

Samuel Arnold – Child Okeford’s Aussie Pioneer

Readers of The Hill have learned of a group of 30 emigrants to Australia in 1849. The story was read by another amateur historian Barry Barnett who whilst not living in Child Okeford had, as one of his forebears, a man called Ben Weeks. Sadly Ben died from a fall from the Plough and Harrow Inn in Camden New South Wales. Whilst investigating Ben, Barry discovered that the pub had been founded by Samuel Arnold a man who had emigrated from Child Okeford in 1836. His interest piqued, Barry has done a lot of research and I am very pleased to publish his evocative account of the circumstances of Samuel Arnolds emigration and his subsequent life there. The Plough and Harrow Inn [<https://www.ploughnharrow.com.au/>] still exists and they too have been in contact with us and I have been able to provide them with a few old photos of the village. It certainly is a small world. Here then is Barry’s account of Samuel Arnold.

Samuel Arnold – Child Okeford’s Aussie Pioneer

Samuel Arnold was born in Child Okeford in 1811 and was a wheelwright by trade. In 1835, he married Ann Savery in the Church of St Paul, Hamoon. A year later in November 1836, the young married couple left Child Okeford with their baby daughter, Sarah to seek out a better life in New South Wales.

In an era when a North Dorset villager was only likely to venture about ten miles from home, the voyage to Australia must have seemed like a journey to the moon. Even the short land journey to Southampton would have been a culture shock to Samuel and Ann Arnold with the town’s bustling, grubby streets with open sewers.

North Dorset’s Economic Depression

After the Napoleonic Wars the conditions of agricultural labouring classes continued to deteriorate and many parish officials encouraged them to emigrate. Economic depression in the south of England was caused by population growth,

farm mechanisation and foreign competition, particularly on wool.

In this website's April 2018 feature, *the Blandford Colonisation Society* the words of the Reverend Sydney Godolphin Osborne were quoted to graphically describe the poverty of North Dorset villages.

'Within this last year I saw in a room 13 feet square, three beds: on the first lay the mother, a widow, dying of consumption; on the second two unmarried daughters, one 18 years of age, the other 12; on the third a young married couple whom I had married two days before.It was in these cottages that a malignant typhus fever broke out two years ago which afterwards spread through the village.'

'Bounty Immigrants'

Emigration to Canada and the United States was less expensive and the voyage relatively less arduous compared to the long and more perilous journey to the Australian colony. Therefore, some form of incentive to emigrate '*down under*' was required.

As a consequence the Bounty Regulations were published in October 1835. Settlers in New South Wales were allowed to recruit their own workers from Britain. On arrival these immigrants were examined by an appointed Board and if satisfied the settler could claim '*bounty*' money from the Government:

- £30 for a man and wife under 30 years on embarkation
- £15 for a single female between 15 and 30 years
- £10 for unmarried males 18 – 30 years
- £5 for each child over 1 year.

Those accepted had to be either agricultural labourers or tradesmen.

There was an intense interest because the Australian Emigration Agent in London had been offering '*free passage to New South Wales*' for men under 30 years and their wives. In New South Wales there was an increasing demand for carpenters, stonemasons, bricklayers, wheelwrights, shepherds and agricultural labourers.

Macarthur Family

In 1836, Major Edward Macarthur sought the help of the Reverend John West, Rector of Chettle in finding suitable volunteers to emigrate to Australia to work on the Macarthur family's Camden Estate in New South Wales. Camden Park was named after Lord Camden, Colonial Secretary who had granted Edward's father 2,000 hectares to breed the first Merino sheep in Australia.

Edward Macarthur thought the selection of emigrants was like the planting of trees '*each destined colonist should as surely have a known place assigned to him.....as every tree previous to its removal from its native soil has a spot prepared for its reception.*'

Although convict labour had contributed to Macarthur wealth, the family was keen to remove the '*plague spot*' of convict social influences from local society. Their ambitious plan was to make their Camden Park an estate of tenant farmers. Today, Camden Park House is the closest Australia has to a stately home.

Between 1837 and 1839, the Macarthur family brought out 41 families to Camden mainly from North Dorset or from just across the Dorset/Wiltshire border. They came on three vessels, *The Brothers*, *John McLelland* and the *Royal George*.

Accompanying the Arnolds on *The Brothers* were Henry and Caroline Norris and their three children also from Child Okeford.

'No Mischief'

The Macarthur family offered Samuel Arnold a three year contract, an annual £15 wage, a cottage rent free and a plot of ground for a garden. A written agreement was drawn up with the parties being Samuel on the one part and James, William and Edward Macarthur on the other. Providing he got '*into no mischief*' he could keep a cow, pigs and poultry. If he remained in service for five years he would be offered a tenancy of '*fertile land*'. Service was to begin from 11 April 1837 which was the day Samuel first set foot on dry land in Sydney. Individuals were at liberty to leave this employment at any time but had to pay £15 if they left in the first year, £10 in the second and £5 in the third.

Perilous Voyage

Despite the attention to detail given to the voyage by Major Edward Macarthur, the Dorset families still faced the hazards of sickness, boredom and potential shipwreck. They needed also to endure the rough English Channel and Bay of Biscay, the breathless heat of the Tropics and the cold, stormy conditions of the southern latitudes. Indeed, after four weeks' sailing they found themselves back at the port of their departure. Heavy seas and storms had caused so much damage that they had to turn back for repairs. A fresh start had to be made. Further severe storms almost wrecked the ship, the top rigging was washed away and a pedigree stallion was washed overboard.

With a new baby aboard, the sea voyage would have been particularly stressful for the Arnolds as infant mortality rates on the five months' voyage to Australia were high. It was not uncommon for deceased babies to be buried at sea.

Samuel Arnold was spared the normal indignities of the '*crossing the line*' ceremony. This would involve, when crossing the Equator, ducking in seawater and shaving with cream. This consisted of tar, tallow and every other filth imaginable. Failure to pay a fine could involve dousing in the sea from a great height if the unfortunate individual had offended the crew.

Robert Towns – Ship's Master

Robert Towns was the master of *The Brothers*. He was born in Northumberland in 1794 and has been variously described as businessman, slave trader and founder of Townsville, Queensland. In time, he became one of Australia's richest men. Not known for his generosity, the slave trading related to '*black birding*'. This was the practice between 1864 and 1904 of kidnapping South Sea islanders and using them as slave labourers. Around 62,000 people were lured, coerced and deceived to work in slavery like conditions on Australia's sugar plantations. A monument to Robert Town in Townsville and the bitter truth of Australia's involvement in the sugar trade attracts controversy to this day. In time Towns ruled over a business empire from shipping to agriculture. He was also active in politics and became a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council.

Fortunately for the Arnold family, the behaviour of Robert Towns on the voyage

was constrained by the requirements of the much more enlightened Macarthur brothers. However, on a later Macarthur sponsored vessel, a sailor was tied to the wheel as a punishment for drunkenness. Then the sailor lost his life when the wheel turned suddenly and he was thrown overboard.

Secure Rights

The Macarthurs sought to give the immigrants secure rights with a minimal but high standard of living for the labouring classes at the time. Each family on *The Brothers* had their own lit cabin, tea caddy, eating utensils, sugar box, mattress and blankets. There were morning and evening prayers, a Sunday Service and each family was provided with a bible and prayer book. Food was provided already cooked and reading material was also supplied. The men had to rise at 6am to clean their berths and swearing, gambling and alcohol were forbidden. During the voyage the men made up wool bales and nets while the women made clothing from material supplied.

They were paid for this work when they reached New South Wales and allowed to keep some of their clothing. Robert Towns commented '*many...who embarked with a scanty supply, wrought themselves in this way an excellent supply of apparel.*'

Early Tough Life

Early life in New South Wales would have been far from tranquil with cattle thefts, attacks from natives, the occasional murder and bushrangers being the order of the day. Bushrangers were mainly escaped or released convicts or sons of convicts, many of whom were of Irish origins. One of Australia's most notorious bushrangers was Irish born, Jack Donohoe who was shot in his forehead by a soldier at nearby Campbelltown.

Initially, Samuel worked for William and James Macarthur but only for two years before he rented a plot of land. He then he set up his own wheelwright business in Camden. Samuel became highly regarded and the Camden News described him as '*an expert tradesman and industrious, he was at all times full of work.*'

He was a strict Wesleyan and each Sunday the local Wesleyans assembled to hear the scriptures read in the wheelwright shop – cleaned out for the purpose.

In 1841, he purchased land in Camden and built the Plough and Harrow Inn. Initially, he leased it out. Samuel must have been careful with his money because he then sold the Inn to his son, Charles John Arnold. Although, this may have been a way of dividing the asset's value among his seven children.

His wife, Ann died in 1856 but there were no children from his second marriage.

Samuel Arnold had 'green fingers' and when he retired it gave him more time to pursue his horticultural interests. In his later years he was described as '*hale and hearty*' and was regularly seen taking his usual walk along the streets of Camden.

Plough & Harrow Inn – Benjamin Weeks

Two fellow Dorset immigrants on *The Brothers* were Benjamin and Frances Weeks. Benjamin was from Handley and Frances (formerly Jeans) was from Durweston.

Benjamin died in unusual circumstances in 1885 at the age of 73 years. He met his death falling from a window of John Arnold's *Plough and Harrow Inn* in Camden. He had been away from Camden for around 20 years and had returned to look up old friends. Benjamin arrived in the late evening seeking accommodation for the night. He was found dead the next day. There were no marks or footsteps around where he lay and he probably dozed off and fell. There were no indications that he had been drinking.

At his Inquest the jury, without retiring, returned a verdict of '*accidental death*'.

Deep Roots

After a long and eventful life and at the ripe old age of 84, the funeral of Samuel Arnold was held a long way from his Child Okeford roots. The family, friends and the tradesmen of Camden gathered on Tuesday 21 January 1896 at Cawdor Cemetery, New South Wales to pay their respects to Samuel Arnold, a resilient Aussie pioneer.

The Camden News wrote a glowing eulogy:

' (Samuel Arnold) was one of the very earliest settlers in the Camden district, and from the commencement of his career in the New World he possessed and carried out one straight line of conduct and integrity, and was at all times a strict supporter

- through doubt and difficulties, in the then trying times - of firmness and right.' (23 January 1896)

With his seven children, the wheelwright from Child Okeford had put down deep roots in Camden, New South Wales. Indeed, it is known that today there are at least two of his descendants still living in the Camden area.

Barry Barnett June 2018