

School & Winny mind & give a Mothers advise to each of them for you know that it takes a girl all her time to keep her place' (3j).

Biddy Burke's career after May 1884 has so far proved impervious to research. The family recollection of photographs showing the wedding of one of her children suggests that she did not carry through her facetious promise to remain 'an old maid'. Yet inspection of numerous marriage and birth certificates indicates that none of the dozen or so Bridget Burkes who married in Queensland between 1884 and 1899 matched the origins of our emigrant from Balroobuck Beg. In a colony where state regulation was primitive and settlement widely dispersed, it is probable that many careers passed without official record. Biddy herself looked forward to that shadowy future with confidence: 'This is the place that foolish girls are knowing' (3j).

### The Burke Letters, 1882-84 (1-3)

(Bu 1)

Mountview House  
February the 2 1882

My Dear father & mother

(a) After a lonely christmas I received your letter yesterday the 1st of Feb which give me a start to hear that my father is not well. I hope that God will reward you John for your kindnes to him. Dear father it is a hart broken case that we cannot go & see you but I hope in God that you will live to see the day that we will all meet together in the old home again for I can see nothing that takes the memory of it out of my Head. The more please [*places*] I see the more I think of Home. So Now father Chear up & take Courage the is good Hopes across the see. Dear father & mother I feel so glad to hear that Mary A. & Delia is improving well thank god.

(b) Dear parents I got 5 week Holly days at christmas from my mistres & I went Home & spent them with uncle. Myself & Patt realy we had a grand Christmas of it but I woul enjoy it better If I Could have you letter. It takes such a long time gone & coming. I got a few letters from Patt Collins. The landed Heare of late. He is in townsevilla [*Townsville*] & is all right & likes the Colliney fine.

(c) You will remember me to my Sister Mary & her Children & also to my uncle Laurence & Children & uncle William Wife & Children or is Bridg. getting much Bigger. Also to my Aunt Biddy & Husband & family Aunt Peg & Husband & family uncl Mick wife & family uncl Jim Wife & famly & tell that Uncle Martin is sending His best respects to them all.

Remember me to all Clude people & parkmore also to all my neighbors & well wishers especle [*especially*] Jack Burke & Mis & Patt Cannavan & Misis & family and I am so sorrow for Thomas Killela & Patt Callop[?] Death. May the Lord Have Merrcy on them. There is a lot of sudden Deathe heare now for the sun is verry Hot.

(d) Dear father & Mother I am sending you a bit of my Hair in remembrenc of me. It got So dark I think to long to delay the letter to get my likness but I will send it in the next letter. The Country is agrean [*agreeing*] fine with me & I like itt will [*it well*]. I go to Mass every Sunday a nine clock and to vespers at night & so does Patt so ye neadend [*needn't*] be uneasy atall about us. This is the finest Country in the wourld for young people that takes care of themselves. I would like that some of the youngerst of that Country would Come out hear. I cannot ask anny body when I have no sister but I wish I had & I would not leave her 24 hours there but anny boddy that likes to come out let them wright to me at once.

(e) Dear John & Winny

I drop you a few lines hoping that year [*ye are*] fine & in good health as this leave me in att preasant thank God. Winny I am sure that you ar getting plenty to do now for its often I think how do you mannage it atall. I have far bitter [*better*] times of it now at servis than I had there but I feel verry lonely on Sunday. When I see all the Girls gone to see ther Mother I must go to my bed room & Cry my fill.

(f) Dear Winney let me know how all my Cousins doing & also Mrs Burke & Thos & the Children & also Mr & Mis Goley of Balrobuic & not forgetting Richard & Mistrs & Mike Bawn & Patt Burke & Missy & Son & of coors [*course*] Miko Hession Wife & family & now all the fathers & Mothers or did Mary McHugh die yet. Wright Me a letter all about them or does Sibby Dively wright home & if she does send me her adress. I hope to see & mes [*?miss*] the lot of thim yet.

(g) John I asked for my father & mother likness. I hope you will help me to get it from them & do not forget to send me Martin Fitzpatrics adress. I will surely wright to you once a Month & let you do the same. I have no more to say but do not neglect my father for god sake.

(h) I Must Conclude with fond Love remaining yous truely & Loveing Daughter & Sister for ever

B Burke I Be[?]

P.S. +++++ God buy [*good bye*]

(Bu 2)

The Mountview House  
June the 19: 1882.

My Dear father & mother brother & sisters

(a) I am just taking the Oppertunity of wrighting you a few lines for I

know you Oe [*?owe*] me one & one time borrowed a nother & so on but now I must do it hoping to fiend ye all in good health as the departure of this leaves me & my brother in good Health thank God for his Kind merrcy to us all.

(b) Dear father & mother I Hope you got the order that Patt send you. It was 5 pounds from me & the remnd [*remainder*] from himself when—send it I said I would—the next mail. Yea must Excuse me father this is not like Home. One day delayes a Mounth & I couldent Help it but never mind I Hope it all right. I send you a pound John for yourselve for I know & I must say that your the onely friend I have in that part of the wourld. The all have given me for a bit of paper but you. Never mind John God is good. I constantle watch the postman 2wice a day for my father and Mary Letters but its all in vain.

(c) My Dear John I must ask you not to forget my Mother or father for wourld [*world*]. Take good car of them while you Have them for *the ar* the are the nearest friends John. But God Help the Lost Lambs that is far away from them but not forgetting them night or morning nor never will. But I Hope my father is all over illness now & not forgetting My Mother Head. Be careful & get her to keep Herself well raped [*wrapped*] up in boots. Not forgetting my sister Winnifred & my One Dear Mary An & Delia which I am Longing for the day that I will be gone down the Bay to meet them with the Help of God.

(d) Dear parents I am nearly too [*two*] years Landed in this Country & I never yet meet with anny body that I new at Home but Brine Conner from Oram [*?Oranmore*]. He is living within 5 munits [*minutes*] walk of where I am in the town & is Married to a girle from his one [*own*] place att home & has got one baby boy named William. He is sending His best wishes & respects to his Aunt & all his cousins & if the send anny messag in the return of this note I will kindly [*kindly*] give it to him. He hasent heard from His cousin Margret Stanton this Long time. He wants to know does she Wrighte home to her mother.

(e) Now I got a few Letters from Patt. Collins from townsivillia [*Townsville*]. He is getting on all right he will be Coming to Brisbane shortly. & I got a few Letters from Bridget Burke & Maggie Conner from Bunderberg [*Bundaberg*]. The are all right. Bridget Burke is married with 6 mounth to a police & the tell me that Maggie Conner is gone to be married next mounth to a Carpender by traid. I wrote a Letter to Malicki [*Malachy*] Lenighen but I got no answer yet. I am expecting a Letter from Patt & John Burke this Long time & I cannot get it so do not forget to send us their adress for P Patt is Crankey [*cranky*] untill gets their Letter.

(f) & Lett me know How is Libby Dively doing in America. I Hope You will send me Her adress in the next Letter John & if Mary Lenighan does wright Home will you remember me to her & also if Martin Fitzpatrick

Was Here His wages would be 15 shillings a day. When I Landed I could not tell him How the Country was untill I see some of it & uncle been away in the bush He could not exatle [*exactly*] tell How the town was but I am verry sorrow that He went to America so Suddon. There is a bad account of it. This is a good Country. Patt is Earning over a shilling A hour & is a verry good & kind brother & is doing Well. I am sure His father would be Delighted to see Him Now. He grew taller & stouter. I got thin [*omitted: and*] bolder. So yea have to Look out when we goe Home.

(g) He Has Got His phostgraf taken to send Home & he Dosent Like to send it without mine & I Cannot delay the Letter Now but yea will Have them the next Mail. But my Mother musent cry or but [*?put*] Herself about when she sees them. I would Have send them a long time ago but I dont want Her to cry anny. She will be surprised wh[en] she see them.

(h) John will you take [*erased: ?a pen*] to my Onely sister for me & tell that I Have a few Word to say to Her if I new [*knew*] that she would axcept kindlie [*accept kindly*] to do it. But I am sure that My Letter would be bourned now but always after a storm their Come a Came [*calm*]. I have something to say If onely get a few Lines from Her. Realy I did not think tat she would give[?] to say to all the people that she woundend escorth [*wouldn't escort*] me to the station the morning I Left. It built a rock in my Harth [*heart*] that shall never be seperated. My tears often blinds me to think of it. Patt is verry Angery to [*very angry too*] for it for He Knowes How it Hurts Me. Dear John it is Hard Lines to Have serve & wait on anny body & to think of a Comfortable Home & of a father & mother.

(i) Dear John

I am 40 Miles from My uncle. I feal Quare without a Home to goe to when on My sunday out. I often wish to Have you out Heare. I ame verry strange out Here. I cannot make free with any body. I often Have a Walk with Patt & Has a long yarn of Home. He is verry Kind became a steady fellow since He Left Home & also I could not expect My father to be a bit better than My Uncle. His wife & children is all right it is a nice place to go but it is to [*too*] far away but My brother is near me & comes to see me 2 or 3 times a week. We often Have some fun talking of the Old times at Home.

(j) Dear John you wanted to know How do I Like the Country or what sort of people are heare. John that Queston I cannot answer. There is all sortes black & white misted & married together & Living in pretty Cotages Just the same as the white people. Thire is English Irish French German Italian black Chinease and not forgetin the Juse [*Jews*]. There are verry rich fancy John white girls marrid to a black man & Irish girls to [*too*] & to Yellow Chinaman with their Hair platted down there[?] black back. Sow

[so] you see that girls dont care what the do in this Country. The would do anny think [*anything*] before the worke & a great Lot of them does worse[?] than that same. & this is a fine Country for a Young person that can take care of himselfe.

(k) Now John I must ask you for all my Aunts & Uncles Cousins friends & Neighbours sweet Harts & all also did Cannopy die yet. Now John I must Conclude Hoping that You will send me as Long a Letter as I have send you & Lett me know all about Home. Dirrect Your Letter as[?] Patt told you for me, I Have more[?] to say but remaning yours fond sister for ever

BDB

good buy with ++++++++ to all the children.

(l) Per Berer [?]  
Queensland for Ever  
& Augus un ballybug  
go braugh  
[*agus an baile beag go bráth*: 'and the small town for ever']

(Bu 3)

Brisbane  
May the 5: 1884

My Dearest father & mother

(a) I for once in 12 mounths sit to have a few words of conversation with you by a message which I must say is my hardest Job to get through. I got Your letter about 10 days ago which I often wanderd ware You dead or what became of You. As for my Brother & sisters I Quite forgive them as they have got children of their owne to [?look two] & me a child or a lost lam far away from home & nation. To think my father & mother at the end of a long year could cast a thout on me & wright me a letter. Wasent it a chearing present to a true hart from the Dearest frind.

(b) Well now I must thank god for his kindness to spare you they health to do so & also for my own health which I am enjoying grand. I would like to know what did do to my Brother Jack & Winney. One of those fine days I shall encourage some of those girls away from them as I intend to live an old maid. John I heare they ar growing up fine girls like their Aunt Bidy as Mary A used to say when she used to call me they Black Top & denie her father & mother & tell her mother Winney to go home to Clude & take Dinea & leave Vronkey [*?pet names for Mary Ann's sisters Delia and Bridget*] with her. Dont I often wish I could see them now & that strange girl Keatley. I hope she is lik her ant Bidy as well.

(c) I suppose my Sister Mary hasent got a Bit of paper to soil on a sister. I shanent write again untill I write to my boy Martin. I am glad to here

what a fine stout woman Mary became & also I am sorrow for her sister in law Mrs Sulvan of Galway for they wreched life her Mother in law is given her. I here she abuses her fine. I hope M. Walsh is well & as for his sones I suppose they ar fine men now. I am comming home one of those days to have a look & a fine old talk to they lot of Yea & father. You never told anny thing about my uncle Larrance [*Laurence*] what became of him & family. I suppose M. A. is a grown up woman & Mick[?] a big man now. Also my uncle Ml how ever is he. I suppose Bridget & Henery ar grown up as well also Young William. I dare say I would see a change their now & not forgetting Dear old Mrs Goley which I must call her. How is she & has she got onely one boy & the Dear little soul I expect she has onely 2 girls. How ar they all & not forgetting Aunt Bidy or Aunt Peg also all my cousins & friends & not forgetting the old neighbours of sweet Balroback beg. I suppose it as green & as wet as ever.

(d) I am glad that stock is standing a good price but I am sorrow for the corn & & things to get to such a loe price. I suppose the potatoes ar still getting Black. There is no such a thing as a black potae in Queensland & they native potates we can plant the stalks like gerreamen [*geranium*] slips at home in pots. They plant them the same here in the fields & potatoes grows as large as turnips at home. These ar Called sweet potatoes. We have the English potates the same as the home potatoes & turnips & all sorte of vegetables the same as home & anny amount of Beef & mutton & also of meat. Beef is 3½ a lb mutton the same veal & pork from 4d to 6 pence a pound tea 1s. 10d a pound sugar 3 a lb. potatoes ar 1s. a stone to 1s. 6 flour 1½d a pound fowles 5s a pair geese 14s a pair turkeys pound to 25s a pair & every thing is much dear this year than ever fore [*for*] the summer been so hot.

(e) It was the hottest summer in Queensland with the last 20 years. You must think it was hot when the plaits on the dresser should be handled with a cloth. I dont think we had a wet day with the last 12 mounths. We might have a storm or 3 since but not a wet day. Altogether they men cannot sit Idle in this country from wet weather. Now the summer is over & the winter comming on I am so glad. I did feel the heat so much boath night & day we could not sleep. It was Quite enough for us to keep the *the* sweet of our faces [*sweat off our faces*].

(f) I suppose Yea had a cold winter of it home & I dare say father & Mother you had a lonely Christmas of it, & so had I. My brother Patt is out the Bush with the last 14 Mounths. I expected him in at Christmas time & his Job was not finished & did not come. He is comming into town in 3 mounth time but I here from every week. Dont think for a moment its for anny gammling he is in the Bush. No he is a good boy & works 10 hours a day for 12s & is saving a lot of money. There ar young fellows in this town with they last 10 years & they ar not worth a penney & that is



FIGURE 21. 'The old-sod': Burke's, Balroobuck Beg (watercolour by Patsy Lynch, photographed by Mrs. Nancy Lynch).

not like poor Patt. He works hard for it & knows how to save it. A lot of [*them*] Camps in the Bush in tents & feels as happy as the day is long & each man takes it in turn a week cooking & dont they have nice tea.

(g) Now I must tell you some about my uncle. He came to pay me a visit about 2 mounths ago. He feel alright & also all they family. He was saying something about gone home in a year or 2 if he would be spared. I might goe that is if Patt comes well [*we'll*] all goe & see the old sod once more. But I dont suppose I could live there now altho its the deepest thought in my heart does the water still come into the Yard in winter times & I suppose all the Visstoers [*visitors*] they same as ever. Dont I often think of them times.

(h) Well now about my owne self I am in grand health & is enjoying Queensland verry much. I am sorrow that I hadent come 5 years before I did come I would have a lot of money now. That is when my mother used call me a foulsh girl & now every body tell me I have got too much sence but it dosent matter. When I grow older & save some more money I can live Quite happy then. I am sending you one [*on*] three pounds for to drink my health & once more. Well now my Dearest father & Mother I hope your are well & also My Dear old Brother John & Winney. I am making none difference nor never will for I know that Winney will be as kind to You father & Mother as if she was a daughter of Your owne.

(i) And does my poor Mother get as bad a head ache as ever. My head gets verry bad sometimes eather they heat or the cold does not agree with it. I have to nearly always keep a hat one in the house & its makes me often think of my poor Mothers head. They Docters say its from the cold in the feet. I wore cloth boots & I got a wetting from Getting cougth in thunder Storm & got my feet wett & a dreadfull bad cold in the head & eever since then my head is tender but now I am carefull. Thunder storms is verry dangese [*dangerous*] in this countrey they come in less than a min-nits notice. So Mind You Mother be sure & keep warm boots one & the Feaver is verry bad in this climat & there is a lot of people dinen [*dying*]. Some days ther is from 2 to 3 deaths in the Hospital thoes that has no home to go to & a lot more from they homes as well. If you neglect Yourself in this country Your as soon Done for.

(j) Now I Must talk to the Girls which I am glad to here that they filling up My old home. Try & bring them up well John & dond keep them at home from School & Winny mind & give a Mothers advise to each of them for you know that it takes a girl all her time to keep her place. I often think of My Mother now how she used to talk to me. This is the place that foolish girls ar knowing. & dont forget to get them boots. Well now I suppose you will be tirde of reading my letter. I must conclud with fond Love & remaining your daughter & a loving sister & a sincere Aunt untill Death.

B. Burke.

To her father & mother M. & P. Burke. +++++

(k) Wright soone & send me all the Nuse. You never tell me a thing about any body. Let me Now about every body. +++++ Good by all. Kisses +++++

How is Clude & J. & P.