

Geelong & District Insolvency Competition

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Insolvent: Arthur Kent SHARPLEY

Submitted by

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DRIVEN TO DRINK or DRINK DRIVING??

ARTHUR KENT SHARPLEY 1825 - 1893

The rippling effect of a family's history was still having a presence some seventy-five years later when my grandfather, Gordon Sharpley, finally retired from accountancy at the age of 80 and decided to trace his family tree. He had been involved in several Shire histories during his work in municipal affairs and had a great interest in local history and now had time to find his own roots. I remember him speaking about a letter from Mr Harry Nunn, giving him precise details about the ship our Sharpley family arrived on. No computer or internet then! Suddenly grandfather stopping researching, never told us what he'd found and never spoke of the matter again.

It was not until a further eleven years later when I caught the 'gene bug', that I recalled the paperwork that my late grandfather had placed away. My mother now had it in her care and so I was keen to pick up where he had left off, never suspecting what I would find.....

My grandfather's father, Arthur Kent Sharpley, was born in c.1825 in Clojordon, Co.Tipperary, Ireland. It appears that in his teens, Arthur left Ireland for the United States of America where he joined the US Army. Exactly what evolved is unknown but he was to eventually receive an US Army pension, which was still paid to him each month, in Australia, up until his death.¹

In 1854 Arthur married Margaret Paisley in Brookland, New York. Margaret was a native of Greenock, Scotland. By the 17th September 1857 Arthur and Margaret, along with their baby son Thomas, were back living in Borris O'Kane, Co.Tipperary when Arthur's father paid the deposit for the family's fare to come to Geelong, to join the rest of the family who had emigrated in 1853.²

When Arthur and Margaret sailed aboard the "Admiral Boxer", on the 25th February 1858 from Plymouth, baby Thomas did not accompany them, presumably he had died. Arthur listed his occupation as 'labourer' and both he and Margaret gave their native place as "Dublin". At journey's end the couple made their way to Arthur's parents' home in Autumn Street, Ashby.³ Only eight days prior to their first Australian Christmas, their first born colonial child, Robert, was born. Arthur listed his occupation as 'labourer'.⁴

Arthur and Margaret were to live in numerous parts of Geelong West while rearing a further 10 children [2 of their children died at the ages of eight and three⁵] with Arthur's occupation revealing many different jobs but he appears to have become a clerk for the most part – Arthur could read and write, his own father being a teacher.⁶

¹ Court Case (1884 Geelong Advertiser) & Inquest Papers - PROV

² Immigration Remittance Regulations Deposits made at the Sub Treasury, Geelong 1856-1858 (GFHG Library)

³ Assisted Immigration Shipping Lists - GHC

⁴ St Paul's Church of England, Geelong - Baptism Records

⁵ Geelong Cemeteries Trust microfiche records – Western Cemetery, Geelong - GHC

⁶ Geelong Rate Books & Noble Street Methodist Church - Baptism Records

On January 18, 1861 Arthur was involved in a debt case against a Mr Thomas. This appears to be the first of many times that Arthur would appear in court for one reason or another. There was no appearance of plaintiff and the defendant applied for costs on ground that he did not owe any money, had no knowledge of the plaintiff and why he had been sued. Showed receipt and court, said that debt had been settled only after a summons was served. The case was dismissed & application for costs not entertained.⁷

On the 3rd February 1865, Arthur was admitted to the Geelong Hospital suffering an extensive scalp wound. Arthur had been driving a cart down the Fyansford Hill when the horse bolted half way down and in attempting to use the break, the cart overturned and Arthur suffered a severe injury. The scalp on the right of his head and eyelid was torn as well as a severe leg injury. On admittance to the Geelong Hospital it was stated that it was the worst scalp wound in the last 5 years at the hospital. After a two month stay, Arthur was finally discharged on the 7th April.⁸

He was again admitted on the 16th October of the same year for 14 days, the cause being an 'extrusion'. The company, which signed for Arthur's admission, was the brewing company, Volum & Co. Arthur gave his occupation 'clerk', an indication that he must have been in the employ of this company.

Whether this injury led to Arthur becoming an alcoholic to ease head pain or whether he was an alcoholic prior which caused the accident will never be known – but it is a significant event that obviously affected Arthur. According to a post mortem examination conducted after Arthur's death, it was stated that "Arthur had suffered a fractured skull which might affect his mind." As my grandfather was totally against liquor and I now suspect that life at home was not easy with Arthur's bouts of heavy drinking.

On 31 December 1869 Arthur appears at the Newtown/Chilwell Police Court concerning a case over night soil in Mr Down's garden.⁹

On 26 November, 1877 Arthur was listed in the *Geelong Advertiser* for insolvency with debts of £98-7-0 and assets of only £5-0-0 ['a small quantity of household goods'], resulting in a deficiency of £93-7-0. Arthur's reason for not being able to pay these debts was due to an 'unfavourable judgement handed down in the County Court at Colac'. Exactly what this means is unknown for Arthur's son, Robert, had been brought before the Colac Courts for ill conduct during an apprenticeship with Mr George Turner, a chemist at Colac, but the case was dismissed and hence if Arthur had been named as the defendant then no costs were involved. Arthur gave his occupation as 'tailor' but this was crossed out and 'clerk' written in.

Among his creditors were two of his brother-in-laws, Aquilla P Kent (Geelong, grocer) and James Manson Tulloch (Geelong, draper) along with:

- D K Dredge - Colac – teacher
- Frederick Pether – Geelong – carpenter
- Thomas Nicholls- Geelong – grocer
- Mr Whitelaw – Geelong - grocer
- Martin & Sons – Geelong- timber merchants

⁷ Geelong Advertiser 18.1.1861

⁸ Geelong Advertiser 4 Feb 1865

⁹ Geelong Advertiser 2 Jan 1869

- G F Turner- Colac - chemist.
- J Tredgold – Geelong – butcher
- Strong & Pierce – Geelong – boot manufacturers
- Mr Sutherland, Thomas Craven, J M Watson and Mr McKenzie – all of Geelong.¹⁰

In November 1884 Arthur again was involved in money matters, this time being taken to court by a William Pittaway on a fraud summons for the amount of debt for the payment which an order had previously been made. Pittaway was unable to prove that Sharpley was in a position to pay the debt and the bench declined to make an order"¹¹

The amount owing was £9.10.0 Sharpley was threatened with imprisonment for continual interruptions to the hearing saying that he had not earned a shilling since last November and had been supported by his 'dear wife and good sons'. He owned nothing but the clothes he stood in. Under pressure, Sharpley admitted he had worked with his wife at tailoring and also received a pension of \$4 per month from the United States. Sharpley was ordered to pay £5 to the court and 23/6 costs with the balance to be paid within the month. The money was quickly found by his 'dear wife and good sons'.¹²

At some time after the birth of their last child, my grandfather in 1885, Arthur found employment in Windsor, Melbourne.

On 30 March 1893 Robert Sharpley, their oldest son, was also declared insolvent – like father, like son!¹³

This same year saw Arthur's address as 62 Andrew Street, Prahran, and occupation of 'clerk'. He would return to Geelong at weekends to see his family and was still drinking quite heavily. During his drinking bouts when he was often aggressive or depressed, and often threatened to commit suicide, but his family became used to his threats and took little notice of them, blaming his alcoholism for them.

On 4 May, 1893, however, at the age of 71 years, Arthur did carry out his threat - hanging himself. He had been drinking heavily on that day, and at about 5.00 p.m. packed some goods into a bag and told his wife that he was returning to Melbourne. He refused tea which Margaret was preparing, and bade farewell to the younger children. Shortly after his departure, Margaret went into his room and found a suicide note which he had left. Margaret went and reported the fact to her son, Thomas, who was working as a painter in Foster Street, South Geelong, at the time. On reading the note, Thomas told his mother not to worry because his father had often left notes of a similar fashion. Margaret was worried because Arthur had been drinking heavily, but she asked Thomas to report the matter to the police. He therefore reported the matter to Sgt. Dawson, who advised him to go home and care for his father, not realising that Arthur had by this stage left his home. The following morning Arthur's body was discovered in an old shed at the back of the residence of George Hartley, of Belmont.¹⁴

¹⁰ Insolvency Papers – PROV VPRS 815/107/2896 & Victorian Government Gazette 30 Nov 1877

¹¹ "Geelong Advertiser" 17.11.1884

¹² 'Geelong Advertiser 3.9.1985

¹³ Insolvency Papers – PROV VPRS/815/120/337

¹⁴ Inquest Report – 1893 - PROV

The note that Arthur had left read as follows.....

May 4th 1893

"I wish my watch to be given to Gordon also 2/- so he can get it repaired and get a suit of clothes. I leave my knife and 5/- to Joseph. I leave my ring to Agnes and any little money in purse after paying Gordon and Joseph. My trunk & clothes and books do what you like with them.

I am tired of this world and the world is tired of me. I could say more but will not. The US Government owes me 5 months pay this day. I have sent receipts to the Pension agent for 3 months up to March 4th 1893. The Consul General will give you the letter and cheque which will be enclosed for \$18 up to March 4th. He will instruct you how to get it cashed also he will apply for the 2 months pay from 4th March to 4th May being \$12. The Frisco mail due 19th July will bring the cheque for \$18 due to me also receipts which the Consul will attend to. I get £3 .12.0 from Mr.Gerschel for the cheque."

The Magisterial Inquiry held at Geelong on 6 May, 1893, found that Arthur died from "strangulation from hanging, self-inflicted, but there is no evidence to show the state of deceased's mind at the time". Arthur was buried in an unmarked public grave in the Church of England section of the New General (Western) Cemetery in Geelong on 6 May, 1893.

My grandfather, aged 8 at the time of his father's death, sold newspapers after school to help the family eat – another older unmarried brother also worked at the Woollen Mills but drowned one night after work when swimming with mates and so Gordon and his mother, were left to care for two widowed daughters and their 5 children, who had returned to live with them as well.

A sad but true story, so like many families of these times in early Geelong.

[Pam Jennings – not to be included in competition please]