



# THE WAYFARER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ADAM LINDSAY GORDON COMMEMORATIVE COMMITTEE INC.

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## MARRIAGE OR MATESHIP?

In these enlightened times, what can we conclude about Adam Lindsay Gordon's marriage to Margaret (Maggie) Park, 11 years and seven months his junior? If great men owe their success to a great marriage, was Gordon's failure in life a reflection of his marriage given that his problems occurred after he married Maggie? Here was a union between two people bonded by a love of horses but who differed in many respects. Though respectable and industrious, Maggie lacked the education and class to match Gordon's noble bearing as well as the temperament to be on equal par with Gordon who lived in his own isolated world cocooned from reality. What little he confided to his closest friends like William Trainor and George Riddoch, he confided less to his own wife. As Maggie recalled years later;

*"He [Gordon] never spoke much of his family. Indeed he did not speak much about anything. He was very reticent and he did not like anyone prying into his affairs".*

As Gordon kept his worries to himself, Maggie knew little of the problems that ultimately led to Gordon taking his life and was unable to obviate them. Put simply, Maggie was unable to open into Gordon's

inner world and sooth his troubled soul.

God may have gifted in Gordon a poet to sing the first great songs of Australia, but he lacked the qualities to withstand life's hard knocks. For in matters involving pounds, politics, pastoral and partnerships, Gordon experienced failure after failure that eventually left him weary of life. That he managed to inherit £7,000 only to die broke and bankrupt less than nine years later is one of the many tragedies of his tragic life. That Maggie had little say in their financial affairs knowing Gordon was inept with money only compounded the tragedy.

It was also a loveless marriage. Maggie and Gordon had only one child, Annie Lindsay Gordon, born on 3 May 1867, four years and six months after they were married. Annie was to die from enteritis the following year. Maggie's second marriage to Peter Low produced a large brood of seven children who all survived to adulthood.

Then there were the times when both Maggie and Gordon were away from each other for extended periods. Gordon's best poems like *The Sick Stock-riider* and *From the Wreck* were written in the solitude of Rid-

doch's *Yallum Park* near Robe SA in January 1869 whilst Maggie was in Melbourne.

After the failure at Ballarat when Annie died, Gordon suffered a bad fall, and the stables of the livery business burnt, Maggie went back to SA to be with her family. As Gordon was to write to Riddoch, his confidant-in-chief;

*"She was anxious to get a change & I was glad for many reasons to get her away".*

There is no doubt that both Maggie and Gordon loved each other. But what we can conclude is that their loveless marriage did not make Gordon a better poet or a better person. In fact, Gordon's happiest and most stable period of his life in Australia was while horsebreaking by day and writing poetry at night in the companionship of William Trainor.

*(Source: Anderson, H (ed.), "The Last Letters 1868-1870" (1970); Adelaide Advertiser 23 Mar 1912 p19)*



(above) Maggie, seated second from left with her husband Peter Low and children in 1916 (Source: Brighton Historical Society collection)

GORDON ON MAGGIE

Gordon's letters to John Riddoch in "The Last Letters 1868-1870" is revealing for how little Gordon writes on his wife Maggie. After the failure at Ballarat, Gordon would write to Riddoch on 6 October 1868 while staying with Robert Power in Melbourne:

*"Mrs Gordon & I did all the work [for the Hunt Club], indeed she did a great deal more than I did all through*

*the troubled time. She worked like a trump although I never told her how desperate things were looking with me. She suspected that much was wrong & she tried hard to cheer me up & keep me straight & did not worry me. She has more pluck in her little finger than ever I had in my whole body. When I lost the Ballarat hunt cup on 'Maud' I thoroughly gave in & refused to ride 'Cadger' for the Selling Steeplechase saying that it was*

*no use & she said, 'Don't give in like that, old man, you've gone too far to back out and no one else can ride the horse. It's only a small stake but every shilling is of consequence to us now. I was always against riding but you've taken your own way & you must carry it out.' I won on 'Cadger' & 'Viking' won the hurdle race so I did not do so badly".*

(Source: Anderson, H (ed.), "The Last Letters 1868-1870" (1970) p 27-28)

EXCLUSIVE OFFER

Four copies of "The Last Letters 1868-1870" signed exclusively by the editor Hugh Anderson are available for \$A40 incl. postage.

MARGARET PARK: RESPECTABLE AND INDUSTRIOUS

**"Maggie was a child, she was a baker's daughter of little education who neither understood nor wanted to understand his writing."**

The best account we have of Gordon's wife, Margaret Park comes from Geoffrey Hutton's book:

*"Margaret Park was [born in Glasgow on 22 March 1845] the elder daughter of a Scottish immigrant, Alexander Park [Penola Cemetery], who arrived with his family in Melbourne in 1851 or 1852. By trade he was a baker and confectioner, and he set up a business in Melbourne. There his one son and his wife died, and he left the place of ill fortune and with his two daughters Margaret and Sally. He travelled to Adelaide and became foreman of a large bakery in the main road, King William Street.*

*Margaret did not have much schooling but made the most of what she had, and looked after her sister, who was still doing her lessons.*

*She became a good horse-women, which would be unlikely if she had been a servant. She had been brought to Australia too long to have retained a trace of a Glasgow accent, although there was something Scottish in her choice of words and phrases. There was something Scottish in her clear-headed rectitude. The work frequently used to describe her was 'respectable'.*

*Margaret Park's story of Gordon's courtship is that they met at the Robe race-course early in 1862, where she had been driven by John Payne, an official of the course. On his visits to the town Gordon had always stayed at the Robe Hotel, but after meeting her he moved to the Caledonian with a string of three horse for stabling, and stayed for about a fortnight. He had*

*not been injured by a bad fall at the Stockdales' station; he had already banked his inheritance and given up horse-breaking as a living.*

*Gordon's friends and his early biographers wrote of the wedding as a mésalliance, the act of a man whose emotional life has been emptied. Maggie was a child, she was a baker's daughter of little education who neither understood nor wanted to understand his writing. Gordon had hinted to Rev. Julian Tenison-Woods that there had been no romance in their love-making, and while Woods found Maggie a very respectable and industrious girl, he thought she could hardly be a companion to him because of the differences in their position and education".*

(Source: Hutton, G., "Adam Lindsay Gordon. The Man and the Myth" (1996) p91-94)



(above) Maggie's grave at the Bordertown Cemetery (SA)  
(Source: Dingley Dell Collection, Port MacDonnell)



## MAGGIE GORDON: IN HER OWN WORDS



(above) Maggie Gordon soon after The Poet's death.  
(Source: Dingley Dell Collection, Port MacDonnell)

**"He was always too good to others, and he never thought enough of himself. Yes, if he had a fault, it was that he was too good, too open-handed, and too generous."**

In 1912, Maggie Low gave a rare interview which was reported in the *Adelaide Advertiser* of 23 March. The interview has often been the source of debate as to its accuracy. In her own words, this is what Maggie had to say of life with 'Mr Gordon':

"I was just 18 years [sic] when we were married. Mr. Gordon was then riding horses at Robe, and among the best remembered of them were Cadger, Viking and Ingleside. We were married in 1864 [sic], and I first met him about 12 months before that. I stayed with Mr. Bradshaw Young then sergeant of police at Mount Gambier, for a little while before the wedding, which took place at the residence of the Rev John Donn [sic], a Presbyterian Minister, who performed the ceremony. Mr. Gordon and I lived for a time in Mount Gambier. Shortly after our marriage Mr. John Riddoch induced my husband to stand for Parliament. He took little interest in political affairs but he consented to the invitation, and he started on his election campaign. He soon became weary of public life. He was too quiet and reserved for that kind of existence, and the necessity of attending regularly at the sittings of the Assembly was very irksome. He stood it until November 10, 1866 [sic], and then he resigned, and we went back to Robe.

Mr. Gordon always retained

his love for horses, and that is an expensive pastime.

When he lost a race he lost money also.

While we were living at Mount Gambier, we often visited Dingley Dell, a pretty little cottage in a beautiful portion near Port McDonnell, which Mr. Gordon had bought. There was a nice piece of land there, but he did no farming, although he kept racehorses at the place. We made a summer residence of the little cottage...We stopped there a week or two at a time, and then returned to Mount Gambier. We both liked the place because of the attractiveness of its surroundings.

From Robe we went to Ballarat, and Mr. Gordon bought Craig's livery stables, which were adjacent to the well-known hotel. He rode a little also, but not much at that time. It was while he was at Ballarat that his heaviest misfortunes occurred. He had a bad fall from a young horse which he was riding, and he was so seriously injured that he was confined to his bed for many weeks. While he was lying ill his baby daughter died. He was passionately fond of her, and this had a great effect upon his spirits. The death of his child was a great blow, for he had a very affectionate nature. He was always too good to others, and he never thought enough of himself.

Yes, if he had a fault, it was that he was too good, too

open-handed, and too generous.

The sorrow which visited us at Ballarat caused Mr. Gordon to leave that city. We went to Brighton, where he had resided for 18 months, when on June 23, 1870 [sic], the end came. I have never seen the grave of Mr. Gordon, since he was laid in it nearly 42 years ago. Photographs of his monument have been sent to me, and messages on the anniversary of his death, telling of visits to the spot by his admirers. He is now more popular than ever. I have a great desire to go to Brighton and see the grave again.

After Mr. Gordon was dead Mr. John Riddoch, who had always been his greatest friend, came over to Brighton and brought me back to the South-East with him. My husband was always a welcome guest at Yallum Park, and the family had many of his manuscripts. He often drew sketches or wrote poetry for the young ladies there. He used to go out in the paddocks to compose poetry. I had the copyrights of all the books but I sold them about 30 years ago for a very small sum, much less than they were worth and since then I have had no advantage from the sale of the books. I have often regretted parting with the rights, but it is too late to trouble about that now".

(Source: Adelaide Advertiser 23 Mar 1912 p19)

## MEMBERS

Members can read the full interview on the Members' Area on our website

[www.adamlindsaygordon.org](http://www.adamlindsaygordon.org)

GONE

One of Poet Gordon's better poems is "Gone" which describes the death of the explorers Burke and Wills in 1860. Gordon would no doubt have related to the manly and chivalrous conduct of Burke. The poem was first published in the sporting serial "Bailey's Magazine" (London) in March 1870 – the favourable review reached Gordon before his death three months later.

IN Collins Street standeth a statue tall—  
A statue tall on a pillar of stone,  
Telling its story, to great and small,  
Of the dust reclaimed from the sand waste lone.  
Weary and wasted, and worn and wan,  
Feeble and faint, and languid and low,  
He lay on the desert a dying man,  
Who has gone, my friends, where we all must go.

There are perils by land, and perils by water,  
Short, I ween, are the obsequies  
Of the landsman lost, but they may be shorter  
With the mariner lost in the trackless seas ;  
And well for him, when the timbers start,  
And the stout ship reels and settles below,  
Who goes to his doom with as bold a heart  
As the dead man gone where we all must go.

Man is stubborn his rights to yield,  
And redder than dews at eventide  
Are the dews of battle, shed on the field  
By a nation's wrath or a despot's pride ;  
But few who have heard their death-knell roll,  
From the cannon's lips where they faced the foe,  
Have fallen as stout and steady of soul,  
As that dead man gone where we all must go.

Traverse yon spacious burial-ground,  
Many are sleeping soundly there,  
Who pass'd with mourners standing around,  
Kindred, and friends, and children fair ;  
Did he envy such ending ? 'twere hard to say ;  
Had he cause to envy such ending ? no ;  
Can the spirit feel for the senseless clay  
When it once has gone where we all must go ?

What matters the sand or the whitening chalk,  
The blighted herbage, the black'ning log,  
The crooked beak of the eagle-hawk,  
Or the hot red tongue of the native dog ?  
That couch was rugged, those sextons rude,  
Yet, in spite of a leaden shroud, we know  
That the bravest and fairest are earth-worms' food,  
When once they've gone where we all must go.

With the pistol clenched in his failing hand,  
With the death mist spread o'er his fading eyes,  
He saw the sun go down on the sand,  
And he slept, and never saw it rise ;  
'Twas well ; he toil'd till his task was done,  
Constant and calm in his latest throe,  
The storm was weathered, the battle was won,  
When he went, my friends, where we all must go.

[The full version of the poem "Gone" can be viewed on our website  
[www.adamlindsaygordon.org/works\\_gone.htm](http://www.adamlindsaygordon.org/works_gone.htm)]

THE ADAM LINDSAY GORDON GRAVE RESTORATION APPEAL

The Appeal to restore Adam Lindsay Gordon's gravesite at the Brighton General Cemetery has now reached \$2,883.30. The Committee was hoping to expedite reaching the target of \$10,000 through regular and well-attended tours of the Brighton General Cemetery. But we have not been successful with this initiative as much as we would have hoped. **We urge all members and their families to come along to one of the three remaining tours in 2008 and help raise funds towards the Appeal** (see details below).

We thank the following for their generous donations to



The Adam Lindsay Gordon Grave Restoration Appeal:

Tony Abrahams (\$150), Margaret Burns, Kelvin Freeman and Russell Levy (\$100), Dianne Appleby, Carol Nitschke and Jock O'Connor (\$50).

FROTH & BUBBLE 2008 AND POETRY COMPETITION

This year we have commenced an annual Adam Lindsay Gordon poetry competition in two sections. Adults and students aged 12-16. The competition closes on 24 May 2008 and we urge you to submit an entry. The winners will be announced in the Atrium, Federation Square, Melbourne on Saturday 14 June between 2:00pm and 4:00pm as part

of our annual Froth and Bubble Festival. The annual prizes have been kindly donated by Susan Pender, Allan Childs and Lorraine Day and full details appear on our web site. We have combined with World Poetry and The Fellowship of Australian Writers. The guest speakers will be Professor Michael Wilding from Sydney and Lorraine Day from Adelaide.

TOUR OF BRIGHTON GENERAL CEMETERY

Don't forget our next tour of the Brighton General Cemetery (Vic) will be held on **Sunday 27 April 2008 at 10:30am**. 'Adam Lindsay Gordon: His Life and Beyond' is an insightful and informative tour featuring 11 subjects with links to Gordon's story. **Bookings are essential**. Cost is \$5.00 (non-members \$10.00) and includes refreshments and a tour guide. For more information ring 03 5261 2899 or visit our website [www.adamlindsaygordon.org/tours.htm](http://www.adamlindsaygordon.org/tours.htm).

All proceeds goes towards  
The Adam Lindsay Gordon Grave Restoration Appeal.