

## Our Stories

### Northcote Snippets – a series of historical glimpses into Northcote's past

#### Sports at Northcote – Part 1

A long letter was sent by 'Pike' to the *Australasian Newspaper* on 28 July 1866. It gives a first-hand description of the 'Amateur Sports Meet' and happenings on 21 July (1866) at the Red House Inn (later to be known as the Croxton Park Hotel). Mr Goyder operated the inn from the 1850s to 1869, and during the 1860s he tried valiantly to make it a successful sports venue. Pike's letter describes various entertainments both on the field and off. It was reported that some two to three thousand people attended that Saturday afternoon. This first part of the letter deals with Pike's altered plans and some gambling games at the Red House. Some of the unusual words used are explained at the end.

#####

*On Saturday last I had fully made up my mind to go down to Sandridge, to see the good ship Yorkshire haul off, and to speculate in my own mind whether it were better to remain in this protection-mad colony, or to return home, to find friends dead or sadly changed for it is a sad thing to go and find the old house at home altered past knowing. To be sure, the dear old folks may be there, but Time has been busy with them, and has been shaking his dredger over their heads, and making his marks with his skinny fingers in the bonny faces which we can only remember. The house, instead of being like a perfect bedlam with the noise of half-a-dozen healthy young turks, is now as quiet as a church. They have all gone forth into the world to have a tussle with fortune. Our schoolfellows and friends are nearly all either dead, or gone to some other quarter of the globe, and the few that are left have either grown too high or too low for us. It does me good to ruminate thus, for it makes me contented to remain where I am; and for such rumination there is no better place than Sandridge Pier, and no time like that at which one of Green's or Money Wigram's famous liners is taking her departure for the "tight little island." In every passenger's face you can read hopes and tears; and many a one who has kept his pecker up all along is caving in now, as he catches a glimpse of a mate, perhaps, who for years has roughed it with him in the bush or at the diggings, and who more than once has shared the last pannikin of tea and the remaining damper.*



Source: *Historic Shipping Website*

You can see that his heart wants to get out either at his mouth or eyes. He tries to look jolly, but there is a nervous twitching about the corners of the mouth which puts all jollity to flight, and he has to make a bolt of it at last, for fear of making a woman of himself. But I am getting quite melancholy, and that is not my usual style. Well, as I said at first, to Sandridge I was bound; but you know the old adage, "*Man proposes,*" &c.

< *The 'Yorkshire' sailed on 25 July to England and arrived on 22 October.*

In this case my destination was changed by a 'man proposing' that I should go to [the] Northcote races with him, and to the races we went. We got into a cab in Swanston-street, and after a little of what in cabman's language is called 'duck shoving,' we made a start. Our Jehu was a member of the "fancy," who, in his own peculiar phraseology, was 'up to trap;' so he very kindly put us up to a thing or two anent the forthcoming contest of the gladiators.

Our courser, I think, must have been the veritable "*fiery untamed steed, A Tartar of the Collingwood breed,*" who had borne upon his patient back the beautiful Miss Fanny Brown in her terrific ascent of the mountain in Spring-street. However, under the scourge of whip-cord and anathema we arrived at our destination in time to witness the second heat of the Maiden Plate. As in duty-bound I got very much excited, heard the report of a pistol, saw a streak of blue, pink, and green shoot past me, and it was all over. Somebody told me in an ecstasy of joy that somebody had won, and I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind but he was quite correct. After such a strain on the nervous system I thought that it was my duty to have slight, not I hope genteel, refreshment.

[Back to Contents](#)

Having got my weed lighted to my complete satisfaction, I strolled toward the crowd to see what was going on. I had just taken three steps when I was pulled up short by a dirty little urchin, who at first I thought was trying to feel if something which he had lost was in my pocket; but it was not quite so bad. He was only trying to force into my hand a round piece of timber about the size of a cricket ball, so that with it I might knock down two wooden cones, which were placed at a very inviting distance. "Here you are, sir; this 'ere is the newly imported game from the Sandwich Islands - 'Doodle-um buck.' I have no doubt but this was very good way of making money, but I took compassion on the little Bedouin, and didn't try, for fear of reducing him to bankruptcy. I wondered whiting myself if he was forced to file his schedule, like any other respectable man in business, how he would fill it up. Thus I suppose:  
*"Young Arab, sportsman, Melbourne. Causes of insolvency - Losses at doodle-um-buck. Assets, one ball and two pins; liabilities, one shilling. Official assignee, Old Fagin."*

Goyder's Red House Athletics  
 listed under 'Amusements' on p32 Australasian 1866. >

**Amusements.**

---

**A MATEUR ATHLETIC SPORTS MEETING.**  
**GOYDER'S RED HOUSE, NORTHCOTE.**  
**SATURDAY, JULY 21st.**

Under the patronage of the gentlemen of the late Athletic Sports Committee.  
 Judge—W. Levey, Esq.  
 Starter—W. Hammersley, Esq.

**THE MAIDEN PLATE,**  
 120 yards. To be run in heats. First prize, value £3 3s.; second prize, value £1 1s. Entrance, 2s. 6d.

**THE HANDICAP HURDLE RACE,**  
 200 yards, over ten hurdles. First prize, value £3 3s.; second prize, value £1 1s. Entrance, 2s. 6d.

**CHAMPION WALKING MATCH,**  
 Between George Moore, of Melbourne, and Wm. Paine, of Ballarat. Seven miles. For 100 sovs.

**HANDICAP FLAT RACE,**  
 650 yards, or thereabouts. First prize, value £5 5s.; second prize value £2 2s. Entrance, 5s.

Winners of prizes, can receive an order on Messrs. Kilpatrick on the Monday after the meeting. Entries to be made at Mr. Goyder's Hunt Club Hotel, Little Collins-street, on or before 9 p.m., on Wednesday the 17th inst. Handicaps to appear the following day.

On turning away from this young hopeful, I was stuck up by a couple of sucking turfites, who, in the most winning tones, begged of me just to try my hand at their little game, which consisted of knocking small coin off the top of a short wooden column with a broad clay base.

I had been a victim to this seducing game in my young days in Copenhagen - certain monetary destruction. Several other harmless little swindles were in full swing on the outskirts of the crowd. Even Aunt Sally was represented, though feebly. Poor old lady, she was sadly overlooked. She held up her face in a most inviting manner, but no one would salute her. In fact, her pipe was regularly put out. I happened to be pretty close to the proprietors when they struck their tent, and they vented their spleen in curses, both loud and deep. From a part of the conversation which I overheard I think that Mr. Goyder will not be troubled with them for some time to come.

From *Another Point of View by Pike at Goyder's Red House*, transcribed and edited by P. Michell, 2021.  
 (Part 2 of the letter will be published in our next newsletter.)

*Sandridge* – Port Melbourne

*Protection-mad colony* – Victoria separated from NSW in 1851 with ongoing hostility to NSW due to inter-colonial trade duties and tariffs imposed on imported goods.

*Dredger* – old word for container with perforated top – such as a sugar or salt shaker

*Young turk* - a young person, full of new ideas and impatient for change.

*Too high or too low* – in class or wealth.

*Money Wigram* and *Green* ran ships to Australia from UK. The 'Yorkshire' had a capacity of 110 passengers & 60 crew

*Tight little island* – England / Home      *Man proposing* – a friend?

*Duck shoving* – Australian slang 'to jockey for position'

*Jehu* – cabman. *Fancy* – some cabmen saw themselves as unique & dressed well (though some were 'rough' people).

*Up to trap / gladiators* – up to date on local gossip re sportsmen; likely specifically the main event contestants.

*Anent* - in regard to, about, concerning.

*Courser* - cabman's horse from (tough) Collingwood ie hard working and speedy

*Fanny Brown* – reference to then renowned *Life of Miss Fanny Brown: A Clergyman's Daughter* by John Alcock 1760.

*My weed* – cigar      *Turfites* - racing devotees.

[Back to Contents](#)

*Doodle-um-buck* – variation of Daddlums; two pin bowling.

*Coin on top of column game* – a variation of the coconut shy.

*Aunt Sally* - traditional pub game where people throw sticks at an old woman's head to dislodge a clay pipe.

*P. Michell*

---