

Descent

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGISTS



Sacred to the memory of
EMILY WARD
THE DEARLY LOVED ONLY CHILD OF
JAMES WARD JUBBER
AND **EMILY MARGARET ANNE** HIS WIFE
OF THE PERLANDS, HAYWARDS HEATH
WHO DIED SEPTEMBER 14th 1901 IN HER 27th YEAR
In the midst of life we are in death.
EMILY MARGARET ANNE JUBBER
WHO DIED MARCH 21st 1915 IN HER 72nd YEAR
JAMES WARD JUBBER



DECEMBER / SUMMER 2024

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Image of Ward Jubber memorial at St Wilfrid's Churchyard, Haywards Heath,
West Sussex, England by Ruth Graham taken on 23 December 2022.

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the First Nations peoples and we pay respect to Elders past,
present and emerging. The Society acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora
nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which Richmond Villa stands.

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President's Message

PHILIPPA SHELLEY JONES

I expect there are those of you who, like me, are reading this issue of *Descent* electronically for the first time, having answered the call to transfer from a hard copy of the magazine to a PDF version delivered to your inbox. I have to confess that, despite talking the talk and pushing for reduced paper waste and cost savings for the Society, I was not walking the walk — I was finding it very hard to let go of my print copy of the magazine, which I kept next to my bed and dipped in and out of when time permitted.

Having now moved to the electronic version, I am not quite sure why I was so resistant — I can now access *Descent* from any device, increase the font size for easier reading and go directly to the websites and email addresses referred to by clicking on the coloured hyperlinks. Thank you to those who have joined me in the transition.

Of course the electronic version is not for everyone, but if you feel encouraged to make the swap or would just like to take a look at the magazine as a PDF before you make a decision, please email membership@sag.org.au

Society updates

It has been a very busy few months since our September *Descent* issue. In board news, we have welcomed Andrew Redfern and Chris Hingerty as directors, both of whom will already be known to many of you through their high-level involvement in our education program. Both filled casual vacancies left by Keith Roberts departure earlier in the year and, more recently, Sonya Russell's decision to step down as a director for health reasons.

Andrew brings fresh perspectives to the board, particularly in the areas of IT and digital literacy, and Chris offers skills in leadership, education and collaborative thought.

Sonya Russell also resigned from her roles as NSW representative and President of the Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations (AFFHO). I am delighted to report that the AFFHO Council has accepted SAG's nomination of Diana Pecar to fill the vacancy left by Sonya as NSW representative — Diana is an engaged and supportive SAG

member and will be an asset to AFFHO and the Council.

There has been a lot on the Society's work slate in the last three months. The revision of the Society's constitution has been front and centre; by the time you are reading this it is anticipated the new draft, complete with a set of explanatory notes, will be poised to go up on the website for member feedback. Although later than originally foreshadowed, circumstances beyond the board's control have led to the timeline being extended. However, having been through many, many iterations, the draft for consultation will be a robust and ACNC (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) compliant document, expected to see the Society through many years to come. We are enormously grateful to our external consultant, Jonathan Casson, who has been very generous with both his time and charge-out rates.

Also underway is our strategic planning process. The board and members have now had the opportunity to hear a presentation by director Darryl Low Choy on the key findings and analysis of the member survey completed earlier in the year. For those who were unable to make the live session, the recorded presentation is available in the Member Area of the website. Member input will be at the heart of the draft strategic plan being developed over the coming months. Unfortunately, for reasons beyond the board's control, the timeline originally provided to members will need to be extended. An updated timetable will be provided as soon as the board is in a position to discuss and settle on a new schedule.

As many of you are aware, our lease on the state government owned Richmond Villa is due to expire in 2030 and will not be renewed. As beautiful and historic as the building is, it is no longer fit for the Society's needs and this year has demonstrated its shortcomings in more ways than one.

To assess the options moving forward, a Premises Working Group has been formed, made up of current and former board members, current and former staff, and one of our wonderful volunteers. Once ideas and action plans start to

come together, we will advise members of the anticipated timetable and next steps.

Our wonderful volunteers continue to be the backbone of the Society and, with the assistance of Volunteering Australia, the last couple of months have seen the creation of a package of documents providing for consistency and transparency in volunteer recruitment and management. Implementing and overseeing the volunteer program will be our new Volunteer Manager, Boyd Robinson AM, who I'm sure many of you will have the opportunity to meet in the not-too-distant future.

If you are interested in doing some volunteer work, but don't know quite where to offer your services, there are existing projects where you can lend a hand, such as in Certificate and Diploma marking, but we are also more than happy for you to suggest new ones.

A big thank you to those of you who have donated to our November 2024 Digitisation Fundraising Campaign. Digitising our collections has become a priority and the faster we can do it the better. Our existing scanning equipment is simply not up to the task and with your financial help we can purchase new equipment to fast-track our digitising projects, making our collections more widely available.

If you have not yet made a donation but would like to do so, please go to

www.sag.org.au/gift

In this issue

If you haven't already delved into the family history treasure trove of wills, probate packets and deceased estate files, this issue will convince you to get in there and see what you can find!

Many of you will have been enlightened already by the very successful *In Search of ... the Inheritance* conference on 23 November. There were tons of gems in the program, not to mention numerous rabbit holes to swallow us up! Read on for some inspirational tips and intriguing stories of discovery.

I wish you all the very best for a relaxing, research-filled and festive holiday season.



Editor's Letter

DANIELLE TEBB

Welcome to our December *Descent* with the theme of wills and probate. We had well over 150 people registered for our virtual event of the same theme, held on Saturday 23 November and I'm sure the presentations will have many of us reviewing the wills we already have, or ordering the will of that obscure maiden aunt in the hopes it may reveal some hitherto unknown information.

Of course, before we can receive an inheritance, someone has to die, so in this issue we're also looking at related death records and case studies.

Often the most valuable thing we can receive from a will is a personal item — a piece of furniture, item of jewellery, family heirloom, or some other object important to the deceased. However, sometimes we don't appreciate the full significance of the item. We may have the broadbrush strokes of how it fits into our family, but not the details. So, one thing we should all think about doing is to record "biographies" of these items.

Take a photo and provide as much detail as you can. Record the measurements of physical items and describe them in as much detail as possible. Did you purchase it on holiday or receive it for a special occasion? Who gave it to you? When did you get it? Why is it important to you, what does it mean to you, and who does it remind you of?

It can be an overwhelming and time-consuming task to clear out a loved one's possessions, and while individual items bequeathed in a will are likely easily identifiable, often there are a vast number of other items that have to be dealt with. Family members rarely recall the same details of individual items, or may have only sketchy memories of something that was mentioned in childhood or in conversation. Essentially, if items are clearly identified and have a personal story, they have a greater chance of being kept within the family.

Consider also, items have a higher on-sale value if they come with a provenance, so every chance to record information will be of value in the long-run. While objects have different meaning to different people and the immediacy of acquiring an object will never be the same for someone else, our personal connection to a physical item(s) should not be lost.

The September issue marked two years for me as *Descent* editor and I've thoroughly enjoyed the challenge each issue brings. There are still plenty of improvements to implement, however, and opportunities for members to contribute articles.

March *Descent* has a theme of creative ways to preserve your family history, whether that be in a photobook, a traditional family tree, or maybe a quilt or embroidery. There'll be a conference scheduled in April 2025 with a theme of occupations, with an emphasis on occupations with a textile theme — think silk weavers, lace makers, dressmakers and embroiderers.

Our themes for 2025 are:

- **Crafting Your Family History**
Submissions due 20 January for March *Descent*, with a proposed conference in April.
- **Migrations**
Submissions due 20 April for June *Descent*, with a proposed conference in July.
- **Animals**
Submissions due 20 July for September *Descent*.
- **Professional Genealogists**
Submissions due 20 October for December *Descent* with a proposed conference in October.

Edward Thornton (1899–1947)

DIANE THORNTON

Edward Thornton (1899–1947), Irish Army captain, barrister, and solicitor, was born on 24 December 1899 in Toomore, Foxford, County Mayo, Ireland. Edward was the son of Patrick Thornton, a farmer, and his wife Mary, née O'Brien, who were both from County Mayo.

Edward was the eighth of 10 children. Edward attended school in Toomore. As one of the younger sons, Edward knew from an early age that one of his elder brothers would inherit the farm and that he would need to make his livelihood elsewhere.

The first public record of Edward, and the only time he is found on the wrong side of the law, is a listing in the Irish Court of Petty Sessions on 29 August 1917, where aged 17, Edward was fined for riding his bicycle on a public road at night without a light.

Edward was registered as a cadet in the Irish Army on 1 May 1922. While Edward rose to the position of captain, his army career only lasted several years as in 1924 he was admitted to St Bricin's Military Hospital in Dublin after falling ill with tuberculosis (TB).

Edward was the first Irish Army officer to take a stand on the manner of his treatment by the Army. Upon seeing his medical chart, his condition was noted as being for "immediate discharge" meaning that the doctors could do nothing more and he was to be transferred to a hut next to the hospital mortuary. Edward argued that no serving officer should be treated in this manner and that he should be given a chance to live. As a consequence, in early 1925, Edward was sent to a TB treatment facility in Nice, France.

In Nice, Edward met his future wife, Dr Brigid Lyons, a fellow patient, medical doctor and later a TB specialist. Dr Brigid Lyons had a significant role in the Irish Civil War and Easter Rising and her biography is included in the *Irish Dictionary of Biography*. Edward and Brigid were married on 25 October 1925 at the Chapel of St Kevin, at the Dublin Pro Cathedral.

The couple did not enjoy their honeymoon in Paris until April 1927 as Edward continued to be treated for TB, now in Switzerland. Following their honeymoon, Edward returned to Switzerland for further treatment. Upon return to Dublin, Edward qualified for the bar at the King's Inn and began practice as a barrister in 1929.¹

Between 1929 and 1932 Edward's work as a barrister often required him to travel to the West of Ireland. Eventually, the work became too demanding, and his health broke down. In 1934, Edward travelled to the United States and underwent a thoracoplasty operation for his TB and treatment at a hospital at Saranac Lake in the Catskill Mountains. Edward later visited his

sister Ellen who was living in Georgia.

Returning from the United States in 1935, Edward studied for another year and qualified as a solicitor, a less strenuous job. Edward remained well for several years however, by 1940, had developed hypertension (high blood pressure).

Edward died suddenly from a cerebral haemorrhage at his home at 41 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin on 19 July 1947. Edward and Brigid did not have any children.

Edward left an estate valued at £967 (approximately £47,000 in today's currency). Edward was buried with his mother at Toomore Cemetery, County Mayo. His widow Brigid was later buried there as well.



Edward Thornton, circa 1922
The photographer and location are unknown.

Select Bibliography

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Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Ireland, Census 1901 and 1911

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Ireland, Civil Registration of Births, Marriages & Deaths C. Hayes, "Brigid Lyons Thornton", *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Dublin, 2023)

Irish Petty Sessions Order Books CSPS 1/2043, County Mayo, 1917 Mary Thornton, Edward Thornton's niece, personal communication, telephone conversation, 8 October 2023.

Military Archives for the Defence Forces, National Army Census 1922, Ireland

National Archives of Ireland, Probate collection Thom's Directory, Dublin Ireland, 1836–1947

¹ The Honourable Society of King's Inn is Ireland's oldest law school.

SAG runs a Certificate in Genealogical Research to assist members to hone their research skills and explore areas of study they may not be familiar with. The course also functions as a prerequisite to our Diploma in Family Historical Studies. One exercise is to write a biography of an ancestor between 500 and 750 words in the style of an *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry. In each issue of *Descent*, we feature one such biography.

INTRODUCTION TO WILL & PROBATE RECORDS

by Vanessa Cassin, SAG Education Manager



In 2023 I completed the Society's Diploma in Family Historical Studies. The title of my thesis was *All will be revealed: what our ancestors' probate records are telling us*. In this article I hope to give you some insight into locating and using will and probate records.

Firstly, it is important to educate yourself about the various terminology used in will and probate records, as there are specialist legal words, and everyday words can mean something different in this context. A good example is the word "property". In everyday life we would tend to associate this word with a house or a piece of land; however, for inheritance purposes property can mean bank accounts, cash, shares, furniture, etc. ... and land is generally referred to as "real property". You will also come across a number of Latin terms, particularly in historical wills and documents. Purchasing or locating online a legal dictionary is a must for working with will and probate records.

If you are working with records from the United Kingdom, it is important to understand that the Scottish system has significant differences to that of England, Wales and Ireland.

For example, they do not actually have a system of probate in Scotland; the equivalent process is called "confirmation". The National Records of Scotland has an excellent page outlining records for Scotland at www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/wills-and-testaments and ScotlandsPeople has a good guide that includes a glossary of legal terminology for Scotland at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/help-and-support/guides/wills-and-testaments#understanding_content_wills_testaments

It is vital to understand the different types of administration as this will have a big impact on what you may find in the records. The two most common are:

- A **grant of probate** is made when the deceased died **testate**. This means they died having made a **valid will**. In the will the testator (person making the will) would have named an **executor/executrix**. This is the person/s chosen by the testator to carry out their wishes after they die. A grant of probate is the process whereby the executor submits the will and details of the person's assets to the Supreme Court which verifies everything is in order and gives the executor approval to proceed.
- A **grant of letters of administration** is made when the deceased died **intestate**. This means they died without having made a valid will. As there is no will, no one was appointed executor/executrix. The next of kin (or someone acting on their behalf) or a trustee company needs to apply to the Supreme Court to be appointed as the **administrator** so that someone is empowered to deal with the assets of the deceased person. The Supreme Court will review the information submitted to confirm that the person applying to administer the estate has the legal right to do so, and then provides them with the letters of administration appointing them to act on behalf of the estate.

Once you have familiarised yourself with the terminology used in these records, if you are interested in researching wills and probates in Australia you will need to know where to start looking

for them. As with many other genealogy records in Australia it is not straightforward.

These records are maintained at the state and territory level, so your first port of call will be the relevant state archive service. Similar to other records created and maintained at the state level, what is available will vary considerably in terms of the range available for public viewing and what the records contain. While there are many similarities across the jurisdictions, there are also many differences in the forms required to be submitted for probate and the information kept in the probate packets.

Three other cautions are necessary here:

- The records will usually, but not necessarily, be found in the state where the person died. Wills and probate are all about the process of transferring ownership of a person's assets after they die, therefore the paperwork will have been submitted to the Supreme Court in the state or multiple states, where the person's assets were located, which is not always the same as where the person died.
- If a person had minimal or no assets when they died, there was no need to obtain probate or administration of their estate, so you will not find any records. As wills are not recorded on any type of central register in Australia, even if a person made a will, there will be no official record of it unless it was submitted for probate after they died.
- Not all estates were administered immediately after the person died; sometimes this did not occur until decades later, perhaps after an unknown asset came to light, so keep an open mind when searching.

In Australia most state archive services have guides or webinars to help you understand the records they hold.

Links to a selection of these are below:

Public Record Office Victoria

<https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/online-galleries-and-exhibitions/lucy-bell>

<https://youtu.be/O3ZE3m-dlyU?feature=shared>

<https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/explore-topic/wills-and-probates>

MHNSW – State Archives

<https://mhns.wa.gov.au/archive/subjects/probates-and-wills/?filter=webinars>

<https://mhns.wa.gov.au/archive/subjects/probates-and-wills/?filter=guides>

State Records Office of Western Australia

www.wa.gov.au/organisation/state-records-office-of-western-australia/court-records

Tasmania

<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/slat/guides-to-records/wills/introduction/>

Why are these records useful for family history research?

For the family historian, the paper trail created to administer deceased estates has led to the creation of documents and files that can provide incredibly detailed snapshots of our ancestor's family members, assets at the time they died, community or religious affiliations, and even their personalities.

Consider the following example of my own first cousin four times removed. William Anderson, who was born in Scotland in 1828, emigrated to Van Diemen's Land, moved on to Victoria and died in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1909 whilst travelling back to Scotland to visit family.

William was a widower who had never had any children. He was a prosperous farmer and former member of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria.¹ His probate record has been digitised and is available online from the Public Record Office Victoria.² Included in the probate packet is an extensive will that William had executed before his death that told me a great deal about his extended family and him as a person.

William's will was professionally drafted, complex, lengthy, and included trusts. A trustee company was named co-executor alongside his nephew by marriage. The clauses in the will included detailed descriptions and instructions about the sharing of his farming properties amongst family members, including conditions to ensure access roads were kept open by those inheriting the properties. It was, however, the other gifts that were genealogical gold.

In the will itself William named:

- 14 separate relatives of William and his late wife Anne
- 6 separate charitable arms of the Presbyterian church
- 14 other charities dedicated to medical causes and/or disadvantaged children

Some of the relatives named lived in other states and some were still living in Scotland. These gifts provide not only names (and some addresses) of family members, but also an insight into how William viewed family, his religious affiliations, the charitable causes he supported, and what he wanted his lasting legacy to be.

While William Anderson left a substantial estate to be administered, not all probate records are for the wealthy.

Let's take a look at an example from the other end of the scale.

Carl Heinrich Ferdinand Wetzel was the first husband of my great-great-grandmother, Caroline Auguste Bertha Bertram. He was born in Hanover (part of modern Germany) in about 1841 and died at the Kew Lunatic Asylum in Victoria in 1869.

He died intestate, that is, without a will, leaving his widow and six children who were aged between 5 and 21.

There were a number of very interesting pieces of information located in the probate packet held at the Public Record Office Victoria. The first was that letters of administration were not granted in his estate until 18 months after he died. This immediately led me to wonder how his widow was providing for the family during this time. The other notable point was that administration was granted to a shopkeeper, not his widow. Reading through the affidavits provided to support the application by the shopkeeper soon cleared up my questions about this point. Carl's widow, Bertha, had declined to apply for administration of the estate and the shopkeeper had then applied to be appointed on the basis of being a creditor — the deceased owed his store £18.8.2 when he died.³

There was only one asset listed in the application which was described as:

land leased or licensed from the Crown described as 'about a quarter of an acre held under miners right.... on which is erected a 4 room weatherboard and brick house erected about eight years ago in fair repair on the outside' valued at £50 and the furniture therein valued at £10 ⁴

There were no liquid assets in the form of either cash or money held in a bank account, suggesting the family was in a parlous financial position and unable to pay the debt to the store. It is likely Bertha was afraid that if her husband's estate was administered the family would lose their home.

What was even more interesting than knowing what assets Carl had when he died was the detailed list of items that had been purchased on credit from the store that was included in the application. The items listed included flour, boots, potatoes, jam, vinegar and tobacco providing an insight into what the family ate and how they lived.

The other important piece of information that was very valuable for a family historian was confirmation that Carl Wetzel was also known as Louis Wetzel. This had been a matter of some speculation in my research as his name varied on the birth records of his children. Having the letters of administration officially granted as "the estate of Ferdinand Wetzel commonly known as Louis Wetzel late of Hayes Street Ironbark in the City of Sandhurst in the Colony of Victoria miner deceased, intestate"⁵ enabled me to be confident that the father listed on each of the birth certificates was in fact the same person, despite the name differences.

Whilst locating and understanding will and probate records can be complex, as has been shown in the examples above, the information gleaned from them can be incredibly valuable for a family historian. I would encourage all researchers to consider checking for the existence of these records for their ancestors as an essential step in the research process.

1. J. Ann Hone, "Anderson, William (1828–1909)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/anderson-william-2885/text4131>, published first in hardcopy 1969, accessed online 22 May 2023.
2. PROV, VA2624 Master in Equity, Supreme Court (also known as Master in Equity and Lunacy 1867–1923): 1852–1948 VPRS 7591/P0002, 111/785 William Anderson: Will, Grant of Probate, 2 July 1909 and PROV, VA2624 Master in Equity, Supreme Court (also known as Master in Equity and Lunacy 1867–1923): 1852–1948 VPRS 28/P0003, 111/785 William Anderson: Grant of Probate, 2 July 1909.
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4. *ibid*.
5. PROV, VPRS 28/P002, 40/051.

Photo by **MJ S** on **Unsplash**



Vanessa Cassin has been researching her family history for about 20 years.

So far she has traced her ancestors back to England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany

(Hanover) and Italy. She completed the SAG Certificate in Genealogical Research in 2018 and recently completed the SAG Diploma in Family Historical Studies. Vanessa has been a member of the Society since 2004 and joined the staff as Education Manager in late 2020.

A life cut short: Ada Mabel Goldsmith

by Michelle Goldsmith



Single, childless women are often lost in family history research. In days gone by, unless employed by the government or in a profession requiring registration, single women often worked at home or privately, with no official records maintained of their achievements.

For the lucky researcher, recognition for deeds (good or otherwise) undertaken within the community may have been reported in the local newspaper or in the official memoirs of an organisation. You may be fortunate to track them via school, immigration, land, census, or electoral records, although these may come with caveats (i.e. age, wealth, enfranchisement).

However, it can be difficult to find records to confirm their lives other than their vital records.

It was with this in mind that I commenced my research into my father's aunt, Ada Mabel Goldsmith, determined to flesh out her story.

I remember my father telling me that his Auntie Ada had died when she was quite young. As he had been three years old at the time, he retained only vague impressions of her. He did, however, recall the impact her death had on the rest of the family.

The family story was that Ada had died whilst on her way to a dance. Somehow, this news made the images retained by the family of Ada more poignant: a young girl, brought to a new country with her family, who had been out enjoying normal activities, cut down in the prime of her life.

A visit to Rookwood resulted in the discovery of Ada's grave. The inscription was moving but posed more questions:

In loving memory of Ada Mabel Goldsmith
Killed 4th July 1926 aged 24 years
We always think of you dear
And think of how you died
To know you could not say goodbye
Has our hearts and feelings tried

The Victorian concept of a good death was one that allowed the dying to farewell their loved ones in a stoic fashion and thus be welcomed into heaven.¹ Being killed implied she hadn't had time to say goodbye to her family. What had happened to Ada?

The best place to look was Trove, where I was able to locate the story in the historic newspapers.

Woman killed – run over by motor 'bus. (NB omnibus)

Shortly before 7 o'clock last night, Ada Mabel Goldsmith aged 24 years, who resided in Roslyn Street, Canterbury, was knocked down and killed by a motor 'bus at the corner of Robert and Jeffrey streets Canterbury. The wheels of the vehicle passed over her chest. The body was conveyed by the Canterbury Bankstown ambulance to the Western Suburbs hospital morgue.²

The *Daily Telegraph* report was also graphic, stating that Ada had:

attempted to cross the road immediately in front of the bus, and though the driver applied the brakes instantly he could not stop the heavy vehicle. Two wheels passed over the victim's chest, crushing it, and death was almost instantaneous. Dr. Harrison, of Canterbury, was called to the scene, and formally pronounced life extinct.³

The coroner's report, dated 16 July 1926, was very clear as to the cause of death: "injuries accidentally received through being knocked down and run over by a motor bus".⁴

However, the report about Ada "crossing the road immediately in front of the bus" puzzled me. To my mind, this put a slightly different bent to the story. The discovery of another newspaper article added to my confusion.

A year after Ada's death, a story appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.⁵ Ada's mother, Lillian Emily Goldsmith, had sued the owner of the motor bus for 400 pounds in damages for negligence. She claimed that Ada lived at home with her and assisted her in "the work of the house" and had been run over and killed by a motor bus owned by the defendant and driven negligently by him. The plaintiff claimed Ada had stepped off the footpath and walked into the path of the bus. The court found in favour of the plaintiff. I found myself wondering if Ada's death had not been an accident.

The facts of Ada's short life are as follows. Ada Mabel Goldsmith was born on 11 December 1901, the youngest of six children, to Charles and Lillian (née Griffiths) Goldsmith.⁶ Baptismal records in 1902 show the family living in 35 Silverlock Street, Rotherhithe.⁷ At the time Charles was a park constable with the London County Council.⁸ This would have provided the large family with a steady income source.

By the 1911 census, the family was without Charles, who had died in 1908.⁹ They were living at 51 Station Crescent, West Green, South Tottenham and Ada was recorded as a student.¹⁰ By 1921, the family were living at 27 Myrtle Terrace, Weymouth with Ada, aged 19, still living with the family and employed as a Laundry Ironer at the Westham Steam Laundry, Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth.¹¹ With two of her brothers already living in Australia and the family eligible for free passage under the Ex-service scheme, thanks to brother Charles' World War 1 service, Ada and the remaining family migrated to Australia via the *Berrima*.¹² Her passport indicates her occupation as laundress.

Arriving in the summer of 1923, the family initially lived with their brothers on a remote farm outside of Caparra, near Wingham, NSW, before moving to the suburban area of Canterbury (later Belmore). To an outsider, both locations would seem incredibly different in terms of lifestyle and opportunities compared to post-war London but, what if Ada, a young girl who had been raised in one of the biggest cities in the world, hadn't thought so? She had worked outside the family home whilst in London, perhaps enjoying the friends and lifestyle befitting a young woman her age, but indications are that she worked from home helping her mother once the family relocated. That would have seen a reduction of her financial independence, at the very least. This is confirmed by the index card from the deceased estate files: Ada died intestate and owned no assets.¹³

The family had prior experience of sudden loss. Lillian's husband Charles died of pneumonia; Ethel (Charles' wife) lost a brother in France during the war and her mother died on the day their ship departed England, depriving her of both the opportunity to say goodbye or attend her funeral. Having experienced the same sudden grief when Ada died, it is perhaps no surprise that the family turned to spiritualism.

Spiritualism is a subject with many and varied views and resources and I would encourage readers to research further if interested. However, at its essence, spiritualism is based on the belief that the living can communicate with the dead, and that the dead can continue to interact with the living.¹⁴

During the Victorian era, people would attend theatres to watch séances held by famous mediums.¹⁵ Spiritualism experienced an increase in popularity throughout and after World War I, when organised religion couldn't provide the comfort that people needed to deal with their losses.



Suzie Grogan provides an interesting insight into the feeling at the time:

If organised traditional churches could not even agree on what kind of 'after life' the thousands killed were enjoying as a reward for giving their lives for their country, where could the bereaved find comfort? Many did not even have a body as a focus of their grief and could not reconcile themselves to that physical absence.¹⁶

My father's cousin, Stella Parrsons (née Smith), relayed to me her memories of the practice in the household. She said that the search for comfort and closure were of great importance to the women in the family: Ada's mother, sisters and sister-in-law.

Of course, not everyone in the family took the quest for answers through spiritualism seriously. My father loved to relate stories of his exploits with much glee. As a young boy he would hide outside, under a window, and throw dirt at the glass during a séance when the medium asked "Is anyone there?"

I am unsure as to the success or otherwise of the family's attempts to contact Ada and their other dearly departed. After a period of popularity, the spiritualism movement declined after World War II as an increasing number of mediums were exposed as frauds.¹⁷ By the time I came along, the family was more into scepticism than spiritualism and the older people who had been involved were either no longer alive or not prepared to discuss such subjects with a young child.

Ada's story did not turn out as I had initially anticipated. Her short, relatively recordless life as a single woman, living and working from home, makes it difficult for me to truly write her life story, other than placing her in the context of her time.

Looking at the facts that are available to me now, my main questions surround the nature of her death: was it an accident or suicide? And if she did take her own life, why? She certainly came from a loving family who by all accounts missed her greatly until the end of their days.

I do acknowledge that I may be overthinking the newspaper reports and perhaps it was just a tragic accident. Either way, hopefully, writing what I do know means that Ada's short life can be acknowledged and remembered, and that is one of the most important aspects to researching one's family history.

Michelle Goldsmith is a family history librarian who enjoys encouraging and assisting newbies with their family history research as well as discovering more about her own.

She credits listening to the stories of her older relatives with starting down the family history rabbit hole, but wishes she had asked them many more questions.



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Investigating historic Irish wills

by Ruth Graham, SAG CEO

My Irish heritage is full of inherited stories with the occasional instance of inherited land, house or jewellery. Many of the stories are peppered with the value of the land that had been passed down from family farms. The stories of how those who had migrated to America or Australia missed out; how my grandmother had been disinherited; and why the tradition of first-born sons inheriting everything could be questioned when families were left with only a single daughter might be framed.

These stories, particularly those of daughters, are likely to be transferable to the many countries and cultures where primogeniture was the rule, where centuries of religious affiliation determined your ability to own property and other rights (even today!); as much as considerations of duty that expected the first-born son to stay home and run the family farm.

This article outlines some of the ways to investigate your Irish inheritance.

Tracing Irish ancestors can be a rewarding yet complex journey, particularly when it comes to locating vital records like historic wills. Wills offer significant insights into an ancestor's life, detailing their property, family relationships, and sometimes their personal thoughts.

The good news is that a wealth of Irish wills can be accessed online via institutions like PRONI (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland), the National Archives of Ireland, and the Virtual Treasury of Ireland.



Ruth Graham, CEO of the Society of Australian Genealogists, is a family historian with a career in education and research management.

Ruth has been included on Australia's higher education regulator's register of experts and volunteers as a mentor for the University of Melbourne and the Association for Tertiary Education Management. She has family from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

Photo: Udo Butcher and Cindy Yeung, May 2022.

1. PRONI

PRONI holds the records for wills and probate from Northern Ireland, which includes counties Antrim, Armagh, Londonderry, Down, Fermanagh, and Tyrone. Historically, wills in Ireland were probated in local diocesan courts, with records archived at both the National Archives of Ireland and PRONI, depending on the jurisdiction.

Accessing wills via PRONI

PRONI's collection of Irish wills spans several centuries, but online access to these records has greatly simplified the research process. To find Irish wills in PRONI, follow these steps:

1. **Visit the PRONI website:** Start by navigating to www.proni.gov.uk, where the digitised records are hosted.
2. **Search for wills:** From the homepage, access the "Wills and Probate" section under the "Search records online" page. There are two main categories: wills probated before 1858, and those probated after 1858. The 1858 date is important because, prior to this, the Irish probate jurisdiction was based on church law rather than civil law, and post-1858, the jurisdiction was shifted to the civil courts.
3. **Searching by name:** You can search for an ancestor's will by entering their surname or first name, along with the date range if known. It's crucial to have as much identifying information as possible, such as the parish or townland where your ancestor lived.
4. **View the documents:** PRONI offers access to scanned copies of the original probate records, which are available for viewing and downloading. Some documents are indexed, allowing easier navigation, while others may require manual searching through indexes or registers.

Key PRONI resources

Will calendars: These are indexes of probate records from 1858 onwards, listing the names of testators (those making wills) along with brief details like the date of the will, the court where it was probated, and the executor.

Wills and probate records: This includes the original probate documents, such as the testator's will, letters of administration, and associated court records. These records often provide detailed family information, assets, and sometimes specific bequests.

2. NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF IRELAND

The National Archives of Ireland holds a comprehensive collection of Irish wills, primarily focusing on the pre-1858 period, when Ireland was under British rule and probate matters were dealt with by church courts. Following the introduction of the Irish Probate Act in 1858, the civil courts began handling probate, which is now managed by the courts in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Accessing wills via the National Archives of Ireland

To access Irish wills on the National Archives of Ireland website, follow these steps:

1. **Visit the National Archives of Ireland website:** Navigate to www.nationalarchives.ie, which provides access to a range of Irish historical records, including wills.
2. **Search the will index:** The National Archives hosts digital indexes for pre-1858 Irish wills. You can search these indexes by surname, location, and year. Unlike PRONI, this resource focuses on records prior to the establishment of civil probate courts.
3. **Browse the will calendars:** These are lists of probated wills, which can be searched by name, date, or location. This is especially useful when searching for ancestors from specific counties.
4. **Requesting copies of wills:** Once you have identified a will in the database, you can request a copy of the document. The National Archives offers access to scanned images of original documents, which can be either viewed or requested for reproduction.

Key National Archives resources

Pre-1858 wills: The National Archives provides indexes and images for Irish wills probated before the creation of civil probate courts in 1858.

Will calendars: Similar to those available at PRONI, these indexes provide a vital starting point for finding Irish wills, especially if you're looking for records prior to the 1858 date.

3. VIRTUAL TREASURY OF IRELAND

The Virtual Treasury of Ireland is an online resource provided by the Irish government that digitises and makes accessible many of the country's historical records, in an attempt to replicate those lost in the destruction of the Four Courts precinct in Dublin in 1922. This includes a variety of documents, including some wills and probate records.

Accessing wills via the Virtual Treasury of Ireland

To access wills and other records via the Virtual Treasury, follow these steps:

1. **Go to the Virtual Treasury of Ireland website:** Visit www.virtualtreasury.ie, which serves as a digital repository for many Irish historical records.
2. **Use the search function:** You can search for specific wills or probate records by name or time period. The site's search engine will help you locate relevant records.
3. **Explore additional resources:** While the Virtual Treasury focuses more on historical manuscripts and state papers, it may also contain references to Irish wills, particularly for those probated in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Benefits of the Virtual Treasury of Ireland

Access to historical records: It's a great resource for accessing broader collections that may not be directly related to probate but still contain important genealogical information.

High-quality scans: The records available through the Virtual Treasury are high-quality scans of original documents, which can be used in your genealogical research.



Will of Newcomen Edgeworth, Kilshrewley (1788) accessed from Virtual Treasury

Reference Code: LongfordCA Wills 002

Will signed 29 February 1788. Edgeworth bequeaths his estate to his 'beloved wife Mary Edgeworth'. He nominates Richard Lovell Edgeworth esq., of Edgeworthstown (his second cousin) as the guardian of his children and his executor. The will was witnessed by John Langan and James Ragntegan.

CASE STUDY: ALEXANDER NESBITT

My ancestor, Alexander Nesbitt died on 29 August 1897 with probate granted on 7 July 1898 in County Armagh, Northern Ireland. I have transcribed part of the will below:

I Alexander Nesbitt of Drumhirk parish of Aghabog County Monaghan do make my last Will and Testament as follows: I give and bequeath to my son James Nesbitt my house, crop, stock, and furniture and my said son James is to pay to my daughter Jane Nesbitt Ten pounds stg. I give to my son William Alexander Nesbitt now in America one hundred pounds stg deposited in bank in name of John Irwin and my own date signed at Drumhirk this eighteenth day of August 1897.

I can only hope that John Irwin released the funds, and that Jane married well!

The will states that Alexander is from County Monaghan, part of the historic Ulster province, though in the present day, contained within the Republic of Ireland, rather than Northern Ireland, a province of the United Kingdom.

His will has been digitised and is available for free from the PRONI will calendars website.



Locating Irish wills through resources like PRONI, the National Archives of Ireland, and the Virtual Treasury of Ireland should be part of Irish family history research, and I recommend that you review all three archives for your family information.

These institutions provide access to a wealth of probate records, offering valuable insights into our ancestors' lives. Whether you're researching Northern Irish or Republic of Ireland ancestors, understanding how to use these resources will greatly enhance your genealogical search.

KEY WEBSITES

FamilySearch Wiki page on Irish probate records:

www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Ireland_Probate_Records

Index of Irish wills 1484-1858 at Findmypast:

<https://search.findmypast.ie/search-world-records/index-of-irish-wills-1484-1858>

PRONI will calendar:

www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/will-calendars

National Archives of Ireland:

www.nationalarchives.ie/article/testamentary-record/

National Archives Genealogy website:

www.genealogy.nationalarchives.ie/

John Grenham sitemap: www.johngrenham.com/sitemap.php

FURTHER READING

Tracing Your Irish Ancestors: The Complete Guide, 5th Edition (2019) by John Grenham

My Descendants

by W. B. Yeats (1865–1939)

Having inherited a vigorous mind
From my old fathers I must nourish dreams
And leave a woman and a man behind
As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems
Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind,
Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,
But the torn petals strew the garden plot;
And there's but common greenness after that.
And what if my descendants lose the flower
Through natural declension of the soul,
Through too much business with the passing
hour,
Through too much play, or marriage with a fool?
May this laborious stair and this stark tower
Become a roofless ruin that the owl
May build in the cracked masonry and cry
Her desolation to the desolate sky.
The Primum Mobile that fashioned us
Has made the very owls in circles move;
And I, that count myself most prosperous
Seeing that love and friendship are enough,
For an old neighbour's friendship chose the house
And decked and altered it for a girl's love,
And know whatever flourish and decline
These stones remain their monument and mine.

Commentary:

My Descendants explores the tension between ambition for intellectual or artistic legacy and the inevitable decline that time imposes on all things.

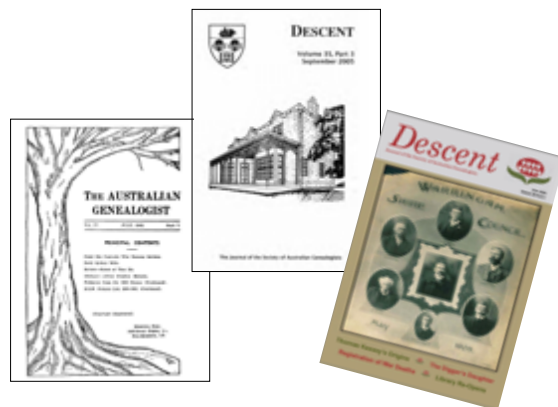
Yeats conveys a sense of melancholy over the transient nature of human achievement but ultimately finds comfort in the enduring value of human connection, love, and friendship.

The poem reflects his contemplation of mortality and his belief that, despite the inevitable decay of material and intellectual pursuits, human relationships offer a deeper, lasting form of fulfillment — something I cherish in my Irish inheritance.

—Ruth Graham

ARTICLES ON WILLS, PROBATE & END-OF-LIFE RECORDS IN THE *DESCENT* ARCHIVES

by Danielle Tebb



In conjunction with our last *In Search of* conference for 2024 — the Inheritance — understanding wills, probate and related records, I have mined the archives of *Descent* and *The Australian Genealogist* (*Descent*'s predecessor) for published articles relating to the theme. These articles are an under-utilised resource and this list will allow you to go directly to the article of interest. Members will need to log into the website and navigate to the Member area, under Publications | Past issues of *Descent*: <https://sag.org.au/Descent>

The earlier articles have outdated instructions for locating and obtaining records, but their methodology, interrogation of the records and general scholarship stand the test on time.

It has long been the Society's practice to index and make available sets of records otherwise difficult to access — in *The Australian Genealogist* Vol. II Part 3, July 1936, it was announced that permission had been given to SAG by the Minister for Justice to copy the list of NSW wills from the earliest recorded at the Probate Office in 1800 up to the year 1901.

In the following issue, Vol. II Part 4, October 1936, the article: "The Value of Wills in Genealogical Research" draws attention to the information wills contain and launches the probate list, beginning with Johan Claus Aagaard through to Matilda Aldrich, published over eight pages. Subsequent list were published in consecutive issues of *The Australian Genealogist* until January 1944 when the project was suspended while investigations were made into the feasibility of publishing the lists into a book.

Article & Edition	Topic
"Early Sydney Wills, part 1" <i>The Australian Genealogist</i> Vol. IV Part 7, July 1943, 101–104.	Subtitled "The Old Green Book", the article outlines the paucity of will records for the first 12 years of the colony and confusion surrounding the official records that have survived. The first will in the colony, that of Curtis Brand, who died 1800 is quoted in full.
"Early Sydney Wills, part 2" <i>The Australian Genealogist</i> Vol. IV Part 8, October 1943, 113–115.	A brief biography of Curtis Brand, referenced above is followed by the wills of the next four men who left a will in the colony: Samuel Branes; William Tough; Samuel Foster and Joseph Smallwood.
"A Simple Guide to Ancestral Research" by P. J. Scott Part 3: Australian Records – Probate <i>Descent</i> Vol. 1 Part 4, December 1963, 20–26.	Comprehensive survey of the places to obtain Australian wills, an explanation of their importance in family history, an outline of what information can be obtained from them, followed by a list of records and where they can be found.
"Causes of Death: Guidelines in the Interpretation of Certified Causes of Death" by Brian Gandevia AM MD FRACP <i>Descent</i> Vol. 20 Part 3, September 1990, 106–114.	A review of medical certification, its errors and its interpretation, as well as its potential usefulness for family historians.
"Inquests: A Note" by Gillian Thompson <i>Descent</i> Vol. 33 No. 2, June 2003, 76–79.	A brief description of the term "inquest" and an overview of what's available at NSW Archives (now Museums of History NSW), the gaps and suggestions of where else to look.
"Prerogative Court of Canterbury – Wills 1384–1858" by Grahame Thom <i>Descent</i> Vol. 34 Part 3, September 2004, 129–135.	Following the release of the index to this record set, a list of wills for those residing in Australia was compiled.
"To the memory of a Beloved Child: A Mystery Solved" by Philippa Barbour <i>Descent</i> Vol. 35 Part 3, September 2005, 107–109.	An inscription on the back of a mourning brooch leads to a hunt for the identity of the child memorialised and a hypothesis suggested on how the item came to Australia.

"A Further Look at Australian Probate Records in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury" by Michael Andrews-Reading <i>Descent</i> Vol. 39 Part 2, June 2009, 58–65.	Examines the reasons for colonial wills ending up in London repositories.
"The Ryerson Index" by John Graham <i>Descent</i> Vol. 39 Part 3, September 2009, 114–117.	Provides an introduction to the online index, its origins in the Sydney Dead Persons' Society and the methodology used in indexing newspaper notices.
"Campaigning for Camperdown Cemetery 1896–1951" by Megan Martin <i>Descent</i> Vol. 39 Part 4, December 2009, 161–168.	A notebook filled with the names of relatives and owners of graves in Camperdown around the turn of the century reveal the start of a protracted campaign to preserve the cemetery.
"Waverley Cemetery – You'll be the Death of Me" by Jan Worthington <i>Descent</i> Vol. 39 Part 4, December 2009, 171–172.	A case study in how rights of burial in a cemetery may not be straight forward.
"New perspectives on Arthur Philip, First Governor of NSW" by Michael Flynn <i>Descent</i> Vol. 43 Part 2, June 2013, 65–81.	Explores the discovery of Phillip's grave, reports of suicide and extended family.
"Restoration of Brown Family Grave at Camperdown Cemetery 2014" by Virginia Rundle <i>Descent</i> Vol. 45 Part 3, September 2015, 150–156.	A chance discovery of an ancestor's grave and the restoration work to restore it to a fitting monument.
"No Record Found" by Paul R.C. Goard <i>Descent</i> Vol. 46 Part 4, December 2016, 188–191.	Explores the various reasons why this message may appear when searching for an ancestor's death entry.
"Ryerson Index to Death Notices & Obituaries in Australian Newspapers" by Pauline Kettle <i>Descent</i> Vol. 47 Part 2, June 2017, 84–85.	Provides hints and tips for successful searching of the site.
"The Violent Death of Thomas Staddon" by Barry Ridding <i>Descent</i> Vol. 49 Part 4, December 2019, 75–78.	Case study of ancestor's death while using explosives for sewerage tunnelling and the changes to workplace safety the inquest eventually effected.
Registration of War Deaths by Heather Garnsey <i>Descent</i> Vol. 50 Part 2, June 2020, 36.	Provides an overview of the vagaries of death registration for those who died on active service, with particular attention to the work of George Porter, Queensland Register General from 1921–1942.

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Putting the record straight:

John Light & the dangers of copying Ancestry trees

by Peter Clifford

On 30 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.¹

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. 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 13 July 1836 and sentenced to transportation for life.²

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 27 August, arriving at Van Diemen’s Land on 22 December 1836.³ He received his ticket of leave on 28 January 1845, moved to Melbourne in 1849, and married Emma Goddard at the Scots’ Church, Collins Street in that city on 14 June 1851.⁴ 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 I received a DNA match through Ancestry 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 100 km 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.⁵

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 15 June 1817 (although quite how the Dorset baptism crept in is a mystery to me).⁶ 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 11 December 1808.⁷ Consistent with the Bristol baptism record, the marriage register states, helpfully, that Henry was a “house

carpenter” (i.e. not a ship’s carpenter, as might have been assumed in Plymouth). They had two children baptised in Plymouth (Mary in 1811 and James in 1814), then John Rowse Light in Bristol in 1817 but, by 1820, they had moved to London, where two further daughters were born (Elizabeth in 1820, and Sarah in 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 6 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, Westminster.⁸

Armed with this additional information about the 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 10 January 1819 was the same child baptised in Bristol in 1817.⁹ 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 29 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 13 September 1818.¹⁰ 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 would 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 would 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 direct 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 112 years ago.¹¹

- 1 *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 5 May 1836 p.3 col.5; *Oxford University and City Herald*, 14 May 1836 p.3 col.4
- 2 *Oxford University and City Herald*, 16 Jul 1836 p.2 col.3
- 3 Ancestry.com, 2010, p.349 no.2554 Coding Labs, n.d.
- 4 Tasmania Archives, n.d., p. Ref. CON31/1/28; Tasmania Archives, n.d., p. Ref. CON18/1/7 p.211 no.1040
- 5 Ancestry.com, n.d.
- 6 Ancestry.com, n.d., p. Bristol Archives Ref. P/St/Mr/R/2/1 p.106 no.844
- 7 **Findmypast.com**, n.d., pp. Plymouth & West Devon Record Office, Stoke Damerel parish register of marriages, 1808, p.69 no.273
- 8 Ancestry.com, n.d., p. London Metropolitan Archives Ref. P89/Mry1/021 p.121 no.968; Ancestry.com, n.d., p. London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) Ref. DI/T/090/016 p.224 no.268; Ancestry.com, 2010, p. Ref. HO107/738/8/33/22
- 9 Ancestry.com, n.d., p. LMA Ref. P89/Mry1/323 p.9 no.70
- 10 Ancestry.com, n.d., pp. South-west Heritage Trust Ref. D\p\w.as/2/1/6 p.31 no.244
- 11 Further information about John’s actual family can be found on my own Ancestry tree at **www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/person/tree/163120694/person/262127384051** and my research into John Rowse Light’s family is available here: **www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/person/tree/163120694/person/262298533950**



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 Institute of Heraldic & Genealogical Studies Higher Certificate in Genealogy and gave up a 30-year career in information technology 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 MA by Research in Local History with the University of Gloucestershire.

Peter can be contacted at peteclifford58@gmail.com

MORE PROBATE PACKETS ADDED TO THE STATE ARCHIVES CATALOGUE

The Supreme Court of NSW has just transferred more than 163,000 probate packets into the State Archives Collection. These are for probates that were granted in the years 1982 to c.1 March 1988, and they are listed in the State Archives catalogue. There are now over 1 million probate packets listed in our catalogue.

Probate packets are one of our most heavily used record series for family historians. We hold them for the years 1817–1982, 1988 and 1989 (with some gaps in the 1970s and 80s). Records in a probate packet include:

- the last will and testament of the deceased
- codicils (additions or revocations to the will)
- letters of administration

You can find a probate packet in our catalogue by searching for the deceased's name followed by the word "death" (i.e. Helen Porter death).

Search for a probate packet at:

<https://mhns.w.au/collections/state-archives-collection/>

★Collection highlight★

Probate packet of Charles Kingsford Smith

By the early 1930s, Charles Kingsford Smith had achieved international fame for his exploits in long-distance flight and had been knighted for his contribution to the development of the Australian aviation industry.

In 1935 (at age 38) he was not in the best of health but keen to go on demonstrating that the future of world transport was in aviation. He arranged for the plane *Lady Southern Cross* to be shipped to England. From there, with co-pilot J. T. Pethybridge, he took off on 6 November 1935, aiming to make one more record-breaking flight to Australia. It was not to be — the plane and both airmen were lost; believed to have crashed into the sea somewhere off the coast of Burma while flying at night towards Singapore.

A report from the Air Commodore of the Royal Air Force, Far East can be found in his probate packet and shows that every effort was made to locate the famous missing aviator and his plane, including offering a reward to whoever could provide useful information. The inclusion of these papers in the probate records is likely to be due to the need to have a sound basis for the assumption that a missing person was dead (thus facilitating the granting of probate).

Kingsford Smith was survived by his wife and son and left an estate valued for probate at £12,875.

Read more at:

<https://mhns.w.au/stories/on-this-day/6-november-1935/>



*Urgent notice issued for missing airmen
MHNSW-StAC: NRS-13660-16-2458-Series 4_212687*

SETTLERS MUSTER BOOK 1800

The Settlers Muster Book of 1800 — a record of early European settlers in Australia in two handwritten volumes — has been digitised and is now accessible to the public for the first time. Honoured on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register in 2021, the Muster Book held by the NSW Parliamentary Library is the most comprehensive surviving record of the early colony.

The significant digitisation project is the result of a collaboration between the NSW Parliamentary Library and MHNSW. The Muster Book is now available on our website at <https://mhns.w.au/guides/settlers-muster-book-1800/> and also through NSW Parliament's new online database, Parlimento at <https://images.parliament.nsw.gov.au>

You can virtually leaf through the pages listing information about early settlers and convicts, or search our online indexes at: <https://mhns.w.au/archive/subjects/census-and-musters/?filter=indexes>

This record offers the opportunity for people to uncover information about their own family members, while historians may discover new details that provide valuable insights into this formative period of the colony.

Given the age and condition of the Muster Book, MHNSW employed specialised equipment to ensure no damage occurred during digitisation. The high-quality images we've produced not only enhance public access but also preserve this artefact for future generations.

DECEASED ESTATE FILES

Deceased estate files are complementary records to our more popular series of probate records and are an often-overlooked resource in our collection.

Created by the NSW Stamp Duties Office, the files contain the papers, correspondence and other documentation relating to the assessment of death duty tax. They are a financial record of the person's estate when they die and frequently have very detailed information about a person's possessions. There are deceased estate files for people from all walks of life, men and women of all ages and financial positions.

We hold deceased estate files for the years 1880–1958, which are searchable via our online index.

Search the index at:

<https://mhnsw.au/indexes/deceased-estates/deceased-estates-index/>



NRS-20347-1-21-7096

CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR HOURS

The last day of operation for the NSW State Archives Reading Room in 2024 is Saturday 21 December.

Copy order and enquiry services will be suspended during this time.

The Reading Room will reopen on Tuesday 7 January 2025.

We wish everyone a safe, happy and healthy holiday break.

Subscribe online to Collection eNews

Join our mailing list at:

<https://pages.wordfly.com/sydneylivingmuseums/pages/Subscribe/>

Be the first to find out about our latest news, exhibitions, events and special offers.

To stay up to date with the NSW State Archives Collection, Caroline Simpson Library Collection and Museums Collection at Museums of History NSW simply select

Collections as one of the options you'd like to hear about.



Trying to tackle those difficult research problems?



SAG has a fantastic range of online, volunteer led research interest groups, bringing together members with common focus areas.

Whether you're interested in a particular software package, a geographic area, genetic genealogy or writing, peruse the groups page on our website to discover what groups we have and when they meet:

www.sag.org.au/Research-and-Software-Groups

OUR SAG COMMUNITY

Out & About BY DANIELLE TEBB

The Settlers Muster Book 1800 Digitised Edition Launch

SAG staff Ruth Graham, Vanessa Cassin and Danielle Tebb attended the launch of the digitised version of The Settlers Muster Book 1800 on Wednesday 23 October in the Jubilee Room at Parliament House, Sydney.

The Muster was included in the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register in 2021 and is recognised as the earliest and most comprehensive surviving record of the New South Wales colony, offering an important view into the early years of the colony.

While the data in the Muster has long been available in print form, together with subsequent musters from 1805–1806, 1811, 1814, 1822 and 1837; this digitised version reveals the beauty of the original pages, the flow of the script and mystery of the abbreviations. Searches can be carried out on a far wider array of topics than merely names, from types of livestock to occupations, further enriching our knowledge of the early days of the colony.

Presentations from Martyn Killion, Director of Collections at Museums of History NSW and Carol Liston, AO, Adjunct Associate Professor at Western Sydney University explored the importance of the Muster, the security surrounding the digitising process, and demonstrated the rich historical details that can be extracted from its pages.

Researchers can access the Settlers Muster Book 1800 through the Parlimento database: <https://images.parliament.nsw.gov.au/> as well as through the Museums of History NSW: <https://mhnsw.au/guides/settlers-muster-book-1800/>



It's a Riot

Parramatta Female Factory

SAG staff Ruth Graham, Vanessa Cassin and Danielle Tebb again attended the *It's a Riot* day at the Parramatta Female Factory, 5 Fleet Street, on Friday 25 October, together with SAG President Philippa Shelley Jones and board members Dianne Snowden and Andrew Redfern, held to celebrate and commemorate the female factory women.

Following the opening presentations by President Gaye Hendrickson, local member Dr Andrew Charlton MP, and Patrons Thomas and Meg Keneally, there was the formal opening of the Parramatta Female Factory Research Centre and Babette Smith Collection with the unveiling of the ceremonial plaque and ribbon cutting.

The annual Thomas Keneally Lecture was given by Dr Hamish Maxwell-Stewart. He detailed the work his students have been doing on mapping convict records in Tasmania through their surviving Conduct Registers, and layering this data with other relevant information such as birth, death and marriage records.

Analysis of this data has revealed that female convicts were punished more often for misdemeanours than their male counterparts, and were twice as likely to be sentenced to solitary confinement, which had long-term effects on their individual birth rates and life expectancy.

Female convicts were also more likely to abscond than their male counterparts, and preliminary analysis shows that NSW female convicts absconded more frequently than their Tasmanian counterparts. Similar mapping analysis on NSW convicts has the potential to provide new understanding of the convict experience.



Heather Garnsey OAM

In the previous issue of *Descent*, we were thrilled to announce that previous SAG Executive Officer, Heather Garnsey had received the Medal of the Order of Australia in the 2024 King's Birthday Honours list. At the time of going to print, however, she hadn't been formally presented with her medal, so she has kindly supplied a photo from the ceremony held on Friday 27 September.

Frazer Memorial Unveiling

BY VANESSA CASSIN

The Society of Australian Genealogists has had a long running connection to the magnificent Rookwood Cemetery in Sydney's Western Suburbs, so it was with great pleasure that I accepted an invitation from the Metropolitan Memorial Parks, who now manage a large portion of this historic cemetery, to represent the SAG at the reopening ceremony for the Frazer Mausoleum on Tuesday 22 October, following an extensive restoration program.

For those who are unfamiliar with this unique building, it was built in 1894 for the wealthy businessman John Frazer and his wife Elizabeth. It stands in the Old Presbyterian section of the cemetery and is reminiscent of a miniature cathedral, complete with stained glass windows, grotesques and gargoyles.

Inside the stunning exterior of the mausoleum its exquisite alabaster sarcophaguses are of particular note. They are believed to be among only a few outside Europe. It is listed on the State Heritage Register and is considered an iconic landmark.

Such was the interest in the restoration the public tickets to the reopening sold out, so it was indeed a privilege to be one of the first to step inside and witness the transformation from a derelict, pigeon-infested building to a magnificent example of gothic architecture and craftsmanship.

Those of us attending the reopening ceremony were able to hear directly from the team of heritage stonemasons and other specialists about some of the challenges involved in working on the building, including finding a scaffolding company willing to risk putting scaffolding over the self-supporting stone dome, and some of the unexpected things they discovered about the building along the journey.

The project included restoration and safety works on some seventy nearby headstones in preparation for the reopening ceremony — a wonderful side project in itself. Those attending on the day were also lucky enough to hear about the life of John Frazer from one of his direct descendants. This insight into the man who commissioned this amazing monument was a special addition to the event.

This reopening of the Frazer Mausoleum was the culmination of thirty years of lobbying and planning by the Friends of Rookwood Group and, along with the team of craftspeople, they are to be congratulated on such a magnificent result. I encourage anyone who has the chance to attend a tour of this historic cemetery to do so.



SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGISTS

AGM 2025

The 92nd Annual General Meeting of the Society of Australian Genealogists will be held on Saturday 24 May 2025 at 3.00pm, AEST. Formal notice will be given in due course. Members are advised that any notice of motions which they wish to move at the Annual General Meeting must be made in accordance with Corporations Law and be received by the Society no later than 5pm on Monday 3 March 2025.

The exact form of the motion to be moved at the meeting must be stated and the Notice of Motion must be signed by two financial members. Any financial member may be nominated for election to the Board by any two financial members. Nomination forms are available by contacting the office on (02) 9247 3953 or via info@sag.org.au. The deadline for nomination is 5pm on Monday 3 March 2025.

SAG Christmas & New Year Holiday Break

Our Family History Research Centre & Library at 2/379 Kent Street will close for the year from 4pm Thursday 19 December and reopen 10am Tuesday 14 January 2025.

The SAG office will close from 4pm Friday 20 December and reopen 9am Tuesday 7 January. Phone messages left during this period won't be returned until our staff return to the office.

Mal Sainty awarded Fellowship

BY DANIELLE TEBB

We've recently been notified that SAG Vice-Patron and Past President Malcolm Sainty has been awarded a Fellowship from the Federation of Australian Historical Societies in recognition of his outstanding contribution to community history and the heritage movement nationally.

On behalf of SAG, I would like to extend my congratulations to Malcolm and acknowledge his years of dedicated service to both this Society as well as the larger family history community.

A summary of his citation reads:

Mr Malcolm Sainty is a member of the Royal Australian Historical Society, a Fellow of the Society of Australian Genealogists, was President of the Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations from 1990–1991 and was awarded the Annual History Citation of the History Council of NSW in 2006.

Mr Sainty has been involved in publishing and indexing Australian historical records for over 50 years, an achievement that has contributed greatly to the work of community historians throughout Australia. In conjunction with his business partner Mr Keith Johnson, Mr Sainty founded the Library of Australian History (LAH). For 40 years LAH published numerous historical books, radically improving access to some of the key resources relating to the post-1788 settlement. In addition, he co-edited and co-authored a range of important publications being:

- ◆ *An index to birth, marriage, death and funeral notices in the Sydney Morning Herald, 1831–1853* (published 1975).
- ◆ *1828 Census of New South Wales* (published 1980).
- ◆ *Sydney Burial Ground 1819–1901: Elizabeth and Devonshire streets and history of Sydney's early cemeteries from 1788* (published 2001).



Biographical Database of Australia (BDA) representatives at the Fellowship presentation, November 2024.

Back row, left to right: Dr Perry McIntyre AM, Board member; Keith Johnson AM, Board member; Dr Carol Liston AO, chair of BDA; Michael Flynn, Hon. Research Officer and Assistant Editor. Front row: Mrs Robin Stern, BDA Webmaster and adviser; seated Malcolm Sainty AM, FFAHS (Hon. Secretary & Editor).

Mr Sainty also played a key role in the development of the *Genealogical Research Directory* in 1981, which was published annually until 2001. It was a key reference work for worldwide family history research, listing the names and addresses of family history researchers world-wide, with their research interest to encourage correspondence and sharing research information with others of the same interest.

Mr Sainty played a pivotal role in the development of the Biographical Database of Australia and its launch in 2013. The Database includes all the data from the *Musters of NSW* from 1800 to 1837, as well as the 1828 Census of NSW. Many other source records have, and are still, being added to the database, including full transcripts of Church Registers. A series of numbers links an individual mentioned in any number of sources. The breadth of information in the early 19th century materials covers not only NSW but also Port Phillip (later Victoria) and Moreton Bay (later Queensland). Similarly, the detailed indexes to the 19th century *Men of Mark* series covers a broad geography of 19th century Australia.

Have you recently published your family history?

We want to celebrate the publishing success stories of our members, so please let us know if you have recently published your family history. Send us a high-resolution cover image and a brief description, and we'll add them to our community pages.

If copies are available for sale, please add the RRP (recommended retail price) and your contact details — all sales are to be made directly with the author unless mentioned otherwise. While we can't review each title, we would also love to add a copy of your family history book to the SAG Library.

Please email editor@sag.org.au.

Obituary

Gillian Vavasour Iles

21 February 1927 – 6 October 2024

Although born in Cape Town, Gillian lived in England from the age of 3 months until she and her doctor husband emigrated to Australia as “Ten Pound Poms” on the SS *Orontes* in 1960.

After making new friendships on the Society’s first Irish Tour in 1984 she became a volunteer in 1988, continuing her service until her early 80s. Gillian was awarded both a Certificate of Merit and a special Certificate of Appreciation, and featured in the 90th anniversary edition of *Descent* as an example of a member who had maintained over 50 years of continuous membership. She was elected a Benefactor in December 2023.

After attending an SAG lecture titled “Stop Researching Start Writing” she was inspired to publish *David and Gillian Iles and our Ancestors* in 2011.

This book carefully documented the Walker, Brown, Tozer, Huxham, Armitage, and Vavasour families back seven generations, along with the Iles, DePear and Stephen families of her husband. Well referenced, illustrated and indexed, it is a wonderful legacy that she has left for her son, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, as well as her wider family. Her associated research papers have also been lodged with the SAG.

Gillian had a particular interest in the friendship between her great-grandfather’s uncle, Charles Armitage Brown and the English poet John Keats. She devoted many hours of research and correspondence to that subject and had an article published in the *Keats-Shelley Journal* revealing unknown facts about the financial dealings between Brown and Keats. Many academics have since incorporated her research into their own publications about Keats.

Having turned 97 in February Gillian began to visibly slow down. The last time I saw her she expressed regret at not finishing the family history, and I had to remind her that no-one ever really does.

Gillian died peacefully at Montana Nursing Home in Mosman on 6 October.

Gillian’s funeral was held on Thursday 17 October. SAG was represented by former Executive Officer Heather Garnsey; former Librarian Lorraine Brothers; Vice-Patron Keith Johnson and Membership Officer Danielle Tebb.

by Heather Garnsey

Deaths

The deaths of the following members and former members were notified to the Society between August and October 2024.

We extend our sympathies to the family and friends of them all.

Gillian Iles
Mosman
6 October 2024

Kay Shaw
Chatswood
4 September 2024

Don Jarman
Epping
8 July 2024

Warwick David Sherring
East Lismore
14 June 2024

Lois McEvoy
Turramurra
3 August 2024

Rev. George Matthew Wilkins
Bathurst
4 April 2024

Jean Violet Robb
Forestville
20 June 2024



EDUCATION@SAG

BY VANESSA CASSIN

It is hard to believe we are heading into the final weeks of 2024. While clichéd, it feels like only a short time since I was putting the finishing touches to the year's schedule and wondering what wonderful research finds our members would have in 2024.

While this year has not been without its challenges for the Society, water ingress in the basement at Richmond Villa stands out for one, I am proud to look back and see that through the combined efforts of volunteers and staff we have again delivered a full and varied program of courses and events for members and friends of the Society.

In this issue I am continuing to include a section where I can acknowledge and thank those people and organisations who have presented at an event in the last quarter (the vast majority on a voluntary basis). We could not bring our education and events program to fruition without all these dedicated and generous volunteers.

The last quarter of 2024 has seen the introduction of a three-part Digital Skills for Family Historians course. The initial offerings of this course booked out so quickly that two more programs were squeezed in during November. Almost 100 members have now improved their knowledge of important topics like password managers, electronic file organisation and techniques for locating information online.

The success of skills-based programs like these, together with our new AI and Technology Group, have shown the thirst our members have for learning about how to embrace new technologies as part of their genealogical toolkit. Based on the popularity of this course, we are now looking at developing a follow-up program, in addition to a series of webinars to assist members to get the most from the various commercial genealogical platforms. Stay tuned for more details in 2025!

At the other end of the complexity scale, Veronica Williams and a team of assistants have recently presented a four-module program on using Chromosome Analysis in family history. This was an intensive program and we hope to hear of some successes in cracking research

problems from the participants in the future. Congratulations to all who participated. Christine Hingerty has also presented and facilitated numerous sessions demonstrating the use of Y-DNA and it has been pleasing to observe an increase in the understanding of this particular type of DNA test among our members.

Whilst we have presented a number of technology and genetic genealogy events recently, we certainly haven't forgotten the importance of traditional research skill sets. I am pleased to announce that in 2025 we will be trialling a new support group based around improving the quality of our source citations. This group is the brainchild of Danielle Lautrec, known to many of you for her webinars on using Excel for family history and her research methodology courses. While interacting with event attendees Danielle identified a need for further support amongst researchers for dealing with the varied and, sometimes unusual, sources we come across in family history and emailed me a proposal to start a group so members could collaborate on this topic — something the SAG is very happy to support.

Finally, it was wonderful to meet quite a few members at the *Day with Family Tree Maker and Family Book Creator* held at the Sydney Masonic Centre in October. Our international guests provided some excellent tips and tricks for getting the most out of the two software packages. We were also thrilled to welcome a number of new members who joined the SAG after attending this event.

You can find more details about all these events plus much more by visiting the events page of our website at www.sag.org.au/events. Please make a special effort to check the page frequently in January and February 2025 as we will be working hard to list many of our events for next year between now and then.

As the year draws to a close I would like to wish all of you a safe and enjoyable holiday period. I look forward to seeing you at our events in 2025.

*Thank you to all those who contributed to the SAG Education program from September – November 2024.
Any omissions from this list are purely accidental. Names are in alphabetical order.*

Presenters & Hosts	Brad Argent, Kathryn Barrett, Peter Benson, Gill Blanchard, Geoff Bovard (Friends of Rookwood), Fiona Brooker,
Webinars	Angela Buckley, Jo Callaghan, Debra Carter, Janelle Collins (State Library of NSW), Cassie Gilmartin,
Book Club	Shaun Gilmartin, Vicki Hails, Chris Hingerty, Lyn Hudson-Williamson, Melissa Hulbert, Jennifer McLaughlin-Doherty,
Let's Talk About	Jeff Madsen, David Mayne, Robert Nash, Dennis O'Brien, Michelle Patient, Simon Pearce, Andrew Redfern, Dr Dianne Snowden AM, Christine Woodlands
Conference Presenters	Michael Flynn, Stefan Harms, Daniel Horowitz, Lyn Hudson-Williamson, Stephen Lynch, Sarah Pettyfer, Andrew Redfern, Dr Emily Vine, Public Record Office Victoria, Duff Wilson
Course Presenters & Assistants	Gail Bryant, Leisa Byrne, Jennie Fairs, Vicki Hails, Danielle Lautrec, Jeff Madsen, Dr Betty O'Neill, Andrew Redfern, Dr Dianne Snowden AM, Veronica Williams
Family History Connect Presenters	Patrice Connelly, Chris Hingerty, Tony Jackson
Group Presenters & Leads	Thistle Anderson, Lisa Apfel, Jill Ball, Kathryn Barrett, Anne Blythe-Cooper, Sally Byatt, Elizabeth Capelin, Larry Czarnik, Jennie Fairs, Kerry Farmer, Michael Flynn, Dale Fogarty, Heather Garnsey, Elizabeth Gordon, Kathleen Hackett, Vicki Hails, Chris Hingerty, Richard Horsburgh, Melissa Hulbert, Suzanne Hyde, Alan Jones, Jenny Joyce, Danielle Lautrec, Kam Louie, Lorraine Luks, Brice McDowell, Brian MacLauchlan, Bronwyn MacLeod, John Macpherson, Lilian Magill, Yvonne Masters, Jason Murphy (National Library of New Zealand), Kristine Newton, Danny O'Neill, Michelle Patient, Diana Pecar, Brad Powe, Natalie Jane Prior (representing Chesterfield & Districts FHS), Emily Purser, Sandy Pullen, Linda Radulovitch, Pamela Rajkowski, Andrew Redfern, Sharon Shelley, Helene Shepherd, Cathie Sherwood, Sally Skulte, Lorna Steele-McGinn, Sue Stenning, Megan Tilley, Maureen Trotter, Annesley Watson, Sharon Watson, Pauline Weeks, Robert Williams (Broome Museum), Veronica Williams, Christine Woodlands

DNA CORNER

BY CHRISTINE WOODLANDS

Great ways to use a GEDCOM at DNA Painter

I was tempted to write about the great developments at AncestryDNA again in this issue. However, following the excellent webinar recently presented by Andrew Redfern, GEDCOM – Who, What, Where, When and How?, we'll instead look at using GEDCOMs at my favourite third-party site, **dnainter.com**. The basic version of DNA Painter is free and a subscription version is available for more advanced users. The tools covered below are free once you have set up an account using this link: <https://dnainter.com/account/register>

The **Ancestral Tree tool** visualises your family line as a tree, fan chart and text pedigree which allows you to create and share different views of your direct line. You can use a GEDCOM, or input the details manually to create an Ancestral Tree. With the tree, you can use DNA Painter Dimensions to create and share different views, like country or region of birth, age at death or birth century for you and your ancestors. Of course, you can create a family line for anyone you choose. This tool is simple to use and has many applications for all family historians. Image 1 shows people born in Australia in gold, Denmark in red, Ireland in green, Germany in grey and England in blue.

The **DNA Coverage tool** allows you to import a GEDCOM or build a tree, then mark the people who have taken a DNA test. The tool estimates the DNA coverage for the root person in the tree and can help you to work out the best person to test next.

This tool is simple to use and very useful when considering your DNA testing strategy. Image 2 shows the six descendants of Agnes who have tested account for approximately 49% of her genome. Agnes's great grandson, Jack, is the next suggested tester as:

- Agnes has no living children to test
- Gail, her only living grandchild, has tested, and
- Jack is her only living great-grandchild who has not tested.

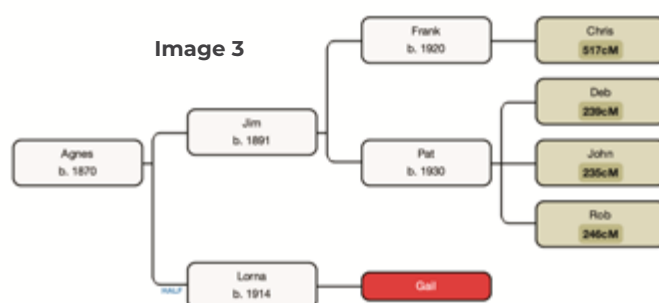
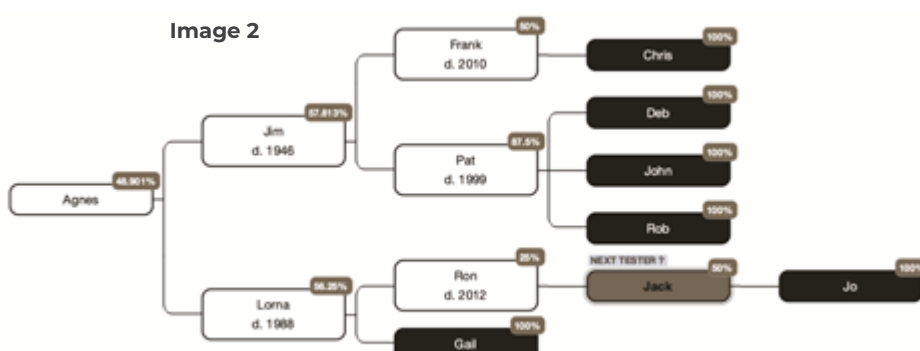
If Jack tested, this would add about 2% additional coverage.

Agnes was one of the 11 children of James and Eliza. Fifty-four descendants of James and Eliza have taken a DNA test with 50 of them at AncestryDNA. About 80% of James and Eliza's genome is covered by these testers, so the more descendants who test, the greater the genome coverage.

What Are the Odds? (WATO) was the most popular tool at DNA Painter until the completely overhauled **What Are the Odds? Plus (WATO Plus)** tool was released earlier this year. WATO and WATO Plus can help you work out where someone might fit into a known family tree by using the amount of DNA the tester shares with their matches in that tree. WATO produces a descendant chart just like DNA Coverage. I find this particularly useful to show the DNA shared by the tester with matches.

In Image 3, we're showing the amount of DNA tester Gail shares with her matches who are her half first cousins.

In Image 4, we're looking at how Gail might fit into the known tree of Chris, Deb, John and Rob. In this example, Hypothesis 7 is the relationship between Gail (the tester) and her matches. It's possible but the probability is less than 1%. This shows that WATO is a powerful tool but we must know how to set the tree up accurately, interpret the results



and use it along with other DNA and documentary evidence. If you would like to see this tree and read about the various hypotheses, you can follow this link, available until 30 June 2025:

<https://dnainter.com/tools/wato3/view/885f8076a11f5a5e#1%7C1%7C1%7C1%7C14%7C54%7C74%7C0>

Module 4 of SAG's "Analysing your AncestryDNA results" program is devoted to working with the WATO and WATO Plus tools.

You can see that there are a number of different ways to use a GEDCOM at DNA Painter. Some tools are easier than others, but they are all welcome additions to the family historians' toolbox.

Keep an eye on the Society's events calendar for webinars on DNA Painter in 2025.

Further resources

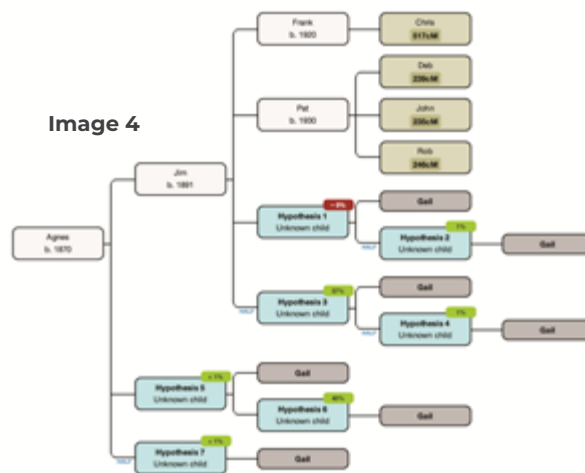
Free webinar from Jonny Perl, the creator of DNA Painter, explaining the site's main features: <https://familytreewebinars.com?p=49770>

Importing GEDCOMs into DNA Painter: <https://blog.dnainter.com/blog/you-can-import-gedcom-and-segment-data-did-you-know-6/>

Ancestral Trees: <https://blog.dnainter.com/blog/eight-ways-you-can-use-ancestral-trees-at-dna-painter/>

DNA Coverage tool: <https://dnainter.com/blog/how-to-use-the-new-dna-coverage-tool/>

Free webinar from Jonny Perl explaining WATO: <https://familytreewebinars.com?p=21332>



It is anticipated that this column will become a regular feature of *Descent*, helping us all to develop our skills and understanding around digital literacy and using technology for family history.

Each article will endeavour to cater for all levels of learners, from beginner to more advanced, so implement what is applicable to your situation.

Questions are welcome; send to admin@sag.org.au for answering in subsequent columns.

Nearly 100 people have already completed the course, Digital Skills for Family Historians, which explores strategies, tools, tips and techniques in a variety of software that genealogists regularly use. Feedback received was excellent, resulting in further sessions of this course being planned throughout 2025.

Zoom

With many organisations, including SAG, holding many meetings, workshops and seminars online, being able to use Zoom has become a necessary skill.

Are you able to perform each of these tasks on a Zoom call?



Join a call	Add reactions during a call	Enter/Exit full screen mode
Leave a call	Send a message in chat	Add reactions in chat
Turn mic on/off	Change screen view – speaker/gallery	Save chat
Turn camera on/off	Send a private message in chat	Share screen
Turn participants list on/off		Stop sharing screen
Turn chat on/off		
Raise/lower hand		

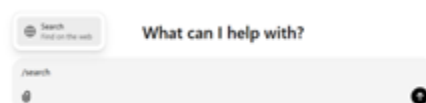
Should you restart your computer?

Yes, your computer should be restarted regularly. I would suggest once per week. Restarting the computer will ensure any updates are installed correctly and restarting also clears a computer's memory to give it a fresh start. So, build a weekly restart into your routine. To help you remember, call it Restart Monday which is the first thing you do on your computer on Monday.



Search function comes to ChatGPT

One of the overriding principles of tools such as ChatGPT has been that it is not a search engine. Until now! A new search feature is being rolled out allowing you to prompt ChatGPT to search the internet and return a list of results. Some users (particularly paid subscribers) will notice a little globe beside the paper clip and clicking this will activate the search function. If you don't yet have the icon, type "/search" and this will allow you to direct ChatGPT to search.



Join the AI & IT Special Interest Group

Do you want to learn about some of the latest technology tools and AI approaches for family history? Or some tips and tricks for using different software? Join our bimonthly AI & IT Special Interest Group meetings. From latest news to troubleshooting, hardware and software, this group explores and shares discoveries and findings we have uncovered in the many pieces of software we use. Members and non-members welcome. Register at: www.sag.org.au/events



LIBRARY NEWS



BY KARLIE FRELINGOS

This is a selection of books, pamphlets and other format items accessioned.

The information provided is the title of the record, library classification number, format and donor's name.

All items are in our Research Centre & Library at 2/379 Kent Street unless otherwise noted.

Consult the Library Catalogue at www.sag.org.au and click on the "Using our Collections" button to locate full details of the items included in this list.

AUSTRALIA

Paradiso: A novel by Steve Capelin. (2021) A3/8/6 (book)
[Donated by Elizabeth Hurst]

The Forgotten: The Chinese Labour Corps and the Chinese Anzacs in the Great War by Will Davies. (2020) A3/70/110 (book) [Donated by Kathryn Barrett]

An Inventive Life: The Story of a Creative and the Woman Who Enabled Him by Colleen O'Sullivan. (2024) A6/BRO/33 (book)

The Thistle and the Waratah: A History of the Gill family in New South Wales by Russell Fraser. (2018) A6/GIL/11 (book) [Donated by the author]

The heritage and legacy of Joseph Samuel Hanson 1810–1852: Clerk, dealer, publican, merchant, landowner, shipowner, gentleman by Charles F. Moore, Rod Hanson & Peter Hanson. (2022) A6/HAN/CD.1 (electronic resource) [Donated by Philippa Shelley Jones]

Life and times of Constable Thomas Rayfield 1824–1874 by Peter Clark. A6/RAY/Pam.3 (pamphlet) [Donated by the author]

John & June Roxby: Cricket, singing, a love story and Kahibah by Peter Bartley. A6/ROX/Pam.2 (pamphlet)

Joan Tonking "Best woman in the world": A full life by Ian Tonking. (2022) A6/TON/3 (book) [Donated by the author]

The letter: Tracing our Irish Whyte ancestors by Patricia Rogerson. (2023) A6/WHY/3 (book) [Donated by the author]

A new life in a new land: German immigrants in the Shoalhaven 1850–1900 by Robyn Florance. (2013) B3/20/Pam.6 (pamphlet) [Donated by the estate of Jenny Paterson]

Hambledon Cottage: A house history, its evolution, occupation and activation 1824–2024 by Parramatta and District Historical Society. (2024) B4.150/20/8 (book) [Donated by Vanessa Cassin]

God's acre: Religion comes to the bend in the river: A history of the Anglican Parish of Beresfield by Gail Orchard. (2004) B4.322/91/Pam.1 (pamphlet) [Donated by the estate of Alan Day]

A historical account of Kendall & Camden Haven area by Camden Haven Adult & Community Education Inc. (1998) B4.439/2/Pam.1 (pamphlet)

Resilience at the foot of the Brindabellas by Cameron Archer. B4.611/1/1 (pamphlet) [Donated by the author]

A history of the burials in the Lewis Ponds General Cemetery 1861–1919 by Jennifer Howarth. (2023) B4.800/48/1 (Thesis) [Donated by the author]

The parish of Grenfell 1884–1984 by D. L. Phillips. (1984) B4.810/92/Pam.1 (pamphlet) [Donated by the estate of Alan Day]

From these beginnings: History of the Shire of Alberton (Victoria) by John E. Adams. (1990) C4.971/1/1 (book) [Donated by Jennifer Oswald-Sealy]

Truth Telling: From Colonising to Covenanting: The Proceedings of the Fourth Uniting Church National History Society Conference, 24–27 August 2023, Darwin Northern Territory by Uniting Church National History Society. (2024) G4.800/99/1 (book) [Donated by Rex Meyer]

NEW ZEALAND

Aramoho: The community on the river: The early years by Laraine Sole. (2013) K4/1/34 (book)

With Grace: Her story and place in Campbell history 1642–1856 by Evelyn McIver-Keeley. (2023) K6/CAM/2 (book)

Reflections and the story of the Matthew White family by George Whitelock. (1985) K6/WHI/Pam.1 (pamphlet) [Donated by Jennifer Oswald-Sealy]

ENGLAND

Cornwall's engine houses by D. B. Barton. (1989) N4.7/10/Pam.16 (pamphlet) [Donated by the estate of Alan Day]

Bedfordshire probate inventories before 1660 by Barbara Tearle. (2024) N7.1/20/1 (book) [Donated by Graham Lugsdin]

SCOTLAND

Parish of Monifieth (pre-1913 boundary): Memorial inscriptions by Tay Valley Family History Society. (2005) P7.2/11/Pam.4 (pamphlet)

IRELAND

Gribbin: A family history of Ulster by John P. Gribbin. (2023) R6/GRI/1 (book) [Donated by Rex Meyer]

CANADA

Iron bars and bookshelves: A history of the Morrin Centre by Louisa Blair, Patrick Donovan & Donald Fyson. (2016) T3/50/1 (book) [Donated by Lorraine Brothers]

RETRO RESEARCH ...

that never goes out of style!

BY GEMMA BESWICK

Final chapter: Unearthing the stories in undertakers & funeral directors records from our Library collection

At first glance, records from undertakers and funeral directors might seem sombre or even grim. However, delving into these archives can reveal a treasure trove of fascinating stories and cultural insights. The Society's library collection items focusing on undertakers, funeral directors and their records offer a unique window into the past, showcasing how communities have honoured their departed and how practices around death have evolved over time.

Exploring these items from the library collection can also reveal the unexpected connections between individuals and their communities. Many families have deep ties to local undertakers and funeral directors and other allied occupations often spanning generations. These relationships highlight the important role that these professions play not just in times of grief, but as integral members of the community fabric.

Next time you visit our library, consider stopping by our collection of undertakers and funeral directors records. You might be surprised by the stories waiting to be uncovered. In a world that often shies away from conversations about death, these sources invite us to reflect, remember, and celebrate life in all its complexities.

Many thanks to Society volunteer, **Robyn O'Keeffe**, who helped compile items and information for this article. Greatly appreciated!

These resources have been compiled by a number of different societies and groups at different times. Some resources are indexes to other records held elsewhere, other items are lists of funerals or burials, and other items still share the stories of the individuals, and families, who through carrying out their work as funeral directors and similar occupations, were cornerstones of support during very difficult times for families. It would be impossible to include every relevant title here that we have in the library collection, therefore just a sample from the collection is included below:

AUSTRALIA

New South Wales

A list of funerals conducted by J. W. Chandler Pty Ltd, Undertakers, Macquarie Street, Windsor, 1920–1987, compiled by H. H. Cottrell – B7/10/3 (Book)

Bathurst & Kelso NSW burials, cremations & headstones 1817–2003, compiled by Family History Group Bathurst – B7/11/CD.6 (Electronic resource)

Burial records from Logan Funerals of Narrabri c1900–2009, compiled by Central Coast Family History Society Inc. – B7/10/CD.3 (Electronic resource)

Camperdown Cemetery – burial butts St Stephen's Church of England, Newtown, NSW (Microform: reels 3229–3235)

Charles Kinsela & Sons funeral directors, burial index 1905–1955, compiled by Central Coast Family History Society – B7/10/CD.2 (Electronic resource)

Funeral records of Charles Kinsela Funeral Homes Pty Ltd: Funeral registers (Microform: reels 2028–2036).

Coffs Harbour undertaker's index, volume 1, A–J by Nick Vine Hall and H L Barley – B7/10/1 (Book). There is a second volume of the title in the collection.

Index to order books of F. Arnold & Sons, Stonemasons 1923–1977 (part ii), compiled by Ruth Keir (nee Arnold) – NSW-HIS-ARN:1 (Microform)

Index to records of R. Ayrton, funeral director, Canowindra, compiled by Virginia Cullane – B7/10/Pam.1 (Pamphlet)

Max Perrams Funerals Liverpool NSW: March 1962 to September 1973, compiled by Betty Biffin & Betty Shepherd for Liverpool Genealogical Society, Inc. – B7/10/CD.1 (Electronic resource). There are two other volumes of this title in the collection.



Metcalf & Morris 1922–1957: Funeral directors, Parramatta – B7/10/CD.4 (Electronic resource)

Records from Simplicity Funerals Bateau Bay, NSW 1963 – 2011 by Wyong Family History Group Inc. – B7/10/CD.6 (Electronic resource)

William Riley & Son, funeral director, Lismore NSW: index July 1935 to December 1945, compiled by Glenda Manwaring – B7/10/4 (Book). There is another volume of this title in the collection.

Wood Coffill (Katoomba) burial index 1916 to 1945: volume 1 by Blue Mountains Family History Society Inc. – B7/10/5a (Book)



“The Undertaker” by Gagan Sadana - Street Photographer is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Victoria

Burial registers of Geelong, Crematorium Funeral service register print – VIC-CEM-GEE:4 (Microform). There is an additional reel of this title in the collection.

Coburg Cemetery burial register 1998 1st section – funeral service deceased listing; 2nd section – funeral service location print – VIC-CEM-COB:1998 (Microform)

Funeral director records as a genealogical resource by Bruce L. Garner – C2/10/Pam.18 (Pamphlet)

Queensland

Alex Gow funeral director's records index: books 6–10, 1922–1930, Genealogical Society of Queensland – H7/11/122b (Book)

Cannon and Cripps Funeral directors records: index 1897–1967; 1967–1990, compiled by Genealogical Society of Queensland – H7/10/CD.1 (Electronic resource)

Funerals of Distinction Funeral directors records: 1977–1991, compiled by Genealogical Society of Queensland – H7/10/CD.2 (Electronic resource)

Gregson & Weight, Caloundra funeral director: index to records 1972–1999 – QLD-FNL:2 (Microform)

Index to Metropolitan funeral directors records, compiled by the Genealogical Society of Queensland Inc – H7/11/125k. There are another 8 volumes of this title in the collection.

Index to the books of K. M. Smith, undertaker, Brisbane: 1877–1960 – QLD-CEM:1 (Microform)

John Hislop Funeral directors records: 1969–1991, compiled by Genealogical Society of Queensland – H7/10/CD.3 (Electronic resource)

Le Grand funeral director's records index, compiled by Genealogical Society of Queensland – H7/11/126 (Book)

Lohrisch (Beenleigh) funeral directors records index – H7/11/35 (Book)

T. T. Cornes funeral director's records index: (1929) 1965–1982, Genealogical Society of Queensland – H7/11/123 (Book)

Tucker and Nankivell funeral director's records index: A–Z 1928–1983, Genealogical Society of Queensland – H7/11/124 (Book)

Tasmania

Undertakers of Hobart vol. 1: index to Pierce J. Keating funeral records 1895–1964 (with gaps), compiled by Tasmanian Family History Society Inc Hobart Branch – D7/10/1 (Book). There are another 4 volumes of this title in the collection.

Western Australia

The dismal trader...: the undertaker business in Perth, 1860–1939 by Leonie B. Liveris – F4.000/12/1 (Book)

ENGLAND

Cheshire and Lancashire funeral certificates, Vol. VI. 1600–1678, edited by John Paul Rylands – N7.20/10/6 (Book)

Index to Dunn's Funeral account books, Bromley, Kent, England: 1803–1839, compiled and indexed by Jean Rawlings – ENG-KEN-FNL:1 (Microform)

Wesley Chapel, City Road, undertakers 1799–1854, produced by the London & North Middlesex Family History Society – ENG-MDX-OCC (Microform)

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Lorraine Turtle has conducted courses in family history for U3A and regularly visits NSW State Archives for research. Both Lorraine and Laurie were teachers in "former lives" and are available for talks to family history groups.

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