

Wacko the Didolo

Deep trauma can never be put into words, it is like a fog that persists over generations. Sometimes it hides or has been buried and does not want to emerge voluntarily. Sometimes it comes up as a scary persona.. a Pogue like punk seemingly not in emotional control, potentially violent and scary. Sometimes someone has to live to old age and look back over generations to get some understanding. Great books can be written. Great thoughts can be had. What difference all this makes is unclear. Perhaps the fragility of the human condition is what is eventually revealed, perhaps hidden tragedy tells us to have more patience and to learn to savour quiet moments with the ones we love, that don't, at the time, seem to mean anything at all.

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“The ghost is at once real and not real.”¹

The traces of our family's Irish ancestry on my father's side were almost lost, only my father's, Auntys' and uncles' humor, and the occasional phrase, were vestiges of an unknown past. Phrases like *Wacko the Didolo* sometimes emerged as a crack or in conversation. Sometimes something resonated with me like my Kananook Primary school fiddle playing headmaster playing “MacNamara's band” or “Maria” or “the black velvet band”.

My father and his siblings were always probing against a door that was very firmly closed. Dad wrote his Masters preliminary essay on Stephen Dedalus and Hamlet when I was 10 years old. There were eerie things in my memories, and now, as I read Dad's words 60 years later almost to the day. This place called Dublin always intrigued me. I had it in my mind that it was like the Melbourne I knew as a boy, with no buildings much higher than Flinders St Station or St Pauls Cathedral.

There were many false leads. We always thought that my father's father Eric Thomas Botsman was “black Irish”. His Sunday stroll up to the Doncaster Inn for the “Catholic Hour”, his toughness, generally reckless behaviour and unbridled, uncensorious barracking for Carlton seemed to confirm his ancestry.

But Eric had a practically royal ancestry. Much to my surprise, it was my grand mother Ivy, a champion womans fast bowler of Melbourne in the 1930s, who was keeping a

¹ Peter B. Botsman, “Stephen and Hamlet: A Study of the Hamlet allusions in the first episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses*”, Monash University, 30th September 1966, p. 1

deep, dark secret. It was so profoundly kept, that her children only ever hinted at the truth. Only much later in life did her oldest daughter Robin (Sue) begin to put the pieces together.

Ivy had so carefully converted to the Church of England and covered up our Irish convict, rebellious ancestry that such a possibility was simply beyond comprehension. There were clues of course. Ivy's vegetable garden, her potatoes, her shelved walls full of preserved fruit and jam and, above all, her capacity to handle personal tragedy and hardship with a sad, reflective stoicism.

Eric, who had inherited wealth from his mother, a very astute business woman of Preston, blew the lot on an orchard that ran hundreds of acres, from the contemporary Shopping Town to Wetherby Rd Doncaster. His first crop was 1933 and most of that first crop ended up at the tip or was given away. It was pure bad luck or folly which ever way you wanted to look at it. He declared bankruptcy but he did build a virtual mansion with Greek columns on five acres on Wetherby Rd, Doncaster. Much to my sadness the old house has been knocked down making way for flats and that heavily built up Melbourne environment which has come to define its suburbs. No-one would now know the majestic orchards of the past, and before that, the bushland, were ever there.

Eric totally won me over as a grandson. I idolised him. He seemed to give me a pathway into adulthood and the fraternity of men.



Eric Thomas Botsman, 21 January, 1942

II

Eric promptly went off to war in 1942. It might have been motivated by the need to redeem himself. My father, who was about 9 at the time, never overcame his worries

about money and somehow I too have that same psychological fear of being broke. Maybe I unconsciously liked to fly close to the wind at various times of my life emulating Poppa. My farm machinery shed resembles his old workshop. It groans with tools strewn around as the jobs and projects accumulate with a certain randomness.

I found the picture of Eric's enlistment in the Australian War Records archive in 2026. I had never seen it before and I never knew him as a young man. So finding it really rocked me a bit. He looks so young, pensive and sensitive to me. He was 35 when he enlisted on 21 January 1942. It was going to be a hell of a time. He was discharged in April 1945 with distinguished service and was released from bankruptcy as a reward.

As a young man I only knew the damage that the war did to my grandfather. So this photo really brings home the burden that war would have. Again all this was sort of hidden from us. I have lived a longer life than my grandfather and my father so I have time to go back and find out as much as I can about his war years. Otherwise who of my family would have known or ever found this photograph.

Eric trained as a linesman for Land Headquarters Signals for fourteen days in Melbourne in May 1942. In July he volunteered for service with the Australian Imperial Force and was transferred to Queensland where activities in Papua New Guinea were coordinated from.

On the 9th August he was classified as a linesman T.G. II. As a linesman he would be responsible for: laying cables: running miles of heavy field telephone and telegraph wire over all terrain, climbing poles: stringing wires high up on telegraph poles or trees, maintenance: going out in all weather conditions—and often under enemy fire—to find and repair breaks in the lines caused by bombing, artillery, storms, or falling trees. T.G. II stands for Trade Group II. The army categorised technical specialists into different "Trade Groups" based on their skill levels, experience, and the complexity of their work. Group II was a highly skilled technical classification. To get this, a soldier had to pass official army trade tests, proving they could build, splice, test, and troubleshoot complex multi-line communication networks. At this time the Pacific War was at its height. The Battle of Kokoda had begun just weeks earlier in July 1942, and Queensland was rapidly transforming into a massive military staging ground.

Less than a month after qualifying as a Class II Linesman on 1 Sept Eric was promoted to Lance Corporal (L/Cpl). Three months later on the 8th December he was promoted to Acting Corporal (A/Cpl) six days later he became Corporal.

On the 14th December Eric's field service was interrupted when he was evacuated to the 112th Australian General Hospital (112 AGH). at Greenslopes, Brisbane with a bad ankle injury. The family story was that he tripped over a tent peg but there is a history of ankle injuries in our family. Two days later because 112 AGH needed beds for severely ill or wounded troops, Eric was moved down the medical chain to 4CH (4th Convalescent

Home). After five weeks of recovery, Eric's ankle was healed he was transferred to a transit camp where soldiers waited after leaving the hospital before being sent back to work and on the 23rd January he returned to active duty. On the 23 March he was treated for scabies which was in plague proportions in the crowded military camps.

Tragedy struck at home on 22 June 1943. The eldest of my uncles, Michael Thomas, named after his grandfather and father, died on the operating table at St Vincents Hospital, Melbourne. He was only 13. The family story is that Michael had bad headaches after a bump on the head. He was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Ivy travelled back and forth from Doncaster to Melbourne city consulting specialists. By this stage Ivy's parents had moved to Doncaster and may have supported Ivy during this difficult time. But later in that same year Ivy's father Michael also died.

It is hard to imagine the burden Ivy carried in 1943 with four other children at home. But it was devastating for the whole family. Who knows when the news reached Eric. He was a valued soldier. In the same month that Michael died, Eric was made a corporal and soon after that Sergeant. He was sent home to Melbourn from the 2 – 24 July no doubt on compassionate leave.

But from August 1943 Eric's war really began. He was put in charge of the 7th Australian Line Maintenance Section responsible for keeping hundreds of miles of vital military telephone and telegraph lines repaired and running across their designated territory.

In early September he received advanced technical training at the Woolloongabba Receiving Office (Gabba RO) in Brisbane. The "Gabba" area was an important logistics and communications node in Queensland. On 3 September 1943, Eric boarded the troopship *SS Canberra* in Townsville and sailed north, disembarking at Port Moresby, New Guinea. His work was to establish and maintain vital communication networks. There is no records of where he went. But my Uncle Anton remembers Eric describing in great detail the battle of Shaggy Ridge, one of the seminal battles of the PNG campaign.

For over a year, Eric was in the thick of it. As a Sergeant leading the 7th Australian Line Maintenance Section (7ALMS) under the 19th Lines of Communication Signals, he and his team were responsible for running and maintaining thousands of miles of tactical telephone lines through dense jungle, mountain ranges, and swamps to keep forward bases connected.

On the 13 November 1944 after more than 14 months of continuous, exhausting jungle service, Eric's section was flown back home. He and his group boarded an aircraft at the recaptured northern New Guinea base of Madang and landed back in Townsville, Queensland.

In January 1945 Eric returned south to Victoria and after a period of short-term transitional leave was honourably discharged just months before the official end of the

war. He had begun his war as a specialized militia linesman, volunteered for the regular AIF, and rose rapidly from Corporal to Sergeant because of his leadership and technical skill. He spent over a year under grueling tropical conditions keeping the Australian Army's vital communications open across New Guinea before returning home as a highly accomplished veteran. I remember his campaign medals, including the 1939–1945 Star, the Pacific Star, the War Medal 1939–1945, and the Australia Service Medal 1939–1945. The medals disappeared over the years. Despite my regular questioning he never really wanted to talk much about the war. Although he worked for many years for A.V. Jennings in Melbourne as a carpenter at the end of his life he was a TPI veteran. He was only 65 when he died in 1972.

III

The deaths of Michael Thomas Botsman, aged 13 and his grandfather and namesake Michael Martin in 1943 cast a vast and painful shadow over our family and a huge burden for particularly Ivy Botsman to carry. The tragedy was further reinforced by the death at birth of Michael Barry Botsman in 1955 to my Uncle Barry and Auntie Lois and an even greater tragedy when Noelle Carrol nee Botsman's son, and Ivy's grandson, Michael John, aged 3, died in 1975. These were family traumas carried by all in unconscious ways even us children.

IV

Poppa had a big influence on my life. I idolised him and loved to be in his company. He and Nanna would come to watch me play football and I stayed with them, or my mother's parents, for three weekends out of every eleven weeks of term while I was at boarding school between 1968 and 1971.

When I came to spend the weekend Nana (Ivy) insisted I dressed in my school uniform on Sundays and come to church with her at the Holy Trinity Church of England, Doncaster. It was not an option I liked at all. I slept next door to Nan and Pop in the beds of my father and his brothers and sisters with prickly thick blankets on cold Melbourne nights.

If I had a conversation it was always with Pop. Most of all I just wanted to sit with him and watch the football on the tv (a somewhat scary thing, given his wild shouts) near the fire or hang out in his shed. But now in my later life I realised I should have been talking to Ivy about her family. Over the years there was plenty of opportunities but I, like most of her immediate family, had no clue about her past. If only I had known.



Nana: Ivy Botsman with her hat trick ball.

V

What we did know was about Nana's career as a cricketer. But even that was veiled and not really acknowledged much.

Nana was a tall and agile athlete, one of the notable figures in the early development of organised women's cricket in Victoria during the 1920s.

Raised in Preston, she left school at the age of seventeen and obtained employment at the Government Printing Office. From childhood she showed marked sporting ability. Her brothers had told their mother that if they were required to mind their sister, she must learn their games; by the age of seven she could play cricket, and by eight she could drop-kick a football. Family holidays were spent at Snug in Tasmania with her grandmother, Mary Martin. Ivy later told her own family that she had "many cousins – all over Tasmania."

She acquired the nickname "Greg," a reference to the Australian Test fast bowler Jack Gregory, reflecting both her bowling style and the respect she commanded among contemporaries. In 1922 the Preston Ladies Cricket Club was established. By September 1923 Nana was serving as its secretary. Contemporary press coverage recorded her enthusiasm for the forthcoming season and her efforts to obtain information about the proposed ladies' cricket association (*The Herald*, Melbourne, 1 September 1923). She was among the group of enthusiasts who helped form the Victorian Women's Cricket Association (VWCA). Preston was one of the four foundation clubs, together with Brunswick, St Peter's and Essendon. Victoria was the first Australian state to establish its own governing body for women's cricket.

Nana captained the Preston side. In an early-1920s match at the University Oval against Brunswick, a group of taxi drivers watching the game called out, "Come and have a look at the sheilas," and then, "They've even got a Gregory." Among her recorded performances were an unbeaten 92 against St Peter's and a hat-trick against Brunswick in 1926.

According to family records she was selected in an Australian side proposed to tour England in 1928. She declined the opportunity in order to marry and begin family life. She married Eric Botsman in that same year.

Ivy Botsman was a keen follower of cricket throughout her life. In 1984, at the age of eighty-one, she was recognised at major matches, including a West Indies versus Australia day-night fixture in Sydney and an Australia–England Test, and was the subject of a feature in the *Central Coast Express*. She died in 1989.

Through her dual roles as administrator and player, Ivy Edna Botsman (née Martin) contributed significantly to the establishment and early success of organised women's cricket in Victoria.²

² *The Herald* (Melbourne), 1 September 1923, p. 4. Family history manuscript (Botsman/Martin records). Kevin Reed, *The Widows of Tullow and Outages in Westmeath*, 1998, pp. 104-7, Darebin Libraries local

VI

“And leave a light on in your lonely window
And a heartfelt welcome in your eye
From far away on the deep, black ocean
You’re the one I’ll come back to find”³

But there was much more to Nana and her family. It began with Nana’s grandmother Honor Hughes, who had the misfortune to be a widow living in County Mayo, Ireland, in 1847–48, at the height of the potato famine.

County Mayo was among the hardest-hit places in Ireland. Its population fell by approximately 29 per cent between 1845 and 1851. The potato crop had failed year after year. Fever followed hunger, and the dead began to outnumber the living. Formal graveyards filled and became overcrowded. Contemporary local reporting described the conditions at Leigue Cemetery in Ballina, where graves were so shallow that portions of coffins remained visible above ground (widely attributed in Mayo Famine histories to the *Tyrawly Herald*)⁴. Workhouse dead were buried in open mass pits, sometimes covered only with lime. In many districts bodies were interred where they fell—by roadsides, in fields, or in bogs. Along the coast, local memory and later accounts record burials in sand dunes and on the seashore when consecrated ground could no longer contain the numbers. Ordinary markers of life and death had collapsed.

Honor Hughes was a widow with five children in the middle of that collapse. Born about 1808–1809 in County Galway (records give 31 December 1808), she had worked as a country servant. She could neither read nor write. Records later described her as a woman of sallow complexion, reddish-brown hair and grey eyes, standing five feet four inches tall. She was Roman Catholic and had no previous convictions.

When the chance came, she took five sheep. Meat for the children. In those years many women took the same risk. In June 1848 Honor Hughes was tried at the Mayo sessions for sheep-stealing. She was convicted and sentenced to seven years’ transportation.⁵

history notes on Preston Ladies Cricket Club and the foundation of the Victorian Women’s Cricket Association.

³ Glen Hansard, “Leave a Light in Your Lonely Window”

⁴ Famine burial conditions: *Tyrawly Herald* (Ballina) references to Leigue Cemetery; *Ballina Chronicle* 2 May 1849; workhouse mass graves and “Path of the Dead” at Castlebar; coastal and roadside burials in local memory and secondary Mayo histories.

⁵ Sheep- and cattle-stealing rose dramatically in Ireland as the Famine deepened. Constabulary figures show reported cases climbing from a few hundred in 1845 to more than 10,000 in 1847, of which only about 1,500 resulted in convictions. Judges frequently imposed transportation sentences of seven or ten years even on first offenders, including women with dependent children, arguing that an example had to be made. Contemporary parliamentary discussion and assize reports record starving defendants pleading guilty and sometimes requesting transportation because short prison terms would only return

Only two of her five children—Mary, aged ten, and Walter, aged seven—were allowed to sail with her. The other three were left behind in a landscape of filled graveyards, mass pits, and dune burials. Their names do not appear again.

She never saw them after that day. She could not return. The sentence and the ocean closed the road for good. Somewhere behind her a light might still have burned in a window, a place kept ready in case the absent one found a way home. She carried that possibility with her across the water, knowing the distance made it only a hope.

In 1849 Honor and the two youngest were embarked. They sailed from Dublin on **5 April 1849** (some secondary records note early May) aboard the *Maria* (also recorded as *Maria II*), a barque of approximately 460–500 tons built at Yarmouth in 1836. The ship carried 166 female convicts; one woman died on the voyage and 165 were landed. About fifty children belonging to the convicts were allowed to accompany their mothers. The surgeon superintendent was Edward Nolloth, whose medical journal (ADM 101/49/3, National Archives, Kew) covers the period from 5 March to 28 July 1849. On **23 July 1849** the ship reached Hobart. The authorities took Mary and Walter straight to the Queen's Orphan School on **28 July 1849**. Honor grief as a mother now separated from all her children must have been profound.⁶

The Queen's Orphan School (originally the King's Orphan Schools, established 1828 and later renamed) at New Town was the principal institution in Van Diemen's Land for the children of convicts, orphans, and the destitute. Designed by John Lee Archer, it stood in St John's Avenue with separate buildings for boys and girls and St John's Church between them. Conditions were harsh: cold rooms, poor sanitation, inadequate heating, and high rates of disease. Official policy generally separated children from their convict mothers on the grounds that the mothers would "contaminate" them. Walter Hughes (orphan number 2703) remained there until **26 April 1852**, when he was discharged to his mother after she had obtained her ticket of leave and married. Mary was apprenticed.

Two years after arrival in VDL Honor began to rebuild what she could. On **6 October 1851**, at Franklin, she married William Jones, a widowed sawyer (permission to marry had been approved on 9 September 1851). She signed the register with her mark. Her

them to the same desperate conditions. Mercy was rarely shown when the charge was livestock theft, regardless of the motive of feeding a family

⁶ *Maria I* or *Maria II* in some records, sailed Dublin 5 April 1849, arrived Hobart 23 July 1849; 166 women embarked, 1 death; surgeon Edward Nolloth (ADM 101/49/3); contemporary newspaper notices (*Tuam Herald*, *Warder* and *Dublin Weekly Mail*).

son Walter was later discharged from the Orphan School into her care⁷. Her daughter Mary was apprenticed and would grow up to become the mother of Ivy Edna Martin—later known on the cricket fields of Melbourne as “Greg.”

A woman named Honorah Jones died in Hobart on 18 August 1868. If it was Honor, she was nearly sixty. The official records are sparse. They do not record what she felt leaving her children in Ireland, nor how she carried that silence across the rest of her life. Yet the outline that remains is clear: a mother who broke the law so her children might eat, who crossed an ocean with two of them, and who lived out her days knowing the other three were gone beyond any road she could travel.

VII

“Oh, a hungry feeling, came o'er me stealing
And the mice were squealing in me prison cell
Then the auld triangle, went jingle jangle
All along the banks of the Royal Canal”⁸

Ivy's grandfather was not a sheep-stealer. He was transported for firing on police.

Christopher Martin was tried at Mullingar, County Westmeath, on 22 January 1846 — at the height of the famine, two years before Honor took the five sheep. He was twenty-nine, a farm labourer from Westmeath, Roman Catholic, able to read a little. The Tasmanian convict record describes him as five feet nine and a quarter, fresh complexion, dark brown hair, black whiskers, hazel eyes. He named only his mother, Bridget Martin. Family memory, held by Sue Ruchel, is that Bridget had been an O'Toole. His brothers were Edward, Patrick, William, Michael and Andrew. No sisters were listed. His father does not appear.

The charge was not a cottage theft. It was a night raid at Ballintue, a town near Ballynacarrigy, on the house of James Dalton. Dalton was the man the landlord had put in after the eviction of an Irish family. The Martin party wanted Dalton out. Someone talked. Hugh M. Tuite, local landlord and later foreman of the grand jury, wrote privately to Dublin Castle from Mullingar in December 1845 asking for ten pounds to pay the man who “gave us the information so truly and accurately as to be able to save Jas. Dalton's life, and apprehend the fellows in the act.” The informer, Tuite said, already knew “every outrage that is intended by the Ribbonmen hereabouts” and would have the new signs and passwords at the New Year. The Crown Solicitor was authorised to pay. Head

⁷ Queen's Orphan School: Admission of Walter and Mary Hughes 28 July 1849; Walter discharged 26 April 1852 to mother (SWD 7 & SWD 28, Tasmanian Archives). Institutional history from contemporary descriptions and later studies (harsh conditions, separation policy, high disease rates).

⁸ Dick Shannon, “The Auld Triangle”

Constable Matthew Campbell and others were bound in twenty pounds to appear and prosecute.

Six constables went in. Campbell's sworn information of 23 December 1845 says that after a wait on the canal line they saw five or six men file into Dalton's house. A tall man, Michael Martin, levelled a gun and fired; powder from the muzzle grazed Campbell's face. Someone inside shouted "fire away boys." Campbell called on them to surrender in the Queen's name. An old man, Casey, hid under the bed. After the surrender a policeman shot him there. Casey was too badly wounded to stand trial. Michael Kiernan's arm was shattered by a musket ball as he tried to escape through a window. Two of the party were taken inside; four men in custody were named as Michael Martin, Michael Kiernan, Christopher Martin and Edward Cahill.

The *Freeman's Journal* reporter covering the incident could not let the shot under the bed pass. What excuse, he asked, could the policeman make who went round the end of the house and discharged a ball at a man who could not resist? Campbell admitted the killing.

The government did not wait for the ordinary assizes. A Special Commission was sent down to Mullingar — Chief Justice Doherty, Chief Baron Maziere Brady, a grand jury headed by the same Hugh Morgan Tuite. Ten men were arraigned, eight convicted. The cost, the *Freeman's Journal* later estimated, was not less than ten thousand pounds: two judges and five chief officers, three defence counsel, the Crown Solicitor's bill, witnesses, clerks, bailiffs, turnkeys. "Justice," the paper wrote, "is administered at protection prices." It called the whole performance a "little salutary blood letting" demanded by the Westmeath gentry, and asked why that county should be singled out for the brand when the ordinary assizes were only weeks away.

Brian Seery, twenty-eight, Catholic, was convicted of shooting at Sir Francis Hopkins of Rochford. He was tried twice; the evidence shifted. He was hanged at Mullingar on 28 February 1846. Local memory of that hanging was still sharp when Reed stood in the town 130 years later. Some said Seery was innocent and had covered for another man. No doubt the hanging of Seery must have haunted Christopher and his peers all their lives.

Christopher Martin was sentenced to fifteen years. Michael Martin, listed as a farmer, took life. Both were shipped on the *Lord Auckland*, a Calcutta-built barque of 628 tons, Dublin 19 April 1846, Cape of Good Hope, Hobart 25 August 1846. Master Robert Brown; surgeon J. J. W. Roberts. One hundred and seventy-six men embarked; all were landed. Bateson records a later Dublin run by the same ship in 101 days.

The Dublin Castle Male Convict Register for Westmeath, 1846, puts them in a single list:

No.	Name	Age	Sentence
1841	Brian Seery	28	Death — hanged Mullingar 28.2.1846
1844–46	Brian, Michael, William Duffy	30, 21, 23	Life
1847	Edward Keenan	33	7 years
1848	Michael Martin	22	Life
1849	Christopher Martin	29	15 years
1850	Michael Kiernan	20	15 years
1851	Patrick O’Neil	23	Life

All labourers except Michael Martin. All Catholic. All unmarried except Kiernan. The Martins and Kiernan: feloniously shooting at police with intent to murder. The Duffys: cutting and maiming Hugh Erwin (paid £100 for his information; even the local magistrate wanted him paid and sent out of the district). Keenan: a threatening notice on Ben Digby. O’Neil: cutting and wounding. John Egan and Michael Delamour, tried for assault and taking a gun, walked free.

Michael Martin, arriving in Hobart, put the offence in one sentence: “I shot the police with firearms. They were ejecting a tenant and we were resisting.” This line represented the whole politics of that terrible winter.

The press called them Ribbonmen, Terryalts, Molly Maguires. These and older names hung over rural Ireland: Shanavests, Whiteboys, Carders, Blackfeet, Whitefeet, Rockites, Pacificators, Oak Boys, Lady Clares. These societies were agrarian first — rent, eviction, occupiers put in on a neighbour’s holding — and only later folded into Fenianism and the para-military identity of the Invincibles. Daniel O’Connell’s non-violence was wearing through. On 15 April 1848 the *Freeman’s Journal* described attacks on flour mills in Clonmel by people “whose eyes protruded through the skin which covered them — staring through their eyes as if they had just risen from their shrouds, crying out that they could no longer endure the extremity of their distress and that they must take that food which they could not produce.” That is the context of the Westmeath actions of Christopher and his friends.

Ribbonism itself was never one army. From the 1820s a distinct Society of Ribbonmen had used oaths, signs, passwords and parish committees; by the mid-1840s the same word was also a police convenience, a way to name any night party that fired into a house. The Molly Maguires, who surface in the mid-1840s from Cavan, Leitrim and the border counties, were often a land-first break from the more urban, sectarian Ribbon lodges: young men in women’s clothes or blacked faces, sworn to put out *a hard agent*

or a *grabber*. The Terry Alts of Clare in 1830–31 had already shown the pattern — threatening notices signed with a nickname, a raid on a new tenant. Westmeath sat in the middle of that belt. Magistrates writing to Dublin in November 1845 asked for “strong measures to repress the lawless spirit of the ribbon and rockite conspirators.” Tuite’s informer spoke of Ribbon signs and passwords as if they were as real as the canal bank. Whether Christopher had ever knelt for a Ribbon oath is not known but it was likely. What was real was the cottage, the gun, the eviction.

Griffith’s Valuation, taken later (1854), still shows the ground. Ballintue, scene of the raid, lies in Kilmacneven parish, barony of Moygoish: Patrick Dalton on seventeen acres, Hugh Martin owner-occupier of six. Hugh M. Tuite — the man who paid the informer and then sat as grand-jury foreman — held forty-six acres at Ballynacarrow and let farms across Churchtown and Conlanstown. In Ballymaglavy, in 1834, a Patrick Martin held twenty Irish acres, ten of them arable, rent £1 15s. The names Dalton and Martin are on the same maps. The raid was not abstract.

In Van Diemen’s Land Christopher was moved around. Pearson’s Point under Mr Lucas, February 1848; the Coal Mines, near Port Arthur, on the Tasman Peninsula under James Hurst, June 1848; Harrington under S. Withers, September 1850; a spell as a Hobart constable that October; James Lucas again at Pafssge; J. Waldie on Bruny Island, March 1851. Ticket of leave refused 25 May 1852: he must serve seven and a half years. Apply again, January 1853; apply again, March 1854. Conditional pardon recommended 11 April 1854. He was still a convict when he married Honor’s daughter Mary.

Mary Hughes was then about eighteen. Apprenticed from the Queen’s Orphan School to Daniel Hales at Battery Point on 26 August 1851 — the discharge book entry is the first hard sighting of her after the *Maria* — she is the child Honor had not been allowed to keep. It may be she met Christopher in the Huon, visiting Honor after Honor’s marriage to the sawyer William Jones at Franklin in October 1851. Christopher and Mary married in 1855. Two famine transports, Mayo and Westmeath, closed in one household.

The other men from the Special Commission did not all vanish. Michael Martin, the life-sentence “farmer,” eventually went home. Miss Elizabeth Martin of Ballynacarrigy farmed at Conlanstown, married, had no children. He died in 1904, and is buried at Milltown. His 1900 will, signed with his mark, left all to his wife Mary and then to a nephew Edward Martin of Ballymaglavy. Local families in Moyvore still claimed descent from a brother Edward — a name Christopher listed and Michael did not.

Michael Kiernan, whose arm the police ball shattered, settled at Snug. The falls there still carry his name. He had a hut and land on the valuation roll, at least nine children, and is buried at Snug with Margaret Theresa (d. 1883) and Mary Ann (d. 1900). In 1881 Bernard Lawrence Martin, eldest child of Christopher and Mary, married Margaret Kiernan. The two Westmeath men who had stood in Dalton’s cottage became kin by

marriage on the Channel. Margaret Mary O'Brien (1866–1955), long friend of the Martins, lies just behind Christopher and Mary's headstone at Snug.

The Duffy brothers, County Meath men, left descendants at Richmond. Edward Keenan, who had served the notice on Digby, died in Hobart in his late seventies. Patrick O'Neil died at Hobart in 1854.

Christopher and Mary are buried at Snug. Ivy's father, Michael Martin, is their son. When that Michael dies in Doncaster in 1943, the year the other Michael dies on the table at St Vincent's, the Westmeath name is still being given to boys who will not live to carry it.

Ivy never told that story. She bowled like Jack Gregory, kept the jam shelves, and took a reluctant grandson to Holy Trinity in a school uniform. The convict grandfather stayed in Tasmania, and in a silence she had every reason to keep.

What we know of the raid, the Commission, the ship and the Tasmanian years is owed to Kevin Reed, *The Widows of Tullow and Outrages in Westmeath* (1998), Chapter 2, "Christopher Martin," and the records he printed there: Tasmanian Archives CON 52/70 and related convict volumes; the Dublin Castle Male Convict Register and Westmeath Outrage Papers 30/2003; Hugh M. Tuite's letters to Under-Secretary Richard Pennefather, December 1845; Head Constable Campbell's information of 23 December 1845; *Freeman's Journal*, 31 December 1845 and 21–27 January 1846; *Westmeath Guardian*, November 1845–March 1846; Griffith's Valuation and the 1834 tithe applotment for Piercetown; Charles Bateson, *The Convict Ships*; G. Locker Lampson (1907) on the named societies; and Leo Daly, pers. comm. Auntie Robin "Sue" Ruchel's memory of Bridget O'Toole. Without Reed the door Ivy closed would still have no handle.

However perhaps there was something that I was just not told as a child. About the time Dad was writing about Stephen Dedalus and Hamlet I do remember making a trip to Hobart and Port Arthur with my parents. I remember my parents being a bit agitated. I can remember looking into the darkened cells and thinking how horrific it must have been and the story of the ferocious dogs that patrolled Eagle Hawke neck deterring any thoughts of escape from the penitentiary.

VIII

"Take my hand and dry your tears, babe
Take my hand, forget your fears, babe
There's no pain, there's no more sorrow
They're all gone, gone in the years, babe
Where small birds sang and leaves were falling

Where we once watched the row boats landing
By the broad majestic Shannon”⁹

I am not sure why it is necessary for me to trawl like this over our family history. I think it is about trying to understand a certain sadness and perhaps a certain rebelliousness I have always felt in my life. Do the great torments of people six generations past still live on in us? Is the lack of acknowledgement and the sense that my mother always tried to instill in us, to not look back, just look forward, have some kind of reverse reaction?

All of this current writing was triggered. I never knew much of Glen Hansard until his death this year. I read an obituary that appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald and it made me listen more deeply to his music. Then I watched his funeral in Dublin. It touched me and I felt a great pang for Honor Hughes and Mary leaving family behind and for Christopher Martin and the Ribbon Men. Ireland is a beating heart for the world. It abhors injustice and it is no wonder why. I think too this is why many of us Irish-Australian descendants feel so passionately for the injustices and crimes perpetuated against Aboriginal communities in Australia. The country must come clean if it is to have a just and honest future.

⁹ Shane MacGowan, “The Broad Majestic Shannon”