St Helena Island
WARDERS’ CHILDREN’S CEMETERY

Unearthing the social history of a prison island’s families.

By Belinda Daly
‘The St Helena Island Community’
St Helena Island is situated in Moreton Bay, near the city of Brisbane. A National Park since 1979, St Helena has had a multi-layered history as indigenous land, Quarantine Station, dugong hunting base, Penal Establishment and grazing land.

During its time as St Helena Penal Establishment from 1867 to 1932, St Helena saw prisoners, warders (prison guards) and the families of some warders living on the island in and around the specially constructed prison stockade. There are two cemeteries on St Helena Island - one for the prisoners who died while incarcerated on the island, and one for the children of the warders.

The Warders’ children’s cemetery is small, but significant. It highlights aspects of Colonial Queensland history, whilst giving an insight into the lives of ordinary families living their lives in unusual circumstances. New research in 2018 has revealed there are many more children’s graves in this cemetery than previously realised.

- We can only see half of the children’s graves in the cemetery.
- 6 new burials and 8 new deaths of children have been discovered.
- Not all children who died on the island were buried in the cemetery.
- Not all children who were buried in the cemetery died on the island.

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Sarah Bowden and Frances Hamilton are NOT buried on St Helena Island. But they are the first two children to die on the island.

Sarah Bowden’s father, William and mother Sarah Gawn had only recently moved their family to St Helena Island when Sarah died. She is the first known child to die on St Helena, on the 14th February 1874. Her cause of death was ‘Teething accompanied with Diarrhoea.’

Frances Margaret Hamilton was born on St Helena Island on the 27 February 1875, the fourth child of James Hamilton, Chief Warder, and his wife Ann Jane Gamble. Frances died on the 15th March 1875, again on St Helena Island, aged 16 days. Dr Challinor was in attendance when she died of ‘Convulsions,’ which had lasted 4 days.

Sarah and Frances are definite proof that not all children who died on the island are buried there. Both were buried at the Presbyterian Cemetery in Brisbane.

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Andrew Craigie was born at Doughboy Creek, near Bulimba in Brisbane, in 1873, the fourth child of Andrew Craigie Snr, a Turnkey, and Margaret Maxwell Laidlaw.

Andrew Senior was a long term turnkey, or prison warder, on St Helena Island, having worked there since 1867 when the prison first officially opened. He was given permission for his family to live with him on St Helena Island in 1869.

Andrew Craigie Junior died and was buried in the St Helena Island Children’s cemetery on 29 December 1875, aged 2 years. He died from Scarlet Fever and convulsions, lasting one day. Dr Challinor was in attendance as he was not the only child sick on the island from Scarlet Fever. (See M. Maitland)

Scarlet Fever is a very contagious bacterial throat infection which includes a red rash over the body. Also known as Scarlantina, it was a disease often spread on immigrant ships arriving in Moreton Bay. An epidemic was sweeping through Queensland in 1875, with 51 deaths from Scarlet Fever in that year alone.

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Mary Harriet May Maitland was born in England and migrated with her extended family to Moreton Bay, arriving in January 1874 aged 1.

Her father Charles appears to have received employment as a warder on St Helena Island fairly quickly, as he was employed there in 1875, aged 23. The family, including Mary’s mother Elizabeth Sewell, were living together on the island. Her brother Charles was born on the island.

Mary died on the 3/1/1876 aged 2 years, from Scarlet Fever, five days after the death of another child on the island, Andrew Craigie, from the same illness.

Mary was ill for a week with Dr Challinor in attendance. She was buried in the St Helena Island children’s cemetery on the 3rd January 1876. Tragically, like so many families at that time, the Maitland family were to eventually lose four of their five children at a very young age.
ANNE MCKENZIE

“In loving memory of Anne, daughter of Alexander and Ellen McKenzie who died August 11th 1878. Aged 1 year and 4 Months. Also of Peter and Jessie, their son and daughter who died in Brisbane.

“Fold them o Father in thine arms,
   And let them henceforth be
Messengers of love between
   Our human hearts and thee”

Anne McKenzie was born on St Helena Island, the sixth child of Sugar Boiler and Warder Alexander McKenzie and Ellen Brown.

She died on the 12/8/1878, aged 1 year, from Acute Hydrocephalus (water on the brain). Dr Challinor, once again, was in attendance. Anne was buried in the St Helena Children’s cemetery on 13th August 1878.
Frank Holloway was the fourth child born to Warder Charles Holloway and wife Eliza Jane Hamlin, but the first of the Holloway children to die. Frank died on St Helena Island at only 3 months old and was buried on the 18th December 1881. Frank died from ‘Marasmus,’ which is a wasting away of the body, an illness the doctor said had lasted 7 weeks.

George Holloway second born and the eldest son, died and was buried on St Helena Island on the 31st October 1884, aged 8 years. Dr Wray was in attendance and diagnosed that George had been suffering from ‘Traumatic Tetanus’ for 3 days. Traumatic Tetanus is defined as tetanus following infection of the wound, and involved muscle spasms.

Both boys share a headstone, with a poetic inscription:

“Lord, what is life!

‘Tis like a flower,

That blossoms and is gone,

We see it flourish for an hour,

With all its beauty on.”
Christopher McPherson was born on St Helena Island on Christmas Day, 25/12/1883. Dr Wray attended to him from the 28th December 1883 and he died of ‘Convulsions’ on the 2nd January 1884 on St Helena Island.

Christopher was the third son of Kate White and Warder Donald McPherson, a long term warder on the island. Christopher’s death certificate showcases a real sense of community amongst the warders, who assisted the McPherson family to bury Christopher in the Warder’s children’s cemetery. When he was buried on St Helena Island on the 3rd January 1884, Warder Donald Smith, another long term warder on the island, acted as undertaker. Warders Richard Gunning and John North, both married warders with young children of their own, were in attendance as witnesses and friends.

No headstone is visible in the cemetery.

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One headstone base exists in the children’s cemetery, missing its corresponding headstone. Whether it belongs to any one of the 6 children buried here without a headstone remains a mystery.

Headstone image by Belinda Daly
By the time William Smyth was appointed as a Turnkey in 1872, he was already married to Jane Dodd and had two children. His fifth child John Henry Bamford Smyth was born on St Helena Island on the 26th April 1878. John died on the 6th June 1878 aged 41 days, ill nearly from birth, with Dr Challinor in attendance. He was buried the following day in the St Helena cemetery. James Hamilton, Chief Warder, acted as undertaker and Warders Richard Antisell and James Downie were in attendance.

Alice Smyth was born prematurely on St Helena Island on the 19th December 1883. She died on the 1st January 1884 aged 17 days, from ‘General debility’ with Dr Wray in attendance. By this time her father William had been promoted to Trade Instructor in the Boot and Saddlemaking workshop.

Alice was buried on the 3rd January 1884 on St Helena Island. Warder Donald Smith acted as undertaker, with Chief Warder Henry Gimson and Warder John Murphy in attendance. Both children do not have a headstone.
Not all staff on the island were warders. The St Helena School No.12 had been without a school teacher for a year for the 30 warders’ children by the time Walter Hore was appointed in the role in August 1884. Walter arrived with his wife Frances Joseph and six children, moving into a cottage on Warders’ Row.

Four more children were born in the time the family were on St Helena Island. Charlotte was their sixth daughter and she died on the 3rd November 1887 aged 5 months, from diarrhoea and convulsions after a week’s illness.

“In loving memory of Charlotte E. K. Hore, aged 5 months

‘Safe from all sin and sorrow

Forever with God at rest.”

Her headstone is well preserved, being made from marble, while her two brothers have no headstone visible.

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Augustus Herbert Sydney Hore was born on St Helena Island on the 21st December 1888. He died on the 4th August 1889, aged 7 months from ‘Convulsions and Diarrhoea’ lasting 12 days. Dr Wray had last seen him on the 3rd August and was in attendance when he died.

He was buried on St Helena Island on the 5th August 1889, with Warder Donald Smith acting as undertaker. Warder Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh - who had lost his own daughter only months before - and Warder Donald McPherson - who had lost his son in 1883 - were in attendance.

Montague Ruthven Hore was the last child born to the Hore family. He was born on St Helena Island on the 2nd December 1890 and died on on St Helena Island on the 19th December 1890 aged 17 days. Montague died from ‘Diarrhoea and Exhaustion’ lasting 10 days, with Dr Wray in attendance.

He was buried on St Helena Island on the 19th December 1890, with Warder Donald Smith again acting as undertaker. M Walton and Warder John Sanders were in attendance.
Eleanor Mary Fetherstonhaugh is the oldest child to be buried in St Helena Warders’ children’s cemetery:

“Eleanor Mary (Nellie) Featherstonhaugh
Eldest beloved daughter of
Cuthbert J & Julia L Featherstonhaugh,
who departed this life
29th May 1889, Aged 19 years”

Eleanor was born in New Zealand in 1869. Her father Cuthbert first came to St Helena Island as a warder in 1879. Warder Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh and mother Julia Waldie were living with their family on St Helena Island when Eleanor died from ‘Tuberculosis’ on the island on the 29th May 1889. Tuberculosis, otherwise known as Consumption, is a bacterial infection commonly affecting the lungs. Spread through coughing and sneezing, it was the leading cause of death in Queensland at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Nellie’s marble headstone remains well preserved in the Warders’ children’s cemetery.
Selby Robertson was NOT the child of a St Helena Warder or even a family living on the island.

Telegram Lytton, 9:48am Feb 1893: Body of male child apparently about five 5 years of age washed ashore here this morning. Body much decomposed not hair remaining had on striped dress with worked blue leaf pattern and kind of stays such as little boys wear and button their trousers to. Keeping clothing for identification and burying body.

Charles Pennefather, Superintendent, St Helena

Letter 22nd Feb 1893: List of clothing taken from the body of the deceased child. The clothing has been washed, disinfected and is as follows: 1 woollen singlet, 1 corded stays, 1 drill petticoat, 1 cotton frock. The body of the deceased was enclosed in a coffin and buried on Sunday afternoon, the Church of England burial service being read. C. Pennefather.

Memo: I have identified the clothing as having been worn by my youngest boy, Selby Stuart, the day he was killed … near Oxley bridge, on the 9th inst. Will Robertson 22.2.93

Selby had drowned in the Brisbane River and carried by currents to St Helena Island. No headstone is visible.
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Information can be shared in the interests of promoting and understanding the history of St Helena Island and the importance of future conservation, but must acknowledge the author. This cemetery information should not be sold for profit without permission from Belinda Daly.

www.sthelenacommunity.com.au

- Belinda Daly is compiling new information on the social history of St Helena Island, particularly the warders and their families. She has initiated the ‘St Helena Island Community’ blog in order to share information and build a community of like minded people. Please access this on the site address above.

- Ongoing research on all aspects of St Helena Island is being conducted by the ‘St Helena Island Community,’ by Belinda Daly and Sandy Liddle.

- Please contact Belinda and Sandy to uncover, contribute to and share St Helena Island’s unique and fascinating history.

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