



*The Mount*, from the north-east, c1885. 'Lizzie's corner', under the verandah, is where James Rogers buried the time capsule. Note the balustrade over the porch is of a lighter coloured and less durable sandstone, possibly local soapstone. Photo, Kerry and Jones, Photographers, Sydney, BDHS

## **THE MOUNT, Mount Pleasant Estate, Ophir Road, Bathurst. 1870 – 1879 Calvert Vaux – Henry Sadleir – George Allen Mansfield – James Rogers – David Jones**

Without the love affair that developed at Mount Pleasant in 1873 between a Scottish builder, James Rogers, and a young Englishwoman, Eliza (Lizzie) Ellen Wait, the story of who designed and built the *The Mount* may never have emerged.

When James Horne Stewart (1825–1920) inherited the huge Mount Pleasant estate from his father, General William Stewart (1769–1854), he was gripped by a vision of a grand country mansion. It was going to be more splendid than *Hathrop*, the villa that Edmund Webb had built at Gorman's Hill in 1863, and when it was finished in 1879 it outshone all the other stately villas around Bathurst, such as *Bathampton*, *Leeholme*, *Karralee* and *Logan Brae*. These homes, all built in the 1870s, are Georgian in style, embellished with Gothic touches over Mid-Victorian polychrome brickwork, and finished with broad verandahs in timber or cast iron. Later examples, such as *Moreauvia*, *Hereford*, *Woolstone* and *Blair Athol* went further



James Horne Stewart (1825–1920).  
Photo, J. Hubert Newman, Sydney. Courtesy of Christopher Morgan

and featured decorative faceted bays.

From the start *The Mount*, also mistakenly called *Stewart's Mount*, and renamed *Abercrombie House* in 1969, was destined to be something very different, unique in the Bathurst district and probably in all the colony. It was conceived as nothing less

than a baronial castle, evoking those of Stewart's homeland.

The old family home of *Mount Pleasant* passed to James Stewart with the death of his mother, Anne Sylvia, in 1869. The home was built around 1832 and renamed *Mount Pleasant* in the 1890s by descendants of George Rankin. It is a unique example of a castellated Gothick 'garrison' style residence, made entirely of bricks and built by convicts and free contractors. To obtain bricks for the internal walls of his new mansion Stewart immediately demolished about two-thirds of *Mount Pleasant*. Unfortunately, once construction on *The Mount* started in earnest, it was discovered that these old bricks were too soft to be of use, so a vast quantity of new bricks had to be ordered from Bathurst and the old bricks consigned to the outbuildings. Some of the structural timbers taken from the old home were reused as rafters and collar ties in the roof of *The Mount*.<sup>1</sup>



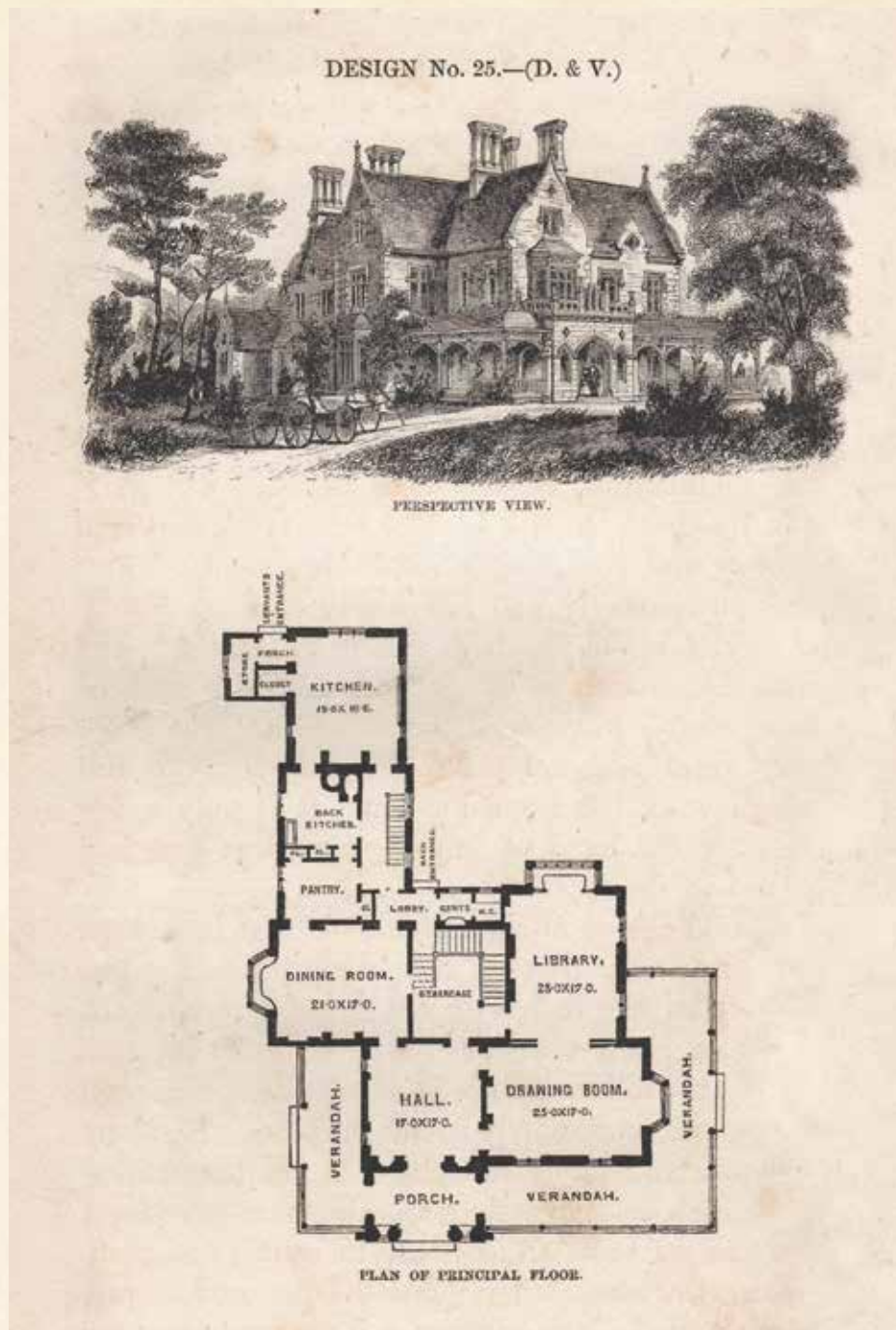
Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages*, Design 25, for a 'Villa of Brick and Stone'. p. 276. Photo, GL, from 1857 first edition

### CALVERT VAUX - *Villas and Cottages*

As to the distinctive style of *The Mount*, its origins can be found in a book first published in 1857 by an English landscape architect named Calvert Vaux (1824–95). In 1848 Vaux emigrated to America, where in partnership with Andrew Jackson Downing (1815–52) he laid out the grounds surrounding the U.S. Capitol and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington. Vaux's considerable reputation was further enhanced after planning Central Park in New York City with a later partner, Frederick Olmstead, and completing landscaping projects for Chicago, Buffalo and the State Niagara Reservation at Niagara Falls, N.Y.

His pattern book, *Villas and Cottages*, reprinted in 1864 and 1872, was highly sought after by architects all around the world. It contained invaluable design ideas, advice on construction methods, and even costings for a wide variety of Neo-Gothic homes. It concluded with a catalogue of thirty-two designs, ranging from simple outbuildings and picturesque cottages to the most elaborate villas. A 'Villa of Brick and Stone', design 25 in the 1857 edition, and 30 in 1864, is virtually identical to *The Mount*. Vaux had planned this villa for Matthew Vassar, of Poughkeepsie, NY, to be erected at his country estate called *Springside* not far from the Hudson River, but the villa was not built. We know that Stewart visited New York around the time Vaux was building Central Park and may have acquired the book for himself.

There is no doubt Vaux's design was the inspiration for Stewart, who in 1870 engaged an architect to build his Australian version.<sup>2</sup> Although Vaux made no mention of the stylistic origins of his villa for Matthew Vassar, in the context of Australian architecture it belongs to the Victorian Tudor, c1840–c1890,<sup>3</sup> a style that derived from the sixteenth century and, with its steeply pitched roofs, rugged masonry, parapeted gables, and towers



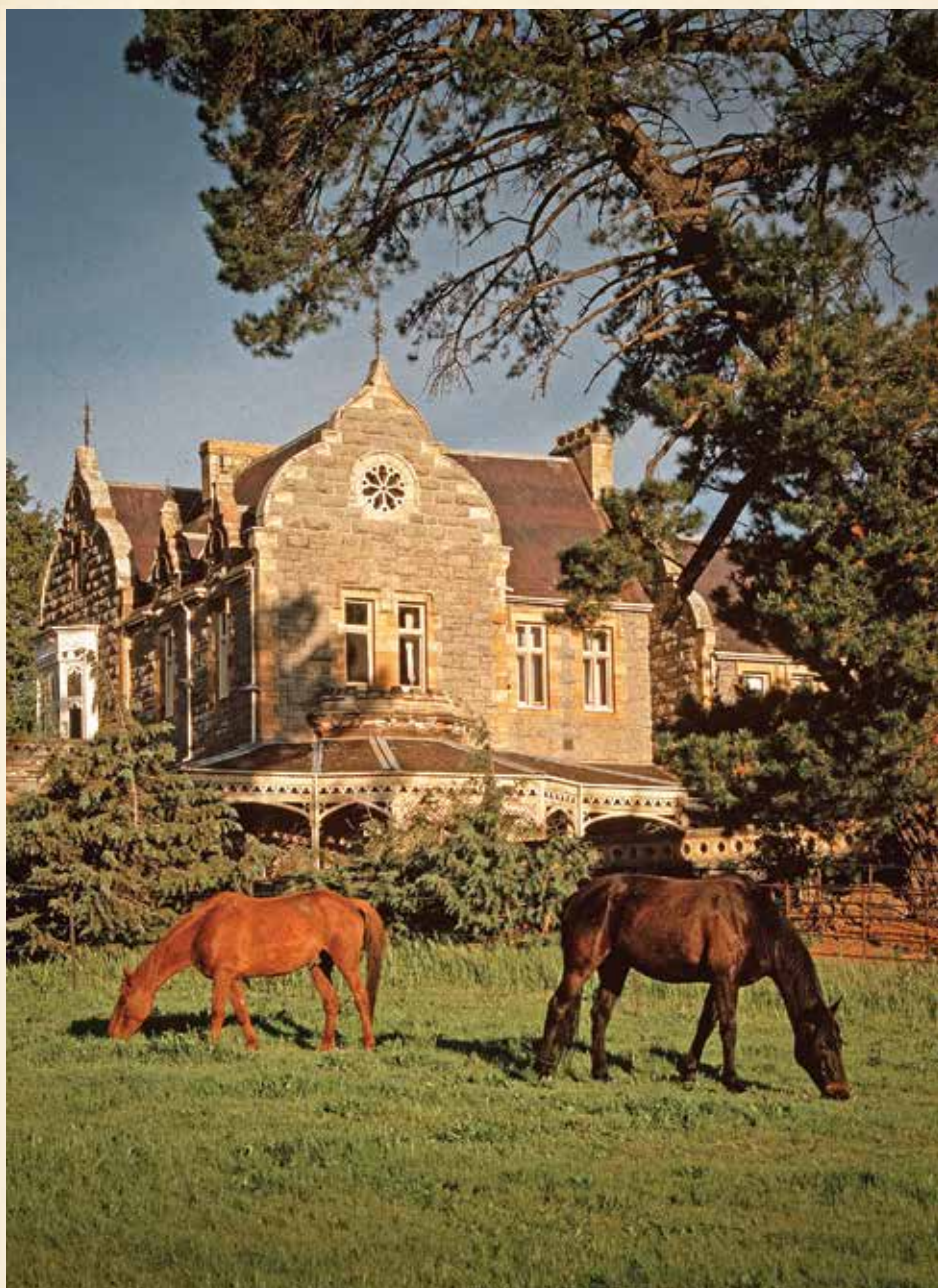
with peculiar 'candle snuffer' roofs, makes reference to the Scottish baronial idiom, which in turn reflects an earlier French influence.

Several buildings in Bathurst feature stylised parapeted gables on which a mixture of curvilinear and notched shapes can be found. For example, Bathurst Railway Station 1876, the semi-detached houses at 253–255 Russell Street, or the house at 90 Bentinck Street designed by John Copeman in 1892. Loosely called Dutch gables, the Bathurst examples, including those at *The Mount*, are called notched gables because of the small protruding angles and, unlike most Dutch gables, do not finish with a

crowning pediment. Features of both types, however, are often intermixed. In keeping with Vaux's design, a number of gablet roof vents and dormers at *The Mount* repeat the notched style of the main gables.

The asymmetrical massing of the building and its dramatic setting on the hilltop makes *The Mount* a fine example of the *romantic picturesque*, a movement which developed in the eighteenth century. The classical picturesque had its origins in the seventeenth-century Arcadian landscapes of Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorrain. For architects of the period, the idealism of a natural setting was essential to create the right





*The Mount, before restoration of the chimney stacks. Photo, GL 1987*

architectural ‘effect’ for the landowner. A superb example is the English Baroque mansion, Castle Howard (1699–1712), in Yorkshire, by architect Sir John Vanbrugh.

In England, the romantic picturesque developed as a reaction to the ‘perfection’ of Neoclassicism. Influenced by the romantic poets and novelists of the day, such as Sir Walter Scott, architects naturally turned to the Gothic for inspiration, hence the popularity of pattern books like Vaux’s. In painting this is reflected in the work of the German landscape artist Casper David Friedrich (1774–1840). It was also a movement driven by strong religious beliefs.

Brought on by sentimentality and

nostalgia, in this case for the Stewarts’ homeland of Caithness in Scotland, all the ingredients of the picturesque came together in *The Mount*. The same longing had created the old family home, *Mount Pleasant*, 1832, the remains of which nestled within sight of Stewart’s new mansion.

#### THE SITE

The site Stewart chose for *The Mount* was spectacular but difficult. To the south of *Mount Pleasant*, across the Ophir Road, was a rising hill crowned by a substantial outcrop of granite (granodiorite), the colour of which was a warm grey not readily found elsewhere in the district.<sup>4</sup> As stone was essential to Vaux’s design, the intention was to excavate the

necessary rock from there and use it for the external walls, laid as coursed random rubble. Black mortar was chosen for the tuck-pointing to emphasise the black mica speckled throughout the grey granite. The colour also serves to clearly define each block, giving the building a pronounced visual strength. The excavation of the stone was first started in 1871 by a Frenchman, Jules Nausea, who was well liked on the estate, but who did not last as he was ‘not accustomed to hard work.’ The excavations were completed around mid 1872 by a man known only as ‘Happy Jack’, who died not long after.<sup>5</sup>

This stage of the excavation took over a year to complete because of the amount of granite that had to be removed, a huge granite boulder being only the ‘tip of the iceberg.’ A sketch dating from 1858 shows this outcrop among a stand of gumtrees on the spot where the house was built. In his account of the building of *Abercrombie House*, the present owner, Christopher Morgan, describes how the granite was broken up using the ‘hammer and tap’ method perfected in the hard rock gold mining of the Bathurst district in the 1860s. The technique involved hammering a chisel into the rock and turning it between blows. A cylindrical hole up to two feet deep was thus created. When a series of such holes was packed with black powder and blasted, the rock came away in useable quantities. Some of the blocks in the external walls still carry the hammering scars.



A section of wall on the western wing showing pale coloured scars, evidence of the ‘hammer and tap’ method used to quarry the granite. Photo, GL





Of note are the restored chimney stacks, the tower with gables and 'candle-snuffer' roof, and the Hawkesbury sandstone trim contrasting with the grey granite and black tuck pointing. The low building at left was originally a glass-roofed greenhouse, destroyed in a hailstorm in the 1880s. The roof was rebuilt in 1980s. Future plans include reconstruction of the glass roof. *Photo, GL*

Despite the size of the granite boulder, during 1871 it became apparent that more stone would be needed, so an extensive basement was excavated, and beneath that a massive underground tank was dug. The demands were such that the site had become a quarry, the depth of which determined the lower level of the building. After the basic excavation was completed, the next task was to build the footings and the walls of the cellar and basement rooms. This took another year.

### JAMES WARDIE ROGERS

Much of what we know of these events comes from a statement written by James Wardie Rogers, a Scottish builder, who in July 1872 was given the contract to build the footings, and the walls of the cellars and basement. For the next year Rogers worked on building the walls with basalt which had been quarried on the plateau summit of Mount Pleasant. Basalt, of the 'bluestone' variety, was selected for its waterproofing and great strength. Its use below ground also conserved the limited supply of granite for the walls to be built above. Most of the outbuildings at Mount Pleasant, including the Coach House and Stables, are of bluestone basalt quarried on the estate. Bluestone was used extensively throughout the Bathurst

district for any below-ground walling and for general kerb and guttering.<sup>6</sup> For this stage of construction Rogers was helped by John Griffin, a labourer from NSW, and two Irishmen, William Marra, a builder, and James Scott, a stone cutter.<sup>7</sup>

To celebrate the completion of his work, on 21 August 1873 Rogers wrote a statement of events which is thought to have been buried in a time capsule under the first cornerstone of the building. This invaluable document confirms that the original architect was Henry Sadleir, and with his death on 6 December 1872, 'the general superintendence was given to G. A. Mansfield, Sydney, who made some slight alterations to Mr Sadleir's plans.'<sup>8</sup>

Rogers also relates how 'the first corner stone was laid by Miss Lizzie Ellen Wait, the governess of the Stewart children. It was laid in the north-east corner, since called by the builders "Lizzie's Corner."' Barely able to conceal his obvious affection for Lizzie, Rogers devoted the rest of the statement to her and obliged us by making a copy,

'Miss Waits, who is a native of London, England, is a young lady who, by the grace of her mind and person, her affable and friendly manner, and by her strict attention to every womanly duty, hath won the respect and esteem of all

who know her. Her moral and Christian character hath made her friends in the church (Wesleyan) which she attends, and in the Sunday School of which she is a teacher. The writer of this paper could name more than one who have been made better by a kind "word in season" from her. May she long enjoy health, happiness and prosperity; and may her friends always prove friendly.'

Eight months later on 19 April 1874, with the mansion still four years from completion, James and Lizzie were married in the Wesleyan Church in William Street, Bathurst. Invoices written in his name confirm Rogers continued to work on *The Mount* until it was completed in 1878.

### THE ARCHITECTS – Henry Sadleir and George Allen Mansfield

Thanks to Rogers we have the best indication of how the design of Stewart's mansion unfolded. Henry Sadleir set up an architectural practice in Bathurst after completing his articles in mid 1858 with the Sydney firm of John Frederick Hilly and George Allen Mansfield, (see Chapter 5). After practising successfully in Bathurst from 1858–63, during which time he completed the first section of Webb's Western Warehouse in George Street, as well as Webb's villa, *Hathrop*, at Gorman's Hill, and a large shop in Orange for the Dalton Brothers, Sadleir returned to Sydney around mid 1863 to work in the Colonial Architect's Office as a clerk of works. After a brief period as City Surveyor for Goulburn Council, he arrived back in Bathurst around May 1870, when he immediately started work on the second stage of Webb's Western Warehouse at 171–179 George Street.

At the same time Sadleir was appointed clerk of works for Thomas Rowe's St Stephen's Church in George Street. Stewart was a staunch Presbyterian and contributed a considerable amount towards the construction of the new church.<sup>9</sup> He was one of three deacons and, as a trustee, was also on the building





*The Mount*, c1885, looking east from Mount Pleasant. In the foreground are the Coach House and Stables, built from blue basalt quarried on the estate. Photo, Kerry and Jones, Photographers, Sydney, BDHS

committee with Richard Machattie, Henry Butterworth, John Busby and Charles McPhillamy.<sup>10</sup> During the early planning of St Stephen's in 1870 Stewart no doubt would have met Sadleir.

Because of Sadleir's rapidly growing reputation in the period 1870–71, with work also underway on *Bishopscourt*, *Ethelton*, *Alloway Bank*, *Oaklands* and All Saints' Parsonage, it seems likely Stewart engaged the promising architect to work on *The Mount*, starting with the huge task of preparing the site. The first thing Sadleir would have done was to survey the land and draw plans based on Vaux's villa. These are the drawings referred to by Rogers as 'Mr Sadleir's plans.' When a fatal epileptic seizure claimed Sadleir on 6 December 1872, George Allen Mansfield was brought in to take over the project.

The earliest we hear of Mansfield in Bathurst is when he opened an office on 11 December 1872, less than a week after Sadleir died.<sup>11</sup> When Mansfield took over he was too busy in Sydney and with statewide projects, including those as Architect for the Council of Education, to have based himself in Bathurst just to supervise *The Mount*. This raises the question of who became the supervising architect or clerk of works after Sadleir. With Rogers well underway constructing the cellars, and the highly respected

David Jones appointed the builder for the rest of the building in late 1873,<sup>12</sup> a clerk of works may not have been considered necessary.

Mansfield's involvement was confirmed on 1 October 1873 when he and his brother Ralph, practising as Mansfield Brothers, called tenders for a Villa Residence at Bathurst. It may seem odd that Mansfield was not involved with *The Mount* from the outset, because he and Stewart were related by marriage. In 1857 Mansfield married Mary Emma Lucy Allen in Glebe, Sydney. Her brother,

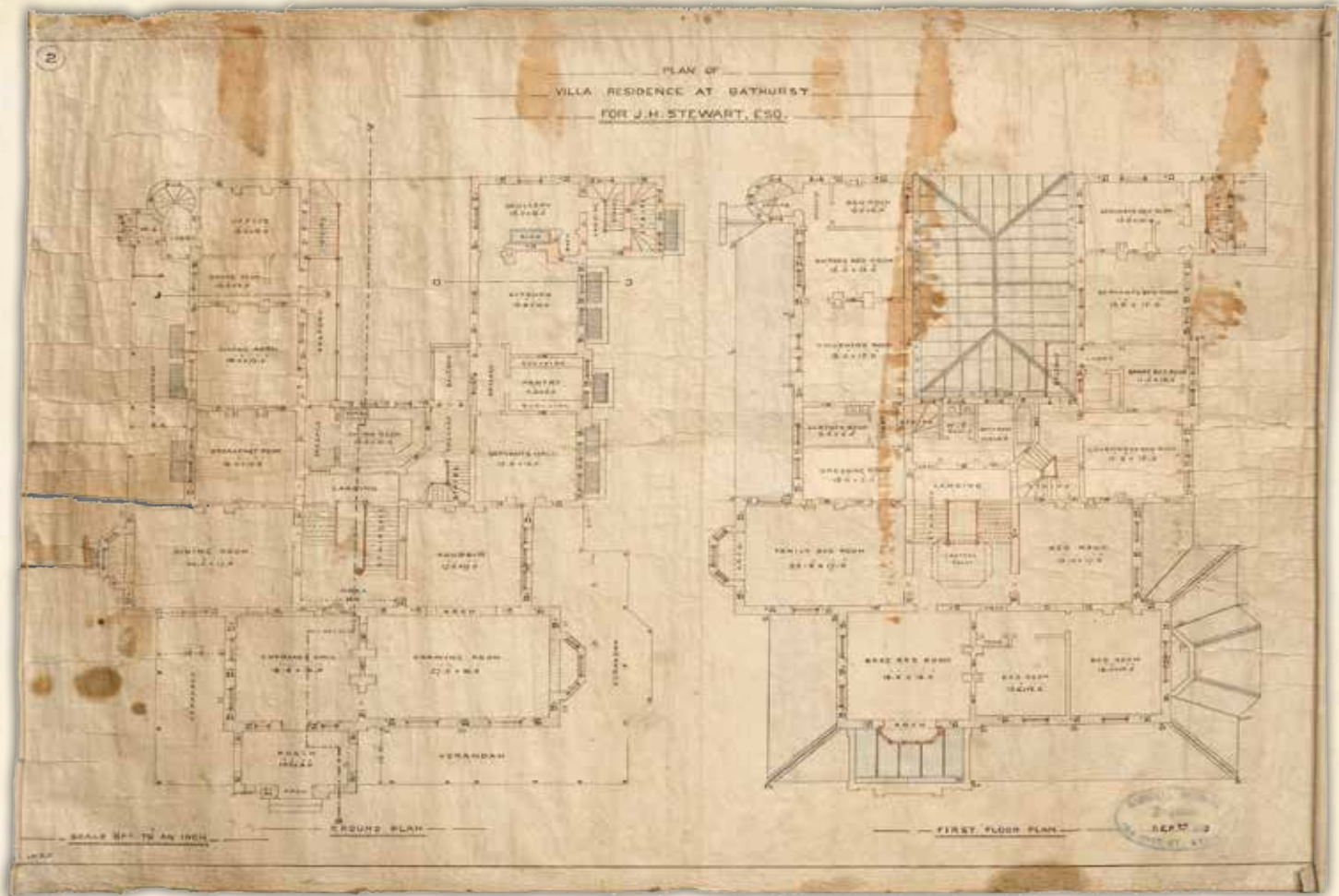
George Wigram Allen, was married to Marian Clapham Boyce, whose sister, Harriet Eliza Boyce, had married J.H. Stewart in 1855. To add further confusion, in 1861 Mary Emma Lucy died, and in 1863 Mansfield married her first cousin Mary Ann Lorne McDougall, their mothers being sisters.

Despite the family connection, no record of any early involvement by Mansfield has been found. This is confirmed by Rogers' account, 'the general superintendence was given to G. A. Mansfield, Sydney.' If Mansfield



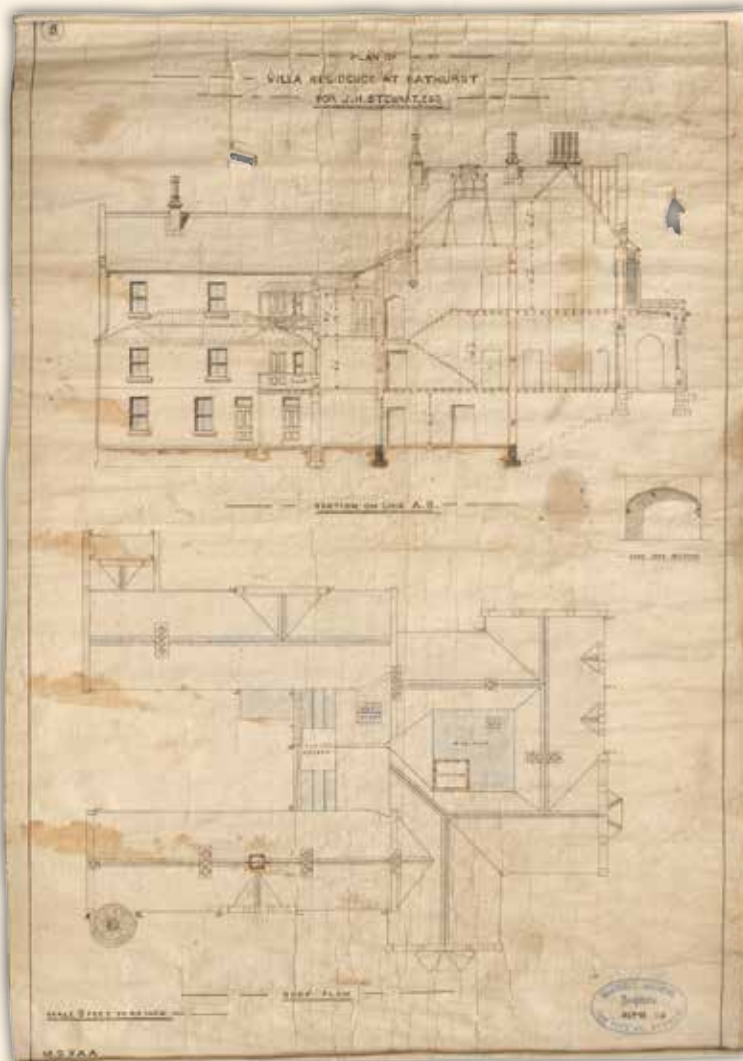
The drawing room of *The Mount*. The photo carries a note, 'The Mount, Drawing Room, Original Furniture.' Photo, c1898, BDHS





Above: Mansfield's floor plans, Sheet 2. Stamped 'Mansfield Bros,' dated September 1873. Courtesy of Christopher Morgan, Photo GL

Right: Sheet 5 of Mansfield's plans, showing a Roof Plan, and section through the Entrance Hall and stairwell and east elevation of the additional wing. September 1873. Courtesy of Christopher Morgan, Photo, GL



was the original architect, Rogers would have known and not used the word 'given', nor referred to 'Mr Sadleir's drawings.' It is possible, however, that Mansfield advised Stewart about the intended building and may well have suggested using his pupil, Henry Sadleir, who was then back in Bathurst.

### THE MANSFIELD DRAWINGS – September 1873

Regardless of Sadleir's involvement, the history of *The Mount* has been included here in the Mansfield Catalogue, because the building we know today was built from a new set of at least five sheets of drawings prepared by Mansfield Brothers in September 1873. New drawings were needed to incorporate a three-storey kitchen and servants' wing that was added on the western side of Vaux's design. This explains why, when Mansfield called tenders for the whole of the building on 1 October (SMH 1873 1 Oct), he asked for the price to include excavations for the additional wing.



Because this wing is three stories, the awkward junction with the Library on Vaux's plan, and called the Boudoir on Mansfield's plan, was handled by a large party wall visible from the outside as a parapeted gable similar to those on the main elevation. A section of the rear courtyard created by the third wing was infilled in 1890 to create a ballroom.

On 6 January 1879 Mansfield called tenders for 'Plastering a LARGE HOUSE in the country'; and in February for carpenters and joiners' work and all finishing trades 'at MOUNT PLEASANT, near BATHURST, for J.H. Stewart, Esq.' (SMH 1 Feb, BT 8 Feb). Although David Jones was the main contractor, his brother, William Ellis Jones, was a superb joiner and is thought to have completed much of the finer finishing work. Such was Stewart's hankering for the old country, some of the Australian red cedar which was used throughout most of the building was coloured and 'grained' to match English oak. This effect can be seen in the entrance hall.

In order for Mansfield to build such a faithful replica above ground, Sadleir's footings and basements must have been to Vaux's plans. *The Mount* is therefore a villa based on a design by Calvert Vaux and adapted for J.H. Stewart, first by Sadleir, then Mansfield.

After suffering serious neglect from 1927 until the 1950s, *The Mount* was restored by Professor James Stewart of Sydney University. After his death in 1962, the building again languished until 1969 when it was bought by Mr Rex Morgan and family. Since then, *The Mount*, or *Abercrombie House*, has undergone extensive and faithful restoration, a daunting programme now being carried on by Christopher and Xanthe Morgan.



Marble fireplace in the Drawing Room, which was shown as the 'Boudoir' on Mansfield's plans.  
Photo, GL





Sunset at *The Mount*. Approached from the north-west, the asymmetrical massing of the home and the dramatic setting encapsulate the Picturesque style. Photo GL

### Notes

1. For a thorough analysis of all the architectural details of *Abercrombie House*, refer to Christopher Morgan's 'A brief historical account of the building of Abercrombie House, Bathurst in the 1870s.' written 15 August 2008. *Abercrombie House* is open for guided or self-guided tours, when further information can be found on pamphlets and various plaques throughout the building and garden.
2. Sadleir would have seen the book in Mansfield and Hilly's office in the late 1850s when he was completing his articles with the firm. We know that when Sadleir moved to Bathurst he was collecting all the equipment he needed to go into practice. For example, in May 1858 he bought a theodolite and a copy of Gwilt's *Encyclopaedia of Architecture*, so Vaux's pattern book would have been useful in the relative isolation of Bathurst. Edward Gell, with whom Sadleir designed the Presbyterian School, had a copy of the 1864 edition.
3. Apperly, Irving and Reynolds, *Identifying Australian Architecture*. Angus & Robertson, 1989, p. 86
4. In 1915 when Gilbert Doble was planning the Evans Memorial in King's Parade he searched the district and selected the same granite from the Mount Pleasant Estate quarry. In 1929 Bathurst Council approved the establishment of a basalt quarry at Mt Pleasant.
5. Written statement by James Rogers, 21 August 1873.
6. In Bathurst one remaining section of bluestone guttering can be found in George Street between Keppel and Piper Streets. Orange and Millthorpe retain much of their bluestone.
7. Written statement by James Rogers, 21 August 1873.
8. The slight alterations to Sadleir's plans of the basements are thought to include replacing the servants' WCs with a stairwell constructed from a demolished timber staircase from the original house of Mt Pleasant. Ref: C. Morgan.
9. In 1908 when J.H. Stewart paid for the construction of the Presbyterian Hall in Howick Street, he also donated to the Church a section of the steel fence from The Mount, for use along the George Street frontage of the manse. This fence, part of which still exists, was made by Hill and Smith Ltd, celebrated suppliers of monumental gates to Queen Victoria. Similar gates and large sections of the fence, dating from the 1890s, can still be seen at *Abercrombie House*. See Sadleir, 1859 Presbyterian School, Chapter 5.
10. Recorded on the Illuminated manuscript in St Stephen's archives, Bathurst.
11. Mansfield, only two years older than Sadleir, was probably in Bathurst for Sadleir's funeral at Holy Trinity, Kelso. On that trip he was available for consultation at the Royal Hotel.
12. Doust, Rev. R.H. *After One Hundred Years, Centenary of Methodism in Bathurst. 1832–1932*, p 101. No newspaper accounts have been found confirming Jones as the builder of *The Mount*.