

# Mary ABERCROMBIE & McRAE, nee McLEAN & Adam ABERCROMBIE & Duncan McRAE

Biography as published in 1995

**MARY McLEAN** (1818 -1889) - the 4th child and eldest daughter of Donald and Christina (nee McPhee) McLean.

Parents : Christina McLean (nee McPhee) & Donald McLean

Born 2/4/1818 - baptised on the 5th at Kilmallie Argylshire, Scotland.

As a passenger on the "Navarino" of 1837 her age was given as 19 years and her occupation as "servant". As her first marriage took place before the family settled at Strathalbyn she does not appear there in the Census of 1841.

FIRST MARRIAGE: at Holy Trinity, Adelaide, to Adam Abercrombie (born 1804, Stirling, Scotland). He was a timber merchant and wheelwright of Hindley Street, Adelaide and had arrived from Hobart by the "Parsee" in 1839. This ship was lost on the Troubridge Shoal and Adam was the last to leave the wreck as he had bullocks on board. Mary was aged 22 at the time of her marriage and Adam was 14 years her senior. Nothing is known of his life in Tasmania.

DEATH: of Adam Abercrombie, husband of Mary, Accidentally at Hindley St. Adelaide on 23/7/1848 interred at West Terrace with his children on 25/7/1948.

The Adelaide newspaper "The South Australian", Tuesday 24/7/1848, Headline:-

## **Local news - Dreadful Occurrence in Hindley Street.**

"Yesterday morning the city was thrown into intense excitement by the rumour which was rapidly circulated, that Mr Adam Abercrombie, wheelwright, with his children, had been poisoned. We regret much to have the painful duty of stating that there was too much foundation for this distressing report.

It appears that on Sunday night Dr Woodforde was sent for to attend Mrs Abercrombie for a complaint in the face, and left about 12 o'clock. At this time Mr and Mrs Abercrombie who usually slept with their three children in an apartment adjoining the usual dining room, retired to bed, having been induced by the coldness of the night air to light a charcoal fire in an iron pot, and place it in the room. Yesterday morning Mrs Abercrombie awoke at a quarter past eight, called one of the children, who also dressed but she could not succeed in arousing her husband, but felt no alarm at the circumstances.

Supposing the other two children to be asleep, breakfast was prepared and one of Mr Abercrombie's workmen coming in, was requested by Mrs Abercrombie to try to awaken her husband. The melancholy truth soon flashed upon them and the best medical attention was soon procured. Dr Woodforde, Dr Smith and Mr Phillips were quickly on the spot and all that energy and human skill could effect was tried, but without any success, on the two children, one aged 8 years and the other 15 months, both fine children.

The father's habit of body was much against his recovery and the most vigorous measures were resorted to. He was placed in a hot bath, the jugular vein opened, hot flannels etc. were employed freely and at 12 o'clock there was some faint hope of recovery.

There is no chimney in the room where the family slept and of course the carbonic acid gas evolved from the burning charcoal would be highly detrimental to human life. It is astonishing that anybody should be so ignorant of so notorious a fact. Mr Abercrombie expired at 4 pm. He had been gradually sinking since the morning and was attended by Dr Smith up to the time of his decease.

The unhappy widow is in a distraught state and has but one child left of her little family. She lost a boy some time since by an accident, The Coroner has been apprised and will hold an inquest on the three victims of this fatal casualty of this day." Then followed that Adam had arrived in 1839 by the "Parsee", that he was an old colonist and that Mary was a daughter of an even older colonist, Mr McLean, formerly of Black Forest and residing at Strathalbyn. (Note: Hilton was originally part of the dense bush as was the present suburb of Black Forest.)

#### THE INQUEST.

Local News: "The "South Australian", dated Friday 27/7/1848.

On Tuesday last at 10 a.m. a highly respectable jury were assembled in the parlour of the "Black Bull Inn", Hindley Street, before W. Wyatt Esquire, Coroner of the Province, to enquire into the decease of Adam Abercrombie, Christina Abercrombie, and Mary Abercrombie, an account of which melancholy occurrence was given in our last.

Samuel Richardson, blacksmith, was the first witness, deposed as follows:- On Sunday night between 11 and 12 o'clock I was called up by my employer and desired to fetch Dr Woodforde. The doctor was about three quarters of an hour before he came, and I was again sent for him and I went to bed; about 8 a.m. on Monday I woke. Deceased was senseless in bed and neither Mrs Abercrombie or myself could wake him. Mrs A. said the two children were either dead or dying. They felt warm and there was some froth on the mouth of Mary. the youngest. Went to Dr Woodforde. The coroner suggested that the excitement the witness necessarily laboured under would make the evidence as to the time uncertain. (The witness had said the doctor was an hour in coming). In the meantime he went for Mr Phillips.

By a juror:- It was almost 9 o'clock when I went for Dr Woodforde. James Phillips, surgeon of North Terrace - about half past 9 I was sent for and found the father and the two children lying in the same bed. The father was foaming at the mouth, with obstructed breathing and the face in a livid and congested state. The two children were apparently dead. By this time Dr Woodforde and Dr D. Smith had arrived and we found the vessel containing charcoal but the fire had gone out. It was about four feet from the bed on the floor. The two children were nearest this vessel. The children were warm but this is a common case in poisoning by charcoal fumes.

We detected no pulsation in them; used artificial respiration, and all the usual remedies. The same were applied to the father with the addition of bleeding, cupping etc. and also the exhibition of oxygen gas as suggested by Dr Nash who was also consulted. He died at 4 o'clock. The cause of death was congestion of the brain and lungs, caused by the inhalation of carbonic gas and carburetted hydrogen formed from the decomposition of the water in the damp walls of the room.

By a juror:- The child saved was deeply embedded in clothes and soundly asleep and she had to be well shaken to be aroused, Dr Nash, Colonial Surgeon, corroborated the testimony of the last witness and after some very proper remarks by the Coroner on the foolishness of sleeping in a room with charcoal fire burning, especially where there is no chimney or other place of ventilation, the Jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

Too much publicity in this case cannot be given. The dreadful consequence of burning charcoal in a close room we thought everyone knew. It is a common method of committing suicide in France and other Continental countries."

Abercrombie children - of Mary and Adam :-

1. Christina Abercrombie - born 1841 at Hindley St. Adelaide - prior to official registrations so the full date is not available. DEATH: 23/7/1848 aged 8 years, accidentally. See newspaper article, interred at West Terrace Cemetery on 25/7/1848.

2. Rachel Abercrombe - born c. 1844 at Hindley St. Adelaide - registration not found. She survived the tragedy which took her father and her sisters, The only mention of her in later years is found in the 1865 diary of Ewen McDonald, the entry dated 14/3/1865 - "Rachel Abercrombie came with dray and children", (to his house at Finnis) and the children would have been her young half brothers and sisters. McRaes. No marriage or death date up to 1907 could be traced at the Wright House registrations. She may have married in Victoria.
3. Adam (junior) Abercrombe - Jr born 9/3/1846 at Hindley St. Adelaide. DEATH: on 13/3/1848 aged 2 years, caused by a fall from a wagon wheel which he was attempting to climb. He was buried at West Terrace Cemetery 14/3/1848.
4. Mary Abercrombie - born 24/4/1848 at Hindley St. Adelaide. DEATH: on 23/7/1848 aged 15 months, accidentally. (But according to birth registration dates she was 3 months old). Interred at West Terrace Cemetery on 25/7/1848.

After the tragedies Mary, who was now aged 30, would have sold the business at Hindley St. as she appears to have joined her family at Strathalbyn and 4 years later married again.

SECOND MARRIAGE: at Holy Trinity, Adelaide by the Rev, Dean James Farrell to Duncan McRae (b. 26/6/1826 at Kintail, Stirlingshire, Scotland). The Witnesses were Allan and Catherine McLean. Duncan was 25, bachelor and a labourer and Mary put back her age by two years to 32 instead of 34, no doubt feeling the age difference needed a small adjustment.

HISTORY: Although there is no proof, the arrival in S.A. of Duncan was very likely by the "Tomatin" on 11/3/1840 when he was aged 14 years. The McRae group on that ship has no recorded details, but Finlay and Janet (no ages given) could have been his parents (Finlay b. 1796 was buried at Aldinga aged 83 in July 1879) and the children Catherine, Farquhar, Barbara, John and Duncan. This family settled at Willunga and Aldinga. Also on the "Tomatin" were the Leslies (one of whom, Robert, married Ann McLean, sister of Mary) and the Hugh and Donald McLean who have been mistakenly added to the McLean family. That they came from Ardgour and were very likely to be related is true.

Relatives of the Duncan line believe that he came from Kintail, near Dornie on Loch Alsh, a McRae stronghold in Stirlingshire. Dornie has a museum of McRaes.

Although at the time of his marriage Duncan was merely "labourer", the Harold Stowe book "They Built Strathalbyn" has him as farmer and blacksmith. The earliest mention of Duncan who was by then at Lake Plains near Milang, was by Matthew Rankine in his diary, 5/3/1856 at the Strathalbyn Show where Duncan won first prize for an iron plough and afterwards there was a dinner (very poor). This was held at the "Jolly Farmer". an inn on the corner of Alfred Place and Russell St. and opposite St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. A house now occupies the site.

Duncan again won a first prize for his plough at a match somewhere on the plains on 30/7/1856 when 23 ploughs competed in a match at "Mr Gordon's" a near neighbour of Matthew and afterwards they all went to Langhorns Creek to a very good dinner. At this time there was a blacksmith at Strathalbyn named Malcolm McRae and who afterwards was in business at Milang, so there is no certainty that Duncan was the blacksmith mentioned. He was most definitely a farmer "near Milang", however, and it was at Milang that Duncan's children were born. The biographical Index of 1986 shows Duncan as "farmer", only, and place of residence as Milang, Angas Plains and Strathalbyn. also.

That prior to his marriage he went to the Victorian gold fields and returned with more than 1000 pounds (\$2000) worth of gold in 1861 was told in a article in the "Argus" in later years.

Mary had 10 children all told from her two marriages – 4 with Adam, and 6 with Duncan.

McRae children - of Mary and Duncan :-

1. Duncan (junior) McRae – born 29/11/1852 (probably at Strathalbyn at the senior McLean's). The "Belvidere Hotel" between Strathalbyn and Angas Plains was licenced to D. McRae 1872 - 13/9/1874 and it is not sure whether this refers to his father, also Duncan McRae or to himself, From 14/9/1874 to 1880 the "Wellington Inn" at Wellington West on the Murray River was held by Duncan McRae. Again it cannot be ascertained, but this last would appear to have been the son. No record of a marriage has been found. DEATH: on 2/4/1881 at Adelaide, aged 28 years, interred West Terrace Cemetery.
2. Catherine McRae - born 26/6/1854 at Milang, S.A. MARRIED: William Morris (at a Catholic Church). Date not found. CHILDREN: Believed to have had two daughters - these were mentioned in a newspaper report of the presentation of a stained glass window to the Catholic Church of the Good Shepherd, Strathalbyn. Unfortunately these notices have been mislaid. The daughters were not named. DEATHS: William Morris - no newspaper notice in the "Argus" but his burial at the R.C. Section of the Strathalbyn Cemetery took place on 10/2/1927. He was aged 76 years. Catherine Morris died on 20/3/1929 aged 75 years and was interred with William in grave no. 84. OBITUARY: "Argus" of 28/3/1929. (Thursday) "The death took place last week of the relict of the late Mr William Morris formerly well known of this district and her remains were laid to rest in the Strathalbyn Cemetery on Thursday last. The Rev. Father Fahy officiated at the service."
3. Allan McRae - born 16/11/1856 at Milang, S.A. MARRIED Bertha (Bertha) Schultz. [See biographies 5083](#)
4. Donald Hugh McRae – born 9/8/1858 at 'Kintail', Milang, Lake Alexandrina. Married Margaret Gollan Laidlaw. [See biography 5084](#)
5. John James McRae – born 7/9/1860 at Milang. [See biographies 5085](#)
6. Mary Ann McRae – born 7/9/1860 at Milang. [See biographies](#)

From the diaries of Ewen McDonald, brother-in-law of Mary, the first entry:- Mrs and Mary and James and John (Joney as Ewen called his son) to Milang for Mrs McRae," on 20/2/1865.

14/3/1865 - was the arrival at the McDonald house at Finnis of Rachel Abercrombie, and there were further mentions of either Mary visiting her sister at Finnis or of "Mrs" going to Milang to Mary or of Ewen himself, with others, spending an evening with "Mrs McRae". That the whisky flowed at her house is hinted at, and always at Milang.

Duncan was still at Lake Plains near Milang in 1864 when a committee was formed for a school to be erected at Milang in the October; it was of one room and one teacher and officially opened on 1/3/1865 and used as well for public meetings.

Mary and Duncan retired from Milang (and Angas Plains apparently) to live at Strathalbyn. They were certainly at that town in 1881 when much controversy was going on concerning the railway from Adelaide to Mt Barker was proposed to extend to Strathalbyn. Duncan was not in favour. In 1884 it is reported that the line went over Avenue Road, through the paddocks of Mr Marchant's "Burnside Estate", into McRae's property and past the old brewery on the corner of South Terrace and Murray Street. At the time the "Southern Argus" reported many arguments concerning this project.

The railway prevailed and the line is still in place in 1993 although used only by the tourist train Steam Ranger.

DEATH: Mary McRae died at Strathalbyn on 22/9/1889 in her 72nd year and was buried on the 24th at the Strathalbyn Cemetery. Div. 1/309.

OBITUARY: "Southern Argus" 26/9/1889. (A Colonist of 51 years)

"On the 22nd September at Strathalbyn, after a painful illness, Mary. wife of Duncan McRae, late of Milang. in her 72nd year. Her end was peace."

DEATH: of Duncan McRae on 23/5/1901 aged 74 years. Buried 24th, Div. 1/308.

OBITUARY: "Southern Argus" of 30/5/1901.

"On Thursday morning last an old resident of the south, Mr Duncan McRae, died somewhat suddenly, but as he had been in feeble health for a long time and had reached a good old age, his death was not altogether unexpected. Mr J. W. Elliot, JP. made enquiries and gave a certificate for burial. Mr McRae in earlier years took a keen interest in public matters and was an energetic colonist, but for many years later he lived in retirement. Mr Donald McRae of this town and Mr Allen McRae of Noarlunga were sons of the deceased. Mrs W. Morris being a daughter. Mr McRae was buried at the Strathalbyn Cemetery on Friday."

Before leaving the McRae/McLean section - some notes from Janet Martin concerning the history of the McRaes in Scotland .....

"On 25/10/1839, towards the period of the Scottish Highland Clearances, a number of Scots from Kintail (Glenshiel) embarked on a British vessel on her maiden voyage to Australia. This was the "Tomatin" with McRaes and many of their friends. seeking a new life in South Australia. They hoped to practise their religion free of state control in the new colony.

They were able to settle at and to purchase property at Aldinga in 1847. They were able to erect a church in the Aldinga/Willunga area following worship in private houses. By 1858 the Rev. James Benny had arrived and managed a collection of Free Presbyterian Churches of South Australia from Morphett Vale.

McRaes, (kin to Duncan of this history), McKenzies, McCallums and Stewarts were active 1856 - 1880 within the Free Church of Aldinga. It did not join in 1856 the Free Church of Presbyterians. these matters being very important to the Scottish migrants. and no doubt to Duncan McRae and his family.

By 1865 the Presbyterian Churches had merged. but not all. The McRae Society of S.A. is still trying to prevent further decay of the church and to preserve its meaning in terms of early migration of state history in 1992.

To go back a long way in McRae history - one of them went to Kintail in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century to give loyal support to the Barons of Kintail (McKenzies) they then formed the bodyguard of the Chief of Kintail and their privilege was to bear the dead bodies of the Barons of Kintail to their place of burial. From 1539 when a Duncan McRae killed a Duncan McDonald during a McDonald attack the lands of Inverinate have belonged to McRaes. The McRaes in due course became owners at Kintail. (The stories are rather complicated) and the McRaes became owners of Castle Eileen Donan and nearby areas. In 1719 Kintail was ransacked by the English Hanovarians, houses were burnt, Castle Eileen was then blown up and whole families were destroyed.. The castle was restored in 1932 by Colonel John McRae-Gilstrap. There are now very few McRaes left in Kintail and the areas near Castle Eileen Donan. Of this clan Duncan McRae b. 26/6/1826 left for South

Australia by the "Tomatin". That his farm near Milang was called "Kintail" shows a definite connection with the above history."

- SOURCE : This biography is an extract from "The History of Donald & Christina McLean and Their Descendants" which was published in 1995 – page 378 to 394.
- COLONIALISTS : Christina and Donald McLean and their ten children migrated from Argyllshire to South Australia in 1837. This was in the earliest years of the colony. The McLeans initially settled near Adelaide where they grew the first wheat crop in SA. Then in about 1840 they pioneered the Strathalbyn area. There are now well over 20,000 descendants spread across Australia and elsewhere.
- CHANGES : Please contact us with additions, corrections or suggestions about any part of this family tree.
- CONTACT : Visit our website [www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com](http://www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com) or Strathalbyn Museum phone 08 8536 2656 to discover more about your family – and about privacy and copyright.