

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2023**

## **2302 Persistence Pays Off**

**by Lilian Magill**

## **Persistence Pays Off.**

Back in the mists of time, well not quiet but 40 years ago, when I started this genealogical journey, I struck my first brick wall and the myth that went with it.

Enter my great-grandfather, Arthur Galbraith, birthplace, Ayr, Scotland, as stated on his son's, birth certificate.<sup>i</sup>

My mother duly commented, "You won't find anything about HIM, he died hunting for cowries (a type of seashell), in the Red Sea."

Questions were asked, like "What was he doing there?" "Why was he there?" And the important one, "How do you know?" My mother didn't have the answers and her siblings didn't know anything either, so the myth was passed on and my brick wall remained insurmountable.

I gradually added more about my grandfather, also named Arthur Galbraith, found details of his mother and her family but great-grandfather, Arthur was still being stubborn and not letting me find him.

On a research trip to Victoria, I spent time at the Public Record Office trying find his arrival, nothing. As did searches through reels of microfilmed newspapers. I was getting fed up with trying to crack this myth.

I shelved Arthur and his family for years, working on my paternal side instead and only dragging Arthur out, when I thought there might be something new to look at. I would wonder, would it ever be solved, or would it always be the stubborn branch, not giving up secrets?

With the arrival of the internet and online data bases, researching both in Australia and overseas became more accessible but where to start? Scotland's People, looked like the best place as great-grandfather was born there.

Roughly calculating his year of birth, from both the marriage and birth certificates I had purchased, I duly created an account and paid for my credits. Now the fun begins.

Entering the scant details, I had into the search fields yielded results, but two stood out, both in Ayr. The first one 1848<sup>ii</sup> and the second in 1852,<sup>iii</sup> but wait they are BOTH to parents Samuel Galbraith and Margaret Kidstone Nicol and named Arthur. No, no, no, not more confusion. Searching for more children of this couple, I found another seven, including two with the name John, all born in Ayr. I found the death of the first John, so the next boy got the same name. Could this have happened to my Arthur? Well as of writing this, I still haven't found the death of the first Arthur but have safely assumed that he died before his brother was born and the name was re-used.

While all this wonderful research filled out my Galbraith Family Tree, Arthur was still being elusive. Time to put him back on the shelf.

Life happens, mum passed, still not knowing what had happened to her grandfather. I still looked, occasionally, for the elusive Arthur and his place of death.

In 2010 I reviewed exactly what I had, in the way of documents for the Galbraith side and found some glaring holes. Missing my grandfather's death certificate and no details about his mother's death. I purchased a transcript of his death<sup>iv</sup>, and his father is listed as a seaman, maybe there is a grain of truth in the family myth?

Once again life happened, a death, a wedding, two more grandchildren and retirement, finally I had more time to devote to this myth.

I looked at the details on my great uncle William's (born 1893), birth transcript<sup>v</sup>, just in case Arthur had died prior to his birth. No, very much alive.

Trolled Trove for his death, nothing, BUT I did find his wife, Mary Ann Galbraith's funeral notice<sup>vi</sup>, in 1912, listed as May Mary Galbraith, it had the names of my grandfather, his address and his brother, I knew it was the right lady. Now to get her transcript<sup>vii</sup> and see what is recorded there. Nothing.

November 2014, back I went to Scotland's People, and this time I spotted "Deaths at Sea", well it won't hurt to look. Details entered, hit send and BINGO, there he was. 30 years after I started searching for him and 100 years after his death, I had him, or so I hoped. Contacting my transcription agent, I ordered the certificate and waited and waited.

January 2015 and I finally opened an official looking letter from the General Register Office, Edinburgh and cried. Here were the details of Arthur's death;

***Name of Ship Orizaba, Official Number 93688, Date of Death 25.6.94, Place of Death Colombo, Name and Surname of Deceased Arthur Galbraith, Sex M, Age 41, Occupation Miner, Nationality Scotch, (Ayr), Last place of Abode Sydney, Cause of Death Cerebral Apoplexy, Passenger.***<sup>viii</sup>

Now armed with this information I again searched Trove and a small article in the Sydney Morning Herald, Friday 13 July 1894, page 6, gives details of the ship's voyage and the last three lines read; "... *While at Colombo Arthur Galbraith third class passenger from London to Sydney, died suddenly from cerebral apoplexy and was buried there...*"<sup>ix</sup>

While the family myth had been solved another mystery arose, what was he doing in Colombo and where had he been?

My enforced isolation due to Sydney's lockdown rules had me determined to solve this mystery.

In 1893 Margaret Kidstone Galbraith, nee Nicoll, Arthur's mother died<sup>x</sup>, in Ayr. Arthur had gone back to Ayr to help his brother settle the estate and was on his way back to Mary Ann, Arthur, and William, when he succumbed to a stroke and died. His final resting place is far from his loved ones, roughly halfway between Scotland and Australia.<sup>xi</sup>

My myth busting skills, and my persistence paid off.

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<sup>i</sup> Victorian Birth Certificate, 3814 for Arthur GALBRAITH born 8 December 1884. Copy purchased 5 June 1984

<sup>ii</sup> 17/02/1850, GALBRAITH, Arthur [O.P.R. Births 578/00 0110 0189 AYR], copy purchased, Scotland's People 23 February 2013.

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- <sup>iii</sup> 1852, GALBRAITH, Arthur, [O.P.R. Births 578/ Ayr) Page 234 of 294, copy purchased Scotland's People 23 February 2013.
- <sup>iv</sup> New South Wales, Death Transcription, GALBRAITH, Arthur, 18 January 1965, Registration number 13654/1965. Purchased 15 February 2010.
- <sup>v</sup> New South Wales, Birth Transcription, GALBRAITH, William Cameron, 17 March 1890, Registration number 18347/1890. Purchased 18 July 2014.
- <sup>vi</sup> The Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW:1883-1930)/ Tue 5 Mar 1912/ Page 3/ Family Notices, Galbraith May Mary, Funeral Notice. Accessed, via Trove, 20 June 2014.
- <sup>vii</sup> New South Wales, Death Transcription, GALBRAITH, Mat Mary, 1 March 1912, Registration number 03453/1912. Purchased 18 July 2014.
- <sup>viii</sup> Extract of an entry in the Marine Register Book, kept at The General Register Office, Edinburgh, in terms of the Merchant Shipping Acts 1894 (section 254), "Births and Deaths Registration", **September 1894**. GALBRAITH, Arthur, DoD, 25.6.94, Number 93688. Copy purchased 10 December 2014.
- <sup>ix</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1842-1954) Friday 13 July 1894, page 6, The Orizaba Due To-Morrow. Accessed via Trove, 9 January 2015.
- <sup>x</sup> 1893 GALBRAITH, Margaret, [Statutory Deaths 578/00 0179], copy purchased Scotland's People, 23 February 2015.
- <sup>xi</sup> Distance from Scotland to Colombo in nautical miles, 4,862. Distance between Colombo and Sydney in nautical miles, 4,725. Google question 7 April 2023.