

The Governor's scrapbook

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Abstract

At a crucial time in Sydney's colonial history, the Governor of Darlinghurst Gaol, John Cecil Read, started collecting cuttings, postcards, photographs and drawings, and glued them into a large scrapbook. For 130 years, this book was passed down through generations of his family, until the Read family donated it to the National Art School Collection during a major exhibition about the history of Darlinghurst Gaol. It was first put on display for the public in September

2022. Originally thought to be full of reproductions, on close examination 53 original artworks and 15 photographs were identified amongst the prints. They include some of the earliest examples of art by prisoners to be found in Australia.

Introduction

Darlinghurst Gaol [Fig 1] was Sydney's principal gaol for 73 years, from 1841 to 1914. After the gaol closed, the site continued to be used as a Military Detention

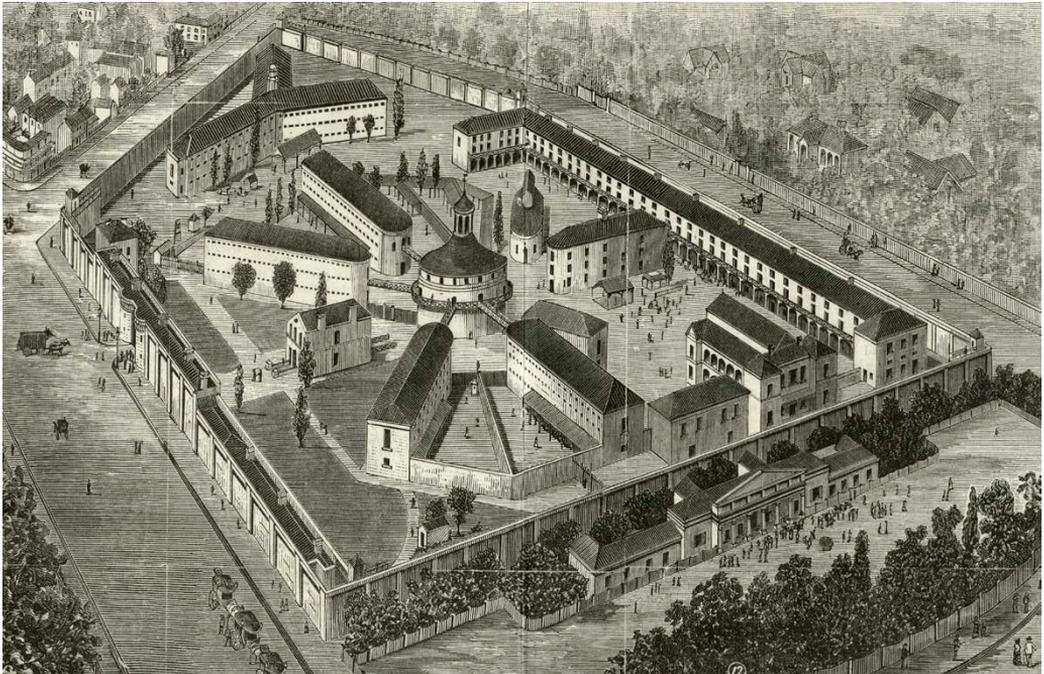


Figure 1: Darlinghurst Gaol (detail from engraving in the *Illustrated Sydney News* 21.II.1883). Original by Arthur Collingridge de Tourcey. National Art School Collection. Notice that the gaol embodies Bentham's panopticon architecture, see Semple (1993). [Ed.]

Barracks, holding Irish, German and Russian detainees during the Great War. It was not until 1921 that a decision was made to remove all the prisoners and convert the buildings into East Sydney Technical College, which opened in February 1922. The art department of Sydney Technical College moved to the former gaol site at this time, and was later renamed the National Art School. All other technical college departments were moved to alternate campuses in Sydney in 2005, allowing the National Art School to expand into the remaining buildings of Darlinghurst Gaol.

In 2022 the National Art School celebrated two important milestones: the 100-year anniversary of the Art School's presence on its current site in Darlinghurst, and 200 years since the first stones were quarried and laid for the walls of Darlinghurst Gaol in 1822.

To mark this significant occasion, the National Art School produced a major new publication *CAPTIVATE: Stories from the National Art School and Darlinghurst Gaol* (Beck 2022), and curated an exhibition with the same title. Many rare items made or used in Darlinghurst Gaol were returned to the site for the first time since the gaol closed in 1914. These were either borrowed from public institutions, or donated to the National Art School Collection, which has been held on site since the 1920s. One of the most significant items exhibited in *Captive*, was a 212-page scrapbook compiled by John Cecil Read during his tenure as gaol governor from 1861 to 1888.

Governor Read and his family

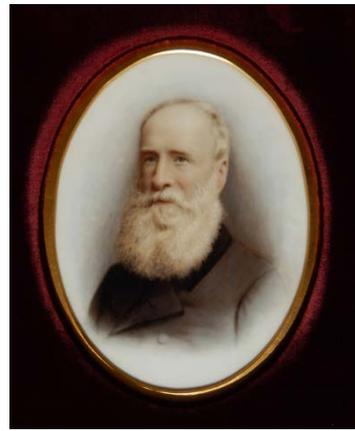


Figure 2: Sir John Cecil Read c. 1880s, Governor of Darlinghurst Gaol 1861–1888. Hand-coloured photograph on glass. Courtesy John Read.

Sir John Cecil Read (1820–1899) [Fig 2] was the longest-serving governor of Darlinghurst Gaol, holding the position for almost 28 years. When he became governor in 1861, the gaol had been operating as Sydney's gaol for twenty years, but was in a parlous state.

Read was descended from Sir John Read of Ireland, and although he was actually the 9th Baronet, he chose not to use the title.¹ The family moved from Ireland to England, and in 1838 John Cecil Read married Anne Egan, daughter of Michael Egan from Dublin. All their children were born in England.

After a distinguished service of 15 years with the London Metropolitan Police, in 1854 Read resigned from the police department. The following year he was offered a position as inspector of the Sydney Police in Australia. After accepting the position, he travelled with 86 British police and his large family, on the ship "Exodus." They sailed

¹ Sir John Read of Ireland was created the 1st Baronet of the Read family on the 16th of March 1641. This hereditary title is awarded by the British Crown.

from England in April 1855 and arrived in Sydney in July.²

After his arrival in New South Wales, in 1858 Read was sent to take charge of police arrangements at the great gold rush at Canoona, near Rockhampton. He was praised for helping prevent serious riots by disappointed diggers at the time.³ On returning to Sydney he became Inspector of Police at the Station House in George Street South. This covered the area of Surry Hills and Darlinghurst.⁴

In 1861, after the suspension of the previous governor, Henry Beverley, John Read was appointed Governor of Darlinghurst Gaol, which was at the time in a neglected state. The buildings were incomplete, with only four of the proposed seven cell-wings built. As well as supervising the building works, he soon introduced reforms to the gaol system, including setting up a manufacturing wing in the gaol where prisoners could learn trades. While profitable for the Government, they also taught the prisoners how they might earn an honest livelihood for themselves after they were released. Mat-making, bookbinding and shoemaking were the chief trades taught, and these were expanded in later years. Though always a strict disciplinarian, it was reported that Read was a humane man, who took a keen interest in the prisoners. Some of them were proud of telling how, after they had left gaol,

he had taken them in hand and helped them to lead better lives than they had previously done.⁵

Keen to promote the inmates' achievements, Read entered their work into exhibitions. He displayed the medallions and awards he received in the 1875 Agricultural Society of NSW exhibition, and the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia (USA) for "Mats and Matting made by Australian Aborigines." A photograph of this award is printed in the scrapbook. Mats by Aborigines from the gaol were also shown in the Amsterdam (1883) and Calcutta (1883–84) Expositions, listed under "Applied Arts," but shown in the Ethnographic sections.⁶ Photos of the showroom in the manufacturing wing of Darlinghurst Gaol (now Building 11) show some of the complex woven mats on display as well as paintings on the walls. In the 1879 Sydney International Exhibition, Read was also awarded a medal for Mats and Matting made by Darlinghurst Gaol inmates.⁷

Although no documentation has been discovered about Read's interest in art, he certainly allowed some prisoners to paint in their cells, and from the evidence in the scrapbook, he also collected their work. Despite the gaol and colony being principally a place of punishment, Read gave prisoners the chance to pursue other interests while serving their sentences.

2 Pulling (2011).

3 Although it was rumoured that a large deposit of gold had been found, the gold rush only lasted a few months when it was found that this was untrue. <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/blog/gold-fever-canoona-delusion-near-rockhampton>

4 Waugh (1861).

5 Anon. (1899).

6 De Lorenzo & Chanin (2022, p. 747).

7 Although the winning exhibits were made by prisoners, the awards were presented to the governor of the gaol. The original medals are held in the Cooma Museum and repository for Corrective Services NSW.



Figure 3: Maria Read, December 1872. Courtesy John Read.

John Read lived in the Governor's Quarters on site (now Building 22) with his wife Anne, four sons and two daughters, and the family recall that his youngest daughter Maria Read (1850–1914), painted in watercolours. [Fig 3] Indeed one watercolour of a landscape in the sketchbook does have “M.READ” inscribed in the corner. In 2023 the Read family also donated 25 of Maria's signed works, completed in Darlinghurst Gaol, to the National Art School Collection, and it can be presumed from the style of these that at least five of the watercolours in the sketchbook are painted by her. [Fig 4] Many of the recently donated sketches and watercolours have titles and dates; one intriguing drawing depicts a wooden gazebo, surrounded by fences and a Norfolk Island Pine in a garden, titled *Darlinghurst Gaol*, 10.6.1876.

Although Read chose not to use his title, he was obviously proud of his Irish heritage, and he glued copies of the Read crest on the outside and inside of the marbled cover of the scrapbook, inscribed with the family



Figure 4: Maria Read. Watercolour from John Cecil Read's scrapbook p. 87.

motto *Cedant Arma Togæ* (interpreted as: let military power be subject to civil authority).

The scrapbook

Governor Read's scrapbook was compiled during the 1800s, at a time when the emergence and increased accessibility of printed material sparked a trend in collecting a variety of images. Blank, bound books — previously used for journals or artwork — were filled with clippings, cards, photographs and printed memorabilia. Some of these books contained a mix of personal journal entries, hand-drawn sketches, and watercolours, along with various scraps of printed material.⁸



Figure 5: Cover of the Read scrapbook 1861–1888.

⁸ <https://www.scrapbook.com/articles/history-of-scrapbooking>

The Read book [Fig 5] is quite large — 34 × 29 × 7 cm — leather-bound with an extremely worn marbled cardboard cover. The scraps appear to have been glued in with a starch paste, which although brown in colour, fortunately has not discoloured the images. It appears to have been designed specifically as a scrapbook, as there is a separator strip between each double page, which allows room for the collaged scraps to be added without affecting the spine. As these scrapbooks were commercially available at this time, it can be assumed that Read bought the book from a stationery shop, or else commissioned a bookbinder to make it especially for him.

Like other Victorian scrapbooks, the Read book contains a haphazard arrangement of literary and pictorial cuttings from a large variety of sources. The scrapbook has a lot to tell us about Read, his family, the other people around him, and more generally about his times. It was assembled for roughly three decades in the late 19th century, when the colony was between adolescence and maturity as a society. His descendants believe that that Read compiled it himself during his time at Darlinghurst Gaol, but it is also possible that other members of his family added to it as well.

Many images display notions of sentimentality and nostalgia, and some of the caricatures reveal racist, sexist and anti-Semitic tropes. These were common at the time, but quite offensive today. Some images were cut out of popular magazines, like *Punch* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Others are stereotypical images bought from a stationery supplier and assembled for various reasons or of interest to the family. As there

is so little documentation in the book, the conclusions we can make about their provenance involves much conjecture, but it is particularly intriguing to try and solve this complex puzzle.

Most images are of British locations, possibly because the Read parents used the pictures to educate their children about "home." There are over 30 prints by the English printer and engraver George Baxter (1804–1867). In 1835, Baxter invented and patented a process of colour printing that made reproductions of paintings available on a mass scale. His process incorporated the aquatint method and involved superimposing the colours using wooden blocks. Baxter used carefully etched plates, a hand press, and the finest colours, oils and paper. Examples of his work in the scrapbook are mostly rural scenes and tourist attractions in Britain, such as Brougham Castle and Tintern Abbey. They are finely produced and each bears Baxter's stamp and patent number.⁹ [Fig 6]

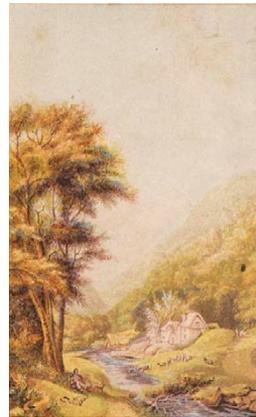


Figure 6: George Baxter, *Water Mill on the Rye*. Print from John Cecil Read's scrapbook p. 49.

⁹ <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mpo6663/george-baxter>

Other pages contain many coloured prints by the Swiss printer Auguste Thez, depicting European scenes and illustrative prints which appear to have a narrative, although there is no information with these. They are juxtaposed with stock images of men and women from magazines, cartoons, mountain scenes with waterfalls, caricatures of animals and people — in fact anything that seemed to take the fancy of those who collected them.

Some prints are of the British royal family, and there are quite a few relating to Napoleon I and St. Helena. Some appear to be copies of engravings of exotic landscapes, and others show “natives” from America, Africa, and other continents. There is a decided lack of Australian subject matter displayed in the book. Read collected some small clipped-out images of Melbourne landmarks, and apart from the original artworks by gaol prisoners, there is only one other antipodean image, a sepia photo of a painting which depicts a kangaroo hunt, as opposed to many of English hunting scenes.

In all, there are 456 items glued onto the blue pages of the scrapbook. Despite its age, some are in excellent condition, and others are badly foxed. Tears in the blue backing paper have been repaired over the years, and some pages are empty. It looks as though family members have deliberately removed over 35 images, perhaps to make copies of them or give them to prisoners to copy. Some of Maria Read's loose artworks have a similar pattern of brown glue in each corner, so may have been removed by her at a later date to keep with her other sketches. There are also four loose printed devotional cards containing Bible verses

inside the back cover, as well as a piece of pink blotting paper with sepia ink blots and a pressed plant, possibly pine needles. This sepia reversed text on the blotting paper looks similar to writing by prisoner Henry Louis Bertrand describing the artworks in the book.

Artworks

The most fascinating works in the scrapbook are the original sketches and watercolours by gaol inmates. Although quite a few artworks by convict artists from the 18th century have been identified in State collections, 19th century artworks by prisoners who had been convicted of crimes in Australia are rare.¹⁰ As this book was compiled within the walls of Darlinghurst Gaol, we can conclude that the original works are all by inmates, apart from those by Read's daughter Maria. The Read sketchbook contains a number of images of particular interest that are to do with people at Darlinghurst, bushranging scenes, people in gaol waiting for trial, and caricatures of local Sydney identities.

There are two long-term prisoners who are most likely to have made these works and given them to John Cecil Read: Henry Louis Bertrand and Frank Pearson. Some are definitely by Bertrand (signed “*HLB*”), and others bear a close resemblance to known works by Pearson. These two prisoners were held in Darlinghurst Gaol at the same time, although Pearson was only gaoled for 11 years, as opposed to Bertrand's 28. Both men were serving life sentences for murder, and were of a similar age. Both were well educated, with some knowledge of Latin and an interest in art and music.

¹⁰ Convict artworks are referenced in Anemaat (2019).

Henry Louis Bertrand (1841–1924)

Some long-term prisoners turned to art as a way to survive their long years in gaol. There were no art classes, but several inmates were already skilled artists, and shared their skills with fellow prisoners. In 1891, convicted murderer Henry Louis Bertrand was the first known painter to depict the site from the inside. [Fig 7] His now-iconic watercolour of the buildings of Darlinghurst Gaol is held by the State Library of New South Wales. Known as the notorious “Demon Dentist of Wynyard Square,” Bertrand became one of the longest-serving prisoners in Darlinghurst after being sentenced to death and later reprieved for killing his lover’s husband in 1866. His time at Darlinghurst Gaol ran almost concurrently with that of the Governor John Cecil Read, and it appears that Read encouraged Bertrand’s artistic pursuits.

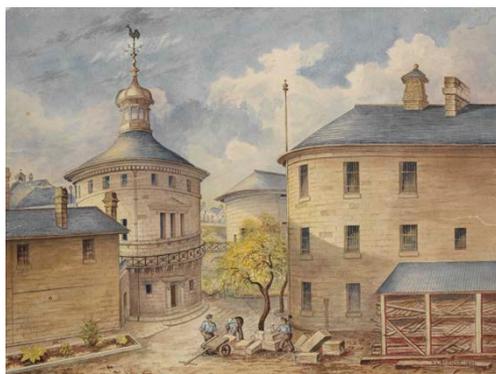


Figure 7: Henry Louis Bertrand, *Darlinghurst Gaol* 1891. Watercolour. State Library of NSW, Mitchell Library SV1/Gao/Darh/2.

While in gaol Bertrand played the organ in the chapel, carved delicate bone objects, worked as a dentist in the hospital and used the paints his mother supplied him with to paint a life-sized crucifix in his cell. Along

with his fellow inmate Frank Pearson, he is often credited with designing the stained glass windows for the chapel but probably only painted the frieze above the windows.¹¹ Bertrand was 53 on his final release on 17 June 1894. At this time he gave some of his artworks to the Gaol chaplain, Rev. William Cuthbert. Cuthbert’s grand-daughter later donated some of these to the Mitchell Library, and kept four others in the family. These watercolours have remarkable similarities with paintings in the Read scrapbook, and also with other works by prisoner Frank Pearson. Some appear to be copies of postcards or magazine clippings of exotic landscapes, perhaps a way of escaping the drab walls of Darlinghurst Gaol.



Figure 8: Henry Louis Bertrand, *A very respectable individual*, c. 1880s. Watercolour from John Cecil Read’s scrapbook p.196.

Bertrand’s works are the most numerous in the scrapbook. Although only four are signed “HLB,” a full page of 15 caricatures in pencil towards the back of the book shows duplicates of many of the watercolour caricatures scattered throughout the sketchbook. This proves that these watercolours were also done by Bertrand. Another giveaway is his handwriting. He

11 Edwards (2016).

had a distinctive style, signed in sepia ink, and wrote often satiric or sarcastic notes under each drawing. For example, one of his drawings of a policeman is named “A very respectable individual.” [Fig 8]



Figure 9: Henry Louis Bertrand (signed “HLB”), *Safer in than out*, c. 1880s. Watercolour and ink from John Cecil Read’s scrapbook p. 168.

One signed watercolour is titled “Safer in than out,” and it depicts a mouse in a cage with two dogs staring at it. The space they are in looks very similar to a sandstone cell in Darlinghurst Gaol, and the buildings outside could be those in Burton Street outside the gaol. The title of the drawing may have a double meaning, and relate to the prisoners in the gaol itself, rather than the animals portrayed.[Fig 9]

Bertrand served another five years in Darlinghurst after Governor Read retired. Towards the back of the Read scrapbook is a full-page watercolour which looks very similar to Bertrand’s other work, and it is possible that Bertrand gave it to Read before he retired. Titled “Our Ancestors: Novel Theory of Human Pedigree by an Intelligent German,” it illustrates evolution from single-cell animals to primitive man, via a kangaroo, monkeys and other animals.¹²

[Fig 10] Its Latin inscription translates as “The fool has said to his heart, there is no God”. As an educated but sceptical man, it sounds like something Bertrand could have written, possibly referring to the German scientist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), who was such an influence on Charles Darwin. Darwin’s book *On the Origin of the Species* was published in 1859. Throughout the sketchbook are other printed images of engravings by Humboldt, showing that Read might have also been drawn to his research.

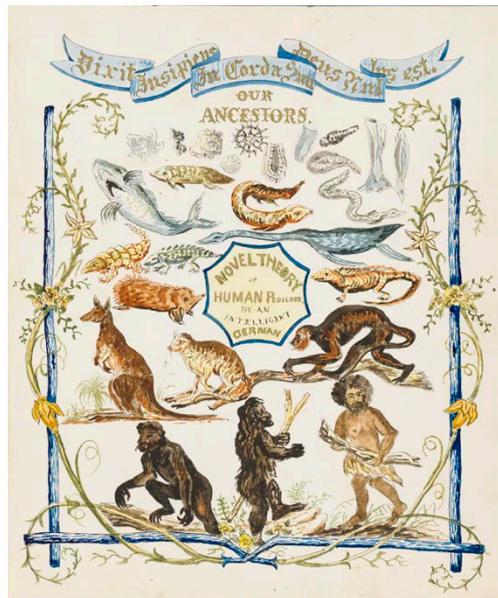


Figure 10: Unidentified artist. *Our Ancestors: Novel Theory of Human Pedigree by an Intelligent German*. Gouache from John Cecil Read’s scrapbook p. 100.

Frank Pearson (Captain Starlight)
(1837–1899)

Frank Pearson was an enigmatic character, who consistently lied about his background,

¹² Read retired in 1888, which means that Bertrand’s sketch of evolution is very early. See Moyal & Marks (2019) [Ed.]

used many aliases, forged signatures and stole other prisoners’ identities. As the bushranger Captain Starlight, he ranged the countryside in northern NSW, bailed up travellers and eventually killed a policeman, Senior Constable John McCabe, in a shootout. He was sentenced to death by hanging, later commuted to life imprisonment. Pearson arrived in Darlinghurst Gaol in 1873, and for many years he became an exemplary prisoner, serving as an assistant to the Catholic Chaplain. [Fig 11]



Figure 11: Frank Pearson (Captain Starlight), from the Darlinghurst Gaol Photograph Description books, 1873. Museums of History New South Wales — State Archives Collection. MHNSW-StAC NRS 2138 [11/17378] p. 251.

While in gaol he converted to the Catholic faith, and was visited by the Sisters of Charity. Sr. Gertrude Davis and Sr. Mary de Sales Phillips were two of the sisters who visited Frank Pearson. They would walk to Darlinghurst two or three times a week from their convent in Potts Point to minister to prisoners.

Possibly encouraged by his fellow inmate Henry Bertrand and Governor John Read, Pearson learnt to draw and paint while in gaol, and completed many artworks in the 11

years he was held in Darlinghurst. Upon his release in 1884, Pearson presented the Sisters of Charity with a sketchbook containing dozens of his original artworks, as a token of his gratitude for the care and attention the Sisters had afforded him. The artworks have remained in the possession of the Sisters of Charity ever since. His sketches and watercolours cover a broad range of subjects: copies from postcards and magazines, drawings of his fellow inmates, and many flower studies. Like Bertrand’s works, they often have a descriptive note underneath in Pearson’s hand, such as “A Gaol Bird,” and “Ye Bold Trooper.” Most were completed towards the end of his sentence 1882–1884, and signed with an “A,” possibly referring to one of his aliases, Arnold.



Figure 12: Frank Pearson (Captain Starlight). Painting and collage of addressed envelopes. 1890. Gouache and ink. National Art School Collection, Gift of Allan Harding 2021.

After his release, Pearson continued to paint and draw for the rest of his life. Six years after leaving Sydney he turned up at “Yarawa” station at Mungindi, near Moree in northern NSW, using the alias “Patrick Pelly.” While stuck on the property during the 1890 flood, he entertained the family with stories

of his bushranging exploits, and painted a series of watercolours which he left as a thank-you for their hospitality. Relatives of the family he stayed with recently donated these original artworks by Captain Starlight to the National Art School collection. Like the Bertrand watercolours, they depict idyllic scenes of landscapes and seascapes, and bear similarities with the unsigned works in the Read scrapbook.



Figure 13: Unidentified artist. Painting of envelopes and notes c. 1880s. Gouache and ink from John Cecil Read's scrapbook p. 86.

Pearson also painted some *trompe l'oeil* images of letters and stamped envelopes in which he successfully achieves an optical illusion that the envelopes are torn and glued onto a page. [Fig 12] His skills as a forger and adoption of fellow prisoners' names can be seen in these works. They look surprisingly "modern" and are quite distinct from Bertrand's work. One work in the scrapbook is remarkably similar to these, and because of this it can be assumed that it is also by Pearson. [Fig 13] Others in the scrapbook, particularly of sailing ships, have many characteristics which appear in his later work as well. [Fig 14]



Figure 14: Unidentified artist. Two ships in a storm. Watercolour from John Cecil Read's scrapbook p. 16.

Unknown artworks

Many interesting drawings in the book are unsigned. There are eight delicate paintings of flowers, three pencil copies of other artists' paintings, and eight drawings of what look to be people in the street who are a variety of ethnicities. Any of these could be by Bertrand or Pearson, or by other prisoners who enjoyed drawing.

The rare depictions of bushrangers in action are strangely stilted with little understanding of perspective, but overall the subject matter of horses, mail coaches and men on horseback are quite competently drawn. Two in pencil are named "Driving Cattle Overland 'Camped'" (signed "FS"), and "Scene near Jugiong, Murrumbidgee". This work could refer to the bailing up of the mail coach by Ben Hall and his gang in November 1864.¹³ This event did occur near Jugiong, and indeed some of Ben Hall's gang ended up incarcerated in Darlinghurst Gaol. If drawn by one of the 33 bushrangers held in Darlinghurst Gaol in the 19th century, they are significant and rare examples of

13 Anon. (1864).

bushranging exploits as depicted by the bushrangers who were there.¹⁴

Another shoot-out is depicted in a very similar style on page 96. This one is in pen and ink and wash, and has the title, "Sticking up the Lambing Flat Coach," in a script that looks like Bertrand's. [Fig 15] Lambing Flat was an early name for the town of Young, NSW, and a place where bushrangers, including the outlaw and Darlinghurst Gaol prisoner, Frank Gardiner, were known to roam. It is also known that Gardiner himself was adept at drawing horses, as he made a mat in the gaol manufacturing wing in 1866, with an image of his favourite horse "Darkie."¹⁵



Figure 15: Unidentified artist. *Sticking up the Lambing Flat coach*, c. 1870s. Pen and ink from John Cecil Read's scrapbook p. 96.

On the same page as the Lambing Flat drawing, another pen, ink and wash drawing is titled "Waiting for Trial." This is almost certainly by Bertrand, as some of the characters re-appear in his signed drawing on page 211, and the text is very similar to Bertrand's. The group of 12 men and one boy are from various social classes, ages and races, and it is most likely a scene that Bertrand witnessed many times, as new prisoners were brought in for trial in the courthouse adjacent to Darlinghurst Gaol. In fact, Bertrand himself

was held in the trial wing (A Wing) for many months after his own trial, while waiting to see if his death sentence would be commuted to life. [Fig 16].



Figure 16: Henry Louis Bertrand. *Waiting for trial*, c. 1870s. Pen and ink from John Cecil Read's scrapbook p. 96.

Photographs

Of the fifteen original photos found in the scrapbook, only three have titles. As governor of Darlinghurst Gaol, John Cecil Read travelled to other gaols in the colony, and there are three unique sepia photographs on page 74, probably taken by Read. The top one is a stereo-view of a river valley and town, which looks like Parramatta. The centre photo is of Darlinghurst Gaol taken from the northwest, looking across the terrace houses of Surry Hills towards the Forbes Street gate. The photo was taken before 1871 when the original Forbes Street gate was replaced. Although in poor condition, it is the only known early photograph taken from this angle. A third photograph with five people in the foreground is of Berima Gaol in country NSW. It shows the front gate and wall, built by convict labour and opened in 1839.

¹⁴ Beck (2014).

¹⁵ Gardiner's hand-loomed mat "Gardiner's Darkie" was exhibited in the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition. Anon. (1866).

Other photographs scattered throughout the book include images of unknown Aboriginal or Maori men taken in the 1860s, some originals of which can be found in Te Papa Tongarewa (the Museum of New Zealand). There are also some personal photographs: one of a dog with a large stick in its mouth sitting on a chair; one of five elegantly dressed women, who could be members of the Read family; and one of a gentleman, who could be John Cecil Read himself when he was young. Unfortunately there are no names on these, and the current family cannot recognise who they are.

A beautiful photograph of a large two-storey Victorian house with iron lace on the verandah is glued onto one of the last pages of the book. Two women are standing on the balcony of the top floor, and the woman on the left bears a resemblance to known photos of Anne Read, John Cecil Read's wife. This could be Read's residence after he retired, "Arawa," in Nelson's Bay Road, Waverley, where he lived from 1889 to 1899. [Fig 17].



Figure 17: Photograph, unidentified, possibly of John Cecil Read's house *Arawa* from John Cecil Read's scrapbook p. 200.

Conclusion

The discovery of a hitherto unknown scrapbook compiled in Darlinghurst Gaol is a major find, which deserves many more hours of research and analysis. As the documentation accompanying the book is so sparse, many of the conclusions in this paper involve informed speculation, raising more questions for future exploration.

The appearance of the Read scrapbook certainly reveals its age. The well-worn cover is in poor condition, the spine of the book itself has been broken and some pages are coming loose. It is currently being conserved and restored, and will be a much treasured item in the National Art School Collection. The fact that the Read family have kept this significant book for so many years means that it can continue to contribute to our knowledge of the past.

Acknowledgements

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