

## THOMAS PEEL —

### The Dream That Became a Nightmare

[By J. C. H. GILL, B.A., LL.B.]

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“Two or three miserable little stone huts with crude coverings of rushes for roofs and clay for floors stood in Mandurah about 115 years ago. Inside one of the huts an old man was seated before a small fire, whose scant warmth he shared with three kangaroo dogs. The wretched room was filled with smoke. But if one peered through the murk one might have seen furniture more befitting a stately English home than such a wretched hut. A piano, a table of antique design, a Chipendale chair and what was once an elegant walnut cabinet were crowded into the hut. On the table were some handsome plate, fine china and wine glasses of exquisite design. Behind the door hung a faded red hunting coat.

“The kangaroo dogs raced out of the hut at the approach of a horseman and Thomas Peel, trying to assume the dignity of an English gentleman, went to the door to see who the traveller was. The rider did not draw rein. He was soon lost to view along the Coast Road and Thomas Peel returned to his seat by the rapidly dwindling fire.”

Thus writes John Stokes in 1958 in “The Western State”—his work dealing with some of the people and ports of Western Australia.

We are immediately provoked into asking who was Thomas Peel and what had brought him within the pitiful category of decayed gentility?

For an answer we must go back to the year 1826.

#### COLONY'S BOUNDARY EXTENDED

Up to that year the British Government had shown itself extremely reluctant to establish its claim to the whole Australian Continent. Indeed in 1788 the Government had annexed the Continent only as far west as the 135th degree of east longitude. It was not until June 1825, when General Sir Ralph Darling was appointed as Governor of New South Wales, that the extension of the colony's north-south boundary to longi-

tude 129 degrees east was authorised. This boundary was still a thousand miles from the western shores facing the Indian Ocean.

Although France had been bled white by the ambitions of the first Napoleon and had lost the bulk of her overseas colonial possessions to England in the wars engendered by the Napoleonic dream of world power, which was irretrievably shattered on the field of Waterloo, the post-1815 British Governments were ever mindful that France would probably seek new Colonial possessions to replace those she had lost. Thus although defeated France still had her old role of being the greatest spur to British colonial expansion with its resultant benefits to home trade and industry.

### BRITISH ATTITUDE TO COLONIAL EXPANSION

British Governments of the 18th and early 19th centuries had a strangely supine attitude towards colonial expansion. It seemed that if colonial possessions were garnered as the incidental fruits of a continental war they were accepted in the normal course of things. But if it was a matter of exploiting the fruits of voyages of discovery or of moving in to protect private traders in areas not within the influence of any other European power England was slow to act unless there was some prospect of France, or to a lesser degree, Spain, getting in first by settlement or conquest; then England was quick to act.

In the third decade of the 19th century the French were actively engaged in voyages of discovery around the Australian shores.

In December 1826 Captain James Stirling, on a tour of duty in Australian waters in command of *H.M.S. Success*, suggested to Governor Darling that the time had come for settlement on the western coast of the Continent. The area between Shark Bay and Cape Leeuwin, whilst so far unexplored by any British officer, from a geographical viewpoint seemed well positioned as a site for a naval and trading station. Darling gave Stirling leave to investigate the area. Accompanied by Charles Fraser, the New South Wales Government Botanist, he spent a fortnight in March 1827 examining the land around the Swan River, which had been discovered and named by Vlaming in 1697.

Both Stirling and Fraser reported in glowing terms on what they had seen. Although the land around the mouth of the river appeared to be sterile, in the hinterland were good timber and alluvial flats as fertile as those on the banks of the Hawkesbury River in New South Wales.

Stirling, backed by the recommendation of Darling, offered

to lead an expedition to colonise the area; but both British Government and East India Company declined the offer on the scores of expense and distance of the Swan River from other British colonies.

### CROWN COLONY ESTABLISHED

On his return to London in mid-1828 Stirling continued to press for colonisation on the coast of New Holland as the western third of Australia was still called. Suggested colonisation enterprises by private enterprise were worked out, but rejected by the Government which was not willing to grant a charter to a private colonising company. It was decided instead to establish a Crown Colony under direct government supervision and thus prevent possible trespass by the French Government.

On 27 April 1829 *H.M.S. Challenger* (Captain C. H. Fremantle) arrived in Cockburn Sound and on 2 May he formally annexed the remaining third of the Australian Continent.

Meanwhile on 30 December 1828 Captain Stirling was appointed to command the new colony with the title of Lieutenant-Governor. Peter Brown was appointed his Colonial Secretary and J. S. Roe, a naval officer with experience of Australian coastal survey work and at that time employed in the Admiralty, was appointed Surveyor-General.

Stirling, his staff and some 150 colonists with stores, farming equipment, livestock, seed and plants sailed from Portsmouth in February 1829 and dropped anchor off Garden Island on 31 May. Their ship, the hired transport "*Parmelia*," was convoyed by *H.M.S. Sulphur* (Commander Dance), in which were Captain F. C. Irwin and a detachment of the 63rd (West Suffolk) Regiment. After grounding on *Parmelia* Bank in the process on 2 June 1829, "*Parmelia*" safely joined *H.M.S. Challenger* at anchor in Cockburn Sound.

### FOUNDATION OF CAPITAL

On 18 June the new colony came into being officially when a Proclamation was read both on the mainland and on Garden Island where the Government officials and colonists with their wives and families were temporarily located. By 12 August 1829 Stirling had selected and named Fremantle at the mouth of the Swan as the colony's port and Perth, some twelve miles up-river at the foot of Mt. Eliza, as the capital of the colony. The foundation of the capital was observed by an official ceremony and the felling of a tree on the King's (George IV) Birthday, 12 August.

The stage is now set for Thomas Peel. Before Stirling's appointment as Lieutenant-Governor, which carried with it a free grant of 100,000 acres of land with priority of choice, but after the departure of *H.M.S. Challenger* from Table Bay on 5 November 1828, to take possession of New Holland, an association formed of Messrs. Thomas Peel, E. W. H. Schenley, Sir F. Vincent and Colonel T. Potter Macqueen, M.P., forwarded on 14 November 1828 a memorial to the British Government.

#### LAND GRANT SOUGHT

The memorial sought the allocation of a land grant of four million acres at 1/6 per acre in return for the settlement of 10,000 emigrants at £30 per head.

The syndicate undertook the responsibility of:

- Conveying 10,000 persons to the colony and settling them on the land.
- Bringing into the colony 1,000 head of horned stock.
- Arranging for all necessary supplies and equipment.
- Maintaining a regular communication of three ships to Sydney.
- Providing surveyors for the purpose of allotting 200 acres of land to every male settler; and
- Completing the whole undertaking within four years.

The idea of emigrating to the new land, highly praised as it was by Stirling and Fraser, had fired the imagination of many people in England, in particular tenant farmers hungry for their own land and workmen anxious to escape from the shocking conditions prevailing in an England still in the throes of her Industrial Revolution.

#### PEEL'S AMBITIOUS PLAN

The "Swan River Mania" as the Press of the time called it attracted also moneyed gentlefolk, professional men, tradesmen and numbers of military and naval men who had been eeking out an existence on half pay since the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

The plan of the syndicate of which Thomas Peel was a member was the most ambitious of a number of colonisation schemes put forward. However, the Colonial Office objected to the size of the grant sought and offered instead on 6 December 1828 one million acres on the following conditions:

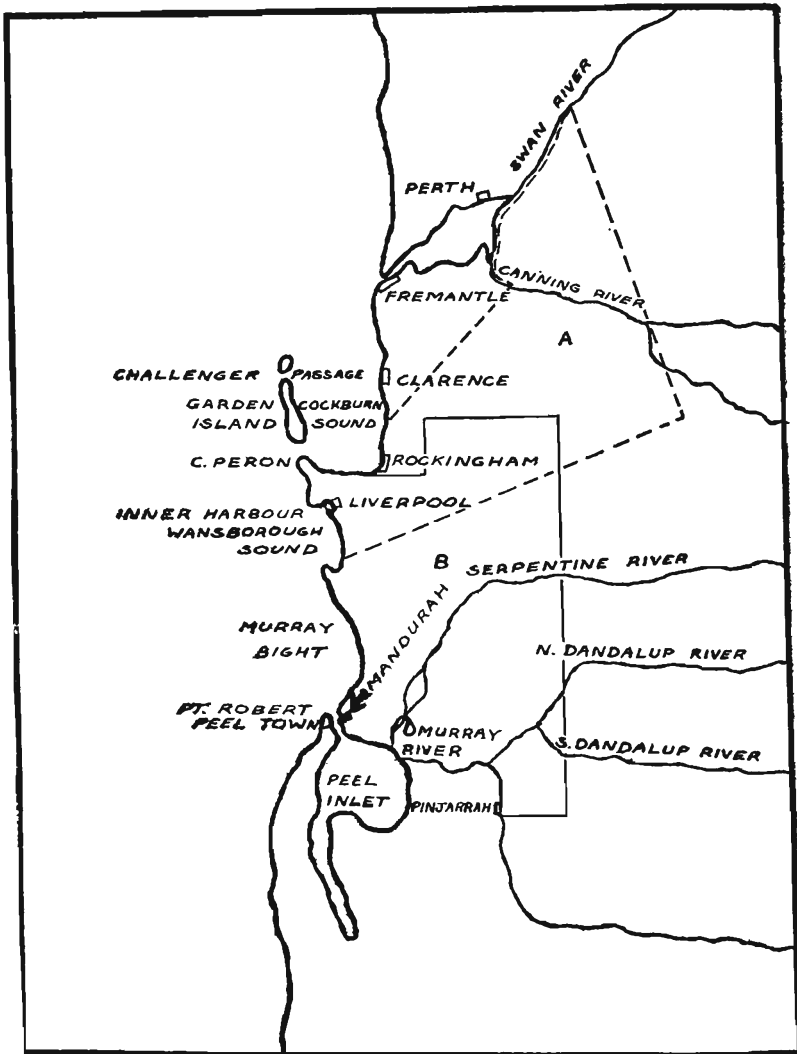
- (a) Half a million acres would be granted after the arrival of the syndicate's first vessel provided it contained not less than 400 persons over 10 years of age in the proportion of five females for every six males.

(b) If the first grant has been covered by investment by 1840 then the remaining half a million acres would be granted; and (c) in the case of any retardation of their investments, the syndicate would be granted 40 acres for every £3 invested.

These terms were not acceptable to Peel's associates, who all withdrew from the syndicate.

### PEEL GOES ON ALONE

Peel was made of sterner stuff and on 27 January 1829 he



MAP SHOWING PEEL'S (A) ORIGINAL, (B) ACTUAL GRANT

advised the Colonial Office that he was willing to carry on the scheme at his own expense in terms of the grant offered on 6 December 1828. I think that Peel must have had a good deal of verbal negotiation with the Colonial Office and matters must have been fairly well settled when he wrote on 27 January because on 29 January his application was granted subject to his first vessel with the necessary number of settlers arriving at Swan River not later than 1 November 1829.

Peel wasted no time. On 29 January he requested he be supplied with a map showing definitely the grant allotted to him. The Colonial Under-Secretary (Twiss) invited Peel to be present with Stirling when the latter's grant of 100,000 acres and 250,000 acres on account of Peel's grant would be marked out for them.

Both Peel and Stirling were to be allowed 21 years' grace to enable them to bring their land into a fit state of cultivation before any of it became liable to revert to the Crown for failure to carry out the necessary improvements. This compared more than favourably with the 10 years to be allowed to the other colonists going out with Stirling at their own expense under the auspices of the Government.

Now Thomas Peel was a first cousin, once removed, of Sir Robert Peel of Police Reform, Catholic Emancipation and Corn Law fame, Prime Minister of England in 1834-5 and 1841-6.

#### ALLEGATIONS OF NEPOTISM AND JOBBERY

The size of the grant, the long term allowed to bring it into cultivation, coupled with the fact that the first settlers were told that free grants would be made to them in order of priority of arrival and in proportion to the amount of capital they invested, and here was Peel who would not be the first settler gaining apparent favours, caused a storm of dissatisfaction and protest joined with allegations of nepotism and jobbery.

The London Press was quick to join in the clamour with disparaging articles and cartoons alleging favourable treatment for Sir Robert Peel's "country cousin" Thomas.

It was pointed out that Peel would possess all the water frontages on the south bank of the Swan and on the Canning River. It was considered he should not have received this grant until he had actually arrived on the spot.

Despite all this Peel pushed ahead with his preparations. He advertised offering farms of 200-400 acres for families and 100 acres for single persons, plus 50 acres more for every servant they took out.

He undertook to provide artisans and labourers for engagement by the settlers and to furnish all supplies the settlers might require at the lowest possible prices.

To the work force he offered five-year indentures on, for those times, not unfavourable terms.

Both servants and settlers would be conveyed to the colony by Peel at their own expense.

#### TIME RUNS AGAINST PEEL

However, time began to run against Peel. The average duration of the journey from England to Swan River was sixteen weeks. Hence on 4 July 1829 we find Peel in correspondence with Sir George Murray, the Colonial Secretary, questioning the need for him to land all 400 migrants by 1 November 1829, and suggesting that it would be sufficient for him to have enough landed as would cover the 250,000 acres already reserved for him. He also asked to be allowed an extension of time until 31 December 1829 to complete his contract.

In support of his request he put forward that he was about to embark in the ship "*Gilmore*" with 200 migrants, together with stores and all necessary equipment; that he had made arrangements through his agent, Solomon Levy, a London merchant, for two other vessels to arrive in the colony about 90 days after his own arrival, and for a continuous supply of stores to be forwarded to him; that the total cost of his venture and insurance and freight was £180,000, and that as much public good would accrue from his efforts he asked that no injustice be practised towards him.

"*Gilmore*" sailed from Gravesend on 26 July 1829, but head winds in the Channel delayed her arrival at Plymouth where Peel was waiting to embark. On arrival at Plymouth, however, Captain George of the "*Gilmore*" informed Peel that his crew had mutinied and refused to proceed on the voyage; as a consequence he could not guarantee to reach the Swan River by 1 November. Peel wrote again to Sir George Murray seeking an extension until 30 November to land his first group of colonists.

Sir George was not disposed to be kind. On 29 July he wrote to Lieutenant-Governor Stirling instructing him that if all the passengers and cargo of Peel's first ship were not landed by 1 November Peel would be entitled to no part of his grant which would then be subject to general distribution. If he landed some of his people by 1 November he would be entitled to as much of the grant as their number and the amount of capital invested would entitle him.

### PEEL FAILS TO MEET DEADLINE

On 2 August Murray, in reply to Peel's submissions, advised that his first settlers must be landed by 1 November 1829, and the remainder not later than 30 April 1830, and that he would be entitled only to 250,000 acres instead of one million as originally agreed.

By the time "*Gilmore*" departed from Plymouth in the latter part of August 1829, Peel had no chance of meeting the deadline of 1 November. Some of his colonists must also have had second thoughts because the list of colonists who arrived at their destination numbers 179 only and not the 200 previously indicated by Peel.

Apart from emigrants Peel must have had "*Gilmore*" almost bursting at the seams with other cargo to judge by an English newspaper article quoted by Stokes:

"Like a second Noah Mr. Peel has been careful to preserve for the new Ararat on which his ark is destined to rest specimens of 'every living thing, male and female, after their kind.' Horses, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, geese and ducks decently paired and comfortably accommodated, crowd the upper deck of the *Gilmore*."

On 15 December 1829 *Gilmore* arrived in Cockburn Sound—over six weeks after the time stipulated by the English Government. A place for disembarkation had been assigned at Clarence—about 12 miles south of Fremantle. Colonists and stores were landed on the beach and there they remained inactive for the next nine months or more.

### PEEL'S INCAPACITY

After all the ability Peel had shown in his planning of and preparations for his colonisation scheme it rapidly became evident that he lacked the capacity to carry his scheme to fruition. His inability to keep to the arrival date set by the Government was probably first indication of this incapacity; although considering the means of transport by sea then available and its dependence on the whims of the weather the Government was not exactly liberal in the time it allowed.

Be that as it may, once having arrived at the Swan River Settlement Peel did practically nothing to put his settlers on their farms or give his artisans and labourers their expected employment. He seemed completely unable to organise the settlement of the farmer or to provide productive employment for the latter.

On account of his late arrival Peel lost his original grant on the south bank of the Swan. On 12 January 1830 he made an application to Lieutenant-Governor Stirling for a grant



of land. He was told he could have an area which was in the main south of his original grant and on the whole poorer country than the alluvial flats of the Swan and Canning Rivers. He was asked to make a formal application as to acreage. He delayed doing so until 31 July 1832, when he asked for 250,000 acres. On 2 August 1832 Surveyor-General Roe assigned him a grant of that size with boundaries and conditions. It was titled "Lands of the Murray," but instead of 21 years' grace of tenure Peel was given only 10 years which brought him into line with all the other settlers. Finally, on 25 November 1834, Peel's grant was officially recorded by the Crown "in consideration of certain location duties performed to the satisfaction of Governor Stirling."

### PRIVATIONS OF THE COLONISTS

To return to the "*Gilmore*" colonists, they were joined in their miserable existence on the beach at Clarence by another 116 workmen who arrived in the ship "*Hoogley*" on 14 February 1830.

Then on 12 May 1830 the ship "*Rockingham*" with 172 colonists arrived off Garden Island. With naval assistance she navigated Challenger Passage and dropped anchor off Clarence on 14 May. Almost immediately a violent storm swept in from the north-west.

Peel, showing the lack of judgment and obstinacy which was characteristic of him, chose that inopportune time to commence the work of disembarkation. He ordered all the single men to proceed to Garden Island in four of the ship's boats, but the gale was blowing so hard that the boats were swept into the mainland where they overturned in the surf. The occupants, however, reached land in safety.

The ship fared no better; her anchor dragged and she was driven on to the beach broadside on. As she struck the quarter boat, which was drifting by, was secured and by that means an attempt was made to land the married men and their families. Most of the passengers, with the assistance of those already landed, reached the shore by this means, although the boat was overturned in the process. The remainder jumped into the sea and made their way through the boiling surf. Miraculously there was no loss of life.

The beach offered no shelter to the castaways and they remained huddled in groups throughout the night in pouring rain, howling wind and pitch darkness illuminated only by lightning flashes, until with the dawn the weather cleared.

Next day with the assistance of earlier arrivals Peel organised working parties to unload the "*Rockingham*."

Most of the food stores were soaked by seawater and unfit for use. Much clothing was ruined and prized personal possessions made useless. Farming implements were dumped on the beach, where they were to remain until they became rusty heaps of junk. The cattle were swum ashore, but there was no enclosure to hold them or feed to give them. They were turned loose to forage for themselves. Many strayed away into the bush, where, if they escaped the spears of the natives, they eventually reached the Darling Ranges and formed the nucleus of herds of wild cattle.

### SETTLERS' DESPERATE SITUATION

As the weeks passed the position of Peel's settlers became desperate. Salt pork of poor quality was the main item of their diet. Poorly built huts and tents offered scant protection during the winter months. Some were reduced to sleeping in old casks or other extemporised shelters.

Peel made no attempt to alleviate their sufferings or satisfy their grumblings. He himself was now living on Garden Island afraid to come near his disillusioned people.

The winter of 1830 wreaked its toll among them. By 21 July 1830, when Stirling sent Alexander Collie, surgeon of *H.M.S. Sulphur*, to investigate reports of the colonists' dreadful sufferings that had reached him, 28 were dead from pneumonia, scurvy and dysentery. Surgeon Collie found the chief cause of all the sickness was the lack of fresh meat, vegetables and acids such as lime juice and vinegar.

A little later John Morgan, Government Storekeeper on Garden Island, wrote:

"Peel's affairs are very gloomy. He is a ruined man unless someone arrives here to manage his affairs, one who has general knowledge of agriculture and management of men. Peel is totally incapable of conducting an establishment himself and he has no one willing nor allowed to act for him. His people are wretchedly provided for; thirty-seven have already been buried."

### PEEL'S PAPER MONEY REFUSED

Peel lacked the means to pay his men's wages. He found that his paper money, backed by Solomon Levy in London, was not accepted in the colony. An application to Stirling for a loan of £80 to help pay his people in June 1830 was refused on the ground that there was a shortage of specie in the colony. Levy has been earlier mentioned as Peel's agent, but he seems to have become his partner fairly early in the piece. It was probably the only way in which Peel could satisfy his increasing financial involvement with Levy.

As early as July 1830 the indentured men began to seek release. From then on there was a steady flow of tradesmen, servants and farmers from Clarence to other parts of the infant colony. The magistrates did not seem to place any obstacles in the way of those servants who had the initiative to seek a release from their indentures.

Finally, in October 1830, Stirling took a hand in the matter and sent Messrs. W. Mackie, Brown and Andrews to Clarence to suggest to the remaining servants that they pay Peel their passage money in exchange for the cancellation of their indentures and then seek employment elsewhere. Most took advantage of this and a number of them built small boats to enable them to reach the capital to which at that time there was no road from Clarence.

About a month later Peel sent his few remaining servants and a free carpenter named Myerick to Mandurah on the northern bank of the mouth of Peel Inlet into which flow the Serpentine and Murray Rivers. They were told to select about 50 acres each and settle themselves on it.

Early in 1831 when one of the servants named Watson had finished his house Peel recalled him to Clarence and took possession of the house himself without paying Watson anything for it, even wages. Thus began Peel's association with Mandurah that was to last for nearly the next 35 years. By now only two servants, Tuckey and Eacott, remained at Mandurah. All the others had left.

Food shortage and troublesome natives were two constant sources of anxiety. Peel had consumed all his supplies whilst at Clarence and Garden Island. The tiny settlement at Mandurah was dependent on Government stores of which a quarterly supply was finally arranged until the settlement could stand on its own feet.

In October 1831 Peel was appointed Magistrate of the districts of Clarence and Murray, and in the same month Stirling stationed a lieutenant and six soldiers at Mandurah to protect the settlers against the natives. The Murray tribe was very belligerent and having acquired a taste for the white man's food it was inclined to try and take by force what it could not get by other means. The bulk of Peel's remaining livestock was thus lost to the depredations of the natives.

#### ATTACK BY ABORIGINES

On 17 September 1833, and again on 21 April 1834, a party of Murray natives attacked Shenton's Mill on Mill Point, just across the Swan Narrows from Perth, and stole quantities of flour. On the second occasion Captain Ellis and a detachment of soldiers came to Mandurah to capture

the thieves. With the help of Peel and other settlers the ring-leaders were captured and subsequently punished by flogging at Perth gaol. In July 1834 matters came to a head when Private Nesbitt was speared to death and Sergeant Barron badly wounded after the natives had lured them into the bush, whilst they were searching for a horse near Mandurah. The natives tried to persuade Peel to come with Barron and Nesbitt, but his by now ingrained distrust of them led to his refusal to go.

On 28 October 1834 Governor Stirling, with a large party of soldiers, police and settlers, including Peel, caught 70 to 80 Murray natives in a cross-fire on the banks of the Murray River and slew about 30 in a two-hours' fight. The Europeans suffered some casualties from spear wounds, of whom Captain Ellis was the only one to die. This was the famous battle of Pinjarrah and although it showed the natives the strength of the settlers it did not wholly end hostilities, which continued sporadically for a number of years afterwards.

In April 1834 Peel had been joined by his wife. Mrs. Peel was accompanied by two daughters, Julia (13 years) and Dorothy (Dora) (7 years), one son, Thomas (9 years), and her mother, Mrs. Ayrton. The nominal roll of the "*Gilmore*" shows Peel as accompanied by one son when he arrived in the colony on 15 December 1829. The reference books I have been able to get hold of say nothing of the death of a son of Peel during his lifetime and Thomas Peel Junior is spoken of as if he were Peel's only son. However, a Fred Peel is spoken of obliquely, and in W. C. Smart's "Mandurah and Pinjarrah" reference is made to Fred Peel as being the child of Mrs. Peel and that his real name was Proctor. Be that as it may, Fred Peel appears to have received part of the Peel Estate after Peel's death. He is thus probably the son referred to in the nominal roll of the "*Gilmore*."

In 1836 Lieutenant Bunbury records that apart from a detachment of four soldiers at Mandurah the only inhabitants were Peel, Tuckey and Eacott and families. Bunbury states that whilst Tuckey and Eacott respected Peel, they both feared and hated him.<sup>(1)</sup>

In 1838 Peel interested himself in the suitability of Safety Bay in the northern part of his grant as a harbour. Stirling and Roe took an interest in the matter and Peel proposed a town there to which he gave the name Liverpool. He had discovered an extensive tract of wheatland on the Serpentine River in his grant and intended to dispose of a number of farms there for which Liverpool, about seven miles away,

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(1) See Appendix A.

would be the port. However, like so many of Peel's plans this also failed to materialise in his lifetime. Safety Bay is now a well known seaside resort for the residents of Perth.

#### PEEL APPOINTED TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

In 1839 Peel, W. L. Brockman, George Leake and William Tanner were appointed by Governor Hutt as the first four non-official members of the colony's legislative council. The official members, of course, outnumbered them, including as they did the Governor, the Military Commandant, the Colonial Secretary, the Surveyor-General, Advocate-General and Collector of Revenue. This did not help the popularity of the successive governors, who often clashed with the leaders among the colonists. The Colonial Office had instructed Stirling not to put Peel in the Council, but this embargo was apparently lifted with the coming of Hutt.<sup>(2)</sup>

In 1839 Peel disposed of 10,000 acres around Pinjarrah, which included some of his best land, to Captain Singleton. This area became known as the Creaton Estate.

He also sold 1,750 acres between the west bank of the Serpentine and Peel Inlet to a Mr. Creary. This area included the one-acre cemetery site set aside by Peel some years before. In 1862 Creary's executor, one Thomson, objected to a burial taking place there as he claimed the land was part of the Creary Estate and not public land. Peel claimed he had not included the cemetery land in the sale to Creary. However, G. F. Stone, the Attorney-General of the day, ruled that 30 years' continuous use as a public cemetery put the cemetery site beyond any claim the Creary Estate could make to it. This is a typical example of the manner in which Peel became embroiled in small matters because of his failure to define his intentions, purposely or otherwise, when dealing with others.

In 1840 Peel and Singleton were appointed Directors of Roads in the Murray District.

In this year Peel voluntarily surrendered his whole grant back to the Crown on condition that it be reallotted to him under new titles. The new grant was assigned as Cockburn Sound Lot 16. Peel's wife was a party with him to the surrender document, but it does not seem that she was named in the new title.

Then Mrs. Peel, apparently unable any longer to endure the conditions under which they lived and tired of her husband's autocracy and chicanery, left Peel and returned to England with her two daughters. Thomas Junior and Mrs.

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(2) See Appendix B.

Ayrton remained with Peel, while the ambiguous Fred also stayed in the colony where he died in 1872 and was buried at Mandurah.

### PEEL'S DOUBLE DEALING FOILED

It is known that Mrs. Peel on at least one occasion intervened to foil double dealing by Peel. The former servant Eacott had selected a good piece of land and Peel schemed to deprive him of it when the survey was made by including it in his own boundary. Mrs. Peel warned Eacott of her husband's intentions and Peel was obliged to let him retain his selection. This rankled and as a result Peel never missed demanding from Eacott his 2d. per acre per annum quit rent. Mrs. Peel's departure evidently took place in late 1840 or early 1841. Some notoriety must have attached to it for on 31 March 1841 Peel resigned his seat on the Legislative Council and the Commission of the Peace he had held since 1831 for the Murray and Clarence Districts. After this his interest in public affairs and activities grew less and less, but he still remained the autocrat of Mandurah and every ready to indulge in sharp practice.

On one occasion he sold Tuckey some pigs. Tuckey, who had already paid, called to collect the animals only to find Peel had already slaughtered them and had them hanging under his verandah for his own use.

During the period from 1842 to 1856 some rather scathing pen pictures of Peel are to be found in Archdeacon J. R. Wollaston's Picton and Albany Journals. For the record Wollaston's appointment as Archdeacon was not made until 1849.

On Friday, 4 February 1842, the Archdeacon while journeying from Perth to Picton visits Peel's home at Mandurah for the first time. He says:

"I feel at a loss how to describe the residence of this notorious man, who possesses a territory around him of nearly a quarter of a million acres! His wife (once an actress, I am told) and daughters are in England. His household consists of himself; his only son, a youth; his wife's mother, a hearty old lady upwards of 80, and a black servant of the ordinary kind. He bears a very indifferent character, but is hospitable and gentlemanlike. I believe he is cousin to Sir Robert. He lives in a miserable hut, or nest of huts, built of stone and covered (not thatched) with rushes.

### "BROKEN-DOWN GENTLEMAN"

"Everything about him shows the broken-down gentleman; clay floors and handsome plate, curtains for doors, and

pianoforte, windows without glass, and costly china, hardly any utensil put to its proper use; odd cups and saucers, coffee in a mug, handsome china bowl for washing and as a ewer, a Toby Fillpot beer jug, the only looking-glass the size of the hand and a whole pig hanging in the verandah, etc. He has beautiful summer and winter gardens and extensive graperies, but in utter neglect.

“Two fine bulls, which draw him about, were feeding near. When once put on the road I was told he could go to sleep in perfect safety in his cart. I got a good bed, however, on a sofa in the dining hut and in this respect was quite as well off as my host, for he sleeps on one himself, having no bedroom exclusively as such. He had plenty of fine dogs and a miserable looking pony. In short, it was impossible not to muse sadly at what I witnessed and I left him the next day with melancholy feelings of regret at such a dreadful waste of God’s bountiful gifts.

“He talked of going to England to get up another company to buy his land. Not but what I think, with Safety Bay as an anchorage (if it deserves its character), a sober scheme might answer better than that of Australind (a contemporary land settlement scheme that also failed); yet, after all that has passed, surely the very name of Peel will act as an effectual damper upon such an undertaking.”

### HIS “INDIFFERENT CHARACTER”

The Archdeacon was to have practical experience of Peel’s “indifferent character” within the next fortnight. He sent his two sons to trade some horses with Peel for heifers, of which the latter professed to have large numbers. On Thursday, 17 February 1842, Wollaston says: “John and George returned from Mandurah. . . They could not deal with Mr. Peel, who misrepresented his stock to me, and I am pleased that my boys were a match for him and acted with caution and prudence.”

In 1842 Peel’s partner in England, his erstwhile agent Solomon Levy, died, leaving his share of the partnership to John Levy Roberts.

On 20 October 1842 the Archdeacon records: “Mr. Peel has another fine map of Liverpool, an extensive town in nubibus, with a railroad not indeed to the moon but to the Mahogany Range from Safety Bay for the conveyance of timber! (In 1872 a railway did in fact connect Jarrahdale and Rockingham and at times the Rockingham Jetty had its full complement of our sailing vessels loading jarrah for overseas—so even though not in his lifetime at least one of Peel’s

plans bore fruit.) He (Mr. Peel), I hear, has made arrangements at last with Levi's Executors, whose agent he was as Leader of the Expedition, the failure of which is so well known. His salary was to have been £1,500 per year, but having received nothing he seized the immense territory for arrears of pay for 12 years. The whole grant to Levi's Company originally was 250,000 acres. The Executors have now offered Peel as a compromise £1,200 and 100,000 acres, he giving up to them the other 150,000! He will, of course, pick out all the best and this projected Liverpool is part of it. I should not wonder if he now went to England and gambled it all away. He has some of the finest land for extent in the country."

The Archdeacon appears to have got hold of some gossip here of an ill-informed nature. There appears no doubt that Peel was the master of his own destiny and not the servant of any company. Circumstances later forced him to enter into some basis of partnership with Levy, in which the latter bequeathed his interest to J. L. Roberts.

On 14 October 1849 Peel wrote to the Governor (Captain Charles Fitzgerald, R.N.) expressing his intention of proceeding to England to effect an adjustment between Roberts and himself and also his debt to the Crown. He was willing, he stated, to surrender 10,000 acres back to the Crown as payment of the debt, but as he could not give clear title to the land the proposal fell through.

Peel did not go to England, but in 1851 Roberts and he signed an agreement whereby they were to be considered as joint tenants of the grant. In 1862 Roberts sold his share of the estate to the Colonization Assurance Company and on 18 July 1865, by a Deed of Partition, Peel took the southern half of the estate.

#### "A CRAFTY OLD GENTLEMAN"

It is interesting to note that on 15 August 1843, when Peel was only 43 years old, Wollaston, who was himself 52 at the time, refers to Peel as "a crafty old gentleman." This is an indication of how Peel must have let his appearance go as a result of the disappointments and vicissitudes he had undergone in the past 13 years.

In 1845 Mrs. Ayrton died at the age of 84 years. Dora Peel now returned from England and kept house for her father. In this year, although it lay outside his grant, Peel unsuccessfully tried to claim Mill Island in the Murray River where James and Thomas Cooper were conducting a thriving grist mill.



In 1849 Peel became extensively engaged in the timber trade. He had saw pits operating in several places for a while, but once again his activity dwindled away to nothing.

On 29 March 1851 Archdeacon Wollaston is indignant because he could not conduct a service at the Mandurah Church for "Mr. Peel had taken possession of it, as his private property, and had converted it into his dwelling house. I thought it odd last year he should have a chimney to the church; now it is explained. He hid himself somewhere and I saw him not, but I saw the church full of his rubbish, with his bed, furniture, etc. I left my name on his table." But on 10 April 1853, "At Mandurah I found the little humble church restored to its right use by its proprietor, Mr. Peel." However, on 21 February 1856, "Peel's Chapel—late his residence—now his stable at Mandurah." The brevity of this last entry speaks volumes.

By 1858 Peel, the former Magistrate, had fallen so far that in May of that year he was obliged to appear before the Murray District Magistrate (whose name was also Murray) charged with an offence (presumably assault) against his housekeeper, Elizabeth Mandrell. Although Peel denied the accusation he was bound over on his own bond of £50 to be of good behaviour in the future.

On 22 December 1865 Thomas Peel died at the age of 65 years. It was a hot day and all morning Peel had been watching livestock branded. At noon he climbed a slope in front of his house to see if expected cargo boats from Fremantle were in sight. On his return to the house, he gulped down a glass of wine, collapsed in a stroke and died without regaining consciousness. His grave is in the Mandurah churchyard and the headstone states he "bore with much fortitude the hardships and disappointments endured by the early colonists."

Peel's grandiose colonisation scheme, though a failure in itself, did indirectly benefit the young colony in the West, for it brought there a number of skilled artisans and labourers who were badly needed. In their dispersal over the colony after Peel's failure they opened up more avenues for future development.

Lastly, despite Peel's inadequacies of character it must be conceded that he did remain and see his life out in the colony instead of quitting it as many did, without criticism, in the hard times that had to be endured in the first thirty odd years after initial settlement.

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## APPENDIX A

The following extract from Lieut. H. W. Bunbury's "Early Days in Western Australia" (page 172) is an interesting description of Peel's life at Mandurah:

"He lives at Peeltown or Mandurup, in a long, low, thatched cottage built of wattle and daub, white-washed and kept scrupulously clean. There he resides with his wife, two young daughters and young son, Tommy, who, with his wife's mother, form the establishment. Not a single servant, male or female, has he, except generally one or two natives, young men or lads, who wash the dishes, look after the horses and assist in various other ways, such as feeding pigs, poultry, etc. The old woman cooks and never appears at table; often as I was there I never saw her face. Of course the fare is not sumptuous but depends, as usual in the bush, on native resources.

"From being a well-known person who began with extensive means and all possible advantages, he has failed completely and his failure has gone far to ruin the prospects of the colony. He began under false colours and it is hard that a whole community should suffer for the faults of one individual. He took out with him about four hundred persons of both sexes and every requisite for an extensive establishment, utensils of all kinds, houses in frames, stock and, in fact, everything that could be needed except money, of which it appears he brought little or none, as he borrowed small sums at the Cape from his fellow migrants. On his arrival he established all his people in extensive barracks at Clarence, on the barren beach, with very little water. He appears to have taken no measures for forming farms on the good portions of his land, nor indeed were any attempts made to search for any. He lived himself at Garden Island in company with the naval officers of the ships in harbour, for a long time too indolent, and latterly afraid, to go near his people, who from grumbling came to threats as they found themselves starving by inches on an unknown shore, with no occupation and no chance of improving their condition. At

length, after many had died of scurvy and other diseases brought on by neglect and want of proper food, the Government was obliged to interfere and cancel the indentures of the greater part of them, leaving them at liberty to seek a livelihood where they pleased. Since then these men, many of them, have done extremely well, and have turned out the best and most industrious migrants in the colony, doing credit to their selection in England, whoever made it, and proving that Peel's failure was his own fault and not that of his people as he wishes to make one believe.

"He afterwards made some attempts to form farms, but on the poor coast land, instead of on the rich alluvial flats, and from the mismanagement, careless habits and want of perseverance, nothing succeeded."

#### APPENDIX B

The Colonial Office's attitude towards Peel is evident in a private memorandum from that office to Captain Stirling:

"The Governor is not to put Mr. Peel in the Council. If, as is probable, his party shall arrive too late for fulfilment of the conditions on which he received his grant, he will have no claim at all and even if he arrives in time, I cannot but think that the impetuosity and indiscretion, to use no harsher words, which he has betrayed in his communications with this department, will render him an unsafe member of a body whose deliberations are likely to involve both general and individual interests of great and yearly increasing importance." (C.O. 18/3.)