A school was established at Wollongong between December 1826 and June 1827. The first teacher was J Stack. Eleven pupils were enrolled and the average attendance was seven, from which it may be assumed that education was not highly appreciated in Illawarra at this period. The school was closed in 1828, and in 1832 it was reported that all attempts to form a new school had failed owing to the dispersed state of the population. It was found that in no part of the district more than ten children could be assembled. In the following year it was reported that a public school, which was much needed, was conducted in Smith's barn. William Davis was the master. . .

I believe J Stack to have been James Stack brother of Michael Stack. Michael and James Stack, seamen on the Malabar, had asked for permission to settle in the Colony prior to leaving England. After arrival on 30 October 1819 they applied for permission to leave the ship to take up a position with John McArthur. After a very short time (in June 1820) they applied jointly for a grant of land and were granted 100 acres. The 1828 Census shows Michael Stack as having 600 acres in Illawarra.

Alexander Stewart in his Reminiscenses of Illawarra says this of the Stacks: Messrs. Stack, butchers, had a property at Dapto, west of Mr George Brown's. West of Stacks' was Moles' and west of Moles' was Pauls'. One of the Stacks, I think Michael, was living on the estate.

William Davis, our second schoolmaster, must have been appointed almost straight off the Mary Catherine which arrived 21 October 1833
for The Blue Books, or, more correctly, *The General Returns of the Colony*; show him as schoolmaster at Wollongong in that year receiving £50 per annum for teaching 8 boys and 12 girls. Later returns show William as receiving £40 and Mrs Sarah Davis as receiving £10 [I understand she was teaching sewing]. William & Sarah remained at the school until 1837. In 1838 John A Allen is shown as schoolmaster. In 1840 Edward & Mrs Gregory took over and were teaching 50 boys and 38 girls.

Alexander Stewart in his *Reminiscences of Illawarra*⁴ tells the Wollongong part of the story - in speaking of the shipbuilder John Cunningham he states that Cunningham had two apprentices

> The other apprentice was called Davis, and was the son of a schoolmaster who lived here and then taught a school in Mr Smith's barn, which stood where Beattie's stables now stand. I think this apprentice Davis is now living at Brisbane Water and building vessels there, and I believe he has been for many years past.

and then, talking of the arrival of Minister Wilkinson in 1832, he says:

> Mr Wilkinson lived in his new cottage as soon as it was built, and continued to hold service in the barn. In the week time the barn was now occupied as a Church of England day school. A Mr Davis was appointed school master and many of the present old residents of the district went to that school.

Information conveyed by several correspondents allows me to fill in more of the story of William Davis.

According to the *The Brisbane Water Story*⁵ William originally came from Breagh near Portadown in the North of Ireland and first came to Australia as a Chaplain on a convict ship in the 1820s. This has not been confirmed nor does it seem very likely. Sometime before 1822/3 William lost his first wife, Isabelle née Milsop; exactly when this happened is unclear but the NSW Index to Burials shows Benjamin as the child of William & Sarah and so we know that Benjamin and subsequent children were born to Sarah (see list below). At this stage Sarah's maiden name is not known.
This "story" goes on to say that on his earlier visit William was offered the position of Chief Clerk to the Supreme Court and, as a result of this, William, on returning home gathered family and belongings together, and set sail for Australia once again, this time as a Chaplain on a vessel going to Sydney in 1833. On arrival he found, much to his disappointment, that the position he had been offered was already filled. However, within two years of arrival, "he was building a school at Wollongong for the Church of England and teaching there". The latter statement is patently untrue as we see below.

The *Australian* of 25 October 1833 records the arrival of the *Mary Catherine* under the command of Benjamin Rock Jones. The ship had left Liverpool on 15 June and after a call at Hobart Town arrived in Sydney on 21 October. Among the passengers are listed: Mr William Davis, teacher, Mrs Sarah Davis, William, George, John, Benjamin, Elizabeth, Mary, Ann, and Rock Benjamin Davis - this is incorrect and should read Rock Jones Davis⁶ and Mary & Ann should read as one person, Mary Ann, so that there were only two girls not three in the party.

So much for the listing in the *Australian*, the ship's passenger list gives a slightly different listing:

- William Davis, 40, teacher
- Sarah 40
- William, 16
- George 16
- John 12
- Benjamin 10
- Elizabeth 8
- Mary Anne 8
- Thomas 4

The *Australian*’s list leaves off Thomas altogether while the passenger list fails to show the baby Rock who was born during the voyage. The ages are also suspect as being approximately 2-4 years greater than the age in 1833 as calculated from the family bible: at the same time it shows a couple of sets of twins.
Sarah Davis Jnr, is said to have stayed behind with her maternal grandparents and followed the family out sometime later. Sarah would have been about 16 and was possibly left as a companion for her grandparents.

[I was unable to find evidence of Sarah's arrival in Australia but since this story was first published in *Illawarra Branches* No. 35, June 1993 a member, Kaye Purnell, has written saying that she has found the arrival of Thomas & Sarah Johnston on the *David McIver* in 1852: Thomas was 33 and Sarah 35. Sarah is shown as the daughter of William and Isabella Davis, both dead and is shown on the shipping records as having been born at Warren Point, Co. Down. The records show against her name "Five brothers: William & four brothers Davis residing at Balmain, (boat builders)".]

No source references have been produced by Mr Swancott to confirm his statement regarding the offer of the position of Chief Clerk nor can I find any evidence that William Davis came as other than a steerage passenger on the *Mary Catherine*.

Charles Swancott's story tells that one of William's sons "was apprenticed to a shipbuilder, Robert Dryburgh Cunningham, formerly of Dawes Battery ...".

I beg to differ: I believe young Davis was apprenticed to John Cunningham, an ex convict shipbuilder who had arrived per *Shipley* in 1822 and built a number of ships in Wollongong in the 1830s. As far as I can make out R D Cunningham was never in Illawarra.

Shortly after young Edward's birth in 1837 William took his family to Kincumber. Exactly what his occupation was between 1837 and 1843 is unknown. Rock, in an affidavit stated that the family moved to Kincumber in 1839. In the 1841 Census William is shown as living at Cockle Creek in a stone house.

William had a family of twelve:

*By Isabelle Milsop:*
George  b. Sept. 1 1815 d. Ireland
Sarah  b. April 6 1817.
William  b. 6 May 1819.  m. Isabella Jeffivat at Balmain 21 November 1850. d. 11 February 1858 from phsis. Shown on d.c. as child of William Davis and Isabelle Milsop.

Uncertain as to mother - probably Isabelle

George  b. 11 June 1821 m. Jane Metcalf 21/1/1853 at Surry Hills, d. Kincumber 1860 from consumption - mother unknown.
John  b. March 19 1823 did not marry, d. 1840,
Thomas  b. February 6 1825 d. Ireland.

By his second wife, Sarah:-

Benjamin  b. July 13 1826 d.12 May 1883 child of William & Sarah
Elizabeth  b. 15 March 1828 . On 28 March 1851 Elizabeth of Balmain m. Charles Johnson of Sydney in the Wesleyan Church. Witnesses: William Davis & Matilda Hollebone. Elizabeth Johnston (sic), shown as the daughter of William & Sarah, died in the central Sydney area about 1866
Mary Ann  b. March 14 1830 bu. Balmain NSW 9 May 1850
Thomas  b. March 1 1832 d. 1883. m. Sussannah Pickett 1855 (372 43) d. 1893 father William, mother unknown. The Probate Index shows a Thomas Davis of Terrigal dying 13 April 1893.

All the above were born in Ireland.

Rock J  b. at sea 2 July 1833 m. 1855 Mary Ann Ward (371 43) d. 1904.
It would appear that the first George and the first Thomas died in infancy otherwise William and his wife wouldn't have given subsequent children the same names. This means then that it was George born June 11 1821 who married Jane Metcalf on 21 January 1853 not George born 1815 as shown in *The Brisbane Water Story*. George is shown in the *NSW Index to Burials* as the son of William and dying at Gosford. His tombstone indicates he was aged 38, i.e. born 1821/2. George, is shown in the Probate Index as of Kincumber, died 26/4/1860: he left a probated will No. 4920 Series 1. John died 11 May 1840 so that perhaps 6 of William's sons grew to full adulthood. It looks then as though either William or George was apprenticed to John Cunningham in Wollongong in the 1830s.

During his stay in Wollongong William was able to invest in a little land buying 30 acres from James Stares Spearing (part of Spearing's 2000 acre grant). 13 of these acres were sold to John Barrett on 1 April 1838 while the remaining 17 acres were sold to James & Robert Osborne on 27 May 1839.

A number of William's sons became shipbuilders in the Kincumber area and the town of Davistown (previously Cockle Creek I believe) on Brisbane Water commemorates the family.

Swancott errs in stating that William and Sarah were buried in the Devonshire Street Cemetery: the register of burials in the parish of Kincumber clearly shows that Sarah Davis, husband a schoolmaster, died on 30 July 1845 aged 49 and was buried on 1 August and that William Davis, schoolteacher, died on 26 October 1846 and was buried on the 29th October.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This is an updated version of an earlier article. I must thank Miss H Elaine Davis, Mrs Valma Stuart-Duff and Mrs Gwen Dundon for their help in compiling this story.


4. ibid

5. Charles Swancott, Honorary Research Officer, Brisbane Water Historical Society. 1954

6. *The Brisbane Water Story* Pt. 3 states that he was named after his material grandmother who was a Miss Rock. However a descendant, Gwen Dundon, tells me that he was named after the captain of the ship which seems more likely.

7. See in *Illawarra Branches* No. 33