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22

Aug 2020

MIGHT "HANDEL" BE THE SOMERTON MAN MESSIAH?

by nickpelling · 15 Comments

Pretty much everyone who has had a look at the Somerton Man mystery at some stage ends up raking through Gerry Feltus' book "The Unknown Man" for research leads to follow.

So let's hear what Gerry has to say about "Handel" (p.59):

At 11 a.m. on 7 January [1949] Detective Sergeant A Evans had a conversation with a tool inspector at General Motor's (Holden's) Ltd. He and several of his workmates were of the opinion that the deceased was a former employee with the Christian name Handel and an English surname. Born in Sweden on 10 November 1899, he was a member of the Merchant Navy in the First World War. A butcher by trade, he was employed in the Tool Section from 27 August 1946 to 17 February 1948. It was believed he lost his wife about 6 months earlier. His last known address was 271 Gouger Street, Adelaide.

I vaguely remembered seeing the (fairly unusual) Christian name Handel before: and so searched Cipher Mysteries. And here's what I had written [back in 2015](#):

I also asked about AA59/1/256. TIRS [Tasmanian Information and Research Service] noted that this file contains records dating from 1947 to 1950, and contains records relating to seven British migrants: John Bradley, Alan Clay, Frederick North, J L Targett, Henry Alfred Thompson, Kenneth Thompson, and **William Handel Williams**.

And with that, the game is afoot (as Conan Doyle famously wrote). So let's pursue the ball for a little while, see where it leads.

Trove on 271 Gouger Street

It doesn't take long in Trove to find a couple of references to the address mentioned, and they're both deaths of women in 1948:

[Adelaide Advertiser, 22nd May 1948](#)

KEEGAN.—On May 20, Helen Keegan, of 271 Gouger street, Adelaide late of 35 Alexander street, Prospect, loved aunt of May and Alice and friend of Dolly. Aged 66 years. Requiescat in pace.

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Adelaide Advertiser, 3rd August 1948

NELSON.—On July 31, at Adelaide, Maisie Josephine, of 271 Gouger street, Adelaide, loved wife of Thomas Nelson and loving mother of Raymond and Patricia, Requiescat in pace.

Perhaps one of these two is relevant, perhaps not: but I thought I'd mention them anyway. But the rest of Trove's hits are fairly silent, alas: mostly they talk about the Maher family (e.g. Thomas Francis Maher) at that address.

The Christian name "Handel"

When you start raking through FamilySearch et al for men with the first name "Handel" born in 1899, you will (if you're expecting to find any Swedish people) have a bit of a surprise. Because the first name "Handel" seems to have been a peculiarly English trend during the 19th century, particularly in Lancashire.

For example, I drew up a list of men with the first name Handel born/christened in the UK in 1899 / 1900:

- Handel Bond — All Souls, Ancoats, Lancs
- Handel Riley — Bolton, Lancs
- Handel Ward — Barton Upon Irwell, Lancs
- Handel Wild — Bury, Lancs
- Handel Howarth — Ashton Under Lyne, Lancs
- Handel Fletcher — Ormskirk, Lancs
- Handel Fletcher — Bolton, Lancs
- Handel Morris — Barton Upon Irwell, Lancs
- Handel Seddon — Bolton, Lancs
- Handel Shepherd — Endin, Lancs
- Handel Whiteley — Bournemouth, Dorset
- Handel Morris — Walkden, Lancs
- Handel Carpenter — Walsall, Staffs
- Handel Hodson — Wheatley Hill, Durham
- Handel Heatley — Prestwich, Lancs
- Handel Eckersley — Bolton, Lancs
- Handel Hone — Ashton Under Lyne, Lancs (probably [Joseph Handel Hone](#), 1900-1980)
- Handel "Nenole" [*Hard to read, I'm not convinced this is correct*]

However, I should point out that I fed all of these names into both Trove and the NAA's RecordSearch, without any luck. For what it's worth, I did find (a) [Handel Hone playing trumpet in 1955](#) (he's the guy in the middle):

nickpelling on Might "Handel" be the Somerton Man Messiah?

D.N.O'Donovan on Might "Handel" be the Somerton Man Messiah?

Stefano Guidoni on Might "Handel" be the Somerton Man Messiah?

john sanders on Might "Handel" be the Somerton Man Messiah?

Jackie Speel on Might "Handel" be the Somerton Man Messiah?

nickpelling on Might "Handel" be the Somerton Man Messiah?

john sanders on Might "Handel" be the Somerton Man Messiah?

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Cipher Non-Fiction (43)

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Anthon Transcript (6)

Beale Ciphers (39)

Bellaso Ciphers (9)

Blitz Ciphers (5)

Book of Soyga (2)

Captain Kidd Maps (5)

Chaocipher (5)

Chinese Gold Bar Cipher (2)

Codex Seraphinianus (15)

Crossword Suicide (3)

D'Agapeyeff Cipher (14)

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I did find a Handel Booth, 26, who emigrated (with Annie Booth, 25) on an Oversea Settlement Pass (O.S.P.) on the Demosthenes on 3rd July 1922. But there's no sight of him in the archives beyond that.

I should also mention that there was [an Ancestry mention](#) of a William Handel Williams (1914-1986), born in Gorseinon, Swansea, in 1914. Though I don't have access to Ancestry, I strongly suspect that this was the same William Handel Williams (b. 5th November 1914, d. 25th September 1986) who was cremated in [Manukau Memorial Gardens](#), Auckland, NZ. So the Risdon migrant file mention was probably no more than a coincidence.

Might he be Handel, Hallelujah?

Gerry Feltus doesn't mention whether the 'Handel' line of enquiry led anywhere, even though he does give the resolutions to many of the others. Hence it's not obvious to me that this was resolved by SAPOL at the time.

Furthermore, I suspect (having searched the Swedish BDM records) that Handel's supposed Swedish birthplace might not be correct. Rather, the odds seem reasonably high to me that our missing Handel was born in England (and indeed probably in Lancashire). So it could well have been that the police were entirely unsuccessful in tracing him.

Incidentally, there were a fair few middle-name-Handels I could have tried tracing (but didn't), e.g.:

- Ronald Handel Haswell — 1899, Handsworth, Birmingham ([1899-1950](#), says Ancestry)
- Wilfred Handel Bennett — 1900, Blackburn, Lancs (married Elsie Caroline Bennett, says a tree on Ancestry)
- Henry Handel Edwards — 1899, Belvedere, Kent ([September 30 1899](#), says MyHeritage)
- Leslie Handel Wells — 1900, Hackney, London (1900-1930, says Ancestry)
- George Handel McCallum - 1900, Liverpool
- Hubert Handel Arthur — 1899, Southport, Lancs ([26th Feb 1899 - 11th Jan 1983](#)) [died in Stanmore, NSW]
- William Handel Allsop — 1899, Huthwaite, Notts ([6th July 1899 - 25th July 1983](#), says Ancestry)

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 The Devil's Handwriting (2)
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 Vinland Map (6)
 Voynich Manuscript (697)
 Weldon Ciphers (3)
 WW2 Cipher Pigeon (29)
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Historical Research (240)

Places Of Interest (63)

Telescope History (28)

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So unfortunately I don't have an answer neatly tied with a bow and flourish this time around, sorry. But perhaps someone else will have more luck stitching all these pieces together, so we can find out who Handel was. 😊

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Posted in: [Tamam Shud](#)

15 thoughts on “Might “Handel” be the Somerton Man Messiah?”



john sanders

on [August 22, 2020 at 8:40 am](#) said:

Nick: Whilst you do seem to have invested some considerable time on this new line and obviously have a handel (sic) on a number of possibilities for further inquiry, I'd be inclined to put Feltus' credibility not far in van of Cramer and his surfer pal. One suggestion on digging up stuff on the Handel names is to throw it up on Sth. Aust. Geni. without a surname and you'll have nine hits to keep you busy, e.g. Watt and Voycey. As for your 271 Gouger St. Adelaide address, I expect you'll find that it may have been a funeral home, being across the way from West Terrace cemetery and a hundred yards or so from the mortuary.... I'm back to page 1 still trying to make whence of E.C. Johnson.



nickpelling

on [August 22, 2020 at 9:05 am](#) said:

John sanders: given that Feltus supplied an exact date of birth for the unknown Handel, I thought it would have been churlish not to restrict my search to at least the approximate year. Frederick Handel Voysey (1904-1987) and George Handel Watt (1904-unknown) were two of the many that got filtered out for that reason.

All the same, the real reason for the post was obviously because it gave me the opportunity to make Handel-related puns. 😊



Jackie Speel

on [August 22, 2020 at 11:16 am](#) said:

There is also 'Free BMD' for UK names – which is easy to use but has its limits: the several '(William) Handel Williams' seem to be Welsh. As 'Handel Williams' was in the Merchant Navy there might well be something in the service records (variously online).

There is also the possibility of nicknames, unusual name reworked and misinterpretations of placenames and family history by someone not familiar with 'places abroad.'



john sanders

on August 22, 2020 at 2:18 pm said:

Nick: I seem to recall that Feltus also gave Marrickville (Sydney) as the place of birth for his Teresa Johnston? but didn't bother to elaborate, so as not to invade the family's privacy. My take on such being, that if Gerry couldn't get even that right, why should we believe anything else he tries to spin. Mind you, my mention of Voysey and Watt was given purely as examples of possibilities for your Holden employee and nothing more. NB: The Harkness family were most probably living in Newcastle NSW during the twenties when Jessie, Jean and Ellen were born (Thomas Harkness in Bankruptcy 1926 trove).



Stefano Guidoni

on August 22, 2020 at 7:38 pm said:

Handel is not listed as a Swedish name on Nordic Names (<https://www.nordicnames.de>). I suppose that all those British Handels were named after the famous German composer that lived and worked in Great Britain, so it must be a British thing. Of course, a British subject could have a baby in Sweden.



D.N.O'Donovan

on August 22, 2020 at 9:43 pm said:

Well, isn't the aim of Somerton man research to put a handel to the chap?

..any groan you get I can get worse..



nickpelling

on August 22, 2020 at 10:25 pm said:

Diane: I really can't handel these dreadful puns, by George.



nickpelling

on August 22, 2020 at 10:31 pm said:

Stefano Guidoni: it's hard to tell why the craze for calling boys "Handel" took hold in Lancashire, but in the end that may well not really matter. As you point out, it's not a Nordic name at all (I checked various online Swedish male name lists to be sure, but your link was better), and was probably named after the composer.

All I was trying to do was to put a bit of historical flesh on Gerry Feltus' somewhat bare-bones account. With a few bad puns to keep me going. 😊



john sanders

on August 23, 2020 at 1:30 am said:

My el cheapo ebook has Nick's verbatim take on GF's Handel name give away on page 84; needless to say I am as usual, far from impressed by the author's crass

withholding of the nominee's full name. My take on the GM tool maker's filing with Det. Evans is that all relevant details were no doubt taken from employment or union records which must surely have included the worker's full...'monicker'.



john sanders

on August 23, 2020 at 2:16 am said:

Nick: Nice try; Handel Thomas Nelson with all above personal and employment details deceased about 4/4/51 according to memo from Detective Storch Sapol.



john sanders

on August 23, 2020 at 3:00 am said:

....and we can confirm that your well spotted deceased Maisie (Marie) Josephine Nelson left behind her loved ones, hubby Thomas and kids Raymond & Patricia. Tom was known by both Nelsen/Nelson and an additional aka. handle, Thomas Land, a displaced tattooed alien from Elbing Germany, so that's that!...what have we got on displaced stable bums.



john sanders

on August 23, 2020 at 10:53 am said:

Apart from his omission of the Nelson handle, Feltus came through with sufficient detail to get the job done; not so with Edward Cecil Johnson of Payneham who turns out to be Edmund from the Salvos hostel in Currie St. The weird thing is that HQ took a call 8.30pm from Glenelg day one to inform Det. Sgt. Leane (no inits.) and Payneham police that the abovenamed, aged '55' who was known to have a broken left arm and a right little finger (right middle..WW1) missing was nominated for Somerton man. We know that super sleuth Harry Strangway from Glenelg would have had a good look over the body earlier on and so surely Ted Johnson should have been ruled out by his assessment...but wasn't and so we need answers on how & from whom the flawed ID came about.



john sanders

on August 23, 2020 at 2:01 pm said:

Edgar Cecil Johnson, (not Edward or Edmudd) who's mum Augusta and younger rudder had come home to Payneham in '48 from hols in Blighty when the sad news of SM broke. A few years back I recall picking up Ted teaching the bread making art at a local tech. school, under guidance of Sir 'Who called the bastard a cook' C.S. Hicks though I could be mistaken.



nickpelling

on August 23, 2020 at 4:24 pm said:

john sanders: thank you very much, that ties everything up nicely, well done! 😊

Can I ask where you found the 4/4/51 memo from Harry Storch?



john sanders

on August 23, 2020 at 10:27 pm said:

Nick: Sure you can, but while you're at it perhaps you might have an opinion on two other similar interesting NAA files on an old friend Wolff Willhelm Cohen the 'butsher' and Wilhelm Cohen the engineer, both from Loxton and why not?.

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