

WEBB FAMILY HISTORY

James and Grace Webb.

From the foregoing Webb Family Histories you will have read that our earlier researchers, Athol and Claire, reached the conclusion that James Webb, a convict transported from England to Australia, and his wife Grace, were most likely the ancestors of our Webb family in New Zealand. This conclusion was largely based on the fact that their son Thomas was of the same age as our earliest Webb ancestor in New Zealand, because of the names that Thomas gave his children, and also because his youngest son, also named Thomas, spent time in Sydney seeking compensation for land acquired by the NSW Government. In total this evidence is quite compelling, and although it is unlikely we will ever find the paperwork to prove it, we can confidently assume that James and Grace were our ancestors.

James Webb is said in all discovered documents to be from the County of Wiltshire, England, but none of these documents tell us which parish. Webb is a very common name throughout Wiltshire, particularly in the adjoining parishes of Bromham, Calne and Melksham, and is perhaps more common here than in any other county. The documents tell us that James was born in 1779 so we would expect to find his baptism in parish records up to about 2 or 3 years later. We have a hard copy of the record of baptisms at St. Nicholas Church, Bromham, Wiltshire, where there is a record for a James Webb being baptised in 1781 whose parents were Robert and Mary. Since these names were given to his children, and the time is as expected, we can fairly confidently assume that we have found our man. Ancestry.com gives a date of 5 August 1781 for this baptism.

The Church of England parish church in Bromham, St. Nicholas, dates from the 13th century. Several additions were made later, including a tall spire which was added in the 15th century. It is now a Grade I listed building. The church contains a chapel in remembrance of Hugo Webbe, its first rector, and his daughter-in-law Anne which is dated 1597. Could James have been a descendant of Hugo? We will never know.

The earliest official document found concerning our James records that at the Berkshire Assizes on 16 July 1817 the jurors found him guilty of stealing a horse and bridle from a Richard Balding of Padworth, Berkshire.¹ James is described here as a labourer of the parish of Padworth, who was otherwise called James Kenton. The next document records that on the first day of March in the fifty ninth year of the reign of King George III at a court in Westminster James was sentenced to be hanged. Then a newspaper report in the *Reading Mercury* of 8 March 1819 tells us that his sentence of death was reprieved and he was to be transported for seven years.

¹ The resolution of our copy of this interesting document is so poor as to be almost illegible. We will repeat it here:
Berkshire: The Jurors for our Lord the King upon their oath present that James Webb late of the parish of Padworth in the County of Berks. labourer otherwise called James Kenton on the sixteenth day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventeen with force and arms at the Parish aforesaid in the County aforesaid – One Gelding of the price of ten pounds and One Saddle of the value of thirty shillings of the goods and chattels of Richard Balding then and there being found feloniously did steal take away and lead away against the peace of our Lord the King his crown and dignity.
(The original, which is at National Archives, U.K. ref. ASSI 5/139/1 PFF4023, has not been digitised and cannot be down loaded.)

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A little later James must have escaped from the local goal because the Gaoler of Reading sought reimbursement of £13 19s. expenses for James' recapture. Later in 1819 James was held on the prison ship *Laurel* in Portsmouth Harbour before being transported to Australia on the *Malabar* which left from Spithead on 17 June 1819 and arrived in Sydney on 30 October that year with a total of 170 prisoners. There were more than 20 convicts named James Webb transported to Australia, all on different ships, over the period from 1818 to 1862, eight of them to New South Wales. There was only the one James Webb on the *Malabar*. In Australia detailed records were maintained about all convicts. And since each convict was identified by the name of the ship on which they arrived we can be confident that we have the correct James Webb in Australia.

James is described in convict documents as a sawyer, 5ft.0ins. in height, of fair complexion with light brown hair, nose inclined to the right side, small finger of left hand crooked, and small lump on his left cheek. By 1828 he was said to be nearly bald.

In Australia the convicts were not necessarily held in captivity. Initially they were employed constructing roads and other public works but, provided they were of good behaviour, they were later 'assigned' to settlers who provided them with board and lodging and paid a wage which gave them the opportunity to accumulate savings. In the 1822 General Muster James was recorded as a Government Sawyer based in Sydney and in the 1823, 1824, 1825 Muster he is recorded as a Government Servant employed by a Mr. Winder of Newcastle. In the meantime he was apparently working for Thos. Trip, a Master Builder, who petitioned the Governor for James to be given a 'Ticket of Leave'. This was recommended by the Sydney Bench on 26 May 1828 and the papers granting his Ticket of Leave were dated 18 August that year.

The following paragraph from the petition signed by Thos. Trip is of particular interest: "That your Petitioner has a Wife and Four Children, and that at some time antecedent to the present period, he applied through the regular authorities for leave for their transmission to this Colony at the expense of the Crown. That your petitioner was informed the Prayer of his Petition was acceded to, and the regular documentation for that purpose was sent home on or about the time the late Governor left the Colony, which induces Your Petitioner to look for their arrival at the earliest opportunity."

We can conclude from this that the Crown agreed to meet the cost of transporting Grace and her four children to Australia. The 1828 census of N.S.W. tells us that Grace Webb, together with Thomas, Robert and Mary, had sailed on the ship *Jupiter*, which had arrived in Sydney on 25th November 1823. Unfortunately, the passenger list for the *Jupiter* has not survived so we do not know if there was a fourth child on the ship. Three days after the arrival of the *Jupiter*, on the 28th of November 1823, James was officially 'assigned' to Grace, and the family was together once again, living in Kent Street, Sydney.

The 1828 census of N.S.W. also tells us that James, aged 49, a sawyer, who had arrived on the *Malabar* in 1819, now had his Ticket of Leave and was living in Princes Street. With him at this address were Grace aged 42, Thomas aged 17, Robert aged 16, and Mary aged 14, all of whom 'came free' on the *Jupiter*. Their religion is given as Protestant. (Princes Street was demolished about 1927 to make way for the southern approaches to the Sydney Harbour Bridge). The undated petition written by Thos Trip must have been written before the arrival of the *Jupiter*, i.e. probably about mid 1823.

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Finding the marriage of James and Grace back in England has proved difficult, and is perhaps an impossible, task. It is not listed in the St. Nicholas Church records. For some time we have believed that our James Webb married Grace Skippage in Devender. Further research has shown however that the marriage of this couple took place in Hadstock, Essex. This couple had five children, Mary, Martha, Elisabeth, Anne and John baptised on 15 August 1802, 25 December 1804, 21 June 1807, 6 August 1809 and 26 July 1812 respectively. This family unit can be found in the 1831 census of England, all remaining together in Hadstock. Clearly these were not our ancestors.

No other marriage record for a James Webb and Grace has been found, and likewise, no baptismal records for any of the three known children. We might conclude from this that the family were non-conformists and this could explain why they gave their religion as Protestant rather than Anglican in the 1828 N.S.W. census.

But could James have married under the name James Kenton? A search of parish registers for England over the likely years for a marriage of a James Kenton and Grace was unsuccessful. But a search of baptismal records found that a James Kenton and his wife Grace had two children baptised. Betty, born 3 December 1800 was baptised on 3 December 1801 at St. Peters, Oldham, Lancashire, and Mary baptised 16 October 1817 also at Oldham, Lancs. Baptismal records for neither a Thomas nor a Robert to James Kenton and Grace were found. It also seems unlikely that James would have left Wiltshire for Lancashire and later return south to Berkshire. We have drawn a blank again!

There is one further convict record concerning James Webb's Ticket of Leave which notes that it was "Torn up 14 July 1831, Webb having died lately in Sydney."

James died in 1831 aged 53, a burial ceremony being performed at St. James Church, Sydney on 14th. April that year. He was pre-deceased by Grace, aged 50, who was buried from St. Phillip's Church, Sydney on 15 November 1830. At that time no death certificates were issued of the type issued now. Until 1856 churches issued burial certificates and those for James and Grace unfortunately give no information about their parents, their spouse or their children. James and Grace were buried in the 'Sydney Burial Ground', also known as the 'Devonshire Street Cemetery', which is now the site of the Central Railway Station. In 1901 the bodies were exhumed, those of James and Grace being re-interred at 'Bunnerong Cemetery' which is now part of 'Eastern Suburbs Memorial Park'. The records of these re-interments give only the initials J. and G. Webb, however, they do tell us that they were exhumed from the same plot in the Church of England section of the Sydney Burial Ground. So this must be the resting place our ancestors remains.

Claire O'Neil discovered the following documents concerning land owned by James Webb:

1. Deed of Sale dated seventeenth of May 1828, William Humphreys to James Webb, of an allotment sixty feet in depth in Fort Street fronting Fort Phillips bounded on the north by the fence of William Humphreys dividing Thomas Lincoln's ground and on the south by W. McQuin's wall and fence, amount paid £30.

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2. A Memorial recording the sale to Thomas Lincoln out of the above allotment of an area thirteen feet by sixty feet for £16:5:8. This Memorial was attested to by Thomas Webb of Fort Street, Sydney on 6 June 1831 and bears his mark.
3. A Memorial dated 1 September 1831 for the release of a house and premises in Fort Street, Sydney to Matthew Charlton. The property is described as seven square perches of land more or less in the Parish of St. Phillip bounded on the west by the east side of Fort Street thirty feet on the north side by Lincoln's premises sixty three feet three inches on the east side by Thomas Humphrey's premises thirty feet and on the south side by a westerly line to Fort Street. The consideration was £97:10:0

It is stated in this Deed that James Webb, the father of Thomas Webb, purchased these premises on 17 May 1828 from Thomas Humphreys that the said James Webb on or about 12 April 1831 died intestate and that Thomas Webb became lawfully possessed of the same by hereditary right in consequence of being his eldest legitimate son.

There is now a Lower Fort Street in Sydney at Dawes Point, Fort Street itself, along with Princes Street, having been demolished to make way for the approaches to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. By comparing an 1837 map of Sydney with a modern one we can see that there was once a fort here, the site being known nowadays as Observatory Hill. The property that James Webb owned would have been almost due east of this hill.

We mention elsewhere that oral history and the records of the Maori Land Court tell us that Thomas Webb, the youngest son of the Thomas Webb born in England, spent some years in Sydney during the eighteen sixties attempting to justify a claim to ownership of the land where the Sydney Post Office now stands (or once stood). As far as we know the younger Thomas was unsuccessful in proving ownership to any land in Sydney other than that he inherited.

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The children of James and Grace Webb.

Further research has attempted to find information about the children of James and Grace.

(i) Thomas. All that we know about Thomas has been recorded on this site.

(ii) Robert. We have now been in contact with several persons living in Australia who are convinced they or their spouse are descendants of Robert's despite having no paper evidence to prove this. It is believed that Robert married on 10 August 1840 at Hunters Hill to Sarah Louise Elfick/Elphic. Both made their mark with an "X". They died on 24 April 1879 and 19 March 1908 respectively after producing 13 children. Neither of their Death Certificates provided information about their parents and Robert's age 'does not compute'. It is suspected that Robert and Sarah wished to hide their convict ancestry and so made it difficult for it to be discovered by leaving omissions from certificates.

(iii) Mary. The only facts known about Mary are that she arrived in Australia on the *Jupiter* with her mother and brothers and was aged 14 at the time of the 1828 census when she was living with the family in Princes Street. No marriage or death has been found in N.S.W. records.

(iv) The fourth child. The fact that the passenger list for the *Jupiter* has not survived (according to the Archivist, State Records Authority of New South Wales) is unhelpful and this leaves only the NSW census conducted in November 1828 as a possible source. If a fourth child did arrive on the *Jupiter* he or she was not living at home. The census conveniently records the ship of arrival of each individual. However, it does not include any other Webbs who arrived on the *Jupiter*. Thus we can conclude that if the fourth child did arrive in Australia, then if male he died prior to the 1828 census, or if female she either died or else married in Australia before the census was taken and would appear under her married name.

If a fourth child did arrive on the *Jupiter* and died before the 1828 census its burial notice might be found by searching church records but there is no guarantee that the notice would include the names of its parents.

If the fourth child was a female who married before the census its identity might be found by creating a list of passengers arriving on the *Jupiter*, who were in NSW at the time of the census. Such a child would appear under her married name and would probably be the eldest female in the family and an age of around 18 to 21 could be anticipated. Of the 38 females (excluding Grace and Mary) who arrived on the *Jupiter* there are just two possibilities: Elizabeth Martin, aged 20, a lodger living in Sussex St., Sydney with 3 year old Henry, and Martha Smith, age not given, living with John Smith in George St., Sydney with 2 year old Emily. Elizabeth Martin was probably unmarried and other records show that Martha Smith's maiden name was Gamble. The was one bride named Mary Webb who married between 1822 and 1828. She married Thomas Kelly, but the census tells us that she arrived on the *Grenada* in 1824. Although this expedition has proved inconclusive, it is probably correct to say that the fourth child, if one existed, did not come to Australia with Grace on the *Jupiter* but remained in England.

Don Hayward February 2018