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2015 Just Plain Alice

by Julie Webb

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Since 1788, Australia experienced waves of convict immigration from Great Britain. The emptying of overcrowded gaols had proved a success; however, from 1815 in an attempt to improve the moral character of society, the government promoted the migration of free settlers to the colony. By the mid-1830s opposition to transportation grew, not because of the inhumanity within the system but mainly the inflicted 'stain' on the free middle classes.¹ It is within this field of conflict that Alice arrived on the *Elizabeth IV* from London in 1836.²

Documents state she was aged 30, could read and write, was of protestant faith and a widow. Two children, Ann and Alice accompanied her on the voyage, the youngest being only fifteen months old.³ Working as a dressmaker by trade in England was not sufficient to sustain her small family, embarking on an unsuccessful criminal lifestyle she was discovered receiving stolen goods. The majority of women convicts were convicted of petty crimes and Alice, a native of Liverpool, was brought before the Lancaster (Liverpool) Borough Session of Peace on the 26 October 1835.⁴ With no previous convictions, she was sentenced to seven years and transportation to the colonies.⁵

Her appearance was well documented; regrettably, Alice was physically challenged, standing only five feet and a half-inch. Her complexion was ruddy and freckled, with brown eyes and bright chestnut hair. If this wasn't enough, she had lost upper front teeth and had a hairy mole on the left side of her chin.⁶ This vision of loveliness would not endear her to the opposite sex once arriving in the colony, she would need to do her best and work hard for a new life. One can only imagine her feelings as she walked from the ship with her two little girls⁷ not knowing their fate. On arrival, she would be sent to the Parramatta Female Factory,⁸ what this meant for her girls was unknown. Less than four weeks later in November 1836,⁹ her eldest daughter Ann would be removed and sent to the Orphan School. Alice must have been bereft when her child was ripped from her arms and taken away.

Her youngest daughter Alice would stay with her during the ensuing years at the Female Factory. Enduring malnourishment, manual labour and cruelty, Alice worked through the classification levels and after three years became eligible to participate in the monthly Bride Fairs. One Sunday in June 1839, James Carmody travelled from Sydney to inspect the available ladies, scarcely 'love at first sight', the banns were read in St John's Parramatta and they were married on July 27, 1839.¹⁰ James had obtained his Certificate of Freedom that year,¹¹ having arrived on the *Portland* in 1833;¹² his first attempt to marry had failed the year previous as both parties were under bond. Alice was married under the name of McShean,¹³ her widowed name, although other documents give multiple variations of MacShane, McShane, McSheen, and MacShean. It appears Alice's surname was questionable and her age was also in doubt. She is documented as 35 when married,¹⁴ according to the ship's indent she should have been 33,¹⁵ her death certificate places her at 34,¹⁶ this gives us a birth date ranging from 1804 to 1806 and still no maiden name to be found.

Young baby James arrived one year after their marriage; he was to be their only child.¹⁷ Another year later we see an application to the Colonial Secretary, Edward Deas Thomson, in 1841 by James Carmody for the release of Alice's daughter Ann from the Orphan School.¹⁸ Tragically, this request was denied because the Governor believed they only wanted Ann so

'her services would be valuable to them',¹⁹ rather than any strong sense of family. Alice did not become a free woman until November 1842.²⁰ However, the denial of their application was so devastating for Alice, that in desperation she composed a letter to Lady Elizabeth Gipps the Governor's wife in 1843,²¹ pleading for her consideration as a mother; all to no avail and no answer.

Figure 1.
 First page and signature of a handwritten letter from Alice Carmody to Lady Elizabeth Gipps, wife of the Governor in 1843, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir George Gipps.
 Includes handwritten notation to the left of the letter by the Governor (G.G.) that Alice "ought not to have written to Lady Gipps".

Any compassion from the hierarchy was absent and the family had to wait for Ann's release. Ann never came to live with her mother as the Orphan School had secured an apprenticeship when she reached thirteen. After years in servitude, Ann would marry John May when she was 21, interestingly Ann quoted her name as Ann McShehan Carmody on her marriage certificate.²²

Ann's younger sister Alice had married a year earlier to John Donaldson,²³ and it wasn't until each daughter stated they were born in Cheshire,²⁴ do we have a glimpse of their early life. Further evidence appears on the death certificates of both women including the occupation of their father as a teacher of music and musician. Andrew McShane and Alice Barlow are

documented as Alice Donaldson's parents, this information was given by her daughter Isabella,²⁵ and Ann May's death certificate confirms her parents as Thomas McShane and Alice Pickering, the informant being her husband John May.²⁶ Alice Carmody's death certificate gives us no information as to her parents or former husband.²⁷ Alice spent her life as a homemaker, whilst her husband worked as a cooper and labourer, it is evident that the marriage soured in the 1850s as James placed several newspaper ads, distancing himself from her debts and claiming no responsibility.²⁸

Despite extensive research, no birth entry can be confirmed regarding the parents of Alice Carmody nee Barlow or Pickering.^{29,30} Nor do we have any evidence of a marriage between her and Andrew or Thomas McShane or McShean.³¹ We can only assume that Alice Carmody lived a good life, despite the few misdemeanours along the way; she died aged 60 from Tuberculosis, and I am proud to call her family and my most elusive ancestor. Silent voices from the past give us clues to the origins of Alice, yet the mystery remains. Her name lives on in successive generations whilst her story is one of courage, determination, and sadness, but most of all resilience.

¹ Lucy Hughes Turnbull, 'The end of transportation', *Dictionary of Sydney*, 2008,

https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/the_end_of_transportation, accessed 20 April 2020.

² Australia Convict Ship Muster Roll – Alice MacShane, *New South Wales, Australia Convict Ship Muster Rolls and Related Records, 1790-1849* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA, Original data: New South Wales Government. *Musters and other papers relating to convict ships*. Series CGS 1155, Reels 2417-2428. State Records Authority of New South Wales. Kingswood, New South Wales, Australia, <http://ancestry.com.au>, accessed 22 April 2020.

³ Free Passengers and Crew on Convict Ships into Sydney 1830-40, *State Library of NSW*, Australian Reference- Special Collections Area (Q929.3944/28SET).

⁴ Lancaster Borough Sessions – Alice McShane, *England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2009, Class: *HO 27*; Piece: *49*; Page: *572*, <http://ancestry.com.au>, accessed 22 April 2020.

⁵ Convict Transportation Register – Alice MacShane, *Australian Convict Transportation Registers – Other Fleets & Ships, 1791-1868* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA, Class: *HO 11*; Piece: *10*, <http://ancestry.com.au>, accessed 12 April 2020.

⁶ Convict Indent 'Elizabeth IV' – Alice MacShane, State Archives NSW; Series: *NRS 12189*; Item: *[X639]*; Microfiche: *720*, New South Wales Government. *Bound manuscript indents, 1788–1842*. NRS 12188, microfiche 614–619, 626–657, 660–695. State Records Authority of New South Wales, Kingswood, New South Wales, Australia, <http://ancestry.com.au>, accessed 12 April 2020.

⁷ Free Passengers and Crew on Convict Ships into Sydney 1830-40, *State Library of NSW*, (Endnote 3).

⁸ Parramatta Female Factory – Alice McShean, *New South Wales, Australia, Convict Applications for the Publication of Banns, 1828-1830, 1838-1839* [database on-line], New South Wales Government. *Colonial Secretary. Returns of applications for the publication of banns, 1828–41*. Main series of letters received, NRS 905. The State Records Authority of New South Wales, Kingswood, New South Wales, Australia, <http://ancestry.com.au>, accessed 12 April 2020.

⁹ Admission to Orphan School - Ann McShean, 10 November 1836, *NSW State Archives, Child Care and Protection Index 1817-1942*, NRS:12266,[1]; COD 506, Page 39, <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research>, accessed 21 April 2020.

¹⁰ Marriage Certificate Transcript - James Carmody and Alice McShean, *NSW BDM (Early Church Records)*, Ref No: Vol 23B No 223, 1839.

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- ¹¹ Certificate of Freedom - James Carmody, 3 April 1839, *NSW State Archives, Convicts Index 1791-1873*, Entry No: 39/0506, Citation: 4/4347; Reel 1002, <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research>, accessed 21 April 2020.
- ¹² Convict indent 'Portland' - James Carmody, *New South Wales, Australia, Convict Indents, 1788-1842* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011, <http://ancestry.com.au>, accessed 22 April 2020.
- ¹³ Marriage Certificate Transcript - James Carmody and Alice McShean, (Endnote 10).
- ¹⁴ Marriage Certificate Transcript - James Carmody and Alice McShean, (Endnote 10).
- ¹⁵ Convict Indent 'Elizabeth IV' – Alice MacShane, State Archives NSW; Series: *NRS 12189*; Item: *[X639]*; Microfiche: 720, New South Wales Government. *Bound manuscript indents, 1788–1842*. NRS 12188, microfiche 614–619, 626–657, 660–695. State Records Authority of New South Wales, Kingswood, New South Wales, Australia, <http://ancestry.com.au>, accessed 12 April 2020.
- ¹⁶ Death Certificate Transcript - Alice Carmody, *NSW BDM*, Ref No: 1865/1537.
- ¹⁷ Baptism Transcript – James Carmody, *NSW BDM (Early Church Records)*, Ref No: Vol 61 No 274, 1840.
- ¹⁸ Letter to Colonial Secretary Edward Thomson from James Carmody, 6 March 1841, 41/2801, NRS 922: *Colonial Secretary, Indexes and Registers of letters received, 1826-1906*, photocopy of original from collection of Beverley Johnson, Brisbane, 2004.
- ¹⁹ Notation by Governor George Gipps (G.G.) regarding an application by James Carmody, 18 March 1841, NRS 922: *Colonial Secretary, Indexes and Registers of letters received, 1826-1906*, photocopy of original from collection of Beverley Johnson, Brisbane, 2004.
- ²⁰ Certificate of Freedom – Alice McShane, 9 November 1842, NSW State Archives, Convicts Index 1791-1873, Entry No: 42/1936, Citation: 4/4378; Reel 1012, <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research>, accessed 21 April 2020.
- ²¹ Letter to Lady Elizabeth Gipps from Alice Carmody, 18 July 1843, 41/2891, NRS 922: *Colonial Secretary, Indexes and Registers of letters received, 1826-1906*, photocopy of original from collection of Beverley Johnson, Brisbane, 2004.
- ²² Marriage Certificate Transcript - Ann McShean Carmody and John May, *NSW BDM (Early Church Records)*, Ref No: Vol 80 No 700, 1852.
- ²³ Marriage Certificate Transcript - Alice McShean and John Donaldson, *NSW BDM (Early Church Records)*, Ref No: Vol 79 No 295, 1851.
- ²⁴ Birth Certificate Transcript - Charles May, *NSW BDM*, Ref No: 1866/433.
- ²⁵ Death Certificate Transcript - Alice Donaldson, *NSW BDM*, Ref No: 1907/1326.
- ²⁶ Death Certificate Transcript – Ann May, *NSW BDM*, Ref No: 1866/964.
- ²⁷ Death Certificate Transcript - Alice Carmody, (Endnote 16).
- ²⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954)* Tuesday 26 July 1853, p 4 Advertising, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>, accessed 26 April 2020.
- ²⁹ Birth Record search – Alice Barlow, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/record/results?q.givenName=alice&q.surname=barlow&q.birthLikePlace=liverpool&q.birthLikeDate.from=1804&q.birthLikeDate.to=1806>, accessed 24 April 2020.
- ³⁰ Birth Record search – Alice Pickering, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/record/results?q.givenName=alice&q.surname=pickering&q.birthLikePlace=liverpool&q.birthLikeDate.from=1804&q.birthLikeDate.to=1806>, accessed 24 April 2020.
- ³¹ Marriage Record search – Alice Barlow/Pickering to Andrew/Thomas MacShane/McShean, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/record/results?q.givenName=alice&q.surname=mcshane&q.birthLikePlace=liverpool&q.birthLikeDate.from=1804&q.birthLikeDate.to=1806&q.marriageLikeDate.from=1820,eLikeD>, accessed 24 April 2020.