

OUR EAGLEHAWK CONNECTIONS:

THE MASON, PARKER, DIXON, SINDEN AND MARSHALL FAMILIES

In 1852 John and Elizabeth PARKER and their five children emigrated from Kent to Melbourne on the Bombay, as assisted migrants. By 1857 they were at Campbell's Creek, farming. In that year their eldest daughter Elizabeth married Peter Henderson DON, a storekeeper at Diamond Gully, Campbell's Creek. Two years later, their other daughter Sarah Rebecca, aged 15, married James MASON in Christ Church Castlemaine, on 26 December 1860. Elizabeth and Peter Don were their witnesses. James had left his family in Sydney (having emigrated to Sydney from Aberdeen in 1833) and was gold mining at Campbells Creek.

The first child of James and Sarah Rebecca Mason, named Francis, was born at Campbells Creek on 21 November 1861. Two daughters were also born at Campbells Creek, Sarah Rebecca in 1864 and Elizabeth in 1866. Elizabeth died there in the following year. Sarah's birth certificate indicates that before her birth the family had moved to Daylesford where James was recorded as working as a blacksmith. Sarah Rebecca returned home to her mother at Campbells Creek for her confinement. Elizabeth's 1866 birth certificate indicates the whole family had returned to Campbells Creek, with James still recorded as a blacksmith.

In 1868 James and Sarah Rebecca Mason and their two children Francis and Sarah Rebecca moved to Creswick where two more daughter were born. (Elizabeth Phillips 1868 - 1869) and Elizabeth Anne (1870 - ?). James was working as a blacksmith. Meanwhile the Parkers had remained at Campbells Creek, with John recorded in the directories as being a brick layer of Ten Foot Hill. (Sand Directories 1867 and 1872-3)

At some time between the birth of Elizabeth Anne (27 May 1870) and the death of the child Sarah Rebecca (16 January 1872) the Mason family moved to Eaglehawk, to American Gully, where James had employment as a gold miner. Sarah Rebecca died there aged 7 years, from heart disease and enlarged kidneys and liver. She was buried at Eaglehawk cemetery in the Anglican monumental section A, plot number 204. Her funeral was conducted by the Rev J Carlyle.

At about the time of Sarah Rebecca's death her grandparents John and Elizabeth PARKER, also moved to Eaglehawk where John also gained employment as a gold miner. Their address in 1876 was California Gully. Presumably either John Parker or his son-in law James Mason found mining work in Eaglehawk and arranged similar employment for the other.

In 1873 James and Sarah Mason had a stillborn son and he was buried with his sister Sarah Rebecca at Eaglehawk cemetery.

It may have been at about this time that the lives of the Parkers and Masons became intermeshed with the lives of the Dixons of California Gully. William Dixon, a pitman of Northumberland had been recruited in England to manage a mine at Eaglehawk and arrived circa 1857, without his family. His wife Jane and three children (John Thornton, George and Elizabeth) arrived on the Great Britain in 1863. Two more children were born at Eaglehawk: Mary (28 March 1864) and Jane Ann (3 July 1866).

The Dixons were Primitive Methodists and the Parkers and Masons had been Anglicans so it was unlikely that they met through church, a major social venue in those days. Two possibilities are that the Parkers and Dixons might have been neighbours, with both families living on Upper California Gully Road, or they may have met through employment at the same mine. The only grounds for establishing that their lives were intertwined by 1876 is through the naming of the first child of John Thornton DIXON, William Mason Dixon, born circa 1875. John had married Elizabeth Cunningham at Ironbark in 1873 and William was their first child. (John's brother George married Jessie Watson in 1875 in California Gully.)

1876 was not a good year for these families. First William Dixon died from pneumonia aged 51, on 28 March 1876. He was buried at Eaglehawk cemetery in Section L plot number 1, following a Primitive Methodist funeral conducted by the Rev Frederick Sinden. Tragically, William left a specific legacy of fifty pounds to his first grandchild, William Mason Dixon, unaware that his grandson would share his grave only a few months later. The remainder of William Dixon's estate was left to his wife Jane for her lifetime and then to his children. William had done reasonably well as he left real estate of four hundred and sixty four pounds and personal property worth one hundred and twenty three pounds. A Robert Thornton played a role in the making of the will the day before William Dixon died. A Robert Thornton came to Australia on the same voyage of the Great Britain as Jane Dixon and children. Who was this Robert Thornton and whatever happened to him. (And if he was Jane Dixon's brother then what happened to his own family in Northumberland?)

Then on 17 September 1876, John Parker died aged 55. His cause of death cannot be read but appears to be a "mining" disease. Surprisingly he was buried by a Bible Christian Minister, in Eaglehawk cemetery, in Section A2 plot 117.

There was one other Eaglehawk death in 1876 which was later to be of interest to these families. That was Jane Marshall, the wife of Robert Marshall. She was buried at Eaglehawk cemetery on 31 March 1876, in the same plot (Section F plot number 98) as her baby boy who had been buried the previous year. (Her death certificate has not yet been seen).

The following year, in April 1877 there was another death which was to prove of interest to the families. This was the death of Jane Ann nee Engleby, who had married the Rev Frederick Sinden in 1870. Three children survived her, a baby daughter had died the previous year. Her death and burial details have not yet been obtained.

In 1878, on 12th April, the Rev Frederick Sinden, aged 35, married Elizabeth Dixon, aged 21 at California Hill (possibly at the residence of the bride). The marriage was celebrated by Charles Anthony and the two witnesses were Robert Marshall (presumably the man who had lost his wife the previous year) and Jane Dixon, the bride's mother.

In about 1878 James Mason and his family moved from Eaglehawk to Echuca where Sarah Rebecca (the wife of James) died in 1880.

1881 proved to be another dramatic year for the Eaglehawk families. First John Thornton Dixon, commercial traveller, died on 7 January 1881, to be buried with his father and son in Section L plot 1. (I have the letter which Jane Dixon wrote to Elizabeth and Fred Sinden informing them of the death - it is harrowing!) Next, on 17 October 1881, Elizabeth Parker died in Bendigo and was brought to Eaglehawk for burial with her husband (Section A2 plot 117).

In 1883 Jane Dixon the widow of William Dixon, married Robert Marshall widower and mining manager. The happy couple travelled to Longford Tasmania for the ceremony to be conducted by the very handy Fred Sinden. They were married on 15 January 1883.

Between 1878 and 1883 Francis Mason was training for the ministry in the Bible Christian Church. In 1883 he was appointed to his first circuit: Horsham.

On 15 April 1884 Jane (Dixon) Marshall died from cancer at California Gully. Fred Sinden was at hand to officiate at her funeral and burial in Section L, plot 1, thus rejoining her first husband, first son and first grandson.

On 3 April 1888 Mary Dixon, daughter of William and Jane Dixon, married Francis Mason in North Creswick. The officiating minister was none other than Fred Sinden who had been transferred there. (Francis Mason had been transferred to Ballarat). The one puzzle in this event is the relationship to the Dixons of the marriage witness Edmund Marshall, who married the other witness Clara Copeland later in the same year. Was Edmund a relation of Robert Marshall: and the larger question is: were both or either of the Marshalls relations of William Dixon through his mother's line (his mother was Mary Marshall, born in Bedlington Northumberland).

The final little piece to this tale is the death in 1897 of Robert Marshall, the second husband of Jane Dixon nee Thornton. He was buried with his first wife and baby boy at Eaglehawk cemetery (Section F plot 98).

There is of course more to this tale. William Dixon's cemetery plot was in fact a double plot (plots 1 and 2 in Section L). Later in the same double plot were buried George Dixon, his wife Jessie Watson, Evelyn May Dixon and Robert Dixon. Their story is yet to be researched. The plot has been vandalised but fortunately there is still the headstone for George and Jessie.

Summer 1996 issue of the NDFHS journal. George Bell re-iterated the newspaper claim that the miners were afflicted with gold mania and had rushed to the colonies, totally disregarding their contract to their mine owners in Durham. Mr Bell however failed to reprint the closing paragraph of the original newspaper article which added support to the family myth that William Dixon had been recruited. The closing paragraph stated: "Mr Ord left Durham on Monday morning with 60 emigrants for Australia by the 'Saldanha'. Mr Ord was an agent who had been tasked to find labour for the mines of Victoria. Clearly there were two groups: one was specifically recruited and contracted for employment in the gold mines and the other group was rushing off to the diggings in the "traditional" manner. As a post script to this little excitement: several miners were captured by the police and were returned to their employers to serve out their bonds. Two cousins of William Dixon, Robert and George Marshall emigrated the following year on the Lightning. Unfortunately, according to George Bell, the court records no longer exist to show us whether the Marshall brothers were amongst those captured and returned to their employers.

Whether or not he was a criminal absconder, William Dixon emigrated to Eaglehawk and took up the occupation of quartz miner. Jane and the three children followed in 1863 as unassisted migrants on the Great Britain (voyage number 23), leaving Bristol on 25th January 1863 and arriving in Melbourne 69 days later. Jane was accompanied by her brother Robert Thornton. Two more children were born to William and Jane Dixon in Eaglehawk. Mary, known as Polly, was born on 28th March 1864 and Jane Ann was born on 3rd July 1866.

Eaglehawk Rates Books record William's property: on 30 December 1865 he was granted allotments 53 and 54 Section M Corner of Staley St and Upper California Gully Road, California Gully. On 17th December 1867 he was granted allotments 7, 8 and 9 Section 31 Reserve St and corner of Campbell and Reserve St Eaglehawk. Photographs of William and Jane Dixon and their home are held by a descendant of Harvey Ruck.

It is not yet known when William graduated to the position of mining manager however that occupation is recorded on the marriage certificates of his sons John in 1873 and George in 1875 and then on William's Death Certificate in 1876. According to his Death Notice in the Bendigo Advertiser William Dixon was manager of the Catherine Reef Mine.

Mining managers were not popular people in the 1860s and 1870s in the Bendigo area. They were thought to have more concern for the owners' profits than the safety and health of the miners and scathing reports were written about conditions in the larger mines. William however did not live to see the worst of the conflict, dying of pneumonia after 2 weeks illness on 28th March 1876. He was buried at Eaglehawk Cemetery on 31st March 1876 in plot number 1 Section L (a double family plot) after a funeral conducted by Rev Frederick Sinden, Primitive Methodist.

According to the Probate papers William Dixon left real estate worth four hundred and sixty four pounds and personal estate worth one hundred and twenty three pounds seven shillings and seven pence. He made his Will the day before his death, when he was already declining. He left everything to his dear wife Jane Dixon for her lifetime, then to his children. The witness to the Will was Robert Alexander Thornton. He left one specific legacy: fifty pounds to his grandson William (son of John Thornton Dixon). Sadly, the wealthy young William did not get to spend his inheritance, he died on 26th April 1876, only a few weeks after his grandfather; and he is buried with him.

In 1860 Robert Marshall, William's cousin who had followed him to VIC, had married a girl from Blyth NBL, Jane Todd, also from a mining family, however Jane died in 1876 in Eaglehawk, leaving a son Edmund. The Dixon and Marshall families had been close but became closer when in 1883 Jane Dixon travelled to Longford, Tasmania with Robert Marshall to be married on 15th January by Rev Fred Sinden, Jane's son in law, who had married Jane's daughter Elizabeth in 1878 (see below).

Jane returned to Eaglehawk with her new husband but developed cancer shortly after her marriage and died on 18th April 1884 after 8 months illness. Fred Sinden officiated at her funeral. Robert Marshall remarried and had further children however he retained business connections with the Dixons. He died in 1897 and is buried at Eaglehawk. William and Jane, together with two sons, a daughter in law and three grandchildren are buried together in plot L1/2 at Eaglehawk cemetery.

Edward Marshall Dixon (1826 – 1864) became a pitman, presumably starting as a trapper. He married in South Shields in 1852 however his wife died and he married again, to Elizabeth Robson in September 1863. This marriage too was short lived because Edward was killed in a colliery accident in 1864. He is