

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2020**

## **2028 Orphan Girl in Mourning Dress**

**by Marianne Larkin**

## Orphan Girl in “Mourning Dress”

On 26 February, 1868, Detective Constable Vickers, found a young girl in “mourning dress” walking aimlessly through the streets of Hobart. She was apprehended and charged with “wandering and not having a proper home or guardianship”.<sup>1</sup>

Addressing the Stipendiary Magistrate and Alderman the following day, D. C. Vickers stated: “the father of the girl was dead; that the mother was a common prostitute wandering from public-house to public-house; (and) that the girl had been kept by someone out of charity lately.” In response to a question put by Alderman, Henry Cook, the girl, Mary Jane Boucher, said she would like to have a “settled home” where she would be “properly brought up”. The Bench ordered the girl be sent to Trinity Hill Industrial School for a period of two and a half years under the Industrial Schools Act of 1867.<sup>2</sup>

Mary Jane’s father, John Charles Boucher, had died suddenly two weeks earlier on Elizabeth Street in Hobart. He was 45 years of age. For Mary Jane, this was the latest in a series of tragedies which had befallen her. Three years earlier in 1865, a fire in their Harrington Street home claimed the life of her young sister, Eliza. Mary Jane, along with her siblings, Frederick and Eliza, were reportedly playing marbles inside their house, when a candle was accidentally knocked over causing the younger girl’s clothing to catch alight. She died of her burns in hospital the following day.<sup>3</sup>

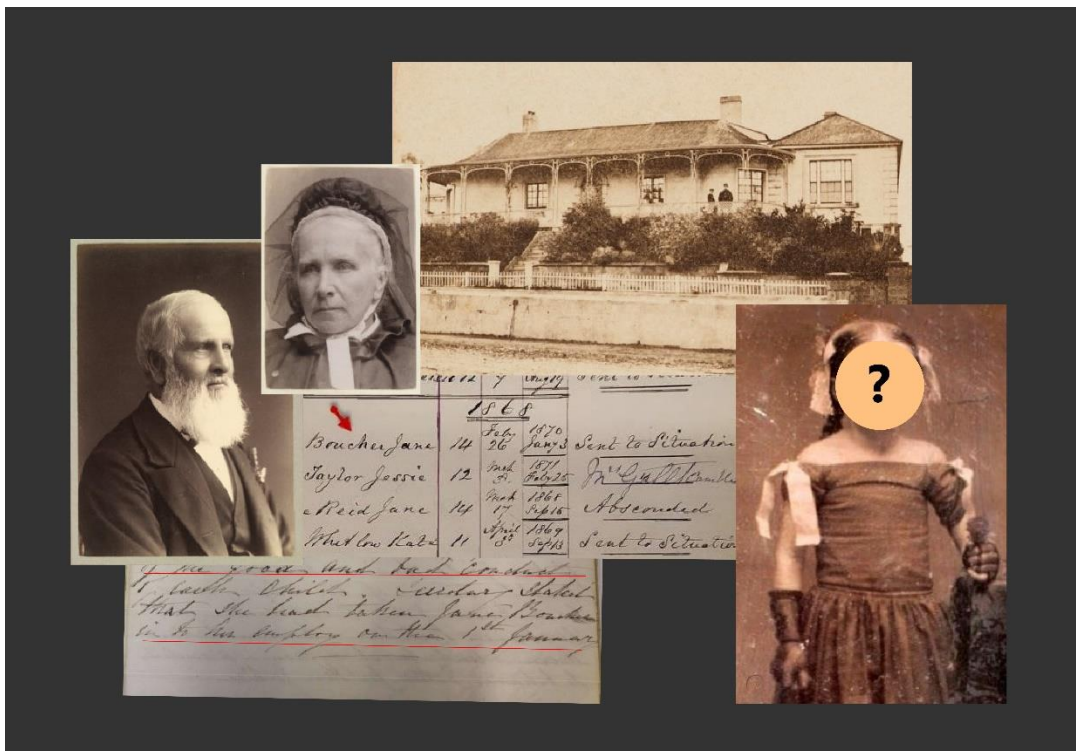


Figure 1: (from left) portraits of Mr. and Mrs. George Salier from Tasmanian Archives + Heritage; Melbourne Lodge by Samuel Clifford from Library of NSW PXB199; Victorian girl in mourning dress from <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/death-parent-young-girl-holds-single-294087446>.

For Mary Jane, the loss of her father must have been particularly devastating as he was their sole carer and provider. The former convict, from Paddington, England, was trying to make a life for himself and his young family taking whatever work he could find. While his conduct record stated he

was a plasterer and modeler by trade, John Boucher was variously recorded in Hobart as a: brass finisher, foreman, and timber dealer.<sup>4</sup>

Soon after receiving his Certificate of Freedom, John married Irishwoman, Catherine Whelan, who had recently arrived on the Martin Luther with a sentence of 7 years for larceny.<sup>5</sup>

First born to the couple was a son, Frederick Alfred, on 24 March, 1854. Mary Jane appears to be their second child. The birth is registered as 7 February, 1856 with “given name not recorded”. In addition to Mary and Frederick a third child was born on 7 July, 1858. She was Eliza.<sup>6</sup>

Catherine doesn’t appear to have stayed with the family for long. She was regularly in trouble with the police and first came to notice in early December, 1860. Charged with “disturbing the peace” and “assaulting” a constable, Catherine was fined 5s for the first offence and £1 for the second, or in default, one month’s imprisonment. She thereafter accumulated a “crowded record of offences”.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike her mother, Mary Jane Boucher’s name is not reported in the local press again. At the start of January, 1870, Mary Jane was discharged from the Industrial School and “sent to a situation”. That situation was to Mrs. George Salier, Secretary of the Management Committee of the Industrial School.<sup>8</sup>

The Salier family lived at Melbourne Lodge, Elizabeth Street, Hobart. George Salier was a successful merchant and politician. It was a busy household when Mary Jane joined it. There were seven children under 15, one daughter, Kate, the same age as Mary, 16, and several older children. Life must have been quite different working and living with the Salier family for the now, teenage, orphan girl.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, her brother Frederick, had begun a successful maritime career. He married Mary Ann Leary in 1876, fathered six children and became a well-respected member of the Hobart seafaring community.<sup>10</sup>

On Thursday, 10 April, 1879 an advertisement appeared in a Hobart newspaper seeking a “respectable young woman as General Servant” for the Salier family. Does this suggest Mary Jane had left their employ? She would be in her mid-twenties at that time and possibly seeking to marry and start her own family. There are, however, no records of any marriage or births for Mary Jane Boucher in Van Diemen’s land.<sup>11</sup>

Some expatriates who had migrated to New Zealand were trying to lure local cooks and servants across the Tasman Sea. “If some of the many Tasmanian girls, ready and willing to work, came here, I feel sure they would meet with speedy engagements.” Perhaps she was enticed by the prospect of moving there.<sup>12</sup>

Or was she beguiled by a trickster? A few years earlier there was speculation that many servant girls were being “induced to give up their comfortable situations in Tasmania” on “provision for life” promises only to be shipped to Brisbane and Adelaide and “shut up for life, where they are not known, and perhaps may never be heard of again”.<sup>13</sup>

A note in one of the newspaper notices issued by Fredrick’s family on the death of son, Charles Herbert, is suggestive of family members living abroad and interstate. It read: “Melbourne, Sydney and New Zealand papers please copy.” Was Mary Jane at one of those locations?<sup>14</sup>

An exhaustive search of births, deaths and marriage records throughout the Australian states and New Zealand has yielded nothing. An extensive search of passenger lists has also failed to provide any leads as to where she may have gone.

Many servant girls at risk of destitution, or who found themselves in trouble were sent to The Magdalen Home in Hobart. The Good Shepherd Archives have no record of Mary Jane Boucher at any of their institutions.<sup>15</sup>

While efforts thus far have failed to find any trace of the elusive Mary Jane Boucher, perhaps one day, someone or something will unveil her story.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tasmanian Times*, "The Industrial School Act," 27 February, 1868, p2; TROVE.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; [https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/N/Neglected%20children.htm](https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/N/Neglected%20children.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Eliza Boucher Inquest SC195/1/49 Inquest 5932, Tasmanian Archives + Heritage.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Boucher Conduct Record CON33-1-66 image 35; Tasmanian Archives + Heritage.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Boucher Conduct Record *ibid*; Boucher Whelan Marriage Record RGD37/1/12 no 717; Catherine Whelan Conduct Record CON41-1-35 image 217, Tasmanian Archives + Heritage.

<sup>6</sup> Eliza Boucher Birth Record RGD33/1/7 no 1701; Frederick Alfred Boucher Birth Record RGD33/1/5 no 825, Given Name Not Recorded Boucher Birth Record RGD33/1/6 no 1065; Tasmanian Archives + Heritage.

<sup>7</sup> *Hobart Mercury*, 10 December, 1860, p2; *Tasmanian Morning Herald*, 28 April, 1866, p2, TROVE.

<sup>8</sup> Record of Minutes, Trinity Hill Industrial School Committee, 14 January, 1870, Special Collections, UTAS.

<sup>9</sup> <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/salier-george-4531>; <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Salier-3>.

<sup>10</sup> Marriage record Frederick Boucher and Mary Ann Leary RGD37/1/35 no 293, Birth Record Frederick Alfred Boucher RGD33/1/12 no 797; Birth Record Charles Herbert Boucher RGD33/1/12 no 1680; Birth Record Annie Gladys Isobel Boucher RGD33/1/13 no 256; Birth Record Grace Eva Lemaistre Boucher RGD33/1/13 no 2260; Birth Record Arthur Morris Boucher RGD33/1/11 no 2942; Birth Record Clyde Tennyson Boucher RGD33/1/20 no 20; Tasmanian Archives + Heritage.

<sup>11</sup> *Hobart Mercury*, 10 April, 1879, p1, TROVE.

<sup>12</sup> *Tasmanian Tribune*, "Our Wellington Letter," 17 April, 1876, p3.

<sup>13</sup> *Weekly Examiner*, 25 July, 1874, p8, TROVE.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Herbert Boucher Death Notice, *Hobart Mercury*, 5 November, 1929, p1, TROVE.

<sup>15</sup> Email correspondence between author and Ingrid Camilleri, Heritage Support Worker, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, 19 February, 2020.