

THE STORY OF THE RICHARDS OF THE GIBSON FAMILY

Like all good stories of long ago this begins: -

Once upon a time, about 1796 an Ayrshire lad named Richard Gibson wooed and won his lass, Janet Gillies. Richard was perhaps born in Craigie, or it may have been Dreghorn, while Janet, it seems, was from Stewarton.

Having won his Janet they were married in November 1796 in St Quivox and Newton Ayr, and, as was quite usual in those days, there were six children born to them. Richard was described on his son's death certificate a labourer, other records suggest he was a miner.

The story continues with their eldest son, the second Richard, born 5th September 1798 in St Quivox and baptized, as was proper, on the following day. Richard may have had the middle name of Oswald, though it is never shown as such on official documents, until his own son's death certificate, but his twin grandsons were named for him, Richard and Oswald, as was a third grandson baptized Richard Oswald.

Richard having in his turn grown old enough to notices the lasses, he wooed and won a bride from near Coylton.

Margaret Thom (born 1805) was the second child and eldest daughter of James Thom and Agness Smith of Barbieston [Barbiston] Farm, where James was both farmer and wright

Richard and Margaret were wed in Coylton on the 15th December 1826, and took up life in Mauchline, Richard Oswald as a grocer.

In due course their first son, James, was born in September 1827, but sadly died young, and was buried in the Gibson family plot in Mauchline churchyard. The only girl in the family came 18 months later, born just after Christmas in 1829 and baptized Agnes on the 5th January 1830. Agnes grew and flourished, eventually marrying in 1850 to Stewart Allison, saw miller and timber merchant of Greenock, and bearing him six girls and two sons.

Then the third Richard made his entry to the story, born on 17th November 1831, and baptized ten days later. Tragedy struck the little family with the

death of Margaret on 19 January 1834, aged 28. She was buried with young James, there is a headstone for them both. Agnes was only four, Richard just past two years old.

Richard Oswald at some stage hired a young woman named Isabella Richmond as family servant [1841 census] to care for home and children. By 1844, having got her pregnant, Isabella and Richard Oswald were married in August. Isabella was 30, Richard Oswald 46. Agnes and Richard must have been fond of their stepmother, Agnes named her fourth daughter Isabella Richmond Allison.

Three months later young Richard's first stepbrother was born, baptized on 5 November as James Thom Gibson. Two and a half years later John Richmond appeared, baptized in May 1847, followed by David in 1848 and William in 1850.

Young Richard went off to live and work in Greenock in August 1847, just before his sixteenth birthday. The early signs of his financial ability have been preserved in the small brown leather-covered notebook he started, in which to record his weekly expenses and eventually his income, carefully balancing the two. He was fairly well off, as he earned an annual salary of £10 per annum from A & T Anderson, working in their office probably, though what their business was is unknown. He also had an allowance of about £2 per month from family sources.

The early entries of the cash book show a hungry boy who, besides paying lodgings at 3 shillings a week and victuals, the cost of which varied from 3/5d to 5/6 ½d. per week, also bought snacks such as ship's biscuit 3d each, apples, cheese, gooseberries, and black sugar to fill the cracks. He also wrote many letters, buying stamps, paper, wax, and a signet for stamping the wax seals cost a ½ d. Hair cuts were 2d, but hair oil cost 6d. He had thick, very curly, black hair, a new hairbrush cost him 1/-. Washing of clothes was done for him about once a month and cost between 2/- and 3/-. For the first couple of years he went regularly to church, putting ½ d. in the collection, but as he grew older there were other amusements, fairs, concerts, dancing, skating [skates cost 5/- in December 1848], sailing or excursions to neighbouring towns and across the Clyde. He enjoyed the circus so much in 1849 that he went twice; in March it cost 1/9d. but the

April seat was a cheaper one at 1/6d. Being a healthy lad the only medicines were for cholera medicine in January 1849, there was an outbreak of the disease in the area, and laudnam later the same year, a touch of toothache perhaps, or maybe hangover headaches.

By March 1850 he was having such a good time that he lost track of his cashbook entries – there is a disgusted note, “my cash having got into confusion I must start anew.” All was sorted out on the next page. He was quite the natty gent, buying a blue coat, tartan trousers, various other clothes, hats, bonnet, boots and a plaid. In 1851 a vest cost 10/-, comment in brackets ‘dear’ !

A ‘merschaum’ pipe – 2/- , a whip etc.- 4/- , a pistol – 3/-, and a set of Burn’s works – 8/-, were all items necessary for the young gentleman. He went home to Mauchline regularly and took presents for family and servants. He was fond of his mother’s siblings, with mention of Aunt Sarah (Thom, who married Thomas McClelland and lived in Mauchline) and Uncle Jas, living at that time in Barbieston Farm with his wife Mary and his elderly father James Thom.

In November 1851 young Richard received a gift- or a bequest - from his grandfather, old James Thom, of £49 17s 6d, which he used to emigrated to Australia, leaving after a final visit home to Mauchline in December. He bought his passage and outfit for £13 13s 2d. and had £20 in his pocket on arrival. By the end of May 1852 he was in Victoria and had earned another £30, working as a clerk for stock and station agents, Mickle and Bakewell. The final balance in the cashbook stood at £50.

Richard tried a couple of jobs, wisely ignoring the lure of the goldfields, finally working for the stock and station firm of Dalmahoy Campbell & Co. He became a partner in 1858, just before his marriage to Mary Ann Sweetman, a 19 year old English lass who had emigrated with her parents to Victoria in January 1852. Richard managed Dal.Campbell and Co. very successfully for the next 14 years, first for Dal himself until his death, then for Dal’s wife Catherine Ann. In 1872 the partnership in Dal. Campbell and Co. expired, so Richard set up his own stock and station firm, Richard Gibson and Co., which became known throughout the colonies as one of the

leaders in the stock and station business, doing business in all the eastern states and even New Zealand on occasion.

Richard and Mary Ann had eight children, five surviving to late teens. Mary Ann died in 1875 of phthisis [consumption/TB- cold wet winters] which was endemic in Melbourne in those years, as was Colonial Fever [typhoid – heat and poor sanitation]. There was much public discussion about the best places to build sanatoriums to treat such patients. She did not have long to enjoy the mansion, called 'Barbiston', which Richard had erected in Royal Park, Melbourne, as he bought the land- 2 roods 15 perches - in a Crown Land auction in 1869 for £235 2s 6d; it would have taken some time to be built. The house still stands, it is now the Treacy Convention Centre, catering for weddings and other function. It is very close to Melbourne Zoological Gardens – Richard donated animals at intervals, - parrots, a 'laughing jackass' [kookaburra], and a platypus over the years.

After Mary Ann's death Richard took Mr Edward Trenchard into partnership in 1876 and left him to run the day to day business of the firm of Richard Gibson and Co. At some stage Richard had bought 164 acres of prime farmland at Tullamarine, about 10 miles from Melbourne, which he called Barbiston Farm. He became interested in Ayrshire dairy cattle, although most of the cattle sold through his firm were shorthorns, with a few Herefords. His office in Melbourne had a gallery showing painted portraits of the stud cattle which passed through his hands.

By 1882 he had become very serious about establishing a fine stud, so purchased various animals imported from the Duke of Buccleuch's renowned Drumlanrig herd. He proudly had his own private catalogue printed in October 1882, and entered several animals in the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria's annual Show that November.

Tragically, the day the animals were due in the ring Richard's eldest son, James, aged 19, went for his usual early morning ride in the Royal Park, tried to jump a fence and came off, fracturing his skull. He was dead when found about 9.30am. This left the twins, Richard [the fourth of the name] and Oswald, as the heirs to his fortune, along with their sisters, Margaret and Edith.

Meanwhile, back in Scotland, Richard Oswald and Isabella and their four boys were flourishing. Richard had become a 'Grocer and Inn keeper' in Loudoun Street. [1851 census]. He died in October 1858, leaving Isabella to carry on as 'Grocer and spirit dealer' in Main Street, [1861 census] and finish raising the boys. In 1860 a gravestone was 'erected by his son Richard Gibson, Melbourne, Australia' in Mauchline churchyard.

By 1861 the eldest, James Thom, was 17 so he also came to Victoria, to join his stepbrother. He married a Melbourne girl, Emily Isabel Vernon in 1873, and they went to live on Mallara Station, a large sheep run on the Darling River, [river frontage of 12 miles, 99 square miles in size] in the Wentworth district of NSW. They had three daughters before moving to Bourke, NSW, where their only son Richard Oswald [the fifth Richard] made his appearance, followed by another little girl. James and Isabel, with Cora, the eldest daughter, retired to Annandale, Sydney, NSW, where James died in 1931.

John Richmond became an architect, but in 1870 died unmarried at the age of 23, having suffered from phthisis for several years. He is buried with his father in Mauchline Churchyard. Five years later Isabella died on 21st July 1875 and was buried with her husband and son.

Third brother David married Mary McMillan Mair in January 1876, but was died early in that September, having contracted encephalitis, and was also buried with his father, mother and brother, inscriptions being added to the headstone in each case.

The youngest brother, William, aged 25, had sailed for Australia about two months before David died, he would have got the news some months after arriving in November 1876. William also settled in NSW, in 1881 he married Charlotte Kiernan of Deniliquin. There were nine children born to them, firstly in Deniliquin and later in Hay, NSW. William died in Granville NSW in 1949.

Back in Australia Richard of Melbourne arranged in 1883 for the Latin inscription on the old slab in the Mauchline family plot to be refurbished. He saw his elder daughter, Margaret Thom Gibson, married to Arthur Helton Tuckett in February 1884 and, having been diagnosed with severe heart disease, made his will, leaving a £1000 to his great friend, Dr Thomas Dick,

Superintendent of the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum near Melbourne, an annuity to his father-in-law, James Sweetman, and generous bequests to his Allison nieces and nephew, also to his namesake, Richard Gibson McClelland, born in 1884 to his cousin Thomas McClelland, who was the son of Aunt Sarah (Thom). His employees were left legacies, the amount depending on their length of service. The four surviving children had incomes from a Trust fund, the twins to each receive £500 per annum until the age of twenty-five, when they would inherit their share of the capital. The girls were to have sole and exclusive use of their income from the Trust, without husbands having any claim on it.

In 1885 he must have become annoyed with the twins for he made a codicil to his will, reducing their allowance per annum to £150 per year and increasing their age of inheritance to 27 years. This was the year his first grandchild, Margaret's little daughter Mary Gibson Tuckett was born. In May the following year he would have shared Margaret's grief for her stillborn twins, boy and girl.

On the morning of Saturday 24 July 1886, either Edith or Richard found him dead in bed at the house 'Barbiston'. Oswald was in NSW and didn't get back to Melbourne until the following Friday. Richard was buried privately in the tomb in Melbourne General Cemetery, where five of his children, his wife Mary Ann and his parents-in-law, James and Priscilla Sweetman are buried as well. There are inscriptions naming them all except for Mary Ann and Richard. Instead there is an inscription on the old slab in Mauchline acknowledging that Richard had the lettering renewed and giving his exact date of death. Mary Ann is not acknowledged anywhere.

Probate on his will was proved at almost £124,000. His beloved herd of Ayrshire cattle were of huge interest throughout the colonies and New Zealand and brought record prices when sold at the clearing sale on his Tullamarine property, Barbiston Farm. As well, a local newspaper reported that the land used for his stockyards at Newmarket in Melbourne sold for £1000 per acre.

In 1888 his younger daughter Edith married Reginald Tuckett, the younger brother of her sister Margaret's husband Arthur Tuckett. The couple sailed away on a world tour honeymoon, lasting 18 months. Edith kept a diary and

map of their travels. They did visit Mauchline briefly, but were mostly interested in Robbie Burns. The same year the twins, Richard and Oswald Gibson of Melbourne, presented two silver communion cups to the Parish of Mauchline. These cups have only recently come to light again, having been hidden away in their wooden box in the Church.

The twins became graziers, Richard in Victoria and Oswald in NSW. Both married but neither had children, so the lineage continues through the girls, Agnes Allison, Margaret and Edith Tuckett, and possibly through James Thom or William's children.