

# Helen Haenke

at *Rockton*

A c r e a t i v e l i f e

UQP

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and recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests.  
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regulations of the country of origin.

First page: *Frangipanis*, one of Helen  
Haenke's still lifes, c. 1950s.

Previous pages: Portrait of Helen  
Haenke by Wilfred Hayward 'Bill' Veal,  
c. 1940s.

This page: *Friends of the Fryer  
Library* newsletter, June 1979, and a  
newspaper article about the motif  
created by Helen Haenke.

Contents pages: *Rockton*, painted by  
Cliff Sheldrake for the 2008 Heritage  
Building Society (now Heritage Bank)  
Calendar.

## Foreword

In the third newsletter of the *Friends of the Fryer Library*, June 1979, the President announced 'our first meeting for the year ... will commemorate the work of Helen Haenke, a good friend of the Fryer Library, whose death in December last saddened us all. Instead of a lecture, there is to be a reading of some of her poems and a small memorial exhibition.' The newsletter featured a floral motif designed by the talented playwright, poet, short story writer and artist, whose drawing of a banksia had been used on the Fryer Memorial Library's Golden Jubilee 1977 leaflet.

Helen's last collection of poems, *Prophets and Honour*, begins with a quote from the Gospel of Matthew 13:57: 'A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country'. Recognition came to Helen far from the place of her birth in Newcastle, New South Wales, when she settled with her husband in his hometown of Ipswich in Queensland. From the family's historic house, *Rockton*, Helen would look out to her community and invite them to play readings, recitals and concerts. As she writes, 'I live in a house among trees and look out'. It was a place that inspired her deeply.

Helen's surviving daughters, Angela Geertsma and Margo Rayner, with the support of the other members of the Jani Haenke Charitable Trust, have kindly donated most of her papers to the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland. This collection preserves a fascinating record of her life and work. As the Fryer celebrates its 90th year I am delighted that this book by UQP will connect a new generation to Helen Haenke's plays, poems, prose and artworks. Creations that form 'a magnificent legacy, revealing a remarkable depth of compassion and a shrewd, astute perception of people and their surroundings.'

Simon Farley  
The Fryer Librarian



### FRIENDS OF THE FRYER LIBRARY Newsletter

Newsletter No. 3  
June 1979

Dear Friends,

Already we are well into 1979. This is to announce that our first meeting for the year will be held on Friday June 22nd at 5.15 p.m. in Central Library staff lecture room, lower ground floor. The occasion will commemorate the work of Helen Haenke, a good friend of the Fryer Library, whose death in December last saddened us all. Instead of a lecture, there is to be a reading of some of her poems. There will be a small memorial exhibition in the lecture room, instead of the customary open display of books in the Robinson Room.

Visitors.

... we had the pleasure of meeting Commander Douglas Fryer, ... who were touring Australia. Commander ... the Fryer Library is ... was a





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1

## A Creative Spirit Grows

Helen Joyce Haenke was born on 9 May 1916 at Wickham, an inner-city suburb of Newcastle in New South Wales. She was the eldest child of Walter Charles Petherbridge, a medical practitioner, and his wife Lily Myrtle (née Wood). She is pictured here with her parents and the eldest of her three brothers, David (born 1918) – John was born in 1920 and Colin 1923.



On 9 October 1937, at the age of 21, Helen married Willis Haenke at All Saints' Church in Petersham, Sydney. As the press lavishly gushed, she designed her own wedding gown, adding yet another bow to her creative life.

OF IPSWICH AND SYDNEY INTEREST

Haenke—Petherbridge Wedding

A WEDDING of interest in Ipswich will be celebrated in All Saints' Church, Petersham, Sydney, this evening. The bride, Miss Helen Petherbridge, is the only daughter of Dr. and Mrs. W. Petherbridge, Petersham, Sydney, and the bridegroom, Mr. Willis Lynn Haenke, is the only son of Mr. and Mrs. M. W. Haenke, Rockton, Ipswich.



MISS HELEN PETHERBRIDGE.  
—Photograph by H. Noel Maitland.

ARUM lilies and roses will beautify the church.  
To be given away by her father, the bride will wear white lace cut on Victorian lines with a short train falling from the gathered waistline at the back. Her circular veil of cut tulle features applique lace flowers and a tulle ruffle edge. It will be held in position by coronet of gardenias and lily of the valley. The bride will carry a Victorian posy of similar flowers, edged with tulle.

OLD WORLD STYLE

MISS MOLLY DOUGLASS, the only bridesmaid, will feature white Swiss embroidered organdi fashioned in old world style. Her short chin length veil of white cut tulle will be arranged with a coronet of pink Cecil Brunner roses and blue delphiniums to match her posy of similar flowers.

Mr. Duncan McCorquodale will attend as best man.

The reception will be held at the home of the bride's parents at Petersham. Mrs. Petherbridge will wear flowered chiffon patterned in three shades of blue. To it she will add a navy lacquered taffetas coat and a matching toque. She will carry a bouquet of daisies, buttercups, cornflowers and scarlet ranunculi. Mrs. Haenke (mother of the bridegroom) will favour beige Alençon lace over brown crepe de chine. Fashioned with sunray pleated sleeves, the frock is allied with a ripple brown ring velvet coat and a matching baku hat. Her bouquet is composed of green guelders roses and brown orchids.

The honeymoon will be spent touring the south coast of New South Wales. For her travelling the bride will don a grey tailored costume, to which she will add black accessories and Russian fox fur.

PETERSHAM WEDDING

On Saturday night last Miss Helen Petherbridge, only daughter of Dr. and Mrs. W. C. Petherbridge, of Petersham, was married to Mr. Willis Haenke, of Rockton, Ipswich, Queensland.

The ceremony took place at All Saints' Church, Petersham, and was performed by the Rev. C. E. Adams. Mr. Duncan MacCorquodale was best man.

Made to her own design, the bride wore a Victorian frock of white lace. Ruffles of white tulle edged the "V" necked bodice, short puffed sleeves, and the hemline of the full, fully trained skirt. The ruffles were repeated on the edge of the circular finger-tip length tulle veil which had appliques of the lace of which the frock was made, and was held to the head with a coronet of gardenias and lily-of-the-valley.

The same flowers, formed an Early Victorian bouquet mounted in tulle, with streams falling to the hemline of the frock.

Made on the same Victorian lines was the frock of white Swiss embroidered organdie muslin worn by the bridesmaid, Miss Nellie Douglass, of Epping. Cecil Brunner roses and delphiniums formed her bouquet and the coronet which held a circular veil of white tulle.

A reception was later held at the residence of the bride's parents, Larnook, Petersham. Mrs. Petherbridge wore a flowered chiffon frock in three shades of blue. Her coat and toque were of lacquered satin in a matching shade of blue, and she carried a bouquet of lily flowers. A tailored gown of beige Alençon was worn by the bridegroom's mother, whose bouquet was of forest green flowers and foliage. For travelling, the bride chose a grey tailored suit with a Russian fox fur and black hat and accessories.

Designed Own Wedding Gown

A BRIDE who designed her own wedding gown was Miss Helen Petherbridge, only daughter of Dr. and Mrs. W. C. Petherbridge, of Petersham, whose wedding to Mr. Willis Haenke, of Ipswich, was celebrated at All Saints' Church, Petersham, on Saturday.

The bride has studied art and dress designing for several years, and has frequently shown pictures at the Industrial Art Society's exhibitions.



MRS. WILLIAM HAENKE, who designed her wedding gown of white lace, in which she was married at All Saints', Petersham, on Saturday. She was Miss Helen Petherbridge.  
—Monte Lake.

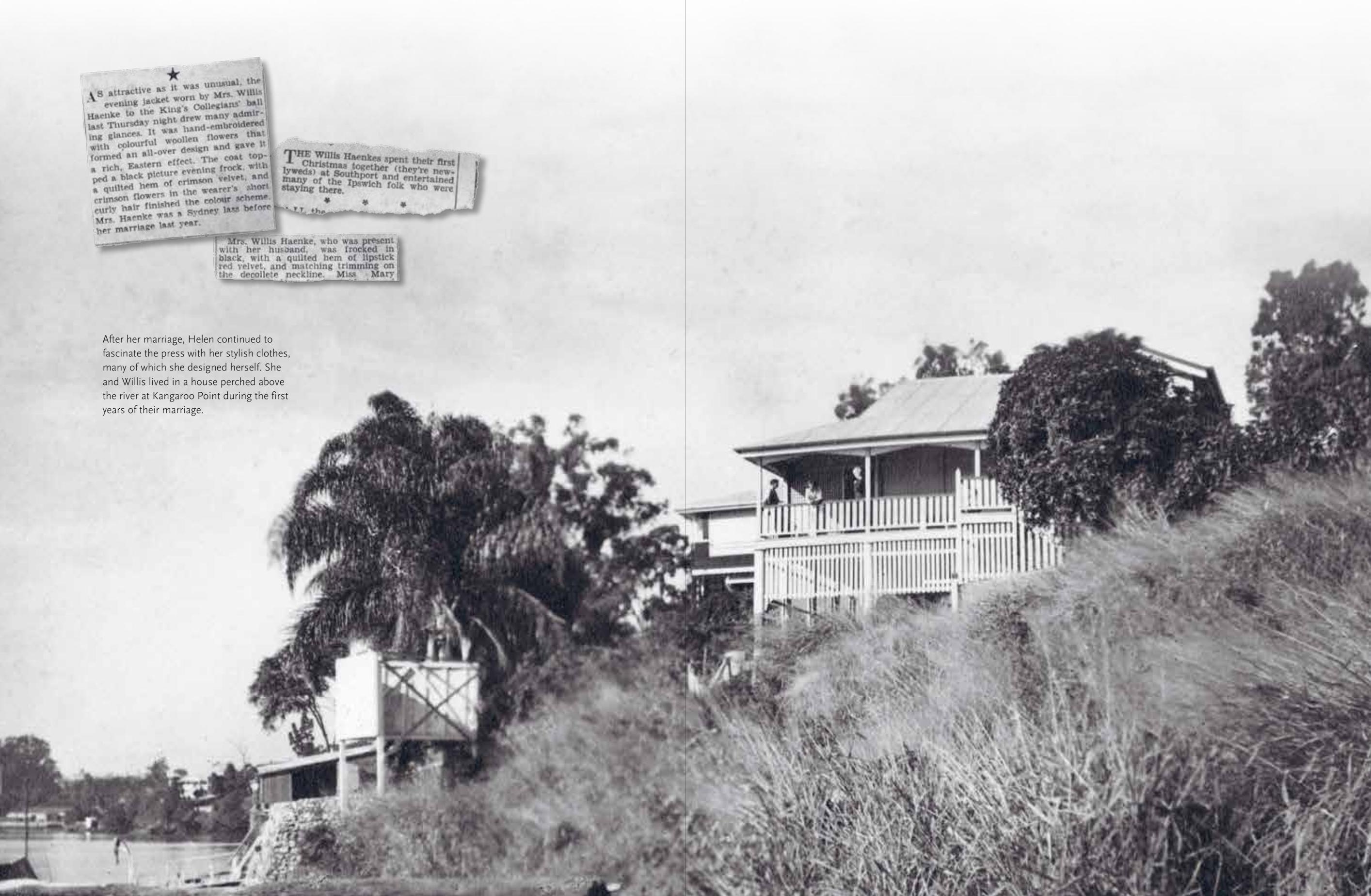


★  
AS attractive as it was unusual, the evening jacket worn by Mrs. Willis Haenke to the King's Collegians' ball last Thursday night drew many admiring glances. It was hand-embroidered with colourful woollen flowers that formed an all-over design and gave it a rich, Eastern effect. The coat topped a black picture evening frock, with a quilted hem of crimson velvet, and crimson flowers in the wearer's short curly hair finished the colour scheme. Mrs. Haenke was a Sydney lass before her marriage last year.

THE Willis Haenkes spent their first Christmas together (they're newlyweds) at Southport and entertained many of the Ipswich folk who were staying there.

Mrs. Willis Haenke, who was present with her husband, was frocked in black, with a quilted hem of lipstick red velvet, and matching trimming on the decoilete neckline. Miss Mary

After her marriage, Helen continued to fascinate the press with her stylish clothes, many of which she designed herself. She and Willis lived in a house perched above the river at Kangaroo Point during the first years of their marriage.





Left: Helen and Willis had three daughters – Jani, born in 1940; Angela, born in 1943; and Margot, born in 1945 – seen here on the steps of Rockton with Helen and their cousin Jody (seated next to Helen), not long after Margot was born.

Right: This later photograph of (left to right) Angela, Helen, Margot and Jani is also taken near the verandah at Rockton.



Below: Angela Geertsma, Helen and Willis's second daughter, created this pedigree chart while researching her family's history.

FAMILY NAME HAENKE..... **PE I G R E E C H A R T** CHART NO. 16

Show which certificates have been obtained.

\* The yellow highlighter is for the certificates of which I have copies.

<p><b>Willis Lynn HAENKE</b></p> <p>Born. 2 July 1911.....          Where. IPSWICH, QLD.....          Married. 9 OCT. 1937, SYDNEY.          Died. 20-11-1987.....          Where. CALOUNDRA, QLD.          Ashes strewn on Baby Bay.</p>	<p><b>John Wilhelm HAENKE</b></p> <p>Born. 3 Nov. 1843.....          Where. MORASKO (Poland).....          Married. 3 Oct. 1869, QLD.          Died. 17 Feb. 1909.....          Where. IPSWICH, QLD.  <b>Frederica Christina L. MULLER</b>          Born. 22 Nov. 1849.....          Where. BERLIN (GERMANY)          Died. 12 Jan. 1924.....          Where. IPSWICH, QLD.  <b>Benjamin Horst TAYLOR</b>          Born. 12 July 1857.....          Where. GOULBURN.....          Married. 5 Oct. 1880, QLD.          Died. 22 June 1914.....          Where. IPSWICH, QLD.          Laura Jane HARRIS</p>	<p><b>Johannes Martin HAENKE</b> CHART NO. 16          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Anna Elizabeth BRIX</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Johann Gottfried MULLER</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Christine Louise BAHLOW</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>John Peterson TAYLOR</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Ann Bartlett ROPER</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Jonathan HARRIS</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Maria BLACKWELL</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>William PETHERBRIDGE</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Lydia Anna PETHERBRIDGE</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>John Charles BONARIUS</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Margaret DUKER</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>James WOOD</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Sarah Ann CARRUTHERS</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>William Henry THOMPSON</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p> <p><b>Rosa CHILD</b>          Continued on Chart.....</p>
<p><b>Angela Lynn HAENKE</b></p> <p>Born. 27 Nov. 1943.....          Where. BRISBANE, QLD.          Married 29 July 1972, Amsterdam.          Died.....          Where.....</p>	<p><b>Martin William HAENKE</b></p> <p>Born. 5 MARCH 1875.....          Where. WARWICK, QLD.....          Married. 3 AUG. 1898, IPSWICH.          Died. 12 JAN. 1957.....          Where. IPSWICH, QLD.....</p>	<p><b>Laura Lydia TAYLOR</b></p> <p>Born. 1 JULY 1881.....          Where. WARWICK, QLD.....          Died. 21 APRIL 1959.....          Where. IPSWICH, QLD.....</p>
<p><b>Wybe Lute GEERTSMA</b></p> <p>Name of Spouse.....</p>	<p><b>Helen Joyce PETHERBRIDGE</b></p> <p>Born. 9 MAY 1915.....          Where. NEWCASTLE, NSW.....          Died. 7 DEC. 1976.....          Where. IPSWICH, QLD.....</p>	<p><b>Walter Charles PETHERBRIDGE</b></p> <p>Born. 25 DEC. 1888.....          Where. MOLONG, NSW.....          Married. 4 APRIL 1918.....          Died. 15 FEB. 1942.....          Where. KIPPING, NSW.....</p>
<p>NAME OF COMPILER.....          WHERE.....          ADDRESS.....</p>	<p><b>Lily Myrtle WOOD</b></p> <p>Born. 26 JUNE 1887.....          Died. 28 NOV. 1976.....          Where. IPSWICH, QLD.....</p>	<p><b>Charles William WOOD</b></p> <p>Born. 11 MAY 1859.....          Where. ORANGE, NSW.....          Married. 21 SEPT. 1882, BORA.          Died. 13 MAY 1907.....          Where. KANGAROO VALLEY, NSW.  <b>Helen THOMPSON</b>          Born. 25 AUG. 1859.....          Where. BORA, NSW.....          Died. 28 SEPT. 1942.....          Where. BRISLEY, NSW.....</p>

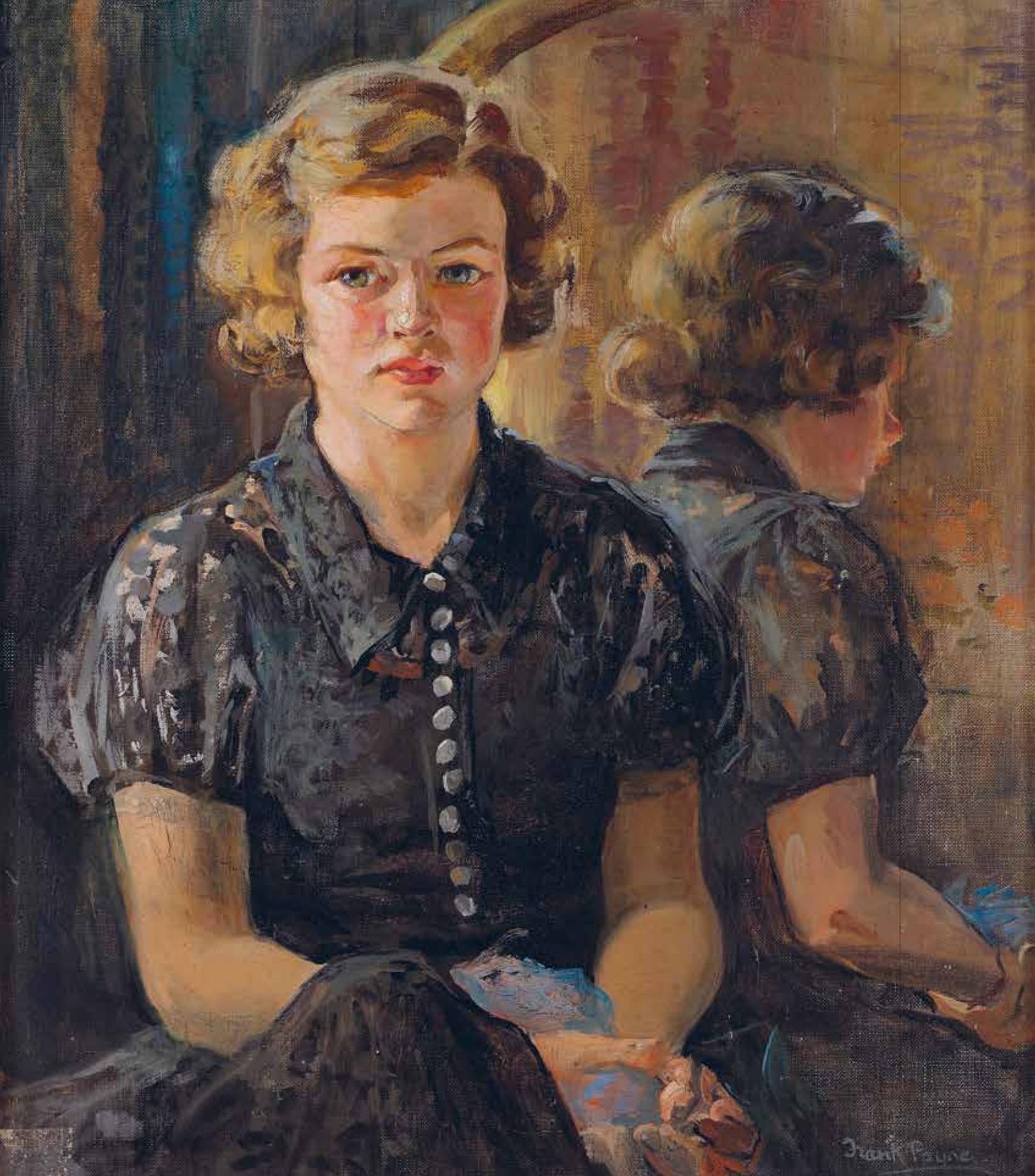
IPSWICH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY INC.



Jani (left) and Helen relax on the grassy rise at the back of *Rockton*. The widow's walk can be seen clearly on top of the second storey on the right of the house. The decorative windows at the end of the verandah indicate where the ballroom is located.

# 3

## An Artist's View



Left: A young Helen, possibly still a teenager, sat for this portrait by Frances (Frank) Payne (1885–1996) at a time when her own artistic life was just beginning. Frank, some 30 years older than Helen, was a graphic artist, well-known painter and arts mentor. It is possible their talks during the sittings may have encouraged Helen to later study at art college and work as a graphic artist.

Right: Helen's paintings predominately consisted of landscapes and still lifes, and over 50 of them continue to adorn the walls at *Rockton*.



As a young woman in the 1930s, Helen was trained as a commercial artist – university was for her brothers. In Melbourne in 1940 and '41 Helen took the opportunity to study art with the painter Max Meldrum. Meldrum was a painter and art teacher with a well-developed and articulated theory of painting. He was then at the height of his reputation and power in the art world, having won the Archibald Prize in 1939 and again in 1940.

Like many successful men of that period, Meldrum's attitudes to aspiring women artists was patronising. Indeed, according to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, when Nora Heysen won the Archibald Prize in 1938, Meldrum gave it as his considered opinion that 'women could not be expected to paint as well as men'. According to Helen's daughter Jani, Meldrum was also patronising towards Helen, this housewife who sometimes turned up at art class with a baby in a bassinet. Jani recalled her mother saying that when they entertained Meldrum at home, he showed more interest in talking with Willis than he did with Helen about her painting. It is reasonable to assume then, that, although it did not entirely destroy Helen's passion for painting, the experience of being Meldrum's pupil cannot have done a lot to enhance her self-confidence as an artist.

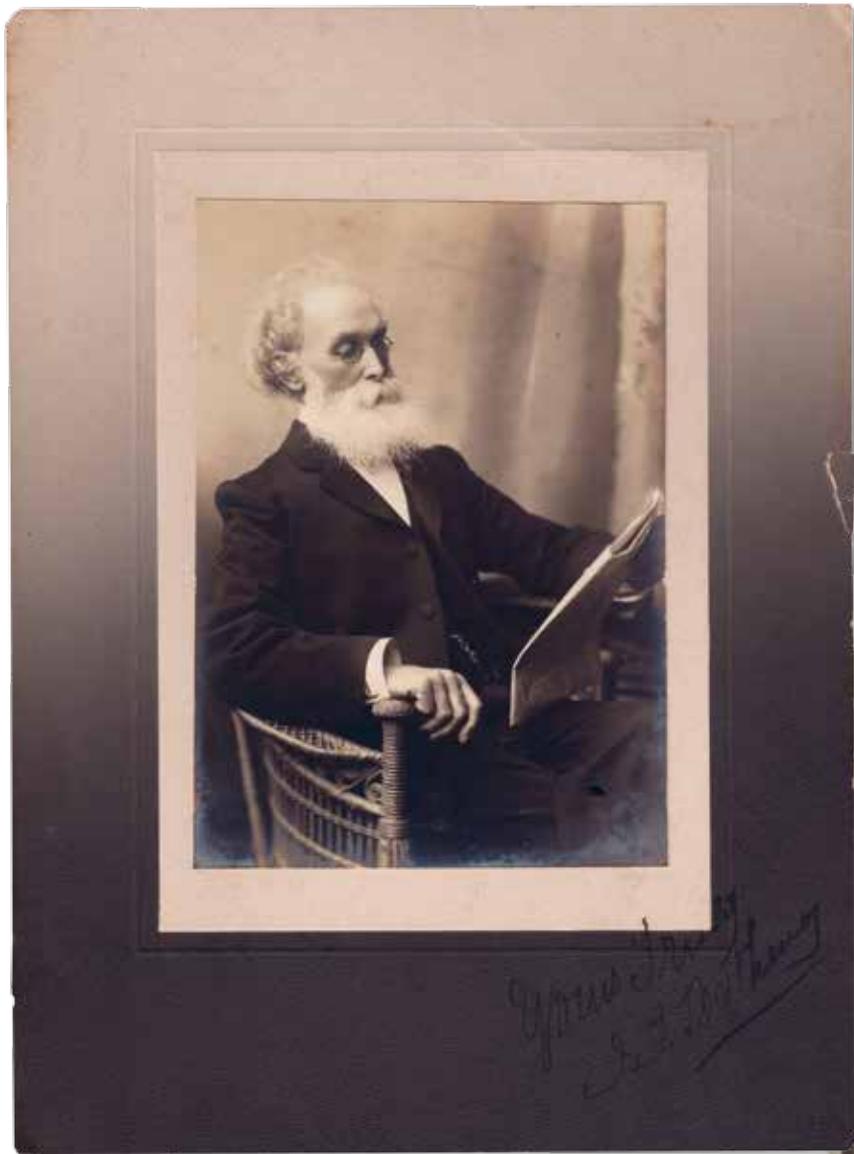
By 1945 Helen and Willis had returned to Ipswich. The demands of child raising and the expectations in those days that came with the role of wife and mother would have left little time for the pursuit of Helen's interest in painting. In 1947 Willis bought a small cottage that he relocated to Cleveland, and Jani remembered her mother painting there at weekends. Some of Helen's paintings were exhibited at the Redlands Museum just before Jani died in 2009.

#### Margaret Grace

Margaret Grace first met Helen in 1956, when Margaret was an English teacher coaching the Ipswich State School debating team and Helen was an adjudicator of inter-school debates. Margaret later married poet and author Thomas Shapcott and they both knew Helen well. Margaret spoke about Helen at the opening of an exhibition of Helen's work at the Redlands Museum in 2009.



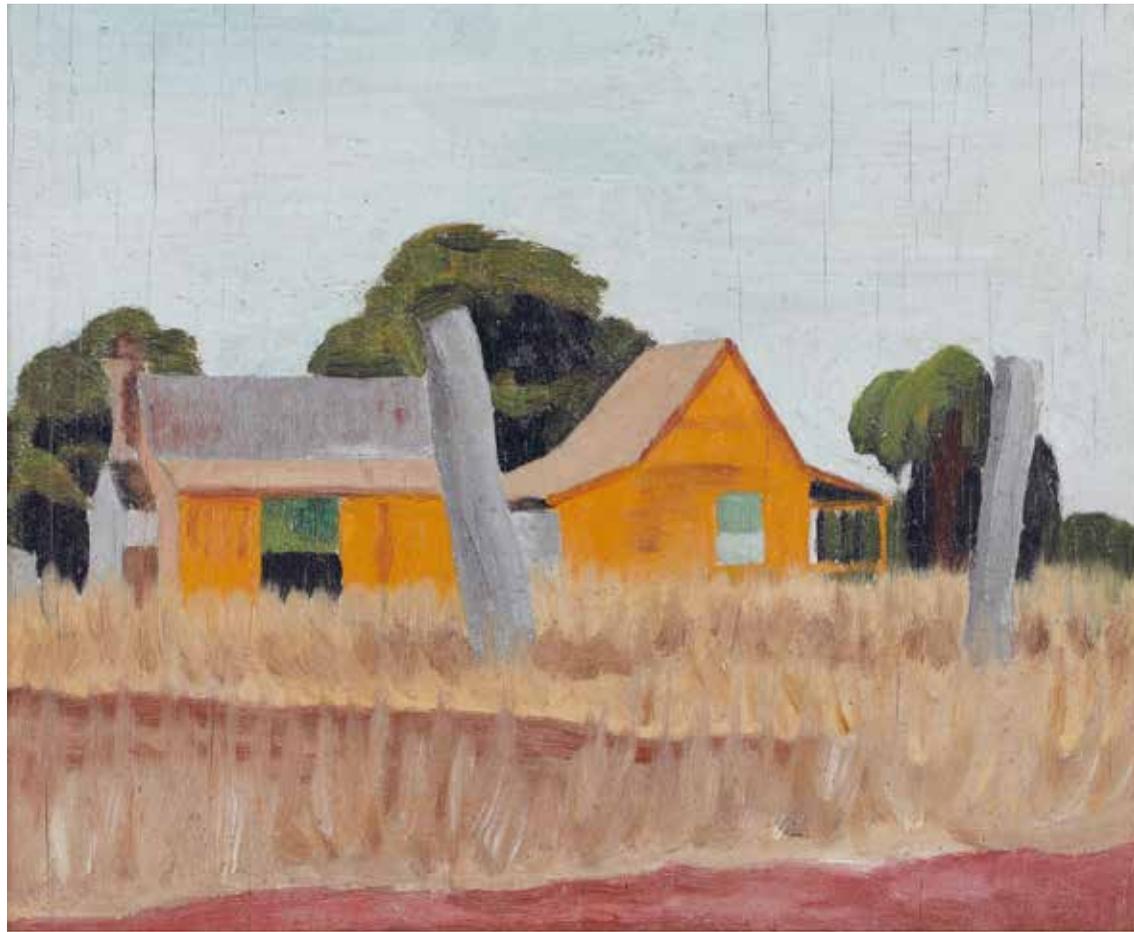
Helen's world was the subject of many of her canvases. This table in *Rockton's* breakfast room was where Helen would sit in the sunshine and look out upon her garden, inspiring her creative thoughts and works.



Duncan Max Meldrum (1875–1955) was a Scottish-born Australian painter, known as the founder of Australian Tonalism, a representational style of painting, as well as portrait work, for which he won the Archibald Prize in 1939 and 1940. He was a controversial but highly regarded figure in the art world, and Helen studied painting with him during the two years she lived in Melbourne in the early 1940s. Helen's daughter Angela Geertsma says Meldrum 'must have recognised her talent to have accepted her as a pupil ... as true to his time he had little belief in the value of women.'



Meldrum's influence on Helen's work can be seen in a number of her paintings, such as this unfinished painting of *Rockton*. Meldrum championed tonalism, 'the rapid and direct recording of tonal impressions (generalised massed areas of light and dark) ... to create an exact illusion of nature ... a spontaneous, "perceptual" and responsive form of painting, as opposed to traditional tonal painting, which is craft-based and measured.'



Willis and Helen bought a block of land in Shore Street on Cleveland Point and moved an old weatherboard house from West End, Brisbane, to the site. Willis renovated the dwelling, and he and Helen can be seen (left) at the gatepost. At this family holiday home Helen could paint and write while their children played nearby. In the one above, she painted a house just down the street, nearer to the point.

Above: A storm approaches as the waters of Raby Bay lap the edges of Cleveland Point.

Right: Raby Bay painted from Cleveland Point, looking across the bay towards Ormiston.

