



Address at the General Meeting on 12 Nov 2022

## **Dr Barry Cotter, The First Doctor in Melbourne**

By Moira McAlister

Moira McAlister is a descendant of Dr Barry Cotter and has done considerable research on his life and that of his wife Inez. She has written an historical novel called *Izzy* based on the research contained in the biographical website [drbarrycotter.com](http://drbarrycotter.com) which was cached by the National Library of Australia in 2015.

Barry Cotter, baptised in Cork, Ireland, in 1809 was the second son of Barry Cotter, Magistrate, and Eliza Hayes. When he was 15 his father died, leaving his mother with four young children. She remarried however - this time to a local doctor and apothecary, Dr Denis O'Connell, 15 years her junior. Barry did an apprenticeship with O'Connell and then completed a medical degree in Glasgow. He was 20 on graduation in 1829.

He embarked for Australia, arriving in Van Diemen's Land in 1830. In Campbell Town he was fortunate to receive a land grant of 640 acres, whilst as a doctor he was responsible for the care of convicts building the Ross Bridge. Forty-two letters exist which were written over a period of two years between Dr Cotter, Mr Atkinson, the supervisor of convicts, and John Scott who was the Colonial surgeon. Atkinson accused Cotter of not looking after the convicts well. Cotter had also been involved in litigation regarding a private business and was sometimes found brawling. After five years in Campbell Town, he was dismissed from government service.

He obviously knew John Batman and Joseph Gellibrand of the Port Phillip Association and on November the 6<sup>th</sup> 1835, he arrived in the Port Phillip District of New South Wales with John Batman. Cotter arrived as a doctor, but also acted as Gellibrand's agent, and was responsible for the care of Gellibrand's sheep. This supplemented his income as a doctor in a small community.

He later applied unsuccessfully for the position of Colonial Surgeon but in December 1836 was taken on in a temporary capacity.

John Pascoe Fawkner wrote in his diary that Cotter was often drunk, but was young and enthusiastic, and fitted into the society of mostly young people.

John Batman's wife, Eliza, and their seven children arrived in Port Phillip accompanied by Inez Seville Fitzgerald who was companion to Mrs Arundel Wrighte in Launceston. Inez was said to be the illegitimate child of Edward Fox Fitzgerald and Inez Isobel Seville.

At the first land sales in 1837 Cotter bought property on the corner of Swanston St and Bourke St. and following his marriage to Inez Fitzgerald in 1838 they lived in a house built on that land. Cotter joined the Temperance Society and the Melbourne Club.

In 1839 their first child Frances Laura Snodgrass Cotter was born. A second child, Helena Hayes Cotter was born in 1840.

Following the birth of Helena, Barry and Inez intended to travel to Britain. Barry sold his medical practice, but the arrival of the ship *Glen Huntley* in 1840, carrying passengers with typhus, interrupted their plans. A quarantine station at Point Ormond was organised and Cotter spent four months working there.

During his time in Port Phillip, Cotter had bought considerable property and the auction of some of their possessions in February 1841 indicated that they lived very comfortably. Amongst their belongings were horses and carriages, and books by distinguished authors.

They returned to England on the *Rookery* in March 1841 with Inez expecting another child. Moira's great grandfather Charles Henry Barry Cotter was born in England in November 1841.

The financial crash in the early 1840s caused Cotter to leave his wife, then expecting her fourth child, and return to Melbourne where he found his possessions worthless.

He began working again in Melbourne and in 1844 having made a bit of money he boarded the *Isabella* bound for London. This ship was wrecked in a storm off Flinders Island in Bass Strait. Cotter was reported as having acquitted himself very bravely, but all his belongings, including his medical graduation certificate were lost. He remained in Port Phillip for another two years before he was back on his feet again.

In 1843 in England, Inez had given birth to a son, Francis Henry Durell Cotter and ten months later, in Medway, Kent, she gave birth to another baby who was named Inez Seville Vignoles. Who was her father? The name given in the baptism record was Francis Durell Vignoles and he was an officer in the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

It is highly likely that Inez had met Francis Vignoles in Melbourne. In 1835, the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot had arrived in Australia to guard convicts, and Francis Durell Vignoles was in that Regiment. Shipping records indicate that he left Melbourne in December 1841 bound for Sydney and then England.

In early 1845, just weeks after baby Inez Seville Vignoles was born, Francis Vignoles was sent to India and Inez never saw him again. Baby Inez Vignoles died of remittent fever in July 1846.

In August 1846, Barry Cotter had arrived back in England to find his wife in mourning. He had been away from his wife and children for some years, and their marriage seemed irretrievable. In 1847 he embarked as ship's surgeon on the *Royal George* bound for Adelaide.

The 1851 British census indicates that Inez and her children were living in Chatham, Kent, close to where the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment had been stationed. Inez gave 'Vignoles' as surname for herself and all her children, instead of the surname Cotter.

How she managed financially is unknown but seven years having passed since her husband had returned to Australia, she married shipwright, James Thomas Hobbs in 1854, in Kent, England.

Barry Cotter also remarried in 1854. He married Selina Elkington, a 29 year old widow, in Gawler, South Australia. In 1861 Cotter was appointed medical officer in Menindee, and he treated members of the Burke and Wills Expedition when required. He appears to have liked working in the outback. Sadly, Selena received fatal injuries after her dress caught in the turning shaft on the deck of a paddle steamer on the Darling River. They had been married for seven years.

In 1860, Inez, calling herself Mrs Cotter, arrived in Sydney with her grown up children and her husband James Thomas Hobbs. Letters she wrote indicate she had come to claim her Right of Dower but plainly this would be unsuccessful as Barry Cotter was still very much alive.

Inez died in Melbourne in 1864. She was buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery, MGC-COE-Comp-L-No-458.

Francis Durrell Vignoles, after finishing his tour of duty in India, resigned from his Regiment and went to Queensland. There he became a grazier, and in 1864 he married Elizabeth Dunne. He died in Queensland aged 76 in 1893.

Barry Cotter died in 1877 in Swan Hill. In the Central Australia and Bourke Telegraph he was described as being 5ft 8in, slender, gentlemanly, and well respected as a doctor.

**Contributed by Jan Hanslow, PPPG member No 1057.**