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# Out of sight, out of mind: Ex-convict female paupers incarcerated in Queensland's benevolent asylums

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The establishment of Queensland's first establishment for paupers, the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum on Stradbroke Island, led to over 18,000 males and 3,000 females being transferred by ferry from Brisbane's bayside to their island exile between 1865 and 1946. Among their number were at least 148 male and nineteen female ex-convicts who had once served sentences of transportation in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. Of these, at least ten male inmates had served colonial sentences at Moreton Bay, with the remainder arriving in the district after the closure of the penal settlement in 1839. However, there is no evidence that any of the nineteen female emancipists admitted to Dunwich were former Moreton Bay prisoners. In addition to these women, Ann Jane Webb, originally identified as an ex-convict in the first Brisbane Gaol register, was later reported in a local newspaper to have died in the Rockhampton Benevolent Asylum in 1897.<sup>1</sup> In total, my research has established that twenty ex-convict women were admitted to Queensland benevolent institutions prior to 1900. Although the number is small, the detailed admissions registers of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, as historian Daniel McKay has noted, offer tantalising glimpses of the lives of ex-convicts. Recording each inmate's final years, they provide 'tantalizing hints to long lives lived, or of bigger stories untold'.<sup>2</sup> In this article I am concerned mostly with the emancipist women, and some of the men, who can be identified as

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Jane Webb per '*Mary Ann* of London [sic]' (1839), No. 198, 20 November 1859, Register of Prison Admissions, H. M. Gaol, Brisbane, 3 January 1850 to 3 February 1864, Queensland State Archives (QSA), Series ID 10826, 2917; *Morning Bulletin*, 11 June 1897, p. 5. See also historical death image of Ann Jane Webb, died 6 May 1897, Rockhampton Benevolent Asylum, Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (QRBDM), 1897/C/3575. There was no woman named Ann Jane Webb on board the *Mary Ann* (1839) and she cannot be linked with any of the women on board. *Mary Ann* 5 (1839), Printed Indents, State Archives New South Wales, Sydney (SANSW), X642.

<sup>2</sup> D. McKay, 'Dunwich Benevolent Asylum', 12 August 2013, <studentsatthe archives.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/dunwich-benevolent-asylum/> (12 March 2016).

being admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum. These stories form an underexplored and underrated aspect of Queensland's colonial history.

Indeed, the registers of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum provide a treasure trove of genealogical and historical clues to the backgrounds of female ex-convicts, revealing maiden names, as well as details about parents, husbands and children, and some account of each woman's 'History' prior to admission. They allow us to see beyond what historian Tamsin O'Connor termed the 'damning brevity' of the convict indents which reduced each convict to a crime and a trade.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Mary Donnelly, described in the indent of the *Numa* (1834) as a fifteen-year-old kitchen maid from Tyrone convicted of 'man robbery' — whose sister Ann Donnelly and brother-in-law Charles Power had already been transported — is revealed in the Dunwich admission register to be Mary Watkins, a sixty-six-year-old woman with 'Senile Debility' whose children were 'all dead'. She lived at Aramac, over 1,100 kilometres north-west of Brisbane, where her second husband was employed as a station hand.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the indent of the *John Renwick* (1838) tells us that Jane Doyle was a nineteen-year-old pickpocket from Liverpool with 'PFJTED 7 yrs 7y' tattooed on her left arm and two brothers already transported. In the asylum registers she is transformed into sixty-year-old Jane Perryman, admitted in 1881, less than a week after her husband, John Perryman, a shoemaker and sailor who had been paralysed for eight years.<sup>5</sup> These extra — and extraordinary — details provide so much more than 'the usual genealogical moments between birth and death that characterise convict and colonial life'.<sup>6</sup> Rather, they provide vital insights into the last years and days of those whose lives appear to have been largely defined and damned by transportation and institutionalisation. Further, hiding within these shortest of micro-narratives — some of

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<sup>3</sup> T. O'Connor, 'Raising Lazarus', in L. Frost and H. Maxwell-Stewart (eds), *Chain Letters: Narrating Convict Lives*, Carlton (Vic), 2001, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Donnelly per *Numa* (1834), Printed Indents, SANSW X636; Mary Watkins (née Donnelly), No. 140, 4 February 1882, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>5</sup> Jane Doyle per *John Renwick* (1838), SANSW Printed Indents, X641; Jane Perryman (née Doyle), No. 114, 5 April 1881, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520; John Perryman, No. 819, 31 March 1881, Dunwich Male Admission Register, QSA, 9518.

<sup>6</sup> T. O'Connor, 'Who do we think we are? The perils of writing family history as national history', *History Australia*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2016, p. 454.

which appear to be an abbreviated transcript of a female ex-convict's own words — are the whispers of each woman's unique voice.

During its eighty-year lifespan, from 1865 to 1946, the asylum on Stradbroke Island housed over 21,000 men, women and children, with peak occupation occurring in 1903 when there were 1,600 residents.<sup>7</sup> Inmates ranged from Moreton Bay's earliest pioneers and settlers, including free emigrants and ex-convicts, to soldiers who fought in the Crimean War (1853-1856), the Indian Mutiny (1857-1858) and World War I (1914-1918).<sup>8</sup> Most were elderly and infirm paupers — many drawn from the benevolent wards of the district's hospitals or from the ranks of the homeless — but Dunwich simultaneously operated as 'the safety net, the catch-all for the senile, destitute and abandoned dregs of the colony'.<sup>9</sup> At times the asylum also housed teens and adults who had incurable or terminal illnesses, as well as those who were blind, paralysed, crippled, mentally disabled or mentally ill, or were diabetics, epileptics, consumptives, lepers or inebriates.<sup>10</sup> Even orphaned and disabled children were temporarily housed among the contagious, dying and occasionally insane or violent inmates of Stradbroke Island.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to the so-called 'deserving' poor 'who toiled stoically towards success, and never abandoned the struggle', the residents of Dunwich were considered 'permanently useless'. For them, according to Queensland historian Raymond Evans, 'nothing but contempt was offered'.<sup>12</sup> Inmates were separated by gender, race and infirmity with

<sup>7</sup> J. B. Goodall, 'Whom nobody owns: The Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, an institutional biography 1866-1946', PhD. thesis, University of Queensland, 1992, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> E. Gondwe, H. Guille and L. Jackson, 'Dunwich asylum mess hall is 100', *Queensland Journal of Labour History*, No. 18, 2014, p. 10; Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 67, 74; A. Rentoul, *Island of a Million Tears: History of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum 1866-1946*, Capalaba (Qld), pp. ix, 257.

<sup>9</sup> McKay, *op. cit.*, np.

<sup>10</sup> R. Evans, 'Charitable institutions of the Queensland government to 1919', MA thesis, University of Queensland, 1970, pp. 150-154; Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-86; McKay, *op. cit.*, np.

<sup>11</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152. For example, in August 1871, ten-year-old Mary Jane Howson, described as 'An Idiot child [sic]', was admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum from the 'Lunatic Reception House Brisbane' before being discharged to the Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum in December 1872. See, Mary Jane Howson, No. 257, Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, Male and Female Admission Register, 1 January 1859 to 26 January 1875, QSA, 9519.

<sup>12</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

sections for women, 'Asiatics' (principally Chinese), the blind, lepers and inebriates. For a period there was also a tent city for consumptives suffering from tuberculosis.<sup>13</sup> In all, over 8,500 asylum inmates (just over 40 per cent) died at the asylum.<sup>14</sup> Of these, 8,246 are known to have received a pauper's burial at the Dunwich Cemetery.<sup>15</sup> This number includes fifteen of the nineteen ex-convict women identified as having been sent to Stradbroke Island.

To date, studies of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum have made only brief references to its ex-convict inmates. In their 2013 article, Elisabeth Gondwe, Howard Guille and Lisa Jackson write that asylum inmates included 'a considerable number of people who had been transported to the Australian colonies'. They refer to 'Johnny Cassim, who was of Indian origin and transported from Mauritius to become an hotelier and respected citizen of Cleveland' — a bayside suburb of Brisbane with an enviable view across the water to Stradbroke Island.<sup>16</sup> However, my research has established that John Vincent Cassim (transported as 'Cassim') was not an inmate of Dunwich.<sup>17</sup> The confusion has probably arisen due to the erection of a memorial to Cassim and his first wife, Irishwoman Mary Cassim (née Tealy or Taylor), at the Dunwich Cemetery.<sup>18</sup> According to Mary's death certificate, she died in Cleveland in 1861 aged forty-five and was buried at the Dunwich Cemetery.<sup>19</sup> When John Cassim died in Cleveland in 1884, his body was also taken by boat across the water to be buried at Stradbroke Island.<sup>20</sup> It was, in fact, Cassim's much

<sup>13</sup> Gondwe, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 8; Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 75, 80-81, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Based on figures provided in Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 411-412.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Environment, Land and Water, Qld, 'Dunwich Cemetery', *Queensland Heritage Register*, <environment.ehp.qld.gov.au/heritageregister/detail/?id=600773> (8 May 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Gondwe, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Cassim per *Layton* (1840), Printed Indents, SANSW X642A.

<sup>18</sup> *Moreton Bay Courier*, 14 February 1861, p. 2; Department of Environment, Land and Water, Qld, *op. cit.*, n.p; J. Gray and F. Lourigan, 'Dunwich Cemetery', *Internment.net: Cemetery Records Online*, <interment.net/data/aus/qld/redland/dunwich/index.htm> (8 May 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Historical death image of Mary Cassim, daughter of John Tealy, died 12 February 1861, Cleveland, Qld, QRBDM, 1861/B/586. A notation on Cassim's 1843 ticket of leave (TL) for Moreton Bay names his wife as 'Mary Taylor'. TL No. 43/2988, 20 December 1843, Ticket of Leave Butts, SANSW 4/4183. The marriage of (John) Cassim and Mary Tealy or Taylor could not be located in Queensland or New South Wales records.

<sup>20</sup> Historical death image of John Vincent Cassim, [parents unknown], died 10 February 1884, Cleveland, Qld, QRBDM, 1884/C/4085; *Brisbane Courier*, 14 February

younger second wife, Annie Cassim (née Rafter), who was admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum in 1921 aged eighty-two with a broken femur. However, while Annie died at Dunwich, she was buried on the mainland at Nudgee Cemetery.<sup>21</sup> Annie Rafter was not born until 1839 and Mary Tealy or Taylor, born in County Cavan in 1816, cannot be confirmed as a convict or free arrival.<sup>22</sup>

Chapter One of Raymond Evans' 1969 Master's thesis focuses on the crucial role that Moreton Bay's convict legacy played in the punitive nature of Queensland's charitable institutions, including the lunatic asylum, benevolent asylum and lazarets. While Evans noted in his conclusion that ex-convict shepherds 'formed the largest occupational group of lunatic inmates' at the Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum until the 1870s, he did not quantify the presence of former convicts at Woogaroo or other Queensland institutions.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, few ex-convict inmates of Dunwich are named. Notably, Evans referred to the male emancipist, G. Williams, 'one of the first inmates' of Dunwich who 'had previously been a convict there 30 years before' when Stradbroke Island operated as an outstation of the Moreton Bay penal settlement.<sup>24</sup> Williams, who 'knew the island thoroughly', absconded from the asylum in March 1867.<sup>25</sup> Evans also referred to Mary Singleton and Mary Frost who gave evidence about the appalling conditions at Dunwich, including the sexual harassment of female inmates, but was unaware that the women had been transported to the colonies decades earlier under their maiden names of Keating and Jones.<sup>26</sup>

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1884, p. 1; *Queenslander*, 23 February 1884, p. 298; *Queensland Figaro*, 16 February 1884, p. 19.

- 21 Historical death image of Annie or Anne [sic] Cassim, daughter of Patrick Rafter and Mary Cronley [sic], died 6 June 1921, Benevolent Asylum Dunwich [sic], Qld, QRBDM, 1921/B/34693; *Telegraph*, 7 June 1921, p. 4; Memorial page for Annie Rafter Cassin [sic], died 6 June 1921, buried Nudgee Cemetery, Qld, *Find A Grave* database, Memorial ID 166587128, record created 7 July 2016 by John Winterbotham, <findagrave.com/memorial/166587128/annie-cassin> (8 May 2021).
- 22 Historical death image of Mary Cassim, daughter of John Tealy, died 12 February 1861, Cleveland, Qld, QRBDM, 1861/B/586; Historical death image of Annie or Anne [sic] Cassim, daughter of Patrick Rafter and Mary Cronley [sic], died 6 June 1921, Benevolent Asylum Dunwich [sic], Qld, QRBDM, 1921/B/34693.
- 23 Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 295.
- 24 *Ibid*, endnote 130.
- 25 Dunwich Report, 23 March 1867 [sic], quoted in *ibid*.
- 26 Mary Singleton (née Keating), No. 10, 3 January 1867 and Mary Frost (née Jones), No. 138, 20 January 1882, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520; Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 174.

Joseph Goodall's 1992 thesis, a self-described 'institutional biography', focuses on the history and function of the asylum and its staff as representatives of institutional authority.<sup>27</sup> Male and female inmates are grouped by different criteria in extensive appendices recording numbers of inmates by, amongst other factors, birthplace, district, religion, age, and deaths per year.<sup>28</sup> However, of the much smaller number of inmates mentioned individually in the main thesis body, the majority of whom are male, only one is referred to as a former convict. The unnamed man, we are told, worked at Dunwich in 1827 and 1831 when it was a penal outstation and finally escaped from the asylum on his third attempt in 1867.<sup>29</sup> Goodall was clearly referring to the same ex-convict named by Evans as 'G. Williams'.

Goodall's thesis, while not necessarily expanding our knowledge of the individual convict experience at Dunwich, underlines the self-serving and uncharitable motivations of those instrumental in locating the asylum on Stradbroke Island. Agreeing with Evans' interpretation, Goodall describes the institution's physical isolation as a deliberate 'symptom of social abandonment'. There was no intention, he wrote, to act benevolently or even humanely. Rather, Goodall argues that:

In housing the unwanted members of society who were embarrassments and liabilities, Dunwich served a social system driven by motives of economic progress. The asylum's function was not to help the weak and crippled but to hide them.<sup>30</sup>

Goodall concluded that 'nobody was willing to take responsibility for the benevolent asylum, which was left to manage as best it could in physical and social exile'.<sup>31</sup> Not only were its residents, including ex-convicts, deliberately hidden from public view, but their maltreatment was seen as no more than what defective members of society deserved,

Archie Rentoul's self-published book, *Island of a Million Tears* (2015), provides a different view, concentrating on the asylum's superintendents, staff and living conditions of the inmates. However, apart from including a list of Crimean and Indian Mutiny soldiers, he

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27 Goodall, *op. cit.*, np.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 363-423.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

30 *Ibid.*, np.

31 *Ibid.*

does not quantify the presence of different categories of inmates.<sup>32</sup> In addition, while Rentoul recognises that a significant number of the asylum's early inmates were former convicts, he erroneously assumes that they were all twice-convicted colonial convicts, 'sent to Moreton Bay [penal settlement] in the early 19th century'.<sup>33</sup> In fact, most of the former convict men had arrived in the district with tickets of leave or as emancipated convicts after the commencement of free settlement at Moreton Bay in 1842, although one of the exceptions, Thomas Brooks, is notable, as explained below.<sup>34</sup>

From the outset Dunwich was an overwhelmingly masculine institution. Goodall estimates that male inmates outnumbered females by six to one, 'proportions which did not change appreciably during Dunwich's history'.<sup>35</sup> Using this estimate, Dunwich's 21,000 inmates comprised about 18,000 male and 3,000 female inmates.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Goodall's data shows that 2,788 women were admitted to the asylum.<sup>37</sup> However, Goodall's statistics, based on the Annual Reports of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum for the years 1870 to 1946, do not cover the first five years of the asylum's operation (1865 to 1869), while figures are also missing for eight of the thirteen years between 1870 and 1882.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, many post-1890 applications to enter the

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<sup>32</sup> Rentoul, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39. This is in contrast to Andrew Piper's analysis of Tasmanian charitable institutions which showed that, while there was a ratio of about six male inmates to one female inmate in 1873, after the mid-1890s the number of male inmates declined while 'female daily average numbers steadily increased'. A. Piper, "'Mind-forg'd manacles": The mechanics of control inside late-nineteenth century Tasmanian charitable institutions', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2010, p. 1059.

<sup>36</sup> Calculations based on the total number and proportion of Dunwich inmates given in Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39, where he states that there were 21,000 inmates and that males outnumbered females by six to one.

<sup>37</sup> Calculations based on the number of female inmates admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum 1870-1946, in Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-387.

<sup>38</sup> Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-387. As Goodall explains on p. 353, the annual reports prepared by the superintendent were published in the parliamentary papers irregularly until 1883, while the 1874 report was never published. In addition, it can be seen from Figure 3.8 on pp. 386-387, 'Annual total of men and women admitted to Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, 1870-1946', that there are no admission figures available for 1865-1869, 1872, 1873, 1875, 1876, 1878, 1879, 1881 and 1882. In addition, the only figures available for female admissions during this period are for the following five years: 1870 (4 female admissions), 1871 (10), 1874 (7), 1877 (13) and 1880 (24).



asylum, as well as the post-1907 admission registers, have been lost. Goodall notes that:

This invalidates any kind of analysis of the entire history of the benevolent asylum based on these sources, although a work confining itself to the nineteenth century would have valuable and detailed insights into the inmates.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, this article, based primarily on the first female admission register covering the period 1865 to 1906 (rather than the asylum's Annual Reports), provides the most accurate picture to date of nineteenth-century female inmates at the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, including the small number revealed through my research to be female ex-convicts.<sup>40</sup>

The first female admission register covering the period 1865 to 1906 contains just 877 names.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, there are five male admission registers containing 5,009 names for the slightly shorter period 1865 to 1903.<sup>42</sup> These registers scrupulously recorded names, ages and places of birth, along with the names of mothers, fathers,

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>40</sup> Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520. Note 1: The vast majority of entries in this register date from 1865 to 1906. Only two female admissions are dated 1859 and there are none for the period 1860-1864. Prior to the establishment of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum in May 1865, benevolent patients were accommodated in the district's hospitals, including those in Brisbane, Ipswich and Toowoomba. After administrators decided that these patients — often the elderly, infirm, paupers and/or alcoholics — needed to be removed from the district's overcrowded hospitals, they were sent back and forth between Brisbane and Stradbroke Island several times between May 1865 and December 1866. Eventually, a final decision was made to permanently accommodate them at Dunwich. See, Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2, 46-51. Note 2: The two women recorded as admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum in 1859, neither of whom appear to be ex-convicts, were presumably patients in a hospital benevolent ward prior to being transferred to Stradbroke Island in 1865.

<sup>41</sup> Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520. As discussed in the preceding footnote, only two of the 877 female entries pre-date 1865. Some inmates had a duplicate entry recorded in a second register; see, Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, Male and Female Admission Register, QSA, 9519.

<sup>42</sup> Dunwich Male Admission Registers, 1 January 1859 - 29 September 1882, QSA, 9518; 7 October 1859 to 30 April 1889, QSA, 298713; 3 May 1889 to 20 August 1894, QSA, 298717; 29 August 1894 to 6 March 1900, QSA, 298714; 6 March 1900 to 3 April 1903, QSA, 298715. As for the first female admissions register, the first male register, covering the period 1859-1882, also includes a small number of pre-1865 entries. In addition, there is some duplication as the first male register covers 1859-1882 while the second register covers 1859-1889. In effect, the second male register covers the period 1882-1889.

spouses and children. The 'History' of each inmate was recorded in a short paragraph outlining the inmate's path to infirmity or pauperism, often including the ship and year of their arrival in Australia, places of residence and employment throughout the colonies, year of arrival in Queensland and, occasionally, status on arrival in the colonies (for example, immigrant, soldier, 'bond' or 'transported'). The collection of this detailed biographical information did not represent a genuine interest in an inmate's family and life story. Rather, it appears that the principal aim was to investigate the possibility of an inmate or their family making a financial contribution to the cost of their upkeep at the asylum.<sup>43</sup>

I have calculated that of the 1,000 men listed in the first male admissions register covering the years 1865 to 1882, at least 147 (or 15 per cent) were ex-convicts. Of these, 68 were recorded as 'bond' on arrival in Australia and another 26 were described as a 'prisoner', 'transported', under 'sentence' or having been 'assigned'. An additional eleven men named their ship as one of the two convict 'exile' vessels that sailed directly to Moreton Bay: the *Mount Stuart Elphinstone* (1849) and the *Bangalore* (1850). In addition to these 105 men, enough details were provided to identify 42 men in convict records (including indents and tickets of leave).<sup>44</sup> In addition, at least one male ex-convict listed in the second male register, covering the period 1882 to 1889, married a female ex-convict also admitted to the asylum, meaning that there were at least 148 male ex-convict inmates at Dunwich.<sup>45</sup> Cross-checking these names with the Chronological Register of Convicts at Moreton Bay (that is, of prisoners sent to the penal settlement) reveals that at least ten were colonial prisoners under sentence at the settlement prior to 1839.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Goodall, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>44</sup> Dunwich Male Admission Register, QSA, 9518. In addition to these 147 men, the vessel and year named by another 36 men match the names of convict ships to Sydney and Hobart, but their names cannot be traced on the corresponding ship's indent. The entries of the remaining 817 men indicate that they were immigrants, soldiers or other free arrivals, or do not contain enough information to identify the men as either convict or free.

<sup>45</sup> David Ferguson, No. 1781, 11 November 1887, Dunwich Male Admission Register, QSA, 298713. Note: It is highly likely that future research would locate the names of additional male ex-convicts in this and the remaining three male admission registers, each containing 1,000 names and covering the period 1882-1903.

<sup>46</sup> Author's own database of male ex-convicts admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum 1865-1882 cross-referenced with the Chronological Register of Convicts at Moreton Bay, 14 September 1824 to 15 November 1839 (Chronological Register, 1824-1839), QSA, Series ID 5653. The *Mount Stuart Elphinstone* (1849) carried 225 exiles and



Figure 1: Mary Ann Proctor, possibly Mary Ann Wallace per *Sea Queen* (1846), standing, died at the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, Queensland in 1892, and her daughter Susan Stevens (née Proctor), seated. Photograph held by Wendy Favell, reproduced with permission.

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the *Bangalore* (1850) carried 292 exiles. See, M. O'Keeffe, *Convicts at Moreton Bay, 1824-1859*, Brisbane, 2001, pp. 23, 25; R. Evans, *A History of Queensland*, Port Melbourne (Vic), 2007, p. 61.

Interestingly, my research has revealed that among these 'double offenders' was Thomas Brooks per *Grenada* (1818), transported to the Moreton Bay penal settlement in 1825 and well known as the subject of six chapters ghost-written by 'Jack Bushman' that appeared under the title 'Passages from the life of a "Lifer"' in the *Moreton Bay Courier* in April 1859.<sup>47</sup> The identity of Jack-Bushman, as well as the veracity and motivations of the account, have been widely debated for years.<sup>48</sup> What was not previously known, until now, was where Brooks lived out the rest of his life. In 'Passages', Brooks said he had spent 'twenty-one years as a slave, and six years as a ticket-of-leave man', and was now content with 'plenty of work', his 'bark umpie', a 'quiet pipe' and his Aboriginal 'gin', Susey.<sup>49</sup> It can now be revealed that in July 1866, seven years after the publication of 'Passages', Brooks was admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum for several months. He was readmitted in September 1869 for about five months, and again in May 1878 when, aged eighty-eight, he entered the asylum for the last time, dying one month later of 'Senile Decay'.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Brooks spent over fifty years in Queensland, making him one of the district's earliest and longest continuously-resident European inhabitants. My discovery of Brooks' entry in the admissions register of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum provides crucial closure to the story of 'Jack Bushman', and

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Brooks per *Grenada* 1 (1819), Prisoner No. 18, Chronological Register, 1824-1839, QSA, Series ID 5653, p. 3; Thomas Brooks, No. 69, 23 July 1866, Dunwich Male Admission Register, QSA, 9518; Jack Bushman [pseudonym], 'Passages from the life of a "lifer"', *Moreton Bay Courier*, 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 April 1859, all p. 4. Note: Chapters 1 to 4 were published on 2, 9, 16 and 23 April 1859 respectively, while Chapters 5 and 6 were published in the same edition on 30 April 1859.

<sup>48</sup> I. Duffield, 'Problematic passages: "Jack Bushman's" convict narrative', in I. Duffield and J. Bradley (eds), *Representing Convicts: New Perspectives on Convict Forced Labour Migration*, London and Washington, 1997, pp. 20-42; I. Duffield, 'New evidence on the authorship of "Jack Bushman's" narrative', 1999, *International Centre for Convict Studies*, University of Tasmania, Hobart, <[iccs.arts.utas.edu.au/narratives/duffieldintro.html](http://iccs.arts.utas.edu.au/narratives/duffieldintro.html)> (18 October 2017); R. Evans and W. Thorpe, 'In search of "Jack Bushman"', in L. Frost and H. Maxwell-Stewart (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 32-48; H. Maxwell-Stewart, 'The search for the convict voice', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1998, pp. 77-78; H. Maxwell-Stewart, 'The search for the invisible man', in Frost and Maxwell-Stewart (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 61; M. R. Wolter, 'Sound and fury in colonial Australia: The search for the convict voice, 1800-1840', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2014, pp. 33-34, 87-98.

<sup>49</sup> *Moreton Bay Courier*, 30 April 1859, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Brooks, No. 69, 23 July 1866, Dunwich Male Admission Register, QSA, 9518. Rentoul, *op. cit.*, p. 10 revealed in 2015 that Brooks returned to the asylum in 1878, but he was not aware of Brooks' link to the 'Jack Bushman' narrative.

indicates that there may be other treasures yet to be revealed from within the asylum registers.<sup>51</sup>

Among these treasures are nineteen female ex-convicts whose presence at the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum spans a period of nearly forty years from the admission of sixty-six-year-old Anne Edwards in June 1866 to the death of Catherine Taylor in July 1904.<sup>52</sup> Five of the nineteen women were described in Dunwich records as 'bond', though Mary Butler, who said she arrived on the *Buffaloo* [sic], cannot be traced on the indent of the *Buffalo* (1833).<sup>53</sup> The names of an additional four inmates were recognised as ex-convict women admitted to the Brisbane Gaol between 1850 and 1864.<sup>54</sup> Another seven female emancipists were revealed by cross-checking the vessel names, arrival years and maiden names provided on admission to the asylum with New South Wales convict indents.<sup>55</sup> The other three women were more difficult to identify. Mary Groombridge and Catherine Taylor said they arrived on vessels known to have carried female convicts to Van Diemen's Land but were not listed on the indents under their maiden or other known surnames. However, their details, such as age and place of birth, are similar to the details of women transported under another name who later disappeared without trace.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Mary

<sup>51</sup> My discovery of the Dunwich admission record of Thomas Brooks per *Grenada* at the Queensland State Archives on 27 July 2017 and its connection to 'Jack Bushman' has been confirmed by Raymond Evans and Tamsin O'Connor, in emails dated 28 July 2017, 6 August 2017, 18 August 2017 and 28 August 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Anne Edwards (née Feeney), No. 7, 18 June 1866; Catherine Taylor (née Dalton), No. 235, 26 April 1888, in Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Adams (née Sutton), No. 75, 9 April 1878; Mary Allen (née Prendergrast), No. 22, 16 November 1868; Mary Butler, No. 162, 12 April 1883; Mary Irwin (née O'Brien), No. 91, 15 January 1880; Jane Perryman (née Doyle), No. 114, 5 April 1881, in Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520

<sup>54</sup> Mary Singleton per *Sable Chief* (1856) [sic] (Gaol Annual No. 132, 13 April 1862); Mary Frost per *Minerva* (1839) (Gaol Annual No. 127, 21 June 1860); Susan Reynolds per *Caroline* (1833) (Gaol Annual No. 33, 17 February 1859); Agnes Ferguson per *Whitby* (1839) (first admission: Gaol Annual No. 29, 9 March 1850), in Brisbane Gaol Register, 1850-1864, QSA, 2917.

<sup>55</sup> Anne Edwards (née Feeney), No. 7, 18 June 1866; Mary Frawley (née MacGarry), No. 104, 21 October 1880; Rosanna Kenny (née McLister [sic]), No. 300, 7 April 1891; Mary Scott (née Leahey [sic]), No. 182, 24 January 1884; Abigail Sterling (née Murphy), No. 84, 4 June 1879; Judith Thompson (née White), No. 92, 22 January 1880; Mary Watkins (née Donnelly), No. 140, 4 February 1882, in Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Groombridge (née Lilley), No. 34, 27 August 1871 and Catherine Taylor (née Dalton), No. 235, 26 April 1888, in Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520. Mary Groombridge has been identified in the Female Convicts in Van Diemen's Land Database as likely being transported under the name Elizabeth Wilson. 'Female

Ann Wallace per *Sea Queen* (1846) is said to have died at the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum on 26 June 1892.<sup>57</sup> The Dunwich register entry for this woman gives no hint of a convict background, simply stating that Mary Ann Proctor (née Curran) 'Came to Sydney' in 1860.<sup>58</sup> However, Mary Ann's husband, Henry Proctor, was also a Dunwich inmate and his entry states that he was 'Married at Hobart Town when twenty-five years old to Mary Ann Wallace'.<sup>59</sup> Descendants have pieced together a complex history strongly inferring that Mary Ann Proctor was transported to Hobart on the *Sea Queen* in 1846 as Mary Ann Wallace.<sup>60</sup>

These nineteen female emancipists comprised only 2.2 per cent of the 877 women admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum between 1865 and 1906.<sup>61</sup> They were, then, an extreme minority, although it is likely that there were more than my research has currently identified. Still, because the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum admission records include a brief 'History' of each of these women prior to entry, we have something like a set of micro-narratives containing echoes of each woman's voice. Occasionally these mini-biographies were even transcribed using the first person. Mary Adams, for example, admitted to the asylum in 1878 suffering 'Senile Decay' and 'Diabetes', described her passage to Van Diemen's Land and subsequent travels north through New South Wales to Queensland. The 78-year-old's 'History' recorded that she:

Came to Hobarton [sic] per ship "Duke of Cornwall"  
about 36 years ago. Bond. Came to N S Wales [sic] about  
twenty years ago, Queensland about seven years ago.  
Lived with Mr Hammond for twelve months till my

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Convicts in Van Diemen's Land Database', *Female Convicts Research Centre*, n.d., <femaleconvicts.org.au> (8 May 2021). My research indicates that Catherine Taylor was most likely transported as Catherine Jones per *Royal Admiral* (1842).

57 Mary Ann Wallace per *Sea Queen* (1846), *Female Convicts Research Centre*, n.d., <femaleconvicts.org.au> (8 May 2021).

58 Mary Ann Proctor (née Curran), No. 333, 13 April 1892, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

59 Henry Proctor, No. 921, 16 February 1882, Dunwich Male Admission Register, QSA, 9518.

60 Mary Ann Wallace per *Sea Queen* (1846), *Female Convicts Research Centre*, n.d., <femaleconvicts.org.au> (8 May 2012); Wendy Favell (descendant of Mary Ann Proctor) to Jan Richardson, email, 23 November 2017.

61 Calculation based on analysis of the Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

husband died. I then lived at St George's Bridge about 6 years. No means.<sup>62</sup>

Combining this information with additional details contained in the Dunwich register, including Adam's maiden name of Sutton, allowed her to be located in the indent of the *Duke of Cornwall* that sailed into Hobart in 1850.<sup>63</sup> From Sutton's conduct record we know that she married Zachariah Hardman in Van Diemen's Land in 1853 and obtained a conditional pardon in 1854.<sup>64</sup> Then, by her own account, she moved to New South Wales around 1862, Queensland around 1871, and St George's Bridge (500 kilometres west of Brisbane) in 1872.<sup>65</sup> In 1876, using her married name of Mary Hardman, she married John Francis Adams.<sup>66</sup> A Dalby newspaper described the unconventional circumstances of the marriage:

Mr. Adams is the philanthropic gentleman who advertised some time ago in a contemporary journal for a house-keeper — 'One who has known sorrow preferred.' A mature lady applied for the billet, but as Mr. Adams was a single gentleman, she could not live with him with credit to her reputation, except a marriage ceremony took place. Mr. Adams agreed to this arrangement.<sup>67</sup>

However, the new bride alleged that she had quickly become a victim of domestic violence:

Mary Adams said ... he struck me with a tin plate, and knocked me off the chair; my face was out and swelled in consequence; he also made a blow with his hand which caught me on the face; he then ordered me out of the house, saying, "Begone!" you b—y old b—h !" I then left the house, and came to town to live.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Mary Adams (née Sutton), No. 75, 9 April 1878, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>63</sup> Mary Sutton per *Duke of Cornwall* (1850), Indent, Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (TAHO), CON15/1/6.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Sutton per *Duke of Cornwall* (1850), Conduct Record, TAHO, CON41/1/28.

<sup>65</sup> Mary Adams (née Sutton), No. 75, 9 April 1878, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>66</sup> Marriage registration of John Francis and Mary Hardman, married 29 April 1876, Qld, QRBDM, 1876/C/4.

<sup>67</sup> *Dalby Herald*, 30 September 1876, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

John Adams said his wife's statement was a 'tissue of falsehoods' but was fined twenty shillings for 'wife beating'.<sup>69</sup> Less than eighteen months later, Mary Adams was admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum saying that her second husband was 'living in Brisbane, I believe'.<sup>70</sup>

Other female ex-convicts also travelled widely within the colonies. The 'History' of 66-year-old Mary Singleton, admitted to Dunwich in 1867 suffering 'Debility', conveys not only her mode of arrival in Australia (and therefore her status as a former convict), but also her peripatetic existence travelling up and down the eastern seaboard of Australia:

Came to Sydney per ship 'Whitby' of London 23 June 1834. Went to Maitland. Remained till 1850. Went to Shoalhaven and Goulburn. Back to Sydney. Went to Gladstone in 1852. Thence to Brisbane.<sup>71</sup>

From the rest of Singleton's entry we learn that her maiden name was Keating and she was born in Tipperary in about 1801.<sup>72</sup> These 'genealogical moments' allow Mary Singleton to be positively identified as Mary Keating who arrived on the *Whitby* in 1839 (not 1834 as stated in her asylum entry).<sup>73</sup> In addition, a notation on her certificate of freedom described her as the 'Wife of Chas [sic] Singleton, per *Lady Harewood* (1), free by servitude'.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the Dunwich register provides the vital link proving that the mysterious Mary Singleton per *Sable Chief* (1856) [sic], described as 'Bond' when admitted to the Brisbane Gaol in 1862, was actually transported as Mary Keating per *Whitby* (1839).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Mary Adams (née Sutton), No. 75, 9 April 1878, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>71</sup> Mary Singleton (née Keating), No. 10, 3 January 1867, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Mary Keating per *Whitby* (1839), Printed Indents, SANSW X642.

<sup>74</sup> Mary Keating per *Whitby* (1839), Certificate of Freedom No. 49/174, 3 May 1849, Butts of Certificates of Freedom, SANSW 4/4412, Reel 1026. Also see, Charles Singleton and Mary Keating, 16 July 1840, Register of Convicts' Applications to Marry, SANSW 4/4513, p. 168.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Singleton per *Sable Chief* (1856) [sic], Gaol Annual No. 132, 13 April 1862, Brisbane Gaol Register, 1850-1864, QSA, 2917.



In contrast, the claims of Mary Allen proved far more difficult to verify. Admitted to Dunwich in November 1868 aged 67 with 'Senile Debility & Rheumatism', Allen said she was born in Dublin to Patrick Prendergrast [sic], a soldier, and his wife Catherine Mourne. Allen's 'History' recorded that she:

Came to Sydney per Ship 'Roslin Castle' in 1835. Landed in March. Bond. My first place was with Mr Symonds in whose [service] I remained eighteen months, when I married a man named Jas [sic] Hill. He lived but a short time, about two years after his death I married Richard Allen. He died in the Brisbane Hospital about three years ago. Was one of the two first white women sent to Moreton Bay. Have lived at Ipswich about thirty years. Have a brother somewhere in the Australian colonies.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the detail in this micro-biography, most of Mary's story could not initially be verified. There was no trace of a Mary Prendergrast on board the 1835 sailing of the *Roslin Castle*, which docked in Sydney in early 1836, nor of any ticket of leave, certificate of freedom or conditional pardon.<sup>77</sup> There was also no record of either marriage to James Hill or Richard Allen, and no proof that Mary had been at Moreton Bay since about 1838.

However, years of painstaking research have finally revealed that Mary Allen was transported as Mary Downs, a 22-year-old born and tried in Dublin. Her first assignment on arrival in the colonies was with 'M. Simmons' of Sydney — the 'Mr Symonds' referred to in Mary's 'History'.<sup>78</sup> Two years later she received permission to marry James Hill, a blacksmith who arrived as an assisted immigrant on the *Minerva* in 1838.<sup>79</sup> Hill is first mentioned in Queensland records in May 1844

<sup>76</sup> Mary Allen (née Prendergrast), No. 22, 16 November 1868, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>77</sup> Indent, *Roslin Castle* (1836), Printed Indents, SANSW X638.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Downs per *Roslin Castle* (1836), Printed Indents, SANSW X638; Mary Downs per *Roslyn Castle* [sic] (1836), New South Wales Convict Musters, 31 December 1837, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Home Office Papers, HO 10, Piece 33, pp. 10-11.

<sup>79</sup> James Hill and Mary Downs, 12 September 1839, Register of Convicts' Applications to Marry, SANSW 4/4510, p. 59; James Hill and Mary Downs, 13 September 1839, Returns of Applications for the Publication of Banns, SANSW NRS 905; James Hill and Mary Downs, 23 September 1839, Register of Convicts' Applications to Marry, SANSW 4/4513, p. 115; Marriage entry of James Hill and Mary Downs, 23 October 1839, St John's Anglican Church, Parramatta, NSW, REG/MAR/4. There are no further convict records for Mary Downs per *Roslin Castle* (1836). She does not appear

when he appeared as a defendant in a case before the Court of Requests (Petty Sessions) in Brisbane.<sup>80</sup> James Hill and Mary Hill also each purchased land in Moreton Bay in August 1844.<sup>81</sup> Then five years later, in April 1849, Mary placed two notices in the *Moreton Bay Courier*:

DIED. At his residence, at Little Ipswich, on Wednesday, the 21st March last, James Hill, in his 38th year, sincerely regretted.<sup>82</sup>

NOTICE. The undersigned requests all parties indebted to the late James Hill, of Little Ipswich, to settle their accounts before the first day of May next, as all accounts unpaid after that date shall be handed over to her Solicitor for recovery; and all claims against the deceased James Hill — if any, may be forwarded to her residence, Little Ipswich.

MARY HILL<sup>83</sup>

When Mary was admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum in 1868 she said that she married Richard Allen about two years after the death of James Hill, dating her second marriage to about 1851. There is no record of this marriage taking place in Queensland but we find 'Mary Allen' first mentioned in the *Moreton Bay Courier* in October 1851 when she was brought before the court for 'indecent exposure' and fined £5.<sup>84</sup> In fact, between 1851 and 1868, Mary Allen was mentioned in over eighty newspaper reports.<sup>85</sup> She was also admitted to the Brisbane Gaol a total of 37 times between 1853 and 1868.<sup>86</sup> It seems to have only

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to have received a ticket of leave, certificate of freedom or conditional pardon under the name Mary Downs or Mary Hill.

- <sup>80</sup> James Hill, 6 May 1844, Register of cases tried in the Court of Requests (Petty Sessions) for the recovery of small debts, Brisbane, QSA, ITM3974.
- <sup>81</sup> James Hill, 21 August 1844 and Mary Hill, 21 August 1844, Titles Office, Brisbane, Land records 1842-1859, EX 1: 88, Queensland Family History Society, Queensland Early Pioneers, <[www.findmypast.com.au/](http://www.findmypast.com.au/)> (31 January 2021).
- <sup>82</sup> *Moreton Bay Courier*, 7 April 1849, p. 1. James Hill's death was not registered in Queensland or New South Wales.
- <sup>83</sup> *Moreton Bay Courier*, 7 April 1849, p. 1.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 October 1851, p. 2.
- <sup>85</sup> Articles naming Mary Allen commence with *Moreton Bay Courier*, 25 October 1851, p. 2 and end with *Brisbane Courier*, 7 April 1868, p. 3.
- <sup>86</sup> Mary Allen per *Rosland Castle* (1835) [sic], 26 admissions dating from 18 August 1853 to 3 December 1863, Brisbane Gaol Register, 1850-1864, QSA, 2917; Mary Allen, eleven admissions dating from 1864 to 1866, in Brisbane Gaol Register, 1 January 1864 to c. 31 December 1868, QSA, 2943.

been Mary's entry to Dunwich that finally brought her reoffending — mainly for drunkenness and offensive language — to an end.

But what of Mary Allen's intriguing claim to have been 'one of the two first white women sent to Moreton Bay' — by her account, as early as 1838? Her second husband, Richard Allen, a convict per the *Royal Admiral* (1833), was sentenced to seven years' transportation to the Moreton Bay penal settlement in April 1835 for 'Receiving a Bushranger'.<sup>87</sup> By early 1840, with the penal station closed and only 26 convicts remaining to maintain the buildings and other assets, Allen was recorded as one of 'Two Overseers now serving under Colonial Sentence at Moreton Bay'.<sup>88</sup> That year the residue of Richard Allen's sentence was remitted and in 1843 he received a ticket of leave allowing him to remain in the district.<sup>89</sup> However, there is no evidence that Mary Downs or Hill was 'sent to Moreton Bay' as a convict, nor that she was 'one of the two first white women' in the district. By 1844, when it seems she first arrived at Moreton Bay with James Hill, the district's population of six-hundred already included the wives and servants of the district's officials and German missionaries, some of whom had already been in the district for several years, along with the wives of free settlers and a small number of female convicts with tickets of leave.<sup>90</sup> In addition, Hannah Rigby per *Lord Sidmouth* (1823), transported to Moreton Bay twice, chose to remain in the district when the penal settlement closed in 1839, while Sarah Davis per *Burrell* (1832), the ex-convict wife of merchant and trader John Williams, first arrived in Brisbane in late 1841 or early 1842.<sup>91</sup>

Of the nineteen ex-convict women admitted to the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, four were admitted from the Brisbane Hospital, three from the Ipswich Hospital, two from Toowoomba Hospital, and one had been in the Roma Hospital for six weeks. Other women were

<sup>87</sup> Richard Allen per *Royal Admiral* (1833), Hulk Annual No. 86, 12 February 1835, Transportation Book (*Phoenix Hulk*), SANSW 4/6445.

<sup>88</sup> Gorman to Colonial Secretary, 22 February 1840, State Library of Queensland, A2.11, p. 159, and 31 March 1840, State Library of Queensland, A2.11, pp. 174-177.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Allen per *Royal Admiral* 2 (1833), Prisoner No. 2647, Chronological Register, 1824-1839, QSA, Series ID 5653, p. 92; Richard Allen per *Royal Admiral* (1833), TL No. 43/482, 7 February 1843, Ticket of Leave Butts, SANSW 4/4173; *Australasian Chronicle*, 20 April 1843, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 31 August 1841, np.; *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, 9 March 1844, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> J. Richardson, 'Invisible stories: The presence of female convicts in Queensland following the closure of the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement in 1842', *History in the Making*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2013, pp. 86-108.

listed as coming from Toowoomba, Gayndah, Aramac and Minnie Downs (both near Longreach), and the gold rush town of Croydon (500 kilometres west of Cairns). Eleven women were described as suffering 'Senile Debility' or 'Senile Decay'. Mary Singleton was admitted with 'Debility' and Mary Frost had spent four months in the Brisbane Hospital with 'Debility & Broken Leg'. Catherine Taylor suffered from 'General infirmity' while Susan Reynolds had been in both the Brisbane and Toowoomba hospitals with 'Paralysis'. Mary Ann Proctor had a 'Bad Throat' and two women were admitted after suffering injuries: Agnes Ferguson, aged sixty-seven, was admitted with a 'Broken Shoulder Bone' and Rosanna Kenny, aged sixty-nine, was admitted from Gayndah suffering 'Accidental injury from horse'. Abigail Sterling, admitted in 1879, was the only ex-convict woman for whom a cause of admission was not listed.<sup>92</sup>

In some cases, the women's physical and mental capacities were also described in contemporary newspaper articles. Three years before she was admitted to the asylum in 1871 with senile decay, Mary Groombridge was described in an Ipswich newspaper as 'a very poor and helpless woman' who had lost a sum of money. She was reported as 'the wife of a man named Stephen Groombridge, in the service of Mr. Ivory at Bandamba [Bundamba]'.<sup>93</sup> While this article paints an image of an elderly, frail and possibly senile woman, other articles appear to challenge the diagnosis recorded in the asylum registers. Mary Scott, transported to New South Wales on the *Margaret* in 1837, was described as aged 'about 100' and suffering 'Senile Debility' when she was admitted to Dunwich in 1884.<sup>94</sup> That same year, a report in the *Darling Downs Gazette* under the headline 'A centenarian' stated that:

Mary Scott, recently charged at the Court as a vagrant will probably be forwarded on to Dunwich. She is hale, and has all her faculties perfect, but is unfortunately blind and therefore unable to earn a living. The old

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<sup>92</sup> Mary Singleton (née Keating), No. 10, 3 January 1867; Mary Frost (née Jones), No. 138, 20 January 1882; Catherine Taylor (née Dalton), No. 235, 26 April 1888; Mary Ann Proctor (née Curran), No. 333, 13 April 1892; Agnes Ferguson (née O'Connor [sic]), No. 231, 11 November 1887; Rosanna Kenny (née McLister [sic]), No. 300, 7 April 1891; Abigail Sterling (née Murphy), No. 84, 4 June 1879, in Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>93</sup> *Queensland Times*, 2 January 1868, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Mary Scott (née Leahey [sic]), No. 182, 24 January 1884, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

woman states, what appears to be perfectly true, that she is over one hundred years of age.<sup>95</sup>

The indent of the *Margaret* (1837) reveals that Mary Scott (née Leahey) was transported as Mary 'Lahy [sic] or Bohorn', a forty-year-old widow with four sons and one daughter, whose brother Patrick Lahy was 'a prisoner, in the colony 15 years'.<sup>96</sup> Based on this information, Scott was only about 87 when she was admitted to the asylum, but information in the convict indents cannot always be relied upon either. Whatever the case, when she died in January 1884, only three days after being admitted to the asylum, the press reported that: 'Mrs. Mary Scott, formerly a resident of Toowoomba, a native of Kilkenny, Ireland, died, at Dunwich, 27th January, at the extreme age of 100 years'.<sup>97</sup>

Agnes Ferguson's admission with a broken shoulder bone followed an assault in the Brisbane watch-house by fellow prisoner, Catherine Webb, which resulted in serious contusions and fractures.<sup>98</sup> Being elderly, Ferguson was slow to recover and, after five weeks at the Brisbane Hospital, she was removed to Stradbroke Island. One of the few emancipist women not described as suffering from senile debility, Ferguson told the Dunwich staff that she:

Arrived in Sydney 1839 in the ship "Whitby". I remained 10 years in New South Wales. I then came to Brisbane and have been living at South Pine ever since. My son Charles is living at Cobbolds Creek, South Pine. I have no property, no cash, and came down here with my husband who is also infirm.<sup>99</sup>

Agnes's ex-convict husband, David Ferguson per *Hooghley* (1834), was already in the asylum, admitted the year previous.<sup>100</sup> Agnes lived for another five years at the asylum before dying there in 1893, aged in her

<sup>95</sup> *Darling Downs Gazette*, 16 January 1884, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Mary Lahy or Bohorn [sic] per *Margaret* (1837), Printed Indents, SANSW X640.

<sup>97</sup> *Queensland Times*, 7 February 1884, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 10 October 1887, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Agnes Ferguson (née O'Connor [sic]), No. 231, 11 November 1887, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>100</sup> David Ferguson per *Hooghley* (1834), TL No. 45/830 for Moreton Bay, 28 April 1845, Ticket of Leave Butts, SANSW 4/4199; David Ferguson, No. 1781, 11 November 1887, Dunwich Male Admission Register, 1859-1889, QSA, 298713.

seventies.<sup>101</sup> David Ferguson was transferred to the Brisbane Hospital and died there in 1897 reportedly aged ninety-four.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to the tales of ill-health and poverty that led female ex-convicts to the asylum door, we also hear voices lamenting separations from family and the loss of husbands and children. On admission to Dunwich, Mary Watkins said that her children were 'all dead', while Mary Ann Proctor's entry specified that six daughters were dead. Of Mary Scott's eight children, seven were dead and her remaining daughter, Ellen, was 'last heard of in Rockhampton 2 years ago'. Mary Frawley had eleven children but was alone in the world. Four boys and two girls were dead, while the addresses of another three sons and two daughters were 'unknown'. Catherine Taylor's husband was dead and she had 'No relatives in the colonies except my sons whose whereabouts I cannot discover, they are supposed to be in Victoria'. Mary Frost, admitted with 'Debility & Broken Leg' in 1882, married her second husband John Frost in Ipswich when she was thirty-eight, but he had deserted her long ago and died one year before she was admitted. Her daughter Mary Anne was dead and her son Francis was 'in the Roma District'. Susan Reynolds had four children but the register only named her daughter, Annie Adelaide, aged forty, and mentioned a grandson in Townsville. No other information could be provided as: 'Memory gone and no really reliable information to 2 boys and one girl dead'.<sup>103</sup>

Of the nineteen women only Mary Butler was listed as 'Never' marrying.<sup>104</sup> Fifteen women named their husband (or husbands), while three provided enough information to trace their husband's details. The husbands of three female emancipists were ex-convicts but did not

<sup>101</sup> Agnes Ferguson (née O'Connor [sic]), No. 231, 11 November 1887, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520; *Brisbane Courier*, 4 May 1893, p. 4. The Dunwich register records that Ferguson was aged 67 when she was admitted in 1887 and the newspaper report of her death in 1893 gives her age as 72. However, based on convict records, it appears that Agnes was born c. 1815, making her 72 when she was assaulted in prison and 78 when she died in 1893.

<sup>102</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 2 June 1897, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> Mary Watkins (née Donnelly), No. 140, 4 February 1882; Mary Ann Proctor (née Curran), No. 333, 13 April 1892; Mary Scott (née Leahey [sic]), No. 182, 24 January 1884; Mary Frawley (née MacGarry), No. 104, 21 October 1880; Catherine Taylor (née Dalton), No. 235, 26 April 1888; Mary Frost (née Jones), No. 138, 20 January 1882; Susan Reynolds (née Hill), No. 179, 13 December 1883, in Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>104</sup> Mary Butler, No. 162, 12 April 1883, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

enter Dunwich with their wives.<sup>105</sup> Four ex-convict husbands were inmates at the asylum: Thomas Edwards per *Baring* (1819), Stephen Groombridge per *Surrey* (1819) to Van Diemen's Land, Michael Irwin per *Mary Porcher* [sic] (1825) and David Ferguson per *Hooghley* (1834).<sup>106</sup> Henry Proctor, another asylum inmate, stated that he arrived in Van Diemen's Land on the *Lady Franklin* but descendants believe he may have been transported as a convict.<sup>107</sup> Husbands who said they arrived free include John J. Thompson, a carpenter who arrived at Port Philip on the Dutch ship *Bobelstein* in 1853, and John Perryman who worked his passage as a sailor on the whaling barque *Alert* in 1839.<sup>108</sup>

Fifteen of the nineteen women died at the asylum (the last three between 1901 and 1904) and were buried in the mass unmarked grave at the Dunwich Cemetery. Of the four who did not die at the asylum, only two deaths can be traced.<sup>109</sup> Abigail Sterling per *City of Edinburgh* (1828) died at the Brisbane Hospital in 1880, less than a year after she was admitted to Dunwich.<sup>110</sup> The second, Rosanna Kenny per *Sarah and Elizabeth* (1837), was transferred to the benevolent asylum in 1891 after being injured by a horse.<sup>111</sup> In 1893, newspapers reported that 'Rosanna Kenny, late of Dunwich, aged 71 years' died of 'senile decay' at the 'Hospital for the Insane at Woogaroo', near Ipswich. This was an

<sup>105</sup> Richard Allen per *Royal Admiral* (1833), TL No. 43/482, 7 February 1843, Ticket of Leave Butts, SANSW 4/4173; Edward Kenny per *Camden 2* (1833), Printed Indents, SANSW X635; Charles Singleton per *Lady Harewood* (1831), Printed Indents, SANSW X633.

<sup>106</sup> Dunwich Male Admission Register, 1859-1889, QSA, 298713. Thomas Edwards is recorded as arriving on the *Midas* (1819) but convict records confirm he arrived on the *Baring* (1819). Michael Irwin's Dunwich record states that he arrived on the 'Mary Porcher' in 1825, presumably the *Henry Porcher* (1825), but there is no record of him arriving on this or any convict ship to NSW.

<sup>107</sup> Henry Proctor, No. 921, 16 February 1882, Dunwich Male Admission Register, QSA, 9518. Personal communication with Wendy Favell, 15 May 2020, suggests that descendants believe Henry Proctor arrived on the *Moffatt* (1842), although that character appears to have married Ellen Smith in Launceston in 1853. At this stage there is not enough evidence to state which ship Mary Ann Proctor's husband Henry arrived on and, therefore, whether or not he was a convict.

<sup>108</sup> John James Thompson, No. 688, 22 January 1880, and John Perryman, No. 819, 31 March 1881, in Dunwich Male Admission Register, QSA, 9518.

<sup>109</sup> Mary Singleton (née Keating), No. 10, and Mary Butler, No. 162, in Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

<sup>110</sup> Abigail Sterling (née Murphy), No. 84, 4 June 1879, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520; *Queenslander*, 24 April 1880, p. 517.

<sup>111</sup> Rose [sic] McCollister [sic] per *Sarah and Elizabeth* (1837), Printed Indents, SANSW X640; Rosanna Kenny (née McLister [sic]), No. 300, 7 April 1891, Dunwich Female Admission Register, QSA, 9520.

unfortunate end for Kenny as the lunatic asylum was a place to be feared, particularly for women and the vulnerable.<sup>112</sup>

In 1870, Chief Wardsman Thomas Jessie described Woogaroo as a 'foul and filthy institution, stinking from its base to its roof', 'alive with vermin', and 'populated with half-clad and apparently utterly neglected lunatics'.<sup>113</sup> In 1869, David Anderson, a general labourer at the asylum, told an inquiry about a female patient who was 'quite naked in a cell, without any straw for bedding, and with her arms handcuffed behind her'.<sup>114</sup> Dr Jaap described seeing a woman who 'paced about for some time like a caged lioness' in a wooden box 'of the most offensive and abominable description'.<sup>115</sup> In July 1871, an official visitor to the asylum wrote that he:

found four unfortunate women, very ill, lying in their beds upon the floor in the open corridor ... and subjected to the annoyance of the incessant yelling and dancing of a number of violent patients.<sup>116</sup>

Kenny did not die at Woogaroo until 1893 but conditions had improved little, if at all. Raymond Evans concluded that 'the Asylum of 1915 differed little from the institution of 1869 in its character; only in its proportions'.<sup>117</sup>

In 1946, the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum was finally closed and the majority of its remaining 768 residents were transferred to the Eventide Home at Sandgate on Brisbane's bayside. In 1950 it was reported that records from the old asylum were blowing about on the beach at Dunwich. Neglected and overgrown graves at the Dunwich Cemetery started to collapse and the numbered trefoil markers which identified paupers' graves were removed.<sup>118</sup> In 1987 and 1988, restoration work was carried out at the cemetery with the aid of Bicentennial grants. A memorial wall to honour those in unmarked

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<sup>112</sup> *Telegraph*, 30 November 1893, p. 7; *Queensland Times*, 2 December 1893, p. 7; Evans, *op. cit.*, chs. 3-5.

<sup>113</sup> Jesse to Under Secretary, 15 August 1870, quoted in Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>114</sup> Evidence of David Anderson, Col. A123 [sic], in *ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>115</sup> Evidence of Dr Jaap, Woogaroo Report, 1873, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>116</sup> A. W. Manning, Report, 25 July 1871, in *ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>117</sup> Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Queensland Health has restricted access to the Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum records until 2071, including those containing pre-1900 entries, preventing further research on this matter.

<sup>118</sup> Goodall, *op. cit.*, pp. 302, 336.



graves was constructed from bricks which remained after the demolition of the asylum laundry. Nameplates have been added for some inmates whose burials have been confirmed by research.<sup>119</sup> Little physical trace exists of the asylum or its residents. What does remain is the documentary evidence left by a bureaucracy determined to isolate those they had no interest in understanding, let alone helping. Among their number were nineteen female ex-convicts and at least 148 male ex-convicts present in Queensland long after their original journeys of transportation to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land.

While the number of ex-convict women whose life stories have been revealed through what Tamsin O'Connor has termed the 'cardboard graves' of the 'paper dead' is small,<sup>120</sup> there is no doubting the importance of their discovery to a more inclusive and nuanced history of Queensland. The mining of the long-neglected admissions registers of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum has revealed them to be a valuable, and perhaps even unparalleled, insight into the lives of ex-convict women during Queensland's free settlement era. For over and above the genealogical snippets and rudimentary 'History' recounted by each inmate on entry to the asylum, we are gifted a rare closure to the stories of female ex-convicts whose lives ended in poor and desperate circumstances. The asylum admissions registers may not have yielded the convict tales of good fortune and redemption that we may expect or want to hear, yet they are equally revealing and deserving of resurrection.

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119 Department of Environment, Land and Water, Qld, op. cit., np; L. Uhlmann, 'Visit a cemetery', *Redland City Bulletin*, 6 June 2013, <[redlandcitybulletin.com.au/story/1554149/visit-a-cemetery/](http://redlandcitybulletin.com.au/story/1554149/visit-a-cemetery/)> (20 July 2017).

120 O'Connor, 'Raising Lazarus', p. 160.