

From Wiltshire to Australia 1851
The Story of an Emigration

During the spring and summer of 1851 258 Wiltshire men, women and children emigrated to the colonies of South Australia and Victoria. The men were all workers on the land of one kind or another, except for a few bricklayers and brick makers, a wheelwright and a miller; the women were their wives, sisters or daughters, apart from one of two independent so-called 'farm servants'. They went to Australia in sailing ships chartered by a Colonial Office board, with free passages. Thousands of emigrants went overseas from the British Isles at that time; why should a small group of them from Wiltshire be of particular interest? I will give one reason straight away; others, I hope, will become apparent later on.

The Wiltshire emigration of 1851 happens to be unusually well documented; we know exactly how it was organised, we know the emigrants' full names and ages, the names and ages of their children, and the villages and towns the came from. These particulars are given in a register, a minute book and a handful of correspondence deposited some years ago by the Marquis of Ailesbury in the County Record Office at Trowbridge. They are all that remains of the Wiltshire Emigration Association, which arranged the departure of these people to Australia.

Here, it seemed to me, was something worth investigating, which might provide an interesting story and give an insight into early Victorian Wiltshire. But it was not until I got in touch with descendants of some of the emigrants in South Australia that I began to feel that the emigration had really taken place and they have provided some interesting personal details.

Much less is known about those who went to Victoria and their descendants. There were fewer of them, and they went straight into the confusion caused by the gold rush. Gold was discovered in Victoria in May 1851 when the 'John Knox', carrying some of the Wiltshire emigrants to Port Phillip, was already on the high seas and a few weeks before the 'Statesman', carrying the rest of the them, had sailed. By the time they arrived, the administration of the colony was hard pressed by the inflow of migrants, their chances of finding a settled way of life were not so good as in South Australia and their movements have understandably proved very difficult to trace. One thing they all had in common besides their Wiltshire origin, whether they went to Victoria or to South Australia, they include no convicts.

In this paper I propose to devote a good deal of space to describing the conditions from which the emigrants were getting away. Then I shall deal briefly with their departure from England and voyage to Australia, explaining first how the Wiltshire Emigration Association was formed.

It was in the 1830's and 40's that the emigration movement gathered momentum, and in the late 40's and 50's it reached a climax. It may seem surprising that so many people wanted to get away from the country which was fast becoming the workshop of the world and the ruler of its greatest empire, and that this Wiltshire emigration took place at exactly the same time as the Great Exhibition of 1851. The fact remains that many emigrants were driven overseas by dire need.

The need was greatest in Ireland during and after the prolonged potato famine of 1845-47, but it was quite acute in rural areas of the South of England too.

When we come to examine the situation in Wiltshire, the strongest motive, I think, was hunger. Listen to what an agricultural labourer, Jacob Baker of Hodson near Swindon, said in February 1850. "And you, gentlemen, must know that our case is very bad, and that we have not near victuals enough. How would you like to sit down with your wife and young children four days in the week to not half bread and potatoes enough, and the other three days upon not half enough boiled Swedes and but with little fire to cook them with?" Baker, who had taught himself to read and write, had intended to make the speech, from which this passage is taken, at a meeting in Swindon arranged by the North Wiltshire Agricultural Protection Society, a body formed in 1844 to fight against the repeal of the Corn Laws. The farmers relied on the Corn Laws to protect them against imports of cheap foreign corn. It was a highly combative speech, in some ways very modern in tone, for it criticised a month other things the size of the Queen's income.

The organisers of the meeting were careful not to let a working man like Baker say anything at all; and in this perhaps they did him a service, for he would have spoken with a broad Wiltshire accents, and some of the bigwigs on the platform, like for instance, Earl Stanhope, would not have understood what he said.

Baker took the speech home in his pocket and showed it to Thomas Dyke, a farmer who often employed him. Dyke sent it to the editor of the *Devizes Gazette* who, to his lasting credit, published it in full in that Tory journal. Jacob Baker, his wife and 9 children were among the emigrants of 1851 and during the voyage he wrote a poem containing this significant couplet:

Off we go to Adelaide, as fast as we be able
Beef and mutton we expect to see upon the table

And see them they did. Exactly 2 years after the Protection meeting in Swindon, in February 1852, Jacob wrote from Lyndoch Valley, north of Adelaide, to Thomas Dyke and his other friends in Hodson. "Poor people in Hodson do not know what good living is. We have a joint of fresh meat on our table every day and little Bill says "I want to give Tom Weston some". Little Bill was 6 years old and his remark makes one realise how keenly the lack of proteins could be felt by an agricultural worker's family in the 1840's and 50's.

It was the same in other parts of Wiltshire. Dr. Greenup of Calne, reporting to the Assistant Poor Law Commissioner in 1841, referred to "insufficiency of food" as "the great evil" in the lives of the poor; and a mother of 6 in Calne said her family never had butcher's meat, that for milk they were dependent on the Vicar giving them a little, and - to quote her own words "We never know what it is to get enough to eat; at the end of the meal the children are always asking for more at every meal; I then say, you don't want your father to go to prison do you".

James Caird, reviewing the state of English agriculture for *The Times* in 1850 noted that the labourer's diet on Salisbury Plain consisted of bread with a little butter or lard, and cheese and bacon only occasionally when he could afford them. "We found",

said Caird, "a prevalent desire for emigration among the labourers themselves". Nor apparently did their food improve much with the greater indirect prosperity of the 1850's and 60's, though evidence becomes more indirect and less specific.

In the early 50's the annual dinner given in January to the aged and infirm persons of Collingbourne Kingston, about 60 of them, was regarded as an event of some importance. Lady Ailsbury came, and caused a sensation by carving the joints and waiting at table. It was the one really good meal that the aged and infirm persons of Collingbourne Kingston got in that year.

In 1853, Marlborough was running a soup kitchen for its poor. And a writer on agriculture in the prosperous 1860's said of Wiltshire: "The peasantry however do not seem to be so well fed or clothed as in the northern or midland counties". The Poor Law Guardians of the Tisbury Union, when criticised in 1867 for the inadequacy of the meals provided in their workhouse, retorted that the inmates got more to eat there than others were getting in their own homes".

Wiltshire would not have been the best county in which to look for evidence to support Mr. Gladstone's statement that between 1853 and 1861, when the national income showed a marked increase, "If the rich had been growing richer, the poor had been growing less poor".

Closely related to hunger as motives for emigration were low wages and unemployment. Though the figures for wages mean little by themselves without knowing what could be bought with the money and what fringe benefits, if any, there were, they are worth quoting for the make it possible to believe that Wiltshire was one of the counties where the agricultural labourer's weekly wage was lowest. Farmers at Devizes market in 1835 talked of reducing it to 5 shillings. That, if it had happened, would have been an all-time low. 6 shillings was usual in a few areas, and not uncommon in bad times. But as a rule, in the 1840's and early 1850's, 7 shillings seems to have been the normal weekly wage in South Wiltshire, 8 shillings in North Wiltshire and Dorset.

An interesting pointer to what the labourers themselves considered a reasonable wage was given in the early spring of 1853 when an unheard of event took place in the Wylve Valley and its neighbourhood - the labourers struck for higher wages. The strike was probably encouraged by emigration; so many workers had left the farms that the strikers could be reasonably sure their jobs would not be taken by others. They demanded that their 7 shillings a week be raised to 9 shillings; and when the Rector of Barford St. Martin, the Rev. Samuel Waldegrave, called upon to arbitrate between the men and the farmers, proposed a compromise solution of 8 shillings a week, the labourers firmly rejected it.

7 years later Samuel Waldegrave was appointed Bishop of Carlisle and appears to have been more successful at managing a diocese than he had been at trying to settle a strike. Meanwhile, the idea of striking had spread to one or two other parts of Wiltshire. In Winterbourne Monckton and other villages round Avebury, the farmers came to terms with the men before the threatened strike could take place; but we don't know what the terms were.

I suspect that this was the beginning of a slight improvement in wages in Wiltshire, by 1880 they had risen to 12 or 14 shillings; but even with 12 or 14 shillings, the Vicar of Figheldean noted that there was not much meat in the cottages.

In Australia, the wage scale was noticeably more generous. More important, since prices were higher, the fringe benefits were considerable. Jacob Baker was full of it; when "a farmer came down out of the bush and hired us" as he put it, Jacob himself got 10 shillings a week, his eldest son 9 shillings, his second son 7 shillings, with rations for them all - which meant, per week, 40lb of flour, 40lb of beef or mutton, 1lb of tea and 4lb of sugar as well as free fuel and no rent.

The imaginations of his friends in Hodson must have boggled at these statistics. It was just the sort of thing that stimulated emigration, for as Sidney Herbert shrewdly put it, writing from Wilton House to a correspondent in Australia early in 1851, "... It is very difficult with the labouring class to remove an idea which has once taken possession of the mind, and no printed report is of an weight with them against the evidence of some one person whom they themselves know personally".

Only one of the 1851 Wiltshire emigrants is definitely known to have had relatives already settled in Australia, but enough people from Wiltshire villages had already gone there to provide a steady trickle of information of this personal kind.

How exactly could a man and his family live on 7 shillings or 8 shillings a week? John Guthrie, the Vicar of Calne had tried to work it out, but "in all cases that I have tried" he said, "without exception, their expenditure seems to exceed their earnings. This problem many of us have tried to solve but without success". In Dorset, with its 8 shillings wage, another parson did work it out. He found that extra work done at harvest time and fringe benefits, if we can call them that, made a noticeable contribution to a labourer's real wage: by fringe benefits I mean an allotment, the gleanings of his family, the tiny bit of money earned by the children, and above all having to pay no rent.

Even so it is a remarkable table that Sidney Osborne compiled of earnings and expenditure for 49 weeks of the year 1843 of a farm labourer, his wife and four children. What with contributions to the clothing club, the benefit club and schooling as well as payment for food, fuel and shoe leather, they only just kept their heads above water financially and had no money left over for luxuries apart from a few currants. The table appears at the end of a pamphlet called 'A View of the Low Moral and Physical Condition of the Agricultural Labourer', published at Blandford in 1844. The title speaks for itself; and the author in time became known for his championship of the agricultural worker in the south of England and his knowledge of the conditions under which he had to live. Particularly he emphasised the bad effect of overcrowding on morals.

It is time to introduce him properly, for I shall refer to him again: he was the Hon. and Rev. Sidney Godolphin Osborne, Rector of Bryanston and Vicar of Durweston, two small parishes which had been joined together. Although it was Dorset he knew, it was a part of Dorset close to Wiltshire with similar conditions for the agricultural labourer, though the housing may have been a bit worse. His evidence has been curiously overlooked in recent times.

Can it be that left-wing social historians have assumed that a country parson who was the son of a lord and the brother of a duke could not possibly have known much about the working man? If so, they are wrong. For Sidney Osborne knew a lot.

Unemployment was an even greater curse than low wages, for the farmers as well as for the labourers themselves. Farmers kept wages low in order to employ as many men as they could; for the unemployed drifted eventually into the workhouse, and the workhouse was supported out of the rates, to which the farmers were the main contributors. The families of married men in the workhouse came on the rates too.

In the north of England better work was done by fewer men for higher wages, as Earl Bruce, son and heir of the Marquis of Ailesbury, one of the biggest landowners in Wiltshire with land in Yorkshire too, pointed out at the annual dinner of the Marlborough District Association at the Marlborough Town Hall in October 1849. But in the north there were fewer farm labourers. The crunch came in the winter, when there was so much less to do on the land.

An enterprising man like Jacob Baker could, as he put it, "job about and get work where I can": he cut wood, hedged and ditched, and drew teeth at sixpence apiece. Even so, he only just managed to keep out of the workhouse which was the only place to go to when you came to the end of your resources. For there was no unemployment benefit, no sickness benefit, no supplementary allowances of any kind - and no representation in Parliament for the working man. (Earl Stanhope, telling the House of Lords in 1839 that "labour, which was a species of property, had as full a right to be represented in Parliament as any capital, whether invested in land or in the funds", seemed to be speaking at least half a century too soon, and their lordships were not impressed).

Sometimes desperate efforts were made to find employment for men whose work was not needed in the winter. For instance, at Lacock in 1844 the parish vestry tried to make all the farmers agree to employ a fixed number of men throughout the winter, and the wealthiest landowner of the neighbourhood, T.H.S. Sotheron Estcourt, later M.P. for North Wilts., undertook to pay the parish £100 in order to provide employment for the rest. The experiment appears to have broken down because a few farmers would not co-operate, but it is interesting none the less and does credit to Sotheron Estcourt. In 1851 some emigrants from Lacock were recommended by the Chippenham Union, - that is, by the workhouse authorities - which suggests that unemployment continued in that area.

Unemployment in the rural parts of the southern counties was attributed at the time, probably with good reason, to the rapid growth of the population. Earl Bruce had no doubt about it. Far too many men had been coming to his house in Savernake Forest during the previous winters to ask for work which he couldn't give them; far too many "young men between twenty and twenty-five years of age, who are now looked upon as rather undecided characters - something between good and bad" were in danger of going wrong but would settle down well if they could find employment and good masters. There wasn't enough work to go round. Bruce thought of these young men as being on the loose with their parents perhaps in the workhouse.

Sidney Osborne realised that many of them lived at home in over-crowded cottages, sleeping perhaps in the same room as their sisters and not wanted in the one 'keeping-room' downstairs in the evenings while the children were being attended to, and bored if they did stay there: as a result they tended to congregate at the beershop where they spent what little money they had and met all the bad characters of the neighbourhood, or else they took to poaching.

Even if they had work, these young men often couldn't marry because they could find nowhere to live. Bruce referred to cottage-building as "that greatest of all burdens to the landlord", and his attitude is typical; for only model landowners like the Duke of Wellington built plenty of cottages and built them well. But then in the country only landlords built cottages fit to live in at all; and most of them, like Bruce, felt that the more they built the more they would encourage early marriages and use up the money they would much rather spend on building churches and schools. For in the country it was the landlords - or sometimes a rich parson - who provided and maintained the village school. It was one of the things expected of him, and it had the advantage that his wife could take an interest and, as it were, show the flag in the villages. Several of the great ladies of Wiltshire concerned themselves with village education; Lady Bruce even took the lessons herself at times.

The result of lack of accommodation combined with lack of birth control was a plentiful supply of illegitimate children; and what it was like to be one of them can be glimpsed from an entry in the Collingbourne Kingston vestry book dated 10 November 1843: "And also it is agreed, that all the surplus children shall be sent to the workhouse instead of being employed at stone-picking". It was not much fun being a surplus child in Collingbourne Kingston, ordered about by the parish overseers and packed off to the workhouse at Pewsey for the winter.

Yet perhaps they were better off at Collingbourne than they would have been at Wroughton, where Elle Wyndham noticed in 1845 "that the whole place swarms with children that are being brought up to anything but obtaining an honest livelihood". They were certainly better off than the 1,400 pauper children of Holborn housed and fed for four shillings and sixpence a week each at Mr. Peter Drouet's establishment at Tooting, where the drains were not all that they might have been and an open sewer ran through the grounds, with the result that the children began to die off like flies with the cholera in the autumn of 1848.

Further evidence of the number of young men living at home comes from the west of Wiltshire in a list of cottages belonging to Lord Bath at Horningsham. It might be argued that many bachelor sons between 20 and 30 years of age live with their parents in the countryside today; but what is not common today is to find a man and his wife with a son of 22 and six other children, as in one of the Horningsham cottages, all sleeping in one room. A few places could fairly be called rural slums. Such, according to Lord Lansdowne's agent, was the village of Studley, where he found 29 people living under the same roof. Warminster Common was notorious, though much improved when its water supply was properly channelled in 1849, so that the sewage did not run into it, and the village avoided the cholera epidemic of that year.

Burbage too may have been on the way to becoming a rural slum. Kelly's Directory described it as being "a picturesque but not particularly clean village", and it had more inhabitants in 1851 than in 1951. During the summer many people lived in tents and barns, and one can only assume that they went to the workhouse in the winter, unless they were Irish reapers or railway navvies or other very temporary residents.

Altogether it is not surprising to find a fair number of young unmarried men among the Wiltshire emigrants to Australia in 1851. In Australia, though it might be difficult to find a wife, they would at least be wanted. As Bruce and other landowners knew, the colonists were continually asking for agricultural labourers. But how could they get there? On 7 shillings or 8 shillings a week no man could pay for his passage, let alone for the passages of his wife and children if he had them. He needed assistance.

In 1850 the main form of assisted emigration was provided by the Colonial office, and served principally Australia, to a much lesser extent Van Diemen's Land and Cape Colony (Tasmania and South Africa). New South Wales and South Australia each had its own government, while Victoria created a separate colony in that very year of 1850, also established a government of its own. These Australian governments sent part of their revenues from the sales of land to the Colonial Office for the express purpose of paying the passages of emigrants, stating at the same time what sort of emigrants they wanted. The business of despatching the emigrants was managed by a small branch of the Colonial Office at No. 9 Park Street, Westminster, known as the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners. It was they who chartered the ships, vetted the selection of emigrants, collected the deposits that emigrants had to pay, and looked after them when they arrived at the port of embarkation. Once embarked, they travelled free.

There remained the problem of putting the prospective emigrants in touch with the Commissioners in Park Street, so that he could get his free passage. This was normally done in one of two ways - either through agents employed by the colonial governments or by the parish authorities, the vestries, working under the supervision of the Poor Law Commissioners. And somebody had to find the money to enable the emigrant who was earning, say, 7 shillings a week to buy the clothing which the Emigration Commissioners required him to have, to travel to the port of embarkation - probably Deptford or Plymouth - and to pay the deposit without which he would not be allowed a berth for his free passage.

Several Wiltshire vestries were familiar with the procedure for obtaining free passages; for vestries found it a convenient way of off-loading able-bodied paupers whom they would otherwise have to maintain in the workhouses on the rates, at least during the winter, and they could also help employed men and women who wanted to emigrate. Authority to pay emigrants' expenses out of the rates was written into the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, one of the most important as well as most unpopular reforms of the Whig governments of Lords Grey and Melbourne. Use was made of this authority as early as 1838 at Marston Magna; in 1850 it was used at Chirton; and there had been a considerable exodus from Calne. In 1848 the Collingbourne Kingston vestry, when recording their decisions to despatch the Hailstone family to Sydney on the rates, actually referred to "the regulations of the Government Emigration Board", thus showing that news of its existence had by then penetrated into the heart of rural Wiltshire.

Sometimes a landowner helped out by paying part of the emigrants' expenses, as Sotheron Estcourt did at Bishop's Cannings in 1842, when five families from that village and Horton were sent off to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).

The vital link in the chain connecting the agricultural labourer who thought of emigrating and the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners in London was usually the parson; for he was always a member of the parish vestry and, as a rule, presided over it. Moreover he was expected by the locals to know what was going on in the wide world outside the village. Parsons played a significant part in the emigration of 1851. But financially everything depended on the landowners and the farmers; for they paid the rates.

Earl Bruce had come to the conclusion by the autumn of 1849 that Wiltshire needed more emigration. This was surely the answer to the unemployment problem, to the overfilling of the workhouses in winter, the overcrowding in the cottages and the malnutrition. This was the way to give the young men a chance to make a new life for themselves. Many landowners were encouraging it, not least his brother-in-law Sidney Herbert, who was becoming more and more deeply involved in the whole business of emigration.

So in his long speech at the Marlborough District Association dinner in October 1849 Bruce proposed that landowners and farmers should go halves with the vestries in paying the expenses of emigrants. His father, Lord Ailesbury, he said, had authorised him to tell them "that he will be ready most cordially and not sparingly to contribute to any families upon his estates who may be desirous of emigrating, provided the parish will contribute with equal readiness and liberality towards the same object".

Lord Ailesbury would in fact do for many parishes what Sotheron Estcourt had done 7 years before for one parish. It seemed a fair offer; and if it was taken up throughout the whole Marlborough district - better still throughout the whole county - many good emigrants would get off to Australia, and the poor rates would be reduced. Englishmen seemed designed by Providence to colonise a large part of the world; why should Wiltshire men not be among them? But there was a fly in the ointment.

Bruce was reckoning without the farmers. As it happened, the leading farmer in Wiltshire was present at the dinner in his capacity of Vice-Chairman of the Association; he was also Chairman of the North Wiltshire Agricultural Protection Society which Jacob Baker hoped to address a few months later; he was a staunch antagonist of the repeal of the Corn Laws and a man who did not mince his words. Mr. George Brown of Avebury at once challenged Lord Bruce. He made it quite clear that, since the landowners had let the farmers down by repealing the Corn Laws designed to protect the farming interest by taxing imports of foreign corn, the farmers could no more afford to support any scheme of emigration than they could to employ all the men on the land who wanted work; "and you will find, my Lord, that the different parishes will not come forward and deposit those sums of money which are required for such a purpose". Mr. Brown's remarks were received with "continual cheering". Lord Bruce was outgunned, but he went down fighting. He made a firm and tactful reply, not committing himself but indicating that he had not come to the end of his ideas.

However it was obviously no use to try to encourage emigration on a parish basis if the farmers, who paid so much of the rates and did so much work on the vestries, refused to cooperate. And the farmers would follow the lead given by George Brown: he was the uncrowned king of Wiltshire farming, and as the subscription list of the North Wilts Agricultural Protection Society shows, in North Wilts at any rate they were protectionists to a man.

Lord Bruce had to think again. It was on second thoughts and after consultation with some of his friends and neighbours that the idea of a Wiltshire Emigration Association emerged; and in the course of the year 1850 it took shape. But before I go further and explain how the Association got the emigrants off to Australia, I should like to say a few words about Lord Bruce himself.

He was born in 1804, the eldest son and heir, as I have said, of the first Marquis of Ailesbury, and died as second Marquis in 1878. He never went to school, but was at Christ Church, Oxford, in the early 1820's, just too soon to meet that brilliant band of

Christ Church men which included Gladstone, Sidney Herbert, Elgin, Dalhousie and Robert Lowe. One of his greatest Oxford friends, G.A. Montgomery, who became Rector of Bishopstone near Salisbury, was tragically killed by a piece of falling masonry in the unfinished church at Grafton, while standing next to Bruce; and the memorial which Bruce put up in the church shows how deeply this incident affected him. He was happily married to one of Sidney Herbert's sisters, but unhappily they had no children. Another of Sidney Herbert's sisters had married, though she died soon after marrying, the Earl of Shelburne, Lord Lansdowne's son and heir; and this bond between the families of three great Wiltshire landowners played its part in the emigration of 1851, as we shall see.

Since his father lived a long time - from 1773 to 1856 - it was natural that Bruce should take over more and more of the management of the family estates; by 1850 he was the man who mattered at Savernake, and everyone knew it. The Ailesbury estates lay partly in Wiltshire, in and south of Marlborough, and partly in Yorkshire, in the Masham area north of Ripon.

But neither Bruce nor his father seems to have spent much time on the Yorkshire estates; when they were not in London, Savernake was their home. Bruce had sat in the House of Lords since 1838, after a very short spell in the Commons as M.P. for Marlborough: the practice of thus "kicking upstairs", to use Halifax's phrase, the eldest sons of some peers had the advantage of lowering the average age of the upper house without permanently increasing its size. But it may well be a pity that Bruce did not stay longer in the Commons, where he might have become more interested in politics.

To a Victorian nobleman two kinds of career were open. He might, if he was politically ambitious, seek office young, attain Cabinet rank, and even like Lord Derby, Lord Aberdeen, Lord Salisbury or Lord Rosebery become prime Minister; or else achieve distinction in governing part of the empire; or shine in both fields like the 5th Marquis of Lansdowne, who never sat in the Commons at all, but became Governor-General of Canada, Viceroy of India and Foreign Secretary. That was one course.

The alternative, for the politically unambitious, was to take a lead in local affairs, and at the centre of power to be content with honours that involved little or no responsibility. Lord Bruce followed the second course. The command of the Wiltshire Yeomanry Cavalry, appropriate to a keen horseman like him, the Lord-Lieutenancy of the county, the Garter, the Mastership of the Horse in Palmerston's second and Gladstone's first governments - these he attained; but neither Palmerston nor Gladstone nor anyone else seems to have considered him seriously for a political appointment that mattered. One cannot help wondering why.

He was a competent man, energetic and tactful, respected and trusted in Wiltshire, sincere and sympathetic. If he was not quite up to the standard required for governing India or Canada, he might at least have presided effectively over a Royal Commission. Nor did he lack imagination.

In 1853, when the headmaster of the Marlborough Grammar School, dwindling in numbers, at last retired after a long innings, leaving an Ailesbury appointment to be filled, and at the same time Marlborough College, just ten years old, was drifting onto financial rocks, Bruce put forward a scheme for amalgamating the two schools, using the College premises for teaching Classical subjects and the Grammar School for what he called modern subjects, mainly French, Mathematics and Physics. Were it not for the absence of German in his curriculum one might suspect that he had been discussing education with Prince Albert.

His plan for the two schools was a highly interesting one - much too interesting for the Rector and Burgesses of Marlborough who shot it down in one. Bruce was obviously annoyed and could not resist making some sarcastic remarks at the expense of the Rector, a rather pompous Welsh baronet; but he at once withdrew the scheme. Perhaps he withdrew too easily when opposed.

Perhaps he made a fatal mistake in not speaking often enough in the House of Lords, where he remained silent for his first ten years, spoke twice in 1849, then became silent again - a contrast with his readiness in speaking on his own home ground. Perhaps he just did not want political power. He is remembered as the marquis who put sixteen miles of fencing round Savernake Forest and let loose the deer in it, so making it the largest and most beautiful deer park in England. And he was buried with honour. On a cold January day twenty-two clergymen, many of them holding Ailesbury livings, waited for an hour at the church gate for the coffin, which, when it at last appeared, was drawn by eight game-keepers dressed in black velvet jackets and followed by mourners who included a former Foreign Secretary and a representative of the Queen. It was a dignified exit.

In the years 1849-51 we see Bruce at his best. He took a great deal of trouble about the Wiltshire Emigration Association. If the farmers would not play on emigration, the landowners would have to act on their own, helped by the parsons. For this purpose a county organisation offered the best hope of success. County loyalties were strong in those days of slow communications and broad accents.

(The breadth of the accent was brought home to me when in some notes written by an 1851 emigrant in her old age in Australia I saw that she had spelt Barford BARVOURED).

A society could raise funds by subscriptions, and those funds would be at the disposal of the committee, the chairman and the secretary. Bruce of course was elected Chairman of the Wiltshire Emigration Association; the Committee when it met was never more than a small quorum; and the Secretary was efficient. Several of the biggest landowners in the county joined the committee in name, if not in person.

Sidney Herbert, immersed in emigration matters on a national scale, only attended one meeting in London and was obviously careful not to stand in his brother-in-law's way; but a Wiltshire committee to which Sidney Herbert did not belong, or at least subscribe, would have carried little weight with many of the gentry and parsons.

One curious omission from the Committee's membership at first was Sir John Awdry, a retired Indian judge who had already once been Chairman of Quarter Sessions, and was to do many years' service in that capacity: Awdry put the matter right by appearing at a meeting in Marlborough uninvited, thus leaving the members present no choice but to co-opt him onto the Committee. They made rules, which have unfortunately been lost, but by and large they seem to have let Bruce get on with the job in his own way. He and his Secretary virtually ran the show from an office in Marlborough; and, if the farmers didn't like it, that was too bad for them.

Another advantage of a county organisation with a committee of grandees and gentry was that the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners had to pay more attention to it than they would to a parish vestry or a Board of Guardians; indeed it suited them admirably to have such a body to deal with, as it was more likely to produce the right number of emigrants at the right place at the right time than several vestries scattered over the whole county would do.

Emigrants were unreliable; they didn't always turn up. But the Wiltshire Emigration Association, which had paid their railway fares from Chippenham to Plymouth, saw that they did; and, as far as can be judged from the records, the discipline among the Wiltshire emigrants was admirable.

Bruce played his cards skilfully. With Shelburne paving the way, he went to Bowood and discussed his plans with Lord Lansdowne. Henry, the third Marquis of Lansdowne, the Lord Lieutenant of the county and a grandee of great distinction had been a member of every Whig cabinet since 1830, and there happened to be a Whig cabinet in 1850. So, when he passed on Bruce's scheme to the Colonial Office, the Colonial Office had to take it seriously. One of the Emigration Commissioners vetted it, and suggested some alterations. Bruce, with some reluctance, accepted the alterations.

The way was now clear. He put a long advertisement in the local papers at Christmas time 1850, which must have been seen by everyone in a position of authority in the county. Then applications began to come in, and Stanbrough, the secretary, started a busy correspondence with the Commissioners in Park Street. It had taken a year to get things going, but it was worth the trouble.

There are one or two little signs that the Wiltshire emigrants were treated with special consideration. For instance, those allocated to the John Knox, sailing for Port Phillip in April 1851, did not, like many others summoned to embark on that vessel, have to wait at Plymouth for another, because the Commissioners had purposely summoned more than her full complement for the John Knox after being let down on previous occasions by emigrants who failed to appear on time or to appear at all. The Wiltshire emigrants went on six different ships - four to Adelaide and two to Port Phillip (that is, Geelong or Melbourne) - between March and June 1851.

The Commissioners liked to put emigrants from different parts of the British Isles together in the same ship. On one occasion in 1849, when they departed from this principle and filled a whole ship from Dorset, the Hon. Francis Scott, M.P. for North Berwickshire and Master of the Surrey Union Hounds, who made the colonies his special hunting-ground, complained in the House that Dorset and Wiltshire were getting favourable treatment at the expense of other counties: was the idea to enable certain landowners in Dorset and Wiltshire, Mr. Scott wondered, to clear their estates of able-bodied paupers?

Colonial Secretaries and Under-Secretaries had much to put up with in answering questions like these. But Mr. Scott does not seem to have made any protest when the Wiltshire Emigration Association was formed, with the obvious likelihood of Wiltshire producing a large number of emigrants. No serious hitches in the arrangements are recorded, and all the emigrants reached Plymouth in good time for embarkation. This is commendable when the slowness of communications inside the county is considered.

They all had to muster for the train journey at Chippenham, which was easy enough, say, for four young men from Calne who were taken there by the Rev. Guthrie; A4 was a turnpike road, and the distance was short. But those coming from the Salisbury area, of whom there were quite a few, must have had to plan well ahead; for A360 was not a turnpike road, and the going would have been slower.

The last party to leave in June was delayed at Exeter for 2½ hours by the large number of excursion trains taking people from the west country to London and back for the Great Exhibition. The station-master produced some food, and they were well looked after; but it seems ironical that agricultural labourers and their families should have been held up on their way out of the country to escape poverty and unemployment by crowds of excursionists who could afford to pay for the return journey to London to see the wonders of Victorian technology.

For the young unmarried man emigration was an adventure, and if he decided at the last moment not to go, as a few did, his family was not seriously inconvenienced. It was different for a married man with wife and children. For them it meant a great upheaval - first the sale of all their furniture and most of their belongings, which might only just pay their outstanding debts, their arrears of rent, and the journey to Chippenham; then the long voyage to the other end of the world, and no guarantee of a warm reception when they got there. Moreover, when the cottage was sold or given up, it was too late to think again. "Why is dad selling everything, are we all going to have new clothes?" Sidney Osborne heard the children say.

The journey to Chippenham alone was a strange experience to those who had seldom gone outside their villages, and for some must have taken the best part of two days.

Most of the emigrants came from five areas of Wiltshire - from villages round Salisbury, from Calne, from Lacock, from Ramsbury, and particularly from the Savernake estate south and south east of Marlborough. There was besides a compact little group from Shalbourne, and a sprinkling from villages near Swindon, from Manningford, Urchfont, Great Cheverell, Berwick St. Leonard and Warminster, with one couple from Melchet near Romsey, one family from Pewsey and one from Wootton Bassett, and two brothers from Boreham.

The distribution is very uneven, with the emphasis on the eastern end of the county. That is not surprising. The Wiltshire Emigration Association was an exercise in paternalistic administration by landowners and parsons, characteristic of the way in which things were done in the countryside at that time. Where a landowner was keen and took an interest, or failing a landowner a parson, there emigrants were likely to be forthcoming; where neither landowner nor parson particularly cared about emigration, they were not forthcoming.

The main gaps are in the Malmesbury area and in the south-west of Wiltshire; and in the south-west the lack of emigrants may be partly due to the fact that Sidney Herbert, who was administering the Pembroke estates, had for some years been helping men to emigrate who wanted to go.

The reverse applies in the areas from which most of the emigrants came. Anthony Kingston at Shalbourne, Sotheron Estcourt near Chippenham, Captain Seymour and Thomas Smith at Ramsbury, and Bruce himself recommended between them about half the total number of emigrants. Bruce's long list does indeed make one wonder whether his main motive in creating the Association was to get young men on the Savernake estate off to Australia before they married and wanted cottages.

But that would be an unfair, or at any rate incomplete, estimate of his motives: his long advertisement in the local press makes it clear that he was thinking on a genuinely county basis and wanting to help those who found it difficult to get information about the ways and means of emigrating. Sotheron Estcourt, it seems, was active in the Lacock area; for it must have been he who persuaded the Chippenham Union to recommend several men, whom they had presumably had in their workhouse.

Some landowners who subscribed to the Association did not recommend any emigrants but showed interest; others who did not subscribe helped individuals.

Lord Radnor, riding one day in April 1851 across Alderbury Common, shouted out to young Ambrose Phillips, whom he saw walking along with his brother, and asked what ship he was going on and when. Jacob Baker and his family were helped financially by several people in the Chisledon area, though of course only recommended by one of them, John Brown. Bruce not only paid some deposits but, taking Seymour with him, travelled with one party of emigrants to Plymouth and inspected the two ships on which they were about to embark, the John Knox and the Marion.

How much interest the parsons took in individual emigrants it is difficult to say, except in the case of Guthrie of Calne. But several of them subscribed to the Association, some recommended emigrants, and some made recommendations on behalf of land-owners, as Newton Smart, Rector of Farley, did for Sir Frederick Bathurst of Clarendon Park, which suggests that he knew the individuals concerned better than Bathurst did. Guthrie not only looked after, and paid the deposits of the four young men already mentioned; he and his wife had them to dinner the day before their departure - an occasion on which it might have been interesting to be a fly on the wall.

With equal concern Guthrie arranged for a woman to go who had been deserted many years before by her husband and had brought up her three children, who went with her, by her own unaided efforts. Such a family would obviously make admirable settlers in Australia, but with no father and the eldest son only twenty-one years old they might well have been rejected by the Commissioners if Guthrie had not pushed their claim.

Concern was always shown for the religious welfare of emigrants - and before they embarked at Plymouth, every one of the Wiltshire party was given a bible and a prayer book by the Emigrants' Employment Society. But again, with a much more personal touch, Mrs. Sidney Herbert sent a little parcel of religious books and a short serious letter in her own hand to Eliza Blake, a girl of fifteen who had worked as a nursery maid at Wilton House, shortly before she departed to Australia with her family. "I send you some books, Eliza, which I hope you will read on your voyage and which may help you to remember one who will ever be anxious to hear of your welfare", the letter begins.

The point I wish to make is that this Wiltshire emigration was not just another example of "shovelling out your paupers", to use Charles Buller's famous words, "to where they might die, without shocking their betters with the sight and sound of their last agony". The emigrants were treated as individuals who needed help. And, as for dying, the evidence available suggests that most of them took their time about that; most of them had plenty of children and grandchildren and lived to a ripe old age.

Of the voyage itself not much can be said here. It lasted anything up to 14 weeks. The Omega took 103 days to reach Adelaide, the Statesman only 78 to reach Geelong. The shorter the voyage, the nearer you went to the Antarctic Continent; the Statesman's captain was the first man to sail an emigrant ship to Australia on the great circle course recommended by the American oceanographer M.F. Maury, and her passengers, who had no idea what was coming to them, not surprisingly complained of the "Intense cold".

It is difficult for us today to imagine the discomforts of a long voyage in a large sailing ship. A few deaths on the way to Australia were taken for granted: adults died of what the ships' surgeons called diarrhoea, and children usually of measles. A corresponding number of births during the voyage was considered a satisfactory compensation.

The Emigration Commissioners had become experts in chartering ships and had a good record. Indeed by 1851 they were really rather pleased with themselves. "And we are happy to be able to say", they wrote on 15 April that year in a report to Mr. Herman Merivale, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, "that so far as our emigrant ships are concerned we have never had the misfortune to meet with any accident at all". Famous last words!

On 30 July the Marion, with 124 of the Wiltshire emigrants on board ran aground on the Troubridge Shoal off the coast of South Australia and had to be abandoned as a total wreck.

It was not as bad as being wrecked on the west coast of Ireland in a January gale, as sometimes happened to emigrant ships on their way to America. The winters in South Australia are mild, and the Marion took time to sink. The unpleasant thing was that it happened in the evening just after dark when the children had already been sent below to bed and had been battened down. Some of the Irish passengers panicked. Some of the crew, determined not to lose altogether the vessel's most precious piece of cargo, made a beeline for the rum and dosed themselves with it liberally before lowering the boats.

The result was that some of the boats put out to sea instead of making for the land, and in one of them a Wiltshire infant born during the voyage died of exposure. Later a woman was killed, partly through her own fault, when a cart overturned going down a steep hill: she and the infant were the only casualties. The majority of the emigrants were landed in two different places - on the mainland, and on the Yorke Peninsula, where they had their first taste of damper.

News of the wreck was brought very quickly to the Governor in Adelaide, Sir Henry Young, and the Harbourmaster at Port Adelaide, eight miles from the town, Captain Lipson, mounted a rescue operation early next morning. Meanwhile, a vessel which had fortunately been near the scene of the wreck brought 170 of the emigrants to Port Adelaide: they were the lucky ones. The party on the mainland took four days to reach Adelaide. Most of the luggage had been lost in the wreck, but a change of linen

was issued on the fourth day and money was given to all the emigrants, so that they could buy clothes to replace what they had lost. This compensation money, issued on the Governor's orders, amounted to £690.

The rest of the saga - the long quarrel between the ship's captain and the harbourmaster, the argument about how much money the ship's owners should pay the Emigration Commissioners, and the other argument about who, if anyone, should repay the £690 compensation money to the South Australian Government, the problem of whether or not to have a lighthouse on the Troubridge Shoal - these things did not concern the emigrants. They had at any rate, with two exceptions reached Adelaide, and were temporarily fed and housed to the best of the colonists' ability.

It was an eventful beginning to a new life and was remembered vividly by William Blake, a child at the time, sixty years later. This was the sort of thing the Wiltshire emigrants could take in their stride; and the South Australian authorities had certainly risen to the occasion. Considering that the colony was only fifteen years old and that its government's resources were limited, the rescue operation had been remarkably well carried out.

It is just not possible to say what all the emigrants did when they arrived in Australia, and how they prospered afterwards, because they never thought that we should be interested to know, so very few of them seem to have left any written records. Writing was a difficult business if you had left school at the age of nine, as most of the men had. But we have enough information to enable us to see what advantages they had in Australia that had been lacking in England. Better wages and better food are the two most obvious, as Jacob Baker's letter shows. Above all there was plenty of work for a healthy young agricultural labourer who could dig and plough and manage a horse. There were also certain freedoms, which the emigrants themselves had hardly realised they lacked at home but soon found in Australia.

One of the most important was religious freedom. Nobody objected if you became a Primitive Methodist or a Roman Catholic. John Lewis Cassidy, who went into the building trade, became a pillar of the Primitive Methodist church in one of the growing suburbs of Adelaide: if he had stayed in Ramsbury, his religion would not have helped him in his career, and might have been a drawback. Richard Judd of Clarendon married a Roman Catholic Irish girl whom he met on the Marion (emigrant ships were great match-makers) and himself became a Roman Catholic. It was much easier to do that in Australia than in England; for, although a great county lady like Mrs. Herbert could go over to Rome and still be respected, an agricultural worker living in the closed community of a village in the south of England might well get into trouble with the parson and the squire if he changed his religion in that direction and was seen walking off on Sunday, Heaven knows how many miles, to attend mass at the nearest Romish tabernacle.

Jacob Baker, finding that people in his part of the Lyndoch Valley did not go to church at all, got up and preached under a tree. Quite a few people in England did not go to Church; but preaching under trees by working men was not encouraged in Wiltshire villages. The emigrants were also much more free to move about, and labour contracts did not prevent men from going to the gold diggings. Australia provided opportunities for a working man which simply did not exist in England. Ambrose Phillips and his father-in-law, Joseph Blake, went to the gold diggings and between them made just enough money to buy a small farm, which prospered: neither of them had any hope of acquiring land in England.

It was these things, which made life in Australia worthwhile. In England the hard struggle to the bitter end offered little prospect of any lasting satisfaction or of comfort in old age; the bitter end might even be that worst of all humiliations, a pauper's funeral - the deal coffin, the hurried committal, a grave without a name, and beer on the private rate for the mourners if they were lucky. Village life and village death in the south of England had changed little for the better, and in some ways had changed for the worse, since Thomas Gray wrote his Elegy. So in spite of the enormous distance from friends and relations left behind, in spite of the tricky climate, in spite of the vastness of the country, and in spite of the very rough life and hard physical labour it involved, Australia held the emigrants.

Nor did it matter how large your family became: there was room for them all, and the country needed populating. It would not have suited me, and many people emigrated to Australia in the eighteen-fifties whom it didn't suit either; but the hard-working agricultural labourer from the south of England was just the man whom it did suit, and his wife, who must have worked herself to the bone, stood by him, so that together they won through.

Mark Baker
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