

Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Wexford Gentleman

Mary Harriet Sparks

H. B. Moorhouse

TOWSEY TALES

Edward Towsey

NAME: Mary Euphrasie O'Leary (née Towsey)

BIRTH DETAILS: 4 January 1864 Henley-upon-Thames

DEATH DETAILS: 17 Aug.1907 Wellington, NZ

CHART REF: Towsey Chart B1

MARRIAGE DETAILS: 26 June 1902 Wellington

SPOUSE: Robert O'Leary

Mary Euphrasie Towsey, Known as May, was the last of Charles Augustus and Mary Harriet Towsey's ten children.

The first we hear of May, is in the census of April 1871. Although the family were still living at 10 Hart Street, in Henley, on that particular night, 7 year-old May, with her mother and 12 year-old sister, Connie, were lodging in a guest house in Brighton, enjoying the first warmth of spring at the seaside.

Three months later, Charles Towsey retired and the few family members still at home moved to Deal, near Ramsgate on the Kent coast. The family had already been spending time at Ramsgate, as we have photos taken there from 1868.



SACRED HEART HIGH and SELECT SCHOOLS FOR YOUNG LADIES.

Conducted by the
RELIGIOUS OF "NOTRE DAME DES MISSIONS,"
BARBADOES STREET, CHRISTCHURCH

Was re-opened on Thursday, 24th of January, at 9.30 a.m.
Application for boarders and day pupils to be made, if possible,
on or before Saturday, 26th of January, between the hours of 10 a.m.
and 5 p.m.
For further particulars apply to the Rev. Mother Prioress.

Arthur John's youngest sister, Mary Euphrasie Towsey, known as May, arrived in Christchurch from England on 16th April, 1886, travelling in 2nd class aboard the SS Coptic.

The concert given in the Oddfellows Hall, Lyttelton, on Monday by Mr Towsey's glee class, and some amateurs, was well attended. The following part songs and glees were well received:—"The Blacksmith," "Sweet and Low," "Venetian Boatmen's Song," "O, Hush thee my Baby," "Take Care," and "Hark to the Rolling Drum." Miss Hill, Miss Whitby, Mrs Gilmore, Mrs Chambers, and Miss Kenner contributed a number of solos several of which were re-demanded, while the singing of Mr Smith and Mr Towsey's playing were much appreciated. Miss Towsey, a pianist new to Lyttelton, performed two solos, and showed herself to be a finished pianist. The concert was a pronounced success. It may be mentioned that numerous applications have been received from new members for next term, and that the class shows signs of careful training and study.

The Star, Christchurch, 16th June 1886

taught at the Sacred Heart Convent School for Young Ladies. It is not clear if she started at the convent upon arrival in 1886, or at a later date, but she was living there by 1893. May was not, of course, Catholic herself; nor

May was then 22 years old and had been studying music for four years at the newly established Berlin Scharwenka Conservatory under the then famous pianist and composer, Xaver Scharwenka. She also studied at Trinity College in London.

In Christchurch, apart from private pupils, May

M I S S M A Y T O W S E Y

Has re commenced TEACHING
THIS DAY (FRIDAY), JAN. 21st.

ADDRESS:

Care of Mr ARTHUR TOWSEY,
250, Armagh street W.

MUSIC.

M R A R T H U R T O W S E Y

Resumes TEACHING at his Residence,
260, Armagh street W.,

MONDAY, JANUARY 24TH.

Star Newspaper, Christchurch, 22 Jan. 1887

Costume Concert.

MERIVALE TENNIS CLUB.

The Merivale Tennis Club are to be congratulated upon the phenomenal success of the entertainment they produced last night at the Theatre Royal, under the musical conductorship of Mr A. Towsey and the stage managerhip of Mr J. J. Kinsey. The house was crowded to excess in the dress circle and stalls, while the pit was by no means empty.

17th June 1887

The second part of the programme consisted of the trial scene from "Pickwick." For this the stage was arranged with more than usual attention to correctness of detail. The immortal Samuel Pickwick was impersonated by Mr F. de C. Malet, who might have been Dickens' original so well was he "got up." Mr Malet had very little to say, but said his "lines" capitally, while his by-play throughout was equally good. Mr J. C. Martin, as Mr Justice Stareleigh, seemed thoroughly at home on

the Bench, dozing through counsels' addresses, speaking with judicial emphasis, making the recognised errors in note-taking and conducting himself with all due dignity. Miss

Towsey as Mrs Cluppins exhibited histrionic ability of much more than average professional excellence in her business and dialogue. The manner in which she pointed out, among the audience, the ladies from whom she had received the information she gave to the jury was most realistic and amusing.



SS Tarawera, Milford Sound, 1888



May Towsey
Christchurch N.Z. circa 1888

were all of the pupils at the convent. So this did not seem to interfere with her teaching of music and perhaps the German language as well.

There is a report of a tourist excursion to the South West coast of the South Island, that had become a regular event each summer. On an earlier trip, Edward Towsey had been the musical director and, in January of 1884, Jessy Towsey had taken the trip, before the family had left Dunedin.

The excursion of January 1888, had amongst the passengers, Arthur John Towsey and his sister May.

In October of 1888, the Towsey family went to Melbourne to see the Great Exhibition, which was centred around a temporary exhibition building, built in the Exhibition Gardens on Exhibition Street, all of which are still there. By looking at the ship passenger lists at that time, it is apparent that May Towsey accompanied the family on the trip.

This picture of May Towsey was taken in Christchurch in the mid 1890s. We see though, that in January 1900, May is playing a piano solo: Norwegian Dances in a charity concert, in Hastings, which is on Hawkes Bay, near Napier on the south east coast of the North Island, in aid of the war relief fund, for those wounded in the Boer War. Five months later, she performed in another charity concert, in aid of a famine in India.



On 26th June, 1902, she was married in Wellington to Robert O'Leary, a 37 year-old train driver, one year younger than herself, born in County Tipperary, in 1865.

Robert O'Leary must have been a widower, as he already had a seven year-old son and a five year-old daughter. I have not been able to discover any details of his earlier marriage or of the birth of his children, so this might have happened outside New Zealand.

In 1905, May O'Leary, at the rather late age of forty years, gave birth to a son whom she named Edward Augustus O'Leary.

Perhaps the 'Edward' part of the name was in honour of her elder brother, Edward Towsey, whilst the 'Augustus' in the middle might have been added to give an extra air of classical gentility, as had been popular at the time of her grandfather, William Augustus Towsey, or May might just have been fondly remembering her dear father, Charles Augustus.

May O'Leary was pregnant for a second time by the end of 1906. She gave birth to a daughter, whom she unsurprisingly and unimaginatively named Mary, on 31st July, 1907.

Unfortunately, most likely as a result of bad hygiene at the birth, May contracted septicaemia and tragically died on 17th August. She was buried at Karori Cemetery in Wellington, where she was joined by her son, Edward, who died just three years later, at five years of age.



On a happier note, it seems that her daughter, Mary O'Leary lived for 85 years, dying in New Zealand in 1992. Perhaps she wisely followed the example of her aunts back in England, that her mother had failed to follow, of never marrying, or if you do, to at least avoid having children.