



WEST DAPTO CATHOLIC CEMETERY RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

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Firstly, those of you who gave their email contact details at the last West Dapto Cemetery Mass, thank you for expressing your interest in hearing about the progress of our research into those buried or memorialised in West Dapto Catholic Cemetery. The rest of you that we are sending this to are people whom we knew had an interest in someone buried in the cemetery.

Secondly, apologies for taking so long since last November to actually produce this first email. The expected Christmas rush was followed by a period of family oriented activities both before and after the birth of our first grandchild. Hopefully this newsletter will be the first of a series of more frequent communications.

In this first newsletter we will attempt to provide a bit of an insight into the process we are following and hence why each of our cemetery books take a minimum of four years to produce. The latter portions of this newsletter will give you a more concise update on the number of people we have finished off, how many we are working on and, unfortunately, how many we have yet to start.

As you may appreciate, researching 'long lost' people can become a time consuming endeavour, even for 'full-time' historians such as ourselves, but we feel that finally we are in a position to provide an update that can say that we are at last making some in-roads into the work there is to be done. Let's start with an example from Terry to give you a feel for the size of the task:

In February when Wendy was heading off to be a 'grandmother in waiting', giving our daughter day time company and support in the final days of her pregnancy, I asked for suggestions on 'where to next?' – "Make a start on the O'Briens" was the reply – 3 months later I am still knee deep in O'Briens – there are no less than 43 of them buried at West Dapto, or closer to 50 if one counts the daughters who were of course buried using their married names !!!!!

Sorting out who was related to whom, and hence identifying the family lines, was generally the easy part and achieved relatively quickly. More time consuming was identifying and detailing the full families of each person, not all of whom appeared as other West Dapto burials, with many wandering far and wide, often interstate, or even entering the convent and hence having their death and burial registered under a combination both their religious and family identities. Also confusing were the early O'Brien families who not only neglected to register most of their children's births, but also seemingly had them baptised out of the area – obituaries in the two local papers could disagree on the number of children – was it 14 or 15 ?? – and why would only some of them appear in the Wollongong or Albion Park / Dapto baptism registers?? Even more confusing were death certificates which listed the children under alternate names, out of sequence, or even listed deceased offspring as being among the living and, presumably, enumerating other surviving children as being among the un-named "so many males, so many females deceased"!!!

While we try to discover as many details as possible for each person actually buried in the cemetery, we also attempt to gather at least the basics for each of their offspring – date of birth, baptism details, marriage details, death date and burial location. I was attempting to "finish off the O'Briens", or at least the first pass there-of, by researching one lone burial of an O'Brien who originated from Candelo, near Bega, only moving to Dapto in later life and hence not seeming to be a member of any of the family lines already researched. Imagine my joy when I found he had had not one wife but two wives, sisters in fact, and had ended up with no less than 17 children !!! Instead of needing to research just one person, I had to find details on him, his two wives (at least they had the same parents), their collective total of 17 children and, for those who were married, details of their spouses.

Of course, with many of the early pioneers we must also ask the question – from whence did they come – if they were not born in the colony, were they convict, were they free? This can lead us on a merry chase through both convict and immigrant records, trying to decide between possibilities (of the same name) and then obtaining images of all relevant documents to retain as references to substantiate the life story we construct for each of them.

Having determined the 'life event' details for each of those buried in the cemetery, we then proceed on to see what newspaper articles we have found or can find for them, so that each person can then become a real character in the history of the Dapto parish and local area.

Over the past several years, we have gathered, as computer image files, over 35,000 newspaper articles on Illawarra Catholics that we expect to be researching at some stage. These are as varied as being accounts of court appearances, cattle sales, accidents, bazaars, weddings, obituaries, advertisements or public notices, death or funeral notices etc, dating, according to the person, anywhere from the 1820's to the current day. In years past we gathered these newspaper 'clippings' through reading the local papers, cover to cover, on microfilm at Wollongong Library, dumping images there-from onto a USB thumb drive. Nowadays, the Australian Archives "Trove" website has digitised images of most Australian papers up to 1954 available online, with the automatic search facility allowing you to rapidly scan for a word, or sequence of words in whichever newspapers you select, over whichever time period you specify. Search results can be viewed and a little cutting and manipulation of screen dumps on my PC results in the final image of the article we are after. However, Trove does not replace the library research. Eg. Wollongong Library has a year of the *Kiama Examiner* that is not on Trove and the *South Coast Herald* (covering just Albion Park and Dapto) is also not on Trove. Death notices etc post 1954 need searching back in the library. All of our 35,000+ newspaper clipping images are uniquely named indicating the identity and date of the paper from which it was sourced. All 35,000+ image files have been indexed by surname / given name / initial into a massive Excel spreadsheet to make it easier to find what we already have on the person at hand ... or at least that should be the case in theory, but try sorting out which Thomas / Tom O'Brien is which, or is the Mr. T O'Brien the particular Thomas O'Brien we are working on, or could it be any of the two or three Timothy O'Briens we are also to document. One of the jobs we have done since the November Cemetery Mass was to complete the indexing of the newspaper files we had as we previously had some 10,000 that were not indexed.

Searching for articles from newspapers beyond 1954 means going back to the time consuming practice of reading every paper, page by page, on microfilm – a fairly fruitless task given the vast amount of 'meaningless' information / advertising in the more modern papers. There is however, one exception to this problem and that is death and funeral notices. Another website – *The Ryerson Index* – provides an index into death / funeral notices in most Australian newspapers right up almost to the current day. Generated totally by volunteer transcribers, the index provides at least the full name of the deceased, date of death (or funeral), date and identity of the paper. Often it will also provide the person's age and their (recent) place of residence – eg late of Dapto – thereby giving a further clue as to whether or not the notice refers to the person being sought. Armed with dozens of entries from the Ryerson, afternoons are then spent in Wollongong Library obtaining images of the death / funeral notices from the post 1954 newspaper microfilms – thankfully most turning out to be relevant, some though simply telling us to keep on looking. They can also fill in details of spouses and children, especially for more recent generations.

Therefore, for each O'Brien I am working on, I first go to the spreadsheet, try and identify which articles definitely relate to the person, and then copy those image files into a Word document so they can be typed up and cross-checked so as to progressively build up the history of the person involved. Once having exhausted our already gathered collection, I then use Trove to search for any further articles, searching first for their full name eg William James O'Brien, and then for abbreviations thereof eg William J O'Brien or W.J. O'Brien. With William James O'Brien being involved in several of the local sporting teams, Dapto Show Society, a trustee for Reed Park, a director of the Dapto Dairy Co-operative, a prominent local farmer, a sometimes contractor to Central Illawarra Council and a person with an uncanny knack for being involved in traffic incidents, I have ended up with no end of newspaper articles that I need to either type up in full, summarise or simply reference – his entry will certainly be one of the larger ones that will appear in the book, but one that will truly document the history and development of the local area, hence reflecting the times that he and his contemporaries lived through.

A few statistics about West Dapto Catholic Cemetery:

The earliest dated burial in West Dapto is that of Richard Mallon, who died in 1831 and was originally buried in Wollongong. He was later re-interred in West Dapto after his widow gave the land to the church. The earliest "original" burial is that of Elizabeth Nunan, who died in 1846, followed by Caroline Swan in 1852 (both being g-g-grandmothers of Terry).

Prior to 1950, we have 480 known burials. Why do we mention 1950? The church's cemetery register was begun in approximately 1950. Because an extremely high number of the pre-1950

deaths are in unmarked graves, it has been a long hard search over many years to come up with these names.

At this stage, we have topped the 900 mark for burials in the cemetery. Of these 900, over 300 are unmarked burials and research into other possible burials is still ongoing. Research on 411 of these individuals has begun and 92 of these have been completed. Why so many more started than completed – others are waiting on birth, marriage or death certificate transcripts for further information, newspaper article collecting and typing to be completed, further library research to be completed and sometimes they are just left there “unfinished” in the hope that some new records out there might sort out the puzzles we are left with.

What are we looking for? What information can you send us on your relatives in the cemetery?

Main Person: Full name; date and place of birth; parents including father’s profession and mother’s maiden name.

Baptism details including date, place, priest or minister, godparents.

Marriage details including date, place (church and town), spouse, priest or minister, witnesses.

Spouse (same details as main person, even if not buried in West Dapto).

For both main person and spouse, if not born in Australia, how and when did they arrive – convict or free immigrant (this also includes post WWII immigration).

Death date, place, cause, age.

Burial date, place, priest or minister; undertaker; witnesses.

Profession for either or both

Residence where and when

Children: For each child

Name, birthdate, birthplace, baptism details, marriage details (details like for main person including parents of spouse), death and burial details.

To the above we add full or partial transcripts of documents of interest, transcripts of newspaper articles – in particular family notices and obituaries but also other articles that give background information.

Lastly, we need photographs of the people. For many of those unmarked burials and the many early burials, this will not be possible as there were no photos taken at that time or none have survived or are known to us. However, we would appreciate photographs that people do have – whether of the people or their farms/homes etc. We are able to scan photos for you. If you scan them yourself, please scan at, at least, 300 dpi. A photograph that ends up only 150 kb or less is worthless to print in a book as it will be too grainy.

A few examples of those stories completed:

Many of the unmarked burials are babies with only a few lines to describe their short lives.

PRIMMER, Irene Doris born 06.01.1917 Dapto; parents James Albert Primmer, labourer, and Irene Estelle Campbell. Baptised 13.02.1917 by Rev. William P. McNally. Baptism recorded in the register of St Francis Xavier’s RC Wollongong. Godparents John Tiller and Eliza Goodwin. Died 22.09.1917. Buried 22.09.1917 RC Cemetery West Dapto by Rev. P. Power. No headstone – burial recorded in burial register of St Paul’s RC Albion Park.
Residence: Dapto 1917

PRIMMER, Iris Agatha born c. April 1922 Keiraville; parents James Albert Primmer, labourer, and Irene Estelle Campbell.
Died 22.07.1922 Keiraville, from spina bifida and hydrocephalus, aged 11 weeks. Buried 23.07.1922 RC Cemetery West Dapto. Undertaker James Primmer. Witnesses Daniel Bede Warrington and Elizabeth McEwan. No headstone – death and burial details from death registration.
Residence: Keiraville 1922

Note: We do not have Iris’ exact date of birth as we are not able to purchase a birth transcript for a 1922 birth (births must be over 100 years to be obtained by non-family members) and we have not found a baptism record, which would have been able to give the birth date. Hence this record could only be “totally” completed by a family member who has a record of the birth.

HENLEY, James (Jerry) born c.1810 Cork Ireland

At the Surry Winter Quarter Sessions 1833, James Henley was tried for Robbery and sentenced to death. This was commuted to transportation for Life.

James arrived 15.09.1834 Sydney per convict transport *Roslin Castle*; Master William Richards, Surgeon Robert Espie. He was described as James Henley, age 23, could read and write, was Roman Catholic and single. His native place was Cork and he was a blacksmith. He was tried 18.12.1833 at Surry Quarter Sessions for highway robbery and sentenced to Life. He had a former conviction with sentence of 6 weeks. He was described as 5 foot 9 inches tall, of ruddy complexion with dark brown hair and grey eyes. A further description said his nose large, scar left side of forehead, scar on each eyebrow, scar on nose, marks of scrofula under left jaw, M H on upper right arm, scar back of fourth finger of right hand, scar back of middle and blue ring on fourth fingers of left hand. The Transportation register listed James Henley convicted as per Surrey Quarter Sessions 18th December 1833, sentenced to Life. On the list of convict dispersals from the Roslin Castle, James Henley was assigned to John Buckland, Shaw Town.

In the 1837 Convict Muster James Henley is listed as aged 24 years, arrived per *Roslin Castle* 1834 and working for the Government at Liverpool.

The Parramatta Gaol Entrance Book for 1838 lists James Henley of the *Roslin Castle* 1834, on bond, from Cork, Catholic, a blacksmith, tried March 22 at Liverpool and sentenced to 2 months at The Treadmill.

The Sydney Gaol Entrance Book for 1838 lists James Henley of *Roslin Castle* 1834, born in 1814, 5 foot 9½ inches tall, of stout make, fresh complexion, brown hair, grey eyes with "A A" on upper right arm and scar under right eye.

The Parramatta Gaol Entrance Book for 1839 lists James Hanley of *Roslin Castle* 1834, on bond, native place "London", Catholic, a blacksmith, admitted 4 July Liverpool for Treadmill, disposed of 5 July. Brk of Agt - ? Break of Agreement.

The Parramatta Gaol Entrance Book for 1840 lists James Henley of *Roslin Castle* "1828", on bond, native place "London", Catholic, a blacksmith, admitted 23.07.1840 Liverpool, for iron gang and disposed of to Stockade Parramatta 23.07.1840.

The Parramatta Gaol Entrance Book for 1841 lists James Henley of *Roslin Castle* 1834, on bond, native place "London", Catholic, a blacksmith, admitted 18.10.1841 Liverpool for Treadmill, disposed of 19.10.1841.

The Sydney Herald Thursday 16.12.1841

HYDE PARK BARRACKS' COURT. – The list at this Court, yesterday, was unusually heavy, amounting in all to thirty charges. ... James Hanley, assigned to Mr. Butler, of the Cowpastures, was convicted of having been out of hours without a pass, and sentenced to be worked on the treadmill for two months, and returned to service.

The Darlinghurst Gaol Entrance Book for 1843 lists James Hanley of *Roslin Castle* "1836", born 1815, 5 foot 9¼ inches tall, stout make, pock complexion, brown hair, hazel eyes. No other remarks.

The Sydney Gaol Entrance Book 1846 lists for the Phoenix Hulk Prisoner No. 154 James Hanley of the *Roslin Castle* 1834, on bond, was tried at the Sydney Quarter Sessions on 10.03.1846 for attempting to escape from the Colony and sentenced to 14 years. His year of birth was listed as 1815, height 5 foot 8¼ inches, of stout make, fresh complexion, with brown hair and grey eyes and with M H on his upper right arm. His original conviction was in Surry December 1833 for Highway Robbery, sentenced to Life.

James died 02.02.1863 Dapto, aged 53 years, from natural causes. Death registered as Jerry Henley. Buried 04.02.1863 RC Cemetery West Dapto; undertaker John Caldwell. Witnesses John Nunan and Philip Spittague. No headstone – burial details from death registration.

Profession: Blacksmith

Residence: Cork Ireland c.1810, Surry England 1833, Shaw Town NSW 1834, Liverpool NSW 1837, 1838, Cowpastures 1841, Dapto 1863

If you know of anyone who would like a copy of this newsletter, please pass it on and also have them contact us to be added to the mailing list.

Yours in Illawarra Catholic History
Wendy and Terry Nunan.