

SIDNEY HOUSE, TOOWONG

[By L. E. SLAUGHTER]

(Given at a meeting of The Historical Society of Queensland on 28th October 1954)

Thomas Finney arrived in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, after a long voyage in the "Flying Cloud" in 1862. After the death of his first wife he married Sidney Ann Jackson, who was born in Dublin, Ireland, on April 8th, 1844. The ceremony took place in the original Wickham Street Presbyterian Church on May 8th, 1866.

William Henry Jackson

William Henry Jackson was born at Kilmore, Ireland, on 19th February 1835. He received an appointment in the Civil Service, from Viscount Canning in June 1854. He was for ten years in the Marine Post office service, between Kingston and Holyhead. He resigned in January 1870 and arrived in Brisbane on 25th April 1870.

The Jackson family belongs to Irish landed gentry. Ancestors were members of a Scottish family which settled in Kilmore, County Monagan, Ireland, in the mid-seventeenth century, when they became landed proprietors.

William Jackson's father was Henry Jackson of Kilmore. Including William, there were eleven sons and daughters. One daughter, Sidney Anne married Thomas Finney and another, Isabella Jane, who was born on 2nd May 1840, married James Isles. They had five sons. Mr. C. Isles, of Isles Love and Co. Pty. Ltd., is a grandson.

A brother, James Jackson, was killed in the battle of Gettysburg, U.S.A., on 1st July 1863.

The crest of the family includes an eagle's head. There is also an eagle in the family arms. This eagle's head with Thomas Finney's signature is incorporated in "Finneys" trade mark.

Sidney House

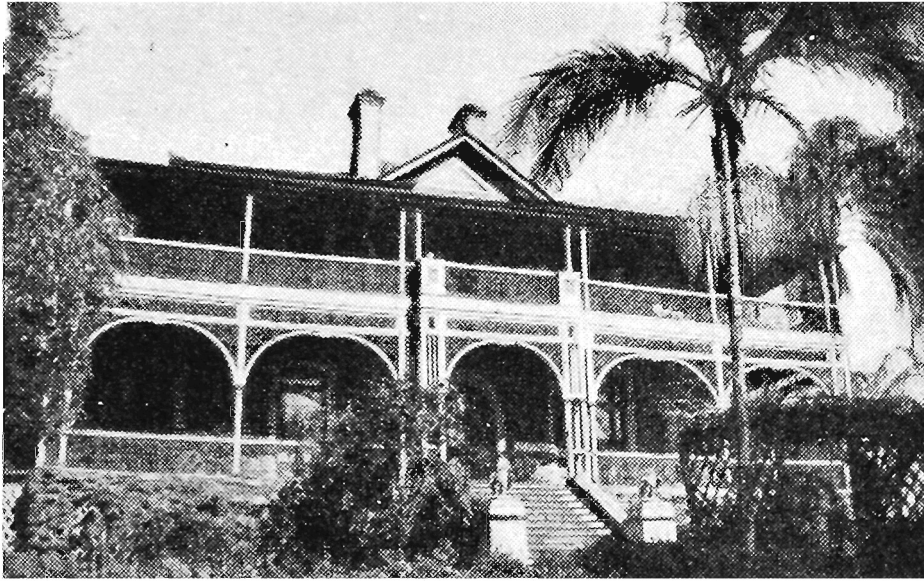
When Crown lands were being sold in Brisbane in 1854, Robert Towns and George Christie on May 11th of that year, bought a block of land bounded by the river and River Road, near where Toowong railway station now is. The area of this land was 2 acres, 3 roods and 4 perches.

This land was resold to Sidney Anne Finney (wife of Thomas Finney), on May 12th, 1881. On this land in 1882, Sidney House was built.

On Mrs. Finney's death, at the age of 39 years on October 13, 1883, according to her will, the property came into the possession of Thomas Finney.

Sidney House To-day

Mention has already been made of the beginnings of Sydney House. This has changed little to-day in its appearance. It is two stories with a basement, which



may be entered from the ground level. In this basement were servants' quarters and the cellar. The basement walls and piers are of bricks with bases of sandstone. Expert opinion has stated that these solid foundations even to-day would carry another two stories.

Opposite the stone entrance stairs to the building is another flight of similar stairs leading down to what was, in the early days, a sunken rose garden. On each side of the lower step and still standing are two pottery urns, which used to contain flower plants. Along the river bank was the once famous Finney orchard.

Two stone eagles are still on pedestals on each side of the lower step to the entrance of the house. When the building was occupied by the American Army, the soldiers claimed them as "American Eagles" and would have "souveniered" them to send to U.S.A. had not the owner foiled that attempt.

On the left of the stairway is a large circular garden plot, around which is a border of pointed stones. This was originally a gold fish pond, which subsequently was filled in with soil and converted to a garden plot.

The house does not face the street (Coronation Drive, formerly River Road); but is sideways on. On the road side and also on the river side of the home is a weeping fig tree. These trees were planted when the house was erected. Dominating the slate roof are tall chimneys.

Inside the main door is an interesting cedar screen partition with glass sides. Beyond this, a statue of a woman on the lower part of the balustrade of the cedar staircase commands attention. This figure is marble, although in recent days it has been painted brown. The figure originally held aloft a torch; but in more modern times this has been changed to an electric light. Flowing garments clothe the figure and a pitcher stands alongside.

Even to-day the figure is referred to as "The Lady of The Lamp." It was said to represent Florence Nightingale; but Miss Nightingale was an entirely different type with a different type of lamp.

The home has twenty rooms. On the left of the ground floor is what is known as the ballroom. This is a large room divided by massive folding cedar doors and was a lounge in normal use. It is now divided into several bedrooms, as the house is now a guest house.

On the right is a large front room, there is a small room, behind which is the dining room. This is still used as such to-day.

The kitchen is at the rear of the building. It is an extension and is spacious. Here is a large "Crown" wood fuel range, which is at least forty-five years old, and a "Garland" gas stove, approximately sixty-five years old.

At the top of the first flight of stairs, there is a magnificent stained glass window. This was purchased by Thomas Finney in Ireland and the cost was £80 before shipping it to Australia. There are three main panels. The themes are Australian and the style is of those years. The top panel is circular and shows a kangaroo with stockmen on horses, with rifles and kangaroo dogs (to-day known as greyhounds) and a

large old-man kangaroo. The middle panel is also circular and illustrates a ploughman, with a plough drawn by bullocks. The bottom panel is semi-circular and is a duck-shooting scene, showing a beautiful lake and mountains with wild ducks and a man with a shot gun. This window can be seen to advantage from the top of the second flight of stairs.

The top floor rooms correspond with those of the ground floor for size and position. At the front of the corridor is a small room, which in the early days, was a "dressing room." Access to the balcony is gained through this room. From this balcony there is a fine view straight along the middle of the river to Grey Street Bridge. The river takes a turn to the right near the house. All rooms have fire grates with marble mantel pieces. Around some of the grates are tiles depicting mediaeval scenes and other pictures. Around the grate in the dining room are coloured tiles showing Shakespearian scenes.

Sidney Anne Finney, Thomas Finney's wife, died on 13th October 1883, at the age of 39. Her will bequeathed the property to her husband, Thomas Finney, and he came into possession of it on 15th July 1884. Elizabeth Finney, Thomas Finney's mother, lived at Sidney House.

In the year 1901, while he was living at 105 Durham Street, East Finchley, Middlesex, Thomas Finney married in London, Janet Edgar Farrow, the widow of Thomas Farrow. Mr. Finney was living at East Finchley as late as 2nd April 1903, because it was at this address where his last will was made. However, on 16th December 1903, at the age of 66 years and 11 months and six days, he died at Sidney House and was buried in Toowong Cemetary.

According to his will, Thomas Finney left to his widow, a life interest in "Sidney House, on trust with a right to live there until her re-marriage or death." She continued to live there with her son and three daughters, by her previous marriage. She left the house when she went to England, in mid-1905. She severed her connection with Finney Isles & Co. Limited then; but acted as buyer for the Company for a short term.

She was born in Brisbane on the 27th March 1866 and is now living at Turramurra, a suburb of Sydney, New South Wales.

An auction sale of the furniture and furnishings of Sidney House was held on Wednesday 29th March 1916. On the same day the house was auctioned and sold to Anne Valleley, wife of Peter Valleley. The auctioneers were Isles, Love & Co.

Sidney House was purchased by Henry Hatch and his wife, Florence Hatch, on 3rd February 1926. They first established the home as a guest house.

The surrounding land has since been subdivided and sold to various buyers. The area on which Sidney House now stands is 1 rood, 3 8-10ths perches, Resubdivisions 11 and 12. The present owner is Mrs. Florence Verney, who lives in a nearby cottage on part of the original ground of the old home.