

Edwin Colenso (1827-1897)



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Edwin Colenso was born in January 1827 in Italy.¹ His father Samuel May Colenso was a saddler in Penzance. Samuel had withdrawn his eldest son William from school in September 1826 and indentured him as an apprentice printer. Samuel and his wife then travelled to Italy, possibly in preparation for establishing an ironmonger shop in London. Their eldest daughter Jane Emily was already living, in 1826, with her uncle William and his wife Frances in Marazion.² The other children may have been distributed amongst their relatives.

Year	Date	Address	Source	Place of Birth	Informant
1853	22 Nov 1853	Irish Town	birth John	Italy	Eliza
1856	2 Mar 1856	Yarra Street Geelong	birth William	Italy - family place Cornwall	Eliza
1859	16 Oct 1859	Parkington Street, Geelong	birth of Edwin	Italy - family place Cornwall	Edwin
1861	15 Aug 1861	Parkington Street, Chilwell	birth of William	Italy - but brought up Penzance Cornwall	Edwin
1863	22 May 1863	Parkington Street, Chilwell	birth of Mary Jane	Italy	Edwin
1865	25 April 1865	Nicholas Street, Chilwell	birth of Emily Caroline	Italy	Edwin
1867	7 Nov 1867	Nicholas Street, Chilwell	birth of Richard Alfred	Italy	Martha
1870	15 May 1870	Noble Street, Chilwell	birth of Thomas Henry	Italy	Martha
1872	26 May 1872	Noble Street, Chilwell	birth of Amelia Virginia	Italy	Martha
1874	23 Aug 1874	Noble Street, Chilwell	birth of Joseph Austin	Italy	Edwin
1876	21 May 1876	Noble Street, Chilwell	birth of Benjamin	Italy	Edwin
1877	18 Sep 1877	Noble Street, Chilwell	birth of Alfred George	Italy	Edwin
1880	24 Mar 1880	Noble Street, Chilwell	birth of Albert Ernest	Italy	Edwin

After being raised in Penzance, Edwin immigrated to Geelong, Victoria, arriving on the *Berkshire* on the October 3, 1848 at Point Henry. His name was recorded as Edward Collins, 21, cabinetmaker, able to read and write, Baptist from Penzance Cornwall. His employer was given as Short of South Geelong.

John Tregarthen Short (23), a native of St Ives, and his wife Eliza Edgecumbe Short (27), a native of Penzance, were also passengers on the *Berkshire*. The couple has married in Penzance on May 16, 1848. The *Berkshire* left Plymouth on June 9. John, also a cabinet maker and joiner, was intending to set up a business in Geelong.

In his obituary in 1894, the Geelong Advertiser described John Short as “..... a very old colonist, he arrived in Victoria in 1848, and it is stated to have built the first brick house in Geelong. For some years, when wages were very high, he followed the occupations of carpenter, builder, and contractor, and subsequently for a number of years had a produce store in Mercer-street.”

From August 15, 1854 Edwin was engaged by Mr King as foreman of his undertaking business. He was discharged from this position on November 15 of that year. In the newspaper report of Colenso v. King for breach of contract it was claimed that this was because of poor workmanship and to irregular habits resulting from being frequently the worse for drink.³ Mr King testified that “.....he had occasion to remonstrate with him; upon which he flew into a passion, threw down his tools, and with an oath, said he would leave the premises, which he did;.....”

¹ As indicated on all the birth certificates of his children.

² “Ghost Story.” *eColenso Supplement*, August 2016, 8

³ *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, September 17, 1855, page 2.

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Edwin had joined the gold rush at Ballarat and was reported to have been at the Eureka Stockade in December 1854.

First advertised as an undertaker in January 1859.

In his obituary it states that he was employed at his trade in one workshop for 42 years [1855], having successfully served Messrs W B King, J W Hudson, and W B King and sons, undertakers of Moorabool-street.

Talking about burying reminds us of a somewhat ghastly-amusing incident that happened in Geelong some years ago, when Colenso, as undertaker, who claimed relationship with the Bishop of that name, used to knock around. One evening he was drinking in the bar of the Black Bull Hotel, in company with a military-looking stranger. In their cups they became quite confidential, and the stranger informed Colenso that he was an old soldier. "Ah," replied Colenso, "just as I thought; a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind – I'm a volunteer myself," and then scanning his friend from the top of his head to the sole of his foot he exclaimed, "By Jove, what a fine corpse you would make! Look here, old fellow, if you let me have your funeral I'll get you the most comfortable grave in the new cemetery; don't go to the old one, it is so cold and damp there." Scarcely a month elapsed before the man died, and Colenso was called up to perform the last sad office. This he did; and when asked by a person who had overheard the conversation alluded to, as to how he had got on, his reply was "The finest corpse I ever had the pleasure of handling, poor fellow, I gave him a good deep warm grave in a dry gravelly soil, war's alarms will never more trouble him, no man was more comfortably buried." Poor Colenso, he was a man who had evidently seen better days, and could his funeral sayings be collected, they would form an amusing a book as ever was written by Josh Billings.⁴ He was, however, wrapped in his doleful profession, and never seemed to think there was really anything funny in his remarks. He has since gone the way of all flesh, and let us hope has been comfortably interred.⁵

Edwin did not die until twelve years after this story, June 30, 1897, aged 70 years. He had been suffering from valvular heart disease for about 3 years. He was buried by W. King at the Eastern Cemetery.

His wife Martha was executrix of his will. She wrote to the Master in Equity, in 1902, from *Bishopstowe*, in Cohuna Street, West Brunswick describing the estate as a house in Noble Street, Chilwell valued at £90 and furniture and effects valued at £20. She was the sole beneficiary.⁶

⁴Josh Billings was the pen name of 19th-century American humourist Henry Wheeler Shaw (April 21, 1818 – October 14, 1885). He was a famous humour writer and lecturer in the United States, perhaps second only to Mark Twain, during the latter half of the 19th century.

⁵ Hamilton Spectator, April 9 1885, page 3.

⁶ The house in Cohuna Street belonged to Richard Alfred Colenso. The name taken from the house of Bishop John William Colenso, of Natal.

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Marriage to Eliza Cook

In January 5, 1850 Edwin married Eliza Cook, in Geelong. The celebrant was Francis Tuckfield, a minister of the Wesleyan Church.⁷ The witnesses were Henry Mitchell and William Amos, both of Geelong. Edwin had been christened as a Wesleyan in Penzance in 1842.

The couple had four sons – Samuel Robert (1850-1850), Samuel Robert (1851-1890), John (1853-1933) and William (1856-1857). Edwin was recorded as a cabinetmaker or carpenter on their certificates.

Eliza died on October 21, 1858 of hysterics caused by a fright, resulting in continued convulsions. She had been in Victoria for seventeen years.

Marriage to Martha Austin

Edwin married his second wife, Martha Austin, in February 1859. They had eleven children, nine living to adulthood, seven sons and two daughters.

- Edwin Austin Colenso (1859-1898) who became a grocer in Melbourne.
- William Colenso (1861-1939), who was a drover, grain sampler, unionist, publican and shipping providore.
- Emily Caroline Colenso (1865-1950), married Alfred Allan Winstanley, who was a merchant.
- Richard Alfred Colenso (1867-1923) who was a shipping providore, amateur actor, local politician and cycling handicapper.
- Thomas Henry Colenso (1870-1950) a painter and decorator who started a paint manufacturing business, called Coloro.
- Amelia Virginia Colenso (1872-1898), married Robert Courtney Feltham, a farmer.
- Joseph Austin Colenso (1874-1939) who possibly served in the Boer War, emigrated to NZ, established a painter and decorator business and was involved in amateur swimming competitions.
- Alfred George Colenso (1877-1950) became manager of a Woollen Mill and was a competitive rower.
- Albert Ernest Colenso (1880-1954) who served in the Boer War and settled in South Africa as a policeman.

Most, if not all, of the sons were active Freemasons, like the family back in Penzance.

In Edwin's obituary, published in the Geelong Advertiser in July 1897, his early years in Victoria are described as follows.

Mr Colenso arrived in the [Corio] bay in October 1848, and was among the first undertakers who opened business in this town. He joined the mad rush to the diggings early in the fifties, and participated in the Ballarat riots, taking sides with the late Hon. Peter Lalor at the famous Eureka Stockade. He had the rather sensational experience when returning to Geelong, having been "stuck-up" by bushrangers, robbed of his hard earned gold, and was left in a perfectly nude state, by them, lashed to a tree. He was discovered by a settler shortly after, and was released.....Mr Colenso came from the Penzance (Cornwall) family, several of whom have distinguished themselves in the literary and scientific world, notably the late Right Rev. John William Colenso, DD, Lord Bishop of Natal and the Rev. William Colenso, the most eminent living authority on New Zealand botany, and the first printer to set up the press in that colony for the Royal Missionary Society.⁸

⁷ Francis Tuckfield (1808-1865) was a Wesleyan missionary from Germoe, Cornwall, who worked among the aboriginal tribes from 1838 until 1850. His mission station was then closed by the government, and he continued as a minister at various churches in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania until his death in Portland.

⁸ "The Late Mr Edwin Colenso," *Geelong Advertiser*, July 5, 1897, 4.

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While there is no evidence that any of Edwin's sons knew their uncle William, on his death in 1899, in addition to several obituaries, the following family notice was inserted in four Australian newspapers:

*On the 10th February, at Napier, NZ, Rev. William Colenso, FRS, FLS, etc. aged 88 years, beloved uncle of William, Richard Alfred, Thomas, Joseph, Alfred, Ernest and Caroline, of Geelong and Melbourne. A colonist of New Zealand for 65 years.*⁹

Those listed are the surviving children of Edwin's second marriage.

Community Involvement

One of the consequences of bushranger activity and the Eureka rebellion was the establishment of a volunteer corps in 1854, not exceeding 2000 members, with the officers appointed by the Victorian Governor. Several rifle units were first, quickly followed by artillery and cavalry. By 1860, the provision had been expanded to allow up to 10,000.¹⁰ A meeting concerning the Artillery Brigade in Geelong was held in February 1864 and the reports mentioned Mr Colenso moving a motion to elect the sergeants.¹¹ In September 1871, a gunner Colenso was mentioned with regard to the Geelong Volunteers.



Victorian Volunteer Rifles 1854 Drill hall, Skene St Geelong. Rear of Gold Diggers Hotel

In 1866, Edwin was the clerk (or verger) of the All Saints' Church. This church, on the corner of Noble and Talbot Streets was erected by the Church of England in 1862. It became part of Geelong College.

*Somewhere in Irishtown Mr Colenso had his cabinet-maker's shop. He made the first pulpit and reading desk for All Saints' Church. His uncle was Bishop Colenso, of South Africa, who was the author of the arithmetic used in the schools of these early days.*¹²

In 1873, Edwin was the secretary to the Newtown Fire Brigade.

The Two Daws

*A quiet but shocking case of suicide occurred early this week. From the evidence adduced at the inquest, it appeared that the unfortunate man, Richard Daw, had been drinking hard during the Christmas holidays. In a moment of mental aberration, which was increased by the receipt of news from England, he precipitated himself into the Moorabool, and was drowned. A considerable sum of money was found on his person, besides several articles of value. The usual verdict of – "Temporary Insanity" was returned.*¹³

In an affidavit Edwin Colenso reported that while he was residing in Geelong March 1849 he observed the arrival of the emigrant ship Osprey.¹⁴ Two days after the arrival Edwin entered the Emigrant Depot

⁹ *The Argus* (Feb 14), *Age* (Feb 14), *Australasian* (Feb 18) and *Weekly Times* (Feb 18).

¹⁰ "A Brief History of Artillery in Victoria" available http://artilleryvic.org.au/History_of_Artillery_in_Vic_Pt1.pdf

¹¹ "The Artillery Brigade." *Geelong Advertiser*, February 23, 1864, 2.

¹² Bottrell, J.H. Early Homes of Chilwell – No.3 Irishtown. *Geelong Advertiser*, December 24 1927, page 1.

¹³ *Geelong Advertiser*, January 24, 1857, page 3.

¹⁴ Affidavit of Edwin Colenso, 20 March 1861, to the Supreme Court of Victoria.

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and spoke to Richard Daw, recognising him as a Cornishman. After the first meeting they frequently met and conversed. Richard Daw became a gold-digger.

From around twelve months before his death, on January 14, 1856, Richard Daw resided next door to Edwin and talked more about his family back in Cornwall, mentioning his father Edward, deceased mother and his sisters. About two months before his death Richard Daw came to live with Edwin and his family.

After Richard's death, Edwin wrote to his own family in Penzance, giving them Richard Daw's particulars, requesting them to find his father and inform him of the death. After this was done Edwin, in September 1857, received a power of attorney to apply for letters of Administration for the estate. This was done on May 6, 1858, they were granted in June 1858 and the monies were remitted to Edward Daw in September 1858.

In the SUPREME COURT of the COLONY of VICTORIA: Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction.—In the records of RICHARD DAW, late of the city of Melbourne, in the colony of Victoria, laborer, deceased.—Notice is hereby given that application will be made to this honorable Court in its Ecclesiastical jurisdiction, after the expiration of 14 days from the publication of this notice, that LETTERS of ADMINISTRATION may be granted to Edwin Colenso, of Irish-town, near Geelong, in the said colony, cabinetmaker, attorney for Edward Daw, the father and next of kin of the said Richard Daw, deceased.
Dated at Geelong aforesaid, the 5th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1858.
THOS. C. HARWOOD, Proctor for the said Edwin Colenso and Edward Daw.

A Supreme Court case arose in 1861, after the curator of intestate estates paid another attorney representing another Edward Dawe, from Isle of Wight, the funds as well. The following article described the facts of the case.¹⁵

Edwin Colenso

A very curious instance of loose proceeding in the Supreme Court, in former years, followed up by a still more curious instance of careless proceeding in the office of the curator of intestate estates, is exposed by our report of a motion by counsel in the matter of the estate of Richard Dawe, deceased, before Mr Justice Pohlman, *in banco*, yesterday. In 1858 the Court granted administration of the estate of Richard Dawe (or Daw), deceased, at Geelong to Colenso, of Geelong, attorney for Edward Dawe (the father of Richard), resident somewhere in Cornwall, England. Colenso got the money from the curator of intestate estates, and sent it home to Edward Dawe, of Cornwall. The curator's clerk forgot to enter this payment to Colenso. In 1859 the Court erroneously granted administration of the same estate to Henry Bowden, attorney for a family named Daw, residing somewhere in the Isle of Wight, who had long missed a brother Richard, who had heard of the decease of a Richard Daw at Geelong, in Victoria, leaving £500, and who thought such a Richard Daw must be identical with the one they had long missed. Bowden, like Colenso, applied to the curator for the £500 belonging to the estate. The curator, not finding any entry in his books that he had paid £500 to Colenso for Edward Dawe, in Cornwall, paid £500 a second time to Bowden, for the Daws of the Isle of Wight. Luckily, the curator discovered the error before Bowden had remitted the money home. He now came to the court with proper proofs, and was allowed to correct the double error of the Court and of his own office, at the price of paying Mr Bowden all the costs of the second erroneous administration and of the rectification.



¹⁵ *Bendigo Advertiser*, March 16, 1861, page 3. The poem and cartoon appeared in *Melbourne Punch*, March 21, 1861 page 9.

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THE TWO DAWS

NO FABLE BY GAY, BUT A GRAVE REALITY.
For proof that we may take without restriction,
The dictum,—"truth's oft stranger far than fiction,"
Peruse this tale of legal jurisdiction.
In the year 'forty seven, Richard Daw,
For the first time our fam'd Victoria saw ;
A Cornish man—from Truro or Penzance—
He came here to advance His fortunes (*then* there was a likely chance.)
For ten long years Daw to his work applied,
When (Death steals on a man ere he suspects it!)
Having amass'd five hundred pounds, he died,
Leaving no widow to lament his exit,
Nor legal representative out here,
To take his cash, and hold his memory dear.

Now, not to tell my story in extenso,
A Geelong gentleman, by name Colenso,
A gentleman engag'd in law,
Knew Richard Daw,
Saw him for ten years at Ms labours ply,
And saw him die;
Knew of the cash he had in bank or bureau,
And, finally, his father, Edward, knew,
Who in Penzance resided, or in Truro,
To whom the son's effects were justly due.
Accordingly, our well dispos'd attorney,
From Geelong unto Melbourne took a journey;
Without delay made formal application,
And sued out letters of administration;
On Mr. Shovelbottom was a waiter,
Who of estates intestate was curator,
Claim'd Richard Daw's five hundred pounds and got 'em
From that most courteous Mr. Shovelbottom,
Remitting it, receiv'd a prompt receipt,
And thus his legal duties were complete.

Though imperfection is the lot of all,
Both great and small,
Yet when another, not oneself, commits
An error, into what unseemly fits
Of anger does one fall, the wretch denouncing;
Just so I feel dispos'd to give a trouncing
To one who can't but turn as parchment pale,
In Punch's paper reading this, my tale.
A clerk, (there are too many such, od, rot 'em !)
In the employ of Mr. Shovelbottom,
Although, no doubt, he saw,
That memorable draw,
Made by Colenso on account of Daw,
Yet he omitted these five hundred pounds,—
Our Muse is here dispos'd to cry out "Zounds!"—
To enter in the books, a grave omission!
Of which, however, we had never heard,
But for some circumstances that occur'd,
To tell which, briefly, I'm in a position.

There is a family whose name is Daw,
(Whom bitter disappointment soon must gnaw!)
Who their first breath drew in the Isle of Wight,
Not in that western county Cornwall hight.
Now, these same Daws had long a kinsman lost,
Richard, who years ago the ocean cross'd;
And seeing—'twas no overwhelming sight—
That Richard Daw had in Victoria died,
Worth money, waiting for them to divide,
They simultaneously resolved to stick
To cash, thus got together by poor Dick,
And so they set to work to do the trick.
Each separate fact they urg'd so strongly, gave its

Weight and importance to their affidavits,
Which they sent out to their attorney here;
And none could think a case more plain and clear,
Or entertain a faith impliciter,
Than Mr. Henry Bowden, their solicitor.
We come now to the marrow of our theme;—
The keeper of the records, it would seem,
Is some such negligent, oblivious spark,
As Mr. Shovelbottom's clerk.
The Court, no record of the former case
Existing, signified its approbation,
Granting with affability and grace,
The sued-for letters of administration.
Now Bowden, following by two years Colenso,
At Mr. Shovelbottom's, waiting stands,
For cash to which, like Jessica's Lorenzo,
He'd no more claim than to my house and lands,
Nor waits he long; for the oblivious clerk
Forgets he had forgot the former payment ;
Meanwhile, round Mr. Shovelbottom, dark Forgetfulness is
cast like a loose raiment,
Five hundred pounds without the slightest cause,
To Bowden paid for unentitled Daws !
Oh ! could the memory be controll'd by laws!

The error was found out, and not too late ;
But how ? that's rather singular to state,
'Tis no invention of a wanton muse,
That would the world's credulity abuse ;
The facts were told to me by one who got 'em
From—'tis no secret—Mr. Shovelbottom ;
And they are represented unto me as
A strange association of ideas,
Resulting in a beneficial end .—
I quite agree with Mr. S.'s friend.
It seems that Mr. Wilson's importation
Of birds, and beasts, and glowworms, insects splendid,
Met Mr. Shovelbottom's approbation,
"But," he remark'd, before the subject ended,
"Wilson indeed had merited applause,
Had he brought out a pair of British daws,
Two daws—oh, Memory I how I us'd to sing,
Ere I with Blackstone imp'd my legal wing :
"Said the young Jack Daw to the old Jack Daw,
I've as much right here as thou,
We'll soon see that, said the old Jack Daw,
And he kick'd him off the cow,"

Now, as a lawyer, I'd attention draw
Unto this point: you see, the young Jack Daw
Claims rights to a location on a cow,
Which the old daw will by no means allow.
Two daws with separate rights—two daws, O heaven !
It was in 'fifty-eight or 'fifty-seven,
I paid Colenso on sufficient grounds—
'Twas Richard Daw's estate—five hundred pounds;
And now I've paid—oh, fearful oversight!
That sum to strange Daws in the Isle of Wight!
I'm off" to Bowden—where's my clerk ? I'm stunn'd,
Five hundred twice paid! Bowden must refund."

How, when the case was brought before the Court,
The Court look'd foolish, I need not report;
How Bowden look'd when he the cash surrender'd; What
joy in Shovelbottom was engender'd,
When the five hundred pounds lie saw repaid—
And how his clerk kept darkly in the shade,—
These things may be conceiv'd—I need not tell 'em :
But now I swear by parchment and by vellum,
By horse-hair wigs, stuff gowns, and law too dear,
They manage legal business strangely here !

Gabb v Colenso (Affiliation)

On June 14, 1866 Elizabeth Gabb, aged 20, gave birth to Frederick. Elizabeth was unmarried and the witness was a nurse, Mrs Jackson. Frederick died on the December 21 from convulsions attributed to teething. The undertaker who organised his burial was Edwin Colenso.

During his short life, Frederick was the centre of a judicial controversy in Geelong in July.

Elizabeth Gabb summoned Edwin Colenso, the clerk of All Saints Church, for maintenance of an illegitimate child, alleging that he was the father. The plaintiff testified that she had known Colenso for 2 years and had been initially intimate with him on October 1, 1865 and the intimacy continued until within two weeks of the child's birth. She also testified that when she told Colenso that she was pregnant he wanted her to take herbs to induce an abortion.

One of the witnesses during the court case was Samuel Colenso, a child [15 years old], examined by his father – *“I saw, about a month ago, at the Church, Mrs Cox, Mrs Gabb and the nurse. They said the child was yours. You denied it, and told them to go to court and mind what they said.....You called me from the end of the church to listen to the conversation. I saw them at our house in the evening. They brought the baby and put it in the arms of my little brother. They were drunk and dropped the baby. No bottle was sent for. Mother kept the child for a fortnight and two days.”*

The Court believed Elizabeth Gabb and Mrs Cox and made an order for 5s per week, with costs being awarded to the defendant (Colenso). The prosecuting lawyer claimed that Colenso threatened him after the case. Colenso was recalled, apologised for his behaviour and was reprimanded and advised of the consequences of repeating it.

The lawyer representing Edwin Colenso was again Thomas Charles Harwood.