

KEW ILLUSTRATED



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

**KEW COURT HOUSE
NOVEMBER 2016 - FEBRUARY 2017**

An Exhibition mounted by the Kew Historical Society of
the photographic plates in Henry Kellett's 1891 photographic album
Kew Where We Live.

THE ALBUM

The collaboration between Henry Kellett (later Sir Henry de Castres Kellett Bt.) and the local photographer John Frederick Cooke Farquhar, *Kew Where We Live*, comprises twelve photographic images of Kew at the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

In the frontispiece to the album, Henry Kellett advertised this collection of photographs as: *'Photographic views of Kew and its surroundings, executed by the 'Argentic Bromide' process, which ensures absolute permanency of the photograph. In a few years hence when most of the old landmarks will have disappeared, these views will be a valuable memento of Kew as it was in 1891'*. Individual photographs were advertised for sale separately, which accounts for a number of photographs being in national collections, such as that of the State Library of Victoria.

The photographic album, bound in maroon cloth, is embossed at centre front with the words 'KEW WHERE WE LIVE'. Marbleised paper is used to decorate the inside covers, and the thirteen pages include a preface and twelve named plates. A double border outlined in red, surrounds each plate. The same colour is used for the name of the photograph (e.g. 'Birds Eye View Looking North') and for the photographer's name at lower left.

How the photographic album entered into the collection of the Kew Historical Society, sometime after 1958 is uncertain. As the collection also includes a number of items, some personal, relating to the life and death of Sir Henry de Castres Kellett, it is probable that his family donated the album, and many of the other items.

Due to age and mishandling, the album is in need of urgent conservation including the repair of the frontispiece, and rebinding. The extensive foxing and discoloration on mounts, and in some cases on the photographs is probably not repairable.

THE CONTEXT

1890 and 1891 were the last years in the land boom that Victoria had enjoyed for almost a decade during the 1880s. 1893 was the real start of the depression with the failure of the banking system. It was well towards the end of the 1890s before there were tentative signs of economic recovery in Victoria. Kew suffered the depression with the rest of the Colony. However, for the time being, in 1890 and 1891, prosperity reigned.

1891 and 1892 saw Kew's population reach its peak for the decade. These two years saw the annual valuation of the Borough also reach its peak, along with Council revenue. There were sharp declines from 1893. These indicators of land values suggest that the land boom in 1890 and 1891 was continuing in Kew. Kew land sales in 1890 and 1891 were described as "brisk," and several new shops were built in 1891, including the National Bank of Australia building. In 1893 the land market virtually stalled in Kew. It was not till about 1897 that it started to revive.

In the meantime, life in Kew continued as it had in the 1880s. Streets were formed and drained. Gas lighting continued to be installed and nightsoil collections arranged. There were constant requests for more frequent railway services to the city. There were continuing calls for more schools and postal services.

However, some new problems arose. The need for sewerage was becoming a major issue as the nightsoil arrangements were considered a disgrace. Electric lighting was being investigated for Kew. There was a continuing battle to have the Kew Railway Line extended to Doncaster. The Council had one of its perennial debates about the need for public baths and a new town hall. The Kew Court continued to deal with cases of wandering cattle, minor assaults, cruelty to horses, dangerous driving of carts and occasional non-payment of debt. Generosity abounded. Most Justices of the Peace in Kew, along with those present at a public meeting, donated money to the London Dock Workers' Strike Fund.

THE PUBLISHER

Sir Henry de Castres Kellett, the son of a hereditary baronet, was born in South Australia in 1851. His English title had been created in Ireland in 1801, but the family was originally Norman with later branches living in England and Ireland. His father, preferring to be known as Mr. Kellett did not assert his right to the title until it was in danger of being usurped by an adventurer. At that time, his father believed he owed it to his descendants to prove his succession. His son, Henry de Castres Kellett was to assume the title in 1906.

In 1884, Henry Kellett was elected to Kew Council, serving as a councillor for forty years; a remarkable example of public service. His community service was not restricted to Council. He was also President and Trustee of the Kew Australian Natives Association, Captain of the Kew Volunteer Fire Brigade, representative of the southern municipalities on the Fire Brigades Board, Vice President of the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Association, representative of Kew Council on the MMBW Board and a member of the Tramways Trust.

Henry Kellett continued his father's newsagency and stationer business in High Street, Kew and also acted as an insurance, postal and real estate agent.

He was to meet his death in 1924, in a tragic car accident on Cotham Road, while on Council business. A large cortege followed the hearse from his home 'Lota Begg' in Westbrook Street, East Kew to Boroondara General Cemetery. He is memorialised in the naming of Kellett Reserve and Kellett Grove.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

John Frederick Cooke Farquhar was an intrepid English colonial traveller of independent means and an inventor who constantly sought patents for various chemical-based projects. He began his short sojourn in Melbourne, operating as a photographer, initially in Caulfield. A subsequent partnership between Farquhar, Henry Jenkins and Arthur Gaubert - 'Farquhar & Co., - in Malvern was dissolved in 1888. A number of photographs from this period are in State Collections, such as his images of the Melbourne Cup of 1889. In the same year, Farquhar entered into a professional partnership with Thomas Baker. They initially set up a business in 'Victoria Lodge', Swanston Street but by 1890 opened rooms in Elizabeth Street, renaming their atelier as the 'Victorian Gallery of Australian Views'. To coincide with the opening, they mounted an exhibition of 'argentic bromide' enlarged landscape photographs (with some prints over a metre square). 'Dry Plate' photography allowed Farquhar and Baker to take quality, out-of-the-studio landscape and architectural photographs. The business was highly profitable; the general public purchasing photographs for domestic decoration, rather than purchasing original works of art such as paintings or lithographs. The tourist trade was also attracted to these 'noble' images, using them as marketing tools in places such as such train carriages.

The Kew businessman, Henry Kellett, recognising the commercial potential of Farquhar and Baker's 'beautiful presentments of Victorian scenery', selected Farquhar, to photograph scenes of Kew that ranged from panoramas to pastoral scenes. At the time, Farquhar was a resident of Pakington Street. By 1898, J.F.C Farquhar is recorded as resident of New South Wales, being named in a Police Gazette of that year for criminal activity involving larceny. Details of his subsequent activities are unrecorded.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PROCESS

The term 'Argentic Bromide' that Henry Kellett used to advertise the photographs in *Kew Where We Live* is also called the 'gelatine silver' process. Gelatine silver processing, which is a 'Dry Plate' process superseded the previously used 'Wet Plate' process, as the latter needed to be processed virtually immediately, using sunlight. The Dry Plate process allowed for the negatives to be kept for weeks before processing, hence its value for landscape photography. Negatives would stay stable until they could be processed in a dark room. The Dry Plate process produced a fine grain image and was considered everlasting. It made the lithograph virtually redundant. According to Jack Cato, the guru of the history of Australian photography, Australia was very slow to adopt the new process and technically was not very adept at using it. The gelatine silver process was to be used by Australian photographers from c. 1886-1960, when it in turn was replaced with colour photography technology.

DIGITISING THE PHOTOGRAPHS

Because of damage over time to the original mounts and images in Henry Kellett's *Kew Where We Live*, the digitisation of each part of the album - the covers, preamble and the twelve plates - involved careful removal of foxing and rebalancing of 'colours' to match each original. Differential fading of the images was undertaken but in some areas, damage left nothing 'recoverable.' In a number of instances this involved maximising a repair to fill in these absences.

Repair of the paper mounts was problematic as the foxing was in the same colour spectrum as the paper. Large spouls were erased through digitisation, but under closer examination, there were thousands of mould spots on each page. A decision was taken to treat each plate as a number of layers, removing the photograph, title and photographer's name from the mount. After these digital layers were separated, each was cleaned manually, before being reassembled.

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