

Croker Prize for Biography

Entry 1506

Abraham's Journey

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London, England, 1841 is a seething mass of humanity. Amongst the throng is Abraham Marks, my great-great grandfather. He is from Strzelno, Posen, (Poland)¹and he is a refugee - a Jew. 'From the beginnings of Prussian rule....Poles were subject to a series of measures aimed against them and their culture..' They were portrayed as 'backward "Slavs" by Prussian officials who wanted to spread German language and culture.'²Abraham has come here, to London, hoping to escape the religious and political unrest of his own land. There are 18,000 Jews already in London.³

Abraham, a hawker, has found accommodation in a coffee-house run by Joseph Fountain in Aldgate, with several other young men from 'foreign parts,'⁴'selling watches, gold and silver pencil cases, eye-glasses...jewellery...thermometers, barometers, telescopes, and microscopes.'⁵Others sell sponges and combs, nuts and oranges, pencils, sealing wax and old clothes.

The Jews are not well-liked. They have a reputation for miserliness, for cheating, for being receivers of stolen goods. Abraham feels as much an outcast here as he did at home. But he has an ally. Her name is Emily Whitaker and she lives nearby. Her parents, too, have a coffee-house but her father, Charles, is in the Debtors' Prison.⁶She helps her mother, Martha, and grandmother, Ann, in the coffee-house⁷and it is here that she and Abraham make plans for a future together in the new colony of Australia that they have heard so much about. So it is that, sometime before 1850, Abraham arrives in Van Diemen's Land to prepare for their new life.

Hobart, in the new colony of Van Diemen's Land, has become home to many Jews. In 1845, just a few years before Abraham arrives, the Jewish population raise and consecrate a Synagogue on land donated by Judah Solomon who, with his brother Joseph, had been transported from London in 1820 on the 'Castle Forbes' for receiving stolen goods. They eventually were able 'to engage in business and prosper.'⁸Abraham thinks that he, too, has a chance to prosper here and in 1850 he is already a partner with Henry Horwitz from Germany,⁹in an import-export business. They are also pawnbrokers and general merchants, eventually trading in everything from vests and 'trowsers' (sic),¹⁰ tea, coffee and tobacco, to wine, spirits and canary seed.¹¹Names such as Solomon, Abrahams, Levy and Cohen are commonplace among the merchants of Hobart. Quite a few are ex-convicts who are managing to eke out a living.

Things are going well for Abraham and in July 1850 he marries a Rebecca Abrahams in a Jewish ceremony in his Hobart residence.¹²What, then, has become of Emily? Has she been left behind in London to help in the coffee-house? Has she met someone else? Have their dreams and plans to be together come to nothing? In February 1852 a son, Lewis, is born to Rebecca and Abraham,¹³ but six weeks later a notice in the newspaper advertises for a 'wet-

nurse, wanted immediately,' at the Marks' residence,¹⁴ suggesting, perhaps, that Rebecca is ill and unable to nurse her baby, or, tragically, has died. However, there seems to be no record of Rebecca's death, or of her leaving the colony, or even of her admission to an asylum. Happily though, baby Lewis survives and eventually fathers a child of his own, a daughter, Emily Clara.¹⁵

In January 1853, just eleven months after the birth of Lewis, another son, Charles Whitaker Marks, my great-grandfather, is born, but it is Emily Whitaker who is recorded as the mother.¹⁶ No record of a marriage between Abraham and Emily can be found. The mystery of the missing Rebecca deepens. Over the next twelve years another seven children are born to Abraham and Emily,¹⁷ the last three, Henry, Sarah and Percy, dying in infancy.¹⁸

By 1856 the firm of Horwitz and Marks is doing well, operating out of Melbourne as well as Hobart. The papers of the day regularly report on the ships' cargoes coming and going. It is from Melbourne that the firm, Horwitz and Marks, ships gold from the booming gold-fields of Victoria to Hobart, but their luck runs out when they are caught red-handed smuggling gold under three hundred sheep in the hold of the vessel "Tasmania." 1800 ounces of gold worth 7300 pounds is seized, upon which the duty amounting to 250 pounds was not paid. They receive a fine of 100 pounds which is considered extremely lenient for such a serious crime and much is made in the newspapers of 'The Extensive Seizure of Gold.'¹⁹ Someone, perhaps with a grudge, under the pseudonym 'Pleeseman X' (sic), (Policeman X), has even written a lengthy poem about it called 'The Smugglers Bold'. It first appears in the Melbourne Punch and mimics the strong Jewish accent. It begins:

"I've a tale of bold adwenture,	("I've a tale of bold adventure,
Vich all may hear as chews,-	Which all may hear as choose,-
An owdacious case of smuggling	An audacious case of smuggling
By a pare of upright Jews..."(sic) ²⁰	By a pair of upright Jews.")

Abraham, in the meantime, has become a member of the Hobart Synagogue. He contributes to the funds²¹ and in 1860, notwithstanding his recent scandalous brush with the law, he is elected Treasurer of the Synagogue,²² and in February, 1862, he is on the committee of the new Hobart Town Hebrew Proprietary School.²³ In 1862 he is also naturalised,²⁴ allowing him the rights of a British subject.

At 2 o'clock on September 25th, 1863, Abraham is driving seven children, including four of his own, in a horse-drawn carriage when the horse bolts and Abraham and the children are 'thrown out violently' and are 'picked up insensible.' They sustain serious injuries 'being much bruised and cut about the face,' one child 'in a very precarious position' suffering

severe concussion. Abraham is badly bruised but his injuries are 'not of a dangerous character.' They are treated immediately by Dr Hall, and then at their respective homes by Dr Crowther.²⁵

Abraham remains Treasurer of the Synagogue until 1866 when, in his farewell speech, he says, "the great commercial depression of this beautiful colony caused me necessarily to seek out a new field of enterprise." He is given a special presentation in the Synagogue, the president Mr P. Levy addressing him in glowing terms, saying that his "valuable services will be long held in pleasing remembrance by every member of the congregation." "The Rev. J. Goldreich briefly addressed Mr Marks, expressing ...his sincere esteem for him, both as an office-bearer and a firm and faithful friend."²⁶

The partnership of Horwitz and Marks is 'dissolved by mutual consent, Mr Marks retiring from the business.'²⁷ Abraham and his family head for prosperous Ballarat²⁸ in the Victorian gold-fields. Here, he and his sons have a clothier's shop²⁹ as well as a money-lending and gold-broking business.³⁰ One night a fire breaks out in the shop. No-one is injured but Abraham says he stands to 'lose 200 pounds by the fire, as he' is 'not fully insured.' An enquiry into the cause of the fire is held and the jury returns the verdict- '...how or by what means the said fire was caused or originated there is not any evidence before us to prove.'³¹ Then, sadly, their twelve year old daughter, Clara, dies.³² Abraham and Emily have now lost four of their children.

By 1875 Abraham has had quite a journey, fleeing from persecution and strife to an unfamiliar country across the seas, to make a new life. He has been a refugee, hawker, gold smuggler, Treasurer, pawnbroker and gold buyer. Now he faces another court case, this time charged with buying a 12 ounce gold nugget stolen by two brothers named Wallis, from the Queen Company mine for which they worked. The brothers are found guilty, 'each sentenced to three and a half years' imprisonment with hard labour.'³³ 850 pounds is sought from Abraham for the value of the stolen property.³⁴ His death seven months later from an apparent heart attack 'may have been accelerated by anxiety in reference to the recent lawsuit for recovery of stolen gold.' He dies on a train returning from Melbourne where he had taken with him 'some pot plants to distribute amongst his friends.'³⁵

Abraham is buried next to Clara in the Old Ballarat Cemetery.³⁶ Emily died in Hobart in 1876 and is buried in the Jewish section of the Cornelian Bay Cemetery.³⁷

Finding the elusive 'Rebecca' proved difficult. After intensive research and deliberation, I came to the conclusion that Rebecca was Emily. Having come across articles on the Internet regarding similar searches, I discovered that it was quite common for a gentile woman to take a Jewish name in order to marry into the faith, 'Rebecca Abrahams' an obvious choice. This conclusion was eventually proven by finding the Jewish burial records of two of the

babies, Henry (died 1863), and Sarah (died 1865), with their mother's name as Rebecca instead of Emily.³⁸ It has been for me a most rewarding journey.

¹ LincTasmania: Tasmanian Names Index: Naturalisations, 1862

² Wikipedia: "Greater Poland Uprising (1848)"

³ Mayhew, Henry: 'London Labour and the London Poor': London: Griffin, Bohn and Co. 1861-1862

⁴ Ancestry.com:1841 London Census

⁵ Mayhew, Henry: 'London Labour and the London Poor': London: Griffin, Bohn and Co. 1861-1862

⁶ Ancestry.com: 1841 London Census

⁷ Ancestry.com: 1841 London Census

⁸ "Judah and the Building of the Hobart Synagogue": Tasmanian Geographic: August 15, 2013

⁹ Ancestry.com: England, Alien Arrivals, 1810-1811, 1826-1869

¹⁰ Trove: The Courier (Hobart, Tas:1840-1859), September 27,1853 p.3

¹¹ Trove: The Mercury (Hobart, Tas:1860-1954), January 26, 1864 p.1

¹² LincTasmania: Tasmanian Names Index: Marriages, 1850

Trove: Launceston Examiner(Tas:1842-1899), July 31, 1850 p.6

¹³ LincTasmania: Tasmanian Names Index: Births, 1852

¹⁴ Trove: Colonial Times (Hobart, Tas:1828-1857), March 12, 1852 p.3

¹⁵ NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages

¹⁶ LincTasmania: Tasmanian Names Index: Births, 1853

¹⁷ LincTasmania: Tasmanian Names Index: Births, 1855, 1858, 1859, 1861, 1862, 1864, 1865

¹⁸ LincTasmania: Tasmanian Names Index: Deaths, 1863, 1865, 1866

¹⁹ Trove: "The Extensive Seizure of Smuggled Gold": The Cornwall Chronicle (Launceston, Tas: 1835- 1880), March 12, 1856 p.5

²⁰ Trove: "The Smugglers Bold": Melbourne Punch: March 6, 1856 p.6

²¹ Trove: "To the Honorable...": The Courier (Hobart, Tas:1840-1854), October 26, 1854 p.3

²² Trove: "Levy and Others v. Lazarus": The Mercury (Hobart, Tas:1860-1954), February 13, 1863 p.2

²³ Trove: "Hobart Town Proprietary School": The Mercury (Hobart, Tas: 1860-1954), February 18, 1862 p.1

²⁴ LincTasmania: Tasmanian Names Index: Naturalisations, 1862

²⁵ Trove: "Serious Accident": The Cornwall Chronicle (Launceston, 1835-1880), September 26, 1863 p.3

²⁶ Trove: "Presentation to A. Marks, Esq.": The Mercury (Hobart, Tas: 1860-1954, September 26, 1866 p.3

²⁷ Trove: "Dissolution of Partnership": The Argus (Melbourne, Vic: 1848-1957), May 29, 1869 p.7

²⁸ Wikipedia: "Ballarat"

²⁹ Trove: "The Late Fire in Bridge Street": The Ballarat Star (Vic: 1865-1870, 1914-1918), August 20,1869 p.3

³⁰ Trove: "Gold Stealing at Ballarat": The Argus (Melbourne, Vic: 1848-1957), March 17, 1875 p.7

³¹ Trove: "The Late Fire in Bridge Street": The Ballarat Star (Vic: 1865-1870, 1914-1918),August 20, 1869 p.3

³² Billion graves ballaarat old cemetery

³³ Trove: "Gold Stealing at Ballarat": The Argus (Melbourne, Vic: 1848-1957), March 17, 1875 p.7

³⁴ Trove: "Town News" : The Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.: 1864-1946), May 1, 1875 p.19

³⁵ Trove: "Sudden Death in a Railway Train": Bendigo Advertiser (Vic.: 1855-1918), October 13, 1875 p.3

³⁶ billiongraves.com: Ballarat Old Cemetery, Victoria

³⁷ millingtons.com.au: Cornelian Bay Cemetery, Tasmania

³⁸ The BD-BD (Beverley Davis Burial Data)