

GENESIS OF KABLE REUNIONS

Life is full of surprises. A small fire is built and the sparks fly up in unexpected directions that one could never have foreseen, and that sometimes have stupendous consequences.

I want to tell you about two Kable women who, in their time, lit a spark that led to us being here today. One is my mother, Della Scott, of the fourth generation of the Kables, born in this country. The other is Susannah Mileham, born in the first generation. They are both what I call Keepers of the Kable Family History.

A Keeper is one who stays in touch with all the members of their particular branch – acting as an information centre, a sort of post office, conveyor of family news – preserving the links. They are what we'd call today 'ethno-historians'. Their information is drawn from their direct or indirect participation in events, conversations with others, gossip, observations and letters. It brings people of another time to life for those who follow, so that they are not just names on a family tree – names without substance.

Della Scott was a Keeper of the George Esto branch of the family, which established itself mainly in the Bathurst-Blayney-Teapot Swamp district of NSW. Her mother was Blanche Kable, a grand-daughter of George Esto, and thus a great granddaughter of Henry and Susannah.

Susannah Mileham was the fifth child and second daughter of Henry and Susannah. She saw all the branches of the Kable family take root in this land, whether it was along the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers, over the Blue Mountains to Bathurst, or in the far north into Queensland.

It was the Queensland branch which instigated the family reunion which Della Scott then organised to take place in January 1968. I want to tell you how this happened because it illustrates the tremendous importance of family reunions.

Following my father's death, my mother lived with me and my family overseas for a few years. We settled in Sydney in 1965 where, shortly after, we had a visit from our Kable cousin, Heather Dorahy. A visit which proved to be of great significance in the Kable story.

Heather's mother was Stella Susannah Kable, a sister of Della's mother, Blanche. Heather was a painter of landscapes who, in her artistic wanderings, got to know the Kable sites in the Hawkesbury area better than most. Heather told my mother that the Kable Family vault in the graveyard of St Matthew's in Windsor was falling apart. Within 24 hours the two women were in Windsor checking it out.

The vault was indeed in a bad state. I doubt that it had seen any maintenance since Will Gaudry was interred there in 1816, eight or nine years before the church was built. Most of one long side that looks towards the church belfry had been stove in; one could see into the black void of the interior. Before returning home, Della had a quote from a stone-mason and a contract with him for the grave's restoration.

My husband Mervyn said: ‘Why don’t you tell your Bathurst and Barry Mob about it? Some of them might like to contribute towards its restoration.’ So Della did. The donations poured in.

Shortly after, Della took a train to Brisbane to visit an old friend from her school days in Barry. While there, she looked up ‘Kable’ in the telephone directories, She found a number of Kable subscribers and got in touch with many of them. They were all excited to hear about the vault and wanted to contribute. Two of the gentlemen of considerable consequence who appeared to be the Keepers of the Kable history in Queensland, were Frank Kable OBE and Arthur Ingham Myers, prominent in The Fellowship of First Fleeters. They persuaded Della to organise a Kable family reunion in Sydney so that the Queensland Branch could meet with those in the south.

Della lost no time in planning a reunion. It would be held over the last weekend of January 1968. We estimated an attendance of between 60 and 70 people to be seated for a dinner and accompanying formalities. A suitable venue was Georgian House at Neutral Bay. Our cousin in Orange, Vivian Kable, would bring his scale-model of the Transport *Friendship* to be the centre-piece of the main table.

Very early into the New Year, I was sent on a government mission to New Guinea. As a result, all the planning that still had to be done for the Reunion was left to my mother. On my return from New Guinea, I found everything in order, but there had been a problem: the number of people expected to attend had swelled to well over one hundred. As a result, the sit-down dinner had now to be a giant buffet.

It was a great evening with lots of spontaneous stories and laughter. Frank Kable was a jovial chairman. The Queensland branch was well represented, and (I thought) better informed than the rest of us. It emerged that most people, like me, had only a fuzzy idea of the early part of Henry’s and Susannah’s history; some had conflicting stories, and all were hungry for more information.

I was asked if I would put on paper as much of the story as had come to light so that it could be photocopied and distributed to family members. I was asked for the account to be not just a list of names and dates and notes, but in a form to interest our young ones who would carry on the Kable story after us.

And so my first step in that project was to draw on the archives of The Mitchell Library and interview my relatives of earlier generations, especially the great-aunts. I discovered my mother held information I had not known about, or had forgotten: stories that I could use to bring to life those early Kables; to give colour to their everyday world; and provide insights into the reasons for what they said and did. Others in the wider family were generous in sharing their knowledge. Of course, not everything could be used within the confines of a novel.

Let us go back one step and ask: where did Della get her information from? It was certainly not from archives or libraries. The repository of her sort of information is in the Keeper’s head. Della was given the information over many years by her mother, Blanche Kable. And who or what was the source of Blanche’s information? It can only have been her great-aunt Susannah Mileham, daughter of Henry and Susannah.

I recall some opposition to the truth of this argument on the grounds that Susannah had been born in 1795, whereas Blanche was not born until 1870! But the gap is not so great if one considers that Susannah lived to 90 years of age. She outlived all of her siblings and most of her many nieces and nephews. Blanche Kable was 16 years old when her great-aunt Susannah died in 1885; Blanche's sisters, my great-aunts, Catherine Mileham ('Aunt Kate') was 10, while Stella Susannah was 6. The girls had several older brothers. All of them remembered 'Old Aunt Susie'.

I, myself, recall my grandmother Blanche telling me that Aunt Susannah had become a widow after only five years of marriage and, because her husband had been a government medical officer, Susannah had received a government pension of 100 pounds a year for the rest of her long life. 'Aunt Susie was always boasting about it,' she told me. 'She thought it was a great joke – like getting the better of the government. "Why would I want to remarry when I have financial independence without the bother of it," she would say.'

It was what Susannah said about others that is valuable. Much of it found its way into the characters I described and events I retold in all three novels, to give the narrative substance and immediacy.

The title I gave to my first very long and weighty manuscript was *The Raking of the Ashes*. Angus & Robertson accepted it for publication. Their general editor, Richard Neville, happened to be a cricket buff. He insisted on a change in the title 'because,' he said, 'with the cricket season coming on, everybody will think the story is about cricket!' Being a cricket addict myself, I breathed some heat into the ashes to become embers. Then he said the manuscript should be two books; it should be cut and rewritten where necessary to make a sequel!

Those two books, *The Raking of the Embers* and *The Flame in the Morning*, would never have been written had it not been for the family reunion at Georgian House; and if not for the Keepers of the family's history who carried out solid research here, but most particularly in England. I recall in this period a lot of 'false starts' regarding the spelling of Kable's name and his family origins. It was not until after the publication of the first novel that further research in England revealed Henry's correct name family name was Keable and his family origins other than had been thought.

I think of Old Aunt Susannah Mileham as the most important Keeper of the Kable history, yet she is largely forgotten or overlooked today. This is because we don't know much about her. She spent almost her entire life living through others.

Growing up in the family home as the elder daughters, Susannah and her sister Diana, who was 7 years older, were expected from an early age to help run the house and supervise their six younger siblings: little Eunice and 5 small boys all looking for mischief! By 1810 when the family moved from Sydney to Pitt Town, there were no older brothers they could turn to for help: two of their 3 older brother had died young, while the eldest, Harry, who had been born in Norwich Castle Gaol, continued to live a bachelor's life in Sydney, looking after his father's mercantile interests and spending much of his time at sea.

When Diana married in 1809, the parental burden fell on 14 year old Susannah alone, because Eunice, aged 10 was too young for responsibility. Over the next 10 years, Susannah was the mainstay of the Pitt Town family, controller of her unruly younger brothers, and the ‘maiden aunt’ to be called upon to assist Diana with the care of her young Gaudry and Teale children resulting from successive marriages.

In 1818 the eldest of Susannah’s younger brothers, George Esto, married Susannah Jones and moved into Windsor to manage his father’s brewery. And the following year, Susannah, now 24 years old, - almost a spinster – married Dr James Mileham, who was 31 years her senior and had a daughter Lucy, only 4 years younger than herself. That left Eunice at home to care for her parents and 4 teen-age brothers. No doubt Susannah was available to help out, while we know that Mileham did what he could as a Magistrate – not always successfully - to keep the Kable boys out of gaol.

After barely 5 years of marriage, James Mileham died, leaving Susannah childless, but with a widow’s pension. Her young brothers, however, no longer had his guiding hand and protection. Poor Eunice, it seems, had had enough of them: she married John Fitz, a successful businessman and moved into Windsor. Susannah, no doubt, filled the gap, more particularly to care for her ailing mother.

The following year, 1825, saw the death of Susannah’s mother, and her father Henry a widower in the near-empty house on his farm at Pitt Town. All of his young sons, except the youngest, Edgar, had married and moved out of the family home. Young John and his wife Eliza might have stayed there for a few months, but from 1826 they were on a farm across the river at Portland Head where the first of their many children was born. Susannah, no doubt, filled the gap.

In the meantime, Susannah’s step-daughter, Lucy Mileham, married Sam Hassall who had a land grant from Governor Macquarie at Camden. Susannah saw her father handling his widowhood by keeping busy with friends: Edward Eagar, William Baker, Joseph Harper, among others, who were all working to further the ‘Emancipists’ Cause’. And she saw that her brother Harry was visiting the Pitt Town farm more often, preparing for his retirement. She decided to accept Lucy’s offer of a home with her at ‘Macquarie Grove’ where she could help look after Lucy’s babies. She got Diana’s permission to take Emma Gaudry with her. Emma was now 10 or 11, and was proving to be a difficult child for her busy mother to handle.

In time, Emma met John Wild there – the only son of a couple farming a property in the neighbourhood called ‘Vanderville’(now known as the township called The Oaks. They married in 1832, and when John’s parents died shortly after, Susannah moved to ‘Vanderville’ to help Emma with her babies.

Susannah was to spend the rest of her long life there. ‘Vanderville’ grew into a fine estate, a mecca for long visits by many Kable relatives, and for some like Susannah, it became another home. Emma’s youngest brother, George Gaudry with his wife Elizabeth, moved there as early as 1838, just after George had served 4 months in Windsor Gaol for taking part in a prize fight. George took over management of the farm and sired ten children there. Another permanent guest was Susannah’s eldest brother, Harry Kable. After Harry retired, he moved to the Pitt town farm to look after his father. When in 1846 his father died, Harry spent his remaining years at ‘Vmderville’.

Over the half-century that Susannah spent at 'Vanderville', she was surrounded by family coming and going. She must have enjoyed informing them with stories while hearing more stories from them to add to her store. When she died on 20th June 1885, at the age of 90, she had outlived all her siblings and their spouses. (Harry, John Teale, George Esto and Diana all dying between 1852 and 1854). Emma died only 7 months after her aunt Susannah; and her brother George Gaudry died four years later.

Susannah was buried in the graveyard of St Matthew's on 'Vanderville' (The Oaks) near her brother Harry. On her gravestone are the words: '*She hath done what she could*'. Susannah would probably have said the best thing she did was to live to draw a government pension for 60 years. I would say the best thing she did was to be a Keeper of the Kable family history through those early years and to live long enough to pass on her stories to my grandmother. among others.

Henry Kable was 82 years old when he died in 1846. Like his daughter Susannah, he was a long-liver. There are lots of stories about Kable – about his being first ashore at Sydney Cove, about his business dealings, his incarceration by Governor Bligh, his rapid acquisition of land grants at Pitt Town and elsewhere, and so on.

The point to be made is that his daughter Susannah Mileham was only 51 years old when her father died; she would live for another 39 years. Eight years after Kable's death, his eldest daughter Diana died, aged 66. Her obituary in the newspaper records as fact the story about her father being first ashore. It is interesting that no credible person appears to have disputed this claim, or other seemingly outrageous claims, closer to or at least within the wide framework of Susannah Mileham's life.

The launch of *The Raking of the Embers* sparked a totally unforeseen event. I asked my friend and colleague James 'Jim' Staples, a judge of the NSW Industrial Commission to launch it. When he read the copy I gave him, I was not prepared for his excited reaction. Was the part about Cable bringing on the first civil law suit in the Colony fact or fiction, he wanted to know. He grew even more excited when I assured him it was all fact and he would find the record of it as the first Case in the archives of the Court of Civil Jurisdiction for 1788-1809.

In allowing the Cables to bring a case to court, Judge Advocate Collins either ignored or did not know of the English common law rule of *felony attain*. Under that rule, a person sentenced to death for felony was unable to hold property, give evidence or seek justice from a ruling of the Court. Whatever the reason behind Governor Phillip's decision, he allowed the action. The success of the action soon changed the penal colony into a free society, as emancipists used the precedent to further rights previously denied them.

Justice Staples' excitement was timely; he was able to use this 1788 case as a precedent, just in time to prevent the promulgation into law of legislation which had already passed through both Houses of the NSW Parliament. The legislation was devised in 1981 to prevent Darcy Dugan and other felons who were involved in the 1980 Bathurst Gaol riots, from bringing an action against certain of their prison warders.

In explaining the importance of the precedent to me, Jim ‘Staples said: “*If the legislation passed by the NSW Parliament were to become law, and you subsequently decided you’d rather go to gaol than pay your fines for illegal parking, ... and if, while you were in gaol I burgled your house, robbing you of valuable items; and if you had some evidence that I was the culprit, you would not be able to seek justice by bringing a suit against me in the Courts*”.

My mother, Della, died two days after the launch.

Recently, I had a letter from my great-niece, Meike, telling me she now has a degree in Law, and how excited she had been when her instructor cited the 1788 case of Henry and Susannah Cable v Donald Sinclair. It’s another spark down the ancestral line.

I was keen to write a third book taking the story of Henry to his death in 1846, but I was then in the Senior Executive Service of the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade – a role which was time-consuming and took me overseas for a good part of each year. It was not until I retired that I was able to make use of the great research carried out by Mary Caldwell as a Keeper of the Emma Gaudry-John Wild branch of the Kable family. By that time, my earlier books were out of print and A&R were in the process of selling out to Harper Collins. So I self-published, reprinting the earlier two books and adding the third, ‘*The Fire in his Eye*’ to make a trilogy, ‘*Kable. Convict Extraordinaire*’! Now, that volume is out of print. The cost of a reprint is beyond me, so I have produced a CD of the volume which can be read on line or down-loaded. I have brought a limited supply with me for those who would like one. The purchase price is \$25.

I suspect you are all Keepers of the Kable Family history; and that is why you have listened to me so patiently. Judge Staples was so fixated by the story of Henry and Susannah that whenever he had the chance to talk about them, he would begin with: ‘*Ladies and gentlemen: I will not be brief!*’

I should have taken a leaf from his book. Ladies and gentlemen ... thank you!

June Whittaker OAM

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