# Westray Villa From the Orkney Islands of Scotland

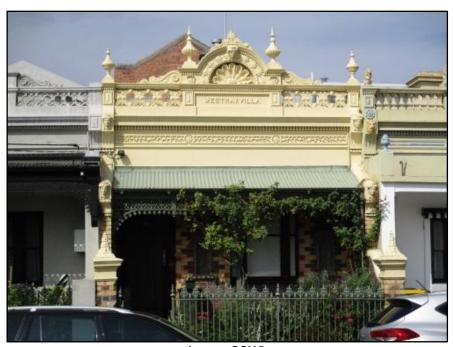


Image: CCHG
Westray Villa
248 Canning Street North Carlton

Westray Villa in Canning Street, North Carlton, was the home of the Cormack family from the 1880s through to 1960. To explore the origin of this house's name, we travel back to a remote island off the coast of Scotland and follow the journey of a young woman who made a life-changing – and almost life-threatening – choice in the mid-19th century. Phoebe Papley (Paplie) was born in 1833 (or 1834) at Westray in the Orkney islands of Scotland. Westray, while not the smallest of the Orkney islands, is only 18.2 square miles or 47 square kilometres in area and, in the 19th century, would have offered limited opportunities for earning a living and supporting a family. Phoebe was the daughter of James Papley and Barbara (Barbra) Skee (Skea, Skae or Skay) and the Scotland census of 1841 recorded four residents in the household at Dogtua (Dogtuan) as:

Name	Age	Birth Year	Birth Place
Barbra Paplie	45 years	1796	Orkney, Scotland
Febey Paplie	8 years	1833	Orkney, Scotland
Jane Paplie	5 years	1836	Orkney, Scotland
Mary Paplie	40 years	1801	Orkney, Scotland

In the 1851 census Phoebe was no longer listed as living at Dogtua. In the same census year, a young woman named "Phoebe Pably", aged 18, was recorded as a servant living in the household of Stewart and Mary Logie at Ark House in Westray. A year later, in 1852, Phoebe left her island home to embark on an eventful journey to a new life in Australia. She was described in the passenger list as a domestic servant of the Presbyterian religion and, unlike many of her fellow passengers, she could read and write. Phoebe was not alone on the voyage, as her older brother James, sister-in-

law Jessie (Janet) and their two children, also named James and Jessie, were on the same ship. Phoebe's name appears on a different page of the shipping list, suggesting that she was housed separately in the single women's quarters, in line with ship boarding practices at the time. 1,2,3,4,5

The Papleys were among an estimated 795 Scottish, Irish and English passengers and 48 crew aboard the ill-fated emigrant ship *Ticonderoga*. The American-built ship was fitted out to maximise the number of passengers carried and, while there was sufficient food on board for 120 days, there was no provision for the ship to take on fresh food and water during the non-stop voyage. The *Ticonderoga* sailed from Liverpool on 4 August 1852 and arrived at Port Phillip Heads 3 months later on 3 November, flying the yellow "plague" flag. The double-deck ship was overcrowded and unsanitary conditions on board led to the rapid spread of disease, reported as scarlet fever and the even more deadly typhus fever. 100 passengers died during the voyage and were buried at sea. The ship was denied entry to Port Phillip Bay and the passengers – the living, the dead and the dying – were offloaded at a remote beach near Point Nepean. <sup>6,7</sup>

Having endured three months at sea in appalling conditions, the survivors now faced an indeterminate period of quarantine until the disease had run its course. For Anglo-Celtic people accustomed to a colder climate, the first glimpse of their new home with its strange coastal vegetation would have been bleak. A makeshift camp of tents was set up, but this offered little protection from the hot Australian sun and the inevitable flies. Once the news of the *Ticonderoga's* plight had reached Melbourne, supplies of fresh food and medicine were despatched to Point Nepean. The hulk *Lysander* was fitted out as a hospital ship to accept the more serious cases, many of whom died. The dead were buried, often by their grieving relatives, in the sandy soil and their graves were marked by rough stone or wooden markers. The official death toll was 168 passengers and 2 crew, but it is thought to be higher as some deaths went unreported. The Papleys survived and arrived at Hobson's Bay, just before Christmas, on 22 December 1852, nearly five months after their departure from Liverpool.

James Papley, an agricultural laborer, was engaged by William Gillespie, a tailor, of Belfast (an early name for Port Fairy) and he headed off to work in the western district in January 1853. There was a demand for workers as many had abandoned their posts to seek their fortunes on the goldfields. James and his wife Jessie had three more children – two sons named Robert in 1854 and 1857, the first of whom died in 1855, and William in 1859. When the new Belfast Hospital and Benevolent Asylum was opened in 1856, James and Jessie Papley were appointed as Master and Matron. There were concerns expressed about their suitability for the positions, particularly in relation to Mrs Papley, and allegations were made of mismanagement of inmates and financial resources. They were dismissed in 1858, then re-instated to the positions, which they held until 1871, when Mr and Mrs Mainwaring were appointed. The Papley's reputation was not enhanced by an allegation of indecent assault in 1869, involving their teenage son James and Phoebe Mott, a servant at the hospital. The incident and subsequent inquiry were considered of sufficient importance to be published in the Melbourne newspapers. 9,10,11,12

If even a portion of what the Banner of Belfast states concerning the local hospital be true, the hospital committee would appear to be very lenient in discharging their duty, to say the least : — "We learn that the committee appointed to investigate the charge made by the girl Mott have virtually shelved

the case. We are also informed that notwithstanding that the committee were specially instructed to inquire into the general management of the hospital, no such inquiry was made; on the contrary, that those anxious to do so were obstructed. From the time of this occurrence there seemed a very anxious desire to hush it up, and the girl was prevented laying a [sic] criminal information against Papley. In her subsequent statement she does not accuse him of any criminal intent, but this was after certain influences were exerted to silence her. If she had been of that opinion at first, why go to the police court to lay informations [sic] against Papley?

Papley's statement that the affair was a 'lark' is not worthy of belief. Neither is it consistent with his statement that he was about to destroy himself because his father had compelled him to go to Mr Burnett's revival meeting, where he met the girl Mott. If the committee believed that statement they would have had him arrested as a dangerous lunatic. There can be no doubt that the girl was tampered with, from the discrepancy between her written statement and that made by her at the police office. That the committee stood between the culprit and the law – that they burked the inquiry into the general management of the hospital – is proof sufficient that the investigation was a mere sham. To delay inquiry for three weeks, until the matter was quietly arranged, looked also like a pre-determination to hush up the affair."

Phoebe Papley's first few years in Australia are unknown - she may have gone to Belfast with James and his family, or she may have stayed in Melbourne and obtained a position as a domestic servant. In 1856, Phoebe had another life-changing event when she married a fellow Scot named William Cormack. William, born in Wick, Caithness in 1825, was a tailor by trade and the 1841 Scotland Census confirms that he was an apprentice at the age of 15. According to Victorian birth and death records, William and Phoebe had eight (possibly nine) children. The first recorded birth was Barbara Jane in 1857, followed by Rachel in 1858. There was an unrecorded birth of a daughter named Phoebe and, working back from her age at death, her year of birth would have been circa 1857, the same as Barbara. As there is no further record of Barbara, it is possible that she was re-named Phoebe. 13,14

The next daughter, Jane, did not live to her first birthday. She was born in 1861 and died in December of the same year. Then came two sons, William Donald in 1862 and James Robert in 1865, and another daughter Jessie Elizabeth in 1868. Two more sons, George Alexander and John Papley, were born in 1870 and 1872, but George died in 1874 at the age of 4. The family lived in a three room brick house in Faraday Street Carlton and William Cormack also owned the adjoining house, which was rented out. (At the time, the houses were numbered 85 and 87, but were changed to 110 and 112 Faraday Street in the late 1880s.) Young Phoebe must have wandered from home in May 1860, when Mr Cormack placed an advertisement in the public notices of *The Argus* for a lost child. It may seem strange to advertise a lost child in the same manner as you would a lost animal, but child supervision standards were different in the 19th century compared to those of today. 15,16,17

LOST, a GIRL, three years old. Had on a man's cloth cap, polka jacket, and stripe pinafore; Name Phoebe. Address Mr. Cormack, 85 Faraday-street, Carlton.

By the 1870s, the Cormack family was rapidly out-growing the three room house in Faraday Street and in the same decade land allotments became available in the new suburb of North Carlton. The prison stockade had closed in 1866 and the lunatic asylum, which replaced it, closed in 1873. The old asylum site was taken over by the Education Department and a new school (originally called the Stockade School and now Carlton North Primary School) opened in July 1873, encouraging families with children to move into the area. One of the early crown land owners was George Williams of Carlton, who bought four allotments in section 86, the area bounded by Canning, Yorke (later Lee) and Station Streets in 1870. He paid £280 for allotment 4, containing 1 rood and 12% perches. The crown allotment originally stretched all the way back to Station Street but, after subdivision, the block of land purchased by William Cormack in 1880 measured 17 feet 6 inches wide by 102 feet deep. In the same month the land purchase was registered, October 1880, a notice of intent was lodged by John Wright – a builder of Lygon Street, Carlton – for a five room cottage in Canning Street. The owner's name is recorded as "Cormick" and, given the street location and coincidental dates, this construction was quite possibly Westray Villa. The new house first appears in the Melbourne City Council rate books in 1881 and is described as a "four-roomed brick house with verandah and bathroom". From 1889, there were indications that the house had been extended because room count had increased to eight. 18,19,20,21,22

In 1891, Phoebe participated in a significant event that had far-reaching implications for generations of women who followed her. The so-called "Monster" petition in support of the vote for women records three signatories at the address of 248 Canning Street, North Carlton – J. Cormack, P. Cormack and Mrs Cormack. The first signature was most likely Phoebe's daughter Jessie and the second Phoebe junior. The petition was tabled in the Parliament of Victoria in September in 1891, but it was not until 1902 that women were allowed to vote in Commonwealth elections and 1908 in Victorian elections. The Commonwealth electoral roll for 1903 lists five registered voters living at Westray Villa. Jessie was unmarried and still living at home, together with her mother Phoebe and her brothers James, John Papley and William Donald Cormack. 23,24,25

Name	Address	Occupation
Cormack, James	248 Canning Street, North Carlton	Plasterer
Cormack, Jessie	248 Canning Street, North Carlton	Home duties
Cormack, John Papley	248 Canning Street, North Carlton	Clerk
Cormack, Phoebe	248 Canning Street, North Carlton	Home duties
Cormack, William Donald	248 Canning Street, North Carlton	Weigher

Tragedy struck Westray Villa in 1897. Phoebe was no stranger to death – she had witnessed the events on board the *Ticonderoga* and she had lost two of her own young children – but the loss of another daughter and her husband, within months of each other, was almost too much for a wife and mother to bear. Her daughter Phoebe died at home on 15 April, aged 39 years, and was buried on Good Friday of 1897. Seven months later, on 1 November, her husband William died. According to his probate documents he died intestate (without leaving a will) and it was some years before his estate was finally wound up. His main asset, according to the documents, was the house in Canning Street, valued at £475, and furniture valued at £15. No money or personal items were recorded. Letters of administration (in lieu of probate) were granted to Phoebe, with a note signed by her in March 1901 stating "The house and

land in Canning Street is still retained by me. That being the only asset in the estate." However, Phoebe's name does not appear as proprietor on the certificate of title and her husband's estate was not duly administered until 1920. Phoebe had a place to live, but she may have had little in the way of financial assets. Her financial situation could possibly explain a curious advertisement that appeared in *The Age* in October 1900. <sup>26,27,28,29</sup>

# MRS. Power has accommodation for ladies expecting; terms moderate: doctor in attendance. Westray Villa, 248 Canning-st., N. Carlton.

At the time, it was not uncommon for maternity services to be offered in private houses. Mrs Power may have been a registered nurse, or an experienced midwife, and the attendance of a doctor was likely to inspire confidence in her services. Phoebe may have, through financial necessity, rented out one or more of the eight rooms in the house to Mrs Power for maternity purposes.

Phoebe Cormack signed her last will and testament on 6 November 1900, leaving her estate in equal shares to her children William Donald, James Robert, Jessie Elizabeth and John Papley Cormack. Phoebe's address stated in the will was 457 Canning Street, North Carlton, though her name continued to be listed as the occupier of 248 Canning Street in Sands & McDougall directories.<sup>30</sup>

Phoebe's second daughter Rachel was not named in her will. Rachel had contracted scarlet fever as a child and may have suffered brain damage from complications of the disease. Rachel was diagnosed with "idiocy" and committed to Kew Lunatic Asylum in March 1878. She was transferred to Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum in June 1880 and she spent the rest of her life there as a state patient. Rachel died in the asylum hospital on 24 February 1914. Her mother Phoebe died a few weeks later at Westray Villa, aged 80 years. Phoebe's death notice appeared in *The Age* of 21 March 1914.

CORMACK. On the 13th March, at her residence, 248 Canning-Street, North Carlton, Phoebe, widow of the late W. Cormick. A colonist of 60 years. Interred privately Saturday, 14th. A patient sufferer at rest. Deeply regretted.

Eight months later, Phoebe's brother James Papley died in Portland, aged 88 years. That Phoebe and James cheated death on the *Ticonderoga* and both lived into their eighties is a testament to the strong constitution of their Westray ancestors.

In a recent issue we recorded the death of Mr James Papley, senior, of Narrawong, which occurred at his son's residence, Percy-street, Portland, on September 25, and whose remains were interred in the Narrawong cemetery on the Sunday following, the funeral being largely attended. The deceased, who was 88 years old, was a very old colonist, he having arrived in Australia in the year 1852 in the ship Tyconderoga [sic] from Orkney Island, Scotland. He and his wife took the position of master and matron of the first Port Fairy hospital, which they held for a number of years. He afterwards took to farming in the Narrawong district, where he lived for 43 years. Deceased leaves three sons, a number of grandchildren, and great grandchildren. 34

Phoebe's estate was valued at £208, 6 shillings and 8 pence, with the amount £158, 6 shillings and 8 pence listed as "interest in a deceased person's estate." This was

equivalent to a one third share of her husband's real estate, valued at £475 in 1898. Probate was granted to her elder sons William Donald Cormack and James Robert Cormack. At the time of Phoebe's death in 1914, her husband William's estate had not been duly administered – she may have simply omitted to complete the paperwork – and this generated a second application for letters of administration in 1920. William Donald Cormack, the eldest son of William and Phoebe Cormack, applied for "administration of the unadministered estate" of his father in August 1920. In the application he states that the house, then valued at £680, was occupied by his sister Jessie Elizabeth Cormack, his brothers James Robert Cormack, John Papley Cormack (crossed out) and himself. His explanation for the time delay in application was that he was not aware of the requirement until he consulted his solicitors. 35,36

James Papley junior's son Leonard was killed in action at Gallipoli in 1915 and, two years later, James died in Portland in 1917. His obituary, published in *Port Fairy Gazette* states that he was born in the Orkney Islands and came to Australia as an infant:

Mr James Papley, an old and respected resident of Portland, died on Sunday morning last, after a brief illness. He was born at the Orkney Is. in 1852, and came to Australia with his parents in his infancy. His father was superintendent of the Port Fairy hospital for some time, and afterwards took up farming at Narrawong. Deceased was a carpenter and joiner by trade, and carried on business at Portland up to the time of his death. He held a seat for a short term on the hospital board, and was a member of the cemetery trust. He leaves a widow, two sons (Fred and William) and three daughters (Maisie, Eileen and Kathleen) to mourn his loss. One of his sons (Leonard) was killed at Gallipoli a few days after the memorable landing, and his daughter Alma died a few months ago. The funeral left All Saints' R.C. church on Tuesday for the South Cemetery.

Phoebe's younger sister Jane Papley, a needlewoman and dressmaker, migrated to Australia in later life and she died in Camberwell in 1923 at the age of 85 years, once again a testament to the Papley family's longevity. She was buried in the Cormack family grave in Melbourne General Cemetery. Death visited the Cormack family again in 1928, with the uncanny repetition of two funerals within a few months of each other. Jessie Elizabeth Cormack died at home, aged 61 years, followed by her brother James Robert Cormack, aged 64 years, at a private hospital in Fitzroy. Ownership of Westray Villa was transferred to the two surviving Cormack brothers, William Donald and John Papley. 39,40,41,42

William Donald Cormack died on 24 November 1940, aged 78 years, followed by his brother John Papley Cormack on 23 August 1956, aged 84 years. The death of John Papley Cormack, in the centenary year of his parents' marriage, was the final link with Westray Villa and the young woman who had left her homeland in 1852. Probate was granted to John's children – John Henry Cormack of 197 Station Street, North Carlton, and Florence Jane Phoebe Cormack of 248 Canning Street, North Carlton. The house changed ownership in 1960, ending 80 years of continuous ownership and occupancy by the Cormack family. Over the years, the house has undergone some modifications, but the original brick structure and the name "Westray Villa" on the parapet remain essentially the same.<sup>43</sup>

Phoebe's final resting place is in Melbourne General Cemetery, not far from Westray Villa in North Carlton. She and William are buried in an unmarked grave in the Presbyterian compartment, together with their children Jane, George and Phoebe. Backing onto this grave is another of more recent burial, marked out and identified only by a number, where Rachel, Jane Papley, Jessie, James and William Donald are buried. John Papley Cormack is buried in a separate unmarked grave with his wife Florence Matilda Holyoake, who he married in 1908. Nearby there is an elaborate monument to the Orkney family, a reminder that others in this sea of graves might share their ancestral roots with the Orkney Islands of Scotland. 44,45

## **Postscript**

In the aftermath of the *Ticonderoga* tragedy, questions were asked and blame was laid variously on the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission (for chartering the ship), the ship owners (for seeking profit at the expense of passenger health and safety), and, by no less a personage than Lieutenant Governor Charles La Trobe, the passengers themselves for not keeping their quarters clean. A positive outcome from the tragedy was that double-deck ships were no longer to be used for emigrant transport and passenger numbers were restricted, particularly for infants and young children, who had higher mortality rates. The *Ticonderoga* had its final voyage, in either 1872 or 1879, when it was wrecked off the coast of India.

A permanent quarantine (or sanitary) station was established at Point Nepean – the area having been fortuitously selected for the purpose some months prior to the arrival of the *Ticonderoga* – and it provided an essential public health service for nearly a century and a half, by containing infectious diseases before they reached the populated areas of Victoria. In the chaotic early days of setting up the station, ablebodied stonemasons and carpenters amongst the passengers of the *Ticonderoga* were engaged to build structures to house passengers and staff. Some of these tradesmen elected to stay and settle in the area, as work was guaranteed and the pay was good. The area where the *Ticonderoga* passengers first came ashore in 1852 became known as *Ticonderoga Bay*. This bay is now a dolphin sanctuary and the sociable marine mammals frolic in the waters once sailed by the plague ship *Ticonderoga*.

Finally, we return to the ancient island of Westray. In 2009, an archaeological dig uncovered a 4 cm carved Neolithic figurine, the first one of its kind to be found in Scotland and the earliest depiction of a human face found in the United Kingdom. The stone figurine was dubbed the "Westray Wife" and, in the local parlance, the term "wife" can mean any woman, regardless of her marital status. Phoebe Papley was a young Westray woman when she left her homeland in 1852 and she became a Westray wife when she married William Cormack in 1856. The connection between the "Westray Wife" and the house in Canning Street is tenuous, but intriguing. <sup>50</sup>

Susan C. Crowe Carlton Community History Group March 2019 Revised May 2019

### A Note on Sources:

Information on the history of the house known as Westray Villa is taken from Research into 248 Canning Street, North Carlton. National Trust of Australia (Victoria). This document includes some biographical information on the Papley and Cormack families and, where sources exist, these records have been cross-checked with immigration and shipping records; birth, death and marriage records; census records; probate documents, land title records and electoral rolls.

Michael Veitch's 2018 publication *Hell ship*: The true story of the plague ship *Ticonderoga*, one of the most calamitous voyages in Australian history gives a detailed account of life and death on board the *Ticonderoga*, and the events that led to the tragedy.

The Port Fairy Historical Society provided information on the family of James Papley and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

Special thanks to Jodie Linney (née Cormack) for additional information on Rachel Cormack.

#### References:

- Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950
- Scotland Census 1841
- <sup>3</sup> Scotland Census 1851
- Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, 1839–1923.
- According to the Scottish Girls Names website, the names "Jessie" and "Janet" are synonymous. <a href="https://www.scottishgirlsnames.co.uk/jessie/">https://www.scottishgirlsnames.co.uk/jessie/</a>
- Michael Veitch. Hell ship: The true story of the plague ship Ticonderoga, one of the most calamitous voyages in Australian history. Allen & Unwin, 2018
- Scarlet fever and typhus are bacterial diseases, which can now be treated with antibiotics. The mode of typhus transmission via human body lice was not understood until the 20th century.
- Some sources state that James Papley's infant son James died either during the voyage or in quarantine, but his name does not appear on the list of deaths. The birth of a child named James was registered to James and Jessie Papley at Belfast (Port Fairy) in 1853. James Papley junior's obituary, published in the *Port Fairy Gazette* of 28 June 1917, states that he was born in the Orkney Islands in 1852.
- Marten A. Syme. Seeds of a settlement: a perspective of Port Fairy in the second half of the nineteenth century through the surviving buildings and their inhabitants, 1991, p. 134-135
- <sup>10</sup> Hamilton Spectator, 12 April 1871, p. 4
- <sup>11</sup> The Age, 17 July 1869, p. 2
- Victorian birth records confirm that Phoebe Mott was a local girl, born in Belfast in 1851. She would have been about 18 years old at the time of the alleged assault.
- <sup>13</sup> Scotland Births & Baptisms 1564-1950
- <sup>14</sup> Pioneer Index. Victoria 1836-1888
- <sup>15</sup> The births of some of the Cormack children are recorded with the maternal name variations of "Phebe", "Popley" and "Possley".

- Building ownership and occupancy information on the Faraday Street houses is sourced from Melbourne City Council rate books (Smith and Victoria wards).
- <sup>17</sup> The Argus 16 May, 1860, p. 6
- <sup>18</sup> Certificate of title, vol. 367, fol. 258
- <sup>19</sup> Certificate of title, vol. 1204, fol. 768
- Notice of Intent, reg. no. 8539, 8 October 1880 (Australian Architectural Index)
- Melbourne City Council, Victoria Ward, 1881, no. 2538. Note: Bathrooms were sometimes included in the overall room count.
- <sup>22</sup> Melbourne City Council, Victoria Ward, 1881, no. 2108
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/static/WomensPetition/pdfs/434.pdf>
- Australian Electoral Commission
- <sup>25</sup> Commonwealth Electoral Roll, Division of Northern Melbourne, 1903
- <sup>26</sup> The Age, 7 April 1897, p. 3
- <sup>27</sup> The Age, 3 November 1897, p. 8
- Letters of Administration of William Cormack's estate, 67-101 (1898) (VPRS 28)
- <sup>29</sup> The Age, 6 October 1900, p. 6
- Last will and testament of Phoebe Cormack, 140-166 (1900) (VPRS 7591)
- 31 Case books of female patients, 1878, p. 21-22 (VPRS 7397)
- <sup>32</sup> Inquest deposition file 158-1914 (VPRS 24)
- <sup>33</sup> The Age, 21 March 1914, p. 5
- <sup>34</sup> Port Fairy Gazette, 2 November 1914, p. 2
- <sup>35</sup> Probate File of Phoebe Cormack, 140-166 (1915) (VPRS 28)
- Letters of Administration of William Cormack's estate, 172-678 (1920) (VPRS 28)
- 37 NAA: B2455, PAPLEY LEONARD (National Archives of Australia)
- <sup>18</sup> James Papley's death notice in *Port Fairy Gazette*, 28 June 1917, p. 2
- Jane Papley's occupation is listed as "Ayreshire Needlework" in the Scotland 1861 Census and "Dressmaker" in the Scotland 1881 Census.
- Dates of death are confirmed by probate documents (where applicable), newspapers notices or Melbourne General Cemetery records.
- <sup>41</sup> The Age, 16 October 1928, p. 1
- 42 Certificate of title, vol. 1204, fol. 768
- Probate File of John Papley Cormack, 508/623 (1956) (VPRS 28)
- 44 Melbourne General Cemetery records
- <sup>45</sup> The marriage was reported in *The Age*, 30 January 1909, p. 5
- Letter from Governor La Trobe to Sir John Pakington, 26 January 1853, quoted by Michael Veitch in *Hell Ship*, p. 242.
- Wikipedia (accessed 14 March 2019) cites the year 1872, while Michael Veitch cites October 1879 in *Hell Ship*, p. 239.
- <sup>48</sup> The place name Ticonderoga Bay appeared in newspaper reports and the Victoria Government Gazette from 1853.
- <sup>49</sup> Wildlife (Marine Mammals) Regulations 2009 (Statutory Rule No. 143/2009)
- The story behind the Westray Wife <a href="https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/scotland/articles/the-story-behind-the-westray-wife/">https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/scotland/articles/the-story-behind-the-westray-wife/></a>