

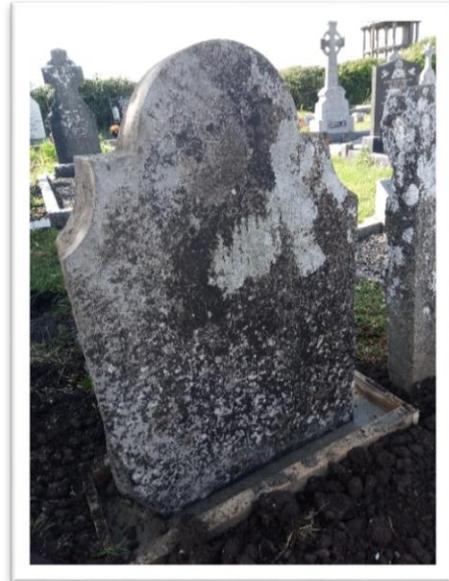
## An Old Clare Hill Gravestone By Eric Shaw

Clarecastle  
Ballyea  
Heritage &  
Wildlife Group



For many years, there was a broken gravestone in Clare Hill cemetery. It was a heavy limestone upright stone that had broken into two parts. With support from Fr Pat Malone and the Pastoral Council, the stone was reset by John McTigue, stonemason, in May 2020. He thought that there may have been a split in the stone and the weather over the years caused it to shatter. The stone is very weathered and covered in lichen but the inscription is readable:

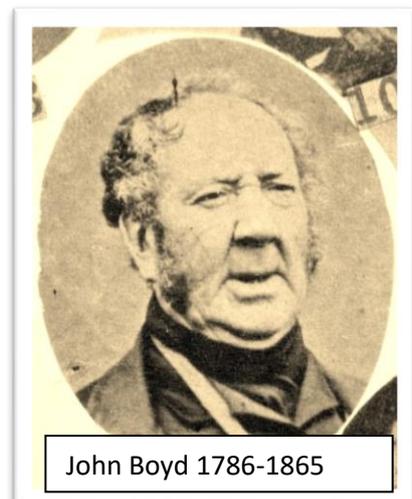
**SACRED| to| the memory of Eliza Sim | wife of  
Captain John Boyd | of the 91<sup>st</sup> and late of the  
81<sup>st</sup>| Regiment | who died at Clare Castle |  
29th day of Sept<sup>r</sup> 1836 | aged 39 years**



From a genealogy site, <https://www.findagrave.com>, I discovered that a person in Australia, Sharon Watson, had been seeking information on the gravestone and I made contact with her. She is the 4 x great-granddaughter of Eliza and John Boyd and was able to give me some fascinating information.

Sharon states that to a fair degree, Eliza's death set in chain a series of events that brought the Boyds to Australia and brought her family there into existence. Eliza Sim was born in Aberdeen in Scotland and was the daughter of a Customs House official. Some of her siblings became part of the diaspora of the British Empire, scattered across the globe. When Eliza married John Boyd in 1817, he was on a part pension recovering from injuries gained during the Battle of the Pyrenees in Spain, one of a series of battles he fought in during the Napoleonic wars. Initially they seem to have stayed in Footdee, Eliza's home place, a small fishing village at the East end of Aberdeen. It appears John resumed his military career and was stationed in Ireland, performing garrison duty at Clarecastle.

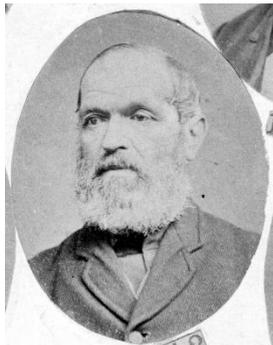
When Eliza died at Clare Castle, John Boyd was left with five children to raise, so he transferred from the 81<sup>st</sup> Regiment to the 91<sup>st</sup> Regiment the day after her death, presumably so he could return to Scotland where Eliza had family that could help him. It was through this new military unit that their daughter Jane (Sharon's 3x great grandmother) met her husband, Henry John White. They married in a hurry, shortly before she turned seventeen, because John had decided to move most of the family to Australia, leaving behind only his youngest daughter Jessie. They arrived in Melbourne at the end of 1839, only four years after the Colony of Port Phillip (modern day Victoria) was established - so they are Port Phillip pioneers.



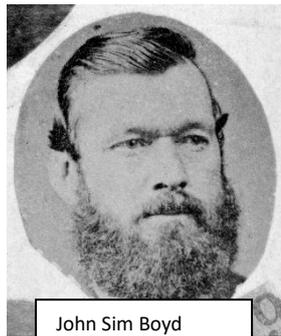
John Boyd 1786-1865

Sharon is descended from a number of pioneering families, including Irish bounty immigrants (whose passage was paid by squatters already in Victoria) from County Clare and County Tipperary. She often wondered what they would have thought of John Boyd and Eliza Sim - and vice versa. They may not have seen eye to eye!

Although John Boyd did not leave any written accounts of his life, Sharon has amassed quite a lot of information, thanks to a combination of the military records she has been able to access and Trove, the Australian newspaper database run by the National Library of Australia. The photograph of John Boyd is part of a larger body of work completed by portrait photographer Thomas Chuck Foster in the 1860s and 1870s. Realising that the Port Phillip pioneers were ageing, he set about photographing as many as he could. The result of this exercise is held at the State Library of Victoria. As well as the photograph of John, one can also find John Boyd's son John Sim Boyd and his son-in-law Henry John White.



Henry John White 1872



John Sim Boyd

Sharon does not know who John Boyd's his parents were and if he had siblings. His military record gives his date of birth, but no corresponding baptism record has been found. Disappointingly, even though his son John Sim Boyd completed his death certificate, he did not list John's parents and Sharon's suspicion is that he did not know who they were. (He did list all of John and

Eliza's children, including a couple that died as

infants in Footdee, well before John Jnr was born.<sup>1</sup>) Something that's quite noticeable in the various records is that Eliza's family features quite strongly but John's family is entirely absent.

John Boyd attended his wife's funeral in Clare Hill but he never saw the gravestone. It was erected later by his regiment. Sharon's hope is to visit Clare Hill and to close that gap of over 180 years.

Sharon's 3x great grandfather, Thomas Kennedy, hailed from Kilmaley. While she has Griffith's valuation documents and various other papers, she does not know who his parents were either. Thomas Kennedy married Johanna Ryan in Geelong in 1851 when the record keeping system was still very basic and parents were not recorded. Sharon lives in hope that DNA might someday help.



Clare Castle & Barracks

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<sup>1</sup> John & Eliza Boyd's children – all born in Aberdeen

John 1819-1819, Jane 1822-1905, George 1824-1900, John Sim Boyd 1826-1890, Eliza 1828-1858