

What's in a Name?

Names are the lifeblood of genealogy. We rely on people being given a name and, with a few notable exceptions, keeping that name for the duration of their life. In this way we can track them over their lifetime and make those all-important links from the generation that went before to the generations that follow. When people change names, particularly family names, it makes for family history nightmares.

Some conventions can come to the rescue. In British traditions at least, a woman adopts the family name of her husband on marriage. In some few cases, particularly where the woman carries a particularly significant heritage the children may get a double barrelled surname combining both the mother's and father's family name. A not very common practice and not one I am familiar with in my own family¹.

A practice I am more familiar with is the giving of maiden names as middle names, which ensures the family names of women are not lost forever. This convention can be a godsend when trying to piece together families of the same name, time and place and where different sets of parents have the same given and family names. It has rescued me on more than one occasion.

Variant spellings are another bugbear. This can come about for many reasons, such as mishearing or other errors by scribes, illiteracy, no agreed spelling or spelling that is simply guessed at, as well as the ubiquitous Anglicisation of non-English names. However, with some creative thinking this can usually be worked through.

What can't be easily accounted for is where people randomly change their name mid-life. While in more recent times there will often be documents that record this, such as statutory declarations or deed polls or adoption records, more often than not no formal process was executed in centuries past. It was this that I faced in trying to piece together the family of my paternal grandmother's parents. One name change I was alert to, while another I was oblivious of.

I knew my grandmother's father, Stanley John ERICKSON b.1889, had deserted his family leaving behind his wife and five young children. That he changed his name and began his life anew was a given.

With regards to my grandmother's mother however I thought I had all the necessary pieces to begin a detailed family history. She carried in her name both her mother's and her maternal grandmother's maiden names; Ryan and McEwen² respectively – Annie Ryan McEwan MARTIN. And on the other side her father's death certificate provided a wealth of detail including the full names of

¹ I have however come across examples of people adopting a mother's or other family name not their father's in order to lay claim to a family right or legacy.

² My grandmother gave me her mother's second middle name as 'McQueen' and there are records where it is recorded as McQueen or Mcquen rather than McEwan. I have settled on McEwen because that is the name given consistently in the Australian electoral rolls and I suggest that is how it was pronounced, Mc-Que-En. I accept that McQueen is an Anglicisation of MacSween and not usually a variant spelling of McEwan.

his parents, his father's occupation, his place of birth and even how long he had been in Australia.

Added to this I had what my grandmother had told me of what she knew. Unfortunately every turn I took drew a blank. My grandmother's father had vanished into thin air while her mother's parents seemed to have appeared from nowhere.

That was all a few weeks ago but since then a lot of the mystery has been resolved. From time to time I pick up threads that have never been explored (by me) and see where they take me. Recently I decided to have a look at the trees of my mother's siblings-in-law, in particular, the family of her eldest sister's husband. It proved very interesting and showed that my uncle Bruce³ had something in common with my father besides their shared Scandinavian ancestry. Both Bruce and my father had mothers who had been deserted by their fathers when they were young.

In Bruce's case I was able to track down what had happened to his maternal grandfather – he had moved to Melbourne 450 miles south of Sydney and established a whole new family under an assumed name. Fortunately, Bruce's grandfather used an alias that was known at the time and recorded in one of the police gazette notices of his desertion. Thus making his identification relatively easy.

Stan Erickson

These discoveries prompted me to ask my father again what he knew of his own grandfather which confirmed there were no family stories about what name Stanley Erickson had assumed in his new life, just the story that he worked as a butcher (he had been a fisherman working the Manning River when married to my great grandmother). One of Stan's sons, who was just 5 years old when Stan took off north, went looking for him in Brisbane in the 1950's with his new bride in hand. Whilst he believed he was getting close to tracking down his long lost father, he and his wife returned to NSW having not set eyes on the elusive Stanley.

However, while my conversation with dad identified no new information he did reveal that he had once seen, in some list, a reference to a 1970's death record for a Stanley Erickson. He wondered at the time if this could have been his grandfather but did not know how to get hold of it.

It had never occurred to me to look for death records for Stanley under his real name. It just seemed all too obvious.

The index of deaths held by the Queensland registry lists the full names of the deceased's parents. A quick search of the on-line index failed to show up a Stanley Erickson with the correct parents but one listing did stick out. It was for a Stanley Erickson, no parents recorded, died 1963. It seemed worth a punt so I purchased the certificate.

³ Bruce Anderson (1927-2009) married my mother's eldest sister, June Beryl Rogers (1928 – 2009) on 6 January 1951.

Much to my surprise the death certificate confirmed he was my great grandfather. The initial typed out record of the death, with particulars reported by a D P Barry, did not include the names of Stanley's parents nor the fact that he was married. It did record he was also known as Stanley HOWARD. However, courtesy of the Pensions Office, handwritten additions to the certificate recorded the names of his parents and his wife, my great grandmother.

From Stan's address at the time of his death I was able to identify 2 electoral roll entries for 1958 and 1963. Unfortunately there were no other Howards registered at that address.

'D P Barry' on the other hand proved a much more fruitful line of enquiry. Donald Richard Barry, who registered the death of Stanley Erickson/Howard, has long since deceased but I was able to make contact with one of his sons who confirmed that Stanley Howard was the de facto husband of his late grandmother Mrs Polly Barry. Polly and Stan never had children of their own however the lone surviving child from Polly's first marriage, now in her 90s, was able to tell me that Stan had become a 'boarder' with the family in the late 1920s when she was just an infant. She also confirmed that Stan at one time worked as a butcher, quite a good one she recalled.

The Barrys were able to provide me with a photograph of Stan with Polly. I then went in search of a photograph of the younger Stanley to compare the two and confirm, not that I think there's much doubt, that Stanley Howard of Brisbane was the one and same Stanley John Erickson of Cundletown, NSW.

My father didn't have a picture of his grandfather so put me on to his cousin whose father, Kelly Erickson, had gone looking for Stan back in the 1950s. What came back to me was not a photograph of Stan - it seems nobody has one - but instead a photograph of Stanley's in-laws, the Martins, and some scans from the Martin family Bible.

Bridget and Robert Martin

As far as my grandmother knew her maternal grandmother Bridget MARTIN née RYAN had been born in Edinburgh around 1854. Bridget's father was a 'Ryan' while her mother was a 'McQueen' but try as I did I could find no record of her birth. Even a visit to the former General Register Office for Scotland at New Register House was no help. I also drew a blank on any record of Bridget Ryan's parents' marriage.

I had similar problems with my grandmother's maternal grandfather. According to his death certificate Robert Thomas MARTIN was the son of John MARTIN and Elizabeth HART, born circa 1854 in Swindon, Wiltshire. He had travelled out to Australia when he was about 21 years old. Unfortunately I couldn't find a birth record or any census records for his time in England. My hopes were raised when a visit to St Catherine's house in Aldwych (we are going back some years now) uncovered the following index record "Wellingborough [NORTHANTS], volume 15 page 857" for the 4th quarter of 1856. Under this index record of married

persons were 10 names, two of which were a John Martin and Elizabeth Hart. That was easy I thought and I wrote off to the registry office for the certificate.

I was more than a little surprised when the reply came back that while I had got the index right and both John and Elizabeth appeared on the page they were not recorded as marrying each other. I was gobsmacked to say the least and this played on my mind for a while before it got too much for me and I wrote off again requesting the supposedly separate record of marriages for John and Elizabeth and what was returned to me was in fact two certificates, one recording the marriage of John Martin and Sarah Leach and the other recording the marriage of Elizabeth Hart and George Barron. And that is pretty much where things have been for the last two decades until I received a copy of the Martin family Bible page of deaths.

The Martin Family Bible

The family bible records an 1887 death of a Bernard RYAN, drowned, presumably in NSW, and the 1891 death in England of Elizabeth BARRETT. Who were these people? I had always assumed Bridget had immigrated to Australia as an adult. I was not aware there were any other of her Ryans in the country.

It was not difficult from this point to get the record of Bernard's death and confirm his parents as John RYAN and Margaret MALONE. Bernard belonged to a family of Ryans who have been well researched and appear in a number of ancestry.com trees.

In going back through my records I was surprised to discover I had never acquired a copy of Bridget's death certificate. If I had I would have known some time ago that her mother's maiden name was Malone and not McQueen [or McEwan] as I had been led to believe. Bridget was the eldest of the Ryan children and the only one born in Scotland before she and her parents emigrated soon after her birth. Bernard was her younger brother; her husband, Robert Martin is recorded as one of the witnesses to his burial.

Many of the Ryan family trees knew there was a daughter named Bridget but they did not appear to know what became of her. They do now. I've still not found a record of Bridget's 1854 birth but I do have a record of her parent's marriage at Channelkirk, Berwickshire on 17 January 1853.

Shedding day-light on an old problem – Robert Martin's parents

Working out who Elizabeth Barrett was proved a little more convoluted. Robert Thomas Martin's 1929 death certificate records he was 75 years of age at death, that he was born in Swindon, Wiltshire and that he had been in NSW 54 years. It also records his mother as Elizabeth Hart.

The death certificate for the Elizabeth Barrett, listed in the Martin family Bible as having died in England, 23 August 1891, records she was the wife of John BARRETT and lived at 35 Newport Street, Swindon. She was 60 years old at death. Elizabeth was buried at Christ Church, Swindon on 26 August 1891.

The 1891 English census records the following family living at 35 Newport Street - John Barrett, Elizabeth Barrett, his wife, and a son named Benjamin DAY, 16 years of age. Ten years earlier the 1881 census records the same family at Number 51 plus another son, Charles Fred DAY.

John Barrett had married Elizabeth in 1880; they were both widowed. Elizabeth's name was given as Elizabeth DAY and her father was recorded as Thomas HART. Therefore, Elizabeth's maiden name was *Hart*.

The only logical conclusion then for why this woman's death was recorded in the Martin family Bible is that she was Elizabeth Hart, mother of Robert Thomas Martin as recorded in his 1929 death certificate.

However, Elizabeth Barrett née Hart does not appear to have had a son named Robert Thomas Martin. She did have 9 children with her first husband, John DAY, between 1847 and 1864⁴. Clearly there was little scope for her to have also had a child with a John 'MARTIN' in 1854.

On the same day that Robert Thomas Martin was born, recorded in the family bible as 10 February 1854, Elizabeth Hart, Mrs Day gave birth to Thomas DAY at Swindon, Wiltshire. Robert must therefore be this child and at some point, probably when in Australia, Thomas Day changed his name to Robert Thomas Martin⁵.

So, my great grandfather Stanley John Erickson became Stanley Howard and my x2 great grandfather Robert Thomas Martin was really Thomas Day. I'm still not sure where the name McEwan fits in. perhaps it is a confusion with Bridget's maternal grandmother's maiden name McHue. It isn't that much of a stretch to get from McHue to McHue-En. In the similar way that McEwan seems to have morphed into Mc-Que-En/McQueen.

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Further details on the above findings and specific references can be found on my Palmer Rogers family tree on ancestry.com. My user name is gatp63. A tree showing the relationships between the people referred to above is found below.

⁴ The eagle eyed amongst you will have clocked that Elizabeth's son Benjamin Day was born around 1875. He was not however John Day's son, John having died in 1872. No father is given for Benjamin in either his birth or baptism records.

⁵ There are other points of similarity between Thomas and Robert. Robert's father was recorded at his death as John Martin, carpenter while Thomas' father was John Day, carpenter and joiner.

