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A group of important items from the  
Scott, Mitchell and Merewether families in New South Wales  
1801 – 1914

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## *The Scott, Mitchell and Merewether families in NSW*

James Mitchell (1792 – 1869) was born in Fife, Scotland. He joined the Army Medical Corps in 1810 and after active service in Europe and America during the Napoleonic Wars ‘was appointed assistant surgeon to the 48th Regiment then stationed in New South Wales and arrived in Sydney in November 1821’.<sup>i</sup> In June 1823 he was transferred to the Colonial Medical Department as an assistant surgeon and posted to the Sydney Hospital. He was promoted to the position of surgeon in 1829. Mitchell had been granted 2000 acres (809 ha) at Burragorang in 1822, and in the next fifteen years acquired holdings in the Hunter district by grant and purchase, including the Burwood and Rothbury estates. In 1826 he was a founding member of the Australian Subscription Library, a precursor of the Public, and now State Library of New South Wales.

Only a few months after James Mitchell, Robert and Helenus Scott arrived in New South Wales in early 1822. The Scott brothers had been born in Bombay in India, where their father, Dr Helenus Scott the elder, was an East India Company surgeon and President of the Bombay Medical Board. In ca. 1797 Dr. Scott had married Augusta Maria Frederick. She was the daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Frederick. Frederick had ‘entered the East India Company’s service, as a Captain, about the year 1776...’.<sup>ii</sup> He is recorded as serving as a Major in the Bombay army in 1778. Augusta Maria Scott’s birth year is usually given as ca. 1775, but Burke’s Peerage records it as 1776.<sup>iii</sup> This means that she was either born in India or was a very young child when her family moved there. Following her father’s death in 1791, she ‘inherited some of the immense wealth which had been amassed by her ancestor Sir John Frederick’.<sup>iv</sup> Sir John had been a wealthy merchant and Lord Mayor of London in 1662.

The Scotts had six children, and at least the first five were born in Bombay: another Augusta Maria (1798 – 1871), Robert (1799 – 1844), Alexander Walker (1800 – 1883), Helenus John (1802 – 1879), David Charles Frederick (1804 – 1881) and Patrick (?1809 – 1887). They lived at Poway (Powai), then a small village just outside of Bombay, where from 1799 they leased the Poway Estate.<sup>v</sup> When Dr Scott was away in Bombay for longer periods he regularly wrote to his wife at Poway.<sup>vi</sup> In 1809 the Scotts returned to England, but ‘restive conditions in Britain [...] were dispiriting to resourceful spirits like the Scotts’.<sup>vii</sup> There were plans for at least one of the brothers to return to India to practice law: ‘It would have given me much satisfaction to know that Wm Lee is willing to give you & Walker instruction in Sanskrit [...]. I consider this language as of the greatest consequence to a young man going to India in the Law’.<sup>viii</sup>

Instead the Scotts, possibly also encouraged by Sir Joseph Banks, sought a future in the relatively new colony of New South Wales. In late 1821 Dr Helenus Scott, accompanied by his sons Robert and Helenus, embarked on the *Britomart* for New South Wales. Dr Scott died suddenly on the voyage and was buried at the Cape. His two sons received land grants in the Hunter Valley after their arrival in early 1822. Their combined property *Glendon*, where they soon began breeding blood

horses, was adjacent to James Mitchell's *Rothbury*. The three men formed a friendship, and 'their search [for wives] would link them closely forever'.<sup>ix</sup>

Augusta Maria Scott and her daughter continued to live in England and on the continent for many years, Mrs Scott finding 'quite horrid' the idea of her sons 'being surrounded by convicts'.<sup>x</sup> This sentiment was mirrored by what friends in Bombay thought: 'Your brother Edward showed me a letter from Van Diemen's Land, by which I was glad to see that Helenus was going to England. I cannot imagine that it should be necessary for the sons of such a man as his Father was to look for employment in a barbarous land'.<sup>xi</sup> Following her husband's death Mrs Scott was left an estate of over £24,000, including property interests in Bombay. Another family friend writes from there: 'In regard to the future management of your affairs in this country, I have no prospect of being able to remain long in it [...] I would advise the Executor therefore to grant power of attorney to your two brothers, and to join with them anyone or more of the gentlemen connected with the Agency in India whom you would wish to employ. I shall before leaving the country deliver to Major Edward all papers connected with Poway'.<sup>xii</sup>

The third-eldest of the six Scott children, Alexander Walker, was also keen to establish himself in Australia. Although without any experience, he 'could not resist the new continent with its... obvious potential to make money'.<sup>xiii</sup> Walker, as he was known, had decided to become a merchant, had purchased a ship, and had named it the *Australia*. He arrived at Newcastle on 17 January 1827. His brother Robert had tried in vain to dissuade him: 'It tends simply to this that unless a man by long experience can understand markets... he is sure sometimes or other to be taken in'.<sup>xiv</sup> Robert Scott's views of his brother's business acumen proved right and 'this and voyages to the colony in 1829 and 1831 proved financially disastrous'.<sup>xv</sup>

On his last voyage in 1831 Walker Scott brought his mother and sister to New South Wales. Arriving in Sydney on 20 August 1831, at the beginning of the golden age of the 1830s, and bringing her considerable wealth, Mrs Scott purchased *Cumberland Place* on Bunker's Hill in The Rocks from the wealthy merchant Robert Campbell senior. Following this 1831 voyage Walker Scott was keen to establish trade with India. 'The family was now together except for David and Patrick who were in India. [...], and already there were plans to trade with Calcutta and Bombay, where Patrick could arrange the cargoes'.<sup>xvi</sup>

On 22 August 1833 Miss Augusta Maria Scott (the younger) married Dr James Mitchell, 'with whom she had corresponded for some years'.<sup>xvii</sup> The Mitchells moved into Mrs Scott's house, *Cumberland Place*, where James Mitchell opened a private practice. Their first child, born in 1834, was yet another Augusta Maria, later Mrs Edward Christopher Merewether. 1836 saw the arrival of the Mitchells' second child, David Scott Mitchell, Australia's greatest book collector and founder of the Mitchell Library. A second daughter, Margaret, was born in 1840.

Earlier this year I acquired a group of items from a direct descendant of the three families.

1801



A Georgian silver sauce ladle (length 18.5 cm) with James Mitchell's monogram 'JM' engraved on the handle, hallmarked London 1801, maker's mark A.D (maybe Abraham Dry?)



Two Bank of Australia share certificates (14 x 22.5 cm each) for “One Hundred Pounds Ster.g” each, printed on vellum (S. Clayton sct), numbered No. 1153 and No. 1159 and issued to James Norton on 1 July 1826, with his name inserted in ink. Share certificate 1159 a little foxed, else very good.

Norton was one of the founding directors of the Bank of Australia, and was James Mitchell’s solicitor. The two shares are signed by Cashier ‘W[illiam Henry] Mackenzie (Ent.d); and the Directors W. Jemmett Browne, A. B. Spark, George Brown and H[annibal] McArthur.

The versos are endorsed in ms. “Received Ten Pounds Sterling, the Amount of first & second instalments in this share.” and are signed by “Thos Macvitie, Managing Director”. This represented the amount “payable on allotment” (Butlin 1953, p. 195). Butlin also records that the capital raised was to be £100,000 in £100 shares. The numbers on these shares indicate that the target was exceeded before the bank commenced operations on 3 July 1826.

The Bank of Australia was formed as a rival to the Bank of New South Wales. It was dubbed the "pure merino" bank because its share register included the plutocracy of the colony but excluded the ex-convicts who had been associated with the Bank of New South Wales. The bank opened on 3 July 1826 in George Street, Sydney. James Mitchell was a shareholder of the bank.

ca. 1833



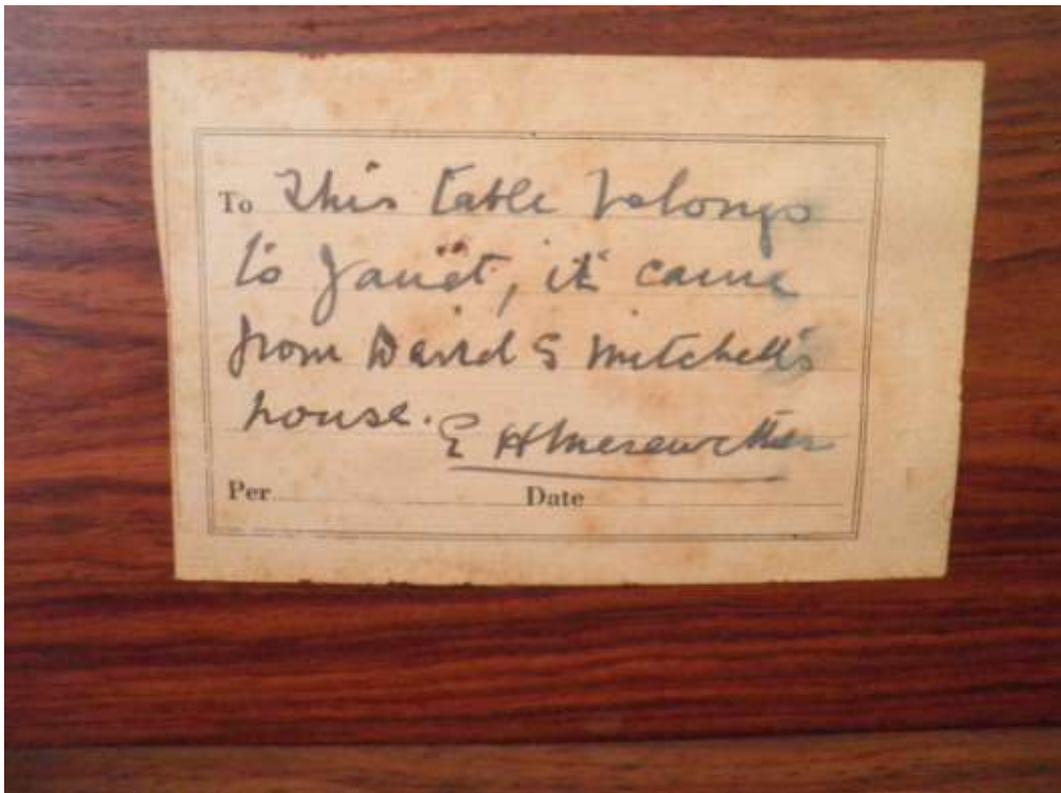
A Games Table, almost certainly of Anglo-Indian origin and of teak and padouk wood, with ebony and mother-of-pearl inlays. This games table was made for James Mitchell, and has his monogram 'JM' engraved on two round mother-of-pearl inlays. I suggest that it was commissioned for Mitchell by his mother-in-law Augusta Maria Scott and made in Bombay ca. 1833.

Made of hardwood, most likely teak and padouk wood, that has aged to a rich and lustrous dark yellow and brown patina, the games table (H 74, W 79 and D 55 cm) is in beautiful original condition. The chess board at the top consists of fields of mother-of-pearl and ebony inlays. It slides out to reveal an interior backgammon board, also inlaid in mother-of-pearl and ebony. Four ebony cradles at the base of each section of the board provide assistance in keeping pieces in place during a game. There are a further 32 small inlaid squares, one at the tip of each of the 24 backgammon fields and 8 arranged around the centre. Each of these consists of 16 tiny squares of mother-of-pearl and ebony in a checked pattern.

Two central round mother-of pearl inlays (38 mm in diameter) are engraved with James Mitchell's monogram 'JM'. The table has two compartments with hinged lids at the sides containing a total of 8 removable teak boxes of varying sizes for the storage of games pieces. It stands on a column leg with carved twisted rope decoration and on a quadraform form base with carved scrolled feet.

After his father's death in 1869 the table passed into David Scott Mitchell's possession, was passed on to two of his sister's children, and then through a further three generations in the Merewether family.





A very important piece of Anglo-Indian furniture, made for an important early NSW colonial figure, and with a highly significant further provenance, thus very rare.

For a detailed description of the table and its provenance, refer to my article in the November 2012 issue of *Australiana*, also available for download on our website [www.harbeck.com.au](http://www.harbeck.com.au)

ca. 1835



A group of 16 Chinese mother-of-pearl gaming counters in various shapes, (lozenges 2 x 5.5 cm, rectangles 2 x 5.5 cm and round 3.3 cm diameter), engraved with Chinese scenes, and the four rectangular ones engraved with James Mitchell's monogram, ca. 1835. Fine.

ca. 1840



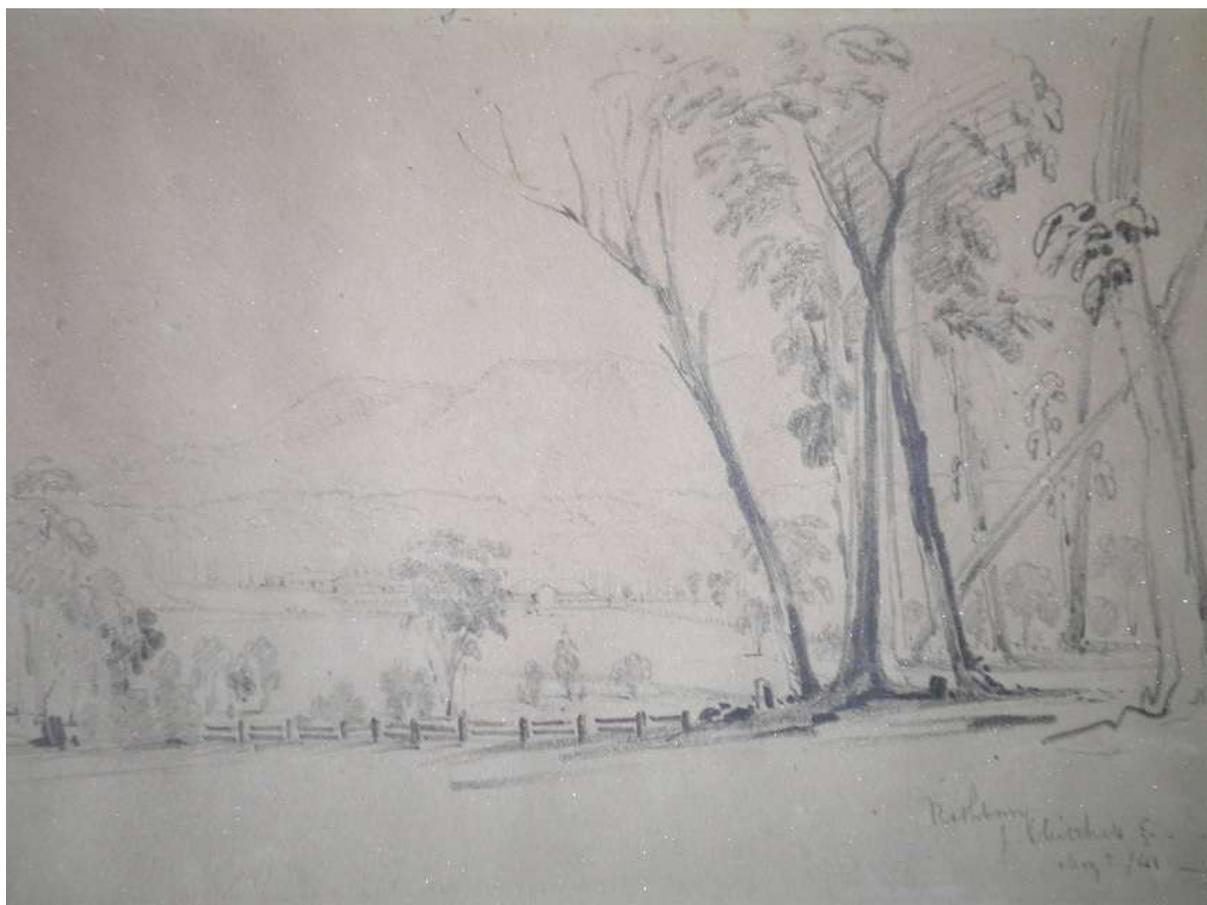
James Mitchell's letter seal (7.5 cm in length), made of ebony wood, with his initials and crest and motto 'Deo favente'. Fine and with small traces of red wax.

ca. 1840



A limestone bust of Patrick Scott (1809 – 1887) as a young man. On a black plinth (total height 23 cm). Artist unknown. Sydney (?), ca. 1840. A label written ca. 1950 affixed to underside of the plinth identifies the subject as Patrick Scott. He was the youngest child of Augusta Maria and Dr Helenus Scott, a brother of Augusta Maria Mitchell, and a brother-in-law of James Mitchell. The bust is said to have been made shortly after his arrival in Australia in 1840. It was quite possibly made from limestone found at the Scott's property of Glendon in the Hunter Valley.

A few spots a little yellowed, the nose more so, else fine.



Martens, Conrad (attributed). 'Rothbury. J. Mitchell Esq. '2 May 1841' (lr). A pencil sketch (19 x 28.5 cm) of James Mitchell's Rothbury Estate, unsigned, but attributable to Conrad Martens. This drawing adds to our knowledge of Conrad Martens. Martens is known to have been at the Scotts' Glendon property on 3 May 1841. This pencil sketch shows he was at neighbouring Rothbury the day before.

Rothbury Estate was the primary source of David Scott Mitchell's income that allowed him to put together the magnificent collection of books, documents and pictures that was to become the Mitchell Library. The Rothbury Colliery opened by his nephews Henry and Edward Merewether in 1914 was to provide the funds to pay the balance of Mitchell's bequest of £70,000 as well as the balance of the bequest of £5,000 to his cousin Rose Scott. According to Merewether family records, this pencil sketch belonged to Rose Scott. She gave it to H A M Merewether, executor of David Scott Mitchell's will, in gratitude for ensuring the bequest to her was paid out.

Together with another unsigned pencil sketch (20 x 30 cm) titled 'lr 'Tahlee, Port Stephens, 1841' and also attributed to Martens. Both are minimally browned, but else in very good condition.

ca. 1850



An agate fob seal (2.5 x 3 cm) with initials 'G R' below the crest of a rampant lion, two hands holding daggers, one pointing upwards the other downwards, and motto 'Deo non viribus confideto', ca. 1850. Fine.

This may have been the seal of George William Rusden (1819 – 1903), historian, educationist, public servant and author of the *History of Australia* (1883). His sister Sarah Anne (Saranna) Rusden was married to the younger Helenus Scott. Rusden did not marry, so it seems very likely that some of his possessions passed into the Scott and Merewether families after his death, possibly also through his niece Rose Scott.

ca. 1860



Scott, Maria 'Ria' Jane (attributed). A watercolour painting of Rose Bay Park, Sydney, (25.5 x 35 cm), ca. 1860, attributed by the Merewether family to Maria ('Ria') Jane Scott (nee Barney), who had studied under Conrad Martens. It is said to show Woollahra House (built in 1857) in the background. (24.5 x 33 cm). Laid down on a modern white board.

Maria Jane Barney (1821 – 1890) married David Charles Frederick Scott (1804-1881) in 1838, thus becoming an aunt to David Scott Mitchell.

The Mitchell Library holds several sketchbooks with watercolours done and collected by Maria Jane Scott. One of these includes an 1850 watercolour of 'Rose Bay from Tivoli' by Conrad Martens.

Today this park is the Royal Sydney Golf Club.

1914



A photograph album (15 x 23 cm) of 11 albumen prints (9 x 15 cm) of Rothbury Colliery shortly after it was opened by the Merewethers. The front cover is titled in white ink "Xmas 1914. Rothbury. With the Proprietors' Compliments". The first photograph with some slight brown-staining, the other very slightly faded, a few mount boards cracked in the fold, boards and photographs minimally warped.

The photos are captioned in white ink. 1. Rothbury Colliery. 2. Officials. 3. Portion of P.M. shift. Rothbury Miners. 4. Main Endless Hauling Engine. 5. Lancashire Boilers – Rothbury 6. Pit-Top. 7. Picking Belt & Screen – empty. 8. Picking Belt & Screen – full. 9. Coal train leaving Rothbury Colliery. 10. Shipping Coal in Newcastle. 11 British Science Congress visit Rothbury 22 August 1914. This last photograph shows a delegation of 53 British scientists and 16 accompanying wives who were in Australia for the 84<sup>th</sup> meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in August 1914. The last mount board is signed J. Kelley (?).

The Rothbury coal mine, opened by the Merewether brothers in 1914, was to provide the funds to pay the Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales the balance of the bequest made by their uncle David Scott Mitchell. Rothbury Estate had earlier been the primary source of income for David Scott Mitchell.

## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> Elizabeth Guilford, 'James Mitchell, (1792–1869)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mitchell-james-2462/text3295>.
- <sup>ii</sup> [Philippart, John]. *The East India Military Calendar. Vol. 3*. Printed for Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, London, 1826, pp 285-286.
- <sup>iii</sup> Charles Mosley (ed.). *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage and Knightage*, 107<sup>th</sup> edition, Burke's Peerage (Genealogical Books) Ltd, Wilmington, Delaware, U.S.A, 2003, Vol. 1, p 1490. Her elder sister Martha was born in 1775, her younger sister Lucy in 1777. Two brothers, Charles and Edward, followed in 1778 and 1784.
- <sup>iv</sup> Paul Brunton, 'The collector collected', *A Grand Obsession. The DS Mitchell Story*, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, 2007, p 28.
- <sup>v</sup> Cf. 'Powai'. Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powai>
- <sup>vi</sup> Cf. Scott Family Papers, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML A2260
- <sup>vii</sup> Eileen Chanin, *Book Life. The life and times of David Scott Mitchell*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2011, p 25.
- <sup>viii</sup> Dr Helenus Scott to Robert Scott, 10 October 1820, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML A2260.
- <sup>ix</sup> Chanin, op. cit. p 23.
- <sup>x</sup> Augusta Maria Scott to Robert Scott, 23 April 1823, Scott Family papers, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML A2260.
- <sup>xi</sup> A family friend [signature illegible] to Augusta Maria Scott, 24 October 1822, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML A2260.
- <sup>xii</sup> William Jenkins (?) to Augusta Maria Scott, 24 October 1824, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML A2260.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Marion Ord, *Historical drawings of native flowers. Harriet and Helena Scott*. Craftsman House, Roseville, 1988, p 19.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Robert Scott to Alexander Walker Scott, 3 January 1825, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML A2263.
- <sup>xv</sup> Nancy Gray, 'Scott, Alexander Walker (1800–1883)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/scott-alexander-walker-4545/text7449>.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ord, op. cit. p 19. David Scott had become a Captain in the East India Company's service in 1824 and arrived in New South Wales in 1835. Patrick Scott, a poet, came to Australia in 1840, the year of his mother's death. He returned to England where he died at Glendon, Surrey, in 1887.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Nancy Gray, 'Scott, Robert (1799–1844)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/scott-robert-2642/text3673>.