

MARY ANN CHALKER – WILD COLONIAL GIRL?

Mary Ann Chalker was born in interesting times, the seventh child of William Chalker/Charker and the eighth child of Elizabeth Shackell/Shackle, both of whom were transported to Australia as convicts. Their story is well known to Chalker/Charker family descendants.

Mary Ann was a Christmas baby, born December 25, 1818 at Cawdor, [Mittagong NSW](#). At the time of her birth there were no Catholic priests yet in Australia so she remained unbaptised until she was almost three years old. [Father John Therry](#) and [Father Phillip Conolly](#) arrived in 1820 and by 1821 a temporary chapel had been erected on the site of [St Mary's Cathedral](#) in Sydney. It was to this chapel that William and Elizabeth brought their family, travelling for two days by horse and cart, for the christening of Mary Ann and newborn George. Father Therry officiated at the baptism that took place in August 1821.

Sadly, William Chalker's health began to decline and when Mary Ann was only four years old, her father died (February 1823). Elizabeth received an offer of marriage soon after the death of William but chose to remain single to keep her children's inheritance intact. One can only wonder how a woman could have managed to bring up 9 children on her own. Perhaps neighbours rallied around – and we would like to think that Michael and Catherine McGlynn were good neighbours because eventually a number of McGlynns would marry into the Chalker family. They were certainly all good friends in 1830 when they knew the *Wild Colonial Boy* [Jack Donohoe](#) and his gang, and appeared to be involved in all sorts of not-quite-legal transactions with them. Mary Ann was just a child at the time but it is somehow exciting to think that she had known some notorious [bushrangers](#) and lived to tell the tale.

In 1830, Jack Donohoe was shot and killed after two years on the run as an escaped convict/bushranger. He had been a savage murderer and had robbed many farmers so his friendship with the Chalkers and McGlynns is mysterious (although according to myth he was a handsome, chivalrous Robin Hood, a hero to the oppressed convicts). When Donohoe was killed, another gang member called John Walmsley was captured and sentenced to death. To avoid being hanged, he offered to be an informer and gave up the names of people whom he claimed either harboured the gang or received and disposed of their stolen goods. Amongst the 30 or so names were the McGlynns, Elizabeth Shackell and three of her sons. The McGlynns were charged but found not guilty. Walmsley gave evidence in the Supreme Court that he knew the Chalkers and the McGlynns very well and much buying and selling went on. He says "...the children were always in bed when we went there..." so it is just conjecture that Mary Ann might have met the *Wild Colonial Boy* and his gang. Walmsley told the court that Elizabeth gave them tea, bread and butter and other provisions. Luckily the Chalkers were also found not guilty. The evidence was strong but uncorroborated.

Michael McGlynn of County Clare had taken the [oath of United Irishmen](#) and was found guilty of violating the Insurrection Act and transported to Australia for 7 years. Catherine Collins of Cork was also transported and it is assumed they met whilst awaiting their journey aboard the "[Rolla](#)". By the time they arrived in May 1803, Catherine was in an advanced state of pregnancy and was allowed to go with Michael, who had been assigned to Benjamin Nicholls at Bringelly. All of their seven children were born there. Michael was eventually granted land next to the Chalker's farm at South Creek but by 1831 he had sold the farm and took up land at Mittagong.

Michael and Catherine's fifth child was a boy called Thomas, born in 1813. In 1834 he would be a witness at his own parents' belated marriage and in 1836 he would become Mary Ann Chalker's second husband.

Mary Ann married her first husband at the age of 13 years and 9 months. He was Robert Walker and the wedding took place at [St Paul's, Cobbitty](#), on October 6, 1832. The marriage was to last a mere 3 months and Mary Ann found herself a widow at 14 years of age. She returned to her mother's home at South Creek. Thomas McGlynn, who had been Mary Ann's childhood friend and neighbour, would call in on the Chalker family when he was in the district with his brother John. Before long the friendship grew into something more and Mary Ann found herself pregnant with her first child. Thomas and Mary Ann promised Elizabeth that they would marry at the first opportunity, and this they did.

Mary Ann married Thomas McGlynn in a double ceremony with John McGlynn and Ellen Turner at [St Matthew's Catholic Church, Windsor](#), on July 14, 1836. (Purely by coincidence, this writer, the great-great-grand daughter of Mary Ann and Thomas, was married in the same church in 1973).

Their firstborn, Joseph, was born at Webb's Creek in January 1837. Then, after a gap of eight years (during which time Mary Ann also cared for the daughter of John McGlynn, whose wife Ellen had died), Thomas Michael was born in Bargo on July 7, 1845 (he was to marry Mary Ellen, daughter of Daniel Chalker {1806 - 1891}). The family settled in Mittagong and John was born on February 13, 1848. The next son, James, was born on June 30, 1849 and was later to form an alliance and then marry Ann Elizabeth Chalker née Kelly, the estranged wife of Daniel Chalker (1836 - 1909). The fifth child was my great grandmother Catherine Anne, born March 13, 1852. She was followed in almost yearly intervals by Frederick (1854), Elizabeth (1855), Edward (1856), William (1857), Mary (1859) and Daniel (1861).

Thomas McGlynn died in 1869 at Mittagong. Mary Ann must have been lonely and would have appreciated the companionship of an old family friend, James Williams, who was also the godfather of my great grandmother Catherine Anne. They married in 1873 but sadly Mary Ann died only weeks later on November 12, 1873.

Catherine Anne McGlynn was to marry Joshua Wilkins at the age of 20 in 1872. Joshua was the son of free-settlers Asaph and Maria Wilkins from Gloucestershire, and had his own butcher shop in Mittagong. They moved to Sydney with their 9 surviving children in c.1902. Joshua continued as a butcher in Albert St. Redfern until retiring to Boomerang St. Haberfield to live with their youngest son Frederick (1889 – 1986) and his wife Margaret née Higgins (1891 – 1971). Joshua died here in 1920 and the family, with Catherine, moved again to Croydon. Catherine died there in 1934.

Fred and Margaret Wilkins were my grandparents. Their children were Frederick (1919-2006), Therese (1921 – 2004), Sydney (1922 –1982) and Anthony (1924-2007). From this line alone, Mary Ann Chalker and Michael McGlynn have 40 descendents still living in 2009, in Australia, Hong Kong and Pittsburgh USA.

[Mary Ann Chalker](#) (Williams) and [Thomas McGlynn](#) are both buried at [Chapel Lane Cemetery, Lower Mittagong](#).



Two of Mary Ann's daughters –
Catherine Wilkins and Mary Caites



A young Catherine Wilkins



Sydney Joseph Wilkins
(Son of Fred and Margaret)



Grave of Mary Ann

Written and photos provided by Lyn Scaysbrook (née Wilkins).

REFERENCES:

- "From Clerics, Cavaliers & Convicts"* 1995 E.W. Northwood (self published)
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