GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS   (November 2002)

By Rob Upson

WILLIAM 'BENDIGO' THOMPSON

In October 1811, a Mrs Thompson, in the English town of Nottingham, gave birth to triplet boys. They were nicknamed Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego, the latter being the nickname given to William Thompson. This nickname became corrupted to Bendigo and then shortened to 'Bendy'. Bendigo grew up to be quite a sportsman excelling at bare-knuckle prize fighting. By the age of 18 he was fighting for money and by 21 was a regular pro-fighter.

The law was not exactly in favour of this so-called prize fighting and fights were often held in out of the way places and would draw huge crowds, some as large as 15,000. The spectators certainly got their money's worth in those days, as fights would last for a lot more rounds than they do today. Here are some of the opponents that Bendigo Thompson fought against.

1835	v. Ben Caunt	Won on a foul in 22 rounds
1836	v. John Leachman	Won on a foul in 52 rounds
1837	v. Charles Langham	Won in 51 rounds
1837	v. Bill Looney	Won in 92 rounds
1838	v. Ben Caunt	Lost in 75 rounds
1839	v. James Burke	Won on a foul in 10 rounds
1845	v. Ben Caunt	Won on a foul in 93 rounds
1850	v. Tom Paddock	Won on a foul in 49 rounds

At the age of 39 'Bendy' retired as undefeated Champion of England holding two prize belts and four silver cups. He then took up the sport of drinking and for the next twenty years was in and out of jail on drunk and disorderly charges. The paragraph heading 'Bendigo in Trouble Again' was permanently set by a Nottingham newspaper.

After attending a revivalist meeting he 'saw the light' and at the age of 60 joined a band of Nottingham evangelists touring the provinces. His fame as a prizefighter would often ensure packed congregations. In 1880 he fell down the stairs at his home, fracturing several ribs and puncturing a lung. He died on 23 August and his funeral procession was a mile long with thousands lining the route.

Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego were three young men who appeared in a story from the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. After refusing to worship the golden idol of Nebuchadnezzar they were thrown into the fiery furnace of Babylon and emerged unscathed, as did Daniel when he survived the lion's den.

And it came to pass that in the antipodes in 1839 Charles Sherratt occupied the grazing property known as the Ravenswood Run. A shepherd who was employed there was given the nickname of Bendigo as he was supposed to have been useful with his fists. A hut in which he lived in the Rocks area of what is now Golden Square became known as Bendigo's hut and the creek was known as Bendigo's Creek. After the discovery of gold in this area in 1851 by Margaret Kennedy the subsequent goldfield became known as Bendigo. (But you already knew that)

The story of William 'Bendigo' Thompson is told in an article on the Internet as part of the Sherwood Times website. Those of you who have Internet access can read this interesting tale at
www.times1190.freeserve.co.uk/bendigo.htm