

FREDERICK STRANGE—ARTIST—c.1807-1873

By

CLIFFORD CRAIG AND ISABELLA MEAD
Launceston.

(With 10 plates)

The work of Frederick Strange, although well-known during his lifetime to the various small communities in which he lived, has through the years been almost forgotten.

Ten years ago, probably no more than ten of his works were known. Scarcely anyone could have told you anything of the man himself. Now, it is realized that his work was much more prolific than was at once thought. He was a painstaking artist revelling in a wealth of detail that enables those who are interested in the past to reconstruct it with authenticity and clarity. He has recorded buildings which, but for him, would be unknown and unimagined by people to-day. To this topographical artist history owes a great debt. As well as leaving a unique record of the Launceston of the middle of the last century, Frederick Strange has left us paintings in which we find good drawing and perspective together with delicate colouring and interesting composition. These paintings and drawings have been one of the most interesting 're-discoveries' in this decade.

Frederick Strange was born in Nottingham, England, in 1807. Of his parents and early life in England nothing is known. His subsequent record, however, suggests that probably, after doing an apprenticeship as a house painter, he became involved with bad companions. Economic conditions in England were such, at this time, that many Fagin-like gangs existed and were accepted as part of the life of the country. Perhaps Frederick Strange, portrait painter and house painter, was forced to join one of these.

At the Quarter Sessions, Colchester, Essex, on the 22nd June 1837, he was tried for stealing a watch. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. His gaol report says that his character and connection was bad. His hulk report was good, however, as was the surgeon's report on his health.

Frederick Strange was transported in the convict ship "Neptune" which sailed from Sheerness on the 7th October 1837 and arrived at Hobart Town on the 18th January 1838. The "Neptune" carried 350 male convicts, two of whom died during the voyage out. The Hobart Town Courier has this report of her arrival.

"Jan. 18—the ship Neptune, 647 tons, Ferris, from Sheerness 7th October, with Government stores and 348 male convicts—passengers, Dr. J. Steret, Capt. Mainwaring, Mrs. Mainwaring, 2 children and servant, Ensign Paget, 2 serjeants, and 27 soldiers of the 51st regiment, 8 women and 6 children."

Frederick Strange does not appear to have been assigned on his arrival but to have been employed as a Government messenger. Like many convicts it appears that he found it difficult to keep out of trouble. His personal appearance probably did not help in this. He was a most remarkable looking man. He had dark brown hair, red whiskers, light brown eyebrows, dark blue eyes. He had a high forehead and a pale complexion. He was just over 5½ feet in height.

In 1841 Strange was given a third-class pass order and found his way to Launceston. Here he evidently set up as a painter, for Henty Button in "Flotsam and Jetsam" says (page 115) that in 1846 or 1847 Mr. and Mrs. Waddell had their portraits painted by Frederick Strange. At the same time Mrs. Waddell had Mr. Strange paint also a portrait of their nephew Henry Button. The portraits of Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Waddell are now hanging in the schoolroom of Milton Hall, Frederick Street, Launceston, but the whereabouts of the Henry Button portrait is unknown.

Henry Button relates also, that in 1848 after his association with John Glover (Henry Button married John Glover's grand-daughter) he had a strong desire to draw and went to Mr. Strange for lessons. Strange was evidently also a drawing master and Button made very good progress. (Flotsam and Jetsam page 125). Mr. Button does not say where he went for his lessons, but it was probably in Mr. Strange's house in York Street. Here, in 1848, according to the census return of that year, Frederick Strange was living alone in a brick house owned by Thomas Scott. He had a ticket-of-leave and was a "dissenter" in religion (Census 1848). This brick cottage was probably one in York Street above Tamar Street where property belonging to Thomas Scott joined that belonging to W. E. Lawrence (Lands and Surveys Dept.).

Soon after this, it appears that Strange moved back to Hobart and Henry Allport says that there he worked for a man named Graves who had been a varnish maker in the Old Country and who then kept a painter's shop at the corner of Barrack and Macquarie Streets. Graves, says Mr. Allport, later moved to the corner of Melville and Elizabeth Streets and Strange continued to work for him there.

The oil painting of Battery Point, painted by Strange in 1848, probably during his stay in Hobart, is now in the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston. On the 4th December 1848 he received a conditional pardon. (Hobart Town Gazette 4th December 1848 page 908.)

He does not seem to have stayed long in Hobart—in fact his sojourn there does not appear to have been noticed by his Launceston friends, for by 1851 he is exhibiting at the Launceston Art Exhibition. The "Examiner" in reviewing the Exhibition says "... but we must not omit the name of another exhibitor to the Exhibition, Mr. Strange. This artist has resided in Launceston for several years and his paintings will be at once recognisable from their local character, many of the landscapes have been taken from the immediate neighbourhood whilst some are views of the town itself" (The Launceston Examiner 5 March 1851).

In December 1855 Frederick Strange announced that he had removed to Paterson Street opposite Stewart's coach building establishment where lessons would be given in landscape drawing, and portraits taken in oil or by daguerrotype. (The Launceston Examiner 11 January 1855.)

In 1858 Strange painted the delightful water-colour of Brisbane Street, Launceston, which hangs in the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. This was reproduced by A. D. Baker in "Life & Times of Sir Richard Dry," 1951 (opposite page 33); and in the 1958 Calendar of the National Bank of Australasia. Another watercolour of Launceston from near the Cataract Gorge was painted about the same time.

An advertisement in The Launceston Examiner 15th January 1859 reads—" . . . to be raffled for—an oil painting of Launceston, by Strange, 5 x 3½ feet—20 members £1-15-0 each. To be seen at the studio of the artist, Cameron Street, adjoining Allen's Land Mart"—(The Launceston Examiner 15th January 1859). Evidently, between 1855 and 1858 Strange moved his rooms from Paterson Street to Cameron Street, Launceston.

The Mitchell Library has in its collection a picture of an old water-power sawmill near Launceston, Tasmania, drawn by F. Strange about 1860, copied by A. Collins 1928. It has also an oil painting of Launceston, 1860. The lettering on the back of this says 'painted by Strange, artist, Launceston 1860'.

Mr. Henry Allport says that there was published by R. V. Hood in the 1860s a very good lithograph of Hobart from Knocklofty and that this drawing was done by Strange. When this drawing was done is not known.

In recent times important discoveries of Strange paintings of Launceston have been made by Mr. Clive Turnbull of Melbourne and Dr. Geraldine Archer of Launceston.

In 1862 the premises that Strange occupied in Cameron Street, opposite the Commercial Bank (the present Equitable Building Society) were taken over by Mr. C. A. H. Williamson who was prepared to execute every description of photographic likenesses at greatly reduced prices. Probably Strange was unable, or, being an artist, did not want, to cope with the advent of photography, for daguerreotype portraits had become much more fashionable than painted portraits. He seems at this time to have turned to trade, for in the Directory of Tasmania 1867 he is classified as "Grocer" Charles Street, Launceston. Here he died on the 31 March 1873.

The funeral notice said—"Friends are invited to attend the funeral of the late Mr. Frederick Strange which will leave his late residence, Charles Street, on Tuesday (this day) at 3 o'clock. Hills, Undertaker, Brisbane Street," (Examiner, 1 April 1873). His death certificate says he was 64 years of age, that he died of rheumatic fever and describes him as an artist. Being a dissenter he was probably buried in the Charles Street General Cemetery, although there is no record of this and the cemetery is now a reserve.

STRANGE'S PAINTINGS

Strange did not sign his work. Occasionally "Strange" is to be found roughly printed on the stretcher of a painting. The attributions are made as a rule by consideration of the style, but of course information handed down by word of mouth has been of great value.

Tasmanian Museum, Hobart

1. In "Early Art In Tasmania" Henry Allport says "Many years ago the picture in our Art Gallery depicting the New Town Road near the Harvest Home Tavern was purchased as the work of John Glover, but the late R. L. Hood always asserted that it was painted by Strange. As Hood did nearly all of Strange's framing and stretcher-making, and knew him and his work intimately, it seems more than probable that he was correct." This is an oil painting. 50½ x 41 inches.
2. Hobart Town from Mount Knocklofty. Oil on canvas. 50½ x 41 inches.

Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston.

3. Launceston from Cataract Hill. Watercolour. 55½ x 33½ inches.
4. Brisbane Street, Launceston. 1858. Watercolour. 19 x 10½ inches.
5. The Gorge, Launceston. Watercolour. 14 x 8 inches.
6. Launceston from the Westbury Road. 1859. Oil. 58½ x 34½ inches.
7. Hobart Town, showing St. George's Church and the Mill. 1848. Oil. 36 x 24½ inches.

Dr. Geraldine Archer, Launceston

8. Launceston from Windmill Hill. Watercolour. 20 x 10½ inches.
9. Stephenson's Bend, Tamar River, Launceston. Watercolour. 19½ x 11½ inches.

Milton Hall, Launceston

Both these paintings are in oil.

10. Mr. J. S. Waddell. c.1846. 27 x 35 inches.
11. Mrs. J. S. Waddell. c. 1846. 27 x 35 inches.

Mitchell Library, Sydney.

12. Saw-mill, Launceston. 1860. This is a copy by A. Collins 1928. 15½ x 9½ inches.
13. An oil painting of Launceston. 1860. On the back of this is "Painted by Strange, artist, Launceston 1860". 35½ x 23½ inches.

Mr. Clive Turnbull, Melbourne.

Mr. Turnbull purchased this set some years ago from an antiquarian bookseller in Melbourne. They were in an old leather cover. It is obvious that Strange had prepared this numbered series with the idea of producing a book of engravings. Many of the buildings shown have now been demolished. The inscriptions given are in handwriting on the mount beneath or on each picture. All are watercolours.

14. Frontispiece. There is no inscription other than "Frontispiece". It is a view of Launceston from Hill Street. 11.9/16 x 7.4/16 inches.
 15. "City of Hobart. / General view looking south-east. / Plate No. (1)." 9.14/16 x 6 inches.
 16. "Stevenson's Bend. / Banks of the Tamar, four miles below / the Town. Plate No. 2." 9.15/16 x 5.13/16 inches.
 17. "View of Launceston / from over the River Bar. / Plate No. 3." 10.1/16 x 6.14/16 inches.
 18. "Mouth of the South Esk River, / with Cataract Mill & Punt. / Plate No. (4)." 9.15/16 x 5.14/16 inches.
 19. "Plate No. 5." This is a view of the wharf from across the river. 11½ x 7.2/16 inches.
 20. "View of the town & river Tamar / from Windmill Hill. Plate No. 6." Immediately beneath the picture are "York Street", "Brisbane Street", "Patterson Street", "Cameron Street". 10 x 6.4/16 inches.
 21. "Banks of the River North Esk / from the Bridge. / Plate No. 7." 10 x 5.10/16 inches.
 22. "Brisbane Street / looking west. Plate No. 8." Immediately beneath the picture commencing from the western end are "J. Crooks", "E. Dease", "J. Robertson", "Tamar Ins. Comy.", "McEacharn", "Cornwall Ins. Compy.", "J. Hudson", "T. Sadler", "A. Duthie", "D. Murray", "H. Bennett". 10.14/16 x 5.13/16 inches.
- The section shown is the northern side between Charles and St. John Streets.

23. This shows six separate buildings "1. (Trinity Church corner of George & Cameron Streets)". Beneath this is "2. (Wesleyan Chapel, Patterson Street.)", "3. Post Office, George Street." Beneath this is "4. Baptist Church, York Street." "5. Union Bank, George Street." Beneath this is "6. Roman Catholic Church, Margaret Street." Beneath the whole is "(Public Buildings) Plate No. 9". About 3¼ x 2½ inches each.

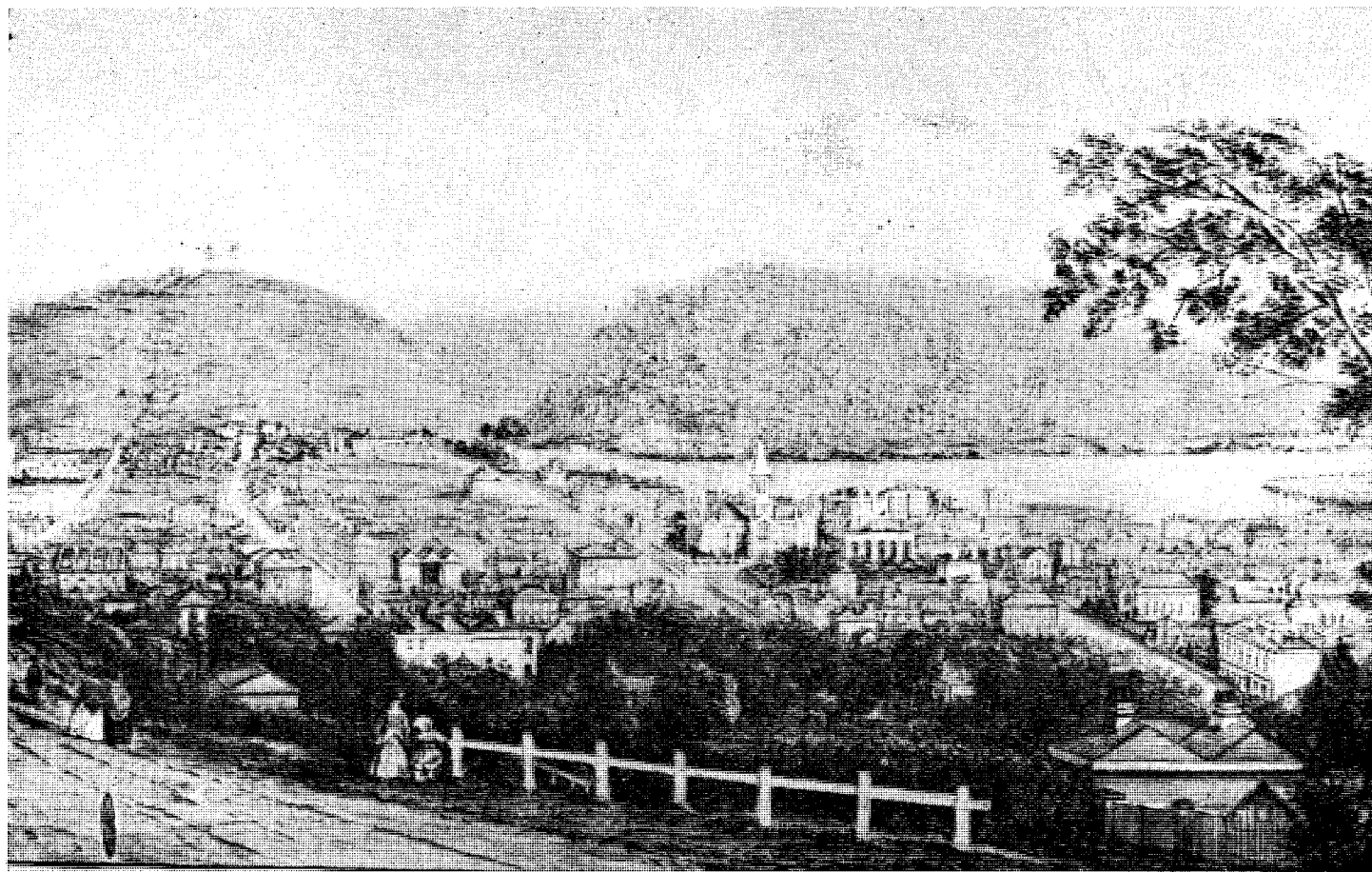
24. This shows three separate buildings. Beneath the group is "(Jews Synagogue, St. John Street)," "(St. Andrews Scotch National / Church.)" "Court House, Patterson Street) / Plate No. 10." About 3¼ x 2½ inches each.
 25. "St. John's Episcopal Church St. John's Square Plate No. 11." 9.14/16 v 6.11.16 inches.
 26. "St. John's Congregational Church / St. John's square. Plate No. 12." 9.15/16 x 6.5/16 inches.
 27. "Upper St. John Street, looking North. / view taken from opposite the residence / of H. Dowling Esq. / Plate No. 13." 9.2/16 x 4.5/16 inches.
 28. "Cameron Street, looking towards the / Botanical Gardens. / Plate No. 14." Immediately beneath the picture are "Police Court)" "(Bank of Tasmania)". 9.3/16 x 6 inches.
 29. "Bank of Tasmania & Residence of F. Evans Esqr. / Cameron Street. / Plate No. 15." 7.2/16 x 4.5/16 inches
 30. "Launceston Club Hotel / Brisbane Street. / Plate No. 16." 7.14/16 x 5.4/16 inches.
 31. "Third Basin on the River Esk." 8.12/16 x 5.8/16 inches.
 - "Ben Nevis" from Greenhill. / Plate No. (18)." 5.8/16 inches.
- This is not a watercolour by Strange. It is a coloured lithograph after a drawing by Miss Elizabeth Hudspeth. It is No. 18 in the Series but Strange had not specially marked it as not being by himself. 8 x 5.14/16 inches.
32. "Messrs. Grub & Tyson's Saw Mill / Piper's River. / Plate No. 19." 11.3/16 x 6.10/16 inches.

Launceston Club

33. Launceston from the Westbury Road. Water colour. 11¼ x 6¾ inches.
- 34, 35. There are two watercolours privately owned in Hobart but no details are available.

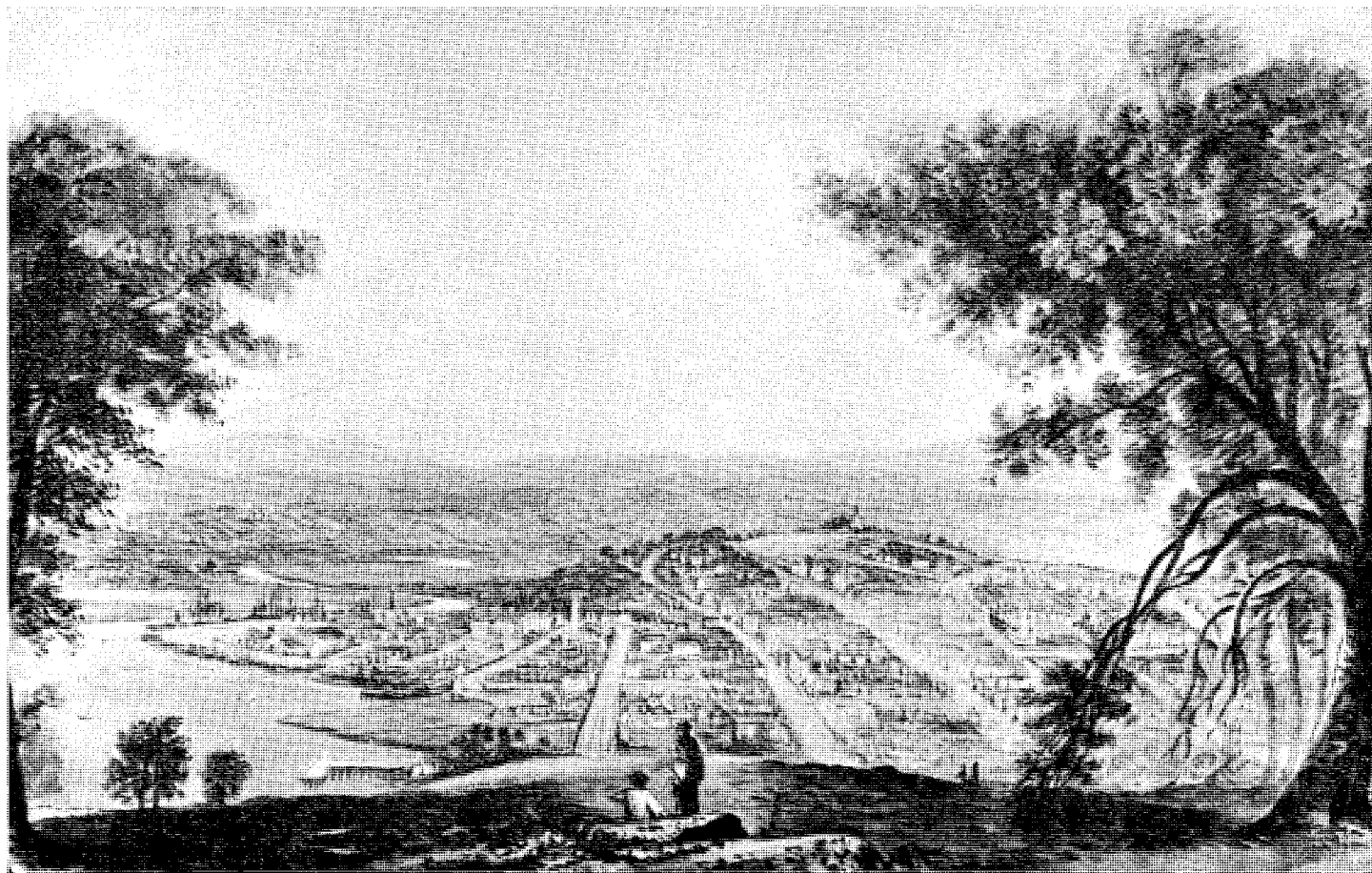
REFERENCES

- ALLPORT, HENRY.—Early Art in Tasmania. *Mercury* 20, 21, 24, 25 August 1931.
- BUTTON, HENRY.—Flotsam and Jetsam. A. W. Birchall & Sons, Launceston.
- CRAIG, C.—The Engravers of Van Diemen's Land, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1961. The engraving, City of Hobart From Knocklofty, by R. V. Hood after Frederick Strange, is described on page 74.



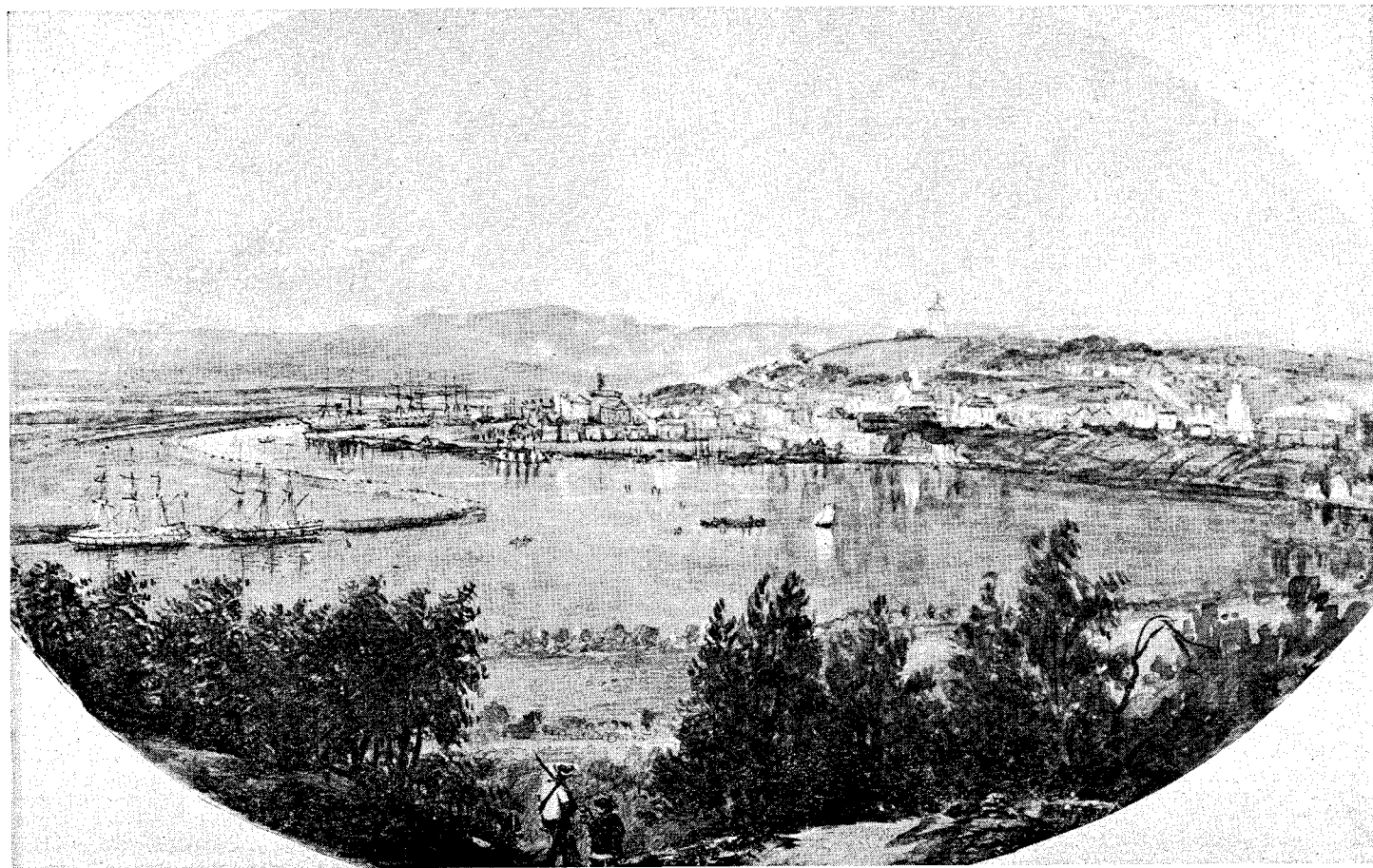
(No. 8) LAUNCESTON FROM WINDMILL HILL.

St. Andrew's Church with its spire, built in 1850, is the central point of the drawing. Adjacent is the Mechanics Institute, built in 1857, and now the Public Library. Henry Clayton designed both buildings, which still stand.

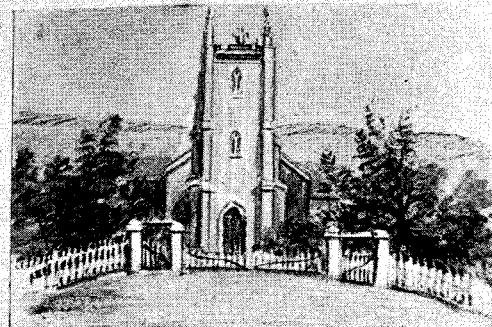
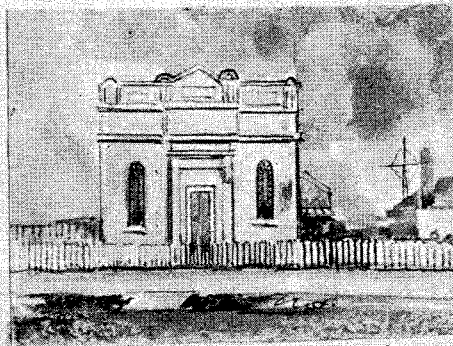
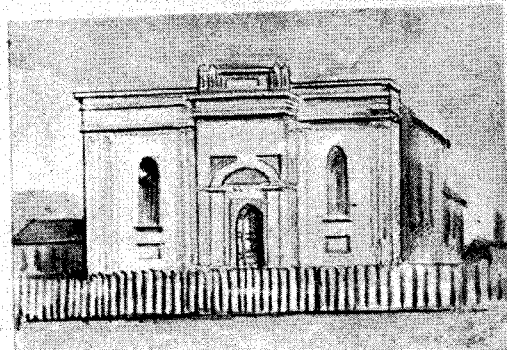
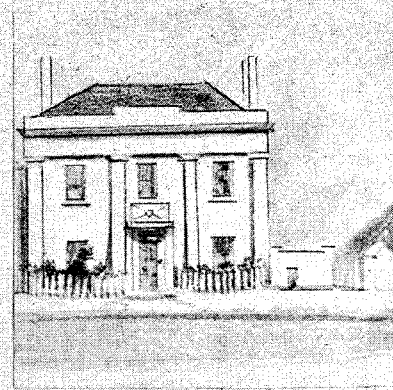
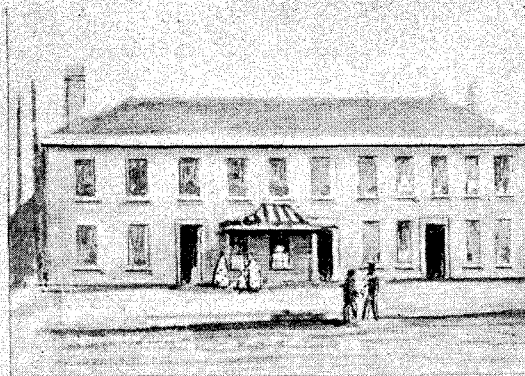
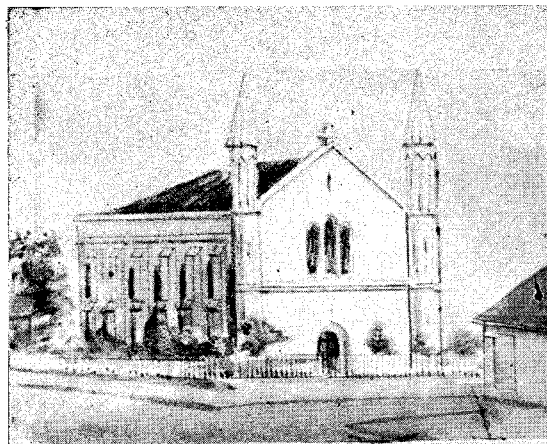


(No. 14) LAUNCESTON FROM CATARACT HILL.

This shows the town and the pool formed by the junction of the rivers, the North Esk and the South Esk.



(No. 17) LAUNCESTON FROM WHAT IS NOW TREVALLYN.
This shows the signal station on the Windmill Hill and the wharves.



2

1 (Trinity Church, corner of George & Cameron Streets.)

2 (Wesleyan Chapel, Patterson Street.)

4

3/ Post Office, George Street.

~~Public Building~~ 4/ Baptist Chapel, York Street.

(Public Buildings)

Plate No. 8. 9.

6

5/ Union Bank, George Street.

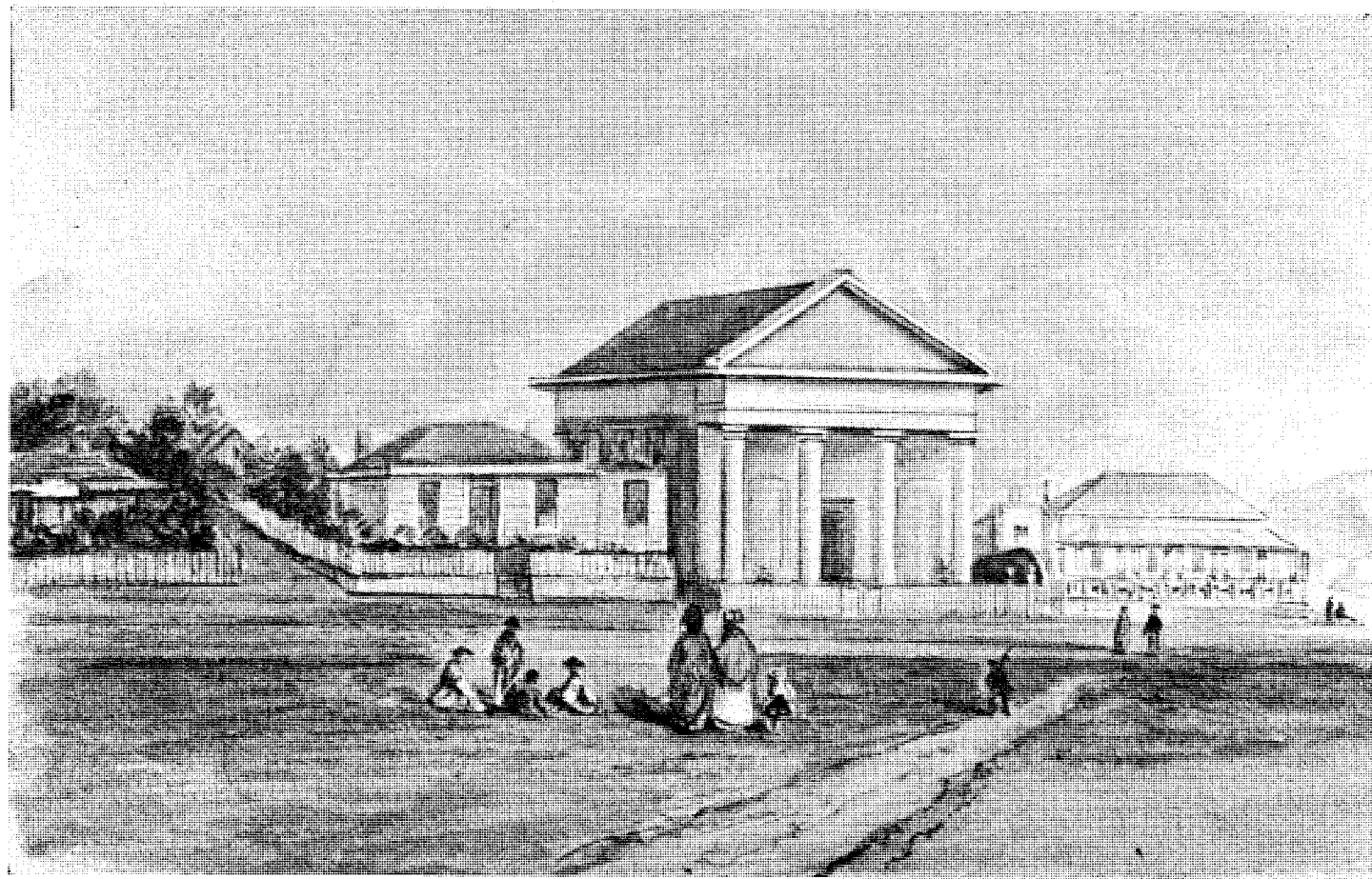
6/ Roman Catholic Church, Margaret Street.

(No. 23) OLD TRINITY CHURCH: this was built in 1842 and demolished in 1902. WESLEYAN CHAPEL: this was the first Wesleyan meeting house built in the north of Tasmania. It was opened on Christmas Day 1835. The architect was S. Jackson and the builders Weir and Ferguson. It is now the Sunday School. POST OFFICE: this still stands at 47-55 George Street but a modern front has been added to the lower storey. It was used as a post office from approximately 1839 to 1859. BAPTIST CHAPEL, YORK STREET: this was opened on the 27 November 1840. The pastor, the Reverend Henry Dowling, was the first Baptist Minister in Tasmania. The building still stands, opposite Kingsway, but with the addition of a modern front. It is used now for commercial purposes. UNION BANK, GEORGE STREET: this was opened as the Tamar Bank in 1834 but became the Union Bank in 1838. It was adjacent to the Post Office, shown in (3). It is now incorporated in a business block. ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH: this was the first Roman Catholic Church in the north of Tasmania. It was opened in 1842 but demolished in 1865.



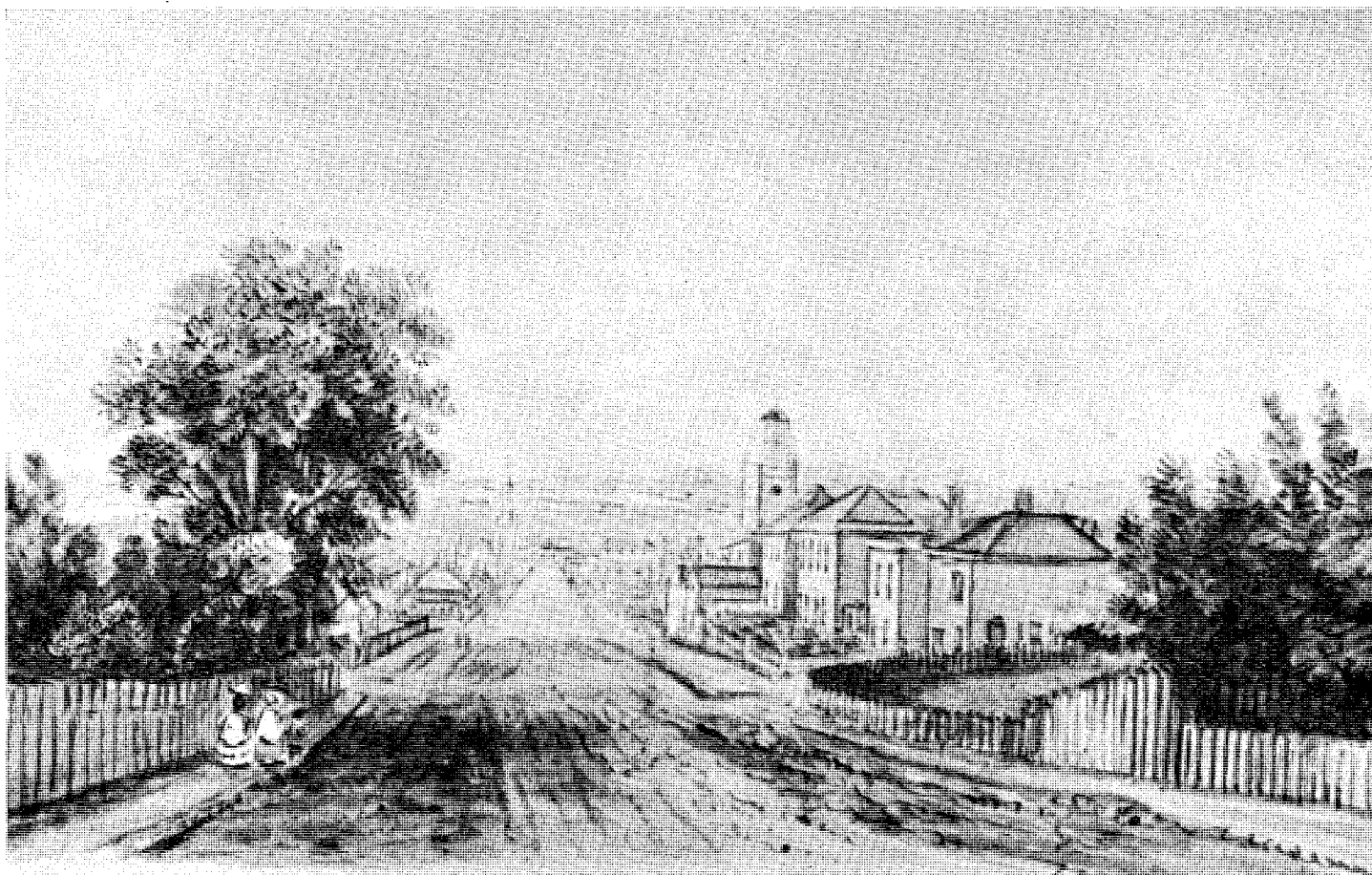
(No. 25) ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, LAUNCESTON.

Lieutenant-Governor Arthur laid the foundation stone of this church, the first in Northern Tasmania, on the 28 December 1824. Only the tower, completed in 1830, when John Lee Archer was Colonial Architect, remains. On the right is the home of Dr. William Russ Pugh. He, in 1847, administered the first ether anaesthetic in the Southern Hemisphere. The house still stands.



(No. 26) ST. JOHN'S CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

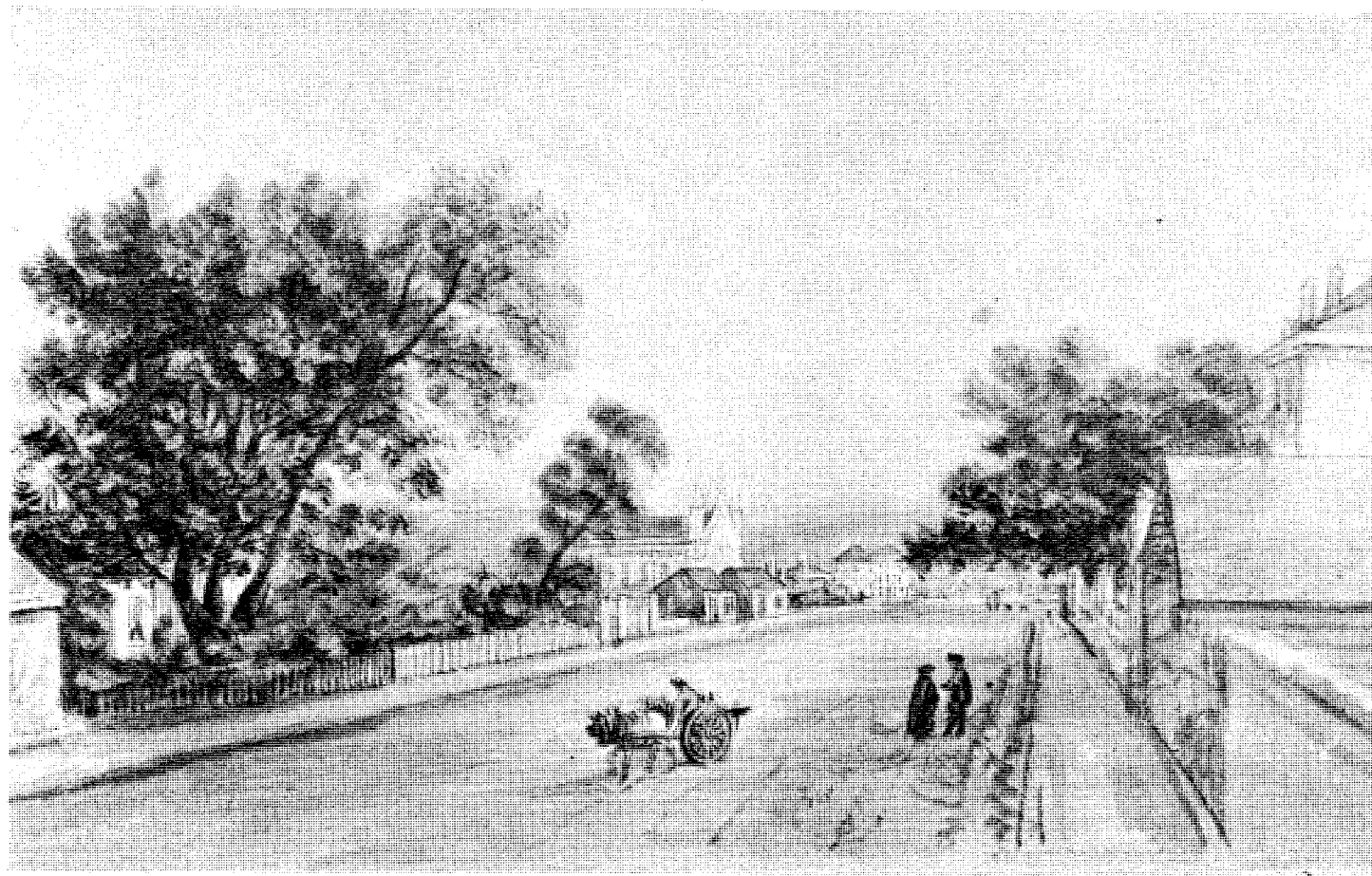
This was opened on the 12 August 1842. When it became too small Christ Church was built next door and the Chapel became, in 1884, the Rev. E. A. Nathan's High School for boys. It is now called Milton Hall and is used for church activities.



(No. 27) ST. JOHN STREET, LAUNCESTON.

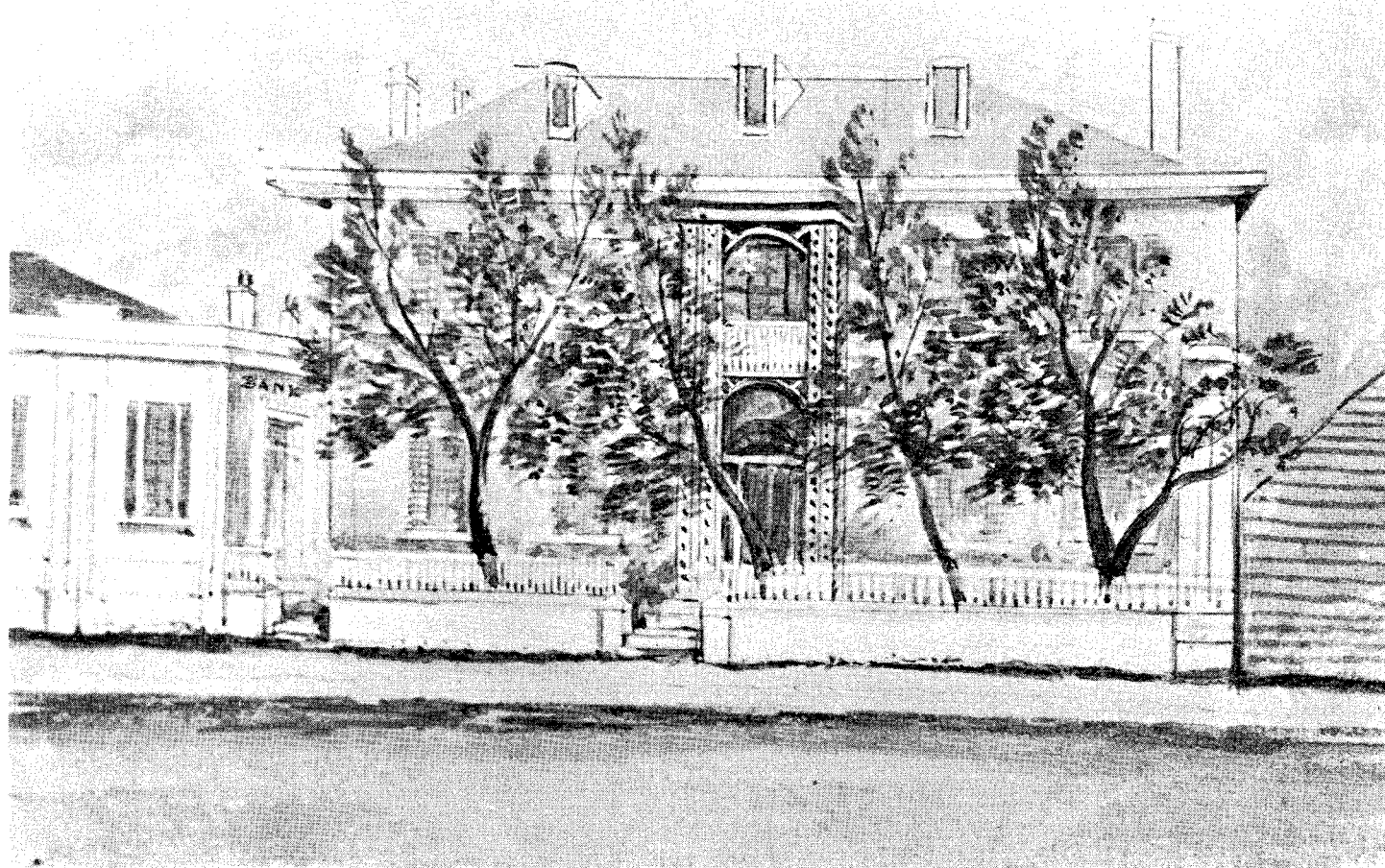
“View taken from opposite the residence of H. Dowling Esq.”

Practically all the buildings shown in this drawing remain as surviving examples of Georgian architecture. Mr. Henry Dowling was the leading printer and publisher in Launceston and was prominent in political and civic life.



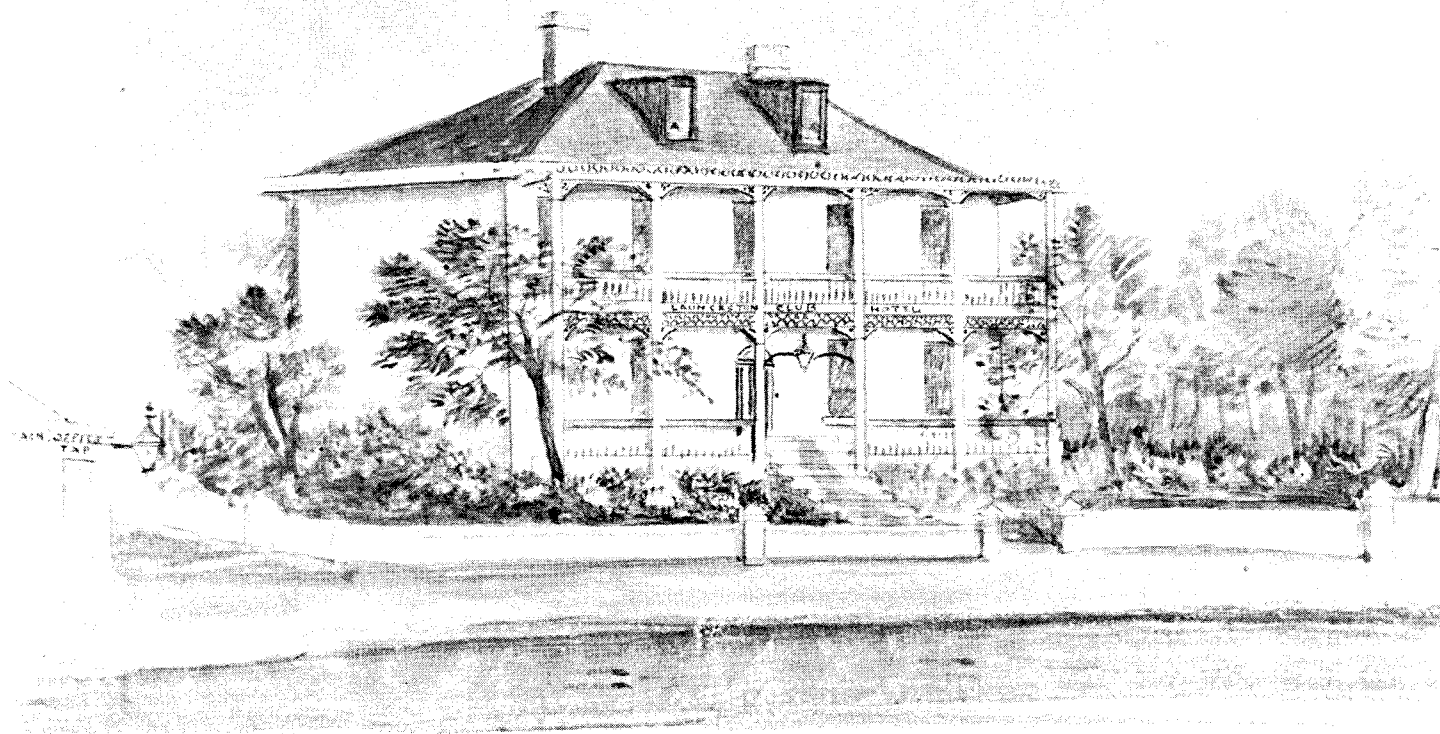
(No. 28) CAMERON STREET, LAUNCESTON.

The house beyond old Trinity Church was originally named de Little's buildings after its architect and builder. Its present name is Nabowla House.



(No. 29) THE BANK OF TASMANIA.

This was established in 1853. Mr. Francis Evans was the manager until 1873. In 1885 it became the National Bank of Tasmania. The Bank is now the Equitable Building Society and the Northern Club stands on Mr. Evans' residence.



(No. 30) UNION CLUB HOTEL.

This was originally the club house of the 99th Regiment. It became a stage coach terminal. The Duke of Edinburgh stayed here in 1868. Sir Richard Dry had his town residence here. It is demolished.