



WEST DAPTO CATHOLIC CEMETERY RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

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No. 4 March 2018

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2018 – a new year which, we hope, should bring us that much closer to the publication of at least our first volume (of how many?) covering the history of the West Dapto Cemetery site and the lives of those buried there-in.

We hope and trust that you all had a good Christmas – we did, as we actually took a month or so off from our West Dapto research, though it was very much a “busman’s holiday”, working instead on some of our own family history research and a more general look at the ownership history of many of the (not necessarily Catholic owned) farms in the local area.

Thankyou Bishop Emeritus Peter Ingham

Before we launch forth into an update on where we are up to, we would like to express our very own thanks to Bishop Emeritus Peter Ingham for the personal interest in our research that he has shown over the past several years. Bishop Peter, your interest has certainly been a source of on-going encouragement to us, and we hope that in your retirement you will have more time to muse on our discoveries and to appreciate our forebears in the local parishes and diocese.

Good News and Discoveries on the Land Records Front

In our November newsletter I (Terry) complained of my frustration over the difficulty of accessing an ever increasing number of historical land documents that were fundamental to my research into where the early Dapto Catholic families lived. By the end of November over 600,000 Old System Deeds were unavailable for easy review, even though some 400,000 digitised images there-of had been produced but had not been added to the online database.

In the last week of November a message was left for me to call a very nice lady at the Registrar General’s Office concerning the complaint I had lodged via Gareth Ward, MP for Kiama and Parliamentary Secretary for the Illawarra. I had expected the complaint to eventually reach the Registrar General’s staff as they are responsible for the contractual aspects of the privatisation of the Land & Property Information Service. The nice lady told me that the issue I had raised was about to be rectified, and that ‘good things’ should happen shortly. Indeed, the following weekend some 250,000 images were added to the online system, which had climbed to around 400,000 new images by the time I received a second phone call a week later – I was told to refer any future issues direct to their office rather than bothering to complain via an MP. Things have now returned to ‘normal’ with only 180,000-190,000 deeds being unavailable at any point in time, from the day they are removed from the shelf till the day they eventually re-appear as newly added images on the online system. You can be assured that I emailed my grateful thanks to Gareth Ward as soon as the backlog of images started to flood onto the online system.

So what land related gems have I discovered since the last newsletter? Perhaps the most interesting, but maybe not surprising, would be the fact that there was no less shortage of people willing to swindle others out of their money in the early 1800’s as there may be today!!! Hard to understand sequences of land sales were not always the result of poor government records!

A couple of weeks ago we received a call from a fellow local historian that produced great outcomes for us all. We and this particular historian sometimes collaborate with each other, as at times it is only when we combine the snippets of information we have each discovered, that the answers to all our collective questions might suddenly fall into place. She is currently researching each of the ‘Veterans’ (ex-soldiers) who, in the 1830’s, were granted the ten 100 acre grants either side of Dapto Creek, stretching from near Brownsville to below Mt Kembla. I have discussed three of these grants before –

Elizabeth Cray inherited one, donating part of it for the West Dapto Cemetery (and the first church), John Barrett purchased another, selling part of it as the site for the first Convent, and James Woodland purchased part of another before he sourced his own grant higher up the mountainside.

Another of our very early Catholics, James Connolly, one of my (Terry's) g-g-g-grandfathers, purchased Veterans Allotment No. 4, located NW of the current West Dapto Catholic Cemetery. On 03.09.1833 James purchased the 100a from the relevant Veteran, James Mitchell, for just £25 – a seemingly cheap price but the land would have at that time been just virgin bush, a fact that is supported by 1830's court cases that talk about forest clearings in the area. James Mitchell had been promised the land 26.11.1829 and had been authorised to take possession of it 08.09.1830. As with many such early grantees, and particularly so for these ten Veterans, Mitchell seems to have had little interest in actually farming the land himself, and hence sold the property to James Connolly well before the wheels of government had turned enough to produce and issue the actual deeds to the property five years later. Even though the sale to James Connolly was correctly registered as an Old System Deed in its own right, it is obvious that not all government records were updated as they should have been. Notices in the Sydney papers in late 1838, advising of the forthcoming issue of various deeds for grants all over the colony, indicated that the deed for Veteran's Allotment No. 4 at West Dapto was to be issued in the name of James Mitchell, rather than James Connolly. Several other deeds appearing in the same notice were noted as going to be issued to someone other than the original grantee, "AT THE REQUEST OF THE ORIGINAL GRANTEE", ie because the original grantee had already on-sold their grant to another party. This seems to indicate that if a grantee sold his grant before the issue of the official deeds, then the grantee would normally inform the relevant government officials to ultimately issue the deed to the other party, rather than (still) to themselves – obviously James Mitchell had not undertaken any such action.

In the intervening years, in fact in 1837, James Connolly had passed away. His death pre-dated Elizabeth Cray's donation of the land for the cemetery at West Dapto, so he was buried in the original Catholic burial ground at the bottom end of Crown Street, Wollongong, that cemetery now being partially covered by WIN Stadium and the Entertainment Centre. James Connolly's headstone is actually the oldest surviving headstone in what is now known as Andrew Lysaght Park, the headstone being one of several affixed to a memorial wall at the southern end of the concourse.

James Connolly's widow, Julia, then married one Thomas Drinkwater, an ex-convict living in the Dapto area. Just exactly when this marriage took place is unknown. Being before 1856 when state registration of births, deaths and marriages was introduced, we are dependent upon church records, newspaper reports of marriages, or indirect references to marriage dates in other legal documents. The only possible record we can find is a reference in Fr Therry's diaries recording one of his journeys to the Illawarra about that time – he detailed each of the several baptisms he performed at that time, but then just added the comment "also performed 5 marriages". Not only might one of these marriages have been that of Julia Connolly and Thomas Drinkwater, but also that of her daughter, Caroline Connolly, to William Henry Swan, one of my (Terry's) g-g-g-grandfather's! Both these women are buried in West Dapto Cemetery. After their marriage, Julia and Thomas Drinkwater farmed the 100a purchased by James Connolly, the farm becoming known as "Drinkwater's Farm".

Now the published list of deeds that would soon be available for collection was preceded by comments stating that the list had been prepared using the best information available to those compiling the list. The comments stressed that should the information relating to any deed not be correct, then affected parties had three months to make written submission so that the deed might be appropriately altered. Whether she was still Julia Connolly, widow, or Julia Drinkwater, married woman, in late 1838 Julia and/or Julia and Thomas was/were obviously not aware of the notice, nor the need to make written submission to avoid the deed being incorrectly issued in three months' time. Whether they were aware of the need to acquire the original grant documentation but just never saw the Sydney newspapers, or in fact whether they could even read at all, is not known. What we can assume though, is that one James Mitchell was quite well aware of the situation and he certainly did not make any written submission to correct the situation. Instead he gratefully took receipt of the deed for "Waterloo Farm" 13.12.1838. He then sold the property, for a second time, 17.09.1839 to Francis O'Brien of Sydney for the intriguing sum of £10 and 10 shillings per week for life. Francis O'Brien on-sold the property to Alexander M^cLean just 5 months later for a nice profit making sum of £800. (Is this a transcription error of mine or the Lands Office typist who transcribed these very early records many years ago – perhaps it was only £80? Another "loose end" for me to check on!).

In the meantime, the Drinkwaters obviously put substantial effort into the property, “their” property, oblivious to the wheeling and dealing being undertaken by Sydney based land speculators. Things came to a head in 1842 when Alexander M^cLean was declared bankrupt and his assets, including the Dapto property, were placed into the hands of the court to dispose of. Thomas Drinkwater was also being taken through the insolvency courts about the same time, with our fellow historian sighting some records quoting Thomas as stating that while he did have assets (the farm), the documentation relating there-to was (apparently) all but worthless. The *Sydney Herald* of the 07.07.1842 carried, on the same page, not one but two notices announcing the auction of the Dapto property – the first by the official assignee of M^cLean’s insolvent estate, the second by Thomas Drinkwater, detailing the clearing, cultivation and erection of buildings that had been undertaken on the property by the Connollys / Drinkwaters over the previous 9 years. This legal conundrum was eventually taken before the courts, with the ruling being made in favour of those holding documentation leading back to the official 1838 deed, rather than any documentation relating to its (registered) sale/purchase prior to that date. “Drinkwaters Farm” was simply sold out from underneath Thomas and Julia – they had been swindled out of their family property.

Family Research – Where are we up to?

In preparation for this newsletter, Wendy started the task of trying to determine exactly how far we have progressed with documenting the 496 people identified as belonging to the ‘early’ families who had their first burials before 1900 ie those people we have tagged as being potential inclusions in our first West Dapto publication. Working her way through 160 or more Word files she tried to identify whether, for each person, we had started / finished documenting the basic family information, started / finished researching / documenting their land ownership, and started / finished identifying, typing up and crosschecking newspaper articles mentioning them. After 2 or 3 days effort she gave up!!

Suffice to say we believe we have completed the basic family information on them all, though one runs the risk of finding a death notice that mentions a previously unknown son or daughter, thereby identifying more family related research to be undertaken. We have completed, once again we think, finding the newspaper articles on most, either from our previously gathered collection of 30,000+ articles on Illawarra Catholics (from years of reading microfilm copies of the local papers), or from more recently discovered items we can now find via the online digitised newspaper images on the *Trove* website. The automated searching via *Trove* has enabled us to track down many family members who have moved out of the local area, even interstate. As noted above, Terry is very close to completing his searches relating to their land ownership etc, with an ever decreasing number of ‘loose ends’ remaining.

Given that we will soon start to re-read all that we have thrown together to see if it actually makes sense, we may have to plead for your patience for another 12 months or so, though we would dearly love to be formalising some sort of advertising and pre-publication offer towards the end of this year – it all depends on how quickly we can get the remaining ‘first pass’ work completed and how problem-free our initial re-reading turns out to be.

In the meantime please, please, please, if you have photos of anyone buried in the cemetery who is one of, or is descended from one of the early families could you contact us ASAP – the earlier we have good quality (minimum 300dpi) copies of the photos the better, for once we start combining the files and formatting the actual book content (in alphabetical order) it will mean an awful amount of re-work if we get a late arriving photo for a person whose entry has already been formatted.

Also, please, please, please, if you have a deceased relative buried in the cemetery and know they have a family relationship with one of the early Dapto families, if you have not already done so, contact us ASAP to make sure we have identified the relationship and have hence tagged / researched them for our first publication. Just recently Wendy realised that Maud Lobb (buried 1950) was a great grand-daughter of Martin Moran (buried 1872). She was initially missed because the intervening generations were buried in Wollongong and hence were not fully researched by us.

Also, when many of you gave us your email addresses, you did not say what families you were connected with. If we can have a list of those families, then we can pose precise questions to you when we are having difficulties with the research.

MARTIN O'MEALLY.

Martin O'Meally is one of our burials without a headstone. I (Wendy) had recently thought I had finished the research on him. However, I still had not found his entry into Australia. My previous research had been via the State Archives Shipping Indexes and this had led nowhere. I decided recently, for one last ditch effort at finding him, to go into *Ancestry*. The first thing I found was an Embarkation Orders document which clearly listed Martin O'Malley being brought out by H. Osborne (of Marshall Mount) per *Vocalist*. This told me that I was on the right track and to look for him as O'Malley. (Over the years he was recorded per every spelling variation of O'Malley or O'Mealey that you could think of.) Transcribed in part, this document was as follows.

Colony of New South Wales

NOMINEE.

LIST of Persons nominated by Purchasers of Land in New South Wales for Passages to that Colony, who have received Embarkation Orders to join the Ship, *Vocalist*.

The following persons each had £1 deposit paid by H. Osborne: Robert Scott, John M^cGrath, John M^cKinley, Jane M^cKinley, Martin O'Malley aged 21. (Martin was the only one of these listed with an age.)

Government Emigration Office

23 June 1856

Secretary

(John & Jane M^cKinley are buried in the RC Section of Wollongong Cemetery. Their daughter, Mary Jane, married Thomas Clifford and is buried in West Dapto.)

Once I was able to look at the *Vocalist* records, I found my 21 year old Martin listed as Matthew Mealey. I eventually realised that there were two people on this ship whose records I needed to look at, Matthew Mealey and Martin O'Malley. One of the records stated that there was supposed to be a brother, Dennis, in Sydney. I then tried to find his entry into NSW. I did not find it but curiously found a record of Dennis Mealey sponsoring his brother Matthew Mealey, on one record as "under 40" and then on another as 35 and having a wife. So I knew that something was wrong.

As I already knew who Martin's parents were, (from his first marriage record) I then had a closer look at the two men and realised that the details for each had been hopelessly jumbled between their entries in the *Vocalist* records. I have copied their entries here and have bolded the information that should have been under **Martin O'Mealey** who later lived in Albion Park and is buried at West Dapto.

Matthew Mealey **21 Farm Labourer RC Neither R/W Good Health**
From Westport Mayo
Parents John & Mary, father dead, mother at Westport
Sister Bridget Keenan at Dapto Illawarra was crossed out and replaced with
"Dennis Mealey a brother living in Sydney"
£5 R.R. written over £1 ditto under A.I. Act

Martin O'Malley 35 Farm Labourer RC Neither R/W Good Health
From Cappamore Limerick
Parents Dennis & Hannah, Both dead
A brother Dennis living in Crown St Sydney
£1 & R.R. per H. Osborne Esq

Martin's sister, Bridget, had arrived in 1850 per *Panama*, listed as Bridget Maly. She was married in 1850 to David Keenan, listed as Bridget Maly. David died in 1875 and was buried at St Paul's RC Cemetery Albion Park. Bridget again married in 1875, to Archibald Henderson Ritchie. She died in 1881 and was buried in the Old RC Burial Ground Wollongong (now Andrew Lysaght Park). They also had another sister, Mary, who arrived in 1864 per *Sandringham* as Mary Malley. In 1865 she married Christopher Burgess, being listed as Mary O'Mealie (newspaper). Note, this marriage is very badly indexed in the NSW Marriage Index with two entries, first having wife Mary Nellis and second having wife Mary Oshelo – obviously the transcriber / indexer could not read O'Mealie! Mary and Christopher lived in Wollongong. This family connection was discovered via Bridget's obituary, which stated she died at the residence of her sister, Mrs Burgess. Mary died 1913 and was buried in the RC Section of the New Wollongong Cemetery.

The above may give you an idea of some of the problems we encounter as we try to research these people.