

William Kaye

In the northeast corner of the suburb of Laverton, east of Bladin Street and north of Cole Street, is a residential area where the street names reflect on a time long ago. A time well before Laverton became a suburb within the western region of Melbourne. If you were to look at the plans of the Parish of Truganina, from the second half of the 1800s, the names of many landholders and graziers are now reflected in the street names within this section of Laverton. One of these names is Kaye Crescent, which honours the significant land holding of Stock and Station agent¹ William Kaye Jnr during the 1850s and 1860s. So, now you're probably wondering, what was his story?

In about 1821, William Kaye Jnr was born in the West Yorkshire village of Clayton, England, to parents William Kaye Snr and Elizabeth Kaye (nee Marshall). William Kaye Jnr appears to have been the second youngest of six children born to the couple. We unfortunately know little of William Jnr's early years. From our research, we do know that his father operated a manufacturing business, but it's unclear what he manufactured. It also appears that the family had some wealth behind them. Additionally, William Jnr's grandfather was also a retired farmer, so it was inevitable that young William would end up working an industry like agriculture, and that he would oversee his own business. In fact, on his marriage registration, his rank or profession was noted as 'gentleman'.

In September 1841, William (now roughly twenty years old) and his business partner, Robert Cay, had a partnership deed prepared. An agreement was made that they would purchase stock and proceed to South Australia to begin business as farmers and wool dealers with £1,000 each. We believe that the two men travelled from England to Australia, possibly landing initially in Adelaide, before proceeding to the colony at Port Phillip, ultimately arriving sometime in 1842. They joined the squatting firm² of E & W Charlton and from here, they began to purchase agricultural land.

William appears to have settled into in the colony quite well, quickly establishing several businesses and forging bonds with political colleagues. After only five years in Australia, William returned to England. Soon after, on 9 August 1848, he was married Elizabeth Cheesbrough at St Peter's church in Bradford, Yorkshire. Elizabeth was the daughter of John and Elizabeth Cheesbrough. The couple's first of eight children, Mary, was born the same year that they were married. We are unaware as to whether William was acquainted with Elizabeth before he first sailed to Australia or whether they met following his return to England.

By 1850, William had already returned to the colony of Port Phillip with his wife, Elizabeth, and their daughter, Mary. It was a very timely return because Victoria had been declared as a separate colony from New South Wales, with gold shortly discovered afterward. This made Melbourne and Victoria the place to be in Australia. With the huge influx of people arriving in Melbourne during the gold rush, there were many requests for farming land once this prosperous period began to wrap up. As a station and stock agent, William found himself quite busy at this time, both professionally and in his home life. The couple welcomed their second child, Emily Jane, into the world. Just a year later, their third child, Henrietta, was born too.

¹ The stock and station agent was a respected and influential figure, coordinating farmers and connecting them to the outside world of banks, wool buyers, and government agencies in Australasia and overseas, whose impact on export-led growth cannot be underestimated.

² Early squatters were usually men who had come to Australia in search of new opportunities. Many of them were wealthy individuals from England who used their new land acquisitions as a source of income. A squatting firm or agents were used to find suitable crown land for new arrivals.

In 1852, the business partnership that William Kaye had with Robert Cay and E & W Charlton dissolved. By the following year, 1853, William partnered with James Butchart to form a business known as Kaye & Butchart. Their first action was to purchase the stock and agency business of Mickle & Bakewell, who were situated on Bourke Street, Melbourne, and with it they acquired pastoral interests in both Victoria and New South Wales. That same year, William and Elizabeth gave birth to their fourth child, Elizabeth, and in 1855, their fifth child Mary Alma was born. William Kaye finally gained an heir in 1856 when Elizabeth gave birth to their sixth child, and first son, also named William.

In 1856, William Kaye decided to try his hand at state politics, running for election to the state Legislative Assembly. On 1 November 1856, he was elected as the last candidate required to represent the Eastern Province and he took his place within the Victorian Parliament. However, his life as a politician was unfortunately short lived. The candidate that had the next highest voters, William Highett, claimed that William Kaye had paid another sitting member to rally for him within the electorate, due to the pressure of his business not allowing him to visit the electorate area himself. This accusation was soon proven true. On 1 February 1857, William was found guilty by a committee of the Legislative Council of bribery, citing that a payment of £200 was to have "induced [the agent] to exert a corrupt influence upon the election". Whilst William's days as a politician had ended, his connections with the men of the Victorian political scene certainly did not. This experience would later have great benefits on his future business ventures.

Following this political period, business didn't slow down for Kaye & Butchart. In 1858, with agricultural land opening up to the west of Melbourne, namely in the Parish of Truganina, the partners purchased eight large adjoining allotments in the area (see Appendix A). During this year, William and Elizabeth, once again, added to their family with the birth of their second son, John Arthur. With William's family growing and his business likewise, new opportunities were on the cards on both fronts.

In 1859, William commissioned the building of a family home known as 'Ascog'³ in Southey Street, St Kilda, which was designed in the Italianate style. At the time, the Kaye family were living in Melbourne.



Ascog 1872, City of Port Phillip Collection: Donald Mc Donald Collection 1872

At the same time, the business of Kaye & Butchart were also looking for a new premises within central Melbourne. They acquired land at 421 Bourke Street and constructed a single-storey bluestone office,

³ Ascog- we do not know why William gave the home this name. Coincidentally, there is a castle in Scotland, built in the 17th Century, that bears the same name.

which was situated on the corner of Bourke Street and McKillop Street. Like Ascog, the new office building of Kaye & Butchart was just as impressive. The classical form and detailing of the building were reflective of both the success of early stock agents, as well as that of its owners. The building was later added to, with a second story being built in 1863 and then a third in 1919. The Commercial Bank of Australia's first-ever branch occupied the building from the 1880s, and it ultimately still stands today. Until recently (2022), it was the home of a long-standing Melbourne jewellery business that had occupied the building since 1975. It is now the Hopetoun Tea Rooms.



421 Bourke Street Melbourne, previous the offices of Kaye, Butchart & Co

In 1859, William and Elizabeth saw the birth of their eighth child, Charles Walter. By this time, business was prosperous, and the Kaye family were living within a grand home in St Kilda. However, sometime within the next two years, they bid farewell to Australia and returned to their homeland of England. The 1861 England Census lists the Kaye family as having lived in High Hoyland, Yorkshire, in what would have been a large house. On the property, they had a butler, coachman, groom (also known as a stable boy), housekeeper, lady's maid, kitchen maid, scullery maid, and house maid⁴.

It appears that William kept a keen interest and input into his partnership back in Australia, still being recognised as a senior partner of Kaye & Butchart. It is worth mentioning that during William's time in Australia, he was also a director and president of Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company. Additionally, he was a member of the provisional committee of the Melbourne, Mount Alexander, and Murray River Railway Company too.

⁴ A description of these positions can be found within Appendix B

Elizabeth Kaye (nee Cheesborough) died in 1866 and was buried in London Necropolis cemetery (plot 32), in Brookwood, Surrey, England. This left William with the care of their eight children, now aged between sixteen and six. Over the next few years, William appeared to end his business interests in Australia. The Melbourne-based business, now known as Kaye, Butchart & Co, was taken over by J. G. Dougharty in around 1868, who had been made a junior partner in the early 1860s. This also coincided with the death of James Butchart on 12 November 1869.

On 17 March 1870, William Kaye got married again, this time to Emmeline Jane Straight Aitkin (nee Harvey), a widow who was the daughter of Simon Harvey. The Harvey's also appear to have been an affluent family, as on the marriage registration, both fathers were described as an Esquire⁵.

The family moved from Yorkshire to a home in Portland Place, London. By this time, there were still five children still living at home. Also, the home must have again been quite substantial as they had eleven domestic staff. William, now about fifty years old, was living on the income generated from his investments in Australia. By 1881, all of the Kaye children had left home, which left William and Emmeline living on their own with a reduced domestic staff of six.



Burial Monument - William and Elizabeth Kaye, London

In March 1893, Emmeline Kaye passed away. Two months later, on 10 May 1893, William Kaye passed away as well, aged seventy-two. He was living at Saxham Hall, Bury St Edmund, Suffolk. Saxham Hall, the property of Thomas R. Mills esq. and occupied by William Kaye esq., which is in the midst of a fine park of 140 acres. It is studded with trees and plantations, as well as embellished with lawns and terraces tastefully planted along its west side. The principal entrance was through a portico, over which are the family arms (a lion rampant).

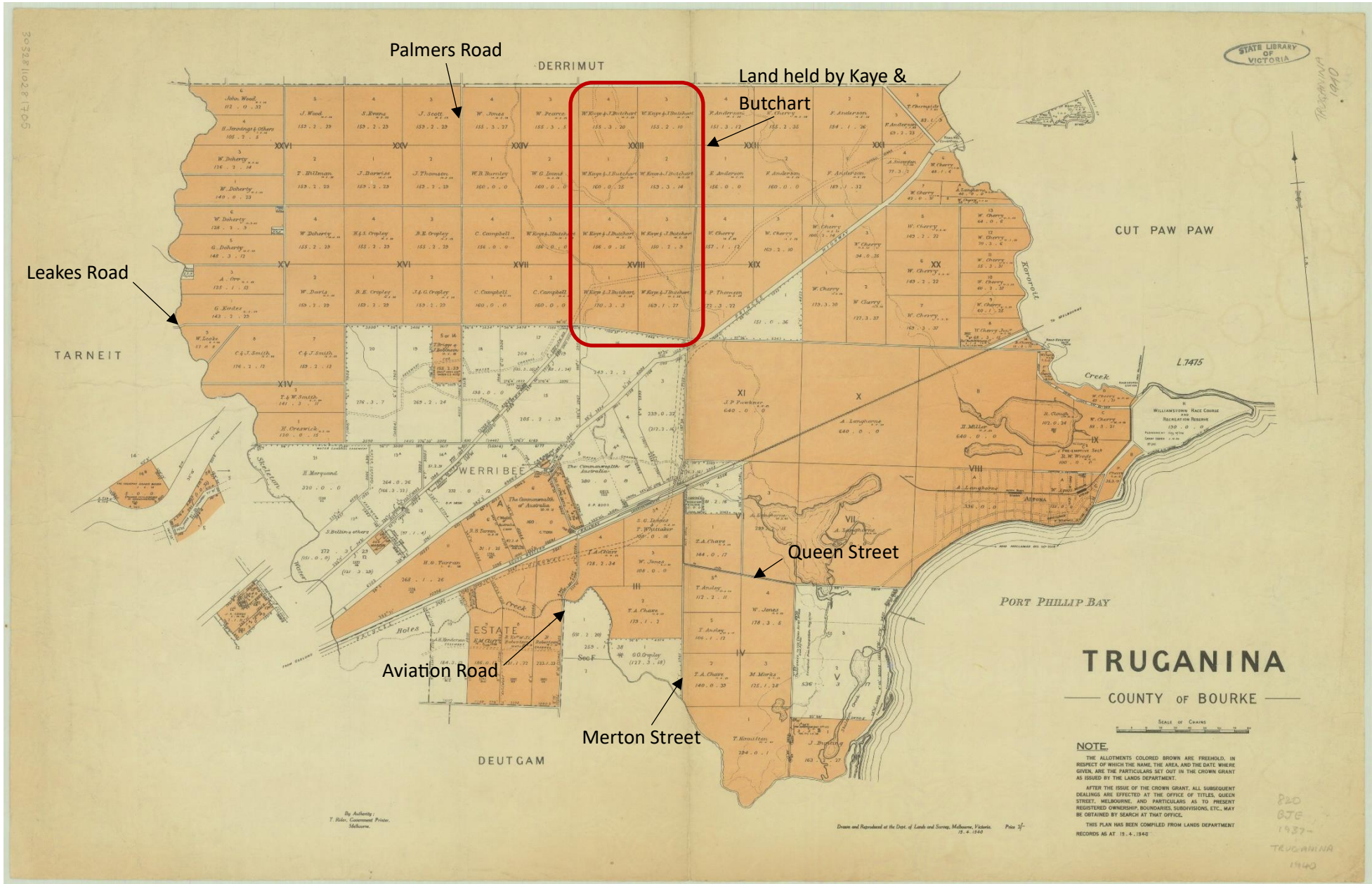
William Kaye was buried alongside his first wife, Elizabeth Kaye (nee Cheesborough) in London Necropolis cemetery (plot 32), Brookwood, Surrey, England. To gain an idea of how successful William Kaye had been in with his many ventures, the sworn valuation of his estate (October 1893) was valued at £113,541, which equates today (2023) at £17,621,096⁶.

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⁵ In the United Kingdom, 'esquire' historically was a title of respect accorded to men of higher social rank, particularly members of the landed gentry above the rank of gentleman and below the rank of knight.

⁶ These are Great British pounds, so if converted to Australian dollars in 2023, this figure would be nearly doubled.



Appendix B

Butler: The butler, was the senior male servant, has the highest servant status. They were in charge of the other serving/household staff and ensured that the household ran smoothly.

Coachman: As well as skill in driving, the coachman was responsible for making sure the other staff carried out their duties properly. He made sure the horses were well looked after and properly fed and groomed.

Groom: The job of the groom was to feed, 'groom', and exercise the horses, as well as cleaning out the stables and assisting the coachman.

Housekeeper: The senior most female member of the staff appointed for domestic help was the housekeeper. She was directly under the mistress, the head of the house and was in charge of all the female servants excluding the lady's maid and head nurse, who were directly under the mistress. The housekeeper looked after everything that happened during the daily running of the household. Along with this, she had to keep weekly account of the daily expenses in a ledger, paying off the bills and filing receipts.

Lady's maid: A lady's maid was clever and competent in performing the duties of her place. She must have understood dressing, dressmaking, repairs to fabric, arranging the lady's clothing for a dinner party. She must have possessed good taste, understood the care of fabrics, leather, silk, wool and have experience in carrying out the repair of all clothes. She would also hand make entire outfits for the lady of the house.

Kitchen maid or Cook: The cook had to prepare all the food and it was her duty to keep the kitchen in order, including scrubbing floors and pots and pans with the support of the scullery maid. She may also have had to help the Housemaid in her duties, such as laying the fires and keeping the house clean and tidy.

Scullery maid: scullery maids were the lowest-ranked and often the youngest of the female domestic servants and acted as assistants to a kitchen maid. The scullery maid provided hot water for the scullery, kitchen tasks, and household. In addition to her other tasks, the scullery maid had to keep the scullery clean by clearing away meat and vegetable garbage, scrubbing worktables, and swilling the floors. A scullery was where the cleaning of dishes was undertaken or as an overflow kitchen.

Housemaid: The housemaid was responsible for keeping the house clean and in order. She was meant to do much of this out of view of the family and so had to rise very early in the morning to complete her work. It was also necessary to keep to a very strict routine to ensure that all the work was done. Each hour of the day and each day of the week had clearly defined tasks.

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