

Condemned to a Lifetime of Institutional Living

Izod Darcy King

1848—1920

By Jann Niven, October 2018.

Mystery and conjecture attend the birth and naming of Izod Darcy King. On board the vessel *'Australasia'* in 1849¹ he was listed, as a child, six months old. He was with his mother, Nappy King, at the Grangegorman Prison in Dublin in April 1849² as they waited to be transferred to a ship to take them to Van Dieman's Land. In the records he is named as **Hyson King**, and nine months old.

What was his crime and sentence that dogged his steps from birth to death?

His crime was to be blind, whether congenital or acquired, to a mother convicted of a felony, and his sentence was to a lifetime in institutions in Tasmania.

From the distance with which we are viewing the health of Izod, we cannot accurately diagnose why he was blind.³ Blindness could have been present at birth because of congenital abnormalities, cataract, infantile glaucoma, optic nerve lesions, Albinism, and cancers. Maternal infections or a Vitamin A deficiency as a cause of blindness are known today.

Malnutrition in the mother mainly causes low birth weight and normal development to be retarded, but infections transmitted in the birth passage during delivery, and head trauma after birth can also cause blindness. Not having any accurate information, except that it is believed that Izod was¹¹ *'blind from infancy'*, the cause, other than congenital blindness, could be the Vitamin A deficiency caused by the malnutrition conditions during the Irish famine years. Then fish, milk, eggs, carrots and green leafy vegetables were in short or non-existent supply to those who could not pay for them.

Vitamin A is contained in breast milk in quantities according to the mother's state of nutrition. Many studies have been documented in undeveloped countries⁴ showing that once breast feeding ceases, or if the maternal store of Vitamin A was already low, that there is the risk of a rapid descent into blindness unless Retinol injections or milk containing Vitamin A is supplied. Nutrition knowledge in the 1800's was poor, although, in the case of Scurvy, which occupied the minds of the Surgeon's on the convict ships, it was known that the juice of limes was sufficient to prevent this disease.

Once Izod went onto prison rations in the nursery when Nappy was put out to service, the lack of sufficient Vitamin A may have been the cause. Whatever the cause, blindness in infants has an adverse effect on growth and development⁴, for 75% of early learning occurs from vision.

There is no record of a Baptism, and his unusual first and second names given to him by Nappy, have puzzled. A reasonable explanation is sought. 'Izod' is almost unknown, except for Kevin *Izod* O'Doherty, (named after **his** own Grandfather), of the Free Ireland Movement, and briefly, before conviction, co-editor of the '*Irish Tribune*'.

No reading of Kevin O'Doherty's life story gives any indication of his movements around the mid 1840's, nor whether he took part in the gatherings in Galway, or even visited Clifden on the west coast of Ireland where Nappy King lived. The rest of Kevin's life is well documented, since he, also, was transported to Tasmania as a state prisoner in 1849. Why Nappy seized on this first name is a mystery, but it is reasonable to suppose that this is where 'Izod' came from.

'Darcy' raises even more questions. Nappy's Convict Indent which accompanied her on her travel to Tasmania on the '*Australasia*' and during her servitude, notes that she lived with Mr Hyson. Here, imagination has taken flight. With her Irish accent, was 'Hyson' the translation of Hyacinth? Hyacinth D'Arcy was the name of one of the local gentry who owned Clifden Castle.

He was well regarded for his untiring efforts and his many letters to inform Dublin and the Relief Commission of the situation in Clifden and the surrounding areas during the famine years. He too, did not fare well during the famine, and was in severe financial difficulties which resulted in the sale of much of his property in the Encumbered Estates' Court.

There were several other related D'Arcy family members in the Clifden area. So, is this the surname source of Izod's middle name?

When the vessel '*Australasia*' reached Hobart in late September 1849, Nappy and Izod were transferred to the Dynnyrne Nursery.⁵ There they stayed together for some unknown time before being transferred to the Cascades Female Factory, as Nappy was deemed to be ready for service. She was contracted out to Mary Gormley in Murray Street, Hobart on 1st January 1851.⁶

The first shock was to be left alone in the Female Factory as a toddler without any further attention from his mother, dependant on others for his care for most of 1851. Whether his blindness was evident then, is not recorded.

The next upheaval was to be transferred to the Infant School at the Queen's Orphanage⁷ on the 8th December 1851, along with eight other small children from the Female Factory. The Infant School was in the same building as the Female School of the orphanage. Izod was three and a half years old and entirely dependent on the kindness or otherwise, of a new set of strangers, and a new building to learn to navigate, if his sight was/or had deteriorated.

Unlike many others, he survived the rigours of early orphanage life, and four years later, on 2nd April 1856⁷ he was transferred to the Male Orphan School when he was almost eight years old. For the first time, it is noted that he is blind in the entry Register. This was another dependant situation, a new set of strangers and rules, and a different building to learn to move around in.

An 1857 published report in the *Australian Medical Journal* (published by the Medical Society Victoria No V1 April 1857) and compiled by Dr Edward Hall in Tasmania, about

conditions in the Queen's Orphanage, Hobart, received considerable comment in the local newspapers⁸. Dr Hall had gathered the relevant statistics in 1855, making comment about the disparity between the higher number of child deaths in the orphanage with that of the children outside in the community. He stated that the children in the orphanage were housed in over-crowded and ill ventilated dormitories, received inadequate and inappropriate for age food rations, and shared water and towels many times over which rapidly spread infections.

Izod survived. There is a blank space alongside his name on the Admission Register where 'to whom discharged' was listed, so it is not known how long he stayed there, or where he was sent on being discharged.

Neither have we been able to discover whether his mother Nappy, during her periods of 'free' time from duties at the homes she was contracted to work at in Hobart, ever managed to visit him.

The Police Gazette⁹ recorded that Izod was discharged from the Paupers' Depot at Port Arthur on 19 November 1870. His condition, as noted in the notice, was *'free, a native'*. As the Paupers Depot was not constructed until 1864, it may be supposed that Izod had remained at the Male Orphan School at the Queen's Orphanage until at least 1864 when he was about sixteen years of age, before being sent to the Pauper's Depot.

After being discharged from Port Arthur in 1870, Izod's whereabouts are unknown until he surfaced in a short report in the *'Launceston Examiner'* on Monday 20 May 1873. An Ann Gavin was brought up on a charge of having stolen a pipe, the property of Izod Darcy, or King, a blind man. Ann was eventually discharged for want of evidence. It seems that he had made his own way to Launceston and we do not know the reason why there was a move to the north of Tasmania, nor whether it was prompted by officialdom or family members now living there.

Three years later, Izod was admitted on 30 October 1876¹⁰ to the Launceston Pauper Establishment. No documents have been discovered that explained the reason for his admission to the Asylum.

By 1876, his Aunt Kitty was a widow and presumably still living in Launceston with his grown cousin Charlotte Ball. His mother, Nappy was married and living in Ulverstone—and not without her problems as discovered in her story. His step-brother John and step-sister Elizabeth were also married and living on the central north coast of Tasmania.

The Launceston Invalid Asylum was established in 1868 by refurbishing the Military Barracks in what is now known as Royal Park, but it was closed down, demolished, and developed into a park sometime in the late 1800's and opened officially in 1912 as Royal Park.

The Asylum housed destitute males with congenital defects, from birth, injury or disease. Treatment and care were very different then, and discipline and order was emphasised with attention to cleanliness and a need for calmness. The Asylum was under the control of the Superintendent of the Launceston Penal Establishment.

As a twenty-nine year old blind person, Izod must have satisfied the medical authorities that he was capable of leaving to manage on his own, for he was discharged at his own request on 17th January 1877.¹⁰ His freedom was short lived.

On 15 March 1878¹¹ Izod was then sent as 'a person of unsound mind' under a Justice's Order from the Launceston Invalid Depot, to the New Norfolk Insane Asylum and admitted on 22nd March 1878 with the diagnosis of Amentia which had existed for the past six weeks. In the late 1800's this term usually denoted an individual born with mental deficiencies. According to the Admission Register, his initial examination recorded that he was a pauper, blind, single, twenty-six years of age, a Roman Catholic residing in Launceston for many years. Sadly, no known relatives were recorded.

Izod's mental state had definitely deteriorated. He was delusional, rendered his clothing, he was restless and sleepless whilst also refusing to eat. By 26 March 1876, with no

treatment detailed, it was recorded that he seemed better and was able to talk coherently, eat and sleep normally and answer questions rationally and readily. Izod was removed to the front part of the Men's Wards at New Norfolk¹¹ on 28 May 1878, and from the Admission Register, appears to have existed there without further mental changes until 26 August 1880 which was the extent of the Case Book examined.

Interestingly, his mother, Nappy King (Nappy/Belinda Pow) was also admitted to the New Norfolk Insane Asylum on 19 May 1882¹². Her condition was for Dementia and one wonders whether mother and son ever crossed paths within the asylum grounds, or whether they even recognised each other?

Like many Colonial Institutions, New Norfolk suffered from overcrowding. Over proceeding years, many plans had been drawn up for much needed improvements, but were shelved due to want of funds. In 1883 a Royal Commission sat to consider the State of Lunatic Asylums in Tasmania.¹³ Many deficiencies, apart from the overcrowding were identified. Amongst the complaints noted was that there was poor separation between violent and quiet patients, poor light and ventilation; inadequate conditions for the fee-paying patients, and contradictory opinions of treatment were being offered.

Izod Darcy King was discharged from the New Norfolk Asylum, with his condition 'relieved' on 12 July 1890.¹¹

Izod came full circle back to the Queen's Orphanage now renamed either the New Town Charitable Society 1879—1912 or New Town Infirmary 1912—1934. There are no details for this Admission available in the Tasmanian Archives.

Izod died at New Town Infirmary 15 July 1920¹⁴ and was buried in an unmarked and unidentified grave site within the Roman Catholic B section at the Cornelian Cemetery. No further information has been obtained as to payment for the plot and the burial. The Tasmanian Roman Catholic Diocese Archivist in Hobart was unable to locate any details.