

AN O'BRIEN GRAVE IN BRIGHTON CEMETERY

Twenty years ago, when I first started researching my family history, I went searching for the grave of my grandmother, Dorothy Vera O'Brien Colenso Collins (1902-1954) in Melbourne's Brighton Cemetery. She was buried with her brother William O'Brien (1892-1892). As there was no mention of her on the gravestone I ordered the burial records for the plot and found a mystery that has taken years to resolve.



There had been four internments in the grave, that was initially purchased by Mrs Charlotte O'Brien (nee Ryan), the wife of Michael O'Brien. Marjory Wishart was one of their granddaughters and Dorothy was their youngest daughter.

At the time of Dorothy's death her brother Joseph Herbert O'Brien was still living and had been the executor of his mother's estate and authorised her internment in the family grave. She had been divorced by her husband Rupert Natal Colenso in 1942 and had changed her name, as well as her children's, to Collins.

3410	William O'Brien (1892-1892)	Child of Michael O'Brien & Charlotte Ryan
4889	Mary O'Brien (1876-1903)	Born at sea on the coast of NZ
6452	Marjory Lilian Wishart (1910-1910)	Child of William John Wishart & Mary Ellen O'Brien
	1928	Kerbing & tablet added
47470	Dorothy Collins (1902-1954)	Of 141 Wellington St Windsor, daughter of Michael O'Brien and Charlotte Ryan

The surprise was Mary O'Brien. From her death certificate Mary was the daughter of Daniel O'Brien and Margaret Carmody, and she died of heart disease in the Women's Hospital on July 6, two hours after she was admitted. She was 27 years old and had been in Victoria for 7 weeks. The internment notice recorded that she had been born at sea, off the coast of New Zealand.

The New Zealand Tablet reported on August 13, 1903.¹

A cable message announcing the death of Miss M. O'Brien, eldest daughter of Mr. Daniel O'Brien, of Addison's Flat, was received on the 9th inst. The deceased who had been in business in Westport for some time past, left for Sydney several weeks ago to visit her relatives. The unexpected intelligence announcing her decease came as a great shock to her father and family, who in their bereavement have the sympathy of a wide circle of friends in the Buller district.—R.I.P.

Mary O'Brien had boarded the *TSS Moeraki* at Wellington and arrived in Melbourne on May 24, 1903. She was listed as Miss O'Brien, 24, single and categorised as a labourer/domestic. The relatives were Michael O'Brien, who was living, with his wife Charlotte and large family, in Hotham street St Kilda. However, the death certificate indicates that while her usual residence was New Zealand her address in Melbourne was in the Smith Ward, a municipal district based around Smith street in Collingwood.

The Women's Hospital was on the corner of Grattan and Swanston Streets in Carlton. It was founded in 1856 and was originally located in a rented house in Albert Street, East Melbourne, but in

¹ The NZ Tablet was a Catholic periodical published weekly in Dunedin from 1873 to 1996. It was set up to represent the interests of Catholics throughout NZ.

1858 it moved to its own site in Madeline (now Swanston) St Carlton. It was originally called the Lying-in Hospital and Infirmary for Diseases Peculiar to Women and Children, but this was cut back to the Women's Hospital and then in 1954 it became the Royal Women's Hospital. In its early days the hospital was intended for very poor women - those who absolutely could not afford any private medical or midwifery attention.

Her parents Daniel and Margaret O'Brien had sailed to Nelson on the iron full-rigged ship *Hannibal*, arriving June 9, 1875. The voyage was described in the *Colonist*², June 10, 1875:

The fine iron ship Hannibal, 1191 tons, classed at Lloyd's AA with star, Capt Brown, arrived on June 9 from London, after a very successful voyage of 92 days from port to port, and 81 days from land to land. On Tuesday, June 8, she was sighted from the Pilot station, and on the following morning the Charles Edward, with the Health Officer (Dr Squires), the Immigration Officer (Mr Elliott), the Provincial Secretary (Mr O'Conor), and the representative of this journal on board, proceeded down the Bay, and towed her to the anchorage. Captain Brown reports leaving Gravesend on the 9th March, and was towed to the Downs; passed through the Downs on the 13th, and discharged her pilot off the Lizard on the 16th. This was the last land sighted, and in nineteen days from that date she crossed the Equator in 29 degs. W longitude. She experienced good NE trades, but instead of falling in with the SE trades had but light variable winds, which lasted to the meridian of the Cape, which she passed on the 49th day after leaving the Lizard, in the latitude 39 degs S. She ran her easting between the degrees of 40 and 48, with strong winds; rounded Tasmania on the 30th May, and made Cape Farewell on the 5th June, but adverse winds prevented her making the anchorage till the above day.

The Surgeon (Dr Russell) seems to have had his hands full, no less than five cases of scarlatina and ten of gastric fever, besides many cases of minor ailments, having occurred during the voyage, but, happily, the issue of so much dangerous sickness was much more favourable than is the case on most immigrant ships; but one death occurred from disease, a child named Fanny Hault, having died on the 7th March from scarlatina. The first case of scarlatina broke out at Gravesend on the 13th March, and the last case was convalescent on the 17th May; the last case of gastric fever was convalescent on the 10th May. There was, however, one other death, that of a passenger names James Brewer, who was washed overboard and drowned on the 9th May. There were four births. We believe Dr Russell had charge of an emigrant ship which arrived at Wellington last year when the local papers spoke extremely well of the manner in which this gentleman had conducted his charge, and in the present instance he has been equally successful.

Of the captain and officers, the passengers all speak well, and a testimonial is in the course of preparation to those gentlemen, and we may add that the captain and officers likewise speak well of the emigrants.

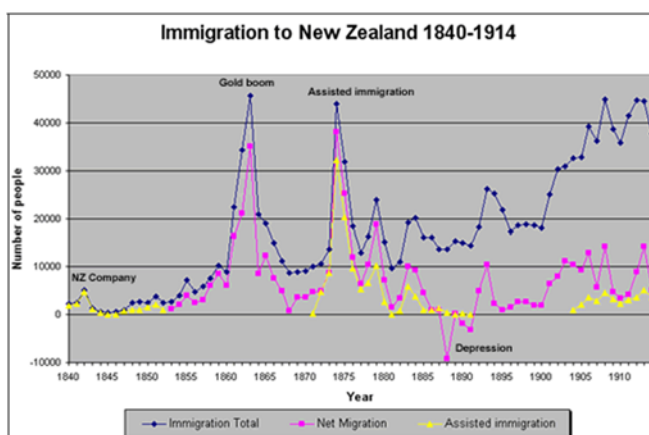
The ship will not come inside the harbor, as nearly the whole of the cargo is for Wellington, whither she will sail in a few days. The cabin passengers are the Rev Mr Wallace, Mr Hansard, and Misses Hansard (2). The number of emigrants with which she sailed was 209, or equal to 195 statute adults, and the number to be landed, including cabin passengers will be 201½ statute adults. Their disembarkation will take place this morning.

On the passenger list was Daniel O'Brien, aged 28, a farm labourer, from county Clare in Ireland. His wife, Margaret, was 27, also from county Clare. The passengers also included John O'Brien (19), John (26) and Patrick (24) Carmody, all single farm labourers from county Clare. They were all government assisted immigrants, part of the major immigrations of the 1870s and early 1880s.

² The *Colonist* was a newspaper established in Nelson in 1857. It continued until 1920. It is available on-line from Papers Past <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>

The history of emigration from Ireland is a complex story, often focussed on the failure of the potato crops between 1845 and 1848, and British government policy that used the Poor Laws to encourage starving agricultural workers and their families to leave Ireland. Reformation of agriculture with the consolidation of small-holdings resulted in elevated emigration numbers until around 1855/6. This trend continued with many of the younger sons leaving after the eldest son inherited the family farm. Emigration was so colossal that it has been estimated that roughly one in two people born in Ireland in the 19th century emigrated.

Most of the Irish migrated to the United States, but the end of convicts in the 1840s and the goldrush in Victoria in the 1850s attracted them to Australia. The goldrush in New Zealand in the 1860s diverted some to New Zealand. Both Australia and New Zealand offered assisted passages.



An earlier Irish immigrant to NZ may have been Daniel's brother Michael, who then boarded the steamship Gothenburg at Greymouth on the December 10, 1869, bound for Melbourne. He was 19 years old and a miner. On his death certificate in 1935 he was recorded as having been in Victoria for 64 years—this is the only passenger record I can find that comes close to being probable.

Daniel and Margaret settled at Addison's Flat, halfway between Westport and the goldmining town of Charleston, where Daniel was a miner or contractor.³

Gold was discovered at Addison's Flat in May 1867. The industry continued with varying success, with several claims still being worked in the early 1900s. In its heyday there were between three thousand and four thousand men gold digging in the vicinity. By 1901 the population was 208. Now everything, but the cemetery, has disappeared. The township gained notoriety as the site of a sectarian riot between Protestants and Irish Catholics in April 1868, which became known as "The Battle of Addisons Flat."

In the previous month a procession, led by a priest, had marched to Hokitika cemetery to erect a Celtic Cross to honour the memory of three Fenians executed in Manchester. On St Patrick's day there had been another peaceful procession. After the attempted assassination of the Duke of Edinburgh on March 12 in Sydney, Irish leaders in Hokitika were arrested on charges of riot and seditious libel. At this time as party of non-Irish men marched into Addisons, singing patriotic songs and were met by a hail of stones by assembled Irishmen and were forced to retreat. The local warden, Kynnersley, diffused the situation and reported that "*all the wounds received did not require ten inches of sticking plaster, and all the property destroyed would be well paid by a ten pound note.*"⁴

³ Described as a miner on Helena's birth certificate and Mary's death certificate. He was shown as a contractor on the electoral rolls.

⁴ "The Battle of Addison's Flat, 1868", from An Encyclopedia of New Zealand, edited by A H McLintock, originally published in 1966.

URL: <http://.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/riots/page-2> (accessed 03 Feb 2018)

The couple had married in the May 1874 (on the 4th or 5th) in Scarriff, part of the diocese of Killaloe in county Clare⁵. Their children, all daughters, were:

- Mary Ann, born at sea off the coast of NZ, May 31, 1875.
- Margaret Mary, born February 12, 1878, baptised at Charleston February 17, 1878.
- Helena Veronica, born October 1, 1880, baptised at Addison's Flat October 10, 1880.⁶
- Catherine Winifred, born August 23, 1883, baptised September 8, 1883 at Charleston.

Margaret Carmody O'Brien died in Addison's Flats on April 10, 1899. She was buried in the local cemetery.

Helena (Lena) married Michael Joseph McNamara on October 29, 1907 in St Patrick's Church in Addison's Flat with Father Bergin as the celebrant. The groom was the son of Patrick McNamara of Limerick, Ireland and the nephew of the late very Rev. Dean William Joseph Mahoney (1848-1903) who administered the Catholic community in Nelson for nearly thirty years. The wedding was described in the NZ Tablet, with an emphasis on gold:

The bride, who was given away by her father, was attired in white silk, and wore the customary wreath and veil. Miss Kate O'Brien, the sister of the bride, acted as bridesmaid. She wore a gold cross and chain, the gift of the bridegroom. The bridegroom's gift to the bride was a gold watch and chain, and the bride's gift to the bridegroom a set of gold sleeve-links.

They had a son Brian Patrick in 1914, then moved to Cambridge in the Waikato in 1917 and ran a boarding house called the Carlton in Queen street. They had a daughter Mary Catherine in 1921.

Catherine (Kate) married a journalist called Harry Joseph Keogh Peters on December 29, 1909, presumably at Addison's as it was also performed by Father Bergin. The groom worked for the NZ Tablet. From his WW1 records he was born in Gorey, Wexford, Ireland and had served in the Cape Mounted Police in South Africa for 5 years, leaving of his own accord. This unit was dissolved in 1913, but obviously he had left before 1909. There is a Mr H Peters, aged 20, listed as a passenger on the Raglan Castle, leaving



St Patrick's Catholic Church Addison's Flat, c 1900

⁵ The marriage details are on the birth certificate of their daughter Helena.

⁶ Helena's name on her birth certificate looks like Eleanor and has been transcribed as Cleanso in the NZ BMD Historical Index. This caught my eye as Colenso is my father's surname. Cleanso could be a misspelling and connected to William Colenso, a noted pioneer of NZ.

Southampton on January 11, 1902, disembarking at the Cape. His occupation was given as "CMR", probably a member of the Cape Mounted Rifles, a unit aligned with the Cape Mounted Police.

He enlisted in the NZ Expeditionary Force twice, on both occasions his surname was given as Keogh:

- November 1, 1915 until May 30, 1916 marked for service in NZ only, described as having a poor physique. He was a sergeant with the Hospital Records Office, leaving after his own application.
- Joined again July 18, 1918 and demobilised March 24, 1919. Again, he was with the NZ Medical Corps.

His wife, as next-of-kin, was described as Mrs Peters Keogh and her address was Addison's Westport. Their three children Gerard (b.1910), Margaret (b.1912) and Daniel (b.1915) are also listed. The first was born in Wellington and the last two in Dunedin.

Kate and Harry appear to have separated sometime before 1919, as Harry was living in Dunedin and Kate in Addison's. Then the NZ Tablet reports her death in the issue of September 2, 1920:

With very sincere regret the death is recorded of Mrs. Keogh Peters, who passed away at the Hamilton Hospital on August 16, after a severe illness of four weeks, borne with Christian fortitude. She was attended during her illness by the Rev. Father Dore, of Hamilton, and fortified by all the last sacred rites of the Holy Church, having received Holy Communion on the Sunday morning before her death. The late Mrs Peters went to Cambridge about 11 months ago, and opened up a business as a draper and dressmaker. By her kind and cheery nature she made a great many friends. The deceased was the youngest daughter of Mr Daniel O'Brien, late of Addisons, West Coast, and now of Cambridge, and a sister of Mrs Michael McNamara, of the "Carlton," Cambridge, and of Miss Maggie O'Brien, of Cambridge. She leaves three little children to mourn the loss of a kind and loving mother. The Rev. Father Dore officiated at the graveside. Much sympathy is extended to the bereaved relatives. — R.I.P.

Their son Daniel Henry, aged 6, died in July 1921.

On August 5, 1924 Harry Joseph Peters, also known as Marcus Joseph Patrick Keogh, cut the throat of his 16-month son, Desmond Collins Peters. He had been caring for his son and three younger daughters while his wife was working and the eldest daughter, 6½, was at school. When his wife and daughter returned the baby was lying in his cot cover by a rug. Harry was sitting in the kitchen and admitted that he had done it. He told the Police that he had intended to cut his own throat and thought it a pity to leave his only son behind.

At the inquest it was stated that Harry had spent a week in a Mental Hospital in May, but was discharged as not insane. He had been drinking a good deal of whiskey for 18-months prior to his hospitalisation. While he had cut-back on the alcohol, he was unable to find work as he was nervous and rundown.

He was committed to trial for murder, but was acquitted as the jury decided, within ten minutes, that he was insane when he committed the act. He was placed in custody at the discretion of the Minister of Justice. He died in March 1926 at the Oakley Hospital, a psychiatric hospital at Point Chevalier.

If the elder daughter was genetically his, then he was separated from Kate O'Brien around 1918, but only formalised his second relationship after her death. He married Kathleen Lillian Ventry Smith in 1921. On his military history sheet his next of kin is named as his wife, living in Addison's, while he gave the name of the woman he married as "Miss Kathleen O'Brien" – maybe his de facto relationship was the source of his confusion with the names.

He was described in the newspapers as "42 years of age, a slightly built man, ruddy faced, with grey hair, and when he appeared in the dock had a far-away vacant look in his eyes."

Kate's remaining two children, Gerard and Margaret Mary, were raised by her sisters in Cambridge, using the surname Keogh-Peters. They both married and had children.

Daniel's death was reported in the NZ Tablet July 5, 1923.

MR DANIEL O'BRIEN, ADDISON'S FLAT

On Saturday, the 9th ult., there passed away at the District Hospital, one of Westport's most respected identities in the person of Mr. Daniel O'Brien (writes a correspondent). Deceased was born at Killaloe, Ireland, in the year 1849, and came to New Zealand 47 years ago, making his home at Addison's Flat. During his life he gave evidence of his strong faith by devotedness to his religious duties. When his end was drawing near he was constantly attended by Rev. Father Sweeney, who gave him all the consolations of Holy Church, while the Sisters of the local convent visited him frequently. He was predeceased by his wife twenty-three years ago, and his youngest daughter—(Katie), Mrs Keogh-Peters—two years back. Two daughters—Miss Maggie O'Brien (Westport) and Mrs McNamara (Cambridge) are the surviving members of his family, to whom it is extended the deep sympathy of the community. On Monday morning (June 11) Requiem Mass for the repose of his soul was celebrated at St. Canice's Church, and later his remains were laid to rest beside his wife's in the Addison's Cemetery—RIP.

On his death certificate his occupation was given as a miner. His wife had been Margaret Carmody, but his parents are listed as unknown, although his father's occupation is given as a farmer, which is consistent with Michael O'Brien's death certificate in 1935. His birthplace was given as Killaloe in county Clare.

Whether Michael and Daniel O'Brien were brothers is not proven by the records. That they were close relatives is probable as Daniel's daughter Mary was buried with Michael's infant son in the Brighton Cemetery. Michael's parents were Michael O'Brien and Margaret O'Brien (nee O'Brien). He had an elder brother called Denis christened in 1846, who may have inherited the farm in Ireland, while the other boy(s) left for the New World – a frequent occurrence at the time in Ireland.



Daniel's grandson Pilot Officer Brian Patrick McNamara lost his life, during air operations, while serving with the Royal Air Force. He had paid his own fare to England in May 1939 and joined the RAF in August, just before the outbreak of war. He served as a bomber pilot, taking part in regular raids over Germany, including twenty-five raids with No.75 (NZ) Squadron, piloting Vickers Wellingtons.

On January 10, 1941, Brian left RAF Feltwell, in a Wellington, to conduct a night flying test. He and his crew successfully completed the test and were flying to RAF Bassingbourn to collect a new pilot. However, the weather was poor, visibility limited, so after descending to determine their position the aircraft hit trees. Of the six crew only the rear gunner survived, with serious injuries.

Brian was buried at St Nicholas' Churchyard Feltwell.

His father died in 1945 and his mother in 1959. His sister Mary was a member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in New Zealand. She later married, and her family was raised in the Waikato.

Margaret Mary O'Brien did not marry and died in Cambridge in 1961.



AN O'BRIEN GRAVE IN BRIGHTON CEMETERY

Appendix – Relevant NZ Electoral Roll Entries

1880-1881	Daniel O'Brien	Addison's	Contractor
1882-1883	Daniel O'Brien	Addison's	Contractor
1885-1886	Daniel O'Brien	Addison's	Contractor
1894-1895	Daniel O'Brien	Addison's	Contractor
1896	Daniel O'Brien Margaret O'Brien	Addison's Addison's	Contractor Married woman
1897	Daniel O'Brien Margaret O'Brien	Addison's Addison's	Contractor Married woman
1899	Daniel O'Brien Mary Ann O'Brien	Addison's Addison's	Contractor Spinster
1900	Daniel O'Brien Margaret O'Brien	Addison's Addison's	Contractor Domestic duties
1903	Daniel O'Brien Helena O'Brien	Addison's Addison's	Contractor
1905-1906	Daniel O'Brien Helena O'Brien Kate Winifred O'Brien Margaret Josephine O'Brien	Addison's Addison's Addison's Addison's	Contractor Spinster Spinster
1908	Daniel O'Brien Helena O'Brien Kate Winifred O'Brien Margaret Josephine O'Brien	Addison's Addison's Addison's Addison's	Contractor Spinster Spinster Spinster
1911	Daniel O'Brien Helena McNamara Patrick McNamara Harry Joseph Keogh	Addison's Addison's Addison's Wellington	Contractor Married woman Miner Journalist
1914	Daniel O'Brien Harry Joseph Peters Keogh Katherine Peters Keogh	Addison's Dunedin Dunedin	Contractor Journalist Married
1919	Daniel O'Brien Margaret Josephine O'Brien Katie Peters-Keogh Harry Joseph Peters Keogh	Addison's Addison's Addison's Dunedin	Contractor Spinster married Journalist
1922	Daniel O'Brien	Addison's	Contractor
1925	Michael Joseph McNamara Helena McNamara Margaret O'Brien	'The Carlton' Queen Street Cambridge	Boarding house keeper Married woman Spinster
1935	Michael Joseph McNamara Helena McNamara Margaret O'Brien	'Carlton' Queen Street Cambridge	Boarding house keeper Married woman Spinster