

The Family of Abraham Balcomb

Abraham Balcomb was born at Burwash in Sussex and baptised there 7 Jan 1781. His father, Thomas Balcomb, had died eight months earlier at the age of 31. In 1783 Abraham's mother, Susanna Collins, married William Kemp and moved to Brightling, Sussex, where she had another four children to add to the five she had had by her first husband. Susanna died at Brightling in 1823 aged 74.

On 13 Oct 1809 Abraham married Mercy Webb at New Romney, Kent. They had 10 children:

1. Ann Balcomb, born 30 Apr and baptized 9 Sep 1810 in New Romney, Kent.
2. Sarah Balcomb, born 14 Jun and baptized 2 Aug 1812 in New Romney, Kent. She was buried 4 Apr 1816 in New Romney, Kent.
3. Mercy Balcomb, born 22 Mar and baptized 8 May 1814 in New Romney, Kent.
4. Mary Balcomb, born 2 Oct 1815 and baptized 26 Nov 1815 in New Romney, Kent.
5. Sophia Sarah Balcomb, born 5 May and baptized 22 Jun 1817 in New Romney, Kent.
6. Harriett Balcomb, born 12 Sep and baptized 18 Oct 1818 in New Romney, Kent.
7. Hannah Balcomb, born 25 Mar and baptized 5 Apr 1821 in New Romney, Kent.
8. Abraham Balcomb, born 3 Feb and baptized 9 Feb 1823 in New Romney, Kent.
9. George Balcomb, born 10 May and baptized 19 Jun 1825 in New Romney, Kent. He was buried 19 Sep 1825 in New Romney, Kent.
10. Eliza Balcomb, born 18 Sep and baptized 27 Sep 1826 in New Romney, Kent. She was buried 6 May 1827 in New Romney, Kent.

Abraham worked as a labourer and, during the period after the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1819, the area was relatively prosperous. However, the condition of the greater part of the country, particularly in the industrial areas, was steadily deteriorating, and a great agricultural depression began in 1822 and 1823. In the New Romney area the worst of this terrible depression was from 1822 to 1832

By 1830 the plight of the Balcomb family had become desperate. Abraham had absconded, probably to London to avoid Debtors Prison, and his destitute wife and four underage children became the responsibility of the Parish. Under the existing Poor Laws a woman adopted her husband's home parish as her own when she married. On 24 April 1830 Mercy, with children Sophia Sarah, Harriett, Hannah and Abraham, was removed from New Romney, which in this instance meant to the Ticehurst Union Workhouse. The Ticehurst Workhouse covered eight parishes, one of which was Burwash.

Mercy's health collapsed and she died in January 1832 at Ticehurst aged 45 (buried 9 Jan 1832), followed in February by her 14 year old daughter, Harriett (buried 26 Feb 1832).

At the time Mercy and her children were sent to the Workhouse, her eldest daughter, Ann, had already married John Thomas Pilgrim at Dover 7 Jan 1829. On 12 Oct 1831, the second surviving daughter, Mercy, married Robert Blanch at Biddenden in Kent and on 12 Aug 1832 the next daughter, Mary married Robert Blanch's younger brother, James Blanch.

To escape their plight Abraham Balcomb migrated to America. Using his mother's maiden name of Collins, he arrived in New York on the "Sovereign" on 24 September 1832. With him were four children, his eldest daughter, Ann, with her husband John Thomas Pilgrim and daughter Sophia Pilgrim, Sophia Sarah, aged 15, Hannah, aged 11, and Abraham, aged 9.

Abraham's fate in America is not known, nor is that of his daughter Hannah. His daughter, Ann Balcom Pilgrim, settled at Cameron, Steuben County, New York, and appears to have still been alive at the time of the 1840 Census with her husband and five children. She died before 1850 when her husband was living at Barrington, Yates County, New York, married to Jane, aged 24.

In 1850 Abraham Jr was living at Cameron and his sister Sophia Sarah Hargrave was living at Senia, Ontario County, New York. In 1860 they were both living at Cameron.

The remaining daughters, Mercy Balcomb Blanch and Mary Balcomb Blanch, migrated to Australia with their families in 1838.

Life with Robert Blanch must have been difficult for Mercy because, in August 1842, she absconded with an ex-convict, Joseph Blundell, and adopted her grandmother's name of Susan. The Blundells became pioneers in the area that later became Canberra, the Australian capital. Susan Blundell (formerly Mercy Balcomb) died in April 1892. She had had five children by Robert Blanch and ten by Joseph Blundell.



Susan Blundell
(Mercy Balcomb Blanch)

Mary Balcomb Blanch died at Plattsburg, New South Wales, in 1904 at the age of 89, having had seventeen children, seven of whom survived her.

William Good
March 2012