

Outstanding Pioneer Women

Agnes Allan (1794-1891): The first European woman to visit the Chathams

Agness Allan¹ was born in Ulster where her family had settled after leaving Ayrshire, in Scotland during the Stuart religious persecutions. Agness claimed that her family was related to the founder of the Allan line of steamers. The Allan Line was once the largest private shipping line in the world, being founded by Sir Hugh Allan (1810-1862).² No direct link has been found but there were relations in the area at the time so she could well be right.

She married John Allen who was born in 1791. After his parents died, he ran away, aged 9, to the Navy where he served on the *Speedy* (Lord Cochrane) and then as Able Seaman on the *Aboukir* (Captain Thomson). John was discharged in 1815 at the age of 18. He settled at Irvine, working as a weaver and agricultural labourer until 1820 when he married Agness Allan and moved to Kilmarnock.



JOHN ALLAN, 1811.

Agness did not change her name on marriage and family legend has it that, instead, John changed his, out of gallantry for his wife. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Scottish society in the Highlands suffered severely from the collapse of its system of chiefs and fighting clans. As the population increased, overcrowding occurred and subsistence farming did not meet food needs. In order to create space for sheep farming, many major landowners evicted crofters, sometimes burning their cottages.



MRS. J. ALLAN.

The Allans were weavers and small farmers, so were doubtless affected by these upheavals. In 1842, therefore, they emigrated to New Zealand with their four sons and three daughters. They were not simply seeking to escape the poverty and tense political situation; another reason for leaving was to found a church in which they could worship, in their own way, without interference. They were religious dissenters and had attended the Burgher Kirk, in Kilmarnock, one of many sects that split from the Church of Scotland during the 18th century.

¹ Agness was the 3rd great grandmother of the Rylance sisters.

² http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/allan_hugh_11E.html

On 4 July 1842, John and Agness and the children sailed from Cumbrae on the barque *New Zealand*, arriving in Nelson³ on 3 November 1842. John apparently had a small property at Richmond. They moved on to Otago in 1844, over three years before the official settlement began. This was largely as a result of difficulties with land title in Nelson, challenging economic conditions and the so-called Wairau Massacre.⁴ The voyage south was not quite as expected. Soon after leaving Nelson, John Allan fell ill, and the ship put into Picton to consult a doctor, who was on board a man-of-war which was anchored there. As this boat was also going on to Otago, and then to the Chatham Islands, and as John had been a man-of-war's man, the captain offered to take him and his wife with them so that he might have the attendance of the ship's doctor during the voyage. After leaving Picton, a fair wind for the Chathams sprang up, so the captain decided to go there first. Consequently, Agness Allan was the first white woman to visit the Chatham Islands. It is not clear whether she saw this as an achievement!



The Allans initially lived at Andersons Bay but in 1850 moved to the Taieri where John built a house on the farm he called Bellfield. He became the first elder of the East Taieri Presbyterian Church and in 1854 a member of the first Otago Presbytery.

He died in August 1863.

Agness Allan survived her husband by twenty-eight years, and died at Bellfield on 10th April, 1891, at the advanced age of ninety- six years. Joseph Anderson has described her thus:

She was a typical woman for a new country. Of rather under-sized stature, she was active and wiry, maintaining her activity of mind and body until the end of her long life. When I was a child of two-and-a- half years of age I was staying at Bellfield, when Grandmother took me home to Port Chalmers. We left the Taieri in the morning with the bullock sledge that was going as far as Dunedin, where we stayed the night with James Allan. During the afternoon I got lost - a frequent occurrence. As there was a great fear that I might wander into the surrounding scrub and bush, a search party was organised. When I was found, Grandmother rushed up and caught me in her arms, declaring: "I will never lose sight of him again until I place him in the charge of his mother." Next day when we again

³ Note there was another pioneering Allan family consisting of David Allan (1838-1920) and his wife Agnes Allan (1830-1915) who was a great horse rider and midwife based in Collingwood. No connection has yet been made.

⁴ This incident occurred on 17 June and had a profound impact in terms of settler uncertainty despite the Maori having right on their side.

started on our journey she said I walked bravely for a mile or two, and when I grew tired she carried me on her back for the remaining seven miles! All I remember of the journey was that when we entered Port Chalmers, my brother John, with another small boy, came to meet us, and from my high elevation on grandmother's back I was throwing down a biscuit from a paper bag to each of the boys.

Some time after we had removed to Waiwera she decided on coming out to see us. Without sending word, she stepped onto the public coach that passed Bellfield in the morning and arrived at the Waiwera Hotel after dark on the same day, where she stayed overnight. Next morning an obliging shepherd who had his sheep rounds in our direction piloted her over some deep creeks and through the open tussock country for the three miles from the hotel to Kelvingrove.

In the early Taieri life she was looked upon by her neighbours as truly 'a mother in Israel.' Whenever sickness occurred the cry at once arose: "Go for Mrs Allan." I can remember seeing gathered at Bellfield a number of mothers getting their children vaccinated.

When her death took place the attendance at her funeral was one of the largest of any that ever took place in the Taieri, and was probably exceeded only by that of her son, James Allan, of Hopehill, who died a few months after his mother.⁵

⁵ James Allan Thompson, the Taieri Allans, 1929, NZ Bible Society, p71

Husband Parents



John Allen
1720 - 1799



Isabella
- 1799

Wife Parents



Joseph ALLAN
1756 - 1846



Dorothy Woods
1759 - 1838

Husband

[+ Add another spouse](#)

Wife

[+ Add another spouse](#)



JOHN ALLAN

BIRTH: 1791 in Ulster, Northern Ireland
DEATH: Aug 1863 in East Taieri, Otago, New Zealand

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AGNESS ALLAN

BIRTH: 1794 in Ulster, Northern Ireland
DEATH: 10 Apr 1891 in East Taieri, Otago, New Zealand

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Relationship Events

Marriage

1820 in Irvine, Ayrshire, Scotland

Children

[+ Add a child](#)



Janet ALLAN

Daughter

BIRTH 1821
in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire,
Scotland

DEATH 01 Mar 1899 in East
Taieri, Otago, New Zealand



James Hopehill Allan

Son

BIRTH 21 Jan 1824
in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire,
Scotland

DEATH 05 Jul 1891 in East
Taieri, Otago, New Zealand



Isabella Allan

Daughter

BIRTH 1826
in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire,
Scotland

DEATH 1905 in Otago, New
Zealand



Joseph Allan

Son

BIRTH 1828
in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire,
Scotland

DEATH 28 Mar 1878 in East
Taieri, Otago, New Zealand



John ALLAN

Son

BIRTH Mar 1831 in Irvine,
Ayrshire, Scotland

DEATH 28 Jan 1901
in Bellfield, East Taieri,
Otago, New Zealand



Agnes ALLAN

Daughter

BIRTH 4 Jul 1833
in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, ,
Scotland

DEATH 27 Jun 1922
in Mosgiel, Greater Dunedin



William Allan

Son

BIRTH abt 1836
in Stewarton, Ayrshire

DEATH 1 Dec 1866
in Otago, New Zealand



Ann ALLAN

Daughter

BIRTH abt 1843
in Stewarton, Ayrshire

DEATH