

The First Settlement City Gazette

The Journal of the
Redcliffe & District Family History Group Inc.
Established 5th March 1987



28 March 2024. Members of our group had lunch at Café 63 in Redcliffe to celebrate Vice President Sam Gill's 90th birthday. Sam is on the left in the blue shirt.

This occasion was also to welcome our English member, Jenny Brice, who had come back for another visit. Jenny is third on the right.

July 2024

Redcliffe and District Family History Group Inc.

Library Address: Clontarf Beach Scout Den, Cnr Maine Rd & Isobel St., Clontarf, Qld. 4019

Postal Address: 18 Collins Street, Woody Point, Qld. 4019

Email address: rdfhg2012@gmail.com

Website: www.redcliffefamilyhistory.org

PATRONS: **The Hon Luke Howarth, MP - Federal Member for Petrie**
 Councillor Sandra Ruck, Division 5, Moreton Bay Regional Council
 Councillor Karl Winchester, Division 6, Moreton Bay Regional Council

President	Cheryl Salisbury	0408 452 265
Vice President	Sam Gill	0468 354 776
Treasurer	Ted Flack	3885 8678
Secretary	Joan Flack	3885 8678
IT/Librarian	Graham Prothero	
Newsletter Editor	Leonne Willis	3885 3533
Committee Member	Dianne Hendey	

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Financial Year 1st July 20 to 30th June 20.

New Membership Joining Fee	\$ 6.00
Single Membership	\$ 35.00
Family Membership	\$ 40.00

LIBRARY HOURS: Tuesday & Thursday mornings 9.30 am - 12.30 pm
Closed: Mid December to late January.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS of Members are held at the Group's Library on the second Thursday of every second month from 11.00 a.m. Members are encouraged to attend.

NEWSLETTER. Members receive a copy of our newsletter, "*The First Settlement City Gazette*" by e-mail during the months of March, July and November. Hard copies are available. The newsletters are also available on the Group's website shown above.

R&DFHG has reciprocal rights with Redlands Genealogical Society and Toowoomba & Darling Downs Family History Society. We look forward to a long association with both societies.

Disclaimer: The Redcliffe & District Family History Group Inc. does not hold itself responsible for the opinions expressed or statements made by the contributors of articles published in this newsletter. Unless an article is marked copyright, Family History organisations have permission to reprint items from this Newsletter, providing that the source is acknowledged.

R7DFHG extends thanks to The Hon Luke Howarth, Federal Member for Petrie and his office staff who kindly print and collate this newsletter.

ADMIN SECTION.

New Members. We wish to welcome to our Group - **Annette Kapitzke, Teresa McLeod and Ray and Kay White.**

Information Day. Saturday, 9 March. Our group opened up our library to the general public for a visit. In this way, they could find out what we could offer in the way of assistance to discover their family history. This visit included availability of online facilities and library resources. A steady flow of people attended with one person joining.

Heritage Day, Thursday, 9 May. The City of Moreton Bay held a **Moreton Bay History seminar** at the Morayfield Sports and Events Centre. This involved guest speakers and stalls from the region's historical groups and societies. The picture below shows two of our members who attended and manned an information booth.



Queensland Day, Thursday, 6 June. This is an annual celebration which commemorates the official separation from New South Wales as an independent colony in 1859.



It was fortunate for us that, this year, **June 6** coincided with a library day. The picture above shows members of our group celebrating the occasion with a trivia quiz about Queensland. This was followed by a delicious Morning Tea supplied by the attendees. The prize for the trivia was a treat - a *Caramello Koala* (a chocolate bar with a caramel centre). As our president remarked, perhaps eating this treat was not appropriate as the koala is our state fauna emblem.

ADMIN SECTION. Ctd.

Picnic in the Park. Saturday, 14 September 2024. Our group will be manning a booth at the event, “*Redcliffe Remembers 1824 - 2024, Picnic in the Park*” which is sponsored by the group, **History Redcliffe.**

DATES TO REMEMBER: Thursday, 22 August. **Annual General Meeting** to be held at our library in the **Clontarf Scout Den**, commencing 10.00 am, followed by Morning Tea.

Saturday, 14 September, as above, **History Redcliffe** event.

Thursday, 19 September. **General Meeting of Members**, starting 11.00 am.

Willis Family Research by Member Leonne Willis.

Thomas Kingston Willis (1910 - 1986). Some years before my father died, I asked him about his family background. All he knew was that his mother, **Ellen Plant**, had come from important people in Toowoomba (Queensland). About 25 years ago, I finally decided to look into my paternal line. Through my father’s youngest sister, Carmel, I discovered that two of his other siblings were still alive and also that I had 17 first cousins - all living in Queensland.

I gradually made contact with those relatives and thus my paternal line research started in earnest. Sadly, I had no photos of anyone from previous generations but this soon changed because of the kindness of various cousins. I made a copy of many photos; even a few going back into the 19th century. I have used some of these in this biography which also includes a bush incident when my father was just a baby.

My Great-Grandparents. John Plant 1831 - 1883. This is a copy from a newspaper. The original photo has been lost.



John was born in Cavan, Ireland and emigrated to Moreton Bay, Qld, in 1856. In 1872, he married **Alice Gillis, 1856 - 1913**, who was born on a sheep station on the Condamine River in Western Queensland.

John was 25 years older than Alice. However, their marriage certificate records that he was **31** and she was **21** when she was actually **16** years old. Saying that she **21**, meant that she did not need parental consent.



John and Alice would farm on the Darling Downs and they had six children; one of whom was my grandmother, **Ellen Plant**.

Voyage to Australia.

Before the opening of the Suez Canal in **1869**, ships sailed to Australia via the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa) then along our southern coast and up the eastern coast. Now, some preferred to sail via the northern route; over the top of Australia, through the Torres Strait and straight down our eastern coast.

This led to the development of various settlements along the way; such Cooktown, Cairns, Rockhampton, Maryborough etc. with a final stop in Brisbane.

My Grandparents.

George Willis (1872 - 1919).

In July 1888, George emigrated from Lincolnshire as a free immigrant; paying one pound for his passage on the "*Famenoth*". It was an iron-hulled barque of 983 tons built in 1876. It would be a voyage of 3 months; fast in contrast to earlier voyages.

George disembarked at **Maryborough** on 2 Nov 1888. The Queensland archives shipping list describes him as "Farm Labourer. Age 17 years - unmarried male, English, Protestant, could read and write and came from Lincoln." At some point in time, George decided to include **Hampden** as his middle name.

Occupation.

I was unable to discover what work George did in the immediate years after his arrival in 1888. The next piece of my research puzzle comes eleven years later. In the Queensland Railways (QR) archives, I found a record that a "George Willis was hired as a labourer on 9 Jan 1900". From the QR records, I traced him and found he started work in the Roma District. He stayed with the QR and, over time, his positions differed - labourer, lengthsman and lastly fettler. Initially, George received 7 shillings per day and, at the time of his death in 1919, he was earning 10 shillings per day.

Working in a railway gang, George was always in the open air; repairing old lines and/or putting down new sections. Overall, he worked in the Districts of Roma and Toowoomba, and, for a time, on the Killarney branch line. Many of these lines were pulled up in the 1970's.

A fettler gang working in the bush.



Marriage and Early Family Life.

On 29 Oct 1903, as **George Hampden Willis**, George married Ellen Plant. He said he was 31. Ellen recorded herself as **Nellie Plant**, aged 22. The marriage took place in the Lutheran Church at Koojarewon, near Highfields, Toowoomba. In contrast to the previous generation, their ages were correct.



I will add here, that over her lifetime, in various documents, I found that Ellen used other names - Nellie, Nell, and much later, Helen.

This is the only photo which I have of my grandmother. She was aged about 40 years.



My photo taken in 1999.

I have no photo of my grandfather, George. Two family members, my Aunt, Carmel Gott nee Willis and an older cousin, Blanche Spathonis nee Davidson, both spoke to me about his studio photo. They said it was large and oval-shaped and they remembered it vividly. It hung on a wall in the old family home in Coopers Plains, Brisbane. George was standing with his hand on his hip and wearing his Masonic apron. He was tall, good-looking, had a medium-sized moustache and was of strong build.

With this information, I spoke with many family members. Sadly, however, no one had a clue as to what had happened to George's photo. Another one of those family mysteries!

Also, in life, his eyes were blue and his hair was originally red but had gone grey when he was a young man. My grandmother, Ellen, also did relate to Blanche that George had a lovely singing voice and would entertain his young children by tap-dancing on the table much to their immense delight.

Evidently, George took charge of naming his children and he, certainly, had a flair for unusual names. In birth order, their six children were named as follows:

Robina May (1904), Dalby.

Thelma Evaline (1905), Highfields , near Toowoomba.

George Mervael Douglas (1908), Yangan, on the Killarney branch line.

Thomas Kingston (1910), Cherry Gully. However, Ellen went into Warwick for the birth.

Joffrey Merrilton (1915), Toowoomba.

Carmel Lorraine (1919), Toowoomba.

My father, Thomas Kingston.
About 3 years.



For seven years of their sixteen-year marriage, Ellen and the children had a nomadic lifestyle; moving around with George because they had no permanent home. Their birth certificates show where they lived, in and around, the south-eastern corner of Queensland.

It is hard to imagine now, in the modern era, how my grandmother coped - the cold Darling Downs winters, the hot summers and the rainy seasons. Also, there would be the daily cooking, plus washing clothes and all the other chores of rearing a young family, in a tent, in the bush.

A typical fettler's abode
in the bush.



Bush Incident.

When the fettling gang worked at a distance from the camp, George and the other men would be away during the whole day.

Then, Ellen would be alone with her small children. She became afraid when some nomadic aborigines started coming by. They peered into the tents and became fascinated with her and the children.

However, on this particular day, because the gang was working reasonably close, Ellen decided to take lunch to George. So, she set off with her three older children. When she left, there were no aborigines around. My father, Thomas, then a young baby, was left sleeping in his crib. He was not yet walking.

When Ellen returned, the crib was empty and there was no sign of Thomas. Greatly distressed, she ran back to her husband and all the men started searching for the aborigines. Eventually, they were able to find their camp. To the men's relief, there was Thomas in the arms of one of the women. With great reluctance, she did hand my father back and he was unharmed.

My father as a baby. Studio photo after this incident.



Aftermath.

From older family members, I know that my grandmother remained distressed and, definitely, would no longer live in the bush. Consequently, a local doctor (Dr. McKenzie) found a house for them in Delacey Street, Toowoomba. In addition, the QR transferred George to the nearby Drayton railway shunting yards.

Years before Ellen died, she told her daughter, Carmel, about this incident. Also, when her granddaughter, Blanche, was about 13 years old, Ellen told her as well. It was obviously something that my grandmother could never forget. During my separate meetings with aunty Carmel and cousin Blanche, they then told me of what had happened to my father when he was just a baby.

Also, when I was visiting another older Toowoomba cousin, Pandal Maag, she took me over to Delacey Street and pointed out the house where George and Ellen and their children had lived after the above incident.

Later Years. Since 1917, the QR had also employed my grandmother, Ellen, as Station Mistress at **Woolmer** and a house came with the position.

There was also room for a vegetable garden, poultry and, apparently, goats. I was told that she liked having goats around.

Woolmer house. My photo taken in 2003.



1919. Death came early for George. On 9 Feb 1919, when he was 46 years of age, he collapsed in the shunting yards and was rushed to the main Toowoomba hospital. However, shortly after admission, George died before Ellen could arrive. She was then pregnant with her daughter, Carmel. Cause of death was aortic anuresis and cardiac failure. The certificate also stated that he had suffered for years from a heart problem; possibly unknown to his family.

George is buried in the Cabarlah cemetery, just outside of Toowoomba. His grave lies next to that of his mother-in-law, Alice Plant nee Gillis. Many Plant family graves are there as well.

In **1921**, the QR transferred Ellen as **Nellie Willis** to Kleinton; again as Station Mistress. A house came with the position and a school was nearby. Her oldest daughter, Robina May, now 17, helped her run the station and the boom gates.



Kleinton house. My photo taken in 1999.

Looking at the above two photos, one can only wonder how Ellen had reared her family of six children in such small houses. However, I suppose that, after years of living in a tent in the bush, a house, no matter how small, would have seemed wonderful.

In June 1925, Ellen married **Hugh Gibson**, from Northern Ireland. He was a very kind step-father to her children. In June 1945, at age **64 years**, my grandmother died from untreated skin cancer.

As **Helen Gibson**, she was buried in Dutton Park cemetery; now called South Brisbane cemetery.

Photo taken by cousin, Barry Willis, in 2003.

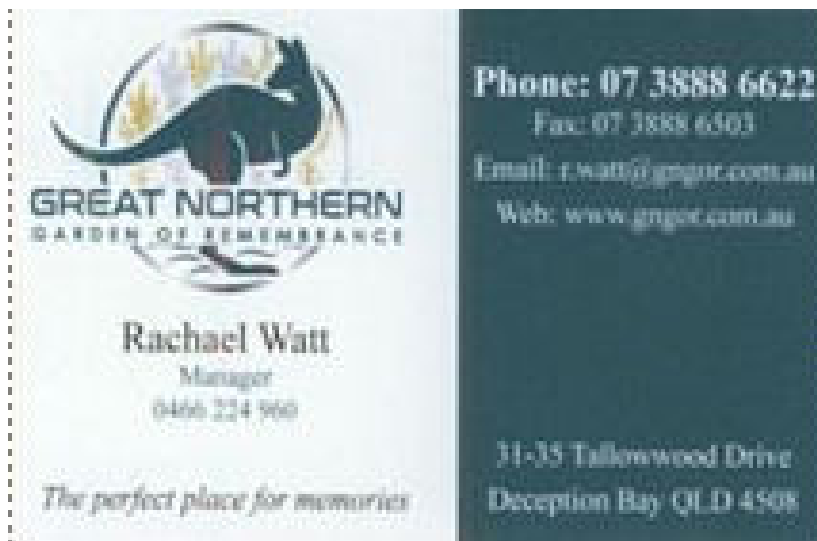


Epilogue. Ellen was much beloved by her family. The ashes of her three sons, George, Thomas and Joffrey are buried in her grave and also the ashes of Doris, the wife of Joffrey.

Sources: Qld State Archives, QR archives, Qld. Electoral Rolls and family memories.

The members of the Redcliffe & District Family History Group extend their thanks to the Hon. Luke Howarth MP for his continuing support of the Group.

The “First Settlement City Gazette” is kindly printed with the compliments of The Hon Luke Howarth MP, Federal Member for Petrie and sponsored by the following companies.



Terry Rogers

FCA, FGA, FCIS

羅涵琛

CA資深會計師

Phone: (+61 7) 3284 4582


Email: terry@twrgroup.com.au

Suite 1/20 Baynes Street, Margate Qld 4019

Suite 2/80 Ipswich Road, Woolloongabba Qld 4102

PO Box 242, Margate Beach Qld 4019 Australia

LICENSED SURVEYORS & DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS

WD  **Surveys**

Errol Deller

15 Anzac Avenue

PO Box 548

Redcliffe Qld 4020

mail@wdsurveys.com.au

www.wdsurveys.com.au

T 3284 1466

M 0408 723 150

Redcliffe Remembers - 1824 - 2024.

**save
the
date**

Picnic *in the* **Park**

**free
event**

**10AM-3PM SAT, 14TH SEPTEMBER
REDCLIFFE MUSEUM PRECINCT**



Redcliffe Remembers

1824

**HISTORY
REDCLIFFE**

2024

www.historyredcliffe.com.au