

## THE KEMPS OF RETTENDON

“Don’t worry son, no one’s gonna miss one sheep”. Alright thought Samuel little knowing he was the lamb being led to slaughter.

Slaughter is perhaps too strong a word for what faced Samuel Kemp, he would after all go on to live a long life and raise a family. I am one of his descendants<sup>i</sup>. But first Samuel, and his older persuasive brother Thomas would be led to the other side of the world to break their backs in the building of a new nation. A nation, coincidentally, whose early prosperity would ride on the backs of sheep<sup>ii</sup> and whose folklore would eulogise a suicidal sheep stealer<sup>iii</sup>.

The brothers’ naivety is perhaps bewildering to modern sensibilities. William Pertwee’s sheep was missed and the teenage Samuel owned up to it when challenged by the local constabulary, blaming his older brother for the whole enterprise. Thomas was more a father to Samuel, being 16 years his senior and their father having died when Samuel was just four.

With Samuel under arrest constable Clark sought out Thomas finding him drinking at the Hawk in Battlesbridge. Thomas seemed unperturbed, or possibly unprepared when confronted. “Pertwee’s sheep? Darn it, I had Mr Pertwee’s sheep but you can’t prove it.”

### ***Conviction and Transportation***

Despite his denials in court a fellow patron that day at the Hawk attested to his public house confession and the brothers were sent by the magistrates to the Assizes court who found them both guilty, and sentenced them to Life transportation<sup>iv</sup>. And with the taste of mutton still lingering they were bound for Botany Bay.

Thomas and Samuel sailed together aboard the *Captain Cook* departing Portsmouth on 5 May 1833 under the command of Captain William Tompson with the guard being provided by Captain William Henry Armstrong and a detachment of the Royal North British Fusiliers. The two brothers had spent the previous 5 weeks moored in Portsmouth harbour on the Prison Hulk *Leviathan* having been first locked up in Chelmsford Gaol after their arrests in February.

The weather had been unseasonably cold when they raised anchor and many of the men had come down with the flu. Samuel was one such sufferer and spent the first 8 days of the voyage in the sick bay. But things improved as they made their way out of the English Channel and into the expanse of the Atlantic.

The journey across the Great Southern Ocean however was not so pleasant with the ship’s surgeon John Morgan complaining of *‘the most dreadful weather imaginable - continually under water, decks below constantly wet, though all the care and use of stoves they could take could not keep the place dry, and bed and bedding remained wet in spite of all they could try’*. The *Captain Cook* arrived in Port Jackson on Monday 26 August 1833. All but four of the 330 convicts survived the nearly 4 months at sea.

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The penal colony at New South Wales was effectively an open prison. Convicts lived alongside free settlers, freed convicts, Aboriginals and the growing number of second-generation immigrants under the watchful eye of British armed forces and officials. Thomas was assigned as a farm servant to Roger Murphy of Sydney while Samuel was assigned to John McDougall of Baulkham Hills, also as a farm servant.

### ***Thomas Kemp 1797-1842***

Thomas' time in Australia was troubled. Within two years he was in Parramatta Gaol having been sentenced to 21 days at the treadmill by the Parramatta Bench for an unknown offence. He was escorted up river to Sydney on 19 June 1835, probably to Carter's Barracks<sup>v</sup> where central station now stands to spend 3 weeks on one of its 2 convict powered grain mills.

At some point Thomas was put into the service of David Johns[t]on at Jeir nearly 200 miles southwest of Sydney. It did not work out well. On 16 January 1838 he absconded. He was eventually caught and was returned on 29 June after nearly 6 months on the run. Thomas offered no defence for his actions and received 50 lashes.

He soon found himself in trouble again, this time for losing sheep! On the 24 July 1838 he lost 14 sheep and received 25 lashes for neglect. He was convicted again of neglect after the flock he was shepherding was scattered by a pack of dogs on 1 October 1838. He received 35 lashes. He was however acquitted of a more serious charge of, on 28 September 1838, killing and skinning 4 sheep under his care.

I don't know how long he spent in the district of Queanbeyan. The irony that he found himself a shepherd can't have been lost on him but at some point he made his way back to the emerging city at Sydney Cove. On the 11 October 1841, described as a gardener, the 45-year-old Thomas was again sent to Parramatta Gaol this time by the Liverpool Bench for an unknown offence. He was sent to the Hyde Park Barracks the following day. It's not clear how long he spent at the barracks but in less than a year Thomas died at the hospital of the New Military Stockade. Thomas was buried at St Mary Cathedral.

### ***Thomas' family in Essex***

There is no record of Thomas having children during his decade in the colony but he did leave behind a family in Essex. On 5 May 1823 Thomas married Ann BLAKELY at All Saints, Rettendon. They had 5 children before Thomas' was wrenched from his family and sent down under. Their first born, Samuel, died just 18 months old in March 1825.

The couple had two daughters, Mary Ann born 1826 and Sophia born 1830, whose fates I have been unable to establish. Their fifth child was, like their first, a son named Samuel who like his earlier brother didn't survive infancy. The second baby Samuel died at nine months and was buried just 3 days after Thomas had left England, never to return.

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Ann and Thomas' middle child was named after his father. Thomas the younger was baptised at St Mary, Runwell on 13 January 1828. On Christmas Eve 1853 he married Mahala THAKE the daughter of James and Mary Ann PEPPER. It seems Thomas and Mahala had no children, or at least none that survived. The couple moved first to the east end of London and later further west and south of the river Thames where Thomas worked as a labourer. Thomas died at the age of 51 and was buried at St Mary, Putney.

I have not discovered much of what happened to Ann Blakely after her husband was transported to New South Wales. I can't find a record for her in the 1841 census (on census night 1841 Thomas jnr and Sophia were staying with their father's cousin<sup>vi</sup>). Thomas' wife survived him by just 5 years and Ann Blakely was buried at All Saints, Rettendon on 24 September 1847<sup>vii</sup>.

### ***Samuel Kemp 1813-1894***

Unlike his older brother Samuel Kemp fared much better in Australia. Though like his brother he too had some brushes with the law. On 1 July 1840 the magistrate at Muswellbrook sent him for trial on charges of an undisclosed felony. Whatever the outcome he was discharged but not before spending a few weeks in Newcastle Gaol.

Whilst his older brother had ended up being sent south Samuel went in the opposite direction settling first in the Hunter River region. In April 1844 the Patricks Plains Bench recommended him for a Ticket of Leave. It was issued to him on 8 August 1844 just shy of 11 years since he had landed in the colony on a Life sentence. Seven weeks later he was issued with a Ticket of Leave Passport which allowed him to move to Liverpool Plains, west of Sydney, in the service of John McDougall the same man whose service he had been assigned to when he had arrived a decade earlier.

By 1845 Samuel was back in the Hunter where he married the 24-year-old Catherine Campbell. The two went on to have 11<sup>viii</sup> children. Catherine had been convicted of assault and robbery at the Glasgow Court of Justiciary on 29 September 1838. She was sentenced to 14 years transportation and arrived in the colony aboard the *Planter* on 13 March 1839. Catherine was killed in 1874 when the buggy she was travelling in, driven by Samuel, hit a tree when the horse veered and she was thrown out.

Samuel lived on another 20 years dying at his son's farm at Mitchell in the south west of Queensland at the age of 81.<sup>ix</sup>

### ***The Essex Kemps***

Samuel and Thomas had been born and raised in Essex, a south-eastern English county. Their home before they suffered transportation was Rettendon parish on the River Crouch<sup>x</sup> 9½ miles from Chelmsford. The brother's parents were Thomas KEMP, an agricultural labourer<sup>xi</sup> and Martha FISHER. They married at St Mary the Virgin, Chelmsford on 28 November 1796. Thomas was their first child, baptised a year later at Rettendon's parish church of All Saints on 26 November.

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I have not identified Thomas senior's antecedence however Martha was the daughter of Cornelius Fisher and Elisabeth JOHNSON who married at St Mary the Virgin, Langenhoe in 1758. Martha, along with all her siblings, was baptised at Wix, on the River Stour.

A second son soon followed for Thomas and Martha. John was baptised at All Saints on 29 December 1799. The next two boys were likely twins. They were certainly baptised on the same day, 26 February 1804<sup>xii</sup> at St Mary the Virgin, Woodham Ferrers.

Woodham Ferrers is just a few miles from Rettendon and it is likely the family had relocated there, perhaps in search of work. Their second child, John, had been buried at Woodham Ferrers 3 months before they baptised Jeremiah and Joseph.

There then seems to be a ten-year break before Samuel is baptised at All Saints during the Sunday service of 1 May 1814. Did Martha go such a long period without giving birth?<sup>xiii</sup> She was 42 when Samuel was born. Did they only have boys?

Samuel and Thomas' father Thomas Kemp died in 1817 at the age of 53. He was buried at All Saints on 16 April. Samuel was still a toddler. Martha married again in 1825. She had doubtless been supported by her elder boys in the intervening years but they would soon have their own new families; Thomas married 1823, with Jeremiah marrying in 1827 and Joseph in 1828.

Martha Fisher's second husband was the widower, James Vale. They enjoyed nearly 25 years together. Martha was buried at All Saints on 31 March 1850. James survived another 3+ years and was laid to rest on 11 January 1854 also in Rettendon parish.

As mentioned above the twins both married. Joseph married Hannah Sach on 15 September 1828 at All Saints. Sadly he died a year later and was buried on 27 November 1829. It seems they did not have any children.

### ***The two families of Jeremiah Kemp 1801-1885***

Jeremiah also married at All Saints. On 12 August 1827 he wed the widow Mrs. Ruth PLAYLE née CROSBY. She was 10 years Jeremiah's senior and had 2 children from her first marriage. She would have another 3 with Jeremiah.

Ruth died just 12 years into their marriage and at the 1841 census the newly widowed Jeremiah had his two young daughters with him; Martha born 1833 and Mary born 1836. I don't know where or what became of their son Jeremiah Kemp born 1828. Also at the cottage on Bear Tree Lane was Ruth's daughter from her first marriage; the 23-year-old Frances Playle, born 1818.

In the next 3 decennial censuses Frances Playle is recorded living with Jeremiah as his housekeeper. What is more curious is that in 1851 Jeremiah and Ruth's children are not recorded but two new youngsters are listed in the

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house on census night as Jeremiah's children; John aged 7 and Elizabeth aged 5.

The five-year-old Elizabeth is almost certainly the same Eliza Playle baptised at All Saints on 21 June 1846. Only her mother, Frances, was listed in the baptism record. John's birth was registered at Chelmsford in the first quarter of 1843. His surname was Playle.

In 1861 the 'family' are at Cole Hill, Rettendon. The 60-year-old Jeremiah is working as a labourer. Frances is still his housekeeper and the now 15-year-old Eliza Playle has been joined by a 6 year old sister, Sophia. Ten years later, at the next census, Frances is still Jeremiah's housekeeper with only Sophia in tow.

I think it likely that all three; John, Elizabeth and Sophia were Jeremiah's children. John even adopted the name Kemp when marrying Mary Ann HAMMOND in 1870. Sophia also married however retained the name Playle until her nuptials, thereafter known as Mrs Sophia MUNSON. Elizabeth also married under the surname Playle to William WILSHERE.

In the 1881 census Frances Playle was with her daughter and son-in-law, the Munsons. The 80-year-old Jeremiah Kemp was at the Chelmsford District Union Workhouse, curiously listed as 'married' and not 'widowed'. Why did Frances and Jeremiah never marry? Was it because they started life as stepfather and stepdaughter? Jeremiah Kemp died in 1885 and was buried at All Saints, Rettendon.

Frances Playle was again with the family of her daughter Sophia at Rettendon on census night 1891. She was recorded as an 80 year-old widow (she was in fact unmarried and nearer 73). Frances Playle died in 1894 and was buried at All Saints, Rettendon on 26 August.

### **Conclusion**

There is still much research to be undertaken<sup>xiv</sup>. What happened to Jeremiah's children that he had with his wife Ruth Crosby? Or Thomas and Ann's daughters? Where are the records of Samuel's son William referred to in his 1894 death certificate? And of course, where did Thomas Kemp hail from?

Please see my ancestry tree *Palmer Rogers* for the evidence that supports the above. As ever thanks go out to all those whose research I have relied on. In particular, thanks go to 'wjdavies1' who kindly pointed out that I had the wrong Catherine Campbell as Samuel's wife. I have provided a record of the 3 generations of Kemps at Annex A. Please feel free to email with any corrections.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> DNA matches show that I am a descendant of Samuel's daughter Sarah Jane 1848-1940.

<sup>ii</sup> The notion is often expressed as riding on the sheep's back, and sometimes as living off the sheep's back. A phrase used to allude to wool as the source of Australia's national prosperity. For much of Australia's recent history wool has been the basis of the national economy and the country's major export. The first wool exports from Australia to Britain began in the 1820s, and the industry boomed throughout the 19th century and beyond. Despite setbacks such as drought, world war, and depression, wool continued its traditional dominance until the mid-20th century. See <https://slll.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/andc/meanings-origins/o>

<sup>iii</sup> In 1977 Australia held a plebiscite on a National Song. *Waltzing Matilda* a song about a drifter who jumps to his death in a pond rather than face capture for stealing a jumbuck (ram) came second to *Advance Australia Fair* and received 50% more votes than *God Save the Queen*.

<sup>iv</sup> The Chelmsford Chronicle wrote on 15 February 1833 "*Thos Kemp and Samuel Kemp, two labourers, brothers, were brought up for re-examination charged with stealing sheep from Mr. [William] Pertwee, of Rettendon. It appeared from the evidence of several witnesses, that after the sheep was lost from Mr. Pertwee's field, suspicion attached to the prisoners, and Samuel was taken into custody, when made a full confession, and pointed out the place where the skin was concealed. He declared that he was led to the commission of the crime by the persuasions of his brother. Isaac Clark, constable of Rettendon, was desired to take Thos. Kemp into custody; found him at the Hawk, and told him the charge against him. The prisoner said, "I don't deny that I took Mr. Pertwee's sheep, but you can't prove it." Barthrop, a labourer, proved that he was at the Hawk, and heard the prisoner say, "Mr. Pertwee's sheep! d--n it, I had Mr. Pertwee's sheep, but you can't prove it." Other witnesses were examined to show that the prisoners had mutton about the time the sheep was lost. Thomas denied using the words attributed to him. They were both committed for trial at the Assizes.*"

3 weeks later (8 March) the Chelmsford Chronicle published the following "*Thomas Kemp, 36, and Samuel Kemp, 18, labourers, were indicted for stealing a sheep from Wm. Pertwee, at Rettendon.—The evidence against the prisoners has recently been published in our Petty Session reports.—Guilty.—Transported for life.*"

<sup>v</sup> See <https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/convict-sydney/treadmill> for detail on the punishment.

<sup>vi</sup> In the 1841 English census Mary Moss (spelled Mos) was residing at Rettendon with 10 minors named Mos plus Thomas Kemp (15) and Sophia Kemp (10). In the 1851 census only Mrs Moss's 2 youngest children bear the name Moss. Four older children, who were with her in 1841 now bore the name FISHER. There are baptism records at All Saints for these children with only the mother's name Mary Fisher recorded in 4 of them. In 1834 Mary Fisher married William Moss, the father of her next two children. The absence of father's names for her first four children suggests she was unmarried and Fisher was her maiden name. Fisher was also the maiden name of Samuel and Thomas' mother, Martha.

Mary Fisher was therefore likely the daughter of John & Mary Fisher (baptised at Wix Essex in 1789). I believe this John was the son of Cornelius and Elizabeth Fisher of Wix.

Apart from the 2 Kemp children, the two Moss children, and the 5 Fishers there were another 3 named Mos(s). The youngest in the house that day was Ellen [Mos] who was the daughter of Mary's eldest girl, also named Mary. Ellen's father Samuel Moss aged 20 was in the house. Samuel and Mary would marry the following week. There was also a 13yo Charlotte Mos – I have no idea who this was.

<sup>vii</sup> Two weeks after Ann Kemp's burial there was a burial of a 'new born' boy. Did Ann die in childbirth? John William Kemp was buried 7 October 1847. I can find no baptism record for him.

<sup>viii</sup> Samuel's death certificate records 11 children; Sarah Jane 47yrs, Louisa 44yrs, William 39yrs, Alfred 34yrs, Henry 37yrs, Walter 30yrs plus 4 males and 1 female who had pre-deceased Samuel. Those children were a boy born circa 1846, missing presumed dead 1848, James 1849-1867, George 1853-1876, Mary Ann 1862-1863, with an unknown 4<sup>th</sup> deceased son. Catherine's 1874 death certificate is consistent with this.

<sup>ix</sup> Samuel's death certificate records his age at death as 82 years 1 month. This would put his birth at June/July 1812. Samuel was baptized on 1 May 1814. In March 1833 he was described in court as 18 years old. If he was a summer child I think it more likely to have been 1813 and not 1812. If that is correct then he was over 19½ when he jumped William Pertwee's sheep.

<sup>x</sup> Samuel's 1894 death certificate gives his mother as Ann Couch. Did Samuel in old age misremember the name of the river he grew up on as his mother's maiden name?

<sup>xi</sup> When Samuel was baptized his father was described as a 'pauper'.

<sup>xii</sup> When the boys died, Joseph in 1829 and Jeremiah in 1885, their stated age at death both give them an estimated year of birth of 1801.

<sup>xiii</sup> Whilst I can find no other baptism record there is an 1832 burial at All Saints of a 22yo John Kemp. Did Thomas and Martha have a son in 1813? If so, was he Samuel's twin? And if so why was Samuel baptized and John not?

<sup>xiv</sup> Since undertaking this research, I have identified a DNA match with a descendent of the Fishers. Ancestry.com's *audreybrookes* is my 6<sup>th</sup> cousin. We share Cornelius and Elizabeth Fisher of Wix as x5 Great Grandparents.

## Kemps of Rettendon family tree

1. **Kemp, Thomas b.circa 1764.** bur 16 Apr 1817. Married **Martha Fisher (1770-1850)** at St Mary the Virgin, Chelmsford 28 Nov 1796.

- 2. **Thomas bpt 26 Nov 1797.** bur 9 May 1842. Married Ann Blakely (1805-1847) at All Saints, Rettendon 5 May 1823
  - 3. **Samuel b.circa 1823,** bur 8 Mar 1825
  - 3. **Mary Ann bpt 7 February 1826**
  - 3. **Thomas bpt 13 Jan 1828,** bur 24 Oct 1878. m.Mahala Thake (1833-1912) at All Saints, Rettendon 24 Dec 1853.
  - 3.**Sophia bpt 13 Apr 1830**
  - 3.**Samuel bpt 18 Nov 1832,** bur 8 May 1833

2. **John bpt 29 Dec 1799.** bur 21 Dec 1803

2. **Joseph b.circa 1801,** bpt 16 Feb 1804 bur 27 Nov 1829. Married Hannah Sach at All Saints Rettendon 15 Sep 1828

2. **Jeremiah b.circa 1801,** bpt 16 Feb 1804 bur 12 Jan 1885. Married Ruth Crosby (1791-1839) at All Saints, Rettendon 12 Aug 1827

- 3. **Jeremiah bpt 15 May 1828.**
- 3. **Martha b.circa 1834** bur 7 Oct 1846.
- 3. **Mary b.circa 1836.**  
(children to Frances Playle (1818-1894), daughter of Ruth Crosby from her first marriage)
- 3. **John b. 1843** bur 22 Dec 1913. m.Mary Ann Hammond in Essex 1870.
- 3. **Elizabeth bpt 21 Jun 1846** bur 30 Jan 1909. m.William Wilshire (1842-1909) at All Saints Rettendon 19 Mar 1866
- 3. **Sophia b.1855** bur 22 Feb 1936. m.Edward John Munson (1857-1932) at All Saints Rettendon 2 Oct 1875

2. **John (speculative) b. circa 1813** bur 28 May 1835

- 2. **Samuel bpt 1 May 1814** bur 6 Aug 1894. Married Catherine Campbell (1821-1874) in NSW 1845
  - 3. **Boy name unknown b.circa 1846.** Lost never found 1848
  - 3. **Sarah Jane b.26 Apr 1848.** d.21 Sep 1940. m.John T Gilligan (1847-1941) at Wee Waa, NSW 1 Oct 1870
  - 3. **James b.10 Dec 1849** d.1867.
  - 3. **Louisa b.22 Aug 1851** d.28 Feb 1916. m.Benjamin Kellett (1846-1924) at Warialda, NSW 11 Jun 1868
  - 3. **George Ernest b.30 Jun 1853.** d.1876
  - 3. **William b.circa 1855.**
  - 3. **Harry b.1857 d.6 Oct 1950.** m.Elizabeth Jane Jeal (1867-1955) at Kelly's Gully, NSW 15 Feb 1887
  - 3. **'male' (speculative) b.circa 1859.** d.bef 1874 – Catherine's death cert 1874 refers to a 3<sup>rd</sup> deceased male
  - 3. **Alfred b.1860** d.26 Jul 1945. m.Edith Millicent Jeal (1875-1892) in Queensland 13 Apr 1892
  - 3. **Mary A b.1862** d.1863.
  - 3. **Walter Robert b.1864** d.1937. did not marry but had a child with Alice Maud Kadel (1891-1962)

## Key

- b. – date born
- bpt. – date baptized
- bur. – date buried
- d. – date died
- m. – date married