

Address given to Oatley Historical and Heritage Society: James Oatley [c1770-1839]

Thank you for asking me to Oatley today. Without having checked every one of Sydney's 700-plus suburbs, it's evident that Oatley is an uncommon, possibly unique example of a Sydney suburb named after a transported convict. Today I want to talk about James Oatley, who gave his name to your suburb. How did this come about? What sort of man was he? Would you like him if you met him? Well, let's find out.

James Oatley was born in the vicinity of Tamworth, Staffordshire, England, in about 1770. Tamworth is a few miles north of Birmingham, and that part of the world was James's home for the first half of his life. In later years when he was living in Sydney he named one of his properties 'Needwood Forest', after a beauty spot near Tamworth. An 18th century poem contains the lines:

*With what fond gaze my eye pursues,
NEEDWOOD, thy sweetly-varying views!*

[Illus 2: Shown here is the painting *Needwood Forest* by the great artist Joseph Wright of Derby, painted in 1790.]

We don't know anything about his family or who his parents were, but they must have been able to scrape up the sum required to put young James to an apprenticeship. Because in 1784 when he was about 14 he was apprenticed to clockmaker Richard Baker of Tamworth for seven years. Tamworth was at that time a small market town of around 2-3000 people, dominated by the Peel family – Sir Robert Peel MP, father of the later Prime Minister, owned cotton mills locally. Many of Oatley's contemporaries would have worked in mills like these. The network of canals in the Midlands included one linking Tamworth with Birmingham and Coventry.



[Illus 3. Tamworth in 1798, cotton-spinning mill on River Tame, Tamworth Castle on the hill behind.]



Illus 4. The Queen's Head, Tamworth. An 18th century listed building. Oatley may have supped here as a young man.

It is likely that Oatley was familiar with Birmingham and its satellite towns.

As part of his apprenticeship it would have been essential that he made his own precision tools – they could not be bought off the shelf. At the end of his apprenticeship, he was entitled to practise as a journeyman clockmaker, likely still working for Baker.



Illus 5. Here is a beautiful 8-day brass and mahogany clock by Richard Baker of Tamworth, circa 1790. Could be yours if you have a spare \$12,000. Possibly Oatley worked on it.



[Illus 6, 7. Dial of a long-case clock by Oatley, Tamworth, circa 1790-1800, colourful bird – possibly a jay?]

Long-case clocks marked *Oatley, Tamworth*, survive from this period. Few people in Tamworth could aspire to owning such a clock, so the bulk of his trade would have been in repairing and selling watches, and perhaps other work such as mending jewellery. In 1803 he took on an apprentice of his own, named Thomas Atkins.



[Illus 8. St Martin's Church, Birmingham – you might imagine that to be James and Sarah in the foreground!]

When he was about 32, James Oatley was married to Sarah Bennett at St Martin's Church, Birmingham, on 27 October 1802. He was described as a Watch Maker. His Bondsman was a John Barnes – a bondsman was someone who guaranteed that there was no lawful impediment to the marriage. He married older than average for the period, which was about 24 for men.

What was his appearance? We know from official records that he was of stocky build, about 5'6" (1.66m) tall, with grey or hazel eyes, and a pale complexion – he didn't have the ruddy face of a farm-worker.

There is unlikely to have been more than one clockmaker in Tamworth. If James wanted to get on, he faced having to set up on his own, possibly in a larger town. Money was tight, and was tempted into a criminal way of getting it.

Three and a half years into his marriage, on 21 March 1806, James Oatley, aged 35, and John Barnes, aged 33, were found guilty at trial of stealing about a ton weight of cheese, the property of Mr Robert Proudman of Tamworth. A ton of cheese is no minor theft, and must have required a wagon and a storehouse. In present day value it might be valued at upwards of \$10,000, if you factor 2,000 x 500g packs of cheese at \$10 each. When even petty thefts drew the death penalty, Oatley and Barnes were lucky to be sentenced only to transportation for seven years. Incidentally, there is a list on Wikipedia of more than 80 convicted prisoners known to have been transported to Australia for the crime of stealing cheese. But Oatley was not one of them.



[Illus 9. The Portland, Oatley's home for six years. But minus the gilt.]

Instead, he and Barnes were imprisoned on the *Portland* Hulk in Langstone Harbour, Portsmouth, on the south coast of England. Readers of the marvellous nautical novels by Patrick O'Brian, will know that in many cases, crew for England's navy came from pressganged civilians, and prisoners from the jails. Oatley was lucky not to have been one of them. And while the picture we have of life on the prison hulks is not rosy – see Dickens' *Great Expectations* – for Oatley it would not have been quite so bad as that, though no picnic all the same.



[Illus 10. Line of hulks in Portsmouth Harbour c1810. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Used for French prisoners of war as well as English convicts]

At this time, of course, Britain was engaged in the Napoleonic campaigns, and it was common to employ prisoners on menial labour in the Portsmouth dockyards. It was more productive to do that than go to the expense of transporting them overseas. It is interesting to speculate on how Oatley passed his imprisonment. His was a relatively rare case of a literate tradesman with a niche skill, which the authorities would have got to hear about, and his fellow-prisoners would have been well aware of too. Possibly he was able to do favours for his jailors.

After serving six years on the *Portland*, in October 1812, both James Oatley and John Barnes received free pardons from the Prince Regent. Another *Portland* prisoner to be freed at the same time was the forger Joseph Lycett. Lycett was another man brought up near Tamworth and was acquainted with Oatley. He re-enters the story later. In the same week, for context, Napoleon began his retreat from Moscow.



[Illus 11. Portsmouth Point by Rowlandson, 1814. Thieves, drunks, sailors and their voluptuous doxies.]

It would appear that Oatley did not return to the Midlands, but settled in Portsmouth. Here is the well-known illustration, *Portsmouth Point*, by Thomas Rowlandson, giving a colourful depiction of the riotous bustle of the town in the 1810s.

Did Sarah join him there or remain in the Tamworth area? We don't know. Did Oatley go straight? Yes, on the face of it. He opened premises in Mile End Road, Portsea, where he was described as a watchmaker. But he financed his business by operating as a fence – you might be reminded of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*. Aged 43, not quite a year after his release, he was arrested again. Until recently details of his second arrest were not known, but I discovered this article in a newspaper called *The Englishman*, 12 September 1813.

OFFENCES.

T. Malpas has been committed to take his trial at the next Hauts County Assizes, for a burglary and robbery on the premises of Mr. Lockyer, watch-maker, of Broadstreet, Portsmouth, from whence he stole a number of watches, gold chains, and trinkets. He was traced to Devizes, in Wilts, and, upon being questioned how he became possessed of the property, said, he had received it from one J. Oatley, a watch-maker, at Mile-end, Portsea. Oatley had the report of being an honest, regular tradesman; but, upon searching his premises, a larger quantity of bedding and other household furniture presented itself, than he appeared to require for his use. This suspicious circumstance was the principal cause of his real character being developed; in the course of which it appeared, that he had committed burglaries in the houses of Capt. Love, at Kingston Crescent, and Capt. Lee, in Church-path, during the absence of the families, and that he took every moveable article of furniture. He has, therefore, been committed to take his trial for the same.

Englishman 12 September 1813.

[Illus 12. Extract from *The Englishman 12 September 1813.*]

"T Malpas has been committed to take his trial at the next Hampshire County Assizes for a burglary and robbery on the premises of Mr Lockyer, of Broad Street, Portsmouth, from whence he stole a number of watches, gold chains and trinkets. He was traced to Devizes, Wiltshire and upon being questioned how he became possessed of the property said he had received it from one J Oatley, a watch maker, at Mile End, Portsea. Oatley had the report of being an honest, regular tradesman, but upon searching his premises a larger quantity of bedding and other household furniture presented itself than he appeared to require for his use. This suspicious circumstance was the principal cause of his real character being developed. In the course of which it appeared that he had committed burglaries in the houses of Captain Love at Kingston Crescent, and Captain Lee in Church Path during the absence of the families, and that he took every moveable article of furniture. He has therefore been committed to take his trial for the same."

This shows that while on the surface Oatley was a respectable watchmaker, he was also operating from his premises as both a thief and a fence. Mind you, he was unlucky to be caught out.



[Illus 13. Dickens' birthplace in 1812, now Commercial Road, Portsmouth.]

Interestingly, his street address in Portsea – Mile End Road – was also that of Admiralty clerk John Dickens, who in 1813 had a one-year old son, Charles, whose earliest years were spent in Portsea. Did Dickens draw on childhood memories of the local watchmaker's arrest and transportation for *Great Expectations*??

James was remanded to Winchester Castle Gaol until his trial at Southampton on Thursday 10 March 1814. The charge was **larceny above two pounds in a dwelling house**, and he pleaded not guilty. He was accused of stealing "*two featherbeds of the value of Five Pounds each, two bolsters of the value of five shillings each, two counterpanes,, twenty yards of Dimity, one window curtain valance,, two yards of Dimity, six yards of cotton, one looking glass to the value of ten shillings, one pestle, one mortar, two finger glasses, one set of castors, and six goblets of the value of sixpence each, the Goods and Chattels of William Love in the dwelling house of the said William Love then feloniously did steal and carry away against the Peace of our said Lord the King..*'

The total value of the goods was sixteen pounds five shillings and sixpence. James was found guilty, and was sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he was dead. It must have been a nasty moment for him. However he was reprieved, to be transported beyond the seas for the term of his natural life.

He was also charged with another theft, on 17 June 1813, when he stole from the dwelling house of Captain Mark Lee a featherbed of value of five pounds, ten shirts, three counterpanes, three pairs of trousers, and one writing desk of the value of three pounds. There was no need to proceed with this charge.

You have to feel sorry for poor Captain Lee – came home from fighting Boney's navy to find that he didn't have a spare pair of trousers to change into!

James Oatley remained in Winchester Gaol for almost six months before being transported from England forever on the *Marquis of Wellington* on 1 September 1814. He was 44.



[Illus 14. Convict ship *Mountstuart Elphinstone*, 1815.]

I haven't found an illustration of the *Marquis of Wellington*, but this is a contemporary convict ship of similar dimensions. The voyage took 149 days – think of that next time you fly Qantas to the UK.

SHIP NEWS.

Yesterday arrived the transport ship *Marquis Wellington*, Capt. Betham, with 199 male prisoners, under guard of a detachment of the 10th Regt. commanded by Lieutenant NENN. She left England the 1st of September; touched at Madeira, and afterwards at Rio de Janeiro, which she left the 29th of November, after a three weeks stay. The *Emue* armed Brig, intended for this station, left England the same time with the *Marquis Wellington*, and sailed from Rio the day before her, bound for Hobart Town, whether she conveys EDWARD ABBOTT, Esq. Deputy Judge Advocate for that settlement, accompanied by Mrs. ABBOTT and family.

A valuable Investment, imported on the *Marquis of Wellington*, will be disposed of by Wholesale in the ensuing Week, at Mr. RILEY'S Stores; consisting of Port Wine in Bottles, Porter and Ale in Casks and Bottles, Jamaica Rum, Hollands' Gin, Rio Rum, Madeira Wine, Butter and Cheese, Printed Cotton and Cambricks, Hosiery, Haberdashery, Stationary, Boots and Shoes. Glass and Earthenware of sorts, Tin Ware, Ironmongery, Cutlery, Nails, Paints, Coopers and Carpenters' Tools, Telescopes, Spruce, Corks, and Brazil Tobacco.—Some Ladies and Gentlemen's very elegant Watches; an Assortment of Musical Instruments, and of lately published Music; and a valuable Selection of Books will also be sold.

[Illus 15, 16 details of the voyage and cargo.]

The ship came by the regular route via Madeira and Rio and the Cape of Good Hope. Only one prisoner died on the voyage, in contrast to earlier consignments. The ship also carried a large cargo of rum, brandy and gin, which must have been tormenting for the convicts, as well as, ironically, cheese and elegant watches.

Six months later, the ship *Northampton* carrying convicts' wives arrived in Sydney. And who should be on it but a woman named Sarah Oatley, with two children, Emma aged 4 and Robert, aged three months, born on the voyage. But this was not Oatley's wife, it was an imposter. What happened to Sarah Oatley, nee Bennett we don't know. Did she continue to live in the Tamworth area, had she ever had children with James - we don't know. The

person masquerading as Sarah Oatley, presumably with the connivance of James Oatley, was in reality the partner of the forger Joseph Lycett, and her real name was Mary. The child Emma was Lycett's daughter, and the boy born on the voyage was brought up as Oatley's son, though he can't have been Lycett's or Oatley's.

Mary Lycett must have hoped that she could rejoin her partner Joseph Lycett when she reached New South Wales. But when she arrived she found that he had been arrested again and was serving a jail sentence at Newcastle. She was out of options and had to go through with the pretence that she was Oatley's wife. Over the next five years, under the name of Mrs Mary Oatley, she bore him three more sons – James jr, Frederick and George, who died as an infant. They were all christened at St Philip's Church.

When Oatley arrived in 1815, Sydney was beginning to look more like a township rather than a collection of bark huts.



[Illus 14 Cockle Bay from Dawes Point 1812 by J Eyre. Museums of History.]

Governor Macquarie welcomed the arrival of Oatley's ship, because it came at a time when labourers were badly wanted. In addition, any man with a skilled trade was given favourable treatment. The only man in the colony with knowledge of clocks was a fellow named Henry Lane, who looked after the town clock on Church Hill. People in the town set their watches by it. But he had just died.

This meant James Oatley's experience as a transported convict was remarkably easy. He was now in the fortunate position of being the only person in the colony who knew anything about clocks and timekeeping. He did not have to work on any of the work-gangs and met with no financial difficulties.



[Illus 17. Cockle Bay 1819 (Darling Harbour), showing John Dickson's steam mill. Could even be Oatley's cottage at left??]

In fact, by 1816, the year after his arrival, he was already in a position to buy a block of land. This was at Cockle Bay, near the first steam engine in the colony. He was already in business as a clock and watchmaker. He was given his ticket of leave in 1816, again, relatively rapidly – normally you had to wait seven or eight years.

Credit has to be given to Governor Macquarie for seeking out expertise wherever it was to be found. Commercial activity was beginning to thrive. Various substantial buildings were completed or underway – Hyde Park Barracks, the Rum Hospital, St James Church, and so on. In George Street, beside the old burial ground, work would in due course begin on St Andrew's Cathedral.

But Sydney residents needed a prominent town clock, so that there could be an agreed-upon time for them to set their watches by. This would be installed at the Hyde Park Convict Barracks, designed by the convict architect Francis Greenway. Naturally, Oatley was commissioned to provide it. The clock, made in Oatley's workshop, was installed by July 1819, and James was paid the substantial sum of seventy-five pounds. It was the first clock made in Australia.



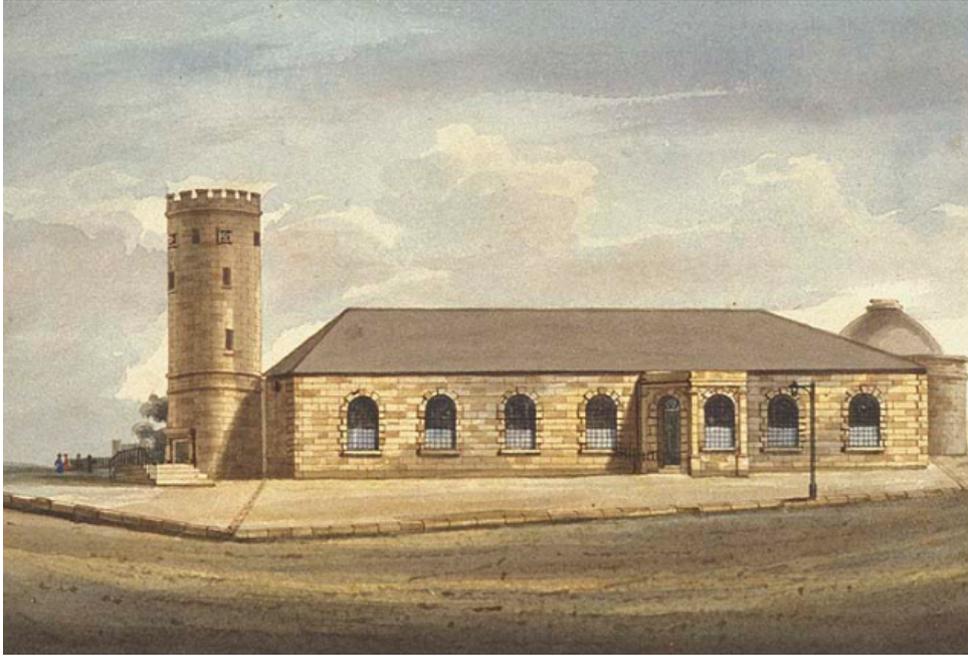
[Illus 18. Hyde Park Barracks. Museums of History.]

A description of the Barracks in the *Sydney Gazette* in July 1819, soon after the building was completed, confirms that the clock was made in the colony.

elegant entablature, they also supporting a pediment where the roof ends. In the tympanum is placed a very handsome clock, made here, which does much credit to the maker. Down the sides the range of pilastres are continued; and these being of a fine coloured stone, and the main building of brick, must be successful

[Illus 20. *Sydney Gazette* 17 July 1819, p2. The clockmaker was not named in this description.]

Oatley was appointed the Keeper of the Town Clock at a salary of thirty pounds per annum, receiving regular payments until September 1821. He had the tender to keep it in working order.



[Illus 21. St Phillip's Church, York Street, c1840. Mitchell Library]

He also attended to the clock at St Phillip's church. Occasionally there were complaints that the two Sydney clocks were showing different times.



[Illus 22. Hyde Park Barracks Vulliamy clock mechanism. Photo Andrew Markerink.]

Sydney Living Museums states that the existing mechanism of the clock dates from the 1830s, so must have replaced Oatley's original mechanism. It has the maker's name Vulliamy, London, who were clockmakers to the Crown. The bell which strikes the hours is later, too, dating from 1837, and cast at a London foundry.

Oatley applied for a pardon. His application said he had "made every atonement in his power by good morals, and had strenuously exerted himself in providing for his Dear little Family, by upright and persevering Industry, despite his unfortunate situation."

Governor Macquarie granted the conditional pardon in October 1821. He was on the way out, replaced two months later by Governor Brisbane.

By 1822, Oatley had been supplanted as Keeper of the Clocks by a new arrival in the colony, a protégé of the new Governor Brisbane. This was not the end of the world for

James, because he was now a free man with a thriving watchmaking business. But he was not one to let a chance go to waste. So in April 1822 he guilt-tripped the Governor, reminding him that he had promised a consideration for the loss of his position. He asked for a grant of land for the benefit of his growing family. In due course, Brisbane came up with 300 acres. Not just any old 300 acres. This was the grant dated 15 August 1825, that became the suburb of Oatley, that we commemorate today, two hundred years later.

15 August 1833, Sir Thomas Brisbane, James
 Oatley of Sydney Three hundred acres bounded Saint
 George, commencing at George's River, and bounded on the
 west by a line North, seventy three Chains; on the
 North by Doctor Townson's farm, being line South
 sixty degrees East, fifty eight Chains, and East seventy
 five degrees North thirty two Chains, to a creek; on the
 East by the creek; and on the South by George's River to
 the Commencing Point; being the land inserted as No. 12
 in the Government Notice of 14th October 1831, but
 according to an amended description, James Oatley,
 Two pounds ten shillings 1st Jan 1833 said 1st Jan 1833, £
 Thirty eight acres, fifty pounds -
 R. Bourke Sydney 31 August 1833
 Michael Corbett Rich^d Bourke

[Illus 23. A letter written by Governor Bourke letter in 1833 referring to the 1825 grant. Note - Gov Darling had authorised the publication of the grant in Gov Gaz of October 1831. The land was 58 chains along the north west boundary of Dr Townson's land then 73 chains south down to Gungah Bay. On the east the distance was 32 chains along Townson's boundary to the north west arm of the creek entering Oatley Bay. Courtesy Julian Sheen.]

1822 was a big year for James, because that September, he also purchased the premises where he and his family had been living and working for the past five years. This was a dwelling house and premises in George Street, opposite the Old Burial Ground. He paid £150, a substantial sum.

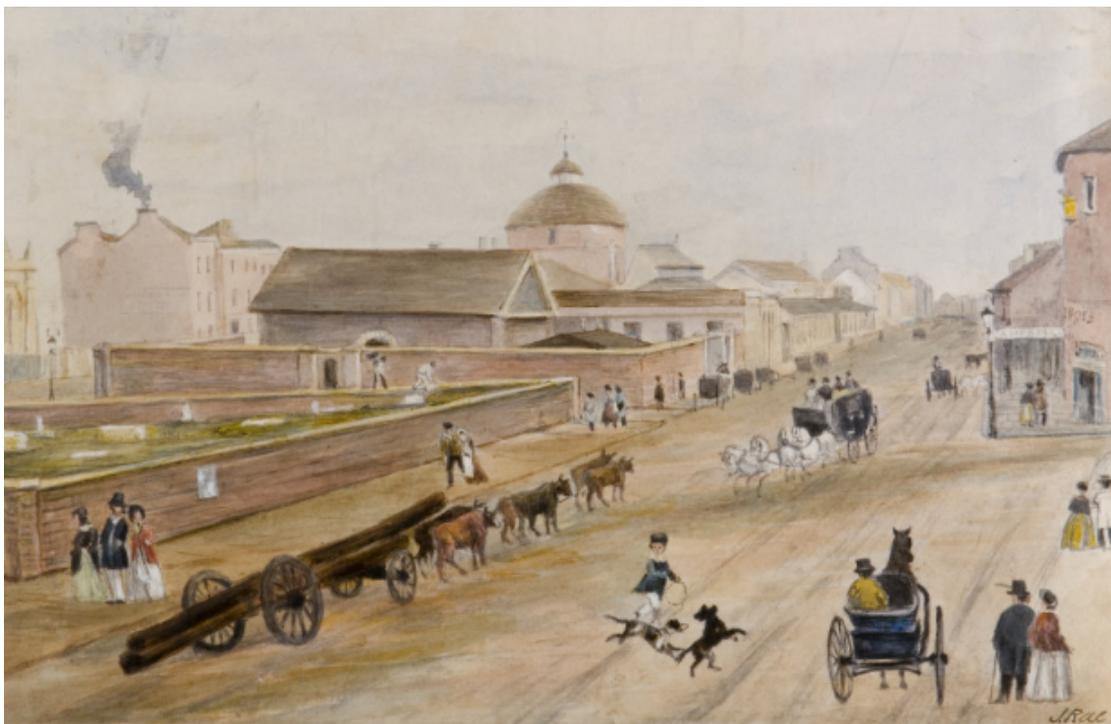
ADVERTISEMENTS.

FORTY SILVER DOLLARS REWARD.—LOST. a GOLD WATCH; Maker's Name, Letherland, Liverpool, A. D. 1818; with Gold Chain, Seals, and Key.—Any Person bringing the same to Mr. James Oatley, Watch-maker, near the Burial Ground, Sydney, shall receive the above Reward.

[Illus 24. Advert giving Oatley's address]

He lived there, keeping his nose clean, until his death in 1839 – in fact, the property remained in the possession of the Oatley family into the 20th century. To give you a clear idea of where the Oatley shop was, the present-day Sydney Town Hall is on the site of the Old Burial Ground, and Oatley's would have been almost directly opposite – about where Woolworth's is nowadays. One of his neighbours was Gregory Blaxland, the explorer. George Street markets were nearby – it was becoming a busy part of town.

In 1822 he added to this by buying a plot of land on the corner of Pitt and Goulburn Streets, the present-day location of the Civic Hotel.



[Illus 25. George Street looking north, 1842. John Rae. City of Sydney Archives. Burial Ground later site of Town Hall. Oatley's premises were opposite.]



[Illus 26. Trig survey of 1865 showing Old Burial Ground – Oatley’s premises on left hand side of George Street.]

A few years later, he assured his customers that he remained at the same address:

OLD OATLEY
THE WATCH-MAKER,
HE LIVES WHERE HE DID!
AND bears leave to inform his **OLD**
RESPECTABLE FRIENDS, that
 he has the means in Sydney of giving them the true time and rate of their valuable Time-keepers, (which he is at all times happy to do) without the hazard of sending them a sea voyage, where a contrary wind might spring up and make the rate they went on board much quicker than on their return.

[Illus 27, advert in *Sydney Monitor* July 1833.]

As well as the Oatley family, there were several assigned convicts whom he employed. The 1828 Census shows five men working for him, three of whom were from the Birmingham area: Cooper Broderick, age 31, arrived 1827, watchmaker from Warwick; William Hanson, age 26, arrived 1826, jeweller, from Birmingham, Warwickshire; William Harbourn, age 30, arrived 1818, clockmaker, from Coventry, Warwickshire [Shiple, ticket of leave 1827]; William Kay, age 33, arrived 1826, watchmaker, from London; John Wilson, age 34, arrived 1826, watchmaker.

While Oatley would have had to house, clothe and feed the men, their labour was free. He watched them like a hawk, very mindful of his newly-won respectability and prosperity. He also had the power to punish them if they stepped out of line. And he did. He was not a kind-hearted man.

I was never taken before a Magistrate. I have received since I have been in Mr. Oatley's service, I should think, about fifteen hundred lashes at the least. My life therefore is one of perpetual misery The distress of my mind from seeing no hope of release from the hard service of Mr. Oatley, drives me to drink, and the

[Illus 28. *Sydney Monitor* 31 May 1837.]

For example, one of his workmen, John Wilson, aged 34, although otherwise well-behaved was by his own admission a drunkard. When he was drunk he absented himself from work. For being absent from work he was heavily flogged by his employer. In May 1837 Wilson wrote to the *Sydney Monitor* publicly pleading to be assigned to a new master. He stated that in the eleven years he had been employed by Oatley he had been flogged fifty or sixty times, totalling upwards of fifteen hundred lashes. Oatley could have had Wilson reassigned to another master but persisted in trying to reform him with corporal punishment.

Oatley in turn wrote that he had indeed flogged Wilson more than fifty times, but that he deserved three times that. He still hoped by further flogging to amend Wilson's behaviour. Poor Wilson was the butt of his fellow employees – on one occasion he was napping when for a prank his fellow workers tied a cord to his toes, draped it out through the window, then went outside and began tugging on the cord. Wilson woke up, was dragged towards the window, and broke it as he struggled. At this point Oatley appeared and hauled him to court – Wilson was sentenced to 50 lashes. Seems unfair.

NOTICE.

ALL PERSONS are cautioned from giving trust or Credit to my Wife Mary Ann Oatley, as she is living apart from me, and I will not be answerable for any Debts she may contract.

JAMES OATLEY.

Dated the 29th day May, 1838.

[Illus 29. 30 May 1838 Commercial Journal. Mrs Mary Ann Oatley, nee Bogg]

By 1832, James Oatley's partner of convenience, Mary, had left him – she went off and married someone else. His eye was then caught by a younger woman, Mary Ann Bogg, and he married her in September 1833. He was 63, she was 27. This was not a marriage made in heaven. Four years later she too moved out, and Oatley placed notices in the newspapers warning tradesmen not to give her credit.

TO THE PUBLIC.

WHEREAS my husband, James Oatley, has thought proper, in the public prints, to caution parties from giving me credit on his responsibility, I am anxious to apprise that Public, that whatever debt I may contract will only be the ordinary necessaries for support, and which in such case he is bound to supp'y.

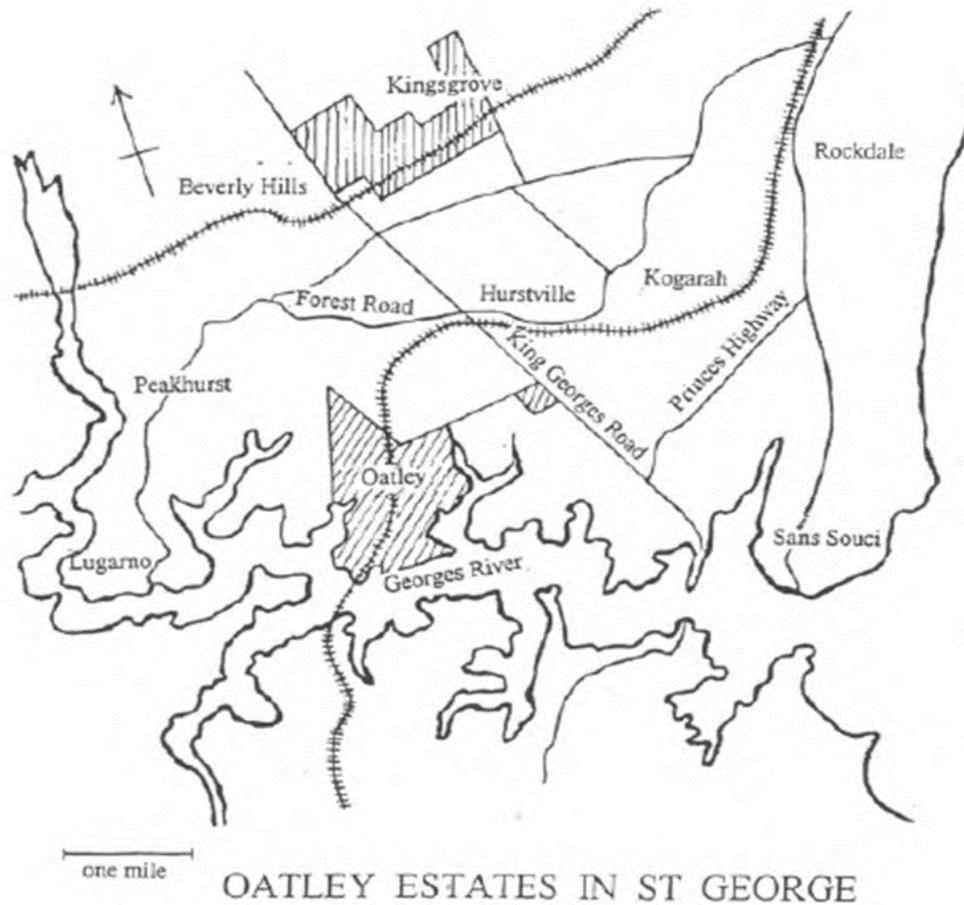
In answer to my living apart from my husband I beg to say, I have been driven and actually turned out of my house by his untoward behaviour.

MARY ANN OATLEY.

Sydney, June 1, 1838.

[Illus 30. 4 June 1838 Sydney Herald]

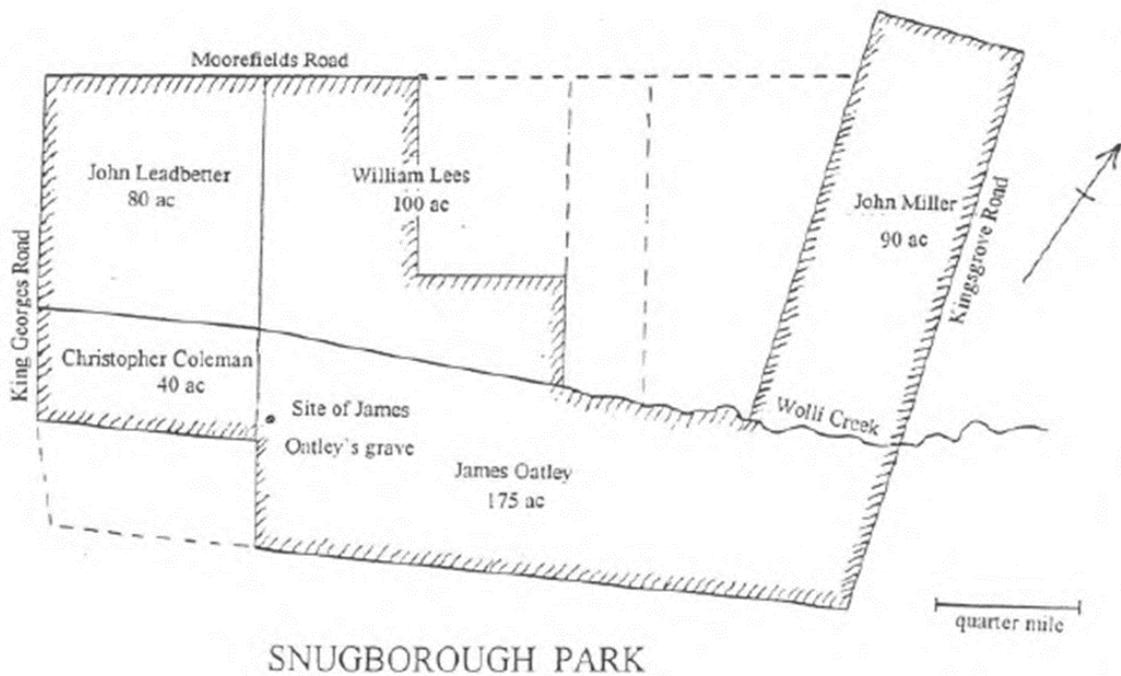
Mary Ann was not having that, and placed her own notice in the newspapers, accusing him with having driven her from her home by his untoward behaviour.



[Illus 31. Oatley's land in St George area.]

With the profits from his solid business, Oatley invested in land. Let's have a look at what he acquired in our area. In 1824 he acquired 80 acres in the St George area for a whole £28. The present-day location is in Beverly Hills, at the corner of King Georges and Moorefields Roads.

Three years later he picked up 40 acres at the south western corner of King Georges Road and Hurstville Road.



[Illus 32. Snugborough land, as drawn by D J Hatton.]

He continued buying up land which came up for sale in coming years. At his death, he had amassed nearly 450 acres in the Beverly Hills and Kingsgrove area, watered by the chain of ponds which we know as Wollie Creek. Part of this land was known as Snugborough Park. If you go from Beverly Hills to Kingsgrove on the train, all the land to your left was owned by him once upon a time.

ST. GEORGE'S PARISH
IN THE DISTRICT OF BOTANY BAY.
SEVERAL respectable persons have commenced to clear and cultivate their farms near Cook's River and Salt Pan Creek, and to raise Vegetables for the Sydney Market, and also Wheat and Maize: these farms are adapted for these purposes. Good Wheat was grown on some of them last year, and there is a good crop of Corn now growing on two or three of the farms. Mr. Oatley has a pretty place, and others are following his example.

[Illus 33. The Sydney Monitor 13 January 1829 reported:]

"St George's Parish: Several respectable persons have commenced to clear and cultivate their farms near Cook's River and Salt Pan Creek and to raise vegetables for the Sydney markets and also wheat and maize – these farms are adapted for these purposes.

Good wheat was grown on some of them last year and there is a good crop of corn now growing on two or three of the farms. Mr Oatley has a pretty place and others are following his example. Felling and burning are going on rapidly; neat cottages are also building. If encouraged, this district will be a short and pleasant retreat from Sydney. The present road however is a circuitous route of from 14 to 16 miles, part of which is through a thick brush, where the settlers' men have been twice or thrice robbed of their provisions."

The article goes on to urge the Governor to open the road according to the plan, which would shorten the distance to more like seven or eight miles.

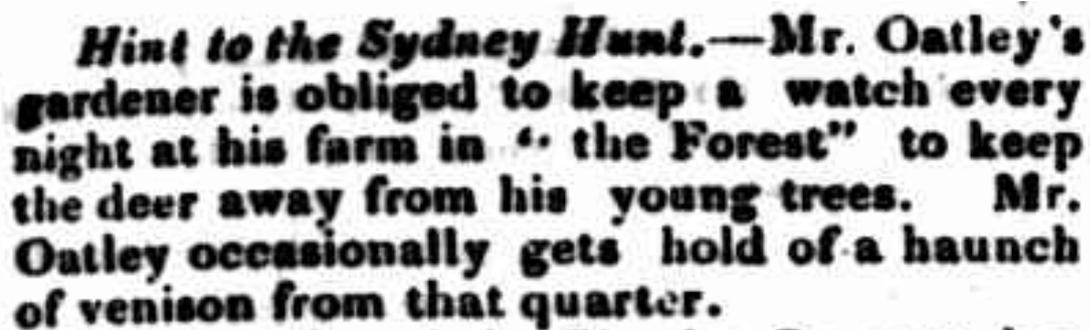
A couple of pertinent points about this article - firstly, it describes our man as Mr Oatley, and a respectable person'. This was all that he could have desired. What a turnaround in his fortunes. Respectability was of huge importance in colonial Sydney, and he was determined to maintain that reputation.

Secondly, the farm described as a 'pretty place' was his property at Snugborough, which would nowadays be at Beverly Hills, sloping east down to the railway line.

In 1858 the Snugborough property was offered for sale, and a description of the property stated that it included an orange orchard of 1,000 citrus trees, laid out by the late James Oatley at enormous expense, also a deciduous orchard of pear trees. 200 acres were cleared and paddocked, growing wheat, oats and barley, and the remainder was timbered. There were creeks, chains of ponds, waterholes etc.

The house was described as a weatherboard building, brick-nogged – excellent word – with drawing, dining and breakfast rooms, three bedrooms, three dressing-rooms, storerooms and conveniences. Stabling for five horses, and a substantial shed for any number more. A large weatherboard barn, milking and stock yards.

On the estate was blue metal, brick-earth, pipe-clay and marl – it might be noted that the Kingsgrove area was later home to brick and tile works. A well-grassed area of 2000 acres was adjoining. A nearby farm a quarter of the size had recently sold for £3,000. How well the Oatleys had done.



Hint to the Sydney Hunt.—Mr. Oatley's gardener is obliged to keep a watch every night at his farm in "the Forest" to keep the deer away from his young trees. Mr. Oatley occasionally gets hold of a haunch of venison from that quarter.

[Illus 34. *Australian* 2 June 1835.]

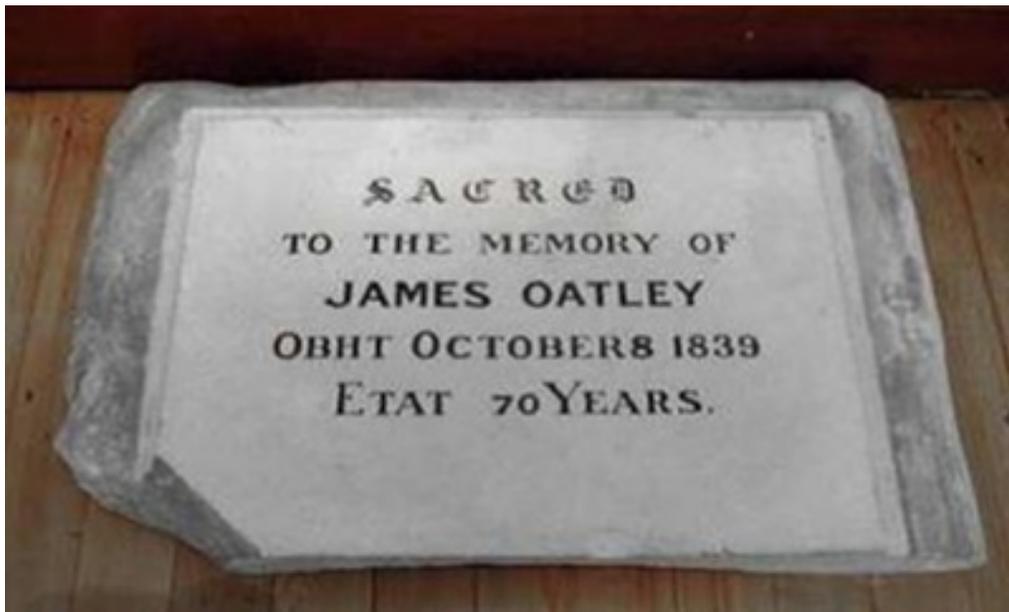
In its time, it made for exciting ground for deer- and fox-hunting, as this newspaper mention makes clear: This area was thick with deer in the 1830s, and the Sydney Hunt regularly rode over Oatley's land south of the Punch Bowl (two words).

We don't know how often Oatley visited his farm. He would have put in a bailiff to run it for him, and would have paid occasional visits to it, but not at the expense of his main business interests in Sydney. The distance from Sydney was still a consideration at this time, and a handicap to market gardeners. Note that by the time James died, the area he referred to as Needwood Forest, the present-day suburb of Oatley, was still undeveloped apart from some limited timber-cutting.

DEATH.—On Wednesday last, at his Farm, Cook's River, Mr. Oatley, the celebrated Watchmaker, late of George-street, aged 72 years.

[Illus 35. 15 October 1839 Chronicle]

James died at his Snugborough Park property on 8 October 1839. He was buried there.



[Illus 36. Gravestone of James Oatley. Georges River Museums. Note alteration of obit.]

The overgrown headstone was rediscovered in 1925 on the southern side of Ponyara Road, between Pallamanna Parade and Kooemba Road, and donated to Hurstville Historical Society. It is now in the Georges River Museum collection.



[illus 37. Site of James Oatley's grave, Ponyara Road Beverly Hills, 1981]

Hurstville Council placed a marker at the site of his grave. His son Frederick took over the watch and clockmaking business. Another son, James junior, later became Lord Mayor of Sydney and Member for Canterbury.

**TWO CAPTAINS, MERCHANTS,
and OTHERS — FREDERICK
OATLEY**, trusting he may hope for the
continued patronage so liberally enjoyed by his
late Father, James Oatley, deceased, begs to state
that he still carries on the business of Chrono-
meter and Watch and Clock Manufacturer.
F. O. moreover begs to state that he has for
many years been sole agent for his Father. His
known punctuality and despatch may secure to
him a share of public encouragement, which he
will most anxiously endeavour to preserve.
George street, opposite the Old Burying Ground.

[Illus 38. 13 November 1839 Sydney Herald]



[Illus 39. James Oatley junior. Did he resemble his father? City of Sydney Archives.]

It is not easy to give a fair assessment of James Oatley's character. He was fortunate not to be executed for a series of reckless opportunistic crimes. He was a hard taskmaster and possibly a difficult husband. On the other hand, when he came to Sydney he took the chance to reform, worked industriously and made a successful life for himself. And the beautiful clocks that bear his name continue to tick to this day.



[Illus 40. Oatley long case clock no 19. Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.]

John MacRitchie August 15 2025