

MATHER PAPERS

Robert and Ann Mather and four children arrived in Tasmania in 1822. Ann Mather (1786-1831) was the daughter of Rev. Joseph Benson (1749-1821), a prominent Methodist minister and friend of John Wesley. She married Robert Mather (c 1782-1855), a draper of London, son of Mather of Lauder near Berwick-on-Tweed, UK in 1811. Their children were: Sarah Benson (born 1812, married 1840 George Washington Walker, Quaker missionary); Joseph Benson (born 1814, married 1842 Anna Maria Cotton, children: Joseph Francis (1844-1925), Anna Maria (1846 -), Esther Ann (1849 - , married CH Robey); Maria Louisa (1851-1857); Emma Elizabeth (1853 – married William Benson); Frances Josephine (1855-1856); Robert Andrew (1815-1884, married Ann Pollard, children: Samuel Robert (1843-); Ann Benson (1845-); Sarah Benson (1846-75); Robert (1847-1912); Theophilus Henry; Thomas Bourne (1851-1926); Joseph Benson (1852); Jane Dixon (1854-); George Lidbetter (1859-64), and two others who died in infancy.

In 1821 Robert Mather joined a group of members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society who proposed to charter a ship to proceed to VDL., and many of the papers are business papers relating to this proposal and the subsequent delays when the ship 'Hope' was seized by H M Customs as being unseaworthy and held in Ramsgate until the party was eventually transferred to the 'Heroine' in 1822 (M10/1-15, R&/21-32).

On finally arriving in Hobart in September 1822 Robert Mather rented a house for one hundred pounds a year and set up in business, for the first few months in partnership with a fellow passenger, Henry Hopkins. Later, in 1823, he moved to 'London House' which he had built at the corner of Elizabeth and Liverpool Streets where he established a general store and drapery business. In 1824 he acquired land at Muddy Plains, called Lauderdale, where he farmed. After his wife's death in 1831 he closed the Hobart business and moved to the farm, until in 1836 financial problems made it necessary to establish a business again in partnership with his sons.

Ann Mather's letters to her brother, Rev Samuel Benson (Curate of St. Saviour's, Southwark) and sisters, Isabella Whytall and Sarah Benson (later Mrs Hammond) give some idea of the family's early life in Tasmania. Copies and extracts of the letters were made by

the Benson family after Ann's death and later given to Ann's daughter Sarah. Unfortunately the extracts were chosen particularly for their religious sentiments (M10/18). In her letters Ann Mather referred to the voyage out when Robert Mather had a broken hip and Ann's child born on board, died at sea at six weeks of age of 'thrush'. A midwife, Hannah Field, travelled with them to look after Mrs Mather and the children, and she assisted at the birth of another healthy child born in Hobart on 27 November 1823. Another servant, Mary Combes, has also come out with them and James Turnbull as a 'farming man'. In the rented house in Hobart the family had four rooms behind the shop and the children slept in hammocks. There was a shortage of real money in VDL at that time, and also of paper – Sarah, sent to buy tea, was disconcerted on being asked for a dirty hankerchief to put it in. Ann Mather was in ill-health and mainly lived at the Lauderdale property, but moaned: 'I have laid three weeks on my bed and only Mr Mather once in two or three days to make my bed for me and my little Sarah to get me a little tea or gruel', but later she got 'one of those young women sent out by the 'Guardian Society'. The children were in good health and had an excellent master to instruct them, and the baby 'grows very heavy' for 'children in this town are of a most astonishing size and generally healthy', (Jan. 1824, M10/18 (1).

Ann Mather also kept a diary (M19/4), but Robert, writing to her brother after her death said he was grieved to find she had cut nearly all her diary to pieces, but what she left indicated her desire to be in Christ Jesus (M10/20). The remaining pages of diary, 1802-1807, 1820-1822, 1829-1831, in fact consist mainly of spiritual reflections and illness, apart from some comments about the voyage and the delay in Ramsgate. On Sarah's eighteenth birthday she noted that her bodily afflictions dated from Sarah's birth: 'I took cold in my first lying in from the carelessness of the nurse'. She had sent her son John to school to Mr Lindley for twelve months, as she noted on his birthday 11 July 1831.

Sarah Benson Mather's letter to her aunt describing her mother's death in 1831 also gives a picture of the household at Lauderdale – father and son, Robert, busy on the farm, John at school, Joseph away learning the business and young Samuel doing his lessons at home and being set to learn psalm CXII (M10/19).

The papers also include a few letters of advice from Methodist missionaries, William Horton, Benjamin Carvosso, Walter Lawry and Ralph Mansfield (R7/45-49, 20). Robert Mather was a foundation trustee of the Wesleyan church in Hobart in 1823 but he seems to have become disillusioned with the Wesleyans, possibly owing to the reaction of some of his fellow passengers to the troubles over the 'Hope' voyage. In 1825 William Horton wrote that it would give him satisfaction to hear of Mather's reunion with the Methodists,

reminding him that it was not worldly gain that induced him to emigrate but 'an earnest desire to be useful in the vineyard of the Lord'. In 1826 Benjamin Carvosso wrote a letter of spiritual advice on Mather's moral state and urged him to attend the Sunday morning service not just the evening one. However in 1832 the Quaker missionaries, George Washington Walker, and James Backhouse visited the Mathers in Lauderdale and shortly afterwards most of the family joined the Society of Friends. In 1840 Sarah married George Washington Walker. Joseph Benson Mather became Clerk to the Hobart Friends' Meeting and amongst letters written to him are some from Friends, including James Backhouse about the Meeting House (R7/87), from English Friend Charles Wheeler (R7/88-90), and some interesting letters from a Dublin Friend, Mary John Knott, who referred in 1841 to the 'general adoption of teetotalism' in Dublin which had emptied the prisons and the great benefit of the railways (R7/92).

The Mather papers were deposited by three separate descendants of Robert and Ann Mather and are in three collections (M10, M19, R7). See also the Walker Papers (W9), for papers of George Washington and Sarah Benson (Mather) Walker.

(A journal of the voyage 1821-22 is in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, ref. no. ZB 379).