

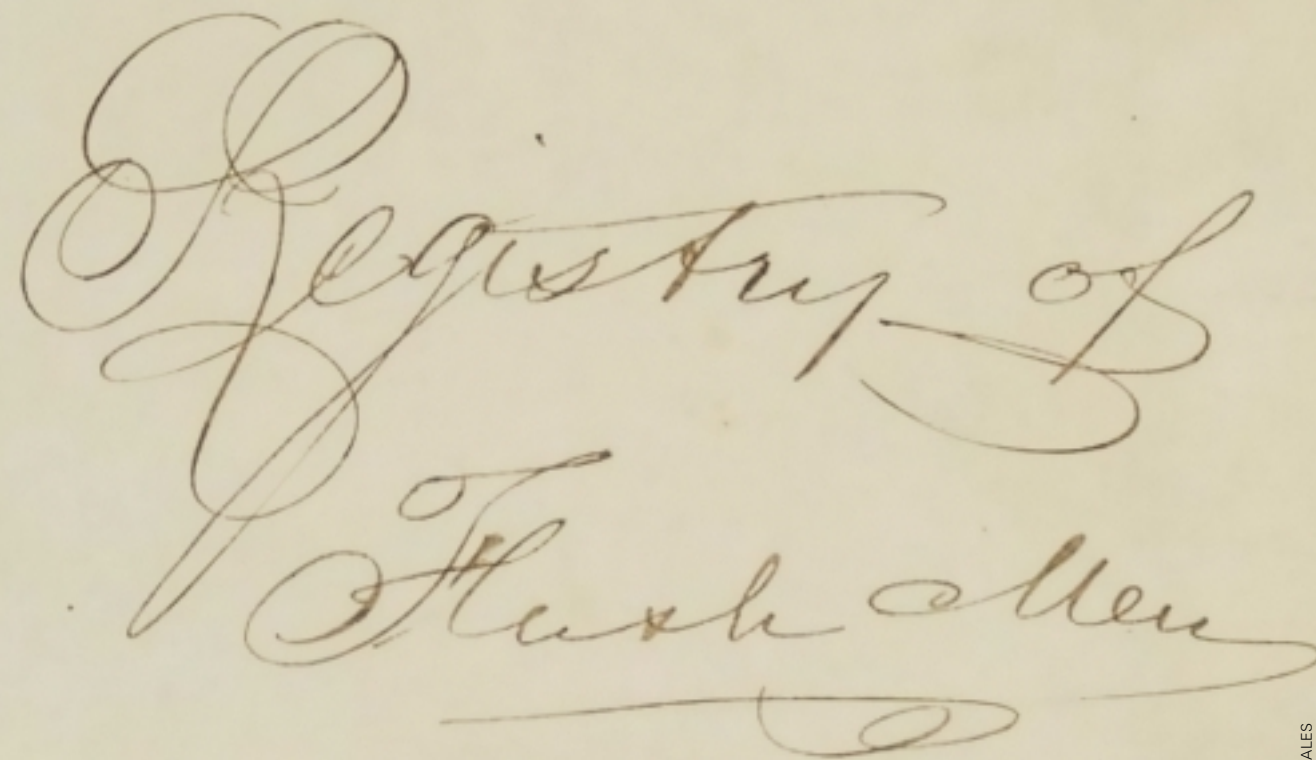
'A disorderly nest of low strumpets'



State Records is preparing to launch a digital facsimile of the 'Registry of Flash Men', a fascinating account of underworld life in 1840s Sydney. The registry is the first in a series of manuscripts, maps and photographs from the collection which will be digitally reproduced and made available via State Records' website.

The 'Registry of Flash Men' is a remarkable volume, which records meticulous observations of inner-city criminal life by William Augustus Miles (*left*), while he was Superintendent (later Commissioner) of Police in New South Wales.

DRAWING OF WILLIAM AUGUSTUS MILES. REPRODUCED COURTESY OF DIXSON LIBRARY. STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES



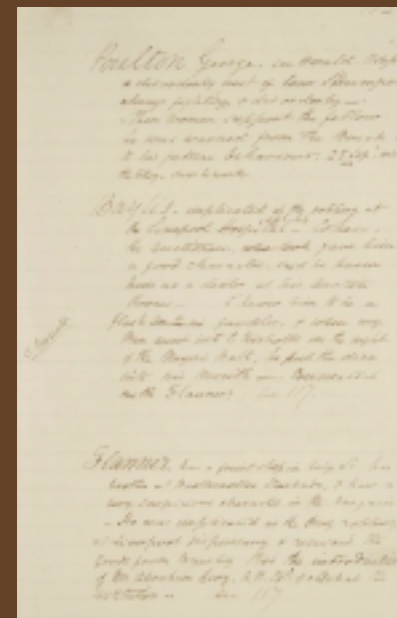
Miles documented the comings and goings of suspicious characters and known criminals, mostly in The Rocks area, including the 'Flash Mob' (a gang of eight who committed robberies and assaults); the Norfolk Islanders (who had previously been imprisoned at the Norfolk Island Penal Establishment) and 'Sydney Bullies, Brothel Keepers and Thieves'.

The result is an extraordinary tableau of life played out in the city's streets, pubs, shops and houses, from 1841–45. Miles took great delight in detail and commented upon aliases, appearance, modus operandi, known associates, places of residence, occupation, character and temperament, sightings, details of previous convictions and incidents in which suspects were known or suspected of being involved. He often included newspaper clippings with reports of suspects' brushes with the law and the court system.

Augustus Miles had his own ambiguous relationship to the law. Appointed Superintendent in 1840, he had intended to make the New South Wales police force resemble its London counterpart, but was hampered by insufficient funds and the lack of suitable policemen. When he testified to the Select Committee on Police in 1847, he generally defended his men against charges of neglect of duty and corruption, although he admitted that there was difficulty in hiring and retaining appropriate personnel because of uncompetitive salaries and better opportunities in other lines of work. In 1847 several complaints against him were investigated, including carelessness in his account keeping, the wrongful dismissal of an officer and insobriety (a charge which was unsubstantiated).

The online version of the 'Registry of Flash Men' will include a typed transcript alongside the digital copy of each hand-written page of Miles' original manuscript, to assist with speed and ease of reading. The transcriptions (*see samples*) retain all Miles' cross-references and crossings out. The online register will also include a glossary of terms, an index to names appearing in the text and descriptions of significant Sydney landmarks, hotels and lesser known streets, no longer in existence.

← Digital facsimile of William Augustus Miles' handwritten title page to his 'Registry of Flash Men'



Transcribed excerpts from the 'Registry of Flash Men'

page 8

Hart T. W of Hart's buildings in Pitt St caught D^r B — n. with his wife got damages & set up in business — . — Some time ago a man was found in Hart's house, a lodger with his throat cut — The affair was then considered very mysterious — Some time afterwards a Watch which was recognized as having belonged to this man was traced to have been in Hart's possession — but there was no proof & there the matter ended — — Hart moreover attempted to ravish his own daughter on her bed —

page 10

Needham, Mary, a notorious prostitute seldom out of gaol — On being missed about 6 weeks Mr.K. met her asked her what had become of her "Oh, Sir, I am as happy as the day is" "long", said she "I've got a couple of girls" "at last" and a small house for them to work in!"

page 102

Poulton George — see Herald. 11 Sep [18]44 A disorderly nest of low strumpets Always fighting & disorderly — . — These women support the fellow he was warned from the Bench as to his future behaviour. 25 Sep [18]44 visited The Alley - says he works.