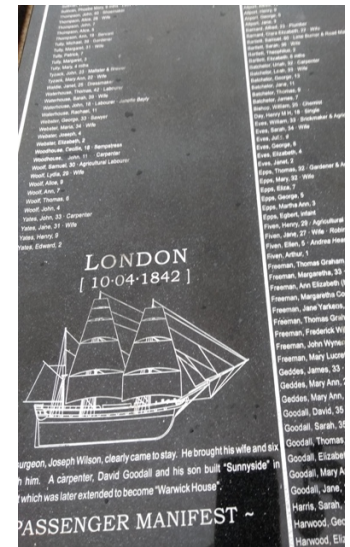


HOW A YOUNG FAMILY FLED FAMINE FOR NEW ZEALAND

As poor economic conditions and unemployment stalked the land following years of war and poor harvests, a young couple in their early thirties took ship in November 1841 to seek a better life in New Zealand. A huge risk, but one that came right for William, 33, and Sarah Eves, 34, who left their native Kent with four children aged between two and nine; three girls and a boy joined by another son shortly after their eventual arrival in Nelson, New Zealand on 10 April 1842. That son was the paternal great grandfather of Ashley Eves - a member of the Ulster New Zealand Trust team of volunteers at The Ballance House.

To commemorate the original settlement of Nelson, the Nelson Settlers' Memorial at the town's harbour front lists the names, by immigrant ship, of the original settlers. There can be found the names of all those, including the Eves family (top right), who sailed on the tiny 388 tons, 100ft long migrant ship the 'London' from Gravesend in Kent. Their voyage to Nelson took almost five months, which suggests they endured bad weather, be it storms or being becalmed in the southern ocean.



But why would a brick maker and farm labourer risk the lives of his family by journeying to a land only just beginning to be settled by Europeans?

Ashley Eves suggests, "They had a choice, stay and live always on the verge of poverty and starvation in the British Isles where the chances of improving themselves were minimal, or by moving to a new land, to New Zealand, and through hard work to clear bush and develop farm pastures, improve their lot by becoming landowning farmers, in a society that was becoming highly egalitarian with class no barrier to individual progress".

By the time William and Sarah's five eldest children were in their 50s a **New Zealand prime minister originally from Ulster, John Ballance**, was laying the foundations of a welfare state and suffrage for all adults of a voting age. The early days for these pioneers were far from easy as red tape wrangling between the Colonial authorities and the NZ Company, which had brought out the settlers, delayed allocation of land. At first the family, including new baby, were squatting on land and living in a Raupo reed dwelling similar to the one in those early photographs displayed around the Cottage Room at The Ballance House.

However by 1851 William, Sarah and their now seven strong brood owned a 25 acre farm thanks to a Crown Grant. Of this over half had already been fenced and a quarter cleared of bush and cultivated - hard, gruelling work.

Yet, as Ashley reflects, "They had moved from quite severe poverty as landless labourers to owning and farming their own land near Nelson, an area with one of the sunniest climates in New Zealand located at the top of the South Island. "Later generations of the family worked as saw millers up to the beginning of the 20th century, by which time clearing trees for timber had been completed around Nelson.



"So my grandfather moved to **Hawkes Bay on North Island** and developed a brick making business at Havelock North near to Hastings and Napier. This business flourished until 1962 when my Dad decided to move out of brick making due to the problems with brick buildings during earthquakes".

Looking across the generations since that young couple undertook such a risky voyage, the Eves family have enjoyed a good lifestyle and some successes. "My father's first cousin, **Sir Keith Holyoake, pictured, became New Zealand Prime Minister twice**, briefly in 1957 and then again from 1960-1972 later becoming 13th Governor-General of New Zealand from 1977-1980."



Given the civilised way of life the Eves family have enjoyed in Aotearoa, the land of the long white cloud, how did Ashley end up in Northern Ireland? "Leaving Hastings Boys' High School in 1964, I started a mechanical engineering degree at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, specialising in aeronautical engineering during my final year.

Choosing this option was to set the course for the rest of my life, and indeed that of my wife Roberta and our two sons," Ashley reflected. "My first opportunity to work in the aerospace industry was with the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Melbourne, Australia. This was a short term placement but the job and living in Australia held few attractions. So my first proper full time job was back at home where I took up a post teaching maths and physics at Hastings Girls' High School until something of real interest came along. That turned out to be a Commonwealth Aeronautical Scholarship to study at post graduate level aircraft propulsion at Cranfield Institute of Technology, Bedfordshire, now known as Cranfield University".

On 15 September 1970, Roberta & Ashley arrived in the UK having met during his Christchurch student days. A native of Christchurch, Roberta ended up temping as a PA/secretary in London while Ashley lived at Cranfield in halls of residence.

"During July 1972 we were wed in London and my career in gas turbine engineering has since taken us to several parts of the UK. In 1987 I was appointed Sales and Marketing Director of James Mackie & Sons Ltd, Belfast. This appointment turned out not to be a good move, but within a few short months I secured appointment as a senior executive of Short Brothers prior to its acquisition by Bombardier".

In parallel, their two sons took advantage of the excellent education provided by Northern Ireland's grammar schools and two of the UK's top universities. Today they have both established themselves as partners of highly respected firms operating in the corporate law and corporate finance industries. Both work from offices in Bristol and so by default this means that the UK is now home for Ashley and Roberta. "The ties to New Zealand remain very strong, but having children and now grand children in the UK means thoughts of retiring to a home by the Pacific have faded," Ashley reflected.

"However, volunteering at the UNZT Ballance House is something I greatly enjoy. It has provided the opportunity for me to learn more about my homeland, and to meet many visitors to The Ballance House. Sharing what I know about my native country is very satisfying, especially since large numbers from this province also forsook their homeland and headed to New Zealand in search of a place of their own and a better life for their children."

Thanks to UNZT volunteers Rodney Magowan and Ashley Eves for taking the time to compile this article.