

Henry Passmore

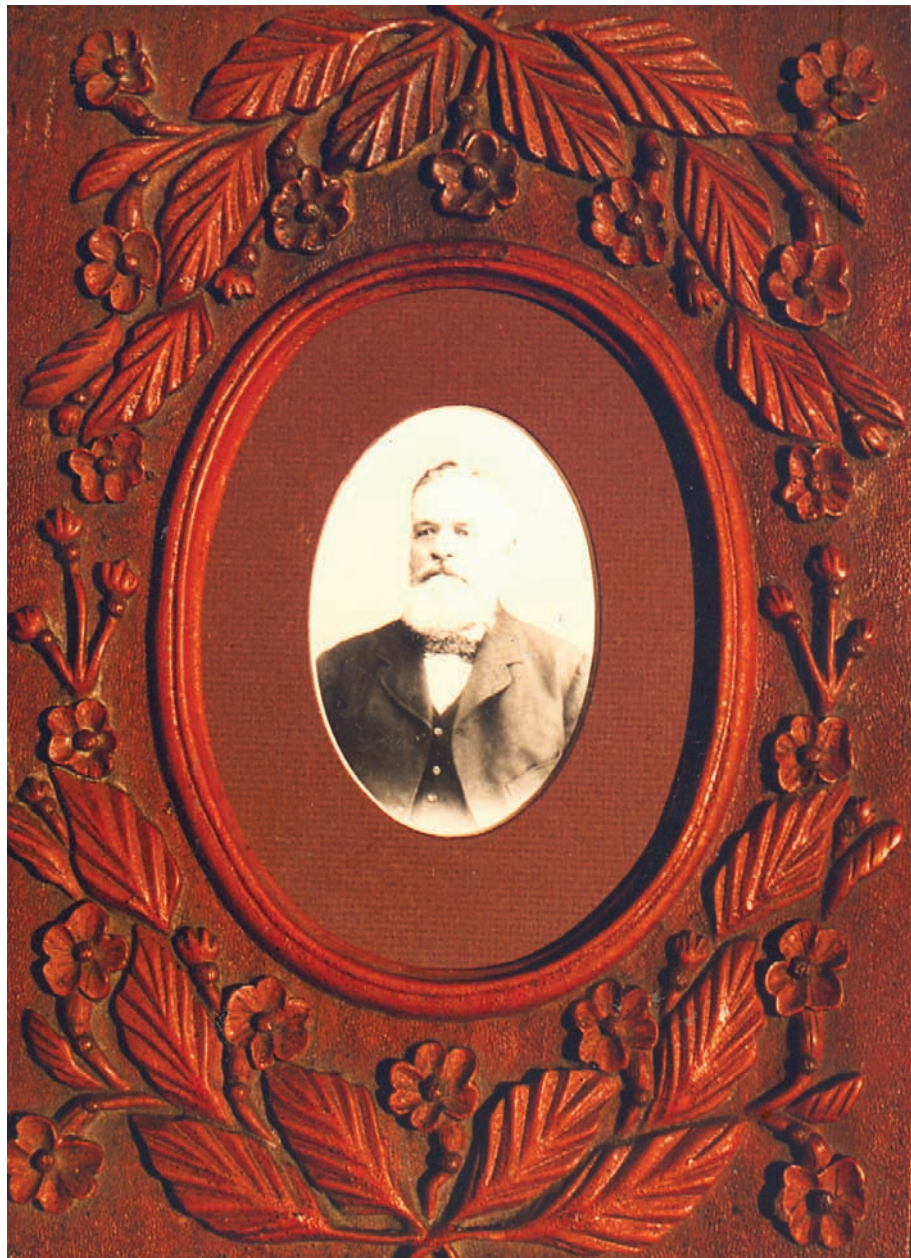
a man with a passion:
public servant, woodcarver and embroiderer

Dorothy Erickson continues her illuminating series on Western Australian craftsmen and women, this time looking at the works of amateur timber worker and embroiderer Henry Passmore.

DOROTHY ERICKSON

Henry Passmore (plate 1), embroiderer and woodcarver was born at Raleigh, Barnstaple, England on 22 February 1840¹ and died 6 March 1920 in North Fremantle, Western Australia. He was Anglican, the literate son of a lacemaker, himself the son of a woolmaker. Henry however became a midshipman in the Royal Navy, serving on HMS Caesar in the Baltic and Crimea from 1854–1862. He then joined the Convict Service at Dartmoor Prison in 1863, arriving in Western Australia in the Racehorse on 15 August 1865 as warden in charge of convicts, at a salary of £59 per annum.

¹ Henry Passmore (1840–1920), shown in a photo frame he made in the 1880s





2

Henry Passmore (1840–1920), Fremantle from the northern shore of the Swan River, woolwork. Collection: WA Museum

3

Passmore exhibited at the 1881 International Exhibition on the Perth Esplanade. The dome was frescoed inside by Henry Prinsep, while potted palms and a Viennese orchestra provided the ambience of an Austrian kursaal. Collection Battye Library, BL3076B/11

Passmore joined the Public Works Department in Western Australia in 1872 when there were only five officers and was in charge of convicts involved in public works, roads, bridges, river dredging etc. He also took up land on the Upper Swan Valley, working it 1866–8 while supervising the building of roads etc in the area. In the 1870s he lived in Perth where the Supreme Court Gardens are now.

In 1872 he was in charge of dredging of the Swan River. One of his embroideries shows the dredge Black Swan working opposite where he later had his house in North Fremantle (plate 2). Embroidery, like painting, was one of the pastimes that seamen and naval officers used to fill relaxation time on their long voyages and it is probable that he took it up when at sea. He also

opened the Greenmount quarries about 1878. In the same year, while in charge of the dredge, he caught a strange, large flying fish which caused much interest among naturalists.² He retired from the civil service in 1898, after 26 years working for the West Australian colonial government, and 44 since he joined the Royal Navy.³

Outside his public works jobs, Passmore was active as a woolworker and woodcarver. In 1881 he was an exhibitor in the Perth International Exhibition staged by Joubert and Twopeny on the Esplanade (plate 3). The critics were generous in their praise of Fred Mason's jewellery and of the sculptor D. A. Gray but considered that some of the woolwork exhibited was an example of misapplied industry. This was the work of Henry Passmore.



We can judge for ourselves as a number of woolwork pictures and woodcarvings made by Passmore are still in existence. He used stitchery in wool to realise the panorama from where he built his John Street, North Fremantle home across the river to the Fremantle township and Arthur's Head (plate 2). There is a certain naiveté in the use of high perspective. The bar across the Swan River is obviously still in place; it was removed by Passmore's successor, the engineer C. Y. O'Connor (1843–1902), to create Fremantle Harbour.

Passmore also embroidered the representation of a cricket match on the Perth Foreshore (plate 5). This he reputedly embroidered while working on the Black Swan dredging Perth Water. As this took place in the 1870s, it is possible that he exhibited both pictures in the 1881 exhibition.

He had married Mary Sarah Ellis (1838–1877), purportedly in 1858. When his wife died in 1877 leaving him with seven young children, Passmore 'married' his housekeeper. It is probable that it was about this time he commenced his furniture making and woodcarving. He spent five



4
Henry Passmore (1840–1920), woolwork embroidery picture. Private collection

5
Henry Passmore (1840–1920), Cricket match on Perth Esplanade from the dredging barge Black Swan. Collection: Royal Western Australian Historical Society



years in Albany (the five years included 1886) reclaiming the sand drift beside the road to the south coast. He surveyed the first telephone line from Wannerup Inlet to the Pilot Station at Albany. Later, he married Mary Ann (Marion) Dibb (c. 1848–1925) – who according to the family was very extravagant and gave away furniture and silver.

In 1891 Henry Passmore bought lots 36, 47, 48 and in 1895 lot 35, of Fremantle suburban lot 25, in North Fremantle between Harvest Road and John Street and developed a small village there. Between 1892 and 1910, he built a home for each of his children, although not all took up residence. Raleigh Avenue, named after his birthplace, had arches across it. The seven

houses – six wooden cottages and a limestone random rubble cottage – fronted this narrow street and on the rear of the blocks were stables, orchards, a windmill, vines, and a fowl yard. A 1900 description of his private street described the scene:

The versatility and energy of purpose possessed by Mr Passmore is further shown in his surroundings in Raleigh Avenue, North Fremantle. He has built several houses on a large block of land acquired several years ago, and the approach is up an avenue from John Street under a succession of creeper-covered arches. Pink and white idollychus have been trained over these arches, and when in full bloom a delightful picture is presented. He loves gardening as well as wood-carving, and his knowledge of botany and plant-life generally is very extensive.⁴

Henry Passmore was an accomplished amateur furniture-maker and woodcarver who exhibited at international exhibitions such as the Indian and Colonial Exhibition of 1886 in London, where he exhibited three carved photograph stands. One is probably the stand illustrated in plate 1 and another that in plate 6. He was awarded a medal for woodcarving at this exhibition.

Passmore's furniture was on show in Sandover's shop window in Perth once a year (plate 7). It was displayed with the sign 'Henry Passmore's Suite' and even the Governor (who presided over the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny veterans' dinners at the Esplanade Hotel that Passmore regularly attended) came to inspect it.

In 1905, he exhibited his work in a fund-raising bazaar held at the North Fremantle Congregational Church:

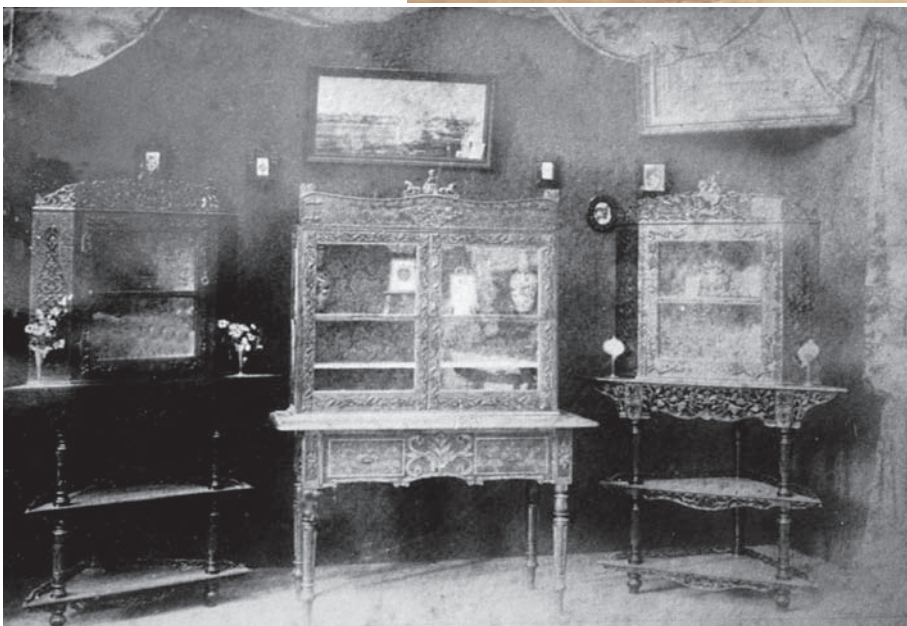
One of the greatest attractions is a valuable collection of carvings and other curios lent for the occasion by Mr. Henry Passmore. It includes a drawing-room suite constructed of kauri pine, jarrah, and Queensland cedar, which represents the work of Mr. Passmore in his spare time for a period of ten years.⁵

After his retirement, Passmore remained active in public life. He was elected to North Fremantle Council in December 1898. He stood unsuccessfully for the state seat of North Fremantle in 1901⁶, and during the campaign

6
Photograph of carved photo stand on side table c. 1885, both by Henry Passmore (1840–1920). This photograph stand may have been exhibited in 1886. The frame was reputedly donated to the WA Museum by descendant Mrs Jones of Ethel St, Guildford. Photograph from family archives



7
Henry Passmore (1840–1920), 'The Passmore Suite' on display in Sandovers' window. Photograph from family archives



took out public notices that he intended to 'take legal proceedings' against those making 'slanderous and malicious statements in public'.⁷ He became a Justice of the Peace.⁸ Holding his Council position for 14 years, he resigned in the aftermath of a messy municipal controversy into paying rates by instalments in October 1912, where the Town Clerk was dismissed for failing to issue proper receipts and account for the money.⁹

Passmore was a writer of letters to the editor, particular on matters relating to ports. Between August and December 1892, Fremantle optometrist Mr C. Wolfson ran over 50 regular advertisements carrying Passmore's testimonial for his spectacles; he claimed that one of his eyes was near-sighted and the other far-sighted, but 'I am now able to do any amount of reading or writing free from the continued ache that I use [sic] to suffer from before using your glasses.'¹⁰

Passmore took more than a passing interest in cures for rheumatism. In 1906, he recommended 'Dr McLaughlin's electric belt' as a cure¹¹, and the following year he installed the first electric motor in North Fremantle, to drive an invention he patented for rheumatism.¹² By 1910, he was advertising his 'Anti-Rheumatic Galvanic Plate – An absolute cure for Rheumatism, Gout, Sciatica and all Kinds of Nervous Troubles', available from Henry Passmore at North Fremantle 'At the Low Cost of 10s. 6d.' with a testimonial from a miner who swore by one he had borrowed from a friend.¹³ His business expanded and from 1913, he was advertising 'Passmore's Patent Plates for rheumatism, lumbago and sciatica', marketed widely from an office in Melbourne (plate 8).¹⁴

He died aged 80 in 1920 at his residence in Raleigh Avenue (now Passmore Avenue), North Fremantle. As a Royal Navy veteran, his coffin was draped with a Union Jack and carried on a gun carriage to the Karrakatta Cemetery on 8 March 1820.¹⁵ The family continued to own the street until 1938 when it was sold.

A newspaper tribute to him, written in 1900 following his retirement, stated that:

In his comfortable residence at Raleigh Avenue is to be found a perfect museum of highly artistic carvings and other articles for beautifying the home all showing wonderful skill and possession of extraordinary patience. Bookcases, sideboards, chairs and occasional tables have all been made during spare hours and then decorated with carvings



executed in a style worthy of any art school. Mr Passmore is entirely self taught, but some of his carvings in high relief, as well as others on the flat, are really works of art and clearly show that if he had devoted the whole of his time to this particular branch of industry he would have had a distinguished career.¹⁶

SUCCESS
 attracts the efforts of a Westralian who has conquered the Eastern States by his marvellous Patent.

RHEUMATISM, Lumbago, Sciatica,

are no longer dreaded, as a certain Cure is assured, thanks to the investigations of Mr. Henry Passmore, North Fremantle, a gentleman well known in your midst. The effective Cures accomplished in W.A. has induced Mr. Passmore to extend the scope of his wonderful curative agent and he has established a head office in Melbourne, this being the most central city, where sufferers throughout the Commonwealth can more readily obtain

PASSMORE PATENT PLATES
 (ROYAL LETTERS PATENT 9478)

No longer need you experience the twinges of the demon Rheumatism. No more agonising Sciatica, nor Lumbago.

This treatment is based on Scientific Principles. Read the evidence from one of your neighbours.

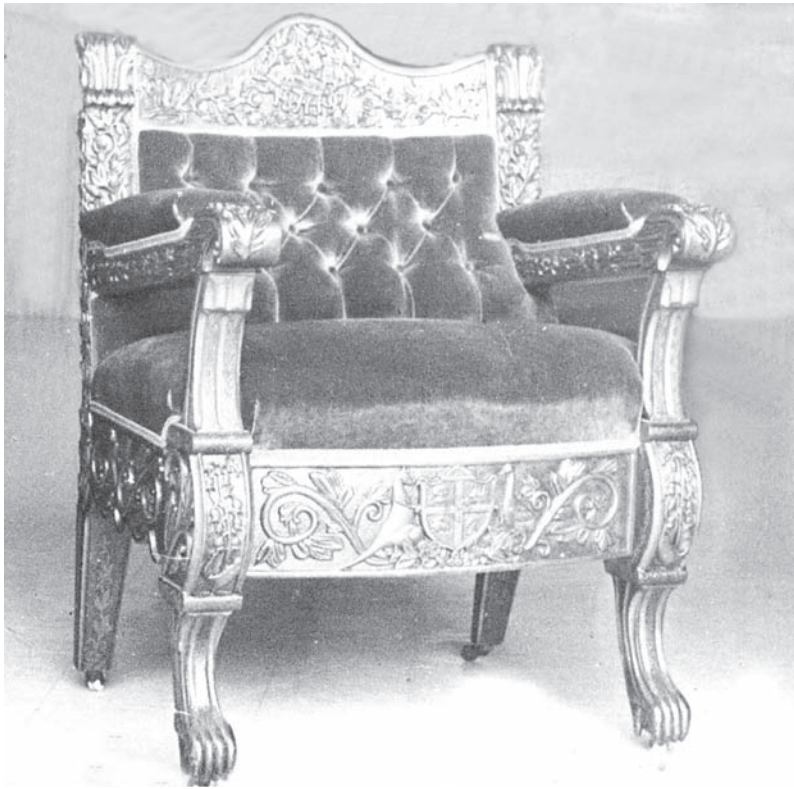
Henry Passmore, Esq., writes: "I have much pleasure in stating that both my wife and myself have derived wonderful benefit from the use of 1 square Patent Plate. My wife was so invalid for twenty years, and had tried every possible known cure for Rheumatism and Nervousness including the best medical advice both in Sydney and New Zealand, and was still invalid for four months by Mr. Collins, the 1 square Patent Plate, of Brisbane, N.Z. She has, however, derived the greatest benefit from the use of your remedy, and is now considerably improved. I, myself, have got 1 inch in my over-brushing of skin, and can strongly recommend it to fellow sufferers."
 (Signed) E. COLLINS.

FREE A very elaborate descriptive Booklet has been published giving in detail the Cause and effects of the treatment, in colour on the above ailments **WRITE TO-DAY** and receive this book **FREE** in a plain wrapper.

HENRY PASSMORE, 161 Arlington Chambers, 229-231 Collins Street, Melbourne.

8
 Henry Passmore advertised 'Passmore patent plates' as a cure for rheumatism. *Western Mail*, 13 June 1913, p. 40

9
 Photograph of a corner cabinet by Henry Passmore (1840–1920), one of those displayed in Sandovers' window, given to Charles Passmore. Photograph from family archives



10
 Photograph of a chair, 1897, by Henry Passmore (1840–1920), now in the collection of the Royal WA Historical Society. Photograph from family archives

11
 Henry Passmore (1840–1920), cedar sideboard, the first piece of furniture he made. Collection: National Trust (WA)



Almost a year after Henry died, Perth auctioneers Ashenden & Co offered 'the Passmore collection of carvings' on 25 January 1921:¹⁷

HANDSOME CARVED ARTISTIC FURNITURE. HAND-CARVED WORK of the late Mr. HENRY PASSMORE, of FREMANTLE. Magnificent CARVED OVERMANTLE, carved water lilies and base relief HANDSOME CARVED SIDEBOARD 2 very unique CARVED CHINA CABINETS Handsome CARVED COUCH 2 Queen Anne design CARVED CHAIRS BOOKCASE beautifully carved OCC. TABLE, rectangular carved and punchwork top.

After listing other household lots which may have belonged to Passmore, they continued:

We call special attention to the fine collection of Unique Carvings specified above which were the life work of the late Mr. HENRY PASSMORE, who recently died at Fremantle, being a very old colonist, and held many public positions under the West Australian Government. He also held positions in the Navy and served in the Battle of the Baltic. The CARVED FURNITURE shows a unique taste and an amount of artistic merit.

When the last Mrs Passmore died on 7 July 1925 aged 77,¹⁸ the family says her stepson Harry collected the furniture that remained and parcelled it out among the family. Each of his children received a piece of intricately carved furniture. Annie Kennedy had a carved armchair upholstered in velvet, which was donated to the Royal Western Australian Historical Society by her daughter Eva Isles (plate 10). Detailed carving on the chair has motifs that had significance for him, e.g. pig sticking, which referred to army tactics and exercises. The seat front had a version of an Australian coat of arms incorporating the Scottish thistle and an English rose.

Minnie Howson had the large carved cedar sideboard (plate 11) which is now part of the collection of the National Trust (WA). Other pieces are known from photographs (plates 9, 12, 13), while those dispersed at auction in 1921 went into private hands.

Dr Dorothy Erickson is a Perth-based historian and author as well as an internationally renowned jeweller. Her latest book is *Gold and silversmithing in Western Australia: a history* UWA Publishing, 2010).

Collections represented:

Royal Western Australian Historical Society
Western Australian Museum
National Trust (WA)
Family collections

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Acknowledgments

Information and photographs from Robert Pow and Kate McGurk, descendants.

Notes

- 1 *Sunday Times* 5 July 1914 p 6 notes his birth as 29 Feb 1840.
- 2 *WA Times* 7 May 1878 p 2.
- 3 *Sunday Times* 5 July 1914, p 6.
- 4 Anon, 1900.
- 5 *West Australian* 5 Oct 1905 p 6.
- 6 *West Australian* 24 Apr 1901 p 5.
- 7 *West Australian* 9 Apr 1901 p 8 and 10 Apr 1901 p 6.
- 8 *Western Mail* 15 Jun 1907 p 31.
- 9 *Sunday Times* 6 Oct 1912 p 15; *West Australian* 3 Nov 1912 p 9 & 15 Aug 1913 p 7.
- 10 E.g. *West Australian* 1 Aug 1892 p 2



12

Photograph of a couch, 1880s, by Henry Passmore (1840-1920).
Photograph from family archives



13

Henry Passmore (1840-1920), overmantel carved with lilies. On display in the National Trust property Woodbridge in the late 1970s, it was reputedly donated to the WA Museum by descendant Mrs Jones, of Ethel Street, Guildford

- 11 *West Australian* 14 July 1906 p 3
- 12 *West Australian* 23 Dec 1907 p 7.
- 13 *Sunday Times* 30 Oct 1910 p 22.
- 14 *Western Mail* 13 June 1913 p 40.
- 15 *Sunday Times* 7 Mar 1920 p 20; *West Australian* 11 Mar 1920 pp 4 & 42.
- 16 Anon 'Councillor H. Passmore Visits Mother Country', *The Umpire* 24 March 1900. I am indebted to descendant Kate McGurk for most of the photographs and much of the information on Passmore.
- 17 *West Australian* 25 Jan 1921 p 3.
- 18 *West Australian* 8 July 1925 p 1.