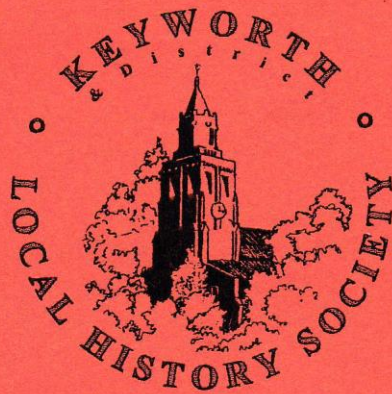


KEYWORTH  
CONNECTIONS  
ABROAD



BOB HAMMOND

## **KEYWORTH CONNECTIONS ABROAD**

### **Two Early 19th. Century Emigrant families from Keyworth**

Copies of two letters, and the start of a third, written by former Keyworth residents nearly two hundred years ago, were given to me recently by Mrs. Jean Anabel-Cooper, formerly of Thorpe-in-the-Glebe. They had been handed down through the family of her late husband - a recipient of one of the letters was Thomas Anabel of Thorpe. The writers - William Pike and William Belshaw - were emigrants who went with their families, one to South Africa in 1820, the other to the United States in 1834. The letters were addressed to relations and friends back home. This Occasional Paper contains transcripts of both letters and brief photocopied extracts, together with some background information putting into context the writers, their families, the journeys and destinations described. The photocopied extracts are to be found on the centre pages of this paper.

By way of introduction some similarities and contrasts will be noted between the two letters, the people and circumstances involved. One of the most striking similarities is the way in which the letters were written: both comprise a continuous stream of words, with no punctuation marks or paragraphs and without capital letters to indicate the beginning of new sentences - see the photocopied extracts. The spellings are also unconventional in places, though some may have been normal at the time the letters were written. On the other hand, both writers express themselves clearly and with generally correct syntax.

Another similarity concerns the emigrant parties to which the writers belonged: both were large nuclear families, consisting of parents and numerous children, all travelling together: the Pikes comprised seven, ranging in age from 44 to 4; the Belshaws twelve, including one non-family member, of similar age-range. In this respect they were unlike many pioneers of earlier times, before there were established European settlements in either South Africa or North America, who often went out on their own to establish a foothold before summoning their families to join



them - e.g. 17th. century settlers in New England, like the Puritan John Winthrop.<sup>1</sup>

The letters differ in subject matter. William Pike had little to say about the journey to South Africa; he concentrated rather on the conditions on his new homestead, perhaps because one of his reasons for writing was to try to persuade friends and relatives to join him. In contrast, William Belshaw devoted almost his entire letter to describing the journey across the Atlantic and into the interior of North America. It was written before the family had finally settled on their own land, so there was as yet little to say on the subject of the new homestead, but plenty on the new experiences of what was, almost certainly, the first time the young writer had left England, let alone Europe.

The difference in circumstances which motivated the two families to migrate is not immediately apparent from the letters. William Pike was a pauper - an unemployed framework knitter. His motive was, presumably, to escape destitution. Moreover, he could never have afforded to pay for his family to make the journey to South Africa or to equip a smallholding without financial help. A government-sponsored settlement scheme offered a means of escape. William Belshaw, on the other hand, was the eldest son of the largest tenant farmer in Keyworth. The family was relatively prosperous, although long-term prospects for such a large family were not promising. Their journey to America was not subsidised; they travelled and settled entirely under their own steam. This difference explains, incidentally, why there is more background information relating to the Pikes than to the Belshaws: the officially sponsored expedition in which the Pikes took part was documented at the time, and has been written about since, as footnotes to this paper indicate; there are no comparable documents or studies relating to the Belshaws.

The 19th. century was a period of unprecedented population movement in Britain, much of it from villages to towns, but also much going overseas. Keyworth must have contributed to these movements, although the fact that its population grew at national rates during most of the century suggests that outward migration was less here than in many other rural areas. Nevertheless there was a great deal of poverty in the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Puritan Dilemma - The Story of John Winthrop* by Edmund S. Morgan (1958)

village, with its two staple industries - farming and framework knitting - being notorious for the insecurity and low wages endured by its labourers; while there were few openings for the more enterprising without land, education, or money. So outward migration among families at different levels of the economic spectrum was to be expected from Keyworth, though perhaps on a more limited scale than elsewhere.

Migrants were motivated by both 'push' factors (intolerable circumstances in their home areas) and 'pull' factors (greater opportunities perceived elsewhere). The two families represented by these letters were very different: the Pikes were paupers, for whom the push factor was dominant; the Belshaws were, by the modest Keyworth standards of the time, relatively well-off, drawn by prospects of greater opportunity abroad rather than driven by destitution at home. We do not know how either family fared in their new homes, but the land for which the Belshaws were making in the American Prairies held far greater promise than that allocated to the Pikes in the South African Veldt.

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#### **Letter from William Pike**

*Transcribed from a photocopy taken from what was probably a handwritten copy of the original, as one of the children - Elijah - is given a girl's name (Elizah) - hardly a mistake the father would make! The spelling has been retained but we do not know how much is William Pike's and how much the copier's (if it is a copy). I have added some punctuation and paragraphing.*

**Clumber Valley near Bathurst, Cape Colony, South Africa.  
Nov 10th. 1820.**

Dear and Honored Parents and freinds, this Comes with our love to you hoping that it will find you Well Both in Body and soul, as in mercy it leaves us, for witch I thank God. I feel Thankfull to God for placing us hear. We are all contented And happy, our Prospect for A Better World are Brightening. We have preaching and Praying meeting at our house, when

the weather Does not permit us to Be out. Whe have 6 Local Preachers with in a few miles Round.

We arrived hear The 16 of July, After staying 7 weeks in Algoe Bay (*the bay on which Port Elizabeth now stands*) and 8 Days pleasant riding in Company with about 30 waggons, through woods and pleasant plains and a Delitfull Country without Going Through one Town and But a few houses. Whe had No Danger with respect to wild beasts for, tho we pitched our tents All Night in open forest or by Large water, We never saw Nor herd Any. We left our Ships on Whitsonsatterday.

We are all well and enjoy good Health. Sarah is out in servis, Thomas and William at home Helping to Dig and Build, Elizah (*should be Elijah, a boy*) and Rose tent the Cows and Goats. Whe got our Land Lotted out on the 22 Day, Witch are very Good Lotts. Mine and Thomas (*Thomas, the eldest son, was allotted a plot of his own*) is one, Both to Gather (*together*) parted by a River. Ours is A very Pleasant Homestead, about 3 acres, in form of it Half moon Inclosed By A River on one side And a wood on the other. Whe have made our house in the wood Witch is very pleasant.

Whe have got five Cows, one stirk (*yearling*), one Bullock, one Callft. It Been the first Whe had calved we Call it Keyworth. Thay are as fine Cows as Ever you see in England. The Cow that Lately Calved cost £2 . 0s . 0d., Whitch if in England would be nearly £20. Whe have Eight Goats; Goats are very common in this Country, Giving A Deal of milk. Whe have About one Acre and half of wheat, Some of whitch is come into Ear Now, Whitch we expect to Reap About Christmas. It is amasing to see the Swift Groth of things set and sowed hear. One Crop of Potatoes Have Been Got hear and whe are About to sett Again. The Wood Land is very Ritch, the Country is covered with Grass up to the knees winter and Summer. Thear is no hay making hear: the Dutch Do not know what a sythe is. In our lot whe have Not more than 4 Acres of Wood. The Land in jeneral is very Good. Our



Homestead is of Two sorts: one part very Light and Sandy, the other Black soil. We have Got vines figges and Plantes Which Grow well. Thear is in the Woods Different kind of fruits witch are very Good, but we dont know theor Names yet.

Thearin is Abundance of Trees and Birds witch we never saw sutch Before. Many of the Birds are Remarkabley Butifull. Hear is plenty of monkes and many wild Bores, one Brickshares and Partridges and Guinea Hens. The Countrey is very Extensive: we can see many miles Round with out seeing one House, only settlers like ourselves. The nearest Town that I know of is Grains town (*Grahamstown*), witch is Betwixt 20 and 30 miles from us. The Nearest Dutch man's house is 16 miles. We are Within 3 or 4 miles from Bathurst witch is to be the Principle Town in Coliney and to all the Settlers. The Govenor, his the Excelant Lord Summersett, Laid the first stone of a Large Building theair on the 9 Instant. Thear is settlers all Round us. Thear is 35 Parties Which form so many Towns; Whe lye Nearly in the senter. Ours is reckoned to Be one of the Best Locations. We are nine or ten miles from the sea cost.

We hear talk of the Caffers (*Kaffirs*), But that is all the same as the talk about the wild Beast. I never Have see Any, only a large laner (*hyena?*) as one of our Neighbour Shot by Setting a gun fast in the Ground and Beating (*baiting*) it with Beef, witch was a very large one.

Our Government is very Good to us in finding us stone (*stores?*): whe have had Rations Ever since we Landed and Expect to Receive them till our Crops will mantane us. Our Rations is one pound and Half of meat per man per Day witch we Receive as Live Stock, and 12 ounce of flower per day. We Receive Them monthl;y, witch are more than six sheep to my family (*per?*) month. And sprits witch we have had more than 3 Gallons, Nearly 4 Att once of Brandy.

In the tent togeather tools of most movst are Provided for us without money the first time, Sutch as Axes, Saws, Spades, Shovels, pans, frying pans, Plows, Harrows, Beds, Blankets,

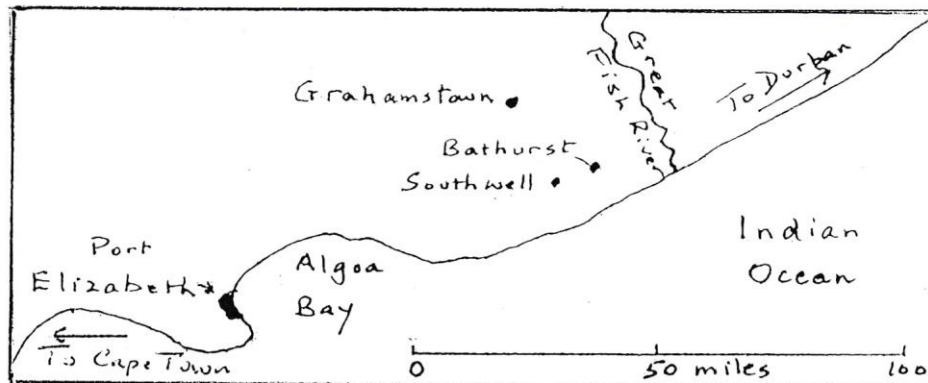
Sythes, Sickels, And Carpenters Tools. And and At very Low price: Good Saws at 3s . 6d per peice, Blankets 5s., with other Things in propotion, so that if any of you will Come over we Can find you with a Good Dinner And Plenty of tools to work with and a Bed to Ly on hear, and Plenty of Land for Nothing, And Good Incouragement.

I wish my freinds and Neibours had come with us. They would have had house and Land and Cows with other Cattle. By this the climate is very Good, the are (*air?*) Pure, the weather not very hot (I have never new it hott then I have felt it in England). But our midsummer Is about Christmas. We have been hear one Winter, June, July and August, and I never saw frost or snow. We Never had our health Better nor never so well Before. Our Prospect are very Promising. Hear is plenty of Land, Government Gives great Incouragement, and we are sittuated Near What is Expected to be the Greatest Markett Town in the Coliny. Theay (*are*) expecting to form a Bay within six or eight miles from Bathurst, Witch will Greatly help Trade and Comers.

Thearfore i wish as many of my freinds to Come as Can. I will do what I can for them. I wish you to Communicate this to all my freinds. Tell Brother Willm hallam he may do Well. John Hodgett mught do well - Smiths are wanted, and Government lends tools. Tell Mr thomas Cook hear is Plenty of Good Land. Willm tyers of Plumtree wished to hear from me: Brother Willm Pike will tell him from me, this is the third letter I have sent to you, And I wish to have An answer as soon as posseble. Please to direct for Nottingham Party, Clumber, Near Bathurst, South Africa. We send our Best Love to you All our freinds, Especially my Brothers and sister. I Charge them to meet me in a better world. My Prayer is Continually offered to the Throne of Grace for you all, as I trust yours is for us. My Love to James homes (*Holmes?*) and family, with all my Class mates. Tell them to hold fast to the Leard (*Lord*). Tell Brother Simpson to be faithful; my Love to mathey Hodgett and Wife,

to Willm Pike and Fammily, to michil Bonser and Wife, to mr  
Wm Eggleston and fammily, To Mr Barnet, and all freinds. So  
fair Well  
Yours Willm Pike

#### Sketch map of the Grahamstown Area of Cape Province



#### Explanatory Notes and context of the Pike letter

In 1819, the British government, which had only recently taken control of the South African Cape Colony from the Dutch (to forestall the French during the Napoleonic wars, and to act as a staging post for ships to and from India) sponsored a settlement scheme in the district of Albany, south of the Great Fish river and near the coast in what is now the Eastern Cape, between Port Elizabeth and East London.

The aim was threefold: to create a buffer zone of densely occupied land between sparsely settled white pastoralists and indigenous blacks (Xhosas), who were located on opposite sides of the Great Fish river; to establish a British presence in the newly acquired colony, where most whites were Dutch; and to ameliorate unemployment, pauperism and the unacceptably high level of the poor rate in Britain, in the aftermath of war and widespread enclosures. Of these, the first seems to have been



paramount, and it determined the policy of small land grants which was to doom the agricultural project to failure.

Organisation of the scheme was decentralised, often on a county basis, with local gentry and aristocrats making most of the arrangements and raising much of the necessary money, though the government provided sea transport free.<sup>2</sup> The Nottinghamshire contingent was run by a committee headed by the Duke of Newcastle, supported by the Duke of Portland, Earl Manvers, the County Clerk of the Peace (Edward Smith Godfrey, who conducted most of the correspondence, now held by Nottinghamshire Archives) and the Rev. Thomas Becher, more famous today for his association with the founding of Southwell Workhouse. The whole contingent were settled in the same locality, within a few miles of Bathurst (named after the then Colonial Secretary), in districts which came to be known as Clumber (after the Nottinghamshire seat of the Duke of Newcastle) and Southwell.<sup>3</sup>

About a thousand men, together with their families, were settled, of which Nottinghamshire provided over 150, including 60 men and 26 women, though more than this applied to join the scheme. According to a list of applicants<sup>4</sup> drawn up on October 30th, 1819, they nearly all came from the three parishes of Nottingham itself (St. Mary's, St. Peter's and St. Nicholas'), but there were a few from nearby villages - Radford, Mapperley and Keyworth. There was also a man from Bunny (William Cross<sup>5</sup>), but he seems to have dropped out - he is not among those listed on 30th. January, 1820, as having set sail from Liverpool for the Cape. The Keyworth family comprised William Pike (aged 41)<sup>6</sup>, writer of the above letter, together with his wife Mary (44), and their children Thomas (19),

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<sup>2</sup> There were over 50 parties, drawn from all parts of Britain and Ireland; the Nottinghamshire party was larger than most - see L.E. Edwards, *The 1820 Settlers in South Africa*, Longmans, 1934, pp. 174-5.

<sup>3</sup> see Thoroton Society Record Series Volume 21, 1962, pp. 40 - 64.

<sup>4</sup> see Nottinghamshire Archives, CP/5/1/4/113-115

<sup>5</sup> The same William Cross is named in the 1841 and 1851 censuses for Bunny as a shoemaker or cordwainer, and on pp. 19 and 20 of the K&DLHS Newsletter No. 29.

<sup>6</sup> At least three William Pikes lived in Keyworth and fathered children during the second decade of the 19th. century, according to the parish baptismal registers. All were framework knitters.

Sarah (17), William (16), Elijah (6) and Rose (4). All can be traced in the Keyworth baptismal and marriage registers, except William Junior, suggesting he may have been adopted. Mary Pike is named in the Keyworth marriage register for 1799 as Mary Hallam of Bunny.

William Pike was, in 1819, a pauper. A letter from Keyworth's Overseer of the Poor, William Cook, dated 9th. November, 1819 and addressed to the Clerk of the Peace,<sup>7</sup> describes him as such, and adds that "he demands of the parish £30 to purchase necessities for the voyage". The purpose of the letter is (i) to find out where the money is to come from - from the government or from various local sponsors, or from the parish poor rate; and (ii) advice as to a secure method of payment which did not involve handing the money over direct to Pike. As a pauper he was probably regarded as somewhat feckless - stereotyping the poor was as common then as now. We have no record of a reply.

The October list of applicants is remarkable in that of the 76 Nottinghamshire men named, 60 gave their occupation as framework knitter.<sup>8</sup> That industry was undergoing one of its periodic depressions, associated this time with a change in men's fashion, from breeches and hose to long trousers and short socks, and there were presumably many framework knitters out of work and dependent on the Poor Rate. William Pike was evidently one of them. However, in the later January list of those who actually set out for the Cape, the number of men is reduced to 60, and of these only 17 gave their occupation as framework knitter. It seems that some (many!) had changed their occupation in the intervening three months, perhaps because the organisers were unwilling to take so many of the same trade. Thus, while William Pike is shown as a framework knitter on both lists, his eldest son, Thomas, is a framework knitter in the earlier and a labourer in the later list.

Framework knitters seem to have been out of favour with the leader of the Nottinghamshire party, a London surgeon called Thomas Calton. In a letter written en route (position given as latitude "nothing" and longitude 20

<sup>7</sup> Nottinghamshire Archives, CP/5/1/6/29-32

<sup>8</sup> The occupational structure of the Nottinghamshire contingent was not typical: over all, farmers and agricultural workers comprised 55% of the colonists, artisans (of whom less than a tenth were framework knitters) 33%, shopkeepers 7%, professionals 2%, servicemen and seamen 4%. (I.E. Edwards, *op.cit.*, pp. 171-3).

on 14th. March, 1820) and transferred to a passing north-bound ship, Calton complains "Some there are whom I find have proved themselves greater eaters than workers, so I am afraid will prove the same at The Cape. These are the framework knitters. I must sincerely beg and pray you send no more here." Whether or not there was any substance in the complaint, it is unlikely that skill on a knitting frame was the best qualification for pioneer farmers breaking in virgin land, which is what the new settlers were to find themselves doing. On the other hand, those few framework knitters from villages, like the Pikes, may have managed smallholdings as well as operated knitting frames, and would almost certainly have done casual farmwork before emigrating.

The optimistic tone of William Pike's letter seems not to have been borne out by subsequent events. The government were intent on creating a densely populated settlement which would have sufficient manpower to fend off marauding 'Kaffirs' (a pejorative term used by whites to refer to blacks), so individuals were only allocated about four acres each, from which a living could only be obtained by intensive cultivation. But the land and climate were not suitable for intensive farming, even when conducted by experienced farmers, which the majority of the settlers were not. The soils were mostly acid, the rains unreliable; the first crops of corn were ruined by disease; and many lost livestock in 'Kaffir' raids. Within three years, more than half had abandoned their land and moved into the townships to pursue trades they had followed in Britain, though that refers to all the settlers and not necessarily to the Nottinghamshire contingent.<sup>9</sup> In any case, enough of the Nottinghamshire party stayed on in the immediate locality for both Clumber and Southwell to acquire railway stations later in the 19th. century, and Pikes were still living nearby in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> But we know no more of what happened to William Pike and his family. Many of the original settlers prospered as artisans and craftsmen after their farms had failed, in a country where their skills were in demand,<sup>11</sup> and it is to be hoped that the Pikes were among them.

Two words in the letter give a clue to William Pike's religious affiliation: he refers to his 'class mates'. He could obviously write

<sup>9</sup> Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit on South Africa, 1993, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Thoroton Society Record Series, Volume 21, 1962.

<sup>11</sup> I.E. Edwards: *op. cit.*, p. 147.



(unusual for a pauper at the time), though his spelling was idiosyncratic, so he probably had some schooling.<sup>12</sup> If Keyworth had had a day school in the late 1780s and early 1790s, when William was of elementary school age, it is unlikely that he would still be referring to his 'class mates' thirty years later, if for no other reason than that the school, with only one teacher, would not be divided into classes. He may have learnt the rudiments at a Sunday school, which might have had enough (volunteer) teachers to divide the children into classes, though whether much would be learnt with lessons only once a week is doubtful. But the word 'class' was used, as it still is, to describe groups of *adults* into which congregations of Methodists were and still are divided. This had and has nothing to do with social class, but is analogous to the idea of the tutorial group in a university. The class provides mutual spiritual support for its members, considered especially important in the absence of a resident minister, and may have included help with reading in the early days. So reference to 'class-mates' most likely indicated a Methodist connection.

There is further circumstantial evidence of William Pike and his family being Methodists: the revivalist language at the beginning and end of the letter; the reference to local preachers; and the fact that so many Pikes and so many framework knitters in 19th. century Keyworth were Methodists - indeed, another William Pike, perhaps the one referred to in the letter, is thought to have founded the Primitive Methodist congregation in Keyworth in 1818.<sup>13</sup>

The letter was written eight years before the first (Primitive) Methodist chapel was built in the village in 1828 - the house now at 12, Elm Avenue - confirming that there was an organised Methodist congregation some years before there was a chapel. (There would have had to be for the money to be raised to build the chapel.) We do not know who most of these early Methodists were, but we can assume that, in addition to "Brother Willm Pike", "Brother Simpson" was one, and perhaps "Mathey

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<sup>12</sup> It is possible that Pike dictated the letter to a scribe, if he could not write himself.

<sup>13</sup> The first documented reference to Methodists in Keyworth is a Wesleyan circuit plan of 1809 - a programme of dates and visiting preachers. It seems that the Wesleyans died out or were absorbed by the Primitives a decade later. See: J. Atkins, *Keyworth Methodist Church Centenary Booklet*, 1981.

Copy of first page of William Pike's letter from South Africa  
(reduced in size)

Chimber Valley near Bathurst Nov 10<sup>th</sup> 1820  
Dear and Honored Parents and friends this comes  
with our Love to you hoping that it will find you  
Well Both in Body and Soul as in mercy it leaves  
us for with I thank God I feel Thankfull to  
God for placing us here we are all Contented  
And happy our Prospect for a Better World  
Are brightening we have Preaching and  
Praying meeting at our house When the wea-  
ther Does not Permit us to Be out we have 6  
Local Preachers with in a few miles Round We  
Arrived here The 16 of July After staying 7  
Weeks in Algoe Bay and 8 Days Pleasant  
Riding in Company with about 50 waggons thro  
rough woods and Pleasant Plains and a Delifull  
Country without Going Through one Town and  
But a few houses We had no Danger with  
Respect to wild Beasts for tho we richer

Copy of a page of William Belshaw's letter from America  
(reduced in size)

I pray be so good as to send this to Bartholomew Bridge otherwise  
 send my best word that we are all alive and in good health  
 which we ought to be very thankful for many the Lord  
 bless us all and direct us in all our undertakings. I was  
 in June 10<sup>th</sup> West of New York sooner than we expected  
 so that I had not time to send you this letter was so wet  
 the the country very much it is a dead letter but  
 here there was several farms to sell all over the new  
 which they want to sell and go forth from up the coun-  
 try Mrs Bradsell's shoemaker that was apprentice to  
 Mrs Garrison of Weymouth Tenquies for at Ethia I  
 got out of the boat and run first where after a while  
 search I miss him out He had left after 5 days  
 before and is gone up to buy land at Illinois. Bread  
 is higher here than in England. Brother George was  
 bid 3 dollars per week and Board at New York and  
 after the first week or two he would give him 6 dollars  
 6 dollars is the regular price but taking is so different  
 to what it is in England. Cakes of flour are a great  
 deal better here than in England. Butchers meat  
 is low we are going to crop the lake Erie this year  
 for Dutton who is we shall go a few miles in the  
 country and then back to our usual place. The  
 traveling we have come 531 miles from New York



Hodgett" (Matthias Hodget, the blacksmith), Michael Bonser, William Eggleston, Mr. Barnett and "Brother" William Hallam were others, though the last may have been so called because he was a brother-in-law of the writer. The fact that William Pike's children were baptised in the Church of England shows that in its early days, Methodists - even Primitive Methodists - had not cut their connections with the established church entirely - John Wesley himself is reputed to have said that he had lived and would die a member of the Church of England. Keyworth's Methodist baptismal register dates from 1835.

William Pike was probably homesick when he wrote the letter; he was certainly keen to persuade some of his friends to come out and join him. In that he seems to have been unsuccessful, because most of those named in the letter appear in the 1851 Keyworth census enumerator's schedules: Matthias Hodgett (then aged 59), Michael Bonser (60), Mr. (Thomas) Barnett (64), John Hodgett (64) and Thomas Cook (59); while in the 1841 census schedules we find another William Pike (then aged 50). They were all somewhat younger contemporaries of the letter writer, who would have been 62 in 1841 and 72 in 1851. It is indeed highly unlikely that any of William's Keyworth friends ever saw him again: the government sponsored no further emigration to The Cape with free passage, for although, as we have noted, some individual settlers eventually prospered, the main purpose of the project - to create a buffer zone of dense settlement between the Xhosas and white pastoralists, was a failure, and 'Kaffir' wars continued sporadically through much of the 19th. century.

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## **Letters from William Belshaw written in 1834**

*There are two letters: one completed, the other only just begun. Some of the photocopy is difficult to read; gaps filled with dots indicate where it is indecipherable. As with the Pike letter, original spelling has been retained but punctuation and paragraphing added.*

### **First letter**

**New York**

Dear Cousin,

It is with great pleasure that I now take my pen to write a few lines to you from Americas shores. We reached New York May 21 after a voyage of 36 days. We left England on the 14th of April, we sailed along the coast of Wales .... steadily having a soft breeze the north east wind ..... About eight oclock Sister Mae was rather sick ... we went to bed but the rest of us appeared verry well. About half past eleven oclock The wind blew and tossed the ship about and in half an hour there was a general vomiting all around. About four oclock it began to abate, I got up and went on deck. The sea was all covered with white foam, we were all of us sick but the next day being fine and a steady wind we was much better. The wind continued favourable for us for ten days during which time we made more than half the way and if the wind had continued for us we should have been here in 8 or 10 days more, but the wind have got into the west and blew a strong gale so that we had to tack about. But on the next day it turned into the north west and blew very severe that it drove us out of our coast (*course?*) a long way. Father and Mary was frightened - Father allways was afraid that the vessel would turn over I was not ..... a capital new wife (?)..... ..... at Boston. Captain Hall is native of America Born at

Boston he is about 33 years of age has sailed to England 35 times .....

In the ship the first mate was a strong fellow with the Irish - he could not bear them. There was about 30 English besides ourselves and as many scotch and about one hundred Irish there was three fiddlers on board. The Irish had dancings every day for the first ten days but when the weather was rough they was still. The Irish was in the steerage, the English and scotch in the second cabin who had often some quarrels with them at the fire about cooking, though there was one for us and one for them, yet we could not keep them from ours. They often had fights among themselves: when two began they always all began, so sometimes they threw sticks out and played away as hard as they could. We are all very glad we have got out of their company. The man that came with us was the most master of them; he never was that least sick all the while at sea. Mother, (?) Mary, Henry, John and myself was the worst. The terrible (?) twins was very well, particular Charles, Samuel, Ann, Thomas and George was very well. After the first night it had been very cold weather all the while at sea. Our Captain said he never knew it so stormy at this time of the year and to hold so long: we was 22 days when the stormy weather set in and yet did not get more than 150 miles. Then there was calm 2 or 3 days; one day the sea was very smooth, almost every person was on deck looking at porpoises that was darting about in the water. Some of them had large ..... and some more which the Sailors called Spanish men of war. When a large turtle came floating on the top of the water, when the captain ordered the boat to be let down, He got in the boat with the second mate and 2 sailors. They rowed the boat out round it and then came close to it. When the captain seized it it made a great struggle and was very near pulling the captain into the water but the other got to and helped him and got him into the



Boat. He was a fine fellow, weighed about 5 stone - they said he would be worth 2 pounds at New York.

Whit Sunday we expected to see land before night but the wind kept much ahead of us. Monday the wind was better and we came very near land at night but the wind turned quite calm. Many of the passengers ..... went to bed. On Tuesday morning the wind was very still; we could not sail but they was a great number of fishing vessels all around us so we knew we was not far from land. About 12 oclock we came within sight of land, a pilot came on board and we sailed into the channel. It was the most beautiful sight I ever saw in my life: there was an island on one side, Statten Island on the other was some very pretty, gentlemens houses and beautiful green sides and such ..... of green trees as I never saw in my life.

We then came over against ..... quarantine ground when the .... was to come on board but he did not come until the next morning. The Captain sent two sailors on shore for some brooms (?) and tobacco and cigars which are very cheap here. They returned home loaded with the fruit of the land - we never went to bed that night. Four or five of our passengers sent for a gallon of Brandy it cost six shillings. Cigars the Captain gave us, there is 6 for a cent so we was smoking and drinking most of the night. In the morning the Captain let us take the boat and go on shore where they was every thing we could wish for. They was apples, oranges and nuts - walnuts, almonds - and figs. We went to a public house and got a leg of Veal. We picked the bone. We had pies and tarts of all kinds, Sherry wine and ale, we drank it all alike, 3 cents a glass.

The captain got a steam boat to take us to New York which was 5 miles distant. It was a very beautiful steamer. They sold liquors on board. Almost all our ships crew went upon the steamer, some of them soon got fresh with the liquors which is very strong. New York was very handsome

place: there is rows of trees on the sides of the streets; the people dress very grand, most of them have rings on there fingers. We are going up the country by a steam boat for Ollaway (*Albany?*) and so up to the state of Illonies, (*Illinois?*)<sup>14</sup> which all the people almost prefer to any other part. We shall take Mr. Attenborough's Frank with us to Buffalo where we are informed will be the best place to send it from. Pray be so good as to send this to Barky Bridge; otherwise send my Ant word that we are all alive and in good health, which we ought to be very thankfull for. May the Lord bless us all and direct us in all our undertakings.

**Buffalo June 10th.** We left New York sooner than we expected, so that I had not time to send you this letter. We did not like the country very much; it is a deal better about here. There was several farms to sell, all on the road which they want to sell and go further up the country. Mr. Bradiswell, shoemaker that was apprenticed to Mr. Garner of Wysall, I enquired for at Utica I got out of the boat and ran first where after a little search I missed him out. He had left Utica 5 days before and is gone up to buy land Illinies.<sup>15</sup>

Bread is higher (*dearer*) here than in England. Brother George was bid 5 dollars per week and Board at New York, and after the first week or two he would give him 6 dollars. 6 dollars is the regular price but baking is so different to what it is in England. Cousin Wm Voce would do a great deal better here than in England: Butchers meat is low (*cheap*).

We are going cross the Lake Erie this afternoon for Detroit when we shall go a few miles in the country and then look

<sup>14</sup> The Belshaws may not have seen these names written down, and spelt them as they heard them pronounced, in an unfamiliar accent. Albany would certainly have been the major terminus for steamboats going up the Hudson river from New York.

<sup>15</sup> This suggests that the Belshaws were not the first from the Keyworth district to emigrate to America. Perhaps Mr. Bradiswell had encouraged them to follow in his footsteps - migrants are often drawn towards places where there is some personal link or recommendation.

around us. We are very tired of travelling: we have come 550 miles from New York and it is 370 up the lake. Mother and father, Brothers and Sisters unite with me in kind love to you and all our kind relations and neighbours. I remain your affectionate

Cousin  
Wm Belshaw

Mr John Savidge  
Bunny  
On the London Road  
England  
Mr Solloingham

Thomas Annabel  
Thorpe

(some more names)

### Second letter

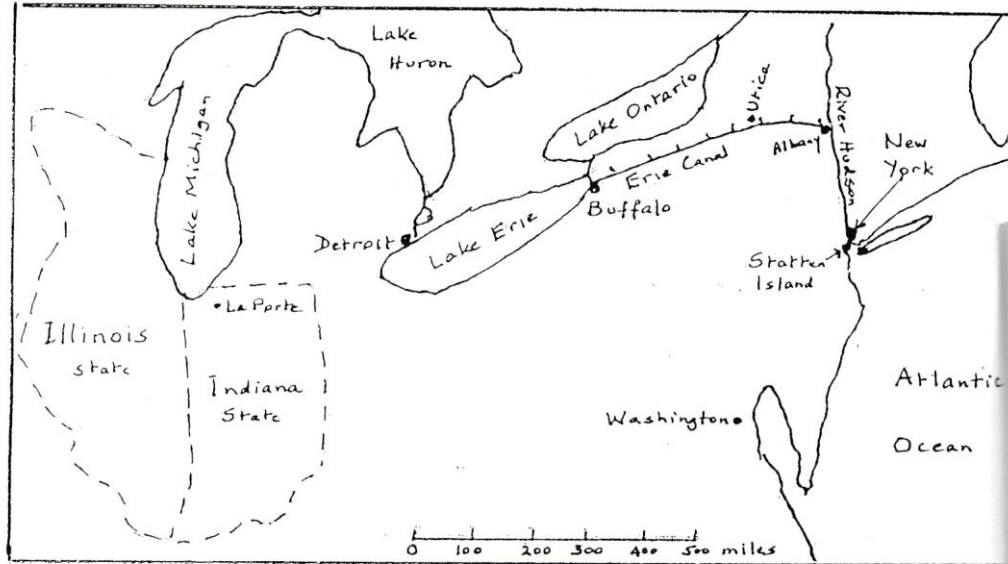
**September 20th 1834 Direct Rolling Prairie County of Laport  
state of Indiana North America**

Dear Grandfather and Grandmother I now take my pen to write you a letter from America which I believe you have expected for some time first I intended to write before now but we have been very busy in harvest

*(that is all there is)*



**Sketch map of the Belshaws' Journey from New York to La Porte, Indiana.**



**Explanatory notes and context of the Belshaw letters**

William Belshaw junior, writer of the accompanying letters (one complete, the other only just begun) from America dated 1834, appears to have been the 21 year-old eldest son of George and Elizabeth Belshaw. The Belshaws were a large family who had lived in Keyworth for at least three generations. They were tenant farmers.

William Belshaw senior, grandfather of the letter-writer, first appears in the Keyworth land tax returns in 1785, as one of the leading farmers (but not landowners) in the parish. He had succeeded George Belshaw (his father?) as tenant on land belonging to Mrs. Tibson in that year. But he is also named in Bunny's parish register of 1774 as a resident of Keyworth marrying Elizabeth Woodroffe of Bunny; and in the Keyworth Independent

Church accounts from 1776<sup>16</sup> as an annual subscriber of one guinea for a double seat in the then recently built chapel (now known as The Hall, on Nottingham Road). He was buried in Keyworth church in 1830 at the age of 84, so he was born in 1745/6. There is no record of his baptism in Keyworth, suggesting he was either born elsewhere or his parents were dissenters - his own son had his children baptised at the Independent church, whose register goes back to 1790 - not early enough to record William's baptism. The grandfather and grandmother to whom the second letter is addressed were presumably the writer's maternal grandparents.

As a leading farmer William senior enjoyed a relatively high status in the village, and his son George served as a church warden on a number of occasions<sup>17</sup> in the 1820s (while having his children baptised at the Independent Chapel - see below). After enclosure he occupied the farm belonging to Samuel Smith M.P., which subsequently became known as Shaw's Farm, named after the family who succeeded the Belshaws as tenants in 1834 on the death of Smith, and who occupied it for the next 90 years. It was based on what is now 36, Main Street.

William Belshaw's son, George, took over the farm some time in the 1820s. He had at least ten children whose baptisms are recorded in the Independent church register between 1812 and 1833. A daughter - Elizabeth - died in infancy, but, with one exception, the rest are named in the letter and therefore survived long enough to embark on the voyage to America with their parents. George's eldest son, William Junior, the writer of the letter, also refers to "father" and "mother" (George and Elizabeth) who, by 1834, were probably in their forties. So the writer's party consisted of at least eleven - the parents and nine children ranging in age from 22 (Mary) to 1 (Edward). One cannot be sure because baby Edward is not named in the letter, while Charles, who is, does not appear in the baptismal register. In addition, they took with them Frank Attenborough - presumably a young family friend - as far as Buffalo. What is certain is that the whole Belshaw family left Keyworth: there is no more mention of them in the registers after 1834, neither is the name found under Keyworth in later directories or in the 1841 and subsequent censuses.

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<sup>16</sup> In Nottinghamshire Archives IR3/6/1

<sup>17</sup> See Churchwardens' Accounts in Nottinghamshire Archives PR1141

The Belshaws continued to have family connections in the locality, however. The first letter is addressed to a cousin called John Savidge of Bunny, and the Keyworth marriage register records Ann Belshaw - almost certainly a sister of George - marrying a man of this name in 1794. From the Bunny register we also learn of the baptism of their son, John, in 1795. It is he to whom the letter was addressed 39 years later as Cousin John. (The Bunny register also notes that baby John's father was an innkeeper, while the letter locates the inn "on the London Road", which suggests it was the Rancliffe Arms.) Three other Belshaw brides of about the same period - probably sisters of Ann - were married to John Voce of Bradmore (a relation of whom is mentioned in the letter), John Eggleston of Keyworth and John Shepparson of Keyworth.

One can only speculate on the reason for the family emigrating. The father, George, was running a fairly large farm and his older children were by 1834 able to be useful about the house or on the farm. But they were fairly well educated for the time (evinced by the vocabulary, syntax and spelling of the letter), and were perhaps ambitious. Seven of the children were boys and opportunities for acquiring tenancies, let alone land-ownership, were limited for people of their means. The main alternative to farming in Keyworth was framework knitting, a notoriously insecure and unremunerative occupation; while towns were at their most squalid, with life-expectancy little more than half that of rural areas before conditions were ameliorated by the introduction of municipal water supply, sewage disposal and housing by-laws. The mid-west of the United States, on the other hand, was just opening up to settlers with offers of large tracts of land at nominal prices - indeed much virgin land was acquired by settlers at that time by squatting with no payment at all.<sup>18</sup> It offered the prospect of both economic advancement and healthy living for those with skill and energy who were prepared to cut their ties with their homeland, endure the discomfort and danger of a lengthy sea voyage and overland trek, and venture into the unknown with all their possessions at risk. The following

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<sup>18</sup> In 1809 land had been acquired by the U.S. government in Indiana and Illinois from indigenous Indians, who were then removed further west, using dubious means and at nominal cost - 3 million acres, or about the size of East Anglia, for \$7,000 and annuities of \$1750. (M.Ridge & R.A. Billington: *America's Frontier Story*, p. 256).



extract from a letter to England by an earlier settler gives an idea of what drew people like George Belshaw to the mid-west:

*"Our soil appears to be rich, a fine black mould, inclining to sand, from one to three or four feet deep; so easy of tillage as to reduce the expense of cultivation below that of the land I have been accustomed to in England.....We are not called upon, after receiving our money for produce, to refund a portion of it for rent, another portion for tithe, a third for poor rates and a fourth for taxes; which latter are here so light as scarcely to be brought into the nicest calculation."*<sup>19</sup>

It is unlikely that George saw this letter, but there were many others like it, and there were advertising companies, like the Erie Canal Company, anxious to encourage settlers who would ultimately become clients and boost their profits. George must have felt that here was the opportunity he was looking for: his own farm experience and his children's labour (four of his sons were already teenagers or older when they set out) would provide the skill and energy to bring such a promising wilderness under cultivation.

Most of the completed letter describes the journey. The 36-day trans-Atlantic crossing was by sailing boat, where the main pre-occupation was the strength and direction of the wind. The writer also mentions fellow passengers - Irish outnumbered English and 'Scotch' combined, which was normal even before the Irish potato famine of the mid-1840s - and refers to both living and cooking arrangements, which were clearly very basic. They then travelled by steam boat from New York up the Hudson river to Albany, by horse-drawn barge along the Erie Canal (completed in 1825) to Buffalo - the canal was too shallow for the paddle steamers of the time; and then along Lake Erie, again by steam boat, to Detroit. It seems that the first letter was posted from here, though, if this is correct, the writer's estimates of distances travelled are not very accurate: Detroit is over 600 miles from New York by the route taken (he makes it 550), of which the journey along Lake Erie is only 280 miles (he says 370).

The second letter is from Laporte County in the state of Indiana, which is immediately south of Lake Michigan, about 50 miles from Chicago, and over 200 miles west of Detroit (from where the writer had said they were

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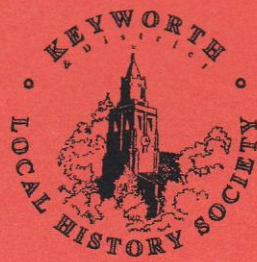
<sup>19</sup> Morris Birkbeck, *Letters from Illinois* (London, 1818) quoted in Ridge & Billington, op. cit., p.280. Tithes in Keyworth had been abolished at enclosure in 1799, but the other deductions mentioned would still have applied.

going "a few miles into the country and then look around", presumably for work or for land or both). There seems to have been a change of plan: they either trekked overland for more than a few miles from Detroit to Laporte, or travelled most of the way via Lakes Huron and Michigan, a more comfortable, but much longer journey of 600 miles.

We do not know how long the whole journey from New York took: they set out soon after May 21 and the letter from Laporte is dated September 20 of the same year - i.e., four months later. But they must have been in Laporte some time because they had been "very busy in harvest", presumably working on an already established farm to earn some money until they acquired their own land.

Whether they stayed in Laporte or moved on to Illinois (the state immediately west of Indiana) we cannot tell, but the first letter implies that Illinois (if that is what is meant by "the state of Illoneis") is where they are making for. Perhaps they had responded to an advertisement, newspaper article or letter from an acquaintance, proclaiming Illinois as the promised land. Unlike the plot occupied by the Pikes in South Africa, both Indiana and Illinois really were 'promised land', capable of yielding rich harvests of crops and livestock, where the Belshaws should have prospered. A search for Belshaws living in either Indiana or Illinois today might be the next step in resolving where George and his family eventually settled, and how they fared.

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