
Community voices – transcript – OH 391/6

Mark Peel

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Interviewer: Pauline Paine

For: Elizabeth: From Dusty Plains to Royal Names

Extract of an Oral History where he explains his family's reasons for leaving England in the 1950s for Elizabeth and the abundance that was offered in Australia.

Perhaps if you tell me how your family came to Elizabeth.

Well my father's family all came together, I think my grandmother was the one who made the decision to migrate. To kind of put a description on what she was thinking, I think she felt that the peoples' peace had failed, that England wasn't going to be a place of opportunity. I think she was one of those English people who had hoped for a lot post-war, that this would be a people's peace and that this would be a new Britain and it hadn't eventuated. Winston Churchill was in power and she hated Winston Churchill, and I think she decided the family would go. My father had wanted to migrate I think independently, but he was part of their assisted passage because they needed his skill for the points. My grandfather had points as a tradesman as well but they needed my father because there were four other children. So my father's family came out in July. Once they came to Adelaide, then Elizabeth was the only option because people then were being offered two years in the hostel, or a week in the hostel and then a house in Elizabeth. The choice was fairly easy. But I'm not quite sure why Adelaide - I think my grandfather - this may even be in the book, I may be forgetting something - I think he may have got some kind of position, or some hope of some position in Adelaide and that's why they came here. My father was signed up to work at the government aircraft factories at Parafield. And that's certainly why he came to Adelaide, so maybe the family just followed him. However the Government Aircraft factory closed while he was on the boat and he didn't have a job. And he worked as a farm hand, a labourer all kinds of things, until he got work at WRE in 1958 or 1959. My mother came to Adelaide because her father had an acquaintance in Largs Bay who could be her personal nominee. She had similarly decided that England was going down hill and that she needed to leave.

But I think she wanted to leave Britain, she'd come from a fairly closed community, she wanted to travel to see the world, and industrial Lancashire in the 1950's was a very bleak place to be. I mean there were bits of rationing that still hadn't come off since the war, there are still bomb sites in Liverpool and Manchester that haven't been repaired - it was a very bleak existence.

.... and Australia was at time selling itself in Britain, and South Australia in particular. And the messages were - I don't know how consciously - but very cleverly designed because they stressed sunshine and warmth. And they talked about abundance, and I think a lot of British people, especially in those parts of Britain, hadn't known abundance for a very long time.