

Tracing the steps of my most travelled ancestor**A man with a secret past**

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My paternal grandfather was an elusive character. His past was shrouded in mystery and he seemed intent on keeping it that way.

I commenced tracing my family history in 1986. At that time, my understanding was that my grandfather had died when my father was very young. When I was about eighteen years old, my father confessed to being illegitimate. It was a taboo subject, and never mentioned again. Although I was a little uneasy about possible repercussions from delving into his past, I believed I had the right to explore my heritage.

I began my research by applying for the marriage certificate of my parents. I then applied for my father's birth certificate, which states:

Alvar Clive Healand, born 17 April 1920, Carlton. Parents: Alvar Healand, age 33, born Tasmania, Carpenter, and Dora Healand formerly Boulter, age 28, born South Yarra. Date of marriage 17 September 1915.¹

Although nothing on the certificate indicated illegitimacy, the idea of my father falsely laying claim to such social disgrace was absurd. When a search failed to find a marriage record, I could only assume Dora had provided phony details. A subsequent search of the Tasmanian birth index also failed to produce any record of my grandfather's birth.

Shortly afterwards, I came across the following entry in the Victorian Births Index at my local genealogy society:

1887: Heland, Regnhold Albar. Parents: Frederick Will. & Mary Elean. Bastin, Malvern

This had to be my grandfather! I was well aware of the possibility of spelling variations. Moreover, not only is *Alvar* a very unusual name, so is *Healand*. The year of birth corresponded with my grandfather's age of 33 years indicated on my father's birth certificate. According to the certificate, my great-grandfather, Frederick William Heland, had been born in Sweden.²

I decided to go through the Melbourne phone books in the hope of finding a relative who knew something. When the *Healand* enquiries proved fruitless, I wrote to those listed as *Heland*, and this is where I received a lucky break. I came across the descendants of Harold George HELAND, Alvar's younger brother. The family name was actually *von Heland*.

They sent me a Pedigree from the Swedish House of Nobles, listing members of the nobility. From this document I learned that Alvar Reinhold von Heland had worked as a carpenter in Remuera, New Zealand, and that three of the children from his second marriage had been born there.

Although I was convinced I was on to the correct family, my challenge was in proving the link between Alvar and Dora. Without a marriage certificate, how could I prove their relationship? I needed to find a living family member – somebody who had actually known them.

Once again I returned to the Melbourne phone books, this time writing to all those listed under the name of *Boulter*. Another stroke of luck! I received a letter from Nora BOULTER, the second wife of Dora's deceased brother, Raymond. She knew of the scandal. My grandfather had been (in her words) '*German or something similar, and off a boat.*'

According to the Swedish documents, Stuart HELAND was my father's half-brother. I decided to try my luck with the Sydney phone book, and my hopes escalated when I found an entry for an *SR Heland*. However, my subsequent letter went unanswered.

¹ Victorian birth certificate No 10335.

² Victorian birth certificate No 12642.

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Wondering what to do next, I decided to write to well-known Australian genealogist, Janet REAKES. I was delighted when her reply confirmed I was on the right track. She believed my family would be eligible for inclusion in the records of the House of Nobles in Sweden, and suggested I write to them.

Their reply was disappointing. They had no knowledge of Dora BOULTER. Their records showed that at the time of my father's birth, Alvar Reinhold VON HELAND had still been married to his first wife, Ruby STABBACK. They suggested I write to James SANDERSON, a Sydney genealogist specialising in Scandinavian research.

Before I had a chance to do this, and without warning, my father suddenly asked me if I was also tracing his side of the family. He had come across my *Healand* entry in the *Genealogical Research Directory* at the local library. Taking a deep breath, I admitted that I was. Much to my surprise, he was not upset at all – in fact, quite the opposite. At last, everything was out in the open!

As I had assumed, he had grown up under the name of Alvar BOULTER. His mother had told him that he had been named after his father, but that his father had died when he was very young. At about sixteen years of age, when applying for his birth certificate, he had made the astonishing discovery that his birth had been registered under the name of Alvar HEALAND. The subsequent confrontation resulted in his mother's confession to him having been born out of wedlock.

He knew very little. His father had promised to marry Dora. He had been agreeable to being named as father on the birth certificate, and had paid her child support of £1 per week for a couple of years. However, he had disappeared when my father was about three years old.

My father recalled his father having had some connection with boats – vague memories of being on board a boat with him, and also on the wharves at Williamstown. He also remembered spending time with his mother and her Swedish friends, the PETERSON family, who lived on *The Three Cheers*, a former Bass Strait trader that had been converted to a houseboat. In addition, comments from a childhood friend had alluded to his father being German.

I again wrote to Stuart HELAND, and this time he replied. He had no knowledge of any other siblings, but suggested I phone him. Fortunately, this resulted in his acceptance of my claims.

He told me that Alvar had been a carpenter, with a passion for yachts and sailing. He had belonged to the Hobson's Bay Yacht Club in Williamstown, where he had won a pair of gold cufflinks as first prize in a yacht race on *The Namoi*. His parents had married in 1922 (around the time Alvar had disappeared out of Dora's life).

Stuart said his father had been rather a secretive man. After a marriage spanning some thirty years, the discovery of a prior marriage had come as a complete shock to his widow when going through his papers following his death.

After comparing the stories of both my father and Stuart, it was obvious we were discussing the same man. A photo given to me by Stuart shows my grandfather dressed in a seaman's jacket and cap. He bears a strong resemblance to my son, the only member of our family with the sandy hair Stuart attributed to his father. This also explained my father's sandy moustache on his one and only attempt at growing one – in complete contrast to his black hair. Stuart expressed the hope that we might all meet in the near future.

Still needing some form of documentation to verify Alvar and Dora's relationship, I finally wrote to James SANDERSON, the Scandinavian genealogy expert. Although he confirmed I was on the right track, he was unable to offer any assistance.

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A further letter to the House of Nobles resulted in a reply from their chief genealogist.³ He congratulated me on my 'excellent work', agreeing 'without demur' that Alvar Reinhold VON HELAND was my grandfather. He was emphatic on one point though. It was not possible for my family to be included in the records. They applied to legitimate members of the Swedish nobility only, or to those whose birth had subsequently been legitimized by marriage.

He viewed this as being unimportant, saying I could still trace my ancestry in a direct line back fourteen and fifteen generations, through various Counts, Countesses, Barons and Baronesses, to two Swedish Kings – Gustavus I, born 1496, King of Sweden 1523-1560, and his son, Ericus XIV, born 1533, King of Sweden 1560-1568. He had enclosed a chart showing the direct lineage.⁴ We were also descended from the ancient Kings of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Poland, and the Emperors of Germany and Byzans – just to mention one of them: Charlemagne 747-814, crowned an Emperor by Pope Leo III in Rome on Christmas Day 800.

Fifteen months after this incredibly exciting discovery, my father died very suddenly. He had always wondered about his background, but the social stigma of illegitimacy in those times had resulted in him keeping it a closely guarded secret. My belief is that fate stepped in, revealing the truth to him just in time.

My research had revealed Alvar marrying his first wife, Ruby, in 1908.⁵ ⁶ Following the birth of their daughter, Mavis Claire, in 1913⁷ they appear to have separated. The 1914 electoral roll shows Alvar living in Richmond, and Ruby with her family in East Melbourne.⁸ Although I had wondered whether Dora had been named co-respondent in the 1922 divorce, it had been granted on the grounds of Alvar's desertion.⁹ ¹⁰ However, I am told the real reason was that Ruby had been involved with Alvar's brother.

I also finally found proof of the relationship between Alvar and Dora on the 1919 electoral roll – the year prior to my father's birth in Carlton.¹¹

Heland, Alvan, 12 Carlton st., Carlton, woodcutter, M.

Heland, Dora, 12 Carlton st., Carlton, home duties, F.

Alvar appears to have led rather a colourful life. His interest in sailing may have been inherited from his father Wilhelm, a sailor who had jumped ship in Australia in 1880 and gone to the Ballarat goldfields.

In March 1916, Alvar came close to losing his life in a boating incident.¹² In November 1922, an advertisement for the sale of his boat suggests the tying up of loose ends before fleeing Victoria following his second marriage.¹³

His marriage to Clara MELLOR took place in Melbourne on 22 December 1922,¹⁴ the day his divorce from Ruby became final. A short time later, the couple departed for Brisbane, and moved to New Zealand soon after. Three children were born there. The family returned to Australia about five years later, not to Alvar's birthplace of Melbourne, but to Sydney – where Stuart was born. Considering the period in which he lived, he had certainly travelled considerably. Alvar died in Sydney on 4 February 1956.¹⁵

³ Letter dated 19 November 1990 from Chief Genealogist, Palace of the House of Nobles, Sweden.

⁴ *Den Introducerade Svenska Adels Ättartavlor* (Ancestral Records of Swedish nobility).

⁵ Victorian marriage certificate No 5898.

⁶ Melbourne *Argus* newspaper 14 September 1908.

⁷ Victorian birth certificate No 25735.

⁸ Victorian electoral rolls 1914.

⁹ Divorce papers, Supreme Court, Melbourne.

¹⁰ Melbourne *Argus* newspaper 23 September 1922.

¹¹ Victorian electoral roll 1919.

¹² Melbourne *Argus* newspaper 2 March 1916.

¹³ Melbourne *Argus* newspaper 4 November 1922.

¹⁴ Victorian marriage certificate No 10452.

¹⁵ NSW death certificate No 664/2036.

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During his early years, it would appear that he had been running away from his responsibilities, attempting to keep not only his relationship with Dora, and the child from that relationship, hidden from his new wife – but also his first marriage, and the daughter from that marriage.

I have always felt there is a link between Alvar, the Swedish PETERSON family, and Tasmania. Maybe he had been a member of the crew of *The Three Cheers*. Although I have made numerous enquires, nothing has eventuated from any of them. A member of the Heland family said that Wilhelm Fredrik VON HELAND and his wife had lived in Tasmania at some stage, and a woman from the BOULTER family told me Alvar had been (in her words) '*off a ship, an officer or something.*'

It is interesting that both my father and my grandfather were carpenters who enjoyed boats.

This has been a fascinating journey, not only for the peace and sense of closure it brought my father, but for my eventual meeting with Stuart (holder of the title Baron) and his family in Sydney – although sadly, after my father's death. David, my half-cousin, bears a strong resemblance to photos of my father in his younger days, and also to my son, Jason. We have established a nice relationship, and keep in regular contact. We all met up in Sydney earlier in 2010. This ultimate connection to my father's family has been immensely rewarding.

Note

There are numerous spelling variations throughout the records, e.g.

Alvar, Albar, Alvan

Heland, Healand

Alvar Reinhold, Alvar Regnhold

Vilhelm Fredrik, Wilhelm Fredrik, as well as the anglicised version of this name, William Frederick.

With special thanks to Stuart Heland, David Heland, Paul Heland, Nora Boulter and Selina West-Onley.