



## Orphan Profile:

Mary Casserly from Newtowncashel, Longford

### Snapshot

- ◆ One of 58 orphans selected for emigration to Australia from Workhouses in County Longford
- ◆ Arrived per *Digby* in April 1849
- ◆ Married aged 24 to John Wilson
- ◆ Married aged 29 to John Williams
- ◆ Went to Goldfields in Tumut/Adelong Region
- ◆ Travelled to New Zealand Goldfields in 1862/3
- ◆ First woman to cross into the Inangahua Valley and settle in the gold fields town of Kynnersley
- ◆ Held up by Bushrangers in 1866
- ◆ Ran several hotels and stores after husbands death
- ◆ Lived to age 64, died in Caplestone, NZ
- ◆ 12 children and 21 grand-children



Mary Casserly (right), and daughter Rosanna Kynnersley Williams (standing) - circa late 1880s

Photo: John Coghlan

### *Early Life in Ireland*

Mary Casserly was born on 28 February 1831 in Newtowncashel, a town in the Poor Law Union of Ballymahon, bounded to the west and the south by the waters of Lough Ree, a lake that forms part of the Shannon River.

Mary's parents were Patrick Casserly, a cabinet maker born approximately 1798, and Ann Skelly born about 1796. Mary's baptismal sponsors were recorded as Patrick Casserly and Nora Murtagh.

Both Mary's parents died in Newtowncashel most probably from the effects of the Great Famine; Ann on 17 February 1848 at the age of 52 years, and Patrick 11 days later on Mary's 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, 28 February 1848, aged 50 years. Their burial location is unknown.

Great grand-son, John Coghlan, has identified birth records of four other children in the family, all born in Newtowncashel;

- *Brigid* born on 4 February 1833, her baptismal sponsors being Michael Skelly and Mary Glennan;
- *Thomas* on 27 May 1835, his sponsors being Thomas Doherty and Mary Creegh;
- *Ann* on 13 March 1839 and her sponsors were Michael Casserly and Brigid Casserly; and
- *Margaret* on 15 April 1844 with sponsors Margaret and Patrick Casserly.

Another brother, Patrick, married an Ann Doolin in Newtowncashel on 17 April 1861 and their four children were named Patrick (b.1863), Mary (b.1865), Margaret (b.1871), and Brigid (b.1879), and of these, Mary and Patrick were later to emigrate to New Zealand in 1883.

## The Workhouse

At some point, either before or following the deaths of her parents, it appears that Mary entered the local workhouse, most likely at Longford, which had opened in 1842. Built for 1000 inmates, by the end of 1848 over 2300 people were staying there, with many dying of typhus which was rife across the union. According to Peter Higginbotham, in a short 10 year period over 16,000 people died at Longford workhouse, most of whom would



Longford Workhouse  
Source: (Ireland Reaching Out)

have been buried in the mass graves adjoining the site to the South.

Around November 1848, the Government Agent Lieutenant Henry visited the workhouses across the County and advised their Boards of Guardians to nominate a number of girls for emigration to Australia. Mary was selected, and about 10 months after the death of her parents she departed the workhouse, together with 58 other girls from County Longford, for their journey

## Voyage to Australia

The ship *Digby*, at just over 12 months old arrived in Plymouth from Liverpool on 4 December 1848. The orphan girls and other emigrants embarked on 11 December 1848 and the ship set sail five days later on 16 December 1848.

On board the ship were the Master, Captain Tabor, his wife and child, the Surgeon Superintendent Dr. William Neville, 45 crew, 234 orphan girls and 22 married couples.

During the voyage, between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January there were 8 cases of typhus fever reported, of which two girls aged 16 and 17, sadly died. Two premature births were also recorded. In all, over 505 'distinct cases of disease' were reported on board to Dr. Neville since leaving Plymouth out of 308 people.

The Mitchell Library in Sydney holds extracts from Neville's private diary, recording accounts of incidents occurring on board, along with supporting statements from other passengers and crew.

The most serious of complaints were leveled at the ships master Captain Taber, who according to Neville, was complicit

in defrauding the emigrants of their regulated ration allowances. He reports of inferior quality beef unfit for eating, and the emigrants rationed allowances of tea, sugar, flour and water being reduced by up to half. On discovery, Dr. Neville publicly accused the Captain of fraud leading to several heated confrontations.

At one point, Dr. Neville was threatened to be put in irons, and was saved in another incident by a passenger who prevented a crew member from attacking him. In another fiery outburst, the Captain turned the ship around and sailed back toward England for 3 days - before turning again toward Sydney.

The Captains wife Mrs. Tabor, inflamed the already tense situation by inciting the crew against the doctor. To the Doctor's annoyance she also restricted the emigrants use of the (Poop) deck area because their presence was 'inconvenient to her'. Singing and dancing, noted the Doctor in his diary were essential for spirit and health on long monotonous journeys.

...continued next page

### *Voyage to Australia, cont.*

Neville also complained of the Ship's carpenter of having improper relations with one of the matrons and taunting an orphan girl by pulling her clothes over her head. Another girl is reported as trying to throw herself overboard but was saved because her foot was caught in the rigging. Neville also was involved in breaking up a dispute between some girls from the Cavan Union which resulted in him being hit over the head with a tin pot. Neville punished the ringleader by cutting off her hair.

Whilst several of the married passengers made complaints about their treatment on arrival, the immigration list records

very few complaints being stated by the orphan girls.

Neville's journal was returned to England, however we are yet to find any formal action lodged or taken against Taber in relation to the claims by Ne-



### *Arrival in Sydney*

The Digby arrived in Sydney Harbour on 4 April 1849 after a 110 day passage.

On arrival at Sydney, Mary's details were recorded by the Immigration Agent on the *Digby* passenger list as *Mary Cassidy* rather than *Casserly*. This practice is in common with many of the Irish orphan girls' names being incorrectly recorded due to accent differences. This also applied to the capturing of place names, as in the case with Mary where her 'Native Place' is given as Castle, Co. Longford instead of 'Cashel'. The practice of mishearing and/or misspelling continued later with the registrations of Mary's marriage ("Cassely") and childrens' birth registrations ("Cassidy")

Following disembarkation from the *Digby*, Mary and the other orphans travelled up Macquarie Street to Hyde Park Barracks where they were to stay before gaining employment.

On 25 June 1849, The Sydney Morning Herald reported that "*Fifteen of the orphan girls by the ship Digby still remain in the depot; they appear to have given general satisfaction where they have gone to service in the town and district;*

*the statement from their employers being to the effect that they are teachable, honest, and respectful'*

Mary was assigned to a Mr. James Turner Grocott of George Street, Sydney. Grocott, a native of Lancashire, sold prints, music and stationery. He also published an Australian novel in the 1840s, was licensee of the harbour-side Pier Hotel at Manly and chartered a steamer between Manly and Watsons Bay taking sightseers on fishing, and shooting expeditions. He was declared insolvent in late 1848 prior to Mary's employment and again in 1855.

At the time of Mary's employment, Grocott's wife had not long had a child and perhaps Mary was taken on board to assist. When announcing the birth in the Sydney Morning Herald, Grocott's residence was described as a music salon, situated at 486 George Street in Sydney.

Mary remained in this role until 26 November when she returns to the Hyde Park Barracks, her indentures being cancelled 3 days later.



## Children

1. **Maria Jane** Wilson b. 1855,Adelong
2. **Michael John** Wilson b. 1857,Tumut
3. **Mary Anne** Wilson b. 1858,Gracetown, nr. Tumut
4. **Walter James** Williams b. 1861, NSW—place unconfirmed
5. **John** Williams b. 1862/3 Weatherston, Otago, NZ
6. **Charles** Williams, b. 1864,Weatherston, Otago, NZ
7. **Rosanna Kynnersley** Williams b. 1866, Kynnersley, NZ
8. **Edward Joseph** Williams b. 1868, Kynnersley, NZ
9. **Helena** Williams b,1871, Kynnersley, NZ
10. **Mary Ann Teresa** Williams b.1873, Kynnersley, NZ
11. **Sydney Thomas** Williams b. 1875, Kynnersley, NZ
12. **Joseph Patrick** Williams, b. 1878, Kynnersley, NZ

### *To the Southern Gold Fields*

It is 6 years before Mary reappears in the records; around 470 kilometers south of Sydney marrying John Wilson, a native of County Monaghan at Wagga Wagga, on 11 February 1855.

The marriage was witnessed by William Manley and Harriet Warby and celebrated by the travelling Catholic Priest, Father John Maher from nearby Albury. As a result of the gold mining activities at Beechworth on the Victorian border, Albury's population had grown to 600 and Father Maher, originally from Sydney, was appointed resident priest in October 1854, conducting mass, baptisms and weddings in private homes or at his own residence.

Mary and John's first child, Maria Jane Wilson, was born on 4 November 1855 at which time their address was given as Gundagai/Adelong.

In the 1850s, Gundagai was the principle town south of Yass on the Sydney-Melbourne road and travellers to the Victorian goldfields ensured it prosperity. Nearby Adelong was proclaimed a goldfield in February 1855, and a slab hut and calico settlement was established for 30 miles along Adelong Creek catering to 2000 diggers of Irish, German, Chinese and American ethnicity. It is likely that Mary and John were either working these goldfields or involved with the provision of stores or services to meet the needs of the diggers.

Their 2<sup>nd</sup> child, Michael, was born at nearby Tumut on 13 August 1857 and their 3<sup>rd</sup>

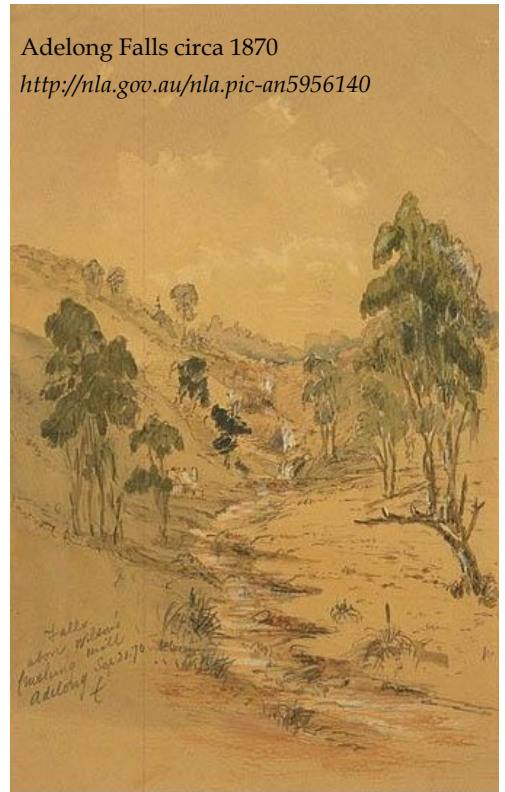
### *Marriage to John Williams*

Left with three young children Mary was in a difficult position and she married her second husband, John Williams. No record has been found of this marriage, but information in John's death registration indicates that it was at Gundagai in about 1860. A son, Walter was born to them in November 1861, the location is only known to be 'in NSW'.

John Williams was born at Crinkle, Birr, Co. Offaly, Ireland in about 1827 and he joined the British army there on 27 June 1849. This being during the famine, John

Adelong Falls circa 1870

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an5956140>



child Mary Anne, on 14 November 1858 at 'Gracetown', a settlement near Tumut that no longer exists. Gracetown may possibly have been at one time a landed estate, as a local paper referred to it as being 'five miles to the northwood of the town with some fifteen tenants whose holdings are under crop.

It is not known what happened to John Wilson, but he seemed to disappear from the family sometime after November 1858 (when he registered the birth of Mary Anne) and prior to about 1860-61. It is not known if he died or deserted the family.

Coghlan believes that he enlisted in the army as a means of being fed. He arrived in New Zealand as a private in the 58<sup>th</sup> Regiment in December 1852 and was involved in actions against the Maoris. He took his discharge in November 1858 when the Regiment was being returned to England. Some of those who chose not to return to England went to Australia, probably because of gold discoveries in NSW at about that time, and it seems that John Williams was one of these.

### To New Zealand Gold Fields

Gold was discovered in Otago, New Zealand in 1861. Shortly after in 1862/63 John and Mary came over to this gold-field, bringing the two boys with them, but leaving the two girls behind in NSW, presumably with friends. There is oral information in the family that these two sisters later married two brothers named Doyle (or possibly Boyle) in Wagga Wagga, but efforts to find any trace of them have been fruitless.

John and Mary set up a store at Weatherston on the goldfields in Central Otago, and two further sons were born there, John in 1862 or 1863, and Charles in August 1864. In late 1865 they left

Otago and travelled to the Greymouth area on the West Coast of the South Island where they again set up a goldfields store at North Beach, on the sea coast just north of the Grey river. Several months later in March 1866, their tent was slit open by the notorious gang of bushrangers, Burgess, Kelly and Levy, who demanded they hand over their gold.

According to deeply entrenched family oral tradition, the robbers did not find any gold because Mary had it hidden in her stays and underclothes, and the family was not harmed because they recognised that Mary was pregnant.

### To Kynnersley Gold Fields

Learning of the discovery of another gold-field, in mid April 1866 they travelled inland by boat and horseback, travelling for 4 days to the Inangahua Valley near the junction of the Waitahu and Inangahua rivers, where they again set up a store/hotel in the rapidly growing canvas township of Kynnersley.

Their journey included 3 days on horseback with Mary who was seven months pregnant, holding 20 month old Charles in her arms. Slung on the horses sides were gin cases in which sons John and Edward travelled in, with fourth son Walter perched in a camp-oven with the

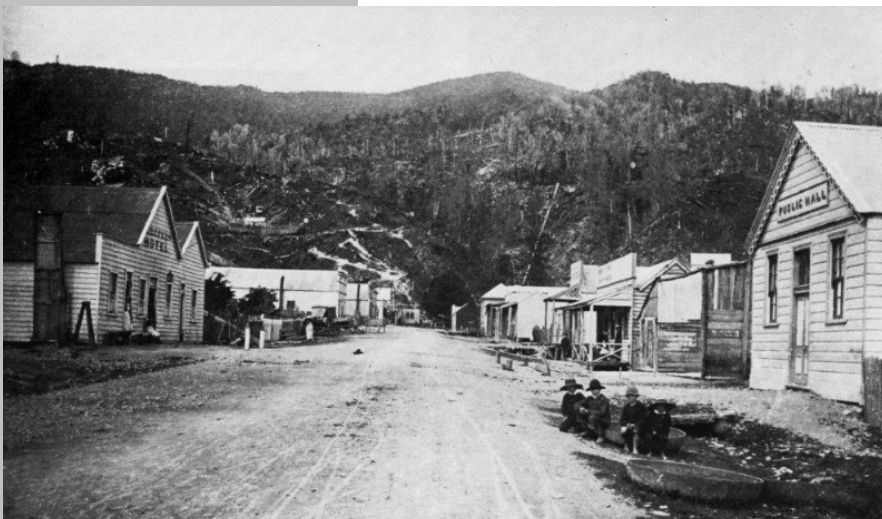
cat. They had eleven horses, and two men with them with axes and shovels to clear the way through the bush and other difficult areas. This story was passed on in the early 1930s to a great grand daughter of John and Mary who was interviewing many old identities in the Reefton area as part of an essay she was writing. The story about the Williams family journey to Kynnersley was relayed by her grandfather John Williams, jnr., then aged about 70 who was one of the young boys who in 1866 made the horseback trek in a gin case. He also added that the family still had the camp oven, and a descendant of the cat.

With their 4 young sons, the Williams were the first European family to arrive in the valley. This was reported in the *Grey River Argus* of 30 June 1866, which stated "We have been informed that only one woman has as yet crossed the saddle up the Little Grey. This fact was accomplished by Mrs Williams, the wife of a publican at the township of Kynnersley, who crossed the saddle on horseback with a baby in her arms, and two other children slung over the horse's back in gin cases. She is now the only woman in the township of Kynnersley."

1894 photo of the main street (Church St.) of the old township of Boatmans (Capleston).

Mary's *Globe Hotel* is the second building on the left side of the photo. (A long looking building). Mary might have been present in the hotel when the photo was taken.

The background gives some indication of the hillside where in 1895 the goat caused her to fall. She died in the hotel. The childrens' hats in right foreground are fascinating!





### *..Land for nothing*

Soon after the Williams arrival, the Nelson Provincial Goldfields Warden Thomas Kynnersley, visited the area. Recognising that Mary was soon to deliver a child who would be the first born in the locality, he promised the Williams a grant of 600 acres of land if the child was named after him. On 8 June 1866, *Rosanna Kynnersley Williams* arrived; the first non-Maori child to be born in the area. The Williams went on to have 5 more children in Kynnersley, the last being born in 1878.

Two years after Rosanna's birth, Kynnersley resigned his official position because of continual ill health from tuberculosis and left for England. He returned in 1870 and took up a role on the Nelson provincial Council but died in February 1874 aged 34 years.

Despite several requests at local Council and Government level to have the promise honoured, the land grant never eventuated.

In June 1873 John Williams asked Mr O'Connor, the local representative on the Nelson Provincial Council, to raise the matter at a meeting of the Council. O'Connor did this, and his motion was seconded by a Mr. Ivess, but according to the minutes of the meeting many of

the other Council members treated the matter as a joke, resulting in O'Connor withdrawing the motion. A lengthy report of the discussion on this motion was published in the *Nelson Evening Mail* on Wednesday 4 June 1873.

Some years later in 1905, Rosanna herself, who by this time is Mrs Creagan, raised the matter with the NZ Central Government, and it was reported on page 3 of the *Auckland Star* on 25 August 1905.

*“Six hundred acres of land for nothing is worth having if you can get it. This, the humble petition of Rosanna Kynnersley Creagan of Waitahu in the County of Inangahua, N.Z., settler, was presented to the house yesterday by Mr. Colvin, member for Buller. It is based on an alleged promise given years ago by the late Mr. Kynnersley, formerly Warden of Inangahua District. It seems Mrs. Creagan's mother was the first white woman in the Inangahua District, and her father was a pioneer at Waitahu. The petitioner was born in June 1866, and when the Warden heard of her advent he promised the parents 600 acres of land on her behalf, but owing to his death the promise was not fulfilled. Therefore she seeks 600 acres or 'such other relief as the House may deem fit'.*

### *Ferry, Court and Church Services*

In about 1868 the Williams built an accommodation house/store/hotel adjacent to the Waitahu river, and provided a ferry service over the river. This building was the first substantial wooden building in the area, and the first Court cases and Church services were held in it. It survived numerous earthquakes, including two very large ones in 1929 and in 1968,

Old Williams store, circa 1868

This building still stood up until 1970s

Photo: John Coghlan



The township of Kynnersley no longer exists, except for a farm that has taken the name. The locality is generally known as *Fern Flat*, but officially *Waitahu*, the name of the river it is situated on.

## ..Family Loss, Family Gain

In 1877 a 4 year old daughter, Mary Ann Teresa died of burns. On May 1st 1881, Mary's husband John died of congestion of the lungs at his residence at Fern Flat aged 54. Five days later on May 6th, Mary and John's second son Walter also died, aged 20 of 'relapsing fever'.

In the early 1880s two of Mary's brother Patrick's children, Mary and Patrick Cas-

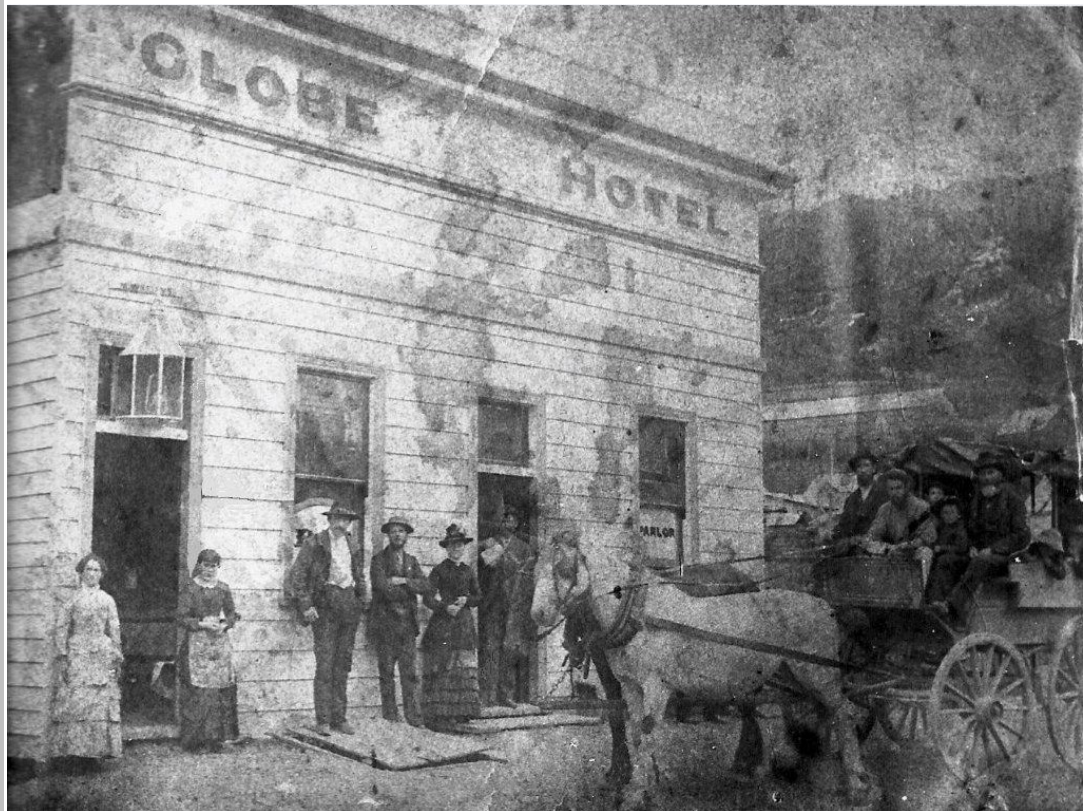
serly came out from Ireland, apparently at Mary's request, and in 1885 her niece Mary was married to Michael, the oldest son of Mary senior. Because they were first cousins they obtained Vatican permission for the marriage.

In the late 1880s Mary bought two hotels in different gold field locations, the towns of Black's Point and Boatmans.

### MARRIAGE NOTICE.

**WILLIAMS—CASERLY.** On the 15th July, 1885, by the REV. FATHER ROLLAND. MICHAEL WILLIAMS, eldest son of the late JOHN WILLIAMS, Fern Flat, to MARY CASERLY, eldest daughter of PATRICK CASERLY, Co. Longford, Ireland

Inangahua Times, 17 July 1885



Mary William's Globe Hotel, late 1880s

Left of the (left) door is Rosanna Williams, next to her Helen Williams and to the left of the middle door is Mary Williams. Mary's name M.WILLIAMS is on the plaque above the lantern over the left door. Photo: John Coghlan

## Final Years

In March 1894, daughter Helena (known as Nellie) married John Francis Coghlan. Helena suffered from TB and died in February 1895 three weeks after giving birth to John Joseph Coghlan.

Mary assumed responsibility for caring for her new grandson, rearing him on goat's milk. Mary use to catch and milk the goat on the hillside behind the hotel at Boatmans (also called Capleston).

In November 1895 the goat pulled her over on the hillside and she died the next day of the internal injuries received. John Coghlan's father used to often say to him "Two women died because of me."

Mary is buried in the Pioneers' Cemetery at Reefton with her husband John Williams, son Walter, and daughters Mary Ann, and Helena.

Descendant John Coghlan remembers Mary Ann's sons Edward (Ned) and Sydney (Syd), both unmarried who lived well into their 80s.

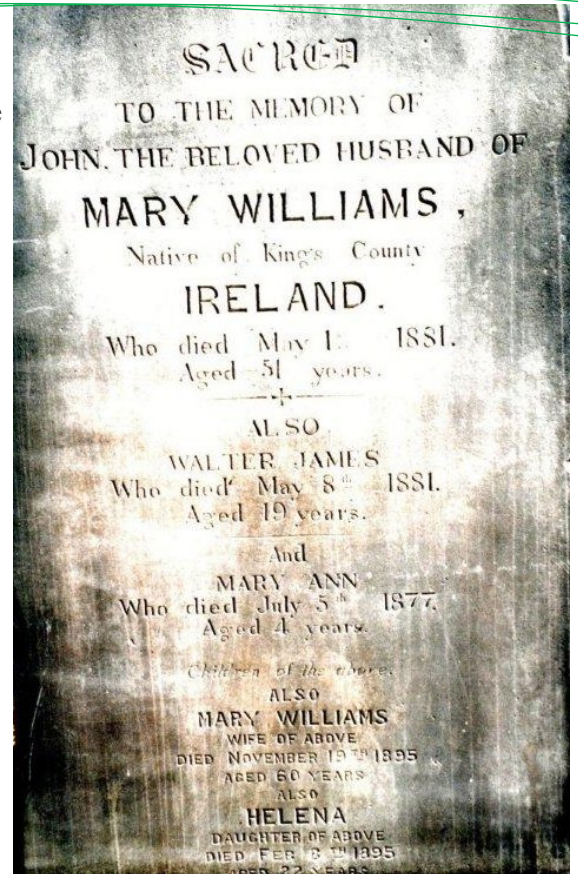
Another son Joseph Patrick went to California in the late 1890s. He is known to have written home regularly sending comics to younger family members. Joseph was not heard of again following the San Francisco earthquake in 1906.



*Final Years, cont*

Her following obituary was published in the *Inangahua Times* on Wednesday 20 November 1895

*It is our painful duty to chronicle the death of Mrs. Williams, relict of the late Mr John Williams, of Fern Flat, which took place at Capleston yesterday. The deceased slipped and fell on Saturday, sustaining internal injuries which caused her death. She was one of the oldest identities of the district, having settled with her husband at Fern Flat as far back as we believe as 1866. The family will be well and favourably remembered by 'Old timers' whom we regret to say, are now fast disappearing. Mrs Williams was of a kindly and hospitable disposition, and many can bear testimony to her numerous excellent qualities. She experienced all the vicissitudes incidental to pioneering (including being held up by a gang of NZ bushrangers) the severity of which few nowadays can realise. Two of her sons, Charles and Edward, are absent in Western Australia, and another, Mr J Williams, occupies the old house at Fern Flat. She was a native of Longford, Ireland, and about 63 years old. The funeral will take place on Thursday*

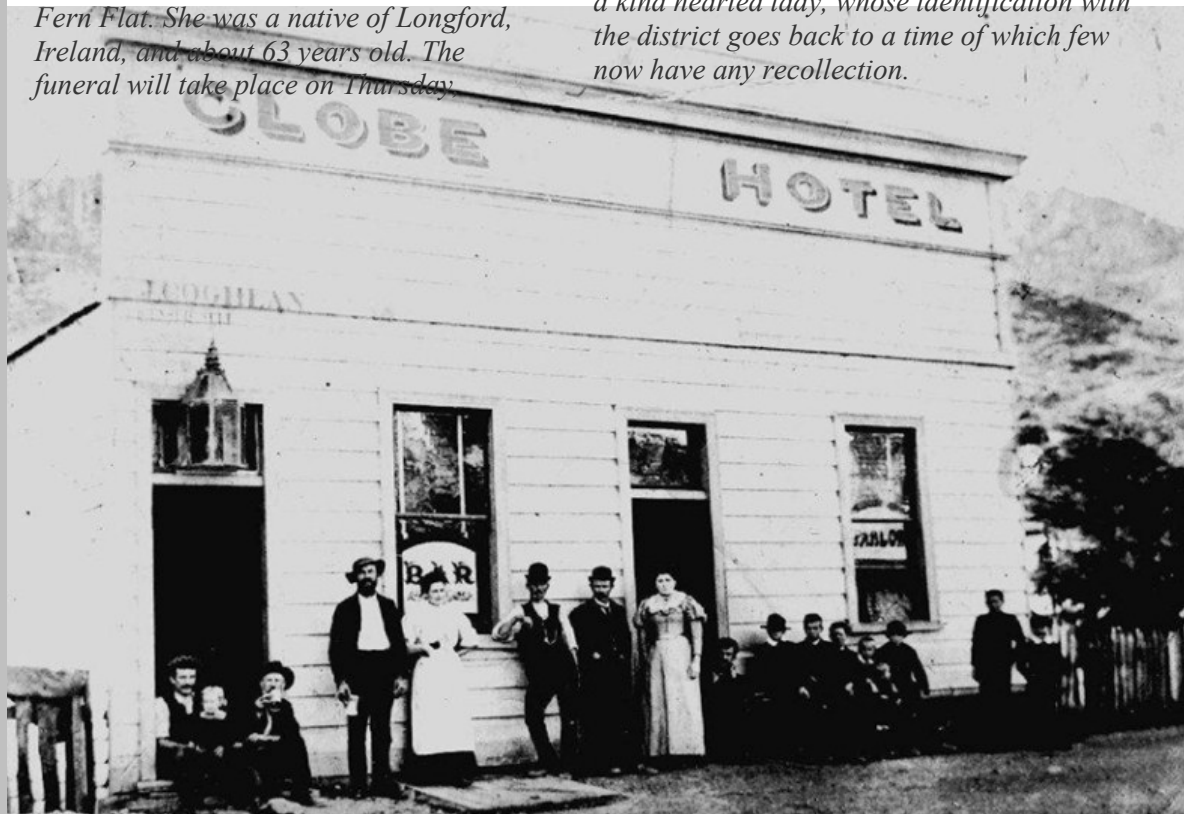


*when the remains will be interred in the old Reefton Cemetery. This finishes the career of a kind hearted lady, whose identification with the district goes back to a time of which few now have any recollection.*

**FUNERAL NOTICE.**

**T**HE FRIENDS of Mr John Williams are respectfully invited to follow the remains of His Mother to the Old Cemetery. The Funeral will leave her late residence, Boatman's, TO-MORROW (Thursday) at 2 p.m.

The remains of the late Mrs John Williams were interred in the old cemetery yesterday afternoon. Despite the bad weather which prevailed a large number of friends of the deceased came from all parts of the district to pay their last respects to her memory. The Rev. Father Rolland officiated at the grave.



Globe Hotel, late 1890s

In the left of the doorway is John Francis Coghlan (Helena's husband) and his son John Joseph Coghlan. At the middle door is Ellen Coghlan (sister of John Francis) who cared for John Joseph following the death of his mother (Helena) and grandmother (Mary Williams). Photo: John Coghlan