

## HARRIETT SLEE (NEE TAITE)

A brief history by Ken Slee (gg grandson)

Harriett Blackshaw Taite was born at Southwark, London, on April 9 1802. There were four older and four younger siblings including Henry Pettit Taite the baby of the family (more on him later).

Harriett's parents were Joseph Taite Jnr and Elizabeth Blackshaw Wall. Joseph Taite Jnr was a leather tanner and dealer, developer of new industrial leather processing methods and a warden of the leather seller's guild in London.

Harriett's grandfather Joseph Snr, was a publican and instrumental in the settling and development of the town of Boston Spa in West Yorkshire.

Nothing is known of Harriett Taite's early life, but on May 18 1820 she married Josiah Slee in Southwark. Josiah had been born in Southwark on January 20 1791 to Noah and Elizabeth Slee (nee Lynch).

Noah Slee had his origins in Devon but in London had become a wealthy landowner through involvement in the industrial scale manufacturing of vinegar. His older sister Jane had married a Thomas Benson who had also become very wealthy through involvement in similar brewing enterprises in Southwark. A mutual friend and possibly relative, Richard Thornton, was the wealthiest man in England when he died in the 1860s.

Josiah Slee and one of his older brothers, Noah Jnr, funded by their father to the tune of £1,650, had set up as large-scale tanners, curriers and leather dealers in Southwark.

Josiah and Harriett Slee had six children in London, Josiah Jnr, Harriett Jnr, Emma, Frederick Taite, Edgar and Agnes. Frederick Taite Slee died aged one year in London.

In July 1831 Josiah raised £300 by mortgaging his fifth-share of the 15 houses he inherited from his father in Southwark and the family embarked on September 26 1831 on the ship *John Woodall* as steerage passengers. On board were Josiah (40 years) and Harriett Slee (29), their five surviving children aged from five months to ten years, Harriett's youngest brother Henry Pettit Taite (aged 18) and Harriett's sister's in-laws from Boston Spa, the Burnleys (John and Hannah and eight children).

Just why the Slees left London for Van Diemen's Land is unknown but there are many possibilities – for health reasons, to become landowner/farmers, chasing their fortune, family connections etc. Certainly, there were many potential contacts from Devon and Southwark already in VDL that they may have been corresponding with.

The *John Woodall* arrived in Hobart Town on February 17 1832. Unfortunately, Mrs Burnley and her infant daughter had died at sea.

After their arrival in VDL another child, Charles Slee was born at Newtown in 1834, with Josiah recording on the baptismal record that he was a "Farmer" rather than "Currier". Henry Pettit Taite meanwhile had gained employment as the superintendent of the Bermondsey Tannery owned by Samuel James Wintle. The Bermondsey/Southwark area was a major centre for leather tanning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century so the tannery name was significant.

The Burnleys had moved to Launceston where they became involved in a range of activities before being declared bankrupt. The Burnley family, except the two oldest sons, then returned to England in 1834 (the elder of the two boys, William Bust Burnley, later became a businessman, parliamentarian and landowner in Melbourne - the inner-Melbourne suburb of Burnley is named after him).

Josiah Slee died at the Salter farm at New Norfolk (The Falls) in January 1838 and a family bible record written by Henry Pettit Taite states that he “died of a broken heart”. He was buried in the Stephens Street Cemetery at New Norfolk. Land ownership grants ceased in 1831 and whether this frustrated an ambition to become landed gentry is unknown but possible. Josiah was buried at New Norfolk. Probate on his will indicated that his assets were valued at less than £100.

Harriett was forced to take employment in this crisis. The owner of the *Colonial Times*, Henry Saxelby Melville Wintle praised her suitability for the role of superintendence of the nursery at the Cascades Female Factory. This was perhaps because he knew her brother Henry Pettit Taite through his brother’s tanning business or it is even possible that the families knew each other through previous involvement in the London leather trade.

In February 1839, a Mr J Slee (probably Josiah Jnr aged 17 years) sailed for London on the *Frances*, presumably in relation to the family’s assets in Southwark.

Henry Pettit Taite married Elizabeth Salter in 1840. The Salters were also from Devon and were probably related by marriage to the Slees. Henry gained control of land at Brighton and Bagdad, a daughter was born in 1841, but he then died in February 1844 of a “burst blood vessel” and was buried at St Marks Church Pontville.

Josiah Slee Jnr was declared bankrupt in Hobart in 1845 but what business he had been involved in is unknown. In 1846, he left for Sydney and never returned to Tasmania.

In August 1846 Harriett Slee Jnr married Henry Howson, a music teacher in Hobart and they had three children over the next several years.

By 1847 Harriett Slee was in financial difficulties and wrote to London seeking assistance but was told that the money still owed on the mortgage on the Southwark houses exceeded the value of her share.

In 1848 Emma Slee, the second daughter married William Buckland at Hobart. William was a son of Charles and Anne Eliza Buckland of Hobart and cousin of the Reverend J R Buckland. A daughter, Emma Jnr, was born in 1849 at Dynnyrne but the mother died one or two days later.

Because of the various marriages that had taken place in Hobart, Frederick Gawan Hinsby, William Buckland, Valentine Fleming and Edgar and Charles Slee were related, a fact that took all of them except Fleming to the Victorian Goldfields in the early 1850s. Frederick Wood and three Dermer brothers were also friends of the family and involved in the move to Victoria.

Samuel Slee, convicted of stealing geese in Devon was in Hobart in the early 1850s. He was a cousin of Josiah Slee Snr and granted a ticket of leave in 1854. If his presence was known to other family members it is unlikely that their relationship was acknowledged.

Meanwhile back in London a number of court cases were underway involving the Tasmanian Slees and other family members but what they were about or their outcomes is currently unknown.

In January 1852 newspaper reports state that C Slee and J and G Dermer were cabin passengers on the *Union* between Geelong and Hobart – they had presumably been exploring the Victorian Goldfields.

In April 1852, the *Helen* sailed from Hobart to Melbourne with cabin passengers Edgar (23 years) and Charles Slee (18), Henry Howson (30), William Buckland (29), Frederick Wood (16), and George (20), Thomas (23) and William Dermer (24). It is suspected that they then mined gold at Fryers Creek, now Fryerstown, near Castlemaine.

Edgar Slee and Henry Howson then returned to Hobart, perhaps more than once and in March 1853 they and the rest of their families travelled on the *Eucalyptus* to Melbourne – Edgar Slee, Harriett Slee Snr, Agnes Slee, Harriett and Henry Howson and their two surviving children and infant Emma Buckland.

The fact that family members were able to afford cabin accommodation on these trips indicates that the recent financial troubles were now behind them – cabins costing twice as much as steerage berths.

Harriett Slee died at Carisbrook to the west of Castlemaine in December 1854 of “general decay” and was buried in the Bald Hills Cemetery east of the town. This cemetery is now a grassy paddock with no evidence of graves but a recently erected monument lists the names of those interred there. A witness to the funeral was Hector Norman Simson, the local squatter, and it seems possible that Harriett may have been accommodated at his house at the time of her death.

There are said to be a music book and other artefacts belonging to Harriett Slee deposited with the Castlemaine Historical Society by descendants of the Howson family.

Fates of the other associates and family members:

- The Howsons settled in Castlemaine where Henry was a miner, butcher, music store proprietor and musician.
- Josiah Slee Jnr seems to have had perpetual money problems. He married a Mary Eaton in Ipswich, Queensland in 1849, then ran a shipping business in Sydney before becoming an accountant in that town. There were no children from the marriage.
- William Buckland was likely a victim of an armed robbery (using the alias Buckhurst) with his brother-in-law Frederick Gawan Hinsby near Malmsbury in 1853. The perpetrators were brought before Justice Redmond Barry at Castlemaine and later hanged in Melbourne. His daughter Emma was adopted by Edward and Agnes Garsed (nee Slee). He later remarried in Hobart to Ellen Allardyce Gellie and had another family at Koondrook in northern Victoria where he became a farmer, newsagent and accountant.
- Edgar Slee married Mary Ann Brittingham at Newstead and had a family. He was a mover and shaker involved in farming, butchering, local council and volunteer forces and in later life became a stock and station agent at Euroa. An adopted daughter married Donald McKinnon of Evandale in Tasmania.
- Agnes Slee married Edward Garsed, a pharmacist in Hobart and then in Bendigo. Edward was a prominent member of Bendigo society. The Garseds adopted William and Emma Buckland’s daughter Emma, spent time in Hobart and England and for a time lived near the Bucklands at Koondrook.
- Charles Slee (Ken Slee’s g grandfather) became a farmer and butcher at Newstead and raised a large family. He too was involved in a wide range of community activities.
- The Dermer brothers (sons of Doctor Dermer, the Assistant Colonial Surgeon of Hobart) were friends of the Slee family. They mined for gold in Victoria before moving later in the century to New Zealand.

- Frederick Gawan Hinsby had married Theophila Oke Buckland in Hobart in 1845. He was shot in the face in the robbery mentioned above but apparently not seriously wounded. He was later the principal of the independent *Collegiate School* at Kyneton in Victoria.
- Frederick George Wood was the son of James Wood the Registrar of the Supreme Court in Hobart. After his father's death in 1854 Frederick Wood returned to Hobart and was appointed to his father's role but died in 1859 of tuberculosis.



A portrait said to be of Harriett Slee (nee Taite).