



View of Kilkeel Harbour, acknowledgment to Raymond's County Down Website

Chambers

of

***Kilkeel, County Down, Ireland
and Dunmanway, County Cork, Ireland***

to

Otago and Canterbury, New Zealand

compiled by

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***additions and corrections always welcome, please contact:
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Introduction:

This brief account of a family of Chambers is based on the papers and recollections of the Skipworth family, into which Mary CHAMBERS married in 1875, with some additions from public records, and from contact with other Chambers descendants. The compilers are aware that there are probably more living descendants of this family in New Zealand. We would be happy to incorporate their contributions into this document should they come forward.

To assist the reader a chart has been compiled on the following page, showing the essential details of the relationships, as they are currently understood. Where a range of possible birth dates has been indicated for an individual the likeliest has been chosen, prefixed by "about".

Chalmers or Chambers?

A central part of our research has involved unravelling the enigma of this family's surname. The position now adopted is that Chambers is the original spelling and that Chalmers was a variant used in New Zealand for reasons that are not entirely clear.

Discussions can readily be found on the internet¹ and in surname dictionaries explaining the relationship of Chambers/Chalmers. The derivation is from the Old French *Chambre*, a room. An employee with access to the Lord's inner room might adopt the name Chamber, or Chamberer, or Chamberlain. Chalmers is the Scottish variant of this name. Chambers is the common form in Ireland. The name Chambers was brought over to Ireland from Ayrshire, Scotland with James Hamilton in 1606.

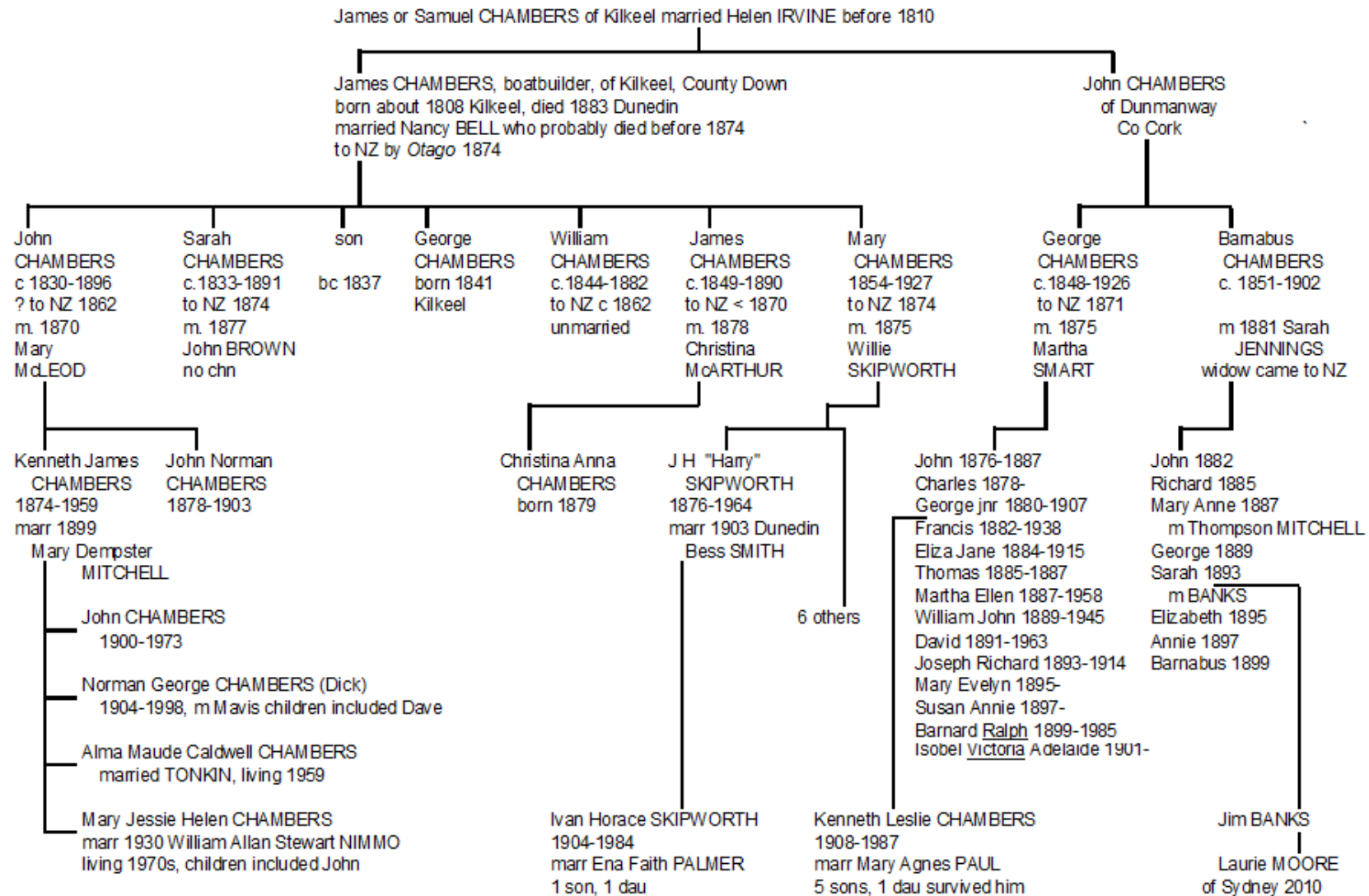
Assuming that Kilkeel is indeed their community of origin (see below), we looked at the Griffiths Valuation 1865 for Kilkeel, County Down, and found that the name Chalmers does not occur, while there were several entries for Chambers, including one for a James CHAMBERS who could well be the progenitor of this family group.

A second piece of evidence supporting Chambers as the original name is the inscription on a photograph of a young woman which has survived among Skipworth family papers: "To Mary CHAMBERS on her departure to New Zealand from her friend Susan LEE, May 27th 1874."

A letter survives from the period shortly after arrival in New Zealand, written by Mary's future husband Willie Skipworth on 15 Oct 1874. It begins, "My Dear Minnie", and later refers to her brother and his wife, Mrs CHAMBERS. Mary's brother John was married and in New Zealand by this date, so this is most likely to be the couple referred to.

Mary apparently changed the spelling of her surname to Chalmers on arrival in Dunedin, adopting the Scottish spelling of the name, in keeping with the Scottish settlement of Dunedin with its Port Chalmers and its Chalmers Presbyterian Church. It was as Mary CHALMERS that she signed her marriage entry a little over a year after her arrival in Dunedin,² and it was as Mary CHALMERS that she was entered in the new family bible. However, uncertainty continued in the family as to how the name should be spelled.

When Willie died in 1902 his wife's maiden name was given as CHAMBERS.³ Willie and Mary's third son was entered Lionel Herbert Chalmers SKIPWORTH in the family bible, but the spelling Chambers was used in his death registration in 1914.⁴ Their daughter Winifred gave her mother's maiden name as Chalmers on her marriage in 1910,⁵ but their daughter Maud gave it as Chambers when she married in 1925.⁶ A grandson was registered with the third christian name Chambers,⁷ but Chalmers appears on his tombstone.⁸



James CHAMBERS and Nancy BELL

Mary SKIPWORTH's death certificate,⁹ states she was born at Kilkeel, County Down, Ireland to James CHALMERS (sic) and his wife Nancy, nee BELL. This information would have been supplied by Mary's daughter Maud, and although we no longer have any document that Maud relied on for her grandparents' names, we believe the information is likely to be correct. Maud was interested in her origins and would have been careful to obtain details from her mother.

James' death certificate, 1 Dec 1883, states that he was born at Kilkeel to parents James CHAMBERS, mariner, and Helen IRVINE.¹² [James' parents will be discussed again on page 16.] It also confirms his marriage to Nancy BELL, when he was 18 years of age, and states that he had living four sons aged 53, 46, 44, 33 and two daughters aged 50 and 31. This suggests a marriage date for James and Nancy about 1828 and a birth date for James about 1810. It has been very difficult to sort out the birth order of James and Nancy's children, due to the conflicting ages they have given at different stages of their lives. We may have to wait until their baptisms are found in Kilkeel records.

The SKIPWORTH family bible records that Mary CHAMBERS travelled to NZ in the ship *Otago*. The *Otago* passenger list (1874)¹⁰ includes the following names, although there is nothing to link these three together as family members:

CHAMBERS, James, 57 carpenter of County Down, Ireland
CHAMBERS, Sarah, 30 seamstress of County Down, Ireland
CHAMBERS, Mary Ann, 22 of County Down, Ireland

[This is the only document showing Mary's name as Mary Ann. It is taken to be an error.]

Family baptisms at Kilkeel have not been found, other than that for son George, but from available evidence, it appears that James and Nancy had at least the following children:

John CHAMBERS, born about 1830, County Down, Ireland
Sarah CHAMBERS, born about 1833, County Down, Ireland
Second son born about 1837, living 1883
*George CHAMBERS, born 1841, Kilkeel, County Down, Ireland
William CHAMBERS, born abt 1844, County Down, Ireland (predeceased his father)
James CHAMBERS, born about 1850, Kilkeel, County Down, Ireland
*Mary CHAMBERS, born 16 Nov 1854, Kilkeel, County Down, Ireland (refer family bible)

* Ages given on their father's death certificate are not accurate, others may also be incorrect. There may have been other children born in the 1840s, the time of the great famine, who did not survive. There is no guarantee that the third surviving son was George born 1841.

It appears that James' wife Nancy had died before 1874. Their sons John, William and James were in New Zealand and may have sent favourable reports back to Ireland. So, at the age of at least 57 James decided to emigrate with his unmarried daughters Sarah and Mary, perhaps believing they could look to a better future in New Zealand than in Ireland. Judging from his age at death James was aged 66 at emigration but may have reduced his age to qualify for a passage.

We have little information about James' life in New Zealand. He had given his occupation as carpenter to the shipping authorities, but when he died was described as a boat builder. Looking at the illustration of Kilkeel harbour it is not hard to imagine him at work.

James died on 1 Dec 1883 aged 75, native of Ireland, 9 years in New Zealand, last address Moray Place, Dunedin.¹² He was buried at the Southern Cemetery, Block 127 Plot 003, with his daughter and son-in-law Sarah and John BROWN.³³ Refer to page 9 for his memorial inscription. This puts his birth about 1808, though the shipping list, often less reliable, would put it at 1817. Moray Place was to be Mary's address in her widowhood, a curious link with her father.

Chambers records in Kilkeel

We are indebted to Raymond's County Down website (2006) for the information in this section.¹³

Kilkeel is located on the South East coast of Co. Down in Northern Ireland, and lies approximately midway between Belfast and Dublin. Kilkeel is the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Mourne and even today the surrounding area is referred to as the Kingdom of Mourne. The current population of Kilkeel is about 5500, and around 8500 for the Kingdom as a whole. The area is surrounded by the Irish Sea on two sides and the Mourne Mountains on the other two, and has only three access roads from the rest of Northern Ireland.

Industry. The main occupations of the area are farming and fishing. Kilkeel has the largest fishing fleet in Ireland with over 120 trawlers. There is also a small granite industry, which used to be much larger with granite products being exported to England. It has a number of fish processing factories which specialise in the processing of prawns. It also has two major factories, one of which produces toughened glass which is exported world wide and the other produces aircraft seats and is the European headquarters of B.A.E. Aerospace. Tourism is becoming a major industry and during the summer the population doubles.

Climate. The Mourne area has a very temperate climate with few frosts and little snow in winter. The weather is always milder than the rest of Northern Ireland due to the shelter of the mountains. The area also has the warmest sea water of Northern Ireland but it is still cold at 5 degrees centigrade, a temperature which changes little during the year.

Freeholders 1813-1821

The 40 shilling freeholders list for the Barony of Mourne, commencing January 1st. 1813 to Jan. 1st. 1821, Registries in Kilkeel, 22nd of Oct. 1820.

This information acts as a kind of census of the Kilkeel Parish. It gives the name of the 40 shilling freeholder, his abode, landlord and the names of Tenures or other Lives. The freehold was usually for as long as the person lived or someone they named. They could name three people, quite a lot of those named as tenures or other lives were family members.

Name	Abode	Landlord	Names of Lives
Chambers, Robert	*Magheramurphy	Wm. Needham	Robert Chambers John Atkinson Jhn. Stevenson
Chambers, William	*Magheramurphy	Wm. Needham	James Chambers Andrew Chambers William Chambers

* Magheramurphy is the townland for Kilkeel

Old Time Kilkeel Fishing Boats

"The Emu" (J. Chambers) registered 1895

"The Willie" (Jim Chambers)

"The Harmony" (Captain S. Chambers)

"The Progress" (Hugh Chambers)

"The Christina Shearer" (T. Chambers)

..... A further witness was Capt. Thomas Chambers, a prominent sailmaker in Kilkeel, who before settling ashore in 1907, had skippered and owned the schooners Edith and Harmony: "If I had been in charge of that coaster I would have tried to get in out of the storm....."

Tithe Applotment Books for Kilkeel parish 1823-1838

Chambers, George

Chambers, John

Chambers, William

Chambers, Hugh

Chambers, Robert

Chambers, James

Chambers, Widow, Mary

Griffiths Valuation of Tenements 1863, County of Down, Barony of Mourne Union of Kilkeel
(office means shed)

Townland	Name	Immediate Lessors	Description	Area (acres)
Cranfield	Alexander Chambers	Patrick Rogers	House	
Maghery	James Chambers	Kilmorey Estate	Land	1--0--0
*Magheramurphy	James Chambers (Jas)	Kilmorey Estate	House, Office & Small Garden	
*Magheramurphy	Jas. Chambers (Jeremy)	Kilmorey Estate	House, Office & Small Garden	
*Magheramurphy	Ellen Chambers	John S. Moore	Land	2--3--25
Magheramurphy	Ellen Chambers	John S. Moore	Land	0--3--20
Greencastle St	James Chambers (Jas)	Kilmorey Estate	House, Office & Small Garden	
Greencastle St	Jas. Chambers (Jeremy)	Kilmorey Estate	House, Office & Small Garden	
Greencastle St	Ellen Chambers	John S. Moore	Small Garden	0--3--10
Greencastle St	Ellen Chambers	John S. Moore	House, Office & Land	0--3--20
Shore Road	John Chambers	Henry McKee	House, Yard & Small Garden	
Brackenagh West	Andrew Chambers	Francis Moore	House, Offices & Land	10--3--35
Moneydorrhagh More	Hugh Chambers	Kilmorey Estate	House, Office & Land	10--1--5

* Kilkeel is in Magheramurphy townland

Some Kilkeel Parish Marriages approx 1847-1867 – Chambers

Husband	Wife	Marriage Date	Husband's father	Wife's father
Bell, Charles	Margaret Chambers	25 Nov 1851	Charles Orr	William Chambers
Chambers, William Age 21	Eliza Grills Age 21	17 Sep 1856	William Chambers	John Grills
Chambers, Joseph	Elizabeth McCormick	26 Nov 1862	Hugh Chambers	Thomas McCormick
Chambers, Thomas	Margaret Wells	25 Jul 1852	Moses Chambers	John Wells
Wightman, James	Eliza Chambers	30 Jan 1855	James Wightman	William Chambers

Some Kilkeel area Births 1865-1874

Child	Birth Date	Father	Mother
Chambers, Margaret	21 May 1868	Joseph Chambers	Elizabeth McCormick
Chambers, Nugent	17 Sep 1868	William Chambers	Elizabeth Grills
Chambers, Samuel	14 Aug 1871	William Chambers	Elizabeth Grills
Chambers, William	13 Jun 1869	Hugh Chambers	Eliza McBurney
Chambers, Mary Jane	5 Dec 1870	Hugh Chambers	Eliza McBurney
Chambers, Eliza	2 Dec 1872	Hugh Chambers	Eliza McBurney
Chambers, Margaret	4 Jun 1870	John Chambers	Ellen Carleton
Chambers, Annie	4 Sep 1874	George Chambers	Nancy McKnight

Conclusions

We are looking in Kilkeel for James CHAMBERS and Nancy BELL, with children John, George, William, James, Sarah and Mary, also his parents James, senior, mariner, and Helen IRVINE. The evidence is encouraging, though nothing can be proved. There are many mentions of Chambers of Kilkeel in maritime records in the late 19th century which could be relatives. There are entries for James, Jas, and Jas (Jeremy) in the Griffiths valuations 1863, which could be relevant, remembering that James junior and his father could both have been present in 1863. The available births and marriages do not cover the appropriate periods, but the surname is well represented.

Either William or Robert in the 40 shilling freeholders (1813-1821) could refer to James senior's father, but we have no way of telling.

The tithe applotments (1823-1838) could refer to James senior or junior.

Given the fairly common surname and forenames, it is unsafe to draw conclusions from this material.



Greencastle Street, Kilkeel, County Down taken about 1808,
courtesy of Sheila Phillips and the National Library of Ireland

{below} Newry Street, Kilkeel about 2000
image courtesy Ros Davies Co. Down, Northern Ireland Family History Research Site
photo by Briege McComiskey



John CHAMBERS (son of James & Nancy) **and Mary McLEOD**

John CHAMBERS was the eldest surviving son, born about 1830 judging from his age 53 on his father's death certificate in 1883.

He was possibly the John CHAMBERS who arrived on 18 Jan 1862 at Port Chalmers, Dunedin from Melbourne on the *Commodore Perry*.¹⁵ He was at Gabriel's Gully gold fields in 1862 with SMITH of Greenfield.¹⁶ The *Lyttelton Times* reported another J Chambers among immigrants landing at Lyttelton on 22 Jan 1859 from the *Strathallan*.

He said he was 32, a hawker, in his notice of intention to marry in October 1870,⁴⁶ but appears to have understated his age. *The Otago Daily Times* announced the marriage of John, eldest son of James CHAMBERS of Kilkeel County Down Ireland, and Mary McLEOD at Knox Church, Dunedin.^{14, 52}

He was of Cumberland Street, Dunedin in 1878 on his brother James' Intention to Marry.

John died aged 65, on 20 Jun 1896, last address Ellis St Dunedin, storeman, and was buried in the Southern Cemetery, Block 106 plot 0006, with his wife Mary who died a widow, native of Scotland, 55 years in NZ, age 88 on 19 Feb 1920, last address Caversham. He was native of County Down, Ireland, 30 years in NZ.³⁴ Mary had arrived in Lyttelton by *Mermaid* in 1862.¹⁶ Their stone reads:³⁴

Sacred to the memory of Kenneth McLEOD, native of Assynt, Sutherlandshire, Scotland died 14 Jan 1873 aged 44.

Also John CHAMBERS died 20 Jan 1896 aged 65 years

Also Mary CHAMBERS wife of the above died 19 Feb 1920 aged 87 (sic)

Their youngest son John Norman died 31 Mar 1903. [at Middlemarch, aged 25]

The younger son John Norman, had died at Middlemarch, aged 25.³³

John and Mary's only other child, Kenneth James CHAMBERS, was born on 15 Aug 1874, in Dunedin.^{18, 19} In 1894 he is listed as a railway cadet. Ken maintained contact with his first cousin Harry Skipworth in Christchurch, and signed Harry's birthday book (in our possession 2006). He married Mary Dempster MITCHELL in 1899.⁵¹ Through the 1940s and 50s they lived at 11 Moana Crescent, Anderson's Bay, Dunedin.¹⁷

Kenneth died aged 85 on 9 May 1959²⁰ and was buried at Anderson's Bay Cemetery, Block 149 Plot 0079, occupation stationmaster, with his wife Mary who died 10 Sep 1943 aged 74, native of NZ.³³ His will, made in 1958, mentions his four children and implies that both Norman and Mary had children:⁵⁵

(a) John, who was born on 21 May 1900,⁵⁶ married Helen McGEE in 1940, and died on 19 Sep 1973 aged 73, last address 121 Argyle St, Mosgiel.³³ They had no children. John was an engineer.

(b) Mary Jessie Helen, who was born on 19 Sep 1901, married William Allan Stewart NIMMO⁵⁴ in 1930, and died on 10 Jul 1993 aged 91.⁵⁸ They had 3 sons and a daughter. Allan was a coalmine manager at Ngapara, and later at Coalgate. Ivan SKIPWORTH corresponded with Mary NIMMO in the 1970s, and concluded "Her father and my father were cousins because my father's mother and her father's father were brother and sister."

(c) Norman George "Dick", who was born on 7 Aug 1904, married Mavis LEE in 1944, and died on 16 Nov 1998 aged 94.³³ They had 4 sons. Dick was a motor engineer of Dunedin.

(d) Alma Maude Caldwell was born on 14 Jan 1908, married Ronald TONKIN in 1932, and died in 1999 aged 91. They had 2 sons and 3 daughters. Ronald was a dentist/orthodontist of Timaru and later Auckland.

Sarah CHAMBERS (daughter of James & Nancy) **and *John BROWN***

Sarah, was the eldest daughter, aged 50 on her father's death certificate, suggesting that she was born about 1833, almost certainly in Kilkeel. This date is thought to be more reliable than other estimates, as the six siblings are listed together with little room for manoeuvre.

She came to New Zealand on the ship *Otago* in 1874, as a 30 year old seamstress, with her father James and sister Mary, apparently understating her age for the shipping records.

In 1877 she married John BROWN²¹ (1834-1909), a stonemason, also from County Down, who had arrived in NZ about 1862. She was probably about 44 at marriage, and it is not known if there were any children. To remain unmarried until the age of 44 seems unusual, and may suggest that her mother Nancy had died early, forcing Sarah into the mother substitute / housekeeper role.

Sarah died on 23 May 1891³¹ and at that time they were living at Stanley Street, Rothsay. Her age at death, 52/53 would have been provided by her husband and suggests a birth year of about 1838. Sarah may have understated her age at marriage, to present herself as younger than her husband.

Sarah was buried with her father and her husband at the Southern Cemetery, Dunedin, Block 127 Plot 3. John's last address was Burnside, Dunedin.³³ Their memorial reads:³⁴

*Erected in memory of James CHAMBERS
who died 1 Dec 1883 aged 75 years,*

also

*Sarah the beloved wife of John BROWN
and daughter of the above
who died 28 May 1891, aged 53 years.*

*In memory of John BROWN
died 27 Oct 1909 aged 71 years.*



Unknown male CHAMBERS (son of James & Nancy)

A second son of James Chambers, born about 1837, is listed on his death certificate as living, aged 46 in 1883, but we have no indication of his name, or which country he was living in.

George CHAMBERS (son of James & Nancy)

George CHAMBERS, son of James and Nancy (BELL) was born on 20 Apr 1841 and baptised on 22 Apr 1841 according to Mourne (Kilkeel) Presbyterian records.⁶⁰ Initially we thought that this was the George who emigrated to Canterbury, but it is now clear that they are different people, though probably cousins - refer to page 13.



Mourne Presbyterian Church, Kilkeel [modernised 1933]

George Chambers, son of James & Nancy, was baptised here in 1841

image courtesy Ros Davies Co. Down, Northern Ireland Family History Research Site

photo by James Edga

William CHAMBERS *abt 1844 - 1882* (son of James & Nancy) Unmarried

He emigrated to NZ, probably around 1862, and is at present known to us only from two documents, and two newspaper references. One of these is a letter written by his eldest brother John from Dunedin on Jan 23 1893 to John Manchester of Waimate asking about deeds to property owned by his late brother William Chambers.

This letter led to the death certificate which shows: *William Chambers died on 16 August 1882, a labourer, age 38. Verdict of Jury, accidentally killed by horse dray passing over his head. Parents not known, born in County Down Ireland, about 20 years in New Zealand, not married. The informant was the local police constable.* The death must have been registered before William's relatives had been identified, otherwise better detail of his birth and parents would have been recorded. However, William is likely to have been in possession of letters which would allow police to contact his family. Having died a year before his father, he would not have been included among the list of surviving children on James' death certificate.

The Press Association took up the story and notices appeared throughout the country: *A man named William Chambers fell off a dray at Waimate this afternoon, and the wheel passed over his head. He was conveyed to the hospital, but died soon after reaching it. He was a single man, and had lived in the district eleven or twelve years.*

Timaru Herald 13 Aug 1884 Intestate Estate. — Among the estates of deceased persons placed under the charge of the Public Trustee during last month was that of William Chambers, of Waimate, the value being about £60.

James CHAMBERS (son of James & Nancy) **and Christina McARTHUR**

James CHAMBERS, ploughman of South Clutha, was a witness at the marriage of John CHAMBERS and Mary McLEOD in 1870 (see above). This James has now been identified with the groom who married Christina McARTHUR on 25 May 1878.⁶¹ Their intention to marry nominates the home of John Chambers, Cumberland St, Dunedin as the proposed venue, but the marriage certificate reveals that the ceremony occurred at the house of Robert McKenzie, Inchclutha. James' age was given as 30 and Christina 19. She had no relative in the colony to give consent.

On 25 Oct 1889 the *Clutha Leader* reported:

An inquiry into the fire by which the house of James Chambers, platelayer, Waipahi, was destroyed last week failed to show the origin of the fire. Chambers left for his work at 8 o'clock in the morning. Mrs Chambers was at home all day washing, and had a fire outside about 30ft from the house. Between 7 and 8 o'clock at night she and her little girl were sitting in the kitchen, when the girl said she felt the smell of fire. Her mother asked her to go outside to see whether any of the ashes were blowing about. She went, but saw nothing wrong. A little afterwards she again said she felt the smell of wood burning. The door between the kitchen and a bedroom was then opened, when the latter was found full of smoke. Mrs Chambers ran out, called for assistance, and then fainted. Several people came, but only a few articles of furniture were saved. A fire occurred in the same house about a year ago, but was discovered and extinguished before much damage was done. That fire originated at the fireplace in the kitchen. The house contained seven rooms and scullery, and was valued by the builder who built part of it at £200. The house was insured for £200 in the South British Insurance Office, and the furniture, &c. for £180 in the same office. A verdict that there was no evidence as to the origin of the fire was returned.

James died of enteritis "aged 33" on 18 Apr 1890, a surfaceman of Waipahi (between Gore and Balclutha).⁶² His death certificate confirms his parents as James CHAMBERS and Nancy BELL, and indicates that he had one daughter aged 11. She was Anna Christina CHAMBERS, born on 21 Feb 1879.⁶³

Anna was last found at Normal School, Dunedin, admitted in 1890, last school Waipahi, last day at Normal School 18th May 1890, destination - unknown. Her parent/guardian was Mr. Chambers, of Gt. King Street. Since her father had died on 18th April 1890 she was probably living with her Uncle John. No record of her marriage or death was found in NZ records, leading to a suspicion that she may have adopted a step-father's surname.

So, when was James born? His age at death can be easily rejected, as he had aged only 3 years during the 12 years of his marriage. If he was aged 30 at marriage in 1878 he would have been 35 in 1883 when his father died. The ages of the two youngest sons listed at that time were given as 44 and 33, making James almost certainly the youngest, and placing his birth about 1849.

It is worth noting that whereas Harry Skipworth had kept in touch with his cousins in John's and George's families, no memory of Anna Christina has been passed down. James' widow is likely to have remarried and not maintained contact with her first husband's family.

Mary CHAMBERS (daughter of James & Nancy) **and John William SKIPWORTH** (Willie)

Family legend has it that Mary's future husband, Willie Skipworth, travelled with her in the *Otago*, as an assistant purser, but no surviving crew list has been found to verify this fact. Also on board were two families, the Wallers and the Andersons, who were to be life-long friends of the Skipworths. Pearl ANDERSON, aged 95 in 1977, recalled her parents saying how good Willie Skipworth was to them during the voyage out. Pearl's recollection helps to validate the belief that Mary and Willie met on the voyage to New Zealand.

As discussed above, Mary adopted the variant Chalmers of her name on arrival in New Zealand, though the family seem to have remained uncertain of which spelling to use.

We have been assisted in our attempt to trace the origin of this family by Sheila Philips, a local indexer living at Kilkeel. Sheila believes she knows the identity of the Susan Lee whose photograph addressed to her friend Mary Chambers is referred to on page 2 above. Sheila wrote: "The name Susan LEE also jumped out at me - the Lee name was not common in these parts - and most of the people of that name descend from one Malcolm Lee, born in Co. Tyrone, who came to Kilkeel as a sort of Town Clerk - the job passed down to his son Harcourt Lee - who was the father of Susan(na Jane) Lee. The Lee family lived in Derryogue townland - which is now part of the town of Kilkeel. Susan and Mary probably knew each other from school - the Lee folk were Church of Ireland not Presbyterian. According to the 1901 Census for Kilkeel, Susan was aged 42, making her birth around 1858/59 - she was still single and a professional pianist."

Mary's life in New Zealand is dealt with in more detail in the Skipworth story, but briefly, Mary married John William SKIPWORTH, "Willie," in 1875 and had 3 sons and 4 daughters in Dunedin between 1876 and 1894. Willie died in 1902 and a few years later Mary moved to Auckland. A consequence of this move was that as Ivan Skipworth grew up in Christchurch he saw very little of his grandmother, to the detriment of the passing down of family details. He was aware that he had CHAMBERS "cousins," though he did not know the exact relationship. By obtaining details from birth, death and marriage certificates, we have been able to construct the family chart on page 3.



Mary Skipworth's grave, Southern Cemetery, Dunedin, Block 15P Plot 64



George CHAMBERS (son of John) and Martha SMART

George said he was a bachelor, and labourer aged 27 when he was married on 20th Feb 1875 at the Presbyterian Manse, Christchurch by Charles FRASER, officiating minister, to Martha SMART age 21 domestic servant, spinster. The register was signed by George CHALMERS (sic) and Martha SMART, and witnesses A JOHNSTON, Rakaia Gorge, shepherd, and Elizabeth FARQUHAR Mar [married woman?].²² Although George, like his cousin Mary, was using the Scottish form Chalmers at this point in his life, later documentation is all in the name of Chambers. The location and occupation of the witness A. JOHNSTON suggests that possibly George was also employed on a farm at Rakaia Gorge.

He is probably the George CHAMBERS who arrived at Lyttelton, Canterbury on the *Coronilla* from London on 10th Aug 1871.²³ In 1872 he worked on the railway line from Christchurch to Kaiapoi.²⁴

On the birth certificate for George and Martha's son George, George senior's birthplace is given as Cork, and the date 1851. The evidence for George being part of this family of Chambers is quite solid (see below), but births so far apart as County Down and County Cork seem unlikely for brothers, and George appears to have been a cousin.

George died on 17 Sep 1926 aged 82 and was buried at Methven.³⁵ Martha died aged 83 on 30 Mar 1939 and is also buried at Methven.

George and Martha had 14 children, of who 11 married, leaving many descendants, most in the mid-Canterbury area. List from a family member.

1. John CHAMBERS,³⁶ 1876-1887, buried age 11 at Methven with his father and brothers
2. Charles CHAMBERS,³⁷ 1878- married Fanny DOWELL or DORRELL,⁴⁴ labourer of Cairnbrae in Selwyn electorate 1905-1908 [death not in Ashburton District database]
3. George CHAMBERS junior,²⁵ 1880-1933, buried age 53 at Methven, married Sarah Ann REESBY (see below)
4. Francis CHAMBERS,²⁶ 1882-1938, buried age 56 at Methven, married Alice or Annie RODGER in 1905.³⁰
5. Eliza Jane CHAMBERS,³⁸ 1883-1915, buried age 31 at Methven, married George W ALDRIDGE, teacher
6. Thomas CHAMBERS,^{39, 40} 1885-1887, died aged 2, buried at Methven with his father and brothers
7. Martha Ellen CHAMBERS,⁴¹ 1887-1958, buried age 71 at Methven with her mother, married Jocelyn J (Joss) ANDREW of Masterton
8. William John CHAMBERS,⁴⁵ 1889-1945, buried age 55 at Methven, married Eva May GILHAM. Was he the William John CHAMBERS married to Ada Talbot CHAMBERS at Doyleston 1902-1908. Noted 1889 birth registered Oamaru district.
9. David CHAMBERS,⁴² 1891-1963, buried age 72 at Methven, married Frances Harriet (Fanny) SMITH
10. Joseph Richard CHAMBERS,⁴³ 1893-1914, buried age 21 at Methven with his father and brothers. In the territorial army at Burnham.
11. Mary Evelyn CHAMBERS,⁴⁷ 1895-1961, married Albert DIXON 1929
12. Susan Annie CHAMBERS,⁴⁸ 1897- , married William BOAG
13. Barnard Ralph CHAMBERS,⁴⁹ 1899-1985 , married Jeanie ROBERTSON 1926
14. Isabel Victoria Alexandra CHAMBERS,¹¹ 1901-1958 , married Leicester ANDERSON 1922

George CHAMBERS junior (son of George) **and Sarah Ann REESBY**

According to his birth certificate, he was born on Feb 28th 1880, at Springfield, son of George CHAMBERS, farmer aged 29 born Cork Ireland, and Martha CHAMBERS formerly SMART aged 24 years, born Lurgan, Armagh, Ireland, who were married 20 Jan 1875 at Presbyterian Manse, Christchurch. Informant Ann SMART, present at birth, Springfield.²⁵

Young George apparently used the suffix Junior to distinguish himself from his father, even signing his marriage entry thus. On 11th July 1907, in the private home of Mr REESBY, Lyndhurst, District of Rakaia, George CHAMBERS junior aged 27 farmer, bachelor, born Methven, living at Methven, son of George CHAMBERS, farmer and Martha CHAMBERS nee SMART married Sarah Ann REESBY age 24, dressmaker, spinster born at Southbridge, resident Southbridge, usually resident Methven, daughter of Thomas REESBY labourer and Comfort REESBY nee WALDEN. Witnesses J J REESBY, saddler, Lyndhurst and F CHAMBERS, shepherd, Methven.²⁷

George junior was buried at Methven on 21 Sep 1933, aged 53. Sarah died aged 87 on 10 Mar 1970 and was also buried at Methven.⁵⁷

George and Sarah Ann had a son Kenneth Leslie CHAMBERS, born on 5 Nov 1908 at Methven.³² He was married in 1934 at Methven to Mary Agnes PAUL.²⁸ At the time of his death on 28 Jan 1987 in Ashburton they had surviving sons aged 51, 49, 47, 43, 40, and a daughter aged 38.²⁹ From electoral rolls we know he was a labourer at Hatfield, Mt Hutt, in 1946, a farmhand of West Melton in 1954, and that by 1981 he was retired and living at 45 Albert Street Ashburton where he continued till his death.¹⁷ He and his wife were buried at Ashburton.⁵⁷

As was the case with the John CHAMBERS family, Harry SKIPWORTH had kept in touch with his cousin George CHAMBERS junior, and through occasional visits Ivan SKIPWORTH was vaguely aware of his "cousin" Ken CHAMBERS "from around Methven". It is from these memories that we have been able to piece together the family story.

The placement of the George CHAMBERS branch in this family is a little problematic however. George's family understand his birthplace to have been Dunmanway, Cork. They do not have a name for his mother, and give his father's name as John. If John is correct, the connection may be a generation earlier, with James having had a brother John. This fits well with the details from Barnabus CHAMBERS' Cork marriage certificate which shows his father as John CHAMBERS, farmer.

Barnabus CHAMBERS (son of John, possible nephew of James) **and Sarah JENNINGS**

Barnabus CHAMBERS, born about 1851, married Sarah Jennings on 11 June 1881 in Cork, Ireland. He died before 1901 as evidenced by the census return of House 2, Cullenagh (Garrown, Cork): Sarah CHAMBERS age 40, head of family, widow, farmer, with John son 19, Richard son 16, Mary dau 14, George son 12, Sarah dau 8, Lizzie dau 6, Annie dau 4, Barnabas son 2. All Church of Ireland, 3 older children on farm, rest at school.

They were still at the farm in 1911: Sarah CHAMBERS head, widow, farmer, age 56, George son age 22; Annie daughter 14; Barnabus son 11.

Sometime after 1911, Sarah came to NZ with some of her children (John, Mary, Elizabeth, Sarah, and Barnabus) and settled in Ashburton. A group photo at the 1909 marriage of Mary Anne CHAMBERS to Thompson MITCHELL, shows George and Martha CHAMBERS prominently placed, supporting the view that Mary Anne was George's niece.

Sarah CHAMBERS, widow of Ashburton, died intestate, probate filed Wellington 27 Aug 1943. Her death registration indicates age 84, suggesting a birthdate about 1859.

Other Chambers at Dunmanway

Barnabas CHAMBERS born 1920 at Dunmanway suggests that relatives may still be there.

William CHAMBERS born 1865 son of James Chambers and Mary Murry
Thomas CHAMBERS born 1867 son of James Chambers and Mary Barry
Anne CHAMBERS born 1870 daughter of James Chambers and Mary Barry
James CHAMBERS born 1872 son of James Chambers and Mary Barry

Charles CHAMBERS born 1867 son of Charles Chambers and Sally Deane
George CHAMBERS born 1869 son of Charles Chambers and Sarah Deane
Charles CHAMBERS born 1871 son of Charles Chambers and Sarah Deane
Sarah CHAMBERS born 1873 daughter of Charles Chambers and Sarah Deane

Susan CHAMBERS born 1865 dau of Charles Chambers and Mary Buttimer
Ann CHAMBERS born 1867 dau of Charles Chambers and Mary Buttimer
Thomas Charles CHAMBERS born 1869 son of Charles Chambers and Mary Buttimer
Charles CHAMBERS born 7 Oct 1871 son of Charles Chambers and Mary Buttimer
John CHAMBERS born 1874 son of Charles Chambers and Mary Buttimer

George CHAMBERS born 4 Jun 1868 son of George Chambers and Ellen Trinder

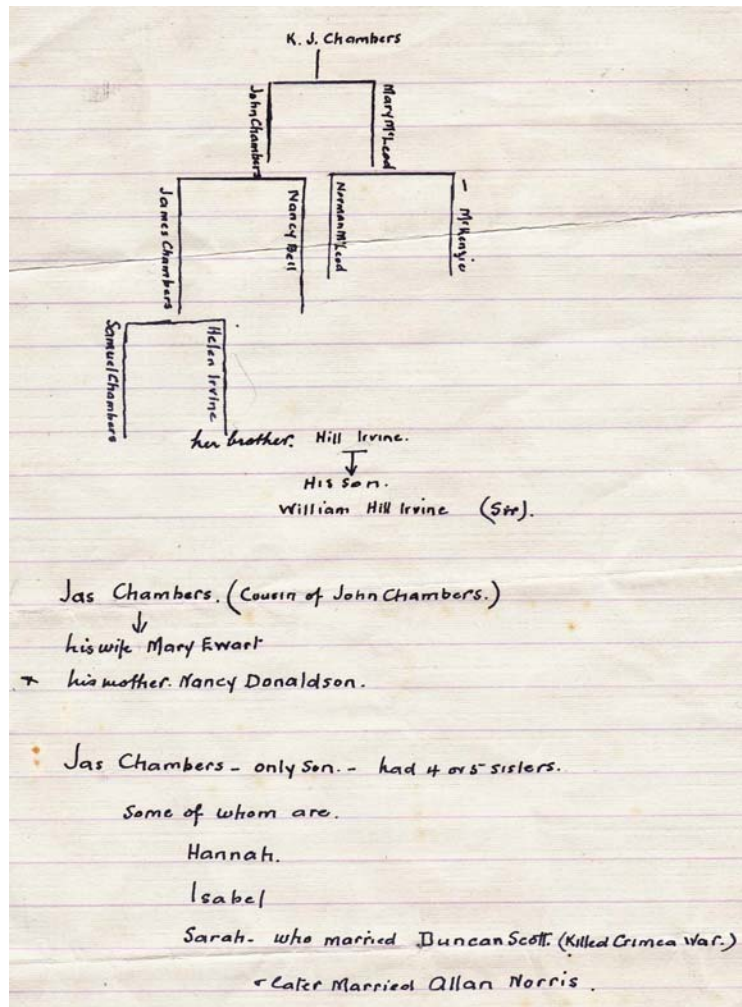
Anne CHAMBERS, daughter of Charles, married John Bennett 1865
Mary CHAMBERS daughter of Daniel, married Florence Crowley 1866
Charles CHAMBERS son of Daniel born abt 1831 married 1861 Elizabeth WEBB
Anne CHAMBERS born 1875 dau of Richard Chambers and Mary Kingston

Richard CHAMBERS born abt 1885 arrived New York 1911

Barnabus CHAMBERS born third quarter 1898 Dunmanway Cork, died 18 Apr 1950, buried at Methven plot 211 aged 52. Will filed Archives Christchurch, 4 May 1950.

Mary Anne CHAMBERS married Thompson MITCHELL 1909/40 NS

Late Additional Information



The above sheet has been found with old papers of the Dunedin Chambers family. It differs from the family's understanding in 1882, when James Chambers' parents were given as James Chambers and Helen Irvine. Here, the father's name has changed to Samuel.

This paper appears to be a series of notes from a meeting with a relative. It includes some details of the Irvines who had emigrated to Australia, suggesting that Ken had met one of the Irvines. There is an apparent error though. Helen Irvine's son James Chambers was born about 1808. Hill Irvine's son (Sir William) was born in 1858, making it more likely that Hill was Helen's nephew than her brother. [Sir William had a distinguished career as an Australian politician and judge - refer Wikipedia.]

The middle section of the paper talks of John Chambers' cousin James, but it does not tell us who this James' father was. The bottom section provides details of this cousin James' siblings.

Further Research

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland has listed a number of Kilkeel registers that could be relevant at http://www.proni.gov.uk/guide_to_church_records.pdf. Apparently these are not available through LDS Family Search, but local indexing is in progress and results are being posted at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~rosdavies/index.html>. It will be worth keeping a watch on this site, which also contains photographic images and historic information on Kilkeel.

The search for the unidentified son listed on James' death certificate continues. A William CHAMBERS who died in Nelson in 1868, aged 27 born Down, Ireland, was investigated, and found to be the son of a David Chambers of Drumnoscamph in the parish of Clonduff - a different family.

A George CHAMBERS arrived on 30 Sept 1862 from Melbourne on the ship *Greyhound*. His age was given as 27 suggesting a birth year 1835 - too early for our George born 1841.

A George CHAMBERS, who died in 1909, aged 75 yrs proved to be from a different family,

Acknowledgement

This 2010 revision of our Chambers history has been facilitated by the contributions of John NIMMO, great grandson of John CHAMBERS, who has supplied details of the younger brothers, William of Waimate and James of South Clutha. Working with Sheila Philips of Kilkeel, John has also supplied the birth record for George CHAMBERS (1841) and there is room to hope that further Kilkeel records will be discovered, as indexing is on-going.

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