

NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)

RESEARCH INTO 'FLETE', 2 FLETE AVENUE, MALVERN.

F.N. 3357.

A Malvern rate book search confirms that the twelve-roomed single storied brick residence 'Flete' at 2 Flete Avenue was built in 1883 for Judge Hartley Williams (1843 - 1929) Supreme Court Judge, later Sir Hartley Williams.<sup>(1)</sup>

After Sir Redmond Barry's death in 1881 Williams was nominated to succeed him and was sworn in as the youngest judge in the colony. He became well-known and respected for the common-sense of his summings-up and judgements.<sup>(2)</sup> Williams lived at 'Flete' in the early 1880s and later in the middle 1890s.<sup>(3)</sup>

ARCHITECT/BUILDER

A search for the name of the architect who designed Williams' mansion or of the builder who constructed it has been unsuccessful so far. However, there still remain some useful sources to check.

In 1889 'Flete' is recorded as the property of Stratford Strettle, auctioneer.<sup>(4)</sup> Williams first wife had died in 1885 and in 1887 he married his cousin Jessie Bruce Lawford, eldest daughter of Thomas Acland Lawford of Wimbledon.<sup>(5)</sup> William re-purchased 'Flete' in 1894<sup>(6)</sup> and lived there with his second wife and family until 1901.<sup>(7)</sup>

Captain Charles Lawrance purchased 'Flete' in 1902<sup>(8)</sup> when Sir Hartley Williams retired to live in England where he died on 12 July 1929.<sup>(9)</sup> Lawrance's widow, Mary, became owner in 1905.<sup>(10)</sup>

Another distinguished legal man, Sir John Latham, Chief Justice of the High Court,<sup>(11)</sup> was associated with the old brick mansion from 1921, when it was owned by his wife, Eleanor.<sup>(12)</sup>

- 
- (1) First RB listing - Malvern RB 1883 No.112 listed then in  
(2) ADB vol 6 pp 403 & 404 (Boundary (Kooyong) Road  
(3) See below  
(4) Malvern RB 1889 No. 381 (5) ADB vol 6 pp 403 & 404  
(6) Malvern RB 1894 No. 21 (7) See below  
(8) Malvern RB 1902/3 No. 21 (9) See ADB article  
(10) Malvern CC records  
(11) Johns Who's Who 1922 p 155  
(12) Malvern RB 1921/22 No. 1028

The Lathams lived at 'Flete' for some time but in the early 1940s, when they were residing at 42 Washington Street, Toorak, let the building to Yasutaro Niizeki, merchant, and to Southern Headquarters, W.A.A.F. (13)

In 1946 the Melbourne Bible Institute purchased the property, re-named it "Lawry House", and turned it into a Women's Hostel. (14)

Currently owned by the Yooralla Society of Victoria, it was damaged recently by fire (August 1977) and is under threat of demolition to allow re-development of the site. (15)

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS

A comparison of a 1902 MMBW plan with a 1977 auction plan shows that the two rear wings of the building were added some time after the turn of the century. The architect/builder responsible for these additions are unknown. (16)

ASSOCIATIONS WITH MELBA

No evidence has been found in the Malvern rate books or elsewhere that Melba ever lived at 'Flete'. (17)

LIST OF OWNERS/OCCUPIERS 1883 - 1979

- 1883 Judge Hartley Williams, Supreme Court Judge (O/O) 'Flete'
- 1889 Stratford Strettle, auctioneer (O/O)
- 1894 Judge H. Williams (o/o)
- 1902/3 Captain Charles Lawrance (O/O)
- 1905 Mrs. Mary Lawrance (O/O)
- (1908 lets to G.L. Burke, merchant
- 1912
- (1919/20 subdivision)
- 1921/22 Mrs. E. Latham, wife of Sir John Latham, Chief Justice of High Court (O/O)
- (1942 Yasutaro Niizeki, merchant (occ)
- 1943 Southern HQs, W.A.A.F. (occ)

---

(13) Malvern CC records  
 (14) Ibid.  
 (15) See file  
 (16) c.f. 1902 MMBW plan with 1977 auction plan  
 (17) See file

- 1946 Melbourne Bible Institute (owner).....  
Women's Hostel - "Lawry House"  
1977 Yooralla Society of Victoria (O/O)<sup>(18)</sup>

EARLY HISTORY OF THE BUILDING 1880s - 1901

As we have seen the first owner of 'Flete' in 1883 was Judge Hartley Williams, soon after his appointment as a Supreme Court Judge.<sup>(19)</sup>

Earlier, from 1877 Williams owned a smaller brick residence in Boundary (Kooyong) Road in part of allotment section 26<sup>(20)</sup> However, following his Supreme Court appointment he sold this property in 1882 to Thomas King Scott, squatter. Scott was its owner still in 1889.<sup>(22)</sup>

Williams purchased the site of 'Flete' in 1883, part of sections 25 and 25A, about six acres of land, from Joseph Harris, nurseryman, and William Moss, clergyman, both of South Yarra. A six-roomed brick house on the site was demolished.<sup>(23)</sup>

'Flete' appears for the first time in the 1882 Malvern rate book.<sup>(24)</sup> By 1884 its valuation has increased to £500.<sup>(25)</sup>

Sir Hartley Williams was born on 15 October 1843 at Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, the second son of Sir Edward Eyre Williams (1813-1880) a distinguished English judge, who arrived in Melbourne in 1841, owned the Como Estate in 1846 - 1852, and later became a colleague of the Supreme Court Judges Stawell and Sir Redmond Barry.<sup>(26)</sup>

Sir Hartley was educated in England and called to the Bar in 1867. In 1870 he married Edith Ellen Horne in Hobart and they returned to Melbourne in 1871. As a Supreme Court Judge from 1881 Williams was respected for his judgements. He was often criticized, however, for his unorthodox views on politics and religion. In 1903 he resigned and retired to England, where he died on 12 July 1929.<sup>(27)</sup>

Williams sold 'Flete' for the first time in 1889 to Stratford Strettle, auctioneer.<sup>(28)</sup> The 1892 Malvern rate book

---

(18) Malvern Rate Books etc.  
(20) Malvern RB 1877 No. 381.  
(22) Ibid. 1889 No. 81  
(24) See above  
(26) ADB vol 6 p 403  
(28) See above.

(19) See above  
(21) Ibid. 1881 No. 423  
(23) Ibid. 1882 Nos. 110 & 111  
(25) Malvern RB 1884 No. 115  
(27) Ibid and p 404

identifies the building as a brick house of twelve rooms owned and occupied by Strettle.<sup>(29)</sup> He is the owner still in 1893.<sup>(30)</sup> Judge Williams repurchases 'Flete' in 1894.<sup>(31)</sup> He is knighted in that year.<sup>(32)</sup> He sells 'Flete' in 1902/3 following his decision to retire.<sup>(33)</sup>

MMBW 1902 PLAN

A fine MMBW plan dated 1902 shows 'Flete' as it still was at the turn of the century standing on six acres of land with a frontage to Kooyong Road, near High Street. A long wide gravel drive sweeps up to the Kooyong Road entrance. The house has wide verandahs, a conservatory on the west side, a small pavilion and a large asphalt tennis court on the S.E. side. There are stables at the rear of the building with a gravel drive branching out to the main gateway and a second gateway, both in Kooyong Road. The building's main entrance has steps on the west side. There are steps on the north side, also, which may have led to lawns and a formal garden.<sup>(34)</sup>

As we have seen Captain Charles Lawrance's widow, Mary, becomes the owner of 'Flete' after his death in 1905. She lets at various times to George Burke, merchant.<sup>(35)</sup> She is listed as owner for the last time in 1920/21, following a subdivision of the property, when 'Flete' is described as a brick house of twelve rooms on lots 8,9,10 in Flete Avenue, N.A.V. £250.<sup>(36)</sup>

LATHAM OWNERSHIP 1921 - 1945

Sir John Latham, owner of 'Flete' in 1921,<sup>(37)</sup> was born in Ascot Vale on 25 August 1877 and called to the Bar in 1904. He was a lecturer in Logic and Philosophy and later, in Law, at Melbourne University. He was created CMG in January 1920,<sup>(38)</sup> and became Chief Justice of the High Court. The Lathams lived at 'Flete' until the 1940s, when they let it to private individuals and the W.A.A.F.<sup>(39)</sup>

In 1946 the property was purchased by the Melbourne Bible Institute of 117 Kooyong Road (another historic 19th century mansion), re-named "Lawry House" and used as a Women's Hostel.<sup>(40)</sup>

- 
- |   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| (29) Malvern RB 1892 No. 22                   | (30) Ibid. 1893 No. 21      |
| (31) Ibid. 1894 No. 21                        | (32) See <u>ADB</u> article |
| (33) Ibid. 1902/3 No. 21                      | (34) <u>MMBW 1902 plan.</u> |
| (35) Malvern RB 1913/14 No. 22                | (36) Ibid. 1920/21 No. 1005 |
| (37) See above.                               |                             |
| (38) <u>Johns Who's Who 1922</u> pp 154 & 155 |                             |
| (39) See above                                |                             |
| (40) Ibid.                                    |                             |

In the 1950s it was listed as a brick house of thirteen rooms  
N.A.V. £580. (41)

In 1977 a proposed subdivision prior to an auction was  
submitted to the Trust, which envisaged cutting off a small  
section of the ends of the two rear wings. (42) The Trust's  
Building Committee decided that "the loss was not essential  
to the Classification provided the termination of the rear wings  
was done in a manner which was sympathetic to the style of the  
house". (43)

Subsequently "Lawry House" was sold to the Yooralla  
Society of Victoria, has had fire damage to its interior and  
is under threat of demolition. The Trust strongly supports  
retention of the classification of the building and recommends  
its repairs, renovation and restoration. (44)

- 
- (41) Malvern RB North Ward Book 9)  
(42) 20th century additions. See above.  
(43) See file corres. 22/4/77  
(44) See file.
- 

#### LIST OF SOURCES

ADB vol 6

Cooper, J.B. The History of Malvern (1935)

Malvern Rate Books, Western Riding and North Ward

CC records

Melbourne/Victorian directories

Mennell, P.; The Dictionary of Australasian Biography (1892)

Johns' Notable Australians (1908)

Johns' Whos Who in the Commonwealth of Australia (1922)

#### MAPS/PLANS

MMBW Detail plan Malvern 1902 (S.L.V.)

Auction plan 1977 (See file)

---

C. KELLAWAY

15 Nov. 1979.