

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR COLONEL WILLIAM SORELL: APPEARANCES OF RESPECTABILITY

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Colonel William Sorell was Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land between 1817 and 1824. Early histories of the colony have large sections on the rule of George Arthur who succeeded him, but little written on Sorell himself. One of the aims of my Master of Arts research was to establish whether Sorell's administration had in fact been overshadowed by the extensive reporting of Arthur, both because of self promotion and also by historians.

I compared the number of pages about the two men in various histories of the colony. John West in his *The History of Tasmania* covered Sorell's seven year administration in fifteen pages, but allocated fifty-seven pages to Arthur's twelve years, and these are without sections such as Aborigines and Transportation. Lloyd Robson's *A History of Tasmania* is similar, where details on Sorell fill thirty-nine pages while those on Arthur monopolise 152 pages. Official despatches in *Historical Records of Australia* are even more unequal. Sorell's seven years fill approximately 1000 pages in Series III,¹ while for the first five years of Arthur's administration despatches fill about 2900 pages.²

I also investigated Sorell's administration, in particular his role in the development of the convict system, the establishment of free settlement and the system of land grants to settlers.³ Sorell was recalled mainly because of his personal life, and this will be the topic of this paper — but first a few words about his predecessor, Lieutenant-Governor Colonel Thomas Davey.

Davey was appointed in 1813, just ten years after the first European settlement in the colony. He spent a lot of time inside Government House which he described as 'more like a barn than a receptacle for the head of authority'. This was because he met with a number of accidents which resulted in serious injuries and broken bones, many of them reportedly due to his fondness for alcoholic beverages. Known by the locals as 'Mad Tom', or 'The Mad Governor', Davey took pleasure in practical jokes and frequently dropped into public houses,⁴ and as one report suggested, cohabited unashamedly and openly with convict women.⁵

At the time Van Diemen's Land was part of New South Wales and therefore came under the control of Governor-in-Chief, Lachlan Macquarie, and it was in Sydney that Davey spent some time before travelling on to Hobart Town. Even before Davey's arrival in Sydney Macquarie was critical of him, having been privately warned from the Colonial Office that his financial honesty was doubtful.⁶

It was just two years into Davey's term that Macquarie began a campaign to have him replaced. His decision disregarded Davey's achievements in the colony, and instead focused on his behaviour, and mainly on his drinking. Macquarie was concerned that Davey's actions affected not only Davey and his family, but also made him totally incapable of performing his duties, despite which, Macquarie had to admit that he had 'no direct or positive proof' that Davey authorised the smuggling of Spirits at the Derwent', but Macquarie thought that the rumours he had heard were well founded.⁷

¹ *Historical Records of Australia (HRA)* Series III, volume ii 238 pages; *HRA* III, iii 667 pages; *HRA* III, iv 93 pages. There is also sundry correspondence in *HRA* Series I.

² *HRA* III, iv, 308 pages; *HRA* III, v, 722 pages; *HRA* III, vi, 445 pages; *HRA* III, vii, 685 pages.

³ Leonie C Mickleborough, 'Colonel William Sorell, Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land 1817–1824: An examination of his convict system and establishment of free settlement', unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Tasmania, 2002.

⁴ J West *The History of Tasmania* A G L Shaw (editor) (Sydney, 1981). First published Launceston 1852 by Henry Dowling in two volumes, p. 48; J W Beattie *Glimpses of the Lives and Times of the Early Tasmanian Governors* (Hobart, 1905), p. 23.

⁵ Oldham Papers vol 3, p. 348 Royal Society cited in C M H Clark *A History of Australia*, Volume 1 (Melbourne, 1981) p. 284.

⁶ *HRA* 1, viii, pp 458–61 Macquarie to Bathurst, 22 March 1815.

⁷ *HRA* 1, viii, pp. 459–60 Macquarie to Bathurst, 22 March 1815.

Davey had problems with an increase in bushranging. He was hampered by a lack of legal organisation to deal with the problem and he continually complained about Macquarie's lack of response to his requests for increased military protection.⁸ He had other difficulties, including a far-flung settlement, Aborigines and escaped convicts. There was one court of justice in the colony for minor matters, and those charged with serious crimes needed to be tried in Sydney.⁹ In April 1815, in an act of desperation because of the bushrangers, Davey declared martial law. His action was actually illegal,¹⁰ as it was the Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief who had the powers to declare martial law.¹¹ Macquarie continued criticising Davey,¹² and in April 1816 Lord Bathurst notified Macquarie that His Royal Highness deemed it necessary to remove Davey,¹³ and so he was recalled.

SORELL'S BACKGROUND

The replacement for Davey was Colonel William Sorell, who was born in London in 1773, into an upper-class military family.¹⁴ When he was 17 years-old he entered the army as an ensign, and three years later proceeded on active service to the West Indies. Promotions continued, and after a further seven years he was transferred to the King's Regiment with the rank of captain and he accompanied the army to Ferrol and the coast of Spain. He gained extensive military experience which included the command of a battalion during the organisation and training of the Light Brigade under Sir John Moore.¹⁵

It is likely that it was due to patronage that he was appointed adjutant-general at the Cape of Good Hope, where he sailed with the 4th garrison Battalion in 1807.¹⁶ It was this appointment in South Africa which required him to remain away from England for several years and which marked a turning point in his life, both public and personal. He travelled alone, his newly married wife Harriet Coleman and their seven children, the oldest only 7 years old, stayed behind in London.¹⁷

At the Cape, the rather grave, steady and reserved Sorell, who was also described as highly respectable and who was understood to be a single man, became friendly with Lieutenant William Kent and his wife Louisa, and he actively joined in with the busy social life of parties and dinners. In 1811 William and Louisa Kent returned to England to attend to a family matter. Sorell also returned to England six months later, and in November 1812 resigned his appointment as adjutant-general, following which, he was appointed major in the 46th Regiment of Foot. A year later he resigned from military service.¹⁸

When making application to sell his commission as a major, as testimony Sorell cited past recommendations by His Royal Highness and leading officers. In addition, he claimed he was on friendly terms with Sir Henry Torrens the military secretary to the Duke of York. It is likely, therefore, when Bathurst was looking for a replacement for Davey that Sorell's influential contacts recommended him to the Colonial Office.¹⁹

⁸ AOT Reel 6071, p. 151.

⁹ HRA 111, iii p. 283 evidence of A W H Humphrey to Commissioner J T Bigge, 13 March 1820.

¹⁰ West *The History of Tasmania*, p. 563, n 78.

¹¹ HRA 1, viii p. 675 n 123; HRA 1, vii pp. 186, 730.

¹² Some examples, HRA 1, vii, p. 709; HRA 111, ii, p. 67; HRA I, vii, p. 730; HRA 1, vii, pp. 459–60.

¹³ HRA 1, ix, pp. 113–14 Bathurst to Macquarie, 18 April 1816.

¹⁴ According to *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)* vol 2 p. 459 Sorell was born in 1775. This appears incorrect. According to his death certificate GRO 460/1848 Marylebone, Middlesex, he died 4 June 1884 at 27 George St Marylebone aged 74 years; see also death notice in *The Times* 8 June 1884. He was baptised 22 September 1773 at St Mary's Church Marylebone see *International Genealogical Index* (Utah, 1992) Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Country: England. County: London, p. 140,030. If official details correct Sorell was born between 5 June 1773 and 22 September 1773.

¹⁵ HRA 111, iii p vii; *ADB* vol 2 (Melbourne, 1966), pp. 459–62.

¹⁶ R W Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania vol. 11* (Melbourne, 1939), p. 144. See Leonie C Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land. Lieutenant-Governor, 1817–24* (Hobart, 2004), p. 8 for further details on Sorell's patrons.

¹⁷ Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land* see Appendix and pp. 6–10 for family details.

¹⁸ AOT AB694/10 (Bonwick Transcript 10) pp. 4200–202, p. 4211; A Alexander *Governors' Ladies* (Hobart, 1987), p. 71; Giblin *The Early History of Tasmania*, p. 145; HRA 111, iii, p. viii.

¹⁹ Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land*, p. 8.

Bathurst notified Sorell of his appointment,²⁰ but it appears that his investigations were not very thorough, or were confined to Sorell's military capacity, otherwise Bathurst would have realised Sorell had not provided adequate financial support to his wife and six surviving children,

SORELL'S ARRIVAL AT SYDNEY

In March 1817 Sorell, a lady and four children were welcomed to Sydney Town by Lachlan Macquarie where they spent some time before travelling to Hobart Town. Macquarie was impressed with Sorell, described him as 'a man of good understanding, energy and firmness', and combined with 'honour and integrity', he hoped Sorell would be a 'great acquisition' to Van Diemen's Land.²¹ The lady who travelled with Sorell, and who was welcomed by Macquarie, was not his wife Harriet, but Mrs Louisa Kent.²²

The arrival in Sydney of Louisa Kent with Sorell must have created a curious situation for the Macquaries, because on their outward voyage to Sydney in 1809 the Macquaries had spent time at the Cape of Good Hope, and as well as Sorell, they also met the Kents. Therefore Macquarie knew it was Louisa Kent who arrived with Sorell and was subsequently introduced as his wife.²³ Elizabeth Macquarie even mentioned Sorell in her diary when she wrote how of those she met at the Cape, it was Sorell she 'liked the best'.²⁴

ARRIVAL AT THE RIVER DERWENT

After ten days in Sydney the Sorell family left for Hobart Town where upon arrival they were welcomed with extensive celebrations which included a gunfire salute. The description of Hobart Town that Macquarie supplied to Sorell was far from encouraging. He claimed that Davey had disregarded orders and instructions which reduced the colony to a state of 'Ruin, Wretchedness and Corruption'.²⁵ Sorell found that even though the colony had been founded for less than fifteen years, it was not in the terrible condition as described by Macquarie.

On 9 April 1817 Sorell commenced a very successful and popular administration. He encountered problems to be expected, those caused by distance, soil, topography, lack of shelter and shortages of skilled labour and equipment and a general lack of amenities which were found in a more mature colony. Convicts were employed by government in the construction of public works, there were some industries, the colony was self sufficient in beef, mutton and grain and surpluses were being exported.²⁶ However, there were also problems. The operation of the survey department had fallen behind, and the medical service was one department where the problem of acquiring competent men was set against the influence of patrons. Sorell found no money in the police fund to meet the salaries of superintendents, overseers and civil officers, and found currency problems in the commissariat where many transactions had been by barter, or else involved the issue of chits such as store receipts and promissory notes, often written on flimsy pieces of paper easily lost or destroyed.²⁷

A Sorell initiative was the direct shipment of convicts from Britain. These commenced in June 1818, and therefore relieved the labour shortage which made it possible for both public and private works to progress. With the resulting increase in convicts Sorell formed what he described as a 'system of perpetual reference

²⁰ HRA 111, ii p. 183 Commission and Instructions, 20 March 1817.

²¹ HRA 1, ix pp. 344, 347–48 Macquarie to Bathurst, 4 April 1817. Sorell was the first administrator of Van Diemen's Land of whom Macquarie approved.

²² One Kent girl and their own three sons, Edmund, Robert and Henry.

²³ 'Journal of William Sorell, 27–30 December 1823' on 31 July 1824 she is referred to as 'Mrs L.M. Sorell' and on 18 April 1825 'Louisa Matilda'; Paul Edwards, *Of Yesteryear & Nowadays* (Hawley Beach, 1994), pp. 75–76, pp. 78–79 as Cox; Jane Sorell, *Governor, William & Julia Sorell* (Hobart, n.d. 1988?), p. 23 and p. 84 as Louisa Matilda Cox.

²⁴ Elizabeth Macquarie Journals C126, 23 September 1809 and A773 p. 92, 27 March 1817 both cited in M H Ellis, *Lachlan Macquarie* (Sydney, 1970), p. 364 and J Ritchie, *Lachlan Macquarie: A Biography* (Melbourne, 1986), p. 574, n 81.

²⁵ HRA 1, ix p. 347 Macquarie to Bathurst, 4 April 1817; HRA 1, ix p. 338 Macquarie to Bathurst, 3 April 1817.

²⁶ West, *The History of Tasmania*, pp. 48, 50–53; HRA 111, ii, pp. 148–49 Davey to Bathurst 13 April 1816; Beattie, *Glimpses of the Lives and Times of the Early Tasmanian Governors*, p. 24.

²⁷ Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land*, p. 38.

and control'. His system was such that on the arrival of a convict ship the name of each convict was entered into one of a series of registers.²⁸

The rapid increase in convicts also had its downside. It meant that a secure place of confinement for convicts who repeatedly offended was necessary — both for the convicts themselves, and for the security of the inhabitants, and in May 1818,²⁹ Sorell suggested to Macquarie the benefits of a place of secondary punishment. At the time of his suggestion secondarily convicted prisoners were sent to the Coal River, Newcastle.³⁰ Despite Sorell's suggestion it was more than three and a half years later, in December 1821, before 110 people were sent to the west coast to found the settlement at Macquarie Harbour, where escape was almost impossible.³¹

POPULAR ADMINISTRATOR

In contrast to his predecessors, Sorell's arrival in Van Diemen's Land had the appearance of respectability. He was accepted as president of the Bible Society, he allowed Divine Service to be held on the verandah at Government House until the completion of the new St David's Church, and founded the Agricultural Society. Sorell advanced the colony economically, as well as suppressing the bushrangers, where his greatest success was the death of Michael Howe. A decline in bushranging then followed³² only to re-surface in the years of his successor, George Arthur.

As well as accessibility to the colonists, often when in the Government House garden, it is likely Sorell's popularity was boosted by the growing prosperity of the colony through an economic boom particularly in the agricultural industry, and also during 1819 and 1820 when adverse weather conditions in New South Wales were an advantage for Van Diemen's Land, as the colonists exported wheat, potatoes, kangaroo skins, casks of salted meat, tallow and whale oil to the senior colony.³³

Between 1819 and 1824 a succession of publications³⁴ drew attention to the potential of the colony. However, the increasing number of Europeans who arrived and occupied the land had significant consequences for the survival of the Aboriginal inhabitants as land was progressively granted into their hunting grounds. Sorell showed some realisation of the problems caused by interference to the movements and food gathering of the Aborigines³⁵ but the only mention he made in his report to his successor George Arthur was that they might pose a policing problem around the Clyde River.³⁶

Many of the free settlers arrived with the expectation of making money. They qualified for grants on the basis of the capital they brought with them, and there is little doubt that Sorell's popularity was also helped through the granting of land, which peaked in 1823.³⁷ It was the combination of free land which was granted to settlers and their free assigned convict labour that really established the economy of the colony. Other convicts were employed in the construction of public works such as bridges, buildings, wharves and roads, and these improvements helped everyone, therefore as the situation of colonists improved, they thought highly of the already popular Sorell. He was also well-liked by the convicts, as he allowed those who were required to pay for their lodging to work during their free time.³⁸

²⁸ *HRA* 111, iii, pp. xi–xii; Specimen pages of registers see *HRA* 111, iii, pp. 542–44.

²⁹ *HRA* 111, iii, p. 927 n 5; *HRA* 111, iv, pp. 43–44 Sorell to Goulburn, 13 December 1821.

³⁰ *HRA* 111, iii, pp. 18–20 Sorell to Goulburn 12 May 1820; *HRA* 111, iv, p. 861 n 13.

³¹ *HRA* 111, iv, p. 44 Sorell to Goulburn 13 December 1821.

³² E Curr, *An Account of the Colony of VDL* (1824) Facsimile Reproduction (Hobart, 1967), p. 10; *HRA* 111, iii, pp. 252–53 evidence of J Gordon to Commissioner J T Bigge, 4 March 1820.

³³ J T Bigge, *The Bigge Reports Volume 3. Agriculture & Trade 1823* Facsimile Edition No. 70 (Adelaide, 1966), p. 21, pp. 25–26, p. 29, p. 54, p. 90.

³⁴ William Wentworth (1819), Charles Jeffreys (1820), James Dixon (1822), George Evans (1822) Thomas Reid (1822) Thomas Godwin (1823) Edward Curr (1824).

³⁵ *Hobart Town Gazette (HTG)* Government Order 13 March 1819 p. 1.

³⁶ *HRA* 111, iv, p. 149 Sorell to Arthur, 22 May 1824 Enclosure in Arthur to Bathurst, 9 June 1824, pp. 133–56.

³⁷ AOT LSD 354; S Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania* (Melbourne, 1992), p. 13, pp. 165–69.

³⁸ *HRA* 111, iii, pp. 231–32 evidence of Major T Bell to Commissioner J T Bigge, 26 February 1820.

REAPPEARANCE OF FIRST FAMILY

However, despite all the success of his administration and also his popularity, Sorell was to face a dilemma in his private life when towards the end of 1817, throughout the colony Anthony Fenn Kemp circulated a report from the London *Times*. The report of a court case brought by William Kent³⁹ confirmed that Sorell's lady was not Mrs Sorell at all, but Mrs Kent.⁴⁰

So what had happened? — In 1811 after the Kents returned to England, Lieutenant Kent was appointed to Ireland, and then ordered back to the Cape. In 1817 he eventually returned to London, and even though by that time Sorell and Louisa Kent (Kent's own wife), were in Van Diemen's Land, Kent took Sorell to court for 'criminal conversation'. Sorell, in his absence, was found guilty, and fined £3,000,⁴¹ a massive amount considering his annual salary as Lieut-Governor was £800.

As well as this predicament, Sorell had the dilemma of his wife Harriet, and their six surviving children (one having died), the oldest of whom, by this time was 16 year-old William. Harriet had been in a workhouse, she was still forced to seek assistance from the parish and her two youngest girls (possibly Matilda and Harriet who were about 11 years-old), had been sent as parish apprentices to factories in Derbyshire.⁴²

Anthony Fenn Kemp, the person who circulated the newspaper report, was an administrator in Launceston between 1804 and 1807 but he will perhaps be remembered mainly for his exploits against government authority, in particular, as a member of the New South Wales Rum Corps. He returned to Van Diemen's Land in January 1816 where Davey gave him a land grant of 800 acres, and he became a merchant at Hobart Town. In 1816 Macquarie appointed Kemp a justice-of-the-peace, but between 1817 and 1819 he was involved in a series of quarrels, first with Davey and then with Sorell.⁴³

In May 1818 Sorell reported Kemp's misconduct and suspended him as a magistrate. Macquarie fully supported Kemp's dismissal — but at the same time cautioned Sorell against taking the 'wily and obsessive' Kemp to a court of law, for whenever Kemp considered his economic interests to be threatened in any way, or his right to do what he liked, restricted, he reacted with 'explosive violence'.⁴⁴

So it was probably retaliation against Sorell that between March and November 1818 Kemp wrote letters of complaint. He wrote to Henry Brougham in London, no doubt thinking he had an ally in Brougham, as he had been a campaigner for William Kent in his court case against Sorell. Kemp also wrote to the Bishop of London, twice to Lord Bathurst, and even to Macquarie.⁴⁵ He complained that Sorell had a mistress living in Government House, he took her to church and introduced her as Mrs Sorell, and they and the four or five children were seen parading about in the government carriage.⁴⁶

Kemp's information was nothing new to Lord Bathurst. Certain details of Sorell's domestic life had already come to his notice. In June 1818, Sorell's wife Harriet had written and told him that while her husband was living in adultery with Mrs Kent, he had left her a cripple with seven children; for three years he had contributed nothing to his family's support, and as a result, she had been forced to enter a workhouse. Their

³⁹ *The Times* (London), 7 July 1817.

⁴⁰ *HRA* 111, iv, p. 681 Bigge to Bathurst, 3 February 1823 how Kemp circulated the newspaper.

⁴¹ *The Times* (London), 7 July 1817; *HRA* 111, ii, n 128 pp. 81–82; *HRA* 111, iv, pp. 681–82 Bigge to Bathurst, 3 February 1823.

⁴² AOT AB694/10 (Bonwick Transcript) pp. 4199, 4201; *HRA* 111, ii, pp. 338–39 Harriet Sorell to Bathurst, 21 June 1818; AOT AB694/13 (Bonwick Transcript) p. 6124 for proof of marriage of Sorell and Harriet Coleman in 1807.

⁴³ M & T Kemp, 'Captain Anthony Fenn Kemp', *JRAHS* 52:1, pp. 10–22; *HRA* 111, iii, pp. 215–16 evidence of Kemp, 8 and 9 November 1819; *ADB* vol 2 p. 39.

⁴⁴ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol 1*, p. 132.

⁴⁵ Brougham in March 1818 see *HRA* 111, iii, pp. 916–17; Bishop of London see Kemp to Bigge *HRA* 111, iii, p. 221; Bathurst 11 November 1818 see *HRA* 111, ii, pp. 684–85, and 15 November 1818 see *HRA* 111, ii, pp. 686–67; Macquarie April 1818 see *HRA* 111, iii, pp. 916–17.

⁴⁶ Kemp to Bigge *HRA* 111, iii, p. 221, 9 November 1819; *HRA* 111, iii, pp. 215–30 Kemp to Bigge 8 November 1819.

eldest son, William, the future Registrar-General of the Supreme Court of Van Diemen's Land, who it seems at that time was working for Mt Watkins an optician, supported his mother's plea for financial help and said that if her needs were not met soon it would be no use, because she would not last much longer.⁴⁷

Probably Sorell's administrative capabilities influenced Bathurst, and it was almost two years before Bathurst wrote to the Bishop of London. He told the Bishop that while he was aware of the complaints against Sorell's moral behaviour he was reluctant to dismiss him before Commissioner Bigge had reported on his private character.⁴⁸ Commissioner Bigge was appointed by the Colonial Office because of a concern that transportation might no longer be an effective deterrent in Britain, nor the means of reformation in the settlements. Bigge was also directed to enquire into Sorell's private life.⁴⁹

After Bigge's arrival in the colony Kemp gave lengthy evidence. Bigge also heard how Louisa Kent had sat at the Lieutenant-Governor's table and accompanied him on horse-back in the streets of Hobart Town. Despite Bigge learning that the principal facts as given by Kemp were true, he was only able to find three individuals in the easy-going Hobart Town society who criticised Sorell for his private life.⁵⁰ The Commissioner admitted there weren't many people in the colony who would be influenced by Sorell's example but as the number and respectability of free immigrants increased, the damaging effects of his conduct would be felt. Bigge also regretted Sorell had no intentions of changing his domestic situation, and his report, dated 3 February 1823 confirmed the truth of the allegations. Apparently in fairness to Sorell, Bigge had delayed transmission of his evidence on the consequence of Sorell's adultery for almost three years, and when he finally submitted his report, it was after he had written favourably on Sorell's official achievements.⁵¹

When rumours of Sorell's recall began to circulate in the colony, concern was raised among the colonists. A public meeting of protest was called for 30 October 1823 in Hobart Town where a committee of fifteen influential settlers⁵² was appointed to transmit a petition to the King. The petition praised Sorell during his term of office, deplored his recall, and appealed for his continuation.⁵³ Such action was a rare example of popularity. Sorell had overcome all opposition to his administration, because the chairman of the committee was none other than Kemp. So in the course of three to four years Fenn Kemp did a complete turn-around. In 1823 Kemp claimed that for seven years he had witnessed the leader's 'unremitting Attention' to the duties of his office and his 'high Talent for public Business'.⁵⁴

It may be an indication of early colonial society why Kemp changed his loyalty, or perhaps it was a case of self-interest. Around this time an allegiance to the new colony was obvious, newspapers were giving the settlers opportunities to express concerns, a middle class was developing, and so expectations of society were also changing. Settlers were arriving in increasing numbers and receiving land grants. One settler⁵⁵ described a 'degree of nationality', and colonists were enjoying prosperity. Convicts were either assigned to settlers or were employed on public works, and a social structure was developing. The Aboriginal situation

⁴⁷ HRA 111, ii, pp. 338–39, Harriet Sorell to Bathurst 6 August 1818; AOT AB694/13 (Bonwick transcript) p. 6118 William Sorell to Goulburn, 28 August 1818.

⁴⁸ Bathurst to Bishop of London 10 January 1820 BT Box 50 *Missionary vol. ii* p. 561–62 cited in J Ritchie, *Punishment & Profit* (Melbourne, 1970), p. 143.

⁴⁹ HRA I, x, pp. 807–23 Bathurst to Sidmouth, 23 April 1817.

⁵⁰ HRA 111, iii, pp. 227–30 evidence of Kemp 12 May 1820. The three were Major Thomas Bell acting engineer and inspector of public works, with a 'Temporary estrangement' from what Bigge believed was 'a growing indifference' by Sorell to the 'circumstances of his situation'; Reverend Richard Hill a visiting Church of England clergyman, and also Kemp, see HRA 111, iv pp. 681–82 Bigge to Bathurst, 3 February 1823.

⁵¹ HRA 111, iv, pp. 683–84 Bigge to Bathurst 3 February 1823; HRA 111, iii, pp. 675–76 Bigge to Bathurst 23 August 1820; Ritchie *Punishment & Profit*, p. 144.

⁵² E Abbott, T Anstey, J Archer, W A Bethune, F Dawes, H J Emmett, J Gordon, T G Gregson, S Hood A W H Humphrey, A F Kemp, R L Murray, H Ross, G F Read, J Scott, see West, *The History of Tasmania*, p. 78.

⁵³ West, *The History of Tasmania*, pp. 76–77; HRA 111, iv, pp. 548–50 petition to the King; HRA 111, iv, pp. 547–51 Kemp to Barnard, 18 January 1824.

⁵⁴ HRA 111, iv, pp. 547–50 Kemp to Barnard, 18 January 1824.

⁵⁵ Edward Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally designed for the use of emigrants* (London, 1824) Facsimile edition (Hobart, 1967), p. 19.

seemed stable and the bushranging situation was being brought under control. Prosperity in Britain influenced the colony, and as the merchants gained from the increasing wealth, there were opportunities and Kemp was a leading figure among the merchants, importers, shippers and graziers.

As an indication of the settlers' respect for Sorell, they agreed to present him with a piece of silver plate, for which £750 was contributed.⁵⁶ The northern colonists also sensed the anticipated loss, and at a meeting in Launceston, it was unanimously resolved that the colony's prosperity had 'rapidly and uniformly increased', and progress and general improvement had been 'great beyond example' during his administration.⁵⁷

It is reasonable to assume that the signatories on the petition influenced Fenn Kemp, as most of these had received substantial land grants during Sorell's administration. Several were merchants: Walter Bethune and George Read, the superintendent of carpenters, were both in partnership with Fenn Kemp at various times, at least eight signatories were justices-of-the-peace, one was a surgeon⁵⁸ and others had land grants close to Fenn Kemp.

The attempt by the colonists to prevent Sorell's recall was, to them, unknowingly too late. In a letter dated 4 July 1823, Bathurst had offered the vacancy to George Arthur but it was not until 26 August that Bathurst wrote to Sorell with, what he described as 'the painful necessity' of recalling him, the reasons for which, Sorell would 'already know'. Despite Bathurst recalling Sorell for personal reasons, Bathurst praised his administration of the colony.⁵⁹

It is unclear when Sorell received the official letter of his recall but it was sometime after 10 October 1823, because on that date Sorell wrote a 'Private' despatch to under-secretary Wilmot Horton appealing for further employment, because he had just learned of his recall by means of a 'private communication'.⁶⁰ Sorell's term as lieutenant-governor of Van Diemen's Land ended on 14 May 1824, when he was replaced by Arthur.

DEPARTURE FROM THE COLONY

After successfully administering the colony for seven years and five weeks, in June 1824 Sorell, Louisa Kent and seven children left Hobart Town⁶¹ and travelled to London. The seven children would have been one Kent girl and the other six were their own surviving children. The three youngest had died and been buried in Hobart Town.⁶² Relatively little else is known of Sorell, Mrs Kent and the children once they returned to London. There was no new appointment, but Sorell did have his annual pension of £500 and 2000 acres in Van Diemen's Land. In total he received about 11,810 acres, but possibly as much as 12,710 acres.

In 1826 Sorell and his family were living in Ireland, and in 1827 he was in London. By November he was living in Brussels, and in April 1831 was in Belgium in the coastal town of Ostende.⁶³ It seems that between August 1835 and August 1838 the family was living in France.⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

⁵⁶ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol 1*, p. 133; West, *The History of Tasmania*, pp. 75–76. The silver arrived two days after Sorell's departure and according to his son William, he sent it to England on the next available ship.

⁵⁷ The 15 November Launceston meeting see *HTG*, 22 and 29 November 1823; The Hobart meeting on 30 October see *HTG* 1, 8 and 15 November 1823.

⁵⁸ Abbott, Anstey, Archer, Beamont, Bethune, Gregson, Humphrey, Read. Hood was the surgeon.

⁵⁹ *HRA* 111, iv, p. 85 Bathurst to Sorell, 26 August 1823.

⁶⁰ *HRA* 111, iv, p. 89 Sorell to Horton, 10 October 1823.

⁶¹ AOT CSO 63 Departure list for *Guildford*.

⁶² Edmund, Robert, Henry, Matilda, Frederick and George. See Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land*, Appendix pp. 123–24 for family details.

⁶³ *HTG*, 5 August 1826 p. 2; AOT PRO Reel 267 CO 280/63, pp. 492–94 Sorell to Horton, 3 November 1835.

⁶⁴ Lucy Frost (ed.), A B Dawbin, *A Face in the Glass*, (Melbourne, 1992), p. 138.

Colonial Office officials must have been aware of Sorell's domestic arrangements at the time of his appointment to Van Diemen's Land. It is unlikely that he could return from the Cape and live with the wife of Lieutenant Kent from 1812 to 1816 without their knowledge, especially when Lieutenant Kent received another two overseas appointments and travelled without his wife.

The only Sorell to remain in Van Diemen's Land was William, the first born child of William and Harriet who arrived in 1823, just months before his father's departure. This was the first time that father and son had seen each other since William was 7 years-old when Sorell left for the Cape of Good Hope.⁶⁵

As surprising as the about-face by Kemp over Sorell, William junior became friendly with the Kemp family, and in 1825 married their daughter Elizabeth. The marriage was not ultimately successful, and in 1838 on the pretext that she was taking the children to Europe to 'further their education', Elizabeth Sorell abandoned their children in Brussels from where she ran off to India with Colonel George Deare whom she had known in Hobart Town. At the time (former Lieutenant-Governor) William Sorell was living in Belgium with his sister, Catherina Gregg, and from there he arranged for the return home to Van Diemen's Land of his five grandchildren.⁶⁶

After 1838 Sorell disappears from the record until his death in London on 4 June 1848 at 27 George Street, Marylebone. He was survived by his long-time partner, who was granted administration of his estate under the name 'Louisa Matilda Sorell, widow'. So it seems that they had at last married. It is not known when their respective first spouses died, or when Louisa died, but there is an indication that she was still alive in 1855.⁶⁷

Sorell was a victim of a campaign of public morality regardless of the success of his administration at a time when the balance of the population was changing from convicts to free settlers and when an appearance of respectability was becoming significant. It was Sorell's personal life which was the reason for his recall, and equally it was Harriet and their six surviving children who were also victims, and by his treatment of them, they too played a part in his recall.

⁶⁵ HRA 111, iv, p. 684 Bigge to Bathurst, 3 February 1823; 'Diary of William Sorell 27–30 December 1823'.

⁶⁶ Frost (ed.), Dawbin, *A Face in the Glass*, p. 138; Edwards, *Of Yesteryear and Nowadays*, p. 85.

⁶⁷ Mickleborough, *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land*, pp. 111–12 and associated references. No proof of marriage has yet been located.