

When is a Braund not a Braund? When she's abroad

The story of Mary Braund the first fleet convict

Michael Braund

This article is based on one of many biographies of emigrant Braunds that appear in our book *Was the Grass Green? the worldwide Braund movement*, which is available in our shop.

Introduction

The adventures of Mary Bryant (née Broad) are well known, being the subject of books, newspaper articles, plays (*Mary Bryant*, by Tom O'Neil) and a film (*The Incredible Journey of Mary Bryant*, by Peter Andrikidis, 2005). Her story is remarkable. She was convicted of highway robbery, sentenced to death, had her sentence commuted to transportation to Australia, escaped to Kupang, in Timor, fetched up in Newgate prison, was liberated by the celebrated writer and lawyer, James Boswell, and returned to Cornwall.

Little, though, is actually known of Mary. A Mary Broad was born in Fowey, in 1765 (baptised 1 May 1765, according to Family Search), the daughter of a fisherman, William Broad, and his wife, Grace. A Mary Broad was sentenced to seven years' transportation. She gave birth to a daughter, Charlotte, married William Bryant, in Sydney, and had a son, Emanuel. We know that her husband and children died before she was brought back to England, and we know that she was pardoned through the strenuous efforts of James Boswell. We know, too, that she returned to Cornwall, receiving financial help from Boswell, until his death in 1795. This is, more or less, all we know about Mary Broad. It is only by searching the records that we can glean a little more about her. But, as I will attempt to show in this account, the records are not always consistent, and we are left wondering just what is genuine and what is not.

We know nothing of Mary's early years, yet this has not stopped the *Daily Mirror* (1986) from describing Mary as a "bold, full-figured Cornish beauty". She grew up "as wild and reckless as her brothers. Lithe and high-spirited she had no lack of suitors ...". A

description of Mary's appearance is, perhaps, a little more authentic in Willson (nd), who refers to the register at Newgate prison and describes Mary:

5' 4" tall, grey eyes, brown hair and sallow complexion. A description in First Fleet Online adds that Mary (in 1792) was also of "middle stature, marked with smallpox, one knee bent but is not lame, age twenty five". This contrasts with the *Daily Mirror's* description, but she had experienced the return journey from Australia, the deaths of her husband and children, and some time in Newgate. We may surmise that Mary was short, with grey eyes and brown hair.

Crime, trial, deportation

Cobley (1970) describes Mary's trial, held at the Devon Lent Assizes, Exeter, on 20 March 1786, before Sir James Eyre Knt. and Sir Beaumont Hotham Knt. Mary, along with Catherine Fryer and Mary Haydon, was accused of "feloniously assaulting Agnes Lakeman Sp^r ¹ in the King's Highway feloniously putting her in corporal fear and danger of her life ... and feloniously and violently taking from her person and against her will in the said Highway one Silk Bonnet val. 12d and other goods value 11. 11s ² her property". Mary and her colleagues were each found guilty of highway robbery and sentenced to be hanged. After a reprieve, the sentence was changed to transportation for 7 years.³ Mary was tried as Mary Braund.

Cook (1993) submits that, at the Lenten Assizes in Exeter Castle, Mary was recorded as Mary Braund in the court records. He describes, in the margin of the court list, a note: "Mary Braund - to be Hanged", as well as a scribbled note saying either "High Roby" or "High Toby" (the former seems more likely, being a shorthand for Highway Robbery). Mary's sentence was commuted to seven years' transportation probably, suggests Cook, because Mary and others like her would have been ideal for servicing the male convicts and helping to keep them quiet. Mary was still a Braund in the Order of the Judges which confirmed her transportation "beyond the seas" following the extension of "the Royal Mercy" by his Majesty. Excell (nd), too, claims that Mary was condemned and sentenced as Mary Braund. Willson (nd), though, maintains that Mary was sentenced as Mary Broad.

One wonders at the severity of the sentence, but Gillen (1989) attempts to put such apparent injustice into perspective by suggesting that Mary and her fellow convicts were victims of the harsh laws prevailing in England at the end of the eighteenth century. Many of these laws, especially the death penalty, seemed to be aimed at the poor, for 'economic' (*property* might be a better word) crimes (theft, for example) invariably attracted the death penalty, while most murderers were given small fines and acquittal. Copley (1970), too, maintains that the convicts were transported simply because they had committed crimes, even though they may seem trivial today. Crimes against property, in particular, attracted harsh penalties. Age was not a barrier to transportation.

The Charlotte

After her sentencing, Mary was moved to the *Dunkirk*, one of the several hulks used to house convicts awaiting transportation. The *Dunkirk*, an old warship, was moored off Plymouth where, as well as accommodating "local" prisoners, it served as a collection point for prisoners from various gaols as they were assembled for the First Fleet. Conditions on board were horrendous and women prisoners were brutalised by the marines supposed to be guarding them (First Fleet Online).

On 11 March 1787, the *Charlotte*, under Thomas Gilbert, Master (Tench 1961), sailed to Plymouth to pick up her cargo of prisoners. The *Charlotte*, a transport ship of 345 tons, was first surveyed at Deptford in 1786, measured 6'6" afore, amid and abaft (abaft = in or behind the stern of a ship), and was built on the Thames. The Table of Biographical Data (in Gillen 1989) says that the ship was such a heavy sailer that it had to be towed down the English Channel by the naval escort *Hyaena* when she left for Australia on 13 May 1787.⁴

Phillip (1789) describes the *Charlotte* as having accommodation for 100 male convicts and 24 female, although it actually embarked with 88 and 20 respectively. The compliment of marines was under the command of Captain Tench, with his detachment of Lieutenants Creswell and Poulden, three sergeants, three corporals, one drum and pipe and thirty-four privates.⁵

The *Charlotte* was one of six convict ships that, with three store ships and two men-of-war, made up the First Fleet, carrying who were to become the founders of Australia. According to Cobley (1970), some 778 convicts made up the First Fleet.

The Journey

Much has been written about the early trips to Australia. Conditions were harsh and several of the convicts died *en route*. For Mary, the journey provided extra concern, for she gave birth to her daughter, Charlotte, one of three females born during the voyage, on board ship off the Cape of Good Hope.⁶ The father of Charlotte is open to conjecture. King (2004) suggests that a turnkey on the *Dunkirk*, one Charlie Spence, may have been the father, conception having taken place before the *Charlotte* sailed, and in return for smuggling a letter out to Mary's family. The List of Founders (in Gillen 1989) records Charlotte as Charlotte Spence Braund, adding fuel to King's claim. But the List also states that Charlotte was the daughter of Mary Braund and William Bryant, providing us with an alternative father to Charlie Spence. William Bryant appeared before the Launceston Assizes on 20 March 1784, accused of forgery. Being found guilty, he was sentenced to be hanged, later changed to transportation for and during the term of 7 years.⁷ Mary and William certainly developed a close relationship and were to share many adventures over the following few years.

Lewis, in her foreword to Fidlon and Ryan's (1981) book, states that the eleven ships bringing the convicts to Australia actually brought Australia's nation-builders. But Mary, who left no descendants in Australia, does not fit into this category.⁸ Fidlon and Ryan distinguish between the *First Fleeters* (those who actually arrived in Australia on the eleven ships) and *currency children* (those who were born in Australia). Mary's daughter, Charlotte, was thus, by this definition, a *First Fleeter*, while her brother, Emanuel, baptised in Sydney on 4 April 1790, was a *currency child*.

Settlement

Botany Bay had been recommended for settlement by Captain James Cook after his brief visit in 1770. Phillip declared it unsuitable and, following exploration to the north, entered

the harbour of Port Jackson. This is where the First Fleet lay at anchor in Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788.⁹



Botany Bay. Sirius & Convoy going in: Supply & Agents Division in the Bay. 21 Janry 1788, water colour from Journal 'A Voyage to New South Wales' William Bradley, Safe 1 / 14 No.

9. Via Wikimedia Commons

King (1984) mentions the fourteen marriages that were solemnised during the first week, but offers no names. In fact, the first marriages were performed on 10 February 1788 and included William Bryant and Mary Braund. The marriage register for St. Phillip's church, Sydney (1788), shows William's signature and Mary's mark (she is listed as Mary Brand, though the name that has been written against her mark could be Brand or Braud. It is not Braund). (Table of biographical data, in Gillen 1989)

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mary Braund".

St. Phillip's (Sydney) marriage register (From Gillen 1989)

The Escape

Based on accounts written at the time (by naval officers, marines and surgeons), King (1984) describes the first 2½ years of settlement at Sydney Cove, from 1788 up until the arrival of the second fleet in June 1790. King makes no mention of Mary. What probably occupied much of Mary's and William's thoughts during this time was surviving and escaping, as well as caring for their new child, Emanuel. Most of the texts dealing with the first settlement describe the harsh conditions, the lack of food (few of the convicts had farming experience) and the firm discipline. William, who held a position of trust because of his fishing experience, stole some fish, and was duly punished. From the captain of the Dutch snow *Waaksamheid*, a two-masted merchant vessel, William obtained a chart, compass, quadrant, two muskets, ammunition and food. (Australian Dictionary of Biography, on-line edition). Mary and her group finally managed to escape. Hughes (1987), telling the story of the escape in some detail, attributes the escape to Mary rather than William. Barton (1889, pp. 72-3) describes William Bryant's escape to Timor, accompanied by his wife and two children and seven men as "(t)he most adventurous of the many attempts" to escape. Collins (1802, vol. 2, p. 156) describes the escape of William Bryant and his wife, Mary Braud. There is no mention of Mary and William's escape in Gillen's (1989) lengthy introduction.

Tench (1789, reprinted 1961), in his Journal entry for March, 1791, describes the "very daring manoeuvre ... by a set of convicts, eleven in number, including a woman, wife of one of the party, and two little children" (p. 219). That they endured hardships and danger, and completed a tremendously-hazardous journey, is beyond doubt – in Hughes's words, the escape became celebrated in convict lore.

But the escape foundered in Timor, where their true identity was discovered. They were transferred to Batavia (present-day Jakarta) and put on the *Gorgon*, bound for England. Tench describes how he remembered Mary and William from the *Charlotte*, and appears to have been sympathetic to their escape. Both William and Emanuel died in Batavia from fever and little Charlotte did not survive much longer. Gillen (1989), referring to Clark

(1787-92), wrote that the hot weather caused many child deaths, including that of a 'convict child' (Charlotte Braund). Lt. Ralph Clark (1787-1792) writes in his Journal and Letters for Sunday 6th. (of May, 1792): "Squally weather with a great dele of Rain all this day – last night the child belonging to Mary Broad the convict woman who went a way in the fishing Boat from P Jackson last Year died about four o'clock committed the Body to the deep – Latd. 5- 25 No."

Back to England

Mary was placed in Newgate prison after her arrival in London. Following significant efforts by James Boswell, Mary was pardoned in 1793, returning to Cornwall. Pitkin (1998) suggests that Mary's last-known whereabouts were in Fowey, Cornwall. In November, 1794, Mary acknowledged one of Boswell's regular payments to her. Hughes is of the opinion that Boswell settled an annuity of £10 on Mary. It is thought by some that Mary married Richard Thomas on her return to Cornwall.

Embellishments, Errors and Inconsistencies

Because the facts about Mary are scant, one must be wary of turning to some of the popular histories that have been written about her as a source of information.

In his review of Erickson's book, *The girl from Botany Bay: The true story of the convict Mary Broad and her extraordinary escape*, Wilks (2004) points out, "She (Erickson) also piles on the descriptive verbiage in a heroic struggle to build a full biography around the few remaining scraps of information about Mary". This technique also applies to King's (2004)¹⁰ and Cook's (1993) accounts. Cook, for example, describes Mary's father as a mariner. Andrikidis's (2005) film, very loosely based on the Mary Bryant story, is guilty of the same liberal writing. The film concentrates on the escape from Sydney, but has William and Emanuel being shot in Timor while trying to escape!

The *Daily Mirror* (1986) recounts the standard story, though with some poetic licence. Mary never admitted who the father (of Charlotte) was, for "she probably did not know herself". I wonder what was the source of this claim? These days, the newspaper would be sued for making libellous comments.

William Parsons (recounted in Hughes 1987) composed a poem based on the unlikely romantic relationship between Boswell and Mary. Mary, back in Cornwall, pines for Boswell:

*Was it for this I braved the ocean's roar,
And plied those thousand leagues the lab'ring oar?
Oh, rather had I stayed, the willing prey
Of grief and famine in the direful bay!
Or perished, whelmed in the Atlantic tide!
Or, home returned, in air suspended died!*

Mary even envisages the ultimate bliss of being hanged with Boswell at Tyburn:

*First let our weight the trembling scaffold bear
Till we consummate the last bliss in air.*

The story of Mary Broad/Braund/Bryant suffers, unfortunately, from such embellishment.

Mary's story contains errors, too. In a review of Hausman and Hausman (2003), Mary is described as the "nineteen-year-old Mary Bryant ... sentenced in January of 1786 to be hanged ...". Of course, she didn't become Mary Bryant until after her marriage in Sydney. The same reviewer also describes how Mary was "transported" to Botany Bay (later Sidney, Australia) ... In fact, Port Jackson actually became Sydney (with a 'y'). Omissions are commonplace: in Phillip (1789), the list of convicts contains William Bryant, convicted Launceston 20.3.1784 to 7 years' transportation. There is no mention of Mary Broad, Braund or Bryant (or Charlotte). In his notes on Tench's description, Fitzhardinge names William Bryant and his wife, Mary Braund, Brand or Broad, commenting that Mary's name does not appear in the first fleet registers.

Mary's story suffers from inconsistencies. Most authors maintain that her name was Broad up until her marriage to William Bryant in Sydney. Other authors state that she was known by other names (Braund, Brand, Braud ...). Currey (1983) discusses the several names by which Mary was known: both the Gaol Book covering the Assizes held in Exeter

in March 1786, and the Transportation Book based on these records, show her as Mary Braund. Excell (nd) examines Mary's 'true' family name: she was condemned and sentenced as Mary Braund, the Newgate register has Mary Briant alias Broad, other records in the Penal Settlement (though not specified) refer to Mary as Broad, her pardon was in the name of Bryant alias Broad and her baptism was for Mary Broad. Mary's marriage certificate is in the name of Bran or Brand and her son, Emanuel's, birth certificate is in the name of Briant.

Fidlon and Ryan (1981) illustrate the problem of aliases and spelling variations very well in their list of convict names. Mary appears, as does another convict, James:

Name	Status	Ship
BRAND , Charlotte Spence	Convict's child	Charlotte
BRAND , Mary also BRAUND also BROAD also BRYANT	Convict	Charlotte
BROAD , Mary see BRAND , Mary		
BRYANT , Mary see BRAND		
TENCHALL, James also	Convict	Friendship
TENEHILL, James also		
TENHILL, James also		
TENIHILE, James also		
TENINGHILL, James also		
TENKELL, James also		
TENNINGHILL, James also		
TENNYHILL, James		

Appendix D of Cobley illustrates further the problem of alternative spellings to names. Brand, one name by which Mary was known, is offered as an alternative to Bran and Bryn.

Hughes (1987) cites William Bryant, a Cornishman, as the only fisherman of the First Fleet, though later (on page 205), Hughes describes William as a smuggler and a sailor. Gillen lists *two* fishermen. Following the escape from Port Jackson, the authorities published a list of escapees - the whole of Mary's family is Bryant, including Charlotte (who may or

may not have been the daughter of William; she was christened Charlotte Broad or Braund, depending on the source!).

Such inconsistencies, admittedly small, exist throughout Mary's story and detract from its overall veracity.

Summary

Mary's story is interesting and full of adventure. Unfortunately, it is based on few facts. Some authors have made full use of this and have presented dramatic stories in which the truth might be stretched in varying degrees. It makes for absorbing reading or watching, but presents family historians with a few authentication problems. In Tench (1789, reprinted 1961), Fitzhardinge laments the loss of narratives or letters written by convicts, "lower-deck seamen or the rank-and-file marines sent out as guards. Enlightening details of epic stories, such as those of the Bryants ... appear to have been lost for ever" (p. viii-ix).

We know that a Mary Broad was baptised in Fowey, Cornwall, and that a Mary Broad (or was that Mary Braund?) was sentenced to deportation to Australia. Was this the same Mary? Mary was deported, married, had children and eventually returned to England, finishing up in Cornwall. Then she disappears from the records.

Cook (1993) includes an interesting discussion about the fate of Mary after her return to Fowey. He is of the opinion that Mary's signed receipt ('MB') of 1 November 1794 for Boswell's annuity "is the last certain record we have of Mary's existence" (page 234). Cook speculates that a Mary Bryant married Richard Thomas on 13 October 1807 in the parish of Breage, near Helston, some forty miles from Fowey. Mary Bryant signed the register with her mark. In 1811, a girl, Mary Anne, daughter of Richard and Mary Thomas of Breage, was baptised. Mary would have been forty-six. Another daughter, Elizabeth, was baptised in July, 1812, though this daughter died very soon after birth. Perhaps this was our Mary? The Fowey area fits, the dates fit, but we don't know!

Mary's name varies from Broad to Braund to Brand to Bryant (or Briant); sometimes she appears in the records, sometimes not. I can't find any primary evidence for Fowey as her birthplace (although a Mary Broad was baptised there). As far as I can make out all the secondary sources tell much the same story, saying that the Mary Broad of Fowey was the one who committed an offence in Plymouth. But why does she appear as Braund? Family tradition has suggested that she gave the name Braund in order to protect her true family (Broad) from embarrassment.

I like the idea put forward by Copley (1970), who suggests that the spelling of names was one of the main administrative difficulties for those trying to organise the First Fleet: "Proper names were often spelled as they sounded and several variations of many names occurred" (page xi). Gillen (1989), too, describes the general confusion that permeated the organising and departure of the First Fleet. He suggests that the numbers who left England and reached Australia may never be known precisely, adding that some names were mistaken from hand-written lists and some recorded phonetically from strong, local accents. With her Cornish accent, coupled with a clerk who was not from the area, or who was in a hurry, it would be easy to mishear Broad and write Braund. Try it, with a West Country accent - they sound the same! Mary, who was illiterate, would not have been able to check the spelling of her name in the lists.

I don't think that Mary was one of ours, but she deserves to be included in our family history. But maybe, just maybe, she is a genetic Braund. ¹¹

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Note from Janet Few

Although I had been aware of Mary's existence for a quarter of a century, until Michael was preparing this article for *Was the Grass Greener?* it had not registered that the Fowey birthplace may just be an educated guess. As Michael points out, we have not found any primary evidence for the Fowey connection; indeed there seems to be no contemporary evidence that Mary was Cornish. Her crime took place in Plymouth and at her trial she was described as a 'forest dweller'. Could this refer to Dartmoor Forest, some twenty miles

north east of Plymouth? In any case, this implies that Mary was of no fixed abode. It would be interesting to try to ascertain which secondary source was the first to mention Fowey.

Mary was illiterate; therefore all official renditions of her name are based on what the writer *thought* she was saying. The Assize court record and the document commuting her sentence clearly record the name as Braund. The court records were created locally, in an area where the clerk might be familiar with the surname. The further Mary went from the West Country, the less likely she was to have her name spelt correctly. From experience, I know that when in Devon, where Braunds can be more frequently found, Braund is likely to be spelt in that way but growing up in south London, where the name was exceedingly rare, it was much more likely to be written incorrectly. Unlike Mary, I was able to correct misspellings. In researching the wider Braund family, we find that Brand frequently mutates into something more well know, such as Brawn or Broad. It is very unusual for a common surname to be mis-transcribed into a name that is more unusual. I have come across no instances of families that are consistently Brawns or Broads later becoming Braunds. The theory that the illiterate Mary, who was probably leading an itinerant lifestyle, was trying to protect her family by changing her name to Broad is unlikely in the extreme. If that were the case, why did she not give the name Broad on arrest? If she really was from Fowey, she was many miles from her family and the neighbours would have been very unlikely to have learned of her fate.

If and it is *if*, she was not from Fowey, where was she from? Given that Mary would probably have been as vague about her age as she was about her surname, the age of nineteen, quoted in 1785, may be inaccurate. There are several Mary Broads baptised in Cornwall in 1765 and 1766 alone, some of whom came from parishes considerably closer to Plymouth than Fowey. There are also three Mary Braunds baptised in Devon between 1762 and 1772, whose futures cannot be accounted for:

Mary, the daughter of Humphrey and Martha Braund née Ward, baptised 30 May 1762 in Clawton (branch 1).

Mary base daughter of Margaret Webb, reputed father William Braund, baptised 22 May 1768 at Buckland Filleigh (branch 4)

Mary daughter of William and Elizabeth Braund née Quick, baptised 15 November 1770 at Bradford (branch 4)

Is one of these our convict? We will probably never know who Mary really was.

Further Thoughts as a Result of new Research

In 2021 Charlotte Mac Kenzie published the results of her in-depth research into Mary's story in the form of a documentary. Using sources such as correspondence between James Boswell and Edward Puckey, Mary's brother-in-law, Charlotte has established that Mary was indeed a Broad, the daughter of William and Dorothy Broad née Julef and granddaughter of Josiah and Prudence Broad née Pope of St. Neot in Cornwall. The final sighting of Mary was in Lostwithiel, Cornwall in 1794, when she signed a receipt for her alliance from Boswell. There is also evidence that she was in St. Veep, Cornwall in that year.

You can view Charlotte's documentary [here](#).

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1. Spinster.
2. Probably £11 11s
3. References: PRO Assizes 23/8; PRO Assizes 24/26; Devon Record Office, Gaol Calendar, Epiphany Sessions 1786.
4. The *Charlotte* later returned to England on 28 November 1789, eventually being lost off Newfoundland in 1818.
5. Collins offers slightly different numbers for the marine detachment, adding 'the principal fergeon of the colony'
6. Charlotte was born just beyond Rio de Janeiro on 8 September 1787, and baptised at the Cape of Good Hope on 28 October 1787. Charlotte was described by surgeon John White as "a fine girl". (List of Founders, in Gillen 1989)
7. References: PRO Assizes 23/8; PRO Assizes 24/26
8. Perhaps Mary's only legacy in Australia is a few leaves from Botany Bay used as tea. Mary brought these back to England with her and gave them to Boswell: some of the leaves are now to be found in the Mitchell library in Sydney (Willson nd).
9. Port Jackson was named after Sir George Jackson, Judge-Advocate of the English Fleet and Secretary of the Admiralty, who was also a friend and patron of Captain James Cook. Cook's Journal of 6 May 1770 reads: "... at Noon, we were by observation in the Latitude of 33 degrees 50 minutes S, about 2 or 3 miles from the Land, and abreast of the Bay, wherein there appear'd to be safe Anchorage which I called Port Jackson".
10. King's account - a popular history and to be handled with care - makes no mention of the name Braund.
11. An idea that Janet Few would like to believe.

Addendum

Mary's pardon, issued 2 May 1793

George R

Whereas Mary Bryant, otherwise Broad, now a Prisoner in Newgate, stands charged with escaping from the Persons having the legal Custody of her, before the Expiration of the Term for which she had been ordered to be transported. And whereas some favourable circumstances have been humbly represented unto Us in her Behalf inducing Us to extend our Grace & Mercy unto her and to grant her Our Free Pardon for her said Crime. Our Will & Pleasure therefore is that you cause her the said Mary Bryant, otherwise Broad, to be forthwith discharged out of Custody and that she be inserted for her said Crime in Our first & next general Pardon that shall come out for the poor Convicts in Newgate, without any Condition whatsoever. And for so doing this shall be your Warrant. Given at Our Court at St. James's the 2nd Day of May 1793, In the Thirty third Year of Our Reign.

To Our Trusty & Wellbeloved Sir John
William Rose Knt. Recorder of Our City of
London, The Sheriffs of Our said City ? of
Middx. And all others whom it may
concern.

By His Majesty's Command
Henry Dundas