# WILLIAM MACKY

## (c.1813/20 – c.1853)

## STORIES OF A LIFE

### INTRODUCTION

William Macky survived in family memory long before he emerged from the archives. Among his descendants, he was remembered as the ancestor who was "lost on the goldfields of Victoria" in the mid-19th century. [1]

In 1907, more than fifty years after his disappearance, William's story appeared in print as part of an article on his son, the Rev. W. M. Dill Macky. There, William Macky Snr was described as a "well-to-do farmer" having been "caught with the gold fever" in the early 1850s, emigrating to Victoria, and disappearing after sending a final letter from Buninyong. [2] As he was only four years old when his father disappeared, the placename was almost certainly transmitted through family memory before eventually being carried into print.

Over time, William's disappearance became absorbed into broader narratives about the Victorian gold rush and the men who went in pursuit of fortune. Family memory preserved the fact of his disappearance, but much of the individual life behind it faded from view. This paper addresses that absence. While uncertainties remain, the surviving evidence allows William Macky's life to be reconstructed in far greater detail and, on the balance of probabilities, identifies a man who may no longer be lost. [3]

### INTENT

This paper reconstructs a fuller account of William Macky's life and disappearance by drawing on contemporary family letters (1848–1853), newspaper reports, letters published under William's own name, and archival records where they survive. At times, there is clear evidence of date, place, event. At other times, William appears only through convergences of evidence, including material that places him as the son of James Macky

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1 "The Life Story of the Rev. W. M. Dill Macky, D.D.," The Watchman, 12 December 1907, 9–10.

2 *The Watchman,* 12 December 1907, 9.

3 The story of Susannah Dill Macky has yet to be researched in depth by this author.

Esq. of Gallagh. At times, the paper can offer only a partial glimpse of the man, reconstructed by a convergence of evidence. However, throughout, the paper distinguishes carefully between primary-source evidence, family tradition, and later retrospective interpretation.

To better understand William's life and decisions, this paper situates him within a wider network of kin and extended kin. It also considers the broader historical and geographical context, including the economic pressures and opportunities that shaped migration to New Zealand and Australia. In doing so, it seeks to reconstruct William Macky's life from the surviving evidence and to assess, on the balance of probabilities, what became of him.

## WILLIAM, SON OF JAMES MACKY ESQ.

William Macky was probably born between 1813 and 1820, the likely son of James Macky Esq. of Gallagh (c.1758–1842) and Dorcas Macky née Macky (c.1758–1842) of Clonsquien [sic].[4] His siblings likely included an eldest sister (as yet unidentified in the surviving records), Dorcas (c.1810–1842), James (c.1812–1831) and Elizabeth (c.1814–1842).

In about 1843, William very likely married Susannah Dill. Between 1844 and 1851 they had five children; James, Grace Dill, Richard Dill, Dorcas and William Marcus Dill.[5] William very likely emigrated to Victoria in 1852 and probably died at Hiscock's Diggings, Buninyong in May 1853.

At first glance, these appear to be straightforward biographical facts. Most, however, do not rest upon a single document recording a specific event. In some parts of his life, William survives only in fragments: within family correspondence, grave markers, burial placement, family memory, and other contemporary records. In others, he is more clearly visible.

These sources differ both in their nature and evidentiary value. Individually, they rarely provide certainty. Taken together, however, a degree of probability emerges. The account presented here is therefore not built upon any single source, but upon the convergence of

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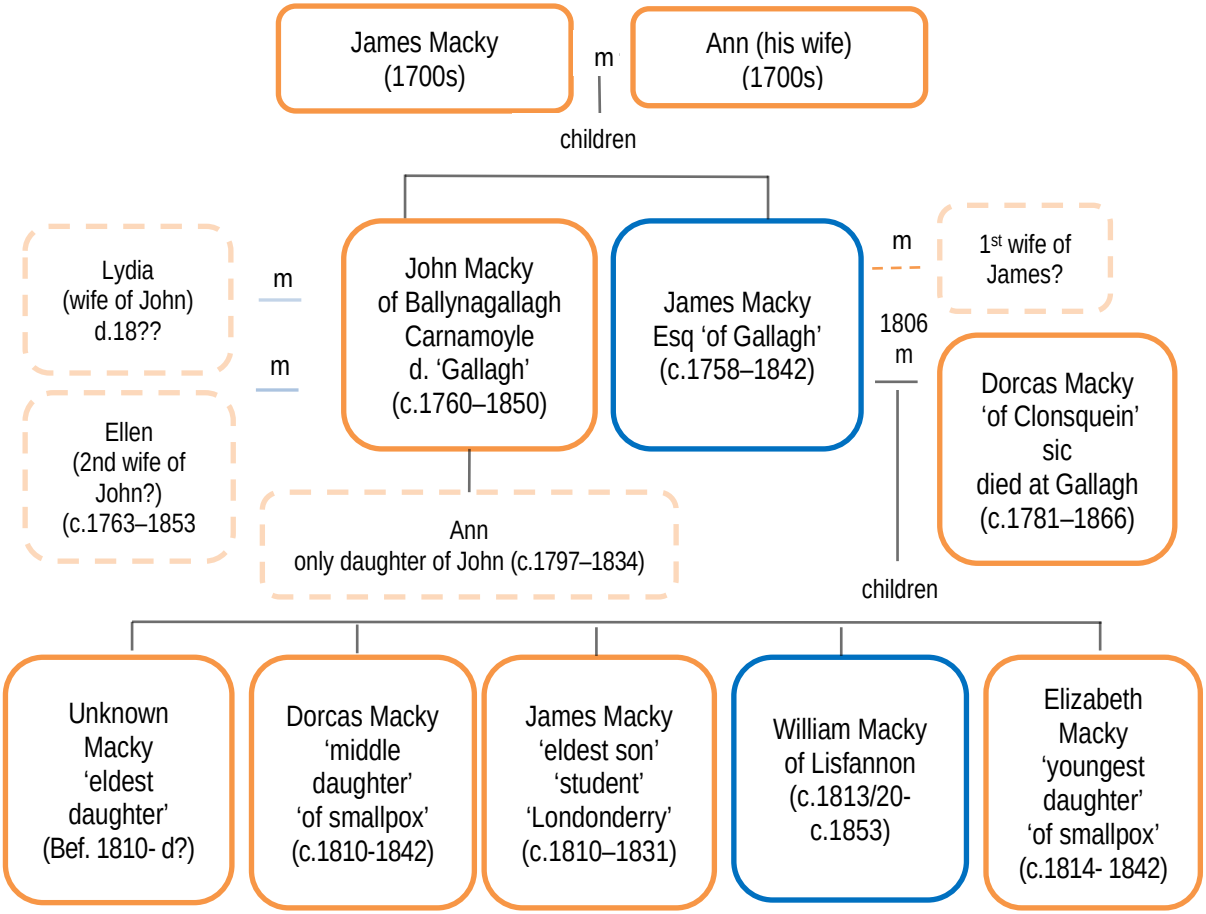
[4] Henry Farrar, *Irish Marriages in Walker's Hibernian Magazine, 1771–1812*, vol. 2 (K–Z), 281, accessed via Archive.Org, on 2 May 2026

[5] Dr James Macky is progenitor of a Macky family in NSW and Rev W.M. Dill Macky of the Dill-Macky family

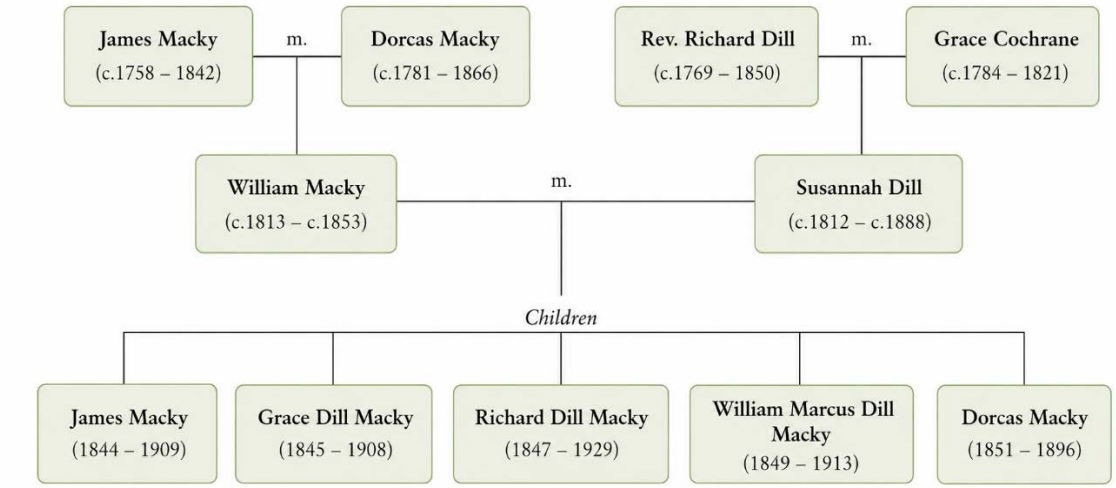
many. It represents the most probable reconstruction of William Macky's life and family presently available. [6]

***Figure 1: MACKYs of Gallagh – Three Generations***




[6] Detailed evidence of William's family structure is discussed in the Appendices.

### *Figure 2: William Macky and Susannah Dill within their immediate family context* [7]




These family trees (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) offer a provisional reconstruction of William Macky's family. The reconstruction places William within a family centred on Gallagh, a village within the townland of Ballynagalliagh in the Northwest Liberties of Londonderry. William's father, James Macky Esq., was likely the head of a substantial household there.

The available evidence further indicates that this family formed part of a densely interconnected kin network extending across Ballynagalliagh, Coshquin, and neighbouring townlands. Many precise relationships are now obscured by the loss of records and the repeated use of the same forenames across multiple generations within different branches of the Macky family.

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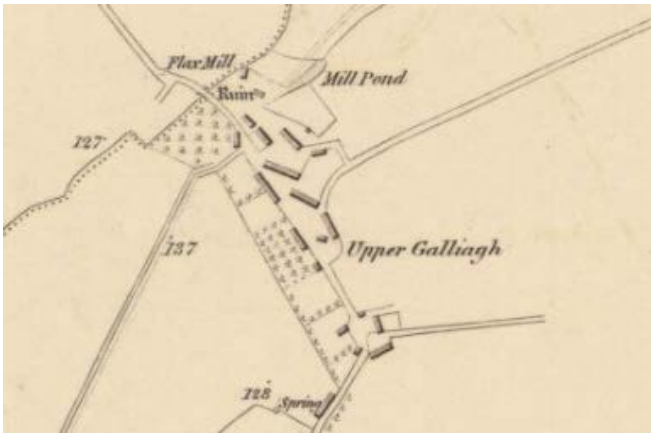
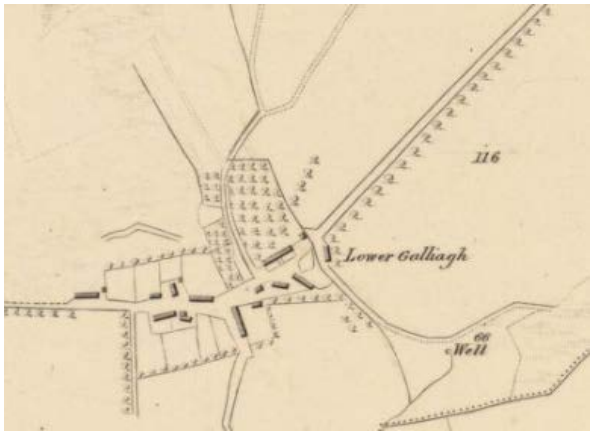
[7] This reconstruction is based on the evidence discussed in the text and appendices. The recurrence of names such as James, William, Dorcas, Elizabeth and Richard reflects naming practices commonly found in Ulster-Scots families of the period and provides supporting evidence for the family relationships proposed here.

Marriage record for Susannah Dill and William Macky has not been located. Susannah's birth and death dates are from *Macky Genealogy Tables*. Their marriage is reported in Congregation Elders, “The Life Story of the Rev. W. M. Dill Macky, D.D.,” 9. The figure is intended as an aid to understanding the family relationships discussed in the text; evidential arguments are discussed separately.

***Figure 3: Upper and Lower Gallagh, in Ballynagalliagh 1830***




In the 1831 census, only two Macky households were recorded in Ballynagalliagh: those of James and John Macky, both associated with Gallagh. In rural Ulster, farming households commonly functioned as productive entities, combining family labour and servants within a single economic unit of agricultural production. [8] Both James and John Macky maintained comparatively large households that included resident servants, suggesting that the Mackys of Gallagh participated in this wider rural world.

Contemporary rural households often prepared different children for different futures. James, the eldest son of James Macky Esq., appears to have occupied one such path. The Belfast News-Letter (5 May 1829) listed "James Macky, Londonderry" among students receiving distinction in Greek,[9] lending context to the description "student" later recorded on his grave. His gravestone records that he died on 17 February 1831, aged nineteen years. [10]

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8 Liam Kennedy and Peter M. Solar, “The Rural Economy, 1780–1914,” in Ulster Since 1600: Politics, Economy, and Society, ed. Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

9 Belfast News-Letter (Belfast, Northern Ireland), 5 May 1829, "Greek Distinctions."

10 Macky.net, “Gallery,” image and transcription of the gravestone of James Macky ("Student"), Drumhaggart Presbyterian Graveyard, Burt, County Donegal, accessed 3 May 2026.

### *Table 1: 1831 Census – MACKY Ballynagalliagh* [11]

| Surname | Forename | Parish | Townland/St | H | M | F | MS | FS | total | RC | PR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MACKY | John | Templemore | Ballynagalliagh | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 6 |
| MACKY | James | Templemore | Ballynagalliagh | 1 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 14 | 2 | 12 |

H [Households] M [Male], F [Female], MS [Male Servant], FS [Female Servant], RC [Roman Catholic], PR [Presbyterian]

The death of James 'student' was the first of several losses that would affect the family during the following decade. In March 1842, James Macky Esq. died at the age of eighty-four. [12] Later that year, within days of each other, Elizabeth, described as the "youngest daughter", and Dorcas, the "second daughter" of the late James Macky Esq., died of smallpox. All of them died at Gallagh within the townland of Ballinagallagh.[13]

The year 1842 also marks William's first appearance in newsprint. In October that year, a farm at Lisfannon was advertised for sale as being "now in the occupation of Wm. Macky, Jun."[14]

Lisfannon was a coastal townland in Burt parish, Barony of Inishowen West, County Donegal, situated on the eastern shore of Lough Swilly approximately four miles from Londonderry. It comprised about 131 statute acres and was held under Lord Templemore. Its position on the main road between Londonderry and Newtowncunningham provided access to both urban and rural markets, while its shoreline location offered another advantage. Contemporary advertisements noted that the premises "abound with Sea Manure", reflecting the long-established practice of gathering seaweed from the shores of Lough Swilly to improve agricultural productivity.[15]

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11 *1831 Census of Ireland.* https://www.billmacafee.com/1831census/1831derrycensusnames.pdf (accessed 1 May 2026).

12 *Londonderry Sentinel,* 19 Mar. 1842.

13 *Londonderry Sentinel* (Londonderry, Ireland), 19 November 1842, death notices of Elizabeth and Dorcas Macky, reporting the deaths of Elizabeth, "youngest daughter," and Dorcas, "the second daughter of the late James Macky, Esq.," of Ballinagallagh.

14 *Londonderry Sentinel*, 29 October 1842, p.3 "To Be Sold And Immediate Possession Given"

15 *Londonderry Sentinel*, 29 October 1842.

***Figure 4: Lisfannon, Surveyed 1831***

Within this world, place formed an important part of identity. The kin network around the Mackys extended across Gallagh, Coshquin, Lisfannon, Ardmore, and neighbouring districts. These localities were more than geographical references. They identified family groups, patterns of association, and enduring social relationships, some of which can be traced across later generations and migrations. In a landscape where the same surnames and forenames recurred across multiple households and generations, place often provided a more reliable means of identification than personal names alone.

## WILLIAM OF LISFANNON

In contemporary family letters (1848–1853), William rarely appears as “William Macky”, but as “William of Lisfannon”.[16] The designation mattered.

In nineteenth-century rural Co. Donegal, many individuals shared the same forenames and surnames. Within the surviving letters and newspapers, locality was frequently used to distinguish one person from another. Contemporary newspapers identified individuals through locality: "James Macky Esq. of Gallagh," "Joseph Cochrane of Coleraine," and "William Macky of Lisfannon and Ardmore." Place names also helped to identify kin and extended kin networks across generations, family branches and neighbouring townlands.

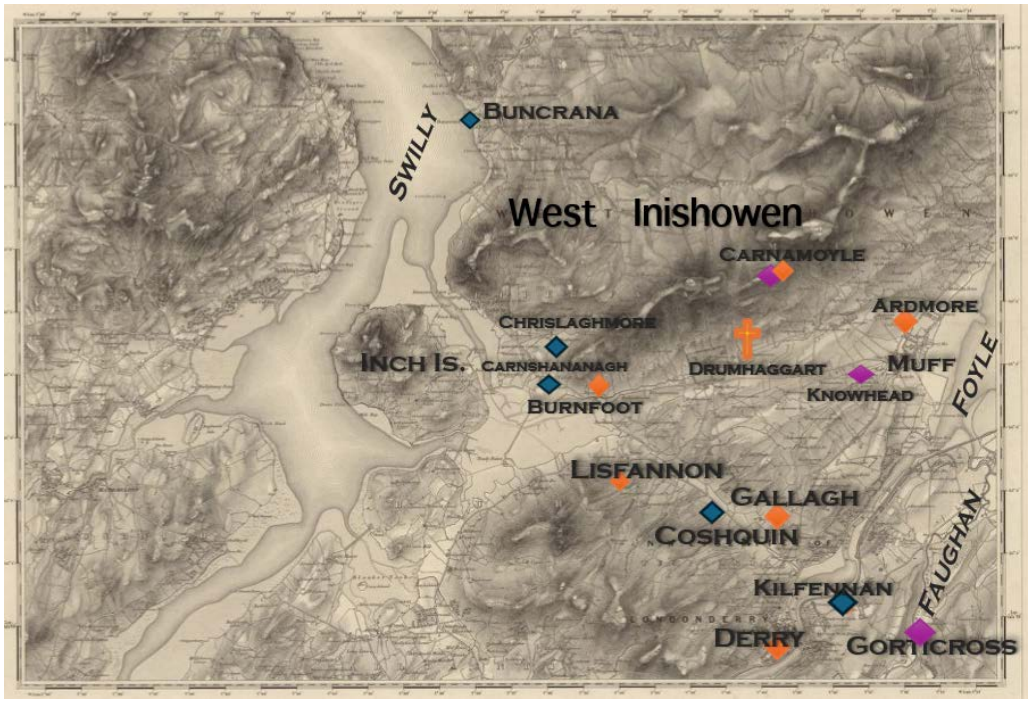
[16] Macky Family letters, letters 2, 8, 11, 14, 23, 25, 33, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47

Thus, the Macky family letters include "William Macky of Gallaugh" and "William of Lisfannon" as distinct individuals.[17]

Name and place functioned not merely as disambiguation, but as social identification within a densely interconnected regional world. To describe a man as “William of Lisfannon” situated him within a recognisable landscape of kinship, property, memory, and obligation. Locality functioned as part of social identity.

For example, Macky family correspondents referred to individuals “Mr Reed of Culmore,” “Mr Joseph Cochrane of Chrislaughmore,” and  more informally, “Mrs Cochrane of Chrisla.” Place-based networks were used to refer to networks collectively, such as the “Gallaugh people.” In one letter, William Macky of Coshquin wrote to his brother Thomas Macky that the “Kilfennan, Gallaugh and Glenlough people … join with me in kind love to you…”

*Figure 5: William Macky: Extended Kin Networks*




National Library of Scotland. (nd). *Map Images*.  Accessed 26 May, 2026, https://maps.nls.uk/view/246835076

*Table 2: Legend - Place associated*

ORANGE – places of William Macky and the “Gallagh people”, Drumhaggart burials see Fig: [5]

[17] Macky Family Letters, letters 2, 10, 11, 16, 23, 25, 33, and 47; *Belfast Newsletter* (Belfast), 6 June 1828; *Londonderry Sentinel* (Londonderry), 19 March 1842.

BLUE - places of the Mackys of Coshquin & the intermarried Cochranes. Source of the Macky family letters. PURPLE: of Susannah Dill Macky. Her father Rev. Richard Dill of Knowhead held land in Carnamoyle, as did John MACKY of Ballynagalliagh. At one point, William and Susannah were associated with Ardmore, near Knowhead. [18]

Whilst William's early life is not directly evident in the surviving records, he appears repeatedly in the family correspondence. There he is discussed by relatives, reported upon, worried over, and criticised. The portrait that emerges is neither consistent nor entirely flattering. Through these scattered references, we catch glimpses of William and gain a clearer understanding of how his relatives saw him.

## COUSIN WILLIAM

Within Macky family correspondence, William is often referred to as "Cousin" to the children of John Macky (c.1785–1871) of Coshquin. However, during the nineteenth century, the term could be used more broadly than strict modern first-cousin usage.[19] The correspondence itself provides an example: in 1851 Thomas Macky wrote that "Joe is assisting his cousin at the factory," referring to Joseph Cochrane (1822–1875) and Joseph Cochrane (1792–1877), who were first cousins once removed.[20] Hence, the designation of "Cousin" to William suggests that he was Macky kin, but the nature of his connection with the Mackys of Coshquin has yet to be definitively documented. It plausibly arises from the proposed placement of both John of Coshquin and William of Lisfannon within the Macky family of Ballynagalliagh, although the precise relationship remains unproven.[21]

A close reading of the Macky family letters and usage of kin titles reveal near-kin and extended networks, as well as other clues as to families that Macky women may have married into. For example, "Aunt Tait", "Aunt Dunn", "Aunt Jane" and "Aunt Gwynne" (of

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[18] *Londonderry Journal* (Londonderry), 29 May 1846, "Mr. W. Macky and the Rev. Mr. Maxwell, J.P.," describing William Macky as "of Lisfannon, or Ardmore"

[19] Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. "cousin," 1828 Webster's Dictionary, https://www.1828.mshaffer.com/d/word/cousin.

[20] Thomas Macky to Catherine Cochrane, 7 April 1851, Macky Family Letters; Wanda Hopkins, email correspondence with the author, 7 July 2026. Hopkins identifies the two men as Joseph Cochrane (1822–1875) and Joseph Cochrane (1792–1877), first cousins once removed.

[21] Macafee, 1831 Census Returns for Co. Londonderry, Ballynagalliagh townland, accessed 2 May 2026, https://billmacafee.com/1831census.htm.

"the Gwynnes"). Due to the orientation of the title to the authors of the letters, these women could be née Macky, or née Lindsay - from Elizabeth Lindsay who was the wife of John Macky (c.1785–1871). Other titles used within the letters suggest generational distinctions such as in, "Old Mr Cochrane", "Old Jack Macky of Gallaugh", or "young Joe".

The correspondence also hints at familial and kin obligations either directly, or indirectly. For example, Catherine Cochrane postpones possible migration to New Zealand in order to support her sister during childbirth. William Cochrane writes to his brother that Catherine,

> "is at present in Cootehill but they expect her soon in Carnshanagh as Rebecca is near her confinement and of course, she must be there then."[22]

A second example appears in relation to Aunt Mary Ann. When Mary Ann marries Thomas Baird in 1850 and departs suddenly for New Zealand, William Macky of Coshquin writes to his brother Thomas of the consternation this caused among extended kin:

> "there is a great deal of anger among those who expected her [Aunt Mary Ann's] money. The Taits are in a bad way about it. Gallaugh people are nearly as bad, but as we never expected any of her money of course, we need not care what she does. But I think there is no fear but she will do well enough. There was an old attachment between them [Mary Ann and Thomas Baird]. She has £280 to give him which, together with his own, he must have a great deal of money."

By contrasting "we" with both the Taits and the Gallaugh people, William of Coshquin implicitly places all three groups within a shared field of kinship obligation and expectation, while simultaneously claiming his Macky group has a position of moral detachment from it. The disclaimer itself is significant. It would be unnecessary were the Coshquin Mackys entirely unrelated to such expectations. In this respect, the passage reveals not simply family relationships, but the assumptions, judgements, and explanatory narratives through which those relationships were understood and articulated.

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[22] Macky Family Letters, letter 16

Mary Ann was a widow following the death of her husband, Mr Watt.[23] In 1850, she was also approximately fifty-eight years old and apparently possessed £280 cash when she married Mr Baird. It seems she chose other than what the Taits and Gallagh people expected of her.

In any case, Mary Ann was not alone in a later in life marriage, as William of Coshquin writes to his brother Thomas: "The city house is no more. They have failed and Mills has gone to America. [Old] Mr Cochrane has married Miss Cowan in spite of them all and is gone to America also."[24]

Cousin William of Lisfannon's significance within the kin network extended beyond simple affection or gossip. His repeated movements between Lisfannon, Derry, America, and later to Australia, carried consequences not only for himself, but also for "Mrs Macky and children" who remained dependent upon wider family and local support structures during his absences. For example, on 28 January 1849, John Macky writes to his son Thomas,

> "your Cousin William Macky of Lisfannon has started off to America. He sailed from Liverpool for New York the day before Christmas. Mrs Macky and children are still in Lisfannon and what they mean to do I cannot say." [25]

On 18 May 1849, Thomas Macky to Catherine Cochrane (who he later married),

> "William Macky was going away and leaving Susan behind. So much for marrying for the sake of some paltry gold." [26]

The remark is striking, not only for what it suggests about William and Susan's marriage, but also for what it reveals about Thomas Macky's interpretation of his cousin's

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[23] Irish Genealogy, marriage record for Thomas Baird and Mary Macky, 29 January 1850, Londonderry Registration District, Group Registration ID 3198086, https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/view/?record_id=cima-3198086.

[24] Macky Family Letters, letter 10, William Macky to Thomas Macky, 13 September 1849; Wanda Hopkins, "Joseph Cochrane (1823–1875)," Irish Genealogical Research Society 80th Anniversary Archive, noting that the "City House" was a warehouse business in Londonderry operated with his Aunt Orr. https://www.irishancestors.ie/80th-anniversary-archive-joseph-cochrane-137 [Accessed 28 May 2026]

[25] Macky Family Letters, letter 2

[26] Macky Family Letters, letter 8

circumstances. Nor was Thomas alone in expressing such views. Later that year, his brother William of Coshquin rejected their father's suggestion that he seek advancement through marriage to an heiress, stating that he would rather "try and do something for myself." [27] Read together, the comments suggest something of the values through which the Coshquin Mackys interpreted Cousin William's choices. The correspondence records events, but it also preserves the moral frameworks through which those events were understood.

The letters reveal something more subtle than discussion of William's decisions and movements. They also discuss shared economic pressure and reveal the process by which kin and extended networks shared information from around the globe, informing the decisions that William and others made. Yet throughout the letters different forms of instability were narrated differently within the kin network itself. Debt, migration, business collapse, and uncertain prospects appear repeatedly throughout the correspondence. By contrast, the narrative surrounding Cousin William is uniquely and consistently exceptional.

The period we hear of Cousin William in the letters (1848–1853) unfolded against a backdrop of mounting strain in the rural economy of north-west Ireland. Many tenant households faced increasing pressure from declining agricultural returns, insecure tenure, and the wider economic disruptions of the 1840s.[28] Yet while such difficulties were often discussed as collective or structural problems, correspondents repeatedly interpreted William's circumstances through observations about character, producing a narrative that extended beyond the events themselves. For example, in July 1849 William of Coshquin writes to his brother Thomas,

> "William Macky of Lisfannon has been in America since January last but I hear he is coming home again. He is a most extraordinary genius. He will never go mad (he is not long in one mind). Mrs Macky and family were not with him." [29]

Then on 29 November 1849 William of Coshquin writes again to Thomas,

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[27] Macky Family Letters, letter 14

[28] Christine Kinealy, This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845–52 (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994).

[29] Macky Family Letters, letter 11

> "William Macky is home from America. He has got quite a republican spirit home with him. I wanted him to go to New Zealand but he would go nowhere that was under British government." [30]

On 2 October 1850 William of Coshquin to Thomas,

> "William is about to leave Lisfannon. He was ejected for non-payment of rent. I don't know where he intends going-- he is a wonderful genius." [31]

That sentence sat within a much larger crisis in Irish landholding. These were the years of the Great Famine (1845–1852), a period of severe social and economic disruption across Ireland.[32] Agricultural prices were falling, rents were increasingly in arrears, and evictions were becoming more common. William of Lisfannon was not alone. Across Ireland, many small farmers faced growing uncertainty about their future.[33]

On 28 January 1850, William Macky of Coshquin wrote to his brother Thomas,

> "The tenants of the Templemore estate have had a public meeting and petitioned Lord Templemore for a reduction of rent. They have not yet received an answer." [34]

This news suggests that concerns over rents extended well beyond a single farm or household. The tenants of the estate were acting collectively.

Writing some ten months later, John Macky reported to his son James that the matter had not resolved:

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30 Macky Family Letters, letter 14

31 Macky Family Letters, letter 23

32 Kinealy, 1994.

33 Alice Effie Murray, A History of the Commercial and Financial Relations between England and Ireland from the Period of the Restoration (London: P.S. King & Son, 1907), chap. XVI, "The Economic Condition of Ireland during the Nineteenth Century"; Colm Ó Gráda, Cormac Ó Gráda, and others, "Population and Poverty in Ireland on the Eve of the Great Famine," Demography 59, no. 5 (2022): 1607–1633.

34 Macky Family Letters, letter 16

> "High rents are still kept up, but they will soon get a great deal of the land to themselves as the people are emigrating rapidly—but there will soon be few able to do so." [35]

In the same letter John Macky adds,

> "Your cousin, William Macky, of Lisfannon has given up his farm to Lord Templemore for, I may say, nothing. He gets no money for it." [36]

William's loss of Lisfannon is reported not as an isolated event but within a wider account of rent pressure and emigration. Indeed, John Macky appears to regard the terms upon which William surrendered the farm as particularly unfavourable.

Nor was William's cousin at Coshquin entirely immune from the same concerns. In the same letter, John Macky describes him as,

> "Your brother, William [of Coshquin] …is smart and well-disposed and I think would do well in anything he had to do… but here is only losing his time working hard for Lord Templemore." [37]

William of Coshquin is not portrayed as improvident or incapable. On the contrary, his father regarded him as intelligent, industrious, and capable of succeeding in almost any occupation. Yet even he is represented as struggling to see a future under Lord Templemore.

Two years later, the situation appears little improved. Writing to his brother Thomas on 27 June 1852, William of Coshquin explained that the family intended advertising Coshquin for sale and, if successful, emigrating to New Zealand. Yet he immediately expressed doubt that a purchaser could be found:

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35 Macky Family Letters, letter 25

36 Macky Family Letters, letter 25

37 Macky Family Letters, letter 25

> "very few care for purchasing land now, particularly on Lord Templemore's estates." [38]

Confidence in the value and future prospects of land itself appears to have weakened. William of Coshquin worried that after debts were paid there would be little remaining with which to begin a new life overseas.[39]

William's situation is less unique when viewed alongside the circumstances of other family members. Aunt Dunn, John Macky of Coshquin, and Joseph Cochrane all experienced forms of instability, dependency, financial pressure, or economic loss. Yet these difficulties were generally discussed as circumstances requiring adaptation or support. William's comparable difficulties were repeatedly interpreted through observations about character and disposition. For example, in a letter of 28 January 1850, William of Coshquin writes to his brother,

> "Aunt Dunn is living all alone in Glenlough. She could not get her place sold and I don't know how she will manage." [40]

In a letter of 29th November 1849, William of Coshquin tells his brother Thomas of the business losses of the Cochrane family (in-laws of brother Rev John Macky and later, of Thomas Lindsay Macky),

> "Mr Joseph Cochrane married Miss Cowan and went to America-- their business failed them in Derry. Mr Mills went to America also and died shortly after he arrived there, much to the grief of all who knew him. I do not know in what amount he failed but he compounded with the creditors and young Joseph carried on the concern but he is about to give it up. Mr S L Cochrane of Christlaugh went security for the payment of the creditors and I am afraid he will lose a deal by that

38 Macky Family Letters, letter 42

39 Macky Family Letters, letter 42

40 Macky Family Letters, letter 16

> besides £400 he advanced to them at first. Sam Cochrane will also lose £100 by them." [41]

And on the 10th of April 1850, William of Coshquin writes to his brother Thomas about their father John Macky who,

> "is about selling Kilfennan; at present he has been offered £600 for it, but the expenses for making the searches for the titles would amount to £40 which the seller must pay. That would be a great drawback in the price of it so he is in doubt what to do. I think it will be better for him to take it and to pay his debts as there are some of his creditors urgent for him to pay them." [42]

Financial difficulties were not rare in the family at this time. Yet William Macky's circumstances attracted a distinctive pattern of commentary. Correspondents did not merely report his situation but repeatedly interpreted it through observations about character and disposition. By contrast, the financial difficulties of John Macky and the substantial losses of the Cochrane family are discussed principally in terms of debt, creditors, property, business failure, and practical responses.

In June 1851, at almost the same time that family correspondence was questioning William's prospects, advertisements for the sale of the Kilfennan and Coshquin farms directed prospective purchasers to "Mr. Wm. Macky, Auctioneer, Diamond, Derry," or to the proprietor, "Mr. John Macky, Coshquin."[43]

The proposed sale concerned substantial family property at a time when land, debt, rent, and emigration were matters of pressing concern. Yet William himself was one of the named points of contact. The same kin network that had repeatedly characterised William in personal terms nevertheless continued to entrust him with responsibilities involving family property.

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41 Macky Family Letters, letter 14

42 Macky Family Letters, letter 19

43 Advertisement for the sale of the Kilfennan and Coshquin farms, *Londonderry Sentinel* (Londonderry), 10 July 1851, advertising a sale scheduled for 9 June 1851 and directing enquiries to "Mr. Wm. Macky, Auctioneer, Diamond, Derry," and "Mr. John Macky, Coshquin."

William's circumstances also differed from those of his kin John Macky of Coshquin. John Macky was sixty-five, William was twenty-eight years younger.[44] William's father and (possibly) all but one elder sister were deceased. John Macky Sr had four adult sons capable of contributing labour, commercial activity, migration income, and wider economic support. By the late 1840s, members of his family were already participating in commercial ventures linked to California, New Zealand, and other emerging colonial opportunities.[45] His son Thomas Macky described speculative trade with California in 1849, noting that some goods returned "more than 200 per cent profit".[46] William of Lisfannon inhabited the same world of speculation and economic uncertainty, but from a more vulnerable position. William was supporting a young family while attempting to maintain an increasingly precarious household economy.

Nor was William alone in viewing migration as a possible solution. Throughout the correspondence, family members discussed opportunities in America, California, New Zealand, Australia, and elsewhere within the expanding British and trans-Pacific world. Migration formed part of the repertoire of responses available to families confronting economic uncertainty. The letters reveal kin and extended networks in which information, opportunities, and reports circulated across great distances, shaping the decisions of those who remained in Ireland. For example, in a letter of 11 Dec 1849, Catherine Cochrane writes to her future husband Thomas of "Sam…in Montreal" and "James in Quebec". [47] Months later, Thomas writes to Catherine,

> "I left Auckland for San Francisco in November. At that time, California was all the rage here and over all the Colonies and many hundreds went there."[48]

And on 18 April 1853, Dorcas Macky to her brother William of Coshquin:

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[44] John Macky's year of birth has been calculated from the age at death recorded on his grave marker: Find a Grave, memorial for John Macky (1788–1853), Memorial ID 175188184, accessed 2 June 2026, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/175188184/john_macky. William Macky's approximate birth year is reconstructed from the evidence discussed in the Parentage chapter.

[45] Macky Family Letters, letters 9, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 33.

[46] Macky Family Letters, letter 9

[47] Macky Family Letters, letter 15

[48] Macky Family Letters, letter 21

> "There was a letter from a son of Captain Allan, formerly of Buncrana, who mentions seeing brother Thomas in Sydney who told him he had been at the diggings…."[49]

Viewed against this wider pattern of migration and family mobility, William's eventual departure for Australia appears less as an isolated act of restlessness than as one possible response to circumstances that many within his kin and extended networks were likewise attempting to navigate.

On the 25th of May 1852, John Macky of Coshquin writes to his son Thomas,

> "I write to you by this opportunity by your cousin William Macky who is leaving this now for Port Philip and Melbourne and leaving Mrs Macky and his four children behind. He has been unfortunate and is going to try his fortune in that country among the gold."[50]

This report makes it likely that William Macky was one of approximately 90,000 people to arrive in Melbourne in 1852 following the discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851. [51] We learn elsewhere that his cousin William of Coshquin (son of John) also contemplated a similar journey. In a letter of 27 June 1852, William of Coshquin wrote to his brother Thomas:

> "We intend advertising Coshquin for sale immediately and if it be sold, we will all start for New Zealand. But I am afraid that there is not much chance of getting it sold as very few care for purchasing land now, particularly on Lord Templemore's estates, and if not sold we would have very little cash out with us. When all debts are paid there will be little left. But if not sold, my father has promised to send me out in September. I may be able to do something there but here I can do little either for myself or any other person. I had some thought of

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49 Macky Family Letters, letter 45

50 Macky Family Letters, letter 41

51 National Museum of Australia, "Gold Rushes," *Defining Moments in Australian History*, accessed 24 May 2026, https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/gold-rushes; Macky Family Letters, letter 41.

> going to Australia to the 'diggins' but New Zealand will most likely be my destination."[52]

Even members of the more economically secure Coshquin branch contemplated departure. The unusual feature of William's story was not that he went, but that he subsequently disappeared.

The surviving correspondence repeatedly discusses Cousin William's circumstances through observations about temperament, judgement, and disposition. At the same time, it preserves evidence that William's decisions were made within a wider environment of economic pressure and uncertainty. Tenants collectively and publicly sought rent reductions. Rents remained high. Emigration accelerated. Farms proved increasingly difficult to sell. Farms were surrendered.

The result is a more complicated picture than the family narrative alone might suggest. The narrative of William's life within the letters was exceptional. The circumstances in which William's life unfolded were not.

## WILLIAM THE LITIGANT

If the family letters preserve William Macky through the observations and politics of others, the newspapers of the 1840s and early 1850s offer a different perspective. Here William appears as an active participant in the public life of north-west Ulster. The newspapers preserve something rarely encountered elsewhere in the surviving record: William's own voice.

The resulting portrait is both familiar and surprising. Familiar, because certain characteristics hinted at within the family correspondence begin to reappear via independent sources. Surprising, because the newspapers also reveal a man of great confidence, public visibility, and willingness to act as his own advocate. Long before he left for Australia, William was appearing before magistrates, engaging in litigation and publicly defending his actions in the local press.

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[52] Macky Family Letters, letter 42

In May 1846 at the Burnfoot Petty Sessions, appearing in a dispute concerning a former servant, William attracted the attention of both the magistrates and the press, as the Londonderry Journal reports: [53]

**MR W. MACKY AND THE REV. MR MAXWELL, J.P.**

Burnfoot Petty Sessions – Magistrates... – Rev. P.R. Maxwell; Andrew Ferguson, Esq, Daniel Todd, Esq, George V. Hart, Esq., John Snow, Esq., R.M.

William Macky of Lisfannon, or Ardmore, appeared at suit of Mary Gill, for wages of seven weeks she had lived in his service.

On being sworn, she stated that, on engaging with Mrs. Macky, the wife of the defendant, for a quarter, her mistress told her she would hire another girl to assist her with the work, but she had not done so, and that, from the severity of the work, and harsh treatment on the part of Mrs. Macky, she had left, and, on going back to ask for her wages, Mr. Macky had assaulted her by tearing open her handkerchief, and, without allowing her to speak to her mistress, had thrust her forcibly out of the house."

The surviving record rarely allows servants to describe a household from below. Mary's evidence described the Macky household in her own words. She was not merely claiming unpaid wages. She was explaining why she left. The conditions she described formed part of her testimony as to how she came to abandon her service without notice. William's response:

The defendant, on being asked by the Magistrate why he objected to pay the girl her wages, came forward with a large edition of Nunn's Justice of the Peace in his hand, and said that his reason was because she left his service without giving him any notice, and that he wished to obtain a summons against her.

[53] "Mr. W. Macky and the Rev. Mr. Maxwell, J.P.," *Londonderry Journal* (Londonderry, Northern Ireland), 29 May 1846; see also " *Londonderry Journal* (Londonderry, Northern Ireland), 20 May 1846.

Mr. Maxwell said, from the records of the Sessions' book, his name appeared more frequently in connexion with disputes with his servants than all the men in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Macky, in a confident manner, replied that Mr. Maxwell had said he would retain an Attorney to support, at the Sessions, decisions of the Bench, which he (Mr. Macky) had appealed.

Mr. Maxwell said that when he found a man in the constant practice of disputing with his servants, and refusing to pay them their wages for the time they had been in his service, and when the Bench decided against him appealing to the Quarter Sessions, where the servant was not able to go for the want of means, he considered it an act of justice to engage a professional man, in order to prevent the servant from being defrauded of his or her wages.[54]

Maxwell's comments suggest a longer acquaintance with William Macky. William was already familiar to the bench.

The defendant, Macky, after receiving a reproof from others of the Magistrates, for the insolent manner in which he had addressed Mr. Maxwell, was heard in evidence against the girl, and stated that she left his service without notice; but as he was not present at the agreement made between his wife and the girl, and as his own admission corroborated the part of her evidence relative to his putting her forcibly out, and not allowing her to see her mistress, the Magistrates, on consulting together, decided that Mr. Macky should pay the girl for the time she had been in his employment.

From this decision Mr. Macky said that he would appeal, and Mr. Maxwell told him that the Magistrates would receive his appeal; but that should the girl wish to

[54] *Londonderry Journal*, 29 May 1846, see also " *Londonderry Journal* (Londonderry, Northern Ireland), 20 May 1846.

proceed against him for the assault, they would give her a summons for him and hear the complaint.[55]

William understood the matter and its reporting differently.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DERRY STANDARD.

Sir— I beg leave, through the medium of your valuable journal, to make a few observations with respect to some statements in the Londonderry Sentinel of Saturday last, in reference to the report of a trial at the Burnfoot Petty Sessions, on Friday the 15th instant, between Mary Gill and William Mackay, in which we were reciprocally plaintiff and defendant. A summons against her was obtained by me calling upon her to attend the Court and answer my charge for leaving my service without liberty or notice. My summons had been first obtained, but hers was first called; and on being examined, she stated, as in the Sentinel, that Mrs Mackay had told her she would hire another girl to assist her which was absolutely false, she having the same number of servants that she had always been accustomed to keep, and had entered into no stipulations of the kind with her; and that on my being asked by the magistrates why I objected to pay her wages, that my answer, as contained in my summons, was, that she had left my service without liberty or notice, which was contrary to law and justice. The Sentinel has represented me as going forward with confidence and addressing the magistrates with insolence. That I did feel confident of the justice of my cause, and that I may have used language corresponding with that feeling, I will admit; and that my insolence consisted of boldly asserting facts which I knew I could prove, and denying other statements asserted, which I knew could not be proved against me, as for the illustration of which, I shall give the following:"[56]

William's letter does more than dispute the newspaper report. It reveals how he wished to be understood. Confidence, in his telling, was not insolence. He presented himself as a

[55] Londonderry Journal, 29 May 1846.

[56] *Londonderry Journal*, 29 May 1846.

man asserting facts, defending his rights, and challenging what he regarded as inaccurate or unfair claims. Whether others agreed is another matter. What is clear is that William saw himself as acting reasonably.

In the same letter to the *Londonderry Standard*, William recounted an earlier dispute with three other servants.

> "On the 14th of June 1845, Edward Gallagher, John Sweeny, and George Magowan, who were then fed servants of mine, having returned from their labours in the fields before the usual time of quitting, were served with their suppers, and desired each, after supper, to go and fetch some water from a well—an order which would have required at most about ten minutes to have executed, but which order they all deliberately refused to obey; when, on the next morning, they came to me inquiring what was to be the business of the day? They were told that I looked upon last night's disobedience as dissolving the connection between me and them. Summonses were afterwards issued and served on both sides, with the exception of Sweeny, who apologized, acknowledging his fault; and when Gallagher and Magowan's cases came to a hearing, I was sentenced to pay them all wages due for the time they had served, from which decision I appealed, when, on the evening of the day when Mr. Maxwell was about to sign the appeal table, he told me publicly in my tavern, that he would provide an attorney for their defence; yet, notwithstanding their cases were afterwards settled to my complete satisfaction, and without the necessity of another hearing in a court of justice."[57]

Maxwell's concern was not simply that William appealed decisions. His concern was what happened afterwards. A servant might succeed before the local magistrates yet lack the means to defend that victory at Quarter Sessions if an appeal followed. Maxwell's explanation for providing legal assistance to servants reveals how he viewed the matter as one of practical justice.

Nor was Gallagher the only example William supplied.

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[57] *Londonderry Journal*, 29 May 1846.

> But does Mr. Maxwell forget the case of Manus Carland, which may also be found on the records of the Sessions' Book. This young man, because his breakfast was not offered him till between the hours of nine and ten o'clock on the second morning after the others had refused my service, as on other mornings it was offered between eight and nine, refused to remain any longer in my service, and when afterwards brought before the Magistrates, and they being about to convict him, as I understood, I humbly requested that his punishment might be mitigated, as all I wished was, that servants might be brought to see that they could not treat their employers as they pleased with impunity, when Mr. Maxwell said, that if I did not wish him punished, I should pay him his wages, to which I replied, that I did not wish to have the law dismantled, but only a mitigation of the punishment, when Mr. Maxwell told me if I did not immediately pay him his wages, he would procure means whereby I would be compelled to do so; … he [Maxwell] desired him [Carland] to return and have a summons issued against me for wages, upon the hearing of which summons … the case was dismissed, Mr. Maxwell not happening to be present."[58]

The Burnfoot proceedings reveal more than a disagreement over servants' wages. Maxwell's remarks point towards a history of disputes already familiar to the bench, while William's attempt to defend himself unexpectedly preserves several more. Gallagher, Magowan, Carland, and Mary Gill enter the record because William chose to answer Maxwell publicly. In doing so, he left one of the earliest sustained examples of his own voice. The disputes also provide a glimpse of William's approach to labour relations. Whether dealing with servants, magistrates, or critics, he appears determined to justify his actions, defend his authority, and contest accounts he believed to be inaccurate or unfair.

Taken alone, these incidents reveal only fragments. Yet they provide something unusually valuable: observations of William drawn from contemporary records rather than later family recollection. Whatever conclusions are ultimately reached about his character, they emerge not from family tradition but from contemporary witnesses, disputes, and William's own words.

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58 *Londonderry Journal*, 29 May 1846.

## YOUNG CABINET MAKER, DISAPPOINTED FARMER, AUCTIONEER

William's appearance as an auctioneer followed a period of considerable instability. In 1851, William of Coshquin informed his brother that their cousin:

> "William Macky has quit farming and turned auctioneer. …
> I am afraid he will never do very well in any business." [59]

The newspapers confirm the change. Throughout that year advertisements appeared in the Derry press offering farms, livestock, furniture, and household effects for sale through "William Macky, Auctioneer."[60] William was attempting a reinvention. By July that year he was operating from the Mart, Diamond, in the commercial heart of Derry. The Diamond was one of the city's most prominent public spaces, where markets, shops, warehouses, and wharves brought together buyers, sellers, merchants and traders from across the region. Nearby, on Shipquay Street, established auctioneer George Walters conducted business from his Mart and Livery Stables.[61] William's next public appearance was within this competitive commercial world.

*Figure 6: Londonderry (Derry) - Surveyed 1830* [62]

[59] Macky Family Letters, letter 33.

[60] Advertisement, *Londonderry Journal* (Londonderry, Northern Ireland), 28 March 1851.

[61] Advertisement, *Londonderry Journal* (Londonderry, Northern Ireland), 9 July 1851.

[62] Ordnance Survey, Londonderry, surveyed 1830s, National Library of Scotland Map Images, accessed 1 June 2026, https://maps.nls.uk/view/246838565.

In July 1851, readers of the *Derry Standard* encountered the following:

GEORGE WALTERS, Auctioneer & Valuator

**Mart & Livery Stables, Shipquay Street, Londonderry**

RETURNS his sincere thanks to the Public for the very liberal support …and confidently appeals to the Nobility, Clergy, Gentry, and Trade of Derry.

The business of an Auctioneer requires more skill, energy, and practice, than any other profession. It is absurd to suppose that a *disappointed Farmer*, a *young Cabinetmaker*, or *any other person in one branch of Business only*, however respectable, can be competent to discharge the MULTIFARIOUS duties of an Auctioneer and Valuator."[63]

Walters' advertisement contained more than criticism. It reveals details otherwise absent from the family record. In dismissing William as a "young Cabinetmaker" and a "disappointed Farmer", Walters inadvertently places him successively as cabinetmaker, farmer and auctioneer by 1851.

Walters presented himself as an established figure, thanking Nobility, Clergy, Gentry, and Public, while portraying Macky as a newcomer whose stay in Derry would be brief. The criticism was personal, but it was also commercial. Walters was defending his position within a competitive marketplace while casting doubt upon the qualifications of a rival. Rather than ignoring Walters' criticism, he answered it publicly through the same advertising columns in which both men conducted their business. Macky responded in an adjacent advertisement.

ADJOURNED SALE

…of that FARM in SAPPAGH, held in Perpetuity, …will be Sold by AUCTION, at the MART, DIAMOND

WILLIAM MACKY, Auctioneer

N.B…Sale of Furniture, &c., &.c

Perceiving in this day's Standard... from George Walters, … attempting to malign his competitors without any provocation? Mr Walters at one

63 Advertisement, *Londonderry Journal* (Londonderry, Northern Ireland), 9 July 1851.

period of his life, it is said, was an "intenerant preacher." Why, therefore, should he so soon have forgotten the golden rule- 'Do unto others …' … must the man exhibit himself in his true colours? WILLIAM MACKY [64]

Walters, unwilling to leave the matter unanswered, had the last surviving word:

TO BE SOLD
AT THE MART, SHIPQUAY STREET

A SUPERIOR COTTAGE PIANO…;Two large Glasses; Two Clocks in cases…; a good Cart, and several useful Horses and Ponies

**Also, FARMS and HOUSE PROPERTY, by**

GEO. WALTERS, Auctioneer.

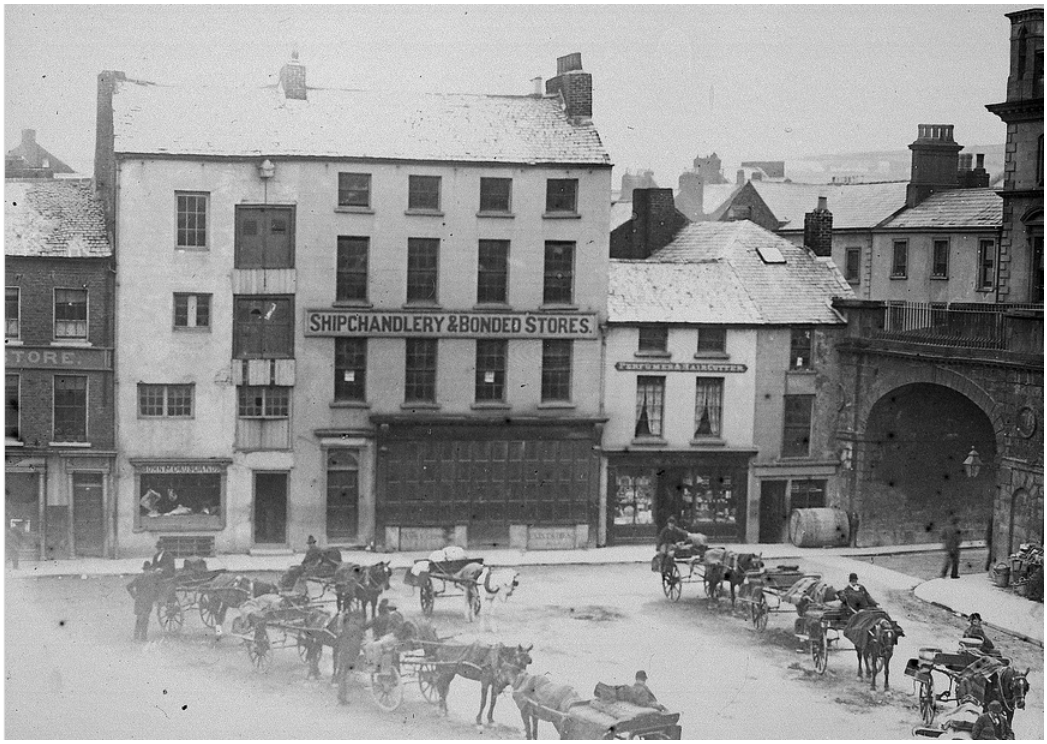
P.S.- In reply to Mr. Macky, G.W. begs to state that it is no crime to be a "Disappointed Farmer;" …but the fact is, he did not consider him as an opponent, Mr. M. having lately expressed his intention to leave the country…

G.W. professes the "golden rule" as his motto; but Mr. M. is so "malicious in his attack" he will not allow him that or any other rule. Now, G.W. will be more liberal with Mr. M., and admit *the fact* that he has a favourite rule as his motto – namely, *the rule of contrary*. G.W [65]

64 *Londonderry Journal*, 9 July 1851.

65 Advertisement, *Londonderry Sentinel* (Londonderry, Northern Ireland), 11 July 1851.

*Figure 7: Shipquay Place, Derry c.1850* [66]




Read in sequence, the advertisements resemble less a series of commercial notices than a public contest conducted through the columns of the local press. Farms, horses, furniture, pianos, and household goods were offered for sale alongside personal criticism and public reply. Commercial promotion, professional rivalry and private grievance occupied the same printed space.

The exchange may have been undignified, but it was not private. Auctioneering depended upon reputation, public confidence, and visibility; argument itself may have helped keep both names before the reading public. Yet whatever commercial advantage the quarrel offered, it also reveals William operating in a different arena from that encountered at Burnfoot: not as a litigant before magistrates, but as a businessman competing for reputation in a public marketplace. Here he appears not as "Cousin William," not as the absent farmer of family memory, but as a man prepared to answer criticism in print, defend his standing, and strike back in his own name. It is a rare opportunity to hear William speaking in his own voice rather than through the observations of relatives, magistrates, or journalists.

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[66] Derryofthepast, “Shipquay Place, probably around 1850,” Instagram post, 1 January 2025, crediting *Twisted Limbs & Crooked* Branches as source, accessed 1 June 2026.

## VICTORIA

William's departure for Melbourne in 1852 removed him from the Donegal landscapes that had shaped the surviving correspondence and newspaper reports, but it did not remove him from the family's information networks. Letters continued to circulate between relatives in Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia, carrying reports of fortunes won, opportunities discovered, and the experiences of those who had already left.

In April 1853, William's cousin Dorcas reported that “there have been a great many letters from the young men that went out last summer from Derry to Australia and there is one from William Macky”. According to her account, William “has begun carpenter work at Geelong and gets a pound a day.” A few months later in September 1853, Eliza Macky wrote to her son William that “Gallaugh people are all well, they have letters frequently from William. He is still with the same person near Geelong at £6 per week. He has purchased two lots of building ground and is building a house. He has sent home £30 to Mrs Macky.”[67]

These references are significant. They place William in the Geelong district during the very period in which family memory would later associate him with Buninyong. They also suggest a degree of economic progress. Rather than going directly to the goldfields William appears to have found employment, acquired property, and begun establishing himself in colonial Victoria. Dorcas's description of William working as a carpenter in Geelong suggests that his cabinetmaking skills may have assisted him in securing employment and becoming established within the local economy relatively quickly.

Dorcas's letter also reveals how migration opportunities were discussed and evaluated within these extended kin networks. Reports circulated not merely about William, but about numerous young men from the district. One correspondent described having “been at the diggings and had got a great deal of gold.”[68] Such accounts carried news, encouragement, and sometimes caution. Australia was not an unknown frontier so much as an increasingly familiar destination connected to Donegal through chains of correspondence, kinship, and migration. Indeed, the Macky family letters did not always present migration solely through stories of success. Letters also carried warnings about

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[67] Macky Family Letters, letters 45 and 47.

[68] Macky Family Letters, letter 45

the risks and uncertainties of gold-rush societies. Writing from California in October 1850, Thomas Macky described a world transformed by the pursuit of gold. “It certainly is a most extraordinary place, fearfully wicked,” he wrote, “There is no restraint and the worst passions of men broke loose.” Yet he also recognised the power of its attraction: “Such is the attraction gold has for all, yet thousands repent bitterly leaving happy homes to go to it. At the mines very many die and no one will do anything for you. On the other hand, if you handle a lot of it, you are in danger of being murdered.”[69] Reports such as these conveyed both opportunity and danger. Through letters circulating between relatives, distant destinations became increasingly familiar, not as abstract places, but as environments where fortunes might be made, lost, or paid for at considerable personal cost.

The surviving correspondence contains remarkably little direct information about William's own experience in Victoria. Beyond Dorcas's report of his employment as a carpenter at Geelong, only one further reference has been located. Writing in September 1853, a relative reported that the “Gallaugh people are all well, they have letters frequently from William”. According to this account, he was “still with the same person near Geelong at £6 per week,” had “purchased two lots of building ground,” was “building a house,” and had “sent home £30 to Mrs Macky.”[70]

Taken at face value, these reports suggest a degree of stability and progress. William appears to have secured regular employment, accumulated sufficient resources to purchase land and maintained contact with his family in Ireland. Nothing in these final family references hints at impending difficulty. The correspondence leaves William apparently advancing in colonial Victoria.

Then the letters stop.

## BUNINYONG

More than fifty years later, a memory of what followed survived. Reported in 1907, Rev. William Marcus Dill Macky recalled that his father  had emigrated to Victoria during the gold rush, intending that his family would later join him. “Within a year,” he wrote, “his

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69 Macky Family Letters, letter 24.

70 Macky family letters, letter 47

letters suddenly ceased." According to this account, William's last letter had been written from Buninyong, after which "he was never more heard of, although every effort was made at the time and afterwards to discover his fate."[71]

The statement was recorded long after the events it describes and must therefore be treated cautiously. Nevertheless, it is significant. "The goldfields" could easily have become a generic family phrase. Buninyong could not.

The township of Buninyong, Victoria, occupied a prominent position in the earliest phase of the Victorian gold rush. In August 1851 the Geelong Advertiser reported that news of gold discoveries near Buninyong was "the ONLY topic of engrossing interest at present,"[72] while correspondents predicted that the district would prove richer than previously identified fields.[73] Newspapers carried regular reports headed "Latest from Buninyong,"[74] describing the movement of diggers, the development of new workings in neighbouring locations such as Yuille's Creek and Hiscock's Diggings.[75] One contemporary visitor described an "enlivening picture" in which "some thousands of the human family" were congregated, "all, apparently, most earnestly engaged upon the search for gold."[76]

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71 *The Watchman,* 12 December 1907, 9.

72 "Buninyong Gold Field," *Geelong Advertiser* (Geelong, Victoria), 15 August 1851, 2.

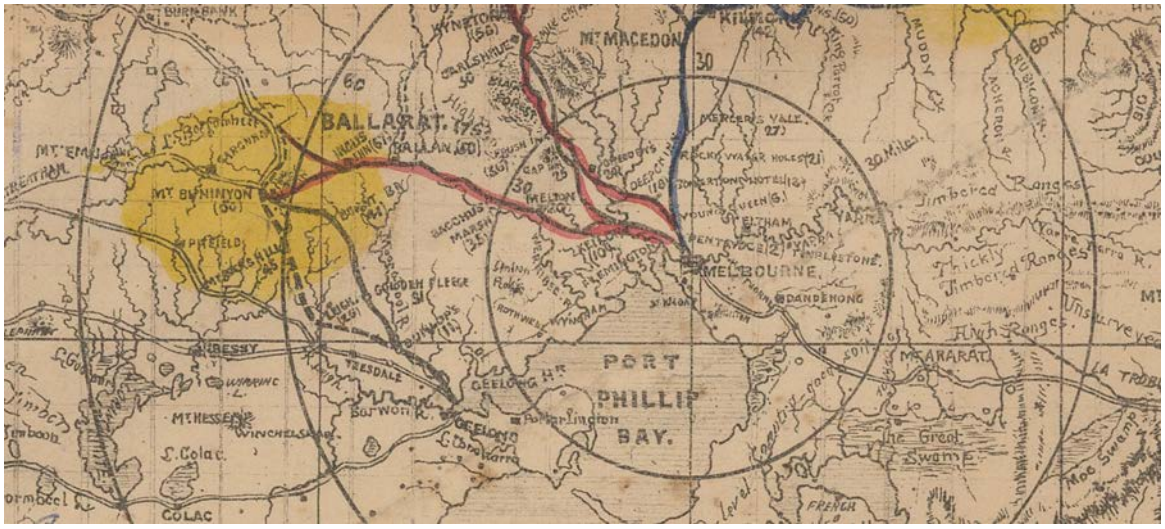
73 *Geelong Advertiser*, 15 August 1851, 2.

74 "Latest from Buninyong," *Geelong Advertiser* (Geelong, Victoria), 1 September 1851, 2.

75 *Geelong Advertiser*, 1 September 1851, 2.

76 "Buninyong Gold Fields," *Cornwall Chronicle* (Launceston, Tasmania), 18 December 1851, 2.

*Figure 8: The Diggers Road Guide to Gold Mines of Victoria, 1853* [77]




For contemporaries, Buninyong was not an obscure settlement later overshadowed by Ballarat. It was itself a recognised destination within the rapidly expanding goldfields. Gold discoveries, new diggings, and reports of spectacular finds ensured that its name circulated widely through colonial newspapers. Contemporary newspaper reports indicate that Buninyong remained an active and widely reported goldfield in the months immediately preceding William's death. In February 1853, the Sydney Morning Herald reported the discovery of a 120-pound nugget at Canadian Gully, situated approximately four miles north-west of Buninyong and two miles from Ballarat. Such reports helped sustain the district's reputation as a place of opportunity while illustrating the scale of discoveries that continued to attract miners to the district.

More than half a century later, Rev Dill Macky named Buninyong as the last association of place to William Macky. The significance of that detail becomes clearer when contemporary newspaper records from the district are examined.

## THE INQUEST

The next record to emerge from the archives is unexpected: an inquest conducted at Buninyong in May 1853 into the death of a man named William Mackey.

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[77] Edward Gilks, *The Digger's Road Guide to the Gold Mines of Victoria and the Country* Extending *210 Miles Round Melbourne* (Melbourne, August 1853), State Library Victoria, accessed 2 June 2026, https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE7179531&mode=browse

On 20 May 1853, a coroner's jury assembled at Hiscock's Diggings in the Buninyong district to inquire into the death of William Mackey who died the day before.[78] The proceedings were conducted by Coroner William Augustus Price former Army Surgeon, before a jury of twelve men, whose names were carefully entered into the record. Five witnesses were sworn and examined, while the surgeon James Graham conducted a post-mortem examination of the body. Even on the rough and rapidly changing Victorian goldfields, the machinery of colonial law was already operating in a recognisably British form.[79]

The evidence revealed William Mackey's final days were spent among a small community of miners at Hiscock's Diggings in the Buninyong district. The inquest identifies several of those around him, including John Wiggs, William Baker, William Gray, David Wallace and Walter Clarke. Gray described himself as a "shipmate" of the deceased, while Wallace and Clarke were repeatedly referred to as his "mates." Their testimony provides a rare glimpse of William's last twenty-four hours.

Five witnesses made depositions as follows:

**1st Witness: James Prior**

> On Wednesday at dinner time, as I came up from the Gully, I saw some people assembled about 80 yards from me. I went up and saw a scuffle in which the deceased was engaged. When I got up to where the people were, there was a man by the name of P. Wigg. He held the deceased in his arms. During the time he had him in his arms, the deceased struck at a man close by, upon which I left them and came down to my hut. About half an hour after, the deceased came down to my hut and laid down on the bed place and did not complain of illness.

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[78] The Coroner's report erroneously refers to "Hitchcock's' Diggings and not 'Hiscock', who was the name of the man who discovered gold in the area. See for example, "The Buninyong Gold Fields" Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer, VIC, 21 Feb 1856, p. 2 , https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/91864664

[79] Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), VPRS 24/P0000, *Inquest Deposition Files*, Unit 1853/259 Male, *William Mackey: Inquest, Buninyong, Victoria*, hearing 22 May 1853.

He lay on the bed place for an hour and a half. The mates, either two or three, came into my hut and took the deceased to their own place about 4 or 5 o'clock last night. Thursday, the two mates brought him back to my hut, where I found him on my return lying on my bed. He never complained of sickness before me. All he craved for was a drink of water. He died in one of his mate's arms and mine. When he complained, a doctor from Buninyong was sent for, who came last evening. When he came, he ordered some medicine which was to be brought from his residence by one of the mates. He got a powder, as ordered by the doctor, from one of his mates, which, having taken, he expired in about two minutes.

To the Foreman: The deceased was not sober when the first affray took place. The mates were not in the affray with the deceased. Witness cannot say who the opponent in the affray was, being a stranger himself.

Signed by his mark, William Prior.

**2nd Witness: William Baker**

On Wednesday at dinner time, me and John Wiggs were sitting at our dinner, and William Mackey came up to our tent door. While he was getting it, three men whose names I do not know were passing by the tent door, and William Mackey went after them. In about five or ten minutes, a bit of a mob assembled about 40 yards off. John Wiggs went over to the mob. John Wiggs laid hold of the deceased and took him away from the man he had been fighting with. The deceased jumped out of John Wiggs's arms to get at his opponent, whom the witness does not know. John Wiggs brought him down and put him on the stretcher where he was. The deceased was very drunk at the time.

The deceased made no complaint of illness at this time. He lay upon the stretcher about two hours. This occurred on Wednesday. After lying about two hours, he got up and went down to the tent to which he belonged, about half a mile from here, and said before leaving that he would fight the man for £20 on the following morning.

The deceased remained at the tent where he belonged until 4 or 5 o'clock yesterday, the 19th instant, when he was brought up here by his two mates. He complained to the witness that he had received a blow in his left side and was very ill, upon which the mates went and fetched a doctor from Buninyong, who ordered medicine, which the deceased took, and a few moments afterwards expired. This was about 7 o'clock yesterday evening.

Signed by his mark, William Baker.

**3rd Witness: William Gray, shipmate of the deceased**

Upon Wednesday night I came up here to William Prior's tent and I saw William Mackey lying in William Prior's bed. He was moaning and making a great noise, holding his belly like. He did not speak to me; he was too ill to do so. I then went out and cut some wood, brought it in and put some on the fire. I sat at the fire some time. I then went back to my own tent.

I saw the deceased next morning, Thursday, upon his being brought down to our tent, where he was laid on the bed on the floor. He seemed very ill and asked for some castor oil, which one of the mates took from me upon my getting it. The two mates, David Wallace and Walter Clarke, brought him up to William Prior's tent. I saw no more of the deceased until I heard he was dead.

Signed William Gray.

**4th Witness: Francis Love**

I was returning from work the day the deceased met with the accident in company with a young man, Edmond Strange. It was dinner time. We passed these huts on the way and got about 80 or 100 yards past them when the deceased called out to us to stop. We did stop, when he came up. He inquired the reason we did not stop and take a glass with him. Edmond Strange told him that he was not acquainted with him and did not like to drink.

The deceased replied, "Then you are one of those flash gentlemen. If you won't drink, then we shall fight," or words to that effect.

Edmond Strange told him to go and lie down. The deceased then struck Edmond Strange. A scuffle then ensued and Edmond Strange threw the deceased down, I believe on his side. By this time a man, a friend of the deceased, came up whose name was John Wiggs, who tried to persuade the deceased to come away. The deceased broke away from the arms of

John Wiggs and struck Edmond Strange once or twice, to the best of my belief. Edmond Strange returned the blow. They were finally separated.

The deceased said he would fight him for £20. Edmond Strange struck him prior to his being in John Wiggs's arms.

Signed Frank Love.

**5th Witness: Edmond Strange**

As me and my mate were coming up from the Gully to dinner, we first got past here when the deceased shouted out to me or my mate to have a slap of gin, and I would not stop. As I was about 100 yards away, he came running up to me and said, "Why was it you did not come and have a slap?"

I told the deceased he was a perfect stranger to me and that I would not drink with strangers. He said, "You must either drink or fight." I told him I did not want to do either. Then he said I must and struck me on the eyes.

John Wiggs came out of William Prior's tent and came to take the deceased away. He caught hold of the man, but the deceased got away from him twice, and then he struck me twice. I latched hold of him and threw him down without giving him a blow. I told him I did not like to strike him, upon which Wiggs came and took him away.

To the Foreman: When he fell down, I fell with him.

Signed Edmond Strange, by his mark.

The medical evidence and jury verdict addressed different questions. Surgeon James Graham, who conducted the post-mortem examination, certified that he had examined the body of "William McKey" and was of the opinion that death was caused by:

"Peritoneal Inflammation the result of internal causes but accelerated by violence."

Peritoneal inflammation (now commonly termed peritonitis) is inflammation of the membrane lining the abdominal cavity and surrounding the internal organs. The witnesses described William as "holding his belly," complaining of pain in his side, requesting castor oil, and becoming progressively more ill over the course of approximately twenty-four hours. Graham's opinion suggests that he believed an internal abdominal condition was involved, but that the violence associated with the affray had hastened the fatal outcome.

The coroner's jury, by contrast, directed its attention to the circumstances of the affray. Their verdict found:

> "that the deceased William Macky came by his death from the effects of injuries received in an aggravated and most unjustifiable assault made by him upon Edmond Strange, and in which the deceased was the principal aggressor."

The inquest was concluded on 22 May 1853.

## WILLIAM MACKEY OF BUNINYONG?

The question, then, is whether the William Mackey who died at Hiscock's Diggings on 19 May 1853 can be identified with William Macky of Lisfannon. No single piece of evidence proves the identification. The case rests instead upon a convergence of name, place, timing, family memory, correspondence, and the failure of bounded searches to reveal a plausible competing candidate.

The first convergence is place and name. Family memory, recorded more than fifty years later, preserved Buninyong as the location of William's final letter. That detail is significant because Buninyong was not a generic reference to "the goldfields", but a specific place within the Victorian mining landscape. The inquest likewise concerns a man named William Mackey who died at Hiscock's Diggings in the Buninyong district in May 1853. [80]

A second convergence is timing. The Rev. William Marcus Dill Macky later recalled that his father's letters ceased "within a year" of his emigration to Victoria. [81] William Snr left Ireland in May 1852. The inquest death occurred in May 1853.

The last surviving family reference to William appears in a September 1853 letter written by Eliza Macky to her son William. At first glance, this might appear to place William alive several months after the Buninyong inquest. Yet the information recorded by Eliza was not necessarily contemporary with the date of her letter. It had already passed through several stages of transmission: from William in Victoria, to the Gallaugh family who received his letters, and only then to Eliza, who repeated the news in September. The family correspondence itself demonstrates the delays that characterised these communication networks. In July 1852, for example, William of Coshquin told his brother Thomas that a letter written on 26 February 1849 had arrived on 26 July 1849, "just five months in coming." News recorded in September therefore need not describe circumstances in September. It may instead preserve information already several months old by the time it reached Ireland and was committed to paper by Eliza.[82]

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[80] *The Watchman,* 12 December 1907, 9..; PROV, VPRS 24/P0000, Unit 1853/259, *William Mackey: Inquest*.

[81] *The Watchman,* 12 December 1907, 9.

[82] Macky Family Letters, letters 41 and 47.

What other William Macky could this have been? To test the identification, searches were undertaken for other men of the same or closely similar name in Victoria during the relevant period. Victorian death registrations for 1850–1855 produced no plausible alternative. A William Mackey who died at Geelong in 1852 was recorded as sixty-five years old, excluding him by both age and chronology, while a William Mackay who died in 1854 was an infant. Contemporary newspaper searches likewise identified a number of Mackay, Mackey and Mackie names, but these resolved into distinct individuals through age, initials, occupation, residence or documented survival. One William P. Mackay, for example, was an established resident of Gawler, South Australia, before travelling to the Bendigo diggings in 1852. An unresolved William Macky appears in an Adelaide unclaimed-letter list in July 1852, but no evidence has been found connecting him with Victoria. The surname index to the 1853 Bendigo Goldfields Petition was also checked without revealing a William Macky or Mackey. These searches cannot establish that no other man of that name was present in Victoria, but they have not revealed a competing candidate with a comparable fit to the man who died at Hiscock's Diggings.[83]

Important limitations remain. Most significantly, the inquest record contains no direct identification. No place of origin, family connection, wife, children or prior occupation is recorded. The identification therefore rests upon circumstantial convergence rather than explicit confirmation.

A further difficulty lies in the later family account that "every effort" was made to discover William's fate after his disappearance from Buninyong. It is possible that the inquest never came to the attention of William's relatives. Equally, fragmentary reports of his fate may have circulated within family or local networks without leaving a surviving documentary trace. Family tradition ultimately preserved not a confirmed death, but a disappearance. William's letters ceased and, in his son's words, "from that time he was never more heard of." The fragmentary nature of both the family correspondence and the colonial record means that the absence of evidence cannot be treated as evidence of absence.

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[83] William Mackey, Geelong, Victorian Death Registration, 2326 / 1852; and William Mackay Sutheland, Victoria Death Registration 5034/1854; William P. Mackay, Gawler to Bendigo: Adelaide Morning Chronicle, 14 June 1852, correspondence headed "The Diggings", letter dated Bendigo Creek, 8 May 1852; William Macky, Adelaide: South Australian Register, 12 August 1852, p. 3, "Unclaimed Letters—July 31, 1852 also published in the Adelaide Observer, 14 August 1852, p. 8. ; W. H. Mackay: The Argus, 3 May 1853, p. 9, "Abstract of Sales by Auction. This Day";

If this conclusion is correct, William's remains lie in one of the cemeteries serving Buninyong in 1853, most likely the Old Buninyong Cemetery or Buninyong Cemetery itself.[84]

## CONCLUSION

William Macky entered family memory as an absence. By the early twentieth century he survived chiefly as the ancestor who had gone to the Victorian goldfields, written a final letter from Buninyong, and then vanished. Beyond that, little remained except the persistence of a mystery.

The surviving records tell a richer story. Family correspondence, newspaper reports, court proceedings, advertisements, published letters, and colonial archives reveal a man who was far more than a name in a pedigree or a victim of circumstance. Before his departure for Australia, William appears variously as farmer, husband, father, cabinetmaker, auctioneer, litigant, employer, newspaper letter writer, emigrant, and gold-seeker. He is not recovered evenly. Again and again, the records preserve him at moments when reputation, obligation, authority, labour, and standing were being contested. They do not show the whole man. They show the moments in which he became visible.

The evidence assembled in this paper does not resolve every question. William's parentage remains probable rather than definitively proven. Most of his experience in America and Australia remains obscure. Most importantly, the identification of the William Mackey who died at Hiscock's Diggings in May 1853 with William Macky of Lisfannon cannot be established with complete certainty. Yet the convergence of place, name, timing, family memory, correspondence, and occupational context is sufficient that the possibility cannot be lightly dismissed. The recurring documentary pattern in which William appears in moments of dispute may support that case, but it cannot prove it.

The paper has placed William within the social worlds he inhabited: the kin networks of Gallagh, Lisfannon, Coshquin, and Ardmore; the courts of Burnfoot and the auction houses of Londonderry; the migration streams linking Ireland to America and Australasia; and the Victorian goldfields. Whether the Buninyong inquest ultimately proves to be his

[84] Buninyong and District Community Association, "Cemetery," Buninyong Community Website, accessed 6 June 2026, https://www.buninyong.vic.au/cemetery.

final chapter or merely another convergence of evidence, William Macky no longer appears simply as a man who vanished.

His story begins with “William of Lisfannon.” It ends, perhaps, with “William Mackey of Buninyong.” Between those two placenames lies the life that this paper has attempted to recover.

# EPILOGUE

**Susannah Dill Macky**

Susannah Dill, wife of William Macky and mother of their five children, remains a comparatively elusive figure in the family record. Contemporary references during William's lifetime are scarce. She appears as “Susan” in surviving family correspondence and as “Mrs Macky” in newspaper reports of the Burnfoot Petty Sessions. When William departed for Port Phillip in May 1852, he left Susannah and their children in Ireland. Following his disappearance in Victoria, the surviving family correspondence provides little information about her subsequent circumstances. [85]

An important record of Susannah's later life survives in the will of her brother, the Rev. Edward Marcus Dill, Presbyterian minister of Clonakilty, County Cork. In his will, dated 10 July 1862, he identifies his sister as “Susan Dill otherwise Macky”, then residing at Ballyarnett, near Londonderry. He bequeathed her £500 for her separate use and benefit, protected from the control or debts of any present or future husband. Similar provisions appear elsewhere in Edward's will, including protections for Grace and Dorcas. Such arrangements were an established means of protecting married women's inheritances and should not, in themselves, be interpreted as reflecting concern about William's conduct or as evidence that he was still living. [86]

The will also names all five of Susannah's children: James, Richard, William, Dorcas and Grace Dill Macky. Edward provided that, should Susannah predecease him, her £500 bequest would instead be divided among them. He also made separate provisions for Grace and Dorcas following the death of his wife, Sarah Jane. These arrangements provide evidence of the continuing connection between Susannah and her children and the wider Dill family network. [87]

Susannah died on 28 October 1888, aged seventy-six, at the Manse, Balteagh, Limavady. Her son Richard Dill Macky announced her funeral and intended interment at Muff Graveyard,

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[85] Macky Family Letters, letter 41, John Macky to Thomas Macky, 25 May 1852; Londonderry Journal, 29 May 1846, report of Burnfoot Petty Sessions.

[86] Will of the Rev. Edward Marcus Dill, 10 July 1862, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), T2858/2/3. The will also provides similar protections for the inheritances of Susannah’s daughters, Grace Dill and Dorcas Macky

[87] Will of the Rev. Edward Marcus Dill, 10 July 1862, PRONI, T2858/2/3.

County Donegal, although the precise location of the burial ground referred to in the notice has yet to be established. [88]

Although the surviving record of Susannah's life remains fragmentary, her brother's will and her son's funeral announcement provide contemporary evidence of her circumstances long after William's disappearance. Of William and Susannah Macky's five children, the documentary record preserves considerably fuller accounts of their subsequent lives.

**Dr James Macky (1844–1909)** married Mary Mitchell at St Columba's Church, Lower Moville, on 28 November 1872.[89] They had seven children: Robert (died at age 2 years 3 months)[90], Honoria Laurence,[91] Susana Dill [sic] (died in infancy)[92], Robert Mitchell[93], William John,[94] George Duncan[95], and Dorcas Mary (died an infant). In 1885, James gained the *Triple Qualification*, awarded jointly by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. His entry in the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh's *Register of Licentiates* records his

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[88] Londonderry Sentinel (Londonderry, Northern Ireland), Tuesday, 30 October 1888, death and funeral announcement for Susan Macky, signed Richard Dill Macky.

[89] "Ireland, Civil Registration Indexes, 1845–1958," FamilySearch, entry for James Macky and Mary Mitchell, marriage registration, 1872, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FYS3-MYF (accessed 6 June 2026); handwritten family genealogical notes on the reverse of an unidentified family photograph, author unknown, internal references suggesting that the writer was a child of Reby (Nora) Honoria Laurence Macky, later passed to Athol Capper Bray and then to William R. C. Bray in 1989, Family Photo Records, privately held by the author. Note states the marriage of Dr James Macky and Mary Mitchell on 28 November 1872.

[90] Ireland civil birth registration, Robert Macky, born 9 November 1873, Gallagh, Co. Londonderry, no. 149, registered 20 November 1873, Irish Genealogy; handwritten family genealogical notes, recording the same birth date under the forename "John" and a death on 4 February 1876, aged two years three months.

[91] Ireland civil birth registration, Honoria Laurence Macky, born 1 December 1874, Gallagh, Co. Londonderry, registered 17 December 1874, Irish Genealogy; daughter of James Macky, farmer, and Mary Macky formerly Mitchell.

[92] Handwritten family genealogical notes, entry for "Susana Dill" [sic], born 30 June 1876 and died 16 July 1876.

[93] Ireland civil birth registration, Robert Mitchell Macky, born 21 July 1877, Gallagh, Co. Londonderry, registered 18 August 1877, Irish Genealogy; son of James Macky, farmer, and Mary Macky formerly Mitchell.

[94] Ireland civil birth registration, William George Macky, born 12 January 1879, Gallagh, Co. Londonderry, registered 23 January 1879, Irish Genealogy; son of James Macky, farmer, and Mary Macky formerly Mitchell. The child was subsequently known as William John Macky, the name used in his marriage, coroner's inquest and burial records.

[95] Ireland civil birth registration, George Duncan Macky, born 27 August 1880, Gallagh, Co. Londonderry, registered 9 September 1880, Irish Genealogy; son of James Macky, farmer, and Mary Macky formerly Mitchell.

birthplace as Londonderry and his residence in 1885 as Greencastle, Moville, Co. Donegal.[96] In 1886, James arrived in Victoria aboard the Loch Long and subsequently settled in New South Wales and established a medical practice at Ulmarra, where he served the community for nine years. Following an accident that resulted in the loss of a thumb, he retired to Bucca Creek. He died at Grafton in 1909 from blood poisoning. [97]

**Grace Dill Macky** (1845–1908) married Andrew Cochrane, Esq., of Gorticross Cottage, Derry, in the Presbyterian Church, Moville, on 5 May 1871. The ceremony was conducted by the Rev. John Bell, assisted by the Rev. William McConnell. The marriage notice described her as the "eldest daughter of the late Wm. Macky, Esq., late of Lisfannon, Burt."[98]

**Rev. Richard Dill Macky (1847–1929)** was educated at Magee College, Londonderry, and entered the Presbyterian ministry in 1872, his first charge being at Balteagh, Ireland. He emigrated to Australia in the early 1880s and was attached to Palmer Street Presbyterian Church, Sydney, before being recalled by his former congregation in Ireland. Returning to Australia in 1889, he served at Pitt Street Presbyterian Church, Sydney, from 1890, Tenterfield from 1904, and Byron Bay from 1905. He later carried out ministerial duties at Picton before retiring. Richard married Hannah Hammett Watson in Sydney on 18 February 1891. They did not have children. He died on 21 June 1929, leaving a widow.[99]

**Rev. William Marcus Dill Macky (1849–1913)** was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry at Draperstown, County Londonderry in 1876 and married Ellen Elizabeth Moorewood there in 1881. They had six children: Susannah Dill, Frances M. Dill, William M. Dill, Grace Dill, Wilhelmina D. Dill, and James Dill Macky. After a decade as minister of Draperstown, he emigrated to New South Wales in 1886 and became minister of Scots Church, Sydney, where he remained until his death. He served as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of NSW, lectured in theology, served as senior Presbyterian chaplain to the military forces, and in 1901 founded and became the first President of the Australian

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[96] Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, Register of Licentiates, 1885, entry for James Macky, scan supplied to the author by Estela Dukan, Assistant Librarian, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, email correspondence, 7 August 2026.

[97] *The Grafton Argus and Clarence River General Advertiser* (Grafton, NSW), 1 November 1909, 3, “Obituary: Dr. James Macky.”

[98] Londonderry Sentinel (Londonderry, Ireland), 5 May 1871, marriage notice of Andrew Cochrane and Grace Dill Macky; family records of Grace Dill Macky.

[99] *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, NSW), 25 June 1929, 15, “Rev. R. Dill-Macky”; New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, marriage of Richard Dill Macky and Hannah Hammett Watson, Sydney, 18 February 1891.

Protestant Defence Association. He died at Neutral Bay, Sydney, in 1913. It was in a published article on his life that the best-known version of William Macky's story was preserved.[100]

**Dorcas Macky (1851–1896)** was in Melbourne at the time of her death. It is not currently known when she arrived in Australia. A Coroner's report states that at the time of her death, aged 45, she was living at 140 Highett Street, Richmond, with William Wallace Moncrieff. She died in a house fire on 27 October 1896. A coroner's inquest identified her as Dorcas Macky and returned a verdict of accidental death. [101]

[100] N. J. McDonald, "Macky, William Marcus Dill (1849–1913)," in A*ustralian Dictionary of Biography, vol. 10* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1986), accessed 4 June 2026, https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dill-macky-william-marcus-5980; family records of Rev. William Marcus Dill Macky and Ellen Elizabeth

[101] Coroner's Inquest into the death of Dorcas Macky, 30 October 1896, PROV (Public Record Office Victoria), VPRS 24/P0, Unit 1896/1321.

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