



Anne Philp, *Caroline's diary: a woman's world in colonial Australia*, Anchor Books Australia, Spit Junction [Sydney], paperback, x + 269 pp, RRP \$30, available at www.anchorbooksaustralia.com.au

In 1988 a box containing 24 small leather-bound diaries spanning almost 50 years was discovered at Brownlow Hill, a colonial residence, farming estate and significant garden in Camden, NSW.

Brownlow Hill's garden is well-known to AGHS members as a joint recording venture of AGHS's national management committee and the NSW branch, and as the venue for the subsequent branch visit. The diaries reveal a second AGHS connection – their author, Caroline

Thomas, lived on the pastoral property of Saumarez outside Armidale. The Northern NSW sub-branch is very involved with the relocation of a heritage rose garden to Saumarez (see vol 27 no 2, 2015).

Caroline's story begins in Victorian London, where we meet a rather wilful young lady, enjoying an exhausting social whirl. Life changes dramatically when her barrister father fails to honour a significant debt. He flees England for the colony of NSW under an assumed name. His wife and eldest daughter are faced with the shame of dodging creditors while facing damning publicity in *The Times*, and needing to approach friends and relatives for money for the family's passage to NSW.

In Sydney, Caroline's diaries continue her meticulous record of potential suitors and social events but also reveal her secret longings.

When forced to accept a country governess position to assist the family finances, she writes, 'Want someone to love who will love me. Feel lonely', a lament worthy of a Jane Austin character. But life was about to change.

In 1856, Caroline's father was finally reinstated as a Sydney attorney. The family's dark period was over. Within months, Caroline was married to pastoralist Henry Arding Thomas, and embarked on the life of a loyal wife and devoted mother.

The diaries reveal her increasing maturity as she coped with an isolated rural life and the loss of several of her 11 children.

Henry purchased three rural properties with little consultation with Caroline, but she gives no hint of the loss and upheaval as she moves from Buckingham in central NSW to Saumarez near Armidale, and finally to Wivenhoe at Camden. The wilful city girl matured into a dedicated country wife.

Anne Philp has tackled a daunting and time-consuming task in transcribing the minute diary entries, many cross-written. She places this

rich family material into the context of colonial life and includes detailed property descriptions. There are occasional references to Caroline's appreciation of the gardener's efforts, but no indication that she gained pleasure from any actual work herself. Nevertheless, this is an absorbing read that widens our understanding of the challenges experienced by colonial women on properties which (in many cases) still have notable gardens which are now historically significant.

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