

What one piece of information can reveal – A Life Changing Moment

I have been involved in genealogy for many years and quite often it comes into conversation, back in 2013 I was asked to help find additional information for a close family friend. Initially I was asked about her family and within a couple of days I was able to provide some more detail. I was then asked if I could assist her husband, her was adopted out at 2 weeks old in India. This adoption had always been known to me and while being a very strong family orientated person, he never really showed much interest in genealogy due to the fact nothing was known about his real family. My first thought was to ask do they have anything, a document, story etc, and with this she was able to produce a letter. This letter essentially indicated that she would not make any claims in the future and it was signed 'Sylvia Erskine-Cowper'. Ironically, the clue was staring them in the face all along, this was a double barrel surname and in India, this was GOLD!

Over the next few nights, I was able to track down the Erskine-Cowper family back to a Glen (John) Harrison Cowper (1855-1907) and Mary Aileen Erskine (1864-1930) where the double barrel surname was formed. By various means I was able to form this family and connections. On the Erskine side, a William David Erskine (1813-1839) came from England into India and was Captain in the Madras Army. His ancestry linked up with some previous research on this family. Erskine hailed from Scotland and was tied in with the Bruce & Dundas families of Nobility and Royalty in Scotland. From the Cowper side, George Cowper (1822-1869) also came from England to India and was in the 1st Sapper & Miners. This family also originated from Scotland, his father William (1791-?) being born in Dundee.



Running hot on the trail and capturing all members of this family I found Sylvia Enid Gladys Erskine-Cowper (1923-?) daughter of Glen Ronald Erskine-Cowper (1889-?) and Christina Elizabeth Cowper (1889-?). While tracking down more information to try and understand what led to the adoption and if I could identify the father, a twist was uncovered. This family moved to Victoria Australia, years before my friends themselves had migrated. Whilst to date I have been unable to establish the father I can surmise that the family looked down on the union most likely put pressure for the adoption and shipped her off not long after (further reasons will become self-evident).

Turning my attention now to Australia, I was able to capture several key details on Glen Ronald Erskine-Cowper (1889-1952) and his wife Christina Elizabeth Cowper (1889-1956) and three daughters. Glen and Christina had both died at a house in Blackburn. I then decided to visit this house and upon arrival I

identified this house had been untouched for many years, leading to the conclusion it was still owned by the family. I left my card and at this stage I went back to my friends to tell them what I had uncovered. The news was far more than either had expected and importantly I guided them through the information and waiting to possibly hear from a family member.



Not long after leaving my card I received a call from a lovely lady who turned out to be Sylvia's Daughter. The subsequent call revealed that Sylvia died in 1976, she had a daughter earlier she was encouraged to give up for adoption and refused for this to occur (this reflects how much pain she had suffered with her first son and would not allow history to repeat). Sylvia finally found happiness and married Cyril Vogt Wilson (1911-2004) having another daughter and a son. The next step was to setup a meeting with my friends and his two sisters and brother. On the 24th May 2013 we all met, and I had asked my friend to bring her letter and in turn their new family brought a letter also. It was clear before seeing the letters together they were family, the resemblance, wow! The handwriting matched perfectly and now a family unaware of each other, fully reunited.

The experience was purely my pleasure and honour to be part of organising, it goes to show what being a detective and a piece of information can uncover. Whilst there are still some unanswered questions, this certainly went above and beyond to filling a hole and giving some explanation and now my friend has much more to brag about his ancestors!

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