

The lamentable death of Lady Mary FitzRoy

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'Here's to the arm which can hold 'em when gone, / Still to a gallop inclined, sir'¹

'The lamentable death of Lady Mary FitzRoy was ... an irreparable misfortune to the colony'²

In Australian historical surveys the life and work of Sir Charles FitzRoy, New South Wales' tenth governor occupies the best part of a column. If there is an entry for his wife, it merely notes 'FitzRoy, Lady Mary, death of'. The text to which the index entry refers usually chronicles the universal outpouring of grief following her death in Parramatta in 1847, when a carriage driven by her husband overturned. To single out one tragedy from the hundreds may seem odd, given the numerous untimely deaths and fatal accidents which befell members of the colonial elite. Neither the death in childbirth of Lady Barkly, itself said to be triggered by a carriage accident, nor the early demise of Lady Brisbane in 1832, elicited such public grieving, while the untimely death of Sir Charles Hotham in 1855 appears to have called forth nothing more than a general sense of relief amongst the Victorian colonists. Of these fatalities, possibly only that of Hotham warrants an index entry today. Yet the 'lamentable' death of Lady Mary is constantly brought to the historian's attention because it is mentioned so often by contemporary diarists and journalists. It is clear that with her death the colonists of New South Wales felt that something quite extraordinary had occurred, yet the precise nature of this calamity remains unclear. Sensational as the story of Sir Charles and Lady Mary FitzRoy's fatal drive was, what it represented to contemporary colonial society at a deeper level was far more unsettling. This article contends that what made Lady Mary's death significant and continues to intrigue today is the light it sheds on the changing constructs of masculinity and femininity in the middle of the nineteenth century and the tragic impact these changes could have on the lives of individuals.

Looking beyond the immediate cause of a bolting team, the reasons for the Parramatta accident may be found in the struggle between two antithetical models

of masculinity in the nineteenth century—the older aristocratic construct which had given rise to the Dandy and the Regency buck (and had moulded FitzRoy himself), as opposed to the still-evolving middle-class paradigm of gentlemanly virtue, whose exemplar was that paragon of domesticity, Queen Victoria's husband, Albert-the-Good.

Until the early decades of the nineteenth century the dominant paradigm of masculinity in elite circles was based on the supposedly 'natural' differences between the sexes. It mandated a rigid separation of the masculine and feminine spheres, the former public and outer-directed and the latter domestic and private. Within the separate masculine world of the English aristocrat there was little to counteract any tendency to live a self-absorbed life governed by little more than the whims of pleasure. Some seasoned their somewhat aimless lives with bouts of institutionalised risk-taking on the hunting field, in gambling salons and the boudoir, on Hampstead Heath accompanied by their seconds or 'tooling' along the turnpike in a 'Suicide' or High flyer gig.

In marked contrast stood the model of Evangelical masculinity, whose roots are intertwined with the rise to economic and political power of the English middle classes from the late eighteenth century and through the 1840s. This construct of masculinity emphasised restraint in all things, personal piety, moral rectitude, the value of a life devoted to good works and an uxorious concern for one's family; values which were deeply unsettling to aristocrats of the older generation like Lord Melbourne, who grumbled to the young Queen Victoria that: 'Nobody is gay now: they are so religious'.³ Lord Melbourne would have found no quibble with FitzRoy's conduct of life, for he enjoyed the traditional manly pursuits of the English land-owning or military aristocrat, particularly hunting, shooting, wenching and driving, losing no opportunity to practice them all. Modern readers may be less accustomed to that of the hard driving nobleman, yet the last-mentioned skill was just as ardently pursued as the former and in the colony of New South Wales there existed no greater proponent of this art than FitzRoy.

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On the morning of Tuesday 7 December 1847, the FitzRoy family and household were preparing to leave Parramatta for Sydney, to attend to such government business as could not be transacted in 'the interior' of Parramatta and to grace the wedding of Carlo Connell and Miss Baldock.⁴ With the onset of summer, it was the season for society weddings; four days earlier, the FitzRoys had graced the nuptials of Emmeline Macarthur with their presence and now it was time to leave for Sydney to attend another wedding.

Although this trip had become part of the FitzRoy's routine at the start of each week, it involved a huge amount of planning and behind-the-scenes bustle in its undertaking. Finally, all was complete and the servants and luggage had departed by river steamer from the Government House private jetty, so that only half a dozen staff

were on hand to assist the Governor's entourage as it prepared to leave, led by one of His Excellency's four-in-hand carriages. As well as Sir Charles and Lady Mary, the road party consisted of the aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Charles Chester Masters of the 58th Foot, and a footman, John Gibbs, his hat bearing the coveted cockade that only the servants of royalty or vice-royalty were entitled to wear, seated up behind the coach. Mr. George FitzRoy, the governor's son who was also his private secretary, would bring up the rear driving his own gig.

Under FitzRoy's administration, the government house at Parramatta was transformed into a truly vice-regal country seat. In 1837 Governor Bourke finally made a start on building a new Government House in Sydney's Domain. In 1845, FitzRoy's immediate predecessor readily conceded that Parramatta's government domain should be rented out to offset the ballooning costs of the new vice-regal quarters in Sydney. However, arguing forcibly for the retention of the house itself, the proverbially frugal Gipps stressed in his correspondence to the Home Office that the governor's health and well-being required a country retreat for its upkeep. Within two weeks of his arrival on 2 August 1846, FitzRoy had visited Parramatta and made it quite clear that he fully concurred with this argument, even though he had scarcely experienced the rigours of life in Sydney.

Consideration of mental and physical wellbeing probably ranked low on the list of reasons which commended the idea of a country estate to the new governor, for FitzRoy was an aristocratic rather than a military or naval governor and well aware of the trappings of office proper to his elevated position. When official duties did not require it, he consciously set himself apart from New South Wales' hothouse society where fractious colonial exclusives lorded it above the salt and rich emancipists were doomed forever to dwell below it. The new governor and the masculine portion of his entourage soon established their own social circle, a freedom they enjoyed because of FitzRoy's independent means.⁵ Word soon spread that entrée to Government House depended less upon breeding or social standing and more upon whether or not the company was congenial to the Governor, his sons and his cousin Lieutenant-Colonel Godfrey Mundy, recently appointed deputy Adjutant-General to the colonial garrison. It was inevitable that such capriciousness would attract criticism from all ranks of colonial society.

For this reason alone, the value of a sequestered country estate to a governor wearied of Sydney Society and its petty quarrels was inestimable. FitzRoy immediately embarked on a program of renovations and developments, including building a racecourse, at his own expense. True scions of an English aristocratic house, the male FitzRois enjoyed hunting and the Governor had kennels built at Parramatta to house the pack of hounds that he had had specially selected from the Duke of Beaufort's pack. Subsequently he claimed exclusive use of the domain, arguing the charge on his private income gave him the right to exclude the people of Parramatta from land which he and his entourage wished to use for their pleasure.

Another reason for building up an estate at Parramatta must surely have been the fact that as early as the mid-1820s, the Parramatta, or Western, Road, which started

in the heart of Sydney, had been transformed into a stretch of Telford roadway⁶ acknowledged as being the equal of any in Europe and excellently adapted for coaching. Like its celebrated English namesake, the Western or Bath Road, the colonial turnpike supported a four-horse stagecoach service running twice daily.⁷ A well-horsed private carriage could comfortably undertake the journey in less than two hours. In its infancy, New South Wales conspicuously lacked the tradition and pageantry of the mother country and Macquarie's elegant gothic tollgate, though reviled by his critics as a waste of public money, fulfilled its creator's dream of helping to instil a sense of pride amongst colonial society. It quickly became the place to see and be seen in one's carriage. Dumaresq noted it was 'decidedly the Hyde Park corner of our western road ... [and] might safely bear a comparison with that celebrated, gay and bustling entrance into London'. It was a sign that on this corner of the colony at least one English pursuit dear to the heart of the gentry was taking root. Coach driving (or as its devotees termed it 'going down the Road') as practised by the English gentleman was intimately bound up with public display of skill and the magnificence of horseflesh and coachwork that only leisure could practice, money purchase, or breeding deploy. It was a tradition that FitzRoy enthusiastically championed.

For wealthy men of his generation, there was boundless admiration for the coach driver and in particular, the skilled but risky art of four-in-hand driving, a passion triggered by the introduction of the system of mail coaches in 1784. Once regarded as a job for servants, driving came to be regarded as a gentlemanly pursuit, which could be indulged without loss of caste. Indeed driving, like other manly sports such as boxing, was claimed to contribute to the moral education of a gentleman, since its practice would:

inspire confidence in difficult situations, and suggest resources in danger. Their consequent influence on the moral conduct of man is such, that, by a courage which is well founded, because it springs from a perfect knowledge of his own powers, he is often enabled to render the most important services to other.⁸

No whip could be entirely trusted, one writer warned, unless he had been started on this educative process early, for:

a man who has not been brought up among horses and acquired his general knowledge through rough-and-tumble methods when discretion does not outweigh rashness, will find it difficult ... to obtain the highest proficiency, since he will be likely to lack that confidence and coolness which are of the first importance to a good coachman.⁹

Brought up amongst horses and horsemen, FitzRoy was an enthusiastic and skilful 'whip' with the wealth which enabled him to 'do the thing as it should be'.¹⁰ There on the road between his two official residences was the stage upon which a gentleman could drive out in something like the London manner.

The coach drawn up at the door of Government House Parramatta was just one of His Excellency's vehicles, all designed to uphold the dignity of the office. It was

most probably a barouche,¹¹ a heavy, high-built four-wheeled open carriage for use in town, where it was usually drawn by a pair. It was also suitable to be driven four-in-hand over longer distances behind a team of big, upstanding horses by a coachman and groom, mounted on their high-set box. A single folding hood shaded the occupants of the privileged rear seat—the seat of honour. Since the introduction of the barouche in England in the 1760s, it fully justified its place in aristocratic and royal mews, being regularly wheeled out to lend dignity to great occasions and to enhance the pageantry of ceremonial events.

Before the equipages draw away from Government House door on their short fateful trip, let us consider their human freight. The driver approaching the four-in-hand is Sir Charles Augustus FitzRoy himself, aged fifty-one, grandson of the third Earl of Grafton, late lieutenant colonel in the Royal Horse Guards, veteran of Waterloo and career colonial administrator. He was the first governor of an Australian colony to possess close and impeccable aristocratic connections and could trace his ancestry back to Charles II, to whom he bore a marked resemblance in looks and, as it transpired, in morals.¹² Garryowen described him as 'a good-tempered, easy-going kind of gentleman, who did not suffer the worries of the world to discompose him unnecessarily' while James Stephen characterised him as 'a man of torpid mind and body'.¹³ His many contemporary critics scathingly dismissed him in pamphlet and newspaper columns as a mere aristocratic idler, owing his post to his powerful English family connections.¹⁴ Twentieth century historians also highlighted his laziness and carelessness, though conceding him charm, poise, a talent for command and for delegation, which, coupled with a grasp of the main issues besetting the colony and a native shrewdness¹⁵ ensured that his administration was not plagued by the endless internecine warfare that beset his predecessors.

FitzRoy was adjudged a showy but proficient driver by his contemporaries, but a series of small, unconnected accidents that attended him and his family on the road and in his stables indicate that he had not outgrown that love of rough-and-tumble around horses so desirable a quality in the aristocratic young man, nor yet a predilection for taking risks. In middle age he remained confident that his skills could be relied on to get him out of any scrape¹⁶ as a series of small incidents show. Some months before the Parramatta accident, his son was severely kicked by a horse in the stable yard at Parramatta, which points to FitzRoy's fatal predilection for highly-strung animals for riding or coaching. On a pleasure jaunt while visiting Melbourne in 1849, the Governor allowed his carriage to venture too near to a group of people letting off fireworks in Collins St. The horses bolted and the carriage capsized at the bottom of the hill, injuring his son George and shaking up the other occupants.¹⁷

Lady Mary, now settling herself into the cushioned interior of her carriage, was aged fifty-seven. To the undoubted joy of her more socially aware Australian subjects, she was of impeccable 'gentle' birth and moreover even better connected than her husband. The daughter of the fourth Duke of Richmond and Lennox and descended from the Dukes of Argyle on her mother's side, she was born into a life

of privilege and ease, as her father successively occupied the position of Viceroy of Ireland, Lord Lieutenant of Sussex and Governor of Upper and Lower Canada. Her upbringing as the daughter of a diplomat was admirable training for the life of an administrator's wife that she was to lead following her marriage to Captain FitzRoy in 1820. Her eventful married life had turned her into an experienced and intrepid traveller, but now she was now preparing to embark on her last journey.

The time that necessarily went into the preparation for even so simple a trip of twenty miles strikes the modern reader, to whom ample horsepower is available at whim, as prodigious. Some hours before the time of departure, the stables behind Government House Parramatta would have presented a scene of considerable bustle, as horses and coach were readied for the trip to Sydney under the watchful eye of FitzRoy's coachman. At was at this point, even before the sun had risen, that the first in the links of the chain of incidents culminating in eventual disaster was forged. The team FitzRoy had commanded to be put to his coach that day were spirited young animals of highbred hot-blooded stock,¹⁸ as one might have expected to find in the stables of a nobleman, rather than more placid carriage horses. Although they were broken in, they could hardly be considered the ideal team for a peaceful drive.¹⁹ No sagacious whip who valued his neck would ever consider driving a team in which there were no tried and trusted animals harnessed alongside the young horses of unknown temperament.²⁰ Yet this is precisely what FitzRoy was about to attempt, constituting the first link in what was to become a chain of accidents.

The newly fed and groomed horses having been put to the coach, the coachman's next duty was to drive from the stable yard to the front door, accompanied by the groom in his place in the rear rumble seat. All witnesses to this scene had noticed that something was awry, for the horses were in high spirits and showed every sign of skittishness even in the short drive round to the door.

The second link in the chain of disasters was now forged. It was later rumoured that Sir Charles' coachman, only too aware that the team was young, unschooled and scarcely broken in, had resigned rather than obey his master's order to drive the party to Sydney that day.²¹ Apparently undeterred by his coachman's professional opinion regarding the suitability of the team and perhaps overconfident of his skill, FitzRoy decided to take the reins himself. Now, like all careful 'whips' he was taking time and care to inspect the harness to ensure that everything was properly secure and running smoothly, prior to mounting the box.²²

To modern eyes, the third link appears such a natural, timely and logical action that it is scarcely recognisable for the fatal mistake it was. Instead of taking the usual precaution of waiting until the coachman was settled on his box before entering the carriage, Lady Mary allowed herself to be handed into the vehicle by the footman. She thus settled herself into her accustomed place, the seat of honour at the rear near-side, before her husband was seated on the box seat and hence in complete control of the horses. A nineteenth century etiquette book explained that it showed no disrespect for the gentleman driver to take his seat before his female passengers, for:

Some ladies have a great disinclination to mount a four-in-hand or mail phaeton until the driver is seated with the reins in his hand and in full command of the horses. There is nothing surprising in this, for after all, the groom who stands at the head of the horses before the start has very little control over them, and one or two disagreeable accidents have occurred in this way, the horses taking fright and escaping his grasp. Consequently it would be no breach of good manners for the gentleman driving to take his seat and thus reassure his nervous companion.²³

Charles Masters, the ADC, now mounted the box on the nearside. The footman then took up his seat on the dickey or rumble seat immediately behind his mistress and separated from her by the hood, which was fully extended to provide shade. Still standing on the ground, FitzRoy took up the reins, ready to mount the box. But at this point, the most dangerous moment in the whole drama of the departure of a four-in-hand carriage, disaster struck.²⁴

It appears that he had barely time to mount the box and transfer the reins from his right hand to his left when the skittish horses started, bearing the carriage and its dismayed occupants rapidly off down the hill. The grooms stayed at their posts at the horses' heads, at first endeavouring to hold them back, then running along with them until overpowered by their combined strength. FitzRoy now committed another error of judgement: he ordered his men to loose their hold, trusting to his skill to manage the team, which now broke into a full gallop or as a witness deposed 'a perfect racing pace'.²⁵

Faced with a bolting team, the paradoxical recourse was to let the horses have their heads, even urging them on to wear them out, while at the same time steering for the centre of the road, keeping the traces as tight as possible in order to keep the coach tracking straight and preventing the body from rolling which might lead to overturning.²⁶ This FitzRoy attempted to do and the solution might have worked had there been a longer stretch of open road. But the sloping serpentine driveway led to an avenue of oak trees before reaching the gate that led out to Parramatta town, and by now the barouche was careering wildly. As it gathered speed and an accident seemed inevitable, Lady Mary was seen to stand up in the carriage, screaming to her husband. The footman hastily pulled back the hood and attempted to lift Lady Mary, who had by now fainted, out of her seat and into the hind seat. It was too late, for the wheel glanced a tree and the barouche overturned, smashing against the row of oak trees lining the main drive leading to the Government House gates. The newspapers recounted that: 'Its occupants were dashed out with great violence. Lady Mary fell on her head, fracturing the base of the skull, causing blood to flow rapidly from her mouth and ears. His Excellency escaped with trifling injuries'.²⁷ A doctor was summoned and arrived within six or seven minutes but Lady Mary died almost immediately, still pinned under the hood of the coach and uttering only the words: 'Sir Charles'. Charles Masters lingered on until evening. The footman, like his master, was fortunate to escape with minor injuries.

The joint funeral of Lady Mary and Charles Masters, at which FitzRoy, curiously enough in view of his relatively slight injuries, felt unable to attend,²⁸ was held on

9 December and was remarkable for its size. Though the interment itself was intended to be a private ceremony, the service brought all Sydney to a halt, with most businesses and all government offices being closed and the streets deserted. It was clear that the accident had touched a chord with ordinary people, for on every hand a pall of gloom descended and everyone appeared downcast. Over four thousand people came to pay their respects and there were over eight hundred mourners in the funeral procession.²⁹ A continuous line of carriages bearing the upper classes filled the road from Sydney to Parramatta, while crowded steamers disgorged passengers by the hundreds and yet more people poured in on foot from all directions.

The effect that the ceremony had on this huge crowd was truly remarkable. St. John's Parramatta was packed but the majority stood outside the building in a subdued mood giving the police little to do but keep the roadway clear for the cortege and the official mourners as they left the church to go the burial-ground. At the actual interment, the crowds joined in the responses and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the newspaper reported that 'the effect was a thrilling one. When the benediction was pronounced there was scarcely a dry eye'. What struck the reporter was the fact that there was no disorderly behaviour—the huge press of on-lookers apparently numbed by a sense of bewilderment and loss. The only sign of stress apparent amongst the crowd occurred when the coffins were conveyed to the vault, but even then there was no sign of 'its usual concomitants, violence and harsh language'. The *Sydney Morning Herald* compared this remarkable public response with the spontaneous outpouring of grief for the death in childbirth in 1817 of Princess Charlotte Augusta, the only child of the future George IV, which occasioned great anxiety since it threw open the question of succession to the throne.³⁰

The shock waves generated by Lady Mary's untimely death spread quickly throughout the neighboring colonies provoking the same spontaneous public and private expressions of dismay and personal loss, for the most part couched in conventional terms.³¹ However, Georgiana McCrae's diary entry concerning the event concluded with a distinctly ambiguous phrase: 'Sir Charles, the Jehu!'³² which stands in marked contrast to the usual acceptance of the accident as 'one of those sad and solemn casualties to which we are all liable'. Taken together with the remarkable fact of the non-attendance of the Governor at his wife's funeral, this passage hints at an unstated but perhaps widely held apportionment of blame. McCrae, an illegitimate daughter of the Duke of Argyll, had been born and raised in the same raffish Regency world that had spawned the Graftons and FitzRoy and knew its workings too well to confuse the risk-taking antics of a superannuated rake like FitzRoy with mere bad luck.

Moreover, she had had considerable personal experience of headstrong, unreasonable and ultimately foolish men whose actions unerringly brought their loved ones to the brink of disaster. In this passage, she seems to have picked her words with especial care: Jehu was a biblical warrior-king of Israel, celebrated for the chariot-borne havoc and slaughter he wrought in God's name.³³ The role of FitzRoy, the remark implies, should have been to protect and nurture, but instead he had exposed

his family to danger though his habitual personal obsession, thereby creating horror instead of harmony.

Mid-nineteenth century English society consciously eschewed an earlier generation's example of such spectacularly independent female travellers as the notorious Lady Archer and the fearless Lady Lade, coach-driving wife of the Prince Regent's Master of the Horse.³⁴ By the middle of the century the dependence of women upon their male escorts for every aspect of their convenience, comfort and safety while travelling was almost total, as shown by McCrae's 1841 description of 'a fearful experience' she endured when she accepted a lift home after dinner with Mr. Meek, Melbourne's first attorney. Belying his name by essaying the canyons of Collins St. at midnight, Meek woke everyone as he did so with his whooping and madcap driving: 'the horse sent at top-speed through the worst country in the world. At one minute we were completely off the ground, at the next, suddenly down again—gutters, three or four feet deep, and everywhere, jagged tree stumps interspersed with boulders!'³⁵ Thus her remark sounds very like a cry from the heart on behalf of all colonial women who, like Lady Mary, found themselves exposed to danger on the road because of deeply ingrained habits of masculine recklessness and risk-taking.

McCrae would have known well that much of the rough-and-tumble education of the Regency gentleman coachman involved deliberately courting risks in order to learn to handle accidents. Amongst those for whom money was no object it was held that no man could be a good coachman unless he had turned his coach over once, for otherwise he would not know how to get it back on its wheels again.³⁶ Reviewing the Parramatta accident against this background, it appears quite likely that FitzRoy actually preferred a rumbustious start, relishing the challenge of bringing his team under his command, at which point they would steady to their work and go quietly. He was not alone in this preference, for a contemporary coaching enthusiast recalled that:

A quiet start was a thing I never cared much about; what I enjoyed as a good lively one, when they [the horses] would be all up in a heap on each other's backs, so to speak, one bolting, another rearing, another throwing herself down, while the fourth might give general rat-tats by some hard kicks against the front boot.³⁷

Perhaps, too, the remark highlights the governor's incessant travels and the eagerness with which he embarked upon them, which did not fit well with the evolving middle-class morality and which warrant closer scrutiny. In the days before railways and the electric telegraph revolutionised communication, travel was an important part of every governor's administration in order to superintend the orderly development of new territories, sort out administrative problems in existing districts as well as to put the stamp of firm government on the infant colony. It was undertaken with the genuine enthusiasm of the trailblazer by Macquarie, La Trobe and Franklin; as an onerous task to be scrupulously discharged by some, like Gipps; and avoided where possible by others, like Denison and especially Sir Thomas Brisbane, who boasted that he rarely ventured outside his Parramatta domain.³⁸ However FitzRoy's

travels appear to be motivated as much by pleasure as official business. It has been suggested that travel in its nineteenth century colonial context is gendered; a masculine discourse about escape from the feminised 'other' represented by stasis, represented by 'home' with all its domestic entanglements.³⁹ Certainly FitzRoy, true to his upbringing as an English gentleman, found the interests of the pastoralists with their large estates and complement of attractive and attentive womenfolk far more congenial than the squalid concerns of Sydney's mercantile elite and he took every opportunity to inform himself fully and at first hand of their affairs. Perhaps his upbringing as a Regency youth inculcated a desire to use the road as a pretext for escaping the intricate net of disagreeable social engagements whenever possible.

Having had a four-in-hand drag built for him by the coachbuilding firm of Martyn of Pitt Street almost as soon as he took up his post, he set out with his entourage in November 1846 to travel to Carcoar across the Blue Mountains, the first of a number of rural progresses he was to undertake, enjoying the hospitality of the colony's great landowners, such as the Icelys, Macarthurs, Dangars and Lawsons.

This and subsequent expeditions of necessity involved Lady Mary, who well knew that her husband was not to be trusted abroad and unaccompanied and so took upon herself the role of guardian of his morals and reputation.⁴⁰ It is probable that the thirty-three days of constant travel during the hotter months of their first year in the colony must have been uncomfortable for Lady Mary, for she did not enjoy robust health. Almost at once, in February 1847, the FitzRois travelled through the Hunter region, looking into the plight of farm labourers, after which Lady Mary fell very ill. Clearly, FitzRoy had few qualms about exposing his family to hardship or even danger, putting a premium on his own interests and pleasure at all times.

It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast in travelling styles between FitzRoy and Superintendent La Trobe, the Governor of Victoria, a man moulded in the new pattern of evangelical masculinity, who was described by the devout but shrewd squatter Anne Drysdale as 'an excellent pious man'.⁴¹ He kept no carriage at all until left an Irish Jaunting or 'outside' car in the will of J. D. Lyon Campbell when he died at 35. The chance acquisition did nothing to enhance the governor's status whatever pleasure it brought to himself and his family, as a Jaunting car was hardly considered a carriage at all, being fit only for Irish peasantry rather than a gentleman. Even McCrae, who could ill-afford to be snobbish about carriages, noted its change of ownership in grandiloquent fashion: '8th April 1845 ... the La Trobes came in their jaunting-car'. Even when his salary at last reached a level that enabled him to afford the luxury of a coach that was undisputedly above reproach,⁴² La Trobe carefully avoided any ostentatious display of his new status as a gentleman whip, such as FitzRoy sought with his remodelling of the Domain,⁴³ and his frequent expeditions and trips around Sydney in his immaculate turnout. Not for La Trobe the extensive stabling, blood horses, liveried servants or custom-made carriages. Edward La Trobe Bateman's drawing of the stables and hay house at Jolimont show a rather bucolic scene with a solitary barouche poking out of the coach house and a figure on horseback who is perhaps the Superintendent himself, at ease in the saddle, yarning

to the stable-hand while a dog ambles by—a far cry from the picture of bustle and spit-and-polish that one imagines the stable-yard at Parramatta would have presented at a similar period.⁴⁴

As a whip, La Trobe avoided risk-taking entirely, ever considerate of the safety of his passengers and the welfare of his horses even if he ran the risk of appearing as a milquetoast or if his turnout presented but a plain picture compared to that of his dashing New South Wales counterpart. On 16 November 1850, McCrae, standing in for Mme. Sophia La Trobe who was indisposed by a neuralgic headache, accompanied La Trobe and his family to the opening of Princes Bridge in the open coach and pair, driven by La Trobe's Private Secretary, Edward Bell. The party drove sedately to the Treasury, whereupon:

Mr. Bell changed places with His Honour who drove us, more slowly than his predecessor, to ... our proper stand—beside the Bishop's barouche [awaiting] the signal for us to set out for the bridge. Mr. La Trobe gathered up the reins and we proceeded at a majestic pace until we reached the middle of the arch.⁴⁵

Such sobriety of manner by no means indicated a lack of taste for adventure, for La Trobe was an enthusiastic and observant traveller, avid in his pursuit of the scientifically interesting and the scenically thought-provoking whenever his official duties allowed this indulgence. But if he travelled alone it could scarcely be claimed that he travelled to escape from domestic entanglements. Much to his dismay, Mme. Sophie La Trobe's precarious health frequently prevented her from accompanying him as he longed to share the new sights of the new country with her. He was never happier than during the infrequent times when 'dear S. and little Charles' could travel with him as they did when he visited the Dandenong district.⁴⁶ However, his personal conduct was such that Sophie never felt obliged to accompany him wherever he went. Ironically for such a model of uxoriousness, while La Trobe was absent on his travels in 1848, she suffered a fall while out in the jaunting car and the family dated her subsequent gradual decline which ended in her death in 1854 from that accident.⁴⁷

Eleanor Stephen wrote resignedly to her daughter in January 1848 that 'The mourning for poor Lady Mary is now laid aside, and her name will soon cease to be mentioned 'yet her lamentable death stubbornly refuses to fade entirely from public memory'.⁴⁸ Intrigued by the accounts of the remarkable outpouring of public grief, some historians have selected the fatal accident at Parramatta as a pivotal event in their narrative, though the degree of significance that has been attributed to the event has varied considerably.⁴⁹ What was it about this accident that has caused its memory to linger?

At the most superficial level it could be said that carriage accidents, though less spectacular than shipwrecks, always generated a sense of *schadenfreude*, the more so since they nearly always involved rich or famous people. Gory accidents, then as now, sold newspapers and even when no loss of life resulted, they were still highly newsworthy.⁵⁰ They could yet become the stuff of story and even legend and assume

a life of their own.⁵¹ Certainly, the story of the death of Lady Mary gathered its own legends about it soon enough. Recording the death of her friend, Emmeline Macarthur wrote in her diary:

I may note a strange coincidence. Lady Mary had a favourite parrot that said her name distinctly and frequently, and his talent of speaking afforded us much amusement. She had charged the footman to carry the cage to the steamer, not to place it on the cart. Whilst at breakfast, the footman returned to say that the bird had fallen dead as he turned into the avenue; when less than two hours later, Lady Mary was killed on the same spot.⁵²

Old Government House Parramatta today finds a place in popular books, and latterly, web sites dealing with haunted Australia, which recount the death of Lady Mary to a new generation.

It was an age which relished any opportunity to point morals and found gloomy satisfaction in 'edifying deaths'. The Parramatta accident certainly provided a dramatic object-lesson in how the figurehead of the colony, one 'occupying the highest place in the most elevated rank of our female community—the consort of one who represents our august sovereign' could suddenly be brought low. The thought prompted Macarthur to record piously: 'No words can tell what a mockery & what a sign of the uncertainty of earthly happiness, the present was then to the past'.

So high was the universal high regard in which Lady Mary was held after such a short stay in New South Wales that it is tempting to see the outpouring of feeling as mourning for the loss of a symbol of the new femininity whose guiding light was Queen Victoria herself, as much as for that of a flesh-and-blood woman, though her obituaries laid considerable stress upon her 'dignified and unaffected manners and amiable disposition' adjudging her as 'possessing all the virtues and graces which form the brightest ornaments of her sex'.⁵³

Certainly, her outlook and behaviour accorded well with the new spirit of the Victorian age and its changing concepts of the role of women. Davidoff's work has been fundamental in explicating the changing models of femininity in the Victorian age, but one aspect of the evolving 'oppositional' and evangelical culture which was closely identified with the growth and consolidation of middle-class power throughout the course of the nineteenth century. The eighteenth century concept of marriage prevailing in aristocratic circles, in which the union served to build and reinforce networks of power, patronage and influence frequently permitted women to wield considerable political power as they presided over country house gatherings or London salons. At the same time in middle-class circles, the economic value of married women and their daughters to the family enterprise was acknowledged and without their input the success of most small business enterprises might have been problematical. These models were gradually replaced in the nineteenth century by a new compact through which middle-class and later, upper-class women, relinquished their influence and independence in the world in favour of domestic seclusion and subordination to paternalistic direction and protection upon marriage.

A woman's realm was the home, which she turned into a bulwark of love and sympathy to protect her husband, sons and brothers against the cruel, unfeeling world, which was their sphere of endeavour. As if in return for their loss of overt power, women exerted subtle but nevertheless pervasive influence maintaining the fabric of society through their ability to direct all aspects of domestic life, especially the subtle but all-pervasive regulation of entry into society and enforcing standards of morality expressed in the code of etiquette.⁵⁴

As the wife of a man somewhat naively characterised early in his term in the colony as 'a plain, simple, unaffected, high-souled Christian gentleman',⁵⁵ Lady Mary appeared to provide the perfect exemplar of the ideal middle-class married woman, despite her impeccable aristocratic origins. Unlike the much-maligned Lady Franklin, who was widely and unjustly supposed to be the power behind the governor, drafting Sir John's correspondence and dispatches,⁵⁶ Lady Mary played no obvious part in the machinery of government. Instead, her influence was confined to the domestic and social side of official life, where the open-handedness of the FitzRoy regime stood in marked and welcome contrast with the parsimony of the Gippseys. Lady Mary successfully set the tone of colonial society and organised the balls, dinners, visits and entertainments upon which the very lifeblood of polite society depended. This she managed with great tact and without undue condescension or discrimination, mixing as freely with the colonial grandees and their wives as with those of the lower orders. Like a mother solicitous for the wellbeing of her children, she was widely acknowledged as much for the depth of her knowledge of people's concerns as for her genuine compassion and practical organising skills as she went about aiding disaster victims or inquiring into the lives of the rural poor.

As she performed her numerous public duties, she was simultaneously exercising her role as the moral guardian of her family, striving from the first to keep her husband's libido in check. Her exertions to keep him in check whilst on their travels has been noted. In Sydney, Lady Mary took care to invite a predominantly older age group to her public parties, an action so skillfully handled that a correspondent in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 19 October 1846 to complain in puzzlement:

There are a few beautiful girls in Sydney, Sir Charles, yet those few we have not been favoured with lately at Government House. Surely it is not true that Lady Mary dislikes the young and the pretty. Dances lately consist of elderly ladies, whose dancing days must have past long since ... Those same elderly ladies take the gent's [sic] by force and act so, that the young girls are kept in the back ground.⁵⁷

FitzRoy's sexual peccadilloes after her death became the subject of widespread rumours which began to gather around his person even before the official period of mourning was complete and may have effectively blocked his chances for any further advancement within the Colonial Office. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, at first dismissive of the stories' veracity, was forced to admit their truth, but attributed FitzRoy's behaviour to the carriage accident:

The influence of the Governor is not in what he is, but in what he is thought to be, and the bonds of society are scarcely less injured by the reputation for official delinquency than in its reality. It is unfortunate for Sir Charles that he lost, at an early period, the amiable lady ... the presence of a pure-minded woman in a station so eminent guarantees its atmosphere.⁵⁸

As these stories circulated in the months following the death of Lady Mary, the general feelings of goodwill towards the Governor may have changed. Here, a parallel may be made with the out-pouring of public feeling, much of it fuelled by the tabloid press and gossip and all mutely antagonistic towards the House of Windsor, which surfaced on the occasion of the accidental death and subsequent funeral of Princess Diana and the subdued, grief-stricken crowd which descended on the Parramatta cemetery. In previous decades, FitzRoy's conduct of life which so struck McCrae and incensed John Dunmore Lang might well have escaped without undue comment, whatever private tragedies it wrought. Yet now it seemed grossly out of keeping with contemporary concepts of masculinity and femininity, whose focus was essentially domestic and protective. The very size and silence of the crowd was such a powerful display of public disapproval that the governor preferred not to show himself in public during the funeral.

It was not only FitzRoy's personal conduct which was out of keeping with the spirit of the times. By the time the FitzRois were setting off on their last fateful journey, the 'road' whose glories he was so keen to foster in Australia had long been pronounced defunct in England. For all his interest in 'handling the ribbons' FitzRoy declared himself a supporter of railway development in New South Wales and officiated at sod-turning ceremonies, which eventually ensured that his successors made their vice-regal progresses throughout the colony in the comparative safety and comfort of a railway carriage.⁵⁹

After FitzRoy's departure from office, it is noteworthy that the conduct of successive governors tended to conform to the middle-class, rather than the Regency ideal of masculinity. Certainly no governor until Lord Hopetoun aspired to maintain such stables nor cared to drive himself in such style as Sir Charles deemed appropriate. It is true that successive Victorian governors courted popularity by driving onto the racecourse at Flemington on Cup Day in their four-in-hand drags and that Sir Hercules Robinson, together with 'a few of the leading citizens of Sydney, had been engaged in the establishment of a four-in-hand club' whose aim was the staging of stately progresses or pleasure drives to scenic spots for picnics. These carefully orchestrated ceremonial drives were very different from the 'going-down-the-road' style of high-speed travelling FitzRoy relished. A contemporary wit apostrophised drivers of fashionable late nineteenth century four-in-hand drags horsed with less-than-lively teams thus: 'Here you are, your [sic] four-in-hand swells, with four horses; three on [sic] 'em stands still, while he [sic] whips up the fourth'.⁶⁰

So far and so quickly did the pendulum swing in the opposite direction that Sir William Denison, FitzRoy's immediate successor, was hard-pressed to put together

a suitable escort to accompany the State coach in which he rode to the ceremonial opening of the first Parliament for responsible government in Australia on 22 May 1856. He was forced to impress untrained horses and to put every Government House servant into livery in order to stage a fitting entrance.⁶¹ Later governors so far forgot their viceregal dignity that on occasions when touring inland they went abroad in buggies.⁶² The old order had indeed passed and its like was never seen again.

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Notes

- 1 Old coaching song.
- 2 Godfrey Mundy, *Our Antipodes*, London, 1852, p. 372.
- 3 Venetia Murray, *An elegant madness*, Harmondsworth, 1998, p. 288.
- 4 Marie Walker, *The life & times of Lady Mary FitzRoy*, Maryborough, 1994, p. 10.
- 5 In the face of growing tide of innuendo concerning the lack of discrimination governing entrée to Government House, FitzRoy was forced to defend his guest list at the 1847 Queen's Birthday Ball by pointing out that the cost of the entertainment was defrayed by himself, Rollo Gillespie, *Viceregal quarters*, Sydney, 1975, p. 140.
- 6 Judy Birmingham et al., *Industrial archaeology in Australia*, Melbourne, 1983, p. 124. In 1808 before the road was sealed, it took Lt. James Finucane six hours to travel the twenty-four miles from Sydney, James Finucane, *Distracted settlement: New South Wales after Bligh*, Melbourne, 1998, p. 80.
- 7 Peter Cunningham, *Two years in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1966, p. 43.
- 8 Donald Walker, *British manly exercise*, London, 1832, p. 2. With such endorsements, the style of driving which had established the English mail coach as the envy of the world became the epitome to which gentlemen drivers aspired.
- 9 Fairman Rogers, *A manual of coaching*, London, 1900, p. 351.
- 10 Harold Malet, *Annals of the road*, London, 1876, pp. 286-7.
- 11 The vehicle has been variously described over the years. John Dunmore Lang called it a curricule, Archibald Gilchrist & Gordon Powell, *John Dunmore Lang*, Melbourne, 1999, p. 106, while Manning Clark, *History of Australia*, Melbourne, 1973, vol. 3, p. 378 states that the vehicle was a phaeton, neither of which tally with the contemporary newspaper accounts. These clearly indicate that the four-horse carriage used that day had a dickey seat for the groom and that Lady Mary sat in a separate compartment whose rear seat was shaded by a folding hood, while Masters and FitzRoy were seated on the box, a description which does not match either curricule or phaeton. Curricules were designed to be drawn exclusively by pairs. By 1847 the phaeton had long shed its Regency high-flyer image and had become a much tamer vehicle better suited to the Park than the Road. Most phaetons sported low-set open coachwork and lacked a box seat for the coachman, being driven by the owner from the seat within the carriage body. It would have been most unusual for any contemporary phaeton to be driven by more than a pair of ponies, while the description rules out the heavy-duty Gentleman's or Mail Phaeton, which was often driven four-in-hand but had no hood for the rear passengers and no dickey seat.
- 12 Bishop Broughton noted that the Governor was commonly referred to by 'his loving subjects' as 'King Charles', S.G. Foster, *Colonial improver*, Melbourne, 1978, p. 84.
- 13 Edmund Finn Garryowen, *The chronicles of early Melbourne*, Melbourne, 1888, p. 226; Foster, p. 85. The *South Australian Register* attributed a measure of politic wisdom to the governor's indolence, remarking that 'the power he possessed, Sir Charles FitzRoy has wisely allowed to slumber', John Ward, *Australia's First Governor-General*, Sydney, 1953, p. 21.

- 14 Ward, p. 21.
- 15 Gillespie, p. 134.
- 16 By the close of the century, this type of whip was contrasted unfavourably with the man possessed 'of good judgement and foresight [who] will attain his end without getting into the difficulty at all. In the long run, [this] method is preferable, as it usually better to *keep out of a "fix"* than to get out', Rogers, p. 22.
- 17 Garryowen, pp. 224–5.
- 18 'There is a tradition with horsebreeders that sees all domestic horses as hotbloods, warmbloods, or coldbloods. These three types have nothing to do with body temperatures but with the breeding and origins of the various types of horse. There are two kinds of hotbloods, the Arabs and the Thoroughbreds', Desmond Morris, *Horsewatching*, New York, 1988, p. 92.
- 19 Until the 1858 introduction to Australia of the Rarey system of horse schooling which relied upon the application of horse psychology rather than brute strength, horse-breaking in Australia was an imperfect business where the results could never be guaranteed and usually resembled 'a contest of strength between man and horse, the result of which was an exhausted horse with a broken spirit', Gerald Walsh, *Pioneering days*, Sydney, 1993, pp. 33–40.
- 20 Phillip Barnard Brown, coach driver for John Allison Monkhouse [pers. comm. 2 March 1901].
- 21 Thomas Ann Cole, Diary 7 November 1868, La Trobe Library MS 10570. In accepting the resignation, perhaps Sir Charles saw himself as cast in the same mould as Nimrod's acclaimed coachman-baronet Sir John Fagg. As early as 1852, John Dunmore Lang advanced the view that 'the governor was *imprudently* acting as charioteer', A. Gilchrist, *John Dunmore Lang*, Melbourne, 1951, p. 542 (italics mine).
- 22 The minute inspection conducted by Sir John Fagg Bt. before setting out on a driving expedition shows how this should be done: 'As a naval officer manning his vessel for a voyage would not presume to leave the port till every, even the least, article was provided; so neither would the worthy baronet think of mounting his box till every buckle, every rein, was drawn together in its proper place. Thus it is that he is capable of holding his cattle as it were in his little finger', Malet, p. 286–7. Corbett stresses the importance of a rigorous pre-departure checking on the part of the driver in order to 'prevent any necessity for sorting the reins after having mounted the box, and thus enabling him to start without a moment's delay', Edward Corbett, *An old coachman's chatter*, 1974, p. 248.
- 23 Mrs. Humphrey, *Manners for men*, Whitstable, 1897, pp. 4–49.
- 24 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1847, p. 2.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Rogers, p. 355.
- 27 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1847.
- 28 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December 1847.
- 29 Large funerals were by no means uncommon; that of John Dunmore Lang in August 1878 was attended by a crowd of at least three thousand and the procession stretched over a mile in length. Unlike Lady Mary however, Lang's association with the colony was long-standing if at times somewhat turbulent and dated back to 1823; D. Baker, *Preacher, politician, patriot: a life of John Dunmore Lang*, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 209–10.
- 30 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December 1847.
- 31 In March 1848, the Melbourne merchant James Graham wrote of 'poor Lady Mary's melancholy end' to a colonial friend now living in London, commenting on 'the gloom it threw over the whole Colony', Sally Graham, *Pioneer Merchant*, Melbourne, 1985, p. 189. The prosaic Victorian squatter George Russell, *en route* Home, made a detour to Parramatta mainly to see the Wool Manufactory, yet 'visited the spot where Lady Fitz Roy was killed by a fall from her carriage', P.L. Brown (ed.), *The narrative of George Russell of Golf Hill*, London, 1935, p. 262.

- 32 Georgiana McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal*, Sydney, 1966, p. 250.
- 33 3 *Kings* 19:16. Throughout the nineteenth century Jehu was the name commonly and facetiously applied (mostly with a lower case 'j') to any hack driver whose spirit outran his skill, with no worse result than mild consternation on the part of his passengers.
- 34 Hugh McCausland, *Old sporting characters*, London, 1948, pp. 61-62.
- 35 McCrae, p. 56.
- 36 *Coaching days of England*, London, 1966, p. 30. The same element of risk-taking was seen in early colonial Melbourne: 'Driving home from one of the first-named entertainments, through the lamp-less streets, a carriage, piloted by a gallant officer, came to grief against a stump. The ladies were thrown out, the carriage thrown over, and the charioteer fractured. Paterfamilias, absent on business, marked his disapproval of the expedition by resolutely refraining from repairing the vehicle. For years after it stood in the back yard with cracked panels, a monument of domestic miscalculation', Rolf Boldrewood, *Old Melbourne memories*, Melbourne, 1884, p. 4.
- 37 Stanley Harris, *Old coaching days*, London, 1882, p. 264.
- 38 Gilchrist, p. 51.
- 39 Elaine Stratford, 'Gender, place and travel: the case of Elsie Birks, South Australian pioneer', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 66, 2000, p. 123.
- 40 D. Baker, *Days of wrath*, Melbourne, 1985, p. 376.
- 41 Nance Donkin, *Always a lady*, Melbourne, 1990, p. 99.
- 42 McCrae, p. 213.
- 43 By the late 1840s the Sydney Domain had become a fashionable resort following the construction of the new Government House and the laying out of a park with trees and carriage drives, where: 'On Monday afternoons between the hours of four and five the Domain is resorted to by the fashionables and unfashionables of Sydney, eager to listen to the harmonious strains of the band of the 99th Regiment. The carriage folk from Potts Point and other fashionable localities assembled round the ground. The Governor, Sir Charles FitzRoy, his A.D.C., distinguished gentlemen, officials and their ladies frequently appeared on horses, all in the height of equestrian fashion'. Geoffrey Scott, *Sydney's highways of history*, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 170-1.
- 44 Alan Gross, *Charles Joseph La Trobe*, Melbourne, 1956, p. 94.
- 45 McCrae, pp. 206-7.
- 46 Gross, p. 29.
- 47 *Ibid*, p. 95.
- 48 Bedford, p. 62.
- 49 Baker, *Days of wrath*, p. 148.
- 50 *Australasian Sketcher*, 9 August 1873, pp. 90, 82.
- 51 When Bligh summoned Major Johnston to a meeting the day before the start of the Rum Rebellion, Johnston declined to obey, citing injuries resulting from a fall from his gig. Bligh suspected the accident was the result of Johnston's drunken state after a dinner party; Gwyneth Dow, *Samuel Terry*, Sydney, 1974, p. 170. Tradition says the reason a young Cambridge scholar named John Payne, later infamous as Bogong Jack the bushranger, was banished to Australia in the early 1850s was that he had overturned the Edinburgh-London coach between Stamford and Stilton which had resulted in broken bones for the daughter of the local squire who had been illegally occupying the box seat with him; Eric Harding, *Bogong Jack*, Melbourne, 1967, pp. 4-5.
- 52 Jane De Falbe, *My dear Miss Macarthur*, Sydney, 1988, p. 39; http://www.strangenation.com.au/sng_invest_oghp.htm.
- 53 Melbourne *Argus*, 13 December 1847, p. 3; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December 1847, p. 3.
- 54 Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes*, London, 1987, pp. 21-25; Leonore

Davidoff, *The best circles*, London, 1973, p. 16.

55 Clark, p. 343

56 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Sir John Franklin in Tasmania*, Melbourne, 1949, p. 242.

57 Gillespie, p. 135

58 Quoted in Geoffrey Scott, *Sydney's Highways of History*, pp. 171–2.

59 This account of the progress of Sir George Bowen to Sandhurst is indicative of the style of vice-regal travelling in the second half of the century: 'The station platform was lined with spectators and vociferous cheers were given as the train stopped ... His Excellency was then escorted to a handsome carriage, drawn by two grey horses and the procession which had been arranged to conduct him as a guard of honour was formed'. *Australasian Sketcher*, November 1873 p. 151.

60 *Australasian Sketcher*, 12 July 1873 p. 66; Harris, p. 124.

61 Gwendoline Wilson, *Murray of Yarralumla*, Melbourne, 1968, p. 244.

62 Hugh McGregor, *Horse & buggy days*, Canberra, 1981, p. 85.