

Maryanne and Kitty Scott

One of the more intriguing and possibly best-known stories of the people who worked for Drysdale and Newcomb is that of Maryanne and Kitty Scott. These two Indigenous girls initially came to Boronggoop as young children in November 1843. They joined two other girls the two ladies were also caring for, Ellen and Adelaide Batman who had come in 1842, children of the late John Batman founder the Port Phillip settlement. Together, these four children, often referred to as ‘the girls’ in Anne Drysdale’s Diaries, were treated as members of the family, taken to chapel, visits to the Thomson and Armstrong homesteads and driving with Caroline into Corio on her frequent business trips.¹ Both sets of children had lost their fathers and their mothers felt unable to care of them. Caroline took responsibility for the girls’ education and religious instruction. However, this family environment began to break up after three years when Maryanne was aged about 12 and Kitty about 9. In November 1846, the Batman girls returned to Melbourne to live with their mother.² By 1847, the Scott girls were regarded as servants. In January, Drysdale reported ‘*young ladies becoming useful servants – Mary Anne has become tall and very strong. Kitty is small but very attractive and clever. They go on regularly with their lessons and are far advanced as they may every require, but it is necessary to continue the teaching that they may not forget what they have learnt*’.³ Later, in the Diary she entered ‘*The children are our only servants & do well*’.⁴ Around 1848, Maryanne left for alternative employment leaving Kitty with Drysdale and Newcomb but she became increasingly restive.

Background

Maryanne and Katherine (Kitty) Scott came to Boronggoop in the aftermath of the wreck of the Rebecca which resulted in the drowning of their father, sealer John Scott, told in the preceding story of Susannah Johnstone. Scott arrived in Sydney in about 1808, was discharged from the merchant navy and began sealing. At first, relationships between local Indigenous tribespeople and sealers were cooperative in NSW, and Scott operated during this phase. As more sealers arrived, their behaviour became increasingly aggressive and the tribespeople increasingly resentful of their intrusions. Scott, something of a loner, moved southward. He settled for a time in Westernport Bay. There he partnered with an Indigenous woman, Maria. Whether he and Maria had any children is not clear and none were not mentioned in his diary. He later moved to King Island and partnered with Mary, probably a Tasmanian Aboriginal woman, with whom he had a least five children. In addition to the four discussed below, another boy John was born in 1841 but died in infancy. A third Indigenous woman, Georgia, referred to as ‘The Ranger’ in John’s diaries, lived near the family⁵.

¹ Anne Drysdale, Diary entries, 26 December 1843, 4 January 1844, 19 January 1844, 25 January 1844, 7 May 1844, 3 April 1846, 28 May 1846, 3 July 1846.

² Anne Drysdale, Diary entry, 7 November 1846.

³ Luke Agati, John Scott: Sealer, Family Man & His King Island (1828-55), King Island Historical Society, 2019, p. 12. [This was not a Diary entry].

⁴ Anne Drysdale, Diary entry, 22 May 1847.

⁵ Graeme Broxam, *John Scott, sealer of Bass Strait and his ‘forgotten’ Tasmanian Aboriginal descendants*, THRA podcast, 9 November 2021, <https://thra.org.au/events/john-scott-sealer-bass-strait-and-his-forgotten-tasmanian-aboriginal-descendants>.

It was not uncommon for sealers in the Bass Strait to live with Indigenous women and they often required these women to hunt seals for them using traditional methods. Their treatment of the women was categorised as cruel and enforced slavery.⁶ John Scott however does seem to have been more humane than the stereotypical Island sealer, caring for his family and educating his children by providing them with both literacy and religious instruction. Captain Mactaggert of the *Rebecca* referred to the older children as being able to read and write very well and knowing the English prayer book by heart⁷. Ships frequently appeared off the Island's coast but rarely stopped. As discussed in the above story of Susannah Johnstone, the ship *Rebecca* stopped offshore to King Island in September 1843. John, needing ink and paper to teach his children writing, took his longboat over to the *Rebecca* with his whole family, Mary, Maria, his eldest son Tom, Maryanne and Kitty and an infant daughter. Scott was described as a fine venerable looking man with hair and beard as white as snow. They were given what they wanted including books and other things for the children. However, a squall blew up and upset the long boat as they were returning home. John Scott and the infant drowned on 30 September 1843 but the women were able to save the other children who could swim. The squall also forced the *Rebecca* onto rocks. Most of its' crew and passengers got to shore in their longboat and were looked after by the women.⁸

Captain Mactaggert, a man named Bill, Susannah Johnstone and young Tom Scott took the longboat to Port Phillip and landed at [Indented] Head. There they met Mr. Nicholas Fenwick, the police magistrate who also held a pastoral lease over that land. He took charge of Tom and employed Susan as she was known to work for his sister. At the request of the girls' mother who was concerned they would become wild on the death of their father, Mactaggert put an advertisement in the Melbourne paper asking for a woman who would take care of the girls. This was answered by Anne Drysdale and Caroline Newcomb who wrote to him on the 30th October 1843.⁹ Maryanne and her sister Kitty were sent to Geelong arriving on the 16th November. Drysdale described them as '*children from King's Island, very fine little creatures, dressed in pelisses of kangaroo skin. They seem very smart and intelligent*'.¹⁰ Maryanne was then aged about eight years and Kitty about five. Tom later left the Fenwick's and returned to King Island where he took up seal hunting. He was drowned off Westernport Bay.¹¹

After John Scott's death, the women survived by hunting wallaby skins for David Howie. Howie had a property on Robin Island off the north-west coast of Tasmania but also had interests on King Island where he employed men to hunt wallaby. He visited Geelong presumably on business and was in contact with Susannah Coverdale (nee Johnstone). Susannah retained contact with Kitty and Maryanne, creating a circle of communication regarding activity on King Island. Georgia (also known as Kuitiki and Kude Karra) is believed to have been left on the Island in 1835 to hunt skins by Captain William Dutton, a whaler, who earlier had founded the

⁶ Joel Stephen Birnie, *My People's Songs: How an Indigenous Family Survived Colonial Tasmania*, Monash University Press, 2022, pp. 7-8.

⁷ Luke Agati, *John Scott: Sealer, Family Man & His King Island (1828-55)*, King Island History Society, 2019, p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11; Mark Howard to Marion Taylor, email, 27 January 2006.

⁹ Anne Drysdale, diary entry, 30 October 1843.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 November 1843.

¹¹ Agati, *John Scott*, p. 12.

whaling station at Portland Bay in 1828. Georgia died in 1854. Mary is presumed to have also died sometime around 1854. Maria, then elderly and destitute, was removed to the Furneaux Islands in 1863 and was awarded a pension which she never received.¹²

Maryanne's Story

Maryanne (aka Mary Ann or Mary) Scott was born in 1834 on King Island.¹³ Her father John Scott (1770-1843) was a sealer. Her mother was an Indigenous woman, Mary or Mannermannemer. After three and a half years at Boronggoop, she began working for them as a servant when aged around 13. Probably in 1848 when she was 14, Maryanne moved to work for Susannah Coverdale as a nanny to her young children.¹⁴ However, Maryanne became pregnant aged 14, and gave birth to a daughter, Janet, born Geelong in 1849.¹⁵ She then worked for Mrs Howie on Robin Island who she said treated her like a friend. However, this woman drowned soon after Maryanne arrived. Mr Howie recommended Maryanne go with his overseer on King Island, a man named Thomas Blake. Blake had promised to marry her but was renegeing on this offer¹⁶ Blake did marry Maryanne on 29 November 1850 in Geelong at Christ Church, presumably under pressure from Howie.¹⁷ Maryanne returned to King Island with Blake but he deserted her leaving her destitute. She then lived with her mother Mary and Maria hunting wallabies.¹⁸ Janet was reported as thriving in mid 1852 but was placed in the Queens Orphanage, Hobart on the 1 November 1852. She died 8 October 1853 and was buried in St. John's Cemetery, New Town.¹⁹ Maryanne had moved to Hobart presumably at this time.



Fig. 1 New Town, St. John's Avenue, Church and Orphanages, 1870, Image PHI/1/15, Tasmanian Archives, State Library of Tasmania.

What became of Thomas Blake is unknown. However, aged 19, Maryanne married George Smith on the 22 May 1854 at St. Mark's church, Pontville, Tasmania.²⁰ Their children were:

- George Evan Smith (19 November 1854 - 14 January 1856) born in Hobart.
- Mary Ann Phoebe Smith, born 11 November 1856 in Hobart.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵ Mary Ann Scott, Family Tree, ancestry.com.au, accessed 16 January, 2023.

¹⁶ Maryanne Scott to Susannah Coverdale, Letter, 10 June 1852.

¹⁷ Thomas Blake, Australian Marriage Index, Victoria, 1850, reg. No. 23497, ancestry.com.au, accessed 16 January 2023.

¹⁸ Maryanne Scott to Susannah Coverdale, Letter, 10 June 1852.

¹⁹ Janet Scott, Orphan No. 4849, Friends of the Orphan Schools, www.orphanschool.org.au, accessed 16 Nov. 2023.

²⁰ Mary Ann Scott, Family Tree, ancestry.com.au, accessed 16 January, 2023.

- Frederick William Smith, born 8 January 1859 in Hobart, died 23 February 1859 in Hobart.
- Susannah Maria Smith, born 4 March 1860 in Campbelltown, Tasmania, died 11 November 1908 in Beaconsfield, Tasmania.
- Walter William Smith, born 24 August 1862 in Hobart, died 1931.

[George was in Goal for six months from February 1865. George was an ex-convict who came out on the Gilmore 2. Susannah, aged 6, and Mary Ann Phoebe, aged 10, were placed in Queens Orphanage, Hobart, on the 20th and 29th October 1866 respectively. Their discharge dates were not shown.²¹]

- * Grace Smith, born 17 June 1865 in Hobart, died 14 March 1872 in Launceston, Tasmania.
- Kate Smith, born 11 February 1868 in Swansea, Tasmania, died 1943,
- Edward John Smith, born 12 January 1870 in Swansea, Tasmania, died 1934.
- Arthur Bamber Smith, born 1872 in Launceston, Tasmania, died 1940.
- Frederick Adolphus Smith, born 12 September 1875, Launceston, Tasmania, died 1958.
- Erskine Turton Scott Smith, born 14 January 1880, Launceston, Tasmania, died 1912 in Mildura, Victoria.

Mary Ann was aged 45 by the time of this last birth. The family later returned to Victoria. Her husband, George Smith, died on the 30 June 1898 at Royal Melbourne Hospital, Victoria. Maryanne was resident in Northcote, Melbourne in 1903, and died 8 January 1914 aged 79 at the Cheltenham Benevolent Home, Victoria. She was buried at the Northcote cemetery, Darebin, Melbourne.²²

Kitty's Story

Kitty (aka Catherine or Katherine) Scott was born about 1838 on King Island, her father was the sealer John Scott and mother Mary or Mannermannemener. She remained as a servant with Drysdale and Newcomb after her sister left but problems began around that time. The diary entries indicate that she may have been expected to take over washing clothes, the role originally performed by Bidy Trainer as told above. However, she was less compliant and a number of incidents were reported including several in the Diaries in 1851 when she was around 13 years old illustrating her rebellious spirit. In this period, due to the lure of the newly discovered goldfields, it was proving very difficult to retain workers at Coriyule. As a consequence of Kitty's absences, Caroline was often left to do the washing.

- 6 May 1848: A man named Thompson, an employee of Drysdale and Newcomb was sentenced for one month's imprisonment for absconding from their service. He enticed Kitty, then about 10 years old, to accompany him. He was apprehended quickly and the girl returned to Misses Drysdale and Newcomb.²³

²¹ Susannah Maria Smith, Orphan no. 5068, Mary Ann Phoebe Smith, Orphan no. 5049, Friends of the Orphan Schools, www.orphanschool.org.au, accessed 16 Nov. 2023.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Anon., 'Wednesday Morning, May 17', *Geelong Advertiser*, 17 May 1848, p. 2.

- 14 July 1851: 'Kitty went out this afternoon & has not yet returned. Mrs Lee finished washing'. 15 July: 'Kitty returned before we went to bed. We gave her warning to seek other employment'.²⁴
- 23 July 1851: 'Kitty behaved so very ill, haven broken up Mr. Sheffield's trunk & taken money, etc. that she was locked up in the cellar with her hands tyed'[sic]. 24 July: 'Caroline returned at sunset. She & I went to Kitty & on her promising to amend she was released'.²⁵
- 26 August 1851: 'Kitty went off with all her clothes at dusk & was bought home at 9 o'clock by the blacksmith'.²⁶
- 30 September 1851: 'Caroline overlooked Kitty washing'. 1 October: 'Caroline finished her cloathes' [sic].²⁷
- 14 November 1851: 'Kitty went out dressed after dinner & has not yet returned'. 15 November: 'Martin went out early with Beckley's dray & as Kitty has not returned, Caroline & I have done their work'.²⁸

However, from Maryanne's letter written in June 1852, Kitty was still with Drysdale and Newcomb at that time although it was clearly becoming an issue. Anne Drysdale had apparently considered sending Kitty back to King Island. In this letter, Maryanne strongly opposed her sister's plans to go to the diggings and advised her to stay with Drysdale and Newcomb.²⁹ However, Kitty apparently did go to the diggings with family records showing her living in Kingower and Bealiba.³⁰ During this period, the rich Victorian goldfields were opening up and the Ladies were finding it increasingly difficult to retain staff. Kingower is a rural area 12 km from Inglewood and about 45 km west of Bendigo in the Loddon Shire, halfway between Dunolly and St. Arnaud. Gold was discovered in 1853. Bealiba is in the Central Goldfields Shire, 24 km from Dunolly and 47 km from Maryborough. Gold was discovered in 1856, and later opened for selection by farmers. The town was laid out in 1862, and adopted the name of the original pastoral lease Bealiba which means red gum near the creek. A railway station opened in 1878.³¹

Kitty married Francis Symonds on 5 April 1856 at Christ Church, Geelong. They had five children:

- Catherine Lavina Symonds, born 13 June 1859, Kingower, Victoria, died 1905.
- Francis Symonds, born 15 February 1861, Kingower, Victoria, died 1936.
- Thomas Drysdale Symonds, born 17 June 1862, Kingower, Victoria, died 1929.
- Ellen Caroline Symonds, born 6 April 1864, Kingower, Victoria, died 1937.
- Mary Louisa Symonds, born February 1867, Bealiba, Victoria, died 1867.

²⁴ Bev Roberts, Ed., *Miss D & Miss N, an extraordinary partnership*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2009, p. 239.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.248.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

²⁹ Maryanne Scott to Susannah Coverdale, Letter, 10 June 1852.

³⁰ Catherine Kitty Scott, Family Tree, ancestry.com.au, accessed 16 January 2023.

³¹ Tiny Towns Arts Trail, www.tinytownsartstrail.com.au, accessed 18 November 2023.

Kitty died on the 29 May 1867 at Bealiba Station, Victoria of acute bronchitis, aged 29. Francis Symonds died in 1907.³²



Fig. 2 Bealiba © Tiny Towns Arts Trail, www.tinytownsartstrail.com.au

John Scott's Diaries are available on -

https://librarietas.ent.sirsiidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/tas/search/results?qu=NS&qu=1612-1

Anne Drysdale's Diaries are available online at the State Library of Victoria.

³² *Ibid.*