

Desmier Family History Newsletter

June 1997

Issue No. 5

Editors Note

This newsletter concentrates on the descendants of Esther Dorothea Desmier of the Northern Clan. Most of the information has been sent to me by Robert Gibbs. Robert's name will be familiar to those of you who have read the other copies of the newsletter. He has been very successful in researching many branches of his family history as well as the Desmier line. I have included a descendant chart of this branch of the family which links directly to the chart sent out with newsletter 2 to make the relationships clearer. Also on this chart you will see Sibyl and Laura Aquino who were featured in Newsletter No 2. I've had to increase the size of this issue however, I think it is worthwhile as it keeps all the information together.

I would appreciate more contributions from others to keep the newsletter rolling along, particularly from those families that I am referring to as the Southern clan. I haven't been able to include many articles on these families as I have no personal knowledge of the people myself other than names and dates and they are of course not very interesting in themselves.

R" Dew

The following people profiles have been contributed by Robert Gibbs

Esther Dorothea Desmier

My maternal grandmother, Esther Dorothea Desmier

married Tomas Anibal Rodrigues Aquino in July 1891. Esther and Tomaz it is said had six children, four daughters and two sons, both of the sons died young. The eldest daughter, Othelia married Alfred John Gibbs who was from English and Southern Irish stock.

Tomaz, who was born in Goa, had obtained a first class degree in medicine from

Bombay University and had been appointed as an assistant surgeon in the Hospital at Hyderabad, Sind. Esther's family lived in nearby Kotri and her father, George Charles Desmier, was a Jailer at Hyderabad, Sind and Surat.



Fact her Aquino (nee Desmier) with her grandchildren, rear right Alfred Gibbs, left Robert Gibbs, front Alban Weeks, seated Margaret Gibbs, being held either Yvonne or June Weeks. Photograph taken about 1927.

Tomaz' position was a Government of India appointment so whenever there was an outbreak of cholera or typhoid or whatever he was sent to be the doctor in charge of the epidemic which is why their children were

born at such great distances from each other; my mother, Othelia in Hyderabad; Sybil in Bombay; Laura in Gadag and Mary in Sukkur. Tomaz, according to one of my aunts was allergic to horses (his main form of transport). Eventually he was taken seriously ill and went to be treated by his doctor brother in Baroda (now Vadodara) where he died in 1902. His wife Esther (now about 31) was a good seamstress and having already seen Bombay might have been advised to go to Poona with her young family. It was in the hills and it was an army town so

there would be a better chance of part time work at least Her father George Charles (who by now would have been 60) and her mother, Sarah, both died in Poona so they must also have left Hyderabad to retire in Poona.

Othelia Clothilde Aquino

My mother, known to her family as Bijou, met my father, Alfred John Gibbs, in Bombay and, I suspect, eloped with him to Hong Kong. They were married there in January 1916 and lived on Kowloon side in Durban Villas (near the Peninsular Hotel). He worked in a chemists shop in Victoria, Hong Kong. Both my brother Alfred and myself were born in Hong Kong where we resided for two years after which we set off for Calcutta where we spent about five years. My parents separated and so the rest of us had a long train journey from Calcutta to Bombay, where we stayed with my Grandmother. We lived very close to the Gateway of India and to the Taj Mahal Hotel - the centre of evening life for the young men and women. In 1928 my mother brought my brother and myself to England and we were put into a school in Chertsey Surrey. The school was run by the Salesians, an ecclesiastical order founded by Don Bosco. I was there three years and then taken to live with the parents of one of my mothers friends in India. They lived

in far off Bradford. In 1933 my mother came to live in England and after many moves we settled in Shipley where my mother bought herself a house. She had a hard struggling life and eventually died in Knaresborough in October 1962 a fortnight or so before her 70th birthday.



Othelia Gibbs (nee Aquino) with her children; from the left Alfred, Margaret and Robert. Photograph taken about 1936 Bradford, Yorkshire.

Margaret Esther Gibbs

My sister Margaret Esther (Baby May to the family) was born in Calcutta on 16th August 1920. At around four years of age she was very delicate - Bombay weather was unsuitable- so she was packed off as a boarder to a convent in Panchgani in the hills near Puna so we only saw her at Christmas (the end of the school year in India). I remember her again in 1933 when my mother came to England finally. She was taken out of school in Walmer, Deal where she had been put in 1931 and she completed her education in St Joseph's College, Bradford where she shone academically. She also proved to be musically very talented and was in their choir which won many prizes at local festivals. When she left school she trained in typing and shorthand and was



Margaret Gibbs about six years old.

Photograph taken Bombay about 1926

employed as a secretary, she succeeded wonderfully well. She was drafted into munitions during the war but was able to take up work with ENSA as a singer and dancer. Unfortunately she and mother fell out severely and around 1944 May left home. My last recollection of her was late in 1945 when I went to see her in Manchester where she had a senior post with ICI. From Manchester she vanished into thin air until finally tracked down living in Capetown, South Africa. So far as I know she is still there. She wrote once to say that she was in a senior executive post and I do not doubt for one moment that she has proved to be a very successful career woman. I know that she had a brilliant brain and was master of three or four foreign languages which, allied to a strong personality, was bound to take

her to the highest levels.

Alfred William George Gibbs

Alfred was born in January 1918 in Kowloon, Hong Kong. Like many thousands of others my brother Alfred and myself went through the depression of the early and mid 1930's. He was the unluckiest in that two firms in Bradford for whom he worked went out of business so he was thrown onto the scrap heap. In early 1939 he was in very poor health so he decided to leave home and join the RAF. His first posting was in Cranwell. In March 1940 he was posted to the middle east and spent the war in and around Cairo in the accounts department in which he rose to the rank of

Sergeant. Towards the end of the war he volunteered to be trained for the Fleet Air Arm and was in the middle of his training when the war ended. and his ambition was brought to an end. His training had been in South Africa and he saw much of that country. Having a strong organisational bent he led parties of RAF officers and men to safaris in Kenya and Uganda. I have seen his photographs of the Murchison Falls and many other areas and they are superb. His photographic ability is very exceptional. He also shone in physical activities representing the RAF at home and abroad at cricket, hockey and tennis In addition he was a very

strong swimmer capable of doing three miles at a stretch in the open seas. In 1947 he was awarded a commission in the RAF and after 18 years of service retired as a Flight Lieutenant. What to do in civvy street now was the question because in August 1947 Alfred had married in Huddersfield and by now there were two infant sons Stephen and Geoffrey born in September 1949 and May 1951 respectively. Alfred decided to take his line of accountancy to degree level and to his very great credit, by external study whilst at the same time doing odd jobs of work he obtained his arts degree. He then applied for a place in a college of Education for his teachers degree and was given a place in Huddersfield. He continued to work and study very hard and came out with a qualification to teach adults at further education level in Accountancy He started in Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire and then went to various posts in the Birmingham area. His two sons went to one of the first Comprehensive schools in the country at Nottingham. They

me "Bob, I've reached the stage now that if they get past me I don't bother to chase them". I watched him playing on one occasion and if it was a question of one on one the younger player did not get past him. His (Alfred's) stick work was too clever and quick; his anticipation too was better than the very much younger player

For the past few years Alfred has been going to "Golden Oldie" hockey events in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and USA and has been combining these with trekking in Nepal and white water rafting in both New Zealand and USA. He still works out and weight trains twice a week in a gym and is to boot a very accomplished ballroom dancer Occasionally he will play a game of squash - just to keep in trim. It makes me tired just to think of it.

Alfred's older son, Stephen, is married with children and is a teacher of physical education at a school where his wife is head of the department Stephen is also an accomplished bass baritone and sings with a choir accompanied by the

were not only very clever academically but also shone as all round sportsmen at swimming, tennis, basketball etc representing the county on

several occasions. Stephen came close to representing England at International level at Basketball.

Alfred retained his love of sport and continued with his tennis and hockey At 78 he is still playing hockey and captains a team. He once told



*Alfred (left) and Robert Gibbs.
Photograph taken October 1995*

Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. He has also won occasional prizes as a solo singer

Geoffrey, the younger of the two boys, qualified at Leeds University in Electrical Engineering Now he and his girlfriend work in the same department of a large company (Siemens I think) Both are interested in golf with Geoffrey being close to a single figure handicap. Both boys are obviously chips off the old block_

Robert Thomas Gibbs

I was born in October 1916 in Kowloon Hong Kong and when I was about two years old the family moved back to India We spent about five years in Calcutta and when my parents separated my mother and we three children moved to Bombay to live at first with my grandmother. My first memory of Bombay was Watson's Annexe where my grandmother had a large groundfloor flat. Apart from us my

mothers sister, Mary, shared the flat Aunt Mary was studying to be a doctor. My mother soon got herself a job in Bombay and life went on serenely for all of us I remember occasionally my brother and I going fishing from the sea wall near the Gateway of India

When I was 9 and my brother 8 we too were sent to Panchgani where our sister was at school. I remember it because there was a priest there who encouraged the kids to collect insects like beetles etc for him. These he used to pickle and add to his collection

because on one occasion a young girl picked up a black beetle which turned out to be a scorpion This meant of course primitive treatment such as burning her hand with red hot pieces of wood and without anaesthetics_ Naturally her screams could be heard throughout the compound. The boys also used to go hunting and killing snakes which earned them extra sweets. The next year my brother and I were sent to a Jesuit school in Byculla, Bombay. It was very



The Taj Mahal International Hotel and the gateway of India Monument (1989)

Things occasionally went wrong

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large because it contained about 1,000 boys from 10 up to 17 or 18. Perhaps it was thought we boys had to be toughened. The discipline certainly was strict but they had a lovely camp school at Khandhala, near Poona where nearly the whole school went for the long holiday. It was very exciting being there because the village was very small and even the young boys of 10 and 11 were allowed to go exploring. We found a pool and there of course we learned one way or another to swim. Homemade wings made from a pillowcase proved a great help until one lad became separated from his pillowcase and the rest of us had to jump in and rescue him from drowning by pushing and shoving him in turn until he reached the shallow area. One afternoon on arriving at the pool we saw a large snake coiled in a slight hollow near the pool. Of course we all picked up sticks and tried to get at it but the biggest boy claimed first swipe but he missed it. The snake uncoiled like lightning and slid into the pool with all of us whooping and jumping in after it. I've often wondered how did we ever hope to get to grips with it. Anyway we never saw it again which is probably just as well. Around the village there was nothing but wild country and night times were a bit scary because we could hear hyenas and jackals and occasionally a tiger in the distance. The toilets were well separated from the dormitories so most of the 10 year olds woke a senior boy to act as an escort in an emergency but my friend and I argued that if any large animal was met it wouldn't much matter whether the boy was a senior or not so we used to wake each other which made us feel we were being very brave. One night proved very exciting because there was gunfire and sure enough the next morning the priests took us to the village and there in the middle of the dirt road lay a huge tiger which used to occasionally raid the village at nights.

Khandhala is in a beautiful setting with huge ravines 1,000 or more feet deep with steep sides. Occasionally the priests took us on picnics to the pools at the bottom of the ravines. One pool in particular was my favourite because it was big with a large waterfall at one end and it was fun to swim near the fall to see how close you dared to go. Unfortunately the climb up from the pool used to be hard and tiring but we young ones dared not stop and rest because the priest bringing up the rear clobbered our legs with a stick whenever we stopped. Looking back it was Great fun and certainly strengthening. Like Panchgani snakes were in abundance so whenever there was nothing else going on we went hunting for snakes to kill. I don't remember any of us getting bitten. I must say, when going to the toilets in the dark I was very wary about snakes because they had the advantage at night

In the short October holiday our Uncle Joe Kirby (see *newsletter 3*) took us with him on an inspection of railway works, bridges and things. We met him at Victoria railway terminus at Bombay and he ordered his sleeper carriage to be attached to a train and off we went for one glorious week. I remember him well saying " You see that bridge over there? I built that." I made my mind up to be a civil

engineer like him but it didn't work out that way unfortunately.

Neither my brother nor I knew that our stay in India was soon to be over. In March 1928 my mother, brother and I left in the SS Letitia for Liverpool. My brother and I were taken to the Salesian College at Chertsey Surrey. We said goodbye to my mother in the principal's office and she returned to work in India. By now I was 11 and my brother 10 Alfred and I settled in as best as we could in what were very different surroundings to what we were used to. We spent three reasonably happy years at the school and in 1931 I was taken out of school by my mother and put in the care of a Mr and Mrs Binns whose son was a friend of my mother in Bombay. despite the world wide depression I had several different jobs of work, one of them as fate decreed was to work on the railway starting as a messenger boy at Bradford Forster Square Station.

In the summer of 1933 my mother sent a letter instructing me to seek out a place for the family to live. As a 16 year old I did my best but the basement flat turned out to be unsuitable to my mother so we moved to two top floor rooms near Lister Park and eventually moved to a house where mother let out rooms and took in lodgers in order to survive.

I joined the army in September 1939 very soon after the outbreak of war. I was sent to serve in Hong Kong where I was captured by the Japanese and sent to Japan as a POW. People in England heard no news of me until the end of the war. I left the army in September 1946. Whilst spending my last six months in York I applied to be a teacher and was accepted at Lancaster training college. After training I was appointed to a school in Harrogate where I spent eight happy years excluding a break of nearly two years doing service in Korea and Japan between 1950 and 1952. I was moved to two other schools and served until my retirement in September 1979. My last post was in a large comprehensive school of 2,000 pupils in Knaresborough to where I had moved to live. My daughter Margaret was born in July 1957 and like her Aunt May she turned out to be a very clever and industrious person obtaining a first class honours degree in Chemistry at St Andrews University Scotland. She is now married to Richard Moore and lives in York 19 miles away from Knaresborough. She works for a large doctor's practice as the person in charge of their computer section. Richard is working hard for his degree in accountancy.

RESEARCHING ANGLO INDIAN ANCESTRY WITHOUT VISITING THE INDIA OFFICE LIBRARY

I have included this extract from an article that I wrote for the British Ancestors in India Society Journal in the hope that it may assist those of you researching other branches of your family.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS or Mormons) is more commonly known in genealogy circles for the International Genealogical Index that lists the birth, christening and marriage dates for many millions of deceased people. However, the church also has an ongoing programme of filming old parish records, censuses, military records, professional registers etc in many countries throughout the world. This collection of films includes many that relate to Anglo Indian ancestry, the original copies of which are located in the India Office Library and in some cases still in India. The full list of the records that have been microfilmed can be seen at any FHC by looking up the Locality Index section of the Family History Library Catalogue. The Locality Index lists all the microfilms that can be borrowed relating to genealogical or historical information for each country. Within the records for each country the records are further categorised according to the type of record. The last time I looked there were 101 categories in the Locality Index for India (which also covers modern day Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Burma and smaller colonies such as Pondichery or Goa). The Index is either in microfiche format or, at those FHC's that have computers, on CD-ROM. I have found the CD-ROM version much more convenient as it is possible to copy sections from the index to disk and examine it at a more leisurely pace on my computer at home.

Once you have found the title and film number of the microfilm you want to view from the entries in the Locality Index it must be ordered so that it can be sent to your local family history centre for you to look at. The main repository for the micro-films is Salt Lake City in the USA but I have been told that whenever a film is ordered by a FHC in another country the film is copied and it is the copy that you receive. After you have finished with the film (you have a four week loan period) it is retained at a main library in your country (Sydney in the case of Australia). This means that the more frequently requested films (such as indexes) only take a couple of weeks to arrive. Other films that have not been requested by somebody in your country before may take several months. In Australia the cost of requesting and borrowing a film is \$6.00AUS.

For those people just starting out in their quest to find their Indian ancestry the best place to start is the Parish Register Transcripts. These are found under the "Church Records" category of the Locality Index and consist of the transcripts that the churches were obliged to send to the authorities every year or so. Unfortunately these returns were not always completed. I have been told that it is estimated that only about 80% of the events have been recorded in this manner. nevertheless it is a very good place to start your research.

Pre-1948 records are filed according to the Presidency in which the event occurred ie. Bombay, Bengal or Madras. Records for places in what is now Pakistan may be found in either the Bengal or Bombay Presidency depending upon the actual location and year of the event. Those for Burma are found with the Bengal Presidency entries. The records for each Presidency have been indexed. If you know the approximate date and location of the event that you are looking for you can obtain the number of the index film to order from the locality catalogue. The indexes for baptisms, marriages and burials are separate and the number of years covered by each film varies considerably. For example the records for Bengal are recorded on 46 films of indexes covering the period 1698 - 1948. The 18th century records are all on one film but in the later years when there was a large European population each film may only cover 4 or 5 years of records.

When you receive the index film it is a relatively quick process to scan the records for each year to find the occurrences of the names that you are interested in as the records are usually entered alphabetically for each year. When you find an entry you are interested in record the full name, year of the event and the folio or page number of the transcript. Now if you return to the Locality Index you can find the reference number of the microfilm that contains the volume of the transcripts that you are looking for. Make sure that you look in the correct Presidency and use the year of the event as a check that you have copied the record correctly from the index. Now you have a choice. You can either order the microfilm with the event recorded on it as you did for the index film or, alternatively, you can just order a photocopy of the entry from the main LDS library in Salt Lake City. I prefer the latter method, it is easier, cheaper and I will want my own copy of the record anyway. Obtain a "Request for Photocopies" form from your local Family History Centre. On it enter the details that you obtained from the index microfilm together with the film number and send it off. The cost of each photocopy is 25 cents with a \$2.00US minimum charge and so I order 8 photocopies at a time. To avoid bank charges I send a \$2 US bank-note rather than a money order and have never had any problems doing this.

The Parish Register Transcripts for British India are just one example of the types of records available that will make aspects of researching your Indian Ancestry relatively easy from anywhere in the world. There are many other types of microfilmed records available through your local FHC that you will no doubt find useful as you progress with your research. These include Military records, Probate records, Wills and Administrations (Court records); East India Company records and Pension details.

