

From Ewelme House to Ewelme Cottage - 13,500 miles under sail

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Ruth Page, a guide at Ewelme Cottage, (opened as a heritage museum in Auckland in 1968), visited the village last July expressly to see Saffron House and the church, both connected to the Victorian builders of New Zealand's Ewelme Cottage. I promised to revisit the Cottage again this year to photograph artefacts taken from Ewelme House [now Saffron House] to Auckland in 1850. Oxford born orphan Blanche Hawkins [1819-1912], lived from 1836 at Ewelme House with her widowed aunt Lady Charlotte Taunton. In 1842 Blanche was married, in Ewelme church, to clergyman Vicesimus* Lush (the 20th* surviving child of his father's three wives!) In 1844 Lady Taunton died and Blanche cleared Ewelme House of her aunt's belongings.

Vicesimus was a popular curate at Faringdon church from 1843 to 1849 but had fallen foul of church politics which thwarted his promotion. Determined to advance in his ministry, and being inspired by the missionary zeal prevalent at the time 'to preach to the unconverted heathen of the South Seas', he wrote to Bishop George Selwyn in Auckland in 1849 for a position in New Zealand. This was granted, and Vicesimus set about raising the necessary funds for the voyage. His family now consisted of 7 yr old Blanche, Charlotte, Mary and baby Charles, plus a servant, 'Betsy' Sainsbury. (Five more children were born in New Zealand). Vicesimus and Blanche wound up their affairs and for their long journey chose the ship the 'Barbara Gordon' a 338-ton barque under the command of Captain Lilley. She set sail from St Katherine's Dock on May 14th, 1850, and reached the Lizard on the 23rd. Vicesimus wrote in his diary 'At 10.0 pm saw the Lizard light, far, far astern of us - the last sight I shall probably ever have of dear old England - I now turn my gaze for the headlands of New Zealand.'

It was an arduous five-month voyage, initially they suffered bouts of debilitating seasickness and often alcohol-fuelled rowdiness amongst the passengers - the miscreants being severely chastised by Vicesimus. He preached Sunday services and tried, unsuccessfully, to master a Mauri Grammar, whilst Blanche schooled the children. Baby Charles was teething. A fellow passenger's diary uncharitably noted 'We have a great nuisance on board, the clergyman's baby, the dear little duck screams the whole day and seems to possess the most powerful lungs - and if the kindest wishes of the passengers had been granted, he would long ere this have been consigned to the tender mercies of the deep.'



The Lush family stepped ashore in Auckland on October 10th, 1850. The gamble proved to be a beneficial career move, as Vicesimus was determined to stay in his adopted country to prosper in his ministry. In 1863 he bought land in Parnell, Auckland to build a kauri hardwood family home which Blanche nostalgically named Ewelme Cottage. After his death in 1882 it became Blanche's permanent home for her 30 years of widowhood. Although far away from her homeland, Blanche would have treasured the few items taken on the perilous sea journey as reminders of her young life with her aunt at Ewelme House.



Photos - Lady Taunton's chamberstick (candle stick), a handsome writing box, one of two papier-mache lacquered black trays

Carol Sawbridge - Ewelme Village Archive