

Chapter 11

Biography of John Bernard Moore – “John Ellis”

Hangman John Bernard Moore died on May 8, 1950, at age 57, due to kidney cancer.¹ The death certificate includes a considerable amount of information that may not be accurate, depending on the knowledge and veracity of the informant, assumed to be his wife, Mary Pratt Moore, or son, calling himself Bernard Moore. Our hangman was said to be born in England on February 5, 1893. His father was Alfred Moore, and his mother was Annie Vale. He was married to Mary Gertrude Pratt. He was said to have resided in Canada for 25 years, most recently on Kennedy Road, Milliken, in the Township of Markham, District of York. Curiously, his profession was listed not as a farmer, but as a mason in the bricklaying business, which he had allegedly been engaged in for the last 14 years.² His remains were buried at the Pine Hills Cemetery in Scarborough.³ As we will see, much of this information is questionable. We know for certain, for example, that he resided in Canada long before 1925.

I. PARENTS?

Turning to the English records for his purported mother, we discover that Annie Vale was born in Colchester, Essex, sometime in the first three months of 1860,⁴ but not baptized until the age of 12 in 1872.⁵ Her father, Joseph Vale, a baker, and mother, Ellen

¹ Medical Certificate of Death, Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869-1950. As noted previously all genealogical references are taken from ancestry.com or familysearch.com unless otherwise stated.

² Statement of Death, *ibid.*

³ Section J, Lot 2274, Pine Hills Cemetery, Mount Pleasant Group, Find a Grave, at <www.mountpleasantgroup.com>.

⁴ *England and Wales Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915.*

⁵ *Essex, England Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1921.*

Lawrence Vale, lived in Colchester on Magdalene Street and eventually had 11 children, two dying as infants.⁶ The family was evidently poor. For example, in the 1881 Census, the mother, Ellen, was listed as a “mangle woman,” renting out her mangle machine to press clothes or taking in laundry for pressing.⁷ In the 1871 Census, daughter, Mary A. Vale, age 14 at the time, was working as a domestic servant. Mary A. Vale was four years older than her sister, Annie Ruth Vale.⁸ In the Census of 1881, Annie Ruth Vale, reported as 22 years of age, and also a former domestic servant like her sister, was now a special inmate at the House of Mercy, an institution for “fallen” girls and women in Great Maplestead, Essex.⁹ We do not know how long the purported mother of our hangman was there, and what “special” means. Her father Joseph died in 1902, and her mother in 1911.¹⁰

Annie Ruth Vale got married sometime in the last three months of 1888 to Alfred Moore,¹¹ the purported father of our hangman. Alfred James Moore was born in 1867, six or seven years younger than his wife, Annie Ruth Vale, born in 1860. Alfred Moore was born in Walton-on-the-Naze, a seaside area not far from Colchester, Essex.¹² His father, James, was a bricklayer, and his mother, Jane Sallows Moore, took in laundry.¹³ The family was small. Alfred had an older half-brother, William Sallows, who was born at least a year prior to the marriage of James and Jane in 1862.¹⁴ Given that he was listed in 1871 at the age of 10 with the last name of Sallows rather than Moore, we presume that this would be a child of Jane Sallows, the mother of Alfred, but not a child of the father, James Moore. John William Sallows eventually got married and had a large family, and lived at Great Oakley,

⁶ *England Census of 1861 and 1871.*

⁷ *England Census of 1881* [Census].

⁸ *England Census of 1871.*

⁹ *Census*, *supra* note 7.

¹⁰ *England and Wales Civil Registration of Deaths Index, 1832-1915.*

¹¹ *England and Wales Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915* [Civil Registration].

¹² According to *Census of 1871* when he was 4 years old.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Essex, England, Church of England Marriages, 1754-1937.*

Walton district, where he was a butcher.¹⁵ He died in 1918 at the age of 58.¹⁶ The purported father of our hangman also had one younger brother, Arthur, who was two years younger than him.¹⁷ This brother ended up immigrating to the United States, and died in 1940 in New York.¹⁸ In 1911, both of Alfred's parents were still living at age 70 at Clacton on the Sea in Walton, Essex, and Jane was listed as having given birth to only 3 children.¹⁹

As noted, our hangman's parents, Alfred James Moore and Annie Ruth Vale, were married in 1888.²⁰ In the Census of 1891, Annie Ruth Vale was listed as 30, and Alfred James Moore, age 23, was listed as a bricklayer. There were no children listed, and the couple was living in Colchester at 126 Magdalen Street with one of Annie Ruth Vale's widowed uncles, Daniel Vale, a bread and beer seller.²¹

II. ADOPTED?

Ten years later, in the Census of 1901, we have all sorts of questions that arise as to our hangman's actual lineage. His death certificate listed his birth as February 5, 1893, so we would expect that he would show up as a 7- or 8-year-old with his parents in 1901. John B. Moore's alleged parents were still living with Daniel Vale, now 84, at 126 Magdalen Street in Colchester. Alfred, age 32, was listed as a bricklayer, while Annie, 38, was a homemaker. There was no listing of a son, John B. Moore, at all. Rather, there was a son, John J. Moore, born in Colchester, age 11, living with them. This boy would have been born around 1890 or even 1889, depending on the date of the census, but was not listed in the earlier census of 1891. Perhaps this John J. Moore was our

¹⁵ See *England Census of 1881*; *England Census of 1891*; *England Census of 1901*; *England Census of 1911*.

¹⁶ England and Wales, *Civil Registered Death Index*, 1916-2007.

¹⁷ *England Census of 1871*.

¹⁸ New York, *Index of Death Certificates*, 1862-1948. The parents of Arthur Moore are listed as James Moore and Jane Sallows. See also, US Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007.

¹⁹ *England Census of 1911*.

²⁰ Civil Registration, *supra* note 11.

²¹ *England Census of 1891*.

hangman, who changed his middle name to Bernard, and was born in 1890, rather than 1893? There are many persons called John J. Moore in various records, but none, other than the census of 1901, relate to a John J. Moore born specifically in Colchester around 1890.

Ten years later, in the Census of 1911, our mystery deepens. We have living at 126 Magdalen Street, Colchester, Alfred James Moore, 44, married for 23 years, bricklayer, living with wife, Annie Ruth Moore, 50. In this census, there was a question about how many children the wife had given birth to in her lifetime. The answer was zero! No mention of either John J. Moore born in 1890, or John B. Moore born in 1893. Instead, we have an adopted daughter, Mary Gertrude Moore, aged 8.²² We surmise that this adopted child would have been born in 1903 or so. Perhaps the John J. Moore mentioned in the Census of 1901 was also adopted, but it is equally possible that Annie Ruth Vale Moore may have lied that she never gave birth to any children.

III. MOVE TO CANADA:

While we have no records as to the birth of John B. Moore or his whereabouts for decades, we have evidence that he may have moved to Canada at an early age. Jumping forward several decades, and keeping in mind that the death notice in the newspaper mentioned a connection of some sort with Cochrane, Ontario, the Canadian Census for 1921 revealed that John B. Moore, born in England, age 29, (so born in 1892-93, depending on birthdate and date of census), labourer in the building industry earning \$700 a year, and his wife Mary, age 20, born in England, were living in the town of Cochrane, Ontario. We will eventually deal with his marriage, but for our purposes, what is significant at this stage is that John B. Moore stated that he came to Canada in 1907, while his wife came in 1919.²³ If he was born in February of 1893, he would have been only a 14-year-old lad when he came to Canada in 1907, if this information is reliable.

The 1921 Canadian Census also records that John Bernard Moore's parents, Alfred J. Moore, age 54, and Annie (Vale) Moore,

²² *England Census of 1911.*

²³ *1921 Census of Canada.*

age 58, both born in England, were now also living at the same address in Cochrane, Ontario, along with a roomer, Walter Vale, a single man aged 24, whom we presume was related in some way to Annie Vale, the purported mother of our hangman. Interestingly, it is the father, Alfred, who is listed here as an independent bricklayer.²⁴ The record also indicates that parents Alfred and Annie came to Canada in 1919, the same time as wife, Mary Pratt Moore arrived, while “roomer” Walter Vale arrived in 1920.

IV. ARMY

While we cannot find the records as to John B. Moore’s locations and occupations in Canada from 1907 through 1915, we know that on January 26, 1916, John Bernard Moore signed the attestation papers in Haileybury, Ontario, to join the 159th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.²⁵ We have numerous questions as to his veracity. Here he listed his birth date as being in London, England, on Dec. 5, 1884, rather than Feb. 5, 1893, the date listed on his death certificate in 1950. There is no question that he is our hangman, given his handwriting and the address found in numerous subsequent documents in the fifty pages in his Canadian army personnel file.²⁶ Why would he claim to be 31 years of age, rather than 22, turning 23? How do we know that this is not his real age, as apposed to the one announced at his death? He also listed his mother as Mary Anne Moore at 126 Magdalen Street in Colchester, England. As we have noted, his mother’s name was always listed as Annie Ruth Moore, not Mary Moore, although she may have called herself Mary.

At this point of enlistment in the army in 1916, John Bernard Moore claimed he was a cook living in Englehart, Ontario. He was measured as being 5 feet, six and three/quarter inches tall, and had a tattoo on his right wrist. He also claimed that he had previously

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *First World War Personnel Records*, National Archives of Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166 Box 3331-8 [National Archives].

²⁶ *Ibid.*

served for five years in the R.A.M.C.²⁷ We presume this means the Royal Army Medical Corp, but we have no evidence of this service.

Before the 159th Battalion shipped for Europe on October 31, 1916, John B. Moore filled out a will form witnessed by various army superiors on October 4th.²⁸ He bequeathed all his property to his sister, Miss Mary Moore, 126 Magdalen Street in Colchester, England. This would be the Mary Gertrude Moore listed as an 8-year-old adopted daughter in the English Census of 1911, who would now be 13 or 14 years old. On the same date as the will, he filled out a form on “Particulars of Families” where he listed his father as Alfred James Moore, and his mother as Mary Anne Moore, both living at 126 Magdalen Street, Colchester. But on this document, he stated that he was born in Currah, Ireland. Again, we do not know why he would lie on various documents, claiming to be born in London, England, and then claim a birth in Ireland.

John Bernard Moore arrived in England with his army company on November 11, 1916. While stationed at Seaford, he was transferred to the 8th Reserve Battalion briefly, but then on Feb. 8, 1917, he was transferred to the Canadian Railway Troops stationed at Purfleet.²⁹ On Feb. 18, the 4th Battalion CRT shipped to France, arriving on Feb. 23. We do not know the details of his work in France for many months, but then we find a considerable number of medical records in his file, starting on October 8, 1917, when he was taken off the field by ambulance and diagnosed at the field hospital with myalgia.³⁰ Soon after he was diagnosed with severe arthritis caused by Gonorrhea said to have been contacted several months earlier. While it is difficult to read the various handwriting on the medical records, Moore apparently had painful swelling of most of his joints and various “discharges.” He was under treatment at various Canadian Army hospitals in France and then was shipped back to England on November 20, 1917, to the Military Hospital at Manchester Row for 8 days of Gonorrhea treatments and then transferred to the Canadian Special Hospital in Witley, Surrey, for another 52 days of treatment for Gonorrhea. He was discharged from the hospital on Dec. 12, 1917. However,

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

on January 17, 1918, at Purfleet he was again suffering, this time from extreme rheumatism in his joints, exacerbated by the wet weather, and was unable to walk, much less march, when the rheumatic attacks took place.³¹

V. HE MARRIES HIS ADOPTED SISTER

On Feb. 18, 1918, he was granted leave in Purfleet to get married. A separate English record reveals that John Bernard Moore, age 26 on Feb. 23, 1918, married Mary Gertrude Pratt, supposedly age 17, at Christ Church, Surrey, England.³² We notice that he was no longer pretending to be born in 1884, but rather the age here fits with being born in 1893 rather than 1884. On the other hand, perhaps he was born earlier but lied as to his age, so as not to have too great an age gap between himself and the supposedly 17-year-old girl he was marrying. The marriage record listed him as a soldier with the Canadian Railway Troops stationed at Purfleet, England. His father, Alfred, was one of the witnesses on the marriage certificate.³³ His army file thereafter includes various "separation" payments to his now dependent wife, listed as Mary Gertrude Moore at 126 Magdalene Street, Colchester, the same address as his parents. When he was discharged from the Army during demobilization at the end of May 1919, his proposed residence after discharge was 126 Magdalene Street, Colchester.³⁴

Is it possible that this Mary Gertrude Pratt whom he married was really Mary Gertrude Moore, his sister by adoption, and that "Pratt" was just a convenient ruse? This would be the "sister" mentioned in his will in 1916. In the Canadian Census of 1931, wife Mary Gertrude Moore was listed as 27 years old, instead of 30, which she would have been if we follow the marriage record. In other words, this fits with Mary being 15 and his sister by adoption. Perhaps her birth name was Pratt before becoming Mary Gertrude Moore by adoption and then Mary Gertrude Moore again by marriage. There was a Pratt family living in Colchester with four

³¹ Numerous "Proceedings of a Medical Board," *ibid*.

³² *Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937*.

³³ *Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937*.

³⁴ National Archives, *supra* note 25.

boys, ages 16, 14, 12 and 7.³⁵ Given the gap in the ages of the third and fourth child, one wonders if Ellen Gertrude Mary Pratt, born in 1901, two years after the third boy and who died in infancy at Colchester,³⁶ might have been a source for borrowing the Pratt name.

In the end the English records leave us with the mystery as to our hangman's wife and the hangman's own lineage. Was he the biological son of Alfred Moore and Annie Vale? Was he adopted by them? Is he perhaps a child of Annie Vale, but not of Alfred Moore? Was he a child of Mary A. Moore, the older sister of his purported mother, Annie Vale?

VI. COCHRANE ONTARIO WITH WIFE AND PARENTS:

Several months after John Bernard Moore was released from the army, the ship *Baltic* arrived in Halifax on September 27, 1919, and John Moore, age 27, a returning soldier, born in England, and listed as a farmer from Cochrane from 1911 to 1916, disembarked from steerage.³⁷ Nothing here about John Moore being a former cook from Englehart. His purported parents were with him. Alfred James Moore, age 52, and wife, Annie Ruth Moore, age 56, stated they had never been to Canada before and were now going to live with their son, John B. Moore, in Cochrane. Mary Moore, the wife of John B. Moore, also disembarked, but was in a higher class of passengers, and was listed as born in England but from Scottish parentage and going to Cochrane as a housewife.³⁸

As noted previously, the Canadian Census of 1921, listed the younger Moore family living with the Moore parents in Cochrane, Ontario. Ten years later, according to the Canadian Census of 1931, John Bernard Moore, now 39, and his wife, Mary, now curiously listed as only 27 years of age instead of 30, were still living in Cochrane. They had a newborn son, William B. Moore. We

³⁵ England Census of 1911 and see earlier Census of 1901 when they lived on Magdalene Street.

³⁶ *England and Wales Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915; England and Wales, Civil Registered Death Index, 1916-2007.*

³⁷ Canada, *Incoming Passenger Lists, 1865-1935.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

assume that this son, who later called himself Bernard Moore, was the only child they had.³⁹ John Bernard Moore was listed as a Bailiff for the Divisional Court, making \$3000 a year, which is about \$60,000 a year in 2024 terms. His widowed father lived elsewhere in Cochrane and was listed as making \$450 a year as a bricklayer and unemployed for lack of jobs for the last 26 weeks.⁴⁰ John B. Moore's mother, Annie Ruth Vale, died in Cochrane from a sudden heart attack at age 62 on July 3, 1924.⁴¹

It would seem reasonable that John B. Moore, as a bailiff, executing judgments of the court, may have met Arthur Ellis or Sam Edwards and worked as their assistant for a time, especially for several hangings in North Bay and Haileybury. However, he may have been an assistant to executions in Ontario even before he became a bailiff or even went overseas in the war.

In January of 1932, John B. Moore lost his job as tax collector for the town of Cochrane. We assume that this was part of his job as bailiff. He was arrested in connection with an alleged shortage of \$3,800 and was released from jail on the posting of \$4,000 bail.⁴² A different report stated the shortage was \$3,600.⁴³ When the case came before Magistrate Tucker in Cochrane the charge had apparently been reduced to \$3,500 and then the amount changed again as reported in the local press:

Two men were required to carry the town's books into court. Receipts and cheque vouchers of several taxpayers for which it was alleged no credit was given, were next brought forth. Many of them were rentals collected from one of the largest taxpayers in town, to be applied to arrears. Crown-Attorney Caldbick explained that G. N. Ross, town auditor, had found that cheques to the amount of \$2,900 had been deposited to the credit of the town, but no official receipt had been given and was not entered in the collector's cash book.⁴⁴

³⁹ See post-death tribute notices in the *Toronto Star*.

⁴⁰ 1931 *Canada Census*.

⁴¹ *Ontario Deaths 1869-1950*.

⁴² "Ex-Collector of Taxes Held Deficit Charged," *Toronto Star* (14 January 1932) at 39.

⁴³ "Hold Cochrane Tax Collector," *Owen Sound Sun Times* (14 January 1932) at 1; Also see, "Adjourned for Week," *North Bay Nugget* (6 February 1932) at 14 where the amount is said to be \$3,645.

⁴⁴ "Case Against Cochrane Man Adjourned to Monday," *Timmins Porcupine Advance* (11 February 1932) at 2.

Lawyer John Greer, acting for Moore, quite rightly argued that the case should be adjourned until the defense had disclosure of just what the evidence was. Magistrate Tucker adjourned the case for a week.⁴⁵ Thereafter there were no press accounts as to subsequent proceedings. We may assume the charges were dropped, but in any case, this would have been an embarrassing event for John B. Moore. We cannot say on this evidence, without more, that John B. Moore was dishonest, although given the deception evident in the various records we have looked at, one may wonder.

A local history book on Cochrane has references to Magistrate Tucker but nothing on John B. Moore.⁴⁶

On April 14, 1936, the purported father of John B. Moore died in Cochrane, Ontario at the age of 70. The death certificate stated that he was a widower who been a bricklayer for 45 years until he stopped working in 1930. He died of kidney failure.⁴⁷ We do not know when John Bernard Moore left Cochrane, but when his father died in 1936, he was the informant on the death certificate and still listed his address as Cochrane.⁴⁸

As noted in the last chapter, Moore as hangman “John Ellis” eventually moved to a farm at Milliken and travelled from Toronto to various parts of Canada hanging people for a decade.

Curiously we can find no evidence of when Mary Gertrude (Pratt) Moore died. After hangman John B. Moore died in 1950, there were yearly tributes to him posted by wife Mary and son Bernard for ten years.⁴⁹ Perhaps the wife of the hangman eventually got married again and died under a different name? We have no subsequent information on son William Bernard Moore, born in 1931. Recently a William Bernard Moore, born in 1931 died in 2023 in Toronto and was buried at York Cemetery.⁵⁰ Perhaps this

⁴⁵ See also, “Lawyer Bewildered by Charge Changes,” *Kingston Whig-Standard* (9 February 1932) at 1; “Cochrane Official Appears for Trial,” *Montreal Star* (9 February 1932) at 8; “Adjourn Trial,” *Owen Sound Sun Times* (9 February 1932) at 7.

⁴⁶ Alice Marwick, *Northland Post: The Story of the Town of Cochrane* (Cochrane: 1950) at 297.

⁴⁷ Ontario, Canada, Deaths 1869-1950.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ The last one is found in *Toronto Star* (7 May 1960) at 41.

⁵⁰ Find a Grave (2025), online: <www.findagrave.com> [<https://perma.cc/B5YV-KFST>].

is the hangman's son, but with the many persons with the same name, it might well not be.

