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FEATURES

It is 170 years ago today that John Ringer, a weaver, his wife Sarah, and five children emigrated from Yarmouth to Quebec on board the Miser. They were among more than 5000 men, women and children who sailed from Norfolk ports between 1830 and 1837.

But, as writer **JOY LODEY** suggests, the tourism industry in this region may want to focus on reunions of their descendants over the next five years.



Return of the natives

May 11, 2002

By the 1830s, a rising population combined with agricultural and trade depression had caused a surplus of labour which could not be absorbed, despite many well-intentioned employment schemes.

Since 1597 each parish had been a mini-welfare state providing money, house rent, tools, clothing, shoes, medical and midwifery care, funeral and burial expenses.

Now parish ratepayers, those owning or renting property worth more than £10 a year, were demanding a solution to the crippling cost of escalating poor relief.

Migration to the manufacturing towns of Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire offered only a temporary solution, because those made redundant by a trade depression would be removed under the settlement laws back to their parish. Emigration to the colonies, mainly Canada but later to Australia, was likely to be permanent.



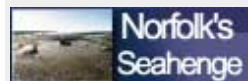
In the nineteenth century thousands of people left East Anglia for a new life in Canada. Many of them sailed from places like Yarmouth, pictured above, and King's Lynn. What became of them and their descendants has been a mystery for a long time but now, thanks to family historians on the other side of the Atlantic, the picture is becoming clearer.

Since 1828, more than 69,000 people had emigrated from the British Isles to the United States and more than 96,000 to Canada.

Enterprising young men and families quickly heeded advice to "sail away Peter, sail away Paul". Encouraged by shipping advertisements in local newspapers they used their savings or, like Brett Athow of Little Fransham and King's Lynn, were helped by friends to book their passage. For those without funds, parish ratepayers could empower the parish vestry



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committee to raise a loan, to be repaid from the poor's rate.

Churchwardens and overseers were busy contracting with the ship-owners, buying stores and utensils for the emigrants' journey, arranging an escort and transport to the port, providing money for their use on landing and keeping careful accounts for loans to be repaid.



An advertisement "TO EMIGRANTS FOR QUEBEC" in the Norfolk Chronicle in April 1832 announced that the Miser, a fine fast sailing ship of 200 tons would sail from Yarmouth for Quebec in May, under Thomas Spurgeon, master. It offered superior accommodation for steerage and cabin passengers and the reassurance of an experienced surgeon on board.

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Home thoughts – Yarmouth harbour with the town hall by night. Many people emigrated from the Norfolk port – now their descendants are retracing their steps.



Return of the natives Cont

May 11 , 2002

Carleton Rode ratepayers responded promptly, agreeing on May 1 that £70 be borrowed at five per cent interest to pay for emigration. Four days later William Sayer took the coach to Yarmouth to book passages for John Ringer and family, James Hawse, James Tite and Edward Hinchley at a cost of £29 plus £8 landing money. On the 9th they were taken to Norwich, breakfasted at The Ship Inn, King Street, for 12s 2d and went by steam packet to Yarmouth where their luggage was removed to the Miser.

At Yarmouth, stores were bought for the group's voyage including:

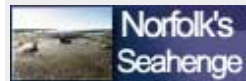
- two cwt bread £2 4s 0d, two cwt flour £2 2s 0d and three sacks 4s 6d;
- potatoes 10s, three stones of sugar £1 1s 0d;
- two cwt beef and bacon £5 4s 0d with salt 1s 6d and a cask 6s 6d;
- cheese 15s 10½d, "salt, mustard, vinegar and bottle" 2s 8d and "beer for three days," 9s 2d.
- Three beds cost £1 2s 6d, four yards green baize 5s 4d, a cask for water 5s 3d, a keeler (tub) 2s 6d, soap 3s 9d, a pail 2s 6d, and tinware 19s 10d.
- The total expense of the emigration, including an installment of interest on the loan, was £71 9s 5d.



On May 9, 1832, the 10 emigrants from Carleton Rode, Norfolk, breakfasted here before going by packet boat to Yarmouth to board The Miser for their journey to Quebec.



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The parish usually provided any necessary shoes and clothing. When 52 people emigrated from Winfarthing in 1836-7, the bill of £479 14s 1¼d included £17 7s 6d for shoes, £7 7s 9d for clothing, plus £8 for clothing James Eley, trousers for Jerry Eley 6s, stockings for John Haystead 2s, John Jessup's hat 5s, hats and caps for eight families £4.

In an age when few could read or write, the relatives and friends they left behind must have wondered how they fared on the voyage, what challenges their new life had presented, and even whether or not they had survived.

Some, like John Ringer and his family who journeyed from Quebec to Smiths Falls, Ontario, were joining relatives already established with whom they could stay until they found work.

Descendants say John worked as a labourer on the new Rideau Canal, designed to shorten the route from Ottawa to Kingston, and later he took a farm.

John Dunn, a cooper from Ber-street gates, Norwich, who with his wife and family sailed on the Spring of Yarmouth on May 12, 1830, and arrived in Quebec on July 3, was unable to find work despite moving to America.

Thoroughly disillusioned, he returned home on the Brighton and in November wrote to the press warning others of the great distress many unemployed emigrants were in, some being paid mainly in store goods. He claimed there were thousands wishing to return to their own country. In contrast, Brett Athow told of his determination to succeed. His letter was published in the Norfolk Chronicle, May 17, 1834. They had left Lynn the previous autumn to go by ship from Hull, but incurred unexpected living costs because the vessel, with 54 passengers of whom 24 were children, was not due to sail for 10 days.

Bracing sea air during the seven weeks' voyage gave the Athows such a healthy appetite that they ran out of food and found it expensive to buy from the ship.

On arrival at New York Brett had to pay \$7 hospital money in case they were ill, a dollar being about 4s 4½d. After paying \$6 as a month's rent in advance, he had just over three shillings, but immediately found five weeks' work in an earthenware warehouse at \$6 a week, about £1 6s 3d. Next he worked as a chandler until March 27, the end of the candle-making season.

In preference to a weekly wage of six to seven dollars, he chose piecework at half a dollar for every 100lb of candles. After three weeks he was making 300lb of candles a day, "to earn nine dollars a week and not work more than 11 hours a day".

On April 1, 1834, he and his family moved to Troy, "a very pretty place" about 170 miles north of New York, where living costs were cheaper. He became a painter and glazier earning six dollars a week, and learned paper-hanging so that he would have "two decent trades", painting in the summer and candle-making in the winter.

His detailed account of local wages and prices, his report that the weather was "much finer than England" and an assurance that there were "no rattlesnakes or wild animals" was published to encourage others.

But some might have been deterred by his news that he feared that another Norfolk emigrant, Mr Kirby, who had not been seen for some months, had died of the cholera which in the summer had killed more than 800 in a week in New York.



This advertisement prompted Carleton Rode ratepayers to finance the emigration to Quebec of John Ringer, his wife Sarah and their five children, together with James Hawse, James Tite and Edward Hinchley. Their passage cost £29 plus an allowance of £8 on landing.

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FEATURES

Return of the natives

May 11, 2002

Since reaching America, Brett and his wife had been very well. He had put on a stone in weight, which he attributed to "a mind at ease". He sent his thanks to relatives and friends "who assisted me to emigrate, for it will be a pleasure for them to hear their exertions were crowned with success".

Among the emigrants' descendants are keen family historians who delight in contact with branches of their families in "the old country".

With their kind help it is possible to discover how their forbears fared in their new land. Sadly, Brett Athow's wife died, but he remarried – a lady from New York.

He was a successful house-painter and by 1850 owned property worth \$1000. He was buried at Rensselaer, Troy, on October 23, 1864.

From 1834 the poor law commissioners in London had to approve parish emigration schemes funded by government or private loans secured by the parish rates. They stipulated that emigration had to be voluntary, it could not be enforced. But as anti-poor law propaganda had generated wild myths about the fate of paupers to be sent to the new "bastilles", hundreds of "good industrious people", complete and incomplete families, husbands and wives (some pregnant), with tots to teenagers, single men and women, widows and widowers were keen to leave.

The Norwich Mercury of April 18, 1835 reported that the Baltic, Wellington and Venus had recently left Yarmouth quay with emigrants for Quebec, the vessels being "well fitted up for the occasion".

When the brig Shannan sailed from King's Lynn on Good Friday 1835, with nearly a hundred emigrants to Quebec, Daniel Gurney, Esq, gave them "bibles, testaments and prayer books".

Apart from those emigrating privately, in January 1836 the poor law commission's emigration agent reported that during 1835 nearly 3000 poor persons had emigrated from Norfolk and a small part of Suffolk to Canada and had arrived safely.

Under the scheme, 3354 emigrated from Norfolk and 1083 from Suffolk between June 1835 and July 1837, in contrast to 476 from Kent, the next highest county.

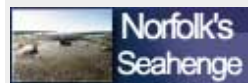
The majority were agricultural labourers but some were shepherds, ploughmen, blacksmiths, thatchers, carpenters, brickmakers, shoemakers



When the Ardewell sailed from King's Lynn on May 5, 1836, 154 emigrants, mostly agricultural labourers and including the Jickling family of Heacham, were said to be "in high spirits". They were intending to settle on the British American Land Company's lands in Lower Canada.



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and others.

Whereas agricultural labourers James and Robert Long of Guestwick had each received more than £20 in parish relief for their families during 1835-6 others had received only a few pounds or none at all that year, but offered to go to leave employment for others.

Lists of emigrants sent to the poor law commissioners sometimes included character references.

Samuel Smith, 36, of Reepham with Kerdiston, was "a man of good character and able to do any work", whereas another was "not so much respected by the parishioners as some other men".

Samuel Craske, aged 57, among 84 emigrants who left Fulmodeston on April 6, 1836, was "a very superior man as shepherd and good character."

Robert Utton, 23, with his wife Eliza, 22, and son Robert, was also listed "but when the emigrants were about starting he declined going".

In contrast, John and Mary Newstead of Knapton who had emigrated with six children, were said to be "located in Upper Canada and are doing very well with her children. The woman was in a state of pregnancy at the time of sailing and the family in very great poverty and therefore most anxious to emigrate."

Seventeen parishes within the Docking poor law union sent 358 people to Canada.

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Return of the natives

May 11, 2002

On April 13, 1836, 195 emigrants sailed from King's Lynn on board the Anne, owned by merchant William English. Despite a rather stormy passage causing severe sea-sickness, they arrived safely at Quebec on June 5. At the Grosse Isle quarantine station on June 2 some had found acquaintances on three emigrant ships from Yarmouth.

Heacham parish officers told the poor law commissioners that Francis and Mary Garner with four children, Robert and Mary Jickling with six, Valentine and Mary Jickling with four, and three single men, William and Matthew Williamson and George Melton, all wished to emigrate on the Ardwell which would be sailing on May 4.

However they actually sailed on May 11 on the Penelope, which a correspondent said "turned out her passengers at Quebec into a steamer, much to their own annoyance and disappointment".

At Port St Francis, on the south side of the St Lawrence, they joined emigrants from the Anne and Ardwell. The Albion from Lowestoft had also arrived and the Brunswick, Protector and Spring from Yarmouth, Columbia and Eliza Liddle from King's Lynn were expected.

A correspondent said parish officers should be told that their landing allowance, usually £2 per adult and £1 dependant children, was insufficient. The British American Land Company did not guarantee a job in its woollen factory at Sherbrooke, nor did it provide relief in money, food and clothing, like most has received at home. However its sub-commissioner had assisted some families by providing temporary work until he could be employed in laying out the ground plan of the new town at Victoria. Others probably applied to local charities.

In 1836, the company was offering its labourers the opportunity of buying cleared land, in whatever sized lots they wished, at 25s an acre, or uncleared land at 7s 6d an acre, with a deposit of one-fifth. A substantial and warm log house 16ft x 20ft cost £6 5s 0d if they erected it themselves. Settlers could also purchase from other land agents and private owners, "wild or partly improved farms at 7s 6d-£4 an acre with houses, barns etc".

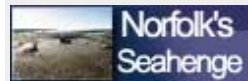
Thus many agricultural labourers, like Samuel Burton Slaughter, who emigrated from Alby in 1836, aged 21, and married at Cornwall, Ontario, in 1838, were



The Custom House at King's Lynn, another port of embarkation for emigrants.



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encouraged to become farmers. James Carrington, Acting Overseer at Great Dunham, commented on his list of 23 applicants: "The Emigrants here described are men of good characters, and are industrious, and I hope will be found good members of society – As it was their own act and deed leaving England."

Robert William Jickling who, at the age of 42 with Mary, his second wife, and six children, emigrated from Heacham to Quebec, together with his younger brother Valentine, aged 29, wife Mary and four children. Valentine's son Robert, born at Heacham in 1834, was killed in the American Civil War and buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Family historians are proud to tell of ancestors and their descendants who became good American and Canadian citizens, serving their country and achieving high office. With the co-operation of family historians on both sides of the Atlantic, the support of the parishes, the district councils and Norfolk County Council, the tourist industry could say to those descendants "come back Peter, come back Paul" to celebrate their family's courage in emigrating and the willingness of parish ratepayers to finance it. With re-enactments at Yarmouth and Lynn, and parish celebrations it could be one of the most spectacular events the county has ever organised.

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