

Julia Brien ~ Biography

[1833 ~ 1909]

The Author. My name is Jon Heppell and my interest in genealogy was inspired by my late father-in-law, Jeffery Wilder, who spent many square metres of shoe leather, reams of photocopy paper and sheets of stamps during the pre-internet 70s, 80s and 90s, to investigate his own ancestry, of which he was deservedly proud. Shortly before he died, I undertook to consolidate his work on a computerised genealogy platform. I was soon caught up in his enthusiasm, and thus the bug was acquired. Many of our ancestors would be blushing in the grave if aware of the exposure, through present day access to modern digitised records, of their past crimes, illegitimacies, affairs and even bigamies; not to mention the serial deceptions they perpetrated in order to conceal those transgressions. Jeffrey had recorded his g-grandmother as Eliza Page, née Dray, born Mudgee. In seeking her parentage, I subsequently uncovered some of those awkward truths, and the extraordinary life of her mother, Julia Brien. This is Julia's story...

Julia Brien (aka Brine, O'Brien, O'Brine), who disembarked in Port Jackson, Sydney from the barque Lismoyne (departed Plymouth England on 22 August 1849) on 29 November 1849, was born in about 1833 in Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland to parents William and May (or Mary, née Collins¹). Her immigration documents described her as a 16 year old orphaned farm servant, unable to either read or write, of good character, and without relatives in the Colony.²

Prior to her migration, Julia was resident at the Kilkenny Workhouse, an institution for the destitute opened in 1842 to house 1300 inmates. By 1849, they numbered over 2000, growing within a year to 3000, undoubtedly exacerbated by the great famine. Workhouse conditions were Dickensian, made as unattractive as possible, as the poor were considered feckless and undeserving. Food was of poor quantity and quality, and strict segregation of the sexes ensured families were split up. There were many cases of cholera and dysentery. Inmates were put to work at menial tasks of no commercial worth.³

Under the Earl Grey sponsored migration scheme ... a) to relieve this overcrowding of Ireland's workhouses and ... b) to resettle young, typically orphaned, female victims of the Irish Famine as domestic workers, and potential brides for the predominantly male Australian colonies, those young Irish girls transported to New South Wales lived for a time at Hyde Park Barracks, until their future was decided.

Julia would have travelled from the Kilkenny Workhouse by train to Dublin, and on to Plymouth by steam packet, to embark for the voyage to NSW. Before they left Ireland each orphan girl was given a regulation kit of clothing, linen and utensils, a bible and a hairbrush, stored in a lockable box. The girls shared bunks in 3rd class quarters and mustered in small mess groups. Each shipment was overseen by a surgeon-superintendent and a matron, who guarded against contact with sailors and fellow passengers.

After several months at sea, the NSW immigrant ships were towed into Sydney Cove, unloading their passengers on the dock like so many parcels. The orphan girls, strangers in a strange place, along with the motley assortment of unaccompanied women and mothers with children, were carted on drays or walked up Macquarie Street to the Immigration Depot at Hyde Park Barracks. Scrutinised by immigration clerks, health officers and clergy, they shared sleeping quarters in the newly-appointed wards upstairs, before signing indentures for work in the ground floor hiring room.⁴ Julia was initially employed, in an unspecified capacity, by a Richard Harnett (an established broker, agent and merchant of O'Connell St), apparently for one year, with remuneration of £8.⁵

Julia married William Page in St Mary's Roman Catholic pre-Cathedral in Sydney on 14 July 1851.⁶ At least 2 children were born to the couple — John in 1856,⁷ and Eliza in 1858.⁸ Julia first came to the attention of the courts, in July 1857, by alleging she was assaulted by one Honora Torphy. This allegation was dismissed in court, Honora then accusing Julia of using insulting language towards her, which was proven and Julia was fined 20 shillings plus 24 shillings and 6 pence court costs.⁹ This first court appearance was illustrative of Julia's fiery temperament, fuelled by a penchant for alcohol and abusive language and which was the cause of just about every subsequent brush with the law.

In 1859 Julia and William endured the worst experience of parenthood imaginable, as little Eliza died in January, aged 1 year,¹⁰ followed in June by her brother John, of age 3.¹¹ This tragedy was perhaps the motivation for William to go bush, leading to Julia's admission to the Benevolent Asylum on 20 August 1860 and discharge on 19 September 1860, at her own request. Details in the inmate journal state *'Married — husband to diggings. Destitute'*. She was admitted again the next day, and discharged 10 October 1860.¹²

In October 1861, William Page appeared in court to answer the complaint of Julia his wife, for having deserted her and left her without the means of support. He was ordered to pay 10 shillings weekly for twelve months.¹³ This payment was reduced in January 1862 from 10 shillings to 6 shillings, on the basis of his own diminished circumstances.¹⁴ Less than 6 months later, in May 1862, Julia was charged with drunkenness and riotous conduct and spent 48 hours in gaol.¹⁵

In 1863 Julia bore an illegitimate child to James (aka Jem or Jemmy) Tick, named Eliza (registered as Tick), who was born 12 July at St Anne's, Liverpool Rd, Burwood. Jemmy was a Chinese, born in Hong Kong in about 1824, and described variously as a wood carter, charcoal smoker and oyster worker.¹⁶ One newspaper report suggested that he used up to 10 aliases. It appears he was also somewhat itinerant, with police records showing him working in the Parramatta Bush, but as far distant as Port Stephens. Julia's liaison with a Chinese man was neither common nor generally sanctioned by society at the time. Given the location of her arrests around the Haymarket, which was already overshadowing the earlier Chinatown in The Rocks, it may be she interacted with the Chinese community more than many of her peers. It may also be an indicator of desperation for male support, or even just a roof, that she did partner with Jemmy. In any event, the relationship was unsuccessful, and short lived.

The following November Julia summoned Jemmy for the maintenance of their illegitimate daughter, for whom the court ordered him to pay 7 shillings 6 pence a week.¹⁷ This was more than likely instigated by the Benevolent Asylum from whom she sought help for the third time,

staying from 14 October 1863 to 5 November 1863, with her child, now known as Eliza Page and aged 3 months. The inmate journal describes Julia as *age 25, per 'Lismon', with Eliza Page age 3 months who had been 'deserted by husband — four months'*. She was allowed out of the asylum on 5 November but did not return — *'absconded with child'*.¹⁸ A medical report from the same time stated Julia was suffering from catarrh and on 3 November she came before the committee who recommended she remain in the asylum for another 2 weeks due to her delicate health.¹⁹

Things started to go downhill rapidly for Julia in 1864. She was charged with using abusive words towards John Swan Sing in February 1864 and spent 48 hrs in gaol.²⁰ In September of the same year she was gaoled for 7 days for using obscene language in Hay St. In the gaol records, Julia is described mostly as being born around 1835, from Kilkenny, arrived on the Lismoyne, had light brown hair, brown eyes, was about 4ft 10 inches tall, could read and was a Catholic.^{21,22}

In early January 1865 Julia was charged with using obscene language and spent 48 hours in gaol.²³ She was no sooner out than in again and then spent another month for vagrancy.²⁴ By the 6th Feb 1865 she was again convicted of vagrancy and using obscene language in Gipps Street (now Barlow St, Haymarket) and sentenced to 3 months gaol.^{25,26} After this Julia disappears from the records and there is no other record of a conviction or gaol sentence to be found under her name or of a Julia from the Lismoyne.

Julia left Sydney sometime after 1865, possibly, as was not uncommon for those of her peers at the time, to escape the pernicious culture of urban Sydney. It is unlikely but unknown whether she rejoined her husband in the goldfields. William Page died in 1868 at Pyramul, near Mudgee from exposure to the weather (it was July) while intoxicated. Described as a digger, he was still pursuing the golden dream.²⁷

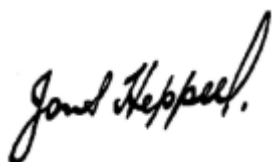
In 1877, at age 44, she married widower John Dray at the St John the Baptist Anglican Church in Mudgee, at which time she was described as a widowed domestic assistant. John was a 57 year old farmer, patriarch of the extensive Dray family originating in Ruckinge, Kent. They both resided at Coomeala Flat on the Munmurra Brook (a tributary of the Goulburn River, south from Cassilis). The bride's parents were recorded as Phillip Ryan and Mary Connor, which is inconsistent with Julia Page (née Brien)'s immigration records. Given the likelihood that her Irish accent would have been less intelligible to an Anglican priest than to an Irish immigration officer, it is conceivable that "William Brien" was erroneously recorded as "Phillip Ryan" &c. &c.²⁸

By 1884 Julia had left the home she shared with John, an acrimonious separation which led to a public repudiation by Mr. Dray, in various local newspapers.²⁹ It is family lore that Julia, accompanied by daughter Eliza and grandson William Page Jnr. (abt. 1yo), then took up residence in Muswellbrook, at least prior to Eliza's marriage to Isaac Budden, in Muswellbrook, in November 1885. It was implied that Eliza was a young widow, and that Page was not her maiden name. The subterfuge extended to the identity of William Page Jnr's father being a William Page Snr, whereas in fact there was no father recorded at his birth (at which Julia Dray was a witness).³⁰

This marriage led to improved circumstances for the Page women, as Isaac was a widowed scion of the successful Budden family, pioneers in Muswellbrook since the late 1830s.³¹ The family owned, operated or managed several businesses and properties, including farms, an extensive sheep run (St Heliers), a saddlery, a tailory, hotels and guest houses. By 1901 Julia Dray was confirmed resident in Muswellbrook and at the stated age of 65, was in receipt of a Government Pension.³² She lived in her later years near St. James R.C. Church and was cared for in her final weeks by Eliza, in the Budden's Family Hotel in Sydney St. Muswellbrook where she died on 7th August 1909, of heart disease accelerated by an attack of pneumonia, (stated age 79, actually 76 according to her immigration record).^{33,34}

Eliza's Eurasian origins were not realized (or, at least, not publicized) by the family, but it made subtle appearances in subsequent generations (refer photo, WPJ below). She had, both before and together with Isaac, given Julia a grandson and 3 grand-daughters; William Page (Jnr) [1883] Sarah [1886], Linda [1887] and Ellena Levinia (known as Viney) [1889], who between them produced 10 great-grand-children in the years bracketing Julia's death, the oldest of whom, Bessie Budden [1907], was my wife Gail's grandmother.

Eliza, aged 64 at the time of her mother Julia's death, lived until just short of 90 years of age, by which time she was simply known as Granny Budden. She died on 12th Jun 1953 at 53 Dickinson St Charlestown, fittingly in accordance with family tradition, in the home of her daughter Linda and grand-daughter Bessie. Gail, Julia's great-great-great-grand-daughter, was just 4 months old at the time.



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William Page Jnr - grand-son



1st, 2nd and 3rd generation Budden descendants of Julia Brien with Isaac Budden c.1914 - standing L-R, Ellena Lavinia & Eliza Page. Seated - Sarah & Albert [Myers] and Linda. At front - Bessie (standing).

- 1 New South Wales Births Deaths & Marriages Deaths Register (Marbract) Transcription - 10177/1909 Julia Dray, William, May, Muswellbrook
- 2 State Archives & Records Authority of New South Wales; *Persons on bounty ships to Sydney, Newcastle, and Moreton Bay (Board's Immigrant Lists)*; Series: 5317; Reel: 2459; Item: [4/4911]
- 3 Ask About Ireland [website] - [The Kilkenny Workhouse](#)
- 4 Sydney Living Museums [website] - [Human Parcels](#)
- 5 Irish Famine Memorial [website] - [Julia Brien](#)
- 6 New South Wales Births Deaths & Marriages online Marriage Index - *William Page and Julia O'Brien 1851, Vol. 97, No. 285. Roman Catholic Marriages Register.* (Recorded as O'Brien in Marbract transcription)
- 7 New South Wales Births Deaths & Marriages online Births Index - *PAGE JOHN 556/1856 (also V1856556 142A) WILLIAM JULIA*
- 8 New South Wales Births Deaths & Marriages online Births Index - *PAGE (FEMALE) 210/1858 WILLIAM JULIA SYDNEY*
- 9 National Library of Australia - Trove - [The Sydney Morning Herald \(NSW : 1842 - 1954\) Thu 16 Jul 1857 Page 4](#)
- 10 New South Wales Births Deaths & Marriages online Deaths Index - *108/1859 Eliza Page William, Julia, Sydney*
- 11 New South Wales Births Deaths & Marriages online Deaths Index - *633/1859 John Page William, Julia, Sydney*
- 12 Benevolent Asylum Admissions & Discharges 1857-1900 - Mitchell Library Ref. D574-D581 - *Inmate Journal 1860*
- 13 National Library of Australia Trove - [Sydney Mail \(NSW : 1860 - 1871\) Sat 26 Oct 1861 Page 8 CENTRAL POLICE COURT](#)
- 14 National Library of Australia Trove - [Sydney Mail \(NSW : 1860 - 1871\) Sat 11 Jan 1862 Page 8 CENTRAL POLICE COURT.](#)
- 15 National Library of Australia Trove - [Empire \(Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875\) Thu 16 May 1862 Page 5 CENTRAL POLICE COURT.](#)
- 16 NSW BDM Births Transcription - *Ref No 1863/3840 Eliza Tick, James Tick, Julia Brines [sic], District of Burwood.*
- 17 National Library of Australia Trove - [The Sydney Morning Herald \(NSW : 1842 - 1954\) Sat 28 Nov 1863 Page 6 CENTRAL POLICE COURT](#)
- 18 Benevolent Asylum Admissions & Discharges 1857-1900 - Mitchell Library Ref. D574-D581 - *Inmate Journal 1863*
- 19 Benevolent Asylum Admissions & Discharges 1857-1900 - Mitchell Library Ref. D574-D581 - *Minutes of the House committee, 3 November 1863*
- 20 National Library of Australia Trove - [Empire \(Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875\) Sat 13 Feb 1864 Page 3 CENTRAL POLICE COURT.](#)
- 21 State Archives & Records Authority of New South Wales; Roll: 861 - *New South Wales, Australia, Gaol Description and Entrance Books, 1818-1930*
- 22 National Library of Australia Trove - [Empire \(Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875\) Sat 13 Feb 1864 Page 3 CENTRAL POLICE COURT.](#)
- 23 State Archives & Records Authority of New South Wales; Roll: 861 - *New South Wales, Australia, Gaol Description and Entrance Books, 1818-1930 - Darlinghurst gaol record, 2 January 1865*
- 24 State Archives & Records Authority of New South Wales; Roll: 861 - *New South Wales, Australia, Gaol Description and Entrance Books, 1818-1930 - Darlinghurst gaol record, 5 January 1865*
- 25 National Library of Australia Trove - [Sydney Mail, 11 February 1865](#)
- 26 State Archives & Records Authority of New South Wales; *Police Gazettes. Series 10958, Reels 3129-3143, 3594-3606*
- 27 State Archives & Records Authority of New South Wales; *Registers of Coroners' Inquests and Magisterial Inquiries, 1834-1942 (microfilm, NRS 343, rolls 2921-2925, 2225, 2763-2769)*
- 28 National Library of Australia Trove - [The registers of the parish of Diocese of Bathurst, NSW : St John the Baptist, Mudgee \[microform\].](#)
- 29 National Library of Australia Trove - [The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser \(NSW : 1843 - 1893\) Feb. 1st. 1884.](#)
- 30 NSW BDM Births Transcription - *Ref No 1883/020840 - Father = illegitimate. Mother = Eliza Page, witness = Julia Dray..*
- 31 National Library of Australia Trove - [The Scone Advocate \(NSW : 1887 - 1954\) Fri 16 Sep 1927 Page 2 MR. ISAAC BUDDEN.](#)
- 32 National Library of Australia Trove - [The Scone Advocate \(NSW : 1887 - 1954\) Fri 16 Aug 1901 Page 2](#)
- 33 National Library of Australia Trove - [The Muswellbrook Chronicle \(NSW : 1898 - 1955\) Wed 11 Aug 1909 Page 2](#)
- 34 New South Wales Births Deaths & Marriages Deaths Register (Marbract) Transcription - 10177/1909 Julia Dray, William, May, Muswellbrook