

Thomas Alford

Pioneer of Drayton and Toowoomba

Born in the Rectory of St Audries Church, West Quantockshead, Somerset 16/09/1816. Thomas Alford left England 10/05/1838 after completing his education at the Merchant Tailors school London. He arrived in Sydney on the 'Hashemy' on 25/01/1839 with George Boulton and family. Thomas married their daughter Elizabeth Boulton at Paterson NSW 07/08/1839. First child Elizabeth junior was born on 09/06/1840 at Paterson.

Governor Gipps Proclaimed Brisbane "no longer a penal settlement" on 11/02/1842. On 21/03/1842 Thomas departed alone on the 'Shamrock' for Brisbane leaving Elizabeth and two daughters to follow after the birth of Mary, on 07/05/1842. Elizabeth arrived in Brisbane on the 'Falcon' about 11/07/1842. Mary was christened by the Reverend Handt, previously chaplain to the Brisbane convict jail, on 17/07/1842 at the jail in Queen Street.

Later in 1842, Thomas moved the family to Cambooya and established the first store on the Darling Downs. This location being unsuccessful, he relocated within 6 months to "The Springs" on Westbrook Creek, at the junction of the roads to Cambooya and Eaton Vale and closer to Gormans and Hodgsons gaps on the road to the Darling Downs from Ipswich.

On or about 13/06/1843 Ludwig Leichhardt stayed with the family on his expedition to Wide Bay. In 1845 the store and inn was licensed as the first Post Office and Thomas Alford's name for the township of Drayton was referred to in official documents. Three children, Thomas junior, Frances and Charles George were born in Drayton which by 1847 had a population of 50.

Thomas was active in community affairs, in particular the committee to establish a National School for which he was appointed Secretary/Treasurer on 02/07/1850. He drew the original plans. This school, continuously in use since opening on 06/09/1851, was built on blocks adjacent to Thomas's Store and Inn, "St Audries", in Darling Street. The population was now 200.

Insolvent, Thomas was forced to sell "St Audries" in 1851. In August 1851 he established a twice weekly carrying business Ipswich-Drayton with a mail contract. By January 1852 Thomas was again insolvent. Sometime between January and May 1852 he moved the family to "The Swamp" and established a house "Toowoomba" and store.

On 22/07/1852 Elizabeth delivered their sixth child Henry King Alford, the first white child born in Toowoomba. He was christened in the house "Toowoomba" by the Reverend Glennie. Reverend Glennie's baptismal certificate recording the name Toowoomba.

Thomas left Elizabeth and the family to run the Toowoomba store while he tried to make a living by going to Bingara gold fields in northern NSW. He made two trips between 16/09/1852 and 08/01/1853 without much success.

In mid 1853 the family moved to Brisbane where by 1854 Thomas had established successful auctioneering rooms on the corner of Queen and Albert Streets. Twin sons William Boulton and Richard Symes were also born that year.

By 1856 the family was living in a large house "Hill End" at Hill End South Brisbane, when insolvency again struck. The practice at the time of using promissory notes and loans instead of cash was fraught with dishonours.

In November 1856 Thomas was appointed Manager of the Ipswich and Drayton Conveyance Association at the Bulls Head Inn, Drayton.

The official gazettal of the name Toowoomba occurred on 28/05/1857.

On 17/03/1858 Thomas was appointed Manager of Shepherds at Pikedale near Warwick, to which the family removed.

In January 1859, after receiving his third certificate of discharge from insolvency, the family returned to Toowoomba where Thomas established an auctioneering business in the Argyle Rooms on the corner of Ruthven and Margaret Streets. Later in Russell Street near the present railway crossing.

This business was again successful. Involved in community affairs as a warden in St Lukes church and school, as starter with the race club and Secretary of the first Toowoomba Royal Agricultural exhibition held 11/07/1862, the family at last seemed to be reaping the benefits of all their tribulations.

Then this tough, persistent, resilient pioneer sadly died of peritonitis on 09/01/1864 aged 48. Stoic Elizabeth outlived him in Toowoomba on the corner of Russell and West Streets for another 40 years, passing away aged 88 on 12/10/1905.

Both are buried in the Alford family plot in Toowoomba cemetery.



BORN:
16 September 1816
Somerset
ENGLAND
DIED:
9 January 1864


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MEMORIES

