

James H Prialux

James Henry Prialux was my great-grandfather who immigrated to New South Wales in 1884 and thus planted the Preeo name in Australia. James was born on 30 May 1865. His parents were Jean Prialux and Nancy Williams. They married in 1853. Jean was born in 1823 and died in 1871. Nancy was born in 1832 and died in 1867.

James was 2 when his mother died and 6 when his father died.

He had a brother named William Nicolas, born in 1861. He died in 1963 aged 102. James had sisters Mary Jane, born 5 December 1856, and Lucy Henriette, born on 19 March 1863.

James and William's grandparents were Jean/John PRIAULX b: 1798 and Catherine RABEY b: 1797.

James' father was a plasterer and his grandfather was a carpenter.

According to the 1881 census, James Prialux lived with James Moon and family (Lucy, wife, and Matilda) after the death of his parents at La Heaumerie, Saints Road, St Peters Port. James Moon was a tailor and James was his apprentice and was James' godfather. Lucy, or Lucie, was Lucy Prialux, his aunt.

Also in the household was John Prialux, a 'former farmer'. John (Jean) was 83. He was James' grandfather. In fact John was listed as a carpenter in the 1841 Census.

There appears to be no entry in the 1871 census under James Prialux, possibly because his father died in that year and James 'fell through the cracks' as an orphan. His mother died in 1867.

James immigrated to New South Wales. He left Portsmouth on the '*Abergeldie*' in December 1883 and arrived in Sydney February 1884. His religion was Church of England in the immigration register and ship's records and had no relatives in the colony. He could read.

One of the more interesting factors in James' emigration was that he left Guernsey in the company of five young men of similar age and class. Australia at the time was a 'working man's paradise' and it had been experiencing a continuous boom since the 1850's. Labour was in short supply and wages were at a level that similar workers in England could not comprehend.

However, Guernsey was gaining in wealth due to the success of the mercantile class and the improvements in agriculture and horticulture and its successful supply of luxury goods to London. Because of this one wonders what was the imperative was for these young men to leave their families and set off across the world.

Certainly James' elder brother, William Nicholas, (1861-1965) profited by this increase in Guernsey's fortune; he stayed on the land after his parents death and was to move back to his ancestral lands in the Forest. He eventually bought Avondale Farm and by 1891 was employing six farm labourers, presumably in horticulture in the burgeoning greenhouse industry. William was evidently an innovator. In 1905 he co-patented an

Apparatus for Growing Crops with the US Patent Office.¹ It is William's ancestors who live in La Geniesse today.

One could surmise, that in James' case, his early orphaning and separation from his immediate family would evoke an independent streak that would only be assuaged by, if not a rebellious, but certainly an adventurist streak. It is unlikely that he would have inherited anything from his parents and would have been looking to better himself elsewhere.

Migration from Guernsey to Australia was in two waves. The majority of immigrants left Guernsey between 1850 and 1855 for Melbourne and Adelaide. The former no doubt urged by the gold rush, the latter to aid the settlement of South Australia by free settlers.

The second small wave was by independent people from the 1855 to 1899. There does not seem to be a unified purpose to these movements other than a long distance marriage arrangement or a family reunion and the odd immigration of whole families. The stand out in this is the immigration of this group of young men from Guernsey seeking a new life in New South Wales.

Accompanying James were:

- Octavius Anthony Bonnell, 18, Carpenter, from the Habits, St Martins.
- Alfred Gould, 22, Carpenter, from Guernsey.
- Thomas Albert Le Cheminant, 19, Plasterer, from March Place, St Peters Port.
- Peter Thomas Le Marchant, 24, Labourer, from St Martin.
- Charles Walter Roper, 19, Carpenter, from St Andrews.²

Apart from Octavius Bonnell and James, who both married and left a traceable family record, these men left few discernable tracks and have faded into history. There is a story to pursue there!

Arrival

James immigrated to New South Wales. He left Portsmouth on the '*Abergeldie*' in December 1883 and arrived in Sydney 3 February 1884. His religion was Church of England in the immigration register and ship's records and had no relatives in the colony. He could read. He was an assisted migrant.

When James Priaulx became James Preeo can only be guessed at, though certainly prior to 1887. However, given the predominately English and Irish population of the time and place, the phonetic 'pree-oh' would have been transposed in writing to Preeo. After all, James was alone in a foreign culture and he had no familial or cultural support to help him maintain the original spelling of his name. Also, it wasn't clear whether he could write and so was at the mercy of officialdom and their vicarious ways.

Amazingly, we have very detail accounts about the voyage of the *Abergeldie*, the process of immigration and the pre-journey preparations of the government through it's Agent

² Guernsey Emigrants to Australia 1828 – 1899, David W Kreckeler, 1999, La Societe Guernesiaise

General and the immigrants themselves. More importantly, we have important clues as to what the males of the party did after their arrival in the colony.

The Sydney Morning Herald of 11 July 1884 contained the following: “The hiring of the single men and married people was commenced at 9 o'clock, and continued till noon, in the hiring room at Fort Macquarie. There was, as usual, a desire for married couples accustomed to farm work and other country employment, and also for single men for farm labour, the demand exceeding the supply. Repeated inquiries for married couples with their children, and for single men for farm work met with no response. The wages offered were, as a rule, from £30 to £52 per annum, with board and lodging for single men for agricultural labour, and up to £70 per annum for married couples. The number of engagements was not large. Mr Treatt, the ... immigration agent, spent some time on board the *Abergeldie* during the afternoon, and gave the people a deal of information regarding the industrial condition of the colony, and advised them as to the choice of locality in which to seek for work. He also afforded them some useful information as to the different conditions of climate, soil, and general character and progress or the various parts of the colony. Today a number of men will proceed to the Richmond River district, acting on the advice given them by Mr. Treatt.”³

It would be reasonable to assume that James was one of those single men who went to the Richmond River District. This assumption is further strengthened by the fact that it gave James direct access to the northern tablelands and the Great Northern Railway that stretched from Tenterfield back to Newcastle, passing through the towns of Armidale, Uralla and Murrurundi, his later stamping ground, and for the new husband and father, James who was to return to this region in later years, bringing his wife, Sarah, and son, Arthur.

The region that James was to arrive in was developing quickly. “In the second half of the nineteenth century the primary industries of the Richmond Valley and the Lismore region in particular continued to be cattle grazing and timber. These primary industries supported a growing economy and population and the development of secondary industries including shipbuilding, transportation, saw milling, tallow manufacturing and other associated business.

1883 saw the opening of the Lismore Hospital and the expansion of other government services including police, mail and land administration along with regular church services and the ever-growing commercial enterprises. By 1891 Lismore had a population 2,925, with much of its economy based on the flourishing dairy industry and the expanding of dairy co-operatives throughout the region. The district was also ravaged by numerous floods and in the last half of the decade was caught in the jaws of drought that did not break until the second year of the new century. In 1894 the railway was extended to the Tweed, but still no connection had been built to the “Great Northern Railway “passing through Tenterfield some 160Km to the west of Lismore.”⁴

³ *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 11 July 1884

⁴ Lloyd D Fielding www.lismore.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/

The main transport links were through the port of Ballina and shipping up the Richmond River. Some enterprising farmers and cattlemen from Casino and Lismore did forge routes to the Great Northern Railway at Tenterfield that gave them access to the Liverpool Plains, the Northern Tablelands and Newcastle.

Thus was the stage was set. James, in all likelihood, found himself in northern New South Wales through the urgings, recommendations, or exhortations of the immigration officials in Sydney. He evidently didn't have any time to become acclimatised to Sydney; proceeding north by coastal ship across the dangerous bar at Ballina to his new life in a new country. Sometime between 1884 and 1887, James found himself in Armidale where he met Sarah Gimbert.

James and Sarah

James Henry Preeo (Priaulx) married Sarah Ruth Elizabeth Gimbert at Uralla in the Wesleyan Church on 10 August, 1887. James was 22 and Sarah 16 years old. William Gimbert's consent to the marriage was noted on the Marriage Certificate.

His marriage to Sarah in Uralla was where the Gimbert family lived, 23 kilometres south of Armidale. James, according to the Marriage Certificate, lived in Armidale. They were soon to go to Murrurundi where their son, Arthur James Preeo, was born in 1890. James and Sarah presumably moved to Murrurundi with William and Ruth Gimbert shortly before or during 1889.

Ruth Gimbert was to give birth to two more children after Sarah's wedding, Walter (1887) and Lily (1893). William and Ruth also had other seven children under the age of 12 with them. It would not seem unreasonable, given the times, for William and Ruth to expect that their eldest daughter would have a role supporting Ruth in caring for the rest of the children, despite being recently married. After all, Sarah was only aged 16.

In 1890 James and Sarah's son, Arthur James, was born at Murrurundi.

On 5 April 1891 the family were counted in the census of that year at Casino. The NSW Police Gazette, 1891, has 'Fletcher and Preeo', Tailors, the victim of a theft of trousers and a coat from them at Broadwater, 37 kilometres south of Lismore.

Australia saw the start of a severe depression in 1890. The depression of the 1890s followed the greatest boom in Australia's history. This great boom began with the gold rushes of the 1850s and despite cyclical downturns, continued almost unchecked for forty years. The years 1890 – 1894 were particularly harsh and the Australian economy did not recover until the turn of the century.

It is not surprising that James and Sarah were caught up in this maelstrom. In 1896, 1897 and 1900 the family were living at 3 Foster St, Surry Hills, presumably drawn to the clothing trade. Foster St was in the notorious Wexford St slum. The clothing or rag trade was prominent in Surry Hills, usually through outwork or piecework systems, and in the houses off the narrow lanes of Surry Hills women ran up slop garments for Dawson's of Brickfield Hill or Cohen Brothers of Goulburn Street, in an effort to supplement often inadequate family incomes.

James, being a Tailor, would have been drawn to the clothing trade situated in the area for employment.

The Depression of the 1890s and the intermittent nature and inadequate wages of working-class employment meant that Surry Hills' families lived precariously close to real poverty. There was no margin to cater for unseen circumstances, and so sickness, unemployment or sudden widowhood could plunge a family into chronic destitution. In coping with long-term poverty, many Surry Hills families were forced to adopt one or more of a range of mostly unpleasant survival strategies.⁵

There was a strong Chinese presence in the Haymarket and Surry Hills area by 1900, partly due to its close proximity to the Belmore Markets where many made their living. By 1900 Wexford Street was almost entirely occupied by Chinese. They were also a significant presence in Exeter Place, and Foster, Mary, Stephen and Elizabeth Streets.

To the wider community, this area was identified as a slum. But for hundreds of families, it was home and the streets were a playground for the children. Hunt Street formed part of the Wexford Street no.1 Resumption. It was widened and realigned in the process. While the Wexford Street resumptions were promoted by the City Council as being about creating new broad access streets to Central Station and a new industrial precinct, it was also about clearing out the poorer populations in Surry Hills, with a dash of racism added in.

This article in the *Daily Telegraph*, "From Slum Lane to Highway", is typical of the sensational journalism associated with slum clearance.

It opens:

*"A thirty-foot lane across a dirty, Chinese infested slum packed thick with fan-tan shops and opium-dens and far worse places; eight acres, dreaded of the respectable, and known mainly to the police, with a death rate 20 per cent worse than the rest of Sydney. That was Wexford Street and the Wexford Street area..."*⁶

The Wexford St area was demolished in the resumptions of the early century. By 1911 it had been eradicated. Wexford Street, Exeter Place and Wemyss Street were all obliterated by the new Wentworth Avenue. Macquarie Street South was renamed Commonwealth Street. High-rise commercial and industrial buildings replaced most of the houses following the resumptions.

In 1900, James disappears from the scene until March, 1916.

It seems as though life hadn't been as kind to James as it could have been. The promise of a new life in a new country was swamped by the reality of living in a Sydney slum. An orphan from Guernsey who joined a vast and growing family, only to leave once he had started a family of his own.

It is probable that he left the Gimberts at that juncture because he sought self-reliance and had become the head of his own family, or did the financial downturn drive him from the Gimbirt household because of grim necessity? Did he pack up the family to return to Murrurundi from Surry Hills only to be swallowed by the vastness of country, or did he send Sarah back to her family until things could get better and carry on alone,

⁵ Garry Wotherspoon, 'Surry Hills', Dictionary of Sydney, 2009, http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/entry/surry_hills, viewed 17 February 2012

⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, "From Slum Lane to Highway", 11 September, 1911

or did he experience a personal catastrophe in Sydney and meet with a dreadful fate? All questions that warrant further investigation. It is likely, however, that we may never find the truth as he could have died in the country and been buried as "Unknown".⁷

Sarah and Arthur and Amelia May

William Gimbert moved his family from Murrurundi to Newtown sometime after 1899 when Florence, their sixth child and third daughter, married. They were ensconced in 65 Wilson St, Newtown, by 1903 where Lily, the youngest child, died. It is most likely that Sarah and Arthur had re-joined the Gimbert family either at Murrurundi or when they came to the city. Certainly, by 1917, Sarah and Arthur had been living at Newtown for some time.

On 2 June, Arthur and Kate married at St Joseph's Catholic Church, Newtown. It was stated on their Marriage Certificate that they were both residents of Newtown. Indeed, they were neighbours.

By happy coincidence, a single father and nine of his ten children, five daughters and four sons, had tenanted number 63 Wilson Street in 1917.⁸ Among Gustaf Albert Peterson's tribe was one Amelia May Peterson, though everyone knew her as Catherine, or Kate

Their union was evidently a love match and their courtship must have been swift. As July Weber-O'Bryan recalled: "I used to ask Nan about your grandfather and I can still remember a softening in her voice and demeanour as she spoke about him. That was a 'love' marriage...."⁹

Before long Arthur and Catherine were living at 14 Regent Lane, Newtown. They were certainly living there in 1924, before they moved to 63 Wilson St, Newtown, in late 1924. The title deeds site Catherine as buying 63 Wilson St on 16 December, 1924.¹⁰

At that stage Sarah Gimbert had been living at 65 Wilson St since the turn of the century.

Arthur died at the Coast Hospital, Little Bay, on 27 July, 1927. By that stage Arthur and Catherine had three children, Blanche, Gustave Albert (Patrick) and Warren.

Catherine remarried in 1929 to Percival Wall. Soon after this Perce, Kate and Blanch moved to Junee where Perce was stationed with the NSW Railways. They later lived at Harris Park. At this stage the Preeo family were separated. Family lore has it that Percival was not fully aware that Catherine had three children. Whilst baby Blanche was hard to hide, the two boys, Warren and Patrick were not so easily concealed. It is a measure of the hardship of the times where a family impelled to be divided by economic and social circumstances.

⁷ Sue Comrie-Thomson, Honorary Research Officer, Society of Australian Genealogists. 26 November 2011

⁸ Sands Directory 1918

⁹ Correspondence between July Weber-O'Bryan and Terence Preeo 12/01/2012

¹⁰ Number 63 was built in 1881 by a Charles Edwards. The title deed sites Catherine as buying 63 Wilson St on 16 December, 1924, from Osmand Adams Stewart and Wall Scott Habress. The Mortgage was discharged on 28 February, 1929.

Patrick remained with his grandmother, Sarah Gimbert, who by this stage was running a boarding house in number 65 Wilson St. Newtown.

Warren was given to the Petersons' care and was to reside at Marrickville until his death in 1935.

Number 63 was to remain in the family however; Gus and Vera, Kate's sisters, were to take up residence for many years. The house was sold in the mid 1980s.

Sarah was to live at 65 Wilson St until her death in 1940.