

Mylchreest family

OCOGS REFERENCE

THE MYLCHREESTS OF PEEL

INTRODUCTION

Before writing about the Mylchreests who lived in PEEL in the early 1800's, I found it very helpful, and most interesting, to read about conditions in Peel at that time.

PEEL was developing from a fishing village of crofters' cottages. The narrow twisting streets were created from the tracks that went between the cottages. Shore Road was just such a track along the seafront, where there were about twelve of these cottages. It was in one of these that John Mylchreest and his family lived. The early crofters kept cattle and it was quite common to see these animals grazing right down to the waters edge.

The growth of the herring industry began in 1820 to a peak in 1850 and then a gradual decline by 1880. At its height over 2,000 men were engaged in this fishing and it was said that you could walk across the harbour on the decks of the herring boats.

In addition to the fishing boats themselves, all of which were built in Peel, a thriving ship building industry had developed. Vessels of all sizes up to schooners with two and three masts were built in PEEL. It is on record that a new vessel was launched in Peel every other week, in the mid 1800's. Together with this great activity in the shipyards went all the allied trades such as sail making, rope and net making, and prosperity in the Town was considerable.

When considering what it was like in PEEL at that time, it is interesting to realise that it was long before motor vehicles, trams, electricity and gas, or even good roads. It was easier to travel round the Island by boat than to face the long and slow journey by land. Entertainment was self generated and life in a community like PEEL must have been very localised.

In addition to those who went to sea for the fishing, many others went further afield. Many PEEL built ships travelled the world and trading with America and the West Indies was quite usual. The Navigation School in PEEL must have produced many highly skilled mariners.

With the decline of the herring fishing in the 1880's so too saw a contraction of the shipbuilding industry. The population of Peel began to drop and many young men and women began to emigrate from the Island.

By the end of the nineteenth century the life and activities of the Manx people began to change. They were moving away from their basic traditional fishing and crofting into the new era of Tourism.

It is however the PEEL before tourism that provides a fascination for me. It is this background that had to be considered when I decided to write about the Mylchreests of PEEL of that period in our history.

ORANGE COUNTY CALIFORNIA
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

The surname MYLCHREEST is pure MANX and of CELTIC origin. It most certainly began as MACGUILLEYCHREEST, "the Son of Christ's Servant", and was first recorded in the PEEL area in 1511. By 1718 it had become MYLCHREEST and was, and still is by some Manx, pronounced MOLLEYCHREEST.

Our own family can be traced from JOHN MYLCHREEST, who was born in PEEL in 1718. He had three children including THOMAS who was born in 1745, who in turn had four children including another JOHN born in 1771. This JOHN had three children including yet another JOHN who was born in 1805.

And so by the beginning of the nineteenth century we have a record of four generations of MYLCHREESTS, all born and bred in PEEL, and almost certainly all involved in seafaring.

When JOHN was born in 1805, it is known that his family lived in a cottage in SHORE road, almost on the beach. This cottage is no longer in existence, having been severely damaged in a storm on a winter's night.

The Island in 1805, the year of the battle of TRAFALGAR, was governed by JOHN MURRAY (later Duke) who was appointed by GEORGE III.

The Island must have been a quiet and interesting place at that time, when the harvesting of the sea and land was the main occupation of the Manx people.

With this introduction as background, the interesting story of JOHN MYLCHREEST (1805 - 1862) and his ten children, is now the purpose of these notes.

JOHN MYLCHREEST (1805 - 1862)

Very little has been recorded about the childhood of John Mylchreest and his older brother, who was known as "Thomas of Peel", and his sister Margaret, who was born in 1797. Margaret married a JOHN MORRISON in 1818 and there are probably descendants of her only daughter Catherine still around. John himself probably went to sea as a child and so missed any of the limited education that was available. This is proved by the fact that when John married CHRISTIAN MOORE on the 4th September 1825 in the Parish Church of GERMAN, in Peel, they both signed the Register with an X.

Fred Palmer in his History of Peel, states that at that time the Mylchreests were probably the best known family in the Shore Road area and were all involved in the sea. John was a very successful skipper of a PEEL fishing boat, as well as being a fine Captain of schooners and smacks. He was part owner and Master of the PEVERIL, a 71 ton Peel built vessel which traded round the coast of Britain. John and Christian Mylchreest produced a family of ten in their little cottage, five girls and five boys, at an average of one every second year between 1828 and 1848.

As it was customary to have large families in the nineteenth century, perhaps there was little else to do, it was also a problem to find jobs for them when they grew up. It was for this reason that many young Manxmen, including several Mylchreests, left their homeland to find work, and hopefully fame and fortune overseas.

Of John's ten children, six were to leave their Island home and four stayed behind. I wil do my best to follow the interesting lives of some of these young Mylchreests.

John himself died in CORK in Southern Ireland in 1862, presumably whilst on passage in his sailing ship, the PEVERIL. His widow CHRISTIAN, died in 1867 and is buried in PEEL New Cemetery.

The story of the PEVERIL is given in the life stories of the next generation of Mylchreests that follows.

MARGARET MYLCHREEST (SHEARD) (1828 - 1898)

The oldest of John and Christian Mylchreest's children was Margaret who was born on 13th January 1828. As the first child, and a girl, it seems likely that Margaret, as she grew up, would help her mother with the other children as they arrived and would attend the Clothworkers School in Peel. In 1853, at the age of twenty five, Margaret married DANIEL SHEARD, a near neighbour and family friend. The Sheard family were merchants in PEEL and also engaged in the busy shipbuilding activity of the town. Daniel Sheard also had a bakery in Market Street and was a boat owner. The Sheards had seven children including THOMAS and DANIEL and some of their families are still living on the Island. Thomas Mylchreest Sheard was born in 1857 and he had two sons, Alan and Tom, both of whom distinguished themselves in different ways. Alan became the General Manager of the Isle of Man Railway and Tom, before becoming a Motor Dealer in the Island, was a racing motor cyclist and won a T.T. race in 1920. The Sheard name continues with Alan's son, another Alan, who is an Architect and Surveyor in the Island today.

Another great character in the Sheard family was HARRIET (born in 1871 and the sixth of Daniel and Margaret's children), who ran a guest house in Peel for many years. A spinster all her life, Harriet was 'real Manx', with a delightful Manx accent and the writer's great regret is not to have recorded, during her lifetime, all that she knew of the Mylchreests of Peel.

CAPTAIN THOMAS MYLCHREEST (1830 - 1892)

Thomas Mylchreest was the second child, and first boy, of John and Christian Mylchreest, and was born in the family cottage in PEEL on the 30th May 1830. Details of his early childhood are sketchy but it is known that Thomas followed his father to sea at an early age. It seems certain that he would serve his apprenticeship in his father's schooner the PEVERIL and was a competent mariner and master in his own right by the time he was twenty four.

He married Annie Clarke, also of PEEL, but unfortunatly they had no children.

In 1856, together with his younger brother JOHN, who was born in 1832, he sailed from PEEL direct to AUSTRALIA in the schooner PEVERIL. This incredible adventure was probably Thomas's greatest achievement and should be described.

JOHN MYLCHREEST (1832 - 1888)

John Mylchreest who was born in PEEL in 1832, was the third child of John and Christian Mylchreest. It must be presumed that he also attended the Clothworkers School in Peel and most probably served an apprenticeship at the shipyard or as a deckhand with his father in the sailing ship PEVERIL. By the time John was sixteen, he had four brothers and five sisters, one born every other year in the period 1828 to 1848. It is not surprising therefore that John decided to emigrate to AUSTRALIA because there was just not enough work in the Island at that time for these large numbers of young people. Together with his older brother Thomas, he left the Island in 1856 on the epic journey in the PEVERIL, which is described elsewhere.

On arrival at Port Phillip, Melbourne in 1857, the brothers sold their ship and made their way to the BALLARAT Goldfields in search of fame and fortune. Luck was not with them, their money dwindling, so they moved to GYMPIE, but still they did not have the success they sought. At this stage the brothers decided to go their own ways, Thomas went back to sea and found his way home to the Isle of Man. John went up the Mary River and worked among the timber, rafting it down for sale to the sawmills. After a while, John decided to take up seafaring again. He bought a vessel and traded along the New South Wales and Queensland coasts, carrying a variety of cargoes including machinery for the new sugar mills in Queensland and equipment for the new Bowling Green Lighthouse.

In 1876 the Government of Queensland decided to establish a Port at CAIRNS, and it was natural, because of his considerable knowledge of that coast, that Captain John Mylchreest should be appointed the first Harbour Master and Pilot. John by this time had married and had three children, a son and two daughters. Unfortunately his son and one of his daughters died in their youth but his surviving daughter married and many of her descendants still live in Queensland to this day. This daughter, Mrs. Christina CROSBY, fortunately recorded in considerable detail, the activities of her father in those early pioneering days in CAIRNS.

JANE MYLCHREEST (1834 - 1915)

Jane was the fourth child of John and Christian Mylchreest and was born in the family cottage on 28th September 1834. Little is known of her early childhood, but her name appears on the Peel Census in 1841 as living at home, age six, together with her eldest sister Margaret, and four brothers, the youngest Joseph, age one. Her name appears again in the 1851 Census now shown as aged eighteen.

Between 1851 and the next Census in 1861, when her name does not appear, it is known that she married Charles Jones, whose origin is not known, except that he came from Wales, and emigrated with her husband to America, probably in the 1860's. The Jones family settled in Cleveland, Ohio, and had five children. Research is continuing as to the life style of Jane and her family and the writer is currently in correspondence with Jane's grandson, also Charles Jones, now retired and living in SARASOTA, FLORIDA. Certainly this Charles, who was born in 1905, has had an interesting and successful life. He was a Commander in the U.S. Navy in the Second World War and a Stock Broker in Cleveland for forty years before retirement.

Lured by the glowing accounts of fortunes to be made in the Australian Goldfields, the two Mylchreest boys obtained permission to take the PEVERIL to Australia and sell her on arrival. The PEVERIL was owned by eight citizens of PEEL at this time, including the boys' mother CHRISTIAN, whose share she had inherited when her husband JOHN died in CORK. And so Tom and John, together with two other PEEL boys, one named QUAYLE, set off in June 1856 on the long voyage. They arrived in PORT PHILLIP, MELBOURNE in March 1857. The arrival of these four young Manxmen caused great interest amongst the citizens of Melbourne and details of their daring and exciting voyage was reported in the local newspapers. The PEVERIL was sold to Arthur Devlin, a merchant of Melbourne, on the 25th March 1857, and this sturdy little Manx vessel survived a further twenty nine years in Australian waters, before she was finally wrecked in the Endeavour River, Queensland, in February 1884.

Tom and John Mylchreest made their way to the BALLARAT diggings and spent some time there. Luck was not with them so they moved on the GYMPIE, but still were not successful. At this point the brothers separated and Thomas found his way home to the Isle of Man where he settled. It is known that Thomas was Master of the Peel built schooner WESTERN MAID in 1876. This sturdy vessel of 147.99 tons, with two masts, carvel built, had a load capacity of 250 tons. She was built by Henry Graves who also managed her on the many voyages to America and the Mediterranean over a period of 27 years.

Under Thomas's command and with a crew of seven, the Western Maid left TROON on the 5th September 1876 on voyage to MALAGA returning to PRESTON in January 1877. With the exception of two, all the crew were Manx, the youngest being John Rooney of Peel, age 17.

On the 15th May 1877, the Western Maid left Glasgow on a typically adventurous voyage which took her to the Mediterranean and then across the Atlantic. The Master's orders for the voyage, issued in GLASGOW on sailing day, tell the story:-

"Voyage: GLASGOW to GIBRALTAR, CADIZ and thence to NEWFOUNDLAND, and/or LABRADOR thence to MEDITERRANEAN Sea, to and from, as may be required until the ship returns to a final port of discharge in U.K., with liberty to call at Port for orders. Probable period of engagement - 12 months. The crew on board to be sober at all times stated or the master may ship others in their place. No spirits allowed. Signed Thomas Mylchreest, 15th May 1877."

It is recorded that the vessel left CADIZ on the 27th June 1877 and was in ST. JOHNS, Newfoundland on the 8th August 1877 where one young crew member was put ashore being "unfit to proceed". Back in LEGHORN on 31st October 1877, the Western Maid under Thomas's command, carried out further voyages between the Mediterranean and the U.K., several of which appear to have seen the vessel on the run from SPAIN to LONDON, presumably with wine as cargo, and on which large prizes were offered for the first vessel to arrive in port. As the WESTERN MAID was a fast ship, she was first home on a number of occasions.

After leaving the sea it is understood that Thomas Mylchreest became a merchant in PEEL, he purchased GLENASPET in Patrick where he lived. He died in 1892, aged 60, and is buried in PEEL New Cemetery with his wife ANNIE.

WILLIAM MYLCHREEST (1837 - 1901)

William Mylchreest was born in PEEL on 23rd February 1837 and was the fifth child of John and Christian. Unfortunately little is known about William's life and how he fared. He lived with his family in childhood and is shown on the PEEL Census of 1841, aged four and again in 1851 aged fourteen. By 1861, when he would have been twenty-four, he had left home. Hopefully one day the writer will pick up his trail. There is a possibility that William went to England and it is a fact that here were Mylchreests in the Liverpool area before the turn of the Century. It must be hoped that William had a successful life. At least it is recorded that he died in 1901 when he would have been sixty-four.

JOSEPH MYLCHREEST (1839 - 1896)

Joseph Mylchreest was the sixth child of John and Christian Mylchreest and was born in the family cottage in PEEL on the 15th September 1839.

Of the ten children that were born into this family, Joseph was probably the most successful. The exploits of this quite remarkable man have been well recorded and his life's story would probably provide sufficient material for a book by itself. For the purpose of these notes however, which are produced to give a picture of the whole of this particular family, then an abbreviated story will suffice.

Joseph was educated at Grawe's School in Peel. He had a reputation at school of not being an attentive scholar, but was a "lively lad" and fond of the outdoor life and fun. On leaving school he served a five year apprenticeship as a carpenter at Grawe's Shipyard. The narrow routine of this life and trade did not suit young Joseph, who was a young man of great energy and strength. It was not surprising that a restless longing for adventure, combined with a personal ambition to prosper, persuaded young Joseph to leave his native Peel and seek fame and fortune in the big world outside. It is interesting to note that Joseph had a short excursion into matrimony before leaving his native Island. At the age of eighteen, he married Catherine Skelly of Foxdale in Patrick Church on the 14th November 1857. There was a daughter to this marriage, Jamina Jane, who later married Henry Lawson and went to live in England, unfortunately Catherine died only a few days after her birth. Jamina Jane Lawson did not have any children. Joseph then left the island, soon after his first marriage, and first went to the West Coast of Africa. His intention was to seek his fortune in the gold rushes that were developing all over the world.

In 1860 he arrived in Australia where prospecting was taking place in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. Unsuccessful, he moved on to the new gold fields in New Zealand. Still not satisfied, he went next to California from where he travelled to British Columbia. From North America he moved on to South America and became engaged in the tin mines of Bolivia, Peru and Chile. It was whilst in CALLAO that he read an article in the "New York World" about the new diamond fields being developed in South Africa. He decided immediately

that that was where he would go. Travelling via Australia, where he met his brother John, who was already there, he arrived in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in the Autumn of 1876, aged thirty five, and fifteen years after leaving home. From now on Joseph's rise to fame and fortune was dramatic.

He went by bullock wagon to KIMBERLEY with his tent and camping gear and only sufficient money left to buy some tobacco. After setting up camp, he went to work as a carpenter, opening a shop in which he was reasonably successful. But it was diamonds that he was seeking. He hired a small claim and worked hard. Gradually this strong, energetic Manxman began to prosper and during the next ten years became the owner of 115 claims on the DUTOITSPAN mine in KIMBERLEY. He employed over a thousand men and his operation was the largest in the Diamond fields at that time. He found one particular diamond of 199 carats which was valued then at £100,000, needless to say this was known as the "Mylchreest Diamond". In 1886 he paid a visit to his native Peel, in order to plan his retirement and return to the Island in due course. He sold his claims in the Dutoitspan mine to his friend, Cecil Rhodes, who was forming the DE BEERS Company at the time.

In the deal which Joseph completed with Rhodes, the purchase price of something like £120,000 was agreed, on condition that Joseph could go on working the mine for a further six months. True to his character, Joseph concentrated his whole workforce on removing the diamond bearing ground from the mine in this period. He erected arc lights over the mine and working night and day, in shifts, he was able to remove an enormous amount of extra diamonds. And so in 1888, after twelve hard years in Kimberley, he returned to a new life in the Isle of Man. Joseph married Phoebe Bishop in Kimberley in 1882, she was a young twenty year old whose family came from Oxfordshire. The first three of their six children and the writer's father, were all born in Kimberley.

Joseph and his family were given a great reception on their arrival in Peel. Their first home was at Heathfield House, and then in 1890 the family moved to Kirk Michael, where Joseph had built for himself, a new residence at the White House, on his recently purchased 500 acre estate. In spite of his great success and wealth, Joseph remained completely unspoilt and natural. A true Manxman with a tough exterior but hiding a kind and generous nature.

He became the member of the House of Keys for Peel in 1891 and was made a Justice of the Peace. It is not surprising that because of his life spent in the diamond fields that he became known as the Diamond King. He became keenly involved in Manx affairs in particular the welfare of Peel. He ran a model farm at the White House with the best pedigree animals. His further three children were all born at the White House.

Joseph died tragically at the age of 59 at the White House in December 1896 from what would appear to have been appendicitis. His widow was 34, and she lived for a further 46 years. The memory of Joseph Mylchreest, "the Diamond King" will live for a long time.

To be Continued.....

COLLECTORS CORNER

I have now collected a few more photographs from various sources and would like to pass these onto anyone who is related for a small charge which should cover the cost of postage etc.

1. Miss Crellin Stenographer and Teacher , taken at Southport approx. 1920's. Age about late twenties early thirties.
2. Grace Senior - Alfred's mother ,taken at Miss Kirton's, Douglas about 1920's or 30's. Grace would be aged about fifty.
3. Miriam Keig (Mrs Quine), taken at Stafford John's about 1920's. Miriam only looks about early twenties.
4. Mrs Morgan, Barbara,Mr Morgan, Joyce Butterworth taken on the 24th. August 1942. Mr and Mrs Morgan look to be in their seventies.
5. Jinnie Bell taken circa 1920 at Miss Kirton's in Douglas aged early thirties ?
6. May Kershaw taken at the same studio as above and about the same time, aged about twenty also another taken when she was about 8 or 9 years of age.
7. Marguerite Craige and baby taken circa 1917 .
8. Several photographs of the Holmes family - one of Mr and Mrs John Holmes taken about 1916, one of Mrs Holmes and a baby taken June 1918 and another of Mr and Mrs Holmes with their family including parents ? taken about 1910.
9. A few photographs of babies Norman Pridoux born 1913 and his cousin Baby Partington of Laxey , taken about the same time, Roy Thomas aged 4½ months, Leslie Hogg,Thomas Beale Slegaby farm taken about 1915.
10. A photograph of Ted Groves taken about 1900 in a uniform, could be to do with the railways or electric trams.

All the above are original photographs and I hope some members will find an ancestor among them.

Please contact the Editor for all items in Collectors Corner.

A last minute find a photograph of Lily Kaighin aged about 10 years circa 1920/ 30.

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