

## 'In Advance of his Time'

Thomas Hurley 1864 - 1931  
Mary Elizabeth Scholes 1865 - 1954



### Born in the village of Ceres

Thomas Hurley was born on December 24<sup>th</sup> 1864, the first of two children of **John Hurley** and **Mary Margaret Quinn** of Ceres, near Geelong in Victoria. His father, a farmer, labourer and shearer, had recently emigrated from Devon in England, and his mother was born in Tasmania, the granddaughter of a convict woman. His sister Mary Jane (known as Polly) was born in 1870 in Ceres and married James Steele Stewart of Terang, Victoria.

On October 29<sup>th</sup> 1865, **Mary Elizabeth Scholes** was also born at Ceres, the youngest of six children of **Absalom Scholes** and **Mary Lumb**. They were a devout Methodist family who had emigrated from West Yorkshire in England in 1857.

### Witness to tragedy

Before Mary (or Lizzie as she was called) had turned one year old, her father Absalom, a builder and carpenter, died as the result of falling whilst working on a church roof at Modewarre. Her mother then had to support the family by running a shop on the main road, Barrabool Road, in Ceres. When Mary was 7 years old, her 10-year-old sister Annie died of hydrocephalus. Then at the age of 11, she witnessed the tragic drowning, in the Barwon River, of her brother David Ernest and her sister Ellen's fiance James Hillard.

At the age of 15 Mary won a certificate for 'Needlework (plain and fancy) and knitting'<sup>1</sup> in the Barrabool Hills Juvenile Exhibition. The same year she and her sister Ellen were among the organisers of an evening of 'Readings' at the Ceres Temperance Hall. This included the 'very pleasant singing of the Misses Scholes and Miss Nellie Steane'<sup>2</sup>. Mary probably attended the local Ceres school. Her brother Rev. Samuel Scholes (1863-1931) became a highly regarded Methodist preacher in Victoria.

## Teachers' college award

Apparently Thomas Hurley wanted to be a blacksmith but instead, after attending the school at Ceres, was sent to the Flinders School in Geelong (now Matthew Flinders Girls' Secondary College), and had to walk there from Ceres every day. In 1882 he matriculated from this school to enter the Teachers' Training College in Melbourne where he was awarded the Gladman Prize, given for the best student of the Teachers' College (in honour of the late Frederick John Gladman who was Principal of the Central Training Institute of Victoria from 1877 to 1884).



The Flinders School, Geelong c1907, where Thomas Hurley was educated. Source: State Library of Victoria

## First teaching appointments

On completing his studies Thomas was temporarily appointed Junior Head Teacher for a few months at Boonah (near Dean's Marsh), where his inspector noted he was 'a careful teacher and is interested in his work.'

Thomas then had to move 400 kms northeast to Lurg, near Benalla, where he took up the appointment of Head Teacher from November 14<sup>th</sup> 1884 to October 19<sup>th</sup> 1886. During this time Inspector Ware reported Thomas was 'somewhat inexperienced but gives promise of becoming a good teacher.....(he) uses good methods and works with care.'<sup>3</sup> From October 20<sup>th</sup> 1886 Thomas was appointed Head Teacher at Greta-Hanson, only a few kilometres away. He received mixed reports from the inspectors: 'some of his methods are faulty, but on the whole a good teacher.' and 'an intelligent teacher.....somewhat deficient in animation'<sup>4</sup>. Both Lurg and Greta would have been small schools of only about 30 pupils.

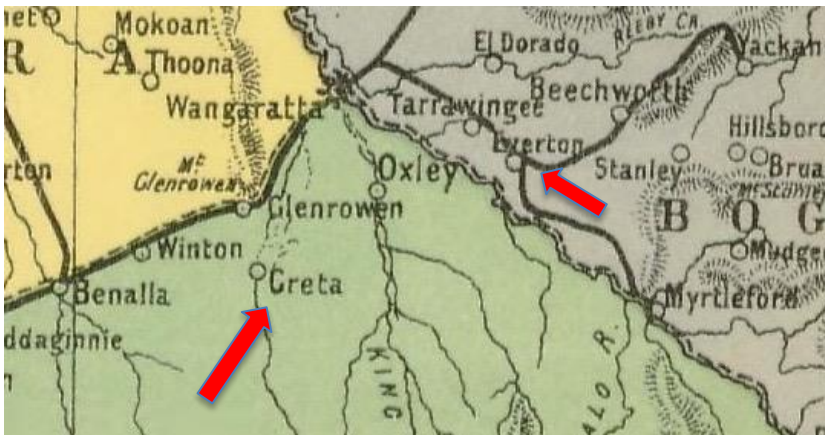
## Return to Ceres to marry

That summer Thomas travelled back home to Ceres and on January 12<sup>th</sup> 1887 at 22 years of age married 21 year-old Mary Elizabeth Scholes. The wedding ceremony took place at the Scholes' home in Ceres, and was conducted by a Wesleyan minister. The witnesses were Mary's sister Ellen Scholes, and William Craig. When the new school year began, Mary would have moved away from home for the first time and begun her married life in northern Victoria – a much drier and hotter area than Ceres nearer the coast. A year later their first son **Thomas Ernest Victor** (Vic) was born at Ceres on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1888. Probably Mary returned to Ceres especially to give birth amongst family. The birth registration shows that Mrs. Lumb was the person present at the birth. This was probably Mary's aunt Betty Lumb.

## Teaching career moves ahead

To progress in his career, Thomas had to keep adding to his qualifications. Whilst at Greta, he qualified to teach Military Drill, sat a Science exam and passed Electricity and

Magnetism. In 1890, through Melbourne University, he achieved 2<sup>nd</sup> class honours in Ancient History, Lower Mathematics, English Language and Literature, and Deductive Logic. The following year he passed another Science exam in Dynamics, Heat, Sound and Light. His inspectors' reports also describe much progress. Between 1889 and 1890 Thomas 'shows teaching power', 'keeps satisfactory discipline', although there was 'some room for improvement in his organising ability'<sup>5</sup>. Then in 1891 the inspector reports: 'doing excellent work in this school which he gained 100% for the second time. Good supply of apparatus in school. Is doing work much above the average. Scholars making good progress'<sup>6</sup>. Whilst living at Greta, Mary gave birth to two more sons: John Cromwell (Crom) in November 1889, and **Horace Leopold (Leo)** on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1891. Then Thomas was transferred to Everton, about 40 kms away and closer to Wangaratta. Leslie Everton (Les) was born here on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1893 and Florence Mabel (Flossie) on December 15<sup>th</sup> 1894.



Thomas's first teaching appointments: Lurg (not shown on map) is between Benalla and Greta. Greta and Everton are indicated. (Victorian Dept. Crown Lands and Survey map 1892) Source: State Library of Victoria



Greta Township, 1880s. Source: State Library of Victoria

## Transfer to Elmhurst

In 1896, at short notice after five years at Everton, Thomas was transferred to Elmhurst over 350 kms away to the south-west, where he was appointed Head Teacher. Before leaving Everton in August, Thomas and Mary were given a Valedictory evening where their friends and colleagues thanked them and celebrated Thomas's contribution to not only the school, but also to the Everton community. Both Thomas and Mary were praised with several speeches and presented with gifts in appreciation. A glowing description of Thomas's career and the meeting was reported in the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*<sup>7</sup>. He was praised for such achievements as 'efficient and intelligent school management', impressive academic success of his pupils, and his revival of the North-Eastern Teachers' Association. One speaker noted he was a 'warm and devoted..... student of matters intellectual, moral,

political and educational'. It was also recorded that 'they did not forget his amiable and respected wife, to whom in a great measure his success was due, inasmuch as Mrs. Hurley's sympathy with all her husband's undertakings had been most pronounced.'

Thomas was presented with a gold medallion inscribed: 'Presented to Mr. T. Hurley by parents of scholars attending the Everton State School as a slight token of esteem' (where is this medallion now?) Mary was presented with a solid silver butter dish on behalf of the ladies of Everton who expressed their sadness at her leaving. According to the report 'Mrs Hurley...was much affected'. Thomas and Mary both made touching speeches in reply and declared they were also sad to be leaving. The evening finished with an 'enthusiastic rendering of Auld Lang Syne and They are Jolly Good Fellows'.

### **Australian Natives Association**

The Hurleys settled at Elmhurst for the next ten years during which their daughter Myrtle Elizabeth was born on January 28<sup>th</sup> 1897. Thomas became a member of the Australian Natives' Association, a type of friendly society, and typical of the era, open only to white men born in Australia. It was a very strong proponent of the federation of the Australian colonies as well as other patriotic causes but was not politically aligned. Thomas was elected secretary of the Elmhurst branch in 1899 and in 1900. The organisation promoted education, aboriginal welfare, afforestation and nature conservation, the development of Australian football, railway expansion, buying Australian made goods, and typical of the times, supported the White Australia Policy! It also provided medical, funeral and sick-pay benefits to members.



Elmhurst is on the road between Ararat and Avoca in Victoria. Source: Victorian Dept. Crown Lands and Survey map 1892)  
Source: State Library Victoria

### **State School Teachers' Union**

From these early days in his career, Thomas was very passionate about the provision of a quality state education system. In 1904 he was elected president of the Victorian State School Teachers' Union at their annual conference held at the Bendigo Town Hall<sup>8</sup>. Among the resolutions passed by the conference were: exemption certificates for infant teachers who had no opportunity to gain certification; objection to school principals having to act as truant officers; teacher representation needed on all education department committees for school programs, teacher training, and selection of texts; teachers should have access to their employment records; establish centres to train pupil teachers in singing and drawing;

head teachers to be permitted to give recommendations for pupil teacher promotions; upgrading of salaries for pupil teachers on graduation, and not forcing them to work in country schools. The conference also discussed the issue of education for the 'mentally deficient' and compulsory continuation night schools for up to 18-year-olds.

### **Defender of state education**

But one particular subject close to Thomas's heart was that of teacher registration. A resolution that all teachers should be registered with their experience and qualifications listed was passed at the conference. Thomas had written about this in the press at least three years earlier pointing out the benefits for the teaching profession of registration. He also wrote letters to the press supporting better teacher salaries and strongly defending teachers against criticism of giving too much homework. In 1895 the Principal of Beechworth Grammar complained of state school pupils competing with private school pupils for matriculation exams. Thomas wrote a letter to the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*<sup>9</sup> pointing out that for the last ten years he had been giving extra tuition, beyond the regulation 5 hours, to a few keen students as they could not afford to attend a private school, the only way at the time to prepare for matriculation: 'Would Mr. Jenkins (the Principal) say that children like these shall have nothing above the free curriculum because they cannot afford to attend a private school?.....parents of slender means should not be prevented from giving their children an education somewhat similar (to a private one)'.

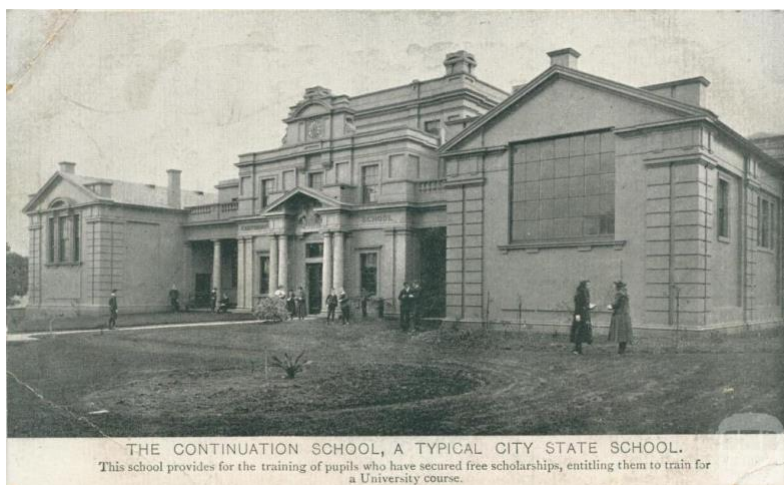
The following year, to the same newspaper<sup>10</sup>, he responded strongly to a correspondent's criticism of state school educational standards. He pointed out how the example given in the newspaper of 6 students not knowing where some international places were located, was illogical and he outlined the relevant curriculum to prove his argument.

In 1905, as outgoing union president, Thomas reiterated the importance of teacher registration as he was concerned that state school teachers might be left out and therefore their professional status not recognised. He also expressed disappointment that there was not greater interest in the union from more teachers.

### **Further study in Melbourne**

In January 1906, the Hurleys had to leave Elmhurst. The previous December, Thomas's outstanding teaching skills and interest in the school environment had been recognised by the Education Department. One of his school inspector's reports stated Thomas was 'Enthusiastic & highly industrious. His teaching & management show great intelligence, success very good. 92 Very Good. Commended for exceptional interest taken in beautifying and improving school grounds.'<sup>11</sup>

Thomas was one of 20 successful applicants selected by the Education Department for his excellent teaching, to attend lectures, free of charge, at the University of Melbourne. This included a posting to a Melbourne school whilst attending the lectures after hours. Thomas was appointed First Mathematics Master at the new Melbourne Continuation School. This was the forerunner of Melbourne High School and was located at that time at the top of Spring Street where the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons is now situated.



The Melbourne Continuation School. Thomas was First Mathematics Master in 1906. Source: victorianplaces.com.au

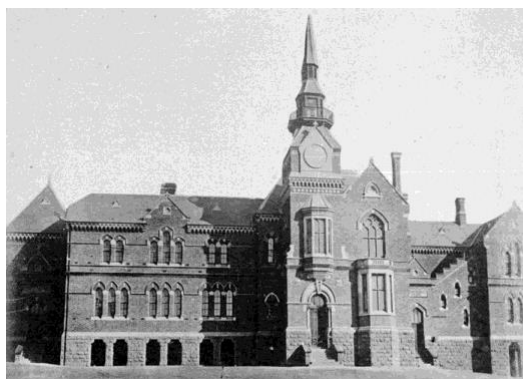
On leaving Elmhurst, the Hurleys had a clearing sale that was advertised in the *Avoca Mail* on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1906. For auction was 'the whole of his well kept furniture, good upright Lipp piano, organ, kitchen utensils, three bicycles, cow and calf, pig, fowls, two buggy horses, etc. No reserve.' One person who would have been glad to see Thomas go would have been a Mr. Walter Gray. Records from the Elmhurst Police Court of March 20<sup>th</sup> 1899 show that Thomas took Walter Gray to court for using threatening words in the State School. Gray pleaded guilty.

### **Bendigo Continuation School begins**

The Hurleys were only in Melbourne for just over 12 months. During this time their youngest child Dorothy Mary was born on April 18<sup>th</sup> 1906 at their home at 47 Bell Street Fitzroy. Then in March 1907 Thomas was sent to Bendigo to be the foundation Head Master of the new Continuation School, now Bendigo Senior Secondary College (his son Les claimed he helped his father design the school's crest). The school opened with 21 girls and 19 boys who were selected on the basis of their being over 14 years of age, having attained the Merit Certificate from their State School and were suitable candidates for training to be State School teachers. The school provided a two-year teacher training course. The first classes were conducted in rooms at the Camp Hill School whilst rooms at the old Supreme Court, near the Gaol were being prepared for teaching.



47 Bell Street Fitzroy, home of the Hurleys in 1906 and birthplace of Dorothy Hurley. Source: realestateview.com.au 2017



Camp Hill School Bendigo 1890. Photo: W H Robinson Studio. Source: Museums Victoria



The Old Supreme Court Bendigo housed the Bendigo Continuation School from 1907 to 1912. Thomas Hurley was the Foundation Headmaster in 1907. Source: Victorian Heritage Database

### **School sports advocate**

Thomas typically launched himself into his new position promoting the interests of his pupils. The local paper noted he had written to the City Council in April requesting the use of local recreational grounds for his pupils to play sport:

'..to have the use of the Upper Reserve for football and cricket on two evenings per week from 4 to 6 o'clock...He also asked for permission for the boys to practise on the Show Grounds during the midday recess.....'<sup>12</sup>. The latter was granted, but the Upper Reserve was only available one afternoon per week. He was offered the vacant ground in front of the Gaol instead.

### **Students' field excursion**

In August, Thomas gained the attention of the *Bendigo Advertiser*<sup>13</sup> when he conducted a Geography and Natural History excursion, seemingly not a common occurrence in Bendigo. Thomas and the other two staff members, Miss Flynn and Mr. Parker and all the pupils met at the Back Creek tram terminus to explore the features of the creek and surrounding landscape, then to Spring Gully reservoir to observe rock formations, continuing on through the bush to collect natural specimens to take back to the school. It was also noted that photographs were taken to record their observations.

### **No ordinary school inspector**

However Thomas was only in Bendigo a few months when on September 10<sup>th</sup> 1907 he was promoted to Inspector of Schools Grade 2 Class D Professional Division at an annual salary of £378. Between 1907 until 1913 he was inspector for the districts of Hamilton, Maryborough, Mildura and Stawell, his annual salary gradually increasing to £414. In 1911 Thomas was inspecting the schools of the Mildura district and a report in the *Mildura Cultivator* on October 28<sup>th</sup> noted:

'He was not content to do the work of an ordinary inspector, but he also made a point of meeting the teachers and showing them how to improve their methods. The schools were just now on the eve of a great change in their programme a new scheme having been evolved, which it was hoped to be beneficial to the rising generation. Mr Hurley desired to

make the points of the scheme clear to the teachers so that there need be no floundering about when the new work was undertaken.'



The Hurley Family in 1908. Standing at back: Leo, Vic, Crom. Seated at front: Myrtle, Mary, Dorothy, Thomas, Flossie and Les. Source: J V Hurley

### **New education programme explained**

The newspaper went on to report, that whilst at Mildura, Thomas addressed a public meeting on the subject of the new approach to education. He noted that the 'three Rs' were not enough to sustain a child's education and that subjects such as Brushwork, to 'train the hand and the eye' was necessary as well as Nature Study, to 'teach boys and girls to observe things .....and train them to look out for causes' also 'History was necessary: everybody should know the conditions of his country and the conditions under which he and other people were living,' also Geography, 'not the rattling off of a list of mountains, lakes, rivers or towns, but a knowledge of distances and general outlines.' This would begin with Australia, then the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries with which we traded. He also outlined that in Reading, children should be given a love of English Literature and Poetry and learn to love books. The report noted he said 'a lot of the grammar now taught was useless and would be eliminated from the curriculum ..... children would be taught the ordinary rules of syntax and how to form sentences correctly. Thomas discussed that Arithmetic would now focus on speed and accuracy in simple calculations and he proceeded to demonstrate this on the blackboard to the meeting. He said the Department proposed to do away with all sums not used in general life, such as 'compound interest running into fractions'. In teaching Language, pupils would be required to explain ideas clearly and concisely. The necessity for regular attendance was pointed out as the parents' responsibility and that there would be consistency of curriculum across the state.

## Maryborough students on strike

In May 1912, whilst in Maryborough, Thomas was at the centre of a controversy that arose when a rationalisation of curriculum, buildings and staff was to be carried out by moving the two upper classes at the East Maryborough School and amalgamating them with those of the West Maryborough School. According to Betty Osborn in her book *Against the Odds – History of Maryborough from 1904*, Thomas Hurley conceived this idea and gave the parents and teachers less than a week to change schools. A meeting with the East School parents, designed to explain the advantages of the changes, became quite heated, and 'an imputation of dishonesty caused Mr. Hurley to decline to proceed.'<sup>14</sup>. The East School's parents' committee, Principal and the Town Clerk formed a petition to protest to the Education Department about the changes, and apparently 'some of the scholars had gone on strike'<sup>15</sup>.

## Ballarat District Inspector

Happier professional engagements were to be had when Thomas went to Ballarat in 1913 as District Inspector. On the occasion of the opening of new swimming baths at the Pleasant Street State School, Thomas gave an address. He was among the official party which included the Mayor and Mayoress Mr and Mrs Brokenshire, local politicians Blair and McGregor, the Government Meteorologist Mr Hunt (who set up a weather balloon), the Director of Swimming in the Education Department Mr Beaurepaire (who gave a swimming demonstration), and the Minister of Education Sir Alexander Peacock who officially opened the baths.

Some other official duties performed in the district by Thomas included the opening of the renovated Durham Lead and Buninyong schools, attending Speech Nights, unveiling Honour Boards and commending students for achievements such as exemplary attendance and essay writing skills. He worked hard to promote community support for the war effort by promoting fund-raising for the Red Cross, and establishing the State Schools' Patriotic Fund which ran fairs, queen carnivals, flower shows and school concerts. In 1917 he convened meetings for the Forward Ballarat committee to promote Home Coming Week to schools and their staff and supported the Ballarat Women's Win the War League. At war's end he helped organise Children's Day events for the Peace Celebrations, by serving on the Sports Committee.

## Tertiary education in Ballarat

Throughout his whole career, Thomas promoted and supported high school and tertiary education, and particularly in the Ballarat district. In July 1920 a citizens' meeting was held in Ballarat to propose the establishment of a university college there. In seconding the motion, Thomas stated that Ballarat students were disadvantaged by distance when it came to university education. He and Inspector Stephenson formed part of a deputation to put these proposals to the Premier, Sir



Ballarat School of Mines (now Federation University) original building 1899. Photo: 2010 raaen99 Source: flickr.com

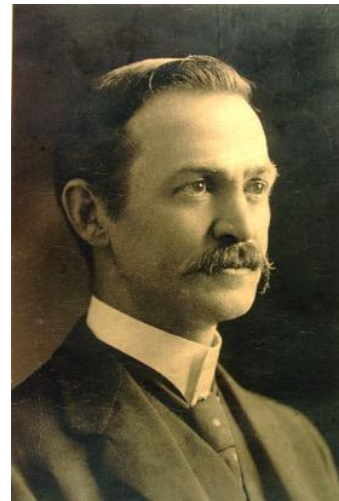
Harry Lawson, when he visited Ballarat the following month. Unfortunately they were not successful. Thomas had served on the Melbourne University Extension Board in 1915 and in 1920 was appointed to the Board of the Ballarat School of Mines where he was also involved with the retraining of returned WW1 servicemen. Thomas was also a strong promoter of night schools and agricultural colleges.

### Loss of Thomas's parents

Thomas and Mary remained in Ballarat for eight years living at 15 Victoria Avenue in a modest Victorian brick terrace house. It was here in December 1915 that Thomas's father John, an 82 year-old retired farmer, died. He had been living with them since about April. No doubt Mary would have nursed her father-in-law through this period. Two years later Thomas's mother Mary Margaret Hurley died in Terang where his sister Polly had been caring for her. Her remains were brought on the train up to Ballarat for the funeral and burial.



Thomas on the front verandah of their house in Ballarat. Source: family collection.



Thomas Hurley c1916  
Source: family collection



Thomas and Mary with their daughters: from left Dorothy, Florence and Myrtle c1910.  
Source: family collection

## Thomas and Mary's daughters:



Florence at Ballarat  
Source: family collection

### **Florence Mabel Hurley**

During this time Florence and Myrtle attended Methodist Ladies' College in Melbourne. Local newspaper lists reveal that in 1910 Florence received a prize for Arithmetic and in 1912 she passed her 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Music Theory examination. On leaving school, she attended the Workingman's College, Melbourne (now Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology). On June 6<sup>th</sup> 1918 Florence married Dr. Keith Stephenson at Lydiard Street Methodist Church in Ballarat. Keith was the son of another Ballarat District School Inspector who was a close colleague and friend of Thomas. After WWI Florence and Keith lived in Clunes, then Daylesford, then Natimuk. After her husband died, Florence lived in Moorabbin. They had two daughters, one became a nurse, the other a pharmacist; and two sons, one also a pharmacist, the other was in the RAAF but died in New Guinea in WWII.



### **Myrtle Elizabeth Hurley**

Myrtle was a stenographer and also trained in home nursing and in 1918 received a Credit in the St. John Ambulance Home Nursing examinations conducted at the Ballarat Town Hall. She also planted trees for the Ballarat Avenue of Honour. Just prior to getting married and moving to Melbourne, she was one of three members of the Ballarat Methodist Church given a farewell at the Pleasant Street Methodist Hall. The Sunday School presented her with a vase as a token of thanks for her several years' work running their kindergarten. Myrtle married William Ernest Hogbin (Bill) Williams in Ballarat in 1920 and had two daughters.

Myrtle at Ballarat. Source:  
family collection



Left: Florence and Myrtle; centre: Dorothy and friend at Ballarat; right: Dorothy at Ballarat - playing a sleuth or gangster? Source: family collection

## Dorothy Mary Hurley

Thomas and Mary's youngest daughter Dorothy, attended the Pleasant Street School and Ballarat High School. In 1920 she was awarded a public scholarship, and achieved her Intermediate Certificate (in which the student had to pass six subjects, including English and Mathematics), and in 1922, she was a successful candidate in the University of Melbourne Supplementary Public Examinations. Like her sister Myrtle, Dorothy was also a kindergarten teacher at the Pleasant Street Methodist Church in Ballarat. In June 1921 she participated in a fair to raise money for a church organ, by helping organise the Bran Pie (similar to a lucky dip) and Fish Pond entertainments. Dorothy didn't marry but held a position in the Commonwealth Bank, apparently the highest position a woman could attain in those days, and travelled overseas with her friends. Her travel diaries were donated to the State Library of Victoria by her close friend and companion Mary Grace Appleford. It was Dorothy Hurley's family history research that uncovered our convict ancestor **Elizabeth Frisby/Glithero/Tamplin** and our connection to Ceres. In 1986, for her 80th birthday, she organised a Hurley family reunion in the Fitzroy Gardens in Melbourne attended by several generations and branches of the Hurley family.

## Thomas and Mary's sons before the war

### Vic and Les

The boys won scholarships to Wesley College in Melbourne and were boarders there. After graduating from school, eldest son Vic completed a Medical Degree at Melbourne University. He worked at the Royal Melbourne Hospital as resident medical officer (1910), registrar (1911), medical superintendent (1912), honorary surgeon to out-patients (1914), and also ran his own private practice in Collins Street that year. After graduating from

Wesley, Les began his medical degree at Melbourne University in 1911. He gained 1<sup>st</sup> class honours in Physiology and Anatomy in 1913.

## Leo and Crom

On completing his Merit Certificate at Elmhurst, and then graduating from Wesley, Leo successfully completed the Junior Public Examination for Melbourne University. In 1907 Leo began working as a clerk for the Department of Defence. Before the war, Crom trained as an actuary for the Australian Mutual Provident Society. He shared a house with Leo in Prahran and both attended the Mt Erica Methodist Church in Prahran.

## Sons join up for World War I

These years at Ballarat saw the duration of World War I and each one of Thomas and Mary's sons enlisted. Vic joined the AIF as a Captain in the Medical Corps at the outbreak of war in August 1914, and joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance at Gallipoli. He was later posted with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian General Hospital in France, and also worked at AIF Headquarters in London. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. It was in London where he met and married Elsie Crowther, an Australian working with the Voluntary Aid Detachment. They were to settle in South Yarra, Melbourne and have six children. At the age of 29 Vic was made a CMG\* in the King's Birthday Honours List of 1917.

Leo joined the AIF in February 1917 and became a Warrant Officer in the Ordnance Unit rising to the level of Lieutenant. He worked in London at the AIF Headquarters at Horseferry Road and with the Ordnance Corps at Tidworth until 1920 when he returned home and was discharged.

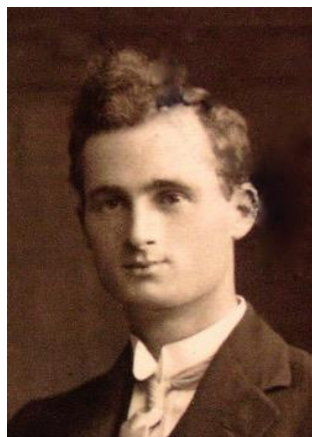
Les interrupted his medical studies in September 1914 to follow his brother Vic and enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance. He was to have the dangerous job of stretcher-bearer at Gallipoli but became ill and had to return home in 1915. He completed his medical degree with 1<sup>st</sup> class honours. In 1917 he married nurse Margaret Muriel Atkinson and they had five daughters and two sons.



Victor Hurley



Leo Hurley



Leslie Hurley



Crom Hurley

## Thomas and Mary's desperate search

In May 1916 Crom enlisted in the AIF. He became a Lance Corporal in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on the Western Front. He was killed in action in Bullecourt, France in 1917 at the age of 28. He left a widow, Alice, and two young children, James Thomas Cromwell (Jimmy) and Elva May.

Crom was reported as missing in action on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1917. Letters from their son Leo written in February 1918 and letters from Thomas to the AIF over 1917 reveal the extremely worrying time for the whole family. Crom's Red Cross file<sup>16</sup> includes letters written by Thomas desperately trying to find out what has happened to his son:

*15 Victoria Avenue, Ballarat  
Victoria, Australia  
5.8.17*

*Dear Miss Chomley*

*The enclosed card is the fifth one I have sent to you, in the hope that my son L Cpt. J C Hurley reported missing since 3<sup>rd</sup> May may be found to be a prisoner of war, and that in the event of such being the case you would be so good as to address it to him, and also send him necessaries. We will cable money for the purpose. His brother Surgeon Lieut. Col. T E V Hurley CMG is now in the No. 2 Australian General Hospital Boulogne.*

*With kind regards and the kindest thanks of his wife and his mother*

*I remain  
Yours very sincerely  
Thomas Hurley*

In December that year, and still without knowledge of Crom's fate, Thomas wrote a very patriotic letter to the *Ballarat Star*<sup>17</sup>. Responding to another writer's letter *Australia has done enough*, Thomas passionately argued that Australia owed it to the Motherland to support her in her time of great need. Crom's death was finally confirmed by February 1<sup>st</sup> the next year. There is no known grave for Crom, but his death along with that of 10,884 others is commemorated at the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux.



Mary and Thomas Hurley with the trees dedicated in 1914 to their sons Vic and Les in the Ballarat Avenue of Honour. Trees were also planted for Crom (1915) and Leo (1917) and all four trees are still there. Source: family collection.

## **Battler for teachers and pupils**

In October 1923 Thomas was promoted to Senior Inspector of Schools Class A in Melbourne, his annual salary rising to £700 per annum. A lengthy report in the *Ballarat Star*<sup>18</sup> described a farewell presentation given to Thomas and Mary at the Sturt Street Club Rooms by the Ballarat teachers. Speakers praised his contributions to education saying he 'set a very high standard'. With pupils he 'always put the child's interest above that of the teachers.....the kindly courteous way he handled the children was fine to watch' and he 'always showed a wonderful sympathy for the backward child'. As an examiner 'Mr Hurley at all times looked for what the child knew and often went to much trouble to find out what the child really meant by an apparently ridiculous answer to an examination question'. With teachers he was 'a good battler for the teachers and for the inspectorial staff' and teachers felt that 'in him they had a friend'.

Thomas and Mary's great civic contribution to Ballarat was also noted, and special reference was made to 'the magnificent war work of Mrs Hurley'. Following the speeches, Thomas and Mary were presented with 'a pair of silver entree dishes and an electric reading lamp'.



## **Mary's community service**

Earlier in March of that year, Mary was given recognition for her services as the President of the Fair Committee at the Agricultural High School. The *Ballarat Star*<sup>19</sup> reported she 'had been a big factor in raising a most substantial sum of money' (over £400 which the Education Department then doubled) towards remodelling and equipping the sports ground. On this occasion she was presented with 'a very handsome art figure' as a token of appreciation.

Mary Hurley at Ballarat.  
Source: family collection

## **Move to Murrumbeena**

From 1924, Thomas, Mary and daughter Dorothy lived at 15 Perth Street Murrumbeena. The other daughters and sons were now married, Myrtle, Les, Leo and Crom's family also living in nearby streets in Murrumbeena, Vic in South Yarra, and Flossie in the country town of Clunes.

## Inspectoral work in Melbourne

Thomas continued his work in the eastern and outer eastern areas of Melbourne, inspecting schools as far away as Berwick and Noble Park (1928), and promoting school building improvements such as the building of a new school at Narre Warren (1926) the opening of which he and Mary attended in 1929 after his retirement. He also promoted the establishment of an afforestation park in Cranbourne (1927) as part of the State Schools' Afforestation Scheme. In addition Thomas served on the Council of the Collingwood Technical School from 1923, the Council of Richmond Technical School from 1926, and was a member of the Board of Examiners in Arithmetic for the Commonwealth Public Service in 1925.

In December 1927, less than a year before Thomas's retirement, his son Leo had died at the age of 36 from 'disease of the brain and tuberculosis'. The actual cause was syphilis contracted during the war when he was overseas. He left a widow, Marie, and five children, the last of whom was born the January following his death. Three years earlier in December 1924, Thomas and Mary purchased two properties on Dandenong Road Murrumbeena, on what is now the northern end of Boyd Park. Number 714 was given to Leo's family and eventually the other nearby property was willed to Crom's son Jimmy. The loss of each son weighed heavily upon Thomas and Mary and they did their best to provide for these sons' families.

## Retirement

By 1928, due to ill health, Thomas had to retire. The Education Department held a retirement dinner for Thomas and another senior school inspector, with presentations made by Mr Hansen, the Director of Education and Mr McRae, Chief School Inspector. Mary and Thomas spent their last years together at their home at 15 Perth Street Murrumbeena. Daughter Dorothy lived with them, and other family members were close by: son Les and family lived nearby in Murrumbeena Road and later at 3 Wahroonga Crescent, and Crom's widow and children lived in Gerald Street.



15 Perth Street  
Murrumbeena, home  
of Thomas, Mary and  
their daughter Dorothy  
Hurley from the 1920s.  
Photo: Ann Hurley  
2000

## Last days at Natimuk

In 1931, Thomas went to stay at Natimuk with his daughter Florence and son-in-law Dr. Keith Stephenson. It was hoped that conditions there in the drier climate would aid his failing health. But that winter, after three days of becoming acutely ill, Thomas passed away. He was 66 years old and had suffered from bronchio-pneumonia and heart failure. His son Les and Keith Stephenson were present at his death. His body was taken to Melbourne by train for the funeral which was held at his home in Murrumbeena, and then for burial at the Springvale Necropolis.

Prior to his death, Thomas would have seen his sons Vic and Les achieve well in their medical careers – Vic becoming a lecturer and examiner in surgery at Melbourne University and Les lecturer in embryology and histology. Vic became President of the Victorian branch of the British Medical Association and also a founding member of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, where his portrait by official war artist Murray Griffin (1903-1992) is displayed. Both Vic and Les held important surgical positions at the Royal Melbourne Hospital during this time.



Florence and husband Dr. Keith Arnold Stephenson.  
Source: Kingston Historical Website

## Thomas Hurley's teaching legacy

Thomas was a highly respected educationalist. From his many years teaching in country schools he understood the importance of resourcefulness and flexibility. He promoted innovative methods of number analysis using counters, bead frames and counting boards. Thomas also believed in grouping students to cater for individual differences to address literacy and numeracy needs. His superiors observed 'he possessed a real understanding of the needs of his children, his inspectorate and his teachers. It seems that he was in advance of his time'. An obituary in the *Education Gazette and Teachers' Aid* of August 25<sup>th</sup> 1931 described Thomas's contribution: '....he showed that respect for detail, that appreciation of thoroughness, and that fertility of resource that had made his work so successful in rural schools.'

Of his personality and character we can deduce that he was kind and compassionate with a strong sense of duty to his family, community and colleagues, as well as being a progressive and creative thinker. The *Teachers' Gazette and Aid* also described his

contributions to conferences: 'On his feet he was a cogent thinker, while a fund of quiet humour was always at his disposal to silence an unwary interjector.'

After her husband's death, Mary continued to live in the Perth Street house for the next 23 years. Her daughter Dorothy stayed on there and nursed Mary through her old age.

### **A knight in the family**

In the 1930s Vic continued as a surgeon at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and was also Chairman of the Board of Examiners in surgery and Chairman of the Red Cross Society. In 1943 he joined the RAAF as Director-General of medical services, developing the RAAF Nursing Service, RAAF hospitals, and improving rehabilitation for injured air crew. After WW2 he continued his work at Royal Melbourne Hospital and was chairman on other committees such as the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. He also contributed to the Chifley government's establishment of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Act of 1947. From this year until 1956 he was President of Royal Melbourne Hospital. Mary must have been extremely proud when in 1950 Victor was appointed KBE<sup>20</sup> in King George VI's New Year's Honours List. When he retired from Royal Melbourne Hospital, the hospital established the Victor Hurley Research Fund that currently offers Grants in Aid to staff.

During this time Les Hurley had his own consulting physician's practice and was also made physician to out-patients at Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1935. In WW2 he worked at the RAAF hospitals and took over Vic's consulting rooms in Parliament Place, East Melbourne. He became Stewart Lecturer in Medicine at Melbourne University in 1947 and continued his work at Royal Melbourne Hospital until 1951. His wife Muriel died in 1945 and he remarried two years later.



Above: Four generations: from left Wendy Hopkins (baby), Lois Hopkins (nee Stephenson), Florence Stephenson (nee Hurley) and Mary (Grandma Hurley). Source: Lyndall Chislett

Mary Hurley at Murrumbeena c1940s  
Source: family collection

On May 27<sup>th</sup> 1954 Mary Elizabeth Hurley died at 88 years of age. She had suffered 'myocarditis' for several years. My father remembers his Grandma Hurley as 'a real lady'. My mother remembers that shortly after my birth in June 1953, Grandma Hurley invited us over to the Perth Street house so she could see the newest addition to the family. She had always hand-knitted a matinee jacket for each Hurley baby. She made me a white one – the last she ever made. Mum described her as very softly spoken, very little and gentle and dressed in black. Mary's granddaughter Claire Weston (daughter of Les Hurley) told me that Grandma Hurley always had a black cat. As soon as one died it would be replaced by another black cat and given the same name - Blackie.

Thomas and Mary are buried with their son Leo at the Springvale Cemetery in Melbourne.



(left) The grave of Thomas and Mary Hurley and son Leo. Springvale Cemetery, Melbourne.

(above) Detail of inscription. Photo: Ann Hurley 2000

Ann Hurley

2020

See my story **The War and the Home Front** for more about their son Horace Leopold Hurley.

[hurleyskidmorehistory.com](http://hurleyskidmorehistory.com)

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> *Geelong Advertiser* October 29 1881

<sup>2</sup> *Geelong Advertiser* June 10 1881

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- <sup>3</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Training Teacher Service Records
- <sup>4</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Training Teacher Service Records
- <sup>5</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Training Teacher Service Records
- <sup>6</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Training Teacher Service Records
- <sup>7</sup> *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* August 22 1896 p9
- <sup>8</sup> *The Age* April 8 1904 p6
- <sup>9</sup> *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* January 12 1895 p12
- <sup>10</sup> *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* June 27 1896 p5
- <sup>11</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Training Teacher Service Records
- <sup>12</sup> *The Bendigo Independent* April 27 1907
- <sup>13</sup> *Bendigo Advertiser* August 12 1907 p3
- <sup>14</sup> *The Argus* December 9 1912
- <sup>15</sup> *The Argus* May 22 1912
- <sup>16</sup> Australian War Memorial - Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files 1914-18 War 1DRL/0428. CMG mentioned in the reproduced letter below is Companion of the order of St Michael and St George (British Honours)
- <sup>17</sup> *Ballarat Star* December 11 1917
- <sup>18</sup> *Ballarat Star* May 28 1923
- <sup>19</sup> *Ballarat Star* May 28 1923
- <sup>20</sup> KBE – Knight Commander of the British Empire

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