

## **Charles St John David (or Richard Thomas Sargent) 1855 – 1924**

**Birth Date:** 17 August 1855 (as Richard Thomas Sargent).

**Where Born:** Chepstow, Monmouthshire, Wales.

**Parents:** Thomas Sargent, born 16 Feb 1824, died 5 Dec 1899, married 7 Feb 1847, Sarah Ely Fryer, born 15 March 1822, died 31 March 1905. All these events occurred in Chepstow.

**Parent's businesses:** Grocery shops and later Timber and Coal Yard and Brick and Tile works.

**Siblings:** Alice Prudence born 1 Dec 1847, died June 1927.

Sarah Eliza born 29 Aug 1849, died Oct 1935, married 1 Jan 1873 Edward Dutson.

George Waters born 29 May 1851, married Polly Rowe.

Mary Ellen born 14 April 1853, died 9 Apr 1944, married 6 Aug 1878 Joseph Colin Child.

Bessie Fryer born 29 Dec 1856, died 1936.

Alfred Gower born 19 July 1858, married Nellie.

Ellen Jane born 4 Feb 1860, married 7 Aug 1881 Thomas Oliver Dickson.

Fanny Matilda born 28 June 1861, died 11 Aug 1892, married 1891 Arthur Martin.

Ada Phoebe born 28 Sep 1863, died Apr 19?5, married 17 Jan 1891 Edmund G Ballard.

**Business in Wales:** Richard Sargent began his own business at the age of 20 in January 1876 as a builder, joiner, undertaker and general contractor in Bridge Street, Chepstow. A destructive fire razed the carpenter's shop just a few weeks later on 8 Feb 1876. A subscription list was opened to raise funds to replace the tools lost in the fire. The business expanded to include painting and wallpaper hanging, the installation of slate and marble chimneypieces, slate cisterns and baths and ornamental tile floors, the construction of green and hot houses, and pianoforte and furniture removal. The business also included personal attendance at funerals with the coffin and hearse provided. Sargent advertised for one or two apprentices in carpentry and joinery in April 1877.

**Marriage:** 23 August 1877, to Amy Catherine (Katie) Brant, born 18 Feb 1853, Wokingham, Berkshire, England, daughter of John, a draper, and Caroline Brant. Married at Baptist Chapel, Milton Road, Wokingham, Berkshire, England. Katie died 16 April 1918.

**Child:** Percival G. Sargent born 24 May 1878, Chepstow. In 1938 Percival was living in Birmingham. He had two children.

**The mystery:** For an unknown reason Richard Sargent suddenly left his, business, wife and child, changed his name and immigrated to Australia. His father advertised builders' premises with adjoining house to let from October to December 1879. In 1881 Katie and Percival were living with her parents in Wokingham.

**Arrival in Australia:** Charles David sailed from London on the ship *Ramsay* 20 September 1879 and arrived in Moreton Bay, Queensland, on 13 January 1880. He was 24 years of age and travelled as a single Second Class Cabin passenger. The *Ramsay* was a barque built on the Isle of Man in 1863. She traded between London and Queensland.

**Qualifications:** Richard Sargent alias Charles St John David had no known formal qualifications in engineering, surveying or architecture. His experience had been of a practical nature. He claimed to be a Member of Society of Engineers, England, Member of Society of Engineers, Victoria and a Fellow of Queensland Institute of Architects.

**Occupation in Australia:** Civil engineer, architect and surveyor. He began working in his field at about 16 years of age, presumably working in his father's business. He spent eleven years in **Queensland**, three years in the Department of the Engineers for Railways, and for eight years he had his own business of Civil Engineers and Architects, Brown and David. He was involved in road making, drainage works, wharf building, tramway construction, and preparing plans for electric tramways.

The Launceston Corporation, **Tasmania**, appointed him as City Engineer, City Surveyor and Surveyor on 1 March 1892. He remained in this position for 32 years until his death in 1924. His major achievements with the Council were:

- The installation of the first hydro electric power scheme in Australia at Duck Reach, opened in 1895;
- Victoria Swimming and Turkish Baths 1897;
- Original 1904 Alexandra Suspension Bridge at the First Basin, Cataract Gorge;
- Laying out of the grounds and construction of the buildings at Carr Villa Memorial Park opened in 1905;
- Sewerage system for East Launceston 1906;
- Sewerage scheme for Greater Launceston;
- Ravenswood, Trevallyn and West Launceston water schemes;
- Extension to the Town Hall;
- Design and construction of the tramway track, tram sheds and offices for the first tramways in Launceston opened in 1911;
- Extension to the Queen Victoria Museum;
- Designed numerous buildings and dwellings for the Corporation.

Other achievements outside the Council were:

- As honorary engineer of the National Agricultural and Pastoral Society he assisted in the layout and construction of the Elphin Showgrounds;
- Assisted the Mowbray Turf Club in the improvement of the Mowbray Racecourse;
- Survey work for the spawning beds for the Northern Tasmanian Fisheries Association;
- Advised the St Leonards Council on occasions.

#### **Organizations and interests:**

- Committee member of the Launceston Mechanics Institute and Public Library;
- Committee member from 1906-1922 and sometime vice-chairman of the Launceston Technical School;
- Honorary engineer to the Northern Tasmanian Fisheries Association and a keen angler;
- Member of the Northern Tasmanian Camera Club;
- Foundation member of the Northern Club in 1894 and president from 1907-1909;
- Associated with the A.B.C. Bowls Club.

**Residences:** c1898 – c1899, Park View, 7 Brisbane Street, Launceston (a boarding house);  
c1903 – c.1908, 34 George Street, Launceston, (a boarding house);  
1910 – 1924, 1 Abbott Street, East Launceston. (He also owned 5 Abbott Street).

**Died:** from pneumonia on 17 July 1924, at Wahroonga, Sydney, New South Wales, while on holiday. His body was returned to Tasmania on the ship *Koranui* on 27 July 1924. He was given a civic funeral, leaving the Town Hall on 28 July 1924.

**Where buried:** Carr Villa Memorial Park, Launceston, just inside the main gate.

**ERECTED BY  
THE LAUNCESTON CITY COUNCIL  
IN MEMORY OF  
CHARLES ST JOHN DAVID  
FOR 32 YEARS CITY ENGINEER  
DIED 17<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1924**

**Si monumentum quaeris, circumspice**

(Translation – If you wish to see his monument, look about you)

**Last will and testament:** AOT, AD 960/48

The last will and testament of Charles St John David of Launceston, Civil Engineer, bequeathed all his property to Mrs Amy Catherine Sargent residing at 281 High Street, Erdington, Birmingham, England, and her heirs. Dated 20 August 1909. His wife died in 1918, but the will was not changed.

**References:**

Launceston City Council:

The Community History Branch of the Queen Victoria Museum holds the Council records which include some correspondence records on David:

LCC: 1 472 March 1892 Correspondence. This contains David's letter of application for the position of Town Surveyor etc, a form letter sent to the applicants' referees, copies of five testimonials and a letter from the Council accepting him for the position and setting out what was expected of him.

LCC: 3 23/1.3. A letter from David's sister S.E. Dutson (Mrs Edward Dutson), Welsh Street, Chepstow, dated 20 Aug 1930 asking for a photograph of the memorial to David. She has named her brother R.T. Sargent. The Corporation replied and sent the photograph stating that he was an excellent and faithful servant.

LCC: 3 24/1.9. Contains a letter from David's son Percival G. Sargent, The Shrubbery, 57 Gravelly Hill North, Erdington, Birmingham, dated 14 Aug 1938 regarding the financial settlement of his father's affairs. He also asked for a photo of his father's grave, which was sent. There is also a letter from Mr H.C.L. Barber (Launceston Mayor 1927, 1928) who met Percival Sargent at a cricket match in Birmingham.

LCC: 5 110 (1892-1896). Consists of letterbooks regarding David's work with the Council.

Books, reports and articles:

Ferrall, R A, *The story of the Northern Club*, Launceston, pp. 5-6, 9, 57.

Hillman, Alfred, *Hillman's directory of Chepstow and the parishes comprising the Chepstow Union*, 1879, pp. 1, 20

Jones, Alan, *Backsight: A history of surveying in colonial Tasmania*, Hobart, 1989, p. 187

Jones, Alan, 'Charles St John David', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, pp. 217-218

Launceston City Council, 'Town Hall staff, 1906' (photo), *Mayor's valedictory address and annual departmental reports*, 1906

Launceston City Council, 'Principal municipal officers, 1907' (photo), *Mayor's valedictory address and annual departmental reports*, 1907

Petrow, Stefan, *Sanatorium of the south?: Public health and politics in Hobart and Launceston 1875-1914*, THRA, Hobart, 1995, pp. 82-86

Richards, Hugh D, *Welsh expatriate engineers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*, Caerphilly, South Wales, Lazy Cat, 2003.

#### Newspapers:

*The Brisbane Courier*, 14 Jan 1880, Shipping – Entered inwards

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 8 Jan – 29 Jan 1876, Advertisements for Richard T Sargent's new business as a builder, joiner, undertaker and general contractor

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 12 Feb 1876, Destructive fire [in the carpenter's shop]

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 12 Feb 1876, Correspondence [3 letters about the fire]

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 12 Feb 1876, Advertisement notifying delays of orders

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 20 Jan 1877 - 10 Feb 1877, Advertisements for business

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 21 Apr 1877 – 12 May 1877, Advertisements for business

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 21 Apr 1877, Advertisement for apprentices to the carpentry and joinery trades – apply to Richard T Sargent, builder

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 25 Aug 1877, Marriage notice for Richard Sargent and Amy Brant

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 1 Jun 1878, birth of son 24 May

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 1 Feb 1879 – 10 May 1879, Advertisements for business

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 18 Oct 1879 – 20 Dec 1879, Advertisement for builder's premises to let – enquire of T Sargent

*Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, 9 Dec 1899, Death of Mr Thomas Sargent

*The Daily Telegraph*, 18 July 1924, p. 5, Mr St John David dead

*The Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1924, p. 4, The remains of the late Mr St John David...

*The Daily Telegraph*, 29 July 1924, p. 5, City honours its dead

*The Examiner*, 1 Mar 1892, p. 2, Current topics. David elected City Surveyor

*The Examiner*, 2 Feb 1901, p. 13, The Federal Capital (David's proposed plan for the future capital city)

*The Examiner*, 11 Dec 1895, p. 5, The Electric Light: A successful trial

*The Examiner*, 18 July 1924, p. 5, Death of Mr C. St John David: 32 years service for city

*The Examiner*, 23 July 1924, p. 6, Late Mr St John David

*The Examiner*, 26 July 1924, p. 1, Death and Funeral notice

*The Examiner*, 28 July 1924, p. 1, Funeral notice

*The Examiner*, 28 July 1924, p. 4, Shipping – Vessels in port, Arrivals

*The Examiner*, 29 July 1924, p. 4, The city pays tribute: Mr St John David's funeral

*The Tasmanian Mail*, 17 July 1897, p. 19, Sketch of new baths by C. St John David

*The Weekly Courier*, 5 Oct 1901, Supplementary Sketch No. 14 (not checked)

*The Weekly Courier*, 19 May 1921, p. 23, portrait

*The Weekly Courier*, 19 May 1921, p. 27, Mr C. St John David

*The Weekly Courier*, 24 July 1924, p. 28, portrait

*The Weekly Courier*, 24 July 1924, p. 52, Municipal Officer's demise

*The Weekly Courier*, 31 July 1924, p. 31, Death takes toll

*The Weekly Courier*, 31 July 1924, p. 32, Launcestonians pass: Death takes heavy toll

*The Weekly Courier*, 31 July 1924, p. 33, Mr St John David's funeral

Other references:

Northern Tasmanian Camera Club, Photographs by C St John David, 1899, Launceston Library, LPIC 021, item 13

1861 and 1881 British Census

*Marion Sargent  
Launceston*

*January 2001  
Updated February 2016*