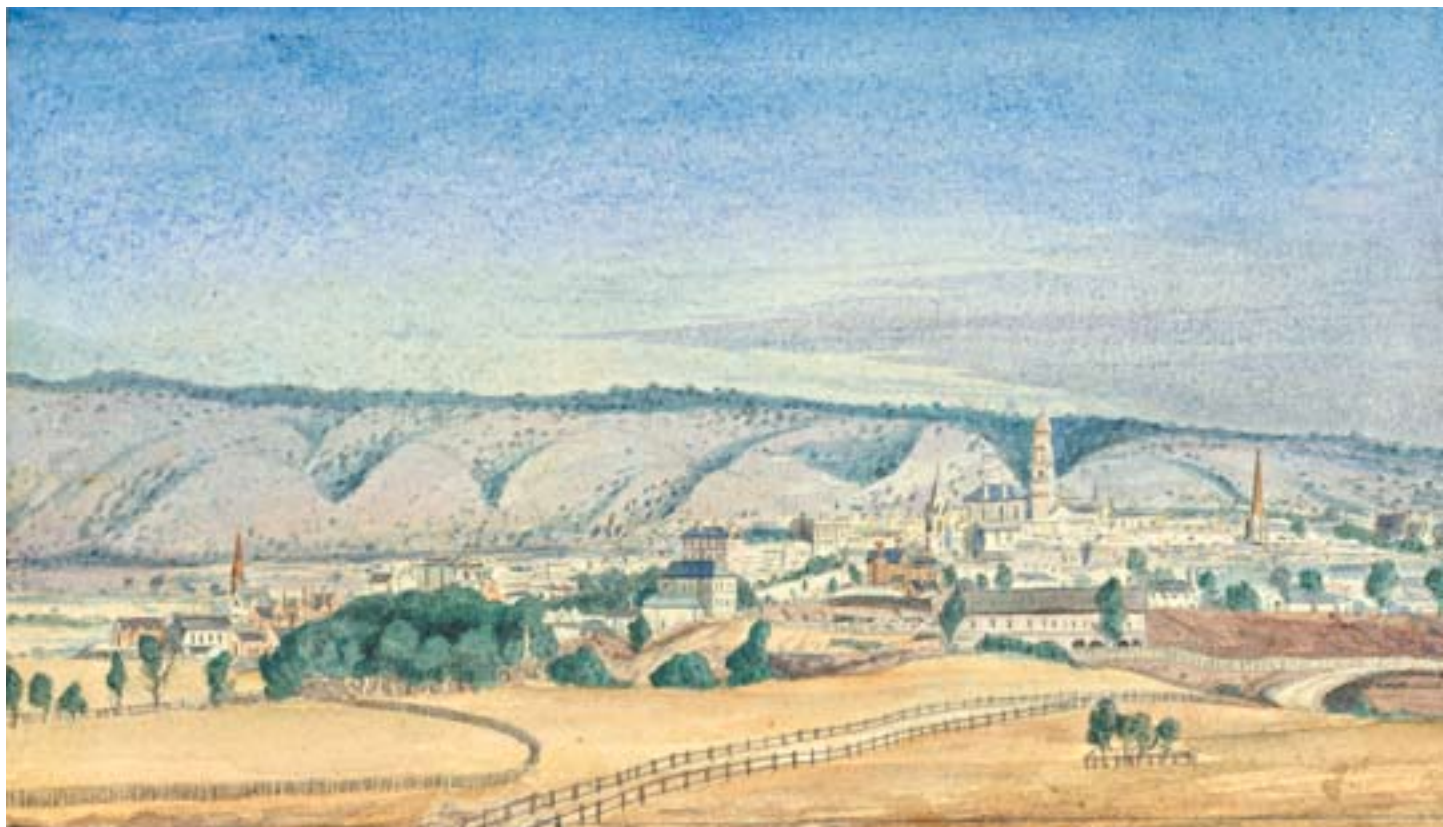


JUDGING PROGRESS TOWARDS A CIVILISED SOCIETY

Stanley Leighton's colonial Australian tour, 1868



Marion Amies investigates some illuminating albums and journals in the Manuscripts Collection

The writer of these notes was visiting Australia for pleasure. The uncharacteristic modesty of this inscription fails to do justice to the historical and artistic record left by Stanley Leighton (1837–1901) in his travel albums and journals now held as MS 360 in the National Library's Manuscripts Collection.

Not just a gentleman's reminiscences, they are as much the report of a self-appointed inquiry into the progress of the Australian colonies towards a civilised society. His observations and analyses also seem to be a conscious part of training for his future career as a British Member of Parliament. Such training he found sorely lacking in many of the colonial statesmen he met on his tour.

When he visited Australia in 1868, Leighton was 31 years old. Second son of Sir Baldwin Leighton, Baronet and Member of Parliament, of Loton Park, Shropshire, he had read law at Oxford and, from 1861, practised as a barrister. He travelled to the colonies with his friend and fellow-barrister, Rees Davies.

The pair came equipped with letters of introduction to governors, statesmen, members of the bar, prominent landowners and distant relatives. These contacts took them to a wide range of parliamentary debates, private dinners, race meetings, balls, remote stations and shepherds' huts. At times their new friends travelled along with them. Frequently, Leighton came across people known to him from Shropshire, or through university, legal or political circles.

Over a period of six months, they travelled—by coach, dogcart, ferry, boat, train, on horseback or by inter-colonial

Stanley Leighton (1837–1901)
Adelaide from Adelaide North,
March 1868
watercolour; 14.2 x 24.8 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an4603125



above:
 Stanley Leighton (1837–1901)
 Map of Tour of Australia
 (detail) 1868
 watercolour & coloured ink on
 paper; 35.8 x 50.0 cm
 Pictures Collection
 nla.pic-vn4330098

below:
 Stanley Leighton (1837–1901)
*Killangoola, Mr Seymour's, nr.
 Penola, South Australia,
 Sat. 24 Ap. 1868*
 watercolour; 8.2 x 25.0 cm
 Pictures Collection
 nla.pic-an4620462

shipping—from Adelaide to Geelong and Melbourne, from Launceston to Hobart and back again, from Melbourne to the Riverina, then across to Wollongong and Sydney, up to Brisbane and Toowoomba, and finally over to Perth. Given the vast areas of the country he covered, it is no wonder Leighton concluded that many of the colonials met were 'more ignorant than myself as far as regarded personal acquaintance with every colony but their own'.

Along the way, Leighton made watercolours, pencil drawings and copious 'rough jottings' in his pocketbooks. He was given, or purchased, photographs of people and places visited. Back home in England, over following years, he produced two albums incorporating 28 watercolours, 28 drawings (most signed 'SL'), and 47 photographs from these travels. He also reworked his jottings, together with additional information and news from the

colonies, into two journals and extensive commentary in the albums.

The albums and journals are not arranged chronologically, but according to subjects, enabling Leighton to set out his conclusions about colonial institutions and society in Australia. There is considerable overlap between the text in the journals and that in the albums—and significant differences. It seems he intended the albums to be a public, more circumspect record, whereas in the journals he acknowledges that his 'little histories are founded almost as much on the current gossip of the town as upon the correct information'. Gossip—and his acerbic observations of incidents and personal foibles.

The scope and detail of the albums and journals is almost overwhelming. However, the frequent headings in the albums, and the contents lists in the journals, make finding major themes easy. Typical of a barrister, Leighton sums up his conclusions at the end of each major subject.

The first album covers the colonial capitals and their neighborhoods—their parliaments, public buildings and private dwellings, botanical gardens, museums, gentlemen's clubs, educational institutions, and arrangements for the destitute. The extent and pretensions of these informed his judgments of the progress of each of the Australian colonies and their relative merits—as did the alacrity and hospitality with which each colonial governor responded to Leighton's letters of introduction!

Also described in the first album are the wealthy landowners. These men received his least qualified praise: they were judged 'able perhaps ... to raise the tone of Colonial



Society, to refine its roughness & open its resources, in fact to improve its civilization'.

In his second album, Leighton largely covers his up-country travels visiting squatters, including the Joneses of Binnum Binnum (see my article in *NLA News*, February 2008). He also includes sections on coach travel, a Queensland sugar plantation, and sketches and paintings of scenery. He introduces the many squatters who gave him hospitality on his journey, and contemplates the effects on them of that 'standing political enigma', the land question. He found that squatters south of the Murray River were 'favourable examples of their class'. They generally were married and intended to remain in Australia. Their 'houses and their surroundings were neat & comparatively comfortable, most of them had gardens ... & there were generally pianos, mirrors, carpets, a few books & pictures'. However, such 'beginnings of civilization' were to be found only here and there at stations along the Murrumbidgee River.

At Morayfield, a sugar plantation 48 kilometres out of Brisbane, Leighton found much to admire. He thoroughly approved the employment of South Sea Islanders: 'Without imported labour tropical productions can never be cultivated, & ... the development of the colony will proceed slowly.' He noted that the Islanders were only 'occasionally [hand]cuffed if they are troublesome'.

Leighton's first journal is devoted to the characteristics of the colonial parliamentary systems, and to the characters and opinions of individual statesmen as demonstrated in parliamentary debates, election campaigns and in private meetings. He provides lively descriptions of 20 prominent statesmen, and makes a scathing critique of 'Democracy as shown in the action of Australian governments'. No supporter of democracy himself, Leighton concluded that 'it would seem to have been intended that these colonies should form the worthless body upon which [such] an experiment might with safety at least to the theorists be tried'.

The second journal begins with detailed descriptions of his visits to selected landowners: at Pewsey Vale, South Australia; Corangamoorak near Colac, Victoria; Mona Vale near Campbelltown in Tasmania; and Camden Park, in New South



Wales. These landowners were chosen to demonstrate colonisation as 'a successful fact' under the circumstances in each colony. Homesteads and furnishings, wives, domestic arrangements and hospitality, gardens and surrounding landscapes, holdings and improvements all came under close scrutiny. Leighton observed of Pewsey Vale that 'here I saw for the first time, the home of a successful colonist, not inherited, but made by himself, the result of 30 years hard labour'. Leighton also quite enjoyed the Pewsey Vale hock, tokay, riesling, frontignac and 75% above proof brandy!

The latter part of the second journal returns to the squatters—those pastoral tenants who Leighton regarded as being suspended in transition while government land remained unsold and subject to the 'trickery and speculation, [which] the dealing with this huge government estate affords'. Only his visits between Mt Gambier and Ballarat are covered: his promised description

above:

Stanley Leighton (1837-1901)
Echuca on the Murray, Victoria,
3rd July 1868
watercolour; 16.5 x 25.0 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an4623798

below:

Stanley Leighton (1837-1901)
Morayfield, Caboolture,
Mr Raff's, nr. Brisbane,
Queensland, Sunday 9 Aug. 1868
pencil; 8.6 x 14.9 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an4621523



of the Riverina squatters was either not written or is in a missing third volume.

Some of the big issues Leighton identifies bear a striking similarity to those of today. He is concerned about workforce availability, trade and protection, the threat of terrorism (at that time by Irish Fenians), and the role of immigration in all of these matters. The recent treason legislation Leighton describes as exhibiting 'a reckless disregard for the first principles of liberty'. Leighton also makes clear what he regards as the proper 'duties of government', however he concludes these were being perverted by democracy, with most infrastructure and social institutions being supported by government grants.

Unusual details also caught Leighton's eye, such as a 'peculiar contrivance' for washing sheep, the ingenuity with which a Chinese gardener lifted water from the Murray River, and how the Melbourne Post Office met the needs of the illiterate. Acclimatisation and the scourge of introduced rabbits, gardening, religion, gentlemen's clubs, and the lack of superior quality merchandise in the shops—all catch his attention. He noted that the dreary 16-hour coach journey from Hay to Deniliquin 'had the charm at least of novelty': the speed of the large Cobb & Co coaches with their stout leather springs making them 'exactly suited to a rough roadless country'; and the sunrise on the plains 'when daylight gradually broke, the sun rose as from a sea-horizon, sheer out of the ground, & showed us the loneliness of our way, which the darkness had hidden before.'

Leighton very much sees himself as the manifestation of the English gentleman. Yet, on occasion, his companion Rees Davies

must have been embarrassed as Leighton threw apples to Aborigines as if to monkeys, and 'enjoyed vexing' their hostess by being overly generous when cutting up the joints at dinner. (As yet, I have not been able to track down Rees Davies or establish whether he, too, kept a record of their travels.)

Shortly after returning to England, Leighton inherited Sweeney Hall, near Oswestry. He married Jessie Maria Williams-Wynn in 1873. Neither their son, Bertie Edward Parker Leighton, who also became an MP (d.1952), nor his daughter, Rachel Frances Marion Leighton (d.1956), had children.

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography outlines Leighton's life as a Conservative MP for North Shropshire (later Oswestry) from 1876 until his death on 4 May 1901. It also notes his accomplishments as an antiquary and amateur artist, and his tours to the colonies. Leighton's portrait was painted by Sir John Everett Millais.

In 1954, Rachel Leighton presented her father's albums and journals to the National Library of Australia, where they have been a largely undiscovered treasure. A complete list of Leighton's delightful paintings and drawings, and links to many of them, can now be accessed via the Library's catalogue, at www.nla.gov.au/pict/ (search 'Stanley Leighton'). But these images tell only part of the story—Leighton's 'little histories' and acerbic observations in the albums and journals are also very much worth reading.

MARION AMIES is a public servant enjoying a brief return to exploring colonial Australia

Stanley Leighton (1837–1901)
*Pewsey Vale, Mr Joseph
Gilbert's, near Lynedoch, South
Australia, Wed. 1st Ap. 1868*
watercolour; 7.8 x 25.0 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an4620111

