

The Cummins family

By Jane Smith

The Cummins family came from Queen's County, Ireland. 33-year-old Cornelius's plan was to bring his wife, Julia (or Judith) and three small children to Australia to join his two uncles in Bathurst. Their infant daughter, Eliza, had died in quarantine. The other two daughters had survived: Catherine, a toddler of two years old, and one-year-old Bridget. The family settled in Foster's Valley, Rockley, near Bathurst. Cornelius turned his hand to sheep farming and mining. Like many men of his generation, Cummins went through periods of financial hardship as well as times of plenty, his fortunes fluctuating according to the economic climate of the times. The banking crisis of 1893 was crippling for him.

Tragically, Julia died within three years of her arrival in the colony. Her death was one of the first amongst the passengers who had survived the voyage and settled into their adopted land. After Julia's death, Cornelius married again. In 1868, he was arrested for receiving a stolen horse. He was tried at Bathurst, found guilty and sentenced to five years on the roads. Owing to his good conduct and industry, however, Cornelius was released after serving only two of those years. Thereafter he stayed on the right side of the law, and by the time of his death in 1895 he was well-regarded in the community. On his death, he left a widow, 11 children, and an 'honored name'.¹

In December 1859, Cornelius's youngest daughter by Julia – Bridget – was 11 years old. Just before Christmas of that year, Bridget was out minding the cows when one of her father's workers, a man named Dennis Fitzpatrick, summoned her. Fitzpatrick gave the young girl four shillings and sixpence, then grabbed hold of her and threw her to the ground. What happened next was, according to the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, unfit for publication.

According to Bridget's deposition in court, 'When he got me on the ground he pulled up my clothes and stripped himself. He lay upon me there. He was touching against me with his private parts. He gave me some money...He lay upon me for about...five minutes. He told me not to say anything about it as next time he came out he would bring me some cakes and lollies. I said I did not want them as I get enough to eat at home...He gave me four shillings. He said it was very well for me to get it for what he was going to do to me. I tried to get away from him. He held me. He said I was a bloody fool for it. I did not cry out as I was frightened.'²

The girl told no one about the assault but a witness alerted her stepmother, and Fitzpatrick was arrested. He was tried at Bathurst Circuit Court and found guilty of indecent assault. He was sentenced to 18 months with hard labour.

It is impossible to know the extent to which the attack affected Bridget. In her thirties – relatively late in life for a woman of her time – she formed a relationship with a widowed labourer named George Thorn. They had two children together: George, born in 1884 and Rosey, in 1887. They lived in Dragon Street, Warwick, where George farmed and Bridget took care of the household. She never learned to read or write. In 1916, when their children were well into adulthood, George and Bridget finally married. Bridget died six years later, having suffered for a year with a tumour in her chest.

¹ (1895, Oct 26). *National Advocate*, p.2

² State Archives NSW: Solicitor for Public Prosecutions and Clerk of the Peace; NRS 880, *Papers and Depositions, Supreme Court Sydney and on Circuit 1824-1946*. [9/6431] Item 1.