Finding French Forebears
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In the 1950s my paternal grandfather endeavoured to research his father's family history but was not able to get very far due to limited available resources. When I started my research in the 1980s it was a lot easier but there was still that brick wall that stood in the way of finding more about our family name, AUCHER. How and when did my French great-grandfather, Arthur Constant AUCHER, come to Australia and who were his French ancestors? With the information now available on the internet my interest was rekindled but again I came up against the same problem. However, using more traditional research I was able to find the solution to demolishing that wall and discovering amazing links between my mother and father. The name of a small French town was the secret.

Both my mother and father grew up in Sydney in the 1920s. There appeared to be little in common in their family backgrounds. My maternal grandmother, Maude Evaline DENNING (1876-1953), was a direct descendant of the convict Thomas DENNING (c1792-1862) and wonderful stories were discovered about her family that included another three convicts. Her husband, my grandfather, Frederick Clive EMANUEL (1882-1967), came from remarkable Jewish ancestors whose line could be traced back to where they immigrated to England from Europe in the late 17th century. All his family arrived in Australia prior to 1836.

My father's mother, Beatrice Louisa JONES (1882-1963), married my grandfather Arthur Leon AUCHER (1881-1962) in England where he had been repatriated after being wounded at Gallipoli with the 2nd Battalion of the Australian Imperial Forces during World War I. With the help of my father's English cousin, many stories about my grandmother's English and Welsh ancestors were revealed.

It was the AUCHER family where I kept coming up against a brick wall. Every document I had about my great-grandfather, Arthur Constant AUCHER, led me to believe he came from Paris. Arthur married in Rockhampton, Queensland in 1880 at the age of 34 giving his parents' names as Leon AUCHER and Julie and his place of birth as Paris, France[1]. His wife was Mary Mahon GIDDINGS (1849-1899) whose father was John Langran GIDDINGS (1818-1873), the paymaster of the 32nd (Cornwall) Regiment of Foot. Both her parents had been at the Siege of Lucknow in 1857[2]. However, no other information could be found about Arthur prior to 1880. Now and then there were some lucky discoveries. When looking for a marriage notice in the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* I chanced upon an advertisement for a school, the Rockhampton Luceum for Boys and Girls conducted by Monsieur A. Aucher[3]. I was also able to source a photograph of this school depicting my great-grandparents and their students[4]. The couple operated the school until the end of the year but with the opening of the Rockhampton Grammar School at the beginning of 1881 they decided to move on[5].

Even though the Queensland birth, death and marriage indexes give the full dates, I finally decided to purchase the marriage for his second marriage to Gertrude Maria Richard PRESTON hoping there could be additional information[6]. The results proved revealing. Arthur had re-married in Brisbane in 1899, shortly after the death of his first wife in Sydney[7]. This was the only document that gave his place of birth as a town called Lauterbourg in the Alsace region of France. This was to be the solution to demolishing that wall.

French civil registration was introduced in 1792 and the information on certificates proved comprehensive. The birth, marriage and death records for Lauterbourg were available on microfilm through the LDS library. To my surprise no-one with the name AUCHER was recorded as living there but there were many with the name AUSCHER. Finally I had found the birth certificate for my great-grandfather, Arthur Constant AUSCHER. He was born at 2 o'clock in the afternoon of 14 August 1845, the son of Léon AUSCHER le jeune, an iron merchant, and his wife Julie AUSCHER[8]. Léon and Julie were first cousins once removed. Through the LDS

[1] Queensland Marriage Certificate 1880/883
[2] R Holmes, *Redcoat: the British soldier in the age of horse and musket*, W W Norton & Co, London, 2002, p179
[3] *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton) 23 April 1880
[4] Rockhampton and District Historical Society HIS 49/2
[5] L McDonald, *Rockhampton: A History of a City and District*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1981, p373
[6] Queensland Marriage Certificate 1899/20278 (there were no children from this marriage)
[7] New South Wales Death Certificate 1899/8232
[8] LDS Film 0726105 (Lauterbourg Naissances 1843-1862)

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films, birth details of his brothers and sisters were found along with the marriage certificate of his parents. Arthur was the youngest of eight children of whom, sadly, only two others, Charlotte and Desiree, lived past their first birthday. Both sisters remained in France and I have been able to trace some of their descendants through the internet.

The internet also yielded a lot of information about the town of Lauterbourg. The history of the town could be traced back to the 12th century as the site of a Roman camp. By 1807 Lauterbourg had a population of just over 2,000 people, of whom 135 were Jewish. In 1808 Napoleon decreed that the Jewish people were to register a surname. Some, such as Aron AUSCHER, chose to preserve his identity by adopting his father's name[9]. Aron, I discovered, was the grandfather of my Arthur Constant AUCHER. So now unbeknown to my father's living family there was Jewish ancestry, a link in both my parents' backgrounds.

In 1870 Prussian soldiers invaded Lauterbourg. Alsace was then annexed by Germany and many of the inhabitants took refuge elsewhere in France. Some of Arthur's relatives left for the United States to join previous generations who had migrated to the southern states there. Arthur had been in the French Army, a soldier of the 84th Foot Regiment, and his sword inscribed *Strasbourg 1871*, along with his campaign medals are still with the family today. Somehow Arthur made his way to Australia.

But why did my great-grandfather change the spelling of his name? A search in the New South Wales archives provided a clue. Arthur Constant Auscher had a prison record. So now there was another convict in the family! The archives were able to provide a copy of his photo and prison record[10].

The Police Gazette of New South Wales for 1875 provided even more detail:

A warrant has been issued by the Water Police Bench for the arrest of Arthur Auscher, charged with stealing a gold brooch chain, of the value of £6 sterling, the property of Adolph Blau, jeweller, Hunter-street. Auscher is about 30 years of age, 6 feet high, medium build, fair complexion, large fair moustache, otherwise clean shaved; dressed in dark suit, and tall white hat; a native of Alsace, in Germany, wears the ribbon of the Legion of Honour. Supposed to have gone to Brisbane in the steamer "Lady Young" on the 29th ultimo.[11]

Arthur Constant AUSCHER was arrested by the Queensland Police and extradited to Sydney where he was convicted and received a sentence of six months in Darlinghurst Gaol. He claimed to be a traveller who had arrived in Sydney on board the *John Duthie* in November 1874.[12] Following his release in August 1875 he was in trouble again the following month.[13]

Arthur Auscher, charged on warrant with uttering a forged cheque for £20 to John A Vandergryp, purporting to be signed by David M. Travers, has been arrested by Detectives Camphin and Wilmott. Committed to trial at Criminal Court.[14]

He was convicted and received two years hard labour in Maitland Gaol for passing the forged cheque.[15]

In 1880 Arthur, a free man, changed the spelling of the surname to AUCHER when he married Mary Mahon GIDDINGS in Rockhampton. In 1881 the family moved to Gladstone where another Lyceum was established and my grandfather, Arthur Leon, was born.[16] The school did not appear to be a success and by the end of the

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[9] S Braun, *Chronicle of the Jewish Community of Lauterbourg* (in French), 18th Conference of the Company of the History of the Jews of Alsace and Lorraine, Strasbourg, 1996
[10] State Records NSW, Series 2134, Entrance Books (Darlinghurst Gaol)
[11] *Police Gazette New South Wales 1875*, Archive CD Books Australia, 2007, p6
[12] ibid p15
[13] ibid p226
[14] ibid p255
[15] ibid p392
[16] Queensland Birth Certificate 1881/2408

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year Arthur was teaching at Scotch College in Melbourne where one of his pupils was John Monash.[17] Coincidentally, Sir John Monash later married a distant relative of my mother's family.

Two more children were born in Melbourne, Albert Jules in 1884[18] and Mary Constance Julie in 1884[19] who was always known to the family as Maisie. Arthur's wife Mary had relatives in Victoria and South Australia. So in 1887 the couple had relocated again and established a Girls' Grammar School in North Adelaide[20] however the following year the family moved again. This time they sailed on board the *City of Adelaide* to Sydney where Arthur set up a translation and type-writing bureau in Elizabeth Street[21]. He became a naturalised British subject again in Sydney in 1893[22]. Arthur had previously been naturalised in Gladstone in April 1881[23].

Arthur Constant Aucher has a small place in Australian history. A story I heard as a child was that 'our family had the first car in Queensland.' This was indeed true as Arthur visited France for the Paris Exposition and returned to Brisbane with a De Dietrich motor car in 1901[24]. The De Dietrich was assembled in Niederredon, a town not far from Lauterbourg and where other members of the Auscher family lived. Arthur then took the car south to Melbourne where he was featured with a photo and article in the *Australian Cyclist and Motor-Card World* on 3 October 1901. This was part of his interview (again omitting any reference to his time in Australia prior to 1880):

Mr. Aucher, B.A. (Paris), is a recent arrival from Brisbane, and brought this motor-car, a De Dietrich, to be officially tested by the Post Office authorities. Mr. Aucher is managing director for a big Brisbane limited liability novelty company, one of their principal lines being the De Dietrich motor-car. He is by no means a stranger, having been out in Australia from Paris for 27 years. His experience has been varied, and includes from the year 1880 to 1889, Master of the French and German languages at the Scotch College, Melbourne, and Hawthorn Grammar School, Lecturer at Ormond College, Lecturer at the Adelaide University. He then abandoned lecturing and was manager of the N.S.W. Government contract of advertising postal pillars known as the "Dan O'Connor Boxes", which Mr. Aucher sold to the Government at a good figure. In '98 he formed a company in Brisbane to place on the market a metallic incandescent burner. In 1900 he went to the Paris exposition, and accepted the position of correspondent to the Brisbane Courier. During his stay on the Continent, Mr. Aucher studied the motor-car industry, recognising the possibilities of the future of the automobile in Australia. He secured the agency of the De Dietrich car for his company.

A search on the National Archives of Australia website revealed that Arthur applied for many patents for such things as lamp burners and an innovative corkscrew. He certainly appeared to be an entrepreneur.

By 1903 Arthur and his second wife had relocated to Sydney where he operated an importing business at Ashfield[25]. He spent his last years living at Marrickville and he died in Sydney in 1931 survived by his second wife, three children and five grandchildren[26]. Perhaps his children and grandchildren were never meant to find out about the secrets of his early years in Australia.

In the past eighteen months the brick wall has certainly been demolished as I found out more about my great-grandfather. I have found French ancestors who emigrated to the United States of America, married into

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[17] R Perry, *Monash: The Outsider Who Won a War*, Random House, Sydney, 2004, p18
[18] Victorian Birth Certificate 1882/18246
[19] Victorian Birth Certificate 1884/4743 (indexed as Archer)
[20] *South Australian Advertiser* 7 January 1887
[21] *New South Wales Post Office Directory 1888*
[22] State Records NSW, Naturalisations, Register number 12, p60
[23] *Votes & Proceedings of the Queensland Parliament 1885*, Vol. 2, p231 (indexed as Ancher)
[24] D W Martin, *Cyclists, Doctors and Others – the Introduction of the Motor Car to Queensland*, Church Archivists' Press, Brisbane, 2001, chapter 8
[25] *New South Wales Post Office Directory 1903*
[26] New South Wales Death Certificate 1931/5678

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a family who then immigrated to Australia and married a relative of my mother's ancestors. Other links between my father and mother have been found where some of his French ancestors have married her English ancestors.

Just by purchasing a marriage certificate I have located my elusive French ancestors and I look forward to discovering even more about them.