

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 4th June 1989 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating Richard Wells

Citation by Mr J Seabrook

Richard George Wells - Born 1805 - died 1846

Richard George Wells was born at Holwell, England, in 1805, to comparatively well-to-do parents. He was given a good education and at an early age was apprenticed to a London bank. He progressed well in his chosen profession and was, in 1826, at the age of 21, sufficiently well established to marry Susanna, four years older than himself, and a friend since their childhood days. By 1829 they had been blessed with two daughters and Richard had risen, in the bank, to the position of Chief Clerk.

At this time there was much talk in English farming and professional circles of the, soon to be established, Swan River Colony in Western Australia, and the very great opportunities open to early settlers in that country. Richard and Susanna decided, with some trepidation, to transfer their young family to the other side of the world.

They arrived in the "Calista" the second migrant ship to reach the Colony, on the 5th of August 1829, after a long and arduous trip, suffering many delays, for various reasons, during the voyage, and the passengers were immediately disembarked on Garden Island.

Up to this time, although the "Parmelia" had arrived some two months earlier, Captain Stirling had thought it wiser to leave all women on the Island for safety reasons. Now, being satisfied that possible danger had been minimised, and that satisfactory shelter had been arranged, he gave the order for the first contingent of women to make the long awaited move to the mainland. On the 8th of August 1829, long boats from the "Parmelia" and the "Calista", with families from their respective ships, set out for the small bay under the rocky bluff now known as "Arthur's Head", just south of the entrance to the Swan River.

With your permission I will now quote from my Grandmother's written description of this first day's landing, as told to her, as a child, by Susanna Fortescue, the second Mrs. Richard Wells.

"On approaching the shore the boatmen commenced to race and a boat from the "Calista" catching an opportune wave, beached first. Richard Wells, seizing his wife, placed her ashore saying. 'There my dear, you are the first white woman to set foot on the mainland of the Swan River Colony.'"

There are other versions of this landing, but I have been able to prove that boats from the two ships did arrive on the beach at the same time, and I, as a great great grandson, like to think that this family description is the correct one. My grandmother always said that her grandfather could get no favours from Governor Stirling, during the whole of his time here, owing to that 'Fancied slight of the first day ashore'.

Richard Wells first found employment as an agent for "Latours", an indent firm, before taking up land in the York district in 1830. However, as a professional man, he was not a happy farmer, and in 1837, he sold part of his holdings and became an agent in York for the short-lived 'Bank of Western Australia'¹. When this bank was taken over by the London based 'Bank of Australasia'¹ in 1841, much to the dismay of some of the shareholders, who considered it to

be 'gratuitous financial suicide', he returned to Perth and was for a short time Chief Clerk in the Colonial Secretary's Office.

A number of disgruntled settlers, influential men in the Colony, not satisfied with a bank controlled from far away London, had by this time taken the necessary steps to establish another, which opened in 1841, under the new name of 'The Western Australian Bank', with a paid up capital of 2000 pounds. They invited Richard Wells to be the new Cashier-Manager.

The bank was opened in the front room of a private house on the corner of Pier Street and St. George's Terrace, opposite the 'Deanery', which still survives today. It prospered from the very beginning, and finally moved, in 1886, to the corner of William Street and the Terrace, where the State Head Office of its successor now stands. Over the door of the building erected in 1886 was placed a carved Key-stone bearing the bearded likeness of Richard Wells. This was often pointed out, in later years, to younger family descendants, in passing, who were requested to smile, and wave, to "Great Grandpa". When the Western Australian Bank building was demolished in 1968 the Key-stone was rescued, by the good offices of Malcolm Uren, Assistant Editor of "The West Australian", from the rubbish tip where the rubble had been taken, and placed on a pedestal in the foyer of the present building. It remains the only known likeness of Richard Wells in existence.

Richard Wells, a deeply religious and much respected man, suffered a heart attack, and died suddenly in April 1846, at the age of 42. Susanna, his first wife, had died eight years before in 1838, leaving him with seven daughters, and lies with him in the grave we are commemorating today. He had been re-married in 1839, to Susanna Fortescue and four more children had been born to them. Richard's second wife Susanna Fortescue, survived him by thirty one years, dying in 1877, at the age of seventy.

Also buried in this grave with Richard and Susanna is their infant grand-daughter, Millesa Maud Badcock, the only child of their daughter Sophie.

The actual wording on this headstone, now unfortunately, vandalised and almost obliterated, originally read:-

Sacred to the Memory of Sarah Susanna, Wife of
Richard Wells - Died June 17th, 1838 - Aged 37.
Richard Wells - Died April 2 8th, 1846, Aged 42.
Millesa Maud Badcock - Grandchild.

Ladies and Gentlemen - I would like to thank the Royal West Australian Society for the opportunity of giving this short description of the life, and times of my pioneer ancestors.

I have enjoyed presenting it to you - Thank you.