

CHAPTER ONE

PRELUDES TO THE AUSTRALIAN REPUBLICAN

Town Hall to pass a loyal resolution congratulating Queen Victoria on her Jubilee. In January 1888, the Republican Union was replaced by the Republican League,³⁴ which was also short-lived. There was no widespread popular support for republicanism or associated organisations. The ARA overcame this difficulty and established an organisational vehicle which aimed at the establishment of an Australian republic. This organisation had a lifespan of eighteen months:

Thady O'Kane is in trouble again.
 This is poetry.
 He was struck upon the nose.
 This is prose.
 He is in for another libel action.
 This is fact.³⁵

According to one description, O'Kane was a spare, grizzled man, about middle height, soft and cultured in speech, and with all the little touches of the public school and university.³⁶ By the time of his death in 1890 O'Kane's journalistic reputation was Australia-wide, and almost every leading paper published an eulogistic obituary. The *Northern Miner*, of which he was sole owner, had become the leading journal in Charters Towers, which had by then a population of about nineteen thousand and was the leading mining centre in Queensland. O'Kane was intimately connected with the history of the city during its rise and heyday, and his activities are well-documented, not least through court records, having been sued for libel on numerous occasions. He was never deterred by the power or influence of an opponent — after a Prime Minister, being sued

34 D. Horne, *The Australian People: The Biography of a Nation* (Sydney, 1972), p.158.

35 *Sydney Bulletin*, 20 May 1882, p.9.

36 R.S. Browne, *A Journalist's Memories* (Brisbane, 1927), p.5.



THADEUS O'KANE — "firebrand of the North".

Source: *Queensland Punch*, 1 June 1890, p.59 held
in State Library of New South Wales.

by Warden Charters would hold no terrors:

His eye was ever on the alert for an affront to himself or his public morals. It was a keen, aggressive, Irish eye. And his pen was vitriolic. Of course, he was 'agin' the Government, but more particularly against all persons in authority, and every issue of the 'Miner' revealed the wickedness and incompetence of Charters Towers officialdom — that is, as Mr. Thaddeus [sic] O'Kane saw it.³⁷

He was a litigious character — he sued as frequently as he was sued, was horsewhipped twice, and was even involved peripherally in the saga of the colonial 'Breaker' Morant. As an editor, he was a persuasive advocate for republicanism, the Liberal party, separation, Irish home rule, mining development, and miners' safety.³⁸

Thaddeus O'Kane was a central figure of the first two decades in the history of Charters Towers. It was a gold-rush town and Thady was the sardonic, wordly observer — one of the most educated and cultured men on the field. From his perch as editor of the oldest newspaper he documented follies and greeds, and paid for it. The early radicalism that O'Kane projected through his editorials, especially during the 1880's, was very influential in the embryonic stage of the labour movement in Charters Towers. But it was O'Kane's strong, Irish republican roots that were of paramount importance in the creation of a republican movement in Charters Towers.³⁹ Indeed his republican sympathies were known, and in some cases admired, throughout the colony. Any study of the Charters Towers republican movement is incomplete without attention to the life, and influence,

37 *Ibid.*, p.5.

38 J. Stoodley & H.J. Gibbney, 'Thaddeus O'Kane', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.5, p.362.

39 O'Kane's Irish republican roots and his fenian links will be analysed further in this chapter.

of Thadeus O'Kane, once called "the firebrand of the North".⁴⁰

When Thadeus O'Kane arrived at Charters Towers he was, at fifty-three, one of the oldest men on the goldfield. A later memorialist recalled that

it was a young man's game: the grand panjandrum of the field, Mr. Charters himself, was only forty....⁴¹

The offer of a position on the only paper at the new rush could hardly be described as a journalistic plum, for the history of gold rushes in the North Kennedy had so far been uninspiring.

O'Kane's appointment was announced in the *Queenslander* of 26 July 1873:

The *Rockhampton Bulletin* understands that Mr. O'Kane has accepted an engagement to edit the *Northern Miner* newspaper at Millchester, which has been suspended for some weeks past.

The *Northern Miner* had been established by James Smith Reid, on 14 August 1872. The new editor, well into middle age, matched the precarious nature both of the town and of the paper to which he was appointed. Apart from the years as the editor of a provincial Irish newspaper, he had spent a total of three and a half years as sub-editor on three Queensland newspapers. His first appointment terminated in acrimony, and he had been dismissed from both the posts he held in Rockhampton. His editorial career too, had been a failure and his appointment to the *Northern Miner* a last chance.

40 *Northern Miner*, 1 March 1883.

41 'Ne'er Do Well', *North Queensland Times*, 1907. Executive power in Charters Towers was concentrated in the office of goldfield commissioner, a title that was later changed to warden. W.S.E.M. Charters, the first goldfield commissioner for North Kennedy, had been appointed to the Cape rush in 1867. By the time of the discovery of Charters Towers in late 1871, that position had become sinecure, as the Cape dwindled (*Port Denison Times*, 12 September 1868).



WILLIAM SKELTON EWBANK MELBOURNE CHARTERS

Charters was the first Goldfield Commissioner, a title later changed to Warden, of Charters Towers. He was six feet four inches tall and weighed eighteen stone. His name and physique were the most impressive things about him.

Source: JCU Library.

At this time Charters Towers was little more than a mining camp with an uncertain future. O'Kane obtained a half-share in the *Northern Miner* and on 12 January 1874, became sole proprietor. Apart from his attempts at a political career the *Northern Miner* was to be O'Kane's main interest until his forced retirement on medical grounds just before his seventieth birthday. He built the *Northern Miner* up into a far-reaching vehicle for the transportation of his message:

...for the 17 years until his death in 1890, the history of the *Northern Miner* was very much a history of Thadeus O'Kane with his influence extending far beyond the boundaries of Charters Towers.⁴²

O'Kane was intimately involved in the process of establishing a community, as the field evolved from mining camp to thriving town.

Thadeus O'Kane was born in Dingle, County Kerry, on 24 January 1820, the youngest of fourteen children of Gregory O'Kane, gentleman, and Johanna, née Fraimes, and christened Timothy Joseph.⁴³ He received a liberal private education before entering Maynooth College, County Kildare, at the age of nineteen, to read for the priesthood. It was at Maynooth that he gained a classical, liberal education to be of great benefit in years to come.⁴⁴ This classical training can be seen in the sprinkling of Latin tags in the *Northern Miner*. In 1846 O'Kane left the seminary, for reasons

42 Manion, *Paper Power*, p.149.

43 Death Certificate, District of Ipswich, 17 May 1890.

44 In a letter from E.P. Graham to the *Northern Advocate*, 26 February 1876, he stated that O'Kane was a "prize-man".

unknown, allegedly without taking Holy Orders.⁴⁵ An article in the *Towers Herald* alluded to O'Kane's wealthy relatives in Ireland:

All Irishmen have not priestly uncles to interest themselves for their nephews, and send them up to Maynooth to be educated at the expense of the already impoverished Irish peasantry and the Maynooth Grant.⁴⁶

After leaving Maynooth, O'Kane went to London where he practised radical journalism, at least until his putative marriage in 1851. Whilst O'Kane was in England he lived with Margaret Matilda Augusta Morris, claiming to have married her on 2 October 1851.⁴⁷ They had a son and four daughters, all born in Ireland. Two girls died as infants. The son, John Gregory, was born in 1857, and the two surviving girls, Mary Theresa and Nora Josephine, were born about 1859 and 1862 respectively.⁴⁸

During the 1850's the O'Kane's lived in a number of residences in England and Ireland. By 1857 O'Kane was conducting a school for advanced pupils at Killarney. While at Killarney an incident occurred on the night after his son John Gregory's birth, that indicates that he may have deserved the label of "radical" even before his emigration to the colonies. The police raided his

45 This statement about O'Kane not having taken Holy Orders is in dispute as the records of Maynooth College are virtually impossible to gain access. This leads one to ask the question: Is something being covered up, even after one and a half centuries? Was O'Kane, as several of his Hibernian opponents on the *Towers Herald* alleged, an ordained priest or perhaps even an unfrocked priest?

46 *Towers Herald*, 16 July 1879.

47 *The Times* (London), 27 January 1864. It was alleged that Mrs. O'Kane had been an actress. Stoodley & Gibbney, 'Thadeus O'Kane', p.362.

48 Death Certificate, District of Ipswich, 17 May 1890.

residence on suspicion that he harboured fenians or "white boys".⁴⁹

O'Kane frequently told the story in later life that

a 'posse' of police surrounded the house, and afterwards searched it from top to bottom in their eagerness to secure a prisoner, but they failed, as there were none concealed.⁵⁰

There is evidence that O'Kane was involved in radical politics in Ireland, which in that context meant opposition to English rule. It appears that his family may have been one of the nationalist families of County Kerry, inferring political radicalism as a family inheritance. The clue was the radical nationalist priest Father John O'Kane who was reputedly active in the land war about County Kerry.⁵¹

On 15 May 1861, O'Kane made his first venture into independent journalism, when he established the *Kerry Star*, at Tralee. When the *Kerry Star* was sold, two years later, it fetched the not inconsiderable sum of £210, certainly an amount beyond the reach of a

49 Fenians was the name given by John O'Mahony to the republican organisation which he founded in New York on 17 March 1858, at the same time as the Irish Republican Brotherhood was founded in Dublin by James Stephens. The name fenian came to connote dedication to physical force to secure the independence of Ireland and the establishment of an Irish Republic (D.J. Hickey & J.E. Doherty, *A Dictionary of Irish History since 1800* (Dublin, 1980), p.166). "White boys" were an agrarian secret society whose principal grievances were landlord exactions, tithes, insecurity of land tenure, wages, hearth-money, tolls, and unemployment. Its association with atrocities earned the condemnation of the Catholic Church and the secular authorities during the 1770's (*ibid.*, p.605).

50 *Northern Miner*, 19 May 1890.

51 Fr Michael O'Ciosain to D.H. Johnson, 7 May 1896. In this letter Fr O'Ciosain mentions how Fr John O'Kane incited the tenants to vote against their landlord's choice in an election. It would be reasonable to assume that, as the parish priest of Castlegregory, Fr John O'Kane was an older brother, or perhaps uncle, of Thadeus. Agrarian secret societies were a common feature of Irish rural life in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries. They generally had no political outlook but were founded for an immediate purpose and recruited in the main from the tenant class (Hickey & Doherty, *Dictionary of Irish History*, p.525).

journalist on the fringes of the nineteenth century press world.⁵²

In the extract dated 17 March 1863, a notation in the margin stated

Seven Tralee men purchased from Fr. John O'Kane P.P. the whole property of the 'Star' for £210 with a view to establish a Catholic and National Paper.⁵³

From this notation it appears that it was Fr John O'Kane that owned the *Kerry Star*.⁵⁴ Extracts from the *Kerry Star* reveal the journalistic style and vitriolic pen of Thadeus O'Kane. The *Kerry Star* ceased publication on 27 March 1863.⁵⁵

After the sale of the *Kerry Star*, O'Kane returned to London. His next recorded action was a petition for dissolution of marriage against his wife for adultery on 19 October 1863. He cited the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, as co-respondent and claimed £20 000 damages. O'Kane's wife claimed that no marriage had ever taken place. As no proof of marriage was produced, there was no case for adultery. In February 1864, O'Kane withdrew the suit.⁵⁶

52 Fr Michael O'Ciosain to D.H. Johnson, 7 May 1986. In this letter were enclosed four extracts from the *Kerry Star*. These extracts were found in a scrapbook, kept by Rev Denis O'Donoghue Parish Priest, of the *Kerry Star*, and one of the seven Tralee men who purchased the *Kerry Star* from Fr John O'Kane.

53 *Kerry Star*, 17 March 1863.

54 This contradicts Kirkpatrick and Manion who state that Thadeus O'Kane owned the paper (Kirkpatrick, *Sworn to No Master*, p.278; Manion, *Paper Power*, p.225).

55 Manion, *Paper Power*, p.225.

56 The case has plausibility. Palmerston had scandalized Albert and Victoria in 1839 by pressing very explicit intentions on one of Victoria's ladies-in-waiting, at Windsor Castle no less: "When Palmerston was aged 55 and on the point of getting married ...he was involved in an incident with Mrs.Brand, the wife of Lord Dacre's son, who was one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting" (J. Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (London, 1970), p.275). The incident was noted in Prince Albert's diary eleven years later: "...while under her roof at Windsor Castle, had committed a brutal attack upon one of her ladies. Had at night, by stealth, introduced himself to her apartment, barricaded the door, and would have consummated his fiendish scheme by violence had not the miraculous efforts of his victim and such assistance attracted by her screams, saved her" (*ibid.*, p.394).

The affair attracted considerable notoriety in London society.⁵⁷

In government circles the whole affair was viewed as an attempt at extortion.⁵⁸ There was evidence that the Palmerston scandal and

its resolution had political rather than mercenary undertones.⁵⁹

The key to O'Kane's withdrawal from the suit centred around the statement that the marriage had

been performed according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church, and that may, perhaps, be a reason to explain how it is that a settlement has been brought about. It is well known that the Roman Catholic Church looks with peculiar disfavour....⁶⁰

No doubt the result caused O'Kane to migrate immediately to the colonies. At the same time he changed his name to Thadeus O'Kane.

By October 1864 he had a contract as a sub-editor with the *North Australian* in Brisbane.⁶¹ The editorial appointment had a rather curious twist. The *North Australian* was owned by Bishop

57 *Ibid.*, p.531.

58 *The Times* (London), 27 January 1864.

59 An article in the *Towers Herald* alluded to a partnership between O'Kane and a fellow Kerry man called Desmond, which had been dissolved through the Dublin Four Courts: "Lord Pam was... dragged into the business, by one or both of the partners...the court on affidavit said it was a dodge on the part of the plaintiff in the case to extort money. Pam hadn't to pay, and the two Kerry's had no spoil to divide" (*Towers Herald*, 4 May 1878). This statement appears to be a reference to the Palmerston scandal. The article concludes by stating that Desmond was in America in 1878 and the other member of the firm was in North Queensland (*ibid.*). In 1878 there was a Captain Thomas Desmond of County Cork living in Los Angeles (W. O'Brien & D. Ryan (eds.), *Devoy's Post Bag*, (Dublin, 1948), p.180). Thomas Desmond was closely involved in assisting the Fenian escape from the Fremantle gaol in 1867 (K. Amos, *The Fenians in Australia* (Kensington, 1988), p.218). Three months beforehand another article in the *Towers Herald* alluded to a sexual liaison between O'Kane and Laura Desmond (*Towers Herald*, 9 January 1878).

60 *The Times* (London), 3 February 1864.

61 *Brisbane Courier*, 18 February 1865.

James Quinn, Catholic prelate of the colony.⁶² During his time in Brisbane, O'Kane was prominent in the Irish community. He was invited, on 20 January 1865, to chair the inaugural meeting of the Irish National League in Brisbane and was elected organising and corresponding secretary of the League.⁶³ The object of the League was "to secure for Ireland...local government"⁶⁴ demonstrating that O'Kane's Irish nationalist sentiments survived the voyage.

O'Kane was employed on the *North Australian* from October 1864 until January 1865, when he was dismissed because he would not publish an article submitted by the proprietor. The issue was editorial independence — a factor that O'Kane prized highly.⁶⁵ O'Kane sued the *North Australian* for breach of contract. The judge's decision reinforced O'Kane's commitment to editorial independence:⁶⁶

The proprietor of a newspaper could not interfere with the discretion of a manager or acting editor of a paper,

62 James Quinn (1819-1881) was "born at Rathbawn, Ireland; was appointed first Roman Catholic Bishop of Queensland in 1859; founder of Queensland Immigration Society which brought 6 000 Irish to the colony in the 1860's. An ardent Irish nationalist to his life's end, Quinn altered his name to O'Quinn in 1875 in honour of Daniel O'Connell, the famed Irish patriot of the 1840's" (Hayston, *Interaction of Religion and Society*, p.4, fn. 8). Tenuous fenian links can be attached to this appointment. Two senior fenians from Cork, James O'Mahony and William Carroll, were among the Irish immigrants who disembarked from the *Chatsworth* at Brisbane in 1862. These two had decided to come to Australia after contact with an agent engaged by Quinn (Amos, *Fenians in Australia*, p.22).

63 *Brisbane Courier*, 25 January 1865.

64 *Ibid.*, 21 January 1865.

65 This was to become evident on his long sole editorship of the *Northern Miner*.

66 The *North Australian* ceased publication on 25 March 1865, only one month after his dismissal.

but could only dismiss him at the termination of the agreement.⁶⁷

Between 1865 and 1872 O'Kane was in Rockhampton sub-editing two of the local newspapers. After only a year at the *Northern Argus* he was dismissed. This was followed by employment with its rival, the *Rockhampton Bulletin*. O'Kane was dismissed after he opposed Charles Hardie Buzacott's successful attempt to purchase the *Rockhampton Bulletin* in May 1890.⁶⁸ During his time in Rockhampton O'Kane returned to teaching operating a private school.⁶⁹ In 1866 O'Kane was on the provisional committee of the Rockhampton Separation League.⁷⁰ A letter to the *Northern Advocate* from E.P. Graham, a long time antagonist, alluded to the arrival of Thadeus' son, John Gregory O'Kane in Charters Towers in 1876.⁷²

67 *Ibid.*, 18 February 1865.

68 *Northern Miner*, 27 September 1887.

69 *Ibid.*, 19 May 1890.

70 *The Weekly Herald*, 7 July 1866; *Rockhampton Bulletin*, 13 August 1872.

71 Throughout 1876 the columns of the *Northern Advocate* were prepared with letters from Edward Power Graham abusing O'Kane (*Northern Advocate*, 5, 12, 18, 26 February, 11, 18 March, 15, 29 April and 6, 27 May, all 1876). Some of the allegations Graham made touched on O'Kane's life in Ireland (*Towers Herald*, 4 May, 29 June and 6 July 1878).

72 John Gregory O'Kane born in Killarney, County Kerry, Ireland, in 1857 was the son of Thadeus (Timothy Joseph) O'Kane and Margaret Morris. According to the QSA immigration files he departed from Queenstown on the *Paval Brigade* on 10 February 1875, and arrived in Townsville on 7 June 1875, at the age of 17. Upon arrival he began work as a sub-editor on the *Northern Miner*. On 21 April 1881, he married Jeanie Elizabeth O'Kane a 21 year old immigrant from Ballymoney, County Antrim (Kennedy Marriage Register, Vol.11, No.415). In 1889, after a family disagreement, John Gregory O'Kane went to Brisbane when he worked on a number of papers. When his father's health declined he took over control of the *Northern Miner* and upon his death sold the paper. In June 1891 he purchased and edited the *Towers Herald*. He was much more conservative than his father. As a freemason and officer in the volunteer defence force he was part of the Charters Towers establishment. He died on 22 August 1898 (Kennedy Death Register, No.5229).

What a pity he hadn't this precious scion of the O's, at his elbow in Rockhampton, when he received his well-merited flogging in the East-street.⁷³

Later that year in the same journal:

Does not everyone recollect the fiasco of a certain hoary suitor, erst of Rockhampton and of the melancholy means with which Carney's riding whip made East-street resound as a finale to that dishonourable adventure.⁷⁴

This was O'Kane's first collision with that nineteenth century form of summary justice — horsewhipping.

The *Northern Miner* had originally been published from a room in the Royal Hotel in Mosman Street, and from that premises next door.⁷⁵ It followed the general migration to Millchester in 1873,⁷⁶ but by 1876 O'Kane had transferred the *Northern Miner* back to Charters Towers.⁷⁷ Opposition to the *Northern Miner* came from the *Northern Advocate*.⁷⁸ This journal was a Millchester based pub-

73 *Northern Advocate*, 18 March 1876.

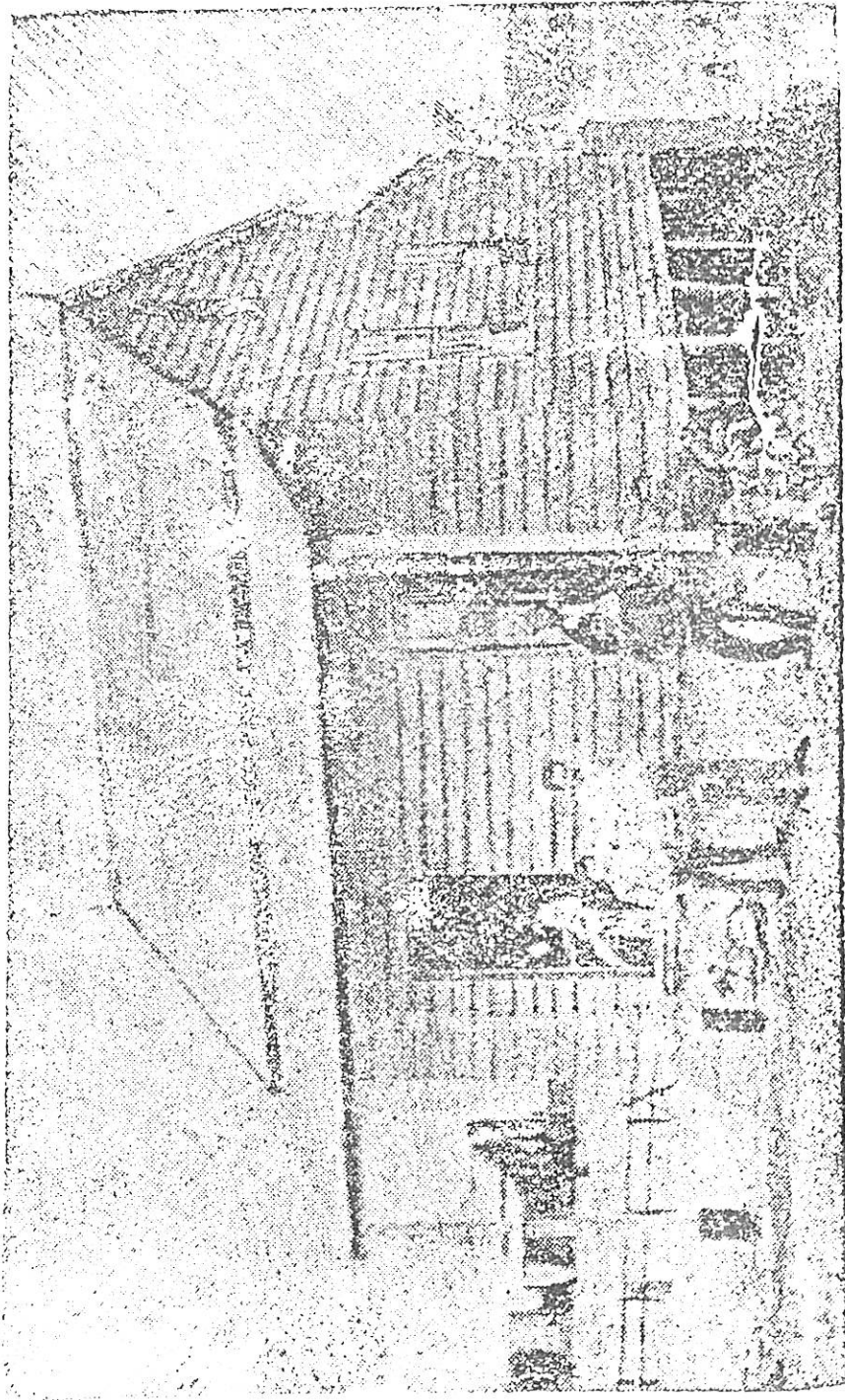
74 *Ibid.*, 25 November 1876.

75 'Ne'er Do Well', *North Queensland Times*, 1907.

76 *Ravenswood Miner*, 3 May 1873.

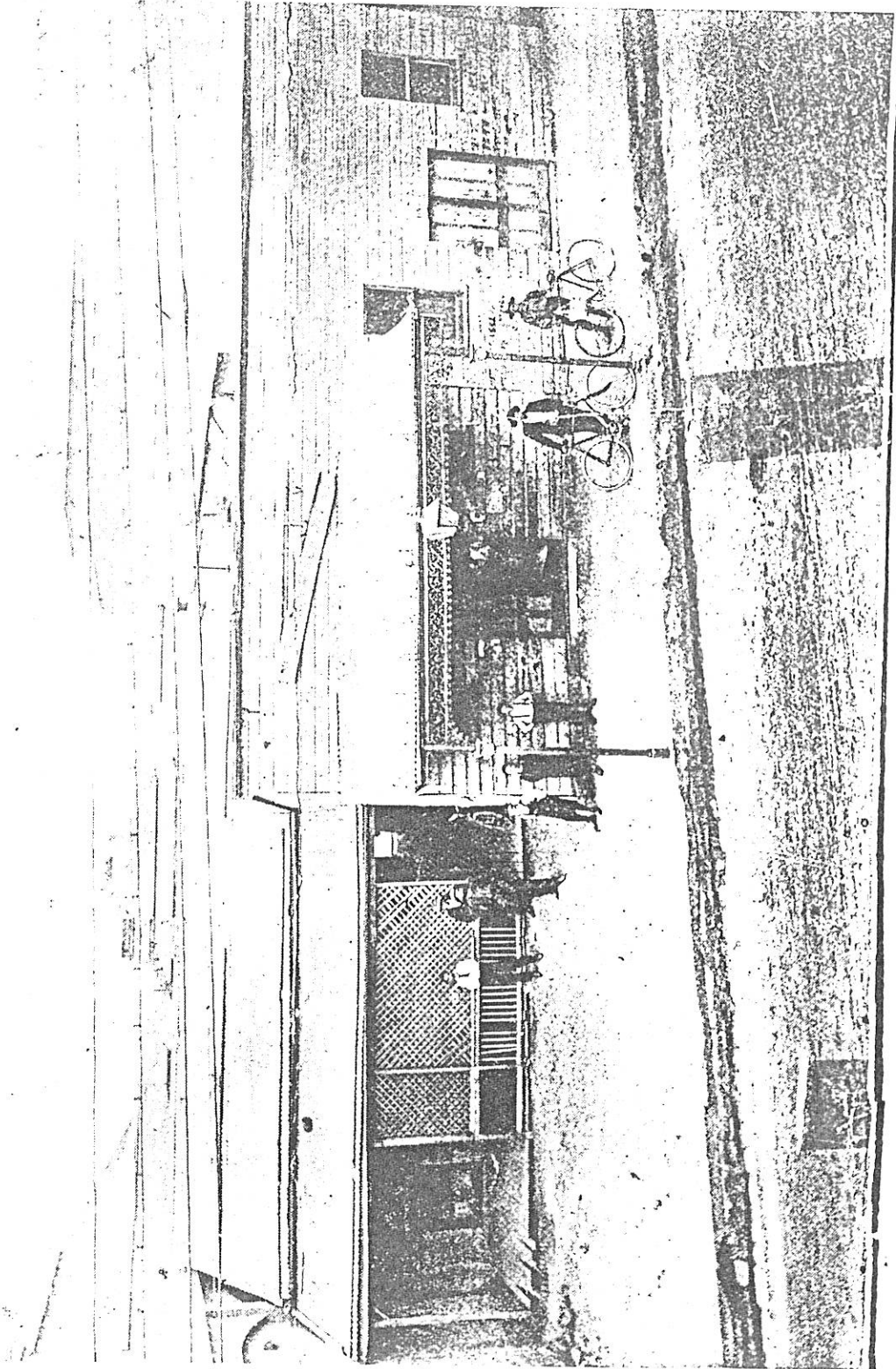
77 *Northern Advocate*, 11 March 1876. The goldfield in 1873 contained not one centre of population, but three distinct settlements. The original settlement around Mosman's discovery at the North Australian on the western end of the field early lost most of its population to Millchester, some miles to the east, where the only available surface water, and hence most of the crushing machinery, was located. There was a small village called Just in Time, after the neighbouring reefs, midway between these two centres. Each of the villages vied for supremacy. The reefs about Millchester were not as rich as those further west, and by 1875 many of the businesses and government offices began to move back to Upper Camp, which by now had appropriated the name Charters Towers (Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.50).

78 The only run of the *Northern Advocate* in JCU Library extends from 1876-1877 and the *Towers Herald* from 1877-1879. The only run of the *Northern Miner* at JCU Library in the seventies is 1877. Thus the knowledge of O'Kane's activities during this decade must be derived from the columns of the rival paper — the rough equivalent of attempting to reconstruct Churchill's wartime career from German sources.



NORTHERN MINER OFFICE, MILLCHESTER
1873-

Source: JCU Library.



THE OLD NORTHERN MINER OFFICE.

GILL STREET, CHARTERS TOWNS

Source: JCU Library



NORTHERN MINER, CHARTERS TOWERS, 1888.

Source: JCU Library.

lication founded by John Macrossan,⁷⁹

John Murtagh Macrossan came into prominence in provincial press circles in the early 1870's. During this time Macrossan was a leading spirit in the Ravenswood mining community. A contemporary of O'Kane, Macrossan was also involved in a horsewhipping incident — he had assaulted Warden T.R. Hackett.⁸⁰ O'Kane conducted a remorseless vendetta against John Macrossan through the editorials of the *Northern Miner*. In 1873 Macrossan had been elected the local member for Charters Towers. He represented everything that O'Kane opposed and, in two particular instances, Macrossan's support of "coolie" labour and government aid for non-vested schools, attracted the particular wrath of O'Kane. The issues ran deeper than this, for Macrossan was a conservative, a member of the McIllwraith government, and thus on the opposite side of the political fence from O'Kane.⁸¹

The year 1876 marked the final breach between Thadeus O'Kane and the Catholic church. In 1875 a new Roman Catholic priest was appointed to Charters Towers.⁸² Denis Fouhy appears to have been a pastor in the authoritative Irish village tradition, and an

79 John Murtagh Macrossan (1833-1891) was born at Creeslough, County Donegal, Ireland. He was MLA for Kennedy 1873-78; MLA for Townsville 1879-91; Secretary for Public Works and Mines 1879-83, 1888-90; Colonial Secretary and Secretary for Mines 1890 (*Charters Towers Times*, 1 April 1891, obit.; *Northern Mining Register*, 4 April 1891, p.121, obit.; C.A. Bernays, *Queensland Politics during Sixty (1859-1919) Years* (Brisbane, 1919), pp.80-81; H. Bryan, 'John Murtagh Macrossan "Jack the Hatter"', in D.J. Murphy & R.B. Joyce (eds.), *Queensland Political Portraits 1859-1952* (St. Lucia, 1978), pp.93-117.

80 Bryan, 'John Murtagh Macrossan', p.95; *Ravenswood Miner*, 13 January 1872.

81 *Northern Advocate*, 11 November 1876; 18 November 1876; *Northern Miner*, 7 February 1877; *Towers Herald*, 16 June 1877.

82 *Northern Mining Register*, Christmas Issue, 1891, p.52.

active propagandist for his faith. He soon collided with O'Kane. In May 1876 Fouhy admonished O'Kane in the sacristy of the church over his opposition to aid non-vested schools. On 17 May O'Kane published an account of the conflict, alleging that the priest's attempt at coercion constituted an attack on the freedom of the press.⁸³ Although the text of O'Kane's article has not survived, it would appear from the *Northern Advocate* leader, that the argument was sparked by press criticism of Fouhy's actions. Throughout 1876, O'Kane had criticised Fouhy for attempting to found a Catholic school. The whole issue of secular versus church education was ventilated in the *Northern Miner*. In the course of a vitriolic attack on the machinations of the Roman Catholic church, O'Kane stated that

...the aim of Bishop O'Quinn is to create a new and holy Ireland, so that it may be in fact and reality Quinnsland....⁸⁴

With his break from the Catholic church, O'Kane regularly denounced sectarian rivalry. Classic embodiments of the Catholic and Protestant points of view came to Charters Towers in the form of two domineering, quick-tempered, Irish clerics. These clerics were Presbyterian Rev James Carson who arrived in Charters Towers in 1875 and Catholic priest Fr Denis Fouhy. Both these men were extreme in their religious convictions.⁸⁵ In 1883 O'Kane advocated a form of non-sectarian political organisation. He wrote

Is it possible to start a Cosmopolitan League excluding all sectarianism, Orange and Green, and confirming its operations to carrying political reforms on their merits? They could be moulded into a political force which would

83 *Northern Advocate*, 20 May 1876.

84 *Northern Miner*, 19 July 1881.

85 Hayston, *Interaction of Religion and Society*, p.108.

be true to the general interests of the colony and of the electorate.⁸⁶

Hayston alleged that O'Kane led a nationalist attack against established religion "heralding the primacy of scientific thought over religious revelations".⁸⁷ The majority of the people of Charters Towers were not prepared to countenance any religious bigotry.

Bolton stated that the population of North Queensland, including all the women and children, by 1876 was 17 042. This figure excluded the Chinese and Pacific Islander populations. On the Palmer River goldfield the number of Chinese had risen to almost 17 000 adult males. These numbers created a disquiet within the European community. Anti-Chinese leagues emerged in Cooktown, Ravenswood, and Charters Towers.⁸⁸ O'Kane's xenophobia was evident in the leaders of the *Northern Miner*:

We have never had any faith in the possibility of improving our blacks into anything above animals....In addition to the native curse another, not less malignant and active, has been introduced under Government sanction in the shape of Polynesians....⁸⁹

O'Kane's campaign against Asian immigration disclosed his attachment to racial purity and a White Australia. He warned that

through Port Darwin, Coolies and Chinamen are entering by thousands....In time they will swarm across the border and form part of our population. The only permanent safety against danger from that direction lay in the federation of the colonies, for then a universal law excluding Chinese and Coolie labour might be passed for the whole of Australia.⁹⁰

86 *Northern Miner*, 5 November 1883.

87 Hayston, *Interaction of Religion and Society*, p.108.

88 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.56-57.

89 *Northern Miner*, 24 January 1877.

90 *Ibid.*, 5 November 1883.

O'Kane believed there was a link between a number of northern sugar planters and the attempt to secure cheap and reliable labour. The northern members of parliament, Macrossan, Cooper and Hamilton, he perceived as "coolie" champions who advocated separation to secure such labour:

It must not be forgotten that many southern members are in favour of 'letting the North go' rather than consent to the introduction of Coolies generally to the colony. The policy of the Liberals of the North is to hold fast to the South, for on the South lies their best support against the Northern sugar planters.⁹¹

Initially O'Kane had been a strong supporter for separation. This modification of his support for separation was partly an attempt to stem the influence of the northern sugar planters.

When the separation dodge made the North drunk he tumbled to the black-labour racket and helped to swing the miners for a white Queensland.⁹²

This change of attitude might have been partly influenced by the enmity O'Kane held towards Macrossan.

Early in 1876 O'Kane fired a broadside at the "grand panjandrum" himself, William Skelton Ewbank Melbourne Charters. He published an editorial on 5 February 1876, that alleged Charters had acted with administrative favouritism in the granting of a number of homestead leases. This editorial landed O'Kane in the Supreme Court in Townsville on a charge of malicious and defamatory libel. O'Kane was released on his own recognizance and was required to appear for trial if called upon during the next twelve months. By being placed in a legal limbo O'Kane's outspoken editorials were in effect censored.⁹³

91 *Ibid.*

92 *The Boomerang*, 5 January 1888.

93 *Northern Advocate*, 3 June 1876; 21 October 1876. This case brought O'Kane a measure of fame that distinguished him from the myriad country editors throughout the colony.

O'Kane continued to draw a fire with his criticism of irregularities.⁹⁴ During 1878 O'Kane sued the *Towers Herald* for libel over allusions to his long buried action for divorce and collision with Lord Palmerston.⁹⁵

O'Kane was already known to a public far beyond the confines of the tropics. From its inception in 1880, the *Sydney Bulletin* detailed the activities of O'Kane.⁹⁶ It had reflected the popular view that O'Kane was a firebrand, writing of Charters Towers that "while Thadeus O'Kane is there it will be the hottest place in creation".⁹⁷ It quoted with relish O'Kane's attack on the hospital committee, and detailed his libel cases with the *Towers Herald*.⁹⁸

On 11 May 1882, O'Kane was charged with criminal libel. The Bench found him guilty, and placed him on a good behaviour bond for the next twelve months.⁹⁹ The view from the public was that this case was an attempt by the Charters Towers mining magnates to gag a radical critic.¹⁰⁰ Letters to the *Northern Miner* supported

94 On 14 February 1874 O'Kane suffered his first libel action as owner of the *Northern Miner*. John E. Rutherford, a chemist and mining investor, claimed £200 damages. Rutherford was awarded £1, a not uncommon verdict in O'Kane's myriad libel cases (Judgement Book, DCT 11A/6, DCT 11C/2, 14 February 1874, QSA). Many of O'Kane's libel actions never came to action, but he did pay at least £800 out in various judgements to Thomas Buckland, John Deane, William Morgan, and John Cooper (Judgement Book, DCT 11C/1, DCT 11A/4, 14 October 1885; 25 November 1881; 11 November 1882; 19 January 1882, QSA, respectively).

95 Judgement Book, DCT 11C/1 bound with DCT 11A/4, 6 July 1878, QSA; *Towers Herald*, 10 July 1878; 20 July 1878; 24 July 1878.

96 *Sydney Bulletin*, 28 April 1883, p.7.

97 *Ibid.*, 27 November 1880.

98 *Ibid.*, 11 September 1882; 18 December 1882.

99 *Northern Miner*, 11 May 1882.

100 *Ibid.*, 23 May 1882.



THADEUS O'KANE, OF THE "NORTHERN MINER."—(See page 7.)

"The darling of the *Sydney Bulletin*."

Source: *Sydney Bulletin*, 28 April 1883, p.1.

O'Kane's editorial style.¹⁰¹ The radical *Sydney Bulletin* leapt to his defence.¹⁰² On 7 September 1882, O'Kane's radical editorial style was vindicated when the Supreme Court overturned the decision.¹⁰³ Through this triumph O'Kane had become a national figure. Henceforth, the name of O'Kane was a touchstone for journalistic independence.

The creation of the municipality of Charters Towers in 1877 saw O'Kane's first attempt at political office. He came thirteenth in a field of eighteen — nine were required.¹⁰⁴ He was soon in dispute with the new council.¹⁰⁵ O'Kane was again defeated for a vacancy on the municipal council on 4 December 1880.¹⁰⁶ According to Stoodley and Gibbney he served as an alderman in 1880-1883 and 1884-1887.¹⁰⁷ Although O'Kane campaigned for a parliamentary office thrice on his own behalf, he was never elected. The first attempt was against Henry Rogers Beor, the attorney-general from Bowen.¹⁰⁸ As a "stranger in a strange place" O'Kane was defeated 141 to 91, leaving a majority of 55 for Beor.¹⁰⁹ The second attempt was a five-cornered race for the two-member electorate of Kennedy — candidates were F.H. Stubbley, Isidor Lissner, Arthur Rutledge, Thomas Buckland, and Thadeus O'Kane.¹¹⁰ O'Kane advocated

101 *Ibid.*, 16 May 1882; 20 May 1882; 1 June 1882; 2 June 1882.

102 *Ibid.*, 4 July

103 *Ibid.*, 14 September 1882.

104 *Ibid.*, 25 August 1877.

105 *Northern Miner*, 13 October 1877.

106 *Ibid.*, 7 December 1880.

107 Stoodley & Gibbney, 'Thadeus O'Kane', p.362.

108 *Northern Miner*, 29 June 1880.

109 *Port Denison Times*, 3 July 1880; *Northern Miner*, 1 July 1880.

110 *Northern Miner*, 2 October 1883. The poll was declared on 8 October 1883. The senior and junior members for Kennedy were respectively: Arthur Rutledge and Isidor Lissner (Menghetti, *Charters Towers*, p.145).

triennial parliaments; payment of Members; the exclusion of Coolies from the colony; the carrying out of public works by the colony and for the colony without recourse to the land grant system; the revision of the land laws and the encouraging of European immigration.¹¹¹

The support for payment of members of parliament, land reform and the maintaining of a White Australia were policies advocated by the *Sydney Bulletin*.¹¹² O'Kane's third, and last attempt, was for the two-member electorate of Charters Towers. This was again a five-cornered race — the candidates were R.J. Sayers, Arthur Rutledge, William Davies, John McDonald and O'Kane.¹¹³ Although never attaining political office above the municipal level, O'Kane's political influence was nearly as great through the use of the pen.

The subjects discussed in the *Northern Miner* included Alfred Russell Wallace,¹¹⁴ John Milton,¹¹⁵ and Henry George.¹¹⁶ Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* was discussed frequently in the *Northern Miner*.¹¹⁷ This emphasis upon land taxation reflected his experiences in Ireland. In the eighties, he ran columns entitled 'Aesthetics', which dealt with such esoteric topics as the defence of Latin,¹¹⁸ and 'Independent Column', which brought to the miners' notice such diverse characters as John Stuart Mill, Henry Kendall, Joseph Cook, and Florence Nightingale.¹¹⁹ O'Kane prided himself on

111 *Northern Miner*, 1 March 1883.

112 See page no. 17, footnote 29.

113 *Northern Miner*, 15 May 1888.

114 *Ibid.*, 20 November 1883; 29 November 1883.

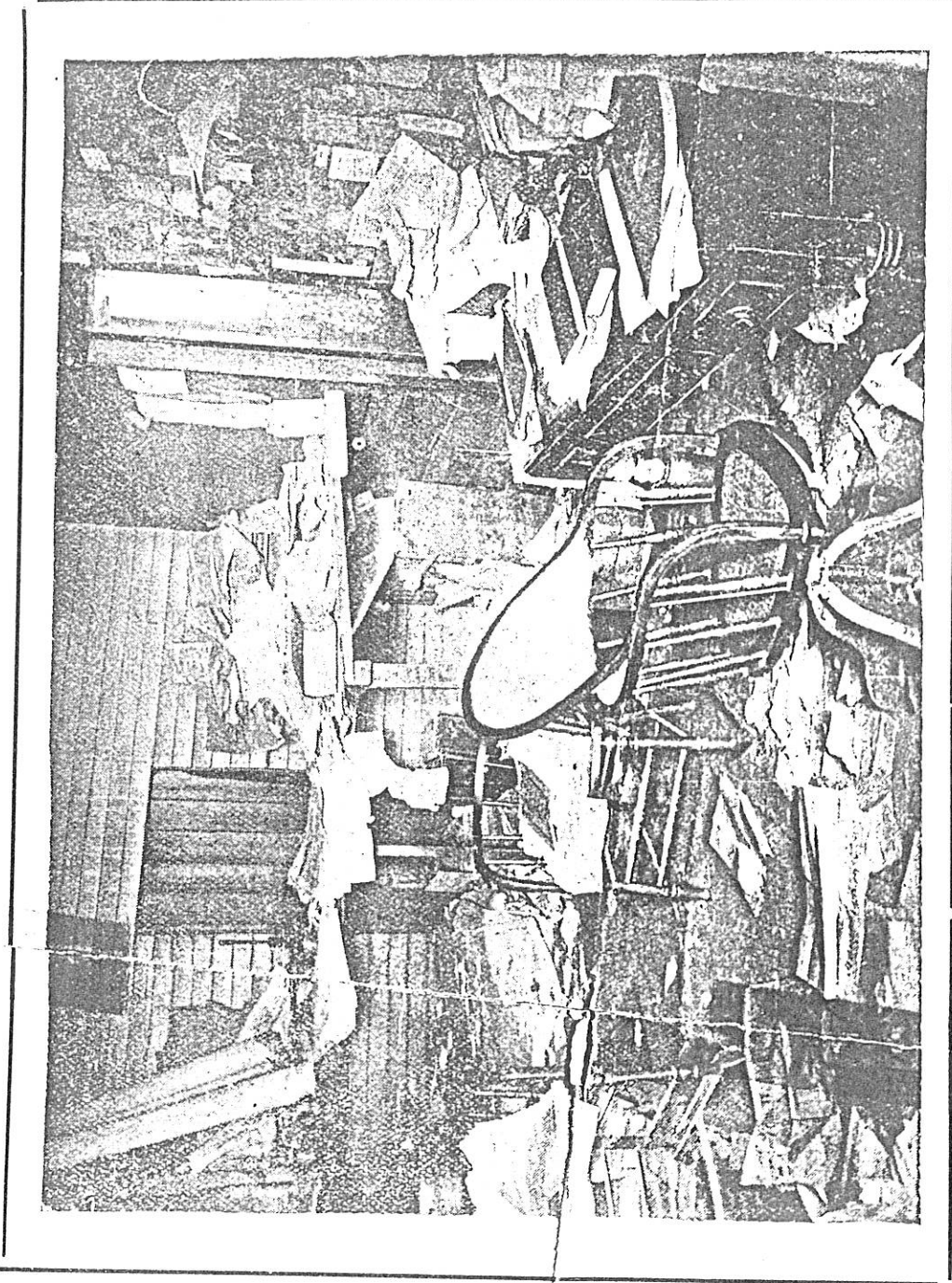
115 *Ibid.*, 14 March 1882.

116 *Ibid.*, 19 June 1884.

117 *Ibid.*, 2 July 1881; 23 June 1882; 22 July 1882; 11 January 1883; 30 November 1883; 13 December 1883; 8 September 1885.

118 *Ibid.*, 4 March 1880.

119 *Ibid.*, 1 August 1822; 12 August 1882; 18 September 1882; 21 September 1882; 16 December 1882 respectively.



THE EDITORIAL ROOM IN THE OLD OFFICE.
(Photo by "Register" photographer).
HARRY WELCH.

Editorial Room of the Northern Miner.

Source: JCU Library.

his literary tastes. He claimed to have always on his desk, Homer, Tacitus and Horace,¹²⁰ took considerable pride in the fact that he was "a first-class prizeman at Maynooth",¹²¹ and claimed that he was responsible for the introduction to the School of Arts library of Tyndall, Darwin, Huxley, Colenso and others of that genre.¹²²

Politically, O'Kane was in the British liberal tradition. He supported the liberal faction in Queensland politics, was vociferously xenophobic, and, as early as 1885, favoured female emancipation.¹²³ The excesses of the latter day fenians disgusted him, for violence, outside the spoken or written word, was never his metier.¹²⁴ In October 1887, O'Kane called for the establishment of a branch of the Australian Republican Union in Charters Towers.¹²⁵ O'Kane attracted considerable criticism for his refusal to endorse the strike action of the unions in the Newcastle strikes in 1889. In a *Northern Miner* leader in 1889, he advocated education rather than strike action as the means of reconciling capital and labour.¹²⁶

Thadeus O'Kane was an influential North Queensland radical during the eighteen seventies and eighties. He was highly influential in setting the stage for the emergence of the ARA in Charters Towers in 1890. However, for all its radical ferment, Charters Towers largely reflected the attitudes of an English city transplanted to the

120 *Ibid.*, 4 March 1880.

121 *Ibid.*, 24 February 1880.

122 *Ibid.*, 26 February 1880.

123 *Ibid.*, 25 July 1885.

124 *Ibid.*, 14 May 1883; 28 July 1883.

125 *Ibid.*, 17 October 1887.

126 *Ibid.*, 22 February 1889.



THE LATE MR. THADEUS JOHN O'KANE.

Source: *Northern Mining Register*, Christmas Issue, 1891, p.51.



The tombstone of O'Kane's granddaughter, Sister Rosa O'Kane AAN, who died of Spanish influenza in 1919.

Source: Charters Towers Album, Vol.1, No.37, North Queensland Collection, JCU Library.

antipodes.¹²⁷ Along with Johannesburg and London, Charters Towers was considered one of the jewels in the crown of the British Empire.

After his death on 17 May 1890,¹²⁸ O'Kane received tributes in many leading newspapers praising his contribution to Australian journalism.¹²⁹ It was left to a firebrand successor, perhaps the real inheritor of O'Kane's mantle on Charters Towers, to face the authorities in the O'Kane manner. F.C.B. Vosper was to be prosecuted by the government in 1891, during the inflamed atmosphere of the shearers' strike. There was a sense of *deja vu* in this prosecution, for Thadeus O'Kane had trodden the same ground before him. However, he was not to be equally victorious, proving perhaps, Paine's maxim that "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered".

Thady dead?
Blame my old eyes!
I feel no—wise—
Game, gruff old Ted!

Old Teddy Kane!
He was a plum,
Cantankerous, rum,
Old thingeyum!
He's past all pain,
To think he's now
For ever bunked!
Made his last bow—
Exit—defunct!
A knotty plank;
A cross-grained crank.
He'd say his say

127 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.186.

128 Death Certificate, District of Ipswich, 17 May 1890.

129 *Charters Towers Times*, 17 May 1890; *The Boomerang*, 24 May 1890, p.7; *Sydney Bulletin*, 24 May 1890, p.9; *The Queensland Punch*, 1 June 1890, p.59; *Northern Miner*, 19 May 1890; *Gympie Miner*, 21 May 1890; *Northern Mining Register*, Christmas Issue, December 1891, p.51; *Courier Mail*, 19 May 1890; *Cooktown Independent*, 21 May 1890; *Northern Age & North Queensland Telegraph*, 19 May 1890; *Townsville Herald*, 24 May 1890; *Brisbane Courier*, 19 May 1890.

Or bust!
And now he's clay
Or dust!

Of late he took
To overlook
And quite forsook
The glass!

His frightened soul
Eschewed the bowl—
The generous bowl—
He swore
It bore
A Fury's daughter!
So—took to water,
And then to bed
And now—he's dead!
'So mote it be!'

Decried
As shady
He turned T.T.
And died

Poor Thady! 130