

Sweeney Family History

Over from Ireland...

It has not been possible to trace the exact date of arrival of this particular branch of the Sweeney family from Ireland, but it is clear that that is where they came from because various Census documents confirm the fact.

It seems that they must have left Ireland before 1841 and they settled in Greenock. In the 1841¹ Census, Michael Sweeney, aged 26, was living with his wife Isabella, a year younger than him, their two children John, aged 7 (also born in Ireland) and Helen, aged 4. Also staying at the house was a woman called Ann Bradley, who may have been Isabella's sister. They were living on Sir Michael Street in Greenock. That area of Greenock has been completely redeveloped and nothing remains of the 19th century buildings.

In the 19th century, Greenock, which had been a fishing town, was transformed into a centre of industry. Sugar refining was a key local industry and its position on the west coast made it ideal for ships coming in from the Caribbean. 1841 was the year that the Glasgow, Paisley, and Greenock Railway opened and Greenock was linked to the towns and cities further east.



Brewer's Sugar Manufactory, Greenock

By 1851², it seems that Michael and his family were still in Sir Michael Street but he was now working as a Sugar Baker.

A decade later, in 1861³, Michael was still working in the sugar industry but the family had moved to 20 Market Street. By this time, Michael and Isabella had six children; John, James, Alice, Joseph, Hugh and Michael.

This area of central Greenock comprised densely packed, poor quality housing which was still in occupation nearly a century later.

¹ 1841 Scottish Census: Parish: Greenock St Andrews; ED: 36; Page: 6; Line: 1320

² 1851 Scottish Census: Parish: Greenock West; ED: 85; Page: 1; Line: 17; Roll: CSSCT1851_119

³ 1861 Scottish Census: Parish: Greenock Middle; ED: 20; Page: 2; Line: 18; Roll: CSSCT1861_76

At some stage in the next 6 years, the family moved east, across Scotland to Leith but at the age of about 52, in 1867, Isabella died.

In 1871⁴, the Census recorded that Michael was again working in the sugar industry. There were three or four Sugar Houses still in operation in Leith at that time⁵ but it is not known in which one Michael was working. Michael was living, with his youngest son Michael, in a house on Merrilies Close.

In 1876, Michael (senior) died. The death registration includes:

Michael Sweeney; Sugar House Labourer; Widower of Isabella Bradley

Age: 64

1876 June 4th; Place of death: Leith General Hospital

Residence: King Street, Leith

Names of parents: John Sweeney (deceased) and Margaret McDade (deceased)

Cause of death: Burns, fractures and dislocation

Name and location of informant; Michael Sweeney, Son; Yardheads, Leith

It is not clear whether the “burns, fractures and dislocation” occurred while Michael was at work, but the likelihood must be high as it was a dangerous industry in which to work.



Leith Hospital

⁴ 1871 Scottish Census; Parish: *Leith South*; ED: 18; Page: 12; Line: 15; Roll: CSSCT1871_169

⁵ <http://www.mawer.clara.net/loc-edinleith.html>

Michael and Isabella had six children:

- John Sweeney b1837
- James Sweeney b1840
- Alice Sweeney b1844
- Joseph Sweeney b1848
- Hugh Sweeney b1850
- Michael Sweeney b1855

From Scotland to England

Joseph Sweeney was born in Greenock sometime around 1848. When his parents moved to Leith, Joseph went with them and by 1871⁶, he had married Catherine Sharp. Joseph was working as a Cooper, making barrels and at that stage, Catherine and he already had a baby boy, also called Joseph, born on 27th Dec 1869. That little boy died in 1876.

In 1871, Joseph's brother Hugh was staying with them at 4 Anderson Place in Leith.

At the time of the Census in 1871, Catherine was about 8 months pregnant, for in May of that year, she gave birth to her second son, Charles Sharp Sweeney.

Sometime around 1879 or 1880, Joseph and Catherine moved to live in the East End of London.

The 1881 Census detailed the family as follows:

<i>Joseph Sweeney</i>	33	<i>Drywork Cooper</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Catherine Sweeney</i>	31		<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Charles Sweeney</i>	10	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Michael Sweeney</i>	6	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Margaret Sweeney</i>	3		<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Joseph Sweeney</i>	6 mths		<i>Canning Town, Essex</i>
<i>Hugh Sweeney (brother)</i>	34	<i>Sugar Baker</i>	<i>Scotland</i>

Joseph was working as a Cooper, making barrels and his brother Hugh, having worked in the Sugar industry in Scotland, was still working as a Sugar Baker. There were already some Sugar Refiners in the area in the early 19th century and they were joined by Henry Tate in 1877 and Abram Lyle in 1881, whose companies merged in 1921 to form Tate & Lyle. It is not clear whether Joseph was making barrels for the refineries.

A decade on, in 1891, Joseph and his family had moved to 2 Barnwood Road, East Ham. The Census read as follows:

<i>Joseph Sweeney</i>	<i>Head</i>	40	<i>Cooper</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Catherine Sweeney</i>	<i>Wife</i>	38		<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Charles Sweeney</i>	<i>Son</i>	19	<i>?/Labourer</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Michael Sweeney</i>	<i>Son</i>	15	<i>Errand Boy</i>	<i>Scotland</i>
<i>Margaret Sweeney</i>	<i>Dau</i>	13	<i>Scholar</i>	<i>Scotland</i>

⁶ 1871 Scottish Census: Parish: Leith South; ED: 16; Page: 3; Line: 9; Roll: CSSCT1871_169

The next entry on the Census is for Joseph's brother Hugh and his family who, it seems, may well have been sharing the same house. In total, the Census suggests that there may have been 14 people in the house on Barnwood Road!

Joseph died some 8 years later in 1899⁷ but not, it would seem, before fathering one more child, a daughter born in 1892 called Isabella.

Charles Sharp Sweeney

Charles Sharp Sweeney was born in Scotland in 1871 and was, quite clearly, named after his mother, Catherine Sharp. However, as noted earlier, before he was 10 years old, the family had moved south to work in the East End of London, probably because of the links with the Sugar refining business in which his father and uncle had worked.

In 1881, he was living with his parents in Florence Street, West Ham and again, a decade later, with them in Barnwood Road.

However, by 1901, Charles had married and was living with his wife's parents in Hayday Road, Canning Town, less than half a mile away.

Charles married Elizabeth Annie Wooding in 1897⁸. The Wooding family had moved to the West Ham area some years earlier from Maldon in Essex and John Wooding, Elizabeth's father, worked as a Barge Waterman. I might be that his father was, himself, a sailor and the 1851 Census clearly has a young man called John Wooding, from Maldon, as an apprentice on board a coaster moored in the Medway on the night of the Census.



Inaugural run of an electric tram in West Ham 1905

⁷ FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915; Vol 4a; Page 64

⁸ FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915; Vol 4a; Page 468

Returning to the Sweeneys, by 1911⁹, Charles and Elizabeth had moved down the road, literally, and set up home at 86 Hayday Road. They had four children:

- Charles Joseph Sweeney b 1901
- Eva Maud Sweeney b 1902
- Daisy Sweeney b 1903
- Anita Isabel Sweeney b 1907

However, close inspection of the next entry on the Census reveals that John and Amelia Wooding were now sharing this house as well! John was now a Shore Boatswain with a Timber company, which, it appears, was some sort of Foreman, overseeing work in the docks. In 1911, Charles was working as a Stationary Engineman. Whether that was on the docks or in the Sugar Refinery (or, of course, both), is not known.

Charles Sharp Sweeney lived moved to live south of the Thames at some stage before 1915, when he was registered in the Electoral Register as living in Charlton¹⁰. It is not known where he was working at this stage, whether it was at his former employment, presumably north of the River, or somewhere new on the south bank. As 'the crow flies' the distance from the previous house in Canning Town is rather less than 2 miles. However, because of the need to cross the river, the distance is rather more like 5 miles, using either the Blackwall Tunnel or the Woolwich Ferry.



Lewisham High Street 1910

Charles lived south of the river for the rest of his life, having moved again in 1922¹¹ to 17 MacArthur Terrace, Charlton Park Road, Greenwich. This was a house that was to be occupied by the family for decades to come because after Charles died in 1949, his daughter Anita, together with her husband John, moved there to share it with her mother Elizabeth. Elizabeth died in 1966.

⁹ 1911 Census; Class: RG14; Piece: 9508; Schedule Number: 90

¹⁰ London, England, Electoral Register 1915

¹¹ London Electoral Register 1922

Charles Joseph Sweeney b 1901

Charles Joseph Sweeney was the oldest child of Charles and Elizabeth and the first of a generation to be born in the 20th Century. He was born in West Ham on 18 August 1901¹². As noted earlier, his family was living in Hayday Road in a house that was being shared with his mother's parents and family.

By 1911, the family had moved to the other end of the road but were still sharing the accommodation.

It is not known where Charles first went to school but it is to be assumed that it was in west Ham. However for senior school, Charles attended The Roan School in Greenwich. This is witnessed by the fact that he won a prize while there. Had the family already moved south of the River or did Charles commute for a while? It is not possible to tell, but the family was definitely living in Greenwich by 1915 when Charles was 15.

The Roan School occupied purpose-built premises in Eastney Street in Greenwich but was originally founded in 1677 through a charitable endowment by John Roan, Yeoman of Harriers to King Charles I, who left a substantial amount in his Will:

"to bring up so many poor town-born children of Greenwich at school, that is to reading, writing, and cyphering, and each of them forty shillings *per annum* towards their clothing until each of them shall accomplish the age of fifteen years. The said poor children shall wear on their upper garment the cognisance or crest of me, John Roan."

In 1923¹³, the first year in which he would have been registered to vote, Charles was still living with his parents in MacArthur Terrace off the Charlton Road.

In 1926¹⁴, at the age of 25, Charles married Jessica Parr. Jess, as she was always known in the family, came from Greenwich and had been working, some fifteen years earlier, as a shop assistant in a shoe and boot shop¹⁵.

It appears that after their marriage, Charles and Jess set up home in Knighton Park Road, Lewisham

Charles made his career in The Land Registry. The Land Registry was a function set up in the late 19th Century but one which came into its own in the mid-20th Century as the ownership of land, and particularly of houses, became commonplace.

In 1930, Charles was noted in The London Gazette as being:

"Land Registry: Assistant Superintendent (Grade II)"

¹² FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915; Vol 4a; Page 200

¹³ London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965

¹⁴ England & Wales, Marriage Index, 1916-2005; Vol 1d; Page 2739

¹⁵ 1911 England Census; Class: RG14; Piece: 2688

He spent his entire working life there and was acknowledged by the Crown in that in 1952, he was awarded the MBE and then in 1964, the London Gazette recorded the award of an OBE to Charles as follows:

Charles Joseph SWEENEY, Esq., M.B.E., Chief Superintendent, Plans Branch, Land Registry.

Charles published a couple of articles in his lifetime including:

- *'The Ordnance Survey and land registration', C. J. Sweeney and J. A. Simpson Geographical Journal, 133, 1 (1967)*
- *Plans and surveys for land registration in England and Wales. Paper read at a conference of Commonwealth Survey Officers held at Cambridge in August 1959; publisher: Land surveying and mining surveying 92/5 (November 1959), 244-248.
Lt Col A W Pritchard and C J Sweeney*

Some three years after their marriage, Jess and Charles had their only child, Colin Charles Michael Sweeney¹⁶, known to his parents as Colin and to the rest of the world as Mike. The family was living in Knighton Park Road, Sydenham, a house that was, once again, being shared with another family.

In 1932 Charles and Jess moved to Adamsrill Road in the Forest Hill area of Lewisham. Family stories tell of the family moving further from London and living in the Sidcup area during the War. At some stage, probably in the 1950s, and after Mike had left home, Jess and Charles moved to Park Avenue, Orpington, the home that they occupied until they died some 30 years later.



The back garden at 42 Park Avenue, Orpington

¹⁶ England & Wales, Birth Index, 1916-2005; Vol 1d; Page 1246