From Dream to Reality: A study of British migration to Western Australia in the 1960s, with special emphasis on those who travelled on the SS Castel Felice

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CHAPTER TWO

Leaving England
The Dream and the Decision to Migrate

The decision of migrants to leave their home country with all its memories and social contacts and to travel the 12,000 miles to the antipodes was usually influenced by an idea that there would be some improvement in their lifestyle in Australia. Historians have long considered the various reasons which provoked the migrations of individuals and families to Australia. Blainey tells us of one young migrant in 1857 who wrote that he was dissatisfied with his prospects in England and expected to make a fortune in Australia.¹ According to Jenkins, ‘there is a point in time when little things add up’ and a family might finally decide to start life anew elsewhere.² Jupp speaks of ‘overcrowded cities and awful weather’ in Britain which many hoped to escape.³ Appleyard thinks there is a relationship between fears of unemployment and the decision to migrate. But he also feels it was not usually socio-economic conditions that were the paramount reason for deciding to emigrate, but the idea of a better life.⁴ Cigler is concerned with the ‘push, pull factors’, and cites political changes in Britain and the shortage of skilled people in Australia as the reason for the increase in migration from Britain in the 1960s.⁵ Lack says that because of the ‘wide social spectrum’ of the British migrants there were many reasons for an individual’s decision to leave home.⁶ Isaac confesses that the ‘motives behind the decision to migrate are extremely vague’.⁷

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As in the findings of Hammerton and Thomson and Wallis⁸ the majority of my participants say their decision was influenced by the promise of warmer weather and then by the idea of a better lifestyle in Australia with more opportunities for themselves and their children. In most cases it was the husband who initiated the idea of migration. The women complied, as the poet Gee suggests:

They left the vine wreathed cottage and the mansion on the hill,  
The houses in the busy streets where life was never still,  
The pleasures of the city, and the friends they cherished best:  
For love they faced the wilderness—the Women of the West.⁹

The participants in my study say they lived in a comfortable home in Britain and that the breadwinners were in full-time work. Some came from small villages and others from large towns; many were buying or owned their own houses. Some were couples with their children, some newly married, and others were young singles. A few of my respondents were children when they left the United Kingdom. Most women gave their occupation when they emigrated as ‘home duties’, though some were teachers, hairdressers, office workers or nurses. Men’s work covered a broader spectrum. There were butchers and bakers, builders, carpenters and plumbers, a number of teachers and policemen, instrument fitters and other technicians, farm workers and factory workers, skilled tradesmen and sales representatives, television and telecommunications engineers, one virologist, a veterinarian and a university professor. Jupp says that by 1965 over 80% of British migrants were assisted and there was no attempt to impose any limit on eligibility by occupation or ability to pay.¹⁰ Appleyard concludes, however, that the selection criteria for assisted migration did ensure that the majority were ordinary working families with a regular income but adds that professionals,

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who arrived without government assistance, often had their fare paid by their employers.\textsuperscript{11} Richardson, in an effort to define settler migration, says settlers were those migrants intending to live permanently in their new community.\textsuperscript{12} In my study some participants say their initial intention was to stay for a limited period but they became permanent settlers and others, as we shall later see, left Australia though they at first expected to settle here. The changing economic conditions in Britain over the decade of the 1960s did not seem to change the reasons given by my participants for emigrating though the stories reported in my study are reliant on the memories of the respondents and these memories may have been affected by later circumstance in their lives. Some may even have written what they thought I wanted them to say, although I tried to avoid that effect in the way I constructed my survey questions. Most of the respondents to my survey have made a success of their lives in Australia after initial hardship. This is reflected in the research by Hammerton and Colebourne who say the ‘dominant story is of successful struggle’.\textsuperscript{13}

The motivation for migrants to leave Britain in the 1960s may have been different from that of earlier immigrants, even of those who had left England in the late 1940s and the 1950s.\textsuperscript{14} Jupp says the ‘numbers of migrants coming to Australia actually increased as conditions in Britain improved in the 1960s’.\textsuperscript{15} In the same period Australia’s policy on immigration was changing. This was set out by Australia’s then immigration minister, Hubert Opperman, at a conference held in Canberra in 1966 at which he welcomed every migrant application, ‘on its merits’. He hoped though that each ‘would find work and become Australian in the shortest possible time’, and that Australia would remain a ‘substantially homogenous society’. In conclusion he stated that because the immigration policies affected

\textsuperscript{14} Hammerton and Thomson, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{15} Jupp, \textit{Immigration}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn, p. 134.
‘hundreds of thousands of men, women and children’ the procedures must, ‘recognise the importance of the individual’.

In the early 1960s an aggressive publicity campaign on emigration was set in place in the media of the United Kingdom. Australian migration offices were established in London, Manchester, Edinburgh, Belfast, Birmingham and Glasgow. Similar offices were also set up by individual Australian states in most major cities of the United Kingdom. There had been a decrease in migration to Western Australia in the late 1950s due to the adverse publicity generated by reports from disillusioned migrants who had returned to Britain on the availability of housing and employment for the newcomers. During 1961 and 1962 the state government sent W. S. Lonnie to lead a mission to Great Britain to encourage migration to Western Australia. Initially the intention was to concentrate on unemployment areas in Glasgow, Northern Ireland and the Tyneside. Soon film nights and displays promoting the opportunities awaiting the new migrant in Western Australia were set up in all major cities of the British Isles. Assisted passages were offered even to those who had previously migrated to Australia, and returned to live in Britain. Later the officers went into northern Europe to canvas migrants. A report of the visit was presented to a Western Australian sub-committee headed by Charles Court, later to be premier of this state. Promises made to prospective migrants applying under the scheme included: employment on arrival in Western Australia; immediate accommodation at the Point Walter Hostel, and availability of housing within a reasonable period after their arrival. It is interesting that the emphasis of the Lonnie mission was to canvas areas of high unemployment because Richardson in his research concludes ‘few

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16 Hubert Opperman, Minister of Immigration, ‘Australia’s Immigration Policy’, A paper delivered at Canberra to Youth & Student Seminar on International Affairs (organised by the National Youth Council in association with the National Union of Australian University Students and the Australian Institute of International Affair), 26 May 1966.

migrants came from areas of high unemployment’. 18 Indeed all of the breadwinners in my study were in full employment when the decision was made to emigrate.

Although for most of England the 1960s were a time of prosperity, in the north the ship-building industries were declining due to overseas competition; the clothing and carpeting industries were being affected by a change from wool to synthetics, and coal mines were being closed. 19 Jupp suggests that immigration abroad was a continuation of the drift south by the unemployed from the northern industrial areas. 20 Many of my respondents who came from the north of England and Scotland did express concern with respect to future unemployment and careers for their children. There were efforts by other Western Australian agencies, such as the Western Australian Employers’ Federation, to increase the intake of migrants to fill the vacancies that existed in Australia for skilled workers. These efforts seem to have been effective. A large number of applications (3,200) had already been received as a result of advertisements placed in British newspapers seeking immigrants when in 1965 the West Australian reported that the premier of Western Australia, David Brand, was doubling the number of teams, which consisted of representatives from the Commonwealth Immigration Department and the Western Australian Employers’ Federation, touring Britain to encourage more migrants to come to Western Australia. 21

Life in Britain

Florence and Paul Weber migrated to Australia with their children in July 1966. They later returned for a short time to England and then decided to make their permanent home in Western Australia. Mrs Weber’s grandfather, a gypsy, had fled to London from Germany during the troubled period of the 1930s. Her parents’ house was destroyed during the blitz of London and she was evacuated with her mother to the small village of Horton-cum-Studley

18 Alan Richardson, British Immigrants and Australia: A psycho-social study, Australian National University, Canberra, 1974, p. 13.
20 Jupp, Immigration, 2nd edn, p. 35.
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about 12 miles from Oxford. She remembered the small church school where she was educated (and which her children later attended) being supplemented by classes in the ‘big house’. She spoke also of the rationing of clothing and furniture as well as food shortages during the Second World War. In Horton-cum-Studley Mrs Weber was surrounded by family and friends, meeting her husband when she went as a nanny to a farm where he worked. They set up home in a two storey semi-detached house in the village and had four children. Paul Weber had regular work as an engineer and her daughter worked in an office.

The Webers were in a position to take occasional holidays away with their children. On one such opportunity they visited Paul’s family in the Russian sector East Germany. She described this visit:

When we went the first time we’d bathed the children, and I was getting ready to go in the bath myself, so it couldn’t have been very long. There was a knock, knock, knock on the door. “I believe you are illegal immigrants”, pause, “foreign”, and he had to show all his papers and everything. We’d been reported, they’d been dobbing us in, but they couldn’t do anything we were legal.

Mr Weber visited his relatives in East Germany on a number of occasions. He recalled that:

My mother was over there, she told me not to go back there or they would send me to Russia. Because I was an engineer they wanted these people. On the second visit I think it was, they offered me a job in Berlin because I spoke English. She said “let’s take it.” But I speak my mind what I think is right and you couldn’t do that there. In fact the last time I went there I had to go out there quick because I said something out loud in a restaurant and my niece said “Oh, uncle, you better get out quick they are after you”—they were after me.

The Webers therefore had first hand experience of life across Europe during the Cold-War, and enjoyed life in England. Yet after seeing an advertisement in a newspaper and discussing the idea with their children they decided to come to Australia to improve their children’s future prospects.22

Another respondent, Kathleen Platts, had been married for only two years when she and her husband left for Australia. She had lived in the north of Scotland until she left school

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and trained to be a supervisor in the public service. Though the countryside around where she was born was beautiful there were few opportunities for a career and most young people left the district upon marriage. Soldiers, sailors and airmen were stationed close to where she lived then. She had met her husband, who had been in the air force, at a dance in her home town. After marrying, the Platts moved to be near to her husband’s family in Stockton, County Durham, in the north of England. Because both she and her husband had well paid jobs, they set up home in a modern two-storey house in the grounds of an old manor house on

23 Photographs loaned by Mrs F.E. Weber.
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the outskirts of the town. There were shops within a ten minute walk and a regular bus service into the town where her husband’s family lived. The Platts enjoyed the outdoor life, going for holidays, hiking and staying at youth hostels. Although they enjoyed the usual Christmas festivities, Kathleen, coming from Scotland, was used to celebrating at Hogmanay, New Year’s Eve. When she had lived at home the young people had started the festivities with a dance and at midnight a pipe band played in the town square. Later they went from house to house ‘first footing’. Visiting friends and family took up most of the night then there was another dance on New Year’s Day. New Year celebrations also formed part of their life in the north of England.

Her husband, Dennis, worked as an instrument fitter in England. He was recruited under the Lonnie Scheme to work in the new industries that were opening up in Western Australia. They attended an interview and a film evening in Newcastle-on-Tyne with a number of Dennis’ workmates, many of whom were also attracted by the offer of work and accommodation if they migrated to Western Australia. Kathleen felt that Dennis had always wanted to migrate; that he saw it as a ‘huge challenge’. In her interview with me she thought they were ‘leaving the old to be in at the start of something good’, and that her husband was ‘chafing at the bit to go to Australia’; he saw immigration as ‘an opportunity to spread his wings’. She, on the other hand, had not even thought of leaving England. However, because both she and her husband had lived away from home, the thought of leaving England may not have been as challenging to them as it might have been for other couples.24

Jennifer and John Calnon came from the midlands of England, where they lived in the village of Little Carlton, about 13 miles from Newark in Nottinghamshire. The village had few facilities. The butcher and the baker came to the door, and local farms were able to supply other produce. Newark was the place where they went to shop or for entertainment. The children were taken by bus to the local primary school. Generally the Calnons seem to

have had a happy life there, living in a modern, centrally heated bungalow with views over farmland and a garden in which they grew their own fruit and vegetables. Jennifer was involved in the life of the village. She was a member of the table tennis club and had many friends of her own age and circumstances. The family took regular holidays, driving their car to Cornwall or staying on a cruiser on the Broads—a large expanse of marsh and open water, known as the Norfolk Broads, noted for the bird and wildlife in the area. Mrs Calnon remembered that they had had a very comfortable existence and John was the head of a department within the Nottinghamshire education department. However, when Jennifer’s sister, who was living in South Africa at the time with her family, decided to move to Australia, this prompted the Calnons to think of emigrating too. They were recruited and sponsored by the Western Australian education department.\(^{25}\)

Young people often had little option but to accompany their migrating parents. Michael Geurds was only 15 years old and at high school when his parents decided to come to Australia. His father, a rigger, was looking for a more permanent place of work and residence, as he regularly travelled overseas with his job to Africa and Canada. Geurds was born in a Nissen hut on the outskirts of Stockton in northern England, soon after the war when housing was still in very short supply. The family later moved into a brand new semi-detached council house in the suburb of Roseworth, also near Stockton. His focus in life then was on sport and the Boy Scout Movement. He had travelled to Switzerland with his school and he was completing activities towards a Duke of Edinburgh Award (which was forwarded to him after he arrived in Western Australia). As part of the scheme he cycled from one side of England to the other and learned to look after himself. Soccer was his main activity although he also played cricket. There was an oval across the road from his home where he regularly played sport with his friends. He was able to walk, ride his bicycle or use the regular public transport to visit friends and relatives. Geurds later said he thought coming to

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Australia would be a big adventure, though it meant giving away his pet rabbits and budgerigars. His parents came out under the Lonnie scheme, with his aunt and uncle and two small cousins. At 15 he knew this was a permanent move, not just a holiday. Three groups of neighbours also came to Australia at various times under the scheme, but the family did not know any one in Australia when they left England.26

Migrant information publications

Prospective migrants used a range of sources to obtain information regarding Australia and, in particular, Western Australia. Articles and advertisements could regularly be found in British newspapers from governments, industry and other organisations such as religious groups. Sheila and Fred Saville remember reading a book about Western Australia which was serialised in the English Sunday Times.27 Among the most important of such sources, though, were the promotional flyers and booklets provided by government and private agencies to Britons interested in migrating to Australia. They were, mostly, glowing in their praises of the new country. Much later Al Grassby complained that the Australian government had promoted Australia as ‘a paradise where the sun always shone.’28 Jupp defended such publications, arguing that their intention was to recruit as many people as possible and that they contained accurate facts and figures at the time of printing.29 However economic and other conditions changed in Australia and the printed material might therefore have been misleading for some British readers. One respondent complained that the information he received was ‘out of date by years.’30

These kinds of promotional drives were not new. Even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century official guides to migrating to Australia (and other dominions) were made widely available across Britain. But few from the 1960s have now survived. Some were

30 Name withheld, 14th December 2005, Survey 15.
preserved by migrants such as Reverend K. J. Patterson who loaned copies to me during this study. In the ‘Australia Invites You’ pamphlet, produced by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration, prospective migrants were promised high standards of living and told of Australia’s rural economy, beaches, social security, health provisions and educational opportunities. Australia, promised the government, maintained a British way of life and that a million or so recent migrants had received a welcome from ‘predominantly British stock.’

The pamphlet claims in some areas the sea is ‘warm enough to swim in all the year’.

Ian Campbell, who arrived as a backpacker in 1970 and settled in Western Australia, remembered the promotional literature circulating in Britain at the time he left home regarding Australia:

I looked at the migration material in the UK in the mid and late 60s it was aimed at a target audience of young families. It emphasised the healthy outdoor sporting life in a much better climate—One advert I particularly remember showed before and after of a family. One side had the family in raincoats, umbrellas and looking miserable. The other side showed them in light summer clothes looking happy.

The Commonwealth was not the only source of migrant informational materials. In the 1960s the Western Australian state government also produced its fair share of advertising material, enticing prospective migrants to the state, including the pamphlet called ‘The English Family Brown’.

Private organisations and corporations offered information and promises of life in Australia. The Commonwealth Bank and a range of employer’s federations did so in the hope of attracting new clients and new labour, and even sent copies of the West Australian newspaper to prospective migrants in information packs. Religious organisations also offered information to prospective migrants. Material from the Methodist Church in Australia added a degree warning:

It is a mistake for people who have a grave domestic or personality problem to believe that migration to the other side of the world will solve it. People bring their problems with them.

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34 Name withheld, arr. Dec./Jan., 1967/8, Survey 63.
35 So you are going to Australia? Immigration Committee of the General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia in conjunction with the Home Mission Dept. of the Methodist Church Great Britain, London circa 1960s.
But some, like Sheila Saville, relied on ‘instinct’ when it came to the final decision.\textsuperscript{36}

The following table indicates the range of resources my respondents used to gain information to aid in their decision making: they were non-specific as to what type of information they received from any of these sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main sources of information for prospective migrants, as listed by participants.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian government migrant information</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers in Britain</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pamphlets</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family members living in Australia</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>British government migrant information</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends who were living in WA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family or friends who had visited WA</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

While many of the respondents seem to have conducted a thorough research one said:

‘Looked at a map of Australia, seen there was one little dot in Western Australia and said that’s where I want to live’.\textsuperscript{37}

Whatever promotional materials they acquired, it is probably true that most migrants believed what they wanted to believe and had ideas of Australia that were often unrealistic but which suited their dream of a better life.\textsuperscript{38} Some were influenced by popular films: ‘I imagined kangaroos and koalas, hot temperatures, dirt roads and everyone rode horses’.\textsuperscript{39}

Information about work opportunities could have been inaccurate, complicated by the ebb and flow in demand for skilled workers during the 1960s. Some said they received no real information about work. Others found that on arrival their skills were not required at all.\textsuperscript{40}

Richardson suggests that many migrants attracted to the promise of a better life, found it

\textsuperscript{36} Saville, arr. 1969, Survey 85.
\textsuperscript{38} Betka Zamoyska, \textit{The Ten Pound Fare: Experiences of British people who emigrated to Australia in the 1950s}, Viking, London, 1988, p. xx.
\textsuperscript{39} Leslie Jean Ross, arr. July 1964, Survey 10.
difficult to absorb negative information. 41 An open letter to migrants by the Australian Migration Office in London outlined the various ways those who wished to travel to Australia under the £10 scheme could qualify. Sponsorship deals were set out and the age limits delineated. 42 (Most of the participants in this survey fulfilled one or other of the conditions. Some were sponsored by relatives, friends or companies and a few came prepared to find their own accommodation; most were part of an assisted passage scheme.) Printed materials generally provided information regarding Australia’s climate, British way of life, employment opportunities and the like, as the following illustrations demonstrate. By 1968 most

\[\text{Pamphlets, booklets and other material similar to this were made widely available in Britain for prospective migrants of the 1960s. Some were printed by the Commonwealth or state governments; others by industry, employers’ groups, banks, churches and similar organisations. This and the material that follows were supplied by the Reverend Ken Patterson.}\]
‘For only £10’. Those marketing the attraction of Australia to the United Kingdom stressed the Britishness of Australia, as well as its natural resources and living conditions.
A Message to Future Migrants

This book is a departure from the usual publications for migrants.

Hand books — like prices and wages — are not fully covered here. You'll find them in our other booklets.

This book aims to help you visualize and “feel” what it is like down under.

In other words, it aims to fill a real gap — a gap often filled by individual imagination, with misleading results.

Each of the booklets below is packed with facts.

Please use this book to discuss your expectations with our rescued British immigrants.

MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION, GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA


Bottom: ‘Thinking of Australia? A guide for travellers’ was produced by the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, hoping to capitalise on the business which thousands of immigrants might bring with them.

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emphasised lifestyle and opportunities for children.\footnote{Jupp, \textit{The English in Australia}, p. 133.}

\textit{Why they left}

Some of my respondents gave more than one reason for their decision to migrate, but most gave only a perfunctory answer concerning what was perhaps one of the most important decisions of their lives. Had these migrants been interviewed closer to the point of departure or soon after their arrival in Australia they may have offered more detailed reasons for their decision to leave England. The most common reasons given by participants to my survey for making the decision to come to Australia are as follows:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
Weather & 26 \\
Children’s future & 17 \\
‘Better Life’ & 9 \\
Reunite with friends or family & 6 \\
Parent’s choice & 5 \\
Working Holiday & 4 \\
Spouse returning to Australia & 4 \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

The most popular reasons given for immigrating specifically to Western Australia included:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
To reunite with friends and relatives. & 18 \\
Weather & 8 \\
Promised work & 8 \\
‘Lonnie Scheme’ & 4 \\
Seminars and film nights & 4 \\
‘Better Life’ & 3 \\
‘Not so many people’ & 3 \\
First Port of call & 3 \\
Perth – same as Scottish city & 2 \\
Children’s future & 1 \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Seventeen of my respondents had settled first in the eastern states before relocating to Western Australia. Their responses have been included in the above table. The most common
reason to come to Australia was the expectation of better weather, though most chose Western Australia to be with relatives and friends.

These results are similar to the findings of Hammerton and Thomson. Of 89 people they surveyed who arrived in Australia between 1949 and the mid 1970s, the most frequent reasons given for choosing to emigrate included better weather and reunion with families.\textsuperscript{46} Some of my participants gave a very personal explanation for migrating to Australia or Western Australia, including trouble at home with in-laws. In my own case the reasons were numerous: my husband’s employment was very irregular, as he worked in the production of seats for motor cars. He was sent home without pay when other parts of the industry were on strike and the seats were not required. One of my children suffered respiratory problems every winter and a doctor said she needed to be in a drier climate. We lived about a mile away from a coal mine and railway marshalling yards. Every time I took the babies out in a pram their blankets were covered with black specks, as were the clothes when they were hung outside to dry in the winter. Not only was it cold and wet but smoke-induced ‘fogs’ were frequent. As well as all these problems I had an overwhelming fear that an atomic bomb would be dropped on England, the country in the middle, should conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States escalate. When we saw an advertisement placed by the Western Australian Employers’ Federation in a national newspaper seeking welders we applied to emigrate. But perhaps the most important factor was the £10 fare. I don’t think we would have even thought of emigrating if we had had to pay the full fare.

Hammerton suggests that the decision to migrate may have been influenced by one of three relationship dynamics: the friction of the ‘reluctant wife’, the harmony of ‘a consensual agreement’ or even, rarely, that the decision to emigrate was of the wife’s initiative.\textsuperscript{47} While in most instances my respondents say there was an accord in the decision in some cases the wife or husband decided without the partner’s full approval. Participants

\textsuperscript{46} Hammerton and Thomson, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{47} Hammerton and Thomson, p. 78.
who were children at the time of emigration mostly claim that they were not involved at all in
the decision. Hammerton did not mention the children, or in some cases the influence of the
grandparents who might also have formed another dynamic. Children were counted as being
dependent on their families until they were 21 years old and were therefore expected to
emigrate as part of the unit. But Marilyn Fonte considered running away because she didn’t
want to go to Australia: ‘I was devastated at being dragged away from friends and school—I
hated leaving my dog’.

Some of the younger migrants thought the stay in Australia was not
to be permanent, one saying that the parting was ‘quite emotional, but not very as we intended
to return in 2 years’.

It is perhaps the response of Ken Ward, who came on the SS Asturias in 1947 and
was the earliest of my participants to arrive in Western Australia, which sums up the over-
riding reason why most migrants left their home country and came to Australia at any time:
‘unsatisfied with living conditions and job opportunities’. This response had changed little
when in 1969 Chris Moore had ‘several reasons; to get away from miserable weather, there
had to be something better than what I was doing in England’.

Where they came from

This study did not try to try to differentiate between those born in England, Ireland, Scotland
or Wales, although some respondents identified themselves as from those areas. One said he
was a South African living in England who had married an Australian and one was a German
who had been working in England. Some say they had been working overseas and on return
to the United Kingdom were unable to settle down. Others had met Australians while with
the British Army, Navy or Air Force, and some had served on Merchant shipping that had
called in to Australian Ports. One remarked; ‘Having been in Australia when in the Royal

49 Name withheld, arr. Nov. 1966, Survey 32.
50 Kenneth Leslie Ward, arr. 1947, Survey 75.
Navy on an aircraft carrier, I was impressed by the climate and lifestyle’. Another, having resigned from service in Tanganyika, when that country became an independent Tanzania, had intended to settle down in England. But he did not enjoy the English climate—‘difficult after the sunny skies in Tanzania’—and he had trouble in finding suitable employment so he decided to migrate. On being refused permission to migrate to New Zealand because he had too many children (four) he determined that ‘Australia was the land of opportunity’ and that it would ‘support its population in the event of future conflict’. Most, however, were influenced by the post-war migration drive in the United Kingdom—and the £10 fare!

**Racial tension**

The 1960s saw a large influx of people from Commonwealth countries into the United Kingdom claiming British citizenship. The resulting tension developing in Britain, as a result, was enough to provoke some to leave.

One of the respondents, Victor Humphries, who arrived in 1965, was concerned with possible outcomes of coloured immigration into the United Kingdom at that time. He enclosed with his survey a poster of more recent origin which seems to confirm his fears of the problems that might be caused by the influx of immigrants into Britain in the 1960s:

> After fighting for King and Country saw in the 1960s England was being invaded by various people from all points of the British Empire and I

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52 Anon, arr. Dec/Jan1968, Survey 64.
53 Name withheld, arr. Nov. 1962, Survey 40.
could see the predictions of Enoch Powell (MP) coming true—as it has done.\textsuperscript{54}

Another participant who arrived in 1969 goes further, describing some of the outcomes he saw of coloured immigration.

After listening to the now famous speech by Enoch Powell at Easter 1968 about the problems of immigration to the UK (which included the takeover of Battersea by West Indians, and the Bristol riots (involving knife fighting Asians) we decided to apply to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, finally decided Australia was our first choice due to the opportunities offered and the climate.\textsuperscript{55}

Chris Davies also cited ‘racial problems’ as one of the deciding factors in his emigration.\textsuperscript{56}

The movement into Britain by peoples from the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent, mainly to the low socio-economic areas of large cities, led to racial tension and even riots. Enoch Powell was well known in England in the 1960s for his stand against the continuing influx of colonials into Great Britain. Indeed, his strong stand against the British Conservative Party’s approach to immigration is thought to have led to the downfall of the Conservative government and to the rise in power of the British Labour Government under Sir Harold Wilson.\textsuperscript{57} However, political slogans at the time included: ‘If you want a nigger for a neighbour—vote labour’. These famous words have recently been revisited in the political sphere in Britain.\textsuperscript{58} The change of government in 1964 did not immediately assuage the ordinary citizen’s concern with unlimited immigration into Britain. In the Times (London) during March 1965 there were a number of articles on the increasing concern among the ordinary citizens with the influx of people from the West Indies, Pakistan and India, one saying: ‘There is a deep disquiet all over the country about the recent tide of immigration’.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{54} Victor Humphries, arr. Dec. 1966, Survey34.
\textsuperscript{55} Name withheld, arr. Jan/Feb. 1969, Survey 83.
\textsuperscript{56} Christopher Davies, arr. Feb/Mar. 1968, Survey 35.
\textsuperscript{58} John Townsend, ‘A New Language of Racism in Politics’, Guardian, London. www.guardian.co.uk/racism/story/0,276347965300.html#article (09/05/06)
Marwick said the problem was that the British People were basically xenophobic. A survey conducted in Britain the mid 1960s showed four out of five people thought that ‘too many migrants had been let into the country’. All citizens of the British Commonwealth had the same freedom of movement into Britain as the Australians or Canadians, but the Asian and West Indian migrants were more visible because of the colour of their skin and therefore raised the most complaints. This problem led to the tightening of entry for all to the British Isles in the late 1960s.

**Returned servicemen**

A few participants had returned from service with the British Armed Forces and were disappointed with the conditions in the United Kingdom. One had ‘just finished National Service and felt no future so went looking for a better life’. While another says, ‘Leaving British Army did not want to return to Scotland, wanted to start afresh’.

**Fear of war**

The fear of imminent nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union was one of the major reasons that the Caunt family decided to emigrate. Although I was not the only person whose decision to migrate was influenced by this fear I was surprised that the Cold War was mentioned by so few of my respondents. One respondent expressed his reasons for leaving Britain as being; ‘the threat of the Russians and the cold war threat’. Bill Gillbard was also concerned. He wrote that Australia was a ‘better place to bring up a family as the cold war was current in Europe and Australia was half a world away’. Jim Yeomans said he and his family migrated because of ‘the danger presented by the threat of possible nuclear

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64 Name withheld, arr. Mar/Apr 1965, Survey 78.
Perhaps the memory of the nuclear threat in the 1960s has faded with the general regression of the fear of communism.

**Health**

The problem of ill-health was frequently cited as a reason to leave Britain. Loretta Young said that in 1951 the ‘doctor’s advice to Mum and Dad was that if they didn’t get me to a warmer climate I would not survive another winter so they decided to migrate to Australia’. Jennifer Calnon was also worried by a health problem: ‘we were looking for a better climate as our daughter had lung infections from our then proximity to fogs caused by the River Trent’. Josephine Stanbury’s parents made the decision to migrate because Josephine developed asthma during the winter. This, she said, made her father very worried. ‘My chest got very bad Christmas 1963, for 6 weeks my bed was a big armchair in the kitchen by the fire’. The promised improvement in the health of her two children should they be moved to a warmer climate was also a deciding factor for Jeanne Reid. Her village doctor, who was an Australian, said the children would be much better off in Australia.

**Families reunited**

In the 1960s there were no formal policies for the reunification of British families but families and friends did act as sponsors to bring in assisted migrants under the ‘Bring out a Briton’ scheme. One respondent wrote that he came because members of the family were already in Australia. Lillian Clarke’s ‘father’s brother, sister and families had migrated—one in 1965 the other in 1966’. Some were returning to Australia after a sojourn in the British Isles. Margaret Bolton had left Australia for a working holiday in England when she ‘met and married a South African in London’. Her husband had not been to Australia before so when

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71 Name withheld, arr. May 1963, Survey 45.
Leaving England

he applied to migrate she became eligible, as his spouse, to travel with him on an assisted fare.\(^{73}\) The wife of another participant had migrated with her family to Victoria in 1954 and she too had returned on a working/teaching holiday in the United Kingdom. The respondent said that after they were married his wife ‘wished to return to her family and I was keen to go overseas to better prospects and weather having lived in East Africa and USA—away from UK mostly since 1950’.\(^ {74} \) They also were eligible for assisted migration because the husband had not previously applied to be part of the assisted passage scheme. Moyna Harland met her future husband who was visiting his family in Edinburgh in 1963; she ‘became engaged after four weeks’. Her fiancé returned to Western Australia in January 1966 and ‘I followed in May 1966’, she said.\(^ {75} \)

**We came to work**

There were no restrictions in the 1960s on British subjects coming to Australia to work or live. As British subjects they could come and go as they pleased, enjoying the same rights and benefits as Australian citizens. However, a clause in the £10 assisted migration scheme stipulated that if the assisted migrants wanted to leave Australia in less than two years they would be expected to pay not only the return fare but also the balance of the outward fare. This did not seem to concern the prospective migrants. One respondent remarked that she ‘viewed it as an opportunity to see Australia for £10’,\(^ {76} \) presumably being prepared to stay the two years before returning. Later some did regret agreeing to the stipulation and suggested they would have left Australia within the first two years if they had been able to afford to do so.

Many came because of perceived job opportunities. Tom Rollo was ‘disillusioned

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\(^ {73} \) Margaret Bolton, arr. Dec. 1963, Survey 76.

\(^ {74} \) Name withheld, arr. March 1966, Survey 17.

\(^ {75} \) Moyna Harland, arr. July 1966, Survey 22.

\(^ {76} \) Anon, arr. Nov. 1966, Survey 32.
with working conditions and career prospects in UK\footnote{Tom Rollo, arr. Apr. 1963, Survey 44.}.\footnote{Saville, arr. Jun/Jul. 1969, Survey 85.} Sheila and Fred Saville said that in 1969 ‘there was a strong demand for tradesmen to work in Australia’.\footnote{Davies, arr. Feb/Mar. 1968, Survey 35.} Chris Davies made his decision on the toss of a coin: ‘Advert in newspaper by Australian Employers’ Federation for tradesmen. I tossed a coin between W.A. and a job on the south coast of England building a new power station . . . WA won and so did I’.\footnote{Anonymous, arr. Dec/Jan. 1967/68 Survey 64; Anonymous, arr. Dec/Jan. 1967/68 Survey 65; Anonymous, arr. Jan/Feb. 1969, Survey 83} A number of the respondents were attracted to Australia as teachers, one said Australian ‘teaching methods at the time were held up as an example to UK’\footnote{Anonymous, arr. May 1963, Survey 5.}.\footnote{Anonymous, arr. Nov. 1963, Survey 46.} Two of the participants were looking for work that did not involve travel. One confessed he came because ‘work in Stockton was hard to get and he had to travel away all the time’,\footnote{Name withheld, arr. Feb/Mar. 1968, Survey 68.} and another ‘because he was tired of travelling with his work’.\footnote{Name withheld, arr. May 1968, Survey 70.}

Most people were looking for a better life for themselves and their children and expected to enjoy a better climate in Australia. One had been romanced by the ideal of a better life here by a film she had seen as a child:

I had seen a black and white film when I was 12, kids riding to school on horses, the seed was planted then of a better life outside UK. My brother Rob and I made a pact we would migrate when we were 20/21 after he had finished his apprenticeship.\footnote{Name withheld, arr. Feb/Mar. 1968, Survey 68.}

Some decisions were influenced by rising living costs in Britain.

Life was getting expensive in UK; I had two jobs, wife also worked full time. Shire rates kept increasing as did interest on the mortgage, cost of living up, didn’t own a car, wages at a standstill, dissatisfaction with way of life.\footnote{Name withheld, arr. Feb/Mar. 1968, Survey 68.}

**We only came for a holiday**

There were those who wanted to take the opportunity of assisted passages to have a holiday abroad. Another who came from Germany had met people from Australia and New Zealand.
while working in England and so, ‘when I heard of cheap (Government) fare I decided to go to Australia for a few years, not for good. I was in my 20s, and single, I considered it an adventure’. Phena Pritchard who also came on a working holiday with friends said, ‘Having qualified as a State Registered Nurse in London, we did not speak any language well enough to work in a non-English speaking country, Australia seemed a wonderful alternative’. Some migrants who arrived in the 1960s were unassisted and two of my respondents fell in to this category. Ian Campbell came as a backpacker in the 1960s; he enjoyed the working holiday he had in Australia so much that he came back to live in 1970. The Perrins came to Australia on a one year’s work visa in the 1960s, travelling overland from Luton to Pakistan by motorbike and sidecar and then flying on to Perth. Their experiences here also led them to immigrate to Western Australia in the 1970s, but later they returned to live in England.

**Why Western Australia?**

Seventeen of my respondents migrated initially to other states and came to Western Australia later, a process of continued migration which perhaps deserves further research. Others chose to settle in Western Australia while on the voyage here. The Webers, the family from Horton-cum-Studley, for instance only made the decision to come to Western Australia when they became friendly with some Australian people on the ship and went to a seminar with them: ‘We heard how lovely it was and were persuaded to get off the ship in Fremantle instead of going on to Melbourne’. At least eighteen of my respondents came to Western Australia because they had friends and relatives here. Josephine Stanbury said, ‘My brother had migrated to WA a year

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85 Name withheld, arr. Sep/Oct 1960, Survey 86.
86 Phena Angela Pritchard, arr. Dec 1963, Survey 9,
before due to no work in the north of England and he told us it was wonderful in WA’.  

Others came on recommendations of friends. Some were impressed by the Western Australian immigration staff. One said, ‘the immigration official who interviewed my wife and I at Australia House, London was darn good at his job—pleasant, perceptive, persuasive—we were hooked’. Jeanne Reid and her family had intended to go to New South Wales where they knew there was work for her husband, but were persuaded to come to Western Australia ‘by an enthusiastic immigration officer from Swanbourne’.  

In the early 1960s the Lonnie Scheme attracted many migrants to Western Australia and a number of the participants cited this as a reason they chose to come here. The Geurds’ were attracted by the offers of work and housing under the scheme. Kathleen Platts recalled 

Under the Lonnie Scheme the West Australian Government undertook to arrange work and rented accommodation for skilled migrants. This prompted a lot of people to come here as it seemed less of a leap into the unknown for those who had no contacts in Australia.

Platt’s memory, and perhaps her perception of the time, weren’t altogether correct. Rental accommodation was not promised by the state government though immediate, temporary hostel accommodation was. This is as one other respondent recalled it to be:

Mr W. Lonnie headed a team to England mid 1962 recruiting tradesmen for WA. We were accepted when I showed my qualifications. We were promised a job but no accommodation.

Some were offered specific employment before migrating. One came ‘to take up an appointment in the Veterinary Laboratories at the Western Australian Department of Agriculture’, while another says he was able to take up a position in Perth with the company

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97 Lonnie Report.
Leaving England

he had worked for in England. One respondent was offered a job with the Post Office and his wife a position at Royal Perth Hospital before leaving home. Tom Edwards, who came from Wales, had a job waiting with the RSPCA, and David Phillips, also from Wales, was taking up a position with the University of Western Australia. Certainly the promise of work was attractive to prospective migrants, and skilled labour was in demand everywhere—including Albany, which is where one respondent was sent. Another, a bricklayer, recalled advertisements in the press at home offering work to bricklayers in Western Australia (in desperate need due to post-war housing shortages) which provoked his interest. Two respondents say they chose Perth because of its connotations to the town in Scotland with the same name. Some of the other reasons given were that ‘it was the ‘youngest state’ or ‘had the least population, or might be the friendliest. In the end the reasons why the participants chose Western Australia can only be described as numerous and varied.

Completing the formalities

Having decided they would like to migrate to Australia the applicants had to undergo certain formalities before they were accepted. All experienced a similar process: forms, interviews and medicals, including eye and hearing tests, dental examinations and chest X-rays. Complete dossiers of this process are kept for all assisted British migrants at the National Archives and can be accessed and copied. My own and that of my family were obtained for this study. It was surprising to be reminded of events and procedures I had long forgotten. For instance, a letter in my folder, dated 23 September 1965, gave the date for us to sail as 10 October 1965 on the SS Australis. The letter we sent refusing this passage because we had been promised at least three months to settle our affairs in England was also in the folder.

100 Anon, arr. May 1968, Survey 70.
The originals of letters written so long ago in England are now stored in Australia together with other documents such as medical records. Information in this dossier was most useful for this research as it contained material generated in 1966 when the decision to emigrate was made. It is a wonderful resource for genealogists!

The ‘Application for Assisted Passage’ submitted by each prospective migrant required extensive information to gauge his or her suitability. Information on marital status, including date of marriage, was recorded. Migrants were advised they would be considered as married if the wife or husband was still living unless proof of divorce was offered. No provision was made for ‘partners’ or de-facto relationships. Married men had to give the name of their wife and children under the age of 21, state when and where they were born and if they were also travelling to Australia. Particulars of all employment (for the male) since leaving school had to be given, including service in the armed forces. Migrants were required to declare how much capital they intended to bring and in which state they planned to settle. Applicant interviews were held in the closest major city in the United Kingdom to where they lived. In our case this was Nottingham, some distance from our home and which required two long bus rides. Children had to be present at the applicant interview to evaluate their health and mental capacity. The colour of each family member was scrutinised. One of Hammerton’s respondents even reported that, ‘we had to drive the man to Mike’s home so he could check we weren’t trying to smuggle a black baby into Australia’.

Once migrants had been assessed as suitable they had to undergo rigorous medical examinations by practitioners appointed by the Australian government. The medicals seem to have been very thorough. One respondent remembers being taken to see a specialist in Harley Street, London, because of a bone disease she had had as a young child, and she says it ‘almost stopped us all coming out’. Family documentation, such as birth and marriage certificates as well as trade certificates and evidence of other qualifications, were expected to

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107 Hammerton and Thomson, p. 90.
On application to immigrate, prospective migrants would be interviewed and assessed on a range of criteria by which they would be judged suitable for entry to Australia. Forms such as these were completed by migrants, immigration officers and medical staff.

These documents regarding the migration of my family to Australia in 1965-66 were copied recently from the records of the Australian Archives, Perth, File PP276/1, and are now in my personal collection.
be shown at the interview. One of my respondents had to prove he was white because he had been born in South Africa. He says, 'I had to provide a full face photo as well as documents
When the interviews and medicals were completed the prospective migrants waited for the news that their application had been accepted or rejected. In our case the acceptance came through less than a month after we were interviewed on the 14 July 1965. Our medicals were on the 28 July and the acceptance was dated 5 August 1965. The letter stressed that one should not give up employment, sell one’s house or finalise one’s affairs before receiving a notice of embarkation. It also pointed out: ‘Persons who had benefited under the Assisted Passage Scheme are required to repay the Government contribution towards the cost of their fare should they leave Australia before completing two years residence’. On the back of the letter were a number of terms of agreement, including the demand for the £20 fare (for two people) and the request that any passports held by the intending migrants be forwarded with application for a document of identity which gave the migrant access to Australia. Although the whole family was listed on the documents of identity only photographs of the head of the family and his spouse had to be sent along with the application.

As set out by Peters the paper trail for a displaced person or refugee was much more

Nonja Peters documented the paper trail which most displaced persons from Europe endured in seeking migration to Australia in the post-war years.  

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110 Caunt, Private papers acquired from the National Archives, Perth, File PP276/1.
complicated (see illustration, previous page). She says the preference of these migrants was to go to the United States of America; coming to Australia was often pure chance.\(^\text{112}\)

**Now we have to wait!**

From the answers to my survey there seem to have been large differences in the time between the notice of approval and the sailing date. Hammerton also reports that the waiting time for sailing dates could vary from a few weeks to a year and that when the notification did arrive there was often a ‘period of frenetic preparation’.\(^\text{113}\) Some of my respondents say they were given immediate approval, possibly on the basis of their trade qualifications. One was Jim Yeomans whose trade was a ‘master bricklayer/subcontractor and self builder’.\(^\text{114}\) Teachers were also in short supply and offered immediate appointments.\(^\text{115}\) Most participants were given three to five month’s notice of the embarkation date. A few respondents had to wait for longer periods due to the arrival of new babies. Women were not allowed to travel if they were more than 6 months pregnant and new babies had to be 3 months old.\(^\text{116}\) One respondent was kept waiting for over two years. He had a daughter in Perth who brought the matter before the Immigration Department. ‘Result permission to proceed within less than a week, and embarkation notice to sail in one months time—panic stations’.\(^\text{117}\) It is fortunate that most respondents had far more time to get their affairs in order. Most had a house to sell and work commitments to finalise. Furniture and personal property and pets had to be disposed of or crated for transport to Australia. Sheila Saville says her husband, Alfred, had made all crates in which to pack their furniture.\(^\text{118}\) The logistics of moving so many people must have kept the immigration departments very busy. One participant believed that ‘75,000 Poms left

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\(^{111}\) Peters, *Milk and Honey*, p. 64.

\(^{112}\) Peters, *Milk and Honey*, p. 64.

\(^{113}\) Hammerton and Thomson, pp. 89–90.


\(^{115}\) Anon, arr. Dec/Jan. 1967/68, Survey 64.

\(^{116}\) Caunt, Private Papers, National Archives of Australia, Perth, PP276/1.

\(^{117}\) Anon, arr. Feb. 1964, Survey 47.

Leaving England

Documents such as these were issued by the Commonwealth of Australia to inform a prospective migrant of their approval to migrate under the £10 scheme, as were identification papers and additional instructions to consider before travel.119

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119 Caunt, Private papers acquired from the National Archives, Perth, File PP276/1.
**DOCUMENT OF IDENTITY**

This Document which is valid for a single journey only is issued in lieu of a Passport to the Bearer and his wife/family for travel to Australia as Approved Migrants. Details shown below:

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**Signature of Refugee**

**Signature of W.P.T.**
Leaving England

UK for Australia in 1968.’ Official records say 28,739 migrants settled in Western Australia in that year.

**Mum was heartbroken**

A major obstacle to leaving the United Kingdom was facing the reactions of family and friends when they were told of the decision to migrate to Australia. Hammerton puts it mildly when he says ‘leaving Britain could be an emotional experience’. He went on to say that while some were excited by the idea, others were sad and had feelings of guilt. Peters says that breaking the news to the family, ‘was remembered as one of the most stressful in the migrant’s life’ and parents were often totally opposed to the separation. Relatives were often worried that they would not see their loved ones again. The feelings expressed by my respondents ran the whole gamut from a sense of freedom to feelings of remorse at leaving elderly parents. The participants in my study met with mixed reactions when they told people they were going to emigrate. The families of the Webers and Baldwins thought they were crazy, while the Platts found people were concerned they would not see them again and were worried about them going into the unknown: ‘Travel was then a lot more expensive and time consuming than it is now’. One remembered that her family were ‘very distressed’; while another recalled that the reaction of most people he knew was that it was a good idea to migrate because of the growing possibility of unemployment in England.

Respondents, who had been children when leaving Britain, often found the partings traumatic. Loretta Thomas wrote in her survey response that: ‘Mum was heartbroken having to leave all her family behind’. Her grandmother died just before she left and her grandfather

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120 Davies, arr. Feb/Mar. 1968, Survey 35.
122 Hammerton and Thomson, p. 96.
127 Anon, arr. May 1963, Survey 5.
while she was on the ship. Her friends ‘thought we were all mad coming to a country full of savages and where kangaroos hopped down the main streets’. For Jeanne Reid there is a poignant memory. Despite the farewell parties and the good wishes of friends and family, she remains broken-hearted because her nephews and nieces accused her of giving up on her family when really she ‘never, ever, really wanted to come in the first place’. Marilyn Fonte, when asked about reactions of friends and relatives gave this response: ‘Teenage dismay and plotting to run away’. Lesley Ross seemed to be keener to come to Australia. ‘As a 12 year old my friends were all excited for me for the adventure I was about to undertake. My grandparents although devastated never conveyed their concern to me or my brother’. This repression of emotions was also expressed by Patricia Paleeya. ‘Being English a lot was left unsaid although I saw the sadness in my father’s eyes’. Moyna Harland had a similar experience. ‘Widowed mother hid her feelings for my sake but very upset’.

Nevertheless many respondents found their friends and relatives were supportive of the proposed move, especially those who thought the migrants were leaving for a short stay only. Phena Pritchard says people were supportive, but ‘we only intended at the time to stay for a two-year working holiday’. Another said: ‘They were upset about us coming here but we told them that we were thinking of staying 3 years and here we are 40 years later!’ Friends pronounced John and Joan Baldwin ‘would be back in a year’. Ted Parry reported that his family in Wales believed he would ‘pull out at the last minute.’

Some recalled marked differences in the reactions of family and friends: ‘Our

133 Harland, arr. July 1966, Survey 22  
135 Anon, Survey 46.  
families were heartbroken; our friends thought it a great idea’.  Another wrote: ‘Family members were upset, they told us cautionary tales and tried to dissuade us. Friends were supportive and envious’.  Similarly Chris Moore found, ‘People outside the family were supportive and wished me well, but most of my family thought I was mad’.  Chris Davies met with mostly negative reactions: ‘Some people could not understand why I would leave the old country. It was snowing at the time’.  Many families in the post-war years had moved away from the area in Britain where they had grown up, and this tended to ease the pain of separation because in many cases family bonds were already weakened. One participant summed the reactions: ‘Mixed; friends—encouragement, disbelief, envy, curiosity, not too much sadness. Family—dismay, discouragement, some resentment (not obvious)’. I personally don’t think my mother-in-law ever forgave me as she saw me as the prime instigator of the move.

My participants gave many different reasons and motivations why they made the decision to emigrate to Western Australia. All underwent interviews, medicals and other formalities and waited nervously to hear of their acceptance. There were mixed reactions from relatives and friends, some supportive, some negative and some even dismissive of the decision. These memories may have been coloured with time, though they are similar to the findings of Hammerton and Thomson. In coming to Australia they ignored the cautionary tales, negative feedback and family woes. They sold their homes and many of their belongings, packed their bags, gave up their jobs and finalised their affairs in England. Whether they were prepared or not, the time had come to leave home and take passage to Australia.

141 Davies, arr. Feb/Mar. 1968, Survey 35.
142 Hammerton and Thomson, pp. 83–84
144 Hammerton and Thomson, p. 65.