

## **Back to my roots – where it all began**

I never knew my grandfather Sidney Balfour, he died before I was born and as a first generation Australian I had little contact with my extended family.

In 1978 I visited my family in England and was able to hear snippets of my family's history but did not take much notice of the information. It wasn't until the early 90's that I began to query where my Balfour family had originated from. I asked my father what he knew of the Balfour family but he had very little information to offer. He was able to tell me that he thought that his Grandfather was a soldier of fortune and was in the army and may have been in the Black Watch. His father (my grandfather) had grown up in a boys home near Chipping Norton, my father's birth place. He mentioned the name Kingham.

In those early days the internet was in its infancy and genealogical websites were scarce. I decided to look for information in the international phone books available at the Post Office in Melbourne. I came across a reference to Kingham Hill School and wrote to them asking if they had any information relating to a boys home in the area. I had no idea at the time that the boys home and Kingham Hill school were one and the same.

Some months later I received a large package in my mail box on Christmas Eve as we were departing for the long drive to Sydney for the Christmas break. What a Christmas present!

The package contained a wealth of information previously unknown to me. Charles Baring Young, the founder of the home had kept folders for the boys in those early days and not only had my grandfather been there but his older brother Walter Balfour had been the first boy admitted to the home.

Their father, Adam Balfour, had been a soldier in the famous 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (later to be at Rorke's Drift, fighting the Zulus, although he had left the regiment by then) and while stationed in India life had been good. However, on his retirement in 1874, life for both him and his wife Sarah Ann (Annie) took a downhill turn. It would seem that Adam suffered from alcoholism and came and went often. When he did come home he would father another child and leave with the furniture to pawn it. Adam and Annie would have a total of 12 children but only 6 would survive to adulthood. By 1886 Annie has 5 children with her, 3 girls and Walter and Sidney. She has to go into service to make ends meet but is only able to take the girls with her. The boys are placed in care and Walter is in the Carter Home for Destitute Boys in Clapham.

A lady by the name of Louisa Wall wrote to Charles Young asking him to take Walter into his home which was under construction and Walter is the first boy admitted. Sydney would follow in September 1888 having just turned 7.

The folders kept by Charles Young contain letters written by both Louisa Wall and Annie covering a period of some 10 years. They chronicle the ups and downs of Annie as she

struggles to make ends meet. One such letter written by Annie states "he leaves me not one farthing." She takes an interest in the welfare of the boys and is very grateful for the help of Charles Young.

Interestingly, Walter's son Victor Balfour was also a resident of Kingham Hill after his mother left and Walter was unable to care for his 2 surviving children. He was able to board his daughter out and placed Victor in Kingham. Victor would be one of the boys who went to Havelock Farm in Canada in the 1920's and returned about a year later only to disembark with a stomach ulcer and die shortly afterwards.

I visited the school in 1999 with my daughter but as it was an unannounced visit I could only wander amongst the buildings and look from afar.

In April of this year I had the opportunity to visit the UK and this time I did some forward planning. I wanted to hold those folders that had started me on my genealogical journey.

I got to hold those folders and I often think what would have happened to my Grandfather and his brother Walter if they had not been given the opportunity to go to Kingham. Walter was certainly heading down the road to criminality and Sydney would most likely have headed that way too.

Both the boys had a well-rounded education and went on to live productive lives. My grandfather, Sydney married a Chipping Norton girl and had 6 children, my father being the youngest. By all accounts Sydney was an accomplished cricketer and would play for the Kingham Hill cricket team for many years. On my visit to Kingham I found a photo of a dashing man amongst the archives that I'd never seen before, my Grandfather!

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