

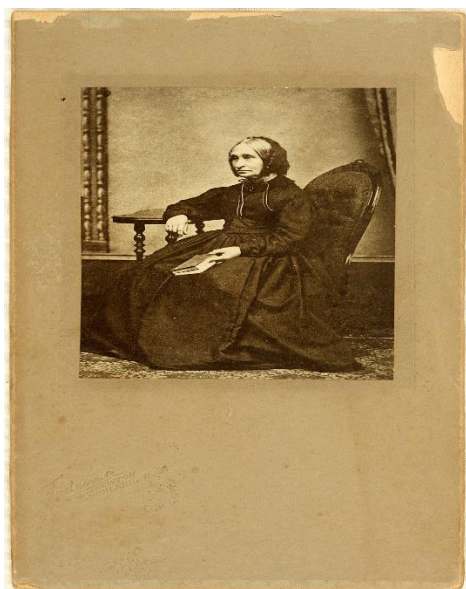
The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mihinare ki Aotearoa*

Voyage from England – Mary Ann Preece (nee Williams)

(A rough diary kept by Mary Ann Williams on her voyage from England 1828-1829)

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A photo taken of Mary Ann later in life.
It was printed sometime after her death by Tadema Studios, Auckland.
(see * in endnotes)

Each morning I look out towards White Pine Bush. It is often shrouded in mist. This was the final mission station of **Mary Ann** (1801-1879) and **James Preece** (1801-1870). It was beside what is now the White Pine Bush Reserve and the farmland where the mission station was, is known as 'Mission Flats.'¹ Shortly afterwards they retired due to James' ill health to Coromandel in 1857. James chose this site for winter in preference to the house he had built at Ahikereru in the heart of Te Urewera.² Before land confiscation a decade later, many Tuhoe wintered over on the warmer coast. This was part of James Preece's argument to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) for this move.

James and Mary Ann were only the second settler (European) couple to be married in New Zealand. They were married by A. N. Brown (1803-1884, later Archdeacon of Tauranga) at Kerikeri, on Friday, 25th January 1833.³ Mary Ann was the first European woman to reside amongst Tuhoe, named by Elsdon Best (1856-1931) as 'children of the mist.' Since I have lived in Whakatane, I have taken an interest in their lives as ones who came as CMS settlers to New Zealand. 'Settlers' was the term the CMS used for its personnel sent as missionaries. I have an admiration for them which was not shared by Bishop Selwyn (1809–1878) who would not ordain James. (James is often referred to as Rev'd. James Preece; this is quite incorrect).

However, the purpose of this article is to bring to you Mary Ann's own account of sailing to Australia in 1828-1829. She was not sent by the Church Missionary Society but rather accompanied her mother to Australia in 1828. Her mother, **Jane Williams** (nee Evans), was widowed quite young and on 18th June 1816, she married **Laban White** who was 22 and she was 38 on their wedding day.

Mary Ann had a younger half-sister, also Jane, from this marriage. Laban trained as a chemist and druggist but was registered as a china and glass dealer in a Bristol directory. On 14th January 1822, he was convicted for embezzlement and committed to the Bristol Goal. He was sentenced to 14 years transportation and sailed aboard the *Eliza* on 13 July 1822 for New South Wales and

arrived at Sydney Cove 22nd November. Jane (now White) was virtually left destitute and never expected to see Laban again. Only about ten per cent of the 162,000 convicts, transported to Australia, ever returned to Britain after serving their sentence.

Jane's first husband, Thomas, had a brother William who helped her but when the opportunity came to sail for Australia, she took it. By 1828, the Governor of New South Wales (later Sir) Ralph Darling (1772-1858) was encouraging families to join their convicted husbands. They were referred to as 'free' passengers.

These Williams hailed from Bristol, which was the first parish of John Wesley (1703- 1791) so the southwest of England was very much influenced by Wesley.⁴ This evangelical zeal is seen in Mary Ann's letter and as is the accompanying prejudice against the Catholic ('Papist') Church. Mary Ann and her family left England from Bristol on the ship 'The Borneo' that was carrying convicts to Australia.

The Borneo, launched in 1817, was 111 feet (33.9 metres) long and weighed 428 tons.⁵ On this trip she carried 73 female convicts and 74 passengers. This did not include the crew or militia which came to guard the convicts. There were also a number of children aboard. The surgeon's notes include an entry saying he vaccinated three as these had not been vaccinated before embarkation. One was the child, aged 4 months at the time on 21 June of a convict, Judy Kelly.⁶ Another convict was Sarah Barnes, the youngest to ever be transported to Australia, aged 14 and sentenced to 14 years for taking prints from a display stand in Shrewsbury.

Laban White didn't expect to see his wife, Jane, again and had taken up with another convict, Mary Ann Johnson and they had a child Lydia Jane. She was brought up by her mother, but Laban continued to support her.⁷ Laban, when he arrived in 1822, had been sent to work for a

William Cox at Bathurst. Cox had another property called Clarendon near Windsor, which Laban managed for him. It was from here that Mary Ann wrote the letter to her friend detailing her journey from England.⁸

Clarendon near Windsor
Australia, Feb 12th1829.

My Ever-Dear Friend,

I take the earliest opportunity of informing you (through the mercy of God) of our safe arrival at this place after a long and tedious voyage of 36 weeks and 5 days, a distance of about 7000 miles from that which is very dear to me, but what cause for thankfulness to Our Heavenly Father for His goodness and mercy in bringing us through so many dangers and difficulties. I will now give you an epitome our voyage since we left the shores of dear old England. May the 10th and had the weather very fine until the 17th when the weather began to be unfavourable and continued so till the 22nd during which time we were going through the Bay of Biscay (Biscay) the wind and sea raged violently but I am thankful to say we received no further damage to our vessel that time than having our main mast damaged. Some of the seamen said they had never experienced such weather in the Bay of Biscay before. On the 30th we put into Madeira to have a new mast; we were there 14 days; it is a most beautiful place but alas, there Antichrist reigns predominant it being for the most part inhabited by the Portuguese except a few English settlers. I went the two Sundays I was there to the English Church, the Captain being kind enough to accompany three of us, as it was not safe for us to go alone the first time as Trinity Sunday June the 1st there is a very exceptional minister there, a Mr Snow, his text was from the epistle of Saint Jude part of the 3rd verse 'Earnestly continue for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints' it was a great comfort to hear again the Gospel preached. The following Sunday I felt

great encouragement from his sermon from Isaiah the 43rd C. the 2nd and part of the 3rd verse: 'When thou passeth through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee for I am the Lord, the God, the Holy One of Israel thy Saviour.' - the whole discourse was very appropriate to me who had made so great a sacrifice through a sense of duty - On St George's Day (at Madeira) there was a very grand day with the Papists; it was dreadful to see the pomp and grandeur of their procession that day in carrying about the host through all the principal streets. Our Elections are nothing to be compared to it. I never saw anything to equal the Cathedral. Superbly decorated with Crimson Velvet and gold fringe and other costly ornaments paintings of saints [word unclear] but how distressing to see the poor deluded creatures kneeling with such devotion at the different images and breaking the Commandments of the Lord our God who has said 'thou shalt not bow down to them or worship them.' How happy I should have been to have given them some tracts but as mine were all in English they would have been of no use to them. We left Madeira the 10th of June, we did not experience any bad weather in June, July, and parts of August, but being becalmed near Cape Verde Islands and having contrary winds we were obliged to put into the Cape of Good Hope for water we arrived there Aug 17th and while there at anchor we had a most dreadful storm on the 20th we put two anchors and three cables and expecting every swell of the sea to be wrecked or to be driven on shore on purpose by order (replaces command crossed out) of the chief mate as the only recourse to save the lives of all on board but thanks be to God for His unspeakable mercy in preserving us for had not the wind changed at the very crisis that we put our last cable nothing would have saved us from

being driven ashore the storm began about 12 o'clock previous to that time the sea was a perfect calm not the least ripple or a breath of wind but oh how sudden the change the clouds began to gather and the wind and the sea in a short time was truly terrific the lather[unclear] mountains high washing over us but the Lord was better to us than all our fears for the morning of the day that the storm began the Captain and some of the passengers went on shore and wished me to accompany them but I declined going he offered the watermen on shore £20 to take him in a life boat to the vessel but no one wanted to do it we left the Cape on Aug the 26th and had a most dreadful passage to Hobart Town Sunday August the 30th. We had a most dreadful sea and strong wind carried but 2 small sails all day it was awfully grand, Sept the 4th, 5th & 6th very bad nights the rain pouring in torrents and our place swimming with water, the 9th a very dreadful night a plank broke in at our stern, the 10th bad but dry, the 11th we had a most dreadful night another plank broke in at the stern that night I think can never be forgotten by any of us, it was indeed distressing to hear the cries of the people the waves were pouring in, in every part of the ship in the middle of the night for about a quarter of an hour it appeared to us that we were sinking (my mother and little sister in fact bore it better than I would have expected) the sensation is better felt than described this was the only time I thought we were in danger but at the very worst when all appeared to be over when hope seemed to lose her hold and having earnestly prayed to the Lord committing myself to the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who alone could say to the strong wind and sea peace be still this promise came so forcible to my mind 'I will deliver thee' that I could not even then despair it. It was verified for in a short time the storm abated never did the opening day appear more delightful to us than the 12th of Sept every man on board from the captain to the cabin boy

was quite worn out with fatigue working the pumps in turn. One of the officers told us the water on the aft was up to the men's waists there great indeed was our deliverance we had a continuance of bad weather until the 3rd of Oct when we had a fair wind and was only 9 miles off land and was obliged to lay to it being so dark that we might have been run ashore or on a rock if we had made to the land the next morning the wind change and we were beating about till the 8th when thanks be to our Heavenly Father who brought us safe through so many dangers we cast anchor at Hobart Town about 3 o'clock we were there 10 weeks and 2 days having the ship repaired. All the prisoners left us there which we were all very glad of as their noise was very disagreeable although they were not near us we had a very pleasant time there and it was so delightful to be able again to attend Church I had the opportunity of attending a mission [word unclear] while at Hobart Town I quite recovered my strength I was very ill for many weeks with a pain in my stomach and excessive weakness that I do not think I could have kept up another week at sea. Mother had her health pretty well excepts the fits which continued the same my dear little sister-in-law was well also except the Whooping Cough she caught on board but she is well now – We left Hobart Town the 19th of Dec for Sydney. Christmas morning we had another misfortune there being a strong breeze we had the top main mast broke short off but that was replaced by the evening by our carpenter and the men, cast anchor the 28th at Sydney a distance of 830 miles from Hobart town I (at mother's request) wrote immediately to Windsor to inform Mr White of our arrival on the morn of January 5th we had the pleasure of seeing our dear friend Mr White looking exceeding well he has a most excellent situation and highly respected by his employer we left the ship that day and arrived here on the

7th of Jan I am sorry to inform you that this place is 54 miles from Sydney. I called on the Revd Wm Cowper with my letter of introduction from Mr East, Mr Cowper is a truly good man he said he was sorry to inform me that at Windsor I should be almost destitute of the means of grace Mr Croft having been removed to Newcastle but that I must await with patience and ...

The folio ends here, and the remainder of the letter is lost ...

The reference (letter of introduction) must have given Mary Ann employment. A few months later, she was appointed Matron of the Parramatta School of Industry, when it opened in June 1829.⁹ Samuel Marsden is remembered now only as the 'flogging parson.' However, he did lots of good things including setting up employment opportunities for convicts. There was considerable pressure on the Female Factory in Parramatta, Marsden added another, the Parramatta School of Industry, which did weaving and sewing. The project was overseen by his eldest daughter, Miss Marsden.¹⁰ Mary Ann is recognised as performing the task of matron well. The Trustees gave her a glowing report.¹¹ However the school was dependent on public donation and struggled for funding. As a result, she moved to New Zealand to assist at the CMS European Girls' School in Paihia, then at the Native Girls' School in Kerikeri, where she married James Preece.¹²

Mary Ann Williams probably never saw her mother again. The voyage from England at that time for many was probably like a voyage to Mars for us, a one-way ticket. I found this letter a moving reminder of the frightening ordeals our early settlers had to endure to reach our fair country.

My thanks to Kate de Courcy, Senior Curator Archives and Manuscripts at the Auckland Central Library (SGGSC), for having the document (Mary Ann's letter) digitised for my perusal.

Mary Ann's grand-daughter, Marnie Spicer collected a number of personal family letters. These along with her notes on the family were deposited with the Auckland Public Library shortly after her death in 1948. They are held in the Sir George Grey Special Collections as 'Preece Papers' and include four collections, NZMSs 105, 1146, 735 and NZMS 1453. The first two manuscripts (collections) have been digitised at my request and can be accessed online.

Endnotes

- * Mary Ann died in 1878 and Tadema whose name is embossed on the cardboard mounting did not open in Karangahape Road (opposite the Tabernacle Buildings), Auckland until early in the 20th Century. The first advertisement in the Auckland Star for Tadema Photographer appeared on 15 October 1910.
- ¹ White Pine Bush is on State Highway 2 between Awakeri and the Pekatahi Bridge (1 lane).
- ² There is a tagged Elm tree planted by James Preece still there. The mission site is opposite Farm Road on the Minginui Road off Highway 38 (no longer a State Highway) from Murupara to Lake Waikaremoana.
- ³ Alfred Nesbit Brown arrived in New Zealand in October 1828, shortly before James Preece.
- ⁴ Not related to the missionaries Henry and William Williams.
- ⁵ Claim a Convict: Ship details, accessed 8/12/2017.
- ⁶ Surgeon Oliver Sproule, his journal accessed from Female Convicts Org.
- ⁷ Laban had another child born to Lucy Brown, just three months after Jane's death in 1846 and 25 days later he married another widow, Mary Howe. Details in Laban White 1794-1873 – Australian Royalty. A family tree of colonial Australians; and in Laban White 1794-1873: Family Tree Circles.com.Genealogy.
- ⁸ The original text can be viewed from Auckland Central Library, Sir George Grey Special Collections, NZMS 105. I have edited i.e., spelling - changing cabel to cable, removing hyphens at the ends of lines and adding a few full stops.
Sometimes Mary Ann writes Windsor and at others Winsor, I have made all Windsor.
- ⁹ Laban White 1794-1873: Family Tree Circles.com.Genealogy.
- ¹⁰ The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser for Tuesday 3 February gives details of the initial donors and donations.
- ¹¹ Laban White 1794-1873: Family Tree Circles.com.Genealogy.
- ¹² Laban White 1794-1873: Family Tree Circles.com.Genealogy.