

# First Year on the Thames Goldfield & other stories

Saturday, 20 July 2019

## The Resurrection of John Gallagher

Hobart Town Jack they called him in days gone by at Thames. John Gallagher, to give him his real name, was what men termed a real character. He was a miner, but no ordinary miner and **the district rang with his exploits** during the 1870s and 1880s. When men gathered together their first question would be “Have you heard Jack’s latest?”

Hobart Town was an athlete, a long distance runner and a boxer; strong and game with wonderful endurance.

He used to race the coach from Waihi to Thames or vice versa. Both would leave the starting post at the weekends when the miner’s were going up to town and Hobart Town Jack always won. This feat of racing the coach over a road journey of 22 miles was one of **the wonders of the goldfields**.

On one occasion he set out on foot from Waihi at the same time as the coach, and travelling via Paeroa, covered the 37 miles to Thames in two hours less than the time taken by the coach. These marathon races created widespread interest and plenty of betting.

Hobart Town went everywhere by boot, preferring to walk or run long journeys rather than ride on horseback or in a coach.

He once beat Frederick Wells, a Thames butcher, who was on horseback. Hobart Town was given a start in the race which was from Waiomu to Tararu, a distance of 7 to 9 miles.

He loved mud and was like a child as far as it was concerned. He would roll in it as a preliminary to starting trouble. One very wet day Hobart Town wandered about Thames in a white duck suit looking like **a drenched ghost**. He completed the look by diving into a mud bath outside a hotel, arising from the mess completely unconcerned. But for all his idiosyncrasies he was a good worker and at one point he even joined the Salvation Army.

So it unleashed a great wave of memories when old Hobart Town Jack’s body was found floating in the harbour near the fish markets at Auckland around 9am on Saturday 7 November 1925.

When recovered from the sea by police the body was found to be clothed in a double breasted brown coat, black tweed trousers, grey shirt and tan shoes.

“It’s Hobart Town Jack!” said William Gibbons, fish curer, who had known him for about 15 years.

Five men employed in an oyster depot also recognised him as John Gallagher aka Hobart Town Jack, who had worked with them sometime previously. He was thought to be in his early seventies.

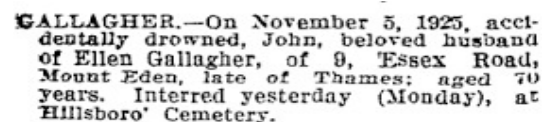
The body was taken to the home of Hobart Town’s wife and family at Essex Road, Mt Eden.

An inquest was opened but in the absence of any evidence of how the body got into the water the proceedings were adjourned ‘sine die’ - for an indefinite period.

One newspaper disagreeably announced the demise of the Thames legend as **“Human Flotsam”** and an **“Old man’s Doom”**.

The funeral took place on Monday 9<sup>th</sup>, the cortege proceeding to Hillsborough cemetery, followed by grieving relatives and a large number of friends. A minister conducted the service at the graveside. It was a beautiful funeral with an abundance of floral wreaths.

Great things were said about Hobart Town Jack and newspapers spared whole columns to record his exploits at the Thames in the old mining days when his star performance was to race the coach on foot.



GALLAGHER.—On November 5, 1925, accidentally drowned, John, beloved husband of Ellen Gallagher, of 9, Essex Road, Mount Eden, late of Thames; aged 70 years. Interred yesterday (Monday), at Hillsboro' Cemetery.

**But Hobart Town Jack was not dead and the man they buried was not him.**

Suspicious arose that a mistake had occurred two days after the funeral. Newspaper reports and the death notice inserted by relatives came to the attention of a resident of Clevedon, who swore he had seen Hobart Town alive on Saturday.

Word was dispatched to Auckland and Hobart Town's eldest son proceeded promptly to Clevedon. Having viewed the body found in the harbour and identified it as his father; he regarded this sighting as **an unfortunate mistake**.

But six miles up the Ness Valley, beyond Clevedon, in a battered little two roomed shack on a grassy clearing, the stunned son discovered his father very much alive.

The son returned to the city late in the afternoon, relating his astonishing discovery to those who had identified the body. The five oyster depot employees who had viewed the remains refused to accept the son's story. Hobart Town Jack would have to be brought to the city to convince the sceptics.

The amazing news had all of Clevedon and Auckland reeling. A *Herald* reporter and photographer beat a track to the shack in a lonely part of the Ness Valley. When the enquiry was made "**Are you John Gallagher?**" he replied "That's me alright."

Pointing to the photographer's box, he asked "What yer got there?" Assured that it was not a coffin, but something that would prove he was still alive, Hobart Town became talkative and happily agreed to be photographed. He carefully smoothed his hair with a liberal amount of water and a small comb before parting it down the middle.

Hobart Town was sharing the shack with a quarry worker and had been a resident on and off at Clevedon and Ness Valley for 12 or 15 years.

The shack was dilapidated with very primitive furnishings and was where he had spent the past few weeks waiting to take a job on the road.

He was greatly amused at the concern his disappearance and reported death had caused. His mate called him "the ghost".

Hobart Town couldn't explain the mystery, except his wife and sons had viewed the body of the unknown man stressed by grief. The body had been in the water about four days. His eldest son intended making a closer examination but discovered too late that **the coffin had been nailed up**.

"How about you chaps fixing me up with a frock coat and bell topper and taking me downtown?" asked Hobart Town "I would like to go round to Munroe's fish market like that, with a collar and tie on too. I'll show 'em how I look."

Hobart Town reminisced about his experiences in the early days at Thames. He had been an all round sport and had trained footballers and other athletes, as well as a rowing crew which wrested the championship laurels from an Auckland crew. "Yes, that was a great win," he said, "and I won £200 over it."

Astonishingly this was **not the first time** Hobart Town had been reported dead. He declared that years ago, while towing a raft of logs on the cutter Willie Winkie, he had an experience that was stated to have cost him his life. The raft broke loose, and he dived from the cutter to try and secure it. Other logs broke loose and he was carried away, but he eventually made it to the shore. His mates lost sight of him and thought him dead, but three days later he turned up safe and sound.

Incredibly, on a second occasion he was again given up for dead. While working in the bush at Hikutaia, in the Thames Valley, he was struck by a falling log and knocked unconscious. His mate thought that he was dead, and sent off a message to that effect, but when the police came to remove the corpse, they found it very much alive, although battered. "I only had a broken leg and a few bruises," Hobart Town said.

After hearing the stories of being thrice dead, listeners retorted "Well, you've certainly had a **charmed life**." "Charmed!" Hobart Town exclaimed, "Why I'm going to live to be 108!"

His daughter had visited a clairvoyant at Thames and so accurate were the predictions that Hobart Town slipped away unknown to his relatives and had his hand read. She told him many things and announced that Hobart Town would top the century by a good eight years.

"And how old are you now?" inquired the reporter.

"Seventy two next April. Yes, I know it is a long time to go, but I'll do it."

Happy and content, he caught a ride with the reporter and was dropped at the mill about a mile from his shack and hobbled in to show a mate the paper containing his premature obituary.

Newspaper headlines throughout the country echoed the gobsmacking news.

**"I'm not the corpse" "Hobart Town's disclaimer" "Protests he is still alive" "Extraordinary case of mistaken identity" "John Gallagher lives"**

*"All Auckland is talking today about the resurrection of John Gallagher. He is very well known here, and last evening many people who knew him went to bed shaking their heads over his sad end. This morning they awoke to find that the old hard case was still alive and enjoying the joke as much as anyone. As a matter of fact, when the corpse was supposed to be lying in his wife's house, the authentic John Gallagher was enjoying a merry evening with his cronies in Clevedon Township. It seems extraordinary that a corpse could thus lie for two days in the wife's home, be seen by her two sons and no thought of mistaken identity should arise . . ."*

*– Press*

13 November, 1925



"John Gallagher. "Hobart Town Jack" who was reported dead, but is very much alive."

*Auckland Star 12 Nov 1925*

*A Jones photo*

But now a bigger conundrum loomed. **Who was the drowned man?** The identity of the corpse which lay in the cemetery was a profound mystery.

Mr F K Hunt, coroner, pointed out that the inquest had not been concluded and no verdict had been given. A written notification that John Gallagher/Hobart Town Jack was alive would be required, or, what would be more conclusive, he could attend with the witness who identified him as the deceased.

When the coroner received proof positive that the real John Gallagher was alive, he could withdraw the warrant he gave for burial in the name of Gallagher and inform the Registrar. As to the dead man, Mr Hunt said that it would be impossible to exhume the body, even were that necessary.

If there was no other evidence of the identity of the dead man forthcoming, a formal verdict of 'found drowned' would be returned and the deceased marked in the records as 'unknown'.

Sergeant Flannagan, of the waterfront police, made **exhaustive inquires** into the identity of the drowned man. The clothes taken from the corpse were kept at the station and it was mainly by these that the identity of the drowned man was finally established.

He was Hugh James Murray, 43, described in newspapers as a single man and returned soldier who had been working principally as a labourer on scows and shingle boats and at the cement works in Whangarei. He had three brothers in Auckland.

But this short newspaper description belied **a much different reality**.

Hugh James Murray was a troubled man. Born in New Zealand in 1882, of Irish emigrant parents, he developed a problem with alcohol early on.

At some stage he began drinking methylated spirits and was prohibited from drinking. He regularly broke his prohibition orders.

In 1914, aged 32, with just 2 pence to his name, he went to a police station requesting a place in the cells. He said he had no friends, no home and his chief desire for the time being was **a corner in which to curl up and sleep**. He was given a place in the cells, on a charge of vagrancy. He looked as if he had been drinking. The year before he had been arrested for theft, but was first hospitalised for weeks with a jaw abscess.

In 1915 he was called up to serve in WW One and trained as a rifleman. While on leave from Trentham training camp he was convicted of drinking while prohibited. Two months later, found drunk again, he was handed over to military authorities who days later shipped him out on the *Navua* as part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion H Company.

Back from war he continued his downward spiral and when, in 1920, he was arrested for four breaches of his prohibition order he was sent to work on his brother's farm and remain there

A year later he was arrested for being idle and disorderly and throwing a bottle of meths on the road. He had been frequently spoken to by police regarding his idleness but had **ignored the warnings**. Punishment was suspended with the rider that if he found work no



further action would be taken.

Four months later he was charged at Hamilton with being **an incorrigible rogue and a vagabond** with no lawful means of support. He and a mate had come to Hamilton stony broke and had been sleeping out. They stole articles from a wash house at the back of a residence. Murray pleaded guilty but said he hoped he'd let off as he had a job to go to and also 12 ½ days pay coming to him from the Public Works department. Unmoved, the judge sentenced him to six months with hard labour.

By the time he was 40 Hugh Murray had accumulated 57 convictions usually for trespass, theft and drunkenness. He was regularly imprisoned with hard labour. At a sentencing for stealing a pair of boots in October 1922 he asked for "a chance" saying he would go straight away and not come back again. "You have had too many chances," said the magistrate, who imposed a sentence of 3 months imprisonment.

By November 1924 Murray's convictions had climbed to 61, including among others, acting in a strange manner by stopping young ladies on Great South Rd, and stealing seven bottles of beer.

In March 1925, once again at Hamilton, he was charged with drunkenness. Murray, now having blackouts, said he remembered starting back to his work at Arapuni (about 60ks from Hamilton) and buying some provisions on the way, including methylated spirits, some of which he drank, after which he did not remember anything. He had come from Arapuni for a **'jollification' on St Patrick's Day** and had spent a week drinking heavily.

By late 1925, a homeless Murray was often seen on Auckland's waterfront, drinking meths and suffering greatly from the after effects. He sold bottles and rags to get drink and was noticeably very shaky.

In the early evening of November 6 Christopher Brown, a fish curer, saw Murray sitting on the Nelson Street wharf drinking meths in the company of another man. Murray had his shoes off and his socks had the heels out of them. **He was not seen again.**

When the inquest into the death of Hugh James Murray opened more problems arose in the already involved case of mistaken identity. Sgt Flannagan, representing the police, was about to call the first witness, when a brother of Murray rose and asked that the inquest be adjourned in order that another brother, who had seen the deceased last, could attend.

"Don't you think the deceased is your brother Hugh James?" asked the coroner. "I do not think for one moment Your Worship," was the brothers startling answer.

Sgt Flannagan firmly replied "The evidence we have clearly establishes identity."

The coroner said he would reopen the inquest if any good purpose could be served but as far as he could gather from the evidence the deceased was Hugh James Murray.

When the body was recovered from the water there was an empty methylated spirits bottle in a pocket.

The coroner found that Hugh James Murray was drowned in the Auckland harbour.



Hugh James Murray in 1921

Evidently there was **an astonishing likeness** between the two men and Hobart Town Jack had a double. The only marked difference between the two was that Hobart Town had a moustache which the dead man did not. Otherwise, the cheek bones, prominent lips, hair and even a broken nose were all identical.

There was no death notice for Hugh James Murray and he remained in the grave dug for the legendary Hobart Town Jack.

**But who was Hobart Town Jack really?**



He was fondly described, prematurely posthumously, by newspapers as  
*“Hobart Town Jack – A Lively Thames Boy – Some Escapades – A Real Character.”*

As his name suggests he was born in Hobart Town, Tasmania on 22 April 1858.

At some stage he arrived in New Zealand, possibly with Sydney born Alrina (Ellen) Crick.

On 16 November 1882, aged 24, he married Ellen at the Thames registrar’s office. Their present residence was noted as Thames, their usual residence as Kennedy’s Bay.

Three weeks later their daughter, Jane Harriet, was born. She was followed in quick succession by Margaret Ellen in 1884, John William in 1886 and Jack around 1888.

In the 1880s, as a man in his prime, Hobart Town Jack was noted for his athletic abilities.

But an **unsettling undercurrent** swirled beneath the story of the athletic legend, the romanticised racer of coaches, the larrikin who loved mud.

In 1887 several Auckland boxers arranged a boxing benefit for William Murphy, a champion lightweight boxer, at the Athletic Hall, Auckland. Details of Murphy’s boxing prowess noted that he had once “licked Hobart Town Jack in 12 rounds”.

This set off a volley of written sparring in the *Observer* newspaper.

*To the Athletic Editor – I see by your issue of April 2<sup>nd</sup> that W Murphy knocked me out in 12 rounds, which I wish to contradict, as he never did it. I am willing to meet him again if he will come to my terms and meet me at the Thames. Throw out your chest Billy.*  
*John Gallagher*

John Gallagher, noted the *Observer* gleefully, was **no less a personage than Hobart Town Jack**, whom Murphy fought and defeated some years ago. Jack had “come out of his shell” and Murphy would no doubt “throw out his chest” and accept the invitation.

William Murphy would not accept the invitation unless it was for a sum exceeding £4. Hobart Town weighed around 12st to Murphy’s 8st 4lb but Hobart Town’s reputation was not good enough for Murphy to proceed to Thames. The last time he fought there he didn’t clear expenses even though he won the battle.

“He knows perfectly well that I am only 11 stone and fight 10st 6lbs,” Hobart Town blustered back, adding “It seems Billy is too timid to face his old opponent.” The fight never happened.

Walking matches were all the rage during the 1870s and 1880s. Hobart Town Jack favoured the go-as-you-please style in which contestants could walk, run, or rest whenever they desired, as long as they followed the official rules.

In January 1888 he competed against Harry Gordon in a half hour’s ‘go-as- you -please.’ The contest was carried out in the most spirited manner but although Hobart Town was leading he gave Harry Gordon a clip on the ear and tumbled him over. Hobart Town was the winner but a protest was lodged against him. His hitting of his opponent was greatly resented by the public who **disapprovingly hooted** at him.

The fabled running match between himself and Fred Wells, butcher, took place in 1888 from the battery at Waiomo, to the Royal Hotel, Tararu Creek, a distance of 8 or 9 miles. Wells rode on horseback whilst Hobart Town ran on foot from the battery. Hobart Town was allowed half an hour’s start and won within minutes, appearing pretty fresh at the finish.

But Hobart Town’s boxing prowess was dubious. In June 1888 he optimistically took on Dick Matthews, an American-born heavy weight champion of New Zealand. The match was a very tame affair only lasting three or four minutes. In the second round Hobart Town **received a pounding** and immediately gave in.

Hobart Town by now was succumbing to an unfortunate fondness for drink which made him belligerent.

At Paeroa he was seen contemplating the mud outside the Criterion Theatre when a young clerk, carrying a typewriter, passed him. **Amused at the muddy man** the clerk laughed at him. Hobart Town pursued the youth up the stairs of the Criterion Theatre, where there were lawyers’ offices, and where some small girls were having a lesson in the use of the typewriter. The startled young clerk attacked Hobart Town in defence of the girls.

The noise of the fight on the landing disturbed the players and audience in the theatre below and men emerged to help. As Hobart Town was dragged down the stairs he broke the banisters with his hands as he went. At the Police Court next morning Hobart Town appeared perfectly clean and calm and unmarked, shining with virtue and innocence.

In June 1890, aged 32, Hobart Town spent a fortnight in prison for resisting police and damaging a uniform. That same year his fifth child, William Alexander was born, with siblings Florence and Emma Kathleen arriving promptly at two year intervals over the next four years.

A two mile walking contest at the old Parawai Gardens in April 1893 between Hobart Town and George Kelly resulted in an easy win for Hobart Town who was given a one minute start.

In 1895 Hobart Town was charged at the Paeroa Police Court with being drunk and disorderly. The next year he breached the peace and used threatening behaviour in Brown Street, Thames.

By now Hobart Town and Ellen were living at Campbell Street, Thames. Their eighth child, Lilian was born. True to form, the irrepressible Hobart Town Jack was calling himself a Mining Expert.

In late November 1897 while working at the Golden Cross Mine in Waitekauri Hobart Town was **struck on the leg** by a stone falling down the pass. He received a rather nasty cut and there was speculation that a planned running race from Paeroa to Thames would fall through.

The long distance race went ahead though taking place on the old coach road. Hobart Town was competing against Kenneth Bain, a running champion from the West Coast. Bain was the favourite at 3 to 2 but Hobart Town's supporter's felt confident of his ability to win and backed him heartily.

Strangely the *Auckland Star* fictitiously reported that at about half distance Hobart Town drew away from Bain and won easily. The time was said to have been 3 hours and 10 minutes.

In reality Bain never showed up and Hobart Town ran the distance by himself. He left Shaw's Commercial Hotel at Paeroa promptly at 12.30pm, passing through Hikutaia at 1.10pm and arrived at Sullivan's Shortland Hotel at Thames at 3.20pm. He completed the distance of about 21miles in 2 hours 50minutes which was considered very good going considering the heat and dust.

A mile race in Mrs Corbett's paddock in March 1898 between Hobart Town Jack and Mr Rae, licensee of the Hauraki Hotel, Waitekauri, saw Mr Rae win by a short nose in 6 minutes 4 seconds. Hobart Town was backed by Mr Ronan of the Golden Cross mine.

Four years later, in 1900, the regularly shifting family of Hobart Town Jack had moved to Sealey Street, Thames and their ninth and last child, Albert, was born.

By 1905 they were living in Upper Pollen Street. In July Hobart Town was caught playing a game of chance called 'Yankee Sweat' at Matatoki. Detective Denorville seized the dices and other implements of play.

In August Hobart Town was charged with assaulting Alex Campbell in the Criterion Theatre, Paeroa. Mr Campbell and his two daughters wanted to go downstairs when Hobart Town rushed up and refused to let them pass. He struck Campbell and also struck one of the girls twice. Mr Campbell refused to press charges, as Hobart Town appeared to be **mad drunk**.

Hobart Town was again brought up at the Magistrates Court Paeroa in 1907 on a charge of being on licensed premises (the race course booth at Paeroa) while having a prohibition order against him.

In 1908 he participated in a wrestling match at the Miner's Union Hall, Waihi, for £10 a side. Before the contest there was a preliminary bout between Don McCarthy and Hobart Town Jack. The bout was somewhat of a farce, as Hobart Town was completely outclassed.

A month later in the Waihi Court Hobart Town Jack was fined £5 and costs for drunkenness and sentenced to three months in prison for having committed an indecent act in Seddon Street, Waihi.

Sometime between 1910 and 1913 he made Clevedon and the Ness Valley a base, living there on and off.

By 1916, now 58, Hobart Town Jack, "a well known character", was fined 20s at Te Aroha for using objectionable language, as well as the extreme penalty of a 12 months prohibition order.

He appears to have drifted around the Waikato – arrested at Huntly for being drunk and using indecent language, then at Morrinsville for not paying a fine. Police noted he was usually dressed in dark tweed suit and he sometimes used the alias Jackson.

In April 1919 he made the court columns of the *NZ Truth* newspaper who described him as "**a big lump of a fellow.**" He was charged at the Auckland Police Court with being drunk on Queen Street and also resisting arrest. Hobart Town still bore the marks of the tussle when he pled guilty. Senior Sergeant John said that although Hobart Town was an elderly man he was still a tough problem. When sober all was well, but when in drink he was a madman.

His arrests for being drunk, idle and disorderly continued although he gave his occupation as a labourer.

In November 1925 Hobart Town was famously resurrected and discovered living humbly at Clevedon, evidently parted from his family and at the age of 67 hoping for a job on the roads.

But eight months later he appeared at Paeroa Police court charged with drunkenness and being idle and disorderly. Hobart Town, whose old haunts were in the area, had been hanging round Paeroa hotels without doing any work. The Bench decided that in his own interests he should be committed and convicted and sentenced to one month, but compassionately without hard labour, at the Mt Eden goal. On the drunkenness charge he was convicted and discharged.

For the next 12 years the noise and fanfare and chaos that surrounded Hobart Town Jack gradually dwindled.

On 13 July 1938 Hobart Town Jack died at Kingseat psychiatric Hospital in Auckland. Despite the clairvoyant's prophecy that he would live to 108 he was 80.

He was interred at Hillsborough cemetery where all those years ago the grave of another man had waited for him.

The newspapers again revived the amazing tales of his exploits, but there were less this time as the passing of years had taken those who knew him and dimmed the memories of others.

*"The death occurred at Onehunga this week of Mr John Gallagher, also known as Hobart Town Jack, to the older generation of New Zealanders. Just how he got his name has never been definitely stated. Hobart Town Jack was one of the most talked-of identities of the Thames goldfields days, and his fame was as wide as the Auckland province. He is one of **the great figures of Thames folklore**, about whose feats of endurance as a runner many tales are told. . . .*

*Northern Advocate 18 July 1938*

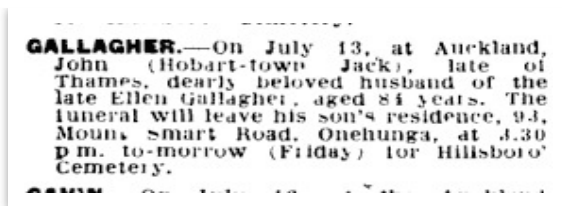
*"Hobart Town Jack! Shades of old Thames, how the name rolls back the years to conjure up memories of the rip-roaring goldfields days of 60 years ago! Days rich in men of fealty strength, rich in nicknames bestowed by the men themselves, robust and rugged beyond the common, upon a few of outstanding physical gifts. There are men still living who can bear witness that he was the original hiker of Auckland fame . . . "*

*Auckland Star 15 July 1938*

Curiously he was remembered for a 'peculiar characteristic' - he was said to never have used strong language. If something annoyed him it was a "jolly beggar" or was "that beggarin' this" or "beggarin' that". Because of this oddity he was evidently called "the beggarin' man."

This is in direct contrast to his arrests for indecent and objectionable language, but perhaps his manners deserted him when he was drunk. Perhaps this was the darker side of him others rarely saw.

Hobart Town's most famous and extraordinary race, against the 'old man with scythe' in the 1925 'drowning' episode was re-told with relish, but this time round **Hobart Town Jack had finally run his last race.**



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Hobart Town Jack appears to have not known his birth year, either genuinely or deliberately. He was born John William Gallagher on 22 April 1858.

In 1917 he told police he was 64, making his birth year 1853 (he was actually 59.) Some of this confusion may have been caused by the 8 and 3 in 1858 and 1853 on handwritten documents looking similar.

At the time of his 'drowning' in 1925 he said he was 71, turning 72 the following April. The death notice says he was 70 and various newspaper reports put him between 70 and 72. He was actually 67 in 1925.

Even his grave inscription is wrong – it says he was 82 when he died in 1938, but he was 80. Probably his family didn't know his exact birth year and relied on what he had told them.

The distances given in the racing of coaches and horses do not match today's distances but road layouts and lengths were different at the time. Waihi to Thames today is 35ks (22 miles), Waiomo to Thames is 14ks (8 miles).

The Willie Winkie incident is not mentioned in newspaper reports. The Willie Winkie sank in 1899. The Hikutaia log accident is also not reported, although a version of these events likely did happen.

Ellen Gallagher died 17 December 1937 aged 73. Her death notice said she was the "dearly beloved wife of John William Gallagher".

Methylated spirits were much more toxic than ordinary alcohol due to the fact that it took much longer to be destroyed in the tissues; the effect of one dose could last for days. It had a poisonous effect on the central nervous system, caused acute gastritis and led to mental confusion. One of its most disastrous effects was on vision. Meths drinkers often had purple lips. A 1934 report said the drinking of methylated spirits "saps the moral strength and leads to more depravity than ordinary alcoholic beverages." It is little wonder Hugh James Murray ended up in the harbour.



## How physically like were John Gallagher and Hugh Murray?

From Police Gazette descriptions -

*Hugh Murray* was around 5ft 4 inches tall. He had a fresh complexion, brown hair, blue eyes and a medium nose. He had a small scar on the right side of his nose and a scar on the end of his right index finger.

From the mid 1900s he had a scar on his left cheek as well as his right jaw – possibly from jaw abscess treatment in 1914.

By 1921 the finger and nose scars were no longer noticeable.

*John Gallagher* was 5ft 9 inches tall in 1916. He had a fresh complexion, dark hair turning grey, grey/hazel eyes, medium nose and stooped shoulders.

By 1924 he was 5ft 5 ¼ inches but described as of a strong build and pigeon chested (a narrow chest that sticks out more than usual). His hair had turned grey. He now had a scar on his nose.

Although the men were 24 years apart in age – the time spent in the water would have been quite disfiguring.

As well as an astonishing physical likeness there were several parallels between Hobart Town Jack and Hugh Murray. They suffered the terrible disease of alcohol addiction, were down on their luck, often homeless, drifting, and had phantom jobs waiting for them.

After the upheaval of World War One, in the early 1920s the prosperous post-war economic boom crashed to a halt and there was an abrupt recession. New Zealand struggled as wool and dairy prices tumbled. Unemployment mushroomed and state spending was drastically cut. For Hobart Town, then in his early 60s, and Hugh Murray, in his late 30s, both addled by drink, it was an unstable world to negotiate.

In 1923, aged 65, Hobart Town was eligible for the means-tested pension but with the many reported discrepancies in his age it is unclear if he received it. In 1925, when he was 67, during his famous 'resurrection' he was reported as hoping for a job on the roads.

It only got worse for Hobart Town. The 1930s Great Depression added fire to flame of unemployment, there was desperation, rioting and great suffering. Work relief schemes offered little hope to elderly, problematic men such as him.

## SOURCES

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Alastair Isdale - I must mention Jack Gallagher, "Hobart Town Jack", a noted character, bushman, miner and long-distance runner, who could race the coach from Waihi to Thames and then from Thames to Waihi. <http://www.ohinemuri.org.nz/journals/13-journal-2-october-1964/351-ohinemuri-links-with-thames>

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at July 20, 2019

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