## **WILLIS, George Frederick**

George F. Willis was born 15th August 1851, in Dapto, NSW, the son of Lewis (1828-1874) and Mary Ann (nee Patterson; 1832-1892) Willis.

George married Delilah Haines in 1875 at Goulburn.

There were seven children, all born Boorowa, near Young, between 1876 and 1887. A daughter was born at Rylstone in 1888, followed by another two children, at Toongabbie, in 1890 and 1891.**1**

In October 1893 the Carlingford Progress Association voted vote £1 towards the relief of Mr. Willis, of Beecroft, who was in a great state of need, owing to continued sickness. It was initially objected to on the basis that Mr. Willis was not a resident of Carlingford, but eventually carried unanimously. A charity concert was also given at the School of Arts, Thornleigh, for the benefit of Mr. Willis and family.**2**

In May 1895 George had a grievance which he expressed to the Beecroft Progress Association, regarding the letting of certain road works in the district, and the work given out to men entirely strangers to the district, instead of to local men. He would not complain if the work was let by tender, but it was a well-known fact that it was not. There were instances he knew where local men could scarcely manage to scrape enough together to keep their little children from starving.**3**

In June 1892 the Progress Association requested consideration of the matter of a new school. There were no further developments until December 1894 when George Willis, a labourer with a large family, took up the cry for local education with a plea to the Minister for Local Instruction, the Hon. Jacob Garrard:

‘I beg most respectfully to ask you to send me a form to enable me to make application to have a publick scoal built at Beecroft – I have a large family to send to scoal, thare is a grate many children hear and no scoal. Your obedient servant George Willis’

The application for a school was lodged in February 1895 by George Willis as secretary of the school committee.

He advised the Minister that ‘our little ones have to puddle through mud and slush to reach the station’ and referred to the dangers of children travelling by train to school at Thornleigh: when thare is so meny to go they cannot be kep still one of mine has been thrown off luckily without misshap’.**4**

By July 1895 George Willis was elected to the committee of the Beecroft Progress Association. That month, at the association’s meeting, it was announced that Mr. G. Willis, who for some time has been agitating for the establishment of a public school in the district, had handed all communications over to the Progress Association, who would now take up the matter.**5**

In 1896 he was again elected to the committee of the Beecroft Progress Association. Around this time Mr. Willis was the successful tenderer for the metalling of Hannah-street, Beecroft.**6**

On 27th March 1897 Beecroft Public School was opened. A word of credit was given to the originator of a public school at Beecroft, Mr. George Willis. By this time he was no longer on the committee of the Beecroft Progress Association.**7**

In December 1897 Mr. Willis was carrying out a contract for 450 yards of ironstone on the New Line Road.**8**

In 1898 he was contracted with the preparation of the new tennis courts on the village green for the Kennedya Tennis Club, which required clearing of heavy timber on the site.**9**

In August 1898, at Thornleigh, for a benefit in aid of Mr. P. Stanton and family, organised mainly by Mr. George Willis, of Beecroft, included “The Beecroft Amateurs,” a troupe of some 15 performers, organised and coached by Mr. Willis.**10**

In 1899 George Willis won three tenders for the Public Works Department: road works, Berowra Creek to Berowra station; fencing Botany sand drift; road works, Mobb’s Hills to Rogan’s Hill.**11**

In January 1900, at the Ryde Police Court, George was charged with being drunk and disorderly, also with having made use of profane language. He stated that he had received great provocation. A man had said to him that he hoped the whole of the British would be shot in the Transvaal, and that his (Willis’) son would be shot amongst them! The Bench imposed a fine of 5s together with 4s 10d costs of court, with the alternative of 48 hours’ imprisonment in each case. The fine was promptly paid.**12**

During 1900 he was successful in winning three road-works tenders: Pennant Hills-road to Beecroft-road; Pearce’s Corner to Brooklyn Railway station; Hornsby to Galston on two occasions. Also, his son, Alfred Willis, of Beecroft, successfully tendered for road works: Pennant Hills Road to Mould’s Corner.**13**

On 1st October 1900, during the Boer War, David John Willis, son of George Frederick and Delilah, was killed in battle at Elandskop, South Africe, aged 20 years. ‘All had known Dave Willis, who had been of great assistance to his father, who followed the avocation of a contractor. He had been a favourite with all with whom he had come in contact.’**14**

In 1901 Alfred Willis won the road-works tender for Cherry-street, Turramurra. George also did road works: Milson’s Point, via Lane Cover Road to Peat’s Ferry; and Pennant Hills Road to Murray Road, Beecroft. There were further successful tenders for George and Alfred in 1902.**15**

In September 1905 George’s wife, Delilah, died. The funeral moved from her residence in Beecroft-road, Beecroft, to Rookwood Church of England Cemetery.**16**

A block of freestone had been given by George Willis for the foundation stone [of the new St. John’s Church in 1907] to which was affixed a bronze tablet recording the event.

George Willis was thanked for his donation of the foundation stone which he had also cut and dressed.**17**

On 29th September 1921, George Willis, aged 70 years, labourer, was burnt to death, along with a faithful dog, in the hut that he had lived in for some time. It is believed that he was asleep at the time. He lived alone in the little hut of canvas, wood and iron, off Princess-street, Ryde, measuring 24ft. by 12ft. There were two unsuccessful attempts to save him. The body was conveyed to the Rookwood Church of England Cemetery.**18**

**Bibliography**

1 Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages

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4 Beecroft and Cheltenham The Shaping of a Sydney Community to 1914, page 153

5 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 13 Jul 1895

6 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 1 Feb 1896; The Daily Telegraph, Thu 6 Feb 1896

7 The Cumberland Free Press, Sat 3 Apr 1897

8 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 11 Dec 1897

9 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 1 Oct 1898

10 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 27 Aug 1898

11 The Sydney Morning Herald, Tue 31 Jan 1899; The Australian Star, Tue 30 May 1899; New South Wales Government Gazette, Tue 7 Nov 1899

12 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 6 Jan 1900

13 Evening News, Tue 20 Mar 1900; New South Wales Government Gazette, Fri 11 May 1900; New South Wales Government Gazette, Fri 14 Sep 1900; New South Wales Government Gazette, Fri 23 Nov 1900; Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate, Tue 27 Nov 1900; Evening News, Tue 18 Dec 1900

14 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 3 Nov 1900

15 The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser, Sat 21 Sep 1901; Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales, Tue 1 Oct 1901

16 The Sydney Morning Herald, Thu 14 Sep 1905

17 Beecroft and Cheltenham The Shaping of a Sydney Community to 1914, page 221, 230

18 The Sun, Fri 30 Sep 1921; Evening News, Fri 30 Sep 1921; The Daily Telegraph, Fri 30 Sep 1921; The Sydney Morning Herald, Sat 1 Oct 1921

**NOTE**: Additional information contained within Beecroft Cheltenham History Group website and book ‘Beecroft and Cheltenham, the Shaping of a Sydney Community to 1914’.