

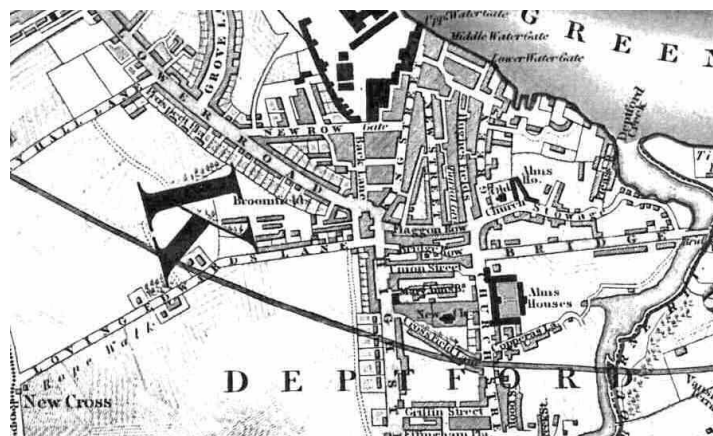
# The Secret Life of Hesketh Davis Wells

When starting to research my family history over 50 years ago, I found that my mother's side had come mostly from London and the south east whereas my father's were mainly from Liverpool, Ireland and Gloucestershire. However, recent discoveries have proved me wrong - a branch of my mother's family had a 'secret' link with Liverpool.

## Hesketh Davis WELLS & Mary Ann Catherine GARNER

My 3x great grandfather, Hesketh Davis WELLS was born in Deptford in 1806, the son of Hesketh Davis WELLS, a shipwright, and Ann, nee BEAUCHAMP. At the age of 18 Hesketh followed in the footsteps of his father and was apprenticed to John Small SEDGER who was traded as a shipwright and ship-breaker at St Mary's, Rotherhithe. John SEDGER lived at the Globe House in Globe Street, Rotherhithe, so it is likely that Hesketh lived there or lodged nearby during his apprenticeship. On finishing his apprenticeship Hesketh worked with his father and younger brother, Robert Thomas WELLS, who had also been apprenticed to a shipwright. Together they traded under the name of Hesketh Davis Wells & Sons. Initially they were ships chandlers in Deptford but then become timber, coal and firewood merchants with various addresses not only in Deptford but also in the district around Old Street, Middlesex.

Records show that both Hesketh and his father lived at Prospect Place, Deptford. This was a row of houses on the south side of Lower Road, Deptford, near where it joined the top of the High Street. This part of Lower Road was renamed Broomfields or Broomfield Place and then subsequently Evelyn Street, as it known today. Therefore, given the addresses found for the Wells family, it can safely be assumed that they occupied the same property from about 1802 until at least the 1870's. Indeed, the 1851 and 1861 Censuses show Hesketh Davis WELLS living at 43 Broomfields, with his widowed mother and two of his siblings living at 42 Broomfields which was presumably next door. A map of Deptford in 1833 shows that the back of Prospect Place looked out onto open fields towards the village of New Cross.



*1833 Map of Deptford showing Prospect Place and Broomfields*

In 1835 Hesketh Davis WELLS married Mary Ann Catherine GARNER at St Paul's Church, Deptford. Mary, an orphan and minor at the time of her marriage, had benefited from an inheritance from her maternal uncle, Edward SWIFT, who had held leases on land and properties in Deptford, including the Black Horse public house at 108 Evelyn Street which still stands today. Hesketh and Mary had two children: Hesketh James WELLS born in 1836 and Mary Ann WELLS in 1838. However, tragedy struck in 1843 when Mary died aged only 27 years. The cause of death was 'delirium', so perhaps she suffered some kind of breakdown. In the will made she made a year before her death, Mary mentions an indenture dated 25 July 1835 (three days before her marriage) which was effectively a prenuptial agreement designed to protect the assets she brought to the marriage. Thus Hesketh Davis WELLS was left a widower aged 37, with two small children to care for, aged only 5 and 7 years old.

### **Mary Esther BARBER**

In the years following his wife's death, Hesketh started a relationship with a woman, Mary Esther BARBER, with whom he had a further six children. The 1851 Census shows Mary BARBER living in Deptford with her widowed mother and a daughter, Mary BARBER, aged five years, who was probably the couple's first child. Nothing else is known about their first daughter, so she probably went into service or died young, but thereafter followed five other children: Herbert Wells BARBER in 1847, Alice Wells BARBER in 1849, Walter BARBER in about 1852, James Wells BARBER in 1853 and Ellen BARBER in 1855. No birth certificates for these children have been located, although this was not uncommon at the time. Birth registration had been introduced in 1837 but was not officially made compulsory until 1875. Interestingly, however, Hesketh Davis WELLS registered the birth of his daughter Mary Ann in 1838, even though registration had only come into effect the year before.

Although the children's births were not registered, evidence of Hesketh being their father, appears in baptismal records. Herbert Wells BARBER was baptised at St Luke's Church, Old Street, Middlesex in 1847, his surname listed as BARBER and his parents as Hesketh WELLS and Mary Esther BARBER. Hesketh gives his occupation as Gentleman. Apart from Walter, for whom no baptism record has been found, the remaining children were baptised as adults, using the surname BARBER but giving their father's name as Hesketh BARBER and his occupation as timber merchant, so they must have some knowledge of who his was.

At her death Mary BARBER's occupation was given as domestic servant, so perhaps this is how she met Hesketh Davis WELLS. It is possible that Hesketh felt unable to marry Mary because of the difference in their social status or that the indenture mentioned in his wife's will held financial disincentives for him to re-marry.

Mary lived in Deptford with her children and widowed mother, about a mile south of Evelyn Street, so where did the couple manage to meet? On the 1851 Census both Hesketh James and Mary Ann WELLS were away boarding at adjacent schools in Blackheath, so they were

not always at home. On the 1851, 1861 and 1871 Censuses, Hesketh had the same live-in servant, Sarah KENT, so it would have been difficult for Mary to visit him in Evelyn Street, especially with his mother and sister living next door! One possibility is the district of St Luke's, Old Street. Although Deptford appears to have been the main place of residence for the WELLS family, they may also have had not only business addresses but also accommodation in St Luke's, Old Street or nearby which probably explains why Herbert Wells BARBER was baptised at St Luke's Church, Old Street. In 1858 at the age of 36 Mary Esther BARBER died of pneumonia and was buried in Brockley Cemetery. Her five remaining children, between the ages of three and eleven, continued to be looked after by their grandmother, Esther Walter BARBER, until her death in 1870.

Throughout the 1850's and 1860's, after his father's death and when his children were growing up, Hesketh Davis WELLS continued working alongside his brother as a timber merchant. At the same time he began taking an increasing active part in local affairs. In 1855 Parliament had passed the Metropolis Local Management Act which created the Metropolitan Board of Works, a London-wide body to coordinate the construction of the city's infrastructure, and a forerunner of the London County Council. The Act also created a second tier of local government consisting of parish vestries and district boards of works. On the introduction of the Act, Hesketh Davis WELLS was elected as vestryman (similar to today's local councillor) for the North Ward of St Paul's, Deptford and from that body elected as their representative on the Greenwich District Board of Works. He was also involved in the running of affairs of St Paul's Church, Deptford, and for over 40 years was a trustee of John Addey's, a local Deptford charity. In 1846 and 1851 Hesketh appears on the list of subscribers to the London Art Union. Art unions were organisations created to function as patrons of art. Members would pay a small annual subscription. The union would then spend the subscriptions on works of contemporary art which were distributed among its members by means of a lottery. To all intents and purposes Hesketh Davis WELLS appeared to be an active and respectable member of the Deptford community.

Hesketh retained a number of connections with the shipwright community. Having served an indenture, he was able to become a member of the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights in the City of London. He is listed as such on the electoral rolls of 1859 and 1862. All three of his sons by Mary BARBER worked in shipping, so it is probably safe to assume that he was involved in their education and initial employment.

In 1869 disaster struck as Hesketh Davis WELLS was declared bankrupt. He had incurred debts of £38,670 10s 3d – a huge amount at that time. A contemporary newspaper article reported that "*The bankrupt, a man of advanced years, had retired from business, amassed a competence. In an evil hour he had been induced to rejoin the firm, as a sleeping partner, and from this his misfortunes had arisen.*" A contributory factor cited was the sudden death of Hesketh's brother and business partner, Robert Thomas WELLS, earlier that year.

The last few years of his life must have been broken ones for Hesketh. He died at his home in 43 Evelyn Street, Deptford in 1873 from cancer of the oesophagus, and was buried in St Paul's churchyard, Deptford, alongside his late wife, Mary.

### **Hesketh James WELLS & Mary Ann WELLS**

On the 1851 Census Hesketh James WELLS was at a boarding school in Blackheath. That same year, aged 15, he was apprenticed to his uncle and father's business partner, Robert Thomas WELLS, a member of the Company of Watermen & Lightermen of the River Thames. This indenture lasted until 1859. However, Robert must have been fairly flexible with the arrangement. Apprentices were not normally allowed to marry during their apprenticeship but in 1857 Hesketh James WELLS married Elizabeth SHEPPARD, the daughter of Henry SHEPPARD, a Deptford market gardener, at St Luke's Church, Old Street. Hesketh spent his early adult years working alongside his father and uncle in the timber business but by 1861 was employed as a ship broker's clerk. He also became a member of two Masonic lodges, one in Deptford and another in Lewisham.

After their marriage Hesketh James and Elizabeth WELLS lived at various addresses in St Lukes's, Old Street, Rotherhithe, Deptford, Charlton and finally Camberwell. The couple had two daughters: Florence Maud WELLS in 1857 who was my great-grandmother and Elizabeth Sarah WELLS in 1861. In 1871 when they were aged 12 and 10 respectively, both daughters were away at a boarding school in Harmondsworth, Middlesex, close to where Heathrow Airport is now situated. This is all the more interesting as Elizabeth Sarah WELLS was deaf and dumb. I have been told that the family communicated with her using sign language.

Also in 1857 Hesketh's sister, Mary Ann WELLS married Edward PEMBROKE at St Paul's Deptford. The son of a Deptford butcher, Edward had started his working life aged 15 as an office boy in the London firm of W S Lindsay & Co, ship brokers and coal fitters. He quickly rose through the ranks to become a wealthy ship owner and ship broker. Hesketh James WELLS was sometime an employee of his brother-in-law in the firm of Galbraith, Pembroke & Co.

Mary Ann PEMBROKE started her married life in Tulse Hill before moving to a large detached house in Blackheath, with views across Greenwich Park, where she and Edward were able to live in considerable comfort. The 1881 Census shows that the household included five live-in servants. Edward and Mary PEMBROKE had ten children, nine of whom survived to adulthood. One of their sons was named Hesketh, after Mary's brother.

Hesketh's wife, Elizabeth WELLS, died in 1877 aged 39 years and was buried in Nunhead Cemetery. The following year banns were read at St Mary's Lambeth between Hesketh James WELLS and Mary Ann GOODE. This is probably the same Mary Ann GOODE who aged 14 was a live-in servant for Hesketh and his wife on the 1861 Census. However, there is no evidence that the marriage ever took place, probably because Hesketh was already

suffering from tuberculosis. He moved to Torquay, presumably for health reasons, and died there in 1880 aged 44 years, his sister Mary Ann PEMBROKE in attendance. He is buried in Torquay Cemetery.

Mary Ann PEMBROKE died in 1908 at the age of 70. She is buried in the family mausoleum in Charlton Cemetery, close to where she lived in Blackheath.

### **Herbert Wells BARBER & James Wells BARBER**

After leaving school aged 15, Herbert and James BARBER were employed by the London based shipping firm of Patton, Vickers & Co. During the early 1860's Herbert moved to their Liverpool offices and in 1873 became a partner of the firm. In 1868 at St Andrew's Church, Bebington he married Sarah POSTLETHWAITE, the daughter of John POSTLETHWAITE, an auctioneer. In the 1871 Census he was living with his wife and young daughter Esther Jane BARBER in Tranmere, a suburb of Birkenhead. Also living with the family was Herbert's younger sister Ellen BARBER, aged 15.

In 1870 Esther Jane BARBER, the children's grandmother, died aged 73 years. She was buried in Brockley Cemetery in the same grave as her daughter, Mary Esther BARBER. The remaining siblings continued to live in the family home at 72 Douglas Street, Deptford. However, by 1871 James too had moved to Liverpool. He and Herbert WELLS lived nearby each other in Tranmere, so must have commuted to their offices in central Liverpool.

Whilst living in Tranmere Herbert BARBER became an active member of the Birkenhead Liberal Association, including standing as a local candidate for the Clifton Ward in 1879. Between about 1867 and 1882 both brothers were members of the local rifle volunteers. Herbert was a member of the 30<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Rifle Volunteers (as well as being its sometime treasurer) and James was a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cheshire Rifle Volunteers. In fact, James' interest in shooting very nearly put an end to his whole career.

On the evening of 16 June 1876 the Liverpool Rowing Club was holding races on the Mersey at Rock Ferry. James BARBER, a member of the club, was in the judges' boat and was firing shots into the water to signal the finish of the races. Nearby was moored the Akbar, a reformatory ship. On board was George Robinson aged 16 who was struck by a stray bullet and died of his injuries two days later. James BARBER was arrested, charged with manslaughter and remanded in custody for a week pending a trial at the Cheshire Assizes at Chester Castle. Subsequent to that hearing, the case against James was dropped as the Grand Jury decided that the boy on the vessel was unseen and that the prisoner could not have any idea that the shot he fired would reach the deceased.

In 1880 Herbert BARBER was sent to New York as the American representative of Patton, Vickers & Co who also operated the Monarch Steamship Line between New York and London. In 1884 at St Peter's Liverpool James BARBER married Catherine GANDEY, the daughter of Thomas GANDEY, a master mariner. After the failure of the Monarch Line

James joined Herbert in New York and the two brothers soon established a partnership under the name of Barber & Co, which carried on a general shipping business as agents and charters. This developed into a highly successful business involving the ownership of steamships, which carried trade to Europe, Africa and eventually worldwide, and was known as the Barber Line. The business had offices in Battery Place overlooking the harbour towards the Statue of Liberty but for many years the two brothers and their families sailed back and forth across the Atlantic. In 1893, the Barbers inaugurated the first regular steamship line between New York and the Far East via the Suez Canal. In 1897 a subsidiary company, the Atlantic Stevedoring Co, was formed and in 1901 branch offices were opened in Norfolk, London and Liverpool. In the same year a subsidiary, the New York & Oriental Steamship Co., Ltd., was formed to carry on the Far East Service.

Herbert and Sarah BARBER had 18 children in total, 12 of whom survived to adulthood. James and Catherine BARBER had seven children. Both families purchased large properties in Englewood, New Jersey, where they were close neighbours for over 30 years. The brothers were active members of St Paul's Episcopal Church in Englewood, Herbert BARBER being for many years vestryman and superintendent of the Sunday School.

Both brothers were avid golfers and members of Englewood Golf Club. James BARBER, like many of his contemporary captains of industry, chose to spend time in chic Pinehurst, home of one of America's premier golfing resorts. In 1917 he began construction of his second Pinehurst residence. In the grounds of his new property, he had laid out a small 18 hole golf course. Upon first seeing his new home, the story goes that James pronounced "This'll Do". The words stuck and the home and the golf course all took on the name Thistle Dhu. Here, at this earliest-known miniature golf course in America, James and his wife held social events and small tournaments. In 2012, the Pinehurst Resort opened a new putting course on its famous grounds and named it Thistle Dhu in memory of James BARBER.



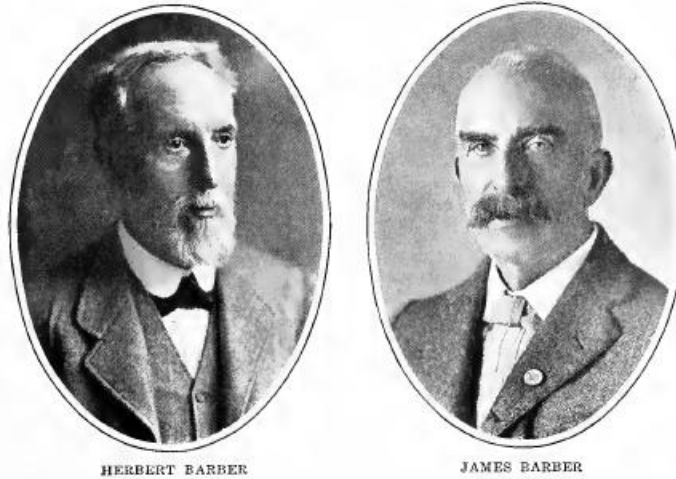
*James Barber's home "Thistle Dhu" where he built the first miniature golf course.*

Like their father, Hesketh Davis WELLS, Herbert and James BARBER were active in public life. Both brothers were involved in the Seamen's Church Institute in New York. Founded in 1834 and affiliated with the Episcopal Church, the Institute still exists today and serves mariners through education, pastoral care and legal advocacy. Herbert became a member of

the Board of Managers in 1905 and accepted a position on the Building Committee in 1910 where his connections with the shipping community proved invaluable.

In 1915, following an operation at the Presbyterian Hospital, New York, Herbert BARBER died aged 68 years old. He is buried in Brookside Cemetery, Englewood.

On the death of Herbert, James BARBER became President of Barber & Co and its subsidiary companies. Two years later he was succeeded by his only son, Edward J BARBER.



*Photographs of Herbert & James Barber which appeared in The Book of Englewood*

James BARBER was a major contributor to the construction of the Broad Street Hospital in New York. In memory of his brother, the initial building was named the Herbert Barber Memorial Building. In 1917 it was announced that the hospital had been offered to the government for use during the War with an additional contribution from Barber & Co of \$50,000. Mrs Herbert BARBER gave an additional contribution of \$10,000 and Mrs James BARBER a motor ambulance. Also in memory of his late brother, James erected the large west window at St Paul's Church, Englewood.

James BARBER finally retired in 1922. He died six years later of heart failure at his home in Pinehurst, aged 74 years. He too is buried in Brookside Cemetery, Englewood.

### **Ellen BARBER**

Ellen BARBER was baptised in 1871 at St Paul's, Birkenhead, on the same day as her nephew Herbert Postlethwaite BARBER. She was 16 years old and gave her parents' names as Hesketh and Mary BARBER, with her father's occupation as Timber Merchant.

In 1880 she married George BURROW, a post office clerk, at St Mary's, Birkenhead. Interestingly, on the marriage certificate she gave her father's name as Hesketh D WELLS, Timber Merchant. The couple went on to have nine children, seven of whom survived to

adulthood. Two of Ellen's children emigrated to New York, including John BURROW who almost certainly worked for the Barber Line. Apart from a voyage to New York in 1916, Ellen lived the rest of her life on the Wirral. She died in 1929 at the age of 73 and is buried in Neston cemetery.

### **Walter BARBER**

Walter lived all his life in Deptford. In the 1871 Census he gave his occupation as Commercial Clerk (shipping), so he probably commuted to the City. It is not known whether he worked directly or indirectly for the Barber Line. In 1875 Walter married Marian FLEMING. The couple lived in Endwell Road, Brockley and had two sons, John Walter born in 1881 and Herbert Frederic in 1884.

Walter died in 1886 aged only 34 years and was buried in nearby Ladywell Cemetery. His gravestone was erected by the Committee, Officers and Teachers of the Deptford Ragged School as Walter had been "*for more than 18 years the Teachers' Secretary*".

In 1914 Walter's son, Herbert Frederic BARBER, emigrated to New York where he worked for Barber & Co as manager of shipping and lading for 31 years.

### **Alice Wells BARBER aka CLEMENTS**

In 1872 Alice Wells BARBER married a local Deptford butcher, Edwin Clements MAJOR. The couple had one son, Herbert Edwin Clements, born in 1874 but sadly he only lived a few months. Soon afterwards the couple moved from Deptford to the Everton district of Liverpool. However, they appeared to have separated a few years later as by 1881 Alice, now calling herself Mrs Alice CLEMENTS, was living in Tranmere with her sister, Ellen. In 1882 Edwin Clements MAJOR bigamously married a lady by the name of Margaret LAWRENSON. Perhaps Alice preferred to be known as Alice CLEMENTS to differentiate herself from her philandering husband and his new "wife". In 1891 Alice was living in a boarding house in Birkenhead and described herself as a widow and needlewoman.

On 1 February 1898 Alice CLEMENTS took the train from Birkenhead to stay with some friends, Mr and Mrs Robert BUCKLEY. They lived at the Little Crosby Lighthouse at Hightown, mid way between Liverpool and Southport, where Mr BUCKLEY was the lighthouse keeper. The BUCKLEYS lived in the house attached to the lighthouse. Alice arrived with only her hand luggage, having left her boxes at Hightown railway station. That night a terrible storm blew up with hurricane force winds. Thomas BOLTON, a signalman at the Hightown cabin on the Southport Branch of the Lancaster and Yorkshire railway, went on duty at 4am and was astonished to see that the lighthouse was on fire and burning furiously. By the time the Crosby Fire Brigade arrived the lighthouse and adjoining house had been completely burnt out, with no sign of the occupants. At the inquest the jury was shown the grisly remains of their charred bodies. It was thought that the force of the wind blew in the lantern of the lighthouse causing the lamps to explode and set fire to the surrounding



woodwork. The burning oil then ran to the floors below, igniting them in turn. The jury found that the occupants of the lighthouse had burnt to death in the fire which had been caused accidentally. They recommended that if the lighthouse was re-erected, every precaution should be made for the lamps to be inspected whilst they were burning. Alice CLEMENTS and the BUCKLEYS were buried together in the same grave at Toxteth Park Cemetery. A temporary light was instituted at the lighthouse but finally discontinued in July 1898.



*A drawing of the Crosby Lighthouse which appeared in the Weekly Standard & Express*

## **Conclusion**

Although Hesketh Davis WELLS was unable to publically acknowledge the existence of his second family, there is certainly evidence to indicate that he took an interest in the education and upbringing of his children by Mary BARBER, and that they in turn were aware of who their father was. The question remains as to whether the two families of Hesketh Davis WELLS were aware of each other's existence. Since several of the children worked or had connections with shipping in the City and came from Deptford, there is a chance that they knew, but it is something which is likely to remain a mystery – that is unless there are any other descendants out there that know differently!

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hilary.darque@btinternet.com*

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