

Murder At 'Maplestead'

In 2021 I came across an article in the form of a letter from 'An Old Resident' to the Editor Newspaper Inquirer and Commercial News of Wednesday 28 March, 1877 page 3.

The column was headed OUR OPEN COLUMN Epitaphs On Tombstones

The writer referred to an article on page 31 of the Home News of January 19, 1877 in which there was an account of a tombstone that had been erected in memory of Benjamin Keeton at Wadsley near Sheffield. It had apparently displeased the vicar and churchwardens who ordered it taken down or they would deface it or place it downwards.

The writer drew attention to a verse which was painted on a slab over a grave in the Mourambine churchyard in the Beverley area Western Australia.

My years were few,

My career was wild,

Let loose to bad habits

Almost from a child.

The slab was erected by subscriptions to mark the resting place of the remains of an unfortunate woman who was shot in the district in December, 1873 by a man who was living in a state of adultery with her.

The writer pointed out that if the bat and ball was contrary to the rules of burial grounds, then this verse of such "questionable propriety should be allowed as to remain where it is a mockery to crime and virtue".

Subsequent research using Trove established the identity of the 'unfortunate woman' as being a Mary Ann Lloyd.

Last year I visited the beautiful St Patrick's Anglican church in Mourambine near Pingelly (gazetted in 1898) in search of Mary Ann's grave. After the first church was burnt in 1842 a second stone church was consecrated in May, 1873. Mary Ann's burial would have been one of the earliest but sadly there was no sign of a grave. At some stage the burial records were housed in a metal box inside the church but had been stolen several years ago so it wasn't surprising that a local church custodian had no knowledge of this burial.

Who was Mary Ann Lloyd ?

Mary Ann had been born in Ireland in 1853 to parents William Galbraith and Elizabeth Smurfit / Scrimphett/ Smofphet. At the time she was the second child of four, three of whom were born in Ireland and one in South Africa. A further five children were born in W.A.

Her father William was born about 1827 in Magherafelt, Londonerry, Ireland and son of Robert Galbraith. He joined the 89th Regiment of Foot in Belfast in 1844 aged 17 and was discharged on medical grounds in Cork in 1861. He arrived in W.A. in 1863 as a convict guard aboard the ship 'Merchantman' with his wife and four children. On arrival he became a member of the enrolled Pensioner Force of W.A.

William's first appointment in 1863 was as a warder at Gingin W.A. before moving to York in 1867. Children born after arrival in W.A. included Robert John born 1864 and Arundel Edward b 1867, both born in York. It was noted that he was at the York Depot with his wife and six children in March, 1869.

Mary married an ex-convict John Lloyd in the Canning district in 1871. John had been convicted at the Port Cumberland Marine Barracks for striking an Army Colonel and received 14 years transportation to the Swan River Colony. After a period in the Chatham Prison he arrived on the ship 'Clara' in 1864. He was employed by an Ellis in Augusta before moving to the York Beverley area where he was employed by a number of men including Barrett (possibly Barrett Lennard) Hoops, McCarthy and Marwick in the years 1871 to 1874.

Mary Ann began living with a convict Robert Goswell. He was born in 1835 and convicted in Exeter in 1858 for 'wounding with intent'. He was transported for 10 years and arrived on the convict ship 'Palmerston' in 1861 as convict no 5802.

Mary Ann had run away from him and returned to Beverley to a sandalwood cutters hut near Mourambine. In December, 1873 Goswell made an excuse to his master that he needed to go to York to obtain eye lotion but instead armed with a gun and under the influence of liquor, tracked down Mary Ann to the Sewell property 'Maplestead' 80 miles east of York where he shot her dead.

The 'Fremantle Herald' newspaper stated he met her at the door of the house and accosted her with the words "Here you are my lady ; Take that". He apparently told several people what he had done but no one believed him.

A different version of events was listed in 'Australian Executions 1870- 1967 Capital Punishment UK'.

This stated that Mary Ann Lloyd left Goswell and went to live with a sandalwood cutter John Doran. On the day of the murder Goswell went to the house and demanded money he had given Mary Ann be returned. She laughed at him after which he shot her to death with his gun.

Feeling remorseful the next day he surrendered himself into custody at the York Police Station and made a full confession to the murder.

Goswell's counsel (Mr Parker) tried to induce him to withdraw his guilty plea because of extenuating circumstances but Goswell said "My Lord I am guilty of the crime with which I am charged and I could not in the presence of God or man deny it".

A lengthy newspaper account in the 'Inquirer and Commercial News' Wednesday 14 January, 1874 gave details of the trial and hanging of Robert Goswell at the Perth Goal on 13 January, 1874.

John Lloyd continued working for Marwick in York and for George Cox and A.G. Robins in Mourambine between 1874 and 1876. He died in the York Hospital on 14 November, 1897 aged 45 and was buried in the R.C. section of the York Cemetery in an unmarked grave. His occupation was listed as a hospital orderly.

Mary Ann's father William died of the effects of heatstroke in South Perth on 4th January, 1880 aged 50 leaving his wife and young children so destitute that the two youngest were admitted to an orphanage. Her mother Elizabeth died 2 December, 1880 aged 49.

There are five unmarked graves, these being William & Elizabeth in East Perth, Goswell in Perth and Lloyd in York although at least the final resting place for Mary Ann was marked for a short period of time at Mourambine.

Much of this information was obtained using the free online archive Trove. Funding is due to expire in July, 2023. I hope present users of Trove will petition the Federal Government to continue support for this incredible research tool which receives 20 million hits per year.

Margaret Sermon January, 2023.