

## The Journeys of Mary Murphy

Mary Murphy was born in Count Cork in 1824. Most likely in the village of Ballinhassig, in the province of Munster about 10 kilometres south of Cork City. Mary was one of four children to her mother also Mary and father Joseph Murphy.

From her Con 41 record we know that Mary had been jailed before for stealing clothes and charged with stealing money and setting fire to a house, but was discharged. In 1848, then aged just 24, she teamed up with three other young women, Ellen Gallavan also aged 24, Mary McCarthy aged 20 and McCarthy's younger sister, Julia aged 18. Possibly on Mary's initiative, they set fire to a house as they were later quite proud to state "*For the purpose of being transported.*"

They appeared in County Cork Court on 15<sup>th</sup> September, prosecuted by Mr Kellaher, all being found guilty and receiving their wish with 7 years transportation to Van Diemen's Land. They remained in jail in Cork until removed to Grangegorman Female Penitentiary arriving at 6pm on 7<sup>th</sup> December.

They remained at Grangegorman depot for just on 4 months until joining a large group of women destined to be loaded onto the transport ***Maria*** bound for Van Diemen's Land.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1849, Surgeon **Edward Nolloth** examined 226 women, 56 children and 2 free settlers at the depot and found many of the children unfit for embarkation, some labouring under measles or the debility consequent of that disease, others having a contagious disease of the head (Porrigo).

Over the next 10 days, 166 female convicts and their 35 children along with 2 free settlers and 2 children were embarked in 23 messes on board the ***Maria***.

The free settlers and their children were partitioned off from the prisoners on the starboard side in Midships of the prison deck. On embarkation the women with but few exceptions appeared to be in good health and cheerful.

A matron (Mrs Grogan), her husband and 3 children along with an exceedingly disagreeable man, a Mr Hart, his wife and 6 daughters were also accommodated.

Noletth stated in his report that matron Grogan proved to be very willing, but was not by any means adapted to fulfil the duties of her office.

The ships crew consisted, including Officers, of 29 men and 4 boys. Total number of souls on board was 254.

On April 5<sup>th</sup> at 11 am the ***Maria*** was towed to the Kish Light. Then during the first night & for the 2 following days, strong breezes from the Southward caused most of the women & children to suffer greatly from sea sickness.

The following routine was generally observed during the voyage to Van Diemen's Land. The cooks were admitted on deck at 5.30AM to light the fires and prepare breakfast. At 6.30 the prisoners &c were roused and at 7 the beds and bedding stowed on the booms. By 8am all hands had washed and cleaned themselves and breakfast was ready.

At 9.30 the prison deck, hospital and other areas were scrubbed and scraped. The berths were all cleaned and nin-tiol-atrol and the solution of Chloride of lime [a white powder used to bleach] was daily employed and it was found to be exceedingly useful in purifying the water closets.

All the people except those employed cleaning were sent on deck and at 10am prayers were read.

The women, during the rest of the morning were employed in knitting, learning to read and write.

At noon dinner. Lime juice was generally turned out and a glass of wine on alternate days given to each woman and a smaller quantity to the children.

During the afternoon until 3pm the women were employed as in the forenoon and at 3.30 beds were taken below. At 4pm supper was generally ready and at 5 prayers read.

At sunset or a little before all prisoners and children were sent below and the prison doors locked. At 8pm surgeon Noleth went round to inspect the prison and the doors were finally secured for the night.

During the voyage they had a great number of wet days, particularly for 16 days whilst becalmed near the equator and during the last 3 weeks of the voyage. The thermometer when at the highest was 32° c and at the lowest 4° c with occasional hail, sleet and very strong breezes.

They did not put into any port and finally arrived at Hobart Town on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1849.

The next day, 4 prisoners and one infant were sent on shore to the Colonial Hospital. On the 25<sup>th</sup> 3 prisoners by order of the Comptroller General were sent on shore to undergo punishment for misconduct during the voyage. The conduct of the prisoners in general was good. During the 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> of July, officers of the Comptroller General's office were employed on board compiling the indents and taking a description of the prisoners.

One interesting fact emerges from the women's indents is that Mary Murphy and the McCarthy girls listed Johanna Walsh as their accomplice in the burning of the house, not Ellen Gallivan, possibly they had a falling out with Ellen on the voyage out and had teamed up with Johanna.

Mary in her **Con19** description record was listed as being a housemaid, 5ft 1inch tall, aged 24 with fair completion, oval head and visage, with a

high forehead, dark brown hair, hazel eyes with a noticeable squint, a long nose and a wide mouth.

Finally on the 28<sup>th</sup> July, 155 prisoners were removed to the "**Anson**", convict hulk in New Town Bay making in the whole 165 disembarked from the **Maria** only one of the original having died on the passage out. Mary was presumably kept at the **Anson** until she was given 3<sup>rd</sup> Class status on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1849.

Mary was then assigned to Dr. William Stokell, Hobart Town's leading surgeon and apocothery, who lived in the magnificent "Harrington House" on the corner of Melbourne Street (now Victoria Street) and Harrington Street. Mary worked as a housemaid caring for the Stokell's 2 year old daughter, Annie Margaret and her two young brothers.

However, six months later, Mary blotted her copybook by being found drunk in his premises on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1850. Stokell carted her off to the lower court the next day.

Mary was found guilty and sentenced to one calendar month's imprisonment with hard labour back at the Female Factory by Magistrate Augustus Eardley Willmot.

Mary was then assigned to Charles Bridgen, the Assistant Commissary General and his wife to look after their 3 year old son. Unfortunately this also ended a few months later with Mary back in the lower court before Magistrate Eardley Willmot, charged *with 'having several articles of wearing apparel in her possession to the value of about £4, not accounting satisfactorily for the means with which she purchased them etc.'*

Willmot gave Mary nine months' hard labour back in the Female Factory and she was not to be allowed to enter service in the district of Hobart

again. Her only recorded misdemeanour whilst there at the Factory was spending seven days in the cells for insolence.

After her release at the end of 1851, Mary was transferred to the Campbell Town district, spending some time in the Ross Female Factory before she was assigned to John Duxbury, who ran a public house, an inn at Stony Creek between Campbell Town and Avoca. A few weeks later a child was born to a Mary Murphy, fathered by a Charlice Jones, the baby christened Mary in Avoca Catholic Church in May 1852. The birth not registered with the Registrar Generals Department. Was this our Mary?

Interestingly, within a couple of weeks Mary was back at Ross, where she received her Ticket of Leave a month later in August.

I am not sure just when Mary arrived in Oatlands, however, she was soon very friendly with the very well known Solomon Blay. The fact that in his short career as public executioner Solomon had already dispatched 116 persons to meet their maker obviously did not concern Mary greatly.

In January they applied to be married which was approved the next day and even though Mary was a catholic, their Banns were announced the following Sunday by Rev. John Ison in St Peter's Anglican Church, Oatlands and repeated twice more before they were married on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> February 1853.

Solomon was busy the week before, as he had been in Hobart Town to execute two men on the Friday arriving back to Oatlands at the weekend just in time for his wedding.

The day following the wedding, the Hobart Town Courier newspaper humorously reported to its readers to marriage details under the heading, Oatlands.

"t'was the morn of Valentine, When the birds began to prate,"

That the usually quiet township of Oatlands was roused from its lassitude by the gladsome announcement that a marriage in high life, which had been previously more than hinted at in the amatory columns of the Government Gazette, was about to take place.

The affair created a little interest in the township, from the position of the favoured bridegroom (Solomon Blay), who holds the distinguished appointment of "the finisher of the law" for the territory of Van Diemen's Land. They were attended to Church at 8 o'clock (the hour when the bridegroom usually "ties knots" of a different description) by a *highly respectable (?)* couple of the township.

We believe that after a short trip to the metropolis the honeymoon will be spent at the gaol, where the bride, Miss Mary Murphy, resides.

Solomon had certainly been residing in the condemned cells of Oatlands Gaol for some time, free board and lodgings where he carried out his tasks for the Sheriff. He was allowed the freedom to roam Oatlands during the day at will as long as he returned when the gates were securely locked at night.

Just where they lived in their first few years as husband and wife in Oatlands is unclear. Solomon also worked as a constable and was permitted to take possession and reside, much to people's disgust in their houses whilst they were facing court under prosecution. They must have travelled as well, Solomon conducting a small business as a second hand dealer. Mary became involved in a court action in Bothwell when she was assaulted by a well know troublesome women there in August 1855.

But by 1858 they were residing in a skilling, a small addition to the rear of a house owned by Samuel Bailey, on the outskirts of Oatlands. They moved about the town always in rental accommodation, but sometimes even sub-letting the houses they rented.

It appears that Mary utilized her wisdom and common sense to manage the family budget.

Even though she could not read or write Mary opened a bank account by depositing £24 with the Hobart Town Savings Bank in January 1861. The clerk in recording her description matched that of her Con 19 record noting her height, her brown hair, hazel eyes and squint. From the bank records she made regular deposits, sometimes as high as £50, a surprisingly large amount. On other occasions she deposited the exact amount of Solomon's weekly wages. By August 1867 she had amassed the tidy sum of £256-15-6. On new years day 1868 Solomon opened his own Savings Bank account with a transfer of £106-15-6 from Mary's account.

Solomon's occupation had kept him busy travelling on a regular basis by coach to both Hobart and Launceston to carry out his grim public duties. Since their marriage he had executed another 77 men and one woman, Margaret Coghlin. He had finished enough tasks and decided to retire from public duties. His resignation was accepted and with Mary they then planned to get away from Tasmania for good.

So began the next component of Mary's journeys.

The SS Southern Cross, the regular steam ferry to Melbourne, arrived in Hobart on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July 1868. The Blay's had moved to Hobart and on Monday the 27<sup>th</sup> they attended the savings bank, each drawing out all their savings and closing their accounts, a total of £267-2-6.

They next went to the Tasmanian Steamship Company office on the wharf and booked a passage on the Southern Cross, not under the name of Blay but as Mr and Mrs Murphy. Now the mystery deepens as there is also listed an infant with them. The Southern Cross sailed two days later on Wednesday at 4pm arriving in Melbourne on the Friday.

Mr & Mrs Murphy then purchased tickets on the screw steamship Somersetshire which departed from alongside Sandridge Railway Pier for London five days later on the Wednesday afternoon.

From a letter which Solomon wrote to Governor DuCane in 1870, he takes up the journey story

*"Having saved a little money... I purchased a cottage and a piece of ground outside London believing that I could live unknown and quietly in my retreat – but such was not to be. It soon became whispered about that I was the executioner from Tasmania and as a matter of course there was no more peace for me in the land of freedom. At last I was obliged to sell my home at a fearful sacrifice to preserve my life and that of those dear to me and return to Tasmania where I would not be molested."*

After arriving back in Melbourne in 1869 on the Roxburgh Castle under the name Mr & Mrs Bray, they quietly returned to Hobart.

They had been away less than 12 months. Solomon asked to be reinstated in his old position, the government quickly agreeing. The Blay's then remained in Hobart renting houses in a variety of streets around North Hobart.

Finally they settled at 80 Argyle Street with a shop attached, diagonally opposite the fire station and very conveniently close to Campbell Street gaol with its adjoining execution yard.

Possibly because of financial problems, but it was 10 years before Mary reopened an account with the savings bank with a cash deposit of £25, drawing little out, but also not depositing much either over the following years.

Mary's ultimate Journey began on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> July 1884 when she passed away during a particularly bad bronchitis epidemic raging in Hobart. Whether the Mercury misspelled her name or more likely Solomon deliberately disguised the family name is open to conjecture.

Laid out at home, her funeral was arranged by undertaker Alex Clark. Mary finally left their Argyle Street residence in the very ornate hearse followed by 5 coaches, presumably filled with her many friends.

Mary, throughout her life had continued as a practicing catholic, attending St Mary's Cathedral in Hobart. Thus young Father Patrick Gleeson from the Cathedral attended and conducted a Catholic graveside service for her burial.

Mary has now rested peacefully in a quiet spot in Cornelian Bay cemetery for 127 years. For some time now I thought it would be fitting that she should at last have some recognition as a remarkable lady married for 30 years to also a extraordinary man in Tasmania's significant penal history.

Hence, a small coarse sandstone monument with a brass plaque attached will be installed on her grave before the end of the year.

**Brian Rieusset**