

A Very Different Life



Widden Valley Aerial View

Acknowledgement: Antony Thompson & Widden Stud

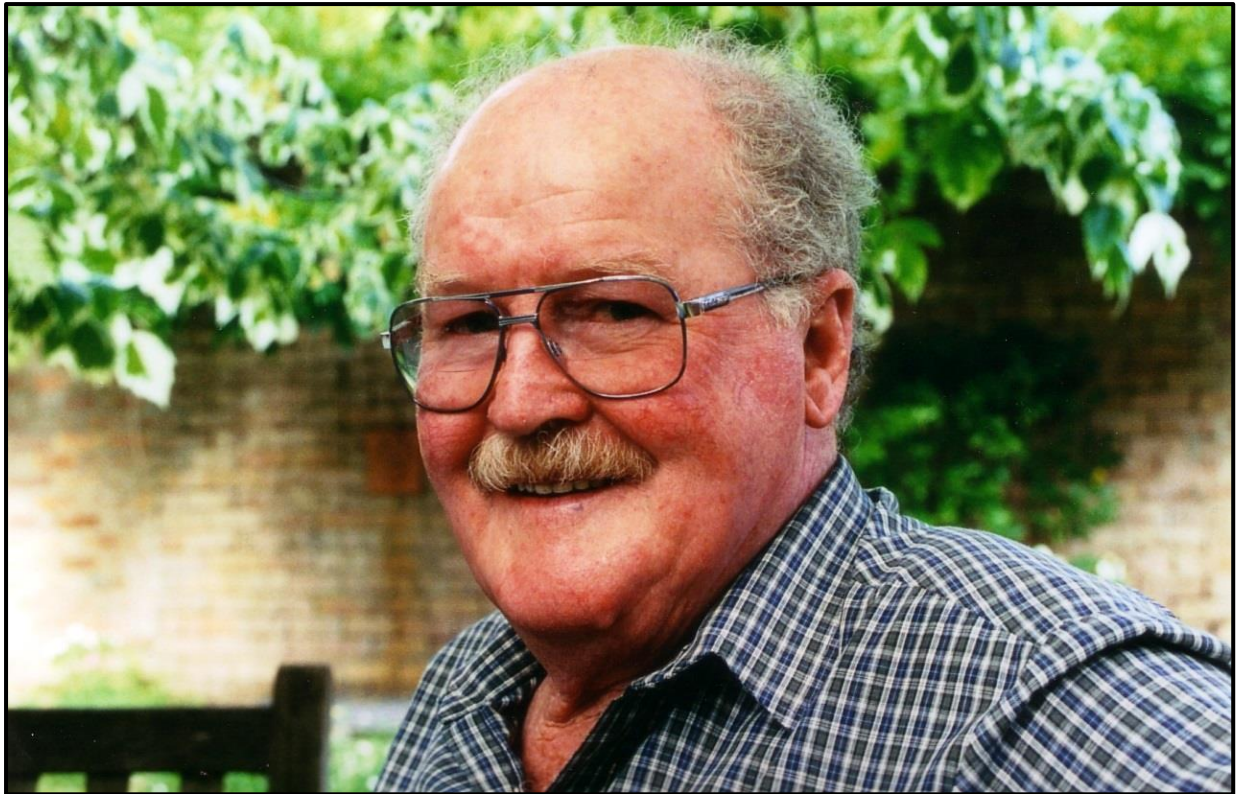
A Very Different Life

I've had the audacity and taken great liberty in posting the following vignette on my website 'blog'. It's written by a very special lady. I think I'll let her tell her story? It's easier to beg forgiveness than plead for permission!

By Jennifer Ellis

It is close on 4 years now that I have become a resident of Bupa Roseville. I came to reside in this Nursing Home in a rather convoluted manner. I am here now, but perhaps I could write about the valley in which I lived as a young bride.

Although I was born and received my education in Sydney, after my marriage in 1961 I went to live on an isolated farm in the upper reaches of the Hunter Valley. I had married a country boy who at that time was the manager of a large property, on which fat cattle were grazed, destined for the Sydney markets at Homebush.



Cliff Ellis

Photo taken in my courtyard garden at 'Geraldton'

Our home was in a valley, on the eastern fall of the Great Dividing Range. The valley was a beautiful and peaceful place, but its history was anything but calm and tranquil. In the early days it was the haunt of cattle thieves and bushrangers. Its very isolation made the valley an ideal hideaway for those desperados hoping to escape the long arm of the law.

Perhaps the most infamous of those bushrangers was the self-styled Captain Thunderbolt. Born Frederick Ward at Windsor of convict parents, at a young age Ward took to horse-stealing, and was convicted and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in the penitentiary on Cockatoo Island, in Sydney Harbour. After serving less than three years of his sentence, Frederick Ward escaped imprisonment by swimming from the north side of the island onto land near the present-day Woolwich.

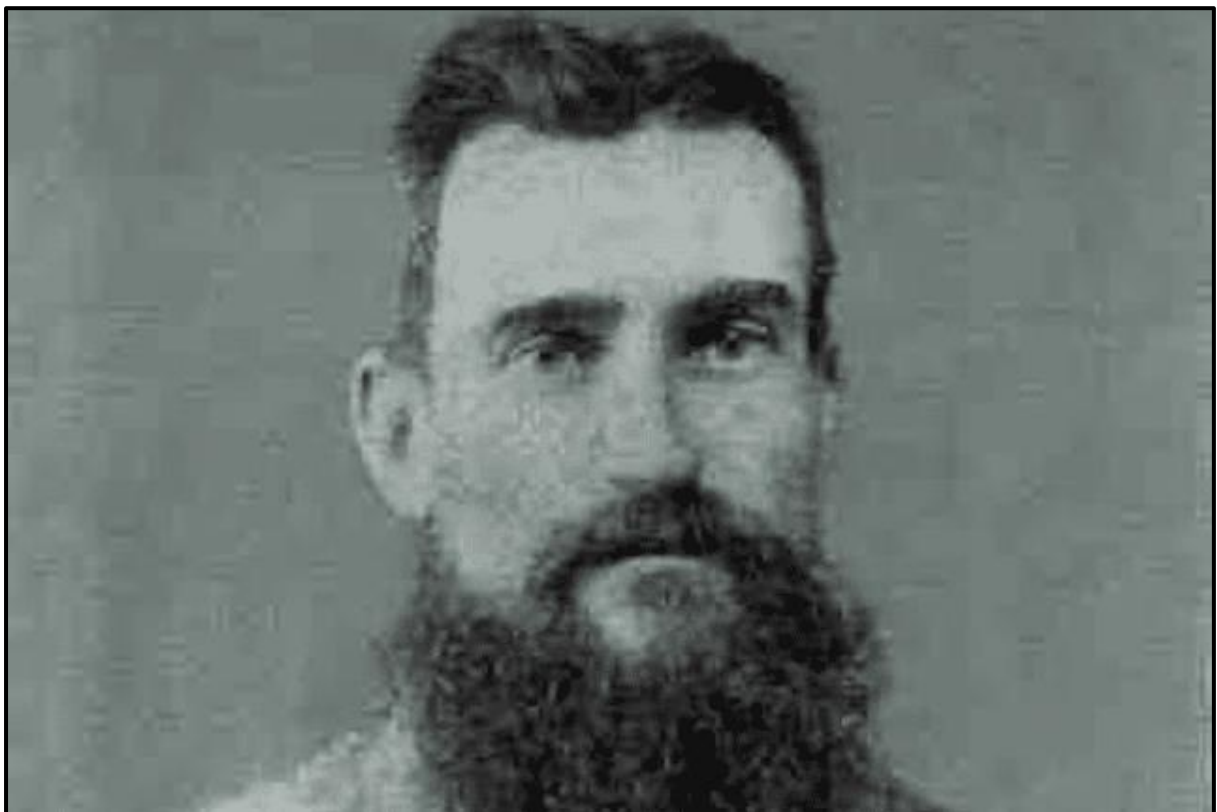
From there, Ward, or Thunderbolt as he now called himself, roamed the highways and byways of the New England ranges, holding up and robbing mail coaches and any sole traveller making his way along the dusty roads. Thunderbolt made his home in my valley, in a cave, high up among the craggy bluffs of the surrounding mountains. From his cave he had an excellent view of the goings on in the valley. His particular interests were the horses belonging to the valley settlers. He stole the best of these, one that was fresh and could outrun any pursuing mounted policeman. It is to be said that he always left a horse in its place, albeit a tired or sore-footed one!

Living with Thunderbolt in my valley was his unchurched, but faithful wife, who went by the name of Yellow Long. It was wintertime in the valley, and cold and damp in Thunderbolt's cave. The only warmth was provided by a small fire at the cave's entrance which offered very little protection against the biting winds that swirled along the sandstone cliffs.

Thunderbolt and Yellow Long huddled together for warmth, but after a particularly vicious snowstorm when the temperature dropped well below zero, Yellow Long became seriously ill. Thunderbolt realised that she needed medical attention that he couldn't provide, but above all she needed a place to rest, which was warm and dry.

Thunderbolt carried her on his saddle some sixty miles from my valley, to the nearest hospital, at Muswellbrook. There, Yellow Long was refused admission, not because of her part-Aboriginality, but because Thunderbolt was a proscribed outlaw. By this time she was desperately ill with Pneumonia and Thunderbolt knew that he must find help for her.

He carried Yellow Long on his saddle to the cottage of one of the valley settlers. She was given succour and the comfort of a warm bed, but despite the settler's careful attention, Yellow Long's condition worsened, and she died, cradled in the arms of the valley cottager. She was buried nearby, in a dry, rocky gully by the valley settlers. How do I know this? The descendants of these valley settlers were my godparents.



Frederick Ward *aka* Captain Thunderbolt

The Legend of Captain Thunderbolt - Frederick Ward

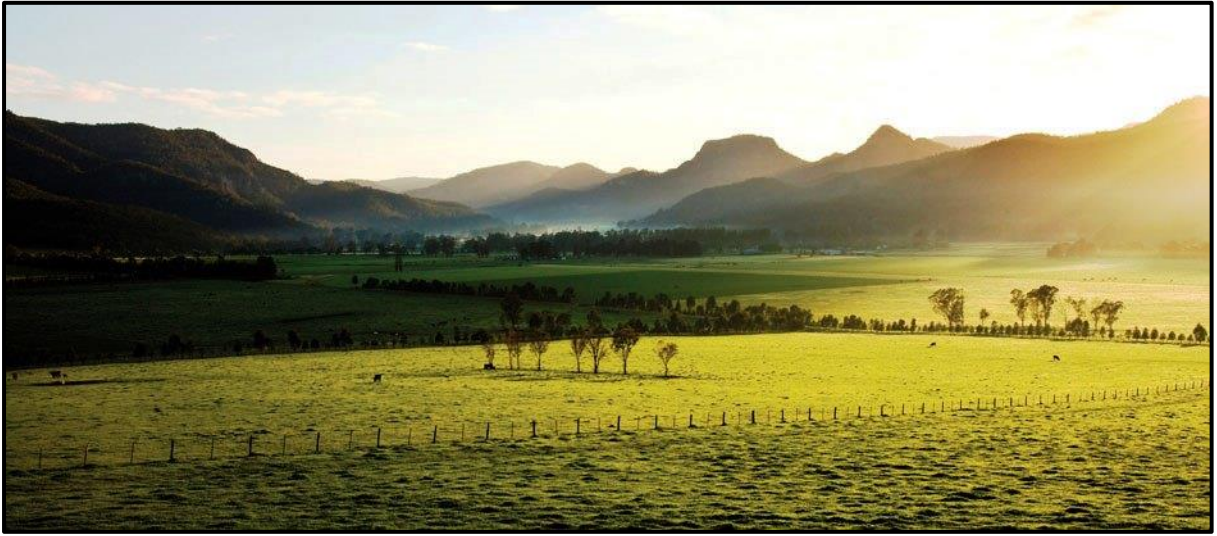
Written by Arnold Goode (1990) from the Uralla Historical Society

"His attachment to Mary Ann Bugg in his early career and his attempt to settle as a family was greatly admired. The Police continually harassed his endeavours, which kept him on the move, at times leaving Mary Ann and children to fend for themselves. Twice "Mrs Captain Thunderbolt" was arrested and imprisoned and twice the N.S.W. Parliament debated her situation. Both times the N.S.W. Governor, Sir John Young-intervened and ordered her release. (vii) During Mary Ann's second imprisonment Ward befriended Louisa Mason, also known as Yellow Long, whose maiden name was Lucy Anne Clarke. She became Ward's paramour, living in the bush on Bell's Mountain near Muswellbrook. (According to police records and a study of Stephan William's book page 102 shows that Mary Ann, Louisa Mason and Yellow Long were one and the same person). Over a period of time Yellow Long's health became critical through being constantly compelled to be on the look-out for Police patrols. Fred Ward nursed her, but he was forced to seek help. Making her comfortable, he rode to Mrs Bradford's home on the Goulburn River. Ward described her condition and the site of their hideout. Mrs Bradford and Rev White found the shelter and brought her back in a cart. Dr Brown and Constable Boon were sent for, arriving a few minutes after Mary breathed her last. Thunderbolt indicated to Mrs Bradford that he was leaving there and going north. Within several weeks he had visited Goonoo Goonoo station and he now, possessed the thoroughbred racehorse "Combo". Thunderbolt's bushranging escapades have now become history. It was his skill as a horseman his love of horse racing, that the 'selectors" in the bush greatly admired. He acquired famous racehorses and either used them as common mounts to outpace the mediocre Police horses or he traded them for profit. Among his annexations were Beeswing, Combo, The Barb, Eucalyptus, Come-by-Chance, Toy Boy, Talleyrand and Kerosene".

Some twenty or more years later, a man by the name of Thomas Browne came to holiday in the valley. He was a writer, who wrote under the pen-name of Rolf Boldrewood. He heard stories told to him by the valley people, and later became the author of one of the country's best-known and favourite stories, "Robbery Under Arms". As the title would suggest, Thomas Browne borrowed from the valley settlers' stories for the exploits and adventures of the fictitious Captain Starlight.

It's many years since I left my valley. I can remember more of my life in the valley, but perhaps that can wait for another time.

A Very Different Life II



Featured Image: 'Dawn in the Valley' (The 'Widden Valley' which Jennifer Ellis knows so very well)

A Very Different Life (2)

By Jenifer Ellis.

Following Thunderbolt's death in 1870 at Uralla in the New England Ranges at the hands of the troopers (the local police) peace and quiet returned to my valley.



The Widden Valley as it might have appeared 100+ years ago

It was fertile country with broad acres of farmland situated between the lofty peaks of the Great Dividing Range. The valley became noted as the nursery of champion racehorses, and early Melbourne Cup winners, such as Lord Cardigan (1903), Posinatus (1913) and Spearfelt (1926) were born and bred on its fertile pastures. Another racehorse of note which came from the valley in the early days was Oakleigh, winner of the Caulfield Cup in 1887, whilst the stallions Lochiel and Grafton were the champion sires of many of the important winners in the latter part of the 1800s.



"Spearfelt"

However, during the 1920s and 1930s the peace of the valley was compromised once more when yet another "Bushranger" took up residence in my valley. This time it was a lady, by the name of Jessie Hickman, who lived a solitary existence in a crude hut at the end of my valley.

Elizabeth Jessie Hickman (nee Hunt; 6 September 1890 – 1936) was an Australian bushranger. She had multiple aliases but is often referred to as **The Lady Bushranger**. In the 1920s she established herself as leader of a gang of cattle thieves in the area that is now Wollemi National Park. Forgotten for several decades after her death, she has been the subject of two recent books: *The Untold* by Courtney Collins (2012), and *Out of the Mists: The Hidden History of Elizabeth Jessie Hickman* (2014).

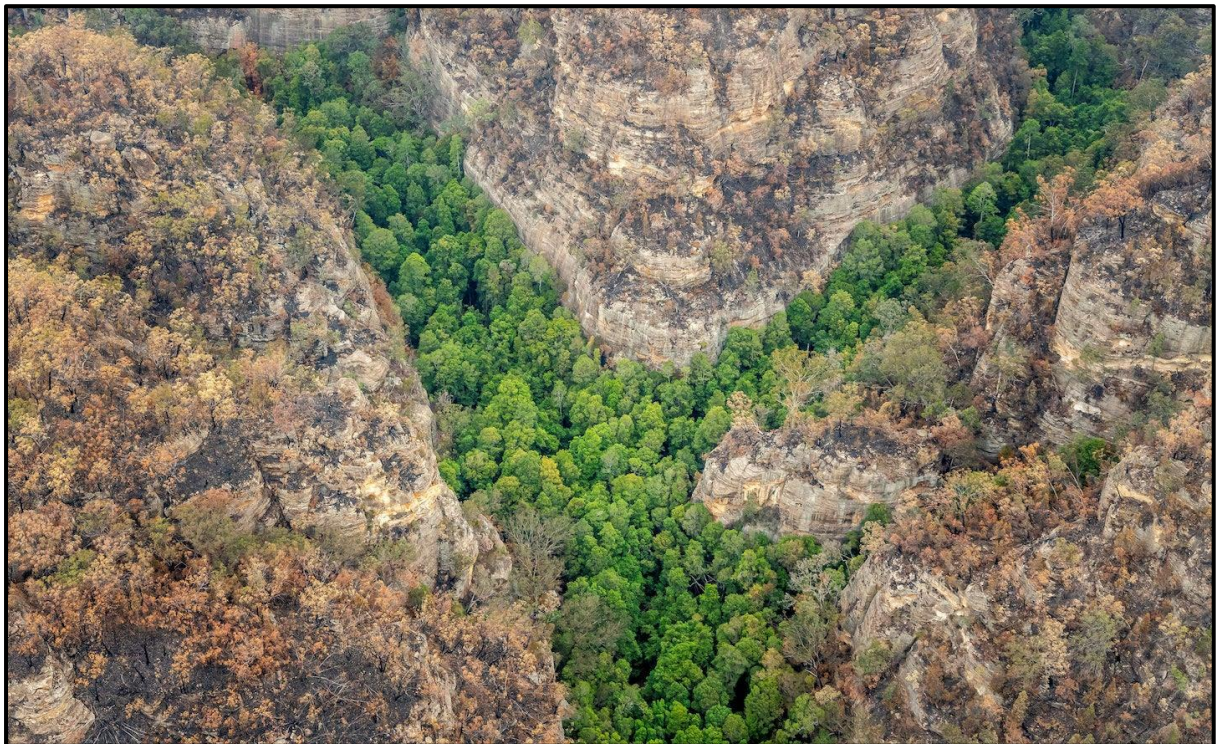


Jessie Hickman prison photograph taken 15 August 1913

Strictly speaking Jessie was not a "bushranger" at all, as she didn't rob travellers on the road. From an early age she had been apprenticed to a travelling circus where she learnt rough and trick riding and she became an expert horsewoman, who used her skill on horseback .to steal horses and cattle. She stole the cattle and horses from the Western side of the Great Dividing Range, and brought them down the mountains and into a set of stockyards which she had constructed near her hut at the end of my valley. From there Jessie drove the animals on horseback to the cattle sales at the nearest Hunter Valley town, where she made a tidy profit by selling these stolen animals. She once offered one of her horses for sale to my husband's father. Although it was a superior animal, my father in law declined her offer, as he was well aware of her reputation as a horse and cattle thief! Jessie was arrested by the police on two or three occasions. She came up before the magistrates and served a couple of stretches in Long Bay Gaol.

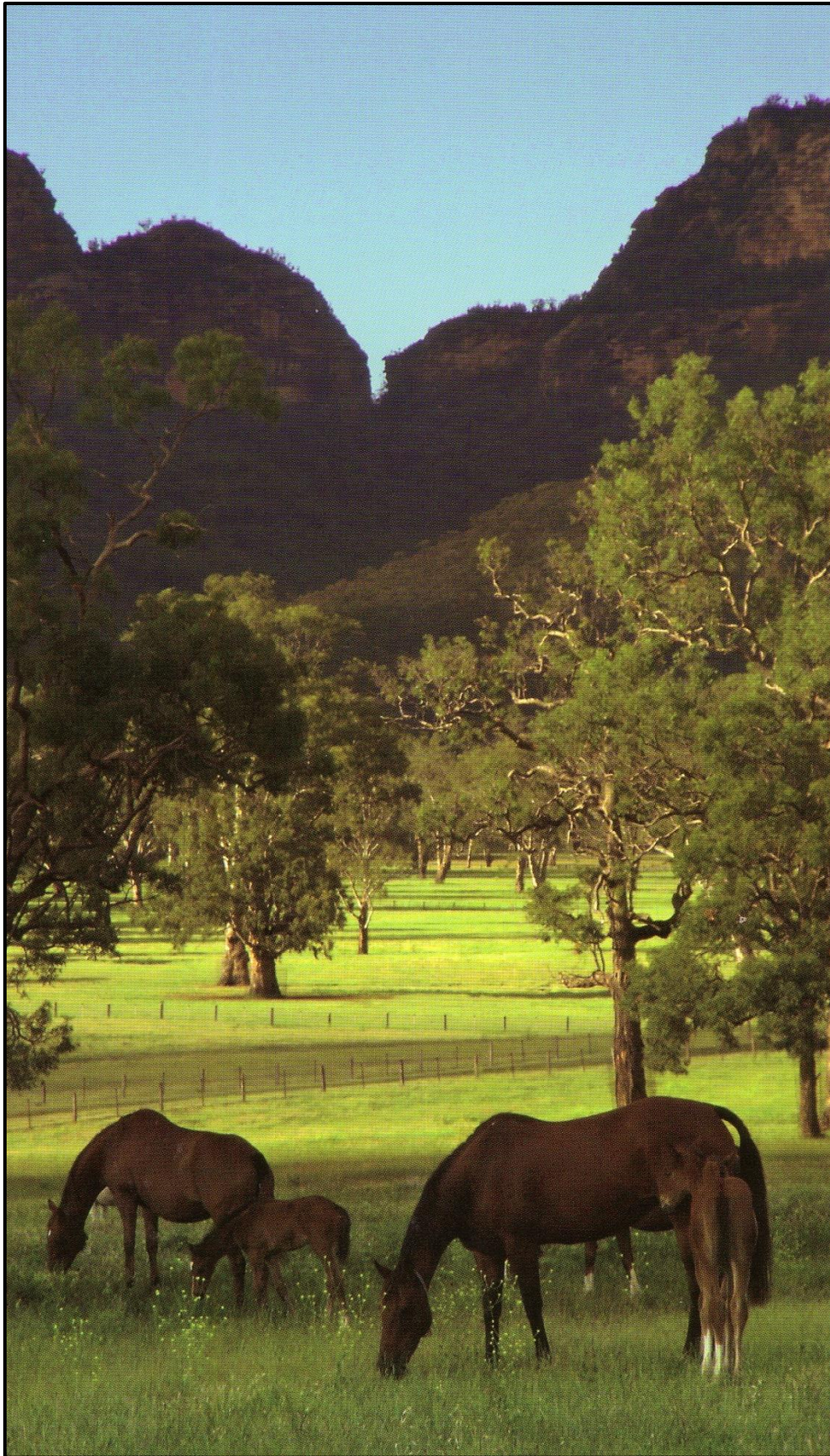
Eventually she became more and more eccentric, and for her own protection she was committed to protective custody at an institution in Newcastle. Jessie fretted for her former wild and free bush life, and she died there in the early 1930s. She was buried in an unmarked, pauper's grave in the Sandgate Cemetery. However, a few years ago, a lady of my acquaintance became aware that she was Jessie's granddaughter. In 1911 Jessie had given birth to a son, who was given up for adoption, as Jessie realised that life in the wild country was no place for a small child. My friend, Jessie's granddaughter, has paid for a small plaque in the cemetery, marking Jessie's grave. After much research she has also written a book, detailing the story of Jessie's life. My friend herself died a couple of years ago, but not before she had put the record straight and had told the story about her colourful, adventuring grandmother.

My valley is known by a few people for its proximity to one of nature's arboreal wonders, the small stand of the recently discovered Wollemi Pine. Although not a true pine tree, but rather of the genus Araucarian, these trees were widespread in both hemispheres during Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, but up until they were stumbled upon in a canyon in wilderness terrain by a bush-walking member of the NSW National Parks, they were thought to be extinct and only existed as 200 million year old fossils. Although I have never seen them, it gives me a thrill to think that about thirty specimens of these "dinosaur" trees were living very near to my valley. Perhaps Jessie had taken note of them when she passed by on her perilous journey with the stolen cattle and horses!



Wollemi Gorge with the Wollemi Pines saved from Gospers Mountain Fire in January 2020





My Valley

"Terrible Hollow"

Introduction

This is the story of the Widden Valley 'from the inside'; written and compiled by a former lady resident with the objective purview and competent literacy skills to compile the dossier. She married into the milieu and for many years lived a vicarious pioneering life very different to her Eastern Suburbs of Sydney origins.

Origin

Dear Bill,

We must have some psychic connection. I was just thinking of you and reading the new information on Scone Veterinary hospital, which contains some visual presentation of the Widden Valley, when lo and behold up pops your email with a site for me to open and read. Unfortunately, when I try to open it I just get the notice from the nursing home's WiFi saying it won't download. I'll see if one of the nurses can open it for me.

Why my thoughts drifted in your direction is because of your continual reference to the Widden Valley as "Terrible Hollow". Yes, the author of 'Robbery Under Arms', Thomas Browne, did spend a holiday in the Valley, at Baramul, I believe, and listened and digested stories told to him by the Valley settlers. Rolf Boldrewood was Thomas Browne's pen name.

Over the years I have written a few stories that have been published by a Newcastle publishing house, called Catchfire Press. Some I have written about my early life in the Widden Valley and I have included some of its history. No, not Doug Barries'. A couple of my short stories concerning the Valley have been/and are being published in this nursing home's magazine. I have deliberately 'dumbed them down' as most residents here are very elderly and/or are Dementia sufferers. I was wondering if you would like to hear about Terrible Hollow from my perspective?

I hope to be able to read, or listen to your email.

My thanks, best wishes and love, Jen.

The story

I wonder if you know the story of the settlement of the Widden Valley? It was not settled in the first place by the Thompson family, although they had a lot to do with its development. The first settlers into the Valley were a couple by the name of George and Sarah Simpson at Emu Vale. Both children of ex-convicts, Sarah was barely 16 years old, and heavily pregnant, whilst George was some-what older.

The year was 1846 when George and Sarah made their way into the Widden Valley. They came from the Western fall of the Mountains, not from the Hunter Valley/Eastern side. The Widden Valley was already known to a few people, mainly troopers from the Rylstone/Mudgee districts, who found the entrance to the Valley when on the trail of runaway convicts. I believe these troopers "discovered" the caves containing the centuries' old Aboriginal hand prints.

George and Sarah, together with their pack horses and bullock dray, left their home on the Hawkesbury, travelled across the Blue Mountains, and then made their way onto the plateau of Nullo Mountain. From there they crossed onto Mount Corrigudgy and scrambled their way down the mountain and into the Emu Creek branch of the Widden Valley. Can you imagine it; 16 year old heavily pregnant girl?

Their first permanent home (most likely a one or two roomed shack) was on the banks of the Emu Creek, in what we used to call the front lucerne paddock, right at the entrance to Emu Vale. This rudimentary home was extended over the years, but it was washed away in one of the many floods that bedevil the Emu Creek. However it was still standing when three months after their arrival in the Valley, Sarah gave birth to the first of her twelve children, completely unattended by any woman of her kith or kin.

Down near where their home once stood by the banks of the creek is a graveyard, or cemetery, complete with marble headstones, containing the graves of both George and Sarah, and also those of 2 or 3 of their children who died in infancy. At least, this cemetery was still there in our time in the Valley. It was surrounded by a tall, iron fence and my husband used to keep the graves weeded and generally neat and tidy.

George and Sarah's next home stood virtually where the dear little cottage that my husband and I lived in stood. Most of the Simpson house was pulled down by King Ranch when they purchased Emu Vale, but they left one of the main bedrooms, as well as the bathroom, separate toilet and laundry. When the first-born Simpson son, also named George, grew to adulthood, and married, he built a home further up the Emu Creek. This home no longer stands. Around 1880, George Jnr. built yet another home quite close to the main homestead. This home was still extant when I lived on Emu Vale and was the home for my husband's offside, Brian Swords. Our fencers and rabbits, Clarrie and Joe lived in what had been Simpson's dairy.

As I mentioned before, King Ranch pulled down most of what had been the Simpson homestead. They left a bedroom, bathroom, toilet and laundry. To these rooms, they added a very wide hallway (7 ft. wide). At one end of the hall was built a walk-in pantry. Four new rooms, all quite commodious, were built on: a 2nd bedroom, a sunroom or 3rd bedroom, a very large living room, and a gloriously big kitchen. These rooms comprised the homestead, firstly for the manager of King Ranch, and after it was sold, and reverted to its original name of Emu Vale, for my husband and me.

Simpsons had been at Emu Vale for over 150 years, when they sold out to King Ranch. King Ranch brought their Santa Gertrudis cattle there, but Emu Vale was not a successful enterprise under King Ranch's stewardship, and they sold to Tom Flynn in 1961. My husband took over as manager, and we stayed there until our son was of school age, even though there was a school at Widden in those days.

But back to the early days of the Widden Valley. The next family who came into the Valley were the Harrises, at Holbrook, right at the end of the Widden Valley. They intermarried with the Simpsons, of course. The Harris family arrived in the Valley from the Western side of the Mountains, too.

I think the Thompsons came next, probably from Nullo Mountain. These three families, Harris, Simpson and Thompson, between them owned most of the land in the Valley in the early days.

Some few years ago now, we attended the Centenary of St. Lukes Church in the Widden Valley. After the church service we had a bring-your-own picnic in the grounds of the church. The day held some significance for us, as my husband had been a Church Warden at Widden, and our son was baptised there. St. Luke's Church belonged to the greater Newcastle Diocese. It was NOT the family chapel of the Thompson family, as Mrs Valda Thompson used to call it. Two Simpson descendants attended the service and picnic, so my husband obtained the keys of the front gate which was then kept locked, in order that we could take them "back to Emu Vale" as both of these Simpsons had been born there. We were horrified and not a little upset to see the state of the improvements. Every building was in a dilapidated state, and my dear little cottage was in an imminent state of total collapse, having been completely undermined by a multitude of wombats! A few tears were shed that day, and we came away greatly saddened indeed.

Emu Vale and the Widden Valley still held a great significance for my husband and me. Not only was Emu Vale our first marital home, it was through descendants of the Simpson family that I first met my partner. Though not related to them himself, two of his aunts had married two Simpson descendants. Previously I had mentioned that our son was baptised in Widden Church. One of his godfathers was a Simpson descendant and it is through him and his wife that I first met my husband.

Footnote 1:

I don't know how "valid" my dissertation is! I can't say that what I have written is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

*The story of George and Sarah is as accurate as I know it. It's just that what I have written may not please any of their descendants, viz. I said that George and Sarah were children of ex-convicts. This is 100% accurate, but their family story is somewhat less accurate, and has been handed down as such for the following generations. It's only quite recent that it is quite *comme il faut* to have a convict ancestor.*

I purposely mentioned very little about the Thompsons, or the Harrises, simply because I know very little about their involvement in the early days of the Valley. There were other people, too, who lived there in the old days, before A.O and Tom Flynn.

I know you can tell some stories about A.O. Ellison, but I would like to tell you a personal one. We had not long moved to Emu Vale, when my party-line phone rang (long-short-long was our ring). My husband had just left to ride around to Oakleigh for some reason. I picked up the phone when a fairly cultured voice said:

"Welcome to the Valley Mrs. E...s, you'll find living here a bit different to the Supreme Court!" "Yes" I spluttered, "I suppose I will", He then went on to say that my husband had just taken a short cut, riding through Baramul, closely followed by a big black kelpie dog.

"It is a lovely animal, but you can tell him when he comes home that all dogs are shot on sight on Baramul. If he takes the dog home now I will spare its life this time!" Poor man, unbeknown to him, his dog had followed him.

I quickly rang Vas Flynn and told her to send the man and his dog home via the road, and not through A.O.'s paddocks. Dogs were shot on sight on Oakleigh, too. A.O. Was right in one thing he said though: living in the Valley was very different from my previous existence as a member of the Supreme Court staff!

Footnote II

I don't know how you managed to be offside with Noel Tindale? I was quite fond of Daisy Tindale, and Noel as well although I knew very little about him. I know that Noel took up the land of Myrtle Grove sometime in the 1930s. It was vacant land and Noel had every right to sit on it. Over time I assume Noel paid the Govt. for the property. Now this is a story I have heard but can't vouch for its veracity. In the early days Frank Thompson and his ilk would ride up into Myrtle Grove, armed with large stockwhips, and try to drive Noel off the place. Apparently Widden treated Myrtle Grove as vacant land, and Widden used to run stock there. Now that is a story I heard from Daisy Tindale and I certainly can't vouch for it. All I know is that Daisy and Noel were dirt poor, I mean really and truly poor. How they managed to raise 4 sons there is a mystery to me. Their house was obviously home built, and consisted of a bedroom, a living room, a veranda and a detached kitchen. I had never seen people live in such dire poverty. Daisy went to buy supplies only once a month, and then only as far as Baerami. The 4 boys were all home-schooled as they couldn't afford the petrol to drive 5 miles to school. Fortunately Daisy had been a schoolteacher before her marriage so she was able to teach the boys with the help of correspondence lessons. To Daisy's credit, each boy completed their 6 years of high school. In later years Noel built another house with homemade concrete bricks. This was a huge improvement on their bush shack. It had 3 or 4 bedrooms, and the luxury of a bathroom and a flush toilet. Once again, Daisy was the labourer on the job, making concrete bricks and helping to build the house. It's no wonder poor old Daisy had a fatal stroke in her late 50s.

Footnote:

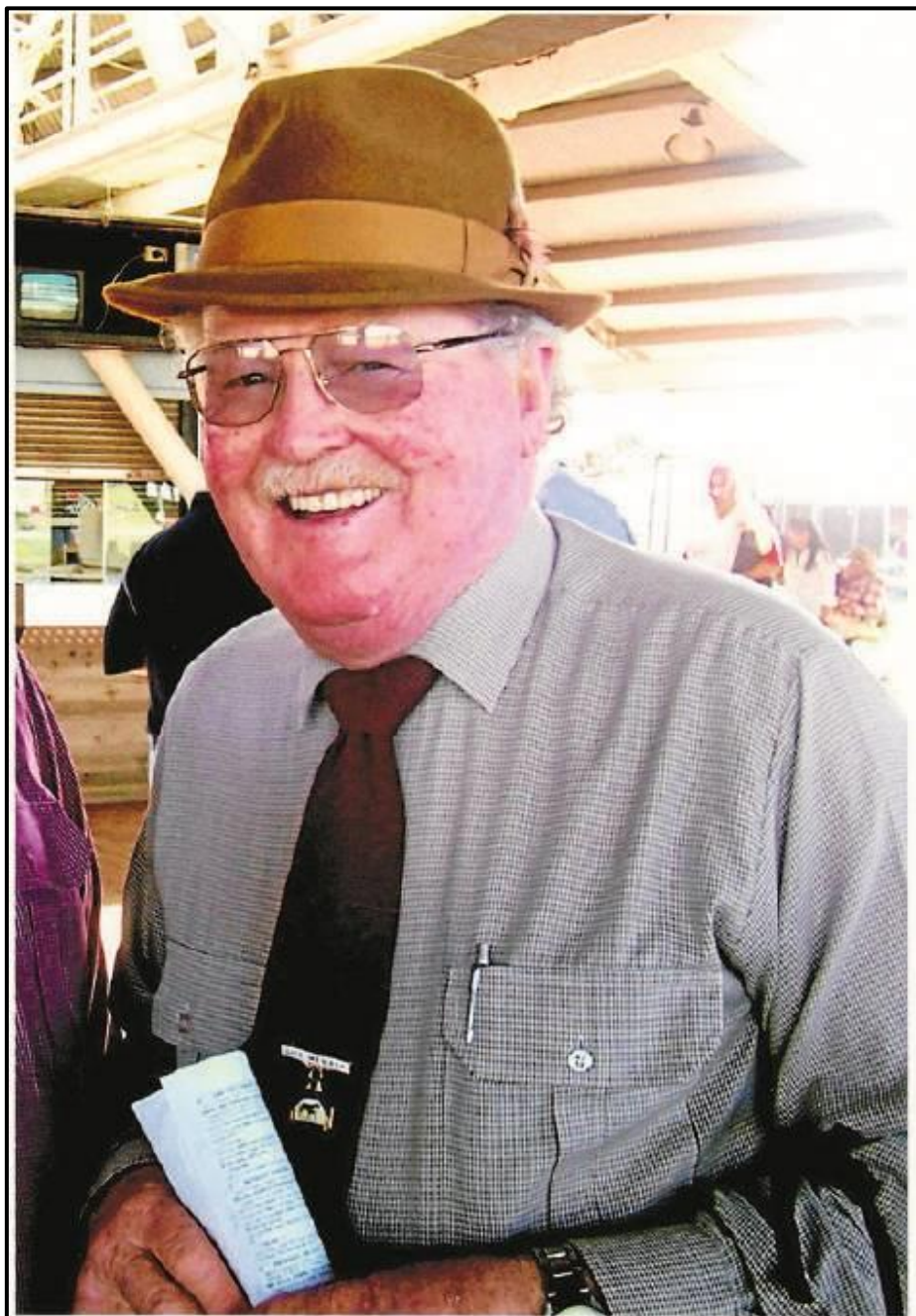
Other *histoire* includes the Lee, Tindale, Thompson and Frost families as having provided original foundation settlers in the Widden Valley. These anecdotes vary according to with whom one is communicating? My very good friend the late 'Bim' Thompson always told me ancestral aboriginal people escorted the very first 'white' tribe into the valley from the Nullo direction. They told them that 'Widden' meant 'stay here; go no further' in whitefella-speak inferring 'this is the best place to be'. They were almost certainly right; the pastures are pristine and the water supply permanent although you might have to dig for it at dry times?

Either John or William Lee is/are reputed to have maintained a massive herd of 5000 Shorthorn Cattle in the Valley. It was claimed to be the largest stud ('pedigree') herd in the world? Certainly members of the Lee family were some of the very first settlers in the Bathurst/Rylstone/Bylong/Nullo areas during the early 1800s. They very sharply followed Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth over the Blue Mountains.

Appendix I

Clifford Douglas Ellis

Gentleman



Photograph taken at Scone Race Club

CLIFFORD DOUGLAS ELLIS (born 27/12/26 at Denman)

It is an incredible honour and even greater privilege to be asked by Cliff, Jennifer, Tim and Rebecca to deliver this encomium on their behalf which we have compiled together.

Cliff Ellis was born on his father's dairy property "Ravenswood" situated between Denman and Jerry's Plains on 27th December 1926. One of 5 children he was a great-great grandson of Thomas Ellis a noted Upper Hunter pioneer settler who came out from Devon, England in 1837 to manage George Bowman's property "Ärrowfield" now renamed "Coolmore" at Jerry's Plains. On his mother's side of the family Cliff also descends from a noted solid early settler. He is a great-great grandson of London commodities broker John Wood who migrated to NSW in 1818. Wood is remembered as an explorer and pioneer settler, who squatted on previously unknown country to the south west of Cowra where he established the mighty Brundah Station. The town of Grenfell grew up on part of Brundah after gold was discovered there in the 1860s.

Born in the mid-1920s leading to the height of the great depression, Cliff's early life was one of hard work around the farm. His formal schooling was cut short with the outbreak of World War II when his father found it impossible to obtain enough outside labour to milk the cows and help run the farm. However life was not all drudgery as he and each of his siblings always had their own ponies; for Cliff the genesis of his life-long passion for horses. Their home also boasted a tennis court which resulted in Cliff becoming a more than proficient tennis player.

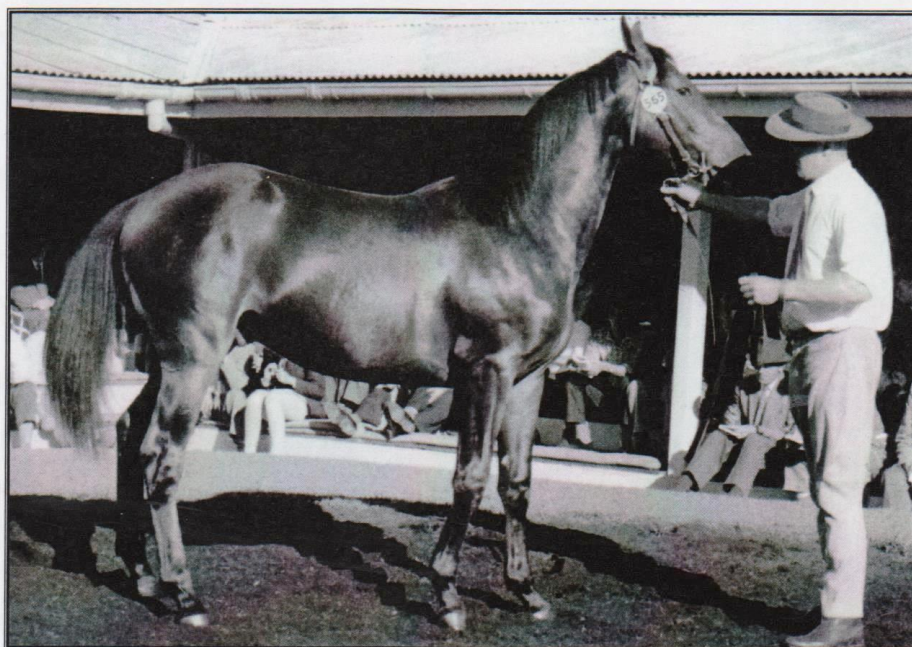
The sale of the family farm in 1949 saw the start of Cliff's love affair with racing and the breeding of thoroughbred horses. He left the cloistered environs of the Denman dairy industry and ventured into the exciting world of the thoroughbred horse in the magnificent Widden Valley. It is no exaggeration to say that the Widden Valley always remained his spiritual home. He started work at the Harris family owned Holbrook Stud where he initially went to break in and educate young horses. He stayed there for about 4 years receiving a thorough grounding in the care and handling of horses by the late Bill Harris with sons Alan and John. Education of both young horses and young people were the seminal drivers in Cliff's professional life. Cliff first attended the Sydney Easter Yearling Sales in 1951.

Cliff's next move in 1953 was just a few miles down the valley. After leaving Holbrook Stud he commenced employment under the guidance of Tom Flynn at the newly established Oakleigh Stud. Here Cliff and Tom's son Ross perfected the growing and presentation of yearlings for sale. Their work was later emulated by many of the prominent studs. In 1961 Tom Flynn bought Emu Vale; another property in the Widden Valley. In that year Cliff married Jennifer Crockett of Double Bay, Sydney. Cliff was given the job of managing Emu Vale a property devoted mainly to the production of fine beef cattle for the Sydney market. Horses were not excluded. Emu Vale also became a spelling place for racehorses as well as the country where Oakleigh's dry mares were over wintered. It was at Emu Vale in October 1967 that I first met Cliff and Jennifer Ellis.

Whilst living at Emu Vale Cliff and Jennifer's son Timothy was born. When Tim reached school age Cliff made the big decision to leave his beloved Widden Valley. After living there for over 21 years he took up employment closer to town where education facilities could be more readily accessed.



Cliff Ellis and Ross Flynn (Oakleigh Stud), Old No. 1 Stable Block, Newmarket, Easter 1962. Yearling Colt by Pirate King ex Canvas Back.



Cliff Ellis, Old Sale Ring Newmarket 1962
Yearling Colt by Pirate King ex Debonaire owned and bred by Cliff.
Sold to Bart Cummings for 3,000 guineas.

(Tim – Cliff was immensely proud of your innate ability to take full advantage of the opportunities in both secondary and tertiary education which prevailing circumstances may have denied him. It's a hoary old cliché but a truism nonetheless that your late father was a graduate with first class honours in the University of Life. He read very widely and was entirely self-taught).

In 1971 Cliff commenced employment as Manager of the Mitchell family's Yarraman Park Stud near Scone. His influence here was tremendous and he was responsible for quite a few young people making a successful career in the horse industry. The owner/manager relationship flourished and still endures today with Arthur, Billy & especially Harry Mitchell represented here today by close confidante Paul Hennessy. Cliff also acted for a short time as mentor and advisor while Brian Agnew established Wakefield Stud at nearby Redbank.

While still living in the Widden Valley Cliff and Jenifer bought a small property at Parkville which they named Kingdon Farm. In 1979 Cliff deemed it time to branch out on his own and the family made the move to Kingdon Farm. Here Cliff specialised in preparing sale yearlings for a select clientele. This new venture was successful so much so that in 1983 the yearlings Cliff prepared topped not only the individual price but also the aggregate total at the Inglis Sydney Easter Yearling Sales. Champion 'Tie the Knot' owned and bred by Sandy Tait & Family was the most illustrious graduate of the Ellis' Kingdon Farm Academy of Equine Excellence. Hawkesbury River celebrity swimmer 'Johnno' who won the Scone Cup in 1959 was the best of the Ellis family's home bred winners. Thank you Brian Russell!

Cliff finally retired in 2000 and he and Jennifer took up residence in Scone.

SOME IMPORTANT DATES IN CLIFF'S CAREER:

- Elected an inaugural Committee Member of the Hunter Valley Blood Horse Breeders Association in the 1970s.
- Long term committee member of Scone Race Club
- In 1987 was awarded the Hunter Valley Blood Horse Breeders Association's Murray Bain Service to Industry Award.
- Scone Horse Week VIP in 1999
- Commenced teaching Horse Industry Course at TAFE in 1989

Avuncular Educator, Tutor, Mentor, Advocate, Friend & Family

Vocational Education and Training is all about knowledge, skills and attitudes; highly desirable attributes which Cliff Ellis accumulated in spades throughout a lifetimes' experience. Happily Cliff chose to share these liberally: he devoted his later years in conveying as much of this as he possibly could to his young charges. The following quotation (10 years ago) is fairly typical:

"I taught for many years at TAFE. I had a short formal education but read all the textbooks around and picked up the mistakes in them. Of course I learned a lot from them as well. We had some very talented students studying the stud groom's course at TAFE many of whom are still in the industry in positions of responsibility. I still hear from quite a few of them. The students who gave me the most satisfaction however were the less talented who tried hard.

I always tried to help them out as much as I could. If they got 48% working their tail off, I'd give them 53. I'd also shoot and bury any residual ego. We resurrected many young people. One of the ones got 48; I gave her 53 and she has never been out of a job since she left TAFE. Maybe I gave her a bit of a chance. I like to think so".

Cliff derived a mildly mischievous and somewhat perky delight in circumventing the stifling didactic strictures imposed by the gargantuan educational bureaucracy which was and is the NSW TAFE Commission. Pedagogue colleagues Mark Judge, Mike and Mia Thew might concur.

Facebook & Social Media

My spouse Sarah posted a notice on 'Facebook' which drew a huge response largely from young people scattered around the globe. The following wish to make tribute to Cliff and his mentorship: Beck Driggers-Bowd (Charleston, SC who may or may not have been the beneficiary of Cliff's liberal interpretation of assessment)), Morag Borsje-Bain (Lennox Head), Kirsty Howey (Darwin), Katrina McCosker-Payne (Scone), George Fraser (Scone), Lisa Randle (Scone), Jenny Dawson (Scone), Sean Hush (Scone), Georgie Mackay (Pindimar), Beverley Goode (Scone), Jane Mactier (Scone), Dianne Van Balen (Scone), Lorraine Gleeson (Scone), Jess Faras (Scone), Robyn Gaiter (Scone).

'Breednet'

Close friend Brian Russell posted on 'Breednet' (www.breednet.com.au) which immediately informed the thoroughbred world.

Gentleman

Thesaurus Trawling: 'Nobleman'; 'Aristocrat'; 'Squire'; 'Grandee'; 'Aesthete';

'Courteous Person' - YES Sartorial – YES! Did you ever see Cliff in Kelly Street? Immaculate in Akubra hat, wool tie, Gloucester shirt, moleskins and RM boots polished to perfection. Even on his pushbike from Satur Cliff exuded true class. Cadel Evans never ever looked so good.

"He's a gentleman: look at his boots" George Bernard Shaw *Pygmalion* (1916) Act I

'A man of chivalrous instincts, fine feelings & good breeding' Concise Oxford English

Cricket Analogy and 'The Urn'

While Cliff may or may not have been the 'Bradman' of Stud Managers the master of style 'Victor Trumper' has an authentic ring to it! I do like cricketing analogies and Cliff was a very fine cricketer; I believe a more than competent wicket keeper/batsman. He made it to 87 on 27/12/13 – a highly significant number in the Aussie Cricket genre. A few short weeks ago on the veranda of the Walter Pye wing @ SMH he and I celebrated Australia's Ashes securing win at the WACA. Cliff waxed eloquently about the outstanding achievement of the current Aussie side. He especially liked the contribution of the 'old blokes'; in particular fellow country-raised wicket keeper/batsman Brad Haddin. Dryly he intoned the bucolic philosophical mantra: ***'An old dog for a hard road; puppies for pavements'***. This was the last intelligible conversation I enjoyed with Cliff. I took the urn with me.

The Urn is emblematic of both 'cupid and cupidity'. Hon Ivo Bligh (8th. Lord Darnley) regained the Ashes in Australia in 1882 following the famous 'Demon' Fred Spofforth inspired victory earlier in England which gave rise to the celebrated obituary to English cricket in the London Sporting Times.

At its very best the urn is a refulgent tribute to true love and devotion. It was presented to the Hon Ivo Bligh by some redoubtable Melbourne Ladies one of whom was Florence Murphy employed as a music teacher at 'Rupertswood', the home of Sir William Clarke. The urn was purported to contain the residual ashes of a set of sacrificial burned bails. Florence Murphy later became Lady Darnley and on the death of her husband in 1927 bequeathed the urn and its contents to the MCC. Lady Florence's 82 year old daughter-in-law put the record straight – the urn contained the ashes of an incinerated veil once the property of the neophyte Florence Murphy. Its' oeuvre is redolent of the relationship enjoyed by Cliff and Jenny; complimented by Tim and latterly Rebecca.

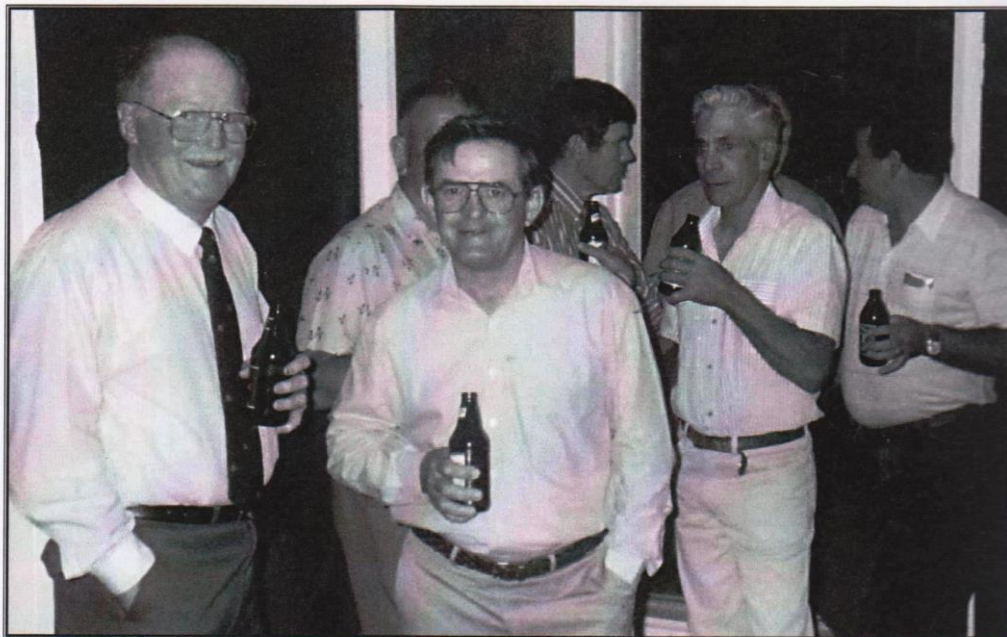
I took this urn as a symbol to the SCG at the week end. I like to believe there were some evocative spiritual ashes contained therein.

I will leave the last word to the late Clifford Douglas Ellis so quintessentially Cliff:

'In conclusion I would like to say that I have lived through a most interesting and stimulating period in the thoroughbred industry meeting people from all walks of life.

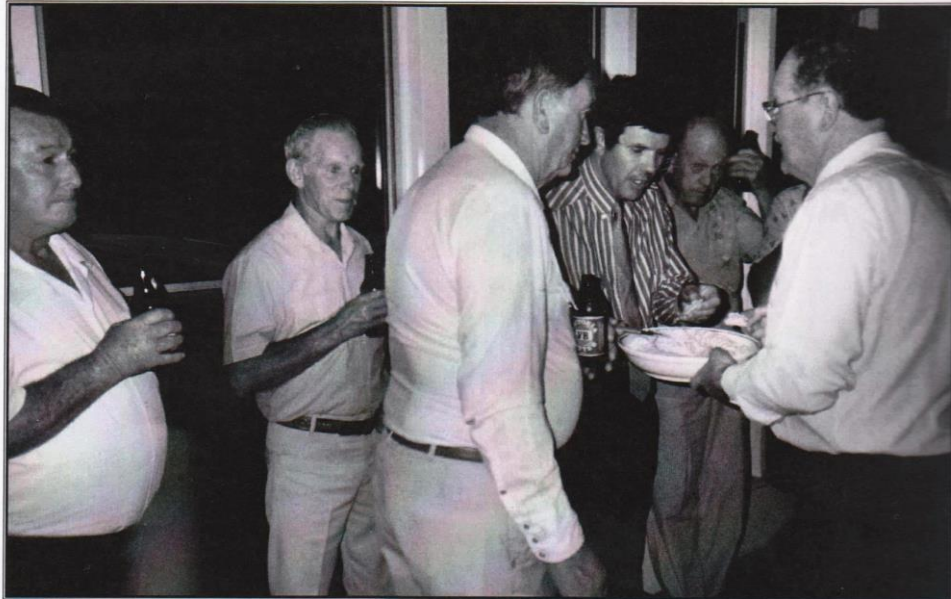
As a wise man once said: We are all equal on the turf - and under it'!

Vale Clifford Douglas Ellis – True and Fine Gentleman – we are here not merely to mourn but also celebrate a brilliant life so very well lived.



50 not out! November 25, 1992 - Cliff Ellis, Syd Anderson behind Hilton Cope, Angus Campbell, Kevin Fitzgerald and Paul Hennessy.

My 50th birthday party @ 'Hepple Farm' 25/11/1992



50 not out! November 25, 1992 -
Ron Jeffries, Reub Cochrane, Jim Gibson, Angus Campbell,
Archie Shepherd and Cliff Ellis.

Appendix II

Cliff Ellis

<https://www.sconeadvocate.com.au/story/2013184/racing-hero-farewelled/>

January 9 2014 - 9:25AM

Racing hero farewelled

Brian Russell

Thousands will have fond memories of Cliff Ellis, one of the Hunter Valley's most respected horsemen who passed away at Scone on the night of December 30 three days after his 87th birthday.

For a quarter of a century until his retirement from the saddle in 2011, he was one of the leaders on horseback in the annual Horse Festival parade at Scone in May each year, an imposing figure, the epitome of the horseman and of the history of the horse in the Hunter Valley, a region in which he lived all his life. Denman born and raised on the family's dairy farm between that town and Jerrys Plains, Cliff was the second youngest of five children, a great grandson of Thomas Ellis, a stockman who migrated from Devon in England in 1837 to manage the settlement established at Jerrys Plains under the name of Arrowfield, now home for thoroughbred breeding giant Coolmore, by one of the Upper Hunter's foremost pioneers, George Bowman.

Cliff had eminent pioneer pastoralists on both sides as his mother descended from John Wood, a London commodities broker who moved to New South Wales in 1818.

He squatted on 180,000 acres of country which he called Brundah Station southwest of what is Cowra.

The town of Grenfel is on Brundah.

John Wood was also one of the fathers of the Australian Thoroughbred.

In particular, he imported mares from Chile in South America which became the foundation of the horse breeding stock on Brundah and which no doubt can be found in some modern horses with colonial heritage.

Educated at a small bush school, Cliff, because of the shortage of labour owing to the war, went to work on the dairy farm at 14.

Fortunately for the horse world, the farm was sold in 1949 and he began more than 50 years involvement following a love of the thoroughbred.

The first 20 were in the historic Widden Valley, the first four breaking in and educating horses under Bill Harris at his family's Holbrook, then the home for the very good imported sire Persian Book.

The balance was with the Flynns, Tom and his managing son Ross, at neighbouring Oakleigh and also Emu Vale, a holding accessed through the Widden Stud.

It was managed for a time by Cliff.

An outstanding source of good horses for over half a century in the ownership of Herbert Thompson, a member of the Widden Stud pioneer family, Oakleigh was developed through the efforts of Ross Flynn and Cliff Ellis from the early 1950s into one of Australia's most upmarket studs with the top sire being the importation Red Gauntlet.

They pioneered modern methods of preparing yearlings for sale embracing feeding and handling from weaning and sale grooming which are practiced by most major vendors today.

In presentation the Oakleigh yearlings, many of them shown in the ring by Cliff, were the jewels of the Inglis Easter sales in the 1960s.

Big moments in the life of Cliff Ellis while at Oakleigh included the win of a horse he bred and sold, the Jack Green (Sydney) trained Hua gelding Johnno in track record time in the 1959 Scone Cup – total prize money \$1,550, his marriage to Jenifer Crockett in 1961 and his topping of the fourth day (small vendors) of the 1962 Easter sale with a Pirate King half-brother to Johnno.

The price of 3,000 guineas (\$6,300) was good money at the time.

Johnno, by the way, became a celebrity again when, after being caught up in a major flood on the Hawkesbury, he swam some considerable distance to safety and was found sheltering on the verandah of a house.

The Ellis family Cliff, Jen and their then five-year-old son Tim, left the remoteness of Widden Valley in 1971 and he became the stud manager for England born Major James Mitchell, the owner of Yarraman Park, a stud farm at Scone which he acquired from famous jockey George Moore.

Yarraman Park flourishes today under the management of Major Mitchell's sons Arthur and Harry.

The wisdom of Cliff Ellis was very valuable for young horsemen learning their trade at Yarraman Park.

Two who went on to prominence as trainers are Guy Walter - a number one Sydney trainer and Murray Johnson.

Murray flies the flag for Australia in America - a country in which one of his runners, Perfect Drift, finished third in the Kentucky Derby.

A great joy for Cliff and Jenifer was the entrusting into their care for foaling down and walking into a sire in 1994 of Sandy Tait's and Jill Nivison's Whiskey Road mare Whisked.

A son of the Blushing Groom sire Nassipour, the foal subsequently raced as the gelded Tie the Knot out of the Guy Walter stables at Warwick Farm, winning 21 races, 13 Group 1s and earning \$6,212,835.

He was one of a number of good horses delivered by the Ellis' after they left Yarraman Park and established an agistment complex - Kingdon Farm at Parkville near Scone in 1979.

The primary focus was the preparation and care of clients' mares, growing their offspring and marketing yearlings.

In 1983 yearlings prepared by Cliff Ellis topped not only the individual price, but also the aggregate price at the Easter Sale.

They also stood the sires Piccolino, Sungazer and Blazing Ruler and for about a dozen years Cliff lectured on the Horse Industry at the Scone TAFE.

Retired to Scone in 2000, Cliff was a major contributor to Scone racing and breeding administration for a quarter of a century.

He served on the Race Club committee for many years and was a foundation committee member of the Hunter Valley Bloodhorse Breeders' Association.

He was so highly respected that in 1987 he was awarded the Hunter Valley Bloodhorse Breeders Service to Industry Award and in 1999 was the Scone Horse Festival VIP. He was also made a Life Member of the Scone Race Club.

Cliff is survived by Jenifer, his wife for over 50 years, their son Timothy and his wife Rebecca, "the daughter he always wanted".

A funeral service conducted at St Luke's Anglican Church Scone on Tuesday was followed by private cremation.