MY FAMILY CONNECTIONS TO THE PIONEERS AND EARLY PROPERTIES OF THE ILLAWARRA (Part 2)

By Joel Thompson

Read at the March 2013 meeting of the Society

Evan Roberts Evans and Catherine Thompson (Contd)

Around 1893, shortly after the death of his mother, Evan and Catherine purchased the Avondale estate and lived out their remaining days there. Both Evan and Catherine died in 1907. Their eldest son, Evan Eustace Thompson Evans inherited Penrose on the condition that upon his death he would pass the property to St Luke’s Church, Brownsville. It was handed over in the 1970s following his death.

Evan and Catherine had nine children in total. Their third child, Minnie Elizabeth Evans carried on my family’s line through her marriage in 1900 to her cousin, Thomas William Brown.

The Brown Family of Sherbrooke and the Thompsons of Berkeley

Sarah Williamson and William Benjamin Henry Brown

Sarah was introduced in Part 1 of this series as the illegitimate daughter of Elizabeth Weston (née Crouch) of West Horsley Place at West Dapto and the convict, Thomas Williamson. She married William B H Brown in Sydney by December of 1851. They had nine children between 1852 and 1872 all of whom were born in Dapto. It appears that during this time, the family resided on the Horsley estate.

William and Sarah appear to have met whilst he was living and working as a tenant farmer at Horsley. The date of his arrival in the area and details of his tenancy are not clear. As anyone who has attempted research on the Dapto area in relation to a Brown will attest to the difficulty. It is a complicated exercise given the number of families named Brown or Browne, and particularly the proliferation of individuals named William Brown or William Browne that resided in the area.
William Benjamin Henry Brown was born in 1828 in Sydney. His father, William Brown (snr) was a shoemaker who had been transported for stealing a silk handkerchief. He arrived in NSW on board the Elizabeth I in August 1820. In 1825 William applied to marry and in November of that year married Elizabeth Catherine Foss (aged 15) in Sydney.

Elizabeth Foss was the daughter of two convicts. Henry Foss who arrived 1806 per Fortune and Ann Foss who arrived 1806 on the William Pitt. They were both convicted in relation to the forgery of bank notes and appeared to be part of a racket. Ann’s story is interesting as she was initially sentenced to death but after petitioning the Bank of England, whom she was deemed to have defrauded, her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

William and Elizabeth had nine children, the eldest of which was William Benjamin Henry Brown. In 1827 William (snr) was granted his ticket of leave and was working as a shoemaker in Sydney. After moves to various suburbs of Sydney and following a stint as a market gardener, William and Elizabeth moved to Peterborough (Shellharbour) around 1853. Elizabeth died 1854 and was buried at Shellharbour. William died in 1872 and was buried with his wife.

By 1873, William and Sarah (née Williamson) Brown had relocated from Dapto to Sherbrooke on the Cataract River above Bulli. Here they established a large orchard named Ferndale. It was reportedly the largest orchard in the Southern Hemisphere and was famed for the quality of its fruit and produce. The family was so prolific that the Brown sons and sons-in-law were able to form the Sherbrooke cricket team with little help from outsiders. According to family folklore, the team reportedly once played against the English Cricket team although it has not been substantiated.

William Benjamin Henry Brown died at Sherbrooke in 1883 and was buried at Brownsville. In 1903, the Government resumed all properties at Sherbrooke for the development of the Cataract Dam. The family, including Sarah Matilda, relocated back to Dapto.

Three of the brothers - Thomas, William and Albert- became a prominent force in the Dapto dairy industry, trading as “The Brown Brothers”. In 1900, Thomas Brown married Minnie Elizabeth Evans, the daughter of Evan Roberts Evan of Penrose and Avondale. Their eldest daughter, Kathleen Edith Brown (my great grandmother), was born at Avondale in 1902.

The Brown Brothers were farming the Wollingurry estate at Yalla possibly as early as 1902. By 1912 a mortgage was taken out on the property in their
name and it seems it was already in their ownership. Whilst the title details relating to the estate are unclear, it appears likely that they had several homes across the property, presumably for the various brothers involved. The Wollingurry Stud became famous for the quality of its Jersey herd. The family remained on the property until the site was resumed by the Government for the construction of the Tallawarra Power Station around 1954.

**Kathleen Edith Brown and Wilfred Carlton Thompson**

In 1924, Kathleen Edith Brown, the daughter of Thomas Brown and Minnie Evans, married the fisherman, Wilfred Carlton Thompson at Berkeley. This brings us to the second Thompson family in my genealogy and the one from which my surname derives. This marriage also provided another connection to yet another early Dapto family.

Wilfred was the son of Samuel Thompson and Emily Barber. Emily was born in 1867 to Edwin Barber and Fanny (Frances) Bodycote. Edwin Barber is believed to have arrived in Australia from Sussex in 1859 and appears to have quickly established residency in Illawarra. He married Fanny in 1863 at St Luke’s Brownsville and appears to have worked as a fisherman from somewhere in Dapto.

Fanny was the eldest child of John Bodycote and Eliza Farmer who were married in Warwickshire c.1841. They arrived in Australia with five of their six children on the *Anna Maria* in 1857. The family initially settled in Maitland but had relocated to *Macquarie River* at Dapto by 1859. John, like his son in law Edwin, also worked as a fisherman. This may explain how his daughter Fanny came to meet and marry Edwin Barber.

Edwin Barber and Fanny (née Bodycote) also ended up residing at Berkeley, where their home, *Rose Cottage* was used to host church services. Emily died in 1900 and Edwin in 1929 and both were buried in Berkeley Pioneer Cemetery.

Their daughter, Emily continued the family connection with fishing when she married Samuel Thompson in 1885. Samuel was born in Botany in 1862. He was the son of George Thompson and Jane Bagnell. George and his children, as well as Jane’s family, the Bagnells, were well known fishing families who resided at “Fishing Village” or “Booralee” near Botany. It is unclear when Samuel first came to Illawarra, but by 1885 he had clearly had contact with the fishing families of Dapto as he and Emily Barber married at Botany that year.
A likely explanation (however speculative) is that the amendment of legislation following the Fishing Enquiry of 1880 and the tightening of licensing and netting laws (particularly for Botany) would have raised a range of difficulties for a young fisherman. This may have led Samuel, along with his brother William, to Lake Illawarra in search of a new fishing ground where they could more easily obtain their own licences and fish without the same level of scrutiny applied at Botany. (http://www.botanyfishingvillage.org)

Following their marriage, Samuel and Emily Thompson established themselves on the Lake at Berkeley, and were among the first fishing families to inhabit the area that would become known as “Fishtown” within the Berkeley estate. Samuel and Emily had five children including Wilfred Carlton Thompson (1893). The Thompsons became one of the prominent Lake Illawarra fishing families that included the Massey, Dennis, Barber and Clifford families. Samuel and Emily Thompson both died in Berkeley in 1934 and 1941 respectively and were buried in the Berkeley Pioneer Cemetery.

**The Uniting of Two early Illawarra Family Lines**

Wilfred Carlton Thompson’s marriage to Kathleen Edith Brown, daughter of Thomas Brown and Minnie Elizabeth Evans of Dapto occurred at Berkeley on 29 March 1924. It brought together two streams of pioneer Illawarra families. Wilfred was a scion of the Thompson, Bodcote and Barber families of Dapto and Berkeley. Kathleen brought to the marriage ancestors from the Weston, Thompson, Williamson, Evans and Brown families all of whom farmed extensively around Dapto.

Wilfred and Kathleen were my great grandparents. They had four sons of which one died at birth. My grandfather, Ronald Thompson, was born at Berkeley in 1925. He broke away from the family fishing tradition and worked at the Steelworks. His two brothers, Noel and Gordon fished Lake Illawarra up until the 1980s when their licenses were revoked in a year of poor fishing. They often earned more from their painting jobs than they did from fishing. This decision by the Government ended a continuous line of Lake Illawarra fisherman that had extended over a period of 130 years. Noel and Gordon remain at their lake side residences in Berkeley to this day.

To complete the story, my grandfather Ronald Thompson married Joan Moore, a descendant of a great many convicts and pioneers of various areas throughout Western Sydney, New England and along the Great Northern Way. Ron and Joan had three children, David, John (my father) and Carol. John married Cheryl Anne Wood in 1972 and they had five children. The middle (and best!) of the brood being the author, Joel Thompson (1981).
Postscript. There is no known link between the two Thompson families in my genealogy but further research may uncover a connection.

WARREN BELLAMY

For more than twenty years, Warren has been a stalwart volunteer at the Museum. Warren was a marine engineer and sailed the seven seas before settling in Wollongong. He has now decided to wave farewell to the ocean blue and settle among the rolling green hills of Armidale.

During his time with us, Warren quietly went about getting things done. In 1996, he and Joyce McCarthy investigated the possibility of acquiring an original post office counter. Warren did the initial assessment and identified the beautiful counter that now graces the Museum foyer.

His seaman’s imagination was fired by the bicentenary of the 1796 voyage of Bass, Flinders and Martin in the Tom Thumb. Warren extensively researched their exploits and represented the Society on the celebrations committee. One of the events overseen by the committee was the construction of a replica of the Tom Thumb.

Warren also attended on behalf of the Society numerous seminars hosted by Museums and Galleries NSW. He and Joyce McCarthy were the Society’s representatives for many years at local chapter meetings of Museums Australia. This involvement, and his enquiring mind, meant that Warren developed a broad knowledge of museum practice and local history.

Visitors to the Museum frequently asked Warren about the origins of the building. Ever practical, his first response was to gather as much evidence as was available at the time. That provided him with information on which to develop a series of models showing the various stages of construction. His model was one of the most commented on exhibits at the Museum. It will be rejuvenated later in the year using further research undertaken by Carol Herben.

We are very sorry to see Warren leave Wollongong. His long and valuable contribution has been of great benefit to the Society and the Museum. His quiet friendliness will be missed and we wish him all the best.