

## The Families BENISCHOWITZ and PYCROFT

Jacob BENISCHOWITZ was born circa 1851 in Shelel (Shellil), Lithuania (then a province of the Russian Empire). A practising Jew, he was the son of Barry and Priva BENISCHOWITZ. In 1893 he was a hotel keeper in Kimberley and died “a retired property owner” resident at “Gransmore” (“Gransmoor”) 12 Tamboerskloof Road / Burnside Road, Cape Town on 11 September 1923 <sup>1</sup>.

He was married “out of community of property as advised by Dr. Lubbert being the law governing the State of Saxony in 1873” to Amalia Bella SELMAN(N), the daughter of Jacob SELMAN.

The couple clearly met in Leipzig (“Lupsic”), Saxony, moved to the Cape Colony in 1886 and were followed a year later by Jacob SELMAN, an hotel keeper in 1887.

Jacob BENISCHOWITZ took the Declaration of Allegiance <sup>2</sup> to the Government of the Cape of Good Hope before Edward William Blyth, Justice of the Peace for Griqualand West, on 30 August 1893. He had arrived in the colony in 1886. He received his Naturalisation together with Jacob SELMAN, John Charles WINKLER, Paul Frederick SMITH, all Prussians.

The couple had eight children :

- Sophie married to Edward IMMERMANN
- Minna married to Solomon Abel KAPLAN
- Annie <sup>3</sup> born 1883 married to Sam TWERSKY (sic. TIVERSKY)
- Lena married to Nathan SARKIN
- Fanny married to Isaac KANTOR
- Barney BENISCHOWITZ born 1889
- Pauline <sup>4</sup> married to Harry LYONS
- Myer Isaac BENISCHOWITZ born 1895 <sup>5</sup>

The family moved to Cape Town circa 1902 and in January 1903 Jacob Benischowitz raised a bond of £800 through the Colonial Orphan Chamber on a 2 properties in Everstedt (Eberstadt), Woodstock <sup>6</sup>.

Jacob BENISCHOWITZ died well-to-do. He left cash of £1,856 and 6 properties in Woodstock, 7 properties in Caledon Street, Cape Town, 4 properties in Buitengracht Street, Cape Town, 5 properties in Observatory and the family home in Tamboerskloof, Cape Town. These realised £19,596 at auction. His executors were Alfred Philipp Bender (the rabbi of the Gardens Synagogue), Jacob Selman ( then still resident in Kimberley) and Myer Isaac Benischowitz (his youngest son).

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<sup>1</sup> Death Notice [MOOC 6/9/2515.2359](#)

<sup>2</sup> Declaration of Allegiance under Aliens Naturalisation Act, 1883 . [KAB CO 4286.C29](#)

<sup>3</sup> Annie TWERSKY née BENISCHOWITZ born Kimberley on 24 August 1883 aged 82 years 9 months. She died on 20 May 1966 in the Rand Clinic, Hillbrow, Johannesburg [TAB MHG 4957/66](#). Her occupation was a housewife. She married Simon TWERSKY who died 1932 / 3. Off-spring : Golda (Olga) TOPTANI, divorcee of No 1034, Lexington Avenue, New York, USA. Sister: Pauline Lyons née BENISCHOWITZ. Nephew: Max WILK, 348 Highland Road, Kensington, Johannesburg

<sup>4</sup> Pauline BENISCHOWITZ married Harris Raphael LYONS born Swansea, Wales circa April 1887 when aged 49 years 10 months. He died on 5 February 1937 in Norman Nursing Home, Davis Street, Doornfontein, Johannesburg [TAB MHG 96267/37](#). His occupation was a Dental surgeon [ Father: Solomon LYONS, 47 Eliot Road, Hendon, London; Mother: Esther Lyons née GOODMAN ]. Off-spring and date of birth: Estelle Lyons b. 19 September 1922

<sup>5</sup> Meyer Isaac BENISCHOWITZ (b. 1895) married in the Gardens Synagogue by A P Bender 8 June 1926 Beatrice ZACKON (b. 1901). The couple had two daughters (b. 1928 and 1931 respectively). The marriage brought a dowry of £10,012 which was reclaimed at the time of divorce. Declared incompatible, with an irrevocable break-down in their relationship, a divorce was granted by Mr Justice Sutton on 5 December 1935. He also officiated over the divorce of Meyer Isaac BENISCHOWITZ who married Ida ABRAMOWITZ (b. 1911) in Durban on 21 October 1936. Clearly deeply upset, and cognisant of the fact that Ida would be “entirely without funds”, Meter B. volunteered at the time of the divorce on 20 March 1940 to pay her £20 per month until her death or remarriage. There were no offspring. He was an alumnus of South African College School 1913-1915. The History of the South African College. W Ritchie. Ed.1918. Vol.II. 853. Myer (sic) Isaac Benischowitz LDSRCS Eng, 1918 First registered in South Africa 1919. Reference : Register for Medical Practitioners and Dentists for Union of South Africa, 1920

<sup>6</sup> Title deeds originally granted to George Glaesar on 21 November 1826.

Each child was given equal portions of the estate except for Myer Isaac Benischowitz who, at the time the will was drawn up, was “studying to become a dentist or medical practitioner” and received an additional £1,000 with which to purchase a practise when qualified. This he did as a dentist, setting up practice in Dawlish Road, Plumstead.

On the death of his mother, Barney BENISCHOWITZ was awarded £2,255/14/11 from the combined estate. However, in anticipation thereof, and on the 12 March 1924 in Kimberley, he had ceded all his rights to the inheritance <sup>7</sup> against a loan of £700. The reason for the loan is not evident.

Amilia Bella BENISCHOWITZ née SELMAN was born in Leipzig, Saxony date unknown (1853). She died 26 April 1924. Her age was not given <sup>8</sup> though it is stated as 71 years on her gravestone. She was illiterate signing her will with an “ X ”. Her personal estate relative to that of her husband was small, some £689. Though her children were her husband’s main beneficiaries, she had had usufruct of her husband’s estate whilst alive.

Barney BENISCHOWITZ was born in Beaconsfield, Kimberley circa May 1889. He died aged 36 years 7 months on 11 December 1925 in Hillbrow Nursing Home, Johannesburg <sup>9</sup>. The cause of death is unknown.

His occupation was that of a Solicitor. He was articled to Jan Johan Michau on 19 February 1908. He received permission to break articles on 6 April 1909 for nine months in order to study for his matriculation examinations. He recommenced articles on 24 January 1910; received his Certificate in Law from the University of the Cape of Good Hope in December 1911; defended his degree successfully before Advocates Buchanan, Moore and van Zyl on 10 July 1912; and was admitted to the role as an attorney and notary public. He swore allegiance to George VI of Great Britain and Northern Ireland before the Hon. Mr Justice Searle, sponsored by Michau, de Villiers and Trill on 4 February 1913. He was one of four so admitted in that year <sup>10</sup>.

He was to marry Edith Gertrude PYCROFT, a medical practitioner.

Edith Gertrude PYCROFT was born 3 November 1883 and died 20 August 1980. Her marriage to Barney BENISCHOWITZ is alluded to in some documents but the details of date and place are never mentioned. The couple produced two children, Ruth and Barney Jacob. Dr. Edith BENISCHOWITZ was pregnant with the latter at the time of her husband’s death in 1925.

Edith Gertrude BENISCHOWITZ (née PYCROFT) appears in the Medical & Pharmacy Register for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope from 1935 onwards <sup>11</sup>. Her Qualifications are given as MB ChB (Univ. Edin 1906). In 1920, Dr Edith Gertrude Benischowitz received the first diploma ever awarded in public health from the University of Cape Town <sup>12</sup>.

Her registered addresses are given first as Cape Town Health Department and then 5 Bray’s Court, Station Rd, Mowbray. She practised under the name Dr Benischowitz until the 1930’s and thereafter reassumed her maiden name. From 1950 until 1973, the entry in the South African Medical & Dental Council Register reads BENISCHOWITZ (now PYCROFT) <sup>13</sup>. She ceased practising aged 90 years.

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<sup>7</sup> “ceded all his right and interest in and to the said inheritance by way of collateral security for due payment of an amount which is being advanced to him by Dinah COHEN born ALMAN, widow”. Interest of 8% paid half-yearly and the ceding of a £1,000 life policy with African Guarantee Indemnity Company completed the transaction.

<sup>8</sup> Death Notice, Inventory of combined estate and Final Liquidation Account [MOOC 6/9/2611/4274 ; 13/1/5272.1365](#)

<sup>9</sup> Death Notice [TAB MHG 58932/25](#)

<sup>10</sup> Admissions : Attorneys, Advocates, Notary Public, Conveyancers, Sworn Translators Commissioners of the Supreme Court . [CSC 9/6/2/1](#). Admissions : Attorneys, Advocates, Notary Public, Conveyancers, Sworn Translators, Commissioners Abroad, Commissioners for Foreign Governments [CSC 9/2/38](#)

<sup>11</sup> The Medical & Pharmacy Register for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope.

<sup>12</sup> Louw, JH. In the Shadow of Table Mountain : A History of the University of Cape Town Medical School. Struik, Cape Town. 1969.

<sup>13</sup> South African Medical & Dental Council Register

After working for the South African Railways, she was appointed to the Cape Town Municipality as a Junior Assistance Medical Officer on 26 September 1929, beginning her service on 15 October 1929. Being obliged to present a birth certificate for the first time ever, she applied for a copy. With its arrival, she discovered for the first time that her year of birth was 1883 rather than 1885 which she has always understood it to be <sup>14</sup>.

At the end of February 1922, Dr Edith Gertrude Pycroft made history by being one of the early residents of the Garden City of Pinelands, buying "Runnymede" situated at the north corner of The Mead, Pinelands <sup>15</sup>.

In 1940, her children, Ruth and Barney Jacob BENISCHOWITZ made application for a change of their surname to the Supreme Court, Pretoria and this was granted by Order of the Court on 11 July 1940. The underlying reason for the application is not clear <sup>16</sup> but the date may be significant.

The Family Pycroft is an interesting one <sup>17</sup>.

James Thomas PYCROFT was born in 1857 in Manchester, the son of Silvanus Pycroft (mother unknown). In Manchester, he married Edith PYCROFT who was baptised 1 December 1857 in Middlesbrough, Yorkshire. She was the daughter of William BOWES and Louisa ("Lucy") TILSON.

At the time of the 1881 British Census of England, Scotland and Wales lists James Thomas PYCROFT, aged 24 years, a Dentist's Assistant <sup>18</sup> and Edith PYCROFT, his wife, aged 23 years, as living at No 11 Grove Place, Caversham, Oxford. They had no children at the time.

We next meet them in South Africa when, on 28 September 1899, Edith Pycroft assisted by her husband, James Thomas Pycroft, raises a bond of £1600 to purchase two pieces of land in Greenpoint, Cape Town <sup>19</sup>. Witnesses to the deed were Gertrude and Claude Pycroft.

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<sup>14</sup> This led to the suggestion that she was trying to hoodwink the authorities, and she being of 45 years of age, immediately became ineligible to join the Cape Town Municipal Pension Fund. In moving to The Council, she lost pension benefits from the South African railways. Further, it obliged her to have changed her marriage certificate, insurance policies and other documents (not detailed) which increased her financial burden. [KAB 3/CT 4/1/5/761. G345/5](#)

<sup>15</sup> see [www.pelteret/publications/pinelands](http://www.pelteret/publications/pinelands)

<sup>16</sup> [SAB URU 1887. 2037](#) Application for change of surname : RUTH BENISCHOWITZ and BARNEY JACOB BENISCHOWITZ "to assume the surname of PYCROFT."

Reasons advanced by RB: 'For the reason that my mother, Edith Gertrude Pycroft (formerly B), a widow, with whom I reside, has reverted to her maiden name of Pycroft.'

Reasons advanced by mother for change of BJB's name: 'For the reason that I am a widow and have reverted to my maiden name of PYCROFT and that the said BJB is under my custody and control.'

Extract from report by Deputy Commissioner, Commanding Cape Western Division: "I have the honour to inform you that the mother of the two abovenamed, who is a medical practitioner and in the employ of the Health Department of the Cape Town City Council, has, since the death of her husband, which occurred fourteen and a half years ago, reverted to her maiden name of Pycroft. The father was an attorney at Kimberly. RB is twenty-four years of age and is a teacher at the Ellerslie School, Green Point, Cape Town, and BJB is fourteen years of age and a scholar at the Wynberg High School. Both were born in Cape Town. The family is well-respected at Pinelands and there would appear to be no Police objection to the application which has been made for the change of name."

APPROVED by Order of the Court : 11-7-1940

<sup>17</sup> For the record : The name is first mentioned in a document dated 20 April 1809 when Stackhouse and Pycroft apply to the Colonial Secretary, H Alexander, to allow the landing in Cape Town of liquor and hops from the Portuguese Ship "Elizabeth". However, this was no direct relative. [KAB CO 3872.184](#)

<sup>18</sup> Thomas James Pycroft. Date of Certificate 15 September 1894. Lic. Den. Surg. R. Coll. Surg. Ireland, 1893. First registered in South Africa 1897. Reference : Medical & Pharmacy Register for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1897

<sup>19</sup> Title first granted to Isaac Petrus Hendrick van der Poel on 22 January 1858. [KAB DOC 4/1/682.5011](#)

On 8 May 1903, James Thomas Pycroft bought a further property on Bellevue (sic Belle Vue) Estate <sup>20</sup> against a bond of a further £1600.

James Thomas PYCROFT and Edith BOWES had four offspring :

- Claude Sylvanus PYCROFT
- Edith Gertrude BENISCHOWITZ
- Bertha JUCHAU
- Dorothy Bowes FERN

In South Africa, James Thomas PYCROFT practiced as a dentist. When he died, he was living at “The Corner”, Forest Place / Acacia Way, Pinelands. He died aged 70½ years of pneumonia on 21 April 1927 leaving an estate of £954 with his wife as sole beneficiary <sup>21</sup>.

Edith Pycroft, his wife, died at “The Corner” on 3 July 1943 aged 85¾ years. She left her estate of £280 to her daughters. No mention is made of her son.

## The Families BENISCHOWITZ and PYCROFT

- pictorial record of elements of their history



IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
JACOB BENISCHOWITZ  
AN EXEMPLARY HUSBAND AND FATHER  
WHO WAS GATHERED TO HIS ANCESTORS  
11<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 1923, AGED 71  
DEEPLY MOURNED BY HIS SORROWING FAMILY

<sup>20</sup> [KAB DOC 4/1/1937.3632](#) Belle Vue Estate is famous for having been one of the strategic land purchases of Lödewyk (Louis) Serrurier [see [www.pelteret.co.za/genealogy/serrurier](http://www.pelteret.co.za/genealogy/serrurier)].

<sup>21</sup> Death Notice [MOOC 6/9/3127.14590](#)



IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
 AMALIA, RELICT OF JACOB BENISCHOWITZ,  
 WHO JOINED HER HUSBAND IN THE LIFE EVERLASTING, 26 APRIL 1924 AGED 71  
 THEY WHO WERE UNITED IN HAPPY WEDLOCK IN THEIR LIVES  
 WERE NOT DIVIDED IN THEIR DEATHS  
 "HER CHILDREN RISE UP AND THEY ARE BLESSED"

Jacob BENISCHOWITZ born circa 1851 died 11 September 1923. Jewish Allotment. Gate 8. Plot 74256C Maitland Cemetery. Amilia Bella BENISCHOWITZ née SELMAN born circa 1853 died 26 April 1924. Jewish Allotment. Gate 8. Plot 74256B. Maitland Cemetery



Jacob and Amelia BENISCHOWITZ lived at "Gransmore" ("Gransmoor") 12 Tamboerskloof Road cnr. Burnside Road, Cape Town. Later, the property was subdivided into three. The five Washington palms (*Washington robusta*) are thought formerly to have lined a driveway leading up to the house.



James Thomas PYCROFT born 1857 died 21 April 1927. Episcopal. Allotment. Gate 2. Plot 19432B (below) Maitland Cemetery. Edith PYCROFT baptised 1 December 1857 died 3 July 1943. Episcopal. Allotment. Gate 2. Plot 19432B (on top) Maitland Cemetery. Edith Gertrude PYCROFT was born 3 November 1883 and died 20 August 1980. Gate 2. Plot 19432B Maitland Cemetery (ashes thought to be interred here).



ALFRED PHILIPP BENDER  
 MINISTER OF THE CAPE TOWN HEBREW CONGREGATION  
 FROM 1895 TO 1937.

A TRUE JEW, A GREAT SOUTH AFRICAN, AN INSPIRING SPIRITUAL LEADER, A DEVOTED PUBLIC WORKER,  
 HE SERVED GOD BY LOVING ALL MANKIND, AND MADE EXAMPLE HIS FOREMOST PRECEPT

BORN IN DUBLIN (IRELAND) 16<sup>th</sup> APRIL 1863. DIED 18<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 1937.  
 MAY HIS MEMORY BE FOR BLESSING.

An incidental finding : the grave of Alfred Philipp Bender, rabbi, lies across the path from his friends,  
 Jacob and Amilia Bella BENISCHOWITZ

**Monday, 31 May 2004**

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