

## HISTORY REFLECTED IN A SILVER DISH

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Colonial Australian silver is enjoying buoyant times; the embryonic interest that surfaced in the late 1960s is now much stronger and more widespread. The interest in the Australian colonial product is based more on rarity than the skills of the individual makers.

There is a premium on the best of the early Australian silversmiths, like Christian Quist and Jochim Wendt. But any piece of Australian silver from pre-1850 is valuable simply because so few pieces were made. The population of the colonies was so small it could support only a limited number of silversmiths, and most of the pieces were commissioned for presentation rather than manufactured for general sale. So a previously unpublicised fine piece of Australian colonial silver may be of immense interest, even though it was not actually made here.

The piece discussed in this article is an old Sheffield Plate entrée dish made by the British electroplate manufacturer, James Dixon and Sons. (Plate 1) Its lid is numbered '3', indicating it was part of a suite of four. The dish was sold by the Sydney jeweller and silver retailer, Lamb and Co.

What makes this piece doubly important is that it was presented to a noted NSW police magistrate, Edward Denny Day, for his role in the capture of a gang of bushrangers led by 'Jew Boy' Davis (Plate 2) which terrorised the Scone area in late 1840. The dish carries an inscription detailing its presentation to Day and was part of the collection of the Watson family, who completed the historical records of Australia in 1914. Two years ago it was bought by a major Sydney private collector.

Richard Lamb, who sold the dish, arrived in Sydney on board the *Lady Fitzberbert* from London in September 1838. He began business as a jeweller in partnership with Clark Irving in November the same year.

*The Australian* newspaper in December 1840 announced that:

The business carried on as jewellers by Irving Lamb and Co will be carried on after January 1st next under the style of Richard Lamb and Co. But it was not until January 1842 that the partnership of Lamb and Irving was

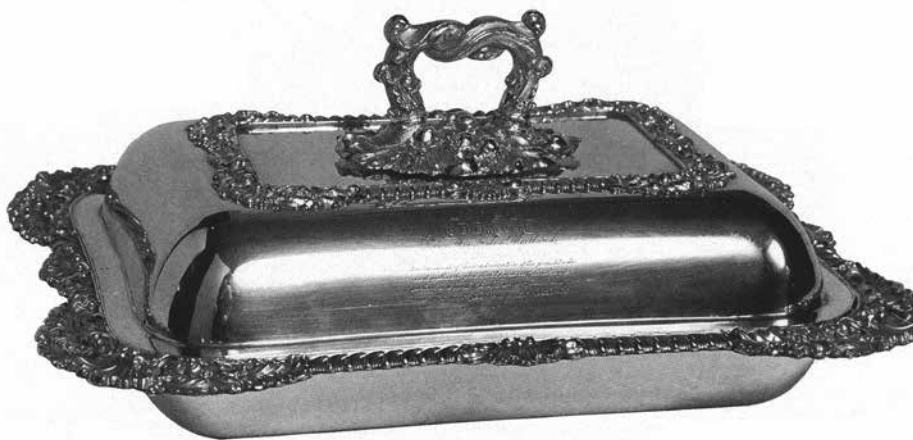


Plate 1. The dish discussed in the article: it was presented to NSW magistrate Edward Day for his part in the capture of Jew Boy Davis' gang of bushrangers.

dissolved by mutual consent. Plate and cutlery worth some £42,000 were offered for sale.

In 1844, Lamb was declared insolvent but he carried on business as a watchmaker and jeweller in George Street into the late 1850s. In December, 1858, he announced his intention to retire from business. His address at the time was 394 George Street, Sydney.

While Lamb was essentially an importer of silver from England, he also had made a few items. A contemporary newspaper refers to him as: 'That celebrated silversmith ... of Sydney.' One of the few recorded items bearing his mark was a silver cup made for the Goulburn (NSW) races of 1848.

The recipient of the entrée dish, Edward Denny Day, was born in County Kerry, Ireland in 1801, and chose the British Army as a career. He became an ensign in the 46<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot and finally a lieutenant in the 62<sup>nd</sup> Regiment in 1833. Because of ill health, Day resigned from the army and decided to seek his fortune in Sydney in a governmental capacity.

His first appointment came in early January, 1836, when he was made Police Magistrate for the Vale of Clwydd which covered the central western NSW area of Hartley and Lithgow. In 1837, he was appointed Police Magistrate of Patrick Plains and, in a letter to *The Australian* newspaper on January 14, 1837, is any guide, was a popular figure in the district. The letter, written by an anonymous settler, gives an insight into Day's performance on the bench:

The inhabitants of Patrick's Plains had last week the benefit of Mr Day's assistance on the bench ... A servant of a gentleman, one of those out and out dreadnought youngsters who had allowed his hair to grow over his countenance, as if he had intended passing himself off as one of the other sex; Mr Day suggested to his brother Magistrate on the Bench, that such a fancy was unbecoming the man's situation, and he was ordered down and underwent the necessary hairdressing by the flogger, before the case was gone into. The same man very properly received sentence of 50 lashes for giving an improper answer to the court. Such is as it should be but such will never be in some of our police Courts. Yours, etc.

A Settler.

In October, 1837, Captain Day was transferred to the northern NSW town of Muswellbrook. Eight months later he was despatched by Governor Gipps to catch the murderers of 28 Aborigines slain in the most callous manner on a station near Myall Creek. Day rounded up 11 of the 12 men responsible for the massacre. His feat received praise in the highest quarters. In an official despatch to London, Gipps wrote:

When Mr Day arrived at the spot some few scattered human bones only were visible – great pains having been taken to destroy the whole remains of the slaughtered blacks by fire but undeniable evidence was procured of more than twenty human heads having been counted on the spot, within a few days after the day of the massacre; and the best accounts lead us to suppose that the number of persons murdered of all ages and both sexes, was not less than 28.

The celebrated trials that followed resulted in the execution of seven white men, the first to receive such a sentence in Australia for the murder of Aborigines. In the first trial, however, 11 of the jury protested against the death sentence and in the second trial, 10 members of the jury decided to recommend leniency.

Day's most famous exploit, the one which led to the presentation of the entrée dish, came several years later. While visiting Muswellbrook in December, 1840, Day learned of a gang of bushrangers which was terrorising the district. The leader of the gang, Davis, known as the 'Jew Boy'. Davis' gang had been active in the area for some months but their arrival took on a new and more ominous dimension on December 21, 1840 when they killed John Graham, a shop assistant in the town of Scone. Day headed the search for the bushrangers and was instrumental in their capture. Day's evidence at the subsequent trial gives a splendid picture of the events leading up to the bushrangers' capture.

Edward Denny Day Esq examined states on Oath:

I reside at Maitland. Shortly before then I was Police Magistrate at Muswellbrook; on the 21<sup>st</sup> December I was at Muswell Brook on my own private affairs; I received information on Sunday evening of twenty of a party of bushrangers being out and took steps to collect a party of men to go in pursuit. I started about seven next morning. I had ten mounted men and a black boy. I took the direction of Scone, and passed through it. I continued in pursuit till six that evening. I came up about fifty miles from Muswell Brook with the bushrangers, at a place called Doughboy Hollow. About half a mile off the road, we saw some drays encamped and some smoke; there were horses tethered and men in their shirtsleeves making a rush for the opposite side of the gully, where their encampment was. I saw about six or seven. We galloped in amongst them; a great many shots were fired on both sides. I can speak positively to Davis having fired at me; Davis rushed up from the gully, evidently to get behind a tree; whilst he was running I fired; he turned and fired at me. I was not more than twenty yards from him, he then ran towards a tree, and resting his gun in the fork of a tree, fired at me through the branches. I returned the shot, and



*Plate 2. Bail up! Jew Boy Davis' gang terrorised the Upper Hunter district in 1840.*

wounded him in the shoulder. Five prisoners were taken in less than five minutes after we charged them. Shea, Marshall, Emerett, Davis and Chitty were the men there; they had arms, there were ten or eleven guns and a great many pistols and seven horses. Glanby was taken next morning; a good deal of conversation took place between the prisoners; they were very communicative. Davis and Marshall kept us awake all night telling stories. I did not hold out any inducement to them; as they came out, I asked their names; they gave a history of all their proceedings without my inducing them to do so; Shea said there need nothing more be said about it; it was he who shot Mr Graham and no one else; these were this very words. Davis said he had always opposed the shedding of blood; for he knew if they once committed a murder, they would not reign a week; and as he said this, he looked to right and left, and said, 'As you see, we have not reigned a day'.

The prisoners were hanged at Gallows Hill, Sydney, before a large crowd. On February 27, 1841, *The Australian* newspaper reported the practical manner in which the residents of the Scone district repaid Captain Day for rounding up the gang. It noted that:

The service of plate which is to be presented to E. D. Day Esq is on view at the establishment of H. Lamb and Co, Jewellers, and bears the following inscription: Presented to Edward Denny Day Esq., Police Magistrate of Maitland, by some residents in the District of Scone, as a testimonial of their admiration of the promptitude and gallantry he displayed in following and capturing a band of bushrangers which had for some months infested the Hunter. February, 1841.

This service of plate, the entrée dish, was presented to Day at a dinner in Maitland on April 5, 1841. Day had resigned his post as Police Magistrate in Maitland, before the 'Jew Boy' episode, and was running private business interests in the town. Unfortunately, these did not work out and the fortunes of our hero generally ran downhill from then on. He returned to the police force and soon became Superintendent of Police in Sydney. Day lost this important post when he became drunk on the night of the Mayor's Fancy Ball. He was sent to Port Macquarie where he served as Magistrate until 1858. Day finished his career in Maitland, where he was still remembered for his exploits. He died at Oldham, Maitland in May, 1876.

A similar, but slightly less ornate, entrée dish is now in the collection of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney. It was originally bought in much the same period by private interests and then 'Presented to John Hubert Plunkett Esq. M.C. Attorney General By the People of New South Wales as a token of respect for his Public Character and esteem for his Private Worth Sydney March A.D. 1841'.

Plunkett, as this inscription on the dish informs us, was Attorney-General of NSW, firstly from 1836 to 1841, then again from 1843 to 1856, and later in Sir Charles Cowper's ministry of 1865. He also served in the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly and made an important contribution to Australia's legal and political history.