

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 30th May 2010 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating The Leake Family

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The name Leake is indelibly written on the pages of West Australian History. It is the name of one of the first -and most influential - of the pioneering families that settled here in 1829. From the very beginning and throughout the nineteenth century the first three generations of the Leake Family contributed considerably to the establishment and development of the social, economic, commercial, legal and political institutions of the new colony. Many members of those three early generations lie buried here, in this Pioneer Cemetery. Today we pay tribute to them. There are of course many descendants still living in Western Australia, including some who are here today. However because most of them have descended from the female members of the family and only very few from the males, the name Leake is not often encountered these days. In fact I think there are only two people here today with the name Leake -Dr Eleanor Leake, granddaughter of George Leake III, the premier who died in 1902 - and her brother Tom Leake from NSW.

However, the recorded history of the Leake family spans a period of about 350 years, beginning with a goldsmith in London, who was active during the third quarter of the seventeenth century. This man was, in effect, the patriarch of the Western Australian Leake family.

Research has shown that he had a son, Luke Leake (who I will call Luke I) who lived in the town of Sudbury, in Suffolk, who, like his father - was a goldsmith - and also a bookseller. Until some of them came to Western Australia in 1829, the Leake family continued to live in rural Suffolk, with some members establishing themselves as merchants in London.

Luke Leake I had married Ann Heading in October 1783 and they had three sons - George, Luke and John - all of whom came to the Swan River Colony. We know little else about Luke I, except that he was born in 1756 and died in 1800.

However, this Luke's widow, Mrs Anne Leake, is well known to Western Australian historians because she has always been identified as the oldest of all the early colonists who arrived in those first months of settlement. She had been born on 28 March 1758, and was a month or so past her seventy-first birthday when she, her son Luke II and grand-daughter Anne Eliza Leake left England in the ship *Atwick* bound for the Swan River.

Now - a voyage from Britain to Australia in those days was a major undertaking, even for someone who was young and healthy. The *Atwick* was at sea for a total of 125 days. By modern standards the vessel was small: she was 98 feet 7 inches long, with a maximum breadth of 28 feet one inch. Room had to be made on this tiny ship for about eighty passengers - with all their luggage, fanning equipment and livestock. But the seventy one year old Mrs Leake survived the trip, and settled happily with her sons and grandchildren in Fremantle and Perth. She proved to be an admirable pioneer, making the best of things at all times. One anecdote recounted by Jane Roberts in the journal of her voyage to Australia, evokes a delightful image of Mrs Leake and her granddaughter, serving a very graceful and formal afternoon tea - of dry biscuits and black tea - in the most primitive of circumstances.

This brave woman eventually died in October 1836, aged 78, much loved by all who knew her. She was - in fact - the matriarch of all the West Australian Leakes and was the first of the family to be buried in this cemetery.

Luke II, the eldest of her sons, appears to have been a scholarly man, with interests in history, religion and literature. He didn't marry until 1825 when, at the age of forty, he married Mary Anne Walpole, then aged about 25. After their marriage they lived in Stoke Newington, just to the east of the City of London. Mary Ann produced three sons in the space of three and a half years who, in accordance with Leake family tradition, were named George, John and Luke. A further child Catherine was born in the Swan River Colony.

George (that is George I), younger brother of Luke II, was married in 1813 to Anne Growse, from Suffolk, who died shortly after giving birth to a daughter, Anne Eliza. George lived in Mecklenburgh Square, in the centre of London, and it seems that his widowed mother Ann lived with him, and took on the task of raising her granddaughter.

John, the youngest of the brothers, married Mary Sheen, also from Suffolk. He visited the colony in 1837 but stayed only for four years, going on to Adelaide in 1841 and then back to England.

London at the time when Luke I and Ann lived there was the financial capital of Europe (if not the world) and their sons set up in business as bill brokers. At that time most of Britain's commerce was conducted through the medium of bills of exchange, and bill brokers were employed in buying, selling, accepting, presenting, guaranteeing and endorsing bills of exchange. Many of these brokers conducted their business in the City of London.

However, London in 1825 experienced a severe contraction in business activities - and the Leake family suffered a serious financial crisis. It appears that they had made some unwise investments, and suddenly lost a lot of money. The shock was such that Luke 2 then aged only 44, had a stroke, and became an invalid for the remaining ten years of his life.

Fortuitously, at that time - around September 1828 - James Stirling was in London, attempting to persuade the British government to establish a colony at the Swan River, in Western Australia. It is possible that the Leake family was already acquainted with Stirling, and that it was on his advice that, late in 1828 they made the momentous decision to salvage what they could from the business, and attempt to renew their fortunes in Western Australia. George took passage in the *Calista*, the first merchant ship going to the new colony, and arrived there in August 1829. As I said before, his older brother Luke 2, together with his elderly mother Ann Leake and George's daughter Ann Eliza followed shortly afterwards in the *Atwick*.

Luke Leake was never happy in Western Australia. As we know, he was an invalid, and he appears to have spent his time reading, and yearning to return to London and the Stock Exchange. He didn't see his wife and sons again until four years later in January 1833 when they finally arrived in the colony aboard the *Cygnets*. He never recovered his health and eventually died in 1838, aged 54. He was buried here in the same plot as his mother.

But his brother George (that is George I) nourished. This first George Leake would have to be a prime candidate for the title of the Swan River colony's most prominent citizen.

Most of you will be well aware of the stories of failure, disaster and heartbreak that mark the records of the early years - and yet George's career shows that it was possible to prosper. He took up a grant of just under 15,000 acres on the Upper Swan, at its junction with Ellen's

Brook and he appointed Lt Bull R N as manager .The Property on which was erected a flourmill, was developed into one of the finest properties in the Swan Valley.

As a merchant, George ran a successful business as an importer and retailer of all types of goods. He acted as agent for merchants and traders in India, Cape Town and Britain. He was a shipping agent and he became a financier and banker. He was a member of a group of colonists who tried to establish an export trade in horses to India.

He was an extremely busy man but nevertheless he made time for many Public duties. He was appointed the Government Resident in Fremantle and later a Magistrate for that area. He was a guardian for the Children's Friend Society.

He was a nominated member of the Legislative Council, Chairman of the Perth Town Trust and later of the Swan Road Trust. He was a director of the Agricultural Society, and a founder and director of the Bank of Western Australia. Research shows that in almost every edition of the *Perth Gazette* in the 1830s and 1840s his name is mentioned between its pages - in some capacity or another.

AND.... on a lighter note it is recorded that when the first horse races were held in October 1833 on the beach at South Fremantle, it was a horse owned by George Leake that won the day. According to the *Perth Gazette*, "...in the second race there were only two starters, Mr. George Leake's Jack and Mr. Samson's black mare". (As most of the ponies didn't really want to participate - running anywhere but on the gazetted course - it seems to have been a day filled with exasperated laughter!)

Then, in 1840, at the age of 54 George married the much younger Georgiana Kingsford, only daughter of the flour miller Samuel Kingsford, who had built a flourmill on the site of what is now the *Parmelia Hotel*. This young woman was an artist, painting in the years 1840 to 1850 the collection of delicate wildflower paintings that are at present on display at the *Royal Western Australian Historical Society*. Georgiana Leake's album of paintings was donated in 1933 by Mrs Jane Adam, who had brought it back from England - and it has now become the subject of a thoroughly researched monograph on this artist's life and work.

George died in 1849, aged 63. He had only the one child, his daughter Anne Eliza (from his first marriage) who had married Richard McBride Broun (brother of Peter Broun the colonial secretary). She was left well provided for by her father - but the family's businesses passed to his three nephews, the sons of his invalid brother Luke 2.

This fine and enterprising man George I is buried here in the same plot as his mother and his brother Luke.

Interestingly, research has suggested that after the death of Luke, George had taken it upon himself to support his sister-in-law and children wherever he could. Mary Anne Leake had proved herself to be an admirable settler and for many years she seems to have run a shop in St George's Terrace. However, such an enterprise would not have covered school fees in England for her sons - or the several passages home that seem to have occurred - and it could only have been Uncle George who provided the wherewithal. That his nephews George Walpole Leake and Luke Samuel Leake were such high profile and successful Western Australians must largely be down to their Uncle George.

Luke's eldest son, George Walpole Leake (George II), like his uncle George, became one of the most prominent citizens of Perth. He was educated at King's College London and

completed his legal qualifications in South Australia and Victoria. He commenced the practice of law in the Swan River Colony in 1852 and was subsequently called to the Bar there. He was appointed a Q. C. in 1875 and Crown Solicitor in 1857, a position he held for many years. During the next 30 years he occupied many temporary official positions, including Attorney General (four times), Supreme Court Judge (twice) and Chief Justice (three times). He was also for many years Local Court and Police Court Magistrate for the Perth District. In addition to his legal duties he was for many years a nominated member of the Legislature. George Walpole was a colourful character of whom many stories were told. He had a keen and quick wit, which sometimes descended into ridicule and sarcasm. While he also had a sharp temper he was apparently a very kind and generous man - with a mischievous sense of humour. He died in 1895 at the age of 70 and is buried here in the Family Plot with his wife Rose Ellen (nee Gliddon) and other members of his family.

His brother Luke Samuel Leake (that is Luke III) was a more easy-going man. He married Louisa Walpole in 1855. He took over the family's businesses, and accumulated a substantial fortune as a merchant and trader. In 1870 he was elected to the Legislative Council, and in the same year was elected the Speaker, a position he held until his death in 1886. Luke was also a director of the Western Australian Bank from 1854 until 1886. He was Chairman and then Auditor of the Perth Town Trust. He was president of the Swan River Mechanics institute. He was appointed a magistrate and Inspector of Rottneest and Perth Prisons. He was on the Board of Education and was the first Captain of the Perth Volunteer Rifles. He was knighted in 1876.

Sir Luke died in 1886 near Malta. He was given a State Funeral and his memorial is next to the Family Plot. (A very fine and formal court costume that was worn by Sir Luke Samuel Leake is presently on display at the Society's museum.)

Catherine Ann Leake the youngest of the Luke and Mary Ann's family was born in Perth in 1834. She married James George Lee Steere in London in 1859. When his brother in law Sir Luke Leake died in 1886, James Lee Steere became Speaker and in 1898 he too, was knighted. James and Catherine had 15 Children. Lady Catherine died in Perth in 1922. Although Sir Luke's marriage to Louisa Walpole produced no children, G.W. Leake's marriage to Rose Ellen Gliddon produced seven daughters and one son and 52 grandchildren. The seven Leake sisters were famous in their time.

Mary the eldest married Bishop Parry.

Jessie married Colonel Skinner of the British Army

Amy married Stephen Henry Parker who became the Chief Justice.

Constance married T. S. Lodge.

Rose married Cecil Clifton who became the Commissioner of Lands

Blanche married Dr Kelsall.

Jane married Keith Adam a magistrate, who was a descendant of the famous and influential eighteenth and early nineteenth century Adam family of architects.

And when the last of these seven daughters married their mischievous father placed an advertisement in the local press, apologising to the young men of the Colony that he had no more daughters for them to marry.

G W Leake's only son, George Leake (i.e. George Leake III) was born in Perth in 1856. He was educated at the Bishop's Boys School - later known as *The High School*, then *Hale School* - and finally at *St Peters College* Adelaide. He was then articled to his father and in 1880, at the age of 24; he was admitted to the West Australian Bar. He was the Solicitor General for some years and like his father was QC. In 1890 he was elected to the first Parliament under Responsible Government. He was very active in promoting Federation and in the political

turmoil that followed when John Forrest went to the Federal Parliament; he twice became Premier and was Premier when he died of pneumonia in 1902 at the age of 46. He was given a State Funeral and is buried here in this Pioneers Cemetery near the other members of his Family. In King's Park a fine memorial fountain was erected in his memory.

This George had married Louisa Emily Burt the daughter of the former Chief Justice Sir Archibald Burt. They had six children one of whom, Francis Walpole Leake, took silk as his father and grandfather had done before him. Sadly, another son, Lt George Arthur Leake (ie George IV) was killed in action at Hill 60 on Gallipoli. He is commemorated on his father's tombstone in this Cemetery.

This citation would not be complete without some mention of the strong and industrious Leake family women who contributed so much to all aspects of the development of the Colony. Those of the second and third generations became the wives of some of the leading men of their time - and in turn the mothers and grandmothers of those who were to lead the state through the Twentieth Century. Tragically, some of their men were to give their lives in the two great 20th century world wars. The pioneering Leake women who worked quietly beside so many of our great pioneering men are - with them - honoured here today, for their contribution to the development of Western Australia.

We honour them all.