

Foreword

In the digital age the search for one's ancestors is a popular pastime. It has even become a form of televised entertainment with celebrities on such shows as *Who Do You Think You Are* seeking the aid of historians and other experts on their family origins. Some hope that with the click of a mouse, a long-lost file will be located and details of ancestors will come to life on the screen. And with the advent of digitised archives it is also now possible to link transnational records to give snaps of individual and families at points in time.

What is now known as 'family history' originated from the study of genealogy designed to reveal the history of the 'family name' through the male line of descent. Using the census data in Britain and the United States, such organisations as ancestry.com can produce booklets on family names. Thus we can learn that at the census of 1851 in Britain the name of Sherington was recorded for only fifty-seven individuals of whom more than half resided in Lancashire. By 1881, there were thirty-nine Sheringtons by name throughout Lancashire, Durham and Yorkshire, nine in London and seven in Warwickshire. And by then there

were also small pockets of Sheringtons in North America, particularly in Michigan.¹

Despite the new digital era helping to identify the locality of nineteenth-century and even present-day families, the extended genealogy of family names remains often uncertain, particularly in locating the connections between place and names. Inherited family names, traditionally through the male line of descent, emerged in the British context as surnames or additional second names. In the Anglo-Saxon era there were often just single personal names. Following the Norman conquest of Britain surnames emerged in the medieval period, although only occasionally did medieval surnames become hereditary. Until the creation of parish registers and the universal recording of births, marriages and deaths, the spelling of surnames varied and individuals often had more than one surname. Modern forms of surnames came from the phonetic spelling of names usually found in the parish registers of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries.²

Surnames which then merged into family names had various origins. The most popular form was related to locality.³ The name of Sherington originally referred to a locality being Anglo-Saxon in origin. In Old English, Sherington was *Sciringtun* meaning Scira's farm or settlement. Who Scira was is now lost in time but the name survived. In Buckinghamshire, near Newton Pagnell, there is the village of Sherington dating from a seventh century Anglo-Saxon settlement. The American historian A.C. Chibnall, tracing his own family history, produced a 1960s study of this village of Sherington with a focus on land and land holdings from before the Norman Conquest until the twentieth century.⁴

1 *The Sherington Name in History* (Provo: The Generations Network, 2007), 39, 64 and 68.

2 P.H. Reaney, *A Dictionary of British Surnames* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), xii–xiv.

3 *Ibid.*, xiv–xvii.

4 A.C. Chibnall, *Sherington: Fiefs and Fields of a Buckinghamshire Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

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This Buckinghamshire village may have been the first place in England to be named 'Sherington' and certainly members of this Sherington line as well as others have continued to visit it as a 'homeland'. By the fifteenth century, however, there were other places associated with the name of 'Sherington' sometimes now spelt 'Sherrington' or even 'Sharington'. These included villages in Warwickshire and Wiltshire as well as Norfolk where 'The two most common place name suffixes are the old English *ham*, usually translated as "village or settlement"; *tun*, settlement or farm'.⁵

About one-fifth of the sixteenth-century surnames in Norfolk were derived from local place names, less than the national average of about one-third but still significant. Many of those in sixteenth-century Norfolk with 'locality' surnames derived these from the neighbouring County of Suffolk, and particularly from East Suffolk.⁶ The inter-connection between Norfolk and Suffolk is also an important part of the story of this line of the Sherington family which is the focus of this book. Parish and other records suggest that since the sixteenth century this particular family has spelt its surname with an 'e' and one 'r'.

Genealogy was thus an important foundation of this history which has taken a half a century to research and compile, involving more than one generation of the extended Sherington family in Australia as well as cousins in Britain. Beginning before the digital age, research first concentrated on extensive parish records in Suffolk as well as family papers and official births and death records from London and then family papers and records in Australia. With the coming of the global age of communications, contact was re-established between the descendants of the Pretty family from Ipswich and the Sherington family of Upper Norwood near the former Crystal Palace in South London. The

5 Tom Williamson, *The Origins of Norfolk* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 85.

6 R.A. McKinley, *Norfolk Surnames in the Sixteenth Century*, Department of English Local History, occasional papers, second series, no. 2 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969), 17, 25.

Pretty–Sherington marriage alliance in the nineteenth century provided a focus as did the Sheringtons who left London for Australia and America. Indeed this recent research clearly revealed how the digital age can actually reunite extended families in a new bond of friendship.

But understanding the history of a family involves more than genealogy. In recent decades historians have come to understand the history of the family in terms of its changing structure, values and contexts. Age and gender relations in particular have become crucial as part of the history of the western family. This history tries to understand the changing contexts of one particular line of the Sherington family over almost five centuries. As is the case with most histories, this is a narrative of change which draws upon a variety of sources to try to grasp the process which led to migration from Suffolk into London and then to Australia and also to the Americas. As such it tries to provide some understanding of the changing meaning of ‘family’ as well as wider social and economic contexts from the sixteenth century onwards set within three specific localities – the village of Westleton in Suffolk, South London and Sydney, New South Wales.

This is therefore not so much just the history of ‘a family’ but of many families over time. The family name of Sherington provides a link to those born with this name, or associated through marriage or in other ways. There is also a specific focus on the idea of enterprise. It is now fashionable to concentrate on the cultural aspects of the family exemplified through love, marriage and the upbringing of children. These are present in this history, but principally this is an historical study of the middling ranks of society where the survival of the family depended on not so much personal attachments but varying fortunes and enterprise. For most of these centuries the family was an economic enterprise as much as a form of emotional attachment. In Suffolk there was the family farm; in South London a family business based on the new world of retail and consumption; and in Sydney the family manufacturing firm of Ford Sherington. Eco-

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conomic fortunes of the family thus governed the lives of most of the family members. Indeed we see here the creation of the family business, which has been so important in middle-class social and economic life for most of the recent past.

Research for this book has been an extended family affair, taking place over half a century and involving extensive effort and cost, both financial and personal. In particular we would like to thank our father, William George Sherington (to whom the book is dedicated), our Australian-born cousins Charles Richard Sherington and Dorothy Barbara Dawson, and our English cousin Mark Shephard who has revealed to our generation what was unknown to our Australian-born fathers' and mothers' generation. Our brother David generously funded the cost of the production of the book.

Outside the immediate family others have assisted in many ways. Our long-time English friends William Fullick and Margaret Byrne were assiduous in their research of aspects of the Banfields and Sheringtons in nineteenth-century South London. In a recent bike-ride our old Australian friend Ross Hayward visited and took photos of Middletown in California where a member of the Sherington family was murdered in 1890. Others have contributed, not the least, through research assistance or by reading and commenting on the text. They include Joanna Martin, Roger Kennell, Dick Selleck, David Carment, and Julia Horne. Thanks are also due to Susan Murray-Smith, Agata Mrva-Montoya and Bronwyn O'Reilly of Sydney University Press for producing this history. For all of the above we thank you.

Many of the sources for this history are still held in private possession. It is hoped that in future most of these will be deposited in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

This history is extensive and ambitious in its breadth. It commences in the Anglo-Saxon past and virtually ends at the time the Sydney Opera House was being completed in the early 1970s. My late brother and I hoped that it will reveal something of the

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lives and experiences of our ancestors. And perhaps future generations will carry this history into the twenty-first century.

One final word on nomenclature. As with many families of English heritage, the name of William was often given to the first-born son. However, from the nineteenth century there was often a second personal name attached. To distinguish so many Williams this practice of including a second personal name is used in the latter parts of the text.

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Sydney

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