



# An Inventive Medico defeats Calamity and Change

Besides being a physician, surgeon, chemist and author, by 1838 Edward Davy had become an inventor in the field of telegraphy. His rivals were Samuel T. Morse, the Englishmen Cooke and Wheatstone, but it was Davy's relay that was first patented. The railways were negotiating; fame and fortune seemed imminent. However, for unstated reasons but probably to escape a disastrous marriage, he left his patent in the care of his father and came to Adelaide alone, leaving his infant son George to be raised by Edward's parents in Devon.

He brought with him a Manning house and a cart with farming implements, but did not farm. In later years, he wrote "medical men were rather too numerous [in Adelaide in the 1840's]...so I had to set about making a living in the best way I could." His "making a living" was affected by calamity!

The first was the introduction of the Distillation Act of 1842, to which Edward was outspokenly opposed. As Editor of the *Adelaide Examiner*, he attacked the Governor thus:

*"...will South Australia be prohibited from growing her own corn?...grinding her flour?...our own colonists must unite to oppose the Governor's Act!"*

Edward and his cousin, Thomas Bennett, were distillers and wine merchants (1841-44) in Walkerville, with business premises in Currie Street. The distillery closed.

Ever inventive, when the price of wheat fell, he set up a starch factory on the banks of the Torrens. Another calamity, as the 1844 flood washed it all away, along with his gold watch and medical certificates. He then re-entered medical practice and was "doctoring about 60 miners at Montacute".

In letters to his brother in England (also a doctor), he wrote of the healthy climate being "particularly advantageous", and lamented the lack of midwifery cases, since "...the labours are so easy...(and) most of the poor employ no doctor." The healthy climate and healthy strong young women could be regarded as "calamitous" for Edward's medical career.

His Yatala smelting company was economic in 1849, but he failed to win a lucrative Burra ore contract and his workers ran off to the gold diggings. In 1852, he became Superintendent of the Assay Office in the Treasury Building, but when the same position was offered to him in Melbourne at three times the salary, he reluctantly accepted, and in 1853 left the colony. However the office closed and his next thirty years were spent in country practice in Victoria.



Gold from the Victorian Diggings (right) to the Adelaide Pound 1852 (left)

From information provided by Jill Davy,  
Edward's great granddaughter  
March 2014



## Edward DAVY [1806-1885]

### Married

[1] Mary Ann MINSHULL in 1831

&

[2] Rebecca SOPER in 1847  
at the Holy Trinity Church

&

[3] Arabella HARDINGE

Departed April 1839

Arrived August 1839 on the

## Somersetshire

Child of Edward & Mary Ann:

George (1836-1929)

Children of Edward & Rebecca:

Elizabeth (1843-?)

Ellen (1845-1846)

Thomas (1847-)

Henry (1849-?)

Mary (1851-?)