

## Letters to the Editor

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MARTIN GARDINER  
From Graeme Cohen

Dear Professor O'Farrell,

In Issue Number 85 (Summer 2020, 3–15), you published an article of mine, *Martin Gardiner: the first Irish–Australian mathematician*, in which I recounted much of what I knew then regarding Gardiner's life and work in Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century. He was a surveyor by trade, but, though he had only two years' formal training in surveying, civil engineering and other studies (in Queen's College, Galway), he proved to be a perceptive and acknowledged geometer, exceeding the output of Australia's other mathematicians of the time.

I was aware, when I wrote the article, of a number of descendants that Gardiner had in Australia, and, as I had done before, I continued afterwards to seek out information on his life. Numerous sources were available: his publications in local Royal Society Journals and Proceedings; his letters to newspapers as a constant commentator on the actions of government; and birth, death and marriage certificates. Important aspects of his life however remained opaque to me, so I ignored those (or, rather, invented alternative situations) and went ahead to write my first novel, *The Possibly True Story of Martin Gardiner*.

Within a few weeks of the article in your Bulletin appearing online, I was contacted by John Gardiner, a great grandson of Martin, living in Sydney, with further news of Martin's life. Although I had written of Martin spending time in Queensland, quoting newspaper references concerning his surveying work there in the 1870s and 1880s, for example, John's news floored me. I knew of Martin's wife Bridget whom he brought from Ireland to Melbourne in 1856, and his three children with her; and I knew of his wife Emma whom he married in Sydney after Bridget's death, and his three children with her; but I knew nothing of his subsequent liaison with Caroline in Brisbane, and his three children with her. That is the news John gave me. To John Gardiner, his great grandfather was known as George. That is the name that Caroline knew him by. Yet there was enough family history to convince me that Martin and George were the same person. So, if nothing else, my novel needed more work. What I had previously written became Part I, necessarily modified. Martin Gardiner's life with Caroline became Part II.

May I recommend that your readers obtain a copy of *The Possibly True Story of Martin Gardiner*? The work is so much the better because of the publication of his really true story a few years before, what I knew of it at the time, in your Bulletin.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Cohen

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g.cohen@bigpond.net.au

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