

Epilogue

by

Graeme von Bibra

OVER THE MANY YEARS since Franz Ludwig had departed for Van Diemen's Land there had been little or no discourse between the family in Germany and that in Australia. In fact, in documents in my possession dated January 1835 the author, Heinrich Carl von Bibra, states in part: '*...of Franz Ludwig von Bibra nothing has been heard of since the year 1819 when he returned to the British Army, but it is advised by rumour that he and his family had arrived at Van Diemen's Land, where he lately died, that his eldest son was still living there and that the other children and their Mother were in England.*'

Then for many years no connection was made between the families on either side of the globe until my great-grandfather, Louis Edward, made a trip to Germany and despite language difficulties was made most welcome by his German relatives.

Again a gap of many years appeared until the 1930s, when Alfred von Bibra of Irmelshausen began writing to Charles Louis in Western Australia. These letters are still in my possession, but not those from Australia in reply. The correspondence ceased due to World War Two.

It was then not until 1952 that the relationship resumed. This occurred when my late father, Sir Eric von Bibra, and my mother, on a business trip to Germany made enquiries about the family there. They contacted them at Irmelshausen as described earlier in the book, and were warmly welcomed by Hans and Inga and Alfred (mentioned previously), and later Sigismund. There was great joy expressed that the 'lost tribe', the Gleicherwiesens, still existed and were thriving.

Then in 1955 during my first sojourn overseas all the family went to visit Irmelshausen and the first seeds of interest in the family history were sown in me, which was inevitable when confronted with this magnificent castle,

inhabited for six hundred years by one's own family and stacked with reminders of our history in every glorious room and hallway.

One evening after dinner we were enjoying a good German beer when Hans asked my father when he had been born. Father replied, "*September 2nd, 1895*", to which Hans responded, "*I was born September 1st, 1895*"; this, of course, called for more beer! Conversation then turned to World War I, during which it was disclosed that Hans had been a colonel in the German Army and my father a captain in the Australian Army. Further discussion revealed that they had both been involved in the same battles in France and both had been wounded. Of course, amid much merriment and more beer each accused the other of inflicting the injury which each had sustained – proving, of course, the stupidity of war where two men of the same family and age should be trying to kill each other.

From that re-association of the family many members of the Australian branch have visited Germany to meet their relatives and see the von Bibra



*Outside Irmelshausen Castle, 1994. Members of the von Bibra family at the reunion.
(Photo courtesy Graeme von Bibra, Margate.)*



*Gleicherwiesen branch members of the von Bibra family
at the reunion, 1994*

(Photo courtesy Graeme von Bibra, Margate)

heritage. Then in 1985, mainly at the instigation of Conrad von Bibra and his family at Brennhausen, a reunion of the worldwide von Bibra family was arranged and held in Germany, which many Australian von Bibras attended. This is thought to be the first gathering of the family to be held since early Medieval times, when the twenty-one barons from five branches had met at Bibra Castle to arrange a Peace Treaty among its disorderly members.

Then again in 1994 Conrad and family, together with Hans and family of Irmelshausen, called another reunion. This was an even greater success, with over a hundred von Bibras from all over the world attending, and including some from the U.K. who had only recently become aware of their worldwide family. This gathering had the greater incentive of being able to enter freely what had been the GDR (East Germany) where the town and castle Bibra are situated, as well as the village of Gleicherwiesen from whence the Australian branch emanated. A visit was made to Bibra where a tour of the old castle (still in the family's possession) was made and a most moving church service was



*Portion of St Leo's
Church in the village of
Bibra.*

*(Photo courtesy Graeme
von Bibra, Margate.)*

conducted in the ancient St Leo's church by Baroness Elizabeth von Bibra. The church contained a great amount of Bibra family memorabilia and really brought home to us the heritage we possess as members of this unique family.

The finale of this great reunion was a lunch in a restaurant in Bibra. It had become apparent that the Gleicherwiesen branch was the predominant one, over thirty of its members being at the reunion from a total of some one hundred present. It was therefore decided that the next reunion should be held in Australia the following year, when it was hoped that overseas relatives would attend.

In earlier times and perhaps because of much closer relationship, the family in Tasmania had been very closely knit; however, as time and relationships moved on gradually we grew apart. A great change to this state of affairs took place when we gathered together as a family at Warren and Sally von Bibra's home at Ulverstone on March 3rd, 1996. Present were



*Warren and Sally von Bibra's home, Ulverstone, at the 1996 gathering.
(Photo E. H. Nyman.)*



*Some von Bibra members at 'Coburg', standing on the bridge which replaces the ford
where Franz Ludwig von Bibra's body was found in 1823.
(Photo E. H. Nyman.)*



*At 'Beaufront', Ross, 1996.
Kenneth and Berta von
Bibra watching Baron Hans
von Bibra (Irmelshausen
Castle) planting an oak tree
to commemorate the
occasion of the reunion.
(Photo E. H. Nyman.)*



*'Beaufront', Ross.
(Photo courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth von Bibra, Ross.)*

relatives from USA, Germany, New Zealand and most states of Australia, but those attending were predominately from Tasmania. At that gathering a family was recreated. There were many differences between us in our lives – our occupations, our interests, our philosophies, etc, – but we had a common uniting bond: we were von Bibras and proud of it.

On the Monday, March 4th, the family visited 'Coburg', Cressy, the property which had been granted to our ancestor Franz Ludwig, and stood beside the place where he had been drowned. Nearby a plaque in his memory was laid by his descendants.

The gathering had a very special ending when we all lunched in the garden at 'Beaufront', Ross, as guests of Kenneth and Berta von Bibra. Afterwards an oak tree was planted by Baron Hans von Bibra as a reminder of this, the first reunion of the von Bibra family in Australia since Franz Ludwig and his family arrived here in 1823, and the first visit to Australia by senior family members from Germany.

*The plaque
at 'Coburg'
in memory
of Franz
Ludwig von
Bibra,
made by
Colin von
Bibra,
Hobart.
(Photo
E. H.
Nyman.)*

