Old Friends, Rich Relations: Early Days on the Richmond and Clarence Rivers

Edwin Wilson

I was born into the then isolated farming community at East Wardell in 1942, on the Richmond River (far north coast of New South Wales). A formative ten years of my early life (from 1948–1958) had been spent at Mullumbimby,[1] but my heartland had extended from the Clarence to the Tweed.

This Paradise had been settled from the 1840s in a Red Gold Rush by the feckless and the dispossessed, and people trying to better themselves—by emancipists, adventurers, and remittance men—for had they been settled, they'd have happily stayed where they were. The far north coast had been a wild and lawless place, with no roads or constabulary, and a considerable shortage of women.

Farming communities had been established on the floodplains of the Hawkesbury River from the early days of the Colony. Their children travelled north in search of other rivers that provided roads into the wooded hinterlands, looking for cedar trees, and lime (from burning shells), and farming land. Sadly most Promised Lands are occupied. This greater expansion resulted in frontier conflict all along its moving edge, and the ultimate dispossession of the river tribes, and a degree of fraternizing with the enemy.

Until quite recently this dispossession had been airbrushed from our psyches, for the Aborigines had fought back, to try to retain their traditional hunting grounds. The Clarence River countryside was more open than the Richmond, and the aborigines more 'warlike' in defending their patch, with reports of murders of white shepherds, and much retaliation by the whites with guns and cyanide.[2]

Edwin Wilson is a Sydney-based painter and poet and author of twenty one books. His *Collected Poems* were published by Kardoorair Press (Armidale) in 2002. His *New Selected Poems* (Woodbine Press) came out in 2010. A childhood on the far north coast of New South Wales (living at East Wardell, Brunswick Heads, Mullumbimby, and Tweed Heads), is revisited in *The Mullumbimby Kid* (Woodbine Press, 2000).

1 A more detailed treatment of my childhood may be found in *The Mullumbimby Kid* (Sydney: Woodbine Press, 2000).

2 Stories told by Nina Shore (née Neale). The reading of reports of such massacres in the 'Bawden Lectures', in the library of the Clarence River Historical Society was the initial impulse for me to write *Wild Tamarind* (and later *Cedar House*, strongly based on stories from the north coast, especially the Clarence River)

All farms had guns in the 'good old days', when the guns had been used to 'disperse' (meaning to shoot) the blacks. White men also used European laws of 'trespass' to exclude the natives from their most plentiful supply of food on the flood plains and river banks.

The other item airbrushed from our psyche was our convict past. In old white Australia the convict 'stain' was always there, for even those who'd come out 'free' had married into tainted lines. My mother always said there were convicts in the Wilson family, neglecting to mention her own side of the family.

With the coming of the Bicentennial there was a shift in paradigm, when what had previously been shameful had become almost mandatory. There'd been an outpouring of emancipated pride at the clan gathering for my uncle Jack (John Thomas) Wilson's funeral at Wardell (in 1988). My father had died before I was born, so I knew less about the Wilson line. I'd become very interested in the family history, to better understand my origins, and who I really was. As it transpires I'm related to half the pioneer families of the Lower Hawkesbury, and seventh generation white Australian on two branches of my family tree.

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Two of these 'unmentionables'—of native dispossession and convicts—had come together in Nan Wilson's own grandfather, James Lewis, a butcher convicted of stealing fifty-six yards of printed cotton. Transported on the hell ship, *Hillsborough*, they'd reached Sydney Cove in 1799, with their clothes rotting off their backs.

A researching cousin, Fay Fry, had made a wrong turn with his supposed Duce/Druce alias (as recorded in *The Mullumbimby Kid*). His remaining story is correct, for James Lewis was semi-literate, and signed his name with a distinctive hand, so he'd left a paper trail. Along the way he had worked as a sailor and sealer, and became an 'extra' constable in later life (which gives some insights into the old culture of the New South Wales police force).

While serving on Pelican Island (Dowardee Island) at Port Stephens with part of a cedar party, where some smuggling of spirits had been taking place, he'd been killed in a native attack towards the end of April 1824. After the attack, the settler's huts had been plundered, leaving the survivors in fear of their lives, which helps explain my grandmother's fear of the aborigines.[3]

A large group of aboriginal men and women stood outside the church at Jack Wilson's funeral. An old man came over to me at the cemetery. He'd worked with Jack as a cane cutter in his youth, then went away looking for work, and came back starving. Jack had taken him back to

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3 Expansive family history research.

his home (at a time of enforced segregation, when the aborigines needed a permit to leave the Island), and stuffed bread into his mouth as he cooked him a meal of fried steak, tomato and eggs. The old man had come to the funeral to repay that spontaneous act. Jack's generation was part Irish, and the Irish had an instinctive sense of what oppression was.

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Nan Wilson was descended from Peter Hibbs, who'd come out free. According to family legend he'd sailed on the *Endeavour* as a boy with Cook, then returned to Botany Bay with Governor Phillip on the *Sirius*, the flagship of the First Fleet.[4] If this was so he would have seen the far north coast of New South Wales from the sea when Cook named Cape Byron (after the grandfather of the poet), Mount Warning, and Point Danger (where jungle grew down to the sea).

After accompanying Phillip on the first exploration of the Hawkesbury River, he'd been stranded on Norfolk Island when the *Sirius* had been wrecked. Here he met and married the convict girl Mary Pardo (Pardoe/Pardeaux), who'd arrived on the *Lady Juliana* in 1790, and worked his land grant. He later settled with his growing family on the Hawkesbury, and their children married into this community.

Peter's daughter Sarah married the Irish Miller Francis Byrne(s), convicted of highway robbery, who'd farmed on the Lower Hawkesbury. Their son James married Harriet Watkins, daughter of the convict Thomas Watkins (convicted of stealing a horse) who'd married Sarah Lewis (or Conway), daughter of James Lewis and the mystery woman, Catherine Conway (who turned out to be the convict Catherine Williams, transported on the *Neptune* in 1790).[5]

Tom and Sarah worked as carters in Sydney Town, where Tom got his horse at last, and went on to own city properties, and a farm and pub at Mangrove Creek, on the Lower Hawkesbury. Their houses consisted of 'a single slab hut or [a] wattle and daub room roofed with bark and earth floors, where the farmer and his family ate and slept'.[6] Peter Hibbs and his family had initially lived in a cave (most probably an overhang of sandstone rock) at the mouth of Pumpkin Creek.[7] Peter received more land grants on the Hawkesbury, but lost everything in two killer floods (in 1809), and was bought out by Mary Reibey.[8]

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4 Edwin Wilson and Tom Richmond, 'The Saga of Peter Hibbs', *Hawkesbury River History: Governor Phillip: Exploration and Early Settlement*, ed. by Jocelyn Powell and Lorraine Banks (Dharug and Lower Hawkesbury Historical Society, 1990), pp. 85-98.

5 The expanded story of Catherine Conway or Lewis may be found in my Family History manuscript, under the working title of 'Old Friends, Rich Relations'.

6 Roy H. Goddard, *The Life and Times of James Milson* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1955), p. 35.

7 Family legend.

8 From Edwin Wilson and Tom Richmond, 'The Saga of Peter Hibbs', *op. cit*.

Back on the Island Peter Hibbs had been associated with the building of the sloop *Norfolk*, and sailed as her Colonial Master (as supply ship to Matthew Flinders in his circumnavigation of Tasmania in 1798). It is assumed that Hibbs stayed with Flinders on his subsequent voyage up the north coast, and saw the rocks turn from yellow (of Sydney Basin sandstones) to black (igneous type volcanic). At Shoal Bay (mouth of the Clarence River, although the significance of this had not been realized at the time), the *Norfolk* had sprung a leak, necessitating repairs.

The log of this voyage described the native huts as being:

> of a circular form, of about eight feet [in] diameter. The frame was made of stronger tendrils of vines crossing each other in all directions and bound together with strong wiry grass at the principle intersections. The covering was a bark of a soft texture resembling the bark of what is called the Tea trees at Port Jackson [most probably *Melaleuca* or 'paper bark']; and so completely laid in, as to keep out both wind and rain: the entrance is by a small awning projecting from the periphery of the circle and does not go directly into the hut but turns sufficiently to prevent the rain from beating in. The height of the under part of the roof is about four and a half or five feet and those that I entered had collected a coat of soot from the fire which had been made in the middle of the huts.
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> One hut was double, containing two … but one entrance for kindred families [of] 10–15 people. Bongaree [a Sydney native], who was with me, admitted they were much superior to any of the native houses he had before seen.[9]

This journal was printed in part in Flinders' *Voyage to Terra Australis*[10] and more fully in Collins' 'Account of New South Wales',[11] without this description, one assumes in support of the politics of 'non-settlement', as expressed in the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Cook had seen fires all along the east coast, and Flinders reported smoke in the hinterlands in this same Journal, that 'bespoke [of the] country to be inhabited'.

At the appropriately-named Point Skirmish (in Moreton Bay), the natives spoke a language that Bongaree could not understand. The contact had been friendly at first, then the natives attacked; one of them had been shot and wounded (almost identical to what had happened at Botany Bay in 1770).

Peter Hibbs and his son George then sailed on the *Porpoise*, making two trips (in 1801 and 1802) to Tahiti for salt pork for the starving

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9 MS Sloop *Norfolk*, Flinders CY 1270 Reel, ML C211.

10 Matthew Flinders, *Voyage to Terra Australis*, Vol 1 (London: G.T. & W. Nicol, Booksellers to His Majesty, 1914), pp. cxciv–ccii.

11 David Collins, *Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, Vol II, (1975) [this edition ed. by Brian H. Fletcher], pp. 225–263.

colony (indirect evidence of his having been there earlier with Cook). Flinders returned to the north coast area in 1803, at the start of his circumnavigation of the continent.

With him were Robert Brown (botanist), Ferdinand Bauer (artist), and Peter Good ('gardener'). Peter Good, referring to the area between Schnapper (sic) Point (Evans Head) and Point Lookout, observed 'the country seems very beautyfull (sic) diversified with vallies (sic) and large plains covered with trees'.[12]

John Oxley, Surveyor-General of New South Wales, had sailed north in 1823 to select a site for a new penal settlement. During this trip he discovered the Tweed River, explored Moreton Bay and discovered the Brisbane River.[13]

In 1828, Henry Rous, captain of the *Rainbow* doing survey work north of Port Jackson, discovered the Brunswick River and was the first documented European to navigate the Richmond River. After getting through a winding channel flanked by sand banks (location of the town of Ballina) he was 'elated to find an expanse of water two miles wide … [and] … continued … 17 miles until he came to the north-west branch [at] Broadwater'.[14] Tall forests and almost impenetrable scrub extended in places down the river and over the surrounding hills,[15] and in the upper reaches vines twisted out over the water.[16]

Charles Fraser (Superintendent of the Sydney Botanic Garden, established 1816) and the explorer/botanist Allan Cunningham had accompanied John Oxley to Moreton Bay in 1828. Fraser had collected plants for the Sydney Gardens from the dense forest on the southern bank of the Brisbane River, and measured out the site for what became the (Brisbane) City Botanic Gardens. He and Cunningham had explored inland along the Brisbane and Logan rivers, where Fraser recorded that the natives skinned their dead, and cured the skins above small fires, supported by a triangle of spears.[17]

Richard Craig, a convict who'd escaped from Moreton Bay (on 17 December 1830) is known to have passed through the northern rivers area, arriving at Port Macquarie in 1831. Because of his usefulness as a

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12 T.G. Vallance, D.T. Moore and E.W. Groves, *Nature's Investigator: The Dairy of Robert Brown in Australia*, 1801–1805 (Canberra: Australian Biological Resources Study, 2001), p. 227.

13 *Australian Encyclopaedia*.

14 Centenary Booklet of the *Wardell School and District*, 1867–1967, p. 2.

15 *Ibid*., p. 6.

16 Elsie Webster (author of the book on Ludwig Leichhardt, *Whirlwind on the Plains*) had shown me such a description of the Macleay (?) River (from an Allan Cunningham manuscript) at the Sydney Gardens.

17 Charles Fraser, 'Journal of a Two Months' Residence on the Banks of the Rivers Brisbane and Logan, on the East Coast of New Holland', as published by W.J. Hooker in his *Botanical Miscellany*, Vol. I, p. 238.

guide and an interpreter he'd been pardoned, and later encouraged settlers to the Clarence when the 1839 drought was devastating southern settlements.[18]

My first free-settler Clarence River ancestor on my mother's side, Faithful Crabbe, and his sister Dinah (spelt variously with or without the 'e', supposedly related to the poet George Crabbe), and Richard and his wife Elizabeth, came to Australia from Somerset on the *Glenswilly* in 1840. They arrived at South Grafton with the French ex-convict, Francis (François) Girard, in his brig *Alfred* on 11 March 1841. Faithful bought into the business of Innkeeper and Ferryman at the Clarence River Inn at First Falls, now Eatonsville. My relative Martha Ann was born in 1847, after which her father drowned at Thomas Hewitt's wharf, near Alumy Creek. His body was never found. William Southian took over his business, and married his widow as well.[19]

My free-settler Richmond River ancestor on my father's father's side was a Danish sailor (most probably Wilhelm Jensen Sondelev, who had given his name to or was named after the village of Sondelev) and who jumped ship in Sydney during the gold rushes. Because he was an illegal immigrant (or 'boat person'—they were all boat people before the days of Jumbo Jets) with a bounty on his head, he'd anglicized his name to Charles Wilson. In 1859 he married Mary Ann Riordan in the old St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney (as Mary had been 'Green'). Mary was a Gaelic-speaking servant girl from Limerick (father John Riordan, mother Margaret Ryan), who'd followed her brother out to Australia after the famine, after her parents had both died.

Charles and Mary were illiterate, as they signed their marriage certificate with their mark, in the form of a cross ('x'). Charles' father's name was Jens (James); his mother was Cathrine Jacobs(datter).[20]

Charles selected what became two adjacent allotments of forested land (of 60 and 40 acres respectively, purchased on conditional sale without competition in 1867 and 1868 at one pound an acre) on the deep water at East Wardell. An early photograph of James E. James' (Jimmy Jimmy's) Sawmill at East Wardell gives an idea of the vegetation and how desolate the place had been. This sawmill was situated near where the river punt (to Wardell) operated when I was a child (where Alex Fisher's store had been), where the bridge was later built. The Wilson selection was about a mile to the south of this, on the same side of the river.

Being the first settler on that part of the river he could have had as much land as he wanted, but coming from tiny Denmark had said 'a

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18 *Ibid*., p. 2.
19 Family history research from many sources.
20 *Ibid*.

hundred acres was enough for him'. His next task was to clear the jungle brush, becoming a subsistence farmer, with cows, chooks, quince trees, and growing corn. In the early days he had to row over ten miles on the tide (to Ballina) and back, to obtain bulk provisions. He supplemented his income by working the sailing boats to Sydney. On one of these trips he must have obtained grafts of citrus trees from the Botanic Gardens (as that's one of the things the Gardens was set up to do). The old citrus grove (of the original homestead) was still producing small tart fruit when I was a child, like one of the surviving trees in the Sydney Gardens where I worked (from 1980–2003), that (Gardens' Director) J.H. Maiden had recorded as being there in his census of 1903.

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In 1968 I planted my first banyan tree, the northern one, between the river and the road, at the place where the original homestead had been, where the fibro cottage in which I'd lived was built in World War II. There'd been a jetty at this spot, from which Charles had rowed to Casino (in 1870) to record the birth (in the local Registry) of his daughter Mary Ann. this same Mary Ann, the 'pretty one', had thrown her engagement ring into the river from this jetty. Because of entrenched sectarianism her mother had not approved of a Presbyterian fiancée. The Wars of Ulster on Richmond continued for the next 100 years, turning me off religion, when the Green infused the Orange to produce a muddy brown (just like the river after rain).

Mary Ann never married, and lived most of her life at 45 Commodore Street, Newtown, with her brother Charles, and died in 1967, at the grand old age of 97. Brother Charles had been engaged to Julia Meaney, but went bald at age nineteen when she'd jilted him. Neither subsequently married.[21]

Charles Wilson senior's brother-in-law, John Riordan, had settled across the river (on the Wardell bank). Hungry for land (after the famine) he'd progressively taken up his 'river mile' (in the names of his growing family of young boys), from the high bank to the hills some way behind.[22] My relatives now occupied the land on both sides of the river, with what became the Aboriginal Reserve (of Cabbage Tree Island) sandwiched in between.

The houses of the early settlers were:

> … miserable slab huts of their own building, open to admit wind and rain in most parts; badly thatched with reeds (of which the colour is not to be seen within for the smoke and dirt with which it is covered). No floor; the fireplace a recess made with slabs; their bed a sort of cot slung

21 Told to me by my aunty Lexi Rippon (née Wilson).
22 Told to me by my third cousin, Margaret (Maggie) Riordan.

> with bullock hide to the rough rafters, and everything giving the idea of filth and wretchedness.'[23]

The farm outhouses of my childhood were built of tall vertical slabs of Cabbage Palm, with wooden shingle roofs, the internal walls plastered with newspapers. The palm stem had been split down its length three ways, leaving a central plank flat on both sides. My grandfather was rightly proud when his new timber house built on the adjacent farm, the 'best house on that side of the river between Ballina and Broadwater'.[24] The house had been built, c.1903, by his brother-in-law on his father's side, the Danish carpenter Alfred Christensen, who'd married Pop's sister Catherine (Kitty) and selected near Burn's Point (closer to Ballina). Alfred fell off another house, aged only 28, and was impaled and died, and buried without a stone.

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My most illustrious free ancestor on the Clarence was on my mother's side, the literate, musical, and elusive Andrew (St Clare) Nelson, 'gentleman', had arrived on the *Wildwave* in 1862. One of his granddaughters was my great aunty Nina Shore (nee Neale) of Grafton. She and her husband had no children. She'd sublimated on river stories, and loved talking about 'Old Friends and Rich Relations', of rags to riches in three generations, then back to rags again (and sometimes in one generation). The recitation for her grandfather went like this:

> Andrew St Clare Nelson was highly musical and spoke seven different languages, and was Headmaster and Bandmaster of South Grafton, and related to Lord Nelson. His 'uncle' (Lord Nelson) had sent him to College and he'd joined the Royal Navy, but they'd given him such a hard time (because he was a Nelson?) he'd left and come to Australia.[25]

The young accept the world as they find it, and I did not find it odd that half my world appeared to be 'related to Lord Nelson'. Andrew turned out to be a true remittance man, receiving 'foreign remittances' during his time in the Royal Navy, and possibly later on. Nina was always talking about Yulgilbar Castle in those days as well, with some connection, as someone there had sailed with Nelson on the *Victory*. Edward Olgivie and his brother Frederick had taken up land in 1840, squatting on both sides of the Clarence at Baryulgil (later site of an infamous asbestos mine). They'd called their property Yulgilbar; their castle was built after 1860. The Olgivie family had good relations with the local aborigines, and Edward Olgivie's granddaughter, Jessie Street, was an early campaigner for Aboriginal Rights.

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23 Centenary Booklet of the *Wardell School and District*, 1867–1967, *op. cit*., p. 8.
24 Told to me by my aunty Lexi Rippon (née Wilson).
25 Litany of Nina Shore (nee Neale) to her grandfather.

Wardell, the core location of Edwin Wilson's home terrain.

Andrew Nelson did not have wealth or health in his retirement. He'd had trouble with his eyesight (nothing to do with the purported Nelson connection), and died sitting in his study, of 'heart problems', aged 64 year.

I'd met up with a family-history-researching cousin, Sister Mary Joseph (Patricia Wightley), in the mid 1990s. As well as being 'related to Lord Nelson' Pat's branch of the family tree had Aboriginal heritage, and she was incredibly proud of both. We pooled our resources. Our joint paper on Andrew Nelson was published in *Australian Folklore*.[26]

Andrew had taken lodgings at the Clarence River Inn, and eloped with the pregnant Marta Ann in early 1865. Her step-father, William Southian, was not amused, and had a notice posted in the local newspaper:

> All parties are cautioned against purchasing any cattle or horses supposed to belong to Martha Ann Crabb or the *so-called* [my italics] Andrew St Clare Nelson, the girl being only 17 years old last October

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26 Edwin Wilson and Patricia Wightley, 'Lord Nelson's Daughter and her possible descendants in northern New South Wales', *Australian Folklore*, No. 11, 1996, pp. 164-181.

> instead of 21 which both parties knew very well and got married by the Rev. J.H. Carvin without mine or her mother's consent. I turned the man out of my house and employ on 29 December, 1864, finding him out so many times to be a sly artful lying fellow.[27]

Andrew was appointed teacher at the South Grafton Private School soon after his marriage (in 1865). According to Nina he'd been working up the river (most probably for William Southian at First Falls?):

> They'd advertised for someone to take up the position of teacher at the old Church of England Hall in South Grafton. He'd come down from the bush in moleskin pants and hobnail boots and sat for the exam and was appointed.

In 1867 an application was made to the Council of Education for the establishment of a Public School at South Grafton, to double for Church of England services on the Sabbath. Andrew got the nod. I've held his application in my hand, signed by a virtual Who's Who of South Grafton at the time.

As they were talking about a building for the Church of England services I'd imagined bricks and mortar in my mind. His school/church turned out to be no more than a rough slab hut, some 22 feet x 20 feet x 9 feet high (only slightly larger than an orchid house I built in my own back yard at Mullumbimby when only sixteen years). Nor was the teacher's residence much better, and later became part of the chook pen in Mrs Chaseling's back yard in South Grafton until the 1970s.[28]

Andrew, however, appeared to thrive, and went on to become headmaster of a new brick school. He was very self-assured by all accounts (the locals had dubbed him 'Nabob'), and strict, especially about dress codes, and treated his pupils more like naval cadets, and ran his school with naval discipline, and could be pretty savage with the stick (but even-handed, caning both girls and boys).

Quite naturally, some kids were terrified of school, especially when he was wearing his white coat (which meant he was on the warpath). Old man McLennan (who'd supported the school application) had four boys, and drove them to classes each morning with a stock whip like a flock of sheep. Mrs Marshall brought her son 'Brumby' along each day with a rope around his neck. She had to rope him every morning before he got out of bed, and keep him tied. As soon as the rope was removed he'd jump the school gate and run into the bush (but 'Brumby' turned out 'all right' in later life).

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27 Newspaper clipping shown to me by Mrs Mary Bate, Grafton Historical Society.
28 Told to me by my cousin Ron Evans of South Grafton.

Injustice still burnt in Allie Frier's breast after seventy years because he'd been wrongly caned. The girls had said 'Allie Frier winked at us', when he hadn't winked. Retribution had been swift; a particular girl was thrown into the toilet pit.[29]

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Andrew and Martha had seven children, including their brilliant but flawed son Frank (aka 'Oliver Bainbridge'), born 1877 at Upper Copmanhurst. Frank left town under a cloud, and changed his name, and carved out an independent 'career' as orator, writer, 'ambassador and spy' for Empire, to be assassinated by the IRA in 1922, aged only 45. His remarkable story was also published in *Australian Folklore*.[30]

Andrew and Martha's daughter Elizabeth Ann Nelson married William G.F. (Bill) Neale, shopkeeper of South Grafton, in 1889. Bill Neale did not have a head for business, and virtually 'gave his last shilling away'.[31]

Bill was the son of the successful South Grafton butcher and shopkeeper, Thomas James Neale, whose sister Elizabeth had married into the Small family at Ulmarra (who were squatters with massive holdings). Their pioneer homestead still exists beside Swan Creek. Lizzie Small has the dubious honour of introducing water hyacinth to the Clarence River. She'd worried that her 'pretty blue flowers [in Swan Creek] had all died'. Unfortunately they'd survived.[32]

Thomas James Neale married Elizabeth Sarah Edwards at South Grafton in 1862. Her parents were the convicts Frederick Edwards, Lock Key Maker/Silversmith (transported *Houghley II* in 1828 from Stafford for theft), and Eliza Smith (transported *Surry 9* in 1840 from Bristol for pick-pocketing). This pair were the punk-rockers of their day. He had a tattoo of a woman on his right arm. She had lost her two front upper teeth, and had a tattoo on her upper left arm that read:

FMTMBE Fox EMASGHPB JB

It would take a cipher genius to 'translate' that arm, but to have such detail after all these years is quite remarkable.

Thomas James Neale (described as a horse breaker at the time of his marriage) was the son of George Roddle/er Neale, who'd married Bridget Murphy at St Johns Parramatta in 1830. Her parents were the convicts John Murphy, stonemason from Clonmel, Tipperary, Ireland (transported for life on the *Boyd* in 1805), and Eleanor Davis, sentenced to 7 years in Dublin (transported on the *Hercules* in 1802).

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29 Stories documented by Ron Evans, South Grafton, in the 1960s.

30 Edwin Wilson and Patricia Wightley, 'Oliver Bainbridge – An Unacknowledged Casualty of the Death of Empire', *Australian Folklore*, No. 13, 1998, pp. 77-93.

31 Told to me by my great aunty, Nina Shore (nee Neale).

32 *Ibid*.

George Roddle/er Neale was the son of the convicts William Neale (Neil) of Billesden, Leicestershire, convicted with five other soldiers (probably for desertion) and transported on the *Surprise* (arriving in Port Jackson 1794), and Sarah Townsend, born Isle of Wright, initially sentenced to death for highway robbery (most probably an assault related to street walking), transmuted to life and transported on the *Surprise*.

There'd been complex problems on the voyage to do with the Scottish Martyrs and a plot to mutiny. Neale received 25 lashed for his troubles and was confined in irons on the open deck on half allowance, but appears to have given 'evidence', and was released and served with the NSW Corps, 102nd Regiment. As part of the Rum Corps, he'd received a grant of 25 acres of land at Petersham Hill (which would have been worth a fair bit in today's money). After the withdrawal of the NSW Corps (in 1810), Neale obtained a discharge (in order to stay in the colony), and a further land grant of 80 acres in the Airds district.

In 1810 he'd belatedly married Sarah Townhend, after half a tribe of kids. Governor Macquarie had agreed to pardon her on the condition she marry and become respectable, at a time of big fights between the emancipists and exclusivists. Something went terribly wrong for William Neale. By 1833 he was reduced to the status of labourer in the Airds district, with 50 hogs to his name.[33]

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Back on the Richmond, the Wardell of the 1870s was a rip-roaring frontier town with many pubs, plonk houses, and brothels,[34] when 'paleneck' timber-getters came out of the forest shade from time to time to binge. Theirs was a dangerous occupation, with many references in the literature to 'widow-makers' or 'killing trees'.

My other great grandmother on my father's side, Jemima Newport had followed two of her brothers to Australia from Portadown, County Armagh, after the death of both her parents (James and Eliza née Curran) in 1875. An unmarried brother, Thomas Curran Newport was later killed when the limb of a tree fell on him in 1890 at Billynudgel (near Mullumbimby) and he was buried in a bush grave. His grieving family had him exhumed and brought back to Ballina in a lead coffin for a proper burial. A plaque was supposed to have been attached to the tree that had dropped the limb, and was still there in 1988.[35]

Jemima was Orange and literate, and obtained employment as a governess to sugar mill employees at Southgate, via Grafton. There she met and married John Thomas Byrnes (son of James Byrnes and Harriet Watkins, who'd been working on the construction of the Southgate Mill,

33 From an extensive range of documented sources.
34 Told to me by my uncle, Jack Wilson.
35 Told to me by Newport descendant, Nancy Krohn.

near Grafton, in 1897. John's mother Harriet had died in 1852, aged only 23, following complications from the birth of her second child, Francis James (or Jim).

My Wilson grandmother, Harriet Mary (May) Byrnes, born 1880 at Southgate, had come to the Richmond with her parents as a baby to the farm south of the Wilson selection at East Wardell, as the fates had apparently decreed.

May Byrnes was pregnant with my father when she married James Joseph (or Jim) Wilson (at her parent's home). Pop had been 'protecting her from the blacks' on at least one occasion under an upturned punt on the riverbank. In the maintenance of a long-standing tradition, Pop's mother had not approved of the match.[36]

My father, Edwin James Wilson, was born in 1903, just before the first powered flight at Kittyhawk. All the maiden aunts on both sides had all cooed, saying 'isn't he a tiddy (Gaelic for lovely little?) boy', so 'Tidge' had struck. Then Wilson aunts had kidnapped him one day to have him Christened Catholic, kick-starting the Religious Wars.

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Bill Neale's daughter Jessie married Ernest Smith, farm boy from Tockholels, Lancashire, who'd emigrated on the *Orsova* in 1910. In Australia he'd worked for the Railways, to finally settle in South Lismore, as the hills reminded him of the countryside around Tockholes.

My mother, Gladys Jean (Jean) Smith (born 1917), was yet to meet Tidge Wilson at a dance in Alstonville, that blighted love, that the river stories of the Richmond and Clarence would now overlap and coalesce in me.

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Eds.

The writer, Edwin Wilson, has contributed several articles to *Australian Folklore* in earlier years. See *Australian Folklore*, 9, 10 and 11.

The Lord Nelson putative link is discussed at length by the writer in his 'Lord Nelson's Daughter . . . ' in *Australian Folklore*, 11, 1996, pp. 164-181.

36 From marriage certificate, and stories told to me by third cousin Margaret ('Maggie') Riordan.