

The Search
For
David Borthwick

A Family History
By
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Chapter One

In my Grandfather Borthwick's house, "Bothkenny" in Glenpatrick road, Elderslie, Renfrewshire, where I was born and brought up, there was, on the half-landing of the stairs, a small table on which rested a brass-bound campaign desk filled with Borthwick family memorabilia among which were two old letters dated August and November 1865 from my Grandfather's Uncle David written home from New Zealand to his brother and sisters in Scotland.

My Mother used to tell me that Uncle David had emigrated to New Zealand, written those two letters home, and then it seemed, had disappeared from the face of the earth. The family never heard from him again.

Research in Register House in Edinburgh elicited a little more information about David's background, which I give below:

David was born on the 1st of May 1842 in Lasswade, Edinburghshire, the youngest of five children of James Borthwick an agricultural labourer from Cockpen and his wife Agnes Bunyan from Stow in the same county.

Little is known of David's childhood though he was classed as a scholar in the 1851 census at the age of eight and was obviously given a reasonable schooling as his hand-writing and his grasp of English show in his letters home from New Zealand.

At the age of eighteen David is shown in the 1861 census as working as a ploughman for Peter Good of Firth Mains, a farm of 500 acres employing 6 labourers 1 boy and 2 women. Three of the men including David, and the boy, lived on site probably in the bothy.

Some three years later David appears to have felt that his prospects would be improved by emigrating to the colonies. He managed to secure a passage, probably government sponsored, on the Clipper ship *Viola* of the Patrick Henderson Line sailing from Glasgow for Auckland, New Zealand. He arrived in Auckland towards the end of March 1865, a voyage of some three months, and immediately started to look for work.

Perhaps the next part of the story would best come in David's own words in his letters home. (The spelling is David's throughout):

Camp Waipp,

13th Agst 1865

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am happy to inform you that I am in good health, and I am also happy to inform you if I ever have the good luck to return it will be as a conquering hero, as I have been fighting the Moaries here almost since I arrived. When I came ashore we were all sent up the country to a place called the Wiaroe and we took two days going to it. And we were very badly used their living in tents. So I left and came back to Auckland to see and get a job and I got the offer of a job at 13/- a week with rations. William Ross also came to Town and he was promised a job in a Blacksmiths shop but he did not know what day he would get started. Where we were in the Wiaroa it was only 5/- a day we were getting

and counting wet days it was hardly enough to support him and his family. I left my Chest at the Wiaroa in Charge of one of my shipmates, and when I came to Auckland I had no time to go back, but I sent the keys to William Ross and sent word for him to take the Chest into his Tent. When I came to Auckland I seen it advertised in the Paper that there was one hundred men wanted as military settlers and we were to get 2/6 per day counting sabbath and clothes and food and likewise 50 acres of land engaged for 3 years and we get 12 Months Rations after we are put on the land and if peace is proclaimed before the 3 years is up we will be put on our land and get the 12 Months Rations. So I think that is a very good start, and if the Government gives us the Land they promised it is first Class. When we joined we were embarked on board of a steamer and sent to Napier and we took 4 days coming. It is about 350 miles from Auckland.

We got our arms there and was then sent to Camp at a place called Pukefapa that is 12 miles from Napier. We were drilled there and I felt very uncomfortable having to get up every morning at 7 o'clock to practice extensive motions. We remained there about 6 weeks and were then sent to a place called Clive as the natives were intimidating the settlers there. The natives then broke out with a sort of fanatical Religion called How How and we were sent down here. I was very sorry leaving Clive to come to this place as there is no white people here but ourselves and the friendly natives that are fighting with us against the How Hows. We have been a month here and we had 5 skirmishes with them and then they surrounded the Paw we were in and were firing at us incessantly for one whole day and all our loss was one killed and 2 or 3 wounded and we killed about 20 that day for by what we killed at the skirmishing. We then attacked them and rushed their Paw with the Bayonet and killed about 30 of them. We gave them no quarter as they give none, but we spared the Women and Children and set fire to their whole Garrison. The friendly natives then went round the Coast and took 3 Paws and took their Colours with them Likewise about 30 Prisoners but the friendly natives fight very Harmless. They killed about 10 that day and we had only 5 wounded. They are giving us great praise for the Manner in which we Rushed the Paw. There was never anything since the New Zealand War broke out even with the Regular Troops and so little loss of Lives on our side. It is an awful Business Charging with the Bayonet and the Moories with their Tomahawks, but they are very Brave people they contest the ground with us very hard and I can assure you my heart sickened to see

the first man baynoted. But after a few minutes I thought nothing of it as there was men lying dead all around me and young men in the prime of life. but we had to do it, and the only sensation of thought I felt was of my Friends at Home and 50 notions running through your head about death but after the first death you forget everything but to slaughter anything that comes before you. There was some of our men that acted very cruel to the natives that morning and actually baynoted some of their Women and children. but the natives do kill our Women & Children if they come into their hands. We killed one of their Head Chiefs what they call a Rangitera. We have conquered them all with the exception of one Paw and that is their strongest, it is about a mile from where we are and we are expecting every day to be sent to attack it and I Fear we shall lose some of our men at the attack as it is well fortified but we are bound to take it if the half of us are killed. The Natives are fine Tall Handsome men about 6 feet and you would hardly know the Women from the men if it was not for the Tatooing. I and another Scotsman are living in a tent with a Rangitera Chief and the Women along with us. The Women has got no shame, they go about half naked with a Blanket about them and they Fight in the Trenches along with the men.

I have never slept in a House except one night since I left Home. I cannot tell you anything about this Place as we as we cannot go out except there is about 20 of us and armed and we have only one suit of clothes and we are crawling with Lice, and the Natives eat them of one another without the least shame. We have no stockings nor can't get them for love nor money but bits of rags round our feet.

I have sent two letters to William Ross to send my clothes but received no answer. I will write again soon if I am not knocked over at the taking of this Big Paw and I will send you the Papers about the whole of our proceedings.

Give James Baily my respects and tell him how I am getting on. And tell him I would not advise him to come out at the Present time as things are very unsettled here and nothing but Warr to the Knife

.....

(The rest of this letter is lost)

Some three months passed before a second letter arrived home. In this letter David seems much happier and contented with his lot.....

Nov. 2nd 1865

Dear Brother & Sisters,

I hope this will find you all quite well as it leaves me at present. And I am happy to tell you that I feel happier than when I last wrote to you as the Haw Haws have all given up there Arms so the fighting is all over for the present at this part. And We have shifted out of the Pa from the Moari's into a camp by ourselves and We have built a nice little Wharie for two of us and are very comfortable. Tell Lizzie now is her chance if she intends to come and take charge of my hut as she used to talk about. I had a letter from Willie Ross the other day they were all quite well but did not say what he was doing. We are getting a shilling a day extra and two tots of Grog since coming here on active service. We now go about hunting Wild pigs and there will be plenty of Peaches here soon as the trees are now in blossom. And there are Plenty of Wild Grape Vines fig trees Quinces and Green Goosberries are now in abundance, what do you think of that for November. And the Potatoes are now fit for digging (howkin). We are living like Gentlemen now, We ride about when We like as there are lots of horses here we have only to go and catch one and ride where We like and We have scarce anything to do.

We get one pound and half meat the same of flour and any amount of potatoes and an allowance of Tea and Coffee a day so We live well here. And We have got a store here so We can get things for money now which is more than We could before, but he knows how to charge, if you give him a pound you must take the worth of it as there is no silver much less Coppers. We have now got rid of the Scotch Grays since leaving the Moari Pa. If James was here he need not bye Pigs and feed them he could go and catch one when he wanted it and could shoot any amount of Wild Pidgeons and Ducks. There are no Gamekeepers here tell Andrew Tait. I went to the Barracks and asked a good few, the Sergeant and several others for Robert Darling and they did not know anyone of that name. If you have heard anything of James Dixon let me know when you write and send me his address. If Johny was out here he need not go shooting sparrows as he used to do. He would find plenty here to shoot besides.

I have written to Willie Ross and asked him to send you a paper every week as we cant get them here. I am sorry I could not see Agnes before I came away, I have been thinking a good deal about her. Tell her I will send something to her when I go to Napier. Ask Alexdr. Penman if he can get my two Couzins address and send to me. So now I must

conclude as I have no more to say at present.

From your affectionate

Brother

David Borthwick

Military Settler

Napier, Hawkes Bay

So there the trail petered out. The fighting seems to have stopped, David is happy in his little Wharie. He has money in his pocket and has plenty to eat and drink. In his own words he is living the life of a Gentleman. And yet he has stopped writing home to his family. It really is a puzzle.

Chapter Two

The story now moves forward some hundred years to 1960 when I met Joyce Stevenson in Aden and we were married in Sussex, England. Six years previously Joyce's big sister Jean met and married a young New Zealand Engineer Peter Sharpe who was over in Britain on a graduate apprenticeship. Peter took Jean home to New Zealand and Joyce and Jean lost contact.

There the story might have ended but for our developing an interest in family history round about 1984. Shortly after I retired in 1989 I was in Register House in January 1990 and I came across the death certificate of Joyce's Aunt Jean who had died in the Western General Infirmary in Edinburgh in 1982. The informant was George Cowe (Joyce's Uncle) whose address was given as in Carricknowe only about two miles from our home in Barnton. If Uncle George were still alive he would be well up in his eighties.

We didn't feel we could just charge over there so Joyce wrote explaining the situation. Imagine our excitement when two days later we got a phone call: "hello, this is your uncle George!". Uncle George was 87 but bright as a button. He was able to tell us that Jean had also been trying to find her family, and had been in contact with Uncle George since 1983. He was able to give Joyce Jean's address in Christchurch New Zealand. Joyce immediately sat down and wrote a long letter to Jean giving Jean as much of the family history as we had been able to find. A week later our phone rang on Sunday evening. It was Jean from New Zealand. Jean had received Joyce's letter and had immediately got on the phone to her long-lost sister. What a reunion that was!

In the summer of 1991 Jean and Peter came over to Britain to stay with us. Eighteen months later in early 1993 Joyce and I went over to New Zealand.

The thought of going to New Zealand brought back memories of the brass-bound campaign desk and the letters of Great-great Uncle David Borthwick. Would we be able to solve the riddle of David's disappearance? Only time would tell.

One of Peter's little self-imposed tasks in his retirement was to visit some of the old parishioners in the area, and on one occasion he took Joyce and me along to see an old lady called Marian Lee whose grandparents had come out from Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While we were having tea with Marian I noticed an old book in a bookcase; the title was "Defenders of New Zealand", written by Thomas Wyath Gudgeon, published and printed in Auckland in 1887. I asked Marian if I might browse through it and she said "Of course". It was a series of anecdotes of the exploits of certain men who had fought in the Maori Wars (Now called the Land Wars). In the appendix was a list of men who had been killed fighting the Maoris; and there part-way down the first page was a line which made my blood run cold:

"Borthwick, David, Pvt. Hawkes Bay Military Settlers..K.I.A. Nov.18 '65"

In another part of the book I was able to determine that David was killed along with his sergeant and four other men at the storming of the Pa at Waerenga-a-Hika just north of Turanga now known as Gisborne. Well, I had always wanted to solve the riddle of the disappearance of Great-great Uncle David but now that I had the answer I felt rather deflated. However it was still left to go up to North Island and see if there was anything at Waerenga-a Hika or close-by to commemorate the death of the six men.

Jean and Peter had arranged for the four of us to go on a tour of North Island. We drove up to Nelson and caught the ferry across to Wellington.

We made our way by stages up to Gisborne and put up at the Teal Motor Lodge for a few days whilst exploring the area. At the Gisborne museum we picked up a booklet which mentioned the old cemetery at Makaraka on the main road out of Gisborne where among the monuments was "an old obelisk standing close to the road (which) marks an even earlier event, when the battle of

Waerenga-a-Hika took place in 1865, the soldiers who were killed fighting for the government are remembered by this stone, and their remains were buried under it some years after the battle.”

We all four piled into the car and drove out to the cemetery. There was the Obelisk fully inscribed:

THIS MONUMENT IN
memory of those killed in action
and other privates
of the Hawkes Bay Military Settlers
November 1865
at Waerenga-a-Hika
erected by their comrades

Inscribed on two of the other faces were six names, five of them were correct according to the old book but the sixth that should have been D.Borthwick was Robert Bothwell!

What were we to do? There had been no Robert Bothwell. At least no one of that name was killed at Waerenga-a-Hika. Having just solved an old family riddle, we had uncovered a 130-year-old mistake. I felt that my old relative had been ignored or tossed aside. We’d have to think what to do.

We carried on our tour of the North Island but my thoughts were ever and again on how we could right the wrong done to the Borthwick Name. On the way back to Christchurch we had to go through Wellington again and Peter took us to the Register Office in Lower Hutt, where we looked for the record of David’s death, but had no success. It seemed that back in 1865 the records were not 100% accurate. That afternoon we went to the National Archives and there we were able to find David’s Conditions of Enlistment along with all the other men enlisted along with him. Again no trace of any Robert Bothwell. We also found copies of the despatches pertaining to the fighting at Waerenga-a-Hika together with casualty returns. Everything pointed to the 130-year-old error on the old obelisk.

Time was running out for us as we were due to return Scotland. We came home pleased with having made the acquaintance of all our New Zealand relatives but slightly sad that we had left some unfinished business in the Makaraka cemetery.

Chapter Three

Shortly before our next trip to New Zealand in 1996 it occurred to me that the only way things seem to get done in our modern-day society is when people call in the Power of the press. Accordingly I sat down and wrote to the editor of the Gisborne local newspaper explaining our predicament and seeking to enlist his help. Within two weeks I received a letter from Gisborne's Deputy Mayor, David S. Scott, saying that the editor of the local newspaper Iain Gillies (a Scot from Mallaig) had passed on my letter, and saying "You certainly have discovered what appears to be a major mistake in the non-recognition of a very brave young man who fought for what he believed was right those many years ago." He went on to say that they would do all in their power to clarify the error, and he invited us to contact the Mayor when we arrived in New Zealand to arrange a meeting. Hooray, Action at last!

In early February, Joyce and I flew to Auckland and after a tour round the North Island, we arrived in Gisborne. We had previously telephoned the Mayor's office and had talked with the Mayor's secretary Phillipa Browne-Baylis to arrange a meeting. The next morning we drove round to the Council Offices and on giving our names were shown into the mayor's office where we were introduced to the Mayor, W. John Clarke, his Deputy David Scott, and the Community Development manager, Seton Clare. Also in the room were representatives from The Gisborne Herald, the local radio station, and the Gisborne Television Centre. After coffee and biscuits, we had to repeat our story for each of the three members of the News Media.

It so happened that people from The Heritage Property Unit of the Department of Internal Affairs were refurbishing War Graves and Monuments in the area and they were told to stop work on the Makaraka Monument pending confirmation of my assertions by Margaret Marks of the War Graves Commission. This she forthwith did. (She could hardly do otherwise).

Instructions were at once given to the masons to remove the name 'Robert Bothwell' and replace it with the correct one 'David Borthwick'.

At last, not only had we solved the Borthwick Enigma but Great-great-Uncle David was finally to be commemorated in the Makaraka Monument after some 130 years.

Were it not for the fact that the New Zealand People are very proud of their heritage and take great pains to maintain it, this story would not have had such a satisfactory outcome.

As a postscript to this story it may be of interest to mention the coincidence that David Borthwick's great nephew James Borthwick, a private in the 4th battalion Royal Scots was killed in action at Gallipoli fighting alongside the troops of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC's) on the 19th December 1915, almost exactly 50 years after his great uncle's death in New Zealand.

Appendix One

The originals of David Borthwick's letters are now in the Alexander Turnbull Library of the National Library of New Zealand in Wellington where in view of the New Zealand People's great regard for their history and heritage I am sure that they will be looked after with great care for the foreseeable future.

I should like to take this opportunity of thanking the following people for their help in the search:

Alistair and Craig Andrew, Dalkey, Dublin, R.O.I.

George Cowe (Uncle George) Carrickknowe, Edinburgh.

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Iain Gillies, the Editor of the Gisborne Herald

Linda Schager, Te Kawa, Te Awamutu, NZ.

Elizabeth J. Sharpe, Archivist, Wanganui Museum

In April 1991, some 15 months after we met him, Uncle George died peacefully in his sleep. But for our finding him the year before, we would probably not have found Jean, would not have gone to New Zealand, would not have met Marian Lee (who died in 1994); this story could not have been written.
