

MICHAEL BOWEN

Michael Bowen was the eldest of seven children born to Patrick and Julia (nee Hannan) of Monegall, King's County (now Offaly County) in Southern Ireland. Michael was born c1830 and grew up during troubled times in Ireland when successive potato crops were ravaged by disease resulting in famine and starvation for many. He was a semiliterate farm labourer. ⁱ

Both his parents died of cholera in 1847 and three of their children also died during the potato famine. Then aged seventeen years Michael assumed the parental role over his surviving siblings. In March 1851 Michael stole a ram at Cullenwaine belonging to Thomas Mears and was indicted for the offence in Birr Sessions, King's County on 10th April 1851, found guilty and subsequently sentenced to ten years' transportation.ⁱⁱ Bowen, who had previous convictions and punishments was imprisoned in Newgate Prison, Dublin where his character was recorded as 'good.'ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Bowen was transported to the Swan River Colony in 1853, arriving in Fremantle on 13th August on the 'Phoebe Dunbar' as convict 2524.^{iv} Following a short period at the Fremantle Establishment Michael was sent with a contingent to the Toodyay Convict Depot where he was initially assigned to road works, being assigned constable of his group. He was described as 'well conducted and steady and especially recommended' when granted his ticket of leave on July 24th 1854.^v

Soon after Michael Bowen became employed at 'Glen Avon' by Jane Slade, widow of Frederick who had been the Resident Magistrate of Toodyay prior to his death in 1850.

The Annual Meeting of the Toodyay, Northam and Victoria Plains Agricultural Society of 4 November 1857 records Michael Bowen as presenting himself as a candidate for His Excellency's Bounty having been engaged in all branches of

being farm servant for three years and four months to Mrs Jane Slade and her son Frederick William Slade on 'Glen Avon.'^{vi}

A month later Mrs Slade had the pleasure of being able to state 'the utmost unqualified commendation to his (Bowen's) whole conduct as being honest, sober, industrious and respectful. He was a good farm servant in all its departments. Furthermore she had never seen him worse for liquor.'^{vii} Unfortunately for Bowen James Butterly of Mumberkine won the Governor's Five pound bounty having been voted as the best workman.

Sadly, Jane Slade died early in 1859 as a result of a horse and sulky accident. However Bowen remained for a time in the employ of Frederick Slade junior.

While still in his employment Michael Bowen married on 16th October 1859 in the Toodyay Catholic Chapel (old town) seventeen year old Ellen Bourke (b1841) daughter of Thomas Bourke and Mary (nee Meagher) of Tipperary, Ireland who arrived aboard the 'Sabrina' in June 1853.^{viii}

Michael and Ellen had a family of eight children, the eldest of whom, both sons, were born at 'Glen Avon.' A third child, **Elisha** was born in 1864 and recorded as male although no further records are known about him. The daily medical journals of the Convict Establishments for WA record that from February to April 1864 expirée Michael Bowen was being treated for mental disorders real or feigned.^{ix} One can only ponder that this may have been related to Elisha who may have been stillborn or died in infancy. Five Bowen daughters followed.

According to the Ticket of Leave Register Michael Bowen was farming on his own account in June 1860 Landgate records show that he purchased Avon Location 404 from Thomas Colbart in the 1860s, and selling it in 1870 to James Lilley of Perth. It was later purchased by William Henry Perrin.

Bowen received his Conditional Pardon in June 1861. In 1865 he applied for 50 acres of Tillage Lease land on the border and within James McLean Dempster's Pastoral Lease at

Wongamine. Like many large land holders Dempster favoured the settlement of his best workmen on small lots within easy distances. Bowen took up further Tillage Leases until eventually the farm he named "Patricia" comprised about 1500 acres.^x Tillage leases of fifty or one hundred acres required higher rentals than Pastoral Leases but could be converted to freehold at the end of seven years' tenure.

Until his Wongamine land was brought into partial clearing, fencing and production Michael Bowen continued to work for farmers in the surrounding district, including Dempster and Slade. He was paid partially in credit from Dempster's Toodyay Store for items he purchased. During part of this time he lived with his family in a stone cottage on 'Ninego' an eastern portion of Francis Whitfield's 'Knockdominie' later known as "Wicklows Hills", where some of their children were born.

In the mid 1860s Michael Bowen was among numerous settlers to petition for a road from Sinclair's Crossing to Slater's at Goomalling, given the amount of produce and sandalwood being carted to and from that direction.

In August 1867 he was summoned by Police Constable Holloway of Toodyay for leaving his team (of horses) in the main street for too long. This was not uncommon as the Police Occurrence book for the time records others for the same offence.^{xi}

Michael Bowen initially built a mud batt cottage and mud batt sheds on 'Patricia' farm. Between 1864 and 1876 he employed 5 ticket of Leave men. In 1874 he completed a nine roomed brick and iron house and although she would have watched its progress, Ellen sadly, didn't get to live in the new home as she died in August 1874 at the age of 33 years when her youngest child was just six weeks old. The rearing of the children was largely left to Michael as the eldest daughter was only nine years old.

Michael died resting in his chair on the front verandah of his Wongamine home on 13th August 1893 at the age of 63 and lies buried at Toodyay alongside Ellen.^{xii}

Michael Bowen's descendants spread far and wide throughout the Goomalling and neighbouring districts. His two surviving sons, Patrick and James Henry served commendable terms on the Goomalling Road Board. Four of the five daughters married farming stock.

Michael Bowen would look down proudly upon his descendants today in the knowledge that land at 'Patricia' remains in the Bowen family today, although renamed 'Hampton Estate' and run as a wedding and event function centre by Natalee and Mark Bowen.

Researched and compiled by Barbara Sewell, 2022

ⁱ Dictionary of Western Australians Vol 3 1850-1868

ⁱⁱ The Kings County Chronicle and General Intelligencer 16.4.1851

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Bowen convict 2524 – SROWA Character Book Consignment 1156/18

^{iv} Ibid

^v State Records Office of WA (SROWA) Consignment 1156/R6 ticket of leave register

^{vi} Annual Meeting of the Toodyay, Northam and Victoria Plains Agricultural Society 4.11.1857

^{vii} Letter of recommendation to the Toodyay, Northam and Victoria Plains Agricultural Society from Mrs Jane Slade, 27.12.1857

^{viii} Transcripts of Roman Catholic marriage records, Toodyay; Battye Library Acc2936/A2 microfilm

See also The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians 1829-1888 Vol 3 p268

^{ix} SROWA Consignment 1156/M19 Medical Journals of the Convict Establishment

^x Refer 1865 SDUR B6/642 L & S Nos

SDUR N1/39

1870 SDUR M4/541 A-C

1875 SDUR B9/1007 L & S Nos

^{xi} SROWA Acc 422/2 18.8.1867 Police Occurrence Books

^{xii} Bowen, Justin - Michael Bowen and Descendants typescript 13.11.1982