

# Edwin Foss Duffield: a colonial-born craftsman

Trove and family histories have recently revealed information about Edwin Foss Duffield (1846–1922), a colonial-born craftsman of distinction in Western Australia. He commenced working in Fremantle in the late 1860s as a cabinet maker and undertaker, and a number of pieces of furniture from his workshop survive.

## DOROTHY ERICKSON

Edwin Foss Duffield was the grandson of Exeter-born John Hole Duffield (1797–1859) one of the early settlers at the Swan River colony. John Hole Duffield had arrived in the Warrior in March 1830, to be followed by his wife Charlotte Foss (1797/8–1865) and four children in December 1831 on the Egyptian. Three of their offspring had died young in England, while another four were born in Western Australia.<sup>1</sup>

John Hole Duffield must have brought considerable goods, as he was granted 500 acres (202 ha) of land near

Fremantle and more in the Murray district further south. His property Bicton, named after a parish in Devon near his birthplace of Exeter, is today a suburb of Perth. John Duffield was a cooper, carpenter and contractor, who established a commercial vineyard at Bicton and exported the first cask of wine from the colony to a friend in England in 1848.<sup>2</sup>

His family claimed that he was the first to find gold in Western Australia, near Toodyay in 1849.<sup>3</sup> He became a wealthy brewer, wine merchant, proprietor of the Albion Hotel and expanded his holdings with land at

Harvey and town lots in Fremantle. His youngest son, James Hole Duffield (1839–1860) and a labourer John Luff died when a well they were sinking at Bicton collapsed on them on 22 March 1860.<sup>4</sup>

His eponymous son John Hole Duffield jr (1819–1894) was a jack-of-all-trades who became a schoolmaster to Aborigines, mail contractor and general dealer. In 1842 he married Sarah (1824–1908) daughter of another early settler, William Glyde, an indentured servant of Thomas Peel.

Edwin Foss Duffield (1846–1922) was born at Fremantle, their first son to survive childhood, and given the



### 1-3.

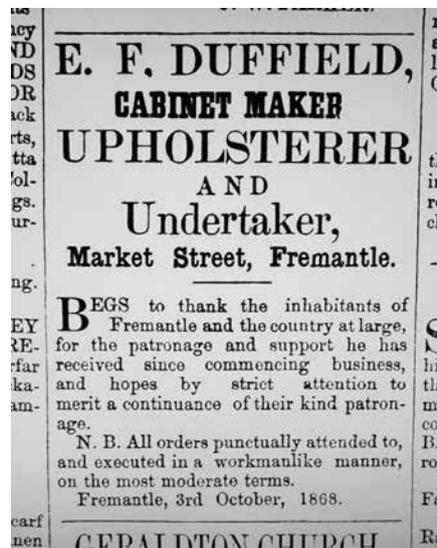
Edwin Foss Duffield (1846–1922), jarrah chiffofier in Sampson House, Fremantle. Collection National Trust of Australia (WA). Photos D. Erickson



name of his own father's elder brother (1817–1831), who had died aged 13 at Plymouth, after his grandfather had sailed for Western Australia. By the time he was old enough to consider an occupation, his father had inherited half his father's 'Bicton Estate' and could apprentice him to a good master. The successful entrepreneur George Lazenby<sup>5</sup> (1807–1895) was chosen and Edwin became a cabinet maker, upholsterer and undertaker.

By February 1868 he had established his own enterprise in Market Street, styled "E. F. Duffield cabinet maker &c.", when his first advertisement appears in the Fremantle Herald,<sup>6</sup> (later expanded to "cabinet maker upholsterer and undertaker") thanking "the inhabitants of Fremantle and the country at large, for the patronage and support he has received since commencing business" (plate 4). The same advertisement runs in the weekly Herald until 1 January 1870, when he changes the format; this is his major advertising spend, Trove recording 437 advertisements in the Herald up till 1883, and another in the following year when he seeks "a good strong lad" as an apprentice.<sup>7</sup>

At the Loan Exhibition of Art and Industry held in Perth's Town Hall from 6–10 September 1870 – the first



such exhibition held in the colony of Western Australia – Duffield was one of four craftsmen singled out for their fine woodwork; the others were the consummate craftsman Joseph Hamblin<sup>8</sup> (1820 UK–1899), Isidore Oriol (1825 Spain–1912) and Hookum Chan<sup>9</sup> (c. 1800 India–1903). Duffield's exhibits included a sandalwood whatnot, an inlaid cabinet and two wooden boxes he had made for Mr G W Leake, and attracted comments in the Perth and Fremantle press.

The Perth Gazette commended his whatnot but thought his inlay work

4.

Advertisement for E F Duffield, Herald (Fremantle) 24 October 1868 page 1.

5.

Edwin Foss Duffield (1846–1922), one of at least two inlaid tables made for the Leake family. Photo D. Erickson

6.

Edwin Foss Duffield (1846–1922), detail of the top of the pair to the table pictured. A similar table was exhibited in London in 1862. A third is held by the Duffield family and a fourth was auctioned recently. Photo D. Erickson

pedestrian in comparison to that of Hookum Chan:

Mr. Duffield had a very pretty and chastely designed "What-not" of sandalwood, the workmanship of which we thought better than that of the inlaid cabinet (No. 372) or of the two inlaid boxes (Nos. 383 and 324) exhibited by Mr. Leake, but also of Mr. Duffield's workmanship, exhibiting no originality of design. The contrary appeared to us to be the case with two small specimens





*Drawing Room. Grass Valley.*

## 7.

The pair to the G W Leake games table exhibited in London in 1862 made by Edwin Foss Duffield, seen in the Grass Valley homestead at York, photographed c 1880s. Aesthetic movement overtones can be seen with the Japanese screen, peacock feathers and Chinese porcelain

## 8.

Edwin Foss Duffield (1846–1922), games table of various woods, McKenzies Auction June 2013 lot 250. At least three more like this exist in Western Australia. Courtesy McKenzies Auctioneers

(Nos. 421 and 423) the productions of Hookham Chan; the former is a work-box, the top of which is inlaid in a geometrical design exhibiting a greater amount of good art than any other cabinet work exhibited, while certainly the workmanship is noways inferior; the same might be said of the cotton stand although the design was far more simple and required much less thought.<sup>10</sup>

Fremantle's Herald took a more charitable view, describing G W Leake's "Sandalwood, Shea [sic] Oak and Banksea [sic]" box made by Duffield as being a "a beautiful piece of workmanship" and thought his "inlaid wood cabinet manufactured of sandalwood, shea [sic] oak, rasperry [sic] jam and mahogany deserves honorable mention."<sup>11</sup>

Edwin was well known as a cabinet maker in the 1870s servicing the people of Fremantle, but then expanded his interests. From 1878 until 1884 he had an agency in Geraldton, initially through Philip Duffield (possibly a cousin) and later through William Jose's Trefusis Aerated Waters and Cordial Manufactory.<sup>12</sup> A hundred advertisements in Geraldton's weekly Victorian Express



advised that the agency could obtain works from the Fremantle "cabinet & furniture maker, upholsterer and carpenter" promptly by coastal ship.

In 1878 Edwin donated a parcel of "work done" for sale at the Perth Orphanage Bazaar held at Government House.<sup>13</sup> Duffield fitted out the new Fremantle Grammar School building in 1886. The building was handed over to the governors on the evening of Friday 22 January, and Duffield's workmen installed the furniture and fittings over the weekend, in time for the school's opening on Monday 25 January.<sup>14</sup> The year before, George Pyke, an apprentice aged about 20 whom he had trained, sailed with the Sydney contingent to fight in the Sudan.<sup>15</sup>

In October and November 1886, Duffield placed several advertisements, offering "a first-class opportunity" to lease or purchase his business and premises.<sup>16</sup> In December, Duffield and Frank Herbert Snook (1868–1923) announced that Snook has leased Duffield's premises. Both hope that Snook, in continuing the business of cabinet making, undertaking etc, will be accorded the same patronage as Duffield.<sup>17</sup>

Four years later, in December 1890, Duffield again offered the workshops

in Market Street, next to the National Hotel, for lease.<sup>18</sup> Snook's obituary says that "he did a very successful trade for three or four years" but, "tiring of this occupation, he sold out advantageously" and became a builder in Southern Cross.<sup>19</sup>

A chiffonier (**plates 1–3**) of Duffield's making is in Samson House, the National Trust property in Fremantle. This was the home of Sir W. Frederick Sampson (1892-1974), Mayor of Fremantle and grandson of early settler Lionel, who donated it to the state so that it became part of the Western Australian Museum before being given to the National Trust. The furniture would have been made for his father Michael Samson, a prominent Fremantle wine merchant.

Other pieces, such as a games table made from various Australian woods, are still held by the family<sup>20</sup> and others by descendants of the Leake family (**plates 6–8**). All the games tables seen are slightly different in height or minor details. Another unidentified games table, but clearly by the same hand, was sold for \$3,600 at auction at McKenzies in Claremont, a suburb of Perth in June 2013 (**plate 9**). MacKenzies also sold a table which bore Duffield's stamp (**plates 10–11**). St John's Church of England in Fremantle has a carved bookcase by Duffield which was presented by Thelma and David Johnson, while dealers Lauder & Howard in Fremantle had a console whatnot attributed to Duffield (**plate 12**). Apart from that, few pieces have yet been identified.

Edwin had married the wealthy George Lazenby's daughter Adeline (1848–1917) at Serpentine in 1869. Their first child Frank (1870–1927) was baptised in 1870. In all they had three sons and seven daughters. Duffield became a landowner and a pillar of society in Fremantle. He was an ardent supporter of St John's Anglican Church in Fremantle, as his parents had been before him,<sup>21</sup> becoming a church warden. He was also an officer of the Fremantle Odd Fellows Lodge.

He was Acting Town Clerk when the Town Clerk, his brother-in-law, was on holiday.<sup>22</sup> He was a director of the Fremantle Gas Company for 36 years, returning officer for elections in 1897, director of the Fremantle Building and Benefit Society in 1910<sup>23</sup> and patron of the Fremantle Bowling Club, where he possibly spent considerable time after his wife died in January 1917, leaving an estate of £351 to her husband.<sup>24</sup>

It was not all work and no play. In 1874 he owned a cutter, the Scud. His income in retirement may have come from four valuable Fremantle town lots that he sold in 1920.<sup>25</sup>

The Duffields lived at Wanilyah, 180 Beach Street, Fremantle where he died on 2 November 1922. The newspapers described him as "The deceased occupied a prominent position in the commercial life of the Port. ... He was of a retiring disposition, unostentatious ...".<sup>26</sup> A memorial service was held for him in St John's Fremantle on Sunday

## 9.

Edwin Foss Duffield (1846–1922), jarrah chiffonier, McKenzie's Auction November 2013 lot 202. Courtesy McKenzies Auctioneers



## 10.

Edwin Foss Duffield (1846–1922), jarrah table, McKenzies Auction November 2013, lot 203. Courtesy McKenzies Auctioneers

## 11.

Duffield's ink stamp on the underside of the jarrah table reads EDWIN F. DUFFIELD / Cabinet Maker &c / MARKET STREET / FREMANTLE. Courtesy McKenzies Auctioneers

## 12.

This jarrah console whatnot may have been made by Duffield. Lauder & Howard illustrated it in *An Introduction to Western Australian Colonial Furniture* published in 1988 and exhibited it in 2010. Photograph by Victor France courtesy Lauder & Howard, Fremantle



**Dorothy Erickson** is a jeweller and historian who lives in Perth, WA. She has exhibited internationally since 1979 with work in prestigious museums around the world. She is also an art critic and writer on art, crafts and design so when, through illness, she was unable to continue making jewellery for a time in the 1980s she undertook a PhD in art history. She has since published four books: *Art and Design in Western Australia: Perth Technical College 1900–2000*; *A Joy Forever: The Story of Kings Park*; *Gold and Silversmithing in Western Australia: A History*; and *Inspired by Light and Land: Designers and Makers in Western Australia 1829–1969*.

Dorothy has just discovered that her great great grandfather, who migrated to Victoria in 1842, was a cabinetmaker in the UK and Melbourne before he took up land. She may be contacted at [dorothyerickson@ozemail.com.au](mailto:dorothyerickson@ozemail.com.au).



5 November and a stained glass window in honour of Edwin and Adeline Duffield was dedicated in St John's on Sunday 18 January 1931. Since then he appears to have slipped from all but the family's memory. This may redress the situation.

#### REFERENCES

- Oliver E. Duffield, *The Duffields of Bicton 1776–1979*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide
- Dorothy Erickson, *Inspired by light and land: designers and makers in Western Australia 1829–1969*, Perth, WA Museum 2014 pp 70-71
- Rica Erickson (comp.), *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians pre 1829–1888 vol II D–J*, Perth, UWA Press 1988 p 906
- Kevin Fahy & Andrew Simpson,

*Australian Furniture: Pictorial History and Dictionary 1788–1938*. Sydney, Casuarina Press 1998 p 46

#### NOTES

- 1 [www.tuckerjr.com/getperson.php?personID=16562&tree=Tucker-Eatch](http://www.tuckerjr.com/getperson.php?personID=16562&tree=Tucker-Eatch), accessed 10 Feb 2016.
- 2 SA Register 22 Sep 1849 p 2. In 1868, he advertised various wines made by Philip Webster of Fremantle for sale, e.g. Herald (Fremantle) 9 Oct 1868 p 2.
- 3 West Australian 3 Apr 1931 p 9.
- 4 Perth Gazette 30 Mar 1860 p 2.
- 5 [www.daa0.org.au/bio/george-lazenby/biography](http://www.daa0.org.au/bio/george-lazenby/biography), accessed 10 Feb 2016
- 6 Herald (Fremantle) 15 Feb 1868 p 2.
- 7 Herald (Fremantle) 3 May 1884 p 2.
- 8 Australiana vol 36 no 3, Aug 2014, pp 4–10.
- 9 Australiana vol 35 no 2, May 2013, pp 18–23.
- 10 Perth Gazette & West Australian Times 16 Sep 1870 p 3. G W Leake was a major exhibitor at the event, held to support a fund for destitute women.
- 11 Herald (Fremantle) 10 Sept 1870 p 1s. The

Hon George Walpole Leake QC (d 1895) was a member of the prominent legal family.

- 12 Victorian Express (Geraldton) 25 Sep 1878 p 2; 2 Apr 1884 p 1. William Jose was formerly a Norfolk St, Fremantle storekeeper.
- 13 Inquirer & Commercial News 18 Dec 1878 p 4.
- 14 Western Mail 30 Jan 1886 p 34.
- 15 Herald (Fremantle) 11 Apr 1885 p 2.
- 16 Daily News 18 Oct 1886 p 3.
- 17 Inquirer & Commercial News 15 Dec 1886 p 7.
- 18 Ibid. 24 Dec 1890 p 2; 2 Jan 1891 p 2.
- 19 Kalgoorlie Miner 19 Jul 1923 p 8
- 20 Family member Maudie Wagner had a chess table made by E. F. Duffield using various Western Australian woods.
- 21 *West Australian* 17 Jan 1931 p 12.
- 22 *West Australian* 5 Sep 5 1888 p 3.
- 23 *West Australian* 23 Aug 23 1910 p 4.
- 24 *Sunday Times* 21 Jan 1917 p 1; 22 Jul 1917 p 16s.
- 25 *Daily News* 23 Jun 1920 p 1.
- 26 *Daily News* 3 Nov 1922 p 10; 4 Nov 1922 p 16.