

# A Bridge so far. “Reconnection between lands for a family from Ceylon”

By Kyle J Joustra International Ceylon Database

For 67 years Timothy Rowland Bridge was unaware of his ancestors, other than a few pieces of information. He knew his father, Frederick William Bridge, was from either New South Wales or Victoria in Australia. He knew of his life in Ceylon and being a planter/ manager on Rasagalla Estate, Balangoda and later Tempo Estate, Kalutara. It’s hard to fathom so little was known or passed on, and yet he lost his father when he was quite young. This problem is a lot more common than you would expect.

A good friend of Timothy’s, decided to post a query on the Ceylon Genealogy Group Page of Facebook, which is one of the outreaches the International Ceylon Database has to connect with people. So my first task was to locate him in Ceylon, within a short time, I could confirm and add to his work history on various Estates. There was also a P S Bridge and on one estate they were joint Assistant Managers, a coincidence, maybe yet more research would tell.

I then expanded my search to Australia and linkages back to Ceylon. Under pioneers of Australia I came across the name Lancaster Bridge, a pioneer of Newbridge in Victoria, whom had and eight children two of which were Frederick William and a Patten Smith. Whilst this seemed right I now had to cross-reference and prove by eliminating any further candidates and tracing the lives of this family. Within a short time I found reference to Lancaster Bridge dying and two of his sons were in Ceylon.



Figure 1 Kiribatgalla Estate Ratapura

Tracing Lancaster’s wife Ellen Ann Martin, I found that she moved from Newbridge to Caulfield and lived in 29 Norwood Rd also referred to and called ‘Ratnapura’, there was no doubt we had uncovered Timothy’s grandparents, uncles and aunts. Their children seemed to be involved in Ceylon and India some of whom married in India and had children there. Patten Smith Bridge came back to Australia after Managing at several estates in Ratnapura, whether he had any children in Ceylon is not known for sure however dates would indicate at least one was and the rest were born in Australia.

Lancaster Bridge was an Anglican and was quite involved in the St John’s Church at Newbridge (her daughter was Sunday school teacher and also the Organist there). His wife was also of Newbridge and her father, Frederick Gaze Martin, was a farmer in Newbridge and originally came from Norfolk in England. Frederick Gaze Martin among his children had a Frederick Rowland Martin, as I would find in tracing this family the passing on of certain ‘Tracer Names’<sup>1</sup>



Figure 2 St John Newbridge

Now the challenge was to find out and see if we could go back further on the Bridge family, in my search I found that Lancaster Bridge came into Australia on the ‘Ann Dashwood’, a Clipper that arrived from Liverpool to Australia on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1853, he was from Roscrea Ireland. Further to this

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<sup>1</sup> Tracer Names are used to reflect a past relative or surname that the family hails from

I came across a prison record for Lancaster Bridge of Roscrea Ireland for Potato Stealing in 1850, while I can't completely confirm it's the same person, the name combination is not common and the dates would explain a possible reason for coming to Australia. He had a brother, Patten Smith Bridge in Roscrea, who there is quite a bit about him in court cases and his role as manager of Estates there for some Landed Proprietors. I was able to find Lancaster and Patten's father who was William Bridge and he married a Mary Smith. These surnames peaked my interest as they obviously had some position in Ireland, a little more tracking and it was uncovered that Mary Smith's father was Patten Smith



*Figure 3 Racket Hall, Roscrea once owned by Patten Smith*

and he was listed in Burkes Landed Gentry, connecting up with Sir Joshua Smith whom arrived with Oliver Cromwell to quell the Irish Rebellion in 1649 and received land in what was then King's County, for his efforts. Sir Joshua and some of his family became part of the Quaker movement and some ended up in America. The trace on the Bridge side of the family turned up surnames of Bridge, Smith, Patten, Higham and Coffey.

Attention now turned to discover more on the Martin side, and like the Bridge family which could lead quickly to dead ends, as a rules of some interesting names and not common combinations, it allowed to me trace back with relative ease. Frederick Gaze's father was Thomas Martin and his wife was Address Pestell Pleasants, and I found further connection on the Pleasants and Pestell families of Norfolk.

So now we know and can see quite a bit of interesting history and movements of this family, its now the job to pass this on to the future generations and even track down people who probably don't know each other exists. The process, whilst I find it quite easy, I also recognise this comes from experience both in understanding where to look and patterns along with historical context. The beauty of the process is both the discovery and the challenge, while also not putting unreal expectations. The results bears fruit and delight that I can provide something where previously not much was known. This serves as just another example of what can be dug up with a little detective work and interrogation.

An exert from his Frederick Gaze Martin's Will:

**FREDERICK Gaze Martin**, of Newbridge, farmer, by his will dated December 22, 1890, and presented for probate by Mr. R. C. Morgan, of Melbourne, solicitor, appointed his son **Frederick Rowland Martin**, of Burke's Flat, farmer, sole executor. Testator directed his real estate to be sold and out of the proceeds made the following bequests -To his son **Frederick Rowland Martin**, £100 j to his daughter Ellen, £25; to Mary Jane Methvin, .£75, and the balance equally to his children **Frederick Rowland Martin**, Ellen Ann Bridge, Thomas Lissey **Martin** and Address Maud Birch. Testator also made the following bequests: to his son **Frederick** ail his horses, cattle (except 5 cows otherwise specified), buggy\* harness, dray, &c., and also his watch ; to his daughter Ellen his safe; and to these two equally all his other household effects. To Mary Jane Methvin testator bequeathed her choice of 5 cows. Testator died June 27, 1895, and the estate is sworn at .£675 real and J2160 personal; total .£835.

Newspaper Ad 11/1/1932 The Argus

**BRIDGE.**—On the 8th January, at her home, 29 Norwood road, Caulfield, Ellen Ann, loved wife of the late Lancaster Bridge, of Newbridge, aged 94 years.