

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2020

2009 Down the Rabbit Hole

by Sue Bulbrook

Down the Rabbit Hole

“Congratulations to you both! The first girl in the Bulbrook family for generations!”

So said my parents-in-law when our first child, a daughter, was born in 1987. The first girl? Really? My own family has girls everywhere; who doesn't breed girls? Surely there were other females in the family? “No!” was always the very confident response.

The elusiveness of the female line was strongly reinforced by family folklore: the Bulbrook family only produced one child, and a boy at that. Now I was really perplexed.

And so my search began. Quietly, sensitively, and surreptitiously, a question here, a gentle nudge there. More careful questioning about past family members, visitors, photos: “Who's that?” But to no avail. I was beginning to feel like Lewis Carroll's Alice, as she falls ‘Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end?’ⁱ

Ignoring the ubiquitousness of single, male offspring, I furtively did what any sensible 35 year-old daughter-in-law would do and went to my own mother for help. And, sure enough, an Alice E. Bulbrook was discovered arriving in Australia, via the *Ormuz*, in October 1889ⁱⁱ. Well done Mum! The “Unassisted immigration to Victoria 1852-1923” report listed my illusory Alice quite clearly. She travelled with a Mr H. and Mrs E. Bulbrook. But who was this Alice and, furthermore, who was she to Herbert Edward Bulbrook, with whom the persistent male Bulbrook line began?

Let me here put Herbert Edward in the picture.

Herbert Edward “H.E.” Bulbrook was born in 1873ⁱⁱⁱ, in Kennington, England to Edward Charles and Elizabeth Martha Bulbrook (formerly Dyer)^{iv}. Herbert married Elizabeth Smith in 1900 in Surrey, England^v and they bore Charles Edward Bulbrook (b 1904 in Wycombe, England^{vi}). Herbert, Elizabeth and Charles Bulbrook immigrated from London to Sydney, via Melbourne, as passengers onboard the *Otway*, in 1909^{vii}. Charles married Nona Tredice Monro—the antithesis to an elusive family as the Monros carry the noted Poynter name—at Neutral Bay, Sydney, in 1925^{viii}. Charles and Nona's child, Robert Charles, was born at Mosman, in March 1929^{ix}. Robert Charles is my father-in-law and has recently celebrated his 91st birthday. Together, Herbert, Charles and Robert formed the “one child and a boy at that” family line. Folklore seemed to be correct; there were indeed three generations of single male children. Robert married Faye Miller in 1952^x and they have two sons. Thus, the male tradition continued, albeit with *two* boys this time.

Still searching to uncover the link between my elusive Alice and H.E. Bulbrook, I continued my fall down the rabbit hole via the NSW BDM Registry and found details of Alice Bulbrook's marriage to Sydney Robert Jiggins in April 1893^{xi}. But particularly striking here—and a vital clue in my quest—is the name of one of the marriage's witnesses: Herbert Edward “H.E.” Bulbrook!

“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice.^{xii}

I looked more closely. Alice Bulbrook's marriage transcription lists her parents as Edward Charles Bulbrook and Elizabeth Martha Dyer—the very same parents as H.E. Bulbrook.

So Herbert had a sister! And she was living in Sydney.

At last, an elusive female Bulbrook born to the family. With a bump, I had reached the bottom of the rabbit hole and could finally place Alice in the family tree. But, just as in Wonderland, not everything made sense. I struggled to understand Alice's absence from the Bulbrook family narrative. She was born, then not mentioned again by subsequent generations of Bulbrooks. She appeared in the historical record so wonderfully, so ready to be heard, yet silenced by family folklore.

Further research through the NSW BDM revealed that Alice Elizabeth Jiggins (nee Bulbrook), gave birth to a daughter, Dorothy A. Jiggins, in 1894 at Mosman, Sydney^{xiii}.

My obscure Alice Bulbrook had finally developed a sense of embodiment and legitimacy. A female Bulbrook had existed after all. Nonetheless, it remained true that my daughter, our eldest, was indeed “the first female born in the Bulbrook family for generations”.

But why had my Alice never been mentioned? The answer to this mysterious question rests in my mind to this day. Our family has a beautiful, detailed history of H.E. Bulbrook— Alice's brother— and his life and endeavours, but nothing recorded about Alice herself. Like Carroll's Alice, who said to the mouse, ““You promised to tell me your history, you know... Please come back and finish your story!””^{xiv}

A little more information came via a Family Notice in *The Sydney Morning Herald* from June 1935, mentioning the death of Elizabeth Martha Bulbrook at her granddaughter's residence in Campsie. She is described as the “dearly beloved mother of Mrs A. E. Jiggins”—a passing reference to Alice here.^{xv}.

A beautiful final crack at the obstinate stonewalling came in the form of a photo (sometimes you just get lucky). Going through old snapshots of my father-in-law's “passed down box of photos”, I found a photo of a ‘Dorothy Jiggins, 3yrs 11months, taken by The Swiss Studio, King Street, Sydney’. An ancestor had sensibly written this information on the back of the photograph and my father-in-law had no sense of who it showed or knowledge of its existence.



Alice Bulbrook's daughter, Dorothy A Jiggins, photo dated c.1898

Submitted by Sue Bulbrook
Croker Prize for Biography 2020 - Society of Australian Genealogists

And so, my elusive Alice was the eldest of two children born to Edward and Elizabeth Bulbrook. Her younger brother, Herbert Edward, is my father-in-law's ancestor. But Alice is *also* his ancestor and now she sits beautifully on my family tree, along with her husband, Sydney, and her daughter Dorothy. There is unquestionably more to discover about Alice Bulbrook. But, for the moment at least, it is time to, “Wake up, Alice dear... Why, what a long sleep you've had!”^{xvi}

ⁱ Carroll L. (1916) *Alice in Wonderland*. Ward, Lock & Co, Limited: London, Melbourne and Toronto. Chapter 1, p.27.

ⁱⁱ PROV, Unassisted passenger lists (1852-1923), Record Series Number (VPRS):497, fiche 521, p.12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Herbert Edward Bulbrook, Certificate of Birth, No.166 in St Peter, Walworth, Surrey, true copy by Registrar, 8th January, 1896.

^{iv} 30 October, 1870, Lambeth, London, certified and true copy of marriage certificate for Edward and Elizabeth Bulbrook (nee Dyer), COL741873;MXC926369.

^v May 19th, 1900; from original marriage certificate held by author, No. 298, 1900, page 149, County of Surrey.

^{vi} Charles Edward, Certificate of Registry of Birth, Entry No. 419, William Gray, Registrar, 11th October 1904, Wycombe.

^{vii} 1909 Otway – item barcode 9255344 on Passengers' Listing.

^{viii} Certificate of Marriage, 1925, Charles and Nona Bulbrook (nee Monro), No C201913, No 31 in Minister's Register.

^{ix} Robert Charles, born Sydney, 12 March, 1929. Still living.

^x Marriage Certificate NSWBDM's, 18561/1952, Chatswood, NSW.

^{xi} Marriage Transcription NSWBDM's, Murrin 17 February 2007, Registration #07607/1893.

^{xii} Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*. Chapter 2, p.44.

^{xiii} Dorothy Jiggins birth, NSWBDM's #21927/1894, Mosman.

^{xiv} Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*. Chapter 3, p.77 & 82.

^{xv} 'Family Notices', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 22 June 1935, p.14,. Accessed 29 March 2020.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/17202947>

^{xvi} Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*. Chapter 12, p.329.

Additional References:

Carroll L. (1916) *Alice in Wonderland*. Ward, Lock & Co, Limited: London, Melbourne and Toronto.