

**Rachel Solomon**  
***The Victorian Diaries of a Welsh Swagman***  
**(1869-1894)**

**Introduction**

In 1997 the State Library of Victoria acquired the Victorian diaries of Joseph Jenkins, comprising part of each of 1869, 1870 and 1871-94.<sup>1</sup> After Joseph Jenkins' death in 1898, in Wales, the diaries were stored in the attic of his daughter Elinor's farmhouse and, it seems, were forgotten until seventy years later when they were discovered by his great granddaughter, Frances Evans. His grandson, William Evans, thereafter published an 'Abridged and Annotated' version of the Australian diaries as *Diary of a Welsh Swagman 1869-1894*.<sup>2</sup> This was an important publication. It not only introduced Jenkins to a reading public, but in addition has become a well-regarded historical account of early Victoria.

A Victorian man, Peter Bristow, became interested in the original manuscripts and pursued the possibility of having them returned to Victoria. This subsequently led to their purchase by the State Library of Victoria (hereafter SLV).<sup>3</sup> They now take a pride of place as one of only twenty-one items listed online in the Library's 'Treasures and Curios' collection. The Library is currently undertaking a project to transcribe and digitise the manuscript diaries and, thereby, allow for easier access to the full content. William Evans' version is more limited, comprising an edited, altered and re-presented version of his grandfather's writings.

This article reviews the diaries in a Victorian context. It commences with the circumstances in which Joseph Jenkins suddenly departed from Wales and sailed to Victoria. It concludes with the circumstances in which, many years later, Jenkins left Victoria and returned to Wales.

The diaries are perhaps most significant for what they reveal of aspects of life in Victoria over a twenty-five year period. Particular observations have been selected for discussion: some to illustrate Jenkins' insights into issues which continue to be relevant today, some to illustrate his convictions about specific topics, and others for his perspective on certain historical events that contributed to the development of the Colony.

Some time is spent on the physical structure of the diaries, the manner in which Jenkins wrote them, and kept them safe, and the motivations he had for keeping a daily diary. These motivations, along with his particular rules for content and composition, are viewed in the context of his general beliefs and philosophies.

In addition, his journey, as told through the diaries, is viewed through the framework of his principles.

## An Abrupt Departure from Wales

Joseph Jenkins (1818-1898), made a sudden decision in 1868 at age fifty, to abandon a life of unhappiness in Wales to journey alone, first by train from his home at Trecefel farm, Tregaron, and then by the cargo ship *Eurynome* from Liverpool to Australia. He left behind a wife and eight children (one had died earlier). He had been an active member of his Welsh community as an educationalist, poet, political and social activist, celebrated farmer and ‘visionary in the field of farming machinery’,<sup>4</sup> yet his despair and his sense of betrayal were so great that he sacrificed all comforts of home and reinvented himself as an itinerant labourer, a swagman, in the new colony of Victoria.<sup>5</sup>

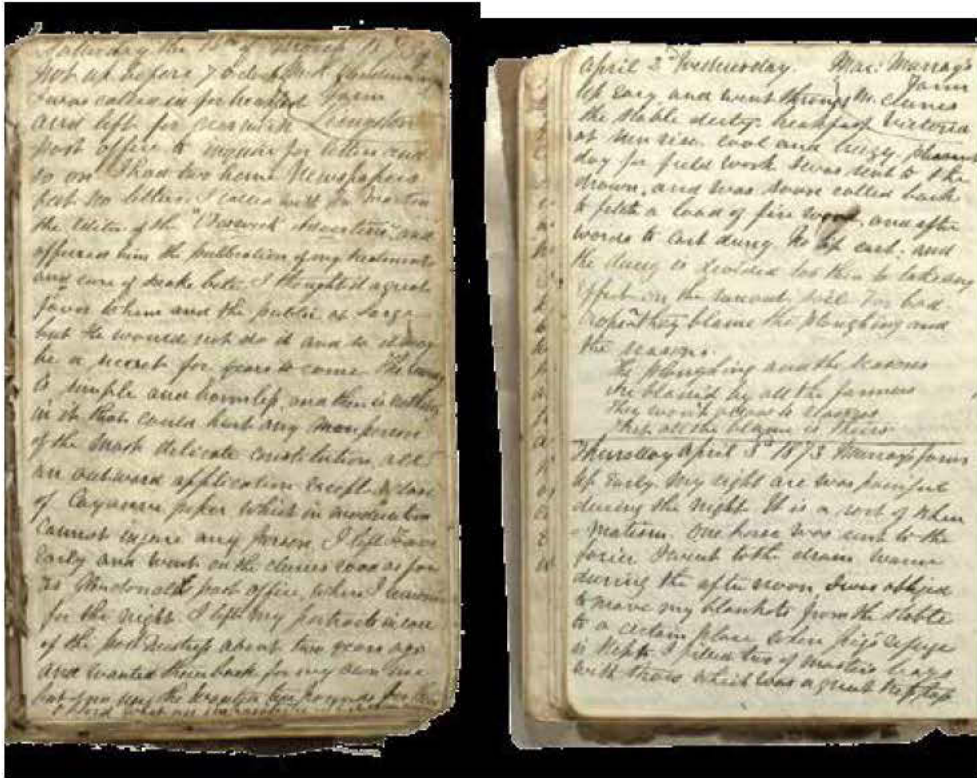
Explanation for this extraordinary break is inconsistent and, at times, veiled. The diaries kept by Jenkins in Australia contain hints and furtive references to marital issues and political disagreements. Making sense of these allusions is not easy. Extracts from his earlier Welsh diaries shed some light.<sup>6</sup> For example, during his stay at the Castlemaine Hospital in Victoria in 1878, Jenkins compared his pain to that inflicted by ‘the Female devil at Trecefel who was and is the very cause of it through twisting my testicles at different times without the least provocation’.<sup>7</sup> In an earlier diary from Wales (May 1868), Jenkins claimed that his son Lewis, wife Betty, two daughters Margaret and Elinor and their maid attempted to murder him in his sleep and for two hours, thereafter, causing him a range of injuries, including the breaking of ribs.<sup>8</sup>

Jenkins’ account of this attempt on his life, whether accurate or exaggerated, reflects a breaking point in the increasingly tense home environment, which can be traced back to earlier events, particularly the death of the eldest Jenkins child, Jenkin, in 1863. Hostilities between Joseph and Betty began to surface at this point, and a chain of unfortunate responses transpired. The foremost of these was Joseph’s increasing reliance on alcohol. Financial mismanagement and dependency on Betty’s father for assistance, Betty’s despondency, neglect of the farm, and personal and political divisions followed. In 1868, the ninth Jenkins child was born: Jenkins had expressed incomprehension at the news of the pregnancy.<sup>9</sup> 1868 was also a contentious year for Jenkins when his support for the Tory over the Liberal candidate in the general election saw him reviled by his fellow tenant farmers.

In anecdotal evidence from a conversation with Joseph Jenkins’ grandson and editor, William Evans, it was said by Evans that the difficulties between Jenkins and his wife stemmed from the illness their son. Evans claimed that Jenkin Jenkins contracted pneumonia, later to be the cause of his death, after being made to work long hours by his father in terrible weather. He claimed that Betty was never able to forgive her husband.<sup>10</sup> This may have been the story told to Evans, or one which Evans himself authored. In fact, Jenkin died at age seventeen from tuberculosis.<sup>11</sup> William Evans, in his ‘Introduction’ to *Diary of a Welsh Swagman*, was careful to preserve the dignity of the family in examining the cause of Jenkins sudden departure from Wales. He specifically excluded alcoholism from Jenkins’ history.<sup>12</sup>



Joseph Jenkins, carte de visite, reproduced opposite page 278 of Bethan Phillips, *Pity the Swagman: the Australian odyssey of a Victorian diarist*, Aberystwyth: Cymdeithas Lyfrau Ceredigion Gyf, 2002. This and other images of Jenkins can also be viewed on Google Images.



Jenkins diary entry for 15 March 1873

Jenkins diary entries for 2 and 3 April 1873.

## The Ongoing Significance of the Diaries

The significance of the diaries is twofold. Firstly, the diaries themselves tell a marvellous tale. Although Jenkins' flight from his home and his family makes for a unique and intriguing story, his greatest legacy and most significant contribution is the story he related of colonial life. During his twenty-five year sojourn in Australia, he diligently and carefully kept a daily diary. Few such examples chronicling the adventures of a lower class labourer have surfaced from colonial times.<sup>13</sup>

A brief survey of known published and unpublished nineteenth century diary writing in Victoria reveals some similarities, but also marked differences in content and extent.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately there is no listing of extant diaries in private collections and institutions in Australia. Furthermore, diary studies have largely been avoided in archival and academic considerations due to the problematic nature of categorising and defining what actually constitutes a diary.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the task of accurately positioning and

evaluating the worth of Jenkins' Victorian diaries is difficult. It should also be noted that the Victorian diaries form part of a larger oeuvre which began in Wales in 1839 and were concluded in the same place in 1898.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, the diaries have provided a springboard for a body of further research across a variety of disciplines. The following examples demonstrate the wide ranging areas of interest generated by the diaries. The most notable is the biography by Bethan Phillips. Previous to her biography *Pity the Swagman*, she published a study in Welsh, *Rhwng Dau Fyd* (1998). She also wrote two film scripts, one in English and one in Welsh, based on Jenkins' diaries.<sup>17</sup>

Each of Lewis Lloyd and Ethne Jeffreys has written a chapter on Joseph Jenkins in their respective studies of 'Australians from Wales' and 'Welsh Australians' based on William Evans' *Diary of a Welsh Swagman*. Robert Llewellyn Tyler has used information from the diaries as source material for his study of the Welsh in Ballarat for the years 1850-1900.<sup>18</sup>

Miles Fairburn has compared and contrasted Jenkins' plight and diary keeping methods to that of James Cox. Cox emigrated from Wiltshire to work as a casual labourer in New Zealand in 1880. His diaries run from 1888-1925.<sup>19</sup>

Charles Fahey partly quoted William Evans' version of Jenkins' words for the title of his article, "Abusing the Horses and Exploiting the Labourer": the Victorian agricultural and pastoral labourer, 1871-1911'. Jenkins wrote of three characteristics peculiar to the Victorian colonial farmer: 'exhausting the land, abusing the horses and bouncing men.'<sup>20</sup> William Evans changed the last phrase to 'exploiting the labourer'. Fahey has drawn on Jenkins' unique insights into the nineteenth-century rural labour market: 'All that most labourers have left historians are tirades against them in the country press, and entries in station and farm journals.'<sup>21</sup>

Joseph Jenkins' description of the 'white box' timber near Ravenswood was used by Angela Taylor in her study of the Ballarat-Creswick State Forest.<sup>22</sup> William J. Lines quoted Jenkins writing of the degradation of the land by squatters in 1872 in his history of the impact of settlement on nature in Australia.<sup>23</sup>

Inga Clendinnen contrasted Joseph Jenkins with the legendary swagman of Banjo Paterson's 'Waltzing Matilda' in order to explain how national values are created in a political context through the confusion of history and myth and legend: 'Joseph Jenkins was nothing like my old friend in the billabong'. She also noted that Jenkins was not 'typical' of the swagman, if such a category existed beyond the tramping of heavy swags around rural Australia in search of work. He was a thoughtful and an experienced farmer and certainly 'no vagabond, but a solid citizen . . .'<sup>24</sup>

An online article by Gary Hill also alludes in its title to the differences between Jenkins' experiences and that of the national myth, 'Once a Not So Jolly Swagman: the story of Joseph Jenkins.'<sup>25</sup> This in-depth study of Jenkins, with accompanying photographic interpretations, came about as the author was researching another Welshman who came

to Victoria in the nineteenth century, William Meirion Evans. The appeal of Jenkins' story to the author appears to be based on a number of factors including his Welsh background, his place in the history of Victoria, the intellectual nature of his diary musings, and his enigmatic journey from his family and back again.

On 21 April 2013, the Maldon Focus Inc hosted a talk to discuss the diaries and what they reveal about Jenkins' relationship to the town. Shona Dewar, a librarian in the Manuscripts Collection at the State Library of Victoria, explained the processes of preserving and opening up access to the diaries through digitisation and transcription. I outlined the multifarious roles Jenkins played in Maldon where he was the street cleaner for almost a decade.<sup>26</sup> Responses to the talk evidenced ongoing personal and historical links between Jenkins and the town's residents.

## **The Diaries**

The physical structure of the diaries varies and, therefore, they do not appear as a uniform set. Rather, they differ in size, structure and appearance, reflecting the circumstances of their origins. Some are hard covered, lined journals, often with extra pages hand sewn; others are makeshift books which Jenkins constructed with linen or card covers. The first entry in the diaries held in the SLV (24 March 1869) was later copied to a 'more hardy and lighter' book. The very idea of reproducing an earlier entry in a book more agreeable to an itinerant life, tells of the difficulties and constraints the swagman would begin to face in keeping a material record of his experiences. Throughout his wanderings, Jenkins would often need to 'labor under heavy swag'.<sup>27</sup>

In 1875, he made his own diary because he had forgotten that the main shops were closed for New Years' Day. It was important to Jenkins to start the diary no later than the first day of the year. Often he began on the last day of the previous year. A less typical diary is that of 1874. This is a neat, pocket sized official diary which does not accommodate the usual amount of writing. The diaries became more uniform from 1885 when Jenkins was settled in the town of Maldon. From then they were generally larger format, hard covered and lined exercise books or journals. He had a separate and small shipboard diary for the return trip to Wales in 1894.

A typical daily entry follows a basic format: date and place at the top of the entry, followed by time of rising and breakfast, chores performed and a comment on the weather, including the direction of the wind. Entries in which Jenkins expressed a strong view are longer and more detailed. Observations about the work, the crops, and his state of mind and health are also common. On occasions, especially when he felt hard done by, Jenkins referred to himself in the third person. He also changed the narrative tone of a small number of entries from the private to the more testimonial by signing or initialling them.

It was rare for conversation to be recorded, or much to be noted, about co-workers. His Sunday entries usually recorded activities such as washing and darning, and lists of correspondence and reading material. Apart from newspapers, local and Welsh, the

Bible, and Iolo's Psalms,<sup>28</sup> there is perhaps surprisingly little said about what he was reading. In the limited fiction that he allowed himself, Alexander Pope was a favourite and he was delighted with Shakespeare, Milton and Robert Burns. He was so enchanted with Dickens' *David Copperfield* that he wrote and inserted a review in the library copy for the benefit of the next reader.<sup>29</sup> Colonial culture did not seem to reach, or perhaps interest, Jenkins. In Maldon, Jenkins took advantage of George McArthur's private library for books and a space for reading at his bakery: 'In fact it is a Library of poetical and philosophical books of the best type'.<sup>30</sup>

Quill and ink were Jenkins' preferred writing tools. He regretted writing with pencil and suggested that such entries would need to be copied, presumably for permanency.<sup>31</sup> In 1884, he bought some steel pens, but noted that they were 'not equal to the old quill for me'.<sup>32</sup> A downside of using ink was that the cork was prone to coming loose in his pocket and spilling over his diary.<sup>33</sup> The handwriting throughout the twenty-five diaries varies between a tightly worked script, composed in a careful and deliberate manner and an almost illegible scrawl, with little or no punctuation.

As a swagman, Jenkins would often struggle to find suitable writing conditions. His sleeping quarters on the barn floor at William Clarke's farm in Mt Cameron, in 1874, are described as inferior to those of the horses. Fatigue caused by a long day's heavy labouring or travelling also made writing difficult. Nevertheless, he continued each night to record and to reflect on his day. During this same year, he contended with periods of illness, rheumatism in his hand and other injury. He described the increasing weakness in his hands and how he met his obligation to write each day by holding a pencil in his mouth.<sup>34</sup> Four years later, two of the fingers on his right hand were struck by a piece of airborne white quartz from a gold digging. This caused him severe difficulty and pain when writing for the remainder of the year. He ignored the doctor's advice to amputate and instead bound the fingers together for some stability.

## **Safekeeping of the Diaries**

From the outset, Jenkins regarded his manuscript diaries as an important personal and historical set of documents. On March 24 1869, he recorded that he had sent home to Wales his diary of the voyage to Australia, along with a letter, with a man named Richard Jones. He wished it to travel safely and be preserved. The letter accompanying the diary was received first. Eventually the diary also arrived. Whether Jenkins intended it to be returned solely for safekeeping or, differently, as a form of communication with his family, is not evident. Certainly, it was common practice of the time for travellers to send their diaries home as a way of sharing their experiences. In the only known extant letter from Jenkins' wife, Betty, she commented that she has learned something of the cause of his departure from home through letters to their children and her cousin. She did not mention a diary. This could indicate several things: the diary was not meant for perusal by the family, it had not yet arrived (the letter is undated), or it did not offer information on this issue of obvious curiosity for Betty.

It was of ongoing concern to Jenkins that his diaries returned to Wales. In 1886, he recorded in his diary a correspondence in which his nephew, William Lloyd Trefynor, agreed to take possession of and care for the diaries in Wales.<sup>35</sup> The diaries were not sent. After the death of his friend David Evans (Rheola), on whose property he had stored eleven of the diaries, Jenkins anxiously retrieved them before the sale of his land. He began to worry that no one would take the time, effort or expense to ensure that the diaries were appropriately safeguarded and returned to his family.<sup>36</sup> In 1894, the year he returned home, the emphasis of his concern shifted to the survival of the diaries in Wales:

this is the 53rd diary filled by me and 25 of them were filled in Australia I would be glad to see them together before am to die, but most likely that I will not have my desired object fulfilled and very likely that some of them are devoured and burnt by my traitors in Cardiganshire but I cant help that revengeful crime<sup>37</sup>

Fortunately, the Victorian diaries were let be but the final four Welsh diaries were destroyed.

Archivist Michael Piggott suggests that the practice of sending diaries home ensured the travelling diarists were ‘writing themselves into history’ by creating contemporary and future readers.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it was Joseph Jenkins’ wish to create an historical as well as contemporary set of documents. He understood the significance of first-hand accounts, especially in historically formative times. Yet, he also questioned the role of such records in a time when newspapers provided daily, weekly and monthly news and opinions.<sup>39</sup> The content of the diaries suggest that they were written for more than personal record and satisfaction. Much of what is written is more general than personal, and audience is considered and often addressed. Bethan Phillips notes Jenkins’ obsequiousness when referring to the ship’s Captain on the outward journey to Australia was, in all likelihood, because diaries were available for scrutiny in order to protect the shipping company from adverse recordings. Jenkins noted, ‘Anyone found writing against him will be guilty of High Treason!’<sup>40</sup>

For the diaries to have any long-term significance, Jenkins recognised that they needed to survive their time in the Colony. If circumstance would permit, he would entrust to a friend, such as David Evans, his diaries, books and items of clothing for safekeeping. Possessions for the swagman were vulnerable to theft, and this accounts for the gap in his records from April to September 1869. Vandalism was also of concern. On 28 July 1894, intruders had strewn seven of his diaries around his cottage. Humans were not the only vandals however. On 15 August 1889, he complained of rats nibbling at his books. Torn or chewed pages are evident in a number of the diaries. Water and rot also caused damage. The diary for the year 1872 was worst affected. It is remarkable that most of the diaries are still in good condition. Jenkins’ vigilant eye to the future can be credited for this.



## **Motivation and Principles of Diary Keeping**

Joseph Jenkins had some formal education, but much was self-driven.<sup>41</sup> He was first educated by a 'hot-tempered' private tutor and then by a Unitarian minister at a small school five miles from home, who he described as a 'teacher without parallel'. He referred to his education as only 'two quarters of schooling when very young'.<sup>42</sup> He later worked with an 'educated friend in London' to improve his English through a course of correspondence. He continued his self-education through written engagement with journals and newspapers in both Welsh and English. He ascribed the idea of recording his days in diary form as originating from this same desire to learn and to improve his second language, English.<sup>43</sup> It was an extraordinary commitment to continue this task of self-betterment, which he had begun many years earlier in Wales, in the adverse physical conditions which he bore in Victoria. However, Welsh remained his spoken language of choice.<sup>44</sup>

Although almost all the diary entries were written in English, Jenkins most often composed accompanying poetry in Welsh. Perhaps he found the strict format of the Welsh *Englyn* to be a more suitable vehicle for passionate and creative expression than English poetry or prose. A very unusual instance of diary writing in Welsh occurred on 28 May 1878, when Jenkins seemed to struggle with his English and, for the remaining three quarters of the page, lapsed into his native language.

Jenkins' passion for diary writing prompted him, in 1882, to outline a plan in which school children would be presented with blank diaries to 'nurse their learning through life'. He believed that the social, financial and emotional woes of the Colony could begin to be repaired through this simple plan.<sup>45</sup> He stressed the necessity for 'daily' and thus disciplined entries. Here, Jenkins places himself within the scholarly debate about what constitutes a diary, as distinct from journal or other forms of autobiographical writing. The Latin root of the word 'diary' is 'daily allowance', and for Jenkins this distinguishes and defines diary writing. It is never conceived as a unified whole, but rather as a fragmentary record characterised by repetitions, gaps and silences.<sup>46</sup>

Diary writing was the most prolific of his writings, yet it was not the only narrative Jenkins was creating for himself and his readers. He continued a regular correspondence with family and friends, and wrote letters and opinion pieces to newspapers.<sup>47</sup> Poetry also figured as an important form of writing and expression. In some instances there was overlap between these modes of expression, either deliberate or incidental. One such example is a handwritten copy of a letter addressed to the Creswick Police Magistrate in which Jenkins sought to appeal a judgment where his case against the farmer Mr Henry, for payment owing, was dismissed. Here, he demonstrated a different narrative voice and, at the same time, provided a case for the authenticity and truthfulness of contemporary diary records: 'When a working man writes down after finishing his day's labor what more evidence is required above producing his day book in court like Bankers Store Keepers etc.'<sup>48</sup>

The idea of writing daily was of paramount importance and pride to Jenkins. It was, for him, what defined the honest diary record. It was often his practice, in a preamble to a new year and a new diary, to announce the number of the diary, provide a short outline of his life, including his address in Wales, and a statement to the effect that his diaries have been ‘without a blank day’ since he first began writing.<sup>49</sup> The daily record very much became part of the way he defined himself.

Writing daily was a matter of discipline and self-regulation. Writing in the present was a matter of principle:

There are many complete diaries, and rather too complete in one sense. I mean by those that are in the habit of writing upon loose and blank sheets. They buy their paper at the first start of the same size and sort and put them in order after filling them. Those are so clever as to insert a written sheet here and there as to answer their purpose among what was written sometimes months ago, so they make themselves prophets and foretellers of many things—all in disguise. Diaries of those sorts are not only useless but dangerous. Palmer the great Poisoner was not so bad as that in his diary. Through thought forwardness. Then same man may be both a faithful friend and a dangerous enemy. A friend to what is right, and a formidable enemy to what is glaringly wrong. Let my Epitaph run thus Here laid beneath a man in name But short of form, of feat, and fame. Himself.<sup>50</sup>

Immediacy and truth were at the core of Joseph Jenkins’ religious and philosophical outlook, and informed his beliefs on authenticity in autobiographical writing, amongst other things. He reasoned that only contemporaneous and unrevised writing can present a true testament of daily experience.<sup>51</sup> He argued that one should look over a past diary not to revise, but to confront the lessons it has to offer. The past cannot be altered and one should be willing to examine it as it was.<sup>52</sup> This places Jenkins in the tradition of what Miles Fairburn describes as the ‘self-accounting diarist’, a tradition of self-betterment or correction originating in the Reformation.<sup>53</sup>

Often, Jenkins referred to time as being fixed; and man changing. Time ‘is a standard object in nature, and we are on the wing, not the time.’<sup>54</sup> He loathed dishonesty in record keeping as in action. Dishonesty pertains not only to the past, but also the future. Pretence of foreknowledge and promises of future actions were just as dishonest to Jenkins as a misrepresentation of what has been.<sup>55</sup>

Jenkins subscribed to the beliefs of Unitarianism which, he explained, as deriving from the Christian Bible, but differing in interpretation from orthodox Christianity. Unitarianism embraces the idea that Jesus Christ is a spiritually endowed human who provides lessons of the potential of man through love and nature. The unity of God is revealed through nature.

There is pain attached to sin against nature and that is a direct payment not something in future. There is a lasting bliss in unity with doing good.<sup>56</sup>

Nature is incomplete so that man can continue its growth and improvement. It is not imperfect as eternal punishment for Original Sin in the Garden of Eden. Man also improves with time and becomes more civilised. Man is never condemned to either

Heaven or Hell; redemption from sin can be achieved during one's lifetime.<sup>57</sup> Hence, Jenkins aimed to live fully and well in the present, ever aware of nature.

Jenkins became an avid reader of the Bible, both *The Old Testament* and *The New Testament*, on the journey to Australia and continued to study it in earnest thereafter.<sup>58</sup> Irregularly, he attended a convenient Christian Sunday service, but was usually dissatisfied with the religious interpretation offered in the sermon. The idea of an ornamental building as a House of God was itself antipathetic to his ideas of Divine communion and charity to fellow man.<sup>59</sup> His Sunday reading regularly included the Bible and a sermon. He often recalled his favourite sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, and the saying 'Do unto others as you would others do unto you'.<sup>60</sup> Notions of justice and fairness are essential to Unitarian ideas of living presently and productively.

Jenkins' concern with these ideas is evident in the diary entries recording the injustices he perceived around him. These entries are often his most lengthy and passionate. On 4 September 1873, Jenkins wrote two pages as his 'daily allowance' and followed with another nine pages of 'Observations of the Week', in which he addressed such issues as the treatment of labourers, particularly swagmen. He lamented the taking of land from the Aborigines and its subsequent mishandling, and for this he blamed the government for encouraging greed and power. He also expressed his horror at the shearing sheep too close to the skin. These were for Jenkins examples of sins against Nature.

Such entries are the most rewarding for the reader, particularly as many of the views Jenkins expressed are contrary to the prevailing views of the time. His concern that he might have been replicating history, as told in the contemporary daily or weekly newspapers, is not met. Many of Jenkins' attitudes were progressive. Some, such as concern for women's rights and suffrage, were not: 'women suffrage will turn this world upside down!!'.<sup>61</sup> In regard to race relations and the land, Jenkins was sensitive and thoughtful. The connection between white man's ignorance and greed toward the land and his refusal to take lessons from the Aborigines is a recurrent theme. The writing is always emotionally charged on this topic. Writing of the large landholders who refuse to fertilise their crops with manure, he said: 'Their land is not half the value now as to what it was when they bought from the thieves who stole from the natives'.<sup>62</sup> Tom Griffiths suggests that nineteenth century 'Historians and scientists, collectors and naturalists' were inevitably drawn to questions about Aboriginal culture in their contemplation of nature and its relation to the past.<sup>63</sup> So too, Jenkins regarded indigenous history when discussing land issues.

Jenkins' admiration for the natives is also evident in the personal encounters he recorded in his diaries. In July 1874, in Maryborough Hospital, he was disturbed by the treatment of an Aboriginal man after his death. He described him as treated fairly during his awful illness, but 'No more heed or notice taken of his death than if he was a common fly or moth'.<sup>64</sup> Jenkins was so moved by this incident that he wrote a poem to accompany this diary entry. Later, the same year, Jenkins recounted a conversation he had with an

officer at the Inglewood Hospital on the topic of the killing of the Aborigines. Jenkins questioned the assumption of authority by the Europeans over the natives.<sup>65</sup> In July 1887 he took pity on a hungry Aboriginal man named Equinhup, otherwise known as ‘Tom Clark’, and invited him into his cottage to share a meal and a blanket for the evening.<sup>66</sup> The following day he gave him nearly a pound in silver, with the promise of more, and a letter written on Equinhup’s behalf, petitioning the Railway Commissioners for compensation for land taken: ‘As I am the last of the Aboriginal tribe in this part. So I do humbly wish you to compare the title deeds. I had mine from the Author of Nature, and the land under all the railways is titled by the white man’s lawyers, bush man, bush manners’. A promise of payment for compensation was obtained and Equinhup received ‘20 shillings in silver with a promise for more’.<sup>67</sup>

Jenkins was open to learning from the Chinese whom he describes as ‘kind and hospitable people’ who are good with their crops. He believed that their lack of assimilation was due mainly to the language barrier.<sup>68</sup> In 1871, Jenkins was horrified by the census which recorded Aborigines and Chinese separately to that of the general population. As well as the obvious prejudice of the record keeping, the numbers themselves testify to a diminished indigenous population. According to Jenkins, the Colony at that point comprised 729,654 plus 17,813 Chinese and 859 Aborigines.<sup>69</sup>

## **Observations on Colonial Victoria**

Joseph Jenkins’ conscientious attempt to capture the present truth, as he saw it, provides valuable comment on himself, early Victoria, and the world beyond. The topics that sparked his interest are numerous and vast. He was an interested man living in and recording interesting times. The twenty-five years Jenkins spent in Victoria were full of excitement and change and, also, devastation and impoverishment.

The rush for gold had a profound effect on the formation of Victoria. Immigrants came from places other than Britain bringing with them their own cultures: ‘The search is open to ev’ry race’.<sup>70</sup> Railway links, ports and gold-boom towns were established. Jenkins nicknamed Castlemaine ‘Golden Town’, as he could see no reason other than gold for a town to be built on unproductive land.<sup>71</sup> He noted, but not regretfully, that he had arrived in the Colony too late to be part of the gold boom 1851-60.<sup>72</sup> His diary entries indicate growing personal, social and economic struggles associated with the decline in gold more often than triumphs. People were leaving the gold fields with ‘nothing but hunger and poverty’.<sup>73</sup>

Jenkins had been in Victoria for over five years before he tried his luck at digging for gold.<sup>74</sup> He did so during a period of recuperation from illness, when he was still unfit for farm labour. Twenty years later, he declared that it was not to be his luck or destiny to find gold: ‘Gold never glitter in my hand and never will’. He forfeited his own shares in gold reefs which had become worthless.<sup>75</sup> The endless chatter about gold by Sunday visitors to his cottage was tedious and uninteresting. As with farming and agriculture, he was interested in the progress in machinery, including diamond drills from America

which were being used to bore for gold.<sup>76</sup>

In line with his general outlook on work and nature, Jenkins found it more satisfying to work hard to make the land more productive than to exhaust it for personal wealth. He was ambivalent about the rewards of finding gold. He enjoyed freedom from the complexities and burdens of material excess: 'Those who possess their command on gold and land have more to lament on their death bed than the penniless man could bear to trouble his hour of dissolution.'<sup>77</sup>

Although Jenkins embraced the long hours and the hard work of farm labour, he was generally critical of farming methods and practices in the Colony. In 1873, he complained that labourers were employed for short periods at a time only, thus leaving fertile land neglected and empty for many months of the year. He felt that if lease holders were obliged either to employ labourers or pay tax on their land, they would be encouraged to increase productivity.<sup>78</sup> He noted that many farmers were unprepared for circumstances such as drought and bushfire. Provision was not made for water tanks and dams to prevent the deaths of livestock and crops.<sup>79</sup> He regularly expressed the view that Victoria contained ample fertile land, and that if cultivated correctly, or for greatest benefit, could offer prosperity in the years when it would otherwise struggle to provide basic provisions.<sup>80</sup>

Jenkins was engaged with the political news of the day and held strong views on particular politicians and policy. During his time in the Colony, he witnessed seventeen changes in government, including multiple, and not necessarily successive, terms for some Premiers. He saw two primary reasons for this instability. First, the ineffectual bicameral system of the Parliament required for a bill to pass a majority in both the Legislative Assembly and also in the ultra-conservative upper house Council. Deadlocks became a feature of attempts to pass legislation and no provision existed for resolution.<sup>81</sup> Disappointed with the result of the February 1880 election, Jenkins sought some solace in the fact that the new Conservative government, with its small majority, could do 'neither good nor bad all will be like ciphers, except in receiving their salaries £300 a year to all except the ministry who receives an extra.'<sup>82</sup> The second reason for the political flux, according to Jenkins, was that voters were impatient for change, especially during the depression of the 1890s, at the end of the land boom. The main political issues which Jenkins identified during his time in Victoria were legislative reform, land tax and protectionism.

Although he was very set in his views, in 1877 Jenkins described voting as a 'useless bother.'<sup>83</sup> He was entitled to vote for the Assembly as part of manhood suffrage (1857). At this election he chose not to make the sixty or so mile journey to Castlemaine to register his vote as he felt the election was already decided in favour of a second term for the liberal Premier Graham Berry. In 1880, there were two elections. Jenkins received a letter of exemption, possibly from the Liberal members, from voting on the eve of the February election 'as it is considered that my friends are certain of an overwhelming majority'. Although he again avoided the trip to Castlemaine, he did attempt to influence

the outcome through a letter he sent in to the *Leader* on 15 February 1880.<sup>84</sup> A further reason for abstaining may have been his disillusionment with the ballot process itself. At this election, and also at the following election in July, he complained of inequality and corruption in the casting of votes and expressed his disgust with the way ‘those who rob people wholesale of their principles are too respectable to be punished.’<sup>85</sup> He obviously felt differently in 1894, the year he was to leave Victoria, when he suffered great pains to drag his by then aching body to the polling booth.

Writing about the 1890 Maritime Workers’ Strike, Jenkins amalgamated many of his ideas about politics, religion, economics and social wellbeing. Victoria had become the site of an historic clash between labour and capital. Shearers had joined maritime workers to strike for better pay and working conditions. Jenkins informed himself of the progress of the dispute through newspapers. He sympathised with the workers, yet saw each side as contributing to the hardships suffered by all, including infants and the elderly, as commodity prices increased considerably. He explained that the labourer had suffered too long at the hands of the capitalist and that there should be an appreciation that ‘Labor is the foremost capital of all nation.’ He drew an analogy between the biblical story of the Garden of Eden and the relationship between labour and capital in which he defined labour as the necessary precondition for wealth: Adam was given the Garden, but had to ‘dress it’ and then harvest it before he could enjoy its fruits.<sup>86</sup> Jenkins suggested that the only way that the employers would be shaken from their position would be for the workers to all unite under as a common force. Following the defeat of the strikes, unions sought political influence and labour parties sought election to Parliament.<sup>87</sup>

Through his diaries, Jenkins recorded and commented on characters and events that defined the time. Ned Kelly is a noteworthy example. In December 1878, Jenkins wrote of a gang of four unnamed bushrangers who were spreading fear through the Colony, particularly the bush. Upon reading of their capture in June 1880, he described them as ‘young and desperate bloodsuckers’. As news came to light about the two-day siege at Glenrowan and the capture of Ned Kelly, Jenkins sought out various newspaper articles for details. In October 1880, Kelly was sentenced to death by hanging, and Jenkins was appalled with the judge, Chief Justice Redmond Barry, for the sentence itself, which he described as ‘another murder’; and also for the ‘cowardly manner’ of the order, where another was employed to perform the execution. Jenkins nevertheless thought that, if hanging were acceptable, Kelly of all people would have deserved such a fate. On the day of the execution, Jenkins turned to *The New Testament* to support his argument that the death penalty is anti-Christian. He quoted Jesus Christ on the cross: ‘O Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’. Furthermore, he expressed the Unitarian belief that taking a life is a sin against Nature.<sup>88</sup> He was pessimistic about a society that authorises the old to kill the young. Kelly’s executioner, Elijah Upjohn, was seventy years of age. The following day Jenkins puzzled over Kelly’s words on the scaffold: ‘Such is Life’. He could not make sense of Kelly speaking either of fate or a natural state of events, given the lives he had taken.

Sport as a pastime, and as a spectacle, was a feature of life in the Colony. When Jenkins first arrived in Victoria, he noticed active and healthy looking children enjoying the popular sport of cricket.<sup>89</sup> Later, however, he bemoaned the fact that 'about 40 per cent' of the school children he saw in Maldon could play football and cricket, but would 'not know what end of a cabbage plant to put in the earth of their rich garden . . .'.<sup>90</sup> He regretted that productivity of land often came second to sport:

Cricketing, footballing, running, wrestling boxing, rowing etc are by far too numerous in a new country where the surface of the good land is shamefully neglected yet the syndicates buy the land nearly two times above its value more than the most skilful farmer can make out of it with having nothing for his labor.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, he enjoyed watching several cricket matches, including the England Eleven against Ballarat in 1874, for which he rose at 4.00 am so as to walk fourteen miles to Ballarat.

As the years progressed, Jenkins noted that football had taken over from cricket as the most popular sport amongst children. He gave some boys who came knocking at his door a small donation for their local football club in 1888.<sup>92</sup> Another sport to evolve during Jenkins' residence in Victoria was bike riding. In 1884 he was intrigued by Evan Lewis' bicycle which could get him to Maldon, eight miles away, in less than a third of the time that it would take him to walk.<sup>93</sup> By 1894, Jenkins noted the popularity of bike riding for competition, exercise and activity. It had moved on from being merely a mode of transport. He considered it superior to cricket or football for exercise. Women had also begun to exercise. Jenkins was unsure in what manner they rode their bikes.<sup>94</sup> Lawn tennis and bowling were also enjoyed by ladies and gentlemen.<sup>95</sup>

In March 1869, Jenkins stumbled upon a race-track on his way to Castlemaine.<sup>96</sup> He placed a one shilling bet on a winning horse, but when he went to collect his winnings the bookie was nowhere in sight. At that point Jenkins swore off horse races. His interest in the Melbourne Cup was varied. Some years he showed some interest, reading about it and recording what he read; in other years it was not mentioned. He was interested in the growing spectacle it was becoming, for both the horse racing itself and also women's fashion.<sup>97</sup>

In 1888, he reflected that, although horse racing and other pastimes that involved betting were popular, 'Balls and concerts are the trumps of sports in this colony by the young and middle ages the former movement that is dancing and waltzing and are the favorites in every locality'.<sup>98</sup> He did not participate.

The St David's Day Eisteddfod at Ballarat was an event that Jenkins regularly attended and, on these occasions, recited an Englyn or two, which he had composed for the occasion. In 1883, he missed the deadline for submission. He had, to that point, won a prize for each of thirteen years since coming to Victoria. The Eisteddfod was an important cultural activity for the large Welsh community. However, opinion began to divide over the authenticity of the event as it began to transform into a more multi-cultural and cosmopolitan festival, with the English language becoming prominent over

the Welsh, and composition being taken over by recitation and song.<sup>99</sup> In 1877, Jenkins complained that the meaning of the Eisteddfod had been lost in the adaptations.<sup>100</sup> Jenkins kept the tradition alive privately in the Englynion which he composed and frequently interspersed in his diary entries. He was also asked a number of times to submit poems for private and public occasions. At the Queen's Jubilee celebrations he was acclaimed the 'Bard of Maldon' for his verses dedicated to Lady Loch, the Governor's wife.<sup>101</sup>

Much of Jenkins' knowledge of the happenings in the Colony was gained from first-hand experience, but some was also obtained through newspaper reports. He actively sought to inform himself when swaggering and later at town 'reading rooms'. The *Leader* and the *Age* are the two most frequently cited Melbourne newspapers; regional papers such as the *Tarrangower Times* and the *Ballarat Star* are also mentioned. It was his habit to send newspapers home to Wales together with correspondence.<sup>102</sup> Relatives in Wales reciprocated with Welsh papers, such *Cambrian News*, *Hereford Times*, *Reynold's Weekly Newspaper*, *Aberystwyth Observer*, *Daily News* and the *Welshman*. The correspondence also kept him abreast of family and local news. Although the reception of the news was delayed, Jenkins was able to comment on topics as diverse as the overthrow of Napoleon III (1870), Arctic exploration (1877), the Cardiganshire elections (1880), and control of the Suez Canal (1884). Sadly, he also received news of the deaths of his son Lewis (d. 1869) and daughter Margaret (d. 1883) from notices in the newspaper.

## **Exorcising the Demons**

Joseph Jenkins was extremely disciplined during his twenty-five years in Victoria. It would seem that the life he adopted in Australia was, in many ways, an attempt to exorcise the demons of his life in Wales. Engaging in the present, in nature and working or travelling to the point of exhaustion barred the way for the many negative thoughts of home. Of course, anger, despair and sorrow were prone to rise to the surface occasionally, especially when news came of illness or death at home.

Characters from the past would also visit in various forms in dreams and, more often nightmares: 'I am in Wales often when I ought to sleep.'<sup>103</sup> Dreams became a subject of curiosity for Jenkins, particularly in the later years. In 1882, he described a dream in which he felt overwhelmed and helpless as the living and the dead from his past crowded around him, all talking simultaneously.<sup>104</sup> The death of a family member was a recurring feature. He dreamed that his son Tom drowned as he watched on, unable to assist.<sup>105</sup> Less than two months before the death of his brother, Ben, Jenkins dreamed that Ben had shot himself.<sup>106</sup> Later, he was more graphic in his descriptions, and he gave more of a clue as to the cause of the rift between him and his wife Betty, when he recorded a dream that their daughter Ann became 'waylaid by some fornicator like her mother'.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps Jenkins fathering of the ninth child was truly inconceivable after all.

Generally, Jenkins demonstrated a great ability to distract and control his thoughts. He was proud of his restraint in his acceptance of the Templar's oath of abstinence from



alcohol which he first swore in 1873 and again in 1890. He very rarely joined in drinking, and for much of his time, went so far as to avoid medical remedies which contained alcohol. On the few occasions when he did drink, he recorded being thoughtful and controlled in the amount he consumed. He did not agree with complete abstinence, and noted that on leaving a lecture at the Temperance Hall in Maldon that his pockets were emptier than if he had visited a hotel.<sup>108</sup>

He had a very proud work ethic, and believed that it was better to be employed for little pay than to wait around for better work or higher wages, as he saw so many around him do. He also found it preferable to partake in unpleasant and difficult work than to be ‘swagging’ around the countryside.<sup>109</sup> The journey from one farm to another in search of work was disagreeable on many levels. His swag was heavy, even when he left some possessions behind, and he had to be on the lookout for thieves. In June 1874, he had the string attached to his swag cut and his new boots were stolen. The distances he needed to cover on foot were great and often came to nothing as he was one of many swagmen looking for work in difficult times. In 1884, he asserted, with almost certain exaggeration, that Victoria, with a population of less than a million, had over two hundred thousand swagmen.<sup>110</sup> Bed for the swagman would often be in the bush, under the stars or in a haystack. Many of the farmers were hostile and some went so far as to set their dogs out to ward off swagmen from approaching their ‘miserable abodes’.<sup>111</sup>

Jenkins did find work at a number of farms, much of it short term. His occupations included cleaning stables, building fences, thatching straw, threshing wheat, building stacks, carting hay, ploughing land and back burning with its attendant responsibilities. He endured cruel masters, gruelling work and unemployment, yet held faith in the fact that this sort of work was man’s obligation:

From farm to farm in Search of toil  
Begging for it while we can  
Improve and till the public soil  
Which God ordained for man

He also had positive experiences. In 1875, at ‘Spray Farm’ on the Bellarine Peninsula, he experienced kindness, pleasant working conditions and beautiful surroundings. Unfortunately, by March 1876, the farmer could not afford to keep the farm running and Jenkins again needed to look for work.<sup>112</sup>

By 1882, Jenkins decided that an itinerant life was no longer sustainable. Farming work and walking long distances with a heavy swag was too arduous for his aging body. He adapted by building himself a hut from timber and stringy bark in the bush near Ravenswood and trying to sell split wood. For £1, he was entitled to one acre of land, a roadway and water springs, as part of the miner’s right (1857).<sup>113</sup> Although he complained that the land was unproductive, and the people quarrelsome, he found solace in the religious communion he experienced in nature. Events conspired against him remaining at his cottage. He had not been paid for seven tons of timber he had sold; a selector threatened to take over the land under amendments to the Land Rights Act

(1869);<sup>114</sup> and he had no remunerative work. He described 1883 as his most unfortunate since coming to Victoria. He saw the potential of the Colony to support its inhabitants as being crushed by the mismanagement of the land by the government and wealthy selectors.<sup>115</sup>

In July 1884, he successfully tendered for work to clear land for a road. His wages were minimal, but as always he understood the importance of being employed and vouched to 'hang to it and do my best'.<sup>116</sup> He built a second hut for himself in the bush, closer to the work. In November 1884, he was given work digging a drain; and in January 1885, he began working for the Maldon Shire Council to clear the town's drains. Initially, he rented a cottage in the town, but as he obtained more permanent work, he bought a small cottage on wasteland near the railway line. He became a street cleaner, doing the lowliest of work, including removing the carcasses of dead animals from drains. Yet, it was less the nature of the work than the inequity in pay and treatment that worried him. He continued to work hard, despite doctor's recommendations to the contrary. His diaries of these nine years reflect a much more complex life than his day job would suggest.<sup>117</sup>

## **Returning Home**

The last Victorian diaries were written by an old, disillusioned man, suffering physical and psychological weariness. Many of his Welsh compatriots in Maldon had predeceased him, and his feelings of disconnectedness and vulnerability played alongside the persistent feelings of resentment and guilt that taunted him periodically throughout his years in Australia. He was often humiliated by the children of the town, whom he described as 'the reckless governors of this place',<sup>118</sup> and could no longer endure the insults they thrust at him and his property. He also suffered for his age, and began to lack the strength to work and support himself. Most terrifying though, was the thought of dying alone, and not having met his grandchildren. His own thoughts jotted down at the end of a day, or a slow correspondence with those to whom he had a genuine, if troubled, connection could no longer sustain him. In a moment of suicidal despair, he still longed for the immortality that his diaries would provide if they received the homecoming he so desperately desired for them.

On 23 November 1894, Joseph Jenkins boarded a train to Melbourne where he withdrew money to secure a cabin aboard the mail ship *Ophir*. The ship sailed from Port Melbourne the next day. He requested that, if he should not survive the journey, his diaries be entrusted to his daughter and son-in-law, Elinor and Ebenisar Evans.

On 5 January 1895, Jenkins was met at Tilbury Docks by a brother, cousin and three of his sons. After an absence of a quarter of a century he, along with the diaries, went home to Trecefel Farm. Once there, however, it seems that Joseph Jenkins was unable to continue as the man who created the diaries and lived by the principles of their authorship. The diaries of the final four years in Wales were destroyed. One can only assume that the subjects contained within them were too personal and hurtful to

those who were to outlive him. He returned to the family and personal conflicts he ran away from all those years earlier, and again, took to drinking. On 26 September 1898, aged eighty, Joseph Jenkins died.

'The Welsh Swagman Drinking Fountain' was erected in his memory at the Maldon Railway Station in 1994, one hundred years after his departure from Australia. He is quoted on the plaque: "Through this [diary] I am building my own monument . . . June 1877". The diary was a physical and spiritual companion for Jenkins. He created something which he hoped to be a permanent communication, a legacy and connection to those he left behind and for those he would never know. He was a man confident in his views and with a sense of being able to contribute to a better world through their expression. In his own words: ' . . . the labour of my brains / Invaluable treasures, future gains . . .'<sup>19</sup>.



Diary of Joseph Jenkins, 1885. MS 13267/15, SLV. Note the inserted pages being a different size to the original book.