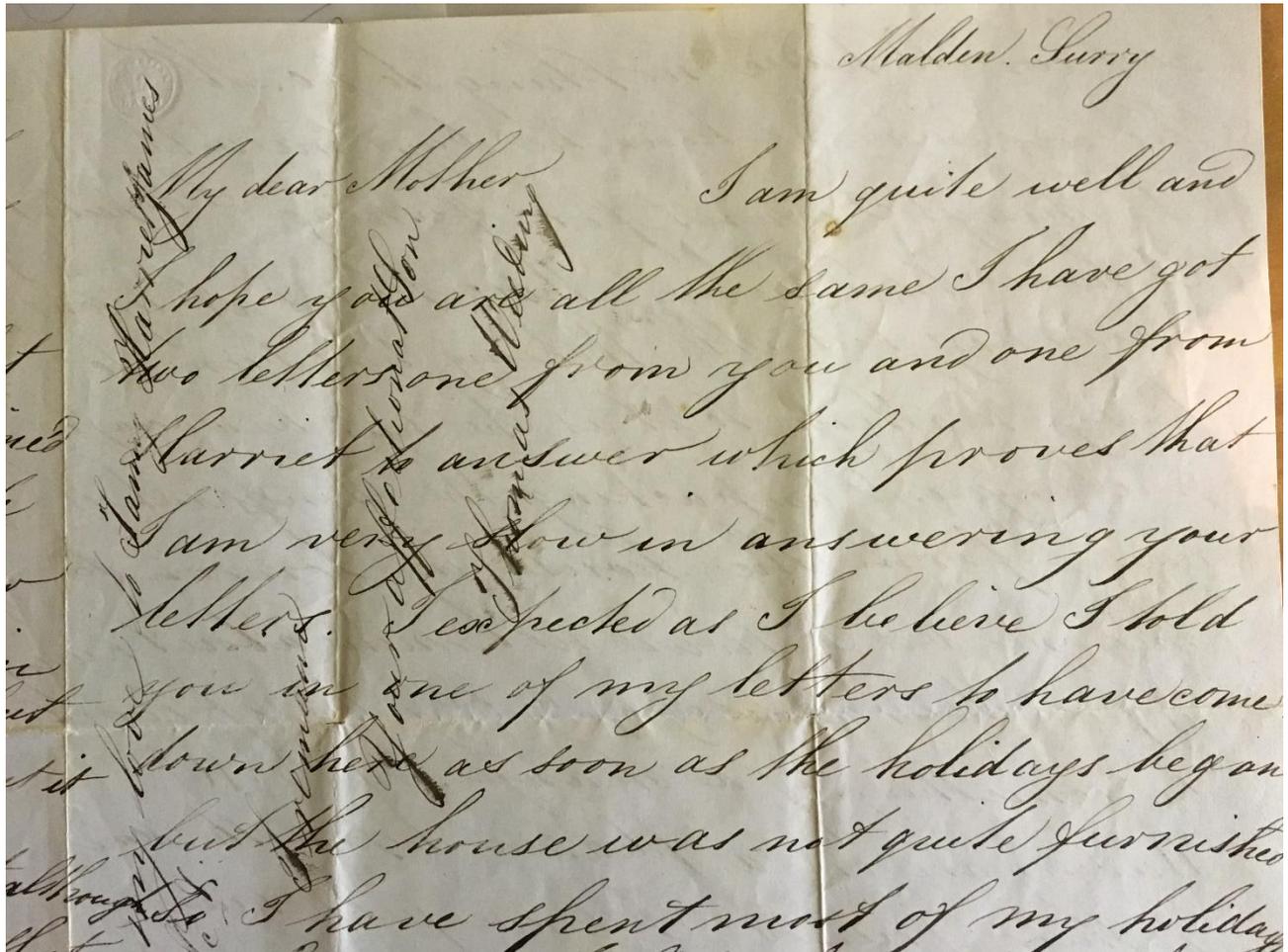


Annotated Letter Number 1 : Thomas Weeding writing home to Mother, ca August 1844



Malden, Surrey

My dear Mother,

I am quite well and I hope you are all the same I have got two letters, one from you and one from Harriet to answer which proves that I am very slow in answering your letters. I expected as I believe I told you on one of my letters to have come down here as soon as the holidays began but the house was not quite furnished so I have spent most of my holidays in London. I like being down here much better than in London I have a good deal of fishing here although I do not catch many fish it passes away a good many hours which otherways would pass very heavily as I would have nothing to do. Mr Weeding is very kind he buys me all the things I want for fishing. I expected to have had two or three hours at lessons every day but Mrs Weeding has been too busy to attend to it as she has been occupied packing and unpacking the things which came from the house in London to this one but I should not mind about having a few hours study of a day as it would be something of a change. Mr & Mrs Weeding are on a pleasure trip with some of their friends. I have just heard from Mrs Barkly she is now quite well but has again been ill since I wrote to you last she intends to come and see me when I am at school as she will not have an opportunity of doing so before I go she sends her love to all of you.

I am much obliged to you for the newspapers you sent me and I should be very much obliged if you would send me some more if you think they have got any thing in that will please me about

bushrangers or anything of that sort they only cost a penny for postage and Harriet mentions in her letter that you will send me some more if they interest me but if they are of any use to you I don't care about having them.

I think something should be done to destroy **the caterpillars** for they seem to be doing a great deal of mischief but I suppose it would be difficult to destroy them without destroying the corn also but you have not said whether they have destroyed any of your corn but I suppose they have as I know they came and paid a visit when I was with you but from what I can judge they appear to be increasing in number and perhaps they will increase until they become a regular plague which they are now only on a small scale.

I am still very anxious to know what Tom Weeding is doing and you mentioned in one of your letters that Uncle was thinking about coming over here and was getting a **collection of curiosities** for that purpose but I suppose he is still thinking about it.

I have not seen James Morris yet although it is some time since you said that he was going to leave Sidney and you supposed that I had already seen him.

I am almost ashamed to send this letter but I hope you will excuse and I think you would if you saw the patent pen – holder I have got it is one of my own making.

Please to give my love to Fanny Harriet James and Uncle etc etc

I remain

Your affectionate son

Thomas Weeding

bushrangers or anything of that sort....

Thomas' mother would be well aware of bushrangers near Oatlands. Only three months ago (April 1844) one bushranger and a murderer (Reed and Marshall) had been apprehended and sentenced to death at the Oatlands Supreme Court. On the morning of Wednesday 24 April, a temporary scaffold was erected outside the gaol gates and about 70 or 80 of the townfolk of Oatlands assembled for the show. The Colonial Times reported that:

“Reed, who was a fine young man, appeared to die instantly, while Marshall, a man of slighter form, struggled for a few minutes...Marshall's body was delivered to the Surgeons for dissection”

Of course we'll never know for sure, but Thomas' mother may well have sent this issue of the Colonial Times, with its local interest, to her son in faraway England

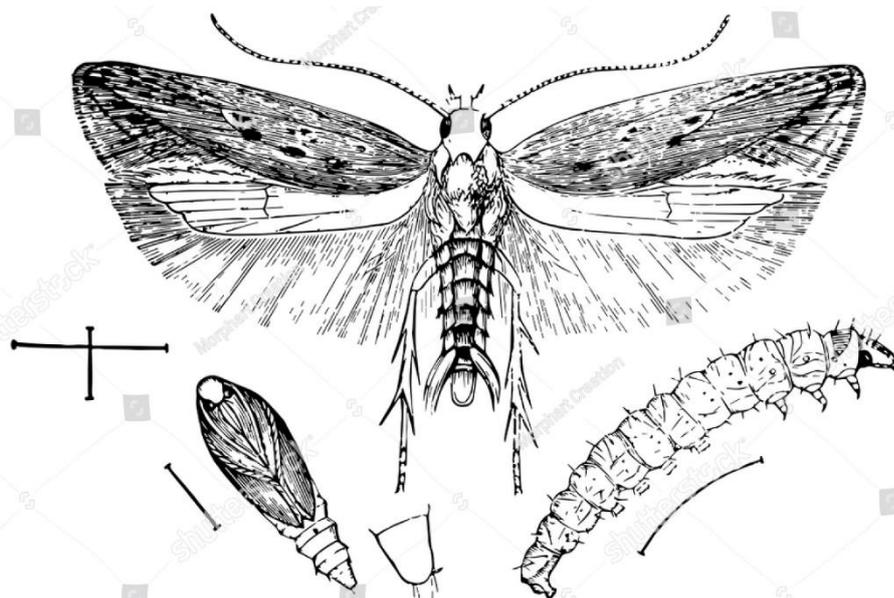
EXECUTION AT OATLANDS.

On Wednesday last, the two unfortunate criminals, Alexander Reid and Thomas Marshall, who were left for execution at the late Assize, and not subsequently respited with the other prisoners, suffered the last penalty of the law at Oatlands; Reid (an absconder from Port Arthur) for feloniously shooting at and wounding Constable Murray, who led the capturing party by whom his gang were taken; Marshall for the wilful murder of Benjamin Smith. The scaffold was erected in front of the great gates of the prison, around which, at the hour appointed for the occasion, a knot of about fifty spectators assembled, chiefly

the caterpillars ?

Caterpillars was one of many subjects canvassed at the 1844 Midlands Agricultural Show. Apparently caterpillars were becoming a particular problem in the Van Diemen's Land barley crop, which was intended mainly for the production of beer. Thomas' reference to the caterpillar problem suggests that his brother James had been branching out into barley for the brewing interests.

Note also that in the 19th century, farmers used the word 'corn' to mean any cereal crop eg wheat, barley.



“collection of curiosities”



“Cabinets of Curiosities” have a long history, dating back to the medieval period when moneyed types collected all manner of interesting objects, minerals, and religious artefacts to amaze and astound their friends with. In the 19th century, many Europeans returning to Britain from the colonies brought with them collections of local gems, flora and fauna sourced from the colonies. Perhaps the most famous example is Sir Stamford Raffles, founder of Singapore, who chartered his own ship to bring home an enormous haul of Asian curiosities, including live plants and animals. Sadly the entire cargo was lost at sea.

In the case of Thomas’ uncle referred to in the letter (we think one of the legion of Thomas Weedings), he would probably have been bringing such things as bird eggs and stuffed animals. Sadly, there is a very dark side to this practice, which was the intense competition to bring back to European collecting institutions artefacts from the ‘natives’ (Aborigines). The most prized artefacts were bones, skulls, and even whole skeletons. In the 20th and 21st centuries, Aboriginal activists have worked tirelessly to bring these stolen ‘artefacts’ back home, although this project is sadly a long way from complete.