

The Sir William James Thomas Connection

I first became aware of a possible connection to the family in my early teens. My great grandmother **Rachel EMBRY** was visiting with us one Good Friday. She was chatting away to us all and at one point my mother mentioned that she had realised that **Sir William James Cooper THOMAS** was living not far from us. Gran Embry was very interested and stated that it would be good to meet up with him sometime and have a chat and then the conversation moved on.

Sometime later Mum explained that the Sir William James Cooper Thomas, living at Tregate, was the son of **Sir William James Thomas** who she believed was related to the family somehow. Gran Embry's father, **John (Ioan) WILLIAMS**, had known him well and there was an occasion when Sir William had invited John to ride in a carriage procession through Cardiff with him.

Of course the other prominent story in the William's side of our family was John's heroic exploits in helping to rescue the miners trapped in Tynewydd Pit after the flooding accident there in 1877. For this John had been given a sum of money, a pocket watch, a bible and the Albert Medal. Over the years I learned a little more about the Tynewydd Disaster and Mum had a few old photographs and some newspaper cuttings about it. She also had a small copy of a Citation given to the rescuers, I presume on the occasion of the awarding of the Albert Medal on Caerphilly Mountain. At first I thought the citation must be for John Williams but later discovered it was for **James Thomas** and I wondered how it came to be amongst the ephemera that my family had kept concerning the disaster.

Years passed and I later began to have a great passion (or obsession) for Genealogy and began to ask more questions about the family from other relations and about 1997 began to delve more thoroughly into researching and recording my Family History. This included asking other family members what they knew. Like most family stories there was a mixture of hearsay, supposition, rumour, and inaccurate recollections but always a grain of truth. I just had to sort out fact from fiction and piece together who was who in the family.

Going back to Sir William James Thomas I heard that he was the son of **Mary THOMAS**, sister to **Ann THOMAS** who had married John Williams of Albert Medal fame. Sir William though was supposed to have been born "the wrong side of the blanket". I followed this lead up with a visit to the library and a look at Who's Who but the entry stated that Sir William was the son of **Thomas James Thomas** and **Jane PHILLIPS** and he had been orphaned at an early age - so bang went the story about him being the illegitimate son of Mary Thomas.

John Williams, Gran Embry's father married Ann Thomas, daughter of **Edward Thomas** in 1873. At the time of the Tynewydd Pit disaster they had two daughters; **Mary Ann** and Rachel (Gran Embry). They then decided to emigrate to USA following John's sister **Rachel** and her husband **William DAVIES** and John's aunt **Margaret Williams** married to **Oliver LEWIS**. John and Ann went on to have 5 more children born in the USA before they returned to Wales. Several differing stories have been told to me of who came back when but they all pointed to the fact that once back in Wales with her family Ann did not want to return to the USA. This happened about 1896/7. I was told that the THOMAS's were farmers out Lisvane way. Gram Embry - then Rachel Williams - had been on her way to see **Siamps THOMAS** and was crossing a field when she met Grancher Embry (**Rachel Williams** married **William Hubert EMBRY** in 1897).

I had supposed that the Thomas's that they were on about were Ann's parents or brother. I hadn't at that time been able to get much of a hold on Ann's family. Her marriage certificate stated that her father was named **Edward**.

Over the years and as more information became available over the internet I pieced together Sir William James' younger life and family tree. I learned that he was the grandson of **James (Siamps) THOMAS** a coal mine engineer and owner of the Tynewydd Pit amongst others. Siamps had made his home in and around Porth and Ynyshir where Sir William grew up. He owned or managed several mines, one of which was the Troedyrhiw Mine where John Williams had been working when disaster struck at the Tynewydd Pit. John had been called from that mine to work on the rescue.

Siamps wife Elizabeth died in 1861 and the census recorded that Siamps is living at Mount Pleasant Ynyshir. He is a widower with four children: **Thomas, Rachel, Mary Ann** and **Elizabeth**. Thomas is 20 and working as a colliery manager

In 1871 Siamps is recorded as a colliery manager living at Troedyrhiw but does not name the house. His youngest daughter Elizabeth is living with him and working as a dressmaker. He has a housekeeper living at the house with him: **Margaret Thomas** recorded as a married woman aged 35 born Ystrad. Also living there are **Ann Thomas** aged 16 a domestic servant, **Margaret J Thomas** aged 14 dairymaid and a boarder and **Watkin Thomas** aged 19 working as a coal miner, all born Llantrisant. Ann, Margaret and Watkin are in fact the children of Mary Thomas the housekeeper. .

In 1881 Siamps is still living at Troedyrhiw and the address is again noted as Mount Pleasant He is a widower and a coal proprietor employing 600 men. His housekeeper is still Margaret Thomas and she is still recorded as being married.

Things have changed by 1891 though. James is now recorded as a widower and colliery labourer boarding with Mary THOMAS a married woman aged 48 born Dinas. They are living at 31 Fitzhammond Embankment, Cardiff. She has six children with her; **Elizabeth**,

William, Mary Ann, Jane, Edward and Maggie. There is another child visiting 12 year old **Edith ROBLIN**.

In 1901 Siamps has moved again. He is now living at Cross Farm Llanedarne. His relationship to the Head of the hosue **Mary THOMAS** is "Uncle", he is recorded as a widow and colliery proprietor. Mary has 5 children living with her Elizabeth now married and known as **Elizabeth HOLLINGSHEAD**, William - farm bailiff, Jane, Edward - clerk in coal office and Margaret. There is also a granddaughter, **Janet THOMAS** aged 7, as well as a cook, housemaid, groom and stable boy.

Siamps died later that year.

Meanwhile Siamps' son Thomas had married Jane Phillips and she had given birth to a son William James born 1867. She died aged 27 in 1869. In 1871 William is recorded with Jane's parents on the census at Tonypistill, Mynyddislwyn. His father then married **Rachel JOHN** in 1874 and they had three daughters **Elizabeth, Rachel and Sarah Maud** before Thomas caught pneumonia and died in 1885.

In 1881 Thomas and Rachel are living Danygraig House Ystrad with their 4 year old daughter Elizabeth and Rachel's aunt. William James is living with his maternal grandmother Jane **PHILLIPS**, a widow, and several cousins, at Tonypistill. William James is working as a pupil teacher.

In 1891 William James is a colliery agent living with his stepmother at Craig Road, Brynawel. They are all still together at Bryn Awel House in 1901 and William is recorded as a colliery agent employer.

William James inherited his grandfather's estate when Siamps died in 1901. In 1917 William James married **Mary Maud COOPER** in Kensington and they had three children. One of whom was Sir William James Cooper Thomas as stated at the beginning of this story and whom Gran Embry had obviously known in the past.

Meanwhile Gran Embry - Rachel Williams - daughter of John Williams and Ann Thomas married William Hubert Embry at Penarth in 1897.

So how does all this pull together? Well Ann **THOMAS** domestic servant to Siamps in 1871 is my great-great grandmother - mother to Rachel Williams (Gran Embry) wife of John Williams and daughter of Edward and Margaret Williams (who in turn was the housekeeper to Siamps in 1871) sister to Margaret J (dairymaid to Siamps 1871) and niece of Watkin (Boarding with Siamps in 1871).

Margaret Llewellyn had married **Edward Thomas** in the late 1830s and in 1841 they are living at Dinas Llantrisant with their 3 year old son **Robert** and one year old daughter

Mary. Edward is a collier. The family has grown by the time of the 1851 census - Edward is working as a coal miner and they are living at Craig Ddu Cottages Llantrisant. Robert is 12 and working as a coal miner, Mary's age is given as 8, there is also **Ann 6, Jane 2** and **Alice 9** months. Living with them is Margaret's brother **Watkin LLEWELLYN**, 18 coal miner.

By 1861 Edward (haulier) and Margaret are living at Troedyrhiw with Robert 22 - coal miner and Mary 18, Watkin 9, Ann 6 and Margaret Jane 4.

In 1871 Margaret has left Edward and along with Ann, Margaret J and Watkin is living with Siamps Thomas. Margaret is still living with him in 1881 but by 1891 Siamps has Mary (Edward and Margaret's eldest daughter) living with him with her children. Mary had married Evan THOMAS and their children were **Thomas, John, Elizabeth, Catherine, William** and **Mary Ann**. They had three further children **Jane, Edward** and **Margaret** but although they bore Evan's name were probably the children of Siamps.

As well as from parish records BMD indexes and census returns I gained a lot of information about Siamps and Sir William James Thomas from a book "The Entrepreneurial Society of the Rhondda Valleys 1840-1920" In there it states that in his later years Siamps decided to stand down from the day to day running of the mines and turned to farming. He bought a lot of land in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire. This land included **Cross Farm** where he and Mary were recorded as living in 1901 census.

I kept going back to my aunt's comments about the Thomas's being farmers around Lisvane/Llanedarne and Gran Embry going to see Siamps there when she met Grancher. Then one day while going back over the Embry Family History the penny dropped! In the 1891 census living at Cross Farm, Llanedarne were Grancher's Uncle, **Alfred** and Aunt, **Maria**. Maria was married to **John SUTTON**. Alfred is recorded as head of the household and a railway contractor and John Sutton as the farmer. John and Maria have three children living with them there.

I don't know whether Alfred owned the farm and sold it to Siamps. Alfred at one time had bought several properties in Cardiff which he left to various members of the family in his will. Whatever the circumstances I know that by 1894 at the latest John and Maria Sutton were living at a property in Newport Road Cardiff as their youngest daughter **Emmaline** met with an unfortunate accident and was killed. She fell out of a bedroom window while living at Newport Road. Not many years later John Sutton died and Maria emigrated to Canada with two of her children.

As I said amongst the gossip, rumour and reminiscences there is always a thread of truth. Probably Siamps had already bought other land and property near to Cross Farm before acquiring that house. By chance it would seem that Grancher Embry was visiting his aunt and uncle when Gran walked across the fields to see Siamps. My great

grandmother's sister was Mary who did have children born "the wrong side of the blanket" but not Sir William James Thomas. The children she bore Siamps would have been uncles and aunts to him although they were quite a bit younger than him. I am still working on the supposition that one day I will find a family link between Margaret Thomas (Llewellyn) and Siamps . He was known to be supportive of family and to employ them and keep them close to him. There are just too many THOMAS's to be sure though.

P.S. In 2020 I had my DNA analysed and among the matches that came up was a certain lady who turned out to be a 4th cousin to me. We both share the same Great-great-great-grandmother, Margaret Llewellyn. I descend through Margaret's daughter Ann and the 4th cousin through Margaret's daughter Mary and her daughter Mary Ann Thomas who later married Arthur Hollingshead.