

The Life and Art of
Edgar Turner Sheppard





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opposite
Self portrait, c.1950

below
*George Sheppard as
a boy, c.1935*

Introduction

This book is the story of the life and art of Edgar Turner Sheppard (1879–1956). Edgar was born in Australia, studied art in France, lived for a time in New Zealand, joined the army in his late 30s and served in France during World War 1. He then lived the rest of his life in Willoughby in Sydney, New South Wales. It was in Sydney that he painted the paintings and drew the sketches that are reproduced in this book, paintings and drawings which were for the most part unsigned and undated, in many cases completed on scrap paper or old wood and canvas, and which were stored in boxes or displayed in the houses of his children and grandchildren for decades after his death in 1956.

Edgar Sheppard was my grandfather. George Sheppard, my father, was his fourth child. Our lives overlapped by seven years, from the date of my birth in 1949 to his death in 1956. I still have recollections,



top

Photograph of Edgar Turner Sheppard at his easel, c.1940

below

Edgar Turner Sheppard's chest where over 100 paintings had been discovered after many years



as a young child, of sitting with him at his home in Willoughby while he made drawings of trees, ships, trains, and of people in notebooks. 20 years ago my mother told me there was an old chest sitting in storage in our family home in Sydney which contained a collection of his paintings. At that time I had seen some of his paintings framed and displayed on the walls of my home, and I was aware that my relatives also had numerous paintings, but I had thought these were all that had survived.

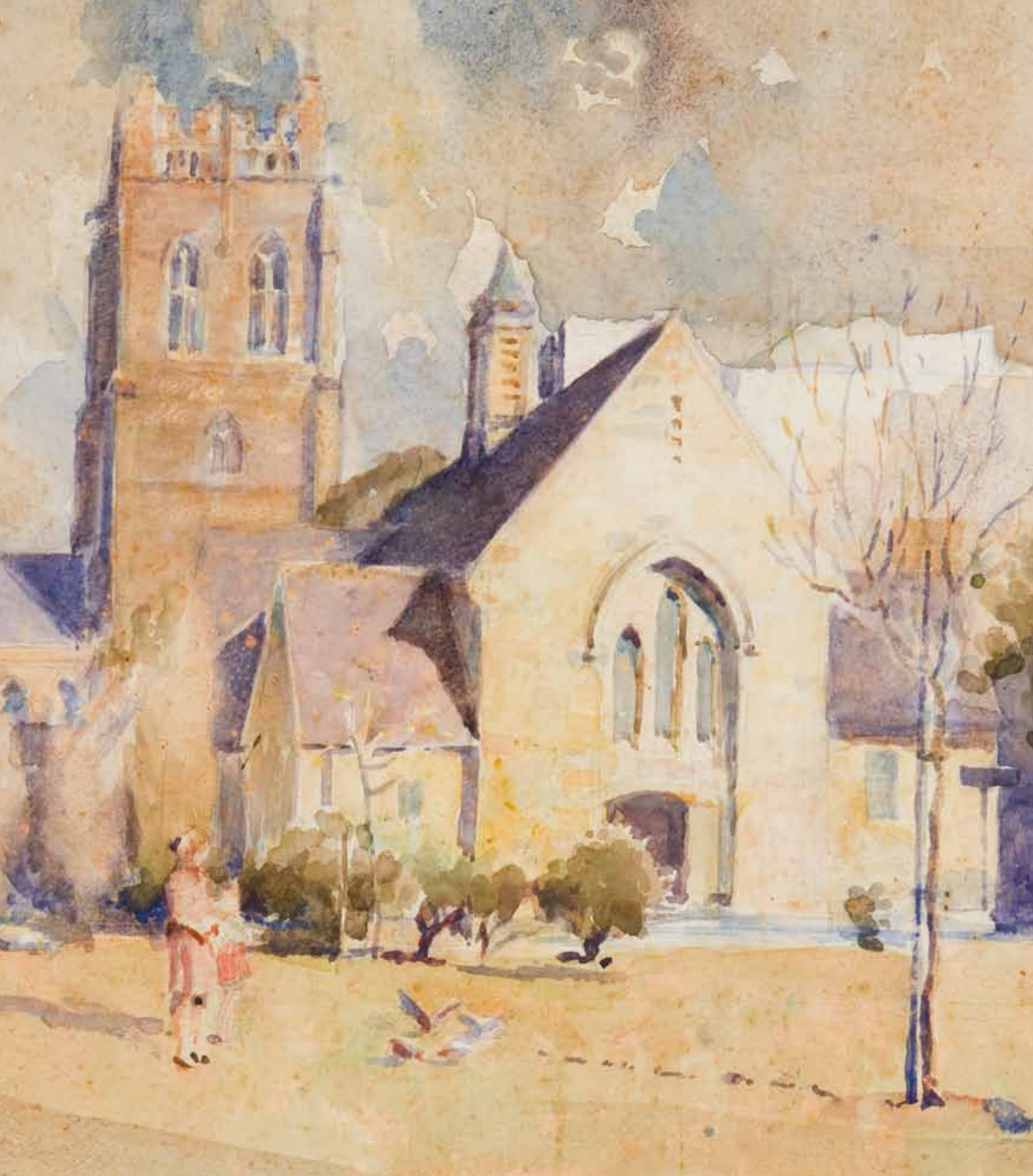
I found the chest, with the name 'E. T. Sheppard' imprinted on the top. Inside were over 100 paintings – watercolours, oils, some drawings – on surfaces ranging from old paper, pieces of wood and canvas.

Edgar Sheppard's story is one which begins with families migrating from Ireland to Australia in the mid nineteenth century, of early settlement in the Maitland region of New South Wales, of study in France, of marriage and establishing a family in New Zealand, of the premature death of his first wife, of service on the Western Front in World War I, of a new family after the war, and of further tragedy in World War II. But most of all it is the story of an artist.

*The Life and Art of
Edgar Turner Sheppard*

Berry's Bay looking towards
Pymont, c. unknown





opposite
St Phillip's Church, Church Hill, York
St, Sydney where George and Nancy
were married. My mother Nancy is
pictured in the foreground, c.1947

below
John Sheppard, c.1860

John Sheppard (1815-1889) & *Arabella Leader* (1817-1882)

On 12 May 1839 the barque *Navarino*, 463 tonnes, departed Cork, Ireland bound for Sydney with 218 passengers, mostly assisted migrants en route to Australia. On board was John Sheppard, aged 24. John Sheppard had been born at Youghal, near Cork in 1815. He would eventually become Edgar's grandfather.

The *Navarino* sailed into Sydney on 19 August 1839. John's first job in Australia was with the Sydney Herald Office where he earned a wage of £2/5/- a week. He then worked as an overseer in the Government Printing Office from December 1840 until July 1841. By this time he had married Arabella Leader at St Mary's Catholic Church in Sydney on 7 April 1840.



St John's Catholic Church, Maitland, NSW, 2010
where John Sheppard was reported to have
painted the alter paintings



Arabella Leader had come to Australia, aged 21, with her father, four sisters and one brother, aboard the *Calcutta*, which left Cork on 29 June 1838 and arrived in Sydney on 16 October 1838. Arabella was a devout Catholic all of her life and John is reported to have changed his religion for her, but reverted to the Church of England after her death in 1882.

John Sheppard is reported to have been a painter, and to have executed the altar paintings for the St John's Catholic Church in Maitland. The altar was removed in 1930 and no trace of the paintings has been found since.

An advertisement in the *Maitland Mercury* on 11 March 1848 stated that John Sheppard had opened a business in High Street, Maitland “offering ornamental paintings, transparencies, painting and gilding on glass, engraving on wood and all metals, brass seals and picture frames, plus cleaning of paintings and framing services”. He was also the machinist and scenery painter for the Maitland Theatre Company and a regular donor to the Irish Famine Relief Fund during this period.

The Sheppard family lived in Government Road, Horseshoe Bend, West Maitland, which is today called Carrington Street. John and Arabella had seven children between 1841 and 1855. The sixth was Edward William Sheppard, born in 1853 and later to become the father of Edgar Turner Sheppard.

*The Life and Art of
Edgar Turner Sheppard*

Maitland Mercury Newspaper and Printing Office,
2010, where John Sheppard was employed

The seven children, and the dates of their birth and death as follows:

<i>Eliza Maria Sheppard</i>	<i>1841–unknown</i>
<i>John Joseph Sheppard</i>	<i>1846–1893</i>
<i>Arabella Theresa Sheppard</i>	<i>1845–1930</i>
<i>Clara Mary Ann Sheppard</i>	<i>1848–1937</i>
<i>Stephen A. Sheppard</i>	<i>1850–1851</i>
<i>Edward William Sheppard</i>	<i>1853–1897</i>
<i>Mary Anne Sheppard</i>	<i>1855–1855</i>



John's artistic skills were recognised at the 1861 Maitland Show. According to reports in the *Maitland Mercury*, for which he worked for a time, and the *Maitland Ensign*, he won certificates for a number of categories including veneered picture frames, colonial fancy woods and landscape and figure painting.

John Sheppard died at home on 17 August 1889. Arabella had died in April 1882, and both were buried at Campbells Hill Cemetery at West Maitland. John willed all of his real estate and furniture to his two daughters, Arabella and Clara, and all his books, tools and machinery to his son John Joseph. His other two surviving children, Eliza and Edward, appear to have received no inheritance. It is not clear whether this was an oversight or deliberate, but the outcome was that Edward, who was to become Edgar's father, was left without an inheritance.

Maitland is situated on the Hunter River, which flows from the mountains to the north of the Hunter Valley and joins the coast at the port city of Newcastle. Horseshoe Bend is named because the river flows around the area in the shape of a horseshoe, and it is an area which is highly prone to flooding. Maitland's history includes regular serious floods, including the years of 1857, 1867, 1870, 1874 and 1875. The next major flood came in May 1889, and would have seriously damaged many of the houses in Horseshoe Bend. When John Sheppard died later that year, the Maitland Mercury reported that he had been badly affected by the loss of many of his possessions. An even more massive flood was to come four years later in 1893, when the Mercury reported that all of the 265 houses in Horseshoe Bend were flooded.

Death of an Old Resident

The news that old John Sheppard is dead will cause a pang in many breasts, for our friend was one of the best known and respected men in the community, notwithstanding that the afternoon of his long and useful life passed away quietly and unostentatiously, although the morning of his days had its full complement of stir and vicissitude. The late Mr Sheppard was born in the city of Cork about seventy-four years ago, where in his boyhood he was acquainted with the great painter Barry, and their intimacy had some bearing on the future career of the subject of these lines, who received many lessons in sketching from the great master. More than half a century ago Mr Sheppard arrived in Sydney, where he obtained a very responsible position in the management of the first Government printing office in the colony, and there he remained for some time. In the height of the great gold fever Mr Sheppard wandered to the Turon, and many notable spots on that once famous diggings have been handed down to posterity by his brush, which he wielded with real artistic taste and extraordinary facility. Many of Mr Sheppard's earlier efforts in the art have been sold for high prices, and one of his pictures may now be found as an altar piece in St. John's Cathedral. Unlike the majority of men, Mr Sheppard was "Jack of all trades and master of many". In addition to being a landscape painter, he was a practical jeweller, a first-class wood carver, a carpenter, machinist, gun-smith, had an inkling into engineering, and built some of the best boats that ever floated on the Hunter. He was also for a period, many years ago, employed in this office as "jobbing" hand, and several fonts of wooden type which he cut yet remain to remind us of him. He had read widely and well, was a great book collector, and was an excellent conversationalist and entertaining companion. In short, he was a genius of no mean order, and nothing that he ever turned his hand or mind to mastered him. His spare, gaunt form and rough-hewn features, with their twinkling eyes, beetling brows, and his wealth of time-touched hair, made his presence a remarkable one, and he was altogether a loveable and notable old man. During the late flood the water entered his residence in the Horseshoe Bend, destroying a lifelong collection of books and curios, and this severance from his ancient companions seems to have affected Mr Sheppard greatly, for he was never the same since, and his life slowly ebbed away until he passed to the great hereafter on Sunday last painlessly and calmly, surrounded by several grown-up family of sons and daughters. His funeral will take place this afternoon, and it is only natural to expect a very large attendance at the last resting-place of such a well-known and respected resident.

Extract from Maitland Mercury 20th August 1889

*The Life and Art of
Edgar Turner Sheppard*

sketch, c.unknown





opposite
Sailing Ship moored at
Berry's Bay, c.unknown

below
Edward (Ned) Sheppard, c.1885

Ned Sheppard (1853-1897) & *Caroline Helen Turner* (1856-1942)

Edward William Sheppard, the sixth child of John and Arabella Sheppard, was born at West Maitland on 2 January 1853. Known as Ned, he was to become the father of Edgar Turner Sheppard in 1879.

Ned was a well-known boat builder in Maitland and Stockton, near the port of Newcastle north of Sydney, working with his brother John until John's death in 1893. He built "butcher boats" and rowing skiffs at Stockton. Butcher boats were used by providers to row out to the sailing ships before they arrived in Newcastle Harbour to get the orders for stocking ships. Edgar was later to demonstrate a strong interest in boats, both through his paintings and through the building of model boats.



Edgar Turner Sheppard,
aged 3, c.1881



Ned developed his boating skills living near the Hunter River in Maitland. Boats were essential during times of floods and rowing had become a leading sport for those living by the river.

A series of articles ‘Reminiscences of Maitland Diocese’ was published in the *Newcastle and Maitland Catholic Sentinel* between 1973 and 1940 by P A Punch. One of these articles (see opposite page), published on 1 April 1939, reflected on the activities of Ned and the Sheppard family.

Ned was also an amateur rower and boxer. He was reported to have been a big man with a fighting weight of 17 stone (108 kg). Charlie Davis, an old Stockton man who was a contemporary of Edgar Sheppard and used to play with Edgar when they were children, apparently told stories of Ned’s huge physique and hands, and of his having inflicted harsh punishment on the two boys when they aroused his anger.

Ned married Caroline Helen Turner on 18 June 1877 at Congregational Church, St Leonards in Sydney. He was 24 and she 20 years old at the time. They had six children:

<i>Edward Beadon Sheppard</i>	1878–1879
<i>Edgar Turner Sheppard</i>	1879–1956
<i>Herbert John Sheppard</i>	1882–1953
<i>Albert Roydon Sheppard</i>	1884–1952
<i>Wallace Turner Sheppard</i>	1886–1955
<i>Lillian Campbell Sheppard</i>	1892–1900

Edgar Turner Sheppard,
aged 7, c.1885

The Sheppard Family

P A Punch, writing in 1939, said this of the Sheppard family:

Throughout the 1860's and 70's, boat building was a flourishing trade in the Horseshoe Bend. The town being so subject to floods, the possession of a boat was almost necessary to the enjoyment of a sense of security. The late Sheppard Family – father and sons – of Horseshoe Bend constructed boats of all kinds from the giant flood boat to the tiniest dinghy, and their workmanship was so excellent as to be the envy of Sydney builders. Their workshop was in High Street at the eastern end of the embankment. It was washed away in the great flood of 1867. Others competed with them but none could approach the high standard, which their work exhibited. Two of their sons, John and Neddy, were scullers of some note and pulled off several contests at regattas here and at Newcastle. They were prominent members of the Flood Boat Crew and did yeoman service when the Hunter would kick over the traces and give the town its periodical ducking.



Four generations, (left to right) Edna as a young girl, Edgar's grandmother Helen Barnes, Edgar's mother Caroline Turner and Edgar aged about 30, c. 1915



Caroline was the daughter of Richard Beadon Turner (1819–1864) and Helen French (1838–1926). Richard Beadon Turner was the second son of Rev. John Turner from Somerset in England and had come to Australia around 1838, later settling in West Maitland where several Turner relations were already established.

Helen French, born in England, was the illegitimate daughter of William Trent and Elizabeth Grant, but had changed her name from Ellen Trent to Helen French, possibly to hide her illegitimate origins. She had arrived in Australia at the age of 10 on 9 June 1849 aboard the *Emma Eugenia* with her mother, stepfather and three-year-old sister Ann. She married Richard Beadon Turner in 1855 at the age of 16, and they lived at Devonshire Street, West Maitland. Richard Turner died some 10 years later. In 1866, she married William Barnes, a farmer from Swan Reach, Hinton in the Hunter Valley region on New South Wales, near Maitland. Edgar Turner Sheppard was later to be born in Hinton.

Ned and Caroline's marriage broke up in early 1892. Caroline was at that time pregnant with their sixth child, Lillian, who was born after the separation. Edgar and his brothers saw little of their sister. The boys stayed with their father until his death in 1897 when the family split up. Edgar apparently blamed his mother for the break up, and while he continued to see her occasionally it was a strained and distant relationship.

Sudden Death at Stockton

The well-known boatbuilder, Mr. Edward Sheppard, who has been a resident of Stockton for 11 or 12 years, before which time he followed the same calling at Maitland, died very suddenly at about 3pm yesterday.

The deceased has, it appears, complained for a few days past of occasional very severe pains in the region of the chest, but upon being pressed by his sons to do so, he always declined to see a medical man. Yesterday, at about the hour stated, he was seized with one of these attacks, and before Dr Dunlop, who is acting as locum tenens for Dr Hester, could arrive, he expired.

The deceased was a man of very large proportions, and was possessed of unusual physical strength. Besides his reputation as a very skilful boatbuilder, he at one time acquired some distinction as a rowing man, particularly over short distances. His age at the time of his death is not clearly known, but he was between 40 and 50. The death was at once reported to Constable Knight, in charge of the Stockton police depot, who proceeded to the deceased's residence and took charge of the body until the arrival of the doctor. An inquiry will probably be held this morning.



Newcastle Herald 28th August 1897