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# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MESSER FAMILY

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Updated 24 July 2006.

The earliest known member that I have found of our MESSER family was a JAMES MESSER who lived in Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire, England, from about 1700. It was quite easy to trace the family backwards using the Parish Registers and Bishop's Transcripts for St Helen's Church as the family remained in Wheathampstead, at least until our branch came to Australia in the 1880s. The males in our direct line were named either James or John and in each generation followed the trade of a blacksmith.

But JAMES, above, proved to be my brick wall. I have found no record of his birth or the names of his parents, nor have I have found a marriage for JAMES MESSER. Records of St. Helen's Church, Wheathampstead, show the baptism of children for JAMES and ELIZABETH MESSER. In 1756 James was the landlord of the Swan Inn. St. Helen's Parish Register records the burial on 22 Dec 1761 of JAMES MESSER, an Innholder. It also records the burial of ELIZABETH, wife of JAMES MESSER, on 16 Jun 1756.

The Bishop's Transcripts revealed the baptism of three children for JAMES and ELIZABETH MESSER. These were JOHN (our ancestor), born 17 Nov 1737, baptised 04 Dec 1737, died Dec 1795, THOMAS, born 25 Aug 1740, baptised 07 Sep 1740, died Jan 1809, and MARY, born 20 Dec 1741 and baptised 02 Jan 1741/42. However, the Parish Register revealed the baptism of only MARY MESSER. What was revealed in the Parish Register was the baptism of JOHN MASON, son of JAMES MASON and ELIZABETH, his wife, and the baptism of THOMAS MASON, son of JAMES MASON and ELIZABETH, his wife. The dates were exactly the same as the entries for JOHN and THOMAS on the Bishop's Transcripts, only the family name was different. The writing was easy to read so there was no problem in deciphering the script. To make things even more confusing, I noted the baptism of six more children born to JAMES MASON (or MASSON) and ELIZABETH, his wife.

These were ELIZABETH, born 13 Apr 1725, baptised 09 May 1725, buried 01 Sep 1725, JAMES, born 06 Nov 1726, baptised 27 Nov 1726, THOMAS, born 28 Aug 1728, baptised 25 Sep 1728, SARAH, born 07 Mar 1729/30, baptised 22 Mar 1729/30, WILLIAM, born 06 May 1732, baptised 21 May 1732, and FRANCES, (son) born 17 Jan 1734/35, baptised 02 Feb 1734/35.

As I do not know when JAMES MESSER, later of the Swan, and ELIZABETH married, I cannot prove if the MASON/MESSER name is the same. The question arises as to why the Bishop's Transcripts differ from the Parish Register. They were supposed to be a copy of the Register. I have prints of both the Parish

Register and the Bishop's Transcripts and they are in different handwriting. So who changed the name, and why? Also, as I viewed the Film of the Parish Register, I found only one other entry for MASON. This was WILLIAM MASON, an infant, buried on 28 Sep 1768.

The other question to be answered is this. If the MASON/MESSER names were one and the same then would two children in the family be named THOMAS unless the earlier one had died? I have not found a burial for THOMAS MASON, born 1728.

On the I.G.I. there is a record of JAMES MASON, son of WILLIAM, born in 1700 and baptised at Hatfield. There is also a marriage for a JAMES MASON and ELIZABETH HOBODY, at Holy Trinity, Bengeo, Herts., on 28 Dec 1724. Could this be the marriage that I need?

A chance email from a fellow Messer researcher in England provided me with the one elusive piece that may have completed the jigsaw. He had obtained the Will of JAMES MESSER, a Victualler, and in the Will JAMES appointed his brother-in-law, JAMES HOBDEE, to be the sole executor. This seemed to be sufficient to prove that JAMES MESSER and JAMES MASON were one and the same person. (JAMES signed the Will as 'MESSER.') In his Will, JAMES mentions bequests to his sons JOHN, WILLIAM and THOMAS, and his daughters, SARAH, wife of DANIEL MARDELL, and MARY.

Furthermore, according to the Allen Index, SARAH MASSER, of Wheathampstead, married DANIEL MARDALE on 12th May 1753.

However, one question remains unanswered. Which of the two is the correct name? The marriage record at Bengeo states that both JAMES and ELIZABETH were from Wheathampstead. So what were they doing in Bengeo? It is not exactly close to Wheathampstead. A fellow researcher found a number of records of the Hobdy (various spelling) name in Wheathampstead but found no record of a baptism for ELIZABETH. However, he did find a burial for her brother, JAMES, (mentioned in the Will) at Wheathampstead on 26th July 1790. Interestingly he is recorded as a blacksmith, the same occupation as many of the MESSER family down through the years. (As an aside – it seems that there was a blacksmith shop attached to the Swan Inn for many years.)

Other Hertfordshire female names marrying into the MESSER family in the following years include KNIGHT, NASH, HULKS, WILCOX, FREEMAN, FAULDER, SALE, HUCKERBY, MUNT, POTTER, CHAPMAN.

Male names include WRIGHT, LEWIN, HUMPHREY, PEARMAN, BEESON.

The last in our direct chain of MESSER blacksmiths, my husband's great-grandfather, JOHN MESSER, died at Wheathampstead in 1887. Prior to their father's death, four of his sons, GEORGE, ALFRED WILLIAM, FRED and ENOS, had already migrated to Queensland. In 1888 JOHN'S widow, ELIZA (nee MUNT), sailed to Queensland with her three remaining sons, ZACHARIAH, REUBEN and JESSE, thus severing that direct link to Wheathampstead but forging a new chain in Australia – but no blacksmiths as far as I know!

Val Messer -