

From Berwick St. Leonard (Wiltshire) to Australia

An account by John Keynes

My present family generation comprises eight siblings (seven still living) from 1911 to the present and the only early family history commonly known is "that grandfather was born on a ship coming out from England in about 1850 and it was thought he and his family came from Cornwall". How incredible that research revealed a saga of stormy seas, shipwreck, a longboat capsized, rescue from a raging surf and a long overland trek in a bullock drawn dray, all forgotten in a few generations. How was it possible that at least some of the story hadn't been passed down? The events started in Wiltshire, England, in 1851.

In the early 1850s economic conditions in South Wiltshire were extremely bad, particularly for farm labourers of whom great-grandfather Keros Caines (later Keynes in Australia) was one, and he and his family became part of a group of 350 emigrants (including 258 from Wiltshire) to be granted assisted passage to South Australia. Arrangements were made for the group to be transported on a clipper ship, the *Marion*, newly built in Quebec, Canada and delivered to England in early 1851. Keros, his wife Elizabeth and children Ellen, Kadmiel and Susan left their home village of many generations, Berwick St. Leonard, and embarked at Plymouth on the 24th March, 1851. Elizabeth was almost seven month's pregnant at the time.



The voyage was to be plagued with "a succession of stormy weather" and Elizabeth gave birth to Samuel James, my grandfather, at about the time the *Marion* rounded the Cape of Good Hope. It can only be imagined what trauma the family and Elizabeth in particular experienced during that time. In addition to the pregnancy and the furthest any of

child-birth, how homesick would this family be, when for generations the furthest any of them would have travelled would have been to surrounding villages.

After his birth and when Samuel James was eight weeks old, the *Marion* entered South Australian waters, four months after leaving England. At that time lighthouses were few and far between and the Troubridge Shoals off Yorke Peninsula had no warning lights and the *Marion* was driven on to a reef on the shoals. Her captain later complained that inaccuracy of charts and strong currents drove his ship on to the reef, irretrievably wrecking the *Marion*. The reef is now named Marion Reef.

Newspaper and other reports at the time gave some inconsistencies in the descriptions of subsequent events, but the following is the most likely account following the shipwreck as applying to Keros and his family.

Shortly after the *Marion* grounded at 10 o'clock that Tuesday night, 29th July, 1851, the Captain ordered the ship's longboats to be launched, to take as many passengers as they could hold, to shore on Yorke Peninsula. The boats would not hold all the passengers and crew, so the sailors manning the longboats were ordered to take the passengers to shore and then return for more, no more than two hours likely to be needed between each trip. 'Women and children first into the lifeboats' meant that Elizabeth and the children (now four) were separated from Keros and loaded into one of the longboats. Keros remained on the *Marion*. One report said that some of the crew used the uproar to get to the ship's rum and this could be the reason why the longboat containing Elizabeth and the four children, even though the crew were equipped with a compass, rowed off in the wrong direction, spending the whole night with its 70 passengers, including 33 children, heading eastwards instead of westwards to Yorke Peninsula, no more than 6 kilometres away. The next morning they came in sight of land and sought a landing site along the rocky coastline. They had travelled more than 60 kilometres to the other side of the Gulf.

A newspaper report at the time had the following graphic account: ".on account of the rocks and breakers they could not find an accessible point, although one of the sailors had some acquaintance with the coast. At length, however, it became necessary to determine upon the perilous attempt to land. It would appear that when the long-boat struck on the rocky shore of Cape Jervis she stove in her bows; a second sea drove her higher up on the rocks, and a third completely capsized the boat. This appalling debarkation occurred at about a mile from the boat-harbour of Cape Jervis. In this trying emergency, the bravery and promptitude of the sailors were beyond all praise; they plunged into the foaming billows, and, picking up several children in succession, succeeded in saving every life. We append a list of the persons thus wonderfully preserved:-....." Elizabeth Caines and her four children were included in the list. Perhaps it was fortunate that the sailors were sober by this time.



Keros's headstone, Kapunda

Keros and his family were later united in Adelaide and eventually moved to a farm at Freeling in South Australia where Keros and Elizabeth lived until they died circa. 1890.

By any standards, this introduction to life in Australia was unusual and worthy of excited retelling. And yet it was quickly forgotten in family folk-lore and it took research in public records to find it.

Keros and Elizabeth were buried at a Cemetery in Kapunda where my family lived for decades, and yet we never knew the graves were there, even though a prominent headstone was still completely legible. Is this not uncommon loss of family history one of the motivations for the Genealogist?