

Frank Close's obituary of Richard Dalitz FRS (Guardian Education, 24 January 2006) noted that the name Dalitz had been 'a byword in high-energy physics for half a century' but did not go into the origin of the name, a question that baffled its bearer himself for the first half of his life. Among his classmates at primary school, who gave him the nickname 'Fritzie' (as he once told me), it passed for German, but Dick was sceptical. He suspected that the Dalitzes, although they came from Germany, were not Germans but belonged to some other ethnic group. It was only after he came to Oxford in 1963 that he found proof that they were descended from the pre-German inhabitants of what later became Brandenburg, known as the Wends (or Sorbs), who survive to this day in a few villages between Cottbus and Berlin. Having discovered that his great-grandparents had emigrated from this region to Australia in 1858, he eventually identified the exact village as Werben and, despite the Iron Curtain, he arrived there one day in the 1970s to check the parish records. It was a stirring moment when, examining the church books together, he and the village historian discovered that they were related. He went further into the history of the Wendish emigration to Australia and discovered, among many other interesting things, that the sailing-ship 'Pribislaw', which had carried a large group of Wendish emigrants to Melbourne in 1850, had run aground in the Shetlands in 1870. Armed with this information another Australian Wend, Robert Wuchatsch, discovered in 2002 that some of the ship's timbers had survived and were still in Lerwick. Eventually they were purchased by the Australian Wendish Heritage Society and taken to a museum in Australia. Despite limited linguistic skills Dick's curiosity led him to cast new light on other aspects of Wendish history, including the biography of the poet Mato Kosyk. He also did original research on the life of the polyglot poet Georg Sauerwein, a German champion of the Wends. But his greatest gift to the land of his father's fathers was the distinction he brought to the Wendish name Dalitz.

2.2.06

Dear Professor Heweliga-Smith,

Above is an amended version of what I sent to the 'Guardian' and copied to Prof. Close. What I wrote about Dick finding the remains of the 'Pribislaw' was wrong, but I have now corrected it. Fortunately, the 'Guardian' used only a fraction of what I had written and left the mistakes out.

If you need any more detail, such as Dick's publications on Sorbian/Wendish affairs, do let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Gerald Stone

P.S. No need to return any of this, as I have copies. I'd like a copy of your obituary, when it appears. GJS.

Autobiographical notes made by Richard Dalitz
for Gerald Stone c. ~~1985~~¹⁹⁸⁵⁻1990

My Childhood & Life in Australia

(population 2000)

Dimboola, my birthplace, is a small town on the river Wimmera, which flows north from the Grampian mountains of western Victoria until it disappears in the sands of the semi-desert to the north. My grandfather Heinrich lived on the 'Settlement', a cluster of smallholdings, several km out from the town of Dimboola, near the river. He had some cows, one or two horses, a few sheep, quite a few hens, as well as land devoted to growing vegetables, with many fruit trees. In Wjerbno, I think he would have been termed a "Kössath".

Heinrich had been born in 1861 at Klemzig, near Adelaide (South Australia), soon after his parents Mathes Dalitz and Maria Habner, arrived in Australia. By 1875, the family had settled at Robertstown, about 100 km north from Adelaide, in a district where there were many German settlers. A few years after Heinrich had married Anna Elizabeth Wuttke there, during which time my father Friedrich Wilhelm was born, Heinrich and his family left Robertstown to settle in the Wimmera district ^{of Victoria}, which involved a journey of some 350 km, mostly across semi-desert country. Heinrich's main income was as a stonemason, primarily building chimneys, since houses were then generally made of wood, with a galvanised iron roof, wood being inexpensive and readily available. He had a large family (10 boys and 3 girls), more than a small-holding could support, so that the boys had minimal education, having to go out to work as soon as possible. My father Friedrich Wilhelm was the oldest boy; he took up work as a blacksmith in Dimboola town. My mother was a school teacher at Dimboola and was of Scottish descent.

It is worth saying a little about the later history of this family. Of the girls, one died young by accident, while the other two married, one to a Schulze, the other to a Tepper, both being from German families. Of the other 9 boys, two became local farmers, having married into ^{German} families (Möller and Hirthe) owning farmland locally, two became grocer's assistants locally, one died in France in 1917, one became a country post-office employee, one became a carpenter in a country town, another became a country tailor (and mayor of his town, for several