

## **Teggs Monthly 1836: Fisher's Ghost, A Legend of Campbelltown**

### **More About It, Ten Years After The Event**

In the New Year's number of the TOWN AND COUNTRY JOURNAL there was published a report of the trial of Worrall for the murder of Fisher at Campbelltown in 1826. The story of Fisher's Ghost appears to be of considerable interest, judging from the letters we have received on the subject, although those letters have thrown no new light upon it. The writers repeat the ghost story told in our issue for January 2, and assert that the Fisher murder was discovered through the agency of the victim's ghost. Our correspondents, in justification of their assertion, state that old residents of Campbelltown have often told them the story, or that they have from their childhood been taught to believe that the murder was discovered through the apparition of Fisher. As was stated in our former article on the subject, the ghost, for all we can prove to the contrary, might have appeared; but the necessity for its appearance is not apparent. The evidence adduced at the trial of Worrall shows that Fisher disappeared in a mysterious manner, and it would have been a remarkable case indeed if foul play had not been suspected, and Worrall had escaped from the chain of suspicious circumstances which surrounded him. All this was fully gone into in our former article, and it will be of more interest now to discuss the origin of the ghost story as it first appeared in type. No doubt "Tegg's Monthly Magazine" was responsible for its publication to the world. In No. 1 of that magazine (the issue for March, 1836), published by James Tegg, George-street, and printed by H. Bull, at the Colonist Office, a story with the following title appeared:

"Fisher's Ghost, a Legend of Campbelltown." The story was re-published in the SYDNEY GAZETTE for March 6, 1836; and it will be interesting to readers of this version, printed below, to observe how, in the short space of 10 years, the facts of the case as disclosed at the trial were apparently forgotten, and the story as it read in the law report of 1826 differed from the version in "Tegg's Magazine" in 1836.

In the 1836 version it is stated that Fisher was a free man some years before he was murdered. In the report of the trial in 1826 the evidence showed that he was within a month or two of being a free man when he disappeared, and one of the reasons that suspicion of foul play was aroused was the fact that if his alleged visit to England had been postponed for a month or two he might have left the country without incurring penalties to which "ticket of leave men" were then subject for leaving New South Wales.

In the version of 1836 Fisher is described as a dissolute character very much in debt, and at one time in gaol on that account. It is represented that one of his drunken associates

named Worrall suggested to him the expediency of entering into a scheme to defraud his creditor by making over the whole of his property, and that subsequently Fisher consented to this, with the result that his creditor, finding that Fisher was without means, allowed him to be released, and Fisher returned to Campbelltown and shortly after disappeared. According to the report of the trial, Fisher was only in debt for a very small amount, and had never been hardly pressed for it. No documents could be produced by Worrall accounting, for his being in possession of Fisher's property.

William Howe, according to the story of 1836, was the superintendent of police for Campbelltown in 1826, and he, in consequence of an apparition being seen by a man named Hurley, went to a certain place and there found the body of Fisher, and this led to the arrest of Worrall. The report of the trial shows that Robert Burke was chief constable of Campbelltown, and that owing to Fisher's mysterious disappearance and Worrall being in possession of his property without being able to account for that fact, and owing also, to blood stains found on a fence, and for other reasons common in all murder cases, this police officer and his assistants searched for and found Fisher's body. The defence of the accused put forward by his counsel shows that no attempt was made to account for the prisoner's unlawful possession of Fisher's property. The defence set up was that Fisher was murdered by other men; that the murder was witnessed by Worrall, and he had been sworn to secrecy. The version of 1836 states that the suspicion against Worrall being confirmed by a body of circumstantial evidence he was committed for trial before the Supreme Court; the conviction that retributive justice was now to overtake him had such an effect on his mind that he confessed his guilt. A long statement is then made purporting to be Worrall's confession. In this confession the man describes himself as a cold-blooded murderer who committed the crime after long premeditation. The inference from this is that Worrall pleaded guilty. The facts proved by the report of the trial show that he did not confess to killing Fisher until the night before he was hanged, and that with almost his dying breath he declared that he had struck Fisher in mistake for a horse; and on seeing the terrible mistake he had made he became confused, and foolishly endeavored to destroy all traces of his dreadful error. It will be noticed that according to Tegg Worrall spelt his name with one l. But the following reprint will enable our readers to compare for themselves the story of Fisher's murder, as told at his trial, and the ghost story as it first appeared in:

The incidents related in the following tale must be familiar to many of our readers, especially to those in Campbelltown and its neighborhood. We have trusted solely to memory in drawing up the statements. The inaccuracies, however (if there be any), can only be of minor importance. The principal portions of the tale may be relied on as strictly true. We leave others to solve the problem of the appearance of Fisher's ghost, contenting ourselves with simply telling the tale as it was told to us. Most of those

concerned in the investigation of the affair are still alive, and can bear testimony to its truth.

Have you ever paid a visit to the town or rather, the village of Campbelltown? If you have not, we advise you to do so speedily. We recommend you to do so the more willingly because we can speak from experience of the pleasure we have felt when domiciled in its comfortable little inn, enjoying a few days relaxation from the bustle and dust of Sydney. If you have been there, you can dispense with our description of its neat little church, its straggling appearance, and its pleasant situation; in short, of all the beauties which it presents to a toil worn, dust-blinded citizen on his first visit - and enable us to come at once to the subject of our tale. The visitor to Campbelltown must have observed as he strolled through the village a large unfinished brick building fast mouldering to decay, which seems to have been intended at the time of its erection for a store by its appearance, however, shows that whatever may have been, the intention in erecting it, something must have intervened to prevent the accomplishment of the object. It is now rapidly falling into decay, and the freshness of the grass which covers the sward around it, shows that whatever the cause may be, the ruins are not much frequented by the inhabitants of the surrounding cottages. The unfinished building and the land which surrounds it were the property some few years ago of a man named Frederick Fisher, who occupied an adjoining cottage, of which scarcely a trace now remains. Fisher had been originally a prisoner. He had served his time in the employ of a gentleman in the neighborhood, and had removed to the town when he obtained his ticket-of-leave,

Some years, previous to the commencement of our tale he had received his certificate of freedom, having undergone his sentence, which had been awarded to him by the laws of the country. He had also, after he became free, obtained a grant of a town allotment, and had commenced the building referred to, intending on its completion to occupy one portion of it as a dwelling-house, and to convert the remaining part into a store.

Fisher was but a boy at the time of the commission of the offence which had led to his transportation. His relatives, enraged at the disgrace he had subjected them to by his misconduct, had taken little notice of him after that period; and as he could put no trust in those whom he saw around him placed in circumstances similar to his own, he had, consequently, formed no friendship which might have enabled him to pass pleasantly his vacant time; his education, also, had been much neglected in his youth by those very relatives who were so liberal of their censure after, he had gone astray. It is not, therefore, a matter of surprise, that his time should have occasionally hung heavy on his hands. His own fireside presented few attractions to him; his conduct, since his arrival in the colony, not having been such as to afford him much gratification in the retrospect, the resolutions of amendment he had made whilst in gaol, and on the passage out, had

melted like snow when exposed to the demoralising influence of the example set by those around him. Fisher, like most of his class, flew for refuge from unpleasant recollections to the society which the neighboring taproom afforded, and sought for that which he found not at home in quaffing the flowing bowl. The necessary consequence of conduct such as his soon became apparent. His business, to which on gaining his freedom he had paid strict attention, was now neglected; but instead of endeavoring by exertion to extricate himself from the difficulties which began to surround him, he plunged yet deeper into a life of dissipation, frequenting the purlieus of the tap both night and day. His inevitable ruin soon became so apparent that his creditors resolved no longer to brook delay. He was accordingly arrested, and lodged in gaol at the instance of one of their number, for a debt of £100.

Although Fisher had been weak enough to allow the bad example of others to lead him astray, he was yet far from having reached that pitch of depravity which many of his associates had attained; although he had neglected his business, and spent in dissipation those means which ought to have been applied to the liquidation of his debt, he had yet sufficient moral principle remaining. The shudder when one of his drunken associates named Worrall, suggested the expediency of entering into a scheme to defraud, his creditors, by making over to him the whole of his property which yet remained; making, at the same time, a private engagement that it should be restored to him as soon as he was permitted to leave the gaol. The persuasions of Worrall, who represented to him the ease and safety with which he might revenge himself on his creditors, and regain possession of his property without any incumbrance, soon overcame the feelings of repugnance which he had at first felt, and he consented to make a transfer of all he possessed to Worrall under these conditions. Mr. P., at whose instance Fisher had been incarcerated, finding that he was not the owner of the property he had supposed, consented after some time to his liberation, as the only means by which he was likely ever to recover the amount of his claim. Fisher, immediately on his release, returned to Campbelltown, exulting in the success of his scheme.

Shortly after Fisher's return, he left his house one evening with the intention, it was supposed, of resorting, according to his usual custom, to some of the neighboring ginshops. Morning came, but his continued absence excited no surprise, as it was supposed that he had got so drunk the previous night as to be unable to return home. As the day wore on and no signs of his appearance, a neighbor went to inquire at the various public-houses whether he had been there. He had not been at any of his usual haunts; nor had any person seen him since the previous evening. Many conjectures were made as to cause of his protracted absence, but no feasible reason could be adduced until the afternoon. Worrall returned from Sydney, whither he said, he had accompanied Fisher on the previous evening, who had sailed early that morning for England, in order to avoid

the importunities of his creditors, who had lately been rather, troublesome to him, some having even threatened to lodge him again in gaol. This was corroborated by the fact that a vessel did sail for England on that day. Worrall's statements set completely at rest all the conjectures which had been previously afloat as to the cause of Fisher's disappearance, and he was allowed to take undisputed possession of the property on producing Fisher's conveyance. Time wore on, and Fisher's name was almost forgotten or never alluded to except by the deluded creditors, who consoled themselves for their loss by venting imprecations and forming resolutions never again to be so easily gulled.

About six weeks after Fisher's disappearance Mr. Hurly, a respectable settler in the vicinity of Campbelltown, was returning thence to his residence. He had long been acquainted with Fisher, and it is by no means improbable that his mind reverted to his sudden disappearance when passing the place where he had so long resided. Be that as it may, however, no doubt as to Worrall's statement ever entered his mind. It was about 10 o'clock at night when he left Campbelltown; the moon had risen, but her brilliance was obscured by clouds. After he had passed the late residence of Fisher, about from 500 to 800 yards, he observed the figure of a man sitting on the top of the fence on the same side of the road as the house. On approaching nearer, what was his surprise to recognise distinctly the features of Fisher, whom he had supposed then far on his way to England. He approached the figure with the intention of assuring himself that he had not been deceived by a fancied resemblance. The ghastly appearance which the features presented to his view on his near approach struck such a chill of terror to his heart as chained him motionless to the spot. The figure, as he gazed, arose from the fence and, waving its arm, pointed in the direction of a small dry creek, which crosses the paddock at that place, and disappeared gradually from his view, apparently following the windings of the creek. The terror which overpowered the faculties of Hurly at this sight defies all power of description; in a state of stupefaction he left the spot and endeavored to obtain an entrance into the nearest house. How he managed to find his way to the house he has no recollection, but just as he approached it his senses totally forsook him. The noise caused by his head striking the door as he fell alarmed the inmates, who, on opening it, found him in a death-like swoon. He was carried into the house where he lay for a whole week in the delirium of a brain fever. The frequent mention of the name of Fisher in his ravings attracted the attention of those who attended him, and conjecture was soon busy at work to ascertain what had driven him into such a state. His known character for sobriety as well as the testimony of those who had parted from him only a few minutes before, forbade the supposition that it had been caused by drunkenness, and rumor with her thousand tongues turned the villagers' heads with vain conjectures as to its probable cause.

On the morning of the ninth day of Hurley's illness he awoke after a long and refreshing sleep, in the full possession of his senses, and expressed a wish to those around him that the police magistrate should be sent for immediately.

William Howe, Esq., of Glenlee, who then filled the situation of superintendent of police for Campbelltown and the surrounding districts, was sent for, and came immediately on being made aware of the circumstances. To him Hurley disclosed what he had seen, and suspicion of Fisher's having met with foul play, which that sight impressed on his mind. As soon as Hurley was able to leave his bed, Mr. Howe, accompanied by a few constables, among whom was a native black named Gilbert went, conducted by Hurley, to the place where the apparition, had been seen. On closely examining the panel of fencing pointed out, Mr. Howe discovered spots of blood. An active search was commenced to discover further traces of the supposed murder but nothing more was observed. It was thought advisable to trace the course of the creek in the direction to which the apparition had pointed and in which it had disappeared. Some small ponds of water still remained in the creek, and these Black Gilbert was directed to explore with his spear. He carefully examined each as he approached it, but the shake of the head denoted his want of success. On approaching a larger pond than any of those he had before searched, the standers-by observed his eyes sparkle as he exclaimed in a tone of triumph, while yet at some distance from the spot, "White man's fat sit down here." As soon as he reached the bank of the pond he thrust his spear into the water, and after some search he pointed to a particular spot in the water, saying, "White man there." The constables were immediately set to work to clear away the water, which was soon effected, and on digging among the sand the remains of a human being in an advanced stage of decomposition were discovered. It became now obvious to all that Fisher (if the remains which had been found were really his) had met with an untimely end. Suspicion alighted on Worrall, who was the only person who had reaped any benefit from Fisher's death; and it was remembered also that he it was who had first propagated the story of Fisher's return to England. Many circumstances corroborative, of this suspicion flashed on the minds of the neighbors which until now had escaped their notice.

Mr. Howe caused Worrall to be arrested, and the suspicion being confirmed by a body of circumstantial evidence, he was, committed to take his trial before the Supreme Court for the murder. The conviction and retributive justice now about to overtake him had such an effect on his mind that he confessed his guilt. His reason for so barbarous a proceeding arose from the transaction mentioned in the former part of the narrative. Fisher, overjoyed at the success of the scheme by which he had defrauded his creditors, forgot to regain possession of the deed of conveyance by which he had made over his property to Worrall. The thought occurred to Worrall that if he could only get Fisher quietly out of the way, he would be able to claim possession of the property in right of

that conveyance. This project had repeatedly occurred to him while Fisher was in gaol, and he had resolved even then either to regain possession of the private agreement which compelled him to restore the property whenever it might be required, or to get rid of him entirely.

Foiled in his scheme to obtain possession of this document by Fisher's unexpected liberation, he formed the diabolical scheme which he ultimately accomplished. Under the mask of friendship, he was Fisher's companion during the day, and night after night he watched Fisher's motions from the time of his return from gaol, but had accidentally been foiled in every attempt he had made until the one on which the murder was committed. On that night he was, as usual, prowling about Fisher's cottage, looking for an opportunity to attain his ends, when Fisher, tempted by the beauty of the evening, left his house to take a walk, followed at some distance by Worrall. At the place where the blood was afterwards discovered Fisher stopped and leaned against the fence, apparently wrapped in deep thought. The assassin had now before him the opportunity he had so long waited for, and taking up a broken panel of the fence he stole quietly behind him, and with one blow of his weapon stretched him lifeless on the ground. He carried the dead body from the scene of the murder to the place where it was afterwards discovered, and buried it deep in the sand, A few weeks after he had made the confession he expiated his crime on the scaffold, imploring with his last breath the forgiveness of his Maker.

**Source: National Library of Australia <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/71232896>**