

# First Year on the Thames Goldfield & other stories

Sunday, 28 July 2019

## Damned with faint praise

Two pig-headed Scotsmen arguing for nearly an hour over whether the title of the Thames Miner's Guide was correct was one of the milder reaction's to a book that caused great indignation when it was published in September 1868.

General opinion was that the book should be entirely remodeled into a more convenient size, the type changed and the many errors corrected. The guide largely consisted of extracts from Phillips 'Mining and Metallurgy of Gold and Silver' - information which should have been left out altogether; it was of **no use and little interest to the miner**.

The miscellaneous section contained pointless statistics regarding the Californian and Australian mines. The historical account of the discovery of gold in Australia and New Zealand was incomplete and superfluous. What did the Ballarat riots have to do with anything?

The population of the Thames was calculated at 18,000 – a wild over estimation. The description of claims was nowhere near complete as to number, quality or yield. Several of the well-known rich claims were not even mentioned. The maps were **inaccurate and incomplete**.

The Rules and Regulations of the goldfield should have been included; a synopsis of Warden's Court decisions would also have been helpful. How claim holders could form themselves into companies could have been included. How to peg out a claim, work a claim and forms of the various schedules required by the Goldfields Act suggested themselves as being suitable for a Miner's Guide but were **sadly lacking**. The book did not come up to what ought to have been provided for the price.

The Thames Miner's Guide and Pocket Companion was judged a **failure**.

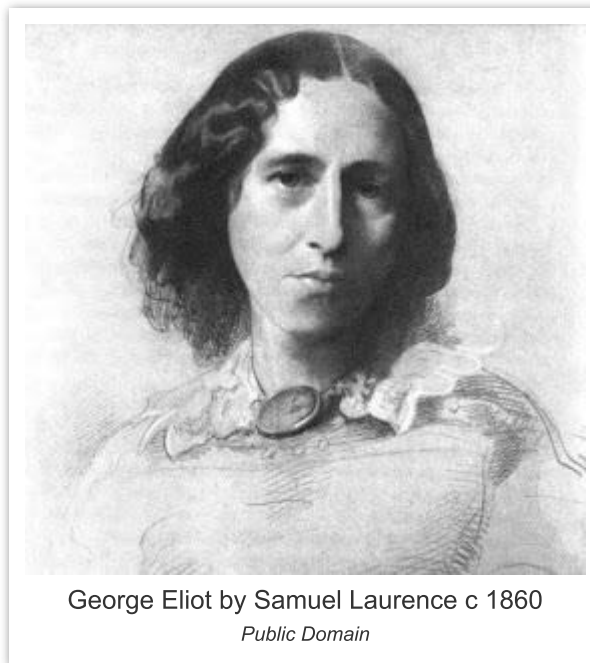
The author of this beleaguered book was **anonymous** and was to remain that way for the **next 110 years**.

In 1978 a letter written by Edward Clarke in Parnell, Auckland, to his aunt Mary Ann (or Marian) Evans in London was published. It

was dated 31 July 1868 and detailed his progress in writing the Thames Miner's Guide and Pocket Companion.

He found it hard to acquire first class literature in Auckland and his main expense was the high price he had to pay for scientific books. He needed Dr Ure's Dictionary of Science, Arts and Mining, Kaustel on Mining and Machinery used in quartz crushing mills and J A Phillips on Mining and Metallurgy – all published by E and A Spon, London. He had written to a family friend in England, Dr Kittermaster, for the books suggesting that as his aunt lived in London and was associated with publishers she may obtain them at retail price for him.

This was Edward's first attempt to write a book, an occupation most familiar to his aunt Mary Ann who was also known as **George Eliot, a popular novelist admired the world over**, but restricted by the times to write under a male nom de plume.



Edward Clarke was born in 1838 in Meriden, Warwickshire, England. His father, also Edward Clarke, was a surgeon. His mother, Christiana (nee Evans), was George Eliot's sister.

Edward's **childhood was marred** by the family's fluctuating finances, sibling deaths and parental ill health. Edward's father, although a surgeon, went bankrupt in 1845 not long after the sixth of his nine children was born. He died suddenly in 1852 leaving Christiana barely solvent and alone with five surviving children.

Isaac Evan's, brother of Christiana and George Eliot, allowed Christiana to live in a house, once her own, which he had inherited, but did little to provide for her children. The family lived in **miserable austerity** overseen by their parsimonious uncle.

In 1853 there was talk of an orphanage and there were plans to send 15 year old Edward to Adelaide, Australia. Mrs Whichcote, a patient of his late father's, offered to place him under suitable protection there.

George Eliot strongly recommended Christiana accept the offer and went as far as to buy a book on the colony to encourage the decision. George Eliot also contemplated taking them **all to Australia** to settle them and then return but this plan never eventuated.

A year later, in 1854, Edward, 16, and his brother Robert, 15, had prospects of satisfactory situations in Birmingham and Leicester but disaster struck the family again in 1855 when Robert, who had been rather a handful was sent to sea and drowned aged 16.

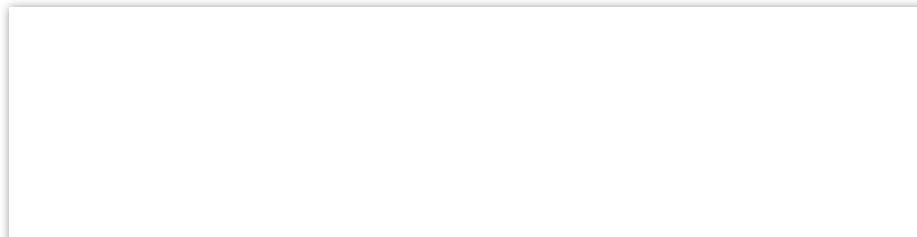
The use of the pen name George Eliot was not only a way to avoid stereotyping Marian Evans' writing; it was also a cover for her private life. George Eliot was living with the married George Henry Lewes and **outraged society** had shunned her.

In 1857 when George Eliot finally confessed the situation to her brother Isaac he immediately disowned her and induced their sister Christiana do the same. Edward's already precarious formative years were now overshadowed by a **sense of shame** and family fallout.

In 1859, when Edward was 20 he was causing his mother considerable anxiety. Christiana, who had been almost perpetually pregnant bearing nine children, was exhausted and underfed. She contracted TB and died in March 1859. The pages of George Eliot's journal were left blank following the news of her sister's death.

One month later in April the now orphaned Edward finished his apprenticeship, which was likely along clerical lines.

In another blow, his sister Catherine died in 1860 aged 13, leaving **just three survivors** of a family of 12 - Edward, Christopher and Emily.





Said to be Christiana Evans, mother of Edward Clarke, sister of George Eliot

*Unknown Artist.*

*Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery*

In 1861 Edward, aged 23 left England for Australia. He endured many hardships and was unsuccessful in his endeavours, which are not clear, but they were possibly connected with the gold rushes which had begun 10 years earlier.

Three years later, in November 1864, he arrived in New Zealand, aged 26. The Auckland economy was seriously depressed following the government's removal to Wellington in 1865, and the departure of the British troops.

Edward began working for the *New Zealander* newspaper as a shorthand reporter. The *New Zealander* was first published in 1845 focusing on the interests of settlers and with an emphatic inclination towards Maori. By 1859 it was New Zealand's leading newspaper, becoming a daily in 1863.

The *New Zealander's* pro-Maori stance suited Edward who was also sympathetic to their plight. He found them superior to the lower class of Europeans, considering them a warm, honest and frank people when justly dealt with who had been treated disgracefully by

the NZ government.

By 1864, the year Edward Clarke joined the *New Zealander* the paper was losing influence and support. Its correspondents were mostly amateur, reporting rumour as fact and regurgitating stories from competitors the *NZ Herald* and the *Daily Southern Cross*. **Staff were poorly paid** and sometimes not at all.

Despite these seemingly hopeless employment prospects, in February 1865 Edward Clarke married Ellen Nicholls at the Otahuhu Church of England.

Ellen was the daughter of William Nicholls, a Cornish man Edward admired as a worthy settler, well positioned in society who owned substantial property.

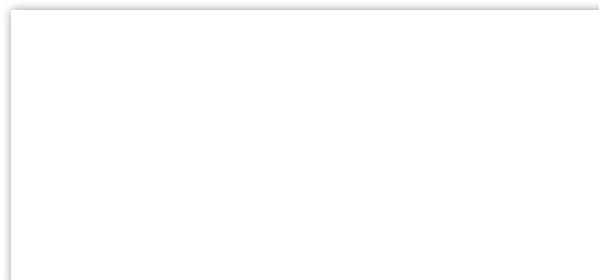
Ellen made Edward a good wife, although she was very high spirited and had a quick temper. She was a first rate housekeeper and they were both very comfortable. He also described her as a **'great screw'** which presumably had a different meaning in that era.

Edward loathed 'lower society' and was happiest when tucked away in the sanctuary of his study or a library. He was friends with Mrs Octavia Rumsey a well traveled linguist, wife of the famous architect Edward Rumsey.

Edward Clarke took great pleasure in receiving letters from family in England which he longed to visit again. He hardly ever read a novel, but he had read most of George Eliot's.

By 1865 the *New Zealander* had toned down its unpopular sympathetic approach to Maori but it couldn't keep up daily publication and reverted to bi-weekly. In May 1866 the office burnt down and the *New Zealander* was no more. **An inquiry suggested arson.**

Edward worked a short engagement, possibly as a tutor to Octavia Rumsey's three sons before starting work for the *Daily Southern Cross* as a shorthand reporter and temporary subeditor. The *Cross* was struggling financially and making a loss. The rival *NZ Herald* was rapidly increasing its circulation and securing advertising.





Thames goldfield 1867  
*Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 4-856*

In 1867 **gold was discovered** at Thames resulting in a major rush to the area. On the back of this the Auckland economy finally began to improve.

Newspaper reporters eagerly awaited the return to Auckland of steamers from Thames. A flagpole at Mt Victoria ran up a signal whenever a vessel was sighted. Reporters raced to the wharf and hired boatmen to row them out to the incoming steamers to be the **first to get the news**. When the ship was reached parcels of papers and notes were tossed over and caught then rowed back to shore and into print.

Edward Clarke was swept up in the Thames frenzy, buying a share in one claim for £40 the value of which jumped to £600; in another he made £90. He eyed up other claims which yielded an average 8 ozs to the ton of quartz.

In the space of one short year Thames had transformed from swamp and wild peach groves into a large flourishing town. Quartz rose in stacks everywhere waiting for machinery to crush and free the gold from it.

Whenever Edward approached Thames by steamer the gold bearing ranges looked to him like an **enormous rabbit warren**. The men going in and out of the tunnels reminded him of his youth when he used to watch the rabbits in Packington Park in Warwickshire, England.

In June 1868 the *Daily Southern Cross* announced that arrangements were being made for the publication of a 'pamphlet' entitled The Thames Miner's Guide and Pocket Companion, written expressly for the inexperienced miner and others interested in mining operations. A guide such as this was very much wanted at the diggings.



The *Cross* stated it would receive the names of subscribers but if 200 applications were not forthcoming previous to 29th July the author would not consider it worth his while to incur the expense of publication, as he did not wish the price of a single copy to exceed 5 shillings.

Edward spent many **sleepless nights studying** scientific books and papers. He called on the help of Captain Hutton, the government geologist, and Dr Robert Maunsell, a noted missionary and Maori scholar. Now 30, Edward's hair began to turn grey, brought on he thought by the hard study and anxiety caused by writing the guide.

He was optimistic though as large numbers of orders had come in and he was confident it would be a financial success. Captain Hutton was to revise his work before it went to press. Mr Wayte, the only publisher in Auckland, was bringing out the book which was to be bound in cloth.

Edward even planned another, larger edition which would include undeveloped newly opened goldfields.

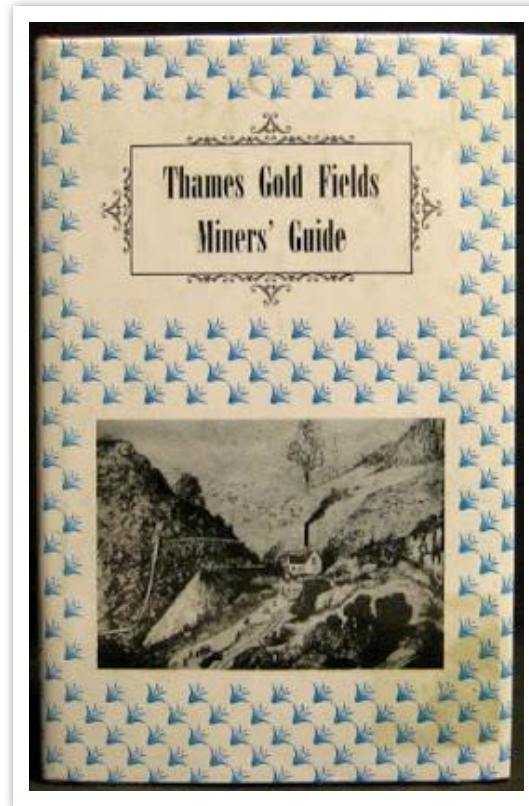
He also had a series of articles to write regarding the 'Great Question of Education in NZ' which he felt was inadequate, the poor having no means of educating their children.

Edward Clarke's time was fully occupied, he spent full days working on the guide and also preparing articles for the *Cross*. His marriage, though childless, seemed settled although Ellen's health fluctuated.

Letters from home had dried up despite Edward's repeated entreaties for news. His brother Christopher had arrived in Australia shortly after Edward left there for New Zealand but there had been no contact between the brothers. Edward had written to his sister Emily faithfully every month and invited her to **come out to New Zealand**, even offering to pay £50 towards costs. He disliked the thought of her being dependent upon anyone when he had the means to provide for her.

Despite his employment at floundering newspapers Edward seemed financially secure - perhaps his gold speculation boosted the coffers. News had reached him that Emily didn't want to come to New Zealand. She was very bright and reluctant to leave her books, regarding the **far flung colony** as lacking in intellectual society.

By the end of July 1868 Edward was tired. He wrote the leading article for the *Cross* to coincide with the first anniversary of the opening of the Thames goldfields. It was a lengthy piece published on 1 August 1868, trumpeting the success of the goldfield - "It does not seem an exaggeration to say that it is the most singular and richest goldfield in the world – the ground is but scratched – the field only begun to be opened. The prospect, therefore, is one of extraordinary and **bewildering brilliancy**."



The Thames Miner's Guide and Pocket Companion was published in September 1868. E Wayte, publisher of Auckland and Shortland, announced copies would be available to subscribers from September 22.

Three days later a scathing review of the guide was published, astonishingly by author's employers, the *Daily Southern Cross*.

In fairness to Edward Clarke, he was well aware of the guide's shortcomings and said as much in the preface asking readers to "**excuse the numerous errors** which the first edition of a work of this kind must almost necessarily contain." Concealing himself behind the umbrella term of "the authors" he admits much information was condensed from *The Mining and Metallurgy of Gold and Silver* by J. A. Phillips. He regretted that the description of claims was not more comprehensive, that some of the best claims had been accidentally omitted and that the historical portion was not more complete. Authentic information on the subject had been difficult to get. It was hoped future editions would rectify these errors.



The Miner's Guide did have its supporters – a letter to the *Daily Southern Cross* headed 'The Poor Miner's Guide' from 'A Reader' stated it had "been roughly handled and really the authors, proprietors or compilers are sincerely to be **pitied for the amount of abuse** they are receiving from reviewers and other critics. The work is clearly a maiden production and although it is far from being what it was expected to be, it might have been worse, very much worse."

The author remained anonymous.

The tepid reception of the Miner's Guide must have been a blow to the self-esteem of Edward Clarke, particularly with his employers at the *Daily Southern Cross* disingenuously distancing themselves from him. That his aunt was a famous author and he had failed in this area would have stung.

He also lost money in the endeavour - he wanted the price to be 5 shillings but it blew out to over 10 shillings.

There is an interesting possibility that Edward Clarke wrote the unfavourable review himself, well aware of its shortcomings and trying to short circuit the anticipated backlash.

He evidently continued working for the *Cross* in the months after the Miner's Guide fallout as articles on education in New Zealand were published through to 1896.

A late review of the Thames Miner's Guide printed in the *Lyttleton Times* in April 1869 may have been a salve of sorts. It said the work "contains a great deal of valuable information on the subject of gold mining generally with, of course, special reference to the Thames quartz reefs. The maps alone are worth more than the price charged for the book."

Edward re-surfaced at Hamilton, Waikato, in 1871 as a rate collector for the Highway Boards Agency. Highway Boards were an early form of local government which collected revenue to develop roading across the country. They had limited powers, few staff, restricted funds for improvement and the areas under their control were frustratingly of differing sizes with inconsistent boundaries.

Edward oversaw rate and debt collections, and organised tradesmen's accounts. He attended court hearings to chase up debts. One of his annual tasks was to prepare an assessment list of owners and property.

By 1873 Edward Clarke was the secretary of the Hamilton Institute (library). Eighteen seventy three was also the year his wife Ellen ominously fell ill again with consumption.

Edward remained with the Hamilton East and West Town Boards until a **sudden dramatic development** in early June 1874. Advertisements announced his appointment as collector to the Board was cancelled. He was accused of neglecting to perform his

duties in gathering rates. Receipts that Edward had issued were to be collected to ascertain any deficiency in his accounts.

With a sickly wife, an undoubtedly struggling marriage, the **shadow of the wretched Thames Miner's Guide** and now a job loss shrouded in shame Edward appears to have left New Zealand.

News of Edward's disgrace reached England and in June 1875 George Eliot, writing to Edward's sister Emily refers to him as "**the unfortunate Brother**" and mentions how painfully distressed family friends would be to hear of his "trouble." Silence, she advised, was probably for the best.

For a family leery of public scandal, ostracising Edward was their default course of action.

Edward's wife Ellen died of consumption at the age of 32, on 19 September 1875 at her father's home in Mangere, Auckland. Edward Clarke does not seem to have been involved in funeral preparations or even present in New Zealand, although death registration details state she was the wife of Edward Clarke, rate collector.

Edward may have gone to America but by the end of 1877 he was visiting his sister at Brighton, England. He hoped to be invited to his Uncle Isaac's for Christmas, but the distant and miserly Uncle Isaac of his childhood sent a **frigid response** – he did not want to see Edward, it would be too distressing. Edward could communicate by letter only.

There is no trace of Edward Clarke after 1877. Uncle Issac's letter says he is glad Edward is "**doing well in America**" and after Issac's rebuff Edward may well have returned there.

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George Eliot died on 22 December 1880. She left Edward's sister Emily £5,000 in her Will but Edward was not mentioned.

Edward's brother Christopher Charles died in June 1913 at Penrith, NSW, Australia, aged 68. He had managed a tweed mill at Regentville for about five years, and was a leading member of the Penrith Dramatic Club. He was active in fundraising and remembered as an above average actor. Later he was employed for 12 years as a railway clerk at Penrith. He left a wife and a son, who was manager of the Penrith NSW Savings Bank. His small obituary remarked "The authoress, George Eliot, was the late Mr Clarke's aunt."

Edward's sister Emily Susannah died in July 1924, aged 80, at Thanet, Kent, England. She was unmarried.

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The belligerent Scotsmen were pointlessly arguing over whether the title should be “miner’s” in the possessive singular or “miners” in the possessive plural.

George Eliot was variously known as Marian, Mary Anne and Mary Ann.

The true population of the Thames by the end of its first year has long been a point of contention. The number of between 18,000 and 20,000 repeated in various writings is patently incorrect and has been erroneously used ever since, having originated from Edward Clarke's over estimation originally published in the Thames Miner's Guide.

In letter to his Aunt Mary Ann he again perpetuates the myth by writing "There are more than 20,000 miners at the Thames alone."

The *Daily Southern Cross*, sub-edited by Edward Clarke, also repeated this fallacy.

According to the statistics collected by Daniel Joseph O’Keefe, auctioneer and mining agent, by August 1868 "the goldfields population amounts to about 12,000, the greater proportion being able bodied men, engaged in mining and other pursuits."

There is a great analysis of the Thames population here - <https://timespanner.blogspot.com/2011/01/counting-heads-in-auckland-and-thames.html>

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## SOURCES

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First Year on the Thames Goldfield - <http://www.firstyearthamesgoldfield.co.nz/>

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at July 28, 2019

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