

52 Ancestors 2022 - Week 7 - Landed

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Landed



Fancroft

This is Fancroft, family home of the Whittens, my mother's family, from the late 18th century until it was sold out of the family in 2016.

My earliest record of it is as the home of my third great grandparents, William and Prudence Whitten (nee Clery, (or Cleary)). William and Prudence were married in 1780, and by the time their son Edward was born in 1795, they were living at Fancroft, just outside Roscrea in County Tipperary.

Edward was their sixth child and he and his bride, Martha Lucas also lived at Fancroft. Death records are not clear, but Whitten family historians think that Edward was the oldest surviving son at the time of his father's death.

Edward and Martha had 12 children. Little is known about the first two sons, Robert (b 1822) and William (b 1823) The next three children were girls – Matilda, Eliza and Mary, and then the next son, Edward, died at the age of three.

Edward senior died in 1850, and perhaps Robert or William may have inherited Fancroft on his death, but it was John (b.1833) who eventually took over the property, and his family line which remained.

The five children who were younger than John all emigrated to Australia, but Fancroft remained strong in their memories, and they passed this on to succeeding generations.

The first to return were Anthony's sons, Alfred and Albert, who visited in the summer of 1912. Alf kept a diary which describes the house and many of the family they met while they were there. #

The story in the family is that John Whitten's third son, Joseph Abraham Whitten was named as his father's heir, but that the eldest son, Edward, who had gone to Canada, returned, burned that will and claimed Fancroft for himself. Edward was married to Charlotte Wallace and had seven children and it appears that the first two sons both emigrated to Canada when quite young.

(When I met Marjorie in 1977, I asked her about all the emigrations to Canada and the USA in the family. She said, "every time there was a family fight, someone emigrated", so perhaps these two sons were at odds with Edward?)

I think that the third son, George Washington Whitten must have taken over the farm after Edward's death in 1930. There is a record of George and Lily and their son Eddie travelling back from Canada to Ireland in 1933, but I don't know if they had been resident there or if it was a short visit.

George died in 1951 and I assume that this is when Marjorie took over the running of Fancroft. At some stage she was joined by Billy Williams, son of her sister Frances, and he inherited the property on Marjorie's death in 1977.

All the Australian members of the extended family who visited Fancroft have commented on the coat of arms (see below) and the enormous kitchen with its stone flagged floor and magnificent display of copper pots and blue and white china. The "Whitten descendant" who wrote a lengthy piece dated 1966 and reproduced on Tim Hobson's "Whittens in Australia" webpage describes a busy working kitchen with a creamery and pantry and a churn still used by Marjorie twice a week. Sadly, by the time of my sister Margie's visit in 2012 the kitchen was empty of all but a table – Billy Williams was taking his meals with his neighbours. When Billy died in 2016, Fancroft was put on the market and when I was there in 2017 it presented a sorry site. We were told that the new owners had wanted only the land and had no interest in the house, which was empty and abandoned. After 300 years in the Whitten family, it is slowly falling into disrepair.





#Monday 5th

In the morning we went out to Joe Whitten's and had dinner. He has 45 Irish acres of land. Irish acres are 1¼ acres. Had tea there and met Francis Rorke who asked us to her (his?) place.

Tuesday 6th

Went into town and had a good look through the co-operative bacon factory. Killing, scraping and singeing etc. Then we called on John Mason once more. Had dinner at Luttrells, called on Daley the C of E curate who was out then back to tea at Luttrells where we met old Mrs Drought who knew Father well. After tea we went to the old Roscrea Castle. This seems to be a very old stronghold from the top of which one could see all the district round about. Singing and home.

Wednesday 7th

Morning quiet time at Fancroft. Afternoon shooting. Evening chatting in the Home.

Thursday 8th

Attended the Fair in Roscrea. It seemed strange to see cattle sheep and horses, pigs in the streets and the buyers and sellers chatting and driving a hard bargain. There was a fine little mob of Irish ponies, rounded up in the streets. 42 publicans in Roscrea...