THE CRUCIBLE YEARS

Van Diemens's Land, 1820-1824

The Seven Ordeals of

WILLIAM ROADKNIGHT

Praise for **The Crucible Years**

A very engaging account of William Roadknight's extraordinary trials and tribulations. A pleasure to read.

Mary Ramsay

Pete's writing about William Roadknight's years in Tasmania is filled with both enthusiasm for the topic and intimate knowledge of his subject. Quite an amazing story!

Bob Wakelin

Pete has a very accessible writing style which makes the extraordinary life of William Roadknight an exciting read. Pete's book makes everything clear in terms of timeline, events and the extraordinary resilience and courage of William. I thoroughly recommend this book.

Jocelyn Dexter

True stories resonate the most to me. This is an incredible one which comes alive and has memorable insights into early Tasmanian history.

Allister Haynes

THE CRUCIBLE YEARS

The Seven Ordeals of WILLIAM ROADKNIGHT

Pete Stebbins PhD

The Crucible Years: The Seven Ordeals of William Roadknight
© Dr Pete Stebbins PhD
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Thank you, Jim!

Without your encouragement,
this book would never have happened.

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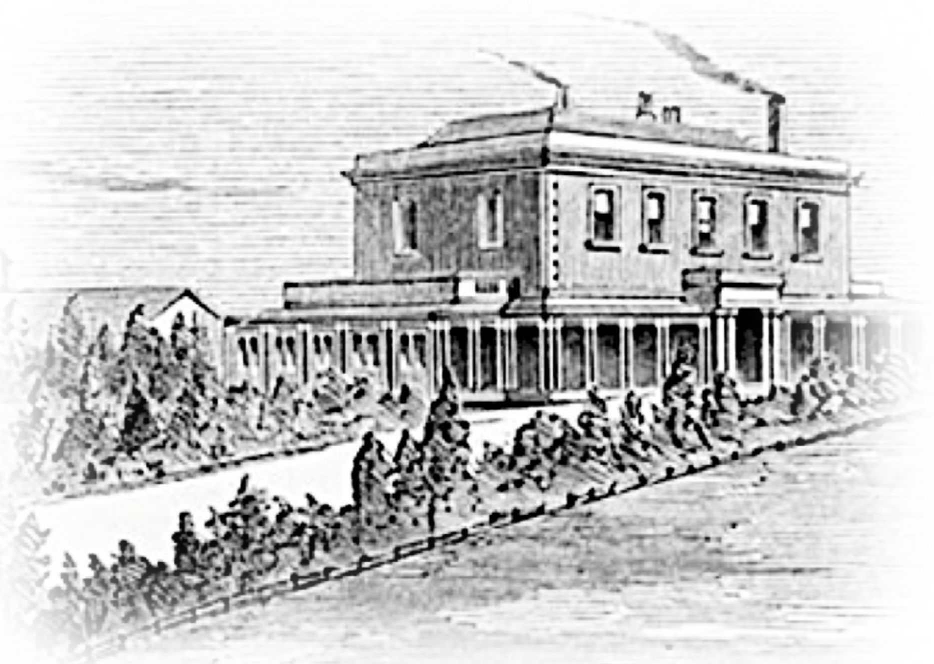
Introduction

From Disasters Come Dynasties



Introduction

From Disasters Come Dynasties

The wound is the place where the Light enters you.
— Rumi

My name is Pete Stebbins, and I am an author and Clinical Psychologist. As a child growing up, my grandparents would tell me amazing stories of my ancestors immigrating to Australia and becoming pioneers, settling in new lands. As I grew older, the stories about one particular ancestor, William Roadknight (1792-1862) were told to me in much more detail. His tragedies and triumphs — charged with attempted murder, wrongful conviction, a convict prison island, a rescue voyage, free pardon, land grants, philanthropy…

I must admit that, at the time, many of these stories seemed a bit farfetched, akin to hearing a 'fisherman's tale' of how big their catch was; no doubt there was some truth to it but also likely a bit of exaggeration. I was an adult now—consumed with my own life, work, marriage, and family, and these stories, as fanciful as they were, would be things I'd politely smile about but otherwise set aside in my mind. It was something to ponder upon another day… until one day, 'another day' finally arrived and the truth hit me like a brick: there was no 'fisherman's tale' of exaggeration in the story of William Roadknight; it was quite the opposite. In fact, the story had been understated and the truth was more incredible than I could have possibly imagined!

On the face of it, this book is about the story of my great, great, great, great, great grandfather, William Roadknight, who became a wealthy pastoralist and philanthropist in 19th century Australia. But beneath the surface, this book is about courage, compassion and triumph over adversity… about the 'crucible years' in someone's life—the critical life stages we all go through where choices must be made. These are the choices in which our ultimate destiny is shaped.

It is sad to think about it, but on Tuesday 25 November 1862, William's life ended. After suffering from a chronic bout of gastritis, he died alone at home in Geelong, Victoria, Australia, aged seventy. His actual death was just like his own father's had been—unassuming and stoic to the end. Just like his father, William downplayed his chronic illness to his family, preferring that his death did not burden his children and disrupt their own busy lives.

However, the circumstances of William's death were the complete opposite of his father. William had spent his final years living in his sprawling 17-room mansion on his 35-acre riverfront estate. He was a self-made wealthy Australian man in the mid 19th century and pillar of his local community and church; he should have been content and proud of all his achievements. Yet, at this point in time, surrounded by servants, he was somewhat bored, restless, and melancholic—the unexpected shadow that descends upon a man once he has fulfilled all his wildest dreams and more.

In contrast, William's father had died before his dreams could be realised — isolated within his cabin, deep in the bowels of a transport ship sailing from England to Van Diemen's Land (the colonial name of the island of Tasmania). The ship's journey had been an arduous one and was almost complete with land in sight. It must have been heartbreaking for William's father to feel the cold, inflexible hands of death finger at him. How grief-stricken he would have been, as he had not fulfilled his promise to guarantee his sons and wider family safe passage and a successful new start to life in the colonies.

There is a rich tale to be told about William's tumultuous years of tragedies and triumphs in Van Diemen's Land, which we'll dive into shortly. At the age of forty-six, William was drawn into the promise of riches in distant lands for the second time — in the newly established settlement of Port Phillip in Victoria.

By this time, he had overcome so much extreme adversity and begun to prosper in earnest with land grants, local business ventures, a position of authority in his local community, and strong hard-won government connections who shared his strong work ethic and fair-minded approach to matters of justice. Most of his children had now grown up, and he had remarried after his first wife passed away.

He moved from Van Diemen's Land to the new settlement of Port Phillip in Victoria. It is the right move as, in just over two decades, he built a massive rural empire which today would be worth over AUD $500 million.

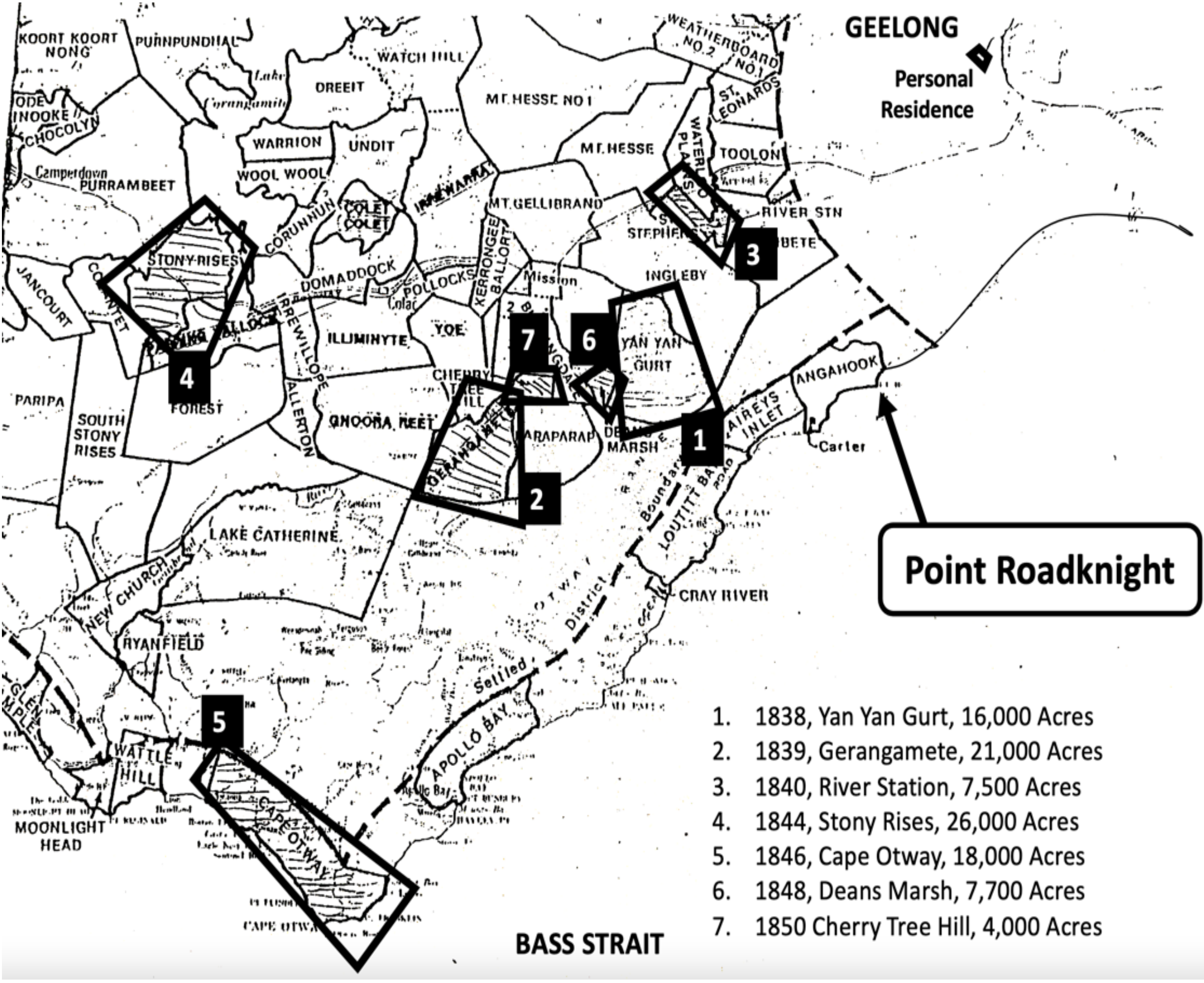
To give you a sense of the extent of William's success, at the peak of his prosperity, William Roadknight's landholdings were in excess of 100,000 acres. This was in western Victoria stretching from Geelong to beyond Cape Otway—including a length of what is now more famously known as 'The Great Ocean Road'.

William became one of the most influential pastoralists in Victoria and was one of the founding fathers of both the cities of Melbourne and Geelong. He was a devout Christian, philanthropist, and advocate for the protection of local indigenous communities. Such was his importance to the society of the time, that a major landmark, Point Roadknight near Anglesea, was named in his honour. However, his later success was built on the back of incredible personal suffering and injustice …

William Roadknight's life spans 1792-1862; it is some seventy years. If you were to draw up a timeline on a page and insert all the key events, the successes and failures, the triumphs and tragedies, there would be no blank space left. He crammed so much—what would have taken multiple lifetimes for others—into this one very intense and productive life.

What is of particular interest to me and the purpose of writing this book are the four years of William's life between the ages of 28-32 (1820-1824). These are what I term 'The Crucible Years'.

Within that specific period, there are tipping points… critical moments where the outcome hung in the balance, in which so many extraordinary events shaped his later successes in life. The story of what took place in these four years is not believable… except for the fact that historical records show it to be true.*


GEELONG
Personal Residence
Point Roadknight
BASS STRAIT
1. 1838, Yan Yan Gurt, 16,000 Acres
2. 1839, Gerangamete, 21,000 Acres
3. 1840, River Station, 7,500 Acres
4. 1844, Stony Rises, 26,000 Acres
5. 1846, Cape Otway, 18,000 Acres
6. 1848, Deans Marsh, 7,700 Acres
7. 1850 Cherry Tree Hill, 4,000 Acres
KOORT KOORT NONG
PURNPUNDIAL
WATCH HILL
DREEIT
MT. HESSE NO 1
WEATHERBOARD NO. 2
WEATHERBOARD NO. 1
ST. LEONARDS
WARRION
UNDIT
MT. HESSE
TOOLON
CHOCOLYN
PURRAMBEET
WOOL WOOL
COLET COLET
MT. GELLIBRAND
RIVER STN
STONY RISES
CORUNNUN
DOMADDOCK
POLLOCKS
BETE
INGLEBY
Mission
JANCOURT
ILLIMINYTE
YOE
YAN YAN GURT
IRREWILLOPE
ANGAHOOK
PARIPA
FOREST
ALLERTON
GNOORA REET
AIREYS INLET
SOUTH STONY RISES
MARSH
Carter
LOUTITT BAY
LAKE CATHERINE
CRAY RIVER
NEW CHURCH
District
Settled
RYANFIELD
APOLLO BAY
WATTLE HILL
MOONLIGHT HEAD
CAPE OTWAY

*We are fortunate to have access to a number of archival sources chronicling the life of William Roadknight which are listed in the reference section of this book. A standout among these is James Campbell's *'Many Parts: The Life & Times of William Roadknight'* which provides a treasure trove of facts and figures from his extensive archival research. It is from these sources that we can see that William was a man with great compassion – always caring for his family and community, and resilience – hammered and honed through surviving extreme hardship and injustice.

In the space of only four years, William endured seven major ordeals, or what we psychologists would call 'Major Stressful Life Events'. These were:

- Bereavement
- Displacement
- Terror
- Injustice
- Exile
- Survival
- Financial ruin.

Bereavement: in relation to the unexpected and sudden death of William's father on the voyage to Van Diemen's Land when William was twenty-eight years old.

Displacement: in relation to the isolation and dislocation of trying to establish himself and his family in Van Diemen's Land without his mentor and father (or any other family or friends of origin) to guide him.

Terror: in relation to the intimidation and threats of harm made against him and his family by drunken convict labourers masquerading as bushrangers who were a constant source of threat in the local areas.

Injustice: related to the biased investigation against him, charges of attempted murder, and his subsequent mistrial and wrongful conviction.

Exile: in being unlawfully sentenced to Sarah Island Prison colony away from any hope of seeing his wife and children for seven years.

Survival: in battling horrendous Southern Ocean storms for four days and nights. During that time, he staved off hypothermia, extreme fatigue, and hunger on a rescue mission back to Hobart Town.

Financial Ruin: in relation to having to sell up all his land and possessions to pay debtors so he could start all over again.

It is of no coincidence that the years between the ages of 28-32 were so poignant in his life; developmental psychologists know that the years around the age of thirty typically mark the transition phase whereby we finish the developmental task of intimacy vs isolation and then begin facing the challenges of generativity vs stagnation.

As I write this book some 200 years later, this developmental understanding still applies. Although I must acknowledge that some developmental stages may have been triggered somewhat earlier associated with social conventions of the time (i.e., younger age of marriage and entrance into the workforce).

In my own work as a Clinical Psychologist, I have seen many people wrestle with the challenges of intimacy vs isolation and generativity vs stagnation throughout their early 30s and beyond. In my early to mid-30s, I too, reached the apex of my own personal and professional struggles encircled by disasters on all fronts. In hindsight, this has deepened my appreciation and respect for William Roadknight's remarkable journey. *How on earth did he manage to continue to grow and develop so positively when he was subjected to so much suffering?*

The journey through life is never a straight line and, for most of us in our middle and later years, it looks more like a messy bowl of cooked spaghetti rather than the straight uncooked spaghetti in the packet! Vast amounts of detail, some remarkable and much of it trivial, make up the grand biopic of our lives. Wading through such extensive narratives to separate the remarkable from the trivial is only for the brave and curious few.

What is worthwhile, and most useful to study for our own personal growth and development, are the remarkable events, focusing on

critical moments on the timeline when someone finds themselves in the ‘Crucible’—tested and shaped by fire—where seeds of later life successes and/or failures were sown. These are the juicy bits—the interesting stuff, the stuff that makes us stop and think. It makes us think about our own life and the choices we make when, looking back, we become aware that hardships and challenges confronted us. These adverse life events give us a chance to get to know ourselves more, to tap into our own deeper reserves of resilience and grace, to take courage and set boundaries with others, to endure physical or emotional strain that, at times, seems never-ending, and to find a way to move forwards with the life that is still open before us.

So, join me in discovering these ‘Crucible Years’ in William Roadnight’s life. We’ll journey through William’s successes and failures; discover the differences between what people say and what people do; and learn of his hardship and victimisation… and then how he moved forward in his life.

The Epilogue presents my views on what made William ‘tick’; what drove him? How did William overcome the seven ordeals so that he became a resilient, powerful and successful man of his era? What special life lessons can we learn from him — life lessons that are hidden from ordinary view — that chart the path of his extraordinary success.

The Afterword provides insights into the missing link in the puzzle of how William made the jump from Van Diemen’s Land to Victoria – what drove him to such an extraordinary level of subsequent success and wealth.

These life lessons and insights are all entirely relevant to the challenges that many of us are facing over 200 years later!

Chapter 1

Prelude: The Dreamers of the Day

Chapter 1

Prelude: The Dreamers of the Day

All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible.
— T E Lawrence

In 1820, at the age of 28, William Roadknight began his year of transformation. William became, in the words of T. E. Lawrence: *'A dreamer of the day – where he acts on his dreams with open eyes, to make them possible.'*

The responsibility of the future of the Roadknight family moved from his dying father to rest firmly upon his shoulders. Even though he was the youngest son, there was an unspoken bond between him and his father in their duty to care for his older brother, Thomas, who had become quite unstable since returning from fighting the French at Waterloo (which we'll explain further shortly).

To understand the makings of William Roadknight, we must first briefly go back in time though, to see how he was brought up and the impact that his father's behaviour and expectations would have in shaping his character…

William was born in Dunchurch, Warwickshire, England, in 1792, the younger of the two sons of his parents, Thomas and Ann Roadknight. His brother, also named Thomas, was four years older. The name 'Roadknight' (meaning: *'freeman of mounted service'*) dates back to the thirteenth century, and for centuries the first two sons of the next generation were always named Thomas and William.

William's father was a leather worker in the market town of Dunchurch.

Leather work and saddlery were good businesses to be in at that time as horses were the main form of transportation across Britain. Also, Britain was at war with France (1793–1815); and the military were buying massive amounts of necessary arms and saddlery equipment.

Until the age of nine, William lived a sheltered village life in Dunchurch, travelling into the nearby township of Marton to attend the local church. It was a focal point for the wider community and a connection point for many young men in the district who would later join the military and/or immigrate to the colonies. Then, in 1801, he and his family move to London.

At this point, I have to ask why? Why move the whole family from a rural village to a big city like London? It was a fair distance of over 75 miles for that day and age…

Historical records reveal two major trends that would have shaped such a decision in 1801. The first being the agricultural revolution that was taking place where the local village commons were privatised by the elite, both reducing available farmland and horses with intensive farming methods. This increased hardship and poverty in the village and drove many families off the land and into the cities to work in factories. The second being the boom in war-related business available in London. By 1801, as many as one in four adult males in Britain were employed as soldiers and other armed service personnel, and they were all congregating in the major cities and ports.

In this context, the rural location of a declining saddlery business had much less potential than a booming saddlery business based in a major city. Thomas Snr, William's father, was an astute businessman and entrepreneur; he could sense the 'winds of change'. London was clearly the right opportunity for his saddlery business, but one can only imagine the turmoil and angst as he made that life-changing decision. Imagine the mix of excitement and trepidation his family must have felt on the long journey down through the middle of England, from rural villages to larger towns and cities, as they strategically relocated to the northern edges of London.

The new location for their business and life was in Aldergate, on the great northern road to Edinburgh. This was a smart location to set up shop, as it was where all the traffic of enlisted soldiers and militia passed by. Therefore, it was an obvious location where saddlery was 'top of

mind' for an ever-growing number of soldiers and citizens who were at the beginning or end of long trips where quality horse equipment was essential.

After the move and through the good connections of his father, William attended a private school until he turned fifteen. At that age, just like his older brother, he left school and started his apprenticeship in the family's saddlery business.

But unlike his brother, William didn't complete his apprenticeship in the family business. Instead, in 1809, William stopped partway through this training, and, with the blessing of his father, he left the family business and became a clerk at the Bank of England where he stayed for the next eleven years.

Again, it is here that we have to ask why? Why stop his apprenticeship? Why would William's own father encourage him to leave the family business? Why, in 1809?

By 1809, Britain had been at war with France for sixteen years and there was still no end in sight (peace was not finally achieved until 1815). The cost of the drawn-out war with France was causing massive economic strain, and a recession was looming. The industrial revolution was proceeding rapidly since the advent of machine based harvesting and manufacturing methods. There were increasing numbers of textile mills and factories built in major towns and cities. Urban population growth was rising while the communities in rural areas were rapidly shrinking. There was also a poor harvest in 1809 with much industrial unrest, and inflation was on the rise. One can only imagine the hardships to which the British population was succumbing.

In 1809, historical records indicate that merchants, such as Thomas Roadknight, who eight years earlier had secured the financial survival of the family by leaving rural England to become a London merchant, were now struggling. Previously, he had cashed in on the rise of a rapidly growing military sector and increased patronage of horse-drawn transport between London and other major cities. But, once again, times had changed; Much of the British economy completely collapsed overburdened with the expense of a protracted war.

Eight years earlier, William's father had demonstrated an uncanny ability to sense the 'winds of change' when he moved his family and saddlery

business from Dunchurch to London. Once again, the environment was rapidly changing. He was likely concerned about his family's financial future and the need to have work for his sons. In 1809, the only secure jobs with any guarantee of longevity would have been in the military, banking, and government.

And therefore, the reasoning for Thomas Snr urging his younger son, William, to leave the family business prematurely and become a clerk at the Bank of England becomes obvious. Further, it is a testament to his father's willingness to set aside pride in the family business in order to safeguard his son's future prospects and career (an important marker we'll revisit much later in the story). William's older brother, Thomas, joined the military in 1810. Thus, their father ensured that both sons had secure jobs. No doubt, he had infused them with some of his insights on how to 'read the environment' and consider the steps needed to set themselves up for future success.

And so it was that in 1812, at the age of nineteen, William married another Aldergate local – twenty-one-year-old Harriet White. As William was only nineteen, he required his father's consent and one can only assume, yet again, the guiding hand of his father in more major life decisions. Over the next four years, William and Harriet had three sons: Thomas, William, and Henry, and a daughter, Harriet.

During this time, William continued to work as a clerk in the Bank of England, whilst his father ran the saddlery business and his older brother served in the military.

During his military career, Thomas Jnr was promoted to Captain of Dragoons under the Duke of Wellington and fought against Napoleon's French forces in the latter stages of the Peninsular War (1812–1815). Whilst against the French, Thomas became friends with another younger soldier, John Montagu (who becomes a key figure, many years later, in Van Diemen's Land).

After the Second Peace of Paris in 1815, Thomas stayed on in France as part of the allied occupying force for several years. When Thomas returned to England in 1818 as a war veteran on half pay, he appeared to be struggling with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – a condition which seemed to plague him intermittently for the rest of his life. The likely PTSD diagnosis is based on the combination of three factors:

(1) The high incidence of PTSD in veterans who had seen active combat (and the fact that the battles between the British and French armed forces during the Peninsular Wars are regarded by historians as some of the 'bloodiest' conflicts of the era).

(2) Archival documents indicate Thomas suffered *'a series of misfortunes'* (unspecified) and didn't take up any further occupation upon return to London, instead relying on government benefits. Later on, in Van Diemen's Land he would be indisposed *'because he was too much under the influence of his medicine'* on multiple occasions causing all sorts of problems with Government Officials who had employed him, and

(3) Thomas, for the remainder of his life, does not appear to develop any significant additional relationships beyond his immediate family and military associates. Neither are there any known romantic connections that may have led towards marriage, despite this being a normal pattern across generations of his family.

PTSD in the 18th Century

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been around for thousands of years albeit in earlier names.

Deuteronomy, a book in the Bible, refers to soldiers removed from the front lines because of 'nervous breakdowns'. Jean Froissart, a Medieval chronicler and an observer of the Hundred Years War (1337-1400), noted that soldiers were awakened in their sleep by nightmares of war.

By the 18th century in Europe, there were numerous vivid accounts of soldiers having violent and panicked reactions that occurred long after battles had ceased, and which also would afflict soldiers who witnessed such events but were not actually physically harmed themselves.

In the mid-1800s the German physician, Hermann Oppenheim, described these symptoms as 'hysteria' or a kind of 'traumatic neurosis', describing this in war veterans and in victims of railway accidents.

By 1818, in the aftermath of the protracted war with France, there was an economic depression across Britain. The cost of food rose, unemployment increased, and wages for workers were reduced.

Merchants such as William's father would have been in constant discussions with colleagues about the grim state of things in London. One can only imagine that they would also have discussed where the

more favourable 'winds of change' may have been blowing… where the next opportunities might be. The opportunity for riches in new colonies of Britain would, most likely, have been a hot topic of conversation, as it was the focal point of many newspaper stories and books at the time. Britain now had over twenty colonies, including Tobago, Mauritius, Malta, St Lucia, the Cape, and the United Provinces of Āgra and Oudh in India. More than 200 million people were governed; at the time, this was 26 percent of the world's total population.

William's father, as previously noted, took his role as a family provider very seriously, with a long-standing pattern of worrying about current circumstances and staying attuned to emerging opportunities.

William, now a man in his twenties with his own family to look after, had no doubt inherited his father's sense of responsibility to provide for his family. In this context, it is likely William saw his father as a role model and had a deep trust in his father's wisdom and guidance—promptly acting upon the ideas and strategies his father recommended.

The year 1818 appears to be pivotal for William, with several critical events occurring.

First, William's brother returned to London as a war veteran with PTSD. Thomas Jnr doesn't find work nor establish relationships easily upon his return and relies heavily on William and his wider family for support.

Second, William's mother Ann died. This would have been tragic for such a close family, and this left William's father a widower in a merchant business struggling in the postwar depression. This would have been a huge concern for William as he struggled with his own grief, whilst also providing support to his grieving father.

Finally, in addition to supporting his father and brother, William was working incredibly long hours. Reportedly, 10-12 hours a day, six days a week, was a common occurrence in commercial circles with even longer hours for many factory and clerical workers. This was all while raising his four young children, aged one to five, with Harriett.

In these increasingly difficult circumstances, it is likely that William's

father would have become increasingly convinced of the opportunities for new beginnings in the colonies. Being the man he was, despite his despondency, he would have continued to investigate 'a better way of life' for both him and his sons. Trusting his own instincts, as he had done successfully with previous major decisions, it seems almost certain that William's father became more and more vocal with his sons about the opportunities abroad.

Of all the possible colonial opportunities abroad, Van Diemen's Land stood out head and shoulders above the rest. The newspapers were reporting incredibly favourable descriptions of the opportunities for colonists in Van Dieman's Land based on the writings of Lieutenant Jefferies and Surveyor George Evans:

'The surface of Van Diemen's Land is richly variegated and diversified by range and moderate hills and broad valleys presenting the most agreeable scenes, and replete with whatever a rich soil and fine climate can produce. Large tracts of land, perfectly free from timber or underwood, and covered with luxuriant herbage, are to be found in all directions.'

Imagine the 'sales pitch' by William's father to his sons… He would have bemoaned their circumstances in England where they were many rungs down the ladder of social success; they were disconnected from privileges and opportunities of the upper class—having to hustle and be forever vigilant to the opportunity just to survive. On the other hand, he would have extolled the virtues of being a 'free settler' in a convict colony. They would be at the top of the social order, the first in line for all the privileges and opportunities that might arise with the benefit of convict servants to help them forge ahead as pioneers!

One can only imagine William's own musings about his father's vision of the future. He had complete trust in his father's uncanny knack of seeing the future and protecting the family, his reflections on his current social standing, the role of convicts in England, and the upper class with all their servants and estates…

After all, who doesn't wish for an easier life and daydream about future success from time to time? Those feelings are as relevant today as they were back then; it is human nature, isn't it?

William came to a decision. He started turning the dream of new beginnings in colonial Australia into action.

First, he began reading about life in the new colonies, researching land grants and farming, and having ever more expansive conversations with his father about their now combined vision of a life abroad. This was a vision that united their family. It was a vision of starting afresh, away from the old world—bringing much needed closure to the grief from his mother's death. His father and he set about creating a glorious new future where they would leave behind their mediocre existence. Throughout 1819, the stream of favourable reports about life in Van Diemen's Land continued:

'These tracts of land are invariably of the very best description, and millions of acres, which are capable of being instantly converted to all the purposes of husbandry, still remain unappropriated. Here the colonist has no expense to incur in clearing his farm: he is not compelled to a great preliminary outlay of capital, before he can expect a considerable return.'

Throughout 1819 and into early 1820, William continued to work as a clerk at the Bank of England. He raised his four children, attended church, supported his family (including his father and older brother). It was at this time that, as discussed with the family, the opportunity arose to apply to move to Van Diemen's Land. It was an exciting and mysterious penal colony now open to free settlers some 17,000kms away on the 'other side of the earth'. All were included in the application – his family, brother and father.

On 29 May 1820, William finally received his letter of resettlement permission and entitlement to land grants; Van Diemen's Land was a penal colony and, up until then, was not open to immigrant free settlers.

Timing everything to perfection, at the age of twenty-eight, William quit his job with the Bank of England. The very next day, on 7 July 1820, the family set sail on the ship, *SS Skelton,* to Van Diemen's Land. They were a cautiously optimistic group that included William's brother and father, as well as his wife, three sons, and daughter.

It was to be a five-month voyage, and it gave the Roadknight family a lot of time to talk together about their hopes and dreams for the next stage of their lives. Additionally, it provided them with the opportunity to build social relationships with the other free settlers that were also on the voyage.

Among the passengers and crew, two brothers, James and Robert O'Neill, were also on the voyage. They had similar letters of permission for resettlement to those of William and his own brother, Thomas. The O'Neill brothers, along with the ship's captain, Thomas Scott (who was also moving to Van Diemen's Land after the voyage), became regular evening conversation partners with the Roadknights.

As the voyage progressed, a deeper friendship developed between the two sets of brothers and Thomas Scott. Unbeknownst to them, at the time, this would sow the seeds of more tragic circumstances that would fall upon them a few years later.

Both Robert and James O'Neill were known to be an intriguing mix of heavy drinkers; they were prone to quarrelling, and yet, they were also fine scholars and intellectuals.

These latter positive characteristics no doubt created an easy friendship for William, who was a well read, devout, and respectful man. However, it is likely that he found the O'Neill brothers' heavy drinking and quarrelling much more challenging. From what we know of his character, this likely would have created an awkwardness for him at the late-night card playing sessions, which were frequent on the voyage. Unlike William, however, his brother Thomas, who was a former soldier, may have felt more at ease in these more rowdy moments of the voyage.

Three months into the voyage, just after disembarking from their first stop in Cape Town, South Africa, William's father grew sick and paid a visit to the ship's doctor. For the next two months, he 'suffered in silence' (with only a small reference to a 'sick' passenger noted in Captain Thomas Scott's logbook and no additional commentary noted in any family letters or wider archives). It doesn't appear that William's father sought any additional medical assistance throughout the remainder of the voyage; it is unclear why, but perhaps the news was not good, and he did not want to dwell on it. It is likely that he increasingly confined himself to his cabin whilst encouraging his sons to develop their friendships and connections with their fellow passengers who would soon be neighbours as free settlers in Van Diemen's Land.

On 25 November 1820, land was sighted as the South-West Cape of Van Diemen's Land came into view and the ship entered the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. In today's world, this is known as the

expanse of water between lunawuni / Bruny Island and the south-east mainland of Tasmania. Sadly, William's father was notably absent from all the buzz and excitement of the passengers and crew on the main deck.

Thomas Snr was down below, alone for much of the time – confined to his cabin. Tragically, just two days before arriving in Hobart Town, his chronic illness became too much and he died. In Captain Scott's logbook, there is a brief note about his deteriorating condition, and also his dying wish to make landfall before he perished … but it was not to be.

Given William's dedication to his father, he would have visited him regularly in his cabin as he grew sicker. As an intelligent man, he would no doubt have suspected that his father was much more ill than he was willing to admit.

In those last days of his father's life, it is likely that William would have been given much clearer instructions about how to represent the family and lobby for land grants upon arrival in Hobart Town; this would have been the role his father would have played.

It is also likely that William's father would have shared his worries and concerns about William's older brother, Thomas, and the need for William to 'watch over' him in the brave new world. These conversations would have, more than anything, indicated to William that his father was aware that he would not be able to do take on those responsibilities.

For William, having his father, the family patriarch, die prior to their arrival in Van Diemen's Land was a massive loss. William was very much accustomed to being in the role of supportive son, trusting and relying upon his father's guidance. It is unlikely that he would have yet acquired his father's wisdom in understanding the complexities of social order and how to navigate the political and economic complexities of the time.

Was William aware of this 'missing link' in his adult development? Perhaps he believed he was ready for this next challenge and his humility, faith, and work ethic would be enough to ensure his future success? Perhaps his naïve excitement and optimism about the next chapter of his life and confidence in the new relationships he was forming on the voyage had created a misguided overestimation of his ability to assume the role of family patriarch? Perhaps William's father felt it best to withhold some of his own worries and insights about the foreseeable risks of the immediate future? Sadly, towards the end, time had run out; William's father was simply just too sick to engage in conversations with William, beyond what was absolutely necessary.

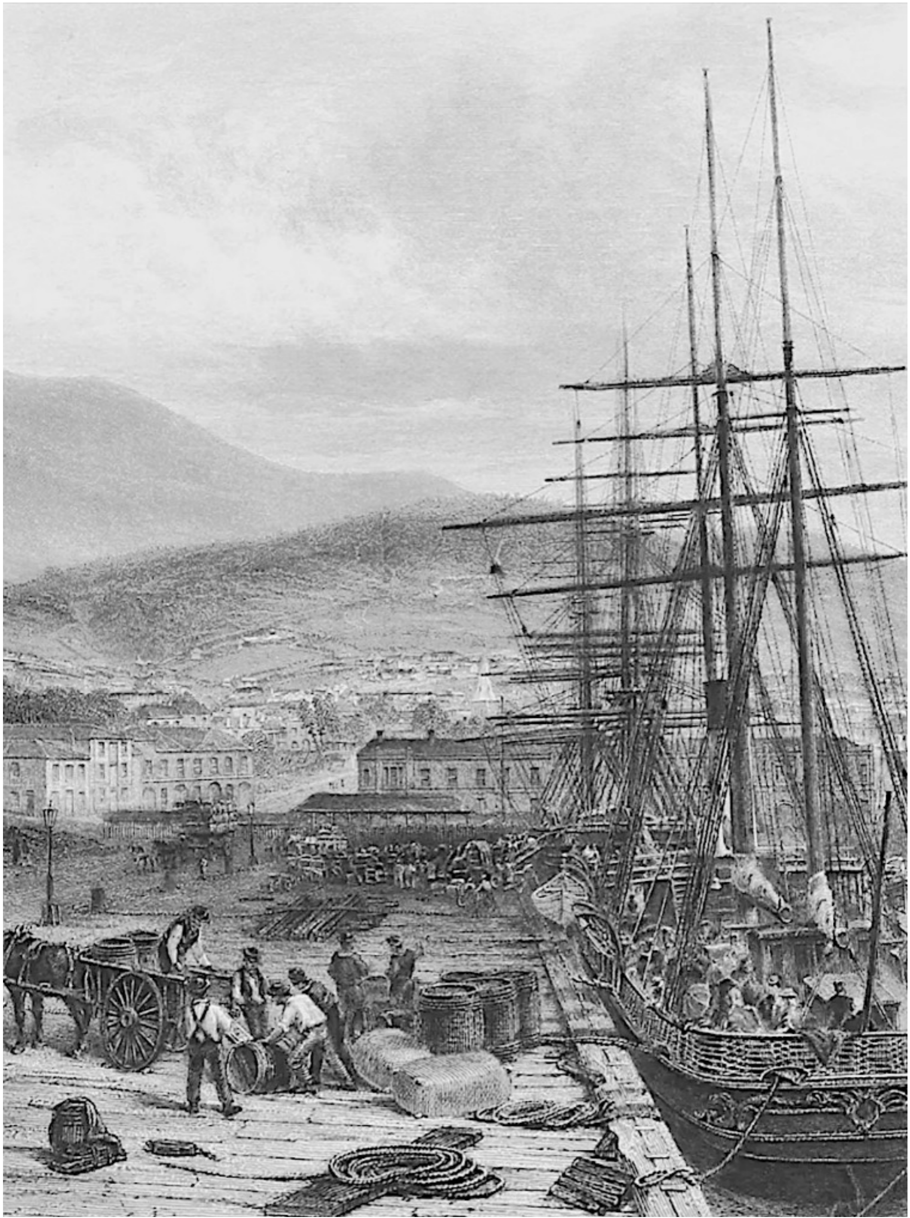
Two days after William's father died, their ship arrived in Hobart Town, docking on 27 November 1820. Immediately upon arrival, William organised for his father to be buried discretely after a small funeral service at St David's Church the following day (the site of which is now St David's Park in Hobart). It was to be some 42 years later that William's own funeral and burial followed this same modest pattern … but we are getting ahead of ourselves here.

And so, in 1820, it began: William Roadknight arrived in Hobart Town, grieving the death of his father, supporting his war veteran brother, and needing to urgently establish himself and provide for his wife and four children. William was filled with an intense desire to fulfill his late father's legacy – the vision of creating a dynasty in this new colony.

William was now well and truly in the throes of 'The Crucible Years' of 1820–1824. He was not to know that these would devastate and destroy him before he would rise like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes to eventually live the dream of a family dynasty that would last for generations to come …

Chapter 2

Duped: The Bad Luck of Good Luck



Chapter 2

Duped: The Bad Luck of Good Luck

Wisdom consists of knowing how to distinguish the nature of trouble, and in choosing the lesser evil.
— Niccolo Machiavelli

Having just buried his father, William had no time to waste. He had to set aside the still raw emotions and grief from the death of his father, the family patriarch and mentor, who had overseen his own and his brother's safety and prosperity for twenty-eight years.

William now had to assume the role of patriarch, the family protector, for his own young family and for his brother. He had to focus intently on the urgent and immediate tasks that lay ahead. First, find shelter and accommodation for his family and his brother in Hobart Town. Second, meet with Governor Sorrell, who presided over the settlement, to hand over their letters of authority.

The backstory to Hobart Town provides some important context. For thousands of years, the area had been a sustainable habitat for the indigenous Paredarerme people on the northern side of the Derwent River, and the Nuenonne people on the Southern side. Then, in 1803, a large group of British convicts and settlers, under the command of David Collins (Lieutenant Governor) landed and settled in the area after an unsuccessful attempt at colonising Port Phillip Bay in what would later become the state of Victoria. In 1803, there were two British settlements on the banks of the Derwent River—Risdon Cove on the northeastern side and Sullivan's Cove on the southwestern side.

Sullivan's Cove quickly became the main settlement and the site on which Hobart Town was founded in 1804 as an official British colonial

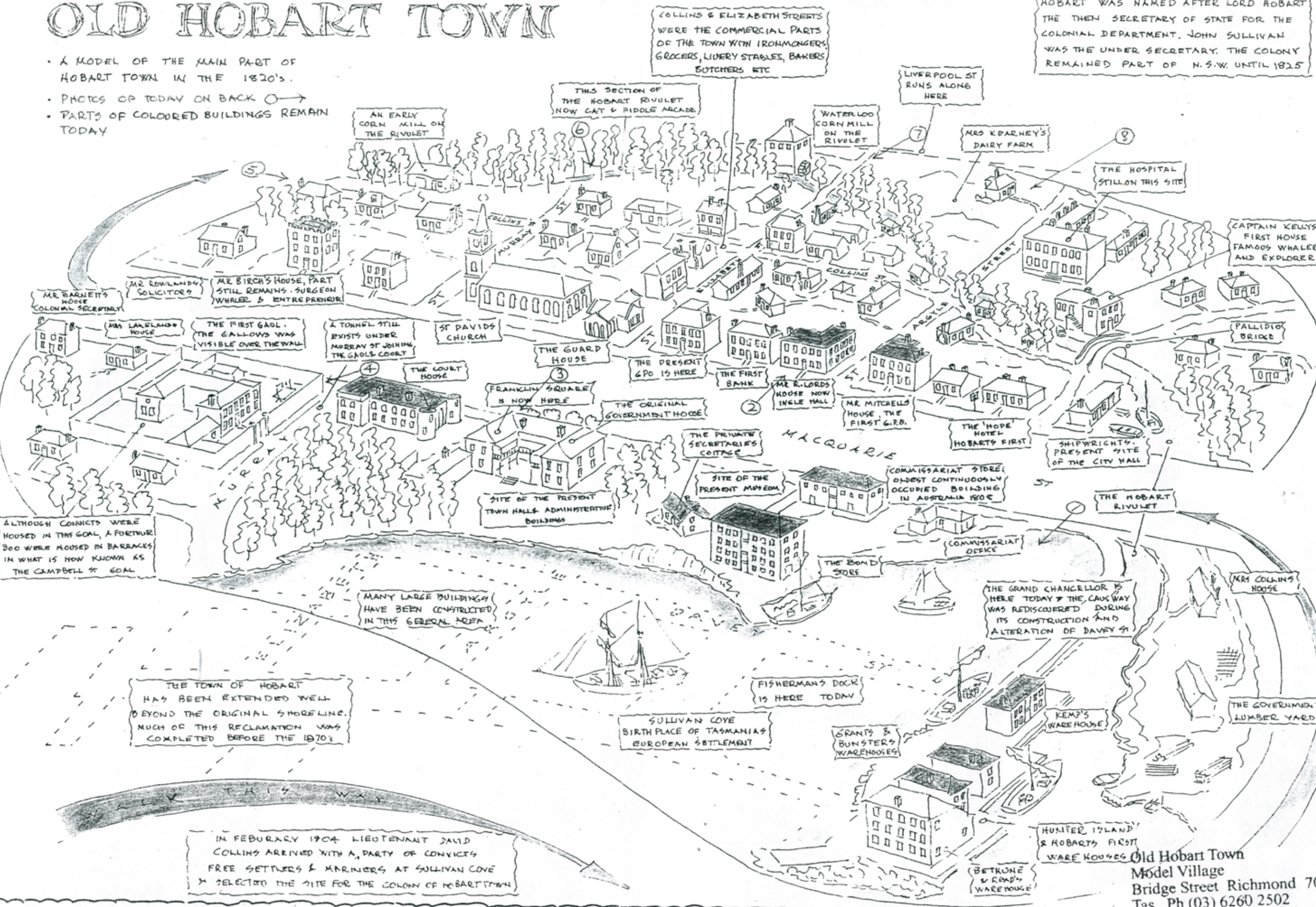
outpost and penal settlement. One year later, when the Norfolk Island penal colony was closed, its inhabitants were relocated to Hobart Town. This event swelled the population to create an actual 'township' of convicts, soldiers, and administrators.

Over the next few years, Hobart Town developed as a mix of penal colony and 'newly' freed settlers (former convicts who had completed their sentences). During these early years, extensive hunting for kangaroo meat which depleted local stocks fed the town and led to inland exploration for further hunting. Additionally, there was land clearing for the grazing of the imported cattle and sheep stock (which would gradually replace the over-reliance on kangaroo meat).

There were high hopes of large-scale farming and agriculture endeavours in years to come as initial lands were cleared and crops and cattle runs were established by government workers and convicts. By 1811, there were about 1500 people in residence, mostly in wooden huts and temporary shelters.

After the death of Lieutenant Governor David Collins in 1810, there were several years of instability in the leadership of the colony, as subsequently appointed governors changed several times. During these unstable years of governance, Hobart Town quickly degenerated to a state of anarchy. There was a complete breakdown of law and order. Abuses of privilege were rife among the established officers and administrators of the prison colony, and convict labourers were under little control. Many of the convicts escaped into the wilderness. They became gangs of bushrangers who terrorised many outlying settlers without any fear of capture or punishment.

There was never enough stability within the government to bring any of these issues under control until 1816, when William Sorrell was appointed as governor with a directive to restore law and order. Sorrell quickly did exactly what was needed to restore order: capturing and executing a number of bushrangers and convening meetings in the township to collaboratively develop a plan to restore law and order across the colony. These initiatives were well publicised by the local newspaper, the *Hobart Town Gazette*, which was a key source of news and information across the colony.


OLD HOBART TOWN
• A MODEL OF THE MAIN PART OF HOBART TOWN IN THE 1820's.
• PHOTOS OF TODAY ON BACK
• PARTS OF COLOURED BUILDINGS REMAIN TODAY
HOBART WAS NAMED AFTER LORD HOBART THE THEN SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIAL DEPARTMENT. JOHN SULLIVAN WAS THE UNDER SECRETARY. THE COLONY REMAINED PART OF N.S.W. UNTIL 1825
COLLINS & ELIZABETH STREETS WERE THE COMMERCIAL PARTS OF THE TOWN WITH IRONMONGERS GROCERS, LIVERY STABLES, BAKERS BUTCHERS ETC
THIS SECTION OF THE HOBART RIVULET NOW CAT & FIDDLE ARCADE
AN EARLY CORN MILL ON THE RIVULET
WATERLOO CORN MILL ON THE RIVULET
LIVERPOOL ST RUNS ALONG HERE
MRS KEARNEY'S DAIRY FARM
THE HOSPITAL STILL ON THIS SITE
CAPTAIN KELLYS FIRST HOUSE FAMOUS WHALER AND EXPLORER
PALLIDIO BRIDGE
MR BARNETTS HOUSE COLONIAL SECRETARY
MR ROWLANDS SOLICITORS
MR BIRCH'S HOUSE, PART STILL REMAINS. SURGEON WHALER & ENTREPRENEUR
MRS LAKELANDS HOUSE
THE FIRST GAOL. THE GALLOWS WAS VISIBLE OVER THE WALL
A TONNEL STILL EXISTS UNDER MURRAY ST JOINING THE GAOLS COORT
ST DAVIDS CHURCH
THE COURT HOUSE
THE GUARD HOUSE
FRANKLIN SQUARE IS NOW HERE
THE PRESENT GPO IS HERE
THE FIRST BANK
MR R. LORDS HOUSE NOW INGLE HALL
MR MITCHELLS HOUSE, THE FIRST G.P.O.
THE 'HOPE' HOTEL HOBARTS FIRST
SHIPWRIGHTS. PRESENT SITE OF THE CITY HALL
THE ORIGINAL GOVERNMENT HOUSE
THE PRIVATE SECRETARIES COTTAGE
SITE OF THE PRESENT MUSEUM
COMMISSARIAT STORE. OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY OCCUPIED BUILDING IN AUSTRALIA 1808
SITE OF THE PRESENT TOWN HALL & ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDINGS
THE HOBART RIVULET
COMMISSARIAT OFFICE
THE BOND STORE
ALTHOUGH CONVICTS WERE HOUSED IN THIS GOAL, A FORTHUR 300 WERE HOUSED IN BARRACKS IN WHAT IS NOW KNOWN AS THE CAMPBELL ST GOAL
MANY LARGE BUILDINGS HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED IN THIS GENERAL AREA
THE GRAND CHANCELLOR IS HERE TODAY & THE CAUSWAY WAS REDISCOVERED DURING ITS CONSTRUCTION AND ALTERATION OF DAVEY ST
MRS COLLINS HOUSE
THE TOWN OF HOBART HAS BEEN EXTENDED WELL BEYOND THE ORIGINAL SHORELINE. MUCH OF THIS RECLAMATION WAS COMPLETED BEFORE THE 1870's
FISHERMANS DOCK IS HERE TODAY
SULLIVAN COVE BIRTH PLACE OF TASMANIAS EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT
GRANTS & BUNSTERS WAREHOUSES
KEMP'S WAREHOUSE
THE GOVERNMENT LUMBER YARD
HUNTER ISLAND & HOBARTS FIRST WARE HOUSES
BETHUNE & READ'S WAREHOUSE
WALK THIS WAY
IN FEBURARY 1804 LIEUTENANT DAVID COLLINS ARRIVED WITH A PARTY OF CONVICTS FREE SETTLERS & MARINERS AT SULLIVAN COVE & SELECTED THE SITE FOR THE COLONY OF HOBART TOWN
COLLINS
MURRAY
ELIZABETH
ARGYLE
STREET
MACQUARIE
ST
Old Hobart Town
Model Village
Bridge Street Richmond 7025
Tas. Ph (03) 6260 2502

Governor William Sorrell (1775-1848)
Sorrell governed from 1816-1824 and throughout this time Van Diemen's Land was under the supervision of the Colony of New South Wales. This limited Sorell's authority on matters of land grants and legal affairs. He had to walk a fine line between appeasing the, at times, inappropriate expectations of the locally important politicians and families whilst ensuring fairness, justice and improved living conditions for all free settlers and convicts as per the terms of his appointment as Governor. Quotes about his character include: *"He was a man of active mind and shrewd penetration, affable and gentlemanly in the extreme; there was a facility of access to his person at all hours, and his desire to please every individual applicant greatly added to his popularity; with him there was no austerity, no wish to have favours begged; on the contrary, to ask was to have if it was in Sorell's power to grant, and few applicants overheard him express the monosyllable 'no.' Whilst thus affable, the dignity of his person, as well as his general deportment, commanded respect; and no man, ever so intimate, was known to treat him otherwise than as a governor."* History of Tasmania (J. Fenton, 1884).

By 1818, the British Government, as part of its post-war economic recovery program, decided to fast track the development of their colonies to boost revenue and trade. The decision was made to open Van Diemen's Land to immigrant free settlers with the offer of free land grants. So it was that convict labour, and a steady stream of free settlers, began to arrive directly from Britain. This decision put enormous development pressure on the government of Van Diemen's Land, as they were required to have surveyed lands ready to be granted to new settlers upon arrival. Thus, the pace of exploration and British occupation across Van Diemen's Land swiftly accelerated with gradually escalating irreversible consequences on the local indigenous population*.

*** British Colonialisation and the Indigenous People in Van Diemen's Land**
The impact of British Colonialisation on Indigenous People in Van Diemen's Land has been well documented by many authors. British colonialisation of Van Diemen's Land was progressive and ultimately devastating for the entire indigenous population.
For William Roadknight, the trials and tribulations he would face during his Crucible Years (1820-1824) would not be the result of any interactions with Indigenous People but rather due to the motives and actions of his fellow free settlers, government officials, and convict prisoners. It is the scope of these interactions which defines the focus of this book.
For readers wishing to understand the broader context of the impact of British Colonialisation on the Indigenous People in Van Diemen's Land there are many great reference sources, and a good starting point is to read James Boyce's *Van Diemen's Land* (2008).

At the end of 1820 (when William arrived), Hobart Town was rapidly growing but also was a very dangerous place. Rapidly growing in that the population had risen to over 7400 people in residence with over 420 permanent houses now built in the city (see map of 'Old Hobart Town') and a sprawl of wooden huts and shelters expanding further up the river as more settlements and land grants were assigned to arriving free settlers. Very dangerous because, despite Governor Sorrell's re-establishment of law and order, there was still much anxiety about a possible convict rebellion with only 4 free persons in the population, for every 6 convicts.

The *Hobart Town Gazette* regularly reported convict rebellion rumours and the possibility of convicts overrunning the township and replacing the government. Hobart Town was still subject to extreme violence, jail escapes and robberies, with the corresponding countermeasures of the authorities including hangings, lashes, and ever harsher prison sentences involving chain gangs and hard labour.

In response to this ongoing crisis, and in need of even more extreme punishments, the government announced the construction of a new more remote and desolate convict prison on Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbour.

This was deep in the south-west wilderness, and would become operational by 1821. This, they claimed, would be the 'ultimate punishment' for the worst prisoners who re-offended.

For the newly arrived Roadknight family and other free settlers, the safest place to stay in Hobart Town was to remain on board their docked ship. The Roadknights were able to do so until late December 1820. Every Sunday though, they would disembark and attend St David's Anglican Church—the only church in Hobart Town, along with over 800 other parishioners from the township.

Just like it had been in their village in rural England, attending Sunday Service was both a focal point for those with a Christian faith and also an important place to make a public display of their good nature and social standing. Sunday Service at St David's was the main place (aside from drinking at hotels and holding impromptu street-side gatherings) where government officials and free settlers (both established and newly arrived) could meet together informally to build relationships essential for survival and prosperity in the new colony.

The Roadknights' Land Grants as Free Settlers were finalised at a meeting with Governor Sorell on 4 December 1820, along with others who arrived on the *SS Skelton*.

Unbeknownst to William, just two months prior, the government had abandoned its own farmland in the upper Derwent River declaring it to be unsuitable for the government's stocks of grazing cattle. The land was re-purposed and approved to be sub-divided and granted to newly arriving settlers. This cleared farmland lay on the outskirts of known civilization at the time, beyond which lay only wilderness, bush rangers and distant native tribes. However, the granting of already cleared farmlands would have been seen to be a 'lucky' gift for settlers who received it, but realistically it would also be a challenge for them to prosper on.

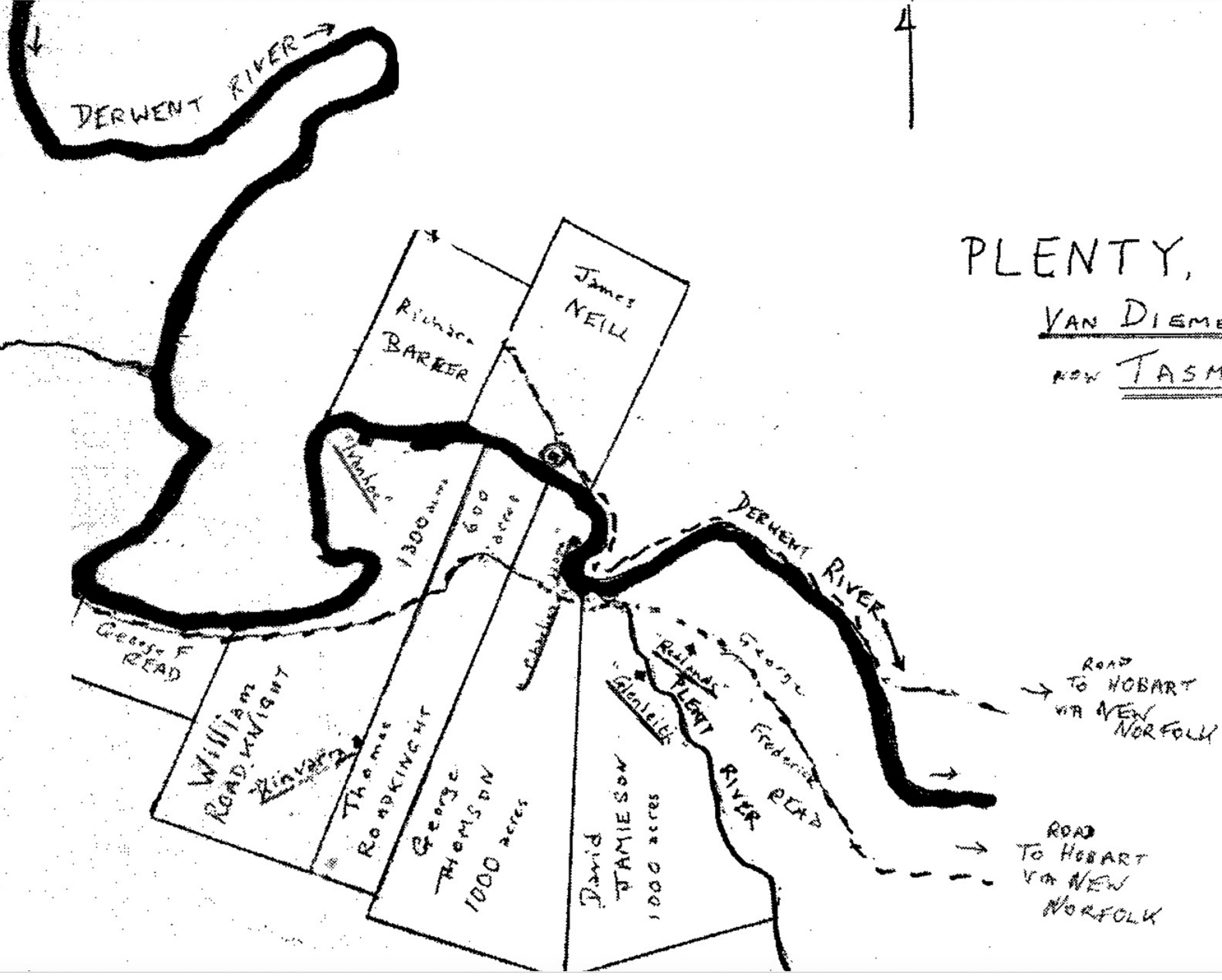
In 1820, there were no detailed maps of the settled areas of Van Diemen's Land available to the public, with the first appearing in 1821 (see diagram). So, William would not have been able to see his land grant in the context of the wider settlement, but rather would have had to rely on the hand-drawn maps of the district provided by surveyors at the time. Nonetheless, there was no getting away from the fact that he was going to live on the outer edge of known civilisation.

William, in the absence of his father, led the family at the meeting for the Land Grant, with his brother accompanying him. After William presented the three letters of introduction from the British government (one for his deceased father and one each for himself and Thomas), Governor Sorell allotted a total of 2,000 acres of land between them.

At this same meeting, their friend James O'Neill was granted 1,000 acres on a neighbouring allotment across the Derwent River (see diagram). One can only guess how positive this must have felt for everyone concerned, given the friendship that had developed on the long voyage from England and the fact that the lands had already been cleared by the government.

Bestowing such a large land grant with already cleared lands would have been a huge blessing for William, but its location on the outer edges of civilisation would have been a concern for his wife, Harriet. Would they be safe? Would they be attacked by bushrangers? How would they get help if an accident happened?

One can only imagine the conversation between William and Harriet. Like many couples, they would likely have argued the pros and cons of their location: a great expanse of land, views, tranquility, uninterrupted privacy, and safety from all the conflict and violence in Hobart Town, on one hand. Yet, on the other hand, there was isolation, loneliness, and insecurity should they find themselves attacked by bushrangers or suffering from some sort of accident or misfortune.


PLENTY,
VAN DIEMEN'S LAN
now TASMANIA
DERWENT RIVER
DERWENT RIVER
ROAD TO HOBART VIA NEW NORFOLK
ROAD TO HOBART VIA NEW NORFOLK
PLENTY RIVER
George Frederick READ
Redlands
Glenleith
James NEILL
Richard BARKER
1300 acres
600 acres
Ivanhoe
David JAMIESON
1000 acres
George THOMSON
1000 acres
Thomas ROADKNIGHT
William ROADKNIGHT
George F READ

Once William received his land grant, he immediately began the task of settling his property. He travelled with his family and his assigned convict labour (totalling ten convicts until their sentences were completed) out past the township of New Norfolk and just a few kilometres past the newest settlement of Plenty (approximately 50km up the Derwent River from Hobart Town).

Upon arriving at his newly granted lands, William surveyed the scene from a grassy hill at the centre of his vast property and knew he was incredibly lucky! When he was given his land grant in Hobart Town he, his brother Thomas, and the O'Neills had only been advised of the property boundaries and total acres they were assigned and had no idea of the topography of the land itself. But here he was now, standing on the grassy hill which marked the centre of his lands. To the south, cleared pastures continued up an undulating slope to the distant hills beyond. To the west more flat, fertile ground led down to the western reaches of the Derwent River. To the east, his brother Thomas' lands, also a mixture of gently sloping hills and river flats. And to his north, the grassy hill he stood upon sloped down onto a broad promontory of land, like a ships bow, standing tall and wide over a long, straight stretch of the Derwent River with majestic river gums lining the river bank below. This was the perfect site for a homestead which William immediately began to build – an eight room dwelling facing north across the river with sweeping views from every room – the foundations of which are still visible today.

William's property was topographically far superior to all his neighbours adjoining his boundaries and his neighbours across the river. There must have been a degree of envy or even jealousy from James O'Neill whose lands were on the opposite river bank and faced south with his home site sitting lower on the river flats looking up towards the majestic site of the Roadknight homestead standing proud, high on the opposite bank of the river – still bathed in sunlight as the afternoon shadows darkened all the surrounding lands.

Whilst William was building his eight-room homestead, he was also ploughing some of the pastures for planting. William's intention was to have a mixed farm of wheat crop, fruit trees, market gardens, sheep, and

cattle. Progress was much faster than he could have hoped for thanks to the already cleared lands, for which his brother Thomas shared the same good fortune and one would imagine that the Roadknight brothers were most definitely feeling that their luck 'was in'...

William named his property "Ivanhoe". This name was from the famous three-volume historical romance and adventure novel set in the 12th century, written by Walter Scott and published a year earlier.

In the novel, the protagonist, Wilfred of Ivanhoe, is disinherited by his father for supporting a foreign ruler and for falling in love with a woman who was a descendant of an opposing family dynasty. From there, a series of epic challenges and adventures follow until at last Wilfred and Rowena finally marry and live happily ever after.

The novel was the equivalent of a modern-day action adventure written mainly for a male audience where the hero must fight and overcome the evil forces to win his lady's heart. As a side note, it is claimed that much of the Legend of Robin Hood movie scripts have been drawn from this novel.

William would have read the three-volume novel numerous times on the voyage to Van Diemen's Land. His peers of the day would have smiled about naming his settlement "Ivanhoe", in the same way we do today when someone names their house or car after a famous movie character from a franchise like *Star Wars, Batman* or *The Avengers*. No doubt the hero character 'Wilfred of Ivanhoe', in all his bravery and chivalry, was a source of inspiration to William, who was now deeply engaged in his own epic quest.

And what an epic quest the year of 1821 turned out to be for William. He spent all his available money on moving his family out of tents, establishing them into a timber and stone house, and clearing the land for farming.

William must have been quietly proud of his enormous efforts and must have wished many times that his father was still alive to see it … knowing how proud his father would have been. With crops, orchards, and grazing land for sheep and cattle, income was flowing in, and life

seemed to be settling down. The vision that he and his father conjured up together prior to leaving England was now coming to fruition. And true to his word, William looked after his brother too, ensuring Thomas had a room in their house to stay in and making sure that his land was also well developed and fenced.

Unfortunately, however, this hard-won peace and prosperity were not to last long!

Whilst William got on with his hard work on the land and his focus on his family, his brother Thomas remained a bachelor. Further, he was regularly making trips into Hobart Town to socialise with Robert O'Neill and Captain Thomas Scott, with whom he had developed a strong friendship during the voyage to Van Diemen's land.

By this time, Robert was sharing a house in Hobart Town with Thomas Scott, who had since retired as Captain of the *SS Skelton* and was now working as a government surveyor. Robert's brother, James O'Neill, was the owner of the property across the Derwent River—directly opposite William and Thomas's lands. The first-year settlement experiences of the Roadknight brothers and the O'Neill brothers are interesting in both their similarities and differences.

Firstly, with the O'Neill brothers, whilst they were both known as fine scholars and intellectuals (and also quarrelling drinkers), James was the only brother petitioning for a land grant and worked on the property across the Derwent River opposite William and Thomas' land.

On the other hand, Robert seemed to have been more deeply interested in the arts and literature, and perhaps a more introverted man by nature, preferring to live in town and interact with other intellectuals and officials of the day. Thus, the O'Neill brothers, whilst remaining in close contact with each other, led more separate lives—one based in town, the other on a rural property.

The Roadknight brothers, who were very friendly with the O'Neills on the voyage out to Van Diemen's Land, were far more similar in their initial settlement plans. Both brothers applied for, and were given, land

grants and combined their energy in the early stages to quickly develop their land and establish their much larger properties.

Contrast this with the O'Neills where James, without his brother's help, had to persevere alone—all the while seeing the rapid progress of the Roadknights across the river. Did James secretly envy the two brothers working together so well? Did he wish his own brother Robert could have been more practical and helpful during this time, akin to the partnership of William and Thomas?

But the initial success of the Roadknight brothers' combined efforts gradually dissipated as Thomas spent more and more time in Hobart Town socialising with Robert. No doubt Thomas, who had lived in the big cities in England and France, would have found the isolation of rural life as a single man strange and lonely, and found much comfort in the hustle and bustle of a busy town surrounded by the familiar faces of friends. Thomas was also approximately ten years older than Robert O'Neill and Scott Thomas; he appears to have seen himself as an older and wiser mentor and friend. Perhaps Thomas Roadknight secretly wished to emulate Robert's lifestyle—seeing William as the farmer and himself as the 'man about town'—thinking of it as a similar arrangement to James and Robert O'Neill where Robert spent his time in Hobart, whilst his brother James maintained the land.

Further, we can only speculate, but one wonders whether Thomas was now drinking rum as a routine part of socialising and playing cards with his Hobart Town friends. Perhaps he was harking back to a similar routine on the many evenings together during the voyage out from England or the idle nights spent with off-duty comrades whilst abroad in military service?

With William busy on the farm and their father long since deceased, there was no one to watch over Thomas when he was in Hobart Town. Did the alcohol affect his mental health? Did he become aggressive or sedated when intoxicated? How did his friendships with Robert O'Neill and Thomas Scott develop over the ensuing months? Were there any quarrels from the late nights of drinking and playing cards together? Were they gambling? Were debts incurred?

As 1822 began for William, the first wheat crop was ready to harvest, and orchard trees were established and soon to produce fruit. At the same time, Harriet was busy with the duties of their homestead along with home schooling their three sons who were now aged eight, seven, and six-years-old, and their daughter who was four and a half years old.

Meanwhile, the population of Hobart and the surrounding area was ever-increasing, both in convicts and free settlers. Safety, therefore, was an ever-present concern with gangs of convicts breaking out of jail and terrorising settlers. And so it was that in early February 1822, William's brother Thomas was violently attacked by a group of escaped convicts whilst in Hobart.

The question of why Thomas was in Hobart when the wheat harvest was in full swing (and his help most needed on their properties) can only be answered by assuming that William was now routinely managing and working on both properties.

For Thomas to be the victim of such an attack would no doubt have aggravated his PTSD. Being alone in Hobart Town without the benefit of William to help him cope with the situation would have been unchartered territory for Thomas, now relying even more on his friends in town.

This incident would have also made Thomas even more conscious of his security and the need to carry a firearm when out and about. And this appears to be the backstory for Thomas' visit on 14 February 1822 to his friend Robert in Hobart to retrieve a pistol that Thomas had loaned him. Robert was at home on the day, but for reasons unknown, refused to meet with Thomas. This would appear to anyone to be contrary behaviour between friends. Why had it reached this stage? Was Thomas also there to seek payment of a debt that Robert had owed him? The possibility that Robert could not repay a debt he was owing Thomas makes sense of his desire to avoid contact with him.

Instead, the story goes that Robert instructed the servant of the house, Paddy Dogherty, to tell Thomas he was not home and to not let Thomas enter the house. Why? It is not too far a stretch to consider that perhaps

Thomas' behaviour, related to his PTSD, had become too much to cope with. Had he been drinking to relieve his symptoms? Perhaps there had been a recent drunken quarrel between them, of which Thomas had no memory? Given Thomas' older age and war veteran status, was Robert too anxious to set boundaries with him directly?

Equally, it is entirely plausible (and a theory put forward by a well-researched Roadknight descendent), that Robert's reluctance to meet Thomas may also have been driven by his desire to avoid having to admit he was unable to repay a debt that was now being called upon.

In any event, after Paddy spoke to Thomas, an argument broke out between them. One can well imagine Thomas' indignation when he was told by the servant of the house (whom he had met many times previously on amicable terms) that he was not welcome. Further, he then repeatedly refused to provide answers to Thomas' questions about Robert's location. The argument turned into a scuffle that ended with both men grappling over the very same pistol that Thomas came to collect.

Surely, as an ex-soldier and weapons expert, Thomas would have been able to manage Paddy unless he was intoxicated or mentally unwell. During the scuffle, the pistol discharged and fired swan-shot into Thomas's hand and thigh. Hearing the commotion, Robert, who was hiding in another room to avoid seeing Thomas, appeared and organised for the town doctor to attend. Paddy, despite referees saying he was generally well-behaved, was charged and on 3 March 1822, was found guilty and sentenced to 200 lashes and hard labour in chains at Macquarie Harbour for the 'term of his natural life'.

This punishment seems extreme, particularly given the fact that Robert reportedly heard the entire commotion from another room and did not intervene as the argument escalated. Neither did he provide any statement or evidence (to support Paddy) in the subsequent investigation and trial.

Archival evidence from Thomas Scott's diary shows an entry five days later, on 19 February 1822, with some scribbled notes about a

conversation he had with another friend of Robert's, John Bisdee—the Governor of the Hobart Town Gaol. John apparently told him about a conversation he had with Robert where he allegedly told him that he had instructed Paddy not to let Thomas Roadknight into the house and to shoot him if he tried to break in.

At the time of the incident between Thomas and Paddy, Thomas Scott (who shared the house with Robert) was away on a trip to the Derwent Valley as a surveyor. He was, coincidentally, working on James O'Neill's land about a week later where, no doubt, the hot topic of conversation between them would have been on the plight of James's brother, Robert, and 'what to do about the Thomas Roadknight problem'.

It seems extraordinary that Robert would not give evidence for Paddy's trial and that he seemed to withdraw and not want to get involved. There is no doubt that Robert would have heard the entire commotion whilst hiding in the room next door! He must have surely known what really transpired between the men. Was it anxiety and a sense of guilt about his own cowardice that he wished to hide? Was he afraid of Thomas himself? Was he afraid of the consequences on the wider families of the Roadknights and the O'Neills? Was Paddy actually the aggressor in the situation? Or was it just simply easier to let Paddy take the fall?

And so, the seeds of much bigger problems for William began to be sown. His war veteran brother Thomas has had a relapse of his PTSD after being violently beaten, and in his apparent post traumatic state, he has had a violent altercation with the servant of his good friend Robert. Unbeknownst to Thomas, Robert was trying to avoid any contact with Thomas. In the aftermath, the servant, Paddy, has been found guilty with Thomas's own contribution to the incident, hushed up.

Also, unbeknownst to William, this will be the start of far bigger problems, as irrevocable damage has been done. These events have deeply troubled William's former friends, James and Robert O'Neill and Thomas Scott. They all just want the whole problem to 'go away'.

As an aside, sadly, Paddy spiralled into madness once he was released in 1826, ending up with multiple further convictions, and was sent to an asylum for the insane in 1829.

Just imagine then, the awkwardness of the evolving situation for William Roadknight and James O'Neill. Neighbours on rural properties, with William constantly covering for Thomas's absence from the land and James trying to be the gentlemen (described as *"gentlemen of very enlarged mind richly stored with scientific knowledge – especially in natural history…A rational and instructive conversation…"*).

They try to maintain good neighbourly relationships whilst undeniable inter-family tension over Robert and Thomas's deteriorating friendship builds up towards a breaking point. No doubt, behind the scenes, family loyalties became a crucial point of tension for both William and James, as 'blood is thicker than water'.

Did William understand the seriousness of his brother's problems, or did he simply refuse to see it? Was he duped into thinking James' lack of negative comments to him (or even possibly favourable pleasantries) about his brother was really the truth of his opinion? Could he not see the impossible situation that now existed between them all: the O'Neills wanting to distance themselves from Thomas but having no grudge against William yet trapped together geographically as neighbours...

It seems so obvious, in hindsight, that the O'Neills must have been trying to come up with any ideas they could to solve this seemingly impossible problem… After all they couldn't publicly complain about Thomas's behaviour, especially when Paddy was branded the antagonist, and his trial was long since over. They couldn't denigrate a war hero. They couldn't be sure the establishment of Hobart Town would support them; it was one free settler's word against another. How could they avoid the increasingly likely open conflict between the families?

And so it was that given the inability to deal with Thomas without getting William offside, the O'Neills had to consider Thomas and William as a combined problem. And this assumption of loyalty on the part of William towards Thomas was correct as William would do everything he could to be his brother's keeper—fulfilling his father's dying wish.

With the two Roadknight brothers unable to be dealt with separately, they had to be dealt with together. Thus, the bigger, darker question

for the O'Neill brothers now became: How could they make both the Roadknight brothers simply disappear?

Let's face it, up until now, William's blind trust and faith in humanity, combined with his stoic work ethic, had set him up in good stead. But now, downplaying of his brother's PTSD, and perhaps not being involved more in his brother's social life and looking deeper into his 'bouts of misfortune' (which most likely previously had been managed to some extent behind his back by his late father), proved to be a serious misjudgment. After all, even after his father's death, William had managed to successfully navigate their settlement in Van Diemen's Land for well over a year without any major incidents until then.

The previous 'good luck' of William's approach to life would soon become 'bad luck' as his father was not there to advise him nor watch over Thomas. William was likely somewhat unaware that he was now solely carrying the weight of this massive social problem within this tightly knit, well-connected, and politically sensitive community.

However, with the O'Neills increasingly anxious about the problems with the Roadknights, yet not wanting to cause a fuss, William was now on the outer of the social cliques that mattered. Unfortunately, the stage was set for the penultimate consequences of the 'bad luck of good luck', when the threat of a violent attack on William and his family occurred only a few months later…

Chapter 3

The Fix: Enemies at the Gate

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The Fix: Enemies at the Gate

Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.
— Sun Tzu

By early 1822, gangs of bushrangers were running freely across Van Diemen's Land, despite the dire consequences imposed by Governor Sorrell. These hoodlums were regularly raiding properties to steal food and equipment whilst on the run. Their signature outfit was to wear kangaroo skin as camouflage when hiding out in the wilderness and they were proving to be notoriously successful.

As the year progressed, the crime spree in the Derwent Valley, where William and his family lived, went from bad to worse. In April, four men raided a flour mill and stole a gun in a nearby township. Two of these same men raided the Roadknight's neighbour, George Read's farm, and he was nearly beaten to death in his own home. George Read shared the western boundary of William's property (see map) and such a violent attack, so close by, would have been very alarming to the wider Roadknight household.

In May, six men attacked another settler, further upstream. In August, more violent assaults were recorded downstream in the New Norfolk settlement. In one incident, a whole family was held hostage while their home was ransacked. Many of these attacks took place at dusk or during the night, making everyone in the area more afraid as the sun set each evening.

By late August, everyone in William's local community was continually 'on edge'. Every free settler was constantly worried about the safety of themselves and their families. Any unfamiliar people seen in the area were treated with the utmost suspicion, and every firearm in every household was loaded and ready to be used if necessary.

Thankfully, George Read was now largely recovered from his violent beating back in April and has been appointed a local Justice of the Peace. As was to be expected, he was very motivated to stamp out crime in the area and strengthen local community relationships and support.

And we mustn't forget that amidst all of this drama, there was growing tension between the Roadknights and the O'Neills, (with James O'Neill being William's other neighbour just across the river). James O'Neill and his brother Robert (and their network of friends — some of whom were government officials) were still discussing the unresolved problem of how to make the Roadknight brothers disappear from the area altogether with no resolution in sight.

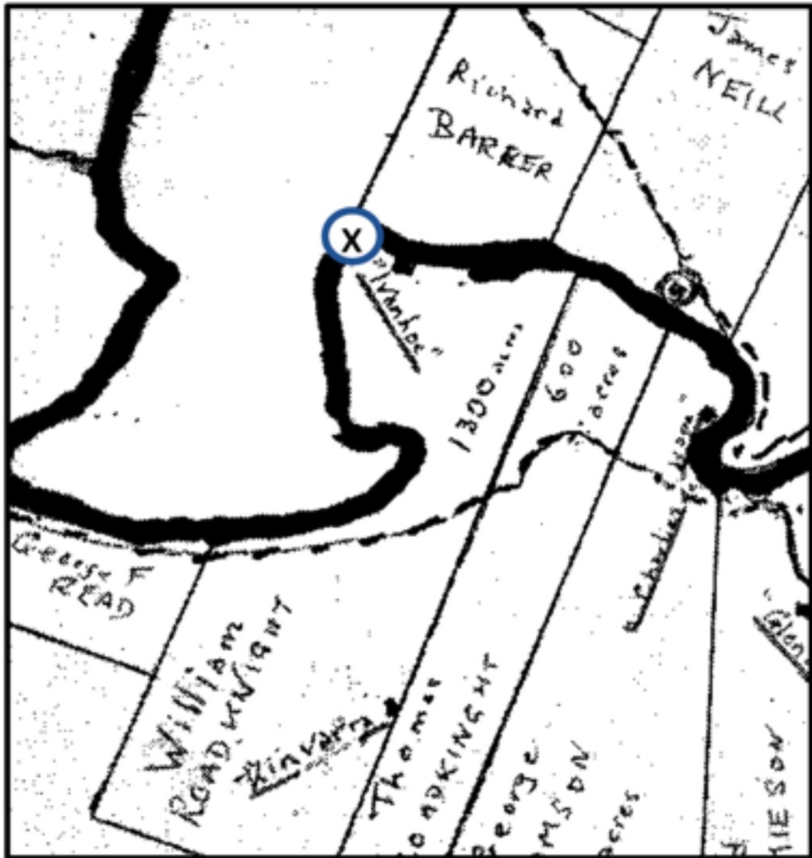
And then it happens; a situation occurs that will escalate from which there will be no going back. It occurs on September 1st, 1822, a Sunday afternoon, at 3.30 pm.

It is a fine and sunny day in early spring, and the wattles were in blossom down by the Derwent River. The seedlings of the future wheat crop are promisingly sprouting in the fields with the fruit trees growing steadily into the high yield orchard that they promise to become. Even the cattle are grazing peacefully in the pastures. It is all a picture of serenity and contentment.

During the early afternoon, William and his wife Harriet were strolling along the northern edge of their property, down by the banks of the Derwent River. They would have been chatting, likely a mix of topics: the progress of their children growing up ever so quickly; their hopes and dreams for the future of their property and lives together; and their ongoing concerns about their safety and security, in light of the threat of escaped convicts causing havoc on neighbouring properties.

As they were talking, William smelled the faintest scent of smoke in the air. At almost the same time, he saw a smoke trail rising behind the bushes, 120 yards away, across a narrow passage of the Derwent River. William wondered, *Why was there smoke in this area?*

The fire was in a remote part of Richard Barker's property (see map) far away from any dwelling or usable field. William's mind would have started to race with anxiety: *Was this the start of a bushfire that needed to be put out before it became a wildfire, or was it the campsite of a gang of bushrangers hiding out in the scrub?*



'X' the likely area of the incident.

William raised his hand in a 'quieting motion' to alert Harriet. It's likely they would have grabbed hands as they crept down to the river's edge to try to see the source of the smoke. As they strained their eyes to see through the dense bush on the other side of the river, they were startled and shocked to see two men suddenly appear: one wearing kangaroo fur skins and one in an officer's blue jacket and cap…

Imagine William's reaction now!

Hyper-alert and with mind racing, William knew from the local newspapers that there were several small gangs of escaped convicts at large, 'gone bush' in the Derwent Valley. He knew some escaped convicts had previously been caught wearing the stolen clothes of

settlers (and the officer's blue jacket and cap seemed a likely match). And he knew that the government had passed laws banning the wearing of any kangaroo fur due to bushrangers wearing such garments.

William was confident in the immediate safety of his position given he was on the other side of the river, so he called out to the men, demanding to know who they were and to justify their presence in such a remote area. While he was speaking to the men, Harriet was still by his side, squeezing his hand tightly, white knuckled with fear.

At this time, William must have been desperately hoping his instincts were wrong, and that they were not bushrangers hiding in the bushes waiting for nightfall to attack him and his family (as had previously occurred to other settlers in the area over recent months).

William's heart must have been pounding as he waited for a reply from the men across the river, but none was forthcoming. However, he and Harriet could still see the men clearly and hear them talking in strange voices. With the men clearly not planning to reply to William's questions, he assumed the worst and quickly took Harriet back up to the homestead.

While they were walking back to the homestead, one of William's convict servants, Stansfield, was in the wheat field firing shots in the air to scare off cockatoos that were eating the seedlings. William asked Stansfield to immediately head down to the river and keep watch over the suspicious men.

As Stansfield arrived at the scene, standing on the high ground on the opposite side of the riverbank from the suspicious men, they began taunting him. *"Come down to the riverside and we'll give you two shots for your one, and we'll let your bloody bastard master know who we are before the night is over…"*

With these comments made, Stansfield knew the men must have known he was a convict servant and that his master was William Roadknight. These comments also suggest they had heard William's previous demands but chose to remain silent at the time (perhaps to heighten William and Harriet's sense of fear and anxiety).

Stansfield fulfilled his duty by silently staying up on the riverbank with a firearm in hand, and not replying to the taunts made at him. This

appeared to infuriate the suspicious men across the river, and they made further threats: *"Fire away you bastard, we've got firearms as well as you! We'll show your master who we are by morning!"*

By this time, another of William's convict servants, Jones, arrived on the scene, having walked over from a nearby paddock upon hearing the commotion. As Stansfield and Jones stood in silence on the higher ground of the riverbank opposite the suspicious men, the abuse continued.

William had returned to his homestead, and with Harriet and the children now safe in the house, he grabbed his firearm (musket) and extra ammunition and began the march back down to the river. No doubt, righteous indignation and proprietorial angst would have been consuming him. He would have been ready to defend himself and his family against these apparent bushrangers.

Like the brave and chivalrous hero, Wilfred of Ivanhoe, in the book "Ivanhoe" for whom he named his property, William would do everything he could to fight for his loved ones and defeat those who would attack him. And with the recent memory of his neighbour, George Read, being so brutally beaten along with members of his household at the hand of bushrangers only a couple of months earlier, William was bracing himself for an 'all out' conflict, if need be.

As William made his way back down to the river, he called out for another of his convict servants, Colley, also out in the wheat field shooting away cockatoos, to join him in the escalating confrontation. With the four men (William, Stansfield, Jones and Colley) now all armed and assembled on the high ground against the three men on the low ground, William must have felt some relief. Yet, their goading and abuse continued, and they had since been joined by another fellow. *"Here we are, three to your four! I dare say you are game fellows …"*

William took a musket from Jones and sighted it on one of the men. William again demanded that they identify themselves. They ignored this ultimatum and instead 'dared' him to fire at them. William looked through the line of sight on his musket to follow one of the men who crept behind a gum tree and crouched down with what appeared, at a distance, to be a gun aimed at him. Upon seeing this, William pulled the trigger, firing the musket, which was loaded with swan-shot; it had little effect. After the echo of the gunshot rang out across the valley and all became silent, William again demanded they show themselves and

identify who they were to which they yelled back, *"Ask my bony arse!"* Meanwhile, another two men had arrived on the scene, joining William and his three convict servants. They were two convict servants of George Thomson, another of William's neighbours, who had come over to give William a completely unrelated message.

Again, William demanded that the men across the river identify themselves. Again, they replied with insults. Again, William fired another shot that missed the mark. Again, more taunts from his enemies across the river: *"You are a bad mark for you fire too high or too low! Fire away you bastards!"* (I guess they didn't realise William was firing to miss on purpose and simply wanted to scare them off).

They escalate the conflict further by saying, *"Go to the rig, my boys. We will give them two for one …"*

William would have assumed that they meant they would all open fire simultaneously, so he ordered his convict servant, Jones, to fire as well.

This time, as the two men fired their muskets, William hit one of the men across the river in the leg. William then ordered Jones to cease fire as they watched the three men run away—two of them helping the wounded and limping third man who had been shot in the leg.

What a relief it must have been for William and his servants. They would have watched keenly as the men finally fled the scene, scrambling up the hill on the other side of the riverbank. William would have felt relief, knowing that he and his household would be safe for the night; that they would be spared from the threats of brutality these men had made, and spared from the violence that had befallen his neighbour, George Read's household, previously.

But Willian knew that the men were still roaming the bush, free to attack others another day. Should he and his servants try to find and capture them before they got too far away? It was now close to 5pm pm, and the sun was setting in the west. With darkness approaching, William returned to the homestead and told another one of his servants, twenty-year-old Elisabeth Vincent, that they had just fought off some bushrangers who had been planning to attack them at nightfall.

As darkness fell on the Roadknight homestead, the emotions of excitement, fear and ultimately relief were buzzing around the family.

Harriet and William had both been caught up in the incident to a lesser and greater extent, and four of their convict servants were also witnesses to the events on the river, along with the two servants from neighbour George Thomson's property. William no doubt felt satisfied that he had made the right decisions protecting his family and community. Further, this would have been reinforced by the comments of the seven witnesses who were present at various times throughout the confrontation.

After everyone had settled down and returned to their evening routines, William withdrew to his drawing room and wrote a letter to send to the local Constable of Police, Mr Pearce. He intended to inform him of what had happened and the need to quickly catch the dangerous bush rangers, one of whom was wounded, and now on the loose in the valley. Whilst he was sitting in his drawing room, William heard a loud voice bellowing out from across the river down on the lower part of his property. William recognised it immediately as his neighbour, James O'Neill. William yelled out a reply, signalling he would go down to the river to talk.

After William had arrived at the river, his neighbour, James O'Neill said, *'Do you know you have shot one of my men?'*

William replied, *'No—but we shot at some suspicious men over that side of the river.'* He pointed westward to the section of the river, further up on Richard Barker's neighbouring property.

As they were talking together, more of James O'Neill's servants came down to the river and William's brother, Thomas, arrived, too. What an awkward moment it must have been for James—trying to reason with William and then his much-maligned brother Thomas Roadknight shows up and starts throwing his weight around. One can only imagine the scene with lamps lit and comments going backward and forth during a cool spring night in the Southern Hemisphere.

William explained what had happened in detail and James would have had to agree that William's actions were justifiable in the circumstances: *"I would certainly have done so too,"* was apparently his comment.

James then alerted William that the servant who was shot was named Thomas Thorp. William then asked for the names of the other two men as he wanted them locked up by the local Constable of the Police, Mr Pearce, for whom he had been writing a letter of complaint. James

refused to provide their names and tried to dissuade William from involving the police, telling him that the men were sorry for their actions and he would ensure it never happened again. William then asked James why they would behave so terribly to him in the first place. James apparently replied that they were drunk on rum, which he had given them to drink together on their day off.

William was stunned and shocked by James' reply. His neighbour had just confirmed that three of his men were down by the river trespassing on another neighbour's property, opposite William's land. Further, he seemed to have condoned them for being abusive and threatening, and in fact, had been drunk on rum that he had given them!

William's mind was racing. Why would James give them rum and then allow them to trespass on the neighbour's property? Why were they targeting William and his family? Could James have suggested to them that they stir up William as a bit of payback for the problems with Thomas? Or perhaps these three men had overheard the complaints of the O'Neills about the Roadknights and took it upon themselves to harass their master's enemy. It seemed extreme that they had intentionally lit a fire in a dry bushland area just to attract his attention…

A long and awkward pause in the conversation took place as William's mind struggled to comprehend the situation in light of James's admissions. Then, William's sense of shock gave way to outrage… and his anger would surely have been visible to James, even in the lamplight, as he again asked William to accept his apology and take no further action.

To add further weight to this second plea to take no further action, James reminded William of his men's stated remorse. He added an additional fact which was that he could not afford to spare these men given the work that needed to be done on his property.

This was to no avail for William, full of indignation and anger, he refused to agree to any of the proposed concessions. The conversation reportedly ended with both men returning to their homesteads.

Once at home, William sent his letter of complaint to Mr Pearce in New Norfolk that same night via messenger on horseback. Meanwhile, James O'Neill loaded his injured servant, Thorp, into a horse and cart and also headed into New Norfolk to seek urgent medical treatment.

The events in the New Norfolk township that evening would have caused quite a stir. Aside from William's letter of complaint being urgently delivered to Constable Pearce by horseback that evening, the noise of a horse and cart bustling down the main street in the dark of night with James yelling out for the local doctor to help him with the injured Thorp would have brought a lot of townspeople out onto the streets.

James would have had a very interested audience of townsfolk keen to hear his version of events, with the injured Thorp nodding enthusiastically, confirming their side of the story. And, of course, they were both able to share their account of events, in person, with Constable Pearce. William's account then would have carried far less weight, as it only relied on the strength of his letter of complaint to provide a truthful account of the incident. It's likely William's account of events contained in his letter was heavily contradicted by James and Thorp in their conversation with Constable Pearce during the evening.

The two men with a horse and trap would have put on quite a show for the townsfolk. After all, both these men stood to lose so much if the truth was to come to light: Thorp his freedom and O'Neill his farm workers' labouring capability. As their stories painted William Roadknight's actions in the most callous of ways, and their own actions in the most innocent of ways, I wonder to what extent James O'Neill (given his extraordinary intellect) began to consider how these circumstances might be used to their strategic advantage? It would fix, once and for all, the bigger problem of getting rid of the wider Roadknight family altogether ...

And as the sun rose the following day, the townsfolk, local doctor, and Constable Pearce had now had many hours to expand and elaborate on James O'Neill's version of events. Extraordinarily, William Roadknight was now firmly typecast as the villain in the story. He was now thought of as callous and uncaring, and he was accused of having overreacted and of having been tyrannical.

William, waking up the following morning, would have been astounded and confused to learn how the tide of public opinion in the local community had turned. It was already heavily weighed against him. It would be fair to say that 'The Fix' was in!

So unfair! So unjust!

William was both traumatised by the threats of James O'Neill's rogue drunken convict servants, and the distress that it caused his wife, Harriet, and their children. Yet, he was determinedly confident in the justice system, as he had the presence of seven witnesses, and he had chosen the 'right' path by notifying the police—and not listened to James' request to ignore the incident—so that the perpetrators could be apprehended and locked up.

Unfortunately for William, he had not considered the political complexity of the situation, nor the consequences of rebuffing James O'Neill's multiple attempts to negotiate a compromise.

It seems plainly obvious that theoretically, William did the 'right' thing throughout the distressing events of the afternoon and evening of Sunday, 1 September 1822. Defending your family from unidentified aggressors was the 'right' thing to do. Notifying the police was the 'right' thing to do (and was a necessity should any of the many witnesses from different masters chose to complain or tell a different story at a later time). Staying with his traumatised family while sending a messenger to the police was the 'right' thing to do.

But the 'theory' of right and the 'practice' of right, in a small outpost township of a rapidly growing and chaotic convict settlement, were worlds apart. William inadvertently put his neighbour, James O'Neill, in an impossible position, making him an unintended 'enemy'. And then, as circumstances unfolded, his 'enemy' was the only one able to have the face-to-face conversations with the police, immediately afterward. William broke the thousand-year-old rule of *'keeping your friends close and your enemies closer'*. In so doing, he allowed James to control the narrative with the police and the wider community.

Had William's father been alive, with his streetwise, London merchant, life experience and practical knowledge, he would have immediately sensed the practical danger of the situation. He would have insisted that William also attend Constable Pearce in person that same night and be present when James told his side of the story.

But William's father was dead. There was no wise old soul watching over William that night. He was on his own, trusting in the theory of 'right' whilst failing miserably at the practice of 'right' in the real-world … and 'The Fix' was in!

Within a couple of days, 'The Fix' was complete when a stunned William Roadknight was charged with *'feloniously shooting at and wounding Thomas Thorp with intent to kill or do some bodily harm.'* His servant, Jones, was hit with the same charge, although this was later downgraded to 'aiding and abetting'.

For William to be charged with 'intent to kill' seems to be, at the very least, excessive, or at the very worst, entirely trumped up. What about the series of warning shots fired prior to the injurious shot? What about the massive firepower William had at his disposal (four men armed with guns) which he did not seek to utilise? If William wanted to kill the men, he had ample opportunity to do so. He was clearly taking a course of action intended to scare them off as opposed to 'kill' them.

In the next few weeks, a shocked and utterly dismayed William Roadknight tried to continue his daily life. His wife, Harriet, was also completely and utterly devastated by the turn of events. To alleviate some of his distress, William may have found some solace in his Christian faith and stories of suffering and injustice, where ultimately, truth prevailed. But while William privately endured his own anguish and worry, a much bigger upheaval was swirling around him. However, he could not see this or was not aware of this as he was not following the maxim 'keep your enemies close'. Thus, over the ensuing weeks, his enemies were free to spread their version of events and cast aspersions on his character across the wider community.

In the outer circle, William was unaware of how James O'Neill's version of events was now the dominant narrative circulating in the gossip of the townsfolk. George Read was also now a much less sympathetic neighbour and unluckily for William, George was also a Justice of the Peace assigned to be one of three judges at his committal hearing in just a couple of weeks' time (21 September 1822).

George, whilst a victim of crime himself and an advocate for community safety, was, no doubt, increasingly concerned about the stories of William's unreasonableness and overreaction in the circumstances. He had been swayed by hearing stories about William's unstable brother, Thomas, who was also known to be unreasonable and prone to overreacting.

The intentions behind this Machiavellian pattern of gossip and undermining seems so obvious 200 years on. By James O'Neill mischievously putting about his own version of the story: *The shooting of an unarmed innocent man minding his own business on the other side of the river. The injustices played out earlier in the year, in March, when Paddy Dogherty shot Thomas Roadknight in self-defence after a home invasion at his master Robert O'Neill's residence…*

I can well imagine James making further remarks and suggestions to paint himself as a victim and arouse sympathy: *Why were the Roadknight brothers targeting the O'Neills? First, Thomas attacked Robert—angry at being denied access to his house. Now, William had attacked James—shooting his convict servant to deprive him of much needed manual labouring support on his property, breaking his will to succeed on the land.*

James's delusional story, if left unchecked, would have got bigger and bigger: *William's desire to bankrupt James and take over his holdings on the cheap …*

And then changing tack to convince the listener of the truth of his musings and then the righteous action that was now necessary: *Those Roadknights had another thing coming to them if they thought they could get away with this. Even in Van Diemen's Land such plotting and scheming would not be swept under the rug… Surely all their neighbours could band together to reverse this horrible injustice and, in turn, apply the same consequences to the Roadknights? Put William in prison and Thomas would sooner or later abandon their land, and it would fall into ruin and could be sold cheaply to their neighbours who all the while would be publicly sympathetic and concerned...* Such a devious story that would have been described as 'evil genius' by Niccolo Machiavelli himself!

By the time the committal hearing on 21 September arrived, three of James O'Neills' servants—Justin, Thorp, and New—had lodged (adapted) witness statements. They claimed that they had gone to the river fishing, and they took along with them a pint of rum left over from a gallon of rum their master, James O'Neill, had given them the previous evening. They had lit a fire some distance back from the riverbank and had refused to identify themselves when initially challenged, as they were drunk and trespassing on Richard Barker's land, neither of which they wanted to be known to their own master.

They denied any assertion that they had spoken in an uncivil tone to William Roadknight, which seems contentious, at the least, given their admission of being drunk (and seven other witnesses who heard their foul language). They also admitted to hiding behind trees before shots were fired and fleeing thereafter.

Interestingly, James O'Neill himself, like his brother Robert, many months earlier in relation to the Thomas Roadknight incident, did not provide any additional statement of evidence prior to the committal hearing. Of the remaining evidence presented at the committal hearing, the two servants of George Thomson and three of the Roadknights' servants (Jones, Colley, and Stansfield) all provided statements which confirmed the events as William had described.

There was then clear evidence of William acting out of 'self-defence' and with 'a sense of duty' to protect his household.

However, there were two overriding points of contention that swung the balance and went against William.

Firstly, there was the fact that it could not be proven that the men on the other side of the river did actually have firearms (one claimed to have raised a stick at William, not a rifle). Secondly, there were the contradictory statements about threats and use of uncivil language.

And so it was, that the three presiding Justices of the Peace (including his neighbour, George Read), whose biases were already swayed, committed both William Roadknight and his convict servant, Jones, to stand trial some five months later on 13 February1823.

After the committal hearing had concluded, William was placed on bail until his scheduled court date. By this time, if William hadn't worked it out yet, it was now obvious that he was the subject of a devastatingly brutal 'fix up'. His enemies were determined to do 'whatever it takes' to get him, his family, and his brother to leave their local community and never come back!

Chapter 4

Trial: Guilty Until Proven Innocent…

Chapter 4

Trial: Guilty Until Proven Innocent…

A man shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty.
— Sir William Garrow

Between the bail hearing on 21 September 1822 and the trial five months later, on 13 February 1823, William kept his head down and worked very hard. He knew there'd be no death penalty to the charges that had been laid. However, he also knew that if he was found guilty, which was a distinct possibility given the absence of justice so far, he would be jailed and unable to help his family.

It would be entirely understandable if he also thought about running away, absconding, jumping bail and fleeing the situation—but where would he go? How would he live with himself if he abandoned his family? And what about the promise made to his dying father to look after his older brother Thomas?

How stressful this would have been for William. His mind would have been in a complete turmoil as his personality was a paradoxical combination of traits—both dreamer/optimist and stoic/realist. Eventually, one must triumph over the other, and in this case, the stoic/realist won the day. His sense of duty, service, and loyalty to his family was crucial in his decision to stay, and work, and hope.

Completing the wheat harvest and preparing the farm for his likely absence was an all-consuming task and a way to shut out the injustice of what had happened. The harvest kept William working on the farm full-time, and just as well, as his situation was now the main topic of gossip in the local community. The Roadknights were on the outer in public opinion and invites to attend the regular gatherings on neighbours' properties had abruptly stopped. The Roadknights would still have been able to hear the sounds of laughter in the valley as their neighbours

gathered together without them. How this would have turned the knife in William's gut!

Harriet, no doubt, would also have been beside herself with stress. On the one hand, she would try to put on a brave face to the children, praying and hoping for some miraculous turn of events … some divine intervention. Likely, she would steel herself with calmness and bravery in front of the children, only to collapse in deep distress when behind closed doors. Perhaps William buried himself so deeply in farm work for much of the time to avoid becoming overwhelmed by Harriet's distress.

Their convict servants too must have been caught up in the tension of it all. Some, no doubt, were compassionate about the plight of the family; others perhaps inclining to the opinions of the local community; whilst others, possibly seeing the opportunity to do less work than was needed.

For Harriet, this period, and the years immediately thereafter, deserve their own chapter, if not an entire book in its own right about her own struggles. Sadly, she reportedly had several nervous breakdowns. Yet, amidst all of this, Harriet displayed tremendous courage and heroism in facing injustice; she supported her children and carried on with the farm whilst suffering the scorn of the local community. However, our protagonist in this story is William Roadknight, her husband, and so we return to his plight …

The reason behind the five-month delay in William's trial from September 1822 until February 1823 was because the severity of the charges required a senior court judge to hear his case. Thus, William either had to be sent to Sydney for trial after his committal hearing or be bailed until the circuit court of Justice John Wylde was in session in the newly established Supreme Court of Van Diemen's Land. This was scheduled from 7 February to 5 March 1823. The Court was housed in a building on the corner of Murray and Macquarie Streets near The Hobart Town Gaol with civil and criminal matters dealt with in the same court complex.

Justice John Wylde 1781-1859
In 1816, Wylde was appointed Deputy Judge Advocate of New South Wales. Wylde's judicial duties were both onerous and diverse, as he had to combine the roles of committing Magistrate, public prosecutor and Judge.
Judge Wylde was accused of bias on numerous occasions. In 1821, Wylde had conducted a circuit court in Van Diemen's Land after which he was heavily criticised by his superior, Justice John Thomas Bigge who said he *'rendered plain subjects unintelligible and expressed himself with such an habitual and studied obscurity of phrase and meaning that the members of the Criminal Court had been placed in a state of greater embarrassment and confusion by his written and verbal addresses than if they had been left to their own unassisted consciences and judgment'.* This over-intellectualisation of trivial matters, and issuing overly complex instruction and bias would be especially disastrous in Van Diemen's Land where the level of legal knowledge possessed by local jurors and solicitors was limited (and thus they could be easily overwhelmed and confused by his explanations and possible biases).

William's court date was set for 13 February 1823, two weeks into the four-week sitting of the court. By this time, Justice John Wylde had already spent two weeks hearing cases.

What had happened in these first two weeks? Was Judge Wylde missing his own family, feeling more agitated and homesick as his stay progressed? Was he feeling frustrated by the poor quality of legal argument he encountered? Who did Judge Wylde dine with in the evenings? Who briefed him on the cases set down for trial?

Wylde, by this time, was known disparagingly by both his own boss, Thomas Bigge and the NSW Governor, Sir Thomas Brisbane. Wylde had a reputation for his merciless attitude, over-zealous sentencing, and his favour of capital punishment, whenever possible.

Whilst Judge Wylde was holding court in Hobart Town, Governor Sorell would have entertained the Judge on numerous occasions. At some of these events, he would have invited the standing Justices of the Peace such as George Read, distinguished members of the community such as Robert and James O'Neill and Captains of the sea such as Thomas Scott.

Thus, prior to the trial, there would have been ample opportunity for

prejudicial conversations between Judge Wylde and influential figures from Hobart Town. The unfortunate situation of the Roadknights would have been discussed ad nauseum, along with 'desired' outcomes—all behind closed doors.

In the public eye, however, the proceedings of the circuit court dominated the newspapers, with reporters from the *Hobart Town Gazette* present at each trial. Afterward, they reported each case in salacious detail … all voraciously consumed by a community as if it was a daytime soap opera. As a case in point, William Roadknight's case took up three columns of newspaper print when details were published several days later.

After an agonizing wait, finally the 13th of February 1823 arrived and William, still a free man, walked into court at the scheduled time, with his solicitor, George Cartwright, by his side. His brother and supporters had gathered in the public gallery along with the newspaper reporters and supporters of the O'Neill brothers.

William had been well briefed by his solicitor on what to expect. As this was a criminal trial, the prosecution would present its case followed by the defence. Both the prosecutor and defence would call witnesses to support their case, who would be questioned by both sides. Once all the evidence had been presented, the jury would then retire to decide whether William was guilty or not guilty of the charges.

As William and his lawyer sat at their desk, facing the judge on one side of the room, the government prosecutor and their assistants sat at a desk on the other side. The tension would have been thick in the air, the silence foreboding, punctuated only by murmurs and whispers from the gallery. After what must have seemed like an agonisingly long time but in reality was only a matter of minutes, the silence was broken with the echo of the doors behind the court room opening and the Clerk of The Court's booming voice stating, *"All Rise"* as the judge entered the room. One can just imagine that William, a proud man, would have stood up straight. Surely, he would have felt incredible tension across his neck, back, and shoulders; tension that had gradually built up as he sat waiting hunched over in the timber chair.

As expected, Judge Wydle proceeded to read out the charges that had been laid and asked William to enter his plea: *"Not Guilty Your Honor"* William would have replied, after which time the prosecution began to present its case.

The trial lasted for six hours. There were some very convincing arguments put forward by George Cartwright, the defence solicitor for William Roadknight, and his convict servant, Jones, to support their innocence. He highlighted that the evidence clearly showed the firing of the muskets was to scare the men away before dark, given they had made threats to attack the Roadknight homestead during the night. As such, he argued that there was 'no intent to kill'. This fact was added to other compelling weaknesses in the Crown's case against his clients, which had already emerged in the trial proceedings including:

1. The convict servants of James O'Neill admitted to consuming rum and trespassing on someone else's land. They also admitted that William Roadknight asked them to identify themselves, which they initially refused.
2. The inconsistent accounts among the three convict servants of their subsequent conduct compared with all other witnesses, who consistently stated that all three men were behaving in an uncivil and threatening manner.
3. The man who was shot, Thomas Thorp, claimed that while he was being evacuated up the hill away from the scene, he heard William Roadknight tell someone back at his homestead, over a mile away, that he meant to kill the bushrangers. *How a wounded drunk man scrambling up a hill in agony could overhear a conversation more than a mile away and unable to be confirmed by his uninjured comrades or any other of the many witnesses, was not explained*.
4. James O'Neill's statement to the police about the extent to which his men had been drinking was entirely contradictory to his previous comments about this to William and Thomas Roadknight on the day of the incident. Furthermore, James's statement was made after the committal hearing had taken place and was relied upon by the Crown instead of calling him as a witness at the trial.
5. Thomas Roadknight's testimony that he witnessed James O'Neill confirm the 'reasonableness' of William's actions under the circumstances and heard James state *'that he would have likely done the same'*, during a conversation between the men later the same day.

As William Roadknight's solicitor concluded the defence, it looked as though common sense in the obvious facts of the situation would prevail and William and Jones would be found 'not guilty' and/or the

charges would be dismissed. But then a very worrying sign occurred.

With the defence arguments concluded, Judge Wylde began his summation and instructions to the jury before they retired to consider their verdict.

Imagine how William and his solicitor would have felt at this point. It seemed that nothing could be said to turn the outcome in their favour, as whatever they put forward seemed to be disregarded. An ominous sense of doom would have hung over them and yet, they would have still been thinking that surely, justice must prevail?!

William and his solicitor would have been incredulous and then with sinking hearts, horrified as Judge Wylde's summation unfolded. First, Wylde confirmed William and Jones's guilt in shooting and injuring Thorp with an intention to kill. (What about all the compelling evidence showing 'no intent to kill'?). Then, the judge instructed the jury that the onus was on the defendants to prove their innocence. He added that it could only be ascertained by proving they were in immediate physical danger and that they were completely certain of the men's 'bushranger status'. Was Judge Wylde simply showing bias at this point, or was this part of his communication style *'that rendered plain subjects unintelligible'*… or perhaps it was both?

Incredulously, Judge Wylde's summation to the jurors invoked a guilty status as the default finding unless the jurors could unequivocally agree that the two men were innocent! Whatever happened to the legal standard of 'innocent until proven guilty', which was a foundation principle of the British legal system?

With Wylde's accusatory tone ringing in their ears, it was at this point that the jury was allowed to retire. They would, no doubt, have been feeling a mixture of confusion and concern. They had basically been ordered to discuss whether, given the guilty verdict foreshadowed in Judge Wylde's summation, there was sufficient basis to unequivocally prove the men's innocence. Was there any doubt or contradictory evidence about the men's alleged 'bushranger status' and their 'immediate intent to harm'? Well, of course there was!

Judge Wylde's summation was indeed mis–leading on a number of points such as: relying on the fact that they did not have firearms (though they claimed they did throughout the altercation); stating that they were only

a hundred metres or so away and could have possibly been recognised by the neighbours who regularly visited each other's properties (he appeared to ignore the fact they were partly hidden among bushes and trees, wearing camouflage and speaking in strange voices); stating that they did not flee the scene immediately after they were spotted (which according to Judge Wylde apparently all reasonable bushrangers do); and stating that there was contradictory evidence about whether any threats of harm had actually been made (despite seven witnesses, none of whom had been drinking, including two impartial witnesses from another master all confirming they had directly witnessed the threats of harm made towards William and his family).

So, if you're a conscientious juror and the Judge has just laid out the facts stated above (minus the bracketed additional details) there was no possible way you could establish with absolute certainty that William and Jones knew categorically, that the men were bushrangers. Indeed, William and George had already accounted for their failure to shoot the men further and kill them outright because they wished to scare them off, not kill them.

In this impossible situation of 'guilty until proven innocent', there was no way the jury had sufficient evidence to prove their innocence given the perverse mis–justice parameters set by Judge Wylde's summing up and instructions to the jury.

What was William thinking standing on the dock as Judge Wylde gave his final summation and instructions to the jury? Did he realise his final minutes of freedom were now ticking down to zero? Was he thinking of his wife and family? Was he still hoping beyond hope that common sense would prevail?

William did not have long to wait. Only thirty minutes later, the jury returned to court.

"Has the jury reached a verdict?" asked Judge Wylde authoritatively.

"Yes, Your Honour. We, the jury, find both men guilty!" The spokesperson for the jury stated in a loud voice which echoed across the courtroom.

The silence that hung in the air for the brief moment after the word 'guilty' was spoken no doubt seemed to last forever. The gallery of press members and supporters of William and Jones, and those with

opposing interests such as the O'Neills and Thomas Scott, would have turned to each other in disbelief.

Imagine the scene: eyes wide, mouths agape with the supporters of the defendants and the members of the press stunned at the outcome. Those with opposing interests would have been smiling with relief that their scheme had worked.

But this 'guilty' verdict was in fact likely given due to the injustice of Judge Wylde's summation and directions to the jurors before they retired to consider their verdict. It was the result of a campaign of lies and innuendo targeting the free settlers and government authorities; it had commenced the evening of the incident on 1 September 1822 and had been gradually building ever since.

But what was to come next would devastate William, Jones, and their supporters, while being most congenial for the opposing interests. For the next part of the proceeding was the sentencing. The sentencing of the convicted parties was Judge Wylde's last chance to show any reasonableness, as the jurors, in coming to their decision, had been keen to ensure the sentencing was light given the circumstances of the case.

Judge Wylde, known for extreme harshness in sentencing, did not show any regard to those circumstances. He sentenced both men to be transported to Macquarie Harbour's Sarah Island Prison, on the western side of Van Diemen's Land, for seven years; this was effective immediately. This sentence was so extreme that even William's enemies would have been left dumbfounded by its harshness.

For Judge Wylde to make such a sentence was unprecedented. Being sent to Sarah Island Prison was a penalty only available to relapsed convicts. Indeed, of all the convicts that were sent to Sarah Island, about half had been sentenced to secondary transportation for offences committed while serving their original sentences in Van Diemen's Land. Nearly 30% were absconders, apprehended as far away as Bombay, Mauritius, and Britain. The remainder were sent directly from newly arrived transport ships or from the colony of Bermuda for engaging in mutinous conduct.

Court records show that the tragedy and injustice of the situation for William and Jones was actually much worse than they would have realised, at the time. In the 'Return of Trials' archival documents

from the case there is a notation from the Officer Jury men stating: *"Very strongly Recommended for Remission of sentence (of both men) in respect of their former peculiar good character and the especial circumstances of the case."*

However, despite the jurors' recommendation for a remitted sentence, Judge Wylde persisted in his desire for excessive and extreme punishment. However, Judge Wylde's extreme sentence had to be ratified by the Governor of the Colony of NSW, before it could be applied. Thus, the Return of Trials documents had to be sent to Governor Thomas Brisbane in Sydney for confirmation. This would have taken a couple more months and Governor Sorell of Van Diemen's Land would have wanted to ensure Governor Brisbane in Sydney had formally approved the sentence to Sarah Island before organising transportation. In the interim, William remained in Hobart Town Gaol until such confirmation was received.

As the court proceedings ended, William was duly taken into custody by the bailiffs and transported to Hobart Town Gaol to await transportation to Sarah Island, Macquarie Harbour for the next seven years. It was a prison sentence he would serve alongside some of the most serially violent psychopaths in the world, including the famous cannibal convict, Alexander Pearce, who killed and ate several of his fellow escaped prisoners.

Chapter 5

Clay: Stimulus … and Response

Chapter 5

Clay: Stimulus … and Response

What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator.
Does a clay pot argue with its maker?
— Isaiah 45:9

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.
— Viktor Frankl

Led away from the courtroom, William would have been in shock; numb to the core. *How could this be happening to him? How could he, in fulfilling his duty to serve and protect his family, his servants and his wider community, now be punished like this? How could it have all gone so wrong? How could a God-fearing respectable free settler like himself now be a convicted criminal?*

Sometimes, the scale of injustice can be so incomprehensible, so shocking, that the mind draws a blank. It would have been like a nuclear winter of complete devastation where the mind has no other choice but to simply switch off and it becomes impossible to think. It was in this zombie-like state of shock, William Roadknight's arms and legs were chained and he was escorted away from the courts and led off to an awaiting prison cell – his fall from grace now fully completed.

One can imagine that William, would have barely recognised what was happening to him. From the outside, he would probably have looked sheepish as he was compliantly obeying instructions, which often had to be stated to him twice. But the prison warden would no doubt have recognised this pattern as shock (and seen it many times previously) when at first William appeared to not understand nor follow the instructions properly. Hobart was still a small enough town that many of the prison staff would have known William previously and been surprised and saddened by his conviction and his severe punishment.

By 1823 the Hobart Town Gaol complex had been split into two prisons. The main Hobart Town Gaol was established in 1818, on the corner of Murray and Macquarie Street. In 1823 it was an almost square building that was 40m long x 42m wide with 3.6m thick walls which often housed over 200 prisoners, at peak capacity.

There was an ongoing problem of chronic overcrowding at the Hobart Town Gaol which led, in 1821, to the construction of the Prison Barracks on nearby Campbell Street. Specifically, this was to provide accommodation for newly arrived transported convicts who were awaiting assignment and, for convicts who had been assigned to government public works.

Whilst historical records are unclear on which location William was sent to, as William was classified as a locally convicted convict, it appears likely he was sent to the main Hobart Town Gaol. This was a prison he had seen (and heard) many times whilst in Hobart. The sight of men tied up and stripped to the waist awaiting their floggings and the sounds of the cat-o-nine-tails whip lashing at their flesh and their screams of terror and agony were a regular occurrence. The hanging gallows were also visible from the street with the corpses of executed prisoners left strung up for all to see. What a dreadful sight that would have been: human bodies strung up, swinging and rotting away in the sunlight; the stench would have been overwhelming as the townsfolk passed by.

In 1818, this original goal was largely just an open, holding pen but by 1823, when William became a prisoner there, it was walled, roofed, and overcrowded with a mix of hardened criminals serving longer sentences and recently convicted criminals who were yet to be sent to even harsher prisons.

The conditions in the overcrowded gaol were harsh, and malnutrition and even starvation were real possibilities. As William was a free man now imprisoned, there was no gaol allowance for meals (aka victuals) provided and without the Governors orders – it was up to William's friends and family to pay for this.

There is no evidence that Governor Sorrell became involved in the provision of necessities for William, such as food. No doubt, he was trying to stay well away from taking either side in the conflict. Instead, it would have been William's brother, Thomas, who would have been

very active in Hobart, ensuring money was paid to the guards for sufficient food and other essentials were made available to him.

With his victuals paid for by his brother, William would have been able to eat his meals with all the other prisoners who were assigned rations, such as soup, bread, seasonal kangaroo, beef, mutton, or salted pork. All of which had to be consumed in one sitting as none of these items could be stored up in case they became provisions for an escape attempt.

The Governor of the Gaol, at the time, was John Bisdee who knew the wider circumstances of the situation between the Roadknights and the O'Neills. Apparently, he had revealed to Thomas Scott previously that he knew Robert O'Neill had told his convict servant, Paddy Dougherty, to shoot Thomas Roadknight, if he tried to enter the house back on the 14 February 1822, where, in fact, Thomas Roadknight was shot.

It also appears that, John Bisdee, was quite concerned about the unfortunate circumstances of William Roadknight as was the senior juryman at the trial, Major Bell. Bell continued his support for William in the aftermath of the trial along with the local magistrate (unrelated to the trial, Mr Humphrey) and Mr Affleck Moodie, the Head of the Commissary in Hobart.

With this support, William was likely classified as a *'gentleman prisoner'*; he would have been afforded whatever legal privileges were available to him during his time in Hobart Town Gaol. These benefits would have included isolation from dangerous prisoners, additional visitations, and access to books and newspapers. These privileges would have been very helpful for William's mental state, whilst in Hobart Town Gaol, as his time there dragged on unexpectedly for five months.

The Gaol was on Murray Street. near the centre of downtown Hobart Town (see map of 'Old Hobart Town' in Chapter 2) and William would have heard the noises of the township, such as the ringing of bells, the yelling of the town criers communicating news to the citizens and the arrival and departure of transport ships. It would have been frustrating for someone with such a strong work ethic such as William having to sit idle with no activity or duties expected from him by the prison guards (due to his *'gentlemen prisoner'* status).

William would have had plenty of time to ruminate on his circumstances. He would likely have wrestled with his faith and Christian beliefs, and read any available newspapers and books, between regular visits from his brother, Thomas, as he awaited his transportation to the Sarah Island Prison in Macquarie Harbour.

During this time, none of the prison guards could tell him how much longer he would remain there. As it turned out, he stayed in Hobart Town Gaol for a further 5 months – until July 1823.

Why was there such a long delay before being sent to Macquarie Harbour? After all, government vessels sailed there every two weeks…

Well, as Thomas would tell William when he visited him in prison, there was much indignation among Free Settlers about both the guilty verdict and the harshness of his sentence to Macquarie Harbour. Thomas would also relay the news from William's property 'Ivanhoe' and how Harriet and the children were coping and how the farm was being maintained.

Beyond the visits with his brother Thomas hearing about his family, the upkeep of the farm and the actions of community supporters, William would also get to read about his situation and public opinion in the newspaper when he was able to obtain a copy. The newspaper provided confirmation of the advocacy of community supporters. He would likely have read and re-read information about the meetings being sought with Governor Sorell to petition for leniency and differences of opinion among officials about the fairness of the situation. Perhaps these differing views among officials had caused a degree of indecision which would explain the 'go slow' in his incarceration process and the lengthy delay in his transportation to Macquarie Harbour. Perhaps, like William himself, his supporters were hoping and praying that some miraculous reversal of fortune would happen before he was sent away.

As the months went by without any further clarification of his circumstances nor any indication of a date when he would be sent to Macquarie Harbour, William and Thomas made a decision to dissolve their property partnership. Consequently, Thomas placed an advertisement in the newspaper on 31 May 1823. The advertisement asked for any partnership-related debts to be sent to him for resolution and adjustment before the two properties (William's 1,000 acres and Thomas' 700 acres) were to become separate entities effective on 30 June 1823.

The question begs to be asked: Why do this now and who was the instigator?

Was it Thomas trying to protect his own interests as William, now a convicted felon, could have his land grant seized by the government and forfeited? (Records show proceedings were recommended but never eventuated). Was Thomas seeking to distance himself from any legal obligations that might involve Harriet and the children?

Was it William trying to protect Harriet? Conscious of all that had happened, had he decided to allow her to sell the land independently of Thomas if she needed to, giving her access to the means to support herself and the children? Was William also trying to support Thomas' ability to continue his life, unencumbered by the burden of caring for Harriet? If it was William's idea, was it yet another noble/heroic gesture on William's part? Or perhaps, it was just plain common sense given Thomas' less than reliable history of being responsible for anyone beyond himself – and even just looking after himself could be a struggle at times.

Whatever the case, it was clear that by June 1823, William knew the old days of the Roadknight brothers working the land together were over for good. How despondent he would have felt. The injustice!

As the months following William's conviction and sentencing dragged on, Governor Sorell did not appear to either disrupt or intervene in these 'go slow' actions within his own government in organising transportation to Sarah Island on Macquarie Harbour. In fact, it appears the Governor was sympathetic to the concerns expressed by those who came to meet with him and share their petitions for mercy. But equally, we know in hindsight that despite this implied support towards William's situation, the Governor did not exercise his official power to write to Governor Brisbane and relay the concerns of his constituents. Further, he did not make any recommendations himself to support the Jury's recommendation for a full remission of sentence. All of this would have been easy for him to do and would have been unlikely to risk the wrath of his own superiors. So, why the failure to act? Who was so important for Governor Sorrell to keep onside to risk the wider anger of the public by not intervening in William's case?

Time and again, William and his supporters must have pondered: Why did Governor Sorell not use his power in accord with the wishes

of the jury and with the petitions of members of the community and government officials? It seems to point to only one thing. He was playing both sides of the field! He was trying to keep those aligned with the O'Neills happy by not intervening whilst privately agreeing about the injustice of the situation to other members of the community aligned to the Roadknights.

Imagine the confusion and mixed messages Thomas Roadknight would have received both directly and indirectly from Governor Sorell as he sought to prevent his brother from being sent to Sarah Island. Imagine the roller coaster of hope and then dismay that William must have felt over the following months.

For five long months, William was imprisoned in the Hobart Town Gaol. He would have kept hoping beyond hope that there would be some intervention to reverse the injustice and that, somehow, he would be set free to return to his wife and family. But, this was not to be. Such a cycle of hope followed by hopelessness either breaks or makes a person and William was being pulled at from both sides.

The famous psychiatrist, Dr Viktor Frankl speaks about this phenomenon in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning,* where he describes the endless suffering of his fellow prisoners in concentration camps in World War II and the differences between those who survived versus those who gave up and perished.

Frankl's famous statement is: *"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."* Frankl, a medical doctor and concentration camp survivor himself, sheds light on the importance of having ultimate hope in an uncertain future as opposed to having hope with a deadline attached to it.

This concept, which is so important for survival and resilience, was then further developed by psychologists after the Vietnam War where the term *'Stockdale Paradox'* was given to this concept of an unconditional state of hope in surviving extreme and uncertain circumstances. The concept was named after James Stockdale after he survived seven years of beatings and torture as a prisoner of war. Conversely, his colleagues who suffered similar fates (some not as severe as him) did not survive shorter imprisonments which was attributed to them 'giving up hope' after their self-imposed deadlines to achieve freedom had passed.

We know that William did survive and eventually went on to become very wealthy and influential later in life. Thus, it seems fair to say that something must have happened ‘within’ William during this time; some turning point within himself where he accepted his fate as it were. g He gave up the fight for his own immediate freedom by some imagined deadline, but he refused to give up the fight for his life, nor the cherished vision he had for a much brighter future.

It is not hard to imagine that William’s unconditional state of hope would have been greatly helped by his devout Christian faith. As a church going regular at St David’s Church in Hobart Town, he would have received regular prison visits from the parish priest and members of the congregation. The concepts of suffering, forgiveness, and transformation were deeply embedded in William’s psyche and no doubt discussed at length during visitation with the parish priest.

As a devout Christian, William would have found solace in the metaphor of the clay and the potter in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament: *“What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot argue with its maker?* (Isaiah 45:9). Perhaps this was the metaphor that William was reflecting on during this time.

As an avid reader of the Bible and religious literature of his era, William may also have been inspired by the 16th Century poem of St John of the Cross, *Dark Night of The Soul,* about the trials and tribulations of life as preparation for transformation. And like the religious heroes of the past, the Christian martyrs persecuted in Roman times, enslaved, and tortured, killed by crucifixion, or fed to the lions, William may have been able to find a state of acceptance not unlike those persecuted Christians of long ago.

As William gained a larger perspective on his suffering, a seemingly paradoxical ‘state of grace’ may have emerged where he was released of his worry and need to control the situation. Hand in hand with this would have been the release from the unbearable weight of trying to protect his wife and children when he could not do so. Further, he would have felt the weight lift from his shoulders as he was freed from the impossible task of trying to find logic and reason in the guilty verdict and harsh prison sentence.

Perhaps William’s mind was also drawn towards his fictitious cherished hero ‘Wilfred of Ivanhoe’. In this transformed state of mind, William’s

courage would have been sparked by both channelling Wilfred's heroic energy and drawing upon the parallels in the epic challenges both he and Wilfred faced. And William's hope would also have been inspired by his hero Wilfred, who ultimately triumphed and was reunited with his loved ones.

Whatever the mix of inspiration William was drawing from, it worked! Records dating back to the era show that during this time William had *'borne it all with great fortitude'*. William's mental state did not decline but rather it improved. His faith strengthened, and he became mentally and emotionally stronger as the months progressed. No doubt by being aware and having a curious nature, William would have watched as his fellow prisoners experienced the opposite trajectory as their time in prison lengthened and their hopes faded.

William would have realised that he needed not only clarity of thought and mental strength but also great reserves of physical health and resilience if he was to survive his time as a convict imprisoned on Sarah Island.

And so it was that in July 1823, a decision was made and William was transported to endure this imprisonment in the depths of a vicious cold winter.

Chapter 6

Crisis: Danger and Opportunity

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The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis'.
One brush stroke stands for danger, the other for opportunity.
— John F. Kennedy

In July 1823, William Roadknight, now a convicted man for many months, was known widely among prison guards and government officials as a 'gentlemen prisoner'. This was a term denoting someone who was more of a political prisoner than a dangerous criminal. Despite his favourable prisoner status (which was handy inside prisons and in the assignment of convict labour tasks), William was nonetheless chained up with his fellow convicts and boarded onto a prison transport ship. This sailed from Hobart around the notorious southwest cape of Van Diemen's Land to Macquarie Harbour and the Sarah Island penal colony.

The ship transporting William and his fellow convicts was an old decaying brig named the *SS Duke of York*. This ship was one of two government owned vessels which sailed constantly between Hobart Town and Sarah Island, providing a regular transportation service for convict transfers, officers, tradesman and administrative staff completing shift rotations, and the food and supplies needed to service the penal colony.

The *SS Duke of York* sailed from Hobart Town on 19 July1823 and on this voyage, the passenger list included prisoners as well as military and administrative personnel. It is not unreasonable to imagine that there were opportunities for conversations to have arisen between William Roadknight, the 'gentleman prisoner' who was seen as a controversial, educated local land holder, and the wider cast of passengers and crew. Such an opportunity to talk freely out in the open sea may have been quite welcome for many who could not voice their concerns freely

whilst in Hobart Town. After all, conversations were the only form of distraction available on this otherwise monotonously slow voyage punctuated by bouts of bad weather and seasickness.

In the wintertime in southern Van Diemen's Land, useable daylight only lasted eight hours per day and travelling at any speed at night in such a large ship was not an option given the hidden reefs, swirling currents and shifting tides. Therefore, travelling at 5-6 knots, covering 10 km per hour, 80 km per day, the 425 km (230 nautical mile) voyage would usually take between 5-7 days.

Sailing charts of the era show that the trip to Sarah Island on Macquarie Harbour begins smoothly enough. They sail down the Derwent River and then along a somewhat protected coastline of bays and passages of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel on the inland side of Bruny Island. For the convicts being transported, this leg of the voyage was the most manageable. They would have been locked in their holdings, and the impact of the wind and rain would have been lighter and the sway of the boat minimal.

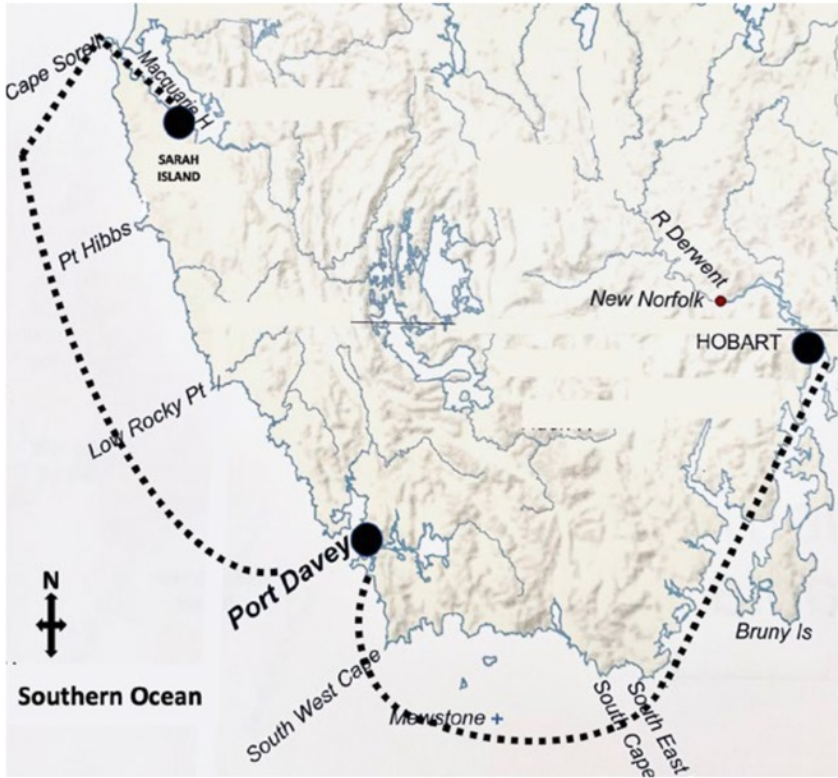
Then, everything changes as ships pass around the South East Cape and faced the brunt of the Southern Ocean. Even to this day at this time of year (July), violent icy storms from Antarctica with large ocean swells induce extreme bouts of seasickness. There is no doubt that vomiting and dehydration would have been common among prisoners crowded in cramped conditions.

For the officers and crew, the conditions would have only been marginally better. Free of the confines of the holding cells they would still have been thrown about the ship violently in the random and chaotic swells as the captain headed offshore for much deeper water to escape the shallow reefs near the coast. Over the next few days, pending the weather, the ship travelled west making a break back towards the shoreline to stop in the safe anchorage of Port Davey.

The final stretch of the journey to Macquarie Harbour is from Port Davey north to what is known as Hells Gates; for transport ships, at that time, it would have been a torrid affair.

The coastline is guarded by a fringe of rocky reefs known as 'The Shank'. This looms ominously, guarding the entrance to the local coastline, and it is only accessible in much smaller boats. The transport

Voyage Map For Convict Transport Ships – Hobart Town to Sarah Island



ships would have been forced to sail further offshore, making their way north on this final and most dangerous leg of the voyage.

If disaster struck on this final leg of the voyage, rows of rocks block the coastline to the east and, due west, the next landfall is on the other side of the world in South America. On many occasions, ships, when overwhelmed by the all-too-common gale-force south westerly storms, would have had to turn around partway through this final leg and sail all the way back to Port Davey. There they would have had to wait out the storms for up to a week before trying again to reach the entrance of Macquarie Harbour.

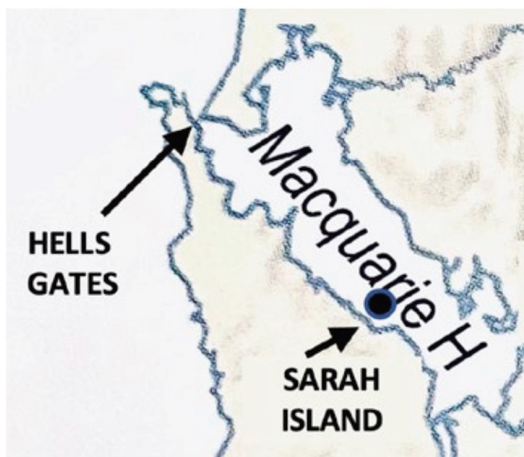
After successfully sailing offshore for over 90 nautical miles to avoid the 'The Shank', ships finally reach the entrance to Macquarie Harbour. But instead of a feeling of relief that the treacherous ocean voyage had concluded, the next challenge arose. It is not hard to imagine the feeling of dread and impending doom as the sailors prepared to cross a very

narrow rocky passage guarding the entrance to the harbour known as ‘Hells Gates’.

In 1823, Hells Gates had a reputation as *‘a shipwreck waiting to happen’*. Many shipwrecks had occurred, and would continue to be a testament to this moniker over the following years. There had also been many near miss incidents of ships nearly running aground on the sandbars or narrowly avoiding the rocky shoreline on either side of Hells Gates. With such a reputation, no doubt the captain, crew, and all of the passengers on William’s ship would have been on edge.

Once ships arrived near the entrance to Hells Gates they would have had to await the services of a Pilot Vessel, a cutter that was permanently stationed at the entrance. It would sail out to meet the incoming ship and guide it through the narrow rocky entrance and across shifting sandbars. During the frequent bad weather, ships that had made it this far would be delayed at the harbour entrance waiting for calmer seas before attempting the passage.

Once safely inside Macquarie Harbour, the sense of relief would have been both real and warranted as it was a safe and secure harbour for ships to anchor in—an immense body of water six times the size of Sydney Harbour. However, being guarded by such a narrow entrance which was fortified and protected, made it an almost impossibly difficult escape route for any convicts. On arrival, and having survived



such an ordeal, any dreams of escaping by stealing a ship and sailing westwards to South America (which occurred some eleven years later, in the infamous 'Frederick Escape' of 1834), would have been dashed for many.

With the stormy seas behind them and smoother waters of the harbour before them, the last stage of the trip would have been another 2-3 hours or 26 km (14 nm); they still had to sail up a long channel past Liberty Point to Sarah Island. Even if there were choppy waters in the harbour, the convicts would have been relieved that the ship no longer rocked violently from the open seas; the surrounding mountainous landscape buffered any rain and winds, to some extent.

What emotions would have surfaced as William became aware of the slow but final stage of the journey across the naturally dark tannin-stained waters of the harbour, and as the penal colony of Sarah Island came into view?

As a 'gentleman prisoner', he might have been allowed to watch from above deck… if not, comments would have been passed around below deck among his fellow prisoners about their 'new' home. By 1823, the once heavily forested island had now become a barren wasteland cleared of all vegetation with brick and timber buildings dotting the landscape, surrounded by a still pristine, heavily forested wilderness.

As the ship came closer to the landing jetty, there would have likely been several whaling boats being rowed and sailed by convict gangs commuting to and from the various mainland logging sites. Floating rafts of Huon pine logs would have bobbed in the water as they were guided into the island's massive saw pits for milling and boat building. If the wind was blowing from the east, then the cries of convicts being whipped with the cat-o-nine-tails would have also been heard above the clamour of the busy prison island.

Sarah Island was first discovered by the British Colonial explorer, Captain James Kelly in 1815, when the potential for timber-getting, particularly Huon Pine, was first noted.

At the beginning of 1822, the Macquarie Harbour Penal Station was established, with Sarah Island as its base. The penal station was

established as a place for banishment for all the Australian colonies. It took the worst convicts, those who had re-offended and those who had escaped from other settlements.

The isolated land was ideally suited for its purpose. It was separated from the mainland by the wide expanse of water, surrounded by a mountainous wilderness and well over a hundred miles away from the colony's other settled areas. The surveyor who mapped Sarah Island concluded that the chances of escape were 'next to impossible'.

Prior to William's arrival, Governor Sorell had insisted that the new penal colony had to be economically viable to reimburse the British government for the expense of its establishment. Thus, a shipyard was built which for a while was the largest in Australia, producing more than 100 vessels over its lifespan. Skilled convicts worked as shipwrights, carpenters, blacksmiths and clerks.

So, by the time William arrived, Sarah Island was a hive of activity with a bakehouse, tannery, hospital, and brick kiln, as well as a convict barracks and accommodation for officials and military personnel. Unfortunately, though, Sarah Island was not self-sufficient. As it had been cleared of all trees and shrubs and built down to the shoreline, it could not produce food—malnutrition, dysentery, and scurvy were often rampant among convicts.

Further, the convict barracks were so crowded that convicts were unable to sleep on their backs. We can only imagine their suffering and, for William, used to his comforts, he would have felt like he had been transported to hell. Rising on those icy mornings would have been particularly grim, feeling the cold seep into every one of his bones, knowing he was trapped on the island.

William and his fellow convict shipmates would have struggled to survive these first winter months; jostling with other inmates to grab a precious few seconds snatched near the flames of the communal fireplace.

Punishment on Sarah Island involved solitary confinement and regular floggings—9,100 lashes were given in 1823, the year of William's arrival. The lashings were typically administered by another convict. And if they were not administered with sufficient severity, the convict who had been given responsibility for administering the lashes was also

lashed. The severity of the lashings was sufficient to cause death in some cases.

Ironically, death was a welcome alternative to life as a convict on Sarah Island, as was the case of a prisoner named Trenham. He went as far as stabbing a fellow inmate as 'a way of ensuring his execution so he wouldn't have to spend more time in this hell'.

During William's time on the island, there was another notorious prisoner in residence – the convict cannibal, Alexander Pearce, who twice escaped whilst logging Huon Pine trees on the mainland. On his second escape into the wilderness he killed and ate his comrades one by one as his supplies ran out.

Most newly arrived convicts stepping off the transport ships onto Sarah Island spent their first few months in probationary labour in a timber-hauling gang. For most of their waking hours, they were cutting timber and preparing it for rafting down the river, often up to their necks in water. Those who conducted themselves satisfactorily were promoted to service positions working as signalmen, boat crew, sawyers and servants, or in the lumber mill and shipyard.

For the convicts arriving in July 1823, the normal process for all newer prisoners was to be initially assigned to convict gangs. They manned whale boats each day rowing and sailing to the forest on the mainland to work in log cutting crews. However, records show that *"'gentlemen convicts' were employed in lighter labour not associated with the lower class"*. Thus William, as a gentlemen prisoner, would have skipped over the initial assignment to a log-cutting crew. He may have been placed immediately in a service position in the shipyard or, more likely, supervising the boat crews—given he would, within months, develop exemplary seamanship.

By moving straight into a service position, William would have maximised his chances to stay physically healthy. He would have avoided the worst hardships of logging on the mainland and bypassing the labouring roles given to the lower-class convicts who were immersed in the freezing water (transporting logs and working in the saw pits) which caused an early death to many.

William would have applied his pre-existing incredible work ethic and high standards to whatever role he was assigned; his previous experiences directing convict labour as a Free Settler would have been invaluable.

His success in being able to work with men from vastly different backgrounds and social classes would have made him stand out to the Commandant and prison guards; they needed reliable prisoners to assist in the running of the island without fear of mutiny or escape. William's work ethic and leadership ability, combined with his general mental state and attitude (as described in the previous chapter) made him a 'model' prisoner, attracting greater responsibilities and opportunities as time progressed.

From July until December 1823, William worked alongside his fellow prisoners in the day-to-day running of Sarah Island. He learned how to sail and row whale boats and other small ships, how to chop down large Huon Pines and float log rafts back to the island, how to supervise the sawpits and the techniques of boat building construction. William kept his head down. He avoided conflict with authorities, and was quick to consider the wider politics of life on Sarah Island. Intentionally, when the guards chose to humiliate him, simply to assert their authority, he turned the other cheek, so to speak. He knew how to stay away from the most troublesome prisoners and how to avoid getting caught up in the acts of corporal punishment (i.e., floggings) that convicts were ordered to perform upon each other.

In his role as a more senior prisoner, even though William quickly learned how to avoid the ever-present dangers from other convicts such as the fights and stabbing attacks, he could not help but overhear the continuous chatter among the convicts planning escapes. Some envisaged a boat escape to South America or to mainland Australia. Some even talked about returning to Hobart Town to become bushrangers, and others discussed fleeing into the wilderness, rather than a ship journey to try and cross over the mainland back to the settlements.

The harshness of life on Sarah Island also took its toll on the officers who were assigned there. Regularly, they were rotated out of these postings and back into positions in Hobart Town. They were assigned to other centres of colonial government or placed in command of military units serving across the British Empire.

In December 1823, William learned that the current Commandant, Lieutenant John Cuthbertson, had been promoted to Captain of the 48th Regiment and reassigned to Hobart Town. He was to be replaced in January 1824 by Lieutenant Samuel Wright of the 3rd Regiment. As the weeks leading up to Christmas passed the officers and guards who, sensing their time on the Island was almost over, were relatively relaxed and jovial, making the most of friendships that had been established. It was also the height of summer and daylight this far south in the Southern Hemisphere lasted more than fourteen hours, almost twice that of the winter months.

In the evenings, after the prisoners were locked in their cells, there was much for these soon-to-be departing officers to celebrate. Over the previous six months, escape attempts had been few and far between and morale among the convict labourers was high. Everyone was celebrating the fact that the first ship, ever entirely built by local hands, the 33-ton schooner *SS Governor Sorell*, had been completed. This gave Lieutenant Cuthbertson the honour of being the first commandant to fulfil Governor Sorrell's wishes of a penal colony that would become economically viable. The *SS Governor Sorell* was now in the final stages of being readied to sail to Hobart Town to be sold at auction. It was the perfect finale for the outgoing Commandant of Sarah Island and would bode well for his future military and government career.

But, less than ten days from the finish of Lieutenant Cuthbertson's time as Commandant, a major disaster struck. On 23 December 1823, just two days before Christmas, amidst some stormy weather, one of his officers noticed the schooner, *SS Governor Sorell*, which was supposed to be anchored at the mouth of the Gordon River some 7 km from the island, had drifted from where she had been anchored the night before. This could only mean one thing: the vessel was dragging its moorings, being pushed by the wind and waves towards the shore. If the ship was not quickly re-anchored in deeper water then a shipwreck would be the inevitable outcome. The Commandant's glorious exit from his tenure on the island would be ruined!

An emergency was declared and all available convict gangs were ordered into their whale boats to make haste to the new schooner. Under the direction of the Commandant, the gangs acted quickly as the ship was drifting perilously close to the shore, and they succeeded in re-attaching lines to the vessel. They dragged it from the edge of the bay and up into the shelter of the river itself.

It is likely that William, with six months of sailing and boat crewing behind him, would have had a major role in this operation. Of course, there were other senior convicts involved too. However, the 'saving of the ship' had been up to them as many of the guards would have been needed on the island to maintain security.

Imagine the relief of the Commandant and the convict crews in saving the ship. As a member of the rescue party, William would have received the thanks that would have been extended by the Commandant to everyone who had helped in the ship's rescue. Then, after the glow of success faded, imagine the level of complete and utter physical exhaustion and hyperthermia setting in as all the boat crews involved had to gather up their equipment and reload their boats for the 7km return trip to Sarah Island in the height of the continuing storm.

It was on this return voyage to the island that tragedy struck. The boat the Commandant was in capsized in the storm and despite the rescue attempts from nearby boats, Lieutenant Cuthbertson and all six of his crew drowned. Was William's whale boat sailing in convoy nearby and did they assist? Or were the returning boats travelling independently, struggling so much in the storm that it was a case of 'every man for himself'? As the boat crews arrived back at Sarah Island at different times, they each told a different part of the story of the catastrophe that had unfolded.

By the following day, 24 December 1823, news of the tragedy had spread quickly across the island, and it was then that the convict prisoners realised that there were no commissioned officers left around them. With only a handful of non-commissioned officers remaining to guard the convicts, they immediately began refusing orders and questioning their authority. The convict prisoners made *'threats to rush the barracks and stage a mutinous coup'*. Immediately, a heavy-handed response resulted in floggings to those making threats in an attempt to restore order.

That same day, a decision had to be made about how to send for help. Clearly, the Governor in Hobart Town needed to be informed immediately, but none of the officers could be sent given the deteriorating security situation on the island. There was no way of knowing when, in January 1824, the replacing Commandant would arrive. Help was urgently needed now, to stave off the escalating threat of mutiny.

The most senior remaining officer who was in charge of the prison colony was Corporal William Douglas, and he could not afford to send any of his remaining officers or guards on the rescue mission. As such, he made the risky decision to send William Roadknight and his boat crew on a desperate voyage back to Hobart Town to raise the alarm.

And so it was that in the afternoon and evening light of 24 December, William and his six-man open whale boat crew began provisioning their boat. There were the oars, an extended mast, extra sails and rigging, and water and food that had to be urgently sourced for the hazardous voyage back to Hobart Town. Meanwhile, the storm that had caused the tragedy continued around them unabated.

For William, the turn of events over the previous twenty-four hours had been extraordinary! First, there were the dangers that had been confronted as they rescued the newly finished ship, which had slipped its anchor and risked being shipwrecked. Then, the unexpected tragedy of Lieutenant Cuthbertson's death; he was a man that William had respected and felt indebted to for his good treatment on the island as a 'gentlemen prisoner'. Following this, the danger of violence and mutiny from the prisoner convicts. And now, an incredible opportunity for William's redemption by commanding the boat being sent to Hobart Town on a rescue mission. If successful, William was counting on this to play in his favour for some form of leniency. Perhaps a sentence reduction? Perhaps a return to Hobart Town Gaol to be nearer his wife and children? Perhaps a Ticket of Leave (now known as parole)? Or, dare he even think of it… a free pardon! He was less than a year into his 7-year sentence on Sarah Island, and he was now unexpectedly going to see Hobart Town again!

But William was only one of seven convict men assigned to the whale boat crew that was sailing the rescue mission (albeit the leader). Whilst everyone in the crew could clearly see this as an opportunity to leave Sarah Island, not everyone would have shared William's sense of duty, unwavering Christian faith, and his view that it was an opportunity for redemption. For some of the crew, it may have simply been an opportunity to escape the horrors of life on Sarah Island. Others may have had ulterior motives to escape into the wilderness as bushrangers or try to sail to South America. Given the potential for such ulterior motives and motivations, William's leadership and judgement in commanding his crew would be fully tested on the voyage commencing the following day.

The obvious question for William was: would they make it back to Hobart Town or would he himself be the subject of a mutiny at sea? Were plans afoot by the crew to sail back up the coast to mainland Australia or abscond with the boat in passages and bays around Port Davey? Or perhaps even when reaching the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, to take up arms as bushrangers in the settlements nearby? All of these scenarios had been a constant source of gossip among prisoners about proposed escapes during his time on the island and so thinking along these lines would have been very prudent and placed William on alert.

With the storm somewhat abating at first light on Christmas Day (1823), William and his crew departed with both sails and rowing oars guiding them up the harbour towards Hells Gates. The crosswinds of the south-westerly storm front that was still rumbling contentiously somewhat slowed their passage. They knew that they would need every bit of daylight, all fourteen hours, if they were to get through Hells Gates and successfully navigate through the treacherous waters of 'The Shanks' down to the anchorage on the southern side of Point Hibbs before nightfall (see map—Point 1).

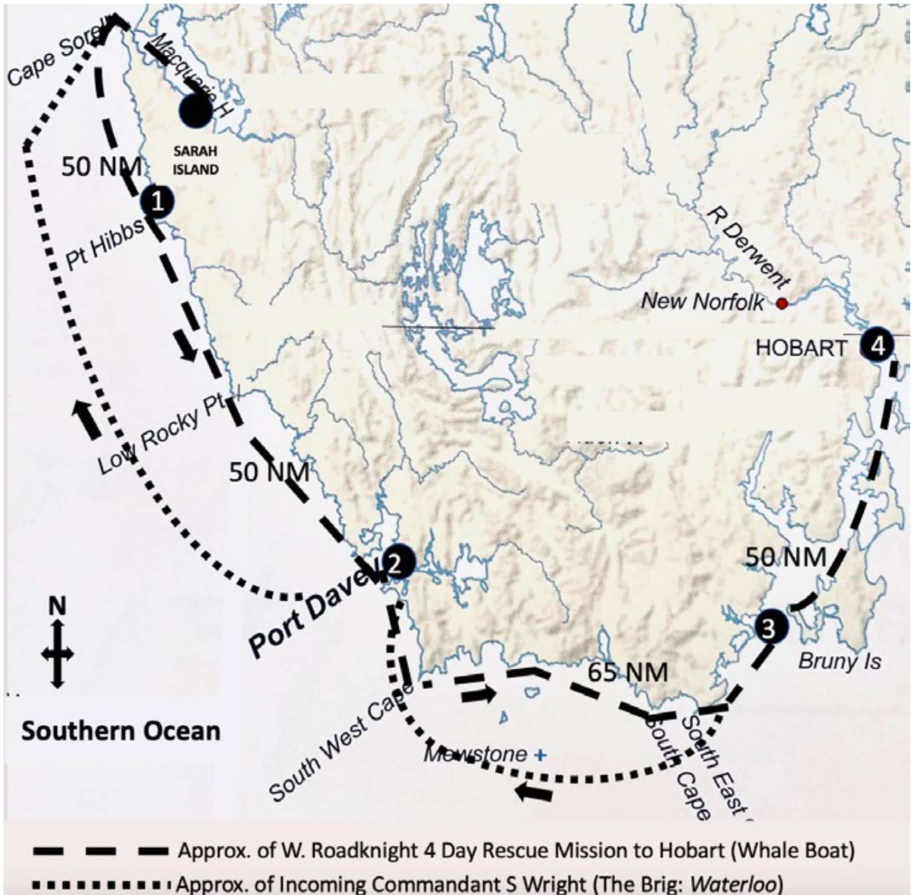
With sails fully extended and extreme tension on the rudder to hold the angle against the south-westerly wind that would otherwise drive them up onto the rocks, they tracked south-east. Eventually, they rounded Point Hibbs in the fading light of day and stopped for the night in the partially sheltered anchorage on the southern side. There is no doubt that this treacherous journey would have been both mentally and physically exhausting.

Waking at first light (if they got any sleep at all given the storm swells regularly passing underneath the boat and crashing loudly on the shoreline close by), they were back in the thick of the roaring south-westerly winds. Ahead of them was another nail-biting tense day of storm sailing, and a vigilant watch would have been undertaken by all for any unexpected rocks and reefs. Their voyage tracked close along the coastline; they would have kept the shore in sight to aid in navigation.

How anxiously they would have all searched for that all important 'break' in the coastline which signified the harbour entrance to Port Davey (see map—Point 2).

Port Davey was a deep-water harbour and stopover point for any ships travelling along this treacherous stretch of coastline. William kept a sharp lookout as he knew there was a remote possibility that they might rendezvous with one of the whaling, timber, or supply ships that were often in the area, and thus be able to raise the alarm sooner than expected. However, once in Port Davey, William and his crew would not have been able to sight any other ships and, after brief respite, they were again in the open ocean.

Map of the Voyage—Christmas Day 1823



The fierce south-westerly winds continued to work in their favour (but equally slowing down any vessels going in the opposite westerly direction) and their journey was a speedy one travelling around the South West Cape before hugging the coastline again until the South East Cape. Then, it would have been all hands on deck for a sharp turn

northwards toward the D'Entrecasteaux Channel (see map—Point 3) where the next safe anchorage could be found before the final leg of the voyage into Hobart Town.

Day after day the icy cold whipping winds stretched the ship's sails to the point of snapping and the crew had to constantly adjust the rigging with their blistered and torn hands. William and his crew would have rotated shifts at the helm, constantly straining to steer the small boat between the giant swells and yelling at the oarsmen to correct roll and list of the boat as it doggedly hugged the shallow coastline. The stormy conditions might also have staved off any ideas that the crew might have had about holding a mutiny and escaping across the ocean (which actually did happen several years later). Given the atrocious weather in December 1823, as reported in the *Hobart Town Gazette*, it's likely the crew would have quickly become united in their desire to reach the safety of Hobart Town. They would have been happy to believe in William's hopes for them all to receive favourable government treatment for their heroics if they succeeded in their rescue mission.

Whilst this incredible sailing voyage epic was unfolding, unbeknownst to them, much, much further out to sea, by complete coincidence, the brig, Waterloo, was riding out the storm in deep water. It had left Hobart Town much earlier than planned to bring the new Commandant and his officers to take up his January 1824 appointment as Commandant of Sarah Island ahead of schedule (see previous map and voyage trajectory in the opposite direction to that of William's whaleboat).

After several mammoth, 14-hour plus days of storm-ridden sailing, covering 50-65 nautical miles (100-120 km) per day, in the afternoon on the fourth day, William and his crew finally turned their boat up the entrance of the Derwent River. An exceptionally fast and very cruel journey was now only hours away from completion. As the sun set on the fourth day of the voyage, William's whale boat docked at Salamanca Port in Hobart Town. They had made it!

Once William's boat had docked, it attracted the attention of port officials who were amazed that any boat of that size would have been out sailing in such bad weather. In stepping off the boat and onto dry land, William was escorted to government officials at the port office. There, he would have shared the news of the tragic circumstances that befell the previous Commandment of Sarah Island, and he would have presented the letters of authority and instruction given to him by

Corporal William Douglas. Then, he and his crew would have been given lodgings nearby in the fading light of the day. What emotions would have claimed these men? They were back on their home territory and feeling like heroes that they were.

They would have all collapsed into their beds jubilantly but also completely exhausted, hopeful of favourable official treatment the following day. No doubt each man's last thought as they succumbed to sleep would have been of their fates and hopes for some reward of leniency given their heroic actions…

Chapter 7

Phoenix: The Good Luck of Bad Luck

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To rise like a phoenix from the ashes means to emerge from a catastrophe stronger, smarter and more powerful.
— Unknown

People can always be trusted to serve their own interests.
— Niccolò Machiavelli

News of the tragic events on Sarah Island were relayed immediately to Governor Sorrell, along with the need for a decision about what to do with William Roadknight. Over the next few days, as the year 1824 began and Governor Sorell was confident in the arrival of the new Commandant and stability returning at Sarah Island, he had to decide the next chapter William's fate.

Should William be returned to Sarah Island to see out his sentence? With order being re-established on the island, there was no need for the gentleman prisoners to be sent back to assist (nor was increasing the prison numbers a good idea until the new Commandant had settled in).

Should William be returned to Hobart Town Gaol for the remainder of his sentence with perhaps some shortening of the sentence also applied? This could be seen as favourable but equally could stir up William's supporters further if he was kept in a nearby prison where they could continue their visits, agitating and lobbying government officials further for his release.

Should William, in light of his heroic behaviour in the rescue mission, be granted a full and free pardon? This would be complicated, time consuming and involve a number of local officials. Further, it would require the consent of the NSW Governor, and could just as easily be approved as it could be rejected—stirring up even more trouble if unsuccessful.

Or perhaps, using the recent heroic actions as grounds for special dispensations within Governor Sorrell's own authority, and mindful of the previous sentencing recommendations of the jury at his trial, could the Governor safely grant William the previously, *"Recommended for Remission of sentence in respect of the former peculiar good character and the especial circumstances of the case?"*

For William and his fellow prisoners who had succeeded in this heroic rescue voyage, the next few days would have been fraught with tension and anxiety. What would be their fate? On one hand, the provision of lodgings without prison guards was a promising sign they were not likely to return to either the Hobart Town Gaol or be sent back to Sarah Island. On the other hand, the failure to immediately provide any definitive outcome as to their fates left the men to conjure up their own best and worst-case scenarios…

For the convict men in their party, who had already served a few years of their sentences, the granting of a 'Ticket of Leave' (allowed to work and live freely in Hobart Town on parole for the remainder of the sentence) was the most likely outcome—and they knew that well enough. But for their fellow prisoner William, with whom a deep friendship and bond had been formed in surviving their harrowing voyage together, there was no such certainty. For William was only six months into his 7-year sentence. This was well below the threshold of time needed to be served before a Ticket of Leave was usually considered. And so the men, in the quiet of the evenings, whilst becoming increasingly certain of their own good fortune, would have resisted the urge to celebrate the forthcoming good news. They knew that William's fate could be different to theirs—but not in a good way…

As Governor Sorell moved to approve the Tickets of Leave for all the eligible men on the voyage, he had to resolve the politically impossible situation he now faced with William Roadknight. His two choices were obvious enough, but each one was a poison chalice. Governor Sorrell could either grant William a Ticket of Leave (despite the brevity of his sentence served to date), or order him back to prison at the same time as his fellow prisoners—now heroes in the eyes of many—were able to be paroled with Tickets of Leave as a reward for their courage and service.

William's own courage and leadership of the men on the voyage was without question. After all, William had been selected for the rescue voyage based mainly on his leadership skills as opposed to his rapidly

acquired sailing skills. Meanwhile, his crew had been mainly selected for the sailing skills and record of good behaviour over the length of their sentence served.

The Ticket of Leave System—Van Diemen's Land 1800s

The Ticket of Leave System was first introduced by Governor Philip Gidley King in 1801. Its principal aim was to reduce the burden on the fledgling colonial government of providing food from the government's limited stores. Convicts who seemed able to support themselves were awarded a Ticket of Leave. Before too long, Tickets began to be given as a reward for good behaviour. This permitted the holders to seek employment within a specified district, but not leave it without the permission of the government or the district's resident magistrate. Each change of employer or district was recorded on the ticket.

Originally the Ticket of Leave was given without any relation to the period of the sentence a convict had already served. Some 'gentlemen convicts' were issued with tickets on their arrival in the colony. Starting in 1811, the need to first officiate some time in servitude was established, and in 1821, Governor Brisbane introduced regulations across all Australian colonies specifying the lengths of sentences that had to be served before a convict could be considered for a Ticket: four years for a seven-year sentence; six to eight years for a 14-year sentence; and, 10 to 12 years for those with a life sentence.

Ticket of Leave holders were not permitted to carry firearms or board a ship. Convicts who observed the conditions of the Ticket of Leave until the completion of their sentence were entitled to a conditional pardon, which removed all restrictions except a ban on leaving the colony.

Convicts who did not observe the conditions of their ticket could be arrested without warrant, tried without recourse to the Supreme Court, and would forfeit their property. The Ticket of Leave had to be renewed annually, and those with one had to attend muster and church services.

Governor Sorell would have felt the weight of making such a decision. No doubt, a fierce internal debate would have raged as he considered William's fate. There was the power of the local newspaper, The Hobart Town Gazette, and almost certainly, the government would face heavy criticism should the others be paroled but not William.

There was the risk of massive criticism by the township against his government for not granting William a Ticket of Leave and sending him back to gaol whilst his fellow prisoners were paroled (as under normal

circumstances they were eligible and he was not). This consideration outweighed the risk of any criticism about a special dispensation for William. The extraordinary nature of the circumstances made it entirely reasonable to reward all the men equally for their heroic efforts, and thus the final decision regarding William became obvious. Furthermore, Sorell knew that any criticism he endured for granting William a Ticket of Leave so early in his sentence could also be rebuffed by the original recommendation of the trial jury for a full remission of William's sentence in the first place.

With the decision made to grant William a Ticket of Leave, all the men could be advised of their fates and rejoice in their pending freedom… albeit with the parole restrictions that their Ticket of Leave status entailed. Thus, William was freed from further incarceration and was able to return to his wife and children on a Ticket of Leave (with his eventual *'free pardon'* still a few years away).

What relief and joy William would have felt at the news, knowing that he was soon to be reunited with his wife and family. The anticipation of reunifying with his family would have consumed him as he waited. His brother Thomas collected William from Hobart Town and they began the journey back to his property 'Ivanhoe' in Plenty, west of the township of New Norfolk.

One can only imagine the extremes of bitter-sweet emotions that William would have experienced on this journey. Bitterness going past the police constable's house in New Norfolk, and seeing the local landmarks reminding him of the O'Neill and Read properties—neighbours who had caused him so much harm. Sweetness, as the thoughts of the love and tenderness he had for his family swelled in his heart, as he got closer and closer to home.

William and Thomas must have had much to talk about on this homeward journey. Thomas would have been glad to have William back but would have also been trying to delicately warn him that things had not gone so well on the farm and that Harriet had struggled in his absence. The family situation was later described as *'destitute and impoverished'* and

Harriet described as *'being in a most unfortunate state of mind unable to attend to the domestic duties her family so loudly called for'*.

Thomas may also have been surprised at the change in William's demeanour, quieter and more thoughtful and reflective. William was no longer the confident and boisterous younger brother who had always been quick to stand up and fight for the family interests. Now, William asked more questions than gave answers and was frequently lost in his thoughts, staring aimlessly out of the carriage and into the vast expanse of the Derwent Valley.

Did Thomas assume that William, through all the traumatic events of the last few months, was simply suffering from some form of angst (what we now know as PTSD), like he suffered from? Did Thomas assume William's quietness was simply a temporary stress-induced state, which, like his own stress episodes, would resolve soon enough and William would soon bounce back to his boisterous, confident self? Or did Thomas recognise the deeper shift in William's persona, and that these changes in character were not trauma related but rather, the fruits of deep and profound personal growth?

As the two men drifted in and out of conversation, bumping around in the horse-drawn carriage, they rounded a bend and William's homestead came into view. As they came down the track closer to the house, William jumped out of the carriage, running towards Harriet and their children as they eagerly ran out of the homestead to greet him. What embraces! William with tears in his eyes hugging Harriet ever so tightly and the children surrounding them; it would have been a giant group hug! And on the veranda of the homestead, the loyal convict servants who had remained on the farm in his absence watching from afar smiling widely. Finally, justice had prevailed, and their master was free!

As the celebrations, tears, and seemingly endless kisses and hugs of his wife and children finally subsided, William would have cast a keen eye across the farm and along the length of the homestead. It would have been clear, just as Thomas had ever so delicately tried to tell him on the journey home, that all was not well.

The paddocks were unploughed, crops were in disarray and the orchard was struggling. The homestead itself needed major repair. All this degradation in only twelve months. William would have felt dumbstruck, probably contemplating, *How it is this possible?*

William wondered why his brother Thomas had let everything deteriorate so quickly. *Perhaps Thomas had himself fallen apart during this time as well?*

William would have been plagued by confusing thoughts. *Why had Harriet 'let it all go'? Why had she not directed their assigned convict servants to maintain the property?* But then, he argued with himself as he remembered that it was always his role to direct the convict servants on matters of property maintenance. Thus, they would most likely have been left to their own devices to do what they thought was best.

As William settled back into life on the farm, every day brought new problems. The debts had piled up in his absence. Summer was the harvest season for the wheat crop, yet there was no crop to harvest! Further, there were no grazing sheep or cattle in any fit state to sell. How could he repay his debts? What could he do? Why had his triumphant and glorious return from exile now been completely overrun by these further struggles and troubles?

Once again, William was faced with new, unforeseen, and massive challenges. However, William did not revert to his previous reactions of anger and despair. A new light burned inside William's mind and soul. He had emerged from his own 'Dark Night of the Soul' experience, and now, he was so much calmer in the face of adversity—a more introspective, insightful, and compassionate man.

Though he had not seen in himself this gradual transformation (as his preoccupation with survival had blocked any chance of quiet self-reflection), those around him saw a very different man emerging. He had been transformed from talker to listener; from reactively ordering others around to proactively seeking their advice; from being driven by his emotions to simply observing his emotions; from seeing everything

as right or wrong to seeing everything in shades of grey; from living in the regrets of the past and the worries of the future to living in the moment and finding joy in the small things. He no longer assumed the worst but hoped for the best. He was a new man, grounded in the reality of his circumstances.

Still strongly religious, it would be fair to say that rather than waiting for death to enter the kingdom of heaven, he determined to work harder to create the kingdom of heaven on earth. The extent of his family's ongoing suffering was so clear to him. Not just the cruelty of the circumstances nor their impoverished conditions—for which he felt responsible—but rather the way they continued to speak of the injustice which had now (at least partially) resolved. William noticed their continued deep unhappiness and inability to embrace the little sparks of joy in having each other to lean on once again.

Additionally, there were many other graces for which they could be thankful: having their physical health; the increasing number of days with sunshine and warmth in the summer; and the nights of warmth by the fire together as a family.

This preoccupation with past negatives at the expense of not enjoying the present positives seemed so foreign to him since he had literally been to hell and back. Yet he knew that, only twelve months ago, he too would have overlooked these same moments of joy; he likely would have indignantly complained about the injustices of the world to anyone who would listen. It was this realisation that finally heightened his self-awareness about the significant changes that had taken place in his own personality and outlook.

William could see how *'the bad luck'* of his previous crucible of suffering in a remote convict prison had now become *'the good luck'* as he had a newfound perspective on life. A life where he was more forgiving and determined to let go of the exhaustion and negativity that being fixated on anger and injustice creates. It was not because it wasn't there, but because life was too short to hold onto anger. He became aware of the importance of a life where he was more positive and present, recognising the world in the present moment. It was too

beautiful to waste time focusing on past wrongs or circumstances largely beyond his own control.

William's first few weeks back at the farm passed by with him listening more than talking, and his evenings were spent thinking more than doing. Everyone around him noticed the changes in his personality and behaviour. As Harriet's protective armour of indignation and anger slowly receded, she became less fixated on her victim status and more open to shifting her thoughts towards the future. A future life for her and William away from the farm and away from the neighbours, some of whom had been conspiring against them whilst others showed complete indifference to their plight and suffering.

It was then that the seed of hope would have germinated. Could they have a life away from the landscape of the Derwent Valley? Away from the river–the scene of so much trouble–visible from every angle of the homestead and a constant reminder of where it had all gone so horribly wrong?

Harriet initially may well have been somewhat puzzled by the new calmness, care, and compassion that William now showered upon her. It wasn't that he had not been caring previously, but it was now different… deeper. It was as if during their conversations together she was the only person in his entire world. As days went by, and there wasn't some sudden end to this honeymoon experience and reversion to his old self, Harriet began to understand just how much the trauma of the last twelve months had changed William. It was not in a bad way like his brother Thomas's regular episodes of chaotic behaviour ever since the battle of Waterloo, but in a good way; William had become even more steadfast, more loving, wiser and stronger!

How relieved she would have felt to have him return and so much sooner than envisaged. For William's children, having their dad back to ask questions and listen would have been a delight for them after not having him present for the last twelve months. At their ages of between six and nine years old, memories of pre-transformation William were quickly overwritten as they stepped happily into this new and improved version of their father. The convict servants who had remained and

would continue to remain in his service for years to come also redoubled their faith in William as a fair and wise master.

Leaving the farm, repaying his debts and moving out of the Derwent Valley became William's number one priority. But how could this happen? He could sell his land, but prices were low and there were many properties available across the area associated with the wider downturn in all the British colonies. Could he find a buyer? And would this be enough money to pay off his outstanding debts? And where could his family go that would be far enough away to break from all the trauma in the Derwent Valley? And finally, William would have looked at all the possibilities as he tried to envisage what he could do to earn a living to support his family.

William spent the months of January until April 1824 working through these issues, seeking advice from his brother and the few trusted friends who remained in the wider community and in government. By April 1824, news was swirling around the colony about the forthcoming retirement of Governor Sorell, who had been in office since 1817.

After seven years ruling the colony under the direction of the NSW Governor, Sorrell's conservative, non-interventionist approach to the many political and legal injustices that had befallen the Roadknights was set to end as a newly announced governor arrived in Hobart Town to take up office on 2 May 1824.

Colonel George Arthur was appointed as the new governor. He was formerly an active soldier in Europe and a man of action concerned with injustice and abolition of slavery. Further, as he was a man sympathetic to the needs of other veteran soldiers, he had several officers join him in his administration, including Captain John Montagu (who was married to his niece and worked as his private secretary). Importantly, Captain John Monatgu was a friend of Thomas Roadknight and they had served together in the British military during the Napoleonic war with France.

Captain John Montagu 1797-1853
Captain John Montagu was an officer in the 52nd Regiment who had fought at the Battle of Waterloo alongside Thomas Roadknight (who was 10 years older than Montagu).
In 1824, Montagu relocated to Van Diemen's Land, where he became Governor George Arthur's private secretary.
In 1826, he was made clerk of the Executive and Legislative Councils but was recalled to England to take up his military duties in 1829. Montagu resigned from the army a year later and was re-appointed clerk of the councils in Hobart Town.
In 1832, Montagu acted as Colonial Treasurer, and in 1834, was appointed Colonial Secretary. This was a position he held until 1843 when he relocated to South Africa to take up a similar government appointment.

Governor Arthur was a man stepping into an increasingly autonomous colony with NSW expecting stronger leadership and self-determination on local matters in Van Diemen's Land. The political tide would turn in William's favour soon and the Roadknights' enemies, who sought to exploit his misfortune, could not rely on the new Governor simply turning a blind eye to their actions, as had been done in previous years. William had heard through the grapevine that one of these enemies, his westerly neighbour George Read (who was also the Justice of the Peace (a JP) who had committed him to stand trial in the first place), was moving quickly to lobby for additional land grants under Governor Sorrell before he departed. In February 1824, George was granted an additional 830 acres of land adjoining the south-west boundary of his property (see map in Chapter 2). William knew that with his expansionist goals, George would be the obvious buyer for his land, too. And luckily for William, with his newfound openness to forgive (or at least not hold on to grudges) and prioritise helping his family over and above any need for revenge, he was able to strike up a conversation with George when the opportunity arose.

Further, George was a shrewd man and well-connected in government. He knew of the complexities of William's situation, and he could smell a bargain a mile away! George knew that there were few buyers around, and he knew that William had to sell his land because of his debts. As a Justice of the Peace, he knew the threat of land resumption by the

government remained real for William as he was still a convicted felon with only a remission of sentence.

George knew he could get the land cheaper now than at any other time. He was also aware that rather than buying back off the government, should it be resumed first, if he bought it off William prior to a resumption, he would not have to compete with others bidding in the auction process for the re-sale of the land. George also knew the other neighbours such as James O'Neill, would not interfere with his negotiations, as he was rapidly becoming the largest landholder in the area. This, combined with his JP status, made him someone to be feared and respected in the local community.

Whilst George thought he had outplayed William, it was actually William who was already ten steps ahead of George. William made sure that throughout the evolving negotiations he never revealed his true emotions nor his ultimate strategy. This behaviour was something he had learned so painfully well on Sarah Island, *always let the other person feel superior and in control of the events if they are unfolding in your favour.*

This new successful approach to communication and negotiation was such a contrast to his disastrous old approach of showing his emotions, where he would have asserted superiority and dogmatically stated his intentions upfront. That had resulted inthe disastrous outcomes of the conversation on 1st September 1822 with his neighbour James O'Neill after William had shot James's convict servant, Thorp, in self-defence.

No doubt that night would have played over and over in William's mind during his time on Sarah Island. He might even have reimagined more positive outcomes if he had behaved differently during that evening conversation after the 1st September 1822 shooting incident where James O'Neill had conceded, apologised, and offered assurances of protection. William, however, had dogmatically persisted in his wish for police involvement and much harsher penalties, thereby placing James in an impossible position—a 'box canyon' where he had no opportunity to escape other than fight.

Over the months, a number of conversations took place between William and George as the terms of sale and final price were negotiated. I can just picture my great-great-great-great-great grandfather's well practised pained facial expressions and unease throughout the negotiations as well-staged responses to encourage George's increasing confidence in the deal. All the while, he would have had to hide his deeper goals of ensuring the sale actually progressed in order to create the urgently needed way out for William and his family to start again.

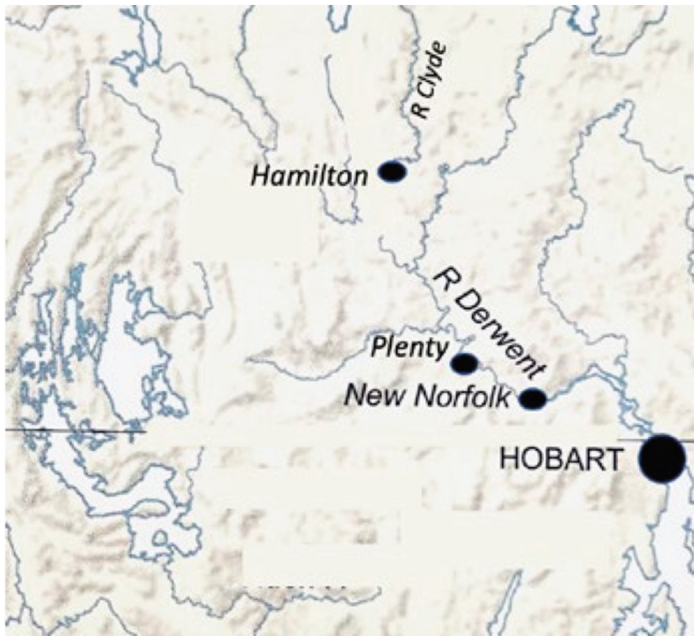
On 30 April 1824, with only days to spare until the outgoing Governor Sorell began the process of handing over power to the incoming Governor Arthur, the deal was signed. The property was to be sold to George Read with proceeds enough to pay off all of William's debts. The exit from the Derwent Valley would be completed by the end of June 1824. With winter now approaching and nowhere to live, where would they go? What land would they live on without any leftover money to purchase? And what would they do to generate income?

The intellect and strategic capability of William was now so much greater than before his ordeal. He was not just the master of negotiations and deftly managing the needs of a complex array of other personality types, but also as a grand strategist—a chess master of sorts—he was more than capable of juggling multiple agendas simultaneously. He had finally assumed the mantel of 'strategic planner'. This was the role his father had held all those years earlier, when he had sensed the changing opportunities and needs of his family, thinking ten steps ahead to ensure their survival in England and then in the decision to move to the colonies.

William knew he and his family's future would be decided by several factors: strategy and tactics (how quickly they could adapt to the ever-changing political conditions in Van Diemen's Land), and resources (access to income, property and transport). So, parallel to the negotiations with George Read to sell his property, he began a campaign of lobbying the incoming Governor Arthur for a new land grant through his brother Thomas's connection with Governor Arthur's private secretary, Captain John Montagu.

William's brother, Thomas, had visited Montagu in early May 1824 to rekindle their friendship and commitment to each other as fellow war veterans. It was likely that during the discussions about the need for William to relocate and start anew two very important pieces of information were revealed: 1) The government's priority for establishing water mills in the newly established settlements to fast-track further economic growth and development, and 2) The requirement for land grant holders to reside on allocated lands which meant that a 25 acre parcel of land in Hamilton previously granted to Henry Hopkins (a prominent figure in early Hobart Town) had been rescinded after Henry declined to take up residence. This unfortunate turn of events for Henry Hopkins could now become a very fortunate event for William and Thomas.

On the advice of Montagu, Thomas then wrote to Governor Sorrell on 31 May 1824 (who was still completing his handover to Governor Arthur up until 12 June 1824) seeking approval for a land grant and development permission to build a flour mill on the banks of the Clyde River at the township of Hamilton. It was a far-flung outpost, miles away from the Derwent Valley on the edge of the unexplored western wilderness.



Thomas's letter also notified the Governor of the urgency of their request in that they had already purchased the materials to construct the flour mill. Further, he added that a government surveyor had already identified a suitable site that could be given as a land grant.

With Thomas following the politically correct channels during this handover period of government, Captain John Montagu could then officially step into the situation and advocate for him. This was revealed in a series of correspondence between Thomas, Montagu, Governor Arthur and the Hamilton Town Surveyor between 1 and 5 June 1824, which resulted in the full 25 acres of Henry Hopkins former land grant being allocated. There was then correspondence from the surveyor, recommending the grant be reduced to 5 acres directly on the Clyde River (the specific site of the flour mill). This proposed reduction of the size of the land grant was then formally disputed by Thomas as 'harsh and unreasonable' with the matter left unresolved. This lack of resolution was actually a stroke of good luck for William, as in the end Governor Arthur did not change his mind and the entire 25 acre grant was assigned to William as per the original approval.

With confirmation of his entitlement to the Mill site and the wider lands surrounding the Mill, William was able to deftly manoeuvre his relocation and construction efforts in Hamilton to establish himself as one of the most important civic leaders of the township. This ability to respectfully manage the complexities of government land granting policies of the era would become a major asset in his subsequent successes in Van Diemen's Land and later on in Victoria.

William had now become a grand master of strategy—surpassing even his own father's ability to manage such complexity. William had succeeded with a very complex strategy over the first six months of 1824. Whilst caring for his distressed wife and family and negotiating the sale of his property to George Read he had also: (1) sourced equipment to build a flour mill, (2) researched sites that might be eligible for land grants up on the Clyde River (away from the Derwent Valley), and (3) advised Thomas behind the scenes in the lobbying of his friend, Montagu, while staying out of the spotlight himself given he was still classed as a convict on a 'Ticket of Leave'.

Why a flour mill? Well, William knew from his time in Hobart Town Gaol and on Sarah Island that industry was the future. Specifically, an industry that produced food staples needed in the local community. Again, this was good luck emerging from previous *bad luck!* However, that would be to simplify it too much as he had also worked hard to stay across the evolving policies of the government which was now prioritising funding for infrastructure and industry initiatives to support regional townships.

For Thomas, once the land grant and mill was approved in Hamilton he had 'a parachute' to escape the Derwent Valley and the toxic environment. He was still playing catch-up with William's strategy, and so, calling on the business aptitude of their father, he does a similar deal with George Read. He sells his land in July 1824 so that he can then join William and his family in their fresh start at Hamilton as flour millers on the Clyde River.

Once again, the Roadknight brothers (with the new, improved version of William) are starting afresh together in another place. This was just like they had done in leaving England and arriving in Van Diemen's Land, only four years earlier!

As Christmas 1824 approached, Thomas enjoys a rekindled friendship with Captain John Montagu, previously his war veteran colleague in France, who is now increasingly interested in conducting a review of William's previous legal misfortune. The Roadknight brothers must have been delighted when Montague began to lobby for William's name to be officially added to both the land grant and flour mill approval in Hamilton.

With the flour mill completed and operational, construction had begun on the general store and post office which would later become known at The Hamilton Inn – one of the few buildings of the era still intact and operational today. These successes marked a high point in the effectiveness of William and Thomas's brotherly partnership that had been through so many trials and tribulations.

As the New Year of 1825 began, William, with his new-found skills of influencing others and envisioning a community where everyone could succeed together, quickly expanded his influence in the community of Hamilton. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed as a Stock Inspector and then, District Constable. William and Harriet had another child together, and with support coming in from various areas of government and the community, William submits an application to seek a Free Pardon. This is granted the following year by which time the phoenix has well and truly risen from the ashes!

Epilogue

Seven Ordeals & Four Life Lessons

The Seven Ordeals

Epilogue

Seven Ordeals & Four Life Lessons

"Fall down seven times, stand up eight."
— Japanese Proverb

The Crucible Years in William Roadknight's life lasted four long and extremely difficult years–from 1820–1824. The Japanese proverb, *"Fall down seven times, stand up eight"*, seems to be a perfect summation of this period in William's life. For it was in this time that he suffered seven ordeals before finally rising up to become the new version of himself which ultimately led to his future success.

In this section, I want to unpack, in more detail, the seven ordeals that William underwent, and later the life lessons learned through his crucible years.

But first, let's recap the seven ordeals, for going back to the beginning is essential to understand the odds that were stacked against William being able to even survive such events let alone thrive and prosper…

The Seven Ordeals

Putting on my professional hat as a clinical psychologist, I believe William suffered seven ordeals or major traumatic events during his Crucible Years. These were, in order: Bereavement, Displacement, Terror, Injustice, Exile, Survival, and Financial Ruin. Let's look at these individually.

- **Bereavement:** in relation to the unexpected and sudden death of his father on the voyage to Van Diemen's Land when William was twenty-eight years old.

- **Displacement:** in relation to the isolation and dislocation of trying to establish himself and his family in Van Diemen's Land without his mentor and father (or any other family or friends of origin) to guide him.
- **Terror:** in relation to the intimidation and threats of harm made against him and his family by drunken convict labourers masquerading as bushrangers who were a constant source of threat in the local areas.
- **Injustice:** related to the biased investigation against him, charges of attempted murder, and his subsequent mistrial and wrongful conviction.
- **Exile:** in being unlawfully sentenced to Sarah Island Prison colony away from any hope of seeing his wife and children for seven years.
- **Survival:** in battling horrendous Southern Ocean storms for four days and nights. During that time, he staved off hypothermia, extreme fatigue, and hunger on a rescue mission back to Hobart Town.
- **Financial Ruin:** in relation to having to sell up all his land and possessions to pay debtors so he could start all over again.

That which doesn't kill you usually makes you weaker,
not stronger!

As a Clinical Psychologist, I know that (a) some stressful life events can create greater risks of mental and physical illness than others, and (b) the risks from stressful life events are cumulative.

Clinical tools such as 'The Stressful Life Events Scale' (Holmes & Rahe) would now categorise each of the seven ordeals William endured as 'Major Stressful Life Events' with each event having it's own risk score between 1-100. Thus, we can calculate a cumulative 'total' risk score. The cumulative impact of so many major stressful life events, in such a short space of time, would have given him a total score of 330. Anyone scoring above 300 is classified as having a 'Very High Likelihood' of developing consequential major physical and mental health problems.

The reality for most people who experience so much trauma in such a short space of time is, in fact, the opposite to Nietzsche's famous quote, 'That which doesn't kill you makes you stronger'. The medical evidence tells us… that which doesn't kill you usually makes you weaker, not stronger.

William Roadknight though, is an unusual case—an exception to the rule. Despite such massive and enduring traumas, he became not only stronger but also wiser, unlike his brother Thomas, whose war-related trauma did not make him stronger but rather caused transient mental health issues for the rest of his life.

Knowledge speaks, wisdom listens.
— Unknown

How and why William survived and thrived despite experiencing such a large and diverse number of traumatic events and then went on to forge what in current terms would be considered a AU $500 million dollar property empire and an enduring family dynasty is a complex question to answer.

There are theoretical links to a diverse range of fields such as genetics, religion, cognitive neuroscience, health and nutrition, and others that might explain this. At a practical level, the answer can be found in the 'listening' William did, as well as listening to others. Instead of giving in to a 'victim' mentality, his ability to reflect, problem solve, and integrate the 'brutal facts' of his difficult circumstances with his deeper values, faith and hope was likely what saved him. This was a newfound skill that emerged during his incarceration. It would have been a hard pill to swallow but he learned to take responsibility for his actions and to focus all his energy on what he could control—letting go of anything and everything outside his control.

And it was through this highly self-disciplined process of introspection, problem solving, and hope for the future that he was able to learn new 'life lessons'. This approach would not only allow his recovery from trauma, but it gave him powerful insights into humankind so enabling his future success on such a grand scale.

The Four (Extraordinary) Life Lessons

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.
— Charles Darwin

In this section, I'd like to extrapolate the events of William's Crucible Years into extraordinary life lessons that may help explain how he attained such massive successes in his later years as a Victorian pastoralist. I also want to ask you, the reader, to consider how these life lessons may be of benefit in the challenges you face.

Life lessons are about the insights we generate after facing challenges and setbacks. Life lessons can be good or bad, helpful or unhelpful. Not all helpful life lessons are equal in their power to enable us to thrive and prosper. Thus life lessons can be 'ordinary' or 'extraordinary' in the benefits they provide us.

Life Lessons: Ordinary vs Extraordinary

A simple way to understand the difference between 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' life lessons can be illustrated by how we deal with 'broken trust'. When trust is broken one helpful but somewhat 'ordinary' life lesson is *'be careful whom you trust'*; This 'ordinary' life lesson is logical, sensible and protective in preventing future problems.

A far more helpful and perhaps less obvious life lesson, that leads to far greater future benefits – arising from the same issue of broken trust is *'you can trust people to serve their own interests'*. This 'extraordinary' life lesson is far more powerful in not only preventing future problems but also in enabling the goodwill and cooperation of others.

I would like to share four of the perhaps less obvious, but arguably more 'extraordinary' life lessons from William's Crucible Years. Life lessons which I believe were pivotal in his rise from the ashes to a subsequent extreme level of success compared to his peers. These 'extraordinary' life lessons are still highly relevant today, as we all grapple with the shifting sands of work and personal relationships, the juggling of competing priorities and material aspirations, and the difficulty of coping with unforeseen challenges and missed opportunities.

1. The early bird gets the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.
Life lesson: know which game you're playing.

This is such an important life lesson that William learned the hard way from the moment he arrived in Van Dieman's Land and then profited from immensely, later in his life.

The saying, *'The early bird gets the worm but the second mouse gets the cheese'* (unknown), highlights the duality and complexity of business and industry in the real world.

The undeniable fact is that there is never *'a one size fits all approach to succeed in every circumstance'*. In some situations, it is very much *'the early bid gets the worm'* where success occurs if you're the first mover in an environment where there is both scarcity and immediate demand. This is also referred to as 'first mover advantage'. Examples of this include being the first to discover a new mining area rich in gold; the first to produce and sell a new type of product or service that the market is ready and able to buy; or the first over the finish line in a race to get the gold medal.

But in other situations, the *'early bird rule'* does not apply. Instead, the rule of 'the second mouse gets the cheese' is more applicable when describing how to succeed when there may well be scarcity and demand, but there are major obstacles to be overcome, such as mouse traps, in order to fulfil this demand.

The first mover, however, is at a disadvantage as they risk using up their resources before they can overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of success. Examples include the costs and time of the initial clearing of lands for farming before the harvest and sale of crops can occur. The 'first' farmer often goes broke along the way and is bought out at a cheaper price by the 'second' farmer who moves quickly to take advantage of the work already done, turning a profit much faster. The same scenario plays out all the time in the modern world in the costly processes of developing new technologies to solve real-world problems where the 'first' company is sold off before it can realise a profit and the 'second' company reaps the rewards.

William Roadknight did not appear to understand that the game being played in Van Diemen's Land's political world was *'the early bird gets the worm'*. To clarify, by the time he had arrived in 1820, there were already quite established social rules and conventions based on colonial life. Further, power brokers and personalities did not match the rules-based social hierarchy of London and the British Establishment. Instead, there were unwritten rules, hidden amongst handshakes, winks and nods, gentlemen's agreements; all of these influenced the application of official law and order.

William was late to this game. The birds had already consumed all of the worms and the fledgling society was fully formed. Worse still, he did not even know this was the game of the era. He had assumed it would be himself and the newly arriving settlers who would benefit most. But for the pre-existing population, they were simply resources to exploit (unless you were street smart and could work out who the true power brokers were and find a way to be invited into the inner circle of the establishment).

However, William reversed his misfortune when he moved to Port Phillip, where he was one of the early birds setting up the settlement and social order of this new colony. By being one of 'the early birds' in the Port Phillip colony he was able to build deep connections with the founding leaders of the community, government, law enforcement, and religious institutions which would pave the way for ever growing prosperity.

At times in my own business life, I have failed to realise I was on the outside of a pre-existing order and wasted time trying to win customers who were deeply embedded with companies who had a long history in the industry. Have you ever made this mistake? It might have been at work, such as trying to branch out into different markets, or personally, trying to make new friends within well-established communities?

William's other mistake in this regard was in the opposite aspect of the saying—*the second mouse gets the cheese*. In his haste to settle and develop his newly acquired property 'Ivanhoe', he consumed all his available funds, assuming that after a few years of big harvests,

he would be able to repay debts incurred in the start-up phase. But a series of unforeseen disasters ensued. This prevented any big harvests or additional income. Thus he faced financial ruin and was forced to sell his land and equipment at a discount to his neighbour who could take advantage of the situation. Had he been more cautious with his savings and land development strategy, it is possible he may have been able to survive these major setbacks. Consequently, the lack of 'rainy day' savings meant his financial ruin was unavoidable.

William learned the lesson about *'the second mouse getting the cheese'* in his later development of land holdings in Port Phillip where he (1) minimised the amount of improvements on his existing lands until he had cash generated from sales to reinvest; and (2.) shrewdly waited until other settlers had exhausted their own efforts ad were looking for buyers where he would become the 'second' purchaser.

Not being the second mouse to the cheese is certainly a mistake I have made. Two examples from my life experience have been: (1) Renovating houses where I have blown budgets and timelines and had to sell properties which were bargains for the new owners but losses for me, and (2) Funding the development of new technology solutions that my customers wanted. This resulted in almost running out of cash as timelines exceeded forecast and customer uptake took longer than expected.

Have you ever made this mistake of jumping in too soon or failing to set aside rainy-day savings for unexpected setbacks? Is there something happening now where you could prepare better for a worst-case scenario?

2. You can have anything you want if you first help others get what they want.
Life lesson: harness the power of social networks.

In my work as a clinical psychologist, many of my patients have told me that when they were a child, they were told that *'when you grow up you can be whatever you want to be if you're willing to work hard'*. I call this the 'work ethic' narrative to success.

This 'work ethic' narrative is only a half-truth when it comes to succeeding in life; it is devilishly inaccurate and leads so many people astray (me included). I would suggest that the whole truth–if there is one—for succeeding in life would also need to include the 'social network' narrative at the end of the phrase *'… and surround yourself with smart people who are willing to help you.'*

I'm guessing that William, like me, and like many others, only got the 'work ethic' half of the story growing up and thus became self-disciplined, hardworking, studious, ambitious, and respectful. And the big problem here, of course, is that these admirable personal qualities will only help you succeed at challenges that are largely within your control. They are challenges where you need to be wiser, stronger, faster, or more skilled in some way to succeed. And this half-truth becomes a 'full- truth' in such specific circumstances with no negative consequence for people who are open to becoming wiser, stronger, faster, or more skilled in areas they wish to grow in.

When you grow up you can be whatever you want to be
if you're willing to work hard … and surround yourself
with smart people who are willing to help you.

The problem many of us face who only rely on 'work ethic' to guide us in life is that there *are not enough positive consequences* from this approach alone when tackling more complex challenges that involve other people. This is where the other half of this truth—this is what I call the 'social network' narrative—must be applied to be successful. This is about building community, social networks, and partnerships. About making friends, understanding other people's wants and needs. About creating comfort and trust. About win-wins, mutually beneficial relationships where we help each other to succeed.

This 'stuff' would have been really tricky for someone like William to fully wrap his head around. People who have a religious upbringing, as William did, often have an in-built focus on helping others and contributing to society. This, in itself, is a really good thing and can accrue social benefits and goodwill from others. However, the developmental problem here is that this helping behaviour stems from a 'work ethic' perspective, not a 'social network' perspective.

Accordingly, we 'think' we have great relationships in our communities, and we may well do, but the problem is we really don't know why because we are helping others on 'auto-pilot'. We are not actively studying and understanding their individual wants and needs. Nor are we looking for how they can help us with our wants or needs. Indeed, we often accidently suppress this aspect of ourselves, negatively labelling it as 'selfish', which may lead to bigger problems later in life.

Put simply, for most of us, when we help others from a 'work ethic' perspective, instead of a 'social network' perspective, we do not deepen our knowledge and skills in understanding others' wants and needs. Further, we do not advance our skills in complex negotiation to craft win-win outcomes.

Without having the knowledge and skill to engage in win-win relationships with others, you cannot fulfil any significant life goals that require input from others who, on the surface, have no incentive to help you or see your point of view. Developing a 'social network' perspective to accompany your 'work ethic' is a definite 'must' for anyone engaged in complex business dealings. However, this aspect is often entirely missing in people who live in closed and stable communities where everyone shares the same 'work ethic' only perspective.

And for William, had he not experienced the terrorising actions of his neighbour's drunken convict servants, and then suffered the consequences of damaged relationships due to his righteous indignation and refusal to negotiate a solution, he may well have stayed on the 'work ethic only' auto pilot for the rest of his life. Working hard and being respectful, surrounded by others who were doing exactly the same thing for exactly the same reasons (i.e., because it was 'the right' thing to do).

But alas for William, his neighbour James O'Neill and it seems, much of the wider society within Van Diemen's Land at the time, were grappling with a changing world. Whilst they acknowledged the importance of a 'work ethic', they were more deeply focused on the 'social network' aspects of survival. Had William appreciated this, he would have stopped himself from exploding in anger and outrage over the terror

inflicted upon himself and his family. Instead, he would have refocused upon James' offer of assurances of safety and his desire to negotiate a solution. From this additional 'social network' perspective, William would have been able to state his own needs and wants and then ask James how these could be met. Further, William would have understood the needs and want of James, addressing these in the conversation. But this didn't happen. Instead, William insisted upon a course of action that would destroy his relationship with his neighbour.

We'll never know what untold good things might have come William's way had he instead negotiated a win-win resolution. What would have happened if James O'Neill had become so personally indebted and grateful to William? I expect James have would done his best to ensure that William's prosperity and good fortune were assured—leveraging his wider network of influential landholders and government officials to assist. Imagine what a 'sliding doors' scenario that would have been… forever changing the course of William's life.

However, history shows that this extremely difficult circumstance and the horrific events that unfolded in the aftermath did teach William, in the most painful of ways, the importance of: (1) better understanding and developing the 'social networks' around him, and (2) having a deeper appreciation and an inquiring mind about the needs and wants of others, as well as being in touch with his own needs and wants, to create win-win outcomes.

We know that when William became a master of this process later in life, he was characterised as *'shrewd, intelligent and popular*. This stands in stark contrast to his self-righteous indignation that he had demonstrated previously with such devastating effects.

For me personally, looking back, I have spent too long only embracing the 'work ethic' half of the success in life's equation. As an adult, I had to play catch up in understanding and embedding the 'social network' side of the equation into my everyday thinking and behaviour.

How about you? Have you been relying too much on your 'work ethic' to somehow save the day in complex interpersonal negotiations?

Have you suppressed or downplayed your own basic needs? Perhaps, you have devalued them as being 'selfish' rather than seeing them as potential enablers for win-win negotiations with others? Or, have you fallen into the other trap of relying too much on social relationships instead of doing the hard work that is necessary to succeed in many areas of life?

3. Be a giver, not a taker.
Life lesson: always be able to offer something of value to others.

One of the mysterious things I have found in my life is to understand why many (but not all) wealthy people are seemingly more generous to others in their time, wisdom, material gifts, tolerance, etc., compared to those without such wealth. I assumed it was because they simply had more to give back and then, perhaps, felt guilty about those they'd harmed on the way to becoming so successful. Or, perhaps those who were struggling, such as myself at the time, understandably had nothing to give. I did not understand that a 'generous spirit' had absolutely nothing to do with objective wealth but rather was indicative of a person's ability to recognise the needs and wants of others (i.e., the social network component of prosperity we covered in the last point). Additionally, I wager that they carefully consider how they could 'add value' to others in each and every interaction. Not merely because it was 'the right thing to do', but also because it was the foundation of a much bigger cycle of goodwill and prosperity.

This process of 'adding value' to others begins with 'time' and 'tongue'; these two things are freely available to everyone regardless of objective wealth and status. The 'time' you give to listening to others and participating in community activities and the 'tongue' by which you praise others, provides opportunities to offer insights and share information. Those who become wealthy use this approach so they can add the third element of 'tangibles' to 'time' and 'tongue'. Consequently, they are able to also give gifts of material value as part of 'giving' muscles in serving others. And as more wealth comes their way, so too does a deeper level of giving and philanthropy. Throughout

this giving and adding value cycle, they are continually improving their skills in the subtle art of negotiating business dealings which meets both the economic and emotional needs of the other party.

Early in William's Crucible Years, he appears to have lacked insight into the importance of being a giver, not a taker. Whilst he was compliant and cooperative with the social order of his community and respectful of his neighbours, he did not appear to seek to add any extra value in relation to their unique needs, per se. As such, no-one was particularly indebted to him in any emotional sense. Nor did he feel the need to protect his interests akin to protecting their own. Thus, when 'push came to shove' in local conflicts, he was easily cast aside, and deemed irrelevant by the silent majority in his community.

I have no doubt William mastered this lesson of 'adding value' at some point during his time as a prisoner on Sarah Island. It was there where his survival depended upon him 'adding value' to his fellow prisoners and guards, many of whom held no value in the previous social order nor shared the same devotion to his religious beliefs.

During his incarceration, William would have keenly understood the power of 'time' and 'tongue' in staying *'off the radar'*, especially when politically sensitive issues were being discussed. He would have become skilled at avoiding taking sides with either guards or prisoners, and carefully steered his own course through the complexities of prison life.

Once he returned to civilisation, and faced looming bankruptcy, William used his own 'tangible' assets as points of value. In this way, he 'added' to others by negotiating the sale to a politically influential buyer who could either help or hinder his future in Van Diemen's Land. As William's Crucible Years concluded, he had mastered the three elements of adding values to others: 'time', 'tongue', and 'tangibles' and thus, whether he realised it or not at the time, his success was now certain although he still had a long and winding road yet to travel.

Once he relocated to Hamilton to start all over again in 1824/25, he was deeply focused on understanding and adding value to everyone around

him. History shows that he took on major roles in the community, in the church, and in his work as the constable and pound inspector. These were roles that enabled William to add tremendous value to other community members. The strengthening of William's 'value adding muscles' during this time paid off enormously over the next two decades once settled in Victoria as he upsized his use of 'time', 'tongue', and 'tangibles' to become one of the very wealthy pastoralists and philanthropists of his era.

When I think about my own journey of learning to 'add value' to others, I feel like I have made some good progress in this space over recent years. I certainly think more about intentionally spending 'time' with others and considering my 'tongue' in how I encourage people and avoid unhelpful comments. In my business life, I am also a firm believer in the importance of 'tangibles' and how providing useful resources can add value to others. What about you? Where could you improve in your work or life adding value to others using the three elements of time, tongue and tangibles?

4. Fame and fortune are not friends. *Life lesson: be clear on your end game.*

Perhaps the most powerful life lesson I uncovered in studying William Roadknight's Crucible Years and his life thereafter was the life lesson that *'fame and fortune are not friends'*.

Fame is a double-sided coin. Heads: publicity and promotion; tails: jealously and resentment. Fame is a useful and necessary short-term tool to gain exposure when you need others to engage with you. For instance, you can raise the awareness and status of your cause/product/service, but it is always a hazard over the long-term, as it encourages competition and criticism. In Australia, we call this dark side of fame *'the tall poppy syndrome'* and there are similar sayings in almost every country in the world.

Fame and fortune are not friends. If you want long-term fame, then do not seek to create a lasting fortune, as the competition and criticism will likely erode your wealth in many different ways. If you want a long-term fortune, then do not seek to create lasting fame. The complexity

of this in the real-world for anyone seeking to build wealth is that some degree of fame or self-promotion is essential on the road to success. The trick is to ensure it is no more than necessary and to be able to turn off this fame and promotion as soon as it has achieved its economic objectives.

Early in the Crucible Years, William appears to neither break this rule nor follow it. Rather, he suffered from guilt by association with his brother Thomas's continual breaking of the rule. Thomas appears to have been very much 'a man about town', full of bravado and heavily networked with his bachelor peers who were intellectuals and government officials deeply embedded in the core of Hobart Town society at the time. Whilst his elevated social status and fame were not initially a problem, it soon became a long-lasting curse after Thomas was shot in a quarrel with Paddy Dogherty and the townsfolk turned against him, and by default against William too. From this point onwards, 'the tall poppy syndrome' was applied with many townsfolk using any and every subtle opportunity to marginalise and hinder both Thomas' and William's prosperity.

As a 'marked man', William did not take any steps to reduce his 'infamous' reputation by association with Thomas, but rather, he inadvertently escalated the 'tall poppy syndrome' infamy after the terror incident with the convict servants of James O'Neill. Things then went from bad to worse after William made no attempt to engage in any restorative actions to reverse his infamy with his offended peers. Nor did he address it by recognising the 'signs of the times' and selling up and moving on to another district as another way to turn off this growing infamy in his local community. His lack of recognition of the problem and lack of any action to address it meant that his eventual financial ruin was only a matter of time and circumstance.

But William had learned this life lesson by the time he was released from prison. He recognised there was no way to reverse the infamy (as his full Free Pardon was still several years away). Thus, his only option was to sell his land (to a neighbour), where he could achieve some restorative value to his reputation in legal and government circles, and relocate to the far-flung outpost of Hamilton. Once there, he was

anonymous and had no bad reputation to have to contend with. In this fresh start, William was able to build his wealth slowly and carefully and limit his exposure to any unnecessary or unwanted fame.

The wisdom applied in this next stage of William's life stands in stark contrast to the foolishness of his brother, Thomas, over subsequent years. Thomas did not learn this life lesson at all, and instead chose to double his bets on using his fame and status as a vehicle for prosperity.

As we'll see in the 'Afterword' section of this book, in subsequent years Thomas took advantage of his influential friend, Montagu – a previous military connection and now new government connection and set up his life in the socially competitive and politically important town of New Norfolk. Then, he constructed a new and outrageously expensive and expansive building, garnering him the adulation of the townsfolk and the bitter jealousy of the government officials above him who lived in less luxurious abodes back in Hobart Town. Thomas's fame was sufficiently widespread and obnoxious to his peers to trigger events that would destroy his wealth and social standing. He was bankrupted and jailed for two years with all his influential friends and associates tainted in the process. Thomas' reputation was totally destroyed and he would never rise up again to have any major role in society.

However, for William, (as we'll also see in the Afterword section of this book), once established in Port Phillip, Victoria, he very consciously applied this principle—of being clear on 'your end game'. He created a larger fortune, which he would maintain and then hand on to the next generation. We know William used fame as a tool early on in Port Phillip by becoming a member of many key institutions of the time and volunteering his time to support a range of causes important to both William's religious beliefs and his business ambitions. Yet, whenever his acts of service or interests became too public or put him at risk of jealousy from his peers in the establishment, he was quick to extinguish such unwanted fame by selling off or distributing sensitive assets. He sold inner city land holdings in Melbourne and Geelong and distributed his vast rural empire into smaller lots across the next generation of his family. Further, he downplayed his pivotal role in the funding and construction of significant civic and church buildings; the pioneering of

the road to Cape Otway and lighthouse construction; and lobbying the government for the protection of indigenous tribes.

I suspect that the lack of wider public knowledge about William's specific role in a number of prominent events and achievements in Victoria at the time is, in a large part, due to his sensitivity, at this stage in his life, to avoid any unnecessary fame and its downsides. William had clearly learned that *fame and fortune were not friends*, and he kept his fortune by actively seeking ways to minimise any unnecessary fame.

The life lesson that 'fame and fortune are not friends' has been a big challenge for me to learn. Having been bullied a lot as a child, suffering 'the tall poppy syndrome', I then suffered the opposite problem of withdrawing too much as an adult. It took me a long time to develop the specific type of fame and self-promotion needed to be recognised as an expert in my industry whilst avoiding any other type of fame which might corrode my prosperity.

How about you? How do you manage the complexities of fame and fortune? How do you juggle the necessary evil of self-promotion and fame to get others to recognise your value and the causes/products/services you want them to engage with? How do you minimise any unnecessary fame and what indicators do you use to avoid accidentally creating the 'tall poppy syndrome'? What could you do differently, so you get the balance right, ending up with the right amount of either fame or fortune according to your personal values?

So, there you have it! This last section has been a re-examination of the seven ordeals from William Roadknight's Crucible Years and a deep dive into four of the less obvious but most extraordinary life lessons that enabled his future success on such a grand scale:

1. The early bird gets the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese. Know which game you're playing.
2. You can have anything you want if you first help others get what they want. Harness the power of social networks.
3. Be a giver, not a taker. You should always be able to offer something of value to others.

4. Fame and fortune are not friends. Be clear on your end game.

I hope this has helped you pause and reflect on the subtleties and complexities of surviving and thriving in complex societies. I hope you can see how these life lessons continue to be incredibly relevant, over 200 years later, in today's ever-changing world.

Finally, and most importantly, I hope you can use these insights to successfully move forwards with the challenges and opportunities in your own life!

Venturus Est Optimus
(The Best is yet come)

Pete Stebbins PhD

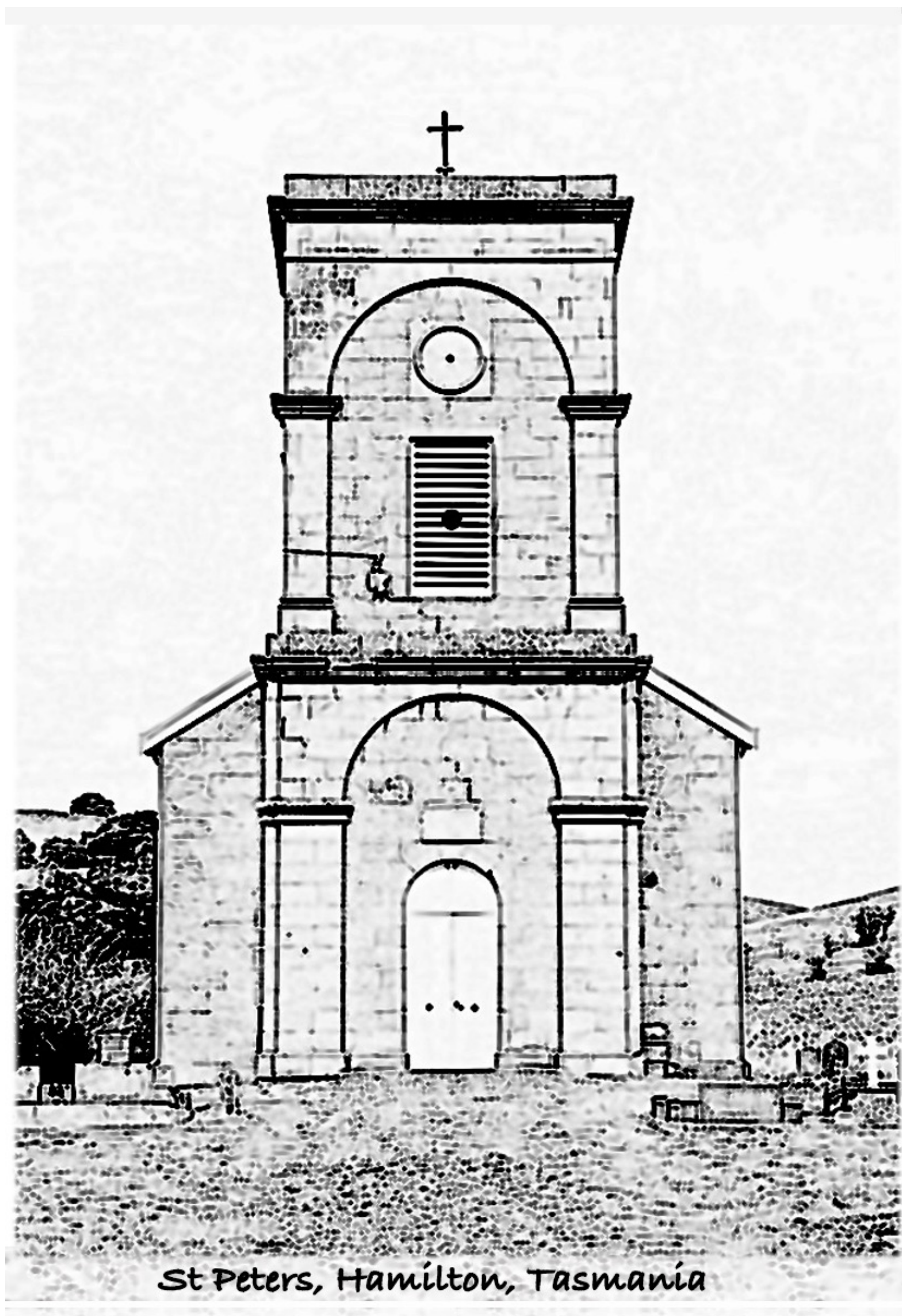
Afterword

Inflection Point: 1836

inflection point

noun

1. **a time of significant change in a situation; a turning point.**



St Peters, Hamilton, Tasmania

Afterword

Inflection Point: 1836

William Roadknight's Crucible Years (1820-1824) were an incredibly intense, humiliating and catastrophic time in his life – an incredible journey of both suffering and transformation.

Yet, William proved to be a man who, despite such incredible suffering, did not harden his heart nor seek revenge on those who harmed him. Instead, he became so much wiser to the ways of the world and, against all odds, became even more compassionate and generous towards those in the wider world around him.

Ultimately, William would establish a vast pastoral empire across western Victoria (which today would be worth over AU $500 million dollars). He would also become a philanthropist and advocate for indigenous communities, yet none of these later achievements would begin in earnest for another twelve years …

The Gravity of Success

'Good is the enemy of great'. This quote by business guru Jim Collins is no truer than when in the context of self-made wealth. The fact is that people who, through their own efforts, become wealthy rarely become extraordinarily wealthy simply because of the gravity of their hard-earned initial wealth. In fact, that can become an anchor holding them back from the extreme level of drive and ambition necessary to become extraordinarily wealthy.

So, how did William overcome the gravity of his initial wealth and success? What happened to him over the next decade (after the Crucible Years), as he became successful and wealthy within his

local community? What triggered the additional 'drive and ambition' necessary to breach the gravity of this success and go on to achieve such a massive jump in his wealth in his later years?

Thus far, we've discovered how William survived his seven ordeals that were pivotal in enabling him to move beyond surviving and actually thrive amidst the social complexities and hardships of Van Diemen's Land. Furthermore, we've extrapolated these events into some extraordinary life lessons that may help explain how he attained such massive successes in his later years as a Victorian pastoralist amidst the rapidly evolving complex politics of the era.

Missing Links

But, for me, there are some missing links in this 'rags to riches' story. Some unanswered questions. After the Crucible Years (1820-1824), William had developed the wisdom and political savvy to survive and thrive. Why wasn't William satisfied with being a successful miller, merchant, and family man in his local community of Hamilton, especially after he had finally made good on his merchant father's dying wishes to build a prosperous new life in the colonies? Why, having attained such power, authority, and success, would risk everything he had to move to Victoria – a colonial frontier which was well away from his family, friends, and power base of political connections?

If life was a logical and rational sequence of events, William's story of success and wealth would have culminated in the high-point of his life in the village of Hamilton, Van Diemen's Land. William is happy and prosperous with a successful business and growing family and a likely future as he ages gracefully, and as the next generation take over the family interests and expands their fledgling empire. William could have rested on his laurels then; he could have been satisfied that he had made his own father proud and content with his high social standing in the local community. Even with the troubles that Thomas Jnr faces, surely there could have been some in-between stage, instead of the next extraordinary step that is taken … yet again.

For William had risen up from the lower-class merchant ranks in the England to become firmly established in the upper-middle class of the

successful landholders in the colonies. But the journey of life is neither logical nor rational and, after twelve further years of William patiently enduring, nurturing, and accumulating wealth, connections, businesses and land holdings, something ‘snaps’ inside him in 1836.

Inflection Point: 1836

The year of 1836 is an inflection point for William. It is in this year, that William and his son, Thomas, take their first trip across the Bass Strait to Port Phillip, Victoria.

They take 1,500 sheep and set up their first grazing settlement. Why did William make the decision to leave Van Diemen’s Land? Why did he gamble on setting up a sheep grazing enterprise—becoming a squatter on distant lands? After all, he had only just reached a new pinnacle of success when, in 1835, the previous year, he had been given a land grant of 640 acres in his local district. This was in addition to his other already substantial land holdings, his flour mill, his local shop, and the expanding list of important community roles and civic responsibilities he held in his local township of Hamilton.

William had previously migrated across the ocean from England to Van Diemen’s Land as a much younger man. That decision had been driven by the need to escape poverty and the limited options for advancement that his lower-class status assigned him. But now, William was quite wealthy and firmly entrenched in the upper-middle class; he had connections in government and the upper echelons of Van Diemen’s Land society. Given this hard-won prosperity and elevated social standing and influence, what on earth would make him decide to let go of it all and leave Van Diemen’s Land? What was the trigger for such seemingly out-of-character behaviour that would ultimately change his life trajectory so much?

Was it his need to escape the crushing grief from his wife Harriet’s death the year prior? Was it another attempt to escape further reputational damage from the ongoing entanglements his older brother, Thomas Snr kept having with senior government officials (similar entanglements many years prior were also disastrous for William too)? Was he

simply bored and looking for another adventure—now that his eldest children had grown up and were ensconced in running the various family businesses? Why would a devout Christian family man, with an excellent reputation and social standing in his local community who, having worked so hard for so long and finally reaping ever increasing rewards decide to parlay everything he had built up over the last twelve years into such a high-risk roll of the dice?

William's life from 1824–1836 was a combination of both challenges and successes. Successes were many and varied such as his 'free full pardon' in 1826 along with his initial land grants and flour mill in Hamilton (subsequently run by his eldest son William Jnr). Once in Hamilton, he was employed as the Hamilton district pound keeper and police constable overseeing sixteen staff.

In 1827, William received accolades for leading a large mixed group of officers and townsfolk on a successful manhunt to capture the infamous bushranger, Patrick Dunne. At the time, Dunne was one of the 'most wanted men' in Van Diemen's Land. That same year William organised the construction of a Constables Office and Holding Cell for prisoners (which is still standing today) and had a Petty Constable reporting to him.

During this time William also received much praise from townsfolk after finally ending a protracted conflict with James Blay (a publican who was aiding and abetting criminal associates and constantly infringing liquor licencing laws) who was sentenced to a lengthy prison term after previously being acquitted on technicalities only to re-offend time and time again.

Then, in 1834 William's second son, Thomas, became the police constable in the nearby district of Marlborough. He was just twenty years old and was a source of much family pride. The next year, 1835, William is the recipient of a much larger land grant of 640 acres in the Hamilton district.

Challenges were also evident during the years of 1824–1836 such as the incredible strain and reputational damage from his brother, Thomas',

seemingly endless calamitous entanglements with government officials. From 1825–1828 Thomas was involved in a colossal building project of the French château inspired mansion called 'Woodbridge' in New Norfolk. This was a grand statement of wealth and prestige drawing much criticism (and jealously) from the establishment in the capital of Hobart Town.

The reckless pursuit of such a folly resulted in his brother's sacking from his job as police constable in New Norfolk and his bankruptcy and imprisonment. This all occurred in 1828 with William, yet again, returning to Hobart Town Gaol… only this time in the role of visitor. William had to support his brother, Thomas, for several years until he was released from prison and in 1831, relocated to Bothwell to work as police constable and pound keeper with a small land grant in the township. Thomas finally settled down, and no longer was he an additional burden for William.

Then, there was the tragedy of William's wife, Harriet's death, in February 1835. This was on a background of gradually worsening chronic ill-health ever since William's previous imprisonment on Sarah Island, many years earlier. The gradually worsening health of Harriet in the preceding years would have been a major concern and her death in 1835 was no doubt a time of major grief and distress for William and his children.

Needless to say, each of these challenges were significant in their own right and would have chipped away at William's resilience. Yet, none of them broke his spirit or his resolve to continue to reside in his local township of Hamilton. However, the catalyst for a move away from Hamilton was not grief and loss, but rather love. It was William's love for his son, Thomas, that triggered an exodus to Port Phillip, Victoria, in 1836.

The backstory for the problems now facing his son, Thomas, began in the months after September 1834, when he, at only 20-years-old, was appointed pound keeper and police district constable in Marlborough, a neighbouring district to Hamilton.

The Roadknights were now a major influence in the law and order of the wider Central Highlands of Van Diemen's Land—William in Hamilton, William's brother, Thomas Snr, in Bothwell, and William's son, Thomas, in Marlborough. However, for William's son, within six months of his appointment in Marlborough, rumours began to swirl around in the local community of improper dealings and fraudulent practices in stock impoundments and profiteering.

As a pound keeper, Thomas had to impound cattle roaming round unsupervised and would then earn a fee associated with keeping them in pasture until their return to owners or their sale at cattle yards; the proceeds would pay for the costs associated with the impoundment process. Local stockmen were jealous of Thomas' success at such a young age, and also became frustrated by his unwillingness to adopt a lax attitude towards stock roaming the town causing damage (which was itself a source of complaints by many other local community members). By mid-1835, complaints and accusations began to reach the ears of the local politicians and officials with William becoming embroiled in the situation towards the end of the same year.

The Roadknights & The Cattle Duffers

There's an excellent description of the many difficulties the local Poundkeepers faced during this era in Van Diemens Land in K.R. Von Stieglitz's book *'A History of Hamilton, Ouse and Gretna':*

"Public pounds were set up in most country districts during Governor Arthur's time, and Roadknight was the first poundkeeper at Hamilton. This was a far more important position in those days, when the country was poorly fenced, than it afterwards became. Straying cattle were such a menace to the hard-working settlers, whose crops were often ruined by them, that Governor Macquarie made an Impounding Law in 1820, which rather lapsed until ten years later (1830), when Governor Arthur made it more stringent. Cattle could then be impounded and sold at public action under certain conditions, and any damage they had done could be paid for and deducted from the proceeds. This led to family feuds, near murder and general dissatisfaction.

The cattle most to blame were those with no brand on them. These had been fair game for anyone able to handle a gun or crack a stockwhip, until Roadknight came on duty. He was told to 'collect the cattle at no expense to the crown, and the legal owners could get them out of pound if proof was forthcoming and the fine was paid.'

> *It was the day of false brands and cattle duffing. Bellowing herds were collected in secret yards with high log fences near Lake Echo and other places among the hills. And there a red-hot iron pot could be guaranteed to cover any other brand most effectively."*

On the 6th of January 1836, Governor Sorrell dismissed both William, and his son Thomas, from their pound keeping and constable duties pending further investigation. By this time, William's brother, had retired from Bothwell policing duties on medical grounds, so he was not caught up in the drama; of which he too would have been tainted by association.

Captain John Montagu, a war veteran colleague of his brother Thomas, completed a full investigation and in February 1836, he handed in a report that exonerated William and recommended his reinstatement to his role and duties. Similar to his father, Thomas Jnr. was also cleared of any wrongdoing. However, unlike his father, Thomas Jnr was not recommended for reinstatement.

If there was ever a single moment in time which became the 'inflection point' for William's later success, it was this day, the 16th of February 1836, when William received the news of his son's now uncertain future and loss of career and identity despite being innocent of any wrongdoing.

This terrible blow to the future prospects of his son became a catalyst for a whole new level of drive and selfless ambition for William. The burden of responsibility William must have felt for ensuring the success of his son Thomas must have been overwhelming. After all, William relied so heavily on his own father for guidance at a similar age. William's own father had been instrumental in the success of his early adult years – providing opportunities for private school education in London, enabling him to undertake an apprenticeship in saddlery, finding him work as Clerk in the Bank of England, facilitating and consenting to his marriage at an early age and, of course, seeing the opportunity and then planning the extended family's big move from England to Van Diemen's Land.

William, now bearing the same sense of responsibility for his own children, had done his best to honour his own father's legacy and indeed had been successful in shepherding his eldest children into the adult world up until now. His eldest son, William Jnr was now married and fully ensconced into the family business running the mill and related enterprises in Hamilton. Thomas was, up until then, forging ahead in building a very successful career. What could be done now to salvage this seemingly irreparable situation for his son? What on earth could Thomas do to re-build his shattered career now that he was a 'marked' man – someone who despite his exoneration would be unlikely to be selected for any government appointment in Van Diemen's Land in the future…

After the initial feeling of shock and sense of overwhelm had passed, William's sense of duty and love for his son took over as his motivating force - for he was determined to create a new future for Thomas where he could prosper and succeed. William wanted Thomas to forge ahead without the entanglements that had struck such a cruel blow to his career so early in his life. And so he begins the next chapter of the Roadknight dynasty, supporting Thomas in establishing a grazing settlement in Victoria.

1836-1839: Torn Between Two Worlds

When I first began researching the life of William Roadknight, I was convinced that his gradual departure from Van Diemen's Land to move permanently to Victoria was a carefully planned and totally pre-meditated strategic withdrawal. I imagined that this was similar to the retreat from Gallipoli in World War One, where soldiers rigged guns to keep firing and give the impression to the enemy that they were still there, thus buying time to escape. After much consideration, I reached the conclusion that William kept up appearances in Van Diemen's Land solely to buy time for the liquidation of his assets and preparations for departure. But I was wrong.

I now believe that William's first foray into Victoria was entirely driven by his desire to help his son start a new life afresh; and this would have been akin to the support he had received from his own father. William

would have watched over Thomas closely over the next few years; he would have both encouraged and jointly participated in a number of major business dealings and property purchases in Victoria, as well as facilitating multiple shipments of livestock across Bass Strait – all with the desire to help his son succeed.

During this time, William was also equally engaged in the next chapter of his life in Hamilton. In September 1836, he was reinstated as pound keeper and local constable. During 1836, he also opened a general store in Hamilton which, by early 1837, expanded to become the regional centre for the supply of woman's apparel and other goods. Then, in February 1838, he got remarried in Hamilton to Elizabeth Twamley.

It is in late1838, almost three years after the decision to support his son Thomas to start afresh in Victoria, when William finally makes a conscious choice to leave Hamilton and move to Victoria with the for sale / lease offers advertised for his Hamilton shop, mill, and landholdings. In 1839 William spends a year divided between two worlds while he liquidates his remaining assets and transitions the rest of his family across Bass Strait and into the new opportunities of their rapidly expanding pastoral empire in Victoria.

1840-1850: The Accidental Empire

The next decade for William is about flaming the fires of his son, Thomas's ambitions, and expanding his other son, William's involvement in their rapidly expanding pastoral enterprises. In addition to this, he was still attending to his patriarchal responsibilities and Christian charitable endeavours.

During this decade, his property empire is built with landholdings in Melbourne City, Geelong, and across Western Victoria. However, this expansion of land holdings does not appear to be an end in itself but rather, on closer inspection, we see so many business dealings, specifically the buying or selling of assets, are linked to his family motivations – enabling the next generation to benefit.

William also donates large sums of money to various causes. He also becomes an advocate for the protection of indigenous communities as he prioritises their employment and provisions for their families in his grazing operations. Then, in 1837 he co-funds the appointment of a local police magistrate to ensure law and order and to prevent the mistreatment of indigenous people by other free settlers in the area. Then, in 1847 the landmark, Point Roadknight, is officially named after William. This is recognition for his actions in pioneering the settlement of Southern and Western Victoria and his philanthropy and community service. How proud William would have felt. This would have meant so much to him… to be recognised like this after all that had come before. This would have validated the move away from Van Diemen's Land.

1850-1860: Return to England and Final Marriage

In 1852, William turns sixty. Over the next year, he transfers all his pastoral leases to his sons and son-in-law. This, more than anything, demonstrates his motivation to share his wealth and distribute leadership responsibilities across the next generation of his family while he is still alive and can assist in the transition.

In March 1853, with all property transfers finalised and everyone now established in their properties, William, his wife, Elizabeth, and their youngest son, leave for England on a multi-year tour of his ancestral home. It was customary, at this time, for those who had 'made it big' in the colonies to go on a journey like this. It was a chance to share their stories of adventure and success with those who had known them previously in much lesser circumstances. High on his list was a visit to the Warickshire region and his childhood village of Dunchurch, as well as the parish church in the neighbouring village of Marton.

Additionally, he decided to spend time in the Aldergate area of London and in other English towns and cities where his relatives now lived and where his friends and associates who had since returned from Van Diemen's Land now resided. William had planned this tour of his home country to last significantly longer than it actually did, as in 1856, an unexpected turn of events would lead to his urgent recall to Victoria.

In early 1856, after an epic series of trials and tribulations, his sons, Henry and William, had unexpectedly vacated the 'Stony Rises' property in western Victoria which had previously been granted to them jointly in 1852. The contractual terms of the transfer of the Stony Rises land required them to be in residence, therefore, their departure meant the property now returned to William's ownership. Being overseas though, it meant that this was at a time when he was least able to effectively take control of a situation that had actually begun months previously.

The decision by both Henry and William to vacate Stony Rises was triggered by challenges of running grazing operations for sheep and cattle on impossibly barren and uninhabitable land. Further, the social isolation had added to the distress of their families so making it an untenable situation. With no one to maintain the property, William made the decision to immediately return from England to take control and install a new overseer who, he hoped, once appointed, would quickly and successfully turn things around.

However, there would be consequences for both Henry and William as neither would benefit from any further land distributions from their father. Henry would work on his older brother, Thomas' properties thereafter, without any further family leadership responsibilities. William, the eldest of the brothers would go into a self-imposed exile taking up leaseholds given to him by his brother, Thomas, in East Gippsland leading to his own epic adventure and quest for redemption. Fortunately, he would eventually build a vast pastoral empire in his own right that would outlast the property empires of both his brother and his father.

In 1857, William's second wife, Elizabeth, died after a long battle with pneumonia. Sadly, this malaise had begun on the hastily organised voyage back from England, a year earlier. Widowed for a second time, William would spend the next three years keeping busy, and working with his second son, also called Thomas, and his son-in-law, Thomas Vicary, developing their remaining properties. He would update and expand his large family homestead on the Barwon River in Geelong, as well as spend time with his children and grandchildren, who resided in the local district. Throughout this period he maintained his

church involvement, philanthropic interests, and roles on various local committees.

In November 1860, William remarries to his third wife Helen Jane Buchan. In October 1861, William and Helen have a still-born son and, in November 1861, William's older brother, Thomas Snr, dies from 'dropsy' aged seventy-five in Hobart Town.

Two years later, William's own health begins to fail him. Sensing the end is near, in October 1962, he makes his final will leaving all his remaining possessions to his wife and youngest son (as all his other children had benefited from the previous large-scale distribution of property in 1852). A month later, just before the end of 1962, William died from 'chronic gastritis' at the age of seventy.

Author's Note and Source References

The primary audience for this book is anyone interested in biographies, Australian history, and inspiring true stories as opposed to academics and historians who may be more interested in having detailed reference lists and footnotes regarding archival sources spread throughout the book.

The timeline of events described in this book is historically accurate, as are the basic character descriptions of each of the major characters. The various conversations and interactions between William, his wider family, and other members of the community, where not specifically referenced as fact, are based on my interpretations of likely events in keeping with the known personality characteristics of the individuals concerned.

Whilst my research yielded a litany of minor references from a vast array of conversations with ocean sailing experts, family relatives, and experts on the colonial history of Van Diemen's Land and Victoria, and numerous helpful websites and blogs (for which I am happy to share with individual readers as is useful), the following reference list will confirm all the major factual events referred to throughout this book.

The comprehensive overview of William Roadknight's life:

- *Many Parts: William Roadknight (1792-1862)* by Jim Campbell.
- *Roadknight Saga (unpublished - 1957)* by Warwick Roadknight

The Van Diemen's Land years of William Roadknight's life:

- *Bothwell – The Gateway to the Highlands* by Gwen Webb
- *The Hermit In Van Diemen's Land* by Henry Savery
- *A History of Hamilton, Ouse and Gretna* by K.R.Von Stieglitz
- *Description of Van Diemen's Land (1822)* by George William Evans.

The Victorian years of William Roadknight and the next generation:

- *The Squatting Roadknights* by Walter R Dexter
- *The Gippsland Roadknights* by Walter R Dexter.

Commentary on Van Diemen's Land history and key figures:

- *The History of Van Diemen's Land: From the Year 1824-1835 inclusive*. By Henry Melville
- *Van Diemen's Land* by James Boyce.

Sarah Island and Sailing on the South-West Coast:

- *Sarah Island* by Ian Brand
- *A History of Port Davey, South-West Tasmania* by Tony Fenton.

Current net worth calculation for William Roadknight's peak wealth:

- Farmbuy, Acreage for Sale in Victoria Review, https://farmbuy.com/post/acreage-for-sale-in-victoria-review.

Appendix 1

The Crucible Years History Trail

We read fine things but never feel them to the full
until we have gone the same steps …
— John Keats (1795-1821)

There is nothing like walking over the same ground, feeling the wind on your face and seeing firsthand the sites where so much of the drama of William's Crucible Years took place. Simply being there and meditatively contemplating the feelings that arise within, can deepen your experience and understanding of William's journey.

William Roadknight's Crucible Years (1820-1824) took place in the southern and western parts of Van Diemen's Land (renamed Tasmania in 1856). Many sites are still around today and accessible for anyone who wishes to 'walk in William's footsteps'.

There is the option of a quick stop in Hobart City, to a long return day trip out to New Norfolk, Plenty, Hamilton, and Boswell. Alternatively, you can go for an extended 2+ days to include a visit to Strahan to see Macquarie Harbour, Hells Gates, and the notorious Sarah Island penal colony. Regardless, there are plenty of experiences to deepen your understanding of the events in this book.

By sharing with you some of the key sites from the book that you can still visit in Tasmania, I hope I can encourage you to visit these special places. Experiencing this will only deepen your appreciation of William Roadknight's 'The Crucible Years' …

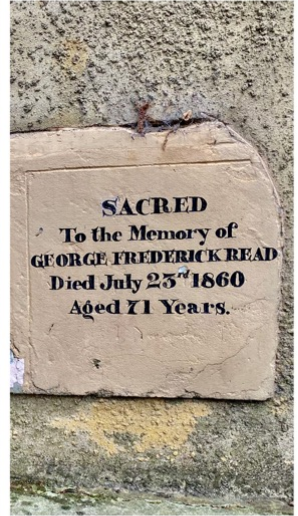
Around Hobart

- **Old Wharf Precinct** (18 Hunter St, Hobart): This is a fantastic spot to visit as it is from here you can stand in the place where William's ship would have arrived in 1820. Looking up towards the cityscape of Hobart and into the mountains beyond, this matches the terrain with the historical etching on the inside covers of this book! Spend some time thinking about what it must have been like after a voyage of many months and then, to finally step onto dry land. This was your 'golden ticket' or the promised land and now, it is a reality before you … how does it feel? Would it likely have exceeded or fallen shortof William's expectations upon his arrival? There is now a great upm arket hotel out on the pier for fancy accommodation or for meals, or maybe a morning coffee or evening drink.

Hobart: Old Town Wharf

- **St David's Park** (16 Elizabeth St. Hobart): This is the site of the original St David's Church in 1820; the exact location is marked by a Memorial to David Collins. This church was the epicentre of all religious gatherings, with attendance pivotal to your social standing in the pecking order of society, at the time. It was here that William buried his father immediately upon arrival (although his gravestone did not survive). Other gravestones of notable characters in this book, such as that of George Fredrick Read, can still be found in the memorial areas of the park. As you wander through the parkland, imagine its former use as a Church and the associated feelings that William would have when here. He would have been grieving his father, and then, establishing his social network, only to become a social outcast and pariah amongst those with whom he had previously worshipped on this site.

Hobart: St David's Park



- **Old Hobart Gaol** (Campbell St & Brisbane St, Hobart): This prison opened in 1821 to house gentlemen prisoners and bankrupts. The other prisoners would have been retained in the first prison down at Salamanca Place (this has since been demolished). It is possible that William, as a gentleman prisoner, may have briefly been housed in this prison just prior to his transfer to Sarah Island. Also, a few years later, his brother, Thomas, would most certainly have been imprisoned here for the two years of his bankruptcy prison sentence. How would an extended stay in this confined space feel for you? How would you keep up your morale?

Hobart: Old Town Gaol

- **Old Hobart Town Tourist Display** (21a Bridge St, Richmond): A 15-20 minute car trip north-east of Hobart takes you to Richmond; it is an amazing historical village with plenty to see and do! Whilst the Roadknights did not feature in this town or district, the Old Hobart Town display centre in Richmond is an absolute 'must-see' so as to appreciate all the buildings and layout of Hobart Town, as it was in the 1820s, where most of the events in this book took place. The wharfs and waterfront, original convict prison, original church, and other key landmarks are all visible in scaled models. Alongside them there are informative storyboards highlighting key aspects of the township at the time of William's arrival. One can even imagine William arriving at this scene after many months at sea, having previously lived in an overcrowded, smoggy, stifling existence in London…

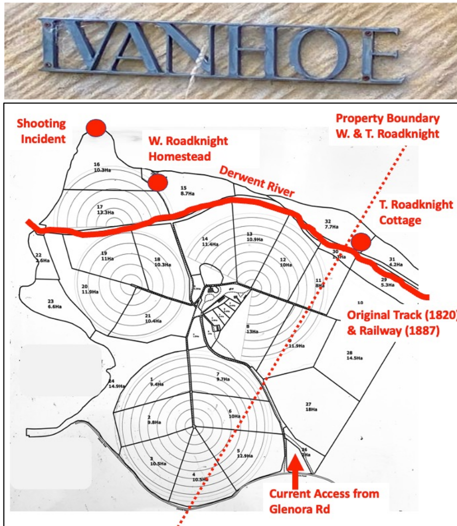
West of Hobart—The Central Highlands and Beyond

- **New Norfolk: The Woodbridge Inn** (6 Bridge St, New Norfolk): In 1825, this landmark (now a boutique hotel) was the project William's older brother, Thomas, was building as a statement of grandeur (which he could not afford). After many delays and financial calamities, Thomas was declared bankrupt and imprisoned. Walking around the grounds, one can imagine how incredible this site would have been in 1825. It was a monumental project like no other anywhere in the township and soon became a source of major gossip and tension in the establishment back in Hobart Town, their own dwellings dwarfed and shamed by this epic building …

New Norfolk: The Woodbridge Inn

- **Plenty: "Ivanhoe" on The Derwent River** (1098 Glenora Road, Plenty): The original property of "Ivanhoe" merged with Thomas Roadknight's holdings (two entry gates on the road) and is still visible today (privately owned). From the top of the hill, you can get a sense of the vastness of this land and the remoteness of the corner of the property where the infamous shooting incident took place. Whilst accessing this specific area requires permission (or you can watch my You Tube Videos on the location of the Homestead and Shooting Incident within the property), you can also drive a further 1 km west down the road where it meets the Derwent River. Walking along the riverbanks, it is easy to imagine William on one side and the drunken men on the other threatening him and his family …

Plenty: 'Ivanhoe' Property & Derwent River



- **Hamilton: St Peter's Church, The Clyde River Mill Site and The Hamilton Inn** (10 Tarleton St, Hamilton): Hamilton is the key to William's subsequent redemption and early prosperity and there is much to see here! The Clyde River is where the mill was actually positioned. The mill site and mill race are still locatable along the bank of the river; one just has to ask the locals for directions. St Peter's Church was the scene of William's marriage to his second wife, Elizabeth Twamley. This was a church his family would have spent many years attending as they grew up and began having families of their own. The architecture of this church would have shaped their

input into supporting church buildings in Victoria many years later.

The Hamilton Inn is by far the star of the show in Hamilton; it is still standing since its completion in 1826. You can see so many of the historical photos and artefacts of the era as well as have a meal or drink and ask as many questions as you can think of to the staff about the history of the building and the wider Hamilton township. I found it amazing to be in a building of that era which was built without government assistance—the techniques of construction at the time mean very few of these building are still standing. This then is a testament to William's ability as a builder. Imagine his family, friends, and even the convict servants all living in and around this main building; it was the epicentre of Hamilton in its heyday. Imagine the social standing and influence he would have had; it would have been such a contrast from his own prisoner status only a few years prior.

Hamilton: St Peters & Hamilton Inn

- **Bothwell: Thomas Roadknights' land grants** (Cnr Patrick St and Arthur Cres, Bothwell): Bothwell is the place where, post-bankruptcy, William's brother, Thomas, became a police constable and pound keeper and was granted land to re-establish himself. The historic centre staff are amazing to talk to and you can still see the land Thomas built upon today.

Bothwell: Thomas Roadknight's Land Grants

- **Strahan: Macquarie Harbour, Sarah Island Penal Colony, and Hells Gates:** Beyond the sites accessible in a day trip from Hobart is a visit to the township of Strahan and a cruise on Macquarie Harbour out to the entrance to see the infamous Hell's Gates. One can even travel up the harbour to visit the Sarah Island Penal Colony. This historic site is the place where William's extreme jail sentence was carried out. It is the place where he learned the art of boat building and sailing and where, within a short space of time, he would lead a rescue voyage up the harbour navigating the entrance at Hell's Gates and then around the inhospitable coastline back to Hobart. Standing deep in the saw pits on Sarah Island and learning of the impossibly cruel conditions along with visiting the other ruins highlights the barbarity of being punished in this place. For me, it was a deeply moving experience. Whilst the island is now heavily re-vegetated, we can imagine how it was entirely barren and constantly windswept when William was imprisoned there…

Strahan: Macquarie Harbour, Hell's Gates & Sarah Island

Extreme Sports: Re-enacting the Rescue Voyage & Sailing The Southwest

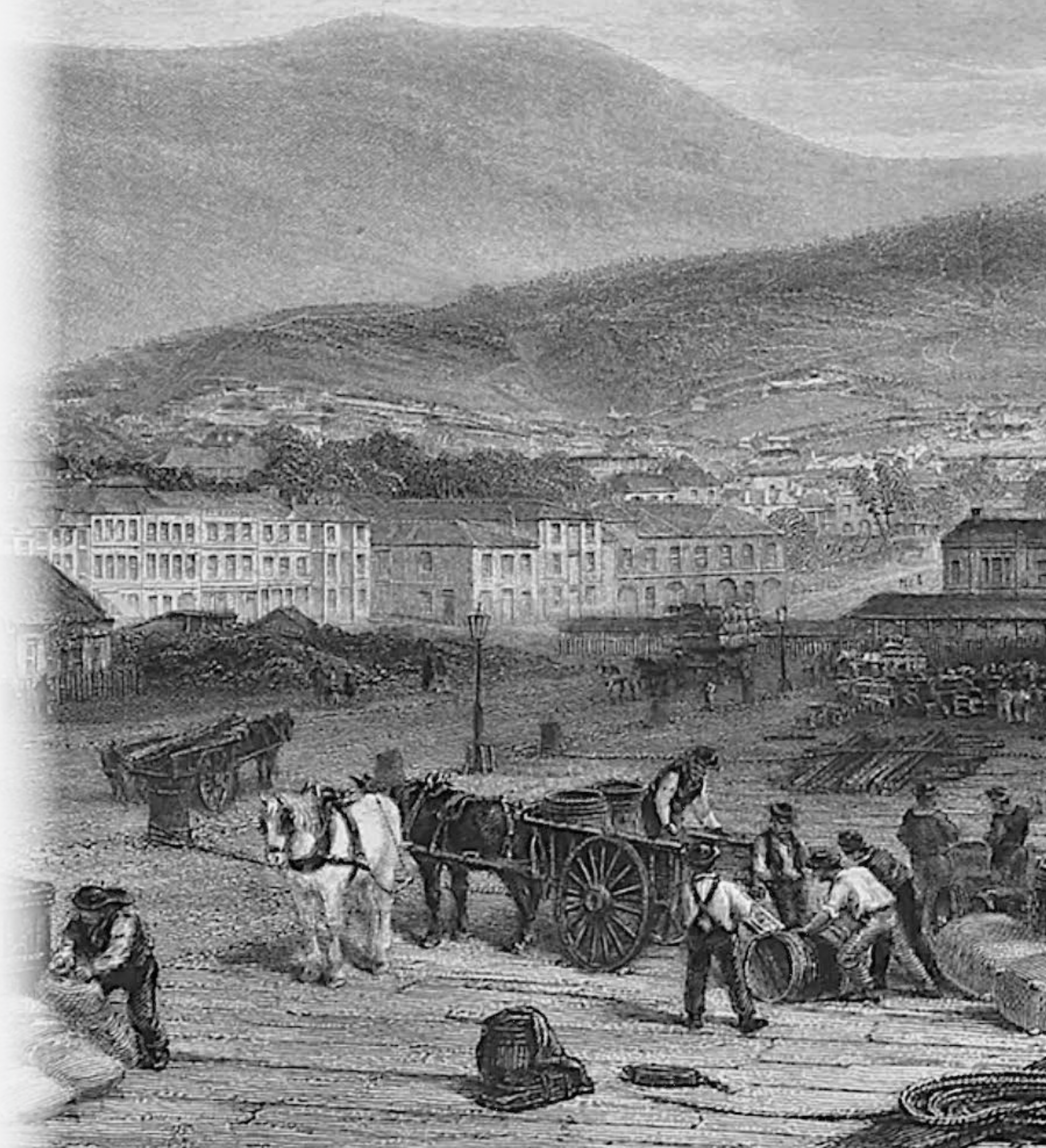
Sailing or sea kayaking from Macquarie Harbour to Hobart is another option (which I have not done yet) for those seeking more extreme adventure. During the research for this book I interviewed experienced sailors who have made this journey by boat and also spoke with several charter yacht companies who confirmed a trip like this was quite feasible. I also researched the option of sea kayaking the same journey and analysed the various stages and safe havens along the journey. I am keen to either sail or sea kayak some or all of this voyage one day – a more extreme adventure yet to come…

About The Author

Dr Pete Stebbins PhD, is a 5th generation grandson of William Roadknight. Pete's motivation for this book was to pass on the legacy of William Roadknight's incredible life to future generations and to the wider world interested in such an extraordinary tale of triumph over adversity.

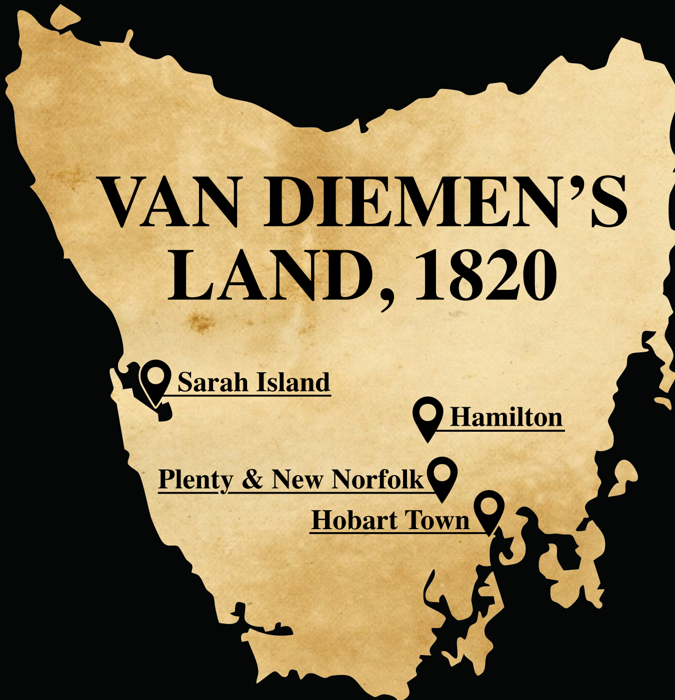
Pete lives in Palm Beach, Queensland, Australia. Pete is married and has five daughters. Pete trained as a clinical psychologist with a PhD thesis that focused on developing resilience and preventing burnout.

Pete now works as an executive coach and leadership team facilitator in education and health. Find out more about Pete at DrPeteStebbins.com or contact Pete at drpetestebbins@gmail.com



"A very engaging account of William Roadknight's extraordinary trials and tribulations. A pleasure to read."

Mary Ramsay



Fact can be stranger and more incredible than fiction - especially in the life of William Roadknight (1792-1862).

His life in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and later in Victoria was remarkable, with so many catastrophic failures and extraordinary successes.

The 4 years from 1820-1824 are the most amazing of all, 'The Crucible Years'.

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