

Single & free: Female Migration to Australia, 1833-1837

Elizabeth Rushen

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Reviewer: Peter Omond

Elizabeth Rushen's book *Single & free: Female Migration to Australia, 1833-1837* is an account of the first scheme for female migration to Australia from Britain and Ireland in the 1830s. Dr Rushen's research brings to light primary sources previously unexamined. Her analysis of London Emigration Committee (LEC) records, as well as a variety of other primary sources, papers and letter-books, presents a varied and interesting picture of the 2,700 women who were carefully selected by the LEC to come to Sydney, Hobart and Launceston between 1833 and 1837. They were a diverse group drawn from cities, towns and villages. They were chosen for their skills in agricultural work, sewing, specific domestic tasks as well as general household work. Some were educated and employed as governesses; some were semi-literate.

The scheme was administered for the colonial office by the LEC, a committee comprising evangelicals, Quakers, philanthropists and merchants whose main concern was the welfare of the women chosen for emigration. The involvement of the Clapham sect, a group of wealthy Anglican evangelicals, the majority of whom worshipped at Clapham parish church, included people such as the Rector, John Venn, a pious and zealous minister, one of the founders of the Church Missionary Society; Zachary Macaulay, an evangelical philanthropist who campaigned for the abolition of slavery and became the governor of the model colony of Sierra Leone; William Wilberforce, a philanthropist and advocate of the abolition of slavery, who led a strictly Christian life and was persuaded by John Newton to serve the cause of Christianity in Parliament; Hannah More, a leading humanitarian of the day who was influenced by Wilberforce to combine religious education with training in spinning, designed to relieve poverty. They shared a keen sense of moral responsibility and the belief that religion must be manifested in good works.

Members of the Religious Society of Friends will be particularly interested to read of the significant contribution made by influential Quaker families such as the Gurney family (Elizabeth Fry's family) and the Hoare family. Samuel Hoare was one of the original members of the 1832 emigration sub-committee and assumed a leading role in the LEC. His son John became the Refuge treasurer in 1849 when Edward Forster died. It was at the instigation of Forster that Elizabeth Fry devoted herself to the welfare of female prisoners in Newgate. There were many other important connections through marriage which enabled these families to exert their humanitarian influence for the welfare of the women. The combination of evangelicals and Quakers was a powerful one and they used their social position, wealth and marriage connections to maintain an active involvement in welfare work, exercising an influence on parliament and public opinion out of all proportion to their numbers.

The conditions of the women's three month journey to Australia, their reception and employment opportunities is well illustrated from diaries and letters and their positive contribution to early Australian society is evaluated. The various 'Tables', 'Lists' and the 'Index' are clear and useful.

The book is divided into three parts; written in a lucid and pleasant style, it is a fascinating story which tells us a great deal about the calibre of the women who came here, as well as something of the LEC and the Christian values which motivated their scheme.

Between the years of 1833 and 1837, a total of fourteen ships sponsored by the London Emigration Committee departed from England and Ireland as part of a scheme to send female emigrants to Sydney, Hobart and Launceston Australia where young women of good character were said to be in high demand. About 4000 people, 2700 of them bounty women, were assisted to emigrate to Australia during this period. Enlarge. In New South Wales, young women could expect to earn Â£12 and Â£14 as housemaids or servants, double what could be had in England while cooks and dairy-women could look forward to earning bet