

THE DRAKEFORDS OF PARAGUAY – My Distant Cousins by Roger Hall

There are so many Drakefords in Paraguay that you would be more likely to meet one there than you would in England. Find out why.

A lecture presented at the 2019 Drakeford gathering in the Congleton museum on 7th November 2019

It's funny what a bit of casual googling can lead to. A few months ago I was googling the name 'Drakeford', as I do from time to time to see whether anything interesting comes up, and I found an intriguing reference to one Oscar Gonzalez Drakeford, a liberal politician in Paraguay. Here he is:



Googling 'Drakeford' and 'Paraguay' produced another surprise. A site called 'Forebears', which contains surnames statistics, gives Paraguay as the country with the highest density of Drakefords in the world! According to the site there are 391 Drakefords in England and 309 in Paraguay. The population of Paraguay is only about one eighth of the population of England¹ and yet Paraguay apparently has about three quarters as many Drakefords as England. If this is true it follows that you would be much more likely to meet a Drakeford in Paraguay than you would here in England (unless, of course, you were in Congleton at the moment!).

I'm always slightly suspicious of statistics, especially if they're from the internet, so I checked out Drakefords on Facebook. Not everyone reveals where they live or where they're from, so a search for 'Drakeford England' or 'Drakeford UK' only produced a handful of entries, but a search for 'Drakeford Paraguay' produced a list of 212 people!

So what's going on? How did all those Drakefords end up in Paraguay? Time for some more googling.

I soon found a couple of books and some journal articles about a place in Paraguay known as New Australia where many of the inhabitants, though Paraguayan, bore English surnames. And some of them were Drakefords.

The story of these New Australians started in the early 1890s. There was a recession in Australia: sheep shearers were fed up with poor job opportunities and harsh employers and went on strike. Government forces clashed with the strikers and some were imprisoned. A visionary journalist called William Lane decided that as things were so bad for workers there he would create a new co-operative socialist utopia for them somewhere else. Over in Paraguay there was a serious shortage of people following a disastrous war with Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay during which around 70% of the adult male population are thought to have died, so the government there offered William Lane almost 2000 square kilometres of land for his utopia. Lane was an eloquent and persuasive speaker and he was able to convince many disaffected Australians and their families that they should sign up to his enterprise. The first shipload of emigrants made the 68 day sea journey from Australia to South America in 1893 and more followed over the next few years.

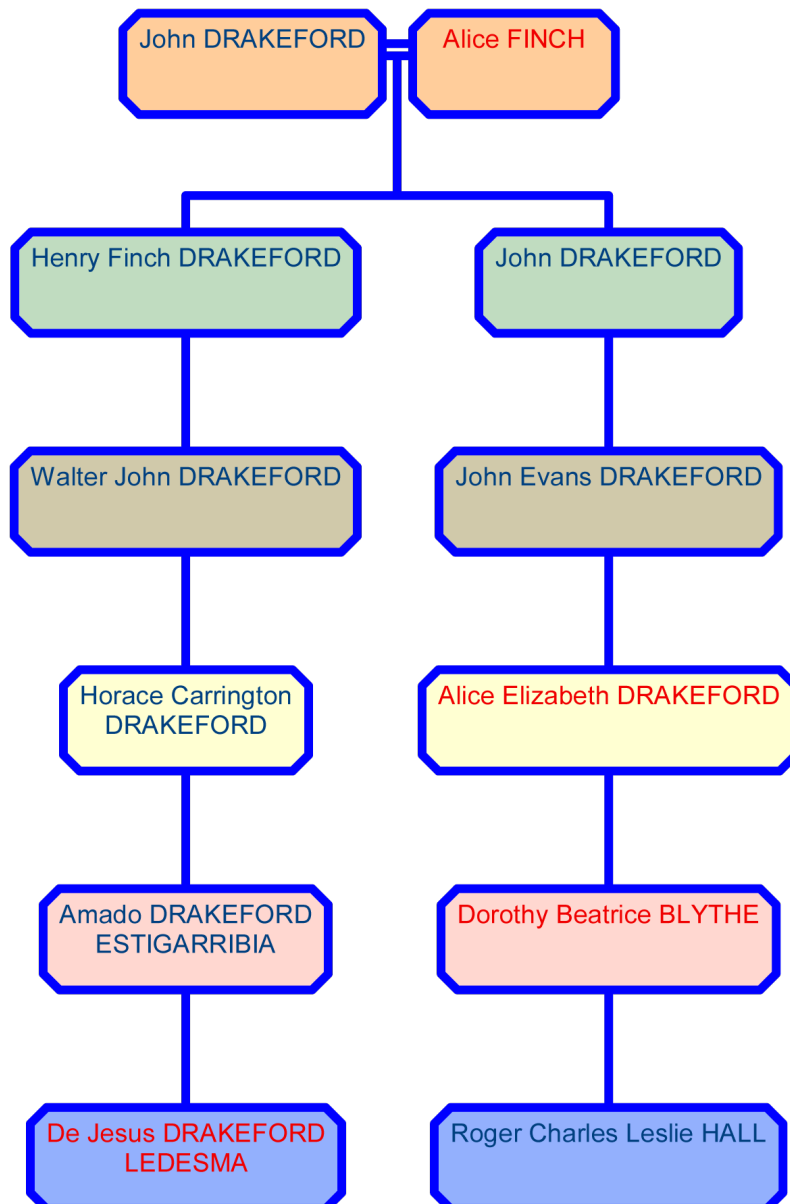
William Lane laid down some rules for the colonists, including a ban on alcohol and a ban on consorting with the Paraguayan women – he wanted the colony to remain purely Australian. These rules did not go down well with many of the single men and were soon broken, and within a few years it became clear that Lane's original plan was a failure. The idealists, including Lane, left Paraguay, but the pragmatists stayed, some of them starting families with Paraguayan partners.

¹ England's population 54 million; Paraguay's population 7 million.

So where did the Drakefords fit into all this? I could not find them in the ships' passenger lists for the original colonists so I placed an appeal for information on a Facebook group I found called 'New Australia Colony, Paraguay'. Someone spotted my appeal and forwarded it to a Molly Drakeford, and she contacted me via Facebook Messenger. Here's Molly.



Molly told me that her official name is De Jesus Drakeford Ledesma and that she is 68 years old, born in New Australia, Paraguay, but now living in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She also said that her grandfather was Horace Carrington Drakeford, who was born in Australia, son of Walter John Drakeford and Elizabeth Ferrier. This was brilliant news for me, because this Walter John Drakeford was a grandson of my 3xgreat grandfather John Drakeford of Bedworth, so Molly was my fourth cousin.



Walter's father Henry had emigrated from England to Australia in 1858, and Walter was born and married there. He had four sons, two, Walter and Horace, born in Victoria and two, Rupert and William, in New South Wales, before dying there from consumption in 1894 at the age of only 31. I had lost track of his widow and family, who did not appear in any online Australian records after his death, and now I knew why.

Molly told me all she could about her Drakeford ancestors, then set up a Facebook group open to all Drakeford descendants from New Australia so that we could expand our knowledge. The group is still going strong and currently has 237 members. I've been contacting members both by group postings and individually via Facebook Messenger, using Google Translate because the Paraguay Drakefords don't speak English and I don't speak Spanish. They've been very interested in learning about the Drakefords' origins in England and many have told me all they know about their Paraguayan Drakeford ancestry, so I've been able to build up a family tree based not, as is usual, on documentary evidence, but almost entirely on their stories, which have been surprisingly consistent.

One of the journal articles which I found early on in this investigation gave the name of a current inhabitant of New Australia who was gathering together the surviving early records of the colony, so I tracked her down too via Facebook and she sent me some useful material including a dated list of owners of cattle which showed that the Drakefords were in Paraguay by 1900.

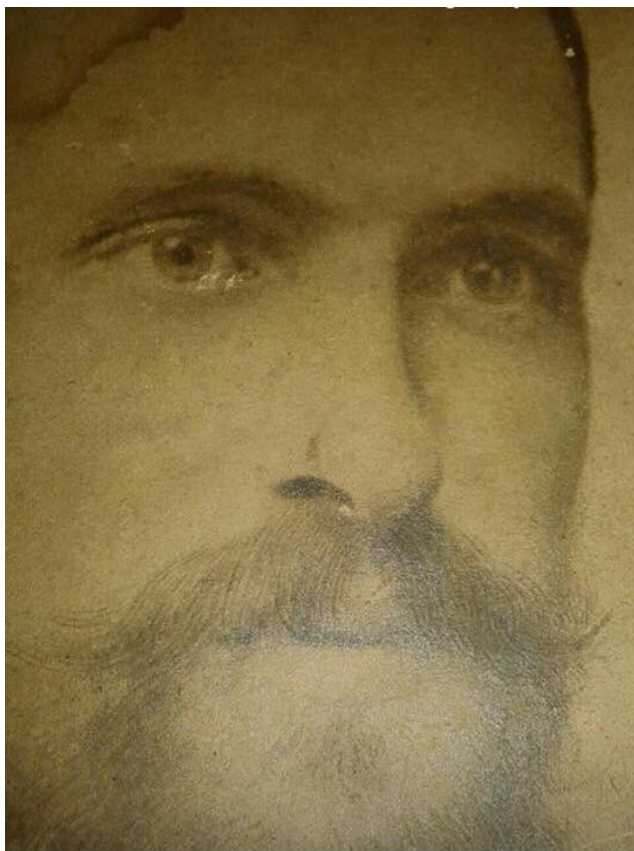
Fecha	Nombre y Apellido	Profesion	País
10 Abril 1900	Charles Beckwith		
10 id id	George Armstrong		
10 id id	Richard Jones		
5 Mayo id	William Colson		
5 id id	Rosa de Castellano		
5 id id	Soderaco Kirk		
5 id id	Hernique Castellano		
5 id id	Francis Castellano		
5 id id	Edward Williams		EN
5 id id	William Williams		EN
5 id id	Robert Jones		EN
5 id id	Paul Castellano		EN
7 Julio 1900	William Jones		VIC
id id	James Jones		EN
id id	Robert Jones		EN
5 Julio id	Juan S. Jones		EN
	R. Jones & W. Drakeford - Australian		
	Drakeford (W. Drakeford)		
Mayo 1901	James O. Kennedy		EN
Nov 1901	Augusto de Almeida		BR
id id	Juan de Almeida		BR
Marzo 1902	Thomas O'Donnell		EN
id id	Antonio Vasquez		EN
id id	Anna Bratti de Almeida		BR
id id	Jorge Villalva		EN
id id	Inge Villalva		EN
id id	Francis Casper		EN
id id	Guillermo Foster		EN
id id	Thomas King		EN
id id	Alfred King		EN
id id	Severino Casanova		EN
id id	Guillermo Roberts		EN
id id	Sydney McCreese		EN
id id	Guillermo Arbery		EN
id id	Horacio Bate		EN
id id	Juan A. Miller		EN

So here's what I've found out about the Paraguay Drakefords. Some time shortly before 1900 the widowed Elizabeth and her sons emigrated from Australia to Paraguay. The boys would still have been quite young: Walter, the eldest, would have been 16 in 1900 and William, the youngest, 11. Did they travel alone? That would seem quite a brave move - I just don't know. Another thing I don't know is what happened to Rupert Drakeford. So far as I can tell he didn't die in Australia, but there's no sign of him in Paraguay either. That leaves Elizabeth and the three boys Walter, Horace and William.

All I know about Elizabeth is that she was alive in Paraguay in 1910. I don't know whether she ever remarried and I assume she died there.

Walter was not the founder of a Paraguayan dynasty. He came to England in 1914 to fight in World War I, survived the war, remained here, married and became a newsagent in Bournemouth. He had no children and died in 1957. That leaves Horace and William.

All the Latin American Drakefords whom I've contacted are descended from either Horace or William. Paraguayan families are generally fairly large, but William got things off to a really good start by marrying three times and fathering at least 21 children. I've identified about 360 descendants including Oscar Gonzalez Drakeford, the first Paraguayan Drakeford I discovered, who is one of his great grandsons. We have a photograph of William: here he is:



Horace was probably more typical: he married once and fathered 9 children, and I have identified about 130 of his descendants.

Many of these Drakefords are still in Paraguay, but some, like Molly, have moved to Argentina, and others have gone to Spain. There is even one in Japan. They include academics, doctors, engineers and other professionals. Some are in business, some in trade – there are all sorts. And they are all our distant cousins.

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