

This is a copy of information written by EMILY CHARLOTTE BUNN nee RUTHERFORD, who was the child brought out from England as a 4 year old, about her Grandmother, MARY ANN PORTER nee STEVENS. It was written in 1940, when Emily was 79 years old.

The original of this was written in pencil in the back of an exercise book used for recording the proceeds of a series of Card Evenings, held fortnightly at the homes of various members of the Bunn Family. People attending paid 1 shilling, and brought a small parcel of refreshments for supper. The home owner provided a small prize for the winner, and any surplus was donated to the War Effort. The first of these Evenings was held 15th June 1940. The amounts raised were from 8 Shillings up to 1 Pound 3 Shillings.

MY GRANDMOTHER

It has been suggested to me by my daughters that I should write a story of my Grandmother whom they think was a very wonderful old lady, an opinion which I share.

I shall relate as well as I can incidents in her life as she told them to me when as a child I used to listen to her in the twilight before the lamp was lit. In the winter evenings we used to sit beside the fire in which I used to picture all sorts of wonderful things and listen to Grandmother's stories.

She was born in 1803 or 1804 in Faversham, Kent. Often she has mentioned the White Cliffs of Dover and Canterbury Cathedral where her parents were married. She was the eldest daughter of a large family; her father was Church of England and her mother a strong Methodist. Her father in Government employ, having a small sailing vessel of his own, was engaged to carry Gun powder and Gun cotton from the factory in Faversham, across the English Channel from Dover to Calais, which took much longer to travel then than in these days, they would have been some days away. Sometimes, as a great treat, he would take one of his children with him, this time it happened to be Mary's turn (her name was Mary Stevens). While they were crossing the channel a terrific storm arose and her father had to strap Mary in her bunk to keep her in. The little vessel arrived safely though several were sunk. Fifty years later, when she was out in Australia, staying at a well known Station property called Ercildoune near Ballarat, she asked the lady of the house, Mrs. Learmonth, for a piece of paper to cut a pattern, when she looked at it, it was an old English Times, with an account of the very storm she had been in. It was not a copy but the original edition of The Times, strange wasn't it? Fifty years after and all the way from England to Australia.

Then she would tell me how England was at war with France and how as children they were frightened that Napoleon would come to take England. She and her brother John used to go to what was called a Dames

School, (a kind of infants school): they to walk past a house with a high brick wall and a Postern gate. They always peeped through a key hole and they could see the Wooden statue of a soldier, in uniform, standing as if on guard-every day they would look, then John would grab her hand and say “Run Polly, Boney"s coming” and they would tear down the road as fast as they could and arrive home breathless.

Another time they were sent to the village Baker, their mother used to make her own bread and send it to the bakers to bake, they were bringing it home in the clothes basket and passing the brick wall took the usual peep and thinking that Boney was after them, they dropped the basket and the bread went rolling down the street. These and other stories used to entertain me enormously.

Time went on and she got too old for Dames School, education was not so easily obtained in those days, the wealthy people either sent their children to boarding schools or had Governesses in to teach them; the middle classes sent them to National schools where they paid a small fee: It was the privilege of the lady of the village, the Squires wife, to choose a girl and to pay for her schooling, the girl in return would sew for her. Mary being a very good seamstress was chosen. She was taught reading writing and arithmetic, history, grammar and geography, which was considered quite sufficient for a girl of her station. The rest of her school time was given to sewing. By the time she was thirteen she had finished three sets of shirts, six shirts in a set, (18 in all) for the squire and his two sons. The gentlemen in those times used to have frills down the front of their shirts, which were drawn thread??? And hem-stitched each side, of course by hand, no machines. By the time she had finished the shirts her eyes ached so badly she asked if she might have a change of work, they gave her a fine linen dress to make for the lady.

She left school when she was thirteen, stayed home and helped her mother until sixteen years old: during these years she made several visits to London, where they had relatives .One particular visit she told me about in after life, as an object lesson: when I was grown up and had children of my own she advised me never to object to having my children vaccinated -her words were, “If you had seen the dreadful effects of Small Pox, how people were disfigured and blinded by the disease. Nearly every second person you meet was marked by it -you would never object to having it done “. This visit, which I mentioned, was to a cousin who was called the “Wharfinger of the Tower Bridge”. It was his duty to close the bridge to prevent shipping going through, and to open it in the morning. He and his family lived in the Tower grounds, they had four children. It was considered a great treat to visit this relative because she could see the sights of London. She arrived at the house and found that the four children were down with Smallpox and the mother sick with nursing them. They could

not get assistance; no one would come near the house. The tradesmen put provisions through a hole in the fence. The house was so full of disease, that if meat were kept in it, it would turn green in a few hours.

Mary having been inoculated against Smallpox was able to stay and help nurse the children. There being no disinfectants in those times, the only way they had to fumigate the house was to have buckets of vinegar in each room, and to keep the poker in the fire -when it was red hot they took it from room to room and stirred up the vinegar, the acid fumes of which helped to make the air cleaner. All the children died.

By this time she was considered old enough to earn her own living, and having an uncle who was Steward of the Gold and Silver plate at the Royal Palace, they asked if he could obtain her a position as maid there. It was his duty to go to Windsor Castle once a month to inspect the plate and to see that it was kept clean and in good order. He also had to stand behind the King's chair at small dinner parties and he said that the drinking and vices he saw was equal to the worst house in London. This was just after George 4th was crowned and she often told me about the Coronation celebrations in their village. They had trestle tables laid in the streets, with oxen roasted whole and barrels of ale and other edibles for everyone who cared to partake. There were dozens of China plates manufactured for the occasion, also dozens of fine linen tea cloths, which were never used after the feasting was over. These articles were divided amongst the staff of servants and retainers of the palace. Her uncle got his share and Mary helped her aunt make night-gowns out of the linen cloths.

As she did not go to the palace, it was decided that she should take up a trade -she chose upholstering which was much in vogue in those days when Four-poster beds were in use. There were valances around the top of the beds, and also from around the mattress to the floor, there were curtains from each post and also window curtains. They were generally made of chintz, lined with other material. It was a trade at which she excelled and kept up in after life. She stayed at this establishment for a year, then decided to train as a nurse.

She commenced at St Thomas's Hospital and after finishing there went to a maternity hospital to complete her training. She qualified as a fully trained Nurse and took a position with a young invalid lady. She was with her for a considerable time during which she travelled with her over the southern part of England. One trip she described to me was very interesting -They went to where the River Thames bubbles up in tiny drops from the ground. They followed the course by easy stages in a carriage, stopping at night in villages. It was three weeks before they came to where it entered the big river in which large ships sailed.

In the meantime her brother John who was a sailor brought home a friend, also a sailor in the Navy. He had been previously in a ship called the

Belarophen, with Lord Nelson in command. During the time he was in that ship he had performed some act of bravery and Lord Nelson gave him his Snuff box as a reward, I still have it in my possession. He was transferred to another ship, which was taken by the French and had been in a French prison for six years. The war being over, he left the navy and was working with his brother who was a tanner. He became a constant visitor and he and Mary eventually married. His name was James Porter, he was six feet tall, and he was twelve years older than her. She was four feet eight, same height as Queen Victoria.

They got along very comfortably for some years when Grandfather had a stroke, which disabled him from working with his brother, so they decided to move to London and open a little business. Not having much capital they started in a small way in a poor part of the city. She has told me about the poverty of the people, how they would come in with a few pence to [purchase just enough for a meal, 1/4 ounce of cheap tea, 2 ounces of sugar, 2 ounces of butter scrapings, (the salt spotted butter came in barrels from Ireland and the outside nearest the barrel was called scrapings) and perhaps a salt Red Herring or Bloater as a great treat. The poor business and set backs they received convinced them that they would have to give up, one incident that she related to me; they had saved a small amount to buy some stock, a smart looking man came in, he was a traveller in the sweet line, he was very nice and plausible and persuaded them to buy several large glass jars of sweets to make their windows look attractive - they in a weak moment spent their little savings, but when opened the jars contained imitation sweets made of plaster of paris, and coloured. It was a great loss so they decided to leave London and went to live in Highgate, a suburb about five miles from the city. They rented a very nice house and let rooms to the Doctors of the district for consulting rooms. This, with jobs that my Grandfather did, and Grandmother's sewing, kept them very comfortable for many years.

By this time there were seven children -Four boys, and three girls-my mother being the eldest, the youngest a baby girl a few weeks old. Grandfather had a second stroke, which deprived him of speech and the power of his limbs. He would never work or speak again -just hobble about on a crude crutch and make them know by signs and noises what he wanted. It was a terrible trial to her knowing what to do; she was so handicapped with a wee baby. The eldest girl being eighteen years old was a good help with the other children, their father was well enough to supervise, so she looked about for some way to earn money to keep the house going. They still had the Doctors rooms, that helped pay the rent but was not enough. At this time a lady in Highgate had a baby that she unable to nurse herself so she wanted a Foster -mother who must live in the house. Grandmother applied for the position, was highly recommended by

the Doctors both in health and character, (she was highly respected), was chosen out of a good number of applicants and went to live with Mrs Charles Knight. He was a writer. She became one of the house-hold, and was treated as such, she had no menial work to do-only to mother the baby and be companion to Mrs Knight. They slept in the same room, and became great friends for life, (in fact forty years after, I had just been married and Grandmother and Grandfather were living with us, she received a letter from a sister in England saying that Mrs Knight's Grand daughter was coming to Australia for her honeymoon and would come to see her -both she and her husband did and had afternoon tea with us and some of our wedding cake. A few days after they left a parcel arrived for Grandmother, it was a beautiful, soft, white shawl which she gave me for my first baby. She stayed with the Knights about two years, (her baby was brought to her), and made friends with many well known people. He being a literary man, a writer of books and articles for a paper called Cassell's Magazine, his visitors were generally people of some calling, they included the well known novelist Charles Dickens, Harriet Beacher Stow who wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, and many others; she was privileged to meet them all. I have books now that they gave her when she left the Knight's.

She went home, resumed her sewing and struggled along for a few years more. The older boys got positions as message boys in a printing factory; the elder girl helped her mother. Some years passed, then the great rush of immigration to Australia came. She made up her mind to come out here. Her eldest son and daughter were married. She saved enough to send the three youngest boys. She paid so much and the government allowed the difference. The eldest boy was fifteen, the next thirteen, and the youngest eleven, they came out to an Aunt who lived in Asling St. Brighton. Once more she saved and in a few years brought the two little girls, aged nine and seven, out herself. leaving Grandfather with the eldest son. The journey took six months, of course they were all sailing vessels in those days. After a few weeks rest with her sister at Brighton she decided to resume her nursing, permission having been obtained. Having letters of introduction from some of the Doctors of London to some of the leading Doctors of Melbourne she had no difficulty in working up a good connection with the elite of Melbourne and country districts. She nursed in all the good families of the time -Lady Stawell, Lady Barry, Lady Stephen, Mrs Learmonth the original owner of Ercildoune, Lady Wilson and many others, she was recommended from one to the other. She travelled over many parts of Victoria, mostly by Cobb's coach, there being no railway in the country districts. Her first journey to Ercildoune was by coach to Ballarat, (the station homestead was about thirty miles out) and the Learmonths sent a Spring Cart to meet the coach. About twenty miles out they ran into a bushfire and had to drive nine miles through it, by that time she was so

overcome by smoke that she was lying in the bottom of the cart. They called into a farmhouse where she a glass of milk which made her sick after which she felt better. When she reached the station she thought that the servants looked strangely at her, but she quite understood why when she saw herself in the mirror. She was black with smoke that they thought she was a black woman. Another time she travelled the same route during a flood, she had a new bonnet, (she was always particular about her bonnets) a neat little lace affair with mauve flowers and ribbon well ????, the coach was going through streams of water and wobbling from side to side, the water dripping through the roof and she had to be strapped in to keep from being out, Her bonnet was like a bit of waste rag, all the stiffness out of it and the colours running together, so she tossed it out of the window.

By this time she had saved a little money, bought a piece of land in Caulfield and had a four roomed cottage built near where St. Marys now stands; in fact the church was started in her cottage, twelve people being the congregation mainly the Stephens family. Canon Gregory of All Saints, St.Kilda, used to walk across the paddocks and preach every Sunday afternoon. This carried on until a little church was built. The present one was built about seventy years ago.

When the house was finished and furnished she decided to send for her husband, also her son and daughter-in-law with whom he was living. They arrived and lived together, looking after Grandfather while she continued her nursing. After a few years more she sent home for the rest of her family, my Mother, Father, and two children. Houses were very scarce and hard to get in those days but she secured a tiny one in Glen Eira Road, Caulfield, and furnished it.

On the arrival of the ship she went to meet her family and received the news that her daughter and one little girl were dead, and that the father and the other little girl had remained in London. It was a terrible shock and her first great sorrow, however she bravely bore it and carried on. The money she had paid to the Government was not returned, but she could get passage for this amount for anyone else. After two and a half years she arranged passage for a young girl who wished to come to Australia, in return she was to bring me. I was four years old and the only one left in the family, my father died eighteen months after Mother and four children previously. After his death I was cared for by Mrs Knight, the lady I mentioned before. My father's relatives wished to adopt me, but Grandmother said No, I was her daughters child and she wanted me, they didn't trouble about me.

I remember the first time I saw my Aunt, she took me off the ship and bought me to Grandmothers at Brighton. She was waiting at the gate; I said, "Are you my Grandmother?" "Yes my dear ", "Well I have come all

the way from England to take care of you“. (She was sixty years old, I was four).

She often said how my words came true, when I grew up her family had married and were scattered over the country -we lived together and when I married, she lived with us until she died. She continued her nursing until she was seventy-two years old. Having helped all her family out to Australia, she had previously borrowed 100 Pounds from her friends in England, which she paid back, she retired from nursing and took in upholstering in which I was able to help her. I learnt dressmaking and we lived very comfortably together and when I married, as I said before, she lived with us until she died at the age of eighty-seven.

I did not realise until I was old myself and had time to think, what a lot I owe her. Her example has helped me to be self reliant, not let troubles get me down, to go on with what I thought was right. When I had something to do which I didn't feel inclined for, the thought came to me, "would Grandmother let that beat her", and I didn't let it beat me. She has left me the legacy of a dominant, independent spirit, which has helped me through life, and I cherish her memory with love and gratitude.