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Finding Forrester:
The Life and Death of
Joseph Forrester, Convict Silversmith

Douglas Wilkie

Joseph Forrester’s death in 1860 was mysterious and unexplained, and was almost undiscovered and unannounced. For many years those who wrote about him could never finish their story, and those who wrote usually restricted their discussion to an evaluation of his silverwork, accompanied by a brief summary of what they could find in his convict conduct record. What they told was the story of Forrester the prisoner, not Forrester the man. My task was to find Joseph Forrester, the man.

Others have also endeavoured to find the missing humanity in convict lives — the ‘invisible men’, and women, who have disappeared in over a century of misconceptions about convicts and their lives and characters. In 1998 Hamish Maxwell-Stewart’s ‘The Search for the Convict Voice’ looked for the voice of the convicts rather than the voice given to them by others.1 Lucy Frost and Maxwell-Stewart followed this up in Chain Letters by bringing together the stories of over a dozen convicts and their families as revealed through letters, tattoos, diaries, petitions and love tokens.2 In most cases what is revealed is very different from the itemised and standard descriptors of the penal bureaucracy, whose records were previously used as the sole source of information about convicts, and which tended to give an impersonal and empirical picture of ‘who were the convicts’. Indeed, there were some convicts, as David Roberts noted, whose experience was ‘so exceptional as to seem unsuitable for arriving at any general approximation of the convict experience’.3

In Joseph Forrester’s life story, as in most convict lives, there are gaps, and where there are gaps we are faced with numerous possibilities. Terri-Ann White’s entry in Chain Letters uses fiction to give life to her convict stories — but even without the overt use of fiction we must still use conjecture and imagination to recreate those stories, recognising that, as Jerzy Topolski observed, ‘the same source information may be used to construct various his-

torical accounts of any fragment of the past. We must endeavour to fill the gaps for, in James Bradley’s words, ‘A narrative must be whole, otherwise it has no sense.

The chronological framework of Joseph Forrester’s life is largely built upon evidence from convict records and contemporary newspaper reports. *Chain Letters* includes the stories of convicts who left their mark engraved upon metal tokens, or literally tattooed upon their bodies. Joseph Forrester appears to have had no tattoos, but he certainly left his mark engraved upon silver and, while there do not appear to be any covert messages to family or loved ones hidden among his embossed patterns and images, the description of his work as being ‘bold’ and ‘naive’ compared to London silversmiths may tell us something about his training, and that, given the scarcity of skilled silversmiths in Australia, he was the best that could be found at the time.7 But to really understand Joseph Forrester would have involved much more speculation and conjecture had it not been for a substantial cache of letters written by Forrester and his brother to their uncle and cousin in Scotland.

Kirsty Reid has observed that historians ‘have been relatively slow to consider the personal and emotional meanings of exile to convicts’ and that historical accounts of early colonial life have been dominated by the assumption ‘that convicts, by virtue of their criminal status, were profoundly anti-familial in outlook and nature’.8 We might speculate about Forrester’s reaction to the seemingly excessive punishments dealt out to him over several years while working for David Barclay, but speculation is hardly needed to understand the clearly articulated personal emotions found in the letters to his family. Here then is the story of Joseph Forrester.

Between 1817 and 1820 brothers William and Joseph Forrester were apprenticed to their uncle, Robert Keay senior, of Perth, Scotland to learn the trade of silversmith.9 A cousin, Robert Keay junior, also learned the trade and became a close friend of the Forrester boys. William Forrester completed his apprenticeship, moved to London, and by December 1825 had taken a furnished house in Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell — a centre for silversmiths,

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6 For example, Frost and Maxwell-Stewart, *Chain Letters*, Chapters 12 and 13.
8 Kirsty Reid, Gender, Crime and Empire: Convicts, Settlers and the State in Early Colonial Australia, Manchester, 2007, p 2.
goldsmiths and jewellers.10 Houses were, he observed, ‘a very difficult thing to get in a good neighbourhood’.11 Younger brother Joseph, born in 1805, was a rather troublesome and unsteady youth who did not complete his apprenticeship, and moved to London with William.12 Unable to find work, he was supported by William despite attracting trouble from people to whom he owed money. Confiding in cousin Robert, William revealed that Joseph was ‘such a simpleton’ who ‘cannot keep his mouth shut’. William would not leave him in charge of the shop because ‘he is not a very good person to give work to or look after men’.13 As Joseph’s trade skills improved, William wrote, ‘He can chase very well & has been very steady’, but he had difficulty managing finance, so William kept him ‘very short of money’, became his banker, and gave him ‘only enough to pay his lodgings, washing &c and an allowance for pocket money’.14 William’s comments to his cousin give the impression that he was a caring and forgiving older brother when it came to Joseph’s transgressions. Had Joseph been employed in another workshop, he may have lost his job or been charged with some offense much earlier than he ultimately was. By October 1826, Joseph had lodgings in Princes Street, Bridgewater Square, and was called to give evidence at the Old Bailey in a case against Philibert Mathey, who had been charged with deception and forgery.15

The late 1820s saw an economic downturn in London with widespread bank failures, bankruptcy and unemployment. William regularly received financial assistance from both uncle Keay and cousin Robert and was embarrassed that they came to his aid in their own hard times.16 Patrick Forrester, another uncle at Hull, sent him small jobs to do.17 The downturn continued and by February 1826, to save money, William was setting diamonds to avoid

11 William Forrester to Robert Keay, 14 December 1825, MS24, Bundle 2, Perth & Kinross Council Archive (hereafter PKCA).
12 Scottish Genealogist, September 2004, p 115. The article in this journal provides a somewhat incomplete account of Joseph Forrester’s life in Australia.
13 William Forrester to Robert Keay, 14 December 1825, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
14 William Forrester to Robert Keay, 6 January 1826, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
15 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org), 26 October January 1826, trial of Philibert Mathey (t18261026-237). Although Mathey was found guilty and sentenced to transportation for seven years he was subsequently granted a free pardon – The Times (London), 3 November 1826, p 3.
16 William Forrester to Robert Keay, 18 December 1825; William Forrester to Robert Keay, 6 February 1826, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
17 William Forrester to Robert Keay, 6 January 1826, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA; Patrick Forrester in Hull - Hull Packet, Friday, 2 June 1843; Friday, 10 April 1846.
purchasing gold; he employed only one mounter, one setter, and Joseph.\textsuperscript{18} 
Despite some optimism, a valuation at the end of 1826 revealed assets insufficient to cover the cost of gold and silver needed for the work William had contracted to do, and he asked Robert for another £50 to get him over more bad times.\textsuperscript{19}

On the positive side, Joseph’s skills continued to improve. In May 1827 when uncle Patrick Forrester came to stay they saw ‘more of the sights to be seen in London … than ever’. Patrick bought nearly £1000 worth of silver plate while in London, ‘but very little jewellery’.\textsuperscript{20} Perhaps on Patrick’s advice, William insured the contents of his house, and told Robert that he wanted to move ‘as I am not at all comfortable where I am at present but the expense will be enormous to me in fact I am afraid to think of it’.\textsuperscript{21} The insurance was wise, as on Sunday 29 June 1828 a fire burned the upper floor of the Red Lion Street house ‘with considerable fury, threatening destruction far and wide’.\textsuperscript{22}

Financial troubles and the destruction caused by the fire put further pressure on the Forrester brothers, and in the evening of 15 January 1829, Joseph, possibly hoping to avoid the cost of purchasing diamonds, broke the window of Charles Plumley’s long-established jewellery shop on Ludgate Hill, and stole eleven diamond pins and two brooches, valued at £35.\textsuperscript{23}

Hamish Maxwell-Stewart is wary of ‘the practice of deploying nineteenth-century middle class readings of convict lives as the “real thing”, but, in a scene foreshadowing Charles Dickens’ ‘Stop Thief’ episode in *Oliver Twist*, Forrester was chased by a crowd down Ludgate Hill into a cul-de-sac where he was caught.\textsuperscript{24} He was tried and found guilty of breaking and entering. It had taken Joseph less than a minute, but the prescribed sentence was death — the premises being a dwelling house as well as a shop. Fortunately for Joseph, by the late 1830s death sentences for property crimes were routinely commuted.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{18} William Forrester to Robert Keay, 6 February 1826, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA. \\
\textsuperscript{19} William Forrester to Robert Keay, 18 January 1827, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA. \\
\textsuperscript{20} William Forrester to Robert Keay, 29 May 1827, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA. \\
\textsuperscript{21} The property was insured with Sun Insurance – Guildhall Library, London, Records of Sun Fire Office, MS 11936/511/1076806, 28 May 1828 Contents: Insured: William Forrester 54 Red Lion Street Clerkenwell jeweller; also MS 11936/514/1067098, 26 October 1827; William Forrester to Robert Keay, 29 May 1827. \\
\textsuperscript{22} *The Times* (London), Monday, 30 June 1828, p 7. \\
\textsuperscript{23} *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org), 15 January 1829, trial of Joseph Forrester (t18290115-205). \\
\textsuperscript{24} Maxwell-Stewart, ‘The Search for the Convict Voice’, pp 75-89; Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, London, 1838, Chapter X. The chase after Forrester is described in the Old Bailey trial transcript, Ref: t18290115-205.
\end{flushleft}
to transportation for life. Two months later William was declared bankrupt. The relatives in Scotland were unimpressed.

Awaiting transportation, Joseph Forrester was sent to the hulks where his behaviour was good, but once on board the convict ship *Thames* bound for Van Diemen’s Land he was caught breaking in to the ship’s hold. After arriving at Hobart on 20 November 1829, and listing his occupation as silversmith and jeweller, Forrester was assigned to work for John Christopher Underwood, a prominent Hobart merchant and auctioneer. While Underwood imported a wide range of goods, including jewellery, silverware, and watches, it is unclear whether Forrester actually practiced his trade while working for him. In October 1830 David Barclay, a Scot from Montrose and of almost identical age to Forrester, arrived at Hobart and opened a jewellery and watch-making business in Elizabeth Street. Barclay soon expanded his business and sought whatever skilled convict watchmakers, silversmiths and jewellers he could find. By 1832, Joseph Forrester was reassigned to work for Barclay.

In London, William’s bankruptcy, coming so soon after Joseph’s conviction, strained relationships with their father’s side of the family, and correspondence went through uncle Keay or cousin Robert. William contemplated leaving England, possibly thinking he would join Joseph in Van Diemen’s Land. By March 1831 business in London had briefly improved and he again had plenty of work before him. Joseph’s troubles were of a different nature. David Barclay was described as a ‘man of marked individuality, of

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28 Convict Description Book, Joseph Forrester, CON18-1-21; Convict Conduct Record, Joseph Forrester, CON31-1-13; Convict Appropriation List, Joseph Forrester, CON27-1-4, all references found in Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (hereafter TAHO).

29 *Hobart Town Courier*, 29 March 1828, p 3.

30 *Colonial Times*, 5 November 1830, p 2; Shipping Arrivals, CUS30-1-1 p 42, TAHO; *Hobart Town Courier*, 17 November 1830, p 3.


33 William Forrester to Robert Keay, 11 March 1831, MS24, Bundle 2 (PKCA).
great mental vigour & of remarkable mechanical skill’ with a ‘caustic tongue, which he could use with effect on provocation’. He was also full of ‘sarcastic humour, and shrewd wit’.34

A caustic tongue and sarcastic humour would surely have provoked Joseph Forrester as much as Forrester provoked Barclay. It was a dangerous combination, not only because of the clash of personalities, but also, as JC Byrne observed, ‘If assigned on his first arrival, the felon is subjected to all the peculiarities of his master’.35 While most employers treated their assigned servants well, AGL Shaw believes 20 per cent relied upon punishment to get results from their servants, and another 20 per cent were ‘pure slave-drivers’.36 While Shaw’s figures may be debatable, Barclay seems to have been among this latter group. The skills, role and treatment of convicts have been discussed extensively in Convict Workers.37 However, many of the conclusions were based on broad quantitative rather than individual qualitative evidence, and it could be argued that revealing the life of an individual resists reduction to statistics.

Before starting with Barclay Forrester’s record was clear, but from July 1832 he regularly managed to find his way to one or other of the many public houses in Hobart: the Spotted Cow in July; Help Me Thru The World in September; George and Dragon in December. His punishments ranged from being admonished; being reassigned; being confined to his cell on bread and water; and ultimately, receiving twenty-five lashes. We might imagine he spent other Saturday evenings at the pub but was never caught.

On Christmas Day 1832, Forrester was accused of being insolent to Barclay and fighting with a fellow servant. He was confined to his cell for six nights but allowed to go to work during the day. Barclay needed Forrester’s skills, but Forrester clearly found Barclay difficult, and by March 1833 he had had enough. He stayed away from work and was accused of inciting his fellow servants to insubordination. Threatening to abscond into the bush if he was sent back to Barclay’s, Forrester was sentenced to fifteen months on Notman’s Road Party instead.38 A number of Forrester’s misdemeanours coincide with

34 James Backhouse Walker, ‘Reminiscences of Life in Hobart 1840s to 1860s’, (1890), Special and Rare Materials Collection, University of Tasmania Library, online at http://eprints.utas.edu.au/1865/ accessed 8 July 2010.
36 AGL Shaw, Convicts and the Colonies – A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and Other Parts of the British Empire, London, 1966, p 226.
38 Robert Notman was the Superintendent of the Road Parties and Chain Gangs which were set to work building roads in Van Diemen’s Land.
Finding Forrester

those of Archibald Simpson, a twenty-five year old watchmaker from Stirling, also assigned to Barclay. While Forrester was sent to the Road Gang, Simpson was sent to Port Arthur, where he spent his time ‘trafficking in articles of jewellery,’ ‘making rings to traffick,’ and other offences.

Whether Simpson was a bad character who influenced Forrester, or whether the worst in Forrester, Simpson and their fellow servants was brought out by Barclay’s sarcasm is difficult to know, but the punishments Simpson suffered while at Barclay’s were significantly worse than Forrester’s — regularly receiving punishments of between twenty-five and fifty lashes. The list of Simpson’s punishments fills the available space in one record book and continues into a new book.

Other servants such as William Cole, a watchmaker, and Charles Jones, initially a labourer, also worked for David Barclay at the same time as Forrester, and went into partnership during the early 1840s. Cole had been transported on board the Stakesby in 1833 for stealing two watches from his master, and, like Simpson and Forrester, had been subjected to continual punishment at Barclay’s, including two years’ hard labour at Port Arthur for stealing one of Barclay’s sixpenny screwdrivers. Jones arrived on the Georgiana on 1 February 1833 and was immediately sent to Barclay’s. Jones’s record is even longer than Forrester’s, frequently being absent without leave, being drunk or insolent, or attempting to enter the room of a female servant. Jones also spent time on the tread wheel in 1834 and on the chain gang in 1837.

It might be tempting to think the convicts received just rewards for their behaviour, but, given Barclay’s reported caustic wit and sarcasm, many of the punishments suffered by his servants were probably unnecessary. It is important to distinguish the punishments received as a result of the assignment system itself from the fact that fewer than one in five convicts actually committed new criminal offences after being transported to Van Diemen’s Land.

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39 Archibald Simpson, Conduct Record, CON31-1-39, TAHO; Description List, CON18-1-10, TAHO; Simpson later went to Launceston to work with Barclay’s brother, James, and eventually set up his own business in Launceston; Launceston Examiner, 3 June 1843, p 6, 21 February 1849, p 8.
40 Archibald Simpson, Conduct Record, CON31-1-39, TAHO; Description List, CON18-1-10, TAHO.
41 Archibald Simpson, Convict Conduct Record, CON 31-1-39, TAHO.
43 Convict Description Book, William Cole, CON18-1-20, TAHO; Convict Conduct Record, William Cole, CON31-1-7, TAHO.
44 Convict Conduct Register, Charles Jones, CON31-1-24, TAHO.
Nevertheless, Forrester could have benefited from convict Henry Tingley’s advice that ‘All a man has got to mind is to keep a still tongue in his head, and do his master’s duty, and then he is looked upon as if he were at home; but if he don’t he may as well be hung at once, for they would take you to the magistrates and get 100 of lashes’.\(^{46}\) We might imagine that a master would not report a servant’s misdemeanours to the court if it meant losing valuable and irreplaceable skilled labour — as Margaret Dillon suggest, ‘where convicts and employers negotiated reasonable working conditions, employers rarely took their workers before the courts on discipline charges’.\(^{47}\) Indeed, some employers like James Macarthur believed that it was ‘in the interests of the assignee to make his convict servant as comfortable as possible. The principle on which we have conducted our establishment is, where a man behaves well, to make him forget, if possible, that he is a convict’.\(^{48}\) The ongoing punishments suffered by Forrester probably did little to help him forget that he was a convict.\(^{49}\)

Forrester’s departure to the Road Party was not good for Barclay. The people of Campbell Town had just ordered a silver presentation cup for James Simpson, the Police Magistrate, and Barclay was compelled to explain that Forrester was ‘the only one in town capable of making such plate so that unless a man arrives in the course of a few weeks you have no chance of getting it done in the colony’.\(^{50}\) Barclay was able to replace Forrester with John Hill, but Hill was an optician by trade and Forrester’s skills could not be matched. James Simpson’s silver cup was eventually made in London and presented to him in August 1834, two years after being ordered.\(^{51}\) Charles Jones would eventually have skills that seemed to surpass Forrester’s, but in 1833 he had

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\(^{49}\) For a comprehensive review of convict labour literature and changing interpretations of the treatment and character of convict labour see David Andrew Roberts, ‘The “Knotted Hands that Set Us High”: Labour History and the Study of Convict Australia’, *Labour History*, No 100, May 2011, pp 33-50.

\(^{50}\) David Barclay to John Leake, 19 March 1833, University of Tasmania Library, Rare Collections, Archived Documents, L1-F184.

\(^{51}\) John Hill, Convict Conduct Record CON 31-1-20, TAHO. Hill arrived in May 1833 and after four instances of insolence, neglect of duty and disobeying his master was granted a ticket of leave in 1837; ‘Transfers’ - *Hobart Town Courier*, 17 May 1833, p 2; ‘Assignments’ - *Colonial Times*, 10 September 1833, p 6; John Hill, Convict Conduct Record, CON 31-1-20, TAHO.
come to Barclay with a labourer’s background and still had much to learn. He was originally intended to be assigned to public works.52

In May 1833, two months after joining Notman’s Road Party, Joseph Forrester was found guilty of idleness. Then he lost his hammer. Hardly surprising—he was a silversmith, not a stonebreaker! But he was found guilty of neglect of duty and sentenced to an extra three months in prison with hard labour on the chain gang. When James Backhouse, the Quaker Missionary, visited Notman’s Road Party in the same year he saw men being flogged for neglect of duty.53 Each man was required to break a cubic yard of stone, which Backhouse thought was excessive for men not accustomed to hard labour. The penalty of up to fifty lashes he thought was ‘an act of oppression’, which ‘tends to harden men, and to drive them to desperation’.54 Presumably, it was in desperation that Forrester absconded from the chain gang after a month. Another six months’ hard labour was added to his original sentence. By mid-November, found guilty of feigning sickness, he was given seven days solitary confinement on bread and water.

Forrester’s displays of protest while on the chain gang were by no means unusual.55 He survived the chain gang and eventually returned to Barclay’s where he soon made a silver cup for presentation to George Augustus Robinson in ‘acknowledgement of the benefit this Colony has derived from the successful conciliation of the Aborigines of this Island effected by him’.56 Another cup was commissioned for presentation to JH Cawthorn by the Southern Agricultural Association in 1835.57

52 Convict Appropriation Register, Charles Jones, CON27-1-6, TAHO; Charles Jones is described as having arrived as a silversmith at http://static.tmag.tas.gov.au/decorativeart/objects/metalware/P2006.123/index.html.


55 For an analysis of chain gangs, see Dillon, ‘Convict Labour and Colonial Society in the Campbell Town Police District’, pp 122-53; See also Reid, Gender, Crime and Empire, pp 170-1; On forms of convict protest, see Alan Atkinson, ‘Four Patterns of Convict Protest’, Labour History, No 37, November 1979, pp 28-51.


Joseph avoided trouble until January 1836 when he struck a fellow servant and was confined to his cell for twenty-four hours. In June he was drunk and fighting in the yard of the Albion public house and spent a week in the cell on bread and water. In August he was absent without leave, and in December he was absent from the church muster. Eight months of relative quiet passed until August 1837 when, soon after a fellow servant, John Flett, was sent to the road gang, Barclay accused Forrester of using threatening language and being insolent — another twenty-five lashes were inflicted upon his back. In London things were faring much better for brother William and on 30 September 1837 he married Charlotte Lister at St James Church, Westminster.

The demand for Joseph Forrester’s skills as a silversmith was steady and spreading beyond Hobart. In 1838 he made a gold and silver presentation snuff box, ordered from Barclay by Alexander Dick of Sydney. Amid the financial difficulties he and William faced during the 1830s, Joseph could never have imagined that this box would sell for $160,000 150 years later.

After serving nearly ten years working for David Barclay, Joseph Forrester was granted a ticket of leave on 22 May 1839 and could have started his own business, but setting up as a silversmith required special equipment not available in Hobart, and it required capital. Fortunately, Joseph inherited about £40 (an annual salary for many) from Euphemia Boswall, heir to the Blackadder estate near Edinburgh. She died in 1829, leaving a fortune of £12,000. Beneficiaries included the children of William Young, maternal grandfather of William, Joseph and Christian Forrester. Joseph would probably have been disinherited but for the efforts of his brother and cousin. The father’s side of the family did disown him, and when an uncle, James Forrester, died in 1840, he left a small fortune of £1,000 each to William and Christian, but

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58 Convict Conduct Record, Joseph Forrester, CON31-1-13, TAHO.
59 John Flett, Convict Conduct Record, CON31-1-14, TAHO; Flett’s record is as long as Forrester’s and although Flett received his freedom in 1846 there are also subsequent convictions dated 1867 and 1883.
60 International Genealogical Index (IGI), Batch M147157 Source 1042320 Call Out No.6904123; she had been christened at St Martin in the Fields, Westminster, on 21 November 1815.
61 This box and other examples of Forrester’s work are described and photographed in Hawkins, Nineteenth Century Australian Silver, Vol 2, p 222.
64 Robert Keay to Dundas and Wilson, 6 February 1833, MS24, Bundle 16, PKCA. Joseph was apparently ignored in early correspondence with the executors of the estate; William Forrester to Robert Keay, 26 April 1833.
nothing to Joseph. A study of family attitudes ‘at home’ towards transported
convicts, and how those attitudes were reflected in popular mid-nineteenth
century literature such as Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, would undoubtedly
be revealing.

It appears that Joseph continued to work for Barclay after gaining his
ticket of leave, and accrued more misdemeanours on his record — drunk
and disorderly; away from his authorised place of residence; failing to attend
chapel on Sunday. In early 1840 Barclay’s workshop made a gold snuff box
that did ‘great credit to the ingenious maker’, to be presented to Captain
King, Port Officer at Hobart. It is not stated whether the ‘ingenious maker’
was Joseph Forrester, but Forrester did make a silver salver for presentation to
James Garrett, Presbyterian Minister at Bothwell in October 1841. Forrester’s
skills have been described as ‘naive’ when compared to work being done
by silversmiths in London; however, given the scarcity of skilled silversmiths
in Australia, he was the best that could be found.

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65 TNA, Probate, James Forrester 1840, PROB11-1932; Norman R. Bennett, *Notes
on Offley Forrester and the Forresters*, online at http://let.letras.up.pt/uploads/ficheiros/4967.pdf, accessed 27 August 2010. It is not known if Joseph Forrester was ever told
of his uncle’s death and legacies.

66 *Colonial Times*, 7 April 1840, p 7.

In April 1841, Forrester married Mary Ann Sadler, a free emigrant. Forrester was thirty-six, Sadler was twenty-six. Joseph wrote lovingly of his wife to William, who forwarded the news indirectly to relatives through cousin Robert. A boy, John Henry, was born in January 1842, but died seven months later, the death later being blamed for a depressive illness that affected Mary Ann for the next six years.

Forrester received his conditional pardon in June 1842, his conduct having been ‘exemplary’ for the previous three years. Marriage, supposedly, was ‘the best instrument for reform’ — at least for female convicts. Perhaps the presence of Mary Ann Sadler in his life had also been a reforming factor for Joseph Forrester — certainly the punishments that he had received at Barclay’s and on the chain gang were roundly criticised as hardening men rather than reforming them. But another path to respectability and reform was through business activity. While the original condition on his pardon was that he could not leave the colony, Joseph left Barclay’s within a week and opened his own business. In London William still complained of slow business but, always supportive of his younger brother, he found the flattting mill Joseph required, and shipped it out to him on the Janet Izat.

Sympathetic members of the family sent finance, and cousin Robert Keay sent a ship-

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68 Convict Applications to Marry, Joseph Forrester, Thames, to Mary Ann Sadler, free, 13 October 1840, CON52-1 p58, RGD37-2, TAHO: 1841-1059; RGD 37-2 1059-1841, TAHO. The marriage certificate states that Forrester was aged 28. He was in fact born in 1805. Nothing further has been located about the origins of Mary Ann Sadler.
69 William Forrester to Robert Keay, 8 January 1842, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
70 Colonial Tasmanian Family Links Database, no 123361, Forrester, male child, 1842, TAHO; Deaths, John Henry Forrester, RGD35-1 1108-1842, TAHO; Burials RGD34-2 989-1842, TAHO.
71 Forrester’s Convict Conduct Record CON31-1-13, TAHO, indicates he received the pardon on 18 June 1842. It was listed in Courier, 10 November 1843, p 4; Home Office: Settlers and Convicts, New South Wales and Tasmania; The National Archives Microfilm Publication HO10, Pieces 31, 52-64; Ancestry.com, New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia, Convict Pardons, 1834-1859 [database on-line].
73 Reid, Gender, Crime and Empire, pp 170-4, 221
75 Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay, 10 September 1843, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
76 A Flattting Mill was used to roll bars of silver or gold between cylinders to create thin ribbons of metal that could then be more easily worked. William Forrester to Robert Keay, 6 November 1841; William Forrester to Robert Keay, 22 November 1841, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA. The Janet Izat arrived at Hobart on 26 October, Courier, 28 October 1842, p 2.
ment of silver plate and jewellery. Intending to attract customers, Joseph advertised the newly arrived stock in December 1842, but the publicity also attracted thieves and within a month the shop was burgled of its entire contents. Most of the property was fortunately recovered.

William wrote to Joseph in mid-1842 at the time of sending the flattening mill, but the ship bearing the letter, the convict ship *Waterloo*, was wrecked off South Africa. Joseph waited nearly a year for William's letter before writing home with news that he was 'pretty well established and have got a good share of the work and thank God getting a comfortable living'. But he missed his family and old friends — 'I am most comfortable in my home but often think of you and all my relations and should like to end my Days in my native land'. He added: 'I often think of the happy days of my youth and when I used to ride behind the Gig when we used to go fishing — those times are gone never to return.' Forrester's wife was supportive and when an eye inflammation prevented him from working for four months he said, 'I could see to do nothing — but thank God I have got a careful wife and have again got about and my eyes are now better than they have been for years'.

Despite David Meredith's suggestion that the positive accounts of life in Van Diemen's Land found in convict's letters were often 'the partial truth, exaggerating, or simply lying', the letters written by Joseph Forrester suggest that, although he wanted to eventually return home, life after Barclay was not all bad and he was enjoying both his marriage and business success. His expressed desire to end his days in his native land appears to be typical of many others, who either wrote to the government or wrote home to friends and relatives. There are no extant letters written during his time with Barclay and, given that letters before and after that period have survived, it is possible that Barclay's iron rule prevented Forrester from writing home.

By September 1843 Forrester was making silver plate for St George's Church, Battery Point, 'two or three more good orders', including a presentation plate for the captain of the *Psyche*, and 'Plenty of Jobbing'. In March 1844 he was called to court as an expert witness to explain the process of

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77 William Forrester to Robert Keay 8 January 1842, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA; 'Shipping News', *Colonial Times*, 1 November 1842, p 2; advertisement, *Courier*, 9 December 1842, p 1; advertisement, *Courier*, 16 December 1842, p 1.
78 *Colonial Times*, 10 January 1843, p 3.
79 *Courier*, 11 November 1842, p 2.
80 Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay, 10 September 1843, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
81 Meredith, 'Full Circle', p 20.
82 Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire*, pp 1-3.
83 Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay, 10 September 1843, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA; plate for the Captain of the *Psyche*, *Courier*, 20 October 1843, p 2.
amalgamating silver. Forrester’s conditional pardon was extended to the other Australian colonies in October 1845, and then to any country ‘except Europe’. The recommendation was that he had ‘been above sixteen years in the Colony the last twelve years of which period he has been free from offence ... and produced good testimonials of character.’ Certainly he had been free of any criminal offence in the eyes of the law, but Barclay saw things differently, and it is probable that the good testimonials came from people Forrester met after leaving Barclay.

Figure 2: Silver Cigar Case 1846
11 x 8 x 1cm, Joseph Forrester (1805-c1860).
Source: Reproduced courtesy of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (Bequest of Mr DM Tarleton, 1945).

A silver cigar case commissioned by jeweller, William Cole, for presentation to former Assistant Police Magistrate William Tarleton brought Forrester more good publicity in early 1846, but the ongoing economic depression meant diversification was in order, and in March, after five years in Collins Street, Hobart, he moved the business to 52 Liverpool Street where he opened a pawnbroking shop. With business struggling in Van Diemen’s Land, and an over-supplied labour market from the release of probationary convicts, prospects looked better in Melbourne, and Joseph and Mary

84 *Colonial Times*, 12 March 1844, p 2.
85 Convict Conduct Register, Joseph Forrester, CON31-1-13, TAHO.
86 Convict Pardons, Joseph Forrester, CON10-59, TAHO online at Ancestry.com.
Ann Forrester decided to join a growing exodus to Port Phillip.\textsuperscript{88} The Forresters made their way to Launceston and left Van Diemen’s Land on board the steamer \textit{Shamrock} on the morning of Saturday 14 November 1846.\textsuperscript{89} It was almost seventeen years to the day since Joseph Forrester had arrived at Hobart on board the \textit{Thames}.

Earlier in the year, an advertisement was placed in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} seeking a ‘first-rate Working Silversmith and Jobbing Jeweller, for the principal establishment in Hobart Town’. This was probably David Barclay looking for a new silversmith. He specifically wanted a ‘respectable, steady, sober man’ who could ‘make a cup, salver, &cc, &cc, and be a competent hand at chasing’. The successful applicant would have his passage paid from Sydney to Hobart.\textsuperscript{90} But it seems a suitably sober person was not found and by 1848 Charles Jones, former fellow assigned servant at Barclay’s, having learned his trade well, advertised that he was now the only manufacturing jeweller and silversmith in Van Diemen’s Land.\textsuperscript{91}

Six months after Forrester arrived in Melbourne a shepherd came to him with some stone containing 60 per cent pure gold. Forrester bought the gold, said nothing about it, but gave a piece to his friend Captain John Clinch, of the \textit{Flying Fish}, who took it to Hobart where the \textit{Courier} broke the story, and other journals soon followed — ‘gold ore, of unprecedented richness, is said to have been found somewhere in the province of Port Phillip’.\textsuperscript{92} The story soon disappeared from the press, but Forrester presumably retained his gold,

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\textsuperscript{88} Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, ‘Convict Transportation from Britain and Ireland 1615-1870’, \textit{History Compass}, Vol 8, No 11, 2010, p 1233; David Meredith and Deborah Oxley, ‘Contracting Convicts: The Convict Labour Market in Van Diemen’s Land 1840-1857’, \textit{Australian Economic History Review}, Vol 45, No 1, 2005, pp 45-72 discusses the impact of the probationary system upon the labour market; For Vandemonians going to Victoria, Alexander, ‘The Legacy’, p 49.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Courier}, 18 November 1846, p 2; \textit{Argus}, 17 November 1846, p 2; \textit{Colonial Times}, 17 November 1846, p 2. All the lists in the press give the names of Mr Joseph Forrester and Mrs Margaret Forrester. This is probably a misprint copied from one to the other. Her name was Mary Ann Forrester; ‘Shipping Intelligence’, \textit{Port Phillip Herald}, 17 November 1846, lists J Forrester and Mrs Forrester. It is unclear whether Forrester sold his Hobart pawnbroking business or left it to be managed by a Mr Bonney. Bonney was reported to be managing Forrester’s pawnbroking shop early in January 1847, \textit{Colonial Times}, 5 January 1847, p 3.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 27 February 1846, p 3.
\textsuperscript{91} There appears to be no subsequent mention of another silversmith with the skills required working from Hobart during 1846. Charles Jones, \textit{Colonial Times}, 31 October 1848, p 1.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Courier}, 19 May 1847, p 2; \textit{Maitland Mercury}, 5 June 1847, p 4; \textit{Sydney Chronicle}, 5 June 1847, p 3.
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which was reported to have been ‘the size of an apple’.

Forrester lived in Flinders Lane but working from Charles Brentani’s shop in Collins Street, but his work was soon being commissioned by other jewellers in Melbourne. However, on Saturday 10 June 1848, his wife Mary Ann was found floating dead in the Yarra River. An inquest was held on the Monday, with Forrester’s employers Charles Brentani and William Bennett included among the members of the jury. Forrester claimed his wife had been ‘insane’ for four years following the death of their son, and had threatened suicide on several previous occasions. On Friday night she had been unwell, and, unknown to Forrester, had sought refuge with Mrs Millet, a neighbour in Flinders Lane, claiming there were people in her house who were out to murder her. Sometime during the night she left Millet’s house and was not seen again until the discovery of her body. The jury came to a verdict of ‘drowned, being in a state of insanity’. Mary Ann was buried immediately after the inquest on 12 June 1848.

A correspondent to the Argus questioned the verdict of the inquest and implied that the death may have been due to murder rather than suicide. There were a number of discrepancies. The death of the son, the supposed cause of her insanity, had actually occurred six years earlier, in July 1842, and there was no record of another child being born or dying after the first. Forrester claimed he and his wife had not argued and that he knew of nobody who held bad intentions towards her, yet the newspapers reported that an argument did occur. Forrester claimed he reported his wife’s disappearance to the constable on duty as soon as he missed her, and had looked ‘everywhere’, but apparently did not go next door to enquire at the Millet’s. The newspapers reported that a night watchman had heard ‘considerable noise in Millet’s house during the night, and the voice of a woman apparently calling for help’. However, the night watchman’s evidence was not presented to the inquest. Neither did the jury consider that the location where the body was found was a likely scene of a murder.

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93 Maitland Mercury, 9 June 1847, p 3; see the same story in Colonial Times, 8 June 1847, p 3; also in Courier, 9 June 1847, p 2; Argus, 25 May 1882, p 9; Sydney Chronicle, 5 June 1847, p 3; Edmund Finn was also known as Garryowen.
94 In July 1847 William Bennett commissioned Forrester to make a silver medal for the Manchester Unity Order of Odd Fellows, Argus, 9 July 1847, p 2. In September 1847 Forrester is listed as working from Collins Street, Argus, 10 September 1847, p 4.
95 An inquest was held on Monday 12 June 1848, Port Phillip Herald, 13 June 1848, p 1.
96 Port Phillip Herald, 13 June 1848, p 1.
97 Death Register, Parish of St James, County of Bourke, Melbourne, p 77, no 1150; also in Victorian Pioneers Index.
98 Argus, 16 June 1848, p 4.
99 Launceston Examiner, 17 June 1848, p 6. The cited Port Phillip source of this report has not been located.
found, in the mud on the north side of the river, was a very shallow part of the river where there was no current and the depth was not conducive to suicide by drowning; nor the fact that her jewellery and other items were missing, arousing suspicion that the jewellery had been removed either before or after her death. The implication to be read into all of this was that it was possibly Forrester who argued with his wife, killed her in a fit of temper, for which he was known, removed her jewellery, and left her body in the river. As for Mrs Millet, she and her husband ran what was described as a ‘notorious lodging house’ that was infamous as a refuge of Pentonvillains — the ex-convicts who had undergone two years of training at Pentonville prison before being transported to Port Phillip. They were given conditional pardons immediately upon arrival but were not to return to England — technically they were no longer serving convicts and were known as exiles.

Following the death of his wife Joseph Forrester was kept busy with a commission from Charles Brentani, making a silver snuff box for the publicans of Melbourne for presentation to Melbourne’s Chief Constable, William Sugden. The Argus described the box as ‘a very superb specimen of colonial workmanship’, ‘very richly chased and embossed with the figures of the Emu and Kangaroo’. Although thirty-one year old Brentani himself may have started learning the trade of silversmith in his youth, transportation also interrupted his training and Brentani knew Forrester, now aged forty-three, was the only person in Australia with the skills to create such a box with its intricate hinges — Jones in Hobart was apparently unable to do this kind of work.

Just before Christmas 1848, Thomas Chapman, a shepherd, came to Melbourne from Hall and McNeill’s station at Glenmona, looking for someone to give advice about some stone he had held for several months. The story of Chapman’s gold has been incorrectly told and misunderstood by most commentators, and is beyond the scope of this article. However, in summary, Chapman ended up at Charles Brentani’s shop where Alexandre Duchene and Joseph Forrester confirmed the stone contained a total of thirty-eight

100 There appears to be no extant letter from Forrester to his cousin Robert Keay in Scotland that mentions the death of Mary Ann Forrester.
101 Argus, 31 March 1848, p 2.
102 Argus, 3 November 1848, p 2.
ounces of 90 per cent pure gold. Italian Brentani was an ex-convict, who had moved from Launceston in 1845, and Frenchman Duchene, a jeweller on a conditional pardon, also from Launceston, had arrived in Melbourne only weeks earlier. Duchene and Brentani gave Chapman £28 for the gold — a considerable bargain. Forrester was left out of the deal — perhaps he had no cash, or perhaps Chapman was the same shepherd who had already sold him an apple-sized piece of gold back in 1847.

Eventually Thomas Chapman was persuaded to take Brentani, Duchene and Forrester to the place he had found the gold. Forrester in particular irritated the squatter, Charles Browning Hall, by making out that he was interested in purchasing the run, but then announcing that he had changed his mind because all the sheep had scab. Although there was certainly gold to be found, Charles La Trobe quickly put an end to the search and the story was eventually dismissed by the press as a hoax.

Later in 1849 a Major Davidson commissioned Charles Brentani to set a valuable diamond into a ‘massive gold ring’ made from some of the Pyrenees gold. Brentani gave the job to Forrester. When Davidson refused to pay the price Brentani took him to court where Justice Redmond Barry was told by former Launceston watchmaker James Robe that the ring was of inferior quality and could easily be made in just a few hours. Davidson was ordered to pay Brentani the costs but Forrester, furious at the slur on his workmanship, wrote to the Argus pointing out that Robe had worked as a watchmaker rather than jeweller in Van Diemen’s Land and challenging Robe ‘or any person whom he can employ in the City of Melbourne, for £50 a-side, to manufacture any article whatever, in either silver or gold, from a diamond pin to a silver teapot’. Perhaps aware of his reputation for bad temper and violence, Forrester added, ‘I have carefully avoided either exaggeration or harsh language, and leave the public to form their own judgment without my adding one word of comment.’ Forrester’s challenge was not taken up.

105 Ann Brentani’s account in the Argus, reprinted in Maitland Mercury, 3 June 1882, p 4; also reprinted in Sydney Mail, 3 June 1882, p 17; ‘Reminiscences in the Life of a Colonial Journalist by Snyder’. Brisbane Courier, 6 February 1875 p 3. Snyder was the pen name of James Snyder Browne; Argus, 31 January 1849; Argus, 2 February 1849; Argus, 31 January 1849, reprinted in Maitland Mercury, 14 February 1849.

106 Argus, 2 February 1849; Snyder says they left within a fortnight and there were five men - Brisbane Courier, 6 February 1875, p 3; Ann Brentani says her husband went with ‘some five or six friends’ - Argus, reprinted in Maitland Mercury, 3 June 1882, p 4; Argus, 6 June 1882, p 9.


108 Argus, 11 August 1849, p 3.
By early 1850 Forrester had opened a watchmaking business in Elizabeth Street, and on Monday 28 January he married Ann Willis, herself a pawnbroker and widow of Samuel Willis, at St James’ Church in Collins Street. By the end of the 1850s the Willis’s Bourke Street store was in Forrester’s name and he was employing at least one assistant. The police regularly visited the store as thieves tried to dispose of goods there.

After the search for gold on Crown Land was made legal in mid-1851, the business of jewellers, silversmiths and goldsmiths took a turn for the better. Unlike Brentani, Forrester did not advertise to purchase gold, but was happy to give his opinion when hopeful gold-seekers brought their discoveries to him, such as in July 1851 when a claimant for the Gold Committee’s reward came to Forrester with some stone believed to contain gold.

By early 1852 Joseph Forrester seems to have fallen out with Charles Brentani and throughout February, possibly following an unsuccessful court case in September 1851, where Brentani accused a former employee of pawning stolen watches at Forrester’s shop. By March 1852 Brentani advertised for a working jeweller who would be paid wages of £6 per week. Forrester was available, but Brentani clearly wanted somebody else. Not only did Forrester fall out with Brentani, but also with John Hughes, a tinsmith, who lived in Collingwood near Brentani’s Shepherds’ Arms Hotel, and had his business at the rear of Forrester’s Bourke Street shop with a frontage to Little Bourke Street. Early in 1852 Hughes borrowed an amount of money from Forrester and as security Hughes gave Forrester the title deeds to his house and land. Forrester claimed he thought it was a sale. Hughes thought otherwise. When Forrester visited the property and found Hughes there, an argument ensured. Forrester’s fiery temper got the better of him and he was subsequently charged with assaulting Hughes. There is no indication of the outcome of

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109 Melbourne Directory 1849 (no publisher) gives Joseph Forrester, Pawnbroker, 100 Bourke Street east; Watchmaking business in Elizabeth Street, Argus, 14 March 1850, p 3; Garryowen (Edmund Finn), Chronicles of Early Melbourne, Melbourne, 1888, p 328; Samuel Willis - 1847 Port Phillip Directory; Ann Willis as Pawnbroker - Garryowen, p 327; Argus, 24 March 1848, p 3. Ann Willis was possibly also known as Eliza Willis who was granted a Pawnbroker’s License in Bourke Street in November 1849, Argus, 13 November 1849, p 2; Argus, 10 October 1848, p 2.
110 Forrester employing a man, Argus, 7 December 1850, p 2; Business in name of Mr Forrester, Argus, 18 December 1850, p 3.
111 Thieves trying to sell stolen goods, Argus, 7 December 1850, p 2; auction of unclaimed goods, Argus, 17 December 1850, p 3, 18 December 1850, p 3.
113 Argus, 18 September 1851, p 2.
114 Brentani advertising for jeweller, Melbourne Morning Herald, 6 March 1852.
the case. However, it is likely that Hughes was right and Forrester wrong. John Hughes went on to become a successful businessman, establishing the firm of Hughes & Harvey, and becoming landlord of the American Hotel in Swanston Street. Perhaps to escape the humiliation, Forrester went to Tasmania briefly. Returning to Melbourne on the Shamrock a week later, he falsified his ship of arrival on the passenger manifest, but admitted he was on a conditional pardon. He was perhaps lucky to get back into Melbourne as the recently passed Convicts Prevention Act was aimed at preventing Vandemonian ex-convicts from coming to Victoria. Five months later Forrester’s pawnbroking shop in Bourke Street was broken into and ‘completely stripped of all the valuables, gold, cash, jewellery, to the value of £2000’.

Forrester’s marriage to Ann Willis lasted barely two years. On 30 March 1853, aged forty-three, she died of unknown causes. No inquest was held and she was buried the next day. Forrester continued the pawnbroking business, as well as advertising Forrester & Co. Watchmakers and Jewellers at 100 Great Bourke Street east. It is unclear who else was in the company in 1853, but by early 1854 Forrester had formed a partnership with Edward Hodgson. The new business, known as Forrester and Hodgson, watchmakers and jewellers, operated from Forrester’s shop at 100 Bourke Street, although the address was regularly advertised as being Hodgson’s and was apparently used as a meeting place for visitors. By November Forrester and Hodgson had created a presentation medal for the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. It was described as being made of ‘colonial gold, and is surrounded with a rich border of grapes and vine-leaves wrought in silver, also the product of the colony ... a most creditable specimen of colonial art.’ The partnership

116 Hughes at Shepherds Arms, Argus, 12 January 1852, p 3; Forrester assaulting Hughes, Argus, 5 March 1852, p 2
117 Hughes’ obituary, Argus, 22 December 1875, p 6; Recent Deaths, Argus, 26 January 1876, p 1s.
118 Departures, Forester Joseph, Steerage, Shamrock, 18 March 1852, Launceston to Melbourne, Larkins, conditional pardon, POL220/1/1 p 616v (TAHO).
120 Empire, 31 August 1852, p 4.
121 Burial Register, Parish of St Mark, County of Bourke, Melbourne 1853, p 33, no 490. There is no inquest registered at the Public Record Office Victoria (hereafter PROV).
122 1853 Melbourne Directory (no publisher), GMF 98, Box 40, State Library of Victoria.
123 For example, Craig Gibson to meet George Gibson at Hodgson’s, 100 Bourke Street, Argus, 20 June 1854, p 1; Craig Gibson to contact Stephen Rodda at Hodgson’s, Argus, 19 October 1854 p 1.
124 Partnership between Forrester and Hodgson, Argus, 19 October 1854, p 1; Forrester as member of Odd Fellows, Argus, 5 October 1854, p 8.
125 Argus, 13 November 1854, p 5.
between Forrester and Hodgson could have been a turning point in Forrester’s career, but events back in the United Kingdom were to determine otherwise.

When Joseph Forrester’s maternal grandfather, William Young, died in 1810 he bequeathed a total of £800 to his daughters or their descendants, but the distribution was not to take place until after the death of his daughter Euphan, which did not occur until 8 February 1852 when she was eighty-three.\(^{126}\) Robert Keay junior became administrator of the estate and drew up the necessary distribution documents. William Forrester signed in London on 24 July 1852.\(^{127}\) Copies were sent to Joseph Forrester along with a power of attorney allowing his brother-in-law, Christian’s husband, David Stuart, to act on his behalf. Thomas Miller, a Melbourne solicitor, and John Hodgson, the Mayor of Melbourne, witnessed Forrester’s signature on 26 January 1854.\(^{128}\) Since 1810 the original capital of £800 had increased significantly and Joseph Forrester alone stood to inherit £774 13s 10d. The documents were sent back to Scotland and David Stuart signed on Joseph Forrester’s behalf on 4 August 1854. The sister, Christian, signed on 24 August 1854, but five days later, before matters were finalized, their brother William died in London.\(^{129}\) His share would go to his wife Charlotte.

News of William’s death prompted Joseph Forrester to disobey the conditions of his conditional pardon and return to Scotland. In December 1854 he dissolved the partnership between himself and Edward Hodgson and on 25 January 1855 left Melbourne with 160 other passengers bound for London on board the \textit{Anglesey}.\(^{130}\) Forrester was fifty and it was twenty-six years since he had left England. When coming to Van Diemen’s Land on board the \textit{Thames} in 1829 he had broken into the hold. If he had broken into the hold of the \textit{Anglesey}, he would have found over 37,000 ounces of gold, as well as 1095 bales of wool, and a gold cup valued at £800, which had been presented to Irish hero William Smith O’Brien back in July 1854.\(^{131}\) During their time in Van Diemen’s Land many convicts maintained a correspondence with their friends and families at home and, as Kirsty Reid has

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126 UK Census Perth, Scotland, 1851 387/00 036/00 002, online at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk. accessed 31 May 2010.
127 ‘Papers relating to the settling of the estates of William Young, late supervisor of excise, Perth and of his daughters Maria Young or Menzies and Euphan Young, 1811-1859’, MS24, Bundle 3, PKCA.
128 ‘Miscellaneous legal papers relating to Robert Keay, Perth 1854’, MS24, Bundle 123, PKCA.
131 \textit{Courier}, 29 January 1855, p 2.
observed, they had ‘despite their physical banishment, sustained an intimate familiar presence ... [and were] ... remembered through broken relationships, mourned as lost family and friends.’\(^\text{132}\) Perhaps Joseph Forrester imagined that his family longed to see him as much as he wanted to be with them again. As soon as Forrester arrived in London he wrote to his sister Christian in Perth. She was shocked at the news that her convict brother had returned and wrote to advise him to stay away because the malicious gossip at home was too much for her to bear. Joseph’s first reaction was one of dismay, of betrayal, and also of defiance. Perhaps, like the returning convict, John Edmunds, in *Pickwick Papers*, Joseph Forrester discovered that ‘in the distant land of his bondage ... he had thought of his native place as he had left it, not as it would be when he returned. The sad reality struck coldly at his heart, and his spirit sank within him.’\(^\text{133}\) Despite his sister’s advice, Joseph defiantly wrote to Robert Keay on 5 June 1855 to say that he would visit Scotland anyway:

You no doubt know that I am in London. I wrote to my sister who advises me not to visit Scotland altho it is nearly thirty years since or more since I saw her or any of my relatives. I actually think she is much too severe in fact Dear Robert I feel it worse than when I left my home. I am extremely sorry that there is such a change in Family concerns and that differences should exist between Friends.\(^\text{134}\)

Forrester lost most of his money after arriving in London. He had explained the circumstances to Christian and asked if she could help with a loan — she refused and made it clear that neither would her husband or William’s wife assist him. Joseph said to Robert:

had I come to England a Beggar man or a disgrace it would have been different – But I do not see why I might not come to Perth or some place handay [sic] to see you as it might be the last time that I will have a chance altho thank God I am as well and strong as ever I was, and when I settle my business in London I am going back to Melbourne to sell off all there and come back eithr to Scotland or London for good.\(^\text{135}\)

\(^\text{133}\) ‘Convict’s Return’, *Colonial Times*, 17 April 1838, pp 5-6; See also Reid, ‘Exile, Empire and the Convict Diaspora’, pp 57-70.
\(^\text{134}\) Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay, 5 June 1855, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
\(^\text{135}\) Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay, 5 June 1855, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
It was thirty years since he had left Scotland, and twenty-six years since being transported to Van Diemen’s Land. But his relatives had not forgotten. If, as Kirsty Reid has observed, the returned convict in literature was ‘a frequent expression of social and cultural unease’, so too did the return of Forrester arouse that unease among his relatives.  

Cousin Robert wrote to Joseph and persuaded him to change his mind. Forrester replied from London:

I duly received yours of 22nd June when you state that you were surprised at my returning to England. The reason is simple after so many years absence that I would naturally have a wish to see my native place again and the Friends of my youth. I certainly will not visit Perth. I will take my sisters & your advice. I was not aware of the gossiping tendencies it would create and would be extremely sorry to do any thing that would be painful to any of my relations in any manner. Dear Robert that was the chief cause of my returning to England & I did not mean, nor do not to rem’n in England, I have got enough to keep me and to spare in Melbourne & think of embarking again in about 14 days so might be by the Queen of the Seas which sails on the 15th of next month. I am very anxious to get away and think my sisters Mrs. Wms. business will all be settled this week.

Joseph again expressed regret that his sister had refused to assist after he had lost his money, and suggested that he could reimburse any loan from his Melbourne bank account once he returned:

Things in London are very dull—I am sorry that you have been so unfortunate in business speculations no doubt but you have plenty to disturb your mind and wits but I hope by the help of God you will yet get over all, the 28 years you have been married to me only look like as many months but the alterations in life and circumstances are great, the many that I knew in London are all most of them dead. Give my respt and Love to Aunt Keay, Your dear wife & family. Please to answer this as you might not hear from me again until I write you from Melbourne. I Remn My Dear Robert Your Old Friend.

Any hopes Forrester may have had for being reunited with his family were dashed. What was he to do? He knew nobody in London and could not go back to Scotland. He had lived in Australia since 1829. Just as Robert Hughes

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136 Reid, ‘Exile, Empire and the Convict Diaspora’, p 58.
137 Joseph Forrester to Robert Keay, 28 June 1855, MS24, Bundle 2, PKCA.
noted, convicts transported to Australia ‘could succeed, but they could hardly, in the real sense, return’. On 7 August 1855 Forrester said goodbye to England forever and left Gravesend on board the Queen of the Seas, arriving back at Port Phillip on 13 November, eleven months after he had set out. He had not only lost his family in Scotland. Years earlier his wives and only son had died, and upon returning to Melbourne he appears to have lost his friends as well.

Forrester’s claim to cousin Robert Keay that he had a good business and sufficient to live on if he returned to Melbourne may have been an exaggeration. But his lifelong friend would never get to know the truth for in June 1856 Keay also died. The matter of the grandfather’s estate would drag on for years to come.

When Forrester returned to Melbourne the people he previously worked for were no longer there. His old employer Brentani was dead. William Bennett had moved to Ballarat to take advantage of the gold rush there. His former partner, Edward Hodgson, thought Forrester would not be returning and sold the Bourke Street business to D Abrahams in July 1855. Abrahams soon cleared out all the stock left with Hodgson, asking patrons to collect their watches or they would be auctioned. Edward Hodgson, like Bennett, moved to Ballarat.

For a few years it seems Forrester stayed in Melbourne and possibly worked for William Edwards, a silver plate manufacturer, who arrived in Melbourne on board the Blanche Moore in July 1857. Forrester may have also worked with Charles Ferdinand Falcke, some thirty years younger, who came to Melbourne from Germany via Adelaide and set up a watch-making business in

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139 *Argus*, 14 November 1855, p 4.
140 ‘Papers relating to the late Robert Keay’, MS24, Bundle 143, PKCA.
141 Charles Brentani died in October 1853 aged thirty-six.
142 *Argus*, 6 July 1855, p 7.
143 *Argus*, 6 July 1855, p 8; *Argus*, 14 August 1855, p 8.
Swanston Street, before eventually going to the Blackwood gold diggings and to Beechworth. It is possible that Forrester went with him.

In September 1860 the *Argus* carried an article about Portuguese wine, including an opinion by Forrester’s cousin, Joseph James Baron de Forrester, son of uncle Patrick, regarding the export of wines from Portugal. If Forrester read the article, he may have again yearned for reconciliation with his family. Whatever his feelings, by 1860 the matter of the inheritance had finally been settled — Forrester’s share was just over £700 — but it would be many months more before he finally received anything. He followed Charles Falcke north, and by early 1861 was working as jeweller, ‘opposite the Criterion Hotel’, in High Street, Beechworth in the Ovens District.

A few months later the *Argus* reported, ‘A working jeweller, residing at the Ovens, has inherited a fortune of about £70,000 by the recent death of a female relative in England’. The news spread — the town was identified as Beechworth, but none named the ‘Lucky Fellow’. Perhaps Joseph Forrester’s inheritance had been inflated by a careless reporter from £700 to £70,000.

Forrester’s enjoyment of the newly acquired fortune was short-lived. He was unhappy and had taken to drinking heavily. One day in mid-July 1863, while under the influence of alcohol, he suffered a slight superficial wound to his head and asked Doctor John Dempster to dress it for him. The injury may have resulted from an altercation with Charles Francis Duchatel of the

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147 ‘Papers relating to the settling of the estates of William Young, late supervisor of excise, Perth and of his daughters Maria Young or Menzies and Euphan Young’, MS24, Bundle 3, PKCA.

148 *Ovens Advertiser*, 20 February 1861, p 1 and ongoing.

149 On the inheritance, see *Argus*, 17 August 1861, p 4.

150 £70,000 inheritance - *South Australian Advertiser*, 19 August 1861, p 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 5 September 1861, p 3; *Maitland Mercury*, 29 August 1861, p 3; *Hobart Mercury*, 24 August 1861, p 3.

151 Evidence given at the inquest of Joseph Forrester, Inquest No. 1077, Beechworth, 7 December 1862, “A man supposed to be Joseph Forrester”, VPRS 24 / P0 / Unit 113, PROV.
Alliance Hotel, and Forrester told his housemate James Barfoot that if Duchatel 'summoned him' he would leave the district.152

A few days later Forrester put on his trousers, his usual black silk velvet waistcoat, leaving it unbuttoned, and tied his necktie in the askew way that people recognized as one of his peculiarities. He took the pink silk handkerchief that Barfoot had recently lent to him and put it in his pocket, along with the knife he often carried, took his pipe, and walked off towards the Chiltern Road.153 When he did not return, Barfoot reported him missing to the police. A search was carried out and enquiries made as to his possible whereabouts, but without success.154 Eventually it was assumed he had carried out his threat to go to Melbourne.

Five months later, on the morning of 6 December 1863, Charles Falcke took his dog for a walk about 600 yards into the bush behind his house at Beechworth. The dog ran off and discovered the remains of a body lying beneath a pine tree. The body was dressed, but had been reduced to a skeleton. Falcke immediately reported the find to the police, telling them he thought the body was that of Joseph Forrester.155

Doctor John Dempster examined the body and, because there were no marks of violence on the skull, surmised that Forrester may have died 'quite tranquilly'.156 Though unable to specify the exact cause of death he thought it was unlikely to have involved violence or poison.157 The police identified the clothes and personal items as being those of Joseph Forrester.158 The Chief Commissioner of Police noted that 'There does not appear to be any reason to suspect anything criminal in this matter'.159 However, the inquest said nothing about the possibility of suicide.

Forrester’s death was registered at Beechworth on 8 December 1863—the cause of death was unknown and the date was sometime around July 1863. What else was known about Forrester was minimal—a jeweller; believed to

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152 James Barfoot may have been a person who was transported for life to Van Diemen’s Land in 1827, Convict Conduct Record, James Barfoot, CON31-1-1, TAHO. He may also have been the J Barfoot who acted as agent in Hobart when somebody advertised for a silversmith in February 1846.
153 Evidence of Charles Falck and James Barfoot at Inquest of Joseph Forrester.
154 Evidence of Sergeant Edward Stephenson Rufson ay Inquest of Joseph Forrester.
155 Evidence of Charles Falck at Inquest of Joseph Forrester; News of inquest in Federal Standard, 7 December 1863; also Argus, 9 December 1863 p 6.
156 Evidence of Doctor John Dempster at Inquest of Joseph Forrester.
157 Federal Standard, 9 December 1863; also in Argus, 11 December 1863, p 7; Ovens Advertiser, 22 December 1863.
158 Evidence of Detective William Craven at Inquest of Joseph Forrester.
159 Inquest of Joseph Forrester, Noted 24 December 1863.
have been married but his wife was dead; thought to have been in Victoria for about twenty years and in New South Wales for fifteen years; thought to have been born either in Perth in Scotland, or in London; aged about sixty-four. No mention of time in Van Diemen’s Land. Forrester was buried at Beechworth on 9 December 1863 with only the Reverend WC Howard and James Barfoot being present. A death notice was placed in the local newspaper two weeks later: Forrester—Mr. J. Forrester, aged 65 years. That summed up his life.

The *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* carried a report of the inquest on 8 December 1863. The same report was copied to the Melbourne *Age* a week later. The Tasmanian newspapers did not carry the news at all, and none connected the lonely death of Joseph Forrester of Beechworth with the person who had worked as a silversmith, jeweller, watchmaker and pawnbroker in Melbourne for about sixteen years. Nor did they connect him with the Joseph Forrester who had accompanied Brentani and Duchene on the quest for Chapman’s gold in 1849. Mrs Brentani may have read about Forrester’s fate but what impact it made, if any, is unknown. She certainly remembered him twenty years later when writing an account of the 1849 gold discovery. As for the relatives back in Scotland, his cousin was dead, his brother was dead, and his sister Christian was still alive, but would she be interested? It would appear that Forrester left no will and it is not known what might have happened to the £700 inheritance he should have received a few years earlier.

For a brief number of years Forrester had been the most competent silversmith in Hobart and Melbourne, and was in great demand, but this was due more to an accident of history than to his superior skills and business sense. As the gold rushes brought more talented gold- and silversmiths to Melbourne, Forrester moved to the country and was forgotten. If we ignore the fact that his work sells for hundreds of thousands of dollars today and look beyond the silverware and antique collectors to ask, ‘and the man Foster,’ as the *Cornwall Chronicle* called him, who was he? We find a man who enjoyed, and suffered, all the emotions of any human being, and perhaps suffered them more than most. Was he one of Manning Clark’s ‘permanent outcasts of society’, serving out ‘the term of his natural life’ in more ways than the sentencing judge might

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160 Beechworth Cemetery Records suggest he was 61. He was in fact 58.
161 Deaths in the District of Beechworth, 1863, no 159.
162 Death notice, *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 22 December 1863.
163 *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 8 December 1863; *Age*, 15 December 1863, p 4.
have intended?164 If he was an outcast, it was only partly because he was an ex-convict and more because of who he was and how others saw him. Because of his comfortable family connections in Scotland, he was, perhaps, outcast more than most.

Many people are quickly and easily forgotten and Joseph Forrester became one of Port Phillip’s forgotten people. But perhaps Forrester’s tragedy is that those he cared about the most were also those who most wanted to forget him.165

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165 Although Joseph Forrester had no surviving children himself, his brother William had children, at least one of whom emigrated and whose descendants now live in Australia and have taken an interest in their ancestors.
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