

The Golden Years

The disastrous years of the first half of the decade were followed by increased prosperity in the late 1840s. Of the twelve apostles, most regained some degree of prosperity; however, Alexander MacKillop never did. Fawkner worked hard, growing vegetables and carting them, to repay his debts. Jonathan Were re-established his fortunes sufficiently to enable him to return to England for a visit with his wife Frances and their family.

While in England, Were probably pursued the cause of separation of the Port Phillip District from New South Wales. Back in 1840, Were had joined in a 'Committee of Three' to draft a presentation to Westminster, demanding separation from the original colony. Meanwhile, Westminster had been re-examining the causes of the loss of the treasured American colonies. They realised that self-government was the solution to retain the larger, prosperous Australian colonies. The result of the 'Were Committee' demand was that the Legislative Council of NSW was changed from a chamber of appointed councillors to a chamber of thirty-six members, two-thirds elected, of whom six would represent the Port Phillip district. This arrangement did not satisfy the people of Melbourne, as the cost and time for attending Sydney meetings made this impossible. The situation became farcical and in 1848 the district elected the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey of London, to represent them; Fawkner was one of those who seconded his nomination.

It is possible that, while Were was in London pushing his case for separation, he met a brilliant young university undergraduate, Hugh Eardly Childers, who had been attending Westminster, where they were already debating the establishment of a new colony based on the Port Phillip district. Childers had a great ambition to enter politics but, with no private income, he decided that the imminent establishment of the new colony in Australia would provide him with his best chance. Thanks to his family connections, he received an introduction from Earl Grey to the superintendent of Port Phillip District, Charles La Trobe.

The Weres and the newly-weds, Hugh and Emily Childers, were fellow passengers on the *Northumberland* when it left England in July 1850, only six months after the twenty-one-year-old Hugh had received his degree. The Weres befriended the young couple and introduced them to Melbourne society, such as it was. In later years, Emily was known as the Belle of the Colony. She kept a diary while she was in Australia, which gives an insight into the life of a young, privileged woman in the raw colony. The Childers were often entertained at the Weres' home, *Moorabbin*, at Brighton. There Emily met and became friendly with Henry Foot's second wife, Sophia, and on occasions stayed with her at *Merriang Cottage*.

