

# The Search for Lt Col FW Bell VC

By

**James C Briggs**

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## The Search for Lt Col FW Bell VC

**I**t all started with walks through a local cemetery. In 1993 I retired from 28 years as a Consultant Pathologist at Frenchay Hospital in Bristol. For the 8 years or so prior to that I had also been one of the three Medical Referees for the City of Bristol, a job I still do. This means that on two evenings a week I have to check all that day's applications for cremations. Each application consists of a set of papers with about 40 questions which have to be answered by an appointed member of the deceased's family and by two independent doctors. When happy that all answers are correct then I am empowered to grant permission for cremation. Before my retirement the sets of papers were delivered to my house, but now I tend to walk to the office at Canford and check the papers there. The office is at the entrance to this beautiful cemetery, at the start of an elegant avenue of trees leading up to the original chapel at the very top. Many superb trees decorate the grounds and they are full of birds and squirrels. The graves lining the avenue are often large and grand and there is absolutely no sense of foreboding anywhere; my grandchildren love going there.

My house is not far away from the back entrance, a ten minute walk along some of the many public footpaths which criss cross this part of Bristol. These paths were originally the ways between the fields before the houses came in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In places the footpaths still resemble country lanes and it is easy some times to forget that you are in the suburb of a big city. My walk to the cemetery is now one of the bonuses of the job.

Although many of the graves are large and elegant, others are less so; some are frankly near-derelict and others uncared for. This is one of the consequences of burial tradition in this country; frequently there is no family around to care for the grave of someone who died 80 or so years ago. In Germany, a country I know well because I have a German wife, graves are uniformly well tended since they are re-used every few decades and family is nearly always there. Some of the graves near my back entrance fall into the uncared for and partially derelict categories. Just inside the entrance is a special grave I first noticed in the autumn of 1995. Its headstone leant a bit, the "kerbstones" marking the plot were also tilted a little; the plot itself was uncared for and partly covered with weeds. The headstone read:

"In Dear Memory of my beloved Husband, Lt Col FW Bell VC, of Perth,

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WA. Died 28th April 1954, aged 79. For Ever and Ever".

What was an Australian VC doing in this Bristol cemetery? Other Commonwealth soldiers can also be found buried, but these overwhelmingly died of their wounds in one of the many WW1 Bristol Military Hospitals. Col Bell clearly didn't fall into this category. I was intrigued. I asked the foreman gardener if he had any idea; he hadn't. I felt a real need to know more and, if possible locate some family in order to take the first step in what I hoped would result in some improvement to the grave - currently, I felt, an inadequate resting place for a brave man. Where to turn?

The first real inquiry I made to the local branch of the Royal British Legion. The cemetery contains an impressive War Memorial, near the top of the main avenue, and the Legion always lay poppies there on Remembrance Sunday; they also put poppies on the many War Graves that are scattered around the grounds. No poppies appeared on FW's grave on Remembrance Day 1995 and it turned out that the Legion had no knowledge of him. (There's another VC's grave too, and I don't think they knew of that one either (see footnote 1)).

So far I had thus reached two dead ends. However, inspiration came. In early December I rang British Telecom and was given the phone number of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association in London. A call to them elicited details of why FW had been given his medal. They gave me their address and I immediately wrote and confirmed the details I had verbally given them. Over the phone they promised me a copy of his entry in the VC & GC book. Christmas came and went and the promised details didn't; so, in frustration, I wrote again on January 8th 1996. The details came a few days later. They included a photo of FW and read:

"BELL, Frederick William

Lieutenant (later Lt Colonel) West Australian Mounted Infantry

Other Decorations:-

Date of Gazette: 4 Oct. 1901

Place/Date of Birth: Perth, Western Australia - 3 Apr. 1875

Place/Date of Death: Bristol - 28 Apr. 1954

Memorials: Canford Cemetery, Bristol; Australian War Memorial, Canberra

Town/County Connections: Bristol

Remarks: Served in First World War - Commandant Embarkation Camps,

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Plymouth; After the war was Political Officer, British Somaliland, then Administrative Officer, Northern Nigeria and Kenya Colony.

Account of Deed: On 16 May 1901 at Brakpan, Transvaal, South Africa, when retiring under heavy fire, Lieutenant Bell noticed a man dismounted. He returned and took him up behind him, but the horse not being equal to the weight, fell with them. The lieutenant then remained behind, covering the man's retirement until he was out of danger."

At last I had made a start, but what of Mrs Bell? She had clearly outlived her husband, but the dates and time scale made it most unlikely that she was still alive. Why wasn't she buried with her husband? Had she gone back to Australia? Were there any children of the marriage and, if so, where were they? The questions kept popping up.

On February 24th 1996 The Times carried an article about the efforts of a London policeman to locate the unmarked grave of one of the first holders of the VC who died in 1857. Not only had he been successful, but he had raised enough money to erect a headstone, with enough left over to do the same for another VC's unmarked grave. The policeman had even located family in New Zealand and they had attended the headstone ceremony. I thought that if this is possible with someone who died in 1855, then I ought to be able to do something for someone who had died in 1954. How to start?

A day or two later the Bristol Journal, a local free newspaper, carried an account of their successful efforts to locate the names of local veterans who had been killed in WW2. Over 50 had been found at that stage and it was planned to inscribe their names on the large First World War Memorial in the centre of our local community. I thought the Journal might be interested to hear of FW and my efforts so far; perhaps some family would come forward. The item was considered sufficiently interesting to warrant a short article and a photograph of myself with the grave. It appeared on 8th March plus my telephone number; readers were requested to contact me if they had information or could offer help. I sat back and hoped.

Two phone calls came on the day of publication, before I had even seen the article myself. It was nice to get them but the callers had no information to give - they just wanted a chat! The next day began the start of an amazing series of calls and letters. The first came from a retired, but not very old, ex

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officer in the British Army currently engaged in writing a doctoral thesis on aspects of late Victorian Australia; he was in collaboration with an Australian colleague, also with a military background, whom he rang each week in Australia. The caller, John Black, said he would raise the matter with his Australian colleague when he rang the next day - the common military background offering a real chance of progress. John then went on to describe the exact stage of the Boer War during which FW had gained his medal. The Boers had retreated to the hills and the War was largely of a guerilla type - hence the use of mounted infantry. A later phone call from John indicated that his colleague had actually found a photo of FW in Australia!

The next day - a Sunday - my wife and I returned from a walk to find a message on our answer phone. The caller said that if I rang back he thought that he would have something to interest me. I rang and the caller, Clive Seward, said that about 15 to 20 years ago, before he moved to his present house, he lived next door to a Mrs Bell; he had a memory that she had said that her deceased husband had held the VC. He also had a memory that Mrs Bell had moved to Oxford to live with a daughter, probably from a previous marriage. I asked if she were Australian. The answer was a very firm: "No - a more prim and proper English lady would be hard to find". Clive went on to say that a Mr and Mrs Paul had lived opposite and they had been active with the Royal British Legion. He knew that Mr Paul had died, but he thought that Mrs Paul was still alive and that she could well know a bit more about the Bells than he did. I then asked him where the Bells had lived. He told me that it was 89 Stoke Lane, Westbury-on-Trym - I was dumbfounded, for I live at 194 in the same road. FW had lived only 400 yards from my present house!

The next day my wife and I visited number 89. The present owners, George and Mary Banting, knew of FW. Mary, additionally, had a great interest in the previous owners of their house (they were the 10th); she had a complete list of all the transactions, including dates and sale prices. She was able to tell me that the Bells had moved from "Darklands", Symonds Yat, Hereford, that Mrs Bell herself had purchased the house on 11th July 1952 and that she had sold it on 7th October 1980, some 26 years after her husband had died.

The next thing I did was to look for Mrs Paul's phone number - there was no

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entry in the book. She was either dead, moved away or ex-directory in that order. In any case, the chances of contacting her seemed remote. Never-the-less a call to my contact in the Legion looked worthwhile and so I rang. I described the situation and was immediately told that Mrs Paul was still the Legion's Standard Bearer. Subsequently it turned out that Mrs Paul knew very little about Mrs Bell: "she kept herself to herself".

With this news, any Australian connection seemed tenuous - the search would need to concentrate on Britain, probably Oxford. However, I still needed more information about FW himself. It struck me that, since he had the VC, there could well have been an obituary published in The Times. At home we have a copy of "Obituaries from The Times 1951-60". FW died in 1954 and it was therefore worth a look - no luck. Closer examination of the book however showed that it was clearly a selection; the entries were mainly for nationally and internationally prominent people. Perhaps there had been an obituary after all.

Bristol is a large city with a marvellous Central Reference Library, which includes a newspaper section. A trip there was called for. I asked the receptionist for copies of The Times for 1954 to be told that they were all on microfilm. The 1954 index was then given to me and in a very few moments I found an entry "Lt Col FW Bell VC; obituary" with details of the date, page number and column for the actual edition (Saturday 1st May 1954). What I found on the microfilm read:

"Lt Col Frederick William Bell, who won the Victoria Cross for conspicuous gallantry at Brakpan in the South African War, died at Bristol on Wednesday at the age of 79.

He won the decoration on May 16th, 1901, at Brakpan. He was retiring under heavy fire after holding the right flank when he saw a colleague who was dismounted. In spite of the intensity of fire he turned about, went to the man's aid, and took him up behind him on his horse. The weight of the two men proved too great for the animal, which fell with them. Bell thereupon insisted that the man should mount the horse and make his escape. Bell remained behind and covered his retirement until he was out of danger. Bell also saw active service in Somaliland and later in the 1914-18 War.

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He later served as a political officer in British Somaliland and as an administrative officer in both Nigeria and Kenya Colony. He retired from the colonial service in 1925 and at the time the circumstances surrounding his retirement received a considerable amount of prominence. The late Lord Delamere moved a resolution in the Administrative Assembly of Kenya drawing the attention to "the reprimand and notice of termination of his services, given by the Government to Lt Col FW Bell VC, a District Commissioner, following his evidence before the Masai Inquiry Committee". The Government contended that Bell's retirement had been previously recommended on the ground that he had reached the age limit, and that it was not connected with the evidence that he had given."



from David Harvey's book "Monuments to Courage"

The account of FW's deed was better than that given in the VC Association book (see also footnote (2)), but what was this "reprimand and termination of services"? What had he done? More research was obviously needed! I therefore went back to the Reference Library and looked up "Masai Inquiry Committee" in the 1925 index. I found an entry for 23rd April, page 11 which read:

"Reprimand of Kenya Official

Lord Delamere's Criticisms (from our correspondent). Nairobi April 20th

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In the Kenya Legislative Council Lord Delamere moved a resolution drawing attention to the reprimand and notification of termination of his services given by the Government to Col FW Bell VC, a District Commissioner, following his evidence before the Masai Inquiry Committee.

Lord Delamere stated that Col Bell had given evidence that certain sums of the Native Trust Fund earmarked for certain purposes had been diverted to other purposes; also that he was ordered to send askaris (native troops) to round up Masai children, who were forced to attend school against the wishes of their parents; and further that he had characterized permission given to superior officers to allow Masai warriors to maintain their war-like insignia as very injudicious.

The resolution was defeated. The Government contended that Col Bell's retirement was previously recommended because he had reached the age limit and was not connected with the evidence, although it was true that action was not taken in regard to Col Bell's retirement until the evidence was given. The Government stated that it retains the right to censure officials who criticize the policy of their superiors, even when giving evidence. It also denied the truth of the allegations made.

Lord Delamere, in the same resolution, asked the Government to abandon the practice of instructing natives beforehand as to the evidence they were expected to give, and quoted a statement of Col Bell that he had been ordered to hold a meeting of the Masai for this purpose before the sitting of the Committee. The Government denied tampering with witnesses, asserting that it endeavoured to assist the Inquiry, but Lord Delamere regarded it as significant that the native speeches which were delivered to the Parliamentary Commission had been typewritten beforehand. He said he was fighting for principles and had no personal interest to serve."

I later found out, in an entry in The Times for 24th June 1924, that Lord Delamere had been a member of the Inquiry Committee (I never did manage to find out why the Committee had been set up in the first place). It was crystal clear that Lord Delamere had been deeply disturbed by the treatment handed out to FW whose only "crime" seems to have been that he told the truth about matters which the Government didn't wish to accept - was it not ever so? FW was not only a brave man, but also an honourable one who suffered for his honesty.



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Just before I found out about the Masai Inquiry, on 16th March, I had a totally unexpected letter from a John Woodgate. He introduced himself somewhat apologetically and went on to say that he had read the article in the Journal and taken the liberty of transcribing it onto the Internet. John has a great interest in genealogy and had been largely responsible for setting up an international genealogy group on the Net. He has contacts around the world and had sent the transcription particularly to contacts in Australia. He enclosed an e-mail that he had received from Rob Nelson in Perth with a mine of information about FW! It was unbelievable. Further e-mails and other documents followed (2) to reveal much of the life and background of FW (3 & 4) and the respect he has in his native West Australia. Based mainly on this information it is now possible to draw up a comprehensive account.

### Summary of the life of Lt Col FW Bell VC

Born in Perth, W Australia 03/04/1875. His paternal grandfather was George Bell (b. UK 1818; d. W Australia 29/11/1908). On 24/01/1846 George married Lydia Charlotte Duffield (b. UK 04/06/1829; d. W Australia 23/07/1915). George arrived on the "Napoleon" in Fremantle in 1840 (by 1865 he's listed as a carpenter in the WA Almanac). Lydia and her mother arrived with early settlers in about 1831, her father, John Hole Duffield, (FW's maternal grandfather) having arrived in Fremantle on HMS "Warrior" in 1830. They had 12 children between 1846 and 1872, 7 girls and 5 boys. Henry Thomas (1848-1923), Lt Col Bell's father, was the second child.

In 1871 Henry Thomas married Alice Agnes Watson (07/05/1853 - 04/09/1936); they had 10 children between 1873 and 1894 and FW was the second.

Of his siblings the eldest, Luna Alice (25/04/1873 - ?), married a Mr Cox and was living in the UK in 1936. Two of his brothers served in the Australian Imperial Force in WW1; Edgar was killed at Gallipoli and Bert at Pozieres in France. For more family details see " Appendix".

FW was initially in the W Australian Customs Dept, joining as a cadet in 1894; he later became a cashier.

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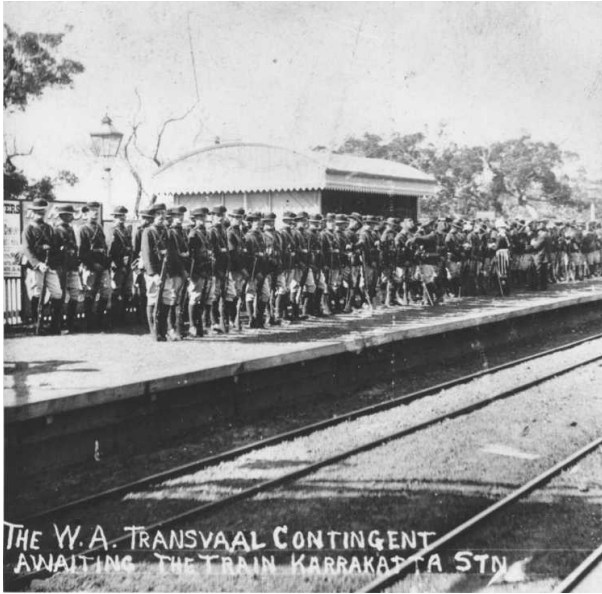
In October 1899, at the outbreak of the South African War, he enlisted as a Private in the 1st West Australian (Mounted Infantry) Contingent. (At this stage of the development of Australia the individual States acted on their own in these matters: only in 1901 did the States combine to produce an "Australian" army).



Fred prior to enlistment. Possibly outside his mother's place in Cottesloe, a beach suburb of Perth, WA or outside a Stirling Street, Perth address.

Source: John Bissett, WA

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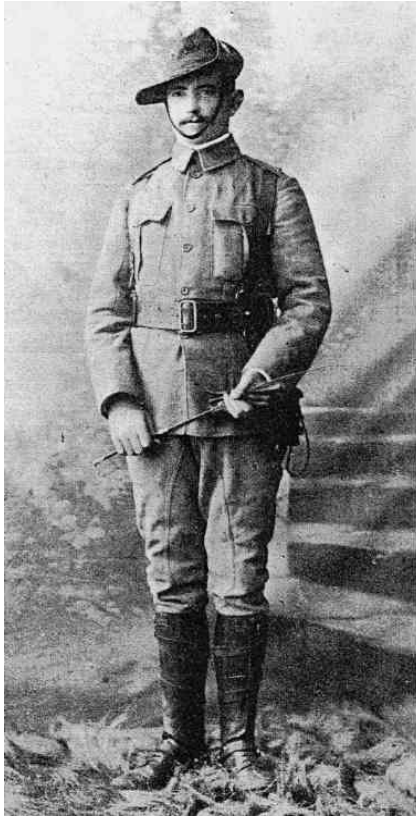


WA Transvaal Contingent lining up on Karrakatta station, near Perth, 7th November 1899. Fred is listed as one of those present - he was a Private at the time.

Souce: Aldon George, via John Sweetman and John Bissett.

He first saw action at Slingsersfontein, and later took part in the relief of Johannesburg and Pretoria and the battles of Diamond Hill and Wittenbergen: on 19th July 1900, in a sharp engagement at Palmeitfontein, he was seriously wounded in the abdomen and invalided to England. He returned to Perth in February 1901, was commissioned Lieutenant in the 6th Contingent on 8th March and re-embarked for South Africa

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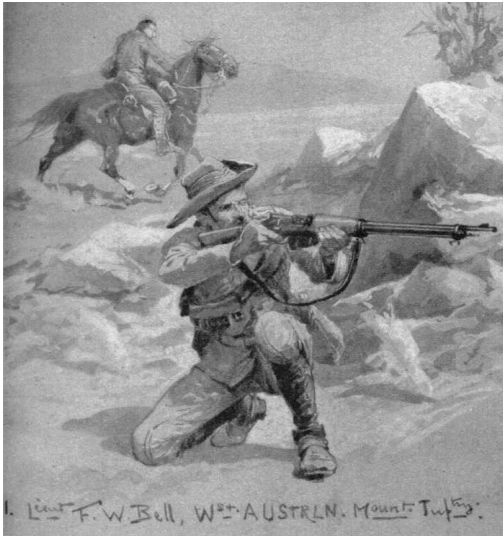


FW as a young soldier.

Source: John Bissett

He gained the VC at Brakpan in the Transvaal for bravery in action. He was the first W Australian to achieve this honour. Details of his action were carried in the London Illustrated News of October 12th 1901, pages 534 and 535, along with two other VC medal winners from different actions.

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Note the remarkable likeness between the earlier photos and the artist's image.

All Crosses are engraved with the date of the action on the back and the recipient's name on the back of the Clasp. However FW was originally presented with an unengraved Cross in South Africa, one of several taken out for presentation in the field by the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. It was returned to the War Office for engraving. In the meantime another Cross with FW's name on it had been prepared for presentation and sent separately to South Africa, but it was later melted down. (There is another version of this story which says that the medal was presented by the Prince to FW in London on 11th July 1902).

After his discharge in May 1902 he joined the Australian section of the Coronation Escort for King Edward VII. He then settled in Perth, but returned to England, joined the Colonial Service in 1905 and was appointed to British Somaliland as an Assistant District Officer in April.

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He became an Assistant Political Officer later that year, a post which he held until 1910. He took up big game hunting and, in 1909, narrowly escaped death in a lion hunt. He found himself alone as a lion charged. He shot it, but managed only to infuriate it by blowing away its lower jaw. The lion and he wrestled in the dust until help arrived. He spent six months in England recovering from the mauling.

He became Assistant Resident in Nigeria in 1910 and an Assistant District Commissioner in Kenya in 1912. In 1914 he became ill and was sent to England to recuperate.

At the outbreak of WW1, on the eve of his recovery, he immediately volunteered for service. (In 1907 he had been commissioned in the 4th Reserve Regiment of Cavalry). He went to France with the Royal Irish Dragoon Guards. He was mentioned in dispatches and promoted to Captain in October 1915. He was also wounded again. He returned to England and was made Commandant of a rest camp and promoted to Major; later he was made Lt Col and became the Commandant of the Embarkation Camps in Plymouth.



FW as a captain in WW1.  
Source - "The Duffields of  
Bicton" (see Appendix), via  
John Bissett

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After the War he became a District Commissioner in Kenya.

In May 1922, aged 47, he married in London to Mabel Mackenzie Valentini (nee Skinner), a divorcee. She died in 1944.

In 1924/25 he gave evidence at the Masai Inquiry Committee at which his evidence appeared to displease the Government; he was retired in 1925, allegedly on the grounds of age - he was 50 at the time. The Government denied the allegations he gave under oath to the Inquiry.

He remarried on 20th February 1945 to Brenda Margaret Cracklow (nee Illingworth), a widow. At this time he was 69.

He visited W Australia with his wife in 1947 and took part in a ceremony with other holders of the VC.

Prior to 1952 he lived at Darklands, Symonds Yat, Hereford. He moved to 89 Stoke Lane, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol following the purchase of the house by his wife on 11th July 1952.

He died in Bristol on Wednesday 28th April 1954 at the age of 79. He is buried in Canford Cemetery, Bristol. An obituary appeared in The Times on Saturday 1st May 1954. His wife continued to live in the house, apparently with Mary Brenda Cracklow, her retired secretary but also probably an unmarried Sister-in-Law from Mrs Bell's first marriage.(5).

Lt Col Bell had no children of his own.

In 1979 W Australia celebrated the 150th anniversary of its first settlement. 150 brass plaques were placed in the pavements of Perth; his details are on the one for 1901.

In 1984 a medal dealer offered his VC (and other medals) for sale to the family in WA. The asking price was apparently A\$43,000, possibly for the VC only. The medal had been sold much earlier (details unknown, but possibly by his widow or step son) and went to Canada. See (5) and last paragraphs of this text.

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It then reappeared on the market in London from where the offer to the family came. In view of the price the family were forced to decline the offer. However the WA Government was alerted about the sale and made arrangements for one of their representatives to make the acquisition. The story hit the WA newspapers on 12th Oct. 1984. The medals are now on permanent display in the WA museum. The medals, 10 in all, consist of the VC; Queen's South Africa Medal (clasps for Wittenbergen, Diamond Hill, Johannesburg, and Cape Colony); King's South Africa Medal (clasps for South Africa 1901 and 1902); Africa General Service Medal (clasp for Somaliland 1908-10); 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal with Oak Leaf (Mention in Dispatches), Coronation Medals for Edward VII, George VI and Elizabeth II.

In 1991 a permanent display about him was placed in the foyer of the Customs Department in Fremantle.

So far 3 relatives had been traced, all in WA, all children of FW's brother Harry George (22/02/1879 - 03/08/1962). Others came to light later.

In one of Rob's e-mails he said that he would be in contact with both the W Australian Customs Service and the W Australian Government in the hope that some money to help restore the grave might be available. He also said that the relatives, some of whom he had actually spoken to, had no objection to the grave being restored. With a view to helping his campaign I made short videos of FW's house in Stoke Lane, Canford cemetery where he's buried, his grave and sent these off to Rob on 25th March.

Rob had also indicated that the Western Australian Museum, where FW's medals are displayed, had a great interest in discovering how they came to end up in Canada; he had spoken to the W Australian medal dealer who had been offered the medals in 1984 and had been told that the medals had been found in Canada by the London firm of Spink; the name of another London intermediary was also given. On 1st April I rang Spink in London; they knew of the intermediary and said they would make enquiries and ring back. This they did about six hours later, but the news was not good. They themselves



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only had records back to 1986 and other sources had no records. It seemed then we could get no further with the saga of the "lost" medals. Pity (6).

In return for all the information from Australia I was asked to try to find out more about FW's English period after his forced retirement. I knew that the address where he and his second wife lived prior to their removal to Bristol was "Darklands, Symonds Yat, Hereford". Back in 1952, when they moved to Bristol, Symonds Yat lay right on the border of Monmouthshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. Monmouthshire and Herefordshire no longer exist as separate Counties. Where was I to turn? I put off the decision until mid May when I rang the General Property Services of Bristol City Council. They were a bit bemused by my request of help as to where to look for information; never-the-less, after some internal consultations, they suggested that I rang Gwent County Council, since they thought that Symonds Yat was now in that domain. BT rapidly gave me the correct phone number and again, after some internal discussions, in which it became clear that they had no records, they gave me the number of the Hereford Record Office, which still exists as a separate entity in spite of the County now being Hereford and Worcester. I rang and told them the information that I was trying to gain about FW. There and then they checked the Electoral Registers, but with no result; they next turned to Kelly's Directory for 1941 and discovered that FW, presumably with his first wife who died in 1944, lived at "Pengwyn", Symonds Yat. They also told me that a Mrs Cracklow was living at "Darklands", Symonds Yat. (Mrs Cracklow was FW's second wife whom he married in 1945). They then checked the 1934 Directory and established that both FW and Mrs Cracklow were at the same addresses. Unfortunately the next oldest Kelly's that they had was for 1922, when I knew that FW was still in Kenya. All of this Hereford information came over the phone in the course of about 20 minutes.

It thus appears that FW lived in Symonds Yat - a very beautiful part of the world incidentally - at least from 1934. Initially he was with his first wife, whom he married in London in 1922. She died in 1944 and about a year later he married Mrs Cracklow, a widow, whom he must have known for many years since they both lived in the same area. When his first wife died he

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moved into "Darklands", owned by Mrs Cracklow and it was for this reason that she, and not he, purchased the house in Bristol. Whether he ever owned "Pengwyn" or merely rented, I don't know. However, see (5).

I now regarded FW's story as complete. I submitted an account of my searches to The Military History Society of Australia and they were delighted to publish it in their journal *Sabretache* - the address having been given me by John Black. (*Sabretache* 1997:38/2:3-12)

However, there was still the problem of the grave. In late August it became clear that the Royal British Legion had been successful in their efforts to find names to go on the War memorial - 127 were eventually found. I thought another approach might be worthwhile. The outcome of this was that, with their great help and especially that of Brigadier Joe Starling, the money for refurbishment was found just before Remembrance Sunday 1996. The BBC were sufficiently interested to make a short film for TV and an interview for radio; they even did a live interview with Rob Nelson! Tragically, Joe Starling died a few weeks later, after a long illness.

The story did now seem complete. I had heard from the stonemason that the actual refurbishment would take place in a few weeks, in very early January 1997. I sent a copy of the Radio Bristol interview to Rob Nelson and closed my folder on FW, only to have to open it again a day or two later! Georgina Harvey, the BBC reporter who had set up the radio and TV interviews rang and said that the Australian press were interested in the story; could I please give her another interview and take her to the grave so that she could take some photos. A suitable date was made and she took her photos and made notes. I expressed some doubt about the chances of her piece ever being printed, but she seemed confident.

All went quiet again until lunch time on Sunday 15th December when a man rang our door bell and said that he was Barry Southgate and that he lived around the corner. He had just come back from Perth in W Australia where, on Sunday 8th December in the WA Sunday Times he had read an article by Georgina which described my efforts to find out about FW. He had been

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fascinated with the story and wondered if I would like the appropriate page to keep, since he'd bought it all the way back with the object of letting me have it! My doubts about Georgina's contacts were clearly unwarranted and I was dumbfounded yet again.

The paper carried a second piece, this time about FW's medals and how they came to Australia via Canada. Apparently FW's step-son had emigrated there and it was he who had sold it to the London dealer. Another piece of the jig-saw had fallen into place (6).

Christmas Eve bought an unexpected letter from Australia - from Edward Keenan a great grandson of Rosetta, one of FW's aunts. He too gave me a copy of the article; he also thanked me deeply for my efforts with the grave! (7).

I now felt FW's story to be well and truly told and, as promised, in mid January 1997 his grave was neatly restored. A final twist came at about 8.30am on 7th March 1997. Our phone rang and the voice at the other end said that he was a John Bissett (3), ringing from Perth in WA. His wife was a great niece of FW; they too had seen the newspaper article and could I please tell them more! I sent them a copy of the story and gave them Edward Keenan's address - they didn't know of him. Later, in June 2000 on a European holiday, they visited us and saw the grave. They told me that a street had recently been named after FW - FW Bell Parade, in the Perth suburb of Victoria Park after new evidence revealed that FW had lived there for a few months working as a local government employee.

In October 1997, I deposited all my papers about FW in the newly opened Empire and Commonwealth Museum housed in Isambard Kingdom Brunel's old (1830) railway station in Bristol.

A couple of years passed and, on 16th May 2001 the centenary of Fred's deed was honoured with a ceremony around his grave. I had alerted the Royal British Legion of this anniversary. They arranged, and paid for, a further refurbishment of the grave, which had become a little green since 1997. As

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well as the Legion's representatives those present also included JN Tidmarsh, MBE, JP, the Lord Lieutenant of Bristol, Lt Col Mike Phelps, Australian Army and Col Brian John, the head of the local branch of the Royal British Legion. Wider coverage had been given on 1st May by the Bristol Times, a weekly historical supplement to the Bristol Evening Post, which published a half page article on the results of my efforts to find out more about Fred.



JN Tidmarsh, MBE, JP, the Lord Lieutenant of Bristol, a Royal British Legion flag bearer, Lt Col Mike Phelps, Australian Army, Col Brian John, the head of the local branch of the Royal British Legion and Canon Roy Harrison, Chaplain to the Gloucestershire County branch of the Legion.

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The ceremony itself, conducted by Canon Roy Harrison, Chaplain to the Gloucestershire County branch of the Legion, consisted of a simple 30 minute grave-side service with flag bearers and a bugler from the Legion. Very dignified and appropriate. Fred would have been extremely proud. The sun even shone!

Although I had long thought Fred's story to be complete, in August 2003 I was surprised, yet again, to receive the following message from Michelle Cracklow in Canada, the granddaughter of George, Fred's stepson. It read:

"Fred and his first wife Isabelle traveled the world together during his war posting. I have some of her souvenirs she purchased on her travels. I can't recall how she died but Fred then married my great grandmother Brenda Cracklow. They lived across the river from each other and were friends before Isabelle passed away. Brenda's first husband passed away of Cancer in 1931. Brenda had had four children with George Agnew Cracklow named; Douglas, Cynthia, George, and Mary. George Agnew Cracklow's grave can be visited in Simmons Yat at the old church on the river. He was an architect and was the man who built Darkland in 1912. I was there in 1999 and George's grave was in very good condition. Brenda then married Fred and he moved in with her at Darkland. It was named Darkland because of all the trees surrounding the house. Mary, one of Brenda's children, resided with them.

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The rest of the children went off to war. My Grandfather George Junior, also known as Anthony, married my grandmother Emma Britland and they had two children, Barbara and Christopher. I know you don't really want the info on my family but there is a reason I am telling you this. Fred may have been a courageous man at some point but, once he Married Brenda and retired, he was a whole different man. As Fred never had any of his own children, his Medals where passed on to George Junior. My father Christopher and my Grandfather emigrated to Canada in 1972 with their families. My grandfather was diagnosed with Cancer and discussed with my dad that he would be the next to receive the Medals. They both decided that, since Fred was not a blood relative, and since Fred had done something unspeakable to some family members, then our family did not want to keep the Medals as a reminder any longer. So they sold the VC and the others in the late 1980's for \$C14,000. I am not sure of the date. Brenda lived her final days with her daughter Mary, since they were both on their own. Mary died in 1997 and is placed next to Brenda, who died in 1982, near Worcester. Fred spent his last years in a hospital in Hereford for the mentally ill. He was moved to a nearby hospital where he passed away.

I am sorry if this becomes a shock to you after all the research you have done but, as you know history, is not always what is documented. This is why our family has not looked after his grave and why the Medals were sold. Our family did give him a proper burial when he died. My father Christopher Cracklow still has the miniatures. Cynthia and Douglas are still alive and well and residing in England; however George (deceased 1990)and Mary (deceased 1997) have been gone some time now and dearly missed. I hope I have been of some help as to how he spent his retired years, why the VC was sold and how it came to Canada. If you have further questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,  
Michelle Cracklow"

My medical background leads me to guess that Fred, who married Brenda Cracklow when he was 69, may well have suffered from Alzheimer's Disease, known as 'Senile Dementia' at that time. This could have been responsible for

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his apparent bizarre behaviour.

Although the above story seemed genuine, it did contain some discrepancies with known details. Fred's obituary in the Times said that he 'died at Bristol', not in Hereford; Fred's first wife was called Mabel Mackenzie Valentini, not Isabelle as given above.

Further enquiries, however, revealed that a 'nearby hospital' was actually one nearer home in Bristol. 'Isabelle' was an error in the family memory of the name of Fred's first wife. She was always known as 'Belle', short for 'Mabel', and not 'Isabelle'.

Later, in September 2003, Michelle (Stewart nee Cracklow) wrote again.

"This is the information I have gathered thus far.

Fred and Brenda Cracklow (Illingworth) knew each other as friends in Symonds Yat. They lived across the river from one another. After Fred's wife passed away, Fred remarried to my great grandmother Brenda. They resided together in Darklands, the house my great grandfather built in 1912. They married on February 20, 1945.

Brenda had four children from her first marriage. Fred had no children of his own. Brenda's children are as follows:

Mary Cracklow born March 30, 1913  
Deceased September 25, 1997

Douglas Cracklow born January 6, 1917

George Anthony Cracklow born May 15, 1919  
Deceased November 6, 1990

Cynthia Cracklow born May 6, 1922

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George Cracklow was my grandfather.

Fred and Brenda travelled to Australia together for a VC ceremony. They lived there for six months. Brenda tried to convince her children they should move there to live; however, they declined the invitation. Brenda and Fred returned home.

Fred was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and was relocated to a mental health hospital in Hereford and was later moved to a closer hospital in Bristol to live out his remaining days. Fred passed away on April 28, 1954. (JCB. In early September 2004 I was sent details of FW's Death Certificate. He died in Stapleton Hospital, Bristol, which I know had previously been 'Stapleton Workhouse', later Manor Park Hospital and is currently called Blackberry Hill Hospital. His death was certified as due to 'Arteriosclerosis'.)

It was George Cracklow that inherited the medals on Fred's behalf. George relocated to Canada in 1973. George relocated to Canada with his wife Emma (Britland) to join his son (my father) and daughter who had already relocated to Canada. George contracted cancer and discussed with Christopher that the medals would be passed on to him. They decided that they would sell the medals and contacted Fred's surviving relatives to offer it to them. They declined the offer, apparently for lack of funds. George was then asked by the Museum to donate the VC. The Australian government eventually purchased the VC in the late 1980's for 14,000 Canadian dollars.

To this day my father still has the miniatures and I have enclosed a picture that he took of them today for you to see. I hope I have been of some help to you all. I have tried to stick to the facts and have left out some personal information to protect the privacy of some living relatives.



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My father is considering putting the miniatures up for sale if you know of anyone who would be interested. Obviously, family members would have first option to purchase if they have an interest. Let me know if you would consider the option."

Later, the following photos (taken in 1946, when Fred was 71, before he and his wife, Brenda went to Australia) were sent to me by Michelle Stewart, nee Cracklow. They were taken by, and are currently owned by Emma Pauline Cracklow



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Mary Cracklow, Fred Bell, Cynthia Cracklow Brenda Bell (Cracklow),  
Barbara Cracklow, Emma Pauline Cracklow (Britland)  
Barbara is Brenda's grand daughter. Barbara is the daughter of George  
Cracklow and wife Emma Pauline Cracklow.

The second photo is of Brenda Bell, Barbara Cracklow and Fred Bell.

The third photo is of George Cracklow, his daughter Barbara Cracklow  
and Fred Bell.

Photos of Fred and his first wife were later sent to me by Michelle.

The miniatures were offered to the WA Museum, which originally agreed to buy them. Later the Museum changed its mind. The set is now likely to be auctioned some time in 2004. I later heard that the family now don't intend to sell.

With these clarifications, and the eventual fate of the miniatures, this must surely be the final chapter of FW's life.

However, life is full of surprises and, on 11 July 2004, I had the following message from Peter Enlund East Burwood, Victoria, Australia.

"You have cited the "Duffields of Bicton" book and I have direct links with the Bell family. I am first cousin five times removed to a Rosetta Bell,

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George's sister, b in 20 February 1812 in Greenwich. Lydia and George had a daughter, also named Rosetta and so we can see where the name comes from. George also has cousin, Rosetta Rebecca Bell, who is my third great grand-aunt. Her grandfather, Henry Trubshaw BELL b 1752 is my fifth great grandfather.

I have been researching the Bell family for less than a year but have had great success in tracing it from afar. It was just yesterday that I received some research from the London Metropolitan Archives with the baptismal records of Henry Trubshaw BELL and a few of his relatives back to 1695. I had already ascertained that George Rutledge had married into the family and learned of his journeys to Australia. The fact that his George Bell accompanied him was a bolt out the blue as is the history that has been documented by the Duffields of South Australia."

In September 2005 another set of messages and photos arrived. The text included:

"Hi James,

My name is Robert Dethridge. I am a grand nephew of Fred Bell. My mother Betty (nee Bell) being one of Fred's brother Harry George Bell's children. Some years ago, I read our local Sunday Times story about your wonderful efforts in bringing Fred's resting place and history to light but I only happened across the full story on the internet this week.

I was moved by the sheer effort and sincerity displayed in your research and the onflow of activity from it.

I am contacting some of my other Bell related cousins and printing off copies of your story for those that may not have internet access.

Only one of Fred's nieces, Pat Bell (86) presently survives. Pat would have met Fred but, unfortunately, she is suffers dementia.

Myself, my sister and my cousins have some mementos of Fred but, in line with modern day relatives, exactly what we hold I cannot say.

I personally have 2 faded and moth eaten photos of Fred in full officer's uniform, previously having rested in on the piano of his sister Eva Bell's house in Cottesloe (a house gifted to her by Fred) for about 65 years or so.

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One is signed, both around 1916.

I still live in Cottesloe and recollect our Aunt Eva telling us stories about Fred and his brothers. I knew the Bell house in Cottesloe very well (my mother inherited it) and it is not the one in the photo behind the early shot of Fred on a pony.

I also have an 1947 story from our local press with a photograph of Fred meeting the last Western Australian to win a VC. Story entitled "First Meets Last".

An oil painting by his artistic sister, Luna, hangs on my lounge room wall as does a photo of his brother Bert.

Fred was possibly Cottesloe's first real hero. His photograph hung on the main wall of City of Cottesloe council chambers for over 80 years (it may still be there). The only other photograph on the same wall being of the King or Queen at the time."



Fred has written a dedication to his mother on the reverse side. It is dated 10.09.16. Taken in or near Devonport UK where he was commanding officer at an embarkation / rest camp.

James Briggs

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### Footnotes:

(1) This grave belongs to Lt Col FS Le Quesne, RAMC, VC. He gained his medal in Tartun, Upper Burma on 4th May 1889. He died in 1950. The grave was eventually restored by the RAMC in the spring of 1999 following a combined effort by myself and the Royal British Legion.

(2) A more detailed account of the action at Brakpan is given in the Western Australian Museum's pamphlet associated with the display of FW's medals. It goes:

"In May and June 1901 the Fifth and Sixth WA Mounted Infantry Contingents were searching for Boer parties in open country east of Johannesburg. In a severe engagement on 15 May, five members of the Sixth Contingent were killed. The following day Boers ambushed the Contingent in long grass in marshy country. They let the leading scouts pass by, then opened fire at close range on the main body. Galloping for the safety of high ground, the West Australians were pursued by Boers firing from horseback. A retreating horse fell with its rider. Lieutenant Bell hoisted the man up behind, but their combined weight was too great for his horse. Bell sent the man on to safety on the horse while he gave rapid covering fire from behind an anthill, covering not only the man's retreat but that of Captain Campbell, a brother officer with another rescued rider mounted behind him. For his bravery that day, Bell was awarded the Victoria Cross". See also end of (5).

(3) One of the documents sent was a copy of a sketch map of the actions at Brakpan. Of the five killed on 15th May one was Lt Anthony Forrest, son of the former Lord Mayor of Perth, and a nephew of the Premier, Sir John Forrest. The news of Anthony Forrest's death may well have contributed to his father's own death soon afterwards. The sketch map, from Sir John's papers, shows where Lt Forrest was killed, and where Lt Bell won his VC. The map now resides in the JS Battye Library of West Australia. The map-maker is not named but from the considerable detail included it must have been drawn by someone very familiar with the scene, probably present on both days.

However, John Bissett told me in June 2000 that the correct story is as

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follows:

The actual map forms the backdrop to FW's medal display in the WA museum. The JS Battye Library has a copy. The map itself was commissioned by Sir John some months after the events - he ordered all the personal diaries of the troops to be examined. On the evidence of these unofficial, and probably illegally kept diaries, the map was drawn up.

(4) Another document sent was a photocopy of an article published in The West Australian Mercury of 21st October 1901. In essence this was a transcript of a letter FW had sent to his parents, dated 10th August and says that since his last letter:

"The contingent have had a tough time, but are recompensed by the results of same, taking in all 50 prisoners, innumerable waggons, cattle, horses and sheep; also mealie and foodstuff. This morning we left Ermelo after spending yesterday there in collecting the inhabitants who were the Boers' best friends. We fought a pretty severe rear-guard action coming away; as we evacuated, the enemy again going in and following us to this camp, the strength of the commando being 800. Many handsome buildings we were compelled to burn, and last night was unique in my experience. Imagine a dozen houses at least in blaze at one time; and again our column camped on the outskirts, having huge bonfire concerts, with instruments looted from the adjacent houses, including at least five pianos among the different regiments, everybody enjoying the scene and life, and merriment prevailing on all sides. Such a sight is not easily forgotten and, no doubt, the night of 10-8-1901 will live a long time in our memories. A few nights since we had the good fortune to bag 25 prisoners. Marching all night we surrounded a farm just as dawn was breaking. We fixed bayonets and charged with a yell, with the result of capturing without a shot. Some trouble was experienced in getting them out of the houses, but a few men with cold steel worked wonders. They were, indeed, a motley lot and, strange to say, amongst them were some old enemies of ours whom we had previously met at Brakpan. We identified them by saddlery, wearing apparel etc., etc., taken from the killed at that place. One man was also wearing a ring our men recognised as belonging to a dead comrade. Our prisoner tried very hard to hide himself in the roof; it was funny to see him poked out of hiding with a bayonet. In this capture, as

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Tommy would say, we "got our own back".

We are now on route to Carolina and, on arrival there expect a good mail. In regard to letters lately captured at Reits, I can place very little reliance on them. The prisoners taken assure us that Botha has not the least intention of giving up. This trek we have been in a lot of the same country as when with Kitchener. The third night out we secured 18 prisoners in the same manner as before mentioned. This portion of the Transvaal is now one burnt out and blackened mass. The want of grass is beginning to tell on the Boers' cattle and horses; those captured by us are, many of them, in poor condition. Only this morning we shot over 50 wild ones driven in by us and found to be useless. A few words in reference to the contingent. The men have now thoroughly settled down to the work and are beginning to understand the wily burgher and his many varied and own peculiar ways of fighting; they have not had, as predicted in the first, a huge picnic. Hard work and plenty of fighting have been the general thing, intermingling with severe night marches in the biting cold. There are few things more fatiguing or trying than the latter. How entirely different everything now is when compared with the general advance of eighteen months ago, unless actually experienced, very few can form any idea of what a prolonged and severe campaign like this really means. Country, one devastated burnt and blackened mass; home and belongings consigned to the flames, as each column winds along; cattle, sheep and livestock either destroyed or driven in; families given short notice to leave their all and come along after watching the destruction of homes they have known since childhood. I am not, in the least, an admirer of the Boer or his ways, but, taking all these things into consideration, I cannot censure him for killing as many of us as possible. What would Englishmen, or Australians, do under the same conditions as our enemies but fight to the last? Blood is thicker than water. Even so, we cannot but admire the Dutch women for their loyalty, self-sacrifice and devotion they have shown to the men fighting against us; now alas, for them, a forlorn cause. Small skirmishes are now the order of the day. The Boers are now broken up into small parties. Nevertheless, they cause us plenty of hard work, with minimum risk to themselves; knowing every nook and corner as they do, it is a simple matter for them to evade us. Night work appears the only way of surprising them as,

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owing to the intensely cold weather, they are compelled to take shelter in some of the farms. Snipe, snipe, snipe from ridge to ridge, and so the rear-guard usually gets it. Guerilla war-fare is now the correct term. From information gleaned from recent prisoners bagged, this struggle seems no nearer termination than it was twelve months ago. The man who changeth not is the Australian soldier. He goes his way happy in the possession of loot and a good horse, and although, perhaps, the weight of a little pig or, perchance a duck on the saddle tells on his mount, he fights none the worse for it. The latest scheme has been collecting kaffirs; the spectacle of a regiment of niggers of all ages and descriptions, from the picaninny to the aged gin with not enough clothing amongst them to make a decent dishcloth, is indeed funny. So they do their daily march in rear of the convoy, carrying their worldly belongings with them. One of the most striking features of the campaign is the necessary destruction of yoke oxen, horses, mules etc. These poor dumb brutes are forced along until they drop from sheer exhaustion, being then shot and left to rot. When I tell you I have seen as many as twenty oxen drop on one march, you will form some idea of the number required; horses even in greater proportion are destroyed. Good old John Bull is ever ready with a fresh one; his purse strings are being pulled severely, however. Something out of the ordinary I witnessed the other evening. We had collected a number of Dutch women and children. It being Sunday night in camp, they asked permission to sing hymns. On being granted them, and after going through well known "Sankey's", assisted by our own Tommies, they sang "Where is my wandering boy tonight?", first in their own tongue and then in ours. This last would have been quite as successful as the former, only our fellows would be original and substitute the word "girl" in lieu of "boy", which caused the ladies, after singing the Dutch National Anthem, to retire, and so the proceedings ended with "God Save the King" from the lusty throats of three or four hundred Britishers. probably you are wondering where the Boers' supplies are coming from and how he exists. 'Tis a simple matter, for every farm there are at least two kaffir kraals; until quite recently these have been left intact by us, notwithstanding they all contained large supplies of mealies, millet etc. As the Boer believes in Might before Right, the consequence is that the kaffir has to part with his stock. We are the sufferers. In addition to this, his cattle are unmolested, with the result of the Boer



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coming behind and helping himself. There are supplies hidden in the country to keep them for many months to come. We are continually bringing to light such things. A favourite place for hiding different articles is their graveyards, shaping the earth so as to resemble a newly made grave. We make some very fair finds in these places; also in the rocks and on the banks of streams we dig up loot of all descriptions.

A rather amusing incident occurred prior to leaving Ermalo. I was behind with a small post. It appears that two privates remained in town after the column had moved out, with the result of the Boers coming in on top of them. As they only had one horse, they tossed a coin as to who would remain behind, whilst the other took his chance of running the gauntlet. The man who decided to ride for it had a bad time, for as he approached me I gave my men the order for volleys, never dreaming he was one of our own men, as I knew the enemy to be in the town. By his waving and shouting I saw something was amiss, and let him approach. Fortunately he was not hit, only scared. The man who was compelled to remain was wounded and taken prisoner, being subsequently released, and arriving at camp the same evening. Both belonged to the Scottish Horse."

(5) On Sunday 16th March 1997 I received a phone call from a Mrs Jackie Sargisson from Bodmin, in Cornwall. Through brief summaries published in the Westbury-on-Trym "Courier" she had been told of my efforts to research FW. She rang to say that when she lived in Bristol she used to visit Mrs Bell in Stoke Lane. Mrs Bell lived with her unmarried daughter Mary (not her Sister-in-Law, as I thought) and they had moved to Droitwich, near Birmingham, in 1980 in order to be near Mrs Bell's other (married) daughter, Cynthia. Mrs Bell had subsequently died, but both her daughters were still alive, Mary about 80 years old and living in a Residential Home in Droitwich. I was given Mary's address and I wrote almost immediately. Mrs Sargisson didn't know Cynthia's address but, on 22nd March, Cynthia, now Mrs Xxxxx, rang and confirmed many of the features of the story of FW. She also said that her mother had died in 1982, aged 92, and is buried in Hampton Lovatt church, near where her daughters live. She also said that FW and his first wife came to Symmonds Yat in 1925 and approached her father for advice

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about a house to rent (she didn't know why the Bells chose Symmonds Yat in the first place). Later Mrs Bell purchased "Pengwyn". When she died she left the house to FW, and the rest of her estate to charity - Dr Barnado's Homes; she had no children of her own. Incidentally, "Pengwyn" lay on one side of the Wye valley in Herefordshire and "Darklands" on the other side in Gloucestershire, all part of the general area known as "Symmonds Yat". Mrs Xxxxx also said that she thought that the man rescued by FW was his batman. Prior to the Boer War FW had worked for many weeks as a cattle driver in Queensland and just before WWI he had spent time in Monte Carlo; he was very broke but gambled all he had left and came away quite rich!

(6) In April 1998 Richard Xxxxx, Cynthia's son, told me that FW's medals had been given to FW's stepson (Cynthia's brother) by FW's wife during her life time. He lived in Canada and sold the medals soon after. It is thought that he used the proceeds to help his own children. He is now dead.

(7) On 21st March 1997 I sent Edward Keenan a video of FW's house plus grave in 1996 and 1997. He later sent me a detailed account of the Bell family history and where he fitted in. See "Appendix"

NB: Family names deleted at their request

### Appendix

Extract from Book One of the "Duffields of Bicton 1776-1974"

This book was apparently privately published by "OD", a member of the Duffield family. The extract was sent to me from W Australia by Edward Keenan, a descendant of Rosetta Bell, who was his great grandmother and FW's aunt. Edward Keenan died in early 2004.

Note: In October 2003 John Bissett in WA sent me the following details about the book: John said that the pages sent to me by Edward Keenan are the only ones with reference to FW. In August 2004 Peter Enlund sent me photocopies

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of the relevant pages - 96-105 - which included the Family Tree from 1819 when George Bell, the first of the Australian branch, was born.

"Duffields of Bicton 1776 -1974 was compiled by Oliver and Pauline Duffield of South Australia. It is a 128 page bound book published in 1974. Additional publication came out in the early nineties. Both Oliver and Pauline have, I believe, passed over. (JCB: the relevant pages are 96-105)

John Duffield came out to WA in 1830 with his family and settled on land now known as Bicton, Perth Western Australia. John was given one of first land grants along the Swan River. John was a cooper (maker of barrels). It would appear that he was born in Bicton in Devon and worked on the estate of Bicton Gardens. The book has family trees and photos of family members."

Lydia Charlotte Duffield was born at Plymouth on the 4th June 1829. She was baptized on the 21st June of that year by the Rev. Robert Hawker in the Parish Church of Charles. She was an infant of four months when her father, John Hole Duffield, left Plymouth for Western Australia. When she arrived with her mother at Fremantle, she was only two years of age and would, therefore, have had no recollection of England. On the 24th January 1846, and at the age of sixteen, Lydia married George Bell, who was then twenty-seven. They were married in St. John's Church, Fremantle, by the Rev. C. King; the record of the ceremony appears in Volume 1, page 3, of the matrimonial records of Western Australia. George Bell was the third son of Henry Thrubshaw Bell of Greenwich, England. George arrived at Fremantle in 1840 in the old sailing ship "Napoleon", which was commanded by Captain Rutledge, his brother-in-law. In the Western Australian Almanac of 1865 George was listed as a carpenter. He was forty-six years of age at the time.

George Bell owned land in Hay Street, Perth, and he and Lydia lived there for many years. When their home in Perth was demolished, they moved to a cottage in Church Avenue, Subiaco. Lydia carried on the traditional name of "Bicton" by giving it to this house, which, incidentally still stands to this day. (Recently I have endeavoured to further perpetuate the name by calling my own home, here at Glenelg North, South Australia, by the same name. It is

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my sincere hope that others, in years to come, will continue the practice).

Few people have the joy of celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of their wedding and Lydia and George were the first couple married in Western Australia to achieve this distinction. Their diamond wedding was celebrated at home and the accompanying photograph (on p. 97) was taken there. It is worth remembering that George Bell was eighty-seven years when this photograph was taken. What a wonderful specimen he looked at this age - a grand old man. He died on the 29th November 1908 at the age of eighty-nine. Lydia lived on for almost another seven years. Her death occurred on the 23rd July 1915. She was eighty-six and a colonist of eighty-four years. They were buried at the old East Perth pioneer cemetery. The cemetery and the church of St. Bartholomew, which stands in its grounds, have been placed on the classified list of the National Trust as a place to be preserved as an essential part of the nation's heritage.

Lydia and George had twelve children. One of their daughters, Evelyn Foss, married James McFarlane Lapsley, a master plumber. The success of the goldfields in Western Australia was largely due to him. Health problems in the early days of the goldfields were closely associated with the lack of good water. Lapsley solved the water problem by condensing salt water from the shallow lakes and wells sunk near by. He built his first small plant at Kurnalpi early in 1894. This became known as the "desert condenser". It could be taken to pieces and easily packed on a camel or horse. Many people throughout the diggings survived the long, hot summers solely because of these machines. Lapsley's idea was quickly developed and condensing plants on an immense scale were built at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. They produced thousands of gallons of good drinking water daily. It has been said that James Lapsley is the forgotten man of Kalgoorlie's history. It was he, and his mate, who cut, soldered and welded the maze of pipes and tanks and maintained the numerous condensers in the desert. Without them, the mining towns of the West would not have existed. In later years, Lapsley was the Superintendent of Metropolitan Fire Brigades in Perth, where he and Evelyn were popular and very well-liked.

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One of Lydia's grandsons, Lieut. F. W. Bell, was the first Western Australian to win a Victoria Cross. It was awarded on the 16th May 1901 for outstanding bravery at Brakpan during the Boer War. When the War broke out in 1899, he enlisted as a private with the 1st Western Australian contingent. He fought in several major engagements, was seriously wounded and invalided to England. After a partial recovery he returned to Western Australia. Still not fit, it is said that he bluffed his way through another medical examination and returned to South Africa with the 6th (Mounted Infantry) contingent, and then came the occasion at Brakpan which won him his Victoria Cross. While retiring under very heavy fire, after holding the right flank, Fred noticed a man dismounted. He returned and picked him up, but the horse was not equal to the double weight and fell with them. Fred remained behind and covered his mate's retirement until he was out of danger. During the 1914-1918 War he served as an officer of the British Army. In 1915, as a temporary captain, he was commandant of an Army rest camp, and later of embarkation troops at Plymouth. He attained the rank of lieut.-colonel. After the War he led an adventurous life whilst in the employ of the British Colonial Office in Somaliland, Kenya and Northern Nigeria. His skill as a big game hunter was well known - on one occasion, in British Somaliland, he was severely mauled by a lion. His body was ripped open, a lung collapsed and his skull injured. He retired from the Colonial Office in 1925 and resided in England. Lieut.-Colonel Bell died at Bristol (England) at the age of seventy-nine. Two of his brothers served in the A.I.F. and were killed in action - Private Edgar Watson Bell at Gallipoli in May 1915; and Lieut. Bert Adam Bell at Pozieres in July 1916.

The second child of Lydia and George was Henry Thomas Bell. One of his daughters, Myra Lydia Bell, married Cuthbert Morton Playne, whose family came to Australia from Gloucestershire about 1890 and settled at Albany. The Playne family originally migrated from France to England in the 16th or 17th century. At that time, skilled weavers were encouraged to enter England in an attempt to improve the woollen industry. The Playnes owned and operated woollen mills for two hundred years. One of these mills, "Longfords", is still a thriving business, operating under the name of William Playne and Co., although the family no longer retains its connection with it. It exports

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beautiful woollen cloth all over the world and also makes the material for the Guardsmen's uniforms, covering for tennis balls and tops for billiard tables at the factory at Nailsworth, Gloucestershire. Myra and Cuthbert Playnes' daughter, Dorothy Eva, (now living at Claremont) married into another old Western Australian pioneering family. Her husband, Peter Mews, is a great-grandson of Thomas William Mews, who arrived with his wife and family at Fremantle in the "Rockingham" in 1830. They came from Dorset, England, and are direct descendants of Doctor Peter Mews (1619- 1706) who was Bishop of Winchester in the reign of Charles II. They brought with them a wooden house, built in sections for easy erection. The Mews family were a family of shipwrights and they built some fine vessels including the schooners - Scud, Ione, Star and Comet - and many lighters and pearling luggers. About the year 1855, Thomas Mews built the Swan River's first steamer, "The Speculator", at the foot of Mt. Eliza. Mr. John Watson, the pilot who took the wheel for "The Speculator's" maiden voyage, was the father of Henry Bell's wife, Alice Watson. He had been a petty-officer in the Royal Navy and was regarded by the early colonists as an authority on nautical matters. It was a momentous trip. "The Speculator" struggled throughout the entire morning down the Swan River as far as the Canning Bridge and then laboured for another five hours to make the return trip to Perth.

Thelma Brearley, grand-daughter of Rosetta Bell, tells the story of the rather unusual circumstances leading to the courtship of Lydia Duffield and George Bell. One day, as he was riding his horse to work from Fremantle to Perth, George saw Lydia seated on a log and weeping. Although he had seen her many times before at this particular spot (near where Claremont is now - she went there regularly to collect mail), he had never spoken to her. Noticing her distress, however, on this occasion, George dismounted. He discovered the reason for her tears was that her parents wished her to marry a man she did not like - he was too old for her, and, moreover, she hated his beard. Subsequently, George told Lydia he had admired her from afar and suggested that she marry "him". Thereupon, she confessed that she admired him too, and was willing to marry him if they could get parental consent. How long this took is not known, but obviously they did succeed. It could not have been very long, for Lydia was only sixteen when they married; George was

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twenty-seven.

An amusing incident, also related by Thelma Brearly, occurred at the reading of Lydia Bell's will. As was the custom in those days, all the family assembled for the occasion, including Lydia's daughter, Rosetta (Mrs Brearley's grandmother). Rosetta knew full well she wouldn't be mentioned in the will as her mother disapproved of her (she was quite right, because she didn't receive a cracker). However she went along purely to see the fun and to keep the kettle boiling for afternoon tea. Several members of the family, bitterly disappointed on realizing that they also were not beneficiaries, began to swoon and Rosetta calmly deposited them on chairs under the pepper-trees in the garden, with smelling salts etc. When she ran out of chairs she attempted to put the last casualty on the grass, but when this particular lady found she was to go on the grass, she promptly came out of her swoon. She wasn't going to have her new dress dirtied on the ground. (Oh, that I had a photograph to show the despair of these poor souls - O.D.)

Rosetta was the third child of Lydia and George. By all accounts she was a most remarkable character. Her grandson, Mostyn Young (brother of Thelma Brearley) was killed in the fighting on Crete in 1941, during World War II. The fourth child of Lydia and George was George William Bell, Headmaster of the Perth Boys' School in St George's Terrace, Perth. This building is to be preserved by the National Trust. On retirement, an illuminated address was presented to George by the boys of the school. George married Sarah Stinton and they had three sons and four daughters. Sarah was a grand-daughter of John Stinton who built, and operated for many years, a wind driven flour mill at Picton, near the Leschenault Estuary.

None of the daughters married. George's eldest son, Aubrey William Bell, was a bank officer, firstly with the State Savings Bank of Western Australia and later with the Commonwealth Bank, when it took over the State Bank during the depression of the 1930s. The State Bank was in Hay Street, Perth, under the old Town Hall. The Commonwealth Bank was in St George's Terrace. Hay Street was crowded when a trolley drew up with two immense office safes, ostensibly full of money from the Commonwealth bank. Many

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believed that this was nothing more than a "show" and that there was not a bean inside the safes. Nevertheless, the effect was acclaimed and faith and stability restored. I have been unable to discover anything regarding the life of the fifth child of Lydia and George - Wesley Bell, who married Elizabeth Corrigan. However, his youngest child and only daughter, Ivy, became a Roman Catholic. She was a brilliant pianist and entered the Convent of Mercy, Victoria Square, Perth. She is now deceased.

The Bell Family History. Taken from 'The Duffields of Bicton'.

LYDIA CHARLOTTE DUFFIELD married GEORGE BELL

b.4-6-1829

b. 1819

d.25-7-1915 NB: Headstone says July 23 d. 1908

1. Annie Charlotte BELL 1846-1889 unmarried
2. Henry Thomas BELL 1848-1923 married Alice Agnes WATSON  
1853-1931 -
  1. Luna BELL 1873 married Fred Cox No Children
  2. Frederick William BELL 1875-1954 married 1. Mabel -No Children  
2. Brenda -No Children
  3. Edna BELL 1877- died in infancy
4. Harry George BELL 1879-1950 married Mena HYMUS 1881-1957
  1. Gordon Rex BELL 1908- married Eleanor HUMPHRIES 1909- No Children
  2. Iris (Betty) BELL 1910- married John DETHRIDGE 1900-
    1. John DETHRIDGE 1940- married Julie DYER 1942-
      1. Leila DETHRIDGE 1970-
      2. Robert DETHRIDGE 1943-
      3. Janet DETHRIDGE 1947-
    3. Jack BELL 1913- married Doreen SHIPTON 1912-
      1. Patricia BELL 1932- married Alan PREEN 1927-
        1. Jennifer PREEN 1957-
        2. Penelope PREEN 1960-
      2. Valerie Bell 1936- married John ROBERTS 1935-
        1. Gemma ROBERTS 1967-



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2. Chelsea ROBERTS 1969-
4. Fred BELL 1915- unmarried
5. Bert BELL 1917- married- Hazel HARRIS 1917-
  1. Faye BELL 1938- married Peter GUTHRIE 1936-
    1. Janette GUTHRIE 1954-
    2. Roy GUTHRIE 1956-
    3. Paul GUTHRIE 1958-
    4. John GUTHRIE 1968-
  2. Dean BELL 1941- married Beverley GOFF 1943-
    1. Trent BELL 1968-
    2. Clayton BELL 1970-
    3. Cameron BELL 1972-
    3. Rex BELL 1954-
6. Patricia BELL 1919- married Charles SHAW 1914- No Children
  5. Edgar Watson (Paddy) BELL 1881-1915
  6. Myra Lydia BELL 1884-1952 married
    - (1) Cuthbert Morton PLAYNE 1876-1913
1. Jean PLAYNE 1900-1967 married Lancelot BIRD 1888-
  1. John Playne BIRD 1924- married Valmai HIRD 1929-
    1. Michael Ian BIRD 1956-
    2. PenelopeJane BIRD 1958-
2. Joscelyn Margaret BIRD 1926- married Percival James BOWEY 1922-
  1. William James BOWEY 1946- married Geralene TYSON 1948-
    1. Jacinta Emma BOWEY 1970-
    2. Chrisanda Annete BOWEY 1971-
  2. Josette BOWEY 1947- married Gerald Bruce NOBLE 1945-
    1. Jarron Kim NOBLE 1968-
    2. Simon Ric NOBLE 1970-
    3. Ryan Alexander NOBLE 1972-
  3. Nola Christine BOWEY 1948-
4. Susan Juliet BOWEY 1951- married Robert Alan DALL 1947-
  1. Natalie Anita DALL 1971-
  2. Miranda Jane DALL 1972-
  5. Robert Alan BOWEY 1952-
3. Wendy-Lu BIRD 1927- married Bernard HACKETT 1927-

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1. Shelley HACKETT 1951-
2. Paul HACKETT 1952-
3. Stephen HACKETT 1954-
4. Daniel HACKETT 1956-
5. Anne HACKETT 1958-
6. David HACKETT 1962-
4. David Fothergill BIRD 1928- married Beverley Narelle RANKIN

1934-

1. Adrian David BIRD 1965-
2. Byron BIRD 1969-
5. Chloe Helen BIRD 1939- married Robert Steven MAUGER
  1. Steven Lance MAUGER 1964-
  2. Bronwen Parry MAUGER 1966-
2. Frances Alice (Nancy) PLAYNE 1902- married Jack Blakely EATON  
1905-  
1956 -No Children
3. Gwendoline Helen PLAYNE 1904- died in infancy
4. Eleanor Lucy Clarice PLAYNE 1906- married William Edward  
MILLER 1905-

1. Pamela Sue MILLER 1930- married Brien TAYLOR 1924-
  1. Helen TAYLOR 1960-
  2. Stuart TAYLOR 1962-
  3. Jane TAYLOR 1964-
  - Twins 4. Ann TAYLOR 1967-
  5. Elizabeth TAYLOR 1967-
2. Barbara Helen MILLER. 1932- married Alexander HILL 1923-
  1. Simon HILL 1956-
  2. Selina HILL 1957-
  3. Peter HILL 1959-
  4. Lucinda HILL 1963-
3. Graham Playne MILLER 1937-
5. Dorothy Eva PLAYNE 1908- married Peter John MEWS 1906-
  1. Peter Playne MEWS 1937- married Jeanette Mary CARROLL  
1937-
  1. Peter David MEWS 1961-

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2. Caroline Edwina MEWS 1966-
2. Nelson Grant MEWS 1940- married Clothilde Marie RUSSELL  
1940-
3. Christopher John MEWS 1946-
4. Ainslie MEWS 1947- married David de VOS 1944-
6. Marjorie PLAYNE 1910- died in infancy
6. Myra Lydia BELL (continued) married  
(2) Gilbert Arthur BEARDON (1872-1926)
7. Grace Emmeline BEARDON 1916- married John Benedict  
BUSSANICH 1915-
1. Phillip John BUSSANICH 1942 married Jennifer BYRNE  
1940-
1. Bruce BUSSANICH 1967
2. Craig BUSSANICH 1969-
3. Marnie BUSSANICH 1971-
2. Joan Margaret BUSSANICH 1945- married Dennis Patrick  
KELLY 1943-
3. Helen Grace BUSSANICH 1949- married John Gregory  
BISSETT 1947-
4. Jennifer Eve BUSSANICH 1957-
8. Gilbert BEARDON 1918-1922
9. Joan Myra BEARDON 1919- married Lee KIRBY 1919- No  
Children
7. Clarice BELL 1885-1950 married Bert GAMBLE -1957 -No Children
8. Eva Victoria BELL 1887- Unmarried
9. Jack BELL 1889-1893
10. Bert Adam BELL 1894-1917 -Unmarried
3. Rosetta BELL 1850-1912 married George DONEGAN -1919
1. Ethel Rose DONEGAN 1873-1936 married John CARTER  
1869-1926
1. Muriel CARTER 1897- married Alwyn Ernest PARKER  
1891-1972
1. Alwyn Jonah PARKER 1917-married Sylvia Mabel  
KINGSTON 1924-
1. Lyndon Read PARKER 1947- married Lea Veronica  
WILLIAMS 1949-
1. Craig Michael PARKER 1971-

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2. Jodi Annette PARKER 1973-
2. Quentin Gerald PARKER 1954-
3. Meriel Clare PARKER 1959-
2. Jeffrey Wyborn PARKER 1920- married Connie SMITH 1922-
1. Rodney Alwyn PARKER 1945- married Naomi JOYCE 1945-
  1. Alan PARKER 1966-
  2. Jacqueline PARKER 1970-
2. Lloyd Jeffrey PARKER 1948- married Beverley NANCARROW 1948-
  3. Kenneth Wyborn PARKER 1950-
  4. Peter Smith PARKER 1957-
  5. John Ernest PARKER 1960-
3. Read Wyborn PARKER 1925- married Victoria Leslie MOIR 1925-
  1. Christopher Read PARKER 1953-
  2. Stephen Anthony PARKER 1955-
  3. Nalda Lee PARKER 1957-
2. Leslie CARTER 1899- married
  1. Matilda SEINOR 1891-1960
1. John CARTER 1929- married Mary KEEVIL 1936-
  1. Leslie John CARTER 1962-
  2. Peter William CARTER 1964-
    2. Lily ROGERS 1904-
  3. Ruby CARTER 1900- married
    1. Fred LYONS 1892-1953
1. Biddy LYONS 1922- married Fred OSBORNE 1919-
  1. Neil OSBORNE 1950-
  2. Ian OSBORNE 1951-
  3. Judy OSBORNE 1952-
2. Shirley LYONS 1924- married Alan GLIDDON 1914-
  1. Jennifer GLIDDON 1954-
- Twins
  2. Rosemary GLIDDON 1957-
  3. Phillipa GLIDDON 1957-
3. Molly LYONS 1927- married John ROSE 1919-
  1. Anne ROSE 1954-
  2. Pippa ROSE 1957-
4. Henry LYONS 1934- married Lois RICHARDSON 1935-
  1. Heather LYONS 1959-

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2. Linda LYONS 1961-  
Ruby CARTER (cont) 1900- married  
2. John KNAPP 1883-1953
4. Fergus CARTER 1910- married Olive DAVIES 1908- No Children
2. Leslie George DONEGAN 1875-1954 married Harriet Elizabeth SMITH
  1. Eva Amy DONEGAN 1901-1936 married George HOLLIS
    1. Joan HOLLIS 1925- married Frederick W. PARKER
      1. Gaye Michelle PARKER 1946- married Keith KESSELL
        1. David Hollis KESSELL 1972-
          2. David PARKER 1953-
            3. Norman PARKER 1957-
              4. Andrew PARKER 1966-
                2. James HOLLIS 1927-1934
    2. Leonard Leslie DONEGAN 1903- married
      1. Elsie HARVEY -1929
        2. Norah McKENZIE
      1. Brian Geoffrey DONEGAN 1942- married Dianne
        1. Geoffrey Roy DONEGAN 1965-
          2. Luke DONEGAN 1968-
    2. Deirdre DONEGAN 1946- married Michael WISHART
      1. David Noel WISHART 1969-
    3. Moya DONEGAN 1948- married Frank NEWLANDS
    3. Louisa Belle DONEGAN 1905-1953 married Harold HURSTON  
1906-1970 -

No

### Children

4. Bert George DONEGAN 1906- married Elsie ASHDOWNE 1907-
  1. Laurel Margaret DONEGAN 1936- married Barry John DIVER 1936-
    1. Barbara Lee DIVER 1959-
      2. Neil John DIVER 1961-
        3. Ross George DIVER 1962-
          5. Ethel May DONEGAN 1908- Unmarried
  6. Ernest Wilfred DONEGAN 1910- married Muriel MILL
    1. Maureen Fay DONEGAN 1936- married Francis John

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### ROBERTS

1. Jasmin Fay ROBERTS 1959-
2. Susan Andrea ROBERTS 1961-
3. Michael Paul ROBERTS 1963-
2. George Ernest DONEGAN 1937-1942
3. Leslie Ernest DONEGAN 1944-1946
3. Eulalie Annie DONEGAN 1877-1964 married Percival YOUNG  
1882-1954
  1. Thelma YOUNG 1910- married Thomas BREARLEY 1907-
    1. Donald BREARLEY 1935- married Joan KEATING 1939-
      1. Linda BREARLEY 1961-
      2. Carol BREARLEY 1965-
    2. Regina1d BREARLEY 1941- married Annie PATERSON  
1949-
    3. Peter BREARLEY 1945- married Carla HOVINGH 1949-
      1. Taron BREARLEY 1971-
      2. Taree BREARLEY 1972-
    2. Mostyn YOUNG 1915-1941 -Unmarried
  4. Lillian Gertrude DONEGAN 1879-1955 married Charles CAMPBELL  
1859-1933
    1. Eulalie CAMPBELL 1900-1961 married Albert James STEBBINS  
1899-1970
      1. Keatha Mauda STEBBINS 1924-
    2. Rodney Charles STEBBINS 1927- married Estelle MANTACH  
1932-
      1. Philip Andrew STEBBINS 1962-
      2. Gillian Maree STEBBINS 1964-
      3. Lachlan Campbell STEBBINS 1929-
  5. Norman Maley BELL 1889- married
    1. Minna BOETCHER -1940
  1. Harold Alexander BELL
  2. Edith BELL married
  3. Frederick Raymond BELL
  4. Thelma BELL
  2. Amelia FRY
  5. Norman Maley BELL 1944-

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6. Mena Foss BELL 1895-1940 -Unmarried
7. Greta May BELL 1898-1911
8. Daughter 1899 -Stillborn
5. Wesley BELL 1855- married Elizabeth CORRIGAN 6 Children
6. Hester Helen BELL 1859- married George MOORE
1. May MOORE 1880-1962 married Frederick FOWLER
  1. Edgar FOWLER
  2. Winifred FOWLER
  3. Hubert FOWLER
  4. Evelyn FOWLER
  5. Leila FOWLER
2. Clarice MOORE 1884-1951 married Tempest HARRIS
  1. Phyllis HARRIS married
    - 3 Sons
3. Pearl MOORE 1888-1947 married Charles FRIEL
  1. Enid FRIEL 1914- married KENNEDY
    1. Patricia KENNEDY married CLARK
      - 2 Daughters
    2. Michael KENNEDY married
    3. Marie KENNEDY married BAGLEY
  4. Bertha MOORE married Stanley ROWETT
    1. Stanley ROWETT
    2. John ROWETT married
      - 4 Sons
5. Winifred MOORE -1963 married Donald GILES
  1. Keith GILES married
    - 2 Children
  2. David GILES married
    - 2 Children
7. Edith Emma BELL 1860- married Alfred VERYARD
  - 2 Children
8. Emily Lydia BELL 1862-1864
9. Evelyn Foss BELL 1866- 1949 married James McFarlane LAPSLEY 1857-1931
  1. James Laurence LAPSLEY 1888-1932 married Daisy LEWIS 1889-1959

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1. George James LAPSLEY married Dorothy MARSHALL 1910-
  1. Rosslyn Kaye LAPSLEY 1942-
2. Lynnette LAPSLEY 1946- married Peter HEALY 1945-
  1. Catriona Rachele HEALY 1973-
2. Lloyd Irwin LAPSLEY 1919- married Dorothy SWIFT 1921-
  1. Robert James LAPSLEY 1950-
  2. Carol LAPSLEY 1952-
3. Noel Harvey 1925- married Betty Margaret LAW 1925-
  1. Kaye LAPSLEY 1959-
  2. Gillian LAPSLEY 1962-
4. William Laurence LAPSLEY 1927- married Brenda Muriel GOMME 1927-
  1. Peta LAPSLEY 1954-
  2. Deborah LAPSLEY 1956-
  3. Laurence LAPSLEY 1960-
2. Charlotte LAPSLEY 1890-1936 married David IRVING 1872-1963
1. Esme IRVING 1932- married Bernard Kenneth BOWEN 1930-
  1. Jennifer BOWEN 1956-
  2. Evelyn Anne BOWEN 1959-
  3. Barbara lane BOWEN 1961-
  4. Elizabeth Margaret BOWEN 1966-
3. Ronald LAPSLEY 1892-1972 married Hilda SHAW 1895-
  1. Clayton LAPSLEY 1925- married Valma McKENZIE-CLARK 1927-
1. Margaret LAPSLEY 1948- married Bruce ARMSTRONG 1944-
  2. Jennifer LAPSLEY 1953-
  3. Elizabeth LAPSLEY 1955-
2. Shirley LAPSLEY 1929- married Robert JAMES 1919-
  1. Judith JAMES 1953-
  2. David JAMES 1957-
10. Ada Lydia BELL 1868-1946 married Ernest ARCHDEACON -No Children



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11. James Laurence BELL 1870-1931 -Unmarried
12. Frank Edwin BELL 1872-1897 married Amelia Elizabeth Beatrice  
CROKER
  1. Gladys BELL 1893-1924 married James TEAGUE
    1. Lennox James TEAGUE 1924-  
(Now Lennox James Gardiner by adoption) married Dorothy Merle  
BATEMAN
  1. Susanne Kaye GARDINER 1951- married Andrew James  
FERGUSON
  2. Robyne Merle GARDINER 1954-
    2. Child -Died in infancy
    3. Child -Died in infancy