

FINDING ANCESTRAL ROOTS

History with its flickering lamp stumbles along a trail of the past,
trying to reconstruct its scenes, to revive its echoes, and kindle with
pale gleams, the passion of former days. Winston Churchill

As a small child I was often moved by songs about faraway places. I loved to sing Doris Day's *Black Hills of Dakota* and fantasised that I had American Indian heritage. Without reliable oral history, and records, it was difficult to determine my family history. A childhood understanding that my maternal grandmother emigrated from Ireland at two years old was shaken when I discovered she was born in Brisbane in 1899 and that her father was born in Sydney. It took some digging to find the Irish heritage was actually on my father's side, his grandmother emigrating in 1844, when she was five years old.

Questions about my ancestors grew more demanding as I approached middle age. For most of us, who missed asking these questions earlier, the answers are often not available from living relatives. In researching family history there are many closed doors. Time was limited for my research and the process of discovery could have been overwhelming had I not chosen to follow only one grandparent from my maternal family and one from my paternal side.

In tracing a direct line back to their countries of origin I was able to complete the overseas aspect of my project in seven weeks while still being able to travel through quite a few regions. I focused on finding the birthplaces of a direct line of ancestors from the United Kingdom. I discovered Armagh and Killyman in Northern Ireland, Glasgow and Jedburgh in Scotland, and Bristol, Dover, Lympe, Hythe, Alfriston and Lambeth in England.

Living in a country so distant I wondered why my ancestral lands held such importance. The urge to explore where my ancestors lived was strong and like many before me I wanted to see if I felt a connection. In 2015, I travelled to the UK and the RE:Location Project took form. I wasn't interested in finding family graves or seeking out living ancestors, although I would have embraced those outcomes; the essence of my project was to experience the landscape.

I wanted to take along something that reflected my ancestors' legacy, and return something Australian to these lands. I made ten little identical art-pods, each with an accompanying story, and enclosed artwork prints using the same image. These would be left at each location to hopefully be found by the locals at some future time. The intention was they would keep one image and replace the pod. The locations were documented well, with the GPS co-ordinates [on page 21] placed on www.artclique.com.au/projects/relocation.