



James Murphy's Demise

by James Michael Fleming

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For some time, I believed that my GG-grandfather (James Murphy) had died at Bourke NSW on 23 July 1914 and was buried in the local cemetery. I now know that he, in fact, lived five years longer and is buried in the Catholic Cemetery at Rookwood NSW. This research report outlines how I came by the truth and provides evidence that other researchers can rely on.



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Researching: Bowen, Flowerdew, Gardner, Gordon, Grady, Hanrahan, Jolliffe, Kemp, Kessey, Murphy, Poulton, Press and so many more!

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Introduction

I started researching the history of my family in 1983 and quickly established that James Murphy was one of my GG-grandparents. He was born at Keelnabrack (Kerry, Ireland) in November 1843, a son of John Murphy and Mary Shea¹. The family arrived in Australia aboard the *Talavera* in August 1853². He married Prudence Whye nee Reed at Gongolgon, NSW on 18 May 1879³ and they produced five children including my G-grandfather, George Charles Reed Murphy⁴. I have researched his life extensively but, for a long time, I was unable to establish when and where James Murphy had died.

Eventually I checked on Ancestry.com for a hint based on what other researchers had concluded about his death. He is included in more than 160 trees on Ancestry and nearly all of them agree that he died in Hope Street Bourke on 23 July 1914 and is buried in the Bourke Cemetery. The few trees that don't include this detail provide no information at all about his death. The conclusion about his death and burial in 1914 is based on NSW death certificate number 1914/13876 (pictured below)⁵.

Date and place of death	Name and occupation	Sex and age	Cause of Death Duration of last illness; medical attendant; when he last saw deceased	Name and occupation of father Name and maiden surname of mother	Informant
180 10 mt. about 23 rd July Hope Street Bourke Municipality	James Murphy Old Age pensioner Sailor	male 71 years	(1) Senile decay and droop. (2) Fading of enquiry (3) A Knox Poolman (4) Deputy Coroner Bourke 23 rd July 1914.	(1) Not known (2) Not known (3) Not known	Certified by - A Knox Poolman Deputy Coroner Bourke
Particulars of registration	When and where buried; name of undertaker	Name and religion of Minister and names of witnesses of burial	Where born and how long in the Australasian Colonies or States	Place of marriage, age, and to whom	Children of marriage
(1) W. A. Gray, the (2) 12 August 1814. (8) Bourke	(1) 24 th July 1914 (2) Church of England Cemetery, Bourke (3) Fred Sharp	(1) John E. Hardy (2) English Church Church of England (3) Patrick Conway John Witte	Ireland not known	(1) Not known (2) Not known (3) Not known	years. not married

Figure 1 - Details on NSW death certificate 1914/13876 that records the death and burial of James Murphy at Bourke in July 1914

I eventually accepted that this was, indeed, a record of the death of my GG-grandfather and recorded the details in my family database.

Doubts

Recently I completed a project to make memorial pages on my website for each ancestor who had died in Australia. The aim was to bring together all memorial material for each ancestor, including gravestone photographs, funeral cards, obituaries and more. This prompted me to examine the death certificate above in more detail. As I did so, I began to have significant doubts and eventually concluded that this death certificate could not possibly relate to my GG-grandfather.

There are three primary problems with the certificate. Firstly, the informant was A Knox (Deputy Coroner at Bourke), not a family member. James was survived by his wife Prudence, son George and daughters Nora, Mary and Lila. There was no evidence that the family had separated, so it would be very strange for someone else to have acted as informant for James' death certificate.

Secondly, the information about his marital status runs contrary to the known facts about my GG-grandfather. The informant had initially written "not known" but had crossed this out and recorded "not married". The fact that "not known" was crossed out indicates that the informant was not guessing or ignorant of the facts; it is a positive, informed statement that the deceased was unmarried. But my GG-grandfather had been married twice. He married his first wife (Ann Malcolm) at Bathurst on 28 December 1864⁶ and divorced her in November 1878. They produced five children. He married his second wife (Prudence Whye nee Reed) at Gongolgon on 18 May 1879 and they produced another five children.

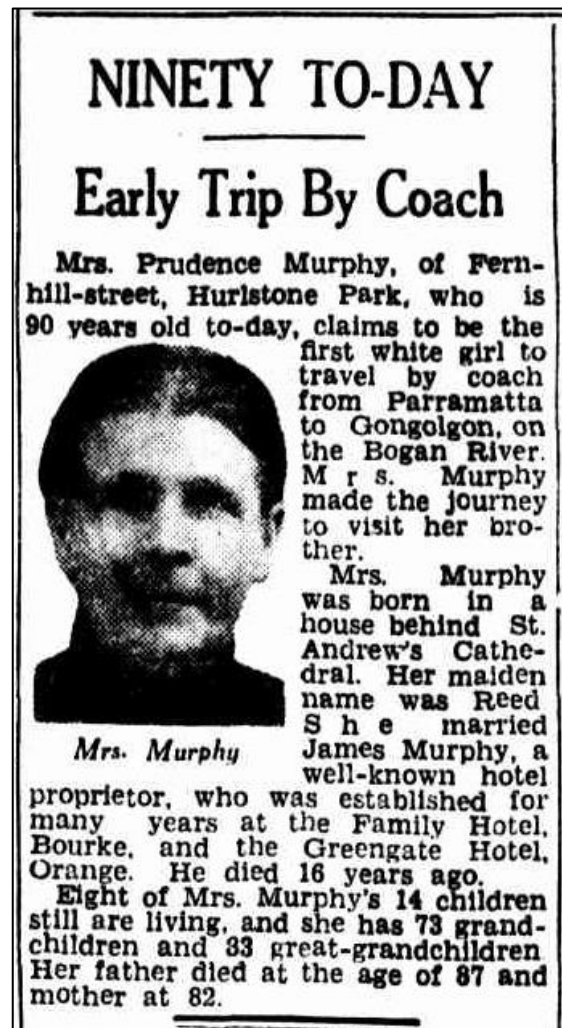
The third problem with this certificate is the deceased's stated occupation: sailor. I have conducted extensive research on his life and can state with certainty that my GG-grandfather had never been a sailor. He worked as a farm labourer as a 15-year-old in 1858⁷; was a farmer in 1864⁶; a labourer in 1867⁸; and a constable in 1870⁹. He continued in the police force until 1880 when he became a publican, his profession thereafter⁷.

My GG-grandfather was well-known in Bourke. He had lived in the district since 1870 and, as a long-time publican, was acquainted with most other long-term residents. He regularly participated in town meetings, frequently addressing them and proposing motions. His son George had married a local woman (Ellen Ruby Bowen)¹⁰ and they had given James three grandchildren who lived in the town¹¹. In these circumstances, it is inconceivable that his death certificate could have three serious anomalies like these. I concluded that the James Murphy who was buried in Bourke in 1914 was another person with the same name. It was a very common name in NSW at that time.

Further evidence

This conclusion was confirmed when I examined a newspaper article that reported on the 90th birthday celebrations for his widow, Prudence Murphy¹². The article from July 1936 states that her husband James Murphy had "died 16 years ago", which would be 1919 or 1920, five or six years after the Bourke burial of 1914.


The article also states that James had been the proprietor of the Greengate Hotel in Orange. Based on this hint I quickly established that James had moved his family to Orange in 1903 where he was associated with the Green Gate Hotel, (which was then licensed to a Denis Murphy)¹³.



NINETY TO-DAY

Early Trip By Coach

Mrs. Prudence Murphy, of Fernhill-street, Hurlstone Park, who is 90 years old to-day, claims to be the first white girl to travel by coach from Parramatta to Gongolgon, on the Bogan River. Mrs. Murphy made the journey to visit her brother.



Mrs. Murphy

Mrs. Murphy was born in a house behind St. Andrew's Cathedral. Her maiden name was Reed. She married James Murphy, a well-known hotel proprietor, who was established for many years at the Family Hotel, Bourke, and the Greengate Hotel, Orange. He died 16 years ago.

Eight of Mrs. Murphy's 14 children still are living, and she has 73 grandchildren and 33 great-grandchildren. Her father died at the age of 87 and mother at 82.

Figure 2 - Sydney Sun article about Prudence Murphy turning 90

James Murphy's Demise

James Murphy had been sued in the Supreme Court by the Australian Joint Stock Bank (his mortgagee) in April 1903¹⁴. This resulted in a mortgagee sale of his Family Hotel in Darling Street Bourke to AV Gow. This must have prompted him to sell the family's remaining assets in Bourke and move to Orange, NSW. The Family Hotel at Bourke was burnt to the ground a year later.

He must have purchased the Green Gate Hotel from Denis Murphy because James held the license in 1904¹⁵, 1905¹⁶ and 1906¹⁷. Denis Murphy held the license of the Prince of Wales Hotel in 1904¹⁵. (A different James Murphy - who was to die in 1910 and was a brother of Denis Murphy - was also an Orange hotelier during these years.)

His youngest daughter (Lila Kate Murphy) married Neills Moller at St Joseph's church in Orange on 16 November 1904¹⁸.

In March 1906 he sold the Green Gate Hotel business to Michael Sharkey¹⁷. He retained the block of land next door to the hotel and sued Sharkey for malicious damage to the dividing fence in May 1906¹⁹.

Newspaper articles reveal that James Murphy remained in Orange throughout 1906²⁰ and that he sold land in Lord Street, Orange in 1907²¹.

It seems likely that he moved with his family to Sydney soon afterwards. His wife Prudence was living at 31 Abercrombie Street Chippendale when she reported to the police that she had lost a gold brooch in June 1909²². Her address was given as Sydney when she sent a condolence card on the death of her daughter-in-law (Ellen Ruby Murphy nee Bowen) in April 1912²³.

Death in 1919

The article about Prudence's 90th birthday states that her husband had died 16 years earlier, which would be 1919 or 1920. The death indexes of the NSW Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages contain five people named James Murphy for those two years. Two were the wrong age (51 and 60 respectively) and two others had the wrong parents (James & Sarah; and Daniel & Ellen). That leaves death certificate 22640/1919 that was recorded in the District of Granville for James Murphy aged 76 years from "Rookwood Asylum"²⁴.

Funeral Notices published in the Sydney Morning Herald on 7 November 1919 prove that James Murphy was buried in the Catholic Cemetery at Rookwood NSW that day²⁵.

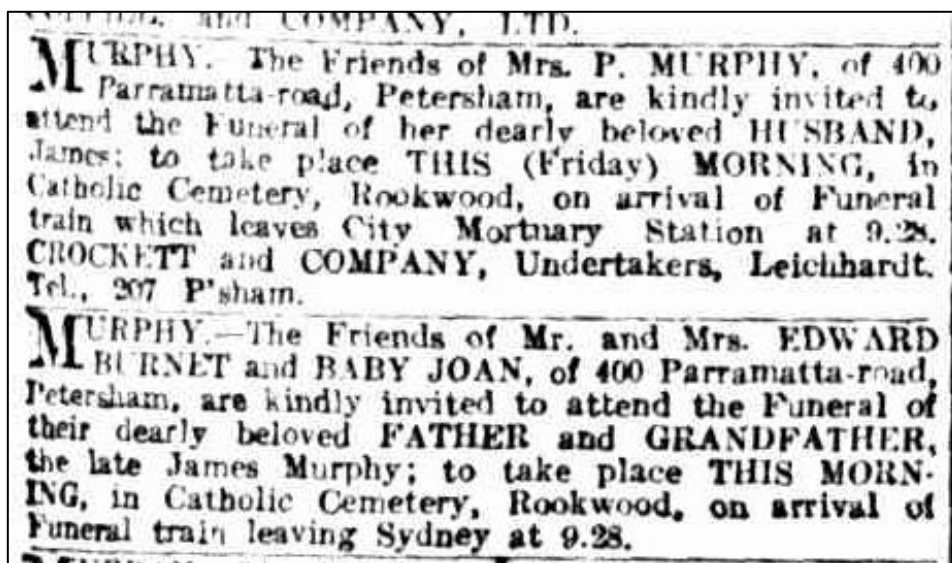


Figure 3 - Funeral Notices for James Murphy, Sydney Morning Herald, 7 November 1919

James Murphy's Demise

The details in the Death Index and Funeral Notices tie in with everything that we know about my GG-grandfather and his family. He was, as stated on the index, 76 years old in 1919. His wife Prudence lived at 400 Parramatta Road, Petersham, which is just a short bus ride from her previous address in Abercrombie Street, Chippendale. She lived with her daughter Nora Lilian Murphy²⁶ who had married Edward Burnet in 1913²⁷. Their daughter Joan Burnet (mentioned in the funeral notice) would have been three years old²⁸.

The death certificate index states that James Murphy had died at "Rookwood Asylum". The name of this institution had been officially changed six years earlier to the Rookwood State Hospital and Asylum for Aged and Infirm Men, Lidcombe. It is clear, therefore, that James' physical health had deteriorated so much that Prudence and Nora were unable to give him proper care at home. Hence, his admission to hospital, where he had died.

This research has enabled me to correct the record about my GG-grandfather's death and burial. We now know that he lived for five years after his namesake was buried at Bourke in 1914 and that his remains are buried in the Catholic Cemetery at Rookwood, NSW, even though the exact location of his unmarked grave is unknown.

Endnotes

- ¹ Baptismal Record: James Murphy 1843, Vol Glenbeigh baptisms, (Nov 1843), Keelnabrack, near Glenbeigh, General Register Office, Ireland
- ² Murphy family entry, *Talavera*, Passenger list, 6 Sep 1853; in 4/4935 (Kingswood: Archives Office of NSW), 2465.
- ³ Marriage Certificate, James Murphy and Prudence Whye nee Reed, 18 May 1879, Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, NSW. 1879/2580 (250).
- ⁴ Birth Certificate Vol 1880 No 11867, George Charles Reed Murphy, (11 February 1881), NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages.
- ⁵ NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, *Index to NSW Deaths*, (Registry of BDM), 13876/1914, Bourke District, 71 years, Bourke.
- ⁶ Marriage Certificate, James Murphy and Ann Malcolm, 28 Dec 1864, Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, NSW. 1864/1546.
- ⁷ Edited, "James Murphy, Esquire," in *Australian Men of Mark, Vol. 2, Series 2*. (Sydney: Charles F Maxwell, 1889).
- ⁸ Death Certificate, Mary Murphy, Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, NSW, Vol 1867 No 4129.
- ⁹ NSW Government Gazette, 26 Feb 1870, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article60898629>, page 3.
- ¹⁰ Marriage Certificate, George Charles Reed Murphy and Ellen Ruby Bowen, 18 October 1905, Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, NSW. 1905/9105.
- ¹¹ Death Certificate, Ellen Ruby Murphy, Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, NSW, Vol 1912 No 4939.
- ¹² Ninety To-Day (1936, July 3). *The Sun* (Sydney, NSW: 1910 - 1954), p. 19 (Country Edition). Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article230309925>
- ¹³ Licensing Court. (1903, June 16). *Leader (Orange, NSW: 1899 - 1945)*, p. 2. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252316645>
- ¹⁴ Advertisement: Supreme Court Notice number 2 1903, page 2, the Western Herald newspaper, 14 Apr 1903, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle103958029>
- ¹⁵ Government Gazette Notices (1904, August 23). *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales (Sydney, NSW: 1901 - 2001)*, p. 6417. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article226483927>
- ¹⁶ Government Gazette Notices (1905, August 25). *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales (Sydney, NSW: 1901 - 2001)*, p. 5801. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article221027719>
- ¹⁷ Licensing Court. (1906, March 3). *Leader (Orange, NSW: 1899 - 1945)*, p. 2. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252224881>
- ¹⁸ Wedding. (1904, November 17). *Leader (Orange, NSW: 1899 - 1945)*, p. 2. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252344903>
- ¹⁹ Orange Police News. (1906, May 23). *Leader (Orange, NSW: 1899 - 1945)*, p. 1. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252234318>
- ²⁰ Table Talk (1906, July 13). *Leader (Orange, NSW: 1899 - 1945)*, p. 2. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252241446>. Correspondence. (1906, July 25). *Leader (Orange, NSW: 1899 - 1945)*, p. 1. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252243260>
- ²¹ Commercial News (1907, May 11). *Leader (Orange, NSW: 1899 - 1945)*, p. 4. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article252353803>
- ²² Watches and Jewellery Reported Stolen, Missing, Etc. (1909, June 2). *New South Wales Police Gazette and Weekly Record of Crime (Sydney: 1860 - 1930)*, p. 194. Retrieved July 5, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article251648215>
- ²³ Death of Mrs George Murphy, 17 April 1912, *Western Herald (Bourke: 1887-1970)*, p. 2.
- ²⁴ NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, *Index to NSW Deaths*, (Registry of BDM), 22640/1919, Granville District, 76 years, Rookwood Asylum.
- ²⁵ Funeral Notices, *Sydney Morning Herald*, column 1, 7 Nov 1919, page 5.

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- ²⁶ NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, *Index to NSW Births*, (Registry of BDM), 12559/1882, Norah L Murphy, father: James, mother: Prudence, Bourke District.
- ²⁷ NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, *Index to NSW Marriages*, (Registry of BDM), 14642/1913, Woollahra District.
- ²⁸ NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, *Index to NSW Births*, (Registry of BDM), 16668/1916, Joan Burnet, father: Edward, mother: Nora L, Randwick District.