

# 'A testimony

## OF OUR ESTEEM'

A brief flurry of controversy erupted on the letters page of the *Hobart Town Courier* in 1833. A year earlier a subscription had been collected from the people of Campbell Town, Van Diemen's Land, but nothing had been heard of it since. The money was intended 'for the purpose of purchasing a memorial in the shape of a piece of plate, to mark the high esteem and respect felt towards our late upright and impartial Police Magistrate James Simpson esq.'<sup>1</sup>

Campbell Town, on the Midland Highway about halfway between Hobart and Launceston, was settled in the early 1820s, Lachlan Macquarie having called it after his wife's maiden name in 1821. The rich pastures were given over to large land grants, attracting wealthy settlers and discouraging the small holdings that encouraged sheep rustling. Such large properties were more effective in the assignment system, replicating the landholder-labourer relationships of rural England. Convict labour enabled these properties to be established quickly, a legacy that can still be clearly seen in the Georgian architecture in this part of Tasmania.

In the late 1820s landholders felt besieged by a 'triple threat' – from sheep and cattle rustlers, bushrangers and Aboriginal people – that made policing a government priority. Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur divided Van Diemen's Land into Police Districts, to each of which was appointed a police magistrate, clerk, constables, field police and one flagellator. Campbell Town was one such district, and in March 1827 James Simpson was appointed magistrate. Arthur operated Van Diemen's Land as a gaol, with Hobart as its central administration point, and Police Magistrates were crucial in exercising and maintaining this authority. 'Classification is the soul of convict discipline', Arthur wrote, 'the whole territory is one large penitentiary, over the several parts of which convicts are distributed ... in obedience to principles rigidly observed.'<sup>2</sup> Magistrates were directed to report back to Arthur on the state of the colony; for example, on 8 May 1828 the Colonial Secretary directed them to report 'whether there are any Farmers in your District, on which the Proprietors do not reside, superintended by Ticket of Leave men or Convicts; if so, you will be pleased to state their characters.'<sup>3</sup> Arthur employed a 'hands on' approach to governing; enquiring into the particulars of individual cases. He directed the Colonial Secretary to write to Simpson in March 1829:



with reference to your order of the 17th instant to the Superintendent of the Road Party at St Peter's Pass directing him to receive the three convicts named in the margin from the service of Mr Willis, I am instructed to request that you will report to me for His Excellency's information in what manner the men are 'totally useless', stating whether it arises from Bodily infirmity or any other cause.<sup>4</sup>

James Simpson (1792? – 1857) had arrived in Van Diemen's Land aboard the *Elizabeth* in April 1825. He was appointed superintendent of government stock at Ross Bridge and then Police Magistrate, a position he held until 1834, despite moving to Hobart in 1832 where he concurrently held the position of Commissioner of the Land Board. By all accounts, Simpson was a successful and well respected Police Magistrate. Jorgen Jorgenson, a former convict who for a time worked 'undercover' in Campbell Town amongst a sheep-stealing ring, described Simpson's time there:

I must first premise that about four years since, Mr. James Simpson was the Police Magistrate of this District, a Gentleman of high honour and integrity ... Under his administration the District enjoyed great quiet, so much so, that at length all felons, sheep and cattle stealers, harbourers and disorderly persons fled from a District so unsafe for them to reside in.<sup>5</sup>

One of the biggest challenges Arthur and Simpson faced during this period was violence between the traditional owners of the land and settlers. Large holdings were granted to settlers who demanded exclusive rights to the land; Aboriginal people were displaced and had to fight for their survival. The Colonial Secretary wrote to Simpson in September 1828 in response to a report of an attack by Aboriginal people on a Campbell Town property that 'the Lieutenant Governor very much regrets that these people continue to manifest such a hostile spirit ... He recommends that you should conceit with the Officer commanding the Military Parties some decided measures for restraining the Aborigines from entering the settled Districts.<sup>6</sup> In November Martial Law was declared, and the government offered land grants to free settlers, or tickets of leave or conditional pardons to convicts, who helped in the efforts to 'conciliate' the Aboriginal people.

John Batman was one such free settler. He led a party that searched the bush in Simpson's district, guided by captured Indigenous women, to 'endeavour if possible

to meet their tribe and effect a reconciliation with them which I hope will be done. The women appear to place the greatest confidence in everything I say to them.<sup>7</sup> As is now known, such attempts were a disaster for Tasmanian Indigenous people, resulting in the loss of both a way of life and of many lives.

The prosperity and security of the Campbell Town district was assured for the settlers, however, and their fears abated. They were extremely grateful to Simpson, and in 1832 raised a subscription to express this gratitude in the form of a silver presentation cup. Yet nothing further was heard for a year, raising the suspicions expressed in the *Courier*. 'A Subscriber' responded to the first correspondent, supposing that 'the treasurer would, though at the *eleventh hour*, have taken some steps to carry the subscribers' wishes into effect, but ... I conclude it still remains in the treasurer's pocket or banking account.<sup>8</sup> A third correspondent hastened to reply, and revealed that an

order for making the plate was twice put into the hands of the first silversmith in Hobart-town, who, after a very considerable delay, was obliged to abandon the undertaking on account of losing his workman: it was then forwarded to a gentleman of the highest respectability in London, and funds placed at his disposal, who will no doubt execute the commission with satisfaction to all parties.<sup>9</sup>

The Hobart silversmith was David Barclay, who had first advertised his services as a watch and chronometer maker a few days after his arrival in Hobart aboard the *Resource* on 29 June 1830. A free settler, Barclay was able to employ assigned convicts, and it was Joseph Forrester who made the embossed silver items that bear Barclay's mark.<sup>10</sup> Forrester was a Scottish silversmith, jeweller and watchmaker, sentenced to transportation for life for housebreaking, and proved a troublesome employee for Barclay. Forrester was repeatedly found out of hours in various public houses, was insolent to his master and fought with fellow servants, until March 1833 when he was found absent, having attempted to incite fellow servants to insubordination, and threatened to abscond into the bush should he be sent back to Barclay. He was sentenced to work on a road party for 15 months<sup>11</sup> – at the time when the people of Campbell Town wished to employ his services to make a fitting tribute to express their esteem for James Simpson, Esquire, and necessitating the order from a London manufacturer. Forrester, and other convict employees, caused endless problems for Barclay, but his specialist skills were vital to his being able to meet the needs of customers and maintain a competitive edge.





Convict labour meant that the colony quickly thrived and established itself, but being forced to rely on such a source of skilled labour was a double-edged sword.

The hallmarks on the cup correspond to this history; they indicate it was made in London in 1833 by Edward, Edward Jr, John and William Barnard. It eventually arrived in Hobart, and Thomas Bannister presented the cup to Simpson in August 1834, along with the following letter, thoughtfully recorded in the *Courier*:

*I have been requested by the inhabitants of Campbell Town, to present you this piece of plate, as a testimony of the degree of estimation in which you are held in that district. It is peculiarly gratifying to me, that I should have been selected to communicate to you, my dear Sir, the sense entertained by those gentlemen of your personal merits, and your public character as a magistrate.*<sup>12</sup>

Simpson 'received with unmixed gratification the testimonial of the esteem of the inhabitants of Campbell Town', reflecting that 'if success has attended my endeavours towards the faithful discharge of the duties of my office, I feel how much of that success is attributable to the cordial support of those amongst whom it was my good fortune to be placed'<sup>13</sup> Arthur pressed Simpson to stay in Hobart, but was unsuccessful: as he reported to the Secretary of State, Simpson was 'infected with the Port Phillip mania.'<sup>14</sup>

Simpson resigned in 1834 and went on to join the Port Phillip Association, continuing the close association he had had with John Batman in Campbell Town. It seems that their experiences in Van Diemen's Land shaped the infamous attempt to form a treaty with the Indigenous people around Port Phillip. Simpson was appointed as arbitrator in disputes between early Melburnians, and became a Police Magistrate in Victoria, as well as holding a succession of other positions, including the Chairman of Market Commissioners, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Sheriff and President of Commissioners of Sewers and

Water Supply. He was constantly involved in the business and community life of the new colony until his death in April 1857, aged 65. He was consistently well regarded, attested to by his funeral procession reaching 1.2 kilometres in length.

The cup presented to Simpson is one of the earliest pieces of silver in the National Historical Collection. With the Batman Treaty, also in the NHC, the cup offers a rich insight into Australia's past. Both will be used in the 'Colonial Foundations' module of the *Creating a Country* gallery to explore the establishment of Melbourne and Hobart, and the relationships between European settlers and Indigenous Australians.

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- <sup>1</sup> An old friend, 'To the editor', *Hobart Town Courier*, 2 August 1833, p. 4.
- <sup>2</sup> George Arthur, *Observations Upon Secondary Punishment*, Hobart: James Ross, 1833, p. 25.
- <sup>3</sup> Colonial Secretary's Office to James Simpson Esq, Police Magistrate, Campbell Town, 8 May 1828, Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), CSO41/1/1 p. 36.
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 240.
- <sup>5</sup> Jorgen Jorgenson, statement regarding police in the Midlands, 29 January 1835, cited by B.W. Wray, 1961, James Simpson Correspondence File, AOT.
- <sup>6</sup> AOT, *op. cit.* 10 September 1828, p. 156.
- <sup>7</sup> John Batman to James Simpson, 26 June 1830, NLA MS 9951 [emphasis in the original]
- <sup>8</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 6 September 1833 [emphasis in the original]
- <sup>9</sup> A real subscriber, 'To the editor', *Hobart Town Courier*, 20 September 1833, p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> J.B. Hawkins, *19th Century Australian Silver*, Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1990, p. 208.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.* pp. 208-9
- <sup>12</sup> Thomas Bannister, 'My dear sir', *Hobart Town Courier*, 7 Nov 1834, p. 2
- <sup>13</sup> James Simpson, 'My dear sir', *ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> Arthur to Glenelg, 23 April 1836, cited by Wray, *op. cit.*

Above left: Rear of silver cup presented to James Simpson.  
Photo: Jason McCarthy, National Museum of Australia

Above right: The Museum recently purchased this ornate sterling silver cup at auction. The engraving reads 'Presented to JAMES SIMPSON Esq. by the Inhabitants of the District of CAMPBELL TOWN as a mark of the Public Esteem Aug. 21st 1834'. The designs on the cup include Australian animals and a coat of arms with a kangaroo on either side.  
Photo: Jason McCarthy, National Museum of Australia