

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 27th May 2012 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating the Chipper Family

Citation by Elizabeth Borrello

This year's 2012 Annual Pioneer's Memorial Service we commemorate the Chipper family. As some of you maybe aware, this service has been taking place since 1954 and at the beginning the aim of the service was to commemorate in general, WA's 19th Century Pioneers. However, since 1964 the focus has been mainly on certain individuals, families or certain groups buried here at these East Perth Pioneer Cemeteries. The Chipper Family is one of the largest pioneer groups buried at these cemeteries. While the official count is 26 (10 adult and 16 babies and/or young children), it is also important to note that there are more Chippers buried here - as still-births have not been officially recorded.¹

Undertaking this Chipper Family research has created a dilemma as I discovered that the name Chipper is a constant in WA's history. To attempt to highlight all the Chippers in WA would make this citation less effective and unworkable. Hence the general focus has been on the adult Chipper pioneers buried at this particular East Perth Cemetery.

The first of the Chipper family to enter the pages of Western Australian history is one of this State's earliest colonists, **John Chipper**. On 6 June 1829, at the age of 24, John Chipper with his new bride of a few months, **Mary (nee Whidby)**, left West Tarring in Sussex on the chartered ship the *Caroline* to arrive at the Swan River Colony on 12 October 1829. Ship records inform us that John Chipper was a contracted labourer to the notable graziers and bank merchants, the Thomas Henty family. Thomas Henty's three sons, James, Stephen and John, chartering the new brig, *the Caroline* were sent ahead by their father to re-establish the family's English farming enterprise in Western Australia. Arriving with prized Spanish merinos and with many of their old family employees (including John Chipper), the Henty clan did not stay long in WA as they sought greener pastures than the impoverished soil of the Swan River Colony and left for Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).²

In 1832, having been released from his contractual obligations to the Henty family, historical records indicate that John Chipper was back in Western Australia. Determined to make the most of the opportunities available, Chipper, now a private contractor, worked hard at his trade of carpenter. It was during one of these private contracting jobs that John Chipper made a unique entry in WA's history books. Travelling from Guildford to York on the hills of Greenmount, (east of Perth) John Chipper and his 14-year-old work companion Reuben Beacham were attacked by a group of Aboriginal people. Sadly the young boy Beacham was fatally speared; however, Chipper miraculously escaped by leaping off boulders on top of a steep hill and although injured, was able to run seven miles (approximately 11 kilometres) to safety. History has officially recorded the place where Chipper jumped on 3 February 1832 and today a commemorative monument can be still located on the site in Greenmount, which has been known since the attack as *Chipper's Leap*.³

John Chipper soon established himself as a significant landowner and reputable citizen. Purchasing allotments in the central part of town in Murray and Hay Streets and more importantly became very involved in public service. Chipper is recorded as the first paid Police Constable in Perth. Peter Conole's historical account of policing in WA, *Protect & Serve* points

out that John Chipper was employed as the "first permanent salaried police officer on 2 April 1840 with an annual salary 20 pounds." ⁴

To compensate for this reasonably low pay, Chipper was also allowed to have another job and held the post of Bailiff of the Supreme Court for 25 years. Other recorded positions held by John Chipper were, Pound-keeper and Collector, member of the Perth Town Trust and Merchant and Inspector of Weights and Measures. John Chipper - son of Richard Chipper and Mary Payne died on 29 January 1871. ⁵

The pages of Western Australia's history have recorded little of John's wife, Mary. Ship records indicate she was 20 years of age when she arrived in 1829 and came from another Sussex village (near and east of Tarring) known as Broadwater.

John and Mary Chipper had eight children -six sons and two daughters. **Thomas** (1831 -1903), **Richard William** (1833 – 1888), **Stephen James** (1835 -1886), **Mary Jane Olive** (1837 - 1839), **George Frederick Whidby** (1843 – 1878), **Jane Frances** (1845-1931), **John Charles** (1847- 1906), **Henry Edward** (1849-1850). Mary Chipper daughter of Jane and Thomas Whidby died 29 October 1878 and is buried here at these cemeteries, together with her husband, daughter Mary Jane Olive sons Henry Edward, Stephen James, John Charles and George Frederick. ⁶

This industrious and resourceful work ethic of John Chipper was indeed passed on to his sons and subsequent Chipper generations. In 1856, the older sons, Thomas and Richard took advantage of work opportunities that availed in this new settlement and became the operators of the first Perth to Albany mail run. The mail run set off from the old United Services Tavern in St George's Terrace, Perth where - incidentally the licensee of the Tavern was their younger brother Stephen. These red and yellow coloured royal mail horse-drawn coaches left from the United Services Tavern and travelled to Albany's King George's Sound. It is important to recall that during this period in WA's early history this service was of fundamental importance to the colony. It was at this time that the Fremantle harbour was deemed unsafe by the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, (P&O). In the early 19th Century the P&O shipping company from the UK operated the world's first passenger ships and subsequently became, in 1832, the first passenger routes to Australia. Noted Western Australian historian, Tom Stannage comments on this very issue;

The absence of safe anchorages outside Fremantle, especially during winter months, had long been lamented by the colonists. Indeed in the early 1850's the P & O Shipping Company refused to allow its mail-carrying vessels to call there and made Albany, with its safe anchorages, their main port of call. This encouraged other shipping companies to do likewise...forcing the expansion of mail/freight service overland between Perth and Albany. ⁷

Linking the two settlements, the mail service involved an arduous horse drawn journey, which originally took up to two weeks and demanded eight stops on route. Furthermore, the journey was made more challenging as the horse-drawn coaches were forced to travel through bush tracks and on unmade and inadequate roads. Western Australian Historian, Professor Reg Appleyard describes Thomas Chipper's hardworking efforts:

At first he used a spring-cart which also carried mail to farmers along the way. The journey took up to two weeks and Thomas, at his own expense, had to maintain and improve the route including changing the road to avoid seasonal hazards. ⁸

Recognising that Thomas Chipper was forced to personally maintain and improve the roads illustrates the colony's serious financial troubles at this point of time. These particular poor economic trends are clearly reflected in the then government's failure to provide adequate roads, bridges, harbours and public buildings for the colony's small population, which was dispersed over such a vast demographic area. It should also be noted that this same period coincides with the historical and controversial Government decision to introduce convicts to the fledgling and almost bankrupt colony. Yet, when convict transportation finally ceased in 1868, the colony was experiencing a higher rate of economic and demographic growth and it was during this time that the Perth to Albany mail run was taken over by the Government. History also acknowledged that this economic growth was short lived. The drought, which soon followed, had a negative and enormous impact and remained until the boom of the gold rush of the 1890's - when Western Australia's economic prosperity undeniably improved!

In a 1979 *West Australian* newspaper article, current generation and member of today's Chipper family, Kim Chipper states that five members of the Chipper family were involved with the mail run and when the Government took over, two Chippers remained and were employed by the Government to operate the service.⁹

Nevertheless, the other three Chipper brothers Stephen, Thomas and Richard soon sought to undertake other business activities. Stephen became a prominent Perth landowner and investor, Thomas an Innkeeper in Kojonup and Richard became a Publican in York. The youngest brother, John Charles was also the notable Publican of *The John Bull Inn*, which was located near the Perth Town Hall and later demolished and re-built as the hotel we recognise today, the *Criterion* in Hay Street. Another son of John and Mary Chipper, George, although only living to 35 years was a well-known employee of the prominent Perth based merchants and shipping agents, Habgood, Absolon and Co.

Granting that at this point of time, we have only progressed to the second generation of this WA pioneering Chipper family, it is without doubt that these Chippers have already contributed significantly to the history of the new Swan River Colony.

The focus of this citation is now drawn to the third son, Stephen James. Stephen James Chipper married Scottish born Maria Sophia Campbell in 1861. Their children were; **John Henry** (1863) died after 9 days, **Stephen James** Junior (1863 -1933), **Henry Richard** (1866-1892), **Donald John** (1868 -1917), **Charles William** (1872), died 6 weeks, **Alfred Aenas** died 3 months, **William Francis Whidby** (1874) died 19 weeks, **Jessie Sophia** (1870-1892), **Margaret Mary** (1876-1902). Evidently many of their nine children sadly did not survive and together with their parents are buried at this cemetery.¹⁰

Today the Chipper name brings immediate recognition to many Western Australians because of its prominence and historical links in our community to the long established company that has involved three generations of funeral directors. Stephen James was the first Chipper to initially venture into the business of undertaking as Leonie B Liveris' in her historical account of the undertaking business in Perth writes;

*In 1861, 1862 and 1865, Stephen James gained government grants of the tender rights for burials of destitute paupers whilst his brother, John Charles, had the contract in 1869.*¹¹

When Stephen James's fourth son, sixteen year old **Donald John Chipper** undertook an apprenticeship as a coach -builder, wheelwright and undertaker, - it would be correct to assume that there may have been some paternal influence regarding this decision. Having been left property that was part of his father's deceased estate, Donald John Chipper, at the age of

twenty-one years, was able to establish his own business at 385 Murray Street, Perth. Later Donald would just focus on undertaking and built larger premises in Hay Street as well as establishing undertaking branches in Fremantle and Kalgoorlie.

Professor Appleyard describes Donald John Chipper by the following statement;

*Chipper was a personable man, had a keen sense of humour, never drove a car but owned many, and travelled frequently to the eastern States by ship. He was a foundation member of the Grand Lodge of Western Australia and its first master (1900-01), and also senior trustee of the Grand Lodge of the United Ancient Order of Druids.*¹²

Donald John Chipper was married at St George's Cathedral on 25 September 1889 to **Florence Edith Lima Maude**, daughter of William Dale, immigration and charities officer with the Western Australian government. They had four children, including a son **Donald John Jnr** who after his father's sudden death in 1917 did not take responsibility of the family funeral business until much later. Meanwhile, for the next ten years the business continued under the guidance of his mother Florence Chipper and her son-in-law Stanley Johnstone. A prominent landmark at 1023 Hay Street, the *Donald J Chipper & Son* funeral director's business eventually relocated to Rokeby Road Subiaco so as to make way for the construction of the new Mitchell Freeway. Today the Chipper Funeral businesses are still run by the current generation and the business located still in Subiaco with other centres in Myaree, Rockingham and Mandurah.

Other notable Chippers who have left their *historical footprint* upon the pages of WA's past have been the children of Richard William, (second son of John and Mary). Their youngest daughter **Miss Eva Chipper** (1881-1985) who was born in York and resided in Claremont lived to 104 years of age. A 1980 newspaper article announcing her 100th birthday also highlighted Miss Chipper's remarkable career as postmistress and her 50-year service to Australia Post.¹³

Eva's older sister, **Laura Ethel** (1879 – 1978) was also another resourceful Chipper *trailblazer* - as she was one of the first woman police officers commissioned in Western Australia. Again Peter Conole refers to this historical fact:

*The first women appointed were Mrs H Dugdale and Miss L E Chipper in August and September of 1917: their main duties were to prevent truancy; to patrol public places and watch out for vulnerable young females; to assist drunken women and their children; to make enquiries on behalf of the State Children's Department...*¹⁴

An interesting and ironic observation to note about these two sisters is that although Eva worked as Postmistress for over 50 years in what was deemed a respectful female career for a woman during the Victorian era - her sister Laura as female Police Officer, however, tackled the most difficult and perhaps least accepted by society at the time. While Laura Chipper and her fellow female constables excelled in a very male dominated environment, she had to contend the strong and varied opinions by men and women regarding the true value of her gender in the police force. Also referring to this very issue in the recently published *Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia* edited by Jenny Gregory and Janice Gothard, the appointment of this State's first female constables took place after strong and intense lobbying by the *Women's Service Guild*. These women invariably had nursing qualifications, worked in plain clothes and their wages were equalled as those of the male officers –indeed a significant and perhaps unknown historical fact to many of us today. Both sisters never married because if so they would have had to abide by the requirements of the day and that was to relinquish their careers.¹⁵

Unfortunately Eva and Laura's younger brothers, **Ross Richard Chipper** (1883 – 1915) and **Lindsay Lewis Stirling Chipper** (1887 -1915) did not live such long lives as their sisters. Both brothers were assigned to the 10th Australian Light Horse Regiment and were killed in action on the same day, 7th August 1915 in Gallipoli. Writing about the young Claremont men who fought in the Great War, Western Australian historians Geoffrey Bolton and Jenny Gregory's, book *Claremont a History* highlight a very poignant historical fact. Referring to the Chipper brothers who resided in the Claremont Street, Agett Street, the readers are informed that every house in Agett Street experienced a war casualty.¹⁶

The brothers are buried in nearby graves in Ari Burma Cemetery Gallipoli. *The Australian War Memorial's* archives also cite that two more Chipper men also died during the 1914 to 1918 Great War. Henry Thomas Chipper (1893 – 1915) was part of the same Australian Light Horse Regiment and alas he was also coincidentally killed in action on the same day as his cousins Lindsey and Ross. Henry Thomas was the grandson of John and Mary's eldest son Thomas. At the Villers Bretonneux Memorial in France, a Michael Chipper is buried. Michael Chipper was killed in action in April 1917 and was the son from the second marriage of Thomas Chipper.¹⁷

The Boer War Nominal Roll also lists Lieutenant and Quartermaster Stephen James Chipper (older brother of Donald John) as a member of the Bushmen's Contingent who fought in South Africa in 1900 and returned in 1901. A tree planted in the Boer memorial site in Kings Park on 17 November 1933 honours Lieutenant Stephen James Chipper, Past President of the South African and Imperial Veterans Association, who had died the previous month.¹⁸

As I conclude this citation, I am well aware that I have not been able to include all the Chippers - as indeed there are many descendants of Mary and John Chipper whom have left their mark in regard to this State's development and historical narrative. I have attempted to keep the selected focus on the Chippers buried at these East Perth Pioneer cemeteries and of some of their ancestral predecessors. During the research my thoughts would also often reflect upon all these babies and young Chippers who did not reach adulthood or at least childhood- as at least 16 are buried here at East Perth. It is well established that child mortality from contagious diseases was a common occurrence in the 19th century. Nonetheless, the death of babies and children would have had a profound impact – in particular upon the family and without a doubt the mother. One is reminded of these Chipper pioneer wives, (beginning with Mary Chipper) of who little is known and of their physical and emotional struggle in the tough and remote living conditions of the Swan River Colony.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this citation, the name Chipper appears constantly in the pages of this State's history, from the time of settlement in 1829 until today. There have been resourceful entrepreneurs, successful publicans, pioneering policemen and policewoman, war heroes, hardworking pastoralists, prominent businessmen, public servants - to list a few. Should a book be written exclusively on the history of the Chipper Family it certainly would be a comprehensive and substantial volume.

End Notes

¹ **The Friends of Battye Library (Inc)**; East Perth Cemeteries Project

² **Appleyard R. T.** *Chipper, Donald John (1868 -1917)*, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/chipper-donald-john-5584/text9529>

³ *Ibid*

⁴ **Conole, P.** 2002, *Protect & Serve: a history of policing in Western Australia* Success Print p 60,

⁵ **Liveris, L. B.** 1991 *The Dismal Trader – The Undertaking Business in Perth* Park Printing p48-49

⁶ **The Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc;** East Perth Cemeteries Project

⁷ **Stannage, C. T.** 1981 *A New History of Western Australia* University of Western Australia Press p222

⁸ **Appleyard R. T.** *Chipper, Donald John (1868 -1917), Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/chipper-donald-john-5584/text9529>

⁹ **Newspaper Article** *Chippers Ride Again.* The Western Australian 14 June 1979

¹⁰ **The Friends of Battye Library (Inc);** East Perth Cemeteries Project

¹¹ **Liveris, L. B.** 1991 *The Dismal Trader – The Undertaking Business in Perth* Park Printing, P49

¹² **Appleyard R. T.** *Chipper, Donald John (1868 -1917), Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/chipper-donald-john-5584/text9529>

¹³ **Newspaper Article.** *Looking Back on 100 Years* The Western Australian 25 December 1980

¹⁴ **Conole, P.** 2002, *Protect & Serve: a history of policing in Western Australia* Success Print, p 171

¹⁵ **Gregory J. & Gothard J.** 2009 *J. Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia.* University of Western Australia Press. p940

¹⁶ **Bolton G. and Gregory J.** 1999 *Claremont a History.* University of Western Australia Press p133

¹⁷ **Australian War Memorial History:** <http://www.awm.gov.au/>

¹⁸ *Ibid*