

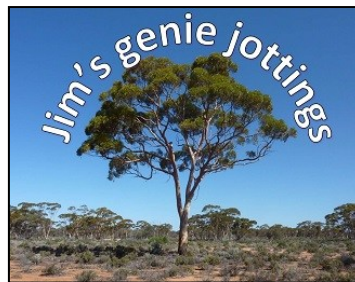
Earnestly Seeking Salvation

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by James Michael Fleming

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This story was entered in the
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The topic was “My relative’s journey”



Jim Fleming is a retired Customs Manager and lives on Sydney's lower north shore. He began researching his family history in 1983 and has been a member of the Society of Australian Genealogists for 35 years. Aside from genealogy he enjoys travelling and sings baritone in two choirs.

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

Website: <http://jimfleming.id.au/up/index.htm>

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Earnestly Seeking Salvation

Following the death of his young wife, my fourth great-grandfather, William Carlisle, embarked on a profound spiritual journey - one that would shape his future decisions and strain his family relationships.

Carlisle was likely the son or nephew of another William Carlisle, who, in 1803, applied from London for permission to settle in New South Wales.¹ They may have originally hailed from Dumfriesshire, Scotland, where they had ties to Admiral Sir Pulteney Malcolm, who provided a letter of introduction to the NSW Governor.²

Arriving in Sydney aboard *Experiment* in 1804, the 20-year-old Carlisle was granted 100 acres to farm at Richmond, NSW.³ His shipmates had included the family of Thomas Gordon, a London acquaintance who became both his neighbour and mentor. For the next seven years, they all lived on Gordon's land while establishing their farms.

Just before his marriage to Gordon's 18-year-old daughter, Mary Ann, in 1811, she underwent a religious awakening, becoming an earnest seeker of salvation under Reverend Robert Cartwright's influence.⁴ However, after their wedding, she quickly grew disillusioned when her husband showed little interest in sharing her devotion. The resulting friction between the strong-willed couple drove them apart, leading Mary Ann - despite her pregnancy - to declare herself "free from his blood."⁴ Even as she lay dying from complications after giving birth to their daughter, Amelia, my third great-grandmother, she maintained this conviction.

Following Mary Ann's death in February 1813,⁵ Carlisle descended into deep grief. Consumed by guilt and despair, he struggled until he came to believe his loss was a divine admonishment. This led to a transformational conversion, which Reverend Cartwright described as a "divine change." The clergyman later encouraged Carlisle to channel his sorrow into missionary work.⁴

In January 1816, Carlisle married Elizabeth Blackman,⁶ but almost immediately left her and their young daughter to join the Church Missionary Society's settlement at Rangihoa in New Zealand's Bay of Islands.⁷ Initially employed as an agriculturalist, he spent a year assessing whether this life would suit his family. Deciding that it would, he returned to Sydney, and the family soon relocated.⁸ Carlisle was then appointed assistant to the mission's schoolmaster.⁹

Life at the settlement was fraught with difficulties. Several of the mission's settlers had quarrelled with its founder, Reverend Samuel Marsden, after he rejected a suggestion that another site would be much better suited to agriculture.¹⁰ Subsequent crop failures led to chronic food shortages and aggravated the discontent, while many struggled with inadequate clothing.¹¹ In desperation, settlers defied Marsden's instructions and traded guns for pork with the Māori. Meanwhile, the schoolmasters grappled with student disinterest and truancy due to the religion-based syllabus. Even more alarming were the recurring outbreaks of tribal warfare. Carlisle later wrote, "My wife has been so terrified she could not eat, but was crying with my children, expecting every moment the natives to break in upon us."¹²

Under the strain of these hardships, Carlisle's mental health deteriorated. When Marsden returned in 1819, he accused the schoolmasters and others of neglecting their duties and engaging in illicit trade. Carlisle, in a moment of impulsivity, resigned, and his family returned to Sydney.

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In 1822, he applied for the position of Superintendent of Convicts at Bathurst, hoping to succeed his brother-in-law, James Blackman.¹³ When this was denied, his focus on missionary work was renewed - despite his family's harrowing experiences and his wife's opposition. Carlisle relentlessly petitioned the Church Missionary Society in London for unpaid wages and reinstatement. His persistence paid off, and he was offered a new missionary post.

This seems to have been the last straw for his wife, who hated the makeshift housing, the food shortages and her husband's neglect. She refused to go and left the marriage, taking both her sons and daughter plus stepdaughter, Amelia.¹⁴ Despite regretting his failure to reconcile with his first wife before her death, Carlisle now severed ties entirely, selling part of his Richmond farm¹⁵ before briefly returning to New Zealand.¹⁶

His worsening mental state manifested in accusations against his estranged wife, published in newspaper advertisements, alleging adultery, theft, and child abandonment.¹⁷ He even appealed to the Attorney-General to regain access to his youngest daughter, Henrietta, but Elizabeth's opposition was implacable and she retained custody.

As Carlisle adjusted to his new reality, his mental health gradually stabilized. He sold the remainder of his farm in 1824 and established a successful Sydney factory for renovating and painting used coaches¹⁸ - a skill likely learned from his father, who may have driven a coach for a wealthy family. Within a few years, his sons, John and James, joined the business.¹⁹ Sadly, he never reconciled with his daughters or estranged wife.

After more than a decade in the coach painting trade, Carlisle returned to teaching, accepting a tutor position at Carwell Station near Rylstone, NSW, with the Nevell family.²⁰ He passed away there in July 1852, around the age of 70, and was buried in the station cemetery on Carwell Creek.²¹

William Carlisle was a hardworking and skilled man whose religious journey - inspired by his wife's piety, energised by her clergyman and forged in his own grief - produced his own fervent convictions. While admirable, this unwavering faith clouded his judgment at crucial moments, straining relationships and adversely altering the course of his family's lives.

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- ¹ Thomas Gordon, William Carlisle & J S Freeman, Letter to Colonial Secretary, 3 September 1803 (London: Public Record Office, PRO13, CO201/28, page 4).
- ² NSW State Archives, Colonial Secretary Letters Received, William Carlisle, 1826, [4/1891] Letter no 26/3159.
- ³ Margaret Carlisle, *The Transport Ship Experiment: Passengers on a Voyage to New South Wales*. Sydney: Margaret Carlisle, 1992. Page 23.
- ⁴ Robert Cartwright to Reverend Josiah Pratt, Letter dated 9 Mar 1817, Marsden Archive, University of Otago, MS-0056/051. https://marsdenarchive.otago.ac.nz/MS_0056_051
- ⁵ Burial Record, Mary Ann Carlisle, NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, Sydney, vol 2A, number 2993, 1813.
- ⁶ Marriage Record, Carlisle - Blackman, NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, Sydney, vol 3A, number 1905, 1816; also, vol 156, number 124.
- ⁷ Classified Advertising (1815, December 30). *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, p. 1. Trove <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article629255>
- ⁸ Classified Advertising (1817, March 22). *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, p. 4. Trove <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2177145>
- ⁹ John Youl, Robert Cartwright & Reverend Samuel Marsden to Reverend Josiah Pratt, Letter dated 27 Mar 1817, Marsden Archive, University of Otago, MS-0056/051. https://marsdenarchive.otago.ac.nz/MS_0056_048
- ¹⁰ Reverend Samuel Marsden to Reverend Josiah Pratt, Letter dated 10 Mar 1816, Marsden Archive, University of Otago, MS-0056/004. https://marsdenarchive.otago.ac.nz/MS_0056_004
- ¹¹ Reverend Thomas Kendall to Reverend Josiah Pratt, Letter dated 6 Nov 1816, Marsden Archive, University of Otago, MS-0056/030. https://marsdenarchive.otago.ac.nz/MS_0056_030
- ¹² Carlisle, p 40.
- ¹³ NSW State Archives, Colonial Secretary Letters Received, William Carlisle, 7 May 1822, [4/3505], p 241, Reel 6009.
- ¹⁴ Ancestry.com. New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convict Musters, 1806-1849, Liverpool Muster 1822, Home Office: Settlers and Convicts, New South Wales and Tasmania; HO/36, The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Kew, Surrey, England.
- ¹⁵ NSW State Archives, Registers of Memorials for Land 1825-1842, William Carlisle, 10 Jun 1822, Reel 1582, Series 12992, memorial 994, Book J.
- ¹⁶ NSW State Archives, Departing Crew and Passenger Lists, Ships' Musters, ship Vansittart, 11 Jun 1822, Mr W Carlisle, Reel 561, Series 1289, item 4/4773, page 212.
- ¹⁷ Classified Advertising (1825, February 17). *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, p. 4. Trove <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2183735>
- ¹⁸ Classified Advertising (1827, March 10). *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, p. 1. Trove <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2187828>
- ¹⁹ NSW State Archives, 1828 Census: Householders' Returns, William Carlisle, Reels 2551-2552, 2506-2507, Series 1273, District: Sydney, residence 44.
- ²⁰ Bertha E Phelps, "Bushrangers at Carwell and Other Places", Chapter VI in *An Australian Tells England*. Sydney: Robert Dey, Son & Co, 1935.
- ²¹ E Nevell, *Burial Register (or Dead Book) relating to Cemetery near Rylstone, NSW*, Descent, Journal of the Society of Australian Genealogists, Vol 6, Part 2 (June 1973), p70.