



Issue 137
April 2025

SHOALHAVEN FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC.

TIME TRAVELLER

ISSN 2207 – 919X

OPEN for Research

Sundays 10am – 2pm

1st and 2nd Thursday

each month

10am – 2pm



General Meetings

Commencing 1.30pm

1st Saturday of each
month

February to
December

S.F.H.S. RESEARCH CENTRE

WORLDWIDE ACCESS

LDS AFFILIATE LIBRARY

LOCAL FAMILY FILES

Berry Estate Records

Computer WIFI

Scanpro / fiche/film reader

Microfilms / Microfiche

Free access to Ancestry.com

Free access to FINDMYPAST

Biographical Database of Australia

Volunteers to assist

Free research to members'

Only \$10 per day for visitors

SHOALHAVEN FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC.

Founded in 1985

Honorary Office Bearers 2024– 2025

President	Lynne Allen
Vice Presidents	Carolyn Howard
Secretary	Marienne Faull
Treasurer	Sue Shore
Librarian	Ken Smith
Assistant Librarian	Gwen Smith
Journal Editor	Jenni Carfoot
Committee	Neville Bray
	Jill Darnell

Contact S.F.H.S.

PO Box 591

NOWRA NSW 2541

Website:

www.shoalhavenfamilyhistory.org.au

Email:

Secretary secretary@shoalhavenfamilyhistory.org.au

Research Officer secretary@shoalhavenfamilyhistory.org.au

Journal Editor editor@shoalhavenfamilyhistory.org.au

S.F.H.S. 2025 Membership Fees

Single Membership \$40	Family Membership \$50
Aged Pensioner (single) \$30	Aged Pensioner (family) \$40

Memberships are due 1st January and may be renewed at any time, but if not renewed as of 1st March it will be considered lapsed and member benefits will no longer apply

CONTENTS

Society info	2
President's Report	3
AGM Elected members	4
In Search of these Members	5
Research Report	6
Family Tree Chart	7
First Wedding in Nowra District Churches	8
First Fleet	9
Nowra Show and Clay Reunion	10
Revealing a Family's Adoptions Secret	11
NSW & ACT AFHS 40 th Annual Conference	12
Research Rooms Advertisement	13
Putting the Record Straight	14-17
From the Library	18

Duty Volunteers – thank you

Bill, Carolyn, Chris, Elsie, Gwen, Ken, Lorelle, Lynne, Margaret, Marienne, Neville and Sue

Helping others in the library is very rewarding, so if you'd like to help, come along for a couple of hours and see how it works before you commit.

Time Traveller

Shoalhaven Family History Society Inc. does not hold itself responsible for statements made or opinions expressed by authors of papers published in this journal.

Individuals who contribute to the time Traveller retain copyright to their articles.

Family history societies may reprint information from the Time Traveller provided full acknowledgement is given.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

2025 will be a big year for Shoalhaven Family History Society as we celebrate 40 years of serving the community. Your committee is planning a function to be held on November 15, the details of which will be released closer to the event. So, mark the date in your calendar and join us as we celebrate 40 years of serving the community.

For all those years, our wonderful, dedicated volunteers have been assisting members of the community to uncover their heritage. These volunteers have been committed and generous with their time, even when it was detrimental to their own research. Volunteers are on duty at the Pyree Research Centre each Sunday and the first two Thursdays of the month to assist you in your quest to uncover your story. Remember your membership entitles you to attend these sessions as often as you like, so please take advantage of their expertise. You may uncover startling details or clear a roadblock which has been plaguing you for years.

Our visitation numbers are still struggling to reach pre Covid levels, but we are hoping that the 40th milestone this year will provide the stimulus to members to throw themselves back into the quest to hunt down those lost ancestors and uncover their lives. The research rooms are looking a treat as the committee constantly applies itself to making the centre more visually appealing and more accessible to researchers.

In 2024 we revived the guest speaker program after the Covid hiatus and our Secretary, Research Officer and Librarian for many years, Marienne Faull, took us on a tour of the Research Centre and its wonderful resources. Marienne stressed the importance of using the SFHS Catalogue during your research to ensure you get the most out of the resources on offer. This catalogue is in hard form in a clearly marked folder and online via the SFHS website. In September Neville Bray led us through the intricacies of DNA, explaining the various forms of DNA testing and their usefulness to the average researcher. His presentation was illuminating and well received by those present. As well as guest speakers, we were entertained at other meetings with activities such as "Who am I?" which elicited surprising responses and 'Would I Lie to You?' which resulted in great mirth and wit. All these activities make our general meetings informative and enjoyable, so come along, soak in the camaraderie and expand your knowledge and partake of afternoon tea at the meeting's conclusion.

2025 will be a year of celebration and growth, so join us on the adventure, we would love to see you.

Lynne Allen

From the Editor

As we head into our 40th year we would like to thank all the past and present members make this society what it is today. If we didn't have the tireless volunteers to help those who are hoping to find more information about their ancestors, we wouldn't exist!

Having said that, we are planning a 40th Anniversary celebration at our Research Centre later in the year and if you know any past members who have moved could you please ask them to contact our Secretary... secretary@shoalhavenfamilyhistory.org.au

We also held our AGM and the lucky door prize drawn by Mayor White went to Robert Howard, free membership for 2026! Congratulations Bob.

We are starting a Beginners class for our members on how to research your family history on April 5 (1000-1200) at the Research Centre. If you are interested in attending, please let our Secretary know.

Jenni Carfoot 22/01

SFHS Inc. 2025 AGM Management Committee Election

Nominations received were as follows: 2025 -2026 COMMITTEE

POSITION	NOMINEES	PROPOSER	SECONDER	STATUS
PRESIDENT	Lynne Allen	Sue Shore	Marianne Faull	<i>elected</i>
VICE PRESIDENT	Carolyn Howard	Sue Shore	Vivien Jones	<i>elected</i>
SECRETARY	Marianne Faull	Carolyn Howard	Julie Rhodes	<i>elected</i>
TREASURER	Sue Shore	Marianne Faull	Lynne Allen	<i>elected</i>
LIBRARIAN	Ken Smith	Neville Bray	Marianne Faull	<i>elected</i>
GENERAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE				
Journal Editor	Jenni Carfoot	Carolyn Howard	Lynne Allen	<i>elected</i>
Assistant Librarian	Gwen Smith	Neville Bray	Sue Shore	<i>elected</i>
Committee Member	Neville Bray	Bill Highfield	Bob Howard	<i>elected</i>
Committee Member	Jill Darnell	Carolyn Howard	Sue Shore	<i>elected</i>

WELCOME ABOARD NEW MEMBERS

THE S.F.H.S Committee and members extend a warm welcome to our newest members.

Linda and David Fletcher
Helen Callaghan
Melinda Benson

Bev and Stephen Foster
Frances Louise Grant

S.F.H.S. Inc. Membership includes:

- Time Traveller e-journal (April, August and December)
- Assistance from experienced research volunteers at S.F.H.S. Research Centre
- Guest Speakers at Monthly Meetings
- Access to information sessions, seminars, webinars, interest groups, family history projects, volunteering, social gatherings and a whole lot more.

The Society is looking for an IT guru to help with small issues that we run into every now and again. Can you help or know of someone who can???

Please contact our wonderful Secretary

IN SEARCH OF THESE ANCESTORS

Interest Names	Details	Member #
Fletcher	Tasmania 1800-1900	25/01
Russell	Hobart. 1800-1900	25/01
Furniss	Victoria 1840-1900	25/01
Williams	Daylesford Vic. 1830-1900	25/01
Mulrooney	Ireland/Victoria 1800-1900	25/01
Foster	Glebe NSW	25/02
Robertson	Northern Rivers NSW	25/02
William Spain	The Depot Nowra c1804-1870	25/03
Catherine Spain nee Walsh	The Depot Nowra 1829-1892	25/03
Patrick Walsh	Nowra 1794-1883	25/03
McGrath family	Nowra	25/03
Wolf family	Nowra/Sydney	25/03
Alice McGrath nee Ryan	1796-1869	25/03
Forbes	To 1920 Aberdeenshire SCT	22/03
Lobban	To 1920 Bannffshire SCT	22/03
Macrae	To 1870 Ross Shire SCT	22/03
Mackenzie	To 1870 Ross Shire SCT	22/03
Mead	To present Bathurst NSW	22/03
Dudley	To present Bathurst NSW	22/03
Dixon family		25/04
Ardler family		25/04
Any aboriginal families	South Coast NSW	25/04
James Bridge & Catherine Gannon	Convict assigned Broulee	25/04

Please direct all enquiries (quoting member number) to:-
 PO Box 591 Nowra NSW 2541 Australia OR secretary@shoalhavenfamilyhistory.org.au and your
 correspondence will be forwarded to the appropriate member.

In accordance with standard Private Practice and to reduce the risk of spam, members email
 addresses are no longer published in the Time Traveller.

RESEARCH REPORT

Family Tree Package Report

Our last happy customer received their family tree package in December. The families researched were the Mears , Hixon, Russell families.



The Mears originated in Westphalia Germany as Meyer, emigrating to Queensland, where William Bernard (AKA Felix) Meyer was a language & music teacher. There was speculation that William “Felix” Bernard Meyer may have attempted to anglicise his surname of Jewish origin - but our client had no documentation whatsoever about William “Felix” Bernard Meyer or his wife Mary Hickson, even though it is apparent they were living in Shoalhaven, NSW in 1853 at the time of Henry’s birth

Henry Walter Mears, was born in Shoalhaven on 23 February, 1853 to William “Felix” Bernard Meyer and Mary C E Hickson (aka Hixon). Henry died on 3 May 1912 in Toowoomba, the birthplace of his wife.

James Russell was a very violent convict who did not change his ways, being well known in the NSW courts and died an extremely painful death, leaving a relieved wife and four children.

In all, a challenging and interesting project, which was very well received by our client.

S.F.H.S. Research Centre Fees					
Member			Non – Member		
Photocopy (per sheet)	A4	20c	Daily research fee		\$10
	A3	40c	All printing cost as detailed above, except for the following:		
Computer printing (per page)	A4	50c			
Microfilm/Fiche	A4	50c			
SFHS Family Group Sheet (blank)		20c			
SFHS Family Group Sheet (with information)		\$1	Pre-1856 BDM record (Microfilm printout)		\$7
Pre-1856 BDM record (Microfilm printout)		\$5	Family file Certificate Photocopy		\$7
Family file Certificate Photocopy		\$5	Nowra Birth or Death record		\$7
Nowra Birth or Death record		\$5	Photographs via email		\$5

Research Team Services

Our Research Officer will undertake research on behalf of paying clients.

The initial \$25 fee covers two hours research and entry level photocopies.

Additional fees may be requested depending on the scope and level of the request.

All enquiries should be addressed to:

The Research Officer
PO Box 591
NOWRA NSW 2541



secretary@shoalhavenfamilyhistory.org.au

As well as our very popular, highly detailed Family Tree Package for \$150 we are offering a revamped service for those who would like a 'brief' overview of their ancestors!

MY FAMILY TREE CHART



If you know someone who would love to see what their family tree looks like but is unable to do the research, we can build a basic 4 generation chart for the very reasonable price of \$50.

MY FAMILY TREE

MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDFATHER		MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDFATHER		MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDFATHER		MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDFATHER	
Name		Name		Name		Name	
Born		Born		Born		Born	
Birthplace		Birthplace		Birthplace		Birthplace	
Married		Married		Married		Married	
Place		Place		Place		Place	
Died		Died		Died		Died	
Buried		Buried		Buried		Buried	

MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDMOTHER		MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDMOTHER		MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDMOTHER		MY PATERNAL GREAT GRANDMOTHER	
Name		Name		Name		Name	
Born		Born		Born		Born	
Birthplace		Birthplace		Birthplace		Birthplace	
Married		Married		Married		Married	
Place		Place		Place		Place	
Died		Died		Died		Died	
Buried		Buried		Buried		Buried	

MY PATERNAL GRANDFATHER		MY PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER		MY MATERNAL GRANDFATHER		MY MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER	
Name		Name		Name		Name	
Born		Born		Born		Born	
Birthplace		Birthplace		Birthplace		Birthplace	
Married		Married		Married		Married	
Place		Place		Place		Place	
Died		Died		Died		Died	
Buried		Buried		Buried		Buried	

MY FATHER		MY MOTHER	
Name		Name	
Born		Born	
Birthplace		Birthplace	
Married		Married	
Place		Place	
Died		Died	
Buried		Buried	

ME	
Name	
Born	
Birthplace	
Married	
Place	
Died	
Buried	

HOW IT WORKS

Our researcher will meet the client in person, if local, or liaise by email/phone if further afield, to discuss the tree, free of charge. Using facts and documents they supply; we will chart their family tree.

This is not confined to the Shoalhaven as our research centre has worldwide access and records.

The resulting one-page family tree chart, if mailed, will incur postage at Australia Post rates.

For more information contact the secretary@shoalhavenfamilyhistory.org.au

or phone 0404 073 794

FIRST WEDDINGS IN NOWRA DISTRICT CHURCHES

No. 2 in a series, by Alan Clark, AM.

SALVATION ARMY BARRACKS, NOWRA

Mouthpiece of the Salvation Army, the *War Cry* revealed in 1895 that the denomination's first Nowra wedding had been on Monday, 25 May 1891 for local lass **Rebecca Watts** and journalist **Ernest Arthur James** who would both work wholeheartedly for the Salvos.

The seventh daughter of Scottish migrant John Watts and his wife Jane (Apperley, nee Miller), Rebecca had been born at Numbaa on 19 January 1865; while Ernest had come from London where he was born in 1859, and since arriving in Nowra he had taken on the position of School of Arts secretary. A brief report of their marriage appeared in a Sydney newspaper:

***A Salvation Wedding:** The local corps of the Salvation Army had a big meeting at the Nowra Barracks last night, the attraction being a "hallelujah" wedding. The contracting parties were Mr. E.A. James, a journalist, and Miss Rebecca Watts, whom Major [Fred] Spratt of Goulburn, "joined together as man and wife". The wedding presents to the bride by many prominent residents of the district were elegant and costly. The happy couple will spend a week or so in the Ulladulla district.*



Becoming involved while Captain George Armstrong had charge of the congregation in 1888-89, Rebecca had regularly handed out the *War Cry* to interested Nowra folk, and eventually became a divisional officer. Two months into their marriage, Ernest was offered a sub-editor's role at the *War Cry* in Melbourne, which then published over 70,000 copies weekly. With the motto of their union, "The Kingdom first", they had no hesitation in accepting, and had relocated by the end of the year. With a rank of Ensign, Ernest quickly slotted into the role that he would hold for four years, while Rebecca became active in the corps at South Richmond, an inner-city suburb. She gave birth to a daughter, Jane Miller in 1892, and a son, William Horace in 1894 but shortly afterwards she contracted a cold that led to inflammation of the lungs which developed into rapid consumption (tuberculosis). An older sister, Margaret Jane (known as Maggie) left her home at Numbaa and spent seven months caring for Rebecca who died on 23 January 1895 just four days after her 30th birthday.

It is not known who cared for his young children, but within two months Ernest's work took him to Gawler (South Australia) where he was said to be "a journalist of considerable experience". When he was appointed editor of the *War Cry* in New Zealand with a rank of Adjutant, the *Shoalhaven News* described him as "a self-denying man, and an inveterate slave to work", also noting he had visited Shoalhaven friends before his departure in June 1895.

That job lasted less than a year for by April 1896 he had become editor of the *War Cry* in Adelaide and was reporting on a welcome for the new Salvation Army Commandant in Australia, Herbert Booth (son of the founder), recently arrived from London. November 1896 saw Ernest marry New Zealand-born Gertrude Miriam Gates. Their first child was born in NSW, but around the turn of the century they settled in New Zealand where Ernest died on 11 July 1930.

Sources: Australian Star, Sydney – Wednesday 27 May 1891; Shoalhaven News and South Coast Districts Advertiser – Saturdays 2 February, 18 May and 8 June 1895; The Bunyip, Gawler, SA – Friday 12 April 1895; The Express and Telegraph, Adelaide – Friday 10 May 1895; Daily Telegraph, Sydney – Friday 24 May 1895; The Laura Standard, SA – Friday 17 April 1896; Advertiser, Adelaide – Monday 24 August 1896; Laurie Stevenson; Ancestry.com.

A First Fleet Reunion

In October this year, a gathering of descendants of three convicts of the First Fleet will happen in Hobart. The purpose is to celebrate the strength and resilience of our ancestors, their unique history, and to share stories of their lives.

When the First Fleet set sail on 13 May 1787, on board the *Scarborough* was Jacob Bellett and Edward Garth and, on the *Friendship*, was Susannah Gough. All were convicts, found guilty of theft and sentenced to transportation.



After the landing in Sydney Cove in January 1788, Edward and Susannah were selected to travel to Norfolk Island to establish a colony to grow food and harvest flax. They were the first to step foot on Norfolk Island when Philip Gidley King established a settlement there on 6 March 1788. They married and had seven children on the island.

Jacob was sent to Norfolk Island on 4 March 1790 on the *Supply* and married Ann Harper, who was transported on the Second Fleet.

When the decision was made to close the settlement on Norfolk Island, the families chose to re-settle in Hobart to start again. The two families were removed to Hobart by 1808.

The families must have known each other well on the island as, after their arrival in Hobart, three children from the Garth family married three from the Bellett family – James Garth married Mary Bellett in 1815, Edward Garth married Ann Bellett in 1816, and John Bellett married Susannah Garth in 1822. These marriages created a strong bond between the two families and a unique family history.

Thousands have descended from the Garth and Bellett families and we hope many will attend the week of activities. If you are related and would like more information about the reunion, email hobartoct2025@gmail.com for details or view the [website](#).

Sources:

Mollie Gillen, *The Founders of Australia: A Biographical Dictionary of the First Fleet* (1989)

People Australia - <https://peopleaustralia.anu.edu.au/>

Tasmanian Archives

Marienne Faull 02/18

NOWRA SHOW HISTORY PUBLISHED IN FULL!

November 2024 saw a reunion held at the Nowra Showground pavilion, to complete a year of activities for the 150th anniversary of Nowra Show Society, formerly known as the Shoalhaven Agricultural and Horticultural Society.

Highlight of the day was the launch of the show history by a former president of the Nowra Show, John Bennett, OAM, who is currently president of the Royal Agricultural Society.

The history was researched and written by Alan Clark, AM, and published in three volumes, each covering 50 years.

Using the surviving minute books and local press coverage to fill the gaps, he wrote a summary of each and every show, producing hundreds of interesting anecdotes.

Mr Bennett highlighted the fact that in the 1930s his great-grandfather Charles Bennett and two others had been voted off the committee for opposing having a bar at the show, and how his grandfather Os Bennett had trained horses in his younger years, winning the publican's trot in 1944.

Although he had only ever known his grandfather to be involved with racing pigeons, Mr Bennett found out Os had been forced to switch because he was with his horses and nowhere to be found when his wife went into labour to deliver son Mervyn – a member of the Nowra Show Committee for 55 years.

Well-illustrated, the history has a list of the major office-bearers over the years, those who had served for long periods of time, some of them in generations of the one family, and of course the showgirls of more than 60 years.

A copy of the history has been lodged with the SFHS library at Pyree; and any reader wishing to buy the three-volume set of books should contact Nowra Show Society through its website.

Alan Clark

*We are a one name research society, dedicated to the Clays of England.
Access to our website is free and so is our membership, do take a look
at the website, see below.*

*There are many Clays in Australia, indeed we have members from many
parts of Australia, I believe your members would find our website an
invaluable source of information on their ancestors. Would you be
interested in listing our website.*

Paul Clay

Director of research
Clay of England Society
www.clayofenglandsociety.co.uk [1]

Links:

[1] <http://www.clayofenglandsociety.co.uk>

REVEALING A FAMILY'S ADOPTION SECRET

Do you have an adopted child in your family tree? If you do, this article by Arthur Radford may be of help to you.....

"I first had a hint of my mother's possible adoption during a chance conversation with a near neighbour at his house in 1993. It came as a bit of a shock as I had been diligently researching my family tree for many years. He had been a close friend, perhaps even a boyfriend of my mother when they were in their teens and showed me photos of her as a teenager. At age 45, I had stumbled upon the family secret!

I had been led to believe that the Grandparents I grew up near, were my mother's natural parents. Subsequently I discovered that my mother was adopted and her birth mother, aged in her 90s, was living in Nowra and not that far from my mother. The upshot of this led to a reunion of mother and daughter and for me, for the first time meeting my birth Grandmother. It also meant a few surprises and a meeting of extended families on both sides. Both my mother and birth Grandmother came from an age and society where these things were not talked about and Nan, as we came to know her, died only a few short years later.

My mother was born in Marrickville in 1925 in a Salvation Army phone for unmarried mothers and at that time, it was unusual for an unmarried mother to keep her baby. The father's name was almost always left off the birth certificate, as was the case when my mother's original birth certificate was obtained. Using my skills as a family researcher, I was able to put together a family tree and trace the family of my birth Grandmother – an ancestry her family was unaware of; she had married and had three children after the birth of my mother.

However, finding out who my birth Grandfather was, was not on the cards and I resigned to never knowing this part of my family.

With the advent of DNA, it never occurred to me that it was a research tool that would be in any way helpful to me and I had accepted that there was a part of me that I would never know, and didn't give it a thought. In 2017 I received a DNA Christmas present from my wife and as I spat into the tube and posted it off, I still wasn't aware that it would make any difference to my knowledge of family. When the results came back and I looked at my ethnicity, there were no surprises there. I had some English and Scottish which I already knew.

As I looked at the list of matches. There was a second cousin whose name I recognized but didn't know she was interested in tracing her family. We have since met up and shared our knowledge. There was also another second cousin with whom I matched, but it was unclear to me who she was. Emails were sent back and forth sharing what we know of each other's family but there was no match. As I learnt more and more of her family, I realized that her family were from the same area in Sydney and the men were nearly all Engineers as my birth mother's father had been in the 1920s. A second cousin of hers appeared in my DNA matches and from that time it became clear that there was a definite connection between me and their family. With other evidence we were able to pinpoint who by birth Grandfather would be. This time there were a number of researchers who had put together a tree that was not only extensive but traced a family back over many generations. That was a little disappointing for me, but I have been able to correct some minor mistakes as I checked through previous research.

So, I now have ancestors who lived in the convict era in Newcastle, taking me back into earlier Australian white settlement and I have six Grandparents in my tree".



Conference Newsletter No.1 December 2024

The Illawarra Family History Group would like to inform everyone that the group will be hosting the 40th annual conference of the NSW & ACT Association of Family History Societies Inc. Our group has previously hosted this conference in 1990 and in 2014.

Theme

Our theme is **They Came From Where?**. All peoples in Australia including First Nations have come originally from some other part of the world. Where, why and how they came is an important part of their story.

Dates

September 12th – 14th September 2025

Venue

The venue for the conference is the Fraternity Club, 11 Bourke St., Fairy Meadow, about 3 km north of Wollongong CBD. There is ample parking at the club which is on the corner of Bourke St and Princes Hwy and only 1 block from Fairy Meadow station. The club is also on the route of the Gong Shuttle, a free shuttle bus service which runs a circular route in both directions 7 days a week around central Wollongong (Bus no. 55). There is a wide range of accommodation available in the Wollongong area. For information on accommodation, transport and attractions see the website www.visitwollongong.com.au the site for Destination Wollongong.

Our website will soon be live and will contain information about registration, costs, speakers and program. The conference will be in person with an online option. There will be a family history fair on the Friday open to members of the public.

Enquiries: conference0925@gmail.com

Judy Bull, Convenor

HAVE YOU VISITED OUR RESEARCH ROOMS RECENTLY??????



DO YOU HAVE OLD RECORDS, NAMED PHOTOGRAPHS OR DOCUMENTS FROM A LOCAL ORGANISATION WHICH NO LONGER EXISTS?

Are you the keeper of old family records? If you no longer need them, why not consider donating them to us!

WE ARE OPEN

1ST AND 2ND THURSDAY 10AM – 2PM

SUNDAYS 10AM – 2PM

(CHRISTMAS CLOSURE DATES WILL BE ADVERTISED IN THE DECEMBER ISSUE)

VISITING CHIDDINGSTONE ON GENEALOGICAL PILGRIMAGE

By Alan Clark, AM.

While in England for Christmas 2024 and staying into the new year, my wife Helen and I enjoyed a family history visit to a Kent village called Chiddingstone that had significance to me for my great-great-great-grandparents, William John King and Elizabeth (nee Waite) had been married there 200 years earlier – almost exactly to the day.

Chiddingstone is regarded as the best surviving example of a single-street Tudor village in Britain and with many of the buildings unchanged for two centuries, it is feasible to suggest that I walked on the paths previously trod by my ancestors.

Popular with film-makers, the village has featured in five movies over the past 40 years. When we arrived around noon, the temperature was a freezing 0°C, and there was ice on the lake alongside Chiddingstone Castle.

We walked down a path beside the local school to see the huge rock after which the village was named. Legend has it that it was called the *Chiding Stone* because nagging wives and other wrong-doers were taken there and rebuked – or chided – by the massed villagers, but you can make up your own mind on that.

Braving the frosty surface to search for the graves of ancestors I had no success, but I had arrived at the large parish church with few expectations and was soon tucking into some delicious local cuisine at the local café across the road – sausage rolls, scones and cake.

From there we travelled to nearby Sundridge where great-grandmother Mary Clark (nee Withers) had been born in 1815. While walking around the graveyard there, we met the churchwarden who went to her nearby home to search the parish records, but alas there were no references to the Withers family in the index.



Putting the record straight:

John Light, and the dangers of copying Ancestry trees

Peter Clifford

August 2024

On 30th April 1836, the *Royal Exeter* coach was en route from Bristol to Cheltenham when it was overtaken by two men mounted on a horse. At that moment, a female passenger exclaimed and gestured at one of riders: she had recognised him as the man who had robbed her family of some valuable property a few days earlier. Hearing a cry of “Stop thief!” from the coachman, the two men rode off at top speed, but, their mount being slowed by its double load, a gentleman who gave chase was able to overhaul them and effect an arrest. The suspect was taken to Cheltenham and thence to Oxford, where he appeared in court and was committed for trial at the next Assizes.ⁱ

The woman in the coach was Sinetta Lambourn, wife of James Lambourn, a horse dealer of Summer Town, Oxford, and the accused was their 16-year-old stable lad, John Light.ⁱⁱ He had disappeared from the Lambourns’ home, along with three watches, a gold chain and two gold seals, worth £10, a few days earlier, after which Sinetta had pursued him to Bath, Bristol, Gloucester and Cheltenham, in the hope of tracking down their missing property. That she was successful in doing so seems barely credible, but the court believed her story, and John was convicted at Oxford Town Hall on 13th July 1836 and sentenced to transportation for life.ⁱⁱⁱ Shortly afterwards, John was taken to the *Leviathan* prison hulk, moored at Portsmouth, where he was held until being transferred to the *Eden*, on which ship John departed England forever on 27th August, arriving at Van Diemen’s Land on 22nd December 1836.^{iv} He received his ticket of leave on 28th January 1845, moved to Melbourne in 1849, and married Emma Goddard at the Scots’ Church, Collins Street in that city on 14th June 1851.^v They had no fewer than 13 children, before John died in 1889, in Kyneton, Victoria, where his widow Emma continued to live until her own death in 1914.

I first became interested in John’s story when Ancestry told me I was a DNA match to a number of people in Australia, all of whom were descendants of John Light. When I looked at their trees on Ancestry, alarm bells soon started to ring. They all seemed to believe that John’s full name was John Rowse Light and he had been born in Bristol about 1819, but (bizarrely) baptised some 100km away in Dorset. Despite the fact he married in Melbourne in 1851, some previous researchers seemed to believe he had somehow returned to England in time to appear on the census that year. This information has clearly been copied unchecked many times, and (as at August 2024) appears in no fewer than 240 Ancestry trees.^{vi} The purpose of this article is to attempt to set the record straight, disprove this identification of John Light the convict with John Rowse Light, and demonstrate how he fits into my own family tree, as evidenced by the Ancestry DNA matches.

The Tasmania convict records tell us little about John’s origins in England beyond the fact that he was aged 17 in 1836 and was from Bristol. At some point somebody has searched for people named John Light born in Bristol around his calculated birth date and has made the perfectly understandable assumption that he was probably the child John Rowse Light, son of Henry Light, carpenter, and his wife Mary, baptised at St Mary, Redcliffe, Bristol, on 15th June 1817 (quite how the Dorset baptism has crept in is a mystery to me).^{vii} Perhaps this was just a tentative suggestion on the part of the original researcher, but Ancestry provides no mechanism for noting the certainty associated with information recorded there, and, if you’re not careful, conjectured links and identifications can get easily converted into apparently concrete facts and duplicated many times - even though, as in this case, they are entirely wrong.

It is the job of a genealogist to use the available information to build a theory of our subject's ancestry. Often the evidence at our disposal is inconclusive, or ambiguous, and several possible reconstructions of the historical facts are possible, with little or nothing to help us decide which is correct. We constantly need to explore possible connections in the hope of finding an acceptable level of certainty to allow us proceed further. In this task, it is important to check for negative evidence as well as supporting information: in other words, if you can't find proof that a theory is right, you should at least make sure you can't find anything that disproves it. In the case of John Rowse Light, if the original researcher had looked into his family background further, they would have discovered that his parents, Henry Light, and Mary Rowse (sometimes also spelled "Rouse", her maiden name being the source of John's middle name), had married at Stoke Damerel, Plymouth, Devon, on 11th December 1808.^{viii} Consistent with the Bristol baptism record, the marriage register states, helpfully, that Henry was a "house carpenter" (ie not a ship's carpenter, as might have been assumed in Plymouth). They had two children baptised in Plymouth (Mary, 1811 and James, 1814), then John Rowse Light in Bristol in 1817, but, by 1820, they had moved to London, where two further daughters were born (Elizabeth, 1820, and Sarah, 1823). Elizabeth too was given her mother's maiden name as a middle name, being baptised Elizabeth Rouse Light at St Mary's, Marylebone, on 6th May 1820, while Sarah's baptism at St James, Piccadilly confirms that Henry was still working as a carpenter, as indeed he was over 20 years later when the 1841 census recorded him living with his family at 37 York Street, St Margaret's, Westminster.^{ix} Armed with this additional information about this family, and, in particular, knowing that the family was living in Marylebone in 1820, we can be very confident that the child named John Rouse Light buried at St Mary's, Marylebone on 10th January 1819 was the same child baptised in Bristol in 1817.^x So, the person that some 240 Ancestry trees identify as the convict John Light transported to Tasmania in 1836 in fact died in infancy 17 years previously.

It did not take me very long to work out John's actual origins. Light was my mother's maiden name, and I had already researched her ancestors extensively and knew that they had been based mostly in the Bristol area from at least the middle of the 18th century. But I had a loose end: my 4 x great-grandfather Samuel Light, baptised at St Augustine's, Bristol, on 29th July 1787, had married Sarah Brown in Bath, some 20 km away, and three of his four children had been baptised there, including the youngest, John Light, christened at All Saints, Weston, Bath on 13th September 1818.^{xi} I had never known what had happened to John, as I could find no trace of him in later records in England – no burial, no marriage, no census entries, nothing. I am not sure I could ever have made the connection between him and the stable lad tried for larceny at Oxford in 1836 if it hadn't been for the fact the DNA matches were indicating I was a cousin of his descendants in Australia. The fact that John had been baptised in nearby Bath, not Bristol, was what had misled previous researchers: when asked where he came from, John will quite naturally have said Bristol, as that was almost certainly where he spent most of his life in England. Bristol was where his father died in 1822 when John was only about 4 years old, and his mother remarried there in 1827. It was also where his two brothers spent most of their lives, including my director ancestor William Brown Light.

In 1836, aged just 17, John Light was wrenched away from his family in Bristol and taken to an alien world on the other side of the planet. That the internet is awash with misinformation about his identity and background feels like a further cruelty committed against his memory. In publishing this article, I am hopeful that John can in some sense be reunited with the family from which he was so brutally sundered nearly 200 years ago.^{xii}

About the author



Peter Clifford was born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire in 1958. He first became interested in family history in 1985, just before his first child was born, having picked up a book on the subject in his local library, and this turned into a passion for both genealogy and local history. In 2012, he achieved the IHGS Higher Certificate in Genealogy and gave up a 30-year career in I.T. to establish a genealogical research practice. After nine years as a full-time, professional genealogist, he was obliged to retire due to his wife's poor health, but still researches whenever possible, and has had several articles published on both family and local history in various magazines and bulletins. He has recently been awarded an M.A. by Research in Local History by the University of Gloucestershire, and is exploring options for progressing to a PhD. Peter can be contacted at peteclifford58@gmail.com

- i *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 05 May 1836, p.3 col.5. *Oxford University and City Herald*, 14 May 1836, p.3 col.4.
- ii Some sources say John was aged 16, others 17. He may well have had a birthday between his arrest in England and his arrival in Australia, though this vagueness over ages isn't uncommon at this era.
- iii *Oxford University and City Herald*, 16 Jul 1836, p.2 col.3.
- iv Ancestry.com, UK, *Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849* Provo, UT, USA, database on-line, Ancestry.com, 2010 <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1989/>> [Original data: The National Archives class HO9/8 p.349 no.2554. Coding Labs, *Convict John*, Convict Records, n.d. <<https://convictrecords.com.au/convicts/light/john/10196/>> [accessed 27 Aug 2024].
- v Tasmania Archives, *Conduct Record*, Libraries Tasmania's Online collection, n.d. <<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/Digital/CON31-1-28/CON31-1-28P203>> Ref. CON31/1/28. Tasmania Archives, *Description List*, Libraries Tasmania Online Collection, n.d. <<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/Digital/CON18-1-7/CON18-1-7P110>> Ref. CON18/1/7 p.211 no.1040. Tasmania Archives, *Passenger List of the "Shamrock"*, Libraries Tasmania's Online collection, n.d. <<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/Record/NamesIndex/575918>> Ref. CON31/1/28.
- vi Ancestry.com, *Public Member Trees*, Ancestry.com, n.d. <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1030/?name=John+Rowse+Light>>.
- vii Ancestry.com, *Bristol, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1922*, Ancestry.com, n.d. <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61685/>> [accessed 27 Aug 2024] Bristol Archives Ref. P/St/Mr/R/2/1 p.106 no.844.
- viii FindMyPast, *Devon Marriages And Banns*, FindMyPast.co.uk, n.d. <<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/devon-marriages-and-banns>> [accessed 27 Aug 2024] Plymouth & West Devon Record Office, Stoke Damerel parish register of marriages, 1808, p.69 no.273.
- ix Ancestry.com, *London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1923*, Ancestry.com, n.d. <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1558/>> [accessed 27 Aug 2024] London Metropolitan Archives Ref. P89/Mry1/021 p.121 no.968. Ancestry.com, *London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1923*, Ancestry.com, n.d. <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1558/>> [accessed 27 Aug 2024] London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) Ref. DI/T/090/016 p.224 no.268. Ancestry.com, *1841 England Census* Provo, UT, USA, database on-line, Ancestry.com, 2010 <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/8978/>> [Original data: The National Archives class HO 107 (1841)] Ref. HO107/738/8/33/22.
- x Ancestry.com, *London, England, Church of England Deaths and Burials, 1813-2003*, Ancestry.com, n.d. <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1559/>> [accessed 27 Aug 2024] LMA Ref. P89/Mry1/323 p.9 no.70.
- xi Ancestry.com, *Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1914*, Ancestry.com, n.d. <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/60857/>> [accessed 27 Aug 2024] South-west Heritage Trust Ref. D\p\w.as/2/1/6 p.31 no.244.
- xii Further information about John's actual family can be found on my own Ancestry tree at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/person/tree/163120694/person/262127384051> My research into John Rowse Light's family is at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/person/tree/163120694/person/2622985339>

Reprinted by kind permission of the author.

From the Library

We have had a large donation of Microfilm and this is part of it.....

NSW Colonial Secretary-

Naturalisation Papers Index 1849 - 1904 Ac# 4884

Records of Naturalisation - 1849 - 1904 Ac# 4885 to 4898

Marriage Licences - 1819 - 1836 Ac# 4899 to 4900

Letters - 1826 - 1835 Ac# 4901

NSW Convict Records - 1788 - 1867 Magistrates letters Ac# 4902 to 4903

Convict Ships plus Prisoners Names. Ireland to Sydney 1791 - 1816 Ac# 4904

Ship Musters. Ship's Passengers, Crew Company - 1816 - 1825 Ac# 4905 A & B

British Troops in India. Troops embarked - 1871 - 1874 Ac# 4906 A & B

Newtown St. Stephens Baptisms - 1858 - 1934 Ac# 4907

Bengal Army European Soldiers - 1788 - 1857 Ac# 4908

Somerset Parish Registers, Bishops Transcripts. Ac# 4909, 4910 A & B

Liverpool St. Peters. Eng.

Baptisms and Burials - 1792 - 1810 Ac# 4911, Christenings - 1823 - 1826 Ac# 4912

Yorkshire Parish Registers, Bishops Transcripts, Baptisms, Marriages, Burials - 1678 - 1848 Ac# 4913, 4914

Suffolk Bishops Transcripts - 1861 - 1862 Ac# 4915

Bristol Temple Church, Marriages - 1842 - 1880 Ac# 4916 A & B

Scotland Bothkennar Parish Registers - baptisms, marriages, burials 1723 - 1858 Ac# 4917

Dublin Society of Friends - births, marriages, deaths 1606 - 1860 Ac# 4918, 4919

|
SAVE
the
DATE
|



Shoalhaven Family History

40TH
ANNIVERSARY

15th November 2025