

to sell Rockfield and purchase it – a good decision, much to the benefit of both parties. By mid-November Sam was residing on the land and making arrangements for building a house. “The Brothers have gone from Myalla and I have a reduced property,” Edward wrote later; “but it is in many ways a better one and it ought to be enough for my moderate wants even though the price of wool threatens to continue so depressed.” More compact, fenced and otherwise improved, Myalla would be more easily managed and capable of producing more efficiently. Most important, nearly all of it had been converted to freehold: the long battle against selectors was nearly over.<sup>4</sup>

But he was not prepared to sell land to just anybody. In the same year his old rival Harkness wanted to purchase The Peak (to the south-east of Myalla and close to Lincluden); Edward refused.

### *A visit to England*

In June Edward began to think about making a trip to England the following year with Amey and the youngsters. The primary aim of the expedition was to see his mother again after twenty-five years; she was now elderly and ailing, “much affected” by the death of her son Charley, and very much wanting to see her eldest son Edward again. She probably also wanted to see her grandchildren, especially the little granddaughter who was called after her.

Gradually the plans for travelling took shape as Edward’s financial position improved. At the beginning of the year he had seven dependent children, by the end the three eldest had moved out on their own. Dick came home to Myalla for a visit in November and suggested that Alfred should join him permanently in surveying. “I wish he may be right,” Edward muttered in his diary, “for I don’t know what else Alfred is fit for.” The two brothers set out for Tumut on 30 November, and Dick was indeed right – as a surveyor Alfred was to have a distinguished career.<sup>5</sup> Eddie, married, soon to be a father and still a source of worry, was continuing with draughting and also became a surveyor. The four youngest would travel with their parents.

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4 Diary, 31 December 1883.

5 *The Advertiser* (Adelaide, SA) 23 February 1911, 7, outlines only part of his career and adventures as Government Field Surveyor in the Papuan public service.

Accordingly their governess, Miss Cary, was given notice and left at the end of January, 1883.

Who would be left in charge at Myalla? Of course, it must be Sam. He was experienced, reliable, trustworthy, and now the owner of adjoining land where he intended to live with his wife Mysic, within walking distance of Myalla. He had proved that he could be independent, but he seemed to prefer working in co-operation with Edward. With Sam once more in charge, Edward could return to England to take up his responsibility for the care of his mother as her eldest son, and therefore the head of the family. It seems that none of his brothers was living in England at that time: Charles had died, Richard was somewhere in the USA, as were two others, Robert and John.<sup>6</sup> One sister, Ellen, had died; there is no mention of the other sister, Ann, or brother James. Edward was the only one available.

All the family (including Eddie) were in Sydney to farewell them as they set out on the P&O steamship “Parramatta” on 23 March 1883 – Edward, Amey, Lenny, Freddy, Nellie and Reggie, their maid Annie Ryan, and their pet parrot. They travelled from Sydney to the United Kingdom by a route that became standard for nearly a century, from the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869 until its blocking by Egypt during the Six Day War with Israel in June 1967. They stopped at Melbourne for several days, then Adelaide, then King George’s Sound (Albany) after a characteristic rough crossing of the Bight; they crossed the Line on 16 April, the children enjoying a visit by King Neptune and especially the ice-cream of excellent quality supplied by the Purser throughout the tropical part of the voyage. They went sight-seeing at Colombo and Aden, but did not go ashore at Port Said (“a low, gambling place”); the boys loved seeing St John’s and the Armoury at Malta, then they steamed past Gibraltar and through the Pillars of Hercules. They arrived at Plymouth on 14 May after a smooth passage of just over seven weeks.

Amey and the children went on to London where she had a brother and a sister, both married and with children, while Edward stayed several days in Plymouth to visit his mother. “Cannot describe my feelings today at all,” he wrote. “Am I sober or awake? I have often dreamt this kind of thing – But I came in the Parramatta and can trace my career from Sydney.” Now he was home – or was he?

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<sup>6</sup> Richard’s whereabouts remained unknown; when his mother died they had to advertise for him in the San Francisco press in order to inform him of her death and his legacy. The other two kept in contact with Edward.

He joined the others in London for sightseeing and joyful reunions with family and friends. Amey's brother, Arthur Silberrad, lived in the City with his wife Lucy and several children and was carrying on their father's business as ship agent and general merchant; her sister Sarah was married to Benjamin Brown and they lived with their children at Dulwich in Surrey.<sup>7</sup> Edward and Amey found "a nice quiet comfortable house, well furnished" nearby at Tulsa Hill, and made it their base for the next few weeks. They also found a boarding school for Lenny and Freddy at St Leonards, near Hastings in East Sussex, and Edward left them there in the care of Mrs Duff, "much pleased" with her and the whole arrangements of the place, the boys "in capital spirits," the weather "charming" and "pretty scenery along the South Coast."

Edward himself was in good spirits. Sightseeing, meeting old friends and visiting old haunts – Plymouth, Ireland, Cambridge – occupied them for several months. But it soon became clear that Edward's mother was very unwell and that it was his duty to stay near her, to make sure she was properly cared for and to manage her affairs. At the end of September he leased a house at Somerton in Somerset, an easy journey by railway to Plymouth. (Railway travel in the United Kingdom was very advanced and very convenient, in total contrast to New South Wales, where the rate of progress on the line from Goulburn to Cooma could be described as glacial.) He made arrangements for domestic staff, got in stores, and ordered bulbs for a spring display in the garden – clearly he intended that the family would be there for some time.

Nellie and Reggie were delighted with "Mount Pleasant,"<sup>8</sup> even more so when they began to attend the local school and made friends; the two older boys moved to a school in Plymouth; the parents began to take an active part in the community at Somerton. On their first Christmas they distributed "Christmas comforts" to several poor people, received "a perfect host" of Christmas cards from English friends and enjoyed a fine turkey for dinner. "1883 has seen the fulfilment of many a dream," Edward wrote at

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7 Amey's brother, Arthur Pouchin Silberrad (1840-1916), married Clarissa Lucy Savill, and was living at 5 Harp Lane, Great Tower Street, London; her eldest sister, Sarah Ann (1832-1890), married to Benjamin Brown, lived at Florence Villa, Croxted Road, Dulwich. Information from George H. Graham, "The Thompsons, Shipbuilders of Sunderland ... Genealogy", <http://www.ghgraham.org/richardsilberrad1802.html> (accessed 9 May 2013.)

8 It is interesting to note that a tributary of Myalla Creek, which runs in the valley parallel to it on the north-west side, is named "Mount Pleasant Creek."

the end of the year. “Scenes of my childhood revisited – Plymouth – Cork – where I was all but unknown – and Cambridge which had an agreeable surprise for me ... I ought to be happy enough in this quiet country town where there is good food and fresh air and we are all well.”

Myalla, far away in Australia, was never far from Edward’s mind. “It ought to be enough for my moderate wants, even though the price of wool has been and threatens to continue so depressed.”<sup>9</sup> Sam kept him informed and he kept in touch by frequent exchange of letters, although the letters took nearly two months in transit. They wrote about lambing and shearing arrangements, sheep dip and fencing wire, and Sam continued to be reassuring: all was going well. But Edward was not so sure. He continued to read the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Manaro Mercury* whenever he could get hold of them, and learned that the sale price of wool went on falling while the rain did not. He attended the wool sales in England, and found them depressing.<sup>10</sup> Whether he could live on the proceeds of his pastoral property was a constant worry.

Old Mrs Pratt died in Plymouth in 1884; but Edward had to remain in England to fulfil his responsibilities as an executor of her estate. “Legacy duties” took up a good deal of his time and energy both that year and the next, indeed, he wondered if he would ever return to Myalla.<sup>11</sup> Sam was doing an excellent job: in August 1885 Edward received a letter from Mr Beazley, his bank manager in Cooma, praising Sam who was giving most of his time to Myalla affairs although his account was now owing £3,500. As far as the management of Myalla went, Beazley did not think there was any point in Edward’s coming back. Meanwhile, as the extended lease on Mount Pleasant was running out, Amey and Edward decided to move to Cambridge, while the boys stayed on



Nellie Pratt, Portrait taken at Plymouth  
 Photograph from Pratt family album.

9 Diary, 31 December 1883.

10 Diary, 20 January 1886.

11 The Diary for 1884 is missing from the collection, but that of the following year shows that Edward and his family were still in England.

at the boarding school in Plymouth. By the end of the year it seemed that Cambridge might become their permanent home.

“The disastrous state of the wool market and the equally disastrous drought” still caused Edward anxiety, however, and he perceived that his financial situation was deteriorating even further.<sup>12</sup> It now seemed to him that, far from making enough for him to live on, Myalla was making no income at all. His perceptions were strengthened by attending wool sales in London and receiving reports from Sam about a light wool clip and even lighter rainfall, though enough rain to interrupt the shearing. By the middle of March 1886 Edward’s anxiety became acute. On 7 April he wrote a letter to his old headmaster, A.B. Weigall, telling him that owing to his getting no income from Myalla he had determined to seek a schoolmaster’s position in Australia and asked him for help. Of course he would have to wait at least three months before getting a reply.



*Children’s party at Cambridge. Nellie seated 2nd left, Reggie seated 6th from left, Amey, back row, 6th from left. Photograph from Pratt family album.*

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12 The drought was real enough. A description of the Monaro published in 1886 refers to the previous year as the last of “what may be, without exaggeration, termed the ‘great drought.’” *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, ed. by Andrew Garran, Vol. I (Sydney: The Picturesque Atlas Publishing Co. Ltd, 1886), 138. Worse droughts came in the 1890s, see Hancock, *Discovering Monaro*, 126-127.

What should he do? There seemed no early settlement of his mother's estate, her Irish land remained unsold, but should he not return to Australia at once? After much anxious bother he decided to stay on in Cambridge for the time being, but he took the boys away from boarding school and taught them himself. He applied for several positions in English schools without success: at 54 he was deemed too old; schools preferred to employ someone much younger. He was convinced he was sinking into ruin and poverty.

It does not seem to have occurred to him that he had an expensive lifestyle: he was staying in rented accommodation in England, moving from one house to another, and sometimes having to pay extra for interim lodgings while waiting to move into the next, and at the same time he was paying a mortgage on Myalla. Amey always had a personal maid, and usually a cook and another servant as well. In March 1886, in the midst of fretting about the depressed wool market, they bought a lot of new furniture, carpets, and even a piano (it cost £26) for their latest house in Cambridge.

### Returning Home

Weigall's reply arrived on 26 June – a cold blast of common sense. He was grieved to hear about Pratt's trouble, recommended that he return to Sydney where he had many friends, made several suggestions about employment but advised him not to take up school teaching again – “A race horse should not turn cart horse.” So Edward arranged for his brother-in-law Arthur Silberrad to book their passage.

Sam wrote cheerfully: he thought Edward was right to return, but that he took too gloomy a view of prospects. The price paid for wool had almost doubled since the January sales, and this should set things right. Better still, in a letter received on 16 August but dated 27 June, Sam advised him that Mr John Cosgrove was offering a low-interest loan to clear the current mortgage on Myalla with enough to spare for further improvements.<sup>13</sup>

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13 John Cosgrove senior with his step brothers Charles and Henry York came to the district in 1848 and applied for the Billilingra Run east of the Murrumbidgee River (16,640 acres), the Adaminaby Run (16,000 acres), and adjacent “Queeingallery” Run (25,600 acres). By 1886 Cosgrove had secured these leases, and his family remained masters of much of the country now known as Cosgrove, York and Murrumbucka Parishes. [http://williamrees.com.au/William\\_Rees/Murrumbucca.html](http://williamrees.com.au/William_Rees/Murrumbucca.html) (accessed 16 May 2013).

Recognizing that he could do no more towards the sale of his late mother's property in Ireland and that her estate would not be settled any time soon, Edward secured his brothers' agreement to defer distribution for a couple of years and left the matter to her solicitors. After a month of farewells and packing, Edward, Amey and the children, not forgetting the new furniture and the piano, sailed for Australia on 21 September. It was a slow journey. The sailing ship took a much longer route "out" than their journey "home" by steamer, it stopped at no ports on the way – so offered no interesting excursions ashore for the passengers, who had to make their own entertainments – and it was more dependent on the winds and the weather. It therefore took more than seventeen weeks instead of just over seven to complete the voyage. Edward's account makes amusing reading – "16 Nov. Rats a nuisance. One of my socks carried off." – but many tedious days passed before they landed in Sydney on 16 January, where Dick and Alfred came on board to meet them.

They discovered "Sydney vastly improved as regards buildings." Apart from numerous new and grand private homes, they would have admired the woolstores at Circular Quay, the impressive Department of Lands building at Bridge Street and the grand Town Hall nearing completion on the site of the old cemetery next to St Andrew's Cathedral.<sup>14</sup> But the railway still operated from the old station at Redfern and only took passengers as far as Bungendore.<sup>15</sup> Arranging for the shipment of their baggage, furniture and piano to Myalla via Merimbula occupied many days. Lenny and Fred set off in advance on 24 January and arrived at Myalla three days later; bad weather and impassable roads held up Amey and the children until the end of the month; Edward stayed on in Sydney for a further week while he consulted his friends and considered his options.

Weigall remained a good friend and adviser: his advice was not to take up teaching again and not to sell Myalla. Other friends urged him to stand for the seat of Monaro in the NSW Legislative Assembly in elections

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14 A. Garran, Francis Myers and F.J. Broomfield, "Sydney", in *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, Vol. I, 63-90.

15 The railway reached Queanbeyan later that year and was officially opened on 8 September 1887. It continued on to Michelago, officially opened on 7 December 1887. It took another eighteen months to reach Cooma where it opened on 20 May 1889. It did not reach Nimmitabel until April 1912, and was finally opened all the way to Bombala in November 1921. The line was closed south of Cooma in 1986, and from Queanbeyan to Cooma in May 1989, a century after it opened. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombala\\_railway\\_line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombala_railway_line) (accessed 15 May 2013).

to be held that year. Edward had always been interested in public affairs, politics and the advancement of the Colony, and he would continue to write and publish articles on matters of public concern; but he declined to stand for Parliament. He had already made up his mind. His decision was to return to Myalla and make it his primary concern and his permanent home.

He took the overnight train to Bungendore on 8 February, somehow managed to get a place on the “contractor’s train” to Queanbeyan, and then travelled on to Cooma arriving at 7.45 pm – less than 24 hours after he left Sydney, at least travel times were improving – and then on to join the rest of the family at “Wyuna”, Sam and Mysic’s homestead on The Brothers. He found everyone well and in good spirits. Sam and Mysic welcomed them to stay until they could get Myalla homestead in order.

### *Improvements at Myalla*

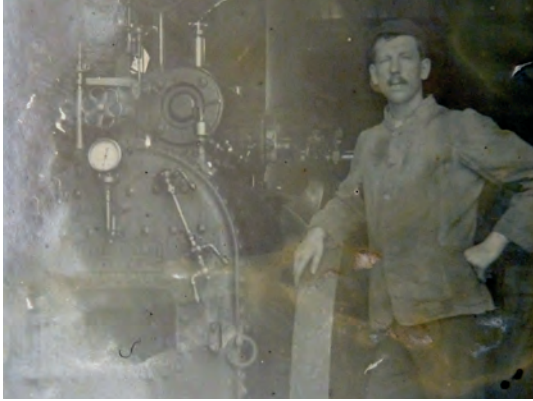
The plan was straightforward, although it took several years to implement. Since Myalla was to be their permanent home, the homestead needed to be comfortable, convenient, and pleasant to live in. Good employees were a valuable asset: they needed to be well treated, fairly paid and comfortably accommodated. Above all, since they must run a profitable business, Edward and Sam needed to find ways of giving their sheep and their wool the best advantage in a competitive market.

Edward, Amey and the children moved into Myalla homestead at the end of February and spent the next few months making necessary repairs



*Renovations at Myalla Homestead. Photograph by courtesy of J. Litchfield*





*Engine and Expert*  
*Photograph from Nellie Pratt's Album*



*Blade shearing at Myalla*  
*Photograph from Nellie Pratt's Album*



*Myalla Woolshed. Photograph from Nellie Pratt's Album*

and renovations. The dining-room floor was taken up and replaced – that room's odd smell was explained by the discovery of “lots of native cat rubbish underneath.”<sup>16</sup> A new porch was constructed after three barrow-loads of bones were removed from beneath the old one. A drawing room with bay window was added on the northern side of the house and a large bedroom next to it, both opening with French windows on to the side verandah.<sup>17</sup> In 1889 the shingle roof was recovered with corrugated iron, a material that lasted much longer and was capable of harvesting rainwater.

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16 The “native cat” or quoll is a carnivorous marsupial about the size of a domestic cat. Native cats were considered a nuisance by European settlers and treated accordingly until the rabbit plague caused a change of attitude. They are now considered a threatened species. <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/quolls2004.html> (accessed 16 May 2013).

17 Diary, 1890.

The garden welcomed them home with “a wonderful crop of apples and plums.” Always keen on fresh fruit and vegetables, Edward soon took the garden in hand and also planted elm trees among the pines in the avenue leading to the homestead. In 1889 he purchased a lawnmower – a domestic example of the programme of mechanization he was implementing at Myalla.

In 1890 Edward had a cottage built for his valued overseer, Thomas Roach.<sup>18</sup> John Owers, the builder, agreed to construct a “weatherboard cottage, 40ft by 24 ft, with stone foundations (himself quarrying) brick chimneys and generally complete shell of house with flooring – for £60 –extra work to be paid for at 8/- a day.”<sup>19</sup> The house was completed and Roach with his family moved into it while Edward was away in England by himself, trying to sell his late mother’s property in order to settle her estate at last. When he returned in October 1890 he noted “T. Roach’s house seems very comfortable.” He must have treated his staff well, for on his return they presented him with “a handsome silver casket.”



*Machine shearing at Myalla*

*Photograph from Nellie Pratt’s Album*

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18 Roach family, see “Roach, David” entry in Monaro Pioneers website, <http://www.monaropioneers.com/TNG/register.php?personID=I149498&tree=MP&generations=4> (accessed 18 February 2014). Thomas was a brother of the gold-miner, David junior.

19 Diary 1890. Owers’ quote provides an interesting comparison with today’s prices for a similar house.



*Myalla gardeners;  
Reggie on verandah.  
Photograph from Pratt  
family album.*

His primary concern was to improve Myalla's productivity and make his wool and his livestock more competitive in the marketplace. Very soon after he came back to Myalla in 1887 he and Sam agreed to manage their two properties together as one. In order to improve the quality of the flock, they paid attention to breeding. James Litchfield was the

first to breed sheep specifically suitable for the Monaro; Edward learned from his friend and neighbour, and purchased some of his best rams from Hazeldean.<sup>20</sup> Lambing took place in winter, often in rough cold weather. Edward did much "shepherding" in July, 1887, and sheltered the new-born lambs and their mothers under the shearing shed until they were stronger. Many ewes produced twins, which Edward found difficult to rear and too many of them perished. Shearing began in November that year and continued for several weeks, and Edward pronounced it "a most successful shearing on the whole." He and Sam had plans for making it even better.

Their most significant improvement to Myalla at this time was the introduction of machine shearing. They were already considering the purchase of a steam engine in the spring of 1887, at the same time as Frederick Wolseley was perfecting his invention of a shearing machine and having it demonstrated in eastern Australia and New Zealand.<sup>21</sup> One of the first to purchase the apparatus was Pat Hill Osborne for his station Currandooley

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20 Plowman, *Cooma Monaro Thematic History*, 23.

21 G. P. Walsh, "Wolseley, Frederick York (1837–1899)", Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wolseley-frederick-york-4881/text8165>, accessed 18 May 2013.

near Bungendore.<sup>22</sup> Sam visited Currandooley to inspect it in May 1889, and was favourably impressed; the Pratt brothers ordered the equipment soon afterwards. Sam made a second visit of inspection in October, and finding everything satisfactory the brothers bought a steam engine.

It arrived at the newly opened Cooma Railway Station on 31 October, but getting it from there and up the long rise over “heavy” roads to Myalla was challenging. Cases of machinery arrived soon afterwards, but when Sam assisted by E. Litchfield opened them they found “lots of deficiencies”. Urgent messages to Wolseley’s works remedied the deficiencies and produced a fitter, Armitage. On 11 November, “Sam, Armitage, Roach &c. set to work at rigging the shed for the machines and make good progress. Inspect the new office, bedroom & engine house – all very good.” The engine was installed the next day, and after a great deal of hard work and bother they managed to get the apparatus working just in time for the arrival of the shearers at short notice. Three of them came even earlier, no doubt keen to try out the new system.

To organize shearing under these new and confused circumstances was difficult. It was only a year since the first shed in Australia had completed shearing by machine; few shearers had experience – all had to be learned, much by trial and error.<sup>23</sup> The situation was further complicated by the Pratts’ running a “Non-Union” shed in the teeth of an increasingly powerful Shearers’ Union.<sup>24</sup> On 23 November the *Cooma Express* published “some characteristic abuse of our shearing,” provoking the indignation of Myalla’s non-union shearers. But on the whole the shearing went well, and continued until 16 January 1890, with only a short break for Christmas.

As shearing progressed the wool was sent to woolscouring works at Queanbeyan to be cleaned before it went on the market. Clean wool would fetch a better price and since it weighed less after cleaning it would cost less

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22 Edgar Beale, “Osborne, Pat Hill (1832–1902)”, Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/osborne-pat-hill-4344/text7053>, accessed 18 May 2013.

23 The first was Samuel McCaughey’s shed at Dunlop Station on the Darling. Peter Hohnen, “McCaughey, Sir Samuel (1835–1919)”, Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mccaughey-sir-samuel-682/text6485>, accessed 18 May 2013.

24 <http://www.atua.org.au/biogs/ALE1232b.htm>, accessed 18 May 2013. The great shearers’ strike on the issue of unionism began at Logan Downs, Queensland, in January 1891, just a year after the Pratts’ first machine shearing had finished.

to transport. In the Pratts' first years at Myalla the sheep were washed in a creek before shearing – a process which seemed to leave the wool even dirtier than it had been beforehand. It made more sense to wash the wool after it was taken off the sheep. By this time they had a choice of two woolscouring works operating in Queanbeyan: Bull's or Tomsitt's. John Bull established his woolwashing works and fellmongery on The Oaks Estate in 1877; in 1885 he sold it to George Tomsitt but soon started a new one that included an abattoir from which fresh meat was freighted to Sydney daily.<sup>25</sup>

The railway was transforming the whole economy of the Monaro. Before the line went through to Cooma the most rapid journey to Sydney had taken several days. Passengers and mail had been able to get through by coach, but Monaro producers had to send their wool and other heavy goods to the coast by wagon, drawn by bullocks or horses, and then ship it to Sydney – a process that could take several weeks. Now it was possible not only for passengers but also freight to be carried to or from Sydney in less than a day; the journey to Melbourne via Goulburn where the track joined the main line was longer, but only by hours, not days.<sup>26</sup> The journey from Myalla to Cooma railway station took the longest time. A man called Butler was the bullocky for big loads of wool; he had his own team and was engaged to cart the wool clip from Myalla to the train. He carried about forty bales at a time, and it took him about a day and a half to get to Cooma railway station.<sup>27</sup> Eventually motor transport would replace the bullock teams, making the journey much faster.

Having experienced the convenience of railways in England, Edward Pratt was one of the first Monaro landholders to seize the opportunities the new rail link offered, and the very first to introduce machine shearing. Myalla was now at the front of technological developments in the industry.

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25 Errol Lea-Scarlett, *Queanbeyan District and People* (Queanbeyan, NSW: Queanbeyan Municipal Council, 1968), 162-165.

26 Plowman, *Cooma Monaro Thematic History*, 37, 39-41. Edward published some of his own ideas on railways in "Betterment and Railways", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September 1895, 4.

27 Gordon Ferguson, "Memories of Myalla".

The “youngsters”

By 1890 Nellie and Reggie were the only Pratt children still living at Myalla. Nellie turned thirteen that year, Reggie eleven. It is not clear whether their father was their only teacher since they returned from England, whether they attended the school on the property, or whether (which seems more likely) they had a governess. They were both clever: at the age of ten Nellie was already learning Algebra; two years later on a trip to Sydney Edward wrote to her in French, and father and daughter exchanged mathematical problems, which they both took pleasure in solving.<sup>28</sup> By 1890 the parents were seriously considering what they should do about secondary education for their daughter and youngest son.

Lenny had just about finished his secondary education when the family returned to Australia in 1887. He turned seventeen that year, and his father encouraged him to apply for a position at the Commercial Bank. He was appointed to a clerkship at £50 per annum, and in June that year began work at Moruya, on the South Coast of NSW. “Poor Leonard starts, cheerful and hopeful,” Edward wrote. “I feel sad, and yet confident as to his future.”<sup>29</sup> Fred turned fifteen that October, and was spending his last year of school at Sydney Grammar. In November he started a little newspaper called the *Grammar School Gazette* – it was his first foray into journalism, but the following year at the age of sixteen he joined the crew of a fast wool ship to begin a career in the merchant navy.

The eldest three were working as surveyors, with varying success. Eddie was not mentioned in his father’s diary very often; the few references indicate that he continued to be short of money and that his father had reason to believe that his misgivings about the marriage to Miss Cavanagh were justified.<sup>30</sup> Richard, who seemed to be doing well in his profession, visited Myalla from time to time, and in the autumn of 1890 he brought Miss Charlotte Fraser to stay for a week; the couple were married in Sydney in 1892. Alfred also was courting: in February 1890 he married Miss Isabel Cary, who had spent several years at Myalla as governess to his younger brothers Lenny and Fred. Alfred was then stationed at Brewarrina, but

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28 Diary entries for 26 October 1887, 31 July 1889.

29 Diary, 27 June 1887.

30 For example, entries for 22 July & 2 December 1887.

Isabel returned to Sydney for the birth of their first child, a daughter, at the end of the year.<sup>31</sup>

Sudden, terrible, the news came by telegraph from Moruya to Cooma and was brought to Sam, who rode hard up and over the long rise to Myalla, arriving at seven in the morning of 2 January 1889. Lenny was dead, killed at Moruya by a fall from a horse.<sup>32</sup>

Amey's reaction to the death of a third son is more easily imagined than described – the others had been infants; this was a young adult, cheerful, confident of a bright future. Edward became ill. Letters of sympathy poured in all through the week and the following week. Even Harkness, that old adversary, sent condolences as soon as he heard.

Edward became too ill with a condition affecting his eyes to continue writing his diary; he had to stay in Cooma close to medical care for several weeks, only returning to Myalla at the end of February. It was Sam and Amey who went to Moruya to visit the grave and “settle all about our dear Leonard.” Richard came to Myalla to help and sympathize. One good to come from the calamity was the development of a more cordial relationship with the Harknesses at Lincluden: the two ladies began to visit each other, and Mrs Harkness helped Edward towards recovery with a practical gift of a pair of “dark spectacles.”

Fred wrote from England, where he was staying with his uncle Arthur Silberrad, “in great distress about Leonard.” Perhaps Fred grieved the most: Lenny had been his closest brother in age, his constant companion in childhood at Myalla and at school in England his best mate. His ship had brought him to Australia in November that year – in time to see the excitement of the steam engine and the machine shearing – and before he had to sail away again, all too soon, he told his father that he hated a career in the merchant navy.

Edward gave in, forwarded money to Arthur Silberrad in order to pay Fred small sums weekly for lodging and other necessities while he considered what he did want to do with his life. He did well. He became a newspaper reporter for the *Daily Telegraph*, then Reuters sent him to China to cover

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31 *SMH*, 14 March 1890, 1; 22 November 1890, 1.

32 He was returning to Moruya after spending Christmas with the Mort family. Betty Ferguson, “Biographical notes”, Papers of Edward Pratt, NLA MS 2277 Box 3, Item 34.

the Boxer revolt, where he later returned as a foreign correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He spent most of his long life in China, having even more adventures than he might have had at sea.<sup>33</sup>



Shearing with blades

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33 Selwyn Speight, *SMH* correspondent in Chungking, wrote a brief biography of Frederick Pratt: "They Stayed Away: Reporters and a Revolution," *SMH*, 19 February 1944, 7.