

Memorial Windows of Camberwell Uniting (Methodist) Church

Sophia Mackereth

Introduction

Avoca is a town in the Central Highlands of Victoria, Australia, 71 kilometres north west of Ballarat. It is situated between the larger centres of Ararat and Maryborough, on the banks of the Avoca River, with Beaufort to its south. Gold was found in the region in 1849, and by 1853 the population of Avoca had increased from 100 to 2,200. By June the following year, its population peaked at 16,000. Its population at the time of the 2016 Census was 1,193.

The Mackereth Family – the first generation

(1) **Mr Edwin Horatio Mackereth** left the Lakes District of England and arrived in Victoria in 1852, to take part in the first gold rushes at Castlemaine, Bendigo, and Forest Creek. Seven years later, he married Miss Catherine Elizabeth Heintz, settled in Avoca the same year, and resided there for the rest of his life.

In 1890, “he planted the Avoca vineyard, and established the fact that the district was capable of producing wine of the first quality, being successful in securing first prizes at all the leading shows of the State.”

Edwin died at Avoca on Wednesday, 27 December 1916, aged 89 years, “in the arms of his devoted wife and family”. His obituary, published in the Avoca Mail on 29 December 1916, told that he was a native of Hedon, Yorkshire.



Original home (restored) – Hedon Farm.

Today, at Mackereth’s Hedon Farm at Avoca, visitors are offered self-contained cottage accommodation, a unique winery event location, and a selection of locally produced fine wines available for sale by the glass, bottle or case.

Edwin took a keen interest in the welfare of the town, in all public movements, and was an ardent politician. He was also a gifted musician. His funeral was a large affair in the town.

(2) Just under two years later, on Friday, 1 November 1918, it was reported that “another of the old pioneers has passed away. We refer to the death of **Mrs Catherine Elizabeth Mackereth**, which occurred on Wednesday last.” “Her many friends will deeply regret to hear of her death.” (*the Avoca Mail*)

“Mrs Mackereth, who was in her 80th year, was of a kindly disposition, being highly esteemed by all who knew her. She came out to Australia in the early fifties, and was married at Castlemaine in 1859.”

“The deceased lady was some weeks ago seized with an attack of influenza (which progressed to pneumonia), from which she never rallied and she passed away as above stated at the age of 79 years.

The late Mrs Mackereth spent the greater part of her life in Avoca, where she reared her family.”

The Mackereth Family – the second generation

Edwin Horatio and Catherine Mackereth had a family of four sons and four daughters (seven in their first 10 years together). They were:

(1) **Edwin Mackereth** (1861-1908), was Catherine and Edwin’s eldest child. From the point of view of this article he is the most important, as it was he who was to marry **Sophia Augusta West**

in 1892, whose name and memory is preserved in the first stained glass window on the left as you enter the Church. More will be said of Edwin, Sophia and their children later.

(2) **Eleanor** was second born, in 1862. Not much is recorded about her, except that she became Mrs Frederick Howard in 1916, aged 54 years. She died four years later, in 1920.

(3) Third born was **Victoria**, in 1864. She was business woman from the start, who early on in her life, purchased her own house in Avoca.

Notice of Removal.

MISS MACKERETH notifies her numerous Patrons and the Public generally that she has removed to her New Premises, opposite Mr Kearney's Avoca.

NOTE THE ADDRESS:—

MISS V. MACKERETH,

DRESSMAKER,

High Street, Avoca.

Victoria operated as a milliner and draper, and ran a dressmaking and haberdashery business in Avoca, which was obviously successful as she was able to move into the main street of the town in 1896.

In July 1935, *The Argus* reported that “the death of Miss Victoria Mackereth, aged 71 years.”

(4) **Alethea** was next born, in 1866.

Alethea (1866 - 1952), managed the wine shop in High Street, Avoca, as a retail outlet for the products of the vineyard. The original wine depot still stands today.

Alethea, like several in her family, had a fine singing voice. In the Avoca Free Press of 28/10/1916, it was reported that she sung in the chorus at the Anniversary of the Avoca Temperance Society in the Shire Hall. Ironically, the main item of discussion at the Anniversary centred around closing times for hotels. It was 11 o'clock in 1914, but made earlier during the war, and the society was seeking to introduce 6 o'clock closing. Their campaign was successful.

According to *The Argus* of 5 November 1952, Alethea Mackereth died suddenly at Maryborough Hospital on 4 November 1952, aged 87 years. She never married.

(5) Fifth born, (1867 – 1960), was **John**, who taught music and singing in Melbourne but returned to Avoca to take over the vineyard on the death of his older brother, Edwin, in 1907. He became a multi-talented local identity, and was proud of his family and his town.

In 1888, John passed the examination qualifying him as a singing-master, and was appointed as a teacher of singing at the local State school, in addition to acting in a similar capacity at the Percydale and Homebush state schools. (*from the Avoca Mail*)

Shortly after, John was “successful in passing in all subjects to be a teacher of drawing. This ... will entitle Mr Mackereth to be appointed as teacher of drawing in addition to his present appointment of singing-master. (*the Avoca Mail*, 7/1/1890).

By 1912, John was co-managing his father's winery. At around the same time, he purchased a private hospital at Avoca. In 1934, he formed a Bowling Club in Avoca.



Photo of John Mackereth, taken in 1951 (aged 84 yrs old), courtesy of The Weekly Times 10/1/1951.

John died in 1960, aged 93 years old.

(6) The second 'Miss A. Mackereth', **Ada**, was born next, in 1869. Ada was a bee keeper, and very little else is on record regarding Ada's early life.

However, In early 1918, it was reported that “It is with feelings of sincere regret that we record the death under sad circumstances of Miss Ada Mackereth, an esteemed resident of Avoca. The deceased lady, who lived by herself within a couple of miles of the town, was reported missing, and search parties were organised.

On Thursday afternoon, after 5 days searching, her dead body was found on the Sugar Loaf Hill in the Pyrenees Ranges. It is believed that she lost her way in the bush, and died of thirst or exposure.”

Ada was 49 years of age. Ada’s remains were interred in the Avoca Cemetery, with others in her family. Ada’s official date of death is recorded as 16 January 1918.

(7) **Alfred** was seventh born, in 1871.

Alfred began his working life as an accountant in the Bank of Victoria, based initially, in Numurkah. In November 1901 he transferred to the Avoca Branch.

Alfred moved around within and upwards in the Bank, and in October 1915 he was appointed as acting Manager of the Shepparton branch (*Kyabram Guardian, Oct 1915*).

However, by this time, Australia was at War. In October 1915, amongst those local volunteers who joined the Australian Expeditionary Force was one Alfred Mackereth. He was 44 years old. Alfred sailed off to serve in France on the Western Front.

So far so good, until 20 October 1917, when the *Bendigo Advertiser* published “The 342nd Casualty List.” (yes indeed, the 342nd such list!). The List contained 896 names: among the 678 soldiers listed as ‘wounded’, was ‘*Private A. Mackereth.*’

A subsequent search revealed that in Alfred Mackereth had been admitted to the Ontario Field Military Hospital, suffering from a gunshot wound to his right arm, received on 22 September 1917.

Fast forward to July 1919, when *Corporal A. Mackereth* and four other members of the Anglican Church were welcomed back to Avoca safely from the War. “Each soldier received a nicely-bound Testament”. (*The Ballarat Star, Friday 11 July, 1919*).

It was also announced around the same time that following a post-battle review, Corporal Mackereth was to be awarded the Military Medal for “conspicuous service and bravery in the field”, as part of the 1st Machine Gun Battalion in late 1917.

Alfred Mackereth was demobilized on 5 June 1919, after which he returned home and quietly resumed his role of local Bank Manager. Brave, as well as unassuming.

Alfred died in 1964. He lived to be 93 years old.

(8) Youngest son **Charles** was born well after his siblings, in 1881.

Charles lived in Avoca his whole life. He worked in the family vineyard. Regrettably Charles died early, on the 15th February 1908, aged 27 years, of Typhoid, at Amherst Hospital (20 kms S-E of Avoca).

Final Resting Place of Original Mackereth Family

Edwin and Catherine and 7 of their 8 children are buried together at the Avoca Cemetery.

Two gravesites are located together. One large plot is a concrete slab covered with two marble blocks, one with details relating to Edwin and Catherine, and five of their eight children. A second block is inscribed in memory of son John (possibly because he died so much later than the rest of his family).

A smaller separate grave is located next to the large family plot. It is of Edwin and Catherine’s second daughter Eleanor, the only one of four daughters to marry.

The inscriptions on the graves are not clear, so they are repeated at right.*



The headstone text reads:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
EDWIN MACKERETH
28th DEC. 1916, 89 YRS
CATHERINE MACKERETH
2nd NOV. 1918, 79 YRS
also their children
EDWIN
31st APRIL 1907, 46 YEARS
CHARLES
15th FEB. 1908, 27 YRS
ADA
1st FEB. 1917, 49 YRS
VICTORIA
14th JULY 1935, 70 YRS
ALETHEA
6 NOV. 1952, 87 YRS.



The second marble inscription reads:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
JOHN
SON OF
EDWIN and CATHERINE
MACKERETH
19th SEPT. 1960, 93 YRS



A third grave sits next to the above two Family graves. It reads:

ELEANOR HOWARD
DIED 15th JUNE 1920
AGED 47 YEARS

Five of the (death) dates listed on the family gravesite above do not match the official records – I will leave that for others to reconcile.

Alfred was cremated at Springvale Cemetery on 17/2/1964. No exact date of death is recorded. The cemetery website states that “the remains have been collected.”

Edwin Mackereth and Sophie West

As mentioned previously, the eldest son of Edwin and Catherine Mackereth was also named **Edwin**.

In terms of Edwin's working life, he appears to have begun life as a member of Victoria Police. Police records confirm it was a short career – he joined in 1888 and resigned in 1889. The decision to leave may have been brought on, in part, by an incident in November 1888 when he was stabbed in the thigh, leaving a wound $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long, close to the femoral artery, by a drunken man he was taking to the lock-up.

Edwin left the Police to become a wine maker in Avoca, at which he excelled, and where he remained living until his early death.

Edwin Mackereth married a Scottish lass, Sophia West in Avoca in 1892. They went on to have two children – Glen (born in 1903) and Alethea (born in 1907).

Sadly, Edwin did not have much time to enjoy life as a father. Information provided by the Avoca and District Historical Society revealed that Edwin had become despondent over matters connected with his business, believing that he had become involved in unforeseen liabilities to such an extent that recovery was impossible.

At a Magisterial Inquiry later, it was stated that, *“under this belief, his mind appeared to have completely collapsed.”* His wife Sophia reported him saying *“it’s no use Sophy, I must either go to gaol or commit suicide.”* He then went out, carrying his gun, saying *“don’t follow me Sophy.”* His son Glen (aged 4) followed him a little way, until his father gave him his watch and purse to mind. When he did not return, an alarm was raised, and the bush was searched for two days before his body was found. He had shot himself with his rifle.

Edwin’s brother John testified at the Inquiry that there was no issue between the two brothers, personally or in their business dealings, and that if they were to wind up their joint business, both would have benefitted financially. The Magistrate returned a verdict of *“suicide whilst suffering from temporary insanity”*.

Edwin died on 16 April 1907, at 46 years of age, less than 8 weeks after his daughter Alethea was born, on 21 February, 1907.

Finally, we come to the lady honoured in the window in our church. **Sophia Augusta West** was born in 1870, daughter of Thomas West and Elizabeth R West (nee Robertson).

The family was originally from County Lanarkshire in Scotland, and were accounted for in the 1881 Scotland Census records: Thomas (aged 56), Elizabeth (aged 54), Elizabeth (aged 16), and Sophia (aged 11).

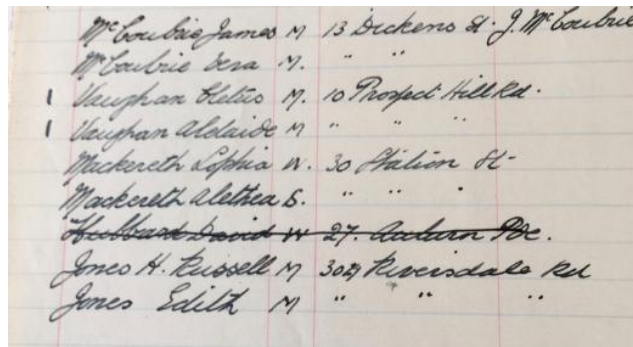
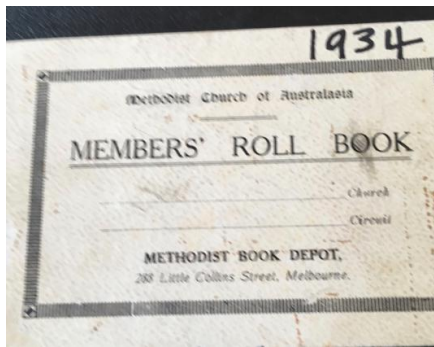
Sometime between 1881 and 1890, the family appears to have left Scotland and ended up in Regional Victoria – possibly seeking gold – and where Sophia was married in Avoca in 1892. The Electoral Rolls indicate that the whole family emigrated, but what happened to the rest of the family afterwards is another story.

The Electoral Rolls also indicate that following the death of her husband in 1907, Sophia remained in the Grampians Region until 1921, then from 1922 until 1925 she appears to have moved to the Geelong and the port of Melbourne areas, before settling in the federal Kooyong electorate in the late 1920s, which I believe took in her long term address in Camberwell. She was to live in Station St. Camberwell from 1934 until her death in 1951.

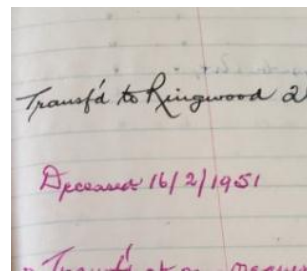
Sadly, I have been unable to unearth much Sophia the person. I have been unable to locate a picture of her, or find any personal information about her. I imagine she must have ‘made ends meet’ somehow as a single mother with two young children, however I have found no evidence as to how she survived. In fact I have only been able to find out two pieces of helpful information.

Firstly, the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) allows access in some instances to Wills and Probate Information after a certain period of time. Edwin died intestate, however there were some funds after finalising the estate for his widow and children.

Secondly, thanks to the UCA Archives, I have been able to find evidence that once settled in Camberwell, by 1928 Sophia was listed on the Camberwell Methodist Church Roll. And by 1934, with her daughter Alethea still living with her, they were both recorded as being on our Church Roll.



Sophia and Alethea Mackereth remained on the Church Roll continuously from 1934 until 1951. Below is the 1951 entry, recording Sophia's death:



Sophia Mackereth died on 16 February 1951. She was 81 years old.

The Argus of 17 February 1951 reported that she died "at her residence, 30 Station Street Camberwell. Sophia was the beloved wife of the late Edwin Mackereth, and loving mother of Glen and Alethea."

Sophia was cremated on 19 February 1951, and her memory preserved at Springvale Cemetery, as well as at Camberwell Uniting Church.

Edwin and Sophia's children

All records show that Edwin and Sophia had two children, Glen and Alethea, born in 1903 and 1907 respectively. Alethea was given the same name as one of her father's sisters, the one who ran the family wine shop.

However, newspaper research unearthed another tragedy in the family. In February 1894, two years after their marriage, the death was reported of **Henry** Whitehouse Mackereth, "beloved infant son of Mrs Edwin Mackereth, late of Avoca, aged three months, at his grandfather's residence". (*The Age* 3/2/1894). One year later, an 'In Memorium' notice was placed in the same newspaper "In affectionate remembrance of my dear little son, Henry Whitehouse (Mackereth), who departed this life on the 30th January, 1894". It was "Inserted by his loving mother", in remembrance of her first born son.

Soon after he left the Police, Edwin and Sophia moved to Melbourne, and in the early 1920s, their son **Glen** took up an apprenticeship with the well-known electrical firm of Oliver J. Nilsen. However, he was laid off when the Depression began, and subsequently returned to Avoca and worked for a time in the family vineyard before setting up his own business in High Street about 1927, where he made radios and sold electrical goods, serving the community well until he retired in the mid-1960s. Glen, a little surprisingly perhaps in light of his father's death, won many trophies for his expert marksmanship as a member of the Avoca Rifle Club.

Glen and his wife, the former Elma Miller, and their children, lived behind the shop in those years. On retirement, they moved back to Melbourne (Mowbray St. in Hawthorn East, in fact), but he continued as a valued member of the Avoca Historical Society. Glen had celebrated his 97th birthday in October 2000, only weeks before he died, in November 2000. Elma pre-deceased him in 1992.

Sophia's daughter **Alethea**, who commissioned the window, was obviously very close to her mother. She came down to Melbourne with her in about 1927/28 (aged about 20), and the two

lived together in Station St Camberwell for the remainder of mother Sophia's life. Again, information is scant on Alethea the person, however, even more surprising, she, like her older brother, was an expert rifle shooter before she left Avoca, and won several trophies.

In life, she described herself as a couturier. She seems not only to be a devoted daughter, but also a devoted churchgoer, and her name appears next to that of her mother on every membership roll at our church for 17 consecutive years.

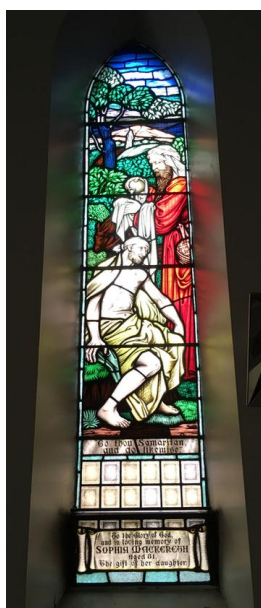
After the death of her mother in 1951, Alethea subsequently married Charles Cecil Williams in 1958, when she was aged 51 years. The couple moved to live in Smith St Camberwell. Charles was 17 years older than Alethea, and he was to die only 5 years after the marriage in 1963, aged 73 years.

Alethea lived on for a further 34 years. In February 1997 she was made subject to an Order of the State Guardianship Board which appointed State Trustees to look after her affairs. This remained in place until November 1997, when she died, aged 90 years.

Her Death Certificate records that she died in a Nursing Home in Caulfield South, from a combination of cardiac arrest, pneumonia, and was suffering from dementia. She was cremated at Springvale Cemetery, at a service conducted by Rev. Vere Heazlewood. Her remains rest in the same Memorial Wall as her mother.

Dedication of Memorial Window

The stained glass window erected in memory of Sophia Augusta Mackereth was dedicated sometime after February 1951, but unfortunately no information has been able to be found so far to confirm the actual date.



The dedication at the base of the window is "To the Glory of God, and in loving memory of SOPHIA MACKERETH, Aged 81. The gift of her daughter." It is a lovely window, filled with strong red, green, blue and gold colours.

The biblical quotation at the bottom of the artwork, says ***"Go thou Samaritan, and do likewise."*** This is intended, I am sure, to be Jesus' final directive from the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10, verse 37).

From her daughter's perspective, this is clearly the image she has of her mother – someone kind and merciful, who followed the Word of the Lord.

However, if you look more closely at the words, I believe you will see that something has gone amiss in the translation. In summary, the quote, as you would know, comes from the occasion when an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, by asking ***"what must I do to inherit eternal life?"***

Jesus answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”

The law expert then asked, “And who is my neighbour?” In reply, Jesus told the parable of the story of the man attacked by robbers, who was beaten up, robbed and left half dead, then ignored by two subsequent passers-by until a Samaritan came to where the man was, saw him, took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, put him on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and gave the innkeeper money to look after him.

To the question asked by Jesus “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” Verse 37 concludes: The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” ie. Regard everyone as your neighbour, and follow the example of the Samaritan in life by showing universal mercy and love.

The words in the window have altered the message from the parable. Either the word “Samaritan” should not be in the quote at all (because Jesus was not telling Samaritans how to live their life, but rather that everyone should act in the way “the good Samaritan” did), or the words in the window should have been written as “Go Thou, as the Samaritan, and do likewise. Oops.

In relation to this article, I wish to thank:

** Carol Judkins (of Carol's Headstone Photographs, Avoca) for giving me permission to use two photographs of the Mackereth family headstones in this article. Carol has taken and documented (by name and cemetery) an extensive series of photographs of cemetery headstones throughout country Victoria. I had the opportunity to visit Avoca after speaking to Carol, and located the family plot.*

** Archivist Jenny Bars, and Lorraine Sage at the UCA Archives in Malvern, who have been most helpful in searching and sourcing relevant historical documents for me in the hope that I can unlock some mysteries of the past. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the volunteers at the UCA Archives, who have all been most welcoming, and are doing a marvellous job in preserving church history.*

** Tony O'Shea and his team from the Avoca and District Historical Society, who provided me with information which helped to fill in gaps in my narrative. The Society has a wealth of historical information, and pride in their town and its current and previous inhabitants.*

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