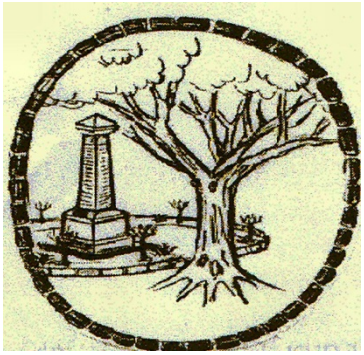


Melton Family History Group Inc

A0030595D **Registered 6th Dec 1994**

September – November 2025

Meeting Times:	1:00pm on the second Thursday of every other month starting in February
Venue:	Melton Library – McKenzie Street, Melton
Membership Fee:	$25 per year payable July each year prior to August A.G.M.
Correspondence:	17 Sutherland Ave, Melton Sth, Vic, 3338.
President:	Pauline Stotten
Vice President	Cheryl Graham
Secretary:	Ian Bowey
Treasurer:	Deborah Slattery
Email:	sec.meltonfhg@outlook.com
Web site	www.meltonfamilyhistory.org
Committee Member:	Sue Morton

2025 Monthly Meetings at Melton Library in McKenzie Street.

9th October	
11th December	End of year break-up
12th February 2026	
9th April	
11th June	

All dates and times are subject to change

Update: Regular work:

Pauline Stotten was appointed as President of the Melton Family history Group during our Annual General Meeting in August. The remaining committee members continued with their previous role.

Discussions are being held for the group to hold a display in the library display cabinet next year. Suggestions from members are welcomed.

The amount of visitors to the library during our Wednesday help sessions has varied considerably. On one recent Wednesday, volunteers were unable to completely assist, as there were so many members of the public requiring help. In response to this, the library has now set aside two extra computers in the main computer area on the first floor of the library for volunteers.

Invisible women

The article below is available online, and is taken from the book by Michelle Scott Tucker, 'Elizabeth Macarthur: A life at the Edge of the World'.

The story of Elizabeth Macarthur, a driving force in early New South Wales, highlights gaps in the story of colonial Australia.

In 1788 a young gentlewoman raised in an English vicarage married a handsome, haughty and penniless army officer. In any Jane Austen novel, that would be the end of the story, but for the woman who would play an integral part in establishing Australia's wool industry, it was just the beginning.

Elizabeth Macarthur landed at Sydney Cove in 1790 with her husband, John, and a sickly infant. She would never return to England. Instead, she and her husband painstakingly carved out a vast agricultural empire. John was eventually credited with founding the Australian wool industry, although it was the practical Elizabeth who ably managed their holdings for more than a dozen years while her volatile husband was overseas, in exile and disgrace. She was an Elizabeth Bennet who married a Wickham instead of a Darcy, and it was only thanks to her that John Macarthur would ever grace the face of Australia's two-dollar note.

Elizabeth was an engaged participant in many of the important commercial and political events of her era, while also being the mother of nine children. She took immediate and practical action to ameliorate some of her husband's wilder political gaffes — John was court-martialled for duelling with his superior officer and was instrumental in the Rum Rebellion overthrow of Governor Bligh. She was a friend to Matthew

Flinders, and her family entertained a young Charles Darwin. Irish political prisoners plotted to burn down her house.

Elizabeth rode out alone to oversee her properties and dined in state with a succession of colonial governors, from Commodore Arthur Phillip in 1790 to Sir Charles FitzRoy in the 1840s. And she established the first merino stud book in Australia, paving the way for an industry that became crucial to an entire nation. She oversaw it all with humour, resignation and a sharp eye for her family's financial future. The Devonshire farmer's daughter, herself a canny farmer and astute business manager, was never simply a farmer's wife.

I was drawn to Elizabeth's Macarthur's story largely because I was surprised to discover that although women were essential to many early Australian farming enterprises, they seem to have been neatly excised from the national consciousness. It was not only the women who were rendered invisible, of course. The growth of nationalism in the late nineteenth century encouraged writers like Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson to create a glorious, nostalgic pioneer past that never really existed yet, as historian John Hirst noted, exerted a significant influence on the writing of formal history. Their pen portraits, and the histories that followed, eschewed the embarrassment of the nation's convict origins (often skipping from First Fleet to the gold rush within the space of a few paragraphs) and completely overlooked the horrors inflicted on Aboriginal people.

John and Elizabeth believed the land was there for the taking. They had no sense of their own ignorance of Aboriginal law, land management and custom. Indeed, Elizabeth's attitude towards Aboriginal people seemed to harden over time. Like many others in the colony, she moved away from a conciliatory view, which in the earliest days had seen her dining with Aboriginal friends and welcoming their visits. Once there were substantial sums of money to be gained or lost, once white people known to her personally had been killed, Elizabeth could only see the original inhabitants as a threat.

She also shared the colonists' general lack of insight about Aboriginal culture, affording it no credence or legitimacy. "Attempts have been made to civilise the natives of this country," she wrote from Parramatta to her goddaughter, "but they are complete savages, and are as lawless and troublesome as when the Colony was first established. Our settlements are constantly subjected to their depredations." That the same could equally be said by Aboriginal people about the colonists completely escaped her.

Time and again, whether the stories concern this frontier conflict, exploration or the spread of agriculture, it is men we hear about, read about, or see in depictions of rural life. Women were not entirely excluded, but even famously powerful stories like Lawson's "The Drover's Wife" carry the explicit message that pioneer women were sacrificial heroines because they did not belong — that the bush was no place for a (white) woman. There was little room in the sacred rural myth for women who thrived in their life beyond the townships and who were successful in their agricultural enterprises. In the United States, the early settlers are depicted as families — men, women and children travelling west in covered wagons. In Australia, the lone male battler captured centre stage.

In the history of Australian farming, though, women very much *were* the real story. Elizabeth Macarthur is only one of many women who were crucial to the family farming enterprise. The endless work of the farm was, and is, often divided along gendered lines but the work of a farm woman is every bit as important to the economic viability of the family business as the work of the farming man. The eggs and dairy products she could sell locally, and the poultry, vegetables and fruit she nurtured, kept many families fed and financially afloat until the cheque from the harvest arrived. And when all those men in the history books were off soldiering, or mining or exploring, who do you think was managing the farm?

Elizabeth Macarthur certainly wasn't the only woman to successfully run the family farm in her husband's absence — or, indeed, without a husband at all. Esther Abrahams managed the family property at

Annandale while her de facto husband George Johnston was in England being tried for the overthrow of Bligh. Governor Lachlan Macquarie visited several lone women farmers during his tours of the NSW colony and seemed to find their presence unremarkable. Harriet King, the wife of naval officer Phillip Parker King, gave birth to son number seven at a Macarthur property in 1827, but within a month had moved (with four of her boys and the baby) out to a 1200-hectare farm about thirty kilometres west of Parramatta. There, while her husband was at sea, she successfully managed the family estate for five years.

Tasmanian convict woman Maria Lord maintained both a retail empire and a farming enterprise. During her husband's lengthy overseas absence, she ran and improved his shops, various well-stocked properties and two hotels. By 1820, according to her entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, she controlled more than a third of Tasmanian colonial resources, holding monopolies for the supply of wheat and meat and a portion of the profitable rum trade.

Another Tasmanian, Eliza Forlonge, walked hundreds of miles alone through the sheep-farming areas of European Saxony, meeting with stud masters to amass a prime flock. In 1831, with her husband and sons, she sailed with the flock around the world and landed them at Launceston. Her family went on to establish the wool industry in Tasmania while their widowed aunt, Janet Templeton, arrived with a similar flock and soon based herself near Goulburn, in New South Wales.

In 1839 Anne Drysdale, aged forty-seven, emigrated from Scotland to the Port Phillip colony (now Victoria) and with her close friend Caroline Newcomb took up land near Geelong. Together the two women created a successful pastoral business. Countless other women, historically discounted as mere wives, worked alongside their husbands to cement their family's future. Countless women also did so on their own, as single women or widows. These women weren't exceptions. Nor were they necessarily exceptional. Like the men they worked alongside, they were simply trying to make a go of things, for themselves and for their families.

In her ambition, her fortitude and her love for her family, Elizabeth Macarthur was just like these other strong, intelligent and successful women. She is interesting not because she was some sort of paragon but because she was, in fact, so very typical. Yet I have discovered that although Elizabeth is one of the few women who are regularly mentioned in the history books, she has routinely been portrayed in a way that belies her energy, humour and practical actions. "Little can I tell you how much I have missed the dear old lady," her daughter-in-law Emily wrote to an aunt in England, months after Elizabeth died at the age of eighty-three. And that image of Elizabeth Macarthur, as genteel lady, as muse to John Macarthur's genius or, erroneously, as some sort of social-climbing society matron has somehow been the picture that has endured in the Australian historical imagination.

Our understanding of Elizabeth Macarthur is shaped by the wealth of material made available to us by her descendants. *The Macarthur Papers*, housed in Sydney's Mitchell Library, amount to some 450 volumes, along with boxes, maps and plans. As a result of digitisation, some are now accessible online. In basic terms, we simply know more about Elizabeth and her family than we do about her female farming peers. But Elizabeth's descendants also (and not entirely without self-interest) set about publicly memorialising John Macarthur in a way that firmly established him as the father of the Australian wool industry.

Battle Abbey, Sussex

During my trip to England earlier this year, I visited the town of 'Battle' in Sussex. This was the location of '*The Battle of Hastings'* on the 14th of October, 1066. Just about every schoolboy knows about this particular battle, when William, the Duke of Normandy defeated the Anglo- Saxon King Harold II.

After the battle, William decided to atone for all the lives lost as well as to commemorate his victory by building an abbey on top of the ridge where he defeated King Harold. This Benedictine abbey was dedicated to St. Martin in 1095. Thankfully, much of the abbey is open for visitors.

Visitors are able to walk around the actual area where the battle took place. Disabled visitors can choose an easier route at the top of the ridge along a pathway. Every so often a description is displayed, highlighting the particular area.

Outside the Battle Abbey

Courtyard view

One of the many rooms inside the abbey

Rather narrow doorways and stairways.

From memory this particular doorway leads to a separate area holding drop toilets. The contents fell to the ground, where it all had to be removed using shovels. Probably by a novice monk.

Abbey from the bottom of the ridge

William the Conqueror on horseback. Apparently his men thought he was killed, so he removed his visor to show he was still alive.

Abbey from battle grounds

Wooden figures of soldiers fighting. These figures are all along the battle area.

Description

Corfe Castle Dorset

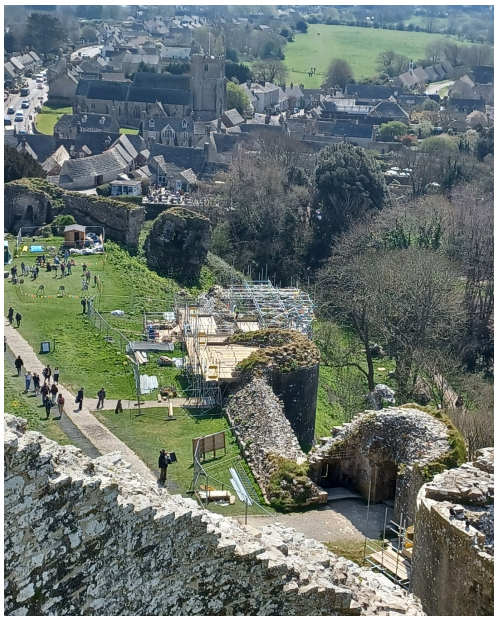
Whilst we are on the subject of William the Conqueror, I visited Corfe Castle in Dorset, the day before Good Friday. William built this castle so that he could control the nearby coastal areas of Dorset. Just to confuse the issue, the village is also named Corfe Castle. Growing up in Somerset, we would often stop in the café across the road for a cuppa on our way to the seaside town of Studland Bay. Believe it or not, that café still exists.

The castle changed hands throughout the years, but it was destroyed by the Parliament's forces during the English Civil War.

Below are just a few of the photos from my visit to Corfe Castle. Note the steepness of the hill.

Castle from towards the bottom of the hill

Inside the castle remains



Overlooking the village of Corfe Castle

Pathway leading up to the castle

The following article comes from a copy of the website https://harpersbazaar.com.au/why-women-take-husbands-surname/ '

Where did the tradition of women taking their husbands' surnames come from?

As you may have guessed, the tradition of women taking their husbands' surnames stems from Western society's patriarchal history.

In Britain, hereditary last names are only around a millennia old, imported by the French around the time of the Norman Conquest. Until the Middle Ages, women didn't actually have recognised names at all, and were simply referred to "Wife of [husband's name]."

Then, around the turn of the 15th century, coverture arrived in England. Under coverture, a husband and wife became unified — a singular being. Instead of a wife just being a husband's property, "Wife of X," she

became seen as an extension of him. That's not to say women were viewed as equals, though. The wife remained a husband's possession, with her ownership passing from her father to her husband on their wedding day (remind you of any other wedding tradition, per chance?).

"Coverture is a legal formation that held that no female person had a legal identity," historian Catherine Allgor tells 'Brides'. "A female baby was covered by her father's identity, and then, when she was married, by her husband's."

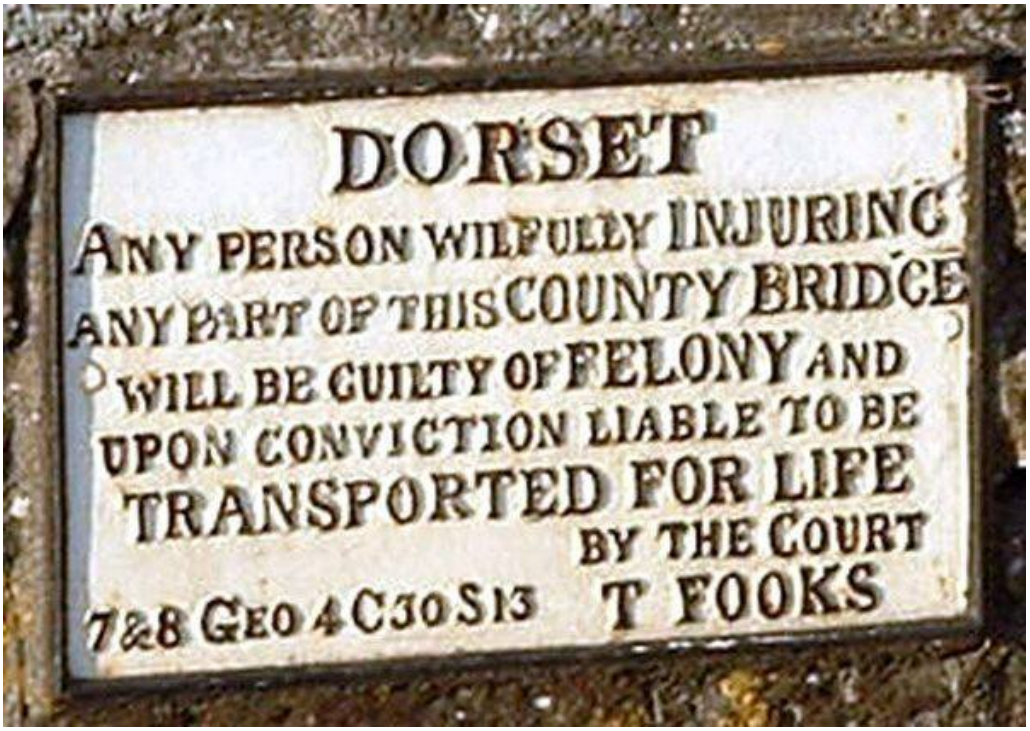
As coverture caught on, so too did the idea of a wife adopting her husband's surname. By the 1600s, the practice was entrenched in greater society and in 1765, was codified into written law by William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England.

The custom carried over into Australia and the United States when they were colonised by England. While women's rights have gradually improved in all three countries, the influence of coverture remained. Until the 1970s, women in the U.S could not get a driver's licence or passport, or register to vote, unless they took their husband's surname. Australia had similar laws, an example being that women in teaching or the Public Service had to resign on marriage and then, heaven forbid, when married women were "allowed" to remain at work, they had to immediately resign at the first "show" of pregnancy.

Not sure what custom is helping women. These laws kept women subjugated. Across the pond and Down Under, the custom helped women secure other legal, economic and familial protections.

But why, in a world that is more gender equitable than ever (though, there is still a long way to go), are women still taking their husbands' last names in overwhelming numbers?

And on a final note,



The above notice was placed on a bridge just outside of Dorchester, in Dorset. So far I have been unable to find any more details.