



## The Butler Society Southern Cross Region

### *Newsletter No 35 - June 2020*

#### *Butlers and Previous Pandemics*

The impact of Covid-19 on the community and our normal way of life has been extensive. However, this hasn't been the first time that Australia has suffered a serious health issue, and the lives of Butlers and their families have been affected.

#### **THE QUARANTINE STATION ON MAGNETIC ISLAND**

As we heard at our Brisbane Gathering last year, **Henry and Elizabeth Butler** and their family were the first white settlers on Magnetic Island.

Records in the Magnetic Island Museum indicate that the Island was officially designated a quarantine base from November 1874. Ships approaching any port in those days were required to fly a yellow flag if there was any disease on board. Typhoid, cholera, measles, even pneumonia, could readily spread among the passengers confined in the cramped conditions on board. Any ship approaching that part of Queensland, and flying the yellow flag, was ordered to anchor off Magnetic Island. As well as passengers and crew, all the cargo, including mail, was quarantined until the local health officer gave the clearance. The shipping agent was required to provide food and canvas shelters for the passengers. It is noted that the records often do not say "tents", just "shelters" which may indicate that flat sheets were strung between trees or bushes, to accommodate the crowd. Perhaps the sails from the ship were employed in this way. In 1883 one report by the immigration agent calmly states that there were 734 people under canvas on the beach! The fact that he made no further comment, would appear to indicate that this number of people was not unusual.

Henry and Elizabeth grew their own vegetables and kept some cows for milk, and must often have had to help eke out the government rations as best they could, especially when a stormy sea prevented boats with supplies crossing from the mainland. Although the family had no official position, they voluntarily spent long hours nursing and assisting the passengers, and Henry sometimes had to conduct a burial service in the absence of a church minister. Evidence suggests that Henry may have utilised information he received from the local indigenous people, about plants and remedies, to nurse the sick. He himself was an advocate of eating fresh produce and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, to avoid illness and disease. He also recommended regular sea



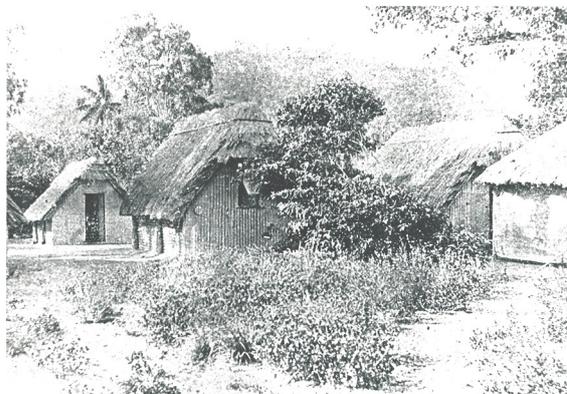
Henry Butler



Elizabeth Butler

bathing. His regime must have worked, because no member of his family died of any of the diseases to which they were exposed, which is amazing!

Frequent calls for a purpose-built quarantine station were ignored for years, until work finally began on a building at West Point in November 1884. Henry and Elizabeth must have heaved a sigh of relief when the beach at their “back doorstep” was no longer being used for this purpose! But visitors began to arrive from the mainland to camp for a weekend or longer, and Henry proceeded to build a number of thatched huts to accommodate them. This must have been Australia's first holiday/health resort! The resort became very popular, and the huts were later replaced with more permanent cabins. Henry's daughter, Nell, and her husband Will Fraser, continued to operate the resort after her parents died.



Holiday huts c1900.

*Photos from Rhonda Smith's collection.*

### **THE BUBONIC PLAGUE IN 1900**

As was reported in our June 2017 Newsletter, one of our members, Michael Ragg, drew our attention to the fact that there was an outbreak of the bubonic plague in 1900 in Sydney. Michael's great-great-grandparents, **Henry and Martha Butler**, came to Australia in the 1850s and Henry established a shop, “Butlers Furniture Bazaar”, on the corner of Park and Castlereagh Streets in Sydney. One of their sons, also called Henry, established a shop selling crockery in George Street.

It was this younger Henry Butler who suddenly died of the bubonic plague in 1900, at the age of 59. It was known that the plague had broken out in other countries, and had spread to Calcutta by 1899, so it was inevitable that ships would eventually bring it to Australia. The disease was spread by rats, and these infested all trading vessels.

However, when Henry first became ill at the beginning of May 1900, both he and his family thought that he was only suffering from a severe cold, which was made worse because he had a “weak chest”. So the family delayed calling the doctor. When Henry's condition deteriorated and the doctor was called, it was some time before he arrived, and Henry had died in the meantime. It then took a while for the doctor to do some tests and diagnose the true cause of death, after which he notified the health authority and the local police. It appears that the city authorities were not yet fully aware of the presence of the plague, and so were not on full alert. However the death of Henry Butler was reported in detail in the newspapers, and protective measures and procedures were then quickly implemented.

Various newspaper reports are available on the “Trove” website. Michael Ragg sent us a copy of the article in *“The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate”*, dated 5 May 1900. After the doctor reported the cause of Henry's death, the Butler family and their home were quarantined. (We now say “went in to lockdown”). Food for the family was left at the front fence by the police. (Home deliveries from shops and supermarkets can now be organised, and left at the front door). The family were then evacuated to a quarantine station at Manly, and the house fumigated. (We now have designated hotels in our cities, where the accommodation is, no doubt, much more comfortable than what was provided at

Manly.) Sadly, members of the family were not allowed to prepare Henry for his burial, and there was no funeral. Henry was placed in a coffin provided by the authorities, and buried at the Manly Quarantine Station cemetery. Family members were understandably grieved by the rush, as it gave them no time to say goodbye, nor give Henry what was considered “a decent burial” with a church service.



Sydney’s rat catchers. Photo: *Daily Telegraph*.

Local authorities organised teams of rat catchers to try to contain the spread of the disease, and poison baits were distributed to residents to encourage them to help with eradicating the pest. A price of twopence a head was offered for each dead rat. One report indicates that there were 1371 cases diagnosed, with 535 deaths, before the plague was brought under control. Unfortunately new waves of the disease broke out for several years afterwards, as ships continued to arrive from infected countries.

### THE SPANISH FLU EPIDEMIC 1919-20

At the end of the First World War, a flu pandemic broke out which rapidly spread around the world. Fifty million or more people died. More people died of this flu than had been killed on all the battlefields during the War. No doubt the fact that many people were extremely tired and malnourished after the long years of war, contributed to the toll. Approximately 12,000 people died in Australia.

During our National Gathering in Brisbane last year, we heard about the part **William and Jessie Butler** and their family played in establishing the township of Kilcoy in Queensland. They were active in arranging for a church to be built, St Mary's, and all members of the family regularly attended, and would have experienced the following restrictions, as described on page 19 of “*A History of the Kilcoy Anglican Parish 1898-1998*”, (published on the occasion of St Mary's Centenary):



...”*The flu epidemic of 1919 required comment from Reverend Hassell in the “Church Chronicle”. Government regulations at the time stipulated that the service was to last only forty-five minutes; anyone with a cold or cough was not to attend; and only every other seat to be occupied. He hastened to add that the epidemic had not been severe in the [Kilcoy] district, although these restrictions remained in force until the end of July.*”



St Mary’s Church, Kilcoy 2019.

The above “social-distancing” restrictions are once again familiar to us, although this time around our governments chose to close our churches altogether. In 1919 churches played a much more prominent role in the community, especially in rural districts, providing support and

assistance to their parishioners, as well as a quiet place for meditation or prayer for those needing it. So the churches remained open. And it was also recognised that a church service would provide the opportunity for a priest or pastor to cast an eye over his "flock" and note if someone looked like needing help. The absence of a regular attendee would be a cause for concern, and someone would visit to check that he/she was well. *Abigail Butler*

## *John Butler - an Unlikely Hero*

**Frank and Ronna Butler** have uncovered some fascinating details about Frank's grandfather while researching the family history. John Butler was a young man from a humble background, but he returned to Australia a hero at the end of the First World War.

John was born in 1889 in Sydney, the son of Bridget Butler, the eldest daughter of Andrew Butler and Ellen (nee Scully). Both Andrew and Ellen had arrived in Australia as children from County Tipperary. Andrew's parents, Thomas Butler and Hannah (nee Ryan), had arrived on the *Athenian* in 1853 with their four children, including Andrew. Hannah's brother, Mathew Ryan, had emigrated some years earlier, and paid for their passage. Ellen, with four siblings and her mother, arrived on the *Bolton*, also in 1853. Unhappily Ellen's father, Patrick, had died on the voyage. Both families eventually settled in the Cooma area, where Andrew took up farming. He and Ellen were married in 1868.

John Butler was 22 years old, 5 foot 1 inch (153cm) tall, and a plasterer by trade when he enlisted for the First World War. The minimum height was 5 feet 2 inches, and he had already been rejected twice by recruiting officers, when, on 11 September 1915, he was finally accepted. Called 'Tich' by his mates, John was a fit, wiry individual. He had played rugby league and won a gold medal. As a plasterer he had a good eye, dexterity and stamina, - all of these attributes would be needed for what lay ahead.

After initial training at the Holsworthy Camp outside Sydney, his Battalion sailed to Egypt, where there was more training. In June his Battalion sailed to Marseille, went on by train to northern France, and then were marched to the trenches. On his arrival, John was chosen to be a Runner for the Brigade Signalling Station, almost certainly because he was short and fit, as speed and agility were essential for this role. He would have received rudimentary training in the 'power of observation, recognition of landmarks, delivering messages and basic map reading' – as well as how to address officers! As a Runner, John wore a red armband. Then, if killed, any other soldier in the vicinity would know to retrieve the message from the dead man's pocket to pass on, if possible, or at least prevent it from falling in to enemy hands.



The Battalion saw its first action at the terrible battles of Pozieres and Mouquet Farm during July and August 1916. The carnage and the conditions John saw on the battlefield shocked him to the core. He itched from the lice, lived with the reek of unwashed men and clothing in trenches too often filled with water, was deafened by the artillery, felt the fear in the silences, existed with the flies, the hundreds of rats, and the decomposing dead, and often went hungry and thirsty. In addition, as a Runner, he was exposed to enemy sniper fire. He delivered his messages between outposts using the trenches where possible, but was often required to cross the open battlefield.

In less than seven weeks in the fighting at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm there were 23,000 Australian casualties including 6,300 dead. Caught up in this madness, John carried out his duties under such difficult circumstances and with such determination and grit that he was commended by three of his field officers for 'exceptional bravery'. Charles Bean, the war historian, wrote that a Runner was lucky if he lasted three weeks before he was killed.

John pushed himself hard for longer than that, but collapsed with physical trauma, and was transferred to a military hospital in England to recover. While there he received the news that he had been awarded the Military Medal, much to his surprise.

After some convalescent leave, he had to report to Command Depot 1 at Perham Downs near Salisbury Plain, to regain his fitness and strength. The soldiers called the place 'Perishing Down' because of the cold, which penetrated their flimsy huts. From here John, with other convalescent soldiers, moved over to the 4<sup>th</sup> Training Battalion at Codford, to undergo a more rigorous program to prepare them for their return to the trenches.



John receiving his medal from King George V.

He was still there as an Acting Lance Corporal helping to train the troops, when King George V came to nearby Bulford Fields to review 30,000 ANZAC troops. Part of the review was the presentation of awards won at Gallipoli and in France. Here, watched by his fellow soldiers, John was presented with his Military Medal. Many newspapers reported the review, both in England and Australia, and a copy of the photo and newspaper cutting from the English *Daily Mirror* came home in John's top pocket.

John then re-joined his Battalion at Vieux Berquin in northern France, and found his unit under constant attack. A month later (again defying the three week life expectancy period) John suffered gunshot wounds to the head, neck and thigh. He was evacuated to a hospital on the coast of France near Dieppe. There were five hospitals in the area, providing a total of 10,000 beds, which were constantly full. So many wounded! From there he was again shipped back to England, very lucky to be alive. After a lengthy stay in hospital, John was repatriated to Australia, where he was given a hero's welcome by his family and the community.

Two months after his return, John married his childhood sweetheart, Ellen Spinks, and they had 6 children. John went back to his trade of plastering, but found the work too strenuous because of his injuries. He found his niche as a nursing orderly at a repatriation hospital, where his knowledge and understanding of what the veterans had experienced were invaluable. His lively manner and sense of humour were also much appreciated.



John's home, decorated for his return.

Years later, in 1971, as part of her televised Christmas message, the Queen sat with her two youngest children showing them a photo album which had belonged to their great-grandfather George V. She turned to a photo of the King presenting a medal to a soldier, and the watching Butler family members in Australia were amazed to recognise that it was the photo of 'their' John! The family wrote to the Queen, and received an acknowledgement from Buckingham Palace - which has become a treasured family keepsake.

*Ronna & Frank Butler*

**Editor's Note:** This is only an abridged version of the story, provided by Ronna and Frank, about John and his war service. A full copy is in our Southern Cross Archive. The award-winning movie "1917", which was shown in cinemas last year, provided a very graphic illustration of the conditions under which Runners operated during this War.

## *Research Hint - Dr Williams's Library*

If you are researching Non-Conformist ancestors, this could be a valuable source for information. Dr Daniel Williams (c1643-1716) was a Presbyterian minister who collected an extensive range of books and documents. On his death his collection was used to establish a library in London, which is now located at 14 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. The collection has been added to over the years, and has many useful records relating to the history of English non-conformity and various churches. The following is quoted from *"The Dictionary of Genealogy"* page 304, edited by Terrick V H Fitzhugh.

*'One of the most useful [records] genealogically is that of Roger Morrice (d.1701/2), compiled as material for a general history of Puritans which he never managed to write. It was taken over by John Evans (c1680-1730), who added a list of dissenting congregations and ministers of the period 1715-29. It finally formed the basis of Daniel Neal's "History of the Puritans". There is another list of congregations, with some histories, dated 1722, by Joseph Thompson, and also the Conventicle Returns of 1669, included in G Lyon Turner's "Records of Nonconformity".*

*As nonconformist ministers continued to neglect register-keeping, the Protestant Dissenting Deputies of the Three Denominations (Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist) formed the General Register of Births and arranged with the trustees of Dr Williams's Library to house it, and for the librarian to act as Clerk. The Register began on 1 January 1742/3. It was open not only to Londoners and nonconformists, but to any parents ready to sign a certificate of their child's birth, and to spend 6 pence on registering a copy. Even some births abroad are included.'*

Information source: *"The Dictionary of Genealogy"* edited by Terrick V H Fitzhugh, published by Alphabooks, Revised Edition 1988, a copy of which is in the Southern Cross Archive.

## *The Butler DNA Project & Transferring Test Results*

Several members have had a DNA test done, using *ancestry.com* or a similar organisation. Several years ago, we set up a Butler DNA Project with a firm called *Family Tree DNA*. It was thought that if we all pool our results in the one location, we shall increase our chances of finding a match. A survey of DNA testing organisations, which was undertaken by ISOGG (the *International Society of Genetic Genealogy*), gave *Family Tree DNA* the top marks for the level and quality of their service.

Gail Riddell, the Administrator for the Butler Project at *Family Tree DNA*, has advised that test results from another firm can be transferred to the Project. There is no fee to do a direct transfer, but extra tools can be unlocked for the payment of US\$19, and Gail believes that the payment of this relatively small charge is worthwhile. The information on how to do the transfer is at <https://learn.familytreedna.com/imports/transfer-autosomal-ancestry/family-tree-dna-family-finder-transfer-program/>.

The Butler Project also has an "Activity Feed" component, where participants can share information and ask questions. Some participants have lodged pedigrees with their results.

The Project is open to both men and women. Surnames usually transmit through the male line, but there are instances where a family history has originated with a female Butler. If you are interested in taking the test, access [www.familytreedna.com](http://www.familytreedna.com). Scroll down to the very bottom of the Home page, and under the heading "Community" click on "Group Projects". Enter Butler in the "Search" line and scroll down the drop-down field for "Butler". Clicking on this opens a field "Join the Butler Group Project". Choose your test. It is best to go for as many Markers as you can afford, as this refines the level of matches to the nearest generations. When you "Order", note that the prices quoted are in American dollars. *Family Tree DNA* will send you a test kit with instructions, and a return addressed envelope. You will receive an email (usually after 4-6 weeks) when your test results are ready, with advice on how to access them on-line. Further emails will be issued every time another person's test results match yours. It opens up another dimension to family history!

## *Collection of Butler Place Names*

**John Butler** from South Australia has sent in another addition to our collection - the **Lake Butler Marina** in Robe, SA. As a plaque at this spot indicates, Lake Butler was named after Captain Gerald Villiers Butler of the 96<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

Captain Butler originally came to Tasmania with his Regiment, and his first government appointment appears to have been that of Justice of the Peace for “the Island of Van Dieman’s Land and its Dependencies” in 1841.

He transferred to South Australia, and was appointed Government Resident at Robe in September 1846 with an annual salary of 200 Pounds. He, with three policemen, a government appointed doctor, and a clerk, were the original administrators for the then new town of Robe.

After four years, Captain Butler and his family moved to Port Adelaide, where he held, among other positions, that of Immigration Officer.

Captain & Mrs Butler



## *Ren Butler, Whisky Specialist*

Comments have been made during the past few months about our increased expenditure on alcohol. This does not necessarily mean that we are all “turning to drink” as a result of Covid-19. Instead, as we are now eating and drinking at home, rather than in public venues, our expenditure on groceries and alcohol is being recorded separately.

However, as we know, Butlers have long been associated with bottles and the consumption of wine. And a Coat of Arms for the Chief Butlers of Ireland, dating back to the late 1100s, incorporates three covered goblets, signifying that the Chief Butler was cup-bearer to the King.

**Ren Butler** is carrying on the Butler tradition, although in a different field. Ren is a whisky specialist and has established “The Whisky Social” in Melbourne, a club which explores and promotes this drink. She organises tastings and events to give people an understanding and appreciation of whisky.

(More information is available on [www.the.whisky.social](http://www.the.whisky.social).)



Photo: Melbourne’s *The Age*  
August 17 2019.

## *Society Meeting - 14 June 2020*

Our thanks go to Rosie and Noel Bushnell for hosting our meeting. As restrictions on group meetings had been lifted, although the number of attendees was limited, some of us were able to get together for a good chat and catch up. (And it was amazing how many things we found to talk about, other than the virus!) Unfortunately, the usual hugs, kisses and handshakes had to be avoided.

### **1. Canadian Butler Rally**

The Canadian Rally which was due to occur in August this year, as was reported in our last Newsletter, has been cancelled due to the restrictions on overseas travel.

### **2. Event in Butler, SA**

The proposed celebrations relating to the history of the settlement of Butler on the Eyre Peninsula in SA, which were to have occurred at the end of March, were also postponed due to travel restrictions. A revised date has yet to be set.

### **3. Butler Airlines Event**

It is proposed to hold an event at Tooraweenah in NSW in November, to celebrate the anniversary of Arthur Butler's record-breaking flight from England to Australia in 1931. A leaflet has been circulated, and details will follow.

### **4. Anniversary Southern Cross Gathering**

In 2022 we shall be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Southern Cross Region. The venue and the dates for this event will be finalised by the end of this year, and a detailed program established by June next year.

### **5. Information Booklets**

John Butler (SA), has suggested that some small information booklets on various Butler related topics, using material from the Archive, could be produced and sold to raise money for the Region. This suggestion is a good one, and shall be investigated.

### **Presentation**

Abigail presented, on behalf of Frank and Ronna Butler, a talk about John Butler, who was a Runner in the First World War. (See page 4.)

### **CHANGE TO DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of our next meeting has been changed from Sunday 6th September to **Sunday 20th September**, and will be held at 8 Victoria Ridge, Upper Ferntree Gully, VIC.

*A full copy of the Minutes of this Meeting can be obtained by contacting a Committee member.*

## *New Members*

We warmly welcome two new members,  
Helen Hill from East Brunswick, VIC and Karen Salamon from Donvale, VIC.

## *Contacts*

**President:** Abigail Butler, 8 Victoria Ridge, Upper Ferntree Gully, VIC 3156.

**Secretary:** Kerry Phillips, [kerrybutlerphillips@yahoo.com](mailto:kerrybutlerphillips@yahoo.com).

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Gladys, 97, is one of our founding members, and is able to tell us a lot about the Region's early activities.



Some items from the Archive.