

My Bere Island Family Connection

I am a descendant of a Bere Island family with the name of Lowney. The Lowneys were originally O'Sullivan's who came to the Beara Peninsular from the banks of the River Laune, which flows from the Lakes of Killarney out to sea near the town of Killorglin, County Kerry. There were so many O'Sullivan's in Beara Peninsular that our branch of the family was known as Launey and later Lowney.

My link to the Lowneys and to Bere Island is through my great great grandmother Margaret Mary Lowney, the elder daughter of Jeremiah Lowney and Catherine McAuliffe and grand daughter of Cornelius Lowney and Daniel McAuliffe. Jeremiah and Catherine, who lived in Rerrin Village, were married on the island on the 8th May 1823 and Margaret was baptised there on the 4th November 1824 with her two grandfathers as sponsors. Her sister Honora Lowney was baptised there on the 17th November 1826.

It appears from the early records of the island that grandfather Cornelius, also of Rerrin Village, was a farmer as he paid a tithe of two shillings and nine pence which was equivalent to 9 acres in 1827. Son Jeremiah was a Baker in Rerrin village. There were three Lowney families farming on the island in the late 1820s - Cornelius at Rerrin, Derby or Jeremiah at Greenane and John at Cloughland. These three could well be related.

Things were fairly tough on the island in the early 1800s. There was a famine in 1822 and in 1832 there was a major outbreak of cholera. In 1824, a British Army officer who was stationed on the island described the conditions of the population which he estimated at 2,000 in a state of great wretchedness resulting from a bad fishing season with famine not far away. In 1831 the fishing season failed for a second year adding to the residents woes. The population of the island fell rapidly after 1841.

About this time it appears that Margaret Lowney left the island, either on her own or with family. Little did she know when she left Bere Peninsular that she was destined to travel for the next decade and end up living on the other side of the world. In about 1842, at the age of 18 years, Margaret met and married Patrick Walsh, a soldier of the 36th Regiment of Foot. Patrick, who was born in Doneraile, near Mallow, County Cork some ten years before Margaret, had joined the army in 1831 and in the subsequent years had travelled & lived in the West Indies and North America. He was home in Cork on furlough in 1842.

Patrick and Margaret were lucky that they were "on strength" with the Regiment and travelled with the soldiers, the only problem being that as it was a Foot Regiment they all had to walk. Early in their marriage they walked from Cork to Limerick, to Tipperary and to Dublin & then Newry, on by ship to Whitehaven in England, then to Newcastle upon Tyne and later to Sheffield. Mary, the couples first born arrived in 1843, probably in Limerick, and son John was born in Newcastle in 1847.

In January 1847 Patrick and Margaret and their children boarded the ship Vengeance for the Ionian Islands living at Corfu and Cephalonia until 1851. Their daughter Catherine was born here. By 1851 the family was back in England and living on the Isle of Wight where Patrick obtained a Medical Discharge due to general debility having served in the army for 14 years and 76 days. The family, who now had a fourth child Patrick, moved up to London where Patrick collected his military pension. At this time Ireland was still in the grip of the famine so there was little point of returning home.

Settlers in Western Australia had petitioned the Home Office to provide a workforce and improved security for the fledgling colony and it was decided to send convicts to work there and to establish a force of ex military personnel to guard them. The Enrolled Pensioner Guard force was established and participants were to provide military service & guard duties as required and preservation of the peace. Those selected would be provided with a uniform, a free passage for themselves and their families, provision of bedding and would be given a land grant and convict labour to work it, after 7 years service. This was a chance of a new life for Patrick, Margaret and their family.

The family boarded the ship Ramillies in 1853 along with 30 Guards, 64 women and children and 277

housed in barracks at the Port of Fremantle as they attended church here. Patrick's health must have improved as more children came along. We know of Elizabeth, Ann, Charles and Frances who were all born and baptised in Fremantle and Patrick, aged six years, died here.

On the 26th September 1860 Patrick accepted the post as a Warder on Rottnest Island which was just off the Western Australian Coast. The accommodation here was good so the family and particularly Margaret probably felt right at home. The children would have loved the beaches and blue skies and it was a very healthy environment.

The settlement in Western Australia prospered and the Enrolled Pensioner Guard force began to be reduced in the 1860s. Patrick would have received his grant of land which he was at liberty to lease or sell and this would have provided some capital. Many of the Guard Force moved on to the eastern States of Australia and Patrick, Margaret and the children travelled the 1,500 miles to Sydney by sea in about 1865.

By 1869 Patrick is found in the Electoral Roll of Paddington, Sydney, an inner city suburb adjacent to the main New South Wales military establishment, Victoria Barracks where it would have been easy for Patrick to collect his pension. By the early 1870s Patrick is listed as a Freeholder of a property on the corner of Stewart and Gordon St, Paddington so he had bought a home and his family was settled at last.

Sadly though Margaret did not live long to enjoy the fruits of their labours as she died on the 26th October 1872 aged 48 years, of chronic disease of the lungs. Her death certificate confirmed Bere Island as her place of birth and noted that Margaret Mary had borne twelve children, 4 males and one female having pre-deceased her. The certificate confirmed the names and ages of her living children as Mary 29, John 27, Catherine 24, Elizabeth 13, Ann 10, Charles 9 & Frances 6. I am descended from Charles.

Margaret Mary was buried at the Catholic Cemetery at Lewisham in Sydney, some fifteen thousands miles from her birthplace on Bere Island. Patrick lived on until the 21st May 1880 and was buried beside her. Margaret and Patrick had an adventurous life and their many descendants are to be found across Australia.

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