

The  
*Ambition  
& Destiny*  
Series

Fact or Fiction



V L McBEATH

## The *Ambition & Destiny* Series

### Fact or Fiction

#### **\*\* Warning – May Contain Spoilers \*\***

The *Ambition & Destiny* Series was inspired by the true story of some of my ancestors. They lived in England during the Victorian-era, and I deliberately chose to write it as a novel, rather than a memoir, to give it more appeal.

Prior to writing the series, I had spent several years researching my family history. This had given me the outline of the story, but in those early years, it was predominantly based on census data, births, deaths and marriage certificates, and Wills.

It seems that this was no ordinary family, however, and as the story unfolded, I found details of some of the key events reported in a variety of newspapers. Working these facts into the fictional storyline eventually took over my life, and there are parts now that even I have to stop and think: *Did I make that up?*

Since the books were first published, readers have asked whether certain storylines were based on real-life events...or whether they are fictional. To answer this, I have pulled together some of the commonly asked questions, and given a little bit of background. As the series progresses, however, it becomes difficult to include questions that don't act as spoilers to the rest of the story. What I can say though is that a lot of Part 4 (*Only One Winner*) and most of Part 5 (*Different World*) are based on fact.

#### **General Principles:**

Before I get into the specifics of the books, I thought I'd cover some of the overarching principles:

1. All major characters in the books are based on real people.
2. All births, deaths, and marriages are true, in terms of dates, places, and for deaths, the cause of death (with one exception, where there was a slight modification).
3. Although the names of streets have sometimes been changed (to help keep the anonymity of the real people), the locations of the story are in the right geographical area and use real street names.
4. I have included mention of significant historical events (such as the death of Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, or the Great Exhibition in London), and tried to represent them in ways that I think would relate to the family at the time of the story.



### From *Condemned by Fate*

#### **Was Charles really imprisoned for stealing some ham and cheese?**

The short answer to this is yes!

During the Victorian-era, even the pettiest of crimes (such as stealing a handkerchief) carried severe penalties. The details of Charles' imprisonment and court hearing were taken from a short newspaper article I found from 1840.

In those times, the penalty for such a crime was likely to be transportation to Australia. Fortunately, things didn't go that far; otherwise I wouldn't be here to write about my ancestor's story today!

\*

### **Was Mary really banished from her family?**

This is one of the storylines I have no evidence for. I included it in the book, however, as I believe it is possible that it could have happened.

At the start of the book, Charles and his family belonged to a religious group called *The Society of Friends*, more commonly known as *Quakers*. In the early nineteenth century, the established church was the Church of England, and those of other religious denominations were considered non-conformers or dissenters. As such, they were excluded from many national institutions, including becoming Members of Parliament, or from attending or teaching at Oxford or Cambridge Universities. It was also often frowned upon to marry someone outside your own religious denomination.

The Quakers themselves were known to banish family or friends who married outside their religious circle, but for Mary and Charles, this wasn't the case. I know that Mary was baptised into the Church of England, but by the end of *Condemned by Fate* and at the start of *Hooks & Eyes*, I know she lived with Charles's family.

This made me wonder if her family could have refused to have anything more to do with her once she married a Quaker. It seemed possible, and so the arguments and subsequent estrangement of Mary from her family became part of the book.



## **From *Hooks & Eyes***

### **Was there a relationship between Mary and Richard?**

This storyline is purely fictional.

The reason I included it was because, following Charles' death, the idea of Mary having someone to turn to, appealed to me. It was also because, at the time, they probably saw a lot of each other, living as they did under the same roof. I was also intrigued because in the 19th century it was forbidden by the church for a man to marry the wife of his dead brother. This was based on the belief that when man and wife came together in matrimony, they were seen as one person in the eyes of the church, and in law. This effectively disqualified Mary from marrying any close relatives of her husbands, potentially adding to her woes.

\*

### **So what about Mr Wetherby and Sarah-Ann?**

There is some truth that Mr Wetherby and Sarah-Ann were fond of each other, although everything about their relationship in *Hooks & Eyes* is fictional.

As the story goes on, however, it becomes more grounded in fact. The reason for its inclusion in the story, however, only becomes apparent in Part 3: *When Time Runs Out*.

\*

### **Is it true that Mr Wetherby manufactured *Hooks & Eyes*?**

He did!

Depending on how far you've got through the series, you're likely to have differing views of Mr Wetherby. From my research, however, one thing seems clear. He was a very dedicated and determined man.

I found an old newspaper clipping that gave an insight into the sort of man he was. He started life in the South West of England (near Gloucester), but when he was in his early twenties, he walked to Birmingham, a journey of approximately 60 miles, because he didn't have the money to pay for transport.

Once there, he started making the hook and eye fasteners we are familiar with today. At one point he was one of the largest manufacturers of them in Birmingham (which probably also means the UK). I have heard reports that he invented them, although I am yet to confirm that.

He subsequently branched out into buttons and the manufacture of brass ornaments, but he never left hooks & eyes. When he died, many years later, he was a very wealthy man.

\*

### **Did they really drink so much gin?**

This is probably the most frequent question I get asked!

If I'm being honest, as far as my ancestors are concerned, I've no idea. However, I felt the need to include it in *Hooks & Eyes*, because at the time, gin was widely drunk by the poor and working classes.

In the early 19th-century water quality in the UK was poor. This was especially true in the rapidly expanding urban centres, and so for the price of a penny, it was often healthier to drink either gin, which had been distilled, or ale.

Within The *Ambition & Destiny* Series, the consumption of gin declines as the books move forward. This is partly because as the century advanced, towns gained access to clean drinking water making alternatives such as tea more popular. It was also because around that time gin was very much associated with the poor. As the family's prosperity increased, their drinking habits had to change accordingly!



## ***From Less Than Equals***

### **Was Harriet really locked in an asylum?**

Yes, she was!

There were several key findings while I was researching my family history that compelled me to write the story, and this was one of them.

The character of Harriet was inspired by the life of my great-great-grandmother. Although I have her hospital records, they don't state why she was initially admitted to the asylum. Because of the way the story develops, however, and because of the way women were treated in the Victorian-era, I decided that it was entirely plausible that being a woman was reason enough for her to have been locked up.

At the time, the primary roles for women were as mothers and homemakers. Women who tried to fight against this norm were often seen as being hysterical and, sadly, many were sent to asylums for corrective therapy.

As part of the research for the books, I spent a lot of time looking at women's rights in the Victorian-era. If you'd like more information, visit my website at:

**[valmcbeath.com/victorian-era-womens-rights/](http://valmcbeath.com/victorian-era-womens-rights/)**

\*

### **Were drugs like morphine and cocaine so commonly used?**

The short answer is yes!

It's difficult to understand today how such dangerous and addictive drugs could be used routinely but it must be remembered that in the Victorian-era there were very few treatment options available.

Ailments such as headaches, toothaches and diarrhoea, were commonplace and morphine was a popular treatment (often in the form of laudanum) because it worked. It was even used in cough medicine and taken regularly by children. The addictive nature of the drug only became known in the latter part of the 19th century, and it wasn't until the early 20th century that its use became restricted.

Cocaine came later (widespread use started in the 1880's). As described in Part 3: *When Time Runs Out* it, was sometimes given in combination with red wine (coca wine or *Vin Mariani*). When it was first introduced it was considered a miracle cure.

As with morphine, it was only later that the addictive nature of the drug became known.

If you'd like further information on laudanum or *Vin Mariani*, there are posts on my website that may be of interest:

[valmcbeath.com/victorian-era-medicine- Laudanum/](http://valmcbeath.com/victorian-era-medicine- Laudanum/)

[valmcbeath.com/victorian-era-medicine-vin-mariani/](http://valmcbeath.com/victorian-era-medicine-vin-mariani/)

\*

### **Did William really have learning difficulties?**

Not that I'm aware of!

Although that particular part of the storyline is made up, it seemed to explain some of the things that happened.

Even if William had struggled in the way I described, however, I doubt he would have been diagnosed correctly. Even today, children with dyslexia, and more so, those with dyscalculia, struggle to get a firm diagnosis. I imagine back then, they would have either suffered in silence or faced a lot of ridicule from people who thought they were imbeciles. It was a cruel world in the 1800s.

\*

### **Did William really name his son after Mr Wetherby?**

Yes, he did – and it gave me no end of problems when I was writing the books!

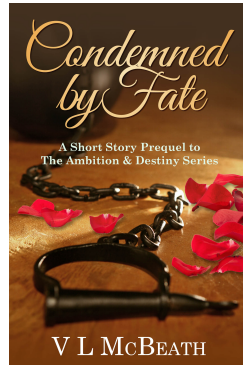


As mentioned earlier, I didn't want to include too much about the later books because I don't want to give away spoilers.

If you have any questions about the storyline, however, please feel free to contact me at: [val@valmcbeath.com](mailto:val@valmcbeath.com) and I'll be happy to answer them.

## Books in The *Ambition & Destiny* Series

Short Story Prequel: *Condemned by Fate*



Part 1: *Hooks & Eyes*

Part 2: *Less Than Equals*

Part 3: *When Time Runs Out*

Part 4: *Only One Winner*

Part 5: *Different World*

## The *Ambition & Destiny* Series



All books are available from Amazon as ebooks or in paperback.

Visit Amazon and search for VL McBeath to find my Author Page.