
Vital Statistics on Norfolk Island, 1788–1814: An Estimate

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Captain James Cook, in command of HMS *Resolution*, discovered Norfolk Island on 10 October 1774.¹ Although some artifacts suggesting earlier visits by Polynesians have been discovered, the first settlement is attributed to Lieutenant Philip Gidley King and his party on 6 March 1788. The population at times comprised convicts, guards, a few free settlers and some ex-convicts. People came and went, the total reaching 1200 at its peak. All persons remaining were evacuated in late February 1814.

The reasons why the settlement was initiated and later abandoned have been well documented. The convicts were to harvest timber and flax and engage in agriculture, and were presumed fit to do the work. The inclusion of a much higher proportion of females than generally transported to Port Jackson was notable. Later some recidivist convicts were sent to Norfolk Island, and under the sadistic regime of Major Joseph Foveaux, commandant 1800–04, civil conditions deteriorated.² Grain production increased until 1794 and then eased.³

1. Merval Hoare, *Norfolk Island: An Outline of its History 1774–1987*, 4th edn, UQP, St Lucia, 1988.

2. Margaret Hazzard, *Punishment Short of Death: A History of the Penal Settlement at Norfolk Island*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1984.

3. David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, (vol. 1 originally pub. 1798), Australiana Facsimile Editions 76, Public Libranes Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1971, p. 515.

What was the life expectation of the population during this period? Calculation of vital rates from the available records, and research into one family, enable an estimate to be made.

Family matters

My interest in Norfolk Island arose from research into the family of Mary Wade (1777-1859) and (Edward) Teague Harrigan (?-1825?) who were on Norfolk Island during the period, as was Mary's later husband Jonathan Brooker (?-1833)⁴. Mary, on her eleventh birthday, 5 October 1788, assaulted and robbed a younger girl of her clothing. Because this was her second offence she was sentenced to death, which was commuted to transportation for life. She travelled to Port Jackson on the *Lady Juliana*, arriving on 3 June 1790. She was sent to Norfolk Island, arriving by the *Surprize* on 7 August 1790.

Harrigan stole two coats worth 20 shillings and was transported for seven years on the *Salamander*, which after a brief stopover at Port Jackson deposited him on Norfolk Island on 4 September 1791. He and Mary had three children born on Norfolk Island, Sarah 1793-1887, Edward 1795-95 and William 1796-1885. His sentence expired on 5 October 1796, Mary's nineteenth birthday, and she was assigned to him as servant (a common device for the government to transfer responsibility for feeding a convict to a free citizen). They were then eligible to leave Norfolk Island. The earliest documented ship to sail from Norfolk Island to Sydney after William's birth was the *Francis* in August 1797,⁵ but no passenger list survives, and intra-colonial shipping was not completely recorded. They were living in Sydney in 1801.⁶

In 1805, Mary was granted her freedom and their relationship ended. Harrigan took to whaling and sealing. His last known voyage was from Sydney for Kangaroo Island via Port Dalrymple on the *Rosetta* in 1817.⁷ The last reference so far found for him is an 1825

4. Marjorie Morrow, et al., *Mary Wade to Us: A Family History 1778-1986*, The Mary Wade History Association, Cromer, NSW, 1986.

5. J. S. Cumpston, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures Sydney 1788-1825*, vol. 1, Roebuck Soc., Canberra, 1977; also John Copley, *Sydney Cove 1795-1800: The Second Governor*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, NSW, 1986, p.162.

6. General Muster of NSW 1801.

7. *Sydney Gazette*, 26 April 1817; AONSW reel 561, p. 229.

reference to an 1823 land grant at Port Dalrymple.⁸

Mary formed a relationship with Jonathan in or after 1805. He had been transported for seven years for stealing a pot of carpenter's glue. He was on Norfolk Island 1791-97 as a convict, and remained as a free pig farmer for two more years. He then went to Parramatta and worked as a farm labourer.⁹ He and Mary had their own farm at Windsor 1807-13, Airs 1813-26 and Fairy Meadow thereafter. They had four children and were married in 1817. Mary lost two of her nine children in infancy and lived to the ripe old age of eighty-two. No specific cause of death was noted.¹⁰

Method

As the source of population data, James Donohoe's book was used.¹¹ He sought to list every person known to be on Norfolk Island during the period, collating census records, victualling lists and church registers, tabulating the name, ship of transportation, date of arrival or birth on Norfolk Island and date of departure or death for each person.

Years of exposure (Y) to events were determined from start and finish estimates based on Donohoe's tabulation. The start was equated to the date of (1) arrival or birth on Norfolk Island; or (2) the first family event listed, e.g. marriage, birth of first child or death of partner or child; or (3) the first census mention. The finish was equated to the date of (1) departure or death on the island; or (2) the last family event listed; or (3) the last census mention. Y equals finish year minus start year, except when the two are identical, in which case Y equals 0.5.

The total person-years of exposure were male 6229, female 4913.

Birth and death events were as noted by Donohoe. Twin birth was assumed if two children listed under the same mother had the same date of birth. Eleven infants whose gender was not stated were arbitrarily assigned, 5.5 each to male and female.

8. Index to VDL land grants 1804-23 AONSW reel 1988, LSD 404; Land grant AONSW reel 1987, 354, vol. 4, p. 225; *Colonial Times & Tasmanian Advertiser*, 18 November 1825, p. 4c. NSL reel RAV/FM4/627.

9. General Muster of NSW 1801.

10. NSW death certificate 1859.5613.

11. James H. Donohoe, *Norfolk Island 1788-1813: The People and their Families*, private pub., Sydney, 1986.

Comparable with methods used for estimating vital rates in modern third world communities lacking reliable data,¹² model life tables were employed to estimate life expectancy at birth from the calculated crude birth and death rates.

Results

There were 574 births: male 270.5, female 303.5. There were 198 deaths: male 125, female 73. Crude birth rates were male 43/1000/year, female 62/1000/year, and combined 52/1000/year. There is an apparent shortage of male births. It is known that some boys born on Norfolk Island joined ships' crews and were not all recorded as departures. Assuming a primary sex ratio of 1.05, the expected number of male births is 319. About forty-eight males might have been born and gone uncounted. Adjusting for these forty-eight, the combined birth rate would be 56/1000/year.

Infant mortality rates (deaths in first year of life) were male 6/270.5 (22/1000), female 8/303.5 (26/1000), and combined 24/1000. Twinning included six pairs: 2 male/male, 1 male/female and 3 female/female. The ratio (1% of births) is unexceptional. Crude death rates were male 20/1000/year and female 15/1000/year.

From model life tables, crude death rates and natural increase rates for each sex provided estimated life expectancies at birth of 43.6 years for males and 52.0 years for females. The male estimate adjusted for the presumed uncounted forty-eight boys is 43.8.

Discussion and conclusion

How good is Donohoe's data? A comparison of his tabulation for Mary and her connexions with data obtained from other sources¹³ is shown in Table 1. Teague Harragan and Edward Harrigan were the same person, infant Edward was born and died in 1795, and additional departure dates were estimated. The corrections do not alter female data, but increase the male Y base by 12% and add a birth-death pair (Table 2).

12 UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs, *Manual 4: Methods of Estimating Basic Demographic Measures from Incomplete Data*, United Nations, New York, 1967.

13 Norfolk Island Victualling Book, Typescript B7/30/1792-1796, Society of Australian Genealogists, p. 29b; Raymond K. Nobbs, *Norfolk Island and its First Settlement 1788-1814*, Library of Australian History, North Sydney, 1988, p. 195; Family Bible of Nathaniel Boon (Sarah's husband), Mitchell Library Collection; Morrow, et al., *Mary Wade to Us*, General Muster of NSW 1801.

Table 1: Norfolk Island: Mary Wade data

Data from Donohoe				Data from other sources		
Name	Ship	In	Out	Correction	In	Out
Harrigan, Teague	<i>Salamander</i>	1791				
				same person	1791	1796
Harrigan, Edward		1790	1796			
Wade, Mary	<i>Lady Juliana</i>	1790	1796		1790	1796
Wade, Edward		1790	1796	born, died 1795	b 1795	d 1795
Wade, Sarah		b 1793	1796		b 1793	1796
Wade, William		b 1796			b 1796	1796
Brooker, John		1791		Jonathan <i>Atlantic</i> out 1799	1791	1799

The estimated life expectancy of females at fifty-two years appears to be realistic. Due to under-recording of male births and loss to follow-up of the same boys who joined ship crews, and to poorer data about adult male departures, the estimated male life expectancy of forty-four years is less reliable. Lower expectancies derived from Collins' 1791-96 data (39.6 for males and 42.2 for females) may signify improvement in population health after 1796.¹⁴ Collins reported 191 births and thirty-eight deaths of children less than two years of age. His summary of 137 deaths (all ages) reported indicated that common causes of death were teething (representing various early childhood illnesses: 23 persons), dysentery (45 persons), debility (22 persons) and consumption (8 persons).

Table 2: Norfolk Island: Mary Wade family data

Data Source	Donohoe		All Other		
Name	Life Years	Birth	Life Years	Birth	Death
Harrigan, Teague			5		
Harrigan, Edward	6				
Wade, Mary	6		6		
Wade, Edward	6		0.5	1	1
Wade, Sarah	3	1	3	1	
Wade, William		1	0.5	1	
Brooker, John			8		

Langton/Sydney Hospital

14. Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*.