

CHAPTER 14

The Community

... with all their care, women adventuring on such a speculation as emigrating friendless to New South Wales, excludes all danger of their being too good for the Colony. But while we want not thieves, nor drunkards, nor prostitutes, we may be allowed perhaps to say, that young women of doubtful character will do much better here than in England, for they will be acceptable as wives to a large class of men in this Colony, who want wives as well as their betters, though not so prudent and delicate in their choice. Such marriages, compared with celibacy, will prove of immense benefit to a Colony.

SM&CA, 15 June 1836

Though the above quote does reflect the social prejudice not uncommon at the time, it also highlights a recognition that the colony had moved well beyond its original purpose as a penal colony to one where settlement by families, of whatever class, was to be encouraged.

From the beginning of transportation government authorities had been aware of the economic and social benefits of keeping families together and various systems had been put in place to address this. Convicts who had demonstrated good behaviour, for example, could apply for their wives or husbands and family to join them. Berrima resident John Jenkins offers one local example. Jenkins, who had been assigned to local landowner James Atkinson when he arrived in 1821, sought Atkinson's support to bring out his wife Elizabeth and five children. They arrived in 1825 and, with land granted to Elizabeth, were able to start their own farm.

The efforts of the government to bring out single females has been mentioned in Chapter 10 in relation to Edmund Kelly's wife, Ellen. She did not seek government permission to join her husband but took advantage of the government's initiative of commissioning ships to transport single non-convict females.

Despite these efforts, the disparity between the number of men and women, particularly marked among the convict and ex-convict communities, was to continue for many years. By 1841, in Berrima township at least, the balance was much improved, with a male:female ratio of 2:1, much lower than in the surrounding district. There were also many young families.

Before exploring the statistics further, it is necessary to remember that at any one time Berrima's community was made up of many transients including the military and their charges, tradesmen employed on building the gaol and courthouse and the travellers.

The first opportunity to identify the families at the core of the Berrima community, the families that were to remain in the township for several years, is the census undertaken in 1841.

The census was compiled over three days at the end of March and is invaluable in providing a snapshot of the households at that time, ten years after the original gazetting of the township. For each household, and under the name of its head, is information on the number, gender and age of people living under the one roof, their occupation and their religion. If they had arrived as convicts it indicates their status as free, holding a ticket of leave or still assigned. Otherwise it states whether the occupants had arrived free or were born in the colony.

There were 144 men in Berrima, fifty-two women and fifty-three children under the age of fourteen, a total of 249 people. If the figures for those in the military contingent and gaol occupants (other than the gaoler, his wife and two adult children) are removed, the figure is reduced to 189. If we then assume some of the fifty-

eight people registered as residing at the four inns were also in transit, a resident population of somewhere around 170 people seems a reasonable estimate.

The census tells us that of this group approximately one-third (most of them children) were born in the colony, one-third had arrived free and the final third had convict origins. All but a few of the latter held either a ticket of leave or a conditional pardon.

Research into the households listed in that census reveals twelve to fifteen families who lived in Berrima for more than five years.

Three of the four innkeepers, Michael Doyle, Bryan McMahan and Joseph Levy, were ex-convicts and had been in the colony for several years. So had leather workers and thriving businessmen Edmund and Joseph Kelly. Others in this category were shoemaker William Eldridge, baker James McCurdy and his wife Rachael and chief constable Noel Chapman. Most of these men had pardons and, when legislation allowed for civil juries and the appointment of local councillors, these ex-convicts were included, subject to property and income levels, to sit alongside those who had been born in the colony or arrived free.

Most of those arriving free were recent immigrants. Among these were several ex-military men who accompanied the convict ships and chose to stay in the colony when their regiments left. In this group were gaoler Henry Forster, policemen Edmund McCormick and James Eagen and storekeeper Daniel Burgoyne.

Others who had arrived free were Thomas Scott, storekeepers James Jerome Higgins, Alexander Mackenzie Fraser, Lewis Levy, Hyam Phillips and Frances Walsh Small. These men, some single and some with families, had all arrived in the 1830s, some no doubt in response to the government's initiatives to encourage immigration. Most had funded their own passage. Higgins, Small and Scott emigrated from Ireland with their families, Higgins with enough money to establish two stores.



Henry Forster's Waterloo Medal, now in the Sydney Museum. *(Bill Brodie)*

Other immigrants came to join their families. Lewis Levy and his brothers came from London and assisted their uncle, Joseph Levy, in his store and inn and later established their own businesses.

Only a few adult residents were first generation Australians, innkeeper and landowner James Harper being one of the few men known to have been born in the colony. Among the women there were more, including inn-keeper's wife Ann Doyle (née Morley), Sophie Levy (née Smith) and sisters Rebecca Chapman and Ann Levy (née Armfield).

This diverse group of people, with their families, was the core of Berrima's community, remaining in the township for many years.

How well they worked together is an unknown but there is no evidence of discrimination based on religion or social background. Among the many who had come from Ireland there were both Catholics and Protestants and several of the married couples held different faiths. Initiatives to construct places of worship were supported across the community. Free immigrant Francis Walsh Small worked with at least three high profile ex-convicts to further

the Catholic cause in the township and despite an outcry from some when legislation was introduced to enable ex-convicts to serve on a jury, the jury lists at Berrima showed no evidence of discrimination. The judgement of social differences evident in the words of the writer to the *Sydney Herald*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, was not evident in Berrima.

Despite differences in origin and circumstances there is every indication that by 1841 Berrima had developed into a cohesive, if still small, community. People were dependent on each other. With relatives half a world away and probably never to be seen again, forging new alliances was the priority.

Headstones of some of Berrima's early residents



Poundkeeper Benjamin Robinson, All Saints Cemetery, Sutton Forest (left); Shoemaker's wife Nora Eldridge, Berrima Cemetery (below)





Innkeepers: Michael Doyle and his wife Ann, gravesite relocated to Woronora Cemetery (above); Bryan McMahon, Berrima Cemetery (right); James Harper, All Saints, Sutton Forest Cemetery (below).





Private Thomas O'Brien, All Saints Cemetery, Sutton Forest (above); Gaolor Henry Forster and wife Margaret, Old Goulburn Cemetry (right)





Innkeeper and merchant Joseph Levy, Rookwood Jewish Cemetery (above); Police Constable Edward McCormick and wife Mary, Berrima Cemetery (right); Annie Levy (wife of storekeeper Lewis Levy), Berrima Cemetery (below).

