### HISTORY, HERSTORY, OUR STORY

Thank you for the privilege of being able to share the female factory stories here today.

First I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and their elders past and present, as well as the descendants who are the continuing connection to this place. It is with respect I walk on these traditional lands and share stories of Australia's past and present.

Today I will be honouring other ancestors as well – the Convict Female Factory women, in particular those who went through Parramatta. These stories are, as my talk title suggests, 'History, Herstory and Our Story'.

I will be sharing with you the shapes of the women's lives by looking at:

- 1. The Historical Context in Britain and Australia
- 2. The convict women's journey these are personal stories
- 3. The rise of the female factory system
- ❖ 4. The Parramatta Female Factories the places and the experiences of the women who lived there
- ❖ 5. And the significance of these women to us today.

Just as a Reminder of the historical context. The factory period in the Colonies was from 1804 to 1856. Within living memory of these women and the general Colonial population were: The industrial and agrarian revolutions, American War of Independence, effects of the French Revolution, failed Irish Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars.

It was a time of ordinary people fighting for their rights whether they were working rights, legal rights or enactment of a fair social contract. They were individuals and groups acting out their free will – to save their children, or defend their lives and liberty.

The women came from all parts of Britain and its colonies - rural settings, industrial towns, villages and cities as we see here.

Now lets look at the shape of the personal journeys. When we start to consider the stories we quickly become aware that it is not just 'one bad girl' but a whole family and communities that are affected. Even if the physical quality of their life was poor, they left behind all that was meaningful and familiar to them. They lost all they loved, as well as their freedom.

I will start with my connection to a female factory (Cascades). I would like you to picture a young mother, Ellen Sweeney with her Irish friends somewhere in the Colony. They would put their shawls around their heads, rock back and forth and sing (I wont sing it or you might all leave now!):

Ahone, Ahone Ahone (Misery, Misery),

I am weeping and wailing and doing what's not pleasing, I'm rocking this baby that's none of my own

Ahone, Ahone and why did I marry?

Ahone, Ahone and why did I wed?

Oh I'm weeping and wailing and doing what's not pleasing, I am rocking this baby that's none of my own.

These words are a part of my connection to my Great Great grandmother. They were her first words reaching through time to me. She was convict of stealing and transported. Her husband had died and she left two children behind never to see them again. This was a common story.

The women experienced extraordinarily difficult circumstances followed by arrest, trial and prison. This was familiar to some but for many it was a first offence.

In the early transportation and early factory period there was little reform. Transportation began before the results of the work of great prison reformers such as John Howard, Jeremy Bentham and Elizabeth Fry.

To give you a sense of what prison was like for the women, prison reformer John Howard observations are very clear.

At Gloucester County Goal (Gloucester Castle) he says:

eight died about Christmas 1788 of the small pox....no separation of the woman...5 or six children have been born lately at the gaol<sup>†</sup>

Of Folkingham he said:

Prison under the keepers house ...5 damp rooms, two are used for a lunatic.... by a trapdoor in one of these rooms you go down 8 steps into a dungeon... No chimney, small court, no pump, no sewer. Yet a woman and child at her breast was sent ...the child died."

Old Newgate he described as:

constant seats of disease, and sources of infection, to the destruction of multitudes, not only in the prison, but abroad. <sup>III</sup>

Howard was followed by Jeremy Bentham who challenged parliament to rethink prison reform. However the greatest impact on the form and function of female factories came from Elizabeth Fry who believed it was through reflection, work and provision of skills that real reform occurred. For convict women, Elizabeth Fry was one of the few voices that championed their cause, gave hope and the possibility of human dignity.

The women were women transported – transported from one place to another, one life to another, one world to another. There was a sense of the perilous as well as travelling to a *new world*, new possibilities. In some cases the sense of peril was well founded.

Featured here is Greenwich, a typical scene surrounding embarkation and William Turner's The Amphitrite.

The Amphitrite, a female transport ship that sailed in 1833, was one of these cases of peril. There were 120 women and children who lost their lives. An eyewitness reporter for London's The Standard, 3rd September 1833 said:

I never saw so many fine and beautiful bodies. The French and the English wept together at such a horrible loss of life.

The convict women could have been saved on four occasions but rescue was thwarted.

The Neva was also shipwrecked. This time in Bass Strait in 1834. On board were 150 female convicts, 9 free women and 55 children. All but 6 perished. Convict woman, Ellen Galvin, 18 years old, was one of the survivors. Her mother and sister, also on the Neva drowned. Her remaining sister was at the convict depot in Cork.

Then there were terrible voyages like the Lady Juliana, 'the floating brothel'. However there were also voyages like the Morley in 1820 where the women were under a proper duty of care.

So what happened to the convict women after they arrived?

These are images of the towns, of Sydney and Parramatta, as the women saw them on arrival, during the factory period. Some women were assigned at the docks. Those who weren't assigned were sent to the female factories.

So what was a convict female factory woman?

Convict Female factory women were convict women who, for various reasons, spent time in a convict female factory.

This may simply have been because they were not assigned at the docks on arrival or it may be because they committed a secondary offence in the Colony.

Were they like these images, which indicate the prevailing attitudes towards convict women, during the factory period?

Governor Hunter described the convict women as:

The disgrace of their sex.... generally found at the bottom of every infamous transaction committed in the colony<sup>iv</sup>

Later Samuel Marsden noted the factory:

spreads its pestilential influence through the most remote part of the colony and the activities of the women as:

...destructive of all religion, morality and good ordervi

In contrast to these views, Mary Lethbridge wrote:

I have a very nice nurse for him [her son], from the Factory, indeed I have been lucky in the three women, they go on very steady, they are all Irish.<sup>vii</sup>

Thomas Reid, while Surgeon on the ship Morley, said the women could:

realize the most favourable expectations, and even forever set, an example of propriety to others in their situation.

The actual profiles of the women don't match the stereotype of the time, that of morally degenerate, prostitutes, from a crime class, unskilled and illiterate.

Were they of a crime class? For 92.1% it was a first or second offence. This suggested that the majority were not of a *crime class* whose nature it was to commit offences. The crimes were largely related to larceny.

Were they inherently lazy? The women brought over 180 trades with them, demonstrating their skills and industry.

Just over half of the English were literate and just under half of the Irish. There was little difference between convict women's literacy and that of the general population.

Now let us look at the rise of the female factory system.

We know that 24,960 convict women were transported by ship. Of these an estimated 9,000 went through the female factory system and at least 5,000 through Parramatta. (About 1 in 7 Australians related to them)

Why did the Convict Female Factories come into existence?

Some answers lay in the intersections of history and personalities, as well as the ideas of the time concerning social reform. This was matched with a Colonial desire for economic power and practical needs.

There was no thought of female factories in the first 10 years of the colony, however, there was the practical need to solve the problem of what to do with the convict women.

Now let us look at the female factory phenomenon and experience.

The first stone was laid for the first purpose built factory in 1818 by Governor Macquarie. His journal at the State Library of NSW reads:

Thursday 9 July 1818!

Went up to Parramatta early this morning in the Carriage ... After Breakfast went to the Place Selected for Building the Factory and Barrack for the Female Convicts on the Left Bank of the Parramatta River ... and at 12,0'Clock laid the Foundation Stone of this New Building in the usual Form; giving the Workmen Four Gallons of spirits to drink Success to the Building. VIII

The women moved in during 1821. The Paramatta Female Factory closed in 1848. Even in this factory life changed over time, as it operation spanned 26 years. There were three building phases – the original 1818 Greenway design, in the 1820s an addition of a third class yard and working areas and, in the late 1830s, an addition of a 3 storey solitary cell block and courtyard.

This brings us to: what is a convict female factory and what was life like for the convict female factory women? The factories were called factories because each was a site of production. The women produced spun wool, flax and linsey woolsey for a range of purposes including sails, blankets and slop clothing.

There were 13 female factories – 2 in each of Parramatta, Port Macquarie and Moreton Bay and one each in Bathurst, Newcastle, Hobart Town, Georgetown, Cascades, Launceston and Ross. The experience in the factories varied according to which factory and when the women were in the factory system.

As Parramatta had the first and second factories and was a model for others and as we are marking its bicentennial, I will focus on the Parramatta factories.

The first factory was a room above the goal at Parramatta. Samuel Marsden notes:

...There is not any room in the factory that can be called a bed-room for these women and children.

In its later years this factory had up to 200 women but could only house about 30 at night. John Thomas Bigge observed the women's experience in the latter years:

The greater portion, therefore, betake themselves to the lodgings in the town of Paramatta, where they cohabit with the male convicts in the employ of government, or with any persons who will receive them.

Over half of all female factory women in the colonies experienced the Parramatta Female Factories.

The Second Factory (marking its bicentennial) is the one commissioned by Governor Macquarie and designed by Francis Greenway for 250-300 women. Of course by 1842 there were 1,200 women and over 200 children.

The Parramatta Female Factory was multi-purpose. It was: accommodation, hospital, workhouse, factory, place of assignment, marriage bureau as well as a prison.

- [1.] As accommodation it was for convict women waiting for assignment, recidivists and short term inmates including women in distress in the town.
- 2. As a hospital, it can claim the first dedicated female health service for convict and free women. This 1827 returns document, from the hospital, shows, among many other conditions, asthma, ulcer, diphtheria, cholera, dysentery and convulsions.
- [3.] as a workhouse and factory it was one of the earliest Colonial manufacturing sites. As well as spinning and weaving work included: straw plaiting, sewing, knitting, washing, nursing, oakum picking and rock breaking.

- [4.] Because it was a place of assignment, it spread its influence to all parts of the Colony. For some women the factory was a better alternative than assignment where much more was subject to the whims and character of the master and mistress. For instance the women may or may not have been allowed to bring children on assignment.
- [5.] The factory was also a marriage Bureau. Emancipated convicts and free settlers could apply for a wife.

Life in the factory included children. Either women arrived with them or gave birth to them at the factory. Early years in the second factory all classes the women could keep their children until they were 3 years old or weened, at which time they were forcibly removed 'from the corrupting influence of the mothers' and sent to orphanages. The girls went to the Female Orphan School and the boys to Cabramatta. Some women never saw their children again.

As transportation increased in the 1830s and 1840s children stayed longer with their mothers, sometimes up to the age of 9.

[6.] The factory was a place of punishment both for minor infractions with new arrivals to the factory a well as for recidivists. In the first Parramatta Female Factory there were no classes. The first distinction was made after arrival in the second female in 1821.

By 1830 the factory was split into 3 classes with the intent to better control the women.  $1^{st}$  class was mainly for women waiting for or returned from assignment.  $2^{nd}$  class consisted of women who committed minor offences in the factory. The  $3^{rd}$  class was for offences such as prostitution, pregnancy, bodily harm or theft of property with high value. Second class women who were frequently insolent could also be demoted to  $3^{rd}$  class.

MAIN OFFENCES for convict women were: drunk and disorderly, absconding from assignment, continued drunkenness, pregnancy while on assignment, prostitution or serious crimes such as theft or bodily harm. Most common was absconding. These images show the Gipp's Solitary cells and a sample of a punishment record.

PUNISHMENTS in the factory ranged from 14 days to a number of years. There was also a penitentiary aspect. This was for women who committed a crime in the colony and their work included breaking rocks and picking oakum. Originally time in solitary was in paired solitary cells and later in the Governor Gipps commissioned cells. Abstracts of punishments at the female factory showed that bread and water and class demotions were the most common ones. There was also a cap of disgrace and there is a record of one woman being chained to wood.

The feared punishment was head shaving which had its origins in British prisons. A warder at Millbank Prison noted convict women's responses before transportation:

Oh yes they would sooner lose their lives than their hair.

Let's now look further into the life in the Parramatta Female Factory.

There was not a consistent experience over time. It covered 27 years and different management gave rise to poor or better treatment and differing levels of corruption. For the matrons there was the added issue of husbands and their indiscretions.

Some of the staff at the Parramatta female factories included: Samuel Marsden, George Mealmaker, Francis Oakes, William Tuckwell, Elizabeth Raine (Falloon), and Matron Anne Gordon. There were also sub-matrons, turnkeys, clerks, master weavers, porters and roles relating to the maintenance of the establishment and the manufacturing.

Marsden was the head of committees for the first and second Parramatta factories. He disliked the women but is to be acknowledged for his advocacy for better factory conditions through his association with Quaker, Elizabeth Fry.

George Mealmaker was a master weaver convicted for sedition (writing pamphlets for the Scottish martyrs) and, when the Colonial appointed master weaver fell overboard on the way out, he was employed as Parramatta's first factory superintendent. One can't help but wonder how this idealist worked, governing the factory women whose rights he fought for in Britain.

Francis Oakes was a Parramatta police superintendent, local businessman and factory superintendent. He was the first superintendent of the Macqiarie commissioned factory.

Henry Gratton Douglass, was a visiting surgeon at the female factory. He was accused of improper conduct with Anne Rumsby, torture and drunkenness at the factory but not proved. He was late a clerk with the legislative assembly, agent for William Charles Wentworth, physician to the King Williams Household and worked on medical constitutional change in the Colony – helped to introduce child welfare and involved in development of Sydney University.

Anne Gordon was matron of the second Parramatta female factory for 9 years, the highest paid female public servant in the Colony. She was also the catalyst for the first of 5 known factory riots.

Sister Xavier Williams from the Sisters of Charity I have also included here as she was often at the factory and advocated for the women.

John Clapham and Matron Leach were recommended by Elizabeth Fry. Some insights into the factory women's lives comes from complaints by Clapham about Matron Leach. Some of Clapham's complaints were that the women were receiving extra food rations; picking mushrooms and reading the Sydney Gazette aloud; and women making things not factory related - ladies shoes and lace. He noted the:

monitor of the second class put her arms around a man's neck and kiss him several times in the presence of her turnkey ...the man had come to sweep the chimneys.

Life was no bed of roses despite the hot chocolate and the chimney sweep. There were riots, an indicator of the women's responses to life at the factory.

For rioting, the women were punished locally and then sent to Newcastle and after Newcastle closed, Port Macquarie and Moreton Bay. There were 5 riots we know about at the factory - 1827, 1831, 1833, 1836 and 1843. The first one has been described as one of the earliest workers actions in Australia. It followed the death of Mary Anne Hamilton from starvation and a government inquiry into conditions at the factory. The Grand Jury inquiry found:

the rations were unsatisfactory 253 women and their children had no access to water supply, the bread was inferior and they were short of clothing and shoes

The full story of this is another talk entirely.

Who were the female factory women and what are some of their stories?

I will share just a sampling from over 9,000 stories so you can get a sense of these individuals whose lives have been less than a footnote in our histories. The women's lives were as varied as yours and mine but in a different set of circumstances. Stories like Mary Hindle, Elizabeth Browning Owen, Suzannah Watson and Constance de la Sablonaire.

MARY HINDLE's was a story of the INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION . She was born in born in Haslingden, Lancashire, c1799. In 1818 she married George Hindle, a handloom weaver, and lived in Pleasant Street, They had 3 children, two of which died young. Haslingden was a weaving centre and Mary's crime was one of protest.

On Monday April 24th 1826 about a 1,000 workers rioted for 4 days. On the 25th of April, Mary Hindle was in the crowd at William Turner's Mill at Helmshore and she shouted encouragement and laughed:

I have won my bet, I bet a shilling that the power looms would be destroyed within five weeks. Mary was convicted of inciting a riot and sentenced to transportation for life. Mary Hindle and Anne Entwhistle were the only two women of the thousand rioters to receive this punishment. After 10 months imprisonment they were transported, arriving in September 1827.

While in the Factory Mary sent a petition to the governor:

I hear that pardons have been granted to the men involved in the crime [machine breaking] and I humbly implore your Excellency to include me in the number of those who have received the Blessing of such Clemency...do not suffer me to languish the remains of my existence in hopeless Slavery.

She never received a pardon and In 1841 Mary committed suicide. She was one of the women who could not cope with the dislocation, separation from family and the attitudes towards women like her.

ELIZABETH BROWNING OWEN IS THE STORY OF A CARING MOTHER not the typical stereotype.

Elizabeth was born in c1792 in Surrey. She had four children. Her husband disappeared around the time of her conviction for forgery. She was sentenced to 14 years and while waiting for transportation, separated from her children. Her nine year old child was deemed too old to travel with their mother. As a result Elizabeth Browning Owen was extremely distressed with the prospect of permanent separation. The ships surgeon, Thomas Reid, noted her struggle at the time of embarkation. He said that:

Her conduct having been exceedingly good since she came on board, induced me to lay a statement of her case before Mr Capper, for consideration of the Secretary of State, whose benevolence granted permission for all the children to be embarked and accompany her.

When Elizabeth arrived at the female factory and she was separated from them all. Within 12 months, however, she agreed to marry Emanuel MARVIN in 1822 and was reunited with her children.

Here are some of the women who have photographs – Susannah Watson, Constance de la Sablonaire, Catherine Long, Mary Noonan, Anne Dunne and Emma Mayner. I will focus on Susannah Watson and Constance de la Sablonaire.

SUZANNAH WATSON's story was one of separation and frequent imprisonment. She was born in 1795. Her first marriage was in England and she had five children. Suzannah was convicted at Nottingham, of shop robbery and transported for 14 years. She arrived with one son, Thomas, age 18 months, and was sent with her baby to the Female Factory on arrival.

Suzannah was assigned to a number of different people over a period of years. She had a number of different relationships and had four more children.

Suzannah was in and out of the factory several times including: 3<sup>rd</sup> class for 6 weeks poor behaviour, then for two years, shoplifting, 3 days in the cells for improper conduct, and 6 months in 1840 obtaining bread under false pretences.

Her son Charles born in the 2<sup>nd</sup> class of the female factory. Thomas was sent to the Male Orphan School where he died. Charles was then also sent to the male orphan school where he remained until he was eleven years old. She had a son John who was born in 1835. Charles died in 1837. Agnes was born in 1837 and died in January 1842

She had a turbulent life and her letters reveal some of her thoughts to her daughter Mary Anne Birk:

Dear Hannah you must make your mind up at once and let me know. I should wish very much for you to come. We see some accounts how bad of they are in England. We take the papers twice a week. This is a most plentifull I may say. Since its been made thou a extravagant country things are plentiful. Plenty of work but short of people to do it. Wages is very high.....

# And in August 1867

I wish you would let me know if your grandfather Edward is alive or dead... and you brother Samuel. is he a live or dead?

Next to her is CONSTANCE DE LA SABLONAIRE who has the rightful title of VISCOUNTESS GATON. She came from Mauritius.

Constance was the daughter of Sir Gabriel Henry Isidore de la Sablonniere and slave Adele Couronne.

Constance with her cousin/sister Elizabeth were sent to a Madame Morel to be taught a range of skills. They were accused of trying to poison the mistress – white powder in her tea.

Madame and her three-year-old son reacted to the tea, with a violent headache, dizziness and palpitations. The doctor decided they had been poisoned with arsenic. The girls were charged with attempted murder.

The case came to court 24th September 1833, and they were found guilty and sentenced to transportation for Life as they were too young for a capital punishment. Elizabeth's father Nereus Verloppe, sought mitigation of her sentence, but the governor said:

I have never seen a more deliberate crime, more distinctly proved.

By the time the Dart was to leave, the girls had been in gaol for two years. This was despite a letter from Constance's grandfather which included the following:

To all of noble birth and those of Note, the holder of this warrant Constance Couronne is my granddaughter. I Morin Patron de Lasablonniere... grant her my protection and the courtesy title of Viscountess Gaton for which she is entitled, be it by half blood, ...

...I grant this title of Viscountess Gaton for her protection not only from my wife and my son but from others who may wish to harm her as a half cast after I am no longer.

On arrival in NSW in 1834, Constance was sent to the Female Factory, Parramatta with her cousin. Imagine the young girl speaking French and in a totally unfamiliar setting. Both were assigned to First Police Magistrate Henry C Wilson. She went, as a servant for his daughter, to Wellington Valley. Constance married, Robert Trudgett, an experienced bushman and stockman there.

Constance became a mother of eleven children all of whom survived into adulthood. She was the local midwife and smoked a pipe, she lived to be 67 years old.

## The other women you see here are:

- CATHERINE LONG was convicted of stealing linen and transported for seven years. The ships surgeon wrote Catherine Long; spare habits. Had led a vicious life. Catherine was 16. At the time.
- MARY NOONAN's story was a typical transportation story. She was sentenced to seven years for theft.
- ANNE DUNNE hers is the story of YOUNG GIRL, age 20, found guilty of 'stealing linen', and sentenced to transportation for seven years.

o EMMA MAYNER – MEMORY OF FATHER, tattooed and initialled on her arm - Emma was found guilty of receiving a time piece and a shawl knowing them to have been stolen. Her age was 18.

## Other kinds of stories include:

- HANNAH BROWN, a silk weaver a story of 'in for a penny, in for a pound'. Hannah and a Sarah Deering were accused of theft. Hannah was found guilty of stealing from three shops, her defence: It was given me. The other prisoner is innocent of it.
- BRIDGET BYRNE IS A STORY OF SEDITION AND DISTRESS. During a rebellion she killed a soldier, in reprisal for the death of her brother. Convicted of murder, she was transported for Life.
- MARY FIELD A STORY OF FAMILY MIGRATION Mary was transported with her daughter Margaret aged 18. Three children preceded her and Margaret having been transported to the Colony of NSW.
- Charlotte Badger Pirate
- o Maria Riseley one of the richest business women in Van Diemen's Land
- Rachel Aarons of Jewish background, first child Rachel born on the battlefield of Waterloo and became a director of Cobb And Co
- Susannah Danford so feisty her husband wouldn't take her from the government and she tried to get to China by walking north, and then there is
- o Elizabeth Somers, Ben Hall's Mum.

#### LET'S NOW ASK OURSELVES WHAT THE WOMEN'S SIGNIFICANCE IS TO US TODAY?

The significance lies somewhere between myth and reality. The women's' experiences in the factories and the colony varied. Some women just couldn't cope with life after total dislocation and sense of powerlessness. These women can at times be seen as victims. At some time we all experience moments of being victims.

However, the women also acted. Some conformed, some escaped, some absconded, others rioted and many went on to have fulfilling lives. The women made a life with the opportunities they had and largely 'disappeared' into the fabric that is Australian society.

I would suggest that the Australian perceptions of:

- o strength in adversity we can survive anything, do anything, came from these convict women (and the convict men).
- Also the mateship,
- o sense of equity,
- o judging people on their actions not what family or circumstance they come from,
- the lack of deference to authority
- o and the sense of humour the ability to take the micky out of things and ourselves,

can all be attributed to them. Many of us can identify with all these aspects but few would source the nature of the Australian character in any degree to these women.

The factory women by living their lives through opportunity in the Colony were part of a quiet revolution where they taught their children and their children's children about their rights and equity which we treasure now.

Surprisingly there are less than 10 objects we know about, in State and National Collections that can be directly provenanced to these factory women.

In the transportation period there are only 4 images that are described as convict women and 2 that are factory women.

The objects and stories I believe, and hope, are still in the families of these women in many different forms. Despite little tangible evidence, outside government records, the experiences and nature of these women have been significant in forming who we are as Australians. Isabel Dale Tooley says:

Courageous... I am proud of her stamina to go through the emotions she must have experienced. I hold her in great awe. What hardships. Not all were criminals and the courage to start anew, live in a strange country. It helps me understand the new migrants. Her relevance to the Australian character is strength of purpose enduring pain and loss and all character building. ix

And as Kate Grenville describes in Joan makes History:

There was not a single joy I could feel that countless Joans had not already felt, not a single mistake I could make that had not been made by some Joan before me..... and although you may not think so to look at me, I am the entire history of the globe walking down the street......and like them all I, Joan, have made history.

Thank you

ML Ref: A781 1-15 pp. [Microfilm Reel CY303 Frames #127-141].

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vi Marsden, Samuel Letter from Rev. Samuel Marsden to Governor Macquarie 19th July 1815

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