

## Joseph Ambler – Perils of Hope

**Summary:** The grave of Joseph Ambler, located in the remains of second cemetery of the Q Station, is a reminder of the perils of migrating to Australia. Leaving Liverpool in 1853 with his young wife and daughter, Joseph died of the heads of Sydney in July 1854 from dysentery.



**Location 1:** Second Cemetery

**Inscription notes:**

**Inscription 1**    **Code:** H5098

**Thorp 1983:**    TBA

**GPS:** 0341759 6256656

## Joseph Ambler – Perils of Hope

When Joseph Ambler set out on his immigration to Australia aboard the *Araminta* in April 1854, he was hoping to take advantage of the labour shortages in the colony of New South Wales to provide a better life for his young family. Aged only 34, Joseph and his wife Esther, aged 24, looked to settle in New South Wales and take advantage of lucrative wages for skilled workers. As a mason, Joseph Ambler was looking to receive around 150 pounds annually for his work, more than what he would earn in Cheshire, where he had previously lived.<sup>1</sup>

However, a new life in the colonies was not to be. During voyage, Ambler was fell ill and died of the headlands of Sydney in early July 1854. Records indicate that he either died of pneumonia or dysentery, and he was interned in the second cemetery at the Q station.<sup>2</sup> His wife, daughter and new born son, Jaber, how was born on the voyage, all survived him. What happened to his young family is unknown, but it was likely that Esther became a farm servant and latter remarried.

Joseph Ambler took advantage of the schemes of assisted migration, whereby the cost of migration was covered in part by a loan from the colonial government, to be paid at a later date.<sup>3</sup> Migration, for many in Britain, was of benefit to both society at home and in the colonies. Arguments were made that excess population could be sent to the colonies to alleviate social problems, and that in wake of the discovery of gold, migrants could fill the void left by departing labourers who went to the gold fields to try their luck at finding gold. In the colonies, the mood for some was much more subdued. Fears of the character of the incoming migrants created anxieties that they were mainly just excess population from Britain, and they would not contribute meaningful to the developing colonies. It was also argued that the families migrating into the colonies provided much needed skills to continue to grow the colony.<sup>4</sup>

However, such an outcome did not materialise for the Ambler family, as Joseph succumbed to disease that was a constant threat in the cramped conditions on board the ship. Although conditions aboard ships had improved since the death of a 104 migrants aboard the *Ticonderoga* in 1852, with fewer passengers being transported on a single ship, and better provisioning of ships taking place, the grave of Joseph Ambler is a reminder of the perils of the voyage to Australia, a voyage many made in search for a better life.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The North Wales Chronicle, Tuesday Feb 22 1849, p. 3 for information on wedding. The birth record of Esther

<sup>2</sup> See NRS 906, Immigrant ship reports - 'Araminta', 'Plantagenet', and 'Sabrina', 1854 [4/1881.3], where a summary of the deaths on board the ship is recorded. H. H. Browne recorded his death as dysentery, whilst the passenger list, obtainable through Ancestry, listed his death as pneumonia.

<sup>3</sup> For information on assisted migration, see Robin Haines, *Emigration and the Labouring Poor: Australian Recruitment in Britain and Ireland, 1831 – 60* (London: Macmillan 1997)

<sup>4</sup> This view is echoed by emigration agent H. H. Browne, and is recorded in the files of fn 2. For more general information on the arguments for migration, see Haines, *Emigration and the Labouring Poor*

<sup>5</sup> Moreton Bay Courier, Saturday Aug 20 1853

## **The Emigration Agent: H. H Browne.**

Hutchinson Hothersal Browne was born to a wealthy London merchant, William Browne, in 1810. Educated at the Merchant Taylor's public school, he embarked on a career in Sydney as Water Police Magistrate and the chief Immigration Agent, before retiring and moving back to England.<sup>1</sup>

As an Immigration Agent, it was his responsibility to ensure that transport ships arriving in the colony maintained a minimum standard of cleanliness and care for their passengers. In one of his report to the Colonial Secretary, Browne told of how the *Araminta*, a ship transporting passengers from Liverpool to Sydney in 1854, "was in a cleanly state on arrival, but the tween decks were dark and without stern windows and same sour smell was experienced between the decks, which is peculiar in this type of vessel."<sup>2</sup> He also commented that the stove was too small for the number of migrant aboard, and the lack of an oven was worrying.

Part of his job was to report the number of deaths by disease on the voyage. In the case of the *Araminta*, he was happy to report only four deaths, where only one adult over the age of 14 died. He commended the ships surgeon, Dr Low for managing the breakouts of infectious diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery and scarlet fever. These diseases were common on voyages to Australia in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but effective separation of the sick from the rest of the passengers helped to reduce the spread of diseases. The ships themselves were usually well provisioned for the 4 month journey, carrying enough supplies for 6 months. As for the *Araminta*, due to the outbreaks of contagious diseases, it was quarantined at North Head, where the ship was fumigated before being allowed to enter Sydney.

Upon arrival, Browne commented, "The immigrants that have arrived by this vessel were an useful body of people. The single female were much inferior to the class of usually selected, but from the scarcity of female domestic servants, these people found steady employment."<sup>3</sup> Browne's selective criticism of certain migrants was characteristic of wider beliefs of the working classes at the time. Roughly, they were divided into either the deserving or undeserving poor. The deserving poor were poor by chance, but given the opportunity, they would work hard to improve themselves. The undeserving poor, however, were poor by

---

<sup>1</sup> Evening News, Tuesday 6 Mar 1894, page 5

<sup>2</sup> NRS 906, Immigrant ship reports - 'Araminta', 'Plantagenet', and 'Sabrina', 1854 [4/1881.3]. Available at the New South Wales State Archive, see <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/>

<sup>3</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, Thursday 28 June 1855. This is Immigration report for 1854, looking at the statistics of the number of migrants, where they were dispersed too, and the economic impact they had.

because of the immoral life choices they had made, and thus they should suffer accordingly. For Browne, the single females on the most part were deservedly poor. He saw them as harbingers of vice, and he perceived that their lack of skills in housekeeping meant that they had ulterior, immoral reasons for migration. On the *Araminta*, he was concerned by the reports from Dr Low that Captain Fearn had a number of stowaway females living with his daughter amongst the officer's cabins. The result of these accusations was an inquiry into the *Araminta*, and whether or not Fearn was to be found guilty of breaching his charter agreements. Fearn himself was not found guilty, and was able to sail from Sydney onto Port De Galle in Ceylon and return to England. The dispute originated from the testimony of Dr Low, the appointed surgeon aboard the ship. Low took issue with the unaccounted females boarding with Fearn's daughter.

Browne, it seemed, had an issue with the migration of single females. He saw them as unfitting for the work they would have to perform, stating they "were for the most part, unaccustomed to any of the occupations of domestic servants; and their conduct, in some instances, on board the vessels during the voyage as well as in the depot here, was such as to lead an observer to entertain grave doubts as to their former habits."<sup>4</sup> Browne was criticised in the press for his antagonistic attitude towards both the single females and Irish orphans who were taken in by the colony.<sup>5</sup> This view was likely a product of his elitist education in England that opposed many of the opinions of those in the colony, many who were the descendants of convicts and assisted migrants. Browne represents a connection to the snobbery and righteousness of the middle classes of England of the nineteenth century.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, Thursday 28 June 1855

<sup>5</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald Friday 15 June 1855