

The Crabtree Foundation (Australian Chapter)
1995 Annual Oration
A Short History In Rhyme Of The Turbulent Life Of Joseph Crabtree

Peter Darvall
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Crabtree Elders, Members too
With reverence, I gaze on you!
Your stature is most evident
So revelations you've been sent
Giants of good scholarship
(More broad than tall, I must let slip)
With awe your quill strokes I peruse
To fill me in, and prompt my muse

From palimpsest and dim archive
Some fragile knowledge you contrive
From relics, heirlooms, dunny doors
From doodled notes, discarded drawers
From records, letters, betting slips
Faint likenesses and manuscripts
From Parish records, epitaphs
From ballads, rhymes and railway graphs
From pickled snakes in brandy jars
On the mantelpiece of country bars
From fragments, gossip, French menus
You recreate the ancient news

As from the castle we look out
And see you scholars lurch about
Like Gondwana's dinosaurs
Some upright, and some all fours
We have not wit to criticise
Nor brain nor skill to supervise
We cannot match your learned way
And witty intellectual play

We can but books and papers count
And calculate the cash amount
That to our coffers then will flow
(Called research quantum, as you know)
But do your studies qualify
And if so, should they count as high
As papers in the open press?
Even greater, I would guess

As compositions, works of art
Inventions or their counterpart
Essential, then, for us to show
In Quality Portfolio

Revelations come in sizes
Varied colours, sundry guises
Some are long, and others brief
If you suspend your disbelief
Like noble scholars here tonight
You perhaps will shed new light
On Providence, the greater scheme
Show things are not as they might seem

Try modern methodology
Historian's technology
Imagine possibility
Conjecture very fruitfully

Please be sure, avoid the danger
Of thinking fiction must be stranger
Than truth, and likely happenstance
The freakish, and the outside chance
Obscure allusions may be the clues
In synthesis, use every ruse!
And thus we break, tenaciously
The silence of conspiracy

Most modern scholars would believe
What Crabtree Elders do conceive
The Crabtree style of scholarship
If ever from this room should slip
Would clear the cobwebs from our eyes
And knowledge revolutionise
Recorded history dull and neat
Such books would be quite obsolete
The Crabtree Elders know the score
They seek no fame, and guard the door

“A little nonsense now and then
Is relished by the wisest men”
In vino veritas, they say
And should the bottle pass their way
Then happily there's more in more
And as they sink towards the floor
Awareness heightened in this state
Blinkingly, they muse on fate

With revelations then replete
Which oftentimes must needs compete
They find the truth with concepts fleet
The scholars have a technique neat
They choose the ones that they like more
(Like Manning Clark did long before)
Such skill and such capacity
Are *not* revealed, for it would be
A hazard to our earnest youth
(We must protect them from the truth)
In here has truth democracy
Outside is kept conspiracy

And so with introduction short
I'll take a snort, record the sport
Of how some orators have found
What they revealed, how broke new ground

Williams, in Wyre Piddle sought
Some clues, and later could report
Significant discovery!
Of bits of glass which he could see
With his insight could only be
Mementoes brought by Crabtree back
The glass which cut the bulging sac
Where viper struck most viciously
And led to the asymmetry
Which he revealed in ninety-three
There bottled on the pump-room shelf
Williams found the snake itself
Recognised by anal scales
(Analysis which rarely fails)
Later, this restless trav'ling man
Was shown by a chap in Port Sudan
A relic to identify
As button, from the Crabtree fly!

Syd, with no apparent plan
Rummaged in the Vatican
Imagine then his great delight
Malus, Josephus, came to light
Out of the darkest, corner shelves
Where abbots had relieved themselves
Came memoirs, in our hero's hand
How he manoeuvred, schemed and planned
(The stained and dog-eared Ingham script
Show that his hand, and glass, have slipped

You guess the net effect of this
Like Polish prelate's pungent piss!)

The version told by Jim McGrath
Is of the lot, the most bizarre!
His reputation we respect
His sources, though, we do suspect
Integrity is not in doubt
References must be left out
For purposes of secrecy
Or confidentiality

In Memphis in a loathsome spot
Salmond found in code a plot
That changed the course of history
Revealed it all to you and me

Who said you were an effete lot
Wine sodden wrecks, not worth a jot?

And now we know that Joe Crabtree
Was born in Chipping Sodbury
In seventeen and fifty four
He lived one hundred years, no more
And died the day that he was born
St Valentine's, about mid morn

An earnest lad at first you know
And choir boy, nicknamed "Cuckoo Joe"
Precocious youth, with wit and sense
And lusty for experience
A poet, sport, and thus of course
Keen on human intercourse

As flute boy, sailed with Captain Cook
Wrote am'rous verse, and then he took
A milkmaid for experiment
(A quite delicious time they spent)
Gifted at this kind of game
Partners to him often came
Indulging this activity
Explains his fine longevity
And much that happened later on
Which shortly I will touch upon

To Oxford then he briefly went
Broke the rules, and down was sent
The crime, to satirise in verse
His tutor, and of course much worse
Like drinking bouts, unseemly play
(As Crabtree scholars do today)

Revelations then diverge
But explanations will emerge
And once again, I strongly urge
You be not sober, sceptical
Or think us hypothetical
Chronology may be in doubt
But be assured, the truth will out
Anomalies are possible
And it is more than probable
That one day with unusual skill
An orator will cut and fill
And smooth the bumpy history
While we with bold alacrity
Leap to new discovery
How Crabtree packed his hundred years
With quests and conquests, joys and tears

Williams records the next events
Which dented Crabtree's confidence
The snake, a melon girl and glass
Elements in what came to pass
Adventures real, yet farcical
And loss of his left testicle
The timely role of explorer Bruce
Providing him sufficient excuse
Years later plotting his demise
To scholars, this is no surprise

Kilbride reveals he then studied for law
But also indulged in very much more
From statistics of the public health
He based his independent wealth
Received in perpetuity
For inventing the annuity

Unhappy with the local pub
He founded a jolly dining club
His int'rest in the vintner's art
Would play in life a major part

He would approve this gathering
(At least in our imagining)

At twenty-seven, in eighty one
(So the tale by McGrath is spun)
Joined the East India Company
And events unfolded rapidly

Smitten by an icy maid
A nervous waiting game he played
She stepped in a nasty in the street
He seized his chance to scrape her feet
And from this vantage point assess
Hypothermia's loveliness
Energetic'ly he sought her
McGillicuddy's caustic daughter
From closer up, he found out then
She liked blood sports, and toyed with men

She called him Fido, he contrived
To follow her, and thus arrived
In Italy to test the pasta
No one since has run it faster
From then until the present day
La Corsa di Corleone!

He managed then in old Beijing
A Pizza Parlour, quite the thing
With music he himself composed
Regretfully, he was deposed
Deftly he led his human resources
But overcome by superior forces
Rescued, returned to old Blighty's shore
And never returned to the Orient more

The next position, he liked the most
In France his uncle found him a post
As vintner's assistant, it suited him fine
Indulging the women, and testing the wine

Neglecting not his poetic pen
His "Ode to Claret" was written then

To scholars now it seems quite fair
To suppose that his studies of underwear
Led to invention of lasting fame
The "Crabtree Gusset" is its name

Last year's orator, the man from La Trobe
American history was anxious to probe
Crabtree went back to England and then
Was visiting his cold mistress when
He met Alexander Hamilton
Who saw he looked like Washington
And quickly was able to call upon
Connivance in an incredible plan
Where, because he so resembled the man
He could double for the senile chief
To the 'States, and to Martha, bring relief
And thus it is that we see still
The Crabtree face on the dollar bill
And I should quote, though hardly need
"That he'd done wondrous things indeed"

But in this time an interlude
Most agile when from here it's viewed
We can conclude, it is quite clear
A truly vintage Crabtree year!
About this time, we do deduce
He arranged for the death of poor James Bruce

By then young Wordsworth took advice
From Crabtree, who found very nice
Annette Vallon, with William then
But she preferred maturer men
It's thought that Crabtree sired her child
(Wordsworth, we suppose, was wild)
But he owed Crabtree, as you see
And accepted the paternity

This fixed, our Joe took a leading part
In the rapid demise of poor Mozart
Constanze, you see, had fallen hard
For the tall and handsome English bard
A disease of Venus he caught from her
(To which I will again aver)
The best device that they could find
Was suet and mercury combined
As butter for the Mozart bread
No wonder then he soon was dead!

Unfinished was, as we've been told
The Requiem for Leopold
And those who know the music well
From sequences can clearly tell

That Crabtree's hand was in the score
In this, and as we know, much more!

He completed this very active time
To take up silk, and steer a crime
To sack Priestley's house, that was the job
By inciting to riot a Royalist mob

Revolution in France, then on the rise
Crabtree, we can surely surmise
Played a leading part in this
For he was never one to miss
Action and opportunity
It's hard to credit that he would be
Unable to converse in French
After so much time with many a wench

As Coogan reports, at this time was done
By Crabtree, the founding of MI 1
With a mission of great significance
To counter subversion of Britain by France

As Hudson has told it wasn't much later
When Crabtree met the little Dictator
Drew on a menu a simple straight line
"Comme ça" - Boney thought it just fine
Adopted the plan and thereupon
To Crabtree is owed "Routes Napoleon"

[To another topic I'll briefly skip
He never neglected scholarship
Crabtree took a larger view
And studied Bulgarian women, too
His work on their anatomy
Is famous, or supposed to be]

Though now you'd think his hands were full
He turned his mind to importing wool
This he found in looming failure
Setting sail then for Australia
Sadly, his secret he could not keep
His scheme for fine merino sheep
And thus McArthur found his fame
The credit belongs to another name!

For years he planned our outback roads
Straight lines between far distant nodes

And then with his departure nigh
Incurred the wrath of Guv'nor Bligh
Reacted strongly, most appalled
The "Rum Rebellion" it was called
(Bligh was ill advised to try it
With Crabtree skilled in art of riot)

This polymath and reprobate
Returning to manipulate
Affairs of Science and the State
Was then adviser, in Coogan's view
Of Wellesley, Duke of Waterloo
Of Faraday, the man of science
Guru to many other clients

Before and after, as you know
Many men to him would owe
(The women, too, seemed satisfied
And we are sure most kinds he tried)

By this time hampered he would be
By piles, disease and injury
The surgeons tried to operate
But found his sword in such a state
They left it for a later day
When better chance might come their way

And so it was in thirty-two
Was grafted on a weapon new
From Bentham, who for greater good
Had left his parts, as we all should
(Consid'ring what I have in view
There's not a part I'd want from you)
Replacement was a great success
He functioned even more, not less

But I anticipate a bit
At this time he paused to fit
Statistics to the public health
How systems can distribute wealth
"In petto" then he had a chair
At London, and he lectured there
On topics strange so it is said
Including "Sex Among the Dead"

By then the railways were the craze
With Wordsworth off he went to gaze

The Rocket ran and squashed quite flat
An official in a tall top hat
Crabtree surmised and at this stage
Computed the new and broader gauge
Which Brunel took the credit for
Crabtree advised him on much more
Designs for locos he supplied
(Later slightly modified)
A giant ship shown on a chart
(An invasion plan of Bonaparte)
Which inspired "Great Eastern" later on
Was Crabtree's, who by then was gone

Orator Murray added more
That Crabtree foretold answers for
Such as disasters over here
The force of gravity, it's clear
Is greater, lower, in our town
Explaining bridges falling down!

He invented, too, a dope
That he, and others, liked to hope
Would hide the iron casting faults
The voids and splits, defective bolts
And so the mighty Tay bridge fell
But Murray's study shows quite well
What other experts did not see
They'd used a faulty recipe!

From Hudson's study it appears
Crabtree devised in his later years
The greatest railway in history
Echuca to Chipping Sodbury!
Factors conspired against this plan
But still as tribute to the man
Light had his plan for Adelaide
And the Goolwa loop at least was made

About this time, I should remark
He lived by the Lake of Charliegrark
The "Bard of Boorooopki" he was known
As Bennetts the well-known scribe has shown
While living there, as Coogan found later
He also conceived the refrigerator

Though ageing, he kept up his sport
And at eighty-five was found in court

Alleged were indecent exposure and rape
The evidence weak, an easy escape
Proceedings aborted, clear from the start
The woman had taken a willing part!
And later, too, he found amour
With Lola Montez on a dancing tour

He practised however seriously
And followed eugenics fervently
Greatness he wanted to promulgate
And one of our number will one day relate
The traces of the C1 strain
Defined by Coogan in his refrain

He did all this, and so much more
But I suspect I heard a snore
(And most of it you've heard before)
So I'll regret my clumsy rhymes
(As has been true so many times)
And dare my thesis to pronounce
Something you may well denounce

How could one man accomplish this
And all the things I had to miss
The thread I now identify
He was recruited as a spy
This has been known from long ago
(As Clive and others clearly show)
But multiple identity
Makes it clear, at least to me
That Crabtree is a code brand name
For a group, or groups, with a bigger game
The master of the pseudonym
Left the habit to those who follow him

Consider now what I show you
Pass it around for a better view
"Purveyors of fine toiletries"
"Crabtree and Evelyn", if you please!
A front, of course, to penetrate
Manipulate affairs of state
Ironically appropriate
Since he himself perfected it
And further you will see the fit
Headquarters of this company
(Significant you will agree)
The State of Vermont, USA

Neighbours with the CIA!
Who interfere consistently
And operate relentlessly
You'd be naive, and very green
To think that the Chinese submarine
Which took off Holt, was not their work
And sacking Whitlam, another lurk
Was it a Crabtree scientists' plot
Public disgrace of Senator Schact?

One thing I'm sure you haven't missed
Crabtree was a Royalist
And so is the Crabtree underground
I do believe this thesis sound
A Republic here they see a threat
They'll stir up trouble now I bet!

You must not think me paranoid
The obvious we can't avoid
Of understanding now and then
And certainly you wonder when
You check our library and see
With the sobriquet "A. Crabtree"
Monographs on the "Psychic craft"
(If not so grim, I might have laughed)
"Stolen magic, at the king's command"
This "Crabtree, J.", in my list at hand

Crabtree claims our admiration
But was, I find, the inspiration
For fables, and for gross intrigue
Only these were in his league

Crabtree scholars, consider well
Who inspired the Pimpernel?
Why him, of course; the Baroness
Would have known of him, I guess
And more, I think that we can trace
From dates, from records and the face
That whatever she was styled
Most likely was his own grandchild!

To guess, our scholars would not fail
That Dickens wrote his well known Tale
Using our hero's diaries
Consider this then, if you please
The icy lady, Crabtree's flame

Was given by Dickens another name
Madame Defarge who so loved gore
Like Hypothermia relished war!

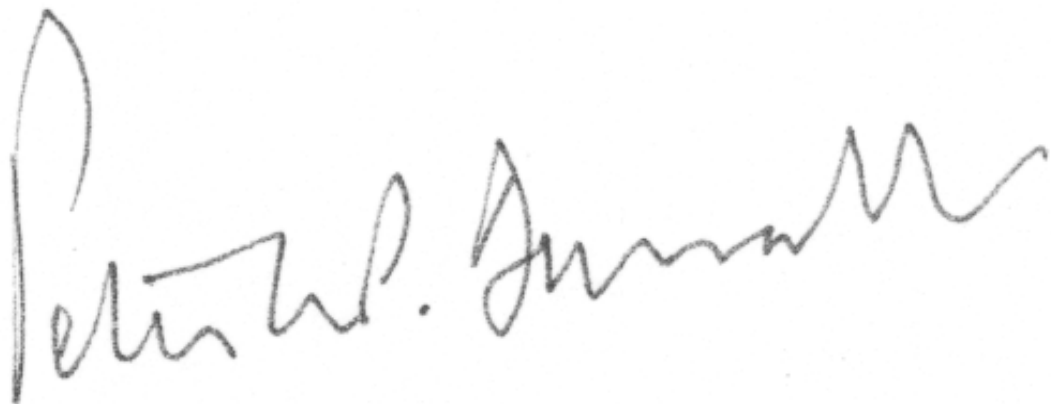
And Harry Flashman crossed his path
MacDonald Fraser knew the swath
That Crabtree cut through life and so
In fiction it could be, also

Thus fact and fable intertwine
And our insights enhanced by wine
The wondrous tale is told again
Another year to marvel when
Mighty Crabtree turned the tide
Both here and on the other side

The orator next year may find
The conspiracy I had in mind
In any case will gladly rove
In the Crabtree history treasure trove

And now I've finished this at last
A story of the golden past
A time of progress, great ideas
Of Crabtree's round one hundred years

President, I'll take my chair
Let's toast the likeness over there!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Peter W. Sumner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

