

The Joneses of BINNUM BINNUM

Marion Amies reflects on the changing fortunes of Henry and Frances Jones of Binnum Binnum station in the mid 1800s

First came across Henry and Frances Jones in the 1980s through the partly fictionalised story of their lives, *Broad Outlines of Long Years in Australia* (1878) by Mrs Henry Jones of Binnum Binnum. My interest in the Joneses was rekindled by a watercolour of Binnum Binnum homestead in the National Library of Australia's recent Coee exhibition. Not familiar with the painting or Stanley Leighton, the painter, I was delighted to explore his albums and journals which record the Australian section of his extended tour of the colonies in 1868. In his journal, Leighton describes his visit to Binnum Binnum:

The next day was Sunday ... Mr Jones read us the morning service, solemnly ... We repeated the responses, & with the assistance of Mrs Jones' harmonium sang 2 hymns ... I continued my sketch of the house, during the afternoon ... and as the early moon rose, I took a solitary walk in the gumtree forest.

When Leighton wrote these words, he knew that the comfort and prosperity captured in his sketches of Binnum Binnum were threatened by Henry Jones' debt and by the proclamation of pastoral leases as agricultural land.

Binnum's prosperity had been built on years of hard work, sheep and cattle sales to feed the Ballarat goldminers, high prices for wool in the European markets, and on substantial credit advanced by Heape and Grice (later Grice, Sumner & Co.).

Henry Owen Jones and his brother, Derwas, migrated from Shropshire to Port Phillip in 1842 where, five years later, they were joined by their brother, Heighway. Their migration was precipitated by the failure of their father's bank in Shrewsbury. Derwas recalled that the indignities of a second-class passage introduced them to 'the necessity of self-help' which, in the coming years, enabled them to tackle such pioneering tasks as timber felling, bullock driving and hut building.

After two years establishing Pontesford station, near Kilmore, north of Melbourne, Henry explored for land along the South Australian border where all three brothers took up extensive leases. A sketch by George French Angas, made not long after they arrived, shows the well-grassed land that became Binnum station. At some stage Henry's holdings included Tallageira and stretched over the border beyond where the township of Frances (named after Mrs Jones) now stands.

Although proud of her lineage reaching back to 1520, Frances Eliza Caton was aware that her marriage prospects were diminished by the family's loss of wealth. She was brought up with her cousins, the Kinchants,



above:
Broad Outlines of Long Years in Australia by Mrs Henry Jones (London: Samuel Tinsley & Co., 1878)

below:
Stanley Leighton (1837–1901)
Binnum Binnum, Mr H. Jones's, Tattiarra [i.e. Tatiara] Country, South Australia, Sunday 3rd May, 1868 watercolour; 8.7 x 33.5 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an4620592





above:
Unknown photographer
Mr Henry Jones of Binnum
Binnum, South Australia
c.1868
albumen photograph
10.4 x 5.9 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn4241046

below right:
Unknown photographer
'Karatta' a Residence at Robe
c.1860
b&w photograph
State Library of South
Australia, B62362
Courtesy State Library of
South Australia

near Oswestry, not far from where Leighton later became the Conservative Member of Parliament for North Shropshire. Leighton remembered that Mr Kinchant was extremely poor. So, when Henry Jones met Frances on a visit to England, she accepted the proposal of the burly—and apparently prosperous—bushman, despite a 19-year age difference. They married on 10 April 1856 in Chester Cathedral.

In *Broad Outlines*, Frances wrote that when she arrived at Binnum she was surprised at the luxury:

[the] little drawing room was so tastefully furnished ... the dark deep cedar mouldings giving it a handsome look.

The original hut, built of split slabs and roofed with lengths of stringybark secured by large poles and corner pegs, was still in use. Its green baize-covered walls were hung with firearms. Bookshelves and cupboards flanked a huge fireplace. A rough porch opened onto the garden, with trellised vines,

fruit trees and a few English poplars. It was in this hut that Leighton attended the Sunday service read by Henry.

Over time, the homestead complex grew to accommodate the Joneses' six children, a governess and house staff. Close by were cottages for the station manager and workers, stables, yards and a handsome woolshed with a tower.

Henry claimed that he modelled the main homestead, finished just before Leighton's visit, on his family home in Shropshire. Comparison of Leighton's watercolour with photographs of Pontesford House gives some support to his claim. Frances described her room as a spacious oasis:

The dressing table stood in a recess at the back of three arches of cedar; the mullioned windows were surmounted with panes of stained glass; in the same recess was a sofa on one side, and an ottoman on the other; the writing table stood in one corner ... to the right was a bathroom, to the left [Henry's] dressing room, and each led out into the garden.

With a passion for gardening, Frances screened the older buildings with evergreens, and softened the new house with crimson passion flower, Cloth of Gold roses and white solanum creepers. She encouraged the station workers to plant flower and vegetable gardens around their cottages, not least to make them 'ornamental instead of unsightly'.

Leighton admired the 'pretty garden' and acknowledged that the new house had 'some architectural pretension'. But he considered that spending money on gardens around





the workers' cottages was unwise given the Joneses' uncertain tenure at Binnum.

Jones also built and gave to Frances a large house, Karatta, at Robe on Guichen Bay. There Frances and the children escaped the intolerable summer heat, together with their social circle from stations surrounding Binnum. In 1863, their circle included Sir James Fergusson, Governor of South Australia, Lady Fergusson and their children.

The Joneses made the most of every social opportunity and entertained on a generous scale. Minnie Hunter, a regular visitor from neighbouring Neuarcurr station, wrote that:

Mrs Jones is a very kind and hospitable woman, everything done in good old English style, servants all civil and obliging and wearing pretty caps and aprons and everything about the place so very nice ... [Their dance] was far and above the others in grandeur and style, everything of the best as was always done at 'Binnum'.

It was at the Penola picnic races that the Joneses met Leighton and pressed him to visit Binnum for their bush ball. To Leighton's surprise, at the ball 'almost every body appeared in full dress except ourselves'. He described Frances as:

pretty & lady like & 'queened' it over the ladies in the bush; she had a scrap-book of her own poetry, & she drew a little too.

He readily appreciated why the locals called Jones 'Lord Harry'.

An acute observer of colonial politics, Leighton understood the reasons for Jones' anxiety about the renewal of his lease. Just as clearly, he saw that Jones 'had not been a saving man' and considered that he had over capitalised. 'Lord Harry' bred stud sheep, fine horses and fast greyhounds. In 1866, he ran 28 000 sheep, 900 cattle and 40 horses. His station improvements were valued at £4405 and he was paying 15 per cent annual interest to his agents, Grice, Sumner and Co., on the credit that had made all this possible. In 1869, the interest totalled more than £3500.

Derwas and Heighway, both cautious, judicious managers, had long since returned to Shropshire leaving Henry without their steadying influence. In *Broad Outlines*, Frances lamented that Henry knew nothing about the station accounts, relying instead on his agents.

By the early 1870s, much of the border plains was proclaimed for agricultural

George French Angas
(1822–1886)
Binnum towards Lake 1844
pencil; 17.7 x 25.2 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an2892749



above:
Unknown photographer
Mrs Frances Eliza Jones of Binnum
Binnum, South Australia c.1868
albumen photograph
9.8 x 5.9 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn4241407

below:
Stanley Leighton (1837–1901)
Woolshed and Huts at Binnum,
Mr Jones, S.A., Monday 4 May, 1868
pencil; 8.4 x 17.0 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an4620752

use and opened to selectors. Frances described several years of uncertainty, with their debt compounded by poor wool prices, Henry's failure to obtain pre-emptive right as a first settler, his attempts to ward off selectors (which added further to their debt), and the inevitable forfeiture of much of their land because of non-compliance with residency requirements.

Assessing the situation as bad, but possibly retrievable, his agents put Binnum in the hands of a manager and, to their mortification, put the Joneses on an

allowance. Although the debt slowly crept down, the agents sold Binnum and the family moved to Karatta which was the only property the Jones owned. Today, it is the only one of their buildings still standing.

Frances returned to England where she wrote and published *Broad Outlines*. Settling in the Isle of Wight, she met and, after Henry's death in 1881, married Captain George Erskine Callander. Her granddaughter recalls her delight at changing her name

from the commonplace 'Jones'. Henry died alone at Lichfield in Staffordshire—but was buried at Pontesbury in Shropshire. Frances outlived Callendar by some 20 years. After Callendar's death she returned to Pontesbury where she died in July 1928. Three of their children settled in England; and three in Australia.

Leighton's chance meeting at the Penola races resulted in a lively, outsider's commentary on the political and personal decisions shaping the Joneses' last years at Binnum. But perhaps his portrayal was influenced by his broader purpose of describing the squatter class in colonial society. He concluded that the squatters (and, perhaps, implicitly the Joneses):

have held their heads too high, unmindful that they live in a country where superiority is an offence not easily forgiven by the people.

Or, maybe his conclusion is more a reflection of Leighton's own Conservative sense of superiority over those who chanced their lot in the colonies.

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