

Thomas Bennet

1826-1915

by Ian Carter, Jill Weber, and Diana Perry (2013)

Thomas Bennet entered this world at the confluence of historical events that were readymade for men like him to make contributions to an expanding British presence across the globe. Great Britain's last land battle at Culloden in 1746 saw the end of any claim "The Old Pretender" Charles Edward Stuart and any other person of the Stuart line might have to the throne of England. After their defeat at Culloden, the Highland Clansmen were then brutally repressed by the Duke of Cumberland, the son of the English Hanoverian incumbent, King George II. These events, though traumatic they might have been to Highland Scotland, set the scene for social and political stability that enabled lowland Scotland along the Clyde to join the industrial revolution and become the ship-building powerhouse of the Empire. Catholic Scotland was subdued and the Church of Scotland, with Presbyterian heritage, took pride in seeing that universal education gave greater ambition to the likes of Thomas Bennet. Industry along the Clyde was fired by the huge coal deposits at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Clackmannan and Kilmarnock. Thomas surely grew up knowing the discoveries of James Cook, the son of a farm labourer, and he could not have failed to be inspired by Cook's mapping of the two islands of New Zealand and the east coast of Australia in his first great global voyage from 1768 to 1771. Thomas must also have known that the industrial revolution received its kick-start by the invention of the rotary-motion steam engine by James Watt in 1769. Watt was the son of a merchant from Greenock, the town where Thomas was a guarantee man for Cairds after he finished his training as an apprentice smith at Doves in Edinburgh. The first patent for a steamboat was taken out by John Fitch who built a steamboat on the Delaware in 1788. In the US most attention on steamships centred on the paddle wheelers to navigate the coast and inland rivers. This culminated in the construction of steam's first commercial success when the paddleboat "New Orleans" was launched to operate on the lower Mississippi in 1811. In the 1830's the Swedish inventor John Ericsson and the British inventor Francis Smith independently "re-invented" the screw propeller. It was then that steam engine and the screw propeller could be put together into steel-hulled vessels so that steam could rule the high seas. The first such vessel was the steamship "Great Britain" designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, of "The Great Western" fame, in 1843. It was later, perhaps after most of Thomas's working life, that multiple expansion steam engines began to power ships in the 1880's and steam turbines began to power the all-conquering dreadnaughts of the British Navy in 1906. These days we tend to think of steam engines being from the past in old steamships, locomotives and Stanley Steamer motor cars but steam turbines are still undergoing intensive technological development in power stations and nuclear-powered ships around the world.

Much of what is known about Thomas Bennet comes from the transcription of cryptic notes that he made in a small diary, from Queensland government archives, from genealogical records and from obituaries that were written upon his death, together with an oral history passed down through his children and grandchildren. Some of these stories might be myth or legend but nonetheless they have been passed on by those who knew him and respected his values and his achievements. These last

sources have been included when it was deemed probable by the authors that they were true. Much credit for the accumulation of information on Thomas and Ann must be given to fourth generation descendants Lucille Stibe and Jessie Beveridge. Jill Weber also kindly shared her historical documents and Diana Perry shared her documents and her meticulous research on the genealogy of Thomas and Ann's family.

For my Carter family Thomas and Ann's story is especially poignant because our grandfather Ernie Carter was nurtured by Ann and Thomas after Ernie's mother Annie Forrest Bennet died from Bright's disease just two months after he was born in 1881. Ernie's Father John Carter remarried and left Ernie with the Bennets to rear, first at Fig Tree Pocket (then Indooroopilly) and later at Toowong. Ernie was the most decent and ethical man who I ever knew, so his life reflects splendidly on the values that were given to him by his grandparents. Given that Thomas was at sea for most of Ernie's youth, the credit for this must be given to Ann Bennet. Almost nothing of her life remains in the written or oral record and only one hazy photograph of her now exists. Just as significant to us is that our family - that of Ernie's only son James, spent most of our youth on a farm just one upstream along Cubberla Creek at Fig Tree Pocket where Thomas and his family bought land in 1866. A constant reminder of Thomas's life was evoked by the familiar sight of the "Gayundah" as it was pushed up and down the Brisbane River by a tug while it served out the last years of its working life as a gravel barge. And as if the old ship and Thomas were not to be forgotten, my wife Judith and I and our children and grandchildren have lived no more than a kilometre or two from where the "Gayundah" lay as a rusting hulk at Woody Point.

Thomas was born in 1826 in Edinburgh where his father Thomas was a tobacconist. Thomas said in his diary that he served his apprenticeship from May 1839 to August 1846 at a company called Doves in Edinburgh. His home was listed at 100 West Bow St, Edinburgh in the 1841 Census and this entry also gave his occupation as an apprentice smith. While design engineering was already the province of the universities of Europe and the US, it was men like Thomas who trained and worked in the foundries and shipyards like those along the Clyde who were prized as engineers to maintain the engines of steamships on the high seas. He then worked for a company that he referred to as Maxtins at Leith and another called Ross before joining Caird's of Greenock in July 1849 with a starting wage of 24 shillings a week. His first job afloat, as he put it, was on a Greenock tugboat. He was a "guarantee" man at Cairds which meant that when the workforce was laid off, Thomas was kept on the payroll for the term of his guarantee.

Caird & Co was established by blacksmith John Caird and his partners in Greenock as the firm of Anderson, Caird, and Company around 1809. It was initially an iron foundry but the partners soon moved into marine and general engineering. In 1838 James Tennant Caird joined the family firm and in 1842 the company bought the Carsdyke yard at Greenock. The firm then moved into shipbuilding and introduced the inverted vertical direct acting engine in the 1840s. Essentially Cairds of Greenock built iron ships with steam engines. By the late 1860's they still built Steam paddle steamers for coastal and inland shipping, and iron-hulled steam-assisted sailing ships for longer passages like southern Atlantic and Australian runs, but Cairds also recognised the future of fast steam ships on the lucrative transatlantic passage. Cairds was fortunate to have John Scott Russel, who managed Cairds from 1834 to 1844. Russel, a marine engineer, was feted by the Royal Society for his research on the wave line system in the construction of ships to prevent the rolling motion and Cairds

built the first ship along these lines, appropriately called the “Scott Russel”. They built ships from small steam-assisted sailing yachts to steamships up to 5000 tons till late in the 19th century when their ships increased enormously in size because of the increased efficiency of steam engines. Cairds also produced locomotives and large steam engines for land-based industrial systems. There was much competition between British and German transatlantic services and between 1858 and 1873 Cairds built 24 ships for the German trans-Atlantic line Norddeutscher-Lloyd alone. For Great Britain they built ships for Cunard, Peninsula and Orient, and British India lines. Of the many other ships was a paddle steamer for service in Uruguay and they also built a ship for the American Confederate States in 1853.

An interesting aside to Caird Story is that John Caird, blacksmith and ship builder had two sons John and Edward Caird who were academic theologians and moral philosophers. The son John, after graduating from University of Glasgow, became a Presbyterian minister was noted for his eloquent sermons and later became the Professor of Divinity at Glasgow University. Edward was educated at the Universities of Glasgow and Oxford, where he became a Fellow and Tutor at Merton College. In 1866 he was appointed to the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow. As a guarantee man at Cairds, Thomas was a favoured and trusted employee. When he came to Australia he brought entrenched religious, moral and ethical values with him that persisted to his children and grandchildren and beyond. There can be little doubt that the prevailing attitudes at Cairds had a profound effect on the lives of Thomas Bennet and many of his descendants.

Thomas married Ann Forrest (b. 3rd February 1821 in North Berwick, East Lothian) at Bowerhouse at Spott in East Lothian in April 1847 where Ann’s father appears to have been a land steward¹. Ann’s mother Margaret Bishop was the sister of Thomas’s maternal grandmother Isabel Bishop, so Thomas and Ann were second cousins. Ann was some five years older than Thomas. Their first child Thomas was born in Greenock on the 27th September 1848 while he was still at Cairds. Their second child John Forrest was born in the 30th April 1850 just after Thomas left Egypt to return home to Greenock after a four month stay there on his first overseas adventure.

On the 20th of September 1849 Thomas sailed as the second engineer on the paddle-steamer “Said Pacha” (a paddle steam yacht built by Cairds in 1848 and owned by HH Egypt) to Egypt, a present to the Khedive² from Queen Victoria. Initially the trip did not go well as after only one day at sea the ship put into Milford Haven in Cornwall for repairs to the paddle wheels. On the third of October, less than two weeks into his first international voyage, Thomas became ill and delirious with typhus and was left at Penzance at the tip of the Cornwall Peninsula to recuperate. He journeyed to London on the 26th of October and on the 29th of October 1849 he sailed from Southampton aboard another Caird-built ship, the “Euxine”³, taking a watch with the rest of the crew along the way. The ship stopped at Gibraltar, then Malta where he left on the “Merlin” on the 9th of November to Alexandria and then joined the “Said Pasha” at Atfah (Alfah) which was reached via a canal and the Nile River from Alexandria. Thomas stayed in Egypt for four months and notes a visit to the

¹ A person who acts for another in the management of land, collection of rents, etc.

² One of the Turkish viceroys who ruled Egypt between 1805 and 1914

³ “**Euxine**”, an iron-hulled passenger liner built by Cairds in 1847 and later destroyed by fire/

Pyramids and the Sphinx in January 1850 with a Mr Miller with whom he returned to Greenock in April 1850 via Rome, Leghorn (Tuscany) and Pisa, then Marseilles, Paris and London.

Thomas was 24 at the time and this adventure and the ambience of the Mediterranean would have influenced his decision to live in Spain for seven years a decade later. In June of 1850 Thomas returned to Cairds, but the company was idle until September of that year and that no doubt influenced his decision in May of 1851 to start his own business in Dumbarton. Thomas and Ann's first daughter Margaret Bishop was born at Dumbarton (b.24th February 1852). Her birth certificate lists Thomas occupation as a tobacconist. Whether the registry clerk confused Thomas's occupation with that of his father is of some conjecture. The name Dumbarton would be etched on the psyche of the family of his third son Richardson when he named his large house at Eagle Junction in Brisbane, and his dairy farm at Rosedale north-west of Bundaberg, "Dumbarton" in nostalgic references the town. Why they felt so is also unclear as Richardson and James Ramsay were born in Lancashire England (Richardson b. Everton, Liverpool about March 1858 and James Ramsay b. Liverpool about September 1859). Jane (b.1863) was most likely born in Barcelona, Spain.

After two years Thomas's business was not paying and by July Thomas returned to Greenock and Cairds as the Chief Engineer aboard the screw steamship "Elba" to Gibraltar, Marseilles, Genoa and Leghorn and then to Civita Vecchia. The "Elba" later played an historical role in the laying of telegraph cable in the Mediterranean and was featured in Robert Louis Stevensen's biography one of the heroes of the early telegraph, Jenkin Flemming. Thomas's second daughter Annie Robertson Bennet (b. 20th July 1853) was born in Greenock, probably towards the end of this voyage.

In May 1854 his guarantee finished and he returned from Marseilles through Paris and Edinburgh and the back to Greenock. In July of that year Thomas started again with a guarantee at Cairds and sailed on the paddle steamer "Heligoland" as Chief Engineer running from Hamburg to Heligoland and then in October to Chrisiania (now Oslo) and then to Gottenborg. The ship was built by Cairds in 1854. In late November the steamer was laid up for an unknown reason and 29 of the crew left. By the time the ship was ready for service only 11 of the crew remained.

In April 1855 Thomas was appointed chief engineer of the "America", another of Caird's steamships built in 1855. In May of 1855 he was appointed to Glennan-Lloyds "Hammonia"¹ but he requested again to rejoin the "America" and was engaged by the owners four days later on June 13th and sailed from Glasgow to Barcelona and Gibraltar.

Thomas makes a note that on June 17th and 18th 1855 three furnace tops were brought down by the second engineer. What ever this was, it didn't stop the ship from reaching Gibraltar on the 20th of June, Barcelona on the 24th, Cadiz on the 25th, Santa Cruz de Tenerife (the capitol of the Canary Islands), Puerto Rico and then to Havana on the 25th of October. On the trip home on December 2nd "America" put into what appears to be "Farfar" in Thomas's hand writing, some ten days steaming from Vigo

¹ HAMMONIA 1854 / BELGIAN / MISSOURI

2,259 gross tons, length 280ft x beam 38.6ft, one funnel, three masts (rigged for sail), clipper bows, iron hull, single screw, speed 10 knots, accommodation for 54-1st, 146-2nd and 310-3rd class passengers. Built by Caird & Co, Greenock for the Hamburg America Line, she was launched on 5th May 1855 and immediately chartered to the French Government for use as a Crimean War transport.

in Spain. Perhaps Fahal in the Azores would be more on the “America’s” direct route. We don’t know whether Thomas was making a play on words or whether it was a real place on the African east coast (apart from Farfar in what is now the central north African country of Chad). Family legend has it that the “America” was the first steamship to sail from Spain to the Americas and return. When the journey ended in Vigo it was placed in quarantine for another unknown reason. During this voyage his sixth child Leonard Flemming (b.8th October 1855) was born at the home of Ann’s parents John and Margaret Forrest at Bowerhouse at Dunbar in Scotland.

Thomas arrived back in Barcelona after putting into Lisbon because of bad weather and then Cadiz. He mentions that he was back in Greenock on the 29th of February 1856, but it is likely that his home base in these years was at Liverpool in Lancashire and that he was in Greenock for reasons involving Cairds. A note by Thomas on this date said; “March – Found on arrival that little Johnny had died”. No record of his death has been found in Scotland so his second-born may have died when Thomas and Ann lived in Liverpool. It appears that the years from about 1855 to 1859 Thomas’s family lived in Liverpool as Richardson (b. West Derby, about March 1858) and James Ramsay (b. Liverpool about September 1859) were born in England, as is also noted in their death certificates.

One report (and family legend) has it that Thomas served and wounded in the Crimean War (1856-58). There is a gap in Thomas’s Diary from 1856 to 1859 so there is no reference to him of his involvement in these hostilities. Given though that Thomas and many of Caird’s ships operated in the Mediterranean, this is possible. The steam age had given the Transport Board of the Admiralty of Great Britain the means to deliver troops to places of conflict reliably and at speed and the government was able to commandeer passenger-line ships for this purpose. Furthermore the steel hulls and superstructure of merchant ships could easily be reinforced to carry large guns for defence and sometimes for formidable offensive operations at sea, particularly against wooden vessels.

From December 1859 until May 1860 Thomas was on a ship that was chartered by the Spanish government for the war in Africa.¹ No entries were made in his diary from 1856 to 1859, so we can assume that he was still on the “America”. When he finished he returned to Barcelona with a gift of 100 pounds which was many months’ salary in those times. He notes that he put new boilers into the ship and finished this service on September 26th 1859.

On September 27th 1859 he joined the mailboat “SS Minorca” on a three year engagement sailing between Barcelona and the Port Mahon on the island of Minorca. At the same time he was offered a position on a Spanish gunboat, but declined. He seems to have extended this contract until 1865. He notes that he was taking on the additional duties of looking after cotton mill engines. He also notes that on December 20th 1865 he resigned from the “SS Minorca” with mutual regrets and afterwards going through France and London he also visited Dunbar, perhaps to farewell friends

¹ The Ifni War, sometimes called the Forgotten War in Spain (la Guerra Olvidada), was a series of armed incursions into Spanish West Africa by Moroccan insurgents and indigenous Sahrawi rebels that began in October 1857 and culminated with the abortive siege of Sidi Ifni. The war, which may be seen as part of the general movement of de-colonization that swept Africa throughout the latter half of the 20th century, was conducted primarily by elements of the Moroccan Army of Liberation which, no longer tied down in conflicts with the French, committed a significant portion of its resources and manpower to the capture of Spanish possessions.

and members of his and Anns family. Many older members of Thomas's family reported that they have cited copies of letter of recommendation and thanks to Thomas from the Spanish Government for his work there, but so far the authors of this biography have not also seen one.

By the time Thomas decided to emigrate to Queensland he had seven surviving children(Thomas b.1849. Margaret Bishop b1852, Annie Robertson b1854, Leonard Flemming b 1855, Richardson b 1858, James Ramsay b 1859 and Jane b 1863). After living in Spain for seven years, he and Ann may have dreaded going back to live beside the Clyde where most children suffered poor health because of the very polluted industrial environment. Their eldest daughter Margaret notes that they went from Spain through France and spent two weeks in London before leaving on the 140 day voyage to Moreton Bay, leaving on the 29th of January 1866. Having seven children aged from three to fourteen on the 1265 ton "Southern Ocean" for nearly five months would have been most trying for any parents.

Aboard the "Southern Ocean" with the Bennets were George Edwards and Ann Draper who settled at Albany Creek, north of Brisbane. George and Ann's Daughter Ellen Mary married John Leitch who had a dairy beside Leitch's Crossing. George died in 1873 at 39 years. Ann remarried and it was her daughter Annie Cuthbert by the second of three of Ann's marriages who married Tom Draper, a farmer at Bunya near Samford. The family is remembered by the suburb of Draper in the area of the Moreton Regional Council. These families would remain friends for generations and some of their descendants still communicate, particularly in matters of historical importance. It was one of the Leitch women who wet nursed James Ernest Carter after his mother Annie Robertson (nee Bennet) died in 1881, just two months after he was born.

On arrival in Moreton Bay, Thomas and his family bought land at Indooroopilly described in his diary as various portions including Portion Numbers 114 and 116. He doesn't mention that he also bought Portions 115, 117, 120, 121 and 129. There is no record of his purchase of Portion 114. Immigrants coming directly to Queensland were entitled to land orders which gave them the right to purchase land at government auctions. Thomas wasted no time. On the 7th of July 1866 he purchased lots 39/40/41/44/45 and 53 (representing the above Portions) in the shire of Indooroopilly in an area which is now Fig Tree Pocket at a total cost of just less than £170. Indooroopilly was then separate from Greater Brisbane.

Portion 115 to 117 were contiguous blocks that represent the 50 acres that occupy the entire land between Cubberla Creek, Fig Tree Pocket Road and Sprenger Street. The Centenary Highway now cuts through the North-western corner of the property. It might have been appropriate for a good farmer to make a fair living from these lands but it is more likely that this canny Scot bought these lands for investment. In 1953 Ernie Carter showed me the entry to the property and he still remembered the same slab fence that was present in the 1880's. Portion 120 was a ten acre block which lay separately on the junction of Sprenger and Karella streets next to where the Marist Brothers College now has its sportsfields. It was on this block that Annie Robertson Bennet and John Carter built the cottage where James Ernest Carter was born in 1881. Annie died in a hospital in Adelaide Street Brisbane some two months later and Thomas bought the land and cottage for £60 from John Carter in April 1882. Portion

121 was another separate eleven acre block along the northern side of Sprenger street. Portion 129, of nine and a half acres, lay between Jesmond streets and the Brisbane River opposite Sherwood Forest Park on the opposite bank. All of these purchases now represent highly desirable real estate in one of the trendiest western suburbs of Brisbane. Most of these lands (except for Portion 121 and the top part of “Silky Oaks”) and the lowset Bennet house would probably have been inundated during the 1893 and 1973 floods.

It is unlikely that Thomas built the house “Silky Oaks” at that time. Fig Tree Pocket Road was no more than a timber track where bullock teams dragged timber down to the river to be floated to Brisbane. This timber no doubt included the silky oaks after which Thomas and Ann named their property.¹ That part of Indooroopilly had few amenities for family life and it is a reasonable assumption that Thomas took his family first to Sydney and Melbourne. The small and historic Fig Tree Pocket School which is less than a mile from all of these properties, opened in 1871 but schools closer to Brisbane at Taringa (1896) Toowong (1880) and Indooroopilly (1899) started much later. The Presbyterians of the area, which included the Bennets, did not open their historical church at the western end of Kenmore Road (in the Brookfield Shire) until 1880. Family legend suggests that Thomas and Ann donated the church’s first organ but church records show that it was donated by their close friends, the family of W N Gibson who lived high above the River not far along Kenmore Road from Fig Tree Pocket Road. The Bennet house burned down in the early 1900’s and between the Great Wars Indooroopilly butcher Wally Penhalligan built his slaughterhouse on the site of the old house. This property is now a housing estate beside the Cubberla Creek Reserve.

By December 1866 Thomas was back at sea apparently daunted by the prospect of farming this virgin land. He started as an engineer on the “Souchays”² from Brisbane to Melbourne for only one voyage. In February of the following year he joined the SS “Hero”³ in Melbourne. The ship was laid up for three weeks while he repaired the engines and boilers before going to Hobart for soldiers. “Hero” was then put into the coal trade with a Robert Kerr as Thomas’s assistant and at the end of the year in November he prepared the ship, putting in new boilers and the repairing its engines. He makes a note at this time that he was consulted about the engines of the “Governor Blackall”⁴. An extraordinary thing in Thomas’s story is that Thomas’s brother Richardson and Richardson’s wife Isabella came to Australia in the “Southern Ocean” and Richardson voyaged with him as second engineer on the “Hero” for at least eight of the ten years that Thomas was associated with the ship, and yet no other records of Richardson and Isabella remain in the family. The “Hero” then began running between Auckland and Sydney and Melbourne. Thomas notes that in January of 1871 he wired for his eldest son also Thomas, to complete a remarkable triad of engineers

¹ The author remembers the last of the bullock teams taking timber out of the State Forest at Gold Creek Road at Upper Brookfield in the early 1950’s. The driver hung his team’s yokes and harness on a fence on the side of the road and they remained there for a year or so until they were taken.

² “Souchays” of Melbourne, N J Simpson Master, Burthen 437 tons.

³ “Hero” of Melbourne, Thomas Logan Master, Burthen 851 tons

⁴ Governor Blackall. Steam Ship of Sydney, W. J Stuart, MASTER, Burthen, 331 Tons

of the Bennet Family in the crew of the “Hero”. His son Thomas was to accompany him for over a year but was to die of tuberculosis at Redfern in August 1875, his death noted in his father’s diary as this terse entry - “Tom died”. Detailed research by Diana Perry, a fifth generation descendant of Thomas through his daughter Margaret Bishop, describes more alliances of the Bennet engineers in Australian waters¹ Thomas would make the same entry for my great-grandmother in 1881; “Annie died.” Just as the six children of James Cook also died while he was sea, the mariners of those times, without proper communication, could at any time be confronted with such news when they returned to their families from their sea journeys. When Thomas’s youngest daughter Jane died on August 5th 1886 at the age of twenty-three, the short entry in his diary said; “received news of Janie’s death’ when he was on a voyage to North Queensland on the “Gayundah”. By 1887 the Overland Telegraph had reached far North Queensland.

The “Hero” must have had a special place in Thomas’s life. He briefly outlines some of the emergencies that he had to deal with while at sea with the ship. In January 1871 he was complimented by the owner Mr Bright for a sum of £10 for getting her ready for sea. In July 1872, the ship was quarantined for six weeks before being relieved. In February 1873 owing to a mistake by the Captain Thomas Logan, the “Hero” went astray off Sydney heads and got “short of coals” for three days before making Jervis Bay. In November 1874, on a voyage to Melbourne, the rudder broke but the engineers contrived to get it safely into port. In a rare display of expressiveness he added that “it was the work of engineers, but the purse of sovereigns went to the Captain” (again Thomas Logan). On the 24th of the same month he describes getting to Melbourne in very bad weather with a very large number of passengers which included Mary of Normanby². At this time he was listed in the Mercantile Navy Lists as holding a Certificate of Competency as a First Class Engineer, able to serve as the Chief Engineer on any ship. In March 1877 he left “Hero” with mutual regrets after 10 years and two months.

In May 1877 he joined the crew of the “Cerebus”, the pride of the colonial Victorian Navy³ and served just a over a year to leave the following May. He then joined the

¹ **Re Thomas Bennet Jnr (1848-1875) being part of the engineer team on the "Hero"**; His name first appears as 3rd engineer on 13th Dec 1868 (arrival in Sydney from Melb). He is a regular from then until April 1870, and re-appears in Jan 1871. Regular again until Sept 1872. Disappears for about a year - re-appears on 12th Aug 1873, for 4 voyages, and then disappears again on 29th September 1873.

There was also a Thomas Bennet, 2nd engineer on "Blackbird", Bris to Syd, 9 Feb 1875

Leonard also appears (as 4th engineer) on 2 voyages with his father on the "Somerset".(Diana Perry 2008

² Most likely the eldest daughter of George Augustus Constantine Phipps, 2nd Marquess of Normanby (1819-1890). He was governor of Nova Scotia (1858–1863), Queensland in 1871-74, New Zealand in 1874-78 and Victoria in 1879-84.

³ Launched in 1868 Cerberus is the only remaining *Monitor* warship now left in the world and not only has its hull but also its gun turrets and its guns intact and was the first of the modern battleships, preceding HMS Devastation by almost three years. She was the first British warship to dispense completely with sail power and to incorporate the shallow draft and Cerberus was the first, and is the only remaining example of a Monitor having a central superstructure. The design for the Cerberus was the first in the world to incorporate the combination of a central superstructure with fore and aft gun turrets. The ship is the only substantially intact surviving warship of any of Australia's pre-Federation colonial navies and is the oldest as well as the only surviving warship to have served in the Royal

SS “Somerset”, owned by the A & E Company, sailing to Singapore and Hong Kong and back¹ on several voyages from 1878 to at least 1880. His family wrote that Thomas proudly boasted that the mailships of E & A always ran on time when Thomas was charged with caring for the engines of its ships.

The Blue Book was an annual publication that listed all of the Queensland government employment records. These show that Thomas was employed as an engineer on the 16th January 1880 as an “Appointment by the Governor by Commission” on an annual salary of £300. He was so employed until 1892 when there was a world-wide depression and the Russians were deemed to be no longer a threat to the colony. The ships of Queensland Marine Defence Force were then decommissioned except as they were needed for the Queensland Naval Brigade when officers were honorary or employed on a casual basis. It seems all of Thomas’s engineering skills from 1880 on were applied in government service and after 1892 he was engaged casually by government agents at a rate of £25 a month.

He was then transferred to the SS “Bowen” in 1881 but having been offered a position on the dredge “Octopus” by the William Riding² family of Indooroopilly, he found that it was not ready for service so he joined the “Laura” as its engineer until the dredge “Octopus” was ready in January 1882. Thomas then became master of the steam dredge “Lytton” operating in the Brisbane River and Moreton Bay and in January 1883 he was transferred to the dredge “Sovereign”. At the first settlement the Brisbane River was vastly different, and from the beginning of dredging in 1863 to the present time many of the bends have been straightened out and the river very much deepened. All of the pristine beaches and sandy shallows that were part of the river have long since gone. The history of the Brisbane River and its shipping channel into Moreton Bay has been very much influenced by the huge amount dredging that it has received. On June 30th 1884 he resigned from the “Sovereign” and he noted that he worked chiefly at Indooroopilly, presumably at his home, but he does not hint of his activities there. In 1884 he was offered the position as master of the dredge “Octopus” in the dredging of Cleveland Bay at Townsville but he declined and in 1884 he was “still working at Indooroopilly”. Again in 1885 he was offered the post as master of the “Platypus” but declined again citing his obligations at Indooroopilly. A source separate to his diaries noted that he was also the master of the bucket dredge “Saurian”³ at Rockhampton. The same source, most likely from family hearsay, said that he also was a master of dredges on the Burnet and Mary Rivers.

Australian Navy. Cerberus represented cutting edge technology from the 1860's and was the flagship and most powerful warship of the Victorian Navy. In addition it was the most powerful warship of any of the Australian Colonial Navies, and incorporated the latest developments in metallurgy, steam power, gun turrets and the use of low freeboard, and was the first armored warship built for Australia. (From the Cerberus's website <http://www.cerberus.com.au/>)

1 SS Somerset of London, S.G. GREEN, Master, Burthen 654 Tons. From the Port of Hong Kong to Sydney NSW, 14th October 1878. Bennet, Thomas Chief Engineer. Crew 1828 Edinburgh.

² William Riding was the master of the Pilot Steamer “Laura” operating out of the Brisbane River and Moreton Bay.

³ “Saurian,” was built in 1871. The bucket dredge was 164.0 feet (50m) in length, 30.2 feet (9.2m) breadth and 11.8 feet (3.6m) depth. In 1929 it was condemned and converted for use as a coal lighter.

It is unclear where Thomas and his family lived from about 1866 to 1880. His sons, James and Richardson certainly were educated and started their careers in Sydney, James with the telegraph at Bathurst and Richardson, according to Thomas's notes, at a firm called Fultons in 1873. That same year he bought a house in Banks St, Melbourne. Family documents also suggest that his sons were educated at the school of John Dunmore Lang, but Lang's foray into education was over in 1852 when his Australian College closed due to Lang's poor administrative skills and he then retreated to the pulpit and politics. Both Thomas and Lang were from Greenock and no doubt had strong church and social affiliations in Sydney, both being strong Presbyterians in a largely Irish-Catholic community which was dominated by an Anglican administration. We know that his eldest son Thomas died in Redfern in 1875, so it is likely that he lived for some years between 1866 and 1880 in Sydney and no doubt in Melbourne when he joined the "Cerberus". Thomas and Ann's eldest daughter Margaret Bishop was married to William Benjamin Perry by the aforesaid Reverend John Dunmore Lang Sydney in 1871 and on their marriage certificate it states; "living with parents in Balmain". In 1874 Margaret says that she went to Melbourne to visit her parents, their passage listed on the "You Yangs", "arriving on the 18th May 1874 from Sydney. Diana Perry, Margaret's great-granddaughter found a Mrs T Bennet as a passenger on the "Hero" arriving in Melbourne on 27th of December 1874. Diana, who has researched Thomas's family genealogy and travels in detail, has found no record of a passage of Thomas's family from Brisbane to Sydney or Melbourne before that. We do know that after 1881 when Ernie Carter was born, Thomas lived at Fig Tree Pocket until about 1888 and then he moved to Main St, Kangaroo Point for a short time and to Bennett St, Toowong in that same year. Older members of Thomas's Family suggest that the street was named after him and is now misspelled, an opinion confirmed by contemporary Queensland Postal directories. He notes that in 1884 that he owned land in Melbourne and that he "Disposed of Footscray land to Jim – Losing money and no job in town". In 1896 he noted that "Penticost took farm". Whether these events were related is unknown although the timing of this statement makes it likely this statement applied to land in Queensland.

It was in 1885 that his association with the colonial Queensland Maritime Defense Force commenced.¹ On November 11th of that year he joined the armed Tugboat "Otter" at the request of a Mr Wilson² when he was recommended to examine and report on the Hydropneumatic guns³. On January the 2nd January 1886 he was instructed to sail to Melbourne about this matter and he returned on the 28th of that month, gave in his report on the hydromatic guns and returned to the "Otter". During March and April of 1886 he went to a torpedo course in Sydney. On March 4th 1886

¹ The original Queensland naval brigade was formed in 1873 when the colony of Queensland was required to raise its own defence force. This raising of the Queensland defence force was due in part to the Russian invasion scare in 1880. The Queensland Naval Brigade was a branch of this force.

² The Queensland Marine Defence Forces's Chief Engineer Robert Wilson

³ Hydro-Pneumatic Gun - A disappearing gun carriage in which the recoil is checked by cylinders containing liquid and air, the air when compressed furnishing the power for restoring the gun to the firing position. It is used with some English and European heavy guns.

he noted that he was appointed to the “Gayundah”¹ and joined on March 15th. On July 6th, “Gayundah” sailed on “a long trip north.” His only naval entry for 1887 was “May 5th – Court Martial of Hesketh²”.

On September 1888 Thomas notes state that he was given charge of all machinery in Maritime Defence and that on February 11th 1889 he received the Commission as Staff Engineer. The Government’s Blue Book for that year indicates that the appointment was made by the Governor by Commission on the 19th of March 1886 again at an annual salary of £300. At this time the fleet consisted of two dedicated warships - ‘Gayundah’ and Paluma’; two armed tugboats - “Otter” and “Boneto”; two armed hopper barges – ”Stingaree” and “Dolphin”; and three pinnaces – “Bream”, “Mosquito” and “Midge”. He also took responsibility for the government yacht “Lucinda”. The Queensland Government also had a fleet of dredges that no doubt also deserved Thomas’s attention from time to time.

On October 25 Captain Townley-Wright who bought the “Gayundah” from England was arrested after a dispute over pay, an event that Thomas reports as; ‘Captain Wright Deposed.’³. In February 1889 Thomas left Brisbane for Thursday Island on the “Gayundah” and on the 16th July 1892 he again notes that he was at Thursday Island. Back in Brisbane on December 30 1892 he notes that “ The ship and all hands

1 HMQS “Gayundah”: Steel gunboat, 360 tons. Built at Newcastle-on-Tyne for the Queensland Navy in 1884 and commissioned in the United Kingdom. Lbd 120 x 26 x 9.5 ft. Hulk filled with concrete and scuttled to form a breakwater at Woody point, Moreton Bay, Queensland, 1958. [LH] during October. Gayundah sailed for Australia in the November of that year under the command of Captain Henry Townley-Wright arriving in Brisbane on the 28th March 1885. Upon arrival in Brisbane, Townley-Wright refused to relinquish his command and was eventually removed by a boarding party of Queensland Police. Over the next few years she served as a training ship, conducting the first ship to shore radio transmissions in Australia. However, with the depression of the 1890s Gayundah was assigned to reserve duties in 1892, being reactivated for annual training at Easter. Following the Federation of Australia, the gunboats joined the Commonwealth Naval Forces, and in 1911 both were integrated into the newly formed Royal Australian Navy. From 22 April - 25 August 1911, at the instigation of the Departments of External Affairs and Trade & Customs, Gayundah sailed under the command of Commander G.A.H. Curtis from Brisbane to Broome, Western Australia to enforce Australia's territorial boundary and fishing zone along the north-west coast of the continent. At Scott Reef, on 25 May, Gayundah boarded and detained two Dutch schooners with illegal catches of trepang (sea cucumber) and trochus shell (*Trochus niloticus*), escorted them into Broome on 29 May, then remained at Broome until mid-July so the officers could appear as witnesses in the resulting court case against the masters of the schooners. For this cruise, the 6" bow gun was removed to provide greater bunkering for coal to increase the ship's range. Gayundah was extensively refitted in early 1914. With the outbreak of World War I, Gayundah was assigned to coastal patrols of Moreton Bay and the east coast of Australia. In 1921 she was sold to Brisbane Gravel Pty Ltd, who employed her as a sand and gravel barge on the Brisbane River. Gayundah was eventually scrapped sometime in the 1950s, before being run aground at Woody Point at Redcliffe, to serve as a breakwater, in 1958. Much of her rusting hull can still be seen today. Gayundah. Steel gunboat, 360 tons. Built at Newcastle-on-Tyne for the Queensland Navy in 1884. Lbd 120 x 26 x 9.5 ft. Hulk filled with concrete and scuttled to form a breakwater at Woody point, Moreton Bay, Queensland, 1958. [LH]

2 This reference is to Lieutenant Spencer Bold Hesketh, second officer the “Gayundah”. No reason for the court martial could be found.

3 In 1886 the Queensland government offered to place Guyundah at the disposal of the the Admiralty if required and Rear-Admiral George Tyrone, the Commander-in-Chief, Australia Station, subsequently authorised the gunboat to wear the White Ensign of Her Majesty's Fleet. This caused problems in 1888 when, after disagreement over salary, Captain Wright was ordered by the Queensland Government to pass command to his first lieutenant, Francis Taylor. Reluctant to comply, and arguing that because his ship wore the White Ensign he was not under Queensland authority, Wright moored Gayundah in the middle of the Brisbane River, trained the Gayundah's guns on Parliament House and threatened to sail for Sydney. A boarding party led by the Police Commissioner, D.T. Seymour, arrested Townley-Wright at gunpoint and defused the crisis. (<http://www.navy.gov.au/spc/history/ships/gayundah.html>)

paid off- divided Mess fund”.¹ On the 30th of September 1892 he had correspondence about a position with the Mine at Mount Morgan but declined.

Thomas notes that from the 4th to the 6th of February 1893 Brisbane saw the once-a-century floods, the likes of which would not be seen again until 1974. The record major flood of 1893 in Brisbane was a result of extremely heavy rainfall falling in the upper reaches of the Stanley River around Peachester. This event occurred well before the completion of the Somerset Dam in the 1930's and long before the Wivenhoe Dam was completed in the mid 1980's. Even though he was paid off from the “Guyandah” he still had responsibilities for the welfare of Queensland Government Ships. On the 11th and again on the 17th of February 1893 he was sent to attend the welfare of the “Guyandah”. On this same flood the “Paluma” was beached high in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens but good fortune in the form of another flood two weeks later enabled the crew to refloat her into the river again.

In October of 1893 Thomas was placed on the unattached list. Captain Almond and Mr. Stewart and others in the maritime industry in Queensland seemed to depend on the skills of Thomas Bennet, as he was called upon to address their problems even when when his wife Ann was seriously ill. He notes that he and Ann were most unwell in 1894 and that Ann was attended at that time that Dr William Kebbel, who was the Staff Surgeon on the “Gayundah”. Yet in November 1894 he received a note from Captain Almond², to act as the Queensland Government’s Engineer-Surveyor “for a time” and in 1895 he surveyed the “Cintra”³ and several other ships.

In April 1895 Thomas went to Cairns in the government yacht “Lucinda”. His cursory notation did not reveal the historical importance of this ship. The “Lucinda” was a 301 ton steel paddle steamer built at Dumbarton in Scotland in 1884 as the official yacht for the Queensland Colonial Government. After its arrival in Brisbane it was used to convey the Governor of Queensland, members of parliament and other dignitaries on visits to provincial towns in central and North Queensland. In addition the Queensland Cabinet met on board the vessel from time to time. Perhaps the “Lucinda's” greatest claim is carrying the Queensland delegates to the First National Australians Convention held in Sydney in March 1891 to establish the draft legislation for a Federation of the Australian colonies in 1901. It was on board the “Lucinda” in the Hawkesbury River that the official draft of a Bill embodying the Constitution of what was to become the Commonwealth of Australia was drawn up. The “Lucinda” was also famous for much grimmer reasons.⁴

1 On 30 September 1892 *Gayundah* was laid up in reserve in Brisbane. Although paid off she was manned as required for training members of the Queensland Naval Brigade. In 1898 *Gayundah* recommissioned under the Queensland Blue Ensign. (<http://www.navy.gov.au/spc/history/ships/gayundah.html>)

² Thomas Michael Almond: Portmaster at Brisbane and later a member and Chairman of The Marine Board.

³ “Cintra” of Brisbane, Burthen 1979 tons, operated between Brisbane and Sydney and as far north as Cooktown, and on occasions ranged as far as Noumea.

⁴ In one of the worst river disasters in Australia's history, the wooden steamship “Pearl” sank with the loss of 23 lives after colliding with the anchor chain of the *Lucinda* in the Brisbane River on 13 February 1896. The *Lucinda* was sold in 1923 and became coal lighter for the Riverside Coal Transport Company until it ended its service in May 1932. The remains of the *Lucinda* were put upon the SE side

Still with his naval cap on and acting for a Mr Stewart¹, Thomas again went to Thursday Island in the “Otter” in June 1895.² In June 1895 Thomas went to Sydney on the “Tyrian”³ and returned two weeks later on the “Leura”⁴. In 1897 he was asked to officiate for Mr Stewart for three months until October the 24th and was paid £25 per month. On January 3rd 1898 Thomas was again surveying for Mr Stewart and on January 10 to the 11th he was sent by Captain Almond to attend to the the engines of the “Paluma”⁵ in flood time which, he notes, are in “very bad order” and returned to find that “On return found Mrs, B. bad in bed”, to be attended by a Dr Hill and 18th February 1898 he was again “sent for to Survey”. Thomas noted in detail the cost of the doctors and nurses for Ann’s care. Whether that was due to his Scottish thrift or his eye for detail is unknown, but he did instill in his children and his grandson Ernie Carter a keen appreciation of the value of money. On the 3rd of March Thomas noted again that ‘mother very ill’ and was attended by a trained nurse but on the 6th of that month was out surveying for Mr Stewart again. He notes visits from Margaret, Jim and Ernie but was still acting occasionally for Mr Stewart. He notes in June 1898 an altercation with Captain Burns⁶ which forced his resignation as his assistant after two weeks and after this said that he was “Acting fully for Mr Stewart”. During these engagements he notes that “Mother still very ill – using morphine” and was being nursed in her illness. In December 1898 he surveyed the “Aramac”.

He starts 1899 on January 31st with a survey of the “Duke of Portland”⁷ and the next month reported on the boilers at the Ipswich Water Works. On June 1st he received a

of Bishop Island at the mouth of the Brisbane River This area has since been covered over as part of the Port of Brisbane expansion

¹ Robert Stewart: the Queensland Governments Engineer-Surveyor and Examiner in Steam.

² The “Otter” was named after the Lieutenant Charles Otter who with fourteen convict volunteers searched for the survivors of the brigantine “Stirling Caste” wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef 320 kilometres south of Thursday Island on the 13th May 1836. Ship’s Captain James Fraser and two of his crew died on Fraser Island but his wife Eliza was rescued. Much controversy surrounds the story.

³ SS “Tyrian” Of Melbourne, John D. Joy, Master, burthen 886 tons.

⁴ SS “Leura” Of Melbourne, John Pain, Master, Burthen 1200 Tons

⁵ Paluma and her sister ship Gayundah were the first vessels ordered by the Queensland government for the Queensland Maritime Defence Force. Their names are aboriginal words for 'thunder' and 'lightning' respectively. Built at a cost of £35,000 each, the vessels were of a 'flat-iron' design and mounted a formidable armament for their size. Both ships carried out trials on 26 September 1884 and reached a speed slightly over 10.5 knots in full power trials over a ten mile course. An agreement had previously been reached between the Admiralty and the Queensland government for the Admiralty to fit out and employ Paluma for survey work in northern Australian waters. This was announced by the Admiralty on 28 July 1884. Consequently, following Paluma's trials, her main deck armament was removed and replaced by facilities for the surveyors, a deckhouse on the quarterdeck replacing the 6-inch gun and a work room forward replacing the 8-inch gun. Paluma was commissioned in the Royal Navy on 28 October 1884 under the command of Lieutenant George E. Richards, RN. She reached Brisbane on 7 May 1885. For the next ten years, Paluma was engaged charting the waters of northern Australia, primarily within the Great Barrier Reef. In 1893, Paluma, then under the command of Captain Pirie, RN, and undergoing refit between surveys was left high and dry in the Botanical Gardens by the great floods of that year.

⁶ Charles Douglas Burns, Government Superintendent of Dredges and Plant and Dockmaster

⁷ “Duke of Portland” sailed between London and Brisbane with the occasional trip to Maryborough, Townsville and Auckland. It is most famous for being the ship that carried Queensland volunteers of the Bushman’s Contingent (Queensland Mounted Infantry Contingent) to the Boer War in 1901. It left

letter from the Marine Board¹ to accept a seat there, where he was paid 21 shillings a meeting. His first meeting was on the 28th of June with Captain Almond as chairman, Richard Strangman Taylor Vice-Chairman, with Messrs F H Hart, Forrest, A J Carter (not related to John Carter) and Thomas Bennet. Then in the middle of all of this he notes in February that Ann (“Mother”) was getting weaker and on morphine as she had been since June 1898. On the 23rd of August he notes; “Mother died” and on the 24th; “mother buried”. The next month Thomas went to Sydney and thence to “Compton”, the property of his eldest daughter Margaret and her husband William Benjamin Perry at Naromine in central New South Wales, and then returned to Brisbane at the end of October. Later in that year he inspected the boilers being made for Gympie and Warwick water works, went to live with his son Richardson at Toowong, sold his furniture and let his house at Bennett Street in Toowong. He was seventy-three at the time and wrote also that he was quite ill in the June of that year. The year of 1900 was just as eventful for him. In May Thomas tested the boilers for Gympie Water Works and after that was very ill until the end of July, but in June was asked to inspect the Boilers for Musgrave and Townsville. February and March 1901 saw him performing various surveys and reports including one on the German mail steamer “Stitten” and the coastal passenger vessel “Cintra”, and supervising repairs to the “Mita”. In May he was required to examine and report on the boilers at Mount Crosby. At home he noted the death of his grand-daughter Mabel Constance Bennet from typhus at the age of five with the words “Mabel died”. She was the youngest daughter of his son Richardson and Agnes Bennet. In October he then moved to Eagle Junction with Richardson’s family and was also close to his grandson Ernie Carter and his wife Daisy, who lived at Woolloowin. He still owned the house “Silky Oaks” at Indooroopilly,

A photograph of officers of the Naval Brigade c1900 who served on the gunboat “Paluma” describes him as Engineer Commander Bennet.

The last of Thomas’s diary entries were in 1902. His role on the Marine Board and his position of the Queensland Government’s Engineer-Survey saw him survey several ships including “Devonshire”, “Argyle”, “Messie”, and “Sunny”. He served on the marine board until 1905 and appears to have retired, being an active 79 years-old that year. He continued to live at Eagle Junction with his son Richardson and his young family and when they moved to their dairy farm “Dumbarton” at Rosedale in about late 1907 or early 1908. Thomas went too. How he coped with remote rural life there is not known. One older family member told of how it was always the Thomas’s routine to keep the sabbath as a day of rest. The old Calvinist was most dismayed when Richardson’s family had to milk cows and feed their calves on a Sunday. He showed even more disquiet when he learned that the only worship at Rosedale until the 1920’s was provided by an Anglican circuit priest from Bundaberg. In 1911 in recognition

from Pinkenba Wharf and travelled via Biera in Portuguese East Africa and then overland for the defence of Rhodesia.

¹ The Marine Board was responsible for all aspects of merchant naval activities in Queensland waters like the appointment and duties of harbour masters, the certification and discipline of ship’s officers and crews, dredging, accident investigation, wharves, oyster beds and the arbitration of disputes. The minutes of the board reflect the sophistication and efficiency of the colonial administration that existed only seventy years after Queensland’s settlement. Meetings were often twice a month.

of his duties Thomas was given the rank of Engineer Commander by the Royal Australian Navy. For his remaining days he took enormous pride in his uniform of Engineer-Commander with the three stripes on both sleeves (without the curl) and he carried his ceremonial sword with the appropriate composure.

There are seven thousand shipwrecks around the Australian coast. It was a credit to his skills that Thomas was able to maintain the engines of ships that navigated the waters off Great Britain, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic to the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand and South East Asia for fifty-five years in the 19th century and at the beginning of the age of steamships without major mishap. Thomas's last naval adventure occurred in 1914 and was recorded sometime after the end of World War One when it was printed in a Bundaberg newspaper. The text of the report is self explanatory:

An Unrecorded Incident

“During the war there were so many incidents of patriotism that were allowed to pass by unnoticed and unrecorded, owing to the fact that everybody was carried away with enthusiasm and the desire to do their utmost to win the war and it is only by accident that particular incidents have been brought under notice. At the unveiling of the soldier memorial at Rosedale on Tuesday some mention was made of a flag presented by the late Capt. Bennet an old naval officer to the Patriotic Committee for use at their functions and which flag was hung in the Rosedale Hall. When the news came through of the reverse at Marne, Capt Bennet who was then in his 90th year polished his sword, donned his uniform and entrained for Brisbane where he offered his services for King and Country. Owing to his advanced age his offer was not accepted but the spirit which his action evoked the depest commendation. Captain Bennet has passed over the Great Divide some years but the people of Rosedale will always retain kindly remembrances of the sturdy old patriot who set such a splendid example to the youth of the Rosedale District”. (Bundaberg Daily News and Mail)

Thomas died at St Andrews Hospital at Bundaberg on the 30th October 1915 after a short illness. His last years are best summed up by the final few sentences in his obituary in the Bundaberg Daily News and Mail and the Brisbane Courier newspapers:

”Since his retirement eight years ago he has lived a quiet peaceful life with his son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. R Bennet, old and highly respected residents of the Rosedale district. He was a man of high intellectual attainments, had travelled all over the world and was a master of several foreign languages, notably French, Spanish, and Italian etc. He is survived by three sons and one daughter namely Mr. R. Bennet (Rosedale), Mr James R Bennet (Cloncurry), Mr L. F. Bennet (Sydney), and Mrs W. B. Perry (Narromine, N.S.W.), and a large number of grand children and great-grandchildren. The deceased's wife predeceased him by about fifteen years and was interred in the Toowong Cemetery, Brisbane, and it was the deceased wish that he should be buried alongside his wife, and his wish was given affect to, and the body was embalmed by Messrs. F. C. Brown” The casket was then entrained to Brisbane.