Extract from Skarratt Web site

"Australian Tom"

Since writing the article "An Australian Connection" for the summer issue of 'The Well', more information about the Skarratt family has come to light.  We now know that there was once a linen draper who lived in the small market town of Kington in Herefordshire. Being a draper he was one of the first to hear of any deaths that occurred in the town, for he supplied black crepe for hat bands and black ribbon for arm bands, or even bolts of suitably dark material for making up mourning clothes. These deaths were all recorded in his diary, often with comments on the manner of death and the nature of the lost one. His diaries also a reveal a lively interest in everything that went on in the town. Very keen on all manner of sporting activities, he commented on the football and cricket matches between the boys of Kington and the neighbouring towns and villages. He described  fishing trips made with his friends; skating outings with his daughter when the severe winters of the 1880's froze the local ponds; and otter hunting up and down the local rivers and brooks.  His comments on musical events are somewhat pithy, being inclined  to describe the effects of the town band or the church choir as producing plenty of noise but not much music. The annual horticultural shows are dealt with lovingly, giving full lists of prizes won by himself-and they were considerable in number. Agricultural shows were always attended and market trends noted. It is interesting to find the misdemeanors of the young were much the same as they are today, such pranks as taking gates of hinges and leaving them in other people's gardens being mentioned.
He was named Thomas Carleton Skarratt, after his father, and the main purpose of the diaries was to keep the scattered members of his family in touch with each other and with the events in their home town of Kington, by posting copies of the diaries from one family to the next, from Kington to Ludlow; to Wigan; Sydney or Melbourne, etc. Two of his younger brothers were William and Charles. William was at first in partnership with him in the draper's business, but later decided to emigrate to Australia to join Charles, who had already gone there. With a neighbour Walter Hall, who had borrowed money from his friends to enable him to get to Australia. Charles had settled in Geelong by 1853, near the goldfields in Victoria. Here he set up a "hotel" for miners and their families, while Walter opened a "store". Both did well and in 1854 Charles married a London born girl called Mary Ellen Wren. This couple (Charlie and Nell in the diaries) raised a large family in Geelong, Melbourne and Sydney, thirteen in all, of whom nine survived. Walter Hall married the diarist's elder sister, Elizabeth (Liz), and both families prospered in the new country, moving from Geelong to Melbourne and from there to Sydney, where eventually in 1881 a large house was built for Charles, called "Carleton". (It is still there and is now a large children's hospital at Summer Hill.)
In 1878 Charles and Walter had become shareholders in the Mount Morgan Mining Company in New South Wales, and they were rich enough to make visits to England. The diary entry for the 12th. of February, 1878 reads "A letter to hand to Henry (another brother) and self in which he mentions the all but decision to send Tom to England". The "all-but" soon became definite, because on the 23rd April came a letter from Tom (who was the eldest son of Charles and Mary Ellen and was called Thomas Carleton Skarratt after his grandfather and his uncle the diarist) to announce that he was in New York and would leave for England on 18th April. On arrival Tom went to stay with his uncle Henry in Ludlow on 5th May, and visited Kington a day or two later. A series of visits to old friends and members of the family followed during the next month or two, and on one occasion the diary records "24th October, Australian Tom came by the 5.00pm. train to spend the night with us". The next year Tom spent at Ludlow before going up to Cambridge. On 6th April, 1880 his uncle wrote "Australian Tom paid us a visit, just for the day, prior to his resuming his studies at Cambridge".
In 1881 Charles decided to bring the rest of his family to England, and they all, except for one daughter, duly arrived in Ludlow in June of that year. The elder girls evidently went away to school, but the two youngest, twins Violet and Daisy, stayed in Ludlow. In December 1881 it was recorded that "Tom had passed his exam" in Cambridge. That was the last mention of Tom until 1885 when he was said to be going to Australia for his health. How long he stayed there is not known, but in 1886 he was a curate at Christ Church, Lancaster Gate, and in 1889 Lord Saukville presented him to the Living of Kemsing, where he died in 1908.
So the next time you walk through the chancel of St Mary's Church, trying as always not to walk on the monumental brass that lies in the middle of the floor, you will know that it was put there in memory of "Australian Tom".

V.E. Bowden

The descendants of the above family members still live in Australia
 My thanks to Mr. Victor Bowden, Kemsing.