NOTES ON THE STAFF FAMILY

There is an interesting theory about the origin of the name Staff (which occurs as Steff and Staff in East Anglia and as Stiff in the West Country). In the Census of 1881, there were 1,940 people with the name (including 773 Staffs). From this it is probable that there were only ten or a dozen families of this name at the time of Domesday and possibly only a single family four or five centuries earlier. Further this family may well be sought among the Saxon invaders of Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries, possibly of the Jutish chieftain Stuf who landed on the Isle of Wight in 514 and who was a direct ancestor of Alfred the Great.

Joseph Staff was born on 22nd. February 1819 at Great Yarmouth in Norfolk and was baptised in the Wesleyan Chapel at Brompton in Kent on 25th. June 1820. His father, Leonard Peter Staff, had married Frances Saywell at Chatham in Kent on 30th. January 1816. They had four other children.

On Christmas Day in 1838, Joseph Staff married Caroline Neale at the parish church at Paddington in London. At the time, he was living in Berkeley Street West and she in Edgeware Road. She had been born at Milton-next-Gravesend in December 1820 and was baptised on 7th. January 1821. Her parents, Robert Neale the Younger, a waterman and lighterman, and Ann Elfick, were married at Milton on 3rd. May 1806. They had nine other children, all but the first born at Milton.

In the Census of 1841, Joseph and Caroline Staff, Robert and Ann Neale and several children are listed as all living in a house in Sussex Place in Milton. In the Census of 1851, Joseph, a ‘carpenter and coal merchant’, and his family are found at 19 Lord Street in Milton.

Two years later the Staffs paid £6.10.0 to go to Australia as bounty migrants. They came on the Royal Mail Steamer ‘Australia’, a ship of 721 tons belonging to the Australia Company, which left London on 19th. February 1853 and Portsmouth five days later. She ‘had got about 60 miles west of Eddystone, when it was discovered that she had sprung a leak, which speedily rose, attaining a height of upwards of 3½ feet in the engine-room’. She returned to Portsmouth and underwent a thorough overhaul. (The valves of the bilge pipes were found defective and the passengers got up a petition when they found they were able to move the rivets and bolts in its bottom up and down.) After three trials, she eventually sailed at 6.00 p.m. on 10th. March 1853.

The ‘Australia’ reached Sydney via The Cape on 8th. June 1853 (a day before the death of Mary Eather). The S.M.H. had this description:

‘The ‘Australia’, a fine new vessel, arrived yesterday after a good run of 100 days (in fact, 91) from Plymouth. She brings out 330 immigrants, 45 married couples, 144 single young women, 9 single young men and 82 children; they are agricultural labourers, farm servants and mechanics, the majority of them being Irish. She has £300,000 in specie for the Colonial Banks . . . A schoolmaster, Mr. Pennington, was on board, who had a class of fifty-four under instruction during the voyage.’

The family left Sydney two days after arrival for the Illawarra on the coastal boat ‘Elizabeth Cohen’. They went straight to ‘Yallah’, a property of 3,800 acres belonging to the Osborne family and situated at the south-west corner of Lake Illawarra, a little below Wollingurry Creek. Their son Alfred was born there only a month later.

After a few years, the Staffs moved onto ‘Lakelands’, a property of 1,300 acres
also owned by the Osbornes and sited at Dapto between Kanahooka and Tallawarra Points. Joseph pursued his trade as a carpenter and in the late 1860's took his family to the Berkeley Estate at the north-west corner of the Lake.

Over twenty three years, Caroline produced thirteen children:

1. Leonard Peter
   b. 5/9/1839 at Milton-next-Gravesend, Kent
   m. 1) Fanny Evelyn Richardson (11/1/1858-26/12/1889) on 19/6/1880 at Walhalla, Victoria.
   2) Bessie Amelia Lawson (?-?) in 1895
   d. 1/1/1901 at Fitzroy, Melbourne.

2. Joseph Robert
   b. 16/10/1840 at Milton
   d. 1845c.

3. Caroline Maria
   b. 5/7/1842 at Milton
   d. 13/3/1844 at Milton

4. Alice Maria
   b. 14/9/1843 at Milton
   d. 7/8/1928 at Wollongong

5. Matthew Stainton
   b. 6/5/1845 at Milton
   d. 18/11/1847 at Milton

6. Annie Maria
   b. 7/1/1848 at Milton
   m. John Francis Hurt (24/12/1842 - 31/7/1921) on 19/10/1871 at Wollongong
   d. 24/10/1931 at Unanderra

7. Edward Thomas
   b. 19/9/1849 at Milton
   d. 23/10/1867 at Dapto

8. William Stainton
   b. 5/9/1851 at Milton
   m. Margaret Alger (14/2/1849-12/2/1916) on 14/5/1879 at Dapto

9. Alfred Brames
   b. 8/7/1853 at Yallah
   d. 27/11/1910 at Fig Tree

10. Henry George
    b. 16/11/1855 at Dapto
    m. Victoria Margaret Whitehall (12/5/1862 - 30/6/1940) on 8/9/1897 at Moe Victoria
    d. 22/10/1924 at Moe Victoria

11. Walter Robert
    b. 14/3/1858 at Dapto
    m. Sarah Jane McGrory (?-?) in 1900c
    d. 26/6/1922 at Ovens Flat, Victoria

12. Joseph Matthew
    b. 14/1/1861 at Dapto
    m. Angelina Francis (5/7/1869 - 5/7/1960) on 24/3/1890 at Wollongong
    d. 12/10/1943 at Fig Tree

13. Charles Elfick
    b. 4/11/1862 at Dapto
    d. 10/8/1898 at Fig Tree

Three of the brothers, Leonard, Henry and Walter, together left Wollongong in 1877 to go farming in Gippsland. Leonard soon went mining at Walhalla and was later mines manager at Toombon and Woods Point before he took over a property at Packenham in the late 1890's. Henry and his descendants farmed at Moe as did
Walter until he went gold-prospecting in Western Australia in 1893. Near Coolgardie he and five others established the ‘Hit or Miss’ mine which they extracted many thousands of ounces of almost pure gold. At one stage they were floated for £180,000 and employed 25 men. He returned to Gippsland in 1900 and settled near Wangaratta in 1904.

Caroline died on the Berkeley Estate on 13th. May 1888 and Joseph at the same place on 2nd. June 1897. Both were buried in the Methodist Cemetery at Wollongong in a tomb measuring 15’ by 9’, whose granite column is inscribed:

‘In the memory of CAROLINE/ The Beloved Wife of JOSEPH STAFF/of Gravesend, Kent, England/Who died 13th. May 1888/Aged 67 years and 5 months/Also JOSEPH STAFF/Who died 2nd. June 1897/Aged 78 years/The heart’s keen anguish only those can tell/Who’ve bid the dearest and best farewell’

Joseph’s estate was sworn under £443.12 on 30th. August 1930, the porch and front window of the Wollongong Methodist Church in Crown Street were dedicated to the memory of Joseph and Caroline.

(To be continued)

— Alfred James

(Copyright, Alfred James, 1986)

50 LASHES FOR FLATULENCE! — OR

“It ain’t what you do — it’s the way that you do it.”

You may think that life in the 1980’s can be rather harsh at times, but the following incident from Wollongong Courthouse, Bench of Magistrates, Case Books for the 21st. of December 1836 shows just how tough life was in Illawarra 150 years ago, especially for a convict.

Court House Wollongong 21st. December 1836

Before William Sheaffe Esq. J.P.

David Keenan; per ship ‘Surry’ - 1836. Life; assigned to Mr. Young

Robert Young of Dapto, being duly sworn, deposes:

Yesterday evening after sunset, I was telling one of my assigned servants (i.e. a convict) that he might have taken the trouble of keeping the cattle from doing damage; while I was speaking I heard a f - t in the men’s hut close by, and I went into it, and the prisoner (David Keenan) was very insolent to me, and told me I had not blood enough to strike him. and upon a former occasion he told me I did not ‘care a f - t’ for me.

Sworn this 21st, Dec 1836, W. Sheaffe J.P.

Defence: My master put his fist to my nose, and I was no insolent to him.

Guilty of insolence to his Master; sentenced to receive a corporal punishment of Fifty Lashes.

William Sheaffe J.P.

How times have changed! Poor David Keenan would then have been taken from the Courthouse to face the flogger on the triangle at the rear of the Police Office.

The tale of David Keenan is one of over 400 described in some detail in surviving copies of the Case Books. These documents cover the period 27th. March 1833 to 29th. November 1844 and are a unique resource for Illawarra history - we are extremely lucky that they still survive after 150 years.

Michael Organ
address to the 1985 Annual Meeting of The Australian Pig-Iron Club, and published by the Club. As the membership of the Club is restricted to persons who have made a substantial contribution to Australian ironmaking, its endorsement of the work would guarantee its authenticity, even if we did not already know Mr. Southern as a meticulous and conscientious researcher (particularly on railways and related subjects).

The basic story of the early attempts at ironmaking could hardly be better summed up than in the opening paragraphs ‘The story of early iron smelting in Australia was one of insurmountable difficulties due primarily to the transport problems in bringing the raw materials to the most suitable location for the smelter. The Colonial Governments considered that the infant manufacturing industries being developed at that time could not afford to pay a premium for iron over the price for the material landed in Australian ports. This imported iron came out as ship’s ballast. Although the Governments were impressed with the achievements of producing iron from local raw materials they would not protect the infant iron industry. A policy of free trade was maintained and all attempts at local iron production were doomed to run at a loss.

“The history of the four blast furnaces in Tasmania, one in South Australia, two in Victoria and six in New South Wales that had a life of less than twenty years is thus one of exploratory or experimental attempts to demonstrate the feasibility of producing iron from native raw materials rather than an economic exercise in the production of iron”.

The authors go on to relate the history of each of these blast furnaces, giving both technical details of the plant and contemporary descriptions easier for the layman to follow. It is a valuable and authoritative contribution not only to Australian industrial history but to the history of this district, to which ironmaking and its development steelmaking have been so important.

NOTES ON THE STAFF FAMILY

(Continued from August Bulletin)

William Stainton Staff, the eighth child of Joseph and Caroline, was born at 19, Lord Street in Milton-next-Gravesend on 5 September 1851. Thus he was only twenty one months old when he arrived in New South Wales.

On 14 May 1879 at which time he was farming on the Keelogues Estate at Fig Tree, he married Margaret Alger of Charcoal at the Osborne Memorial Church of St. Luke at Dapto. She was the fifth child of John and Margaret Alger and had been born on the Berkeley Estate on St Valentine’s Day in 1849.

Soon after their marriage, William built a house in O’Briens Road at Fig Tree which he named ‘Milton Cottage’ after his birth-place. At about the same time he set up as a butcher and remained in that occupation for more than forty years.

William and Margaret had five children:

1. Mabel Pearl b. 13/7/1880 at Fig Tree
d. 10/3/1887 at Fig Tree

2. William Stainton b. 26/12/1882 at Fig Tree
   m. Edith Maud? (1884-4/6/1962) in ?
d. 14/9/1965 at Wollongong

3. Charles Gordon b. 9/8/1883 at Fig Tree
   m. ?
d. 1960c.
4. Edward Albert  
   b. 4/12/1888 at Fig Tree  
   m. Milfred Mabel Parsons (17/7/1887-13/8/1978)  
      on 18/3/1914 at Wollongong  
   d. 15/12/1960 at Wollongong  

5. Oswald Alger  
   b. 2/11/1892 at Fig Tree  
   m. Alice Mary (?) on 10/11/1960 at ?  
   d. 24/1/1960 at Warrawee  

Margaret died on 12 February 1916 in Corrimal Street in Wollongong.  
William died at the ‘Valesco’ Private Hospital at 37, Campbell Street in  
Wollongong on 7 January 1925.  

Apart from ‘Milton Cottage’, William also owned a farm at Central Kembla and a  
quarter share in another farm in O’Brien’s Road. Margaret’s Estate was valued at  
£167.14.5 and William’s at £3,387.14.4 of which all four sons received £590  
after disbursements.  

Both are buried beside William’s parents in a tomb inscribed thus:  

‘In Loving Memory/of/MARGARET/Dearly beloved wife of/  
W.S. STAFF/Who died 12th February 1916/Aged 67 years/  
‘Safe in the arms of Jesus’/Also/William S. STAFF/  
Died 7th Jan. 1925/Aged 73 years.’  

(Edward) Albert Staff, the third son of William and Margaret, was born in ‘Milton  
Cottage’ at Fig Tree on 4 December 1888.  

On leaving school, he went to work as a clerk at Corrimal Coal and Coke Pty. Ltd.  
(‘Cokeworks’) at Unanderra. For two years around 1910 he worked at Arnott’s  
Biscuit Company at Paddington in Sydney before returning to Cokeworks, now at  
Corrimal, where he remained until he retired on 30 September 1952. He became  
Assistant Manager and Acting Manager of the business and was given a gratuitous  
retiring allowance of £2,200.  

On 18 March 1914 he married Milfred Mabel Parsons, daughter of Henry and  
Dorcas Parsons (q.v.) at St. Michael’s Church in Wollongong. Milfred had been born at  
her parent’s home in Corrimal Street on 17 July 1887.  

In 1917 Albert bought a house in Victoria Street in Wollongong for £357.10.0  
and on 20 March 1922, he bought a block of land at 62, Smith Street, part of the  
Smith Estate, for £203. On it Henry Parsons built a house ‘Mahronbah’, in which  
the Staffs lived for the rest of their lives.  

They had three children:  

1. Joyce Milfred  
   b. 15/3/1918 at Wollongong  
   m. Alfred Francis Philip James (21/4/1918-) on 25/4/1945 at  
      London, England  

2. Edward Albert  
   b. 5/7/1921 in Wollongong  

3. Grace Margaret  
   b. 1924 in Wollongong  
   m. Roy Gordon McDonald (?) in ?  

In his youth, Albert was a leading cricketer in the Illawarra and won many awards.  
He once drove the new ball straight into the sea at Kiama, a hit of some 120 yards.  
He died outside ‘Kingston House’, a block of units he owned at the corner of Smith  
and Corrimal Streets, on 15 December 1960 - the day after the Tied Test. He is  
buried in the Berkeley Cemetery.  

Milfred died at her home on 13 August 1978 at the age of 91 and lies in the  
Lakeside Lawn Cemetery at Kanahooka.
Albert was a Parish Councillor and honorary gardener for over 40 years at St Michael's Pro-Cathedral and this is commemorated on a plaque placed outside the southern transept which states:

‘In Memory of/ALBERT STAFF/Parish Councilor/A lover of this Church and Garden/1888-1961.’

(Alfred James, 1985)

“I WOULD SOONER BE A CONVICT THAN A SOLDIER”

Note: When we tried to publish this series of articles in the Bulletins for April, May and June 1985, Gremlins crept in. The first convict letter became split into two parts, and in the course of publication much of the idiosyncrasy of spelling was corrected. Worst of all, however, was that your contributor failed to deliver the third part. Consequently the whole series lost its impact. Therefore it seems best to start again, after flushing out the gremlins, and hoping they stay out.

PART 1

Letters from convicts to their families in Great Britain are indeed rarities, so that two sent from Wollongong in the 1840s are to be treasured, and studied.

In Volume 40 of Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society (1940) two letters, held by the Bedfordshire County Record Office, are reproduced. They were written by one Charles Cartwright to his wife Elizabeth, living at Millbrook in that County, addressed from “Wollongong Stockade, Illawarra”, which was clearly the convict stockade on Flagstaff Hill whence convicts worked to construct the first section of Wollongong Harbour (“the Pier”). The letters are long enough to require separate republication, so that this article will be divided into three parts; this, the first, will set out the first letter; the second letter, in the second part, will complete what Cartwright had to disclose of our locality and of himself; and then, in the third part, we will go through an exercise of simple historical research to find out what we can about the writer of these most interesting letters.

It will be seen later that Cartwright could read and write; but comparison with the second shows that this first letter was written on his behalf rather than by him. It is dated 8th April 1842.

“Since my arrival to this Colony on the 8th August 1838, I have been anxiously expecting that a more favourable opportunity would have presented itself of my writing, thinking that I should have been assigned to private service; but in consequence of the transportation to this Colony having been abolished it has done away with the system of assigning, therefore I have been detained on Government employ since my arrival; and not being settled at one place but sent to different places it has been awkward and very difficult for me to form an idea which way to proceed so that you would be enabled to send a letter that would find me.

“It is with heartfelt gratitude I embrace the present opportunity of addressing this letter to you in hopes it will arrive safe and find you and my dear sons and daughters situated and enjoying good health, as this leaves me in good health for which I return thanks to Almighty God for all these blessings. I particularly desire you will remember me to my dear children, and I further desire you will take into consideration if you have any inclination of emigrating to this Colony and come without delay. It is a country wherein you and the children might get situations and do well and would be of great service to me.