

Frederick Charles Standish



Imagine standing on a dock in London in 1852 looking back at England with mixed feelings of regret and relief. This was Frederick Charles Standish a man whose life had gone so pear-shaped that he was now leaving England under an assumed name and fleeing to the Australian colonies. He had gambled away a fortune, racked up debts that could rival the national debt!

Frederick was the son of Charles Standish of Standish Hall, a grand country estate. Frederick's father, a man of significant means and connections, was a member of parliament and acquaintance of George iv. Young Frederick inherited a fortune and

managed to lose it faster than you can say double or nothing. Despite being given a commission in the Royal Artillery, obtaining the rank of captain and even having a country estate called Caitin Hall in Yorkshire, his luck had run out.

Where did it go so wrong? He was well liked in the establishment, the cigars, the cognac, the leather bound chairs, but he loved more than anything, horse racing and he loved gambling. He was the most popular punter in England; because he was a constant loser. He was rich and every bookie loved him and patronised him. It was even said he had a supernatural ability to lose.

He was such a charming guy and people kept lending him money because they liked him. This of course got him into worse problems and people started to track him down. He knew his time was up. He sold up Caitan Hall after it had been mortgaged to the hilt and headed to the colonies.

So leave it all behind and start a new.

By the time he arrived in Melbourne, the gold rush was in full swing. The impact of the gold rushes was huge. Victoria was an outpost of the empire, a backwater, but Melbourne becomes one of the richest cities on earth and the population increases 10 fold in less than three years to 540,000.

And here's our man Standish showing up and keeping a low profile. His only option is to go to the goldfields which he doesn't like. This man, being a gentleman, is used to being served and certainly not used to manual labour. The goldfields are like the worst musical festival you've ever been to. Mud. No showers. No toilets. Teeming humanity.

Goldfields



He goes to Castlemaine Heathcote Beechworth. But he was as successful prospecting as he had been punting. He could not back a winner.

So he turned to selling illegal grog, calling it a ginger beer business as a front.

Sly grog party



Night Concert at Sly Grog Shop, Main Road, Ballarat by ST Gill

After two years of this, with no prospects and little money, an old buddy Andrew Clark arrived as the new surveyor general; they had been at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich together. After a night of heavy drinking, Standish confessed his dire situation, and Clark, now a respected figure in the colony, promised to help.

Clark used his connections and in a matter of a couple of months, this gambler on the run, this bankrupt bootlegger, becomes becomes the new assistant Commissioner of Police on the Bendigo goldfields. Can you believe it!

He has his foot in the door in the police force and the Victorian public service. Now he gets patronage and gets involved in the world of politics. He is a likeable guy. He could drink with the best of them, loved playing cards and visiting just the top brothels. He becomes friends with all the people in higher positions and is climbing the social ladder.

Then he is promoted to Protector of the Chinese in Bendigo This suited him. His role centred onto confining the Chinese into a particular area and collecting money from them. In 1857 he is promoted again to Warden of the Goldfields in Sandhurst. He becomes a master of networking.

Next, his diary reveals that he was appointed by the executive to be the Chief Commissioner of Police just six years after arriving in the colony.

He connects with the powerbrokers of Melbourne, joins the masons although he was raised as a Catholic, and was promoted to District Grandmaster.

Then, he joins the Melbourne club located in the top end of town at 36 Collins Street where it still stands.

The Melbourne Club



Here is the organisation established by the wealthy squatters who wanted a comfortable luxury city club. This becomes the social headquarters of the Melbourne upper class. And Standish just loved it, all night drinking sessions, cards, and in fact he even moves in and lives there!!!

As Chief Commissioner of Police Standish used his power to promote his favourite activity horse racing. He joined the Victorian Turf Club and promoted a new race, the Melbourne Cup. He modelled the Cup after the Chester Cup in England; He said the Melbourne cup had to be a handicap, a race designed to give all horses a chance to win. This became his enduring legacy.

But he is still losing money on the punt but being the Chief Commissioner of Police it makes it very hard for the bookies to collect.

The first Cup in 1861 attracted a crowd of 4000 people.

1861 Melbourne Cup



This was a smaller number than what had been expected as just prior to the race, Melbourne had been plunged into mourning. Melbourne people had just heard of the death of Robert O'Hara Burke and the ill-fated expedition. All the government buildings are draped in black.

So despite the tragedy, the race meeting goes ahead and lo and behold Standish is the steward for the day.

Standish is in the middle of things with the Burke & Wills saga. His friend Andrew Clark had been on the committee for the Burke and Wills expedition. Burke was a police commanding officer and a close friend of Standish.

Letter from Burke to Standish

On the Darling,
4th October 1860.

My Dear Standish,

I recieved your letter and was glad to hear of the safe arrival of your friend B-----. We have been resting here a few days, awaiting the arrival of our baggage, which has just come up. To-morrow we proceed on, and I shall not delay anywhere untill I reach Cooper's Creek - being an Irishman I must add, unless I can help it.

I leave the hired waggons and my own behind. The accursed implements, the ruin of so many expeditions, I am determined shall not ruin me.

We all march on foot three or four hundred miles at all events, and the horses and camels will have to carry our weight in provisions.

We have already done so for the last forty miles. You should have seen old Becker's face, upon my announcing that all the officers would have to act as working men, and that we should only carry 30. lbs weight of baggage for each man.

Loading camels and then marching twenty miles is no joke. The first two days nearly cooked poor Becker, and I think he will not be able to stand it much longer.

I am confident of success and willling to accept the alternative of success or disgrace, although faliure is possible. This self-imposed task (as you call it) is no sinecure, and I think it will take the sting out of me if I see it out.

Good-bye my dear Standish.

From yours, ever sincerely,
R O'Hara Burke.

Standish becomes a pallbearer for Burke at the state funeral attended by 40,000 people.

Burke & Wills Funeral



PUBLIC FUNERAL AT MELBOURNE OF THE AUSTRALIAN EXPLORERS BURKE AND WILLS.—SEE PAGE 492.

Burke and Wills statue in Melbourne today



And so here is our man Standish. The Chief Commissioner of police, he continues his drinking and gambling and favouring his mates with whom he drinks, plays cards and visits brothels. He is significantly involved in the formal setting up of the Victorian Racing Club; he is a committee man, treasurer, handicapper, steward and ultimately the chairman.

Parliamentary committees investigate him and generally they find him to be an inadequate leader and that the police force is in disarray. They make recommendations for him and others to be removed. But because of his connections with the government and as the government wants police officers only be appointed that are sympathetic to their views, Standish holds his position. Inept at best and corrupt at worst.

From the diary of a journalist, James Smith, it is told that every morning, Standish was furnished with a report giving him the names and the numbers of persons, politicians and officials who spent the night at Sarah Fraser's brothel. So this information was used to blackmail anyone who wanted to have a go at him. He has got dirt on the most powerful people in the higher places.

In 1867, he was asked to escort Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria around Melbourne when he toured as the First Royal visit to the colony.

Prince Alfred



H.R.H. Prince Alfred, K.G., Duke of Edinburgh by HS Sadd

Standish was of course responsible for his security. But on Christmas morning after being with the Governor and dignitaries, Prince Alfred was then collected by Standish and taken to Sarah Fraser's exclusive brothel. Alfred and Standish hit it off. Drinking, cards, they go to the Variety Theatre, speak with the actresses backstage and then of course, off to the races. Huge kudos for the VRC.

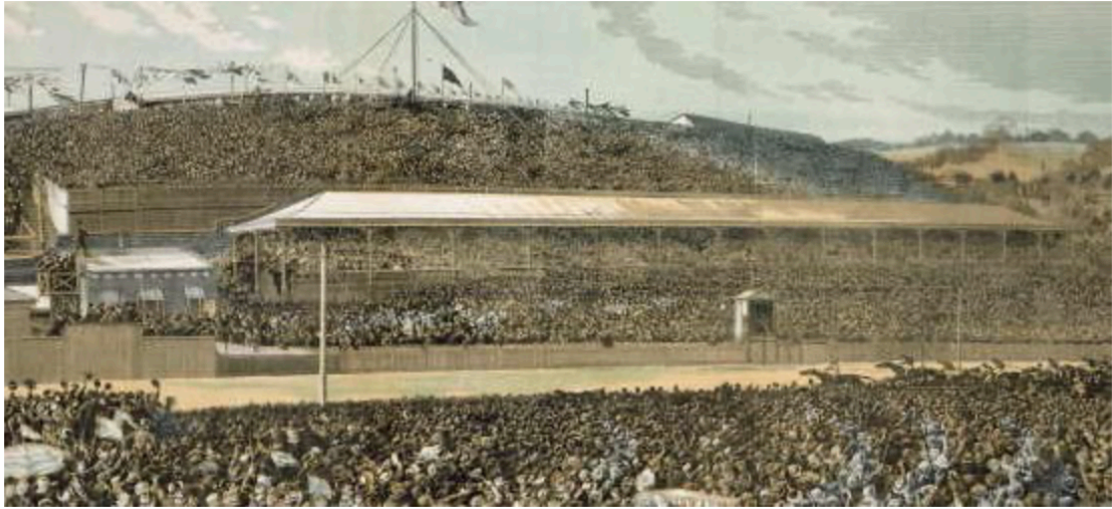
It was just soo good, that the Prince came back in 1869, unattached to spend time with Standish and re live those earlier experiences.

Melbourne Exhibition Building



Melbourne thrives in the 1870's. Classical buildings, the Exhibition Building is completed. The city hosts the world trade fair, and huge crowds gather for the Melbourne Cup.

The Melbourne Cup 1881



But dark clouds are gathering for our Police Commissioner.

And there is one man that finally brings Standish down. Yes none other than Ned Kelly.

Ned Kelly



Standish is the Commissioner when Ned Kelly is on the run. After a couple of years the police still can't catch him. There is a public outcry after the killing of one of the police officers at Stringybark Creek. The ineptitude and corruption of the police force for which Standish is responsible, is exposed.

And as the hunt for Ned Kelly intensified in the Spring of 1880, there were other very important things happening, with the spring Carnival at Flemington. It was also revealed that whilst the hunt for Ned Kelly was on, that Standish in fact suspended the hunt so that the weights for the Melbourne cup could be declared. Getting his priorities in order!!!

The Victorian Government had also passed the Felons Apprehension Act of 1878 which outlawed the gang and made it legal for anybody to shoot them. No presumption of innocence here! Despite this, the gang remain on the run for another two years. They rob banks at Euroa and Jerrilderie. Standish is at a complete loss.

Ultimately Kelly is caught at Glenrowan brought to Melbourne tried and hanged on 11 November 1880.

Old Melbourne Gaol



A Royal Commission, the Longmore Commission, into the Kelly saga is established.

ROYAL COMMISSION



CAUSES OF THE OUTBREAK

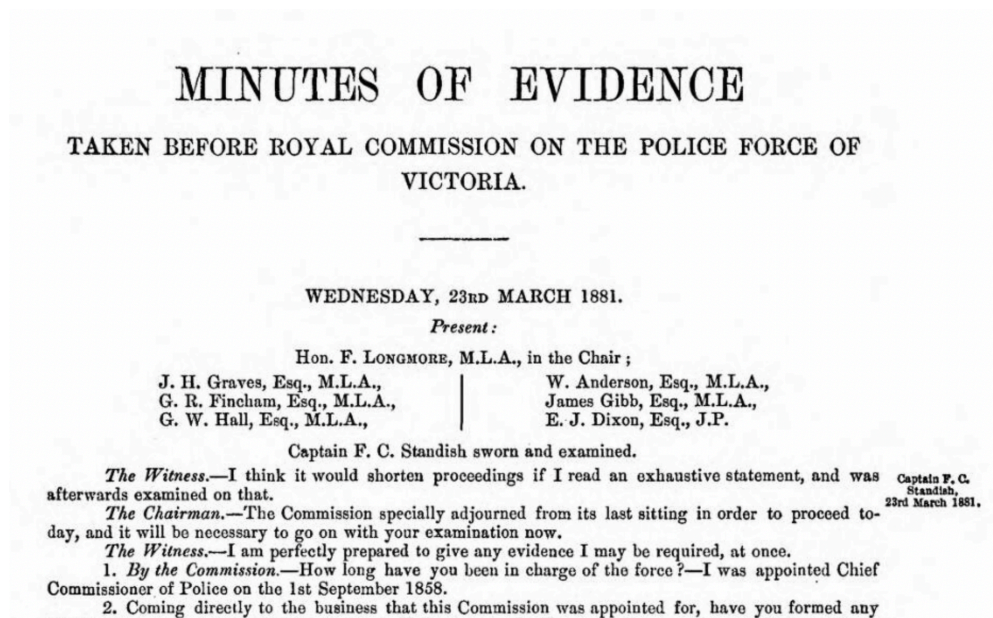


The Official View

The Royal Commission on the Police Force of Victoria, 1881

Source: *Royal Commission on the Police Force of Victoria: Second Progress Report*, in Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1881, Vol. 3, pp. 3ff.

Standish is called as a main witness.



Despite all his connections he cannot hide the fact that the force is completely dysfunctional. It is clear, that for our man Standish, catching criminals is not his strong suit.

Standish reads the writing of the wall. He resigns as Police Commissioner after 22 years.

But he is still well liked and in 1881 becomes the chairman of the VRC. But he only survived until 1883 when he died of cirrhosis of the liver and a fatty degeneration of the heart at the age of 58 year.

He is said to have abandoned Freemasonry on his deathbed, and after a funeral service at the club was buried in the Catholic section of the Melbourne general cemetery. His estate was sworn for probate at £550; unmarried, he left his two horses and his pictures to his servant.

So this man is knee deep in Australia history. Comes to Melbourne as well bred upper class but flees from his punting creditors. He is in the middle of everything on the goldfields. He sees the amazing development of Melbourne, as it becomes the second richest city in the Empire after London. He's part of the legendary expedition of Burke & Wills It is he who established the Melbourne Cup and he is part of the legendary story of Ned Kelly.

But how do we remember Frederick Standish today. There aren't any statues in Melbourne of Standish. There is just simply a race meeting at Flemington in his honour, Standish Handicap Day.

Otherwise perhaps you might pause for reflection on an extraordinary life, in the period of Marvellous Melbourne, as you pass by his grave in the Melbourne cemetery.



