



*'A Family History'*  
*Memoirs*  
*of*  
*Geoffrey Duncan Baker*  
*22.07.31 -*

*Compiled 2007*

MY IMMEDIATE BAKER CLAN

Rear: Doug, Joan, Sid, Geoff

Front: Mum (Minnie)

Inset: Father (Duncan)



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## PREAMBLE

**T**here is no doubt the passing of the years tends to concentrate one's mind on the importance of having an understanding of one's family history, hence my belated attempt to create a written record of that history.

I hope this autobiographical 'walk down memory lane' is of interest to the reader. Whilst I have made mention of *my* great grand parents this is not intended to represent a definitive Baker family tree; it is more of a potted history very much devoted to my immediate side of the family which is, having regard to the title, slanted to my role in it. I have made every effort not to appear too egotistical. It includes a number of personal anecdotes as well as hearsay information which has been gleaned from the many conversations with family members over the years; particularly my sister Joan (Norman) who prior to her death became the unofficial 'family historian'.

In 1993 Joan's daughter Valerie gave her a book in which to record her family memories and I confess I have relied heavily upon the transcript of that document for the details of our early family history. Much of this, of course, was created before my arrival on this mortal coil in 1931.

There is a ring of truth in the cliché 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. I have, therefore, included a number of photographs which, I hope, complement the narrative as well as serving to introduce grand parents, great grand parents great great grand parents and great great great grand parents to the current generation. They also provide the opportunity for the observant to discern any family trait which may have transcended the intervening generations of our family. Future generations may also get some pleasure out of examining the current crop.

It is my hope that the importance of this somewhat anecdotal document is understood earlier than it was in my case and the opportunity taken to learn a little about our family; I hope it will be read by the children of future generations and inspire at least one of them to continue the chronology.

I wish to record my appreciation of the advice and input of my niece Valerie Power (nee Norman). In later years Valerie has enthusiastically taken over the mantel of family historian. She is heavily engaged in the ongoing laborious task of compiling an accurate family tree.

## Early Family History

**M**y paternal great grandfather Charles Baker was born in Chilcote, Somersetshire, England in 1829. He married Mary Anne Childs in Shipton, Somersetshire, England on 5 March 1849. Migrating to Australia they arrived in Sydney in June 1849 eventually settling in the Vaughan Springs district of Victoria where they raised a number of children. They subsequently moved to Rutherglen where Charles died on 22 August 1902. I have enclosed a copy of a letter written by my great, great grandmother Patience Baker to her son and daughter-in-law Charles and Mary in February 1850 . (*see page six*)

A brief biblical type summary of the male line in the Baker family tree reads like this:

Charles begat William James and others  
William begat Duncan Charles and others  
Duncan begat Geoffrey Duncan and others  
Geoffrey begat Gregory Duncan and others  
Gregory begat Mark Gregory and others

My father Duncan Charles Baker was born in Reid Street, Rutherglen on 28 May 1894. He died in the same room 39 years later on 17 October 1933 when I was two years of age. Rutherglen is situated in northern Victoria approximately five kilometers from the Murray River. During this time it was a successful wine producing and gold mining town. Eventually the gold petered out and the wine industry was decimated by the fungal disease phylloxera.

My father was the eldest of three children with two sisters Lydia Catherine and Mildred Margaret. My paternal grandparents of whom I have no memory were William James Baker and Isabella Baker nee McRae.

Grandma Baker died of typhoid fever when my father was seven years old. As work was scarce in Victoria Grandpa Baker had travelled to Western Australia where he obtained employment in the gold-mines in Kalgoorlie. After Grandma's funeral Grandpa Baker returned to Kalgoorlie and his three children were separated and placed with relatives or friends to be cared for.

My father went to live with Grandpa Baker's sister Sophia Arthur and her children in Drummond Street, Rutherglen. Upon leaving school he moved to Melbourne where he was apprenticed to a Mr. Jones as a plumber. In Melbourne he resided with a cousin Charlie Baker and his family in Ormond. Lydia who was five went to live with a Methodist minister and his family in Brunswick a northern suburb of Melbourne while Mildred who was six months old was brought up in Rutherglen by Grandma Baker's sister Mary McRae. This resulted in each child developing quite different personalities.

Grandpa Baker was to subsequently pass away in Rutherglen on 17 January 1933.

Both aunts who were to be very kind to us in later years trained as nurses and were extremely conservative in their outlook. I know they were thrilled when Margaret and Susan followed the same path many years later. Aunt Millie, the more serious of the two, was married with two sons, Robert Neil and Maxwell Gordon Coote. When, as children, we stayed at her home in East Kew I found it difficult to relax. If we did something 'naughty' we had to literally sit in the corner facing the wall while we pondered our perceived sins.

Aunt Lyddy on the other hand never married and devoted herself to nursing. She was one of the first nurses to serve with the Reverend Dr. John Flynn ('Flynn of the Inland') at the Halls Creek hospital in the remote country of north western Australia. This was before very many white people had ventured into the area. In those days it must have been like going to the moon! I have included a letter she wrote to Auntie Millie and Grandpa Baker in 1930 whilst she was en-route to Halls Creek. It gives an interesting insight into the hardships travellers had to endure when crossing the continent in those early days. (*see page 8*)

She went on to be quite successful and retired as owner and matron of the Bryson Hospital where she ran a very tight ship in Bryson Street Canterbury an eastern suburb of Melbourne . Every once in a while to ease mum's workload she would have us over to stay at the hospital for a few days. She was very much a nurse of the old school; I can still see her 'patrolling' the corridors at Bryson looking every inch the matron wearing her starched uniform and veil. In later years her nose would twitch and her lips would commence to curl when she spoke of the 'improvements' in nurses uniforms and conditions.

If I may digress for a moment. The 'Pilot Woods' mentioned in Aunt Lyddy's letter was to become well known in Western Australia with his own airline; coincidentally in 1959 he was to fly Ivy and myself from Perth to Rottnest Island and back in an ex-world war two Avro Anson aeroplane. He was a typical 'Aussie character' who conducted a genuine one man business which he literally 'operated by the seat of his pants'. He took our booking on the telephone, then he picked us up and drove us to the airport where, upon arrival, he opened the hangar and pulled the plane out onto the tarmac ready for take-off. In the air Ivy rode in the cockpit with him and he got her to wind down the landing gear when coming in to land!!! On board air conditioning was provided by holes and splits in the plane's canvas covering.

Back to the main story. Aunt Lyddy was a very Christian lady who was extremely kind to our family.

**Copy of a letter sent by Patience Baker, Somerset, to her son and daughter in law, Charles and Mary Ann Baker in Sydney Australia in February 1850.**

Croscombe, Febry 14/50

My dear children I now take my pen to write to you hoping I will find you both in good health as it leaves us at present. Thank god for it we received your letter the 2 of Febry which was monthly market and it so happened that your Aunt and Unkle Davis was at Dulcott they sent their trap up after me to come to Dulcott. They was all very glad to heare from you and I should have answered your letter before but I have bin waiting to know where we are going to live as we are going to leave Croscombe. Your father have got a very good place at Stoberry to look after a little farming for Mrs Connel. I don't see him about twice a week, he think it is likely that we shall go to Stoberry Lodge but I shall let Mrs Gone know before we leave Croscome. Mrs Gone and Mrs Wooley was so kind as to come down with Mary Ann's letter and I hope I shall soon see them again with a better account of what you are doing for I don't like the mason work but I hope you will take care of yourself. The farmers heare have lowered the mens waiges. They give but 7s. per week. Theye are obliged to sell there chees and corn and cattle very low. Wm. is at work for Snifs(?) Webb, John is porter for Mr Soloman, he have got a verry good place. Ann live with Mrs Juck (?) at hill house but she is going to leave at Lady Day for waiges. Now I must tell you that Elizabeth was married the 11 of June, she have got a daughter. She live at Dulcott and keeps a school. We think John is going to be married at Lady Day, we thought it was to be at Christmas but I don't think he do want to marry while he have got a mother and father to come to. The coller have bin verry bad heare but thank the Lord we have escaped it. There have bin about twenty died here. Your Unkle George's wife for one. They burry them the same day as they dye. Dear Charles I am sorry to tell you that John James wife is quite derange. He said he never had any trouble before they have got 3 boys. Your Aunt sent for John to.....

Part of the following page is torn off

Your father have thought a great deal about you for the last month for we do hear a bad account about the place. Elizabeth give her verry kind love to Mary Ann and she will write you a long letter soon. My dear children I hope you will enjoy yourselves on 5 March and live many happy years together. I shall think on you but I shal not be very happy my self. Your grandmother sends her kind love to you. She is now in her 90 year and I think she is looking as well as when you left home. Dear Charles I hope you will write often and direct to your Aunt as we are not certain how long we shall be in one place but we shall not be so far away but what we shall here from you by Mrs Gone. Now I must conclude by sending all our very kind love to you both.

P. Baker

This document was provided by Valerie Power nee Norman  
Valerie made the following note:

*'Signature is an obviously different hand to the body of the letter.  
5th. March, 1850 was Charles and Mary Ann's first wedding anniversary.  
Patience's maiden name was James so John James may be her nephew.  
All spelling is as found in the letter, not my mistakes. I guess that 'the coller' is cholera'*  
V.N.

She frequently went out of her way to assist us when the chips were down. Once a year she would take us to Myers in the city kit us out in new clothes and buy us lunch at the Myer Mural Hall which was the top eating spot in Myers Burke Street Store in those days. Looking back I feel there were two possible reasons for her great kindness; perhaps she believed she had a Christian obligation to take care of the widow and children of her brother who had been taken prematurely or, on the other hand, she may have seen us as the children she never had. I will never know.

Aunt Lyddy died on 7 October, 1980 and Aunt Millie died on 13 June, 1994.

### World War One

**O**n 20 July 1915 my father enlisted in the 1st. AIF and was posted to the 29th Battalion of the 5th Division. He did his initial training at Broadmeadows a Melbourne suburb and sailed for Egypt on 15 November. After further training in the desert in Egypt the battalion sailed for France where he served until wounded in action on 29 July 1918 in what was referred to as 'The Morlancourt Show!'. Mum's brother Jack who also served in the 29th. Battalion was killed in the same battle. During this period in France his battalion was involved in many battles including Polygon Wood, Villers Bretonneux and Fromelles where several thousand Australians died on the first night of the battle. *(An entry from my father's diary regarding this battle can be found at page 34)* My father's war record obtained from the Australian War memorial in Canberra shows he was admitted to hospital on a number of occasions whilst fighting in France and Belgium suffering from influenza and/or trench fever.

After being wounded my father was evacuated on 9th. August, 1918 to the Beaufort war hospital in Bristol, England for treatment and rehabilitation. He was fortunate to be able to spend some time with family prior to repatriation to Australia per the hospital ship S.S. Orca on 19 February 1919. He was finally discharged on 30 May 1919 when he resumed his trade as a plumber in Melbourne with his former employer.

He was subsequently awarded the 1914/1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Mum retained my father's medals and other wartime paraphernalia for many years before passing them on to his eldest grandson, Gregory. I was proud when Greg had them mounted and presented them to me at Christmas 2003. They now hang on the wall at 19 Newbiggin Street, Burwood.

My mother Minnie Lloyd Hipper was born in Port Melbourne on 1 November 1892. She was the eldest of six children; Jack (killed in France), Robert

Gordon (Bob), Lucie Isabel, Sidney (died aged 15 months) and Stanley Arthur. Joan described mum as 'a most remarkable lady' and I have no argument with that.

She passed away on 21 November 1967.

My father met my mother when he and others from his battalion visited Grandpa and Nanna upon their return to Australia to express their condolences over the death of Uncle Jack. Another lad who was with them, George Gibbons, met my Aunt Lucie at the same time. My parents were married on 14 October 1922 at the Church of Christ in Dandenong Road Malvern where Mum had been the church organist for a number of years. They spent their honeymoon at Marysville.

After their return they moved into their new home at 80 Brunell Street, East Malvern where Joan was born in the front bedroom on 1 October 1923. Mum said that when Joan was born the first thing my father did was go out and buy a 'Box Brownie' camera.

Aunt Lucie and Uncle George were married in 1927.

Like many families of their generation my parents were badly affected by the depression in the late twenties and early thirties. Unemployment was rife with the building trade being one of the first to be affected. Along with thousands of others my father lost his job. Each day he would walk from door to door in a futile search for work; the situation was hopeless, however and eventually they lost their home. They had borrowed seven hundred and fifty pounds from the State Savings Bank to purchase the home and after ten years there was one hundred pounds outstanding on the loan. They, like hundreds of other families, found it impossible to sell their property and the bank foreclosed.

Shortly after I was born my parents returned to the Baker family home in Rutherglen where my father was able to get a job in a gold mine; unfortunately he caught a chill which developed into pneumonia and died on 17 October 1933. His death had such a traumatic effect on Joan that it was many years after her marriage before she would go out on 17 October. One can only speculate what contribution his years surviving artillery and gas attacks together with the constant mud in the trenches in France and Belgium may have made to this outcome.

Joan described him as 'a very loving person who thought we were the best children in the world'.

When my father died mum was 41 years old. I was two at the time having been born in a private

**Copy of original letter from Miss Lydia Baker who went to Port Hedland and Halls Creek as an A.I.M (Australian Inland Mission) nursing sister from 1928-1930 & 1931-1932.**

King Edward Hotel

12.12.30

My Dear Mill and Dad,

By now you will have had my lettergram. It was so disappointing to get the wire on Tuesday afternoon but it is better to wait here than in Derby. Sydney hasn't decided about the special plane, had a wire from Derby this a.m. saying we could get through Jan. 1st. by coach - if so we will go to Hedland Wednesday, stay there the week then go and wait at Derby a few days.

Had a wire from Mrs. Moore asking us to stay with them, we will, be there for Christmas. Leave Boxing Day if the special plane is decided upon we will only stay the one night. There is a man who wants to go to Fitzroy Crossing on it, don't know who it is.

We had a pretty rough trip across, the train rocked and jolted all night, couldn't sleep. The conductor had been on thirty years and said he had never known such a rough trip. We arrived in Adelaide at 9am. A Miss Patterson from AIM met us. Airways car was waiting. We had to get straight into it with all our luggage, two other passengers. We were the only train passengers, the drome is about six miles out. The luggage decided to fall off the back about halfway. Arrived at drome, first one to meet us was our pilot, Mr. Heath. He seemed quite excited and so were we to see him. He said our luggage would be alright, heard him tell the man to put it all on, if necessary to leave something else off. We got our ticket and off we went, about twelve passengers, five women. The plane holds fourteen. The first part of the journey was very pretty, we flew over water for quite a time. Mr. Heath asked us if we would like to sit in the cockpit in the spare pilot's seat. I went in first, it was lovely, got a wonderful view, but a dreadful noise. While flying over the water he said, "Can you swim Sister?" The plane began to bump up and down. I said, "no." He laughed and said, "Its moments like these." He handed me a packet of Minties. I went back to the cabin after about an hour and a half and sent Fuzzy in. She used nearly all the bags, he thought it was a great joke. She had to stay there until we landed at Ceduna for lunch. We didn't feel like eating much. I wasn't sick at all, but felt like it. Five passengers got out there, only seven of us came on, we being the only two ladies. Arrived at Forrest 5pm. washed and had dinner. Fuzzy went to bed 7pm. and slept all night, felt much better in the am. I wasn't feeling too bad so sat up, heard all the Hedland news from Mr. Chater, our pilot for the next day. He could hardly believe his eyes when he saw us.

The Hotel Forest is a lovely place, it is right in the middle of the desert. Would think you were walking into a city hotel. We started for Perth 7am. First part was lovely, no bumps but towards the middle of the day it got bad, was quite pleased to reach Kalgoorlie 12pm. Had a cool drink didn't want any lunch. It was terribly hot. We stayed there 3/4 hour, got to Perth 3.30pm. It took us rather a long time. There was a very strong head wind. Pilot Woods and Mrs. Woods were at the drome to meet us, had their car. Took us to afternoon tea and a lovely drive after, all round the river. Mr. Woods is on leave so we won't have him on the plane. We are staying at the above hotel (King Edward Hotel) it's very handy to everything. We had a mad rush for two days, out to all meals, only had bed and breakfast here. Lunch at Parliament House Tuesday our Hedland member wired us in Kalgoorlie then met us in Perth. They were wishing we were going back to Hedland.

A number of people saw our names in the passenger list Sat. so looked us up. There are a few Hedland people down. We have more time now to go and see everyone. Met some Halls Creek folk on Monday night.

Fuzzy sends her love she is looking better now. Was awfully sick on the plane. Some of the men were just as bad. Her window wouldn't open so she had to pass her bag onto the young man in front. He would throw it out with his. I nearly died when I saw her at first it looked so funny, but he was very nice and didn't mind.

The weather has been very warm, we are now having a thunderstorm, it will cool the air. We are going out to lunch and dinner tonight. I am feeling a bit tired I didn't sleep last night. They were fixing the train line and made an awful noise.

I do hope that you are all well. Wasn't there a crowd at the station. I felt quite bewildered seeing so many. I hope Dad is alright and will stay and have a holiday. I will address this to you, Mill in case Dad is away. Pass it on to Aunt Mary and Duncan. I won't have time to write to all for a while.

We were deaf for a couple of days after we arrived. Had our ears plugged with wool but the noise of three big engines was dreadful. Had all conveniences on the plane, to have a wash, powder one's nose, etc.

Well my dear ones must stop. My love to Dad, Bob, Mary, Dunc. and all the others.

Your loving sister  
Lyd.