



The heirloom that found me

We can spend hours searching for elusive ancestors or family treasures, but as **Michelle Dennis** found out, sometimes we simply need to sit back and let the past come to us...

Back in 2004, I received an email out of the blue from the Aviation Cadet Museum in Arkansas, USA. The president of the museum was contacting me, having purchased a shotgun for his private collection. The gun was engraved with a name and address: 'S Davis, patent, 4 East Smithfield, London'. The gun was also dated 1826. This was very exciting for me, as Samuel Samson

Davis of 4 Upper East Smithfield, London (1780-1832) was my 4x great-grandfather.

Online tip

Michelle's family heirloom probably wouldn't have found its way to her if she hadn't put her family history online. If you put your ancestry in the public domain, you may reap the rewards later, but remember not to include details of living people without their permission.

Samuel Samson Davis was a gunlock maker at the Tower of London and lived in the Whitechapel area. I had already obtained copies of the three patents of gunlocks that he registered (Granted English Patent No 4648 in 1822 for a Combined Flint and Percussion Lock; No 5055 Safety Gun in 1824 with J G Lacey; and No 6046

Samuel Samson Davis' gun.

Two Improved Locks in 1830) while I was on a visit to London a few years earlier. I had been able to ascertain the years that Samuel lived at 4 Upper East Smithfield, London from the Sun Fire insurance policies held at Guildhall Library and from London street directories.

Samuel Samson Davis and his wife Betty née Holbrook had nine children; most were baptised at St Mary, Whitechapel. Two of their sons, Joseph Davis (1807-1884, also a gunlock maker) and Samson Davis (1818-1860, a doctor and surgeon), emigrated to Melbourne, Australia in 1852 with their young families; it is from Dr Samson Davis that I descend. Joseph became a gunlock maker on the goldfields of Castlemaine, Victoria (before becoming town clerk) and Samson joined him there as a doctor. Both brothers wrote and published books and were quite accomplished in their professions.

For many years I had been trying to find an actual gun or gunlock made by Joseph and Samson's father, Samuel Davis, and at last one had found me. The owner of the gun found my family history research on the internet (via my website www.michelledennis.com).

Find out more
Discover more about tracing family heirlooms, or what to search for, with our guide on page 38.



Name and address of patent holder on gun barrel.





The initials S D on the gun.

gun from the USA to my home in Melbourne, Australia, but after a lot of customs red tape and a special permit it was all arranged. Before long I held the workmanship of my 4x great-grandfather in my own hands.

My advice to anyone out there looking for a tangible family heirloom is you should never give up hope of actually finding something one day. Perhaps if you can't find it, it may still find you. 🐣



The gun opened up to show its firing mechanism.

com.au/genealogy.htm) and made contact in the hope of finding out more about the gun. When I was able to fill him in further, he generously offered to sell it to me.

'You don't know how much it means to me personally to get this piece of history back to the family from which it came,' he said. 'Doing all the reunions we do here (at the Aviation Cadet Museum) we bring people back together quite often, but this is the first time we've been able to reunite a gun!'

It was a tricky task to get the

Find out more

- *A Dictionary of London Gunmakers, 1350-1850* by Howard L Blackmore (ISBN: 9780714880211).
- *British Gunmakers: Volume One - London* by Nigel Brown (ISBN: 9781904057475).
- Sun Fire insurance policy records, Guildhall Library, London www.history.ac.uk/gh/fire.htm.
- London Post Office directories www.thegenealogist.co.uk and www.historicaldirectories.org.
- Copies of British patents 1617-1852 (old series) are available from the Intellectual Property Office www.ipo.gov.uk/types/patent/p-about/p-whatis/p-oldnumbers/p-oldnumbers-1617.htm. Details of patent numbers from 1852 to the present day can also be found by using the links on the left of this web page. Information about the national collection of patents held at the British Library can be found at www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpsubject/busmanlaw/ip/ppatents/patents.html.

SUSSEX RECORDS
 PBN Publications publishes all types of SUSSEX material for family historians. Also some MIDDLESEX records. Pre-1841 Census, 1841 & 1851 Census, Parish Registers, Militia Lists & LOTS MORE FOR FULL DETAILS SEE: www.pbnpublications.com Or send SAE to: PBN Publications, 24 The Avenue, Ickenham, Middlesex, UB10 8NP

BOOKBINDERS
 S. INGRAM & D. ROBINSON LTD.
 A4 SHEETS TURNED INTO A HARD BACKED BOOK
YOU PRINT IT WE'LL BIND IT
 A4 Price £35 plus p&p
 Single vols. welcome
 Full details from
 The Bindery, Carnegie Heritage, Information Centre, 342 Anlaby Road, Hull HU3 6JA or visit www.haveitbound.com

RESEARCH IN BRISTOL GLOS, SOM, WILTS
 Plus
 • Location Photography
 • Computer drawn trees from own research
Ag Lab Ancestry
 7 Holmes Grove, Henleaze, Bristol BS9 4ED UK
 Tel: 0117 9620399
 Fax: 0117 9623931
aglabgenealogy98@btinternet.com

Transcription and Translation
 Wills, probates, deeds etc;
 Rates per 100 words
 English handwriting £2.50,
 Latin £5.00,
 Scottish Testaments £5.00.
 Medieval court rolls etc; £10 per hour.
Mr BF Westcott, 14 Daisy Hill Drive, Adlington, Chorley, Lancs, PR6 9NE
 E-mail: brooke@west.co.tt

Faded Memories
 Digital Photo Restoration
 Your old and faded photographs carefully copied, backgrounds extended, creases and tears removed. Scrapes - Montages - Vignettes
 High quality at low prices
 All photographs returned unaltered.
 For free estimate telephone
 LUTON (01582) 619677

WELSH FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH
www.welshfamilyhistory.co.uk
 E mail g.howes2@tiscali.co.uk
 Tel: Greg Howes
 01558 824215

Family Trees Individually Drawn from your researched data
Newtown Design Services
 Ref: FTM
 60 Linksvale Crescent, Newtown, Worcester, WR5 1JJ, England
 website: www.newtowndesign.co.uk
 e-mail: familytrees@newtowndesign.co.uk

Your treasured photographic memories restored
 We can easily restore and modify your old, torn and faded photographs and provide you with a beautiful new picture
Tel: 01449 766612
 Email: restoration@paulchilvers.co.uk
www.paulchilvers.co.uk/restoration

DMF Discover My Family
 Expert research to help you discover your UK family history
 All areas covered back to 1840 for earlier periods:
 London, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset
 No obligation initial consultation
 01722 340 501
enquiries@discovermyfamily.co.uk
 15 High Road, Salisbury SP5 4DS
www.discovermyfamily.co.uk

Familytreeimage.co.uk
 We can offer an ancient tree image from every county in the British Isles. One of these will be from the county of your ancestors making a positive connection for you and future generations.
 A fine addition to your family tree in picture form or as a JPEG image.
W: familytreeimage.co.uk

TORN CORNER Limited
Photo Restoration
 rescue your scratched and faded memories
Cine 2 DVD
 revisit those magical cine and video moments
Heirloom Albums
 all your photos, film clips and family stories in a Photo Book or on DVD
 Call us today on
01926 512 292
 TORN CORNER Ltd.
 28 Northvale Close
 Kenilworth CV8 2EN
info@torncorner.co.uk
www.torncorner.co.uk

Mayday Genealogy
 Family History & Genealogy Research Services
 Your research needs carried out in the London area.
 The National Archives, Westminster, London Metropolitan, SoG, Guildhall, Censuses, Military, BMD Certificates, Probate, Newspapers, etc.
 All enquiries welcome
 89 Third Cross Road
 TWICKENHAM
 TW2 5DY
 Tel: +44(0)20 8894 0488
info@maydaygenealogy.co.uk
www.maydaygenealogy.co.uk