

## Alfred Thomas and Alfred John Penney – Prominent Citizens of Dartford

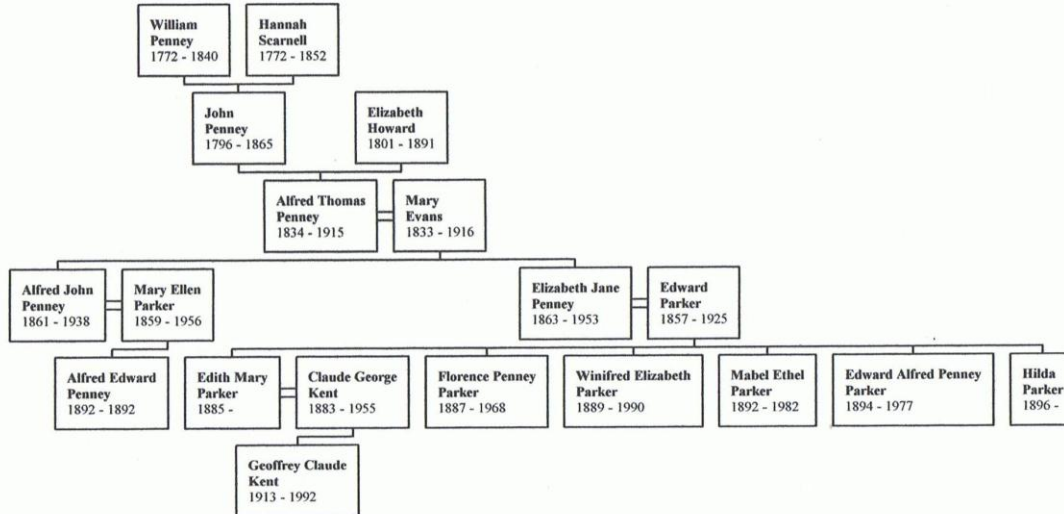
This article is about Alfred Thomas Penney (1834-1915) and his son Alfred John Penney (1861-1938). Both were successful businessmen who played a significant role in Dartford’s civic life.

Alfred Thomas Penney was born in 1834 in Sheerness, on the Isle of Sheppey. He was the sixth of ten children born to John and Elizabeth Penney. John was a shipwright, who later became an “Inspector of shipwrights”. This was a junior management job grade, the first step in a salaried scale. John worked at the Royal Naval Shipyard at Sheerness.

The 1851 census shows that John and his family were living at Rose Street, Sheerness. The household consisted of John Penney aged 55, a shipwright, his wife Elizabeth (49) and children Hannah (20), Walter (18, a shipwright apprentice), Alfred (16, a journeyman grocer), Frederick (14), Amos (12), Jane (9) and Sarah (6). Also living at the address was Elizabeth Howard (72), the widowed mother of Elizabeth Penney.

In 1860 Alfred married Mary Evans at St Paul’s, Deptford. He was aged 25, a grocer. She was 26, born in Ringmer, Sussex, the daughter of a farmer. The marriage register shows that she was unable to sign her name, being illiterate. By 1861 they were living in Lowfield Street, Dartford. Later that year their son, Alfred John was born, followed by a daughter, Elizabeth Jane in 1863. They had another four children who died in infancy<sup>1</sup>.

*Hourglass Tree of Alfred Thomas Penney*



(a more detailed family tree may be found in the “penney42” database on RootsWeb’s WorldConnect Project website)

In 1867, Alfred opened his own store at 44 High Street, Dartford. It was known as “The Tea Pot Shop” as there was a teapot sign outside. Apparently, Alfred gave a brown teapot to each of his customers on the Saturday of the opening week<sup>2</sup>. The shop building no longer exists but was next to the Bull and George Inn, the site of which is now occupied by Boots. The 1871 census shows Alfred, aged 36, a grocer employing one man, living at 44 High St, with his wife Mary (38), his children Alfred (9) and Elizabeth (7) and niece Elizabeth Thomas (19, a daughter of Alfred’s sister Elizabeth).

Alfred opened a branch shop in Lowfield Street and in 1875 acquired premises at 47 High St, Dartford. This site (now occupied by a later building that houses the shop Iceland) became the headquarters of his grocery chain. A warehouse here was used to supply his other shops and allowed goods to be bought in bulk, thus saving money. In 1881, Alfred (46), Mary (48), Alfred (19, an assistant grocer), Elizabeth Penney (17) were living at 47 High St. Also listed at the address were Alfred's niece Elizabeth Thomas (29), five grocer's shopmen and a servant. One of the shopmen was Edward Parker, aged 23 who was born in Teignmouth, Devon. In 1884 he married his employer's daughter, Elizabeth Jane Penney at Holy Trinity Church, Dartford. In 1885, Alfred John Penney (aged 23) married Mary Ellen Parker (25), who was Edward's younger sister.

Alfred Thomas Penney retired from active participation in the grocery business in 1890 when aged 56. His son Alfred John Penney and son-in-law Edward Parker took over and the business was renamed Penney, Son and Parker. In the 1891 census, Alfred Thomas and Mary (plus a servant) are shown living at "Westcroft", West Hill, Dartford. This house no longer exists, the site is now occupied by the Dartford West Health Centre. Alfred John Penney (29, a grocer), his wife Mary (31), two servants, a grocer's apprentice and six grocer's assistants were living at 47 High St. Edward (33) and Elizabeth (27) Parker were living at 3 Tower Road with their children Edith (6), Florence (4) and Winifred (2).

Alfred Thomas Penney performed various public roles in Dartford during his life. He filled the office of overseer (of the poor) as far back as 1875. He was a member of Dartford Board of Guardians for sixteen years, a member of the Local Board of Health and churchwarden at Holy Trinity from 1891 to 95.



Alfred Thomas Penney  
(from Local Studies Collection of Dartford Library)

Alfred John and Mary had a son called Alfred Edward Penney in 1892. Sadly he died aged 9 weeks. They did not have any other children<sup>1</sup>.

By 1900 Penney, Son & Parker had five shops in Dartford (47 High St, 44 High St, 105 Lowfield St, 36 East Hill and 99 Overy St). They also had shops in Bexleyheath, Bexley, Northfleet and Farningham. Alfred John Penney and Edward Parker decided to convert the business into a public company and issued a prospectus in November 1900 (a copy of which is in Dartford Library). It says that the share capital is to be £35,000 in £1 shares, 10,000 of which were allocated (fully paid up) to the vendors (Alfred and Edward), who would be managing directors (on a salary of £250 pa) after the flotation of the company was complete. The average yearly profit for the years 1898, 1899 and 1900 is stated to be £3,098. Applications to buy 22,000 shares at £1 each were invited. The flotation was successful and a shop in South Darenth was added to the chain in 1902.

**PENNEY, SON & PARKER,**  
**GROCERS, PROVISION, WINE, SPIRIT,**  
**AND BOTTLED BEER MERCHANTS,**  
**47, HIGH STREET, DARTFORD.**

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*Sole Proprietors of the Celebrated Brand of*  
**PENGULA CEYLON TEA,**  
IN  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb.,  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb. AND 1 lb., LEAD PACKETS, AT  
**1/8 1/10 and 2/- per lb.**  
*Can also be obtained of our Agents in the surrounding Towns and Villages.*

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NOTED STORES FOR THE FINEST  
**ENGLISH CHEESE, STILTON,**  
*And all Kinds of FOREIGN CHEESES.*

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**HARRIS'S WILTSHIRE HAMS, BACON AND BATH CHAPS.**  
**FINEST SELECTION OF IRISH BACON & HAMS.**

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**AUSTRALIAN BUTTER,**  
*Now arriving in splendid Condition, which we are offering at 1s. per lb.*

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**Branches : 44, HIGH ST., 107, LOWFIELD ST., 36, EAST HILL,**  
**AND 93, OVERY STREET.**

Advert from 1897  
(from Local Studies Collection of Dartford Library)

In 1901, Alfred Thomas and Mary Penney were still living at "Westcroft", West Hill. Alfred John and Mary Penney had moved to "Homewood", Miskin Road. This was one of the most desirable parts of Dartford. Edward and Elizabeth Jane Parker were living at "Ashleigh", Miskin Road with their children Florence (14), Winifred (12), Mabel (9), Edward (7) and Hilda (4). These houses in Miskin Road no longer exist.

The Penneys and Parkers were living at the same addresses in 1911. The census record shows that the houses that they lived in were large – with 9 or 10 rooms. Two additional Parker children are listed, namely Kathleen Isobel (aged 8) and Gerald Howard Parker (aged 6).

Alfred Thomas Penney died in 1915 aged 80. His funeral service was attended by a large congregation<sup>2</sup> and he was buried in East Hill Cemetery. Alfred's wife Mary died the following year. Their gravestone reads as follows.

*In / loving memory of / ALFRED THOMAS PENNEY, / who entered his rest June 20<sup>th</sup> 1915 / aged 80 years / Also of MARY PENNEY / the beloved wife of the above / who entered her rest October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1916 / aged 83 years / "Looking for that blessed hope, and the / glorious appearance of the Great God, and / our saviour, Jesus Christ." / Titus 2.13*

Probate on Alfred's estate, £12,187 (equivalent to about £4 million now<sup>3</sup>) was issued to Alfred John Penney and Edward Parker.

Alfred John Penney paid for the eight bells in Holy Trinity Church, Dartford to be recast in memory of his parents. The largest bell is inscribed

*MEARS & STAINBANK REMADE US IN THE YEAR 1917 AS THE GIFT OF  
ALFRED JOHN PENNEY CHURCHWARDEN IN LOVING MEMORY OF HIS  
PARENTS ALFRED THOMAS & MARY PENNEY*



Penney, Son & Parker shop at 47 High St, date and people unknown  
(from Dartford Borough Museum)

Edward Parker retired in 1924 and moved to Bexhill with his family. He died in 1925 at Hellingly Mental Asylum, E Sussex aged 67 and is buried in East Hill Cemetery in the grave next to Alfred Thomas Penney.

Alfred John Penney surpassed his father in the number of public roles that he performed. He was a member of Dartford Urban District Council 1900-31 and its chairman 1907-9<sup>4</sup>. He became a member of Kent County Council in 1909 and an Alderman in 1927. He was

appointed as a Justice of the Peace in 1913. He was also a churchwarden at Holy Trinity 1906-18 and sat on numerous local boards and committees. Alfred's record of public service was impressive. The climax of his civic career was appointment as the first mayor of the Borough of Dartford when it was granted a charter in 1933. The following picture shows Alfred and his wife Mary during the ceremonials for this event.



Mary Ellen and Alfred John Penney  
(from Dartford Further Historical Notes by S K Keyes, 1938)

Alfred John died in 1938 and was buried in East Hill Cemetery. The Dartford Chronicle<sup>5</sup>, reporting his death, referred to "the character, example and devoted public service of a Christian gentleman and a great Dartfordian." A large number of people attended his funeral and the Dartford Chronicle printed tributes to Alfred from several prominent citizens of Kent. His grave is inscribed

*In loving memory of / ALFRED JOHN PENNEY, J.P.C.C. / Charter Mayor / of Dartford 13<sup>th</sup> Sept 1933 / died 31<sup>st</sup> May 1938, aged 77 years. / The Lord is my shepherd Psalm XXIII / He giveth his beloved sleep Psalm CXXVII / Also / ALFRED EDWARD PENNEY / died 14<sup>th</sup> July 1892 / aged 9 weeks / Also MARY ELLEN PENNEY / beloved wife of the above / died 24<sup>th</sup> March 1956, aged 96 years. / At rest*

Probate on Alfred's estate, total value £33,330 (equivalent to about £6 million now<sup>3</sup>) was granted to his nephew Edward Alfred Penney Parker, dental surgeon, and Claude George Kent (who married Alfred's niece Edith Mary Parker in 1912), corporation surveyor.

Penney, Son and Parker continued to trade until the 1950s. The shop building at 47 High St was demolished c 1959 and the site redeveloped.

If you have any further information about the lives or families of Alfred Thomas Penney, Alfred John Penney or Edward Parker, please contact me on [PhilT42LQS@Yahoo.co.uk](mailto:PhilT42LQS@Yahoo.co.uk)

Philip Taylor © 2011

## References

- 1 This information is from the 1911 census return.
- 2 Obituary of Mr A. T. Penney, Dartford Chronicle 25 June 1915.
- 3 Calculated with respect to average earnings using the website “Measuring Worth”  
[www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/)
- 4 Dartford Further Historical Notes by S K Keyes, 1938
- 5 Dartford Chronicle 3 June 1938

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