

Embroidering the Past

William and Sarah Broadbent had six daughters: Charlotte, Mary Ann, Elizabeth, Nancy, Sarah and Eliza. In the Halifax, Yorkshire 1841 census, William was a silk weaver, Sarah a silk winder, while both Charlotte (14) and Mary Ann (10) were working as worsted spinners.

By the 1851 census, the family was split up and, there being so far no found evidence of the mother, Sarah, it is possible she had died. However, Mary Ann had received several dishonourable mentions in newspapers by this time and seems to have taken on prostitution as a way to make a living. On October 10, 1846, *The Leeds Times* tells us about a robbery in Back George Street in Manchester:

ROBBERY IN BACK GEORGE-STREET.—A woman, named Mary Ann Broadbent, was brought before the magistrates on Wednesday last, charged in conjunction with another woman, with picking the pocket of J. Crawford, of Hunslet, whilst in his company, on the night previous. It appeared from Crawford's statement, that he had been taking a glass in some public-house in the town, and on coming out, met the prisoner, Broadbent, who induced him to go to her "residence" in Back George Street. He had in his pocket that night a £5 note, which he missed the following morning. A woman also swore to the prisoner changing a note on the same night, but withal he failed in proving his charge, the bench remarking, he might have lost the note in the public-house, and they should give the doubt in favour of the woman. She was discharged, the magistrates remarking that she had had a narrow escape, and that she might attribute it solely to Crawford being ignorant whether the note was in his possession when first allured into her company. He made no charge against the other female.

COMMITTED TO YORK CASTLE.—Wm. Robinson,

We don't hear more about her until Wednesday 21 August, 1850 almost four years later when the *Manchester Times* mentions her:

"Charles Taylor, who said he came from Ramsbottom, charged Mary Ann Broadbent, a female of the town, with having robbed him on the night previous, whilst intoxicated. He had given her into the custody of the police, but did not wish to press the charge against her. - He was ordered to pay all expenses, and the female was discharged."

Alas, Mary Ann has not yet learnt her lesson and at the Liverpool Assizes on Monday 9th December, 1850, little more than three months later, she is convicted (along with Ann Crowther) of stealing 7/6 from an unknown person in Rochdale and transported for 7 years. In the 1851 census, she and Ann Crowther are to be found at Millbank Prison in London, and on 22 April, they sail on the Aurora II, arriving in VDL on 10 August 1851. The surgeon's report said Mary Ann was "bad".

After starting her penal servitude at New Town Farm, Mary Ann was assigned on 27th September 1851 to William Russell of Risdon Road, but she absconded twice with consequent punishment. In January 1852 she went to Henry Slee of Sandy Bay, but again went AWOL and was apprehended at ½ past 10 pm in a brothel in bed with a man (9 months' hard labour in Cascades). On 10th September after her release she went to work for Mr Featherstone of Antill Street (out after hours – 14 days in cells). On 8th November she was assigned to Richard Hutchinson of Melbourne Street and two months later she again absconded and served another 12 months' hard labour at Cascades. Just before those 12 months were up, Mary Ann was transferred from Cascades to the Ross Female Factory and thence into the employ of G. Wright of Ross in October 1853. However, in November she spent another month at hard labour at the Ross factory for "using obscene language etc..." On January 15th 1854 she absconded and was sentenced to another 12 months' hard labour at the Launceston Female Factory. Upon her release on 1 November 1854 she was assigned to C J Irvine in Launceston, but went back to the House of Correction 4 weeks later for again absconding. Nine months later on 4 October, 1855, presumably after more hard labour at the Launceston factory, she was assigned to Edward Boys of Frederick Street, Launceston.

A month earlier on 12th September 1855, Mary Ann had applied for permission to marry a free man, John Young, but this was not approved. Mary Ann *was* granted her Ticket of Leave on 5 February 1856, though it can't have been for good behaviour! On 18th March 1856, however, she made another application for permission to marry a free man, James Howard Farrar. This was approved and they married in St John Church, Launceston on 7th April, 1856. Surprisingly Mary Ann signed her own name twice on the marriage certificate, although her convict indent said she could neither read nor write. On 7th December 1857 she was free by servitude and her Certificate of Freedom was issued on 11th December 1857.

By my reckoning, in the course of the 4½ years between her arrival in August 1851 and her marriage in April 1856, she worked a total of about 15 months and spent 3¼ years incarcerated in one or other of the Female Factories. In her former life in Yorkshire, Mary Ann had chosen prostitution over the hard labour of the woollen mills. She had little inclination in VDL to become a housemaid when prostitution (and the additional possible spoils) must have been so much more lucrative. Mary Ann never settled down to accept her lot, and her constant rebellion brought her nothing but solitary confinement and hard labour, presumably in the washrooms of the various Female Factories.

In their first year of marriage, James Farrar, Proprietor of the Fraternity Restaurant in St John Street near the Launceston wharf, was once warned about sly grog selling, and twice

convicted. On the first conviction he was fined £25, but on the second he was fined £50 plus costs. In default of immediate payment, he was committed to gaol.

However, they must have recovered financially, because in 1860, James sponsored two of Mary Ann's sisters on single bounty tickets of £16 each. Nancy (my g-g grandmother) and Sarah Broadbent arrived in the colony in October 1860. However, almost immediately, James and Mary Ann moved to Victoria, so perhaps Mary Ann's reunion with her sisters did not live up to expectations. Mary Ann died on 1st May 1868 in Bouverie Street, North Melbourne, aged 35 years, having resided in Victoria for 8 years. The doctor, Edward Barker, stated on her death certificate that she suffered from mental distress for two months, followed by paralysis for two days. On 3rd May 1868, she was buried in Melbourne General Cemetery where she now lies in an unmarked grave. Mary Ann and James had no children.

All in all, I feel sorry for Mary Ann, who never really seemed to achieve happiness or serenity or even acceptance. She continually fought the system and even her husband's largesse in sponsoring her sisters to Launceston seems not to have been a comfort to her. One is reluctant to imagine the private demons she wrestled with on her road to death of "mental distress".

Coincidentally Ann Crowther, her partner in the original crime for which she was transported, died even earlier on 27th February 1860 in Launceston, aged 32.

* * * *

Meanwhile in about the same time frame, my three-greats grandmother was also battling the convict system but with somewhat more success.

On Wednesday 14th May 1851, while Mary Ann was on the high seas in the Aurora II, Ann Henderson, aged about 25, entered a Close in Havannah Street, Glasgow, and stole from a washing line a striped cotton shirt belonging to James Mullen, Carver and Gelder. She is reputed to have tried to pawn the shirt at a Broker's shop, but Alexander McAllister declined to buy it because it was suspiciously damp.

The next day Ann Henderson, who worked as a carder in a cotton mill, was recognised in Mr McLean's Spirit Cellar in Havannah Street and taken into custody. She declared her innocence, claimed never to have had a shirt in her possession on Wednesday, and said she had pawned a shift in Mr McAllister's Broker's Shop.

On Friday 16th May, a warrant was granted to imprison Ann in Glasgow gaol and search her living quarters in New Vennel, Glasgow. At her trial, it was revealed that Ann had been previously sentenced to 30 days' imprisonment on 26 April 1848 for stealing 3 shirts from a line, and on 7 August 1850 to nine months for stealing a black merino gown, a cotton sheet, a cotton shift, a striped cotton shirt, two tartan shawls, two printed cotton aprons, a pair of worsted stockings and sundry other articles. In the March 1851 census, Ann is to be found in North Prison, Glasgow. Now, almost immediately upon her

release from prison, she had again stolen – what was it about these striped cotton shirts on washing lines that was so irresistible? The shirt, by the way, was never recovered.

Tried on 29 September, 1851, Ann was sentenced to 7 years' transportation and departed Woolwich on the Sir Robert Seppings on 18 March 1852 with her 5-year-old daughter. I wonder who was looking after Margaret during these months of imprisonment in Glasgow? Poor Margaret twice on the journey suffered "obstipatio" and was admitted to the ship's hospital. On her indent, Ann is described as 5/2", aged 26, she could read but not write, and is listed as a housemaid. I don't believe she'd ever worked as a housemaid in her life! She claimed to have been born in Ayr, though we've never managed to find her birth record. Her daughter's father is recorded as George or John Bain of Glasgow, she had two sisters, Mary and Hannah, whom we can't trace, and her offences included stealing a shirt, 9 months for housebreaking and being 5 weeks "on the town", though how she managed that when she was only out of gaol for a week before being apprehended again, I cannot imagine. Her surgeon's report was "excellent and exemplary" and she had a distinguishing feature of "AxH" tattooed on her right arm.

Five days after their arrival in Hobart on 8 July 1852, Margaret was admitted to the Queen's Orphanage, aged 6 years and one month. In later years she confided that she had been locked in with other girls at night (in some unspecified place), and they had to pee in their boots and empty them out in the morning.

Meanwhile Ann was indentured to G. A. Buckland of Arthur Street for 2 days, but on 17th July she was accused of being under the influence of liquor and refusing to return to her service, and sentenced to 6 months' hard labour (in the Cascades washing room?). The punishment book records that she spent 3 days in solitary for neglect of duty on 26 October, 3 days on bread and water and 14 days in "punishment dress" for neglect of duty on 6 January 1853. After that she was indentured to Charles Friend of Sandy Bay. In March she had 7 days in the cells for being drunk and out after hours, was sentenced to 3 months' hard labour for being absent without leave, and for talking in the Apartment, had 3 days on bread and water and was 10 days confined to the Apartment..

In May 1853 she was indentured to G. Cox of Black Marsh. At the end of 1853 she applied to marry Henry Taylor (1842 Tortoise). The marriage took place at Green Ponds (Kempton) on 4 January 1854. She was granted her Ticket of Leave in December of that year, and on 15th March 1855, after almost 3 years, went back to the Queen's Orphanage to pick up Margaret, now aged 9.

And here is where Ann begins embroidering her past. One branch of the family was told that Ann was married to an abusive husband back in England, had lost several babies because of his violence, and that she had emigrated with Margaret to escape from him.

Margaret's surname changed from Bain to Buchanan after leaving the Queen's Orphanage, and another branch of the family was told that she was the daughter of the Rev. Angus Buchanan who was on his way to VDL to a post in the Presbyterian Church, but that he died shipboard. The story goes that Ann and her daughter were taken under

the protection of the head of the Presbyterian Church upon their arrival in VDL. Is it any wonder that we kept running into brick walls when we were researching our family history?

Between 1855 and 1858 Ann had a chequered career as she moved about with Henry Taylor, with her ticket of leave being revoked and reinstated a number of times for being drunk (fined 20/-), for the “indecent exposure of her person” (hard labour) – did she bare her bottom in the time-honoured way of showing disrespect, I wonder? – for being in a public house on a Sunday and for “misconduct in leading an idle and disorderly life” in Oatlands (hard labour). As a last (I would have thought foolhardy) act of rebellion, she absconded for a month in May 1858. Perhaps she was running away from Henry Taylor. She gained her Freedom by Servitude on 5th June, 1858 – her seven years were up! Henry Taylor was granted a Conditional Pardon in May 1859, and then disappeared from records.

Nothing was heard of Ann and Margaret for the next 6 years, but Margaret’s marriage to Jesse Larkin (1850 Nile – stealing and trying to sell a horse) took place in the Campbelltown Presbyterian Church on 16th September, 1864, only 7 months after Jesse had been widowed. He had been married to Mary Lalor (John Calvin, 1848). Jesse could read and write and signed his name very legibly. Margaret signed with a cross, but there are postcards written by Margaret in a flowing hand in the family collection, so somewhere along the way she learnt to read and write. The witnesses to Margaret and Jesse’s marriage ceremony were Ann (masquerading as Ann Daisley) and Thomas Daisley (1846, Palmyra). Jesse was, in fact, about Ann’s age, but it seems it was a happy marriage and Margaret loved Jesse dearly, a fact which is clearly evidenced by her words on his tombstone.

Jesse’s story was also fabricated. He claimed to have emigrated *from* America. In fact, his family had migrated *to* America from the little village of Cranbrook in Kent after Jesse’s transportation, possibly to escape the stigma of owning up to a convict son, which would have made their lives less than comfortable in a small town where everyone knows everyone else.

Margaret gave birth to the first of her twelve children 7 months after their marriage.

Ann and Thomas Daisley (now a shepherd) were married in St Luke’s Church, Campbelltown on 13th February 1866, both signing with a cross. We have never established whether Henry Taylor died or if Ann married bigamously. Ann claimed to be a widow when she married Thomas Daisley. In fact, he also mysteriously disappeared from the records after their marriage.

Margaret and Jesse Larkin had twelve children in all, eight daughters who lived to marry and have families. So by the time Ann Henderson died in Perth on 30 June 1898, possibly aged 75, she had a large extended family. The death certificate claims she was widow of Thomas Daisley, a hawker.

Known to the family as “Annie Buchanan” or “Mrs Daisley”, she is said to have smoked a clay pipe and she went regularly to the Perth pub to pick up a bottle of tippie. She had a trunk full of beautiful clothes. When her grand-daughter, my great-grandmother, Annie Larkin, asked her where they came from, she said, “Oh Annie, I’ve seen better days!” It’s my suspicion that Ann Henderson continued her pilfering ways, but couldn’t wear the clothes for fear of being caught.

Now those fairy stories of Ann and Margaret’s background were so deeply ingrained in the family history that members of my grandmother’s generation recounted them as facts. I believe that embroidering the past allowed both Ann and Margaret to hold their heads up and live proudly in the community.

Background reading:

Alexander, Alison, *Tasmania’s Convicts*, Allen & Unwin, 2010

Frost, Lucy, ed., *Convict Lives at the Ross Female Factory*, Convict Press Inc., 2011

Hood, Susan, *Transcribing Tasmanian Convict Records*, Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority, 2003

Many thanks for research assistance to Ian Robson and Bronwyn Bennett