

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2020

2005 Finding the Real Thomas Walsh

by Rowan Morrison

Finding the Real Thomas Walsh

Although Thomas Walsh was my 3rd great-grandfather he was originally not a high priority in my research as I was fascinated by Briscoe ancestors in my paternal grandmother's family. The Briscoes were property owners in Kilkennyⁱ from the early 1700s, with roots further back to Cumberlandⁱⁱ.

My aunt Gladys had handed down her Briscoe research carried out from the late 1980s in pre-internet times. She had engaged professional genealogists in Ireland to look up vital records, newspapers, the Registry of Deeds and other sources, and even travelled to Kilkenny to meet distant relatives. She was following the ancestors of Henry Harrison Briscoeⁱⁱⁱ, who after serving in the British Army^{iv}, migrated to Australia. His father, also Henry Harrison Briscoe, was a Poor Laws Inspector in County Clare^v during the Great Famine years and had married Eliza Thomasina Walsh in 1830. The Waterford Mail recorded:

“Married Henry Harrison Briscoe eldest son of Edward Briscoe of Cloncunny [Kilkenny] to Eliza Thomasina, only daughter of the late Col. Thomas Walsh, 56th Regiment.”^{vi}

I also inherited Gladys' unsubstantiated notes suggesting Eliza Thomasina's father, Thomas Walsh was born in 1760 and married Barbara Meagher of Tipperary. This was proved to be incorrect.

The father of Henry Harrison senior was as Edward Briscoe (born about 1755)^{vii}. The 95 year old widowed Edward was located in the 1851 census on the Isle of Man and with him a 39 year old 'Eliza T' and daughters Caroline and Thomasina^{viii} while husband Henry Harrison was working in Scotland. The census showed Eliza was born in “W. Indies (Brit Subject)” in about 1812. In the 1871 census Eliza, now a widow^{ix} was living with her daughter Caroline in Devon^x confirming a Jamaica, West Indies birth in about 1811.

In 2010 while travelling in Ireland, I was able to locate Eliza's quite impressive grave at Graigavine, Kilkenny, inscribed as follows:

“Sacred to the Memory of Elizabeth Thomasina Relict of the late Henry Harrison Briscoe Esq. Of Cloncunny Co. Kilkenny And daughter of the Late Lieut. Col. Walsh of H.M. 56th Regt. Died 13th February 1875 in her 66th Year.”^{xi}

This further confirmation suggested Eliza's birth date was around 1809. Based on these dates, Eliza's Jamaican baptism record was discovered as 7 April 1808 for “*Eliza Thomasina Walsh daughter of A. E. French*”, and being born on 3 March 1808.^{xii}

I also obtained a copy of the Thomas Walsh's will, part of which pointed further to his ancestry. Extracts include bequests totalling £1200 to four brothers: Edward, Philip, Joseph and Francis, and £2500 ‘to my innocent child, *Eliza Thomasina Walsh of Spanish Town, Jamaica.*’^{xiii}

Thomas' army career then came into focus through the British Army Lists, starting in 1798 as an Ensign in the 5th Regiment of the Irish Brigade^{xiv} (under commanding officer Col. Charles Viscount Walsh de Serrant), in 1801 in the 27th Regiment of Foot^{xv} during the Campaign in Egypt^{xvi} under General Eyre Coote^{xvii} and other postings^{xviii} including Jamaica between 1806 and 1808 in the 56th Regiment^{xix} again with Eyre Coote.

Coote was also Irish and the two men developed a strong bond and friendship. This was evident upon Thomas' early death in 1810^{xx} when a gig in which he was riding overturned. He was buried at St. Andrew's church at Farnham^{xxi}, Surrey where a memorial plaque was erected at the request of relatives. Details of these events are recorded in the *Eyre Coote Papers* which also identify some of Thomas' relations, including Viscount Thomas Anthony Southwell, Viscount of Gormanston Jenico Preston as well as his brothers. These high connections led to the discovery of Thomas' origins and proud Irish ancestry.

Thomas was born on 4 February 1777 in France into an Irish émigré family and baptised at St. Georges-sur-Loire as Francis Thomas David Joseph Walsh^{xxii}. His father was the second Earl Walsh, a title bestowed on the latter's father Anthony Vincent Walsh by the King James III^{xxiii} in recognition of his Jacobite service and his Irish noble heritage^{xxiv}. Thomas' uncle was also honoured as the Count de Serrant.

So, the real origins of our Thomas Walsh had been unearthed.

i Griffith's Valuations for Parish of Clonmore, Kilkenny, 1848-1864, p7.

ii Carrigan, William, History of the Diocese of Ossory Kilkenny, 1981.

iii "Ireland Births and Baptisms, 1620-1881", database, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:V5V7-VYN: 5 February 2020>), Henry Harrison Briscoe, 1837.

iv Indian Mutiny Medal Recipients, <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~clday/misc.htm>

v Clare County Library - Ennistymon Union Minutes Books, http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/history/et_minutes/et_minutes_book8.htm

vi Waterford Mail, 29th May 1830

vii "Isle of Man Parish Registers, 1598-2009," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XZT8-J4C : 4 August 2017>), Edward Briscoe, 31 Oct 1851, Burial; citing Onchan, Isle of Man, Manx National Heritage Library, Douglas.

viii Record Transcription: 1851 England, Wales & Scotland Census 3, Crescent Bayview, Conchan, Isle of Man

ix 'DEATH OF MR HENRY HARRISON BRISCOE', Inverness Advertiser, 18 November 1864, Inverness Reference Library, Farraline Park, Inverness IV1 1NH

x 1871 Census, Northam, Devonshire.

xi Personally taken photograph "Inscription - Headstone of grave of Eliza Thomasina Briscoe", 25 April 2010, jpeg

xii FamilySearch for the Jamaica, [St. Catherine's] Church of England Parish Register Transcripts, 1664-1880

xiii Prerogative Court of Canterbury, digital version of will: "Thomas Walsh late Colonel in HM 56th Regiment of Foot of Farnham in the County of Surrey"

xiv Army List 1798 WO 65 48 5th Regt Irish Brigade

xv Army List 1801 WO 65 51 27th Regt

xvi Walsh, Thomas, 'Journal of the late campaign in Egypt: including descriptions of that country and of Gibraltar, Minorca, Malta, Marmorice, and Macri: with an appendix containing official papers and documents' London: Printed by Luke Hansard, for T. Cadell, jun. and W. Davies, 1803.

xvii Eyre Coote Papers, 2006, University of Michigan, p.175,

http://www.clements.umich.edu/eadd/coote_calendar.pdf

xviii Army List 1807 WO 65 57 Queens Rangers

xix Army List 1809 WO 65 59 56th Regiment

xx Record Transcription: Surrey Burials

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=PRS%2FSURREY%2FBUR%2F0399708>

xxi War Memorials Register Lieutenant Colonel T Walsh

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/23588>

xxii Jack, TC & EC, 'Jacobite Peerage Baronetage, Knightage and Grants of Honour', Edinburgh, 1904, p180.

xxiii Ibid, p 178

xxiv Brown W., A Royalist family Irish and French (1689-1789) and Prince Charles Edward. Edinburgh, 1904.