

A settler's life - 1

My dear brother

Well, where can I start and what can I say? Conveying to you a true understanding of my new life here in South Australia will be impossible, but let me try.

The journey in that cramped, disease-ridden ship was long and tedious. I survived, but what kept me going during such a trying time, was thinking about a better way of life, a huge parcel of land and making my fortune in South Australia.

Wakefield was right, there's lots of space, fresh air and only a small population of 14 000. But that's about all that's here ... apart from millions of insects and many other strange and wonderful creatures and plants! Everyday I encounter something new. But I've learnt to be very wary of some snakes and spiders, which are deadly.

South Australia hasn't been as successful as they hoped. Adelaide has a few public buildings, a small hospital is being built and the first bridge over the Torrens River opened last year. Initially settlers and livestock poured in and hopes were high. But when I arrived in 1840 it seemed that most settlers had been sitting around in Adelaide, fighting to get more land to sell later and doing nothing with the land they already had. No wonder little has been produced and there is so much debt. Clearing land and planting crops has been difficult without the labourers Wakefield planned to ship out here. In the end they could only afford to send 7500 of them.

After landing, unloading my stock and other possessions, buying some supplies and taking care of lots of paperwork, I couldn't wait to see my new home and to get started. If only I'd been able to persuade some of our local tradesmen who couldn't find work at home to come with me. I desperately need their help, but I'm still glad it was decided that no convicts would be transported here.

My land is beautifully situated with a small brook running through it for most of the year. I've found a young shepherd to watch the few sheep I brought with me until we can clear more land and build some more fences. It will hold a lot more stock when I can afford to get them. I'm hoping to plant some wheat and maize on the higher slopes but it will be some time before the land is cleared. It's long hard work. I've managed to make a small garden for vegetables and have planted a bit of wheat. My diet of damper, meat— often kangaroo—tea with sugar, when I can get it, and the few vegetables I manage to grow is very boring, but thankfully my health has been excellent. You wouldn't recognise me in my broad-brimmed hat, dirty boots and working clothes. My skin is tanned and my hands are rough.

You would no doubt be amused by the small cottage I live in, but I'm quite proud of it. It couldn't be more different from our estate in England. I had a hand in planning and constructing it. The process we used is called 'wattle and daub', which is wattle plastered with clay then whitewash. It has a thatched roof with one door and some open windows which can be covered with shutters when it rains. The floor is packed earth and the furniture I made myself. It is of course a temporary home and I plan to have something much more substantial once I am established.

Your colonial brother

Daniel

