

20 – East Coast (Writers’ Coast)

The most direct route to the east coast is via the Tasman Highway (across the Bridge) to Sorell and turn left (instead of right to Port Arthur). Tasmanians and visitors go to the east coast for the reasons one goes to any coast and this one, for Tasmania, and unlike the west coast, is particularly mild and sunny.

Louisa Anne Meredith

I went to the east coast and, therefore, this itinerary goes, because the writer Louisa Anne Meredith lived in five different houses there over a period of 40 years – her husband Charles was not good with money. And, while Louisa was not very ‘good’ on Aborigines (pp106, 186) or convicts (p158), or even her fellow colonials (p144) she is now recognised as ‘the most significant Tasmanian advocate of environmental concerns’ during her long and active life in the colony; indeed, Tim Bonyhady devotes a detailed and convincing chapter to her in *The Colonial Earth* (2000).

Because the order of Louisa’s homes in this itinerary is determined by geography, it is out of step with the chronology of her life; she therefore needs an introduction, and the string of houses needs to be mentally shuffled to form a satisfactory pattern. The dates set against each house heading should help. (At least six other women writers also feature in this itinerary.)

Louisa Anne Meredith (née Twamley, 1812–1895) was already an established writer in England when she married her cousin Charles in 1839. Her first book of poems was published in 1835 when she was twenty three. She went on to produce several illustrated nature books. Leigh Hunt wrote of her in his mocking ‘Blue Stocking Revels’, showing that she had surely arrived:

Then came young Twamley
Nice, sensitive thing
Whose pen and whose pencil
Give promise like spring.

Charles was visiting Birmingham from Tasmania where his family had emigrated in 1821 and settled on the east coast. Living first in New South Wales about which Louisa published her first Antipodean book, the couple arrived in Tasmania in 1840. In *Louisa Anne Meredith: A Tigress in Exile* (1979; 1990), Vivienne Rae-Ellis charts her life and writing; in a 1974 article, she, too, drew attention to Louisa’s environmental credentials. Louisa’s early years in Tasmania are best captured, though, in *My Home in Tasmania: During a Residence of Nine Years* (1852; 2003). Her biographer writes of it that ‘it has a unique place in the history of Tasmania as the first description of life in the colony by a female resident’. It was also successful in London and New York. While the original is rare and expensive, happily it has been reissued in paperback. The first stops on this itinerary, however, postdate that account.



40. Louisa Anne Meredith, by Mary Morton Allport, 1856, courtesy of the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office

Twamley (Buckland) (1858–67)

The small township of Buckland, 63 kilometres from Hobart, used to be called Prosser's Plain for the river that runs just to the north. And, when the Merediths moved to 'Villeneuve' in 1858, they renamed the property Twamley, Louisa's maiden name. They were to stay there nine years. The house is privately owned, but you can get a real impression of Louisa's environs without intruding by looking out for Twamley Road on the right ten miles from Buckland on the way to Orford and doubling back along a track parallel to the main road. The very tranquillity of the landscape makes it feel as isolated as it was in 1858. Louisa was not happy here.

In 1860, Louisa published *Some of My Bush Friends in Tasmania: Native Flowers, Berries and Insects Drawn from Life, Illustrated and Briefly Described*, and the following year, *Over the Straits* which, although about a

visit to Victoria, contains a chapter attacking cruelty to animals, a perennial preoccupation about which she was to do more than write.

During the Twamley years, time was also spent in Hobart where she staged theatricals at the Government House of Harriet Gore Browne (p200). Among the participants was the future writer Tasma (p256) and her mother **Charlotte Huyber** (1817–1908). Tasma, or Jessie Huyber as she was then, so appealed to Louisa that she was invited to stay at Twamley. Tasma's biographer wrote: '[I]t is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this friendship between the fifty-year-old woman personifying the successful woman author and the fifteen-year-old girl already possessed of an overflowing imagination.' During the 1860s and 1870s, Louisa's name was being recognised in Tasmania as a writer and painter.

Orford (Malunnah) (1868–79)

The drive from Buckland to Orford along the banks of the Prosser is particularly wild and lovely and the house to which the Merediths moved in 1868 (on leaving Twamley) overlooks the mouth of the river. Malunnah, an Aboriginal word meaning nest, was built of local stone and the porch supported by Oyster Bay Pines. Now in a row, the house is 100 yards before the general store opposite the bridge (so park outside the store and walk back).

Between the house and the river is the main road along which rumble huge log-carrying lorries which would have much upset Louisa who abhorred large-scale clearing. In the Huon Valley section of *Walch's Tasmanian Guide Book* (1871), which Louisa edited, she contrasts the 'natural beauty' with the tree-destroying incursions of 'man' – the 'pitiless exterminator'. Although she painted flowers and plants, they were not her main concern in nature, but she loved ferns and railed against their destruction, particularly on Mount Wellington. After a sketching picnic at Fern Tree in 1846, she complained of 'the empty champagne bottles which bristled beside the rocks, the corks and greasy sandwich papers lurking among the moss'.

Animals were Louisa's main concern – she was particularly opposed to the pursuit and killing of them for sport – and it was while living here, in 1878, that, together with **Mary Selina Gellibrand** (1837–1903), she founded the Tasmanian Society for the Protection of Animals; Louisa was the first Honorary Secretary. Mary took over from her and was Secretary at the time of her death.

From Malunnah, the Merediths moved to a cottage in Hobart in 1879, and Charles was to die the following year, but that is jumping too far ahead.

Swansea (Plas Newydd) (1855–58)

All along this coast, in estuaries and lagoons, you will see black swans, sometimes in large numbers – hence the names Swansea and Little Swanport. To visitors from lands where swans are white, this can be startling. Remember these swans; they are precious to Louisa Anne Meredith.

In 1855, the Merediths, having had a fearful, financially-provoked, long-lasting split with Charles' family at Cambria, moved to a small 1834 cottage – Plas Newydd – in Wellington Street, Swansea. It was for sale when I visited it, so I was able to sticky-beak better than might now be possible, but it can be seen from the road. The Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society, just round the corner in Noyes Street, is a good place to drop in. There you can get prints of Louisa's book illustrations and confirmation that Louisa is not buried in Swansea, as a biographical entry has it.

The Merediths lived here for the next three years and it was during that time that their situation changed for the better. By 1856, Charles, prompted by Louisa, had successfully entered parliament. Although her views, other than on animals and the environment, do not appear progressive, she had supported the Chartists campaigning for the reform of the political system in her Birmingham days by writing letters and articles. She expressed herself ambivalently about her political involvement. On 18 May 1833, she wrote to her future father-in-law: 'Don't fancy me a politician in petticoats, but I hear so much that I cannot help now and then talking myself.' And Margaret Swann, in 'Mrs Meredith and Miss Atkinson, Writers and Naturalists' (1929), credited Louisa with using 'her strong powers of organisation' in connection with Charles' election campaigns, though 'this was done as unobtrusively as possible' because of the 'prevailing prejudice against women taking part in politics'. Although being a member of the House of Assembly was unpaid, politics, in which he remained engaged for over 20 years, was to give Charles an aim and a status hitherto lacking. He served four terms as Treasurer and one as Minister for Lands.

They had already left Plas Newydd and moved to Twamley when, in 1860, Charles introduced a Bill to protect black swans' eggs, resulting in the Black Swans Act of 1861, Tasmania's first legislation to protect endangered species. Writing to James Calder, Louisa described how, when 'Charles introduced his bill ... he was jeered and ridiculed but he passed it – to my great joy.' In her children's book *Tasmanian Friends and Foes* (1880), she writes of a 'wretched huckster' who carried out the 'greedy, sordid cruel trade' in eggs of black swans. Then, more specifically, and in a way that her contemporaries would recognise: 'This gallant, noble officer had a boat and crew allowed him for public service, and these he employed in a systematic raid upon the swans' nests, far and near, round the bays and lagoons.'

In the same book, she has a male character declare: 'I should advocate and insist on total abstinence in the matter of feather ornaments ... happy lives are sacrificed every year to gratify the depraved fancies of vain idle women.'

In his later parliamentary career, Charles called for a select committee to look into the conservation of Huon Pines. A Bill to prevent cruelty to animals had been introduced by another member in 1877; in 1879, Charles successfully introduced one to strengthen the earlier legislation and to recognise Louisa's Society. Ill-health forced him to resign that year.

Aged 80, in 1893, Louisa was still writing to the *Mercury* – two letters in four days – condemning the ‘inhuman process’ by which sheep and cattle were shipped from New South Wales to Tasmania.

Opposite Swansea is the Freycinet Peninsula with its untamed National Park, forming Oyster Bay (not to be confused with Oyster Cove, p176). (Rose de Freycinet accompanied her husband Louis on a later expedition but not to Tasmania where he met Ouray-Ouray.)

Cambria (Riversdale) (1841–42, 1848–55)

North of Swansea, over the Meredith River and on a bad corner, opposite, in 2003, some colonial accommodation, and off the main road, is Cambria. This is one of the few places where even I, with my cheeky English research methods, was made to feel I had intruded. Riversdale, originally on the same Meredith property, is beyond Cambria but on the other side of the road. If you keep your eyes peeled you can glimpse it. Take note in passing, for both houses are very much part of the Louisa Anne Meredith story, and status of properties can always change or you could be a guest. In any case, you can now appreciate Cambria from the photographs in Alice Bennett and Georgia Warner's *Country Houses of Tasmania*.

Before Louisa appeared on the scene, her future husband's stepmother, **Mary Meredith** (née Evans, c1795–1842), already lived at Cambria. For the lowdown on Mary Meredith within the settler context of that area Lois Nyman's *East Coasters* (1990) is useful, particularly as she also tells the story of families who travelled out with the Merediths, and other east coast denizens such as the Cottons of Kelvedon (p157), just south of Swansea.

Not long before the Merediths were to leave for Tasmania, his first wife died. His plans still determinedly intact, George Meredith needed someone to look after five children, so he married the family's senior servant Mary Evans, who had been with them since 1813 and by whom he already had a child. Emigration went ahead and they arrived in Tasmania in 1821.

Mary and her midwife mother had attended the dying mother in childbirth so, whether for that reason or her lower class, she was never accepted by her new family, to which were then added five more children. Nor it seems could George Meredith forget his new wife's origins, as Sharon Morgan shows in ‘George and Mary Meredith: The Role of Colonial Wife’ (1989), mainly through their exchange of letters. Meredith spent much of his time in Hobart, doing business and having rows, mainly with the authorities about his land allocation. He wrote to his wife to tell her how to run the estate, how much he longed for her body and how she should be behaving, including her letter-writing to him. She not only had her hostile, inherited family to look after, and her continuing pregnancies, but bushrangers (p6) and the Oyster Bay band of Aborigines to contend with.

As for her most demanding occupation, as Sharon Morgan sums up, ‘Since the farm was one of mixed livestock and crops, she must have been kept very busy just seeing things ran smoothly. She was, in effect, an unpaid farm

manager, without even the prospect of a holiday in Hobart Town since her husband would not allow it.' The main house, Cambria, much as it is today, was not completed until 1836; the family lived in other accommodation on the property until then.

At a certain stage, Meredith wrote asking his niece Louisa Anne Twamley to come out and be governess to her new cousins (her mother had also married beneath her and the family had fallen on hard times). Louisa replied: 'Where would my literature be in Van Diemen's Land? Writing sonnets to whales and porpoises, canzonets to kangaroos, madrigals to "prime merinos" and dirges to black swans, illustrated by portraits of the engaging and lovely natives?' Then her cousin Charles came a-wooing from Tasmania. And, as for the 'dirges to black swans', she wrote in *My Home in Tasmania* of her arrival at Cambria in 1840:

The most interesting ornaments of Cambria belonging to the animal kingdom were ... a pair of beautiful tame black swans, the first of these birds that I had seen in their native land. They seem to live very happily in the creek below the house, and always came at a call to be fed with bread or corn.

There follows, as is usual in this book and is part of its appeal, particularly to nature lovers, a long disquisition on black swans, detailing, too, the cruelties inflicted upon them that were leading to their extermination. 'In proof of this,' she wrote, 'I had been above two years at *Swan* Port before ... my desire to see a *wild* black swan was gratified, though, formerly, thousands frequented every lagoon.'

After a few weeks at Cambria, Louisa and Charles lived at Riversdale while their house at Spring Vale was being built, and returned to Riversdale following their years of semi-exile to Port Sorell in the north when, as usual the money had run out (p384).

But the greatest blow was the row with, at its core, Louisa's perceived unfriendly behaviour towards the inmates of Cambria, her uncle and his second family – Mary had died in 1842. This resulted in George Meredith selling Cambria to the eldest son of his second family, instead of the inheritance being shared among both families with Charles, as the eldest son of the first family, receiving the 'lion's share'. Riversdale was also sold. That is when, in 1855, Louisa and Charles moved to Plas Newydd in Swansea, and intimations of a new life. George was to die the following year and the family rift was to last for many years.

Other women Merediths of Cambria worth noting were **Sarah Westall Poynter** (née Merdith, 1807–1869) (of the first family) painter and sketcher; **Frances Meredith** (Fanny, 1831–1910) (second marriage), sketcher whom Louisa encouraged but who later turned against her; and Violet Mace, potter, last Meredith descendant to live there but more usefully met at Ratho (p329).



41. Cambria, by Louisa Anne Meredith, from Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania*, courtesy of the Glamorgan Spring Bay Historical Society

Spring Vale (1842–44)

The last Meredith home in this itinerary is seven miles north of Cambria, where the Swan and Cygnet Rivers meet at its southern boundary. If you have turned the bend to the right and reached Cranbrook, you have gone too far; but there should be a sign up on the right: ‘Spring Vale Vineyards Tasmania’. Although the house is not part of the commercial set-up, the cellar where you can buy wine by the bottle or case has been constructed within the original stables at the back. There shouldn’t be a problem if you ask to walk to the front and retrieve Louisa.

Her biographer suggests that she ‘spent the happiest time in her life in Tasmania in this house.’ It was their first proper home, built to their specification, and the garden just as they wanted it. She wrote of her life there, in *My Home in Tasmania*:

Roses of various kinds, geraniums, and a host of other good old flowers, were soon planted, and another pleasant source of interest and occupation opened to me. Of the latter I had, indeed, no lack, between the care of my household and our dear children; and besides these there were chickens,

and ducks, and turkeys to rear; butter, cream, cheeses, and other country comforts to make; calves to pet; mushrooms to seek, and convert into Ketchup (these being frequently very abundant and fine); and a whole catalogue of pleasant busy little idlenesses to indulge in, that carried one week after another with reproachful celerity.

Other 'idlenesses' included piano playing in their little library and newspaper reading. There was more to her duties, though: she had to distribute rations, clothing and supplies that arrived by boat to their farmhands: sawyers, stonemasons, carpenters, drainers and fencers, and to keep the accounts. She also finished the manuscript of *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales* (1844), and filled her folio with watercolours – collecting indigenous flowers and berries, and gratefully receiving many little bush creatures brought to her. Several trees she planted still stand.

But Tasmania was descending into economic depression, Charles was no farmer, and he had overspent on building Spring Vale, against family advice. In 1844 he was forced to accept the post of Assistant Police Magistrate at Port Sorell in the north. Louisa was devastated but at least the journey across Tasmania and their homes there were material for her book. They were to stay there until 1848.

After Charles' death in 1880, Louisa lived permanently in Hobart for the remaining 15 years of her life, but so short of money that she was awarded a British government pension in recognition of her work in literature, art and science. She travelled to England for the last time in 1889 to see *Bush Friends in Tasmania: Last Series* (1891) through publication. She died at the home of Melbourne friends.

While Louisa's environmental credentials have been the main focus here, Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish draw attention, in 'Making Tasmania Home: Louisa Meredith's Colonizing prose' (2007), to another facet of her writings: '[They] must also be considered as part of an imperial discourse that legitimised white invasion and settlement of Aboriginal lands.'

Half-way between Swansea and Cranbrook is a main road west joining the east coast to the Midland Highway at Campbell Town. This is the road I deduce must have been taken by Kate Webster, heroine of Rachael Treasure's *The Dare* (2007). As a roving government agricultural adviser, she attends the Campbell Show to meet clients. But the sheep farm – a family bone of contention – is more important to her and seems to be just south of Swansea; this is the only defining clue: 'The morning sun rose over the bay, bringing life to the soft silhouette of Schouten Island. The sun lit up a brown tinge in the cows' black coats.' Not much of the novel is as peaceful as that scene.

Kate Webster has a similar background to her creator who went to agricultural college, began her working life as a jillaroo (trainee farmhand) and now lives with her husband and children on a sheep farm in Tasmania breeding and training kelpies, border collies and waler (from New South Wales) stockhorses. Not all Rachael Treasure's novels are set in Tasmania because her experience is Australia-wide. What I like about this holiday-read

book is that Kate and her life are so different from me and mine – it gave me access to a whole new world and style. And, because so modern, Kate is rather different from the settler women from whom she is descended. She attends an annual gathering with

Girls who didn't give a damn. Stuff the fact they had a bit of a beer belly, tonight they would walk proud in their not-so-stylish dresses, with their not-so-flash hair. The rougher their ute, the sleeker their dogs, the tougher their hands, the more gorgeous they felt. Strong country girls, flexing muscles and flashing pretty smiles.

And yet, Kate acknowledges her ancestors; in the house she is about to lose, 'She could feel the room filled with the energies of the past ... that gentle tenacious strength of the Webster women who had been there before.'

We didn't take that direct route to Campbell Town, but on one occasion, we did take the rough road just beyond Cranbrook that comes out at Avoca ('Midland Highway' itinerary). This is much the route the Merediths started out on towards Port Sorell. Louisa Anne – who could have been a Webster ancestor – rode most of the way, though sometimes she walked, and the children and nursemaid travelled in a custom-built carriage. The luggage went by sea. If you're in exploration mode, this is an interesting drive via Royal George, with fine landscapes – forest reserve giving way to a wide plain – but tedious in a hire car.

Bicheno

But if you choose to miss those temptations, and that of the Freycinet Peninsula (good for a quiet or strenuous walking weekend) this time, Bicheno is a short drive from Spring Vale. Of the harbour, known as the Gulch, Louisa Anne Meredith, who visited it in 1842, wrote:

Skeletons of huts and skeletons of whales stood side by side and with greasy barrels in long and black array, and remains of putrid carcasses steaming in the sunshine, formed a scene of dirt, desolation and disgust, contrasting powerfully with the clean bright crags, snow-white beach and the pure brilliant character of the surrounding scenery.

Ten years earlier, Wauber Debar, the Aborigine who saved the life of two sealers (p112), was buried on the other side of the headland, easily walkable from the Gulch. Her gravestone, in a little railed plot overhung by trees and within sight of the bay named after her, reads:

Here lies Wauba Debar a Female Aborigine of Van Diemen's Land died June 1832 aged 40 years. This stone is erected by a few of her white friends.

Another Bicheno heroine was **Mary Harvey** (née Blackmore, c1836–1911). She was the Buckland-born daughter of a sexton who married a Bicheno policeman in about 1856. With a babe in arms, she rescued her husband from an attacker; then, when he and his comrades were out searching with a warrant for some renegade whalers, she received a tip off, saddled up, found the poor bedraggled bunch, and inveigled them into eating a hearty meal she made for them which left them easy to lock up. Then there was the bushfire when all were at the regatta. Mary and her on-duty husband put the fire out and saved everyone's homes. Finally, there was the time when two lads were clinging to an upturned boat out at sea. Alerted by their brother, and in her husband's boat, Mary made sure that at least one boy was rescued, jumping into the water to hold the boat steady while he was dragged on to it and nursing him back on shore. She is commemorated by Mary Harvey's Restaurant. It may well do her credit; I only took photographs.

Today's Bicheno is one of those places attractive to sea-changers – that phenomenon of young Australians who can't afford big-city mortgages, or older ones who've had enough of the unrelenting pace, and writers. One of those is English-born, Sydney-based Arabella Edge who, house-sitting in Hobart, visited Bicheno (two and a half hours from the capital) and fell under its spell. She bought a plot and, sitting in a caravan while her husband built them a house, wrote her second novel, *The Raft* (inspired by the French painter Géricault). Then, when it became available, they could not resist buying the Hideaway chalet operation next door.

For five years the couple has run four self-contained chalets, with ocean views from their private verandahs, and the Boathouse which sleeps three couples, together with the herb and kitchen gardens and orchard they have created. Bennett wallabies, possums and echidnas range freely. By happy chance, the Boathouse is in Harveys Farm Road, named after farmland owned by Mary Harvey and her husband.

As I write, Arabella is working on a novel to be called *Fields of Ice*, based on John Franklin's ill-fated 1845 voyage to find the North West Passage (p150). Taxed with what line she is taking on Jane Franklin, she reassured me: 'I realised that Jane Franklin had to be restored to life and shed the cliché persona of repressed colonial monster.' I have not stayed at Arabella's place – I discovered her as a writer on the internet – but I shall, I hope (www.bichenohideaway.com).

The setting of Helen Hodgman's *Blue Skies* (1976) is, perhaps deliberately, impossible to determine, except that it is within striking distance by local bus of Hobart. So it cannot be Bicheno, which means Bicheno people won't be insulted by my suggesting you read it lounging around here. The housewife narrator lives in a weatherboard house by a beach and spends her life trying to escape the loneliness and pointlessness of her existence. All come to a sticky end.

Aged 13, Helen Hodgman arrived with her family as part of a 'Bring Out a Briton' campaign in 1958. She finished her education and started her working life in Tasmania but then did odd jobs in London before publishing

this novella. I believe she now lives in Canada. As far as I can see, this is her only fiction set in Tasmania.

Falmouth

From the east coast towards the west, there are two roads, spaced apart like an estuary, that meet up at St Mary's and lead, via Avoca, to the Midland Highway. We took the southernmost, stopping for pancakes, as prescribed, at Elephant Pass. The northernmost runs from the coastal town of Falmouth and just above that is the Winifred Curtis Scamander Reserve (p253).

It was Arabella Edge who alerted me to the fact that not only had Amanda Lohrey, the Tasmanian-born novelist who spent some years enjoying acclaim on the mainland, relocated to Falmouth, but also that she had fairly recently published a novella, *Vertigo* (2008), about a young couple, Anna and Luke, who 'sea-changed' from the big city to a very quiet coastal place.

The story is not overtly set in Tasmania – they have moved from Sydney to a house they found by driving out from the city. But the author obviously drew on her 2006 experience of the bushfires that threatened the east coast of Tasmania following her move to a house she and her husband had built in his childhood place 23 years earlier. Her controversial novel *The Reading Group* (1988) was written there. That fire forms the climax to *Vertigo*. Amanda Lohrey, whom I have failed over the years to contact, told an interviewer about *Vertigo*, 'I'm sick of dark books. When you get to my age, I want to give a sense of hope. There is a sense of endless renewal.' Some of Anna's newly planted saplings survive the fire.

This itinerary has already turned west but many visitors will want to continue north along the coast, or even turn inland further north. Elizabeth Dean's contribution 'The Language Map' in *A Writer's Tasmania* (2000, edited by Carol Patterson and Edith Speers) is helpful. She touches on the Chinese miners of Weldborough and the only wife, that of Ma Mon Chin, as well as the myth that Hollywood's Merle Oberon was born in St Helens. But Helene Chung in *Ching Chong China Girl* goes into more detail about both, as she describes the search for her own roots. She records the impact of Mrs Chin after her arrival in the 1880s, as later recalled by Mrs Bill Grose:

Mrs Chin lived in a nice house overlooking the joss house and was a very gracious lady. Her home and children were kept very clean and smart. It was a pleasure to see her serve her friends and visitors afternoon tea in fine tiny Chinese cups, using Hang Mee tea, often wearing her Chinese robes and tiny, pretty slippers on her tiny feet. Having been born within the walls of China, her feet were bound so that her feet would be becoming to a Chinese lady. Her children attended the Weldborough school and we spent many happy evenings in her home.

Cassandra Pybus also explores the Merle Oberon myth, as well as the north east coast, in the chapter 'Lottie's Little Girl' in *Till Apples Grow on an Orange Tree* (1998).

Mathinna

Not far along the main road west, at the township of Fingal, is a more minor road 26 kilometres north to Mathinna. Please put down the inclusion of Buckland and Mathinna in this east coast itinerary to poetic licence – they are either end of my writers' arc, for Mathinna is part of Marie Pitt's story.

I cannot come to grips with how this township came to be called Mathinna – the name of the Aboriginal girl taken to live in Government House by Jane Franklin. Before it had that name, it was known as Black Boy (diggings) and was not created as a township until 1872 when Mathinna was long dead and the Franklins long departed. Mathinna was not even from any east coast Aboriginal band; indeed, both parents came from the west coast. Township literature simply says it was named after her without explanation.

Mathinna was to grow in the 1890s, but it must have enjoyed some prosperity in the 1870s because Thomas and **Catherine Beswick** (née Clarke/Peve, 1844–1908; m1862) – of the extended family establishing itself in the north east – moved there and three of the eight beautiful Beswick daughters were born there, while the older ones went to school. Thomas is recorded as a miner but ran a general business, probably finding he could make more money selling goods to the miners. They left in 1877, and they and their descendants were to thrive.

Alice Christina Irvine (1879–1940), daughter of a mine manager, and famous both for pioneering domestic science teaching in Tasmania and for *The Central Cookery Book* (1930), was not only born there but started her teaching career at Mathinna School. Her book is still valued.

Gold was discovered at Mathinna in the 1890s and the Golden Gate Mine became one of the state's highest-yielding gold mines. By the end of the decade, it was the third-largest town in Tasmania. Among its 5,000 population was Marie Pitt, poet and political activist. Her experiences and writing about Mathinna, the mining township, are detailed in the history section (pp218–20). So much prosperity led to considerable exploitation and ill-health for the miners, and drudgery and tragedy for their wives.

Though Patsy Crawford's novel *God Bless Little Sister: A Story of the 1912 Queenstown Mining Disaster* (2004) is about a mining community in the west of the island, it admirably conveys the life of miners' families, trade unionism and tragedy more generally.

In 1994, there was an attempt to re-establish the Golden Gate Mine, and in 2006, 70,000 ounces of gold were expected. That was the year we visited this strange, almost non-place in a lunar landscape caused by logging and mining, a place lost in time. To think of Marie Pitt living there and working as a poet and unionist leaves a lesser wordsmith than her lost for words. Park beside the little wooden chapel with its eccentric bell tower on the road leading to the mining area and read 'The Keening'.