

## ISAAC KILLICOAT FROM PERRANWELL TO AUSTRALIA

This is the story of one family representative of the many who lived in Perranwell in the early and mid 1800's, but left to seek a better life overseas. They sought to escape from the poor pay, miserable and arduous working conditions and overcrowded cottages. The staple family food was the potato grown in miners gardens and smallholdings and the failure of the crop in 1845 & 1846, like in Ireland accentuated the misery and along with inflated prices for wheat led to food riots from starving miners.

Many left the county to go overseas or upcountry. Isaac Killicoat was one of these. He was born in 1809, the son of a miner and he lived in Rose cottage on the edge of Greenwith Common, Perranwell. He was fortunate in that his father also Isaac insisted that he had a basic education at the small school run by the vicar of Gwennap. As a boy he and his siblings and friends would play in the fields along the Rissick stream flowing along the valley below the path linking Silver Hill to Chyvogue and would draw water from the same stream at Jacobs well. Rissick cottage is now unrecognisable in a thicket of brambles by this path and Jacobs well is silted up and overgrown and reached with difficulty.

Isaac at the age of 14 years went to work with his father at Tresavean copper mine near Lanner. He grew up to be a very capable young man and was promoted to grass captain at the remarkably early age of 20 and held that position for 20 years. Coming up to grass is the colloquial term used by miners coming up to surface after a shift underground. A grass captain was in charge of all the surface operations at a mine and Tresavean was a large and very profitable mine. He married Ann Rowe, a girl from Tregony in 1833 and a family of 6 children soon followed. His father died in 1842 and is buried with his wife Susanna in Perranarworthal churchyard.

In 1847 Isaac was head hunted by agents operating for a mining company developing the newly discovered copper deposits at Burra in South Australia. He left Perranwell in 1848 along with members of other local families, the Visicks, Hills and Baches. They sailed from Plymouth in ships carrying from 100 to 250 passengers, a few in the relative luxury of cabins and most in the basic conditions called steerage. Such was the demand for miners that free passages were offered and Cornishmen were favoured as many early settlers were from Cornwall and were not transported as convicts.

He arrived in Adelaide after a voyage of 14 weeks and settled at Burra in what was originally sheep farming country 100 miles north of Adelaide. The copper deposits had been discovered in 1845 and the mining leases were held by two groups called in typical Aussie fashion "the nobbs and the snobs". Within 7 years a few isolated townships at Moonta, Wallaroo and Kadina were overrun by 5000 miners mostly from Cornwall and the towns of Redruth, Copperhouse and Lostwithiel sprang up. To this day the area is called "Australia's little Cornwall" and the annual Cornish festival at Moonta with its pasties, Cornish wrestling, brass bands and male voice choirs is a major tourist attraction.

Isaac's wife and children continued living in Perranwell without him for five long years and like many other families survived on remittances sent home. Eventually Ann and her five children sailed to Adelaide in 1854 and joined her husband at Burra. Sadly she died soon afterwards. Isaac had prospered and was well respected for his mining expertise. He travelled widely within Australia and even went on a 7 week voyage to Montevideo in Uruguay to purchase mules for transporting the copper ore. He kept in touch with Perranwell as many mines followed the flag and purchased their mining equipment from Perran Foundry. Several huge beam pumping engines from the Foundry were shipped to the Burra mines and installed in Cornish style engine houses, which exist to this day.

He retired from mining in 1875 and took up sheep farming. He died in 1886 and is buried at Burra, survived by 2 sons, 3 daughters and 22 grandchildren.

Emigration from Cornwall to Australia started in earnest in the 1840's and reached its climax in 1871 – 91 after the collapse of copper mining and the severe reduction in tin mining, when overall, a third of the population of the parish had moved away. Perranwell had reached its population peak of 1755 persons in the 1841 census and this has never been exceeded.

When we consider the number of houses built since that date the 19<sup>th</sup> century and older cottages must have been grossly overcrowded.

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September 2011