

OUR UNBROKEN SPIRITS

# The Real People Behind the Trilogy

*The family history that became three novels — the true ancestors who walk, renamed, through the books.*

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Donna Goodacre

*Author of the Our Unbroken Spirits trilogy*

## Where these stories began

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Thank you for reading. Before you meet Lucy and Ngaroma on the page, I wanted to introduce you to the people who came first — the real ones.

*Our Unbroken Spirits* did not begin as a novel. It began as a family-tree project. I went looking for my own ancestors, and what I found was a line that ran from a famous comedian on the London stage all the way to a small wooden church on the wild west coast of Auckland — and, somewhere in the middle, a young Tainui woman of Kawhia whose world the colonial records barely paused to notice.

That silence is where the fiction was born. Every genealogist knows the moment the documents simply stop: a name with no parents, a woman with no story, a life reduced to a single line in a register. I couldn't recover those lost facts, so I did the only thing I could — I imagined them. The trilogy is, in the end, the spaces between the records, written carefully back in.

Everyone in the pages that follow truly lived. The dates, the ships, the scandals and the small wooden church are all real. What I added was the inner life the archive left out. Here, then, are the real people behind the books.

— Donna



## The line, at a glance

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The trilogy follows a single bloodline as it crosses the world and two cultures. In real life, it ran like this:

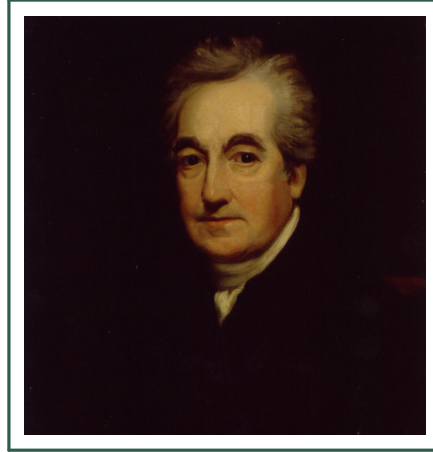
<b>Joseph Shepherd Munden</b>	<i>London comedian (1758–1832) &amp; Mary Jones</i>
↓	
<b>The Greenwoods of Kentish Town</b>	<i>innkeepers, then stockbrokers</i>
↓	
<b>Captain Joseph Greenwood</b>	<i>soldier &amp; politician; sailed to New Zealand, 1847</i>
↓	
<b>Turahina</b>	<i>of the Kawhia coast; Miriama's mother</i>
↓	
<b>Miriama Potiki</b>	<i>and her brother Wiremu, also called Hemi (1838–1888)</i>
↓	
<b>Hōhepa (Joseph) Greenwood</b>	<i>the Hamilton violinist (1856–1889)</i>
↓	
<b>Lucy Clarke</b>	<i>married at fifteen; the heart of the story (1862–1918)</i>
↓	
<b>... and the generations after</b>	<i>down to a young man bound for Gallipoli — and to today</i>

# The Real People

*one ancestor at a time*

## Joseph Shepherd Munden & Mary Jones

*London · 1750s–1790s · my four-times-great-grandparents*



*Joseph Shepherd Munden, comedian of  
Covent Garden*

At the very root of the line stands a man of a hundred faces. Joseph Shepherd Munden, born above a poulterer's shop in Brooke's Market off Leather Lane, ran away again and again to join strolling players until he became one of the most celebrated comedians of the Georgian stage, playing Covent Garden for years.

But I don't descend from his respectable wife. I descend from Mary Jones, the woman who called herself Mrs Munden in the 1780s, bore him four daughters, and was later written out of the polite version of his story. History remembered the famous man and quietly mislaid the woman beside him — a pattern you'll see repeat down the whole line.

### **In the books**

*Joseph and Mary are the seed of everything — and the heart of my prequel-in-progress, [Voices of Leather Lane](#). The trilogy's recurring theme, the woman the records leave in the margins, begins here with Mary.*



## Captain Joseph Greenwood

1816–1861 · soldier, author, politician · the man who crossed the world

Munden's line married into the Greenwoods of Kentish Town — publicans at the Bull and Gate who became wealthy stockbrokers — and produced Joseph Greenwood, a soldier who distinguished himself in the war in Afghanistan and even wrote a book about it.

In 1847 he sailed for New Zealand on the *Minerva* as a brigade major — bringing his wife, Catherine Perroux, and their young son Colin — and arrived at Official Bay to a guard of honour. He prospered: a fine house near St Paul's, racehorses at Mangere, a seat in the House of Representatives. Yet beneath the respectable surface ran another life entirely — one that would join my family to the land he had come to govern.

### In the books

*Joseph is the collision point of two worlds: imperial England and Aotearoa. His choices — and their cost — set the whole saga in motion.*

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## Miriama Potiki

1838–1888 · a young Tainui woman of Kawhia

Miriama came from the Kawhia coast, of Tainui. Her mother was Turahina; her brother was Wiremu, known too by the name Hemi. She was only eighteen when she bore Captain Joseph Greenwood a son — the child who would carry both worlds forward.

Her later life I can trace in full: after Joseph sailed back to England she made a life with Solomon Clarke, then married Richard Paltridge, the signalman at Manukau Heads, and bore six more children before she died at fifty. She lies in the little graveyard at Awhitu Central, beside a wooden church that still stands — her grave unmarked until our own century, when her descendants gathered at last to honour her.

### In the books — *Finding Miriama*

*Book one carries her name. It opens on a wild beach with her mother, Turahina, and a child lost before Miriama is ever born — then follows Miriama and her brother Wiremu into the world that made them.*

## Hōhepa (Joseph McLean) Greenwood

1856–1889 · hairdresser, soldier, violinist of Hamilton

Miriama’s son grew up between two worlds — schooled at St Stephen’s Māori Boys’ School in Parnell, before its records burned. He set up as a hairdresser in Hamilton, joined the Hamilton Light Infantry, and was remembered for his quiet, unassuming manners.

And he played the violin. His obituary in the *Waikato Times* records that his services as a violinist “were always in requisition at all the dances in the countryside.” He died of typhoid at just thirty-three, leaving a young widow and small children.

### In the books — *Of Greenstone and Violins*

*The title of book two is no invention. The violin is his; the greenstone is the Tainui inheritance that runs through Miriama’s line. Two heirlooms, two worlds, one family.*



## Colin Greenwood

*Joseph's son by Catherine Perroux · the painter of the family*

Colin is the half-brother history kept. Where Hōhepa was Joseph Greenwood's son by Miriama and lived at the edge of the respectable world, Colin was the legitimate child — Joseph's son by his wife, Catherine Perroux — carried out to New Zealand on the *Minerva* in 1847 while still a boy, into the fine house, the racehorses and the politics.

There is a truth about Colin that the records of his day could never safely hold: he loved men, in an age when that love was treated as both scandal and crime. He came of age into the same world that would put Oscar Wilde on trial and behind bars — a time when such a life could not be spoken aloud, let alone written into a family register. His is one more story the archive kept in shadow, and one I wanted to bring gently into the light.

But Colin's gift lay elsewhere. He became a painter, and it is partly through his pictures that I can still see the world this family moved through — the wide skies, the tide-flats, the English coast they had left behind. The watercolour below is his: a quiet shore under a clouded sky, a boat drawn up on the wet sand and a far ship lost in the haze.



*Beachy Head — a watercolour by Colin Greenwood*

### **In the books**

*Colin moves through all three novels — the artist who watches and records, and a man whose truest self the record of his time could never hold. In a family story so often about who was written out, Colin is the one holding the brush.*

## Lucy Clarke

*1862–1918 · married at fifteen · the heart of the trilogy*

Born Lucy Drake, renamed Clarke for her stepfather, Lucy was just fifteen when she married a Thames miner named John Taylor. In 1881 she did something a woman of her time was not supposed to do: she took her baby, left her husband and two small sons, and went to live with Hōhepa Greenwood in Hamilton.

They never married, but she stayed with him and bore him four children until his early death left her a widow. Then she married Thomas Chappell, and had seven more. By the end of her life she had borne some fifteen children. A court case, a divorce, a small business of her own: Lucy refused to be only what the record allowed.



*Lucy with her third husband, Tom Chappell, and the Greenwood & Chappell children*

### **In the books**

*Lucy is the colonial heart of Our Unbroken Spirits — the 1880s timeline that today's Ngaroma slowly uncovers. The woman who walked away is the one I most wanted to understand.*

## Thomas Chappell & the road to Gallipoli

*the next generation · into a new century*

Lucy's second husband, Thomas Chappell, raised her growing family into the new century. From the many children of these joined lines — Pōtiki, Greenwood, Clarke, Chappell, Paltridge — came the generation that would meet the twentieth century's first great catastrophe.

Like so many New Zealand families, this one sent a young man overseas who did not come home: Wiri, son of Wiremu, lost at Gallipoli. The thread that began on a Kawhia beach reaches, in the end, to a far shore on the other side of the world — and then forward again, to a descendant today asking who all these people were.



*Wiri (1887–1915) — son of Wiremu —  
who falls at Gallipoli at the close of Book  
Three*

### **In the books — *The Spirit Remains***

*Book three carries the line into war and remembrance — Miriama's brother Wiremu (Hemi) at its heart, and his son Wiri at the shore that takes him — closing the circle between the colonial past and Ngaroma's present-day search.*

## Fact, and the spaces between

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People often ask which parts of the trilogy are ‘true.’ The honest answer is: the bones are all real. The ships sailed, the court cases were heard, the violinist played, the woman left her husband, the young Tainui mother lies in that churchyard at Awhitu. Those things happened.

What I invented is everything the records never kept — the conversations, the griefs, the reasons. When a register gives me a name and two dates, the rest is mine to imagine, as faithfully as I can to the world they lived in. That is what historical fiction lets us do that genealogy alone cannot: it lets us sit with these people, and give them back their inner lives.

If reading their real stories has made you curious about the imagined ones, the books are waiting on the next page.

# Now, the imagined ones

If their real lives moved you, step into the world I built around them.

## **START WITH BOOK ONE**

*Finding Miriama*

[books2read.com/u/m0ydBY](https://books2read.com/u/m0ydBY)

## **THE COMPLETE TRILOGY**

*Our Unbroken Spirits* — in paperback, ebook & audiobook

[the complete trilogy on Amazon](#)

## **STAY IN TOUCH**

New stories, the real history behind the fiction, and what I'm writing next.

[n32y7q.subscribepage.io](https://n32y7q.subscribepage.io)

## **FOLLOW THE RESEARCH**

The family tree behind the books lives on my genealogy blog.

[mundengreenwoodtree.blogspot.com](https://mundengreenwoodtree.blogspot.com)

— Donna Goodacre