

Business women in Moruya 100 Years Ago

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In the article that follows we try to examine the lives of the women who were listed in the 1919 Sands Directory. Their occupations were predominately dressmakers or shopkeepers.

Historically most women carried out domestic type work or assisted their husband in his occupation. The professions such as lawyers and doctors were closed to women. A woman could of course hold one, the highest positions in the land, that of Queen, though this was a position much better held in your own right rather than achieved by being the wife of the King, as no doubt Anne Boleyn would tell us.

The poorer you were of course the less rewarding jobs were available to you, perhaps a washerwoman, a servant or later a factory worker. By 1842 things had progressed to a banning of all women and boys & girls under 10 from working underground. The textile factories in the 18th and 19th century employed a large number of women and children but in 1847 the Factory Act decreed they could only work 10 hours a day. By 1878 women working in factories could not work more than 56 hours a week.

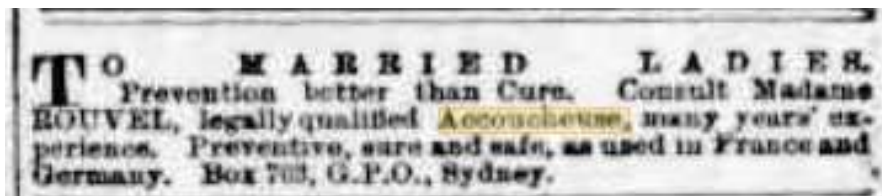
One invention of the 19th century that did open up new employment opportunities for women was the typewriter.

Below you will find a quiz on women's occupations from a previous era. The answers are on page 15.

Match the occupations on the left with the definitions on the right

A. Accoucheuse	1 Broom Maker
B. Alewife	2. Chamberpot Tender
C. Besom Maker	3. Kitchen or laundry worker
D. Necessary woman	4. Dressmaker in the Theatre
E. Pugger	5. Midwife
F. Scullery Maid	6. Lace Attachment Seamstress
G. Tucker	7. Tavern Keeper or Barmaid
H. Tire woman	8. Clay Paste Maker or Clay Treader

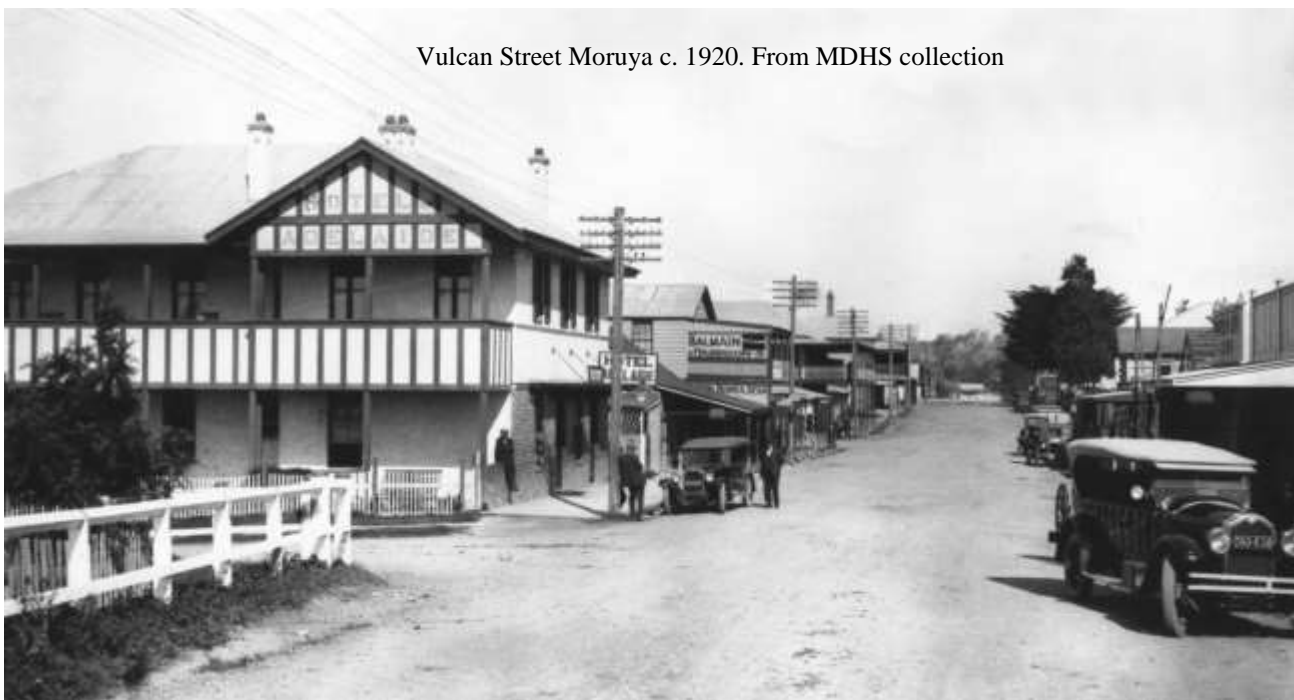
Source: Early women occupations, jobs and avocations by Mary Harrell-Sesniak.



From Australian Town and Country Journal 27th September 1890

Most of the women in Moruya 100 years ago worked at home raising their large families and supplemented the family income when they could with jobs such as cleaning, washing, ironing or sewing. Those on farms were actively engaged with the farm chores with their husbands and older children. The main skilled occupations available to women at this time were teaching or nursing or as our list indicates dressmaking.

Vulcan Street Moruya c. 1920. From MDHS collection



The Sands Directory which was produced annually gives a listing of all the businesses in Country areas from 1901 until it ceased publication in 1932. In Moruya in 1919 only 12 women are listed.

Extracted from the Sands Directory 1919

Constable	Mrs	Matron Hospital	Moruya
Corbett	Miss L	Refreshment Rooms	Moruya
Corbett	Miss	Dressmaker	Moruya
Crandell	Ellen	Dairy Farmer	Moruya
Johnson	Misses	Dressmaker	Moruya
Lamont	Mrs T J	Fancy Goods	Moruya
McDonald & Thomson		Dressmakers	Moruya
Mason	Elizabeth	Dressmaker	Moruya
Murphy	Alice	Dressmaker	Moruya
Murphy	Rosanna	Dressmaker	Moruya
Wallace	Mrs	General Store	Moruya
Waters	Mrs G	Refreshment Rooms	Moruya

A team of Genealogy Volunteers have researched the lives of each of these women in an attempt to find out more about them and their roles in the Community. Even though these women were running their own businesses we find we know very little about them. Their personal struggles and achievements remain only as statistics in public documents, such as their birth, death and marriage. With a few exceptions their personalities and life stories are now unfortunately lost. For many all that remains to remind us of them is a headstone in the cemetery, but many do not even have these.

1. Mrs Constable, Matron Moruya Hospital

Mrs Constable was Alice Matilda May Coppin

Alice was born on the 24th February 1871 at "Ninderra", Moruya to John Coppin and Mary Clara Ahearn the first of their eight children. The next 5 children were all boys so Alice would have had plenty of experience looking after small babies.

Alice's father would have been working at "Ninderra" as the birth of her brothers and sisters show the family moving around various farm properties. The property "Ninderra" was owned by W.H. Simpson.

Alice married Frederick John Constable in March 1898 and they had two sons, Arthur and Frederick. In his recollections Bob Colefax says – “*Bert tells me that the Newsagency was run by Fred and Allie Constable prior to the Irwins having it.*” The Sands Directory confirms a Mrs Constable ran the Newsagency from 1904 to 1906.

Fred unfortunately died 4 years after their marriage, his obituary reports that he had been suffering on and off for many years but he was an exceptionally unassuming character and noted for his kind deeds. Alice was now left with two young children to raise and earn a living to support them. The Moruya courthouse birth records show her from 1910 onwards acting as a midwife. Other women in the Constable family were noted midwives and they probably encouraged Alice to follow this profession. Frequently Alice and Dr Quilter’s name appear on the records together.

In 1917 Alice took over from Mrs Holland as matron of the Moruya Cottage Hospital, and continued as the matron until 1928.

Alice died in November 1944 at the home of her son Arthur at Gundry aged 73. Bob Colefax’s statement that “*it would be safe to say that no citizen of Moruya was more respected and loved than Matron Constable*” perhaps best sums up her life and achievements.

2. Miss L Corbett, Refreshment Rooms

This is **Miss Elizabeth Corbett**, known as Lizzie. She is first listed as having Refreshment rooms in 1918, the listing continues through to 1928, then in 1928, 1929 and 1930 the entry is for a Booking Office.

Elizabeth Mary was born in Moruya on the 14th of May 1881 to John Corbett who had arrived in NSW c.1854 and Bridget Power who arrived in NSW in 1863 with one of her sisters. Bridget’s occupation was given as Needlewoman. John and Bridget had married 8th October 1867 in Moruya Roman Catholic church.



Lizzie was the 9th of their 13 children (5 males and 7 females) of which 3 died early in life and 6 never married.

Electoral Rolls prior to 1919 have Lizzie down as a house maid and domestic duties. We know by 1912 Lizzie was becoming well known for her culinary skills as in January 1912 a benefit was held for Mr J. Gibbon, in the Centennial Hall, and Lizzie along with other young ladies and gentlemen “*served up refreshments which provide ad lib and of the choicest quality*”.

In November 1916 Misses E Corbett and A Byrne were announcing, in the Moruya Examiner, that they had opened Tea Rooms in Vulcan St, where delicious cups of tea and coffee, ‘nontox’, ‘cooee’, cakes and pies all hot, could be had at any hour for the very low price of 6d.

In December 1917 Lizzie along with other business owners were granted a licence to trade on Sundays.

May Koellner (nee Emmott) recollected that in the 1920’s the building north of their home in Vulcan Street, “*was a shop with residence at the rear in which Mrs and Miss L Corbett conducted refreshment rooms and made cakes for sale*”. May reminisced that she still had, in her recipe book, “*Miss Corbett’s Sponge cake recipe*”. (See next page for image of the building)

Lizzie and her sister Mary, a dressmaker, continued to run tearooms in Vulcan St where light food, cold drinks and fresh bread were available. Bob Colefax states “*The proprietresses are to the manner born in this line of business.*”

May Koellner childhood home



Photo showing the location of the Refreshment rooms. This is a photo taken around 1905, at this stage the Sign over the door to left of the building says the Moruya Examiner Printing Office.

Both Lizzie and her sister Mary cared for their mother until her death in 1935 at age 92.

Lizzie married Allen Roger Bede Rankin on 30th of July 1939 in Lavender Bay NSW. This was Allen's 2nd marriage, his first wife Minnie Murphy died in 1937. She was a sister of Alice and Rosanna Murphy mentioned later in this article.

Locals recall "*Lizzie as a smartly dressed lady - beautiful clothes, shoes, bags and gloves and lots of gold jewellery. She could have been a DJ (David Jones) model. In later life Lizzie liked to dress up in her finery and walk down to the Coach stop to see who was coming into or leaving town*".

In 1944 Elizabeth Mary Rankin was an occupier of a house in Queens Street and on the Electoral Roll in 1963, the year of her death, Elizabeth Mary Rankin - home duties and Allen Roger Bede Rankin, Grazier - were living in Vulcan St Moruya.

Lizzie died 25th October 1963 in Moruya Hospital having lived most of her life in Vulcan St Moruya.



3. Miss Corbett, Dressmaker

Miss Corbett is the first of a number of women in Moruya to be listed as Dressmaker. A lot of their work may have been alterations and decoration but the local women would have had access to images of new fashions in Department Store Catalogues and newspaper advertisements which they could take to the dressmakers to copy. The Land newspaper of the 14th of November 1919 in its Fashion Notes Column states - *“There is a simplicity and charm about the summer-time frocks which are on view in most of the drapery shops at the moment. Never before have we had such a wealth of colouring or such lavish embellishments by way of designs. It goes on to say. Another old-new effect on the new season’s frock is trimming in the form of tucks of all descriptions; wide ones or the tiny “pin” ones are very popular.”* Newspapers such as the Smith’s Weekly which started publication in 1919 and was widely read also had a Fashion Column.

1898 model sewing machine



Just which one of the Corbett Sisters was the Miss Corbett listed as a dressmaker is difficult to know for certain. From 1915 to 1917 the Sands Directory records Misses Corbett and Daley, Dressmakers. In 1918 it becomes just Miss Corbett. She is listed again in 1919 but this is the last listing. As their mother’s occupation listed in her immigration record is needlewoman it would be expected she taught all her girls how to sew.

The Daley connection is probably Ellen Daley who married Edward Corbett in 1915 with Lizzie Corbett as one of the witnesses to the marriage.

4. Ellen Crandell, Dairy Farmer

Ellen Crandell was Ellen Maples the daughter of James Maples and Eva Adams, she was the 5th of their 10 children. She was born in the Bega district and married at Tanja in 1907 to Charles Henry Crandell. They moved to the Moruya area sometime after the birth of their son Keith in July 1911 as their daughter Jean was born at Kiora in November 1913.

From Ancestry.com



Ellen’s husband died in August 1958. At the time of his death they were living in Campbell Street Gundry. The 1944 listing of Ratepayers and Electors gives Charles Henry as the owner of this dwelling. In the obituary in the Moruya Advertiser he is described as *“a handy man with tools who could turn his hand to practically any job with reasonable success but most of his working days were spent farming at Mullenderee and Mungerie.”* They are described as *“living in semi retirement at Gundry with Charles doing just sufficient work to keep an interest in life.”*

None of this of course explains why Ellen was listed as a dairy farmer in the Sands Directory. Local memory of the family recalls them as share farmers rather than actually owning the farming land they had their dairy on. Ellen continues to be listed in the Directory until 1932 when it ceases publication.

Ellen died in 1982 aged 93 as is buried in the Anglican cemetery Moruya.



5. Misses Johnson, Dressmakers

The only Johnson sisters found in the Moruya records are Annie and Mary who worked with their father Christopher Johnson in his store in Vulcan Street. When he died in 1928 Mary and Annie were the Trustees of his will and took over the running of the business. Mary's obituary appeared in the Moruya Advertiser of the 12th of July 1961 entitled Death of Miss "Ciss" Johnson. It mentions the sisters running the general store and newsagency but makes no mention of any Dressmaking.

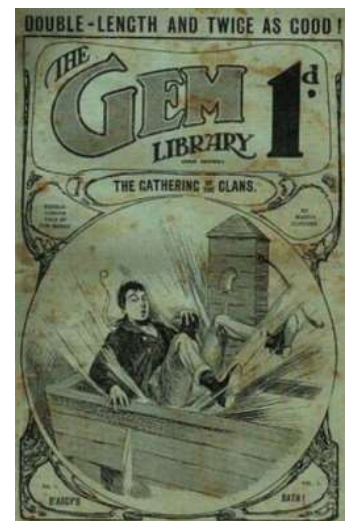
Their Father Mr Christopher Johnson first appears in the Directory in 1913 and is listed as a fruiter. This listing continues to 1917 when the Misses Johnson Dressmakers also appears. In the 1918 edition Mr Johnson's entry is changed to Grocer and the ladies continue as Dressmakers. The 1930 edition has the entries for both the Dressmakers and Grocer changed to Misses Johnson. These entries continue to the final edition in 1932 entry.

6. Mrs T. J. Lamont Fancy Goods

Mrs T. J. Lamont was born **Teresa Jane Williams** in Cornwall, England on the 12th of May 1858, and along with her father Peter Williams (who as years passed was a well known Moruya blacksmith) and mother Theresa (nee Eva) and half sister Ann arrived in Australia on the 3rd of March 1859 on the "Hornet". Tragedy struck the family when her older sister Mary died as the boat was finishing its long journey from the Old Country. A further 13 siblings were all born in the Moruya District. She spent her early years at Wamban Creek, Bodalla and then Vivian Cottage in Campbell Street which her father had built for the family.



In 1878 she married Robert James Taylor Lamont (local Saddler) at Moruya. Robert died in January 1916.



In his recollections Bob Colefax says – “At the southern end, there was a shop run by a Mrs Lamont. It had one side of disuse. This was formerly a saddler's shop run by her husband, who when I first remember, had been

stricken with blindness. Mrs Lamont traded in small toys, nick-nacks and haberdashery. To me as a small child, she had one terrific distinction – she was the first in Moruya to display children’s comics in her window. In my obscure environment I had never heard of such things, and the impact was one of magical wonderment.”

The left side of her husband’s saddlery factory is where it is assumed that Mrs Lamont ran her store. She is listed in the 1901 Sands Directory and every year until 1921. Her husband was also listed in the Directory up until the time of his death.

Teresa Lamont died in the Sydney suburb of Ashfield in 1921.

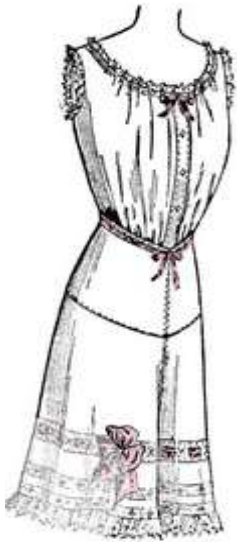
7. McDonald & Thomson, Dressmakers

These two ladies have proved elusive. They appear in the 1918 Sands Directory as well as the 1919 but no further details of exactly who they were have been found.

8. Elizabeth Mason, Dressmaker

Elizabeth Sisley Mason was born in September 1871 in Moruya. Her parents had married in March 1870 in the Moruya Wesleyan Church. At the time of the marriage her father Giles Armitage Mason was aged 32 and listed as a gold miner from Araluen, her mother Mary Ann Sisley was 28 and a resident of Moruya. According to her mother’s obituary Elizabeth was known as Bessie.

Elizabeth did not marry and apart from her listing in the Sands Directory which appears from 1918 to the last issue in 1932 little has been found on her life. A Miss E. Mason is mentioned in the Moruya Examiner of the 18th of October 1919 in an item on the Methodist Sunday School picnic where she organized the Christmas tree, which we presume would have been her. She died in Sydney in 1959.



9. Alice and Rosanna Murphy, Dressmakers

Alice Murphy was born at Mynora, Moruya on the 4th August 1860, the eldest of the 5 children of Edmond Murphy and Susan McDonald who had married in Ireland in 1858 and arrived in Australia around 1860. Her sister **Rose Ann** (Rosanna) and brother John were born at Nelligen, with the two youngest children Annie and Mary being born in Araluen. Their father was a local Police Constable at the time and was appointed to different Stations. He bought the land in Moruya on which their house was eventually built in 1867 while stationed at Braidwood. The Old System Title Documents from 1867 show us the land was 56 Campbell Street where the sisters were to live out their lives. As well as the Campbell Street block a 20 acre paddock on the edge of town, was part of the purchase. He later became a Shopkeeper, keeping at one stage what was known as an Australian Store. We would know it now as a disposal store.

The children spent the early part of their childhood in Nelligen and Araluen, with the majority of their lives in Moruya in a house in Campbell Street, where the three unmarried sisters lived and ran the dressmaking business. Bob Colefax writes in his reminisces:

“Campbell St. N. This was owned and occupied by Miss Annie Murphy and her sister, two elderly spinsters. They were dressmakers. As a child I was intrigued by a shop sized window opening onto the verandah. Two boarders there years later were two elderly men, Bill Crapp and Jack Lynch. This house was on the corner of Evans Lane W., now renamed Foreman Street. Paul Kennedy (now deceased) and his wife Maggie bought and then demolished this house in the 50’s and built a new brick cottage in its place.”

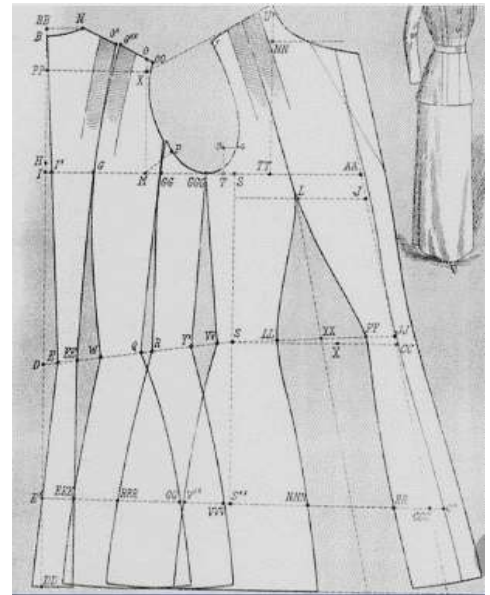
Bob Colefax mentions one of the two spinsters as Annie. They did have a younger sister called Annie who may possibly have also helped in the dressmaking business.

The name Miss Murphy, dressmaker appears in the Sands Directory from 1911 to 1915, is missing from 1916 and 1917 and then in 1918 the names Miss Alice M Murphy and Miss Rosanna Murphy appear. Both Alice and Rosanna continue to appear until the last issue in 1932.

Alice Murphy died at her Campbell Street home on the 12th of March 1938 with Rose Ann Murphy dying on the 20th of October 1939 also at the Campbell Street home. Annie Murphy died in June 1944 at Campbell Street.

The following obituary for Alice Murphy appeared in the Moruya Examiner of the 19th of March 1938.

“After an illness extending over 18 months, and which she bore with remarkable fortitude and resignation, Miss Alice Murphy peacefully passed away on Saturday night. The eldest daughter of the late Mr and Mrs Edward Murphy of the ‘Australian Stores’, Moruya, Miss Alice was born 73 years ago at Moruya. After the death of their parents and relinquishing the store-keeping business, the Misses Murphy occupied themselves with dressmaking until they retired a few years ago. Miss Murphy, who had hitherto enjoyed the best of health, was stricken with slight paralysis, but recovered sufficiently to get about her home. Unfortunately, some months later she had a fall and dislocated her hip, making her practically an invalid for the remainder of her days. Throughout her long illness she had the devoted care and attention of her two sisters, Misses Rose and Annie, who only four months ago suffered the loss of their youngest sister, Mrs Allan Rankin. The passing of Miss Murphy is regretted by a wide circle of friends, many of whom experience an acute personal loss. Her friendship was deeply appreciated by those who possessed it. She was always happy when helping others, especially those in difficulty or trouble, and like her sisters, had a kind word for all. In years gone by the Misses Murphy were prominent and staunch members of the Sacred Heart Church choir, and were faithful workers at church bazaars and other functions. During her illness, she was frequently visited by the Rev Fr McGee and the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, and was fortified by the rites of her holy religion.



The Land Titles records show the property changing hands after the death of the last sister, but their names were never registered on the title deeds.

10. Mrs Wallace, General Store.

Mrs Wallace was Eliza Mary Turner. She was born in Moruya in April 1850 at Glenduart. She was the third child Thomas Turner who had migrated to Australia in 1839 and Susannah Over who was transported in 1838. Both parents had been married previously, Thomas having two sons and Susannah, a daughter so she was actually the 6th child in the family. Eight more babies were born after Eliza so like most young girls in large families she would have done her share of minding the younger children and helping with the housework. When she married James Wallace in January 1871 her occupation is given as a housemaid. James was then a Blacksmith living at Nelligen. Their first child Thomas Joseph was born at Glenduart on the 21st March 1871. They then moved to the Braidwood area as their second child Winifred was registered here in 1872. The next record found of the family is in Sydney where Mary Margaret was born in 1875.

At some stage Eliza returns to Moruya, purchasing the “Gundry Store” site in May 1887. Her name is listed also as one of the storekeepers of Moruya who will be closing every second Wednesday of the month. The Municipal Roll of 1903 lists her as the owner of a shop in Campbell Street with the 1905 Eden-Monaro Roll listing her daughter Winifred living with her.

Gundry Cash Stores.

MRS. E. M. WALLACE

HAS again taken possession of and opened up Business in the well-known GUNDRY STORES, where she hopes to meet her old friends and customers; and by civility and attention to business to merit a share of their support.

GROCERIES AND DRAPERY AT LOWEST RATES FOR CASH.

Only best brands in stock.

DRESSMAKING in the latest Sydney style and at reasonable prices.

The Advertisement shown to the left from the Moruya Examiner 21st April 1899 would indicate she had operated the Gundry store previously. There is no mention of her husband returning to Moruya. James Wallace appears to have died in Wellington, NSW in 1905.

The Document below is from Volume 325 Folio 47 showing Eliza Wallace purchasing and selling the Gundry Store property.

No 1224 1/6 TRANSFER DATED 21st May 1887
 FROM THE WITHIN NAMED James Gough
 TO Eliza Wallace wife of James Wallace with
 a power of appointment OF THE LAND WITHIN DESCRIBED
 PRODUCED & ENTERED 17th June 1887
 AT 20 Mts pt 10 O'CLOCK IN THE fore NOON :
 REGD GENE

No. A 881584 TRANSFER dated 28th October 1922
 from the said Eliza Wallace to James
 Hargreaves Spinks of Moruya
 Farmer
 of the land within described
 Produced and entered 22nd November 1922
 at 38 Mts pt 1 O'clock in the after noon.
 REGISTRAR GENERAL

Her daughter Winifred died in October 1922 which is probably why the property was sold. Winifred had not married but her younger sister Mary Margaret was married to Phillip Davies and was living at Berry. Phillip is the witness on Winifred's death certificate. Interestingly this certificate gives James Wallace's occupation as Journalist.

When she died in February 1937 at age 86 Eliza was living in Berry presumably with her daughter and son-in-law. She left an estate of £604/0/7.¹

Bob Colefax remembers the Wallace family running the Gundry store. He however thought they were two sisters rather than mother and daughter. He says "the elder one was known everywhere as "Honey Wallace". They stocked a wide assortment of odds and ends. One could buy a lucky dip there for a half-penny. I remember buying a toy piano there for nine pence. The shop is still functioning there as a successful general store." Today it is a popular Café.

¹ Will of Eliza Mary Wallace.

11. Mrs G. Waters, Refreshment Rooms

Mrs G. Waters was Mary Ann Lane. She has proved a difficult subject and very little has been discovered about her life.

Mary Ann was born in 1866 in Araluen to Thomas Lane, a miner, and Catherine Keiran. Little is known of her childhood but she married George James Waters in 1898 in Leichhardt, Sydney. George was also born in 1866 but in Moruya.

Mary Ann and George had one daughter, Catherine, born in 1899 who was known as Katie.

On the Electoral Roll of 1910 Mary Ann's occupation is listed as Domestic Duties. 1914 saw Mr and Mrs G J Waters owning land in Hawdon Street Moruya.

In the Sands Directory Mary Ann Waters was running refreshment Rooms from 1918 until 1932 when the Sands Directory ceased publication

In 1944 Mary Ann Waters, home duties, was an occupier of a house in Hawdon Street. She died on the 12th of December 1946 at Gundary, Moruya and is buried in the Moruya Cemetery. Her husband died on the 23rd of August 1930 in Narooma.

References:

Moruya Pioneer Directory. MDHS

MDHS Family Files

MHDS Photographic Collection

Early women occupations, jobs & avocation. By Mary Harrell-Sesniak. <https://blog.genealogybank.com/early-women-occupations-jobs-avocations.html>

Down Memory Lane and A section of Moruya as viewed from the top of Gundary Hill by Aubrey Vernon (Bob) Colefax (Unpublished works)

NSW Parish Maps http://www.nswlrs.com.au/land_titles/historical_research/parish_maps

NSW Electoral and Municipal Rolls

Sands Directories 1901 to 1932 <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/learn/search-our-collections/sands-directory>

Women on our Australian Banknotes

The Queen tended to dominate our early bank notes and remains on the \$5.

\$5	Caroline Chisholm (nee Jones) (1808-1877) Replaced by the Queen	Humanitarian – immigrant welfare.
\$5	Catherine Helen Spence (1825-1910) Commorative Federation Note	Leading woman in public affairs. Championed the rights of women
\$10	Mary Gilmore (nee Cameron) (1865-1962)	Writer and Journalist.
\$20	Mary Reiby (nee Haydock) (1777-1855)	From Convict to successful business woman in the Colony of NSW.
\$50	Edith Cowan (nee Brown) (1861-1932)	First Australian woman to serve as a member of Parliament.
\$100	Dame Nellie Melba (Helen Porter Mitchell) (1861-1931)	Australian operatic soprano of world renown.