 March 1890. Pearce to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶¹⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1561, Cover note 20 March 1890. Acting Government Resident to his secretary.

¹⁶²⁰ 'Pine Creek to Katherine', *NTTG*, 11 April 1890.

¹⁶²¹ 'Local Notes', *North Australian*, 11 April 1890.

¹⁶²² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1741, Telegram 24 June 1890. A.G.D. Beresford to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶²³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1863, Letter 1 August 1890. Phil Saunders to Government Resident.

the future of the Territory was dependent on their mines' success. The press in Adelaide heard about this and a post and telegraph office at the Union was quickly approved.¹⁶²⁴ This station at the Union was opened in June which was thought would add to the development of the areas resources.¹⁶²⁵ Matters did not always flow so smoothly for Knight. In one instance, Gordon chastised him for sending a telegram of 186 words at a cost of twenty-four shillings.¹⁶²⁶ The previous month Gordon had asked Knight to be more economical with telegrams and 'when practicable unite them to lessen cost'.¹⁶²⁷

With position came obligations

Sporting clubs were quick to have the most prominent member of their society as patron. In April 1890, the N.T. Racing Club proposed that Knight be asked to be the club patron¹⁶²⁸ and in June of the same year, the Port Darwin Cricket Club elected him patron.¹⁶²⁹ He became patron of the Northern Territory Athletic Association and generously gave a cheque for five pounds and five shillings to the association, which held its sports carnival on Easter Monday 1891. This money was given as first prize for the championship race of 150 yards.¹⁶³⁰ Being patron to several organisations meant giving generously from time to time.

Knight needs permanency to continue

After several months in the role of acting government resident, by July 1890 Knight was confident in his ability to undertake the position permanently. In a letter to Gordon, Knight expressed his desire to be permanently appointed and asked, if Gordon was satisfied with his 'fitness for duties', could the position be gazetted before the estimates, leaving the question of his salary open. Knight received the appointment via a telegram, and replied with the following:

Most respectfully thanks to yourself & colleagues for the honor conferred upon me. It now remains for me to discharge my duties as the local medium of your administration in such a

¹⁶²⁴ Letter from Knight to Fred, 5 May 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 23.

¹⁶²⁵ 'Union Post and Telegraph Office', *NTTG*, 6 June 1890.

¹⁶²⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1577, Telegram 2 April 1890, Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶²⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1505, Telegram 1 March 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶²⁸ 'The Sportsman', *North Australian*, 18 April 1890.

¹⁶²⁹ 'Port Darwin Cricket Club', *NTTG*, 20 June 1890.

¹⁶³⁰ 'Northern Territory Athletic Association', *NTTG*, 27 March 1891.

manner that neither on personal nor official grounds you may ever have occasion to regret your selection.¹⁶³¹

The *NTTG* reported the news that Knight had been appointed to the permanent position of government resident. Knight had proved himself a capable leader and his new appointment would be a popular one, with the editor heartily congratulating him.¹⁶³² Knight was still anxious and in a telegram to Bews, he stated, ‘I have only been appointed by wire should not the usual commission follow’.¹⁶³³ Bews verified Knight’s appointment as government resident, stating that the commission was gazetted on 17 July 1890, although Knight did not receive confirmation until September of that year.¹⁶³⁴

The *Adelaide Observer* thoroughly endorsed Knight as Parsons’s successor. The newspaper stated it was not easy to ‘give satisfaction to the people of the Northern Territory’ as they were often critical in the way they were governed from Adelaide, but the appointment of Knight would be in accord with their wishes. The article continued:

They recognise in him a gentleman full acquainted with their wants, in thorough sympathy with their aspirations, and in every respect capable of discharging efficiently the duties of the position to which he has been promoted. Although he has grown grey in the service of the Territory his eye is not dim or his natural strength abated. He has the energy of youth in combination with the sound judgment of mature years.¹⁶³⁵

Following his appointment, Knight’s salary was increased to £1,000, including allowances.¹⁶³⁶ Frederic Charles Ward was officially appointed secretary and accountant to Knight.¹⁶³⁷

One unhappy consequence for Knight receiving the government resident’s appointment was that some people with whom he had had long friendships and treated with kindness, turned and became his enemies.¹⁶³⁸ Knight had not only the few local malcontents to deal with, but former government resident and then

¹⁶³¹ SRSA GRS/1/1890/432, Note 9 July 1890. Acting Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶³² ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 18 July 1890.

¹⁶³³ SRSA GRS/1/1890/534, Telegram 26 August 1890. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶³⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4444, Letter August 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶³⁵ ‘Recent appointments’, *Adelaide Observer*, 26 July 1890.

¹⁶³⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1970, Telegram 30 October 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶³⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1895, Letter n.d. August 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶³⁸ ‘Notes of the Week’, *NTTG*, 15 January 1892.

parliamentarian J.L. Parsons brought a question before the House of Assembly addressed to D. Bews relating to a petty complaint about Knight.

Parsons asked Bews if a condemned prisoner was provided with five cigars at 25s a box and was this ‘with the knowledge and approval of the Government Resident?’¹⁶³⁹ The prisoner had been unable to sleep and the doctor recommended five cigars a day for the man. Knight pointed out to the doctor that ‘such a daily allowance of cigars was excessive’.¹⁶⁴⁰ Cigarette tobacco was substituted but the prisoner refused this and stopped smoking. Perhaps the *Adelaide Observer* best summed up this episode when it said of the Territory residents, ‘there is a general feeling of disgust at the paltriness of Mr. Parsons’s action’.¹⁶⁴¹

Knight’s first Northern Territory estimates report to minister

Knight’s first estimates report in June 1890 was comprehensive and direct. He initially wrote about gold and that this was the only export industry excluding a small trade in buffalo hides. Knight said that much could be written as to why mining had been disappointing, but the minerals were there and he proposed that loans be given to the most deserving miners. Although finding minerals was time consuming, there was ‘no indigenous wealth to attract population’. One of the problems with mining was the need for water throughout the year. Knight stated that if he had been in charge much earlier on he would have spent the entire £750 on water conservation and asked for more. He requested a reward of £500 for finding payable gold, an advance of a loan of £4,000 for a deep sinking and opening of a new mine. Minerals were abundant at Borrooloola, but to obtain them Knight suggested a grant as he estimated that £1,000 was required to improve roads to encourage prospecting for the minerals, and another £1,000 for clearing tracks to Queensland.¹⁶⁴²

During his seventeen years in the Territory, Knight had noted the highs, lows and the social and political changes. He was aware of the difficulty in governing the Territory and considered it his duty to forward his ideas for consideration, saying:

¹⁶³⁹ ‘Parliamentary items’, *Evening Journal*, 10 October 1890.

¹⁶⁴⁰ ‘The Parliament’, *SAR*, 10 October 1890.

¹⁶⁴¹ ‘The Northern Territory’, *Adelaide Observer*, 25 October 1890.

¹⁶⁴² SRSA GRS/1/1890/406, Report 7 June 1890. Acting Government Resident to Minister.

If I were asked to state in one sentence why the Territory had failed to progress as expected, I should say, through the lack of a definite progressive policy in administration, consequent on too frequent changes of Ministry; the political Head having to retire just when he began to know something of the business of governing the Settlement, to make room for another who had to commence taking his first lesson and go over the old ground as before.¹⁶⁴³

The Territory had been a free port twice and now tariffs were exceptionally high. There had been liberal estimates and reasonable allowances for public works, which were drastically cut. The population of both Europeans and Chinese was dwindling, having been affected by the lack of government expenditure and jobs. In Chinatown many shops were closed: people were without work and therefore did not spend.

With regard to pastoral land Knight suggested the tenants contribute toward the revenue of the Territory and considered that the 'state should lend a helping hand towards starting an export trade'. This in turn would encourage more crown land to be taken up, thus more revenue for the state. To assist in establishing a meat preserving works, a bonus £2,000 was to be offered and a subsidy of £5,000 'towards a monthly mail service to Singapore to open up trade in live cattle and trade in general'.¹⁶⁴⁴

Further thoughts were to join the two railways by a track from the Territory to South Australia. Knight suggested a new name for the Territory: North Australia. The Chinese were successfully growing good quality rice but were too poor to grow it on a large scale. To encourage more agriculture, Knight recommended that men be give free grants of land for the cultivation of rice upon the Adelaide River and suggested a bonus of £500 to be offered 'for the first 100 tons of dressed rice', and a bonus of £500 'for the first 20 tons of cured and marketable tobacco leaf'.¹⁶⁴⁵

Repairs to buildings

In June 1890 Knight requested by telegram quantities of paint, oil and turpentine, and in August Bews wrote saying the goods had been shipped.¹⁶⁴⁶ The Government Residence required repairs. Knight requested £600 but Bews declined this amount and restricted Knight to having only necessary repairs for protection against wet

¹⁶⁴³ SRSA GRS/1/1890/406, Report 7 June 1890. Acting Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁴⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1890/406, Report 7 June 1890. Acting Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁴⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1890/406, Report 7 June 1890. Acting Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁴⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1892, Letter 20 August 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

weather carried out.¹⁶⁴⁷ Twenty-five casks of cement were shipped north, but Knight was reminded that he must not exceed the allotted £1,000 for repairs for the year.¹⁶⁴⁸ It was not only repairs to buildings that were required but also the Gulnare Jetty was in a bad state. Bews sanctioned the vote for £150 for this work, which was half of what Knight had asked for.¹⁶⁴⁹

For a possible source of revenue, the government acted quickly

The Palmerston District Council requested that the new racecourse could also be used as a recreational ground. Whenever there was a hint of monetary gain, things moved quickly in Adelaide. Gordon, in a telegram to Knight stated that to sublet or charge admission to the ground required a special act to be passed. The ground would be gazetted under the control of the Palmerston council.¹⁶⁵⁰

Baths

Knight had erected the baths using prison labour at the base of Fort Hill in 1880 when he was sheriff. By 1890 they were in disrepair. In fact they were in such a condition that the editor of the *North Australian* referred to them as a ‘consumptive-looking enclosure which in our happier moments we call a bathing ground’.¹⁶⁵¹ A severe storm hit Palmerston in October 1888 badly damaging the stone wall of the baths.¹⁶⁵² In September the following year, it was noted in the *NTTG* that the present sheriff was not maintaining the baths using prison labour as Knight had previously done and the state of the baths was now a safety issue.¹⁶⁵³ The opposition newspaper suggested a deputation be formed and an approach made to Parsons the former government resident to get work done on the baths as he had successfully assisted the racing club to get a new course.¹⁶⁵⁴ No work on the baths was undertaken and a new

¹⁶⁴⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1888, Telegram 12 September 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁴⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1938, Telegram 30 September 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁴⁹ ‘Gulnare Jetty’, *NTTG*, 31 October 1890.

¹⁶⁵⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1815, Telegram 7 July 1890. Minister to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶⁵¹ ‘Local Notes’, *North Australian*, 30 May 1890.

¹⁶⁵² *NTTG*, 13 October 1888.

¹⁶⁵³ ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 7 September 1889.

¹⁶⁵⁴ ‘Local Notes’, *North Australian*, 14 September 1889.

by-law came into force in June 1890 making it an offence to bathe in the sea between Stokes Hill and Lameroo Beach between seven a.m. and six p.m.¹⁶⁵⁵

Perhaps the harsh by-law regulations for bathing prompted Knight to declare that he had decided to have the bathing enclosure made secure as he appreciated people enjoyed this healthy exercise.¹⁶⁵⁶ R. Marshall Stow, the clerk of the Palmerston District Council, wrote to Knight on behalf of the council that the sum of £20 had been allocated back in July for repairs to the baths, but no repairs had been undertaken. Stow asked Knight to consider that the money then go towards the erection of new baths at the bottom of Jervois Road.¹⁶⁵⁷

Knight sent a telegram to Bews explaining that the baths were now in a dangerous state and that the local council had given £20 and asked if Adelaide would contribute a similar amount towards the cost. Knight could not resist the temptation to write that the baths reconstruction would be a 'great boon to residents and visitors'.¹⁶⁵⁸ Late in October 1890, Bews approved the new site and £20 towards the erection of the baths but this was money taken from the roads funds.¹⁶⁵⁹ Sick of waiting for repairs to be undertaken, an enterprising person canvassed the local people and raised twenty pounds. Never one to wait for things to happen, Knight was quick to donate and headed the list with a donation of £5.¹⁶⁶⁰ The locally collected money, together with the council's twenty and the government's twenty, meant there was over sixty pounds available for repairs.¹⁶⁶¹

Knight submitted a plan for the reconstruction of the existing baths, but this matter was deferred until the following meeting as councillors wished to view the new proposed site on Lameroo Beach. Knight was invited to join the inspection party.¹⁶⁶² There was concern at the steepness of the land that approached the beach, as a safe track would have to be formed down the cliff face.¹⁶⁶³ In December the council approved the new baths site, but did not wish to expend the necessary amount of

¹⁶⁵⁵ 'District of Palmerston', *NTTG*, 6 June 1890.

¹⁶⁵⁶ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 13 June 1890.

¹⁶⁵⁷ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1944, Letter 8 October 1890. Marshall Stow to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁵⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1890/693, Telegram 21 October 1890. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁵⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1967, Telegram 27 October 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁶⁰ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 15 May 1891.

¹⁶⁶¹ *NTTG*, 26 December 1890.

¹⁶⁶² 'Palmerston District Council', *NTTG*, 24 October 1890.

¹⁶⁶³ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 24 October 1890.

money to erect the baths unless the public donated funds.¹⁶⁶⁴ This site was opposite the BAT quarters, but it was not until many years later, in May 1922, that new baths were opened on Lameroo Beach. The mayor, Councillor Burton, officially opened them and the occasion was marked by a swimming carnival.¹⁶⁶⁵ A few extant features of these baths can still be seen today on Lameroo Beach.

Meanwhile, Knight's new plan for the old baths varied from the original upright poles, as the new fencing would be of strong post and rail timbers securely bolted.¹⁶⁶⁶ A swimming party had a close encounter with a large crocodile in October, which hastened a decision to put out a tender to rebuild the existing baths.¹⁶⁶⁷ In February 1891, the winning tender of £30 was accepted from H.F. Marker.¹⁶⁶⁸ A prejudiced journalist from *NTTG* wrote that in the past several Chinese had received a monopoly of state contracts, so he was quite elated that a European business, Messrs. Marker and Charles had received the contract.¹⁶⁶⁹ Ironically, Marker and Charles decided not to go ahead with the construction and it was then given to a Chinese contractor.¹⁶⁷⁰ The finished bathing enclosure was under Knight's direction and was thoroughly proofed against all aquatic predators.¹⁶⁷¹ All of Palmerston's swimmers could now exercise and enjoy the sea in safety.

The benevolent side of Knight

As government resident Knight often received petitions that called on his humanity. One in particular was written by an Asian man on behalf of a fellow countryman whom it appeared Knight had previously sentenced to eighteen months gaol, but who bore no grudge. The men were aware of Knight's disposition of benevolence, and in writing the following words, although the English is not quite correct, the gist of his words are understandable: 'he humbly pronounces to throw himself at your feet which has so often been extended to dry the tears of distress'. The man had been out of work for six weeks, a 'helpless & destituted [sic] stranger in this land'. The

¹⁶⁶⁴ 'Palmerston District Council', *NTTG*, 19 December 1890.

¹⁶⁶⁵ 'Swimming carnival', *Northern Standard*, 16 May 1922. The event was also noted in a Queensland newspaper, 'Lameroo beach baths', *Brisbane Courier*, 15 May 1922.

¹⁶⁶⁶ *NTTG*, 26 December 1890.

¹⁶⁶⁷ 'Alligators', *NTTG*, 31 October 1890.

¹⁶⁶⁸ 'Government Tenders', *NTTG*, 20 February 1891.

¹⁶⁶⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 20 February, 1891.

¹⁶⁷⁰ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 20 March 1891.

¹⁶⁷¹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 8 May 1891.

request was for a train ticket to go to the Union settlement down the track.¹⁶⁷² Knight granted the ticket be given. Another train ticket was granted when Dr Lynch at Burrundie asked for help for another destitute man suffering from ophthalmia who required hospitalisation.¹⁶⁷³

Knight was very much aware of the plight of destitute men. Many had come to undertake mining, but for some there was no available work in that field so they returned to Palmerston where employment was tight. In Knight's estimates, he requested money for the destitute as they could not be ignored and requested Bews to vote for this. Knight wrote of his continued concern of men requesting work but unable to find any, as they should not be allowed to starve for want of five shillings a day. Some desperate men stowed away on steamers.¹⁶⁷⁴

One man said he would commit a crime and go to gaol as this seemed to him to be the only way to get food, and Knight remarked it was 'unprofitable for [the] state to breed criminals'. He said he had two men working at repairing flood damaged roads at three and six a day and one of these men so impressed the local council that it gave him eight shillings a day. Knight deduced that helping these men was a positive way of bettering themselves.¹⁶⁷⁵ Knight proposed £250 for the relief work, but Bews at the end of October 1890 wrote that money for this was 'struck out'. Three days later, Bews advised Knight that the vote for relief work was on the estimates.¹⁶⁷⁶ This information is contradictory and the outcome is unknown.

Knight may have had a few altercations with Foelsche, but if someone was deserving Knight was principled enough to assist. In late 1890, Foelsche wrote to Knight saying that although he was thankful for the increase in salary for extra duties, he considered that he was further entitled to an extra £50 a year for acting as commissioner of insolvency, equal to his South Australian counterpart.¹⁶⁷⁷ Knight wrote to Bews explaining that Foelsche was very zealous in discharging all his duties and recommended that he be given the extra £50. Knight telegraphed this through so

¹⁶⁷² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1841, Letter 29 July 1890. Author unknown to Acting Government Resident.

¹⁶⁷³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4493, Telegram 8 December 1891. Lynch to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁷⁴ SRSA GRS/1/1890/706, Telegram 29 October 1890. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁷⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1890/706, Telegram 6 November 1890. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁷⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1890/706, Cover note 31 October 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁷⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1890/708, Letter 28 October 1890. Foelsche to Government Resident.

it could be placed in the estimates before they were presented to parliament.¹⁶⁷⁸ Bews considered Foelsche's salary adequate for the work he undertook, but forwarded Knight's request to the attorney general. In writing to the attorney general, Bews wrote that Foelsche should be given the position of returning officer, a post held by Knight. The attorney general said if Bews could get Knight's resignation he would appoint Foelsche to this position. Bews requested Bath to write to Knight suggesting that as government resident it was reasonable for some other officer to become returning officer.¹⁶⁷⁹ Bews could see this as the solution to increasing Foelsche's salary.

Knight asked to forfeit his position of returning officer

The correspondence from Bath to Knight is not on hand, but Knight's reply to Bews is one of utter dismay at being asked to resign his post of returning officer. Knight was certainly attached to this position, for his words 'I should feel sorry and humiliated if the post of Returning Officer were taken from me', are filled with emotion. The letter goes on to explain the trouble he had taken to get names on the roll, to obtain secure polling places and 'to make out a case to justify the concession of two Representatives in Parliament'. Knight had spent considerable time enrolling people and learning about electoral acts and wished to remain with the South Australian electoral commissioner William Boothby. Knight felt himself 'singularly free from bias or prejudice', and was unable to think of any other man with his experience and qualifications. Knight closed his letter by stating that it would be advisable for him to 'see the new Electoral Roll through'.¹⁶⁸⁰

Aside from Knight's dedication to the position of returning officer, the extra money received from this position gave him a little extra cash. It needs to be remembered, that out of his £1,000 a year salary he had to pay his wife Alice, who resided in London, a monthly allowance of £22 or £264 a year. He was left with £736 with which to maintain his role as government resident. This involved entertaining, catering and alcoholic refreshments for various visitors and dignitaries.

¹⁶⁷⁸ SRSA GRS/1/1890/708, Note 3 November 1890. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁷⁹ SRSA GRS/1/1890/708, Cover note 19 November 1890. Minister to Attorney General, Cover note 21 November 1890 Minister to Bath.

¹⁶⁸⁰ SRSA GRS/1/1891/708, Letter 11 February 1891. Government Resident to Minister.

Regulations for leave of absence

Throughout the administration by South Australia it appeared there was no consistency or rule as to when leave might be taken by civil servants. In October 1890 Bews wanted regulations to be adopted for leave of absence. Taking an unusual step Bews wrote to Knight asking for his suggestions as to when leave should be taken, whether it was three or seven years and how much allowance for passage money.¹⁶⁸¹ Knight instructed his secretary to contact the local banks and the BAT office for their practice in this area and to ask Territory officers on staff for their suggestions.¹⁶⁸² It appears Knight sent the unknown results to Bews on 4 December 1890.¹⁶⁸³

Knight's plans for his old house

Nothing would have pleased Knight more than turning his former house into a museum. It was reported in the *NTTG* that this was a good idea as many people would contribute their curios, as in other countries similar schemes had occurred of houses being turned into various institutions.¹⁶⁸⁴ Knight also explained to Bews that his former residence would make an ideal museum as the house was large and well-disposed for such an enterprise, possibly for several years.¹⁶⁸⁵

Keen for the museum to become a reality, Knight ordered the construction of several glass cases to hold museum specimens.¹⁶⁸⁶ Although he had cases already for the museum, Knight knew further financial assistance was required so asked Gordon if he would approve £50 for cases to start a museum for mining and natural history. If approval was given, Knight would begin to collect contributions.¹⁶⁸⁷ With another change of government minister, Bews approved £50 for museum cases.¹⁶⁸⁸ In September 1890, Knight forwarded the outline of the proposed museum, with

¹⁶⁸¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1990, Letter 13 October 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁸² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1990, Cover note 11 November 1890. Government Resident to Ward.

¹⁶⁸³ Helen Wilson, undated research notes from Northern Territory Archives on Knight.

¹⁶⁸⁴ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 6 June 1890.

¹⁶⁸⁵ SRSA GRS/1/1890/534, Letter 15 September 1890. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁸⁶ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 21 February 1890.

¹⁶⁸⁷ SRSA GRS/1/1890/534, Telegram 16 August 1890. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁶⁸⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1864, Telegram 25 August 1890. Bews to Government Resident. Bews replaced Gordon as Minister for Education and the Territory on 19 August 1890.

Adcock handling mining, Foelsche natural history, Holtze vegetable products, and himself as chairman and available to help wherever he was required.

Knight's first gift for the museum was of two tree snakes from the Eveleen district.¹⁶⁸⁹ It is unknown if the snakes were alive. Several advertisements appeared in the *NTTG* up to the end of 1891 all stating that the Palmerston museum would open soon and that any donations or loans, especially minerals, would be appreciated.¹⁶⁹⁰ In reply to a letter from Knight in September where he must have proposed an exchange, the curator E. Ramsay of the Australian Museum in Sydney, said he had the trustees' permission to forward 'specimens of general interest' to the museum in Palmerston. In return they requested 'Minerals, Weapons, Native Skull, Birds, Eggs'. It appears that a donation by Knight of a copy of his first *Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory* was sent to this museum's library.¹⁶⁹¹

It is not known if the government gave permission, or Knight sought permission to use his house, which was apparently still vacant, as he had moved out some months previously to live in the Residence. An article in the *NTTG* clarifies this mystery a little. Some months after Knight's death, Captain Marsh moved into Knight's old home. It appears that the house was vacant for nearly two years and the few items that were on show there authenticated the story that Knight had attempted to turn the house into a museum. These items were transferred to 'a room adjoining the Government Resident's Office'.¹⁶⁹²

It is not clear why the museum never opened. Perhaps Knight did not have the time to follow through in obtaining enough contributions, or possibly there was a lack of interest by the local populace. After Knight's death, it was noted in the press that he kept the interest for a museum alive, but now with his passing it was wondered what had happened to the committee appointed to get this museum operational. No one appeared to have the same extent of interest in such an institution as Knight.¹⁶⁹³

¹⁶⁸⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 26 September 1890. 'Palmerston museum of mining, products & natural history of the Northern Territory', *NTTG*, 23 October 1891.

¹⁶⁹⁰ 'Palmerston museum', *NTTG*, 16 October 1891.

¹⁶⁹¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4660, Letter 8 October 1891. E. Ramsay to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁹² 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 6 May 1892.

¹⁶⁹³ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 29 January 1892.

Knight reprimanded over gold leases

Many Europeans in the Territory were fearful that the Chinese were monopolising the gold mining leases and signed a petition to restrict the holding of mineral leases by Chinese. Solomon, as one of the Territory's parliamentary representatives, was in agreement in urging the refusal to issue mining leases to Chinese.¹⁶⁹⁴ On 19 September 1891 Solomon spoke with Jenkins on the subject of the Chinese 'monopoly',¹⁶⁹⁵ and the same day Jenkins telegraphed Knight ordering him to 'refuse to grant any gold mining leases or transfers to asiatic [sic] aliens until further advised'.¹⁶⁹⁶ Solomon duly introduced a bill to parliament to amend the Northern Territory Gold Mining Act, which if passed would prevent the issuing of mineral leases to the Chinese.¹⁶⁹⁷ Chinese merchant Arthur Hang Gong had applied for a lease but Jenkins told Knight the application must be kept in abeyance until the 'Solomon bill to amend [the] goldmining act' had been dealt with.¹⁶⁹⁸

Knight received a letter from solicitor Symes who wrote on behalf of his client, a naturalised Chinese who had the rights and privileges of a natural born British subject. Symes enquired as to how the proposed law affected this man.¹⁶⁹⁹ Chief Warden Nash at Burrundie was unsure when asking on behalf of another naturalised Chinese how to negotiate the steps to obtain his gold lease application.¹⁷⁰⁰ Knight asked Ward to advise Nash to accept any applications that had been made on or before 20 September.¹⁷⁰¹ The *NTTG* wrote that all mining leases not completed before 19 September were to be refused.¹⁷⁰² This is where the problem began, the difference of one day.

It seems rather petty now to think that the difference of one extra day Knight had given the Chinese to be granted leases caused such a furore. The fact was the telegram sent by Jenkins to Knight was dated 19 September, with Jenkins assuming Knight would halt the granting of further leases from that day. After reading copies

¹⁶⁹⁴ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 4 September 1891.

¹⁶⁹⁵ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 25 September 1891.

¹⁶⁹⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4357, Telegram 19 September 1891. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁹⁷ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 9 October 1891.

¹⁶⁹⁸ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4394, Telegram 15 October 1891. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁶⁹⁹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4359, Letter 21 September 1891. J.J. Symes to Government Resident.

¹⁷⁰⁰ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4378, Memo 30 September 1891. Chief Warden to Government Resident.

¹⁷⁰¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4412, Cover note 8 October 1891. Government Resident to Ward.

¹⁷⁰² 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 2 October 1891.

of telegrams received and sent by Knight, Solomon was displeased by Knight's actions in not strictly adhering to Jenkins' instructions. Jenkins asked how many leases to Chinese had been completed since that date and the dates they were executed and the names of the lessees. The telegram also contained Solomon's message to Jenkins with the following words: 'Would respectfully point out to you that it is useless for me to attempt legislative reform at request of my Constituents if your distinct instructions are not carried out by local officials'.¹⁷⁰³ Why Knight decided to be defiant is hard to understand, unless he was on the side of the luckless Chinese. He and Solomon had been friends for years and it was a pity if this disagreement caused a division between the two men.

Solomon's Gold Mining Amendment Bill had passed two readings, but was thrown out by the Upper House on the third.¹⁷⁰⁴ Once this occurred, Jenkins notified Knight saying that he could use his own discretion with regard to one particular case of a lease transfer from Millar Brothers to a Chinese man.¹⁷⁰⁵ Chinese applicants continued to be granted leases if they met the criteria of the Northern Territory Gold Mining Act 1873.

A visit north by Lord Kintore

In October 1890, Lord Kintore, governor of South Australia was planning to visit Palmerston in early 1891. The *NTTG* considered this quite unusual as its article on the matter was headed 'A Queer Idea'.¹⁷⁰⁶ It was wondered why Kintore would undertake such a journey but it was thought at the time the venture was because the imperial government wished to know why the Northern Territory had not progressed and to best answer such a request, Kintore had decided to see the Territory for himself.¹⁷⁰⁷ At a luncheon at the Uraidla and Summertown show in February 1891, Kintore said: 'You want to know, I want to know, and Her Majesty's Government at home want to know what hinders its [Northern Territory] development'. According to Kintore's explanation some months later, this had not been the case as the imperial

¹⁷⁰³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4458, Telegram 14 December 1891. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁷⁰⁴ 'Latest telegrams', *NTTG*, 18 December 1891.

¹⁷⁰⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4514, Telegram 22 December 1891. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁷⁰⁶ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 3 October 1890.

¹⁷⁰⁷ 'The Governor's trip to the Northern Territory', *SAR*, 20 February 1891.

government had not directed him to undertake the visit, and it was he alone who made the decision.¹⁷⁰⁸

Kintore explained that he had to give regular reports on the progress of the Territory and that was the reason for him to undertake the trip.¹⁷⁰⁹ To cover such an undertaking, Kintore had only permitted himself one week in Port Darwin in which to gain answers, then to head south to Alice Springs without diverging from the overland telegraph line track and continuing to Adelaide. How one could study this area travelling at a fast rate without deviating from the track is a mystery. Even the *Advertiser* reported that the journey could not be thought an exploration and if a diary were kept, it would be ‘but the driest diary of so many miles compassed between breaking camp in the morning and pitching tents at night’.¹⁷¹⁰

The people of Palmerston, wanting to impress the governor, held a public meeting to democratically decide on the best form of public reception, so a public banquet was agreed upon and a committee formed.¹⁷¹¹ For such a distinguished visitor, Knight organised an array of banqueting, dancing and other festive events, even a corroboree. The *NTTG* stated that Kintore was not likely to return to the Territory, so hoped that he would speak well of the place when returning to Adelaide.¹⁷¹² Unfortunately the committee resolved to exclude the Chinese residents from their banquet,¹⁷¹³ but as it turned out the Chinese held their own and generously invited several Europeans including Knight.¹⁷¹⁴

As a former Palmerston resident, and one of two Northern Territory representatives in the House of Assembly, Vaiben Solomon took exception to Kintore’s visit. Solomon wondered why Kintore needed to undertake this arduous journey as the South Australian government had two competent and knowledgeable men who had lived in the Territory for several years on hand in Adelaide. They could advise the

¹⁷⁰⁸ *Advertiser*, 25 May 1891.

¹⁷⁰⁹ *Advertiser*, 25 May 1891.

¹⁷¹⁰ *Advertiser*, 23 May 1891.

¹⁷¹¹ ‘The Governor’s Reception’, *NTTG*, 6 March 1891.

¹⁷¹² ‘News and Notes’, *NTTG*, 13 February 1891. Lord Kintore was governor of South Australia from 1889 until 1895.

¹⁷¹³ ‘The Governor’s Reception’, *NTTG*, 13 March 1891.

¹⁷¹⁴ ‘The Chinese Banquet’, *NTTG*, 17 April 1891.

government of the day or the imperial authorities on how to advance the Territory.¹⁷¹⁵

Kintore arrived in Port Darwin on 31 March 1890 and was given a grand welcome by Palmerston residents, including several Chinese people. In the evening Kintore was 'entertained by a semi-official banquet at the Residence' and the following day Knight escorted the official party visiting several departments including the overland telegraph and cable offices. On the Thursday Kintore was taken to the government gardens and the leprosarium on Channel Island.¹⁷¹⁶

On his return to Adelaide, Kintore wrote to the secretary of state on the affairs of the Northern Territory. How did he deduce his findings after such a short stay and why would he do this unless under an obligation to? Kintore stated that the growth and prosperity in the Territory were not assured, although during the construction of the Palmerston to Pine Creek railway there was prosperity. Kintore was against restricting Chinese immigration, as it was his opinion that the European was incapable of working in the tropical climate, but the 'Asiatic' could. Having 'Asiatic' people in the Territory would lead to development of the country. Kintore said that since the railway line's completion many people had left, 'each successive steamer carries away its complement of passengers, while few arrive. Empty tenements in many streets witness to its depletion, trade is stagnant, further decadence must render it moribund'. Kintore was positive in his report on the prospects of future mining, but said it was only the Chinese who could work underground. He agreed with Knight that steamers carrying livestock was a good idea to open up the market and that a transcontinental railway should be opened up from Pine Creek south to Adelaide.¹⁷¹⁷

Kintore was sensible in his assessment that it was impossible to legislate an area 2,000 miles away by people who were ignorant of living and working in tropical conditions. He considered it beneficial to both South Australia and the Northern Territory if the northern tropical section of the Territory should be separated and the

¹⁷¹⁵ 'The Northern Territory', *SAR*, 23 April 1891.

¹⁷¹⁶ 'Arrival of His Excellency the Governor', *NTTG*, 3 April 1891.

¹⁷¹⁷ 'Lord Kintore on the Northern Territory', *Advertiser*, 5 August 1891.

area comprising the MacDonnell Ranges and the southern country be retained by South Australia at ‘the 20th or 21st parallel of south latitude’.¹⁷¹⁸

Two years later, and for many years after, this idea of separation was still a subject of discussion in government with the MacDonnell Ranges being the border and becoming part of South Australia. The Northern Territory being considered an ‘undesirable incubus’ could become a new colony and manage its own affairs.¹⁷¹⁹ This came to pass, but not until 1978 when the entire Northern Territory gained self-government.

Places which Kintore never saw on his trip south were named after him, but as Steven Farram in his paper on Kintore’s visit and subsequent dialogue following his return to Adelaide concluded: ‘Kintore’s legacy to the Territory is otherwise slim; apart from enlivening the newspaper columns for several months, it must be concluded that Kintore did little to enhance the development of the Territory’.¹⁷²⁰

Government resident’s annual report

The February 1891 annual report on the Territory was Knight’s first as government resident. The report covered all areas of governance and was mainly written by Knight, but it also included reports from heads of other departments. In compiling this report, Knight had the opportunity to acknowledge what had been accomplished in the past, discuss the present and express his concerns for the future. The transcontinental railway was one subject never far from his mind. The railway saga was a long sorry story that all governments talked of but nothing came to fruition until 2004 when the inaugural train ran from Adelaide to Darwin.

In covering the pastoral question with Knight wanting to furnish as much data as possible to the government on the stocking of the country, he cleverly sent all pastoralists a letter seeking information on their properties. For this he asked the following:

a brief sketch of your blocks, describing name of station, approximate position with regard to any conspicuous object for definition on pastoral maps, how stock thrive, quality of soil and

¹⁷¹⁸ ‘Lord Kintore on the Northern Territory’, *Advertiser*, 5 August 1891.

¹⁷¹⁹ ‘Notes of the Week’, *NTTG*, 28 July 1893.

¹⁷²⁰ Steven Farram, ‘A Queer Idea: Lord Kintore’s visit to the Northern Territory, 1891’, p. 22.

of feed, supply of water, health, nearest market for surplus, improvements made on runs, and prospects generally.¹⁷²¹

Most of the eighteen replies were well detailed and would have supplied Knight with a good overview of how the pastoralists were doing. It appeared that for the majority, their cattle, sheep and horses thrived, and their families were healthy. The pastoralists' main requirements were an export market, a meat preserving works, a cure for the red water disease¹⁷²² and for government to put in artesian bores.

Of interest to Knight were the Chinese, of whom there were officially 5,947 in the Territory at this time, but Knight had spoken with Chinese residents and he was told that in reality there only around 4,000. When Knight first went to the Territory in 1873 he said there were no Chinese in the country but a number of Europeans. Later when Knight was warden of the goldfields, there was open hostility to Chinese miners. Knight said they never invaded Europeans workings even though the Europeans were sure the Chinese would try and take over. But the Chinese followed deserted ground often obtaining gold that had not been found by the white man. With regard to mining, Knight wrote that most minerals were not doing well, except for gold production which continued to increase.

Another of Knight's ideas on how to improve matters in the Territory was to give working European men who had lived in the Territory for over seven years entitlement 'to select a block of 100 acres of land, and hold it free for ninety-nine years'.¹⁷²³ This concept was eagerly taken up by the *NTTG*, which thought it a capital scheme by having the possibility of settling some 500 people. By inserting a clause in the transaction that no sale took place until certain improvements 'of a certain valuation' were made, it was expected that this would stop people from being tempted to sell and make a small profit.¹⁷²⁴

¹⁷²¹ SAPP, Knight, *Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory*, No. 28, 1891. The replies from pastoralists were forwarded onto Adelaide.

¹⁷²² Red water is a tick borne cattle disease that was prevalent in the Territory, killing herds of cattle. It was mentioned in reports in 1886 and thought caused by bad water or bad soils. It was not until 1894 that scientific experts suggested that ticks were the cause of the disease. 'Ticks and redwater', *NTTG*, 28 December 1894.

¹⁷²³ SAPP, Knight, *Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory*, No. 28, 1891.

¹⁷²⁴ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 24 July 1891.

Knight always displayed an outward optimism and so completed his report by stating:

My review of the affairs of the Territory for the past year is now finished, and, however crudely I may have written, I can at least claim that I have recorded what I honestly believe, and without fear or favor. I am sorry that my task has not evoked more praise. One thing, however, I would desire to be understood I have not lost faith in the Territory as a whole, and I believe that a bold, liberal, and comprehensive administration of its affairs in the future will bring about such a grand change for the better, which we all desire, though some depair [sic] of.¹⁷²⁵

This conviction that the Territory would one day become a thriving place was further conveyed in Knight's covering letter with the annual report where he wrote, 'I regret that its tone is not so cheerful as we all might wish but there are glimpses of sunshine here and there that may eventually culminate in a blaze of splendour'.¹⁷²⁶

Was his one report as government resident accurate?

It can be gauged by his one government resident's annual report that he had very pronounced views and had no hesitation in placing his opinions on record. This was probably the first time the South Australian government had received a report that was so outspoken of how things really were. This report must have stood out as he was praised in a South Australian newspaper.

The *Advertiser* commented positively on Knight's lengthy report, comparing Knight's straight-forward approach as a freedom of delivery by not following the normal rules that departmental heads usually observed.

There is something admirable, if startling, in the candor with which Mr. Knight places his private views on record as to the policy of a State or the conduct of individuals. He has a comment for every statement of fact, and he is perfectly indifferent whether it pleases or offends. So high a sense of duty, and such courage in performing it, are rare qualities among the official contributors to blue-books; but although the Government must appreciate the zeal Mr. Knight is displaying, it is just possible that they would prefer a report a little more closely approaching the orthodox neutrality in tone.¹⁷²⁷

The *Advertiser* article finished by hoping that the government could adopt some aspects of Knight's report but wondered if the new minister for the Territory, J.G.

¹⁷²⁵ SAPP, Knight, *Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory*, No. 28, 1891.

¹⁷²⁶ SRSA GRS/1/1891/171. Letter 10 February 1891. Government Resident to Minister.

¹⁷²⁷ *Advertiser*, 20 May 1891.

Jenkins, would remind Knight that the Territory did have two representatives working on its behalf.¹⁷²⁸

This newspaper article clearly pointed out that Knight was outspoken when it was warranted, even if against government's normal line of neutrality. De La Rue, however, felt all the government residents, including Knight exaggerated their reporting where and when required.¹⁷²⁹

Epidemics

In April 1890 influenza spread throughout the city and suburbs of Melbourne resulting in a few fatalities.¹⁷³⁰ The outbreak in England and Europe was severe with hundreds dying of the epidemic.¹⁷³¹ It was raging in New Zealand in April¹⁷³² and by May had taken hold in South Australia.¹⁷³³ The survey ship HMS *Penguin* in September 1890 was heading to Port Darwin with several sailors down with influenza. The ship had been in Western Australian waters near the pearling grounds where people working had also been struck down with the infection. The colonial surgeon gave permission for the ship to dock, but there were severe and moderate cases on board.¹⁷³⁴ Bews informed Knight that the health officer in Port Darwin must satisfy himself that the epidemic presented was influenza and not a more serious disease.¹⁷³⁵ By February 1891, the epidemic was rampant throughout Japan, Hong Kong and parts of China. Tens of thousands of people were suffering.¹⁷³⁶

Knight suffered from a severe attack of bronchitis in November which 'partly incapacitated him for official duty'.¹⁷³⁷ A few weeks later he had a bad attack of influenza.¹⁷³⁸ People in Palmerston were still becoming infected. Although there were only three patients in hospital the influenza in the tropics went through five different phases, whereas in the south there were only three. Even though the medical

¹⁷²⁸ *Advertiser*, 20 May 1891.

¹⁷²⁹ Personal comment from Kathy De La Rue, 2014.

¹⁷³⁰ 'Victoria', *North Australian*, 11 April 1890.

¹⁷³¹ 'Influenza epidemic', *NTTG*, 11 April 1890.

¹⁷³² 'New Zealand', *North Australian*, 11 April 1890.

¹⁷³³ 'Local Notes', *North Australian*, 9 May 1890.

¹⁷³⁴ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 12 September 1890.

¹⁷³⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 1886, Telegram 10 September 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁷³⁶ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 13 February 1891.

¹⁷³⁷ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 20 November 1891.

¹⁷³⁸ 'Death of Mr J.G. Knight, Government Resident', *NTTG*, 15 January 1892.

profession considered the tropical climate unhealthy, very few people in the Territory became ill compared to other places where there were thousands of victims.¹⁷³⁹

Knight's further financial woes

In October 1890, Knight was notified by telegram that his salary would be £1,000 including allowances. A mistake had occurred, for besides the £1,000 an allowance of £64.15s was printed in the estimates and passed.¹⁷⁴⁰ It appeared the accountant making up the monthly monies was guided by the estimates and gave Knight the allowance and now it was being withdrawn. Knight, in despair, wrote to R. Homburg, the acting minister, with a plea for extra money. Knight pointed out in his letter to Homburg that a telegram he had received on 30 October 1890 from Bews had said 'thousand pounds proposed for resident including allowance'.¹⁷⁴¹ This, said Knight was not definitive, as the words 'including allowance' had 'a different significance to included allowances'. Knight requested that before financial adjustments were made, as £1,000 was not enough for the cost of keeping up appearances at the Residence, could the allowance of £64.15.0 stand. Knight stated that he had used his own money for refurnishing and decorating the house and shortly he was to receive the South Australian governor which would cost at least £100. He further added that over the year, several notable people passed through Port Darwin and required entertaining.¹⁷⁴² However, cabinet upheld Bews' minute that £1,000 was to include everything.

Walter Knight

The first mention of Knight's youngest son coming to the Territory was in a letter Knight wrote to Em where he stated that he hoped Fred had made arrangements for Walter to travel on a good sailing ship 'as the longer he is on the water the better for his health and leg'.¹⁷⁴³ Knight was referring to the fact that as a result of a football

¹⁷³⁹ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 25 December 1891.

¹⁷⁴⁰ *SRSA GRS/1/1891/30*. Memo 12 January 1891. Bath to Minister

¹⁷⁴¹ *NTAS*, *NTRS* 790, item 1970, Telegram 30 October 1890. Minister to Government Resident.

¹⁷⁴² *SRSA GRS/1/1891/30*, Letter 28 February 1891. Government Resident to acting Minister R. Homburg. David Bews died suddenly in February 1891.

¹⁷⁴³ Letter from Knight to Emilie, 31 December 1890, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 31.

injury one of Walter's legs had been amputated.¹⁷⁴⁴ Walter Knight arrived in Port Darwin on 12 July 1891 aboard the *Catterthun*.¹⁷⁴⁵ He commenced work in the cable office as an operator.¹⁷⁴⁶ Walter appears to have inherited his father's talent of singing. He appeared with three other men who called themselves the 'Four Chafers' and entertained a large audience with singing at a fund raising concert for the Catholic Church. The *NTTG* mentioned that the harmonious singing was one of the night's highlights.¹⁷⁴⁷

Walter stayed on in Palmerston after his father's death working for the telegraph office. He attended a fancy dress ball in Palmerston in October of 1892 dressed in a 'Windsor Uniform'.¹⁷⁴⁸ Walter undoubtedly enjoyed cricket like his brother Ted who played when he had worked in Palmerston some years previously, as he had kindly donated two strips of coconut matting for the newly reconstructed old Port Darwin cricket club.¹⁷⁴⁹

Walter appeared to have a sense of adventure similar to his father, for he ventured off on a round trip to Batavia and Singapore.¹⁷⁵⁰ While in Singapore, he accepted a position in the cable office at a much higher salary than he had received in Palmerston.¹⁷⁵¹ He returned to Port Darwin to relieve another man on leave in early 1895¹⁷⁵² and stayed for another two years before becoming ill and sailing south from Port Darwin on the *Chingtu* in March 1897 to undergo an operation.¹⁷⁵³ Another similarity with his father was the enjoyment of conversation as he was elected to the general committee of the Literary and Debating Society in September 1895¹⁷⁵⁴ and again the following year.¹⁷⁵⁵ Later in the same year at the gig (rowing boat) race at the annual regatta, Walter was cox in the winning BAT gig.¹⁷⁵⁶

¹⁷⁴⁴ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 16 August 1912.

¹⁷⁴⁵ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 17 July 1891.

¹⁷⁴⁶ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 11 December 1891.

¹⁷⁴⁷ 'Notes of the week', *NTTG*, 11 September 1891.

¹⁷⁴⁸ 'Fancy ball', *NTTG*, 14 October 1892.

¹⁷⁴⁹ 'Cricket', *NTTG*, 9 June 1893.

¹⁷⁵⁰ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 18 May 1894.

¹⁷⁵¹ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 15 June 1894.

¹⁷⁵² 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 22 February 1895.

¹⁷⁵³ 'Shipping', *NTTG*, 5 March 1897.

¹⁷⁵⁴ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 27 September 1895.

¹⁷⁵⁵ 'Port Darwin literary and debating society', *NTTG*, 26 June 1896.

¹⁷⁵⁶ 'Port Darwin Regatta', *NTTG*, 18 September 1896.

In July 1897, Walter's Palmerston friends were advised that he been discharged from hospital and was recovering.¹⁷⁵⁷ Walter did not return to the Territory and no further news of him was received until April 1898 when the *NTTG* reported that he had recovered well from the operation and had arrived in Singapore after being in England.¹⁷⁵⁸ Unfortunately Walter died a relatively young man of forty-three after having worked in the service of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company at several of its cable stations situated in the east. He passed away in London on 9 August 1912 while on leave. The *NTTG* wrote that Walter was a universally liked young man, having a 'cheerful and amiable disposition', and was admired as he suffered greatly from the loss of his leg.¹⁷⁵⁹

Knight's death

The year of 1892 dawned with a newspaper notice that Knight's old horse, Snowball, had died.¹⁷⁶⁰ Fourteen days later, the same newspaper, bordered in black, announced the death of the Knight himself.¹⁷⁶¹ The Adelaide papers were first to publish this sad news. As mentioned earlier, in the previous November Knight had been seriously ill with asthma or bronchitis as described by the *NTTG* but recovered enough to perform his official duties. He succumbed once more on 8 January to a further attack and died on 10 January at seven o'clock in the evening.¹⁷⁶² His illness was later described as cardiac asthma, which is not bronchial asthma but wheezing, coughing and shortness of breath due to congestive heart failure.¹⁷⁶³

Obituaries

The editors of the local paper felt the demise of Knight keenly. Their condolences in an extended editorial bordered in black included the following:

The death of Mr. J.G. Knight, Government Resident of the Northern Territory, is one of the most sorrowful incidents that we have had to record in our extended experience of this

¹⁷⁵⁷ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 9 July 1897.

¹⁷⁵⁸ 'Notes of the Week', *NTTG*, 29 April 1898.

¹⁷⁵⁹ 'News and Notes', *NTTG*, 16 August 1912.

¹⁷⁶⁰ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 1 January 1892.

¹⁷⁶¹ 'Death of Mr J.G. Knight, Government Resident', *NTTG*, 15 January 1892.

¹⁷⁶² 'Death of Mr. J.G. Knight. S.M. Honoured service in the Northern Territory', *SAR*, 11 January 1892.

¹⁷⁶³ Stéphane Jorge, Marie-Hélène Becquemin, Samuel Delerme, et al., 'Cardiac asthma in elderly patients: incidence, clinical A presentation and outcome', *BMC Cardiovascular Disorders*.

country. We cannot recall anything that created so universal a feeling of sadness as the decease of this honored and honourable servant of the Crown and friend of the people, whose death marks the blotting out of a noble life and of perhaps the grandest “landmark” the Territory could point to.¹⁷⁶⁴

The article further noted that not everyone agreed with his appointment as government resident ‘and secretly worked against him’. Although aware of this, he did not let this affect his high principles:

It was not in his nature to bear malice, and the consciousness of wilful injury done to anyone, whether friend or foe, was a thing that could never trouble him. It was his ambition as Government Resident to be popular with all classes. His hospitality and friendship were in no respect limited; they were ever open to all who chose to accept them, and he imposed no conditions. To strangers who called upon him he was the personification of a kind host, and many a one owes a pleasant time spent in Port Darwin to the excessive welcome and generous entertainment provided at Government House. In private life he was affable, kind, and courteous to all, the polished gentleman from first to last. It was his goodness of heart that we should blame for what few mistakes were charged against him in his official capacity, not the desire to be contrary, nor the wish to offend ... He was a devoted friend to the Territory, and through all the years of alternate progression and retrogression of this conflicting country he never once wavered in the belief of its future greatness. His life was a model which any man might adopt and glory in.¹⁷⁶⁵

Condolences for Knight’s passing came from many people. Initially the new minister for Northern Territory, W. Copley, sent a telegram to Ward, Knight’s secretary, expressing his great regret and asked that a wreath be purchased for him and placed on the coffin.¹⁷⁶⁶ Tributes flowed in from the major southern newspapers: all offered several columns and covered his arrival in Melbourne in 1852, his early employment with the Board of Works, his architectural achievements and his outstanding excellence in arranging exhibits for the 1862 exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London, and further involvement with organising displays for the Dublin and Paris exhibitions. The newspapers also described the variety of jobs he undertook in the Northern Territory which culminated in his attaining the highest position in the Territory.

Further articles on Knight’s death appeared in several papers and some gave an insight to how people thought of him. Accolades continued to be reported in the press covering all facets of his life. With regard to his singing prowess, one report said that to hear ‘Knight sing “Maid of Athens, ere we part,” even as an old man, was a real delight’. In the same report on his demise, it was written that Knight’s death

¹⁷⁶⁴ ‘Death of Mr. J.G. Knight, Government Resident’, *NTTG*, 15 January 1892.

¹⁷⁶⁵ ‘Death of Mr. J.G. Knight, Government Resident’, *NTTG*, 15 January 1892.

¹⁷⁶⁶ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4520, Telegram 11 January 1892. Copley to Ward.

was ‘one of the most serious blows the poor Northern Territory has had in a long time’ and ‘it seems to be the fate of most Northern Territory pioneers to die without seeing the fulfilment of their hopes’.¹⁷⁶⁷

Like all eulogies, nobody says anything detrimental about a deceased person. Accolades are expected in a funeral oration, so it was not unexpected that after his death the following appeared in the newspaper acknowledging him as a person possessed of ‘tact, temper, geniality of disposition, and considerable knowledge of human nature’.¹⁷⁶⁸ The obituaries for Knight in the major southern newspapers were often quite lengthy. Each remarked on Knight’s early life in England, his achievements in Melbourne and the long list of positions held in the Northern Territory. He was a man ‘equally remarkable for his untiring activity, his kindly spirit, and his constant good humor’ making friends wherever he went. The article further stated Knight had the ability to manage men which fitted well with being government resident.¹⁷⁶⁹ Other terms were ‘the most pleasantest [sic] of companions, with a fine sense of humour, a kindly, sympathetic nature and much originality of character’.¹⁷⁷⁰ The regional southern papers were briefer. The *Bendigo Independent* wrote that ‘his career had been one of useful and progressive hard work’, noting that his brother George Knight who lived in the area, had the previous week received a very humorous letter from his brother and was therefore quite unprepared for the tragic news.¹⁷⁷¹

Many obituaries reflected on his mastery as an organiser of exhibitions, with an example being ‘full of original ideas of a practical character, and one of the most ingenious, inventive, and resourceful men this colony could boast of 30 years ago’.¹⁷⁷² Many epitaphs spoke of his possibly greatest exhibit, the Victorian Gold Trophy in the form of a pyramid that was shown in Melbourne and shipped to London.¹⁷⁷³ His astuteness in regard to exhibitions was summed up as:

¹⁷⁶⁷ ‘Crumbs’, *Adelaide Observer*, 16 January 1892.

¹⁷⁶⁸ ‘The late J.G. Knight’, *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

¹⁷⁶⁹ ‘Death of Mr. Knight’, *Express and Telegraph*, 11 January 1892.

¹⁷⁷⁰ ‘Death of Mr. J.G. Knight, S.M’, *Adelaide Observer*, 16 January, 1892.

¹⁷⁷¹ ‘Death of the Government Resident of the Northern Territory’, *Bendigo Independent*, 12 February 1892.

¹⁷⁷² ‘The late J.G. Knight’, *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

¹⁷⁷³ The gold pyramid is detailed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

He combined so much good taste with inventiveness, adaptability, practical good sense, and a clear perception of the best methods of quickly arriving at desirable results, that his nominations as the administrator of an exhibition of works of art and industry was a guarantee of its success.¹⁷⁷⁴

The *Express and Telegraph* at the close of its article, stated that the esteem that the people of the Territory had for Knight was shown in the 1887 Jubilee Exhibition in Adelaide, where the main contributors would only exhibit on the understanding that Knight had sole charge of the Northern Territory court.¹⁷⁷⁵

Unlike other death notices of the time where loss or remembrance from families was sometimes caringly expressed, there was no mention of any Knight family member in the short notices in the *Argus* and *Age*. The notices read: ‘Knight.- On 10th Inst., at Port Darwin, John George Knight, Government Resident of the Northern Territory, aged 67’.¹⁷⁷⁶ With the advent of telegrams, all Knight’s family would have been notified at once, yet none his five surviving children, nor his wife or brother placed a notice in remembrance of their father, brother or husband. Even his old friend Sali Cleve, together with many other friends in both South Australia and Victoria did not place notices in the newspapers. Perhaps they mourned his loss privately.

Knight’s age as given in the death notice, supports the baptism record that he was born in 1825. Previous writers stated they were never quite sure how old he was; even the local Territory paper had him aged seventy-two years at his death.

On the Monday following Knight’s death, flags were flown at half-mast, public offices remained closed and private businesses also closed their doors. The cortege left the government residence shortly after 9 o’clock followed by the largest collection of mourners that had ever attended a burial in the Northern Territory. The mourners comprised of Europeans, Chinese, Malays, and Aborigines, many remembering various acts of kindness shown to them by the man whose funeral they were attending. The service was held at the graveside and conducted by the Reverend Finch.¹⁷⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷⁴ ‘The late J.G. Knight’, *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

¹⁷⁷⁵ ‘Death of Mr. Knight. An able administer gone. A great loss to the Territory’, *Express and Telegraph*, 11 January 1892.

¹⁷⁷⁶ ‘Deaths’, *Age*, 12 January 1892. ‘Deaths’, *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

¹⁷⁷⁷ ‘Death of Mr. J.G. Knight, Government Resident’, *NTTG*, 15 January 1892.

The death of his father must have been so hard for young Walter to bear, as he was alone, without another family member to grieve with after having spent a scant six months living in Palmerston. Undoubtedly he would have written several letters to family but the only letter still known to exist was one from Walter to his sister-in-law Emilie, expressing the enormous loss he felt at the passing of his father and how much he missed him.¹⁷⁷⁸ Although Knight was buried in Palmerston, Walter hoped that his father's remains would be removed to Victoria, for in the letter to Em, he further stated: 'This is an awful place to remain in'.¹⁷⁷⁹ If his family were under the impression that his remains would eventually be sent to Melbourne, why was it no one arranged for that to occur? Possibly the passing of time diminished the thought.

Knight's remains today still lie in the Goyder Road pioneer cemetery. In 1906 the people of Palmerston raised money to erect a public memorial over the grave, having collected nine pounds they were sure the balance would be forthcoming.¹⁷⁸⁰ Further mention that enough money was collected for a memorial did not appear in the local newspaper, but, eventuate it did. Knight was not forgotten, for most visitors to Palmerston who had known Knight in previous years thought so highly of him that they visited his grave and remarked on the 'thoughtfulness and good taste' of the tombstone.¹⁷⁸¹

The aftermath of Knight's demise

The South Australian government was ill prepared for its highest public servant in the Territory dying while in office. Word was not received in Palmerston until the 23 January 1892 that the management of the Northern Territory would now be transferred to the treasurer. All 'returns accounts and correspondence' would be handled by the treasurer, W.B. Rounsevell.¹⁷⁸² Simple things like who would sign cheques had to be sorted out. Rounsevell authorised Knight's secretary Ward to sign cheques on behalf of the government, but the local Commercial Bank of Australia Limited requested Ward to notify Rounsevell that the bank required authorisation

¹⁷⁷⁸ Letter from Walter to Emilie, 5 April 1892, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 42.

¹⁷⁷⁹ Letter from Walter to Emilie, 5 April 1892, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 42.

¹⁷⁸⁰ 'News & Notes', *NTTG*, 17 August 1906.

¹⁷⁸¹ 'News & Notes', *NTTG*, 15 February 1907.

¹⁷⁸² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4543, Telegram 23 January 1892. Bath to Ward.

from him.¹⁷⁸³ The English, Scottish and Australian Chartered Bank wanted to know if Ward intended to issue cheques with only his signature.¹⁷⁸⁴ A quick reply from the under treasurer, T. Stephens, told Ward to sign the cheques and Holtze to countersign and show the banks the telegram.¹⁷⁸⁵

The government carried over appointing a new government resident. Some days after Knight's demise, it was rumoured that a member of parliament, John Nicholson, had been offered the job of government resident at £1,000 a year.¹⁷⁸⁶ Another name put forward was P. McMahon Glynn, but he declined the appointment as the salary was not sufficient. Charles James Dashwood, a politician and former solicitor, did accept the position,¹⁷⁸⁷ which he had declined in 1889. Dashwood was appointed government resident and special magistrate on 24 February 1892.¹⁷⁸⁸ Dashwood was unmarried, although his girlfriend, Kate Ellen, had recently registered the birth of their illegitimate son born the previous month. Dashwood and his two unmarried sisters arrived in Port Darwin on 27 April 1892.¹⁷⁸⁹ Perhaps having his sisters to support, he may have decided it was better to take a position away from any scandal, although why he did not marry Kate is unknown. Dashwood accepted the position on a salary of £1,000 a year and £100 allowances.¹⁷⁹⁰

By May, Symes was still trying to finalise Knight's effects and collect any outstanding monies. Symes enquired of another solicitor E.A. Thornton in Adelaide, if Knight's executors had obtained compensation for the decorating of the Residency.¹⁷⁹¹ Thornton replied by telegram in the negative and asked Symes to lodge a claim in Palmerston.¹⁷⁹² The following day Symes wrote to Dashwood outlining monies that were still owing to Knight's estate. These included £3 for ration allowance as returning officer and Knight's salary to the end of January. Symes pointed out that when Knight took over the Residence it was in need of

¹⁷⁸³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4546, Letter 29 January 1892. Commercial Bank of Australia Limited to Ward.

¹⁷⁸⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4547, Memo 29 January 1892. English, Scottish and Australian Chartered Bank to Ward.

¹⁷⁸⁵ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4548, Telegram 29 January 1892. Stephens to Ward.

¹⁷⁸⁶ 'South Australia', *Age*, 19 January 1892.

¹⁷⁸⁷ 'Social', *Melbourne Punch*, 11 February 1892.

¹⁷⁸⁸ 'Chief secretary's office', *NTTG*, 25 March 1892.

¹⁷⁸⁹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 104.

¹⁷⁹⁰ 'Siftings, local and otherwise', *NTTG*, 25 March 1892.

¹⁷⁹¹ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4792, Telegram 10 May 1892. Symes to Thornton.

¹⁷⁹² NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4792, Telegram 12 May 1892. Thornton to Symes.

renovations and poorly furnished so he ‘expended between £25 and £30 out of his own pocket in painting and decorating’ the dining and drawing rooms. The estate was being wound up and as the decorations were of a permanent nature, the executors were justified in asking the government to consider the application favourably.¹⁷⁹³

Unfortunately the South Australian government did not see the matter of compensation in the same light as Symes, as its reply to the application for compensation was that if the Residence had required re-decorating then Knight would have asked the government to pay for it.¹⁷⁹⁴

Knight’s will

Knight’s will was dated 23 June 1891 with specific bequests totalling £3,230. At the time of Knight’s death, Knight’s widow Alice was living at 28 Gloucester Street, Warwick Square, London SW. He left Alice £1,500, Walter was to receive £650, Augustus Edward (Ted) £200, Fred £250, his two daughters Alice and Elizabeth (Lizzie) £250 each, £100 to Blanche Roberts, £10 each to his old Melbourne friend Sali Cleve, his friend in Palmerston James Symes and friend and executor, Nicholas Waters. Knight had made sure that if his assets were insufficient at the time of his death to pay the legatees, the executors were to undertake a corresponding ratio.¹⁷⁹⁵

One of the recipients, Blanche Roberts, was not a family member. There are a few Victorian newspaper articles from the period that include the name Blanche Roberts. All the articles refer to young women, being mentioned as a bridesmaid, or involved in amateur concerts as a singer and pianist. There was a Blanche Roberts travelling from Adelaide to Melbourne in February 1888.¹⁷⁹⁶ Knight had been in Adelaide for 1887 for the Centenary Jubilee Exhibition arriving back in Port Darwin in November 1887. There was mention of a Blanche Roberts singing and playing the piano at various performances.¹⁷⁹⁷ A musical entertainment held in May 1889 at Gisborne

¹⁷⁹³ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4792, Telegram 13 May 1892. Symes to Government Resident.

¹⁷⁹⁴ NTAS, NTRS 790, item 4800, Letter 25 May 1892. Under Treasurer to Government Residence.

¹⁷⁹⁵ Public Record Office Victoria, Victorian Public Record Service, 7591/P2, Unit 192, File 48/430, Wills, [hereafter PROV, VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 192, File 48/430], Unit 192, File 48/430, Probate of John George Knight.

¹⁷⁹⁶ ‘Passengers by intercolonial trains’, *Age*, 15 February 1888.

¹⁷⁹⁷ ‘Amateurs’, *Table Talk*, 13 November 1891.

spoke of Blanche Roberts of Carlton singing well and receiving encores.¹⁷⁹⁸ Whether there were several Blanche Roberts or these articles are about the same person is unknown. It is possible to surmise all manner of thoughts, but whether Knight had formed an acquaintance with her, or met her fleetingly he was impressed enough to have her named in his will, or perhaps it was a totally different woman.

It appears Knight's eldest daughter Alice who was living in New Zealand for many years had assumed her father a rich man, although why she had thought this was a wonder to Walter, as his father had never kept his situation and salary a secret.¹⁷⁹⁹

Probate

The executors of Knight's estate were his son Fred and Nicholas Waters, a police corporal and crown prosecutor in Palmerston. Knight's personal estate was cash in hand £945.10.5, fifty shares in the city of Melbourne Bank Limited worth £237.10.0, twenty-five shares in the British Broken Hill Silver Company worth £12.10.0, and thirty shares in the Metropolitan Gas Company worth £371.5.0, making a total of £1,566.15.5, with a readjustment noted on the probate of £81. In April 1892, probate showed Knight's estate was £1,647.15, which was roughly half of what Knight left in his will.¹⁸⁰⁰

Acting as executor of his father's will, Fred Knight wrote to the minister for the Territory requesting the amount due to his father's estate. In reply, Bath supplied the relevant information including salary of £83.6.8, owing to 31 January 1892 and compensation of approximate £360. The annual allowance to Alice Knight was £264 with the last payment made on 31 December 1891.¹⁸⁰¹ Probate was granted in April 1892. Knight's impoverished personal affairs were at total variance to those of his son Fred, who died in December 1932 leaving an estate to the value of £113,670.¹⁸⁰²

¹⁷⁹⁸ 'Gisborne', *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 1 June 1889.

¹⁷⁹⁹ Letter from Walter to Emilie, 5 April 1892, in Wilson, James and Carment, *The Real Live Resident*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁰⁰ Public Record Office Victoria, Victorian Public Record Service, 28/P0, Unit 611, File 48/430, Probate [hereafter PROV, VPRS 28/P0, Unit 611, File 48/430], Statement of Assets and Liabilities of John George Knight.

¹⁸⁰¹ State Records of South Australia GRS/4, Letters sent, Office of the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, Adelaide, Letters sent 1889-1892 [hereafter SRSA GRS/4], Volume 16, Letter 25 January 1892. James Bath to Fred Knight.

¹⁸⁰² 'Late Mr. F. Knight', *Argus*, 18 February 1933.

Why did Knight think that he had capital at a particular value and six months later his assets were much less? Perhaps he over-estimated the value of his shares: he had always chased money, but it had had the habit of slipping through his fingers. This was Australia's worst yet financial crisis with some financial institutions, including banks, collapsing, so perhaps the value of his shares had reduced dramatically. The final value of his estate would have been of great concern to Knight, as this would not have been his choice to depart life without leaving a legacy of some value to his family. In Melbourne in the 1850s Knight was earning £2,000, by 1892, even after attaining the highest position in the Territory's civil service, his yearly salary was £1,000.

Beleaguered by outside influences

What can be said of these final two years for Knight? On the positive side, he had the opportunity of having two of his children with him at various times. He certainly attained the highest position in the Northern Territory, but regrettably for him it was at a time where it would have been impossible for anyone to put the Territory on the map by outstanding endeavours. With Australia in a depression, the South Australian government putting restraints on spending in almost every area where work was needed and the continual requests for Knight to cut back on the workforce, he was virtually trapped, being almost unable to do anything to alleviate this situation. How frustrating for a man who could visualise such a future for the Territory, but was thwarted at almost every turn.

Conclusion

Knight appears to have enjoyed his term as government resident. If he had been a man of independent means he may have entertained local people more often and probably more lavishly, as he enjoyed society and had an appetite for food and wine. Unfortunately for him, he was not in the position of government resident long enough to make a substantial difference. Even if he had lived another five or ten years and remained in the position the Territory would not have changed very much as the restraints from the SA government did not lighten, which in turn created lethargy in the community. The reality was that South Australia wanted to rid itself of its white elephant.

Donovan claims that Knight's administration was ineffectual because he did not rise above the pettiness that divided Palmerston.¹⁸⁰³ Yet his various obituaries suggest this was not the case. One obituary observed: 'It was not in his nature to bear malice, and the consciousness of wilful injury done to anyone, whether friend or foe, was a thing that could never trouble him'. Privately, it was said, he was 'affable, kind, and courteous to all, the polished gentleman from first to last'.¹⁸⁰⁴

It was not Knight that was ineffectual; each and every one of the men who took on the role of government resident had so little power to make fundamental changes. De La Rue states clearly that the role of the government resident 'was little more than that of an office manager'. She further argues:

The fact that the control of developments in the Territory at every level was in the hands of the politicians and bureaucrats who had no knowledge of the special conditions in the north, made matters difficult for both private settlers and for the civil service.¹⁸⁰⁵

Despite the circumstances prevailing in the Territory at the time, Knight did make definite achievements. The final chapter discusses what impact Knight had on Melbourne and the Northern Territory, the legacy he left, and how he is now remembered.

¹⁸⁰³ Donovan, *A Land Full of Possibilities*, p. 159.

¹⁸⁰⁴ 'Death of Mr J.G. Knight, Government Resident', *NTTG*, 15 January 1892.

¹⁸⁰⁵ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 133.

Chapter Eleven

Conclusion

This study of Knight's life in Australia shows that he appeared to be an opportunist: when an opportunity presented itself he would often take a gamble. He came to Australia with a background of engineering and architecture and undoubtedly saw these professions as his future career. However, at times he worked in a variety of jobs totally unrelated to his qualifications. Indeed, it would be hard to find more contrasting occupations than those undertaken by Knight. Arriving in Melbourne in 1852 as a twenty-seven-year-old, he died forty years later in Palmerston having attained the role of government resident, which was the highest civil service office in the Northern Territory. However, while Knight displayed great capacity in his professional capacities, he continually failed in personal ventures. This was true throughout his working life. Time and time again when employed in some type of structured organisation he displayed great ability. On the contrary, when initiating a venture himself, he more as likely failed. As a civil servant in Palmerston, for example, he discharged all positions with aptitude, but when he speculated privately in mining shares he failed dismally. None of his investments ever paid substantial dividends and he continued to lose in share speculation. He was always short of money.

The impact Knight had on the Northern Territory is discussed in greater detail below. Firstly, however, the discussion centres on Knight's time in Melbourne, where he lived and worked for more than twenty years. Why Knight originally went to Melbourne is not known and it may well have been he simply considered more opportunities awaited him there in his professional field. Possibly the lure of gold had some influence on his decision to emigrate or, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, the catalyst may have been a disagreement he had with his older brother. In Melbourne he did well working in the PWD and later in a private architectural business. He would have been typical of many young men of the day by wanting to stand out and make a name for himself.

Knight was self-assured and not afraid to speak out for a cause he considered of value and it was his concern for his fellow architects and architecture in general that resulted in the formation of an institute of architects for which he was president for six years. He showed talent as an entrepreneur, having the ability to display a variety of exhibits to their best advantage for national and international exhibitions. Knight dabbled in various other areas, then established and successfully ran a gentlemen's club. He became an insolvent for a short time but this did not stop him from trying for positions in other areas.

Later, Knight had difficulty in finding satisfying and securely paid employment in Victoria. Without access to any personal correspondence that may illuminate the matter, it can only be assumed that he considered his future business prospects in Melbourne were slim, as George Levey had replaced him as commissioner for international exhibitions. Knight may have determined that having been insolvent and having a brother-in-law who was a murderer were blots against his character.

It is not known why Knight sought to leave Victoria for the remoteness of the Northern Territory as it was quite an adventurous step to move from a secure colony to a newly-formed settlement. There are a few plausible and reasonable answers: it could simply be that he was moving to the colonial outpost because he had obtained work. Also, knowing gold and other minerals had been discovered there, the thought may have crossed his mind that if the opportunity arose he could hopefully make his fortune, as he had considerable knowledge in mining. Meanwhile, Knight's wife Alice was fifteen years old when she married and by the age of thirty-three she had given birth to nine children with two dying in infancy. Perhaps Alice was no longer interested in staying in the marriage, or at least, maintaining it at close proximity to her husband. By accepting a position in the NT, Knight would move far away from his family. Whatever the reasons for the move, on his second attempt at applying for a position in the NT, Knight was engaged as secretary to the government resident. Taking his eldest son with him, Knight exiled himself in the Northern Territory. Alice never visited him, and within three years of Knight moving north, she had left Australia with four of their children to live in England.

Knight adapted well in his many varied Territory occupations, even though most were quite different to the positions he held in Melbourne. One of the main

differences between Melbourne and Palmerston, besides the climate, was the type of society. He had moved well in the Melbourne social scene and its events, which were mainly levees and balls. Knight and his wife mixed with royalty when the Duke of Edinburgh visited Melbourne in 1867. Not having the restraints that occur in a large city, life in Palmerston was simpler and offered Knight even more opportunities to be involved in social activities, such as arranging picnics and organising regattas. He sang at many functions and his voice must have been worthy of being listened to as he was continually asked to sing his rendition of 'The Widow Machree' to the delight of the audience. He also organised quadrille dances and attended fancy dress balls.

Melbourne

Arriving as a twenty-seven-year-old architect from England, Knight quickly rose in status while working with the PWD. Knight then went into private architectural practice with Thomas Kemp. Peter Kerr later joined their practice and together they constructed several notable buildings, including two churches, a synagogue and private dwellings. Knight was not as outstanding an architect as Joseph Reed or John Clark, or even his business partner, Peter Kerr. But the colonial architect of the day, Captain Charles Pasley, entrusted the organisation for the construction of the Houses of Parliament to Knight. Both Knight and Kerr redesigned Pasley's original plan of the building. It was only through lack of government funding that the Houses of Parliament project was shelved until 1877 when Kerr was appointed architect, long after Knight had ceased to be active in the profession in Melbourne.¹⁸⁰⁶

Knight never purchased nor built himself a house in Melbourne, which seems quite remarkable for a professional man who had at one stage in the 1850s earned the very high yearly salary of £2,000. Owning a house would have provided stability for his family. As it was they moved several times to various suburbs, often living in houses belonging to Knight's old friend Sali Cleve. A couple of times Knight acquired land, but did not build upon this, or possibly never paid off the purchase debt.

Knight took the initiative in 1855 when he wrote an article in the *Argus* newspaper condemning the lack of drains for sanitary matters within the city and offered a

¹⁸⁰⁶ 'The late Mr. J.G. Knight and the Houses of Parliament', *Argus*, 15 January 1892.

solution: using carts to take offensive matter to market gardens. Several years later in 1862 during a dinner in honour of Knight leaving Australia for the London Exhibition, the chairman for the evening, Benjamin Cowderoy, stated it was a pity that ten years previously when Knight had put forward a scheme for Melbourne's sewerage system to the water and sewerage commissioners, he had not been offered the management, as the result may have been far more satisfactory than the state of affairs now.¹⁸⁰⁷

In 1858 Knight conceived the idea of a museum where principal materials could be tested for use in the construction of buildings. The museum was completed in 1859 displaying and describing the characteristics of various building stones and a variety of dressed stone-work offering purchasers the choice of workmanship qualities. The museum proved very successful, but the building industry considered the standard of the workmanship too high and brought pressure to bear on the government of the day which denied further estimates for the museum, so the museum closed in 1860. Not that this deterred Knight who continued work on testing stones that he eventually displayed in the Melbourne Exhibition of 1861.

The building museum disclosed Knight's ability in implementing creative ideas and shortly after he was given the task of bringing together various materials for the Melbourne Exhibition of 1861. It was this exposed latent talent that developed him as an entrepreneur in organising exhibitions, both national and international. His fertile mind allowed him to be inventive and adaptive with a 'clear perspective of the best methods of quickly arriving at desirable results'.¹⁸⁰⁸

Knight was invited to be secretary for Victoria at the London International Exhibition in 1862. He also organised Victoria's contribution for the Dublin Exhibition of 1865 and that of the 1867 Paris Universal. He undertook the role of executive secretary and general manager for the Melbourne Intercolonial of 1866-67 and was executive secretary for Victoria at the Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition in 1873.¹⁸⁰⁹ For the 1862 exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London, Knight constructed a gilded obelisk 'so that its volume matched the exact amount of gold exported from

¹⁸⁰⁷ 'Mr Knight and the Yan Yean', *Argus*, 11 February 1862.

¹⁸⁰⁸ 'The late J.G. Knight', *Argus*, 12 January 1892.

¹⁸⁰⁹ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, p. 283.

the Colony' over the previous ten years. It was recognised as 'one of the most significant exhibits of the century ... the kingpin of an exhibition narrative that emphasized the discovery of gold in the Colony of Victoria'.¹⁸¹⁰

Apart from involvement in museums, from 1861, after he and Kerr parted company in their joint architectural partnership, Knight continued to dally in a little architecture business and at the same time as an agent, importing various objects both domestic and industrial. Some of these devices he adapted, then patented and endeavoured to attract financial backers or manufacturers to become involved. Although the objects appeared to have merit, and despite his efforts, none of these projects are known to have gone ahead. He joined the boards of new insurance companies and for a short time in the later 1860s he lectured at Melbourne University. This was a time of relative instability for Knight, almost like an actor adapting to different roles unable to find the one that best suited him. Having always moved well in social circles, he and his wife were often noted when attending balls: the costumes they wore were often rather flamboyant and costly. They may well have lived beyond their financial means.

Knight helped establish the Athenæum Club, which as proprietor he ran successfully for a couple of years. He then became insolvent while in a wine business with his brother George, but he soon cleared this debt, or someone cleared the debt for him. Knight was restless during the final few years in Melbourne and applied twice to the SA government for any position where his experience would be of usefulness to the NT. In 1872 his application was rejected and before he had received a reply to his second letter, which he wrote to the minister while in Adelaide the following year, he had already boarded a ship in Melbourne with his eldest son to sail north. There is the possibility that he had received a verbal confirmation of his appointment.

Northern Territory

During his time in the Territory Knight contributed substantially to its forward impetus in several fields. Arriving in 1873 he was the secretary and accountant to the government resident and undertook the additional role of supervisor of works. He

¹⁸¹⁰ Jonathan Sweet, 'The Gold Pyramid', in *Gold and Civilisation*, p. 91.

resigned in 1875 due to South Australia's cutting costs by reducing civil servants' salaries and some positions in the Territory. Knight sailed south but was unable to obtain an engagement in Adelaide. He applied for, and obtained the position of warden of the goldfields, returning to the Territory in 1876 and shortly after became chief warden.

As warden, he enforced the mining laws and demonstrated fairness to miners that extended to the Chinese. Alarmed at the lack of medical care available to sick miners, he persuaded the government to purchase Ryan's Hotel, which he renovated into the miners' hospital and administered to the sick himself. This was indeed a notable feat. He studied medical books to gain knowledge and when he did not know how to treat a particular illness he contacted the colonial surgeon in Palmerston for an answer. Knight saved the lives of many people and satisfactorily nursed most men back to health.

While in the goldfields Knight became the correspondent for the *NTTG*, reporting on all the happenings in the various mining areas. Far from Port Darwin, living a rather solitary existence and wanting to give the people in the Territory some amusement, he wrote newspaper articles under the nom de plume of Alonzo Brown. For around three years this outlet allowed his alter ego a certain freedom relating various anecdotal tales of life in the goldfields.

Returning from leave in 1878, Knight did not go back to the goldfields. Although still maintaining the role of chief warden, he remained in Palmerston and increased his work load by taking on other positions. These included clerk of the local court, deputy sheriff, clerk of the licensing bench, government statistician, crown prosecutor and special magistrate. He designed several of the town's buildings, some possibly in collaboration with Gilbert McMinn. Some of his designs can be seen today in buildings such as the infirmary at Fannie Bay gaol, Brown's Mart, the Town Hall ruins, the former court house and police station on the Esplanade and of course many of the adaptations of today's Government House, which was then known as the Government Residence. One area in which he was permitted free rein was in the design of his own house. Although on crown land, the design offered him free expression.

Throughout his time in the Territory, he doggedly pursued the idea that it needed a transcontinental railway line although this did not eventuate in his lifetime. A railway from Palmerston to Adelaide River was constructed and completed in 1888 and was extended to Pine Creek in 1889.¹⁸¹¹ As sheriff, needing to attend court and not qualified in law, he read legal books to obtain a better comprehension of the law. Being in charge of prisoners offered him the use of free manual labour. Examples of his using this facility to the best advantage was utilising prisoners to terrace the grounds of the Government Residence, constructing his own house and erecting sea baths near Fort Hill that provided a much needed recreational facility.

In 1887 Knight was asked to be commissioner for the Adelaide Jubilee and the following year in the same role he attended the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition. In Melbourne in 1888 he exhibited a variety of the Territory's natural resources and various other displays. However, as sheriff he had observed Aboriginal prisoners' artwork at the Fannie Bay gaol and in Melbourne he displayed these primitive sketches and drawings giving the work the title 'The Dawn of Art' thus creating what is now often regarded as the world's first exhibition of Australian Aboriginal art.

When he became government resident his salary did increase to the yearly, yet inadequate sum of £1,000 without allowances. Although there was now a severe financial depression throughout Australia, it must have been a difficult decision for Knight to accept this sum for both positions, when Parsons received over £1,500 and Pater over £1,000. The SA government had repeatedly cut spending, wages and retrenched its Territory civil servants.

One of Knight's first roles was to have good infrastructure in place but he had to press Adelaide for money to have roads and bridges repaired. Eventually when Parsons moved out of the Residence and Knight moved in, he quickly put his mark upon the building by personally paying for the house to be painted and decorated and bought furniture to make the place presentable, as he had to receive many visitors. One such visitor was Lord Kintore, the governor of South Australia.

¹⁸¹¹ De La Rue, *Evolution of Darwin*, p. 80.

In his first estimates report, Knight went into great detail, even criticising the ever changing ministry and ‘the lack of a definite progressive policy in administration’.¹⁸¹² During his time in the Territory, Knight had worked under sixteen different ministers. For his first and only report as government resident, Knight covered many topics, from the lack of a transcontinental railway, to the pastoral industry and also the Chinese. Knight offered a good practical idea of how to open up the Territory by giving European men a selection of 100 acres of land with free-hold for ninety-nine years. But like many of his ideas it met the deaf ears of those in power. Knight’s report was written in a very frank and open manner, which gained him praise from SA’s leading newspaper.

There is no doubt Knight enjoyed the government resident’s role. Unfortunately, he was not in it long enough to achieve as much as he would have wished. Knight’s death on 10 January 1892 followed prolonged serious illness but it still shocked not only Palmerston residents but also those who knew him in Victoria and SA. Newspapers were full of accolades and there were sentiments of genuine regret at his passing.

Knight had endured considerable personal suffering, especially the death of three of his children. There was also the apparent breakdown of his marriage, although Alice remained the main inheritor of his estate. He last saw his daughter Lizzie in 1873 before she sailed to England in 1876, married and briefly returned to Sydney then moved to New Zealand. It is possible he saw his eldest daughter Alice marry in Melbourne but then she moved to Tasmania and then onto New Zealand. His other daughter Ida went to England in 1876 but she is not mentioned in her father’s 1891 will so what happened to her is unknown. He had several grandchildren but it is unlikely he ever saw them all.

Knight was a prolific writer, but regrettably there have only been eight of his personal letters located so far. Six letters to his daughter-in-law Emilie offer a brief insight into Knight’s feelings on children and display his great affection for her. To his son Fred he mainly discussed shares and Territory business activities. Two sons Ted and Walter lived and worked in the Territory. Ted was working at Pine Creek in

¹⁸¹² SRSA GRS/1/1890/406, Report 7 June 1890. Acting Government Resident to Minister.

the goldfields area when Knight was at the Shackle. Walter came to Palmerston in 1891 and spent around six months with his father before his death.

Knight's legacy to Melbourne and Palmerston

In Melbourne, Knight's physical legacies are the buildings he designed while in partnership with Thomas Kemp and Peter Kerr and in particular his architectural contribution to Parliament House. Although Knight made a number of unfortunate investments and sometimes showed a lack of acumen in some of his business dealings, in his professional capacity he appeared as a practical man with common sense and quickly gained respect in several areas. He formed a professional body of architects, giving a series of lectures as he was concerned about the professionalism of architecture and the design of the city as a whole. In between designing and supervising the initial stages of the imposing Parliament House, he set up a museum of building materials. Within a few years his ideas and knowledge associated with minerals were seen in his entrepreneurial flair in several colonial and intercolonial exhibitions. His friendships were wide ranging from politicians, to newspaper editors and literary men. He had suffered family scandals, but endured and moved on.

Knight was one of the early settlers of Palmerston where he competently undertook a variety of occupations. He earned respect from people in all walks of life including Aboriginal and Chinese people. In the NT his lasting contributions are the buildings he designed, some still standing with all being heritage listed, and his forward thinking ideas for the development of the Territory, in particular, the transcontinental railway and improvements in mining. He endeavoured to get the SA government to continue to invest in the Territory.

It is extremely difficult to draw a substantive conclusion on the life of a particular person when there are only a handful of personal letters of note and no diaries, from a man who was considered a prolific letter writer. Information had to be gleaned from his mention in hundreds of official documentation and newspapers. Newspapers continually told of a man whom the majority of people liked, describing him in kindly fashion, a friend to many and undoubtedly, an enemy to a few. Knight died in 1892, with one son by his side, having achieved the highest civil servant position in the Northern Territory.

Knight has the distinction of being the only Northern Territory government resident (or administrator) to have died in office. He is also the only person of that rank to have been buried in the NT. His grave in the Palmerston Pioneer Cemetery in Goyder Road had been neglected for many years, as had the cemetery in general, but it is now well-maintained and comes complete with a commemorative plaque. Knight's contributions to the NT have been recognised in other ways as well. A number of buildings in Darwin he was associated with are now adorned with informative signage that acknowledges his contribution to their construction. Knight is also honoured by Knight Street in the Darwin suburb of Fannie Bay and Knight Lagoons in East Arnhem Land.¹⁸¹³

¹⁸¹³ See NT Place Names Register.

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