

working as an ice-cream maker, and at the time of their marriage both he and Margaret were living in Windmill Street, Fortitude Valley. They were married using Presbyterian rites at the home of the officiating minister, the Reverend James Stewart, at 39 Arthur Street in New Farm. The witnesses were Ballatally and Margaret's sister Lizzie. The marriage certificate records Margaret as being twenty years old and working as a domestic servant.²⁵

This was a rare interracial pairing for the time. Afghans were generally looked down upon by the white Australian population, and it has been noted that it was "virtually impossible for them to find sexual partners or female companionship among European communities". Interracial marriages obviously did occur, but Afghan men in Australia in the 1880s and 1890s tended to marry Aboriginal and 'half-caste' women, or socially and/or economically marginalised European women such as prostitutes, widows, or deserted wives with dependent children.²⁶

The marriage did little to change her ways, and Margaret was still using her maiden name and in constant trouble with the law, receiving seven sentences during 1892 for such offences as disorderly conduct and 'drunkenness'. It is unclear what became of her husband as he does not appear in Queensland records again, and there is no indication of his death or having deserted Margaret. Her own name was still turning up frequently in the records, and in 1897 she served two sentences Toowoomba gaol, one for a breach of the *Contagious Diseases Act* and one for 'quitting the lock hospital', a sure sign that she was not only working as a prostitute, but was also carrying a venereal disease. Lizzie also served time that year, spending fourteen days in the Fortitude Valley lockup for obscene language.²⁷

The family began to break up in the mid-1890s. Their mother Mary was still living in Fortitude Valley in March 1893 when she was admitted to the general hospital. She died there four months later,

aged just fifty years.²⁸ The following year John Blessington, by now a seemingly reformed character, left Brisbane and headed west to Pittsworth, where he found work as a groom at a hotel. He married Sarah O'Neill in 1897 and they went on to have six children together. John eventually became a dairy farmer in the Pittsworth district.²⁹

His young brother 'Sandy', now without parents, followed in John's childhood footsteps in 1895 by being sent to an institution for five years:

Six little boys, charged as being neglected children, guilty of the larceny of a quantity of orange-peel and other goods from R. W. Thurlow and Co., were dealt with as follows; - Samuel George and Sandy Blessington, were sent to the Industrial School for a period of five years; George Hall, Frederick Gedge, and John Buckley were each ordered to receive six stripes with a strap, to be bestowed upon them by their relatives in the court cells; and John Adams was discharged, Mr. Pinnock stating that there was nothing against him whatever.

(Brisbane Courier, 16 September 1895)

In later years Sandy would, like John, also go on to start a family, apparently without getting married.³⁰ He had been the fourth of the five Blessington children to be confined in a corrective facility before they left their teens. After difficult childhoods in the slums, the two younger sisters in particular had emerged very much on the wrong side of the tracks. Margaret would live with the effects of this for another sixty years. Lizzie, however, would be dead within four.