

EARLY WILCOX HISTORY – England

CHAPTER 1 - SILKIES of LYON

Thomas Wilcocks – descendant of Villon's

The Huguenots

Tracing the Wilcox ancestry back to the 1500's, it is understood that the family were silk weavers from Lyon in France. They could have been a tribe, or a handful of families who were 'Huguenots' using the name 'Villon'.

The Huguenots were the Protestants of France inspired by the writings of [John Calvin](#) in the 1530s. The word 'Huguenot' was coined in about 1560 by the French Royal Court when holidaying in Tours on the Loir. Nightly they would hear the illegal Reformees (ie advocating reform in the Church of Rome) chanting their prayers at the city gate of St Hugh. The reform did not come so they continued in their own Christian practice.

The Huguenots were regarded as heretics by the Church and the French Government, and as was the custom of the time were in some instances sent to the galleys or tortured to death and their estates confiscated.

From 1680-1700 around 200,000 Huguenots did left France to avoid religious persecution. By the end of the 17th century and into the 18th century, roughly 500,000 Huguenots had fled France relocating to Protestant nations, such as [England](#), [Scotland](#), Denmark and other countries. Among these refugees was the 'Villon' family who settled at Spitalfields in London where the 'Silkies' congregated. At some stage it is believed that the family also became curriers.

It seems that a negative attitude towards the Huguenots may still prevail. As recently as the 1990's an outburst from an historian in Lyon, in response to a request for information on the family name, Villon, believed to be Silkies, shouted "The Villons were villains! They lived off robbing and looting. They were being hunted down, and fled France"

If the 'Villons' had such a negative reputation in France, it could be that when they arrived in England, they did not want to be know as Villons, so gradually changed the name to Villox then to Willcocks and eventually to Wilcox. Alternatively the name may have simply been Anglisised and corrupted leaving the various surname spellings of today.

The notion of 'Villons' being robbers may have come from another source. By 1860 over two thirds of weavers were out of work, so abandoned the trade. They gained money from looting, many went to the docks, or ended in the poorhouse.

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CHAPTER 2 - THOMAS WILCOCKS

Thomas Willcocks – Felmonger (*Courier or Tanner*) & Private soldier

Born: St. Neots, Huntingdonshire, England circa 1779

Died: 1817

Married: Mary ??? Died at about age 60 St. Neots, Huntingdonshire, England.

Children: Thomas circa 1805 Joseph circa 1812, Mary circa 1813, William circa 1815

She and Joseph had two children when living in England: Joseph, born 1811 and Mary born in 1813 then William 1815, born at Waterloo (*This date and place are questioned*)

Thomas Wilcox, circa 1805

He was the probable son of Thomas Wilcocks. In his will leaving his household belonging's to his wife and his business to his brother, on condition that he effectively takes over and runs the tailoring business, which Joseph did successfully.

Probate 7th August 1833

Research Notes

Unfortunately Thomas does not name any extended family in his will that could help identify his parent's origins, or his mother's maiden name. (perhaps it was not Mary)

Joseph Wilcox, circa 1812

Became a tailor in St. Neots. His story is continued in the next chapter.

Mary Wilcox, circa 1813

Mary was the third child of Thomas Willcocks. According to the notes from Sidney Wilcox, a grandson, Mary was a woman of some character. She heard that the owner of the Swan Inn at High St., Leighton Buzzard Lines, John Bushell, had lost his wife, and was wanting a House-keeper. She went to meet him, got the job and married him quickly.

(A Mary Wilcox is recorded as a servant in the 1841 census. Mary married John Bushell Dec. 1884)

The Swan Inn was a big place that had been drifting, and she lifted the business. It was situated on the old posting Road, London-Lincoln-York, and they had a mob of Post Horses, coaches and boys. However, with the advent of the railway, the Inn drifted again.

When John Bushell died, Mary was left the failing business, which in turn passed to her only child, John Bushell Jr.. He then had only one child, John Bushell again, who became a drunk and died young. What remained of the business was left to the daughters of the original John Bushell, who were both elderly at the time.

William Wilcox, circa 1817

In those days women followed 'Camp', ie Common Soldiers' wives followed them and more or less did the cooking and camp work. Mary gave birth to her third child, William Wilcox, in the Camp on the actual field of Waterloo either the night before, or the night after the battle in 1815.

(from "Story told by Sidney Wilcox to Alan Wilcox but does not match his birth date)

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William married Elizabeth Porters in Feb. 1844. Elizabeth died before him. They had no family but adopted her niece. Sadly this girl got badly disfigured by the bursting of a Kerosene Lamp, so William left all his little fortune to a trust to give her one pound weekly.

William's nephew, John Wilcox, was made Trustee. John thought it a nuisance, and as Elizabeth's niece was weakly and might die at any time, got her to agree that he should take the Capital and give her one pound per week for life. She bucked up, and lived many years and John lost many hundreds over her.

(Sidney Wilcox learnt the story when he visited England in 1903 and the niece was still living then)

He came to Adelaide and was in the Railway Service till he went to England in 1873/74.

Sidney just remembers him as a porter who had lost an arm in the rail service, and he conducted them from the train at Port Adelaide to the ship "City of Adelaide" in 1872.

EARLY WILCOX HISTORY – in England

CHAPTER 3 Joseph Wilcox - Tailor

JOSEPH WILCOX of St Neot's

Born **1812** in Bexhill, Sussex, England

Died 17 May **1893** at about age 81 in St. Neots, Huntingdonshire, England

Married: 1834 Sarah (Sally) Emery (England)

NB – the 1851 census records the surname spelling as Wilcocks

Joseph Wilcox was born to a Church of England family originating from St Neots, where his father had been a currier. He became tailor in St. Neots.

In the will of Joseph's elder brother, Thomas, his tailor's business was left to his brother, Joseph, on condition that he effectively takes over and runs the tailoring business, which Joseph did successfully.

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.

(In Sidney's story) Joseph took over a business owned by a great friend, W. Barker, a tailor and clothier who emigrated to Australia. The original business was owned and occupied by French Flanders from around 1775, and was situated at No. 13 High Street, St Neots.

Joseph owned the business until his death in 1893.

Joseph married Sarah Emery in 1834. As described by Sidney Wilcox, Joseph's grandson, 'Sally (Sarah Emery) was a right down good old sort and sport'. Her father was in the Howard Britannia Implement Factory as a Fitter. One of the family kept the Blue-Cow-Inn on the London-Bedford-Huntingdon-Post Road to Leicester and Manchester. It was of quite some importance in pre-rail days, then faded, and had a revival with motoring, being only about 60 miles from London City. They were said to have kept 12-14 post horses around 1833.

W. Barker had joined the Independent (Congregational) chapel, and gained an interest in and link with Australia. Joseph was also a chief contributor to the cost of the building.

Joseph had his shop at No 13 High Street, St. Neots. The family probably lived above the shop. A stone on the front of the building bears his name and the date 1888.

Joseph became a master tailor/drapery and was the leader of his tribe in St. Neots managing to get all the Gentry jobs. He specialised mainly in uniforms, livery for the Dukes of Manchester and Rutland. He was a speculator in Argentine and Brazil Stocks, doing very well from some good spins. In 1851 he was employing 7 men. (He had 8 children by then).

EARLY WILCOX HISTORY – in England

Joseph Wilcox was very much involved in local affairs. Through his friend, W Barker, he joined the Independent (Congregational) chapel. He was particularly generous towards the Congregational Chapel and the building was only able to be built because he defrayed much of the cost. (*The Congregational Church was built in 1888 and is now the United Reformed Church*)

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.

Up to mid-life Joseph was a real wowser, of the first vintage in the Congregational Chapel. “What!!! Cards, the Theatre, a Spot” – on your life you daren’t mention them! Till one time about 1880 when a new parson came to the Chapel. This man was very liberal minded and bucked up the Chapel. One day he said to old Joe “There’s a fine Shakespeare play on at Theatre tomorrow night. The return rail fare is 2/6 (60 miles each way). Pit seats are 2/6. Take me to it!!” Old Joe bucked, but Sally his wife came in saying “you old fool, it’s time you did something and Parson says it’s good. Go, you have got to go!” Joe did, and it was about a monthly job afterwards. Then Card Parties, then a Spot!

Joseph and Sarah had 13 children. ‘This was a mob, and they came pretty quickly one after the other and had to be provided for.’

The children of Joseph and Sarah (Sally): Thomas (1834) Mary (1835) George (1838) Emery (1840) Susannah (1842) Joseph (1844) John (1846) William (1847) Sarah (1849) Henry (1851) Fanny (1853) Murray (1855) Ernest (1857)

Thomas, the eldest son, was apprenticed to a Linen Draper and Costumier, Geard’s at St Neots and later married one of the girl apprentices Louisa Priscilla Heyden. He was the first of this family to come to Australia, probably about 1856, with his father’s friend, William Barker. Apparently old Joseph gave Thomas 500 pounds to go into business with Barker. They went to Gawler, in South Australia, possibly because Barker had friends there.

Mary

Died young, age 21

George: In 1850 at the age of 12, George was employed at James Paine’s mercantile office on the Market Square, and served five years apprenticeship to the grocery trade. He then served seven years with S Bedells, a big grocers store in High Street, Leicester.

George, Emery and Joseph's story is continued in -
Part 2 - “THE WILCOX'S IN AUSTRALIA.”

Susannah married Benjamin Peppercorn in June 1869, who died in May 1872. Later she married Peter Hammond Cutheridge in 1879, whose first wife had been the sister of her first husband.

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John followed his father in St Neots as a Tailor. He married Mary Anne Readman.

In 1880 he was appointed London Agent for George who was working for Wm Mofflin & Co. In 1889 John moved from St Neots to London.

William 1848 Licentiate of Pharmacy in Lincoln with Benjamin Peppercorn. Sue's (Sussanah) husband.

Sarah 1849

Henry 1851 B.M. of Dublin (Doctor of Medicine) in 1882 married Edith Crowley

Fanny 1853 Married Samuel Gibson.

Murray 1855

Ernest 1857 B.M. of Edinburgh (Doctor of Medicine)

Joseph Wilcox at his death left a fortune of 39,000 pounds. 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. He had retired from his shop in 1887 and it was taken by W Seward who sold boots and shoes and clothing.

St Neot's Chronicle

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.

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

The story is continued in **PART 2 - "WILCOX'S IN AUSTRALIA"**