

A SIDELINE ON THE WALSH FAMILY HISTORY

Mary Cunningham's Rosary beads box, given to Janatha by Pa Walsh in 1976

John Walsh b. Ballyhahill, co Limerick, Ireland in 1826
Carpenter by trade
Migrated on ship "Admiral Boxer", with mother and three sisters,
arriving in Victoria 1857. We don't know their reason for migrating, but things would
have still been grim in Ireland in the 1850s, after the potato blight and famine of the late
1840s. It seems that he was not attracted by the gold rush. Died in Geelong, 1886.

Mary Cunningham b. Co. Tipperary (probably Clonmel) in 1839.
Migrated on ship "Boanerges", arrived in Melbourne, with two sisters (Sarah & Bridget) in
1862. They were sponsored by their brother, James who was married and had migrated to
Geelong in 1854. Died in Geelong, 1896.

John Walsh and Mary Cunningham were married in 1863 at St. Mary's Catholic Church, Geelong. I have their original marriage certificate. They had six children – two girls died as infants and a third girl died when she was 18. The surviving boys were Maurice, (never married), Peter, who married Mary O'Connor and had nine children, (he made up the crap-books that Pa had for many years, and which Allen Walsh now has) and Daniel, Pa Walsh's father, known to us as "Little Grandpa", who married Annie Burke, ("Big Nin") in Geelong in 1901. The Walsh and Cunningham families were all Catholics.

Donald Ross b. Kincardine, Rossshire, Scotland in 1828.
Occupation – farmer & stonemason. Died at Bulla in 1902.

Johanna Sutherland b. Knockarthur, Sutherlandshire, Scotland in 1825.
Died at Bulla in 1895.

(N.B. Allen and Janet Walsh on a visit in 1998, found that Rossshire was full of "Rosses" and Sutherlandshire full of "Sutherlands"!). Since the 1970's, these shires no longer exist and are now part of the "Highland" region of Scotland.

Donald Ross and Johanna Sutherland were married at Golspie, (Sutherlandshire) in 1853, and migrated shortly after, arriving in Victoria on the "Wanata" in 1854. On arrival, they had six months employment at Deep Creek (Bulla district), then presumably set up their own small farm at Bulla, where all their children were born.

As with our Irish Ancestors, we don't know why the Rosses migrated, but conditions in the Scottish highland in the 1850's wouldn't be much different from those in Ireland, and it was at that time that the great migration of Irish and Scots to America and Australia began – and not all of them joined the gold rush).

They had six children: Christina, who married Patrick Burke at Bulla in 1875; Catherine (Aunty Kate); who never married, Thomas, who was married, but to whom we don't know; Johanna, who married a fellow called 'Mellows' and moved to Yarrowonga; and Alexandrina (Lexie), who married James Heagney, (a champion all-round professional athlete at the time). Lexie was the mother of Willie and Alex "Bub" Heagney, whom we knew well in our younger days. She died when Bub was born in 1890, and Aunty Kate raised Willie and Bub in Geelong, initially in hotels that James Heagney bought after winning the Botany Handicap in Sydney in 1888, the purse for which was 520 gold sovereigns!

Patrick Burke was born in Adelaide in 1853. His parents had migrated from Ireland, but we have no details. He was a farm labourer, and married Christina Ross, (Donald Ross's eldest daughter) at the Presbyterian Church, Bulla, in 1875. We don't know whether he was a practicing Catholic, but this was the first mix in our family of the Irish and Scots. The Rosses were Presbyterians, and Donald Ross was one of the founders and builders of the Bulla Presbyterian Church.

Patrick and Christina Burke had eight children, including two sets of twins, although one set of twins died in infancy. One of their children was Annie Burke, Pa Walsh's mother, whom we called "Big Nin". See the appendix for an explanation!. All the Burke family were raised as Presbyterians. When Daniel Walsh and Annie Burke were planning to be married in Geelong in 1901, a problem arose with their religions. As far as I can gather, from the few comments that Pa Walsh made about it, Daniel was refused dispensation to be married outside the Catholic Church, so, in effect, he said "to hell with the church", and never went into a Catholic Church again. I wonder, though, if he ever went to a church for any funerals of his family or Irish friends? We'll never know.

Daniel and Annie were married in the Manse of the High Church (Presbyterian) in Geelong in 1901, and their only child, Maurice, (Pa Walsh) was born in 1903. I have their marriage certificate. Annie kept up attending the Presbyterian Church all her life, but probably not regularly.

Although I never discussed the subject with Pa Walsh, it was never "done" in our earlier days, I've thought for many years that he must have grown up a confused young fellow among the Irish in West Geelong, being neither Catholic or Presbyterian, and ended up neither!

Now to the Rosary beads box that Janatha has – given to her by Pa Walsh in 1976 – which belonged to Mary Walsh (Cunningham). Judging from the sequence of deaths in the family – and assuming that family possessions in those days were passed on to the senior one of the family, (ignoring minors such as Peter Walsh's children, the eldest son being 18 when he died), the Rosary bead box could have come down to Pa Walsh from Mary Walsh (Cunningham) (d. 1896), through Maurice, (d. 1898), Peter (d. 1925), Daniel (d. 1930), and his wife Annie (d. 1955).

I think it unlikely that Daniel inherited it from his mother when she died in 1896. As Pa Walsh said many times, Daniel was apparently a very likeable fellow, but temperamentally had a "short fuse", (we still have some like that in our family!), so it would be possible that, if he had the beads and box in 1901, he would have discarded them when the Church "done him wrong".

Now, for many years, I've thought that Pa Walsh gave Janatha both the beads and the box. I can vaguely remember being in Nana and Pa's lounge room when he gave Janatha the box. But Janatha now tells us she was given only the box. So where are the beads?

Whilst writing this, and jogging the memory, I have a vague recollection that Pa Walsh told me, probably through the 1970s, that he had given the beads to some old Catholic friend, which is the sort of thing he would have done, as he was a pretty sentimental sort of fellow.

Here endeth this particular yarn!

Brian Walsh
Chewton, June, 2002