

James Armstrong



Introduction

This is the story of James Armstrong, the brother of Thomas Armstrong, my great-grandfather, and a key figure in the history of our family: he took his parents and siblings to Australia and New Zealand, where he found prosperity and met a tragic death.

Little is known about his childhood, save the bare facts. He was born at Henwoodie, Roxburghshire, on 25 July, 1832, attended the local school, and worked there as a shepherd until he left Scotland, aged 29, for Fowler's Bay, South Australia, taking his parents and most of his siblings with him. He married Elenora Weir from Symington, Scotland, on the 25th April, 1867 in Queensland, South Australia. In 1874, thirteen years later he bought the estate of Akitio, New Zealand. He drowned there with his nephew, Archie Armstrong, in 1880. His Scottish background is described in my *Henwoodie* and *Barbara Armstrong* essays, which cover this period at length.

Investigating and writing family history seems to me to go through at least three stages. The first is what has always been there: the oral tradition; what has been passed down to me in the family, mainly by my late mother, born Dora Armstrong. In the present case, this consisted only of the knowledge that many of the family went to Australia in the late nineteenth century, and that two drowned in a river. Various Antipodeans visited my mother over the years when they came to Europe. Cattle barons from new Zealand, who boasted private planes and airstrips, came to the Perth cattle sales. Members of the Tulloch family, and two ladies, 'Louise and Winks', one the headmistress of a private girls school. And a Lady Verco had visited in the 1930s,

another distant relative, who brought an orange covered volume on the seashells of the South Seas, on which her husband, the author, had been the world authority. Scraps of information, some of it likely to be wrong; the book which lay in our bookcase throughout my childhood, now vanished.

In the last year or two, thanks to the internet, to contacts made through it with family members, and to the ability to trace official records easily, much more reliable information has been obtained. Most of it was unknown to my mother and her generation, and there is now sufficient to give a clear picture of this Armstrong emigration for future Armstrongs to read and to build upon.

The third phase occurs because of the huge gaps which still persist. If any coherent narrative is to be constructed, some imaginative speculation is needed to fill them. This is where historical reading comes in; family history, social history, local and national history. To take an example, we know little or nothing of how the Armstrongs voyaged to Australia, but a search in libraries uncovers a large literature on emigrants voyages to Australia – where they went from, where they arrived, whether they went by sail or steam, what the journey was like, how long it took, and how much it cost. This allows us to speculate - not to guess – but to know what happened to them and to others, and is a great improvement on the gaps that would otherwise be there. So bear with me as I gather clues and facts from many sources, common and obscure.

Emigration

Between 1852 and 1867 Australia was the most favoured destination for emigrants from Scotland, the very period in which the Armstrongs of Henwoodie made their departure.

There had been heavy emigration from Scotland earlier – from the 1840's on. The Highland Clearances have had most of the publicity, but emigration was common from the Lowlands too. Initially much of the traffic was to North America, but by the 1850's some were going to Australia, and indeed more went from the Highlands to Australia than to Canada during that decade.

The first emigrants to Australia were of course forced – the convicts – and they included Scots. The first reached Botany bay in 1787-8, and this traffic continued until 1868. Some of the Scots who went there in the 1790's were political martyrs. Voluntary emigrants came later. In New South Wales in 1820 there were 9000 convicts and only 1307 free settlers. Eight years later there were 25,600 convicts, 7500 freed convicts, and 4673 settlers. In these early years Scots had begun sheep breeding before 1800 with merino sheep. Scots names figure in place names from Scots explorers, there were two Scots Governors, and by 1822 the Australian Company of Edinburgh had been set up to operate ships from Leith to New South Wales and Van Demans Land. The first Presbyterian minister was there in 1823 and and in the '20s and 30's various skilled trades began to be represented. In 1830 there were sailings from Leith to Swan River in Western Australia, but the Scots predominantly went to Victoria. By 1839 Melbourne was being described as a Scots colony – two thirds of the p[opulation were of Scots origin.

In the 1830's Edward Gibbon -Wakefield, a product of Edinburgh's Royal High School, planned what became known as the Wakefield Movement. He suggested that Australian and New Zealand land should be sold and that all emigrants be required to labour for a time before acquiring land. The money raised should be used to help poor labourers to emigrate. His ideas were taken up by the government and in 1831 a Government Emigration Commission was formed to assist emigrants to Australia.

From 1855 a free grant was available to pay the cost of the whole passage. During the 1840's various societies were formed to assist emigrants.

The discovery of gold in Australia in 1851 – in Victoria and New South Wales – accelerated emigration. That very year had been a disastrous one for graziers because of both fires and drought, and the discovery of gold saved many of them from ruin. Although the news took months to reach Britain, in 1852 19,000 new emigrants landed at Melbourne and 100,000 at Victoria. It was said that the Scots already in Australia were not backward in making for the diggings and in making money from the diggers. At the diggings Scots and Irish outnumbered the English.

From this time on emigration to New Zealand increased and it was not uncommon for those in Australia to move on to New Zealand.

Emigration from the Scottish Borders, 1861-71

A recent study of Scottish migration between 1861 and 1911 (Brock, 1999) shows that the Borders had distinct patterns of movement, and had the largest numbers and proportions of emigrants in between 1861 and 1871, the decade when the Armstrongs emigrated from Henwoodie. The sex ratio of emigrants then was 64M:36F. There were large numbers of children, especially between 5 and 14, and the male emigrants averaged 15-29 years and nearly all under 35.

8% of the Border population was lost to emigration in the decade 1861-71.

She points out that this period is not the highest for Scottish emigration. There were higher losses in the 17th C and in the mid 19th century. Scotland has had centuries of high emigration. In the 19th century its emigration figures were only exceeded by those from Ireland and Norway.

Back in Scotland, in the 1850s, the minister of Selkirk recorded all the destinations of his parishioners who left for overseas. Some sixty left and they were fairly evenly divided at that time between North America and Australia.

From the 1850's on the Border newspapers have regular advertisements like this one from the 1850 Hawick Advertiser of January 1861:

Otago, NZ. The agents of the provincial government are making arrangements for the dispatch of ships for this colony during the Spring and Summer months. The latest accounts from the settlements state that the demand for labour is on the increase, and that all the emigrants who had then arrived had got employment at Good Wages. Every information given by application at this office, ASSISTED PASSAGES will be given as formerly to SHEPHERDS, PLOUGHMEN, LABOURERS AND DOMESTIC SERVANTS, also to CARPENTERS, MASONS AND OTHER TRADESMEN. Mr Cargills pamphlet on Otago, price 6d, the latest and most complete, will be sent to intending Emigrants on application.

By Authority of the Agents, Thos. D Currie, Otago Emigration Office, 20 St Andrew Square, Edinburgh.

Other adverts advertise the 'splendid clipper ship PLADDA sailing from Glasgow for Otago, 31st May.

But ten years earlier the Border Advertiser carried regular adverts for travelling to Australia eg in 1853:

WS Lindseys and Co.'s Line to Australia. For passengers to Port Philip. 'Libraries will be on board each ship, and rules established to maintain order and cleanliness.'

From London, calling at Dartmouth.

In the same year there are adverts for the steamship 'Great Britain' sailing from Liverpool to Melbourne and Sydney in June, from the Clyde to Port Philip – Melbourne – and another for Sydney. There are of course others for New York. This shows that there were some sailings from Scotland – probably also from Leith. The Lintons left from the Thames with a consignment of sheep.

Earlier Armstrongs

The Armstrong name appears early in the history of Australia. An Archibald Armstrong sailed in the First Fleet to Australia, but not as a convict. He was the second and subsequently first mate on the 'Fishburn'. He settled in Australia but was drowned in 1797 while trying to save the crew of the 'Sydney Cove'. He left a son, also Archibald, who is recorded in 1816 as applying for land which his father had been granted.

The earliest mention I can find of an Armstrong shepherd is in Prentis(1983), who quotes a letter from a Highland emigrant in 1852: 'John Armstrong, a Scotch rich man, 13 years in the colony; began as a shepherd, as empty as I, he says himself. Now 60,000 sheep in six stations, two cattle stations, 800 horses and bullocks...' So here is an Armstrong shepherd, no relation of our family, who arrived as early as 1839 and did well. And obituaries from the Australasian Pastoralists Review for the sixteen years up to 1907 show that half those dying were Scots or the sons of Scottish emigrants. In West Victoria the squatters were nearly all Lowland farmers.

To Australia

Between 1852 and 1867 Australia was the most favoured destination for emigrants from Scotland, the very period in which the Armstrongs of Henwoodie made their departure.

There had been heavy emigration from Scotland earlier – from the 1840's on. The Highland Clearances have had most of the publicity, but emigration was common from the Lowlands too. Initially much of the traffic was to North America, but by the 1850's some were going to Australia, and indeed more went from the Highlands to Australia than to Canada during that decade.

The first emigrants to Australia were of course forced – the convicts – and they included Scots. The first reached Botany bay in 1787-8, and this traffic continued until 1868. Some of the Scots who went there in the 1790's were political martyrs. Voluntary emigrants came later. In New South Wales in 1820 there were 9000 convicts and only 1307 free settlers. Eight years later there were 25,600 convicts, 7500 freed convicts, and 4673 settlers. In these early years Scots had begun sheep breeding before 1800 with merino sheep. Scots names figure in place names from Scots explorers, there were two Scots Governors, and by 1822 the Australian Company of Edinburgh had been set up to operate ships from Leith to New South Wales and Van Demans Land. The first Presbyterian minister was there in 1823 and and in the '20s and 30's various skilled trades began to be represented. In 1830 there were sailings from Leith to Swan River in Western Australia, but the Scots predominantly went to Victoria. By 1839 Melbourne was being described as a Scots colony – two thirds of the population were of Scots origin.

In the 1830's Edward Gibbon-Wakefield, a product of Edinburgh's Royal High School, planned what became known as the Wakefield Movement. He suggested that

Australian and New Zealand land should be sold and that all emigrants be required to labour for a time before acquiring land. The money raised should be used to help poor labourers to emigrate. His ideas were taken up by the government and in 1831 a Government Emigration Commission was formed to assist emigrants to Australia. From 1855 a free grant was available to pay the cost of the whole passage. During the 1840's various societies were formed to assist emigrants.

The discovery of gold in Australia in 1851 – in Victoria and New South Wales – accelerated emigration. That very year had been a disastrous one for graziers because of both fires and drought, and the discovery of gold saved many of them from ruin. Although the news took months to reach Britain, in 1852 19,000 new emigrants landed at Melbourne and 100,000 at Victoria. It was said that the Scots already in Australia were not backward in making for the diggings and in making money from the diggers. At the diggings Scots and Irish outnumbered the English.

From this time on emigration to New Zealand increased and it was not uncommon for those in Australia to move on to New Zealand.

For the second half of the nineteenth century, **wool** was Australia's most significant product, and dominated exports from the 1870's until the 1980's. The long boom was from 1860-1890. The sheep population grew from 20 to 102 million. The trade stimulated banking, insurance and transport. For much of the period Australians had the highest per capita incomes in the world. A major slump was in 1891-2 when there was an eight year drought.

Henwoodie Emigrants

We have few details of when and how the Henwoodie Armstrongs went overseas.

Robert Linton, who had married Barbara Armstrong went out to West Victoria in 1865 sailing from the Thames in June with a consignment of sheep. At this date Barbara had been married to him for four years and had had two children.

Her brother, James Armstrong, born at Henwoodie on 25 7 1832 is recorded in Queensland South Australia on 25 4 1867, marrying Elenora Weir from Symington Scotland. She had been born in in 1844, so the bridegroom was 35 and the bride 23. They had four children. James was said to have done well in the gold rush. He used the proceeds to buy the property of Akitio where he drowned in the river of the same name in 1 9 1880 at 48 with his nephew Archie. The estate was auctioned and Robert Linton, representing the trustees, bought it. The oldest son was Francis born 23 2 1869, named after his paternal grandfather. He later took charge.

And so James with his family sailed for Australia.

Australian Armstrongs

James Armstrong was appointed to manage this enterprise in 1861. Swan spent only two years at Fowlers Bay and his brother took over the Yalata Homestead there for a very short time until Armstrong arrived.

How was he appointed to this difficult and responsible job? A shepherd along with hundreds of others all over the Scottish Borders on a remote hillside. It can only have been through his mother, born a Murray, and her family, many of whom had moved to Australia some twenty years earlier. In particular her brother, William Murray of Glen Osmond, some six miles south east of Adelaide, had prospered, as a nurseryman, a jam manufacturer and later the first Conservator of Forests in South Australia.

His parents, **Francis and Mary**, came with him, and three of his sisters. In 1864, **Esther** married Captain William Tulloch, originally from Orkney, mate of the

Daphne at that time, and subsequently master of the vessel *Wollomai*, the regular supplier for the Fowlers Bay run, and later for the whole of the Far West. They had three children, Frank, Nellie and Mary.

Elizabeth married Samuel Mills, originally from Earlston in Roxburghshire. Records suggest he was her junior by 11 years. Their daughter Mary Isabella Mills, married a Joseph Verco, physician and world authority on Pacific seashells. He was knighted. After his wife became Lady Verco, my mother was told by my grandmother: 'She'll always be Mary Mills to me'! I vaguely remember her visiting us at Marchmont Street in Edinburgh about 1935. The orange-covered book of his seashell researches was brought as a gift, and I remember it well in the bookcase there for years afterwards. Two of his children were doctors, one a radiologist. Sir Joseph's grandson was a distinguished radiologist who died in 1999.

The third sister, Eleanor, married someone called Clode, seems to have had no children, and lived until December 1929.

Father Francis died in Queenstown, near Adelaide, on 8th May 1870, aet 68., and a notice was put in the Hawick Advertiser back home. His widow died in 1876 in Queenstown, Port Adelaide.

Who went with him?

There was a large family at Henwoodie: Francis and Mary had ten children in all. Tom, Janet, and Jane were older than James, and after him came Esther, Margaret, Eleanor, John, Elizabeth and Barbara. Tom had departed early to Dumfriesshire, marrying there; Janet married, moving to Dornoch in Sutherland. Barbara was working on the other side of Hawick and married Robert Linton in June 1861. Eleanor, her sister, was a witness at the ceremony, and went to Australia with the other members of the family, making the family's departure date after June 1861. Jane died, aged 30 in 1859. Margaret died, aged 22, in 1861, and her brother John died the following year aged 18. We know that James Armstrong had taken up his managerial post by 1862, so they must have sailed in the middle months of either 1861-1862, the time of year when the journeys were made.

So Margaret probably died before their departure, but John may have died in Scotland or Australia or even on the voyage.

By these exclusions we can calculate that the emigrant party was made up of James, his parents, Francis and Mary, then aged fifty-nine; and three of his sisters: Esther, aged 24, Eleanor, aged twenty and Elizabeth, aged fifteen.

And we can confirm this by the knowledge that all three girls married in Australia, and that their parents died in Adelaide.

He knew the job he was going to, unlike most emigrants at the time, and he knew where he was going.

The Voyage



In the 1860s virtually all emigrant ships were sail not steam. Most sailed from London or Plymouth, a few from Cork or Liverpool. It was only in the 1880s that many sailed from the Clyde.

Usually sailed from April to June. Headed for the south American coast, and were often stuck waiting in London or in the 'doldrums' for favourable winds. They then veered southeasst from S America to pick up the Westerlies which took them east for the next 8000 miles. Here there were heavy seas, snow storms and the threat of icebergs. This was the 'great circle route' through the 'Roaring Forties' and the 'Howling Fifties'.

In the course of the voyage great extremes of heat and cold were experienced.

In the 1860's the voyage averaged 107 days, but because of dependence on wind and weather could vary from records of 69 days to as long as 196. This was a total journey of 12,000 miles, made without any stop and scarcely any sight of land throughout.

An unassisted passage cost £15-£20

1850-1878 – lull in emigration of Scots but not to Australia/NZ

Most of the big squatters had arrived by 1851 – which may be why cheaper poorer land was attempted at the F Bay run in the 1860s?

Assisted Migrants, 1850-1890.

One description of those going to Victoria is as unmarried, Free Kirk, shepherds and farm labourers

91% of the Scots emigrants were literate as compared with 85% of the English and 70% of the Irish

The Armstrong Voyage

James and his family would sail to Adelaide: which british port they departed from is not known. Having arrived they would proceed by coastal ship westwards to Fowlers Bay and the Yalata homestead there, the head station of the run from which he would manage the huge enterprise for the next ? ten years. He was appointed manager, but seems to have been a partner from the beginning. Managers and overseers, even of such large runs were paid up to £200 to £300 annually, and it is inconceivable that he could have amassed a fortune in ten years on such a salary. But who provided him with the substantial capital normally required for a partner. It must have been the Murray influence that supplied it or arranged for him to have a share of the profits. Strangely, other Murrays - his cousins who joined him were not given

his status; George W Murray came as a wool sorter, and was joined later by his brother who came as a jackaroo.

Fowler's Bay



Fowlers Bay today

Fowler's Bay is in South Australia at the extreme west end, on the Southern ocean. It is at the far west of the Far West – the Wild West of Australia – and where the Great Victoria Desert begins. The Far West is a narrow strip of coast line between the sea and the desert stretching for about a 100 miles. Today it is almost as remote, inhabited by some 5000 souls known as The Coasters.

South Australia is dominated by its Capital, Adelaide, and its surroundings.. Fowler's Bay lies 571 miles away, and in the 1860s there were no roads, and the journey was made by boat. Even today the Coasters , now numbering 5000, feel isolated , their land described as 'difficult' and 'marginal'. There are good bays and sand beaches and good surf – the last its main tourist attraction as well as sea fishing. The population sought but failed to obtain self-government in 1926.

Fowler's Bay has samphire swamps and dry saline lagoons; the best farming is inland where there is chalky brown soil. The summers are very hot: temperatures of 119 F and 47.8C have been recorded. There are occasional frosts inland from June to Septemeber, and drought years occur. Orincipally there were kangaroos in great numbers – the western grey - but from the 1860's to the 1890's they were killed in great numbers by professional hjunters , slaughtering them in thousands in the 'kangaroo yards'. Fowler's Bay had ten kangaroos hunters in the 1880's.

Wild dogs and snakes abounded, and the sea was rich in sharks whales and seals. Before 1850 there were whaling stations along the coast, and in 1959 a world record shark of 17 feet and 2664 pounds was caught and preserved.

It is a measure of the remoteness of Fowler's Bay that it was the starting point for many famous explorers.

It was visited by land in 1839 and 1840 on two expeditions by the famous explorer Edward J Eyre. In november, 1840 he was at Fowlers Bay and found good water among the sanddunes there. It was after this, when he explored further west that two aborigines killed his companion Baxter, a wellknown episode in the Australian story.

The area, sparsely populated by itinerant aborigines, was discovered on a reconnaissance voyage by the Dutch in 1627. In 1802 the ship 'Investigator' captained by Matthew Flinders anchored in Fowlers Bay, naming it after the lieutenant of the ship, Robert Fowler. In the same year a French naval expedition explored the coast and its islands. As a result the area is covered with a mixture of Dutch, French and English place-names.

Whalers had visited the area since 1803 and in 1843 there is evidence of a whaling station at Fowlers Bay.

The first 'pastoralists' arrived in 1857-58, and found grassy land behind Fowlers Bay. A reconnaissance party led by W R Swan visited the area in 1858, and he settled at Fowlers Bay in 1860, founding the Yalata head sheep station there. The area was unpromising, and classified as third quality land for the system of pastoral leases in operation. Because of this it was much cheaper to purchase than better quality land elsewhere. This tempted many to take out leases, despite the problems of distance, wild dogs, and above all, the lack of water.

W R Swan was a share holder in the firm of Elder, Smith and Co. in Adelaide. From the 1850s on, Robert Barr Smith and Thomas Elder had made fortunes in copper mining, then diversified into wool selling and 'capitalist pasturing'. Within a few years those who had bought leases in the Far West gave up, defeated by the conditions. One by one their leases were bought by Elder, Smith who had the capital and specialist knowledge to defeat the conditions: by artesian bores for water, fence building, and the appointment of competent managers. Thus in the 1860s they had created a sheep run stretching for one hundred miles with its headquarters at Fowlers Bay and many substations spread along the run.

The Yalata Run

In 1865 Armstrong was joined at Fowlers Bay by his cousin John Murray, and in 1867 by another, George Wright Murray. In later years both would manage this huge business.

By the late sixties, the enormous Barr Smith sheep run had been created. It had two names: either the Fowler's Bay run or the Yalata run, after the original head station.



The stone fences of the sheepyards at Yalata station. Old woolshed at top (Faul)

Until the late 1880's it was the Far West – the complete hundred mile stretch, and life there 'on the edge' made it wild and dangerous.

Add material about characters – poem with James A aborigines

When James Armstrong became its manager he also became a partner.

James married during this period – a Miss Elenora Weir – in 1867, in Queensland, south Australia. She was Scottish, and came from Symington. She was to bear him seven children, the first – Francis, from his grandfather – in 1869.

We know no details of what he did in Australia except that in the thirteen years between his arrival in 1861 and his departure to New Zealand in 1876, he amassed a small fortune of £44,000. It is said that he went first to New Zealand for a holiday. His sister Mrs Robert Linton was there by this time (qv) and he presumably went to visit her and learned of the possibilities there.

By this time his sister had married Captain Tulloch, and he must have been able to provide for his parents – 59 when they arrived in Australia. They did not go with him. His father had died four years earlier, in 1870 in Queenstown, and his mother six years later.

George Wright Murray, his cousin, accompanied him to New Zealand, and another Murray brother, John, took over the Fowler's Bay Run, but left after his wife died in childbirth.

Later History of Fowlers Bay

When James drowned at Akitio in 1880, George W returned to Yalata and Fowler's Bay as manager and remained there until 1922.

In 1888 the leases of the pastoralists expired. There was pressure from the public in South Australia to provide more land for agriculture and those who aspired to be small farmers. This led to claims that the Far West had great potential for such development, and official visits to report on the areas possibilities. Optimistic views were expressed and the land was divided into parcels and sold. Those who succeeded were disillusioned – some immediately when they saw the scrub they had bought; others struggled for years before admitting failure.

The extreme West of the area – around Fowler's Bay – was not sold and remained in Barr Smith's hands. It was sold to George W Murray in 1904 for £3000 and he continued to live at Yalata until 1922.

The farmers survived but their numbers declined and droughts in the twenties and thirties ruined many. Today sheep are still raised and wheat is grown, but only thanks to modern methods and the growth of the large farm. Tourism exists, fishing, and there are salt and gypsum works.

But the area remains remote, and feels neglected in South Australia. Fowlers bay boasts little but its caravan park. It attracts sea fishers and bird and whale spotters.

The Murray connection

Family history has thrown up connections between the Murrays over several generations and before the families intermarried, when Mary Murray married James's father. The more one reads, the more Mary Murray, James's mother

Mary Murrays father a John Murray, b 1779, was a witness when Thomas Armstrong married in Falstone in 1797

I now have several connections between the family going back to the 18C before the families intermarried when Mary M married Francis Armstrong

And several - three – esp William Murray the patriarch went to Australia twenty years earlier in about 1821. Then more of the next generation joined James in Australia and perhaps the next generation at Akitio – the one who drowned with him had come out from home. And a Murray went with James to Akitio returning to manage Fowlers Bay after James drowned.

And then there is the Barbara Armstrong connection and Robert Linton.

They all must have corresponded very regularly to do this networking – there was no other way at the time with the distances involved even locally. And all these letters lost! Not a single one survives.

Then there are connections at home with Tom going to Langshawburn where there was a Murray. Tom was the oldest brother, James the second son, born six years later. And that must connect with Ewes/Sorbie, not far away.

New Zealand

Getting there – whys and wherefores.

Salient facts and dates. Linton from W Victoria NZ in 1872. Crisis at Ngaio station where Robert Linton, James's brother in law was manager. The owner Wilson, heard in spring 1875 that his father was bankrupt. This included the NZ property: Ngaio.

James A buys Akitio in 1876, and gave Linton money to buy farm near Halcombe. Wilson had bought Ngaio from the creditors but was heavily in debt and paid Linton in sheep for his new farm.

In my Linton essay I say that James arrival was coincidental, but I wonder if he wasn't influenced by Linton and Barbara plight. Letters wouldn't take too long from NZ to Fowlers Bay?

James Armstrongs Will

On the 'twelfth day of April one thousand eight hundred and seventy six' James Armstrong signed his will in the office of W B Edwards, solicitor, Wellington, New Zealand. He must just have completed the purchase of Akitio, a time to set his affairs in order.

The full will is reproduced in an appendix, but the salient points are summarised here.

He left all the house contents to his wife Eleanor with an immediate sum of fifty pounds. He appointed his wife, and his brothers-in-law Robert Linton and Samuel Mills as trustees for his whole estate, with discretion to manage it as they think best until his oldest son Francis is twenty-one. They are to manage the stock, buy and sell as they see fit, and employ staff and set their wages. They have to allow Francis to take part in managing the estate, and pay him a reasonable income.

His wife is to receive an annuity of £200, plus another £50 for each child living with and maintained by her.

Each of his daughters is to receive £5000 at the age of twenty-one.

Any extra investment income that may accrue is to be added to these legacies.

The estate is to be divided equally between his sons.

Robert Linton is to receive £100 annually while he supervises the estate, and Samuel Mills a legacy of £20. Perhaps because he was in Australia and unlikely to be an active trustee.

[James came with some of the family – wife and children obviously. But parents stayed in S Australia and retired to the city - Adelaide.

He was joined by one of the Murrays, or even started with him.

Have a look at his will.

Ages of his children. Date of marriage

Note James drowns only four years later.

James was said to have done well in the gold rush, but we know now that this was not the case – his fortune came from the sheep run. He used the proceeds to buy the property of Akitio where he drowned in the river of the same name in 19 1880 aet 48 with his nephew Archie. The estate was auctioned and Robert Linton, representing the trustees, bought it. The oldest son was Francis born 23 2 1869, named after his paternal grandfather. He later took charge.]

Mrs James Armstrong

Elenora did not have her troubles to seek. Born in Symington Scotland in 1844, she married in 1867 in Queenstown Australia. She had at least seven pregnancies, and had three children before the move to New Zealand in 1876. Francis, the later heir to Akitio, was seven, Molly five, and Ella two. Between then and her husband's death four years on, she had a son, James, in January 1878, still born, or dying within the first week or two of his life. By the end of the year she had given birth to another son, also called James. Two years later, in 1880, she was doubly bereaved. Her second son William died aged eight.

When her husband drowned on the 1st September, she was four months pregnant. Her husband died on the first of September, 1880, and the child - another son, Archie - was born on the 29th January 1881.

She raised the baby and the three other children under 12 who survived at the time she became a widow. She lived to see them all married, her oldest son running Akitio with success and young Jim, a doctor.

She died in Masterton New Zealand in 1933, aged 89.

Akitio

The main source for Akitio is an article in a New Zealand newspaper which is reproduced in full here. There are some inaccuracies about the family history, but much information is given that was otherwise unknown, and the more recent history of Akitio is described. The illustrations are from an Akitio website, set up because the estate is currently for sale(2002).



Akitio today

AKITIO A STATION WITH CHARM AND VIVID HISTORY

By Colin Laurie (Evening News, Saturday, August 16. 1969. p5.)

The three magnificent homesteads standing within a mile of each other at Akitio - each the size of a hotel - are monuments to the pioneers' resourcefulness and ability to battle the elements and carve a place for themselves in the country' s history.

But perhaps the one magnificent house to set the visitor' s mind ticking over in a parade of daydreams wondering about the hard work which went into establishing the area, its former glories and the grandeur of past social occasions, is the homestead on Akitio Station, the place where it all started.

The original Akitio Station comprised 98,000 acres and the first owner was Dr. I. E. Featherston, the first superintendent of the Wellington province, after whom the Wairarapa township at the foot of the Rimutakas was named.

The second owner was Donald McLean (later Sir Donald), but neither of these early owners ever set foot on the property. The name to become synonymous with Akitio was that of the third owner, Armstrong. James Armstrong, born at Henwoodie, Roxburgh, Scotland, in 1832 migrated to Western Australia and it was during a trip to New Zealand that he saw, and liked Akitio so much that he went back to Australia to bring his wife and family to Akitio Station in the 1870' s.

The family had lived at Fowler' s Bay, Western Australia, and it was here where his sons the late Frank & James Armstrong were born. James Armstrong in partnership with a Mr. Elder-Smith bought the 98,000 acre property for \$2 an acre and to Mr. Armstrong goes the credit of the early land development in the area to which several families in the Akitio district owe their land owning origins.

Akitio Station quickly showed its potential and cattle were successfully bred there. Tragedy struck in 1880 when James (Snr.) was attempting to move cattle marooned on a sand shoal at the Akitio River mouth. His horse got into quicksand and he was injured. A nephew, Archibald Armstrong, went to his assistance, but both were drowned.



(The picture shows the James Armstrong memorial obelisk in the Akitio burial ground. It reads: In Memory Of/ James Armstrong/Born July 25th 1832/at henwoodie/Roxburghshire/Scotland/And was drowned in/Akitio River/September 1st 1880/And of his two sons/One died in infancy/January 5th 1878/and the other/William L Armstrong/died February 19th 1880/Aged 8 years/"In the midst of life/we are in death."

A cousin, James Murray, was appointed supervisor of the property and within a few years its size shrunk to 33,000 acres after the sale of the portion of land on the southern side of the river known now as Marainanga Station to Sir John Roberts (then Mr.) and J. S. Handyside.

During this period Akitio Station was under capable trusteeship. James' sons Frank & James Jr. were educated at Nelson College, James going on to medical school and Frank worked as a cadet on Bollands Station in the Bideford district for two years.

With the training gained at Akitio and Bollands, Frank Armstrong developed as a man with a natural eye for stock who knew how to work with men. He later bought his brother Jim' s share of the property.

From the 33.000 acres Frank and Jim took over after the death of their father, the station was further sub-divided with sales of 5,000 acres (Huiarau) to Cyril HunterHartgill Estate, 3,000 acres (Burnview) to Frank Armstrong' s father-in-law John Speedy, and a further sale of 3,000 acres after the First World War for returned servicemen settlement.

The man at present controlling the destiny of Akitio Station is Michael Kight. (sic) He is the son of the former Miss Norah Armstrong who married Dannevirke barrister and solicitor Ivan Kight. Ivan Kight was killed in a plane accident during the days after the 1931 Napier earthquake. He flew supplies in from Wairoa during that time.

Frank Armstrong' s son Hamish was also a keen pilot and his body was over found after his plane, which had crash-landed intact in snow on a ridge in the Whakarara country behind Tikokino, was discovered three weeks after the search for it had been called off, in 1935.

After Hamish' s accident Frank Armstrong took over as manager again, but for a time his other son Brian also filled the position.

In the early days before Huiarau was sold to the Hunters a sawmill up river from the homestead sent a steady flow of timber downstream to where it was collected at a boom across the river. However, during floods logs escaped out to the sea. Stories are told of Akitio logs being washed up in Tasmania, but logs are still found along the coastline bearing the old Akitio Sawmilling Company (ASC) initials. However, timber for the present 22-roomed homestead - which was built about 1902 - all came from Auckland.

All the wool in the district was loaded directly into surfboats from bullock waggons then into coastal ships.

In the peak years 6,000 to 7,000 bales of wool were loaded in this manner. Up to 14 bales a trip were taken out to the surfboat and in a good working day between daylight and dark up to 400 bales could be loaded. But six hours in the chains was about the limit for the bullocks. Wool was still shipped directly by sea until the end of World War II.



The credit for introducing the first Aberdeen Angus into the province goes to the Marainanga Station (30,000 acres of the original Akitio Station). At the 1903 dispersal sale of Marainanga, Frank Armstrong purchased some top cattle and shortly afterwards the Akitio Stud (one of the oldest herds in this island) was founded.

Today the Aberdeen Angus beasts bred on the high wind-swept hills which rise sharply from the beach are known the length and breadth of the country and have earned a

reputation overseas. In fact some of the Akitio Stud' s top stock in five-year-old heifers, Acidic and Abashed, daughters of Storm were among a shipment of quality New Zealand beasts flown to Los Angeles, U.S.A. on June 4. The American purchasers Messers W. J. Halpern and Ray McNally acting on behalf of Diplomat Angus Farms were impressed with the Akitio blacks.

Many are the reminders of days gone by still seen around Akitio today. The twisted, buckled red tin shed standing desolately on the beach is the Landing Shed used for many years to store the bales of wool waiting to be loaded on to the surfboats and small coasters that would take them to the markets of the world.

Half a dozen rotting piles, poking up out of the sand at drunken angles are all that remain of the old jetty, built to aid in the loading of the ships that called at Akitio. However, the jetty did not last too long. A strong southerly wind and a pounding storm tore the jetty to shreds. The same storm carried all of the great number of logs held at the boom across the river out to sea, so proving a costly quirk of nature. And not too far from the old jetty can be seen a dark shape jutting from the water which looks like a large shark fin. This is about all that remains of the 1010-ton Pleiades which was driven ashore in October 1899, to save the lives aboard. She was never re-floated and was dismantled where she lay, the hull alone being left

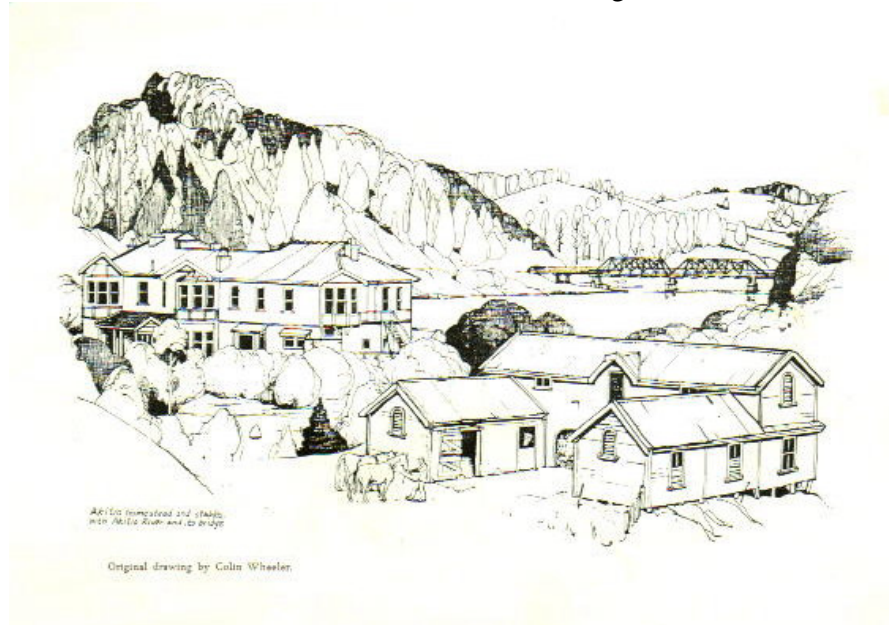
The Pleiades (the Seven Sisters) was wrecked upright just off the beach. The master drove the iron hulled ship ashore to save loss of life.

Everyone aboard reached the shore, and although some accounts say they walked, an official account said they rowed ashore in a lifeboat. The master and mate were

ordered to share the costs when she was declared a total loss. Neither lost their "ticket."

The history of Akitio is high in character, splendour, hard work, glittering social occasions, heartache and tragedy. Little wonder the imposing homestead draws reaction from most travellers who chance upon this majestic sight at the end of a torturously twisting, dusty drive. In fact Akitio can be likened to a living person. It has a soul of its own, and if one listens carefully, the lapping tide at the bridge looking back towards the homestead echoes the life-giving heartbeat that has made Akitio Station more than just another property.

The striking Akitio Station homestead is still a magnificent place despite the nudity of the surrounding trees at this time of the year, and the lack of blooms from the many roses and multitudes of flowers that abound during the summer months.



The 22-roomed house, built about 1902 from timber brought from Auckland, has 10 bedrooms, all of which are still used. Fifty miles from Dannevirke, this is one of three fine homes within a short radius, but it was from Akitio Station that land development in the Akitio district first commenced.

Originally Akitio Station was 98,000 acres.

References

The Australian National Library at Canberra has company archives of Elder Smith and Co from 1862. They have a company history published in 1940, Adelaide: Elder Smith and Company, the First hundred Years.

Barr Smith papers are in the Mortlock Library, State Library of South Australia.

Faul, Jim :Life on the Edge. The Far West Coast of South Australia. 1988 District Council of Murat Bay, Ceduna, South Australia.

Murray, Bill Hope. Murray Pioneers in Australia 1839-1964