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D Parker [irishcoins2000@hotmail.com](mailto:irishcoins2000@hotmail.com)

K A Sheedy [ken.sheedy@mq.edu.au](mailto:ken.sheedy@mq.edu.au)

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*Front cover:* Sirinos/Pyxoes, incuse stater c540-510BC (not to scale). See article "An incuse stater from the series 'Sirinos/Pyxoes' "

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# Peter Cameron and his Highland Society North West Province (Maryborough, Victoria) medals

Peter Lane

## Abstract

*Scottish settlers in Australia brought with them their culture including religion, sports, dress, music, and sometimes their Gaelic language. One such was Peter Cameron, who arrived in Victoria during the Gold Rush era. He was a proud Scott and an athlete who won a total of 5 medals relating to his Scottish heritage in his country of birth and his adopted country. Two of the medals recently surfaced in England, but the fate of the others is a mystery. This is Peter's story and some musings on his Highland Society medals.*

## Keywords

[Highland Society] [medals] [Peter Cameron] [Scottish heritage]

## Background

Today around nine percent of Australia's population were either born in Scotland or have some Scottish heritage. Scots of Victoria website records that there are forty two Clan Societies, thirty seven Highland Pipe Bands, seventeen Scottish Dance Societies, nine Highland Dancing Societies, six Scottish/Caledonian Societies, three Highland Gathering Societies, a Robert Burns Club, a Scottish Gaelic Society of Victoria, and a Scottish Voice (newsletter) currently in existence in Victoria.<sup>1</sup> The oldest Scottish organization in Victoria was *Commun na Feinne* of Geelong, and it was established in 1856. It went into recess during the 1930s depression but it was re-established in 1958. Scottish organizations in Victoria have awarded sports medals for a number of events including tossing the caber, putting the light stone, foot races, throwing light and heavy hammers, hop step and jump, and quoits, plus cultural events like music and Highland dressing.

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1 <http://www.scotsofaus.org.au/>

## Peter Cameron

Peter Cameron was born in Scotland around 1830. He competed there in Highland Games and won a large silver 'Queen's Prize' medal for athletic 'feats'.<sup>3</sup> Wanting to improve his lot in life, he sailed from Liverpool on the *Prince Arthur* bound for Melbourne, arriving on 23 May, 1853. Little is known of his first few years in the colony but like many others at the time, he probably tried his luck on the goldfields. By the late 1850s he was living at or near Maryborough in the centre of the northern goldfields.<sup>4</sup> In 1859 he married Susan Vaughan, who was five years younger.<sup>5</sup> That union appears not to have produced children.<sup>6</sup>

On 1 January 1857, the Highland Society, North West Province (Marlborough, Victoria), held its first Highland Games sports events.<sup>7</sup> In 1859 Peter won the caber tossing and heavy hammer events. The latter event he won again in 1860 and 1861. For each win he was awarded 5 guineas. In 1862 he competed at another Highland Games in Melbourne and took home the prize money of 5 guineas.<sup>8</sup>

In 1863 he won a silver medal for the light hammer event at Maryborough—the first medal he won in Australia.<sup>9</sup> It appears he retired from these physically demanding events that year. At the 1868 Highland Games he competed and won the Best Dressed Highlander for which he was awarded a medal.<sup>10</sup> He competed and won medals in this event for the following two years.<sup>11</sup> Thus by 1870 he had won a total of five Highland medals in Scotland and Victoria. The photo of Cameron (Fig. 1) has him wearing four medals and can be dated between 1868 and 1869.



Figure 1. Peter Cameron in a highland dress with four medals on his jacket c. 1868-69.<sup>2</sup>

2 Willis, Barbara. *Bagpipes, Bowlers & Cabers: History of the Maryborough Highland Society*. Maryborough Highland Society, Maryborough c. 2007, p5.

3 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 18 May 1904, (obituary).

4 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 18 May 1904, (obituary).

5 Victorian Marriage Certificate, 1859, No. 3428.

6 *Bendigo Advertiser*, 17 May 1904, p2.

7 Daily Telegraph (Launceston, Tasmania), 14 January 1916 p.7.

8 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 2 January 1863, p4.

9 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 9 January, 1863, p2.

10 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 3 January 1868, p2.

11 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 4 January 1869, p2. and 5 January 1870, p2.

Maryborough rate books record that in 1873 the Camerons were living at Park Road, Maryborough, and he was described as a publican,<sup>12</sup> owning and running at various times the *Golden Age* at High Street Maryborough and the *Junction Hotel* at Havelock.<sup>13</sup> He also owned a stable in Holyrood Street Maryborough where he later built a brick house. Not all his ventures were successful. When he became an early promoter of an unsuccessful mining company, Chalk's No. 8 Consolidated GM & Co, he apparently lost all the money he invested. In Public life he served as a councillor with the Tullaroop Shire Council, a member on the Maryborough Hospital Committee, and an official at the Highland Games.<sup>14</sup>

Peter died in 1904 at the age of 74,<sup>15</sup> and his wife Susan died in 1924, aged 89.<sup>16</sup> Death duties applied and the probate forms are enlightening. His estate was valued at a little under £1200 which was a considerable sum in those days. It comprised three properties: the *Junction Hotel*, a rented seven roomed brick house with outbuildings, and a vacant land of some six acres all within the district. His other assets included four ponies, a cow, four horse-drawn vehicles, furniture, clothing, tools and bank accounts. Curiously under 'watches, trinkets, jewellery &c.' the amount shown is 'Nil'.<sup>17</sup> His medals would certainly have come under trinkets or jewellery, so what does this mean? Were they stolen or given away before he died, or were they simply ignored to avoid paying duty on them, or seen as being of little or no commercial value? The whole of the estate went to his widow.

When Susan died there is also no mention of medals on the probate form. It appears all her assets were sold up. The proceeds were dispersed among the beneficiaries who included five of Peter's relatives living in Scotland, friends, educational and religious institutions in Victoria, and her relatives in South Africa.<sup>18</sup>

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12 Information supplied by Margaret Walkley, researcher, Maryborough-Midlands Historical Society.

13 Maryborough Rate books from 1873 to 1906.

14 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 18 May 1904 (obituary), p2.

15 Peter Cameron died 16 May 1904 at Maryborough, Victorian Death Register number 5566 (researched by M. Walkley)

16 Susan Cameron died 18 August 1924 at Maryborough, Victorian Death Register number 10719 (researched by M. Walkley)

17 Public Records Office of Victoria digitised Wills and Probate: <http://www.access.prov.vic.gov.au/public/veo-download?objectId=090fe273802fe338&format=pdf&docTitle=Image&encodingId=Revision-2-Document-1-Encoding-1-DocumentData>

18 Public Records Office of Victoria digitised Wills and Probate: <http://www.access.prov.vic.gov.au/public/veo-download?objectId=090fe27380490ce7&format=pdf&docTitle=07591P00020006982230pdf&encodingId=Revision-2-Document-1-Encoding-1-DocumentData>

## Two of Peter Cameron's medals

A little over eighty years after Susan Cameron's death two of Peter's Australian medals turned up in the United Kingdom!<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the medals were given to Peter's relatives living in Scotland and then handed down in the family and shared by a number of beneficiaries, hence only two of the five came on the market. Or were they simply part of the international movement of cultural items?

The two medals that surfaced in the United Kingdom are illustrated below:



Figure 2. 1868 Highland Society North West Province (Victoria), medal



Figure 3. 1870 Highland Society North West Province (Victoria), medal

**Obverse:** Dancing highlander with crossed swords on ground, surrounded by wreath of Scottish thistles. The design has been riveted to surface (the rivets can be seen on the reverse)

**Reverse:** In eight lines, HIGHLAND SOCIETY/MARYBOROUGH/JANy 1<sup>st</sup> 1868/NORTH WESTERN PROVINCE/BEST DRESSED HIGHLANDER/1<sup>st</sup> PRIZE/PRESENTED TO/MR PETER CAMERON Raised plain border.

**Notes: Flat ring attached**

**Weight: 23g.**

**Shape: Round**

**Metal: Silver**

**Size: 50mm.**

**Obverse:** Standing male highlander with sword, raised decorative floral border with Scotch thistle.

**Reverse:** Centre in four lines, JAN. 1<sup>st</sup> 1870/BEST DRESSED/HIGHLANDER/PETER CAMERON around top, HIGHLAND SOCIETY. N.W. PROVINCE below MARYBOROUGH Silver mark 'K&Co' [Kilpatrick & Co of Melbourne]

**Notes: Ring attached**

**Weight: 29g.**

**Shape: Oval**

**Metal: Silver**

**Size: 43mm.**

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<sup>19</sup> Timothy Millett of Timothy Millett Ltd, London, private correspondence 20 January 2015.

The medal maker, Kilpatrick & Co was established in 1853, as a wholesale jewellers and watchmakers conducting business at 20 Queen Street, Melbourne. One of the partners was John Thomson who later became the sole proprietor. Two years later the business moved to 39 Collins Street West and by 1888 employed twenty hands, including apprentices. It had an extensive manufacturing business, as well as giving a large amount of work to outside artisans.<sup>20</sup> It is not known if the medals were made in-house or outsourced in Australia or Great Britain. Unfortunately the study of nineteenth century medals with applied embellishments that were awarded in Australia has not been researched. One of the reasons is that often makers did not stamp their medals. The author is unaware of identical embellishments of the two medals appearing on Scottish or Australian medals.

### **Cultural importance of Cameron's medals**

Australian nineteenth century cultural events were well attended and were written up in newspapers with glowing reports. 'Best dressed' and 'dancing' events like the ones Peter Cameron was awarded medals for, are tangible evidence of Australia's nineteenth century cultural and sporting connections with Scotland. The two medals discussed in this paper are approaching their sesquicentenary of being awarded. It would be appropriate for them to be on display either in a cultural or a sporting museum in Australia, as they are physical symbols of the pride of a Scotsman who arrived in Victoria during the gold rush era.

### **Acknowledgements**

Margaret Walkley, of the Maryborough-Midlands Historical Society Inc. Walkley researched the early years of the *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser* (those years are not available on Trove). Maryborough Rate Books, gathered up some family information, and the image of Peter Cameron. Barbara Abbs for facilitating the research for Millett. Timothy Millett, a London medal dealer and friend, provided all the documents given to him by Walkley and the medal photographs and their details. Without their generous support this article could not have been written.

### **Author**

*Peter Lane, Honorary Numismatist at the Art Gallery of South Australia, is an expert numismatic examiner under the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986. He is a regular contributor to the JNAA and Australiana: pnj.lane@bigpond.com*

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20 <http://925-1000.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=18484&start=80>