NOTES ON THE PARSONS FAMILY

Matthew Parsons and Puah Gardiner, first cousins, were married at Bisley, Gloucestershire on 3 March 1830 in the parish church of All Saints.

Matthew was born at Chalford Lynch in 1810, the fourth child of John Parsons and Grace Gardiner who had married at Bisley on 10 October 1803. His older brothers and sisters Mary (1805), Reuben (1806), and Elizabeth (1808), were also born at Chalford Lynch; his younger ones, Uriah (1813) and Levina (1817) at Oakbridge Lynch. Matthew apparently avoided baptism when the family moved to Oakbridge, about a half mile distant. Grace died at Oakbridge Lynch on 25 August 1838 aged 54 and John, a woollen weaver, at the same place on 21 December 1857 at the age of 80.

Puah, named after one of the Hebrew midwives in Exodus, was baptised at Bisley on 9 October 1808. She was the youngest of eight children of Mark Gardiner and Sarah Matthews who had married at Bisley on 20 August 1792. The elder children were Matthew (1793), Eliphalet (1795), Mark (1797), Edna (1799), Jesse (1801), Ezra (1803) and Luke (1806). Mark died at Chalford on 2 January 1834 aged 63. Sarah was still living in 1838.

The Parsons and Gardiner families had, for many centuries, lived at Chalford, one of nine tythings in the parish of Bisley, some 90 miles west of London.

Most of the population at Chalford had always been handloom weavers, ‘aristocrats of labour’ in the local mills which numbered nine in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The Industrial Revolution with its bias towards the mechanical, the measurable and the quantitative determined the fate of the weavers at Chalford who, adhering to their old ways, were ground by degrees into abject poverty. In 1825 riotous mobs assembled at some of the Chalford mills during the weavers’ strike and, within five years, 40% of the population of Bisley was unemployed and one in seven houses stood empty. In 1835, the area was further affected when the East India Company ceased selling the locally-made ‘stripe’ to its China market.

At this point the parish, under the rectorship of Thomas Keble (brother to John Keble and the leading light of the ‘Bisley School’ of the Oxford Movement), sought assistance under Section 62 of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, to resettle some of the unemployed. The correspondence between Keble and the Home Office survives. Eighty-four people were sent to other counties and on 11 August 1837 the following Indenture was made between the churchwardens and overseers of the parish and the Poor Law Commissioners:

‘Whereas in pursuance of an Act passed in the 4th. and 5th. years of the Reign of His present Majesty King William the Fourth, intituled ‘An Act for the Amendment and better Administration
of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales’, the Rate Payers of the said Parish of Bisley and Owners of Property entitled to vote in the manner provided in the said Act, assembled at a meeting duly convened for the purpose, directed the said Churchwardens and Overseers to borrow the Sum of Two Hundred pounds, to be charged on the Poor Rates of the said Parish, as a fund for defraying the expenses of the Emigration of several poor persons having settlements in the said Parish, to be repaid by equal annual instalments, with interest not exceeding 5 per cent per annum, within five years from the time of borrowing the same.

The Parish used the money to sponsor the passage to Australia (until the last moment, the destination was Canada) of twelve families comprising 60 persons of whom 22 were under the age of seven. For the Parsons it was a family outing as they were accompanied by Matthew’s brother, Reuben and his wife Hannah together with her brother and sister-in-law, William and Esther Pacey, nee Beard. All were fitted out with clothes for the voyage (Matthew received a pair of trousers and two ‘smock frocks’ valued at 9/3) and were conveyed to Bristol in two waggons and a cart.

They travelled to Australia on the ‘Layton’, a barque of 513 tons built at Lancaster in 1814. She left Bristol on 8 September 1837 carrying 122 adults and 110 children and arrived at Sydney on 19 January 1838. The voyage was made in 133 days and was without incident save for an outbreak of the measles, the deaths of Matthew’s and Reuben’s only surviving children, George (3) and Obadiah (1) and Puah’s production of a daughter, Cara Layton, three weeks out of Sydney.

Under the ‘Scheme of Victualling’, each male was allowed a weekly quota of 5½ pounds of bread, 2 pounds & 10ozs of beef, 2½ pounds of pork, 7 ozs of sugar, 1¼ ozs of tea, 1¼ ozs of cocoa, 2 pounds & 10ozs of flour, 1 pint & 5 ozs of pease, 1 quart of oatmeal and 8 ozs of vinegar. One could substitute one pound of beef or port for 3 ozs of currants, raisins or suet or for one and a half pounds of fish. Additionally, adults could have up to two gallons of wine on the voyage, dependent on ‘good conduct and at the discretion of the Surgeon’.

The passengers were delayed off Pinchgut Island for a day and were put up firstly in premises at the rear of Government House and then at the Immigration Depot. From there, all three families were engaged by Hannibal Hawkins Macarthur, nephew of John, to work on ‘Camden Park’ at Menangle.

The Account Books for ‘Camden Park’ shew that Matthew commenced work as a carpenter on 1 February 1838 on a salary of £20 p.a. with free lodging. In May and June he did piece work, construction fences with two others, for which he was paid £9.10.6 made up as follows:
134 rods of 3 rail fencing @ 2/6 5.11.8
42 rods of 2 rail fencing @ 2/- 1.08.0
32 rods of Posts and Rails @ 1/3 13.4
14 rods of 3 rail fencing staffs @ 1/6 7.0
32 posts @ 4d 3.6
9 days work @ 3/- 1.07.0

During the same five months, Puah spent 37 days preparing corn potatoes and tobacco for which she was paid £1.18.4. Of their combined wages of £16.18.10 to the end of June, they saved £7.12.8. The balance was spent on food 141½ lbs of flour, 61 lbs of meat, 20 lbs of sugar and 1¼ lbs of tea), 2 pots, 1 washtub, 1 lamp, 9 lbs of soap, 4½ pints of oil, the cost of a steam boat to Parramatta, the hire of a bullock team to Camden and half a guinea for the funeral of their daughter, Cara.

They remained at Manangle until 11 April 1839 and received further payment of £17.3.10 of which they saved £12.9.7., a feat of industry and thrift. They had heard of the fertile country on the sea coast over the mountains and decided to go there travelling over the old Mt. Keira Road, then the only connecting link with the tablelands. They went by dray with Ira, their son of five weeks, and so steep were portions of the road that the wheels had to be restrained by ropes slung around trees whilst the bullocks slid down. The Parsons arrived in Wollongong on 24 April 1839.

(To be continued) (Copyright, Alfred James, 1984)

ALFRED JAMES

HISTORICAL ART EXHIBITION

Corresponding with Wollongong’s 150th celebrations will be an exhibition entitled “Artists in Illawarra” at Wollongong City Gallery between October 22 and December 10 this year. It has been specially selected to depict lovely Illawarra as seen by many famous artists from the days of earliest settlement to more recent times, including many of Australia’s best. But the historical content alone should attract members, and viewing is strongly recommended. Hours are 12 noon to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays to Sundays.
NOTES ON THE PARSONS FAMILY (Continued)

At first, Matthew worked on ‘Glen Glosh’, a property owned by Dr. John Osborne at Garden Hill, now Mangerton. In 1843 he obtained a six-year ‘clearing lease’ of 30 acres on the same site.

In 1849 the family moved to Fairy Meadow and lived in a small house built by Matthew and facing Carter’s Lane. He worked as a master carpenter and shingler, the first in the district. He prospered for on 29 May 1858, he was able to pay £450 for a lot of 29 acres, 3 roods and 32 perches, part of the Bellambi Estate at Fairy Meadow. On this he built a large house with an attic roof, which was still standing eighty years later.

He established a sawmill and pit on the side of the mountains and when the timber, mostly cedar, was cut, he and his sons transported it to Wollongong and other centres and built houses. He constructed the first house at Kiama and also put the shingles on the two cathedrals in the area, St Michael’s and St Patrick’s.

Puah and Matthew had as many as ten children:

1. Noah b. 23.12.1831 at Chalford Lynch, Gloucestershire
d. 6.1.1832 at Chalford Lynch

2. George b. 18.5.1834 at Chalford Lynch
d. late 1837 at sea.

3. Cara Layton b. December 1837 at sea
d. 3.2.1838 at ‘Camden Park’, Menangle

4. Ira b. 17.3.1839 at ‘Camden Park’
m. 1) Elizabeth Eaden (1842-25.9.1876) on 5.4.1865 at Fairy Meadow.
   2) Maria Hill (1854-14.7.1936) on 20.2.1878 at Wollongong
d. 4.2.1893 at Wollongong

5. Elizabeth b. 1843 at Garden Hill
d. 2.9.1849 at Fairy Meadow

6. Alfred b. 5.2.1844 at Garden Hill
m. Mary Farrell (28.7.1843 - 10.7.1919) on 6.11.1867 at Fairy Meadow.
d. 17.9.1919 at Wollongong.
7. William b. 5.1.1847 at Garden Hill
   m. Margaret Jane Elliott (1851 - 19.1.1910) on 25.7.1872 at Fairy Meadow.
   d. 26.8.1932 at Bellambi.

8. Henry b. 4.2.1849 at Fairy Meadow.
   m. Dorcas Stumbles (1.3.1857 - 25.6.1928) on 24.12.1873 at Fairy Meadow.
   d. 2.6.1933 at Wollongong

9. Emily b. 10.3.1851 at Fairy Meadow
   d. 31.7.1932 at Wollongong

10. Emma b. 19.1.1854 at Fairy Meadow
    m. Nathan Shipp (14.3.1855 - 4.4.1945) on 27.4.1876 at Fairy Meadow
    d. 17.9.1930 at Keiraville

The two pioneers remained married for the extraordinary period of 71 years and 17 days and celebrated their platinum anniversary in 1900. Indeed, their marriage overlapped the reign of Queen Victoria (1837 - 1901) as well as that of William IV (1830 - 1837). At the time it was claimed to be the longest-ever documented marriage.

In 1885 Matthew sold the property at Fairy Meadow and went to live in a house built by his son Henry at 66, Keira Street in Wollongong. Puah died there on 20 March 1901 and Matthew, eleven months later, on 20 February 1902. Both were aged 92 and left 79 living descendants – 5 children, 47 grandchildren and 27 great grandchildren. The inscription on their tombstones in the Church of England portion of Wollongong Cemetery reads:

‘At Rest/In/Loving Memory of /PUAH/ Beloved Wife of /MATTHEW PARSONS/ Died March 20th. 1901/ Aged 94 years/’Rest after Weariness, /Sweet Rest at last’/Also /MATTHEW PARSONS/ Husband of the above/ Died February 20th. 1902/ Aged 93 years’

To digress. Reuben Parsons was born at Chalford Lynch in December 1805 and married Hannah Pacey at Bisley on 1 October 1833. After leaving ‘Camden Park’, he lived in Parramatta before following Matthew to Wollongong in 1844 where he set up business on the corner of Corrimal and Market Streets as an ironmonger and tinsmith. Five children died young. In N.S.W. were born Penninah (1839 - 1923), Adin (1843 - 1928), Enos (1848 - ?), Eunice (1849 - 1937) and Johanna (1851 - ?).

Reuben died at Wollongong on 1 October 1879 aged 73 and Hannah on 6 March 1903 at the age of 90.

Henry Parsons, the writer’s great grandfather, was born in Carter’s Lane, Fairy Meadow on 4 February 1849, the sixth son of Matthew and Puah.
He took full advantage of the opportunities offering so far as schooling was concerned and at an early age went to work with his father, walking each day to the saw-pits and back, a distance of some ten miles. He also used to walk down the beach to North Wollongong and along the top of the cliffs to Brighton Beach to collect the family's supply of flour.

On 24 December 1973, he married Dorcas Stumbles, daughter of Samuel Stumbles at the small Anglican church at Fairy Meadow. Thereafter, he sought a less laborious mode of living and in March 1874 he purchased at the cost of £135 p.a. the rights of collecting the road tolls for south-going traffic at the intersection of the main South Coast Road and the Bellambi Tramline at Russell Vale near Woonona (there was a parallel toll-bar at Kiama). The schedule of fees ranged from a farthing for every sheep, pig or goat to 1/6 for a four horse vehicle and he and his family lived in a cottage next to the toll-bar until he sold his lease in January 1880.

In 1875 he bought for £85 a block of land measuring 50 perches in Corrimal Street in Wollongong and lived there from 1880 when he resumed his trade as a carpenter. In 1893 he purchased the undertaking business of William Hudson in Keira Street and ran the business until the end of the Great War. The firm still operates under the name of H. Parsons and Son.

He continued to buy land including a parcel of about seven parts of an acre in Keira Street and four other lots totalling about 100 perches around the City.

He was a foundation member of Lodge Wollongong, P.A.F.S., and passed through all the chairs. In 1893 he was presented with a P.M. certificate and in 1925, on the jubilee of his membership, he was awarded an inscribed gold medal. He was active in the Volunteer Rifles for many years and had a close connection with St. Michael's Church for most of his life.

Dorcas and Henry produced eleven children at neat intervals of two years:

1. Henry Matthew b. 10.10.1877 at Bellambi  
   m. Mary Ellen Hissett (1880 - 23.3.1942)  
   on 19.12.1900 at Wollongong  
   d. 18.8.1955 at Wollongong

2. Dorcas Annie b. 17.6.1879 at Bellambi  
   m. John Webster Innes (1879 - 31.8.1956) on  
   13.1.1904 at Wollongong  
   d. 5.9.1967 at Wollongong

3. Arthur William b. 8.8.1881 at Wollongong  
   m. Jane Ellen Frost (1881 - 31.8.1956) on  
   19.9.1906 at Wollongong  
   d. 3.8.1945 At Wollongong

4. Frank Edwin b. 3.6.1883 at Wollongong  
   m. Maud Margaret Waite (17.7.1882 - 28.12.1964)  
   on 16.6.1909 at Wollongong  
   d. 14.11.1959 at Wollongong
5. Archibald Samuel b. 25.5.1885 at Wollongong
   m. Elsie Otford Blackburn (23.4.1888 - )
   on 22.8.1906 at Wollongong
   d. 19.5.1942 at Petersham

6. Milfred Mabel b. 17.7.1887 at Wollongong
   on 18.3.1914 at Wollongong
   d. 13.8.1978 at Wollongong

7. Ira Leonard b. 13.10.1889 at Wollongong
   m. Eva Jane Winley (9.2.1892 - 14.12.1975) on
   23.1.1915 at Wollongong
   d. 18.3.1981 at Woonona

8. Leland Percy b. 15.5.1892 at Wollongong
   m. Olive Reay (11.12.1902 - 18.7.1974) on
   20.5.1922 at Summer Hill
   d. 8.7.1980 at Castle Hill

9. May Emily b. 23.6.1894 at Wollongong
   d. 2.3.1906 at Wollongong

10. Alfred Reuben b. 20.8.1896 at Wollongong
    m. Dorothy Allsep (1898 - 29.5.1978) on
    16.9.1922 at Wollongong
    living

11. Eric Raymond b. 23.8.1898 at Wollongong
    d. 6.3.1901 at Wollongong

At their 50th Weeding Anniversary held on 24 December 1923, there
were present their nine surviving children and 18 of their grandchildren who
eventually numbered 31.

Dorcas died at 66 Keira Street on 25 June 1928 aged 71 and Henry
at the same address on 2 June 1933 aged 83. The 'Illawarra Mercury'
had an obituary of about 1,100 words and described the last obsequies thus:

'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of
that man is peace.' This verse from the 37th Chapter of the
Psalms was quoted by the Rev. T. Gee, when the remains of
the late Mr. Henry Parsons were consigned to their last rest-
ing place in the Wollongong C.E. cemetery on the exemplary
life which the deceased had lead, and the kindly manner
which was interwoven in his life.

The large funeral which followed him to his resting place
alongside his wife and father and mother, testified to the
high esteem in which he was held. Members of the Illawarra
Male Voice Choir, and the P.A.F.S. Lodge marched in front
of the hearse to the cemetery, and at the conclusion of the
service the P.A.F.S. Ritual was read and the members of the
Choir sang expressively, 'The Long Day Closes'.

The inscription on the tombstone of Henry and Dorcas Goes:

'In loving memory of/DORCAS PARSONS/Beloved wife of/HENRY PARSONS/Died 25th June 1928/Aged 71 years/With Christ which is far better/Psalms 1.22/Also/HENRY PARSONS/Beloved husband of the above/Died 2nd June 1933/Aged 83 years/Remember.'

In his Will, Henry directed that his property holdings be variously apportioned among his children. By a Deed of Family Arrangement, the land was divided equally and after cash adjustments, the beneficiaries each received cash or kind to the value of £302. By a codicil, his son Alfred was given the opportunity to acquire the undertaking business, lock, stock and barrel, for £150.

The Estate was sworn at the large figure of £8,939.14.1.

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