

# JAMES MCKEOWN

## From fact to folklore to legend to fable...and back again!

### PART 3

– Dr. Dan Catchpole\*

Alfred Samuel Whalans' account of the discovery of Jenolan Caves, published as a letter on February 17th 1920, is deemed to be 'as true a version as one may be ever likely to see now or in the future' [1] for this period of Jenolan's history. As one of the first 'guides' of Jenolan, and son of its recognized discoverer, Alfred should be a most reliable source. Within his account, it is noted that "after considerable investigation' the discovery of the caves by Charles Whalan occurred in 1838. We have discovered that his older brother, James Whalan, when, in 1836 whilst chasing down and capturing the recalcitrant convict abscondee James McKeown after he stole a horse from Whalan's Ginkin station, came across the famed limestone outcrops.



Figure 1 – Signature of William Hall Palmer [16]

Alfred Samuel Whalan, the seventh child of Charles Whalan Jr and Elizabeth Harper, was born in 1849, 13 years after McKeown's capture. In his account, he noted that his first memory of being at the caves was in 1861 when he was a boy of 12 years old, some 25 years after McKeown's capture. At this point Charles Whalan Jr (b. 1811), was 50 years old but his brother James Whalan had died (d. 1854). So whilst Alfred Whalans' involvement with the caves early history is significant, including running a telephone line to the caves as well as helping to build the first Caves House, his account of James McKeown's capture is based on tales told to a young boy and recounted many years afterwards.



Figure 2 – Surveyor General Walker Rannie Davidson [17]

As we tease out the information relating to James McKeown and glean the exact circumstances surrounding his presence in the Jenolan Caves

valley, can we gain any further insight from such accounts? Within Alfred Whalan's account, he recalls that some of the locals used to come to their farm, 'Glyndwr', for the purpose of visiting the caves. He notes that 'Amongst some of the early visitors were Dr. Palmer, then Police Magistrate of Bathurst, Mr. District Surveyor Davidson, 'Old' Doctor Machattie and some of the McPhillamy family.' [2]

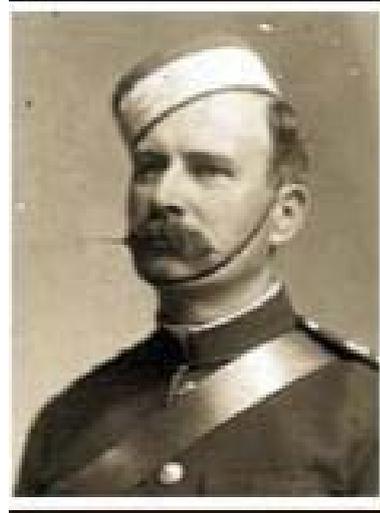


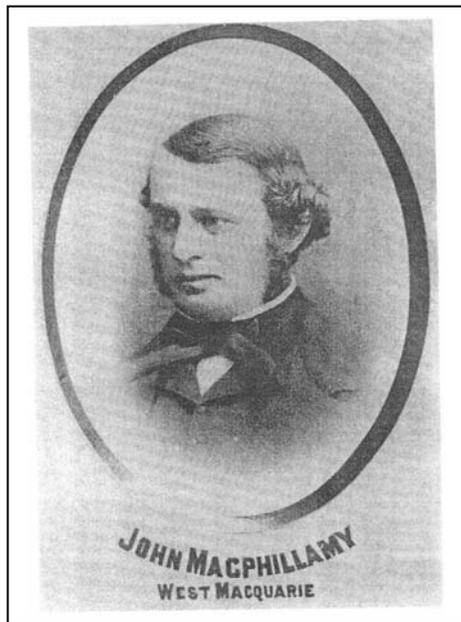
Figure 3 – Dr Thomas Machattie, son of Dr Richard Machattie [18]

#### WHO WERE THESE NOTORIETIES?

**Dr William Hall Palmer** (1804-1884) – was appointed as "Magistrate to the territories and its dependencies' in 1842 [3] and moved from Parramatta to act as Police Magistrate to the Bathurst Court House (Figure 1). Dr Palmer was approved as a medical doctor in 1862. It appears his most famous conviction was of the bushranger John Vane.

**Surveyor Walker Rannie Davidson** (-1876) – officially named as the 'discoverer' and surveyor the Burragylong Caverns (later called Abercrombie Caves) in 1842. In 1844 he was responsible for establishing the township of Orange and was appointed District Surveyor of Bathurst in 1857 and finally NSW's 7th Surveyor General from 1862-68 [3] (Figure 2). A colleague of Sir Thomas Mitchell, Davidson had many roles in constructing a plan for greater western NSW. He is buried in Deniliquin, NSW.

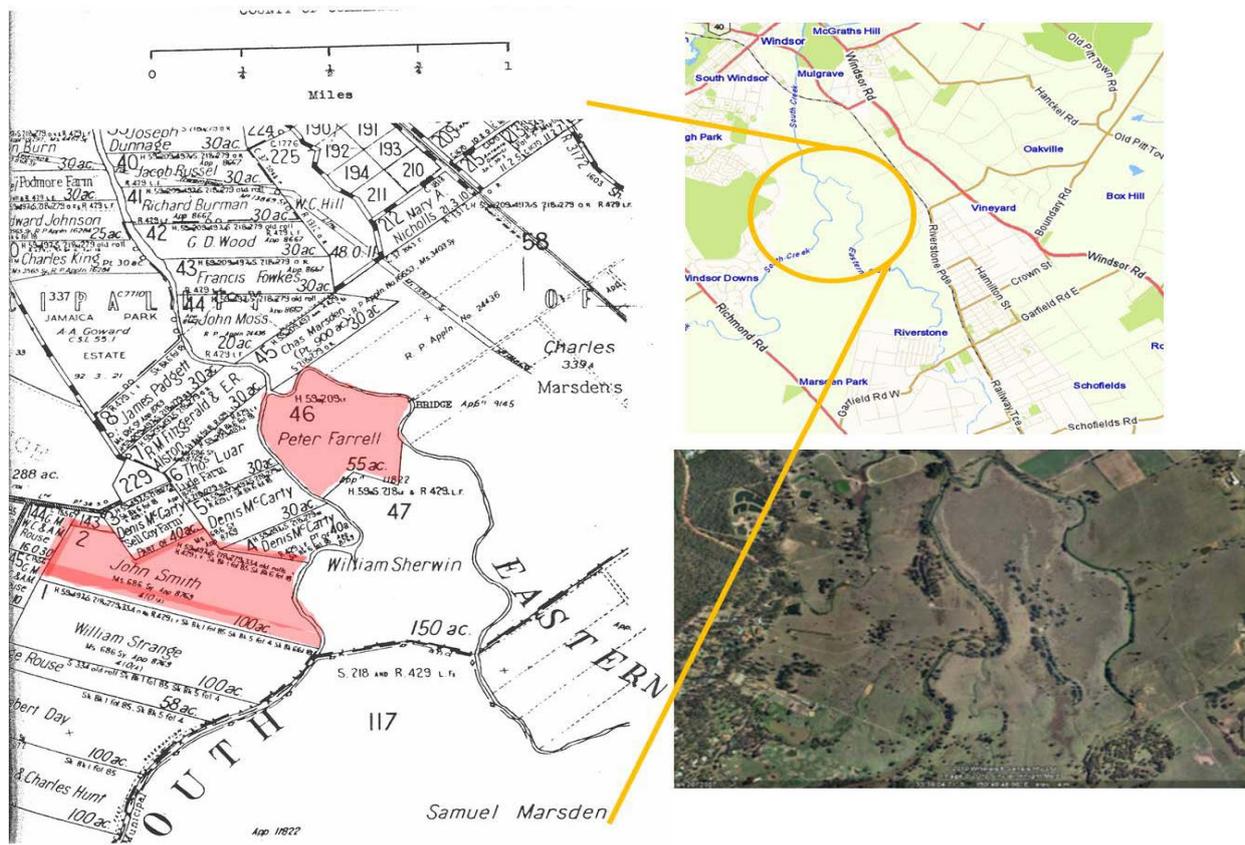
**'Old' Doctor Richard Machattie** (1813-1876) – was the well loved surgeon and Mayor of Bathurst in whom 'Machattie Park' has been named. Richard Machattie sailed from Scotland on the *Lady Fitzherbert* and arrived in Sydney Sep 1838 as ship's surgeon. Obviously 'Old' Machattie had a young son – Thomas Machattie (Figure 3) – who also practiced medicine in Bathurst from 1880-1917. Dr Richard Machattie has been immortalized in an oil painting by Dr W. Ewart in 1853 [4].



**Figure 4** – John Smith McPhillamy, member for West Macquarie (11/6/1859-6/12/1859) Legislative Assembly, NSW Parliament. [9, 19]

**The McPhillamy family** – we are uncertain which members of the extensive McPhillamy family Alfred Whalan was referring to. One of the visitors may have been **John Smith McPhillamy**, (1825-1887), a grazier from Bathurst who was born at South Creek Windsor, New South Wales but also briefly represented the seat of West MacQuarie on the NSW Legislative Assembly in 1859 [5,6] (Figure 4). He is the youngest son of William McPhillamy and Mary Scott. John worked for his stepfather as a station manager at Mount Tamar. On 5 March 1849 he married Maria Sophia, née Dargin (b Aug 1833 when she was 15 years old!). McPhillamy devoted himself to grazing, civic affairs, helped found the Agricultural Association at Bathurst and won prizes for his fine-wool rams at its first show in 1860.

You will note that the notorieties mentioned all had influential roles in building and growing NSWs Greater Western districts, having major impacts in the legal, agricultural, medical and the civic aspects of the society which were developing within the region. And it is within this historical landscape that we must place James McKeown.



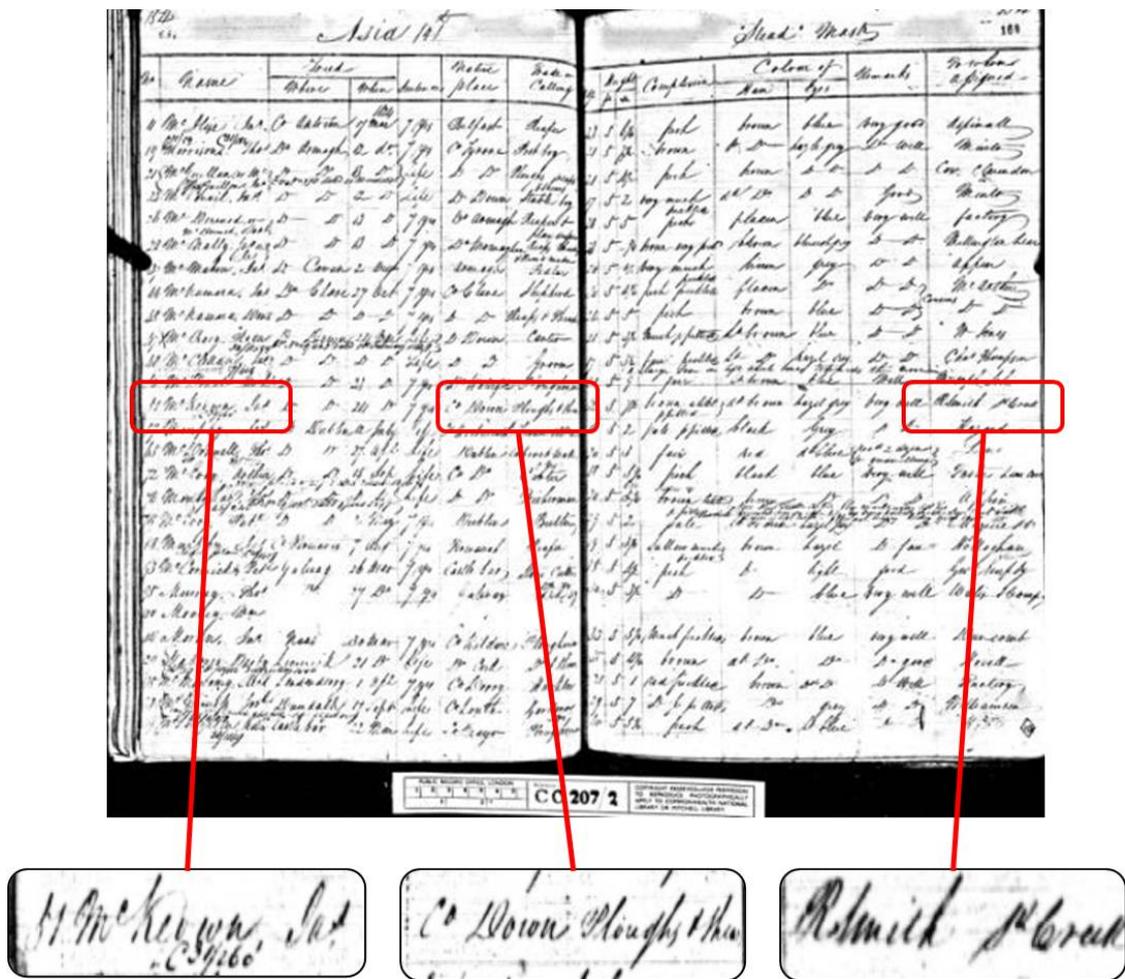
**Figure 5.** Left – ‘South Creek’ (lot 2) owned by John Smith. His son, Robert Smith, resided at this location during the 1820s. William and Mary McPhillamy were convict residents on land owned by Peter Farrell (lot 46) soon after their arrival in the colony in 1817 and until after 1825. Four of the McPhillamy children were born at this location. [9] Right – The present day map and satellite image showing it location between Windsor and Riverstone with access via Windsor Downs estate.

One prominent figure in Bathurst was **Robert Smith** (1788-1851) who arrived on the Barwell in 1798, age 10. His father, John Smith was a free settler and held 150 acres at Baulkham Hills called ‘Torry Burn’ [7]. John Smith also had 100 acres at South Creek, adjacent to land owned by Samuel Marsden (Figure 5) which was the early residence of Robert Smith.

William and Mary McPhillamy were convicts sentenced to transportation for seven years at the Ayr Court, Scotland on 27 April 1816 for the crime of ‘mobbery and obstruction of justice’. Mary arrived at Sydney in February 1817 on the *Lord Melville* and William in March the same year via the *Sir William Bensley*. William and Mary McPhillamy, according to the convict Muster of

1825 were resident in Windsor. Their second child, Robert McPhillamy was born at the 'Tumbledown Barn Homestead' on the 55-acre farm granted to Peter Farrell at South Creek. As per the map (Figure 5) the McPhillamy's were next door neighbors to Robert Smith [8]. William eventually became overseer for Robert Smith at his Mount Tamar station south of Bathurst until his early death in 1838. Mary subsequently married Robert Smith. Childless Robert Smith bequeathed his estate to the McPhillamy children when he died in 1851 turning this ex-convict family to one that 'lived in secure and imposing comfort and dominated the social and public life of the district.' It is noteworthy that only the McPhillamy children born at South Creek received Smith's inheritance. The eldest, James McPhillamy, who was born at sea in 1817, was curiously overlooked. [9]

In reference to Part 1 of this series on James McKeown [10], you will recall that upon his arrival in the colony in 1825 he was assigned to 'R Smith at South Creek' (Figure 6). The 1825 Muster records have James McKeown ('McKeon' in this case) of the 'Asia' being assigned to 'G S W Marsden, Melville' (Figure 7), that is the Reverend Samuel Marsden the prominent leader, official and cleric of early NSW history. Robert Smith was employed by Marsden c1819 to be overseer and was awarded a 'memorial of lands beyond the mountains' in 1823 [11]. Consequently, he acquired runs of land totaling 30,000 acres west of the Blue Mountains including Bathurst, Orange, Wellington and Blayney. This includes Kings Plains, Bella View, White Rock, Glen Esk, Mitchells Plains and Mount Tamar all to the south-south-east of Bathurst in the direction of Rockley, west of Jenolan. (Figure 8). [6,9]



**Figure 6** – Convict Indents for the hulk Asia IV, arriving 1825 noting that 'Jas McKeown' was assigned to 'R Smith Sth Creek'. (Obtained from NSW State Archives)

With Robert Smith owning considerable acreage in and around Bathurst he was sending convicts to his properties as early as 1824. William McPhillamy was noted as being in Bathurst in 1828 Census records as overseer working for Robert Smith. Various properties were the centre of farming activity including 'Glen Esk' on Campbell River near Lagoon as well as Robert and Mary's home at 'Mount Tamar' (Figure 9), which is now named 'Wonalabee' (Figure 10).

Thus, now we can verify that soon after his arrival to Sydney on February 1825, and assignment to Robert Smith at South Creek, James McKeown

found himself on the western side of the Blue Mountains in the Bathurst districts working for Smith/McPhillamy in a region not too far away from Oberon and the Jenolan valley. Therefore commentaries stating 'It has been suggested that he (McKeown) may have been an escapee from the convict gangs which maintained the Great Western, or Bathurst, Road' [12] therefore need to be corrected. Indeed, such commentators, historians and guiding professionals should now not feel that because there are 'no concrete facts on which to base his story'...that they should be... 'forced to construct the most likely tale'. [12]

Name	Age	Sex	Year of Arrival	Duration	Employments
McKenzie Thomas	26	M			Shelly, M. McKenzie Bank
McKenzie John	C	M	1824	14	G. S. H. H. McKenzie Bank
McKenzie Hugh	1813	C	F		Children of John McKenzie Strungally
McKenzie Alice	C	F			
McKenzie Thomas	1818	bc			
McKenzie James	1820	bc			
McKeon James	C	M	1825	7	G. S. H. H. McKenzie Bank
McKeon John	C	M	Recovery	7	G. S. H. H. McKenzie Bank

**Figure 7** – 1825 Muster Record citing James McKeon of the Asia being assigned to Rev Samuel Marsden. (Obtained from NSW State Archives)



**Figure 8** – Some of the more relevant land grants owned by Robert Esk Smith (orange cross). Many of these tracts of land were bequeathed to his step children, the McPhillamy family. Two homesteads (blue cross), Orton Park and Gorman Hills were later purchased by the now substantially well off McPhillamy clan [6, 9]. The regions where James Whalan (pink) and Charles Whalan jr (blue) were purchasing and farming land are indicated. The most direct route (feet symbols) James McKeown may have taken to arrive at the Jenolan valley would have taken him directly through the Whalan's land.

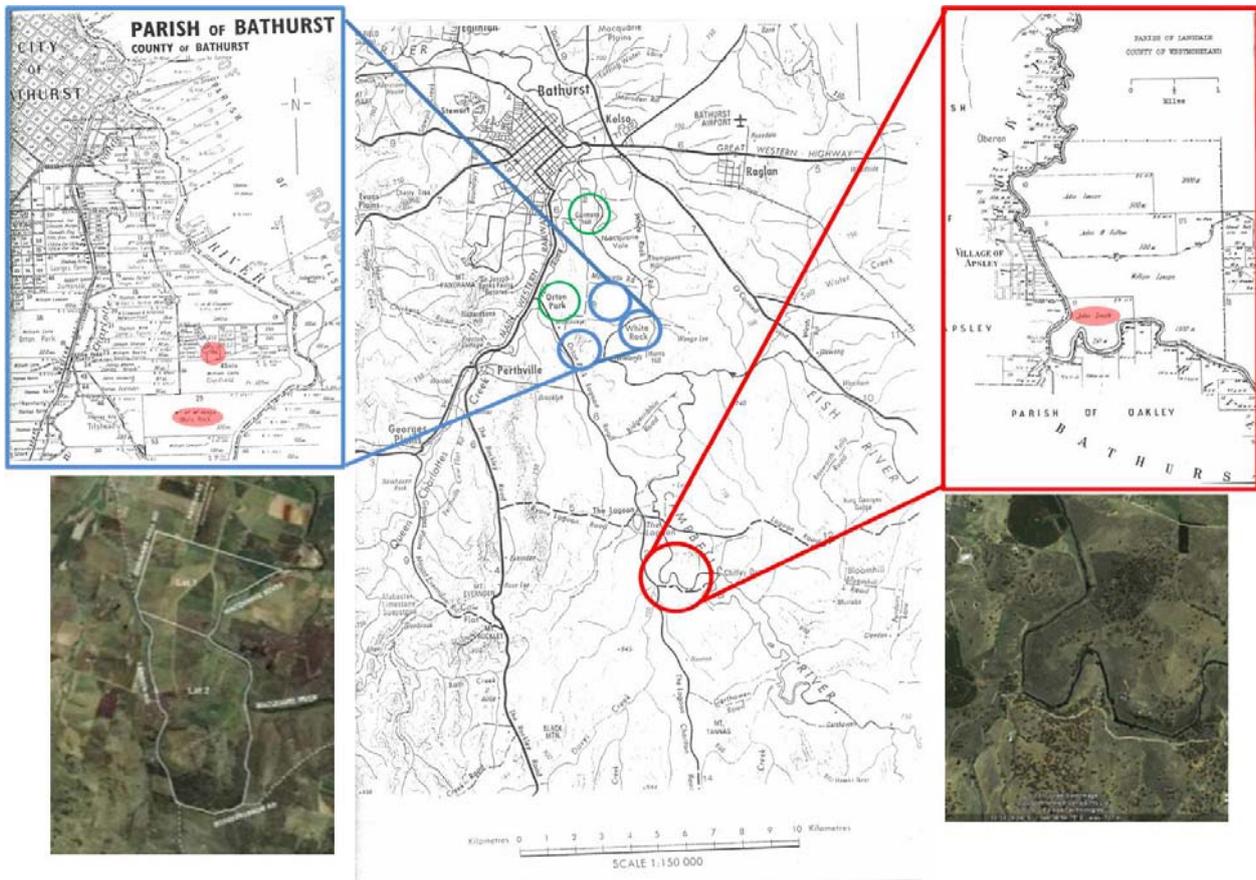
Soon after McKeown's arrival in the area, the 'Domestic Intelligence' Report on 29th October 1827 in *The Monitor* newspaper reported that...

*'A desperate ruffian named McKeon, who has for some time past been the pest of Bathurst, was brought into Sydney with some other prisoners under escort of two of the mounted police on Tuesday last, and safely lodged in His Majesty's Gaol...'* (ie the Hyde Parks Barracks). [13]

This is the first reference to McKeown's 'notoriety' among the locals of Bathurst, given that he was singled out from the other prisoners. This means that McKeown was in the region not long after Bathurst was officially founded (1815) and some 9 years before his capture at Jenolan in 1836. In 1827 Charles Whalan was but a lad at 16 years and James Whalan 21 years old – neither had taken up land grants in the region yet. McKeown however would have been 35 years of age. Since McKeown arrived in 1825 he must have been sent almost immediately to Bathurst by Robert Smith. It appears McKeown had some liberty to roam – hence his title 'Pest of Bathurst' – and is likely therefore that he knew the area better than the Whalans did!! We learn that McKeown was 'desperate' and a 'ruffian'. Not really the romantic figure we sometimes portray. Indeed, McKeown's Ticket of Leave (Figure 11) describes him as rather scarred including having a 'spear wound under his left eye'!

It was also likely that the Whalans may have been aware of McKeown in the area before his Jenolan capture. This is difficult to absolutely verify. That James Whalan and Robert Smith were buying neighboring tracts of land (Figure 8) may have seen them cross paths within business circles. Further, the fact that John Smith McPhillamy's wife, Maria Sophia (*nee* Dargin) was the niece of James Whalan's wife Lydia (*nee* Dargin) draws a direct line between the two families and had them meeting at a social level. [14]

Convict records (Figure 11) indicate that he was indeed convicted of absconding in 1827 and sent to Moreton Bay (Brisbane) for some serious punishment. He returned a few years later on the brig *Governor Phillip* (1830) (Figure 12) to his original assignment in Bathurst, before subsequently absconding to again 'live at large in the bush'. Details of McKeown's time in Moreton Bay are limited, suffice to say, he did it tough! Moreton Bay was a convict settlement established to deal with the more recalcitrant convicts. Whilst there, McKeown may have worked at constructing buildings throughout the burgeoning town, mostly from a material called 'Brisbane tuff', a hard but attractive volcanic rock. This was the birth of Brisbane town although only two buildings from this period remain – The Wickham Terrace Windmill (Figure 13) and the Commissariat store on the Brisbane River (Figure 14). [15]



**Figure 9** – Two important locations for Robert Smith. Blue section - Mount Tamar (Por 196) near White Rock and Bella View (blue circles) near the Campbells River was the family home for Robert and Mary Smith and later for John Smith McPhillamy. Red section – 'Glen Esk', near the Lagoon, was originally purchased by John Smith and later sold to Robert Smith. It has been proposed that this is what brought Robert to the Bathurst district. James McKeown may likely have been assigned to work at either of these two significant farms for Robert Smith, although he may have been located at any of the other sites noted (see Figure 8). [9] Satellite images of these regions are also provided.



**Figure 10** – ‘Wonalabee’ Homestead, on the site previously known as ‘Mount Tamar’, home of Robert and Mary Smith and later, John Smith McPhillamy. James McKeown may likely have worked on this homestead when assigned to Robert Smith in 1825.

**CERTIFICATE OF FREEDOM.**  
 No. 34/1299  
 Date, 8 October 1834

Prisoner's No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name, \_\_\_\_\_ James McKeown  
 Ship, \_\_\_\_\_ Asia (4)  
 Master, \_\_\_\_\_ Stead  
 Year, \_\_\_\_\_ 1825  
 Native Place, \_\_\_\_\_ County Down  
 Trade or Calling, \_\_\_\_\_ Laborer  
 Offence, \_\_\_\_\_ robbing houses of bread  
 Place of Trial, \_\_\_\_\_ Dublin  
 Date of Trial, \_\_\_\_\_ 24 March 1824 for  
 Sentence, \_\_\_\_\_ 7 yrs hard labor  
 Year of Birth, \_\_\_\_\_ 1798  
 Height, \_\_\_\_\_ 5 feet 9 1/2 inches  
 Complexion, \_\_\_\_\_ Dark Sallow & slightly  
 Hair, \_\_\_\_\_ Dark brown frizzled  
 Eyes, \_\_\_\_\_ Brown

General Remarks, \_\_\_\_\_ I fear lame and or  
left eye. Another on left hand  
bone. Large scar on left leg  
was transported to Moreton  
Bay for three years by the  
13th March 1827 for  
breaking out of gaol twice  
& being at large in the bush

in lieu of N. 24/60  
dated 5 April 1831  
reco returned null  
reissued & cancelled

**Figure 11** – Certificate of Freedom for James McKeown reissued in 1834, replacing a previous version issued in 1831. Red box identifies notes of his transportation to Moreton Bay on the 16th October 1827 for ‘breaking out of gaol twice and being at large in the bush’. (Obtained from Tasmanian State Archives)

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Colonial Secretary's Office  
 Sydney 18th November 1830

Sir, I am directed by H.E. the G to inform you that the Sheriff, has been requested to forward to H.M. Barracks, the 18 Prisoners named in the enclosed list; recently arrived on the Governor Phillip from Moreton Bay, and to request that they be kept in the Barracks until further order.

Yours Obedt Servant  
 J. G. G. G.

Hyde Park

List referred to in enclosed letter.

- 1 James Smith Minsterick
- 2 William Quirk John
- 3 William Johnson Guildford

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- 4 Patrick Sullivan per Regal 2
- 5 Richard Gorinan Regal 2
- 6 Chris Murray H.M. Barracks
- 7 James McKeown Asia 4

cc the D. of M. ...

**Figure 12** – Letter to the Colonial Secretary’s Office on 18th November 1830 requesting that Hyde Park Barracks be readied for the arrival of 18 prisoners, including ‘James McKeon per Asia 4’ (No.7) from Moreton Bay. McKeown would be returned to Bathurst and his original assignment under Robert Smith. (Obtained from NSW State Archives)

Moreton Bay was lead by one of the worst Commandants, Captain Patrick Logan. Captain Logan was appointed in 1826 and quickly gained a reputation as the cruelest commandant in the colonies, hated by convicts and soldiers alike – but was killed in a skirmish with Aborigines in 1830, just before McKeown returned to Bathurst. Apparently when news of Logan’s death reached the convicts they went delirious with joy. One even penned a ballad in memoriam which goes...

‘I am a native of the land of Erin  
 That was early banished from my native shore  
 On the ship Columbus went circular sailing  
 And I left behind me the girl I adore  
 On the bounding billows that were loudly raging  
 Bold sea mariners our course did steer  
 We were bound for Sydney our destination  
 And every day cold irons wore

### Chorus

O Moreton Bay you'll find no equal  
Norfolk Island and Emu Plains  
At Castle Hill and cursed Toongabbie  
And all Time Places in New South Wales.

When I arrived it was in Port Jackson  
And I thought my days would happy be  
I soon found out I was greatly mistaken  
I was taken as prisoner to Moreton Bay  
For three long years I was beastly treated  
And heavy Irons on my legs I wore  
My back from flogging it was lacerated  
And oftimes painted with crimson gore

Like the Egyptians and the ancient Hebrews  
We were oppressed under Logan's yoke  
Till a native Black there he lay in ambush  
And he gave the tyrant a mortal stroke  
Now fellow prisoners be exhilarated  
That all such monsters such a death may find  
And when from bondage we are liberated  
Our former suffering shall fade from mind.' [15]

So it was Robert Smith and the McPhillamy family who were responsible for bringing James McKeown into the Bathurst-Oberon region. As a result we can now position McKeown in the historical context which saw him there for the 'birth' of Jenolan. But as we dig deeper, we see that McKeown was part of the establishment of Bathurst, interacting with the pioneering families who are still prominent in the region today. Further, McKeown saw the founding of Brisbane, experienced life in early Sydney cove and as we will see in the next article, was in the midst of the convict colonies on Norfolk Island, Port Arthur and inland Tasmania. To tease out the life of James McKeown finds us learning of our own origins as a nation – real experiences by real people in real situations. For guides who recount these stories to Jenolan's visitors, imparting this

reality will inevitably turn the tour experience from a bit of entertainment into a more personal journey.



**Figure 13** – The convict built Observatory 'Windmill' at Wickham Terrace, Brisbane. [20]



**Figure 14** – The convict built 'Commissariat' building is the oldest building in Brisbane which can still be found on Queens Warf Road. [21]

\*Re-printed (with permission) from *Binoomea*, No. 145, February 2011 – The Newsletter of the Jenolan Caves Historical & Preservation Society. Part One of this article appeared in ACKMA Journal No. 72 (September 2008) and Part Two in Journal No. 79 (June 2010).

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