

**My most unusual ancestor – Fanny RICHMOND**

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From my perspective of a comfortable, stable life in the 21st century, I have many ancestors that I think are unusual as their lives seemed full of hardships, joys, sorrows and taking chances. They would have thought their lives were normal, getting on with daily life, making the most of their situations and opportunities. Many individuals and families around the world, and in my family, took a chance and headed into the unknown for a new life in a new country.

One such ancestor was my great-great grandmother Fanny RICHMOND. I am lucky to have some reminiscences written by Fanny about her life as well as copies of articles published in newspapers. These, in combination with information obtained from vital records by myself and other family members over the last thirty years, have given me an insight into the life of a remarkable woman from a different era.

Fanny RICHMOND was born on 30 January 1851 and christened on 2 March 1851 in Aschchurch, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, England.<sup>1</sup> She was the fifth child for her parents, George and Sarah (née TRAP) RICHMOND. When Fanny was about ten years old her father George, a labourer, died leaving a widow and five young children with few provisions.

After her father died Fanny left school at age 11 and went to read for a blind lady, Miss FERRET, who lived nearby. In Fanny's notes<sup>2</sup> written when she was in her 84th year she vividly recounted details of early life including her time with Miss FERRET. She had to read the Bible 'through and half through again' and the newspaper, although never satisfactorily as she 'always wanted the leading article and I could never find it.' She also had to stand on a stool near Miss FERRET's bed and read prayers to her. Fanny also helped in the household.

When Miss FERRET passed away, Fanny was next employed with a household, minding a baby and other duties, until at age 15 she went to Harrogate in Yorkshire as an underhouse maid at a Ladies Boarding School where she had to make forty beds every morning, except Sundays. Fanny was very happy here and for the first two years did not go home, which was over 200 miles away.

After she had been there about two years she started corresponding with Tola PEACHEY, born 14 April 1849, who was to become her first husband, and she decided to move closer to where he resided in Gloucestershire. We don't know how she met Tola, but most likely on one of her visits home they were introduced or met. He may have been a friend of her brother William as they were of similar age.

Fanny obtained a position in Cheltenham with a clergyman looking after his six children and she was there for two years before moving to another position as a parlour maid before she was married.

Fanny was 21 when she married Tola PEACHEY on 14 October 1872 at the Abbey Church, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire<sup>3</sup>. Tola had spent some months before they were married working as a gardener in Canada<sup>4</sup> to save money for their life together before returning to England.

After being married for nearly a year Fanny and Tola and their baby son William Richmond PEACHEY emigrated to the South Island of New Zealand on the *Star of India* which sailed from London on 26 September 1873 and arrived in Lyttelton, New Zealand on 31 December 1873.

Baby William died during the voyage on 22 October and both parents were grief stricken. The Surgeon's Report<sup>5</sup> for the journey shows William Richmond PEACHEY, 5 months, deceased from 'inflammation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Copy of birth certificate for Fanny Richmond.

<sup>2</sup> Copy of notes written by Fanny Selwyn [9 pages of Reminiscences written 29 April 1934 at 28 Stratford Street, Fendalton, New Zealand] held by family member and also available as part of The Agnes Mildred Westland Collection at Canterbury Museum, New Zealand <http://thecomunityarchive.org.nz/node/68843/description>

<sup>3</sup> Copy of marriage certificate for Fanny RICHMOND and Tola PEACHEY

<sup>4</sup> Arrived Quebec 24 July 1871 on the *Moravian* ref [http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/passengers-quebec-1865-1900/001082-119.01-e.php?&person\\_id\\_nbr=211030&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=f69kssirnv8b02bc4ptj9pgu1](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/passengers-quebec-1865-1900/001082-119.01-e.php?&person_id_nbr=211030&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=f69kssirnv8b02bc4ptj9pgu1)

<sup>5</sup> <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~blanchec/ship2.htm>

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lungs and congestion'. The report also notes in detail the shortcomings in the food supplies and diet with items promised in the passenger contracts not available or unsuitable for the conditions.

Fanny recounts how the Captain's wife took her under her wing and gave her sewing to do, probably to help keep her mind busy.

Tola's experience of the emigration process is also recorded<sup>6</sup>:

*I saw letters from Emigrants in New Zealand published in Reynolds weekly Paper. Mr DAVIES the Agent in Gloucester to whom I applied strongly advised me to go to Canterbury – he had relations and friends out there and he gave me a very good account of the place. I found the accounts I received are very truthful. I paid my way to London – waited five days – received fifteen shillings maintenance money. I had no direct communication with the Agent General's Office. Mr DAVIES forwarded all my letters. He was very, very obliging but an Agent should know something personally of the County for which he is employed and be able to answer questions. I might just as well have written direct to the Agent General. Sub-Agents possessing no knowledge of the Colony are an evil rather than any good. Mr DAVIES having friends in New Zealand was in a better position than a great many local Agents, but as a rule when people having read an advertisement apply to the local Agent and find he knows nothing about the Country for which he is acting they are apt to think the whole thing a take in.*

Once arrived in New Zealand, they were taken in rowboats from the *Star of India* to the shore at 7am, New Year, 1 January 1874 on what Fanny describes as 'a lovely morning.' After about a week in barracks they were placed with Mr INWOOD, a miller, and his family at Southbridge. Fanny recollects this as being a hard time with hard work and no comforts, and after three months they took another position as a married couple in Fendleton.

Fanny and Tola had two children Albert Ernest (Bert) born 17 October 1874 and Annie Elizabeth (my great-grandmother) born 6 December 1875 in New Zealand. When Bert was born they decided to have a home of their own so they left their positions and Tola started working on the railway.

Fanny was expecting their third child Amadyne Sarah (Amy) when Tola had an accident at work<sup>7</sup> on 31 March 1877, during a shunting, where he tripped and fell between two slowly moving carriages as he was about to uncouple them, and sustained injuries to the chest and arm which became inflamed and infected. Just over a week later he died on 9 April 1877. The inquest returned a verdict of Accidental Death. Tola was 28 years old and only five days short of his 29th birthday.

Fanny was a widow with two small children and another on the way in a country on the other side of the world, with no immediate family support. She was 26 years old.

Fanny was persuaded by her brother, John RICHMOND, to travel to Sydney, Australia, where he lived, and so it was in Australia that her fourth child, Amy, was born on 4 September 1877.

When Amy was five months old Fanny and her children travelled to England on the *Star of India* which was 'laden with wool and bugs'. Fanny recalls the voyage:  
*We were 114 days getting home and did not stop anywhere, arrived in London and no one to meet me they had all given us up. No telephone or telegraph used in those days. I took a cab and drove eleven miles through London to catch the train to Cheltenham arriving at the Great Western Station to find the train had left a quarter hour. I did not know what to do. The porter told me that I could stay at the station until the midnight train which I could not do with a baby and two others. Bert not yet four and Annie thirteen months younger. The porter offered to find us lodgings for the night and helped me there with my three babies, two parrots I was taking home to my mother and an old carpet bag which contained with other things £100 in sovereigns and numerous bundles.*

<sup>6</sup> <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/!blanchec/ship4.htm#Tola>

<sup>7</sup> Papers Past: Inquest, Star, Issue 2815, 11 April 1877, page 2

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The voyage back to England surely would have been hard without the support of a husband and with memories of her voyage to New Zealand on the same vessel and the loss of her first child. When I read Fanny's story as a child I was always taken with the fact that she took two parrots home to her mother!

While in England Fanny met Frederick SELWYN whom she married on 7 July 1879<sup>8</sup>. One could think that after her experiences of losing a child and a husband, she would be content to stay near her family in England, but in her own words 'I could not settle in England ... and decided to come back to New Zealand and have never regretted it.' Frederick and Fanny returned with the three children as government immigrants on the *Lady Jocelyn*, arriving on 8 December 1879. The voyage was difficult as the saltwater condensers failed and the food and water for most of the journey was not free from salt. Once settled, Fanny and Frederick had eight children in New Zealand between 1880 and 1891.

Fanny and Frederick had long and happy lives despite hardships on their voyage to New Zealand and early years with a growing family, and were interviewed or mentioned at various times in local newspapers as pioneers of the Christchurch area, having lived in Fendleton for most of their New Zealand lives. [*Early days of Christchurch: experiences of Mrs F. SELWYN* 30 Jan 1938; *Growth of suburb recalled: pioneer celebrates her 94th birthday* 30 January 1945; *Funeral: Mr Frederick SELWYN* 3 May 1938]<sup>10</sup>

Frederick SELWYN passed away aged 88 in May 1938 and Fanny passed away on 8 July 1948. She was 97 years old – ten of her twelve children were still alive and she had over one hundred descendants living at the time of her death. I do not know if Fanny ever returned to England to visit her family there; her mother also lived a long life before passing away in 1902. Fanny may also have travelled to Australia again to visit family as my great grandmother Annie lived in Australia for over half of her long life, passing away in 1968 aged 92. Fanny's daughter Amy also lived in Australia.

When Fanny wrote her reminiscences in 1938 she began with *I am in my 84th year and have often thought that I would like to write of some of the experiences which have been a long and useful life. I cannot remember a time when I have not been helping somebody or sending messages and it was a pleasure for me.* Reading through her notes confirms that she was indeed a woman of great fortitude and sollicitation towards others. I'm sure she always remembered her first husband, my great-grandfather, and her baby William and her first big adventure travelling to the far side of the world with both joy and grief, and delighted in her long and happy second marriage and all her children and descendants.

Fanny is just one of my 'unusual' ancestors, a woman of strength, love, caring and adventurous spirit.

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<sup>8</sup> FreeBDM, England & Wales, Marriage Index: 1837-1915 [database online] accessed via ancestry.com

<sup>10</sup> Copies of newspaper articles held by family member, dated, but not all newspapers identified