



James Alfred Roberts

(1841 - 1896)

Memories of Bronte, Trotting at Boccaccio Park and Elsternwick Park

Article by John Peck (2016)

William Shakespeare once wrote of men, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.”

James Alfred Roberts is eminently qualified under all three of Shakespeare’s measures as he certainly attained greatness through his intellectual acumen, posthumously he had the title of the greatest foundation breeders of the Standardbred (trotters and pacers) thrust upon him by historians and when one studies the achievements of his family, especially his parents and siblings you are attracted to, and convinced by a genetic theory to explain them.

A rapidfire summary of his public office positions display the remarkable standing of James Alfred Roberts – Master of the Combermere Lodge 752; inaugural Deputy Grand Master United Lodge of Victoria; Commissioner to the 1878 Paris World’s Fair, 1879 Sydney International Exhibition, 1880 Melbourne World’s Fair and the 1892/3 Chicago World’s Fair; inaugural trustee Victoria Trotting Club (established Elsternwick Park); Council Member National Agricultural Society (Vic); President Melbourne City Rowing Club; inaugural member Sydney Driving Park Club committee; Council Member NSW Agricultural Society; New South Wales Magistrate; President NSW Protectionist League (Paddington/Waverley); Gold Commissioner (Coolgardie).

Added to that are his successful businesses, his directorships and of course his great passion for the trotter that saw him import trotters from North America, accumulate the largest Standardbred breeding operation in Australia at Ringwood and conduct proprietary trotting meetings at Boccaccio Park (Brighton – now known as Hampton).

Just as impressive is the stunning portfolio of real estate that James either owned, resided in or commissioned during his lifetime, many which are now Heritage-listed.

The latter facet of his life can directly be attributed to the influence of his father John who, after retiring from his haberdashery business in England, emigrated to South Australia where he amassed an envious real estate portfolio that he progressively bequeathed to his family to provide them with the wherewithal to support his imparted wisdom. That stood them all in great stead.

The life of James Alfred Roberts began on 2nd April 1841, when he was born in Sleaf House, one of only six houses in the modest hamlet of Sleaf in Shropshire, as the twelfth child of John Roberts (born across the border in Ruthin, Wales) and Londoner Leonora Willshire.



John Roberts



Leonora Roberts



Significantly that same year John Roberts received communications from his first born William who had emigrated to South Australia that portrayed a positive outlook for this colonial outpost, advising that land was freely available and importantly for the devoutly independent Christian family of the Roberts, the community was flourishing free of the tyrannical rule of the Church of England.

John had successfully operated a haberdashery while wife Leonora was a milliner who owned a child-bed linen warehouse. They were both swayed by the prospects of a new life in South Australia.

On 12th April 1844 John, his wife Leonora and children Edwin (18), Eliza (14), Josiah (11), Ebenezer (8), Jabez (6), John Frith (4) and James Alfred (2) boarded the 450 ton, three-masted barque "Madras" and settled into two cabins, one 7 feet 10 inches by 7 feet by 6 inches and the other 6 feet 8 inches by 6 feet 6 inches.

Thanks to a sea journal dutifully updated daily by another passenger John Angas, a fascinating insight can be gleaned about the emotional roller coaster the passengers endured during the 122 day voyage from London to Fremantle (an additional journey of 13 days was undertaken to Adelaide after a three week break).

April 23 – A few passengers despair of ever reaching South Australia.

May 2 – Have music and singing on deck; two pianos, flutes, guitars and an accordion on board.

May 7 – Sunday evening. Mr Roberts and passengers sing hymns in steerage.

May 14 – Sunday evening. Mr Roberts conducts a service between decks; a good many present.

May 15 – Unpleasantness between Doctor and passengers; Doctor challenged passenger to a duel at ten paces

May 19 – Native boats alongside ship to barter produce for old clothes. Decks covered with turkeys, coconuts, pumpkin, fruits, four monkeys, a goat and three kids.

May 24 – Catch forty young dolphins – very good cooked for dinner.

June 3 – Cross the line; celebrate by ducking one another with buckets of salt water.

July 8 – Hills of seas. Cow so frightened, it gives no milk.

July 29 – Stock of crockery greatly reduced; some use bottoms of wine bottles. Sea pie is very popular in rough weather – a stew of meat, potatoes and duff in pewter soup tureens.

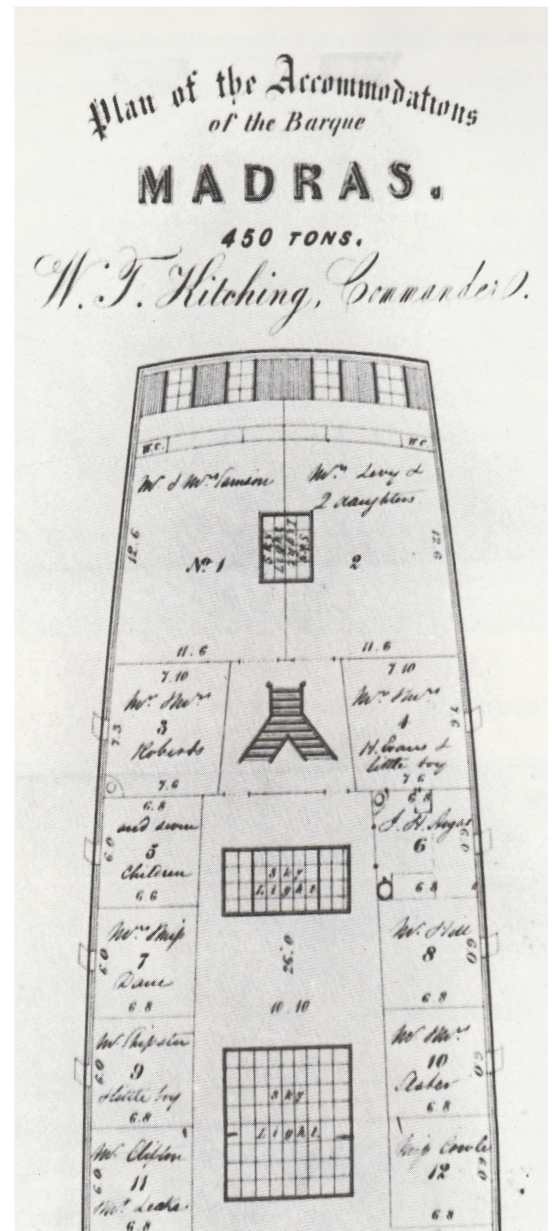
August 13 – Arrive Owen's Anchorage. Choice of going to Perth by river, walking, riding. Some steerage passengers stayed whole three weeks on board with nothing to eat but biscuits and fish.

September 4 – Mrs Slater gave birth to a baby boy.

On 13th September the Roberts family came ashore at Port Adelaide to be met by William and within six months John already owned 82 building allotments in a village called Clifton. One year on he purchased two acres at Kensington settling there to celebrate the birth of his and Leonora's final child Frederick.

The following year John bought property in Hindley Street, an additional six acres in Kensington plus 134 acres abutting the River Torrens. In fact so numerous were John's holdings that he was simply listed as "R" in the Kensington rate books.

The influence of John is best described by an extract from a publication celebrating the 50 year history of Kensington – "Up to 1840 only a few persons had made their homes in Kensington. During the forties, however, a fair impetus had been given to building by the arrival of Mr John Roberts who decided to erect a number of ideal gentleman's residences, so a number of brickyards were started to supply Mr Roberts, and other builders of houses. Mr Roberts agreed to take 200,000 bricks."





"Maesbury" - Kensington (SA)

John Roberts built a seven room brick establishment called "Maesbury" and then another called Ruthin Lodge in 1855, both described by the press of the day as *"picturesque, with their slate roofs and an air of reserve in their old gardens."*

Some acres were kept aside for more spacious ones, one notable example being on the corner of Regent Street and Bishops Place that had 13 rooms, offices and a stable that was tenanted by the first Bishop of Adelaide, Augustus Short.

The house became known as "Bishops Court" or "The Bishops" but with John not approving of bishops in general he subsequently changed the name to "Cleveland House" when the Bishop left.

Complimentary to this initial suburban portfolio John then purchased 800 acres at Mount Barker where several mines later operated extracting silver, lead and copper.

With the arrival of 1850s and the endemic "gold rush fever" that accompanied it, tens of thousands flocked to the Ballarat and Bendigo goldfields to find their fortune. The offspring of John and Leonora were no different to the general population but were smarter using their money to acquire real estate and invest in industries that supplied the goldmining industry – pots, pans, picks, wheels, frames, barrows.

In 1858 a seventeen year-old James Alfred Roberts, known by some of his brothers as "Alf", had finished his schooling and left home for Melbourne gaining employment with the London Ironmongery Firm Briscoe's who had just set up business in the colonies.

He flourished in the workplace impressing his employers and quickly moved into the middle management ranks, so much so that he felt confident enough in 1863 to offer his younger brother Frederick a position.

Frederick wasted no time in going to Melbourne but had to have an apprenticeship bond broken to do so and on arrival he was the sixth and last of John and Leonora's children that had flown the coop for Melbourne.

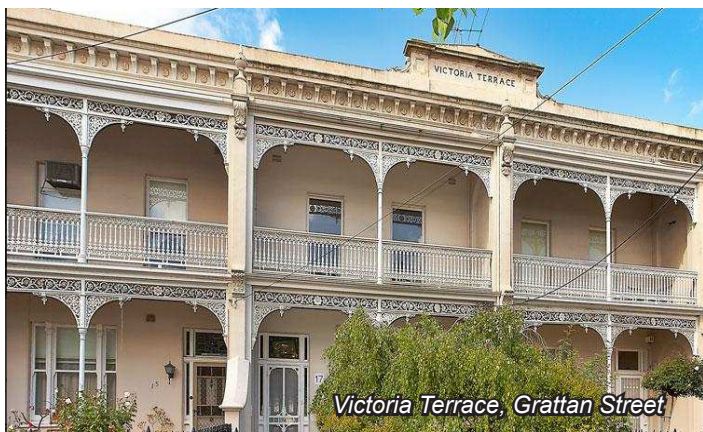
John then decided that due to his advanced age – he was 69 years old – that he and Leonora would also make the move from Kensington to Melbourne to spend more time with their children and grandchildren.

Immediately John and Leonora linked up with the Melbourne-based members of the family in particular their daughter Eliza Morris and spent the earlier years in Melbourne staying at the Morris owned property of Maesbury in Northcote, that later became the Convent of the Good Samaritan.

James had also stayed there and at another Morris owned property at 108 Leicester Street that was advertised as "apartments for gentlemen" and was a two storey, six room brick establishment with a birch cottage in the rear.



"Maesbury" - Northcote (Vic)



In 1866 James married the 17 year-old Marion McMurtrie, daughter of the well known builder David McMurtrie at 8 Grattan Street, one of four terraces in Grattan Street close to the corner with Rathdowne Street that David owned. These terraces were merged with the corner buildings to form the Lemon Tree Hotel in the twentieth century.

The following year James and Marion welcomed their first child Laura Katherine and for the almost two years the family of three lived at 108 Leicester Street, a property that was later swallowed up by a flour mill than stood imposingly on the corner of Leicester and Queensbury Streets.

With baby number two on the way and with James' parents wanting to downsize from their substantial property "Alma House" that straddled the entire block along Chapel Street from Argyle Street to Inkerman Street, James and Marion joined John and Leonore in 1869 they all moved into a property in High Street, opposite St Edmonds Road.

Named Ruthin House, it was to be the home of the Roberts clan for three years and the birthplace of two of James' children – Marion Beatrice on 3rd February 1869 and Alfred George on 31st December 1870.

James' parents returned to Adelaide in 1871. The expanding family numbers and a more prominent role in the business world – he had left Briscoes in 1870 to co-manage a new firm of iron merchants an ironmongers Blyth, Drysdale and Roberts - pushed James and Marion to find new accommodation relocating to the heritage listed Victoria Terrace (number 2) in Grattan Street, Carlyon, ironically just opposite where they were married in 1866.

They remained there for three years welcoming their fourth child Sydney Roberts on 29th March 1873 and during this time James involved himself in the world of the Freemasons as had many of the leading citizens of the time in particular City of Melbourne officialdom.

James made an immediate impression on the Freemason community and on Wednesday March 28th 1874 The Argus reported, *"the installation of worshipful master of the Combermere Lodge, No. 752 E.C., took place at the Masonic-hall, Lonsdale-street, on Monday evening. There was a large attendance of members and brethren present. Brother Cantor acted as installing master, and Brother James Alfred Roberts was duly installed as W.M. (Worshipful Master) for the ensuing 12 months."*

During James' twelve month reign the Lodge elevated its status, a fact acknowledged in The Age when he retired in January 1875 – *"Brother Cantor gave the health of the newly installed master, alluding in graceful terms to the high position the lodge had attained during the time the late master (Brother J.A. Roberts) occupied the chair."*

It was at this time that James moved from Victoria Terrace into a newish two story house that had been built only in 1872 less than a mile away at 181 Drummond Street. James Roberts was one never to forget his upbringing having previously named his property in High Street Ruthin (for his father's birthplace in Wales) and he continued this philosophy by naming his Drummond Street property Elwy House, honouring the tributary of the River Cwyld that flows through the countryside near Ruthin.

On 3rd June 1875 Stanley Leigh Roberts, James and Marion's fifth child, was born at Elwy House, however, celebration of the new arrival was tempered with the death six days later of the Roberts Family patriarch John who passed away in Adelaide.

John had foreseen his impending demise in 1872 when he had appointed his sons Jabez and William along with his solicitor Bayfield Moulden as trustees and executors of his extensive cash and real



estate holdings. He ensured that the families of his son Charles and his daughter Leonora, who had pre-deceased him were remembered with cash bequests and that the remaining nine children all received legacies of real estate - at least one house and a quantity of land.

Another new home in 1876, Montacute House in Grey Street (now numbered no. 62) and another child, Percy Melbourne Roberts being born there on 18th September.

Meanwhile James' business acumen ensured that Blyth, Drysdale and Roberts would become one of the most prominent firms in Melbourne, so much so that the firm opened a branch in Sydney. Within a year of the Sydney enterprise Blyth retired and the two remaining partners decided to sell out the Melbourne business to James' brother William, his son-in-law John Morris and nephew Charles Deakin and concentrate their energies on Sydney.

The Age on Monday 2nd July 1877 reported – *“Messrs, Drysdale and Roberts, iron merchants, who are retiring from business in this city, on Saturday evening gave their employees an entertainment, consisting of a dance and supper, at the Athenaeum. There were several toasts proposed, including that of the old firm and their successors, Messrs. Roberts, Morris and Deakin. The employees took the opportunity of presenting Mr. J. A. Roberts, the resident partner, with a testimonial of their esteem in the shape of a handsome gold locket, chain and pencil-case. The party numbered at least 100; and spent a very enjoyable evening.”*



Montacute House, Grey Street

The stay in Sydney was not permanent and on 22nd February 1878 James, his wife Marion, five children and a governess left Sydney on the Pacific SN Company's Lusitania arriving two days later in Melbourne.

The reason for the Melbourne trip soon became evident. James was about to be appointed by the Royal Commission to be a Commissioner to the 1878 Paris Exhibition (World's Fair) that was due to commence on 1st May and extend through to 10th November.

On 30th March 1878 James and Marion left their two eldest daughters in an elite Girls Boarding school while the other children were looked after by a governess and other extended family.

They joined other Commissioners on the steamship City of Sydney, bound for San Francisco arriving there on 1st May, whereupon they travelled onwards through the Suez Canal sea to London, and then to Paris for the Exhibition.

Coincidentally on the City of Sydney were members of the Australian Cricket contingent such as Hall of Famers Jack Blackham (Prince of Keepers) and fast bowler Fred “Demon” Spofforth, who were to play an exhausting series of 27 matches over four months in England, interesting enough without a single Test match.

James possessed an interest in several sports and with his brother Jabez having earlier played cricket for St Kilda it wasn't surprising that he spent some time with several members and officials of the contingent, striking up some friendships that would be played out in public several years later.

To say that the Paris Exhibition transformed James' life would be an understatement. Apart from the wonderment of Paris the City itself and the social/business networking undertaken, James witnessed new inventions such as the telephone and phonograph as well observing the completed head of the famous Statue of Liberty that would be shipped to New York after the Exhibition. None of that could, however, compare to the impact that the exposure to the sport of trotting while he was in Paris had on James.



1878 Paris Gold Medal

Trotting in the Northern Hemisphere was nearing its zenith at the time with spirited challenges for the title of the best in the world's being waged between the Russian Orloff trotters, the French trotters, the established English hackney trotters and the American standardbred trotter. In 1878 French trotting was in its infancy as an overview translated from the French publication *Le Trotteurs Francais* explained:-

"Harness racing has been practiced in France since 1835. That year, in fact, a decree authorizes the organization of races in Nantes and these are held in the plain of Plée, near the road to Clisson. A racetrack is then implanted on the prairie Mauves. The following year, the first Norman race takes place September 25, 1836 on the beach of Cabourg. Of its success, the Racecourse of the Prairie (Caen) receives the first trotting race meetings of the 26 and 27 August 1837. This formula is gradually extending to the Lower Normandy during the 1840s and then to the entire La France."

The French Trotting Association (Cheval Francais) was established in 1861 and trotting exhibitions were held during the Paris Exhibition for the public. The highlight though came in early September 1878 when the first trotting races in Île-de-France were held at the Hippodrome de Maisons-Laffitte.

The *Le Trotteurs Francais* publication reported, *"This memorable meeting took place on Saturday, September 7, 1878. It was equipped with sixty thousand francs - a considerable sum for a meeting of trot. A huge crowd was moved to attend the six races in the programme and look at evolve the best European and American trotters."*

The prizemoney was sensational and although the Hippodrome de Maisons-Laffitte was later to switch to thoroughbred racing, France was blessed in 1879 with the inauguration of Vincennes, that was soon dubbed the "Temple of Trot" and is now universally revered as the finest trotting complex in the world. The style, the physique and speed of the European and American trotters enthralled James and before he boarded the RMS Assam at Point de Gaulle on 17th September 17th he had already set in motion a master plan to introduce trotting on a grand scale in Australia.



Hippodrome de Maisons-Laffitte

After once again travelling through the Suez Canal to San Francisco, James and Marion arrived back in Melbourne on 7th December and one month later, the family of seven plus a servant transported back to Sydney.

The Sydney International Exhibition was scheduled for 1879 with Melbourne hosting the World's Fair the following year and James Roberts was heavily involved as a Commissioner to both Exhibitions. The experience and contacts that he had garnered in Paris proved invaluable for organisers, not to mention his businesses, Drysdale and Roberts plus Roberts, Chalmers and Co.

James obviously had the ability to departmentalise all of the competing interests such as business, the Exhibitions, Freemasonry, family and his new project, trotting that he planned to base and launch in Victoria.



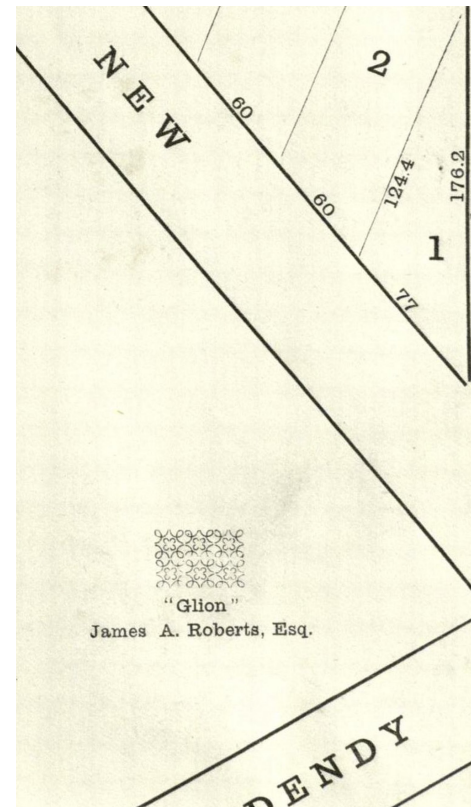
1879 Sydney International Exhibition

With that in mind he shifted his daughters Laura and Marion back to Melbourne in mid 1879 for boarding and schooling at the Carlton Ladies School in Grattan Street and then early in 1880 arranged for the younger members of the family and his wife to move back to Melbourne.

In March 1880 James purchased the magnificent Brighton mansion "Glion" that had been commissioned by preserved meat pioneer Samuel Tallerman who had returned to England to oversee what had burgeoned into an importation business colossus.

The name Glion had special significance for the Jewish Samuel as it was an important village for the Jewish community in Switzerland at the time. Remarkably in 1993 the town of Glion ensured its place in history by being the meeting place for a peace conference between the Jewish, Muslim and Christian religions.

James, a leading freemason, took the opportunity to re-name the mansion, Bronte, in honour of Patrick Branwell Bronte, the legendary freemason brother of the Bronte sisters.



James was aware that an American Charles Colbath had imported an American trotting stallion Von Moltke Junior to Victoria in 1879 standing him at stud next to his home in 38 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, where the Melbourne Veterinary College now stands. The sporting grapevine was also spruiking that others such as J.J. Miller, American Dr. Weir and Andrew Town (NSW) were also seeking to import American trotters.

The selection of the signature stallion for Roberts' pioneering stud venture was left to Mr. S.P. Gregory of San Francisco who scoured stud farms in California for a suitable prospect, eventually selecting Boccaccio who had been awarded a Blue Ribbon at the 1880 Golden Gate Agricultural Show.

Around this time the Sydney Morning Herald reported on a testimonial dinner in April 1880 at the Masonic Hall for Mr. J.N. Oxley, who had been the superintendent of the Agricultural Hall at the Sydney International Exhibition. James Roberts was chosen to give the laudatory address and hand over gifts of two gold watches, a purse of sovereigns and an inscribed silver table service.

Meanwhile in Victoria, there was a flurry of action in regards trotting in Victoria. The sport had been provided with a boost from 1877 thanks to regular monthly races at mixed metropolitan meetings at Sam Cox's Kensington Park enterprise near Macauley Road and Kensington station, however, this was soon to end.

Sam Cox made the decision to take up an option to purchase land he had leased in 1874 known as Feehans Farm and promptly set about creating a racetrack on that property that would be known as Moonee Valley and planning the phasing out and ultimate sale of the Kensington racecourse. The need for a racetrack specifically for trotting had become an urgent priority and James Roberts conveyed his willingness to assist in anyway possible raising funds by putting his Avoca Street "Barrassie" mansion in Randwick and all of its valuable contents including a walnut cottage Pianoforte by Schiedmeyer, on the market.

As James was preparing to move to Victoria to join his family, the foundations were being laid to obtain a trotting track in Victoria. The Argus on 2nd June 1880 reported that:-

“A meeting of persons who take an interest in trotting was held at Goyders Hotel, Bourke street, last night, for the purpose of forming a Trotting Club, for encouraging the breeding and racing of trotting horses. Mr Goyder stated that he had spoken to one of the trustees of the Victoria Amateur Turf Club on the subject of forming a trotting track inside the training track on the Caulfield course He thought if a properly digested scheme was laid before the committee of the club it would be favourably received. A preliminary committee was appointed to take the necessary steps for forming a club. The meeting then adjourned until next Tuesday, when an estimate of the cost of forming a trotting track will be presented to the meeting.”

It soon became apparent that Caulfield was not the only site under consideration and the Press were right on to it with the Geelong Advertiser on 14th June running the following report mentioning Elsternwick for the first time:-

“Those sports who love to see horses stretching themselves out in the confining harness of a "sulky", with a laudable ambition to "break two twelve," or even to emulate two forty-seven, which even in America is good time for a mile, will, perhaps, like to hear that the lovers of trotting here are likely shortly to lay down a trotting course in Elsternwick Park, on a flat there of clay with gravel subsoil, considered most suitable, which is easily approached by road and closely proximate to the Elsternwick railway station.”

The Advocate on Saturday 15th June 1880 printed the following:-

“A meeting of gentlemen interested in trotting was held yesterday evening, at Goyders Victoria Hotel It was resolved that a deputation should wait on the Minister of Lands to endeavour to obtain possession of the Elsternwick park reserve for the purpose of forming a trotting track the following gentlemen were appointed as the deputation - Messrs Beasley, Emmett, Garton, Miller, Robbins, Goyder, Millsom, and Dixon.”

A few days later the Sydney Morning Herald reported on 19th June 1880:-

“Mr J.A. Roberts, of the firm of Drysdale and Roberts, the well-known hardware and iron merchants of this city, intends shortly to retire from the firm, and settle in Victoria, whither his family has preceded him. Mr Roberts has deservedly become popular amongst all classes, not only for his unostentatious acts of charity to the deserving, but for his desire to further the interests of the community at large, whenever duty called. It is said that Mr. Roberts will be entertained by his numerous friends previous to his departure to Melbourne.”

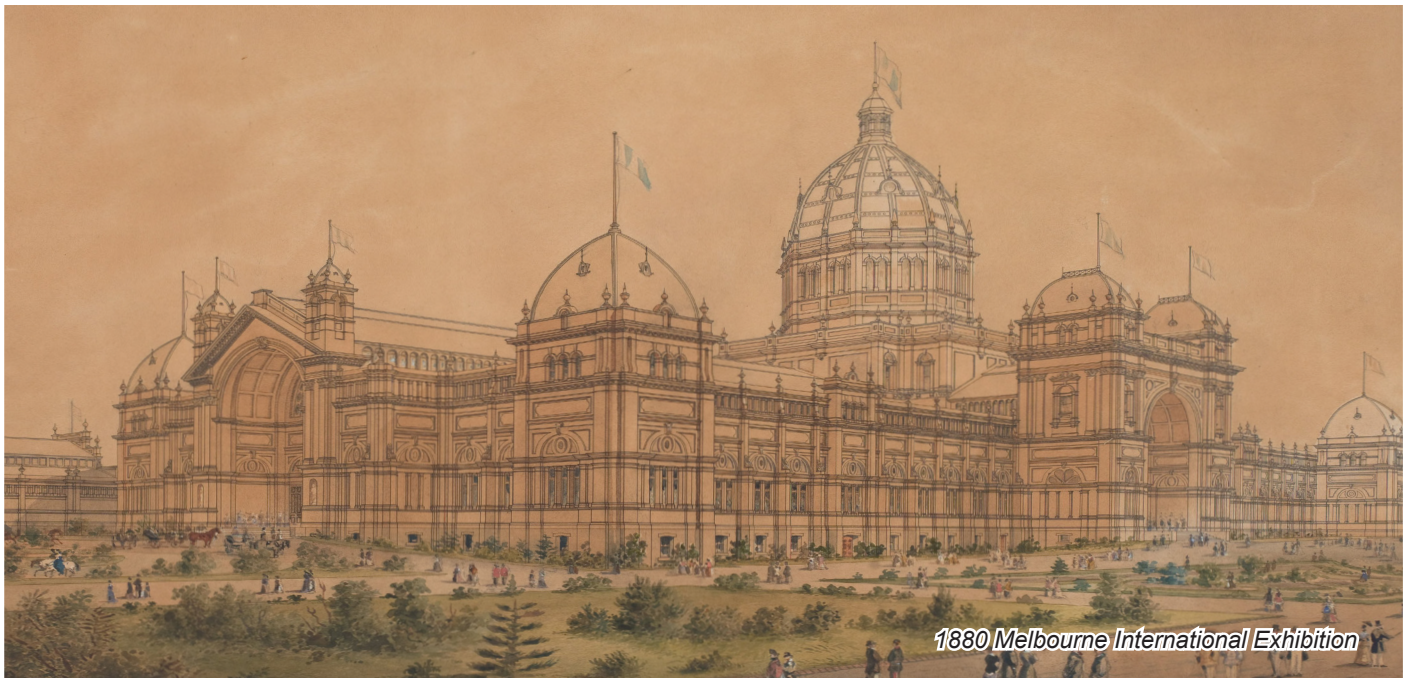
Enthusiasm was high amongst the trotting fraternity as they quickly pressed forward with plans to obtain a lease. The Argus on the 1st July 1880 reported on a deputation:-

“A deputation from the Victoria Trotting Club, consisting of Messrs Goyder, Garton, and others, waited on Mr Bent (in the absence of the Minister of Lands) yesterday, and asked for permission to use 40 acres of land in Elsternwick park, for the purposes of a trotting rink. Mr Bent said that if there were no objection on the part of the department or the Brighton Council, and the Crown Solicitor was of opinion that a lease could be issued, a lease of the necessary land would be granted to the club.”

For James there was some joyous respite from the campaign to obtain a trotting track on 14th August when his wife Marion delivered a healthy boy, George Bramwell, in their new home Bronte, Middle Brighton. The following night James was at a meeting of the Trotting Association where all in attendance were told that the Brighton Borough Council had agreed to lease Elsternwick Park and would receive an offer from Association.

That same month James Roberts' American stallion importation, Boccaccio, set sail for Australia from San Francisco with his impending arrival announced in a series of advertisements in Melbourne and Sydney newspapers.





If that wasn't enough to occupy James' mind, October 1880 was a huge month for him as Exhibition Commissioner with the Melbourne International Exhibition, subsequently recognized as the first World's Fair in the Southern Hemisphere, opening. An exhibit for his company Roberts, Chalmers and Co was front and centre in the New South Wales sector in the magnificent Exhibition building.

James also rushed into the ownership of a trotter purchasing the five-year-old grey gelding Johnny that raced at Kensington Park on the 16th October finishing second to George Millsom's Peter.

In the 17th November 1880 issue of the Argus, an indication was given that matters relating to Elsternwick Park have moved forward:-

"A meeting of gentlemen wishing to form a trotting association was held at Goyder's Hotel last night Mr P G Dixon occupied the chair. Mr Goyder explained that the meeting was called in consequence of the Brighton municipal council being now in a position to treat with the association respecting the lease of the Elsternwick park for a trotting track. He believed the park could be leased for 10 years at a rental of £30 per annum. A sub committee was appointed to meet the Brighton Town Council respecting the details of the lease (Messrs Dixon, Goyder, Miller, Colbath and Robbins). At the suggestion of Mr J J Miller, the sub committee was requested to draw up rules and regulations for the association, and to report to a future meeting. It was decided that the name of the association should be the Australian National Trotting Association."

Phillip Garnet Dixon was the mineral springs water magnate and owner of the champion colonial-bred trotter Wanderer, Frederick Charles Goyder was a horse owner, hotelier and bookmaker, James John Miller was the Sweeps King, trotting owner and the founder of Millers Guide, Charles Colbath imported the American trotting stallion Von Moltke Junior and Frank Robbins was a stevedore and a leading trotting owner/trainer/driver.

On the 18th November the City of Sydney, with Boccaccio aboard arrived in Sydney then travelled overland to Melbourne arriving on Melbourne on Wednesday 24th November. Ever the promoter, James Roberts arranged for Boccaccio to be placed on a train bound for Sandhurst (Bendigo) where the stallion was paraded in the Mall on 1st December, garnering plenty of inches in the local press.

As the efforts to obtain a lease of Elsternwick Park continued without final approval, another group of trotting enthusiasts took up the challenge of creating a racetrack that would be solely used for trotting and James Roberts was amongst them, desperate to achieve a metropolitan trotting track for Melbourne.

Boasting an uncannily similar name, the Australian Trotting Club, announced in October 1880 that the following persons had been appointed directors of the Club – Messrs J.A. Roberts, J Beaumont, Richard Dawson and Stratford Strettle with J.H. Bennett, the secretary pro tem. Richard Dawson was a pianoforte teacher, Stratford Strettle (major horse and cattle sales firm), James Beaumont owned a boot manufacturing firm and JH Bennett (landlord Prince Albert Hotel).

With plans of the Northcote course already on public view in Melbourne in February 1881 the Australian Trotting Club announced that they *"have now completed the purchase of a course from Mr. Geo. Plant at the foot of Northcote-hill, and the work of laying out the course, stand, fencing, &c., will be immediately proceeded with. Mr. M. Egan, architect, has been instructed to prepare plans, &c."*

Meanwhile the quest for the Elsternwick Park lease continued unabated and in March 1881 the holy grail was achieved when the Argus on 12th March 1881 reported the Minister of Lands had given permission to the Brighton Council to lease the Elsternwick Park to the National Trotting Association, for the purpose of forming a trotting track therein. The following Saturday, The Weekly Times reported:-

“A meeting of the Australian National Trotting Association was held at Goyder's Victoria hotel on Wednesday evening. About twenty gentlemen put in appearance, and Mr. Roberts was unanimously voted to the chair. The principal business for which the meeting was convened was the election of trustees for the club ground at Elsternwick Park, and the election of officers. Messrs. J.A. Roberts, P.G. (Phillip Garnet) Dixon, and F C (Frederick Charles) Goyder were appointed the trustees, and Mr. T (Thomas) Bent, M.L.A., was nominated president; Dr. L.L. (Louis Lawrence) Smith, vice-president; Mr. J.A. Roberts, treasurer, and Mr. Robert J. Gibney, secretary of the club. A committee, consisting of eight members, was formed, and authority vested in the committee to take all necessary steps for the issue of scrips. The association is to be registered as a limited liability company, with a capital of £5,000 in 1,000 shares of £5 each. The lease of the ground is in course of preparation, and within a week will be signed, when the association will take possession of it, and commence the work necessary for forming a course. Two hundred shares have already been taken up.”

Thomas Bent was one of Victoria's most controversial politicians who can be found in historical writings of the times as “Honest Tom”/”Bent by Name, Bent by Nature”, Dr. L.L. Smith (often referred to as £ £ Smith) was not far behind when it comes to controversy while F.C. Goyder was a hotelier, bookmaker, horseowner and later a J.P. as well as the first Mayor of Katoomba.

Thomas Bent



Dr L.L. Smith



Dr L.L. Smith had several farms, the most extensive being a tract of land in the outer eastern area of Melbourne called “L.L. Vale”, that when sold became the suburb of Vermont, while L.L. Road was re-named Boronia Road. James Roberts discussed the quality of the land with Smith and would later lease land close to extremities of Smith's land holdings to create a stud farm of his own.

It is appropriate at this time to provide two other overviews of how the trotting track at Elsternwick Park became a reality. Firstly and excerpt from Victorian Trotting Club secretary Thomas Haydon's book Sporting Reminiscences:-

“I think it was early in the eighties that a few trotting enthusiasts met together and founded the Victoria Trotting Club, and they, after casting about for a site for some time, at last fixed upon the Elsternwick Swamp, a piece of waste land belonging to the Crown, which they leased from the Government for a period of ten years. The lease was granted upon the condition that the swamp should be reclaimed; that the public should have free access to the enclosure at all times, save and excepting so many days in the year when trotting or racing meetings were being held; footpaths should be made across it and maintained in good order, and the place should be beautified by tree-planting, etc. The rent was to be of almost a peppercorn character, and what was so paid should go to the Borough of Brighton, in which district the land was situated. Providing that these conditions were faithfully fulfilled, there would be no difficulty in securing a renewal of the lease; so said the then Minister of Lands.”

Another interpretation of what happened can be gleaned from Weston Bate's “A History of Brighton”:-

“The cost of transforming the swamp into a park was at first, however, far beyond the means of the council. The cost of fencing was very high and grazing returned very little. The council therefore welcomed the offer of a group of racing enthusiasts in 1880 to develop ‘the flat known as Elster Park’ as a trotting track, despite the fact that there was a strong protest from certain Elsternwick residents and a rebuff, at first, from the Minister for Lands. The Victoria Trotting Club was specially formed to carry out the proposal – and the Elsternwick Improvement Committee sprang to life to oppose it. The lease agreed to was for ten years, a term of fifty years having been refused. The club was to pay a yearly rent of £30 and within three years was to spend £1,500 on improvements to the park. It was to occupy thirty-seven acres, although it was soon found that that was insufficient, and a further twenty-six acres were added

by the council on its own authority. The club began with a capital of £5,000, much of it provided by its promoters J.A. Roberts and F.C. Goyder. Thomas Bent was elected President."

Meanwhile the Northcote venture, promising as it seemed at times fell foul of politicians, as indeed would Elsternwick Park when it came time to extend the ten year lease, an extension that had been promised by the Minister of Lands.

Mr K.S. Brown was appointed secretary of the Australian Trotting Club in June 1881 and reported at the time that *"a good deal of progress has been made with the track at Northcote, but it is now stated that the line for the Alphington railway has been surveyed right through the ground, and if no deviation is made, the formation of a trotting track will have to be abandoned."*

The Club protested to the Minister of Railways (Thomas Bent) claiming compensation if the Government acquired the land. However, the Government purchased the land back, there was no compensation and even more galling no railway line was ever built.



Frederick Sargood

Elsternwick Park, for the record, was terminated in 1891 with the last serving secretary Thomas Haydon stating, *"but because two or three "goodygoodies" (led by Hugh Reid of the Elsternwick Improvement Committee), backed up by a Member of Parliament of high tone (Sir Frederick Sargood - Rippon Lea), objected to the traffic on race - days temporarily interfering with their comfort and convenience they resented these racing people coming betwixt the wind and their nobility they, in most intemperate language, opposed the renewal of the lease, and, shameful to relate, were successful in so doing, and the Park has now been dismantled and is fast returning to its original condition a swamp. Never was a grosser breach of faith perpetrated by any Minister of the Crown (John Lamont Dow)."*



John Lamont Dow

When a race meeting was programmed at Brighton Park on 11th June, none other than James Roberts had a starter, not in the trotting event, but in the Sportsmans Handicap for thoroughbreds. He had purchased the four-year-old Fernando from fellow high-ranking freemason Sir William Clarke the previous month but alas the horse finished unplaced.

The race meeting prompted a "light bulb" moment for James who convinced the Victoria Trotting Club to programme a trotting meeting that would be conducted on land that he was leasing close to the Retreat Hotel (later became the Hampton Hotel). That meeting would take place on 13th October 1881 and once again James Roberts displayed his entrepreneurial savvy by naming the expanse of land where the track was situated as "Boccaccio Park."

The week following the Brighton Park races a wonderful overview of the then situation of trotting in Victoria was provided by the Weekly Times in its 18th June issue and not unsurprisingly the Bronte establishment and horses owned by James Alfred Roberts were featured. The report stated:-

"When fully extended, scarcely a prettier sight can be seen than a trotting horse in full swing, particularly when handled by a skillful driver in a sulky, and judging from the signs of the times the sport will very soon occupy a high status in the opinion of those who follow the fortunes of the turf. Two trotting clubs will shortly commence operations at Elsternwick and Northcote, and with an eye to the future, Mr J.J. Miller, the well known turf commission agent, has purchased Contractor, a Kentucky celebrity, with an idea perhaps of being able to "pass everything on the road."

Mr. J. A. Roberts feels so certain that the sport has a great future before it, that he has formed a small stud farm at his residence, Bronte, Middle Brighton, and as the lord of the harem is no less a celebrity than the Kentucky- bred Boccaccio. We accepted with pleasure an invitation to inspect the stud on Thursday, the 9th inst.

A four-in-hand, with Mr. J. Garton handling the ribbons, speedily brought the party to Mr, Roberts's "palatial" residence formerly the property of Mr. Tallerman, of preserved meat fame, and before long the horse boxes were inspected. There are twelve in number, six on each side, with an asphalted path down the centre, and are roomy enough, as they are just 12ft. by 12ft. All the latest improvements have been effected. The doors slide backwards and forwards; each box can be lit up with gas made on the premises by one of Needle's patent gas-making machines; the Yan Yean has also been laid on to each box; and, as a matter of fact, everything that experience can devise has been effected, so as to study the health and comfort of the in mates.

In these boxes we saw the well-known horse Yendon; a bay mare, Flora Temple (strongly resembling her American namesake), by Palatinus (by Panic) from a mare by Mariner. Running loose in a paddock adjoining was a bay foal by San Jose Patchen out of Flora, by Snowden. After inspecting these, we adjourned to another range of boxes, and were first introduced to Prince Patchen, a splendid-looking specimen of the American trotter, and who is by the celebrated American trotting stallion San Jose Patchen from Miss Pringle, by the Yorkshire-bred Shakespeare. This colt, who is only seventeen months old, is a wonderfully furnished animal, and, judging from his points, should be a success at the stud. The gem of the lot, however, is Boccaccio, a blood bay, with black points, about sixteen hands and a half, and whose shape is as near perfection as possible. This horse, who was imported by Mr. Roberts from Kentucky at a cost of £1,400, has wonderfully improved in appearance since he landed in Melbourne in November last, and is undoubtedly the beau ideal of the true American trotting horse. He is remarkably quiet and good-tempered, and will stand any amount of handling, which speaks well for the manner in which he must have been treated before and since his arrival in the colonies.

An excellent dinner then followed, and later in the afternoon Cleveland, who accompanied Boccaccio to Sydney, put the "crack," and Flora Temple, Prince Patchen, and the colt by Tubal Cain, through their paces on an excellent piece of road in front of Mr. Roberts's residence. By this time the shades of evening were fast approaching, and, accompanied by Mr. Roberts, we again made our way into town, which we reached with safety, highly delighted with our visit of inspection to a stud which can be said with truth to be almost perfect in its arrangements."

Mentioned in that press report was Mr. James J. Miller, who paid a then record price of \$6,000 for Contractor and at the same time bought a particularly well bred trotting mare called Tilda C. When Tilda C arrived in Melbourne at Kirks Bazaar, James Roberts, cognizant of the need to have the best broodmares possible for his stud venture, purchased her the same day from Miller, for an amount that was described as "a considerable advance on his purchase money."

Never one to forget his father's penchant for real estate, James commissioned the erection of three stunning sets of terraces, one in Beaconsfield Parade near the corner with Fitzroy Street that became known as "Queens Mansion," another in Burnett Street that he named for his wife, Marion – the heritage listed Marion Terrace – and the also heritage-listed Roberts Buildings at 20 Collins Street.

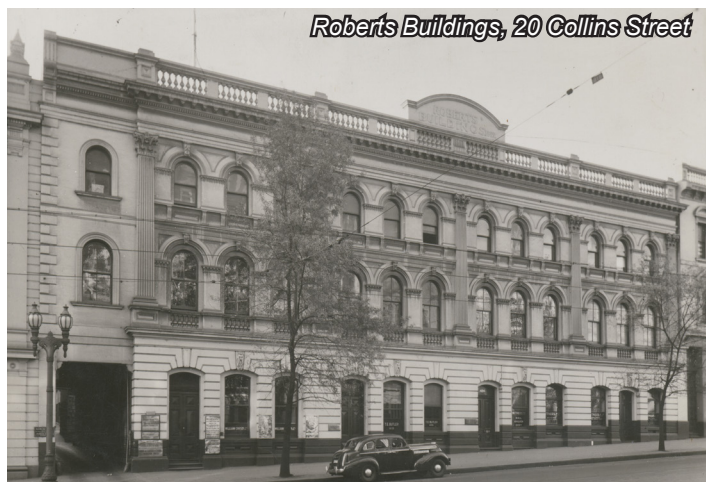
Marion Terrace, Burnett Street

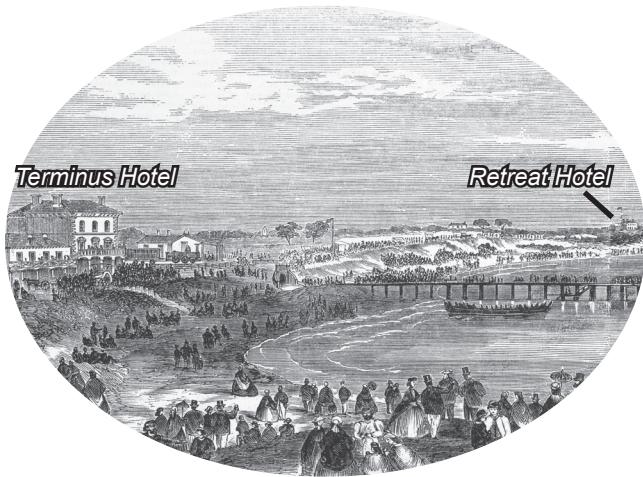


"Queens Mansion", Beaconsfield Parade



Roberts Buildings, 20 Collins Street





On 13th August 1881 the first trotting meeting at Boccaccio Park was conducted, the track situated close to the Retreat Hotel, about a mile and half from the Brighton Beach train station and the Terminus Hotel. The track itself was a little more than six furlongs in length amongst market gardens that was bound by Hampton Street, Holyrood Street and Beach Road, with races conducted counter clockwise and ending along Beach Road.

Some of the market gardeners grew cranberries that captured the interest of the public and fourth estate alike with one writing, *"after the fourth event I strolled quietly across the course towards the railway station, stopping to gather cranberries by the way, and as I stooped to procure these luscious little globules....."*

The meeting provided free publicity for James' imported stallion Boccaccio and gained plenty of inches in the Press, not all of it complimentary due to the ingrained bias against trotting by the newspaper's thoroughbred inclined sporting editors. The Australasian was one of those that appeared to damn with faint praise:-

"In order to provide sport for the lovers of trotting, Mr. J. A. Roberts held a meeting at Brighton on Saturday last, on some ground leased by him for the purpose. The preparations having been made hurriedly, some allowance must be made for the incompleteness of the arrangements, though the stewards worked hard to make the meeting successful. There were about 500 people present, and the weather being very fine, the townsfolk seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves, though the sport was nothing to boast of. The track, which is close to the beach, is a little over three-quarters of a mile round. A small enclosure was provided for those who were willing to pay half a crown, and this was so crowded that the proprietor of the course has determined to enlarge it before another meeting is held. The opening ceremony of the day was a parade of trotting horses, in which the Americans Boccaccio, Tilda C., and Von Moltke Jnr, as well as Wanderer, Brown Hawk, and Prince Patchen, took part."

The first race at the inaugural meeting was won by Frank Robbins with Marmaduke, while the star of the meeting was the American import Von Moltke Junior who won the Three Mile Handicap as well as emerging victorious in the Free-For-All, that was decided in three one mile heats (Von Moltke Junior was the first to win two heats) meaning that he raced a total distance of six miles on the day.

James Roberts took note of the newspaper criticism and patron's complaints as confirmed by the following piece that was published in the Argus on 2nd September 1881:-


BOCCACCIO TROTTING-PARK,
BRIGHTON BEACH.

THE OPENING MEETING OF THE SEASON
Will be held on this Track
On SATURDAY, 13th AUGUST, 1881.

PROGRAMME:

1.45 p.m.,
GRAND PARADE OF TROTTING HORSES
(With colours up).

2.15 p.m.,
MAIDEN PLATE,
Two miles.

2.45 p.m.,
HANDICAP TROT
(In mile heats)
First heat.

3.15 p.m.,
BOCCACCIO-PARK OPEN HANDICAP TROT,
Three miles.

3.45 p.m.,
HANDICAP TROT,
Second heat.

4.15 p.m.,
PONY PLATE,
Two miles.

4.45 p.m.,
HANDICAP TROT,
Final heat.

Entrance to enclosure, 2s. 6d.
Ground free.
Ladies will be admitted to enclosure free of charge, but application must be made previously for ladies' tickets to any of the stewards, or to the secretary.
Trains leave Melbourne for Brighton Beach at 12, 12 40, and 1.29.
Railway return fare, 1s.

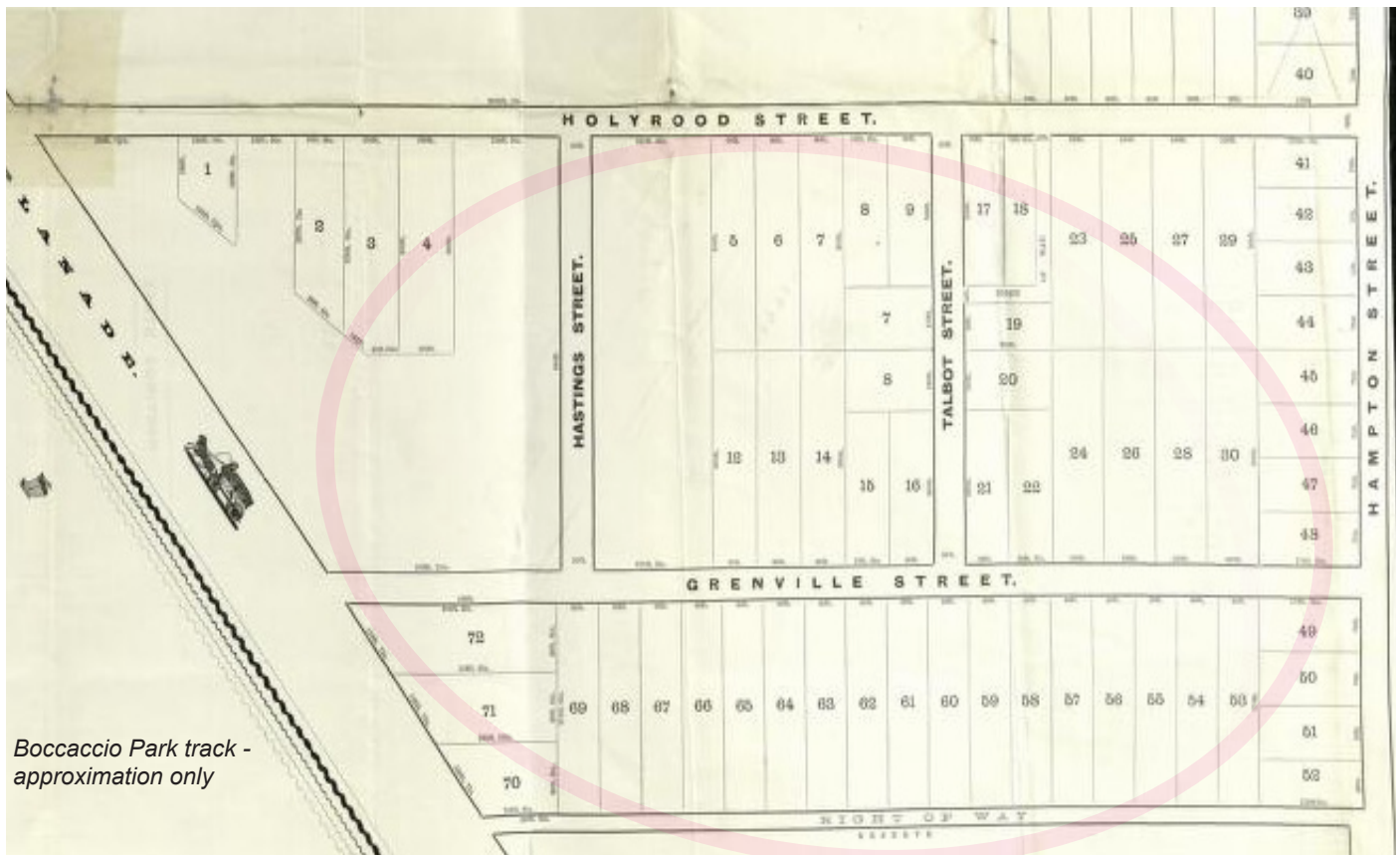
BRIGHTON BEACH.—Boccaccio RACE MEETING, Saturday, near Grimby's celebrated hotel. Splendid poultry dinner provided all sportsmen.

BOCCACCIO TROTTING-PARK, Brighton Beach. —This track is situated between the railway terminus and Retreat Hotel.

BOCCACCIO Race MEETING.—Old Grimby (established 20 years) provides poultry dinner, Saturday. All sportsmen meet there.

BRIGHTON BEACH RACES, Boccaccio-park, Saturday.—Nathaniel Bennett, of Retreat Hotel, appointed by stewards sole caterer.

BOCCACCIO-PARK RACES.—Luncheons provided at Retreat Hotel. Selected refreshments at grand stand. Nathaniel Bennett, proprietor.



"The arrangements for the Boccaccio Park trotting meeting at Brighton to-morrow afternoon are of a much more complete nature than those which were made at the first races upon this course a short time back, the lessee of the ground having evidently profited by experience. The hill has been enclosed by a temporary fence, and the paddock marked off into various sections, for the convenience of the public. On one side and opposite the judge's stand an enclosure, capable of seating 500 persons, is fenced off with corrugated iron, and set apart for ladies, while at the rear a marquee bar been erected and divided into refreshment and retiring rooms. The high fence in the straight, which caused so much annoyance on the last occasion by obstructing the view, has been removed, and a small picket fence, about 3ft. 6in. in height, erected in its place.

At one end of this a press stand has been built and at the other a signal-arm. The straight run has been widened from 8ft. to 10ft., and every attention paid to the track. Three patrol judges will be stationed at every quarter of a mile round the course to report to the judge any case of galloping, whereon the horse will be at once disqualified. The bar accommodation has been considerably increased, and Mr. Roberts, the lessee, has decided that a previous cause of complaint regarding the programmes shall be obviated at this meeting, as they are to be sold at the entrance to the enclosure as well as in town. A temporary carriage-paddock has been added, of considerably larger dimensions than that at the previous races; and in minor matters Mr. Roberts has given all the attention possible to the comfort of visitors compatible with the short tenure of his lease of the track and adjoining grounds."

The next meeting was held on 3rd September and suffered through some dreadful weather although the local press (Leader) were rather sympathetic:-

"The second meeting last Saturday the stewards presented an excellent bill of fare, comprising four events viz. Pony Race, Maiden Plate, Time Handicap and Selling Stakes. Entries for each race were full and more than an average came up to try conclusions. The Boccaccio Park is rapidly assuming all the appearance and circumstance of a race course. The arrangements hitherto provided for the convenience of visitors are of a temporary and portable character; but we believe it is intended to make the course a racecourse for the exhibition of high class trotting animals, such animals as have found as much favour in the eyes of our American cousins.

Notwithstanding the liberality of the stewards, the clerk of the weather had something to say, and it in an unmistakable and disagreeable manner. Prior to the first race, a violent squall of wind, accompanied by drenching rain, utterly demolishing the large marquee which Mr Bennett (of the Retreat Hotel), thought to preside under, instead of which he occupied the position minus the covering he himself provided; it being split into ribbons, and its sudden demolition causing considerable loss through breakage. But in spite of the weather, some 500 people were there, and the programme completed. Had circumstances been more favourable, the number doubtless would have quadrupled. There were not wanting any of the various enticements to gamble; the bookmakers were present, and the lesser fry who gain a livelihood by offering ingenuous methods for small investments such as doodlum-buck, three-up, Aunt Sally & etc, but they had no luck, the frequent squalls upset the paraphernalia and dispersed investors."

A final meeting on 8th October 1881 was a mixed bag comprising two trotting races, a hurdle, a handicap flat event for gallopers and a selling event for hacks and was only memorable for the fact that James Roberts won the last ever trotting race at Boccaccio Park with his mare Flora Temple.

Following that final meeting the Australasian allowed a very critical letter of Boccaccio Park and trotting by someone writing under the nom-de-plume of "St Julien." Within that letter there was an accusation aimed at James Roberts – *"but while I admit his enthusiasm I am fully convinced that no individual in the colony has done the "sport" he admires so much harm."*

Roberts was infuriated and displayed a pugnaciousness that would surface several times later in life by firing off a letter in response:-

"In your issue of 12th inst there appears a wicked and malicious letter, signed of course anonymously, "St Julien." The letter reflects severely on me for my connexion with Boccaccio Trotting Park. In reply to this anonymous defamer of good men's characters (whose letter I assume you published without noticing the vile animus which animates it), all I need say is that neither the stewards nor myself held the slightest legal right to the ground, and could have been, turned off at an hour's notice. I had a sort of right to use part of the ground to exercise Boccaccio and Tilda C. but nothing beyond that.

The stewards, myself included, was; therefore, powerless to prevent doodleum-buckers, card-sharpers, and others from carrying on their little games as they do on other courses. That particular duty belonged to the police, and they were there in force, neither myself or the stewards could be much blamed if objectionable characters, of whom my knowledge in any way, is very limited, found their on to an open park over which the stewards had no legal control.

Boccaccio Park was simply used as a stop gap until the regular course at Elsternwick was completed, as many owners of trotting horses were dissatisfied with past handicapping, mid past arrangement of races on other courses. By using my private exercise ground under the supervision of certain gentlemen, it was hoped that a meeting devoted exclusively to trotting would succeed. It did succeed, and far more than we anticipated.

The first day we were crowded, and were not quite prepared for so much patronage hence the discomfort. The second day when better preparations were made, was "gale" day - In fact the whole of the tents or booths were blown away. The third day, and last day was devoted to trotting, flat and hurdle racing. It was not solely trotting as in previous meetings, as many owners had sent their owners to grass hence the galloping elements which was used simply as a means of making up a programme.

The names of the gentleman who acted as stewards are guarantee that, so far as their knowledge extended, everything was done honestly and honourably. My prominence in connection with the track was not my own seeking, but simply because I more time on my hands and lived nearer the track than others.

I am quite convinced of this, that no one in Victoria has had at heart the interests in trotting more than myself, and my earnest desire has been that the sport should be conducted as to bring honour on all concerned. Did I think that my efforts so far had been useless, or, as your correspondent makes out, worse than useless, then I should be indeed disheartened. This letter of "St Julien" is written, not in the interest of trotting, but as a sly stain at me personally and I regret that your columns should be made the vehicle for venting private malice.

The hypocritical allusion to "men of respectability" filling offices is in keeping with the rest of the letter. Who would take a prominent position in any club to have their private characters traduced by such falsehood-mongers as "St Julien"? I know I will not, so I shall resign all connexion with trotting if I am to be the subject of vile and infamous slanders. Yours etc Jas. A. Roberts.

The Australasian tried to defend the publishing the letter by stating in brackets under this letter that *"we certainly did not notice any animus in it against Mr. Roberts, or we should not have published it."* A rather absurd defence when one reads the extract from St Julien's letter.

"St Julien" followed up with an apology that mirrors the non-apology that is so prevalent in modern times – *"I am exceedingly sorry to find that my remarks caused unpleasantness, and I willingly withdraw any statement Mr. Roberts considers reflects upon him."*

With the transformation of Elsternwick Park from a swamp to a showpiece well on the way, the Victoria Trotting Club announced that there would be no more meetings at Boccaccio Park and that their next meeting would be at Elsternwick Park in 1882. That demise of Boccaccio Park was not mourned save for one turf scribe who lamented *"The lovers of "mixed" sport will be sorry to hear that a portion of Boccaccio Park has been sold for building purposes. I shall miss my cranberries."*

Boccaccio, the stallion, received more positive publicity in November when he won the award for the Best Trotting Stallion at the National Agricultural Society Show at the original showgrounds in St Kilda Road. That followed success at the Bendigo Agricultural Show the previous month.



1881 English Cricket Team - Alfred Shaw (middle-2nd left)

Late in 1881 the English cricket team toured Australia and New Zealand with one Test in Melbourne scheduled to commence on 31st December and of course back in those formative years Tests were “timeless” i.e. teams just kept playing until a result was obtained. The esteem in which James Roberts was held through the lasting friendships formed with the cricketing fraternity back on the City of Sydney back in 1878 was on display as the Australasian reported:-

“The English Eleven had a very pleasant time of it yesterday (30th December). In the morning they were invited to the Town Hall and treated most hospitably by the mayor, who proposed, their healths in a neat speech, immediately afterwards they were conveyed in a handsome four-in-hand to Mr. Robert's residence, Bronte, at Brighton, and according to all accounts they enjoyed themselves there very much. At luncheon, Mr. Zox, M.L.A., proposed the toast of the English Eleven in an excellent speech, and Alfred Shaw appropriately replied. The Englishmen returned to town about 8 o'clock delighted with their outing, and one and all of them say they will not easily forget the kindness shown them, by Mr. and Mrs. Roberts.”

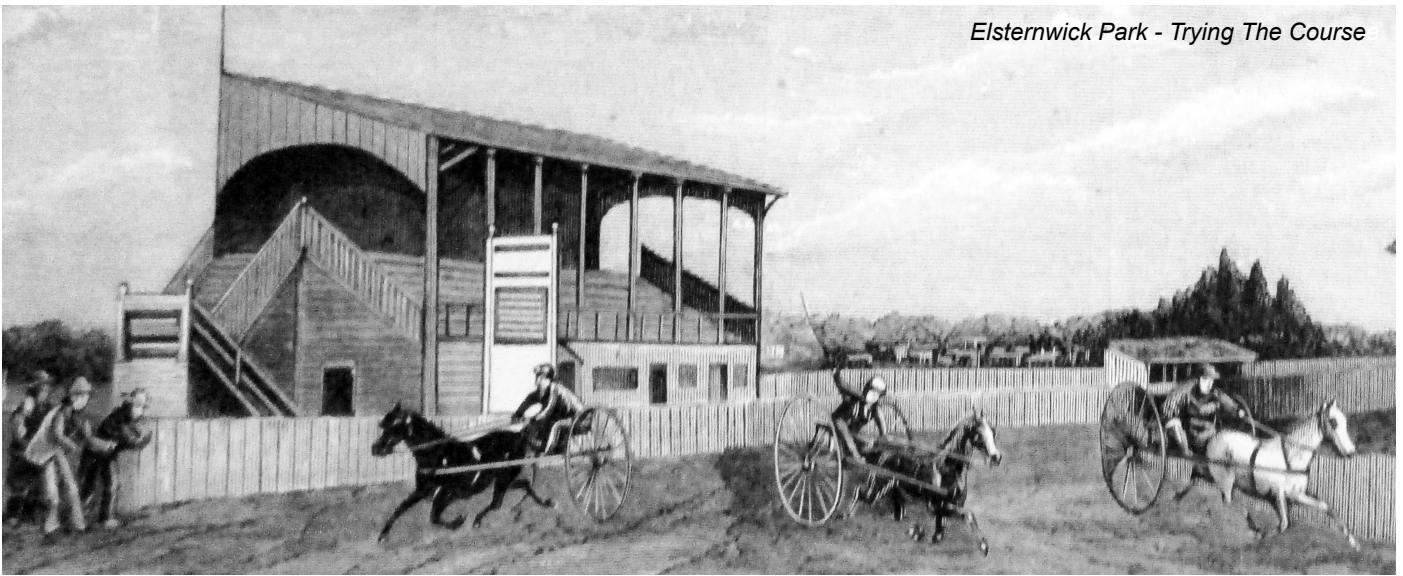
This Test would go into the annals of Australia/England Test cricket as the first ever draw due to some exceptional circumstances revealed by the Wisden Almanac:-

“The departure of the steamer which was to take Shaw's team to New Zealand was delayed by the steamship authorities from the morning of January 4 till 3.45 in the afternoon in the hope that this very important match might be concluded. But all to no purpose, as the heavy scoring all round necessitated the game being drawn when the Australians had scored 127 out of 283 required to win.”

The cynosure of all eyes for those interested in trotting in 1882 was undoubtedly Elsternwick Park. Knowing the set that the racing press had against trotting a concerted effort was made to win them over though hospitality that was reported in the Argus on 20th March:-

“The committee of the Victoria Trotting Club invited, a number of gentlemen to pay a visit of inspection to their newly-formed racecourse, near Elsternwick, on Saturday, March 18, and so great was the interest taken in the attempt to acclimatise trotting races in Victoria that over, 300 persons responded to the invitation. The course is situated on the flat immediately beyond the Elsternwick Hotel, on the Brighton road, and what was for many years a dreary and unsightly swamp, the club has, by the judicious expenditure of a considerable amount of capital, formed into one of the most complete and pleasant racecourses in Australia. Those who knew the swamp in its natural condition can well understand the really wonderful changes that have been effected. The area in possession of the club has been substantially enclosed with an 8ft. timber fence, the stagnant water has been carefully drained, and a broad trotting track exactly a mile round has been formed, which experts say will in time rival the, finest trotting tracks in America.

The entrance gate for foot passengers is situated at the nearest point to Elsternwick station, from which point a broad pathway leads across the ground to the grandstand on the south-west side of the course, close to the sea. The entrance for vehicles is near to the grandstand. On the right of the stand is a large enclosure, with ample shed accommodation for the trotting horses, which will serve the same purpose as the saddling paddock at Flemington. On the left hand is an. equally spacious enclosure for the accommodation of the members' horses and vehicles. The stand is a very convenient structure, placed high above the ground, and giving an excellent view of the course. The judge's box, also well up off the ground, is situated on the inside of the course, opposite to the stand, a wire being stretched across the track for the purpose of assisting the judge in placing the horses. The view from the stand is a very pleasing one; in front is the broad green surface of the course, and beyond that are to be seen in every direction elegant villas showing through the wealth of foliage that is such a marked feature in the landscape. The views along the shore and down the bay are equally beautiful.

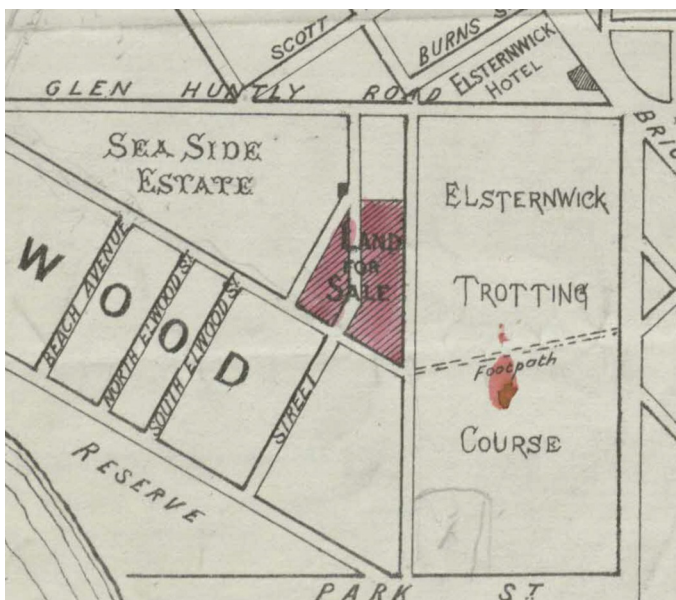


In order to enliven the visit a number, of trotting horses were brought on to the track, and their paces exhibited. The first, to appear were a batch of maiden trotters, who went round the course at a moderate pace, and finished up with a spurt. Then the four imported American trotting stallions, Boccaccio, Vermont Junior, Startle, and Little Giant, were brought out. Boccaccio went round the track in grand style, finishing up with a fine spurt, in which he performed so grandly that the spectators cheered him heartily. Startle, a very handsome dark brown horse, was then sent along for a short distance, and he in turn was well cheered. After these celebrities had been put through their paces, the Australian-bred trotters Captain Dearborn, Native Cat, Wanderer, and Brown Hawk, were sent round the course, Wanderer and Brown Hawk performing very well.

The imported American trotters Tilda C and Walter Scott did a steady trot, and to wind up, Mr. Robbins brought out his famous pair of American trotters, Commodore and Defiance. The former, who was driven by his owner, is a handsome bay, more like an English thoroughbred than the usual-type of American trotters. The pair were taken steadily along the track, and then Commodore was let out at his best pace. For the first time most of those on the ground saw what a really high class American trotter was like. As the horse flew past the stand the spectators greeted him with a ringing cheer of approbation. Defiance is a grand old horse, but he was not so well handled as Commodore, and consequently did not show to so much advantage. After the trotting was over the guests partook of refreshments in the spacious refreshment room under the stand.

All the horses, with one exception, were worked in harness, and to judge by the performance, trotting horses are more at home in harness than under saddle. What was particularly noticed was the neatness of the harness and vehicles brought on to the track. They were all in perfect order, and some of the vehicles were remarkable for the beauty of their design and lightness of construction. The club have effected a great deal in a short time, and they deserve to succeed in their attempt to establish trotting races on a legitimate basis.

In the arrangements on the ground there are on every hand the evidences of good taste and sound judgement, for which the committee with one voice give all the credit to Dr. Weir, who has for several months devoted nearly the whole of his time to the work of superintending every detail."



On opening day, April Fools Day 1882, there were three events programmed, a 50 sovereign Maiden Trot (mile heats, best two of three), a 160 sovereign Stallion Trot (mile heats, best two of three) and a 100 sovereign Purse for horses that had never bettered 2:40 for the mile (mile heats, best three in five). On the following Monday the Argus reported:-

“The opening meeting of the Trotting Club was held on Saturday at the new track at Elsternwick The weather was beautifully fine, and the attendance, numbered over 2,000, which was fully up to expectation. The stand was overcrowded during the contests, and there was a fair attendance of ladies The track, considering that it has only been recently prepared, was in fair order. The judges were Messrs G. Watson, J. Peck, and E W Clarke”.

Oddly enough James Roberts did not have a starter at the inaugural meeting and the honour of winning the first event went to J.J. Miller with his mare Fright who was steered by American Herb Shepherd to a straight heats success, while the Stallion Trot saw the New South Wales owned American imports Startle and Vermont Junior stage three stirring duels in the heats with the George Hall owned, trained and driven Startle (USA) emerging victorious.

The final race was a triumph for Frank Robbins and his local star Brown Hawk who won in three straight heats downing the ageing star of the 1870s Wanderer.

James Roberts may have been missing from the first meeting but a fortnight later at the second his private trainer, the gifted Irishman Andy Mulholland won both events with Roberts’ American mare Tilda C (who won her heat by so far that judges ruled that no further heats be contested) and Boccaccio prevailed in the long awaited match race with fellow import Von Moltke Junior. This match had been discussed for more than a year with even Caulfield thrown up as a possible venue. Von Moltke Junior won the opening heat but then Boccaccio won the next three heats to take the prize.

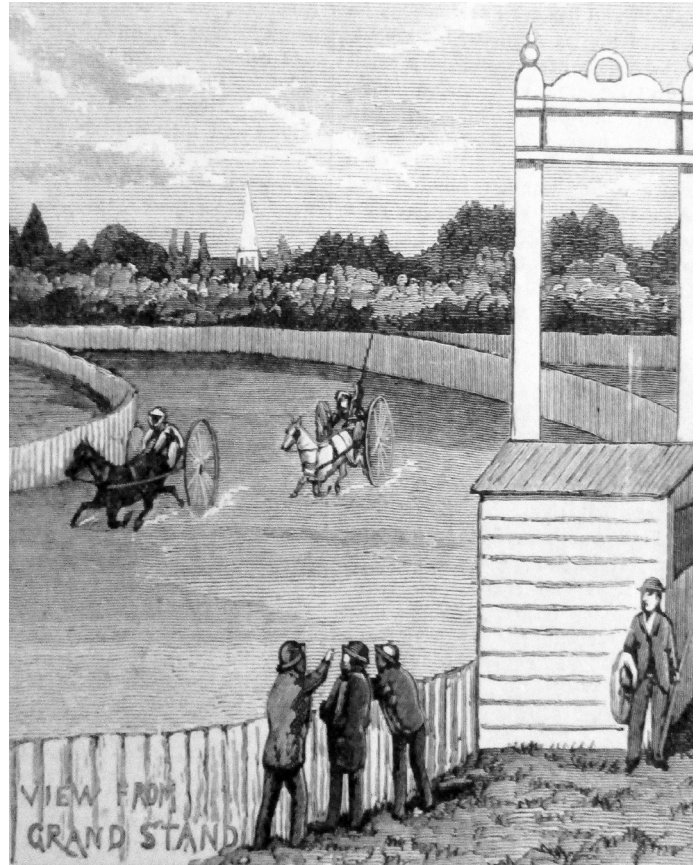
All through the first half of 1882 Roberts had been acquiring and planning for his stud farm that would be known as “Fairlawn” mimicking the name of one of America’s top three breeding farms.

In June 1882 he took possession of a lease of land that ran along the Dandenong Creek near where the Bayswater railway station would later be built. An article in the Kerang Times and Swan Hill Gazette on 20th February 1883 encapsulated the scale of the venture, an overview of the district back in those times and a surprisingly sideline in miniature horses:-

“Fairlawn Stud Farm. formerly the station of the late Judge Barry, is situated in a pleasant valley at the foot of Dandenong Range, about three miles from Ringwood station on the Lilydale Railway. We arrived at a prettily situated and convenient homestead, flanked by fine substantial stabling, stack yards, and sheds; away below lie the fertile paddocks and fields - some 600 acres in all - where roam a number of mares and foals, some attached to the establishment, and others merely visitors; the soil I may remark, incidentally, is of the richest black I ever saw, and its depth is remarkable, and the English grasses sown thrive splendidly.

At a short distance from the stable Mr Roberts has laid down a trotting track (three quarters of a mile), on which those animals already before the public as known performers, or those training for such purposes, are diligently kept up to the mark by regular daily work, and without going into all the details of the course of treatment, I may safely say that they are handled, dressed, and are generally treated with far, and away more care, tenderness, and kindness, than the larger proportion of humans enjoy in early life, hence they are docile and natural, and betray little or none of nervousness or vicious bearing of the so called thoroughbred.

With the aid of my cicerone, (Mr Roberts) I will just run through the most notable of horses, imprimis stands Boccaccio, who is almost too well-known to all who take any interest in horse-flesh, and to all Sandhurst trotting horsemen especially, to render description necessary, is a fine blood bay, 16½ hands high, with black points, and acknowledged by the best judges, to be as near the perfection of a trotting stallion as can be found either in the colonies or in America, and in temper, might be a boy's pony. If my equine friend has a weakness, it is in the direction of raw carrots, which he nibbles from one's hands in the most gentle manner. He is a Kentucky bred horse, and is about ten years of age.



American Trotting Stallions

The undernoted magnificent sires will
STAND this SEASON at

FAIRLAWN STUD FARM RINGWOOD (14 miles from Melbourne)

BOCCACCIO

Time Record, 2m 59½ (made while lame when he defeated Von Moltke, Jnr. on April 16, 1882 at Elsternwick) Boccaccio is the highest bred and grandest trotting stallion yet imported. His shape is perfection, and his carriage superb. He is 16½ bands high, and his colour is blood bay.

LEN ROSE

Time Record as a three year old, 2m. 45s
. One of the phenomenal trotters of America, and imported direct from the stud of Gov. Stanford, Palo Alto, California, from which he was displaced by the champion Piedmont for whom the Governor gave 85,000 dollars.

PIONEER

Bred by General W. T. Withers, Fairlawn Stud Farm Kentucky, U.S.A. Pioneer is a black, or very dark brown colt, foaled May 10, 1880. He is a natural born trotter, and almost full brother to Durango, that equine wonder who has never been known to gallop.

No responsibility of any kind undertaken while mares remain at Fairlawn. Paddock fees will be charged if mares are not removed after notice stinting. With a view to popularise trotting and encourage breeders, I have determined that the service for any of the above three stallions is £10 with a reduction of 10 per cent when two or more mares are booked.

All the above stallions will stand at Fairlawn Stud Farm, Ringwood. Mares received at either Messrs Garton's or Glasscock's stables, or my residence, Bronte, Middle Brighton.

JAMES A ROBERTS. 20 Collins Street west.

His lineage is, as full as that of a Welsh baronet, but without wading through is sufficient, it traces consanguinal relationship with the best time recording blood of America. The Mambrino stallions and Hambletonian mares - indeed, if there be an aristocracy of trotting horses, Boccaccio is full of 'blue blood.'

In the adjoining box stands (when not on the track), Len Rose, a well bred and well known trotter, with a favourable record in America, and who has performed favourably on Australian tracks, amongst others doing a 2m 24sec gait at the meeting of the V.T.C. at Elsternwick December 20th defeating Brown Hawk and Granger. Len Rose is a dark iron grey son of a horse of good repute A.W. Richmond, comes of a good family, and is a kindly docile animal.

Prince Patchen is a colonial raised trotter sired by San Jose Patchen, his dam is a descendant of the imported English stallion Shakespeare. He has wonderful muscular development, fine trotting action and to my taste, has the handsomest head and neck of the whole stud, He will, I learn, be detached shortly for provincial service at Sandhurst.

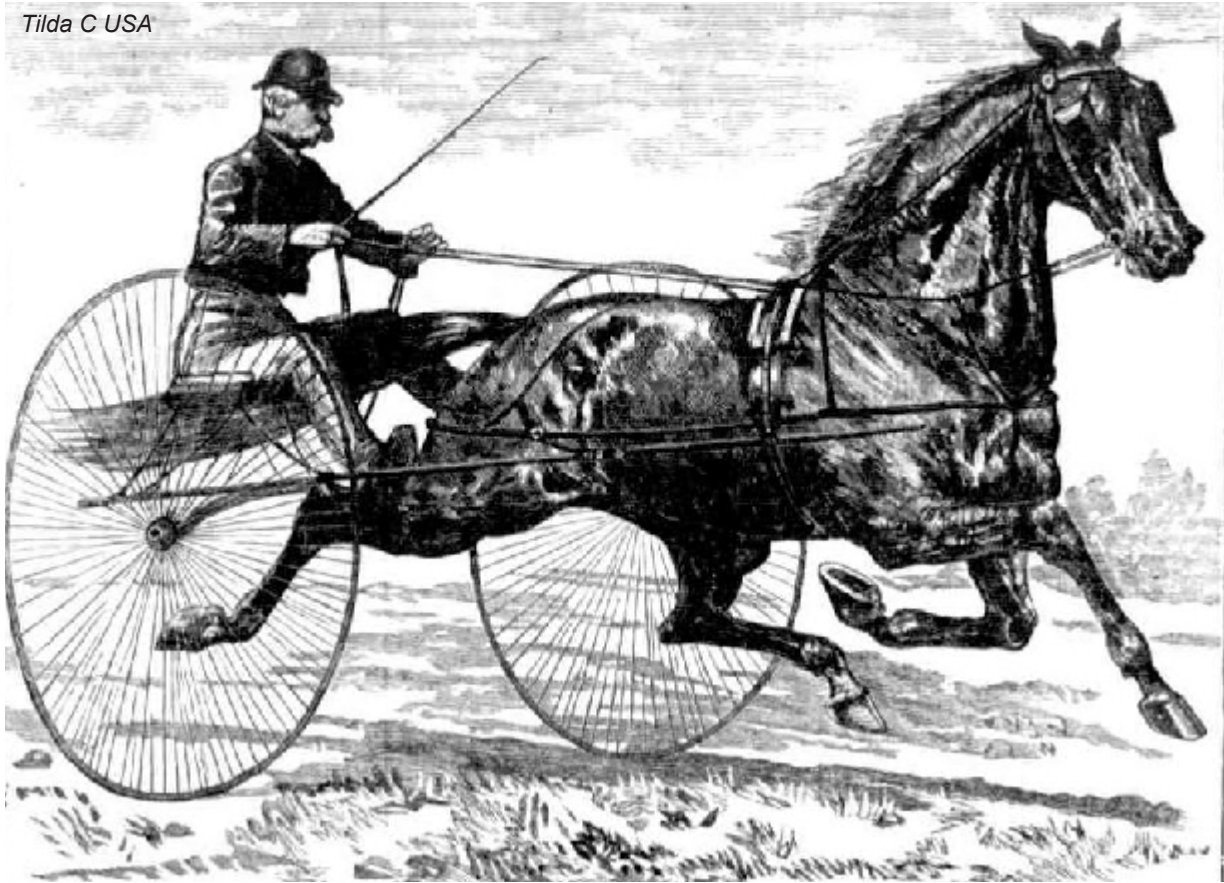
This much of the service entries at Fairlawn but there are also some youngsters - Boccaccio juniors - growing, along, and with a determination not to spare trouble or expense in forming the nucleus of a stud Mr Roberts has effected the purchase of Pioneer, a highly bred trotting stallion sired by the well known Cassius M. Clay junr, out of an Almont mare. Pioneer is brother to Durango, the so called natural trotter who knows no other pace and who at 3 years recorded a 2m 16secs result. This will arrive either by the now incoming mail boat or the next from San Francisco.

There are some performing mares on the establishment, Tilda C, an imported mare who has already shown some fair animals the way round, at Elsternwick. Sylph is a pretty mare also in training. Beside these there is probably an aggregate of 150 mares on a visit at Fairlawn during the season.

I had almost quite forgotten a speciality of Fairlawn in a little mob of ponies, not the general stunted broad backed little animals which are pretty much like the earth at an early stage "without form" but graceful miniature horses and if they increase in arithmetical progression, as they doubtlessly will, Mr Roberts will be a position, should the Emperor of Lilliput require a remount for his mounted troops, to provide the desiderated diminutive chargers or in more sober fact will be able to supply any demand for children's equine pets.

The stallion of the stud, won the gold medal for the best pony stallion, under 12 hands high, defeating many others. A celebrated stallion imported by S Renwick Esq. and which was specially selected from the Duke of Sutherland's famous stud. This little miniature 'boss of the harem,' stands 3ft or 9 hands high, in his boots (shoes), hence the smallness of the progeny. A funny story is associated with the Fairlawn toy horses, he having been forwarded to Portland, to order per SS Casino, Mr Roberts telegraphed to the local press - Look out for Clydesdale entire by steamer - and as soon as the 'turn her ahead easy,' 'back'er,' stop 'er' operations allowed, the press gang jumped on board to inspect the new coming quadruped, but after hunting high and low for the usual horsebox and seeing nothing, they conferred with the steward (who acts as a sort of purser), and after some banter and a bet, the entire standing about three feet high was produced from an unused storeroom or cabin in which he had been put out of the way on the voyage.

Throughout the establishment there appears an orderly system, and the assistants generally to be careful intelligent co-operators in carrying out the intentions of the proprietor, to whom I am under some obligations for his courtesy and hospitality during my brief stay at Fairlawn Stud Farm, which, had circumstances permitted, might have been as far as I was concerned, very agreeably extended."



Soon after taking possession of Fairlawn James Roberts let it slip that he had another shipment of trotting stock on the high seas bound for Australia and in August 1882 they arrived – the stallion Len Rose and the seven broodmares Laura, Rosemary, Fernleaf, Fanny, Cora, Victoria and Sylph.

Len Rose and Sylph were instant hits at Elsternwick Park in the Free-for-All ranks with Len Rose winning six races and Sylph seven events, twice setting an Australian mile record for female trotters.

Although racing ceased at Boccaccio Park when Elsternwick Park came online, James Roberts retained some of the land for training purposes and had some elite and not so elite visitors in August 1882, the elite being the Marquis of Normanby (Governor of Victoria) and the other the boys from the Melbourne Cycling Club who chose Boccaccio Park as a destination instead of Gisborne when the weather turned nasty.



Melbourne Bicycle Club

The National Agricultural Society Show in November 1882 was a triumph for James Roberts as Boccaccio won the imported Stallion prize and Prince Patchen was first in the colonial-bred Stallion category. The following month James was elected to be a Council Member of the Society.

In 1883 Freemasonry occupied a lot of James' time and made a significant call on his energies as moves were made to create the first Grand United Lodge of Victoria. On the 3rd July the Argus reported:-

"The ceremony of inaugurating a Grand Lodge of Freemasons in this colony, to be known as the Grand Lodge of Victoria took place yesterday afternoon at the Protestant hall in the presence of about 200 members of the craft. Brother George Coppin was nominated for the position of the first Grand Master, while Brother J.A. Roberts was nominated as the Deputy Grand Master.

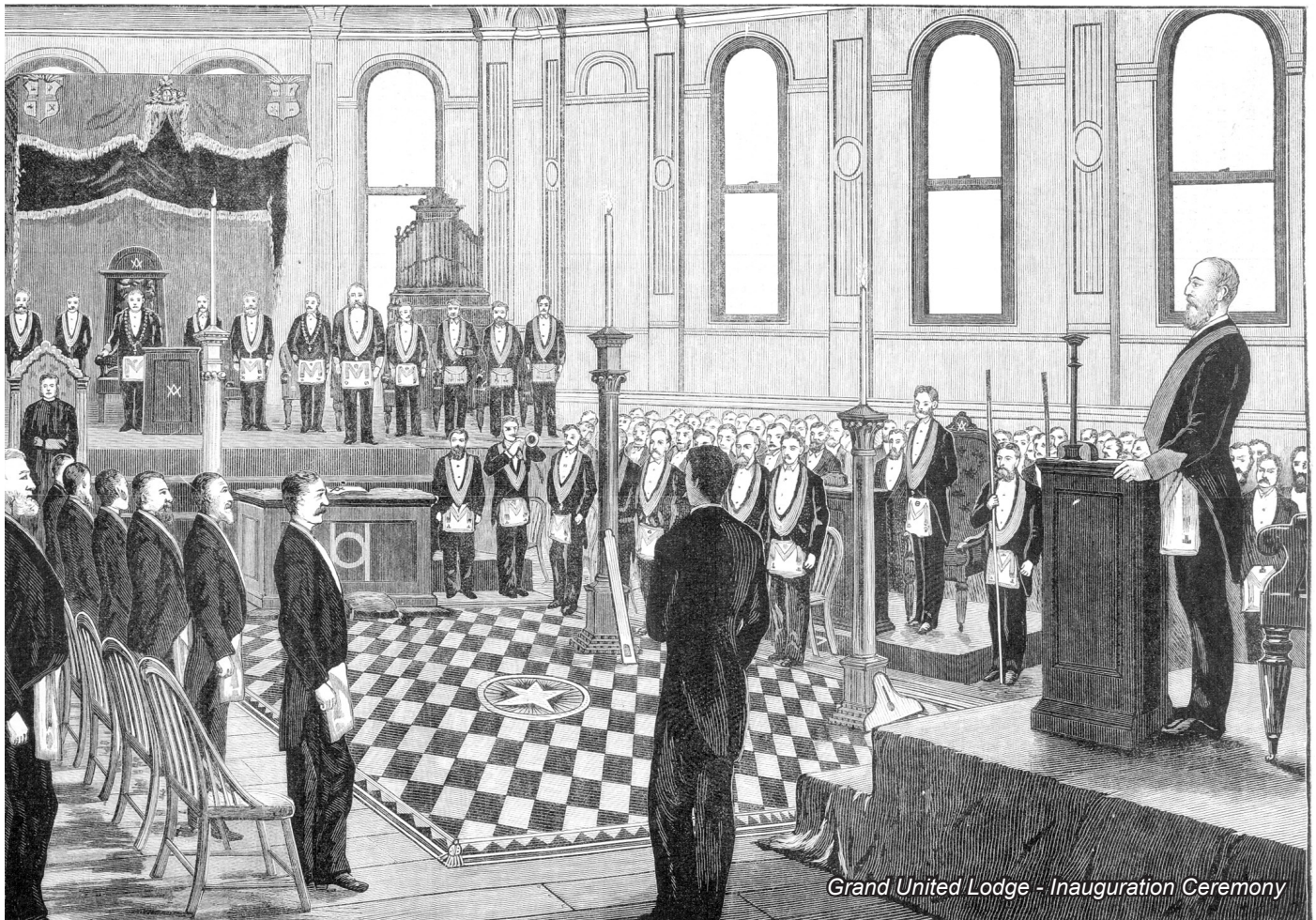
Two days later the same newspaper printed an article to once again emphasise the standing of James Roberts in social circles:-

"Mr J. A. Roberts, deputy grand master of the Grand Lodge of Victoria, entertained yesterday the visitors from other colonies, together with a number of the members of the newly formed lodge. About 80 guests assembled at Mr. Roberts' residence, Bronte, Middle Brighton, where, after some light refreshment, they strolled about the well-appointed grounds, and inspected the fine stud of trotting horses in the stables. Included in the stud are such valuable animals as Boccaccio, Len Rose, and Prince Patchen. At 1 o'clock an excellent dinner was served at Grimbley's Hotel, Brighton Bench, the chairman (Mr. Roberts) being supported by the grand master (Mr. George Coppin) and the grand master of the New South Wales Grand Lodge (Mr J. S. Kurnell). After the loyal toasts the chairman proposed "The Health of the Visitors," who had assisted in the inauguration of the Grand Lodge. In a few years he hoped a suitable Masonic hall would be erected in Melbourne. Mr. Furnell, in responding, said that the assistance rendered by the visitors in inaugurating the new Grand Lodge was a labour of love.

There was no desire on the part of the new Grand Lodge to disassociate themselves from the Grand Lodges of the English constitution. The health of the grand master, Mr George Coppin, was honoured, and also that of the host. An adjournment was then made to the Elsternwick trotting course, where an exhibition of trotting by Mr Roberts' horses was shown. The guests separated highly pleased with the day's enjoyment."

The Freemason magazine issue of 10th October 1883 described Bronte as:-

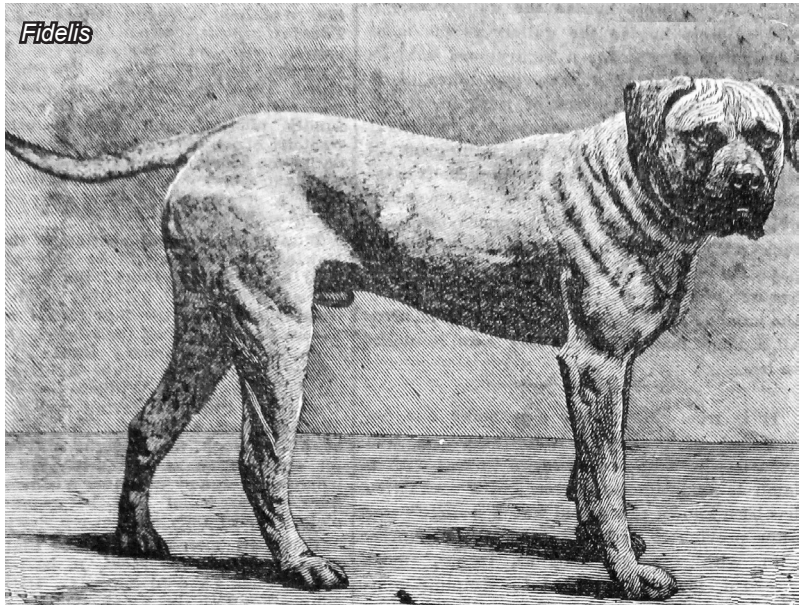
"A perfect haven for a jovial man of sporting tendencies, whose hospitality in food and cigars left a favourable impression."



Grand United Lodge - Inauguration Ceremony

On the trotting front Roberts sold Prince Patchen to a Tasmanian stud where he made an immediate and lasting impact (see Appendix 2), while Boccaccio won his third straight champion stallion ribbon at the 1883 National Agricultural Show and Len Rose made his debut and took out the award for Champion Horse in Harness.

1884 dawned with James Roberts being voted onto the committee of the Victoria Trotting Club and celebrating the arrival of two more expensive imports, however, this time they were not trotters but rather mastiffs. The Sportsman reported that James imported the award winning fawn coloured English mastiff Fidelis and a brindle mastiff slut Duchess of Melbourne, the total cost of the exercise exceeding £300. Not surprisingly Fidelis was acclaimed the Champion at the National Agricultural Show defeating one owned by L.L. Smith.



On 17th March 1884 James Roberts won four heats/races with Sylph and Len Rose, the latter winning an epic five heat duel against fellow Americans Oliver and Australian mile record holder Honesty. As fate would have it those races were the last that Roberts would win at Elsternwick Park and in fact he only ever had three more starters there, all in 1884. Despite the track continuing right through to September 1891, James Roberts is in the history books as the winningest owner at Elsternwick with nineteen (19) victories (see Appendix 3).

James' marketing mind was ever active and in July 1884 he initiated nationwide interest through the Sportsman for his stud farm by donating one guinea as a prize to a reader who came up with the best name for the royally bred filly by Boccaccio (USA) – Tilda C (USA). In just week more than 1,300 entries poured in by post and telegram to the Sportsman's offices with the eventual successful name, "Squa' Gin", submitted by Mr FF Blackburn of Nhill.

While the name today would not have been regarded as "politically correct", the explanation of the thinking behind the name printed in the Sportsman is well worth a read:-

"Squa' Gin" (which combines the names of the native women of America and Australia), is a beverage which rumour tells us ladies are especially partial. The editor of the Sportsman accompanied Mr. Roberts to his farm, and with a bottle of the beverage from which she takes her name, christened the filly, and drank success to her future."

As the time for the second crop of Boccaccio and the first of Len Rose approached James Roberts viewed the concern the growth in numbers at his Fairlawn Stud and the associated increase in costs.

To create some income for his breeding venture, James put his three best horses on the market and they were quickly snapped up – Len Rose went to Tasmania where he excelled and is regarded at Tasmania's greatest stallion pre WW1 (see Appendix 2); Boccaccio went to Quirindi (NSW) where he continued to sire many mares who founded dynasties; and Sylph was sold to Andrew Town of Hobartville Stud (NSW) and subsequently created a dynasty that has produced 26 Classic winners (see Appendix 2) including two Australian 2YO mile record holders, one of them being the inaugural 1911 Melbourne Thousand winner Delavan Chimes.

A lucrative business opportunity had beckoned in Sydney – Roberts, Chalmers and Co – so James made the fateful decision to sell up his entire collection of trotters and not renew the Fairlawn lease when it came up for renewal on 1st April 1885.

On 12th November at the City Bazaar in Sydney Road the dispersal sale of broodmares took place, many of the mares having foals at foot by Boccaccio, Len Rose, Pioneer or Prince Patchen. Sixty eight found new homes in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria leaving more than enough for a subsequent sale. One the mares sold, Katie Merryhawk, was an instant success for JJ Miller with her first foal by Miller's import Contractor being Specification who broke the world four mile record for trotters at Lancaster Park (NZ) in 1894.

When James Roberts arrived in Sydney he settled his family into a new mansion on Nelson Bay Road in Waverley that he called "Fairlawn" and set about selling the remainder of his bloodstock, often through private sale advertisements, although he did have another broodmare dispersal sale in Sydney in March 1885.

It did not take long before James found his way into trotting affairs in Sydney and he became a committeeman of the Sydney Driving Park Club and competed with his grey mares Dozy and Bella Campbell at the inaugural meeting of the Club at Moore Park on 24th October 1885. The following month he was appointed to the Council of the NSW Agricultural Society which allowed the Sydney Driving Park Club to conduct meetings on their grounds.

Dozy won two races at Sydney Driving Park in 1886 and two more in 1887 before James sold her and while the ultimate aim was to sell all his bloodstock James couldn't resist when offered the American mare Lucilla in 1887 and an American gelding called Blackhawk in 1888.

Lucilla competed at only one race meeting for James but prevailed in a three heat free-for-all against another imported mare Lilla G at the Sydney Driving Park where it just so happened that at an earlier meeting James acted as the official starter. Lucilla was twice bred to imported stallion Huon, the costliest trotting horse ever imported at the time, and the subsequent colts Huon Junior and Globe exerted a profound influence on the Australian trotter (see Appendix 2).



During 1887 James Roberts was appointed as a NSW Magistrate and involved himself in the politics of Protectionism versus Free Trade and due to his public profile he was often requested to arrange rallies and be the headline speaker. His verve for the idea of Protectionism saw him fully involved for three years as a spokesperson and in the end he stepped up to be a candidate himself, however, the election delivered four candidates who were all Free-Traders.

Apart from his business, trotting and political interests there was plenty to other matters to occupy James' mind in 1888 as his youngest daughter Minnie would be married and in February that year an advertisement appeared looking for a builder to erect an extension to the Fairlawn mansion.

Prior to those celebrations though was a race at the Sydney Driving Park in June that caused a sensation in Sydney sporting circles and a shock end to James Roberts' involvement in racing trotters. It all involved a trophy that James Roberts donated to the Sydney Driving Park Club, one that the Sydney Morning Herald described thus:-

"The trophy presented by Mr. J. A. Roberts for the "Town Time" Pony Handicap Trot at the supplementary meeting of the Sydney Driving Park Club, Limited, on the 27th instant, is now on view in the window of Mr. J. Thompson's Cigar Divan, King-street. It is a handsome clock, constructed on the design of a monster steam hammer, with pistons, regulator, and all the necessary detail of the engine in miniature, the dial occupying the upper portion of the frame. The trophy is valued at 15 sovs., and is a fitting prize for the "Town Time."

James had purchased a pony trotter called Sandfly from Victoria for his son Alfred to make his racetrack debut behind. Sandfly duly won the race and survived a protest against for galloping, however, there was a sensational subsequent protest by the owners of the runner-up Minnie.

They alleged that Sandfly was not a maiden and had actually won an event at Hurlingham Park (Brighton, Victoria) as Minnie and at a hearing one week later by the Sydney Driving Park Club committee that protest was upheld and Sandfly was disqualified, although they attached no blame to James Roberts, but sheeted it all home to his agent who purchased the pony trotter.

That did not satisfy James Roberts and his son Alfred who indicated their intention to sue the Club over the matter and five months later in the District Court, Magistrate Fitzgerald upheld the disqualification. James at his pugnacious best then took the matter to the Supreme Court and finally on 2nd May 1889, more than ten months after the race, the Full Court comprising Justices Owen, Stephen and Foster denied Roberts appeal. All over a 15 guinea trophy.

On a happier note James and Marion's youngest daughter Marian Beatrice (Minnie) married James Robertson of Hobart at St Marys Church, Waverley on 1st August 1888 and the wedding made the social pages with the Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser reporting:-

"The presents were numerous and handsome, too many to particularise here. Amongst them were silver biscuit drums, dessert knives and forks, fish knives and forks, pearl bracelets, diamond rings, handsome sets of salts, claret jug, afternoon tea



set, dessert service, dinner gong, cushions, pictures, and many other elegant articles. The breakfast was held in the ballroom, recently erected by Mr. Roberts. The breakfast tables were all that could possibly be desired, and much praise is due to Mr. Callaghan for the manner in which everything was supplied. The bride and bridegroom left Fairlawn shortly after 4 o'clock amidst a perfect avalanche of rice and old slippers en route for Melbourne, breaking the journey at Mossvale. A charming dance for young folks, in the evening, was most enjoyable, and Mr. and Mrs. Roberts felt fairly fatigued after the arduous duties of the day. The happy pair will, after their return to Sydney, leave for Brisbane, where they will make their home.

Minnie had three children, one Noel was killed in action at Bullecourt aged just 17 years, another Leslie moved to America where he became an electrical engineer, while the other Marjorie married Captain Gavin Low of the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers and moved to Surrey in England. When Minnie's husband James died in 1918 Minnie also emigrated to Surrey to be close to her daughter.

In early 1889 James Roberts attended the AGM of the Australian Jockey Club, however, he remained a non-owner of thoroughbreds and directed his energies instead to being a foundation member of The National Club, an organization whose aims were to promote the ideals of protectionism.

That year there was also another marriage on the way, this time James' eldest daughter Laura who married James Mitchell Craig of Victoria, the couple united by Reverend R McKeown at St Marys Church, Waverley.

As was the case with her younger sister Minnie, the wedding breakfast was held at Fairlawn and attracted extensive coverage in the Press, in particular by the Illustrated Sydney News who reported in full detail the apparel of more than thirty of the female guests. For the record the bride was "dressed in white moire, with splendid train, tulle veil and orange blossom. She also wore a lovely diamond brooch, the gift of the bridegroom."

Laura and her husband moved to Aviemore in England and once there not a month went by without the women's pages in Australian newspapers publishing a tidbit relating to what she and her family were doing – be it Paris, New York, London or the hotel where they spent most winters holidaying in Switzerland, the Adelboden Hotel which was described in the Brisbane Courier as "a beautiful hotel with its own ice rink and concert and ball rooms."

James involved himself with the courts in September 1891 when he sued a former employee for slander asking substantial damages of £5,000. The matter was successfully settled out of court.

In January 1892 James advertised the last of his trotting stock, one being an unnamed colt by imported Huon from James' imported USA mare Lucilla. That colt would be sold to Messrs Mullampy and Gilchrist of Forbes, named Globe and later became the damsire of Globe Derby, the finest standardbred stallion ever born in the Southern Hemisphere (see Appendix 2).

Ironically the last horse he advertised for sale was the greatest horse that James Robert ever bred, a three-year-old known as Almont, for which he had previously refused an offer of £500. At the foot of his advertisement it read – "If not sold privately this week will be shipped to America as he has shown great evidence of speed."

The horse was sold to Charles Fitzgerald of Dubbo, re-named Huon Junior, and became a household name in trotting circles, winning an historic £400 match race against the American imported mare Hattie S at the Brighton (NSW) racecourse, established a NSW trotters mile record of 2:24.5 at the same course and at stud earned the accolade as New South Wales' best colonial-bred sire prior to WW1 (see Appendix 2).

The following month an advertisement appeared offering some a stunning selection of household assets from Roberts' Fairlawn home which was now on the market e.g. a Wagner concert pianoforte fashioned in Stuttgart, English Oak dining room suite upholstered in green morocco, massive English Oak dining table, a large brass astronomical telescope.



Minnie Roberts

There was, however, enough petty cash around in the Roberts household to donate to a fund to provide souvenirs for the Australian Test cricket team that had scored a remarkable victory in the second Test in Sydney. After scoring just 144 in the first innings and commencing their second innings trailing by 163 runs, the Australians scored an incredible 391 runs in the second innings and then proceeded to roll the English for 156 runs - captain W.G. Grace scored just five runs - to win by 72 runs and take an unbeatable lead in the three Test series.

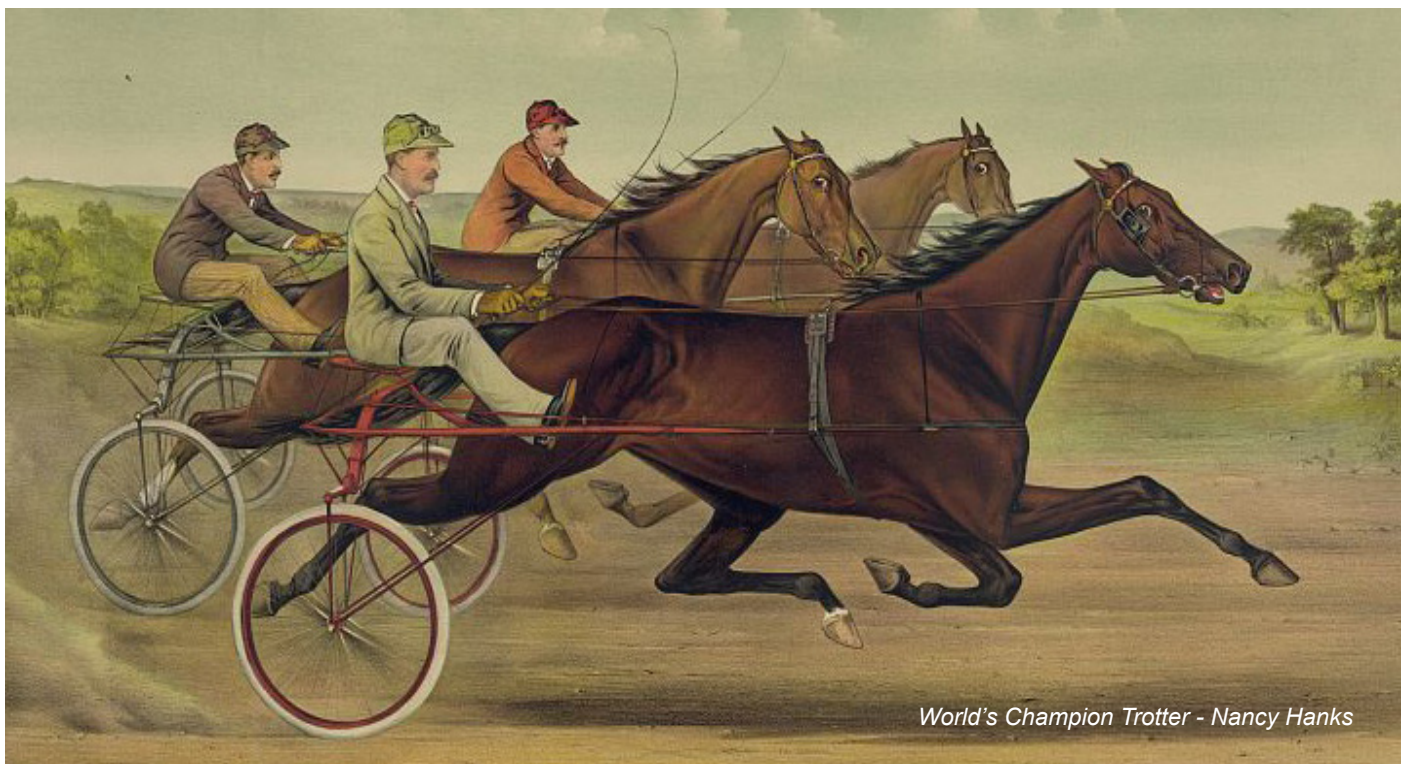
On 4th March Roberts disposed of the 17 room Fairlawn mansion as it was now too large for his purposes now his two daughters had been married. The new owner was Alfred Bearpark Dimelow who transformed the property into the Waverley Boys Grammar School.

Despite his declining financial fortunes James Roberts was still highly regarded in Government circles and in April 1892 he was appointed as a NSW Commissioner to the 1892 Chicago World's Fair and was given the livestock, machinery and implements, manufactures portfolio.

A contingent of New South Wales luminaries led by the NSW Premier George Dibbs left on 5th June and while some went to Chicago, others travelled through to London to try and re-assure London banking officials that Australia was still a good place to invest. For Dibbs there was also a date with destiny as he received a knighthood from the Queen.

The Chicago World's Fair was plagued with delays and did not actually open until May 1893, however, James Roberts and other commissioners spent most of their time in Chicago assisting with the finalization of the New South Wales exhibit.

For James there was one highlight, however, that mirrored what happened in Paris in 1878 when the opportunity of a lifetime to see a world mares mile record attempt by the legendary trotter Nancy Hanks at the nearby Washington Park. James had never seen a trotter cover a mile any faster than 2:20 so was absolutely enthralled when Nancy Hanks trotted the mile in 2:07¼ clipping one full second off the record set by Sunol at Stockton, California the previous year.



The Chicago Commissioners linked up with the London crew in San Francisco when they all boarded the SS Mariposa and after a sea journey of one hour shy of 19 days arrived back in Sydney on 13th September 1892. James may have enjoyed Chicago, however, the financial storm clouds that had enveloped thousands of bankers and investors dampened the enjoyment of being home.

Still there were A-List social appointments to keep and in December 1892 he attended the official opening of the re-modelled Tattersalls Club that the Australian Star described as *"It is doubtful if there has in any part of the world been built a saloon of such magnificence"*.

That evening would have been a welcome respite from the multitude of financial problems he faced on his return including a bankruptcy petition from a creditor Isaac Lewis Isaacs. After two months of private negotiations the petition was withdrawn.

An indicator of just how bad the economic situation was for the community is the excerpt from Eastwood' book "Melbourne, The Growth of a Metropolis" that stated:-

"In 1893, the public debt of the Australian colonies, with a population of four million, reached £198 million. Investments made by anyone with money, or more commonly credit, in land dealings, in the belief that land could not lose money, led to suburban subdivisions of absurd proportions. During 1891 and 1892, when investors could no longer meet their commitments, 140 Victorian companies, and banks and building societies were liquidated. In 1893 Victoria's banking system was nearly suspended."

James remained committed to the cause of Protectionism and in June 1894 he sat on the committee of the Protectionist Party to nail down the criteria for which prospective candidates must meet to be considered for pre-selection for the next election.

There would be few mentions of James Roberts in the latter part of 1894 or indeed in 1895 save for a mention of the death at Quirindi of his first imported stallion Boccaccio. Akin to many people in the eastern colonies James had sought to bolster his financial situation by travelling elsewhere to seek riches – some chose New Zealand, others chased diamonds in South Africa while others, like James selected the Coolgardie/Kalgoorlie goldfields in Western Australia.

He travelled to Adelaide where he boarded the 1,355 ton steamer Innamincka on 16th July 1895 headed for Albany, thence to Fremantle before arriving in Coolgardie. As had been the case when he moved to Victoria some 37 years previous James was not interested in actually fossicking for gold himself, instead setting himself up as a Gold Commissioner.

Business was steady, but not spectacular and as an avid reader of eastern states news, one item in the Coolgardie Miner would have certainly piqued his interest – a report of the Inter Colonial Free For All at Moonee Valley on 4th March 1896, when the Australasia's greatest trotter of the 19th Century, Fritz, swept through the three heats unbeaten and became the first trotter ever in the Southern Hemisphere ever to better 2:15 for the mile (Fritz's best heat time was 2 minutes 14 1/6th seconds).

Sadly James' days were numbered. In April he contracted typhoid fever which, at the time, was rife on the W.A. Goldfields and in Coolgardie in particular and to make matters worse he was also suffering from a bout of pneumonia. At this time Coolgardie hospital was overrun with local newspapers reporting that all 115 beds were occupied by patients and furthermore three nurses had collapsed suffering from exhaustion.

On 6th May, newspapers not only in Coolgardie and Perth, but also in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney reported the demise of James Alfred Roberts:-

"The death has taken place, at the hospital, of Mr. James Alfred Roberts, who at one time held a prominent position in financial circles of Melbourne, and was reputed to be worth £100,000. Latterly he had been camping in a tent adjoining the hospital, and had been ill for some time. When taken to that institution yesterday he was in a dying condition, and died soon after admission."

James Alfred Roberts, born in Sleaford (Shropshire, UK) in 1841 and buried in the Anglican section of the Coolgardie Cemetary in 1896, may have been on this earth for only 55 years, however, his life achievements have left a legacy of architectural magnificence and standardbred excellence that will last three times that.



Coolgardie Hospital Ward - 1890's

APPENDIX ONE: Horses Owned by James Roberts

STALLIONS STOOD AT STUD

Boccaccio (USA), Len Rose (USA), Pioneer (USA), Prince Patchen

STALLIONS BRED

Globe (by Huon), Huon Junior (by Huon), King of Bronte (by Boccaccio)

BROODMARES – IMPORTED

Cora (USA), Fanny (USA), Fernleaf (USA), Laura (USA), Lucilla (USA), Molly Crow (USA), Rosemary (USA), Sylph (USA), Tilda C (USA)

BROODMARES - COLONIAL

Alice (pedigree unknown), Beda (by The Count), Bella Campbell (by Nobleman), Black Bess (by Panic), Black Maria (pedigree unknown), Boons Daughter (by Daniel Boon), Bronte Maid (by Boccaccio), Carangah (by Proto Martyr), Carrie Leigh (by Daniel Boon), Chieftainess (by Chieftain), Constance (pedigree unknown), Cora (pedigree unknown), Daisy Burns (pedigree unknown), Daphne (by Alarm), Dazzle (pedigree unknown), Delight (by Canterbury), Dinah (pedigree unknown), Dolly Varden (by Tam O Shanter), Dozy (pedigree unknown), Emerald (pedigree unknown), Empress (by Hawkeye), Eva (by Flying Dutchman), Express (pedigree unknown), Fair Lemonade (by Boccaccio), Forest Queen (pedigree unknown), Excitement (pedigree unknown), Flirt (pedigree unknown), Florence (pedigree unknown), Frantic (pedigree unknown), Gold Token (pedigree unknown), Fan (pedigree unknown), Flora Temple (by Palatinus), Fright (by Alarm), Huntress (by Foreigner), Jessie Merryhawk (by Merryhawk), Jewess (The Peer), Katie Merryhawk (by Merryhawk), Kew Girl (pedigree unknown), Kitty (by Little Dick), Lady Hawthorn (pedigree unknown), Lady Jane Grey (pedigree unknown), Lady Kemp (pedigree unknown), Lady O'Hara (pedigree unknown), Laura (pedigree unknown), Laura R (by Boccaccio), Lily (pedigree unknown), Little Diamond (pedigree unknown), Lynette (by Palmerston), Maid of Athens (pedigree unknown), Maud S (pedigree unknown), Melody (by Bordeaux), Merridale (pedigree unknown), Merry Bell (by Merryhawk), Millers Maid (pedigree unknown), Minnie (pedigree unknown), Minnie R (by Boccaccio), Misfortune (by Fireworks), Miss Jenkins (pedigree unknown), Miss Leith (Young Stockham), Molly Darling (pedigree unknown), Moss Rose (pedigree unknown), Mrs Beazley (pedigree unknown), Mrs Hampson (pedigree unknown), Nellie (pedigree unknown), Nellie Dixon (Merriman), Postponement (by Merryhawk), Queen of Bronte (Boccaccio), Rose (by Parramatta), Rapture (by Horatio), Romance (pedigree unknown), Rosebud (Childe Harold), Ruby (pedigree unknown), Snowdrift (pedigree unknown), Snowflake (pedigree unknown), Speculation (pedigree unknown), Swamp Angel (pedigree unknown), Sweetbriar (by Architect), Sweetheart (Boccaccio), Sylvia (by Childe Harold), Tell Tale (by Argus Scandal), The Queen (by Boccaccio), Tumult (by Snowden), White Cloud (pedigree unknown), White Fawn (by Merryhawk), Wild Rose (by Boccaccio)

OTHER

Barney (g, Rossmore), Bay Rose (c, Len Rose), Boccaccio Junior (g, Boccaccio), Bronte Boy (g, Boccaccio), Decameron (c, Boccaccio), Diana (f, Len Rose), Fairlawn Chief (g, Boccaccio), Galeed (f, Boccaccio), Fernando (g, The Marquis), George Bramwell (by Boccaccio), Hotspur (g, Winbourne), Johnny (g – pedigree unknown), Mitiamo (c, Boccaccio), Monitor (g – pedigree unknown), Pilgrim (g – pedigree unknown), Prince of Bronte (c, Boccaccio), Quickstep (c, Vermont Junior), Rose Chief (Boccaccio), Tomboy (g, Saunterer), Sandfly (g, pedigree unknown), Town Time (g – pedigree unknown), Unnamed (c, Huon – Polly), Woodstock Patchen (c, San Jose Patchen), Yendon (h - pedigree unknown), Young Norfolk Jack (UK)



Huon Junior

APPENDIX TWO: Influence of Horses Bred/Owned by James Roberts

SYLPH USA - Australian Trotting Mares Mile Record

Second dam of:- DELAVAN CHIMES - Australian 2YO Pacers Mile Record (1909), Melbourne Thousand (1911), BLACK WILKES JUNIOR - NSW Sires Produce 2YO (1910)

Fifth dam of:- RICHARD RANJ - Australian 2YO Pacers Mile Record (1941), NSW Sapling (1941)

Sixth dam of:- BLACK CRUSADER - Tas Sapling 2YO (1951)

Sixth dam of:- ANDI - Inter Dominion heat (1954)

Sixth dam of:- SEPTEMBER FLIGHT - South Australian Derby (1968)

Sixth dam of:- ELMO DAWN - Qld Sunshine Sprint (1971)

Ninth dam of:- TOLIVER MISTAKE (1:54.6) - One of first 100 Aust-bred 1:55 performers

ROSEMARY USA

2nd dam of:- LE ROSIER - NZ Auckland Cup (1905)

CORA USA

Dam of:- VAN DIEMAN - NZ Auckland Cup (1896)

KATIE MERRYHAWK

Dam of:- KING OF BRONTE - Australian 2YO Trotters Mile Record (1884). Also sire (see below). SPECIFICATION - World Four Mile Trotters Record (NZ - 1891)

MISS LEITH

2nd dam of:- HOMELEIGH DICK - NZ Association Hcp (1920), NZ Middleton Hcp (1922)

MOLLY CROW USA

2nd dam of:- URANUS - NSW Easter Cup (1904)

LUCILLA USA - Australian Trotting Mares Mile Record

Dam of:- HUON JUNIOR - NSW Trotters Mile Record. Also sire (see below), GLOBE - Sire (see below)

2nd Dam of:- LUCID - Inaugural Victoria Trotters Derby (1914)

BOCCACCIO USA

Sire of :- King of Bronte (Australian 2YO Trotters Mile record)

Daughters are the ancestress of:- Melo Mae (Tas Easter Cup), Kodak (Inter Dominion heat, WA Sires Produce), Wilver Mint (WA Easter Cup), Raider Adios TT2:00.0 (WA Derby), Lucky Camilla TT1:53.4 (Melbourne Pacing Cup), Michael Frost (Australian Pacing Championship, Inter Dominion heat), Opal Chief (Victoria Derby, Australian 2YO mile record), Tattle Hal (Australian 2YO mile record), Raivolo (WA Fremantle Cup), Opal Raid (Victoria Oaks), Romper Stomper (NZ Trot FFA), Beloro (Inter Dominion heat),

LEN ROSE USA

Sire of: Barwon (Australian Sires Produce)

Sired dam of:- Uranus (WA Easter Cup)

Daughters are the ancestress of:- Jenny (VL Dullard Cup), Willie Lincoln (NZ Stake Earner of Year 1921), Fathers Wish (Aust. Trotters Mile record), Battle Song (WA Fremantle Cup), Hamdon Park (Tas Derby), Dixie Globe (Vic Derby), Fourjay (Australian 2&3YO Trotter of the Year)

PRINCE PATCHEN

Daughters are the ancestress of:- Smokey Nation (Canberra Oaks), Glenwood Advice (Burnie Cup), Stylish Cross (Ulverstone Cup), Stylish Byrd (Tas Golden Slipper), Forest Beau (Tas Danbury Park Cup)

PIONEER USA

No feature race descendants. Stood only two seasons before breaking back.

KING OF BRONTE

Sire of:- Bronte (influential foundation sire)

Daughters are the ancestress of:- The Gap (NSW Derby, Victoria Derby, Victoria Futurity), Tennessee Wood (WA Easter Cup), Gold Vale (Victoria 3YO Futurity), Leilani Lombo (Australian Pacing Gold), Satans Destiny (VSS 2YO), Dunmanus Bay (WASS 4YO), Annas Ann (WA Triple Crown 2YO & 4YO), Radiant Destiny (SA Oaks), Dot Redmond (Vic Trotters Derby), Con Derby (Vic Derby), Connie Glo (WA Fremantle Cup),

HUON JUNIOR

Sire of (174 winners):- Lulu Boy (Melbourne Thousand), Pride (WA Cup)

Sired dams of:- Eulinya Bells (Melbourne Thousand), Lou Doolan (Sydney Thousand), Maori Land (Vic & NSW Sires Produce), Alfred Donald (WA Easter Cup), Black Betel (Ballarat Cup), Nan (Vic Sires Produce), Ukelele Lady (Vic Trotters Derby), Wilverley (Vic Derby)

Daughters are the ancestress of:- Marjorie M (NSW Sires Produce), Mitzi Reward (WA Oaks), Mountain Glory (Tas SS 4YO), Tralee Rose (SA Oaks), White Globe (Australian Trotters Mile Record), Sparkling Pearl (NSW Oaks), Toliver Gigi (Vic & NSW Oaks), Speedy Boy (Inter Dominion heat), Southern Lan (Australian 2&3YO Trotter of the Year), Derby Royale (Inter Dominion Trotters Champion), Wilbur Lad (Vic Trotters Derby), Grand Lad (NSW Trotters Derby), Terronara Lad (QSS 2YO), Dandy Briar (Auckland Cup), Doctor Barry (NZ Derby), Nigel Craig (NZ Trotter of the Year, NZ Trotters Mile record), Flintlock (Qld Derby), Court Martial (NZ Leading Broodmare Sire of Trotters 1986), Jillby Gold (Queen of the Pacific), James Matthew (WA Pearl), Our Cygnet (Tas Derby), Percys Son (WA Sires Produce), Napoleon Stone (Tas Oaks), First Kiss (Inter Dominion heat), Silver Boy (Australian Pacers Mile Record),

GLOBE

Sired dams of: Globe Derby (Australian Pacers Mile record & Hall of Fame Legend), Auto Machine (NZ Otahuhu Cup), Star Pronto (NZ Otahuhu Cup)

Daughters are the ancestress of:- Carclew (Inter Dominion Champion), Tennessee Sky (Inter Dominion Champion, NSW Derby), Admiral Soanai (NZ Dominion Hcp), Master Clan (WA Derby), Radiant Walla (Vic Derby), Peak Hill (NSW Derby)

APPENDIX THREE: Races Won by Horses Owned by James Roberts

BOCCACCIO PARK (Brighton) 08-10-1881

MAIDEN TROT – 10 sovs – One & quarter miles

Mr Roberts FLORA TEMPLE, scr (Cleveland) 1

ELSTERNWICK PARK 15-04-1882

TROT – 50 sovs – mile heats

First & Final heat

JA Roberts blkm TILDA C, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

MATCH – 100 sovs – mile heats

Second heat

JA Roberts BOCCACCIO, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

Third heat

JA Roberts BOCCACCIO, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

Fourth heat

JA Roberts BOCCACCIO, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

ELSTERNWICK PARK 02-12-1882

PURSE – 42 sovs – Two mile heats

First heat

JA Roberts bm6 SYLPH, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

Second heat

JA Roberts bm6 SYLPH, scr (Andy Mulholland) 2p1

ELSTERNWICK PARK 30-12-1882

PURSE – 59 sovs – mile heats

Second heat

JA Roberts grh LEN ROSE, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

Third heat

JA Roberts grh LEN ROSE, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

Fourth heat

JA Roberts grh LEN ROSE, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

ELSTERNWICK PARK 24-02-1883

PURSE – 58 sovs – Mile heats

Third Heat

JA Roberts bma SYLPH, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

ELSTERNWICK PARK 14-04-1883

PURSE – 50 sovs – mile heats

First Heat

JA Roberts bma SYLPH, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

Second heat

JA Roberts bma SYLPH, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

Fourth heat

JA Roberts bma SYLPH, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

ELSTERNWICK PARK 29-12-1883

TROT – 50 sovs – mile heats

First heat

JA Roberts grma BELLA CAMPBELL, scr

(Len Grimwood) 1

ELSTERNWICK PARK 26-01-1884

2YO TROT – 56 sovs – Mile heats

JA Roberts bc2 KING OF BRONTE, scr

(Andy Mulholland) 1

ELSTERNWICK PARK 17-03-1884

TROT – 30 sovs – Mile Heats

First Heat

JA Roberts bm SYLPH, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1DH

FFA TROT – 50 sovs – Mile heats

Second Heat

JA Roberts LEN ROSE, scr (Andy Muholland) 1

Fourth Heat

JA Roberts LEN ROSE, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

Fifth Heat

JA Roberts LEN ROSE, scr (Andy Mulholland) 1

SYDNEY DRIVING PARK 25-08-1886

HANDICAP TROT – 75 sovs – Two miles

Fourth heat

JA Roberts grma DOZY, 410yds, scr (Harry Vincent) 1

SYDNEY DRIVING PARK 07-08-1886

MAIDEN TROT of 20sovs – One mile

Second heat

JA Roberts grma DOZY, scr (Harry Vincent) 1

NSW AGR SHOW MEET (SDP) 02-09-1886

DISTANCE TROT – 100 sovs – One mile

Second Division

JA Roberts grh TOWN TIME, 250yds (Harry Vincent) 1

SYDNEY DRIVING PARK CLUB 20-04-1887

MAIDEN TROT – 25 sovs – One mile heats

First heat

JA Roberts grma DOZY, scr (Harry Vincent) 1

Second heat

JA Roberts grma DOZY, scr (Harry Vincent) 1

FREE FOR ALL – 30 sovs – One mile heats

Second heat

JA Roberts LUCILLA (imp USA), scr (Harry Vincent) 1

Third heat

JA Roberts LUCILLA (imp USA), scr (Harry Vincent) 1

SYDNEY DRIVING PARK 17-12-1887

HANDICAP TROT – 100 sovs – Two miles

First Heat

JA Roberts grma DOZY, 15secs (Harry Vincent) 1

SYDNEY DRIVING PARK 08-02-1888

MAIDEN TROT – 30 sovs – One mile

JA Roberts grga TOWN TIME, scr (Harry Vincent) 2p1

APPENDIX FOUR: Information and Photograph References

INTERNET

trove.nla.gov.au - www.classicfamilies.net - www.slv.gov.au - www.google.com.au - en.wikipedia.org

ORGANISATIONS

State Library of Victoria, Prahran Mechanics Institute, Sandringham Historical Society

NEWSPAPERS

Sportsman, The Argus, The Age, South Bourke & Mornington Journal, Kerang Times & Swan Hill Gazette, The Australasian, The Leader, Australian Star, Sydney Morning Herald, Sporting Judge

PUBLICATIONS

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PHOTOGRAPH/CHARTS

Cover - "The History of John and Leonora Roberts and Family" (W.J. Roberts)

Page 1 - Map of Shropshire - "The History of John and Leonora Roberts and Family" (W.J. Roberts)

Page 1 - John Roberts - "The History of John and Leonora Roberts and Family" (W.J. Roberts)

Page 1 - Leonora Roberts - "The History of John and Leonora Roberts and Family" (W.J. Roberts)

Page 2 - Madras Accommodation - "The History of John and Leonora Roberts and Family" (W.J. Roberts)

Page 3 - Maesbury House - Northcote Leader 1979

Page 4 - Victoria Terrace - Personal Photograph

Page 4 - 2-10 Grattan Street: Lemon Tree Hotel - vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au

Page 4 - Elwy House, Drummond Street - Personal Photograph

Page 5 - Montacute House, Grey Street - Personal Photograph

Page 5 - 1878 Paris Exhibition Gold Medal - ww.arthurchandler.com

Page 6 - Hippodrome le Maisons Laffitte - Le Trotteurs Francais (Jean-Paul Reynaldo)

Page 6 - 1879 Sydney Exhibition - Magazine

Page 7 - Bronte - Punch newspaper 1904

Page 7 - Glion map - Brighton Survey (State Library of Victoria)

Page 8 - Boccaccio - Australian Stud Book Sires Index (Australian Trotting Council)

Page 9 - 1880 Melbourne Exhibition - Souvenir

Page 10 - Thomas Bent - "History of Rippon Lea"

Page 10 - Dr L. L. Smith - "The audacious adventures of Dr Louis Lawrence Smith" (John Poynter)

Page 11 - Sir Frederick Sargood - painting, State Library of Victoria

Page 11 - John Lamont Dow - State Library of Victoria

Page 12 - Marion Terrace - Wikipedia

Page 12 - Queens Mansion, Beaconsfield Parade - Emerald Heritage Centre

Page 12 - Roberts Buildings - State Library of Victoria

Page 13 - Terminus Hotel Looking Towards Retreat - State Library of Victoria

Page 13 - Original Retreat Hotel - Sandringham Historical Society

Page 13 - Boccaccio Park Advertisements - Argus Newspaper

Page 14 - Boccaccio Park Map - Sub Division advertising brochure

Page 16 - 1881 English Cricket Team - "Cricket's Colosseum" (Ken Piesse)

Page 17 - Elsternwick Park: Trying The Course - Australasian newspaper

Page 17 - Map - Elsternwick Trotting Course - Seaside Estate advertising brochure

Page 17 - Elsternwick Park: Grandstand location - Seaside Estate advertising brochure

Page 18 - Elsternwick Park: View from Grandstand - Australasian newspaper

Page 19 - Fairlawn Stud Farm Advertisement - Personal adaption from Argus newspaper

Page 20 - Tilda C - Australasian newspaper

Page 20 - Melbourne Bicycle Club - wood engraving, State Library of Victoria

Page 21 - Inauguration Grand United Lodge of Victoria - wood engraving - State Library of Victoria

Page 22 - Fidelis - Sportsman newspaper (1882)

Page 23 - Sydney Driving Park - Sydney Mail & New South Wales Advertiser

Page 23 - St Marys Church - History of Waverley

Page 24 - Minnie Roberts - Queenslander newspaper (1900)

Page 25 - Nancy Hanks - Currier and Ives collection

Page 26 - Coolgardie Hospital ward - "The Fields" (Ian Templeton/Bernadette McDonald)