THE HALES IN ROSLYN

The name Hale is common in the Forest of Dean area. This is the story of one branch of the Hale family who left their homes in the Forest to seek better lives in other parts of England and Wales and eventually settled in the town of Roslyn, a coal mining town in the north-western state of Washington in the USA. This description of the town appears on the City of Roslyn website http://www.ci.roslyn.wa.us/ :

> Roslyn is located 80 miles east of Seattle, near Interstate 90, in sunny central Washington. Incorporated in 1886 the coal-mining town of Roslyn played an important role in Washington State History. The extensive coal fields in the area fueled the Northern Pacific Railroad's trains during construction and early operation of a direct rail line through the Cascade Mountains.
> Men from coal mining regions in the United States, Europe and elsewhere came to work in the mines. English, Italian and Slavic immigrants were among the early settlers and a significant proportion of the town's early residents were foreign born. In 1888, responding to a strike, the Northern Pacific Coal Company recruited more than 300 African-American miners from Virginia, North Carolina and Kentucky and brought them, with their families, to work in the mines. At one time, 24 ethnic groups and nationalities were living in Roslyn. Today, many of the original families continue to make Roslyn their home.

I visited Roslyn in May 2012. The town is very proud of its heritage and it still has the feel of a pioneer town with wide boulevards and wooden buildings. There is a small museum http://www.roslynmuseum.com/ staffed by volunteers. There are also immaculately kept Historic Cemeteries where many miners and their families are buried, including members of the Hale family. More information about the history of Roslyn can be found on the Roslyn Heritage website http://www.washingtonruralheritage.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/roslyn

The story of the Hales in Roslyn is that of a coal miner from the Forest of Dean called Thomas Hale; his children Agnes, Mitchell, Emily, Sarah, and Lillian; and his great nephew Thomas William Hale.

Thomas Hale (1832 - c1905)



Thomas Hale (centre back row) and his daughters with their husbands
Emily and George Blakemore; Lillian and Joseph Sheldon; Agnes and Winyard Steel; Sarah and Enoch Brockhouse
(Photograph by kind permission of Amy Kollar Anderson, a descendant of Emily Hale Blakemore)

Thomas Hale was a coal miner all his life like his father and grandfather before him. He was born in the Coleford area on 16 November 1832 but was not baptised until three years after his birth. On his baptism certificate his parents are recorded as George Hale (coal miner) and his wife Sarah Ferber.

The coal mines of the Forest of Dean could not provide enough work for all those who needed it so many miners left for other parts of the country and overseas, where their skills were needed to fuel the Industrial Revolution. As a young man, Thomas took advantage of the rapid expansion of the railways and coalfields in the industrial north of England to move to Eastwood in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. There he married Jane Draper, whose father John had turned to coal mining after the decline of the Nottinghamshire framework knitting industry. Thomas and Jane continued to live in the Eastwood district for about 15 more years and had six known children there. But by 1870 the family had moved again, this time to Featherstone in Yorkshire, another coal mining town, where a seventh child was born.

In 1880 Thomas's wife Jane died at the age of 49. One of their children had died in infancy and two had left home, but the other four children, aged between 13 and 25, were still living with Thomas. In November that year Thomas's married daughter Agnes left for the United States of America with her husband Winyard Steele and three children. In June 1881, the census for England was taken. Thomas 48 (coal miner) was a widower living with his children in Featherstone but there were also three visitors from Thomas's birthplace of Coleford in the Forest of Dean. They were Thomas William Hale 25, a coal miner, his wife Edith 23 and their baby daughter Lillian. The two Thomas Hales were related, the elder being the great uncle of the younger. Thomas William and his family were to join the other Hales in Roslyn 15 years later.

Thomas and his remaining daughters left to join Agnes in the USA in November 1881. The names of Emily 19, Sarah Jane 17 and Lillian Hale 15 are recorded on the passenger list for the ship 'City of Brussels' and although I have not found Thomas's name on the transcribed list, it is almost certain that he accompanied them or possibly went ahead. They settled first in Streator, Illinois, a coal mining town about 80 miles SW of Chicago whose population had increased three-fold in the 10 years prior to 1881, mainly because of the influx of immigrant miners.

We do not know what persuaded the family to leave for Roslyn but it was probably connected with the mining boom there at the time. The Northern Pacific Railroad was being built nearby and needed local coal to fuel the steam engines. In 1886, teams of prospectors from the Railroad company discovered large deposits of coal near Roslyn. Within weeks hundreds of miners had started work in there and a camp was built. In two years the town was home to more than 1,000 people. Thomas was aged about 57 when he moved to Roslyn so he would be working in the coal mine when work was available. Fortunately for him he was not working underground on 10 May 1892 because that was the date of the Roslyn mine disaster. There was an explosion underground in which over 40 miners lost their lives, including Thomas's son Mitchell and his son-in-law Winyard.

Thomas and his family continued to live in Roslyn after the disaster. At the 1900 census Thomas was 66 and working as a day labourer, living with his daughter Lillian and her family. Although I have not yet found a death record for Thomas he must have died between the 1900 and 1910 US censuses.

Agnes Hale Steel (1857 – 1901)

Agnes was the first of Thomas's children to leave for the United States. She was born in Nottinghamshire but her family moved to Yorkshire when she was a child. At the age of 18 she married a Forest of Dean miner, Winyard Steel, who had left the Forest as a young man to find work in Yorkshire. The people of the Forest of Dean were a close community, keeping up ties with one another even after they had travelled to other parts of the world, so it is not surprising that Agnes married a man from the area where her father had been born.

In 1880 Agnes and Winyard left England to start a new life in the USA. The demand for skilled miners to work in the coalfields of Illinois and Pennsylvania was high and many miners left England in search of better wages and conditions. On 27 November, they arrived in New York with three children after having travelled steerage on the ship 'Germanic' from Liverpool. They settled first in Streator. They were joined a year later by Agnes' father and sisters, and then in 1886, by her brother Mitchell who had just finished his active army service.

In 1890 Agnes and Winyard left Illinois and moved with their children across the USA to Roslyn in the state of Washington. They were accompanied by Agnes' father Thomas and her brother Mitchell. Sadly the move to Roslyn ended in tragedy for Agnes because her husband and her brother Mitchell were killed in the Roslyn mine explosion of 10 May 1892, along with over 40 other miners. It was the biggest mine disaster in the state of Washington's history. Agnes's son Walter was at the mine that day but escaped injury. This account, dated 14 May 1892, comes from the Ellensburg Localizer:

> An explosion occurred in the coal mine No. 4 at Roslyn, on Tuesday, the 10th inst. It is not known at this writing the precise number in the mine when the explosion occurred. The explosion was a terrific one. Its force may be judged by the damage done 5,000 feet from the place where the men were at work. There were fourteen cars on the track at the mouth of the tunnel. Some of the cars were demolished and others driven with great force down the track. There were from fifty to seventy-five men in the mine. There is little reason to believe that any of them have escaped being killed. It is the first accident of the kind that has occurred in any of the coal mines in this part of the state. Women who had husbands working in the mines were frantically rushing about the mouth of the tunnel, eager to learn the fate of those dear to them. The scene presented was appalling to the extreme.

From a later report of the same newspaper:

> On Tuesday, the 10th, the explosion took place. By 12 o'clock that night, fourteen blackened and mutilated bodies were taken out. They had to be washed before they were recognizable. The railroad station has been improvised as an undertaker's shop. Nearly all the men in the slope were men of family, because the place was recognized as dangerous, and for this reason needed careful men. Many of the families are left destitute, and children of tender years are among the bereaved. Forty-eight persons are known to have been in the mine at the time, and there is little doubt but that all have perished.
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> The slope in which the men were at work is a new one, and runs in a southerly direction for a distance of 2,800 feet from the opening. The outpour of deadly gas from the tunnel was too great to permit a search being prosecuted for any length of time. Every ten minutes relief gangs were sent in and the work was kept up in this way until the foreman, George HARRISON, counseled that it was too risky to continue the search, as to remain would be to suffocate from the deadly fumes. At 12 o'clock on the night of the 10th, the rescue was abandoned.
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> The bodies were taken in improvised dead wagons to the town hall, where they were deposited on long tables side by side, that they might be viewed and identified. The distressing scenes of the afternoon were re-enacted at the town hall, the women coming to thither to claim their dead and mourn them. *(very graphic injuries described)*... Three of them were apparently uninjured. These three had been found lying in the fifth level, east of the main slope, flat upon their faces where they had thrown themselves to escape the baleful effects of the after damp, only to be asphyxiated by it.

Winyard was buried in the Old Knights of Pythias Cemetery, one of the Historic Cemeteries of Roslyn. The Knights of Pythias was a fraternal support organisation, dedicated to the ideals of loyalty and friendship. They helped fellow members in times of difficulty which would have included the means to bury Winyard. Agnes was left with eight children, ranging in age from one year to 16. An enquiry into the disaster found that the explosion was caused by poor ventilation and the mine owners were forced to pay compensation. She stayed on in Roslyn and married George Gaze in 1897. George was from Norfolk in England and had lived about 40 miles from Streator, Illinois so perhaps he knew the family. Together Agnes and George had two children. We do not know exactly when Agnes died but it was about 1902. She would have been in her mid-forties and her early death was perhaps a consequence of the hardships she endured. A coal miner's income was not regular so there must have been times of financial difficulty. She also had a large number of children. According to the information in the 1900 census, she gave birth to 17 children, ten of whom had died. I have not been able to find all the births but the figures represent a rate of one child almost every year of her married life.

Winyard and the other miners killed in the explosion are commemorated on this memorial statue in the main street of Roslyn:



(Thomas) Mitchell Hale (1860 – 1892)

Thomas Mitchell Hale was almost always known by his second name of Mitchell, the family name of his maternal grandmother. He was born in Nottinghamshire, the third known child of Thomas Hale and Jane Draper. The family moved to Yorkshire when Mitchell was a child and when he was old enough he too worked as a coal miner. In June 1879 he joined the Second Battalion of the Grenadier Guards. He spent several months in Egypt, and took part in the Battle of Tel-el-Kabir. In 1885 he returned to Egypt and served in the "Soudan campaign".

We know from his obituary that Mitchell arrived in the US in 1886 which would fit in with his discharge from active army service the previous year. He spent 4 years working as a coal miner in Streator then moved across the country to Roslyn with his father and his sister Agnes and her family. Two years later Mitchell was killed in the 1892 Mining disaster in Roslyn, aged 32. He too belonged to the fraternal society of the Knights of Pythias and is buried in the Old Knights of Pythias Cemetery, Roslyn. This obituary for Mitchell appears on the internet but the original source for it has not yet been found:

MITCHEL HALE was born in Nottingham, England. At the age of 20 he joined the renowned London Grenadiers. In 1882 when trouble occurred between Egypt and England, he was ordered to the scene of war with his regiment whereby he remained at the front for nearly 4 years taking part in all the principle engagements, for his acts of valor and bravery during this campaign, he received valuable medals. The hardships he suffered in the land of deserts no words can describe, some idea can be formed however, of the terrible privations one must naturally suffer when he imagines himself trampling over the burning sands of Egypt with the thermometer at from 140 to 155 degrees above 0, encumbered with about 40 pounds of accoutrements, consisting of rifle, sabre, knapsack, shovel with which to entrench themselves, and a heavy rug and blanket as protection from the raw night air when the thermometer often reaches freezing point. The troops were often compelled to make long forced marches over the sandy wastes, on a diet of dog biscuit, a half pint of brackish water and a can of corned beef that in the great heat was at all times found floating in oil, which was repulsive food for the stomach to take. The wiry and cunning enemy with which they had to contend was accustomed to the heat and full well understood the lay of the country making it almost an impossibility for the English to conquer them. The nights of the invading forces were spent in stockades built of thorny bushes. Under the darkness of the Arabian nights the enemy were constantly harassing the troops preventing them from sleeping and in every other manner known making life a burden to them.

Through this period of terror and death, which is familiar to all readers of Sudan warfare where thousands of brave men perished not by bullets as those who died from that cause were only a small proportion -- the principle reaper of death was heat and disease -- Mitchel Hale passed. He came to America 6 years ago, residing in Streator for 4 years, where he had some miraculous escapes from death -- one time in particular where he was within 100 feet of a powder magazine, containing tons of the matter, when it exploded with a force sufficient to wreck houses a mile from the scene - strange to relate he received only a few minor bruises. He was truly sympathetic to a degree that only those who have suffered great hardships can attain - he was systematic as his long army life of severe discipline had made system in all things a second nature to him. His character was spotless as the driven snow - all his undertakings were zealously carried out - he was one who any man could feel proud to call a friend - he was a true man and a K. of P. No person is more deserving to mansions in the skies than brave, candid and beloved Mich. Hale."

Emily Hale Blakemore (1862 – 1937)

Emily was born in Nottinghamshire. She married George Blakemore shortly a few months after arriving in the USA. George came from Clifford's Mesne near Newent in the Forest of Dean, the son of Eliza Blakemore, a single woman. He was a coal miner and had emigrated two years before Emily to join his uncle Jesse Blakemore in Streator. Emily and George settled in Streator, Illinois and did not move to Roslyn with the rest of Emily's family but she has been included in this account because we know from the reminiscences of one of her descendants that she visited her family in Roslyn from time to time. Emily and George had six known children, all of whom stayed in Streator.

Sarah Jane Hale Brockhouse (1864 – 1943)

Sarah Jane was born in Nottinghamshire, the fifth known child of Thomas Hale and Jane Draper. As a young child she moved to Yorkshire with her family. Her mother died when she was 15 and a year later she emigrated to the USA with her widowed father and sisters. She settled in Streator, Illinois, and married Enoch Brockhouse, a coal miner from Dudley, near Birmingham, who had arrived in the US in 1882. They returned to the UK but we do not know for how long. We do know that they travelled back to the USA about 6 months after the mine explosion which killed Sarah's brother Mitchell and her brother in law Winyard Steel. They lived in Roslyn for the rest of their lives and Enoch worked as an engineer at the mine. They had one child, Lillian Brockhouse, who did not marry but worked as the kindergarten teacher in Roslyn and is still remembered by many people today. Sarah Jane, Enoch and Lillian are all buried in Roslyn.

Lillian Hale Sheldon (1866 – 1942)

Lillian was the sixth known child of Thomas Hale and Jane Draper. She married Joseph Sheldon in Streator in 1886. Joseph was a coal miner, born in Yorkshire, England, into a coal mining family originally from Staffordshire. They lived in Streator for a while and had two children there but they returned to England and settled in Northumberland where another child was born. Six months after her brother was killed in the Roslyn mine disaster Lillian and her family left England again and moved to Roslyn. They returned on the same ship as Lillian's sister Sarah Jane and her husband Enoch Brockhouse. Both families settled in Roslyn near their widowed sister Agnes and their father. Lillian and Joseph continued to live in Roslyn for the rest of their lives. They are buried in the same grave in Roslyn.



Thomas Hale at the grave of his son Thomas Mitchell Hale. Agnes Hale Steel and her children at the grave of her husband Winyard Steel.
(Photograph from an article on the Roslyn Mining Disaster on the HistoryLink.org website http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&File_Id=8016)

Thomas William Hale (1855 – after 1930)

Thomas William Hale was a native of the Forest of Dean, born in Coleford, the eldest child of Henry Hale, a collier, and Lucy Whittington. The Thomas Hale whose story, and that of his children, has been told previously was the great uncle of Thomas William. By the time he was 15 Thomas was already working as a coal miner, initially in the Forest of Dean. As a young man he moved to Stockingford in Warwickshire where he married Edith Townsend in the Stockingford Parish Church. Edith was from the Forest of Dean where her father was a sawyer. The birthplaces of their six known children show that Thomas and Edith moved around England and Wales frequently in the next few years. Of particular interest to this story is the 1881 English census where we find Thomas William, his wife Edith, and their first child Lillian visiting the house of Thomas William's great uncle Thomas Hale in Yorkshire who left for the USA the next year.

Thomas William and his family did not go to the USA until about 15 years after the other Hales. In 1896 Thomas, Edith and five children left England on the SS Rhyneland. Three of his brothers had already settled in the USA - Samuel left in 1885 for Pennsylvania then West Virginia; Harry for Pennsylvania in 1893; and Isaac for Maryland in 1897. A fourth brother, Sydney, left in 1905 but returned the next year. They were all coal miners. We do not know for certain where Thomas William and his family went on their arrival in 1896 but they were living in Roslyn at the 1900 US census and Thomas William was working as a miner. Edith Hale's stay in her new country was short because she died aged 41, in December 1900 of kidney disease. Before she died she gave birth to five known children – Thomas, Elizabeth, Lavinia, Edith and Ellen. Edith Townsend Hale is buried in Roslyn.



Thomas remained in Roslyn and does not appear to have remarried. He went to live with his daughter Lavinia and her husband, Jack Sciutto in Centralia, Lewis County, about 150 miles from Roslyn. Jack was the proprietor of the Olympic Saloon in Centralia where he became known as "King of Bootleggers." Thomas William died at the age of 85 on 20 February 1945.



Thomas William Hale and his children at the graveside of his wife, Edith Townsend Hale.
L to R: Edith Amy, Lavinia, Lillian, Thomas William Hale and Thomas Henry
(Photograph by kind permission of Cyrus Dodd who obtained it from his cousin Peggy Wallace Saum, a descendent of Thomas's daughter Edith Hale Wallace)

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