

Master of all trades

Launceston Family Album

Stories behind the faces at the great expo of 1891

No. 37: A. H. (Harold) Masters, by PETER FORWARD

Arthur Harold Masters was born in Melbourne in 1874 to parents Joseph and Anne Masters (nee Anderson).

His parents had travelled from London to Australia as children on board the frigate-built ship Clifton in 1849, arriving in Hobsons Bay, Port Phillip, Victoria, on February 12, 1850.

His boyhood was spent at Albury where his father was a school principal. Joseph Masters was among the earlier students to obtain a MA degree at the University of Melbourne and was later to become director of Education in Tasmania and then secretary of the Education Department until his retirement at the age of 70.

Harold Masters married Alice Weymouth on November 29, 1899. Alice was a descendant of Dr William Weymouth who travelled from London to Van Diemens Land as a surgeon on a convict ship. Harold and Alice had five children — Muriel, Thelma, Jean, Joyce (who married Edney Forward) and Alan (who married Katherine Will).

Harold was an architect by profession, having spent six months in doing voluntary work in J. & T. Gunn's carpentry and joinery department.

His constructional ideas were certainly sound and he was the first architect to introduce the concept of prestressed concrete beams to Launceston.

He was the architect responsible for many of the fine buildings in Launceston, including the grandstand at the Mowbray Racecourse, the old T. & G. Building (now demolished), Fairlawn in Elphin Rd



● Harold Masters's photograph of the Masters family, picnicking at Cataract Gorge in the 1890s. Alice Masters's parents are on the right.



● Harold Masters (Launceston Family Album, 1891).

and many of the residences on Elphin Rd and High St, as well as a number of business premises.

While architecture was his main profession, Harold had a great ambition to be an electrical engineer and he never missed a chance to expand his knowledge in all areas of wireless telegraphy, electric lighting and X-ray photography. At 17, he joined Mr Corin's night school electricity class at Launceston Technical School, and at 23 had charge of the class on Mr Corin's retirement in 1897.

Altogether he had 60 continuous years' association with

the Launceston Technical School (later College); as a student, then student-teacher, then as instructor of both the architectural/building construction and electricity classes, then secretary-director until the Education Department took over in 1915. He then became a member of the college council until his death in April 1951.

It was in the late 1890s or early 1900s that he and the students from his electricity class sent the first message in morse code to be transmitted in Northern Tasmania to a naval vessel HMS Pioneer which was anchored at Rosevears.

Harold was also credited as being the first in Tasmania to demonstrate communication by means of wireless telegraphy in late 1898 or early 1899.

In 1906 he carried out two-way experiments with HMS Pioneer, both on the Tamar River and along the North-West Coast using Telefunken equipment obtained from Melbourne.

In late 1909 he submitted a scheme to the Longford Council for lighting the township with electricity. It was based on a German formula. He designed the concrete power-

house but had engineers come out from Germany to install the machinery and get the plant working. Some time after the end of the war, the turbine at Newry did the work until the HEC took over in 1926.

Another of Harold Masters's passions was photography. He and Frank Styant Browne, a Launceston pharmacist, were early pioneers in this field.

One of Harold's photographs records one of the earliest uses of X-ray photography in Australia in 1896.

The apparatus used to obtain the x-ray photograph consisted of a powerful battery, a transformer and a vacuum tube. A large electrical spark was passed through the vacuum tube, known as a Crooke's Tube, where the X-rays were generated.

He once used the process to X-ray the hand of a woman who years before had run a needle into her hand at the wrist. Some years later, one of her fingers stiffened and refused to bend. The X-ray photograph clearly showed the position of the broken needle in her finger and it was removed.

● Story contributed by Harold Masters's grandson, Peter Forward, of Hobart, the youngest son of Joyce (nee Masters) and Edney Forward.