

**Croker Prize for Biography**

**Entry 1407**

**The Blackest Sheep in my**

**Family's Flock was ...**

**Elizabeth Mcgregor**

## THE BLACKEST SHEEP IN MY FAMILY'S FLOCK WAS :-

My great, great, grandmother, Elizabeth McGregor, who arrived in Victoria with her mother and 3 brothers in 1853.

Elizabeth was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1839, in Bread Street, Birmingham 1, the third child of John Grierson McGregor and Elizabeth, nee Evans. She was baptised at St. Philip, Birmingham on 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1839 2. I don't know how Elizabeth's parents met: father John McGregor was possibly born in Lanarkshire, Scotland, and mother Elizabeth born in Martley, Worcestershire 3. They were married at St. George, Birmingham on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1833 4. John and Elizabeth had four sons, Andrew, born 1834 5, John born 1837 6, both baptised at St. Philip, Birmingham, James born in 1840 or 1841, possibly in Liverpool (James died in 1843 7) and Monteith, who was born in 1844 at 2 Thurlow Street, Islington 8. The family moved to Liverpool sometime between 1839 and the census of 1841. The 1851 census shows the family living at 28 London Road, Liverpool, minus father John. Elizabeth is described as 'Head of the Family' and working as a ? Broker Andrew, 16, is working in a Brass Foundry. John snr. is not mentioned on the census, he is possibly the John McGregor who arrived in Victoria aboard the 'Marmion' on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1852 9, maybe to prepare for the arrival of his family the following year. Elizabeth arrived with the children in March, 1853, aboard 'Athlone', which sailed on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1852 from Liverpool to Melbourne 10.

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I started tracing the family history in the 1970s, when it was much more time consuming and expensive and finding birth certificates, etc. could be very much hit and miss. It took me a long time to track down Elizabeth McGregor, and I visited at one stage one of her granddaughters, Elizabeth Poole, my father's Aunt Liz. She must have been horrified when I arrived on the doorstep asking questions, and, as she almost literally danced around the subject, it became obvious that she didn't want to talk about her father's mother. The only thing she would tell me was that her father was something of athlete in his younger days in Bourke. I wish I had known then what I know now; and she was the only one, then alive, who might have had information about Elizabeth McGregor. It took me quite a few years before I realised just what Aunt Liz didn't want me to know.

On the weekend of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> November 2009, I attended a seminar organised by the Society of Australian Genealogists held at Orange, entitled 'Lost in Black Sheep'. One of the lectures was about the Sydney Benevolent Society, and, although I had no idea that Elizabeth was living in Sydney at that time, it couldn't hurt to check. Martyn Killion and Heather Garnsey checked the records for me and supplied a report on Elizabeth McGregor, 21 years old, single, pregnant, ship 'Athlone' 11. Definitely my Elizabeth. She was admitted to the Society on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1861 by Dean Cowper and delivered a son, who she named Thomas, on 23<sup>rd</sup> March. The Society also recorded the name of the father as Henry Wolfe, a butcher on the corner of Druitt and Kent Streets. Unfortunately baby Thomas died on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, aged 4 months, of bronchitis 12, and Elizabeth discharged herself on 6<sup>th</sup> August. Henry married a few years later.

I decided to do a search on Trove for any mention of Elizabeth at that time and came across an item in the Sydney Morning Herald, 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1859 <sup>13</sup>.

‘An inquest was also held yesterday at the Lighthouse Hotel, corner of Bathurst and Sussex Streets, on the body of an infant named Elizabeth McGregor, who was five weeks old and an illegitimate. It appeared from the testimony that the infant, though subject to fire, had been accidentally overlaid by its mother, and the jury returned a verdict accordingly. In a rider to the verdict the jury expressed their indignation at the disgraceful conduct of the father of the infant in not having provided for the wants of either mother or child.’

A copy of the birth certificate <sup>14</sup> showed that infant Elizabeth was born on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1859, mother Elizabeth McGregor, 19 years, Birmingham, England. She was living in Bathurst Street at the time. Unfortunately I have not been able to locate any item which mentions the father’s name. The birth was registered on 1<sup>st</sup> March. A copy of the death certificate <sup>15</sup> shows the date of death as 25<sup>th</sup> February, even though the inquest was held on 19<sup>th</sup> February; and the cause was given as ‘convulsions from birth. The mother was living in Bathurst Street. I cant find any references to the fire that might have affected them.

Elizabeth possibly went to her family in Forbes after the death of her baby Thomas, and hopefully was there when her father, John McGregor, died on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1862 of typhoid fever <sup>16</sup>. The family had been living in N.S.W. for 5 years, according to the death certificate and John is described as a miner. Almost a year later, on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 1863, Elizabeth’s mother died of cancer. She was 64 years old <sup>17</sup>.

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After many pink reject slips from the Births Deaths and Marriages Office, I finally found the birth certificate of my great grandfather, John Bagwell, son of Elizabeth McGregor. His marriage certificate <sup>18</sup> had been no help as there was no mention of parents or age. Around 1990 I drove out to Forbes to check court records and found that I had been looking for the wrong name. My great grandfather had not been born John Bagwell, but John McGregg on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1863, in Caledonia Road, Forbes, mother was Elizabeth McGregg, no father given <sup>19</sup>. Further checking located another son, Thomas McGreggor, born 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1865, Caledonia Road, Forbes, mother Elizabeth McGreggor, no father given <sup>20</sup>. Naively I had been searching before, instead of after, John’s birth, for Elizabeth’s marriage to Nathaniel Benjamin Bagwill which took place on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1866 <sup>21</sup>. Nathaniel was born in 1844 <sup>22</sup>, son of John Bagwell and Susan Parrett. On Thomas McGreggor’s birth certificate the name of one of the nurses is Mrs. Bagwill, and I wondered if Nathaniel could have been Thomas’ father, or if Elizabeth met Nathaniel through the nurse, Mrs. Bagwill. After Elizabeth’s marriage, her boys were known as Bagwell, not McGregor. Five weeks later, Nathaniel was dead. Cause of death – ‘suicidal hanging <sup>23</sup>. An inquest was held, conducted by William Farrand, Esq. M.P. who conducted the inquest into the death of Ben Hall. Unfortunately no inquest records exist for that period, but a full report of the proceedings was published in The Empire <sup>24</sup>, which stated, in part:

‘Nathaniel Bagwell had been married only about five or six weeks, and it is said that he and his wife had not lived very pleasantly together.’ ‘For several days preceding his death, the deceased appeared to be very low spirited.’ ‘His wife’s name was Lizzie McGregor before marriage.’

Elizabeth swore – ‘I last saw him alive last night between 11 and 12. On the morning of Monday we had a quarrel, it arose from a consultation about his going to leave me; he talked about going to the Weddin Mountain . . . . . There was never any other cause for quarrel between us, except his inability to assist in providing for the house’. She described an attempt he made to cut his throat with a razor, and several times he threatened to commit suicide. The report describes how she found him hanging and her futile attempts to get a neighbour to help her to cut him down. There is no mention in the inquest report of children in the house at the time. Nathaniel’s brother, Philip, was the informant on the death certificate and he makes no mention of the marriage or children.

How Elizabeth lived after Nathaniel’s death is not known. Her father’s will <sup>25</sup> mentions a mining lease he held with her brother, Monteith, but whether Monteith still lived in the area is unknown. Both of her sons could read and write, so they must have had some education, but Forbes Family History Society has no records of schools in the area in the early 1860s <sup>26</sup>.

Elizabeth next comes under notice in 1875, when, according to the Police Gazette <sup>27</sup>:

Elizabeth Bagwell and Margaret McKenna, summoned by Senior Constable Purcell, Parkes Police, for keeping bawdy Houses at Parkes, have been committed for trial at Forbes Quarter Sessions. Admitted to Bail.

The Deposition Registers <sup>28</sup> give the place and date of Committal as Parkes 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1875. She went to trial on 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1876, the verdict was ‘Guilty’ and sentence: To pay a fine of 5 pounds or to be imprisoned in Forbes Gaol for one month <sup>29</sup>. The fine must have been paid as there is no record of her serving any time in gaol.

A sad footnote to this matter is an item in the Australian Town and Country Journal <sup>30</sup> which states :

‘On Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> inst. (presumably November) before H.H. Cooke: John Bagwell, a lad of about twelve years of age, was charged with setting fire to the grandstand on the Parkes Racecourse. Dismissed. A similar charge against Albert Curtis which was withdrawn.’

I wonder if this was a young boy’s reaction to the news of the arrest of his mother. Elizabeth is mentioned again in the Police Gazette in 1879 <sup>31</sup> when:

‘Edward Reynolds, alias Sayers, charged on warrant with assaulting Elizabeth Bagwell, with intent to commit a rape, has been arrested by Constable Robertson, Grenfell Police. Committed for trail at Forbes Station.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1880, Elizabeth married again, the groom being Frederick William Harrison, aged 42 years, a miner <sup>32</sup>. He was a widower. They were married in St. Georges Church at Parkes and Elizabeth gave her occupation as 'Private Life' and made her mark.

Her sons would have been 17 and 15 years old at the time, and just a few years later, possibly looking for work, they travelled to Bourke, where John married Mary Jane Gould in 1885 <sup>33</sup>. Thomas stayed in Bourke for a few years and then went to Broken Hill where his sister-in-law's brothers were working in the mines. He, unfortunately, was killed in a mining accident on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1889 <sup>34</sup> when he fell down a shaft. He was 22 years old and engaged to be married. His name is on the Miners Memorial.

Elizabeth died the year before her son, on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1888, in Parkes Hospital <sup>35</sup>. Her husband was the informant and gave her age as 43, when she was, in fact, 49 years old. The cause of death was 'Syphilis Menorrhagia' (Menorrhagia is an extreme menstrual bleeding) which she had suffered from for 7 years. She was buried in Parkes Cemetery, in an unmarked grave. Frederick died in 1902 at Nyngan Hospital, the informant was the Matron of the hospital <sup>36</sup>.

Elizabeth's son John Bagwell stayed in the Bourke/Cobar area for some years. In 1898 he was declared bankrupt <sup>37</sup>, and gave the reason as:

'Insufficient work and family sickness. I got in to arrears and could not afterwards meet my liabilities'

The 1890s were years of severe drought and financial depression. At about the time of the First World War the family relocated to Sydney, living in the Annandale/Leichhardt area where John died on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1937 <sup>38</sup>.

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Family History is so much easier now than it was before the Internet. Thanks to the S.A.G. Black Sheep weekend in Orange I discovered the time Elizabeth spent in Sydney. Ancestry. Com and Trove have made the search so much easier, quicker and cheaper.

But, I wish I could talk to Aunt Liz again.....

#### NOTES :

1. England GRO Birth Vol 16, page 213.
2. Ancestry. Com - Birmingham England Baptisms 1813-1912 Ref, DRO25 Archive Roll M42
3. Ancestry.com – Birmingham England Baptisms 1813-1912 Ref. DRO 51 Archive Roll 535
4. Ancestry.com - Birmingham, England Marriages and Banns 1754-1937 Ref. Number DRO 9 Archive Roll M21

5. Ancestry.com – Birmingham, England Baptisms 1813-1912 Ref DRO 25 Archive Roll M41
6. Ancestry.com – 1841 Census Liverpool
7. Ancestry.com – 1841 Census Liverpool
8. Ancestry.com – England and Wales Free BMD Birth Index 1837-1915 Vol. 20 page 417.
9. Ancestry.com – Victoria, Australia Assisted and Unassisted Passenger List 1839 – 1923
10. Public Records Office, Victoria – Index to Unassisted Inward Passenger Lists to Victoria 1852-1923
11. Sydney Benevolent Asylum Admissions and Discharges 1857-1900 Database.
12. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Reg. Nr 1861/000717.
13. Sydney Morning Herald (NSW 1842-1954) Saturday, 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1859 page 4.
14. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages - Birth Certificate Reg. Nr 1859/000397
15. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Reg.Nr 1859/000263
16. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Reg. Nr 1862/4489
17. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Reg. Nr 1863/4370
18. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriage – Marriage Certificate Reg. Nr 1885/4201
19. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Birth Certificate Reg. Nr 1863/9966
20. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Birth Certificate Reg. Nr 1865/11229
21. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Marriage Certificate Reg. Nr 1866/2467
22. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages Birth Certificate Reg. Nr 28/1844
23. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Reg.Nr 1866/05102
24. Empire (Sydney NSW 1850-1875) Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1866, page 3
25. John McGregor Last Will and Testament Number. 5371 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1862
26. Forbes Family History Group Inc. Letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2014
27. New South Wales Police Gazette 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1875 page 368
28. Index to Deposition Registers page No. 072 Series No. NRS849 Reel No. 2760
29. Reg. No. of case 1014, Date of Trial 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1876
30. Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney, NSW, 1870-1907) Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1875 page 10
31. New South Wales Police Gazette 5<sup>th</sup> February, 1879 page 51
32. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Marriage Certificate Nr 63/1880
33. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Marriage Certificate Nr 1885/4201
34. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Nr 1889/D11496
35. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Nr 1888/009300
36. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Nr 1902/015158
37. In the Supreme Court of N.S.W. in Bankruptcy No. 12679 1898
38. Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages – Death Certificate Nr 1937/18986