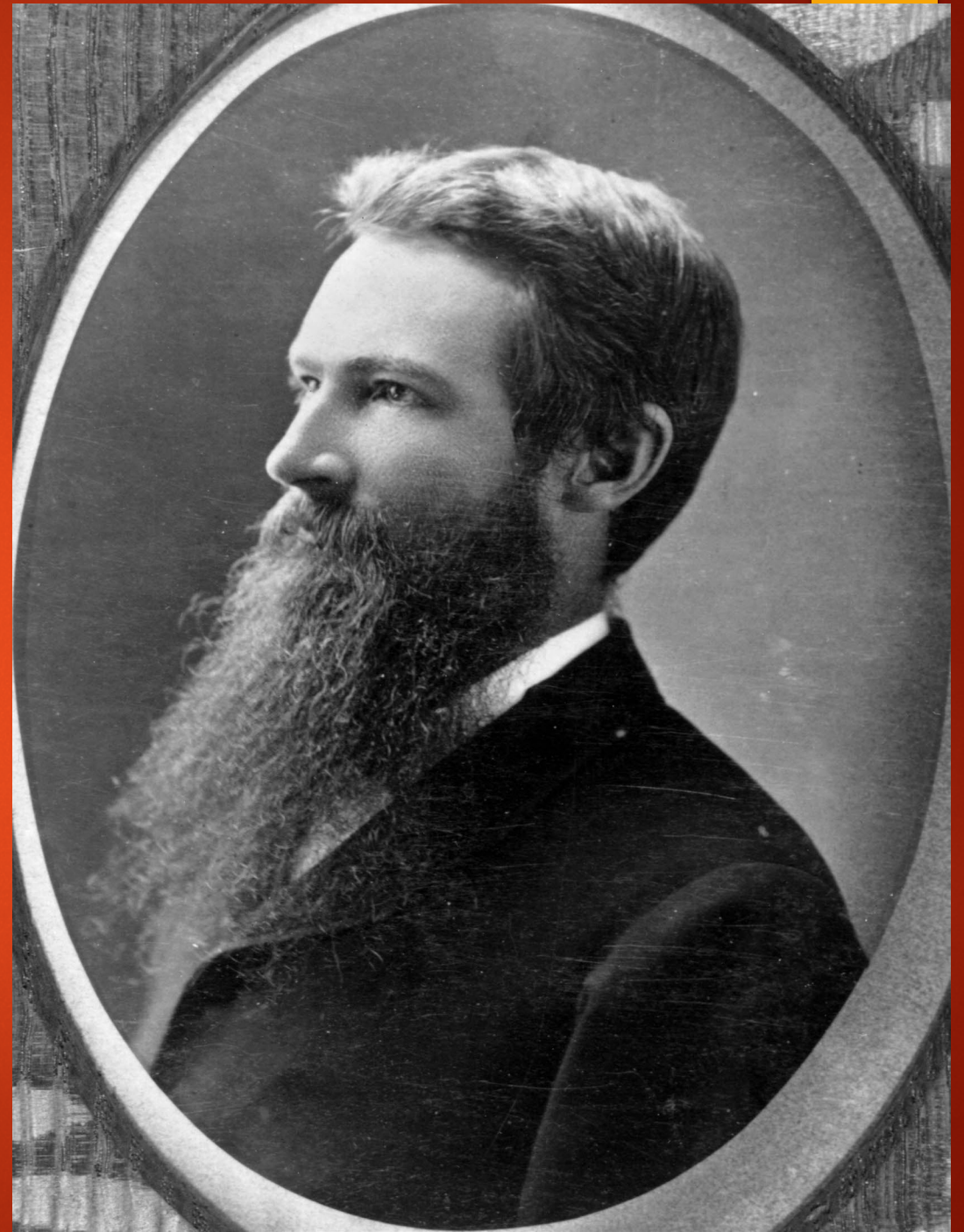


In Search of Samuel
Griffith:
pragmatist or idealist?

- The Hon Peter Applegarth AM KC



Some character assessments

- ▶ “lean, ascetic, cold, clear, collected and acidulated [with] a sceptical and almost cynical manner” - Alfred Deakin describes Griffith
- ▶ “aloof and self-centred” - according to Griffith’s biographer Roger Joyce
- ▶ Griffith achieved leadership in politics “because of his innate strength of character, his indomitable industry, and his transparent mental superiority over those with whom he associated” – Bernays, Clerk of the Queensland Parliament
- ▶ “He never entirely pleased himself.... He seemed to regulate his whole life by the belief that anything was possible to an industrious man ”. - Bernays

Griffith the Outsider

“In so many aspects of his life he began as an outsider, a marginal man distanced from the centres of prestige and authority. It is not just that he was a Queenslander in a continent where wealth and population were concentrated in Victoria and New South Wales. He was Welsh, not English; Congregationalist, not Anglican or Catholic; a colonial, not a metropolitan Briton, and even in the colonial context he was the product of Maitland and Brisbane, not the cities of Melbourne and Sydney. He could not have been anything else but a provincial. The impressive thing about Griffith is that he grew into a great provincial, ready and able to tackle the challenge of knitting together the colonial provincialisms of his time into the making of an Australian nation.”

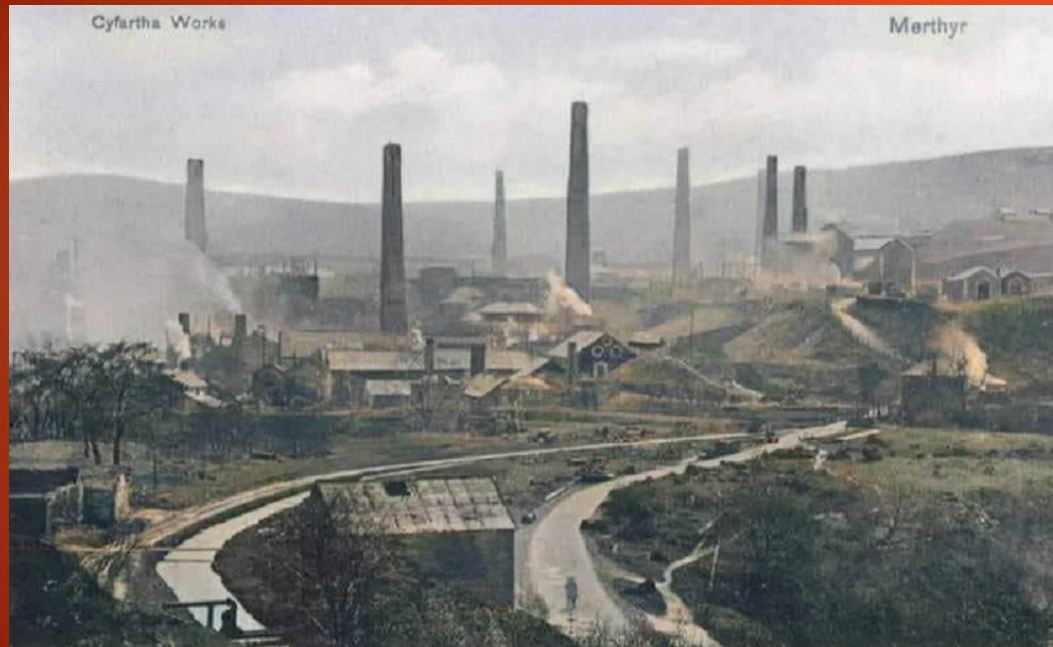
- Professor Geoffrey Bolton

Merthyr Tydfill:

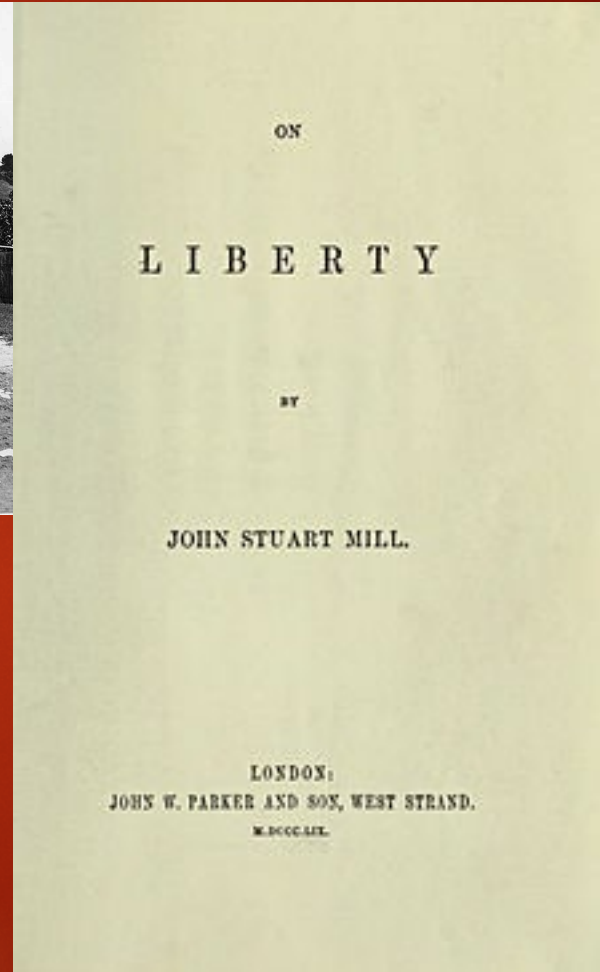
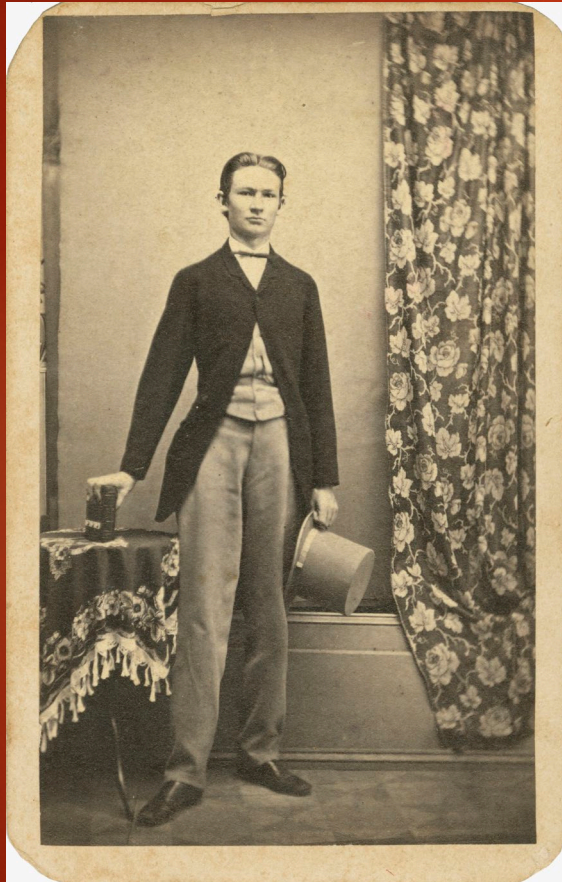
“the sootiest, squalidest and ugliest place on Earth”

“filled with such unguided, hard-worked, fierce, and miserable-looking sons of Adam I never saw before. ... It is like a vision of Hell, and will never leave me.”

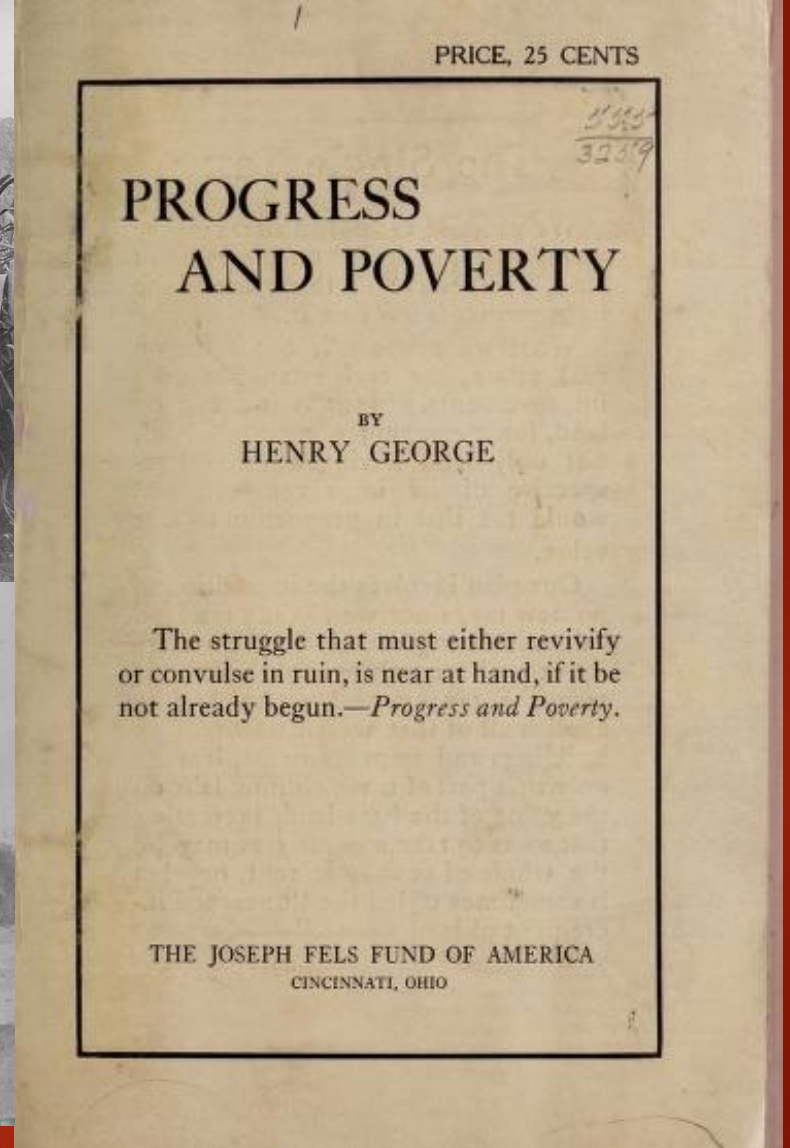
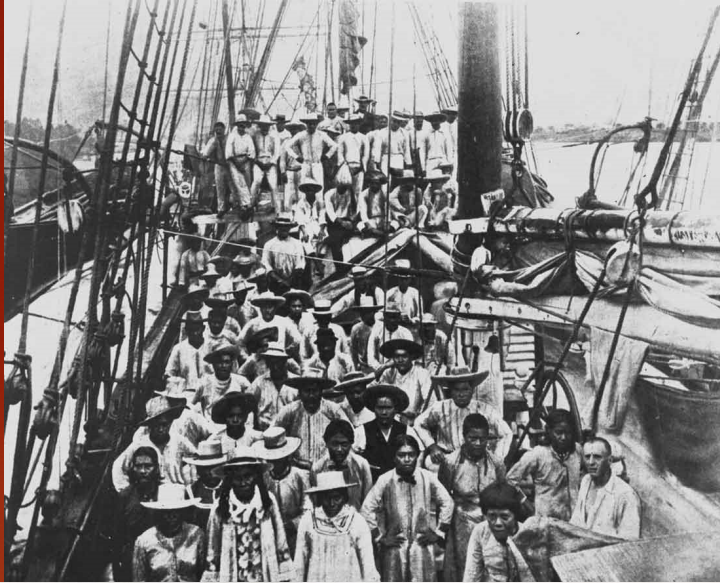
- Thomas Carlyle 1850



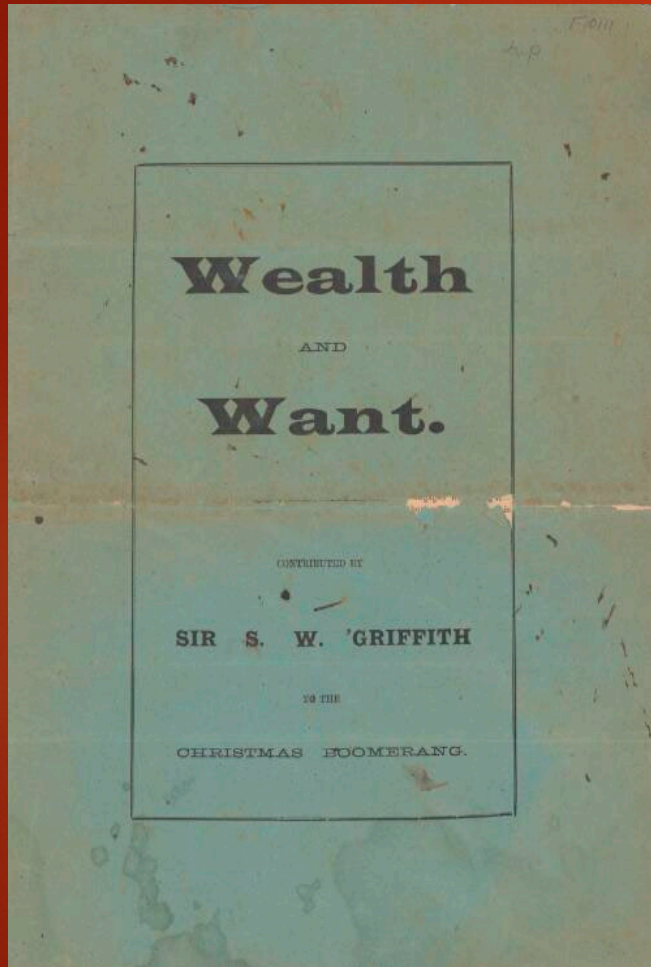
Sydney University: prize winning graduate aged 18



Radical liberal Premier 1883-1888: opponent of the squattocracy and the trade in South Pacific labourers



Radical Opposition Leader: 1888-1890



William Lane was delighted by the prospect of Griffith becoming the leader of an Australian radical movement.

He wrote: “What Pericles was to Athens and to Greece such a leader could be to Australia”.

Meanwhile, the former Chief Justice of New South Wales, Sir Alfred Stephen, accused Griffith’s ideas of “having a smack of communism”

From Opposition in 1890 Griffith introduced two bills that he called “the elementary property law of Queensland”. The first purported to state principles of natural law, including that “it is the duty of the state to make provision by positive law for securing the proper distribution of the products of labour in accordance with the principles hereby declared”.

Premier in the “Griffilwraitth” coalition government 1890-1893

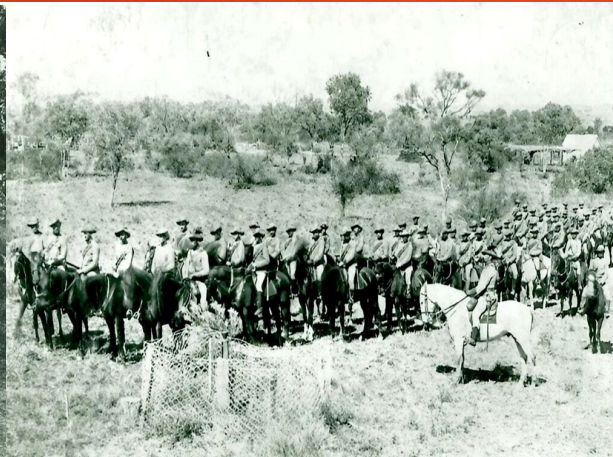
“the business of government is not a matter of theory, but of hard practical duty”.

“The essence of politics is compromise.

Sometimes even a statesman must do that which

is possible, even if it is not the best”

- Sir Samuel Griffith



Strike breaker, class traitor or a devotee to the rule of law?

- ▶ Griffith ordered in troops to quell violence and the destruction of property.
- ▶ He defended the right of strikers to assemble and rejected calls by pastoralists and others to disperse the unionist camps, insisting that the government should act only in the case of actual offences and to prevent non-union labourers from being molested.
- ▶ Griffith relied on an 1826 English statute, since repealed in England, but in force in Queensland, relating to conspiracy and intimidation. On Griffith's initiative, strike leaders were arrested on warrants by officers led by civil magistrates rather than by troops.
- ▶ “Griffith's enforcement of the law...had successfully given the message to the unionists that if they wished to reconstruct society, they would have to do so through the processes of democratic politics.” (David Kemp)

Indigenous issues: Queensland's war of extermination

“Griffith favoured the the abolition of the Native Police because of its excesses, but abolition was politically impossible. Instead, he oversaw:

- A radical attrition of Native Police services;
- Implementation of normalised policing;
- The introduction of Aboriginal court testimony;
- An attempted initiative to rein in the frontier ‘black-birding’ of Aboriginal workers;
- Prosecution of white frontier crimes inflicted on First Nation peoples; and
- The burgeoning of missionary enterprise across the North.”

- Dr Raymond Evans

The rigours of truth telling: Sir Samuel Griffith and Queensland's violent frontier

Selden Society Lecture, 2024

“It is ironic that the lone public figure who apparently attempted, however inadequately, to challenge the mayhem [of a land-taking venture that was steeped in bloodshed] should now be freighted with the principal blame for it.”

- Raymond Evans

Griffith’s actions “showed that he made it his mission to impose the rule of law on the frontier” but realised that the impartial administration of the justice and effective law enforcement were not solutions, by themselves, to the abuses of Aborigines on the frontier. He encouraged the establishment of Christian missions to provide food, shelter and other support to Aborigines who had been dispossessed

- David Kemp

Constitutional framer

“as [a] whole and in every clause the measure bore the stamp of Sir Samuel Griffith’s patient and untiring handiwork, his terse, clear style and force of expression. ...Few even in the mother country or the United States could have accomplished...such a piece of draftsmanship with the same finish in the same time.”

- Alfred Deakin

Griffith played a crucial role in 1891 in “delicately adjusting the balance between the centre and the periphery”.. “the intense intellectual creativity which [Griffith] showed at this important moment in Australian history Griffith can be regarded not as a narrow conservative...but as a great provincial capable of subordinating his local loyalties in the service of a wider vision.”

- Geoffrey Bolton

THE HON. PHILIP O. PYRE
(Tasmania).

THE HON. JOHN FORREST
(Western Australia).

THE HON. JAMES MUNRO
(Victoria).



THE HON. THOMAS PLAYFORD
(South Australia).

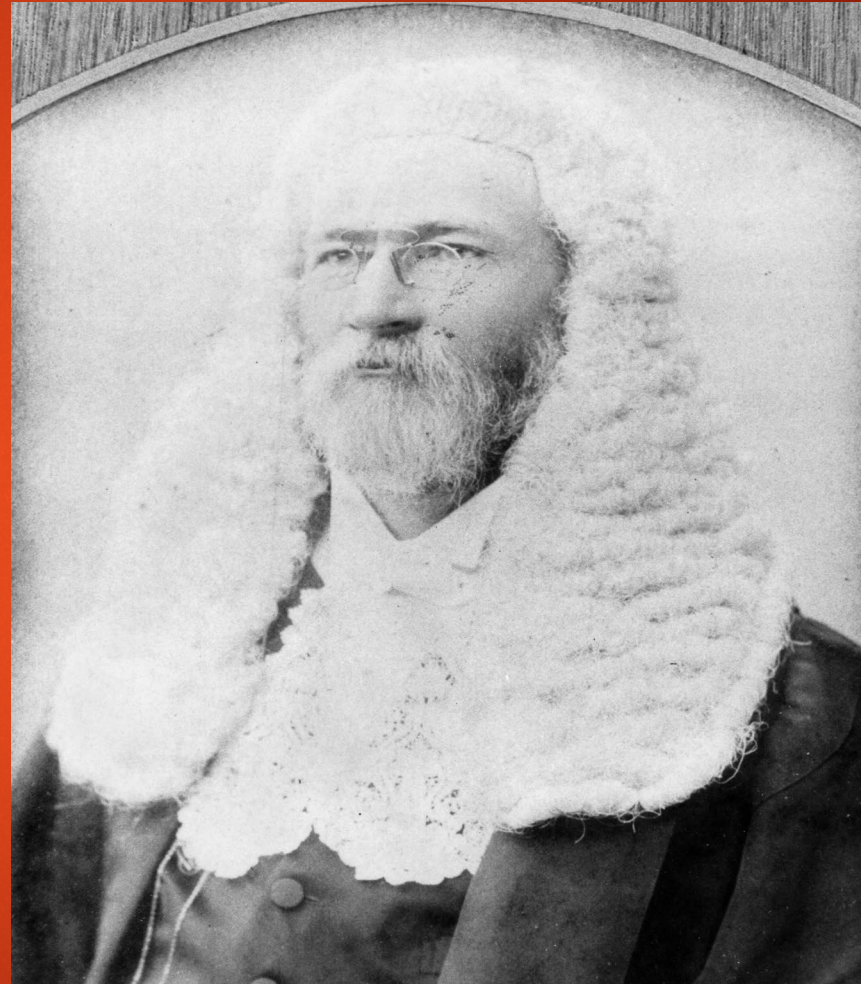
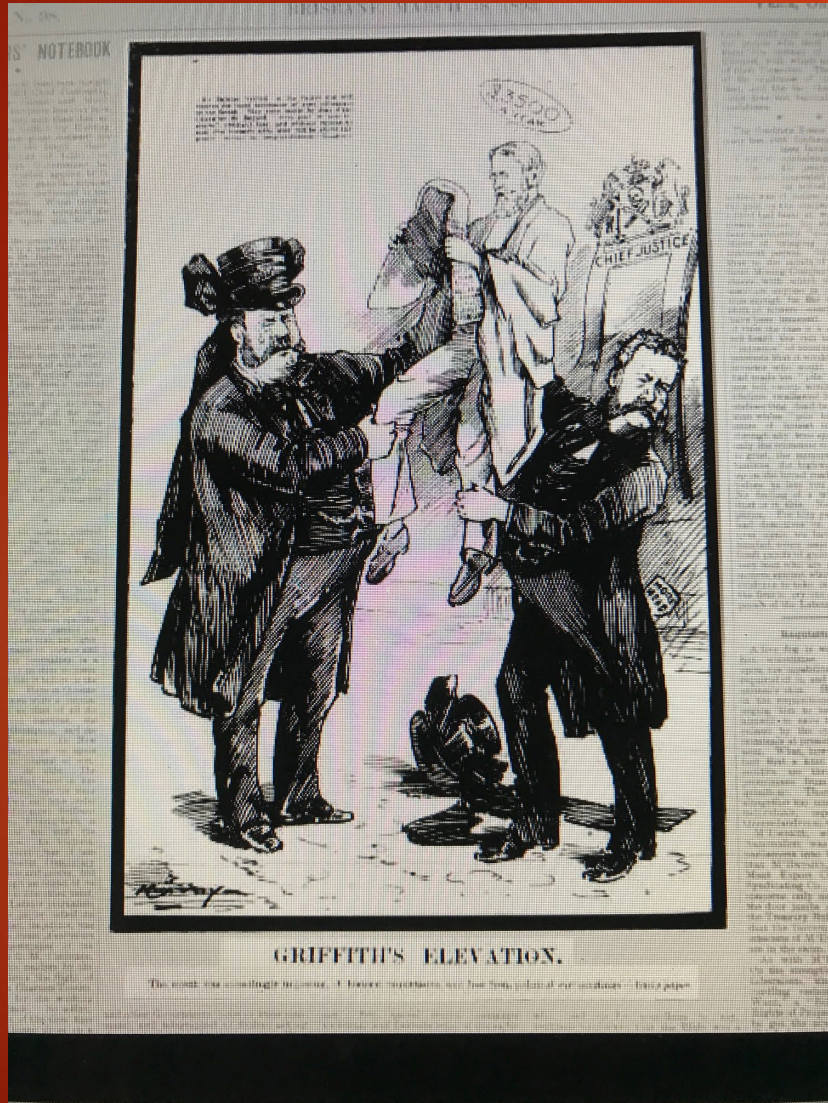
THE HON. SIR HENRY PARKES
(New South Wales).

THE HON. SIR SAMUEL W. GRIFFITH
(Queensland).

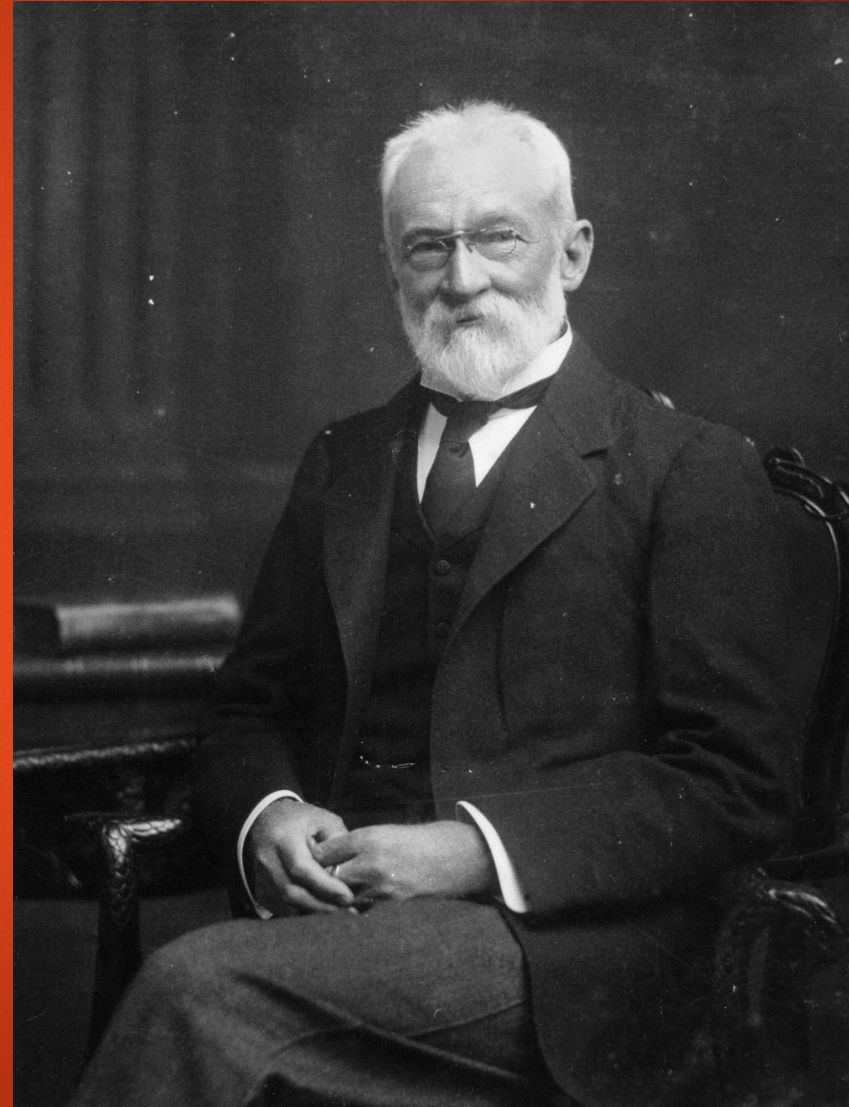
THE NATIONAL AUSTRALASIAN CONVENTION AT SYDNEY: A GROUP OF PRIME MINISTERS.



Chief Justice of Queensland 1893-1903



Chief Justice of Australia: 1903-1919



A Romantic with a passionate inner life

Joyce refers to a multi-faceted person, and a Renaissance man, with a “passionate inner life far removed from the cold existence imposed by his master, the law”.

⊙
THE INFERNO
OF DANTE ALIGHIERI

LITERALLY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE
BY THE MASTERS OF THE ORIGINAL

BY THE MOST DISTINGUISHED
SIR SAMUEL WALKER GRIFFITH
BARRISTER AT LAW, CHIEF CLERK OF THE HIGH COURT
OF IRELAND

VEDDEY
ANGUS & ROBERTSON, Ltd.
PUBLISHERS TO THE UNIVERSITY
1928



From Merthyr to Merthyr



MERTHYR
ESTATE NEW FARM
24 CHARMING RIVER FRONTAGES
For Sale on the GROUND on SATURDAY 29TH November at 3 P.M.
Cameron Bros Auctioneers

GOOD DEEP WATERS FRONTAGES
FINE ELEVATION
DELICIOUS SURROUNDINGS
SCAINTIFUL VIEWS

BRISBANE RIVER

STANLEY

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----

TERMS
£ 20 Deposit
and £ 2 per Month
(not allotment)

Utopian in political philosophy: a shy tenderness for all God's children

Griffith “kept locked away in his heart a shy tenderness for all God’s children, beneath the exterior of a scribe and a Pharisee.” - Manning Clark

Throughout his life Griffith harboured deep convictions about the humanitarian, cooperative and fraternal relations that should govern a social order based on individual rights under the rule of law. He saw a positive role for law in building a better society.

His evidence in 1891 before a Royal Commission in Sydney rejecting the idea of labour as a commodity and advocating laws to establish a living wage place him at the forefront of a uniquely Australian political experiment.

In 1919 he restated 22 propositions that he had tried to state in legislation thirty years before.

“No one could have believed more firmly than he did in the gospel of hard work or have made it more completely a guiding principle in his life. Certainly, no man laboured more strenuously or more self-sacrificingly for the good of the people”. - Queensland Premier, T J Ryan KC, 1919

