

## JOSEPH WILCOX - St Neot's Chronicle & Gazeteer

### From St Neot's Chronicle

**<sup>1</sup>1816 - 1894**

**In Memoriam** – It is with the greatest possible regret that we announce the death of our old and respected townsman, **Mr Joseph Wilcox**, which took place at his residence in New Street on Wednesday evening.

The place he so long and honorably occupied in our town life will not be easily filled. All that concerned the welfare of the town and his fellow townsmen had always a strong claim upon him and agreeably with his oft expressed desire, he has ended his days amongst us. A staunch Non-conformist and Liberal, and to the last an active member of the Local Board, he will be missed from our public life – no man more so.

One of his last acts was the erection of the New Congregational Church here which must entirely be attributed to his initiative and generous donation to the building fund. It stands as a public record of the man whose self-denial, unassuming disposition and thoroughly sterling qualities entirely won the esteem and respect of all privileged to know him.

He leaves an example that may well be followed and an influence that will not readily die.

**Extract from the Gazeteer section of 'St Neots' by C.F. Tebbutt**, published by Phillimore & Co. 1978

Details of the ownership and occupation of a property at No 13 High Street, St Neots.

In 1775 this property was owned by French Flanders, and early last century by W. Barker, tailor and clothier, who emigrated to Australia. The business was then taken over by his great friend, **Joseph Wilcox** (1816-1894) through whom he joined the Independent (Congregational) chapel, and gained an interest in and link with Australia. Wilcox was born at Boxhill, Surrey to a Church of England family originating from St Neots, where his grandfather had been a currier.<sup>2</sup>

His early life was one of great struggle through lack of capital, even with the help of his friend W. Barker. His subsequent career and rise to fortune was remarkable in view of the fact that he had 13 children of which 10 survived him. He was particularly generous towards the Congregational Chapel and the present building was only able to be built because he defrayed much of the cost.<sup>3</sup>

It is likely that the greater part of his fortune was gained in his business connections with Australia, through the co-operation of his equally remarkable second son George.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph's birth more probably 1811 – Gai Woolhouse 26/072009

<sup>2</sup> A currier is a person who dresses leather.

<sup>3</sup> The Congregational Church was built in 1888 and is now the United Reformed Church.

<sup>4</sup> Tebbutt describes George as a second son, but ..... an older son had left home. The census of 1851 has George as the oldest.

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**George Wilcox**, born 1838, was first employed at James Paine's office on the Market Square at the age of 12, and afterwards served a five-year apprenticeship with S Bedells, grocer, of 9 High Street, and a year with a Leicester grocer.

In 1857, at the age of 19, he sailed in the 'Royal Charter' to Australia and, possibly under the wing of W. Barker, got a job as a clerk at one pound a week. In 1858 he joined a small grocery business which a year later amalgamated with an old established drapery shop. This in partnership with his father, he took over under the name of J & W Wilcox, although his father never visited Australia.

In 1863 he returned to England and married Ann Fuller of Manor Farm, St Neots.

Altogether he made 13 voyages between England and Australia and was joined at Adelaide by his brother Joseph.

His knowledge of the goods needed in the new colony enabled him, with the assistance of his father, to build up a large import business as well as to arrange the export of wool, hides and frozen meat to England.

In 1899 he was the largest exporter of frozen lamb in Australia. He also practiced farming and in 1908 owned the Koonamore sheep station with 40,000 sheep.

Joseph Wilcox at his death left a fortune of 39,000 pounds.<sup>5</sup> He had retired from his shop in 1887 and it was taken by W Seward.

The older Joseph Wilcox was very much involved in local affairs. He was a Deacon of the Congregational Church for 30 years, a member of the Committee of St Neots Gas, Light and Coke Company, founded in 1845, a member of the Local Board from 1876 onwards, and a Director of St Neots Paper Mills Company in 1888.

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<sup>5</sup>This Joseph is George's father. The book has no details about the younger Joseph, George's brother.