

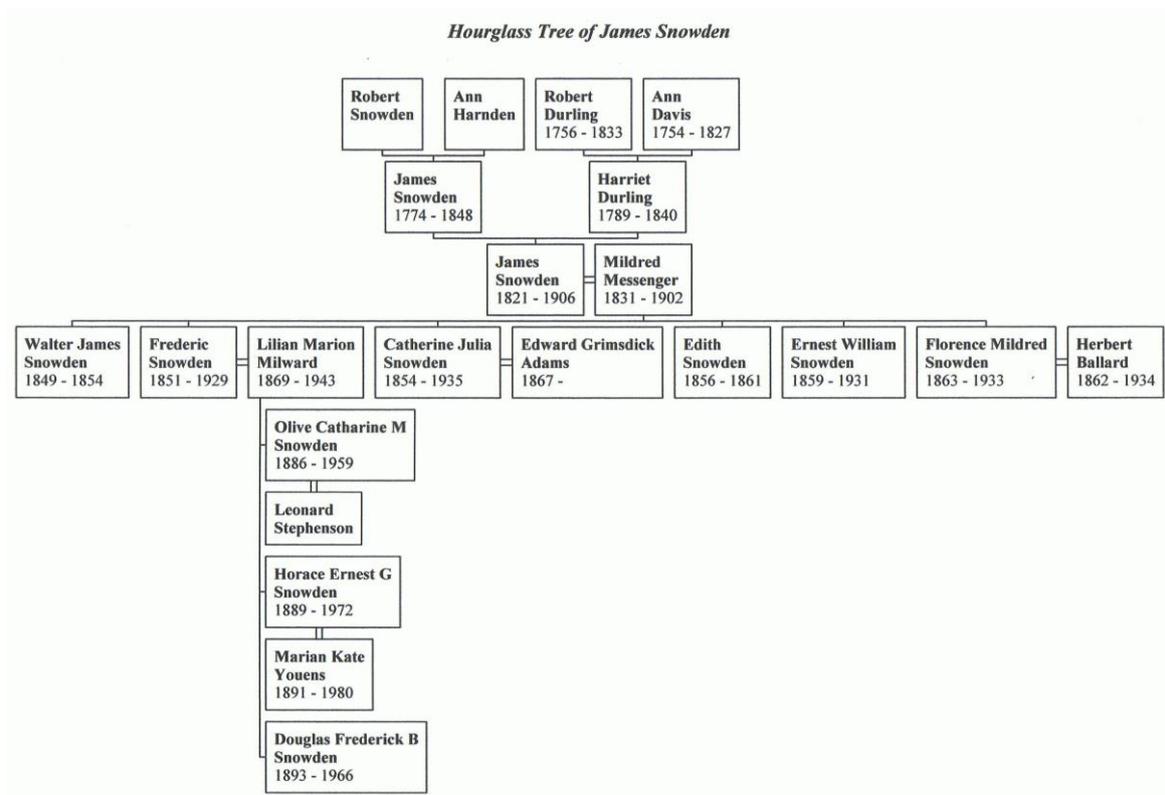
James Snowden (1821-1906) : Engineer and Printer

James Snowden was one of eight children (six boys and two girls) born in Dartford to James and Harriet Snowden. He was baptised on February 6th 1821 at Holy Trinity Church, Dartford. At this time children were usually baptised soon after their birth, so he was probably born in January 1821.

Richard Trevithick, a famous engineer, came to Dartford in 1832 to work for John Hall, who had founded an engineering company at Dartford in 1785. In 1833, Trevithick died in Dartford. There is evidence¹ that James Snowden knew Richard Trevithick and attended his funeral. By the time of John Hall's death in 1836, he had built up a substantial business employing about 300 people². The firm was left to his sons John Hall junior (1792-1850) and Edward Hall (1799-1875). It was renamed J & E Hall and continued to do mixed engineering work, making a variety of products, mainly machinery for other industries. James joined the Hall's company in 1837, aged 16.

Harriet, James's mother died in 1840, aged 50. The 1841 census shows James Snowden senior, a saddler, living in High Street, Dartford with his children Martha, William, Elizabeth, James (an apprentice engineer), Charles, Arthur and Joseph.

In 1848, James Snowden married Mildred Messenger at St Bride's Church, Fleet Street, London. He was aged 27, an engineering draughtsman. She was aged 17, born in Dartford, the daughter of an inn keeper. They went on to have six children, Walter James (1849-54), Frederic (1851-1929), Catherine Julia (1854-1935), Edith (1856-61), Ernest William (1859-1931) and Florence Mildred (1863-1933).



James Snowden senior died in 1848, six months after his son James's marriage. He had made a will in 1847, naming his son-in-law William Edward Manby (the husband of his daughter Elizabeth

Snowden) as an executor. James senior made another will in 1848, naming Emery Alexander Quait (a brother of Mary Emery Quait, who was married to James's son William), his sister-in-law Mary Durling and James Snowden junior as executors. William Edward Manby disputed the validity of the new will after the death of James Snowden senior. The case was heard by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. Some of the case papers are held by the National Archives³. Although they do not state the outcome of the case, it seems that the second will was upheld. It left one eighth of his estate to each of his eight surviving children, with Elizabeth's share held in trust.

In 1851, James was living in Overy Street, Dartford with his wife Mildred (20), son Walter (1) and a servant. Walter died in 1854 aged 5. James Snowden continued to work for J&E Hall's and he also founded a stationery business at 64 High Street, Dartford in 1861⁴. The census that year shows James (39, an engineering draughtsman), Mildred (30, an agent for fancy goods), Frederic (9), Kate (7), Edith (5) and William (3) Snowden living in Dartford High Street. Edith died later in 1861.



James Snowden⁵

The 1871 census lists James, aged 50, an engineering draughtsman with Mildred (40, a general stationer), Frederic (19, a printer employing 2 boys), Catherine (17, a shop assistant), William (12) and Florence (7). The Snowden family were the first printers of a newspaper called the West Kent Advertiser, which began in 1876 and James later became its proprietor⁶. The advert below was printed in the Dartford Chronicle in 1879.

NOTICE.
To Tradesmen, Manufacturers,
Merchants, and others.

J. SNOWDEN,
Having Extensive and Improved
Machinery, combined with Steam
Power, Practical Experience, and a
large selection of New and Elegant
Type, is prepared to execute every
description of

PRINTING
Letter-press, Copper-plate & Litho

PRINTING

In the best manner, on the shortest notice, and
AT REASONABLE PRICES
ESTIMATES FURNISHED.

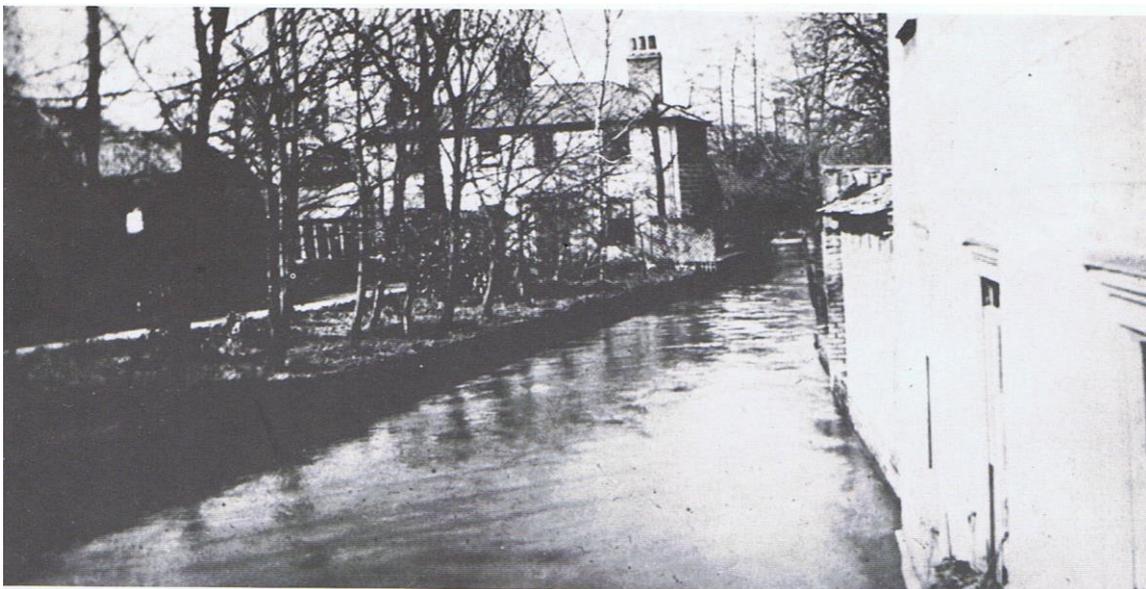
Dartford Steam Printing Works,
DARTFORD, KENT

J & E Hall's had been in decline since about 1850, with ageing management and equipment. After Edward Hall died in 1875, the business marked time until Everard Hesketh (1854-1942) joined in 1878. Harry Miller² recounts

So Everard Hesketh entered the drawing office at Dartford Ironworks. There were, he said, one and a half draughtsmen in the department besides himself! The one was James Snowden, who had joined the firm in 1837, risen to be chief draughtsman and was for a time young Hesketh's boss and mentor; by the time he retired in 1880, their relative status had been reversed. The "half" draughtsman was Burdett, competent in his job despite having only one arm.

James was 59 when he retired and had worked for J & E Halls for 43 years. Everard Hesketh went on to revitalise the firm and return it to being a thriving business.

By 1881, James had moved to Bridge Villa. This house was in Dartford on the west bank of the River Darent, near where the Hanau Bridge now crosses it. The census that year lists James Snowden as an engineer. Also in the household were his wife Mildred (49) and their children Frederic (29, a type printer), Catherine (27), Ernest (22, a type printer) and Florence (17), plus a general servant.



Bridge Villa⁷

Frederic Snowden married Lilian Marion Milward in 1885. His wife was a daughter of the family that lived at what is now known as Acacia Hall in Dartford. They went on to have three children; Olive (b1886), Horace (b1889) and Douglas (1893). As far as I know, these were the only grandchildren of James and Mildred. Their daughter Catherine Snowden married Edward Grimsdick Adams in 1888.

In May 1890, there was a major fire in Dartford. It was described by the Dartford Chronicle⁸ as follows

On Monday evening a fire occurred in High Street by which several shops were reduced to a heap of ruins in a very short time. The business premises referred to are those of Mr James Snowden, printer, Mr Hawes, ironmonger and oil merchant and Mr Snowden, saddler. The fire originated after nine o'clock in Mr Hawes' back premises. One of the little girls was getting a lamp for the purpose of putting the other children to bed, but somehow the child got the vessel upset, and oil set the floor alight.

The article describes efforts to fight the fire by Dartford and other fire brigades. However, the shops at 60, 62 and 64 High Street (which were all insured) were destroyed.

Mr Snowden has lost all his valuable printing job plant, but we are glad to say the newspaper office was not seriously impaired, and the plant is all intact. Mr Snowden will no doubt suffer from the loss of business during the erection of fresh premises.

The Royal Exchange beerhouse, which was next to James's premises at 64 High Street, was damaged but survived. The photo⁷ below shows the scene after the fire. The Royal Exchange is the shop now occupied by "Lucky Nails". The site of 64 High Street is now occupied by "Subway".



The "Mr Snowden, saddler", referred to was Charles Snowden (1822-1904), brother of James. He took over his father's business with his brother William (b1817), who died in 1864 after a road accident⁹. Charles retired after the fire.

The 1891 census shows James Snowden aged 70, a printer and stationer living at Bridge Villa with Mildred (60), Ernest (32, a printer and stationer) and Florence (27), plus a domestic servant. Florence married Herbert Ballard, a civil engineer, in 1893.

In 1901, the household at Bridge Villa was James Snowden (81, a printer and stationer), his wife Mildred (69) and their children Catherine (45) and Ernest (41, a printer and stationer) with a domestic servant.

Mildred Snowden died in 1902 aged 70. James died four years later aged 84. They were buried in East Hill Cemetery. The cemetery records give the address of both as 6 Highfield Road, Dartford. This house no longer exists, the site (on the south side of the junction with Spring Vale) is now a car park. Mildred and James's grave is inscribed

In loving memory of / MILDRED, / the beloved wife of / JAMES SNOWDEN, / died March 31st 1902, / aged 70 years / Also WALTER JAMES, / died Octr 24th 1854, aged 5 years / and EDITH, / died Sept 24th 1861, aged 4 years, / children of the above. / Also the above / JAMES SNOWDEN / died April 11th 1906, aged 84 years / Also ERNEST WILLIAM SNOWDEN, / passed peacefully away June 16th 1931, aged 72 years. / Also of / CATHERINE JULIA ADAMS, / died November 1st 1935, / aged 81 years.



A brief item in the West Kent Advertiser¹⁰ reported James's death, saying "Mr James Snowden was a widely read man, with a mind stored with various subjects, and his reminiscences of old Dartford were most interesting." Probate on the estate of James Snowden was issued to his sons Frederic and Ernest, printers. The value was £3,551, which is equivalent to about £1.5M now¹¹. Frederic and Ernest continued to run the printing and stationery business.

Frederic died in 1929 aged 77. I have paperwork dated May 1931 from "Snowden Brothers" on notepaper headed "West Kent" Printing Works, 62 & 64 High Street, Dartford. Ernest died in June 1931 aged 72. The firm is not listed in a 1932 directory of Dartford, so seems to have closed down soon after Ernest's death



Snowden Brothers, 62-64 High Street, Dartford⁷

James Snowden was not the only one in his family who had a successful life. His brother Arthur (born in 1828), emigrated to Australia, where he became mayor of Melbourne (three times!) and then a member of the Legislative Assembly¹². Another brother, Joseph (1831-1908), when aged 15 was employed by a goldsmith in London. He took over the business twelve years later and ran it for 43 years, becoming a wealthy man and a member of the City of London Court of Common Council. On his death, he left £86,151, which is equivalent to about £35M now⁹.

A family tree of James Snowden can be found in the “snowden42” database on RootsWeb’s WorldConnect Project website. If you have any further information about James Snowden or his family, please contact me on PhilT42LQS@Yahoo.co.uk

Philip Taylor © 2013

References

1. *Grave Concern – Where exactly is last resting place of Richard Trevithick? – Part 2*, Mike Still, Dartford Historical & Antiquarian Newsletter (2005).
2. *Halls of Dartford 1785-1985*, Harry Miller (1985).
3. *Quait and Snowden v Manby Testator or intestate: Snowden, James of Dartford, Kent, gentleman*, PROB 37/1481 at The National Archives

4. *Mr Frederick Snowden*, Dartford Chronicle, 5 July 1929.
5. Photo from *J & E Hall Ltd 1785-1935*, E. Hesketh (1935).
6. *Death of Mr J Snowden*, Dartford Chronicle, 17 April 1906.
7. Photo from Dartford Library collection.
8. *Great Fire at Dartford*, Dartford Chronicle, 30 May 1890.
9. *William Snowden – saddler of Dartford*, notes by Raymond Snowden (1985), in Dartford Library local history folder on Snowden family.
10. *Death of Mr J Snowden*, West Kent Advertiser, 14 April 1906.
11. Calculated by comparison with average earnings, using the website <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/>
12. *The Late Mr Joseph Snowden*, newspaper (not Dartford Chronicle) clipping in Dartford Library Local Studies collection, 18 Sep 1908.