

Notes on William Spurdle and Sarah née Sibley

**(Great-great-great-grandparents of
John, Peter, Margaret, Randle and David Major)**

William Spurdle christened: 13 October 1805, Seaborough, Somerset, England.

Sarah Sibley born: 4 March 1813, Seaborough, Somerset, England.

Married: 30 July 1832, Seaborough.

Arrived in NZ: 23 February 1842, from Plymouth, Devon, England, in 'Timandra'.

Children: *Oliver Cook, born 16 March 1833, Seaborough;
Maria, born 1834, Beaminster, Dorset;
Mary Ann, born 1836, Beaminster;
William Akerman, born 1839, Beaminster;
Frederick Morris, born 2 October 1849, New Plymouth, Taranaki.

*Great-great-grandfather of John, Peter, Margaret, Randle and David Major

William Spurdle died: 20 February 1871, Wanganui.

Sarah Spurdle née Sibley died: 26 July 1883, Wanganui.

William Spurdle's birth and early life

[Much of the information about the Spurdle family is taken from the following sources:

- *the booklet Goodly is Our Heritage, prepared in 1942 by F. Maurice Spurdle for a family reunion;*
- *the substantial A4-size book Spurdle Heritage, published for the 1992 reunion.]*

Seaborough is a small rural parish in Somerset, England, near the border with Dorset. The parish consists of just one farm, with a scattering of houses across the fields and the tiny hamlet of Seaborough nestled around the parish church. The Spurdle family had lived in Seaborough since about 1700. At some time in the latter half of that century the Spurdles joined the new Methodist movement in reaction to the lax, nominal Christianity current in the Anglicanism of the period. The personal faith and commitment that Methodism imbued was to be a mark of the Spurdles over generations to come.

On 20 November 1804 in the parish church a William Spurdle, agricultural labourer, married Mary Gale whose family were of the nearby town of Crewkerne. In October of the following year a son was born to the couple, and named after his father (and his father's father) – William, the first of their nine children.

Hard times struck the little Seaborough community around 1818-19. William's father was unable to find work, forcing the family to depend on parish relief. This humiliation seems to have had its effect on the growing boy. He attended night classes, learning to read and write – his is the first signature to appear in the Seaborough parish register after centuries of illiterate 'marksmen' awkwardly scratching their crosses – and eventually he trained as a carpenter, a trade William continued to work at for the rest of his life.

Marriage

On 30 July 1832 William Spurdle Jnr married Sarah, the daughter of another longstanding Seaborough family, the Sibleys. Sarah had been born in 1813 to Jonathan Sibley, agricultural labourer, and his wife Elizabeth née Papple. William and Sarah's first child, a son, was born some seven months later on 16 March 1833 and christened Oliver Cook on 30 June in the Wesleyan chapel, Axminster, Devon. Three more children followed in quick succession: Maria Sibley, Mary Ann and William Akerman.

In what year William moved from Seaborough to the nearby Dorset town of Beaminster is not known, but it is clear that he was resident there for at least the seven years before he and Sarah made their courageous decision to journey to New Zealand.

The census held throughout the UK in 1841 provides a snapshot of the Spurdle family of East Street, Beaminster, on 7 June of that year. Sarah had her hands full: she was managing a household consisting of four children under nine, plus three working men: her husband William, her brother Jonathan and another 20-year-old man.

Emigration

England in the 1830s was in dire straits. Agriculture was depressed owing to the opening up to farming of the vast spaces of the American west. Unemployment was rife after thousands of soldiers and sailors were discharged in the wake of the defeat of Napoleon. England was on the verge of revolution.

It was at this moment that Edward Gibbon Wakefield was promoting the colonisation of New Zealand as a solution to the condition of the homeland. Many young people were persuaded, among them William and Sarah Spurdle. And so, with their four children, the Spurdles journeyed from Beaminster to Plymouth to board the 382-ton ship 'Timandra'. F. Maurice Spurdle describes the voyage as follows:

The crew's complement of officers and men was 22. The number of passengers (men, women and children) totalled 212. The last pilot quitted the ship... on 2nd November 1841, and after a voyage of 100 days [*the ship*] came to anchor at New Plymouth at 5 p.m. on 23rd February, 1842. The emigrants landed next day in a large whaleboat after a pleasant but uneventful voyage. Six deaths (five children and one adult – a young wife in childbirth) and five births had occurred. The only point of call was at Capetown which was reached on Christmas Day, 53 days out from Plymouth. A stay of one week was made during which the emigrants went ashore.... Of the ships sent out by the Plymouth Company the 'Timandra' was fourth and arrived at its destination eleven months after the first, the 'William Bryan'. Thus a population of about 500, men, women and children, were there to greet them. These had settled down to some extent in houses, huts and tents. The new arrivals made shift as best they could, while luggage, equipment and stores were brought ashore

by surf boat. Every one of the emigrants got employment immediately on landing at 5/- per day, carpenters obtained 7/6. Houses were rented at 5/- to 15/- per week; those who had tents quickly assembled them. The reality of pioneering had begun. The snugness of Seaborough was a fading dream.

A journal of the voyage was kept by Josiah Flight, a cabin passenger and later resident magistrate in New Plymouth for some years. This reveals that, even on shipboard, the working-class emigrants were beginning to enjoy and exercise freedom from the restraints and oppressions of the English class system. On 13 November, 11 days after the ship set sail, Flight records:

Cabin passengers [*i.e. the 'colonists', of which Josiah Flight was one*] hold a consultation on the conduct of the emigrants (language; coming on Poop deck); also as to starting school for the children. Agreed to form ourselves into a Committee for superintending school. Dr. Forbes to draw up a Proclamation covering behaviour, etc.

Further relevant entries read:

14th (Sunday). Divine service at half-past 10 a.m. Many of the emigrants offended at not being allowed use of Poop deck, would not attend....

15th. Engaged all morning examining the children and making other preparations for opening a school.

16th. O'Neil [*an emigrant*], who had offered to assist us in the school, came to say that he was sorry he could not have anything to do with it, as it was contrary to the wish of those who were in his mess [*i.e. meal table group*], and he did not feel himself at liberty to act contrary to their wishes. The emigrants did not like the interference of the cabin passengers, who only wished to have the credit of conducting the school whilst the others did all the working part, etc., etc. The school was opened at 11 a.m., eight of the emigrants assisting.

11th [December]. Petition from emigrants demanding spirits. [*No doubt the cabin passengers were well supplied by the company.*]

13th. Child of Parsons died after few days illness. Dr. Forbes consulted me.... The instruction from the Company to him were that he should make a post-mortem examination in all cases such as that of Parson's child. To this the parents would not give their consent, in which they were supported by the majority of the steerage passengers. I suggested that Dr. Forbes, accompanied by the Captain should again interview the parents and should they continue obstinate, the post-mortem be omitted. Refusing permission the examination was abandoned and the child committed to the deep....

15th. About 3 p.m., Norman's wife died. Dr. Forbes wished to make a post-mortem examination; Norman objected. The Captain and the Doctor then informed him that the instructions given to the Doctor were pre-emptory, he was under the necessity of attending to them in this case. The emigrants then came aft in a body and in a violent manner stated their determination to prevent its being done. The Captain stating to the Doctor that he had not sufficient power to enable the doctor to proceed successfully with the opening of the body, the latter was obliged to succumb to the excitement of the emigrants. About 7 p.m. the body was brought on deck. John Prout [*a Methodist lay preacher*] at the request of some of the emigrants read the burial service over it when it was cast into the sea.

Feb. 11th. One of the regulations of the New Zealand Company is that chloride of lime should be sprinkled about in the emigrants' berths. Some of

them complained that it burnt their clothes; it was, however, considered necessary for the preservation of health that this regulation should be enforced. Whilst Dr. Forbes was below seeing that the cleaning, etc. between decks was going on in a proper manner, about 11 a.m., J. one of the emigrants endeavoured to prevent the constable from sprinkling the chloride in his berth. The chief mate – Mr. Thompson – took the bucket containing the liquid and commenced sprinkling it about J's berth, when J. took hold of the bucket and tried to prevent the mate from throwing any about there; in the scuffle the bucket was overturned and its contents spilt; J. threatened to knock Thompson down if he persisted. Thompson sent for another bucketful and J again tried to prevent it being used, when Thompson threw some over him. J. then struck down Thompson, the latter went off for the hand-bolts, but as J. got away that time they were not used. Soon after noon the crew were mustered on the poop and the emigrants summoned aft, when Dr. Forbes read the Regulations respecting punishment, and the use of lime. Captain Skinner then said that his determination was to put J. in irons unless he acknowledged he had done wrong in assaulting his chief officer. J. said 'he would die first'. On the Captain ordering his men to bring J. upon the poop and put the hand bolts on, which they did after some show of resistance on the part of the emigrants. In the evening J. acknowledged his fault and was released.

Life in New Plymouth

The only record of the Spurdle family in their first years in New Plymouth is contained in a list of 'Houses, Cottages and Warres [*i.e. whares*]', compiled in January 1846 by the police magistrate Henry King, which shows William Spurdle to be the owner and occupier of one cottage. The settlement at that time contained 65 houses, 96 cottages and 63 whares, to house 612 males and 481 females, a total population, men, women and children, of 1,093.

Carol Crandall in *Spurdle Heritage* gives a vivid picture of a major hardship of the Spurdles' early months in New Plymouth – a plague of rats:

Rats were migrating through the settlement when the Spurdles arrived and the plague was at its worst from mid-March to mid-May 1842. Vast numbers were travelling south along the seashore. Josiah Flight ... killed 500 rats in his tent during the worst two months. The rats destroyed everything edible in their path.

In March 1842, one month after arriving in New Plymouth, Sarah gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth Spiller Spurdle.... [*C*]emetery records for Waitapu Urupa, situated on Bayly Road, New Plymouth, tell us that she was ... buried on 27 April 1842, aged 5 weeks. During Elizabeth's short life the house must have been full of rats. We can only wonder if this contributed to her death.

.... Sometime between 1843 and 1848 Sarah had another daughter. Once again this baby did not survive infancy. We know of her existence only through the Waitapu Urupa cemetery records. One of the transcriptions reads: 'W. Spurdle, female infant'.

On 20 October 1849 Frederick Morris Spurdle was born. Of the three children known to be born [*to William and Sarah*] in New Zealand, he was the only one to survive.

Maurice Spurdle continues:

Of the experiences of our ancestors during the first years of colonisation we have very little record. Grandfather [*i.e. William*], as a carpenter, was no

doubt fully employed; likewise grandmother [*i.e. Sarah*] with her family of boys and girls. Another son, Frederick Morris, was born in 1849. In course of time the three sons followed their father's trade, and later on the two older ones took an active part in defending the settlement during the Taranaki war. The two daughters married and reared the usual large colonial family.

For many years the family remained in New Plymouth but, as time went on, the various members went further afield, some to other parts of Taranaki (Waitara and Inglewood) while the two younger sons, William and Fred, made residence in Wanganui. Fred, with a touch of his father's adventurous spirit, also visited Fiji.

Children

William and Sarah produced a total of five children:

- **Oliver Cook**, born 16 March 1833 in Seaborough, Somerset, and christened in the Wesleyan chapel, Axminster, Devon. Oliver married Maria Litherland, New Plymouth, 1 October 1854. Their first child Sarah* was born three months later, on 31 December. Oliver died on 18 September 1911 in Inglewood, and Maria on 27 December of the same year; they are buried together in the Inglewood cemetery. [*For fuller details see Notes on Oliver Cook Spurdle.*]
- **Maria Sibley**, born on 7 July 1834 in Beaminster, Dorset, christened 20 August 1834 in St Mary's church, Beaminster. Had an illegitimate child, Edwin James, born 27 June 1853, New Plymouth. Married (1) William George Williams, aged 67, on 21 November 1854 in the Independent Chapel, New Plymouth. The couple lived together for only a short time before Maria began to co-habit with Arthur O'Neill. William committed suicide in Auckland in 1865. (2) Maria married Arthur O'Neill on 26 January 1867, in the Roman Catholic church, New Plymouth. Maria died on 27 April 1876 in Turakina, Rangitikei.
- **Mary Ann**, born 11 June 1836 in Beaminster and christened 13 November 1836 in the Wesleyan chapel, Bridport, Dorset. Mary Ann married Charles Sutton, 9 May 1853 in the Independent Chapel, New Plymouth. She died, aged 28, on 31 July 1864, New Plymouth.
- **William Akerman**, born 5 July 1839 in Beaminster. William married Elizabeth P. Gilbert on 2 July 1867 in Wanganui.
- **Frederick Morris**, born 2 October 1849, New Plymouth, Taranaki; married Priscilla Fanny Browne in Wanganui, 1873.

On the move: Wanganui and death

In early 1867 William, Sarah and their two younger sons, William and Frederick, moved to Wanganui, probably because of the land wars. William Snr was 62 years old and Sarah 54. William Jnr was married from his parents' home just a few days before his 28th birthday, and prospered in Wanganui as a builder.

In October 1868 William Snr became ill and did not recover, dying, in his River Bank home, on 22 February 1871 of 'exhaustion from the effects of paralysis'. He was 65 years of age. His wife Sarah died on 26 July 1883, aged 70. William Spurdle is buried in the Heads Road Cemetery, Wanganui, Row 28; the plot is about 75cm from the edge of the centre lane, on the right side of the row, heading north. The sexton believes that Sarah Spurdle is buried in the same plot.

***Sarah Spurdle**

Sarah, the daughter of Oliver Cook Spurdle and Maria née Litherland, married Joseph Wallace in Wanganui on 10 December 1873, and bore him 16 children, the first of whom was Sarah Esther Wallace, grandmother of John, Peter, Margaret, Randle and David Major. [See separate essay Notes on Joseph Wallace and Sarah née Spurdle.]