THE BATE FAMILY OF HOOKA CREEK

The Society's public appeal for material in connection with the Historical and Antiques' Exhibition earlier this year resulted in the discovery of much material of value, not by any means the least of which is a series of letters loaned by Miss H. E. Bate, of "Yarrawee," Central Tilba (near Bega). Miss Bate is an aunt of Mr. Jeff Bate, M.P., and it is interesting to know that the family's origins were in the Illawarra District. The purpose of this note is to summarise the letters and so preserve a brief record of this family's fortunes in general and Illawarra associations so far as they extend. Their fortunes may well be regarded as typical of the period.

The Bate family apparently originally came from England and in the early years of the colony, Samuel Bate occupied a Government post from which he was ultimately dismissed. The first letter is a copy of a petition from Samuel Bate dated 13th November, 1820, from Westbourne Terrace, Bayswater, addressed to the Colonial Secretary, Earl Bathurst. It asks for a review of Bate's case. Apparently the review was successful to the extent that although Bate was not reinstated, he was given a grant of land in the colony. This was apparently at Hooka Creek near Dapto.

Apparently the family settled here and various younger members of the Bate family lived with the older people, presumably Samuel and his wife.

Henry Bate was a son and resided with his wife Elizabeth, nee Mossop, whose family came from Whitehaven in Cumberland. It was Elizabeth who may be judged to be one of those rather stronger personalities who manages to hold a widely dispersed family together.
The earliest letter in date is one dated 5th September 1812 addressed to Elizabeth's brother, John Mossop.

It does not contain much news in itself, being largely religious thoughts, but it is of particular interest, because the writer, Wilfrid Mossop, was then a prisoner of war in France. He has much to say about his hardships without saying precisely what they were. Apparently he could write letters to his relatives, but found that letters by way of reply were very sparse.

The family prospered here and certainly grew in numbers. Although Elizabeth had the painful duty of writing in 1810 to her brother-in-law, John Bate, advising the death of old Mr. Bate, losses by death were more than made up by the growth of the family. Another letter is dated 1848 from Richard Bate acknowledging the compliment of being named as godfather of a nephew born to John Bate in Sydney. His news of the recent and expected births in the family makes it quite plain that the Bate family was increasing with considerable exuberance.

But it was Elizabeth who was the letter writer and whose letters are of interest, not because they contained much in the way of news, but the very boredom and the yearning for overseas mail is in itself an eloquent commentary on the lives of the settlers at the time.

Her first letter is dated "Wollongong, November 9th 1839" and is addressed to her aunts in Cumberland. It goes on, "My dear dear Aunts, It is now a long time since I have had a letter from you and I can assure you I'm anxiously wishing for one. I received one from Andrew Elliot about a fortnight ago, which I have answered. I learnt from him that you are all well and wishing to hear from me. When I do write I have so little news that would interest you that I feel ashamed of my letters, but you must take the will for the deed."

"We are again going to live in town, which I am very glad of as I am quite tired of a Country life it is not like England there I am sure I should prefer the County but in this Colony in small places the Society is so indifferent. My eldest Brother is married and has built a very large House and we are going to live with him. Mama and Papa live with us too.

I daresay you will think living with a Mother in law will not be pleasant but I wish it above every thing. I have been married nearly four years and during that time I have not had one quarrel with any member of the Family although we have lived together before. You cannot imagine how very fond they all are of my Dear little Tilly but indeed she is such an engaging little monkey no one could help it. She is now fifteen months old and has walked since she was eleven and many little words too she can say already. Her worst times are over for she has cut sixteen teeth already she had two before she was three months. You see I'm determined to tell you all perfections. She is not at all like me but very like her Father and Grandmama—Oh if you could but see the old Lady how she doats upon her—her eldest Daughter who is married to Captain Baintrie lost her oldest son lately in India he was eleven years old it must be a great trial to his Mother the Climate is killing them all and they do not know when the Regiment will be recalled. He is waiting for his Majority or he would sell out and come and settle in this Colony. I wish he would there would be such a nice lot of us. My dear little sister Mrs. Agnew has lost her baby too. But I am glad to add there is prospects of her soon having another—she is not seventeen yet. I have now only one Brother unmarried besides John and I think I will send him to run away with Jane. If my next child be a Girl it is to be called after my dear Jane and she is to be godmother by proxy—My dear Aunts you must not be angry at this stupid letter but unless I write about self I cannot write at all as know of nothing else to suit you. Mrs. Cooper a Friend of ours intends
coming to England if she does I will seize the opportunity and send some trifles for my sake. I would have done so long ago but I have never known anyone coming to England but Mr. Bell and they were lost. Those persons that brought some letters I have never seen having been up the County. Mr. Bate desires me to send his best love to all his English relations but you must excuse him writing as he is such a lazy fellow at his pen. When he is from home and I get a letter from him it seldom contains more than a dozen words. John also sends his very best love to his dear Aunts and Cousins. He is growing very tall and thinks himself quite a man almost too much so—he takes care of some cattle we have at a distant station but we mean to sell them this month and take him to Sydney with us. Now Dear Aunts I must conclude with fervent wishes for all your happiness not forgetting my dear Jane and Wilfred who you must kiss for me and believe me your affectionate niece E. Bate.

Incidentally her address was given on the back of the letter as being Belvoir House, Surry Hills Sydney, then a fashionable living area. It is of interest to note that although the letter was written in November it was not posted until the end of February the following year.

The last letter is dated 18th December 1845. Apparently the family moved back to Dapto because this letter is addressed from "Hooka Creek." This letter bears the postmark 23 December 1845 and shows that it was received in Whitehaven on 28th April 1846. It is addressed to Elizabeth's cousin and reads,

"My ever dear Cousin, I am almost ashamed to write as I feel I can scarcely hope of your forgiveness for my long silence. I know not what excuse I can make for my apparent neglect unless the distance from town and the difficulty of getting a trustworthy person to take up a letter will do for one. The Illness of my little Sam who was so severely scalded that we did not expect him to recover prevented me when I had an opportunity so if I behave better for the future you must look over it this time.

"Your letter of May 1843 made me feel very uneasy, but the last I received February 1844 informed me of your recovery and I sincerely trust you still enjoy good health. I have not had one hour's sickness since I was married and that is ten years since. The climate is very healthy.

"I did not see Captain Sanderson, indeed living in the bush I have no chance of seeing anyone whose stay in Sydney is short. Young Elliot informed me he enclosed a letter in the package of seeds, I wish if not mislaid you would forward it, as I have a great wish to see it. I receive letters from him so seldom that I do not like to lose one. I believe he is married to an old Schoolfellow of mine, when you see him tell him I am very cross with him for not writing to me oftener than he does, I have only received three letters since I left.

"I was much grieved to hear of Wilfred's narrow escape. I think it was cruel of the owners to compel him to go such a long voyage without seeing his friends when his time was so near expired, but it is like the World every man for himself without much regard for the feelings of others. I anticipate with much pleasure the thoughts of seeing him. I wonder shall I know him he must be quite altered, as time has not stood still since my departure, how I long to return but of that there is not the slightest hope. Times are slowly but surely mending in the Colony we are now busy getting in Harvest which owing to a long drought is not so plentiful as we could wish it but we must be content and thankful. We keep a great many Bees. Honey is not more than 3d. and 4d. per lb. the Bees being able to work winter and summer in fact you can scarcely say we have winter at all. Hot winds have been very prevalent lately you have no Idea how weak they make you feel
but generally a sea breeze sets in in the evening which puts you all to rights again. John tends a Farm near us and is doing very well.

I have frequently asked him to write but he says he has nothing to scribble about, he sends his best and and kindest love to you with fervent wishes for your welfare.

I have now three children your little goddaughter was twelve months old last Thursday and a fine little girl she is but of course I should say so whether or not, Tilly can read very well I am now teaching her to write there is no School near us and a boarding school is too expensive, her Grandfather who lives with us takes great pains with her, he is totally blind and had been so many years before I knew him. Sam had a very narrow escape but he is now quite strong and the marks on his body almost gone. It happened about three weeks before Baby was born and can assure gave me a great fright.

"Now my dear Girl do not follow my bad example and delay writing for I am most anxious to hear how you and my dear Aunts get on in this world of troubles. Perhaps this may find you a wife if so I trust a happy one how I should like to have an invisible cap to watch you for a little while, but the days of Fairys are past and all is sober reality. I have nothing that would interest you to write about so excuse my stupid letter Henry leaves this (place) in the morning and will pop this in the post office for me, he desires me to remember him to you, give my love to Aunts and your Mother when you see her and believe me dear Jane your sincere and affectionate Cousin Elizabeth Bate. Address Mrs. H. Bate, Hooka Creek, Lake Illawarra, near Wollongong." E.B.

The following letter will no doubt be of interest to members:

37 The Boulevard,
Petersham,
22/2/59.

Mr. Edgar Beale,

Dear Sir,
The forthcoming celebrations at Wollongong are of interest to me, for in 1907 I was chosen by the then Chief Inspector of Schools—Mr. James Dawson, to go to Wollongong District School to introduce Kindergarten to the Illawarra District. I had been at famous Riley St. Kindergarten, with Miss Mary Simpson, Head Mistress. Besides teaching this important Infants' School work to each class, I gave demonstrations on Saturday mornings, when teachers came from up and down the Illawarra line to see children who came voluntarily to demonstrate Kindergarten methods.

After a few months at Wollongong, I was visited by the Director of Education, Mr. Peter Board, Chief Inspector Dawson, and Miss M. Simpson to see what progress had been made. Later in the year we had an Exhibition, and I have two photographs of some of the kindergarten work done by the pupils.

If my health permits, I intend coming down to Wollongong for a day's visit, and by all I have read and heard about the City, it may well be that I shall find it difficult to recognise some of the places I knew.

With best wishes for the success of the Celebrations

I am, Yours sincerely

(Miss) Jessie Stead.

P.S. Archdeacon D'Arcy Irvine was then (1907) the Rector of the Anglican Church. J.S.

A further letter from Miss Stead offers the Society a copy of the photograph of the "Kindergarten Occupations" Exhibition of 1907, which should be an interesting addition to our records.

E. MACKRETH, Hon. Sec.,
E. BEALE, President.
46 St. John Ave.,
Wollongong.