

From Burren Street via Balgownie to Broadway, New York, USA

In 1997 our book, "From Burren Street to the Gallows", the John and Sarah Makin Story, which documents the crimes, inquests, trial and aftermath of the killing spree of innocent infants, was released after some five years of research. Wollongong born hotel licensee, John Makin and his wife Sarah, carried out these grisly crimes in Sydney for monetary gains.

When the book was first released the only character we knew little about was John's father, William Samuel Makin, who was a well known identity in Wollongong from the 1850s to his death in 1885. In the last 10 years much has been unearthed about who he really was and a decision was made to revise the book.

While updating the book in 2007 we were contacted and in turn interviewed by those connected with a new Australian musical called "The Hatpin". Though the story of the "Hatpin" is basically fiction it nevertheless is based on John and Sarah Makin's baby-farming exploits around Newtown and Macdonaldtown between 1880 and 1892. We happily assisted James Millar (lyrics), Peter Rutherford (music score) and Neil Gooding (producer) with additional information to be included in the musical.

Rather than base the story on the main characters, John and Sarah Makin, the story line was centred on a single mother, Amber Murray, who is searching for her son, one of the victims. During Amber's search she encounters Minnie Davis, another mother, Thomas Williamson, a Lawyer, and Justice Stephens, the Judge, who are also involved in the historical content. Some of the main characters underwent a change of name. John Makin became Charlie Makin, Sarah Makin became Agatha Makin, Claracne Makin - Clara and Clara Rigby - Rebecca

Finally the date of 27 February 2008 was set for the world premiere which took place at the Seymour Centre off Broadway in Sydney. (The theatre is only a stone's throw from Burren Street, Macdonaldtown, where 7 of the children's remains were exhumed.) Four of us attended and it was pleasing to see in the audience many familiar faces from Australian film, television series past and present.

The musical was set in a "theatre-in-the-round" where the cast carried the few props onto the stage. Scene changes were projected onto a curtain at the back of the stage.

Some actors of note were Caroline O'Connor, who played Harriet Piper, Amber Murray's friend and confidante, Barry Crocker (Mr Justice Stephens), Peter Cousins (Charlie Makin) and newcomer Melle Stewart who did an excellent job of playing and singing the role of Amber Murray.

The musical ran for three weeks. On the last day I and three friends attended the matinee session.

The New York Musical Festival is held annually during September/October. It receives thousands of entries from around the world and from this year's over 4,000 entries only 25 musicals were accepted. We were informed with great excitement that the only Australian musical accepted was "The Hatpin" and that it will be performed on Broadway between 15th and 24th September.

I wonder what my Makin ancestors would have thought about John Makin's crimes being relived some 115 years after he had died at the gallows in Darlinghurst Gaol?

Carol and John Herben.

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