

The Boys from Ballingarry

A Convict Tale from the 1840s.

By Margaret Bougie

At the height of the Great Famine in Ireland four young miners were charged with theft. Even though it was their first criminal offence, three of them joined 10,000 Irish convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land during the period 1840-1853, ensuring they would never see their native Ireland again.

The agricultural and coal-reliant area of Ballingarry, Tipperary was the birthplace of William Wall, the youngest of the quartet.¹ Baptised on 16 April 1826 in Ballingarry, he was the son of John Wall and Margaret Connell. His co-accused, older brother Michael, was baptised on 19 February 1820 at Gortnahoe.² Pierce Barrett, a relative by marriage, and William Butler were 30 years old at the time of their arrest.³

Appearing before Mr. Sergeant Howley, the Assistant Barrister for Tipperary on 1 July 1848, the men were convicted of cow larceny at Cashel Assizes.⁴ Leniency was not shown



The Entrance to Spike Island

as Howley's "sentiments and sympathies lay with the landlords" and his anti-agrarian crime agenda was "ever against the people."⁵ Admitting their offence, they were sentenced to ten years transportation "beyond the seas" to Van Diemen's Land. On 8 July 1848, the men were incarcerated behind the stone walls of Clonmel Prison.⁶

Transferred to the misery of Kilmainham Convict Depot, Dublin on 10 September 1848, they joined the inmates awaiting transportation to Australia. William's behaviour at the prison was reported as good, but his brother Michael only middling. They spent over seven months at Kilmainham except for William Butler who died on 18 April 1849.⁷ The others were relocated to the draconian Spike Island, County Cork on 20 April 1849 where they were expected to perform labour that was "continuous and severe".⁸ The prisoners were put to levelling large rocks on the Island.⁹



*The Cell Door in the West Wing of
Kilmainham Convict Depot*

The *Hyderabad 3*, captained by Master Castle, sailed from the seascape of Queenstown Harbour on 13 September 1850.¹⁰ The fast, seaworthy frigate carried a cargo of 287 male convicts including William, Michael and Pierce.¹¹ The Ship sailed up the panoramic sweep of the Derwent River docking in Hobart Town after a voyage of 91 days.¹² In their Conduct Records, the Surgeon superintendent on board recorded their behaviour as good, but William and Michael were also specially recommended.¹³

The meticulously documented Conduct Records provide an insight into the lives of these men. William's occupation was recorded as a labourer, Michael's as a farm labourer and Pierce as a collier. Indeed, William and Michael by this stage, were experienced labourers. But an occupational hazard was etched into their skin. The recorded scarification, blue marks on their hands, indicated they had previous experience as miners.¹⁴

William's stature was stunted, unlike Michael and Pierce's whose height was notated as around five foot six.¹⁵ Subject to constant famine and a disease rife environment, often lacking sufficient sunlight, conditions were not conducive to William achieving his genetically destined height. At five foot two, he was three inches below the average height of all male convicts transported to Australia in his age category.¹⁶ Subject to an improved diet on arrival in the colony, it is possible that his height increased.

Their Conduct Records also gave a detailed description of their appearances. William was endowed with fair complexion, brown hair, an oval face, wide nostrils and blue eyes. He had a small dent in his right cheek, and perhaps another occupational hazard, a scar

on his forehead.¹⁷ Michael had similar characteristics to his brother except his nose was long and his eyebrows heavy.¹⁸ Pierce was described as having a dark complexion, grey/brown hair, black whiskers, a long face, dark eyebrows, hazel eyes and a large nose.¹⁹

Released from the confines of the *Hyderabad 3*, the men were housed at the Old Wharf Probation Station, situated close to the aquascope of the Hobart Town docks. Here, they worked in chain gangs, their labour exploited building Franklin Wharf and Constitution Dock. In July 1851 they were relocated to the Prison Barracks, Hobart Town and were assigned work at the coal mines in New Town, a semi-rural suburb of Hobart Town.²⁰

Throughout his convict incarceration, William's behaviour was exemplary, but Michael and Pierce erred a little. In February 1853, Pierce was charged with being absent from his authorised place of residence – Mr Luckman's Coal Mines. He received four days solitary confinement for his offence.²¹ In May of the same year, Michael was fined five shillings "for disturbing the peace in being out after hours".²² Following these misdemeanours, they did not reoffend.

During 1853, the men were granted their Ticket of Leave for good behaviour.²³ This allowed them to work for themselves provided that they remained in a specified area, but they could not leave the colony.²⁴ The men transitioned to the free labour force. William and Michael were Probation Pass Holders throughout 1853, earning a modest 20 pounds whilst employed at Luckman's mine in New Town and William continued to work for him at least until 1862.²⁵



William Wall's House in Little Arthur St. Hobart

Eighteen fifty four was an eventful time for the men with each being granted a Conditional Pardon, giving them their freedom on the condition that that they did not return to Ireland.²⁶ Pierce, viewed by the colonial authorities as being affluent enough to provide for a family, was rewarded with a “permission to marry” in February, 1854.²⁷ His wife Ellen Wall had predeceased him by 1850.²⁸ At convict-built St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, Hobart Town, Pierce married 48 year old servant, Mary Sexton.²⁹ Deemed a troublesome convict from County Cork, Mary was a widow with a 10 year old daughter, Bridget Anastasia Swanton.³⁰

The same year Michael was granted a Free Pardon. He received a remittance on his sentence and was free to return to Ireland.³¹ Michael did not return to Tipperary. On 16 November 1854, he completed a *Schedule of Application for Free passage for Wives & Families of Convicts* at the Comptroller General’s Office in Hobart Town. Michael’s former residence was recorded as the Coal Mines Kilcooley, Ballingarry. When the immigrant ship, *Irene*, docked in Hobart Town on 9 May 1856, Michael was reunited with his wife, Margaret Wall (nee Kennedy) and their two children – Margaret and Eliza. The third child who accompanied them was more than likely Pierce Barrett’s son, John.³²

After this time both, Michael and Pierce Barrett, disappear from the published records, but William remained in Hobart Town until his death. Partial remnants of his life can be traced through parish records, local newspapers, police gazettes and convict records.

William Wall married in 1855.³³ His advent into the colony coincided with a large gender imbalance in Van Diemen’s Land – with two men for every woman. Convict women usually liked to marry more prosperous men than William. Against the odds, William appeared in the marriage records – a Catholic to Catholic union.³⁴ Between 1843–1853 42% of the 7000 female convicts transported to Van Diemen’s Land were Irish.³⁵ Among them was William’s bride-to-be, convict Bridget Rafferty, who arrived in Hobart Town 1 September, 1852.³⁶

Bridget (Biddy) Rafferty originated from Galway.³⁷ Sentenced to seven years transportation for coining false six pennies, she was convicted at Kilkenny on 2 April 1851.³⁸ Bridget was incarcerated at Grangegorman Female Convict Depot, Dublin where she spent 16 months training as a plain laundress before being transported on the *Martin Luther* on 1 June 1852.³⁹ The Anti-Transportation League protested the arrival of the ship – the Van Diemonians were keen to remove the enduring convict stain from their town.⁴⁰

On her arrival in the colony, Bridget was approximately 33 years old. Slightly shorter than William at 5 foot 1 inch in height, Bridget was described as having a dark complexion, blue eyes, black hair and sallow skin – possibly indicative of ill health. Her nose, mouth and chin were deemed medium and her face oval.⁴¹

It was unclear how the couple met, possibly crossing paths in New Town in 1852, where they were both worked.⁴² Alternatively, William may have selected Bridget as his wife at the Cascades Female Factory, her place of incarceration.⁴³ William and Bridget celebrated their marriage on 5 March, 1855 at St. Joseph’s Church, Hobart Town. Pierce Barrett’s stepdaughter, Bridget Anastasia, acted as a witness.⁴⁴

There is no evidence to suggest that William and Bridget produced a family, but they acted as sponsors for a number of children. They were godparents to Timothy and Bridget Anastasia Meredith's son, baptised in 1864, to Martin and Phoebe Delaney's daughter in 1869 and to John Barrett and Catherine McNamee's daughter in 1884.⁴⁵

William received his Certificate of Freedom on 27 September 1858.⁴⁶ From this period onwards, his life was marked by a series of court appearances. Residing near the Rainbow Inn on New Town Road, William was questioned at the Police Office on 11 September 1861 on a charge of malicious assault - striking Thomas Lawley on the head with a poker. Charged with the offence, he appeared at a criminal session of the Oyer and Terminer and General Gaol Delivery at the Court House in Hobart Town on 22 October. William was acquitted of the charge.⁴⁷

Less than a year later, he appeared as witness at a coroner's inquest. On 8 May 1862, at the Union Hotel, Hobart Town, William testified about the circumstances surrounding the death of a 13 year old boy, James Taylor - employed driving the gin at Luckman's Coal Pits in New Town where he worked. The boy's father asserted that he had not the slightest reason to believe that William treated the boy unkindly and that he seemed very much grieved when he saw the boy. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death.⁴⁸

By 1870, William was part of the circuitry of the mining industry, leasing his own mine in Augusta Road New Town.⁴⁹ Presumably, this opportunity would not have presented itself had William remained in Ireland. The coal in Hobart Town was sold for domestic use as it was not suitable for export.⁵⁰

In 1856, transportation to Van Diemen's Land was abolished. The colony was renamed Tasmania in a further attempt to remove its hated convict stigma. William too, was keen to be unshackled from the stain of a convict past. In early July 1870, he appeared in the Police Court before the Stipendiary Magistrate. Ironically, he was the defendant in a case against John Barrett and Bridget Anastasia Meredith. William alleged that he was a miner and resided at New Town. He stated he "Knowed the defendants. Remembers the 29th of June. Saw the defendants on that day. They were on their own premises at the time. The first salute be got when he came on the bank from the pit, was," you're a b.....convict wretch." On another occasion the defendants used grossly abusive language towards plaintiff. William admitted that he made "use of a certain blackguard expression" to Mrs Meredith. The case was dismissed, but William had made a point.⁵¹

In the *Reports of Crime* for Tasmania in 1873, William appears to be the victim of retributive justice. Six young turkeys and one old turkey were stolen from his premises in New Town. The Police Gazette assured its readers that the poultry was returned to him.⁵²

Indulging in an extra tipple saw William and Bridget charged alongside John Barrett's father-in-law, James McNamee, with having gone on a "spree". On 11 June 1874 they appeared in the Police Court, Hobart Town. The *Tasmanian Tribune* reported all three admitted they had committed a "sin" and "acknowledged they had plenty of room for

improvement". Promising to join the Good Templar movement, they avoided a prison sentence and each was fined five shillings.⁵³

It appears that William did not maintain contact with his family in Tipperary, but he was not forgotten. His sister and five of her daughters left The Commons and boarded the iron-hulled clipper ship, the *Smyrna*, at Plymouth on 30 May 1878.⁵⁴ Shortly after disembarkation in Sydney, she placed an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* stating "Michael and William Wall who came out to this colony about 30 years ago - your youngest sister Margaret Wall, now Delaney, is at the Immigration Depot, and would be very glad to hear from you".⁵⁵ Records indicate that contact was made with William by 1884.⁵⁶

In 1881 Hobart Town was renamed Hobart. William continued to work in the mining industry stoking the fireplaces of the city. On 20 August 1885, he appeared before the Police Magistrate, Mr Tarleton, pleading guilty to having obstructed the footpath in Murray Street Hobart by driving a load of coals on it. He was fined five shillings with an option of seven days imprisonment. William again appeared before the now Commissioner Tartleton in March 1890.⁵⁷ The plaintiff on this occasion, he sued a Mr. Lane who refused to pay for milk which Bridget had supplied to him. The Commissioner asserted that "the defendant's evidence was full of inconsistencies" and ruled in favour of William for the amount sought.⁵⁸

William was interred at the Cornelian Bay Cemetery on 14 June 1900.⁵⁹ At the time of his death, he was living at 13 Little Arthur Street, North Hobart.⁶⁰ Bridget died of "senilis" in September 1902 at the New Town Charitable Institution.⁶¹ They are buried side by side, however the only reminder is a monument erected to commemorate the burials on the site.

The fragments of recorded incidents form a vivid collage of the lives of the Boys from Ballingarry. Their bleak existence in mid nineteenth century Ireland was replicated in the harsh colonial environment of Van Diemen's Land. Only now are they fondly remembered as the fodder that was used to create Tasmania.



Burial Site of William Wall and Bridget Rafferty

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