

## Rogues and Vagabonds and other family members

As the train pulled away from Dunedin station in a cloud of coal smoke she threw the sandwich out the window. “I’m not eating that muck”, she said in defiance, although not directed at anyone in



particular. Her young daughter beside her wondered at the comment and her husband frowned. He wouldn't say a word though. He knew better. After all, it had been his idea to stop in Dunedin to bid farewell to one of his sister. And even in these post-war years it was still a long way from Invercargill to Wanganui with daughters, a puppy and ailing wife all crammed in a train carriage together.

Indeed the time spread out before him, like the fields of wheat rushing past the window, sweeping away in great swathes of yellow to the snow-capped mountains. The cabin was stuffy and too cramped to provoke her chagrin further, so he continued to concentrate on the fields and mountains. He hoped that his face portrayed the look of 'what a lovely morning; isn't the scenery interesting', instead of pretending he didn't hear the outburst at all.

Moira, with her long hair in twin plats and wearing a pretty new flowery dress, looked up to her Mum, who now also appeared to be staring out into space. That looked like a rather nice sandwich Auntie had made, Moira thought. Why would a sandwich make Mother so angry? She's never angry. Sometimes strict, like the time I spent my bus money on sweets and walked home instead, but never this. Moira too kept her question to herself. She wouldn't really ever understand the cause of the outburst she saw that day back in 1948.

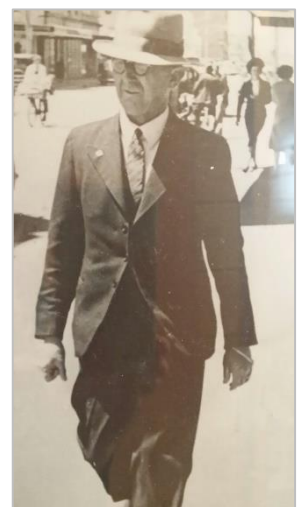
When older Moira would surmise that something had passed between her mother and the Heslin Aunties. Quite what she never knew. So, this then is the story of a family rift, born perhaps from a mistake a young Mataura lad made many, many years ago...

### 1910, Mataura

The year is 1910 and John Francis Heslin (Jock to his mates) is eighteen; a keen rugby player in the local team that his Dad coaches. He is not overly tall, but wiry and fast. It wasn't just rugby he followed his father into, but the Mataura paper mill as well, where he has worked for the past year or so, training as a carpenter. He and Annie have been stepping out together for a while now. Annie is from one of the other established families of Mataura; the Henery's. And like Jock she too is Catholic with an Irish Catholic father and many siblings.

Annie is just a couple of years younger than Jock. It seems as if they've known each other for years really, and they have. Primary school together; her brothers in same rugby club; fathers both involved in the local council together. Mataura is a small community; everyone knows everyone else.

In fact, that right there, is the problem. Everything is known. His whole life is mapped out before him, but everything is about to change. The storm clouds of war are looming over this sleepy Otago township. Jock makes a break for it and heads north – first to a carpentry apprenticeship in the Wairarapa and then to enlist and on to the battlegrounds of northern Europe. When he returns to Mataura it will be almost ten years later. And this time he will have a young English lass called Lily and new baby on his arm and the rest, as they say, is family history.



However, somewhere along the way Jock has left a dark secret behind him. His girl back home was 'in the family way', and instead of introducing his lovely young family to the welcoming arms of his family, they returned to stony faces of judgement.

Now there could be two possible reasons for the frosty reception Lily's daughter witnessed all those years later. And let me say that it wasn't everyone in Jock's family who reacted in this way either. However, it is likely that Jock's sister Nellie disapproved of him leaving Annie in such a state. No doubt they grew up with Annie too and it can't have been easy to face the evidence of his illegitimate child appearing in their community when he was off at war. The other possibility is the prejudice towards war brides which seemed to slip ashore with the returned servicemen and their new wives.

### 1920, Post War New Zealand

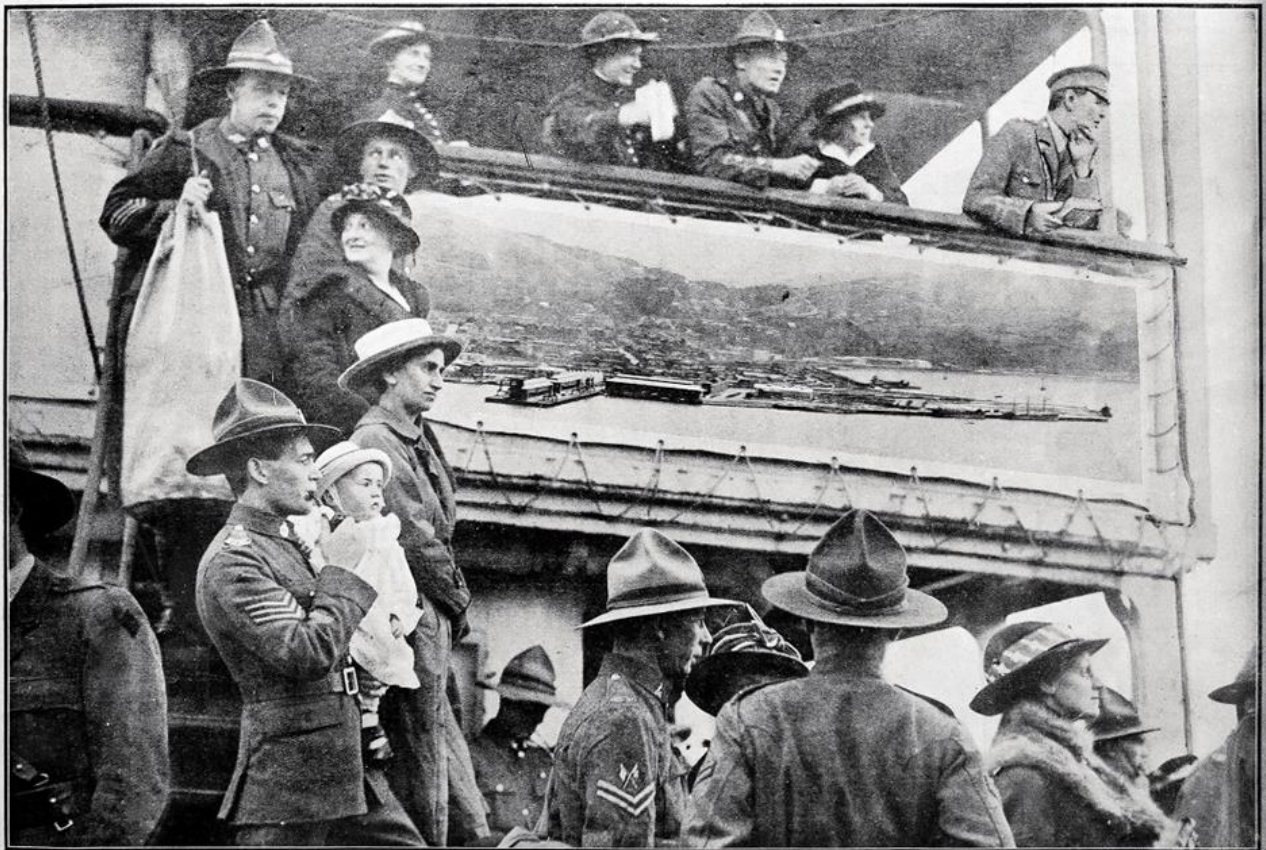
The Great War had taught Kiwis something new about themselves. On the battlefields of Gallipoli and Passchendaele as well as back home the nation found her identity and her voice and she wasn't shy about using it. Whether it was dairy trade with England or the returning war brides New Zealanders were eager to share their strong opinions.

Reading the papers of the time it seemed that almost an entire nation was set against women war brides like Lil. When the New Zealand Government made the decision to transport the newly made 'war brides' home on ships like the passenger steamers Athentic and Ruapehu in 1920 they probably didn't realise the can-o-worms they had opened. And at first there is support and excitement in the air over the returning ready-made-families. In March 1919, this article ran in the local newspaper, the Matura Ensign. It asked;

#### The War Bride.

Young Cupid is a marksman poor  
Despite his love and kisses,  
For though he always hits the mark,  
He's always making Mrs.

*"What kind of girls are our soldier boys marrying in the Old Country?"*



THEIR FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE NEW HOME: ARRIVAL OF SOLDIERS' WIVES FROM ENGLAND LAST WEEK.

It goes on to say that a very reliable source, 'Sister Scott' who had just returned on the ship *Ruapehu*, found she had expected the women to be a rather "poor class of girls", however they were nice girls and didn't deserve the hostile reception they had received in Wellington. The article highlights the biased views some Kiwi's already held before the returning ships even arrived here.

The war brides who returned to the Dominion by the *Ruapehu* are said to be a splendid stamp of womanhood. Most of the new arrivals are English girls, whose ages range from 18 to 25 years. What impressed the nurses most was the care which the mothers exercised over their children, most of whom were little tots with plenty of smiles and ample lung power.

Other articles and letters were not as kind. These transport ships were seen by some as an injustice to the families of the boys not yet home. Why was priority given to a woman and child over the needs of a returning soldier? More to the point, why should these foreign women be given special treatment when there were plenty of young girls left behind who had to cope on their own? After all Kiwi lasses had stepped into the shoes of their men taking up jobs in factories and

offices all over the country; where was their government support? Some felt usurped by the newcomers; relegated back to their parents' home without even a thank you for their efforts and worse still, cheated of a husband by the Pommie women! Sentiment ran high.

In one letter a home-soldier's bride writes "I think it is absolutely unfair to the mothers, wives and children that these women be allowed to come out to this country before the fathers, husbands and sons of our own New Zealand women...evidently we are to take second place!". In another; "it is not 'all honey' for a girl returning on a transport...seldom a word of praise is spoken of these girls". And another from a "Soldiers Sister" this time; "Behind it all is a feeling that our boys have been filched from us! We must stand aside and take second place to a total stranger".

Now imagine that last quote was from one of Jock's sisters. While I doubt they would have taken such a hard line; clearly there was some ill feeling already in place when she arrived in Matura. It certainly would explain, in part, the sentiment Lil encountered. And even the brides themselves became worried about their welcome, some admitting to reporters "we had heard you would throw eggs at us", but perhaps it was harsh words, rather than eggs, that made a greater mark on these women's lives.

There are worse things for a War Bride in New Zealand than just a harsh tongue or poison pen. There were the less fortunate; the ones promised the world, only to be left destitute and lonely many thousands of miles from their homeland.

As early as 1920 there is one such case; that of Mrs Durant, a young English war bride who is ill-treated by her new Kiwi husband. Even on the ship home he preferred the company of two-up dice and card games and beat her when she complained of neglect. On arrival in Auckland her new in-laws treated her unkindly too. They did not welcome the new Mrs Durant, but instead the mother-in-law went through the girls' meagre collection of things and took away her small purse as payment for lodgings! Mrs Durant won her case of mistreatment in the courts, but at what greater cost one wonders.

And then there is the outrageous story of a philanderer who left his war bride in an appalling state. In 1919 Jane Errington returned to Matura on the arm of her young chap. They had met in Durham, England and married two weeks later. He promised a quiet life on the farm back home and

#### WAR BRIDES

As an English war bride and an ex-servicewoman of the last war, I, too, found resentment on arrival. During this war one is grateful that New Zealand children have safety, sunshine and the good food of this Dominion, but there is also a sadness at the intolerance and uncharitable gossip of many to whom the war apparently means little. This is a new country with great possibilities; may a dawning maturity give the women of New Zealand a deeper international sympathy and understanding so that they may with an open mind welcome the coming brides, who have known the suffering and strain of total war.

WAR BRIDE.

initially all seemed well. They moved from Matura to Invercargill and had six children by 1925, when her husband is arrested and sentenced to three years in jail for relations with a minor – a sixteen year old girl. Five years later he is barely back at home when he disappears again; this time off to find work in Dunedin. He doesn't return or send word though, leaving his wife destitute with their young one in her arms. She calls on the police to find him and send him home, but instead what they discover is a lot worse than she bargained for. Edward has married another girl (younger of course) in Dunedin and now he is also up on charges of Bigamy. Jane is so distraught in the courtroom she has to be sedated.

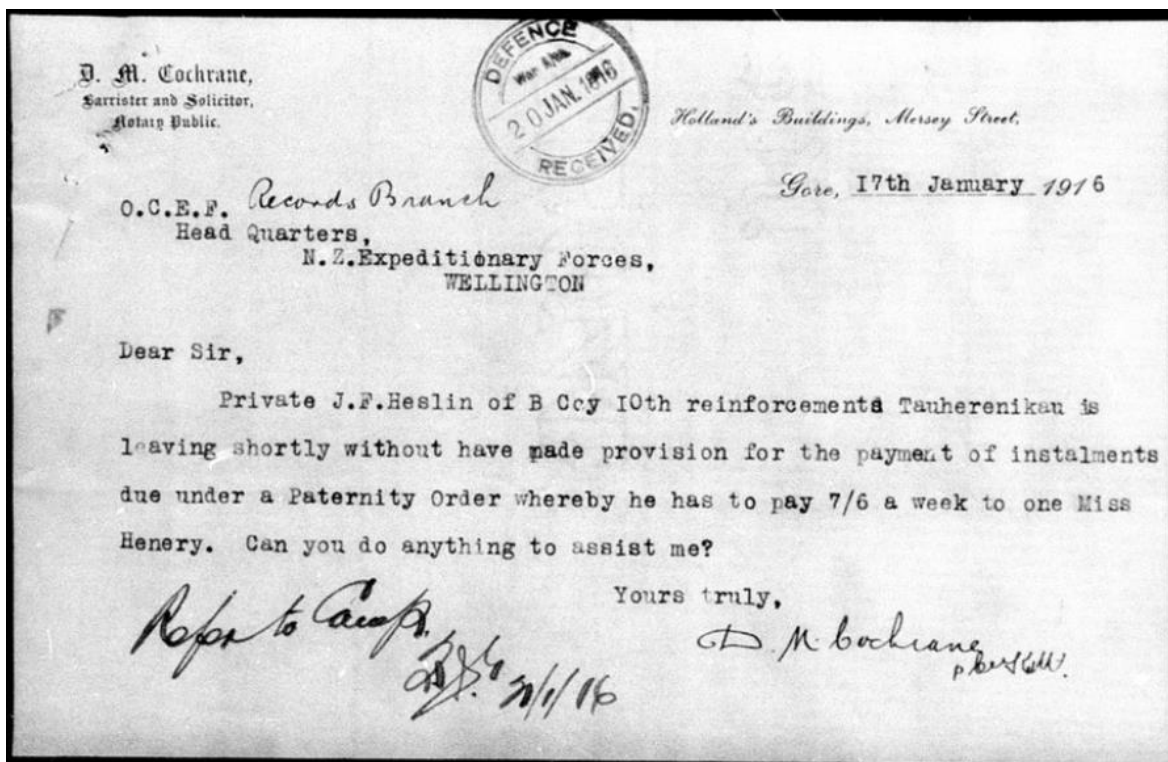
Is this what she traded her English home and family for? And what does this offender have to do with our story? Well he is Edward Henery, Annie's brother! Ironically, he later tries to escape prison, receiving another nine months hard labour, labelled an 'incorrigible rogue'. Perhaps he should have escaped this relationship way back in Durham in 1918 – before it had begun.

ESCAPED FROM PRISON.  
Edward John Henery, aged 31, was charged  
with being an incorrigible rogue in that

In 1918 Lily was one of those women, like Jane Errington, planning to head to New Zealand 'for love'. She wasn't intending to go back either; her home was with Jock now, but how much more comfortable that home could have been if she'd been welcomed by the whole family.

I know what it is like to be turn up out of the blue in a new country and a new family. It can be overwhelming. Twenty five years ago my own fears on meeting my prospective in-laws and new sisters melted away in the warm embrace of Shirley Callaghan. Just a few days after meeting, as I stood in their little church on Sunday in between John and Audrey my heart welled up with the rising music and voices around me. I knew I was the lucky one for now I had two places to call home and two families to call my own.

I wish it had been this way for Lil as well. Instead, she no doubt missed her own siblings and struggled to find comfort with some of Jock's family. Her sense of 'home' was found within her own four walls and in the delight and comfort of her husband and children. Was it really her status as a foreigner and a war bride that resulted in the unwarranted animosity or was it something else?





### **Leaving Annie behind with an illegitimate child**

There is a sense in hearing about Jock from his youngest daughter that he and Lil had no secrets between them. After all they had confronted the worst, lost loved ones and seen the ugly face of war up close. In coming home to Mataura it is very likely that Jock would have told her of his child born out of wedlock with Annie. After all he had known about the child shortly after enlistment when the lawyers tracked him down through the army. Little Rose Mary Henery would have been nearly seven by the time they came home. She and Annie had moved on with her mother marrying the same year Jock returned from the war and they moved away to Dunedin.

Why is this the dark secret in our family? These days in New Zealand having a child with your partner is usually born of love. It isn't illegal; it isn't shameful; it isn't a secret. A hundred years ago though it was a very different story.

### **Illegitimacy – from Protection to Shame**

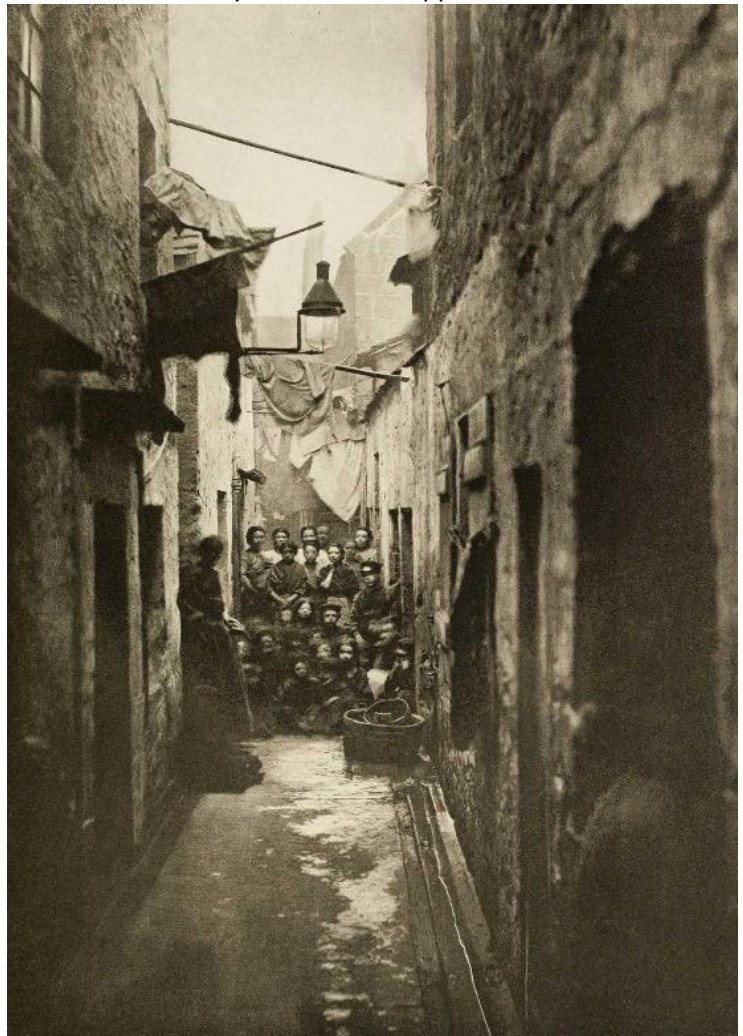
It may be a surprise to hear that the English laws of inheritance and illegitimacy has its origins in the desire to protect the mother and child and provide financial support. A mother having a child on her own would not be able to cope. So, as early as 1575 a father could be ordered by the authorities to pay maintenance to the woman. However, if the man had disappeared then the community the church stepped in.

One such case in my husband's family centres on young Jane Black, born 1838 of Kirk Michael, Isle of Mann. She went up before the parish council a number of times to clarify who the fathers of her five children were! This wasn't all that unusual in those times and wasn't necessarily frowned upon either. Although illegitimacy rates were low (around 1-2%) in England all that changed with the Industrial Revolution.

With Industrialisation the nature of 'community' altered. People gravitated toward the cities in a mass migration which saw the principal of 'care by your community' unsustainable. Sure the city governors and the church tried to provide, but a huge surge in population combined with devastating poverty made it nearly impossible to care for 'ones own'.

### **The shame**

It is true that time and context varies the 'rightness' of a situation. Over time the focus of illegitimacy laws changed and prevention was deemed the better approach. Better to deter than to pay for the care of the unwanted child after arrival. So shame came to the forefront. It had always been there –



*Figure 1 In the new industrial cities, the poor were housed in unhygienic and overcrowded slums. Disease and death became common. This photograph shows the tenements of Glasgow in 1868, some of the most squalid slums in Britain.*

in varying degrees in communities and cultures, but now it really had its day.

In fact the law even stated that a mother could be jailed if she refused to give the name of the father!

In most cases, if the girls family had the means she went away to have her child; or later still, in the twentieth century, she could be sent to those dreadful institutions like the Magdalene Houses; homes for unwed mothers and wayward girls. It has seemed that the responsibility or blame has always lain with the women. I suppose this is because she bears the obvious sign of the sin just as the Latin phrase states *mater semper certa est*; the “mother is always certain”. Therefore hers is the moral dilemma to deal with.

Sometimes the family helped. I like to think that in the case of Annie Henery her family were there for her. Her child was born on her father’s farm in Waimumu, just outside Matura with her sister Isabella there to witness and later register the birth for her. I wonder what little Rose knew of her father growing up. Perhaps she had been told that her father died in the war. Perhaps instead she, unlike her half-sister Moira, knew the truth, although that seems unlikely in 1920’s New Zealand.

What does this have to do with Lily and Jock though? Why the cold shoulder for Lil? We already know that Lil was a good person; slow to anger, incredibly loving and she wanted nothing more in her life than to live quietly in the protective arms of her husband and watch their children grow. How was the shame hers to carry too? May we surmise that Lil was perhaps seen as the reason Jock didn’t come home to Annie and make her a ‘respectable woman’. And if Annie’s childhood friends were the Heslin girls then maybe that goes some way to explain the cool welcome?

One thing is clear, her sister-in-laws missed out on knowing someone very special. They will have also missed out on their brother’s affection as well as knowing many of their nieces and nephews. Just who, in the story then is the rogue; was it the young Jock who appeared to ‘run away to war’; Annie for not being such a good little Catholic girl; Edward Henery, already labelled an “incorrigible rogue” by the papers of the day? Or was it Jocks sisters for not making the best of the relationship with Lily?

Jock’s secret is out now though. As Moira said this week; this is all part of our family history; “it is who we are and where we came from”. By shining a light on these skeletons then perhaps they will no longer haunt our family tree and we can start to mend this hundred year old rift. Until next time then, when we uncover more **“Rogues and Vagabonds and other family members”**.



Figure 2 Jock and Lil with Frank and Bunny (baby on her knee)