

# The George McArthur Bequest

## A personal history

Hilary Maddocks

One September afternoon in 1985 I knocked on the office door of the university bibliographer, Mary Lugton, at the Baillieu Library. The reason for my visit was an exhibition of books that Miss Lugton had curated on the first floor of the library, entitled *The library of a Victorian pioneer, George McArthur 1842–1903*.<sup>1</sup> I thought that she might be interested (she was) in a sad little scrap of paper bearing a brief suicide note that had been in the care of my family for over 80 years.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly before his death in 1903, George McArthur, an eccentric baker from the central Victorian goldmining town of Maldon, bequeathed ‘the whole of his books’, numbering some 2,500 volumes, to the University of Melbourne. This was the University Library’s first significant bequest and at the time represented ten per cent of its holdings. The books McArthur collected were on diverse subjects including Australian exploration and mining history, the works of Robert Burns and Scottish poetry including the border ballads, Bibles in many languages, typography and early printing. In the collection were some of the treasures of today’s Baillieu Library Special Collections, including a fine copy of the *Nuremberg chronicle* of 1493<sup>3</sup> and an

illuminated vulgate Bible printed in 1480<sup>4</sup>—to name just two.

It seems that McArthur suffered from bipolar depression, and he drowned himself in the early morning of 18 October 1903 in the Old Phoenix Dam near the South German Mine in Maldon. He had married late in life and had no children. The story of how this humble baker in a country town managed to amass his extraordinary collection of books (in addition to the coins and curios which he left to the National Museum of Victoria, now the Melbourne Museum) has been splendidly told by Mary Lugton and, more recently, Ian Morrison.<sup>5</sup>

I would like to offer a parallel account of George McArthur. Although we are not blood relatives, George McArthur’s life and collection have to some extent defined my family. My grandfather was named after him (as have been three generations since) and he grew up in Maldon in the early 20th century with stories about the unconventional baker and his remarkable bequest. The Maddocks family also kept a handful of McArthur’s books, some personal papers (including the suicide note) and historic coins, all of which had escaped the men from the university

and museum when they came to Maldon to collect the bequests after his death. Why I hope this is a story worth telling is that, apart from filling some gaps in what is known about McArthur’s life, it shows that the legacy of his collection extends beyond institutional walls. In an obvious sense a collection such as the McArthur Bequest is a tangible collection of books and papers that can be described by bibliographers and scholars; but, as I will try to show, the meaning of a collection lies as much in its capacity to touch and influence our lives as it does in its material reality.

The story begins in the mid-19th century, when the settlement of Maldon was established after alluvial gold was discovered at ‘Bryant’s Diggings’ near Mount Tarrangower in December 1853. By the end of January the following year there were estimated to be around 18,000 gold seekers working on 20 gullies, including Long Gully. When the alluvial gold was exhausted the population dropped somewhat but grew again when the introduction of quartz-crushing machines enabled the extraction of gold from the plentiful quartz reefs in the area. The town was first surveyed in 1854 and in 1858 the municipality of Maldon was proclaimed.

The McArthur and Maddocks families were among the first settlers in the Maldon district. The 12-year-old George McArthur arrived with his family in 1854 after emigrating from Linlithgow, Scotland, two years before. George Sr established a bakery in Main Street on the site of the present McArthur's Bakery (despite the date of 1854 on the parapet it was built some 40 years later).<sup>6</sup> By about the age of 14 George Jr would have been learning the family trade.

Like the McArthurs, Frederick Maddocks, an emigrant from Gillingham in Kent, arrived in the Victorian goldfields in 1852. Described by a contemporary as 'an embodiment of John Bull', he prospered, and in 1856 opened the Australasian Hotel in Long Gully, near the diggings.<sup>7</sup> He sent for his cousin, Mary Blackbird, from Gillingham, and the two were married in St Kilda only days after her arrival in 1858. Their first child was born at Long Gully the following year. In 1860 Maddocks bought another hotel, the Criterion, on the corner of Camp and High Streets, Maldon, and the family moved there, letting out the Australasian. Over the next seven years three more children were born at the Criterion.



Unfortunately George McArthur Sr experienced difficulties in the bakery, as he had made some poor mining investments. In 1870 he was declared insolvent and was forced to mortgage the business. George Jr, then 28, took over the mortgage. It seems he was a more astute businessman; we know that he tendered in 1874 to supply the best bread to the Maldon Hospital at 20 per cent less than the going rates and in 1879 was able to purchase a sizable block of land at Strangways on the west bank of the Loddon River.

In 1872 tragedy struck the Maddocks family. Frederick died, followed by Mary four months later, leaving the four children, aged from five to 12, alone in the colonies. Mary's death was unexpected and she died intestate, making no formal arrangements for the care of the children. However the trustees of the estate stepped in, appointing George McArthur Jr as the children's guardian. There are no records other than family testament to confirm this, but the two families must have been acquainted at least; they operated service businesses in close proximity in a town of, by then, about 3,500 permanent residents.

The Maddocks estate included the two hotels, a weatherboard house, grazing land and 'a brick cottage of six rooms and outbuildings' on High Street. On the parents' death most of the property was let and kept in trust for the children until 1888, when the youngest child was to turn 21. The exception was the High Street house, which Frederick had purchased in 1865 from a Thomas Vivian. He had renovated it soon after, remodelling the facade with distinctive and unusual decorative brickwork around the front windows, door and finials on the parapet. Today the house is usually known as Vivian's Cottage or occasionally McArthur's Cottage, and is one of Maldon's tourist sights.<sup>8</sup>



Mary Burke and Maddocks children, at the front of their house in High Street, Maldon, c. 1880. Maddocks family collection.

When their parents died the four children were moved from the Criterion Hotel to the High Street house and a 33-year-old childless ex-barmaid by the name of Mary Burke was installed as their housekeeper and carer. Possibly she was already employed as the family's housekeeper at the Criterion Hotel; a 'servant's bedroom' is described in an inventory of goods and chattels. We know a little about her. Mary Burke was born Mary O'Connor in Tipperary in about 1839 and with her family immigrated to the colony of Victoria in 1864. She married a miner, Patrick Burke (or Bourke), soon after in Daylesford, but he seems to have disappeared; certainly he was not living with her from 1872.

It is hard to imagine why a 30-year-old bachelor would take on four orphans, but George McArthur was not a predictable man. As described in his obituary in the *Tarrangower Times*, he was 'in many ways rather of an original nature', and at any rate was not responsible for the children's day-to-day care. There is some sense, however, that George, Mary and the children constituted a family unit of sorts, particularly when we consider that George McArthur and Mary Burke were to marry in 1887.

A photograph taken around 1880 (above) shows Mary Burke and her four charges standing in front of the High Street house. Mary Burke is second from the right, between the youngest, Herbert, who looks about 13 and the eldest, Kate, about 21. The other two children are Philip Maldon (far left) and Frederick Jr. Another faded photograph (opposite) dates from around the time of George's marriage to Mary Burke seven years later. Taken in the back courtyard of the High Street house it shows the bearded George surrounded by Mary and three of the children. He and Mary look happy and relaxed—she gestures towards him playfully, holding something in her hand, perhaps a flower.

In January 1886 George sold the bakery to his brother Alexander and embarked on a year-long world trip, during which he collected many of the books that are now in the McArthur Bequest. A month after his return, in February 1887, he and Mary were married in the Presbyterian Church. The marriage was witnessed by Frederick Maddocks and Thomas Bentley Brooks, the local grocer and husband of the eldest Maddocks child, Kate. George then moved into the High Street house with Mary and the three other adult or almost-adult children. Fred, the eldest son, was to

remain living in the house until his own marriage in 1892 and we can assume the other two also lived there until they made their own lives.

It has been observed by both Mary Lugton and Ian Morrison that George and Mary make an appearance in Henry Handel Richardson's memoirs, *Myself when young* (1948). Richardson was the daughter of the local postmistress in Maldon in the early 1880s and she later wrote of the 'plump and sonsy' sweetheart of the middle-aged local baker. According to Richardson's account the pair had to wait seven years before marrying because she was a deserted wife. Just before the seven years were up, the absconder made a sudden appearance before again vanishing, so the unhappy couple were forced to start the seven years all over again. Although the rather gaunt figure of Mary Burke in the photographs is definitely not 'plump and sonsy' there may well be truth in other details of the memoir. Mary's first husband, Patrick Burke, died in 1883. As Mary was not living with him from 1872 they had probably separated. Both being Catholic, divorce was not an option. But if George and Mary were free to marry in 1883 for some reason they chose not to; perhaps they were not romantically involved at

George McArthur, Mary Burke and Maddocks children, at the rear of their house in High Street, Maldon, c. 1887. Maddocks family collection.



that stage. When they did marry, in early 1887, it was shortly before the youngest Maddocks child came of age. In January 1888 the children were entitled to their inheritance as the youngest turned 21. The funds provided by the estate for Mary Burke's services likely ceased at this point, and as the house was now owned by the children, she was no doubt left in a financially vulnerable position. George remedied this by marrying her and buying the house from the estate when it became available in 1888.

George and Mary were married for 16 apparently happy years, during which he built up the bulk of his remarkable collection of books, coins and curios, which he kept in cabinets in the High Street house. In 1903, at the age of 61, McArthur committed suicide after suffering 'unbearable depression'. The renown of his collection was noted in obituaries in the local papers and the *Adelaide Advertiser*. McArthur's death was also acknowledged in the *Proceedings of the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society*, which spoke of his unceasing devotion to the science of numismatics.<sup>9</sup>

McArthur's beneficiaries were his four sisters, the Presbyterian Church, the University of Melbourne, to which he left the 'whole of my

books', and the National Museum of Victoria, which was to receive 'the whole of my coins, medals, decorations, firearms, swords, weapons and curios'. Everything else including the High Street house was left to his wife Mary. The executors of George's will, drawn up a bare two weeks before his death, were his brother-in-law Richard Charles Langslow and Thomas Bentley Brooks, the husband of Kate Maddocks. Brooks was the proprietor of Brooks General Store which still stands in Templeton Street.<sup>10</sup> One of the witnesses was the eldest Maddocks child, Fred Jr, who in 1903 was working as a grocer's assistant for Brooks, his brother-in-law. Then 42 years old and the father of five children, he lived in a house in Chapel Street, next to the Catholic church.

Mary McArthur survived George by only two years, succumbing to 'failure of heart' in 1905 at the age of 66. Her many beneficiaries included the four Maddocks children (Kate was left the High Street house) and the third of Fred Maddocks' four sons, six-year-old George, who was left the not inconsiderable sum of £50. This bequest was an acknowledgement of little George's special relationship to George McArthur, as Fred had named his

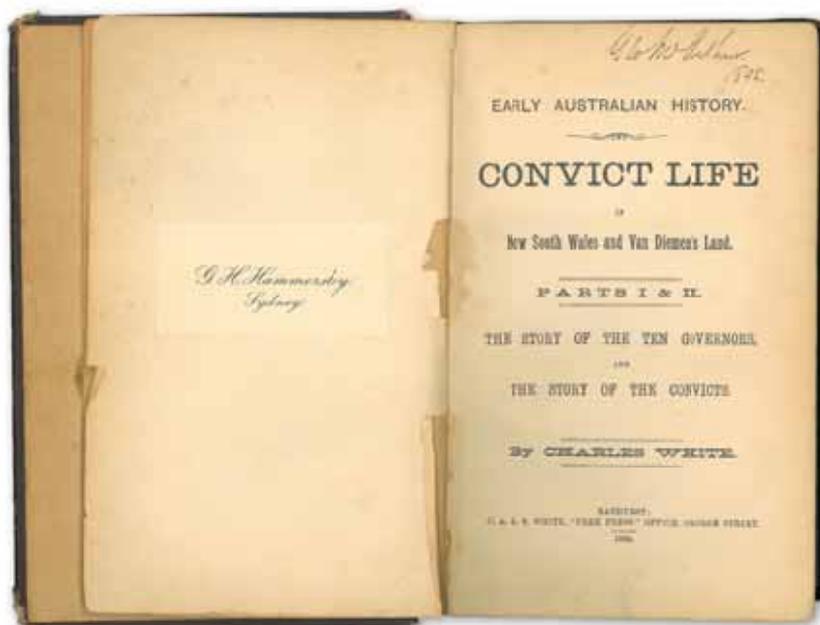
son in McArthur's honour. In 1899, when little George was baptised in the Presbyterian Church, he was sprinkled with water from the River Jordan brought back from the Holy Land by McArthur on his 1886 world trip.

In later life George Maddocks, my grandfather, who died in 1994 aged 95, still had dim memories of McArthur and was probably the last living link to the baker-collector of Maldon. He grew up in Maldon with stories about McArthur, such as the tale that he was a supporter of the Boer War and in retaliation local patriots captured his dog and painted the poor creature red, white and blue. As a child George was also familiar with McArthur's collection of books and coins, for although McArthur had bequeathed his entire collection to the university and museum, some items were given to the Maddocks family prior to his death. We still have some books and coins, inherited from our grandfather.

In subject these books are entirely consistent with McArthur's collecting interests as demonstrated by the McArthur Bequest in the Baillieu Library. All are from the 19th century. They include a copy of the 1815 London edition of the *General Gazetteer* by Richard Brookes, *The poetical works of the late Robert Burns*

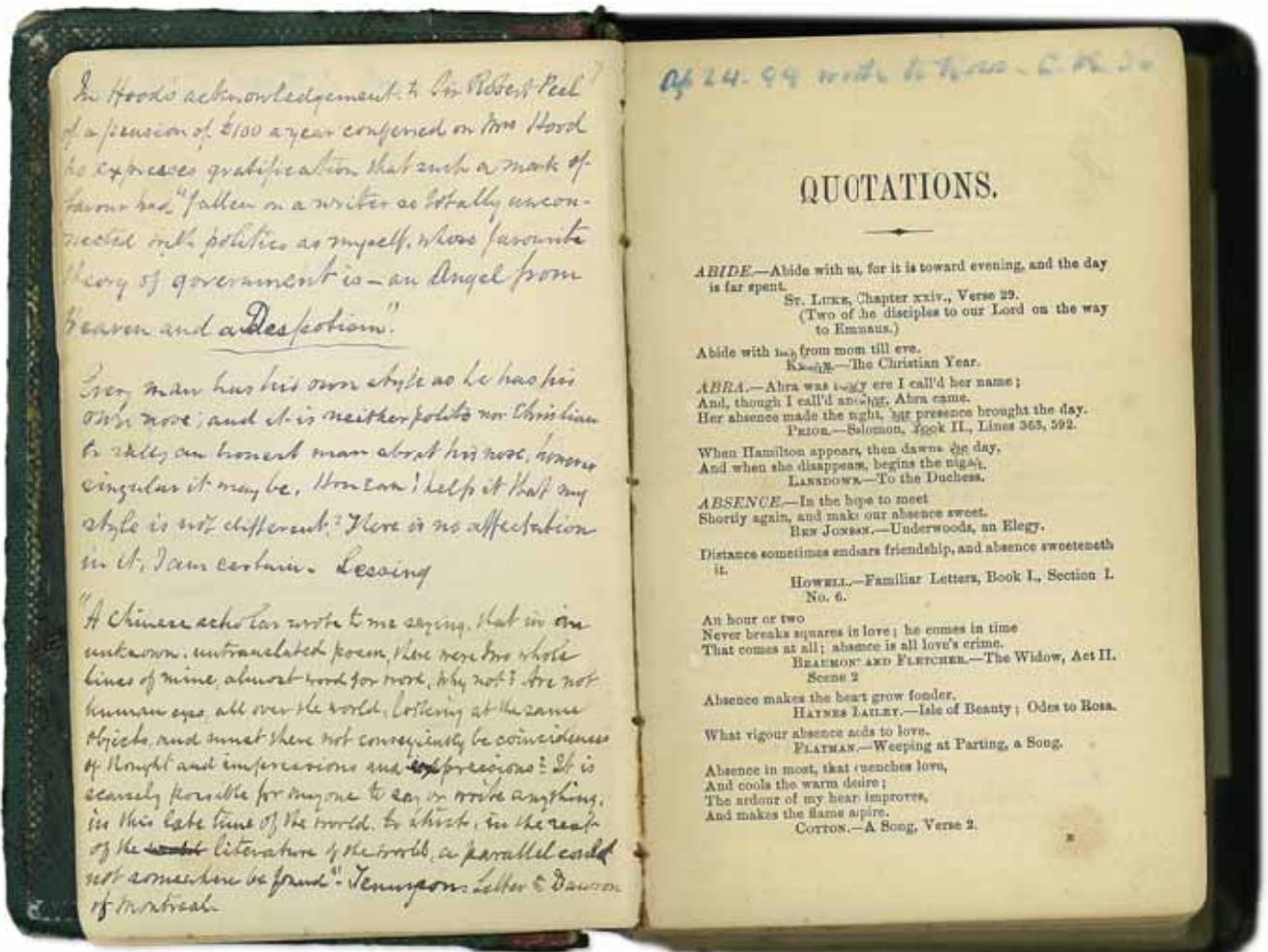
Charles White, *Convict life in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, Bathurst: C. and G.S. White, 1889. Maddocks family collection.

of 1802 (McArthur kept his Burns collection in a 3 x 10 ft cabinet) and *Ballad romances, and other poems* by Romantic novelist and poet Anna-Maria Porter, published in London in 1811. No copies of these particular editions appear to be held in Australian public collections. In addition, we have Charles White's *Convict life in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, printed in Bathurst in 1889, and *An index to familiar quotations* by J.C. Grocott from 1868. A mystery is solved by another book, the first volume of John West's seminal two-volume *The history of Tasmania* from 1852. It would appear to be the missing companion to one of the Baillieu Library's copies of volume 2, which bears the bookplate of the George McArthur Bequest.<sup>11</sup> These books were acquired by the Maddocks family prior to 1903 as none bear the oval purple stamp 'Geo McArthur 1903 Maldon' that their owner stamped in each of his books the year he died. The White (above) and West are inscribed 'Geo McArthur 1895'. He signed and dated 1872 the book of quotations, which contains pasted-in excerpts from newspapers that caught his eye as well as aphorisms and poems written in his characteristic slightly spidery hand (illustrated opposite).



Several other documents passed down within my family became part of the McArthur collection in the Baillieu Library when I donated them in 2003 on the occasion of the centenary of the bequest. These include the suicide note, two short comic poems and a contemporary copy of McArthur's will in the copperplate hand of Frederick Maddocks Jr.<sup>12</sup> I like to think that George McArthur also gave my family another, less material, legacy through his collection, by providing the intellectual springboard and culture for some of our pursuits.

According to Miles Lewis, around the year 1900 Maldon was populated by 'a pathetic collection of eccentrics and rednecks'.<sup>13</sup> While his assessment is just a tad harsh, it is true that the Maddocks family, which was probably typical in many ways, was not especially worldly or educated. Both parents were Maldon-born and bred and Fred Jr, who started work as Brooks' grocer's assistant at the age of 14, was still tottering in to work every day eight decades later. Not one to venture far, he reputedly made the 100-mile trip to Melbourne only once in his 94 years, didn't like it, and never went back.



In Hood's acknowledgements to Sir Robert Peel of a pension of £100 a year conferred on Tom Hood he expresses gratification that such a mark of favour had "fallen on a writer so totally unconnected with politics as myself, whose favourite theory of government is - an Angel from Heaven and a Despotism."

Every man has his own style as he has his own nose; and it is neither polite nor Christian to talk an honest man about his nose, however singular it may be. You can't help it that my style is not different? There is no affectation in it, I am certain. Lessing

"A Chinese scholar wrote to me saying, that in one unknown, untranslated poem, there were two whole lines of mine almost word for word, why not? Are not human eyes all over the world, looking at the same objects, and must there not consequently be coincidences of thought and impressions and expressions? It is scarcely possible for any one to see or write anything, in this late time of the world, to which, in the rest of the world's literature, a parallel could not somewhere be found." - Tenison's Letter to Dawson of Montreal

Apr 24. 99 with to How. C. H. 20

QUOTATIONS.

- ABIDE**—Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.  
St. Luke, Chapter xxiv., Verse 29.  
 (Two of the disciples to our Lord on the way to Emmaus.)
- Abide with us, from morn till eve.  
RAND.—The Christian Year.
- ABRA.**—Abra was away ere I call'd her name;  
 And, though I call'd anon, Abra came.  
 Her absence made the night, her presence brought the day.  
PRIOR.—Solomon, 1000 II., Lines 363, 392.
- When Hamilton appears, then dawns the day,  
 And when he disappears, begins the night.  
LANDOWN.—To the Duchess.
- ABSENCE**—In the hope to meet  
 Shortly again, and make our absence sweet.  
BAY JONSON.—Underwoods, an Elegy.
- Distance sometimes endears friendship, and absence sweeteneth it.  
HOWELL.—Familiar Letters, Book I., Section I. No. 6.
- An hour or two  
 Never breaks squares in love; he comes in time  
 That comes at all; absence is all love's crime.  
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.—The Widow, Act II. Scene 2
- Absence makes the heart grow fonder.  
HAYNES LAYLEY.—Isle of Beauty; Odes to Rosa.
- What vigour absence adds to love.  
PLATTMAN.—Weeping at Parting, a Song.
- Absence in most, that quenches love,  
 And cools the warm desire;  
 The ardour of my heart improves,  
 And makes the flame aspire.  
COTTON.—A Song, Verse 2.



Friends with McArthur, Mary Burke, Maddocks children (seated at right), rear of High Street, c. 1886. Maddocks family collection.

For young George Maddocks, McArthur's namesake, the baker and his collection would have represented an intellectual world beyond the confines of the sleepy, conservative country town. Of six siblings it was George who took an interest in what remained of McArthur's collection. It was also George who aspired to an education beyond the local primary school, when he won a scholarship to Castlemaine High School which then led to the Melbourne Teachers' College. His son and my father, another George, wrote his English honours thesis on the Scottish border ballads at the University of Melbourne in the early 1950s. He was quickly apprised of the family history when he commented to his father how odd it was that many of the university library books he consulted bore the same bookplate—that of George McArthur. My brother is a gold geologist and, like McArthur, collects antiquarian books on Australian goldmining history. For myself, as a child I marvelled at what seemed to be the unimaginable antiquity of McArthur's books on my grandparents' shelves, and I have spent the last 30 years studying even older books—medieval illuminated manuscripts—in some of the great libraries of the world.

McArthur's obituary in the *Tarrangower Times* commented that he believed in 'doing good by stealth', and certainly he has enriched my family through his support for four orphaned children 130 years ago. Generous, with a strong sense of justice, cynical, unconventional and inclined to melancholy, are the traits that come through McArthur's writings and inscriptions. He also had a sense of humour. This, which he copied into his book of quotations, is absolutely characteristic:

No pelting rain can make us stay  
When we have tickets for the play.  
But let one drop the sidewalk smirch  
And it's too wet to go to church.

The author would like to thank Richard Maddocks and Susie Shears, Cultural Collections Coordinator, University of Melbourne.

Dr Hilary Maddocks has a PhD from the University of Melbourne (1990) in the field of medieval manuscript illumination and has held fellowships at the State Library of Victoria and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

- 1 Mary Lugton, *The library of a Victorian pioneer, George McArthur, 1842–1903: An exhibition of books from his bequest to the University of Melbourne*, University of Melbourne, 1985.
- 2 The note is reproduced in Ian Morrison, 'The baker revisited', *University of Melbourne Library Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, July 2004, p. 6, [www.unimelb.edu.au/culturalcollections/research/libraryjournal/vol9no1/morrison.pdf](http://www.unimelb.edu.au/culturalcollections/research/libraryjournal/vol9no1/morrison.pdf).
- 3 Hartmann Schedel, *Lib[er] cronicarum, cu[m] figuris et ymagi[ni]bus ab inicio mu[n]di*, Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 12 July 1493. George McArthur Bequest, 1903, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne. The Baillieu Library's other copy of this work was donated as part of the collection of Dr J. Orde Poynton in the 1950s.
- 4 *Explicit Biblia ...*, Impresa Venetijs: Per Franciscum de Hailbrun, 1480. George McArthur Bequest, 1903, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
- 5 Mary Lugton first wrote about George McArthur in 'George McArthur of Maldon: His life and book collection', unpublished Master of Librarianship thesis, Monash University, 1989. In addition to his article above, see Ian Morrison, *The baker of Maldon: A Baillieu Library exhibition commemorating the centenary of the George McArthur Bequest, 1903*, Parkville: University of Melbourne, 2003, and "A most valuable acquisition": Melbourne University Library and the bequest of George McArthur', *Australian Library Journal*, November 2007, pp. 265–81.
- 6 McArthur's bakery is described in Miles Lewis, *The essential Maldon*, Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications, 1983, pp. 54–7.
- 7 Lewis, *The essential Maldon*, pp. 37, 61.
- 8 The house is described in Lewis, *The essential Maldon*, pp. 58–61. He calls it McArthur's Cottage.
- 9 American Numismatic and Archaeological Society, *Proceedings and Papers*, 49th Annual Meeting, 1907, p. 18.
- 10 Lewis, *The essential Maldon*, pp. 62–5.
- 11 John West, *The history of Tasmania*, vol. 2, Launceston: Henry Dowling, 1852. George McArthur Bequest, 1903, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
- 12 These are described in Morrison, 'The baker revisited'.
- 13 Miles Lewis, 'The baker of Maldon', *University of Melbourne Library Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, July 2004, pp. 3–6 (4), [www.unimelb.edu.au/culturalcollections/research/libraryjournal/vol9no1/lewis.pdf](http://www.unimelb.edu.au/culturalcollections/research/libraryjournal/vol9no1/lewis.pdf).