

Dr FREDERICK WILLIAM COTTON 1874-1950

Frederick Cotton was my godfather's father. I first came across his story while researching my godfather Thomas Cotton, and thought that he was a fascinating person who had led an interesting and diverse life, which was worth recording. Some overlap between Frederick's and Thomas' stories is inevitable, but I have tried to minimise it. Most of the information I have gathered has come from British and Australian newspapers, and the databases of Ancestry.com. I spoke to some of Frederick Cotton's descendants in England and Australia, none of whom had first-hand memories of him – just the family stories that had been passed down to them. It seems that he was somewhat of a loner and a wanderer. The Fremantle Hospital museum kindly provided one of only two photographs of him. I have included selected references as footnotes, and family trees as an appendix.

COTTON FAMILY BACKGROUND.

In the early 1820's, Frederick's great-grandfather Richard Cotton moved his family from Cornwall to the Keinton Mandeville – Baltonsborough area, about seven kilometres south-east of Glastonbury in Somerset and began dairy farming. This area has remained a stronghold of the Cotton family and several of Frederick Cotton's relatives are living there today (see map below, and appended family tree).

By 1827, Robert Worgan Cotton I¹ (Frederick's grandfather) was living in Green Lane Cottage, Keinton Mandeville, Somerset. He was a dairy farmer, and was married to Martha Down. Robert and Martha had six children; Robert Worgan Cotton II, (b.1828, Frederick's father), Mary Peter Cotton (b.1832), John Henry Cotton (b.1832), William Cotton (b.1834), Eliza Cotton (b.1836) and Sarah Ann Cotton (b.1839). 'Worgan' was the family name of Fred's great-great-grandmother Ann Worgan (c.1728-1800), and it was probably inheritances from the Worgan family which helped finance the dairying ventures at Baltonsborough. 'Worgan' has persisted as a family name in every generation of Cottons down to the present, and some family members held the superstition that the Worgan name guarantees survival beyond infancy.

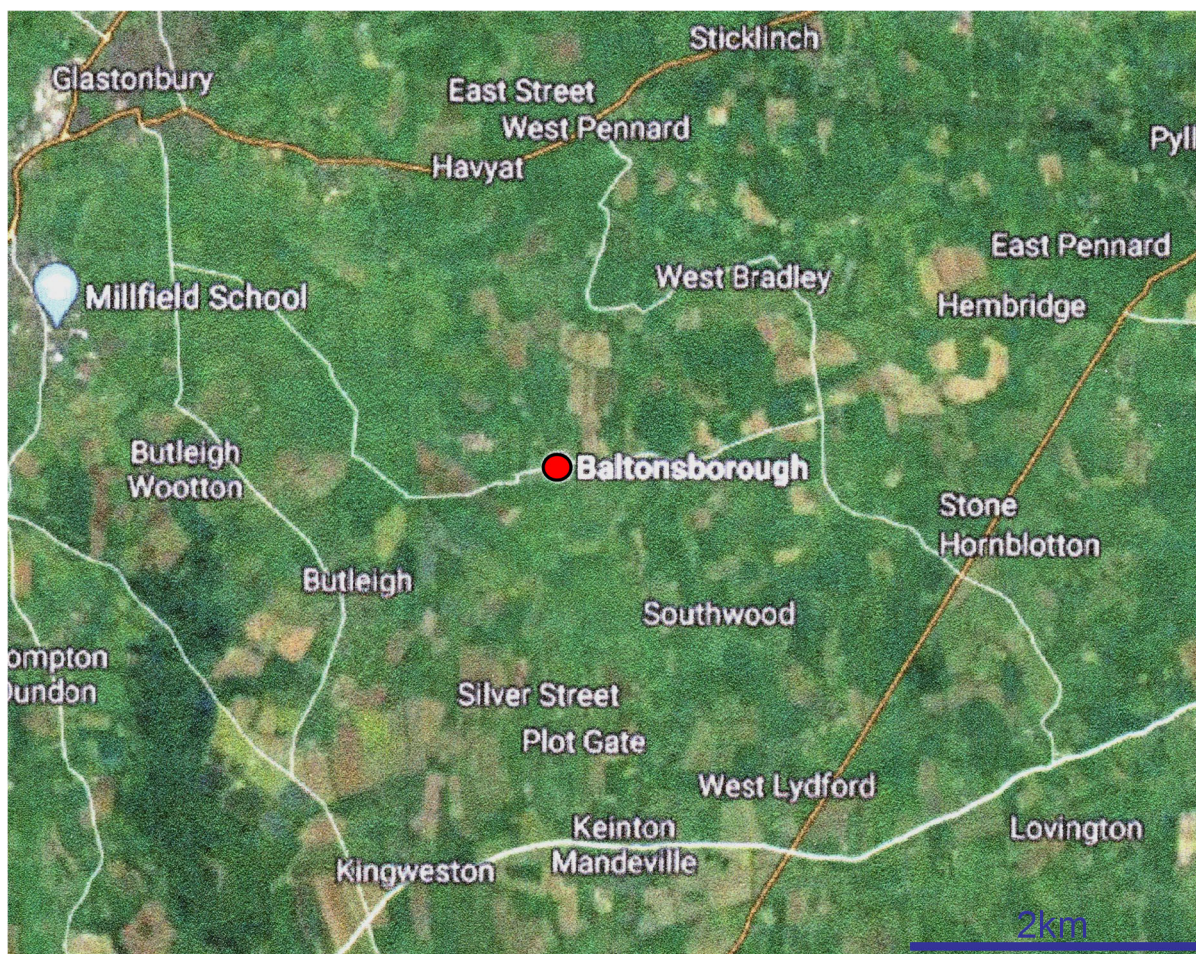
Life was difficult for farmers in England during the 1830's and 1840's. Most did not own the land they worked. Introduction of farm mechanization reduced the need for labour; opening of toll roads, railways and canals brought markets closer; introduction of a new Poor Law Act in 1834 encouraged establishment of large workhouses with reduced conditions; and there was extreme poverty. This led to social unrest – destruction of machinery, theft, rioting and demonstrations, and political agitation in favour of greater representation (the Chartist movement). Some people were arrested, convicted and transported to the colonies. James Austin, a Baltonsborough man and a relative of Frederick Cotton's was transported to Tasmania in 1802 and prospered there. Many others emigrated voluntarily to escape the conditions at home. At least 21 adults and more than 18 children from Baltonsborough emigrated to Australia between 1840 and 1852, most settling permanently.²

The difficult economic and social conditions in rural England affected the Cotton family significantly. In 1840, Robert was arrested, along with 20 other people, for 'riot and assault', but the charge was dropped. Robert's wife Martha died in November 1840, and the extended family came to his rescue, taking in Robert's two surviving daughters, while his sister Ann Cotton came to help raise Robert's two younger sons John and William. On census night in 1841, his eldest son Robert Worgan Cotton II was staying with his uncles Benjamin and Colston Cotton at East Street, West Pennard. It appears that the family unit was struggling to survive. Robert Worgan Cotton I and his sons John and William emigrated to Canada in 1844, seeking a better life. On census night in 1851, Mary and Eliza were still living with their relatives in West Pennard, while Robert Worgan Cotton II (then 22) was living and working at Lubborn House, Baltonsborough, which later became a cheese factory.

In 1855, the railway reached West Pennard which opened a larger market for local fresh produce. The area began to prosper again. In 1864 at the age of 36, Robert Worgan Cotton II married a local Baltonsborough woman, Eliza Austin, then aged 32. Eliza was one of eleven children of which six emigrated to Australia between 1830 and 1850. Three of Eliza's uncles also emigrated to Australia in the 1820's and 1830's.

¹ The name Robert Worgan Cotton was used prolifically. I have added numbers to distinguish individuals.

² Parishes: Baltonsborough', A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 9: Glastonbury and Street (2006), pp. 59-75. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=117177>



Baltonsborough Area, Somerset, England. Closely settled dairy country.

ENGLAND AND INDIA, 1874-1924

Between 1865 and 1874, Robert and Eliza Cotton had six children at Baltonsborough – John Robert (b.1865), Egbert Austin (b.1866), Colston (b.1867), Eliza Eleanor (b.1868), Robert Worgan III (b.1871) and Frederick William Cotton (b.1874). By 1873, Robert had control of about 40 acres and he inherited some money and land from his uncle Benjamin. Besides continuing as a dairy farmer, he became a successful cheese dealer. He was probably a member of the Moravian Church in Baltonsborough and had sufficient money to send his children to Moravian boarding schools in Ockbrook Derbyshire, Bremhill Wiltshire and Stonehouse Gloucestershire for their education. The family farm could not be divided between so many children, so the family had to diversify, either by geography or profession. Of the children, John emigrated to Milwaukee U.S.A. in 1889 and became an engineering draftsman; Egbert joined the Royal Insurance Coy and was posted to various cities in Ireland and England, eventually settling in Birkenhead, Cheshire; Colston emigrated to Australia in about 1900 and became a sheep grazer at ‘Gum Creek’, Carathool, N.S.W.; Eliza, known as “Cissie”, also emigrated to Australia in about 1900 and settled in Melbourne; and Robert III inherited the dairy farm and business interests following his father’s death in 1894.

From about the age of six, the youngest child, Frederick, went to boarding schools, firstly in High Street Glastonbury, then Haywardsend House, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire (now Wycliffe College). Frederick’s mother died when he was ten. Frederick grew to be exceptionally tall, being 6ft 6½in and an imposing figure. At age sixteen, he suffered rheumatic

fever which forced him to spend much time confined to his bed. Because of this illness, and the need for stability and rest, he was taken in by members of his grandmother's family who supported his education.³ He matriculated to London University in January 1892 and went on to study medicine at Bristol University College.⁴ Frederick Cotton graduated from there in 1899, became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons (M.R.C.S. England) and Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians (L.R.C.P. London) the same year.⁵

In late 1899, Frederick joined the Royal Army Medical Corps (R.A.M.C.), which was a new body set up in June 1898 to address the shortage of medical recruits into the armed forces and the grievances of existing army medical staff concerning under-recognition of their services. Enlistment was usually for seven years, followed by five years in reserves. He was initially a surgeon on probation but became a lieutenant in May 1900.⁶



Frederick William Cotton⁷

At St James', Bath in January 1901 at the age of 26, Frederick Cotton married Muriel May Pictor (known as 'May'). May was from Box, Wiltshire, the daughter of a (then) wealthy miner and merchant of Bath building stone. Her grandchild Fred Cotton thinks that May was also in the medical profession, which could explain how they met⁸. May gave her address on 27

³ Bennett, Gordon (Maj. 2/33Bn, retired) "A Tribute to Tom Cotton" Unpublished and undated.

⁴ U.K. University of London Student Registers, 1836-1945. Ancestry.com

⁵ U.K. Medical Registers 1859-1959. Ancestry.com

⁶ Army and Navy Gazette 19 May 1900.

⁷ Courtesy Allen W Cotton. Ancestry.com

⁸ Fred W. Cotton pers. com. 2011

March 1900 at her baptism (aged 21) as the General Hospital, Bristol⁹, so perhaps May was a nurse or a patient there, and Frederick was a young doctor.

At this time, Britain was engaged in colonial wars in India and South Africa, and Australia had become a self-governing Commonwealth. Not long after his marriage, Frederick was sent to serve in the Second Boer War, while May went to live with Frederick’s brother Egbert Cotton and his family in Dublin. The Boers were fighting an effective guerrilla campaign against the English forces and inflicting many casualties. In response, the British forces were dramatically reinforced; they changed their tactics to deny the guerrillas safe harbour and supplies (the *Scorched Earth* policy) and they relentlessly pursued the guerrilla bands. Lieutenant Frederick Cotton served for two years in the Cape Colony and in ‘C’ and ‘D’ Sections of the No.11 British Field Hospital in Transvaal Province.¹⁰ No doubt, he became highly trained with valuable experience in battlefield medicine.



R.A.M.C. receiving station, Second Boer War 1899 – 1902

The Boers surrendered in May 1902 and Frederick returned home to his wife, but later that year he was posted overseas again to India. Between 1903 and 1914, the British Army posted 1000 -1500 officers and 20,000 – 30,000 troops to and from India annually, along with their wives, children and servants.¹¹ Frederick and May were stationed at Murree in the Kashmiri foothills (now within Pakistan) and their first child, Robert Worgan Cotton IV, was born there on 15 August 1903.

They returned to England and were stationed at Dover in Kent when Thomas Richard Worgan Cotton (my godfather) was born on 14 November 1907. It appears that the R.A.M.C. moved Frederick regularly to various postings around the country, and the family moved with him. By 1909, he had the rank of Captain and his permanent mailing address was his bank, Holt & Co

⁹ Bristol England, Church of England Baptisms 1813-1918. (Ancestry.com)

¹⁰ UK Military Campaign Medals and Award Rolls, South Africa 1899-1902 (Ancestry.com)

¹¹ Statistical abstract relating to British India from 1903-04 to 1912-13. Forty-eighth number London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1915. http://dsal.uchicago.edu/statistics/1903_excel/index.html

in London, which by arrangement, had the majority of the British Army officers as clients. When their third child, Margaret Rosemary Worgan Cotton (known as 'Rosemary') was born on 21 August 1911, the family was living at 14 Lower Kemp Street, Fleetwood, Lancashire where the British Territorial Army occupied the Euston Barracks and a campsite.

In 1912, Frederick Cotton applied for, and was posted to India with the Territorial Army. He was promoted to Major in February 1912.¹² He took May, Tom and Rosemary with him to India, but Robert stayed with extended family in Somerset and attended boarding school. When World War I began in August 1914, Frederick continued active duty in India, aged 38. He was one of a large force of soldiers considered unfit for front line duty, who were posted to Garrison Battalions, thereby releasing fit soldiers for front line duty. By the end of W.W.I, there were eighteen Garrison Battalions in India. Frederick and May sent their son Thomas back to join his brother at boarding school in England in 1915. Another son, Peter, was born in India but died there of influenza in 1916.¹³

The activities of Garrison Battalions in India were considered inconsequential and are poorly recorded. Most information comes from personal accounts, and the following poem probably sums up the feeling of the soldiers posted to Garrison Battalions in India.

YOUR KING AND COUNTRY NEED YOU.

Composed by Gunner F. C. Garner, 2nd Battery R.F.A., stationed at Mhow, Central India.

*We heard our Country calling,
And answered to the call,
Signed on for "Active Service,"
As we meant to "Stand or fall."
And every man among us,
In the Sussex R.F.A.,
Thought to do his share of fighting,
And to avenge "The Day."*

*But they packed us out to India,
instead of off to France,
There's lots of "rice" but not much "pice"
And there doesn't seem much chance
Of showing what we can do,
Though we've passed out as efficient,
For at the Practice Camp we showed
Our pluck and skill sufficient.*

*The rumours that we get, too,
Are amusing by the way,
First, we're here for quite a year,
Then we're moving any day.
We are all so discontented,
Being sent out here so far,
And some have had to sell their clothes
For extra "food" and "Char."*

*So, when the war's all over,
And peace reigns o'er the land,
We stand once more in England,
Where do we take our stand?
When we're asked, what did you do
In the war for "Freedom," Right "
We can only say "We minded India
While the others went to fight."¹⁴*

From a newspaper report, we know that Major F. W. Cotton, R.A.M.C., was appointed Deputy Assistant Director, Medical Services (Mobilisation) 3rd (Lahore) Division, in December 1915.¹⁵ It is likely that he moved around to various base hospitals during the war years. He would have dealt mainly with medical administration and logistics, and managed outbreaks of serious diseases (scarlet fever, dengue fever, malaria, etc.). By April 1918, Fredrick had been

¹² Dublin Daily Express 10 Feb 1912.

¹³ Bennet, Gordon. op. cit. Frederick Cotton's Death Certificate lists one child deceased.

¹⁴ Mid Sussex Times 29 June 1915

¹⁵ Englishman's Overland Mail, 3 Dec 1915.

promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and was based in Mhow, India where he was initiated into a local Freemason’s Lodge.¹⁶

The family returned safely from India in May 1919 and Lt. Col. Frederick Cotton retired from the army with little fanfare. Meanwhile, Robert and Tom “*had grown away from their immediate family and it is recorded that they did not recognize their parents when they returned from India and settled into private life.*”¹⁷

In 1920, the Cotton family was living at 10 Eversley Park, Chester, Cheshire and Frederick had a medical practice.¹⁸ Frederick was 46 and May 42 years old when their post-war surprise baby, Philip Rodney Worgan Cotton was born there on 21 March 1920. The other three children ranged from 9 to 17 years old – a considerable age gap.

Soon after Philip’s birth, the family moved to Marnhull, Dorset where Frederick had bought a medical practice. The family lived on a semi-rural block named ‘Tapsays’ with space for growing stock and stock feed, which was May’s hobby. Robert and Thomas began attending the Officer Training Corps attached to the Dorset Regiment¹⁹. Having been impressed by his close contact with Army life in India, with Cadets at school and then with the Dorset Regiment, Thomas begged his father to be allowed to go to Sandhurst, with the aim of joining the Army (the Dorset Regiment) in India. This wish was denied, much to Tom’s disappointment²⁰.

Britain was experiencing post war fatigue and recession (which would deepen to depression in the late 1920’s). Labour unionism, socialism and communism were rising, unemployment increasing and the U.S.A. took over Britain’s pre-war position as the world’s leading economy.

The British Empire was in decline as many of Britain’s colonies began to seek greater (or total) independence, including Australia.



In 1921, the Australian Federal Government took over control from the Australian States of all immigration and pursued it vigorously, after a virtual cessation during W.W.I. The *Empire Settlement Scheme* was introduced whereby Britain and Australia were to share equally in the cost of promoting migration from Britain. Between 1921 and 1929, 221,000 assisted and 100,000 unassisted migrants came to Australia from Britain, attracted by Australia’s promise of guaranteed employment, good wages, land, and plenty of opportunities.²¹ The Western Australia Government established the *Group Settlement Scheme* in 1921 and promoted it heavily in Britain.

The Cotton family had some experience of emigration to Australia. Six of Fred’s eleven uncles and aunts (Austins) had emigrated to Australia in the 1850’s and 1860’s, mostly to take up farming and grazing properties in Victoria. Fred’s brother Colston and sister Eliza ‘Cissie’ Cotton had emigrated to Australia in

¹⁶ United Grand Lodge of England Freemason Membership Register (Ancestry.com)

¹⁷ Bennett, Gordon *ibid.*

¹⁸ UK British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards (Ancestry.com)

¹⁹ Military Service and Enlistment Records, National Archives of Australia Items 6461448 and 6463510

²⁰ Bennett, *op. cit.*

²¹ National Archives of Australia;

http://www.naa.gov.au/naaresources/publications/research_guides/guides/childmig/chapter1.htm

the late 1890's and early 1900's, leaving Robert Worgan Cotton III to inherit the family dairy farm at Baltonsborough. No doubt there was frequent correspondence between the Australian and British family members, and there is a record of one family returning to the U.K. briefly for holidays in Teignmouth, where they entertained family visitors from Baltonsborough.

Seeing little opportunity for a career in farming or in the military in Dorset, Robert and Thomas were attracted by the farming opportunities offered in Australia. They made contact with their relatives in Victoria who invited them to come.²² Robert (20) and Thomas (16) worked many part-time jobs to save for the passage, and then purchased Ticket No. 387 on the S.S. *Ballarat*, departing London for Melbourne on 18 September 1924²³. They listed their calling as 'farming' on the passenger list.

When Frederick and May Cotton became aware of their sons' plan, it prompted them to reconsider their own situation. May had lost her father in 1918 and mother in 1919. Although May's father had once been a wealthy quarry owner and stone merchant from Bath, he was declared personally bankrupt in 1907 and did not die a wealthy man^{24,25} May probably received a small inheritance, and her only sibling was an unmarried sister, so there was little to hold her in England. Australia offered the possibility of a more stable life and, perhaps, a larger farm. For the other children, who must have become accustomed to regular changes of address, it was probably seen as a new adventure. Frederick and May advertised the sale of their live and dead farming stock, grass feed etc. on 1 August 1924²⁶. Frederick sold his practice, resigned from his appointments as medical officer and public vaccinator for the Parish²⁷ and bought Ticket No. 3965 on the same voyage, but with destination Sydney²⁸.

The S.S. *Ballarat* was a Peninsula and Orient liner launched in September 1920; the third ship of that name built by P&O. It was fitted out especially for emigrant transport with passenger capacity for 491 permanent third class, plus 758 temporary berths in prefabricated dormitories on the outward voyage only. There were 931 passengers on board for the Cotton's voyage and, although not fully booked, conditions were probably cramped and uncomfortable. The entire Cotton family, Frederick (50), May (46), Robert (21), Thomas (16), Rosemary (13) and Philip (4) arrived in Fremantle, Western Australia on 28 October 1924²⁹ after a five-week voyage from Britain via the Cape of Good Hope.

²² Bennett, Gordon. op. cit.

²³ U.K. and Ireland Outward Passenger Lists. Ancestry.com

²⁴ Western Daily Press 16 Aug 1918

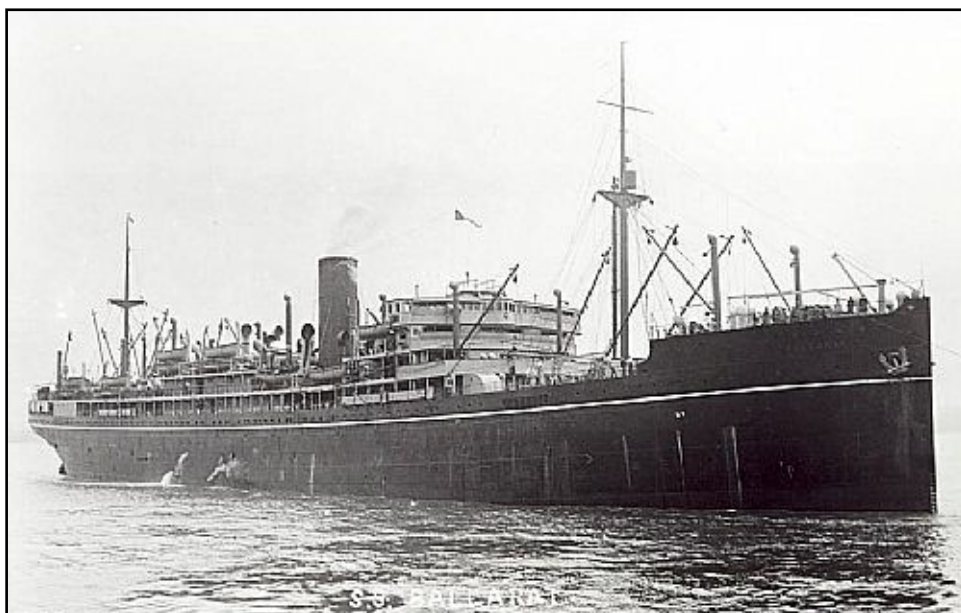
²⁵ Payne, Alan. "Pictor and Sons: Notable Quarry owners" Dec 2018. in Box People and Places

²⁶ Western Gazette 11 Jul 1924

²⁷ Western Gazette 29 Aug 1924

²⁸ U.K. and Ireland Outward Passenger Lists. Ancestry.com

²⁹ Fremantle Western Australia Passenger Lists. Ancestry.com



S.S. *Ballarat*, 1921

WESTERN AUSTRALIA, 1924 – 1939

According to the passenger list, the Cotton family was destined for Sydney, which would make sense as most of their Australian relatives were living in New South Wales and Victoria at that time. They were not listed as Group Settlers in W.A. and probably travelled unassisted. They had no relatives in Western Australia but, for some reason, they decided to leave the ship at Fremantle and settle in W.A. Perhaps the W.A. Government was (and still is) keen to attract medical practitioners to country frontier towns in Western Australia and they made Frederick an attractive offer to stay. Or perhaps they were persuaded to stay in W.A. by the many hopeful Group Settlement Scheme emigrants that they travelled with aboard the S.S. *Ballarat*.



Emigrants arriving in Melbourne aboard the S.S. *Ballarat*, 18 April 1925

Soon after arriving in Australia, the eldest son Robert moved to Victoria, and then on to South Australia where he eventually married and started a family.

After staying in Fremantle for a month, Frederick Cotton took over the duties of the Resident Medical Officer in Boyup Brook on 11 December 1924³⁰. Boyup Brook was a small town of about 500 people within its 3200 sq. km. boundary, situated in farming, grazing and timber country about 270 kilometres by road south of Perth, on the Upper Blackwood River. It took a full day to drive there over very rough roads. It was formally declared a town in 1900 and grew progressively, with addition of a school (1900), railway from Donnybrook (1909), agricultural hall (1910), hotel (1911), police station (1911), and official post office (1914). Town land was opened for leasing in 1914, and the Soldiers' Memorial Hospital (and mortuary) was opened on 10 November 1923. No doubt Frederick had a growing number of patients from the newly-arrived migrant community and, according to Frederick's grandchildren, his patients liked him, but he was quite a reserved man.



Soldiers' Memorial Hospital, Boyup Brook, on completion in 1923



Frederick Cotton's shingle (Courtesy G. Calley, Boyup Brook)

In 1925, Frederick and May Cotton bought a 200-acre freehold property, *Rusmore*, from J.A. Moore³¹. It was close to the town and hospital, and they renamed it *Faraway*. Their daughter

³⁰ The West Australian 9 Dec 1924

³¹ The West Australian 18 Aug 1925

Rosemary and son Philip were sent to boarding schools in regional W.A. In 1926, May Cotton sold a house to one G.N. Leslie of Perth, and was carrying on business in Boyup Brook, independently of Frederick. May alienated the Cotton family relatives back in England by writing several intemperate letters concerning the inheritance she believed should have been Frederick's and hers following the death of Frederick's brother Robert Worgan Cotton III in 1926. After this, the Cottons in England lost touch with 'Uncle Fred' and his family.³²



The driveway into 'Faraway' with an original pepper tree, and Graham Calley, the owner in 2011.



View west from the farmhouse, with an original windmill, and granite outcrops.

³² Allen Cotton, pers. com.

In March 1928, Frederick gave up the practice in Boyup Brook and, at the age of 54, accepted a position as the ship's doctor aboard the M.V. *Centaur*.³³ His address was c/o Dalgetty & Co. Fremantle, which was the shipping agent. His family stayed on at *Faraway*, Boyup Brook, and Frederick left his doctor's shingle there also. One can only speculate about Frederick's reasons for leaving Boyup Brook and his family after 27 years of marriage. Probably the severe economic depression had a lot to do with it - no doubt his patients were struggling to pay anything towards their treatment. Perhaps his marriage to May became unbearable (their daughter-in-law Vivienne and seven grandchildren found May a very 'difficult' woman – the grandchildren would hide when she visited) or perhaps he just gave in to wanderlust, which seemed to be part of his character. The separation seemed to be amicable however, because Frederick and May met briefly on the rare occasions that Frederick returned to Perth.



A.H.S. *Centaur*, early 1943

The M.V. *Centaur*, a relatively new ship (built in 1924) of 3066 tons, was being used as a coastal cargo, cattle and passenger vessel from Fremantle north to Java and Singapore and back. Frederick Cotton probably did not stay with the *Centaur* very long because by 1929, after a short stay in Onslow as *locum tenens* for the Resident Medical Officer there³⁴, he was working as the resident magistrate and medical officer in Wyndham, a northern port town built around the beef cattle industry in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia. The M.V. *Centaur* went on to become famous as a participant in Australia's two greatest naval tragedies; firstly as the rescuer of survivors of the German cruiser *Kormoran* which sank the cruiser H.M.A.S. *Sydney*, with loss of all 645 hands, off Carnarvon W.A. on 19 November 1941; and secondly, after being converted to a hospital ship in early 1943, A.H.S. *Centaur* itself was the victim of a Japanese submarine torpedo attack off Moreton Island, Brisbane on 14 May 1943, resulting in the loss of 268 of the 332 people on board. The locations of the wrecks of the

³³ The West Australian 29 Mar 1928

³⁴ Northern Times 22 June 1928

Sydney and the *Centaur* remained a mystery for almost 70 years until their discoveries in 2008 and 2009 respectively.

While in Wyndham, Frederick had time to express some of his strongly-held opinions by writing to the local press, and his letters give an interesting insight into his character. Firstly, he responded to a paper issued by the British Medical Research Council concerning the health benefits of eating white bread over brown bread. His response was published in the British Medical Journal in June 1929 and the story was picked up by the press in London and then most of the major capital city newspapers in Australia. Frederick’s view was that an increasing proportion of refined food in the diet would lead to nutritional deficiencies and imbalances, and linked this to an increased chance of developing cancer and other diseases. He had a strong belief that man should not meddle with what God has designed and created. He wrote a follow-up article for *The West Australian*, and concluded with the following advice - *“If you desire to prevent disease, to prevent cancer, go back — go back and live as the Lord intended you to live on His gifts and in the free and open air. God knows there is room for every Australian to breathe and turn round in his own country.”*³⁵ Despite sounding like a Baptist or perhaps Moravian minister, Frederick was from the Church of England. Frederick revisited this theme several times over the next three years.

Secondly, he was involved in the local search and rescue effort for two aeroplanes that, on route to London, had made forced landings in the Kimberley region in 1929 and 1930, namely the Fokker monoplane *Southern Cross* flown by Charles Kingsford-Smith³⁶ and a Ryan monoplane flown by Walter Shiers³⁷.



The ‘Southern Cross’

Based on his experience and analysis of these two emergencies, Frederick wrote a long letter to *The West Australian*, full of helpful suggestions to pilots and to government, such as painting the name of cattle stations and missions on the roof of the building, and plotting their position on aeronautical charts, a practice which is in common use today and has helped many a bush

³⁵ *The West Australian* 29 Nov 1929 “Problem of Cancer” by Dr FW Cotton

³⁶ Howard, Frederick. 'Kingsford Smith, Sir Charles Edward (1897 - 1935)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 9, Melbourne University Press, 1983, pp 599-601. <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090602b.htm>

³⁷ Cooke, T.H. 'Shiers, Walter Henry (1889 - 1968)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 11, Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 598. <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110612b.htm>

pilot to navigate.³⁸ The Royal Flying Doctor Service was first established in Cloncurry, Queensland in May 1928. No doubt Frederick was aware of the work being done there when he wrote to the West Australian in April 1930, and perhaps he had experience travelling by air from Wyndham to various clinics throughout the Kimberley region. The R.F.D.S base at Wyndham was established in 1935, after Frederick had left the region.

In August 1930, after a send-off organised by the manager of the Wyndham Meatworks, Frederick sailed back to Perth from Wyndham on the M.V. *Koolinda* for a holiday.³⁹ He used the time to visit May, Rosemary and Phillip at Boyup Brook⁴⁰ and to seek a new position with the Public Health Department. He was sent almost immediately to Esperance to take up the positions of resident magistrate and principal medical officer.⁴¹ This posting lasted only a few months. In February 1931, he was appointed as the Resident Magistrate and Regional Medical Officer based at Roebourne in the remote Pilbara region. Resident Magistrates were subject to the Public Service Act; within their limited jurisdiction, they had the power to do alone what might be done by two or more justices, to act as coroner, to be magistrate of local (petty debts) courts and to act as the chairman of a court of sessions. As the Regional Medical Officer, his jurisdiction covered a circle of about 125km radius from Roebourne. This was covered partly by boat, partly by aeroplane (Australian Aerial Medical Services) and the rest by car or horse.

Frederick gave us an insight to his political views in the address he gave to the crowd assembled at the Roebourne Anzac Memorial on Anzac Day, 1931. With Australia reeling in depression, Frederick *appealed to all present to carefully think before voting for any aspirant to the political arena, for he said, with the ability and integrity of our politicians rested the future of our race. A parliament of sincere men (unbiassed by adherence to party principles) was our only hope of recovery at present. It behove all citizens of Australia to realise that party politics must be "scrapped" in order that the "Torch of Freedom", burning brightly and fiercely, as it had in 1914, should be so when handed on to the next generation. At present, Dr Cotton explained, it was only burning feebly.*⁴²

One of Frederick's first tasks at Roebourne was to try to persuade the W.A. Government to resume the local hospital, which had to been leased to a matron. When the Government controlled the hospital, £4,000 had been spent on it and a staff of four had been employed, but the matron could not even employ a yardman, and the result menaced the health of the community.⁴³ Frederick had no control over the hospital or its staff.⁴⁴ The hospital had unsatisfactory sanitation and no operating theatre. Although these matters were raised in parliament by the Member for Roebourne on several occasions, nothing had changed by the time Frederick left Roebourne, except better access to Aerial Medical Services.

Frederick's son Thomas spent Christmas 1932 with him in Roebourne⁴⁵. By then, Frederick knew many of the local pastoralists and it appears that he assisted Thomas to get a job as a jackeroo at Mardie Station. As the Resident Magistrate, Frederick was kept busy dealing with petty crimes, such as a boy who stowed away aboard the W.A. State Motorship *Koolinda*, and a native who gathered pearl shell without a license⁴⁶. As the District Medical Officer, he was also kept busy visiting patients on passing ships and in outlying sheep stations. The

³⁸ The West Australian 25 Apr 1930 "INHOSPITABLE KIMBERLEYS. Advice to Airmen." By Dr FW Cotton

³⁹ West Australian 14 Aug 1930

⁴⁰ Nelson Advocate 22 Aug 1930

⁴¹ Wyndham Gazette 13 Sep 1930

⁴² Northern Times 30 Apr 1931

⁴³ The West Australian 19 May 1932

⁴⁴ Northern Times 16 Aug 1933

⁴⁵ The West Australian 11 January 1933

⁴⁶ The West Australian 8 Feb 1933

Roebourne region was hit by tropical cyclones (then called *willy willies*) in the summers of 1931 to 1933, causing injuries and widespread damage. Frederick managed to take some short holidays from the Pilbara, staying with his family in a cottage at Busselton in January 1933⁴⁷, and at Rossmore (near Northam) during Easter 1934.⁴⁸

Frederick resigned from the Public Health Department and left Roebourne on 6 January 1935, aged 60. Although Frederick semi-retired to Perth after leaving Roebourne, he continued to practice medicine, mainly as a relief doctor filling in for younger medical practitioners who wished to take some leave. Perhaps this is why he was unable to give his daughter away at her wedding to Bill Monger in Perth on 20 November 1935, rather than any reason of family estrangement. In February 1936, while relieving the Resident Medical Practitioner in Mt Magnet, Frederick was required to investigate the death of a railway worker at Yalgoo, a small settlement about 120km to the west. As part of the investigation, the body had to be exhumed and samples taken for testing. Frederick suspected arsenic poisoning and this was confirmed. He gave evidence at the Coroner's inquest at Yalgoo in March 1936, which was generously covered by the press⁴⁹.

Muriel May Cotton died of cardiac and respiratory failure following an operation at the Bridgetown District Hospital on 2 December 1936, aged 58, and is buried at the Boyup Brook cemetery. Frederick, Robert, Rosemary and Phillip attended the funeral.⁵⁰ In her later years, May suffered from diabetes, arteriosclerosis and acute arthritis⁵¹. In her twelve years at Boyup Brook, May became a respected member of the community. May was on the committee of the Boyup Brook Country Women's' Association (Vice President in 1936), and the committee of the Primary Producers' Association. Her stud dairy cattle business at *Faraway* was a success, with her cattle winning many prizes at the local shows. She left her estate of £448 to daughter Rosemary who, with husband Bill Monger, took over running of *Faraway*.



⁴⁷ South Western News 20 Jan 1933

⁴⁸ Boyup Brook Bulletin 6 April 1934

⁴⁹ Sunday Times 15 Mar 1936

⁵⁰ Nelson Advocate 11 Dec 1936

⁵¹ Death Certificate Bridgetown 66/36



When May died, Frederick was the acting resident medical practitioner at Fremantle Public Hospital, where he had been since mid-1936. He was still there during April 1937 and is mentioned in the press for his role in various coroner's inquests into deaths by electrocution⁵², crushing⁵³, motor vehicle collision⁵⁴ and burns⁵⁵. He resigned from Fremantle Hospital in November 1937⁵⁶, travelled to the Eastern States to visit his sister and other relatives, and returned to Fremantle by ship in December 1937.



Dr F.W. Cotton, Fremantle Hospital, 1937.⁵⁷

SEAFARING WITH NO FIXED ABODE, 1939-1950

Frederick decided to go to sea at the beginning of the W.W.II but, being 65 years old, the merchant navy was his only option. In November 1939, Frederick was working in Kalgoorlie (c/o The Hannans Club) as a relief medico, but moved back to Fremantle later that year. The S.S. *Ulysses* docked in Fremantle on 7 January 1940 and Frederick joined her crew as ship's doctor.

The S.S. *Ulysses* was a passenger and cargo liner built in 1913, registered in Liverpool and operated by the Blue Funnel Line. She had a gross tonnage of 14,647t, was coal fired and had a service speed of 14.5 knots. She had seen service as a troop carrier and hospital ship in W.W.I. Her usual route in 1940 was the run from Liverpool via West Africa, Capetown, and Durban to Fremantle, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane and return, carrying troops and bulk cargoes to and from the U.K., usually independently of convoys.

Frederick joined the ship on her outward leg. She continued to follow this route, passing through Fremantle again five times between February 1940 and March 1941. In June 1941,

⁵² The West Australian 22 Apr 1937

⁵³ The West Australian 15 Apr 1937

⁵⁴ The West Australian 13 Apr 1937

⁵⁵ The West Australian 9 Apr 1937

⁵⁶ Fremantle Hospital records

⁵⁷ Courtesy Fremantle Hospital Museum.

she completed a convoy trip (OB 334) from the Clyde, Scotland to Halifax, Nova Scotia, but then headed for the Indian Ocean again via Capetown. With the threat from Japan mounting, the S.S. *Ulysses* headed for Hong Kong via Colombo and Singapore, arriving at Hong Kong harbour on 5 September 1941.

S.S. *Ulysses* departed Hong Kong on 7 December 1941, one day before the Japanese forces launched their attack in the Battle for Hong Kong. According to Frederick, they were the last boat out of Hong Kong and learned about the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour and Manila while on route to Manila. They changed course to Singapore and were bombed and strafed by Japanese aircraft several times during their escape.⁵⁸ The Hong Kong garrison surrendered to the Japanese on 25 December. S.S. *Ulysses* had been keeping radio silence and was believed lost, but she arrived in Singapore on 22 December 1941 with a full load of evacuees and, after a week for repairs, proceeded on to Fremantle, arriving there on New Year's Eve.



S.S. *Ulysses*, Blue Funnel Line

S.S. *Ulysses*, with Frederick aboard, departed Fremantle for the last time on 3 January 1942, heading for Liverpool via New Zealand and Panama. She stopped off in South Australia to load 4,000 tons of pig iron at Whyalla and had a three-week delay in Adelaide, before proceeding to Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, Wellington and Panama, arriving there on 29 March 1942. *After leaving Cristobal Port, Colón, on the Atlantic side of the Panama Canal, the ship was seriously damaged in a [night-time] collision with the 8,890t Panamanian tanker, Prometheus⁵⁹, and Captain Russell decided to take Ulysses unescorted to Newport, Rhode Island for repairs.⁶⁰* Due to the damage, the *Ulysses*' maximum speed was reduced to 7 knots and she became an easier target for U-Boats which, according to Frederick, were "as thick as fleas on a dog's back"⁶¹. At 22:31 hours on 11 April 1942, the *Ulysses* was hit in the stern by one torpedo from the German submarine U-160, 45 miles south of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina and in the engine room by coup-de-grâce at 22:53 hours. While the crew abandoned ship, the U-boat changed the side and at 23:27 hours fired another coup-de-grâce that hit amidships and caused the ship to sink in 30 minutes, but this was not observed by the Germans because a flying boat was now circling the area. The master, 189 crew members,

⁵⁸ Sunday Times 11 Aug 1946

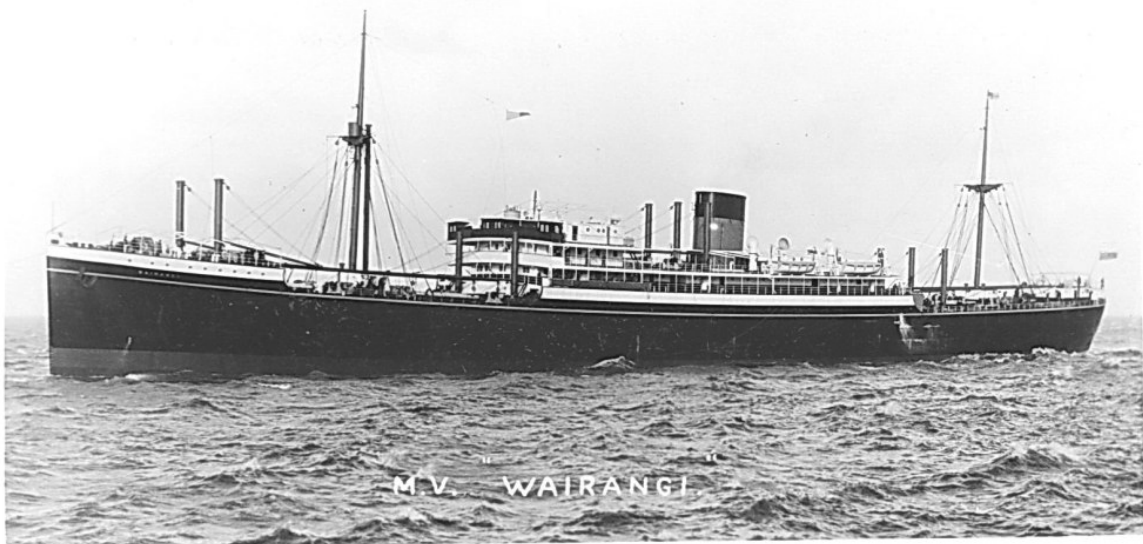
⁵⁹ Other references cite the tanker as the *Golden Heels*.

⁶⁰ Kirkham, Thomas. *World War 2 – The Under 16's*. <http://www.worldwar2undersixteens.org/profiles/profile-of-the-month-kirkham.html>

⁶¹ Daily News 23 Nov 1945

five gunners and 95 passengers took to the lifeboats and were picked up within four and a half hours by the destroyer U.S.S. *Manley* (DD74) and landed at Charleston, South Carolina⁶². All 290 aboard, except the ship's cat, survived the attack. In Charleston the passengers were accommodated in the Francis Marion and Fort Sumter hotels. The next day they were taken by train to New York via Washington, and stayed in the Wellington Hotel for ten days.⁶³ According to one crew member, they "lived it up for a couple of weeks! A personal highlight was dinner at the Waldorf Astoria, courtesy Mrs. Nola Luxford, on Anzac Day, 1942"⁶⁴. Another survivor reported that Baroness Rothschild took every passenger to Macy's store in New York for replacement shoes. From New York, Frederick travelled to Halifax, Nova Scotia and boarded the M.V. *Vibran* which sailed independently of convoys on 12 May 1942 with eleven passengers (crew members of the *Ulysses*?) and arrived in Liverpool, England on 21 May 1942⁶⁵.

Frederick then joined the crew of M.V. *Empire Grace* as the ship's doctor, possibly on her maiden voyage. The M.V. *Empire Grace* was a newly-built, fast, refrigerated cargo liner of 12,804 gross tons. She was one of the Empire Line ships in the service of the British Government, mostly used during W.W.II by the Ministry of War Transport, which owned the ships but contracted out their management to various shipping lines, in this case to Shaw, Savill and Albion Co. Ltd. From her maiden voyage in 1942 until December 1945, the M.V. *Empire Grace* mainly sailed independently on the route from the U.K. to New Zealand and Australia via the Panama Canal, and return. She went through the canal fifteen times. When the ship docked in Melbourne, Frederick would visit and stay with his sister Cissie. There were occasional diversions in escorted convoys to/from New York and Reykjavik, one voyage to Argentina and one voyage to Australia via South Africa. In July 1945, after the war, she began to make the U.K.- Australia run via the Suez Canal.



M.V. *Wairangi* (ex M.V. *Empire Grace*)

⁶² Ulysses (British Steam passenger ship) - Ships hit by German U-boats during WWII - uboat_net.mht

⁶³ Cracknell, Philip. [Battle for Hong Kong & Military History: The last voyage of the SS Ulysses](#)

⁶⁴ Kirkham, Thomas. op. cit.

⁶⁵ U.K. Incoming Passenger Lists 1878-1960. Ancestry.com

At the beginning of 1946, The *Empire Grace* was bought by Shaw Savill and Albion Co. Ltd. and its name changed to M.V. *Wairangi*. Frederick, then aged 72, was still the ship's doctor when he and his son Philip met in Fremantle on 10 August 1946⁶⁶ and swapped seafaring stories. The M.V. *Wairangi* continued to operate between the UK and Australia - New Zealand, visiting Auckland eleven times between May 1948 and January 1962⁶⁷.

I don't know for sure when Frederick retired from the seafaring adventurer's life, but it was probably in 1947-48 at the age of 74⁶⁸. He moved in with his daughter Rosemary and Bill Monger and their two children at their place in Kitchener Road, Melville, W.A. and was on the electoral roll there in 1949. Dr Frederick Cotton died at Fremantle Hospital on 1 February 1950, aged 75, of heart failure. He had been suffering from heart disease (auricular fibrillation) for some time. He was cremated at the Karrakatta Crematorium on 3 February 1950.⁶⁹

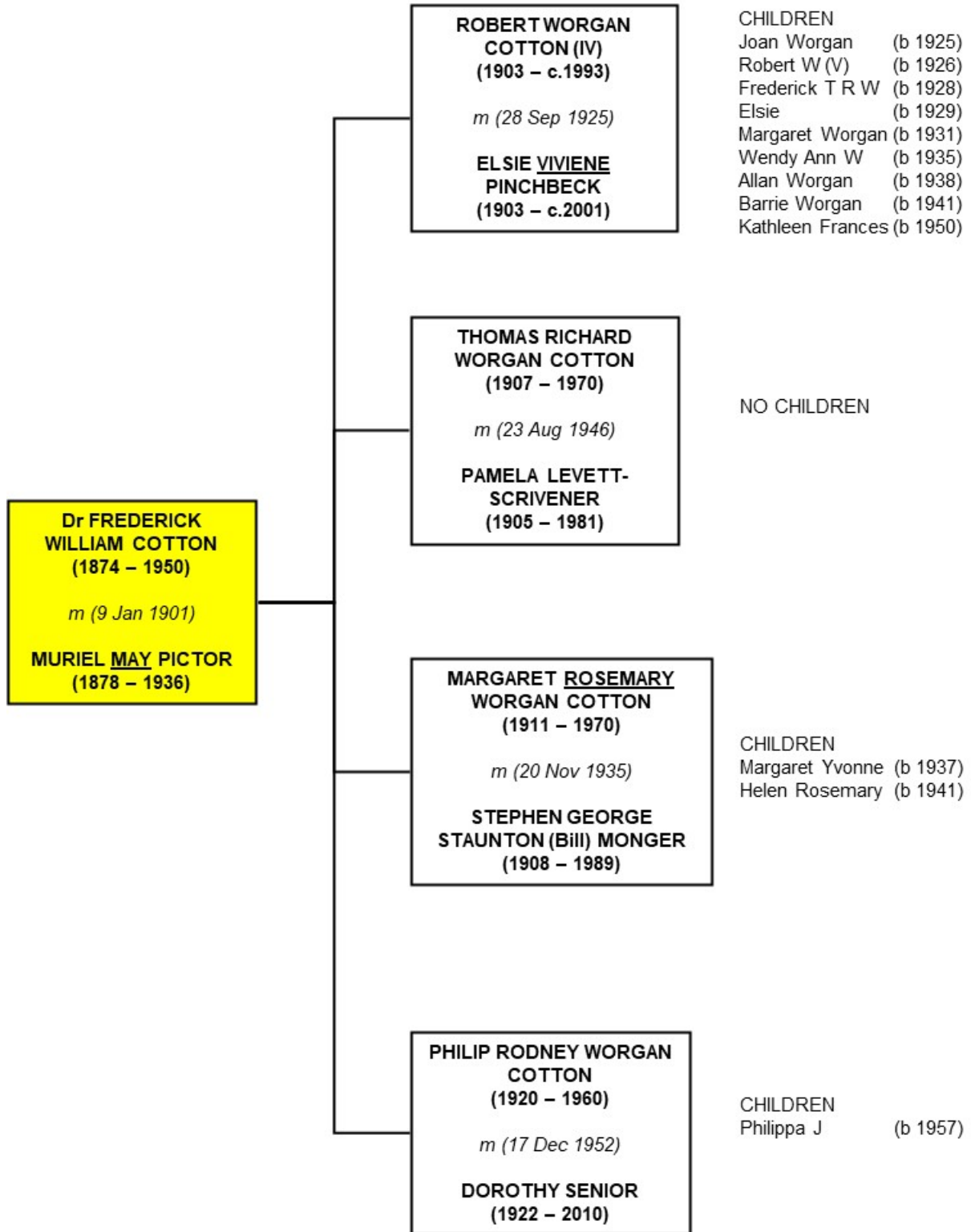
⁶⁶ Sunday Times 11 Aug 1946

⁶⁷ Auckland Shipping Movements

⁶⁸ The *Wairangi* berthed at Fremantle in Jan, Jun and Dec 1947, and Nov 1948.

⁶⁹ Death Certificate Perth 41/50

FREDERICK COTTON'S FAMILY



FREDERICK COTTON'S ANCESTRY

