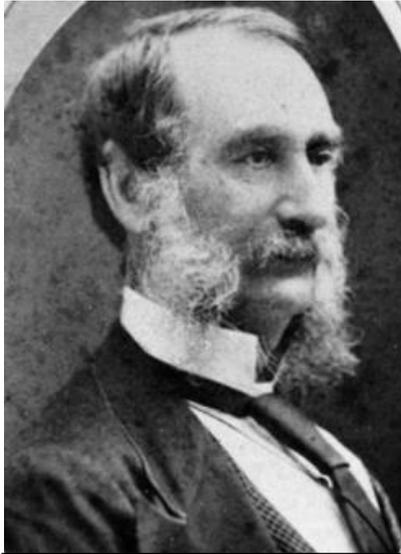


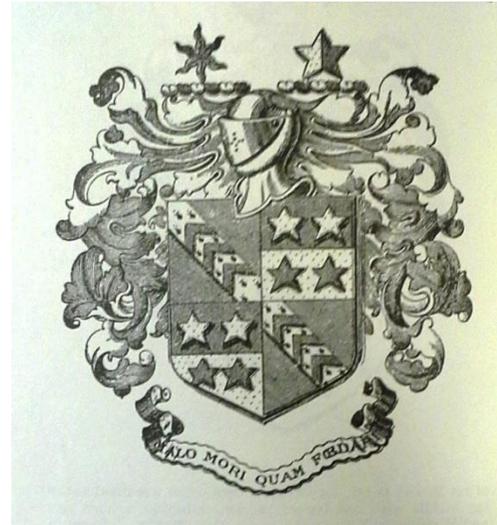
## MURRAY-PRIOR



Thomas Murray-Prior, c1865  
©State Library of Queensland,  
# 54899

Thomas Lodge Murray-Prior, pastoralist and politician, was born on 13 November 1819 at Wells, Somerset, England<sup>1</sup>. He is probably the earliest pioneer to have arrived in Australia with connections in the Mogill district and arguably the most famous individual never to have lived in the area.

He was a son of Captain Thomas Prior, who, as a Lieutenant of the 18<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Light Dragoons (Hussars) fought alongside Wellington at Waterloo<sup>2</sup>. His grandfather, also Thomas, was High Sheriff of Queens County, Ireland in 1799 and Member of the Irish



Coat of Arms of the Murray-Prior Family (see note 1)

Parliament for Lesburne and Bannow.<sup>3</sup> Thomas was educated at Brussels under Rev. William Drury (tutor to Prince Albert, who became Prince Consort of England) and in England by Dr. William Burney, the historian, founder and director of the Royal Naval College at Gosport. He served on H.M.S. *Donegal* in 1837-38 under Admiral Sir John Ommerrey, but resigned in September, 1838 having decided on a pastoral career in Australia. On 26 May 1839, he arrived in Port Jackson, New South Wales aboard the *Roxburgh Castle* as an unassisted migrant<sup>4</sup>. He had left Plymouth on 22 January and travelled via the Cape of Good Hope in the company of 307 other migrants. The Inward Passenger List record notes that the ship had to be conducted into quarantine as 'a consequence of several deaths having occurred

during the voyage'. These included ten children and five adults who had died 'chiefly of bowel complaints'. However, the Health Officer determined that there was no specific contagion involved and thus there was no need for any 'detention' of passengers.

No 153.

REPORT of a *Roxburgh* arrived in Port Jackson, this 26 Day of May 1839.

Vessel's Name.....		REMARKS.			
Tonnage.....					
Master's Name.....					
From whence.....					
When sailed.....					
Lading.....					
Passengers' Names.		Children above 12 years of age.	Children under 12 years of age.	Country.	Profession, Trade, or Calling.
Cabin.		Male.	Female.	Male.	Female.
Howard, Mr. W. Charles			Mr. Charles	Wales	Children
Dr. Charles Henry Scott					
Mr. Wm. Somers, Mr. Somers					Children
Mr. Charles B. Hill					
Thomas L. M. Prior					

The Inward Passenger List for the *Roxburgh Castle* which arrived in Port Jackson on 26 May 1839. State Records of N.S.W

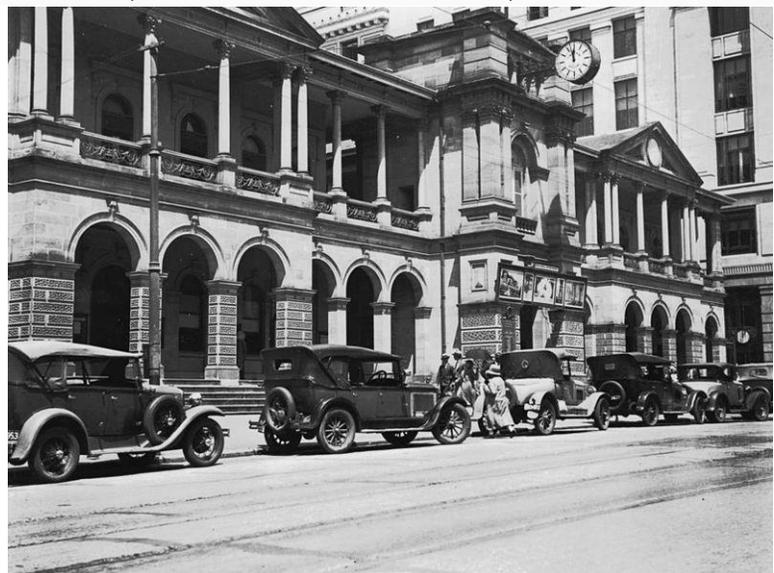
Thomas immediately became involved in the pastoral industry at Dalwood near Branxton in the Hunter Valley. Here he met the explorer Friedrich Leichardt and in June 1843, Leichardt travelled with Prior's party to Moreton Bay for protection, on account of 'the route being infested with blacks'<sup>5</sup>. Later, Thomas subscribed £2,000 to Leichardt's Port Essington expedition in the Northern Territory<sup>6</sup>. In August 1844 he leased land at Bromelton in the Scenic Rim region, one of the two first licenses issued for pastoral occupation in the Logan district, and which was considered superior to Brisbane in terms of soil fertility and navigability of the river. In 1854, he expanded his interests by buying Hawkwood in the Burnett District but met with disaster in that 8,000 of his sheep became infected with scab and had to be destroyed<sup>7,8</sup>. In 1858, worried by the massacre of the Fraser family at Hornet Bank station<sup>9</sup>, he sold out and took up a banana plantation at Ormiston near Cleveland.

His association with Moggill began in 1850 when Thomas purchased portions 17 and 18<sup>10</sup>. He expanded his holding on 17 February 1852 when he purchased 328 acres at Toocobah, the land circumscribed by the Brisbane River which later became known as Prior's Pocket. He paid the princely sum of £1 per acre although on another 12 acre block, he paid £2.10 per acre and £20.6.11 of the total purchase price (£30) came from a Remission Order allowed him as a late officer in Her Majesty's Regiment<sup>11</sup>. However, Thomas did not live at Toocobah and there is no evidence that he became involved in local organisations such as the church or school. Instead, he appears to have maintained a residence across the river at Woogaroo while he improved his imported herd of short-homed Durham cattle. These were confined at Prior's Pocket by the simple expedient of fencing across the narrow neck of the peninsula. Interestingly, he is recorded as a Freeholder living in 'Moghill' in the 1854 Electoral List for the County of Stanley<sup>12</sup>.

In November 1864, he bought Maroon station in the Fassifern district where he settled. Over the five year period between 1850 and 1855 he had acquired a total of 751 acres in Cleveland, Yerongpilly, Toombul and Moggill. He was, thus, regarded as a member of squattocracy in that he had acquired large tracts of land which were used for grazing<sup>13</sup>.

In 1861, he joined the public service as Postal Inspector for the new State of Queensland. He quickly rose up the ranks and became Postmaster-General in 1862 serving until 1874. When that office was transferred to the political arena on 10 April 1866, he was nominated to the Queensland State Legislative Council, serving through the Ministries of Robert Herbert (the first Premier of Queensland), Arthur Macalister, Sir Robert MacKenzie and Arthur Palmer<sup>14</sup>. Thomas was responsible for the erection of the General Post Office building in Queen Street, Brisbane in 1872.

The General Post Office in Queen street as it was in 1931 © Mears E.H., State Library of Queensland and John Oxley Library; #65624



Despite his rapid rise to PMG, Rachel Henning wrote in 1863: 'I suppose it does not require any great talent to be a Postmaster General. I hope not, for such a goose I have seldom seen. He talked incessantly and all his conversation consisted of pointless stories of which he himself was the hero'.<sup>15</sup>

Thomas Murray-Prior had a very large family: in 1846, he married Matilda Harpur and had 12 children between 1848 and 1866. In November 1868 Matilda died and on 18 December 1872, he married Nora Clarina Barton, aunt of the poet A B (Banjo) Paterson, and had a further eight children, making 20 in all!



Prior died at Whytecliffe, near Nundah on 31 December 1892, survived by seven of the 12 children of his first marriage and by seven of the eight children of his second. His eldest daughter, Rosa Caroline, married Arthur Campbell Mackworth Praed in 1872 and won literary fame as Rosa Campbell Praed. No members of the family are buried in Moggill Cemetery.

Whytecliffe House, Nundah ca. 1930 © State Library of Queensland and John Oxley Library; #199905

Described as a handsome man in appearance, sparsely built, and fairly tall, with dark eyes, he did not give one the idea that he was once a sailor, but more like an officer of a crack cavalry regiment. His style was autocratic, but he could unbend<sup>16</sup>. He was also described as suave, courtly and cultured, Murray-Prior collected pictures and bequeathed a small but significant group of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings to the Queensland Art Gallery<sup>17</sup>. These including Jan Brueghel the Younger's *Christ calling the disciple Peter* 1641, Bonaventura Peeters's *Haven of Refuge* c.1640 and *Still life* by Alexander Coosemans c.1650. He was noted for his strong loyalty to the British throne probably because of his claim to be descended from King Edward I through the Butler dynasty of whom James Butler, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Ormonde, led the Royalist forces in 1649-50 against Oliver Cromwell in Ireland.<sup>18</sup>

Neville Marsh

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## References

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- <sup>2</sup> Dalton, Charles. *The Waterloo Roll Call*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1904, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, pp 90-92
- <sup>3</sup> Burke, Sir Edmund *ibid*.
- <sup>4</sup> New South Wales Government. Colonial Secretary: *Reports of Vessels Arrived*, Series 1291, Volume 4/5214, reel 1266. State Records Authority of New South Wales, Kingswood, New South Wales.
- <sup>5</sup> Hannah, Isobel. *The Royal Descent of the First Post-Master General of Queensland*. Queensland Geographic Journal 1953, vol. 55, no. 41, pp. 11-17 (presented to the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (Queensland) 6 April 1953)
- <sup>6</sup> *The Moreton Bay Courier* 20 June 1846
- <sup>7</sup> Hannah, Isobel *ibid*.
- <sup>8</sup> Sheep scab is an acute or chronic form of allergic dermatitis caused by the faeces of the Sheep scab mite *Psoroptes ovis*
- <sup>9</sup> The Hornet Bank massacre of eleven Europeans, including seven members of the Fraser family, took place in October 1857 at a station on the upper Dawson River in Central Queensland. It spurred a much greater counter-massacre (led by William Fraser) in which as many as 300 Aborigines were shot in retaliation, resulting in the extermination of the entire Yeeman peoples and language group (Arthur Laurie: *Hornet Bank Massacre October 27, 1857*. The Historical Society of Queensland Journal Vol. V, no. 5, 1957, p. 1306-1315 (presented 25 July 1957).
- <sup>10</sup> Libby Wager: *Mud Maps of Moggill* published in association with the Pullenvale Field Study Centre 1988, p.48: *Prior's Pocket: Thomas Lodge Murray Prior - Pastoralist and Postmaster-General*.
- <sup>11</sup> Libby Wager *ibid*.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Moreton Bay Courier* 8 July 1854
- <sup>13</sup> Gregory, Helen. *Squatters, Speculators and - Dare I say it - Speculators*. Royal Historical Society of Queensland Society Journal Vol. XI, no. 4, 1983, pp. 74-87 (presented 23 June 1983).
- <sup>14</sup> Hannah, Isobel *ibid*
- <sup>15</sup> Gibbney, H J, Murray-Prior, Thomas Lodge (1819-1892), Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University 1974.
- <sup>16</sup> Hannah, Isobel *ibid*.
- <sup>17</sup> Gibbney, H J *ibid*.
- <sup>18</sup> Hannah, Isobel *ibid*.

**Note 1.** Coat of Arms taken from Fox-Davies, A.C. (1970) *Armorial Families. A Directory of Gentlemen of Coat-Armour*. Volume 2, pub. David and Charles, Newton Abbot, p.1412.