

SOME NOTES ON HORTON COLLEGE, ONCE, A WELL-KNOWN SCHOOL NEAR ROSS, TASMANIA

By

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Perhaps one of the most ambitious ventures ever contemplated for the Midlands of Tasmania, was the suggested opening of a College and Boarding-School for Boys near the township of Ross.

One hundred and ten years or a little more have now gone by since consideration was, we believe, being given at "Somercotes", the home of the late Captain Samuel Horton, to the establishment of a Wesleyan Methodist College for Boys in Tasmania.

"Somercotes", still occupied by relatives of the Captain, stands about two and a half miles south of Ross, on the Main Road from Launceston to Hobart, but the old College building has long since been demolished.

During its useful years Horton College was the home of a great succession of boys, many of whom became Tasmania's most successful doctors and barristers, best known clerymen, most enterprising merchants, and many others who filled with credit to themselves and their school the vocations they afterwards followed.

But before giving details of the actual founding of the school and a little of its history, some reference, perhaps, should be made to events which led to an area of 20 acres near Ross being reserved for this particular school.

Settlement in our Island began in 1803. In September of that year Lieutenant Bowen landed with his party at Risdon on the River Derwent. A few months later (November, 1804) quite independently of the southern attempt, the British flag was hoisted at Outer Cove on the northern coast of Van Diemen's Land, as Tasmania was then known, but both settlements were moved later to more suitable surroundings. Communication between them, if any in those early days, was made only by way of the sea.

Statistical reports go to show that there was a serious shortage of food in the Island during 1807. Partly because of the extreme conditions in Launceston, or Port Dalrymple as it was first called, it was deemed necessary to seek relief and so a small party under the command of Lieutenant Laycock set out for Hobart Town by way of the then unknown bush. The journey, a comparatively short one these days, took them eight days to complete. Once a way through was discovered it was not long before other people began to move to and fro along the route.

By 1811 this route, believed to have been about 160 miles long, must have been fairly well defined, for Governor Lachlan Macquarie who made a visit to this Island then, recorded in his Journal that he made a trip through the country by means of

"the track for travellers". He at the same time referred to his intention to establish four military posts "to keep open the means of communication between the two settlements and to furnish protection to such persons as may wish to settle in the interior".

Macquarie, who was Governor of New South Wales as well as Governor in Chief of Van Diemen's Land, again visited this Island in 1821, and on the journey from north to south chose sites for towns and gave them names. The site to which I particularly wish to refer he called "Ross".

One of the earliest grants in or near Ross was made by Sir Thomas Brisbane to Charles and Henrietta Bowen. Among other grants made later by Sir Thomas was one of 1000 acres or thereabouts to Samuel Horton.

By 1826, Ross had become the centre of settlement in the midlands. "The Union Agricultural Society" of the district considered itself sufficiently important and asked the Lieutenant-Governor, Colonel George Arthur, to become its Patron. The 1827 Almanac refers to a fine show of thoroughbred horses at the Ross Market. This market was held every three months and there is evidence to show that it was operating earlier than 1826. The district was considered to be admirably adapted for the growth of fine wool and the Almanac for 1829 adds that "Ross stands in the centre of some particularly rich and fertile plains of some considerable extent" and "to the right of Ross are extensive tracts containing 30,000 acres of the best land in the Island". Can we wonder that later this locality was deemed suitable for the site of "Horton College".

Just before Macquarie's second visit to Van Diemen's Land, the Rev. Benjamin Carvosso visited Hobart Town on his way to New South Wales. The date recorded in his Journal is 25th April, 1820. He was so impressed with the need for guidance in spiritual matters for the population of Hobart Town that he wrote and made feeling representation to the Missionary Committee in London asking for a missionary for them. He preached the first sermon from the Wesleyan point of view to those residents of the town who would listen. Another Wesleyan Missionary, the Rev. Ralph Mansfield also preached shortly afterwards on his way through to Sydney.

The efforts of these two men led a few converted soldiers to form the nucleus of a Methodist Society. In spite of persecution their numbers increased to 34 and a Sunday School was established. So in August, 1821, when other Wesleyan Missionaries, the Revs. Leigh, Walker and William Horton arrived at Hobart Town on their way to New South

Wales it was agreed between them that Mr. and Mrs. Horton should, pending the receipt of the necessary authority, remain and take charge of the infant church.

It seems that William Horton was so impressed with the prospects and possibilities of Van Diemen's Land that he wrote to his cousin Captain Samuel Horton and persuaded him to come to the Colony. Samuel Horton reached Hobart Town in 1823 and immediately set about going through the formalities of obtaining a grant of land near to the midland centre of Ross.

British Army Regulations at that time permitted officers, not under the rank of captain, to sell their commissions and emigrate to Van Diemen's Land where they would be sure of land grants on arrival. Other immigrants were granted land in proportion to the capital they brought in. Each settler had to go to the Surveyor's Office and demonstrate the amount he had brought to the Colony and quote and describe the number of livestock, farm implements and seed he had. To encourage milling, a special grant of 500 acres was made to settlers who were prepared to erect and work flour mills on their properties.

Land surveying at that time, even allowing for the great difficulties existing, was incredibly careless. Surveyors apparently did little more than count the turns of their conveyance's wheel or their horses' footsteps when measuring distances between pegs.

Samuel Horton was a sea-captain in the Merchant Service which traded in the China Sea before he came to Van Diemen's Land, but apparently gave up that calling to come and settle on the land. After receiving the necessary authority or permit from the Surveyor's Office he journeyed with Thomas Parramore to the property which soon became his home near Ross. It took them 10 days to reach and locate the area received by the Captain under a grant dated 30th June, 1823. He called his property "Somercotes" and in so doing brought the name of the district in which his family lived in Lincolnshire, England, to this side of the world.

Nearly 10 years later the marriage of Samuel Horton to Miss Elizabeth Pridden Hudson took place in the little church at Jericho. The Rev. James Norman conducted the service on 26th April, 1833. Thomas Parramore signed, together with William and Emma Pike, as a witness to the ceremony.

About this time Governor Arthur attempted to revive a project for establishing a College for the secondary education of the youth of the Colony. Much discussion took place but it seems that nothing concrete was done and sectarian difficulties made their appearance. Governor Arthur was withdrawn in 1836. Sir John Franklin took his place and two years later again took up the subject of the establishment of a College in the Colony. According to the Hobart Town *Gazette* of 1840 he is reported to have said, "The leading object, however, now in contemplation, is to found a superior school on such a system that it may at a future period become a College, and be a means of affording a liberal education to the sons of

Colonists, and of preparing them for entering upon the study of the Learned Professions."

Dr. Arnold of Rugby, from whom Sir John had sought advice, wrote (in 1841) "In all British Colonies it is manifest that the Scotch Church has equal rights with the English, and the Roman Catholic has equal rights morally, yet to instruct independently of any church is monstrous and to teach for all three churches together is impossible. I can only conceive the plan of three distinct branches of one college."

Again in 1842 Dr. Arnold wrote, "Mixed Institutions are to my mind so undesirable that I would rather have a college Scotch altogether than that it should represent no church at all."

Franklin's plan appears to have been to have the Government control secondary education, much in the same way as the Government now controls the State High Schools, but the rivalry of the various churches prevented his ideas being carried out. The claims of Bishop Nixon that Franklin's suggested college should be placed under the responsibility of the Church of England,—"the Established Church"—was warmly resented by members of the Presbyterian Church and the "Dissenters" as members of other denominations were called, and brought about much bitter controversy.

Education and kindred subjects no doubt must have been freely discussed during Ministerial visits to "Somercotes". From the conclusions reached, there does not appear to be any doubt that Samuel Horton had suggested the way and offered the means whereby sons of Wesleyans might be independently educated, and according to Wesleyan ideals.

So from the Minutes of the Wesleyan District Meeting held on 17th July, 1850, we learn that the Chairman and Secretary were requested to place the "Somercotes" suggestion fully before the London Committee and to "solicit their countenance and pecuniary aid". By the time the District Meeting met in July, 1851, it had been decided definitely to go on with the scheme for establishing a Wesleyan College in Tasmania. Meetings were held throughout the circuits of the Colony "to excite an interest and to gain financial assistance". The Chairman was requested to get the Deed conveying the property "drawn up without delay".

According to a publication called "The Watchman" of 7th July, 1852, "The foundation stone was laid at noon on 6th January, 1852 in the presence of people of all classes and every Wesleyan minister in the Colony. A Parchment Scroll was placed in a cavity under the Foundation Stone and bore the words, 'This Stone was laid in the name of the Holy Trinity on Tuesday the 6th day of January, in the year of our Lord 1852 and in the 15th year of the reign of Her Gracious Majesty Victoria, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and in the 5th year of the administration of Sir William Denison, Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land by SAMUEL HORTON Esquire, the generous founder of this College, in commemoration of whose munificence the building is to be designated "HORTON COLLEGE". "The Property has been conveyed in trust to the Wesleyan Church for its sole use and benefit as a collegiate

institution for ever.' "Over two hundred of the company then enjoyed 'an excellent repast prepared by Mrs. Horton.'"

During 1851 and 1852 gold was being discovered in Victoria and it was not long before thousands of able-bodied men were seeking their fortunes in that Colony. In consequence the price of manual labour and building materials in Tasmania rose enormously and fears began to be entertained that the building of the College would be delayed indefinitely. Some folk contended that such an establishment as the College was "not necessary" or that "it was much before its time", others, were sure that it would be of great benefit for many years to come and they won the day. Construction of the building proceeded slowly. It was not till the end of 1855 that the structure neared completion, even then only the central portion and one wing, the northern one, had been erected.

The College stood opposite "Somercotes" about two miles south of Ross, on the Main Road between Hobart and Launceston. It was a brick building of two storeys with "dressings and trimmings of carved freestone" set back a little from the road in a block of five acres. This area was later set out in lawns with shrubs and flower beds, many of the plants being supplied from the Royal Society's gardens in Hobart; and to quote Dr. Jobson, who was sent out as the representative of Methodism in England to the Methodist Conference at Sydney in 1861 "The College was backed by round moulded hills and surrounded by arable and pasture land". The bricks for the building were made nearby by convicts and the press with which they were shaped could, until recently, be seen at "Somercotes". Stone was taken from the famous quarries near Ross.

The Rev. J. A. Manton was appointed President or Governor of the College, but it was not till September, 1855, that the building was ready for occupation. Mr. Manton's son John was the first scholar enrolled under the date 3rd October, 1855.

Qualification for admission to the College was "an ability to read the New Testament with facility", and had been laid down by the District Meeting of 1852. By the end of 1855 seven students were attending.

The earliest known advertisement relating to the College is one held by the Mitchell Library, Sydney. It refers to the proposed erection of the building and was probably the circular sent out to Methodist Circuits in 1851. It is undated but bears the names of H. H. Gaud and J. A. Manton. Another reference to the College appears in the Hobart Town Directory for 1857 under the heading "Ecclesiastical—Wesleyan Church, Campbell Town and Ross, Rev. J. A. Manton, President Australasian Conference and Governor, Horton College".

Further reference to Horton College, Ross, is made in Walch's Tasmanian Almanac for 1863, the first year of its publication and reads:—

"The College is the result of contributions by friends of education in Tasmania. Captain Horton of "Somercotes", Ross, having commenced the enterprise by a gift of twenty acres of land as a site for the college and a contribution of £1,000.

"The object contemplated is to afford to sons of Protestant Christians the advantage of a sound general education in connection with a christian home and careful moral and religious training.

"In October 1855 under the presidency of the Rev. J. A. Manton the first pupils were received. Since that period the average number of students has been about fifty: up to the present time 168 have been entered on the College books. The entire cost of the building and furnishings was about £4,500.

"The examinations which have been conducted during the last two years, under the "Tasmanian Council of Education and Scholarship's Act" have given to Horton College a first position among the schools of the Colony, and enabled it to enrol five Associates of Arts.

"The trustees are now enlarging the College, by adding a new wing and thus completing the edifice, the estimated cost of which is £2,000.

"President of the College, Rev. W. A. Quick; Head Master, S. Fiddian; Second Master, J. W. Catton; Third Master, E. W. Nye."

The Almanac for 1864 records that W. W. Fox was the Head Master. Actually he was appointed in England and received instructions to take up duties at the College from the beginning of 1863. Before he reached the College in February, a start had been made on the new wing made necessary by the steady increase in the demand for enrolment. 1862 ended with 66 boys attending the school.

It was November, 1863, before the new or south wing could be occupied. This addition allowed a partition wall in the old building to be removed and a larger dining hall provided, it also practically doubled the accommodation, increasing the number of rooms for staff, classrooms, &c., to 38. The alterations cost £2,000 and largely due to the untiring efforts and careful supervision of Mr. Quick who had received many donations from friends of the College this sum was paid over immediately on completion.

The central block consisted of the main school hall, the dining-hall and classrooms on the ground floor, and on the first floor were two large dormitories, one of them 70 feet by 30 feet, known as the "Chapel" and the other as "number thirteen". The north wing contained the President's quarters, the kitchen, the matron's room (known to the boys as "Number Six") and some of the smaller bedrooms. The southern wing was used for the residence of the Head Master, Staff-room and more class and bedrooms.

From the day of his arrival to the time he retired, Mr. Fox the Head Master worked extremely hard at Horton College to maintain traditions of old English schools, on which under freer Australian conditions Horton College was fashioned.

On 10th November, 1867, Captain Samuel Horton died at the age of 71 years. During his lifetime he had had a vault prepared on a rocky hill overlooking the College and "Somercotes" and to this resting place his remains were then taken. He had no children and his estate was left to his widow with the provision that unless she chose otherwise it was to pass to Thomas Riggall, the

nephew who had come from England to manage it for him. He had further provided that should his nephew leave no children to reach the age of 21 years, the property was to be divided into five parts. Two parts were to go to the British and Foreign Bible Society in England, two parts were to go to the Wesleyan Mission in Sydney for use in Pacific Island Missions and the remaining part was to provide the income for a Scholarship at Horton College. Later many people regretted that he had not fully endowed the College.

To indicate the type of man the hard working Captain was, one story is mentioned. It seems that during 1843 Martin Cash, the noted bushranger, afterwards pardoned, made a visit to "Somercotes", took the inmates completely by surprise and finally bailed up the Captain when he rushed to see what was causing a commotion in the place. It is not hard to imagine the scene described. "Somercotes" men were lying bound on the floor of the kitchen and the Captain, standing with his back to the fireplace, was saying "You may shoot me Cash, but God will protect me. I am not afraid to die, but you are". Bullet marks on the doorway of one of the rooms at "Somercotes" believed to have been caused by a shot from an outlaw's pistol were always an object of awed interest to the boys of the College who were fortunate enough to go and see them.

For some time after the Captain's death, and possibly due to a minor depression in Tasmania, admissions to the College fell considerably, but when it was found that the school was to continue and that conditions generally were improving a period of great prosperity followed. Many improvements were made to the school property. A very fine new tower was added to the central portion of the building, the shingle roof was replaced with iron and an iron gymnasium and large playshed built. The Council of the College made a donation of £200 towards building a new Wesleyan Church at Ross, and the sum of £1,000 was advanced on loan to the Methodist Ladies' College in Launceston. And such was the prosperity at that time that the 1884 Balance Sheet showed a Reserve Fund of £853, a Manton Exhibition Fund of £533 and a Horton Scholarship Fund of £469.

The motto of the College for many years was "Nil sine magno labore", this was later replaced by "Perseverantia Palman Obtinebit". The origin of the College badge or crest is not known.

It is probable that only two boys left their impressions of the school in print, and one of these wrote, "Life at the school was free and pleasant. Sunday was a welcome day, as it is in such institutions all over the world. The time of rising was 7 a.m. instead of 6.30 and after washing at a long row of basins arranged along the length of the dormitory, and putting on clothes and slippers, for boots were never allowed in the dormitory, the boys took their places at their desks in the schoolroom as on other days, and when 8 o'clock struck they were marched into the dining hall where the President joined them and conducted prayers. Breakfast followed and then an hour later, three or four abreast, they walked the 2½ miles to Ross for service in the little Wesleyan Methodist Church there". "On week days the

boys were, on suitable mornings, taken out for drill and short bursts of "double quick" on the Main Road. Periodical visits of a chaise cart loaded with 6d. packets of sweets, &c., provided the College 'tuck-shop'. Once at a standstill, horse, cart and salesman used to be very nearly smothered by eager customers".

Bathing, boating and fishing were popular past-times on the Macquarie River. On hot afternoons the boys were allowed to leave school early, at three o'clock instead of four, to go swimming. On spare afternoons "al fresco" meals of chipped potatoes, with a rabbit boiled in a billy-can and damper made on stone were events of high delight for some. Of course there were cricket and football matches, paper chases over neighbouring properties and other games in season. For those boys wishing for something more strenuous to do there was always wood from the hugh pile to be cut. Property owners round about permitted the College pupils to roam at will. There were many favourite resorts and many a fine collection of wild bird eggs was made during the nesting season.

Indoors there were the usual midnight suppers, pillow fights and so on, and each spring a bird-keeping craze always swept the school. Boxes of all shapes and sizes lined the walls of the large shed in the playground, containing young magpies, jackasses, parrots, crows, hawks and other birds.

According to an advertisement in *Walch's "Literary Intelligencer"* of March, 1864, parents were required to pay per annum "For Board & Education, £50", "Washing, £4 4 0", "Medical attendance £1 1 0" and to provide two pairs of sheets, three pillow cases, six towels and a silver fork and spoon, all marked. Other articles were added to this list in later advertisements.

Vacations were two, six weeks at Mid-summer and a month in Mid-winter.

And then in 1889, just when the College seemed set for a long term of usefulness and service to the community, Mr. Fox, the able and popular Headmaster had to retire owing to ill-health. For 26 years he had not spared himself in the interest of the College and of the boys. The splendid scholastic achievements, moral and physical training were largely due to his firm and friendly guiding authority. The *School Prospectus* for 1888 gives some indication of the successful work of the boys. Between 1879 and 1887 they had obtained four Tasmanian Scholarships, 15 Associates of Arts degrees, three Dry Scholarships and numerous gold medals and other prizes.

(A "Tasmanian Scholarship" was valued at £200 per annum and was tenable for four years at some University in the United Kingdom. Two scholarships only were granted in each year by the State under the "Tasmanian Council of Education and Scholarship's Act" to those students who had been successful in obtaining an Associate of Arts degree.)

Troubles as a rule, it is said, do not come singly and so it was for Horton College. Almost immediately following Mr. Fox's resigning a "Depression" of some magnitude struck the State of Tasmania and despite the fact that Mr. Fox had said the College was "in flourishing circumstances" the years were critical and conditions changing. Even though scholars at Horton College were said

to enjoy special advantages, one in particular, that they were altogether removed from the distractions of town life and thus enabled to give undivided attention to their studies, there seems to have been a growing tendency for parents to send their boys to schools nearer the centres of population.

So with a feeling of great regret we learn that by 1892 the school was in a hopeless financial position. All special funds had been used to meet current expenses and there still remained a debt of fifty-two pounds.

Various suggestions were made to the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, but apparently under the circumstances then existing it was considered doubtful whether anyone could put the College on a further successful career so long as it remained at Ross. Rather than close up the building immediately an agreement was entered into with a Mr. Steer to carry on his private school for boys there. The master's educational status was assumed however, and within a year the financial position had become worse.

The College Trustees were now embarrassed with a building which they owned but which was built on land given in trust for collegiate purposes. All funds at their disposal were exhausted, so because of an uncertain legal position they decided to transfer quietly and as soon as possible the property back to the Horton Estate on the understanding that Mr. Riggall, Captain Horton's nephew and

Trustee would pay all legal and outstanding expenses, which by then had grown to £250. And this was done despite the fact that Methodists throughout Australia had contributed over £5,000 towards the cost of the College buildings.

The residential portion of the school was then occupied for some time by Mr. Riggall's son, who on his father's death in 1917 decided to pull the building down and sell the material. Some of this went into building "Horton" a small homestead at the rear of the College. The College Bell came to Hobart and is now rung daily during term at Hutchins School. Some bricks were taken to Launceston and in 1935 built into one of the walls close to the foundation stone of the Mary Fox wing of the Methodist Ladies' College in Elphin Road, because of the associations of the two schools in the early eighties of last century. And so, with the exception of the building's entrance archway, which still stands, disappeared the visible remains of in its day, one of the best known and most popular Methodist educational establishments in Australia.

In all some 770 boys passed through the College, most of them from Tasmania, but numbers from Victoria, New South Wales and even as far afield as New Zealand, and few of them there would be who did not all their lives remember the influence of Horton College which even today still reaches out to their descendants.

