

Reflections

A Fen family go down under

FROM Queensland, Australia has come an account of the Cross family who emigrated from the Ely area in the 1850s.

Pam McClymont traces her ancestry back to John and Elizabeth Cross, who had 10 children between 1761 and 1789.

In 1855 George, his wife Julia and six children decided to leave their home at Prickwillow to make the long journey to Australia.

Extracts from Julia's letters indicate something of the hardship of the journey.

They set sail from Southampton in November 1855, cheering as they left the dockside but soon suffering as the ship James Fernie heaved and rolled.

After three days of seasickness "a violent storm came on the water and

flew over the ship and we were rocked about, up went our heels and down went our heads as we lay in the bed we quite thought it was all up for us".

It continued very rough until they got to the Bay of Biscay, but by then they were acclimatised.

MIKE PETTY
reflects on recent arrivals in the Cambridgeshire Collection

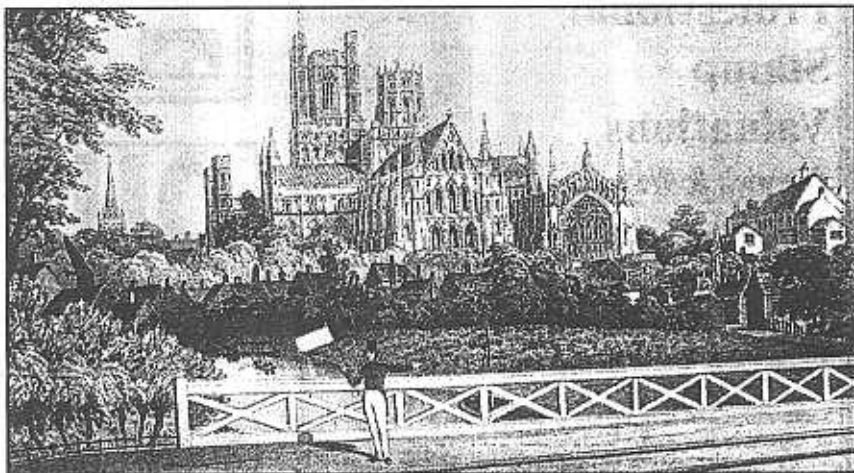
But there were other problems — the noise of the other 440 passengers, half of them Irish, was like the inside of a railway carriage, making eating an endurance — "for if I don't have peace and quietness my food never

does me any good".

When possible she took her boiled rice, boiled beef, potatoes and onion on deck.

On December 5 they passed the Cape of Good Hope and were making good progress; "we have not had one die yet — and the last voyage this ship made to the same place they lost 37 . . . but the Doctor is so particular else we should be as bad now for the Irish are so dirty . . . but the Doctor will not let them have any dinner till their places are all clean".

Christmas Day brought plum pudding and the alarm of fire — some thought caused by the Irish, who were always smoking, even in their beds, but in fact a baker's stove overheating. At last



What they left behind - Ely in 1845.

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they sighted land — and two rocks, one called Sugar Loaf and the other the shape of Castle Hill, Cambridge but much larger.

They docked at Moreton Bay, North Brisbane on January 24, 1856. There was to be a second voyage of 14 days but now there was no shortage of food.

"We have fresh beef and mutton and bread brought from Brisbane — as good beef and mutton as ever I eat in England — I wish you now had the meat that we and many more are obliged to fling overboard for we really cannot eat it all."

They also enjoyed delicacies: pineapples, lemons, pumpkins, apples, walnuts and crabs. This must have prompted the families back home in the Fens to consider their own position.

But when the Crosses reached their new home it was not everything they could wish, with temperatures of 95 deg and

Advertisements for the emigrant ships in Cambridge papers of 1854.

millions of gnats — "they bite you dreadful, all the parts of your flesh that is uncovered, of a night in the morning it will be exactly like small pox . . . we got cow dung and smoked them out of the tent.

"I sleep in gloves and the children's hands in their nightgowns and I sew a handkerchief about their heads of a night".

Nevertheless they were hardy folk, Julia then 36, her husband 42, and two years later they had another daughter.

They settled near Brisbane and, as Mrs McClymont records, they thrived.

The Cross family book from Ely to Australia is available from Mrs Pam McClymont, PO Box 539, Cooroy, Queensland, Australia 4563.