

THE DENNIS FAMILY REUNION  
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BIOGRAPHY OF EDWIN & LUCY DENNIS

by D. M.

Edwin's father, William Dennis Dennis was christened in Silverton, Devon on 7 Oct 1798, the illegitimate son of Elizabeth Dennis. William married Anness Hawkins at Whitestone (pronounced Whitstone), Devon on 26 Nov 1823. Anness was the daughter of John Hawkins and Agnes Tave(r)ner born in Whitestone, 28 Apr 1802.

William Dennis had been a butler/domestic servant and since most of his children were born in the Rectory at Whitestone, we can perhaps assume he served in the household of the Rector, Charles Brown. William seems to have been a man of accomplishment and means. From 1830-1850 he was a choirmaster who handcopied music scores for each member of the choir. William's Will, written in his own hand, bequeathed fifty pounds each to son Edwin and his married daughter Agatha Reed. His eldest and unmarried daughter, Sally, inherited freehold houses Glebe Cottage at Whitestone and tenanted property at South Brent as well as all other "household goods, furniture, monies and securities for money. William and Anness died some years before Edwin and his family emigrated to Australia - Anness in 1867 and William in 1871.

Edwin was the only son of William and Anness and was born in Whitestone on 18 May 1834. He commenced work at the age of ten and by thirteen was working in the mining industry. He later served his apprenticeship as a carpenter.

On 22 Dec 1857 Edwin married Lucy Barford at St James Church in Clerkenwell, London. The 1851 Census described Lucy as a dressmaker. Lucy, born in Maidenhead, Berkshire 2 Nov 1835, was the fifth daughter of Joseph Barford and Rebecca Leaver. Joseph, a widower, married Rebecca in Luton, Bedfordshire but moved back to Maidenhead, Rebecca's home town, where their nine children were born. Rebecca's family were members of the Congregational Meeting House of Protestant Dissenters and all but two of Joseph and Rebecca's children (including Lucy) were christened in that Church at Cookham. Joseph was a Wheelwright who died of rheumatic fever in 1848 aged 62; Rebecca died in 1874, aged 74.

In the nineteen years that followed their marriage, Edwin and Lucy lived in a number of areas in England as can be seen from the birth places of their children. The first child, Mary Anness (Jan 1859) was born in Hawarden, Cheshire; the next four, Henry Barford (Dec 1859), Lucy Rebecca (1860), Elizabeth Lucy (1862), William Edwin (1863) were born in South Brent, Devonshire; Ellen Kate (1867), Herbert (1869), Marion Jane (1872), Agatha Malina (1873) were all born north of the Thames in Middlesex; George Frederic (1875) Wimbledon, Surrey, the last of the children born in England. Family records indicate that two boys, Frank and another son, name unknown, were born in England but died (along with Henry Barford) before leaving for Australia. Thus far no official record has been found of these two children .

In the ten years prior to sailing for Australia, Edwin is thought to have engaged in the building trade as a journeyman joiner, master carpenter and builder, building over one hundred homes in the London suburbs.

In the meantime, Lucy's sister Rebecca, had married their first cousin, David Gray (child of John Gray and Sarah Leaver). In 1854 David and Rebecca left England on the ship "Esmeralda" which arrived in Fremantle, W.A. in October that year. David Gray was a carpenter/builder and upon arrival he and Rebecca travelled to Gingin by bullock and dray where he was engaged by the Brockman family to build on his 20,000 acre property later known as "Cheriton". Two years later they moved to Gawler, S.A. where he continued his building as Pett & Gray. In 1871 they moved to Port Broughton area where he combined building with farming. It was probably, at the Grays' suggestion that Edwin and Lucy Dennis embarked on their voyage to Australia.

On 6 Sep 1876, Edwin, Lucy and their nine surviving children left Plymouth on the 1488-ton iron clipper ship "Duntrune". The immigrants would have paid five, pounds each as steerage passengers or fifteen pounds for a second-class cabin. The shipping records show that Edwin, Lucy and their five youngest children berthed together, while the four eldest children (aged 12-17) were berthed in the single men and women's quarters.

After arriving in Port Adelaide in November 1876, the family travelled to Port Broughton where they stayed with David and Rebecca Gray. Edwin then took up farming and contracting in the Redhill district then moved to Orroroo where he built the Public School, the Imperial Hotel, the Baptist Church and other buildings. Two more children were born during these years: Lillian Adelaide(1876) and John Joseph (1878). The family then lived in Adelaide for a time before taking up farming in Port Broughton in 1886 where they remained for 25 years.

Edwin was a devout church-goer and on the Eve of All Saints 31 Oct 1889 at the Consecration of . the Church of St Philip in Port Broughton, the visiting Bishop of Adelaide G W Kennion, admitted Edwin and two other gentlemen as lay preachers. During the next several years Edwin read the lesson three or four times each month.

Edwin and his family owned a number of farming properties and town blocks in Port Broughton. During a period of-about seven years 'the. family owned or leased eight Town Allotments and twenty four 'Working Man's and Homestead Blocks in Mundoora and Wokurna Wards.

Edwin was involved in the Agricultural Bureau and member of the Masonic order. At one stage he was Curator of the cemetery where he dug the graves, made coffins and read the funeral services.

By 1911 Edwin and Lucy had moved to Ridleyton and in January of that year the family celebrated two family birthdays at the home in Edwardstown of Mary Anness and David Swift. Seven of their children were present including George Frederic from Claremont, W.A.

Lucy died on 28 Mar 1915 at the age of 79. Edwin spent his latter years with his son, William Edwin in Blight Street, Croydon where he enjoyed carpentry work including cribbage boards and puzzles which he gave to the men in the Magill Old Folks Home. Edwin died on 24 May 1928. They were both buried in Hindmarsh Cemetery.