

Melbourne and Mr M called on Mr W.

 27
 before we were seven introduced to a young
 lady. Got home and had supper. After
 which went up and saw all of them
 and then got ready for the theatre. For
 I was in for the play James. I had
 the pleasure of meeting Mr M. by con-
 veyance of some Royal Mail whom I
 recognised at once. I did not expect that
 I promised to meet him at 9 o'clock.
 But he did not keep his appointment
 although I came out of the theatre
 to see him. He told me he was to leave
 for the Green gold fields next morning
 early. That he had been to Sydney back
 Diggins where his partner Dick had
 died and his wife & child. Had the
 pleasure of seeing some mounted
 in the theatre in the process of
 the Bacchus Minstrels. Saw a dancing
 Caravan in the play of the Archer
 in the fourth and the pantomime
 of the Moon of Chatterbox &c.
 It was a very laughable and well
 got up affair. The scenery was
 gorgeous. and reflects credit on the
 artists of Coppin & Co. Got
 home at 10 o'clock and had a drink
 turned in. The weather today was very
 fine, although a good deal of
 dust was flying about.

Friday 28th Dec
 I went out about 8 o'clock had
 breakfast and a walk down by the
 swamp. Took enjoyment in passing
 a place for an engine the bridge
 of which he is fast. For which he
 has a salary of 50 pounds a month.
 Mr M. found I went down to town
 called &

Entry for 28 December 1855, Diary of a miner working on the Ballarat goldfields, 8 July 1855 – 1 January 1856, p. 214. Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 13681

Diary of a miner working on the Ballarat goldfields

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 13681

Acquired 2009

This anonymous diary records in fascinating detail six months, from 8 July 1855 to 1 January 1856, in the life of a Ballarat gold miner. It is closely written in black ink in a ruled cash book bound in black leather. The cover is well worn, with tears on the spine and a broken brass clasp, and there are no stationer's labels or identifying marks. It opens with the following typical entry:

Got up about 9 o'clock. Had breakfast and accompanied John Adams, Dugie Weir, Jim Young & Bill Douglas out to Magpie Gully to assist in erecting their log hut. Engaged all day in getting up the logs and building chimney. Returned after sunset pretty tired and hungry. Supped on cold duff and beefsteak or mutton pie ... Weather very unsettled, occasional showers of rain and glimpses of sunshine today.

The diary was acquired from Melbourne antiquarian bookseller Kay Craddock, with funds raised by the State Library Victoria Foundation Ballarat Goldfields Diary Appeal. Kay and Muriel Craddock had created a transcript of and name index for the diary before offering it for sale. The Library prepared digital images of the entire diary, and, with the vital assistance of volunteers, proofread and formatted the transcript. These resources have become very useful for detailed analysis of the diary.¹

The diarist's identity is the subject of ongoing research. His handwriting, spelling, grammar and talent for description suggest a good education. From the diary, we know that he came from Dumbarton, north-west of Glasgow;² that his doctor felt that he was too delicate for the arduous life of a miner; that he enjoyed a good meal and a few drinks, or 'nobbler's', as he called them; and that he could afford to lend money to friends.

On 23 December 1855, the diarist set off for town to visit friends and to celebrate Hogmanay, or New Year.³ He and fellow digger John Forbes stayed in North Melbourne with John's sister Catherine and her grocer husband, Alexander Morrison, and their children. The diarist bought a felt hat from tailor James McGaw, who had immigrated with the Morrison family on the *Aberfoyle* in 1852. These people and our diarist were all associated with Dumbarton and were part of a close-knit and patriotic Scottish immigrant community in Victoria. We hope our further research will reveal the identity of the author of this important goldfields diary.