

THE FINDING OF KATIE

**The story of
Catherine Mary Quillinan
and the Quillinan families
And
Their place in the tragedy at
MAKOHINE, New Zealand
Before and after
13th November, 1893.**

Contributions from

Allen Shaw
Jan and Ian Shorrocks
Mick Quillinan
J Tuckey
The Whanganui Chronicle
The Paraekaretu Express

Michael Coleman
Phyllis Timms
E G Child
Peter Weston

Makohine Disaster November 1893

The events recorded here follow three pathways of discovery; my own and descendants and families of Patrick and Thomas Quillinan. In particular are **Michael Coleman of Whanganui, New Zealand, and Jan and Ian Shorrocks from Grafton, New South Wales**. Our paths began at different points but have finally met. What follows is a combination of our efforts.

The Scene

Briefly, the story is about the death of a woman and four children in 1893 a few metres from the then proposed site of the Makohine Viaduct near the bush township of Ohingaiti. The area was then the leading edge of a settlement push inland with new road, bridge and railway constructions combined with sawmilling and land clearing for agriculture. Living conditions were generally primitive and often make-shift.



10am Monday Morning, 13th November, 1893.

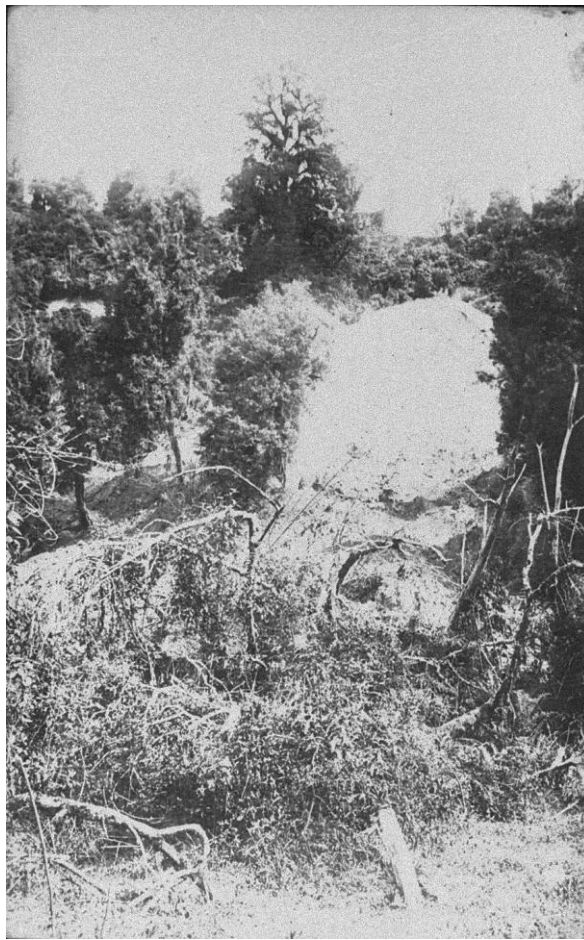
At a point close to and west of the Main Road North and about 200 metres south of the proposed Makohine Viaduct site, the Public Works Department had excavated an auxiliary tunnel high above the public highway. The operation removed earth from the Makohine Railway Tunnel and associated rail approaches on the western face of the operation and dumped the spoil through the auxiliary tunnel into the Makohine Ravine.

Local bush, road and railway workers lived in tents or small huts along the roadways and the Makohine area was dotted with many such dwellings. Two Quillinan families were living directly below the mullock pile.

Wet weather had soaked the earth pile until it became unstable causing the mullock to surge down the sub-vertical face of the Makohine Ravine.

Caught in a huge mud rush from the Public Works Department tunnel 70 metres above the Makohine Valley, Hannah Quillinan and three of her children and a niece, died under a fast moving wall of mud and logs.

The lives of the two remaining families of brothers Patrick and Thomas Quillinan were drastically altered from that day on. The descendants of the two families were separated for the next 119 years and had no contact until February 2012.



A view west up to the auxiliary tunnel site.

This view was taken after the landslip.

Photograph by P.De Loree.

The families of the two Quillinan brothers, Thomas and Patrick, were devastated. The tragedy of this event was self evident and understood by all at the time. As years passed by little evidence remained of that fateful day in 1893 although the memory of it persisted in the older members of the local community.



A view north at Makohine photographed the day after the tragedy.

In the background the Makohine Ravine is shown prior to the construction of the Viaduct. The first child from the left is Mick Quillinan standing with his father Patrick Quillinan. The second child is Mick's half brother Johney.

The third child at the far right is Catherine (Katie) Quillinan, the sole surviving child of Thomas Quillinan. The cottage is one of the two Quillinan homes and is at the very edge of the landslip.

Photographer (Peter) De Loree, formerly of from Dunedin and Christchurch, was resident in Ohingaiti and advertising his photography business at the time of this tragedy.

Paraekatetu Express. Friday December 8th, 1893.

Photography.

PROFESSOR De LOREE & SON, late of Dunedin and Christchurch, with 24 years experience in the art, are taking photographs in Ohingaiti at the low price of **15s Per Dozen**.

ENAMELLED CABINETS, Equal to any in the Colony.

Only for a few days longer: so, lose no time. Secure the Shadow ere the Substance Fades.

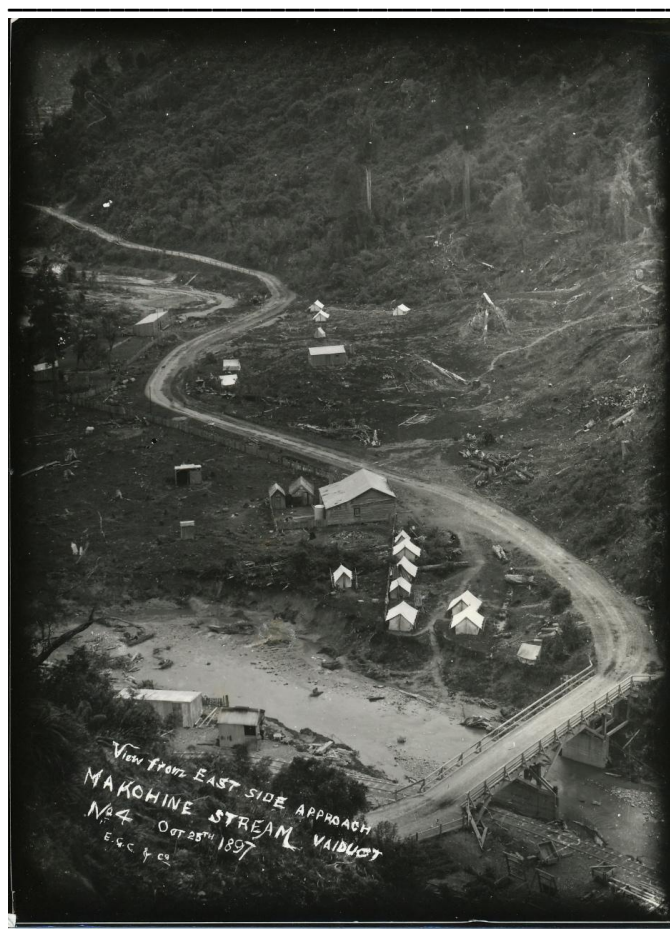
ROLL UP, ROLL UP! NOW IS YOUR CHANCE OR PERHAPS NEVER.

The survivors

Thomas Quillinan was left with a young daughter, **Katie (Catherine)**. He had lost his wife, three children and an irreplaceable family life. His life from here on it still not fully accounted for, but he ended his days at Taihape in 1917. His Death Certificate noted that he had no family. His surviving daughter **Katie (Catherine)** was to be raised and educated by the Nuns at the Sacred Heart Convent School in Whanganui, and, as far as the other relatives were to know, 'disappeared' from view.

Patrick Quillinan lost a daughter but was able to maintain his family life. **Patrick**, and his wife Catherine, re-established themselves in a house about a kilometre south of the disaster site. A daughter, **Jane**, was born in January 1894 to be followed over the next few years by **Isobel, James and Alice**.

After Patrick Quillinan died at Makohine in 1899 his widow and children remained at the Makohine Village Settlement and the children attended the Mangaonoho Primary School. The oldest child, Mick, eventually worked for 8 years in Ohingaiti at the bakery before the family sold their Makohine property and took up land nearby at Poukiore.



This is an 1897 view of the Makohine by E.G. Child and showing the landslip site. Workmen's tents and cottages still dot the area four years later. Heffernan's Boarding House is the only substantial building.

ATL (Alexander Turnbull Library) No. 35465

Heffernan's Boarding House existed at the time Patrick Quillinan and family lived opposite the Loughnane farm property and during the construction of the Makohine Viaduct.

Prior to that, and at the time of the 1893 Landslip, the Boarding House was owned and operated by **Marion Wheeler**. She is mentioned in the newspaper accounts relating to events following the recovery of bodies. The road bridge at this site, which crossed the Makohine Stream, was known as **Wheeler's Bridge**.

The Auxiliary Tunnel In 1960 I had followed up on local information by locating the auxiliary tunnel which was hidden in the regrown bush. Although the timber supports had been removed or rotted away, the tunnel was still as it had been left in 1893.



An (August)1961 photograph taken after finding the auxiliary tunnel the previous year.
Left to Right: Allen Shaw, David Shaw and John McGuckin. Photographer: Colin Robinson.

Mana Ross

While attending secondary school in Whanganui in 1961 I met 93 year old Mana Ross who had been working in the district nearly 70 years earlier and at the time that the landslide occurred. He was one of many workers called to assist in recovering the buried victims. Mana remembered all their names and gave me a graphic first-hand account of the events of that day.

Mick Quillinan

In 1964 I was able to get even closer those dramatic events when my friend, Peter Weston, took me to meet Mick Quillinan and his sister Alice at Poukiore. Peter was much better acquainted with district families than me and must have been aware of the significance of who we were meeting. I don't think I fully appreciated at the time that Mick was a direct survivor of the landslide but I was amazed when he produced two photographs taken at the time. He allowed me to take them away to copy and I returned the originals by post. I never met him again.

Michael Coleman writes: "Uncle Mick, in his youth, was a Baker at Ohingaiti up until his mother moved to the farm up on The Hill (Poukiore). He worked at '**Buckley's General store & Bakery**' and I can remember him once baking some bread for us when we stayed with him and his brother and sister at Mangaonoho. It was good too!"

This is a 1910 photograph of Mick Quillinan at Ohingaiti in his baker's apron and with the bakery delivery cart. On the cart is the late Jim Tuckey who supplied the photograph in 1964.



The Paraekaretu Express

During 1963 and 1964 my researches took me to Wellington and the Alexander Turnbull Library. Here I discovered the **Paraekaretu Express**, a newspaper published in Hunterville by **Joseph Ivess**. The events of the landslide were written up in detail by Ivess and those articles have reproduced in their entirety as a separate document. Although many newspapers reported these events, many of those accounts were reproduced from the Hunterville newspaper

The story of the two brothers and their families

has been the subject of a family research by **Michael Coleman**. Michael Coleman is the son of Isobel and grandson of Patrick Quillinan.

Here are extracts from Michael's letter dated March, 2009.

Arriving in New Zealand

A quick resume. It seems the Quillinan family came out (to New Zealand) in 3 'batches'.

The first being **Matthew**, born 1855 and his brother **Thomas** (b.1863) somewhere around 1877-8. Matthew married in late Oct 1879.

The second group: Matthew's **Father** and **Mother** and **4 more siblings** arrived (nominated by Matthew) in 1879. I have presumed Thomas came with his older brother as he is not on the Passenger List with his parents and other siblings in 1879 – he was however here to witness his sister's marriage to John Neilson in 1882.

Finally, my Grandfather **Patrick** (b.1861) arrived in May 1888 with a new wife and a son (Johney) from a previous marriage. Patrick migrated from Glasgow where he had worked in the Shipyards as an Iron and Brass Foundryman. (I have a couple of his bits of brass-work.) Patrick had been pretty busy....he had moved to Scotland (Tipperary was the home of his parents) and married by 18 years, had two children and was widower by the time he was 25 and in 2 years was arriving in New Zealand. On arrival he seems to have teamed up with his younger brother Thomas who, by now, was also married.

Patrick and Catherine (my Grandparents) and Thomas and Hannah worked on various Government Works. Beginning with the Railway Line in the Manawatu Gorge where they both had children born to them (Registrar, Woodville) and also in the Nelson Area where again they both had daughters born to them... (in Waimea South in 1891) and then on to Makohine with its tragic outcome.

An article printed in the Whanganui Chronicle on Wednesday 10th November 1993.

Page 12. Section : Community.

Last resting Place of family Found.

A Whanganui man has finally found the grave of family members killed in a landslide at Makohine a century ago.

Local legend in the Ohingaiti area holds that the bodies of Johannah Quillinan, her children John, Thomas and Hannah, and her niece Poppy have never been recovered from the hillside which claimed their lives on November 13th, 1893.

But Michael Coleman, son of Poppy's sister, Isobel, says his family has always been certain the bodies were recovered and laid to rest in a cemetery, but details had been forgotten.

Hundred year old newspaper articles lead them to Heads Road Cemetery in Wanganui, where Michael eventually found a headstone commemorating Johannah and her children. The broken headstone had lain, overgrown and concealed, in an old part of the cemetery for years.

The tragic story of the young family's death began about 10am on the day of the slip, when the children were playing in a tree near the road at Makohine, where their fathers were working on earthworks for the railway. Onlookers heard a loud cracking noise from the slope above and the children screaming, according to the

Whanganui Chronicle of 15th November, 1893. Johannah Quillinan ran to her door to see the slip descending on them.

“The maternal instinct prompted her to run and save the children,” says the Chronicle, “but when she was within 10 yards of them, they were overwhelmed and, a falling tree striking her, she was also knocked down and buried. The slip is about six chain wide and 10ft deep on the road and was caused by the weight of earth evacuated from tunnels and cuttings on the railway works.”

A large party of men worked all day to recover the bodies. It wasn't until 5pm that Johannah and three of the children were found. The fourth child was found two hours later. The Chronicle later reported that the bodies were taken to Hunterville for an inquest and subsequently brought by train to Whanganui for the funeral. The headstone found by Michael Coleman tells the rest of the story:

“In Loving Memory of Hannah, beloved wife of

Thomas Quillinan, died 13th November, 1893.

Also John, Thomas and Hannah,

children of the above.

R.I.P.”

Missing from the names on the headstone is that of Poppy, Michael's Aunt. He surmises that she was buried in a different plot in the cemetery, probably with her Grandfather. “We couldn't find a headstone for them. A lot of graves didn't have headstones because people couldn't afford them,” he says. Rumour has it, he adds, that Johannah's headstone was paid for by the Railways.

Michael says the death of nearly all his children was a shock from which Johannah's husband, Thomas Quillinan, never really recovered. “The one remaining child, Catherine, was brought up in the Sacred Heart Convent (in Wanganui) as an orphan, because he couldn't cope.”

Finding Katie

The big mystery in this story is related to the surviving and only remaining child of Thomas Quillinan, Catherine Mary Quillinan (Katie). After losing his wife and three older children, Thomas was unable to raise his remaining child. All that was known was that this child lived with and was raised by the nuns at Sacred Heart Convent School in Whanganui and possibly moved to Australia sometime after that. That was all that was known of Katie by the New Zealand family until February 2012.

While over from Australia and holidaying in at my mother's residence in Whanganui in February 2012 I picked up a small volume which was the St Joseph Convent School Centenary booklet 1880-1980. The first page to fall open revealed two group photos dated 1899 and 1903 and both prints had the individuals identified. And there was Katie Quillinan!!!

I immediately contacted Michael Coleman and suggested he contact the Church and enquiry about the origin of the two booklet photos. This he did and the originals of those two photos were on file. In the same week Michael was informed that an email had arrived from Grafton in New South Wales from the grandson (Ian Shorrocks) of Katie Quillinan and enquiring about any details that might be available re his grandmother. And the rest is history. The two families are now in contact after 119 years. We have discovered that Katie moved to Australia in 1906 aged 17 years. After spending some time as a Governess she married George Frederick Cousins and they had four children. The surviving child of this family, Phyllis, has just turned a fit and healthy 90 years of age and is living in Sydney.

The Australian family organised a trip to take Phyllis to New Zealand where a family reunion was arranged at Whanganui in July of 2012. This included tours to the Woodville area, to the disaster site at Makohine and to Thomas Quillinan's grave at Taihape. The Whanganui Chronicle recorded Phyllis's journey to visit the Old Whanganui Cemetery in Heads Road and the grave of her grandmother, two uncles and an aunt.



Second Cousins Michael Coleman and Phyllis Timms at the Quillinan grave site.

The Heads Road Cemetery, Whanganui, July 2012.

Outlining the 'missing' years of in the life of Katie Quillinan are **recollections by her daughter Phyllis Timms (nee Cousins), May 2012.**

"Our mother, Katherine/Catherine, came to Australia on 8 August, 1906, travelling with twin sisters who were attending the same convent. The sisters Aunt was a Mrs Smith – referred to by Mum as Aunty Smithy – and they lived at Mandurama, a small township south west from Bathurst NSW.

Aunty Smithy arranged for Katherine to be a governess for a family in that area, however, Aunty Smithy's daughters told their mother that Katherine was not happy and was being badly treated by the family, despite everything appearing well, when Aunty Smithy visited. An unannounced visit indicated Katherine's true position, and she was taken back to Mandurama.

Katherine was encouraged by Aunty Smithy to sit for the NSW Teachers examination, and being an exceptional student as indicated by an article in the Wanganui newspaper when she was at the Convent in New Zealand, she gained a teaching position at nearby Molong. Later she was offered a position at a one teacher school situated on "Hillside", a large grazing property in the Bathurst area, owned by the Prior family. The Prior family took an interest in Katherine – she taught two of their children at the school. Later, Edie Prior was bridesmaid for Katherine.

During her time teaching at this school, she met George Frederick Cousins, where he was working as a shearer on "Hillside". Katherine was taken to watch the shearing with the Prior girls, and was asked "which shearer would you pick?" – second from the end was George Cousins, however, he was engaged at that time.

Sometime later, George Cousins took Katherine down to his parents' valley farm, to meet them. Pa Cousins ascertained that she could play the piano, and asked her to accompany the violinists, one of whom was his son, George.

They were married in Bathurst 23 December 1913. Katherine was still teaching when they were married.

Mrs Prior [Nan Prior] provided the wedding on Katherine's behalf.

George purchased a cottage in Bathurst where they lived for a short while before moving to Ilford, to a small sheep station, called "Westwood". It was here that their second child, Hazel was born. Thomas was born previously in Bathurst; Phyllis was born at Kandos; and Raymond born at Blackheath, all in the general area of Bathurst.

The family moved to Blackheath at the start of WWI to be with George's parents, Alfred Thomas Cousins and Harriet Marsden Cousins, as George's four youngest brothers, Athol, Algenon, Claude and Clive had gone to war.

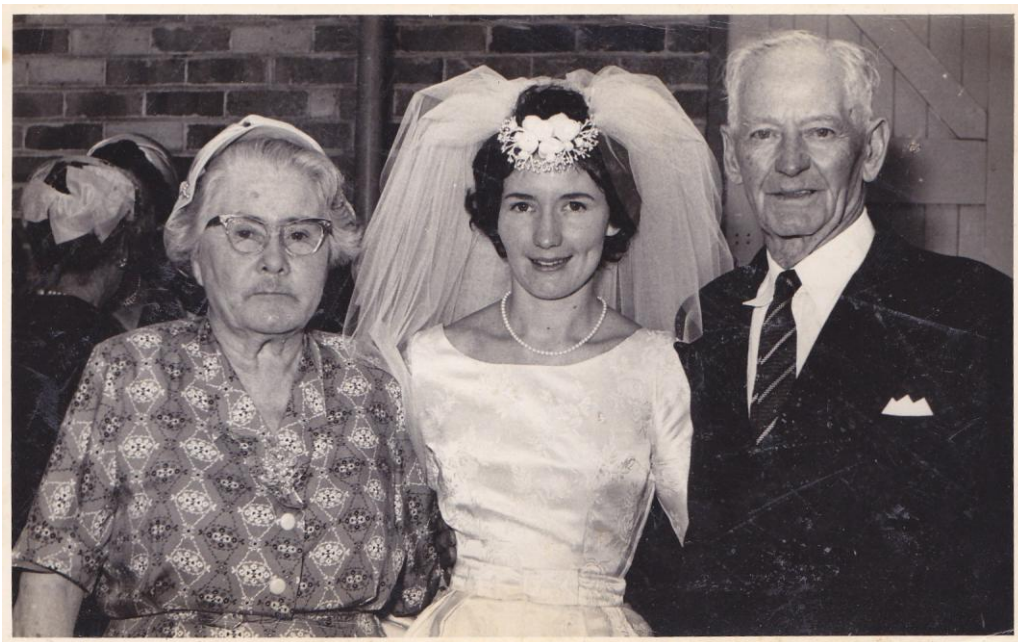
Later the family moved to “Braeside”, a residential property in Blackheath where they lived for approximately 11 years. In 1934, for family health reasons saw them moving to Kulnura, a farming area on the Central Coast of NSW, just north of Sydney and a much warmer and temperate climate.

Katherine and George purchased a 100 acre farm at Kulnura, which included the Post Office. George could work the farm, established with an apple orchard and Katherine ran the Post Office and telephone exchange.



The Post Office at Kulnura

They lived in Kulnura until the mid 1960's whereby they moved to Thornleigh, a northern suburb of Sydney, to be close to Phyllis and her family.



Katie Cousins (nee Quillinan) and husband George Cousins with granddaughter Beryl. 1962-63.

Katherine Mary Quillinan Cousins died in 1968.
George Frederick Cousins died in 1977.”

Journey to Australia

In November 2013 Michael and Jessie Coleman journeyed from New Zealand to join with Phyllis Timms and her family in Sydney to celebrate Phyllis’s 90th birthday.

The circle has been completed.