

Bouffier Family History

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2021

Preface

This Bouffier Family History is divided into three parts: Heinrich Joseph “Henry” Bouffier, Frank James Bouffier and his wife Catharina Teresa “Catherine” Bouffier. Between these three people across forty years, *Bouffier Brothers* “made a name for themselves throughout the world for the excellence of their wines”.¹

This is their story...

Part 1: Henry Bouffier (1815–1882)

Heinrich Joseph Bouffier was born in 1815 in the village of Neudorf (Martinsthall), near the city of Eltsville, Germany. The Bouffiers had lived at Eltville since 1698. His mother Christina Schlimm was from the nearby area of Frauenstein where grapes were grown since the 12th Century.² Henry's wife Catherine (*née* Weber) was born in Camberg, Nassau. The Bouffiers were caught up in the political and economic turmoil in the German states along the Rhine river region during the 1840s. An opportunity arose to migrate as a skilled worker in the wine industry in Australia. So in 1849, Heinrich and Catherine boarded the *Parland* ship and sailed to New South Wales along with many other agricultural workers.

A family story from my mother, Elvina Holmes, is that they brought grape seedlings from the Rhine River on the boat to plant in the Hunter Valley.³ It was a long, difficult journey. Firstly, they travelled from Nassau to Portsmouth, England. Then they sailed for approximately four months to Sydney, NSW. From Sydney they travelled north to the Hunter River port of Morpeth by steamboat. Finally they took a bullock dray to the property.

The Bouffiers began their new life in the Paterson River area of the Hunter Valley, NSW. Their family expanded when Martin was born in 1850 and Frank was born on 28th October 1857. In 1866, Heinrich (known as Henry in Australia) established one of the first vineyards in the Cessnock region—on the northern side of Wollombi Road, stretching from Mount View Road to Alexander Street.⁴

The first years must have been very challenging for all the German agricultural workers in the Hunter Valley region. The Hunter River flooded regularly. Droughts and frost were also ongoing challenging problems.⁵

The new German vigneron were greatly affected by environmental problems. Due to the unfamiliar terrain, new types of soil and climate, the inaugural wine growers had to engage in new methods and experiment with new wine varieties and techniques. They moved away from their own traditional European methods and created their own Australian style.⁶

Henry Bouffier persevered through the problems and was envied for his Hunter River vineyard. He began to take a lively interest in helping and encouraging the other Hunter River vigneron.⁷ Henry wanted to improve the quality of his own wines as well as the wines from his region. A successful strategy used by Henry and other vigneron was to send consignments of wine to exhibitions rather than go to the exhibitions themselves. In 1875 the Bouffiers won medals at the Orange agricultural show and the 1874–1875 Singleton shows.

Henry was quite outspoken about community issues. He became involved in a campaign to change the NSW liquor laws. He had the view that wine would become a popular drink amongst the middle class (rather than beer or spirits). Henry also wrote detailed letters to the editors of newspapers about the Catholic Church, transport plans for the Hunter Valley and the state of the Australian wine industry. He began to be proactive in the infant Australian wine industry by sitting on committees and engaging

in any debate related to the wine industry.⁸

In the mid 1870s, the Bouffier wine business began to expand. In 1878, Bouffier and Son won a medal at the NSW Agriculture Show in Sydney for their “Pineau” wine. In 1878, F. Bouffier was awarded a medal for Burgundy wine. In April 1881, Frank Bouffier from Marcobrunner vineyard was awarded by the NSW Agricultural show the prize for the best light white wine. In 1881, Bouffier and Son won medals at the Australasian International Show in Melbourne. During the period 1877–1882, Henry and his sons (Frank and Martin) worked hard to establish wine stores in Newcastle, Sydney and Maitland, develop interstate markets and improve the quality and variety of the grapes.

The pinnacle of Henry Bouffier’s wine career was surely the Bordeaux Wine Show in October 1882. Bordeaux France was the epicentre of the European wine industry. It was a courageous move to send a wine consignment from the colonies to this important international wine competition. It was extraordinary that Bouffier and Son were awarded a Silver Medal in Bordeaux for Red Hermitage wine. It was a vindication of all their talent and hard work over several decades to be as good as the French “at their own game”.

Unfortunately one month after the Bordeaux Wine Show, Henry had a fall from a horse and he died from a fractured skull (1st November, 1882). This would have been very distressing for his wife Katherine as it was very unexpected and came so soon after the big success at Bordeaux. A wooden cross has been erected at the site of his accident in Debeyers Road, Pokolbin by the Dreyton and Tulloch families. His wife Katherine (*née* Weber) lived until age eighty-six.

Henry Bouffier played an important role in the development of the wine industry in the Hunter Valley, notably Pokolbin and Cessnock areas. His knowledge of European wine methods together with his understanding of grapes and wine was imparted not only to his sons, but to nearby Pokolbin vignerons. His experiments with new Australian viticulture processes (mainly in response to the harsh environment and new soils) helped to advance the infant Australian wine industry far beyond expectations.

Part 2: Frank Bouffier (1857–1898)

Our first knowledge of Frank is that as a boy growing up on the family farm at Paterson River, he was actively involved in felling trees and clearing 14–16 acres to improve their vineyard called *Marcobrunner*. Frank began to be named as a partner in the family wine business at a young age. For example, in 1877 when Frank was aged twenty years, “Henry Bouffier and Son” opened a wine cellar with accommodation at 40 Hunter and O’Connell Street in Sydney and were able to sell wine with a wine licence.⁹ After Henry’s death, Frank inherited the wine “depot” at 97 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst and established himself in Sydney while Martin worked at the Newcastle and Maitland depots.

When Frank was aged twenty three, he married a German woman named Catherine Gattenhof (known as Kate) on 4th May 1880 at St Mary’s Cathedral Sydney.¹⁰ Like the Bouffiers, the Gattenhof family also came from Eltville in the Dukedom of Nassau along the mighty Rhine River and immigrated during the 1850s to Sydney. During the 1880s, Frank and Catherine Bouffier had four children in close succession. In 1882 Catherine Elvina was born. In 1883 Stephen Vivien was born. In 1885 Mary Hilda was born and finally the author’s Grandmother Agnes Florence was born in 1890. The young family moved into the Darlinghurst property possibly to live closer to Catherine’s parents.

Frank and Catherine lived above or behind the wine shop in the 1880s. They began the task of establishing a strong Sydney base at the Oxford Street wine depot. At first, in 1884, the Bouffier advertisements described the shop as a *Deutsche Weinstube*, which in Germany indicated a small wine bar serving some light food.¹¹ It was very cleverly positioned because Oxford Street was beginning to be recognised as one of Sydney’s most prominent high streets. Oxford Street in 1890 was an advantaged precinct with gas lamps, horse-drawn vehicles and steam trams.

After his father’s untimely death, Frank took on a leadership role in the Australian wine growers community. Frank showed an interest in the industry as a whole by attending various meetings about wine issues with other growers.¹² He suggested a plan to create a wine association and conduct their own wine shows.¹³ Frank benefited from being involved in the marketing strategies of his father (and others) and he tried to motivate other growers to look beyond local markets. A good example is the report that “Frank Bouffier took an active role in visiting Hunter River growers with a view to inducing them to exhibit at Bordeaux”.¹⁴

The wine depot in Oxford Street began to attract a lot of interest. Local newspaper editorials encouraged the public to visit the depot to view the displays of wines, trophies and medals.

Those who are anxious to see the development of our Australian wine trade to the dimensions of a great national industry will be pleased to see the efforts of Messrs. Bouffier Bros, to improve the retailing of our Australian wines for general consumption.

They have erected and just opened what is regarded by all who have seen it as the handsomest wine arcade in Australia. They display in the windows and on pedestals the choicest wines of our country attractively bottled, and this, with the elaborate collection of trophies won by the firm in Australia, Europe, India makes up one of the most attractive sights to be seen in Sydney.

The Bouffier Brothers deserve the thanks of the entire wine-growing community of the country for their constant endeavours to popularise Australian wines with Australian people; and most undoubtedly they have been successful, and the Marcobrunner wines take the place of spirits and malt liquors in hundreds of homes, to the manifest improvement in respect of temperance.

Messrs, Bouffier Brothers' wine arcade in 97 Oxford Street is worthy of a visit by all supporters of our great wine growing industry.¹⁵

1889

Bouffier Brothers began to accumulate many awards throughout Australia. In 1889 it was reported that Bouffier Brothers had been awarded more than two hundred wine medals and approximately fifty silver cups.¹⁶ Bouffier Brothers actively pursued these wine shows because the awards generated much publicity, and there was some pride that the Northern areas of NSW had become a leading wine growing area in the State. At the 1888 Albury Show, Bouffier Brothers won a large silver cup for two first prizes in the Best Wines category.¹⁷ The following year in 1889, they were awarded a magnificent silver Champagne bucket for two first and three second prizes in the Red and White wine category.¹⁸

In the 1880s Frank began to market Australian wines on the international stage and achieved significant international sales of wine.¹⁹ He began to look at global markets and global awards for the Australian wine industry. Bouffier Brothers and other Australian wine makers began the marketing strategy of sending consignments to international exhibitions, especially between 1851–1882. There was a flow on effect to other pioneer wine makers as the Australian wines gradually gained a positive reputation around the world.²⁰ Bouffier Brothers won prizes at some of the global exhibitions such as Amsterdam, Paris and Calcutta.

One of the great highlights of Frank Bouffier's career would surely have been his inaugural wine award at the 1893 Chicago World Fair in which Bouffier Brothers competed with wine producers from all over the world. This was an amazing achievement. All the Australian (NSW) displays in wood, wool and other food products at the Chicago Fair were greatly admired. One American writer commented, "After a careful inspection of its exhibits in several departments, one feels that next to the United States, one would rather live in New South Wales than anywhere else in the world."²¹

The 1897 Sydney Show was one of Frank's last outstanding wine exhibitions. The *Australian Town and Country Journal* reported:

Messrs. Bouffier Brothers had a very fine wine trophy at the [Sydney] show. The artistic blending of the various colors, the numerous gold and silver

prize cups, trophies, and medals, and other attractions made the whole display most attractive, and the firm was warmly congratulated on the excellence of their exhibits. Some twenty different varieties of wines were shown by the Messrs. Bouffier Brothers, including ports, sherries, hocks, chablis, sauterne, clarets, burgundies, *etc.*, of various qualities and vintages, which, upon being submitted for examination, were considered to compare favorably with the choicest vintages of the old world.

This speaks well for the future wine-growing industry of Australia, and it is much to be lamented that vineyards are not being more rapidly extended. Much has been done by the firm of Messrs. Bouffier Brothers towards popularising Australian wines in the colonies, as also in the old world, their consignments to Berlin of red and white wines having received the highest commendation from German experts appointed for their examination.²²

It appears that Frank fell into poor health after that exhibition and developed Laryngeal Phthisis which was commonly known as consumption of the throat. It was thought to affect occupations such as carpet layers who were exposed to dust. Today this type of infection would be cured with antibiotics but unfortunately for Frank it was incurable. He may have developed it through the vineyards or the damp wine cellars. He died at the family home in Oxford Street at age forty on 4th January 1898. Elvina was sixteen years old, Vivien was fifteen, Hilda was thirteen and Florence was seven years. For Catherine, aged forty-one, the death of Frank would have been very distressing. She was left to care for four children and to make many decisions about the family wine business. In Frank's will she inherited the Oxford Street residence and wine store. One of her first steps was to get the wine licence transferred into her own name.²³

Frank was a very hard worker throughout his career, especially during the phase when he owned the Oxford Street wine business and residence on the one site. He used innovative ideas to enlarge his business such as starting a wine cafe, creating interesting visual displays in the shop and frequent advertising and editorial marketing in many different newspapers. Frank was a leader in the wine blending and wine tasting fields. He is described as one of the one of the "most eminent wine experts of the day."²⁴ Elvina Holmes related that he was a judge at the Sydney Show and could tell the type of soil where a grape was grown. Despite his own business success, Frank still tried to encourage fellow wine makers to consider overseas business and award opportunities. He worked hard to influence the NSW wine laws in order to make them fair to retailers and spent a lot of time writing long detailed letters to the press (as his father had done) about wine related issues in the 1880–1890s.

A major legacy of Frank Bouffier was his efforts to foster a positive reputation for Australia on the international wine stage. However an old family poem from that year shows that he was also "a devoted family man . . . a man who was beloved by everyone . . . a fond husband . . . a friend to each and all."²⁵ Catherine must have missed his presence in her life because she often wrote loving memorial messages in the newspapers about Frank for another ten years; with words such as "Not gone from memory, not gone from love, but gone to a better home above."²⁶

Part 3: Catherine Bouffier (*née* Gattenhoff) (1857–1940)

Catherine was supported in her unexpected loss by her father Christoff Gattenhof, Frank's brother Martin and her own family. Martin Bouffier took over the grape production so she could concentrate on keeping the Sydney depot operational. The children were sent to boarding school at St Joseph's Hunters Hill and Loreto Normanhurst. Despite their huge loss in the death of Frank, Catherine and Martin pressed on with the business and retained the name *Bouffier Bros*.

Catherine did not have an easy role in taking over the Sydney wine depot. There was a large temperance movement which actively promoted abstinence from alcohol. Women were not treated equally in society. Women in Australia did not have the vote until 1902. Catherine did not have the same freedom as Frank Bouffier to travel around the country, join the gentlemen in their wine meetings or write long spiels to newspapers. However, she did have her own wine licence, which was very rare for a woman in 1898. She still had the support of her brother in law, Martin Bouffier in the Hunter Valley region. So Catherine began to manage the successful wine depot largely by herself for a number of years. By August in the year of Frank's death, Bouffier Brothers had a new display of their claret, hock and Malaga light wines at the Brisbane Show and received another positive press review.²⁷ However Catherine was in for more bad news when her beloved father died in the same year, November 1898.

Also during 1898, Catherine's paternal nephew, Frank Hurley, ran away from home in Sydney when he was aged thirteen. This would have been quite worrisome to his parents and the family. When Frank returned to Sydney with an interest in photography, Catherine helped Frank by giving him permission to take all the empty wine bottles from the wine bar. The family has passed down a story that Frank used the money obtained from the bottles to buy film and purchase his first camera. The family, including Florence Bouffier, went for picnics to South Head and Bondi so young Frank could spend endless hours photographing waves.²⁸

In 1911, Frank Hurley, the grandson of Henry Bouffier, went on his first Antarctica journey with Mawson, which would have been very worrying for the whole family. However it was the trip to Antarctica with Shackleton during 1914–1916, which would have been even more distressing. It appeared that Frank may have been killed on the journey as the ship had not returned. All contact was lost with them. Fortunately, Frank did return with his astounding photographs and established himself as a notable, innovative Australian photographer.²⁹

Catherine added her own creative touch to the wine business. Records from 1887 onwards, consistently complimented Bouffier Bros on the visual displays.³⁰ After Frank's death, Catherine (and possibly Martin) invented a pyramidal shelving display unit that could be taken to various shows. This was very successful and so they constructed thirteen display units. This editorial from the NSW Sydney Agricultural Show at Moore Park in 1899 commended the company on the pyramidal style display and the elaborate

decorations. Bouffier Bros received the “Champion Prize” for the best exhibition of wines at this show:

BOUFFIER BROTHERS’ WINE EXHIBIT.

At the late Royal Agricultural Show Messrs. Bouffier had the finest trophy of Australian wine ever seen at Moore Park. This splendid exhibition consisted of assorted wines. Each pyramid was surmounted by a beautifully designed decanter of wine, and in addition the central pyramid was surmounted by a kangaroo, holding a number of coloured ribbons connecting each decanter. Arranged amongst the bottles were a number of bunches of artificially made black and white grapes, with green vine leaves attached to the stalks, which gave a charming effect to the whole exhibit. Messrs. Bouffier were awarded the champion prize for this splendid trophy of Australian wines.

The well known firm of Bouffier Brothers has been established for more than forty years. The father of the present proprietors planted vineyards on the Hunter and Paterson Rivers in the fifties, and thus early established himself in New South Wales as a noted vigneron. Messrs. Bouffier Brothers have, by their skill and enterprise, made a name for themselves throughout the world for the excellence of their wines. They have been awarded more than two hundred medals, both gold and silver, and about fifty silver cups, all of which are beautifully designed. A noteworthy feature in Messrs. Bouffier’s wine competitions is that being northern planters they beat the southern vignerons at Albury in 1888 and 1889. On those occasions they were awarded two beautiful silver cups. Not only have Messrs. Bouffier Brothers taken a large number of prizes in the Australasian colonies. They have received the highest awards at Paris, Bordeaux, Amsterdam, Indian and Colonial Exhibition (London), Calcutta Exhibition, and Chicago for the very high quality of their wines. These awards speak volumes for the excellence of Messrs. Bouffier’s wines.

This article was accompanied by a rare photo of the display and some of the silver trophies.³¹

Bouffier Bros were chosen to be involved in the celebrations for the Federation of Australia. On 5th January 1901, there was a large Commonwealth Dinner at the Sydney Town Hall to celebrate Federation. Bouffier Bros were the suppliers of wine for the evening. An extraordinary photo was taken of the one thousand male guests sitting at long tables eating an elaborate French inspired banquet. It was a very prestigious event attended by the first Governor General, the Earl of Hopetoun. Catherine must have been very proud that night. It was often mentioned in Bouffier Bros advertising in the years to follow. Bouffier Bros seemed to reach their peak around the period 1901–1903. In the early years of the twentieth century, newspaper articles such as this one described the wine business as “the largest in the Southern Hemisphere”.

AUSTRALIAN WINES:

AT THE COMMONWEALTH STATE BANQUET
A FIRST-CLASS NATIVE PRODUCT.

The name of Bouffier Bros, Vignerons and Wine Merchants, of the Hunter River, and 97 Oxford Street Sydney, is a household word throughout these districts, and, in fact throughout Australasia. They make a first-class wine,

which advertises itself wherever used. The firm has been established over 50 years, for it was in the early forties when the father of the present Messrs. Bouffier Bros, planted his vineyard in the valley of the Hunter River. This business has grown wonderfully since then, and is now the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. These wines have secured numerous prizes in all parts of the world, inside and outside of Australia, and have gained much favor among consumers in the land where they are produced. At the recent Commonwealth State banquet the wines were supplied by Messrs. Bouffier Bros—a fact that speaks for itself. Their sampling kiosk will be at the ensuing Maclean Show, in charge of Mr. V. Bouffier, who will be pleased to receive orders on behalf of the firm *Australian Wines*.³²

The proud history of the Bouffier family was promoted for some time, as seen by this advertisement in 1903;

The firm (Bouffier Brothers) justly claim first place as winegrowers, with a prize list including Paris, Bordeaux, Amsterdam, Calcutta, and last, but not least, the recent Chicago World's Fair where they obtained the couched gold medal for four wines, namely, Hock, Claret, Frontignac, and Malaga.³³

However there was increasing competition from new rivals, legal issues about Henry's land and Catherine's only son Vivien did not want to take over the family wine business.

In Catherine's later years she moved out of Oxford Street and closed the doors of the wine business, perhaps around the time that Martin Bouffier died. She moved to 37 Avoca Street Randwick. Later she relocated to 113 Middle Head Road, Mosman in 1933. She devoted a lot of time to charitable work, supporting the children's schools, Catholic Church social events and the Waitara Foundling Home. Her name was often mentioned in the newspaper at events and family photos show she was an elegant dresser. Elvina Holmes proudly retold the family story that Catherine was the first female wine judge at the Sydney Royal Easter Show.³³

During her long life, Catherine had to overcome a lot of difficult times. She suffered the loss of two infants, the early untimely death of her beloved husband and the unexpected death of her eldest daughter, Katie Elvina in 1922. She lived through the 1890 Depression, World War 1, the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 and the Great Depression.

Catherine Teresa Bouffier (*née* Gattehnof) is remembered for her courage in taking on a wine business in 1897 at a time when women were expected to stay at home. She brought her creative flair to the business. She was very proud of the medals and trophies and loved to display them. She also helped her children Elvina, Vivien, Hilda and Florence by giving them a very good education. She helped her paternal nephew, Frank Hurley embark on his photographic career. She helped her maternal nieces Hilda and Pat Noonan when they lost their mother Elvina in 1923. Catherine stayed true to her Catholic religion and remained a loving mother all her life. Catherine lived a long life and passed away on 31st August 1940 aged 84.

From humble beginnings in Cessnock, the Bouffiers flourished because of faith. Henry had faith he could transport the German wine techniques to Australia. Frank had faith that he could expand their wine business across Australia and internationally. Catherine had faith in herself that she could become a prominent female business operator.

In spite of all the hardships, the Bouffier family flourished because they had faith in themselves and faith in the future.

Footnotes

1. “Bouffier Brothers Wine Exhibit”. 1899. *Australian Town and Country Journal*. 15/4/1899, p 34.
2. Reynolds, K.M. “The Frauenstein Letters”. Peter Lang Publishers. Bern 2009: details the voyage of the immigrants from this Eltville region, specifically mentioning the Gattenhof/Rappenecker/Rheinberger families.
3. Elvina Elizabeth Holmes (*née* Fitzpatrick) is the mother of the author. Elvina was born in 1925, to Herbert and Florence Fitzpatrick (*née* Bouffier). Florence was the daughter of Frank Bouffier and Catherine Bouffier (*née* Gattenhof).
4. “The Bouffiers established the first vineyard in 1866 in Cessnock” quote in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13/3/1923, p 8. (near the Cessnock showground)
5. Wikipedia. “Hunter River, NSW”.
6. Mikaël Pierre, “‘France of the southern hemisphere’: transferring a European wine model to colonial Australia”. History. Université Michel de Montaigne; Bordeaux III; University of Newcastle (Australia), 2020, p 189.
7. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25/11/1882, p 13.
8. *Maitland Mercury*, 18/12/1875, p 6. (one example of many long letters to the Editor) The letters in a range of newspapers written by Henry show a high degree of literacy.
9. *Freeman’s Journal*, 12/5/1877, p 3.
10. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8/5/1880, p 1.
11. *Evening News*, 31/10/1884, p 4.
12. *Maitland Mercury*, 2/6/1888, p 6. (Frank rallies other vigneron to help change the NSW alcohol laws).
13. *Maitland Mercury*, 28/10/1882, pp 4-5.
14. *Maitland Advertiser*, 28/2/1882, p 5.
15. *Evening News*, 23/12/1889, p 5.
16. *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 15/4/1899, p 34.
17. Trophy still held by family member.
18. Trophy held by family member.
19. *Sydney Mail*, 28/10/1882, p 758.
20. Background reading from book: Mikaël Pierre. “‘France of the southern hemisphere’: transferring a European wine model to colonial Australia”. History. Université Michel de Montaigne; Bordeaux; University of Newcastle (Australia), 2020. English version.
21. *Brisbane Courier*, 31/7/1893, p 7.

22. *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 1/5/1897, p 20.
23. Family held Will document. Memorial in *Daily Telegraph*, 4/1/1901, p 1.
24. “Messrs. Bouffier Brothers’ Exhibit.” (1897, May 1). *Australian Town and Country Journal* (NSW: 1870 - 1907), p. 20.
Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article71292693>
25. Family letter, “Father” , By J.C.J. Ryan, 1898 (in possession of the author).
26. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4/1/1900.
27. *Brisbane Courier*, “Exhibition at Brisbane”, 12/8/1898, p 4.
28. Elvina Holmes, family history notes.
29. Website: <https://www.antarctica.gov.au>
30. *Evening News*, 23/12/1889, p 5.
31. *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 15/4/1899, p 34.
32. *Clarence River Advocate*, 22/3/1901, p 8.
33. *Daily Telegraph*, 9/10/1903
34. Elvina Holmes, family history written notes and oral story.

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- Research notes (handwritten and typed) by Elvina Holmes, December 1981. Earlwood. NSW.
- “Fruits of the Vine”, Booklet, 1992.
- Trove website (digital archive of Australian newspapers). Public List: Bouffier articles by Viv. (47 newspaper articles). Category: LISTS. Created by member vivianneb 21/6/2021.
- Mikaël Pierre. “France of the southern hemisphere’: transferring a European wine model to colonial Australia”. History. Université Michel de Montaigne; Bordeaux; University of Newcastle (Australia), 2020. English version.
- Story (supplied), 2020, Bayview Gardens, NSW.
- *Australian Dictionary of Biography: ADB Home: Background Information about Francis (Frank Hurley)* by A.F. Pike.
- Website: <https://www.antarctica.gov.au> (Frank Hurley information)

Thanks from the author

I want to thank my mother Elvina Holmes, *née* Fitzpatrick (d.) for starting my family history journey. You were a true ‘Noble Friend.’ Many thanks to my patient husband and family. Thanks to cousin Sarah, for her early research into the Bouffier family. Thanks to Bettina LeGras for editing and Peter LeGras for typesetting this document. Thanks to the team on Scotland Island (2021) for your encouragement and motivation.