

Letter 7: Thomas considering cricket, India and the Great Exhibition, July 1851

Fallbrooks Malden
July 25 / 51

My dear Sister,

I am really ashamed to confess that I forget when I wrote to you last, so long ago is it but I trust you will supply the intervals between my letters by thinking of me & knowing that I am often thinking of you. In your last I was sorry to hear that Mother & James were not enjoying good health & sincerely hope they are by this, both quite well, they must both take care of themselves.

But to turn to a different subject. I have to congratulate you upon the arrival of Master Herbert, it is undoubtedly a very fine name for a boy and perhaps the best you could select after leaving over old hereditary titles of James, Thomas, John etc. But to speak seriously, be sure and attend early to their education as there is no knowing to what conditions in life they may come to. If ever I have children I think then as I do now, I shall teach them the elements of education myself, but I daresay you will think I shall be too busy for that & perhaps it may happen so.

Mr Weeding has received the wool but has not sold it yet. He recommends Mother sending some more for the same purpose & provided it meets her approbation & suits her convenience I would recommend the same. You say Cousin Thomas has resigned his situation, I hope he has got a better one Mr Weeding got him a letter of recommendation to the Governor, but I daresay situations are not easily obtained. He will like to hear perhaps that W Roberts in India has lately married some lady whose father is a Major in the Army. He is now getting £18,00 (sic) a year – only fancy if I ever get that!

I have also seen poor John McCallum since his disgraced return from India. Mr weeding will not take any more interest in his welfare. I am glad to hear **Van D L has distinguished itself in the gentlemanly game of Cricket**, how much would I have given to have played on their side! We have just had our usual grand match against Worcester Park; & Malden was again victorious much to the disappointment of our opponents. Capt. Shepherd the Chairman of the E I Company is staying at Worcester Park with his family, they are old friends of the Weedings. I invited with Mrs Weedings permission, two of my fellow Collegians to play on my side whilst they had another and several gentlemen from London assist them. I am going on Monday to play a match at Peckham, on the side of Norman, who played on the Malden side and at whose house I was staying last Christmas. He wanted me to come & stay with him again but I cannot as I am engaged to go to a pic-nic a few miles from here. All of us were asked to come in a party, but Mr Weeding does not care about going till the evening so I am going with the Clergymans party. This is my last summer at Malden & it has been much more gay than usual, owing to having friends in the house of my own age & also the Shepherds family. The examinations went off satisfactorily. My essay was 5th out of about 60, so Mr Shepherd has asked to read it & I fear all his daughters are busy with it. The subject was comparing the reign of Queen Elizabeth with that of Queen Victoria. **I have been twice to the Exhibition** & of course found it a most wonderful & grand sight. You cannot see it nearly all in one day. **There are the most beautiful specimens of everything in the world. V.D.L has got a collection, consisting of corn, skins, & also what I have often desired to see some of our native woods beautifully polished & made into furniture.** I am sure the resources of V.D.L have not yet been half developed, if they had got its productions and climate in England they would soon turn them to account. The fate of the building is still a matter of Parliamentary debate, but it is generally believed that it will be preserved as a kind of winter garden or hot house. It seems as if I am destined to gain temporary honors at all my places of education for I was elected President of the Debating Society at Haileybury & also President of the Cricket Club. Every Tuesday evening we have debates at College at which Mr Melvill & family as well as the Professors & strangers attend. The President reads out the subject of debate when the proposer and opposer of the subject speak first then any who likes & finally the question is decided by a show of hands which the President counts & declares. After which any motions or business relating to our own affairs are brought forward and transacted. The President of the cricket club besides superintending the general affairs of the club has to sit at the head of the table at the match dinners and propose in a short speech the health of the opposite side, when they return the compliment and return play.

It is a much easier office than secretary which I have been for the last year. There are Secretaries and Treasurers under the President both in the debating society and the cricket club.

Mr Weeding has been thinking about my **going to India 'overland' as it is called**, and staying a short time at Paris which will be a great treat as also Malta & Egypt which we pass. Most of the students go out that way; it costs a little more but is quicker than going all the way Sea. Mr Shepherds mother has been to VDL & Sidney several times; so we have good chats about it, there was also a little boy, I think his name was Cox, that I saw there once and who I believe comes from Van Diemens Land. They have had a dreadful fire at California which I daresay you have heard have. It is fortunate your husband had gone away before it. Mrs Barkley has

returned to Ellesmere, not to her old house but one close by. I daresay you will all see this letter and for the writing to you again soon
so with love to Mother Fanny James
Believe me your very affectionate brother
TWeeding

I have been twice to the Exhibition...

Thomas is of course referring to the Great Exhibition of 1851. Known officially as “The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations”, this extraordinary event was heavily promoted by Prince Albert. The Exhibition was open to the manufactures of all nations, including British colonies such as Tasmania (see below). To house the displays, an enormous exhibition hall was constructed, made entirely from glass held in a beautiful cast iron framework. During the exhibition, an average of 42,000 people visited per day, totalling a staggering 6 million visitors over the course of the exhibition.

The exhibition had many firsts, one of which was the first ‘pay toilets’ (used by 827,280 visitors). Entry to the toilets was a penny, hence the expression ‘spending a penny’



View of the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, 1851



Queen Victoria opening the Great Exhibition. Note the ironwork, trees and ornamental fountains.

As you might expect from the pictures, the Great Exhibition became a huge success, with Queen Victoria visiting three times.

Van D L has distinguished itself in the gentlemanly game of Cricket...

Thomas has just heard about the game of cricket played between Van Diemen's Lan and Port Phillip at the Launceston Racecourse (now the NTCA ground). This match was hugely significant; it was the first first-class cricket match in Australia, and it coincided with the transformation of convict Van Diemen's Land into free Tasmania, and the separation of the Port Phillip District into the state of Victoria. The game received a great deal of coverage in the Australian press.

And 'Tasmania' won.



Thomas Marshall, captain of the Tasmanian team

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This teapoy made from rare Tasmanian timbers such as musk and blackwood, recently sold at auction in Tasmania for a record amount. This is exactly the type of 'specimen' furniture Thomas would have seen at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Amongst the Tasmanian manufacturers at the Great Exhibition was William Hamilton, one of Van Diemen's Land's premier cabinet makers, who included a small Huon pine table with chessboard inlaid on the table top, created from specimen Tasmanian timbers.



Pedestal table by William Hamilton, ca 1850, featuring Huon Pine (courtesy Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences)

going to India 'overland' as it is called

Thomas is considering travelling overland to India versus going by sea. As he rightly points out, the overland route was more expensive, but the advantages were twofold: it was quicker, and the traveller got to see more. As a young man Thomas would no doubt have been greatly excited to see such exotic places as Paris, Malta, Constantinople, Persia....

There were many different routes that could be taken, all of which are shown in this map published the same year that Thomas was writing (1851). Map Courtesy David Rumsey collection

OVERLAND ROUTE TO INDIA.



