

DOWN MEMORY LANE:

Some reflections on Ebenezer & Eliza Hastwell and some of their descendants

The late Claire Hastwell was a teacher and a story-teller, and her subjects were her grandparents **Ebenezer Hastwell**, born 25th May 1845 in Blackfriars Road, London. The family is fortunate that Claire was inspired to write something of her memoirs which keep the links alive between us in the 21st century and that long-ago Ebenezer in the 19th.

As a little boy of eight years, Ebenezer along with his parents James and Mary Ann Hastwell (nee Adshead) (about two months' pregnant), oldest brother James, 10, and his two younger brothers John, 6 and Edward 3, boarded the sailing ship *Cotfield* which departed Bristol on 1st August 1853 bound for South Australia.

Only a few weeks before sailing the children were still recovering from what was probably whooping cough. But Ebenezer's little sister never got to make the voyage. How much did Ebenezer understand of baby Mary Ann's death from "*dentition and persistent cough*", and the grief of his parents? The little girl's death was, her father wrote, "*deeply deplored by us*". Instead of being able to bring their youngest child to a new life in a new country, they had to leave her behind, buried in Bristol's "*Gideon's ground*".

That we know these things is due only to Ebenezer's father James having kept a journal. He detailed in careful handwriting everything he saw of importance to his social mores and his family that happened before, during and for a little while after the momentous journey. I can see him, no doubt in cramped quarters on board, perhaps lit by a swinging lantern as the little three-masted 604 ton barque at times groaned, pitched and rolled through heavy seas.



Page from James Hastwell's journal

James agonised over the inadequate provisions supplied. With almost a month left of the voyage it is easy to see the importance of provisions to him in his terse entry "*Nov 8 – Harry the steward boy fell overboard and last meat gone.*" Ever economical, James was to use spare pages in the journal as a ledger in the general stores he would later acquire.

The children's bachelor uncle, James' 23 year old brother Edward John Hastwell, also came with the family. Perhaps it was as well they escaped England, for a cholera epidemic took the lives of over ten thousand Londoners that year.

Within a couple of months of arrival in the new homeland Ebenezer would once more have been aware of his mother's sorrow when his new-born sister - again named Mary Ann – survived only one day. She was buried in the North Road Cemetery. We can only surmise the cause of death. What had it been like aboard the *Cotfield* for James' wife, scarcely mentioned in his journal? She had to look after four boisterous boys aged from three to ten, while suffering pregnancy with a lack of appropriate nutrition on the hazardous four month voyage.

Four years later, just two days before Christmas in 1857, Ebenezer lost the youngest of his brothers born in England. Seven year old Edward was laid to rest in the Kensington Pioneer Cemetery, now a park. Again, we do not know the cause of the young boy's death, whether from accident or illness. But statements in the link https://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/fms/archaeology_files/dig_library/directed_studies/Bower_Directed%20Study_2008.pdf to a South Australian study by Emily Bower in 2008 could give us a clue - *“Access to fresh, clean water became a major issue for health in the 1850s (Smith 1973), as did hygiene, with the lack of deep drainage for sewage and waste, only recognised in the 1890s. Until then ... backyard cesspits and creek dumping of waste products were common and contributed to the problem of toxic soil saturation (Blackburn 1970:76)”*

Whatever the cause of their son's death on the 23rd December, Christmas Day 1857 must have been anything but happy for the family.

However the other Hastwell boys and their father, and many of their descendants thrived and prospered in various ways. They were destined to become merchants and storekeepers, teachers, postmasters, bakers, business entrepreneurs, artists and agents. It seems a far cry from generations of Hastwell glass-cutters in London, but some of those multi-faceted cut-glass items were handed down from James as family heirlooms. One set of a beautiful salad bowl and servers was a wedding gift to Ebenezer Hastwell when he married Eliza Brooke on 9th April 1871 at her parents' home in South Terrace Adelaide. Other Hastwell-cut glass heirlooms include condiment cruets and butter and jam dishes.



Hastwell cut-glass

James Stanley Hastwell was the second of Ebenezer and Eliza's seven children. He was born at Mallala, north of Adelaide on 4th July 1873.

James and three of his five brothers - Hubert, Arthur and Walter - were educated at Pulteney Grammar School in Adelaide first established in 1847 by the Church of England.

At the comparatively late age of 41 James Stanley married Metta Amanda Ivy Miller, of Danish descent. She was always known as Ivy. They were wed in the Holder Memorial Methodist Church, Mile End South Australia on 1st July 1914 on the brink of the outbreak of WW1. The couple were to be blessed with three children.

Ivy Nell (known as Nell) Hastwell was born 30th April 1915. Her sister Nita Claire (known as Claire) Hastwell was born on 28th June 1918 in Woodville, South Australia, as the protracted WW1 was drawing to its close. Five years after Claire was born her baby brother **Harry Frith Hastwell** arrived on an unforgettable birth date - New Year's Day 1923.



Nell and Claire Hastwell

Claire tells in her memoirs how her Grandpa was a little less than 5 feet in height –only about 150cm tall. Ebenezer was a baker (among other occupations) but Claire wrote in her recollections:

“I doubt if Grandpa was ever a baker himself as I doubt if he would have been tall enough to mix the dough in the deep trough. He probably employed a baker, but he saw that his boys learnt the trade.”

“I remember my Hastwell grandparents well, although they were old when I was born. He was 73 and she was 69. Their children called them Mater and Pater.”

The boys born to Ebenezer and Eliza were - in order - Hubert Henry, James Stanley, Arthur, Walter, Frederick and Robert Charles. The only girl was Winifred; with six sons, perhaps Eliza was glad of a daughter's arrival in her male-dominated world! Sadly, Winifred died from tuberculosis of the hip in her early twenties.

When Claire knew her grandfather Ebenezer *“he was bald with white hair over his ears and back of his head. Always well groomed and dressed in a style long past. He wore a bowler hat, and had stiff fronted shirt and collar and small bow tie. In summer he wore a pith helmet.”*

“Can't remember Grandma in anything but black. She wore a lace blouse – always white and a high necked boned “collar” to her chin. Her skirts were long, reaching her shoes which were buttoned over her ankles something like boots. I don't know where they could have bought these clothes, as no one else wore them. Grandma had “spectacles” – nothing as common as glasses – for reading. These she kept in a “spectacle” case which she opened at the top and which she attached to her belt by a medallion clip and two little chains.”

“Neither Grandma nor Grandpa had much warmth – she was very severe and ramrod straight and dominated her family – especially Ebby. She, of course, never called him this – I can't remember her addressing him by name at all.”

“They placed great store on good manners and we were always on our very best behaviour when Grandma and Grandpa Hastwell came to visit us. They did the rounds of their sons – and once a month they came to “tea” with us at Statenborough Street, which was a time of tension and pleasure for me. Tension because I feared that I would be the one asked to say ‘Grace’, or that I might spill something or do something to disgrace the family. The pleasure was the story that followed tea ...she would sit on a cane chair on the right of the fireplace with its wood fire burning while I sat in my little cane chair by her side. The story was a continuous saga from the Billabong series by Mary Grant Bruce. I knew exactly where Grandma had stopped in the story and would give a resume of the previous month's episode, for her to pick up from where she had stopped.”

“Grandma was a recognised authority on Homeopathic medicines and in her younger days people in her area sought her advice. She passed her knowledge onto her sons.”

After Eliza died in 1930, Ebenezer went to live with the family at Tantanoola in the South East of South Australia for three or four months. Claire recalled *“This was a trying time for us as we were crowded in a 4 roomed house and he was so irritating I expect he was just trying to be friendly, but didn't know how to treat and talk to children. He used to pat Harry, aged 7 on the head and pull my plaits. And we had to smile and not get cross ... I have a mental picture of him in his Victorian clothes, with a*

book under his arm and a cushion walking to the Tantanoola Oval where he would sit under the pines and read.”



Harry & Jean Hastwell after wedding

Young Harry grew up and married Jean Rosetta Lewis on 4 March 1944. Their children were a daughter **Robyn** and two sons **Mark** and **Peter**; these three were Claire and Nell Hastwell’s niece and nephews. Robyn said “Dad [Harry Frith Hastwell] wrote in his “Reflections” that James and Ivy and the children moved to Tantanoola when Harry was six years old, so that would have been in 1930 when the Great Depression was near its worst.”

“James Stanley Hastwell had been employed by the State Government Public Stores Department (State Supply) as a storeman or clerk. The State Government of the day was flat broke and declared a 10% salary cut for all government employees. With a wife and three children to support, he thought it was better to resign and return to the old family trade of baker. Hence the move to Tantanoola where a business was available. The family was at Tantanoola at the time of the discovery of the caves and the Tantanoola Tiger. Ivy had lived at “Tanta” as a child as her father had been the schoolmaster.”

Robyn wrote “[They] only lived there for 3 years but they were formative years in Dad’s life. They then moved to Murray Bridge for 18 months. [They] returned to [their] city home at 12 Statenborough St, Knightsbridge (Leabrook). James Stanley Hastwell could not get permanent work but took anything that came along – Gepps Cross Abattoirs, gardening, camp cook at shearing time on sheep stations up north and the family would not see him for months at a time.

“When no work [was] to be had, the family had to accept ‘public relief’ and receive rations. In Dad’s

writings, James Stanley comes across as a loving father who was extremely hard working and well respected. Much attention was paid to table manners. He always seemed an elderly man to my father, as he (James) was 50 when Dad (Harry) was born. He died when Dad was 18. He was much loved by the children who had a happy childhood. He was always called Father.”



James Stanley Hastwell (right) at Murray Bridge

On 23rd December 1930 it was reported in the South Eastern Times (Millicent) (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/201003921>) that Nell Hastwell had come third in the second term of her Intermediate year at Millicent High School, evidently no mean feat given the financial difficulties of the Depression which, according to the article, had checked the development of the school.

Nell’s academic skills had her well on her path to becoming a nursing sister.

Meanwhile, the *Border Watch* of Christmas Eve 1931 reported in some detail on page 3 “a nasty accident” under the headline “Car Overturns – Tantanoola Resident and Children Injured”. (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/77958465>) The report stated:

“When returning from Glencoe about midday on Wednesday Mr James Hastwell baker and storekeeper of Tantanoola, who was accompanied by his son and daughter Harry and Claire, met with a nasty accident, which might have had more serious consequences. The car was descending the Glencoe hill on the Tantanoola side when a back tyre blew out, throwing the vehicle on its side and precipitating the occupants on to the roadway.”

“A passing tourist car was immediately on the scene, and the occupants of the overturned car were taken to Tantanoola. Dr Salts was called from Millicent, and an examination showed that the girl’s arm was fractured near the elbow. She also received nasty cuts and abrasions about the head and face. The little boy, Harry, also sustained cuts about the face and head, while Mr Hastwell escaped with minor abrasions and shock. Mr. A. McAdam, the postmaster at Tantanoola and a party of local men went to the scene of the accident, and after making adjustments were able to drive the damaged car into Tantanoola under its own power, a broken windscreen and hood being the chief damage. The patients are progressing as well as can be expected at their home, but it is understood that Claire will be taken to the Millicent Hospital.”

Robyn wrote *“The article about the car accident refers to the time when they went to Glencoe to look for mistletoe on Christmas Eve and were going quite slowly. Dad noted in his writings that Father (James Stanley) suffered a crushed chest. Claire was 13 and Harry 8 at the time. Cuts and abrasions were from the broken windscreen.”*

Harry, reflecting on his life some 65 years later, recalled that Claire’s arm had been broken in the accident, no doubt the reason why she was taken to hospital. Christmas 1931 would have been one long-remembered by the family.

The *South Eastern Times* of 5th January the following year gave the results of the Qualifying Certificate exams at Tantanoola School. The head teacher, Mr C. C. Harrison, had seven students presented and passed. Five of those were awarded Government Exhibitions. Young Claire Hastwell’s name topped the list of five with 662 marks.



Metta Amanda Ivy Miller

It was almost inevitable that the gifted Claire would later become a teacher, thus continuing something of a generational family tradition. Her maternal grandfather, J. L. Miller was a teacher, her mother Metta Amanda Ivy Hastwell (nee Miller) was a teacher before marriage, and then Claire, who carried the distinction of becoming the first female school principal in South Australia. Her niece Robyn was a specialist teacher working with the hearing-impaired and one of Robyn’s sons is a sports coach, thus making five generations of teachers.

Nell Hastwell who in 1936 worked and trained at the Mt Gambier Hospital, passed third in order of merit in the October final nursing examinations in Adelaide



Harry and Claire with arm in sling and head bandaged

(<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/132033718>). She enjoyed a break at the end of the year, spending the last week of her three weeks' holidays at her friend and fellow trainee's parents' home at "Sunnydale" in Strathalbyn. Her friend Anne returned then to Mount Gambier Hospital to continue her training, while newly-qualified "Sister Hastwell" left Strathalbyn in January 1937 to return to her home at Knightsbridge.

In July 1940 Sister Nell Hastwell enjoyed another brief holiday in Mount Gambier as the guest of Dr and Mrs J.R.L. Willis, according to the *Border Watch*. Nell had accepted a nursing appointment at St Neot's Hospital in that town.

The *Border Watch* (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/78159558>) reported in 1944 in their Social Notes that "Sister Hastwell, of Adelaide, and Miss Claire Hastwell, school teacher Tanunda, after spending a few days at Tantanoola, left on Monday for Mount Gambier, where they intend to spend a few days sightseeing before returning to their duties." Later that January while in Mount Gambier staying at Gifford's Hotel, the two sisters had the company of their aunt, Mrs. R. O. Miller who was visiting from Hobart, Tasmania. She had come to the mainland on an extended tour to visit members of her family.



Nell, Harry and Claire Hastwell, about 1941

Harry Frith Hastwell, the only son of James and Ivy, on his own admission had "loathed" school. As a little boy he first attended Marryatville School. After he and his family moved to the South-East for three years, and then to Murray Bridge for about 18 months, they eventually returned to Adelaide's eastern suburbs. Harry finished his primary education in Grades 6 and 7 back at Marryatville school. He gained his Intermediate Certificate at Norwood District High and went on to begin work in 1938 as a copyboy at "The News", Adelaide's daily afternoon newspaper.



Harry Frith Hastwell

Harry enlisted in the Army in 1941 and part of his service was in the Dental Corps as a dental mechanic. After the war he returned to "The News" and continued up the rungs of the ladder in a career that saw him later become a company director and media representative for his own business. By 1982 Hastwell Media celebrated some 30 years in advertising, print and television media and allied fields during a time of great change in technology. He had also been able to set his own sons on the roads to their respective careers. So much for the boy who hated school!

Unlike Harry, neither Nell nor Claire ever married, but both ladies pursued their long and successful careers in nursing and teaching. They are remembered with great fondness by their niece Robyn Upton, formerly Trapp (nee Hastwell) who sent much of the above material to me. Robyn and her brothers Mark and Peter are the children of Harry and Jean (nee Lewis).



In a terrible tragedy – I was with my late mother Pearl Clark (nee Hastwell) when she received the phone call about her second cousins from another family member



Claire, Harry and Nell Hastwell on Harry's 70th birthday, 1 January 1993

– the good ladies' lives were cut short on 3rd August 1996. Both Nell and Claire were killed when a semi-trailer ploughed into the Toyota sedan Claire was driving on the Sturt Highway near Blanchetown. Claire was killed instantly; Nell died from her injuries three days later in the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Nell was 81 years old, Claire 78. Another unrelated family were also victims of this crash.

In December of that year Harry, who had been devoted to his sisters, also died.

So the years go on, 163 years down the track from when 8 year old Ebenezer boarded the *Cotfield*. I wonder if he looked in awe and excitement at the sailing ship, or was he aware only of confusion, a babble of noise, strange smells, salt-laden air, creaking timber and just perhaps the need to stay close to his mother? Certainly the little boy had no idea of his future role in the expansion of the Hastwell family in South Australia. From James, to Ebenezer, to James Stanley, to Harry Frith Hastwell, and now through descendants of Harry's children Robyn, Mark and Peter, it has been a great and continuing journey!

*By Wendy Baker, August 2016 in collaboration with: -
Robyn Meredith Upton & Peter Kingsley Hastwell
and with extracts from: -
"Recollections of Claire Hastwell"
"Reflections of Harry Frith Hastwell"
"The Hastwell Family History in S.A." - Sydney J. Hastwell
1993
and oral history from Pearl Clark (nee Hastwell)*

