

A Tale of Two Cities

With apologies to Charles Dickens for borrowing his title however the key character in this story conducted two consecutive lives, with two families in Australia's two major cities so it seemed apt.

I have been researching family history on and off for a few decades now but have rarely looked into the families of the spouses of my aunties and uncles. I recently decided to remedy this and began with my mother's eldest sister.

Uncle Bruce

This note covers the grandfather of my aunt's husband. Bruce Albert Anderson 1927 - 2009 was the third child and only son of Otto Theodore ANDERSON (1877 - 1947) and Amy Alida LOWE (1882 - 1971). He was also the husband of my mother's sister June Beryl ROGERS (1928-2009).

I had always understood Uncle Bruce's family to have come from somewhere in Scandinavia and if I thought about it probably assumed he had been born there and arrived in Australia as a young child. My parents thought that was a possibility but that even if he had been born in Australia then they certainly believed his two sisters had not been. As it turns out Bruce and his siblings were born in Australia, as were both of their parents, although there is a Scandinavian connection on both sides of his family.

Uncle Bruce's father, Otto Theodore Anderson, was born in Sydney, the son of Petter John ANDERSON (1846 - 1930) and Ula Emma ELSBERG (1855 - 1898).

The Andersons and Elsbergs of Sweden via Denmark

Petter and Emma both arrived in Australia on 13 June 1873 aboard the *Alardus* landing at Maryborough, Queensland. They no doubt became acquainted during the journey. Petter travelled alone as a young 23-year-old single man while the 18 year old Emma was with her parents and three younger siblings. Ula Emma was the daughter of Johann ELLSBERG (1824 - 1893) and Svenborg ANDERSON (1830 - 1911). Sadly during this trip Emma's baby brother August died and was buried when the ship stopped at Melbourne before making its way up the eastern seaboard.

Emma and Petter married in Maryborough on the 25th January 1874 just six months after they arrived in Australia. The Elsbergs and their new son-in-law soon after relocated to Sydney. Little is known of Petter's ancestry. He is described as Swedish however like the Elmsbergs had been residing in Denmark before he emigrated. His parents were Anders and Bengta.

Emma and Petter had seven children between 1875 and 1886. Otto was their third. He was a fireman working on steamships and married Amy Lowe at Marrickville in 1909.

The disappearing father

Amy Alida Lowe was the daughter of Albert Bernard LOWE b. circa 1855 and Frances THOMPSON (1851-1897). Amy was the youngest of four children and soon after her birth her father, a monumental mason originally from Denmark, deserted the family leaving her mother to bring up one boy and three girls under 7yo on a laundresses wages.

When Amy's mother died in 1897 her older brother became head of the household and he looked after each of his 3 younger sisters seeing them all married before he himself wed in 1910. Amy's mother had hailed from Carlisle in North West England. She arrived in Australia at the age of 14 with her mother and siblings joining her father who had already settled in the country.

So, what happened to Amy's father? It is quite possible Amy's father took off before Amy was even born. There are two records of Albert's desertion in the police gazettes. The first was published in 1885, which records Albert as having left Sydney for Melbourne two and half years earlier.

SYDNEY, - Albert Bernard Lowe is charged, on warrant issued in Sydney, with deserting his children, at Sydney, 2½ years ago. Description : - Dane, stonemason, about 30 years of age, 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high, medium build, dark hair and complexion, dark beard, whiskers, and moustache, deep scar on right cheek. Supposed to be working at his trade in Toorak, Victoria where he was seen about six months ago but recent enquiries for him there has failed to find him. His wife and four young children are in Sydney in destitute circumstances. Photo. of the offender in the Melbourne CI police office O.6171 20th October 1885.

Victoria Police Gazette
21 Oct 1885

There is a second record of what is likely to have been a further warrant for his arrest. This time published in 1887 it seems to have been prompted by someone identifying the name Albert was living under in Melbourne, to wit, Albert Fenton.

Newtown.- A warrant has been issued by the Newtown Bench for the arrest of Alfred [sic] Lowe alias Albert Fenton charged with unlawfully deserting his wife Frances Lowe at Newtown about four years ago, leaving her without means of support. He is 34 years of age 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high, stout build, dark complexion, broad features, wrinkled forehead, dark brown curly hair, beard and whiskers (but may now be shaved), blue eyes, scar on right temple, ship tattooed on chest, and one or two figures on arm; a monumental mason. Formerly a Volunteer fireman at Newtown. Said to be in Melbourne.

New South Wales Police Gazette
31 Aug 1887

This notice was also repeated in the Victorian Police Gazette however despite this there is no record of Albert ever being arrested. He can't have been difficult to find since he seems to have been hiding in plain sight.

New city, New family, New life

At least it seems to me that he was the Albert of A.W.Fenton and Co. who advertised in the Colac Herald in 1889. This Albert Walter Fenton lived on Mary street, Kew and operated out of Bulleen road. Of course this man could be a genuine Albert Fenton and not the runaway Albert Lowe of Sydney. However there are some interesting elements of A W Fenton's life that suggests he is a good candidate for Amy's missing father.

Firstly, the two Alberts plied the same trade carving gravestones, were around the same age and tellingly I've not been able to find any record of AWF prior to the 1880s when ABL was in Sydney.

Secondly, there is no evidence that Albert Fenton and his wife Mary Ann Wilson ever married. Was one or both of them already betrothed? Indeed there is some confusion about when and where the two were supposedly wed. Their respective death records provide the following information;

Name	Mary Ann Fenton	Albert Walter Fenton
Informant	"authorised agent - Alfred hospital"	"As instructed by the coroner"
Date of death	7 th May 1916	31 st December 1926
Age at death	65 years	78 years
Calculated year of birth	1850-51	1848
Place of birth	Kent, England	Shetland Isles, Scotland
Years in Victoria/Australia	64 years Victoria	42 years Victoria
Calculated arrival in colony	1851-52	1884
Age when married	25	36 years
Calculated year of marriage	1875-76	1884
Place of marriage	Dover, England	South Melbourne

The information provided in Mary Ann's death certificate requires some unpicking. It's worth noting that it states Mary Ann had married back in England after arriving in Australia at the age of one. While it was not unknown for people in Australia to travel back to Britain for periods of time during which they may have got married and/or had children I'm doubtful that is what happened in this case.

Clearly the two sets of records do not add up unless Mary Ann met and married Albert in England around 1875 only to return with him to Melbourne in 1884. However it doesn't explain why the informant for Albert's death thought he'd only married when he arrived in Melbourne. In any event I've not been able to find a marriage record for the two of them in the county of Kent during the mid 1870s. Equally there appears to be no record of the two marrying in Victoria in the 1870s or 1880s.

When Mary Ann died in 1916 her children's names were listed. Nine names were given as follows; Charles 39 [b.1877], William 37 [b.1879], Gertrude deceased, Emma 33 [b.1883], Lily deceased, Victor 28 [b.1888], Alfred deceased, Walter 23 [b.1893], Harold deceased.

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I've not identified birth records for the two eldest boys either in Kent or Victoria under the family name Fenton. Of the other children the Victorian records provide the following children for this couple -

<u>NAME</u> (as per Birth Cert.)		(as recorded on mother's Death Cert.)
Emma Emily	1885-1972	Emma [31 not 33]
Albert Victor	1887-1949	Victor [29 not 28]
Harold	1890-1890	Alfred
Harold	1891-1891	Harold
Walter Bernard ¹	1891-1967	Walter [25 not 23]
Lilian Gertrude	1893-1893	Gertrude
Lillian Gerte	1896-1897	Lily

Unhelpfully, Albert's death record only lists three children; Emma Emily, Albert Victor and Walter Bernard. We know four of their children died in infancy, which may explain why their names were not recorded when Albert died but it begs the question of what had happened to Charles and William. Had they both died between the deaths of their mother and their father? I have yet to find any records to support this.

I think there are good reasons to suspect there are serious errors in the record given at Mary Ann's death. There are no records I can find of Albert and Mary Ann a) marrying in Devon, Kent around 1875, b) giving birth to 2 young boys in Kent and c) travelling as a family to Victoria. There is no 1881 census record or any travel records that support this explanation.

Mary Ann's own background has its own confusing story. Mary Ann's maiden name is consistently-ish given as Wilson however her death certificate records her father as the butcher Alexander DUNCAN while her mother was her namesake Mary Ann WILSON. More of this later.

Another failed marriage

The key to unravelling this inconsistent picture is to be found through Mary Ann's two eldest boys. While there are no late 1870 birth records for a Charles and a William under the family names Fenton, Wilson or even Duncan there were two brothers, Charles Edward FRAZER b.1878 and William Henry FRAZER b.1880.

These two boys were the sons of Henry Tidd FRASER, a merchant seamen from Liverpool, England. Henry had married a Mary Ann WILSON in Melbourne in 1874. This Mary Ann was the daughter of James WILSON, a bootmaker, however the marriage record has been amended. The original entry for Mary Ann's father was Alexander Duncan recorded as her step-father but it has since been struck out. It is very likely James Wilson's name was added as part of this amendment.

This Mary Ann, wife of Henry Fraser must surely be the same Mary Ann Wilson who died in 1916 the partner of Albert Fenton. Her 1916 death record lists her parents as Alexander Duncan and Mary Ann Wilson making the link unquestionable. However, when her two 'parents' died in 1893 and 1895 respectively neither listed Mary Ann as their daughter.

Whose daughter was she?

Mary Ann Wilson senior had arrived in Hobart, Tasmania in February 1854 just a month and a half before she married Alexander Duncan. She had travelled out to Australia aboard the *Sir Allan McNab* along with her mother, younger sister Kitty and

¹ I've not identified a birth record for Walter. A birth year of 1891 was calculated from his age at death.

her older brother Charles, his wife and what appears to be their baby daughter Mary Ann Wilson. This journey of the Wilsons saw them reunited with George WILSON, head of the family who had, a decade and a half earlier, been transported to Hobart aboard the *Marquis of Hastings* having been convicted of housebreaking in 1838.

There is much more research to be done to establish the full story of this family however I suspect that Mary Ann Wilson born circa 1851, the mother of three² children to Henry Fraser and a further seven children to Albert Fenton was the illegitimate daughter of Mary Ann Wilson b.1833. Mary Ann junior was born in Sussex, England and travelled out to Australia in 1853/4 but was recorded in the ship's manifest as the infant daughter of Charles and his new wife to save the family's blushes. There doesn't appear to be any other 1850's travel record of an infant Mary Ann Wilson to account for her arrival in Australia.

I'm not sure what happened to Henry Tidd Fraser. As a mariner he will have travelled regularly across the globe and there is some evidence to suggest that he returned to his native Liverpool. I have not been able to identify his death record but I suspect that he was still alive by the time Albert Fenton was on the scene, and that he and Mary Ann had simply parted ways. This would account for why Mary Ann Wilson and Albert Fenton never married.

The North Sea Connection

Fenton's 1926 death certificate records he was 78 years of age at death and that he was born in the Shetland Isles, Scotland, the son of William Fenton and Emilie Marie de Vere. He had been in the state of Victoria for 42 years. It also confirmed that his wife was Mary Ann Wilson and that he had married her when he was 36 years of age. We now know that they never married but it is likely that they got together in 1884 when he was about 36 years of age. Their first child, Emma Emily was born in 1885.

Where was Albert Fenton prior to 1884? This was the same year that his death certificate suggests he arrived in Victoria. Is it just a coincidence that Albert Fenton's arrival in Victoria coincides with Albert Lowe's disappearance from Sydney?

What we know of Lowe's date of birth is limited to the information provided in the gazette notices above, which records him as around 30 y.o. in 1885 and 34 in 1887. This places his year of birth in the mid 1850s, compared to 1848 for Albert Fenton. Despite this minor discrepancy between both the place and potential years of birth I still think there are very good reasons to believe Albert Lowe and Albert Fenton are one in the same person. However I have found no evidence to prove this. All I have is the lack of evidence to account for Albert Fenton's existence before 1884 and equally nothing on what became of Albert Lowe when he escaped to Melbourne.

As they say, 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence' and I am not suggesting there is no room for doubt. Evidence could still come to light proving a different account for Lowe's life after he deserted his wife and children while records may yet be uncovered of Fenton's arrival in Australia and his time leading up to it.

It is quite usual for given names to be repeated through the generations. On Lowe's side we have his 2 given names; Albert and Bernard, while for Fenton we have Albert, Walter, William from his father, and Emilie and Marie from his mother. When we look at the children of the 'two' men we find Bernard was used for one of the Fenton boys while amongst the Lowe children William and Marie were used as the middle names for the first born boy and girl respectively. Both Alberts had daughters with the name

² In addition to Charles and William they had a third son, their first born Alexander Henry Fraser b.1877 died in same year.

Lillian shortened to Lily. This proves nothing of course but it is tantalising to think that Albert Lowe's parents were also named William and Marie, these certainly weren't names from his wife's family.

I have also looked at both Shetland and Danish records and found nothing for an Albert Lowe or an Albert Fenton. Indeed, neither of the names Fenton nor Lowe feature in any of the mid 19th century records for that group of islands sitting betwixt the Norwegian and North seas, while there are records under the name of Løwe in the Danish archives, though none featuring an Albert or a William. I have also failed to find anything searching the name De Vere.

I hasten to point out that this research, such that it was, has been nothing more than a cursory consideration of the online records available through www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk and www.danishfamilysearch.com . There may yet be records to uncover should a more thorough search be undertaken.

It's all in the Blood

Of course another way to answer this question is for DNA comparisons of the descendants of Albert Lowe and Albert Fenton. My cousins are two of a number of great grandchildren of Albert Lowe and ancestry.com trees suggest there are probably a number of Fenton descendants around. It is very likely therefore that there are a number of half second-cousins, or not.

Conclusion – for now

My view is that on the balance of probabilities Albert Bernard Lowe deserted Frances Thomson in Sydney and took up with Mary Ann Wilson (Mrs Fraser) in Melbourne, assuming the name Albert Walter Fenton in the process. I have annexed to this paper a family tree to that effect. I would be grateful for any evidence that demonstrates this beyond doubt or indeed proves this to be in error.

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Albert LOWE = Albert FENTON

