

Hidden Gems and Forgotten People

STEWARTSTOWN & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Robert Cranston

ROBERT CRANSTON

Maureen McGrath, a noted local historian from the town related how her mother Alice, nee Park, remembered an old lady who visited the Parks from time to time and spoke wistfully of “my fenian son”. The son was Robert Cranston who had gone to America and written a single letter home to her.

Cranston's story is truly remarkable. He joined the British Army, the 61st Regiment of Foot, in 1863. By 1866 he was a leading member of the Fenian Brotherhood within the Army. He was court martialled in Dublin on the 19th July 1866 for his part in an abortive Fenian mutiny and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Transported to Fremantle, on the convict ship Hougoumont, the last convict voyage to Australia, Cranston was incarcerated in Fremantle Jail from January 1868 until April 17th 1876 when he was rescued along with six other military Fenians who were working outside the gaol, by American Fenians who had purchased a New England whaling ship, the Catalpa, and sailed it to Australia. Pursued by the British navy, they managed to avoid capture and following a lengthy return voyage they arrived to a hero's welcome in New York and later the Catalpa's home port of New Bedford Harbour.

Robert worked for a while as an assistant to O'Donovan Rossa in Clann na Gael. He married a girl originally from Stewartstown called Anne Mulgrew and eventually settled in Philadelphia.

The full story of Robert Cranston is told by Ciaran Fee in his article “Robert Cranston and the Catalpa escape” which appeared in Vol. 10 of The Bell, the Journal of the Stewartstown and District Local History Society. pp 3-18