

# Joseph Hamblin, cabinet-maker and piano maker



Dorothy Erickson's research for her new book *Inspired by Light and Land: Designers and Makers in Western Australia 1829–1969* has uncovered more information about objects made in Western Australia and their makers. Her previous articles published in *Australiana* on Amy Harvey, William Howitt, Charles May and Henry Passmore were made more rewarding with the collaboration of interested family members, who had already undertaken some research or knew where works existed in the family. The research and connections of Joseph Hamblin's descendant Jill Roy have been crucial to documenting his life and work in England, Perth and Victoria.<sup>1</sup>



**1**  
Portrait of Joseph Hamblin, photograph c 1880-90.  
Courtesy of Jill Roy

**2**  
Attributed to Joseph Hamblin (1820–1899), one of a pair of *cellarettes*, jarrah, c. 1848, w 1,000 mm, d 900 mm. Made for Government House, Perth; Hamblin had worked for the refurbishment contractor George Lazenby. Collection: Government House, Perth, photograph courtesy of WA Museum

## DOROTHY ERICKSON

Joseph Hamblin (1820–1899) was a cabinet-maker and joiner who included among his occupations undertaking, teaching violin and singing, and piano tuning (**plate 1**). He was one of the most accomplished 19th-century cabinet-makers to work in Western Australia. Although only a few pieces of

furniture can now be attributed to his craftsmanship, several pianos from his Victorian workshop survive.

Hamblin was born on 20 September 1820 at Speenhamland, Newbury in West Berkshire (85 km west of London), son of the Reverend Joseph Hamblin. About 1832, the musical youngster began a nine-year apprenticeship in London with the Broadwood piano company.

Broadwood is one of the oldest and most prestigious piano making companies in the world. The enterprise started in 1728 when a young Swiss, Burkat Shudi, finished his apprenticeship in London with Hermann Tabel and set up in business for himself. Shudi made harpsichords for Handel, the Prince of Wales and George II; the firm has made instruments for the British monarchs ever since. Royal patronage has proved

### 3

Attributed to Joseph Hamblin (1820–1899), *circular pedestal table with tilt-top*, jarrah, brass fittings, c 1849, h 755 mm diam 1,365 mm. Presumed made for Government House, Perth. Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, NGA 2010.968.A-B. Photograph courtesy of the National Gallery

useful for the firm, which also tunes the pianofortes. Shudi's daughter married John Broadwood, another fine craftsman, in 1769 and when Shudi died in 1773 John Broadwood inherited a share in the firm which eventually became known as John Broadwood & Sons.<sup>2</sup>

At the time Joseph Hamblin was apprenticed c 1832, the firm was managed by John's sons. Joseph must have been a gifted and possibly favoured apprentice. Towards the end of his apprenticeship he is reputed to have made a table inlaid with 500 different timbers for Queen Victoria.<sup>3</sup> Broadwoods paid him £25 for the work, a large sum for the time, especially for an apprentice. It is speculated that this was a wedding present for Queen Victoria, who married in 1840.

Her husband Prince Albert commissioned a Broadwood 'square piano' for Queen Victoria in 1840 and it is possible that Hamblin worked on that as well. The royal couple particularly enjoyed playing and singing with the visiting German composer Felix Mendelssohn between 1842 and 1847; they got on so well that Mendelssohn once said affectionately that "the only really nice, comfortable house in England ... where one feels completely at home, is Buckingham Palace."<sup>4</sup>

Broadwoods was a large enterprise, by 1842 making 2,500 pianos a year in its factory in Horseferry Road, Westminster. The firm was one of the largest employers of labour in London at the time and made all parts in-house. Hamblin would have witnessed the various trades being undertaken but must have wished for better things for himself.



Hamblin married Rebecca Comley in July 1842. The couple migrated to the colony of Western Australia one week later, on 3 August, as steerage passengers on the *Trusty*, arriving in December at the new settlement at Australind, south of Perth near the current port of Bunbury. Australind was at this time a virtual wilderness. The Western Australian Company, which had promoted the new settlement, had run into difficulties and the *Trusty* was one of the last vessels to bring settlers to the scheme. There had been surveying problems in allocating land, which was not suited to the proposed small farm holdings, and the scheme collapsed.

The Hamblins had not put in money to qualify for a land grant, and had to make their living elsewhere. He may have assisted the Cliftons in erecting the early houses in the settlement, but soon moved on.

By December 1843 when their first child was born they were in Perth, with Joseph working as a carpenter and cabinet-maker for the entrepreneurial and wealthy master builder George Lazenby, a leader of the Methodist community. Edwin Foss Duffield, another of the better known cabinet-makers in 19th-century Western Australia, was an apprentice at the time Lazenby employed Hamblin, who was most likely his tutor. Duffield married Lazenby's daughter.

Lazenby (1807-95), who had himself trained as a cabinet-maker, came from a wealthy family. He had migrated to Western Australia for the climate which benefited his health. He was musical and played the cello and violin and was no doubt attracted to employing a man with Hamblin's skills. A man with a social conscience, Lazenby was at times chairman of the Swan River Mechanics' Institute, member of Perth Road Committee 1842–44 and chairman of the Public Institutions Society in 1855.

There was no ordained Methodist minister in the colony in the first six years so Lazenby became a Methodist lay preacher, one of four with the Hardey brothers and Barnard Clarkson. At this time a stigma was attached to being "Chapel" in a colony controlled primarily by "Church" (of England). In defence, the "Chapel" people were a close-knit group who supported each other.

Lazenby left for England in 1845, with samples for the London market that Hamblin fashioned for him. He advertised that Hamblin would be in charge of his business while he was away:<sup>5</sup>

GEORGE LAZENBY hereby notifies his intention to leave the colony for a short time, on a visit to England, by the *Halifax Packet*.



4

Attributed to Joseph Hamblin (1820–1899), *circular pedestal table*, the top two leaves of solid jarrah, with fiddleback jarrah veneer. This has very similar detailing to the NGA table but is not in such good condition and is minus the lion's paw feet. Auctioned in June 2011 by McKenzie's Auctioneers. The table made for Lt Colonel Molloy at Fairlawn, now missing, was almost identical. Photograph courtesy McKenzie's Auctioneers, Claremont WA

N.B. — G. L. takes this opportunity of returning thanks to his friends and the public for the liberal patronage he has received during a residence among them of upwards of 12 years, and begs to state that he has engaged Mr. Joseph Hamblin to conduct the business for him during his absence ; by a reference to whom all orders will

be punctually attended to. Pianos repaired and tuned by J. H. as usual.

In April 1845, Mrs Hamblin and little Joseph Thomas also left for Adelaide en route for England on the *Victoria* – the same ship as George Lazenby.<sup>6</sup> The next year, 1846, Joseph made a sideboard in Lazenby's workshop in "native mahogany" – jarrah. It was described as:<sup>7</sup>

Cabinet-Work. — Such of our readers as are admirers of handsome furniture, will do well to visit Mr. Lazenby's, and see the splendid sideboard just made by Mr. Hamblin from our native mahogany. We have rarely seen a finer specimen of mahogany furniture at home, and we are inclined to think that our jarrah, besides its immense superiority in hardness and durability, has also a more rich and close luxuriance of shade and colour, and a greater resemblance to marble in texture, than the real mahogany known in Europe.

Lazenby had the contract to refurbish the first Government House in Perth. The pair of cellarettes in Government House in Perth (**plate 2**) and the



5

Unknown photographer, 'Squire' Samuel Phillips and his wife Sophia (née Roe) in the drawing-room at Culham, Toodyay c 1893, photograph. The centre pedestal table is possibly by Hamblin, c. 1850. State Library of Western Australia 4103B

superb table with lions' feet, reputedly from Government House (**plate 3**), are attributed to Hamblin.<sup>8</sup> The vice-regal provenance is likely to be accurate, as one Governor's wife dispersed items in the 1960s. The cellarettes went to other historical collections: one to the National Trust which placed it in Warden Funnerty's House in Coolgardie, and the other to the WA Museum, where it was placed in storage until retrieved in the 1990s.

The cellarettes are of faded jarrah with a lovely patina, 100 cm wide and 90 cm deep. They stand on expertly carved lions' feet. The style is Regency – the style brought to the colony by the earliest settlers. This style is admired today and they retain their usefulness, in spite of their rejection in the 1960s.

The table top is solid jarrah made from two mirrored boards with a thumbnail moulded edge over a solid apron with rolled moulding (**plate 3**). It has a tilt top secured by jarrah pegs and a brass lock, and stands on an octagonal column on a platform base. The column and base are jarrah veneered over pine. The table is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia and was featured in its *Out of the West* exhibition in 2011. The tripod base is similar to other pieces seen at auction (**plate 4**) and in old photographs.

Hamblin ceased in Lazenby's employ in 1847 when he sailed on the *Despatch* to join his wife in England. Their second child, George was born in Walworth, London in 1848.

The family returned to Western Australia on the *Ranee*, arriving 13 December 1848 with Joseph's sister Eliza Ellen. Eliza was appointed schoolmistress at Perth Girls' Colonial School where she was apparently a respected teacher from 1849 to 1853. Meanwhile Joseph and Rebecca had two more children in Perth; in 1850 William Harding Hamblin was born and Sarah in December 1851.

On his return, Joseph Hamblin went into business for himself at Mew's Cottage, Bazaar Terrace and may have continued to undertake work for Lazenby when requested. Advertisements in the *Inquirer* list his services as "carpenter,

joiner, cabinet-maker and undertaker", piano tuner and teacher of flute, violin and singing.<sup>9</sup>

## 1851 Exhibition

Hamblin prepared the Western Australian timber samples sent to the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations held at London's Crystal Palace in 1851. A Perth reporter wrote:

We have been much gratified with a view of several specimens of our colonial timber, which are now under preparation by Mr Hamblin, of Perth, for transmission to the Industrial Exhibition ; one of the blocks is of peculiar beauty and is a section of one of those large excrescences which are found upon the York gum, marbled in the most beautiful and minute manner we can conceive it possible for wood to be, and when well polished we have no doubt will attract much attention at the Exhibition.<sup>10</sup>

He was evidently the most skilled and favoured cabinet-maker in Perth while he was there. During his time he was also commissioned to make a chair for the Queen of Spain.<sup>11</sup> This would have been for the Benedictine monk Dom Salvado (later Bishop Salvado), an accomplished pianist who gave concerts to raise money for his work with the Aborigines. It is probable Hamblin tuned the piano for Salvado before his Perth fundraising concerts. The Benedictines had monasteries at Subiaco



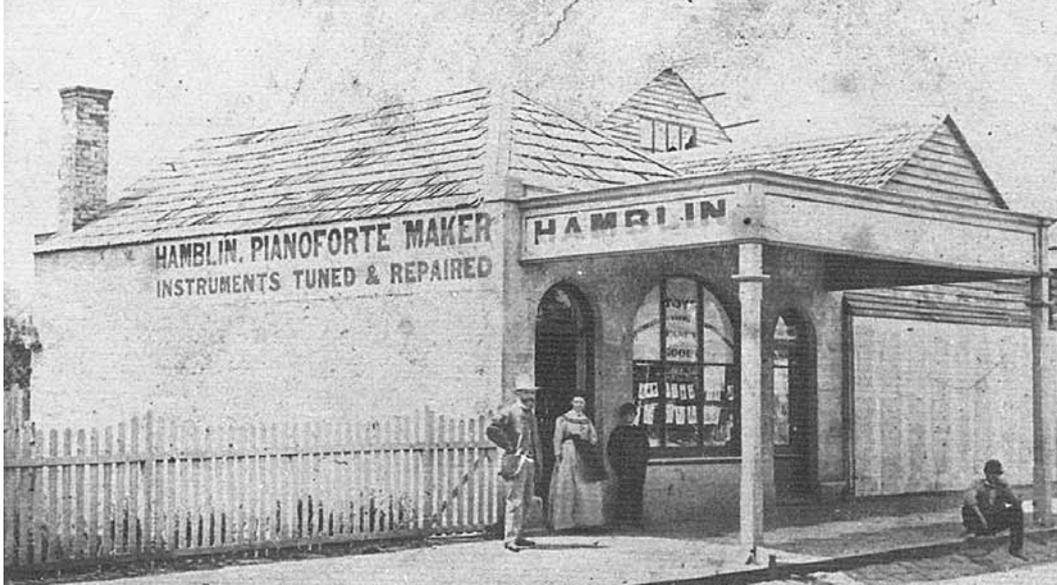
**6**

T. Humphrey & Co, *Eliza Liddelow née Mason*, daughter of Eliza Hamblin, wearing a gold brooch made by Anthony Fouchard from gold mined at Abbott's by her brother Edward Mason (who later died during WWI), Melbourne, c. 1897, photograph. Collection: State Library of Western Australia 4205P

**7**

Anthony Fouchard (1843–1899?), *gold bar brooch* made from gold mined at Abbott's, Perth, stamped AF, 1.5 x 4.8 cm. Collection: Western Australian Museum CH72.226,





8

Shop, Hamblin pianoforte maker, Kyneton, photograph c. 1880, with Joseph Hamblin standing to the left. Joseph's small shop was near his home, Rose Cottage. Courtesy of Jill Roy

and New Norcia in the Victoria Plains district. Dom Salvado returned to Spain in 1849 where his brother, Rev. Father Santos Salvado, was Chaplain to the Queen. It would have been at this time that he took the chair with him, presumably hoping for patronage for his monastery.

Hamblin, the clergyman's son, obviously had a social conscience for in 1851 he was the chairman and apparently the driving force of the newly formed Swan River Mechanics' Institute<sup>12</sup>

... established for the purpose of affording means of intellectual recreation and improvement to the Mechanics and other inhabitants of this Colony, and the cooperation and support of all classes is earnestly requested. ... The objects of the Institute are proposed to be attained by carrying out the following plan : — 1st.— By the formation of a Library for the use of the Members, and opening a Reading Room, furnished with Newspapers, Periodicals, &c, &c, to which all members and subscribers to the Institute will have free admission every week-day evening, between the hours of 7 and 10 o'clock. 2ndly.— By the delivering of Lectures occasionally on subjects of an interesting or useful character during the winter session. And lastly — By the formation of classes amongst the members for the acquirement of any particular science or study.

By 23 July 1851 he was advertising the first lectures:<sup>13</sup>

The first of a course of Lectures on Astronomy will be delivered on Wednesday Evening, August 6, by the Rev. D. Turnbull Boyd, M. A., at the Court House, Perth. All Subscribers of 10s. a-year are entitled to two tickets of admission to the Lectures.

The Governor attended this lecture and Hamblin gave the vote of thanks following the talk.<sup>14</sup> The next talk a week later was on "phonography – the system of writing by sound". Another in November was 'On the Works of Living Authors.' By January 1852 he had acquired Governor Fitzgerald as Honorary Patron and J. S. Roe as president, and was announcing the commencement of the building on the site given to them by the "Local Government" and appealing for donations of money and materials to expedite the project.<sup>15</sup>

Hamblin made furniture for upper echelon settler families such as Resident Magistrate Lt Colonel John Molloy, reputedly the illegitimate son of the Duke of York (one of Queen Victoria's 'wicked uncles') and also for Captain John Septimus Roe RN, the first Surveyor General, President of the Mechanics' Institute and founder of the collection which became the nucleus of the WA Museum. The Molloy table was reputedly at one stage in *Wallcliffe House* at Margaret Rive; if so, it may have been destroyed in the bushfire of 2011. The Roe table is probably with one of his

descendants.

In the 1870 *Loan Exhibition of Works of Art and Industry* held in the Mechanics' Institute, Captain Roe exhibited a table manufactured by Hamblin which<sup>16</sup>

after a wear and tear of thirty two years, only required re polishing to be equal to any newly out of the workshop, testimony sufficient not only to the quality of the workmanship but also of the wood.

The Roe table is possibly that depicted in the portrait of Roe's eldest daughter in her old age as wife of "Squire" Phillips of *Culham* near Toodyay in the Avon valley (**plate 5**).

In June 1852, Eliza Hamblin gave up her teaching to marry Benjamin Mason, a man who had been an apprentice carpenter of Lazenby's. He went on to become a wealthy and influential timber merchant, employing 100 ticket-of-leave men in the timber mills in partnership with the architect Francis Bird and a further 200 at Mason's Landing in Cannington, where Bird built *Woodloes* homestead.

The Mason family later had interests in goldmining in Western Australia, owning the Murchison New King Mine at Abbots. Their son Edward had a brooch made as a present for his sister Eliza who married farmer Frederick Liddelow of Kenwick (**plates 6-7**). The craftsman was Anthony Fouchard, a French émigré jeweller who arrived in 1875 from London.

In 1851 gold had been discovered in the eastern colonies. Convicts were being

introduced into Western Australia, so people were leaving for the gold rushes or to escape from the taint of what would be a penal settlement for the next eighteen years. There had also been some more personal unpleasantness printed in *The Inquirer* newspaper in February 1852, where local workers had been maligned as drunkards, idle and worthless. Hamblin, his brother-in-law Benjamin Mason and a number of other “chapel” tradespeople, some of whom were total abstainers, inserted a rebuttal in the opposing newspaper, *The Perth Gazette*.<sup>17</sup>

The Hamblins and four children sailed for South Australia in February 1854 on the brig *Hamlet*. Emma was born in Adelaide in 1854. By 1855 they were at Sandhurst (Bendigo) where Rebecca was born and by 1857 in Kyneton, then called Carlsruhe, where Benjamin was born in 1860. Joseph’s wife died of complications soon after.

Ten months later, with seven children of his own, he remarried the widow Sarah Britcher, a Baptist with two children. They had a further five, four of whom survived. He became a Baptist in 1860 but resigned from the congregation in 1863. Joseph built the Baptist Church in Kyneton as well as the staircase in the local Roman Catholic presbytery and several houses including his own *Rose Cottage*. The cottage and the church have since been demolished. Deeply religious and ever the non-conformist, he joined the Salvation Army in the 1880s. Joseph died of influenza on 19 November 1899, and was buried in Kyneton cemetery by the Plymouth Brethren sect.

Joseph Hamblin and his eldest son Joseph Thomas were listed trading as carpenters in Kyneton from 1862 to 1872 at least, sometimes as piano makers. In 1872 Joseph is recorded as a piano maker on his daughter Sarah’s marriage certificate. Victorian Post Office Directories 1880–1885 list Joseph Hamblin as ‘Pianoforte maker of Kyneton’ (plate 8). Joseph retired about 1885 and the business became Hamblin & Son piano makers 1888–1896 (the son being John Thomas Hamblin). From 1902, Arthur and Henry Hamblin ran Hamblin Bros. Music Warehouse in



**9**

*Hamblin's Piano Factory and Music Warehouse, High Street, Kyneton, photograph c 1910. Courtesy of Jill Roy*

**10-11**

*Joseph Hamblin (1820–1899), piano, c 1880. Collection Kyneton Historical Society, photographs courtesy of Larina Strauch*



High Street, Kyneton (plate 9).

A piano bearing Joseph senior's paper label 'Joseph Hamblin/KYNETON', still in playing order, is in the Kyneton Historical Museum (plates 10-11).<sup>18</sup> This is wooden framed and was used to record a track for the ABC some years ago of an LP record, *To the Ladies and Gentlemen of the Colony* RO 2555 (World Record Club, Melbourne 1976). Another piano is with a descendant in Matong NSW, while the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney has a piano veneered in burr walnut with the label of Hamblin & Son, Kyneton dated to 1907.<sup>19</sup>

#### COLLECTIONS

Government House, Perth  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Kyneton Historical Museum, Victoria  
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

#### EXHIBITIONS

1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, London  
1870 Exhibition of Works of Art and Industry, Perth  
1888 Centennial International Exhibition, Melbourne

2011 *Out of the West* National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

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Jill Roy not only made her research available, but provided illustrations and further information on pianos by Joseph Hamblin and by his sons.

**Dr Dorothy Erickson** is a Perth-based design historian and practising jeweller, and frequent contributor to *Australiana*. Later this year she will hold a solo exhibition at Artspace Gallery in Camperdown NSW where her latest book, *Inspired by Light and Land: Designers and Makers in Western Australia 1829–1969*, WA Museum Publications, Perth 2014, will be launched on 2 November.

#### NOTES

- 1 Jill Roy, "Those Hamblins" typescript, 1995. The only issues of the *Kyneton Guardian* currently available on Trove are from World War I. An earlier version of this article appeared in *The World of Antiques and Art* 2013.
- 2 <http://www.broadwood.co.uk/history.html>,

accessed 17 June 2014.

- 3 Kevin Fahy & Andrew Simpson, *Australian Furniture: Pictorial History and Dictionary 1788–1938*, Sydney, Casuarina Press, 1998, p 59.
- 4 <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/when-felix-mendelssohn-met-queen-victoria-1305892.html>
- 5 *Inquirer* 19 Feb 1845 p 2 & repeated 26 Feb 1845 p 4, 5 Mar 1845 p 1.
- 6 *Inquirer* 9 April 1845.
- 7 *Inquirer* 12 Aug 1846 p 4.
- 8 Leslie Lauder & Mark Howard, *An Introduction to Western Australian Colonial Furniture*, East Fremantle, Lauder & Howard 1988, pp 22-23.
- 9 *Inquirer* 22 Aug 1849 p 1.
- 10 *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News* 8 Nov 1850 p 2.
- 11 *Kyneton Guardian* 19 Nov 1899.
- 12 *Inquirer* Supplement to 7 May 1851.
- 13 *Inquirer* 23 July 1851 p 2.
- 14 *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News* 8 Aug 1851 p 2.
- 15 *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News* 16 Jan 1852 p 3, *Inquirer* 21 Jan 1852 p 1.
- 16 *Perth Gazette and West Australian Times* 16 Sept 1870.
- 17 *Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News* 13 Feb 1852 p 4
- 18 K Fahy, C Simpson & A Simpson, *Nineteenth-century Australian Furniture*, David Ell Press, Sydney 1985 p 174.
- 19 Powerhouse Museum 2002/130/1.

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