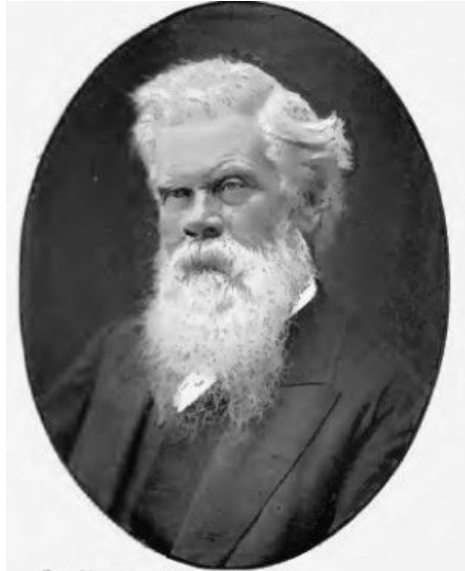


Sir Henry Parkes



May 27th 1815 - April 27th 1896

From Warwickshire to New South
Wales

Who was Sir Henry Parkes and why are we celebrating his bicentenary?

Known as “The Father of Federation” and “The Australian Colossus”, Henry Parkes was the son of a tenant farmer in Stoneleigh who fell on hard times. The family had to leave the area and lived in poverty until Henry and his young wife emigrated to Australia. Although their life there was full of hardship at first, Henry eventually rose to become Premier of New South Wales no less than five times, introducing many significant social reforms.

This booklet aims to give just a brief introduction - for further reading see back page.

“The history of Sir Henry Parkes is almost the political history of New South Wales” *The Manchester Guardian*

“One of the most remarkable Englishmen of his age” *London Standard*

Sir Henry Parkes’ family and Stoneleigh

For at least a hundred years before Sir Henry’s birth, the Parkes family had lived and worked on the Stoneleigh estate. A Thomas Parkes was baptised just over a century before his famous great-grandson, on February 2nd 1715. When he was buried in 1775, the register entry noted him as being “from the Mott House.”

Thomas Parkes’ tenancy seems to have been passed down to his son Edward (b. 1743) and thence to his son, another Thomas Parkes. Born in 1778 just three years after his grandfather’s death, this Thomas Parkes was to fall foul of national difficulties in agriculture and personal misfortune.

Aged 22 he married Martha Faulconbridge, who came from a Fillongley family, at Stoneleigh Church. They would go on to raise seven children, the youngest of whom was **Sir Henry Parkes**, born on May 27th 1815

Sir Henry Parkes' childhood in Stoneleigh



St Mary the Virgin Church



The font

Henry would hardly have remembered living at the cottage of his birth, though he was proud to visit it in later life. Baptised at Stoneleigh Church on 2 July 1815, he would walk as a young boy from his new home at Gibbet Hill to school in Stoneleigh where his schoolmaster was Richard Perks, who had been in charge of the school for many years.



Moat House Cottage



Stoneleigh School

A Change in Fortune

Thomas and Martha continued to farm at Moat House until late 1815. Within months of their last child's birth, however, Thomas decided to gamble on a boom in agricultural prices.

Since the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars, Britain had been cut off from trade with much of Europe and consequently the price of food soared. This, coupled with several years of drought sent crop prices ever higher – and Thomas Parkes saw his chance. He took on the tenancy of a different farm on the Stoneleigh estate, a large, 100-acre plot at Tocil (now part of the University of Warwick).

In 1822, however, the war was over, Waterloo had been won just a month after young Henry's birth and Europe was recovering. When crop prices fell dramatically, rental costs on the estate did not. Annual rent quadrupled to £245 to reflect the higher prices being fetched by wheat crops.

When Thomas Parkes was incapacitated by an accident which left him on crutches, he was even less able to run his farm at a profit. Despite pleas to the Leigh family for tolerance, a year later, in 1823, he was removed from his farm still owing around £500.

Letter from Richard Darley (agent) to the Hon Mrs Julia Judith Leigh 13th June 1822

“Thomas Parkes has been almost confined ever since his unfortunate accident and is obliged now to go upon crutches. He has promised to pay some money on account as soon as possible, but I fear he is poor, and the times are against him. He is not neglecting his farm, and hopes you will indulge him a short time longer, and that he shall be able to pay Mr Leigh all.”

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office DR 18/17/48/17

Henry's life after Stoneleigh...and before Australia

After Thomas Parkes was forced to leave his Stoneleigh farm, he initially went to Wales where he tried to make ends meet on a farm in Glamorganshire. Still owing money to creditors, however, he had to sell his furniture and leave for Gloucestershire where his wife Martha and his daughter Sarah kept a shop whilst he did part-time labouring work.

Even this was not enough to keep the family out of trouble. A relative informed the bailiffs of Thomas' whereabouts and Thomas was sent to debtors' prison, where he remained for eighteen months.

Henry's mother Martha now had to find the one shilling and sixpence rent on the small terraced house they had taken in Moseley Street, Birmingham. Her daughter Sarah went to work as a stay-maker, but saved her five shillings a week to pay off her father's debt. When Thomas was released he worked as a gardener, but his fall from his former life evidently still rankled, since by the 1851 census he described himself as "farmer out of business".

What of Henry? Aged eleven he was never again to attend school. He earned fourpence a day in a rope factory, then worked as a labourer in a rock-breaking gang on the road between Cheltenham and Cirencester. Later he worked for six shillings a week in a brickyard.

Aged twelve he was apprenticed to a bone and ivory turner, John Holding of Moseley Street, and made products such as knife handles, hair combs and toys. He began to self-educate at the same time, joining the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute and reading avidly, especially poetry. By the age of sixteen he was fired by an enthusiasm for radical politics, the Chartist Movement then being at its height.

Henry – from Birmingham to Sydney

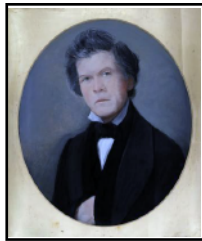
At Carr's Lane Non-Conformist Chapel in Birmingham, Henry met his wife-to-be, Clarinda Varney. They were engaged by the time he was nineteen and at the age of twenty-one he married her at the Anglican Edgbaston Parish Church, on July 11th 1836. In the next two years they were to have two children who survived only a short time, the first, Thomas Campbell, living for a few weeks, and the second, Clarinda Martha, living for just a day. During this time Henry had set up a turning business in Bradford Street, but after it was clear that it was not going to be a success, he decided to seek a better life in London.

It was not long before Henry and Clarinda realised that London was too expensive a place to live: rent was high, and work was hard to find. Eventually Henry had to sell his own lathe to buy food, and had to work exhausting hours in a factory.

Early in the New Year Henry and Clarinda made plans to emigrate, and became “bounty immigrants” – that is, they had a sponsor, one John Marshall, who put up £36 for their travel.

Clarinda was pregnant once more, and they were practically penniless. Some little help was given, and they set sail on March 27th 1839, arriving in July – two days after their child Clarinda Sarah was born, on board ship.

The “adventure” had begun.



Henry had his likeness taken before leaving England

Henry Parkes was both a keen reader of and writer of poetry from his youth, and published six volumes of verse. Writing to Chandos, Lord Leigh, in 1844 he enclosed a small volume of his verses and some poems in manuscript, knowing that Chandos Leigh himself was a poet. "Poetry", he said, "has been to me a world of dear companionship and sunny joy." In later life he corresponded regularly with Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who became a firm friend, and with whom he stayed, on the Isle of Wight, during his return to England in 1882.

On leaving England, he wrote the following sad poem:

THE EMIGRANT'S FAREWELL TO HIS COUNTRY.

I go, my native land, far o'er
The solitary sea,
To regions, where the very stars
Of Heaven will strangers be,

To some untrodden wilderness
Of Australasia's land, -
A home, which man has here denied,
I seek at God's own hand.

I have a mother, ill and poor,
A father, too, in years,
And have no parting gift for them,
No ! nothing save my tears.

I leave them in a busy town,
Where pale mechanics toil
In irksome manufactories,
Shut from the sun and soil.

Fair visions yet, my native land,
Will o'er my lone heart come,

Whene'er I think of friendship's haunts,
Or childhood's peaceful home,

Or love's delightful wanderings,
When she, who shares my lot,
First plucked from 'mong the violets
The sweet forget-me-not.

And then the beauty of such dreams
Will radiate o'er my heart.
Till bitterly I weep, to think
That we were forced to part.

And Heaven two sinless infants lent,
Whose graves are told with thine -
They came and went so angel-like,
I dare not call them mine.

And memory, when her mystic chain
Back o'er the past she flings,
Nothing so beautiful as they
From all her treasures brings.
For their sweet sakes, my native land!
Even if I loved not thee,
My heart would hover o'er thee still,
Where'er my home might be!

Where will my home be? I'll not ask;
I would not now be told!
Enough to know 'tis God who will
In all my being hold.

I do not know what lovely flowers
May deck the new world's vales
But, though the brightest bloom abound,
If spring no primrose hails,

Its absent beauties I shall mourn,
For I have loved that flower;
And my heart's friends have loved it too
From childhood's earliest hour.

Another poignant poem shows his love for his country:

MY NATIVE LAND.

The moonlight of a milder clime
Is round me pour'd o'er scenes sublime;
But I would fly from all earth's light
And grandeur to behold to-night
My native land!

To-morrow's sun will beauteous rise
In Australasia's summer skies;
But more than beautiful to me
Would winter's wildest morning be
In that dear land!

'Twould almost seem that peace and love
Here reign as o'er those realms above;
But, oh! The counter-charm of home
Is found not yet, where'er I roam,
O'er sea or land!

And greenwoods wave which ne'er are sere
In this December summer here;
But I would turn from Eden's bloom
To hail, in winter's waste and gloom,
My native land!

Early years in Australia

On first arriving in Australia Henry found employment difficult to come by. In 1844 he wrote to Chandos, Lord Leigh for a reference but a reply has never been found. He worked as a farm labourer, a tide-waiter and again as a bone-and-ivory turner.

Although lacking a conventional education, Henry Parkes was a lifelong advocate of education and constantly sought to develop his literary skills, not only through his poetry but also through his political writings. At the time of his arrival in Sydney, the conservative *Sydney Morning Herald* was the main newspaper, owned by a fellow Warwickshire immigrant, John Fairfax from Barford who had founded the *Leamington Spa Courier* in 1828. Parkes felt that a more liberal paper was needed and in December 1850 the first edition of *The Empire* appeared. “*I met with encouragement from nearly all my friends. I myself was intoxicated with the hard and exciting mission of a propagandist*”.

Always interested in politics, after nine years in Australia he felt ready to take a more active part, in 1849 supporting proposals to give Universal Suffrage to all men in New South Wales on the same basis as those in England. This was followed by support for the Campaign to Halt Convict Transportation in favour of ‘free immigration’, a campaign in which women were involved - early evidence that Parkes was a firm believer in the abilities, influence and rights of women.

In May 1854 Parkes was declared the newly elected member of the Sydney Legislative Council and earned the title The Honourable Henry Parkes. He flung himself into political life dealing with issues such as education, sewerage, intemperance, and defence force volunteers. Also, although unsuccessful initially, encouraging government support for population growth through voluntary immigration, rather than the transportation of convicts.

His work rate was phenomenal as he continued to run the ‘Empire’.

Positions of influence

Parkes rose through the political ranks to achieve the extraordinary feat of becoming Premier of New South Wales five times, in 1872, 1877, 1878, 1887 and 1889.

The third Premiership, beginning in 1878, was perhaps the most productive: including a revised Land Act, a new Electoral Act, copyright laws, introduction of paid magistrates, regulation of fisheries, extension of employer liability for injured employees, provision of medical schools, improvement of water and sewage systems, a new foster home system and improvement of liquor licensing.

Parkes felt that his crowning achievement during this parliament was the Public Instruction Bill which made school attendance compulsory for all children from 6 to 14 and ended state aid to church schools.

“The Father of Federation”

In 1888 he decided that the time was ripe to forge ahead with his dream of federation.

On 24 October 1889 Parkes delivered what became known as the ‘**Tenterfield Oration**’. The speech was widely publicised and although most colonial governments’ enthusiasm was muted, momentum had been created and in March 1890 a federal convention was held in Melbourne, at which the first bill to constitute “The Commonwealth of Australia” was developed.

On 2 March 1891 the National Australasian Convention met for the first time at Parliament House in Sydney. At the opening dinner Parkes declared “*Our cause is well known. Our cause is peace*” and proposed the toast

“*One people, one destiny!*”

Sadly, Parkes was not to survive to see Federation come about. On April 9th 1896 he caught a chill which developed into pneumonia. He died peacefully at his home "Kenilworth", in the Sydney suburb of Annandale, on Sunday April 27th, a month away from his 81st birthday.

Despite his wish that no public funeral be given, two hundred carriages followed his hearse to Mortuary Station, whence a train took his coffin for a private funeral in Falconbridge. Thirty thousand people lined the route to the station.

Sir Henry Parkes was buried at a cemetery he had created at Springwood, Falconbridge, alongside his first wife Clarinda. Despite a somewhat complicated private life (three wives and seventeen children) and repeated personal financial difficulties, his contribution to Australian politics is seen today as unparalleled. Among other tributes to him after his passing, London's Pall Mall Gazette declared "He will always remain the architect of his country's greatness."

Sir Henry Parkes' dream of federation was finally realised in 1901. The Federal constitution was proclaimed in Sydney and the first Federal Parliament sat in Melbourne in May 1901. As neither Sydney nor Melbourne would accept each other as the seat of government, a new capital – Australian Capital Territory – was agreed and a competition was held for its design. Canberra was chosen in 1908, construction began in 1913 and Parliament House was opened in 1927.

Parkes' dream of a union of the colonies was achieved and he was rightly recognised as the FATHER OF FEDERATION for his leadership in advancing the cause for nationhood in the last ten years of his life.

Sir Henry Parkes Returns to Stoneleigh

Almost sixty years after his family left Stoneleigh and more than forty since emigrating to Australia, Parkes returned to his place of birth.

On December 29th 1881 he set sail on the Royal Mail Steamer *Australia* accompanied by his daughter Annie.

Their journey was first to San Francisco, then Chicago and New York by early February, and afterwards Washington DC and Boston. They arrived in Liverpool in March and then travelled to London and dined several times with the Prime Minister, Gladstone, and attended a State Ball at Buckingham Palace. Always a keen admirer - and writer - of poetry, Parkes went to stay with his favourite poet, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, on the Isle of Wight.

Whilst it seems that prior arrangements might have been made with Lord Leigh to visit Stoneleigh in an official capacity, Sir Henry paid a private visit on April 3rd 1882 to the village, to see the school where he received his first education. The school logbook carries an entry written by him, to record the event.

Three weeks later, in late April, came the longer, weekend visit: Lord Leigh arranged for him to be met at Kenilworth Railway station by a private carriage, and when he arrived at the Grecian Lodges he was met by a large contingent of villagers, the Stoneleigh Fife and Drum Band and a great many children. Lord Leigh welcomed him at the Old Lodge (the Gatehouse) and made a short speech of congratulation to an "old Stoneleigh boy" who now held such a distinguished position. Sir Henry's speech in response remarked upon his vivid recollections of the village and of how he had set out upon a new life in Australia in a "position of absolute friendlessness." He recommended a life of duty and service to all those present, and proposed cheers both for Lord Leigh and the Queen.



Stoneleigh Abbey gatehouse

Lord Leigh himself drove Sir Henry around various familiar parts of the parish during the visit , including the place of his birth, Moat House Cottage. On the Sunday Sir Henry and Annie accompanied Lord Leigh to Stoneleigh Church, leaving the service to “a merry peal of bells.”

In April Sir Henry had met Canon J.T. Thorn, the vicar of Stoneleigh, and in late June he stayed briefly at the vicarage before leaving Stoneleigh for good. A special evening meeting was arranged on June 29th at the Reading Room when a life-size portrait of Sir Henry was revealed, and speeches made: Canon Thorn noted how the village had followed with great pride the career of Sir Henry, whose position had been achieved through “sheer hard work and force of character”. Sir Henry presented a number of books to the Reading Room and when he left, the band played and Mr Fardon gave the salute with a display of anvil-firing.



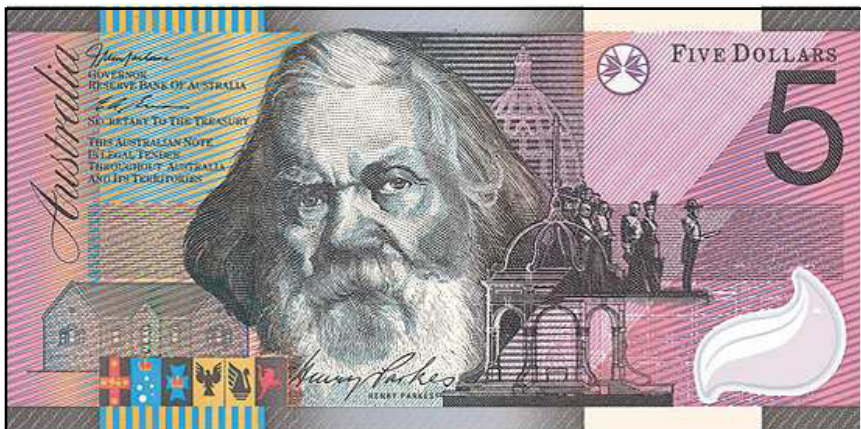
The Reading Room

How is Sir Henry Parkes remembered today?

In 1996, commemorating the centenary of the death of Sir Henry, an Australian £1 coin was minted featuring Sir Henry as the Father of Federation. Designed and sculpted by Wojciech Pietranik, 26.2 million coins were minted.



Australia became an independent nation on 1st January 1901. As part of the centennial celebrations in 2001 a Federation Commemorative \$5 note was issued featuring Sir Henry Parkes.





Sir Henry has the honour of having a town named after him in New South Wales: the name change from **Bushmans** to **Parkes** was gazetted in 1873. In 2008 renowned Australian sculptor Terrance Plowright was commissioned by the Parkes Shire Council, N.S.W. to create a larger than life size bronze statue to stand in the centre of town.

In 1939 the Parkes/Coventry Sister City link was founded as the first such affiliation enjoyed by an Australian town or city, and the link continues to flourish. Most recently:

2001 - Visit to Parkes by a 16 person delegation from Coventry City Council and local soccer team for Australia Day and Centenary of Federation Celebrations.

2012 - Ken Keith, Mayor of Parkes visited Coventry for the Olympics.

2015 - The Honourable Alexander Downer A.C. the Australian High Commissioner to the UK, together with the Coventry Lord Mayor visited Stoneleigh, the Abbey, the Church and Moat House Cottage on 27th May, the bicentennial of the birth of Sir Henry.

On 5th July Ian Thom, the great-great-grandson of Sir Henry, unveiled a plaque in Stoneleigh Church to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Henry's baptism.

Political Life - in brief

Sir Henry Parkes championed many causes and to this day Australia benefits from his vision. The following are some examples:-

Universal suffrage

Condemnation of transportation (i.e. convicts being sent to Australia)

Formal training for teachers

Non-sectarian education for all children -

Naval training for destitute boys

Improved patient care

The Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney

Free trade

Sydney Harbour Bridge construction

Sydney-Melbourne railway

Equality of opportunity/egalitarianism

Improved living conditions for the working classes

Value of labour

Conciliation and Arbitration Commission

Free libraries

Anti slavery

Open spaces for all to enjoy

And above all Australian Federation.

2015 – Stoneleigh Remembers her own.

For many years the “twinning” of the town of Parkes, New South Wales and the city of Coventry has fostered friendship between the two.

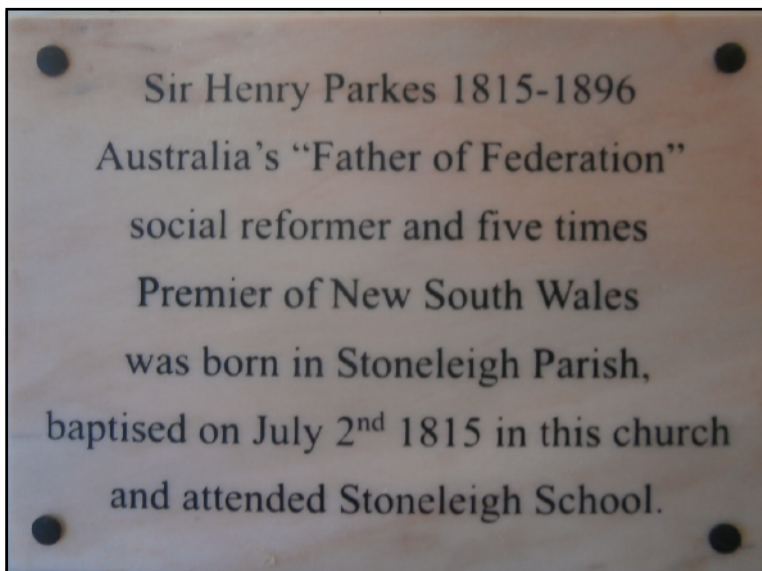
But why is Coventry remembered as Sir Henry’s home...and not Stoneleigh?

Moat House Cottage, Canley, where Sir Henry Parkes was born in 1815, was then part of the Stoneleigh Estate, belonging to the Leigh family. The parish of Stoneleigh extended in that direction to include Westwood, Fletchamstead and Canley until the early twentieth century, these areas being taken within the city boundary in 1927.

It is understandable, then, that in celebrating the achievements of Sir Henry Parkes, who rose from such a disadvantaged background to become one of the most important men in Australian political life, his origins should be traced back to Coventry. Not only is there a road named after him in Canley, Coventry, but there was until recently a school, too, and he is named in Coventry’s “Walk of Fame” in the city centre.

But in Henry’s day, he would have known the hamlet of Canley as part of Stoneleigh. The family’s move to Gibbet Hill – an area taken into the city of Coventry in 1926 – would have strengthened his association with the village, and of course his family’s farming connections with the Estate stretched back to the early eighteenth century.

And so it is with great pleasure that Stoneleigh Village, where Sir Henry Parkes was baptised and went to school, and to which he himself returned with such fond memories, celebrates the bicentenary of his birth in the place where it all began.



If you would like to find out more about Sir Henry Parkes, the most recent biography is *Sir Henry Parkes, the Australian Colossus*, by Stephen Dando-Collins, published by Random House.

This booklet was produced by Stoneleigh History Society and accompanies an extensive display on Sir Henry Parkes in Summer 2015.

Stoneleigh History Society

