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**‘The premier bird painter of the colonies’¹:
*the early career of Neville Henry Cayley
in Victoria*^{*}**



Photographic studio portrait of Neville Henry Cayley (1854–1903). Undated. c. 1888. 13.9 x 9.7 cm. Possibly prepared by William Aldenhoven for use in relation to the Centennial International Exhibition in Melbourne. Author's Collection.

^{*} I dedicate this article to my son Paris Primevère Honoré Athenian Cabouret.

Introduction

NEVILLE HENRY CAYLEY was almost certainly the first person to emigrate to Victoria who was to successfully develop his career as a Natural History artist specialising almost exclusively in birds.

Cayley was born in Norwich in East Anglia on 29 May 1854 as Neville Henry Penniston Caley. In Australia he reinvented his identity as Neville Henry Penniston Edward Stillingfleet Cayley. He died in Sydney on 7 May 1903 and traditionally has been considered to be a New South Welshman. His journey to Australia, however, brought him along with his 21 year old brother William to Melbourne in 1877 and, despite his stated intention otherwise, he never left his adoptive country. New South Wales may claim him but his career began in Victoria.

There remains today an obvious dislocation between the appreciation shown for his enormous talent as an artist and the lack of a detailed biographical study.² His reputation has been compromised by biographical speculation as well as through the prevalence of the work of various plagiarists, in particular that of Frederick Thomas ‘Tom’ Flower, and together these have contributed to him approaching the brink of extinction as a notable artist. His genius, however, recognised by his contemporaries but subsequently overlooked as the public’s taste for Natural History and sporting subjects waned, has in the last two decades witnessed a resurgence in public interest. Having turned a full circle, his work now realises unprecedented prices.

The inescapable conclusion is that Neville Cayley played a uniquely important and conspicuous role in nineteenth-century Australian ornithology and art. He created and delivered to the Australian people a large number of original designs that generated an enduring interest in our birds. In a relatively short life, the second half of which was spent in Australia, he became the pre-eminent resident ornithological draughtsman, and accomplished more than any other single artist, arguably more than ‘the Bird Man’ John Gould, the nominated father of Australian ornithology, to familiarise and enhance an appreciation for our own avifauna. Rather than joining other giants in the pantheon of early Australian naturalists he was buried in what remains an unmarked grave in the Waverley Cemetery in Sydney.

His son, also Neville Cayley, continued this role, particularly through his writing and illustrating *What Bird is That? A guide to the birds of Australia* first published in 1931 and continuously in print ever since. He also became the first Australian artist to be elected as a Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales.

Whilst conspicuous as a resident artist in New South Wales, Neville Henry Cayley’s earlier association with Victoria between 1877 and 1880 was to exert a profound influence on his subsequent career as an animal painter. *Fortuna* did not, however, reveal herself to him in Victoria and after several court hearings over unpaid debts for goods and lodgings, he left the colony and made his way to Sydney on 13 December 1880. His return,

however, was on an heroic scale. In August 1888 he exhibited along with a collection of watercolour drawings of butterflies most likely commissioned by Dr James C. Cox of Sydney and pen and ink studies which had been reproduced in *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, seventy seven watercolour drawings of birds and another called ‘Tiger’ at the Centennial International Exhibition in Melbourne through Diedrich Wilhelm Edvard Aldenhoven, his sole agent and the proprietor of Aldenhoven’s Art Gallery at 74 Hunter Street, Sydney. In May 1894, Aldenhoven exhibited a remarkable one hundred and thirty paintings of birds at the Federal Coffee Palace in Collins Street along with hand-coloured lithographs and hand-coloured photographs which reproduced Neville Cayley’s paintings in the manner intended to illustrate their forthcoming but unrealised publication, *Australian Birds*.³ It was only at this exhibition that it became public knowledge that:

The artist, who we are informed commenced his studies in Gippsland, possesses an innate talent for the portraiture of birds, whether in motion or repose, alive or dead; delineating their plumage with singular fidelity and conscientious care, while proving himself at the same time a skilful colourist. . .⁴

This article focuses on some aspects of Cayley’s early career in Victoria. During this time he was based mainly in Gippsland with a short period in Hamilton before removing to Sydney in December 1880.

Arrival in Victoria

As the eldest son, Neville Henry Caley would have anticipated continuing his father’s highly successful and lucrative business as a silk mercer, haberdasher, laceman and general draper in Norwich. All of this, however, suddenly came to an end when, aged only twelve years and eight months, his father, Nathaniel Henry Caley (1824–1867), unexpectedly died. The young Neville was educated as a boarder at the Palace School at Enfield until he was fifteen years old. He subsequently worked as an assistant draper in 1871 to John Smith in nearby Ipswich in Suffolk. It has been stated⁵ that he entered into training as a naval draughtsman but this is only conjecture and no evidence has been located to support this claim.

The unqualified 23 year old Neville Caley and his brother William Herbert, arrived in Melbourne aboard the iron clipper, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, on 20 September 1877 and together they were described as having ‘no occupation’.⁶ The two were joined on 12 May 1880 by their younger brothers, Ernest Hugh and Arthur Pelham, aged 21 and 19 years respectively. They did not stay long. Arthur left after only one month and returned to London⁷ while Ernest remained for five months before returning to London in October 1880.⁸

Documentation pertaining to the departure from England and arrival in Australia of all four brothers identified them under their correct surname of ‘Caley’. On 24 October 1877, only 34 days after their arrival, Neville and William were identified as the ‘Caley



Cayley & Co., 21, 23 and 25 (formerly 15, 16, and 17) London Street, Norwich, Norfolk. Undated photograph, c. 1875–1900. Image courtesy of Norfolk Museum Service, (Museums of Norwich) (Bridewell Museum Collection).

Brothers' when they were invited to communicate with their shipping agents, Holmes, White and Co.⁹ In all probability they had mislaid some of their luggage. Within one month of his arrival, Arthur also wished to be known by the surname 'Cayley'.

The immediate change of surname by all four brothers suggests the assumption of a new identity was a shared incentive or benefit in coming to Australia. It is likely that the crucible for this initiative arose out of the family feud which evolved following the death of their father and the vexed settlement of his substantial estate. The degree to which Neville, his siblings and their mother, Emily, were disadvantaged resulted in not only considerable dehiscence within the family¹⁰ but also probably acted as a powerful incentive behind his decision to emigrate to Australia.

The first known reference to Neville Cayley, having already changed his surname to Cayley as well as being recognised as an artist appeared in the form of an advertisement placed in the *Argus* in Melbourne on 5 April 1879:

CAYLEY, Mr. NEVILLE, artist,—please communicate with L. Hyman, Swanston-street, artists' colourman. Important.



Neville Henry Cayley. Untitled watercolour of a Cobb & Co coach drawn by four greys along a corduroy track through heavily forested Gippsland landscape in the vicinity of Buln Buln or Warragul. S.L.R. N. Cayley. Undated. c. 1878. Mitchell Library, the State Library of New South Wales, SV*/Cobb/3.

All watercolour drawings hereafter are by Neville Henry Cayley.

Paintings of Warragul

Whatever may have been the many attractions and conveniences, opportunities and adventures that ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ offered, Neville and William Cayley do not appear to have been desirous of living there for long and within twelve months set forth to discover and temporarily settle in Gippsland. They chose the Shire of Buln Buln (the Aboriginal name for the Superb Lyrebird) and variously resided in the neighbouring and nascent hamlets of Warragul, Drouin and Brandy Creek; the latter situated on the old coaching route between Melbourne, Walhalla and the port settlement of Sale to the east. William returned to Melbourne after their Gippsland sojourn and seven years later married Maude Mary Tyler in 1887. He worked in a clerical capacity throughout his career and outlived his brother, dying at the age of 67 years on 17 August 1923.

Long after Neville left the district, his memory was held favourably. Identical obituary notices that appeared in the *West Gippsland Gazette* on 2 June 1903¹² and the *Gippsland Independent* on 4 June 1903¹³ stated:

Old identities of this district will regret to hear of the recent death in Sydney of Neville Cayley, an artist, famous amongst ornithologists for his paintings of Australian birds. He never painted anything but birds . . . for many years [he] lived in Drouin where he was well known by Mr. C. H. Round and many other old identities of this district . . .

It is likely that in Warragul he not only associated with but also probably was employed by Charles Henry Round, an early pioneer as well as amateur artist and



Johan Friedrich [Fred] Carl Kruger (1831-1888), 'Township of Buln Buln, Brandy Creek, Gippsland, 1877'. Albumen sliver photograph, 14.0 x 21.0cm. State Library of Victoria [H.35016. Incorrectly catalogued as c.1880-1881].

local insurance agent for the district.¹⁴ A collection of pencil drawings, somewhat childlike and naïve, by Charles Round, now in the possession of the Warragul & District Historical Society, depict the dwellings of many local residents as well as some commercial enterprises in the district. It is not known whether these were intended for his professional use or were simply an expression of his interest in the infant settlement. It is likely, however, that he became a significant influence in Neville Cayley's early career in Australia and may have offered him some artistic instruction. It is also possible that Cayley obtained his earliest instruction in watercolour drawing from Mrs Margarethe von Reiche who with her husband, Carl Christian Gerhard von Reiche, lived at Brandy Creek and who on 16 May 1879 made it known that she 'will give instructions in pencil and water color drawing . . . Terms . . . £1 1s. per quarter'.¹⁵

If Neville Cayley had undergone any training as a draughtsman then he might have availed himself of instruction from his paternal uncle, Murkin Lawrence Caley (1834-1883), a builder, surveyor and architect living in turn in the counties of Middlesex and Kent. As such, he would have been an invaluable assistant to Charles Round in the depiction of the various selections and their 'improvements' to be insured. As described below, in the earliest of his six known depictions of the township of Warragul, he signed his name '*Neville Cayley D. A. (pinxit)*' which, in all probability and without any substantiated reference to a qualification in fine art, referred to his functioning as a District Agent in the regional insurance operations of Charles Round.



Walter Scott-Barry (attributed), Photograph of Queen Street, Warragul, Victoria, c. Sept–Oct, 1880. The Warragul & District Historical Society, Warragul, Victoria.

In addition to his six known topographical paintings of Warragul, Cayley also did a retrospective watercolour study of James Biram’s general store, pharmacy and residence situated in the forest on the track to Brandy Creek on what was to become Queen Street in Warragul and which was located immediately behind the site of the future railway station. Considering the minute details of signage, his study was almost certainly based on an image taken by an itinerant photographer. That a photograph formed the original image from which he worked is suggested by an observation recorded in the *Warragul Guardian* on 15 July 1886:

We have received from Mr. James Biram a photograph of what we may call Warragul as it was 10 years ago. The photograph shows a solitary house in a dense forest – Mr. Biram’s store and dwelling in the bush where the main street of Warragul now exists.¹⁶

In December 1886 when a reporter for the *West Gippsland Gazette* made a ‘Stroll Round the Town’, he wrote that ‘Mr. Biram pointed out a little water coloured sketch of his first store, where the railway reserve is now’.¹⁷ In December 1897 it was reported again that ‘Mr. Biram possesses an interesting memento in the shape of a watercolour drawing of the first shop and dwelling he built, and which was the first building in Warragul’.¹⁸ The watercolour was reproduced as a photograph and given a title *en face* of the ‘*First Store & House Warragul 1876*’ by William Drayton Thrower (1833–1913), who established a studio in Warragul in February 1885. This photograph was in turn reproduced as a postcard in c. 1910–1914. The original watercolour drawing has not



W.D.Thrower (1833-1913), Photograph entitled 'First Store & House Warragul 1876' reproducing original watercolour drawing attributable to Neville Henry Cayley.

been located but based on these two photographic reproductions, it can be attributed to Neville Cayley on stylistic grounds, especially when compared with a similar view derived from the same source by Clarence Woodhouse whose uncoloured lithograph was published in 1888 in *The Jubilee History of Victoria and Melbourne*.¹⁹

Cayley's subsequent watercolour drawings of Warragul's Queen Street and the new railway station celebrated the coming of the railway with its emergent township which was to eclipse the formerly promising village of Buln Buln on Brandy Creek which was sited strategically where horse-drawn coaches could ford the stream but was bypassed by the new railway system. Neville Cayley's paintings are thus highly significant to the early history of Warragul.

Five original watercolour drawings of the Warragul streetscape have been examined by the author. They are almost uniform in size measuring between 22.5–25.0 x 53.0–54.8 cm, and each sheet appears to have been cut by the artist from a larger sheet of unwatermarked, hand-woven watercolour paper which he probably purchased from L. Hyman, importer of artists' colours and materials at 71 Swanston Street, Melbourne. Three of these paintings are held by the Warragul & District Historical Society, one is in the author's possession and the other is retained by Dr John C. Trinca, grandson of Giovanni A. Trinca who almost certainly commissioned the painting from the artist. All but the last were removed from their frames on 14 February 2014 by the author but no manuscript information relevant to the provenance of the original works was found on either front or back of the images. Only the painting owned by the author was both signed and dated on the image. A sixth painting was reproduced as a postcard in 1909 by the Warragul newsagent, Frederick H. Small and this suggests that a further painting may still exist in private hands. The possibility of a further study of this subject was

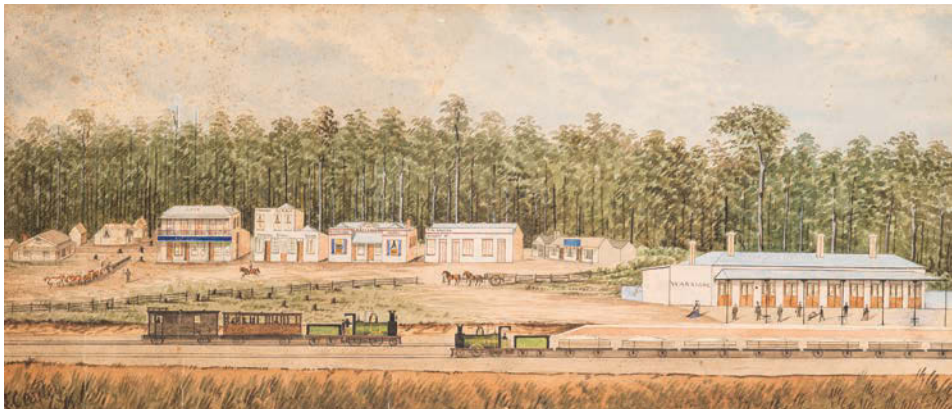


Watercolour drawing of Trinca's Steam Sawmill, Queen Street, Warragul. Undated c. 1879.
S.L.R. N. Cayley. 22.5 x 54.0 cm. The Warragul & District Historical Society, Warragul, Victoria.
Presented in 1978 by the Sibley family.

indicated by its reproduction as part of an elaborate composite polychrome lithograph produced by Rider & Mercer of Ballarat entitled ‘View of Warragul 1889’ which was issued as a large and impressive double page supplement given away free with issues of the *Warragul Guardian* on 3 September 1889.

The content of each image differs slightly and through the inclusion or disappearance of certain elements, they trace the development of the township over the first six months in 1879. The artist's viewing point was identical in all paintings and appears to have been situated within the Railway Reserve between the track and the fence erected along its southern boundary. Cayley's paintings can be better appreciated when compared with a near contemporary photograph of Queen Street which was almost certainly the work of the nineteenth-century photographer, Scott Barry, who came to Warragul during September–October 1880 and photographed the street from the railway station. Some of the buildings in the photographed streetscape were clearly erected after Neville Cayley had completed his last painting of the township in c. June 1879. Another near contemporary view is that of the railway station taken in c. 1879.

Small differences between these paintings render all original variations rather than facsimiles. Neville Cayley went to considerable trouble to depict the names of various business people and many of the usual activities occurring within the township. Why would he have painted so many studies of the same subject? It is highly likely that he did so in response to commissions from local businessman such as Giovanni Trinca or his brother Alfonso, joint proprietors of the Warragul Steam Sawmill, and others including William Love, James Biram, George Streitberg, T. W. Groves, J. B. Witton and Walter Jordan. Some inconsistencies appear, however, in signage and inferred ownership or occupancy of various properties in some of these paintings. Thus, a conundrum becomes



Four watercolour drawings with pen and ink over pencil outline and heightened with bodycolour by Neville Cayley of the new Railway Station and Township along Queen Street at Warragul, Gippsland, Victoria in 1879. Nos. i-ii and iv reproduced courtesy of the Warragul & District Historical Society, Warragul, Victoria.

i. Undated and unsigned. Likely to have been painted prior to 21 March 1879. 24.6 x 54.8 cm.

ii. Undated. Entitled beneath the image on an applied paper label in the artist's manuscript 'Warrigal.' and signed in the same blank area at right beneath image, 'Neville Cayley D.A. (pinxit)'. 25.5 x 54.0 cm.

iii. S.L.L. 'N. Cayley.' and dated 1879. 23.0 x 53.0 cm. Author's Collection.



iv. Unsigned and undated but the presence of a verandah on the front of 'MELBOURNE HOUSE' suggests a date sometime after 16 May 1879. 23.4 x 54.5 cm.



Enlargement by author of J. B. Witton's 'MELBOURNE HOUSE' from above image. The actual size of the building in this painting measures 2.5 x 6.5 cm. In the window to the left of the entrance door in which the proprietor stands, appear to be four tails of the Superb Lyrebird on display.



Watercolour drawing of an adult male Superb Lyrebird.
S.L.R. Neville : Cayley: -1893 -.
Shown image 58.0 x 42.2 cm.
Author's collection.

evident in examination of the author's painting which was chronologically Cayley's fourth Warragul painting. It is the only painting in which the name 'LOVE' appears on the roof of the Royal Hotel and this implies that it may be the earliest painting in his series but this name is unlikely to have actually ever appeared on the roof of the building in the same way that the name of the township did not actually appear on the side of the railway station! T. W. Groves relinquished his Queen Street shop on 21 March 1879 and Walter Jordan, wholesale and retail butcher, did not move in to occupy the Crown Hotel until July 1879. Surprisingly all three names appear in the one painting. Whilst this may reflect 'artistic licence' it may simply have been Neville Cayley's method of creating a visual

directory to the township in which he resided. This painting was folded over ten times and thereby facilitated postage back to England; in all probability for the edification of his family. It was acquired by the author at Sotheby's in London in May 1998.

The earliest painting in this series of six is likely to be that to which he applied a title using the original spelling of the township 'Warrigal' written in Indian ink in old English script on a paper label adhered beneath the image. The painting itself was neither signed nor dated but rather fully signed as noted above beneath the image on the right hand side in the blank margin, '*Neville Cayley D. A. (pinxit)*'. The presence of a tall eucalypt sapling in the foreground and two small wooden buildings directly beyond it (and behind the Crown Hotel along with the presence of T. W. Groves in his Queen Street shop) suggest that this painting was probably executed between January–March 1879.

An almost identical painting by Cayley was reproduced by the newsagent, Frederick H. Small and issued as a printed postcard in 1909 which he incorrectly entitled '*First Train at Warragul. 1879*'. A photographic postcard of the same painting from c. 1914 includes the title '*Warragul 35 years ago*'. In this painting, 'up and down trains' both appear and more travellers are apparent on the railway station platform. It is likely that this painting was also executed between January–March 1879.

The next painting is one of two probably commissioned by local saw miller Giovanni Trinca and has by descent remained within the family. The work was signed at lower right '*N Cayley*' but left undated. The presence of the eucalypt sapling in the foreground temporally groups it with the above two studies and anticipates the next. The presence of both 'up and down trains' carrying passengers eastward and carriages loaded with timber bound for Melbourne as well as eleven passengers on the railway platform, a porter's trolley set against a wall, a mounted horseman, bullocky with his team and two horses with a cart introduce the next study whilst the presence of a large black pig in front of the Crown Hotel recalls the earliest painting. The name of W. Jordan does not appear on this hotel nor does that of 'LOVE' appear on the roof of the Royal Hotel. T. W. Groves still occupies his emporium in Queen Street. Minute differences in details confirm that this was not the painting used by Frederick H. Small in the creation of his 1909 postcard. In Giovanni Trinca's painting the black pig faces to the right whilst it faces to the left in the painting reproduced photographically. In the latter the figure of a man stands in front of the door left ajar into T. W. Groves' store and is absent in the other painting. These minor details reveal how closely Neville Cayley was able to reproduce his own work at this early stage in his career; a faculty which he was to develop later to near photographic exactness.

Chronologically, the next painting was probably the one acquired by the author in London which represents something of a conundrum. The original spelling of the name of the township –Warrigil –was retained as it appeared on George Streitberg's Warrigal Railway Hotel, as well as appearing erroneously on the side of the railway station. The tall eucalypt sapling and two wooden huts behind the Crown Hotel have now disappeared.

In the next painting, the sapling and two wooden buildings are also absent but T. W. Groves is still operating from his shop in Queen Street so the painting is likely to have been executed sometime prior to 21 March 1879, the date Groves vacated the shop. Given the identical framing, this painting is likely to have been a pair to that depicting Trinca's Steam Sawmill (23.3 x 54.5 cm), which was given to the Warragul & District Historical Society by the Sibley family in 1978. Bill Sibley was a grandson of the bullocky Joe Kidd who appears in these paintings as he persuades his team of bullocks to draw a log jinker down the quagmire which would become Smith Street, towards the sawmill. The painting was signed at lower right 'N. Cayley' but left undated.

The last painting in this series was that depicting the shop of T. W. Groves having been taken over by J. B. Witton who renamed the building 'Melbourne House'. The verandah in place suggests that the work was executed some time after 16 May 1879 when David Connor, the owner of the property, published his intention to erect one.²⁰ Local historian Colin Silcock communicated to the present author that 'we may perhaps conclude that the latest of the Cayley watercolours (showing Witton's Store) was painted in June 1879 (allowing for the verandah works to be completed) . . . the painting was executed before the Bank of Australasia opened their premises . . .'²¹ Although it appears to be a highly personalised study, it was left unsigned and undated. The actual size of the buildings in the painting is very small and that representing Melbourne House is only 2.5 x 6.5 cm, yet Cayley's capacity for 'microscopic' detail reveals the face of J. B. Witton peering out of his doorway and with his shop windows, formerly devoid of merchandise during the occupancy of his predecessor, are now replete with colourful goods on the right side and what appear to be almost certainly four mounted tails of the Superb Lyrebird filling the four compartments to the window on the left side of the entrance door.



Watercolour drawing of Edwin Tatterson's Commerical Hotel, Queen Street, Warragul. S.L.R. N Cayley 1879. Size of original painting and current whereabouts unknown but probably measured approximately 23.0 x 53.0 cm. Reproduction from a photographic colour slide taken by Colin Silcock at a Tatterson family gathering held in Warragul, c. February 1982.

Neville Cayley's watercolour drawing of the Commercial Hotel in Warragul which incorporated a general store was painted in 1879 and was almost certainly commissioned by its owner Edwin Tatterson. This painting remained in the family and was photographed with great foresight by Colin Silcock at a Tatterson Family gathering in February 1982 and has subsequently become untraceable.

This painting forms a particularly spirited and interesting subject. Of special note is the great effect achieved by the inclusion in the foreground of a stockman pushing two bullocks from the left and a mob of horses, possibly brumbies but more likely police mounts, being driven by two riders. They are more or less uniformly attired and likely to be police troopers, from the right out of dense scrub as well as a dray with a female occupant loaded with provisions being drawn away from the hotel by a single horse and another to the right of the building with two languid horses out of harness. A man, possibly George or John Tatterson, carries a wooden tray on his head with loaves of bread. 'Microscopically', a woman and a man, possibly Jane and Edwin Tatterson, stand in the doorway and appear to be engaged in relaxed conversation. These elements considerably enliven what would otherwise be a very static subject. Whilst Cayley's figures of horses and other livestock, as well as human figures in these early paintings of the Gippsland period are small elements in his overall compositions, they do illustrate some advanced talent in depicting this type of subject matter.

The Gippsland Natural History Paintings

Neville Cayley was unlikely to find wealthy patrons in Gippsland, the remoteness of which was only partially overcome when the railways coming from east and west united at Warragul in March 1878. He was more likely, however, to meet naturalists and especially those intrepid amateurs that represented the nascent Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria. They were explorers in miniature, intrepid travellers who came like pilgrims to Mecca, but whose peregrinations from the metropolis were limited to weekends and short holidays. His greater lament would have been felt if he had known that he narrowly missed crossing paths with Archibald J. Campbell (1853–1929), the highly distinguished Victorian ornithologist and oologist who had made an excursion to this same area in 1877 to enjoy 'A Week in the Wilds of Gippsland – 1877. Lyre-bird Shooting'.²² It is likely, however, that he did meet the Melbourne born ornithologist and oologist, Alfred J. North, a foundation member of the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, who appears to have centred his field work on the tiny logging settlement of Childers and occasionally at Warragul coincidental to Neville Cayley residing in the same area. It is suggested here that Alfred North may have recommended to Neville Cayley that he proceed from Gippsland to Sydney where he would quickly find employment as a contracted artist at the Australian Museum, then under the curatorship of the former's correspondent and future employer, Edward Pierson Ramsay. Within six months of Neville Cayley arriving in Sydney, he was sent by that institution to Grafton where he was to meet the distinguished naturalist, James Fowler Wilcox. To their shared misfortune, he died on the day before Neville Cayley arrived! Neville Cayley was to work closely with Edward P.

Ramsay and Alfred J. North during the remainder of his career in New South Wales.

Neville Cayley was to become a prolific painter and worked primarily as a watercolourist, although occasionally complemented these works with gouache, pencil or ink and only rarely produced works entirely in oils. He was clearly competent in handling this medium and it is surprising that he did not make greater use of it. His style was typically descriptive rather than interpretative, although whimsical and other anthropomorphic excursions, so fashionable at the time, occasionally lent further meaning to his subjects. In Victoria, he adapted quickly to his new and strange environment and preferentially depicted readily identifiable flora and fauna thereby creating a distinctly ‘Australian’ character in his work. Small formats and dense compositions incorporating many insects and botanical specimens as background to his principal avian subject, *horror vacui*, were typical of this first stylistic period and appear as testimony to minute observation in the various departments of his natural world. Thus, there was almost no hybridisation with English prototypes and the background foliage of Blackwood Wattle or the leafy or dead and angular eucalypt branches which he portrayed are as we see them today more than a century later.

The close handling or tight control over the presentation of his subject matter, especially evident in these early years, may also have been an expression of some difficulty in coming to terms with his new and strange environment at an emotional level as well as in its delineation. There is something comforting and sentimental about the microcosms that he envisaged and portrayed. They generate a sense of security and wholeness to the exclusion of any dangers from the outside world. Expressions of a morbid aspect to the same romantic sentimentality are found in Cayley’s early attempts at depicting *Nature Morte* executed in 1879 which were also perhaps expressive of the mood of a disconsolate young man who was trying to make the best of self-imposed exile.

Paintings of birds which were executed during his residence in Victoria are exceptional rarities. The earliest dated paintings discovered are those from 1879. In his earlier work he appears to have had some difficulty in signing his surname in watercolour and it seems likely that the crudest results correspond to his earliest paintings. It was also during the latter part of 1879 that he began to use more consistently the Greek letter epsilon as a substitute for the letter ‘e’ and did so continuously from the latter part of 1880. There appears to have been a marked preference towards the smaller passerines or perching birds and in this respect he may have exhibited an ongoing interest in the



Watercolour drawing of a Laughing Kookaburra bringing a frog to its two nestlings in a tree hollow. S.L.R. N. Cayley. Undated but c. 1878 – 1879. Entitled in manuscript below image and beneath mountboard, ‘Jackass’. 21.0 x 18.0 cm. Author’s Collection.



Watercolour drawing of a nesting pair of Diamond Firetails (*Emblema guttatum*). S.L.R. N. Cayley. Undated but c. 1878 – 1879. 20.8 x 27.0 cm. Author's Collection.

perceived equivalent of the English song birds, *Harmonia Ruralis*.²³ As a Natural History artist, he attempted to portray as much of the life history of his subject as possible in each painting, and they were typically engaged in foraging for insects amongst native vegetation or nesting. These intimate insights into the lives of his subjects were reliant upon close observation of the birds in the field. The resultant portraits suggest influences that he had probably brought from England and immediately and completely adapted to his new country with its distinctive fauna. They strongly suggest either some basic training in or at least exposure to traditional Natural History art in Britain. The ‘finish’ of those paintings executed up until 1880 was sound and his brushwork confident, and together they suggested that he had quickly achieved a very promising level of artistic skill before leaving Victoria to further develop his career in New South Wales.

Several of his works were not, however, original in as much as they had been derived from published illustrations which he adapted to the Australian scene. In two very early but undated works, probably executed in 1878 and intended as a pair or possibly as part of a series of nesting Victorian native birds, he depicted a notional pair but in fact two adult male Golden Whistlers at nest amidst eucalypt leaves, and an Azure Kingfisher with two young at the entrance to their nesting tunnel. The latter was inspired by a contemporary greeting card depicting *Alcedo atthis*, the Eurasian or Common Kingfisher.

Elsewhere, he adapted from a published engraving of English waterfowl which appeared as Plate 64 in Oliver Goldsmith’s *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature* published by Blackie & Son in 1857.²⁴ A further painting which may have belonged to a series intended to depict Victorian birds at their nests is that which portrays a pair of Diamond Firetails feathering their nest. Again, the composition is dense and intimate and obviously the result of close observation of these birds in the field. A post and rail



Left: Watercolour drawing depicting an Azure Kingfisher (*Ceyx azureus*) and nestlings. Signed at right side *N. Cayley*. Undated but c.1878. 23.0 x 16.5 cm. Author's Collection.
Right: Watercolour drawing depicting a notional pair but in fact two male Golden Whistlers (*Pachycephala pectoralis*) at nest. S.L.L. *N. Cayley*. and indistinctly at L.R. *N Cayley*. 22.5 x 16.5 cm. Undated but c. 1878. Author's Collection.

fence, typical of rural Australia at the time, is seen at lower left. A fourth painting which almost certainly belongs to this period is that depicting a Laughing Kookaburra at its nesting hollow with two young eagerly anticipating their next meal, a very distressed frog! This painting is almost certainly the prototype for this subject matter which was repeated many times in later years. An unusual feature of this painting is his treatment of the eye of the parent bird which appears to have been ‘quartered’; a naive attempt, presumably, to achieve three dimensionality but one which was singularly unsuccessful and to the author’s knowledge never repeated.

Two small undated but very early watercolour drawings depict two of Australia’s avian jewels to which he would have been understandably attracted. The first shows a male Scarlet Robin in readiness to annexe a flying insect or caterpillar whilst a spider makes its escape behind a branch. An adult male Superb Fairy-wren was portrayed in a similar dynamic relationship with its prey, a small butterfly amidst grasses, various herbage and moss-covered tree roots. Cayley was clearly much impressed by these two species which he would have encountered first in Gippsland if not in the parks and gardens of Melbourne. The last painting may be his earliest attempt to delineate the specie which he knew as ‘*The Blue Wren*’. The painting measures 19.0 x 25.0 cm and was signed at l.r. ‘*N. Cayley*’ but also left undated. Gum Arabic was applied over the entire surface of the image and the picture retains its original mountboard with gilt inner edge. Written in the artist’s manuscript in ink *en reverse* is the title which he gave to the subject; namely ‘*The Blue Wren by N. Cayley*’, along with a name in pencil manuscript which has been effectively erased and is now illegible as well as a catalogue or exhibition number



Watercolour drawing of a male Superb Fairy-wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) about to secure a small butterfly amidst dense vegetation. S.L.R. N Cayley. Undated but c. 1878. Entitled *en reverse* in the artist's manuscript 'The Blue Wren. by N. Cayley.' 'No. 47'. 19.0 x 25.0 cm. Author's Collection.



Watercolour drawing of a male Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*) hesitating in the presence of an abundance of prey amongst mosses, lichen and native grasses. S.L.R. N. Cayley. Undated, c. 1878-1879. 15.2 x 22.1 cm. Author's Collection.

'47'. His approach to this subject was unsophisticated when compared with later works and the bird given a needle-like bill more closely resembling that of a Thornbill.

Perhaps the finest of several early works in the author's collection depicting the Superb Fairy-wren is that introducing a pair as they forage in the undergrowth with a detailed landscape background (see cover illustration), no doubt inspired by the progressive clearing of the forest that he would have witnessed in Gippsland. The scrub has been forced back by the advance of agriculture and only a ghostly legacy of ring-barked eucalypts has been left to populate the 'improved' pastures. The artist may have retained this painting as an outstanding example of his work and submitted it for exhibition in 1881 at the Second Annual Exhibition of The Art Society of New South Wales as No. 196 'a picture showing a pair of Blue Wrens, is an exquisitely finished bit, which proves that this artist's forte lies in the delineation of birds.'²⁵

Another important landscape painting executed in Gippsland c.1878-1879 was that which he entitled beneath the image 'Haunt of

the Kingfisher'. He also provided this title for his painting *en reverse* along with an extract from a poem which he attributed to William Wordsworth which, presumably, he took as his source of inspiration. It seems likely that he was already familiar with Wordsworth's poem and the reference there to 'Hazel trees' was possibly brought to mind through the local reference in the wild parts of Gippsland to the native vegetation or 'scrub' as being comprised of 'hazel'.

Furthermore, the title 'Haunt of the Kingfisher' was also one awarded to a small number of engraved Victorian period prints and, as such, may have been available to him locally as a further source of inspiration. Ironically, the branch upon which the



Watercolour drawing entitled beneath the image and *en reverse* ‘Haunt of the Kingfisher’. S.L.R. N. Cayley. Undated but c. 1878–1879. 28.1 x 21.3 cm. Author’s Collection

Kingfisher perches resembles more that of the European deciduous hazelnut tree belonging to the genus *Corylus* with which he would have been familiar in England rather than the Australian native tree belonging to the genus *Pomaderris* (*P. apetala*). Other botanical details are, however, very typical of Gippsland with blue mountainous terrain in the background and a stream girt with the sweeping fronds of the tree ferns *Dicksonia antarctica* and *Cyathea australis* along with the drapery of bark from the towering Mountain Ash which has festooned some of the exposed branches of saplings. It is likely that this painting preceded that depicting an adult Azure Kingfisher with young at nest as little concession was made to accurately portray the Australian specie and it is likely that inspiration for this bird also came from a published source which relied upon the Eurasian Kingfisher.

The author has examined many hundreds of paintings by Neville Henry Cayley but only three have been located which bear the date 1880. Cayley’s output in this year may have been diminished as it was a time of some personal upheaval. He was probably back in Melbourne by April or early May and was preoccupied with his recently arrived brothers, Arthur and Ernest, during the following four months. His brothers had possibly brought remittance money from their mother or proceedings from the final division of their father’s estate. Supplemented through the sale of his own paintings and employment in Hamilton (see below), he could have paid his debts accrued in Gippsland and financed his emergent artistic career in New South Wales. It was shortly after Arthur left for London on 29 June, 1880, that Neville, Ernest and William travelled to Sydney. They sailed on 26 August and arrived back in Melbourne on 14 September. Whilst their reconnaissance was brief their discoveries must have



Watercolour drawing of two Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) and a Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) in pursuit of a small butterfly. Entitled *en reverse* in the artist’s pencil manuscript ‘Fly Catcher Swallows’. Diameter 22.0 cm. S.L. Centre N. Cayley 1880. Author’s Collection.

reassured Neville that his future as an artist lay in New South Wales. Neville returned to Sydney alone on the *Omeo* on 13 December 1880.

A very remarkable painting signed 'N. Cayley 1880' was executed in the round with a diameter of 22.0 cm and inscribed *en reverse* in the artist's manuscript 'Fly Catcher + Swallows'. This painting portrays an incident which he probably witnessed in the vicinity of an extensive waterway in Gippsland and involved what appears to be a contest between two Welcome Swallows and a Grey Fantail in their pursuit of a small butterfly. This painting was laid down on a piece of card measuring 26.8 x 34.3 cm and with one straight vertical edge and the other with rounded corners corresponds to the page of an album or portfolio. This may well have been part of a collection of watercolour drawings which he carried with him to interest potential patrons. It is likely that he arrived in Sydney with such a collection of paintings.

A second painting dated 1880 is also remarkable in that it is one of only a handful within his *oeuvre* in which he depicted English birds. This painting describes three species of British ducks; namely, a male and female Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), a male Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) and four Teal (*Anas crecca*) of which two have been depicted on the water and two on the wing. These birds demonstrate some of the stylistic attributes which were to be developed into his characteristic signatures when in later years his subject matter was expanded into works of greater complexity and monumental proportions. This painting, however, is small and measures only 17.0 x 32.5 cm and was signed at lower right 'N. Cayley.' and dated 1880. The bird species were identified in pencil behind the mountboard and beneath the image *en face* in the artist's manuscript:

Blue Shoveler or broadbill. English (original) —Teal— Teal (Female)—
Wild Mallard—



Watercolour drawing depicting a Shoveler, two Mallard and four Teal. S.L.R. N Cayley 1880. Title appears beneath the image in artist's manuscript 'Blue Shoveler or broadbill. English (original) | –Teal –Teal (female) – | Wild Mallard–'. 17.0 x 32.5 cm. Author's Collection.



Watercolour drawing depicting three Australian Great Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) with a platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) on a swamp. S.L.L. N Cayley. Undated but c. 1880. Entitled *en reverse* 'Australian – Black Divers'. 22.0 x 33.2 cm. Author's Collection.

On the reverse of the painting, the three species were again identified as:

Teal | Spoonbill duck | Wild Duck.

His reference to the Mallard as being ‘original’ may have been intended to infer that this was his own ‘original’ contribution to this composite work which otherwise he had plagiarised.

A further painting from this same period albeit left undated, was that having the same provenance as the last work and depicting three (Australian) Black Cormorants with a Platypus at the edge of a swamp. This painting measures 22.0 x 33.2 cm and was signed at lower left ‘N. Cayley’. The artist did, however, give a title *en reverse*: ‘*Australian-Black Divers*’. This painting appears to be at odds with other works of this period. He demonstrated uncharacteristic temerity in handling his principal subjects and has reduced them to small elements in his landscape. He has included a platypus as an expression of his whimsical sense of humour; all four animals being Australian divers! At first glance, the mountain range in the distance resembles Mount Double Duke situated at the mouth of the Clarence River in northern New South Wales. Closer examination and comparison to other paintings known to be placed in that district reveal significant differences and strongly suggest that this painting was executed prior to his residence there. Subsequently, Mount Double Duke with its twin peaks of Mount Clarence and Mount Richmond became characteristic elements in his paintings when they included a riparian background. A third painting dated 1880 was that entitled ‘*Two Kookaburras on a Branch, with mountainous background signed and dated 1880, watercolour 47 x 35 cm*’ which was sold by Christie, Manson & Woods, on 12 April 1987 (lot no. 281). This painting has not been sighted by the author and its current whereabouts remains unknown.

The Hamilton Natural History Paintings

Three remarkable paintings bear the date 1879 and demonstrate a level of skill which is astonishing given the naïvety of the former studies and early stage in his artistic career, if indeed he ‘commenced his studies in Gippsland’ as reported in May 1894.²⁶ They depict equally unexpected subjects being Still Life studies of a ‘Bat’²⁷ or more specifically ‘*A Crucified Gould’s Long-eared Bat*’ (17.0 x 35.2 cm), a ‘*Dead Parrot*’²⁸ or more specifically ‘*Still Life. A Game Trophy: an Eastern Rosella*’ (34.8 x 24.9 cm) and ‘*Still Life. A Game Trophy: a Swift Parrot*’ (27.5 x 18.0 cm). The bat appears to be recently deceased and its ventral surface was described in minute detail, demonstrating considerable ability in the rendering of fur and the skin of its membranous wings. Inexplicably, the bat’s ears were not symmetrical and were presumably an artifact of its post-mortem manipulation; otherwise in life such an arrangement would have substantially affected its ability to echolocate and survive. Otherwise, this study was unlikely to be surpassed by any other Natural History artist of his day. His watercolour drawing of this common specie of Australian bat is conceptually identical but more finished than a study of a ‘*crucified bat*’ by Hans Holbein the Younger.²⁹



Watercolour drawing of a Still-Life: Game Trophy – An Eastern Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*). S.L.R. N. Cayley. 1879. 34.8 x 24.9 cm. The Hamilton Art Gallery and Museum, Hamilton, Victoria. Bequest of Mrs Hector Bastin (née Nancy Millear) 1988.010.



Watercolour drawing of a Still-Life: Game Trophy – A Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*). S.L.R. N.S. Cayley 1879. 27.8 x 18.7 cm. Author's Collection.

The second painting depicts an Eastern Rosella, also recently deceased, hanging by its feet from a cord and represented in the manner of hanging game or a 'Game Trophy'. The third painting in this remarkable group is that figuring a Swift Parrot, also recently deceased and suspended by a cord from a nail. Not only is this the only painting yet discovered which depicts this vanishing species but it is the only painting in which he signed his name with the inclusion of a second initial 'S'. Presumably this initial was intended to denote the middle name of Stillingfleet which he derived from the Cayley pedigree. The letter 'e' in his surname was also elaborated into a Greek epsilon and as this was absent in the other two paintings and generally present thereafter, it is likely that this painting was the last of these three paintings to be completed in 1879.

These paintings are also unexpected because of the sophisticated rendering of his subject's colouring and form and his demonstrated understanding of this as changed by death and because these paintings pre-date the majority of his 'Still Life' paintings by eight years. These isolated works are extremely important in that they suggest sources of inspiration that he probably brought from England and immediately and completely adapted to his new country with its distinctive fauna. They strongly suggest either training in or at least exposure to traditional Natural History art in Britain as well as the work of game dealers displaying their goods in shops and across stalls, barrows and peds in the marketplaces of Norwich and elsewhere in England.



Watercolour drawing with ink of a deceased Gould's Long-eared Bat (*Nyctophilus gouldi*) or 'A Crucified Bat'. S.L.R. N. Cayley 1879. 17.0 x 35.2 cm. The Hamilton Art Gallery and Museum, Hamilton, Victoria. Bequest of Mrs Hector Bastin (née Nancy Millear) 1988.011.

Cayley's watercolour drawing of the hung Swift Parrot has further significance and by implication, so too do the other two paintings, all of which were dated 1879. This painting was acquired by the author along with a later study of several Latham's Snipe at water's edge. The last painting which came from the same source as that of the Swift Parrot was annotated *en reverse* in a relatively modern hand '*Doling Doling Swamp Hamilton Victoria*'. Given that Cayley's painting of a 'crucified bat' and his Game Trophy of an Eastern Rosella are housed in the Hamilton Art Gallery in Western Victoria, these three paintings were likely to have been executed when Cayley resided in the district in the second half of 1879. Perhaps he had come to realize in that year that his prospects in Gippsland were unfavourable and, already in a somewhat impecunious state, sought new opportunities in the Western District.

Without the favourable recommendations of a well informed intermediary, his removal from Warragul to Hamilton some time in mid-1879 would be difficult to explain. He may have gone there upon the advice of the Warragul storekeeper, Joseph Benjamin Witton,³⁰ who was ideally placed to make such a recommendation having formerly run the post office at Byaduk, fifteen miles south of Hamilton. He was an enterprising businessman and Melbourne House drapers and universal providers must have represented to the artist a quaint antipodean derivative of his late father's successful enterprise in London Street, Norwich. The young artist acquired his requisites at Witton's shop but also probably enjoyed intelligent conversation with the proprietor.

It is likely that Witton would have recommended that he make known his arrival in the Hamilton district by introducing himself to George Reynolds Rippon (1838–1899), joint proprietor of the *Hamilton Spectator*. In so doing, Cayley would have created



**HAMILTON AND WESTERN
DISTRICT COLLEGE.**

PRINCIPAL:
JAMES BEGG,
Glasgow University.

RESIDENT ASSISTANT MASTERS: ANDREW GARDINER, M.A. Edinburgh University.	J. R. KING, M.A. Exhibitioner, Honourman, and Bowen Prizeman. Melbourne University.
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JUNIOR RESIDENT ASSISTANT MASTER:
LOUIS H. LEMME,
Geelong College.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC:
MISS UREN.
VOCAL MUSIC:
MR. GARDINER.

CLASS-DRAWING:
MR. LEMME.

DRAWING AND PAINTING:
MR. N. H. CAYLEY.

MECHANICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL
DRAWING:
MR. CHARLES KING.

GERMAN:
MR. GARDINER.
DANCING:
MRS. OLDMAN.

Mr. Begg intimates that the Academy has been incorporated with the College.
 The classes of the united institutions re-assembled in the College on the 14th July.
 For terms, prospectus, &c., apply to the Principal, or to H. J. Bloomfield, secretary of the College Company.

Advertisement for the Hamilton and Western District College with 'Mr. N. H. Cayley' listed as 'Drawing and Painting' master. *Hamilton Spectator*, 30 August 1879.

a precedent which he was to re-enact when his travels subsequently took him to new cities and provincial townships including Sydney, Grafton, Moss Vale, Bowral, Ballina and Casino. Another Hamilton identity to whom Witton may have provided an introduction was Henry Horwitz, a German-born general storekeeper. It is likely that Henry purchased paintings from Cayley and these were subsequently acquired by his solicitor son, Louis.³¹

It was largely through the efforts of two remarkable headmasters, James Begg, M.A. representing the Hamilton Academy and Henry Beresford de la Poer Wall, M.A. representing the Hamilton and Western District College that the excellent level of scholarship achieved resulted in Hamilton becoming known as 'the Athens of Victoria'.³² On 14 July 1879 the two institutions amalgamated under James Begg as Principal and shortly thereafter, on 7 and 30 August and 18 September, he placed weekly statements or advertisements for the school in George Rippon's *Hamilton Spectator* which identified his illustrious teaching staff and included for 'DRAWING AND PAINTING: MR. N.H. CAYLEY'. George Rippon moved into the old Hamilton Academy buildings where he established his family home.

It is unknown whether Cayley responded from Warragul to a newspaper advertisement placed by James Begg who was looking to appoint new staff for the amalgamating Academy and College, or whether he was already in the Hamilton district and his ability brought to the attention of Begg by George Rippon or

other prominent locals with whom Cayley had become acquainted. Whatever the case, his appointment suggests that he had already attained a very high level of proficiency in his work such that he was deemed fit to teach others. It is likely that he would have resided at the college along with other unmarried staff members and, following the expectation placed on all staff by Principal Begg, exerted a beneficial influence on those students with whom he would have had daily and prolonged contact.

On 2 March 1880, the *Hamilton Spectator* retailed an entry appearing in the *Geelong Advertiser* which referred to an exhibition of paintings emanating from Hamilton. Two paintings by Neville Cayley were included; that depicting a ‘crucified bat’ and another, an unknown study, depicting two or more parrots which, no doubt, would have been presented as a Game Trophy.

The Advertiser, alluding to some pictures painted by Mr. Cayley, of Hamilton, and now being exhibited at Geelong, says :– “N. Cayley has shown great skill in two paintings, ‘Still Life,’ showing dead parrots of beautiful plumage, which have been exquisitely executed; also a bat with outstretched wings.”³³

The question remains as to why Neville Cayley appears to have concentrated during his time in Hamilton on the depiction of *Nature Morte*, dead or silent nature or *Still Life*. It is likely that he was responding to an immediate influence in the form of either examples seen, instruction given or patronage from others familiar with this *genre*, and thus recognising in him the ability and inclination to create such works. A person most ideally suited to this role was Cuthbert Featherstonhaugh Senior (1803–1892), the owner of Correagh station which incorporated ‘...Fetherston’s Swamp or Lake Doling Dolin. . .’³⁴ According to his son, Neville Cayley was ‘a great quail and snipe shot’.³⁵ Featherstonhaugh was remarkably successful in this department and it is possible that they became acquainted during the artist’s residency in Hamilton. An obituary notice in the *Hamilton Spectator*³⁶ recalled that Featherstonhaugh was an outstanding field sportsman. As such, he was reminiscent of Horatio W. Wheelwright.³⁷ Here was an Irish gentleman, well educated and with a personal history of the pursuit of game in various field sports in Ireland and Europe. It seems highly likely that Featherstonhaugh would have been exposed to art in this *genre* as executed by his contemporary, the French Natural History and game artist, Edouard Traviès (1809–1865).³⁸ Some of his *souvenirs de chasse* were lithographed and published by the Parisienne firm of taxidermists, LEDOT, AINÉ and subsequently JEUNE who also created complementary ‘wall domes’ incorporating hanging game birds or; ‘*Natures mortes en relief, pour salle à manger*’.

Neville Cayley’s presence in Hamilton was remembered on 25 November 1891 in a newspaper report of fine art from Hamilton which was then on exhibition in Portland and entitled the ‘Hamilton Juvenile Industrial Exhibition’:

Curiosities, as well as wonderful triumphs with the brush, are studies of still life in water colours by N. Cayley, who was once resident in Hamilton, I believe. There are a duck, a bat, a parrot, a snipe and a blue wren, and with such marvellous fidelity and delicacy of touch is each detail filled in that even with a powerful magnifying glass provided for the purpose one cannot discover a flaw in a feather. Literally microscopic are the beautiful markings of the subjects. These curious and beautiful pictures were loaned by Messrs. Rippon and Horwitz.³⁹

Two of the paintings described above were included in this exhibition.

Warragul Court Appearances and Moving to Sydney

Neville Cayley's attendance was required at the Buln Buln Police Court on Saturday 8 November 1879⁴⁰ in an action initiated by J. B. Witton for 'Goods sold 14s. 6d' which was 'Settled out of court' or rather the 'amount paid into court' without incurring costs.⁴¹ He was also to attend the Warragul Police Court on Saturday 27 December 1879 in an action initiated by James Biram for 'Claim for 7s. 6d., goods sold and delivered. Order for amount 5s. costs'.⁴² These commitments suggest Cayley's presence back in the Warragul district towards the end of 1879. His return may have coincided with the conclusion of his teaching duties in Hamilton. It is not known whether in facing these charges, Neville as the older brother was also accepting responsibility for costs possibly incurred by William Herbert who was still resident in the district.

His appearance in Warragul was also subsequently required a year later as a defendant in an action for recovery of costs initiated by George Streitberg, proprietor of the Railway Hotel in Warragul. The matter was to be heard at the Warragul County Court on 3 December 1880 and was listed in matters 'Under £10'.⁴³ The matter was reported under 'Undefended Cases'.⁴⁴ The defendant was, no doubt, in Melbourne preparing to sail on the s.s. *Omeo* which would land him in Sydney ten days later. The matter was heard before His Honour Judge Nolan.⁴⁵ Local solicitor Alfred Knott appeared:

For [the] plaintiff; no appearance of defendant. Debt, board £7 7s. Mr Knott stated that he had received a letter from the defendant who promised to pay the amount. His Honor gave a verdict for the amount claimed, to be paid in instalments of £2 per week, the first payment to be made on this day month.⁴⁶

It appears that Cayley repaid his first two debts and in all probability honoured that to George Streitberg; an amount equivalent to full board for approximately 28-29 days. It is unlikely that he would have returned to Victoria in 1888 in such a public manner to exhibit at the Centennial International Exhibition if this debt had not been resolved. Examination of the *Victoria Police Gazette* for the years 1878–1881 reveals no reference to the artist and his considerable financial success after leaving Victoria would also suggest that he would have had no difficulty in repaying these comparatively trivial expenses.

For a young man born into privileged circumstances but with aspirations blighted by familial mismanagement of his father's estate, these matters brought before the courts in the Australian wilderness must have been very distressing if not humiliating. Notwithstanding, his experiences in Victoria had given him sufficient confidence in his ability which was presumably further encouraged through the sale of some of his work privately and through public auction that shortly after his arrival in Sydney the *Bulletin* was able to report on 8 January 1881:⁴⁷

Mr. Neville Cayley, an artist, who has settled in Sydney, whose forté is animal subjects, has exhibited some capital sketches in water colours. He gives a faithful picture of many well-known and richly-plumaged birds of Australia.

By 12 January 1882 it was reported that already 'the birds of Australia have certainly never had a better delineator than Mr. Neville Cayley'.⁴⁸