

John Darling and Son

John Darling and Son was an Australian wheat merchant and flour milling company founded in [Adelaide, South Australia](#), for many years the largest in [Australia](#). It was founded by John Darling (1831 – 10 April 1905), a businessman of Scottish origin and Member of Parliament for 25 years. He was succeeded by his eldest son, John Darling jun. (1852 – 1914), also a Member of Parliament, then by Harold Gordon Darling. It was registered as a private company in Victoria in 1953 with three directors: Norman Darling, Leonard Darling, and Leonard Gordon Darling.

John Darling (23 February 1831 – 10 April 1905) was born in [Edinburgh](#) in 1831, second son of John Darling of [Duns](#), into a family of modest means, and was educated at [George Heriot's School](#). His father died when he was 10, and he was forced to leave school at the age of 11.

His first job was as an office boy at the printing shop of Balfour & Jack, but lost that job after 6 or 8 weeks. He next worked at Duncan Sinclair and Sons' [type foundry](#) "Whitford House", then at Alexander Wilson & Son, followed by James Marr, Gallie, & Co., where he worked for about 12 years. Several of his friends, including [Alexander Dowie](#) and Joseph Ferguson, later an owner of [The Register](#), had emigrated to South Australia in 1851, and realizing the lack of opportunities for advancement in Edinburgh, decided to follow them. He was not a wealthy man, and did not qualify for assisted passage, so it took some time before they emigrated.

Business

Early in 1855 he, his wife and two sons arrived at [Semaphore, South Australia](#) in the "Isabella", sailing from [Leith](#). Four days later he was working in the [Rundle Street](#) store of Berry & Gall. This job did not last long, but through a friend he soon found employment with baker Robert Birrell of [Grenfell street](#). This job lasted two years before he left to earn a living with a horse and cart, and at the same time helped set up his wife in a store adjacent to the Stag Inn on Rundle Street. This failed to attract much custom so they built a shop "Millbrook Store" on Glen Osmond Road, which slowly became profitable. Meanwhile he had been approached by James Smith, of Giles & Smith, [Waymouth street](#) who had a flour mill on [West Terrace](#) and in the five years in their employ learned the wheat and flour business. He then resigned from Giles and Smith, and in 1865 was trading independently. In 1867 he took over the sole management of the grain stores in Waymouth Street formerly owned by R. G. Bowen (later to become the factory of D & W. Murray).

In 1872 he made his eldest son John Darling, jun. a partner in the business, thereafter known as J. Darling & Son, millers, grain, and general merchants. For 30 years the business grew steadily, the "Grain King" setting up branches throughout South Australia's wheat belt, buying up flour mills then establishing agencies in [Melbourne](#) in 1880 and [London](#), his company handling most of Australia's export grain.

He retired from the business in October 1897, leaving John Darling, jun., as sole proprietor.

Politics

His political career began in March 1870 when, with [Patrick "Paddy" Coglin](#), he was elected for the House of Assembly seat of West Adelaide. That parliament lasted little more than a year, and he did not stand; rather choosing to travel overseas on business. He was again elected by West Adelaide in 1876 and 1877. In 1878 he was returned for the district of Yatala, but retired in 1880, and did not re-enter Parliament till May 1885, when he won the seat of Stanley. In May, 1887, he was elected as a representative of the Northern District in the Legislative Council. For ten years he remained in the Upper House. In June, 1885, he accepted the portfolio of Commissioner of Public Works in Sir [John Downer's](#) Ministry, but he retired from Government in October of the same year.

"He played a useful and an honorable part in the politics of the State, and he was remembered as a prudent, sagacious legislator. He held his opinions strongly, and was not swayed from his convictions by the desire for applause or popularity. ... He knew his mind, and did not waver, doing solid, conscientious work, supporting in particular the interests of the agriculturists, with whose requirements he made himself thoroughly conversant. His sound judgment and the wide knowledge he had gained of South Australia as a leading man of business, earned him the respect and confidence both of his legislative colleagues and the public. It has well been said that though he was not a frequent speaker in Parliament, his utterances' always carried weight. ... On Select Committees and Royal Commissions he did a great deal of quiet and unostentatious work, which has since benefited the country. The Commission on coal contracts and wharfingering, it may be mentioned, were appointed on his initiative."

Social and Religious

He took a leading part in establishing the [Adelaide Oval](#).

He was a bulwark of the Caledonian Society and was their chief from 1892 to 1894.

Darling was a deacon of the Hindmarsh Square Congregational Church before joining the Flinders St Baptist Church in 1865, serving as Sunday school superintendent, and apart from the two years when he lived in Melbourne, or was overseas on business was an active member of the Baptist Church, working as a lay preacher and serving on committees. John helped found the City Mission Hall in Light Square, towards which he gave £500. His last attendance, the day before he died, was for the first service of the new pastor, Rev. James Mursell. He left an estate worth £67,500.

Family

He married Isabella, daughter of James Ferguson, on 31 December 1850. They had seven sons and one daughter:

- John Darling, jun. (24 January 1852 – 27 March 1914) married Jessie Dowie, eldest daughter of father's friend Alexander Dowie on 14 October 1875. He inherited his father's business. (more below)
- Robert Darling (died ca. 1933) of [Geraldton, Western Australia](#) then [Fremantle, Western Australia](#), accountant and grain dealer. His company was bought out by Frank Green in 1907. He appeared in court in 1911 accused of uttering a worthless cheque to a bookmaker.
- Charles Alfred Darling, manager of the firm's London house, became manager of the British New Guinea Development Company, then retired to [Tumby Bay, South Australia](#). A son, Fred B. Darling, was awarded the [Military Cross](#) in 1916.
- George Darling (ca.1865 – 24 July 1936) of "Thurloo", [Middle Brighton, Victoria](#)
- James Darling, married Bessie, fifth daughter of his father's friend Alexander Dowie, on 26 October 1882; moved to "Glenarona", [Kilmore, Victoria](#)
- Frank Darling (died before May 1934), of "Oatlands", [Moorooduc, Victoria](#)
- [Joseph "Joe" Darling](#) (21 November 1870 – 2 January 1946), the International cricketing captain
- Isabella, married Henry Ernest Hall, of [Williamstown, Victoria](#).

James Darling (1854 – 1932), a nephew, was J. Darling & Son's agent in [Kadina, South Australia](#).

He died of sudden heart failure at the family home "Thurloo" on Kent Tce, Kent Town, perhaps the residence later known as "Darling House" at 64 Kent Tce. Kent Town (now 64 Kensington Rd, Norwood).