



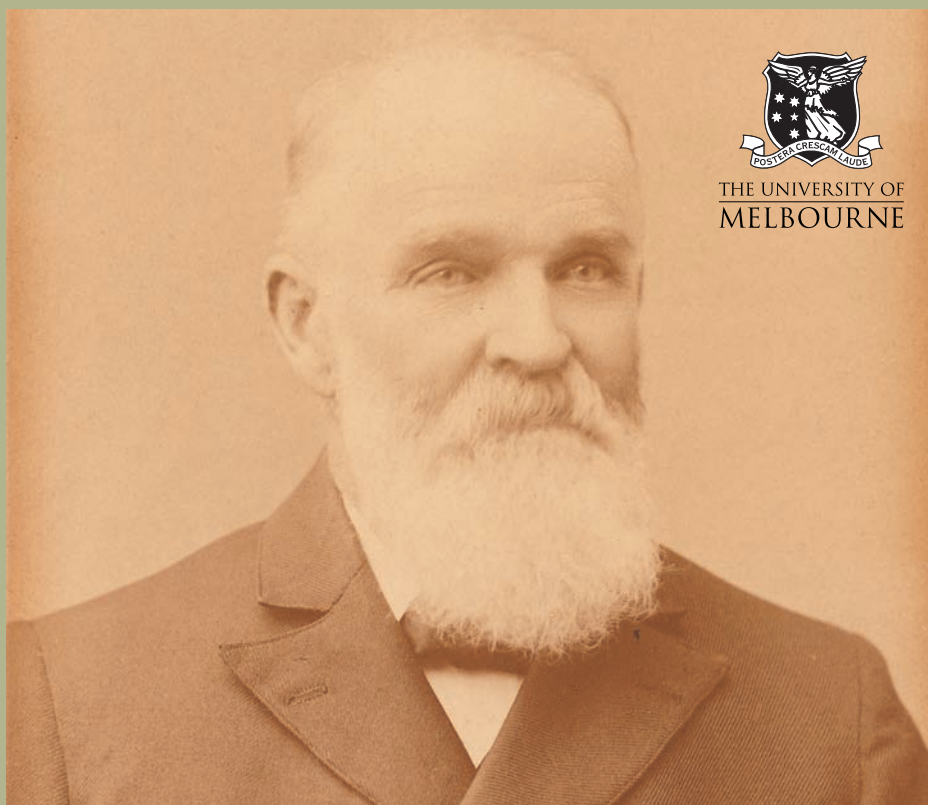
Title page of Sir Walter Raleigh, *History of the World*, London, Printed for Walter Burre, 1614. From the George McArthur Bequest, 1903. (Special Collections, Baillieu Library)

A Baillieu Library Exhibition commemorating the  
Centenary of the George McArthur Bequest, 1903

## THE BAKER OF MALDON

22 SEPTEMBER to 7 NOVEMBER 2003

University of Melbourne



*Yours faithfully*  
(1903) *Geo McArthur.*

Cover of *The Baker of Maldon* exhibition catalogue.

# The Baker of Maldon

The *Baker of Maldon* exhibition at the Baillieu Library celebrated the 100th anniversary of the first significant book bequest to the University of Melbourne. Professor **Miles Lewis** was invited to close the exhibition. Here is what he said on that occasion.

I have been asked to open exhibitions before, but never to close one, and I suppose there must be some protocol — the reverse of breaking a bottle of champagne over the bows. It may be driving a stake through the heart. But I am reluctant to do this because it appears that this exhibition is to enjoy an afterlife of more than a week, and it deserves to be seen as much as possible in that time.

George McArthur was an extraordinary person, and Ian Morrison has done an extraordinary job in presenting him. In fact that is my first complaint. Ian has done too good a job. Looking at these rare and finely displayed works you will have gained the impression that George McArthur was a person of great discernment, and a pioneering scholar and collector, whereas he was in fact as mad as a snake.

I came upon this collection as an undergraduate student almost 40 years ago. Maldon was then an unknown and economically depressed country town, and we were studying its surviving buildings. It was some time before I discovered, to my astonishment, that my own university had an extensive collection of material donated by a Maldon identity. It seemed so improbable — like hearing Kerry Packer burst into high opera.

But when I came to look at the catalogue I was quickly disabused. I would not then have recognised many of the gems you see today, but in any case



Johann Reuchlin, *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* ..., Pforzheim, Thomas Anshelm, 1506. A Hebrew dictionary, with notes on the life of Reuchlin written and pasted in by McArthur. From the George McArthur Bequest, 1903. (Special Collections, Baillieu Library)

they were buried amongst other material, notably an extraordinary collection of Bibles in different languages. I defy anyone to give me a good intellectual reason for collecting Bibles in different languages — it is a jackdaw's collection, the task of an obsessive, not of a scholar.

My own interest at the time was in the Maldon-related material, so I looked only at the collection of miners' licences and other such documents. And this seemed equally to be the product of a morbid mentality. Indeed Ian's scholarly

essay argues that McArthur had some kind of bipolar mental disorder, borne out by his suicide in 1903.

However, and this is my second complaint, Ian seems to more or less go along with McArthur's biographer, Mary Lugton, who dismissed the idea that McArthur had been ostracised for opposing Australian involvement in the Boer War. Why this should be an issue I do not understand.

Working in local history one soon acquires a nose for the sort of myths that spring up almost spontaneously —

the bricks which were brought out as ballast, the bullet holes from the guns of bushrangers, and so on. On the other hand, there are other stories which may seem at least as improbable, but which are just not the sort that get fabricated. Stories in that category should therefore be accepted, *prima facie*, as having a basis in truth.

The story about McArthur, passed down locally, was that he was a Boer sympathiser during the Boer War, and that local patriots captured his dog and dyed it red, white and blue. This is not the sort of story that appears out of nowhere. And it is not intrinsically unlikely that McArthur was a Boer sympathiser, nor that there would be a reaction against him.

This brings me to my main point, which is the way in which the Maldon or Tarrangower goldfield declined from its rip-roaring beginnings, to the pathetic collection of eccentrics and rednecks which clashed at Maldon in 1903, and thence to the white trash can that I first encountered in the 1960s.

I have always felt that we pay too little attention to periods of decline. Western culture, for example, is as much indebted to the thin thread of continuity with antiquity, which survived through the Dark Ages, as it is to the glorious efflorescence of the Renaissance.

So I want to put before you a model. The immigrants who came to Victoria for the gold discoveries were the cream of their generation, in the sense that they were the most adventurous and enterprising people there were. Amongst them, of course, was a good sprinkling of eccentrics, misfits, shysters and remittance men. The successful went on in the next 30 years to become the most influential businessmen, manufacturers, politicians, writers and artists. But they were on the goldfields only briefly, some for only a month or two, few more than a year.

So what happened when the Chartists and the Red Ribbon Leaguers, the Raffaello Carbonis and the Peter



Title page of *The Recantation of the Prelate of Canterbury: being his last advice to his brethren the bishops of England*, London, 1641. Ostensibly this was by William Laud, but was in fact an attack on him. The portrait is by William Marshall. From the George McArthur Bequest, 1903. (Special Collections, Baillieu Library)

Lalors, the Thomas Woolners and William Howitts, retreated to Melbourne or returned to Europe? The mediocre and the eccentric remained behind. For a few years there was enough momentum to keep the goldfields lively, and a few exciting people to keep them that way, from Orion Horne to Jonathan Moon. But soon there began a steady contraction, a deadly attrition which culminated in the Depression of the 1890s.

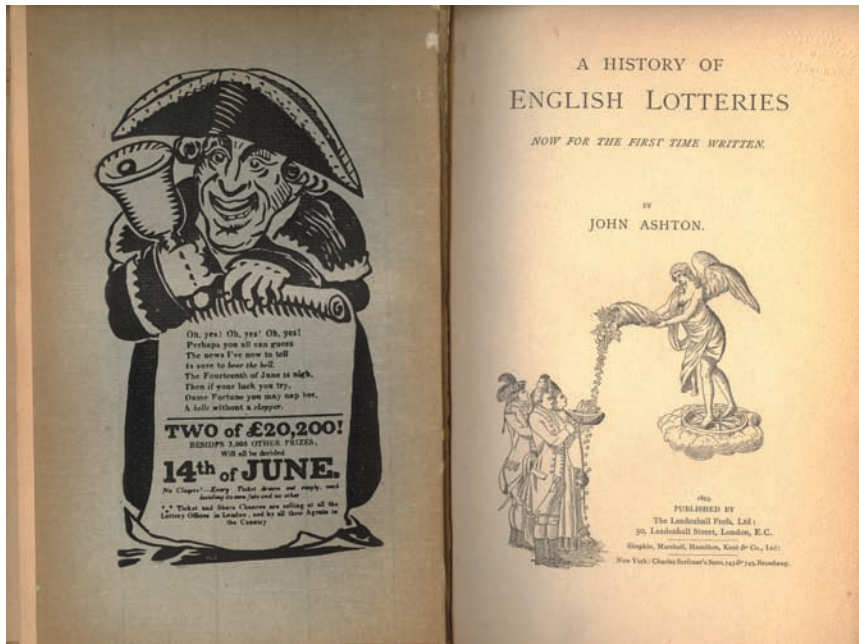
In the 20th century it was even worse. Indeed these towns would have been entirely deserted, but for the fact that property became so cheap that the old and the poor congregated in them. Maldon and the other towns of the Central Goldfields had the lowest living costs in Victoria, and it was stagnation that preserved them. The State Government made a brief attempt to promote decentralisation, which resulted in a shoe factory opening in Maldon in 1944, but that was little enough.

I want to put before you something of this process of suffocating

parochialism. In 1861 the free spirits of the Tarrangower (or Maldon) goldfield were confronted by the pretensions of L.C. Payne and his wife, the newly appointed dispenser and matron of the local hospital. The Paynes published an advertisement in the Tarrangower Times in the form of a calling card:

MR. and MRS. L. C. PAYNE, in acknowledging the honour of various calls, beg to say that as the proper conduct of the Institution demands their entire time and attention, they must be permitted to depart from the more CONVENTIONAL course observed in responding to such compliments by those persons who desire to extend the circle of their acquaintance.

The response was immediate. Mr and Mrs Bill Snooks of Porcupine Flat inserted a card acknowledging the distinguished visits which they received daily from the elite and aristocracy of Tarrangower, but begged to say that as the proper conduct of the puddling machine demanded Bill's entire attention, and looking after the kids demanded that of his wife, they were unable to accept many of the invitations



Frontispiece and title page of John Ashton, *A History of English Lotteries*, London, Leadenhall Press, 1893. From the George McArthur Bequest, 1903. (Special Collections, Baillieu Library)

to soirées and assemblies of fashion with which they were inundated. Other satirical responses followed as well.

It was not just that the adventurers were being replaced by the pretentious and mediocre. The independent miners were being replaced by companies. The pickings for the alluvial fossicker became thinner and thinner. Quartz mining and deep lead alluvial mining required equipment and capital, larger areas and longer leases. The small man confronted the capitalist.

Another goldfield, Whroo, which is to the south of Rushworth, presents a little vignette of the process. The small miners unanimously opposed an extension of the mining lease of the local magnate, John Thomas Lewis. Lewis then set about repossessing the building, which they rented from him as a Mechanics Institute — the very symbol of independence and self-improvement. He also impounded their books and furniture. At a public meeting, the local newspaper somewhat circumspectly reported, 'a feeling of

disgust' at Lewis's conduct 'was strongly manifested by those present'.

But this was not all. The Mining Warden, Strutt, supported Lewis's lease, and Strutt in turn was pilloried in the press, when his position was declared vacant and a successor sought:

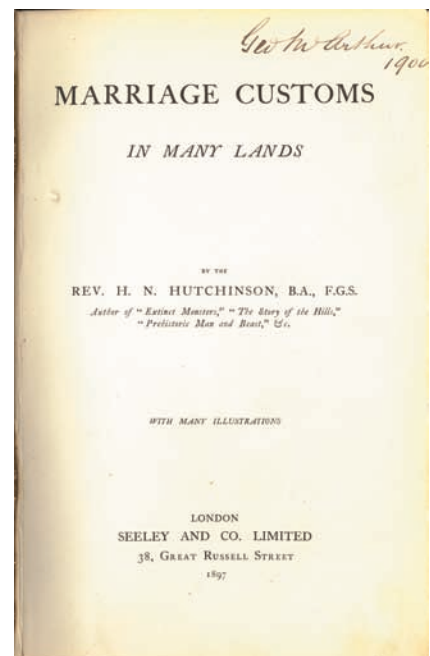
To those who this snug little billet desire,  
I'll explain the attainments the duties require.  
A knowledge of law confined to the way,  
To secure the greatest extent of delay,  
And a notion of justice contrived to insure  
Success to the rich and defeat to the poor.

John Thomas Lewis, the tyrant whom the warden supported, was my own great-grandfather. And the lesson is that it was not just economic decline which destroyed the morale of the goldfields, it was the shift in economic power — from the small man to the capitalist, from the local capitalist to the absentee investor, and from the Australian investor to the English shareholder.

In the depression of the 1890s quartz mining actually boomed at Bendigo, and to some extent in Maldon. But it was now an industry in which absentee capital, much of it British, employed local labour. Where were independent voices to come from now?

Where quartz mining was not booming it was much worse. A map of the 1890s shows many dwellings labelled 'E.B.' at Clunes. That stands for 'Egyptian brick', meaning mud brick, and it shows that makeshift dwellings and shanties were now becoming the norm. In fact mud brick was relatively luxurious. Soon it would be houses of beaten-out meat cans, and after that, hessian bags. The goldfields — or some of them — had become hillbilly country.

Maldon was hit much worse by the depression of the 1920s and 1930s than that of the 1890s. Most of the mining plant and equipment was sold for scrap or moved to other fields. Many of the houses themselves were carted away. By 1932 the population had dropped to 723.



Title page of Henry Neville Hutchinson, *Marriage Customs in Many Lands*, London, Seeley, 1897. From the George McArthur Bequest, 1903. (Special Collections, Baillieu Library)

And so the tide went out, leaving mediocrity peppered with eccentricity. Already in the 1880s Henry Handel Richardson had reported that Maldon was highly conventional — ‘not a place for any over-stepping of the moral law’. But she did notice the number of eccentrics in the town. ‘Old Tom’ (actually Thomas Calder), one of the richest men in town, noted for his deafness and profanity; another rich man (R.D. Oswald) who spoke so little that she thought he was dumb; the chemist’s wife who continued to dress in the mode

of the 1850s; the woman who lived deep in the bush and was astonished to see her first piano; the oriental-looking bank official who was never to be seen without gloves; and of course the woman who was to marry the baker but, as recounted in Ian’s essay, was forced to wait 14 years.

It is no surprise, then, that her fiancé, the subject of this exhibition, was another eccentric. It is true that what was trivia when he collected it has now become — especially in the case of the *Australiana* — rare and valuable

material. But that is due to the effluxion of time more than to the vision of the collector. What you see is a monument to the eccentricity rather than the scholarship of George McArthur, and to the scholarship (but not the eccentricity) of Ian Morrison. I feel more regret than pleasure in declaring it, notionally at least, closed.

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Miles Lewis is an architectural historian and a professor of architecture at the University of Melbourne. He first worked on Maldon as an undergraduate student, and subsequently published the book *The Essential Maldon*.

## The Baker Revisited

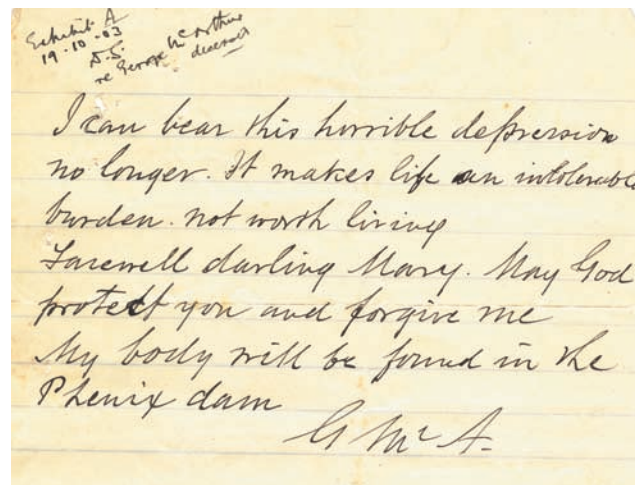
BY IAN MORRISON, Curator Special Collections

Exhibitions are designed to highlight strengths in the University of Melbourne Library’s collections — to show off our ‘treasures’, and also to suggest and encourage research projects. Many, such as *The Baker of Maldon* exhibition, are also timed to coincide with an event or anniversary: our final exhibition for 2003, *The Baker of Maldon*, commemorated the centenary of George McArthur’s bequest to the University.

McArthur remains an enigma. The facts of his life have been painstakingly documented by Mary Lugton, *George McArthur of Maldon: his life and his book collection* (M.Lib thesis, Monash University, 1989), an important study which, regrettably, remains unpublished. Despite Lugton’s efforts, McArthur’s inner life remains obscure. Most of his personal papers were destroyed in a fire some 30 years after his death. One mystery is the timing of his two great journeys, immediately before and after his marriage in 1887.

*The Baker of Maldon* exhibition was seen by a member of the Maddocks family, who are descended from wards of George and Mary McArthur. As a result, the Maddockses donated several George McArthur documents to the Library, including two manuscript poems (‘Matrimonial’ and ‘Why We Go to Church’), a contemporary copy of his will, and — eloquent in its brevity — his suicide note.

They also allowed us to view some family photographs, group portraits that include George’s fiancée Mary Burke. Intriguingly, these photographs show Mary as tall and wiry. Henry Handel Richardson’s autobiography, *Myself when Young* (1948), recounts her childhood in Maldon, with the romantic tale of ‘our baker’ who had to wait twice seven years to marry his ‘plump, sonsy’ sweetheart. George was 45 when he married,



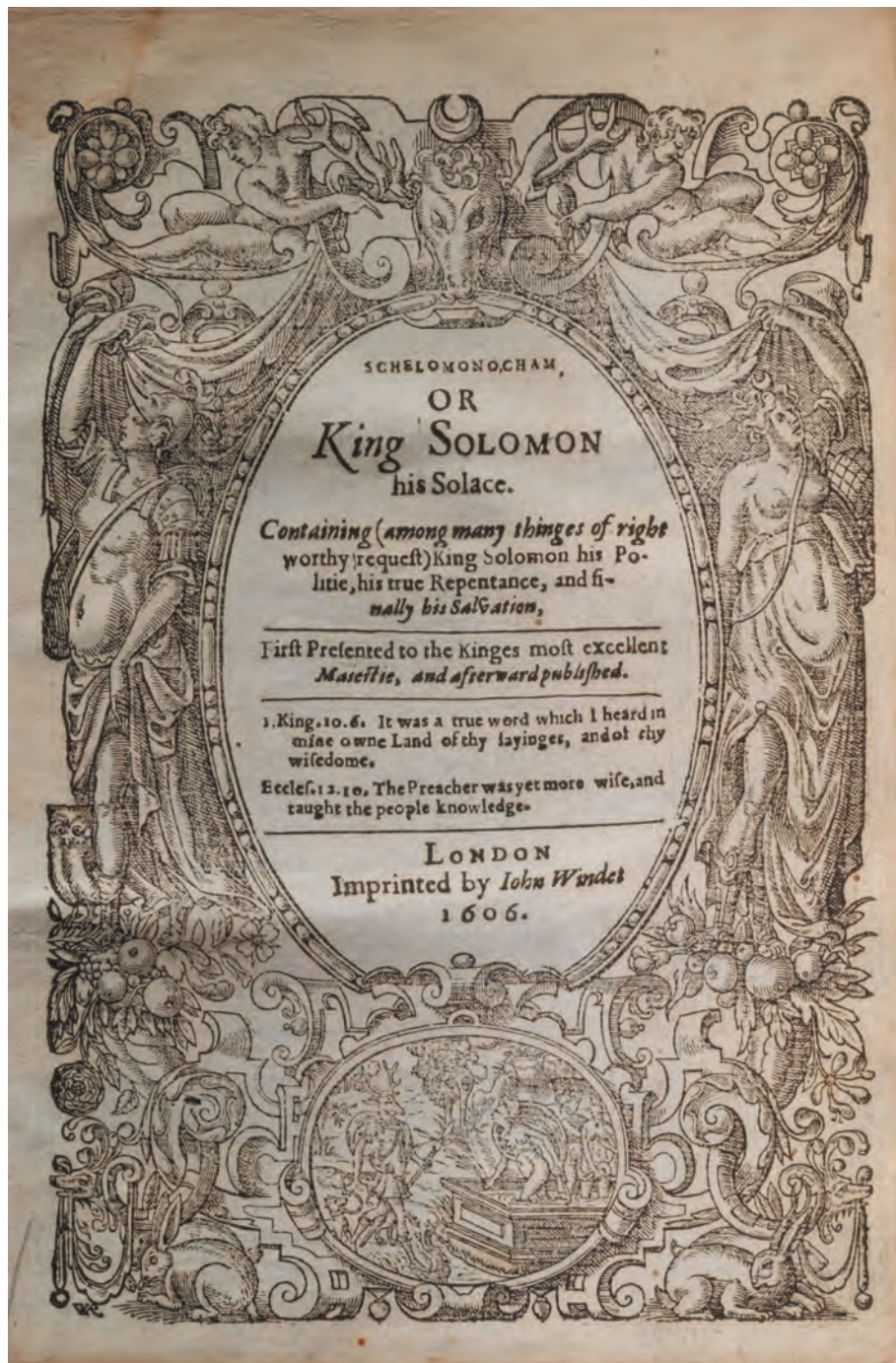
George McArthur’s suicide note, succinctly stating the reasons for his drastic action.

and it seemed reasonable to identify him with Richardson’s anonymous baker. Richardson scholars have long regarded her memoirs as unreliable, and her use of an obscure adjective like ‘sonsy’ (‘having an agreeably healthy or attractive appearance’ — OED) might be a clue that she re-shaped the baker’s sweetheart to fit her somewhat Chaucerian story.

However, if the protracted engagement happened to some other baker, George’s travels are easier to explain; it is the timing of the marriage that is thrown into question. It probably had more to do with Mary’s financial security, with George away on long and dangerous journeys, than with any need either of them felt to obtain the blessings of church and government for their union.

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Copies of the exhibition catalogue *The Baker of Maldon* can be purchased through Special Collections in the Baillieu Library. Phone 03 8344 5380; fax 03 9347 8627, email [morrison@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:morrison@unimelb.edu.au)



Title page of John Carpenter, *Schelomonocham, or, King Solomon his solace: containing (among many thinges of right worthy request) King Solomon his poliitie, his true repentance, and finally his salvation*, London, John Windet, 1606. From the George McArthur Bequest, 1903. (Special Collections, Baillieu Library)