

BRANSCOMBE DIASPORA

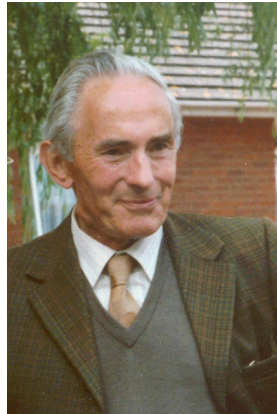
If you look through the old parish registers or census returns, or wander round the graveyard, you'll find family names that lasted for over a century – Bartletts, Perrys, Dowells, Deans, Frenchs, Gushs, Northcotts, Piles, Pikes, Wards, to name just a few. Nowadays these families have all gone. There are a few exceptions – a couple of Dowells, a Cox, a few hidden below a different surname (Betty Rowson was a Somers; Eileen Carpenter a Northcott; Jean Brimson a Perryman; Ivor Dowell's mother was a Dean; John Bass's a French; Sid Sweetland's wife a Gosling; and Bill Carpenter & Frank Adlam are both members of the Ward clan) - but that's all.

People left the parish for many reasons. Branscombe was never a rich village and opportunities to get on' were few and far between. By the nineteenth century – and earlier as well – people left to seek work, or maybe they'd got a girl in trouble, run up debts, or run foul of 'important' people within the community. Some, no doubt, went out of a spirit of adventure. By the mid nineteenth century, with the railways opening up, and mines and factories, London, Manchester, and South Wales were favoured locations. But some went much further afield, to the States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa. **And it is these people that we would like to track.**

We've combed through our oral history transcripts, added details from the Parish Registers and Census Returns, as well as other stray references. We intend to trace the names of some of the ships on which the emigrants sailed. Now it's over to you - when a person disappears abroad from the parish, no record tells us where they have gone to. If you know of anyone who left Branscombe to live in another country in the past, please contact us by email and we will add your stories to the website.

By way of Introduction, here's Lesley Collier talking about those who left, and those who stayed behind. Lesley lived and worked in the

village all his life. The only time he left was during the Second World War when he served in Africa and India. He loved his time abroad and would much rather have talked about India than Branscombe! But here he is ...



LESLEY COLLIER [tape 16b]

You got home [from the war] and found rationing, frightened us to death. A little bit of this and little bit of that, you just didn't know what to do for a while, you felt like going back again. A lot of fellows did go ... - emigrated to different parts of the world.

Barbara: Did you think of [going]?

I would have liked to have done I think, but well, family ties were a bit tight, I was the only son and Eileen was the only daughter, you see. I mean today they say, "Cheerio mum, see you in five years," but in those days they weren't expected to. I mean, mother said to me, "Oh you've been away all these years, now for goodness sake settle down!" ... Today they want to be millionaires, in those days they'd say as long as you've got a roof over your head, a shilling in your pocket and a belly full of food... and a good job, or a job, what else do you want? I mean what's there to have? ... I felt that some of the boys who did leave the village over the years, they got on far better than the ones that stayed - you know what I mean? Some went into business, some got on well,

and perhaps the odd one failed and you didn't hear anything about [them] ... No, I don't think it hurts anyone to get away from home ...

The parents in our days didn't expect it, they rather thought you were going to marry the girl next door, and always [be] running to and fro, to and fro, you know.

Lesley, ruminating on earlier emigration (tape 16b): But many years ago you see, this is going back in the Victorian era, if a young man got a girl into trouble and didn't want to marry her he'd slope off to America or New Zealand ... I mean, this is only hearsay because they used to say. "Oh well, Jack so-and-so was courting a girl ... and there was trouble ahead and he didn't want to marry her ... ", so he'd disappear... and sometimes it happened and sometimes it didn't.

* * * *

BROMFIELD - ERNEST & REGINALD

Lesley Collier was married to Eileen Bromfield. Eileen's great-grandfather, Thomas Bromfield, was the miller at Hole Mill -

Lesley (tape 16B): Ah, great grandfather ... I'm not sure how many children he had, there was one or two went to the States ... Eileen's grandfather remained in England but I think his other brother went off ... as a young man.

REGISTER & CENSUS

Eileen's father was Archibald Reece Bromfeild, b. 1901. Her grand-parents were Lavington and Rosa Bromfield. Her great-grandfather was Thomas, miller at Hole Mill. He was born in 1842, married Margaret, and had five children: Ernest Edmund b. 1871, Lottie, b. 1873, Lavington Thomas b. 1874, Gilbert John b. 1876, and Reginald Henry, b. 1880. Gilbert John died in infancy, Lavington stayed in the village, Ernest Edmund seems to have left Branscombe by 1891, and Reginald by 1901. These are the ones that seem to have gone to the States.

DEAN, CHARLIE, ETTIE, VERE & GAY MILLVINA

Down one of the deep side valleys of Branscombe there's a smallholding – originally called Culverwell, then Culverhole, and then, in the twentieth century, Culverwell again. By the early twentieth century the house had become quite dilapidated and was let out to two families. At one end there was Thomas Northcott, 35, born in Branscombe and employed as a walling mason by the Ford estate, his wife Irene, 34, also from Branscombe and a lace-maker, five children. At the other, there was Charles Dean, 39, thatcher, Branscombe born; his wife Eliza, 39; oldest son Fred, 17, also a thatcher; second son, Bert, 15, farm labourer, and five more children – Willie, Millie, Harold, Charley, and Violet.

Charlie's second son, Bert left the village. He went to London and worked in a pub. Eventually he owned his own establishment. In 1912, he decided that he and his family - his wife Ettie, small son Vere, and six month old baby Girlie Gay Millvina - would emigrate to America. They boarded the *Titanic*. When the ship went down, Bert was drowned, but his wife and two children survived. Girlie Gay Millvina Dean was the youngest survivor of the shipwreck. She died in 2009.



From left, Bertram, Ettie and 2-year old Vere with Bertram's brother and sister Millie in Branscombe shortly before the left for America. Courtesy of Dawn Squire



Vere & Gay Millvina

Lily Gush (born 1901) remembered:

They [the Dean family] come down to Little Seaside to say goodbye to grandfather and mother and that was the first time

I'd had proper flu and they'd had the doctor on me. 'Go up and tell them to put her out of the window to wave goodbye' ... So I waved out of the window to them. I knows which window ... And of course he was drowned ... He helped get Ettie and the children to the boat ... Girlie told me her mother wouldn't ever tell her about it. .. They came back to Southampton but it wasn't very long for they come to Branscombe cos the granny [was] this end and grandfather.

Ivor & Marie Dowell



Ivor Dowell still lives in the village -

My mother was a Dean before she was married. [She was Charles and Eliza's youngest daughter, Violet] It was her brother Bert was on the Titanic when it went down. (tape 49a): Well, when the captain said "Women and children first" then they gave her, she was lucky, they put her in a boat and with her mother. ... Her father died out there, I think he went down with the boat. But yes, they managed to save her ... I think she's the only one left. She comes down in the summer, sometimes, you know,

for a holiday.

According to Bill Carpenter, Gay Millvina's real name was Elizabeth Gladys.

DOWELL, WILLIAM DEAN

We shouldn't really include William Dean Dowell because as far as we can tell he never quite made it to Australia. Bill Dowell was accused of shooting old John Perryman as he walked home from harvesting on a moonlit night in September 1883. Dowell was acquitted, and later wrote a passionate account of what happened (*The Branscombe Murder, The Life of William Dean Dowell, the Accused Murderer*). There were those in the village who thought he was guilty, and those who didn't. He wrote:

After we were discharged and every thing paid, a lot of the poor villagers persuaded us to have a subscription list, and they promised us various sums of money, half-a-crown to one penny. I said no, I would not accept any from the poor people, but the others could please themselves.

Bill had been so upset by what had happened that he decided to emigrate to Australia and it seems likely the subscription was raised with this in mind. But he doesn't seem to have gone, or if he did it was only for a short while. Certainly by the time of the 1891 Census Returns he was living in London. (see Barbara Farquharson & John Torrance *The Shooting at Branscombe Old Pits*, 2009, The Branscombe Project, for a full account)

GUSH, EDWIN CHARLES

Barbara, talking to Lesley Collier (tape 16B): Would Eileen [his wife] have liked to have gone away?

Lesley Collier (tape 16b): I think she probably would have done, she had an uncle in Australia, who would love her to come out there, but she didn't go. And he was doing well out there, that was her mother's brother, and he's dead of course now. ... He got married and went to Australia before the First World War. And of course, Australia was pretty rough then ... He used to work for a big meat firm out there and he used to have to go out in the outback and buy the cattle. Well, he had a ten/twelve-year-old daughter and he wished them all "Cheerio" went out in the outback, and of course there was no radio [to keep] in touch in those days, when he come back, his daughter was dead and buried! ... Died, ... just collapsed and died, I mean it must have been a hell of a shock. ...

He used to say, because he came home here before he died, two or three times. And he said, "You'd go on horse-back!" this is [in] the ... early twenties. Two or three of 'em 'ud get on the horses and be riding for days, they'd see these cattle, and the cattle then would be driven to a point where they were forced in the local meat-packing plant ...

Barbara: But when people wanted to leave the village like that to emigrate, how did they raise the money?

That's what I've often wondered! But sometimes I've heard mother say, that they worked their passage on the cargo boat. And sometimes some of them had gone before ... and they'd say, "Well, come to the States." And they'd arrive probably somewhere in ... they'd really rough it!

Betty Rowson talking to Barbara: I think the uncle was called Eddie.

PARISH REGISTER

Eileen's grand-father was William Charles Gush. He married Amanda Sarah West in 1882. They had eight children – 3 girls and 5 boys. Eileen's mother was the youngest girl – Mabel Grace, born in 1892. Of the five boys, two (William James, b. 1884 & Reginald, b. 1886) were buried in Branscombe. The other three seem to have left the village. The youngest, Roland Clement, was born in 1894. It seems unlikely that he would have married and emigrated *before* the first world war. That leaves two possibilities for the 'Australian uncle' – Edwin Charles, b. 1885, or George Eber, b. 1888. If Betty Rowson is right (see above), then Edwin seems the most likely candidate.

GUSH

Lily Gush was born in 'an hundred and one' (1901). Barbara talked with her in 1989 when she was eighty-eight – she had a strong Devon accent and no teeth, so it was often hard to hear what she said. She was a remarkable person and would tell stories about her grandfather William Rendell that went back to the 1830s. Here she talks about her father's side of the family; under RENDELL she talks about her mother's.

Lily Gush [tape 31]: Rosie, ... her married a Ned Gush, or Edwin. [They went to London, ... he was first cousin to my father]. Henry, I think [his father] was. There was one went out to Africa ... They were saying how they put up some little stone monument on the side of the road because this old Gush whoever he was, he was always generous ... there was some riot or something and some Africans that nearly starved and he gave them half what he got ... And I knew 'twas true because Edwin Gush .. .went out on one of these exchange systems and found out all about the Gushes – it was the generation before I was born ...

SPILLERS

There were Spillers farming in Branscombe from the late 1700s but by the 1881 census the name has disappeared from the village.

Robert Spiller senior was born in Colyton in 1775 and on the 1841 census is at Edge in Branscombe. In 1851 he is farming Edge Barton with 14 labourers to tend his 336 acres.

Robert and his wife Sarah had three sons – Robert, Abraham and Thomas.

In 1841 the son, Robert Spiller junior, is at Hooknell, but by 1851 he is at Hole Farm with 318 acres and employing 12 labourers. He is also a lime burner and employs 7 workers on this side of his business. In fact a map from 1855 shows he has a coal yard by Branscombe Mouth to store coal and culm brought in by boat to fuel his kilns. In all probability he sold coal here too as did the Fords whose coal-yard was more or less adjacent and is documented. By 1861 Robert has moved to Edge and by now has 900 acres and employs 33 men and 8 boys. Robert dies in 1868 at the age of 66 and his widow Ann carries on running the farm but with less than half the workforce and no mention of lime-burning. Robert and Ann had two sons – John and William – who might have been expected to take on the farm but by the 1861 census there is no trace of them. Their sister Mary seems to have remained with her mother at Edge.

Abraham goes on to farm at Rockenhayne and he has two daughters but by 1871 the family do not appear to be in Branscombe any more.

Robert Spiller senior's son Thomas disappears from Branscombe after the 1851 census.

So here we have seemingly successful farming families who by 1881 have completely disappeared from the village. We will probably never know for sure what happened. Was it the agricultural depression? Is it possible that they migrated?

It looks as though we can track John, son of Robert Spiller junior. We have recently found out that a John Spiller originating in Branscombe arrived in Australia in the early 1860s and became very rich as a sugar miller in the Mackay District (which is on the east coast of Queensland). He had a mill known as Branscombe Mill and a local creek became known as Spiller's Creek with a Branscombe Road surviving to this day. The full interesting story of sugar cultivation in this area and Spiller's involvement can be read on this website: http://www.mackayhistory.org/research/sugar_mills/branscombe.html

Internet records do not show passenger lists for vessels leaving this country before 1890 but passport application details prior to this are available although it is not possible to know with certainty whether you have found the correct person as no date of birth or place of residence at the time of application are given. Applications from John Spiller and William Spiller occur in 1858 and 1860 respectively but are they the Branscombe Spiller brothers?

NEWTON, ALAN & CECIL

Mark Newton who was born in Branscombe in 1866 and had 4 children with his wife Lily (formerly Hoad). The eldest was Nussy born in 1890 and then two sons Alan born in 1892 and Cecil 1893, finally a daughter Vera 1907.

Mark Newton and his family lived at Street, Branscombe. He was a cliff farmer who worked plats at Weston below Rempstone Rocks. He is still remembered by the oldest villagers, but he was an old man when they knew him.

As Mark's sons came of working age they helped him on the plats, but must have felt that a better life beckoned elsewhere. Both sons emigrated. Cecil, the younger Newton son, left on the 5th of October 1910 aboard the ship **Matatua** bound for Auckland, New Zealand. We know that Cecil drowned during the First World War. He had joined the New Zealand Navy and reputedly was teaching himself to swim when the tragedy occurred.

Alan (sometimes spelt Allan) left for Australia in [1911] on the 17th November 1911 aboard the ship **Ballarat**, bound for Melbourne from London.

Both the Newtons are listed as farm labourers – as are a large number of the passengers.

Bill Carpenter (see WARD) reports:

Mark Newton's two sons emigrated: Cyril to New Zealand. He was in the navy, but he drowned. Alan went to Australia. He came back with the ANZACS, stayed for a year after WWII. He had land in Australia and farmed.

NORTHCOTT, WILLIAM & CHARLES

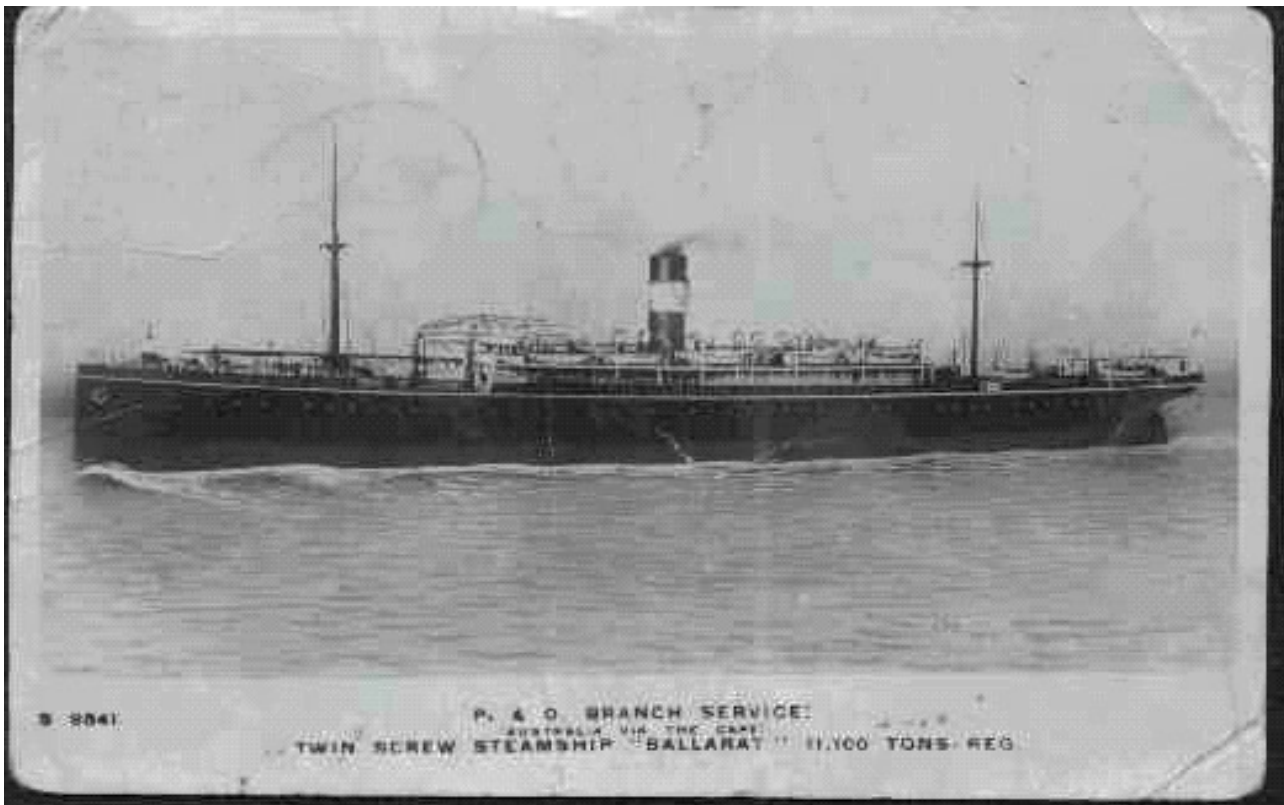
William Northcott travelled on the same ship, the ***Ballarat***, bound for Melbourne, Australia on 17th November 1911. William is listed as a baker on the ship's passenger list. On the 6th November 1913 Charles Northcott, William's younger brother sailed for Melbourne - again on the ***Ballarat***. He was 16 years old. The Northcott brothers had lived at Culverhole. Their father was a stone mason.

Bill Carpenter again (see WARD):

Two of Eileen's uncles, William and Charles went out to Australia.
[Eileen Northcott is Bill Carpenter's wife]

William may have gone out with Alan Newton. [He must have come back] – he was killed when the Germans bombed Exeter hospital.

Charles was in the Australian army. He was killed in the 1914/18 war – his name is on the War Memorial.



Above: The P & O vessel "BALLARAT" – 'AUSTRALIA VIA THE CAPE'

PILE, CHARLES, WALTER, OR BERT

Betty Rowson talking to Barbara: My aunt was called Bessie Pile and she married James Abbott. And she had a sister called Annie Pile who lived up Street, near John Bass. Their brother, I can't remember his name, went to Australia and he used to send them parcels of dried fruit at Christmas time. I remember, I must have been eight or nine, so that's seventy-five years ago.

REGISTER & CENSUS

Bessie and Annie had had six brothers. John Lewis died 1877 aged 3; John Henry died 1900 aged 5; William Francis died 1914 aged 34. This leaves three possibilities for the Australian brother: Charles b.1871, m. Alma Quick 1897, one child, Edith Harriet b. 1901, no further mention; Walter b.1876, present in the 1891 census but not the 1901, no further mention. Albert Louis b. 1889, on the 1891 census but not on the 1901, no further mention.

RENDEL/RANDLE/RENDELL, FRANK, WILLIAM, WALTER & ALFRED

Here Lily Gush talks about her paternal grandfather, William Rendle/Rendel/Randle, who had nine children.

Lily Gush [tape 31]: Grandfather [Rendell] was everything, ... he was a marvellous man. He made cakes ... He had natural curls and lovely pink cheeks, he was like an angel he was ... [They used to live in a place] they used to call Turf House ... And mother used to say the policemen used to, when her and grandfather lived up there, ... to have their meetings from Branscombe and Sidbury. ... He was up there before he was down in the village.

'Cos granny lived over Otter. He used to go over there courting so many times a week....

[When he lived in the village] he worked for the parson. ... When I was a bit of a kid, going up after school, up in the garden with grandfather to see the cucumber frames ... I can remember ...going from Little Seaside, and then next there was two fields and one field and then an orchard. The orchard belonged to the parsonage.

Granny died young ... After [she] died, he'd got a lot of children, they always said how wonderful he brought them up ...

(tape 96) There was three girls - Aunt Ellen, Aunt Liza, and [Mary – Lily's mother] ... The three girls stayed ... but the five boys went to America. ... They went out to different times. One of them went - liked it so much, he saved up till he had enough .. for the one and then the second one I remember about ... Solomon. Solomon married one of mother's sisters. ... We just called him Charlie but his name was Solomon. And Aunt Ellen married a man down Plymouth. ... There was

only mother stayed in Branscombe. ... She was the youngest daughter, yes. Because uncle Fred [Alfred] was the youngest boy. His son still writes from America. Uncle Fred's son, yeh.

Barbara: ... A lot of them went off, didn't they?

Yeah, 'course they did. They didn't have enough money. ... They saved up ... I think Uncle Fred was the first – I believe so. Then they kept sending home till they got the four ... One of the boys, Uncle Will [William] come home while mother was living. ... One of my first cousin's daughter's come home. Her mother was Myrtle Rendell - Myrtle Kalstrom ... he was a Norwegian - Neils Calstrom [?] ...

Barbara: Where did [your grandfather live when he brought up the children?

Some little cottage ... down in the Square ... [He] didn't have a pension, he had poor relief till Lloyd George pension come in. ... There was three or four cottages in a row ... opposite the blacksmith's, one of them they used to call pay house ... and grandfather went there for quite a bit ...

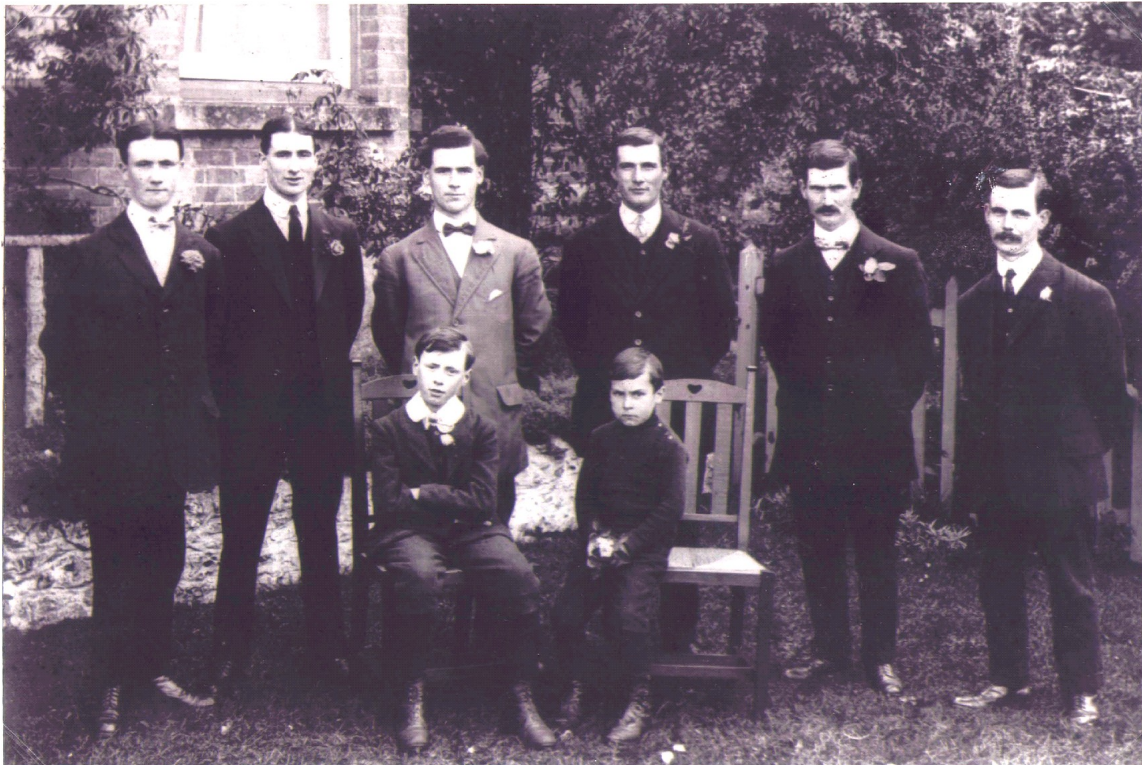
PARISH REGISTER & CENSUS RETURN

William Rendell seems to have been born in Branscombe. He married Sarah who came from Ottery. The first five children (Francis (Frank) b.1859, Eliza b.1862, Ellen b. 1864, William b. 1866, and Mary Ann b. 1869 seem to have been born outside the parish, the last four (Walter, b. 1870, Elizabeth b.1872, Alfred b. 1874 and Sarah b. 1876 were born in Branscombe. Sarah died at birth. William's wife Sarah died, aged 48, in 1879. In the 1881 census the children are all still living in the village. By 1891 the four boys (Frank, William, Walter and Alfred) have left for America. Lily said there were five boys but we haven't found the fifth.

WARD, LEWIS

Bill Carpenter doesn't believe in being recorded – 'there are too many mistakes' he says. But he has an excellent memory and this is what he told us:

Lewis Ward, born 1892, went off to Canada when he was nineteen or twenty. He had about 50 different jobs, including joining the gold rush but finding no gold. He came back in 1914 on the 'Viceroy'. Then he went to Lincolnshire and married a shop-keeper's daughter.



**The Ward Family: Horace, Stanley, Lewis, Sam, Bill Harry;
in front Charlie & Jack**

WILLIAMS, PETER

Tanya Cload married Don Cload. His mother was Ellen Williams, his grandmother was Eliza Williams. She was the sister of William Dean Dowell (see above). Tanya remembers that Eliza Williams' youngest son Peter, born in 1877, started as a farm labourer in Branscombe, but in the 1890s he and his brother Algernon left the village and became insurance agents. Peter then trained in a theological college in Nottingham, became a Methodist minister and went out to South Africa where he became president of the Methodist Movement in Cape Town. He had a large family and died in South Africa.



Rev. Peter Williams