

G. G. Norman vertical engine

Engineer George Grip Norman was born in Bergin, Norway, about 1817.¹ He arrived in Victoria on board the *Gazelle* in December 1853 along with his London-born wife Hannah.² By late 1865 he was in Ballarat.³ Like most early Ballarat engineers, George Norman's initial focus was on the mining industry, possibly as a consulting engineer. However, it did not take long for a slump in mining in the mid-1860s to turn the focus of his business in other directions, leading to the manufacture of a prize-winning sausage-making machine.⁴ The food and beverage industry was to prove a lucrative one. This proceeded alongside the traditional engineering and repair work for industry in general, and the firm developed a very high reputation for its expertise in all these areas.⁵

George Grip Norman died of pneumonia on 9 June 1881 at the age of 64.⁶ His widow Hannah died only a few years later, on 22 January 1886. Frederick George Reeve had been a half-brother to Hannah Norman and had 'grown up with the business',⁷ and he carried on the enterprise retaining the G. G. Norman name.⁸ Reeve was born in London in early 1848. He emigrated to Australia in about 1859 and married Fanny Stephens in 1870.⁹ He died of heart disease on 7 May 1924 at the age of 76, and was buried in the Old Ballarat Cemetery, effectively marking the end of the Norman enterprise.¹⁰

The first mention of an engine in connection with the firm is a small one of about 1nhp lent by Norman for a demonstration at the Ballarat Mechanics Institute in April 1868.¹¹ Whether or not this was actually built by the firm is not presently known, however, Norman was certainly constructing engines at the time of his death.¹² We may never know how many engines were constructed, but there is one notable survivor still in daily use at Sovereign Hill, Ballarat. This is a true vertical engine of 8³/₈-inch bore and 12-inch stroke of 8nhp dating from circa 1889, and it drives the Wilfley table and Berdan pan in the battery. The engine was built specifically for William Hewett's Yarrowee Soap & Candle Works just outside Ballarat, where it drove a chaffcutter supplying chaff for a small breeding herd of dairy cows maintained in association with the soap works.¹³ The engine is made of five relatively-lightweight castings bolted together plus the cylinder casting. The crankshaft is a forging. The flywheel is 'as-cast' apart from some fettling and the boring of the hole for the crankshaft. The cross-head runs on round guides. The engine is substantially as last used (including the Pickering governor); apart from new piston and valve rods, and bushes in the piston and valve-rod glands.

References

¹ George Grip Norman death certificate 3399 of 1881.

² Index to unassisted inwards passenger lists to Victoria 1852-1923, fiche 58, page 1.

³ *The Ballarat Star*, Friday 8 September 1865, page 4. Wills Street formed the eastern extension of Mair Street from Davies Street until at least 1917; at some point thereafter the Wills Street section became contiguous with Mair Street.

⁴ *The Ballarat Star*, Friday 21 September 1866, page 2.

⁵ Smith, J. (1903). *The Cyclopedia of Victoria: An Historical and Commercial Review, Descriptive and Biographical Facts, Figures and Illustrations – an Epitome of Progress*. Cyclopedia Company, 1904: vol. II, page 288.

⁶ G. G. Norman death certificate 3399 of 1881.

⁷ PRO, VPRS 28/P0 unit 381 file 31/664; VPRS 28/P2 unit 197 file 31/664; VPRS 28/P0 unit 261 file 22/520; VPRS 28/P2 unit 120 file 22/520; VPRS 7591/P2 unit 65 file 22/520. (Probate and will of G. G. Norman).

⁸ The firm of G. G. Norman is noted as being in Sturt Street, Ballarat, in 1887 (see Rogers, J. W. F. (ed.). (1887-1888). *The Australasian Federal Directory of Commerce, Trades & Professions*. Melbourne: J. W. F. Rogers. Listed under 'Engineers &

Ironfounders', page 252). This may have been a temporary change of address while Hannah Norman's estate was settled, for the firm was certainly based back in Wills Street shortly thereafter.

⁹ Frederick Reeve death certificate 4068 of 1924.

¹⁰ Frederick Reeve death certificate 4068 of 1924; Australian electoral rolls district of Ballarat, 1909, 1914 and 1924.

¹¹ *The Ballarat Star*, Monday 6 April 1868, Page 2.

¹² *The Australasian*, Saturday 12 February 1881, page 25.

¹³ Interview with Harold Conder (founding curator of steam exhibits at Sovereign Hill), 4 March 2014; Interview with Andrew Smail (last owner of the Yarrowee Soap works), 18 March 2014.