**Thomas Skellet reminiscences**

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EARLY REMINISCENCES.

Mr. Thomas H. B. Skellet knew Campbelltown 74 years ago.

Now Holidaying in Campbelltown.

Mr. Thomas H. B. Skellett who in 1860 first arrived in Campbelltown at the age of 9 years is back again enjoying a "once over" of the old landmarks so well known to him over

70 years ago. Despite his four score years and three, Mr. Skellett and his good wife take their daily walks, and Mr. Skellett easily recalls many old landmarks and old residences familiar to him many long years ago.

Going back to the story of his early reminiscences, let us first introduce Mr. Skellett to those whose residence here in this town does not date back as far as Mr. Skellett tells us. Mr. Skellett is a son of the late John Skellett, and in 1869 received a position in the New South Wales Railways, and after half a century in the employ of that now magnitudinous Department, retired, being awarded by His Majesty the King with the Imperial Service Medal for long and faithful service.

**His Ancestors.**

Mr. Skellett's ancestors were a Cornish family, and curiously enough they were always engaged in Transport construction work. First in the construction of roads, then canals, and later railways.

**The Late John Skellett.**

“The late Mr. John Skellett, my father," said Mr. Thomas Skellett in a little talk with the Editor of the "Campbelltown News," "was one of the officers of the celebrated big Railway Contractors "Tom Brassy," father of the late Lord Brassy., He was engaged on the construction of the railway: from Cherburgh to Paris at the time, when Tom Brassy informed him that he in conjunction with two other large contractors had obtained contracts out in Australia. The firm was Messrs. Peto, Brassy and Betts. Their contract was for the construction of the Railway from Campbelltown to Picton, Blacktown to Penrith and Richmond, also from outside Newcastle towards Singleton. Tom Brassy offered to send my father to Australia as the contractors had chartered a fine sailing vessel the "Alfred," to take all their equipment, officers, and their families, to Australia. As my father's mother and two brothers had gone out to Victoria during the gold rush, and my mother's only brother went out also in 1853, they thought it was a good opportunity to go out to Australia to be near them, but it was seven years after landing here that they met again. The "Alfred" made a fast passage for those times, about 90 days. I remember a lot of events on the trip, first by a school for the children who were instructed by a school master, then a seaman fell from the yard-arm into the sea, but was rescued. Then when we were sailing down the West Coast of Africa there was a lot of talk of large monkeys or apes who stole children and women, and took them away into the forest. I have since wondered if the author of "Tarzan of the Apes" could have got his ideas from these reports. On another occasion I was rushed up on deck to see some "sea pigs," of course I expected to see the domestic family pig, and could not see any legs for they were the porpoises swimming round the ship. Next came a terrific storm, and all the passengers were kept under deck for a couple of days; then I noticed the gangway open and I crept out on deck, and was surprised to see high waves towering

above the ship. One broke on deck, took me off my feet and washed me to the scuppers when one of the sailors managed to rescue me. A few days after this I woke up in the morning to find everything so calm and steady; I could not understand it. I climbed up on deck and there a wonderful view met my sight, we had arrived in Sydney harbour, and anchored just above Garden island. On one side was the beautiful hills running down to the harbour and covered with green trees to the water's edge, which, is now known as North Sydney, on the other side the beautiful points of the harbour extending to the Heads. The sun had not risen very long, and a light breeze was just ruffling the water; the sparkling on the water made a picture in my eye that was a "Fairy-land." The date was 6th January, 1860.

My father was sent direct to Campbelltown and on that evening we arrived at "Doyles" Hotel (now the residence of Mr. H. Meredith, next to Mr. George Chinnocks newsagency), where we all had tea. After tea we went into the garden at the back of the hotel when someone picked some fruit off a tree and gave me one. Well, just coming off a three months voyage and living on food that was preserved in tins all the time, it was the most delicious thing I ever tasted. I think it was an apricot. When we arrived at Campbelltown we found that all the house accommodation had been taken up on account of the influx of the men who were required for the railway constructions. Somebody suggested to my father that Mr. Fieldhouse might have a house to let, so he went to the hotel to make enquiry of him. Mr. Fieldhouse became interested when he learned that he was one of the "New Chums” just arrived to build the railway, and asked him what part of the country he belonged to, so father said he was born in Birmingham. Mr. Fieldhouse took him by the hand and gave it a great shaking saying, "then you are a Brumagin Button, so am I. (Birmingham, was noted for its button factories). If there is a house to be had you shall have it and he managed to get one for us. After we got into the house my mother was very ill caused by eating so much of the tin food, and she always spoke with a deep feeling of gratitude of the kindness of Mrs. Fieldhouse and others who nursed her round to health again. I remember the start made in the construction of the railway from here and watched the driving of some big piles with a pile driver, which were to make a low bridge for the water to drain under about halfway between the station and the Camden crossing. After the line was completed and opened the Government took over all the officers the contractors brought out to Australia. Engineers, surveyors, draftsmen, inspectors, and my father was one of them, who was appointed Permanent Way Inspector from Parramatta Junction (now Granville) to Picton; In 1880 he retired. from the railways living at Picton for a number of years and died in Sydney in 1907, aged 84 years.

Mr. Thomas H. B. Skellett.

It was on the 18th October, 1869, I got an appointment in the Office of the Engineer for Existing Lines. I served under all the Railway Commissioners until Mr. Frazer's time. For over 20 years I was Chief Cashier, and banked all the Railways and Tramways receipts. "At that time” gold coins were in general use and we would take the gold to the bank in string boxes. Some of our deposits were very large. On one occasion, after the Easter Holidays, we put in the record for nearly a quarter of a million pounds, it being only about £2,000 short of that amount. I remember one incident when taking a "load" of bullion to the bank, chiefly gold, sovereigns in a horse drawn cart, the load was that heavy that the axle broke, and a delay ensued while another cart was secured. I was over 50 years in the Railways, and during that time I made a great number of friends and I don't think I ever made an enemy. I am now living in retirement at Beecroft, being one of the pioneers of that place, and took up my residence there in 1893."