

# Kingsley Ogilvie Fairbridge

## 1885—1924

Kingsley Fairbridge was born in Grahamstown, South Africa on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1885 and attended St. Andrew's College until the age of 11. His father, Rhys Seymour Fairbridge was a mining engineer and surveyor moved the family to Umtali Rhodesia (present day Mutare, Zimbabwe), which ended his early education. While living in this new colony just being opened up to European settlers he contracted malaria which reoccurred through the rest of his life.

In early 1903 he travelled to England to visit his grandmother for about a year. It was during this time that he was deeply moved by the conditions of the London slums with its many malnourished and impoverished children. Upon his return to Africa he worked in the Johannesburg gold mines for over two years and started to work on his idea of bringing poor children to South Africa so they could become farmers.

Applying to the Rhodes trustees for a scholarship he was told that he would be favourably considered upon passing the entrance examinations. This was achieved on his fourth attempt and in October 1908 he entered Exeter College, Oxford. The next year with the assistance of university associates he formed the "Society for the Furtherance of Child Emigration to the Colonies" (later the Fairbridge Society). Initially he wanted to establish facilities for his child emigration scheme in Rhodesia but these plans were rebuffed. Over the next two years he spent time solidifying the society, raising funds, obtaining a diploma in forestry and in December 1911 married Ruby Ethel Whitmore, a nurse, who was fully behind his project.

With only a small amount of financial backing they sailed to Western Australia in March 1912 and over the next few months searched for a suitable location to buy and establish their first farm school. A 65 hectare parcel was finally acquired about 97 kilometres south of Perth near the small community of Pinjarra. By January 1913 the initial party of 13 boys aged 7 to 13 arrived with a second party of 22 boys landing at Fremantle in July. The entire endeavour almost failed during World War I as little support came from England. In August 1919 Fairbridge returned to England and raised £27,000 from public subscription and another £20,000 from the British government's Overseas Settlement Committee on condition that Western Australian Government continue its grant of 6 shillings per week per child, which they did.

Shortly after his return and with additional funds a much larger and more suitable property of almost 1,300 hectares was purchased north-east of Pinjarra where the farm and a home site was laid out with separate family-sized cottages built to accommodate the boys and girls. By 1924 there were about 200 children at the farm school. Unfortunately, at midnight on July 19<sup>th</sup> Kingsley Fairbridge died of a lymphatic tumour at age 39 while recuperating from a minor operation. He was buried at the Fairbridge Farm School, Pinjarra.

Although his wife, Ruby, and their two sons and two daughters returned to England the farm school continued thanks to the strong society that had been established in England and Australia. Eventually the school would accommodate up to 400 children at a time and continued to operate until 1981.

Other schools were also established by the Fairbridge Society. They included the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School, here, at Cowichan Station, Vancouver Island in 1935, Northcote Farm School, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria in 1937 and the Molong Fairbridge Farm School, New South Wales in 1938 and the Rhodesia Fairbridge Memorial College, Southern Rhodesia, in 1946. Today the Fairbridge Society, in association with the Prince's Trust, concentrates its efforts on youth programmes within the larger cities of the British Isles.