

WHO WAS MY GRANDPA HASTWELL? – by Wendy Baker ©2022

I know the facts ... Albert John Hastwell was born on 29th June 1886 to my great-grandparents William Henry Hastwell and his wife Mary Ann (nee Johnson). And his youthful death from pneumonia on New Year's Day, 1922 ensured that it could never be forgotten.

My grandmother Gladys Gwendoline was left alone with a mortgage, 7 year old Walter Colin Albert, 5 year old Doreen Gwendoline, 18-1/2 month old toddler Pearl Aileen and the uncomfortable pregnancy of the twin daughters who would be born only six weeks after Albert's death.

But what of Albert's childhood, I wonder? I know he was the sixth child of his parents. Starting in September 1879 their first child was daughter Annie Eliza, followed by Louisa Frances; soon came Henry William, Ernest Alexander and Edward Frederick. So when Albert was born there were already a 7 year old, a 5 year old, a 4 year old, a 3 year old and a 2 year old. Only fourteen months after Albert's birth came Walter Thomas, then two years later Raymond, Mildred Winifred, Lillian Dungate, Rupert Howard, Hilda Flinders and finally the last and 13th, Frank Maurice in 1899. Large families were not unremarkable in those days but what possibly is remarkable is that there do not appear to have been any stillbirths or premature childhood deaths.

William was a saddler by trade and at one point resided in North Adelaide. He himself had been the last born (and the only Australian born) child of James and Mary Ann Hastwell who immigrated to this state in 1853. At the time Albert was born in 1886, his father was a saddler in Houghton.

And there the trail stops. Where did little Albert go to school? Was he called Albert? Or John? Or Bert, Bertie, Alby ... what chance was there in his mother's family-rearing program for him to have any nurturing by his mum? Did he go to secondary school?

The next event that I know of for sure in Albert's life was the sending of a studio photograph of him to his prospective in-laws in Broken Hill.

How did he meet Gladys Gwendoline Davies? At the time of their marriage in Wellington Square Methodist Church, North Adelaide, she lived in Semaphore and he in Ovingham. Her sister Edrie of Birkenhead was one witness and the other was Mr Victor Buxton, Albert's best man and his brother Arthur Buxton was groomsman. Victor was a draper who resided in Ovingham. Albert and Gladys tied the knot at 2.30 in the afternoon on 7th November, 1914, just a few months after World War 1 began. Invited guests enjoyed a reception afterwards in the Lecture Hall.

Albert's father lived in Queen Street Norwood, where he conducted his business as saddler, at the time of the wedding. Gladys' parents lived at 101 Margaret Street, North Adelaide. Gladys was the eldest daughter of Thomas Davies; her mother had died from pneumonia leaving 7 year old Gladys and her two younger siblings in their mourning father's care. After 18 months Thomas married Mary Ann Drought and the three little girls soon found themselves with seven half-brothers and sisters. Two of the girls, Stella and Nita, were Gladys' bridesmaids.

It seems that Albert had a home built for him and his bride before they married, because the address in the newspaper announcement of their marriage was given as "Dungate" West Street, Brompton. How I wish I had taken more interest in my family's history when I was younger – my grandfather's home was demolished long after I was married but before I knew of its existence. It is more than fortunate that we have a photograph of the house in its prime as well as the original specification that Albert wrote for its building.

The name “Dungate” remains a mystery to me. It was important enough to the Hastwell family for Albert’s sister Lillian to bear it as her middle name at her christening. It was important enough that my grandmother Gladys, in the course of time, would have it removed from her Brompton home and take it half way across Australia when she moved to a new home. But its relevance to the Hastwell family escapes me.

Albert and Gladys settled into married life in Brompton and undoubtedly looked forward to beginning a family. My uncle Collin (Walter Collin Albert Hastwell) was their first child, arriving on the 11th October 1915.

Their second baby, a little girl, born at home on the 14th October 1916, was stillborn. I can only imagine the emotions behind the sad little notice in the National Library’s records on Trove newspapers under ‘Births’: “*Hastwell – On the 14th October, 1916 at Dungate, West Street, Brompton, to Mr and Mrs A.J. Hastwell, a daughter (stillborn).*” Knowing something of what would have been Gladys’ pragmatic Welsh background inherited from her father Thomas, and from what I knew of her in later life, I imagine that my grandmother would most likely have suffered the loss of her first daughter in grim resignation, suffering in silence. Certainly there has never been any mention whatever in the family of this lost baby, but I was able to verify it when I found the Hindmarsh Cemetery Records 1846-1987.

Doreen Gwendoline was born on 5th December 1917 and must have been like a wonderful Christmas gift.

My grandfather was something of an amateur artist. My mother, Pearl, remembered a pencil sketch that Albert drew of a wife and children waiting on a beach for their returning fisherman husband and father. I have another of his pencil sketches, entitled “Impudent Hussies”, signed by him.

The Hastwells have apparently always been able to stand up for themselves and Albert was no exception. In the local court, before Mr S Mitchell SM, it was noted in *The Register* of 11th April 1918 that “*Albert John Hastwell of Brompton, sued Dennis Naughton, of North Adelaide, for 19 guineas damages in respect to injuries sustained in an alleged assault while plaintiff was in his sulky. Mr F.G. Hicks appeared for the plaintiff and Mr C.J. Coventry for the defendant, who counter-claimed a similar amount for alleged negligent driving, resulting in the plaintiff’s vehicle striking him. Evidence was given for the prosecution by the plaintiff and Frederick W. Plate, and for the defence by Dr Napier and the defendant. The plaintiff was awarded three pounds on the claim, and the counter claim was non-suited.*”

In *The Express and Telegraph* of 10th April, the account of the “alleged assault” was a little more expansive. It paints quite a picture of the whole incident. According to Mr Hicks (for the plaintiff), “*on March 1 the defendant ran to catch tramcar at the intersection of Kermode and John streets, North Adelaide. The plaintiff was driving a pony and sulky and warned the defendant to get out of the way. When Naughton reached the [tram]car he tried to dash in front of Hastwell’s pony, and then changed his mind. The plaintiff avoided him and drove on.*”

Albert must have thought that having managed to avoid Naughton, all was now well.

But ... “*at North Terrace Naughton left the [tram]car and pulled up the plaintiff’s pony with a jerk.*” Albert would possibly not have foreseen this and the shock of being pulled up in this way prompted him to say “*You appear to be doomed to be run over.*” At which Naughton “*struck him a heavy blow*

on his head, and remarked "You tried to run over me, and it is not your fault that you did not do so." What a strange thing to say! While Albert had claimed the 19 guineas for Naughton's "alleged assault" on his person, Naughton tried counter-claiming a similar amount for "*alleged negligent driving and for injuries sustained by the plaintiff's sulky striking him.*"

It is possible of course that both parties felt mutually aggrieved by the incident and embroidered their respective accounts just a little! As stated earlier on, "the counter-claim was non-suited" and Albert received a mere three guineas for his trouble, so I imagine neither party would have been too pleased at the outcome.

The Sands & McDougall Directory of 1919 records Albert John Hastwell as an Insurance Agent of West Street, (between Fourth Street & Torrens Road) Brompton.

Time moved on and the next baby born to my grandparents was Pearl Aileen on the 23rd April 1920, a baby sister for Walter Collin Albert and Doreen Gwendoline. In 1921 my grandmother was again pregnant; did she know then that she would give birth to twin daughters? The young family was growing, they had their home, Albert's business with the shop, and all must have seemed good in their lives.

That was until, unexpectedly, Albert died on 1st January, 1922. Pneumonia ... it had killed Gladys' birth mother at the early age of 35 years. Now in a sad twist of fate pneumonia killed her husband at the age of 35 years. What a terrible beginning to my grandmother's New Year. The Register of 3rd January carried the announcement of his death – "*Hastwell. On the 1st January, Albert John, the beloved husband of Gladys G. Hastwell, of West Street Brompton, aged 35 years. Leaving a sorrowful wife and three children, to mourn their loss. Safe in God's keeping.*"

I discovered a "*Letter of Administration*" printed on page 9 of *The Mail* (Adelaide) on 25 February, 1922, for a sum of one thousand pounds. Such a letter was a "*grant of authority authorising a person to administer an intestate estate*", or where a will could not be found...

It hardly bears contemplation – suddenly widowed, left with three children under 8 - and only 25 days after her husband's death, twin daughters were born, giving Gladys 5 children under 8. The family story was that she was under the impression that their home was paid for, but it was not so. The financial troubles and looking after the children must have left my grandmother reeling.

As family members do so often, two stepped in to ease Gladys' burden. An "aunt" (never specified but always there in family stories) offered to look after five year old Doreen for a couple of weeks. And Gladys' sister Edrie, married to Justus Williams but childless, offered – indeed almost begged, it has been said, to look after toddler Pearl "until you're on your feet".

Young Doreen, after about a week, announced to her aunt that she wanted to go back home and "help mummy look after the babies" and so she returned home to "Dungate". My mother Pearl, just a toddler, had no voice to protest when her aunt Edrie begged Gladys to let her have Pearl "a little bit longer". The "little bit longer" became Pearl's entire childhood and adolescence and in Mum's old age that separation from her mother returned to haunt her. If her uncle had been a kind and gentle father-figure, her feelings may have been different, but he was not, and of him she harboured bitter memories.

In the days when insurance agents called at their clients' homes to collect the premiums in cash when due, Jesse Carlton was one such agent who called regularly on my grandmother. In 1925, three years

after Albert's death, she married Jesse. One could speculate on the point that both Albert and Jesse were insurance agents!

The family, without Pearl, moved to Melbourne – apparently Jesse had business interests in that state. Later, Gladys tried to coax Pearl to go and live with her, and after young Doreen died from meningitis, she even wrote to Pearl and said that she could play with Doreen's doll. The pleas fell on deaf ears; Mum loved Auntie Edrie and although she never called her "mum" she regarded her as her mother. A solicitor to whom Gladys wrote seeking help advised her that it was better for all concerned to leave Pearl with Edrie.

Pearl grew up without her birth mother, (and with only very occasional visits by her siblings when she was in her teens) and with no tangible keepsake of a father she never knew. The only thing she ever wished for as an adult was that pencil sketch he had drawn of the woman and children on the beach. It would have meant so much to Mum, but it was never given to her. And it followed of course that neither my sister nor I knew our grandfather on that side of the family.

Albert John Hastwell was buried on the 3rd January 1922 in West Terrace Cemetery, Adelaide, in Section - Plan 3, Row number 26, site number 88. When I searched for my grandfather's grave, I found only a simple granite headstone resting on someone else's grave. Even the site itself does not seem distinct. It seems sad, but then, why would Gran's second husband have wanted to bother with caring for her first husband's grave from 500 miles away?

But my twin spinster great-aunts Daphne and Joy Hastwell cared enough to have a Loving Remembrance card in honour of their father with the following verse:

*"Peaceful be thy silent slumber,
Peaceful in thy grave so low;
Thou no more wilt join our number,
Thou no more or song will know;
Yet again we hope to meet thee,
When the day of life is fled;
And in heaven with joy to greet thee,
Where no farewell tears are shed."*

