

Shropshire Émigrés to the AUSTRALIAN GOLD RUSH, 1852

In the early 1850's, it was Australia's turn to experience the excitement of the discovery of gold. One of the main early finds was at Ballarat, in Victoria State, Nr. Melbourne. The prospect of high rewards attracted all types of people to the area, hoping to make their fortunes, repeating the pattern established earlier in the 1849 Californian Gold Rush. Joining this hopeful crowd were two brothers from Broseley, Shropshire.

Thomas and Warren Speake, were the only sons of Thomas and Elizabeth Speake. Thomas senior was a China Painter and Gilder, and worked for the Coalport China Company for most of his working life. It would appear that his sons had no inclination to follow their father's calling. By 1852, Warren was already in Australia, and Thomas left Liverpool on 6th April 1852 aboard the sailing ship the *Anna*, due for Adelaide.

Thomas kept a diary for his voyage, and this has survived, giving some glimpses of his life on board. He travelled in the steerage, where passengers had to cook and look after themselves. He notes "Sunday, 18th April. They are all gone to Church this morning but me as I am cook this week and not able to go. I am making a suet pudding and some boiled rice. We live chiefly off rice and pudding. We eat very little salt meat. Sometimes we boil a piece and let it go cold and then the next day we make an Irish stew or sea pie which takes most of the salt off. We have learned to make the best of what we are allowed."

Their route was towards Brazil, South America, to catch the Trade Winds which would take them South East around the Cape of Good Hope. There is no mention of any stops in port at any time on the journey.

By 23rd April he notes, "The weather is getting much warmer. We are opposite Madeira. Most of the passengers go without

wearing their shoes. Rushton and I commenced this morning. I don't intend wearing more than four shirts all the voyage. I shall wash them every other week. We saw a whale this evening. We could tell it was a whale by the water it threw up. We expect to be in the trade winds soon."

26th April, "We caught the trade winds this morning and we are going 10 miles an hour."

28th April, "Great many flying fish have been seen today. Wind still favourable. It appears strange in the tropics that we have no twilight. As soon as the sun sets it is dark unless there happens to be a moon, which we have. It is beautiful on a calm clear night. To walk the deck after a scorching hot day, at night, the sea appears all sparked off fire. Whether it is phosphorous or an insect I cannot say, as there are various opinions on the subject. It is exactly like the glow worms on land."

By 4th May, the ship was nearing the equator, and was making little progress in poor winds - "The sea being very calm, we saw a great many sharks. The sky looks very heavy. Lightning conductors have been placed at each mast-head. We are making but little progress. The thermometer is 100° in the shade. Most of us sleep on the deck at night. It is unbearable below."

The ship crossed the 'line' - the equator - on a Sunday, so "Neptune hailed the ship and promised to be on board again with his wife on Monday. Captain ordered the stewards to fill a bucket of grog for the sailors. We had fine fun." The next day as promised - "This has been a great day of amusement. Neptune and his wife came on board at 12 o'clock when all the sailors that had not crossed the line before were shaved and dipped. Each of the passengers in our cabin gave them six which freed us from being shaved but not from being ducked. A sail was filled with water and then three or

four took hold of our arms and legs and threw us in. After all were done the Captain gave each of us a tumbler of grog which was very good. We were changing our wet clothes when the cry of ship ahoy was given by the man in the look-out. This caused great excitement. Each had a pen in his hand. The Captain had promised that the first vessel we passed he would go on board if possible, but a gale sprang up which made it impossible for him to go. She was bound for Swansea from California and promised to report us."

So Thomas's hope of sending a letter back to Shropshire via the passing ship was not to be.

By 12th May, the *Anna* had found the South East Trade Winds and made rapid progress. The winds became progressively stronger, and by 22nd May, "The seas still continue very heavy. The waves

look like mountains and the wind is very high and contrary. You will be able to form some idea of its strength when I tell you that it took our fore-top-gallant mast which caused the great deal of trouble."

At the end of May, they were in the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope. "We feel the cold so much on account of the sudden changes. There is an immense quantity of albatross and cape pigeon flying about the ship. We have plenty of sport shooting at them. The days are very short with us. It is dark at four o'clock."

The diary describes the death and burial of one of the passengers, and the confining in irons of two crew members who were involved in violent arguments. The diary entries become fewer in number, and by 27th June. "Several water casks have leaked. We are obliged to take a pint a day and what we have is scarcely fit to use."

By 29th June, Amsterdam Island was passed, and by 11th July the Kangaroo Islands. On 13th July, "We arrived at

Adelaide at 10 o'clock last evening, and anchored in St Vincent's Gulf."

According to the *Shipping Intelligence* in the *Adelaide Register* Newspaper, the *Anna* was 1089 tons. Although Thomas may have found the journey tediously long, two other smaller boats from England, of less than 400 tons, arrived on the same day, having left England more than a month earlier. The *Anna* carried 270 passengers, and also carried the latest newspapers from England, which were reported in the *Register*, including Court details, and the London

prices for Australian copper and gold.

Thomas joined his brother near Melbourne, and became a Gold Mine Supervisor. A family photograph of 1869, shows him with wife and family, looking prosperous. But in 1874, Thomas suffered a fall in a mine shaft, and died of gangrene poisoning. Three years later his wife died

from T.B., and their young family was dispersed to other relatives.

Descendants of Thomas live today in Western Australia, and I am indebted to Mr J.C. Speak of Perth, for the details from Thomas's diary and from the *Reporter*.

It would be very interesting if it is known whether Thomas's and Warren's emigration was part of a more general emigration of Shropshire men to Australia at this time. Thomas's diary gives no evidence of this. His diary suggests his friend for the voyage was an Emanuel Rushton.

The *Shipping Intelligence* gives the full names of all the passengers except the children, and I would be pleased to check the list for any enquirer on receipt of an s.a.e.. Two other passengers on the *Anna* made diaries of their voyage which have survived and there is an Australian publication *Log of Logs*, compiled by Ian Nicholson, which notes all known occurrences of such diaries.

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KEPT DIARY OF THE VOYAGE