

Chapter 15 - More of the Humphries & Watson's Bay

(1815 – 1837)

Catherine Humphries and those of her family who weren't directly involved in the affairs of the Browns, continued to live in 'splendid isolation'. This centred on their government built cottage at Watson's Bay and extended to the family farm at Brisbane Water, a short boat trip to the north. Their ambitions and activity of the family rarely strayed from these idyllic places and the commuting between them. From the time of the marriage of her daughter, Elizabeth, to David Brown junior in 1815, there was clearly some occasional interest in events at Eastern Farms, thence Cattai, and Jerry's Plains. As three other of her children were drawn into striving with the Browns, Catherine had more reason to take an interest in the affairs outside 'the Bay' and Brisbane Water.

However, it seems that Catherine was destined to stay put. She had a very young family of her own, and was pregnant again, at the time of Elizabeth's marriage. That pregnancy produced her last child, a baby boy, David. Her husband, Patrick, was still serving with the military as a private soldier. Overriding all of this is her contentment with the 'Bay' and 'Wicklow'.

The Humphries family couldn't help but be aware of events at South Head. The comings and goings of the pilot boat with the arrival of each new ship was about as hectic as the pace got at the Bay. Ships coming and going from Port Jackson all sailed past Wicklow.

The construction of a new lighthouse at South Head over 1816-18 would have created a topic of conversation there at the time. It replaced a very elementary facility in existence prior to Catherine's arrival on the *Minerva* in 1800. Francis Greenway supervised the construction. Greenway was responsible to Captain John Gill, Acting Principal Engineer to the Colony at the time. The design of the lighthouse is attributed to both⁵⁴²

Catherine's first grandchild Thomas, was born on 29 June 1817 at Eastern Farms/Kissing Point. There is little doubt about her getting prompt word of his arrival from Elizabeth.

South Head Road, 7 miles long (11.3 km) with its 11 bridges, was rebuilt in 1820 by Major Druitt. It still terminated at the Signal Station and the way down the hill to the Bay remained a rough track.

About 1821 the Humphries family were granted the land on which their 'Wicklow' cottage was sited. The grant became known as 'Humphreys Four Acres'. The location of the cottage can be ascertained in a current Sydney street directory. By starting from what is today the Pilot Station on Gibson's Beach, tracing a line north along the waterfront to the baths; then up Gap Street (now Robertson Place) to the Old South Head Road; here the boundary turned right along Salisbury Street, then back to the Pilot Station. 'Wicklow' cottage was situated facing Robertson Place, almost opposite the obelisk monument unveiled by Governor Macquarie on 9 April 1811.⁵⁴³

The muster of September 1822, shows Catherine's son, Thomas, then aged nearly 17 years, as born in the colony, and apprenticed to David Brown senior, Sydney. Thomas is listed as only one of 72 apprenticeships, the majority of which being in the service of the dockyard and the lumberyard. David Brown senior, carpenter and cabinet-maker, was father-in-law to Catherine's daughter Elizabeth.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² Greenway's structure was replaced in 1883 by the present structure (designed by Barnet) built a little to the west. Electric power for the light was generated by two dynamos driven by 'towns gas' engines up to 1912, then replaced by incandescent kerosene gas apparatus until 1933 when the light was connected to the city electricity mains but with diesel powered stand-by. Greenway's structure was to the east and often referred to as the 'Macquarie Tower'.

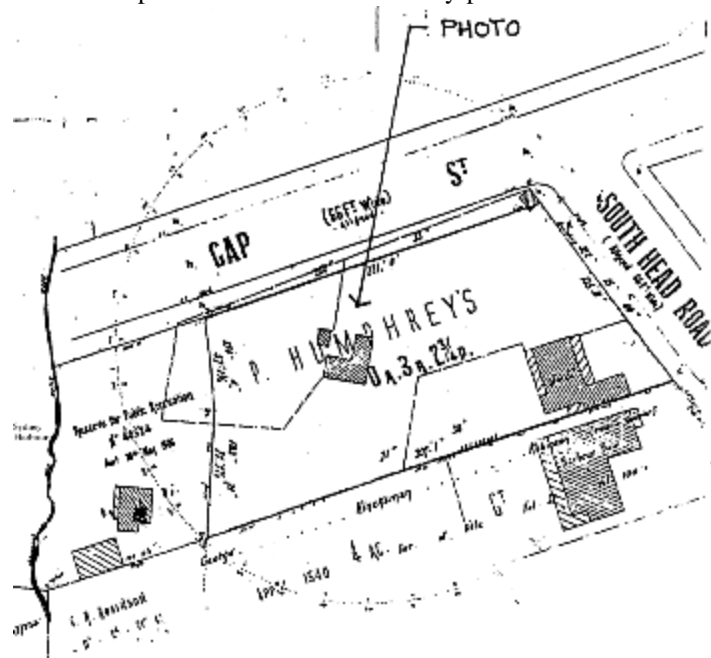
⁵⁴³ Watsons Bay Sketch Book.

⁵⁴⁴ Entry A10804

There seemed little opportunity for employment at Watson's Bay at this time. For many years it appears the Humphries family and the people associated with the pilot station were the only permanent residents and source of employment. Probably the Humphries men, and staff of the pilot station, caught fish to supplement their diet and to trade on a very humble level.

Michael Humphries, at age nineteen, resided at South Head, when he was assigned convict, James Ward of the *Tottenham*, on 30 May 1823.⁵⁴⁵ As Michael's occupation was boat-builder, it is possible that Ward was required to assist him with his trade.

On 11 March 1824 at the South Head location, Michael was assigned another convict, 26-year old James Allright of the '*Earl St Vincent*', described in the 1828 Census as a 'Servant' who had been sentenced for life.



Survey Map of Humphrey's 'Four Acres'. Photograph of Wicklow Cottage at Chapter 6 is referred to above.

Farming at Brisbane Water

Patrick Humphries was discharged from the army on 24th September 1823 after serving 22 years 195 days 'in consequence of disbandment of the Regiment', on a pension of 7 shillings 3-1/2 pence per week. His discharge certificate describes him as 5 feet 5-1/4 inches in height, light brown hair, hazel eyes and fair complexion. His conduct as a soldier had been 'very good'.⁵⁴⁶ Because of his service, Patrick was granted land by Governor Brisbane at Brisbane Water, on the Central Coast of New South Wales.⁵⁴⁷ The grant was 'in consideration of the Royal Veteran Company having been disbanded' and was for 100 acres 'in any part of the colony already surveyed.' Patrick was the last in a large number of soldiers of that company who were listed in the Governor's order.⁵⁴⁸ How Patrick came to choose 100 acres at Brisbane Water is most likely down to its convenience of access by sea from Watson's Bay, and the quality compared with many other grants of the same size. eg. the Brown's at Little Cattai Creek. Patrick's grant came to bear the name of Mount Humphreys.

Soon after receiving his grant, Patrick went there and started farming it with his second eldest son, Thomas. Patrick and Thomas seemed to have a particularly close father and son relationship. Thomas by now would have not long completed his apprenticeship with David Brown senior at Erskine Street. Patrick was also assigned convict labour to help in the development of the property at Brisbane Water.

Brisbane Water is a large inlet with a narrow 'S-bend' entrance to the northern side of the Hawkesbury River's entry into the sea at Broken Bay. The entry to Brisbane Water is guarded by a sand bar that could only be negotiated by boats at high tide. Brisbane Water is hemmed in on all sides by rugged hills.

Patrick's grant was situated on Cockle Creek, which is at the southeast end of Brisbane Water and adjacent to its difficult entry into Broken Bay. The name 'Cockle Creek' is misleading, as it for the most part is a broad and peaceful stretch of water. It is almost bisected to form a crude 'figure eight' by

⁵⁴⁵ SRNSW Fiche 3291 4/45700 p3.

⁵⁴⁶ PRO Ref. WO 97/1141. Shirley Downs e-mail of 9 July 2001

⁵⁴⁷ Pioneer Families Brisbane Waters. Charles Humphreys.

⁵⁴⁸ SRNSW Reel 60011, 435009, pp 484 - 486.

the high promontory on its eastern side that comprised Patrick Humphries' grant. The settlement in that area is referred to as 'South Kincumber'. Up river from Brisbane Water is Windsor.

Mount Humphreys presented an opportunity for a stopover and visiting for members of the family travelling between Windsor and Sydney. Humphries family such as George, David and Catherine Humphries, and the Browns resided in the Windsor area for many years. If they did call in, unless their timing coincided with a convenient high tide, they would have had to wait, or ferry ashore in smaller boats.

The sea journey between South Kincumber property and Watson's Bay was a straightforward one, even in those times. Members of the Humphries family were reputed to have rowed the distance at times, as well as sailed. The availability of seaworthy vessels was no doubt facilitated by Thomas' older brother, Michael's, trade as a boatbuilder. Thomas' own training as a carpenter meant that it was well within the Humphries family's capacity to build various small sea-going craft to serve their needs. In addition, close friends and neighbours at Kincumber, the Frosts, were shipbuilders. The Humphreys other neighbours, the Davies, were known to have shared a ketch that they used to meet much of their transport needs between Brisbane Water and Sydney. The Davies family were also builders of boats.⁵⁴⁹

Up river from South Kincumber, Catherine's daughter, Catherine (II), like two of her brothers, appears to have been living and working with the Browns at Caddai in the early 1820s. She married a John Hopkins on 24 April 1824 at St Matthew's, Church of England and settled at Wilberforce.⁵⁵⁰ At the time, Catherine (II) was only 16 years and four months of age.

After a very few years of having been granted the South Kincumber property, Patrick passed the running of it to his son, Thomas, when he was in his 20th year or thereabouts. Typical of settlement at that time in the area, using assigned convict labour and free men; Thomas grew crops, grazed cattle and cut timber. He was known to have grown maize, pumpkins, and potatoes. For some time, six acres were under cultivation with bananas. Thomas shipped produce and timber, much of it cedar, from his farm direct to the Sydney market.

It is more than likely that Thomas' timber was cut by sawyer William Spears and sons long time friends of the Humphries family, and a close neighbour to his former employer, and tutor in carpentry, David Brown senior. It was business arrangements that provided a useful means of socialising, due in part to the Spears family having 6 sons and 2 daughters. Indicative of this connection, on 24 August 1825, William Spears' 4th eldest son, George, at age 17 years, submitted a memorial to the Government asking for land at Brisbane Water.

Census and Church Events

The 1825 Muster lists Patrick as a pensioner who 'came free' on the 'Boddingtons' in 1798. Aside from 'misrepresenting' his exconvict status, Patrick had lost track of his and the Boddingtons' arrival in the colony in 1793.

The 1828 Census shows Catherine Humphries having arrived on the *Minerva* 1800, and being 40 years old. The Census also states that she was living at Watson's Bay with her husband and daughter Ann aged 16 years. While she had no difficulty in stating her daughter's age correctly, Catherine's true age would have been closer to 50 years. Her husband, Patrick, is described as "Humphrey Humphreys" CF (Came Free). This suggests his common use name at Watson's Bay as being 'Humphrey', particularly by Catherine. Patrick's age is also given as 40 years, although he was 61 years. He gave his occupation as 'Soldier' though had officially retired five years earlier. All three stated that their religion was 'Catholic'. Also, Catherine's son, David Humphries (BC) then 13 years old, and George Humphries (BC) age 19 years are shown living with the David Brown (Catherine's son-in-law) household at Little Cattai - And being employed and fed by him.

⁵⁴⁹ Brisbane Water Story, Part III, Enchanted Waters.

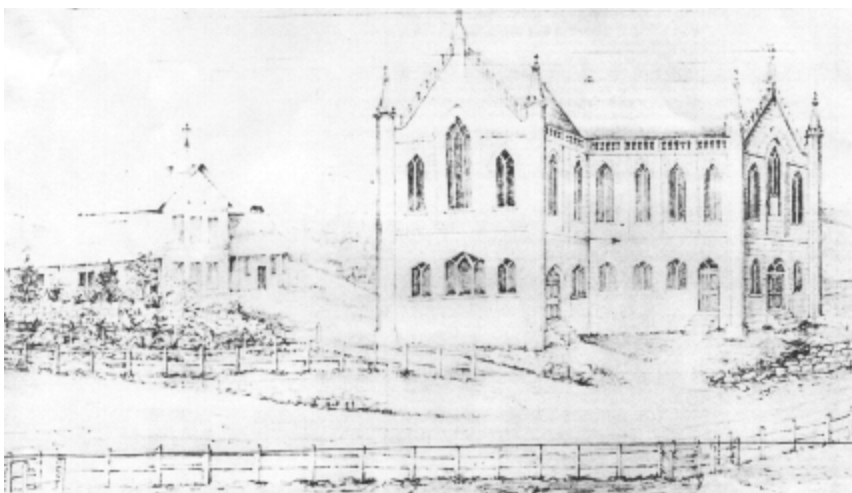
⁵⁵⁰ BDM V1824 3334 3B refers

The fact that the Watson's Bay community was a small one, is illustrated in the 1828 census by the fact that of thirteen persons listed nine of them were connected to the Pilot Station. By coincidence, the Pilot's name then was Thomas Watson who had come out in 1821 - Most of his assistants were Government Servants. This suggests that there was little in the way of commercial fishing happening at the Bay then.

Thomas Humphries was on his farm at Brisbane Water on the occasion of the 1828 Census. He had two assigned workers: William Westly aged 30, and Thomas White aged 22. Of his 100 acres, 15 were cleared, and 15 under cultivation. On it he ran 16 head of cattle. Thomas stated his religion to be 'Catholic'. His brother, Michael, does not seem to have been recorded anywhere for the Census. As well having reasonable quality land, Thomas would have benefited from the plentiful coastal rains.

In 1829, Catherine's sons, Michael and Thomas underwent adult baptisms in the Roman Catholic faith at St Mary's⁵⁵¹. As infants, they had been baptised in the Church of England. This is a significant event. One can imagine it being regarded and treated as special, and an event for celebration.

Thomas Humphries, at 23 years of age, married Mary Spears, aged 16 years, the daughter of William Spears, at St James, C of E Church on 11 August 1829. Thomas' occupation is given as 'Farmer'. William Spears (most likely Mary's brother) and Ann 'Humphries' (aged 17 years), Thomas' sister, were witnesses. Neither Mary nor Ann could sign her name.



St Mary's church 1839⁵⁵²

Michael, at 25 years of age, married Sarah Hence (pictured in later years p 61), at St James (C of E), Sydney, on 26 October 1829. Sarah, who gave her age as 18 years, is said to be born in Cosby, Leicester, England 15 May 1814, that is, not yet 16 years. Michael's occupation was given as 'Boat Builder'. Phillip Fitzpatrick of George Street and Ann 'Humphries' were witnesses to the marriage. Neither Sarah nor Ann could sign her name. The newly wedded couple settled and remained at Watson's Bay.⁵⁵³ Michael's marriage at the C of E venue is intriguing in the light of his adult baptism at St Mary's in the same year. Their daughter, Catherine Anastasia, born at 'the Bay' on 17 September 1831, was obviously named in Catherine's honour.

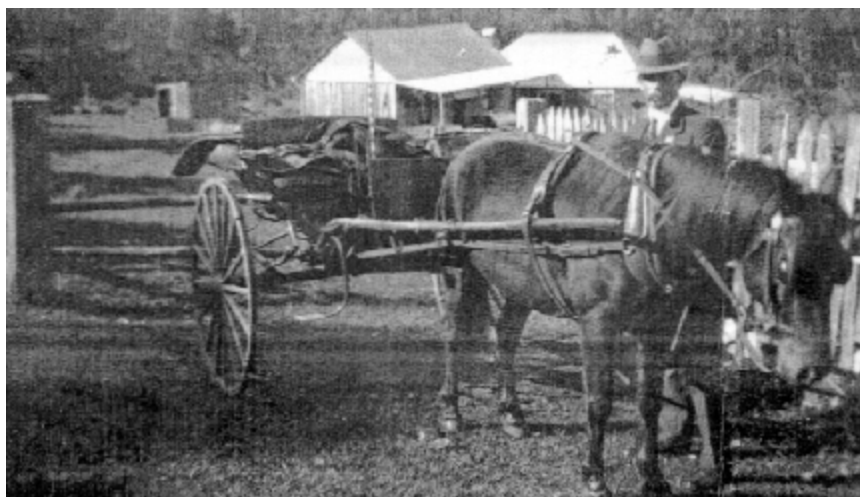
The year after Michael's marriage, 1830, Ann Humphries then aged 18 years, married William Sampson Pickett (born Sydney 30 June 1804), neighbour to Thomas and the skipper of his ketch. The couple settled down on Pickett's 60 acre grant adjacent to Thomas's 'Mount Humphreys' property.

⁵⁵¹ BDM Michael V1828 1328 127 & V1829 1346 128. Thomas V1829 1258 127 & V1829 1261 128.

⁵⁵² St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. 1821-1971.

⁵⁵³ BDM V1829 4696 3B & V1829 814 13 refer.

‘ South Kincumber provided the Humphries family with a most beautiful environment on the Cockle Creek The waters around them were rich in fish and crabs for the taking, there were oysters and other shellfish.... Shells were found in abundance for lime-burning purposes..’⁵⁵⁴



The homestead Thomas Humphries built at South Kincumber is the background for this photo of his grandson, Thomas (son of Francis), tending to his horse and buggy. c1900.

The grant tended to be a much better plot of land than many others of equivalent size in the colony. The land proved

productive. Coastal rainfall was plentiful and frequent. The setting is particularly pleasant. However, whatever merit it had, it didn't succeed in drawing Catherine away from her ‘ Wicklow’ at the Bay for very long, if at all.

The 1832 Post Office Directory describes Watson's Bay as a place 'where the pilots have small allotments of land on which several good houses have been erected, a small village having been marked out.' It notes that the 'village of Watson's Bay is likely to be a place of attraction, from its position on the shore, and aspect of its smooth beach and sheltered waters.'

'Mr Richard Siddons, our old and worthy colonist, has resigned his situation of pilot of Port Jackson; after following that avocation for many years, in consequence of ill health. His place will be filled by Mr Thomas Wealand, the superintendent of the lighthouse, South Head. Mr Siddons taking charge of the establishment in place of Mr W.'

Monday, 9 April 1832.⁵⁵⁵

A settler was thrown from his horse on the South Head, on Monday, and broke his collar bone, owing to the animal becoming restive in consequence of a bullock running at it.'

Thursday, 7 June 1832.⁵⁵⁶

'It has been suggested that if a road were made from the lighthouse to Watson's Bay, which might be done in three weeks, the public would be considerably benefited by mails of vessels finding their way into Sydney via that route some hours sooner than they usually do.'

Monday, 23 July 1832⁵⁵⁷

As to the state of the fishing industry in the colony at that time and the place of Watson's Bay's in it, the following comment is worth noting:

'The supply of fish in Sydney has of late been very bad. It is surprising that no shop has been opened in Sydney in this line, so as to ensure a regular supply to the inhabitants, the same as at Hobart Town.'

SH, Monday, 20 August 1832.⁵⁵⁸

Catherine’s daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, brought their baby son, Alexander, to Sydney from Jerry’s Plains to be baptised on 4 March 1835, at a Presbyterian at Scots Church, in Elizabeth Street.⁵⁵⁹ This event appears to have been intended to provide an opportunity for the members of the Brown family in the Sydney region, to gather and celebrate. For Elizabeth it would have meant catching up with her mother and family at Watson’s Bay.

⁵⁵⁴ The Shipbuilders of Brisbane Water, p 53.

⁵⁵⁵ SH, Domestic Intelligence, p2.

⁵⁵⁶ SH, Domestic Intelligence, p3.

⁵⁵⁷ SH, Domestic Intelligence, p3.

⁵⁵⁸ SH, Domestic Intelligence, p3.

⁵⁵⁹ BDM Reference V1834 2898 Vol 45B 0. NSWRS Reel 5016, V1834 76 Vol 47 0. NSWRS Reel 5017 (NLA mfm 229)

On 28 September 1835, Catherine's grandson, Thomas Brown, married convict, Ann Shepherd. The following year, Catherine's first great grandchild, David, was born, to them.

In 1836, Sir Richard Bourke, Governor of NSW, passed the Church Act, which placed all religions and denominations on an equal footing. It discontinued the privileged position of the Church of England in the colony. It had a significant impact on many in the colony who had cautiously been 'keeping a foot in several camps'.

The first recorded vessel owned by Thomas Humphries was a 16 ton cutter built in 1835-6 at Brisbane Waters and named the 'Thomas and Mary' after himself and his wife. The cutter was skippered by William Pickett. In 1845 the Thomas and Mary was refitted as a schooner. While still the owner of the 'Thomas and Mary', he built a 26 ton schooner which he named the 'Catherine'. Most probably in honour of his mother. This also was skippered by his brother-in-law, William Pickett.

It is apparent that during the 1830s, the population of Watson's Bay was, as forecast by the 1832 Post Office Directory, expanding to something approaching a small village. MESSRS. MANSFIELD & PROUT advertised the sale of property at Watson's Bay in the Sydney Morning Herald of 27 October 1836. Allowing for the inclination of salesmen to put things in a particularly positive light, the promotion gives a good idea of lifestyle in Sydney and what was happening at that end of the harbour at that time:

<p style="text-align:center">BY AUCTION, Healthy Marine Villas, Mercantile Wharfs, or Ship Builders Yards, Watson's Bay, South Head.</p> <p style="text-align:center">MESSRS. MANSFIELD & PROUT</p> <p>Have much pleasure in announcing to the Public, that they are instructed by the Proprietor, to bring into the market a Property possessing the most attractive advantage, as to scenery, recreation, health, and contiguity to the metropolis, that could be desired by the lovers of rural retirement. South Head is, and has long been the favourite resort of the citizens of Sydney, and of Invalids and pleasure seekers from the interior of the Colony; and there can be no doubt that it eventually became the leading watering place - the Brighton of eastern Australia.</p> <p>The land now offered to public competition by Messrs. M. & P., consists of seven allotments situated in the most delightful part of the South Head neighbourhood, being the shore of Watson's Bay. Three of them are on the waterside each one hundred and thirty feet by thirty-four, with the privilege of extending their water frontage & to low watermark, whereby the extreme length will be about doubled; and the depth of the Bay, at the immediate margin of these allotments, will be sufficient to float the largest ship in the world.</p> <p>To those who have been in the habit of visiting South Head and its vicinity, the beauty of the scenery from Watson's Bay is fully appreciated. The noble harbour of Port Jackson, studded with islets and reflecting in its clear bosom the woods which skirt its shores; the elegant mansions of Vaucluse, Point Piper, Mrs Darling's Point; and Darlinghurst; the shipping at anchor in the roads; vessels entering and leaving the Port; the Town of Sydney; and the Blue Mountains in the western horizon;</p> <p>The other four Allotments, each one hundred and two feet by eighty, are at the rear of the three above described, the ground forming a gentle declivity, and commanding all the advantages of scenery possessed by the three front allotments. On the south they open upon a beautiful line of road,</p>

From about this time, a few wealthy families kept holiday houses at Watson's Bay. Watson's Bay like Jerry's Plains was becoming less isolated and it was increasingly feasible for correspondence to be transmitted between those centres.

The extent and the fact of continuing association of various other Humphries family members with the Browns at Cattai and Jerry's Plains meant that there were several likely providers of news to the family at Watson's Bay. The news of the death of Catherine's 38 year old daughter, Elizabeth, at Jerry's Plains on 21 November 1837 would have soon reached her. Whether she was acquainted of news of any contributing illness prior, and who might have notified Catherine of the circumstances are more speculative.