

RBDM Family History Journal



Issue 1 June 2013



Welcome to the first edition of RBDM's *Family History Journal*, a new quarterly newsletter which aims to keep you up to date with the latest developments in our Family History Research area.

I would encourage you to distribute the newsletter through your networks, send it to interested friends and subscribe to receive future editions.

As the sole agency responsible for recording, storing and administering life event records in Queensland, the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (RBDM) is the custodian of Queensland's family history. Whether you're an amateur historian researching your family tree or a professional genealogist, we want to make it as easy as possible for you to access the information you need from our archives.

I'm really excited about the latest developments in our Family History Research area—such as online record ordering and our new Twitter account—and hope that you will enjoy finding out more about them.

David John
Registrar General.

In this issue



Preserving history—Inside RBDM's bindery

The bindery, tucked away in the basement of 110 George Street, is where RBDM's priceless archive of leather bound family event registers are painstakingly maintained and restored.



Family history goes digital

In June 2012, as part of its Revitalisation Program, RBDM embarked on a three year project to digitise six million more records and provide a complete electronic archive.



Family history research gets a makeover—Online ordering

We've given our historical research area makeover. It's now on the Queensland Government's website and includes the revamped historical index search facility which includes online ordering of certificates and scanned register images.



Understanding registration numbers

When you're searching the RBDM archive, the registration number can provide additional information about an event. Find out about registration numbers and how they can help identify the specific record you are looking for.



Death by cassowary—strange deaths and dark tales from RBDM's registers

With death records stretching back to 1829, RBDM has a wealth of strange deaths and dark tales recorded in its historic archive. We look at just a few of the more unusual ways Queenslanders have met their end, from death by centipede to death by cassowary.



Decoding Mary Poppins from RBDM's historical records

We decode Mary Poppins from P.L.Travers birth certificate held among RBDM's extensive collection of historical records.



A little bird told me—RBDM's got a new Twitter account

RBDM now has its very own Twitter account. To keep you up to date with the latest developments in family history research follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/RBDMQLD>.

Preserving history—Inside RBDM's bindery

There can't be many organisations that can boast their very own resident bookbinder; however, the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (RBDM) are one! Ron Jarvis, the Queensland Government's only bindery operations officer (to give him his official title), has been practising his highly skilled craft for nearly 50 years. Ron's job is to preserve Queensland's family history by maintaining and restoring RBDM's priceless archive of life event registers and church records.



Left: RBDM's bindery operations officer, Ron Jarvis, carefully hand stitching the pages of a restored 1943 country births register in RBDM's basement bindery.

"The damaged registers are sent down to me in the bindery for repair" said Ron. The bindery [the name given to any workshop where pages are compiled into books] is tucked away in the basement of 110 George Street, and Ron works surrounded by the tools of his trade—hand presses, guillotines and printing blocks. "The older registers are very fragile. They've suffered from years of use," he added. "The paper tears easily, the pages are falling out and they have often undergone amateur running repairs using sticky tape".

Ron's been working in the bookbinding trade since leaving school. "I started when I was 15," he said. "I was finishing grade 10 and my dad urged me to apply for a job he saw in the paper. I finished my exams on the Friday and started as an apprentice with Watson and Fergusson in South Brisbane the following Monday; they're still going but don't do so much binding now, they're mainly publishers. I moved here in 1972 but in '76 I transferred down to the Titles Office which then had its own bookbinding section; I was there for 19 years before they closed down their bindery. I left with a package and used it to start my own binding business. I began working back here part-time originally, but there was so much work needed doing with the registers I gradually increased my hours, and before I knew it I was working full-time again."

Most of Ron's work is done by hand and while we spoke Ron continued meticulously working on the 1943 country births register he was restoring. "Restoring a register takes quite a bit of time," he said. "First I go through the register and repair all the minor rips and tears. In some cases I can repair the pages in the book, but if it's in bad condition—like this one—I have to take the register apart and work on each page individually before putting the whole register back together". Many of RBDM's registers are large A3+ [329 x 483 mm] bound books containing 200 to 250 pages and weighing up to 20 kilograms, so restoring them is no easy task even for Ron.

"I laminate the damaged pages on both sides with tissue paper to give them strength. The tissue paper's pasted over the original page; it's very fine and goes virtually transparent when it's dry. It's quite tricky to work with though, when it's wet it goes like jelly and if it folds onto itself it's useless. And as it's pasted on, you have to be very careful not to smudge the ink on the register; you can't do much about it if does, you just have to work as quickly and as carefully as possible".

"I reinforce the binding edge of the page with an extra layer of paper where it's drilled ready for stitching. I use a metal stencil to get all the holes in the right place and drill the paper with an ordinary carpenter's hand drill. I then stitch the pages together, like I'm doing now with this register. I then attach the boards [the front and back covers of a hardback book] and cover it with cloth; red for births, black for deaths and green for marriages".

"I make up the labels for the front and spine in the gold blocking press. The labels are made from a leather compound with the title details embossed into the surface in gold leaf. For this births register, I've made up some red leather labels and they'll be attached to the front and spine of the book. When that's done, it will be as good as new. So far this register's taken about 150 hours to restore; it will take another five hours or so to finish it off and attach the labels".

It's clear from watching Ron's painstaking work and listening to him talk about restoring the registers that his passion for his trade hasn't diminished during his many years as a bookbinder. "I'm 63 this year, and when I retire I'm planning to continue with my bookbinding. I'm going to resurrect the binding business I started when I left the Titles Office. I bought all the equipment and it's sitting there at home waiting for me," he said. "But I'll do it more as a hobby to keep my hand in. The thing is, I thoroughly love doing this job and I love books". Thanks to Ron's skill and dedication Queensland's priceless archive of registers and church records will be preserved for future generations.

Historical research gets a makeover—and now you can order our historical records online too!

Family History Research



We've given our historical research area makeover. It's now hosted on the [Queensland Government's website](#) and includes a revamped historical index search facility with online ordering of certificates and register images. Now, when you've found the records you're interested in you can order a copy certificate online; and if the register's been scanned, you can download a copy of the original entry instantly!

Historical records are available to anyone, and searching our online index of historical records is free of charge. You can search for births that took place more than 100 years ago, marriages that took place more than 75 years ago and deaths that occurred more than 30 years ago. In early June the new online ordering system was added to the search facility allowing you to order the records you are interested in online too.

Once you have found a record you want, simply click to add it to your basket; and when you have finished searching you can use your credit card to order copies of all the certificates you are interested in. Plus, if the register has been scanned, you can buy a copy of the original register page and download it instantly. It's a quick and easy way to get your hands on the records you want.



Left: Example of a historical certificate.



Right: A scan of an original register page. In this case a birth register from 1888. Register pages—when available—are supplied as PDF files and remain available for download for up to 14 days after purchase.

Historical certificates cost \$28 when ordered online, while a scan of the original register page costs just \$20; almost half the cost of ordering a certificate by post or over the counter at the registry.

More than sixty years of church records and birth, death and marriage registers are already available as scanned images, and additional records are being added all the time. We are in the process of [digitising our family history archive](#) which will see more and more records made available to family historians as downloadable images.

We hold records dating back to the original Moreton Bay Penal Colony, so get your hands on your family's history now by [searching and ordering records from our online database](#).

The quick and easy way to get your hands on history



« Start | Prev | 1 | Next | End » 20 Records per page

| Req. # | Given Names | Surname | Father's Name | Mother's Name |
|------------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1880/O461 | John Job Crew | Bradfield | John Edward | Maria |
| | Order Product | | | |
| 1870/C1473 | John Frederick Roderick | Bradfield | Richard John Edward | Jane Ward |
| | Order Product | | | |
| 1890/C6416 | Richard John Edward | Bradfield | Richard John Edward | Jane Ward |
| | Order Product | | | |

« Start | Prev | 1 | Next | End »

It's really easy to order a record you're interested in. Just click on 'Order Product', next to the record you are interested in. Choose whether you want a copy of the certificate, a register image (if one is available) or both, and add them to your basket. When you've selected all the records you want, go to checkout and enter your credit card details in the secure payment area.

If you have ordered a certificate it will be posted to you within five to ten working days. Images can be viewed immediately from the confirmation page and you will also receive an email link to your order so you can download it from the RBDM website at any time in the next 14 days. Ordering couldn't be easier and help is always available if you need it. It's the quick and easy way to get your hands on history.



MEMORANDUM OF MARRIAGE in the Registry of QUEENSLAND, in cases where the solemnization of the marriage is required by the 1863 Act of the 26th Victoria, No. 36, and Regd.

| NAME | RESIDENCE | DATE | TIME | PLACE | OFFICIAL | WITNESSES |
|-------------------------|-----------|------|------|-------|----------|-----------|
| John Job Crew | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| John Frederick Roderick | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Richard John Edward | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... |

Understanding registration numbers

A successful search of the RBDM historical index will return a list of records with details for each record. This includes headline information about the registration—the full name of the person, their father and mother's full name, including the mother's maiden name, for births and deaths and the partner's full name for marriages. In addition there will usually be a registration number in the left hand column. This is used to locate the full registration in the archive.

The registration number provides additional information about the event which may help you identify the specific record you are looking for, particularly if you are searching a common name.

The number is made up of three elements:

- the year of registration followed by a forward slash '/'
- a prefix letter (or letters) which provide more details of the event
- the sequential number of that year's event entry.



« Start | Prev | 1 | Next | End » 20 Records per page

| Reg # | Given Names | Surname | Father's Name | Mother's Name |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1880/O461 Order Product | John Job Crew | Bradfield | John Edward | Maria |
| 1870/C1473 Order Product | John Frederick Roderick | Bradfield | Richard John Edward | Jane Ward |
| 1890/C6416 Order Product | Richard John Edward | Bradfield | Richard John Edward | Jane Ward |

« Start | Prev | 1 | Next | End »

*In the above example the registration number **1880/O461** indicates that **John Job Crew Bradfield's** birth was registered in 1880, the 'O' identifies it as a memo birth—meaning it wasn't formally registered at the time and the entry is based on information provided at a later date by the hospital, doctor or midwife. John Bradfield—who built Brisbane's Story Bridge and is most famous for designing and building one of Australia's most iconic structures, the Sydney Harbour Bridge—was registered as born in Sandgate on Boxing Day 1866 (most biographies say he was born in 1867), yet the birth was registered more than thirteen years after it took place! His was the **461st** registration recorded that year.*

It's important to use the year of registration as a guide rather than an absolute date for the event you are looking for—and to allow for this in your searches. In most cases the year of registration will be the same as the year in which the event took place; however, if the event happened late in the year, the registration may fall into the following year's registrations. This will be evident by a very low sequential number (the third element of the registration number).

Life events are normally registered soon after they happen; however, there are certain circumstances when the registration may have taken place many months or years after the event took place—such as in the case of an event happened at sea—in which case the year of entry may also be misleading. This is a case when the prefix letter may help.

The prefix letters provide more information about the event such as where it took place, if it is a church record or whether the event happened at sea. The letters correspond to the descriptions in the table below:

| Type | Code | Description |
|------------------|--------------|--|
| Region | B | Brisbane event |
| | C (or blank) | Country event |
| Births | L | Legitimation—indicating that the birth record has been re-registered to include marriage details of the child's parents |
| | M | Marine birth—a birth that occurred at sea and (normally) registered at the next port of call and not necessarily the destination of the person's voyage |
| | O | Memo birth—in this case the birth was not formally registered. The entry is based on information provided by the hospital, doctor or midwife. As a result the entry may hold limited information |
| | R | Late registration |
| | BBP | Church record of baptism |
| Deaths | M | Marine death—a death that occurred at sea and (normally) registered at the next port of call and not necessarily the destination of the person's voyage |
| | F | Australian Imperial Forces—this indicates a World War One death which may have occurred outside of Australia |
| | S | World War Two death |
| | BBU | Church record of burial |
| Marriages | BMA | Church record of marriage |

Church records—Codes BBP, BBU and BPM—are not comprehensive and may only contain limited information about the event.

It's important to note that some records may not display a prefix letter, while others may be misleading, particularly the location of the event. This is because area boundaries have changed. Some country areas have been created, while others have been abolished and merged into other regional registry districts over time.

For example, a person born in the Brisbane suburb of Windsor in 1957 would have a registration prefix of 'B' indicating a Brisbane birth; however, as Windsor was not incorporated into the Greater Brisbane metropolitan area until 1925 a person born in Windsor during 1880 would have a prefix of 'C' denoting a Country birth.

Death by Cassowary—Strange deaths and dark tales from BDM's archive

With death records stretching back to 1829, well before Queen Victoria decided to split New South Wales and name the top half after herself, RBDM has a wealth of grizzly deaths recorded in its historic archive. Here is just a glimpse at some of the unusual and remarkable ways Queenslanders have met their end.

Our first unusual death took place at the hands, or rather many legs, of a centipede. According to the CSIRO there are no recorded deaths from centipede bites in Australia. That's cold comfort to the grieving family of little Lillie Cains! Lillie lived on Blenheim Station south west of Surat, where her father worked as a stockman. According to the Balonne death register for 1890 poor little Lillie was bitten by a centipede on 28 December, was immediately taken ill and died just four hours later. She was buried in the small graveyard on the station a few days short of her fifth birthday.

| DESCRIPTION. | | | (1) Cause of Death. |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|---|
| When and Where Died. | Name and Surname, Rank or Profession. | Sex and Age. | (2) Duration of last Illness. |
| 28 th Dec 1890 | Lillie Blanche Cains | Female | (3) Medical Attendant by whom certified, and (4) When he last saw Deceased. |
| | | | (1) Bite of Centipede |
| | | | (2) 4 hours |

Poor little Lillie Cains, whose record shows—contrary to what the CSIRO say—died from a centipede bite in 1890.

While poor Lillie's death is—as the CSIRO says—pretty unusual, snake bite is not surprisingly a far more common cause of death in the RBDM archives, particularly in the days before anti-venom. Just a few entries before little Lillie is recorded the unfortunate death of Henry Matthews, a stockman from Dallgonally Station north of Julia Creek. Henry died in October 1890 after being bitten by a snake while out working alone in a distant corner of the property. The cause of death is snake bite or thirst, the latter being one of the main symptoms of being bitten by the former. After being bitten by a snake in 19th Century outback Queensland, Henry was a gonner either way.

| | | | |
|-----|----------------|------|----------------|
| 137 | Henry Matthews | Male | (1) Snake Bite |
| 37 | Stockman | 35 | (2) Thirst |
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The entry for Henry Mathews who died from a snake bite, or thirst, on Dallgonally Station; either way he was a gonner.

With our home 'girt by sea' drowning is also a common death; however, 133 in one go is fairly remarkable. More than 20 years before the Titanic disaster shocked the world; the Royal Mail steamer Quetta sank in the Torres Strait to claim the title of Queensland's worst peacetime maritime disaster.

On 28 February 1890, the SS Quetta—considered one of the most luxurious ships on the Brisbane to England run—was en-route to London as part of the Queensland Royal Mail service. There were 101 passengers listed on board, with another 71 Javanese cane cutters—returning home with their families after the sugar cane harvest—housed in temporary deckhouses. This meant that with her complement of 121 crew, there were 293 people packed on board the ship as she turned into the Adolphus Channel to round Cape York.

Sometime around 9.15pm while ploughing at full speed through a calm moonlit sea, the Quetta struck an uncharted rock. Like Titanic, the Quetta was designed with seven watertight compartments making her 'unsinkable'; however, as with the fateful iceberg, the Quetta struck the rock a glancing blow, ripping a massive gash in her side.

The Quetta sank in less than five minutes. There are other frightening echoes of what was to happen 22 years later with survivors noticing hardly anything before the ship sank, just a 'tremble' throughout the ship and a 'muffled grating noise' from below.

| DEATHS IN THE ASSOCIATION | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|---|--------------------|
| DESCRIPTION | | | |
| (1) Name of Death | (2) Position of last known | (3) Cause of Death | (4) When last seen |
| George Prentice | 18 years old | Lost in the wreck of the SS Quetta in the Torres Strait | 28 Feb 1890 |
| Jessie Prentice | 18 years old | Lost in the wreck of the SS Quetta in the Torres Strait | 28 Feb 1890 |

The entry in the Somerset register for George Prentice—occupation 'Gentleman'—one of the 133 consecutive entries for the dead from the sinking of the Quetta. Listed below is his 18-year-old granddaughter, Jessie, who was travelling with him to London and who also drowned. Neither body was found but both are remembered as 'lost in the wreck of the SS Quetta in the Torres Strait' on the Prentice family plot in Brisbane's Toowong Cemetery.



An artist's copper-plate impression of the Quetta sinking from 'The Queenslander' the weekly summary and literary edition of the 'Brisbane Courier' (now The Courier-Mail).

The following morning a handful of sunburned survivors managed to scramble ashore at Somerset, a remote township established in the 1860s as a coaling station on the very tip of Cape York. They landed near the homestead of Frank Jardine, legendary pioneer of European settlement in Far North Queensland, who immediately sent a horseman 24km south to Paterson to raise the alarm using a newfangled contraption called the electromechanical telegraph, which had just reached Cape York.

On receipt of the message the government steamer Albatross was dispatched on a rescue mission from Thursday Island, while back at Somerset Frank Jardine rounded up whatever boats he could find to pick up survivors.

Unlike the sinking of Titanic, the sea was warm and the islands of the Torres Strait offered temporary safety for those who could swim or cling to flotsam from the ship. Eventually 160 survivors were rescued; the final person saved being 15-year-old Emily Lacy, who was dragged from the water delirious but still mechanically swimming two days after the sinking.

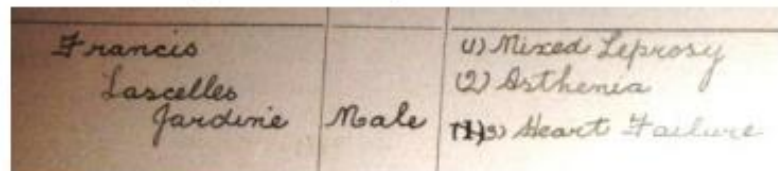
Still, 133 men, women and children are recorded in the register for Somerset as having perished in the disaster, mainly European saloon and steerage passengers who were below decks when the ship sank. Most of the Javanese cane cutters—packed like sardines on the deck—survived.

Frank Jardine, who was responsible for saving so many of the SS Quetta's survivors, was one of the final deaths ever recorded at Somerset. He died in 1919 of leprosy at the age of 82. Frank was the son of the township's founder, John Jardine, who with the help of a detachment British Marines had established the remote settlement on the tip of Cape York in August 1864 at the colonial government's request.

Frank is famous for his unsuccessful attempt to introduce stock-rearing to Cape York. In May 1864 young Frank—he was just 22 at the time—set out from Rockhampton on an epic 1900km overland trek to join his father. Accompanied by his younger brother, four Europeans and four aboriginal stockmen, the team drove 42 horses and 250 head of cattle before them. They reached Somerset 10 months later with just 12 horses and 50 cattle left. It was a heroic, if rather foolhardy expedition immortalised by the naming of Cape York's largest river after him.



Frank Jardine, who helped save so many survivors of the sinking of the SS Quetta, was a pioneer of European settlement in Far North Queensland and one of the last people registered as dying at Somerset. He will be forever associated with Cape York thanks to the Jardine River being named after him. Frank died of leprosy in 1919 at the ripe old age of 82. He was buried on the beach at Somerset, the remote township established by his father.



Unfortunately Frank's cattle didn't flourish in the tropical climate and rugged country of the cape; however, he stayed on in Somerset, married the niece of the King of Samoa and lived a long and happy life. His death from leprosy, a disease most of us associate with biblical times, was not uncommon in Queensland during the 20th Century, with Peel Island in Moreton Bay used as leper colony until 1959.

One of the strangest deaths recorded in the RBDM's archive has to be death by Cassowary. As you probably know, Cassowaries are flightless birds that can grow up to two meters tall, with big feet, large claws and a dagger-like barb on the back of long powerful legs capable of propelling them at 50km per hour.

Gawd Bless You Mary Poppins—Decoding Mary Poppins from RBDM's historical records!

Mary Poppins appears on the surface to be a quintessentially English story, however, the roots of the popular children's classic are about as genuinely English as Dick Van Dyke's Cockney accent in the 1964 Disney film. Mary Poppins actually flew into 17 Cherry Tree Lane on the childhood memories of a young woman from Queensland called P.L.Travers.

She was born Helen Lyndon Goff in Maryborough in August 1899 and it was her experiences growing up in Australia with her two younger sisters (the family briefly moved to Allora on the Darling Downs in 1905 before settling in Bowral in New South Wales in 1907 following the death of her alcoholic father) that inspired many characters, names and settings for her highly successful series of books.

You can understand a lot of the inspiration behind Mary Poppins from looking at Helen Lyndon Goff's birth registration held in the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages (RBDM) in George Street, Brisbane. A birth registration holds more information than just the persons name and when they were born; it contains details of their parents including their place of birth, the father's occupation, the mother's maiden name, details of any siblings and it may even provide their address if the child was born at home or a parent reported the birth. All of these facts can be traced from Helen Lyndon Goff's birth registration into the pages of Mary Poppins.

| Queensland BIRTH CERTIFICATE | | REGISTRATION NUMBER 1899/ 7847 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| CHILD | | |
| Name | Helen Lyndon | |
| Sex | Female | |
| Date of Birth | 5 August 1899 | |
| Place of Birth | Kent & Richmond Streets, Maryborough | |
| FATHER | | |
| Name and surname | Travers Robert Goff | |
| Occupation | Bank Manager | |
| Age and birthplace | 35 years London, Middlesex, England | |
| MOTHER | | |
| Name and maiden surname | Margaret Agnes formerly Morehead | |

Left: A copy of Helen Goff's birth certificate highlighting some of the Mary Poppins connections

As was common at the end of the 19th Century Helen was born at home. In Maryborough the Goff's lived on the corner of Kent and Richmond Streets—above what was then the Australian Joint Stock Bank where Helen's father worked. Their apartment on the upper levels of the building overlooked the Mary River and it's more than coincidence that the name Mary, so prominent in P.L.Travers early childhood, was chosen for her book's principal character.

If you walk a few blocks down Kent Street from the Goff's home you come to Maryborough's Town Hall Green where every Thursday at 1pm the town's historic time cannon is still fired. When the Goff family lived there it was fired everyday, just as the Bank's neighbour in 17 Cherry Tree Lane—Admiral Boom—does in Mary Poppins.

If you walk down Richmond Road toward the Mary River you reach Queens Park, a grand Victorian park similar to the one which features so heavily in the Mary Poppins books; the third book in the series is actually titled *Mary Poppins in the Park*. Queens Park is still a great place to push a pram if you're a nanny, draw some chalk paintings on the pavement if you happen to be a chirpy Cockney chimney sweep on your day off¹, or just go and fly a kite if you are a hapless bank manager wanting some downtime.

In RBDM's Maryborough register for 1899 Helen's father is listed as Travers Robert Goff. She was to adopt his Christian name as her pseudonym, P.L.Travers, when she took up acting and later used it as her pen name. Like Mr Banks in the stories, Helen's father was a kind but disgruntled and highly unsuccessful bank manager; he was actually so bad at his job that he was demoted to bank clerk, a setback that drove him to drink heavily and contributed to his early death at the age of 43. In the Darling Downs' register for 1907 RBDM also holds the record of Travers Goff's death.

Helen's birth certificate also shows her father was born in London, England. He was actually born in Deptford among the dock's of London's impoverished East End and although he would have needed very good hearing to be classed a true Cockney—a true Cockney has to be born within the sound of the bells of St Mary-le-Bow church in the City of London—he would certainly have spoken with a more genuine cockney accent than Dick Van Dyke's character 'Bert' in the film.

Her mother—Margaret Agnes née Morehead—although not a Suffragette, was heavily involved in politics; her brother and Travers's uncle was Boyd Dunlop Morehead, Conservative Premier of Queensland between 1888 and 1890 and coincidentally a vehement opponent of women's suffrage². P.L.Travers was to dedicate her first book to her beloved mother. RBDM also holds the Goff's marriage certificate which shows they were married in Brisbane on 9th November 1908, exactly nine months before Helen's birth.

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|------|----------------|-------------------------|
| 1899/C7847 | Helen Lyndon | Goff | Travers Robert | Margaret Agnes Morehead |
| Order Product | | | | |
| 1905/C3969 | Cicely Margaret | Goff | Travers Robert | Margaret Agnes Morehead |
| Order Product | | | | |
| 1902/C5782 | Barbara Ierne | Goff | Travers Robert | Margaret Agnes Morehead |
| Order Product | | | | |

¹ Mary's friend 'Bert' being a chimney sweep is a construct of the Disney film. In the books Bert is a match-seller and scrivener—pavement artist—both means the unemployed resorted to to earn money during the Great Depression when the books are set and a common site when P.L Travers first arrived in London in the mid 1920s when the army of ex-servicemen returning from the Great War had created chronic unemployment in Britain's major cities.

² Coincidentally as Mrs Bank's support of the Suffragette movement is also a construct of the Disney film. P.L Travers books are set in the depression era of the early 1930's when the first book was written, not the more romantic and elegant Edwardian period portrayed in the film. From Disney's rather misogynistic perspective, Mrs Banks being a committed Suffragette would explain the neglect of her children and the need for a nanny.

As Helen Goff was the eldest child, no siblings are recorded in her birth registration; however, a quick search of RBDM's births index shows she had two younger sisters, Barbara, born in 1902 and Cicely, born in 1905. Although omitted from the film adaptation, in the original book Barbara is the name given to one of the infant twins the nanny—Mary Poppins—is employed to care for alongside the Bank's older children, Jane and Michael. Other names dotted throughout P.L.Travers's books are taken from her mother's extended family with whom she spent a lot of time growing up.

Despite the loss of her father at an early age Helen Goff was well educated thanks to the patronage of a wealthy unmarried aunt, Aunt Elly. She provided the Goff family with accommodation in Bowral following Travers Goff's death and helped raise the young children; many of her mannerisms and her sometimes slightly eccentric behaviour were incorporated into P.L.Travers Mary Poppins character.

After school Helen Lyndon Goff became an accomplished actress under the name Pamela Lyndon Travers—her family had always known her as Lyndon but she just fancied herself as a Pam—touring Australia and New Zealand as part of a Shakespearean theatre company before moving to London in 1924. In England she dabbled in writing and journalism and moved in famous literary circles being inspired to write children's fiction by Peter Pan's author J.M Barry whose adopted son—the inspiration for Peter Pan's character—was her first publisher.

It was in deference to J.M.Barry that she shortened her pen name to P.L.Travers, although in the male dominated world of 1930's literature this also served to disguise the fact that she was a woman. Her first Mary Poppins children's novel was published in 1934 and following its success she went on to write a further seven books in the series, the last of which was published in 1988.



Left: An early publicity shot of Maryborough girl Helen Lyndon Goff as Titania in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She appeared as an actress under her more famous pseudonym of Pamela Lyndon Travers. She later shortened it to her pen name of P.L.Travers in deference to her literary hero J.M.Barry. **Right:** An original 1934 Mary Poppins book cover



Mary Poppins is of course now best known for the classic 1964 Disney film which was roughly based around the first book. Walt Disney tried for 20 years to secure the film rights to Mary Poppins which had been a childhood favourite of his two daughters. Although Travers eventually sold the rights to Disney in 1961, she did so grudgingly and absolutely hated the result. She particularly disliked Dick Van Dyke's mockney Bert and Julie Andrews, who she thought far too pretty for the role and overly saccharin in her portrayal of the character, even

though the performance won Andrews a best actress Oscar in 1965 and secured her the lead in *A Sound of Music*.

Travers hated the film so much she inserted a provision into her will stating no Americans should ever be granted permission to work on a Poppins project again. She died in London in 1996 and Brit Sir Cameron Mackintosh respected her wish as much as possible for his highly successful West End musical. Travers granted him the rights to develop a stage version of Mary Poppins before her death provided he made it more true to her books; however, Disney were necessarily involved as they owned the rights to the songs and a Mary Poppins stage musical would have been inconceivable without *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*, *A spoon full of sugar* or *Chim Chimney*.

As she says herself, Mary Poppins is practically perfect in every way, and interest in all things Poppins is now greater than ever. The books remain in print and continue to delight children the world over with the stories translated into 25 languages. After its successful tour of P.L.Travers childhood home of Australia, the stage show has flown across to the West Coast of America where it continues to sell out theatres. Later this year a highly anticipated film about the trials and tribulations that led to the making of the 1964 film titled '*Saving Mr. Banks*' will open with Tom Hanks as Walt Disney and Emma Thompson as P.L.Travers (or Helen Lyndon Goff as she is known in the pages of RBDM's birth register). The town of Maryborough also remains immensely proud of its most famous former resident and celebrates at the end of June each year with its own Mary Poppins festival.

Helen Lyndon Goff's birth certificate is held among RBDM's extensive collection of historical records. Historical records can be searched online free of charge and now anyone can order a copy online too—without proof of ID—using our enhanced search and ordering facility, part of the revamped [family history research area on the QGov website](#). Helen Lyndon Goff's original Maryborough birth register entry will soon be digitised as part of RBDM's Revitalisation Program; which includes a [three year digitisation project](#) which will see RBDM's complete archive scanned and all historical records made available as digital images. You will then be able order and view the original entry online.

A little bird told me—RBDM's got a new Twitter account



RBDM now has its very own Twitter account. To keep you up to date with the latest developments in family history research follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/RBDMQLD>.

Note this item was not a story but a link to RBDM's Twitter account.

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