

Bequeathed by Miss Sarah E. E. Mitchell and presented by her niece, Miss Grace Mitchell, 24 Sept. 1946 (except items 76 - 79 presented by Miss S. E. E. Mitchell in 1937)

## MITCHELL FAMILY OF LISDILLON

Sarah Mitchell, daughter of John Mitchell of Lisdillon, between Little Swanport and Mayfield on the East Coast of Tasmania, was born in 1853, and kept a diary from the age of 13 until she died at ninetythree in 1946. In her later years, too, she kept scrapbooks in which she stuck, indiscriminately, early letters and memoranda of her family, photographs, newspaper clippings etc., which form an additional record, not only of her own life but of her parents and brothers and sisters.

Her father, John Mitchell, was the son of James Mitchell of St. German's, Cornwall, England, and came to Tasmania as a surveyor in 1837. He took a government post, and later became superintendent of boys at Port Puer, where he wrote a report on the health of the boy convicts in 1846 (RS.32/85 p.42). His Cornish fiancée, Catherine Augusta Keast, followed out in 1839, remembering her voyage to Tasmania as particularly unpleasant, through storms, a drunken captain and shortage of food. The couple were married at Old Trinity Church, Hobart, before settling at Port Puer, where several children were born. Mitchell bought a farm at South Arm, but in 1852 he left his government post and moved to Lisdillon with his wife and five surviving children. There they remained, acquiring an extensive property for raising sheep, cattle, some arable crops and hops. Mitchell also served on Swansea Council and held a government post in the Post Office. He had charge of the Swansea mails, which gave him the privilege of franking his own mail.

The two eldest sons, Frederick Keast and Frank William Drew, were sent to England to complete their education in 1858. Both boys kept brief diaries of their voyage on the 'Derwentwater' via Cape Horn, and their first days in England, where they were met by their Keast relatives. At first they boarded at Sydenham School, near London, but later they moved to a grammar school near their relatives in Cornwall. Here Fred's delicate health became worse through the bullying (a letter from a schoolmate is reminiscent of Tom Brown's Schooldays (RS.32/85 p.37) and he died in 1861 at the age of 18. Frank, however, went to Mannamead School in Plymouth, Devon, and did well in the British Civil Service examinations, being appointed to a post in Dublin, Ireland. In 1922 he built a house in Sussex, England, naming it Lisdillon after his childhood home.

The other two sons, Edwin and Mark, attended Horton College, Tasmania. Mark remained at home and worked Lisdillon, which he inherited. After his marriage to Mabel Ciblin he lived at the Wattles,

a cottage on the property, as his mother remained at Lisdillon during her lifetime. Mark died in 1897, before his mother, leaving Lisdillon to his children. It was advertised for sale, under the terms of his will, when the children were grown up, in 1913. His widow purchased it and remained there for a while, but the property was eventually split up. Edwin, after a spell in a job in New South Wales, settled at Mayfield, formerly part of his father's property.

The eldest daughter, Catherine Penwarne (Kate) married the Reverend John Aubrey Ball of Bright, Victoria, at St. John's Church, Buckland, in 1877 but died the following year and is buried at Buckland.

Of the two daughters born after the family moved to Lisdillon, the youngest, Amy Mary Jane, took a trip to England about 1872 and after her return married Herbert Giblin in 1877. Sarah Elizabeth Emma remained at home, apart from brief holiday visits to Hobart. Her father died in 1880 and Sarah looked after her mother at Lisdillon until Mrs Mitchell's death in 1899. Sarah then took a holiday to stay with her brother, Frank, in Ireland and to see something of England and Europe, before she settled at Tirrzah, near Lisdillon, left to her by her father. In her later years she moved to Schouten House in Swansea with her niece, Grace Catherine, who took care of her. In 1937 she moved into the Westminster Rest Home, North Hobart, where she stayed until she died in 1946.

Sarah started keeping a diary at the age of thirteen and continued until she was ninety-two, although for the last few years she had to dictate them to her niece, Grace. In her diaries she noted, daily the state of the weather and a record of the day's activities, such as helping with routine tasks about the house and property, planting or picking vegetables and fruit from the gardens (peas, lettuces, rhubarb, gooseberries, etc.) or visits to or from neighbours. Friends and neighbours mentioned include the families of Cotton, Giblin, Lyne, Mayson, Meredith of Cambria and Shaw of Red Banks, Swansea. In her earlier years Sarah's routine was occasionally varied by a visit to Hobart or pic-nics on one of the several beaches near by, on the 'Fisherman's' or Pyke Island or at the Hop grounds during harvest time. Each year a 'hop feast' was given for the pickers when the hops were gathered in. In the earlier diaries, too, are frequent references to the horses and to rides to the 'Salt Works', where a wharf was built. The diaries are brief and purely factual; there is no attempt at description, even of less common events such as Government House dances. Even during her trip to Europe in 1900, lasting about eighteen months, Sarah recorded a daily routine often little different from her home life.

On board the 'Afric', on her way to England, for example, she thought the stewards were overworked and notes every day (except Sundays) that she helped to dry 400 knives. She also spent much of the day sketching, visiting the sick in the ship's hospital, or running a Sunday School for the children on board. In Europe she spent most of her time with her brother, Frank and his family near Dublin, and with them visited Killarney and other parts of Ireland. She spent a few weeks in London, seeing the Tower, St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and other sights, lunching, as she notes, on cocoa and bread and butter for 2½ d. A production of Julius Caesar at a famous theatre, however, did not impress her, 'such a horrid 3/- spent, I trust no more theatres for me'. A tour of Continental Europe included Oberammergau where she saw the 'Passion Play 8 O'c. ; 1½ hr. for dinner and 'til 5.30 pm. I went out 1¼ hr. during the crucifixion. The rest was wonderful, may God give me a blessing from it'. In Paris she took a flight in a balloon at the Exposition and went up the Eiffel Tower.

Miss Mitchell spent January and February 1901 in the Scilly Isles,

where she helped to tie up bunches of flowers for marketing. While there she noted the death of Queen Victoria and the proclamation of the Prince of Wales as King on 22 January 1901. She visited her nearest relations in Devon and revisited her brother in Dublin, returning via the Isle Of Man, where she spent a few days before sailing to Falmouth, where she embarked on the SS. Oroya for the return journey to Tasmania.

Back in Tasmania, Miss Mitchell settled at Tirzah, near Lisdillon, on the East Coast and in her old age she moved to Schouten House, Swansea. She was a deeply religious woman and was known to stop cars on the Swansea road to give the passengers a copy of the text for the day. She was also hospitable and delighted to show visitors her collection of curios. Her lively interest in animals, botany, world events and especially intrepid travellers remained. In 1934, at the age of 80, she travelled to Melbourne by one of the first regular air passenger flights, boarding Capt. Holyman's plane at Swansea air field. Her range of other interests was reflected by the photographs, newspaper clippings and other souvenirs which she collected. These in her later years she collected together and stuck, rather haphazardly, into scrapbooks together with some family records.

These scrapbooks, inspite of their lack of order, put life into the bare facts of the diaries by supplementing the information in a more interesting and visual way. Photographs, newspaper clippings, invitations, menus and other souvenirs illustrate events referred to in the diaries as well as Miss Mitchell's other interests.

One scrapbook contains sketches of family life drawn by the elder sister, Catherine Penwarne (Kate) between 1860 and 1875. Here we see the family enjoying pic-nics with the pet dog Caleb, or riding their horses -- in one sketch a guest is shown falling off her mount. Other sketches show some of the family in a gig crossing a river or in a boat rowing through the surf to Schouten Island. There is a lively scene of gay dancing at a 'hop feast' and another of more formal dancing at a social evening at Red Banks (the home of the Shaw family).

Of more importance, perhaps, are the records of the early days of the family in Tasmania, which were also put into the scrap books, mixed with other souvenirs. There is John Mitchell's brief diary of his voyage out and first days in Tasmania and a few letters of his, including a draft of his report on discipline at Port Puer (RS.32/85 p.42). There are also letters, journals and a school report of the two elder boys, Fred and Frank, which their mother had kept. Other miscellaneous items include a letter to Mrs (George) Meredith and advertisements for Mrs Charles (Louisa Ann) Meredith's books.