



EDWARD CLARK

A Basildon Boy - A Victorian Man!

The story of Edward Clark was told to us, as written, in the following history by his great granddaughter who together with her sister paid a visit to the Basildon Heritage Society here at Wat Tyler Country Park in 2018.

Edward Clark was born on 27th April 1830 in Basildon Hall Farm, the son of George and Honor Clark (nee Nevill) one of at least twelve children born in the family between 1821 and 1842.

Edward Clark, her great grandfather is her only ancestor who came from England; all the rest are from Ireland. What they all have in common is that they arrived in time to take advantage of the events that were happening in the early years of settlement in this part of Australia.

Edward Clark was born on 27th April 1830 and Baptised at Holy Cross Church on 13th June 1830. The son of George Clark (born 13th July 1790 in West Hanningfield Essex), who contracted Typhoid, then generally a fatal disease and was buried on 22nd August 1846 aged 55 years at Holy Cross Churchyard leaving nine surviving children) and his wife, Honor Nevill.

Migration to Australia

Edward and his Brother James, left England in 1848 and arrived in Geelong in March 1849. Edward was 18 and James 21 years of age. Why did they decide to emigrate and why Australia? Probably due to migration being encouraged in Britain as a way of dealing with high unemployment as a result of the Industrial Revolution taking place and it is also possible that the boys saw limited future for themselves in England.

Those records that are available, show that Edward and James sailed on the SS 'Osprey' and that the journey took 117 days arriving at Port Phillip Bay Melbourne which includes the settlement of Geelong on 22nd March 1849.

The historical context of the 1840's in south-east Australia might give an insight into why the boys chose to migrate there. By then, there was a growing trend towards a free society rather than a penal colony – migrants, emancipists and native born. There was a huge labour shortage. Convict labour was not sufficient (transportation ceased to New South Wales in 1840) and no longer desirable. Labour was needed to clear the land, plant crops and take care of animals, especially sheep.

When Edward and James Clark arrived in 1849, the State of Victoria did not exist but was known as the Port Phillip District, still part of New South Wales and separation from New South Wales did not occur until 11th November 1850 when the young Queen Victoria consented to giving her name to this new colony.

As the 'penal colony' image declined, it led to a growing appeal to a wider demographic society of migrants to Australia. Employers were forced to increase wages, but this was still not sufficient to provide enough labour, so various systems of 'assisted migration' was introduced.

Perhaps it was this that impacted on their decision to come to Australia. The records show that they were both 'assisted migrants' which meant their fares were paid in return for a period of work with a nominated employer. They were assigned to M. Holmes of Barrabool Hills (near Geelong) for three months, with rations and for £20 per annum.

They left the Osprey at Point Henry near Geelong as ships were unable to sail into Geelong Harbour because of a sand bar. It was said that passengers could walk ashore at low tide. So, the initial experience of both Edward and James Clark was probably very reassuring. Geelong residents even entertained high hopes of outstripping Melbourne, but the sand bar across the harbour was spoiling their prospects.

More than half the population had arrived in the previous five years, a steady flow of state assisted migrants, mainly rural labourers (which described the boys) and female domestic servants. Nearly all adults

were immigrants and just over half were born in England with a further quarter from Ireland whilst the Scottish immigrants comprised most of the rest.

By November 1849 Melbourne had 23,000 residents. Most of the central square mile was built up. The only buildings that survive are the Russell Street Courthouse and the jail. This was the situation that Edward and his brother James Clark would discover upon their arrival. They would have been daunted by the prospect of owning their own land, if this was their ambition. In fact, it probably appeared to them to be a replica of the English system they had just left.

Edward Clark settles down.

Edward and James seemed to have parted ways in the 1850's. In 1860 Edward purchased his first 'selected' land at Navigators and Yendon, small communities near Ballarat. Those who were successful were able to gradually purchase the holdings of their neighbours who were not so successful. Edward's name is shown on several of these plots.



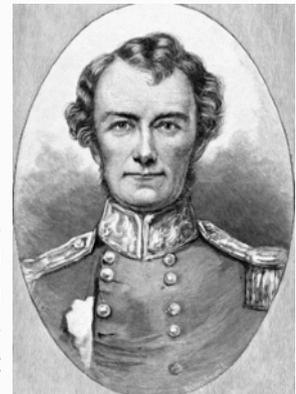
Edward had married an Irish Catholic girl, Mary Connellan from Lisroe in County Clare Ireland, on 8th March 1859, at St. Alipius Church Ballarat, she had also migrated as an assisted migrant arriving at Port Henry in Geelong on 11th July 1854. It is mentioned on the passenger manifest that she was approximately 21 years of age and illiterate but had a contract with a Mr. McNamara of South Geelong to be a Farm Servant for three years.

Mary Clark (nee Connellan) 1833 - 1891

She was taught to read and write by Edward but was evidently unsure of her age at the time she married him. At that time, St. Alipius may well have been a 'tent' church although records show that *"three weddings took place on 8th March 1859 and the three brides were from County Clare whilst the bridegrooms, two being Irish and one English."* Mary Connellan did manage to sign her name!

In 1850 the Port Phillip District separated from New South Wales and the young Queen consented to the new colony bearing her new Victoria. It was given the same form of government as New South Wales and was formally in the hands of a Lieutenant Governor Charles La Trobe and an Executive Council of no more than four members nominated by the Crown (probably dominated by squatters).

Charles Joseph La Trobe (1801-1875), Superintendent and Lieutenant-Governor, was born on 20th March 1801 in London, the son of Christian La Trobe and his wife Hannah, née Sims.



In August 1851, La Trobe reported the discovery of gold at Ballarat. The government soon had to extend its rule over a wide area. Thousands of diggers were concentrated in places such as Ballarat, Omeo, Bendigo, hitherto isolated and the haunt only of sheep, cattle or kangaroos. Public works and land surveys ceased and police dwindled to a handful, but men had to be found to control the ever-shifting goldfield centres. Almost every man in the colony went to the diggings at some time; La Trobe alienated most of them by following New South Wales in imposing a direct tax, the monthly licence fee to search for gold.

The Australian Colonies Government Act of 1850 gave Victoria its own representative government in a Legislative Council of whose members two-thirds were elected and one-third nominated. In January 1851 when La Trobe was appointed lieutenant-governor he had an Executive Council of four, nominated by the Crown, and could veto or reserve bills of the Council, control the Civil List and the proceeds from the sale of crown lands, and initiate all budgetary legislation.

The impact of the gold rush.

Apart from the massive increase in the population and the wealth of the new colony, the gold rush led to dramatic social changes that probably also changed the prospects of immigrants such as Edward and James Clark.

The astute soon realised that a lucrative living could be made supplying the goldfields and growing provisions, more than through actually finding gold and we believe that Edward was one of these astute residents.

The money that was to be made led men to assume a position in society which normally they could not have dreamed of. Labour became very scarce so that those who did stay could ask for enormous wages. Edward may have reaped the benefits of this by continuing to work in the Geelong area for a few years before, or as a means to setting up his cartage business. Most importantly for Edward Clark, demands for the government to 'unlock the land' from the squatters, rose as unsuccessful miners looked elsewhere for their livelihoods.

It was soon apparent that there was more money to be made from supplying the goldfields and transporting goods between the new provincial centres so perhaps Edwards Clark was astute enough to realise this and set himself up as a 'contracting carrier.' It would have been quite a primitive existence but a lucrative one (though he would have had to worry about Bush Rangers!).

It might not be possible to ascertain the facts but according to family stories "*Edward did not mine, but he had a habit of fossicking. He had a gold ring made for each of his daughters, gold he had collected himself. My grandmother said she did not wear hers as it was pure gold and too soft for a ring.*"

(In Australia, New Zealand and Cornwall, **fossicking** is prospecting, especially when carried out as a recreational activity. This can be for gold, precious stones, fossils, etc. by sifting through a prospective area. The term has been argued to come from Cornwall).

Life would have been very basic for the first few years. They probably lived in a 'bark slab' hut with no amenities until they were able to construct a more solid house. Unfortunately, there are no remaining structures of their houses. Work would have been 'backbreaking' to start with as the land was cleared for crops and possibly some dairy cattle. Mary and Edward went on to have twelve children of whom ten survived to adulthood.

The expansion and development of Navigators.

The Government called for tenders, Evens, Merry & Co were the successful contractors to build a rail link between Geelong and Ballarat on 26th August 1858. After many strikes and a lack of progress of the work, Evans, Merry & Co were now in such financial difficulty that early in 1860 they transferred their contract for the line to Williams, Little & Co. By March 1860, work was progressing on the deep cutting north of Navigators, where there were about 400 men engaged.

The Star reported that:

"This precise locality is called Navigator's Village, and can boast of two stores, a butcher's shop and 12 or 13 houses, besides an almost countless number of white tents and shanties".

Official opening day, 10th April 1862, a special train carrying Councillors and passengers left Ballarat at 7.30am to bring the Governor and guest from Melbourne and Geelong to Ballarat, where the Governor was to officially declare the line open. The train was held up for half an hour at the Caledonian Bridge as it found difficulty in climbing the steep gradient to Warrenheip. By the time the train reached Meredith, the firewood supply was exhausted – so there was another delay while the crew stopped to cut wood to replenish the stock. Eventually the train continued on the phenomenal speed of 15mph arriving in Geelong at 11.45am. The Governor boarded, and the train had returned to Ballarat by 2.45pm. Then came the Official opening, complete with a Banquet and grand ball.

The St. Augustine's Catholic school was in existence at Navigators in 1867 and continued for many years. The state school was opened in 1877 only to be closed in 1900, and in 1903 the education department was informed that the building was "demolished by a storm on Saturday last, and not likely to be erected again owing to being closed for such a time for want of pupils".

In 1878, Edward selected further land in the Gippsland area near Yarragon. Under the terms of this selection, he was able to be absent from his land for three months each year to undertake seasonal work and was not required to build a habitable dwelling for three years.

When the harvest was completed at Navigators, Edward and his two eldest teenage sons travelled by train from Ballarat to Yarragon then walked to the Hallston area where he had selected 276 acres for one pound

per acre (to be paid for over twenty years at the rate of one pound per acre, per year with the last payment made in 1901).

In Edward's final years, after establishing his two eldest sons, Edward returned to Navigators where Mary had died in 1891. Her tombstone says that she was 53 but this is a mistake as she was probably up to 5 years older. Edward died in 1908 aged 77 years. The following notice appeared in the local paper:

The Ballarat Star of Wednesday 8th January 1908.

"The many friends of Mr. Edward Clark, farmer, of Navigators, will regret to hear of his death which took place last Monday at his residence.

The deceased was a very old colonist, having arrived in the colony in 1849. He carried on the business of contracting carrier between Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong for some considerable time and after relinquishing that, settled down at his late residence where he carried on farming pursuits with considerable success for the past forty-eight years. The deceased at his death was 77 years old, his wife having predeceased him some seventeen years. He leaves a family of four sons and five daughters, all grown up. The funeral will take place this day at the Ballarat New Cemetery".

The Ballarat Star Friday 10 January 1908.

"The Funeral of Mr. Edward Clark of Navigators took place on Wednesday last when his remains were interred in the Ballarat New Cemetery. The Funeral was largely attended. Messrs. T.W. Clark, J. Clark, E. Clark sons of the deceased, acted as Coffin Bearers and the Pall Bearers were Messrs. M. McCormack, T. Mulcahy, B. Curran, T. Curran, J. Curran, J. Lyons. J. Connellan, J. North, T. Kiely, J. Colquhon and S. McGuigan. Service at the grave was conducted by Archdeacon Allanby and the mortuary arrangements were carried out by Mr. Steve Wellington".

Some final thoughts.

It is indeed a shame that no real family records exist, such as letters or diaries, so it is not possible to really have much understanding of these people as individuals. There are no surviving grandchildren who knew them or who have recorded any observations that I know of. It is said that several of his brothers also came to Australia apart from James. John and David were two possibilities, but I have yet to research this, and I still have to follow the story of James Clark.

I admire the sense of adventure that my ancestors showed. They were prepared to work very hard to make a new life for themselves and for their children. At the time of his death Edward could have been proud of what he had achieved and the way he had set up his sons for the future, a future that was not possible for him at the time of his father's death in 1846 in England.

As far as I know, no letters of correspondence have survived between Edward and his family back in England except for the letter Daniel wrote in 1881 to inform Edward of his mother's death. I like to think of Edward as being an astute man who did not rush off to make his fortune at the goldfields but instead realised that there were better opportunities transporting goods. He was smart enough to seize the opportunity to select land when this became available in 1860 and added to this over the succeeding years. Again, he was canny enough to select better land further from Yarragon in Gippsland because he was looking towards the future rather than possibly a more comfortable existence near the town. Most of his children and grandchildren stayed on the land as farmers but his great grandchildren have largely moved into professional occupations.

His photo suggests a very warm man and I think I would have liked him had we met.

Maria Ryan

**Great Granddaughter of Edward Clark a Basildon Boy and a Victorian Man!
August 2018 following her visit to us.**