



The Alexander in Sydney Cove, 1789

## THE DOUGLAS CONTROVERSY

### Preface

The following thesis was written as the "essay" component of the Society of Australian Genealogists' Diploma in Family Historical Studies in 1986. In the fourteen years since that date many records have become more readily accessible, such as those of the Colonial Secretary. In addition, the author has edited all the early NSW Musters so has a better understanding of the muster and census returns in particular and of the early records in general. As a result, some of the thesis has been rewritten both to include recently discovered information and to omit information that is now of little importance. This has the additional advantage of reducing the word-length. Most of the sources used in this thesis are obvious and well-known to descendants. Source references will only be provided for the more obscure sources of information.

### Introduction

The study of genealogy has interested mankind since ancient times although the methods of its practice have seen many changes. Techniques of tracing genealogies have often been influenced by the social or political importance of family to the society of the time. On occasions these influences have resulted in family histories of questionable accuracy. The 19th century saw an era of shoddy genealogy. With birth the key to social status, many a bogus genealogy was produced to aid would-be social climbers. The weakening of the class system and the application of the scientific method to genealogy has reduced the need and scope for this type of creation. However even today status affects the study of genealogy. In Australia it has become a status symbol to have a First-Fleet ancestor and this can affect a researcher's objectivity.

Genealogical research should follow a step-by-step progression from descendant to ancestor with the link provided by rational research methods and proof of a connection. However the scarcity of information in many early Australian records often makes it difficult to link generations. In these cases "circumstantial evidence" is used to justify the link.

*The Douglas Controversy* deals with one such situation. The controversy centres around three fathers and two sons and raises the question of "who begat who". The three fathers were convicts who arrived in the colony in its early years: William Douglas on the *Alexander* in 1788, Thomas Douglas on the *Canada* in 1801 and William Douglas on the *Coromandel* in 1804. They were the only men in the colony with the surname *Douglas* who appear to have been fathering children prior to 1810 and will be referred to as William *Alex* Douglas, Thomas *Can* Douglas and William *Coro* Douglas. The two sons were born in the colony prior to 1810 and will be referred to as Thomas *BC* Douglas and William *BC* Douglas.

Although records list these men variously as *Douglas* and *Douglass*, the spelling *Douglas* will be used throughout. All of the men were apparently illiterate and no consistency has been found in the spelling of their surnames in the early years, so the spelling of their surnames is of no significance to the analysis of these families.

### **William Alex Douglas**

For many years the general consensus has been that First Fleeter William *Alex* Douglas fathered two sons, Thomas and William, although there is documented evidence of his fathering only one child - a daughter. Parish records show that William *Alex* Douglas married Mary Groves in 1788 and had a daughter Elizabeth baptised in 1796. Elizabeth married Daniel Jurd in 1812 and had nine children. William *Alex* Douglas is recorded as living at Daniel Jurd's place in the 1828 Census.

A number of publications refer to William *Alex* Douglas and his family. Don Chapman in *1788: The People of the First Fleet* writes:

WILLIAM DOUGLAS .... arrived on the *Alexander*. He married Mary Graves (sic) in 1788 and they were settled on a thirty acre farm at the Hawkesbury in 1794. By 1806 he was reduced to renting 15 acres, and they had two children. He later worked as a butcher, and in 1828 was living at Pitt Town. He died at St Albans on 27 November 1838.

In *The Forgotten Valley* M. Hutton Neve writes:

William Douglass arrived 1788 on the *Alexander* and married Mary Groves in Sydney 1st June 1788; he had several children, amongst whom was a daughter Elizabeth who married Daniel Judd/Jurd at St Matthew's Church, Windsor in 1821 (sic). The 1828 Census stated William Douglass was ... living with his daughter and son-in-law, for he was then apparently a widower. He had a son William, on whose behalf he applied for a grant of land in the Valley, and the 1851 Census showed that this son William was a landholder in the Upper Macdonald.

The "Family History and Pedigree of the Thoms Family"<sup>1</sup>, the *1788-1820 Pioneer Register*, and Bobbie Hardy's *Early Hawkesbury Settlers* all list the family of William *Alex* Douglas and Mary Groves as follows:

1. George - md Mary Ann Cross

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<sup>1</sup> Family History and Pedigree of the Thoms Family [SAG 4/5497]

2. Elizabeth - bn 1796, md Daniel Jurd 1812
3. James - bn cl797, md Frances Carroll 1832
4. Thomas - bn c1804, md Charlotte Plumb 1829
5. William - bn c1808, md Jane Wright 1831
6. Sarah - bn 1810, md Thomas Green 1829

This list of children appears to have been determined by the author of "Family History and Pedigree of the Thoms Family", and used as the basis for the other two publications. The researcher appears to have taken the name of any person who was possibly born in the colony in the early years with parents unknown or a father called William Douglas, and absorbed them into the family of William *Alex* Douglas. When evidence comes to light "proving" that the person was not a child of William *Alex* Douglas that person is only then "deleted" from the list.

Evidence conclusively shows that three of the above were not the children of William *Alex* Douglas and Mary Groves. George (No.1) was in fact William *Coro* Douglas who was recorded as *George* in the baptisms of his youngest three children. James (No.3) appears to have arrived in the colony c1830 as there is no trace of him in records prior to that time. Sarah (No.6) was the eldest daughter of William *Coro* Douglas. These three have now been "deleted" from the family of William *Alex* Douglas.

Those researching the Douglas family however still believe that William *Alex* Douglas and Mary Groves had two children, Elizabeth (born 1796) and Thomas (born cl804), and that William *Alex* Douglas and another woman named Ann Peat had a son William (born 1809). The *Fellowship of First Fleeters* apparently register descendants of these three children as descendants of "First Fleeter" William Douglas.

Instead of following accepted genealogical practice of linking a child with parents only when there is proof of a connection, the opposite appears to have occurred when the family of William *Alex* Douglas was being researched. At least three of these children were linked with William and his wife with no evidence to support the connection and were taken out of the family only when evidence was found proving that they could not be a part of the family. In view of the blatant errors in the above list of children it would seem logical to re-examine the evidence and determine if the sons Thomas and William had any real claim to being members of the family of William *Alex* Douglas. However until now this has not occurred. [And even after this thesis was written fourteen years ago, the same errors are still being repeated!]

### **Re-examining the evidence**

The conclusion that William *Alex* Douglas had two or more children appears to have resulted from an incorrect interpretation of the 1806 Musters. The entry for William Douglas in the General Muster records that he arrived on the *Alexander*, was free by servitude, and was renting 15 acres from Williamson at the Hawkesbury. The entry for William in the Land & Stock Muster records that he was farming 15 acres rented from Mr Williamson at the Hawkesbury, and that on the land were one proprietor, one wife and two children.

Chapman and other researchers appear to have assumed from this information that William Alex Douglas' wife in 1806 was Mary Groves and that the two children were Elizabeth (born 1796) and another child for whom there is no baptism record. This information appears to have acted as confirmation of another child's birth to the family prior to 1806. However, the following points indicate that these assumptions and conclusions are incorrect:

1. The heading "wife" in the Land & Stock Muster covered any sort of female companion whether she was a wife, mistress, housekeeper, or whatever. Generally when reference was made to a partner in a muster or census return, an individual entry can be found for that person. However neither a Mary Groves nor a Mary Douglas is listed in the 1806 General Muster nor in Marsden's Female Muster nor in any later record. This raises the possibility that William Alex Douglas' wife had died prior to 1806.
2. The 1806 General Muster records an entry for a Sarah Dailey who came on the *Kitty* in 1792. At the time of the Muster Sarah Dailey was a housekeeper living with William Douglas. No other person was recorded as "living with/wife to" a William Douglas in the 1806 Muster.
3. There were only two men by the name of William Douglas listed in the 1806 General Muster - William Alex Douglas and William Coro Douglas. The latter was a prisoner employed by a D. Brown at that time so it is extremely unlikely that he would have had a "housekeeper". It is also unlikely that Sarah Dailey was living with a soldier of that name (if there even was one) as "Soldier" was generally noted after the partner's name in those instances. This indicates that Sarah Dailey was almost certainly living with William Alex Douglas in 1806.
4. Marsden's Female Muster records that Sarah Dailey of the *Kitty* was a "concubine" with two natural female children.

In order to fully understand the significance of the information contained in the three musters for 1806, it is essential to understand the records themselves. The introductory pages to the published 1806 Musters explain that the information contained in both the extant General Muster and in Marsden's Female Muster was extracted from the original returns of the 1806 General Muster which have not survived. Interestingly enough, the original returns included information that was not transferred to the extant copy of the General Muster, such as details of residence, victualling status and children, and it was from this additional information that Marsden generated his Female Muster.

It is also important to understand why the musters were made and why the various pieces of information were collected. The musters were primarily collected so that the authorities could keep track of the population and could determine victualling requirements. They were not interested to know if Sarah Dailey, for example, was the mother of two children; they merely wanted details of those for whom she was responsible. They did not ask landholders details of their "wife" and "children" to determine if they were married or had produced children; they wanted to know how many people each farm was supporting, or alternatively if these people were being supported by the government stores. These are important distinctions and if misunderstood can lead to an incorrect interpretation of the available information.

As the information from these three 1806 Musters was extracted from the same original source, and as the details of "family" were a reflection of responsibility not biological relationship, there should be a correlation between the various entries. As the Land & Stock Muster records that William *Alex* Douglas' farm was **supporting** a proprietor, a wife and two children, and as Marsden's Female Muster records that Sarah Dailey was **responsible** for two female children, it is likely that Sarah Dailey's two female children were the two children listed as living with William Douglas on his farm in 1806. One of these children was almost certainly William's daughter Elizabeth who was baptised in 1796, but who was the other? Could she had been a daughter born to Sarah Dailey?

Sarah Dailey was a convict from Dublin who was transported to Sydney aboard the *Kitty* in 1792. The convict indents record that she was 23 years of age, however no other information has been located for her either in pre-1806 or post-1806 records. Although no primary source records have been found confirming that Sarah had a daughter, strong circumstantial evidence supports this claim. The early records show that an Elizabeth Dailey married a Thomas Jones in Sydney in 1807. The 1828 Census indicates that Elizabeth was born in the colony c1798, although this is clearly an under-recording of her age as she would have been too young to marry in 1807 if that age was correct. Her burial entry in 1845 records that she was 55 years of age (born c1790). Combining the two references suggests that Elizabeth was born in the colony in the early 1790's, however no baptism entry has apparently survived.

Confirmation that Elizabeth was almost certainly the daughter of Sarah Dailey lies in the name of the witness to her marriage in 1807 - William Douglas. Interestingly enough, Elizabeth also named her two children, William and Sarah. Clearly there is strong circumstantial evidence to indicate that Sarah Dailey had a daughter named Elizabeth and that Elizabeth was the other child recorded as living on William's farm in 1806.

Later references to William *Alex* Douglas provide no evidence of his fathering additional children. William was recorded as a labourer in Sydney in the 1814, 1822 and 1823/4/5 Musters and had no children listed with him, although the latter noted that he had a wife named Eleanor Carthorne. On 30 June 1826 William transferred his house and premises at 5 York Street, Sydney, to his son-in-law Daniel Jurd<sup>2</sup>. The transfer contained the condition that William and his housekeeper Ellen Holden (presumably the same woman) could reside there rent free, however they appear to have resided there for only a short time as by 1828 William was living with his daughter's family in Pitt Town. Daniel and Elizabeth Jurd were well-established at Pitt Town by 1828; they had a 75-acre farm with 6 horses and 24 cattle.

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<sup>2</sup> Land Titles Office: Register of Deeds [BK A. No.99]

William *Alex* Douglas died in 1838 and was buried at St Alban's Old Cemetery with the Jurd family. His monumental inscription reads<sup>3</sup>:

Sacred  
to  
the memory of  
WILLIAM DOUGLAS  
who departed this life  
November 27 1836  
Aged 61 years.

.....d him through one  
daughter he left here behind  
with his grandchildren nine  
whose constant prayer they  
do set forth for him from  
time to time may his soul  
rest in peace amen

This inscription records that William *Alex* Douglas left behind one daughter and nine grandchildren. His daughter Elizabeth had nine children alive in 1838 so the inscription provides no evidence to suggest that William had more than one child or one family of grandchildren living in 1838. This is particularly significant when it is noted that his two alleged "sons" had six children between them at that time.

Therefore, the information available for William *Alex* Douglas does not support the theory that he had any children other than a daughter Elizabeth. No reference has been found suggesting any link with the children Thomas and William. If he had sons nearing adulthood it would seem more logical to transfer his home in Sydney to them rather than to a well-established son-in-law living miles from Sydney. Mrs Hutton Neve writes that William applied for a grant of land for his son William, however why apply for a grant when already disposing of a property?<sup>4</sup>

Finally if William *Alex* Douglas had other children and grandchildren the wording on the gravestone appears particularly odd. Are descendants claiming that the family deliberately excluded any reference to his other children and grandchildren when preparing the inscription or did he in fact have no other children or grandchildren? In view of the available evidence, the latter is almost certainly the correct conclusion.

### **The two sons Thomas and William**

Not only does the information available for William *Alex* Douglas provide no evidence of his fathering other children, the information available for Thomas *BC* Douglas and William *BC* Douglas provides no evidence linking them with William *Alex* Douglas.

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<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly incorrect transcriptions of this headstone have been found in some published references to William Douglass.

<sup>4</sup> No source reference for this information has been located.

In the muster and census records for the 1820's only one Thomas Douglas and one William Douglas with the notation "born in the colony" (BC) were listed. The early marriage registers record only one Thomas Douglas and one William Douglas who appear to have been born in the colony, and these marriage entries link up with the muster and census entries. This suggests that only one Thomas Douglas and one William Douglas were born in the colony in the early 1800s and were alive in the 1820s.

### **Thomas *BC* Douglas**

The only parish records and muster entries located for a Thomas Douglas who was born in the colony in the early years are as follows:

- Baptism: No entry
- 1822 Muster: Douglas, Thomas - BC In gaol for trial, Sydney
- 1823/4/5 Muster List: Douglass, Thomas - 23 BC Labourer, Richmond
- 1828 Census: Douglass, Thos. - 24 BC Prot. Farmer, Richmond, tot. acreage 29, all cultivated
- Marriage: Thomas Douglas married Charlotte Plumb on 11 August 1829 at St Peter's Richmond. Witnesses: Thomas and Alice Adams
- Child's baptism: Thomas, son of Thomas and Charlotte Douglas, Farmer, Richmond, born 12 July 1830, baptised 3 July 1831, St Peter's, Richmond

These records provide the information that Thomas Douglas was born in the colony between 1801 and 1804, resided at Richmond in the 1820's (whereas William *Alex* Douglas was in Sydney) and worked as a farmer. There is no baptism record for a Thomas Douglas who was born in the early years of the colony nor is Thomas linked with parents in the muster or census records, so from the above sources no information about his parentage can be determined.

Further information about Thomas *BC* Douglas is known. Thomas Douglas and Charlotte Plumb had nine children all born at Richmond and baptised at St Peter's, Richmond, as follows:

1. Thomas - bn 1830
2. Maria - bn 1832
3. Phillip - bn 1834
4. Rachael - bn 1836
5. Sarah Jane - bn 1840
6. Joseph - bn 1843
7. Eliza - bn 1846
8. Charlotte Ann - bn 1848
9. George - bn 1851

Thomas' wife Charlotte died in 1881 at Richmond and was buried at St Peter's, Richmond. Thomas was presumably the man who died in 1871 and was also buried at St Peter's, Richmond. The death certificate of this man appears to be that of Charlotte's husband as it records that he was a 66-year-old farm labourer who was born in the colony, however it notes that he was unmarried and had no family. The certificate adds that Thomas' father was a farm labourer by the name of Douglas, his mother unknown; the informant was the superintendent of Windsor Hospital, where

the deceased was residing at the time of his death. Descendants have generally accepted that this is Thomas' death certificate, with the lack of a reference to family being an error on behalf of the informant, however the certificate provides no information to assist in the search for Thomas' parentage.

The information available for Thomas *BC* Douglas provides no evidence to support the theory that William *Alex* Douglas was his father, yet this is the conclusion researchers have reached. This conclusion was probably formed by researchers who combined the following information:

- The entry for Thomas *BC* Douglas in the 1828 Census which recorded that he was born in the colony c1804;
- The lack of a baptism record for any person by the name of Thomas Douglas who was born in the colony in the early years;
- The entry for William *Alex* Douglas in the 1806 Land & Stock Muster which recorded him with a wife and two children; and
- The existence of only one baptism record for a child born to William *Alex* Douglas.

It is worth noting that in a letter to the author, "Fellowship of First Fleeters" staff members Joyce Cowell and Roderick Best wrote that researchers also reached this conclusion because of the consecutive entries for Thomas *BC* Douglass, William *BC* Douglass and William *Alex* Douglass in the 1828 Census. However in reaching this conclusion they clearly failed to understand that the 1828 Census was taken on household returns, one for each household, and that as Thomas *BC* Douglass was recorded as living at Richmond, while the other two were recorded as living at Pitt Town, the consecutive nature of the entries could only have been a matter of coincidence. A failure to take into consideration the method by which the information in a muster or census return was collected can lead to errors in analysis, as has obviously happened in this situation.

A thorough and accurate analysis of the available information shows that the conclusion that Thomas *BC* Douglas was the son of William *Alex* Douglas cannot be supported. No evidence has been found to suggest that William *Alex* Douglas had more than one child, and no evidence has been found to suggest that the father of Thomas *BC* Douglas could have been William *Alex* Douglas. Therefore the possibility must be raised that Thomas *BC* Douglas was the son of another family. Thomas *BC* Douglas's real parentage is discussed later.

### **William *BC* Douglas**

The only entries from the baptism, marriage and muster/census records for a William Douglas who was born in the early years of the colony are as follows:

- Baptism: William, son of William Douglas, ship carpenter, and Ann Peat, born 10 June 1809 Pitt Town, baptised 22 March 1829 Portland Head Presbyterian.
- 1822 Muster: Children are generally unnamed.
- 1823/45 Muster List: Douglass, William - 16 BC Son of William Douglass, Windsor (listed as part of family of William Douglas of Windsor: District Constable, arrived "Coromandel" 1804)

- 1828 Census: Douglass, William - 20 BC Labourer to John Grono, Pitt Town
- Marriage: William Douglas aged 22 of Wilberforce (signed with mark) married Jane Wright aged 15 of Wilberforce on 17 May 1831 at Wilberforce by the rites of the Presbyterian Church. Witnesses were Elizabeth Douglas and Richard Hayes both of Wilberforce.
- Child's baptism: William son of William Douglas and Jane Wright, Settler, Lower Wilberforce, born 28 March 1834, baptised 4 May 1834, Portland Head Presbyterian.

These records provide the information that William *BC* Douglas was born at Pitt Town in 1809 to William Douglas and Ann Peat. His father was a District Constable at Windsor in 1825 and had arrived on the *Coromandel* in 1804. Later records show that William *BC* Douglas lived at Wilberforce in the 1830's and was of the Presbyterian faith. He died in 1877 however his parents were not listed on his death certificate. He and his wife Jane had ten children as follows:

1. William - born 1834
2. Mary Ann - born 1836
3. James - born 1839
4. Ellen - born 1841
5. Ann Pete - born 1844
6. George - born 1846
7. Sarah - born c1849
8. Joseph - born 1851
9. Rosetta - born 1854
10. John Thomas - born 1857

Various records link the child born in 1809 with the man who married Jane Wright. The birth certificate of William and Jane's youngest son records that William "BC" Douglas was born c1809 at Pitt Town. In addition William and Jane named their fifth child "Ann Pete Douglas" after William's natural mother.

Although the 1823/4/5 Muster List includes William *BC* Douglas as part of the family of William *Coro* Douglas this information has been ignored. William *BC* Douglas has been accepted as the son of William *Alex* Douglas apparently as a result of other information located for William *Coro* Douglas' family.

## William Coro Douglas

William *Coro* Douglas arrived as a convict on the transport *Coromandel* in 1804 and either married or established a common-law relationship with Mary Ann Cross c1809. Mary Ann Cross was the daughter of Charles Cross and Rose Flood and was born in the colony c1793. William and Mary Ann Douglass had the following children, although it must be noted that William was recorded as *George* in the baptisms of his youngest three children:

1. Sarah - bn 22 August 1810, bp Windsor
2. Charles - bn 31 July 1812, bp Windsor
3. Elizabeth<sup>5</sup> - twin bn 14 Nov 1814, Wilberforce, bp Windsor
4. Mary Ann - twin bn 14 Nov 1814, Wilberforce, bp Windsor
5. George - bn 12 July 1817, bp Windsor
6. Christopher - bn 1 October 1820, Pitt Town
7. Eleanor - bn 10 June 1823, Pitt Town
8. Humphrey Taylor - bn 10 Apl 1826, Pitt Town
9. Thomas Green - bn 18 Jan 1829, Pitt Town
10. James - bn 9 July 1831, Pitt Town
11. Henry - bn 13 March 1835, Pitt Town

William *Coro* Douglas died in 1852 prior to civil registration so no death certificate is available. However his wife died in 1862 and her death certificate lists the eleven children recorded above, with no reference to a son named William. From the information on this death certificate researchers appear to have concluded that William *BC* Douglas could not have been a member of the family of William *Coro* Douglas and Mary Ann Cross. The evidence of the 1823/4/5 Muster List was ignored.

Nevertheless, the conclusion that William *Alex* Douglas was the father of William *BC* Douglas appears to have been one almost of default. According to his baptism entry, William *BC* Douglas' father had the first name *William* and was resident in the colony in 1809. Eligible in both categories, William *Alex* Douglas was chosen for the role. The letter from the Fellowship of First Fleeters shows that the consecutive, albeit unlinked, entries for William *Alex* Douglas and William *BC* Douglas in the 1828 Census acted as confirmation, as both were residing in Pitt Town at that time. The fact that William *Coro* Douglas was also living at Pitt Town in 1828 appears to have been ignored as the death certificate of Mary Ann (Cross) Douglas had "proved" to those researchers that William *Coro* Douglas could not have been the father. Yet no other evidence has been found suggesting a link between William *BC* Douglas and William *Alex* Douglas.

The conclusion that William *Coro* Douglas was not the father of William *BC* Douglas and therefore that William *Alex* Douglas was the father is inaccurate. The 1823/4/5 Muster List is not the only record to indicate that the family of William *Coro* Douglas included another child.

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<sup>5</sup> The child recorded as the twin of Mary Ann in the baptism register is named Joseph. No baptism has been found for a child Elizabeth born to the Douglass family however the child linked as the twin of Mary Ann in the 1823/4/5 Muster List and recorded as the same age as Mary Ann in the 1828 Census is named *Elizabeth* and not *Joseph*. As there is no reference to a *Joseph Douglas* in any record other than the baptism, and as numerous references to Elizabeth have been found, this suggests that a mistake was made by the session clerk when recording the baptism.

The list of children born to William *Coro* Douglas and his wife Mary Ann Cross (shown above) indicates that they had two children when the General Muster was taken in 1814, six children in 1820, seven children in 1823, eight children in 1826 and nine children in 1829. Yet contemporary records consistently add one more child to the family. The 1814 Muster records that William's wife was **responsible** for three children at that time (although it must be noted that the Muster inaccurately recorded her husband as *Thomas* rather than *William* Douglass). The muster for the Windsor district was taken late in October 1814 prior to the birth of their twins on 14 November 1814, yet according to the list above only two children had been born to William and Mary Ann Douglass prior to the birth of the twins. Therefore the 1814 Muster indicates that the Douglass family included one child more than was recorded in baptism entries and in the death certificate for Mary Ann (Cross) Douglas.

The 1822 Muster records seven unnamed children as belonging to William *Coro* Douglas of Windsor however according to the above list the family only had six children at that time. In July 1824 William Douglas, District Constable of Pitt Town, signed a petition requesting a further grant of land<sup>6</sup>. He stated that he had arrived on the *Coromandel* in 1804 and had a large family of eight children - the eldest 16 years, the youngest 11 months. Again, this is one child more than baptism records and Mary Ann's death certificate suggest had been born to the family; furthermore the eldest child in those records, Sarah, was only 13 years of age in July 1824.

The 1823/4/5 Muster List groups the following eight children as offspring of William *Coro* Douglas:

William	- 16 BC
Sarah	- 15 BC
Charles	- 13 BC
Mary Ann	- 10 BC }
Elizabeth	- 10 BC }
George	- 8 BC
Christopher	- 6 BC
Eleanor	- 3 BC

The eldest child (William aged 16 BC) was the only William Douglas included in the Muster List who was born in the colony. His age indicates quite clearly that he was the same person as William *BC* Douglas (born in the colony in 1809). Why would he be recorded with this family if he was not a member of the family?

The Reeve Record File includes a transcript of a letter from William Douglas, District Constable at Pitt Town, to the Surveyor-General dated 2 February 1828.<sup>7</sup> In the letter William *Coro* Douglas mentions that he has a large family of 9 children, however according to the list of children from baptism records and from the death certificate of Mary Ann (Cross) Douglas only 8 children were alive in 1828, the 9th not to be born for another year.

Clearly all of these records indicate that another child belonged to William *Coro* Douglas' family and that this child was William *BC* Douglas. In addition, further

<sup>6</sup> Petition - William Douglass [SRNSW ref: Colonial Secretary In-Letters - 4/1837 No.287; Reel 1074]

<sup>7</sup> Reeve Record File [SAG ref: 11/6/7/158 - last page]

evidence has been found which supports the theory that William *BC* Douglas was a member of the family of William *Coro* Douglas:

- William *BC* Douglas was living in Pitt Town in 1828 where William *Coro* Douglas and his family were living.
- William *BC* Douglas was of the Presbyterian faith as he was baptised, married and baptised his own children in Presbyterian churches. William *Coro* Douglas also appears to have been Presbyterian as he baptised youngest three children in a Presbyterian church.
- The Presbyterian church in which William *BC* Douglas was baptised in 1829 and in which he baptised his own children in the 1830's was Portland Head Presbyterian. William *Coro* Douglas baptised his youngest three children in Portland Head Presbyterian Church in 1836.
- The marriage of William *BC* Douglas and Jane Wright in 1831 was witnessed by Elizabeth Douglas. William *Coro* Douglas had a daughter Elizabeth who was not married until 1832, however William *Alex* Douglas' daughter Elizabeth was married in 1812 and used the surname *Jurd* from then on so she was not the witness to William *BC* Douglas' marriage. [The other witness was Richard Hayes who was probably the man married to Mary Ann Cross' sister Elizabeth - from Michelle Patient]
- William *BC* Douglas and Jane Wright gave six of their children names that had been given to children of William *Coro* Douglas: *William*, *Mary Ann*, *James*, *Ellen/Eleanor*, *George* and *Sarah*. Furthermore their eldest two children, William and Mary Ann, were given the names of William *Coro* Douglas and his wife Mary Ann Cross. (William *Alex* Douglas' wife was *Mary*, not *Mary Ann* in original sources; these two names were quite distinct in the 1700/1800's with families often giving different daughters the names *Mary* and *Mary Ann*.)
- In 1827 William *Coro* Douglas wrote to the Surveyor-General regarding the selection of his grant of land. He requested that he could select land at Little Caddie Creek adjoining that of his brother-in-law Christopher Cross. In 1845 the *NSW Government Gazette* recorded a grant of land to Christopher Cross and noted that the land had been promised to William Douglass, the younger. Christopher Cross was the brother-in-law of William *Coro* Douglas so it would be understandable if land was transferred between William *Coro* Douglas' son, William *BC* Douglas, and Christopher Cross. However why would a son born to William *Alex* Douglas make such an arrangement?

No baptism has been found for a child William born around 1809 at Pitt Town to William *Coro* Douglas and Mary Ann Cross, however this is not surprising as William *BC* Douglas was not the child of this couple. His baptism entry records that his mother was a woman named Ann Peat. William was clearly aware of his mother's real identity as indicated by the fact that he was baptised as an adult and that he named his fifth child *Ann Pete Douglas*. As William *BC* Douglas was obviously aware of his mother's real identity, it is highly likely that his siblings would also have been aware of her identity. This would account for the fact that William's half-brother Christopher did not include William's name on the death certificate of his mother; Mary Ann (Cross) Douglas was Christopher's mother and the mother of the other children but she was not the mother of William *BC* Douglas.

It is clear from the available evidence that William *BC* Douglas was not the son of William *Alex* Douglas. No evidence whatsoever has been found to suggest a link between William *BC* Douglas and William *Alex* Douglas, however conclusive

evidence has been found linking William *BC* Douglas with William *Coro* Douglas. This evidence shows that William *BC* Douglas was the son of William *Coro* Douglas and a woman named Ann Peat, however he was brought up by William *Coro* Douglas and his wife Mary Ann Cross.

### Thomas "BC" Douglas

Determining the family background of Thomas *BC* Douglas was more difficult as no record has been found linking him with his parents. However one piece of evidence from the 1823/4/5 Muster List acts as the key to solving the puzzle. The Muster List was generally recorded in alphabetical order although this was not always consistent. In family groupings the parents were recorded first with the children following in descending age order. Occasionally children were listed separately from the parents but still in descending age order. The entry for Thomas *BC* Douglas in the extant copy of the 1823/4/5 Muster List is found in the following environment:

Douglass, Thomas - 23 BC Labourer, Richmond  
Douglass, Philip - 20 " " "

The entry for Philip Douglas follows that of Thomas in descending age order and "ditto" Thomas in all other details, although it must be noted that the dittos were transcribed in full in the published volume for computerisation, indexing and sorting purposes. [Always check the original!] Although the Douglas entries in the muster are not consistently in alphabetical order they are loosely that way, however these two entries break the alphabetical order. This suggests that the manner in which the entries were recorded indicates a family relationship. Substance to this theory is provided when it is noted that Thomas *BC* Douglas gave his second son the uncommon name *Philip*.

No trace of a baptism record has been found for a Philip Douglas who was born in the colony in the early 1800's however the various muster, marriage and burial records provide further information:

- 1822 Muster: Douglas, Philip - BC Labourer, Windsor.
- 1825 Muster: Douglass, Philip - 20 BC Labourer, Richmond.
- Marriage: Philip Douglas (aged 20 free) married Ann Ham (aged 16 free) at St Peters Richmond on 22 August 1825. Witnesses were Maria Douglas and James Duff.
- Child's Baptism: James son of Philip and Ann Douglas born 25 February 1827, baptised 20 May 1827 at St Peters Richmond.
- Burial: Douglass, Philip aged 20 BC Farmer died Hospital Sydney buried 17 August 1829, St James, Sydney.
- Monumental Inscription at Devonshire Street Burial Ground: Philip Douglas died 14 August 1828 aged 22 Years.

These records provide the information that Philip Douglas was born in the colony between 1804 and 1808, resided in the Richmond area in the 1820's, was a farmer, and was of unknown parentage. However Philip Douglas is linked with another "Douglas" in the record of his marriage. The witness to his marriage in 1825 was a Maria Douglas who was presumably a member of Philip Douglas' family. It is

therefore important to note that Thomas *BC* Douglas also named his eldest daughter Maria, another less common given name.

The only Maria Douglas listed in the 1823/4/5 Muster was recorded as 15 years of age, born in the colony, and the daughter of Thomas Douglas of Richmond. No record has survived of a baptism for Maria Douglas although other information is available.

- 1822 Muster: Douglas, Maria - 17 BC Windsor
- 1825 Muster: Douglass, Maria - 15 BC Daughter of Thomas Douglas, Richmond
- Marriage: Maria Douglas (aged 19) married John Deegan (aged 29, Assistant Jailer), at St Philip's, Sydney on 15 September 1827 with the consent of her parents. Witnesses: W. Wilson and Mary Wilson both of Sydney

These records provide the information that Maria Douglas was the daughter of Thomas Douglas of Richmond and was born between 1804 and 1810, and that her parents were alive in 1827. In November 1827 the *Sydney Gazette* records that Maria ran away from her husband. No trace of her has been found in later records to date.

From the information in the records above and the names given to Thomas *BC* Douglas' children it appears that Thomas came from a family which included the following members:

- Thomas - born 1801-1804
- Philip - born 1804-1808
- Maria - born 1804-1810

As the only person by the name of Maria Douglas, who was listed in the Musters for the 1820's, was recorded as the daughter of Thomas Douglas of Richmond it is possible that all of these children were members of this man's family. Is there any evidence to support this theory?

### **Thomas *Can* Douglas**

Thomas Douglas of Richmond was a convict who arrived on the *Canada* in 1801. He does not appear to have married in the colony but lived with another convict Sarah Pearce from around 1804 until her death in 1851. Sarah Pearce was born c1780 and was transported per *Nile* in 1801.

The original thesis included copious details about the family of Thomas *Can* Douglas and Sarah Pearce, however it is now unnecessary to provide most of this analysis as information has since been found which provides conclusive evidence of a connection between Thomas *BC* Douglas, Philip Douglas and another sibling, and therefore between Thomas *BC* Douglas and Thomas *Can* Douglas. If more information is required, the original thesis at the Society of Australian Genealogists can be examined.

Thomas *Can* Douglas and Sarah Pearce settled in the Windsor district c1805 and in Richmond c1815 where they remained until their deaths in the 1850's. Sarah was

the mother of twelve children, the first three being born to various men, and the final nine to Thomas *Can* Douglas. Details of these children are as follows:

1. John was born in the late 1790's and arrived with his mother per *Nile* in 1801. He apparently used the surnames *Pearce/Pierce* and *Douglass* at will, and in court records and the 1828 Census he is recorded as *John Pearce alias Douglas*.
2. Thomas was born 15 December 1802 to Sarah Pearce and baptised at St Philip's Sydney on 18 April 1803. The baptism recorded his father as *Thomas Reynolds*, however this man appears to have been a convict who arrived in 1802 aboard the *Atlas* only two months before the child was born. As Thomas Reynolds could not have conceived the child it appears likely that an unknown man conceived the child and that Sarah Pearce was living with Thomas Reynolds at the time of his birth or baptism. Sarah appears to have had little if anything to do with Thomas Reynolds from 1804 onwards (Thomas *Atlas* Reynolds lived with Mary Nuttle from around 1805 onwards and named a son born in 1811 *Thomas*). Evidence will show that Sarah's son Thomas (born 1802) was Thomas *BC* Douglas.
3. Elizabeth was born on 15 July 1804 in Sydney. Her baptism records that she was the daughter of Reynold and Sarah Douglas however no such couple existed. Elizabeth appears to have been conceived while Sarah Pearce was living with Thomas Reynolds and born while Sarah was living with Thomas Douglas, hence the confusion with names. Elizabeth died on 17 September 1804 as a result of being eaten by a pig and was buried on 18 September 1804. The *Sydney Gazette* reported her death and in so doing confirms her connection with Sarah Pearce and also confirms the existence of the two older children as it notes that "the mother on returning home with the little creature in her arms, placed it on the bed that she might herself go in search of two other children". [NB. This story has generated the title for the recent publication *Pig Eats Baby!*]
4. Philip bn c1804-1809 and discussed above. His marriage entry was witnessed by Maria (below).
5. Maria was born between 1805 and 1809 to Thomas Douglas and Sarah Pearce. Her parentage is confirmed by duplicate entries in the 1823/4/5 Muster List. Under the surname *Douglas* Maria was recorded as 15 years of age, born in the colony, and the daughter of Thomas Douglas of Richmond. Under *Pearce* she was recorded as 16 years of age, born in the colony, and the daughter of Sarah Pearce and Thomas Douglas of Richmond; she was also linked with a number of later children. Most of the references for Maria suggest that she was born c1808.
6. Ann born 4 August 1810, baptised Windsor, died 1811.
7. Joseph born 1 April 1812, baptised Windsor.
8. Charlotte born 2 April 1814, baptised Windsor.<sup>8</sup>
9. Sarah born 1 April 1816, Richmond, baptised Richmond

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<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Douglass is the ancestor of the author, Carol Baxter.

10. Henry born 2 Jly 1819, Richmond; baptised Richmond
11. Isaac born 1 February 1821, Richmond; baptised Richmond
12. William born October 1824; died 1825 Richmond

Information has been found which provides confirmation of the link between Sarah Pearce's eldest sons, John, Thomas and Philip. On 1 July 1809 the records of the Colonial Secretary include three consecutive entries which record that John Pearce, Thomas Douglas and Philip Douglas received rations from the Hawkesbury stores.<sup>9</sup> They were placed on half-rations (indicating that they were children) by order of the Lt. Governor, presumably as a result of the Hawkesbury floods in June 1809. These three children were undoubtedly Sarah Pearce's three eldest living children; the daughter Maria was probably still being breast-fed at this time, and was therefore not in need of the same quantity of food. It is interesting to note that Sarah's eldest son was listed with the surname *Pearse* while the other two were named *Douglas*. These were the surnames they used in later life.

These three half-brothers appeared before the courts on a number of occasions in the 1820's charged with a variety of crimes committed in the Richmond/Windsor area. In 1822 the case of "The King vs John Pearce and Philip Douglass Free" recorded that John and Philip were "charged with taking down the fence of William Cox Esq. of Clarendon and turning into his paddock seven head of cattle".<sup>10</sup> John appeared before the courts again in 1826 charged as "John Pearce alias Douglass" although he was described in the proceedings as "Douglass".<sup>11</sup> He was again referred to as John Pearce alias Douglas when he was convicted in 1828 and transported to Moreton Bay.<sup>12</sup> John's half-brother Philip was convicted of another crime in 1827 and died while a prisoner in Sydney a short time later.<sup>13</sup>

The 1822 Muster also reveals that Thomas *BC* Douglas was "in gaol for trial" at that time. Court records reveal that Thomas Douglass (free) was committed for trial in August 1822 on the charge of "stealing a cow" in Richmond.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly enough the proceedings described him as Thomas Douglass jnr, which strongly indicates a relationship with Thomas Douglass snr, that is Thomas *Can* Douglas. Furthermore, the apparent link between Thomas *BC* Douglas and the family of Thomas *Can* Douglas and Sarah Pearce is supported by the fact that Thomas gave six of his children names from that family: *Thomas, Maria, Phillip, Sarah, Joseph* and *Charlotte* (although admittedly the first and last were also the names of Thomas and his wife Charlotte).

The various connections noted in the above records between John Pearce alias Douglas, Thomas *BC* Douglas, Philip Douglas and Maria Douglas, and the connections recorded between Maria Douglas and the family of Thomas Douglas and Sarah Pearce, combined with the fact that all were living in Richmond throughout this period whereas William *Alex* Douglas was living in Sydney, indicate

<sup>9</sup> John Pearce, Thomas Douglas and Philip Douglas on Hawkesbury Stores [SRNSW ref: 9/2673, p.62; Reel 6040].

<sup>10</sup> Court of Criminal Jurisdiction: Session 19-30 Dec 1822 [SRNSW ref: SZ800 p.201 No.17; Reel 1978]

<sup>11</sup> *Sydney Gazette* October 1826.

<sup>12</sup> Petitions [SRNSW ref: 4/1987 No. 28/5758 & 4/1988 No. 28/6005]; also 1828 Census.

<sup>13</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 18 Apl 1827; Col.Sec. petitions, burial entry &c.

<sup>14</sup> Court of Criminal Jurisdiction: 23 Sep - 17 Oct 1822 [SRNSW ref: SZ798 p.357 No.25; Reel 1977]

beyond a shadow of doubt that Thomas *BC* Douglass was a member of the family of Thomas Douglas and Sarah Pearce. Presumably Thomas *BC* Douglass adopted his stepfather's surname as he was only a toddler when his mother established a relationship with Thomas *Can* Douglas.

### **The Three Douglas Families**

The evidence speaks for itself. William *Alex* Douglas was not the father of a large family. He was the father of only one known child, a daughter Elizabeth. His other "sons" were in fact the sons of two other families. Thomas *BC* Douglas was born in 1802 to convict Sarah Pearce and acquired the surname Douglas from his stepfather, Thomas *Can* Douglas. William *BC* Douglas was the son of William *Coro* Douglas and a woman named Ann Peat, and was brought up by William *Coro* Douglas and his wife Mary Ann Cross.

The conclusion that William *Alex* Douglas was the father of these two sons has been accepted as fact for many years now however the evidence proves that the genealogies of all of these families will need to be corrected. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* writes: "Genealogy, like every other branch of knowledge, must ... submit itself to recognized scientific methods and frankly admit where descents hitherto accepted can no longer be satisfactorily proved".

### **Postscript**

One of the most important genealogical rules of thumb is never to accept the research of others without thoroughly checking it. Mollie Gillen in her well-researched and authoritative publication *The Founders of Australia: A Biographical Dictionary of the First Fleet* (1989) researched William Douglas of the *Alexander* and could find no evidence to support the connection between William Douglas and his two alleged sons. Accordingly she omitted all references to these sons in her biography of William *Alex* Douglas.

It is strongly advised that anyone claiming descent from William *Alex* Douglas through these two sons also re-examine the evidence. The above essay can serve as a guideline to the sources that need to be checked and to the manner in which these sources should be interpreted, however it is also recommended that researchers read for themselves the introductory pages to the various muster and census returns quoted in this essay. Given that most of the errors in this family history are the result of an incorrect interpretation of information contained in these muster and census returns, a thorough reading of the introductory pages should prove enlightening and beneficial.