

THE SEARCH FOR COLONEL HEATH

'Let me tell you my story,' began the message from Michael Heath, and it is such an encouraging story of research, discovery and restoration, that it is told here in his own words. 'I live in Toronto, Canada and since retiring five years ago I have taken on the task of researching and documenting our extended family in Canada and before. It was known in the family that the widow Agnes Heath (my great, great, great grandmother) brought her three children (Charles, Emily and Elizabeth) to Canada in 1836 following the death of her husband in India in 1819. It was understood that they left India sometime after 1819 and spent the intervening years in Switzerland and Italy where the children were educated. Beyond dying in "Camp at Ajanta" (the world famous Buddhist caves) nothing was known of the burial location of my great, great, great grandfather.

I searched the internet for a couple of years for his burial location and finally got a break when my contact at the British Library suggested I try BACSA. I searched the online BACSA site and got a partial name match for the Christian Cemetery in Jalna, Maharashtra, India - but it was not conclusive that it was my relative. I pursued a contact at BACSA who put me in touch with Kevin Wells who had done a very thorough report for BACSA on that same cemetery. In very short order Kevin emailed me pictures of my ancestor's burial monument together with the inscription, confirming I had found my ancestor's final resting spot. Kevin's picture made clear that a lot of deterioration had taken place in the 190 or so years since the death of Colonel Charles Heath - I decided when I saw those pictures that I would travel there to restore his monument.

This past October-November I was with my wife trekking in Nepal and while she returned to Canada after our trek, I flew to Mumbai and then took the train to Jalna - I took the train the day after the end of Diwali which was a very bad decision, the train was standing room only for nine hours, luckily I got to the train station very early and secured a seat. I arrived in Jalna in the middle of the afternoon, my tuk-tuk driver did not know of the cemetery but he did know the Church so we made our way there. At the Church I met Nasir, and guided by him we made our way to the cemetery, with Kevin's marvellous report I was able to very quickly find my relative. I explained to Nasir my purpose for coming to Jalna, and he said I should meet Dr Moses who lives at the extended Hospital/Church and former hospital grounds. The Doctor invited me in for tea and biscuits, I presented him with a copy of Kevin's Jalna report and explained my goal of restoring my ancestor's monument within the week so that it could be completed before I had to return to Canada. His support was immediate and thorough, and I am convinced the combination of me showing up and Kevin's report delivered the message that people care about the cemetery. Dr Moses introduced me to Suresh who was doing some bricklaying on the Doctor's site but he released Suresh to work on my project. For the third time that day we returned to the Colonel's burial plot and I nodded supportively while Nasir and Suresh discussed the details of the project. By six that evening I had hired a team of four to begin work the next day and had supplied funds to acquire the bricks, mortar, sand and water needed to get the project moving. Over the following five days I would make a point of visiting the restoration site once or twice a day to show encouragement, ensure they were getting on with it and answer any questions. I asked them to restore the monument in the same way that it was originally built back in 1819. All but one of the grave monuments in the cemetery were built in the same manner, a brick core covered in masonry and then painted white. After five full days the team of four were finished and the following day a pair of painters arrived to finish the project with two coats of paint. I departed the next morning totally satisfied with the restoration project I had been able to complete. *(see page 60)*

An important part of the message is also just how easy the restoration was to accomplish. Show up, stay nearby, have a clear story, a clear mission with a reasonable timeline, smile and be supportive, have cash ready to buy materials, visit the work site daily and again show appreciation and support, tip appropriately. Maybe I got lucky but I sensed everyone I met appreciated me travelling a long way to

their country to honour my ancestor and by extension their country, they in turn wanted to help me.'

Kevin Wells' search for his own ancestor's tomb in the Jalna cemetery was told in *Chowkidar* (Spring 2008) and this led to the detailed report mentioned here, a copy of which is in the BACSA Archives at the British Library. Kevin has now produced a short illustrated history of Colonel Charles Heath, Michael's ancestor, and how he came to be buried at Jalna. Born in Colchester, Essex in 1776, Charles entered the East India Company Army as a cadet. On arrival, probably at Bombay, he was attached to General Stuart's forces which were fighting Tipu Sultan in the final Anglo-Mysore war of 1799. After the defeat and death of the Sultan, Charles, by now a lieutenant, helped to raise the new 7th and 8th Native Infantry Regiments at Cannanore, which lies today in the southern Indian state of Kerala. By 1810 Charles was promoted to the rank of major and the following year he married a Scottish woman, Agnes Wallace, from Arbroath. The wedding took place in St Mary's Church, Madras, often named as the oldest Anglican church east of Suez. Three children were born to the couple, two of the births being recorded at Bellary and Ellichpur, in the northern Deccan. Charles' regiment, the 7th N.I. were based here after the third Mahratta war broke out. This was to be Charles' final campaign and his regiment was led by General Sir John Malcolm. By now he had become a lieutenant colonel and because he had shown such reliability in the field, he was transferred to lead the 13th N.I. at Jalna.

He set off to take up his new post but died in camp at Ajanta, probably from cholera, on 18 February 1819. His body was taken the considerable distance to Jalna and interred in the old cemetery there. Agnes and the children were already at Jalna, in anticipation of Charles' posting there and the words on his tomb have a heart-felt quality: 'Here rests the remains of Lt. Col. Heath, H.C. Service, died 18 February 1819. He was a worthy man, a brave soldier and is sincerely regretted by all his friends. This monument was consecrated in honour of his memory by his affectionate and afflicted wife.' It was Agnes who had the melancholy task of reading the Burial Service over her husband's body in the absence of a chaplain. Agnes did not remain long in India after her husband's death. She gathered up her children and later settled in Canada, where perhaps she already had relatives and from where, two hundred years later, her descendant Michael Heath would make the journey to Jalna.

