

**Geelong & District Insolvency**

**Competition**

**November 2009**

**Insolvent: Thomas Geach KEAM**

**Submitted by**

**Nell Heath**

## THOMAS GEACH KEAM

What manner of a man was Thomas? He was an adventurer who became multi-skilled, and met with challenge in a foreign environment.

Aged 17 years on his arrival in 1849, Thomas's first footsteps in Australia were made from the ship's arrival at Point Henry to the vicinity of Geelong. Here he entered into a business venture, before moving to the Barrabool Hills where he became a tenant farmer. He then tendered for some of the extensive roadwork being undertaken in the area. In May 1860 Thomas was declared insolvent.

### FAMILY BACKGROUND - THE KEAMS MIGRATE TO AUSTRALIA

Thomas was the middle child in a family of eight children. He and his three older sisters, three younger sisters and a little brother, were all born at Trewoon in the Parish of St. Mewan, a well-known china clay mining area near St Austell in Cornwall. Their mother, Emma, had died in 1840, after the birth of her youngest child, Peter. The family head as described in the 1841 census, was Peter (Richard) KEAM, aged 44 years. His occupations, variously described at the birth of his children as yeoman farmer (a land owner), a butcher and victualler of Trewoon, could have been a model for Thomas, who had several livelihoods in his adult life.

In 1849, Peter Keam, a widower with six daughters and two sons, decided to emigrate to Australia with his family. And so, at the age of 17, Thomas came to Australia with his father and siblings. The family departed from Plymouth on the 9th January 1849 on the 'Sir George Seymour', arriving 126 days later at Point Henry near Geelong on May 14th 1849. *The Disposal* shipping list names Peter 51, and his family: Mary 23, Caroline 21, Amelia 19, Thomas 17, Emma 14, Anne (Hannah) 12, Ellen 10 and Peter 8.<sup>1</sup> Part of the story of their arrival, which has been passed down the family, is that Peter "brought all his furniture with him and had his money belt around his waist".

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<sup>1</sup>PROV; Index VPRS 14 Register of assisted British Immigrants 1839-18719 Lists name as KEARN for KEAM

## KEAM FAMILY MARRIAGES

Within the first year of their arrival in May 1849, four of the Thomas's sisters were married. Mary Keam, the eldest in the family, married James Gattie Carr in November 1849. James was an auctioneer and estate agent, who had acquired a number of properties. Mary and James Carr lived with their large family of nine children in "Somerton", the home that James built in Skene Street, Newtown. In March 1850, Emma Keam, at just 16 years, married William Noble, from Co. Tyrone, Ireland. William Noble was a business man, who had arrived in Australia in 1848, and by 1850 was on the board of a building society. On the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1850, a double wedding was performed by Rev Francis Tuckfield, the Wesleyan Minister in Geelong. Caroline Keam married William Tuckfield (brother of Francis) and Amelia married James Searle (Searll), a millwright, who had travelled with the Keam family on the same ship to Australia<sup>2</sup>. James and Amelia had seven children; the fifth child Ada Amelia born 1859, later married her cousin Charles Keam. The Searle family lived in Skene Street Geelong, where James was a draper.

Five years later, Thomas's sister, Anna was married on April 13<sup>th</sup> 1855, to Rev. P Wells, of Castlemaine. With five sisters now married, Thomas Keam, now 24, and living at 'Ballanlea', Barrabool Hills<sup>3</sup>, chose as his bride, Elizabeth Trotter, of Duneed. They married on 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1856 at a Wesleyan Church in Geelong. Elizabeth's parents: Joseph Trotter, a farmer, and Ann Davison, were both from Ireland. The ceremony was performed by Rev. Isaac Harding, who had arrived from Somerset in 1852.

Thomas and Elizabeth had three children. The first born, Charles Thomas, became a Primary School teacher, and in 1883 he married his cousin, Ada Amelia Searll in Newtown, Geelong. Charles taught for many years in Wodonga and died there in 1933. Charlie was joined in Wodonga by his father in his later years. Thomas died in Wodonga at the age of 60, in 1891. Thomas and Elizabeth's daughter, Emma Trotter Keam was born in 1857, and married Edward Lamperd in 1890. A younger son John

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<sup>2</sup> Disposal List includes James Searle age 25 Millwright

<sup>3</sup> G.A. Geelong Advertiser 13 April 1855

Geach Keam, was born in 1860 and married Elizabeth G. Leachy in 1884. John died young, at 41 years old, in N.S.W.

## THOMAS KEAM IN BUSINESS

The discovery of gold in Victoria caused dramatic increases in population and social upheaval. The population of Geelong almost tripled from 1851 to 1857. Some 3,700 immigrants arrived in Geelong in 1853, not all intent on seeking gold, but needing provisions, accommodation and work. A huge trail of fortune seekers was lured to the goldfields in nearby Ballarat.

Early in 1853, at the age of 21, Thomas Keam ventured into a business arrangement with George Noble. The two men took over the business of grocers, wine and spirit merchants from William Noble<sup>4</sup>, who was a brother of George, and brother-in-law of Thomas. Their stores at Ballarat and Geelong offered basic provisions for the influx of immigrants, particularly gold seekers, with wine and spirits at the Geelong Store, in Moorabool St. William Noble continued his business at 15 Great Ryrie St from 1859 until 1874. Four businesses were conducted by the Noble brothers<sup>5</sup>, who came to Geelong from Ireland. The eldest, James Noble, arrived in 1841, and younger brothers John, William and George arrived later. Businesses of the brothers moved and changed hands at a rapid rate, reflecting the feverish activity of the gold rush.

Thomas Keam's involvement in the business was short-lived; in 1854 the business was disposed to Lineham Parks & Co<sup>6</sup>. In opting out of his business venture, Thomas moved to become the occupant of the farm "Ballanlea" in the Barrabool Hills.

## THE BARRABOOL HILLS

### FARMING LAND

The Barrabool Shire lands were surveyed just two years after the survey of Geelong. The first land sales, held in February 1840, were for 25 sections, seven of these large

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<sup>4</sup> G.A. 1:Feb.:1853

<sup>5</sup> G.A.2nd June 1853

<sup>6</sup> G.A. 22 June 1854

sections within the Parish of Barrabool. The size of approximately 600 -1000 acres, effectively excluding small farmers.

The largest buyer, Charles McLachlan, a merchant from Hobart, who purchased 8000 acres at 12 shilling per acre, decided to sub divide 4000 acres of his land into lease holdings.<sup>7</sup> Lease holdings varied in size from 80-650 acres, which potentially could be productive small farms.

Thomas Keam was recorded as the occupier (and his brother-in-law, J.G. Carr as the owner) a small farm in Section 3 of a McLachlan subdivision: 148 acres of good agricultural land on the Devon Road. The holding had a stone house with wooden offices and about two acres of garden<sup>8</sup>. The name 'Ballancea' was carried over to Block 3 from the adjacent Block 4, which was part of the same original run. Block 4, close to the Waurm Ponds Creek, was purchased in 1841 by R.G.Talbot. The 'Ballancea' homestead (1860) was built on a subsequent subdivision of Block 4, by John Heard, who purchased a section of 225 acres.

#### LOCAL CHURCHES

John Heard's farm at Ballancea was the site of the first church in the area, which was built by the Bible Christians at the junction of Polley's and Ballancea Roads in 1856. The Wesleyan community first built a school, and then in November 1857 a church meeting was held to develop worship services. Thomas Keam was included in a committee of management. The Devon Chapel is found a little further west on Polley's Road from the Bible Christians' church, on the Barrabool Road Board map of 1861.<sup>9</sup>

#### ROADS

Despite the early land sales in the Barrabool Shire, road construction was slow to follow and the work of road making was arduous. However, the Colac and Barrabool Roads were eventually surveyed. Following the Surveyor's route, roads were then to be built, drains to be dug, and road metal laid. The road metal was supplied from

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<sup>7</sup> N.S.McAdam "The Barrabool Hills" INVESTIGATOR Vol.7 & No.3

<sup>8</sup> 1861 "Book of the Parish of Barrabool" Page 10

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

quarries that were developed locally. All work was carried out by tender, and Thomas Keam was among the many who made contracting their main livelihood.

## INSOLVENCY

In the Insolvent Estate of THOMAS KEAM of Barrabool Hills, in the Colony of Victoria, farmer<sup>10</sup>

A notice given by H.H.ROBERTS Commissioner of Insolvent Estates Circuit District of Geelong

A meeting OF creditors to be held Ninth August 1860, in Union St, Geelong.

INSOLVENCY JURISDICTION No. 455 Taken at Geelong - filed 4 May 1860

SCHEDULE OF Thomas Keam of Barrabool Hills farmer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1860

Thomas Keam presented his Petition to John George Forbes Esq., Chief Commissioner of insolvent Estates in the Geelong Circuit District, who accepted the surrender of the Estate of Thomas Keam for the benefit of Creditors.

George Webster appointed official Assignee of the Estate

2nd May 1860 Keam gives the reasons for his Insolvency :

*“From a loss of over two thousand pounds in the purchase of land, failure of crops and having been sold off by landlord for rent.”*

After the sequestration of his estate, Keam prepares a Schedule List which he pledges to lodge with the sheriff

Deficiency Amount 789 pound 2 shillings 2 pence compiled, signed Thomas Keam with Affidavit

MEETING before the Commissioner Forbes Thursday ninth August 1860

Creditors who attended	Amount
Benjamin Boylett	5 pounds 19 shillings 9 pence
George Windsor	12 “ 10 “ 0 “
Samuel Pickles	6 “ 1 “ 3 “

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<sup>10</sup> PROV, VPRS 815/PO Court of Insolvency ( Geelong) Series 27 Unit 455

Insolvent appeared

## FINDINGS

Oh what a story behind all this apparent sadness of a hopeful young man having to accept failure. Family disharmony is evident; jealousy and ill will were apparent.

Why were these three creditors the only ones to turn up for their pound of flesh with so much more at stake for the absent creditors?

Samuel Riches, butcher, was a creditor for meat provided from Oct 1859 to May 1860.

George Windsor, the owner of a quarry, was a brother-in-law to Thomas Keam. George was married to Ann Trotter, the sister of Thomas's wife, Elizabeth.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1860 George Windsor made a sworn statement to the effect that "On January 10<sup>th</sup> you (Thomas) removed 60 yards of stone from my Quarry at 6 pence per yard, hence the sum 12 pounds 10 shillings."

Joseph Trotter was very supportive of Keam and his farm: he lent horses, cattle, a wagon and the use of ploughs and harrows owned by J.G.Carr.

9<sup>th</sup> August 1860 Thomas writes

"There was a sale on my property a few days before my Insolvency under a ... for rent. J.G. Carr is my landlord. I owed him at the time 145 pounds. Mr Harper<sup>11</sup> sold me off. I think the sale realised 100 pounds. The Bailiff was in possession seven or eight days before the sale."

Keam states he removed no wheat or oats nor furniture. The size of the farm was 148 acres, part sowed by Mr Trotter. "I have possession of the farm but I do nothing to it". Evidently, Thomas was engaged with road work, while his father-in-law worked the farm. Clearly, Thomas thought the insolvency action was unfair, and that the bailiff was unreasonable.

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<sup>11</sup> Bailiff of Geelong County Court?

James Cox, an employee on the farm for a year up to the sale, confirmed the good relationship between Trotter and Keam. Cox was not involved in the insolvency proceedings, nor did he observe any underhand dealings. Cox continued to work on the farm as an employee of Trotter.

George Windsor in a sworn statement, describes his relationship with his brother-in-law, Thomas Keam, as a neighbour. He considered that Keam was the owner of stock on the property; that the wagon used had a name indicating its ownership changed from Keam to Trotter; and that furniture had been removed and secreted at the Trotter home. He states he had not been in the Trotter home, but claimed that the goods hidden under cover there had been removed before the sale. George seems to not only resent Joseph helping Thomas; evidently there is a rift in the family.

Where did Benjamin Boylett fit into the play? He was not a relative, but a mate who repaired the contentious wagon, and a blacksmith who performed many small jobs for Keam, needed for the road work that was his livelihood. Boylett was owed the money for goods and services listed, eg. sharpening pick, 4 shoes, and a stone hammer.

On 21<sup>st</sup> November an interesting document was produced, exonerating Keam, and signed by five creditors.

*We the undersigned Creditors of Thomas Keam of The Barrabool Hills have much pleasure in certifying the Insolvent has to our satisfaction rendered a faithful Account of all his transactions and that the Insolvency arose from the causes stated by him in his Schedule, and we further desire to express our belief that the prosecution lately entered against him was instituted for the purpose of gratifying an ill feeling and that there was no foundation whatever for the charges made.*

Two creditors who signed the document were relatives: James Searle (husband of Amelia) who lent 340 pounds, and William Noble (husband of Emma), who was owed 140 pounds. Other creditors, Andrew Gibney was owed 140 pounds in wages, William Erwin 6 pounds, and William Hill 36 pounds.



## SUMMARY

Thomas Keam has close ties with his wife's father, Joseph Trotter. He had a generous family member in James Searle; and an interested brother-in-law William Noble, but what of James Gattie Carr, owner of the farm, and husband of his eldest sister Mary?

James Carr, born at Somers Town in London, had a lucky start. An orphan on arrival in Australia aged 13 years, he first went to Hobart, where he was educated by the Mayor of Hobart. Carr invested in property at the outset of the Gold Rush; in 1852 he was so successful he made a profit of 42,000 pounds<sup>12</sup>. Carr entered politics as an M.L.A. and was influential in Land Bills of the 1860s. At his death in September 1902, probate amounted to 185 pounds. Carr owned some 32 properties, worth over nine thousand pounds. Contained in this long list is one worth noting: Section 3, Shire of Barrabool 148 acres, worth 1330 pounds.<sup>13</sup>

In 1860, as well as the insolvency case, Thomas and his wife had their third child and he lost his sister Caroline Tuckfield. She died of typhoid fever in July, leaving husband William, sons William and Samuel (our grandfather) and baby daughter Anna, all my forebears.

A significant report in 1861: Thomas Keam, Occupier of "Ballanlea"<sup>14</sup>

Nell Heath

11 November 2009

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<sup>12</sup> The Cyclopedia of Victoria 1904

<sup>13</sup> PROV, VPRS 30/P Unit 630 File 85146

<sup>14</sup> G.A. 11 April 1861

REFERENCE:

Ian Wynd "Barrabool : Land of the Magpies" 1992,  
Publishers : Barrabool Shire, Grossmans Road, Torquay