

The Webb-Bowen Family of Camrose, Pembrokeshire, Wales

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In the south western corner of Wales, in the county of Pembrokeshire, is located the small village of Camrose – *CAMRHOS, a parish in the hundred of Rhos, county of Pembroke, South Wales, 4 miles (N.W. by N.) from Haverfordwest, on the road to St David's, containing 1259 inhabitants, the amount of the population having increased nearly one-fourth since the census of 1821. The living is a discharged vicarage, in the archdeaconry and diocese of St David's, rated in the king's books at £6.10s.5d, endowed with £400 parliamentary grant, and in the patronage of Hugh Webb Bowen Esq.*¹

The Bowen family of Camrose are an ancient family in Pembrokeshire. They are an offshoot of the Bowens of Lockmyler who claim descent from Bleddyn, Prince of Powys, who lived in the 11th century. The Bowens came to reside in Camrose through marriage into the Roblyn family, who are mentioned in records in the year 1251.² A descendent of this family was Matthew Bowen who was Sheriff of Pembrokeshire between 1698 and 1699. His grandson was Charles Bowen, born in 1683, who later married the daughter of Colonel John Wheeler and who in 1714 became the first of the Bowens to be Vicar of Camrose.

The next of this family who is of interest is Ann Bowen of Camrose. It is yet to be discovered who Ann's parents were, or her year of birth, but she died after 1767. Possibly she was the daughter of Charles Bowen, Vicar of Camrose from 1714. Ann married George Webb, who died in 1821. Their son was Hugh Webb, who took the name "Hugh Webb-Bowen" and thus became the first of the family to be known as **Webb-Bowen**.³ Hugh Webb-Bowen married Emma Ince on 2 October, 1795 at Christleton, Cheshire. Emma was born 17 January, 1775 at Christleton and died at Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire (near Camrose) on 10 March, 1852. Hugh, High Sheriff of Pembrokeshire, succeeded to the Estate, and another son, William Wheeler Webb-Bowen, became Vicar of Camrose.

William Wheeler Webb-Bowen was born at Camrose on 7 November, 1803. William attended Bristol Grammar School, then matriculated Pembroke College, 13 February, 1821, aged 17 years, and entered Peterhouse College, Cambridge University in Lent, 1827. He was awarded a B.A. in 1832 and an M.A. in 1842.⁴

William Wheeler Webb-Bowen married firstly, on 29 June, 1830, Mary Grace Vonburr Fortune, daughter, of Frederic Fortune, Rector of Moet, Pembrokeshire. This first marriage produced four children. He married secondly, on 14 October, 1845, Olivia Lockhart Ellen Duffin, born circa 1821 in Bengal, India (this was Olivia's second marriage, she first married in India to William MacGeorge). Olivia was the daughter of Captain Charles Duffin of the Bengal Calvary and his wife Olivia. William's second marriage to Olivia resulted in eleven offspring.

Children of William and Olivia

1. Bell Ince John Webb-Bowen, born 1846
2. Robert Townsend Webb-Bowen, born 1847
3. William Webb-Bowen born 1849
4. George Cecil Forester Webb-Bowen, born 1850
- 5. Edward Mostyn Webb-Bowen, born 1851**
6. Cecil Webb-Bowen, born 1853
7. Oliver Webb-Bowen, born 1855
8. Stuart Charles Duffin Webb-Bowen, born 1855
9. Oliver Fulke Webb-Bowen, born 1858
10. Townsend Ince Webb-Bowen, born 1860
11. Olivia Lockhart Eltree Webb-Bowen, born 1861

William Wheeler Webb-Bowen was ordained a deacon in 1831, and a priest in 1833. He was the Vicar of Camrose from 1833 to 1881. William died at Camrose Vicarage on 24 May, 1881, aged 77 years. Probate was granted on his Will on 5 October, 1881. He left a personal estate of £27,057.12s.8d.⁵

Edward Mostyn Webb-Bowen, son of William Wheeler Webb-Bowen and his second wife Olivia, was born at Camrose Vicarage on 21 September, 1851. Edward was the 5th child of this marriage. He received his education at the Brompton Grammar School and Eton College. His first employment was as a junior clerk at a wine and spirit merchants in London. Edward then decided to immigrate to Queensland and sailed on the ship “Marietta” on 18 March, 1873, reaching Brisbane on 18 July that year. He subsequently joined the police force in the colony. After training he was sent to Cooktown. When the gold rush commenced on the Palmer River, Edward was ordered to that district in the early part of 1874. He found life on the goldfields far from pleasant and endured many privations. The police on the Palmer spent a great deal of time chasing and harassing the local aborigines, who were deemed to be troublesome. In one such expedition Edward Webb-Bowen was speared in the groin. He was sent to Brisbane to recover, but suffered from the fever and ague several times whilst in Brisbane.⁶ He was then advised by his doctor for the sake of his health, to try the effects of a southern climate, so in March, 1875, he joined the New South Wales force and was stationed at Tenterfield. It was at Tenterfield on 22 February, 1876, that he married Bridget Maria Power, youngest daughter of Mr John Power of Tipperary, Ireland.⁷ Bridget seems to have been known as “Marion”.

Edward was involved in an incident at Tenterfield in 1876 when he was arresting a “notorious character” named Plummer. He shot and wounded this individual, who died the following day. On 14 July, 1877, he then shot and killed Frederick Cranley, who had attempted to rob a hotel in Bendemeer in company with another man. Edward Webb-Bowen was then promoted to officer-in-charge of the Murrundi police station, where he remained until December, 1878, when he decided to leave the force and go to Sydney to seek medical aid for his second child. Sadly, immediately after his arrival in Sydney the child (John Mannayott Townsend Webb-Bowen) died.⁸ In March 1879, Edward had fallen on hard times

when he appeared before the insolvency court in Sydney. His assets were stated to be £5 and his liabilities £198.15s. His address at the time was Zeplins Commercial Hotel, Pitt Street. The cause of his insolvency was said to be “out of employment three months”.⁹

Edward Webb-Bowen then re-joined the New South Wales Police Force. He expressed a wish to be near the supposed haunts of Ned Kelly, so he was sent to Gundagai in April, 1879. Details of Edward’s tragic death at the hand of Captain Moonlite’s gang are well-documented elsewhere and the NSW Police (in particular the Wagga Wagga police) have recently been actively promoting the heroism of Edward Mostyn Webb-Bowen in bravely confronting the bushrangers, so I will not re-tell the story of the Wantabadgery Siege of 17 November, 1879.

After his death Edward’s estate was administered by his brother in England – *Bowen, Edward Mostyn Webb- March, 1880. Administration of the personal estate of Edward Mostyn Webb-Bowen, late of Gundagai in the colony of New South Wales, trooper, who died 23rd November, 1879 at Wantabadgery in the said colony was granted at the Principal Registry, under the usual limitations to Bell Ince John Webb-Bowen of the General Post Office, St Martins Le Grant, in the City of London, gentleman, the lawful attorney of Bridgie Maria Bowen, widow, the relict, now residing in Sydney in the said colony – Personal Estate: £673.14s.10d.*¹⁰

Edward did not actually die at Wantabadgery (as stated above). He was wounded there on 17 November and then brought to Gundagai for medical attention in an endeavour to save his life. He died at Gundagai on 23 November.

Marion Webb-Bowen was devastated by her husband’s death. She obviously struggled on many fronts, trying to come to terms with the tragedy. In July, 1881, she was so frustrated she wrote a letter to a Sydney newspaper, outlining her battle with Mr Allman, the manager of the Gundagai branch of the Commercial Bank. A fund was subscribed for the benefit of her son, Edward Wheeler Webb-Bowen, with donations from members of the public. Marion wrote to Mr Allman, one of the trustees of the fund asking for details. She received a reply, the first part of it which said – *Madam – I must ask you not to cause me so much trouble, repeatedly answering the same questions about the money we hold on your son’s account.....*¹¹. Very officious and callous behaviour on the part of Mr Allman!

It seems that Marion was granted a pension from the government for an amount of £78 a year. In 1881 she *said the pension generously granted to me by the Government is barely sufficient for the maintenance of myself and family*. She went into business, but the venture proved unsuccessful. She was the landlady of the Bay View Hotel in Double Bay, Sydney from January, 1881,¹² so whether the hotel was the unsuccessful business venture, is not known.

Edward and his wife Bridget (known as Marion) had two sons. Their second son, John Mannayott Townsend Webb-Bowen, was born at Murrundi, NSW in 1878¹³ John died at Sydney in 1878.¹⁴ Marion inserted a memorial notice in a South Australian newspaper in 1890 - *In memory of John Mannayott Townsend Webb-Bowen, who died in a fall from a*

horse at Murrundi in 1878.¹⁵ This is puzzling. In what circumstances would a child less than twelve months be able to be killed by a fall from a horse?

Six years later Marion was still living in Adelaide – *MAGISTRATES COURT, NORWOOD-Monday, September 14 (before Messrs J.D. Woods and G.W. Gooden). Marion Bowen was charged by Sergeant Burshall with being drunk and also using indecent language on the Payneham road on Sunday, the 13th inst. Fined 15 shillings and costs, 20 shillings in all. She was also charged by Gustav Meyer, of the Royal Hotel, with breaking one pane of glass, value 20 shillings. The evidence proved that the defendant was endeavouring to get drink at about 8 o'clock on Sunday morning, and being refused, she caused a disturbance and finished up throwing a large stone through the window. Ordered to pay the damage of glass, 20 shillings. Fined 20 shillings, costs of 5 shillings or 14 days imprisonment.*¹⁶

Marion was still having trouble with alcohol in Adelaide in 1890 and 1898 – She rated a brief mention in 1890 – *Police Court, Adelaide, Wednesday, June 25th, Marion Bowen paid 10s. for drunkenness*¹⁷ and again in 1898 – *Police Court, Adelaide, Wednesday, October 26th, Marion Bowen was fined 10s. and 1s.6d costs for having been drunk in Light Square on the previous day.*¹⁸

The eldest son of Marion and Edward Webb-Bowen – Edward Wheeler Webb-Bowen – was born in 1876, possibly at Bendeemer, NSW (birth registered in Armidale, NSW).¹⁹ Edward was aged three years when his father was murdered. In 1892 Edward was attending Newcastle Grammar School and sat the University Junior Examinations, being awarded passes in English, Latin, Arithmetic and Geometry.²⁰ Edward Wheeler Webb-Bowen departed for England in 1893, where he supposedly was to receive training *at a good military school to fit him for his future in life.* In 1893 it was stated that he was the adopted son of Reverend J. Shaw.²¹

Edward Wheeler Webb-Bowen did return to Australia as eleven years later he was mentioned in the NSW Police Gazette – *Merriwa – A warrant has been issued by the Merriwa Bench for the arrest of Edward Wheeler Webb-Bowen, charged with fraudulently obtaining the sum of 5 shillings from Ernest G. Pearson at Merriwa on the 4th instant. Offender is 27 years of age, about 5 feet 11 inches high, fair complexion, brown hair, grey eyes, clean shaven, minus two upper front teeth, scars on right side of head and left forearm from bullet wounds; dressed in dark-blue serge suit, folding panama hat, sharp toed glace kid boots, high turned down collar, fashionable shirt. May go to Muswellbrook, Scone or Quirindi. Served in the South African War. Was sentenced by the Raymond Terrace Bench in November last, to three months gaol for uttering a valueless cheque. Other charges pending.*²²

Edward seems to have been quite a dandy, judging by the description of his dress! The victim, Ernest G. Pearson, died at Sydney in 1955, aged 82 years – “A highly respected and popular resident of Merriwa”. Ernest was a “Digger” in the first A.I.F. The Australian War Memorial and the Australian Archives were contacted and no record of Edward serving in the Boer War (presumed to be the “African War” mentioned) could be found. But the Boer War records are not as complete as WWI records (Edward’s enlistment record for WWI has been

found). It is intriguing about the mention of the bullet wounds to his head and forearm. Another interesting story, no doubt, if facts could be found on how he came by these wounds!!

And why was a Sydney solicitor looking for Edward in 1909? – *Missing friends – Edward Wheeler Webb-Bowen, aged 32 years, 5 feet, 10 inches high, medium strong build, complexion inclined to fair, generally clean shaven, a surveyors assistant or chainman; very much addicted to drink, inquiry at the instance of E.E. Fosbery, solicitor, Pitt and Rowe Streets, Sydney.*²³

On 28 October, 1916 Edward enlisted in the A.I.F., 56th Battalion, Service No. 3256. Before enlisting his occupation was stated to be surveyor and that he was born near the town of Bendeemer, NSW. His next of kin was his uncle, Sir Hugh Webb-Bowen of Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. Private Edward Wheeler Webb-Bowen left Australia on board the “Suevic” on 11 November, 1916, disembarking at Devonport, England. His age at the time was 39 years, 11 months. Edward did not enjoy good health and was reported as being sick and in hospital at various times in England in March, April and June, 1917. His papers were marked “for Early Return” and he finally returned to Australia on board H.M.A.T. “Nester” on 25 September, 1917, in consequence of medical unfitness. A further notation on his papers says “cardiac debility”.²⁴

A small snippet has been found mentioning Edward Wheeler Webb-Bowen in a newspaper in 1929.²⁵ Suggesting he may have spent time in northern New South Wales. This was just a general article on the scourge of bushranging in the Dungog area in the early days. It contained the reference that: *At least one indirectly the victim of bushrangers lived close to Lismore some years ago. This was Mr Webb-Bowen, who was farming with Mr Reg Heron. Old-timers may remember the sensational hold-up of Wantabadgery Station.....*

Edward died at Baralaba Hospital, Queensland on 18 October, 1936. He was an unmarried station hand, aged 60 years at the time of his death. The cause of death was heart failure. The informant on the death certificate was the Matron of the hospital, so Edward had no family members with him when he died. The record of death says that his parents were Mostyn Ince Webb-Bowen, a police officer, and Mary Ann Power. This information is not quite accurate. Edward’s great-grandmother was Emma Ince who married Hugh Webb-Bowen, and the name “Ince” was the first name of one of Edward’s uncles. So that is where the wrong name of his father on the death certificate originated.

Bridget “Marion” Webb-Bowen died at Vogel’s boarding house, Hogeward (?) Lane, Melbourne, on 22 July, 1911 under the name “Marion Bowen”. Her death certificate states that the cause of death was *heart and kidney disease, probably accelerated by alcohol*. The verdict at the inquest held by R.H. Cole, coroner on 27 July, 1911. It continues - *deceased is stated to have been the widow of the late Constable Bowen who was shot by the “Moonlite” gang at Wantabadgery, NSW about 1875*. So this death certainly refers to the correct Marion. She is stated to be female, aged about 70 years.

Marion was buried in the Springvale Cemetery, Melbourne, on 26 July, 1911, attended by Presbyterian clergyman, W. Williams. The present day “Springvale Botanical Cemetery” is the same cemetery. Cemetery records show that a Marion Bowen (not Webb-Bowen) was buried there on 26 July, 1911. The cemetery have advised that Marion was buried in a “public grave”, and burials in the public grave section are not recorded individually, so Marion’s actual burial plot cannot be located and no headstone can be found. It is assumed that ‘public grave’ would mean a pauper’s grave. The columns on her death certificate relating to who she married, any children, how long in the Australian colonies, place of origin, parents and so on all say “Unknown”. So her son Edward was not with her when she died. Perhaps they were estranged as no connection has been found between mother and son since Edward was a child? They were certainly apart in the 1890s when Marion was living in Adelaide and Edward was under the care of Reverend Shaw in the Newcastle/Maitland area.

Bushranging Tragedy Revived. A frail old woman, shabbily dressed, has for years been a well-known figure on a seat in the Carlton Gardens. Here she industriously plied a crochet needle and worked fantastic designs. As each piece was completed she hawked it about the city for sale. It was her only means of eking out an existence. She lived in poor lodgings. But the struggle is over, for she died suddenly on Saturday (says the Melbourne ‘Herald’). Very few knew who this plucky old woman was to whom fate had been so unkind. Her name was Marion Bowen, and she was the widow of Edward Mostyn Webb-Bowen, a man whose name occupies a place among others in the honour list of the New South Wales police force.....²⁶

At the inquest into Marion’s death, Hugh Gribbons, a solicitor’s clerk, gave evidence that she was aged 60 years (this differs from the age of 70 years on the death certificate). Gribbons also said that many years ago she was left an annuity of £78 which she eventually sold to a money-lender in the city for £300. He also said that he knew she drank a little.²⁷

So the Webb-Bowen family came to a sad end in Australia. Marion seems to have led a life of penury and destitution in her later years, as well as battles with the demon drink. Her son Edward also seems to have had the same battle with alcohol, and both fell foul of the law. So they were just as much victims of Captain Moonlite and his gang as their husband and father.

REFERENCES

¹ “A Topographical Dictionary of Wales” by Samuel Lewis (1833).

² “The Bowens of Camrose” by Jon Hudson, freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~bowen/walescamrose

³ www.hisfam.familysearch.org and www.damienfox.co.uk

⁴ Cambridge University Alumni, www.ancestry.com

⁵ England and Wales National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administration).

⁶ The Gundagai Times and Tumut, Adelong and Murrumbidgee District Advertiser, Tuesday, 20 January, 1880.

⁷ The Sydney Morning Herald, 17 March, 1876, NSW Marriage Reference No. 4272 of 1876.

⁸ The Gundagai Times and Tumut, Adelong and Murrumbidgee District Advertiser, Tuesday, 20 December, 1880.

⁹ Evening News (Sydney), 13 March, 1879.

¹⁰ England and Wales National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administration)

¹¹ Evening News (Sydney) Saturday, 23 July, 1881, Page 3.

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- ¹² Sydney Morning Herald, Wednesday, 5 January, 1881, Page 2, Evening News, (Sydney) Tuesday, 4 January, 1881.
- ¹³ NSW Birth Index , No. 17176 of 1878
- ¹⁴ NSW Death Index, No. 2286 of 1878
- ¹⁵ South Australian Register (Adelaide), 24 November, 1890.
- ¹⁶ The Advertiser (Adelaide), Tuesday, 15 September, 1896, Page 3
- ¹⁷ South Australian Register (Adelaide), Thursday, 26 June, 1980, Page 3
- ¹⁸ The Advertiser (Adelaide), Thursday, 27 October, 1898, Page 3.
- ¹⁹ NSW Birth Index, No. 7241 of 1876.
- ²⁰ The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 29 April, 1893.
- ²¹ The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 26 November, 1892.
- ²² NSW Police Gazette, 30 March, 1904, Page 134.
- ²³ NSW Police Gazette, 12 May, 1909, Page 171.
- ²⁴ A.I.F. Nominal Roll, National Archives of Australia, www.naa.gov.au
- ²⁵ Dungog Chronicle, Durham and Gloucester Advertiser, Tuesday, 25 June, 1929.
- ²⁶ Singleton Argus, 29 July, 1911.
- ²⁷ Sydney Morning Herald, Friday, 28 July, 1911. The story of the annuity was re-printed in many other newspapers around Australia.