

Literary Taste – Some Fossilized Preferences

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All, all must perish; but, surviving last,
The love of letters half preserves the past.
True, some decay, yet not a few revive:
Though those shall sink, which now appear to thrive,
As custom arbitrates, whose shifting sway
Our life and language must alike obey.

Byron, *Hints from Horace*.

ALTHOUGH PLACE-NAMES might not be first thought of in a search for evidence of literary tastes, many names on the map of this country bear witness to the books with popular appeal in past generations and particularly during the nineteenth century, the age when cultured taste found expression in the unlikely field of toponomy.

If we ignore the frequent but general references to classical literature in the bestowals of the period up to 1830, we may find many names with specific associations in the early literature of Western Europe and of England. One of the earliest, Vaucluse (in New South Wales) was given to his estate there by W. C. Wentworth in 1827 in honour of the little village in France where Petrarch was born and first saw his Laura. Another ancient name, this time with Arthurian associations, is Avalon (New South Wales) which commemorates the Somerset hamlet where Joseph of Arimathea, St. Patrick and King Arthur are all said to have been.

Ercildoun (in Victoria) commemorates the old Keep on the Scottish border and the man who inherited lands there, Thomas the Rhymer or Thomas of Ercildoun, the author of many strange oracles and romances which in their turn influenced Sir Walter Scott. Another romance figure is recalled by Palmerin Street (in Warwick, Queensland) which takes its name from the hero of several Spanish romances of the sixteenth century. 'Palmerin of England' was one of the two romances of chivalry specially excepted from the holocaust of such works carried out by the curate and the barber in *Don Quixote*.

While drama, generally, has little impact here, Shakespeare's influence is found in Mount Arden (in South Australia), a name given by Matthew Flinders to commemorate the forest in 'As You Like It.' Another enthusiast changed an original Bullock Flat to Oberon (Central Tableland, New South Wales), after the Fairy King in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' Cawdor (South Coast, New South Wales) has been held to be called after the place and person in 'Macbeth' and not the Scottish seat.

Although John Milton does not appear on the map, the place Elwood (Victoria) is associated with his writings. It is a misspelling for the name of Thomas Ellwood (1639–1713), the Quaker who used to read to the blind poet and to whom he suggested by a chance remark the writing of 'Paradise Regained.'

The old Herefordshire inn, "The Man of Ross," built on the site of the home of John Kyrle, "the Man of Ross," famed for his philanthropy, is the origin for Ross (Tasmania). The name, first used there in 1821, is held to be inspired by the lines from Alexander Pope

"Who taught yon Heaven-directed spire to rise?
'The Man of Ross,' each lisp'ing babe replies. . . .
. . . Him portioned maids, unfriended orphans bless'd,
The young who labour, and the old who rest?"

Epistle III – 'Of the Use of Riches,' Ll. 261 ff.

Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote "Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia," the somewhat exotic but didactic romance concerned with a search, for 'surely happiness is somewhere to be found.' And Surveyor Wedge named after it the Valley of Rasselas (Tasmania), recollecting the 'happy valley', where the inhabitants know only "the soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose." Another Eastern association is to be found in Hassan's Walls (New South Wales), from the *Arabian Nights*, in which occur the ruined palace of Hassan, stupendous ruins in the midst of solitude.

Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* (1770) was widely read in its day and for some time after it was deemed to be the most universally popular poem in English. Its ability to stay in the minds of men is, for example, attested by the Auburns¹ in California, Maine,

¹ See 'Ye say they all have passed away,' pp. 270 ff., in *Names on the Land*, by G. R. Stewart (Random House, N. Y.), 1945.

New Hampshire and Massachusetts in the United States. The name, found in the first line of the poem –

Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain

– had a mellifluous sound and, presumably, a vague poetic exhalation and so it is widely found in Australia, too. Auburn, the Melbourne suburb takes its name from the Rev. W. H. Liddiard's house, itself named from the poem. Similar derivations are given for Auburn (in Sydney); Auburn Vale (near Inverell, New South Wales); Auburn (in Tasmania), still known also as Goldsmith; Auburn (in South Australia), etc.

Scottish folk sentiment was strong in many areas and probably it had as much to do with the bestowal of many names as the poetry of Robert Burns. Maxwelton in Queensland commemorates the home of Annie Laurie, Maxwelton House in Dumfriesshire and the song about her written by her rejected suitor, William Douglas. 'Tam-o'-Shanter,' the poem by Burns concerning the farmer of that name and his dealings with the witch, 'Cutty Sark' was the name of two ships which are both remembered, the one by the Creek of the name in South Australia and the other by the Point of like style in Queensland. Cessnock (in New South Wales) was named after Burns' poem, "On Cessnock Banks."

Other sentiments place names enshrine are associated with Northern mythology, popular in the period immediately prior to the Romantic Revival. Valhalla, the palace of immortality of the Scandinavian world and inhabited by the souls of heroes slain in battle, was repeated as the name of the old mining town (in Victoria), but was later given its present spelling, Walhalla.

The ancient term for the farthest bounds of civilization, Ultima Thule, used by the Romans of the British Isles, and revived in the eighteenth century, was used for a pastoral boundary near Bendigo, but it was subsequently shortened to Ultima.

Temora (1763) is one of the chief epics among the Ossianic poems of James Macpherson, (1736–1796), the 'poet-translator' of Invernesshire. It continues the story of the Norse invasion of Ireland, begun in *Fingal* (1762). The name, *Temora*, is that of the palace of the Kings of Ulster in the poem and it was given to a township on the south western slopes in New South Wales.

Of the Romantic poets, Lord Byron (1788–1824) seems to have been by far the most popular and his home, Newstead Abbey, is

probably recalled in at least one of the various Newsteads in Australia. There are places of this name in Victoria, in Launceston (Tasmania), in Northern New South Wales and in South Australia. Cape Byron and Byron Bay, on the far North Coast of New South Wales, were named by Captain Cook as a compliment to the poet's father, Commodore Byron, of H.M.S. *Dolphin*, who later voyaged to the Pacific. It is interesting that a subsequent generation, equating this Byron with the poet, named two tiny isles, to the north of the Cape, Juan and Julia, a recollection of the ill-matched lovers in the opening portion of *Don Juan*.

At a later period the people of Byron Bay, persisting in this literary identification, showed their interest in books by naming streets there after Jonson, Burns, Keats, Browning, Tennyson, Ruskin, Kingsley, Carlyle, and Lawson.

French literature was not very dear to the new settlers, but one distinctive French name is Cape Rabelais (in South Australia), named by the marine surveyor Nicolas Baudin (c. 1750–1803) after François Rabelais (1494–1553) the celebrated French wit and satirist, whose attacks on obscurantism the humanist sailor much admired.

Sir Walter Scott as poet and particularly as novelist seems to have had an extraordinary popularity, if the bestowal of names drawn from his works can be taken as an indication. Lochinvar (Hunter Valley, New South Wales) is the name² of the hero in Scott's famous poem, while Rokeby (Victoria) and Rokeby (Tasmania) are named after the poet's narrative piece, *Rokeby*, written at the Yorkshire village of that name and concerned with that ancient mansion-house, burned down by the Scots in 1314. Wedderburn (in Victoria) was named from a battle piece in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel":

Vails not to tell each hardy clan,
From the fair Middle Marches came; . . .

Vails not to tell what steeds did spurn,
Where the Seven Spears of Wedderburne
Their men in battle-order set. (Canto V, verse iv.)

and the Note LXVIII to the same poem, relative to Sir David Home, of Wedderburn. Branxholme (Victoria) is a recollection of

² Symonds, Mrs. W. King *Nomenclature of New South Wales*, (1914).

“Branxholm,” the great feudal castle in the Teviot Valley in Roxburghshire, which is the principal scene in the poem. It is almost certain that both the Abbotsfords in Victoria and New South Wales were named after Scott’s home, the well-known Abbotsford in Roxburghshire to the west of Melrose.

The novels would appear to have been among the most popular books for general reading, if place name evidence is any guide. The first novel, *Waverley* (1814), is noted by the place of that name in Tasmania, while the second, *Guy Mannering* (1815) is recalled by Dinmont (in Victoria), which name was suggested by C. T. Wilson, the Secretary of the Shire of Colac. The character is remembered by his own introduction –

“I am Dandie Dinmont, sir . . . the Liddesdale lad – ye’ll mind me?”

Rob Roy (1817) is noted in ways direct and indirect. The novel’s title gives the name for a place in Macintyreshire of New South Wales, while the Queensland Aberfoyle was so styled because of the description of the local Scottish scenery in the novel. Another name of interest here is Ardtornish near Modbury in South Australia. The original estate here was managed by a Miss Gregorson, whose father was a friend of Scott’s and was mentioned in both *Rob Roy* and the poem, *The Lord of the Isles*, (1815). Ravenswood in Victoria began as the Ravenswood Inn, the name coming from *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). Edgar, the Master of Ravenswood, is in melancholy exile from his gloomy home, Ravenswood Castle. Gothic horror centres round the Master and his ancestral house and the ruined lord is finally swallowed up in a quicksand on his way to fight a duel. Ravenswood unceasingly dominates the tale in this grim atmosphere where the landscape becomes, as Buchan pointed out, almost a protagonist. *Ivanhoe*, (1819), one of the most popular of the historical novels, gave the names for places in Western New South Wales and greater Melbourne. It is uncertain whether the two Locksleys of New South Wales and the one in Victoria come from the name under which Robin Hood appears in *Ivanhoe* or the better known early poem of Tennyson’s, ‘Locksley Hall’ (1832).

Either the Warwickshire town or the novel (1821) in which are described scenes at that place is the source of Queensland’s Kenilworth. The only contemporary setting for a Scott novel is to be found in his satire of idle fashionable society at the spa of St.

Ronan's Well. The novel of that name has its immense popularity attested by St. Ronan's Well in Western Australia and Queensland's St. Ronan's.

The singular abyss to the north west of Moffat in Dumfriesshire was known as Annandale's Beef Stand or the Devil's Beef Tub and it figures in *Red Gauntlet*. This name was imitated in Queensland's Annandale. In the twenty-second of the novels, *Woodstock* (1826), the scene is the royal park of Woodstock, near Oxford. This setting, which was treated by the novelist in Radcliffian manner, is recalled in the Woodstocks of both Queensland and Tasmania.

Thomas Moore (1779–1852), now vaguely remembered as the author of songs, the *Irish Melodies* and the *National Airs*³, an assortment of drawing-room ballads influencing the Victorian genre, was enormously popular in his own country and elsewhere.⁴ His most sentimental note was the celebrated song of the "sweet vale" which is to be identified with the scenery of the Avoca River, (Co. Wicklow, Ireland) which traverses the area. Major Mitchell the explorer named the Victorian river after it and the town which grew up later on its banks took the name, too. Other echoes of the song are to be found in Avoca Vale (Queensland), Avoca (Tasmania), and Avoca (South Coast, New South Wales).

But Moore's greatest fame undoubtedly came from "Lalla Rookh," known in its day as "the cream of the copyrights." He wrote part of the poem in Derbyshire in the village of Ashbourne,⁵ which tenuous association was sufficient reason for the renaming of Finnis in South Australia as Ashbourne. The heroine or the work must be the source of the New South Wales name, Lallarook. She is making a journey to meet her betrothed, a king she has never seen. On the way she is accompanied by a young poet with whom she falls in love, to find, at the end of her journey, that he and her betrothed are the same man.

In his particular story of 'The Veiled Prophet' there is a song about Bendemeer's Stream, a portion of which is now quoted:

³ R. Birley, *Sunk Without Trace* (R. Hart-Davis, London, 1962), p. 136.

⁴ Goethe told Eckermann that he had better learn English, "the language of Byron, Moore and Scott." (Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, 3 December, 1824.)

⁵ Symonds, *op.cit.*

There's a bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream,
 And the nightingale sings round it all the day long;
 In the time of my childhood 'twas like a sweet dream,
 To sit in the roses and hear the bird's song.

That bower and its music I never forget
 But oft when alone in the bloom of the year,
 I think – is the nightingale singing there yet?
 Are the roses still bright by the calm Bendemeer?

(Moore, *Poetical Works*, VI, pp. 77–78).

The name Bendemeer which occurs in no gazette for the British Isles is the original for Bendemeer (Northern Tablelands, New South Wales).⁶

Many English prose writers are noted in names of places. Victoria honoured the historian and poet Thomas Babington Macaulay by Macaulay, near Melbourne; Thomas Carlyle by Carlyle; and Charles Kingsley the novelist by Eversley, the name of the Hampshire parish Kingsley held so long and in which he wrote his novels and religious prose. Charles Dickens has two of his most popular novels recalled by Pickwick, north of Aberfoyle and Dingley Dell, both in New South Wales, and Bleak House in Victoria. New South Wales recalls W. M. Thackeray in Pendennis, named after the famous novel, published serially (1848–50), and Mrs. Henry Wood's tearful story in East Lynne (South Coast). Western Australia records in Perth's Bulwer Street Edward Bulwer George Lytton the famed novelist and poet, and South Australia in Marryatville remembers the novelist, Captain Marryat, (1792–1848), who was the uncle of Lady Fox Young, wife to the Governor of the state. Alexander William Kinglake (1809–91), famed because of his long sequence of travel narratives, *Eothen* (1863–1887), is personally commemorated by Kinglake, near Eltham, Victoria.

The poet-laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson is, like his son Lord Tennyson, Governor of South Australia, (1899–1902), commemorated in the village name, Tennyson, on the Central Tableland of New South Wales and Tennyson in Victoria. His poetry is recalled in a number of strange ways. 'The Lady of the Lake' was used by a certain Lieutenant Wishart as the name of a vessel of his and this he shortened to Lady's Bay in his designation for one feature of the Victorian coastline. Two early names, Locke's Plat-

⁶ J. S. Ryan, *Papers on Australian Place Names*, (1963), pp. 65–66.

form (Central Tableland, New South Wales), and Burnt Creek (on the railway from Melbourne to Albury) were both replaced by Locksley, probably after the poem 'Locksley Hall.' Another reader of Tennyson's poetry named a station on the Geelong to Ballarat line Elaine, after "Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable, Elaine the lily maid of Astolat."

Australian literature came a little late to be perpetuated on the map in the way in which English books were, yet there are some interesting associations here, too. Although Henry Kingsley (1830–1876) is only of interest in this country for his novel, *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn* (1859), it was probably the enormous popularity of that work which resulted in the name Ravenshoe being found in Queensland. For when the locality (near Cairns) was first surveyed a tattered copy of Henry Kingsley's *Ravenshoe* was found in a tree there and so the present name was given. Thomas Alexander Browne (1826–1915), better known as 'R. Boldrewood' is noted on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales in Enmore, named after Enmore House, Newtown, the home of his father Captain Sylvester Browne. The novelist was indebted to the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott not only for his style but also his pen-name, taken from Scott's 'Marmion':

And that Red King, who, while of old,
Through Boldrewood the chase he led, . . .

Kendall and Kendall Grange on the North Coast of New South Wales honour the poet Henry Kendall (1841–82) who knew the area in his lifetime.

Of modern writers other than English there seems to be little trace, although Mark Twain (1835–1910) has his influence set down on the Queensland landscape. It has not been possible to verify whether the places were named prior to his visit to the country in 1897 or as a result of it but the naming was done by John Atherton (1837–1913), an important pioneer in the far north. Mount Adler, Mount Twiddler and Cooley Hills are all reminders of his taste in literature and knowledge of Twain's writings.

Nineteenth century society in England tended to recall its literary tastes in street names such as those in honour of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dryden, and Addison, all to be found in central Nottingham. The same habit is found in Shakespeare Place, Sydney, which runs past the Public Library of New South Wales. But Australia, unlike

England, and like the United States of America, also thought occasionally of its literary tastes in naming areas and natural features and so it is that we have preserved for us on the state maps the names of some of the books and writers, popular during the period of closer settlement in the Victorian period.

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(These books, in addition to those referred to in the notes, contain information about 'literary' place names).

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