

## Isabella Hutchinson and Orphan Children

By Caroline Haigh, October 2018

**Hello, today I will be providing a case study of convict Isabella Hutchinson and her children and grandchildren who were enrolled in the Orphan Schools. My particular interest is what I have called the 'second-generation' orphans, the grandchildren of convict women who also found themselves residents of the Orphan Schools.**

On 21<sup>st</sup> January 1848, at the height of the Irish potato famine, Thomas Ford, described by *The Londonderry Standard* as 'a little boy' but believed to be 14 years of age, stole 20 Pounds in a paper parcel and 39 calico butter cloths, valued at one penny each. The police found these items in his home where Thomas lived with his widowed mother, Isabella Hutchinson, my 3X great grandmother. Thomas was convicted of theft, his mother of receiving stolen goods and they were both sentenced to transportation for 7 years. They never saw each other again.

Despite being listed on the Irish National Archives' *Ireland-Australia Transportation Database*, Thomas Ford apparently never arrived in Van Diemen's Land (or any other Australian colony). Family oral history has it that Thomas ended up, surprisingly, in America. One possible scenario, is that Thomas was one of the many Irish male prisoners sent to Bermuda to serve their sentences, when that colony was being established. The convicts slept in their hulks in the bay each night and came ashore each day, working in hot, humid conditions. Conditions were so bad and the work quarrying stone to build a breakwater was so difficult, that many of these prisoners had their sentences considerably reduced. Serving his sentence in Bermuda was possibly Thomas's pathway to the United States, although it has yet to be proven.

Following her conviction, Thomas' mother, Isabella Hutchinson, was admitted to the infamous Grangegorman Depot in Dublin on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1848, the only exclusively female prison in the British Isles. Three-weeks after she was admitted, Isabella was joined by her children, 13-year-old Jane Ford, 4-year-old James Ford and 6-year-old Isabella Ford, my great-great-grandmother. It is believed that an older daughter remained in Northern Ireland. It was another five weeks at the depot before they sailed. The family found themselves on board the *Kinnear* headed for Van Diemen's Land, where the children were duly removed to the Orphan Schools upon their arrival.

Convict Isabella Hutchinson was aged 44 when she arrived in Van Diemen's Land. A former servant in County Tyrone, she was about 5 feet 3, with sandy brown hair, high forehead, oval face and a pock-marked complexion.

Isabella's Convict Conduct record is a clean slate. She served her probation on board the *Anson* hulk on the River Derwent and there are no misdemeanours recorded against her name, nor the names of any assignments she undertook. The only notes on her conduct record are her Ticket of Leave granted 12<sup>th</sup> August 1851, (awarded after just two and a half years served), her marriage to Joseph Hadley in 1853, her Conditional Pardon granted two years later and information regarding the inquest into her death in 1873.

In 1853 Isabella remarried. She was 49 years of age, although her age was recorded as a very youthful 30 on her marriage certificate! Isabella's new husband, Joseph Hadley, is a fascinating character - a very heavily-tattooed, gentleman's groom, turned highway robber. His Convict Conduct record noted that he had received 500 lashes before he had even left British shores, but his conduct on board the *Aurora* en route to Van Diemen's Land was described as 'exemplary'. He was elected as Schoolmaster for the Main Prison on board the *Aurora* and Music Master for the boys, for the duration of the voyage. Clearly an educated man. I have found no information, unfortunately, regarding Joseph and Isabella after their marriage and Isabella was recorded as a widow when she died.

We can tell from birth records of her grandchildren where Isabella was the informant, and her later involvement with admitting her grandchildren to the Orphan Schools, that Isabella Hutchinson took a very active interest in the welfare of her children and grandchildren. Other than that, we know little about her life in Van Diemen's Land.

Inquest information reveals that Isabella was working as a domestic up until the day she died, aged 69. She collapsed from a massive heart attack near the corner of Liverpool and Campbell Streets, in Hobart on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1873. Passers-by dragged her to the nearby Union Hotel, where she was subsequently identified as deceased by a doctor. An inquest followed, and her body was formally identified by her eldest daughter Jane, at that time married to a saw miller John Southers and usually residing many miles away in far south Tasmania.

Isabella Hutchinson's daughter, my great-great grandmother, Isabella Ford, spent 6 1/2 years at the Queen's Orphan School. (you can see in this photo, where she is aged about 50, how much Isabella Ford resembles her mother's description of oval face and high forehead).

In December 1859, five years after Isabella Ford's discharge from the Orphan School, there were investigations into the actions of Orphan School Matron, Mrs Smyth, regarding allegations of withholding food and violent behaviour towards the orphans over a number of years. The Matron was known for frequently hitting the children about the head and shoulders with either a cane, a lead-tipped horse whip or the frame of the children's writing slate. She frequently beat children in the hospital for allegedly feigning illness and at least three of these children subsequently died. The investigation into the Matron's behaviour was reported in *the Mercury* on 15 December 1859. The *Mercury* noted that six years previously in 1853, 12-year-old Mary Reid was hit on the back of the head three or four times with her slate, by Mrs Smyth, an action which was witnessed by my great-great-grandmother, Isabella Ford. Isabella was a Monitor at the Orphan School at this time, one of the older girls, and she was asked to provide evidence to the doctor regarding Mrs Smyth's behaviour and poor Mary's subsequent death following this assault.

After initially being given an 'unqualified acquittal' by a Commission of Inquiry, His Excellency, the Governor, Sir Henry Young, overturned the acquittal ruling against Matron Smyth. He stated:

*1<sup>st</sup>. I convict you of misappropriating food; 2<sup>nd</sup>. I convict you of wilful lying; 3<sup>rd</sup>. I convict you of duplicity; 4<sup>th</sup>. I convict you of administering excessive punishment; 5<sup>th</sup>. I convict you of delegating your duties to an irresponsible servant; 6<sup>th</sup>. I convict you of impertinence and disrespect towards the Superintendent; and because you have been guilty of these things and have thus brought sickness, and suffering, and sorrow, upon some hundreds of unprotected and unpitied orphans, I feel it my duty, in order to shew my utter detestation and abhorrence of your conduct, to reprimand you.*

Clearly, my great-great-grandmother Isabella Ford was enrolled at the Orphan School at a particularly difficult time and must have experienced and witnessed some very unpleasant scenes.

Isabella Ford was discharged from the Orphan School on 15 January 1855 to her mother Isabella Hutchinson, when she was 13. How Isabella then lived is not known. By age 23, Isabella had given birth to a daughter Emily, whose father Thomas Spence died two years later in 1867. It is believed that baby Emily also died young or was adopted. That same year, 1867, Isabella began a relationship with cabinet maker Francis Johnson Butterfield and they had a son, George Butterfield, born May 1868 - my great-grandfather. The family story is that Francis Butterfield played the piano at the Theatre Royal and Isabella sang alongside him and also danced. Yet just four months after the birth of their son George, Francis Butterfield married Catherine Frederick and they moved permanently to Dunedin, NZ leaving Isabella to fend for herself with baby George.

Isabella Ford was very fortunate when she met an older former convict Isaac Dann two years later, when she was 27. Isaac had two teenage girls from his first marriage, who unfortunately were both seriously unwell with TB. Isaac and Isabella Ford had tough lives during the 1870s and 1880s, labouring, and living at a cottage, at the Saltwater River Coal Mine near Port Arthur, now known as the Coal Mines Historic Site, and then working as timber cutters at Southport. Sadly, both Isaac's teenage daughters died not long after he met Isabella, but Isaac and Isabella were able to have five more children together. Isaac passed away in 1893, aged 69, but Isabella Ford lived another 30 years as a widow. It is understood that as an older woman Isabella lived with her son George and also with her daughter Ester at National Park. She apparently wrapped her few possessions in an old sheet.

Little is known about Isabella's brother James Ford, who was just four years old when he was admitted to the Orphan School. He was discharged to his mother Isabella Hutchinson three years before his sister Isabella Ford, when he was still only 8 years old, and 8 months after his mother had earned her Ticket of Leave. There is no oral history about James, and there is no evidence that he was in Hobart when his mother passed away. No death certificate has been found for him. I have identified two men called James Ford aged about twenty that left Hobart for Victoria and I suspect that my James may be one of these men, but it requires further investigation.

Convict Isabella Hutchinson's eldest daughter, Jane Ford, was enrolled at the Orphan School for just under one year, before she was apprenticed to Leonard Pearson in Hobart in 1849

when she was about 14. Pearson was a cabinet-maker and upholsterer and an active community member, frequently serving on local juries. After her apprenticeship, Jane became involved with James Hackett, who was possibly an older man and former convict, with whom she had four illegitimate children including daughters, Rachel Ford and Mary Ann Ford. James Hackett abandoned Jane leaving her 'truly destitute' and living in 'wretched conditions' according to Jane's mother, Isabella Hutchinson. Isabella Hutchinson admitted her grand-daughters, 6-year-old Rachel and 3-year-old Mary Ann, to the Orphan School in July 1859 (ten years after their mother Jane was a resident there). Rachel and Mary Ann's brother John had died as a baby and their sister Jane was too young to be admitted to the Orphan School. It is not known what happened to this child.

Although their mother Jane Ford married John Southers in 1864 she did not remove her children Rachel and Mary Ann from the orphan school. Perhaps she wanted them to gain an education denied to her. Certainly, her daughters performed well, with Rachel winning the Needlework Prize in 1863 and Mary Ann winning the Infant Prize in 1862.

Rachel Ford was discharged in June 1865 after six years at the school, aged 12. She was apprenticed to John Williams, of Evandale, presumably as a domestic servant. Nine years later Rachel married fisherman Joseph Hughes, raising her family in the Hastings/Lune River area, near Southport.

Mary Ann Ford, daughter of Jane Ford, and grand-daughter of convict Isabella Hutchinson, was just 3 when she was admitted to the Orphan School in July 1859. She spent 10 years at the school and would not have known her mother at all. At 13, Mary Ann was apprenticed to JJ Hayes of Bridgewater and then a year later was reassigned to a Mrs Hallam. Mrs Hallam appears to be Maria Hallam of Macquarie Street, Hobart. In 1865, four years before Mary's apprenticeship, Mrs Hallam was before the courts after an orphan child in her care escaped to her birth mother because she did not like her position with Mrs Hallam. Mary was likely still apprenticed to Mrs Hallam when her grandmother Isabella Hutchinson died in Hobart in 1873. The rest of Mary's extended family, including her mother Jane, were living outside Hobart at that time, so Mary remained constantly isolated from her wider family.

Mary Ann Ford married billiard marker, Frederick Keasley in Hobart in March 1885 aged 27. Just three weeks after her marriage, Mary went searching for her husband in a brothel he regularly frequented in Watchorn Lane, Hobart, near the Odeon Theatre today. Her husband, Keasley, entered the premises, saw Mary there and asked her to sign a cheque. When Mary refused, her husband beat her, blackening both her eyes. The City Police Court found Mary's husband guilty of assault and fined him. Soon after, Keasley abandoned Mary or she left him, triggering a terrible decline in her circumstances. Within six months of her marriage, on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1885, Mary Ann was admitted to the Hospital for the Insane in New Norfolk for 'being of unsound mind'. She was found in 'filthy condition', unable to care for herself and had recently been prostituting herself to survive. Mary's admission documents noted that she was suffering from 'melancholia' and was a pauper. Within another six months, Mary had died at the Asylum at just 28 years of age from hydatids in her liver, a condition caught through contact with infected dog faeces. No doubt the squalor she had been living in prior to her admission to the Asylum contributed to her death. Mary died far away from the families of her sister Rachel, her mother Jane Ford and her aunt

Isabella Ford, who were all residing south of Hobart at that time. Whether they knew of Mary's dire situation is not known.

Mary Ann's story is particularly poignant, with her childhood spent institutionalised and away from her family, and her apparent ability, suggested by her Infant School prize, resulting only in marriage to an unworthy individual and tragic personal circumstances.

My family story of convict Isabella Hutchinson and her children and grandchildren who passed through the Orphan schools, raises some questions for me. How well did the Orphan Schools equip the children – particularly the girls – for life after school? How often were grandchildren of convict women admitted to the Orphan School? What were the causes of second-generation orphan school admissions? How often was destitution a factor?

These are questions I hope to research further in the future.

Thank You.