

Edward Thomas Miles – 1849-1944

The following short talk was given in February 2005 in Victoria, Australia, at the Ringwood Historical Society, by Elva Brooke. Elva has been a student of the Miles family, of which she is a member, for some years.

Edward Thomas Miles was born and married in Hobart, Tasmania, and was related through marriage to the Tasmanian owner of this website through her own great-aunt Ethel Daniel Miles.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen

Russ has invited me here tonight to talk about Edward Thomas Miles a resident of Ringwood from 1909 until his death in 1944 at the age of 95 years. Before settling down in Ringwood his life was one of adventure, hard work, persistence and controversy. Maybe the good air and calm nature of Ringwood in the first half of the 20th century provided the perfect balance needed for Edward to live out his long and successful life.

I have been researching family history for close on 10 years and am eternally grateful to the insatiable desire of some of the Miles family to put their escapades on paper – i.e. books, war diaries, notes, etc from which I have taken a great deal of the information you are to hear but which is only a small portion of his life's journey. Nowhere, however, have I found mention of why he moved to Ringwood, so far from the sea, his passion for so many years. Perhaps Charlotte decided "enough was enough".

Convict!

Edward's parents were Alfred Miles and Elizabeth Spice. Alfred, his father, was a convict, sentenced at Middlesex Sessions to seven years for stealing a pair of shoes and a teapot from his employer. He was transported to Hobart Town with 239 other convicts on a new ship the 447 ton William Metcalfe. The ship left Portsmouth on the 25th May 1834 and arrived in Van Diemen's Land on 4th September 1834 taking the relatively short time of 102 days. Alfred was described by the Ship's Surgeon as - orderly with a good hulk report. He was single, 14 years of age, 4'11.5" tall, light brown hair, grey eyes and was thickly pock-pitted, possibly a survivor of Small Pox. He was a ladies' shoemaker being in the trade for two years. His behaviour whilst incarcerated was to worsen and his sentence was increased to "life", which meant that he could never return to England. He suffered solitary confinement as well as the lash on many, many occasions.¹

Married



Alfred was given his "ticket of leave" in 1845, twelve years after he arrived in the Colony.

He married Elizabeth Spice in 1847. She was the daughter of two convicts, Thomas Spice and Mary Lloyd. She was born in Hobart Town in 1829. On her 90th birthday she was the oldest living native of Hobart. Alfred was never in trouble after his marriage,² so we can assume that Elizabeth was a positive influence on his short life.

- Elizabeth Spice/Miles b 1829

¹ Tasmanian Archives

² Tasmanian BD&M

Edward Thomas is born

Edward Thomas (we will call him Ted from now on) was born in 1849, the second son. He attended the Glenorchy State School until the family moved to Launceston for a short period around 1863. It is assumed that at 14 years of age, with seven other living siblings at that time, Ted was expected to earn a living.

First job

He was obsessed with the sea and in September 1863 he approached the Master of the ship "Nightingale" which was in port being fitted out and taking on crew for a two year voyage in the China Sea. He applied for, and was hired as "ship's boy" at 2/6d per month for two years. A "boy" was expected to do all the dirty work that nobody else would do. He helped the cook, cleaned and polished, washed clothes, was bullied and cursed by the officers and crew as well as learning the workings of a sailing ship. He learnt to reef sails, steer, use a marlin spike and a sail needle to mend sails. When he was proficient at these he would become an ordinary seaman and then an Able Seaman.

The book

The ship left Launceston, the first port of call was Hobson's Bay docking at Sandridge Pier (now Port Melbourne) where with his first full month's pay of 2/6d he set out to purchase a secondhand copy of "Norie's Epitome of Navigation". After scanning numerous Pawn Shops near the beach front he saw, much to his delight, a well worn second-hand Epitome marked 5/-. With little hope of possessing it, he went in and inquired whether they would take any less and told the Pawnbroker frankly that he only had 2/6. He offered Ted the book for 3/6 but that was beyond his means and he walked out very disappointed and downhearted. He had only gone a few steps when the man came to the door and called him back saying "here you are youngster, you shall have it for 2/6". He clutched the book and returned to the ship where he studied it every night by the light of a "slush lamp". It is interesting to note that "Norie's Navigation" is still in use today as a training book for yachtsmen and women.

Smuggler

After a 74 day trip the "Nightingale" arrived at Shanghai, thence to Japan, then back to Amoy in China. Captain A B B Brown (commonly called "Alphabet Brown") of the "Nightingale" thought it would be a good idea to make some money on the side. At that time the "Taiping Rebellion" was in progress and in collusion with an Amoy ship-chandler he conceived the idea of smuggling a boat load of arms and ammunition to the Rebels who were offering fabulous prices for them. To prevent easy communication with the Rebels, the Yangtse river to Shanghai was guarded by armed junks on one side and several forts on the other. A British frigate was lying at anchor to protect the interests of British subjects and the frigate's boats frequently made surveying expeditions up the river. No other boat was allowed to pass the forts without a passport from either the Captain of the frigate or the British Consul.

Deception

The plan was to paint one of the "Nightingale's" boats similar to the frigate's surveying boat; roll the rifles, cutlasses, etc up in a sail stowed fore and aft on the thwarts in the centre of the boat, in imitation of the method of carrying a naval boat's sails; dress the boat's crew as man-of-war's men and the two leaders of the expedition as naval officers; fly the white ensign over the stern and so disguised, pass the forts and the armed junks as a boat from the frigate, which,

hopefully, would not be challenged. Everything was secretly prepared for the expedition, the ship's boat was hoisted on deck and painted. During the night a boat load of old muskets, revolvers, cutlasses and percussion caps were brought from the shore and added to the stock already on board. The boat was provisioned for a three day cruise, a crew of four selected, one of whom was Ted. Each was fitted with a naval rig and promised a bonus of one hundred dollars out of the illicit trade. Shortly after dark the boat started the forty mile row up the river. Just after dawn as the flood tide was sweeping the boat past the forts, the Chinese salute was returned by dipping the smuggler's ensign. The camouflaged Naval Officers sitting in the stern chuckled.

Gold!

A few hours later, the smuggled goods were carried into a store, placed on a table and trade commenced. The ship-chandler/partner, who had been many years in Amoy, spoke the language well and conducted the bargaining. When the bartering was finished, the rebels had the arms and ammunition, and the smugglers the several bags of gold bars, gold shoes, silver blocks and thousands of dollar coins valued in the aggregate of fifty thousand dollars, the equivalent of about seven thousand pounds. Both parties were apparently well satisfied with the exchange. Preparations were made to return on the following morning at daybreak.

Caught out

Meantime, the Chinese military officials had become wiser. Having ascertained that the naval boat was a smuggler in disguise, they arranged to give the boat's crew a warm reception. Keeping in mid-channel with a good swinging stroke of the oars the boat approached the forts, expecting to again see the ensign dipped in salutation, but instead of a flag salute, a shot was fired across the bows. The boat's head was turned away from the forts and the rowers pulled for their lives. In escaping from the forts on one side, they were approaching the armed junks on the other, and as soon as the boat was in range of their muskets they began to pepper the boat with bullets. If they had been marksmen, all the boat's crew would have been shot. Several bullets struck the boat, one, after passing through the boat's planking, lodged in the thigh of the bow oarsman. The brave officers in naval uniform, scared out of their wits, put the boat's head up the river again and lying flat in the stern were crying out "pull away boys – pull for your lives". Fearing capture with so much bullion on board, they dropped the bags of silver overboard keeping only the smaller and more easily handled bags of gold coins.

Escape

To cut a long story short, the crew rowed against the tide for a time and realised that they would not make it back to Amoy by river, so they decided to trek back over the mountain range with the assistance of one of the Rebels. This took three days during which they were on strict rations of food and water. They arrived on the boat at midnight, hoisted the sails and left the port quietly before being detected. They headed for Singapore where they were to re-copper the hull. After leaving Singapore, the ship made calls at Saigon, Macau, Hong Kong and then on to Foochow.

Time for tea

During Ted's stay in Foochow he admired the world famous Tea Clippers that were lying there waiting for the first of the season's tea to be loaded. They were magnificent ships, things of beauty and grace. After hearing the stories of the Clippers, and the premium paid to the owner of the first tea ship to arrive in London, a bonus of £500 was also payable to the Captain for pro-rata distribution, one third being his portion and the balance divided between the officers and crew, so that everyone on board from the boy in the fore-castle to the Captain on the quarter-deck, had an interest in making a fast voyage. Ted's mind was fixed on making the voyage on one of these vessels, one day.

The Captain of the “Nightingale” decided to load a cargo of tea and head back to Melbourne. After serving 22 months on the “Nightingale” Ted discharged in Sydney as a first-class ordinary seaman.

Preparing for the race



The “Ocean Wave” was at berth there and was sailing for Foochow. Ted joined this ship and three months later was discharged at Foochow as an Able Seaman (A.B.) after having been little more than two years at sea. The Tea Clippers were in the harbour waiting for tea and making preparations for the homeward ocean race to London. He joined the crew of the “Ariel” and was paid £7/10/- for the run equal to about £2/10/- per month. Ted had reached the peak of his ambition at that time, an A.B. on one of the fastest ships afloat.

- Ariel and Taeping

They encountered storms, gales broken masts, lost sails and were becalmed. Finally they arrived at their destination ahead of the “Taeping” and “Sir Lancelot” but because the “Taeping” drew less water than the “Ariel” she went through the locks first, docking 40 minutes ahead of the “Ariel”.

The pen is mightier than the sword

After a short time in England as a special constable during the Fenian Riots, Ted and a seaman friend took it upon themselves to learn Pitman’s Shorthand. They attended classes each day for a month and although they became proficient at the theory, their speeds needed plenty of practice. To gain practice they attended Parliament and were fortunate enough to hear Disraeli and Gladstone speak, something that Ted never forgot.

The Hudson Bay Company

Ted’s finances were becoming short so his next assignment as a sailor was when he signed on in London with the Hudson Bay Company, crewing on their fur traders in the north of Canada with occasional cargoes of seal oil and skins. At one time they were icebound for ten days and feared for their lives, again luck was on their side and they escaped unscathed.

Back to Hobart

Back in London at the age of 19 (1868), Ted achieved the rank of Second Officer on a barque bound for Hobart. His Father had died and Ted was anxious to return to his native land.

He spent the next few years sailing in the Tasman Sea to and from Australian ports as well as one trip to Cheribon, Java, in 1870 where they picked up a cargo of sugar and tea. Two weeks into the journey back to Melbourne smallpox broke out on board. Only Ted (then a Second Mate) and an Able Seaman escaped it. The two had to care for all and sail the ship to Melbourne, where it was quarantined. I don’t know what happened to the cargo of sugar and tea!

In 1870, he went to Adelaide, sat for and received his Master’s Certificate, he was aged 21. At 23 he was in charge of the New Zealand barque, “*Freetrader*”..³

³ ETMiles’ Memoirs

In love

Around 1873 he met and courted Charlotte Eliza Reynolds daughter of Thomas Augustus Reynolds, a well-known business man and mayor and councillor of Hobart, and Charlotte Susannah Petterd. They were the first couple married in the newly renovated St David's Cathedral on the 11th February 1874 and spent their honeymoon on the "*Freetrader*". Charlotte travelled all over the world with her husband on his many trips, even continuing occasionally after the first child, Edward Leslie, was born. It wasn't until the second child was on the way that they purchased a home at Lyttelton, New Zealand and Charlotte left the boat.

Sunk!

The next few years were spent sailing in the Indian Ocean and the Tasman Sea taking greater risks all the time. It was at this stage that he lost three vessels in three years – two in Tasmanian waters and another off New Zealand. All three marine courts of inquiry acquitted him of any wrongdoing or negligence.

Commander and entrepreneur

Until 1879 Ted worked the Indian, China and South African trade, then commanded a series of ships on the Tasmanian East Coast trade. As the managing owner of a fleet of steamers sailing under T A Reynolds and Company's flag, he developed the Hobart to Strahan run.

These were the boom days of the Tasmanian West Coast, and he made the most of it. As part of the firm T A Reynolds and Company, which consisted of his father-in-law, brother-in-law, and himself, he contracted for and constructed the Strahan to Zeehan Railway, completing the job in 1891. The firm also owned several ships on the West Coast run until they sold them to the Union Steamship Company in 1896.

Public recognition

In 1894 "The Leader Newspaper" ran a supplement on Tasmania, detailing among other things the identities of the Isle. After a précis of Edward Miles' life, the journalist says:

*"I am very sorry that I do not see more of Captain Miles...How I would like to fathom the mysteries of travel in this master mariner's memory. Captain Miles is the only man I envy in Hobart."*⁴

Ted was a dapper, beguiling man with a neat spade beard, was quick and decisive in his business methods and not unprepared to bend the law to suit himself on occasion. He was said to have a "Silver" tongue, adept at talking himself into trouble as well as getting himself out of it.⁵

He was involved in public affairs for some years, on the Hobart Marine Board, including a term as Master Warden, he resigned in 1898 to serve as the first Master Warden of the Strahan Marine Board.

Bring down the Government

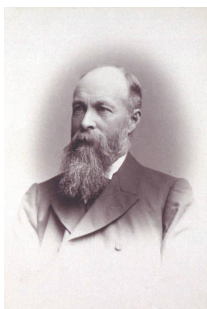
A Parliamentary Select Committee in 1899 investigated allegations of dishonesty involving the Strahan Marine Board and the proposed construction of a Macquarie Harbour Breakwater. Evidence revealed "*a deliberate purpose on Miles' part to obtain and use the position of Master Warden for his own ends*", and indicated that he was, "*improperly and secretly interested in two*

⁴ "The Leader" Supplement 6/10/1898

⁵ Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 10, p500-501

of the tenders for the West breakwater," he employed, 'unworthy means to secure the acceptance by the Board of the higher of these.' Miles resigned from the ministry on the 2nd October, and the Report was tabled on the 4th October, 1899, leading to a vote of no confidence in the Braddon Government, which passed, and the Government resigned six days later.⁶

A new career



Out of a job, his public profile in tatters and his finances under pressure, he then created a new career for himself, travelling to Asia selling ships in China and Japan for Union Steamship Company. He established a timber plant in the Philippines, and contracted for the supply of wooden paving blocks for the streets of Manila, and later supplied sleepers for the Indian Railways. He became interested in mining Tin in Sumatra and designed a dredge for work in Tongkah Harbour, Thailand. He gained a Concession Agreement on Tongkah Harbour and in partnership with Henry Jones & Co (IXL) floated the Tongkah Harbour Tin Dredging Company in 1906. Henry Jones wanted the company called IXL, but Ted told the directors in no uncertain terms that he didn't want the operation "as an advertisement for their damn jam". Ted was appointed General Manager of the Harbour operations. After a few years in Thailand, his health began to suffer. He left several of his children to continue the mining operation, then returned to Australia.

A memorial to him was unveiled at Phuket, Thailand, in 1969.

Settling in Ringwood

In 1909, aged 60, he retired, and Ted, Charlotte and some of the family moved to Ringwood where he purchased "Woorara" a 172 acre farming property in Wonga Park Road, South Warrandyte (now called Wellington Park). In 1913 Ted purchased six acres of land from C G Britten in Warrandyte Road, Ringwood for £425 (\$850) and he commenced erecting a 20 roomed home on it. The whole project including the stables, fences, clearing and laying out the grounds was completed in February 1916 at a cost of £3,342.11.0 (\$6,685). The house was named "Glamorgan" after his electorate in Tasmania. "Woorara" was sold and the family moved into their new home. He erected, as an investment, a number of buildings in the old Main Street which included a two-storey block of shops with the "Coffee Palace" occupying the second floor, a private hospital in Adelaide Street and a residence for the first Manager of the E S & A Bank. He was a foundation member of the Ringwood Progress Society and his family was also heavily involved in the community affairs of the district. He loved his garden and often brought exotic plants back from overseas.⁷



(Diverting a moment, the family also owned a beautiful home called "Moana" at Strahan, Tasmania before shifting to Ringwood. This has been restored and turned into a B&B named "Franklin Manor". If ever you are in Strahan, it is worth a visit. The gardens are glorious and the camelias that he brought home from China with him are still blooming there and are well over 100 years old.)

- Moana, Strahan

⁶ "Mercury" Supplement 30/9/1899

⁷ "Ringwood Place of Many Eagles" Hugh Anderson

The Ringwood family

Together with their parents several children lived in Ringwood:

- Ted's son, Augustus Temple Miles was an orchardist, real estate agent, councillor and served as Mayor of Ringwood for many of years. He was the first Mayor of Ringwood after separation from Lilydale. Gus's wife, Winifred, kept the rainfall figures for Ringwood from 1915 until her untimely death in 1944. She was interested in art and natural history and considered a lady of "rare charm".
- Amy (Girly) Miles, trained as a nurse in Singapore and Penang and served at an Army Dressing Station on the Marne in France in WW1. Afterwards she was an active Secretary of the Ringwood Babies Aid Auxiliary. The locals were of the opinion that "she wouldn't smile for £500",⁸
- Raoul, Keith and Thomas joined the Armed Services and represented their country in war zones at Gallipoli and France during WW1. Russ will be expanding on their war service in his forthcoming book.
- Although this has nothing to do with Ringwood, Ted's daughter Kathleen Edith Miles married in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1927 and their daughter, Charlotte Anne Howe married Peter Sellers, the comedian and actor. They had two children before divorcing. She appeared in a Channel 2 show last year and no doubt she is portrayed in the new film on Peter Sellers starring Geoffrey Rush.

Sad passing

Charlotte died in 1929, and after a service at "Glamorgan" she was buried at Box Hill Cemetery. In 1930 a Manborg Organ was presented to the Church by members of the family in memory of a devoted Wife and Mother. Amy took on the responsibility of "Glamorgan" until her premature death in 1932 at the age of 53. Ted lived to the age of 95 and died on 6 July 1944. Both Amy and Ted are also buried at Box Hill Cemetery.

My Relationship

After listening patiently to this talk, you are no doubt asking where I fit into the family? To say the least, the relationship is a little involved –

- my great-grandfather Arthur was Ted's brother,
- my grandfather Charlie was Charlotte's brother
- and if that isn't enough
- Ted's mother Elizabeth (my great-great-grandmother) married for a second time;. she married my great-grandmother's brother (William Frederick Petterd) who was also Charlotte's uncle.

I will leave you with that little conundrum.

Thank you

Elva Brooke

© 2005 Elva Brooke

⁸ "Ringwood Place of Many Eagles" – Hugh Anderson