

## Adam W. ARMSTRONG (19<sup>TH</sup> Century Fremantle Customs Officer) (1852-1915)

**Adam W Armstrong** was born at Fremantle in 1852 and resided at the port most of his life. He was known as a vigilant Excise Inspector with the Customs Department for 18 years, from 1894 to 1912.

Adam William Armstrong was the fourth son of Francis Fraser Armstrong (born Scotland 1813-1897) who arrived in Western Australia by the *Gilmore*, one of the first ships to bring settlers to the State in 1829. (reference). He married Mary Ann Mews (1819-1886) in 1836. (reference Brady family Tree). Adam had 13 siblings: Francis George Armstrong, Elizabeth Mary Ann (Armstrong) Barnett, Anne Amelia (Armstrong) Turner, Christiana Laura (Armstrong) Stirling, Frances Margaret Armstrong, Francis Gow Armstrong, Jessie Augusta (Armstrong) Spencer, James John Armstrong, Sarah Susannah Wells (Armstrong) Aitchison, Thomas Pope Armstrong, Nathaniel Mews Armstrong, Georgiana Endora (Armstrong) Spencer and Alethea Edwina Mercy (Armstrong) O'Connell. (reference).

Adam's first marriage was to **Margaret Brennan** in 1876. They had 7 children (only 4 survived): Elizabeth, Arthur, Philomena and Francis. (reference). Margaret died in 1892.

Armstrong lived in Fremantle with the exception of 6 years farming in Geraldton (reference). After returning from Geraldton to Fremantle, he was a butcher for a short period of time before selling his butchering business in Perth in 1882. (reference).

Adam remarried in 1892 to **Mary Cass**. They went on to have 4 children (Harold did not survive a year): William, Nellie, Harold and Florence. (reference)

From March 1885 Armstrong became licensee of the Exchange Hotel at 80 High Street, Fremantle (renamed the Commercial in 1888) (reference).

I ADAM WILLIAM ARMSTRONG, married, now residing in High Street, in the town of Fremantle, do hereby give notice that it is my intention to apply at the next Licensing Meeting to beholden for this district for a Publican's General License for the sale of liquor in the house and appurtenances thereunto belonging, situated at High Street, Fremantle, known as the Exchange Hotel, containing eight sitting-rooms and nine bedrooms exclusive of those required by the family, now rented by me from Mr. John Thomas, and of which I am the present occupier... (reference)

In 1885 Adam became licensee of the Club Hotel at the corner of 39 High Street and Henry Street, currently known as the Orient Hotel. After 8 years he went bankrupt with unsettled debts associated with the Club Hotel in 1893. (reference).

A Sept 1893 article explains how he got into debt:

...He paid his creditors about 10 years ago a composition under private arrangement. He had done a little horse racing. He had not gambled and could not play cards. (reference)

From 1900 to 1910 the Armstrong's resided at **17 Canning Road, Plympton**. From 1910 until 1915 when he died at the age of 63, Adam lived at 'Gilmore', 19 Canning Highway, East Fremantle. His wife Mary continued to live at 19 Canning Road until 1925.

Despite being a bankrupt- In 1894 Adam Armstrong was given another chance- He started at the bottom working for Her Majesty's Department of Customs and Excise -at 7s a day and worked his way up to being an Excise Inspector, (appointed December 1898- reference) where he was paid £250 per annum. His debts were discharged in 1906. (reference)

Uniform: In 1879 West Australian Customs Landing Waiters (Customs Boarding Officers who performed ship clearance duties) were issued uniforms consisting of: 'blue serge single breasted frock coats with 4 brass buttons inscribed 'Customs WA' and head wear of a white helmet for summer and a blue cloth cap with black ribbon bearing 'HM Customs WA' in gold, for winter use'. In an official photograph dated 1888 again showing WA Officers they appear to be wearing uniform similar to that prescribed in 1879 however now with a large 'VR' cypher (for 'Victoria Regina' or 'Queen Victoria')



'HM Customs' bullion thread badge on their cap. ([reference](#))

Armstrong's experience in the hotel trade would have been of great benefit when investigating and exposing excise illegalities to do with taxes or 'duties' collected on alcohol. All his recorded court cases involved beer or liquor misdemeanors and he travelled extensively around the Goldfields and the South-west, vigilant in his duties. He was recorded as bringing two charges against the Bunbury Brewing:

**1898:** BUNBURY POLICE COURT. **A. W. Armstrong**, an Inspector of Excise, summoned M E Wallis for neglecting to deface a certain stamp affixed to a beer cask opened contrary to the Act. Adam William Armstrong sworn said he visited Mr Wallis' bottling works at the Bunbury Brewery and found a hog-head of beer opened and the stamp not cut in two or more places as required by the Beer Act. The stamp appeared to him to be affixed in such a way as to be open to fraud and did not comply with the Act ...Adam William Armstrong summoned Archibald Holland with neglecting to keep certain books under the Excise Act... The case was dismissed. ([reference](#))

June **1899:** Excise Prosecutions. On Saturday afternoon Inspector Armstrong, of the Excise Department called on the several licensed victualers of Broad Arrow and Paddington, with the view of ascertaining whether Section 17 of the Beer Duty Act of 1898 was being strictly adhered to. Being his first visit to these parts a thorough and exhaustive examination was made, the cellars attracting his particular attention... ([reference](#)) and June 1899 At the Kalgoorlie Police Court this morning, the R M, gave his reserved decision in the action brought by Inspector Armstrong against Mrs Baldwin, of the Railway Hotel, Burt street, Boulder, for neglecting to cut a duty stamp on a beer barrel, as required by the Act... ([reference](#))



Gaugers at work measuring the alcoholic strength of spirits, c. 1907.

Sept **1899** INSPECTOR Armstrong, of the Excise Department, has been in Geraldton during the last few days. He returned to Perth by last night's train. ([reference](#))

**1901** Adulterated Liquor. John Monagle, licensee of the Victoria Park Hotel, was charged with having adulterated liquor on his premises. Inspector Armstrong, an officer of the Excise Department, deposed to having visited the defendants hotel and obtained a bottle of rum, which, on analysis, was found to be 33.8 under proof. He had tested other bottles of rum in the place, which were found to be correct... ([reference](#))

Armstrong remained with Customs for 18 years, retiring in 1912 due to ill-health. ([reference](#))

**1912** On the occasion of his retirement, after 18 years' service, from the Customs and Excise Department, Mr. A. W. Armstrong was presented on Thursday evening last by his brother officers of H.M. Customs with a handsome gold watch suitably inscribed. ([reference](#))

1915 Adam died in Fremantle.

The chief mourners were: Messrs. Frank, Arthur, and William Armstrong (sons), N. Armstrong (brother), A. Spencer (brother-in-law), J. Wells (son-in-law), Frank Turner, Frank and Harry Pearse, H. Stirling, and William Brennan (nephews), and Walter, Albert, and Robert Mews, George Pearse and H. P. Bateman (cousins). The pallbearers were the Minister for Works (Mr. W. C. Angwin, M.L.A.), Messrs. J. J. Broomhall (representing the Collector of Customs), and L. E. Eliot (representing the Excise Department of H.M. Customs), J.E. Mitchell, R. H. Holmes, and W. Lohoar. ([reference](#))

1926 Mary died.

Mrs. Mary Armstrong, a well known and esteemed resident of East Fremantle, passed away on January 3 at her late residence 'Thornbury' Bedford street, at the age of 63 years. Mrs Armstrong was the widow of a very old pioneer of this State, Mr. Adam William Armstrong... ([reference](#))

Researched by Joel Yik for [www.streetsofeastfreo](http://www.streetsofeastfreo)