

The Dumbletons of Oakhurst & Fairy Knowe by Hugo Leggatt

19th Century

No family has a longer continuous history of involvement at the Wilderness than the Dumbletons. In 1874, three years before George Bennett built the farmhouse which he named "The Wilderness", Walter Dumbleton built his Faerie-Knowe – the hilltop house in the trees which, with an alteration to its spelling, now houses the Fairy Knowe Backpackers' Hostel. Some 30 years prior to that, Walter's older brother, Henry, had bought the farm Avontuur, which Walter later renamed Oakhurst.

Family Origins

Refs:1) www.bl.uk/catalogues/indiaoffice gives the following under Charles Dumbleton papers : 7 letters from Charles Dumbleton to his son Henry (1782-1877), Bengal Civil Service from 1797 to 1822 at Calcutta and Bareilli.

2) The New Monthly Magazine, 1820, Pt.II (July to December) : records Henry Dumbleton esq. of Marlborough Buildings, Bath married Ellen, eldest daughter of John Norris esq. of Hughendon House, Bucks.

Henry Dumbleton snr.(1782-1877).

By 1797 (aged about 15) he was in Bengal where he appears to have remained at least until about 1820. (ref.1 above). Henry then returned to England and married Ellen Norris (1799-1884) [ref. 2 above]. Over the next 20 years, the couple had 11 children, 6 boys, 5 girls. In 1847 he bought Thornhill Park House near Southampton and lived there until his death in 1877 aged 95.

[From Wikipedia : Dumbleton's Copse

A 19th-20th century copse (now disappeared) at the southern end of the Thornhill district, Southampton. It was named after Henry Dumbleton, an East India Company administrator, who bought Thornhill Park House in 1847 and lived there until his death in 1877. A tower block in Thornhill was named Dumbleton Towers after Henry Dumbleton.]

The eldest child of Henry snr. and Ellen was **Henry jnr.** (1821-1909), the second son was Charles (1824- 1919) who went out to India in 1840 and later became a general in the Bengal Lancers. The youngest son (and 9th child) was **Walter Douglas D.** (1836-1917).

Both Henry jnr. and Walter Douglas were owners of the property Avontuur/Oakhurst.

Henry jnr. (1821-1909)

Henry	Dumbleton	Male	20 years	1821 birth	Farnham Hampshire, England
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In the census of June,1841 we find Henry at Home in Farnham, Hampshire

In an "Appreciation" published on 21st March 1909 in the "Victoria Daily Colonist", he is said to have been attracted to South Africa by the tremendous opportunities it offered for big game shooting. He was described as of powerful and athletic build and a remarkably strong swimmer. He also won a scholarship to Brasenose, Oxford.

Henry must have come to the Cape soon after the 1841 census. On 22nd Dec., 1844 he married Clara Marianne Garcia (1827-1915), d. of Maurice Garcia. What had brought him to George ? Their eldest child, Henry Maurice, was baptized in George in Nov. 1846. The following Nov, 1847 the farm Avontuur was formally transferred to Henry, although he probably bought it earlier. Here he built the Old House.

Oakhurst/Avontuur

1 1818 Loan farm to Johannes J. Vivier (who also held Kleinkrans)

2) 1842 sold by George Dutton (George gaoler 1840-1) – possibly to Henry D.

3) 1847, 16.11, formally transferred to Henry Dumbleton

4) 1848, Bishop Gray stays, also '49 & '50 On his 1850 visit the bishop consecrated St. Mark's Church, now St. Mark's Cathedral, in George.

If he came for hunting, what brought him to George?

Henry & Clara had 9 children, 4 b, 5g. The eldest, Henry Maurice, was baptised in George in Nov. 1846, followed by Ellen, bap. Aug, 1848 and Agnes, born at Avontuur on 26.01/1850 by which time her father is described as a Justice of the Peace. At the great Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851, H. Dumbleton of George district received an Honourable Mention for his exhibit of Cape woods.

In Feb., 1850 the ship *Nepaul* was wrecked in a SW gale off the Swart River mouth, with 3 lives being lost. Henry is reported as swimming through boiling surf with a ball of twine in his mouth, and returning with a thicker line which enabled the remainder of the crew to be saved. In 1860, while living in Wynberg, Henry was again involved in a rescue, this time in Zeekoevlei, and involving his own family and that of Richard (later Sir Richard) Southey.

In 1851, July, property offered for sale and was subsequently transferred to Henry, snr, in England.

It appears that the family left Avontuur in the early 50s as Constance, b.1852, and Charles Douglas 1854 appear to have been born in England– Charles was later to marry Florence Rex, d. of Jacob.

The Gov. Gazette of 14 Dec, 1855 reports the arrival of the *Windsor* on the 12th, with Mr. & Mrs. Henry Dumbleton, family, and Walter Dumbleton Esq, Henry's youngest brother (b. 1836). Over the next few years Walter practised as a land surveyor in the Transkei.

Henry and his family returned to England in the mid-60s (Henry & Charles were at Bishops in 1863). Later they moved to Victoria, British Columbia. (Charles later married Florence Rex in Knysna – see above)

7) 1865, transferred to Walter Douglas Dumbleton (1836-1917)

Avontuur was transferred to Walter who then went to England, married Emma Pelly (d. of Sir John P.) in 1866, and returned to live in George while building a new house at Oakhurst. Their eldest, Cecil born on 19.4.1867, is described as d. of W. & Emma of George. They moved into the fine double-storied house in 1867. Laura, b. 1.8.68 is described as "of Oakhurst". Two years later Emma was to produce the third of her eleven children there, while earlier in the year the new home had survived the great fire because of its new tin roof.

In 1877 Walter built the Church of All Saints and conducted Sunday services there until a few months of his death.

Roderick, Walter's second son who later inherited Oakhurst, used to tell of the local farmer who approached his father for a loan of £500. As security he offered the bush-covered sandveld which stretched from Island Lake to the Wilderness lagoon. Not many years later, complaining of drought and disease, the farmer begged Walter to accept the land as he was unable to repay the loan.

So, soon after, Walter and Emma were to be found on horseback on the hills discussing where they would build their beach home. They finally decided on a wooded hill close to the lagoon – and there the original Faerie-Knowe stands to this day.

At the time of the great eruption of Krakatoa in 1883 in Indonesia, Roderick who was ten years old at the time, recalled seeing the waves washing over the dunes into the river. It is interesting to speculate on the effect similar waves would have on our built-up coastline!

Emma Dumbleton died in 1885, having produced 11 children in her 19 years of married life. One daughter, Kathleen, married Charles Owen-Snow, a George doctor, and it is from this couple that the Crowther family, present owners of Oakhurst, is descended.

Walter and Emma's third son, Harold, was to build what is now Fairy Knowe hotel.

After Emma's death, Walter visited England where he met a young Norwegian girl, Elise Sundt, whose parents were attached to the Norwegian consulate in London. After Walter returned home to his large family, Elise followed. The story goes that her sailing ship had to wait for three weeks off the Knysna Heads before the seas were safe to enter

the harbour. Later Walter and Elise were married in St. Mark's Church in George. Walter's second marriage was to last 17 years before Elise died in 1903, aged only 41.

Blanche was born in 1888 and later married HJ "Jack" Raubenheimer. In 1918 she built "Solyst" in Waterside Road and both she and her husband were among the original directors of Wilderness (1921) Ltd. Their son, the late JN Raubenheimer, and his daughter, Sue O'Reilly of Leentjies Klip, continued their deep involvement in Wilderness into the 21st century.

Walter's youngest child, Bertram, was born in 1896 when his father was 60. He made a considerable name as an artist, exhibiting 11 works at the Royal Academy in London in the years between the two world wars.

The Children of Henry & Ellen Dumbleton (more detailed records are kept at Oakhurst)

Henry Dumbleton = Ellen Norris
1782 – 1877 1820 1799 – 1884

1) Henry = Clara Marianne Garcia Henry & Clara finally settled in Victoria, BC
1821-1909 1844 1827 – 1915

2) Ellen
1823-1905

3) Charles = Elizabeth Reed Charles became a general in the Bengal Lancers
1824-1916

4) Arthur Vincent = 1) Marion Benson Arthur served in the Indian army, then settled in Tasmania
1826 – 1903 = 2) Ellen

5) Edgar (Rev.) = Mary
1829 – 1903

6) Horatio = Blanche
1831-1904

7) Agnes 1833 – 1870

8) Rosalind 1834 –

9) Walter Douglas = 1) Emma Pelly Walter built Oakhurst
1836-1917 1866 1841-1885
= 2) Elise Sundt
1886 1862 – 1903

10) Alice

11) Florence b.1840