



# *Pioneer Echo*

*We look forward to your past*

A PUBLICATION OF THE PORT PHILLIP PIONEERS GROUP INC.

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George Selth Coppin c.1890  
(State Library of South Australia)



Above: Bro. the Hon. George Selth Coppin M.P.  
First Grand Master of the Grand  
Lodge of Free and Accepted  
Masons of Victoria,  
Source: [www.slsa.sa.gov.au](http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au)

## GEORGE SELTH COPPIN

George Selth Coppin was a comic actor, a theatrical entrepreneur, a politician and a philanthropist.



George Coppin, in costume as Daniel  
White in Milky White 1881.  
Source: RHSV P-440-T

Right: At Rushall Park Retirement Village there is a cottage and a statue commemorating the theatrical impresario George Coppin.

The statue's plaque reads:

**'George Selth Coppin (1819-1906)  
Founder of the Old Colonists'  
Association of Victoria'**

Source: <https://melbourneshakespeare.github.io/>



**Read more about this amazing man on page 3.**

## The President's Pen

As some members have let us know, the Zoom link at the July meeting again let some (but not all) down. I previously mentioned how frustrating that was for the committee just as it was for those affected. Various committee members later met at the hall to test out the Zoom issue and suggestions have been made to overcome the difficulties. Updated Zoom instructions can be found on page 7 of this issue of *Pioneer Echo* and on the PPPG Website, and I can only apologise again and ask that you stay with us while we iron out the problem.

The Federal Minister responsible for charities recently wrote to all such registered organisations to say that the previous government's "War on Charities" was over and that it is his intention to work with charities to better connect Australians. Town Hall forums and meetings are planned. How it will pan out remains to be seen. But, at the same time, various other governments' budgetary constraints have seen cuts to things like digitisation

and support programs that affect history groups.

While all of that was going on, I have been wandering Europe. In Ravenna in Italy, I found the numerous historical mosaics with their wonderful stories. UNESCO now protects these sites. When these murals were created hundreds of years before Port Phillip was colonised, they were to tell stories as much as they were for the beautification of the buildings. Created at a time when there was no digitisation, no filming and often no books, they enable us today to see what life was like back then. Our First Nations' Peoples have done the same by passing down stories through the generations. What struck me however was that our own PPPG historical presentations are philosophically the same; designed to pass on what life was like. History needs protection and presentation.

We have presentations organised for the coming year and don't forget to look at the new website to read all of the interesting historical stories.

Paul Cronin

**From the Editor:** There were no new members for the August-September term. Also, the October-November *Pioneer Echo* will be mailed out late due to me being overseas.

### PPPG PUZZLE #3

(from the PPPG Puzzler Di Wheeler)

#### Match the clue and answer

|                                                                                                      |                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. First Mayor of Melbourne                                                                          | a. Melbourne High School |
| 2. reedy swamp or black crow                                                                         | b. Australia Felix       |
| 3. Father of Australian theatre                                                                      | c. Rebecca               |
| 4. fortunate or happy Australia                                                                      | d. Exiles                |
| 5. home of Australia's first zoo                                                                     | e. nullah                |
| 6. Aboriginal war club/hunting stick                                                                 | f. Blue Lake             |
| 7. John Batman's ship (entered Port Phillip Bay 29 May 1835)                                         | g. Henry Condell         |
| 8. last and largest of the Moonee Moonee chain of ponds was this tidal lagoon                        | h. George Selth Coppin   |
| 9. youths sentenced to transportation to Australia but granted a pardon on arrival                   | i. Cremorne Gardens      |
| 10. property purchased by Charles Forrest, corner of Toorak Rd and Chapel St down to the Yarra River | J. Toorak                |

**Did you know a cruciverbalist is a crossword puzzle solver?**

Address at the General Meeting on 8 July 2023

**GEORGE COPPIN— The father of Australian theatre?**

Speaker: Elaine Race

Port Phillip Pioneers Group Vice President, Elaine Race, introduced us to George Coppin.

George Selth Coppin jnr, born in 1819 in Steyning, Sussex, England, was the son of George Selth Coppin snr, surgeon, and Elizabeth Jane Jackson, actress. George Selth snr gave up his medical studies to join a group of travelling actors and his son grew up living in tents and learning how to run a circus. He delivered advertising flyers, played the violin, learned how to conduct an orchestra, and how to produce stage sets.

By the age of 16 George had become an independent performer, walking between towns and taking engagements as a comedian, sometimes in cow sheds. He was good natured, talented with a good work ethic. If necessary, he could make money by tuning instruments, or teaching dancing and singing.

In Dublin, he met Maria Watkins Burroughs, nine years his senior. They never married but lived together from 1842 until Maria's death in 1848. They had no children.

In 1843 they travelled to Sydney, Australia, on the *Templar*. Within two weeks of their arrival, they were receiving public acclaim, but George wanted to leave the stage. After raising the funds, they bought a tavern. This was an unsuccessful venture and they returned to the stage to clear their debt. In Van Dieman's Land, their performances received poor reviews and they moved to the Port Phillip District in 1845, bringing with them a team of 5 musicians. Maria had been unwell and had trouble performing.

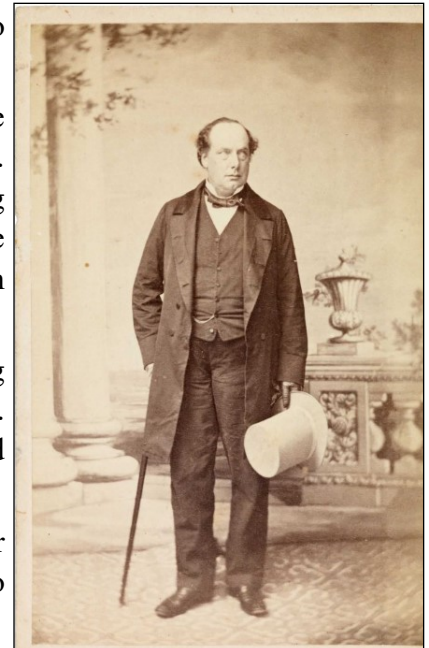
In Melbourne, Coppin met John Thomas Smith who had built the first theatre in Melbourne, the Queen's Theatre Royal, and after some negotiations Coppin was installed as Manager. He prohibited smoking in the theatre to reduce the risk of fires and he trained the actors and actresses so he could produce spectacular shows. The sinking of the *Cataraqui*, with a huge loss of life, devastated the population and Coppin wanted to raise the people's spirits. He donated the takings of one night's performance. He was to become a great philanthropist and his general demeanour meant that he made few enemies, but rather, he made life-long friends.

During his working years he continually alternated between acting and other ventures depending on his income. He established a ferry service to Portland Bay and Port Fairy. When he and Maria decided to go to India, they stopped in at Adelaide and didn't go any further as they saw opportunities there. Coppin was always learning. The Adelaide audiences were generally well educated, and thus sophisticated performances were necessary. The upstairs section of a building owned by the Solomon family was converted to a theatre in five weeks, with seating for 700 people. It was called the Royal Victoria Theatre. Maria was unwell and didn't attend the opening night.

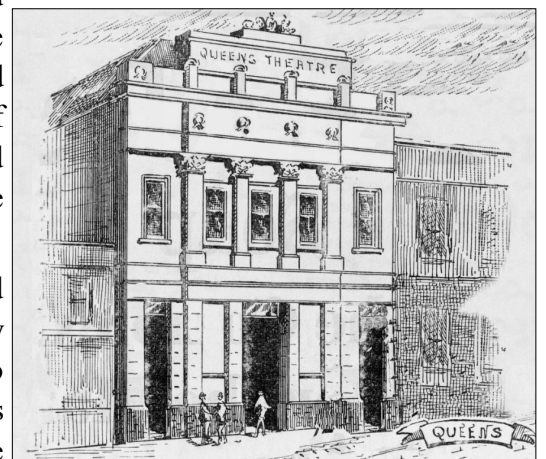
George purchased a tavern which provided a meeting place for Freemasons, Oddfellows, racing stewards and people in the entertainment industry. He and Maria were accepted into Adelaide society quickly.

Their original plan of going to England never eventuated as Maria died in Adelaide in 1848. George decided to remain in Adelaide where he could make enough money to support even family members back in England.

Coppin's enterprises are of great interest. He imported deer, camels, live turtles, thrushes, and white goldfish.



George Selth Coppin c1863  
([www.portrait.gov.au](http://www.portrait.gov.au))



Source: <https://poi-australia.com.au/>

He was the first to import ice. He became involved in overlanding cattle.

He purchased the Semaphore Hotel in Adelaide and organised relay stations, so there could be 'ship to shore' messages and of course the ship captains lodged at his hotel.

In 1852, during the gold rush, George returned to his role as an entertainer and sometimes gold nuggets were thrown onto the stage.

In 1854 he voyaged to London and saw his father for the first time in 12 years. He gave a charity show in London and searched for new talents. He also went into partnership with Gustave Brooke, a Shakespearian actor, and on his return to Melbourne, Coppin entertained his audiences with much loved characters such as the vulgar, Billy Barlow.

Brooke had a sister in law, Harriet (Bray) Hillsden, who was a widow with four children. Coppin supplied her with money for housekeeping and the education of her children and in 1855 they were married. Following the birth of their third child in 1859, Harriet died aged 38. Two years later, George married Harriet's twenty year old daughter, Lucy Hillsden. They went on to have seven children.



Left: Cremorne Gardens c1853. Home of Australia's first zoo and first balloon flight, George Coppin's Cremorne Gardens were filled with stage, theatre, beautiful gardens, a lake, rotundas, circus and refreshments and was accessible to Melburnians via steamer or omnibus.



George and Lucy Coppin in front of the private theatre they had built at their house the 'Anchorage' at Sorrento, Victoria, c.1901

Financially secure again, Coppin retired from the stage. He had been elected a Councillor in Richmond and was nominated for the Legislative Council in the South Western Province. He proposed a National Savings Bank, free libraries in country towns, cheaper postage and compulsory education. Following his success in the implementation of the Torrens Act in Victoria, he resigned from the Legislative Council, and purchased, and operated the Cremorne Gardens.

He was lured back to the stage and leaving his pregnant wife living in their home in the Cremorne Gardens, and with the financial aid of generous friends, he undertook an eighteen month tour of the United States and Canada. He met and introduced J C Williamson to Australia.

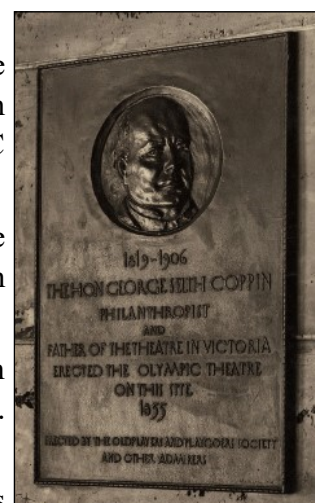
On his return home, he sold the Cremorne Gardens. He saw the potential for the development of Sorrento and founded the Sorrento-Queenscliff Steam Navigation Company. He funded a hotel, court house and post office in Sorrento.

In 1864 he made his final trip overseas, going to America, and following his return in 1867, he became involved with the Carlton Football Club and was President until 1872. He is said to have chosen the white and blue colours for the team.

Coppin's philanthropy was extensive. Amongst his beneficiaries were the St John's Ambulance Association, the Victorian Humane society, the Richmond Free Dispensaries, the Dramatic and Musical Society and he contributed to the introduction of copyright laws.

George died on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1906. His wife Lucy died in 1920 and they are buried together at Boroondara Cemetery, Melbourne.

Contributed by Jan Hanslow, PPPG member No 1057



Plaque in the Comedy Theatre Melbourne in memory of George Coppin

## Telling Port Phillip Ancestor Stories

One of the main functions of the PPPG is to preserve and transmit stories of our ancestors who were in the Port Phillip District of NSW between 1803 and 1851. An audio (or video) short story is now one way you can do this. Your ancestor's most interesting facts, recorded as a spoken teaser of just a couple of minutes, will be posted in the Members Only area, for our members to listen to.

How do I do this?

- Record an audio file using the Voice Memos App on your phone.
- Include only one or two interesting verifiable facts about your Port Phillip Pioneer, and please no fiction.
- Make sure you are in a very quiet room when recording.
- Keep it to two minutes or less.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Make it entertaining and easy to listen to.
- Email it to:

info@www.portphillippioneersgroup.org.au

By emailing this file to

info@www.portphillippioneersgroup.org.au

you are agreeing to have your audio file published on the portphillippioneersgroup.org.au website. In the future these files may be posted on the public website. If you need help about using the Voice Memos App, ask a friend or relation, or about the content, ask a committee member.

**An example can be found on the website at Member News—3 Ways to Tell Ancestor Stories, kindly provided by Beverley Jacobson Member No. 1403**

## PPPG PUZZLE #2—SOLUTION

(from the PPPG Puzzler Di Wheeler)

### Port Phillip Puzzler #2

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | C | D | C | Y | A | R | R | A | A | G | H | B | J |
| U | S | O | L | H | N | F | G | L | N | D | K | L | N |
| D | T | C | O | X | G | P | P | U | N | Y | C | R | L |
| X | A | D | E | K | A | A | R | U | O | R | E | C | P |
| C | N | G | D | D | S | A | Z | R | D | I | L | P | W |
| E | D | M | C | L | R | C | Z | E | T | C | P | F | Q |
| F | R | R | I | R | X | T | O | O | T | T | T | H | V |
| A | E | G | I | C | I | X | C | T | U | T | C | A | X |
| H | W | B | U | F | P | Y | H | D | T | A | E | A | M |
| D | S | E | I | B | R | U | T | N | A | A | R | M | M |
| E | N | T | E | R | P | R | I | Z | E | D | G | Y | H |
| V | D | J | A | S | R | U | S | R | O | P | N | E | K |
| W | H | B | D | E | M | U | B | O | T | T | O | M | Z |
| T | M | X | L | L | P | O | M | K | A | L | L | R | T |

- NAARM
- YARRA
- FITZROY
- GAZETTE
- BIRRARUNG
- EMUBOTTOM
- STANDREWS
- ENTERPRIZE
- BARRYCOTTER
- COOKSCOTTAGE

**The Annual Pioneer Service** will be held at St James Old Cathedral, cnr King & Batman Sts, Melbourne on 12th November 2023 at 10 am. followed by morning tea in the Conference Centre.

PPPG Members welcome



## NOTICE TO ALL MEMBERS

As the banks are phasing out cheque books it would be appreciated if members could make payments by electronic funds transfer (EFT) to:

**Account:** Port Phillip Pioneers Group Inc.

**Bank:** CBA

**BSB:** 063 236

**Account:** 1003 9179

(please identify the EFT payment with your surname and initials)

## CAPTAIN CHARLES FORREST

Further to our last newsletter featuring the Yarra, Valerie Farley has contributed the following pencil sketch of the Yarra drawn by Port Phillip Pioneer Charles FORREST c. 1870 with the accompanying summary;

- ◇ Charles was born in 1809 in India. He joined the British Army, the fourth generation of his family to do so.
- ◇ While later serving in Mauritius he sold his commission and in 1839 married Augusta Alexander, daughter of the Governor of the Arsenal.
- ◇ Charles and Augusta Forrest sailed for Sydney, but finding that land prices had gone up, they decided to buy in Melbourne.
- ◇ In 1840 Charles purchased 17 acres and 3 roods for 29 pounds per acre on the corner of Toorak Rd. and Chapel St. down to the Yarra River. (the site of Melbourne High School)
- ◇ Charles subdivided the land and had sold 6 blocks by 1853. (1)
- ◇ Charles' final years were spent at their property "Yarra Wars," Hamilton's Rd. Lardner. Charles is buried on the property.
- ◇ Charles had two sisters in Port Phillip, Anne Levina (m. Rev. J. Cheyne) and Ellen (m. John Arthur Skinner.)

Anne and John Cheyne are my Port Phillip Pioneers.

**Contributed by Valerie Farley PPPG Member No. 551**

1. Thanks to PPP member Ken Smith for the excellent maps of the subdivision .



Of further interest and to demonstrate the fragility of human life in those early days, an article titled 'Founder of Forrest Hill' stated the following about Charles and Augusta Forrest, ... 'seven children had been born by 1850, when a terrible blow fell. All the children, except the second son died of scarlet fever. Burial in a cemetery was not then compulsory and every day or so the unhappy parents had to inter a beloved child in the back garden. In 1859 a daughter was born. (*The Argus* 17 February 1945 page 12)

## ZOOM Meeting Information

In advance of the ZOOM meeting, if you want to take part on your desktop or laptop computer, please download and install the Zoom 'Desktop Client' software onto your computer if you have not already done so: see <https://zoom.us/download>

If you want to take part on your tablet or phone then download the Zoom app from the relevant App Store.

If you do not want to or have not had the chance to download the Zoom Desktop Client or app in advance, you can join a meeting by going to this web address: <https://pwa.zoom.us/jc/>

Whichever method you use, join the meeting by clicking the *Join* option and entering in the dialogue box this meeting ID and passcode:

**Meeting ID: 870 3139 7074**

**Passcode: 249111**

If you join ahead of the host, there will be a message to inform you that the host has not yet started the Meeting. We recommend you join 5 mins ahead of the start time. While waiting you are able to test your audio and video.

If you cannot get into the meeting, including by backing out and starting again, send a text (please do not phone) to Bronwyn at 0439 808 000.

### Protocol during the ZOOM Meeting:

- Please have your phone, tablet or computer on silent and be in a quiet room.
  - Please ensure you are facing a light source so we can all see you clearly.
  - **SPEAKER VIEW** enables you to see a large image of the current speaker.
  - **GALLERY VIEW** enables you to see all participants (computer only).
  - We will allow a few minutes to permit all participants to enter the meeting.
  - At the start of the Meeting we will enable the “**MUTE ALL**” function to permit the speaker, President, Treasurer, etc. to speak without interruption or background noise.
  - Please note that the microphone icon at the corner of your screen will have a line through it when you are muted.
  - There will be a time delay of 4-5 seconds between speakers.
  - If you need to speak to the meeting:
  - You will find a “**PARTICIPANTS**” button at the bottom of the screen.
  - You will find a “**RAISE your HAND**” function within the “**PARTICIPANTS**” box.
  - We will request you to “**UNMUTE**” yourself so you are enabled to speak. When your small microphone icon no longer has a line through it, you will be heard. There may be a 4-5 second delay during this process.
  - **If there are motions to be VOTED on:**
  - To vote, we will ask you to raise your *real* hand and hold it until the Speaker is able to count those hands.
  - The Meeting **will be videoed** for purposes of recording the Minutes. *By staying in the Meeting it is implied that you have agreed to this.*
  - The video file will not be shared outside of the Port Phillip Pioneers' Group Inc.
- If there is a Bandwidth overload issue you may be asked to turn your video image off, or we might turn it off on your behalf. We apologise in advance if this becomes necessary.



# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Next Meeting:</b>      | <b>Saturday 9 September 2023</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Speaker:</b>           | <b>Speaker:</b> Liz Rushen<br><b>Topic:</b> Garryowen - The Voice of Early Melbourne                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Hall Entry:</b>        | \$2.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Doors Open:</b>        | 1.30 pm. Sign in. Time to browse notice board, borrow library books, and chat.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Meeting Starts:</b>    | <b>2.00 pm.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Guest Speaker:</b>     | 2.30 pm.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Afternoon Tea:</b>     | 3.30 pm. Refreshments.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Venue:</b>             | Wesley Hall, St. Andrew's Uniting Church,<br>cnr Burke and Malvern Rds, Gardiner.<br>Public Transport: Right on the route of the No 72 tram and only a short walk from the Gardiner Railway Station. Melways Reference: Map 59 H7.<br>or<br><b>Online via Zoom digital platform: <a href="https://zoom.us">zoom.us</a></b> |
| <b>Upcoming Meetings:</b> | <b>11 Nov 2023</b> - Gary Presland: Earliest Contacts between Europeans and the Indigenous Inhabitants of the Port Phillip District                                                                                                                                                                                        |

## EXECUTIVE OFFICERS & COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

|                    |                   |            |                            |
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| HONORARY TREASURER | DEAN WHEELER      | 0411526002 | dwheelerpppg@gmail.com     |
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**NEWSLETTER DEADLINE : At least one month prior to the next meeting**

All articles and information contained in this Newsletter are accepted in good faith and the Port Phillip Pioneers Group Inc. takes no responsibility for the content and accuracy contained therein.