

WILLIAM PORDEN KAY

(1809-1897)

Public servant, architect & surveyor



The Tasmanian Government House stands with a commanding view of the River Derwent and the Royal Botanical Gardens, on the Queen's Hobart Domain. In anyone's estimation, it is an impressive building of the Gothic style. It was designed by William Porden Kay who was brought to Tasmania by the Franklins, Sir John (Governor) and his wife Jane who thought it was quite unacceptable that the two leading architects in the colony, James Blackburn and James Thompson were emancipated convicts.

William was many things; architect, surveyor, engineer and Tasmanian public servant. He was born in London in 1809 son of Joseph Kay who also was to call Tasmania home and grandson of eminent architect William Porden. He was nephew to Sir John Franklin's first wife, Eleanor Anne Porden.

Governor Franklin invited William to come to Tasmania and he did so, arriving here 20th May 1842 aboard the *Isabella* and becoming Director of Public Works. There was controversy over the appointment and William was stood down and as a result he was appointed Colonial Architect. The new Governor Sir John Eardley-Wilmot re appointed William as Director of Public Works which in turn saw the decision over

turned by the Colonial Office and he was re-appointed as Colonial Architect.

On the 3rd April 1845 he married Clara Ann Elwell at St Johns Church, New Town, a suburb where he lived for much of his time in the colony. They had a daughter Clara Virginia Poden born 19th December 1849. His house was *Barrington Lodge* (see below) in Swanson Street, which is now an aged care home managed by the Salvation Army.



A new Governor was on the scene, this time Sir William Denison who in turn, like a Gilbert & Sullivan's operetta, appointed for the third time, William as Director of Public Works. Poor ole Will did not know where he was. It was, however, a good decision because from 1846 until 1853 he served on the Bridgewater Bridge Committee and became also Director of Waterworks.

His greatest achievement was that of Government House, the Vice-Regal residence judged to be perhaps the best in the whole of Australia. William designed it as a fine Victorian period house in the Gothic Revival style.



Government House photo

Work began in 1855 on 37 acres of land with sandstone quarried on the site. Construction was completed in 1857. The house consists of 73 rooms, some of which are in Elizabethan and Jacobean Revival styles. The finest rooms are the Main Hall, the Dining Room and the Ante-Drawing room, the French room, the Ballroom and the Conservatory. The scale detail and finish of the entrance hall, grand corridor and state rooms; are unequalled in Australia. William done us proud.

His other major architectural works in Hobart are the Tudor style St Mary's Hospital, (Davey Street), additions to the Hobart Criminal Court (Campbell Street) and the former post office now demolished. He designed the Eardley-Wilmot (Governor of Tasmania) Memorial which lies in St David's Park, Hobart.



Eardley-Wilmot's memorial, St David's Park

It is believed he designed the home *Cawarra* in Risdon Road, New Town. Its architect is unknown, but because of the similarities between Government House and *Cawarra* there is support for this belief. Other works were water extensions and water improvements.



Cawarra House, New Town. Reg Watson photo.

He remained in office with failing eye sight until 1858 when he returned to England, where he died at Tunbridge Wells on the 29th April 1897. His legacy to Tasmania was his master piece, Tasmanian Government House.

- **Reg. A. Watson**