

RECOLLECTIONS OF AN OLD BENDIGO PIONEER - JANE VAHLAND

I was born in the village of Barton Bendish, Norfolk, on the 29th October, 1841. My parents Henry and Elizabeth Barrow came out with their two children, myself and Mary, and a Yorkshire married couple Mr and Mrs Gray. The party being the only saloon passengers on the sailing vessel, *The Dale Park*, bringing immigrants to Australia from Cork, Ireland, in March 1844. The voyage took nearly four months. They travelled in a ship bringing immigrants, as it seems that generally speaking, only such ships carried Doctors and my father was a delicate man.

He and Mr Gray went up to the foothills of Mt Macedon to settle on a 'Settler's pre-emptive right', a mile square and then a nominal rental at so much an acre. My father left my mother, Mrs Gray and the two children in a cottage on Batmans Hill near the site of Spencer Street Station. We lived there for six months while the house at Macedon, which with the furniture was brought from England, was made ready for us. I can remember the grassy slopes running down to the River Yarra and the blacks camping there.

The house near Macedon called Langely Vale, after their Norfolk home, was built opposite the gates of Barfold, the Hon. W.H.F. Mitchell's estate. I believe the name Langely is still somewhere in those parts. We had no candles or matches and used flint steel and lamps of fat with wild honey-suckle cores floating in them for wicks. Tinder of rags were made soaked in salt petre water, then dried. Butter was brought out from Cork in casks, bread, a damper generally baked in earth ovens.

My father's partner Mr Robert Beauchamp, youngest son of Sir Robert Beauchamp of Norfolk, imported some Merino sheep from Saxony in 1847.

I remember a hunt club established in the neighbourhood of Mr Baynton (a neighbour), the Govett's of Pastoria near Kyneton, and the Mitchells etc. I distinctly remember as a girl, seeing the men in their red coats and the busy preparations for the hunt breakfast.

The first Bishop of Melbourne, Bishop Perry, brought out a parcel from our relations in England, soon after his arrival in 1847, and during this visit he baptised the two babies born in Australia.

We had frightful bushfires in summer and snow in winter. There were many aborigines in the district. They used to walk straight into the house in the absence of the menfolk to the great terror of us all and examine everything. I particularly remember a big man called Martin, who had seven lubras, a great many dogs and it seemed to us countless children. In 1849 not having been successful at Langley Vale, Mr Beauchamp settled in Tasmania, and my father took up land further north at Runnymede on the Campaspe River. We travelled in wagons camping out at night.

Our home at Runnymede was also made up and sent out from England. My parents called this place Charterhouse, possibly an association of ideas with Runnymede on the Thames. We girls, four by this time, went to Boarding School to Miss Draper's Academy for young ladies in South Yarra. The younger children had a governess for some years, Miss Moore at home. (The family were 8 in all - 5 girls and 3 boys.)

The journey took three days driving to Melbourne via Kilmore, and later via Bendigo. It was my father's custom, twice yearly to take 2 men and 2 drays to Melbourne for stores. The party was on one occasion bailed up by bushrangers near Diggers Rest, and robbed of several hundred pounds. The money was sewn up in my father's pillow. The bushrangers appeared just at breakfast time, took the money, returning to him several cheques - took one of his horses and told him they had taken £1,000 before breakfast that day. One of the bushrangers was later jailed in the Bendigo jail. Superintendent A.P. Smith, late head of the mounted police, was for some time stationed in the Runnymede district.

We had many visitors there, among them Mr Alexander Black, late Geodetic surveyor of Victoria, later still Surveyor General, Bishop Moorhouse, second Bishop of Victoria, numbers of aborigines, one known as Captain Dana was trained in Captain Dana's black police force.

The aborigines, camped in the neighbourhood, existed on opossums, fish, birds, lizards, yams and when possible a drowned or stolen sheep. They cooked their food in blackfellows ovens, the men eating first, sitting [in] the circles and lubras behind them, then the children and dogs. The men threw scraps of food over their shoulders, and lubras and children and dogs scrambled for possession of the half picked bones etc. I have seen men pinch their lubras to hurry them up. They used to daub themselves with clay either for mourning or to heal their wounds. They also used the young tender leaves of the eucalyptus gum tree heated over the fire, then bruised and applied as a compress on an injury or wound.

My father died as a comparatively young man, but the family lived on at Charterhouse and my parents are both buried in the very old Runnymede cemetery. I married in 1859 and came to Bendigo where I have lived all my life, (during part of that time Bendigo was called Sandhurst, but reverted to Bendigo in 1891, which I believe was the original name.) My husband Mr W.C. Vahlund, an architect, surveyor, and mining surveyor, built several of the public buildings in Bendigo, the fountain in Pall Mall, the general Hospital and Benevolent Asylum and many of the Banks, and the family house of Sir George Lansell - "Fortuna".

We had gay doings in those early days. At one time we had a Grand Opera season for several weeks and I have seen and heard Catherine Hayes, Anna Bishop, Ristori, G.V. Brooke (later drowned in a wreck at Sydney) Jefferson, a personal friend of the family, Walter Montgomery and Lola Montez, the famous dancer. I saw King, the only survivor of the Burke and Wills Expedition at the Shamrock Hotel, after his return with the rescue party - his health completely broken down. There was a company of the 40th Regiment stationed in Bendigo until 1857 when they were withdrawn because of the Indian mutiny. Later the men of the town were sworn in as special constables because of the trouble with and among the navies working in the Big Hill tunnel near Ravenswood. (We used my husband's baton for many years in my kitchen - as a potato masher).

I remember seeing Governor La Trobe in old St Paul's in Melbourne during my boarding school days, and can well recall how frightened we girls were, during the Crimean War, that the Russians would come to Melbourne. One of my school friends married a son of Captain Anthony Beale who built Longwood, St Helena, and the Chapel of St Catherine at Glensborough - the 'Rose' window was in memory of my friend Rose - I remember the Crimean War, the Indian mutiny, the Franco-Prussian and Boer Wars, and I lived through the Great War of 1914-18.

The house my husband built was in Barkly Place, Bendigo, a large block adjoining that of Mr Jacob Cohn, portions of our land were later sold and the home of Mr G. Freeman and Lansellstowe [are] both built on part of the original garden. The old house, built in 1859 is now called 'Vahlunds', has weathered over [a] 100 years as a family home and is still used as such.

I am Jane Vahlund - nee Barrow

Jane Vahlund was born October 29th 1841 at Barton Bendish, Norfolk, England, married July 21st 1859 at Charterhouse, Runnymede and died at Bendigo March 25th, 1922.

Submitted to Betty Jackman, Bendigo Regional Genealogical Society, by a member of the Barrow family - Judy Scarrott. □