

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SOCIETY HELD ON FRIDAY 1st MAY 1981

PRESENT: Mr Lane, Mr Newman, Mrs Burton, Miss Cray, Dr Whittle, Mrs Stanley, Mrs Davenport, Mrs Davis, Mr and Mrs Bell.

APOLOGIES: Mr and Mrs Mantle, Mr Hussey, Miss Gibbs.

GUESTS: Mr and Mrs Collins, Mrs Lodge, Mrs Wolfe.

Mr John Davis spoke on "THE AUSTRALIAN CONNECTION" - a story of families from the villages of Chinnor, Emmington and Sydenham who in 1843 went to seek a better life and a new identity in Australia actively assisted by the local Poor Law authorities.

The beginning of the story is recorded in an old Vestry Minute Book found in the coal shed of Hill Farm contained - the Emigration Account of 1843 - the initial costs of Birth and Marriage Certificates, Medical Examinations, Vaccinations, the cost of transport to Liverpool and new outfits were financed by the Overseers of the Poor helped by a loan of £100 from Samuel Turner and eventually 14 adults with 16 children left in December 1843 for Liverpool, the ship "United Kingdom" and Sydney. They went to Aylesbury by cart and then by rail to Birmingham where £1.0.6 was spent on refreshments. Once in Liverpool, there were 3 nights in lodgings before the vessel sailed on the 20th December.

A parallel saga had occurred some weeks before when a similar party from the Thame Poor Law District (including Emmington and Sydenham) went to Liverpool to take the "Wallace" for Port Phillip. This link was brought to notice through correspondence from Mrs Pam Smith to the Rector asking for information about her ancestors.

The background to these journeys (repeated in many other villages in both Britain and Ireland) stems from the Depression and misery arising after the Napoleonic Wars leading eventually to the 1834 Poor Law and its encouragement of emigration by private committees (such as the London Emigration Committee inspired by Gibbon Wakefield) or by Colonial Governments. By 1843 particularly the colony of New South Wales had become less like a penal settlement - transportation had ended there in 1840.

Under the latter schemes, settlers received a bounty sufficient to cover the costs of the voyage of the emigrants they were to employ. The success of the scheme varied as did the quality of the emigrants, many of whom did not go to work on the land as planned but stayed in the towns. The Bounty Certificates increasingly went to speculators and particularly to the Shipowners with the settlers playing only a nominal role. However the 1844 emigrants (a total of 8000) were reported as above average.

On the "Wallace" (a 3-masted Barque of 762 tons) there were 8 paying passengers, all the other 278 going under the Bounty Scheme. 38 died on the journey of over 3 months, principally children. The comment was made there were too many children on board and too many without agricultural training.

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On the "United Kingdom" (another 3-master, built in Quebec in 1839 of 1262 tons; larger than the "Cutty Sark"), the journey also took over 3 months and the Captain and the Surgeon were reported as unqualified to manage Emigrants. They were still however paid their full gratuities.

Mr Davis described some of the local families that went on these two vessels, covering what is known of their lives both before they went and after they had arrived.

The story is still unfinished.....

After a lively Question and Answer session, Mr Davis was warmly thanked for a most interesting and well documented talk. Particularly appreciated were all the illustrations which had been displayed around the walls of the Adult Education Centre.

Minutes of a meeting of the Society held on Friday 8th. January 1988 at the Reading Room, High Street, Chinnor.

Rev. Douglas Chisholm 'Under the Southern Cross: The Australian Bicentennial'

Members Present:

The Australian Bicentenary
Chris & Lilian Mantle, J.W. Davis, Alan Raistrick, K.G. Scrimgeour, June Cray, John & Myra Bell, Rosemary Davis, Miranda Davis, Mary Darmody-Cadle, Eileen & Pat Whelehan, Alex Thomson, Wilf Newman, Valerie Gossling, Tony Andrew, K. Gibbard, Dorothy Chisholm, Jean Mason, Jan Gooders, Beryl Mitchell, Trevor Hussey.

Visitors:

Mr. & Mrs. J. Wise, D. McCarthy, G.J. & D. Varney, Ann Layton, Ken Mason, Mr. & Mrs. Myring, D. Eaton, P.J. Cleaver, Alan Gooders, A.J. Stevens.

In May 1787 the First Fleet of seven ships left Portsmouth harbour laden with convicts transported from Britain to relieve the overcrowding of British prisons and prison hulks. Most of the crimes were against property rather than people, for example there were no murderers. In January 1788 the fleet reached the bay now known as Sydney harbour and there set about starting the convict settlement. There were no skilled artisans. Years of hardship led to the eventual settlement and development of a great country. The convicts were available as workers for the settlers. The 'incurable' were sent to penal colonies in Tasmania where conditions were appalling.

In the 1840s large numbers of immigrants were being aided to Australia by the poor laws and aided passages to relieve the rural poverty in the agricultural areas. Many people went from the Chinnor area, on ships such as the 'Wallace' and 'United Kingdom', mostly agricultural labourers, and their families. John Davis and June Cray have corresponded with many of the descendants.

The Australian Goldrush was started by a returned digger who had been to California and recognised the soil in his area as probably gold bearing. The arguments about liberty led to a very early democratic government, with every man getting the vote many years before Britain.

In the later years before transportation was stopped in the 1850s many of the convicts had been political prisoners, many of them Irish Catholic activists. The Catholic ethic has been continued by the post-war immigration of continental Europeans.

The treatment of the Aborigines was bad from the first. In Tasmania they had been hunted like dogs, and finally wiped out about 1870. The Aborigines have declared 1988 a year of mourning.