

**Making them real**  
**finding a Queensland past**

**by**

**Pam Garfoot and Elizabeth Conway**

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– Preface –

*Elizabeth:*

My sisters and I knew that our father had been born in Queensland and had spent the first nineteen years of his life there. However, we didn't really think of Dad as a Queenslander and, of ourselves, even less so. We felt that we very much belonged to the southern Australian states, as I had been born in Sydney and Pam and Julia in Melbourne, and our family had lived in Canberra since the early 1960s. Our mother had been born in England and, as we grew up, we also began to feel a kinship with her English family. Mum's mother had lived with us in her final years and there had been many letters from other members of her family still in England. As adults, we had all made extended visits to England and met elderly relatives. Queensland was just not 'on our radar'.

I heard on a radio discussion once that it is often the case that, unlike mothers and daughters, fathers and daughters don't really talk enough. Apparently it is relatively common for a woman to find that her father has died and she has not known all that much about him. When our father died, we realised that, for various reasons, there was so much to find out about Dad and about where he had come from. That is what my sister Pam and I set out to do.

The passion that Pam and I developed for unearthing the history of our father's forebears - *our* family - has motivated us both to tell our story to others and to share some of the amazing things that we have found. Although I have never had a desire to write creatively, I have always enjoyed factual writing and have recently found it satisfying to put the lives of our family into words. Indeed, writing various parts of the book has helped me to consolidate in my own mind the

multitude of facts we have recorded during our research. This piecing together of the lives of our ancestors and presenting them in a readable format proves to be the particular strength that I bring to our writing partnership. Pam's particular strength is an ability to empathise with individuals who lived long ago and to compose the words they might have used to tell their own stories. Of course, we have also contributed much to each other's output and the book truly is a collaborative effort throughout.

We have used different types of voices in writing our story. Firstly, we have presented the results of our research in the form of an historical narrative. Also, on occasion, each of us has chosen to comment on or explain, in a quite personal way, the background to the history being presented. Where we do this, our words appear in shaded boxes so as to distinguish them from the tales Pam and I tell about those who came before us.

Uncovering so much about the people from whom we have sprung has often prompted us to consider what life was really like in those times, particularly for the women. In addition to the outline of their lives that we present, Pam has exercised her imagination to build upon the facts and create short stories that illustrate what could have been the thoughts, joys, sorrows and hopes of two of our great, great grandmothers. She has enabled them to tell their own stories.

It is incredible to me that so much can actually be found about the lives of family members who were born as long ago as two hundred years. Further, I am sure that it would shock *them* greatly to think that their descendants would be able to ponder over the details of their lives and even their secrets so far in the future, and that they would even want to do so. For this reason, Pam and I describe many of the sources we have drawn upon in our ongoing voyage of discovery in the hope that others might be able to use our experience to find similar

information about their own families.

The methods by which we present such information include reference to sources within the text itself and footnotes, although we have kept these to a minimum, preferring instead to list important sources in our bibliography. We have also provided 'How did we find this?' text boxes, at the end of most chapters, which describe the processes by which we uncovered certain parts of the story and the sources we used that would generally be helpful to others. However, the book is not meant to be a textbook on family history research or even a guidebook. We do hope it will provide some useful information, but above all we hope to have told a good story.

*Pam:*

Many people are able to discover something about their family's history and most of them can, if they wish, document what they have discovered for others to read about and for future generations to treasure. In doing so, it is helpful to consider the tools and the skills that are needed for the task. Elizabeth and I found that it would have been ideal had we obtained the necessary tools and skills before beginning our research, rather than as we went along.

On a practical level, much written advice is available for people starting to research and record their family histories, and I won't repeat it here. Instead, I will describe just some of the basic tools which we have particularly appreciated. To begin with - it's virtually essential to have a computer, with easy internet access and attached printing facilities, since such a vast wealth of information can be found on the internet. Discovering useful facts (and sometimes gems) from the comfort of home is not only convenient but considerably cheaper than many alternatives. It can be satisfying and occasionally thrilling. Along with the equipment to make this

happen, a modest budget is important. Most canny researchers will purchase birth, death and marriage certificates, and perhaps also subscribe to databases, pay for transcriptions or engage overseas researchers to do the things that they are not able to do. Genealogical software can make the task of recording the information gathered through research activities manageable. It is also very useful to have access to a good library throughout the discovery process.

More valuable than these practical tools is a range of personal aptitudes and interests that make researching family history extremely enjoyable and rewarding. Having a bent for asking questions and tackling mysteries, as well as a delight in the process of discovery, are vital. So too is having a natural facility for detail and for organising research findings. It is easy to end up with a sea of electronic documents and images and to lose track of what has already been found (as we well know!), if some rigour is not applied to sorting and storing information.

Elizabeth and I also found that a determined resolve to uncover even the trickiest bits of information was an asset. Although there were times when our work ‘went off the boil’ for a period, we kept returning to our quest with renewed vigour, keen to solve longstanding conundrums or to illuminate our subjects with contextual research. This resolve did not always bear fruit, it’s true, and there remain many mysteries we would dearly love to solve – but there is always another day for that.

Experience in writing is a bonus for someone who wishes to research their family’s past and to write about the things they have found, but it is not vital. Many valuable and easy-to-read books have been written to help inexperienced writers turn their findings into interesting prose. Some of these we have listed in the bibliography to this book.

One of the most satisfying elements of family history research is travelling. Of course, this has financial implications and requires careful planning, but the rewards can be enormous. Many historians have spoken of the value, indeed the necessity, of visiting the places that they are studying in order to gain the fullest understanding of the landscape and its impact on past events and experiences. Family history research is no different. While there are many places that have played a significant part in our own family's history that neither of us has yet been able to visit, between us we have been lucky enough to explore widely.

We have visited the small Sussex village of Hailsham, the beautiful rural districts of Northumberland, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire, and the many tiny villages in Scotland and Ireland where some of our ancestors once lived. Brisbane, Perth (in Scotland), Dublin and Mount Morgan have seen us search their streets and landmarks for connections with ancestors who once walked those same streets and were familiar with those same landmarks. We have travelled the countryside of Central Queensland and that around Geelong and Inverleigh in Victoria. Exploring Hammersmith, St Pancras and other parts of modern London has been a particular challenge since so much that is old has disappeared, yet even these experiences we have valued and learned from.

Perhaps one day, one of us will be lucky enough to visit Cooktown, the battlefields of France, or even Peru in the spirit of connecting with our family history. The place I most yearn to visit - to *revisit* - is the Gallipoli peninsula, this time armed with a knowledge of my grandfather's time there that I could not have had when, as part of a holiday in late 1990, I walked the deserted beach at Anzac Cove and saw the cemetery at Lone Pine.

We have seen places we would never have visited without the goal of seeking our family's history and our holidays have

been enhanced by our searches for relics of our family's presence long ago. In addition to the usual benefits gained through travel, our expeditions have immeasurably enriched our understanding of our family's past.

Pages 12 to 18 are not included in the preview sample.

- Introduction -

Pandora's Box

*Pam:*

Everyone, we are told, has at least one book in them, waiting to be written. This might be true I suppose, but the key thing is possibly not what you have to say, but when you choose to say it. It may all be in the timing. There could be a time, a moment, for every book to be written and for me the moment seems to arrive when I least expect it. It could well be that a book has for some time been slowly forming and asking me to write it, but it is a most unlikely event that seems to provide the final impetus.

So, imagine if you will the scene at a 'team building day' in a modern-day workplace. You are in a room, in a nameless but moderately priced conference venue, the chairs are slightly uncomfortable and the coffee is bland. Twenty or thirty other people are trying to participate in the day's agenda just enough to appear engaged but no more than that because, really, they would rather be somewhere else. You know you must endure another six or more hours of discussion, brainstorming and strategic planning before you are to be set free. Best put something into the day, you think, best make a half-decent effort because, if you don't, the day will drag with even more tedium than it otherwise might.

The aim of such days is to deliver, ultimately though perhaps indirectly, something of benefit to the workplace. A shared vision and goal, perhaps, or a more tightly knit team. I have, during my career, spent so much time at planning days that I

have become a little sceptical about them. That's not to say that they are totally wasteful but, at the time, when other work pressures cry out for attention, they seem to chew up many hours for all concerned and sometimes achieve little of a permanent nature.

Often the planning day will include, as a team building exercise, an activity where participants are asked to talk about themselves, or to reveal some previously unknown secret about their past, in short, to disclose private thoughts and aspirations. Perhaps this is designed to bring participants closer to their colleagues, if not closer to their dreams.

Now I am at yet another planning day in a featureless room, whiteboard markers and butcher's paper at hand to capture valuable thoughts, and my colleagues are doing their best to be good. We have been asked to share one of our personal dreams for the future, should we ever be free of all the constraints which block the path to our hopes. Frances has revealed that she would like to leave her job and establish her own little coffee shop; Carla wants to celebrate a forthcoming fiftieth birthday in Paris; Dan has aspirations of becoming a professional basketballer. Before I can even sort out my thoughts - for I have always been prone to opening my mouth just a little too early - I blurt out my dream: I would like to write a book. Do I know what sort of book I have in mind? Even as I make the statement in front of my work mates, I am unsure.