

ANOTHER COLONIAL 'LOCOMOTIVE' PRESS

BRIAN HUBBER

It is almost ten years since B.J. McMullin described in disarming detail the practice of taking the press out of the printing house so that it could participate in public processions.¹ Although probably the earliest example of this practice was in Dublin in the mid-eighteenth century, Dr McMullin supposes that the practice was quite a common one in the Australasian colonies. He goes on to cite three occasions: the separation of Victoria from New South Wales in November 1850; the opening of the Geelong and Melbourne Railway in September 1853 (when a number of keepsakes were printed); and a procession in July 1863 in Christchurch, New Zealand, celebrating the wedding of Edward and Alexandra, the Prince and Princess of Wales (the wedding having taken place in March). The purpose of the present paper is to report a fourth colonial example of this phenomenon.

Sir Charles Joseph La Trobe had been Superintendent of the Port Phillip District from 1839 to 1851 and Lieutenant-Governor from 1851 to 1854. During this time the colony had grown from a pioneer settlement on the pastoral frontier into more closely settled pastoral districts serviced by numerous country towns and a thriving metropolis in the city of Melbourne. The colony had separated from New South Wales in 1850; gold had been discovered in 1851; and the colony had been transformed by the in-rush of diggers, generating a massive economic boom. Throughout this period La Trobe had acted as an assiduous and humane administrator. He is judged well by modern historians, although in his day he did have his detractors – in particular, John Pascoe Fawkner.² Late in 1852 La Trobe requested permission to resign. Newcastle, the Secretary of State, accepted the resignation in April 1853, but it was many months before a replacement was found. La Trobe stayed on until May 1854. The new Lieutenant-Governor arrived in June.

Sir Charles Hotham was a reluctant Governor. Although he had had diplomatic and naval successes in his career, he was appointed against his will to the office of Governor of the Colony of Victoria. He was ill-suited to the demands of colonial administration. Being unable to delegate he virtually worked himself to an early death in December 1855. He is today remembered by a splendid memorial in the Melbourne General Cemetery.

Hotham's failures, however, were all in front of him. His arrival in June 1854 was greeted with great optimism and enthusiasm by Melbourne's crowds. 'One who sailed under Hotham' reported that the new Governor was staggered by the

1 'An Excursion into Printed Keepsakes II: Colonial Celebrations', *Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand* 11(1987), 97-107.

2 See Davis McCaughey, Naomi Perkins and Angus Trimble, *Victoria's Colonial Governors 1839-1900* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1993), 11-39.

reception.³ Processions were of course vital to such public occasions and were extremely well organised. For example, the procession greeting the arrival of the new governor,

During the forenoon ... will be formed on the Sandridge Road, along the line of which flags will be placed with different numbers, and to the leader of each public body will be given a card, bearing the number of the flag indicating the position at which that body should take up its position and form in two ranks, one on each side of the road, and that part of the procession between its flag and the Sandridge pier-head shall have [defiled] through. It will then form into the procession, two and two, beginning from the extremity next the flag.

A sky-rocket let off at noon from Sandridge, will announce to His Excellency that all the arrangements have been completed. On which His Excellency will leave the vessel.

All persons desirous of joining the procession will do well to bear in mind the official announcement that no-one will be allowed to pass Prince's Bridge after half-past ten o'clock this morning until after the procession shall have passed.⁴

A public holiday had been declared. The weather was fine and sunny after heavy showers the previous day. And more than 50,000 people lined the route of the procession – almost a fifth of Melbourne's population. The procession itself included the city corporation, magistrates, clergy, Legislative Council, the Chamber of Commerce, various gentlemen (in carriages and mounted), masonic lodges, Welsh, American and German colonists, various crafts and trades, the Total Abstinence Society, fire brigade, Rowe's American Circus, and the children of various schools. The printers came towards the end of the procession between the Licensed Victuallers Association and the Carpenters and Builders.

Next to *Boniface* [the Licensed Victuallers Association] came *Typo*, the great intelligencer of the age, with his press at work on a four-wheeled waggon, showing off a brief history of the Colony up to the arrival of Sir Charles Hotham in an ornamental form of typography. The senior pressmen of the trade, dressed in masonic orders and wearing the cap of liberty, presided at this locomotive press, and a large muster of the profession were present in the procession.⁵

The *Melbourne Morning Herald* was more effusive, perhaps indicating that the 'locomotive' press came from the *Herald* office. The technology of the printing press was placed squarely under the ægis of *Progress*.

3 Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria* rev. ed. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1968), p.156.

4 *Melbourne Morning Herald* 22 June 1854, p.6.

5 *Argus* 24 June 1854.

The spirit of progress was yet more distinctly marked by the attendance on the scene of that mighty engine of civilization—the Press, *in propria personâ*—which, in the great spirit of the age, reduced theory to practice, by revealing to the eyes of the uninitiated “the secrets of the prison-house”.

We must here explain that a printing press was placed on a car drawn by four horses, decorated with a white covering, and surmounted with a flag bearing a suitable device, having reference to the origin of printing, and attended by a large body of the trade. Those on the stage printed and distributed amongst the people, a brief history of the Colony, and of the press in connection with it, dedicated to Sir Charles Hotham.⁶

The design of the keepsake was the typographical equivalent of the arches which adorned the Governor's route from Sandridge into the city. The arch at Prince's Bridge

was decorated all over with evergreens and flags. On one side were the arms of the Hotham family, with the motto “lead on,” on the other side the colonial arms, with the phrase “Advance Australia.” Over them were figures carved in wood, representing an emu and a kangaroo. In the centre and at the top of the arch was a large gilt crown, bordered with green leaves. On each side of the arch was written the celebrated civic motto, “Victoria Welcomes Victoria's Choice,” in blue letters upon a white ground. Beneath the arch were green boughs in beautiful [patterns].⁷

Two copies of the printed keepsake are known. Both are in the State Library of Victoria. The first copy is held in the Australian Manuscripts Collection, among the papers of Sir Charles Hotham.⁸ The second is in the Picture Collection. (See Figure)⁹ Both copies are on paper and measure 56.8 x 44 cm. The design is an architectural monument using typographical ornaments, and is similar to the keepsake printed in November 1850, celebrating Victoria's separation from New South Wales. Although the two designs are similar, none of the ornaments are common to both designs – except perhaps the crown and the printing press. At the apex of the pediment is the crown. At the base of the pediment, resting on the cornice, is the printing press (an Albion), and as if the symbolism is not explicit enough the phrase ‘THE FOURTH ESTATE’ is spelled out. Set within the frieze, in white on black, is the name of the governor ‘SIR CHARLES HOTHAM’. (Is it significant that the press comes between the crown and the governor? We might wonder further whether the strong and explicit presence of the printers in the procession was a warning to the new governor.) Two columns, made up of ornaments and decorated rules, hold up the entablature. The stylobate comprises a pattern of ornate tulip and acanthus ornaments. Within the space enclosed by the

6 *Melbourne Morning Herald* 24 June 1854.

7 *Ibid.*

8 State Library of Victoria, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 6886, Box 360/9 (d).

9 State Library of Victoria, Picture Collection, H1069.

stylobate, columns and entablature the text for the day is set, beginning, 'THIS PAPER WAS PRINTED JUNE 22, 1854, IN THE LINE OF [in gothic] The Procession formed to Welcome to these Shores [in roman] SIR CHARLES HOTHAM, K.C.B., LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF THE COLONY OF VICTORIA.' The text continues with a brief history of Victoria and her press, interspersed with jingoistic outbursts such as 'Long Live Victoria's Queen, and Her chosen Representative!'

The arrival of Sir Charles Hotham was celebrated in a variety of ways, some more 'literate' than others. Here and there along the procession route were thrown triumphal arches of every order of architecture, 'but mostly nondescript'. At Liarder's public house in Sandridge was a banner with the nonsensical 'Bona - Welcome - Punta Obligardo', apparently a reference to one of Hotham's naval successes. In front of the Criterion Hotel, in the city, was displayed a monster British crown, ornamented and with the legend 'A Queen's Choice, a people's pride welcomes'. Flags and banners were everywhere. In the evening the Criterion's crown was illuminated, as were many of the city's hotels. A bonfire was lit in front of Toorak, the governor's residence, and a lighted tar barrel was carried in triumph through the main streets.¹⁰ 'The evidence of rejoicing was kept up till a late hour ... in the shape of squibs, crackers, and rifle discharges.'¹¹ The keepsake printed on the 'locomotive' press might then be a more 'literate' act than others, but it should be seen as part a broad spectrum of celebratory acts.

*State Library of Victoria
Melbourne*

¹⁰ The lighting of bonfires was obviously a traditional practice, but the colonists always seemed to do it slightly differently. In preparation for the announcement of separation from New South Wales in 1850 a bonfire got out of control and burned down the dunnies on the Flagstaff Hill.

¹¹ *Melbourne Morning Herald* 24 June 1854.