

Dear John or A Twiss in the Tail

Amongst my ancestors are the Taaffes from Ireland. In fact, it was seeing a family tree in my teens with Taaffe and many other unfamiliar names that sparked in me what has been a lifelong fascination with and passion for family history.

This paper brings together all I have found out of one such Taaffe and his family. He was given the name Patrick at birth after his father, but he was known throughout his life as John or, more affectionately, as Native Jack. What follows is based on what I have gleaned from the web and draws on the extensive shared research of many, many others. I don't, unfortunately, have access to any inside information direct descendants may be privy to. If Native Jack is related to me I have yet to discover how, but I came to him recently through a test that was set one of my Taaffe cousins who also spends much of his spare time on family history.

Flying home

A few weeks ago my cousin Bob was contacted by a friend who had seen a Facebook posting seeking information on a Margaret Edith Taaffe after the poster had discovered, following a clear out of his father's garage, a framed glass covered case enclosing a Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force cap accompanied by a photograph of the said woman in her WAAAF uniform and a name plate that read "MARGARET EDITH TAAFFE WAAF –



Carolina Flying Air Boat". The finder of this precious memento from the Second World War had no idea who this woman was but was keen it was reunited with her or her family. His father had no idea how he had come by the object.



Like many people I love a 'who dunnit', or in this case a 'who is it', so along with Bob and Ross, another Taaffe cousin, we eagerly took up the challenge. As it transpired Margaret married into the Taaffe family to a great grandson of Native Jack¹. Margaret and her husband have since passed and while we have names for two of their children, we have yet to locate their current whereabouts.

But this was not my introduction to Native Jack. Last year, following the grand final of the Australian Rugby League we wondered whether we were related to one of the stars of that match; Blake Taaffe. Alas not, but like Margaret's husband the footballer is also a descendant of Native Jack.

An Irish connection

Patrick Taaffe was born 17 December 1926 in Sydney, NSW the son a convicts Patrick Taaffe and Mary Ann Burke. Patrick senior and Mary both hailed from Ireland and had been transported separately; Patrick in 1820 aboard the *Lord Sidmouth* and Mary three years later aboard the *Woodman*. Patrick had been found guilty of

passing forged bank notes at Westmeath and was sentenced to 14 years transportation. Mary had been caught stealing a lamb in Waterford and was sentence to 7 years.

It has been suggested to me that Patrick had a wife and 4 children in Westmeath, and he applied for them to join him. Apparently, she declined to come. If this is so any related correspondence is likely to be in the Colonial Secretary's Papers, 1788-1825 held by the NSW State Archives and Recordsⁱⁱ. Mary Ann, it seems, was also married.

On 3 July 1823 Henry Douglass wrote to the office of the Colonial Secretary on her behalf and that of 7 other convicts transported on the *Woodman*, seeking the whereabouts of their respective husbands. Mary claimed to be the wife of Patrick Bluett who had been convicted in 1822 at Waterford of 'robbery of fire arms' from the premises of Thomas Connery a few years earlier, and was transported for Life on the *Brampton*ⁱⁱⁱ. He was originally sentenced to hang.

Bluett had been assigned to John Wood at Chipping, Liverpool. I'm not sure whether Mary was eventually told where he was but the following year requests were put forward for permission for Mary and Patrick Taaffe to marry, first in the Roman and then the English churches, and despite their spouses still being alive permission was granted in both cases. They chose the Anglicans.

Patrick and Mary Ann were married at St John's, Parramatta on 20 October 1824. They had 5 children^{iv}, 2 of which died in infancy while their son Patrick, later John, had a brother and sister who like him survived into adulthood. I believe his sister Elizabeth, born 1828 was the Catherine Taaffe^v who married Thomas Greer with whom she had 6 children; 5 boys and a girl, while their brother James born 1830 never married.

It is not clear why or when Patrick became John, but he used the name John when he married Elizabeth Freeman in 1849. It is perhaps worthy of note that neither Catherine/Elizabeth nor John used the name Patrick for any of their boys' names, and there were 11 boys between them. Nor does Patricia feature in any of the girl's names. Conversely the two siblings both gave their respective first-born girls their mother's name; Mary Ann. We can only speculate as to what, if anything, this might signify.

I am always a bit wary when I see people with one name being linked to documentation of someone with a completely different name^{vi}. I recognise that some people dislike the name that they are given and change it the first chance they get. It is also the case that people pick up nicknames which destine the name they were registered with to the mists of time. And sometimes names just appear from nowhere. As a child I had always known my father's uncle as 'Bill'. It was years later I learnt his name was Errol and no one really knew why my father always called him Bill.

It niggled me why so many trees were so confident that John Taaffe, husband of Elizabeth Freeman was the same Patrick Taaffe son of Patrick and Mary Ann. What was the evidence? The index of John's death record gives his parents as Patrick and

Mary A but there was bound to be numerous other Patrick and Mary Taaffes at that time.

John's obituary in the newspaper was clear he had been born in the colony^{vii} so that narrowed it down somewhat. However, the obituary gave John's birth date as 20 March 1827 while Patrick's baptism recorded his birth date as 20 December 1826. Not very helpful. What would be helpful is something linking John with 'Patrick's' siblings, but nothing has yet come of that. Of course, if John's 1885 death record gave his mother's name as Mary Ann Burke that would nail it. And thanks to cousin Ross' recent purchase of a transcript of that same record I now know that John's parents were the Kent-street baker Patrick Taaffe and his wife Mary Ann Burke.

One thing leads to another

Native Jack and his wife Elizabeth Freeman had 13 children^{viii}. Unlike his own parents John would not lose any of his children before maturity with 12 of the 13 alive when he died at the age of 59. His daughter Elizabeth born 1857 died in 1876^{ix} at the age of 19 shortly after her marriage to William George Worley (1844-1891). Nearly a decade later John would die following 5 weeks of chronic pneumonia. Was there any link here with an incident that had happened just months earlier?

In mid-February 1885 John's son Thomas was the victim of an assault. Tom's friend named Train escaped the assailants and raised the alarm. John attested in court

"I was just starting into the bush with my son Clarence for a load of wool when Train rushed up to me in a very excited state and said

'Mr Taaffe make haste come over here, they are murdering

Tom (meaning my son) the two at it are Milton and Naud'.

I immediately hurried away with him and when within about thirty yards from the spot I saw the youths before the court running away. Did not see my son Tom until close to him; he was then crying bitterly. I then attempted to run after and catch the prisoners, but could not do it....."^x

If John was already having trouble with his lungs this can't have helped.

I know

Native Jack and Elizabeth's first child was James b.1850 presumably named after Elizabeth's father. Their third child and second son was named John, born 1855. But there is another of their sons who is often also given the name John.

This son was born 1863 and named Ino. Unfortunately, the NSW Births Index lists his name as "Jno (John)". It seems that the indexer presumed some error and that his name was John. This is not the case. His birth record is Ino not Jno as indexed and every other record of this man gives his name as Ino. And there are a number of records to choose from. As well as his listing in the electoral rolls Ino found himself before the courts on several occasions. He appears to have had some challenges with the demon; drink^{xi}.

Ino never married and died at the age of 83 in 1947^{xii}. His older brother John married twice; once to Mary Philomena O'Brien and then after her death to Victoria Wellings. John had 12 children in total and one of them he named Ino Thomas born 1896. And

like the birth record of his uncle this Ino has his own birth record indexed as 'John T' contrary to every other record of his name.

Native Jack was a keen sailor, and in the years before his death he was a judge of regattas on Lake Macquarie. He also owned his own sailing boat which he raced. The boat was named? You guessed it, *Ino*^{xiii}.

More Johns to come

The name John also features in the family of Native Jack's wife which both complicates and reveals much about the history of that family. Elizabeth Freeman was born in 1832 the first child of the convicts James Freeman and Mary Ann Smith. Elizabeth however had an elder brother by her mother Mary Ann and another man. The boy had been named John.

Elizabeth's father, James, was born around 1796 and was convicted at the Old Bailey in 1817 of having, with two unknown accomplices, robbed the postal worker James Judd of a total of 18 pounds 10 shillings. Despite numerous witnesses providing him with an alibi, Mr Judd was insistent that it was James Freeman who had emptied his right-hand breeches pocket on that November evening at Bell Lane, Spitalfields and the Jury believed him^{xiv}. Freeman was sentenced to death, later commuted to 14 years Transportation. James Freeman arrived in Sydney aboard the *Lord Eldon* on the 30 September 1817.

Led astray

Mary Ann Smith was only a girl when James had been sent to NSW and was barely out of her teens when in the late 1820's she hitched her wagon to a man who these days we might call a wrong'un. Matthew Kirkman was already known to the justice system when Mary Ann took up with him. He had already spent two years in gaol having been convicted in 1825 of Larceny. In 1829 he had been up before the Lancaster court accused of robbing the premises of his 'uncle' John Twiss for which he was acquitted^{xv}.

On 25 January 1830 he was again before the court, this time in Salford with Mary Ann Smith as his co-defendant. They were accused of stealing clothes from Matthew's brother Thomas Kirkman on New Year's Day^{xvi}. Matthew managed to get off yet again, there being no evidence of him being in possession of the clothes in question. Mary Ann however did not get out of the proceedings quite so easily since it was she who had fronted up with the clothes at the local pawn brokers and it was she who was in possession of duplicate keys that fitted Thomas Kirkman's rooms. She was, as they say, bang to rights and the judge sentenced her to 7 years transportation^{xvii}.

The report of the case in the Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser stated she had previously been twice convicted at Chester^{xviii}. I have not been able to locate either of these convictions. It does raise an interesting question. If she had had two convictions, how was it that the second conviction did not result in transportation? I find it surprising that, having already spent time in prison, a judge of the period would sentence a recidivist convict to another short sentence. I would argue that exile to a penal colony was *de rigueur* in these circumstances.

There may well be an explanation for this reference at court however, it involves an error on the part of the court clerk. On the 7 April 1826 at the Chester Sessions a 30-year-old Mary Ann Smith was convicted on two counts of Larceny having stolen linen from David Harrison of Portwood^{xix}. She was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment on each indictment to be served consecutively. Did the judge have this other older Mary Ann Smith in mind when considering what to do, or was Mrs Freeman an inveterate thief in her youth? For what it is worth I believe it was the former.

Anti-social behaviour

There is little doubt however as to the habitual nature of Matthew. His record sheet attests to that. In 1829 the Manchester Mercury described him as 'well known to the police'^{xx} and in 1830 the same paper called him a 'noted thief'^{xxi}. Matthew was the son of John and Ann/Mary Kirkman. He was baptised at Goostrey-cum-Barnshaw, Cheshire on 8 April 1804. His brother John (his accomplice in the 1825 robbery) was baptised 25 October 1801 while his brother Thomas (the victim of Mary Ann Smith) was baptised 27 November 1796.

Three weeks before the 1825 heist, perpetrated with brother John and a third man, Matthew married Hannah Rowley in his hometown of Goostrey. I'm not sure what became of her but I hope that with their honeymoon barely ended and her husband behind bars she managed to pick herself up, dust herself off, and got on with her life.

And what of Uncle Twiss? Well, John Twiss was not Matthew's uncle as the Courier's court reporter had it. But they were related by marriage. John Twiss, a tobacconist with a shop in Deansgate, Manchester (the one Matthew had been accused of breaking into and robbing) was the widower of Sarah Biggar (1795-1823) and Sarah was the sister of Hannah Biggar born 1797, the wife of Matthew's elder brother Thomas. It was this Hannah who gave testimony at Mary Ann and Matthew's trial as the victim/prosecutor. Thomas Kirkman wasn't in court, presumably because he didn't want to testify against his brother. John Twiss, the prosecutor in the separate 1829 charges wasn't at that earlier trial either having died between the time his shop was burgled and the case coming to court. This undoubtedly assisted Matthew's defence.

Finally sent down (under)

But Matthew's luck wasn't to last long. When the ship *Kains* with Mary Ann and another 199 women convicts onboard set sail for the penal colony at Sydney Matthew was once again in custody. This time however he was to be convicted having tricked a young female servant into giving him access to her master's house which he and two others then ransacked and robbed. This time the young woman involved escaped the fate that befell Mary Ann and was acquitted. Matthew however got Life Transportation. His crime spree in Salford had been brought to an end. As the Manchester Mercury observed in its report of the trial '*Kirkman has for a number of years been a terror to the town, as one of the most accomplished thieves in it.*'^{xxii} On the 3 March 1831, just as Mary Ann was arriving in Sydney, Matthew Kirkman set sail for the same destination aboard the *Exmouth*.

Matthew Kirkman arrived in Sydney 28 July 1831. At just under 5 months, the *Exmouth* spent nearly half as much time at sea as Mary Ann did aboard the *Kains*. There was to be no happy reunion. I don't know whether or when Mary Ann and

Matthew had contact in the colony. It seems they were certainly aware of each other. More of that later. But for right now, if he knew, Matthew had to reconcile himself to the fact that on 14 November 1831 his former 'wife' Mary Ann Smith married James Freeman at St Phillips, Sydney.

Mary Ann moves on

This can't have been a simple decision for Mary Ann because accompanying her on that epic journey halfway round the globe was her and Matthew's son John. There is some dispute as to when John was born. The Freeman's have that it was either 3 January 1830 or at sea onboard the *Kains* a year later. The Kirkmans on the other hand have it as 3 January 1829. On the slim evidence I have seen I am tempted to go with the 1829 date. My problem with the 1831 date is twofold.

Firstly, it would mean that Mary Ann conceived around early April 1830, three months after her conviction and presumably when she was incarcerated awaiting transportation. This would I suggest have brought John's paternity into doubt, but later events demonstrate that Matthew was unquestionably the father. And secondly, the medical journal of the *Kains'* ship surgeon, Thrasycles Clerk, makes no mention of Mary giving birth. In fact, he records no births taking place the entire journey which one might expect he would do if they had, given that he goes to great lengths to complain that children under six months shouldn't be allowed on such journeys since the diet was in no way conducive to providing the right nutrition for nursing mothers^{xxiii}. His only mention of Mary is that she spent 5 days in the ship's hospital with 'cold' from 17 to 22 February 1831. Unlike several of the other infants John escaped any notable illness on the journey.

As for the 1830 date this coincides with the offence and trial that led to Mary Ann being transported. It would involve Mary Ann being heavily pregnant when Thomas' house was robbed and when she took the stolen clothes to the pawn brokers. There is no reference to this in any of the reporting of the events which would be expected. She was taken into custody the on 2 January and I think it more likely her first full day in prison awaiting trial was spent missing her son's first birthday, rather than giving birth to him.



Dear John

James Freeman married Mary Ann Smith and took in the 2-year-old John. The couple would go on to have 10 of their own children^{xxiv}. In 1845 John, now a teenager would be baptised John Freeman at Gosford, NSW the son of James and Mary Freeman. His birth date was given as 3 January 1830.

From Wee Free back to the Kirk

In 1856 John married Elizabeth Wallis. I am aware that many Freeman Trees on ancestry have John marrying at Sydney when he

was 19 y.o. based on the index of a marriage between a John Freeman and Ellen O'Brien at St Mary's RC Church in 1849 [170/1849 V1849170 96]. This however is another John Freeman, most probably the John Freeman who died 16 January 1876 aged 84. His wife 'Helen' Freeman who died 1868 was born circa 1798.

Mary Ann Smith circa 1810 – 1891

Mother of John Freeman/Kirkman

Mother-in-law of John "Native Jack" Taaffe

Mary Ann's son, the boy James Freeman had brought up as his own, seems to have taken on his father's name and as an adult was known only as John Kirkman. This is the name he married under. The marriage record gives his parents as Matthew Kirkman and Mary Ann, maiden name unknown^{xxv}.

Matthew Kirkman had been assigned to A C Turner at Port Macquarie on his arrival in the colony. He managed to turn his life around and apart from a conviction for being drunk and disorderly in 1836 (for which he got 50 lashes) he seems to have kept out of trouble. By the mid 1840's he was in the service of Major Innes, presumably at his Lake Innes estate. Archibald Clunes Innes had retired to the district having been commander of the first colonial settlement at Port Macquarie in the 1820's. Around the same time Matthew was at Lake Innes my x2 Great Grandmother was working there as a servant.

Although Port Macquarie where Mathew Kirkland established himself is 100 miles from Wyee where the Freemans were there can be little doubt that Mary Ann's and Matthew's paths crossed during this period, or at the very least that John became reacquainted with his birth father. I have no idea what the family made of John reverting to the name Kirkman but when his mother died he was certainly included in the record of her children while John chose the unusual name of one of his sisters-in-law for one of his own daughters^{xxvi} suggesting ongoing good terms.

Matthew purchased 40 acres of land in the Port Macquarie district in 1857 and sadly died two years later. It needs confirming, but it is quite possible that this land was in Ellenborough and known as The Junction. I suggest this because around the time of Matthew's death John moved there from the New England region where he had been living and where he and his wife had their first child^{xxvii}. John would remain the rest of his life in the district and like his father is buried at Ellenborough.

A Dearest of Johns

There isn't a collective noun for a group of Johns, or at least that is what google says. So, I have decided to coin one and I'm calling them a dearest of Johns. In part because they have all become quite dear to me as I have delved into their lives, but

also because I realise some people may receive this missive much as they would a Dear John letter. I am aware it challenges much received wisdom of who is who in a number of families.

Please, if any of what I have written is wrong or goes too far feel free to contact me and put me straight. I agree I have gone out on a limb in some of what I assert, and this speculation may be proved wildly off the mark. However, I would highly recommend 'two steps forward and one step back' to break through a brick wall and so wherever I am in error I would much prefer to know when a step back is needed.

In summary then this is where I have landed with our dearest of Johns (or not) -

- ✓ John Taaffe 1826-1885 : born Patrick but was known throughout his adult life as John with the sobriquet *Native Jack*
- ✓ John Taaffe 1855 – 1927 : second son of Native Jack, born and died a John
- ✗ John Taaffe 1863 – 1947 : third son of Native Jack, born and died an Ino and not a John
- ✗ John Thomas Taaffe 1896 – 1947 : grandson of Native Jack, born Ino Thomas not and never was a John
- ✓ John Freeman 1829-1879 : brother-in-law of Native Jack, spent childhood as John Freeman but throughout his adult live known as John Kirkman reverting to his birth father's surname.

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End Notes

- i NSW Marriage Index 1951/54 Registered at Sydney
- ii Any request by Patrick is likely to be held by the NSW State Archives in NRS 897: Main series of letters received, 1788-1826. Items [4/1746] to [4/1773] on Reels 6049-59 cover the period 1820-1823.
- iii Patrick Bluett received his Ticket of Leave in 1843 requiring him to remain in the Newcastle district with a Conditional Pardon granted in 1848. Post his arrival I have identified no other records, nor any that support a marriage to Mary Burke in Ireland. He does not appear to have married in NSW.
- iv Mary Ann born 1824 (NSW B Index - V1824532 125) died 1930 (NSW D Index - V1830258 14)
Jane born 1825 (NSW B Index - V1825194 II) presumed died before Nov 1828 as not listed in Muster Return
Patrick born 1826 (NSW B Index - V1826116 II) presumed changed name to John and died 1885 (NSW D Index 1885/13540)
Elizabeth born 1828 (NSW B Index - V18288896 IC) presumed changed name to Catherine since no birth record for C and no death record for E, died 1905 (NSW D Index – 1905/4348)
James born 1839 (NSW B Index - V183010674 1C) died 1888 (NSW D Index – 1888/11012)
- v It is purely speculative on my part and I may be alone in this view but I would suggest that Catherine Greer née Taaffe was born Elizabeth in 1828. The only document where Catherine's age is referenced is the 1849 register of convict's permission to marry where she is recorded as 17 giving her a birth year of circa 1832. However, this proposition solves a few issues a) why there is no death record for 'Elizabeth' b) why there is no birth record for 'Catherine' and c) why Mary Ann's death particulars state she had 3 daughters not 4, but I accept this does not prove my case.
- vi I am fully aware that I have done just this in asserting that Elizabeth Taaffe and Catherine, Mrs Greer are the same person despite having very different first names and no documentation to link the two.
- vii '[John Taaffe] was one of the old pioneer natives of the colony, having seen the light of day in Sydney on the 17th of March, 1827'. Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, 31 July 1885 pg.2 col.7
- viii Native Jack and Elizabeth Taaffe's children were – James b.1850; Mary Ann b.1853; John b.1855; Elizabeth b.1857; Eliza b.1859; Catherine b.1861; Ino b.1863; Maud Mabel b.1865; Walter John b.1867; Clarence b.1869; Hannah b.1871; Thomas McDonald b.1873; and Louis Elizabeth b.1877.
- ix I am aware that several Ancestry.com trees have Elizabeth dying at Belmont in 1938 however the newspaper report of her husband's death in 1891 states '*The remains of Mr. Worley were buried beside those of his wife...*' see Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, 13 Nov 1891 pg.7 col.7. Elizabeth Worley's death in 1876 is also consistent with the particulars given on her parent's respective death certificates.
- x Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate; 5 Mar 1885 pg.8 col.3 and 20 Mar 1885 pg.3 col.5. Frederick Milton was acquitted while Paul Nord was sentenced to two months hard labour. See The Maitland and Hunter River General Advertiser 24 Mar 1885 pg.3 col.3
- xi See various Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate editions - 14 Jul 1898 pg.7 col.6; 27 Jul 1914 pg.6 col.5; 22 Sep 1916 pg.6 col.3; 7 Aug 1918 pg.6 col.2; and 13 Apr 1934 pg.15 col.3
- xii Ino Taaffe died 2 Aug 1947 of Senile Myocarditis at the State Hospital, Liverpool. He was buried in the Church of England Cemetery at Wallsend 4 Aug 1947.
- xiii The Belmont Regatta was held 18 Aug 1883. The *Ino* placed 3rd in the 'Dingies under Canvas' class sailed by W.Forbes. In the All Sailing Boats race it did not place but was skippered by John Taaffe. John was a member of the Regatta Committee and was judge of the 1884 Lake Macquarie Annual Regatta.
- xiv https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t18170115-86&div=t18170115-86&terms=james_freeman#highlight
- xv See an account of the trial in the Manchester Mercury 10 Nov 1829 pg.2 col.6
- xvi There are differing accounts of when the offence took place. The Manchester Mercury reported on 5 January 1830 (pg.4 col.6) '*.... from [Hannah Kirkman's] statement it appeared that on New Year's-day their house was left locked up, and on their return they found that their house had been entered apparently by a false key....*' Yet an account of the subsequent trial held 25 January and reported in the Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser the following Saturday (30th pg.4 col.7) states '*He was next indicted along with Mary Ann Smith, for having on the 31st of December, stolen gowns and other articles.....*'
- xvii *ibid*
- xviii *ibid*
- xix See Chester Courant, 11 Apr 1826 pg.3 col.6
- xx See Manchester Mercury 28 Jul 1829 pg.4 col.2
- xxi See Manchester Mercury 1 Jun 1830 pg.4 col.4
- xxii See Manchester Mercury 27 Jul 1830 pg.1 col.6
- xxiii Journal of Thrasycles Clarke - Ancestry.com. UK, Royal Navy Medical Journals, 1817-1857. The National Archives. Kew, Richmond, Surrey.
- xxiv I have calculated the figure of 10 children based on Mary Ann's 1891 death certificate which records the names of 6 living children plus unnamed 4 males and 1 female deceased. I have assumed the death record included her son from her relationship with Matthew Kirkman, making 10 children with James Freeman and 11 in all. The known children

who had died by this date were Elizabeth (d.1876) and John (d.1879). William b.1836 was not named so he is presumed to have predeceased his mother. That leaves 2 males for which there are no records of a birth or death. The NSW BDM Indexes includes the death of an 'infant' Samuel Freeman in 1842 (V18421270 26B) so this is a possible child of James and Mary Ann Freeman.

xxv NSW Marriage Index 1856/1918 Registered at Port Macquarie

xxvi John's half brother James Freeman married Soreina Smyth in 1859. John Kirkman named his daughter born 1871 Soreina Kirkman though it seems she was known as Syvina at death.

XXVII Their first child was Matthew John Kirkman whose birth was registered at Port Macquarie (NSW Birth Index V1857995 44A). Matthew's obituary states '..[he] was born at New England 80 years ago, and came to reside at 'The Junction' Ellenborough, with his parents when he was still a babe in arms.' The Port Macquarie News and Hastings River Advocate 22 Aug 1936 pg.4 col.6