

## A Gift Within a Gift

A scrap of South Australian social history now preserved in the Robert Illing Collection at The University of Melbourne Library

A set of eight opera vocal scores and a single cantata vocal score in the Robert Illing Collection in The University of Melbourne Library, prompted an enquiry which became a paper chase. The scores came to the Collection from Milang, South Australia, with negligible information about their origin.

The chase for information began at the National Trust of South Australia; but that path led nowhere. Then it moved to the State Library of South Australia; the research librarian took much trouble to help, though unbeknown to her the sign posts to the Milang and district Historical Society had been wrongly labelled. When that Society's president was found, the chase became easier. The scores had travelled through two closely knit South Australian families, the Elliots of Strathalbyn and the Yellands of Milang; and then with the Illings from Milang to Melbourne.

At the beginning of 1966 Margaret and Robert Illing and their daughter came from Oxford, England to Adelaide, South Australia — from one academic appointment to another. Soon they began to enjoy driving along the quiet roads and visiting the many beauty spots around Adelaide. Within a year or two they came to know Milang on the shores of Lake Alexandrina, and along the shore they came to Point Sturt and the tiny Church of Christ built in 1861.

As they admired the building, they were approached by Graham Yelland. He and his wife Edna lived in Farm House, set beside the church for which they cared. Graham and Edna worked the farm, which stretched to the lake shore and which had been in their family for many years. Over tea a friendship began between the Illings and the Yellands that has lasted till now.

On the next door farm was Graham's cousin, Laurance Yelland. According to Graham, Laurance's father was a "black note" musician (whatever that may be). Laurance died in 1977, aged over 70. A little over 20 years ago, while the Illings still lived in South Australia and regularly visited Milang, on Graham's suggestion Laurance offered to Robert Illing whatever was of interest in a pile of music which had remained untouched for many years. And so the "Yelland scores" (as Robert called them) found their way into Robert's collection. The scores include works by Auber, Balfe, Bellini, Benedict, Donizetti, Gluck and Caron.

The generosity of Graham and Edna Yelland in both thought and deed is a story on its own. They cared for the church, and for the small complex of buildings around it; and they welcomed all who came by chance or otherwise.

Settlement on the fertile land from Adelaide to Strathalbyn took place about 1840 and Milang was

settled soon after. Many of the Strathalbyn settlers sailed to South Australia in 1839 on the *Fairfield*.

The Yelland family was among these early settlers. Joseph and Maria Yelland came from Cornwall where they had been tenant farmers near St. Austell (an area known to the Illings from their ten years at Exmouth in the nearby county of Devon). The Yellands arrived in Adelaide in 1848 on the *Success* and in 1857 they bought the land at Point Sturt which became the family home known as "Ballaweine". It was their great-grandson Graham and his wife who befriended the Illings in 1966. Not until 15 years later, when the book *Alexandrina's Shore* was published, did the Illings know that so soon after their arrival in Australia they had been befriended by one of the oldest and most respected families in the Milang district.

The Yelland musical scores came from the Elliott family. Joseph Elliott arrived in Adelaide in 1850 on the *Andromache* and then worked at the *Register* newspaper, which later became *The Advertiser*. He had a font of music type from which he printed, and he composed music. He also supervised another Adelaide newspaper, the *Miscellany*. The *Southern Argus* was first printed in 1864; a few years later its printing office moved to Strathalbyn and Joseph Elliott became its owner.



Left:  
Point Sturt Church of Christ, built 1861, with its original slate roof. Here, next door to the Yelland Homestead, the Illings first met the Yellands. (photo: the Milang and District Historical Society)

Bottom:  
Originally the Point Sturt Congregational Church, built on the edge of the Yelland property in the 1860s; then a school until 1928, and derelict until renovated by Graham Yelland. It is now a home for the 85 year old mother of one of the Yelland's farm hands. The old lady only recently came to Australia with all her furniture from Scotland. (photo: the Milang and District Historical Society)

Without doubt Joseph was an enthusiastic musician: his son records his starting an orchestra; and his oft sung song "Bygone Days" was reprinted many times in his own music type. Joseph died in 1883. His son, Joseph William Elliott, took over the *Argus* and time showed him to be a born journalist.

Joseph William Elliott was born in 1859 and died in 1939. His musical enthusiasm was as great as that of his father and he became one of the foremost citizens of Strathalbyn. His eldest daughter Emmie married Joseph Yelland and she continued the musical tradition in Milang. They had a son, Laurence, and it was he who gave the opera scores to Robert Illing.

According to John Yelland, the son of Laurence, Joseph Elliott (the father) wrote reviews of music for the *Register*; his dates match the dates of performances in Adelaide of the Yelland operas, and the scores are unmarked, as though used by a critic rather than a performer. However, none of the scores are dated by their purchaser (father or son) and some are inscribed J. W. Elliott (presumably the son). A middle name for the father is not recorded, although John thought it also was William. So a small doubt remains.



The operas and the cantata in this small Yelland set of scores performed in Adelaide 150 years ago, reflect a popular musical taste and enthusiasm:

- Auber, *Fra Diavolo*, a single production in 1865;
- Balfe, *Rose of Castille*, a handful of performances, 1865–1883;
- Balfe, *Santanella*, a handful of performances, 1871–1882;
- Bellini, *Norma*, over 10 performances, 1861–1891;
- Bellini, *Sonnambula*, over 10 performances, 1861–1891;
- Benedict, *Lilly of Killarney*, just a few of performances, 1865–1879;
- Donizetti, *Lucrezia Borgia*, over 10

performances, 1861–1891;  
Gluck, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, not performed until 1928;  
No newspaper notice of Caron, *Cantata: Victoria*, has been spotted.

These were not all the operas to be heard in Adelaide during the 20 years of Joseph and the *Register*. Some Verdi, a Rossini and a Mozart were also to be heard; and it is perhaps a little odd that scores of *Rigoletto*, the *Barber* and *Figaro* are not with the Yelland scores. Perhaps Joseph preferred Balfe to Rossini, Benedict to Mozart and Donizetti to Verdi.

## FRIENDS OF THE BAILLIEU LIBRARY

### Calendar of Events 1997

#### AUGUST

##### Saturday Seminar: Facsimiles of Medieval Manuscripts in the Baillieu Library

Emeritus Professor Margaret Manion will speak and show participants numerous examples from the collection.

#### SEPTEMBER

Annual Dinner, University House  
Guest Speaker: Cartoonist Peter Nicholson.

#### NOVEMBER

Twilight function: Seminar on book collecting  
Joint function with the Book Collector's Society  
of Australia (Victorian Branch).

Joseph probably reviewed much else, including the *Cantata: Victoria*, which reflected the ardent nationalism of the "mother country" and of the settlers. Other music that came from the Elliots is now in the Mortlock Library in Adelaide and the *Southern Argus* newspapers in the National Trust Museum in Strathalbyn may well hold Joseph's reviews of the Yelland operas.

It remains a fascinating fact that these early settlers, making their lives from farming, enjoyed making good music for themselves. ❖

*(This article was produced from information provided by Robert Illing).*

*Much more about the Yellands, the Elliots and the operas is in three books, copies of which are in The University of Melbourne Library:*

*Jim Faull (editor), Alexandrina's Shore; a History of the Milang district (1981).*

*Nancy Gemmell, Old Strathalbyn and Its People 1839-1939 (1985).*

*Through the Opera Glass: A Chronological Register of Opera Performed in South Australia (1991).*

*The cantata and opera vocal scores can be found in the Robert Illing Collection, DXV VS 80 cantata; and DXV VS 90 operas).*

*The Robert Illing Collection also contains correspondence with the National Trust of South Australia, the State Library of South Australia and John Yelland, who provides a number of details about the Yellands and the Elliots (located at 1 xxxi f Box 7).*

### CAMBRIDGE IN BOOKS

The University, the Town and the County

an author catalogue  
compiled by

**Pierre Gorman**



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