

## *This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'*



### **From Darlington to Wellington: The Sad Story of Isabella Fry**

*An extended version of this story can also be found on the website of the [Braund Society](#) and has appeared in their journal. This story includes details of a suicide, which some readers may find distressing.*

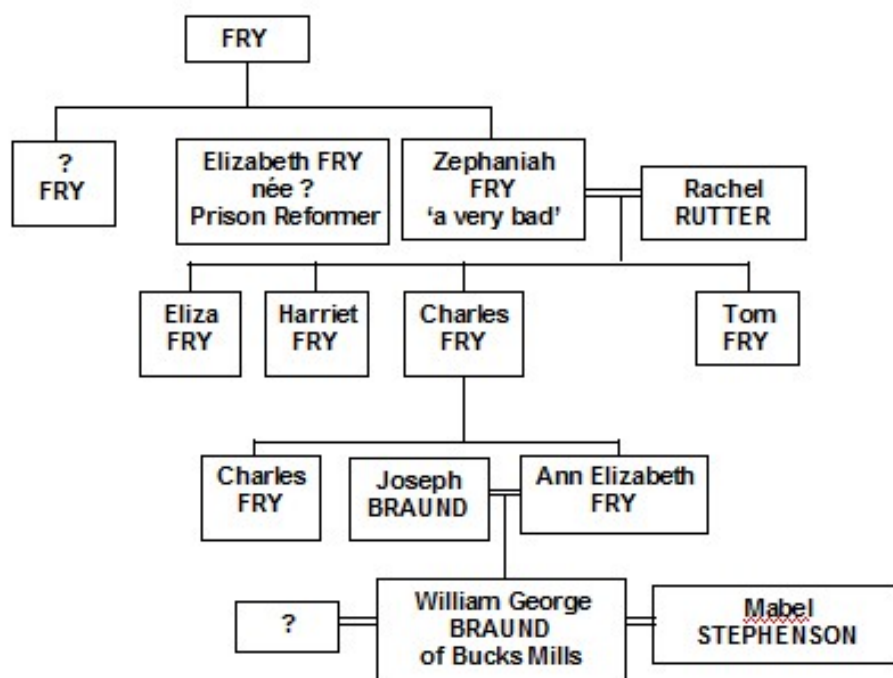
This is the story of one woman, who travelled from Darlington in the north of England to Wellington, New Zealand in the early years of the twentieth century. It began with some family memorabilia relating to the Braund family from the little fishing hamlet of Bucks Mills, on the north Devon coast. There was a photograph of William George Braund, a series of letters and diaries from William's wife Mabel and William's baptismal certificate, which showed his parents to be Joseph and Ann Elizabeth Braund.



**William George Braund**

Along with the documentation, was the rumour that this family were related to Elizabeth Fry, the renowned, early nineteenth century, Quaker prison reformer. Like all good family stories this needed to be taken with a hefty pinch of salt.

There was a piece of paper in the collection that expanded on the Fry connection. It read 'Rachel Rutter married Zephaniah Fry of 30 Castle Street, Bristol - our grandmother. They had four children :- Eliza, Harriet, Charles, Tom. Grandfather was Charles Fry and they had 2 children, Charles and Anne E Fry. Anne El Fry married Captain Braund. Zephaniah Fry was our great-grandfather - he was a very bad man. Zephaniah Fry's brother was husband to Elizabeth Fry.' There was also a marriage certificate for William Braund and his wife Mabel. Surprisingly, this revealed him to be a widower, something that the family were not aware of. This enabled us to draw up a basic family tree and we sought to verify the pedigree and the rumours with documentary evidence.



The research was then put aside for some time. It was when we began an extraction of all post 12 January 1858 wills for the Braund family that we had a break-through. The wills' index included an entry for an Isabella Braund of Wellington, New Zealand, wife of William George Braund, master mariner, whose estate was allegedly valued at £3228.

A New Zealand contact obtained a copy of the will. Isabella left everything to her husband, who swore that the estate was worth less than £100. Now we had the New Zealand clue, we realised that this was probably where the first marriage took place. This proved to be the case. We sent for the certificate and when it arrived, it revealed a new Fry connection; Isabella's maiden name was Fry. Unlike English marriage certificates, those from New Zealand give mother's names as well as father's, so we could see that Isabella's parents were Charles Rutter Fry and Mary Dorothy Tweddell. It also showed that the marriage took place just six weeks before Isabella's death and that one of the witnesses was an Elizabeth B Rutter. Isabella was thirty nine years old, older than usual for a woman's first marriage.

The next step was to obtain Isabella's death certificate, again these are much more informative than those for England and Wales. Isabella died of heart failure and there had been a coroner's inquest. The certificate also showed that Isabella had only been in New Zealand for three months. We had found the first wife but we now had more questions, such as, why was there a coroner's inquest and exactly how were Isabella and Elizabeth Ann Fry, her mother-in-law, related?

Newspaper reports and the details of the inquest helped us to answer the first question, although, inevitably, the newspaper reports conflicted. Piecing together the story, it seems that on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> October, a month after their marriage, William George left Isabella alone in Wellington and sailed on the *Komata*. On Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> Isabella visited the doctor complaining of melancholia and claiming that she wanted to go back to England; the doctor dissuaded her.

On Friday 29<sup>th</sup>, Isabella was admitted to Misses Garrett and Jackson's private hospital Kensington Street. Doctor Herbert visited her on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> and found her rational and quiet. The following day the doctor was summoned as Isabella had taken a bottle of nitric acid that she obtained from surgery. William was sent for and returned to Wellington. On Monday 1<sup>st</sup> Isabella was seen taking a bottle of acid outside the lavatory. William visited her and asked her why she took the acid. Isabella replied that she couldn't help herself. At 4.20pm that day she died of heart failure. The coroner's verdict was that her death was due to heart failure, brought on by a dose of nitric acid 'self-administered whilst in a state of insanity'. Incredibly, no blame was attached to institution; an institution for those of a nervous disposition, who appear to have left acid in an accessible place not once but twice.

It was time to find out more about Isabella's life before she arrived in New Zealand and to see if we could find the connection between her and her mother-in-law. Contrary to popular belief, there are no consolidated passenger lists, recording all those who left the UK since the year dot. These do not begin until 1890. We found Isabella, apparently travelling alone, leaving from London on the *Iconic*. The newspapers reported that Isabella was staying with a cousin, presumably this was the Elizabeth B Rutter who witnessed Isabella's marriage. There was no sign of an Elizabeth B Rutter on the passenger lists, or in the New Zealand indexes of birth marriage and death. The best we could find was a James Rutter going to Wellington in 1890.

We traced Isabella in the UK census records. She appeared to come from a respectable, middle-class, Edwardian family. Her father had been an accountant. There was no obvious connection with the south west of England,

where William Braund came from, at this point. We ordered the marriage certificates for William George Braund's parents and for Isabella Fry's. Isabella's grandfather is shown as Charles Fry 'Accountant' and William Braund's maternal grandfather was Charles Fry 'Cashier'. Investigating Isabella and William's parents further, we found that William Braund's mother, Anne Elizabeth Fry, was born about 1832 in Runcorn, Cheshire, the daughter of Charles Fry 'Cashier'. The family piece of paper said she had a brother called Charles. Isabella's father, Charles Rutter Fry, was born about 1833 in Leeds, Yorkshire and his father was Charles Fry 'Accountant'. Leeds and Runcorn are about 70 miles apart by road. It looked highly likely that these men were one and the same, making Isabella and William first cousins.

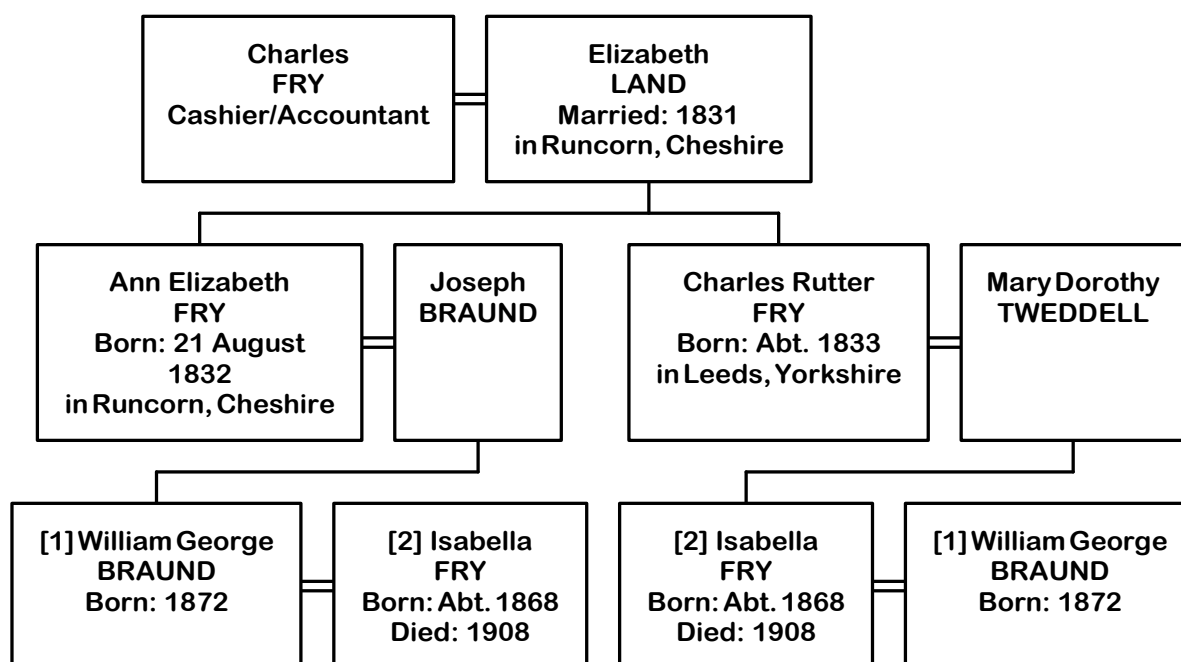
As the family were reportedly Quakers, we wondered how easy it would be to find baptismal records. Family Search soon led us to Ann Elizabeth, daughter of Charles and Elizabeth Fry née Land, being baptised on 11 September 1832, having been born on 21 August. This baptism took place in the Runcorn chapel of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. This is an offshoot of Methodism, so at this point they were not Quakers. Luckily, because this was a non-conformist baptism, the mother's maiden name was recorded; this would be unlikely in an Anglican (Church of England) baptism record. At the time, no baptism could be found for Charles Rutter Fry. A marriage for Charles Fry and Eliza Land took place in Runcorn parish church in 1831. As this was prior to 1 July 1837, all marriages, except those of Jews and Quakers had to take place in a Church of England church.

In the absence of a baptism for Charles Rutter Fry, to really clinch the relationship, we needed to find Charles Rutter and Ann Elizabeth together in

the 1851 or 1841 census. By 1851 Charles was in Durham and Ann was in Kent. Finding them in 1841 was more difficult. Eventually a possible entry was found in the Leeds in household of Elizabeth Walker. There is a scarcity of detail in the 1841 census, no relationships are given, no precise places of birth and ages are inexact. In this entry both Charles and Ann were said to have been born in Yorkshire.

Further investigations showed that Charles Fry senior died in 1833 and his widow, Elizabeth Fry, married Thomas Walker in 1839 in Leeds. So here were Ann and Charles with their mother and step-father. Interestingly, Thomas Walker's occupation is that of 'scribbler', or a carder of wool, a significant step down the social scale from Charles Fry.

Subsequently, the non-conformist registers that are held in class RG4 at the National Archives became available and searchable online and a posthumous baptism was eventually found for Charles Rutter Land, although his mother signed the register as Fry. She would have been three months pregnant when her husband died. This is a reminder that baptisms might not always be recorded with the surname we expect. William George Braund and Isabella Fry were first cousins. We will never know if they were madly in love, or if Isabella was conveniently married off to her cousin.



There was still no evidence of a Quaker connection and we had not found the link to Elizabeth Fry née Gurney; was her husband Zephaniah's brother as stated on the piece of paper? It was using the Quaker records, together with wills and other records in Bristol and Wiltshire Record Offices, that we finally found the connection to Joseph Fry, husband of Elizabeth Gurney. Joseph was not Zephaniah's brother; the connection was much more distant. In fact he was Zephaniah's second cousin once removed. We also found links to the famous chocolate-making Frys. In addition, we tied up another loose end and identified the Elizabeth B Rutter, who had witnessed Isabella's marriage. The relationship here was also one of second cousins once removed, illustrating how this extended family kept in touch with each other. Elizabeth B Rutter was still in England, in Wiltshire, in 1901 but left shortly afterwards. She was back in England by 1919, as she applied for removal from a Dorset Quaker meeting to one in Norwich, Norfolk.

Isabella's is a tragic story of a woman who was uprooted from the life she knew and sent to the other side of the world. It was clearly a situation that she found impossible and lacking support, she took her own life.

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