

#52 Ancestors Week 30 - Easy

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The easiest branch of my family to research has been my mother's family – the Whittens. This is because so much research was already done by the time I came along – By one Russell Bell, who married my mother's first cousin, Doris Whitten.

Russ was a teacher in Quirindi when he met Doris – he actually taught my mother, so was a colleague of my father on the staff of Quirindi District Rural School in the late 1930s.

When he retired from teaching (in the 70s, I think) he decided that a family history would be an interesting project, and he set about collating all the information he could find from all branches of the family. My mother's half sister, Gladys (born 1903) was a good source of information, and there were third generation descendants of the original migrating brothers (Edward, Henry, Anthony, Joseph) and sister (Annie) who all had stories to share. He was lucky that the Whittens are all great storytellers, so everyone had interesting tales to tell.

Russ's history is all the more remarkable because it came long before the internet made communication so immediate. He had to write letters.... and wait for answers. He had to apply and pay for birth, death and marriage certificates that sometimes turned out to be for someone who wasn't related at all. The document he produced at the end, in 1984, was handwritten, and duplicated on that now-ancient machine known to all teachers – the gestetner.

More recently another family member – my second cousin Tim Hobson, has updated the entire Whitten family tree and placed it all on the internet on a site called, "Whittens in Australia". And I too have a tree on Ancestry which has, thanks to modern technology, expanded and enlarged upon Russ's original story.

It's not all easy, however, as any researcher of Irish history will tell you. The Irish records are still a struggle and I have a few burning questions yet to be answered.

Were the original Whittens in Ireland Huguenots?

Was their land really granted to them by Oliver Cromwell?

And (a true Aussie question) ... Are we related to legendary AFL player Ted Whitten?



Russell Bell