

ALFRED SYMONDS



Alfred Symonds

Alfred was John and Catherine (nee Gee) Symonds eldest child and was born in the Holbeach district in Lincolnshire on 23rd February 1851, though one source lists his birth as occurring on 23rd January 1851. He emigrated with his parents and infant sister Rachel aboard the "William Stewart," arriving in Adelaide on 14th July 1853. He received his education from his father but whether it was in his school or informally at home prior to the commencement of John Symonds' school, we can only speculate.

As Alfred and his brother Henry grew up, they had to take over more of the burden of running the farm when they were quite young because John was engrossed with his teaching duties. Alfred was eighteen years old when Spurgeon, his youngest brother was born – his mother Catherine was thirty-nine years old and had given birth to eight children over a span of eighteen years!

Caroline Stacey, daughter of George and Sarah Stacey of Myponga Beach married Alfred on 5th January 1870. This marriage took place at the residence of the bride's father at Myponga Jetty. Caroline's parents had arrived in South Australia aboard the 'Seapark' in 1852 and they, like John and Catherine Symonds lived for a time at McLaren Vale before shifting in 1856 to Myponga Beach which was 'just over the hill' from Wattle Flat. Caroline who was born in England in 1845 was twenty-five years old when she married the nineteen-year-old Alfred.

I don't know if Caroline possessed any personal property but reform had commenced in Australia and by 1870 women in Victoria could own property in their own right and not be forced to hand it over to their husband. Other states slowly followed Victoria and introduced this legislation.

Alfred and Caroline lived at Wattle Flat and in December 1870, when Alfred was nineteen years old, the first of their eleven children was born. Their first three, Alfred James on 12th December 1870, Phillip George on 5th January 1872 and Phillip Henry on 31st January 1873 were all born at Wattle Flat. Phillip George died on 27th February 1872. He was just over seven weeks old and the death certificate states he was 'accidentally poisoned by laudanum' at Boords Flat! The same year as the first Phillip was born, the final link in the overland telegraph was completed but telegrams linking Adelaide with the outside world could only go as far as Palmerston in the Northern Territory as there was a break in the cable in the Java Sea.

Yankalilla Council records show that from 1870 and for the next four years Alfred was the occupier of part of Myponga section 410. This was the land that John Symonds occupied from 1868.

In 1872 Alfred was called upon to serve as one of twelve jurors at an inquest. Levi Shadwell, a twenty-four year old nephew of Robert Shadwell, was killed while he 'was under the influence of harvest wine.' He attempted to bring a reaping machine down a hill and it got out of control and ran over him. This accident probably happened on Wrights Hill road. The accident occurred at Wattle Flat on 7th January 1872. Levi was buried in Yankalilla Cemetery on 8th January 1872. Charles Symonds, Alfred's brother purchased the Shadwell property in 1912.

Alfred and Caroline's next three children all had their births registered at Edithburg, which is on the south east of Yorke Peninsula. William Ernest was born on 22nd April 1874, Edith Jane on 1st October 1875 and Sarah Constance on 10th July 1877. On the electoral roll of 1878, Alfred Symonds' place of residence was listed as Edithburg. The next birth, that of their seventh child, a daughter called Fanny Maria occurred at Minlacowie, which is on the western side of Yorke Peninsula, on 26th March 1879. Two more children Hilda on 17th March 1882 and John Thomas Stacey on 1st November 1884 had their births registered and occurring at Brentwood.

Brentwood is very close to Minlacowie so it was possible that the family were living in the same place but Caroline may have been at her sister-in-law Hannah Symonds' (wife of William Knibb Symonds) home for the birth. Hannah also gave birth to a son Horace at Brentwood in 1885.

On 4th July 1886 another son, Stanley Washington was born. His birth was recorded as occurring near Georgetown, which is about 24kms south of Gladstone in the mid north of South Australia. It was just two months before this birth that the railway from Adelaide to Bordertown was officially opened so that railways were gradually encompassing the state.

Phillip Henry and William Ernest enrolled at Wattle Flat School on 28th March 1887. Their enrolment entry showed they had attended school at Georgetown during the previous year. Nearly two years after her last confinement, the birth of Caroline's eleventh child took place at Yankalilla on 20th June 1888. This son was named Leslie Anderson. Again another Symonds wife had borne a large family and in Caroline's case, she had given birth to eleven children over eighteen years.

1888 was also the centenary of white settlement on Australia though I doubt if too many farmers felt they had much to celebrate when the country was in the grip of the worst recorded drought since colonisation. South Australia was known as the 'Granary of Australia' and its crop yields were dismal and many farmers faced ruin.



Alfred Symonds and Sons rolling mallee at
Nullawil in 1893

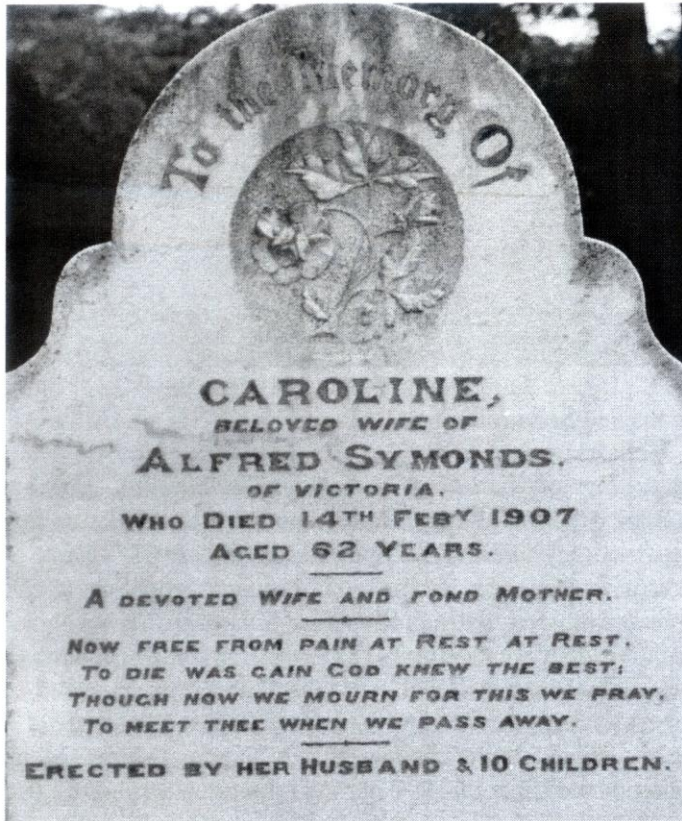
In 1890 Alfred took up land in the mallee country of Victoria at Nullawil. His initial block was the location of Nullawil 50 of 525 acres and the adjoining block, Nullawil 50A of another 525 acres was taken up in his son Phillip Henry's name. Land on the east side of Nullawil was purchased in Caroline's name and their other son William had approximately 600 acres in this area. Records of Myponga Jetty School show that in 1891 Fanny, Sarah, Edith and Hilda Symonds transferred from Myponga School to Myponga Jetty School. This school and the Bible Christian Church beside it were built in 1875. We can only speculate that perhaps Caroline and her younger children remained at Myponga Beach with the Staceys while Alfred and his older sons went to Nullawil to establish the farm. Records of the Dry Tank (later called Winston) School show five Symonds children attended the school – Hilda, John Thomas Stacey, Fanny Maria, Stanley Washington and Leslie Anderson. The School's attendance sheet of 1897 shows John attended on 182 days, Stanley 182 days and Leslie only 171 days.



Alfred Symonds house at Nullawil. Photo taken on 7th October 1896

It was a courageous decision for Alfred and Caroline and their family to leave the lush valley at Wattle Flat and seek more land in the dry hinterland of the Victorian mallee. Even though the mallee is not considered to be large timber, it still required a lot of very hard work to clear enough land to make wheat farming profitable. All the clearing would probably have been carried out with horses pulling bush rollers in the lighter timbered areas and axemen cutting down individual trees in the areas where they were larger.

Alfred was an original trustee of the Dry Tank Wesleyan Church and remained as a trustee until 18th January 1920 when he left the district. He was the first secretary of the trustees and on 25th July 1894 he signed a presentation certificate for the occasion of Mr. & Mrs. William Down's wedding on behalf of the other trustees of the Dry Tank Wesleyan Church.



Caroline Symonds grave Yankalilla Cemetery

While Caroline was on holidaying at Myponga Jetty, with the Stacey family she died suddenly on 14th February 1907. The cause of her death was 'valvular heart disease and goitre.' She was buried in the Yankalilla Cemetery one day later. Caroline was 62 years old. After Alfred's wife died, he remained for some time at Wattle Flat and stayed with his brother Charles and sister-in-law Janet. Like most of the Symonds menfolk, even to the present generation, he was inventive and skilled with his hands so was able to build the first wood stove ever installed in the family home at Wattle Flat. Prior to the installation of the stove, Janet and her daughters and before them, Catherine, had to do all the baking in a brick oven. Long lengths of wood, mainly wattle, were fired in the oven to heat the bricks. When the fire had died down to ashes, they would be removed, then firstly the bread followed by the pies and cakes would be baked in the residual heat given off from the bricks. Imagine the heat in summer! No wonder the women were overjoyed with their wood stove.

Alfred was fond of music and singing and did a little composing for his own pleasure. He was not impressed with the very small folding harmonium the family had so he purchased the organ from the Methodist Church in Myponga and gave it to them. This may have been the organ that his brother William played in the church. His niece Ella, who was a keen musician all her life had a much more suitable instrument on which to practice. Alfred returned to Dry Tank and lived alone for a time and then remarried. I believe his second marriage, to Margaret Jane Collins occurred in Bendigo Victoria in 1913. An inscription in Alfred's family bible would have been written by him in 1908.

Feb 23rd

I Alfred Symonds celebrate my fiftyseventh, 57th Birthday alone at home Nullawil.

A wet afternoon, yet all is well,

Alone, but not alone, for God is always near.

Yea, he hath been my guide,

Then I have nought to fear!

Some tension was caused within the family with this marriage. His son Phillip said their father complained at the time that his new wife couldn't cook a decent rabbit stew! He remained at Dry Tank with his new wife and his sons farmed at Coobang near Parkes, New South Wales where Alfred owned some land.

The Symonds' owned five blocks of land at Coobang. This area was formerly Coobang Station but was broken up into smaller blocks when the Government instigated a plan of closer settlement in the area.

Leslie had the homestead block, and his brothers John (Jack), Stanley, Phillip and their father Alfred all had adjoining blocks across a lane on the north side.

Such were the problems within the family that contact with Alfred rarely occurred and he never met some of his grandchildren. Alfred died on 9th July 1924 in the Alfred Hospital, Melbourne from lobar pneumonia. He was buried in the Brighton Cemetery on 11th July 1924. Alfred was seventy-three years old when he died and not the age of seventy-six years that was recorded on his death certificate.

*May life be song, and melody be sweet
Every note in time, loves Hymn complete
Onwards abounding unison
Lift up the soul! light up the home
Your end be peace.*

Alfred Symonds 20-6-12



Early photo of Caroline Symonds grave and other graves in background in Yankalilla cemetery.