

Matthew Sullivan Update

My previous understanding was that Matthew went to work for “Messrs Wright & Co.” in Geelong when the family arrived in 1844. The handwriting on the Disposal List is certainly difficult to read. A researcher in Melbourne has re-examined the document and advises that it is actually “Messrs Highett & Co.” (See [Arrival details.pdf](#)). Matthew was engaged for 1 year with payment of £25 (no mention about rations).

“Messrs Highett & Co” consisted of John and William Highett. John Highett (1810-1867) was a squatter, later more respectably, a grazier. His younger brother William was quite a “mover and shaker” in the colony – accountant, banker, businessman and politician. John Highett was among the early settlers in the Port Phillip district. The Geelong region was renowned for its sheep grazing and wool production, and probably still is today. In 1837 John Highett had a property named “Hesse Plains” located about 40 kilometres west of Geelong. In 1842 he acquired more land, this time in the Barrabool Hills at the junction of Moorabool and Barwon Rivers, adjacent to the town of Geelong. As to which of these properties Matthew and family went I’m not sure. Perhaps Matthew had occasion to work at both.

John and Ellen Mahony and their three young children were fellow passengers with the Sullivans on the *Abberton*, and they too came from Carrigaline. This Mahony family went to work for “Mr Birch” at Seven Hill Station which I read is located “half way between Melbourne and Geelong”. The Disposal List says the “whole family engaged” though I can’t image what work the three young children would do. Payment was £30 plus rations. An English family from the *Abberton*, John and Alice Harris and their three children, were also engaged by Mr Birch at Seven Hills Station.

William Mahoney and his wife Johanna – fellow participants with Matthew in a fateful incident at Campbellfield a few year later – went to work for “Mrs Graham” at Saltwater River (or Creek) for one year, payment £22 plus rations. Another couple from the *Abberton*, Matthew and Eliza Adams from Buckinghamshire in England, also went to Saltwater Creek, the name of the employer in this case being recorded as “Thomas Graham”.

Forgive me if I take a short diversion here. The name “Mrs Graham” as the person who employed William and Johanna Mahony hides an extraordinary story. Let me just give you a little of it. This “Mrs Graham” was Mary Graham who “married” Thomas Graham in 1840. Thomas Graham already had a wife, Jane Lancaster, back in England who he had abandoned. Still in England, he then bigamously married a widow, Ann Hudson, with whom he then emigrated to Van Diemen’s Land. On the voyage out from England the ship caught fire and sank. Ann was killed, but Thomas Graham eventually made it to Hobart. There he became friendly with a publican, and became even more friendly with the publican’s wife, Mary Crooke. By amazing coincidence, Thomas Graham had a chance encounter in Hobart with his brother-in-law (from his first marriage), William Lancaster, who had been transported to Van Diemen’s Land in 1830 with a sentence of three and a half years. William denounced Thomas for deserting his wife Jane. Thomas’s previous life was catching up with him and he faced being charged with bigamy. So in 1837 Thomas Graham persuaded Mary Crooke to flee with him to Port Phillip. In due course they bought or purchased the Bush Inn (also

known as the Saltwater Punt Inn) at Saltwater Creek. Initially it was run by two of Mary's adult children, but on 6 September 1844 the license was issued to Thomas and Mary Graham. That's just a couple of weeks before the *Abberton* arrived, so we can see why they were looking for staff. Mary and Thomas Graham remained together for over 30 years to his death in 1871. He was very successful in business as a publican, farm owner, property developer, investor, merchant, and even brewery owner. His funeral entourage in Melbourne was reported to have been over a mile long. He left a fortune, but no will. It was only as a result of the ensuing legal disputes over his estate that his secret past was revealed.

Those then were the employers to whom the Sullivans and Mahonys went when they arrived in the colony in 1844.

Matthew and Margaret's first Australian born child was Daniel Sullivan. I have his date of birth as 28 July 1845, at Newtown in Melbourne, with his baptism being conducted at St. Francis Church, Melbourne by Fr Patrick Geoghegan OFM, first parish priest of Melbourne and later bishop of Adelaide. However, the Sullivans would have been living in Geelong on that date, not in Melbourne. There is a suburb named Newtown in Geelong which is adjacent to Highton – a corruption of Highett, named after the pioneer settler John Highett. I have as yet been unable to locate documentary evidence of Daniel's birth and baptismal details for clarification. The one thing I do have is a note on the government file for the transfer of title of land at Winnindoo after Matthew's death. It records that Daniel was 26 years of age on 23 October 1872 which would have him born in 1846 rather than 1845. (See bottom of page 4, **Winnindoo docs.pdf**.)

After leaving their initial employers, Matthew, William and their families moved to the Campbellfield area about 20 kilometres north of Melbourne. They were farmers and had dwellings, variously described as huts or houses, a mile or so from the village of Somerton (sometimes Summerton) in Campbellfield. It was at William Mahony's hut that the assault on John Barry (then aged 34) occurred on the evening of 7 March 1850, as a result of which Matthew Sullivan and William Mahony were charged with attempted murder and grievous bodily harm. Johanna Mahony and a Julia O'Keefe were charge only with grievous bodily harm. At the Supreme Court trial in Melbourne on 16 April 1850, the men were convicted only on the grievous bodily harm charge, and the women were acquitted of the charge against them. Matthew and William were both sentenced to "five years of hard labour on the roads of the colony". (For details of the charges, see **1850-men.pdf**, and **1850-women.pdf**; and for more on the story including a report of the trial, see **Newspaper reports of Campbellfield incident....doc**.)

Matthew is shown on the prison record as having been born in 1797 (see **Sullivan, M - Prison record, small.jpg**). The authorities always want to be sure that the information in their records is accurate. This is important for us since Matthew's age is inconsistent in various other records. On the *Abberton* he is shown as 43 years, whereas it now seems he was 47. Perhaps his chances of obtaining an assisted passage were better if he appeared younger. Similarly on the *Belle Creole* he claimed to be 50 years, again 3 years younger than his actual age. And I seem to remember that his age is different again on other records.

On William Mahony's record (see **Mahony, W – Prison record, small.jpg**) it shows the colour of his eyes were grey. That's an interesting physical feature. I wonder if it has been passed down to his descendents.

The victim of the assault, John Barry, lived about a mile from the Sullivans. He came from Co. Cork, probably from Carrigaline specifically. Griffiths Valuation (year?) lists two John Barrys in Carrigaline. At the time of the incident this John Barry was farming land previously held by Matthew. John Barry arrived at Port Phillip in 1840 as an assisted immigrant on the bounty ship *Andromache*. His brother Richard and wife Lucy were also on board, and it is with them that John went to recuperate after the assault. Richard was a publican in Melbourne, and was proprietor of the Woolpack Inn.

Incidentally, a cabin passenger on that voyage of the *Andromache* was William Brodie who settled at Moonee Ponds. I think that it was Richard Brodie, probably William Brodie's brother, who first employed Catherine Buckley (daughter of Margaret Callaghan from her first marriage) when she arrived on the *Abberton* in 1844. The Port Phillip colony was a small world at that time.

William Mahony and Matthew Sullivan's prison records show they were admitted to Pentridge Gaol on 11 December 1850. I don't know as yet where they were for the previous 8 months since their conviction. They both proved to be model prisoners. Neither had any further infractions recorded against them during their time in custody, and William was even appointed a Sub-Constable on 1 July 1851. Sub-Constable was the lowest rung on the police hierarchy, and was a recognized position in England, Ireland and the British colonies in those days. William was discharged from Pentridge on a Ticket of Leave on 5 April 1852, having served just 2 years of his sentence; Matthew was released on a similar basis 2 months later. I gather that a Ticket of Leave allowed the prisoner to undertake employment of their own choice, but required them to reside in a designated area and report to a magistrate or the police at regular intervals. Matthew and William may have both gone back to where they previously lived at Campbellfield since that's where they had some claim to farming land and where they had a residence. I'm looking into this to see if I can find out more.

Matthew must have been given some time off for good behaviour because he and the family departed Melbourne on the *Belle Creole* bound for Wellington, New Zealand, on 28 January 1855 – about 3 months before his sentence was due to expire. And it's obvious now why they left – to make a new start in life. Matthew worked as a farmer and labourer in the Hawkes Bay region of the North Island, and from his involvement in civic affairs was obviously a respected member of the community. Contact me for the story of their life in New Zealand if you don't already have it.

The last trace I have of Matthew in New Zealand is his name as a juror in a case of wilful damage in April 1861. His name no longer appears on the electoral roll published on 5 October of that year. Neither Faith nor I have been able to find the family on a shipping list for their return to Victoria. However, we do have a record of him back in Australia on 17 November 1861 when he was a sponsor at his daughter Margaret's marriage to Charles McLoughlin at St Francis Church, Melbourne. His occupation is shown as "Farmer".

He was farming at Wurruk Wurruk in the early 1860s (see top of page 15 in **Winnindoo docs.pdf**), an area located on the western edge of Sale in Gippsland. We know about that from the lease he signed on the 27 December 1867 for land at Winnindoo. I know nothing more at the moment about his life at Wurruk Wurruk, but I've contacted the Family History Society in Sale to see if they can tell us more.

He left Wurruk Wurruk early in 1868 to commence farming at Winnindoo, which is located (in Gippsland?) a little west of Sale. This turned out to be his final move in a long and difficult life journey. His time at Winnindoo was very short as he died on 14 September of that same year. For details of the circumstances of his death, see **Sullivan, Mat.-Inquest.pdf** for the records from the Coronial enquiry; see also **Sullivan, Mat- Intestate.pdf** for the probate records. We know which block of land was his at Winnindoo because it was subsequently sold to Thomas Anderson after Matthew's death. On the bottom of page 3 of **Winnindoo maps.pdf**, his farm is in Section 20, block 12, of 123 acres – the middle of three blocks shown with the name T. Anderson.

It's interesting to see other family names on the Winnindoo map – on page 3, Ph. Boland (Philip Boland?, brother-in-law of Daniel Sullivan); on top left of page 4, J. Falls (John Falls, brother-in-law of John McCamey); and on pages 4 and 5, three blocks marked James Rice (father-in-law of Philip Michael Sullivan).