

A short sketch of the "Family Tree" by Leslie W A Benn (Archdeacon of the Church of England) and eldest son of William Sedley Benn.

"Some years ago my relations in Queensland were lucky enough to meet Leslie Benn, William's oldest son, who was an Archdeacon in the Anglican Church there. When mentioning they came from Gippsland, he told them that his Father and family moved there in the 1880,s and that he had his Father' diary. He said his father built many of the buildings there, some of which were in Toora. My Aunt typed this diary (on an old manual typewriter). I am now putting the diary on computer. I have enjoyed it so much, and I hope it gives others as much pleasure."

Judy Whatley.

I paid a visit to Ireland in 1960, and discovered some of the family graves in the Churchyard near Mallow in County Cork, Ireland. I gathered some bits of family history from an old estate owner living near the old stone Church on his property. The Church is close to a small stream over which is an old arch bridge, where it is said that a battle between Cromwell's army and Irish resistors took place during 1649. There are several Benn graves in the Churchyard cemetery, but they were overgrown and neglected. I had to scrape off the moss to be able to decipher the names. Snapshots taken did not come out very well, for the lettering was very indistinct. The old gentleman who owned the property all around was a member of the Irish Gentry and had a vivid recollection of the "Benns", and knew some of them personally. These were my grandfathers brothers, all of whom seem to have migrated to various parts of the world. One went to live in England, another to Canada, another to New Zealand and another to Australia. The name "Anthony" seemed to be a familiar one in the family.

My grandfather's name was William Crawford Benn, whose grave now lies just inside the gates of the Mirboo North cemetery, Victoria. He married Catherine Ford of England, and she is reported to be a first cousin of the first Henry Ford of motor car fame.

Somewhere during the 1860's he decided to migrate to Australia with his wife and family. As far as I can ascertain, the family then consisted of Walter (whose baptism I traced at the parish Church of Middleton), William Sedley(my Father), Catherine & Martha. It would seem that Fred & Charlie and Jane (or Jinnie) were born after arrival in Australia.

They settled in the Western District of Victoria, somewhere about Casterton and Merino, and I understand took up farming there. When Gippsland was being opened to settlement they decided to come to that area, and settled Somewhere near Trafalgar South, in the hill country. Here they carried on sawmill activities. Uncle Walter opened a blacksmith's business in Mirboo Nth.

they named "Avonmore", by which name it is still known. They carved out a home in the heavily timbered and bush country of those days. As the sons grew up they in turn took up selection blocks. Walter selected a block not far from Father's, and Willie selected one further down the Tarwin Valley at Dumbalk.

So we'll now take up the story as revealed in his diaries

BEGINNING OF THE DIARY OF WILLIAM SEDLEY BENN 20th JANUARY 1882
January 20th 1882 Making a track through paddock adjoining Whittes

farm, which evidently was in the Trafalgar area (Gippsland). Several days were taken up making a track to a spring for the cattle. Carting hay and cocksfoot grass on a sledge made in the form of a triangle. This enabled it to slide more readily over stumps and logs. Reaped wheat, oats and peas.

Digging potatoes and building a hay stack. The weather was hot and sultry, during which we did flailing and cleaning wheat.

With brother Walter we carted timber to the saw pit and then cut flooring boards for the new house to be erected. Evenings were spent lining the house and laying floor boards. Splitting slabs also occupied some of the time during these days. Then came the fitting of the partitions in the house and carting further timber to the sawpit where more timber was cut for the house. We collected a dray bought from Mr. McMahon and had a lot of trouble because there were no shafts. It had been used for working with bullocks with a pole fitted, but the pole had been taken out, so we cut a sapling to replace it, and got the dray safely home.

Many more days were occupied in sawing timber for the house. Attention now seems to have been given to the making of furniture for which blackwood was cut and prepared. Made a body for the dray and began ceiling the house and building a stone chimney.

Went to Trafalgar for some sheep bought in Melbourne and transported there by train. On arrival, some were found to be very weak and had to be carried when they knocked up. The day was wet and made the job very disagreeable.

Digging and carting potatoes to Trafalgar occupied many days. A variation in the daily routine was the breaking in of a young draught mare named Jinnie, who was trained to pull the sledge for carting potatoes. Sowing barley was another job in the midst of all this. They moved into the new house on May 3rd, 1882, during wet and windy weather. Evidently a change in handling the carting of potatoes took place, for they were now carted to the road and loaded onto a bullock wagon for transport to Trafalgar.

26.5.1882 Building a yard for feeding pigs occupied some time and then followed the building of a pig sty. Further jobs were the sinking of a well, building a calf house, cutting undergrowth, repairing fencing and erecting gates.

14.7.1882 Found one of the best draught horses killed by a falling tree. The horse was valued at 30 pounds. About four inches of snow fell during the

night. "It was the first time I had seen snow and did not want to see it again" Rolled some snow balls up to three feet in diameter. Had to repair fencing and clean the track after the severe storm. Slaughtered pigs which were taken to Trafalgar on a sledge for market sales. Roads were very bad. Some trips were made by packhorse.

SEPT.1882 Putting up spouting on the house and sawing timber for furniture.

OCT.1882 Did some burning off on warm days.

NOV.1882 Shearing sheep.

DEC.1882 Went on a visit to Melbourne and saw the museum, the picture gallery, public library, wax works and the Eastern market. Went with cousin Ben Ford to the Botanical gardens. Went with Mr. Itume to Sandrick pier and went aboard s splendid ship, the "Northumberland".(on his return journey he Speaks of buying a paper and reading about a disastrous railway accident at Hawthorn)

DEC.25th1882 I stayed at home and passed the time as best I could.

DEC.26th 1882 Spent Boxing Day at a picnic at Trafalgar South on the property of Mr. Burgess. Enjoyed myself tolerably well. Stayed onto the dance at night and enjoyed myself very well.

Diary Continued

Jan.1s1883 Went to a picnic at Narracan West, but the affair was washed out by rain, came home drenched. January was taken up with moulding potatoes, shearing lambs, mowing hay and cutting spars for fences.

FEB.1883 Was taken up with various farming activities.

MAR.1883 General farm work. Lost a bullock and spent two days searching for it, but without success. Spent some days making an outlet road, and cutting chaff.

APR.1883

Some days spent in selling chaff in Trafalgar & Moe. Also did some picking up and burning off.

MAY.1883 Much the same routing, including digging potatoes. In addition to usual farm work I commenced working the grubbing machine, pulling out stumps in the new cultivation paddock and find it a great saving of labour, when compared with hand grubbing.

JULY.1883 Stripped bark with which to thatch the potato heap. Slaughtered pigs for market and carted them on a sledge to Trafalgar. There are some young lambs about. Grubbing & plowing occupied many days. This kind of work continued during August 1883.

SEPT.1883 Much the same work. (He mentions going to Church in Trafalgar on Sundays).

SEPT.22,1883 I went looking for land for selection. Went down to Mirboo South with Walter. We went along the Tarwin River for about 4 miles, and found the track very boggy and rough. We left our horses at Mr. Goldsmith's farm and then proceeded down the river with a Mr Davies for about 2 miles. The night was dark and the track we found very rough. Being new to it, we were tumbling over logs and into holes but at last we reached Mr. Hughes place. There we met William Findley and spent a very amusing night, as some of the company were playing the violin, others the concertina which were accompanied by the bones and tin whistles. We had a dance and about 11 o'clock we went with Mr. Davies to stay the night with him, and on our way to his house we had to walk or crawl along a log crossing the river. After going about half a mile, and ascending a very steep hill, we got to the house. Walter, Willie Findley and myself then rolled into bed and spent the rest of the night in talking and sleeping.

Sept.23.1883 Got up at sunrise. On going outside we found ourselves up on the side of a very steep hill ,looking down to the river. We then went back to Mr. Hughes, had some breakfast, then started with Willie Findley along the river to his selection. After travelling about seven miles through scrub and swamp along a sort of track, scarcely perceptible, we came on a patch os scrub that had been cut down recently. This proved to be Willie Findley's clearing. We went about a quarter of a mile further, then came to his house, which was very roughly constructed of sapling trees and covered with bark. We had some dinner, then went fishing for eels and blackfish. I caught about 8 or 9 fair sized fish, and Walter was fishing in the same hole and he caught about a half a dozen eels.

As the mosquitoes were very troublesome, we came back and had some supper. We spent some time talking and then the three of us turned into one bed again.

SEPT.24,1883 Arose early, and had breakfast, then had a shooting match with Willie Findley's revolver. We had a few shots each at a bear skin pegged out on a log. I hit pretty well, but after shooting a couple of rounds each, Walter proved to be the best shot. We then started back to Goldsmith's where we had left our horses, and went from there to see a selection formerly owned by R.Jackson. We thought it a very good one and Walter pegged it. We then returned back to Goldsmith's and spent the evening very amusingly. Had some recitations and songs given by our kind entertainers. About 12 o'clock we went to bed.

SEPT.25th1883 After having a look at some of Mr. Goldsmith's crop, also a grubbing machine invented by him, we then left for home. On our way we went to see a selection, formerly held by P. Lacy. I pegged it out and we returned home very much pleased with our trip.

SEPT.26,1883 Walter & I went to Trafalgar, took the train to Warragul to get and send in an application for the land we had pegged. We were glad to get away when the train came.

20th March,1884 I went to Drouin to the Land Board and was recommended 320 acres of land. From 21st March I continued farm work, carting chaff, breaking in horses etc. On April 17th I was taking a load of chaff to Childers, and capsized the load. It was heavy work re-loading single handed as I had to carry it through deep mud. The roads were terribly bad. About this time I did some heavy work carting chaff etc. Dingoes were very destructive on the sheep. And as we had lost a lot, I set traps along the track to try and catch them. On 13th May I was successful and caught in the trap a huge dingo- a real old warrior. I put a bullet in him.

23rd July,1884 I opened an account with the Bank of Australasia at Warragul with 20 pound my mother & father gave me to pay my first instalment on the selection. I went with Mr.W.J. Vance to see some land for sale. He was terribly tired after the walk.

30th July,1884 Mr. W.J. Vance rode from Trafalgar South to inspect land in the Mirboo district. Stayed at Scarlett's Hotel. We again continued on the 31st to inspect land till 2nd August, when we pegged two blocks.

12th August,1884 Hough's horse dropped dead.

23rd August,1884 I went to Warragul and got my licence for the land.

27th November,1884 I left Trafalgar South and went to make a start cutting scrub and select a site to build a house.

1885

13th April,1885 Father and I went to Mirboo South to sow grass seed on his selection. Had a terrible trip.

2nd May,1885 Started to build the first house for my father.

15th August,1885 I commenced cutting scrub on my selection and on 22nd November Jinnie and Charlie arrived.

9th December,1885 Chris. James paid us a visit on father's selection.

1886

Uncle Bob (Dr. Ford) and family paid us a visit at Trafalgar South. They came from Melbourne, and got a ride from Trafalgar on a bullock wagon.

10th March,1886 Went through Narracan coal mine with mother, Ella James, and Laura Mann.

25th March,1886 Went to the Warragul Show, where there were several bad accidents.

7th April,1886 Took Sister Jinnie to Trafalgar and she went to Melbourne to see a doctor.

12th April,1886 Carting our furniture to Trafalgar to be trucked to Boolarra on the way to Father's selection Had a terrible journey.

7th May,1886 We said goodbye to "Maine Park" and Trafalgar, and left for good for our new home on the selection.

1886-1887 19th May,1886 Wire from Uncle Bob to say that Jinnie was very ill. Took Mother to Mirboo North on her way to Melbourne.

5th June,1886 Mother returned from Melbourne. Left Jinnie after typhoid fever.

12th June,1886 Jinnie returned from Melbourne.

2nd August,1886 There was a big meeting at Mirboo South to agitate for a train service to Boolarra.

1st November,1886 Shot a wild bull at Mrs Denny's.

21st November,1886 Took Mother to see for the first time, my selection. She then met Mrs. Denny.

31st January,1887 Shooting wild bulls for Mrs Denny.

18th March,1887 Erecting a diving fence for Mrs Denny-Contract for Carmichael..

6th April,1887 Went to Mirboo North to help Walter in the building trade.

28th May,1887 Burying a huge stump.

26th June,1887 Had difficulty in crossing the flooded river at Mirboo South.

29th June,1887 Out of work, so set out shooting possums and kangaroos.

30th June,1887 Queen Victoria Jubilee. Great fireworks at Morwell.

5th August,1887 Getting experience skin buying.

3rd October,1887 Tendered for Tarwin bridge. Had my first visit to Traralgon.

19th November,1887 Cutting scrub for Darragh. Times very hard

9th December,1887 I returned to Mirboo North to work for Walter at wheelwrighting, and building.

21st December,1887 This was Walter's wedding day. He married Miss Lissie Scarlett.

1ST March,1888 Selected my house site

29th March,1888 Made another start at building in Mirboo North
19th April, 1888 Making a spring cart to go on a skin buying trip
9th May, 1888 Left on skin buying trip.
6th August,1888 Arranged to use a wagon for skin buying.
15th November,1888 Went to Traralgon Show.
20th November,1888 Repairing wagons etc. At Mirboo North.
3rd December,1888 Attended Laura Mann's wedding.
6th December,1888 Building Scarlett's house.

1889

15th January, Doing carpentering work with Walter.

For the first time I insured my life in the Widow's Fund Society for 100 pounds, payable at the age of 45.

March,1889 Felling trees for my house site.

April,1889 Splitting timber for a house for Walter and building Darragh's house

April 16th,1889 Lillie Thom's visit

15th May,1889 Went on a deputation to Melbourne to try and get a railway; also a Post Office at Dumbalk.

15th June,1889 Went for a ride to Rumbug's Hill to see Mr. Salmon about building.

16th August,1889 Reviewed my earlier life, and my object in life and arrival in Gippsland.

24th August,1889 Made a start splitting timber for my house

AUGUST,1889 I packed up my tools, bedding, cooking utensils etc., and after dinner I took them down to my selection as I intend to reside as much as possible on it, and get it in order as quickly as I can. I have worked hard and constantly for a long time, trying to pay my way, and keep out of debt, which I have been able to do, but until the last few months, I have been doing my best to get things straight and put the place in a payable state at home. I have never worked with a selfish end, ever since I was a little boy.

My labour and earnings went to help my family and as Fred & Charlie are now grown into young men, and able to take my place, I feel grateful and thankful to myself to be able to say that I believe I have conscientiously done my duty to my parents and brothers and sisters. I am now past the age of 26 and have never had either the same luck in means or education as some have had, so that I have myself mostly to thank for little I have of both. Many years have gone since I was a mere child, my Father then being in the Western District at the town of Merino then renting from Uncle Fred (Mama's brother) a small farm of eight acres which he had, and ever since rented. When he first came to the colony from Count Cork, Ireland, (i.e. my father) he brought four children, I being the youngest, aged two years.

We then went into wheat growing on a small scale, wheat being then a good price. A few years passed by when Jane, Fred, and Charlie were added to the family, making in all seven children by this date. The wheat fell in price

and on a small scale there was very little to be made and with seven helpless children and mother to provide for, it was a heavy pull for one man to get along with. So he was compelled to stay on the farm for the want of means etc. I was sent to the common school for a few years, and got along very well, but at the age of 10 years, my father wished to try and better circumstances.

After some consideration (A few years before 1873) he invested in a Yankee horse-drawn thrashing machine and did fairly well .

As it proved so profitable thrashing corn for the farmers, he was of the opinion that a thrashing machine with steam power on a large scale would be very profitable. So he decided to try his luck. After communicating with a firm in Melbourne, he bought one on time payment, giving his horses and Yankee thrashing machine as security.

The first season it was rather late in getting from Melbourne. Since there was no railway then, it came by boat to Portland and was delayed. So he lost the best part of the season and made very little. The bills of course had to be paid, so he had nothing left for himself. During the winter months the engine would be idle, so he was advised to get a small saw mill plant and work it until the harvest came again- which he did. This was about 1873, I being about ten years old and only a little boy, was then taken from school to the saw mill about eleven miles from the farm. Things were very bad after this date, as there was no capital to pay working expenses etc. The firm from which the machinery was purchased pushed him for money. The mill did very little work and about Christmas all hands deserted it, I being the only one left to look after things.

.On account of this sawmill no crops were put in, and things were getting worse. One night after going to bed by myself, and just as I was going to sleep, a big snake fell from the roof on to my bed, and came crawling in with me. When he settled I sprang out, dressed myself and deserted the mill for home. I met a carrier and stayed under his tarpaulin till morning. I then went back, packed up everything and walked eleven miles to merino. Things had reached the stage when Father was in a bad fix. The firm was closing in on him. A little while longer and things had matured. They closed on him and took his horses, thrashing machine and everything he had given them as security. He was then very badly off, and with all us children to keep, it was rough. Well, that was the last of my schooling, and I went back in everything I had learnt. I had to take to hard work from that date till now. Walter and I used to work hard. A few years later Walter went to work at a sawmill until he came to Gippsland. I worked mostly at home. My father used to cut firewood, and I used to go about getting orders for it, and cart it from the bush into the town. I used to shoot possums and kangaroos and sell their skins and anything I could turn a penny out of to help along.

We managed to make ends meet better as we got bigger, until an advertisement was in the papers that a farm was open for a tenant in Trafalgar, in Gippsland. This was about the year 1881.

I managed by carting gravel to scrape enough together to pay expenses down, so Father could see it.

After he returned a consultation was held, and a decision made to try our luck in Gippsland. A sale of all the things, cattle etc. Was made. I then left for Trafalgar, being then about 18 years old- I got enough to pay my passage, as I came ahead of the family, except Walter, who had gone to take possession. I took my trunk etc. In a carrier's team to Portland. I started from merino with 4.0.0pound, and called at places along the road and laid my money out in the purchase of opossum skins etc. Which I took to Portland, and booked my passage to Melbourne on the steam ship "Julia Percy" I sold all my skins to the steward on board at a good profit.

I arrived in Melbourne and had about a week looking around town. I then spent my money I had made coming along in buying a watch for which I paid 5.10.0 I paid my passage to Trafalgar and all the way from Merino, and only had 4.0.0 when I started. So taking everything into consideration I thought I did well. I have the same watch today and it is a very good time keeper. After arriving in Trafalgar the remainder of the Family arrived in a few days. We have all pulled well together until now. After settling in Trafalgar on the farm, we worked hard and constantly, and had fair luck, and got on well, until we saw a chance to select. About five years ago, some time before I commenced keeping a diary, which relates most of my life until today.

Well, I mentioned in this day's commencement having done all I could for my family, I have today arrived at my selection, to build a house for myself with a view to making a home, settling down and trying if I can to get a suitable wife with whom to jog along the remainder of my life. I camped at the house site in a little house built of my roofing iron.

18.9.1889 Commenced building my house.

29.9.1889 Went to Nambrook station to do some shearing

31.10.1889 Doing up Leach's Hotel

11.12.1889 Making a road into Walter's farm fro Farmer's road

30.12.1889 Found my house crawling with flies, had to go to Mr Hughes

1.01.1890 Taking a review of my position, since I came to Mirboo six years ago.

3.01.1890 Contract cutting scrub for Walter. As I had men to pay, I lost money on the contract.

4.02.1890 Set fire to my scrub, one tree fell, and killed 14 of Mr.W Hughes' pigs.

18.2.1890 Started carting with the wagon.

17.3.1890 Had a sly grog detective on the wagon, but did not discover it until afterwards.

27.3.1890 Had a very narrow escape from being killed by an accident when going down Jago's hill.

10.4.1890 Pulled Mr. Francomb's cart to near Stony Creek.

29.4.1890 Finished carrying for the season, as I have a contract to build a house for Ted Hughes.

3. 5.1890 There is a railway agitation for a line along the Tarwin Valley.

6. 5.1890 I would very much like to get married, as I have no mate.

10.5.1890 I first met my future mate and wife – Gertie Davies. Had my first ride with Gertie.

5. 6.1890 Mrs Dodd died and I went to her funeral next day.

29.7.1890 A travelling Jew stayed with me and he had rather strange religious ideas.

18.8.1890 Still building Ted Hughes house.

22.8.1890 Finished Ted Hughes house. I averaged up the working days at 74 days, and earned 7/2 a day

26.8.1890 I made a start in doing up and lining the house for Mrs. Denny. Took Gertie to a dance at my fathers.

5. 9.1890 Working for Walter splitting timber.

16.9.1890 Consulted Dr. Morrow as I don't feel well. He said indigestion was the trouble, otherwise I was perfectly sound. 17.9.1890 I went to Toora to tender for a building for Mr. Rixon.

19.9.1890 A locomotive was landed at Toora jetty on a mud bank. It was used to make a new railway

20.9.1890 Tendered for Mr. Rixon's house at 163.17.0. He to find the softwood

3.11.1890 Rixon decided to build only half the house, so I undertook the job at 90.00, he to find all softwood.

13.11.1890 Made a start to erect Rixon's house at Toora James Henry & Mr. Treasure are going to help me.

6. 1.1891 Employed a man called Dick Mann.

16.2.1891 I agreed to let Dick Mann a portion of my farm on an improving lease for three years.

25.2.1891 I finished building Rixon's house.

26.2.1891 Commenced building a house for Mr. Cronin.

8. 3.1891 Had my first boating trip with a party.

14.3.1891 Went down the Jubilee Gold mine at Foster.

15.3.1891 Mr. Cronin took me to see the tin mines. There were specks of gold mixed with the tin.

(More to follow)