



Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

March 2020

Meetings

Thursday 12 March - 2020 – 8pm

Speaker: Euan Warmsley

Topic: My Uncle and other *Dunera* Friends

Euan Warmsley will speak about the early lives and later experiences of his uncle and five friends who were among the boat-load of mainly German-Jewish internees sent from England to Australia in WW2. These men were later referred to as the “Dunera Boys” after the name of the ship on which they were transported

Thursday 9 April - 2020 – 8pm

Speaker: Matthew ETTY-LEAL

Topic: Daniel Mannix and Billy Hughes

Matthew ETTY-LEAL will speak about two fascinating personalities who clashed regularly during World War 1, becoming reconciled in the 1930s, and remaining leaders and influencers in, respectively, the Catholic Church and politics, for many years.

Thursday: 9 May

Speaker: Jane Turton

Topic- Stories from Under the Carpet

Jane will tell us about an assortment of tragic tales from Waverley. The stories include colourful characters, accidents, robbery and murder.

**Meetings are held at the Balwyn Evergreen Centre,
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn,**

Email: balwynhistory@gmail.com website: www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs

Recent Speaker: Robin Kelly

Topic: “ From Brass Bands to Brass Beds”.

Robin Vandersluys was born in Kew living in Mary Street until 1949 when the family moved to Rokeby Avenue Deepdene, her father being a policeman. She grew up with David de Kretser who lived locally.

From 1960 to 1961 Robin was the Secretary to the Art Director of GTV Channel 9 and entered a talent quest (which she won), becoming a professional singer and entertainer, with a rare three and a half octave voice range.

From 1961 to 1963 she sang in bands in the Federal Hotel and the Ress Oriental Hotel in Collins St as Robin Vanser (as no one could pronounce Vandersluys). Robin later sang for the Lee Gallagher Show Band, worked in Sydney, appeared on the Don Lane Show with Johnny Ray and many well-known singers, went to Tahiti on a four-week concert tour, later singing with the Bee Gees, Barry Crocker, Johnny O’Keefe and Helen Reddy. Robin often went to Tasmania singing at Wrest Point Casino, Burnie and Devonport.

Robin commenced her restoration career in 1970 picking up an old brass bed near Halls Gap in her Mini van. She placed ads seeking rusty old iron beds, which once restored, were often bought by entertainers such as Deborah Byrne.

Robin then spent a year studying art, after visiting Joels, and could recognise original paintings, for ex., purchasing the Pt Lonsdale lighthouse for a minimal amount, that Joels sold for \$6,000!

Robin’s first shop was at 68 Whitehorse Road on the corner of Barnsbury Road opening in 1971. In 1979 Robin set up Robin Hood Antiques 245 Canterbury Road Canterbury, later renting adjoining shops at 243 and 247, in buildings constructed in 1888, a previous occupant being J Weymouth plumber. Her window displays featured antique canopy beds and canopy costs, counter scales and bric-a-brac.

Robin continued travelling around Victoria picking up beds (and other items) restoring them in black or cream. In 1999 she purchased the block of 3 Heritage shops before auction.

Some of her antique transactions included:

- A bed for Paul Hogan’s “Anzacs”;
- A table for Magda Szubanski’s “Babe”;
- A special window for Helen Mirren’s “Winchester”; and
- 10 beds for Craig’s Hotel, Ballarat.

Robin installed a pianola in her shop allowing her to sing to her customers and her Pomeranian, Susie. In 2018 she donated many of her sequin dresses and photos to Kew Historical Society. In 2019 Robin sold her shops after 48 years of being an antique dealer. Robin finished by singing “Unforgettable”.

The families who lived at the house we now call *Colongulac*

Part 2 Who was R. W. Cerutti?

By Marilyn Poole

Introduction

The first article in this series on the families who lived in *Colongulac* was an account of Swen Nilson Wiedemann and his family. In that article I presented the view that Swen Nilson Wiedemann was the first owner-occupier of *Colongulac* rather than R.W. Cerutti. However, other accounts differ. These other opinions are expressed in the Conservation and Heritage studies and are based on information in the Shire of Boroondara Rate Books and in the Sands & McDougall directories. In what might be termed more official accounts of the first families who lived in the house, the Wiedemann family are not listed as the first owner-occupiers. Researching and writing this article has been an interesting exercise and raised some challenging issues. These issues relate initially to the accuracy of primary sources such as the Shire of Boroondara Rate Books.



Photo of Colongulac, 11 Luena Street, courtesy of Steve McLean

Swen Nilson Wiedemann as first owner occupier of Colongulace

Prior research indicates that Swen Nilson Wiedemann lived and farmed on Belmore Road for about 30 years. An 1877 a Conveyance document obtained by Warwick Foster indicates Wiedemann purchased Lot 1, portions 8A and 9A containing 121 acres of Gideon Rutherford's estate from his wife's brother-in-law Thomas Wilson. In January 1888, notices appeared in both *The Age* and *The Argus* newspapers that Arthur E. Clarke, architect, of Nicholson's Chambers, Swanston Street invited tenders for the erection of a large brick villa in Balwyn for S.N Wiedemann Esq. (*The Age* Wednesday 4 January 1888 p 8; Tuesday 10 January 1888 p.10, *The Argus* Wednesday 4 January 1888 p 3; Tuesday 10 January 1888 p. 7). This large brick villa was later named *Colongulac*. The house was built and the Wiedemann family lived there until 1892 when Swen was gored by a bull and died.

If further proof of owner-occupancy by Swen Nilson Wiedemann of the house (*Colongulac*) and land on Belmore Road is needed the probate documents provide it. Although Swen Wiedemann died intestate, the proceeds of his estate were to be

divided between his widow and their five surviving children. The administration of his estate was given to his widow Prudentia. Unfortunately, all the land and property he owned was mortgaged. According to her affidavit included in the probate papers Swen had still not repaid a £1500 loan from Prudentia at the time of his death. The probate papers document that Swen Nilson Wiedemann had a mortgage with the Australian Mortgage and Deposit Bank of land consisting of 12 acres and 4 perches with a frontage on Belmore Road, Balwyn. This is the land on which *Colongulac* was built (PROV Probate and Administration Files, 50/440, 1892).

Robert W. Cerutty as first owner occupier of Colongulac

The *Camberwell Conservation Study*, 1991 v.4 p, 258 states:

Study Grading: B

Construction Date: 1892c

First Owner: Cerutty, R W.

History

Robert W. Cerutty was owner-occupier of a house on twelve acres of land, rated at £125 for 1892-93. In 1893-94 the rate for Cerutty's house on twelve acres had been halved to £65. A brick house of twelve rooms on the Bonnie View Estate was the first detailed description given by the rate books in 1894-95.

The information taken from the *Camberwell Conservation Study* 1991 is repeated in the description of *Colongulac* on the Heritage Victoria website. (<http://images.heritage.vic.gov.au/attachment/31684>)

Decades later, the *Balwyn and Balwyn North Heritage Study* of 2015 p. 10 infers the first owner-occupier was Robert Cerutty. ...notably ***Robert Cerutty's Colongulac at 11 Luena Road (1892)***.

Even if Cerutty bought the house in 1892 he would not have been the first owner-occupier.

The Sands & McDougall Directories also used the name Robert Cerutty.

1892 Robert Cerutty Cotham Rd, Balwyn

1893 Robert Cerutty Cotham Rd (north side) Balwyn

1894 Robert Cerutty Belmore Rd, Balwyn – gatekeeper

1893-4 Rate Books Wiedemann crossed out and Cerutty (no initials) inserted location Belmore Rd

However, there is yet another difficulty. Robert William Cerutty seems only to exist in the Shire of Boroondara Rate Books and in the Sands & McDougall directories of 1892 and 1893. Robert William Cerutty cannot be found in a search of BMD records, immigration records, PROV wills and probate and Trove newspapers.

An alternative scenario.

It feels rather presumptuous to contradict information from primary sources and to suggest that the researchers in various heritage studies may possibly be incorrect regarding the identity of the first owner-occupier of *Colongulac*.

I am proposing that Swen Nilson Wiedemann was the first owner-occupier of *Colongulac*. I am also proposing that possibly an error was made regarding the identity of Robert W. Cerutti. I believe **Richard** William Cerutti may have been the Robert William Cerutti of Belmore Road in the Rate Books and located in Cotham Road (north) in the Sands & McDougall directories. The difference in names could be a clerical error in the Rate Books or made by Cerutti himself. As you continue to read this article perhaps you will agree with me that even though Cerutti lived at *Colongulac* for a few years it seems unlikely that he actually purchased the house from Prudentia after Swen's death in 1892.

Richard William Cerutti

Given the fact that nothing could be found to identify Robert W. Cerutti I cast the research net somewhat wider. Cerutti is not a particularly common name and was not so in Victoria in the 19th century. I found a Richard William Cerutti with a remarkably similar name and dates that matched as well as someone who would be in a position to move into this grand brick villa in 1892 following Swen's death. Someone, who, after living and working in Williamstown, moved to the eastern suburbs of Melbourne in his retirement. The following account is something of a leap of faith!

Richard William Cerutti was born 18 December 1835 in Tavistock, Devon. He was the son of Peter H. Cerutti and Martha Hole/Holt. The family are listed in the 1841 census for Tavistock, Devon. The father Peter was aged 36 wife Martha aged 36 also. The couple had three children listed in the census - Peter aged 12, Richard aged 5 and John aged 2. The occupation of his father was that of scrivener (scribe or notary). Some time prior to 1851 they migrated to Australia. Peter and Martha Cerutti and their younger children settled in Prahran and the parents lived there for many years. Richard's older brother Peter Holt Cerutti was married at age 20 by special license on 25 October 1849 in Tavistock to Fanny Bell. They also migrated to Australia.

Richard William Cerutti worked for H.M. Customs at Williamstown for most of his working life. He held various job titles mainly as a tide waiter* at Williamstown, other titles were sub collector, landing waiter*, powder magazine keeper inspector of fisheries, assistant immigration officer, receiver and paymaster. Many of these job titles were concurrent. Shortly before retirement he was harbour master at Warrnambool.

(http://www.cerberus.com.au/muster_dadabik/index.php?table_name=crew&function=details&where_field=ID&wher) . Richard's older brother Peter Holt Cerutti was also a customs officer.

Richard married Elizabeth Morphett on 7 July 1866 at All Saints, St. Kilda East. The couple had five children namely William Morphett, Ernest Henry, Loelia Marion Morphett. George Alfred Morphett and Bessie Laura Alice Morphett.

Elizabeth Morphett was born about 1840 in Clarendon, South Australia the daughter of Jeremiah Morphett and Mary Dawes. Jeremiah Morphett and his brother Richard were pioneers and the founders of the small town of Clarendon. The name Morphett is well known in the history of South Australia mainly through Sir John Morphett,

pioneer and land owner and President of the South Australian Legislative Council. Jeremiah Morphett and his brother may have been cousins or related in some way to the family of Sir John Morphett.

In 1871 the index for The Victorian Government Gazette reported a Richard William Cerutti a tide surveyor* of the Customs Department , assistant emigration officer and also Chinese immigration officer at Williamstown. The Statistical Register of the Colony of Victoria of 1879 reported R.W. Cerutti was a tide waiter 3rd schedule in the Dept of Trade and Customs first appointed 1 January 1864 and on a salary of £200 per annum.

In October 1880 he was promoted to Tide Surveyor, Landing Waiter and Clerk 4th Class. However, *The Argus* reported on 16 March 1881 that this promotion was illegal (16 March 1881 p 9). At an official hearing, the illegality of appointments in the Customs Department was discussed at great length in the newspaper. Apparently, the promotion of Cerutti had taken place without his passing the Civil Service Examination. The case of Cerutti was given as an example of someone who had worked for many years above his designated work level and had been unjustly treated as they had been omitted from the Civil Service Act by mistake. His promotion was to be seen as an act of justice.

Richard Cerutti seemed very proud of his position with HM Customs. The marriage announcement to Elizabeth Morphett reported the marriage to Mr. R. W. Cerutti HM Customs. The birth announcements of his children included this information. For example, on the birth of his first child in 1867 in *the Argus* the announcement read “at 51 Twyford St, Williamstown, wife of R.W. Cerutti, HM Customs, a son “ (Saturday 27 April). Similarly, with the death notice of his mother Martha in *The Argus* ‘on 30 December at St Edmund’s Rd, Prahran aged 72 years Martha wife of Mr. P Cerutti formerly of Tavistock, Devon and mother of P.H and R.W. Cerutti of HM Customs of Melbourne and Williamstown” (6 January 1877 p.17).

Cerutti’s work not only involved assessing a ship’s cargo and checking for smuggled goods. In 1880 a report in *The Argus* (Wednesday 17 March 1880 p. 5) told the story of how a Captain Young reported about 3 miles from the lightship a boat was adrift with one man in it and no oars. On learning of the incident, the tide inspector sent #6 Customs boat with Mr Cerutti in charge to look for the boat. However, when they reached the place Cerutti found the boat had already been picked up by the steamer *Dawn*. The old man in the boat was John Oxford who had escaped from the Yarra Bend asylum in November and taken the boat from Williamstown.

It was part of Richard Cerutti’s job to testify in court when there had been an incident involving Customs. In 1882 the *Williamstown Chronicle* (Saturday 14 October 1882, p 2) reported that Richard W. Cerutti had summoned Hugh Bowden a mercantile clerk who had gone on board the ship *Cardigan Castle* while the blue flag was flying (the prosecution was brought in the interests of public health).

By 1888 Cerutti was nearing retirement and was harbour master at Warrnambool. It must have been an interesting year as this was the year a cannon was installed in order to protect Warrnambool harbour from foreign invaders. In September 1888 R W

Cerutty the harbour master directed the brigantine *Elisa Frith* to safe government moorings when the ship had parted her starboard chain and was in distress. (*The Argus* 17 September 1888 p 7)



Richard William Cerutty served 1865

Source Victorian Naval Brigade 1860-71 Courtesy of Tom Corfmat, Victorian Colonial Infantry Association

Evidence Richard William Cerutty was located in Belmore Road, Balwyn and surrounding area following his retirement from HM Customs

There is some evidence that Richard W Cerutty resided in Balwyn following his retirement. The first piece of evidence is the death notice of his father-in-law Jeremiah Morphet. The death notice in *The Argus* on 22 April 1893 p 5 stated that Jeremiah was the beloved father of Mrs Cerutty of Balwyn. The second piece of evidence is from the *Victorian Police Gazette* (29 January 1894) police report from Belmore Road, Balwyn that Cerutty, a civil servant, reported a Shetland pony stolen.

In 1899 the Camberwell & Waverley Rate books listed Richard William Cerutty living at Bowen St, Camberwell. The owners appear to be Southern Insurance Co and English and Australian Mortgage Bank. By 1904 Sands & McDougal Directory listed R W Cerutty living at Brinsley Road, Camberwell. In 1906 the Sands & McDougall directory listed R W Cerutty living at 'Denone' Wilson St, Chatham Rd south side, Surrey Hills

On the 30 August 1907 Richard William Cerutty died at Mont Albert Road, Surrey Hills. His death was reported in The Argus (31 August 1907). He was buried in Boroondara Cemetery, Kew. Cerutty died intestate and left a very modest £435. Elizabeth Morphett Cerutty died in Mont Albert, Surrey Hills in 1918 and her death was reported in The Argus (14 October, 1918). She was buried with her husband in Boroondara Cemetery, Kew.

In conclusion, I propose that Richard William Cerutty was the occupier rather than the owner of the large brick villa later called Colongulac. I believe there was an error made in the Rate Books covering the period 1892-1894 and in the Sands & McDougall directories. This is a matter which requires further research and beyond the scope of this article

Definitions

- A tide waiter was a customs officer who checked a ship's cargo. This often involved boarding a vessel at high tide in order to check for imported goods before the vessel entered port. This was in order to assess customs and excise duty and to check for smuggled goods.
- A landing waiter supervised the unloading of imported goods from the cargo of a ship and like tide waiters checking for smuggled goods.
- A tide surveyor was a customs officer who checked for smuggled goods.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Warwick Foster for his assistance.

Sources

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The Argus 27 April, 1867; 6 January 1877; 17 March 1880; 16 March 1881; 4 January 1888 p 3; 10 January 1881; September 1888; 22 April 1893; 31 August, 1907; 14 Oct, 1918
Victorian Government Gazette 1871
Victorian Police Gazette 29 January 1894
Williamstown Chronicle 14 October 1882

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