

#52 Ancestors Week 22 - In the cemetery

52cousins.blogspot.com/2019/05/52-ancestors-52-weeks-in-cemetery.html



#52 Ancestors Week 22 – In the cemetery

Many of our early ancestors are buried in cemeteries no longer in use. In Lismore and Ballina the pioneer cemeteries have become “Parks” with salvageable headstones straightened and set into walls to protect them from further erosion. In both these cases, the cemeteries have been affected by rising water levels, and many headstones have been lost. While this process “saves” the headstones, they unfortunately lose context, so family or kinship relationships can’t be read by looking at the graves.

In the Pioneer Cemetery of North Lismore are many surviving headstones of my early Lismore family. All four of my paternal 2x great grandparents are here – Charles and Eliza White and Charles and Susan Stanford, as well as two of the Stanford children, Violet and Dyscha.

Some of Paul’s ancestors are here too. Three McCann brothers who all died accidentally over a period of nine years from 1889 - 1898 – Charles (drowned), Nicholas and James (hit by falling trees) are buried here; their headstones gradually becoming less legible as time passes. Nearby are the graves of Paul’s 3x great grandfather James Exton. Born far away in Lincolnshire, England, he died in Lismore in 1876, aged 59. His inscription is also illegible, but it has been recorded. It says,



"Whilst on earth I did remain
My latter days were grief and pain
But God whose mercy ever free
Has from my pains released me."

His wife Susannah does not seem to be in this cemetery, but his daughter Hannah's grave is there, with her husband, John Jones.

Listed on the plaque at the entrance to the cemetery are two more of Paul's 2x great grandparents, James and Sarah Barrow. James was born in Shropshire in 1817 and came to the colony in about 1841. Sarah was born here, the daughter of convicts John Hooper and Rebecca Bloxham. James was a sawyer and had a successful business as a builder in the fledgling town of Lismore – there is a lane named after him in South Lismore.

The location of the first cemetery in Ballina was chosen because it was convenient to the settlement by land and by water, but the town soon outgrew the site. It was declared a rest park in 1957, and the few headstones that had survived were placed in a wall. While beautiful, the area has no sense of the past and is rarely visited. Paul's 3 x great grandfather, the soldier/blacksmith William Johnson is apparently buried here.

My maternal great grandparents are buried in the small bush cemetery at Wallabadah, with one of their sons, a bachelor, and one of their grandsons, my uncle Jackie who died long before I was born., before even my mother, his sister, was born. It has seemed, on the occasions I have visited, as if the country is permanently in drought – it's a bleak and cheerless place. On the day they buried Jackie, however, it was probably sodden with recent rains – when he died on the family property in the hills behind



Wallabadah they were cut off from help by the flooded Jacob and Joseph Creek.

We have heard the story many times. My grandmother, Josie, alone on the property with four small children and a "girl" hired to help her. We don't know who the girl was or how old she was – probably a young teenager. She had taken the older three children (aged 8,6 and 5) outside to play. Jackie was listless at dinner time, then unconscious, then dead. The girl had demonstrated to the others – on Jackie – how to do a "rabbit killer", an edge-of-the-hand chop to the back of the neck. My grandmother laid him out on the kitchen table and sat with him for two days. Neither my grandfather nor a doctor or even an undertaker could cross the flooded creek to come to them. In my mother's many tellings of this tale, Josie is pregnant again which is an added note of poignancy but not true, I think, unless that child too was lost.

There was no inquest or official enquiry. My mother told me that she thought that my grandparents would have wanted to spare the ignorant girl from blame or censure.



In Loving Memory Of

OUR DEAR SON

JACKIE WHITTEN

PASSED AWAY ON 12TH JUNE 1921

AGED 6TH YEARS

AND JESUS CALLED A LITTLE CHILD INTO HIS BOSS