

Eighth Australiana Virtual Show and Tell Report

December 2020

All reports are on line: <https://www.australiana.org.au/news>

Helping to keep Australiana active

The VS&T is intended to entertain members and offer an opportunity to share, inform, discuss and ask questions about items they hold in their private collections.

In viewing the reports please bear in mind that there are limitations to identification when only seeing photographs, so these are, in some cases a “best guess” although other responses have had considerable expertise applied to them.

New items to australiana.queensland@gmail.com or the Secretary please.

Any members who believe that they have better or additional information or alternative hypotheses than those recorded in the reports are invited to please provide them by email to the above address.

Future editions of the Virtual Show and Tell are entirely dependent on items being provided by members. The schedule of publication from now on will be flexible as we have not been receiving enough items to maintain a strict monthly publication schedule.

Please send good quality photographs of items standing upright and preferably on a white base and white background. Images sent as attachments to emails, rather than imbedded in the body of the email, will be better quality. JPEG image files should be between 1 and 3 MB to give good reproduction. Dimensions: height, width and depth in mm or cm please.

Yvonne Barber and David Bedford, editors, 1 December 2020

1. Scouts Thanks Badge



1939. 9ct gold, maker unknown Size: 3 x 6 x 2.5 cm.

This cherished Scouts Thanks Badge was awarded to the owner's grandmother Elsie Lena Coogan (1883-1950) for her consistent and energetic support of the 1st Drummoyne Scouts Group from its inception in 1921, particularly in fund-raising. Her 2 sons William James & Ernest Hyatt were inaugural members.

The bar is 6cm long and the badge 2.5cm x 3cm, the inscription on the front is: Thanks Badge, the inscription on the back is: Mrs E. L. Coogan from 1st Drummoyne Group, 9ct 20.12.39

2. Six canape serving sticks with Australian fauna finials



Presumed early 20th Century. Maker unknown, marked Sterling Silver. Size: 9 cm.

The owner likes these sticks but isn't sure of their original purpose. The matching finials and flattened points would seem to make serving as a hat pin unlikely so one suggestion is that they were for serving canapes.

Any information from silver experts would be most welcome.

Editor's comment: These sterling silver cocktail sticks were possibly developed for the tourist market and designed to decorate a drink or cocktail (maraschino cherry, olive etc) as they look too sharp to put in the mouth for canapes.

3. Napkin ring in the shape of a cuff





Late C19th. Maker: Wendt. Size: 5 x 4- 4.5 diam. cm.

This elegant Sterling silver napkin ring in the shape of a sleeve cuff is unusual and has good detailing. The owner purchased it because the engraved initials partly coincided with a family child's initials. Symptomatic of the issues facing collectors today, the child has shown no interest in Australiana.

Editor's comment: This is a late 19th century item from Wendt of Adelaide with Queen Victoria's head. It is fashioned as a slightly conical military uniform cuff complete with buttons and a rope twist decoration.

4. Sterling Silver pin or serving dishes



Age unknown. Stamped F & R with what looks like a Platypus. Size: Kookaburra 8 diam. cm, Koala 7.5 diam. cm.

The owner is curious as to the maker and age of these dishes.

Editor's comment: The stamp F & R refers to the Sydney company Fairfax and Roberts trading as jewellers, watchmakers and opticians since 1883. The animal in the stamp is a beaver. From 1915 they were based in Hunter St and their jewellery and silverware was mostly of Australian origin. Much of their twentieth century silver, such as these examples, was produced for them by the Sydney firm of W.J. Sanders and Co., and marked F & R or Fx & R.

5. EPNS candle holder



Early 20th Century. Size: 5 x 12 (diam.) cm.

This decorative candle holder has been stamped by the retailer G. McClymont Grafton jewellers. Register mark 1493.

Editor's comment: The candle holder would have been made in Sydney in the first quarter of the 20th century and retailed by McClymont in Grafton.

Mr G McClymont, a shrewd Scotsman, came to Grafton in 1907 and opened a workshop. He established a business connection with some of the Sydney firms so that he could offer the items that were on sale in the best shops in Sydney. After nineteen years he opened a second shop in Lismore.

A piece of self-promotion in the local Clarence and Richmond Examiner in 1912 describes the business.

G. McClymont's shop is a bewildering kind of place. There is such a variety of articles displayed and so much glitter and gleam of jewellery and silver-ware, that one is quite dazzled. All the things have such a bright, new, up-to-date look, and this adds to the bewildering beauty of the whole show. The shop has lately been rearranged and improved, and everything in it naturally shows off to the very best advantage, The Grafton Jewellery and Music Store, as Mr McClymont terms the establishment, is now in the seventh year of its existence, and its progress during that

time has been nothing short of wonderful. A business that has developed and expanded as this has, must have strict honesty, good values, and conscientious attention to the wants of customers at its back. Watch, clock, phonograph and jewellery repairs are done on the premises, and artistic engraving is entrusted to a thoroughly competent man. Also it may be mentioned that the proprietor gives his personal attention to all cases of defective eyesight, and the Optical parlour is a most complete and well-fitted one.

6. Woman's face powder 'compact'



1930. Maker: William Proud. Sterling silver compact with gilt interior and original face powder. Size: 5.3 (diam.) cm.

A small powder compact, gilt interior, with engraved initials QP for Queenie Piggott, a relative of the owner's father-in-law.

Editor's comment: William Proud and his contemporary E J Coote were both involved in the establishment of The Sydney Hall Mark Co. of 1916, and they strongly supported the introduction of an Australia –wide system for the hallmarking of gold and silver.

The marks on this compact are PROUD, 925, wren, H the date letter for 1930 so we can accurately state the year it was made by William Proud. The hall-marking system was not generally supported and lapsed.

7. Set of cedar dining chairs



Detail on top of front rail

Circa 1835. One of a large set, maker unknown. Size: 88 x 47 x 51 cm.

The chair pictured is one of what is now a set of six, but the set must have been longer once, as the numbering on the front seat rails goes up to eleven. The drop-in seats are not shown. The timber is cedar. The owner purchased the set in Mount Gambier at auction in April 1987.

Editor's comment: A quick look in Fahy and Simpson, pp 256 to 259, shows some good comparisons for these chairs. Chairs with similar decoration and design are dated at 1835. The early date for the chairs is supported by the purity and simplicity of line in the chairs' design, including the large and elegant top rail, coupled with the large, extremely well-carved mid-rail/back splat with Prince of Wales feather centre and *Acanthus* leaves to each side. Having been part of a large set indicates that these were made for a very wealthy and/or important setting, either a grand house or perhaps an official government property.

If this were an auction catalogue these would be described as "An important set of early dining chairs".

8. Etching: *A Roadside Farm*, by Ernest Edwin Abbott (1889-1973). No. 13 of 18, although signed 'G. Cope'



1925-1935. Size: 13.5 x 21.2 cm.

“Design and Art Australia Online” (DAAO), an online database of information about Australian artists, carries an entry for Abbott, without mentioning the name of George Cope. However the NGA website in its information on “Australian Prints + Printmaking” shows that Abbott also worked under the name of George Cope. The owner of this print had long been puzzled about the lack of information about the artist Cope, and has so far found no explanation for the use of the name by Abbott, and some of the details that have been found conflict with each other.

English-born Abbott worked as a sign-writer after leaving school, but was apparently listed as an ironmonger when he arrived in WA in 1911. On moving to SA some time later he was said to have “...taught art at Stott’s...for four years”, this was presumably the city business school of that name in Pirie Street. Considering that he was said to have been self-taught, and given the nature of the school, one does wonder at this.

Recorded as moving to Melbourne in 1920 and taking a studio there in Oxford Chambers, Bourke Street, it is then said that he “...took up dry-point etching”. Credited with making his own engraving tools, and using a flat-plate press to produce his prints in short runs of 50 to 75, he later moved to work at his home in Black Rock, signing his work “Ernest E. Abbott” or “E.E. Abbott”. Although best known for his prints of Australian subjects, he also produced watercolours, pastels, and some oils.

Since Abbott appears not to have joined any art societies, nor exhibited, and just sold his works through a few agents and a travelling salesman, he left few traces of his career in the art world. One account relates that he converted his studio to a machine shop in 1939, ending his artistic career. A retrospective exhibition of his etchings, drawn from the Abbott family’s collection, all dated 1925 to 1935, was held at the Antique Centre of Hawthorn (Vic.) in 1993.

Australian Sales Digest www.aasd.com.au illustrates a number of his works, mainly with English subject matter eg “Thatched Cottage” and “Waterloo Stairs” and paintings with eastern themes such as “Eastern Caravan” which presumably were painted before he arrived in Australia. The Australian “Valley Truck” etching which has some similarity to “A Roadside Farm” has the E E Abbott name and the edition number of etching but no mention of George Cope. The Australian Centre for Prints and Printmaking suggests that G Cope or George Cope was an alias for E E Abbott. His address from the Victorian Electoral Rolls for 1919 and 1924 was 106 Pakington Street Kew and in 1936 Bay View Crescent, Sandringham.

9. Telstra staff medal presented to Jennifer Beckham for 22 years and 6 months service



Designed by Michael Meszaros, struck 1997, award date unknown, bronze, 63 mm. The designers name and date commissioned, 1997, is on centre left side of the obverse.

The origins of Telstra dates back to the year of Federation, 1901. The organisation was first known as the Postmaster-General's Department (PMG) and was responsible for postal and telecommunications services. In 1992 the telecommunications section became known as 'Telecom' and a year later it was renamed as 'Telstra'. The business was sold off in stages from 1997, the year of the commissioning of the medal, and was fully privatised in 2011.

Little is known about the recipient, Jennifer Beckham, but the medal was acquired in a junk shop in Adelaide which suggests Beckham worked in SA.

The medal designer, Michael Meszaros was born in Melbourne in 1945, the second son of the Hungarian born sculptor / medallist, Andor Meszaros and Elizabeth Meszaros. Michael's father, 1900-1972 worked from a studio within the family home and Michael became immersed in discussions and work of his father, and Michael created his first medal at the age of 18. Michael then obtained a Degree in Architecture in 1967 and practiced for a year before focusing on sculptures and medallions. He was awarded a Churchill Fellowship which enabled him to attend La Scuola Dell' Arte Della Medaglia which was attached to the Mint of Rome. He has been a prolific designer of medals and sculptures and is represented in the British Museum, Royal Dutch Coin Collection, Christchurch NZ Gallery, Castlemaine Victoria Gallery, as well in private collections in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and many European countries. For further information about the artist go to the Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia, Volume 2, up to 1986 and Volume 11 1986 to 2000, available on line.

10. Miniature wooden suitcase



Circa 1930-1940? Quilted Queensland Maple miniature suitcase. Size: 7 x 41 x 20.8 cm.

There is superb fiddle-back/quilted figure in this example of the timber, *Flindersia brayleyana*. This ornate figure is a frequent feature in the species but was even more common in timber cut from the root and thickened base of the trees included in the second harvest of these giant north-Queensland rainforest trees. The first harvest was by old-fashioned woodcutters working with hand tools. They climbed the trees by inserting planks in the tree to get above the thickest parts of the trunks. This allowed their hand saws to reach across the trunks. The second harvest came later with the ‘advancement’ of fossil-fuelled machinery such as bulldozers to push out the stumps and chainsaws to cut the larger diameters.

The suitcase has an old, original leather handle and sliding-catch locks marked “Legge” with an image of three human legs in a three-part symbol. J. Legge and Co Ltd produced cabinet locks in Willenhall UK from about 1881 and onwards. Trove includes a reference to a Legge catalogue no. 15 from around 1900 but unfortunately it is not available online. Grace’s guide ([https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/J. Legge and Co](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/J._Legge_and_Co)) indicates they operated until at least 1964¹.

Timber from large Queensland Maple trees is less available today as the majority of the remaining old growth trees are, fortunately in this editor’s opinion, relatively safe in reserves and National Parks. From an environmental viewpoint we regret the loss of these rich forests, However, through collecting Australiana we are able to enjoy the beauty of their products and keep these for future generations. Plantation grown Queensland maple is still available and the timber is commonly used for ‘tonewoods’ – guitar bodies etc.

A small suitcase like this may have been used for Masonic regalia, but no evidence of such use remains.

¹ <http://historywebsite.co.uk/Museum/locks/gazetteer/gazlegge.htm>

11. Engraved/Scrimshaw whale's tooth



Age unknown, possibly 1850s. An early Advance Australia coat of arms on one side, and is inscribed on the other, “Whales Tooth from C G Sydney”. Size: 15.5 x 6.5 cm (at the base).

The owner is simply seeking information. They are wondering if it can be dated from the Coat of Arms. This type with the “Advance Australia” motto was being drawn in the 1850s. Also, a member may be able to identify “C G Sydney”

The editors have checked with scrimshaw experts, who have commented that most Australian whalers were illiterate so did not inscribe their work with words. This was in contrast to the north American whalers who were better educated. The high quality of the script and engraving of the tooth are therefore very unusual for Australian work.

A number of possibilities about the tooth and its age exist. One hypothesis is that the item could be a 20th century tourist item, which would explain the very neat script and crispness of the execution.

However, one VS&T editor has found some interesting historical information in Trove that could also form another hypothesis - that the piece of scrimshaw was engraved at or refers to Clifton Gardens, Sydney around the 1850's. This arises because a possible basis for "C.G. Sydney" is that it may refer to Clifton Gardens, named after the Whaler Captain E.H. Cliffe who lived there till 1846.

The *Daily Telegraph* 20 May 1931 p.13 reported on Captain J. H. Watson's research for the Australian Historical Society. Watson found that in 1830, Mr. Fraser, Government Botanist, with Mr. Graham, his assistant, built a cottage at Chowder Bay (now Clifton Gardens), intended to become an invalid establishment. The death of Mr. Fraser in 1831 caused the scheme to be abandoned, and the house, with 15 acres, was sold to Captain E. H. Cliffe, owner of the whaler *Lady Wellington*. Fifteen years later (1846), when the estate had expanded to 56 acres, with two cottages, it was advertised for sale by auction. In the advertisement the property was described as "Cliffeton." In view of these facts, Captain Watson declared that the 'Clifton' in the Clifton Gardens of today is the same name though changed in its spelling, as the Cliffeton that identified the locality through "Captain Cliffe having lived there. "

The term "Advance Australia" first appeared in the Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser 22 October 1840. A few years later, the *SMH* 9 Jun 1846 reported that at a dinner for W Bradbury Esq. M.C. in Goulburn, the Australian coat of arms with the accompanying motto "Advance Australia" was placed above the seat of the Chairman.

12. Toilet mirror, Marquetry and parquetry, Tulipwood and other species



Mirror front and back



Detail of marquetry inlay, pheasant, swan and snake below multi-point star

Circa 1850. Sydney origin, marquetry and parquetry veneered primarily in Tulipwood (*Harpullia pendula*) with some other subsidiary species. Size: 87 x 75.5 x 33 cm.

The unknown maker of this marquetry and parquetry veneered toilet mirror appears to have made at least two similar high-quality Tulipwood veneered items in Sydney around the middle of the 19th century. The Powerhouse/aka Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences has a similarly embellished Tulipwood veneered workbox (Fahy and Simpson, plate 77 p 204). This suggests that more examples are most likely to exist.

The marquetry on the base appears to have great symbolism with Australian Black swans, snakes and other animals depicted in addition to multi-pointed stars. The rear of the mirror is parquetry stars and fans.

Tulipwood, *Harpullia pendula*, is a relatively small rainforest tree from northern NSW and south-east Queensland with a range extending in patches up to Coen in far north Queensland. The distinctive two-tone timber characteristic comes from the sapwood being almost white and the heartwood a rich, striped or mottled brown. As both sapwood and heartwood are resistant to pinhole borers they are useable in furniture, primarily as veneers and inlays. As such, Tulipwood appealed to European and English migrants to Australia who had been used to seeing the similarly two-toned, expensive imported exotic timbers like Kingwood and Zebrawood. These two-toned timbers were used for only the very finest items in the Europe and the UK. The small-size and relative difficulty of obtaining the timber in Australia ensured similar exclusive use.

Other timbers in the mirror are *Casuarina* and an ebony or ebonised timber. It would be wonderful to see any other examples of similar work that members might have, especially if that could help to identify the maker, so the owner asks Society members to contact the editors if you have any please!

13. The advantages of collaboration



Work Box. Circa 1930-1940. Maker unknown, but possibly one of two Queensland makers, either Thomas Griffiths or Heinrich Nielsen. Both used inlaid veneers in their boxes and other work; rectangular wooden box with a variety of inlaid veneers as marquetry, parquetry and banding. Blue satin lining. Unusual screws in the hinges. Size: 31 x 23 x 12 cm.

Peter Lane recently found an interesting work box inlaid with a map of Australia (missing Tasmania). Peter set about finding as much as he could about the box. His approach was to share images and ask questions of people he knew. Other members may be interested in following Peter's approach.

In this example Peter sought information on the best description of the box, knowledge of: the timbers; boxes; sewing tools & equipment, and; from a conservator. Peter communicated with David Bedford (DB) (timbers), Justin Gare (JG) (conservator), Sarah Guest (SG) (boxes in general) and Susan Webster (SW) (sewing-related collectables). Yvonne Barber checked genealogical information. The contributions from each participant are summarised below.

Peter notes at the outset: Consulting with people with a variety of fields is a healthy exercise, although at times it can lead to disappointment it is an important part of the journey of collecting. Here is what the experienced people had to say.

Name: SW writes "I am mounting a one-woman campaign to get people to revert to the old name of 'work boxes' although they were, in essence, sewing boxes. They sat in full view of visitors on a central table in the reception room of middling class households and held the bits and bobs required for ornamental embroidery and craft projects rather than the domestic

mending! In other words they were to an extent status symbols - and yours would fall into this category - it's a goody."

Dating – The Northern Territory was separated from South Australia in 1911 so the box has to date after that time, though that is also quite obvious from the style itself which appears to be either Art Deco or Art Modern. From the 1920s finely figured North Queensland timbers were used as veneers and to form plywoods. Those processes continued until the significant depletion of the North Queensland rainforests by the 1960s made the processes uneconomic. (DB)

Timbers. DB wrote: Top: Timbers and front, excluding banding: Predominantly Queensland timbers so maybe a product of the sunny state. Timbers on the top include Queensland Maple and Queensland Walnut, probably also Maple Silkwood. The chevron decoration to the front looks like Queensland Walnut.

Maker – judging from the banding two possible makers were mentioned by DB and SG.

SG wrote: Notice that, in a promotional leaflet, Nielsen described his timbers as being from North Queensland and imported, by which he may mean, either that they came from distant parts of the globe, or were brought in from other parts of Australia. The latter seems more likely. The leaflet also noted that H. A. Nielsen provided a mail order service.

Heinrich August Freisleben NIELSEN (1858 - 1946) was born in Odense, Denmark and into a dynasty of cabinet makers. By 1888 he is listed in Cooktown as a cabinet maker and from then on as a Builder and Contractor. He appears to have moved from Cooktown to Port Douglas in 1909 when he was contracted to repair the Port Douglas Postal and Customs Buildings following a cyclone and, in 1914, he won the contract to build a new church, St Mary's. At the time it was described as 'a handsome structure and a stable one.'

Judging from a comment in his 1946 obituary claiming that Nielsen was the first to make the inlaid 'secret' jewel boxes there seems to have been competition between Nielsen and Griffiths?

I suspect that all the stringing (which is not typical of Griffiths' work) was imported - it was available (and probably still is) ready-made and probably came from some German source.

DB wrote: "The line of complex banding reminds me of Thomas Griffiths' work." Then, on the subject of whether the bandings are locally made or imported "I certainly have no basis for believing that Griffiths made the bandings and would not be surprised if he imported them, though have always presumed otherwise. They are very precisely made, and are very similar to the purfling and [ready-made] bandings available today. The fact that they used dyed timbers and such small components that the timbers are not easily identifiable complicates the matter. [DB] (DB also showed an example of Griffiths' work replete with similar bandings).

SW "I do agree with Sarah's comments that the banding on your box may have been imported. I am aware that specialist craftsmen sold this type of edging or banding - I consider this a sort of Tunbridge ware style." [SW]

Interior lining: I agree ... that the box may have been re-lined; from your photo, the quality of the work on the interior is not equal to best UK/European finishing. [SW]

Hinges and screws: JG wrote: You are quite right with your observations on the screws, they have been put in and taken out at least once, so we cannot be certain that they were the original screws (but they probably are, I guess as they all seem to match). The slightly rounded heads

(as opposed to the more normal dome headed screw) have been filed down because they didn't allow the lid to close properly (as you noted). This I suppose might be characteristic of the shed enthusiast woodworker, who comes up with slightly agricultural solutions to problems.

I'll will consult with my wood screw history of manufacture text to see if there was a time when they became readily available. In my mind's eye I associate that type of screw with zinc plating which became less fashionable after the explosion of chrome in manufacturing of the early 1930s(?) I assume this tallies with everyone's rough estimate judging by the subject matter, pre-made stringing, etc etc.[JG]

Results

A summary of the results from all correspondents provided the best technical description for the work box and that the ready-made, most likely imported stringing was used by two makers though it is believed that the most likely maker was HA Nielsen. The cooperative and collaborative approach achieved a much more complete assessment of the box than would otherwise have been likely.