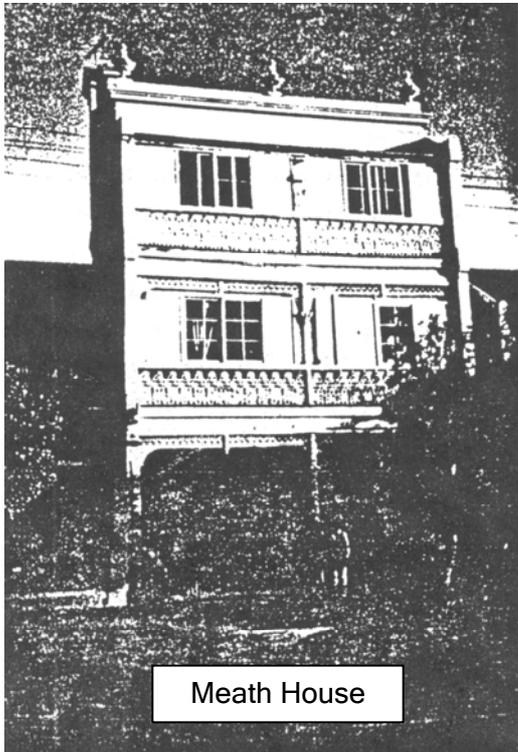


This document was written by Helen Stanley (Mother Gonzaga), alias 'Aunty Nell', probably about 1985. An earlier version was written by Elizabeth Stanley (Aunty Bess) and several segments of the current document are drawn from that account. It contains some minor inaccuracies. We now know that Patrick Stanley came to Australia at the age of 23, arriving on the Victoria on 2nd September 1849. One piece of family 'folklore' that Aunty Nell used to retail (also recorded in Aunty Bess's earlier story) was that the family had made the claim that Patrick Stanley had arrived in Australia at the time that Queen Victoria succeeded to the throne. Had this been true he would have been very young (10 or 11 years old) and the shipping records, along with other documents (including his death certificate) show that he was considerably older. His death certificate states that he had been in Australia for 70 years (being then aged 89). Had this been true it would imply that he was 19 when he arrived (as stated by Aunty Nell). This may be where she got her information from when she wrote this account?

MEATH HOUSE

As the Bicentenary approaches, one's mind is inclined to withdraw from our sky-scrapered skyline, and to endeavour nostalgically to recall the sky-scapes of homes in the last century with their gentler outlines, with even a surmounting scroll featuring the name, such as "Meath House", or in my case, "Kinkora". How much kinder this is than the rectangular ugliness of storeys of units raising their shoe-box shapes against our Australian skies.

As the last survivor of one of the characteristically large families of the turn of the century, I look back at times through the eyes of my elder sisters, at our ancestral home



Meath House

which still stands, sentinel like, with its three storeys above the neighboring 2-storey terrace houses - once called Stanley Terrace - at 35 Cleveland Street, Redfern, between Bourke and South Dowling Streets, on the south side of Cleveland Street. Up till a few years ago, it still maintained its original name, "Meath House" from County Meath, Ireland, the birthplace of Patrick Stanley, an Irish emigrant who left his native land in 1845, at the time of the Irish famine. Though the house is still there, it bears another name, "Illoura" with its street number 461. and is today a shabby edition of what would have been, in the mid 1800's, a well built home capable of accommodating its owner's family of two sons and five daughters, as well as a number of grandchildren from time to time.

The builder of these properties had to start from rock bottom. As a 19 year old migrant to a new land, he must have exercised courage and enterprise. A family legend has it that

an uncle had given him three golden sovereigns from his bakery, and advised him to set off from famine stricken Ireland and seek his fortune, like Dick Whittington, in a new land. His mother's Death Certificate reveals that he came from a farming family, so that when he arrived in Australia, he sought work in the market gardens set up by Jean Baptist near Redfern. From working in the market garden business, he was either given land, or saved money to buy land, for, in ten years, he was able to bring out and support his mother, Mary Stanley. Up till a few years ago, there was an old hoarding up in the area of Paddy's Markets, bearing the name, "Christopher Stanley, Shipping Providore", Christopher being the name of his grandson, later in the same business. When I went last year hoping to see it, the old buildings had been replaced by new ones. It is interesting to note, too, that an article appeared in a Sydney newspaper, five or six years ago, on the name "Paddy's Markets". One theory put forward was that they were called after Patrick Stanley, Mayor of Redfern. The more likely origin, however, was given, as being called after the number of Chinese paddies who worked the markets. However interesting these suggestions are, the fact remains that Patrick Stanley became a wealthy man. There may have been other profitable sidelines readily available in the expanding colony, to have enabled Patrick, within a few decades, to accumulate house property about twenty dwellings in the Redfern area, considerable land some fifty acres at Belmore and Hurstville, later to form the dowries of his daughters, Kitty and Mary, two sizeable dairy properties on the Richmond River and "Meath House". And he, the Dick Whittington of 19th century New South Wales, became Mayor of Redfern not three times, like his London counterpart of the 15th century, but four times. (Details of the Will in the Sydney Municipal Council.)

More significant for his adopted country, though, is the fact that he set up a fine family of Stanleys, O'Briens, Bridges, Scahills and Keoghs who have proliferated into dozens of other families who have produced people distinguished in many fields - business, professional and academic fields - over some five generations.

MEATH HOUSE

The focal centre of this widespread family was the old home of Patrick Stanley and his wife Elizabeth Regan - "Meath House". As the families appeared, Grandpa Stanley's home became the rendezvous of the grandchildren who were brought on Sunday mornings to see and delight their grandparents. One granddaughter, Mary Bridge, writes in her autobiography: "Jack, my big brother, and I loved these affectionate people. Grandma Stanley was incapacitated by crippling rheumatism, and very quiet. Grandpa Stanley was full of vigour, however. We gave them crazy concerts in the evenings when we stayed with them. Jack would stuff a pillow under his small pyjamas coat like a cranky, old man. This produced hearty laughter from Grandpa, and Grandma's eyes twinkled. We had fun, too, looking over Grandpa's fence on to Stanley Lane to watch the antics of the cabby's monkey, attached to a long lead, as it scampered round the yard below, and up and down a pepper-corn tree quite near us. Another joy was listening to "Grimm's Fairy Tales" read by one of our grandparents."

The Stanley girls remembered, too, how Grandpa, after the death of his dear Bessy, would love to have his Stanley granddaughters read to him in the evenings from Dickens' novels in

fact, they were paid 3d. a week for such a chore. The Stanleys lived close by in another 3-storey house, "Kincora", still standing at 651 South Dowling Street, and still quite elegant with its black "Sydney Lace" on each of its three storeys, set against its tasteful henna coloured facade.

Being a much younger member of the Stanley family, I never saw my grandmother, but Grandpa lingered on for many years in that large house, empty except for his Irish housekeeper. I remember feeling very much in awe of a large portrait of the very solemn, life-size, George Elliot-ish visage of my great-grandmother, and was told that the tiny daguerreotype (about 4" X 3") on the dusty blue velvet tablecloth of the small table nearby was the original photo which had been sent to China to be enlarged to life-size. This large portrait was passed on through the generations till I was the last owner. As I had nowhere to keep it, I presented it to the Mitchell Library. When removed from its frame after about a century, the words "Hong Kong" were printed in large lettering across the back, thus proving the truth of the enlargement being a Chinese process.



Painting of Mary Stanley
(Hong Kong - see text)

For a description of the Victorian residence, "Meath House", I am indebted to my sister, Elizabeth Stanley, former librarian for some thirty years at the Fisher Library, Sydney University, and later in charge of the Library, Sydney Law School. This description I found in a lumber room of the old residence in Greenwich of my elder sisters, now deceased. It was evidently a preliminary draft written in an old medical diary belonging to my brother', William. This is how she writes - she had a wonderful memory.

"Included in the many properties owned by Patrick Stanley was that quintessence of urban, Victorian domestic architecture' - number 35 Cleveland Street, Redfern. Built almost on the Street, separated from the footpath by about six feet of verandah, it reared its three storeys, the upper two bordered by balconies, above its single or two storied neighbors. A long side passage with two doors, provided access to the house, which stretched back some hundred feet to an asphalt yard, with a row of poplars along one side, flanked by a series of stands for pot plants, opposite the windows of the domestic offices. A glassed verandah ran across the back of the house, and beyond the kitchen and laundry were a shed and a lavatory, with a bricked fowl-yard stretching back to rather squalid land at the rear. In my childhood, there were still a few dispirited hens whose meal of bran and pollard, mixed to a kind of porridge with

the household scraps, was usually compounded by my grandfather under my absorbed gaze. The lavatory, I remember, had a very high seat, rather awkward for my small stature, and was provided always with a bundle of neatly cut squares of newspaper on a loop of string hung on a peg - - shades of Lady Scott and the rainbow-hued and floral toilet rolls of this nuclear and wasteful age.

The ground and first floor front had a large drawing room with French windows opening on to the adjacent verandah and balcony. The ground floor was carpeted in a rather ugly mustard and red, with a suite of drab chairs, several small tables and whatnots crowded with sepia toned photos, a fair number of them being of ecclesiastical gentlemen who visited the well-to-do Catholics of the city. Dean O'Haran figured there, possibly Archbishop Polding, and I know Cardinal Moran visited them on some family occasions."

Grandpa's name can be seen in St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, in the east transept, on one of the two brass rectangles of names of Churches, Schools and Ecclesiastical Institutions, together with a few names of individuals, under the heading: 'Cardinal Moran's Honour List.'

To return to the description of "Meath House" -

"The outstanding article of furniture in the around drawing room was a piano with a fretwork back lined with red silk. My Aunt Julia played Gilbert & Sullivan by ear. I can still hear the tinkle of her bracelets. She suffered from a tubercular spine, but was a lively and cheerful character, with magnificent brown wavy hair, the care of which took up a lot of time and required several hair brushes. She used to divert herself on the telephone in our shop by exchanging airy badinage with the telephone clerk while waiting for her number to answer."

In 1886 she accompanied her parents on their trip abroad to an Indian and Colonial Exhibition in London, for which her father, as Mayor of Redfern, was given a permit to attend a number of sessions. Sadly, we do not have the diary she kept of this trip. It was at this Exhibition, as a family tradition has it, that Grandpa purchased the beautiful mahogany sideboard that is, at present, housed in Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta. Aunt Julia died in 1908, murmuring on her deathbed with her customary cheerfulness, that as she was "going to Abraham's bosom", she might as well go with a smile.

To return to the domestic arrangements of "Meath House" as described by Elizabeth Stanley -

"On the ground floor at the back of the drawing room, was a dark dining room, rendered even darker, by a suite of furniture upholstered in black horse-hair, whose prickly strands would be pulled out in the many boring periods when we were supposed to sit quietly while the grown-ups droned on interminably about family matters. Along one side was the sideboard, allegedly an exhibit at the London Exhibition in 1886, rearing its majestic mirror and elaborately carved

mahogany, topped by two realistic pineapples; and on it was displayed the very beautiful silver tea and coffee service presented to grandfather as Mayor of Redfern, and now in possession of his great grandson. Here, too, were several biscuit-barrels of Royal Doulton, the contents of which were usually limp and stale. The room, too, smelt rather pleasantly of apples, kept in a rather plebeian double lidded basket lurking in a dark corner. The illumination was provided by the usual hideous gas chandelier of the period, equipped with one or two incandescent lights which were lit by a taper, applied by standing on the table beneath. My Aunt Julia was reported to have used this chore to escape the embraces of one of the regular old ladies - visitors - who was afflicted with a rather bristly chin.

Opposite the dining room was the main, rather unimpressive entrance door with frosted glass panels and opened on to a narrow stairway leading to the upper storeys. A long passage led out to the back verandah and kitchen, so that meals served in the dining room can never have been appetisingly hot, though the verandah pantry did house an impressive cohort of pewter dish covers as well as a rather hideous dinner service of solid china bordered with broad bands of solid turquoise, of which I still use the sole survivor - a soup plate. The kitchen was a rather long room with a window overlooking the asphalt yard with its border of poplars and pot plants on stands.

The equipment of the kitchen would appall the modern housewife used to a multiplicity of electric gadgets. There was a fuel stove and a gas ring, the former not always lighted, and a stone sink and the necessary wooden table and chairs, also a chiffonier which housed cutlery and various small items such as cruets. The brick walls were washed a deep cream, and the last household help who reigned there, had adorned them with colour prints cut from the Jubilee issue of one of the London journals commemorating the glorious reign of Queen Victoria. The one I most admired showed the youthful sovereign, looking like one of Greuze's blooming maidens. Another kitchen appurtenance was an old clock with a charming face garlanded with flowers. It never functioned in my time, but supplied a rustic, decorative note in an otherwise prosaic apartment. Down a step from the kitchen was the laundry furnished with a brick copper, three wooden tubs and a long bench.

A verandah outside the dining room combined as a passage to the kitchen and an area for storing a dinner service and massive pewter dish covers. Outside the dining room, a narrow stairway led to the other two storeys, with a bathroom and a maid's room opening on to a small landing at the top of the first flight. A smaller flight led to the bedroom occupied by my grandparents, comfortably furnished with a walnut suite and, boasting a gas fire. A large drawing room occupied the rest of the floor. This was furnished rather more elegantly than its downstairs counterpart, with a green carpet and a suite of chairs with cabriole legs, and matching sofa, upholstered in green satin. I remember, too, a couple of sinister

looking oil paintings, which could only be landscapes of trolls' country, being executed in dreary shades of grey. There were also a few pieces from the hands of a talented maid-servant, Effie Nutt, a rather fragile looking lass who dealt with the pretty heavy chores of the household.

There was, of course, a good deal of bric-a-brac, some nice Wedgwood pieces, a few porcelain vases, and a quite fascinating screen with a Chinese dragon procession embroidered across it. I was also rather fond of a little girl on a swing, made of china, attached to one of the chandeliers, and a couple of Chinese mandarins with movable heads, and also a gilt clock under a glass dome.

As long as we, Matthew Stanley's children, lived in our shop on the opposite side of Cleveland Street at the corner of Bourke Street, several of us were always accommodated in the second floor bedrooms of "Meath House", austere furnished with four-poster iron bedsteads with white canopies and mosquito nets, wash stands and dressing tables adorned with frills and blue bows. I can remember how our grandparents' bedroom was the gathering point at night for family and visitors, as Grandma was incapacitated with rheumatism. I can remember, too, how a German doctor, Herr Grader attended to her, supplying the evidently ineffective unguents, willingly applied by the current Abigail, who was always in admiration at her patient's smooth, white skin."

Such was "Meath House" at the turn of the century the focal point of the growing number of families of grandchildren who found the big house a fascinating museum of furniture, ornaments, photos and news.

How grateful I am to my sister Elizabeth for these recorded memories which have brought to life for me the old home and the people who frequented it, after they had become so many families themselves. How I wish I could have known those dear people, my grandparents.

Happily I have here before me as I write, that sparkling cut-glass inkwell that is my one authentic memory of "Meath House" How well I remember that day, when as a child of five or six, I made those beautiful rhomboidal patterns on the dust of the velvet tablecloth, by pressing the somewhat heavy inkwell here and there over its surface - little suspecting that, one day I would have it for myself. How delighted I was to find it amongst the bric-a-brac in the old home at Greenwich, some seventy years later. It now brings back to me rather dim but tender memories of those grand life-giving people - the Stanleys of "Meath House".



Patrick and Bessie Stanley