

Keys to the collection— Faces

Robert Dowling

“... he took cheerful views of life, looked on the bright side of human nature, and was somewhat of a laughing philosopher.”

—*The Argus*, Wednesday 14 July 1886.

1827 Robert Hawker Dowling born in Britain.

1834 Robert with his family, migrated to Australia, arriving in Hobart, Tasmania.

1850 Completed an apprenticeship in saddlery. In the same year Robert advertised himself as a professional portrait painter.

1854 He married, and moved his family to Victoria where he set up an art gallery in Geelong specialising in photography. He painted portraits for many Western District pastoralists and their families as well as of Aborigines living in the area.

1857 Robert and his family returned to England to live where he enrolled at Leigh's Academy, to enhance his skills as a painter.

1872–73 He visited Cairo, Egypt and found inspiration there for his painting.

1884 Returned to live in Australia, settling in Melbourne where he opened a studio.

1886 He returned again to London where he died.



Mrs Margaret McArthur of Meningoort—

Margaret McArthur was the wife of the Victorian pioneer and pastoralist Peter McArthur of 'Meningoort' station near Camperdown.

Margaret may have sat for the portrait in Dowling's Geelong studio or it could have been painted from sketches made at 'Meningoort'. He visited the McArthur estate in 1856 and painted a small group portrait of the Aborigine 'King Tom' and his family of the local Mount Elephant clan.

Robert Dowling's painting of Margaret McArthur is one of the finest Victorian portraits from the colonial period. The portrait suggests Margaret's strong character and the quick humour of a Lanarkshire-born Scot.

**Geelong
Gallery**

Victorian Curriculum level 2 to 6
geelonggallery.org.au/learn

Robert Dowling
*Mrs Margaret McArthur
of Meningoort (detail) 1856–57*
oil on canvas
Collection: Geelong Gallery

G E E L O N G
E E L O N G
E E L O N G
L O N G
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N G A L L E R Y
G A L L E R Y



Robert Dowling

born United Kingdom 1827;
worked in Australia 1834-57;
died United Kingdom 1886

*Mrs Margaret McArthur
of Meningoort* 1856-57

oil on canvas
98.5 x 74.0 cm

Collection: Geelong Gallery
Purchased with the generous
assistance of the Trustees
of the Howard Hitchcock
Bequest and with additional
support from the friends of
the Geelong Gallery, 2001

Questions

Why do artists paint portraits?

How does the portrait make you feel and why?

Research

Explore other portraits from the colonial period in Australia. Explain what you think someone your age would look like and would be doing in this era.

Activity

Can you take yourself back to 1850's colonial period in Australia?

Draw or paint yourself back in this time. You will need to consider what you want to communicate about yourself and what you could add to the background to tell your story.