

The graves of Henry and Elizabeth Baldwin

By Rosemary St John ~ April 2020

I too am a descendant of Henry Baldwin, through one of his less successful sons, Bemarr. I was brought up on vague stories about my “illustrious” ancestor Henry whose Baldwin surname was carried by my father and his two brothers and by my own brother as a second forename. The story was that Henry was a very successful free settler; the family either by error or design had chosen to interpret the “FS” beside Henry’s name in the early musters as standing for “Free Settler” rather than “Freedom by Servitude”.

My husband, a family history nerd, was highly suspicious that Henry with an arrival date of 1791 was a free settler and set about researching his background and quickly discovered his convict origin. We also came across Henry’s will in which he expresses his wish to be buried “in a vault already built on my estate” and the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 14 June 1843, page 3, reported his funeral had taken place “on his own property” and his being buried “in a vault previously erected for his wife”. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12416488>

In the late 1970’s, we set out to find the grave. Reasoning that Henry knew the area well and was aware of the risk of floods, we decided to focus on the high ground of his Freemans Reach farms. Henry’s first land holding was Wellow Farm, which runs down to the Hawkesbury and which he acquired by purchase from John Palmer in 1803, but in the same year he had applied for and been granted the adjoining 100ac on its northern boundary, known as Baldwin Farm. This contained the higher ground.

Using an aerial photograph of the area (this was well before Google Maps) we identified the land south of Burgess Road as a likely spot. In Henry’s day and up until 1895, the land between the road and the northern boundary of Baldwin Farm, comprising Portions 453-455 in the Parish Map, was still Crown Land, designated as Wilberforce Common, so we had to pass through this area to reach Baldwin Farm. In doing so we came across bricks and other building debris scattered in the paddock, amongst which were large pieces of cut sandstone bearing carvings, (see photos), which appeared to be the remains of a grave, one which had been appropriated as a step into a nearby wooden hut.





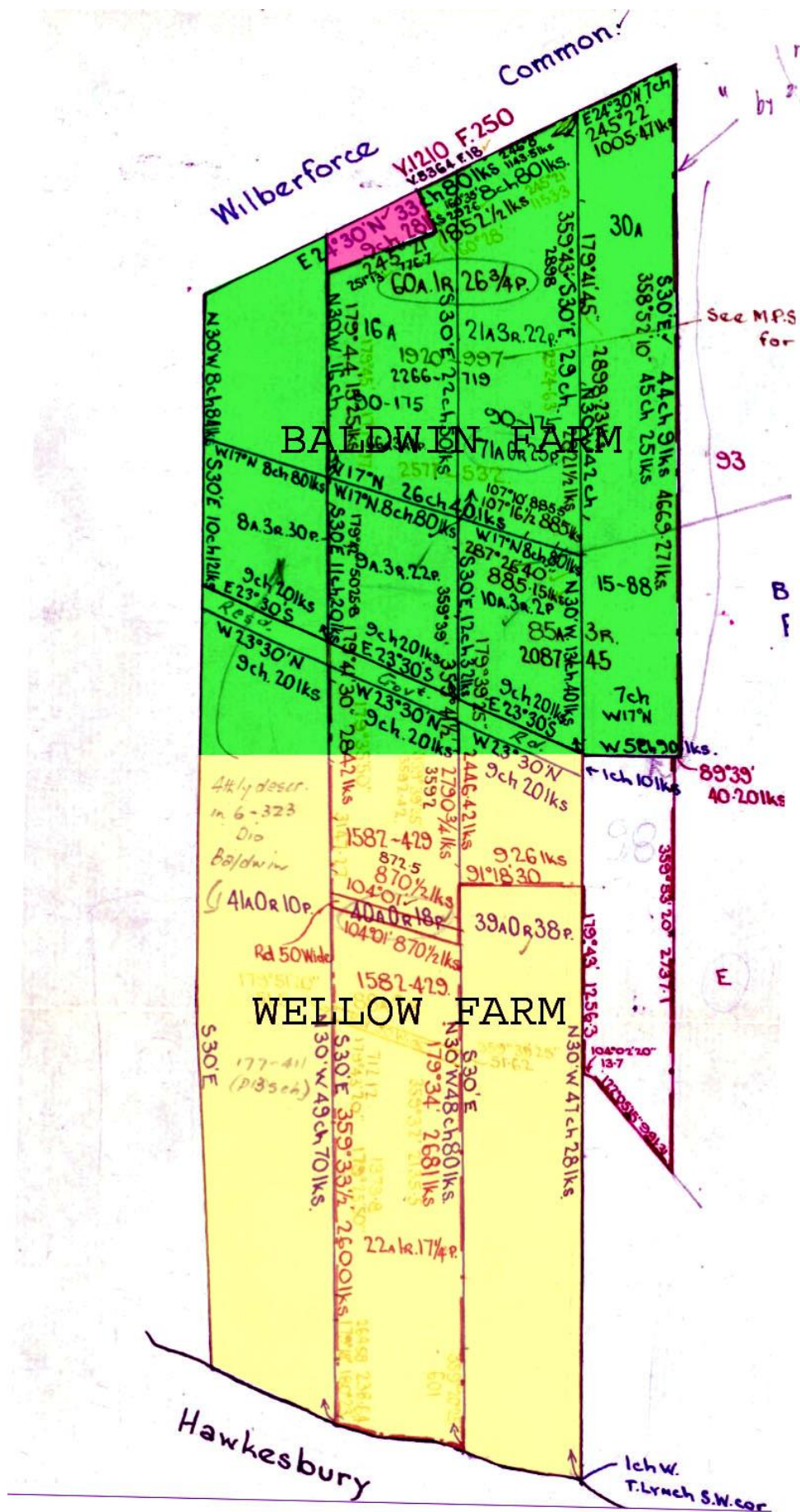
Though nothing of the inscription remained, we assumed these to be the remains of Henry's and Elizabeth's grave. They were not on Baldwin Farm, but on Portion 454, having apparently been moved from their original site during the construction of a dam.

We spoke to one of the locals, a man who remembered as a child in the 1920's seeing the headstone standing and recalled using it as a wicket to play cricket with his mates.

We subsequently approached the then owner of that section of Baldwin Farm, about their willingness to have the grave relocated back onto their property and reconstructed; to which they were agreeable. I then wrote to the Heritage Council of NSW to see if there was any authorisation required to allow this to happen. We received a reply some months later indicating that there was no legal restriction to moving memorials on private land.

However, on returning to the site all the sandstone pieces of the grave had disappeared??

Subsequent research in the records of NSW Land Registry Services (<https://www.nswlrs.com.au/>) has revealed that a small area of just under 2 acres in the 16 acre lot adjacent to Portion 454 on the northern boundary of Baldwin Farm had been designated a "Burying Place", see Old System Records - Book 90 No. 175 and the plan below, with the "Burying Place" coloured pink. And better still, in a Deed of Conveyance, dated 25 May 1844, Book 9 No.260 (OS), this area is referred to as "containing the tombs or graves in which were buried the bodies of the father and other relatives of the said Harvest Baldwin".



The division of the two properties, both originally 100 acre grants, into smaller parcels occurred in 1843 when the four brothers, Wynn, Harvest, Bemarr and Dio, who under Henry's will shared these and the other properties Henry held in "Wilberforce and Curryjong", agreed on a split.

I have included below a copy of a photo from the gravesite looking over the two properties to the river, the view Henry and Elizabeth would have enjoyed. The photo, now over 30 years old, reflects the lower quality photo processing of the time, but brings back fond memories of the search.



The western boundary of the two farms on Portion 94 (Baldwin Farm) and 96 (Wellow Farm) would run along Hibberts Lane from the Hawkesbury River to what would have been its intersection with the western end of Burgess Road had it continued in a straight line rather than looping to the left as it climbs up the hill from the river flats to the village.

Regards,
Rosemary