

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2022**

## **2224 Resilience, Bravery and Love**

**by Jody Taylor**

## Resilience, Bravery and Love.

Where did I come from? As a child, I would have answered that I came from Australia. My mother, her mother and all the relatives that I knew were born in Australia, so I figured that's where I came from. To properly answer the question, let's go back to my great-great grandfather Fred Suley and his young love Elizabeth, and their determination to be together and subsequent journey to Australia. Their story shows the resilience, independence, strong work ethic, bravery, faith and strength of spirit which lives on through the Suley descendants today.

Fred Suley was born on 22 February 1862, the seventh child, to publican and farmer George Suley (1829-1920) and Ann Baxter (1825-1908) in Sutton Bridge, Lincolnshire, England.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Frances Wastling was the first child born to James Wastling (1840-1895), a cow keeper, and Mary Elizabeth Moate (1842-1916) on 1 February 1870 in Beverley, Yorkshire, England.<sup>2</sup>

It was around 1886 when Fred and Elizabeth met, aged approximately 24 and 16 respectively. It is unknown the circumstances of their meeting, but in time they became sweethearts, with her parents forbidding the relationship.<sup>3</sup> The young couple took matters into their own hands, deciding that the only way for them to be together was to travel to the other side of the world, choosing Australia as their destination.<sup>4</sup>

In late 1886, Elizabeth told her parents that she was going to visit a nearby aunt, and they were never to see her again.<sup>5</sup> The young couple had arranged that Elizabeth was to go on ahead, alone, to Australia. She made her way to London, falsely stating her age as 18 and boarded the British India steamship *Duke of Sutherland*, leaving England on 1 November 1886 and disembarking at Brisbane, Australia on 30 December 1886.<sup>6</sup>

She didn't stay in Brisbane long and headed to Rockhampton a few weeks later.<sup>7</sup> She found work at a boarding house and whilst there had a visit from the police enquiring if she was Elizabeth Wastling.<sup>8</sup> The police told her that her parents were worried for her welfare and

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<sup>1</sup> Birth certificate of Fred Suley, born 22 February 1862, General Register Office, UK, 1862, M Quarter in Holbeach, Volume 07A, pg. 329, Ancestry.com; Census record for George Suley, Census of England and Wales, 1911, Lincolnshire, Cowbit, Spalding, ED 1, Folio 13, pg. 19, Ancestry.com.

<sup>2</sup> Birth certificate of Elizabeth Frances Wastling, born 1 February 1870, General Register Office, UK, 1870, M Quarter in Beverley, Volume 09D, pg. 102; Census record for James Wastling, 1871 England Census, Yorkshire, Beverley Parks, ED 41, Folio 151, pg. 1, Ancestry.com.

<sup>3</sup> Personal recollection of Alma Evelyn Suley, c 1994, original held by Dave Mackay.

<sup>4</sup> Personal recollection of Mary Rita nee Suley, interview by author, Toowoomba, Queensland, 24 April 2022, original held by author.

<sup>5</sup> Personal recollection of Alma Evelyn Walker nee Suley.

<sup>6</sup> Passenger list of Duke of Sutherland record for Elizabeth Frances Wastling, Queensland State Archives, Assisted immigration 1848-1912, Series S13086, pg. 422.

<sup>7</sup> Personal recollection of Alma Evelyn Walker nee Suley.

<sup>8</sup> Personal recollection of Rosemarie (Hazel) Rose, c 1996, original held by Dave Mackay.

<sup>9</sup> Personal recollection of Rosemarie (Hazel) Rose.

wanted her to return to England, but Elizabeth refused to go.<sup>9</sup> She remained steadfast that Fred would meet her in Australia as planned.

Meanwhile, back in England, Fred booked his passage on the *Oriana*, which set sail on 6 July 1887.<sup>10</sup> You could only wonder how confident he was feeling when leaving London as it had been many months since they had last seen each other. He disembarked at Maryborough, Australia on 14 October 1887 before making his way to Brisbane.<sup>11</sup>

Elizabeth was indeed still waiting for him, and the couple reunited. They moved to Dulacca, a small Queensland town, approximately 400 kilometres west of Brisbane.<sup>12</sup> Fred became a labourer for the railways and Elizabeth worked as a domestic servant.<sup>13</sup> On 19 August 1889, already with their first child James Ernest, they married in Dulacca.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, the family moved to Toowoomba, settling in Sir Street, adding another nine children to the growing family.<sup>15</sup> In 1907 Fred purchased 320 acres at Maida Hill, near the township of Bell on the Darling Downs, Queensland.<sup>16</sup> His eldest child, James Ernest (Ern), took up the lease on the land and started a dairy farm, naming it *Peak Hill* after the hamlet where Fred's parents lived in Lincolnshire, England.<sup>17</sup> Fred and Elizabeth moved to the Greenmount railway reserve at Nobby where another two children were born, taking the number of children born to 12.<sup>18</sup>

After almost 22 years working for the railway, Fred resigned in 1910.<sup>19</sup> A few years later in 1914, Ern enlisted to fight in the Great War, leaving Fred to take over the lease of *Peak Hill*.<sup>20</sup> His other sons George William Frederick (Bill) and Charles Albert also enlisted and joined their elder brother in Egypt with the Light Horse Brigade.<sup>21</sup> Now in his 50's, the running of a dairy

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<sup>10</sup> Passenger list of *Oriana* record for Fred Suley, Queensland State Archives, Registers of Immigrant Ship's Arrivals, Series ID 13086, Roll: M471.

<sup>11</sup> Passenger list of *Oriana* record for Fred Suley.

<sup>12</sup> Personal recollection of Rosemarie (Hazel) Rose.

<sup>13</sup> Personal recollection of Rosemarie (Hazel) Rose.

<sup>14</sup> Marriage record of Fred Suley and Elizabeth Frances Wastling, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Queensland, 1889/C/1725 (index only, no image currently available); Birth record of James Ernest Suley, born 8 September 1888, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Queensland, 1910/C/2860 (index only, no image available).

<sup>15</sup> Suley Family Tree, Ancestry.com.

<sup>16</sup> 'Property Sales', *Darling Downs Gazette*, 15 June 1907, p. 8

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/179989838>.

<sup>17</sup> Australian Electoral Roll record for Fred Suley and Elizabeth Suley, Queensland, 1903 Greenmount, Darling Downs, Ancestry.com; Birth record of Ivy Hillsborough Suley, born 11 January 1909, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Queensland, 1909/C/12380 (index only, no image available); Birth record of Alma Evelyn Suley, born 23 September 1911, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Queensland, 1911/C/12620 (index only, no image available).

<sup>19</sup> Queensland railway service record for Fred Suley, Queensland State Archives, Queensland railway removals 1890-1915, Series ID 6598, Suley, F.

<sup>20</sup> Service record of James Ernest Suley, First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914-1920, National Archives of Australia, B2455, SULEY JAMES ERNEST; Australian Electoral Roll record for Fred Suley and Elizabeth Suley, Queensland, 1919 Maranoa, Dalby, Queensland, Ancestry.com.

farm would have been hard work for Fred, but for those that stayed behind they did what they had to do to keep life moving.

Eighteen months after enlisting, Ern was wounded by a bullet in Gallipoli, being permanently damaged in his right eye and was discharged from service with defective vision.<sup>22</sup> He arrived home in Australia in June 1916 but instead of returning to work on the farm, he gained employment with the railway and in January 1918, he married Annie Berkley.<sup>23</sup>

Charles returned home in February 1919 with Bill following in August 1919.<sup>24</sup> It was a miracle that all three enlisted sons had come home safely. It wasn't all good news though for the family as Fred passed away from lung cancer on 9 September 1919.<sup>25</sup> Sadly, it was unlikely that Bill saw his father before his passing, as he had disembarked in Sydney only 12 days before.<sup>26</sup> Fred's last days were spent in Brisbane Mater Private Hospital, and he was laid to rest at the Drayton and Toowoomba Cemetery.<sup>27</sup>

With Ern's vision permanently impaired making him unsuitable for running the family farm, it was left to Bill to step up and take it on board, which included taking care of his mother and younger siblings.<sup>28</sup> In August 1922 Bill married Annie's sister Margaret (Tot) Berkley and they went on to have six children.<sup>29</sup> His mother Elizabeth lived with them until 1930, before moving to live with her youngest daughter Alma Walker at Porter's Gap.<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth passed away in 1955, being laid to rest alongside Fred.<sup>31</sup>

Both Fred and his wife Elizabeth are remembered by their children and grandchildren as caring, loving, and a favourite of everyone who knew them.<sup>32</sup> Their descendants are numerous

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<sup>21</sup> Service record of George William Frederick Suley, First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914-1920, National Archives of Australia, B2455, SULEY GEORGE WILLIAM FREDERICK; Service Record of Charles Albert Suley, First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914-1920, National Archives of Australia, B2455, SULEY CHARLES ALBERT.

<sup>22</sup> Service record of James Ernest Suley.

<sup>23</sup> Marriage record of James Ernest Suley and Annie Berkley, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Queensland, 1918/C/676 (index only, no image currently available); Australian Electoral Roll record for James Ernest Suley, Queensland, 1925 Maranoa, Roma, Ancestry.com.

<sup>24</sup> Service record of George William Frederick Suley; Service record of Charles Albert Suley.

<sup>25</sup> Death record of Fred Suley, died 9 September 1919, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Queensland, 1919/B/30350 (index only; no image currently available).

<sup>26</sup> Service record of George William Frederick Suley.

<sup>27</sup> Find a Grave memorial for Fred Suley, 'Frederick Suley', <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/149519174/frederick-suley>, accessed 5 September 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Marriage record of George William Frederick Suley & Margaret Berkley, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Queensland, 1922/C/2576 (index only, no image currently available); Photograph of the Suley family, 13 August 1966, original held by author.

<sup>30</sup> Australian Electoral Roll record of Elizabeth Frances Suley and Alma Evelyn Walker, Queensland, 1934 Maranoa, Dalby, Ancestry.com.

<sup>31</sup> Death record of Elizabeth Frances Suley, died 21 January 1955, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Queensland, 1955/B/6139 (index only; no image currently available); Find a Grave memorial for Elizabeth Frances Suley, 'Elizabeth Frances Wastling Suley', <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/149519175/elizabeth-frances-suley>, accessed 30 May 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Personal recollection of Mary Ward, 10 January 2000, original held by Dave Mackay.

<sup>33</sup> Suley Family Tree, Ancestry.com.

with the majority scattered throughout Queensland, right where it all started.<sup>33</sup> I am proud to be descended from a young English man and his courageous runaway sweetheart who together lay the foundations of a rich full life. This legacy is where I come from.

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