



# LAUNCESTON BRANCH NEWSLETTER

## Library Hours:

**Tuesday**  
10am–3pm

**Monday -  
Thursday:**

By appointment

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**Next Workshop**

Wednesday  
17th June

2pm

**“Irish Research  
Online”**

At the Stables  
45 Tamar St



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**President:** Helen Stuart  
**Editor:** Betty Bissett

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### From the Library:

At the Annual General Meeting of the Launceston Branch held on the 21st April, member, Marion Sargent, President of the Launceston Historical Society gave an illustrated address featuring the early cemeteries in Launceston.

Marion introduced Dianne Cassidy's new publication, *Charles Street General Cemetery 1841-1925 : Launceston's Non-Denomination Burial Ground*.

This publication can be purchased direct from Dianne.

Charles Street General Cemetery 1841 to 1925 Price: \$30.00 plus p&p. – Dianne J.E. Cassidy: Enquiries to [penders10@gmail.com](mailto:penders10@gmail.com)



Marion, holding the new publication is pictured with the outgoing President Russell Watson.

## Evandale Bus Trip, Thursday 19 February, 2015

23 members of the TFHS Inc. Launceston Branch participated in an enjoyable bus trip to Evandale with Terese Binns (also a member) as our driver for the day.

We travelled to Evandale via Breadalbane with Lucille Gee, author of *Relbia – Yesterday and Today* pointing out historical areas of interest along the way.



On arrival at the Evandale History and Community Centre, which was originally the old Evandale State School, we were met by Laurie Wotherspoon and Frank Deane. Laurie spoke about the resources the Society has available for researchers and gave an interesting insight into the history of the Convict Built Evandale to Launceston Water Scheme 1836-1838, which if completed, could have supplied the current water needs for Launceston for many years.

St Andrews Anglican Church

A short walk along High Street to St Andrews Anglican Church followed, where we were met

by Stephanie Dean who kindly agreed to open the church for members to view. Stephanie spoke about the church's history which was built in 1871. This is the third Anglican Church built in Evandale and the freestone font was believed to have been made about 1818 at Port Arthur for St David's Church, Hobart.

Stephanie Dean speaking to the group in St Andrews Anglican Church.



We then crossed the street to St Andrews Uniting Church (formerly Presbyterian) built 1839-1840, mainly through the efforts of the Rev Robert Russell, First Presbyterian Minister in Evandale. His grave is marked with a statue of "Hope". Laurie spoke about the architecture and history of the church, including the beautiful candelabra.



St Andrews Uniting Church (formerly Presbyterian).



Laurie Wotherspoon speaking to group inside the church.

After a leisurely lunch at the Ingleside Bakery we boarded the bus again for a tour around Evandale with Laurie giving us an insight into historical points of interest, stopping off in High Street to inspect the convict built vertical shaft which was part of the Evandale to Launceston Water Scheme.

Our final stop before departing Evandale was at the Church of England Cemetery to view what remains of the headstones and monuments.

Leaving Evandale we travelled via White Hills and Relbia with Lucille speaking about the history of the area, stopping at her home for a delicious Devonshire tea and relaxation in the garden before returning to Launceston.

Thank you to all those involved in making it a very interesting and relaxing day, and I am sure we all came away from the trip having learnt a lot more about the history of Evandale.



Laurie speaking to the group outside the Ingleside Bakery (originally built in 1867 as the Council Chambers and Municipal Offices for the Municipality of Evandale.



Inspecting the convict built vertical shaft which was part of the original Evandale to Launceston Water Scheme.



St Mary's Catholic Church built in 1863, now a private residence, last service held in 2002.



Group enjoying Devonshire Tea in Lucille Gee' garden at Relbia

### **Unholy Matrimony – Anne Gordon [*The Scots Magazine*, Dec 1994]**

Marriages over the blacksmith's anvil at Gretna Green are so well known that many people think it was the only place where such irregular ceremonies before two witnesses took place in Scotland – and that the participants were always runaway English couples. The truth is rather different.

English runaway marriages started after 1754 when an Act of Parliament imposed a penalty of 14 years' transportation on any English Clergyman marrying a couple without proclamation of banns, and anywhere else than in a church or chapel. The result was that English couples then looked to Scotland where irregular marriage was common and, although it was to Gretna that they often went, many of them took an East Coast route to cross the Border into Berwickshire and marry there.

Irregular marriages were those in which an unmarried couple simply declared themselves man and wife before two witnesses. They had been going on throughout Scotland for many years before 1754, particularly among poorer people.

An unusual one took place in the church in Peterhead in 1681 during the weddings of other couples. A young man and woman, Alexander Smith and Janet Davidson, suddenly stood up, joined hands, and declared themselves married. No one could say that there was any lack of witnesses, but the kirk session refused to accept what they had done and censured them before allowing them to marry in church in the regular manner.

In general, couples wasted little time in reporting their irregular marriage to their kirk sessions, although they knew they would be reprimanded, perhaps admonished "to a regular, decent and circumspect behaviour for the future" and might have to pay a fine of around 10/- sterling.

As a deterrent to such marriages, Hawick Kirk Session once ordered an offender to pay 100 merks (over £5 sterling) which he thought was far too much and considered that “he was att [sic] great enough expense anent [sic] his marriage and would not allow anything for his trespass.”

He was an exception, however, and normally couples, along with an exhortation to live in love and peace together, would be officially declared married persons and this fact was recorded in the session minutes. This was particularly important for women. It ensured that should a baby arrive, its paternity was established and maintenance by the father guaranteed, and it also prevented men denying that a marriage had ever taken place, which was not uncommon.

In one such case, an innkeeper came to the session to say that a couple were indeed married. This witness had been suspicious about two men and a woman who came to his inn, had some refreshments and then slipped out to a quiet place “behind Sir Lawrence’s dog-house.” He followed them and heard one of the men carry out a form of marriage service and declare the couple married persons. This the session accepted as marriage even although there had been no witnesses, and the man’s hopes of marriage to someone else were frustrated.

Although it was rare, it was not unknown for women to claim marriage where it did not exist.

Irregular marriages developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when a shortage of clergy meant that it could be difficult for a couple to be married in church, and it was as well to recognise irregular marriage rather than have a couple live in sin. Even after sufficient clergy became available, these marriages still continued in spite of laws against them, largely because as the church became more authoritative it began to place obstacles, expenses and delays in the way of regular marriage.

Those wishing to marry had to prove that they were free to do so, which could mean obtaining the necessary proofs from another parish. That was not necessarily easy without adequate transport or communications. If they had misbehaved, they had to complete church discipline before marriage was allowed or else give surety that they would complete it later. They might have to give evidence of religious knowledge by learning the Commandments, the Creed and perhaps some Scripture texts.

They also had to enter into formal contracts of marriage and give a cash pledge that the marriage would indeed take place, or else find caution for this pledge; and their banns had to be proclaimed. All this was intended to raise standards, but it took money and it took time – and time was often the thing that young couples could not afford, knowing that they would be in trouble with the kirk session if a baby arrived suspiciously swiftly after the wedding. The result was that they got married irregularly.

All that was required to authenticate these marriages was the signature of two witnesses, but it became common for so-called “priests” to conduct proceedings and to provide “lines” – a form of marriage certificate. Any man at all could become a “priest”, be he blacksmith, tailor, baker or anything else; it was only very occasionally that he was a deposed clergyman such as the Reverend Thomas Blair of Lennel, Berwickshire, an obliging man who would backdate “lines” to conceal the common sin of ante-nuptial fornication.

Some “priests” were not above pretending to be clergymen and wrote the words “as minister” after their signatures. An Edinburgh man, Patrick Middleton, went so far as to style himself “minister of the Gospel” which he certainly was not. The “lines of an irregular marriage in 1809 stated that it was performed “according to the form of marriage observed in the Church of Scotland”, while for an English couple there could be included a statement that everything had been done according to the laws of Scotland, but after the manner of the Church of England.

Many “priests” tried to give an aura of respectability to their ceremonies by including prayers and Scripture readings and having the couple repeat virtually the same vows that would be made in a church wedding. After that, it was just a matter of writing out the certificate or ‘lines” and accepting a fee of between 7/6d and 10/6d although some were prepared to take a nominal sum from those too poor to pay the full amount.

The English Act of 1754 which drove young couples to Scotland was almost contemporary with the introduction of turnpike roads and their toll-houses every six or so miles along the way. The right to operate toll-houses was roused [sic] annually by the Turnpike Trustees, and successful bidders had to make as much income as they could to cover rent and show a profit. They did this directly through tolls, and indirectly by selling alcohol, with or without a licence, as the Trustees did not seem averse to any sidelines which could increase their rents and so benefit road-building programmes.

The marriage trade was soon found to be another useful diversification, and some toll-keepers, with their houses so conveniently by the roadside, took on the role of “priests” themselves. Coldstream became famous for what is now called the Marriage House, a toll house still standing on the north side of the Tweed, where many marriages took place.

A few years after the opening of the Carlisle to Glasgow road in 1830, a man named Simon Beattie became toll-keeper a little south of Gretna and, being slightly closer to the Border than the village itself, was able to cream off a good deal of the marriage trade before it got to the village or the smithy.

A “priest” could also be a witness and thus receive two fees. Members of his family could also be paid witnesses, and it is not surprising that should Simon Beattie be away from home, he encouraged one or other of his sturdy daughters to dress up and impersonate him rather than miss the chance of marriage fees.

Other toll-keepers did not perform marriages themselves, but allowed their toll-houses to be used for weddings, which is how a tailor from Berwick-on-Tweed, Andrew Lyons, was able to celebrate 482 marriages in 30 years at various toll-houses in the southern part of Berwickshire. One of these marriages was at the Union Bridge Toll, 11 each at Paxton and Mordington Tolls, 15 at Starch House Toll, and the remainder at Lamberton Toll which was particularly well placed, lying just north of Berwick and formerly on the Great North Road.

Between 1844-47 no less than 1474 irregular marriages were celebrated in this area, an average of about 368 a year, most of them at Lamberton. Six, seven and eight marriages might take place there in one day, but only once did the figure rise to nine.

Andrew Lyons was the last recognised “priest” there, certainly performing marriages as late as 1885, although the final marriage at Lamberton was celebrated not long after that by Harry Smith, another Berwick man who stepped in as an emergency measure when no regular “priest” could be found. Although toll-houses were convenient for such marriages, they were not essential locations, and better-off couples were known to summon a “priest” to them rather than resort to a location as mundane as a toll-house.

So far as local marriage business went, some “priests” touted for trade visiting fairs and markets in search of custom. One Berwickshire man was fully aware of the benefits that publicity can bring and went as far as advertising himself thus:

### BORDER MARRIAGES

*Mr W Ness, at the Blue Bell Inn, High Street, Berwick, begs to offer himself to the notice of the public. He will, for the future, celebrate marriages at the various stations on the Borders, from Lamberton Toll on the East, to Gretna Green on the West, in a manner which must give general satisfaction.*

*A correct register will be kept and carefully preserved, and the most honourable secrecy, when required, will be maintained.*  
Berwick, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1850

Another would-be celebrant declared that he would be available day or night.

Registers were kept by some “priests”, but it is unlikely that any survive. Should an English couple appear sufficiently affluent, rather grand “lines” might be prepared, perhaps as large as a handbill and boldly written, but generally “lines” were just a sheet of paper giving the essential information: “These are to certifie [sic] that William MacLean and Margaret Watt do acknowledge themselves to be lawfully married [sic] as man and wife before these witnesses and so acknowledge the seam this 22 day of July, 1747 at Stirling as we do hear attest the seam by (names of three witnesses)” or “I John Brown, do hereby acknowledge and take you Jannet Allen to be my lawful married wife and do in presence of God promise and Covenant to be a faithful and loving husband to you until God shall separate us by death. Signed – John Brown.” Both these sets of “lines” were produced to the couples’ kirk sessions and copied into their minutes. Some “lines” stated that “so far as can be known” the couple were free of all church censure in spite of the fact that inquiries about this, if made at all, would have been superficial.

The strange thing is that so well known was Gretna Green for irregular marriages, that people would travel there from all over Scotland when they could perfectly well have been married before two witnesses where they were. At last, however, it was realised that all this was unsatisfactory and in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century an Act was passed requiring one of the parties to have lived in Scotland for 21 days which reduced the chance of abuses.

These irregular marriages were abolished by the Marriage (Scotland) act of 1934.

Nevertheless, Gretna Green continues to attract young couples who marry at the Registrar’s office, and then go to The Old Smiddy to receive a “blacksmith’s blessing” and have photographs taken.

Tourists are also well catered for. They can watch an audio-visual presentation of the Gretna Green Story and see the original anvil, marriage room, 18<sup>th</sup>-century cottage and byre. There is a tourist information centre, shop, coach museum and often a piper.

Thus the hurried irregular marriages of former days are still providing regular benefits to Gretna Green.



The Marriage House on the Scottish side of the Tweed at Coldstream. Its true purpose was that of a toll-house, but as did many of his profession, the keeper here diversified into performing irregular weddings for couples coming across the border to escape English restrictions.



# British Interest Group



Meetings on the 1st Wednesday of the month  
at **Lower Meeting Room, Windmill Hill Hall, High Street**, from 2:00 to 4:00.

We are a small group of enthusiastic members of the Tasmanian Family History Society Inc., Launceston Branch, with an interest in anything associated with researching in Britain. The meetings are generally of an informal nature, designed to enable the discussion of either, a specific subject, current problems being encountered, or more usually, both.

New members are always welcome, so if you are researching British ancestors and their families, why not come along and join us?

## Next Meeting is on the Wednesday 6th May 2015 — Topic: “Pastimes of Past Times”

What did our ancestors enjoy doing as hobbies and recreation in the small amount of free time they had available to them? Come along with your stories and maybe even some examples.

## The Society 35th Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting

To be held at the Swansea Town Hall, Franklin St, Swansea

**Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st June.**

**Hosted by Hobart Branch**

The programme and speakers are outlined in the Registration Form in the March edition of *Tasmanian Ancestry*. Closing date for registration and payment is **6 June 2015**.

Note: Register before **Thursday 7 May 2015** and be in the draw for the President’s Early Bird Prize.



## Workshop at The Stables, 45 Tamar St



Wednesday 17th June, 2 pm

### Irish Research Online

#### Application to attend the Branch Workshop

*Fee of \$5.00 includes course material.* I wish to attend the above workshop on the 17th June

Name/s: .....

Address: .....

Phone/Mobile:..... Membership Nos: .....\$5.00 pp

Please return the completed form with your remittance as soon as possible to the:  
Treasurer, TFHS Inc. Launceston Branch, PO Box 1290, Launceston. 7250

Or payment can be made at the Branch Library by Tuesday 9th June.

**Please Note: Should any workshop have to be cancelled by the branch, costs will be refunded**