

IRELAND TO AUSTRALIA....
A TALE OF TWO WORKHOUSE EMIGRANTS

Archival treasures unlock a key to the past for two families. Two Western Australians searching for the origins of their great-great grandmothers who arrived in Freemantle in 1853 trace them to the workhouse in Mountbellew, County Galway.

Galway County Council Archives was able to help two thrilled and delighted researchers confirm and establish with some certainty that their great-great grandmothers had travelled as part of a group of 30 young girls, who received assisted passage, from the workhouse to Western Australia. Bill Marwick and Kerry Ferraro have for many years been independently searching for their ancestors, and had already found out a great deal. However, one tiny piece of information, relating to when and how the girls emigrated remained something of a mystery.

Recently a small, but significant, piece of their interlinking family histories' jigsaw has been found in the Mountbellew Board of Guardian Minutes. Bill had been carrying out his family research for many years and had travelled to Ireland on several occasions in the hunt to track down the origins of his great grandmother, Mary Ann Taylor. Bill is a wonderful story teller and indeed recounts his search with great ease and flare in his book on his family, *'The Marwicks of York'*. He had already established that Mary Ann had arrived in Freemantle, Western Australia in May 1853. He had found her name in the shipping manifest for the *Palestine*, which left Plymouth, England, on 29th November 1852. He knew from her marriage certificate that she was from Castleblakeney, outside Ballinasloe; though at first he thought it was Castleblaney in County Monaghan!

Bill's family have the most wonderful photograph of Mary Ann, taken they believe just before she left Ireland or Plymouth. Because of her dress, and the bible and rosary beads Bill thought that she might have been an orphan in the care of the Sisters of Mercy or the Ballinasloe Union workhouse prior to her departure. But all enquires in those directions drew blanks. He had thought that the Mountbellew Poor Law Union did not open until 1853 and so had ruled that workhouse out.

In fact Galway County Council Archives holds the Board of Guardian Minutes for Mountbellew dating from May 1850 to 1921. The Mountbellew Poor Law Union was declared in February 1850. At the beginning of July 1850 the minutes record that there were 995 inmates chargeable to the



Mary Ann Taylor, circa 1852

Mountbellew Union. However, until the new workhouse in Mountbellew was constructed the Mountbellew paupers were accommodated in the Ballinasloe workhouse. Mountbellew workhouse was occupied for the first time on 17 May 1852, when 26 male and 30 female paupers were transferred from Ballinasloe to it.

Given that Bill had a departure date, 29 November 1852, meant that it was easier to search the minutes and to concentrate on September and October 1852; and so the hunt commenced! The minutes for 10 September 1852 reveal that the Union was preparing to assist with the emigration of 30 ‘...of the female inmates for passages to Van Diemen’s Land by the ship “Travancore” which will sail from Plymouth on 23rd inst’.¹ The following month the minutes for 1 October 1852 include several related entries, stating

‘Sealed order consenting to the expenditure of a sum not exceeding £3.5/ for each of the 30 female inmates who are about being sent to Van Diemen’s Land being applied by the Board of Guardians out of the rates for the purpose of assisting to defray the expenses of their emigration’.

‘Letter from same (Local Government Commissioners) adverting to the proposed emigration to Van Diemen’s Land of 30 of the female inmates of the Mount Bellew Union and stating that having received from Mr Bourke Poor Law Inspector a report on the subject they will issue their consent to the expenditure proposed in these cases’.

And

‘Letter from Emigration Commissioners London forwarding approval circulars for the 30 young women from Mount Bellew Union who have been placed on the List of candidates for passage to Western Australia in a ship which will probably sail from Plymouth at the end of October 1852’².

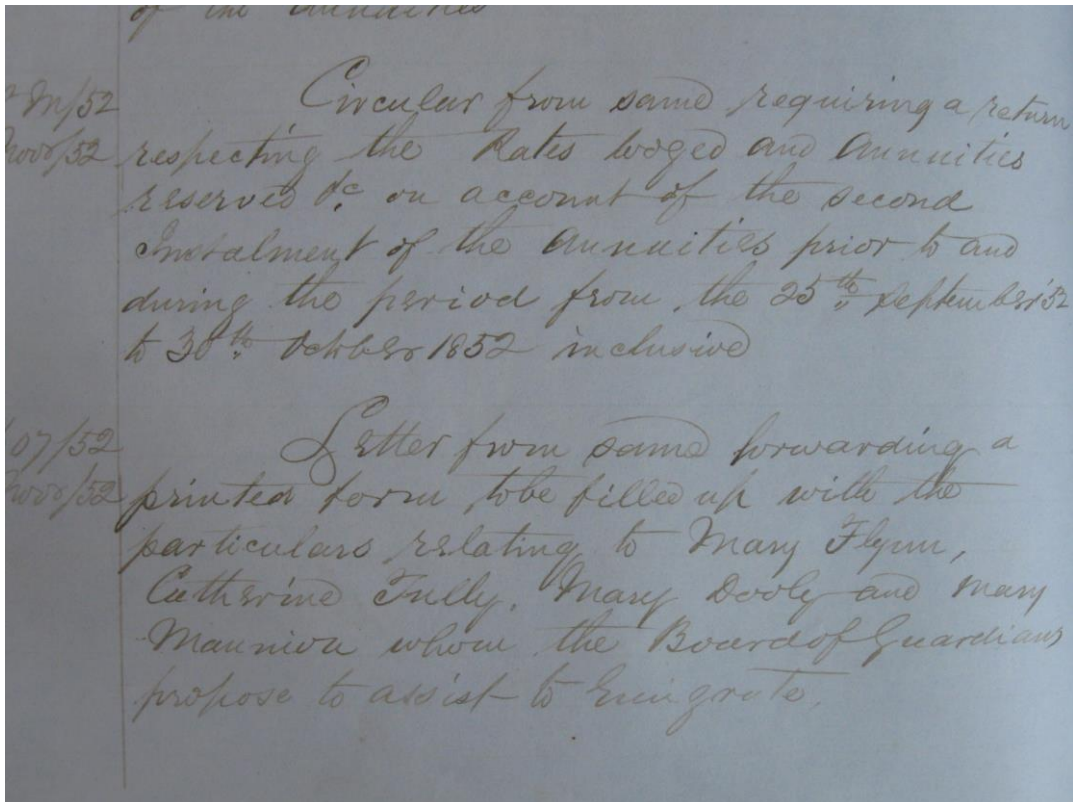
The latter entry was the first to refer to Western Australia. From the minutes it would seem that the 30 girls went there rather than as was first indicated to Van Diemen’s Land. According to an article in the *Independent Journal of Politics and News* the *Travancore* was to leave Plymouth sometime after September 1852 and call to the port of Cadiz in Spain for 30 emigrants³. We suspect that arrangements for the 30 Mountbellew girls were not in place in time to avail of the sailing of the *Travancore*.

¹ Board of Guardian Minutes, (GCCA, Mountbellew Poor Law Union collection, GP4/ 26 Mar 29 Oct 1852), 17 Sept, 1852, p393

² *ibid*, 1 Oct, 1852, pp423-24

³ *Journal of Politics and News*, 3 December 1852, p4, (National Library of Australia Trove website, [http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/3174386?searchTerm=&searchLimits=fromyyyy=1853%7C%7C7Cfrommm=05%7C%7C7Ctoyyyy=1853%7C%7C7Ctomm=05%7C%7C7C1%ADtitle=26%7C%7C7C1%ADtitle=26](http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/3174386?searchTerm=&searchLimits=fromyyyy=1853%7C%7Cfrommm=05%7C%7C7Ctoyyyy=1853%7C%7C7Ctomm=05%7C%7C7C1%ADtitle=26%7C%7C7C1%ADtitle=26) (26 Mar 2012)

Later in October the Medical Officer advised the Board of Guardians that four of the girls selected for emigration were in hospital. The Board then applied to the Emigration Commissioners for permission '*...to have other eligible females substituted for those that may not be able to emigrate at the time appointed as suggested by the Medical Officer*'⁴.



Mountbellew Board of Guardian Minutes, 19 Nov 1852

The next related entry is the one of particular significance to Bill and Kerry, as it contains the names of the substitute girls. Firstly, the minutes for 12 November record that the Poor Law Commissioners withdrew consent for the four girls in hospital to travel. These were named as Bridget Somers, Catherine Kerrane, Bridget King and Mary Flynn. Secondly, they record that the Medical Officer reported that Mary Flynn had recovered and was '*...fit to proceed with the other emigrants*', who were named as Catherine Tully, Castleblakeney, Mary Dooly, Clonbrock and Mary Mannion, Ballinakill⁵.

The Mountbellew minutes document that at week ending 13 November 1852 there were 440 inmates under the care of the Union, 125 of which were able bodied females. At week ending 20 November 1852 there were 401, 102 were able bodied females. But also during that week 32 able bodied females had been discharged. The 30 assisted emigrants presumably are among this number.

⁴ Board of Guardian Minutes, (GCCA, Mountbellew Poor Law Union collection, GP4/ 26 Mar - 29 Oct 1852), 29 Oct 1852, p470

⁵ Board of Guardian Minutes, (GCCA, Mountbellew Poor Law Union collection, GP4/ 5 Nov 1852 – 6 May 1853), 12 Nov 1852, pp30-1

Knowing already that Mary Ann had arrived on the *Palestine* in May 1853 Bill decided to double-check the newspaper listings for newly arrived emigrants. The *Perth Gazette*⁶ listed various passenger details. For instance it gave the family name and number in each party, such as ‘O’Brien, smith and farrier, wife and 3 children’. But the end of the list included 44 names, single girls presumably, travelling with Matron Amos. The names of the four girls listed in the minutes are included, together with an M Taylor, Bill’s great-grandmother!

Kerryn had also been conducting her own family research for many years, and had already established a great deal of information about her great-great grandmother Mary Dooley. She too knew that she had arrived on the *Palestine*. But now she knew with certainty that Mary had received assisted passage and had left from the Mountbellew workhouse. Mary was one of the substitute girls, so one of the few names actually appearing in the Minutes.

A report in the same newspaper notes that among the immigrated on the *Palestine* some were the wives and families of convicts. It further reports

‘The single women by the Palestine, most of whom are from Ireland, have many of them been already engaged in private service at about £12 per annum; few of them have been ever before in service, but the good temper and willingness to do their best and be instructed in household duties, evinced by those Irish girls who arrived in the Travancore, has created quite an impression in their favour. The present importation consists of about sixty fine strong health young women’⁷.

It is extraordinary that the families of these two girls, Mary Ann Taylor and Mary Dooley, should reach the conclusion of their searches within six months of each other and find that both girls originated from the Mountbellew Workhouse. Having survived the Famine, they are likely to have shared similar experiences of great poverty, desperation and loss before boarding the *Palestine*. They are also likely to have shared conversations on the long and tough journey to a strange land far away. It is hard to image what they must have been thinking. However, we do know that they went on to live long, happy and fruitful lives.

From Bill’s book we learn that Mary Ann Taylor, who was just 18 when she arrived in Freemantle, married twice. The first time, just months after her arrival, on 29th November 1853 to Henry Batty, a Ticket of Leave man. They are believed to have had three children, William born in February 1855, John born in 1856 (died 1898) and Catherine in 1858; who it is believed died shortly afterwards. However, Henry was jailed in 1859 for stealing. Mary then appears to have met Henry Beard, another Ticket of Leave man, and moved to York with him.

⁶ Perth Gazette, 6 May 1853, p2,(National Library of Australia Trove website, (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/3174386?searchTerm=&searchLimits=fromyyyy=1853||frommm=05||toyyyy=1853||tomm=05||-title=26||-title=26>) (26 Mar 2012)

⁷ *Ibid.*

They had two children, Maria (1860-1937), and a son, Alfred (1862-1930). Beard was convicted of sheep stealing in 1864, so Mary was left alone again.

A family friend, William Marwick, who had arrived in Australia on the *Sir Walter Raleigh* in March 1852⁸ ‘...offered to look after Mary and her brood of young children while Beard was in prison’⁹. Mary Ann and William entered a ‘...long-lasting *de facto* relationship’¹⁰. They had six children, Webster born in October 1866 (died of consumption in December 1901), William Junior was born in January 1868 (also died of consumption in 1902), Warren (1868-1955), Sarah (1872-1960), Joseph Walker (1873-1940), and Thomas Amos born in January 1875. Though William was a Protestant, Mary Ann had all the children baptized in the Roman Catholic faith. William was a successful landowner and business man. The Marwick Bros Estate was estimated to have 22,000 acres in 1905¹¹. William and Mary Ann married on 25 January 1906. Mary died in July 1926 and had 55 grandchildren....not bad for a poor orphaned Irish emigrant!

Mary Dooley’s story had a similarly happy outcome. Kerry told us that Mary married John Dawson on 28 January 1854 in Busselton, Western Australia. She became a local midwife and had eight children: Mary Jane (1854-1916), Catherine (1857-1930), Elizabeth Magdalene (1859-1946), John Joseph (1862-1934), Susan (1866-1904), Rose Anne (1868-1930), and Edward (1870-1960). Another child died in infancy. *Mary and John Dawson set up home on a farming property called ‘Newbury’, located at Newtown and were some of the earliest pioneers in Western Australia*¹².

Mary died on 27 August 1902 in Nuralingup. The cause of death was cited as asthma. Her father was listed, on a document Kerry has, as Edward O’Dooley, whitesmith, born around 1790. Edward’s brother, Lawrence, has been traced in Griffith’s Valuation to Springlawn, Ballynakill, just outside Mountbellew. He is believed to have had eight children, all but one are thought to have emigrated to America. Mary’s youngest son, Edward, was quoted his mother saying that she went to Australia to ‘find her pot of gold’. Years later, Mary was to have said that “*she found her ‘pot of gold’ in her many children*”¹³.



Mary Dooley, with her husband John Dawson, at their daughter’s wedding, circa 1879

⁸ B. Marwick, *The Marwicks of York*, Wangara, Western Australia, 2011, p22

⁹ *Ibid.*, p25

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p31

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p140

¹² Kerry Ferraro, "Re: Mary Dooley of Clonbrock, Caltra, Ballinasloe, Co Galway", Message to the author. 12 Mar 2012. Email

¹³ Kerry Ferraro, "Re: Mary Dooley of Clonbrock, Caltra, Ballinasloe, Co Galway", Message to the author, 17 Mar 2012 Email attachment

Though more than 150 years separate us from Mary Ann Taylor's and Mary Dooley's departure from Mountbellew, their descendants, Bill and Kerryn, are now in touch with each and share a kindred spirit in the search for their ancestors. Throughout Bill's searches he received much help and assistance from many quarters. In particular from Ms Valerie Kinsella, of the Castleblakeney Heritage Centre, and also from the staff of the Ballinasloe Library, especially Ms Mary Dillon. The knowledge and help of people like Valerie and Mary, and indeed many others like them, should not be overlooked (or indeed underappreciated!) when undertaking family history searches.

Galway County Council Archives holds archive collections for most of the Poor Law Unions which administered workhouses in the county between 1839 and 1925. These collections consist mainly of Board of Guardian Minutes. They provide details on the day to day running of the workhouse and on the care given to the inmates. They also provide a fascinating account of the social conditions of the county spanning the Famine period, the Land Wars, and right through from the 1916 Rising to independence. They chart the social and political evolution of the county and country during that time.

However the Registers of Inmates recording the names and details of the 100s and often 1,000s of destitute men, women and children, who flocked to the workhouse doors, have rarely survived. This is a great pity, as the search for descendants by family historians could be greatly helped if they had survived. Nonetheless, the records can still reveal much about the conditions of the time, and hardships experienced by our predecessors, and should not be overlooked as a useful resource for the genealogist. Indeed, in some lucky instances, such as for Bill and Kerryn, the search can be even more revealing and rewarding.

Galway County Council Archives has been delighted to assist Bill and Kerryn with their searches. It is hugely gratifying when the archives provide a 'positive' search result, and give so much satisfaction and a sense of place to members of Ireland's Diaspora.

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