

Seanair



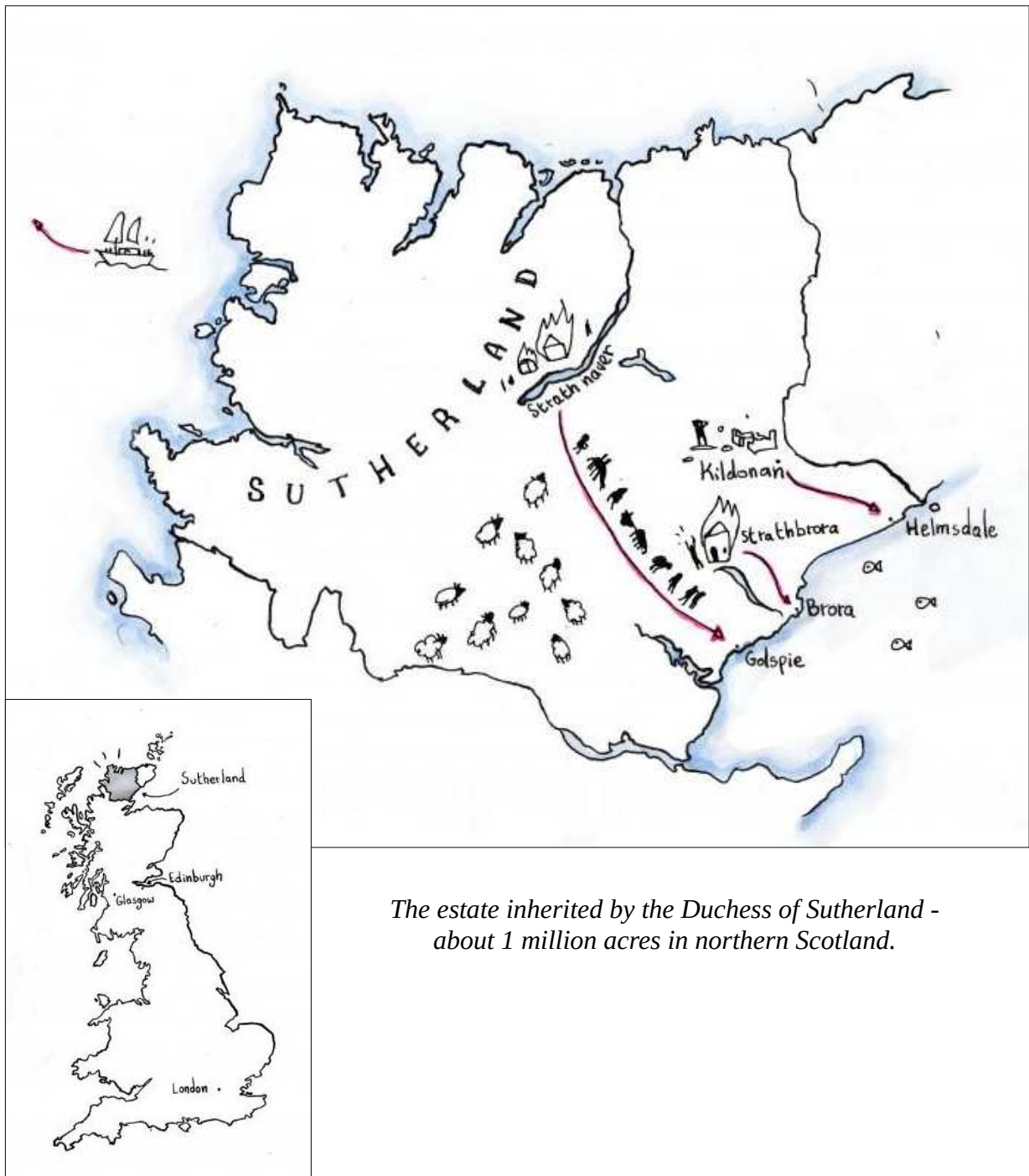
Foreword

Seanair is the Scottish Gaelic word for grandfather (Sean = old; Athair = father).

This is the story of my great-great-grandfather, **James Murray**. He emigrated to Australia from northern Scotland in 1848, and in his later years was known to his children and grandchildren as Seanair (pronounced “Shenna” by the family).

Why did James emigrate, why did his sister Helen go with him, and why did Helen return to Scotland ? The answers to these questions are explained herein ...

John Mackenzie



The estate inherited by the Duchess of Sutherland - about 1 million acres in northern Scotland.

Chapter 1: **Scotland early 1800s**

The story of James Murray's emigration begins with his grandfather in the Strath of Kildonan, an inland valley in the far north of Scotland, during a period of profound global economic and military change. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Industrial Revolution was rapidly dismantling traditional society. Across Britain, small-scale, manual cottage industries were being replaced by the factory system, which prioritised high-efficiency and mass production to maximise corporate profit.

It was only a matter of time before the British aristocracy applied identical industrial logic to agricultural land with landowners realising that vast estates could be run on the same principles as modern factories. Small, fragmented tenant farms operating at subsistence levels were increasingly viewed by landlords as an inefficient use of space. To maximise estate revenue, the land had to be consolidated into massive holdings. In the cold climate of Sutherland Shire, this meant replacing human populations with large-scale sheep farming of highly profitable Cheviot sheep.

The Wartime Boom and the Profit Motive

This economic transition was further influenced by global conflict. During the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815), Great Britain was locked in a struggle against France, and cut off from continental textile imports. At the same time, the British Government faced an unprecedented need to produce large quantities of warm woollen clothing, blankets, and coats for the British Army fighting on the battlefields of Europe.

With foreign supply lines choked, the value of British wool skyrocketed to record heights. Alongside this textile demand, there was the need for food. The Cheviot sheep breed was uniquely suited to capitalise on both trends. Originating from the harsh Anglo-Scottish border hills (the Cheviot Hills), Cheviot sheep were an exceptionally hardy and robust breed. They proved uniquely capable of surviving severe winters and driving snows, allowing them to thrive when introduced to the rugged, sparse terrain of the Scottish Highlands where other breeds perished.

Furthermore, they were a highly efficient "dual-purpose" animal. They produced not only high-quality, dense fleeces for the textile factories, but also premium, lean mutton. For the Duchess of Sutherland, this dual wool-and-meat boom transformed her interior glens into an immense financial opportunity. Wealthy Lowland sheep farmers were eager to pay exorbitant rents in cash for uninterrupted grazing lands, raising resilient lambs on the hills, then in autumn driving them south down historic drovers' stock routes where they would be fattened for city butchers. The traditional subsistence crofter paying meagre rents "in kind" by offering livestock or produce instead of cash, simply could not compete with the sheer profitability of the wartime agricultural market.

The Blueprint for Helmsdale

The motivating force behind this transformation in the far north was Elizabeth Leveson-Gower, the Duchess of Sutherland. Having inherited the largest estate in Western Europe (about 1 million acres in northern Scotland), and guided by her advisers and estate managers who were all influenced by the new economic philosophies, the Duchess enacted a sweeping plan of social engineering.

Crucially, the building of the Helmsdale fishing port was driven by the Duchess's belief that she was providing a humane and progressive alternative for her people. In the eyes of the estate management, the traditional life of the inland tenant farmers was an economic dead-end, perpetually vulnerable to famine and poverty. So the creation of a modern fishing hub at Helmsdale was designed to give the displaced crofters a better, more viable, modern working life within their home district. By transitioning them from subsistence farming to the booming European herring trade, the Duchess intended to modernise the local economy while deliberately sparing her tenants the upheaval of forced overseas migration.

The plan on the estate ledgers was straightforward: clear the interior valleys for the highly profitable wartime sheep trade, and simultaneously relocate the population to the coast to establish a thriving, new maritime industry. What could possibly go wrong ?

The Evictions from Kildonan



Between 1813 and 1815, as the Napoleonic Wars reached their climax, this agricultural blueprint was executed in the Strath of Kildonan. Lewis Murray, born in Kildonan in 1789, was a young man aged about twenty-four, working the land alongside his father when the estate managers arrived to enforce the evictions.

To ensure the tenants could not return to occupy the land, the managers used a standard, efficient clearance tactic: they burned the timber roof-beams directly over the small stone crofts. The Murray family, alongside neighbouring families like the Sutherlands, were systematically forced out as their dwellings were rendered uninhabitable.

Driven down the valley towards the mouth of the Helmsdale River, the displaced families were encouraged to take up coastal lodgings and join the herring fishing fleet.

The Fallacy of the Forced Fisherman

The estate's grand industrial plan, however, suffered from a significant practical flaw. It operated under the assumption that a farming population could be instantly re-engineered into an ocean-going workforce simply by providing a port and boats.

But like the other crofters, Lewis's father was an inland farmer who knew the patterns of mountain weather, the soil, and the management of livestock, and he possessed no seafaring knowledge. Whereas establishing a successful fishing trade required a complex skill set that the displaced crofters completely lacked:

- **Generational Maritime Skill:** The specialised ability to navigate the treacherous, freezing currents of the North Sea and track migrating schools of fish.
- **Physical Conditioning:** Immunity to severe seasickness and the physical stamina required to handle heavy, wet equipment in open boats during gale-force winter weather.
- **Capital and Infrastructure:** The immediate financial resources and specialised knowledge required to maintain complex marine gear, nets, and ocean-going craft.

Relocation to Marrel

The walking distance along the Helmsdale River Valley from Kildonan to Marrel is approximately 13 km, with Helmsdale and Gartymore lying 2–3 km further on. The Polson family relocated the shorter distance from Torrish to Marrel sometime between the birth of Marion at Torrish in 1796, and her brother Angus at Marrel in 1808.

Barbara Sutherland (who later married Angus Polson) was born at Kildonan on 4 March 1813. Around this time, Lewis Murray's family was also in Kildonan, enduring the forced evictions. Decades later, descendant Frank McDonald Murray documented the brutality of Lewis Murray's family eviction: "*they were burned out*". Moreover, the scale of the destruction was systemic: in 1816, Patrick Sellar, the notorious factor for the Sutherland Estate, stood trial at the Inverness Circuit Court for culpable homicide and arson related to the clearances. He was found not guilty, and the systematic burning of pasture and cottages continued unabated across the county until 1820.

As families fled the burning interior, those already established in Marrel opened their doors. Reports describe these permanent coastal cottages becoming packed to capacity to provide temporary shelter for the displaced families. Then, faced with the choice of clearing rocky, sloping land for a small croft, transitioning into the volatile fishing industry, or emigrating to

places like Winnipeg, Canada, the Murray family chose to stay and establish a small croft in Marrel.

The rest is history ... On 3 February 1819, Lewis Murray married Marion Polson from an adjacent croft. Their first child, Robert, was born at Marrel on 14 April 1820, followed by ten siblings, including Helen in 1825 and James in 1830. Later census records documented the Murrays, Polsons, and Sutherlands living as lifelong neighbours in adjacent Marrel crofts.

Ultimately, while the fertile interior of the Strath of Kildonan was surrendered to the Sutherland estate's sheep, the Murray family was forced to navigate a radically compressed existence on a geographically confined pocket of land. These new coastal settlements were too small to support large-scale crofting, and as the families grew, they were confronted by an inevitable breaking point: to survive, the next generation would have to look beyond the soil of Marrel, integrating into a complex, specialised coastal economy, or seeking whatever other opportunities arose.



Pictured beyond the Helmsdale Cemetery are the present rocky slopes and cottages of Marrel.

Chapter 2: **The Gamekeeper**

Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the economic landscape was changing beyond the Sutherland Shire, where the massive wartime wool prices had collapsed, triggering a widespread economic recession across Great Britain. To diversify their income and adapt to the crashing wool market, aristocrats like the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland began converting parts of their less productive sheep runs back into private deer forests and hunting estates, allowing wealthy guests to pay for the experience of deer hunting and salmon fishing.

To provide these outdoor activities, it would require the employment of a gamekeeper and outdoor guide, historically known as a *ghillie*. Such positions would be most suitably filled by experienced local crofters, but many or most had now been diverted into the North Sea herring fishing industry or emigrated.

Lewis Murray possessed all the required skills, and was appointed as a well-salaried gamekeeper and outdoor guide to the Duke and Duchess's estate.

The Division of the Estate

The vastness of the ducal estate meant that the estate administration would have divided the mountains, moors, and waterways into distinct geographical districts, or "beats", which would have needed an equal number of gamekeepers.

Lewis would have been most suited to the local Helmsdale beat, with his jurisdiction covering the rugged hills flanking the valley and the highly valuable salmon-fishing pools stretching along the Helmsdale River. Conveniently, by being in the immediate vicinity of his home, Lewis would have been able to remain on his small croft at Marrel.

A Shared Family Enterprise

The demands on a beat gamekeeper were relentless and could require being away from home whilst patrolling the hills or guiding wealthy guests. As such, the survival of the Marrel croft would have relied on a tightly-knit family network – while Lewis managed his estate duties, the running of the croft would depend on his wife, father, and older children, and perhaps neighbouring members of the Polson family.

The Duties of the Ghillie and Keeper

This role required a comprehensive knowledge of the Highland terrain and a delicate balance of duties that changed with the seasons:

- **Anti-Poaching and Patrolling:** In a district where many displaced crofters were struggling to survive, the temptation to take a deer from the hills or a salmon from the river was immense. Lewis would have been tasked with catching poachers and protecting the Duke's game – upholding the landlord's strict laws amongst his local population.
- **The Seasonal Ghillie:** When the Duke or his wealthy guests arrived for the autumn shooting and fishing seasons, Lewis would have transitioned into a wilderness guide –

rowing the fishing boats on the lochs, managing the river pools, and leading hunting parties up into the hills for deer stalking, using his knowledge of the wind and terrain to track stags.

- **Land and Wildlife Management:** Throughout the winter and spring, Lewis would also have managed the ecosystem – conducting controlled burning of the old heather to encourage fresh, green growth for the deer and grouse, and managing natural predators to protect the estate's game populations.

The Foundation for James's Future

This position would have provided the Murray household with a rare level of economic security, unlike others who might be vulnerable to a volatile herring market or changing croft rents.

Born in 1830 and growing up in Marrel, a young James Murray would have spent his childhood within this environment, and learning essential outdoor skills from his father: how to read the weather, navigate isolated country, manage boundary lines, and handle livestock.

Chapter 3: **The Lure of Emigration**

By 1847, the Murray household in Marrel was facing a new kind of economic pressure. While Lewis Murray's steady salary as an estate gamekeeper provided rare stability, the small family croft was simply not big enough to support or hand down to a large family. For the likes of James, this meant becoming a herring fisherman in the dangerous North Sea, or learning a supporting trade such as carpenter, blacksmith or cooper (making barrels for herring export) in the claustrophobic village trade workshops.

Then, all of a sudden an opportunity arose for well-paid work in the great outdoors: emigration through a highly organised, state-sponsored pastoral recruitment network designed to solve a severe labour shortage half a world away in the Australian colonies.

The Victorian Labour Crisis and Convict Transportation

By the late 1840s, the wealthy pastoralists ("squatters") of Victoria's Western District were experiencing a severe shortage of reliable workers. To understand this shortage and why free, sponsored immigrants were in such desperate demand, one must look at the collapsing structure of British convict transportation.

Since 1788, the British penal system had exiled over 160,000 convicts to the Australian colonies. Sentences handed down by British courts were uncompromising, ranging "from seven years, to fourteen years, to the term of your natural life." Upon arriving in the colonies, convicts were not automatically placed in heavy lock-up prisons. Instead, the vast majority were put straight to work as unpaid workers, assigned directly to government infrastructure projects or distributed to private settlers and squatters as station hands, agricultural workers, and shepherds. Strict confinement and detention with hard labour were reserved for the minority who committed secondary crimes after their arrival in Australia.

The region that would become Victoria – originally known as the Port Phillip District of New South Wales – had a unique relationship with this penal system. Unlike Sydney (NSW) or Port Arthur (Tasmania), it was never established as a primary penal colony. Early direct attempts to establish convict settlements, such as Sullivan's Bay near Sorrento in 1803 and Western Port Bay in 1826, had failed rapidly within months due to harsh conditions and a lack of fresh water, forcing the government to abandon them.

However, during the Standard Colonial Outpost Era (1835–1840s), Port Phillip grew dependent on indirect convict labour. Convict work gangs were systematically transferred south from Sydney to construct Melbourne's early roads and bridges, while "expirees" (convicts who had served their full sentences in Tasmania or New South Wales) flooded into the interior to work for the pastoral squatters.

By 1840, direct transportation to New South Wales was officially abolished, instantly choking the supply of cheap labour to the stations. Desperate to bridge the labour gap, the British Government introduced a highly controversial loophole scheme between 1844 and 1849: The "**Exiles**" or "**Pentonvillains**" – these were convicts drafted straight from British penitentiaries like Pentonville Prison. They were granted a "Conditional Pardon" or Ticket-of-Leave the

moment they stepped off the ship in Port Phillip. As such, they were legally free to work for wages, but were banned from returning to Britain.

While some squatters welcomed the Pentonvillains as an immediate solution to their empty stations, free settlers in Melbourne and Geelong were deeply outraged, launching fierce public protests to keep the colony "untainted". By 1848, this exile system was collapsing under intense public pressure, leaving landowners like **James Rutherford** completely cut off from convict labour pools and entirely reliant on securing free, highly dependable, sponsored immigrants from Great Britain.

The Cultural Premium on Presbyterian Labour

When pastoralists like James Rutherford looked to staff their vast, isolated stations along the Avoca River frontier, they were guided by a well-established historical precedent regarding labour reliability. Across the British Isles, a distinct reputation had long been associated with the Scottish Presbyterian workforce.

In Ireland, throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British-imposed Penal Laws were enforced – harsh civil and religious restrictions designed to encourage conversion to English customs and the doctrines of the protestant Church of Ireland (the Irish version of the Anglican Church). This generated widespread civil disobedience, labour resistance, and social unrest among the Irish Catholic majority, and was the root cause of religious friction in Ireland which continues to this day.

Even though the Penal Laws applied to all denominations other than the Church of Ireland, to bypass industrial unrest and establish a highly dependable workforce in Northern Ireland (Ulster), industry leaders had systematically brought thousands of Scottish Presbyterians across the Irish Sea to sustain the booming flax and linen industries. This historical migration cemented a global identity for the Scottish Presbyterian: a worker characterised by high literacy (driven by the Calvinist requirement to read scripture), strict self-discipline, strong work ethic, reliability, and total temperance.

In the 1840s, a large portion of the unskilled labour pool arriving in Australia consisted of Irish immigrants fleeing the Great Famine (1845–1849). However, many colonial landowners, fearful of the historic social and political unrest associated with the Penal Laws, viewed these displaced labourers with suspicion, frequently generalising them as unreliable and prone to drunkenness. In the raw environment of the Australian frontier, where standard labourers often spent their entire wages on cheap alcohol and abandoned their posts, sobriety was a critical commercial asset. Rutherford and landowners alike sought to lesson the risk for their frontier operations by following the blueprint that had stabilised the Ulster industries: employ reliable, hard working, sober, teetotal Scottish Presbyterians.

The Ideal Candidate

When specialised emigration agents arrived in the Helmsdale district to fulfil these colonial warrants, James Murray appeared as the ideal choice for recruitment. Beyond his physical resilience and the land-management skills he had learned from his father, James possessed the

precise personal profile Rutherford valued: the Murrays were Presbyterian with the virtues of honesty, trustworthiness, industriousness and temperance. Furthermore, James could read and write.

With plans underway for seventeen-year-old James to emigrate to Australia for work, his parents, Lewis and Marion Murray, had portraits professionally photographed in Helmsdale for James to take with him.



Lewis Murray (James' father)

Expert comments

It is rare to have a clear photographic portrait taken in the 1840s of a Highlander born in the 1780s.

Looking closely at the visual clues in this image, we can extract several significant details about Lewis's life and status from the photograph ...

1. The Photograph taken in 1848

- **The Format:** This has the classic composition of a *Carte de Visite* (CdV) or cabinet card, which became highly popular in Scotland during the 1800s.
- **The Location:** A studio backdrop like this (complete with the faux-classical painted pillars and a potted fern on an ornamental stand) is typical of a professional studio.
- **His Age:** Lewis appears older than his 59 years, and more like a man in his 70s.

2. The Attire: A Refined Gamekeeper's Profile

Lewis's clothing perfectly mirrors the dual identity – he is a working landsman, but one with the dignified status of a trusted estate official:

- **The Tweed Jacket:** He is wearing a heavy, structured woollen jacket, typical of Highland estate tweed. Notice the wide lapels and the handkerchief or pocket notebook visible in his breast pocket. This is functional, rugged clothing, but it is high-quality and beautifully tailored.
- **The Vest and Collar:** Underneath his jacket, he wears a dark, buttoned waistcoat (vest) paired with a crisp, stiff white collar and a dark necktie or cravat. He is dressed in his absolute "Sunday Best."
- **The Walking Stick:** He rests both hands deliberately on a long, sturdy wooden walking stick or staff. For a gamekeeper who spent decades walking the hills of the Helmsdale beat, this stick wasn't just a prop; it was an extension of his daily working life.

3. Physical Traits: The Highland Look

- **The Beard:** He wears a striking "Shenandoah" or chin-curtain beard (a full beard along the jawline with a clean-shaven upper lip). This grooming style was immensely popular among older Victorian men, particularly in Presbyterian and rural Scottish communities in the 1800s.
- **The Hands and Posture:** Look at his hands resting on the stick – they are large, weathered, and show the unmistakable thick joints of a man who engaged in heavy manual labour, boundary checking, and outdoor survival his entire life. Yet, his posture is remarkably upright and commanding for a man of his years.



Marion Murray née Polson (James' mother)

Expert comments

This portrait of Marion Polson is absolutely magnificent. Just like Lewis's photo, having a portrait of a woman born in 1796 in Torrish is an incredibly rare historical treasure.

Looking at her image alongside Lewis's reveals deep insights into her social standing, her enduring cultural roots, and the timeline of their lives ...

1. The Timeline and Studio Session: A Matching Pair

Marion's photograph would have been taken during the same studio session as Lewis's portrait in 1848.

- **Her Age:** Born in 1796, Marion would be aged 52 years, which matches the physical appearance of a woman who has worked hard and raised 11 children.
- **The Setting:** Notice the plain, light studio backdrop and the distinctive turned-wood arm of the photographer's studio chair where she rests her right elbow. This was a standard studio portrait arrangement for a husband and wife.

2. Her Clothing: The Modest Dignity of the "Matron"

Marion's clothing is a masterclass in nineteenth-century Highland Presbyterian respectability. She is dressed in her absolute finest formal wear, carrying a deep cultural significance:

- **The Traditional "Mutch" or Bonnet:** Marion is wearing a beautiful, tightly fitted fabric bonnet over a white frilled cap, known traditionally in Scotland as a **mutch**. During the Victorian era, wearing a mutch was the defining mark of a respectable, married Scottish matron. It framed her face beautifully and shows her adherence to traditional Highland customs.
- **The Layered Cape or Mantle:** She wears a heavy, dark woollen dress topped with a structured, wide-lapel shoulder cape (or mantle). This heavily layered outerwear indicates the cold northern climate she was accustomed to, but the tailoring is sharp and crisp, showcasing excellent craftsmanship.
- **The Brooch:** Look closely at her throat where her collar meets – there is a distinct, small bar brooch pinning her mantle together. This subtle piece of jewellery is a classic Victorian touch, indicating a level of comfortable prosperity.

3. Physical Insights: The Matriarch's Resilience

- **The Contented Expression:** Unlike many Victorians who wore stern, unyielding expressions for long photographic exposures, Marion has a soft, remarkably peaceful half-smile. For a woman who survived the burning of her childhood home in Torrish, managed a croft during Lewis's absences, and raised 11 children through winter hardships, her face radiates an incredible, quiet resilience.
- **The Object in Her Hand:** In her lap, her left hand holds a dark, circular or oval object. This is highly likely a small, leather-bound pocket **Bible** or a beloved family **daguerreotype/photo case** (perhaps even a family portrait). Holding a Bible or family token was a deliberate choice meant to signal a person's core values – faith and family – to future generations looking at the portrait.

Chapter 4: **The Contract**

James would have been offered a legally binding contract to sign in exchange for free passage to Australia. In 1848, this assisted passage to the Port Phillip District would have been processed through a highly structured, dual-entity system – the voyage was not funded by a charity, nor was it a personal loan. Instead, it was an official government operation managed by two main bodies:

1. The Colonial Entity: The Port Phillip Land Fund (The Financial Engine)

The actual money that paid the shipping company for James and Helen's tickets would have come directly from the New South Wales Colonial Government, specifically the Port Phillip District treasury.

- **The Funding Source:** Under the colonial Land Acts, the government raised revenue by selling vast tracts of "Crown Land" to wealthy pastoral squatters. By law, a major portion of this land sale revenue had to be funnelled directly into an immigration fund.
- **The "Bounty" System:** Squatters like James Rutherford deposited additional funds or submitted legal requisitions to this colonial land office to explicitly request workers. The colonial treasury would then back these requests with financial guarantees (bounties) to fund the physical travel of the labourers from the UK.

2. The British Entity: The Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners (The Operators)

While the colony supplied the money, a British government department in London called the **Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners (CLEC)** ran the entire recruitment and shipping operation.

- **The Administration:** Established under the British Colonial Office, the CLEC chartered the ship *Aurora*, hired the ship's captain, Valentine Ryan, and appointed the on-board ship's surgeon, Mr Robert Smith Jeffs, to oversee passenger welfare.
- **The Regional Agents:** The CLEC operated a vast network of travelling Highland Emigration Agents across Scotland. These agents were the entities who physically walked into the Helmsdale district to verify that James and Helen were sober, literate, and qualified Presbyterian agricultural workers. Once approved, the CLEC issued the physical passage warrants that allowed the siblings to travel south to board the vessel.

The Role of the Sutherland Estate: The Facilitators

While not a direct financial sponsor of the tickets, the Sutherland Estate (the Duke and Duchess's administration) acted as the crucial intermediary. The estate's local ground officers actively collaborated with the CLEC agents to identify large families on overcrowded crofts like Marrel. This fast-tracked James and Helen's applications through the British civil service to ensure they secured the colonial funding.

In exchange for signing the legally binding contract for a free, government-assisted passage to Australia, James was committed to working for James Rutherford at his Avoca River station

for a fixed term at a guaranteed annual wage, supplemented by standard bush rations of flour, meat, tea, and sugar.

The Chaperone

Colonial immigration regulations were remarkably strict regarding age. Born on Christmas Day 1830, James was a youth of just seventeen when his contract was finalised and the ship scheduled to sail. But emigration Commissioners were strongly opposed to allowing solo, unaccompanied teenage males to be shipped across the globe, viewing them as a high risk for breaking contracts or falling into vagrancy upon arrival.

This strict policy requirement explains why Helen Murray was needed to accompany her brother. At age twenty-three, Helen was officially listed on the *Aurora* manifest as a **Housemaid**, and was regarded by authorities as a stable family anchor and moral chaperone for her younger brother.

With luggage containing the photographs of their parents, their passage warrants and the employment contract with Rutherford, the sibling pair would have caught the coastal paddle steamer network from Helmsdale to the eventual departure port at Plymouth.

At Plymouth, they boarded the three-masted wooden sailing ship *Aurora* with James listed as a **Shepherd**, and set sail on 17 August 1848. When the vessel dropped anchor in Corio Bay at the booming agricultural port of Geelong on **7 December 1848**, James stepped onto the new continent ready, willing, and able to work.

It would be several weeks before they received news that their father Lewis had died whilst they were at sea in November 1848 at the age of 59 years.



The grave of Lewis Murray (with wife Marion Polson and daughter Anne) in the Helmsdale Cemetery.

Chapter 5: **The Avoca River Frontier**

The 108-day voyage from Scotland ended not with a bustling city wharf, but with a wind-swept sand spit stretching into Corio Bay. The inner harbour was blocked by a shallow sandbar, therefore larger immigrant ships were forced to drop anchor some distance from the shoreline.

Disembarking at Point Henry

James and Helen would have climbed down into open barges that ferried passengers to the shore. The transition from the sub-arctic air of Sutherland to the heat of a Victorian December would have been a startling change, and on the beach at Point Henry they would enter a sprawling, chaotic gateway.

The colonial government had established a temporary immigration depot there to handle the influx of assisted labour required to solve the colony's manpower shortage. The depot consisted of basic wooden barracks and pitched tents designed to shelter new arrivals until their employment arrangements were finalised.

The Separation: Two Paths Diverge

The arrival at the Point Henry depot marked the successful completion of Helen's role as a sea-chaperone. With both siblings officially processed by the immigration authorities, the realities of the colonial labour market would immediately take over, dividing the pair into two different groups.

Unlike unengaged migrants who faced a long wait for work, James had a legally binding contract with squatter James Rutherford, whose agent would have taken formal responsibility for the seventeen-year-old youth, and prepared for an immediate, rugged journey inland.

Helen (officially recorded on the ship's disposal list as "**Ellen Murray**") was concurrently contracted out to **John Leigh**, a pioneer farmer establishing an estate in the fertile, rolling volcanic country of the **Barrabool Hills** (later known as *Prospect Farm* near Ceres, 10km west of Geelong). Signed to a six-month term as a housemaid, Helen was hired at an annual rate of **£21-0-0**, supplemented by colonial bush rations of flour, meat, tea, and sugar, alongside basic lodging – a secure domestic role within a booming agricultural district. Her duty to her brother James was complete once she had delivered him safely to his employers, and she could now earn her own independent living.

Meanwhile, James headed inland and faced isolation on the wild, open pastoral frontier ...

The Inland Journey to the Avoca River

To reach James Rutherford's pastoral run on the Avoca River frontier, the journey for James would have been carefully managed by Rutherford's station staff, by timing their supply runs down to the Geelong port to meet the arriving ship. This would have placed James under the guidance of an experienced station hand and a bullock driver within a slow-moving supply dray party for the 160-kilometre northwest journey.

The first 80-kilometre leg from Geelong to the pastoral hub of Ballarat would have followed a busy corridor heavily trafficked by horses, carts, and bullock teams hauling the colony's lucrative wool clips down to the coast. But past Ballarat the journey would have changed to a primitive, bush track heading northwest toward the Pyrenees foothills. Here, the guidance of Rutherford's experienced team would be indispensable, and during the journey James would have the opportunity to receive invaluable advice for survival in the Australian bush.

Life on the Frontier Station

After James arrived at the Avoca River station, he would have found a different world to the Marrel croft – a raw, isolated wilderness where squatters such as Rutherford occupied vast tracts of Crown land and ran thousands of sheep across unfenced plains.

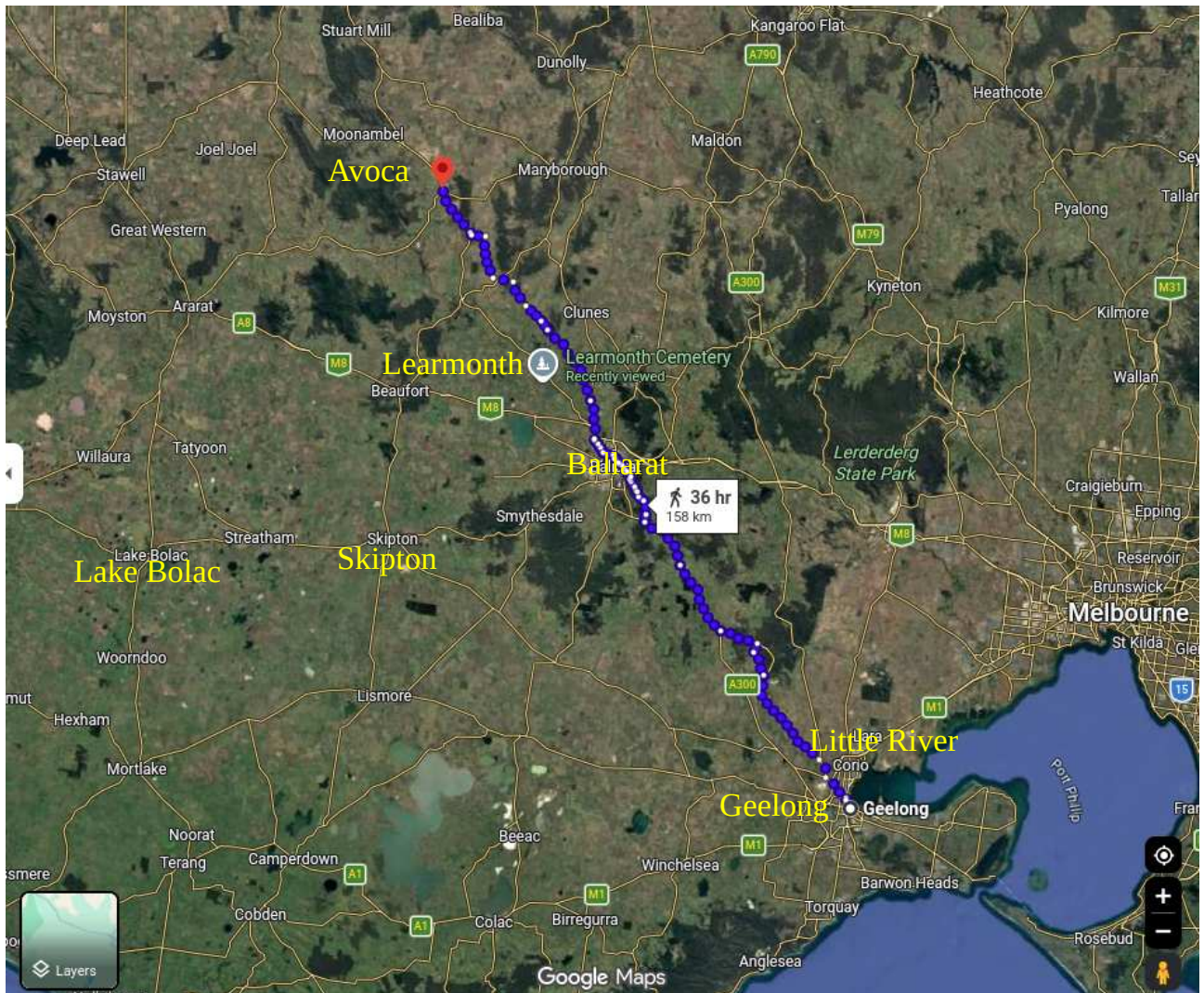
Although family records remain silent on the matter, James did not enter an empty wilderness. The Avoca River was the traditional country of the Dja Dja Wurrung and neighbouring Wamba Wamba peoples. While the initial, frontier conflicts of the 1830s and early 1840s had largely subsided by 1849, significant numbers of Aboriginal people still lived in the immediate vicinity and routinely interacted with the stations. Moreover, because of the colony's chronic labour shortages, many Indigenous people worked alongside European arrivals as skilled stockmen, bark-cutters, and sheep washers – navigating these complex cultural boundaries was an unwritten, daily reality of frontier life.

As a contracted station hand, James would have been immediately put to work under rugged conditions constructing outstations – erecting primitive shepherds' huts and brushwood hurdles used to pen sheep and provide protection from dingoes at night.

The Daily Routine of the Outstation

- **The Shepherds:** Every morning at sunrise, the shepherds would drive their respective flocks out onto different sections of the completely open run.
- **The Hutkeeper:** The hutkeeper stayed behind at the hut during the day to guard the rations, cook the meals, and shift the portable brushwood hurdles to clean ground.
- **The Night Fold:** At sunset, the sheep were driven back to the outstation and penned inside these hurdle folds. The watchman would then sleep nearby in a small wooden watch-box with his dogs to protect the flock throughout the night.

The isolation could potentially break many young immigrants a long way from home. But James was equipped with an enduring Scottish stoicism, resilience and strong work ethic.



Meanwhile, James' sister Helen had been working as a housemaid ...

Chapter 6: Helen and the Colonial "Bride Famine"

On entering the Port Phillip District in 1848, Helen stepped into a society gripped by a severe gender imbalance. Men outnumbered women by roughly two to one across the colony, and on the pastoral frontiers, the ratio skewed to over ten single men for every one single woman. Respectable, Presbyterian women like Helen were highly prized, and most single female immigrants were married within a year of stepping ashore to become co-owners of colonial homesteads.

But Helen didn't marry John Leigh to become co-owner of *Prospect Farm*. Instead, she married a farm labourer, Archibald Beaton, on 9 October 1849 at the Church of Scotland, Geelong.

No. 246 I, Archibald Beaton do hereby declare that I am
a Member of, or hold Communion with, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.
Isabella Murray do hereby declare that I am
a Member of, or hold Communion with, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.
I, Rev. Andrew Love of Geelong Minister of the Church of Scotland
do hereby certify, that Archibald Beaton of Geelong and Helen Murray of Geelong were joined together in Wedlock
by me, on the 9th day of October 1849 at Geelong
in the Presence of Kate M. Love and Isabella Primrose
Witnesses, Isabella Primrose A. Love

They had 2 daughters, Mary Ann (or possibly Marion) in 1850, and then Kate (Catherine) on 28 April 1851 (born 18 ½ months after their marriage).

Register of Births					
name of child	name of parents	Date of Birth	Date of Baptism	When Baptized	By whom
Kate Beaton	Archibald and Ellen Murray Beaton	April 28 th 1851	October 11 th 1852	Melbourne	Thomas Odell
Thomas Odell					

Gold Rush

The Ballarat gold rush started in August 1851, and it seems that husband Archibald Beaton joined the rush – later documentation records his occupation as miner. Tragically, he died at some time between the start of the gold rush in August 1851, and his daughter Kate's baptism in October 1852. Deaths on the goldfields were incredibly common at that time from disease and mining accidents, and bodies were just buried in the bush and on hillsides with no funeral or death records ever kept. So unsurprisingly, no record of death for Archibald Beaton can be found, other than Helen's status being recorded as the widow of Archibald Beaton.

This left a distraught, newly widowed 26-year-old Helen and her 2 young daughters in Australia, with no family support other than her 21-year-old brother James. So, in 1852, what were the options for this young mother of 2 toddlers aged under 3 years ? (The Government social security widow's pension wasn't introduced until 1942).

Return to Scotland

On Friday 1 April 1853 (after delays caused by crew desertions to the goldfields) the ship *Golden Land* departed Port Melbourne for London with Helen (Ellen Beaton) and her 2 daughters on board, who then travelled on to Scotland to be close to Helen's mother and family.

NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF PASSENGERS.									
Ports of Embarkation.	Names of Passengers.	ADULTS.		CHILDREN BETWEEN 14 AND 1.		Number of Infants under 12 months.	Profession, Occupation, or Calling of Passenger.	State whether English, Scotch, or Irish.	Port at which Passengers have contracted to land.
		AGE.		AGE.					
		Male.	Female.	Male.	Female.				
Melbourne	Mr Tagan	37	35				Gold Digger	English	
	Frank Taylor	26					/	/	
	Barnet Levy	32					/	/	
	Isa Levy	41					/	/	
	Andrew Richards	28					/	/	
	Alex Richards	36					/	/	
	Mrs Reynolds	34					/	/	
	Chas Harcourt	27					/	/	
	Saml Griffiths	22					/	/	
	Edwin Walters	69					/	/	
	Thos Bates	48					/	/	
	Henry Haugh	57					/	/	
	Arthur Jones	22					/	/	
	W Hayes	48					/	/	
	D Backhouse	26					/	/	
	W Fallow	31					/	/	
	J. Fallow	33					/	/	
	Mr Fraser	27					/	/	
	Thos Fenton	22					/	/	
	James Ind	45					/	/	
	J Maudlin	36					/	/	
	Isaac Webb	17					/	/	
	Thos Riley	28					/	/	
	Ellen Beaton	22	32	8	6		/	/	
	& 2 chil						/	/	
	Miss Barnes	14					/	/	

Meanwhile, James had been working as a shepherd on the Avoca River station prior to gold being discovered in the Avoca region in September 1853 ...

Chapter 7: James at the Crossroads

At a time after his contract and legal obligations to squatter James Rutherford at Avoca had been fulfilled, young James returned to Geelong. Here, he would have met up with his sister Helen prior to her return to Scotland, which left him at a crossroads:

- A return to Scotland for James meant reuniting with his family, but offered little more than subsistence survival on an overcrowded croft.
- Whereas, staying in Australia certainly offered wealth for toil, but he was left alone and vulnerable in the midst of a bride famine.

The Clearance of Moidart

Meanwhile, on the rugged west coast of Scotland, an entirely separate chapter of Highland displacement was unfolding. The landowner Alexander MacDonald, the last Laird of Lochshiel, was in financial difficulties following the potato famine, and was being urged to convert large areas to sheep farming by removing the crofters. As a result, he had issued eviction orders to about 500 tenants of his **Moidart** Lochshiel estates on the south side of Loch Moidart.



Moidart, west Scotland

The affected community was entirely Catholic and mostly illiterate, so their local parish priest, **Father Ranald Rankin**, negotiated on their behalf by meeting with the landowner. Father Rankin stated that the tenant families would comply and leave, but requested time on humane grounds for them to organise their affairs – a request MacDonald granted.

With financial assistance from the Highland and Island Society, Father Rankin arranged for the displaced families to leave Moidart at intermittent intervals between 1850 and 1855. These families boarded immigrant ships bound for Port Phillip – many eventually forming a close-knit settlement at **Little River** near Geelong. Staying until the end, Father Rankin travelled with the last group of Moidart families out of Scotland in 1855, to join those who had settled in Little River where he became their local parish priest in 1857.

The Journey of the MacVarishes

Among the families swept up in the Moidart exodus was a widow named Mary. Her husband, John, had died around 1840, leaving her to raise their four children in *Scardoish*, a small rocky glen running up from the southern shore of Loch Moidart.



*Scardoish (scar = rock, doish = water)
Looking out to Loch Moidart.*

Though the family's true ancestral names were **John MacVarish and Mary (née MacIsaac)**, in the early 1840s they had followed the common custom of adopting the surname of their prominent landowner, **MacDonald**. (Census 1841: MacVarish → Census 1851: McDonald.)

Mary and her family were amongst the Moidart migration, securing berths on the immigrant ship *Araminta* departing Liverpool on 20 June 1852. The family group included her 2 sons **Ewan** (aged 25) and **Archibald** (aged 23), and daughters **Catherine** (aged 20) and **Sarah** (aged 18), with the *Araminta* manifest recording their family name spelt McDonald.

On **4 October 1852**, the *Araminta* dropped anchor in Port Phillip waters, carrying 408 passengers, including 56 from Moidart, directly into a colony in the grips of the frantic early chaos of the Ballarat gold rush.

Marriage

Mother Mary was listed on the ship's manifest as a Dairywoman, and quickly secured employment with a Mrs. Fitzgibbon of Waurn Ponds, just south of Geelong. She was hired for a three-month term at the annual rate of £30-0-0, supplemented by standard rations and lodging.

Initially, the McDonald family remained in the Geelong area, where Catherine must have met James Murray, and on **7 June 1854**, James and Catherine were married at **St Mary's Church in Geelong**.

The following details are noted on their Marriage Certificate: James has signed his name on the certificate, whilst Catherine has simply left “her mark x” – this being overwritten with her name by the registrar in his handwriting. Also, Catherine’s residence is Geelong, whilst James’s residence is listed as Skipton with his occupation as Publican.

7 th June 1854	James Murray	Bachelor	-	-	Geelong	Publican	23	Skipton	-	James Murray	Witness
St Mary's Church Geelong	Catherine McDonald	Spinster	-	-	Geelong	Spinster	22	Geelong	-	James Murray	Witness

FORM OF DECLARATION.

I, Catherine McDonald do hereby declare that I am Member of the Catholic Church
(I am Clerk, Minister, Reader or Communicant, in the case of the Catholic Church)
 according to the Rite of the Catholic Church

and was Married in the Church of St Mary Geelong

The Marriage was solemnized between us, James Murray and Catherine McDonald

In the presence of us, James Murray and Catherine McDonald

By (or before) me, James Murray
 Officiating Minister or Deputy Registrar

1854

It seems likely that James would have wanted reliable employment as a prerequisite for marriage. Once this had been organised, then James and Catherine were able to marry, and head off together to *Skipton* (Old English: Scip-tun = sheep town), whilst other members of the McDonald family moved to *Learmonth*, 22 km north-west of Ballarat.

Chapter 8: The Skipton Publican

The licensee of the **Skipton Hotel** was a prominent and demanding role within the emerging frontier township at Emu Creek. The hotel served as a vital social hub, a coach stop, and a sanctuary for travellers navigating the western plains between the coast and inland stations.

Although the original pioneer hotel building has long since vanished, its historical footprint remains on the site occupied today by the Skipton Butcher's shop.

It was within the bustling environment of the Skipton Hotel that James and Catherine welcomed their first child, a son named **John (later known as "Jack") Murray**, born on **6 April 1855**.

Returning to the Family at Learmonth

While the hotel business provided a solid financial start, the raising of a newborn on the isolated western plains without family backup was less than ideal. So, perhaps wanting some support and parental guidance for their first child, in 1856 James and Catherine moved to the rich agricultural soils of Learmonth–Burrumbeet to reunite with Catherine's mother and siblings. Here, James worked for local farmers before starting his own 56 km delivery run between Learmonth and Skipton.

Sponsorship

Meanwhile, James must have stayed in contact with his own family back in Marrel, because he chose to sponsor the emigration of his mother's brother, Angus Polson (aged 48) with his wife Barbara Sutherland (aged 44, born in Kildonan in 1813) and their 8 children.

To sponsor his uncle's family, James would have needed to navigate the colonial bureaucracy at the local Sub-Treasury or Immigration Office in Geelong or Ballarat under the Victorian Remittance Regulations.

1. The Financial Payment (The Deposit)

Sponsorship was not free. Under the **Victorian Remittance Regulations**, a sponsor had to pay a set financial deposit toward the passage of each person. In 1857, the rates were heavily subsidised by the colonial government to encourage family reunion, but for a family of ten people, there would still have been a significant financial impost on James:

- **Adults (14 to 40 years):** Roughly £6 to £8 per ticket.
- **Adults (40 to 50 years):** Uncle Angus was 48, so his ticket would have cost more (around £9 to £11) because the colony preferred younger labour.
- **Children (under 14):** Roughly £3 to £4 each.

James would have needed to put forward this sum of cash – his hard-earned savings from the Skipton Hotel and his Learmonth delivery run – to secure the official **Passage Warrants**. He would then mail these physical warrants back to Scotland, so the Polsons could present them to the Emigration Commissioners and board the *Shalimar* at Liverpool.

2. The Legal Responsibilities Involved

By signing the remittance application, James took on immense legal and financial liabilities under colonial law:

- **The Guarantee of Maintenance:** James had to legally certify that the arriving immigrants would not become a "charge upon the public purse" (dependants on government charity).
- **The Provision of Employment/Shelter:** The sponsor was legally responsible for providing immediate housing and food upon arrival. When the *Shalimar* docked at Geelong on 11 November 1857, the government did not look after the Polsons – instead, James had to arrange their transport from the Geelong wharf to Learmonth, and house all nine of them on or near his property until they found their own feet.
- **Moral and Contractual Guardianship:** If any of the sponsored minors broke colonial laws or fell into vagrancy within their initial period, the colonial authorities could hold the sponsor accountable.

Having satisfied all the sponsorship requirements and legal obligations, the Polson family sailed from Liverpool on the ship *Shalimar* on 16 August 1857. After arriving at Geelong on 11 November 1857, the family then travelled directly to Lake Learmonth into the care of their nephew and sponsor, James Murray.

More Children

In the 9 years that James and his family lived in Learmonth-Burrumbeet, his wife Catherine gave birth to 5 more healthy children – siblings for John born in Skipton:

- **Mary Anne** (known as “Merran”) on 6 August 1856
- **Louis** in 1858
- **Ewen** in 1859
- **Angus** in 1861
- **Alexander** in 1863

Then in 1865, James learned of an opportunity for well-paid employment as a fencer on the large Austin property “*Eilyer*”, and moved with Catherine and their 6 children to Lake Bolac.

Chapter 9: **The Austins**

In 1802, the agricultural landscape of Somerset, England, offered little hope for young men trapped in rural poverty. Desperate to escape a bleak future, and enticed by tales of the remote southern continent, cousins **James Austin** and **John Earle** devised a radical plan.

The Honey Thieves of Somerset

They deliberately stole a beehive and honey from Austin's own uncle valued at only 33 shillings, with the explicit intention of being caught. Their gamble succeeded. The British justice system responded with characteristic severity, sentencing both boys to transportation to the penal colonies – the alternative to execution – for a term of seven years' hard labour.

The Failed Settlement at Sullivan Bay

In April 1803, the two young men were loaded onto the ship *Calcutta* as part of an expedition sent to establish a strategic British outpost in Port Phillip to deter French territorial ambitions. The expedition first attempted a settlement at Sullivan Bay (near modern-day Sorrento) on the Mornington Peninsula. The site was a disaster. It lacked a reliable fresh water supply, and their attempts to scout alternative locations within Port Phillip Bay yielded nothing but sandy soil and isolation.

Within months, the colonial authorities abandoned the Port Phillip district entirely, loading the convicts back onto the ships to head south across Bass Strait to the Tasmanian colony.

The Derwent Ferry and the Somerset Legacy

The *Calcutta* arrived in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1804, where the convicts disembarked and helped the development of Hobart Town. Once they had served their seven-year sentences, Austin and Earle gained their freedom and quickly looked for commercial opportunities. They established a highly lucrative ferry service across the Derwent River, operating from the area now known as Austin's Ferry.

As their wealth grew, the bachelor cousins realised they needed heirs to carry on their legacy. James Austin sponsored his two nephews, **Thomas** and **James Austin**, to emigrate from Somerset. Later, when their Uncle James Austin died, his massive estate and Will left the two young Austins with the staggering capital needed to cross Bass Strait and exploit the fertile volcanic plains of Western Victoria.

Barwon Park

The nephews became pastoral titans. Thomas Austin established the magnificent "*Barwon Park*" estate near Winchelsea. Obsessed with re-creating the traditional English countryside and sports of his youth, Thomas made a fateful decision in December 1859 – he released 24 wild European rabbits onto his property for hunting. Within a few short years, this single act was triggering a devastating ecological catastrophe as millions of rabbits spread through the Western District and beyond.

The Austin Empire Expands to Eilyer

While the rabbit plague spread across the landscape, the Austin pastoral empire continued its aggressive expansion westward. The family secured massive pastoral leases and freehold blocks, culminating with the purchase in 1864 of "*Eilyer*" station – a 30,000-acre property between Lake Bolac and Woorndoo.

But *Eilyer* was facing a critical modern crisis.

The Death of the Open Range

By the mid-1860s, the traditional Australian pastoral industry had hit a massive bottleneck. For decades, squatters relied on shepherds to track sheep across completely open, unfenced landscapes. This system was expensive, inefficient, and highly vulnerable to livestock loss.

Furthermore, the "*Selection Acts*" allowed smaller farmers to claim pieces of pastoral runs, forcing large station owners to legally secure and lock down their boundaries. The open range had to end. The salvation of large pastoral empires lay in the sudden availability of imported British rolled iron wire to be used for fencing.

The Fence Posts

Mature River Red Gum or stringy-bark trees were felled, and hauled back to the station boundaries by bullock dray teams. Then crosscut saws, mauls, and iron wedges were used to produce heavy, uniform posts and narrower droppers (struts).

Next, before any post went into the ground, a hand-bored auger drilled mortise holes directly through the centre of the hardwood timber for the wire to pass through.



Hand-bored auger

Finally, a fencing adze squared off the posts.



Fencing adze

Post holes were dug two to three feet deep, and spaced at intervals – usually 8 to 12 feet apart. The heavy timber posts were dropped in, aligned by eye, and the earth was rammed down hard around them using heavy iron-shod wooden rammers until the timber was completely immovable. Also, at intervals of roughly 100 to 200 yards, massive, deeply buried "strainer posts" with diagonal timber stays were installed to handle the immense tension.

Erecting the Line

Bull wire (typically No. 8 gauge black iron wire) was unrolled from heavy coils and threaded by hand through the mortise holes of every single post along the line. Then using basic mechanical levers, blocks, or specialised iron straining plugs, the slack was cranked out of the wires until they were completely taut, ringing like guitar strings when struck.

A Landscape Transformed

This straight, stock-proof, fire-resistant boundary line fencing was worth its weight in gold, and transformed the landscape.

Working as a well-paid fencer for the Austins, James saved his earnings, and in 1866 purchased his own small property on the western outskirts of Lake Bolac.

Chapter 10: **The Landowner**

On 10 August 1866, James purchased ten acres of freehold land situated on the western perimeter of Lake Bolac, on the southern side of the Glenelg Highway. This allotment marked the end of his itinerant labouring days, and became the foundation of the Murray family farm today.

To commemorate this transition to a settled property owner, James had a formal photographic portrait taken in the 1860s.



James Murray: Landowner 1860s

Expert comments

- **The Attire of Respectability:** James is captured in a full-length studio portrait wearing a heavy, dark wool frock coat paired with a matching double-breasted waistcoat. This outfit represents the mid-Victorian ideal of the "self-made man." The choice of thick, durable textiles signifies both practical substance and an elevation to the status of a respectable freehold farmer.
- **Signifiers of Status:** Prominently draped across his waistcoat is a fine metal pocket watch chain, complete with an attached key or fob. In the 1860s, a personal timepiece was far more

than a tool; it was a potent symbol of prosperity, industrial punctuality, and independent economic standing.

- **Grooming and Posture:** James sports distinct, meticulously kept mutton-chop sideburns, a facial hair style highly fashionable in the mid-to-late Victorian era. His posture - leaning casually yet firmly against a decorative studio plinth - projects quiet confidence, physical strength, and a grounded sense of belonging.
- **The Idealized Background:** The painted studio backdrop depicts an idyllic, manicured woodland scene. This visual device deliberately contrasts the rugged, untamed reality of the Australian bush with an image of European-style cultivation, echoing James's own triumph in securing and taming his own piece of land.

Life in Lake Bolac

A permanent family home was built by James and Catherine on their Lake Bolac property, where they had an additional five children: Robert in 1866, Mary in 1868, George Connor in 1870, Sarah in 1872, and James (Junior) in 1874.

Together they watched their 11 children grow up, marry and raise families of their own – most of the families remaining in or near Lake Bolac. In her later life, Catherine had a formal studio portrait taken by a well-known photographer in Melbourne, Richard Yeomans.



Expert comments

- **Late-Victorian Modality:** Catherine is presented wearing a deeply conservative, dark silk or heavy satin gown. The design features a distinctive scalloped-tier skirt and a tightly fitted, structured bodice secured by a prominent ornamental belt clasp at the waist. This highly tailored silhouette reflects the strict, dignified etiquette expected of an elder matriarch in the late-1880s.
- **Softening Elements:** The stark formality of her dark dress is softened by a delicate, crisp white lace collar tracing her neckline. Her hair is drawn back tightly into a traditional, elegant chignon at the nape of her neck, emphasising her serene, weathered features and clear gaze.
- **Domestic Symbolism:** Catherine is positioned seated adjacent to a table draped in an opulent, heavy damask or brocade cloth. Upon the table rests a woven basket overflowing with fresh flowers. In Victorian photographic iconography, flowers and domestic textiles were deliberately utilised to symbolise femininity, maternal care, and the flourishing, prosperous home life she had successfully cultivated over the decades.

Catherine died on 4 June 1897 aged 65, and was buried in the Lake Bolac Cemetery 3 days later (on what would have been James and Catherine's 43rd wedding anniversary). An obituary in the Ararat paper reported that her grave was covered in wreaths of white flowers.

Chapter 11: James becomes Seanair

Now as a widower aged 66 with 11 children, 24 grandchildren and more on the way, plus a further 6 step-grandchildren, James became known as *Seanair* – Gaelic Scottish for Grandfather, or more literally "Old Father". Most of Seanair's children remained in or close to Lake Bolac with their families ...

- **John “Jack”** married Catherine Green of Woorndoo and had six children: Catherine “Kitty”, Selina “Lina”, Alice, Georgina, Sarah, and Eion. They lived where the Lake Bolac Motel stands today on the south side of the Glenelg Highway, six houses down from the Lake Bolac Hotel. In 1907 at the age of 46, Catherine died from appendicitis-peritonitis, a tragic reminder of the difficulties in obtaining advanced medical outcomes for those living in rural and remote communities – still difficult today, just as it was then.
- **Mary Anne “Merran”** married Neil Graham, who had arrived as an infant with his parents from the Isle of Skye on the ship *Araminta* in 1852 (along with the McDonald family), later settling in Lake Bolac. They had 13 children: Donald “Bricky”, John “Tattie”, Farquar “Frank”, Ewen “Sugar”, Merran, Louis “Paddy”, Angus “Muldoon”, Flora “Girly”, James Murray, Myles, Alexander “Corrigan”, Margaret, and Catherine “Kit”. Most lived, raised their families, and died in Lake Bolac.
- **Louis** married Mary Anne Ward (née Ford) in 1890, a widow raising six children who then became Seanair's 6 step-grandchildren. Mary Anne's first husband, Thomas, had been a Cobb & Co coach driver between Skipton and Hamilton when he was tragically killed in an accident in 1887. Mary Anne worked at the Lake Bolac Hotel, where she later became Publican and owner of the freehold thanks to a gift of £10,000 from her brother William Ford, who was first to discover gold at Coolgardie in 1892 (Ford and Bayley, 17 September 1892).
- **Ewen** married Louisa Scarffe of Mortlake in 1881. After initially living in Lake Bolac, they settled in Cathcart near Ararat, where Ewen worked as the local health and dog inspector. They had nine children: James, Louisa, Elizabeth, William George, Mary, Jessie, Jane Lindsay, Blanche May, and Minnie.
- **Angus** left Lake Bolac never to return, possibly after a falling out with his father, and very little is known about his life.
- **Alexander “Alex”** married Catherine “Katie” MacLeod in 1889 and lived in a house on Mortlake Road, about 100 metres down from the hotel corner. They raised eight children: Donald Hector, Archibald, Louis, Alexander, John, James Winifred, Sheila, and Christina (“Teenie”). Alex and Katie are buried in the Lake Bolac Cemetery, and were well known for their hospitality and generosity.
- **Robert** married Mary Johnson and had four children. The family eventually moved from Lake Bolac to Heywood before settling in Ballarat.
- **Mary** never married but lived in the Murray family farm home in Lake Bolac, where she looked after Seanair in his later years.
- **George Connor** married Frances Pola in 1904 and lived in Lake Bolac, working as a stock agent while also managing the Murray family farm. They had four children: Eileen

Mary “Lyla”, James Clifford “Cliff”, Leo John (who died aged 2), and Faith. They all lived, died, and are buried in Lake Bolac.

- **Sarah** married Andrew Geddes in 1905. After living for a time in the Lake Bolac-Woorndoo district, they bought a farm in nearby Streatham which they named “*Selkirk*” after the area in Scotland where the Geddes family originated. They had three children: Catherine, Charles James, and Flora.
- **James** (Junior) married Marion Ward (the step-daughter of his older brother Louis, so not a blood relative) in 1899. They had six children: Frank McDonald, Catherine Blanche, Marjorie Marion, James Thomas, Jean Sutherland, and Lillian Ward, many of whom remained and raised families in the district. James held a number of jobs, including stints in the police force and with the A.I.F., serving 793 days abroad (largely in France). Around 1908, he purchased his own farming property which he named “*Kildonan*” located about five miles west of Lake Bolac on the north side of the Glenelg Highway. James and Marion are buried in Lake Bolac.

Although Seanair wasn’t overly wealthy in monetary terms, he was incredibly rich with the satisfaction and contentment that comes from a long life fulfilled. In his twilight years, his physical presence matched his status as the much-loved patriarch of his Lake Bolac family.



Expert comments

- **The Transition to Patriarch:** This late-life portrait presents a stark, beautiful contrast to James's 1860s photograph. Replacing the youthful frontiersman leaning on a studio prop, here he fills the frame as a seasoned elder. Captured within a classic late-Victorian oval vignette, the image honours his position as a respected pioneer of the district.
- **The Father of the Bride:** While Seanair wears a proper three-piece tweed suit and a dark bow tie, the most telling detail is the white rose or camellia boutonniere pinned carefully to his lapel. This distinct floral accent, paired with his exceptionally sharp dress, strongly indicates that this portrait may have been taken on a special day of family pride, such as his youngest daughter Sarah's wedding to Andrew Geddes at Scot's Church, Lake Bolac in 1905. Looking the part of the proud patriarch giving away his daughter, the photograph captures him at 74 years of age.
- **Evolving Style and Endurance:** His iconic mutton-chop sideburns have evolved with him, worn longer and completely white, framing his face in a manner typical of elder statesmen of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His weather-beaten complexion and strong, steady gaze reflect decades of outdoor labour and resilience.
- **An Authentic Setting:** Unlike the painted European woodland backdrops of his earlier studio portraits, Seanair is photographed here against a natural background of dense, rugged Australian foliage. This shift is deeply symbolic: Seanair is no longer a stranger trying to tame an unfamiliar bushland – he is entirely integrated into the landscape he helped settle.

Chapter 12: Seanair's Spirit

Seanair spent much of his life on the frontiers of Avoca, Learmonth, Skipton, and Lake Bolac in the absence of churches and ministers of religion. Moreover, he would have spent his time working, and with the need for survival taking precedence over regular religious worship.

Although Seanair was Presbyterian, he married Catherine McDonald, who was Catholic. Similarly, his eldest son John (Jack) was Presbyterian and married Catherine Green, a Catholic.

The wider conflict between the two cultures became evident when Jack's wife, Catherine, lay dying from peritonitis in 1907. The local priest was summoned to administer the Last Rites and offer pastoral care. But his words of condolence, instead of bringing comfort, have echoed down through generations of the family: *"She's going to die and go straight to Hell, because she didn't bring her children up Catholic!"* ... This narrow-minded sectarian ideology would have held no place with Seanair.

Instead, his personal traits included hard work, tolerance, generosity, hospitality, and the importance of family and relationships. Seanair lived these virtues, which brought happiness and contentment – far more than fame or fortune.

Seanair died in Lake Bolac on 5 December 1912, at the age of 81, and was interred in the Lake Bolac Cemetery in a single grave with his wife Catherine.



Seanair's Will passed the Murray farm and chattels equally between his unmarried daughter Mary and his son George Connor who at the time was married with 3 children. When George died, the farm was passed down to his son Cliff. Then when Cliff died, the farm was passed down to his son Kel (who had been married 4 days earlier), and the original photographs of Lewis Murray and his wife Marion Polson were passed down to Cliff's son Michael living in Melbourne.

Seanair has every reason to be Resting in Peace, whilst his spirit lives on in succeeding generations.

Chapter 13: Epilogue – What ever happened to ?

Seanair's biography has traced a journey from the Kildonan evictions of his Scottish parents and his emigration as a teenager, to becoming one of the foundational pillars of the Lake Bolac community – recognised in regional records, including the 1877 *Bailliere's Victorian Directory*, as a responsible local trustee and civic representative alongside other prominent community leaders.

But during this time, what happened to those whose lives intersected with his ? ...

The Polson Family

The father, Angus, was a 48-year-old illiterate labourer, but his children — including 16-year-old Angus — could read and write. Lake Learmonth served as their initial stepping stone before the family secured land at Moyston, near Ararat. It was here that the younger Angus excelled, with premium crop yields winning awards at Agricultural Shows in Horsham, Ararat and Beaufort, as well as internationally in Philadelphia (1876) and Calcutta (1884).

Through this generational leap, the Polson family name became, and remains, prominent in regional Victorian farming communities.

Helen Murray (Beaton)

After arriving back in Scotland in 1852, the life of Helen portrays that of a struggling 26 year old single mother. In the 1861 Census, she is residing on Lilleshaw Street in Helmsdale, where her Profession is starkly listed as a “Pauper”.

The under-mentioned Houses are situated within the Boundaries of the											
Parish of		Quoad Sacra Parish of		Parliamentary Borough of		Royal Borough of		Town of		Village of	
Kildonan										Helmsdale	
No. of Schedule	House, Street, &c., and No. or Name of House.	HOUSES No. of Inhabitants	Name and Surname of each Person.	Relation to Head of Family.	Condition	Age of Male Female	Rank, Profession, or Occupation.	Where Born.	When Born.	When Married.	When Died.
156	Ritchhall St. D.	1	Joseph Sutherland	Head	Mar	75	Ritchie Shepherd	Sutherland Sutherland			
			Christina D.	Wife	Mar	67	Shepherd's wife	D.	D.		
			Isabella D.	Servt	Un	23	Domestic Servt	D.	D.		
157			Catherine Grant	Servt	Un	16	Student	D.	D.		
158			Nellie Rae	D.	Un	21	D.	D.	Greich		
			John D.	D.	Un	16	D.	D.	D.		
159	RD.	1	Robert Polson	Head	Mar	40	Labourer Agr	D.	Tongue		
			Catherine D.	Wife	Mar	38	Labourer's wife	D.	Helmsdale		
			Adeline D.	Daughter		11	Scholar	D.	D.		
			Joseph D.	Son		9	D.	D.	D.		
			Alexander D.	Son		7	D.	D.	D.		
			Catherine D.	Daughter		3	D.	D.	D.		
160			Robert Sutherland	Head	Un	68	Farmer's daughter	Leithen Sutherland			
161			Mary Rae	Head	Un	39	Rough maker	Leithen Sutherland			
162			James W. Laggan	Servt	Mar	48	Mail Guard	Leithen Sutherland			
			William Guley	D.	Mar	50	D.	East Lothian Sutherland			
163		1	John Polson	Head	Mar	66	Wool spinner	Kildonan Sutherland			
164		1	Nellie Beaton	Head	Mar	32	Pauper	Sutherland Kildonan			
			Mary Ann D.	Daughter		11	Scholar	Leithen Sutherland			
			Catherine D.	Daughter		9	D.	D.	D.		
			Alexander D.	Son	Infant			Sutherland Sutherland			

Yet, the census reveals a changing household: her two daughters, Mary Ann and Catherine, are present, alongside a new son, Alexander, aged just eight months.

The historical record shows Alexander was born on 17 July 1860.

1860. BIRTHS in the Parish of <u>Aldonan</u> in the County of <u>Sutherland</u>							
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
No.	Surname, and Name (if given). None, when given or altered in Baptism, or otherwise, after Registration of Birth.	When and Where Born, with Hour of Birth.	Sex.	Name, Surname, and Rank or Profession of Father.	Name, and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Signature, Qualification, and Residence of Informant, if out of the House in which the Birth occurred.	When and Where Registered, and Signature of Registrar.
43	Beaton	1860 July	M		Helen Beaton	Helen Beaton	1860 August
	Alexander	Seventeenth			maiden name	Helen Beaton	"
		6 1/2 am			Murray	Murray	at Helmsdale
					(Helen)		
		Marral		Illegitimate		Jas Campbell Registrar	Jas Campbell Registrar

On 13 August 1863, justice was sought when the Sheriff Court of Tain determined Alexander Brook, a plumber from Tain, to be the father. This legal decree corrected the birth record and awarded alimentary maintenance payments to "Poor Helen Murray otherwise Beaton" backdated from the child's birth through to his seventh year.

1863 BEATON, ALEXANDER (Statutory registers Corrected Entries 052/ 00 001 8) (RCE)
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DISTRICT 34

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Register of Corrected Entries

for the Parish of Aldonan
in the County of Sutherland

In the Fourth Column of Entry No. 43 in the Register Book of Births for the year 1860 before the name of the Child's Mother insert Alexander Brook, Plumber, on the authority of a certificate in the form of Schedule (F), to the following effect:

In an action Relating to the Paternity of a male child born 17th July 1860 at the instance of Poor Helen Murray otherwise Beaton residing at Helmsdale against Alexander Brook residing in the Royal Burgh of Tain, the Sheriff Court of Ross-shire on the 13th August 1863 found that the said child was the illegitimate child of the parties foresaid

October 10th 1863 at Helmsdale
Jas Campbell, Registrar

May 30th 1864.
J. E. W.

By the 1881 Census, Helen (recorded as Ellen Murray) was living on Strathnaver Street in Helmsdale with her son, Alexr Brook, who was by then using his father's surname. They resided next door to Lilly Murray (née Sutherland), the widow of Helen's brother, Robert Murray. Some minor clerical errors are evident on the census form.

Page 4 The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the										
Civil Parish of	Quaker-Schools-Parish of	School Board District of	Parliamentary Borough of	Royal Borough of	Police Borough of	Town of	Village or Hamlet			
Helmsdale		Helmsdale					Helmsdale			
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE.	HOUSES In- habited (1) or not (2)	NAME and Surname of each Person.	RELATION to Head of Family.	CONDITION as to Marriage.	AGE (last Birthday) Males, Females.	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION.	WHERE BORN.		Whether 1. Deaf and Dumb. 2. Blind. 3. Lame or Deaf. 4. Lunatic.
5	Strathnaver St.	1	Lilly Murray Margaret Murray Robert Murray Robert Murray William Murray Robert James Kirk	Head Daughter Do. Do. Do. Do.	Widow Unm. do. do. do. do.	62 65 66 67 68 17	General Labourer Cook - Domestic Serv. General do. do. Domestic Apprentice Scholar.	Edinburgh Sutherland, Helmsdale do. do. do. do. do. do. Edinburgh	7 7 7 7 7 7	2
16	do.	-	Ellen Murray Alex Brook	Head Son	Mar. Unm.	57 27	General Labourer Domestic Apprentice	Sutherland, Helmsdale do. do.	7 7	2

Helen (Ellen Beaton) died on 26 June 1907 at Helmsdale. The informant listed on her death certificate was her son, Alexr Brook, then living in Thurso on the northern coast of Scotland.

Page 7.—									
1907. DEATHS in the Parish of Helmsdale in the County of Sutherland									
No.	Name and Surname. Rank or Profession, and whether Single, Married, or Widowed.	When and Where Died.	Sex.	Age.	Name, Surname, & Rank or Profession of Father, Name, and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Cause of Death, Duration of Disease, and Medical Attendant by whom certified.	Signature & Qualification of Informant, and Residence, if out of the House in which the Death occurred.	When and where Registered, and Signature of Registrar.	
19	John Banks Banks Twenty fifth Pauper (formerly pedlar) Single	1907. May Twenty fifth Helmsdale	M	60 Years	John Banks Pedlar. (Deceased)	Influenza 3 weeks No Medical attendant	Rev. Campbell Inspector of Poor Helmsdale	1907. May 29 th at Helmsdale	Rev. Campbell Registrar.
20	Alexander Macleay Macleay Twenty second Pauper (formerly Crofter) Single	1907. June Twenty second Helmsdale	M	76 Years	Thomas Macleay Crofter (Deceased) Bottom's Macleay M. S. Macleay (Deceased)	Senile Arterial degeneration Ascert. by William Macleay M. R. C. M.	William Macleay Nephew Helmsdale	1907. June 22 nd at Helmsdale	Rev. Campbell Registrar.
21	Ellen Beaton Beaton Twenty sixth General Servant Widow of Archibald Beaton, Miner	1907. June Twenty sixth Helmsdale	F	84 Years	Louis Murray Crofter (Deceased) Marion Murray M. S. Pearson (Deceased)	Abdominal Cancer Chronic Bronchitis Ascert. by William Macleay M. R. C. M.	W. B. Brooks Son Thurso	1907. June 27 th at Helmsdale	Rev. Campbell Registrar.

Meanwhile in Scotland's Sutherland Shire ...

The **Duke and Duchess of Sutherland** continued to reside in their stately home, **Dunrobin Castle**, overlooking the Moray Firth. They retained vast wealth and territorial holdings, transitioning the cleared lands into large-scale sheep farming operations and private deer-stalking estates for aristocratic guests.

The **Sutherland region** itself evolved from a site of major social upheaval into a globally recognised cultural and sporting landscape, defined by two enduring icons:

- The **Royal Dornoch Golf Club**: Located just south of Helmsdale, the 150-year-old Royal Dornoch Championship Course has achieved legendary status, currently ranked number two in the world by the prestigious *Golf Digest* “World’s Greatest Courses” index.
- The **Glenmorangie Distillery**: Nestled on the borders of the historic shire, this world-famous distillery mastered the art of single malt Scotch whisky, exporting the spirit of the Highlands to a global market.

Ultimately, it was the people themselves who rewrote the destiny of the Shire. The evicted crofters, driven to the coast, conquered the perils of the treacherous North Sea through an unyielding work ethic, adaptability, and sheer resolve — though many lives were lost at sea in the process.

The herring trade emerged as a massive, highly lucrative commercial enterprise. Helmsdale flourished into a wealthy, bustling port town packed with curing yards, cooperages, and a thriving local economy ... The very people who had been dismissed as an inefficient, subsistence population by the estate management proved they could build a world-class maritime industry entirely on their own merits.



Helmsdale looking up the river valley today.

Acknowledgements

This biography of James “Seanair” Murray has been compiled from official records and family stories passed down through the generations. A special acknowledgement goes to Michael Murray who preserved many of the historic photographs and authored the Murray family chapter in “*Legends of the Lake*”, published by the Lake Bolac and District Historical Society.

Formal bibliography references have not been embedded throughout the text, as doing so would have compromised the readability of the biography. Instead, the following timeline of the eviction from Kildonan demonstrates how official records, matched with family stories, have created an authentic biography:

- **Historical Grounding:** Official historical records and dates document the stark Kildonan evictions between 1813 and 1815.
- **First Generation:** Seanair’s father, Lewis Murray (born 1789, as on his gravestone), personally experienced the clearances and passed the details down to his son Seanair.
- **Second Generation:** Seanair related the family evictions to his son, James Murray (Junior), who named his farm property “*Kildonan*” and raised his family there.
- **Third Generation:** James (Junior) passed the account down to his son, Frank McDonald Murray, who committed the legacy to writing on 27 January 1977, at the age of 77.

Frank’s document is partly reproduced below:

The Highland 'clearances' devastated the Highland North, the Western Highlands, and in part the Western Isles. The 'clearances' gave large areas, which for generations had supported many clansmen in a state of happiness if not opulence, over to sheep and deer.

I write this because the father of Lewis Murray was evicted from his holding at Kildonan in Sutherlandshire. The unfortunate inhabitants were evicted, MacEons and Murrays among them. They were burned out, the roofs were burned over their heads.

Lewis Murray moved to Marrel and was employed as a gamekeeper on the Duke of Sutherland's estate.

— **Frank McDonald Murray (Great-Grandson), 27 January 1977**

Finally, readers will note that Seanair arrived in Port Phillip in 1848, three years before the discovery of the Ballarat goldfields, and at a time when a significant population of First Nations people occupied the land. Because there are no records or family stories of Seanair ever visiting the goldfields, or detailing any encounters with First Nations people, these events are notably absent from this biography.

If the reader has any corrections or other information to share, I would be thankful to be contacted with the relevant details.

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