

Michael and Gillian Carrucan's Visit to Australia, December 2008

Michael, this report's author, is the great grandson of Michael Carrucan and Mary née Droney, who continued to reside on the Fanore farm after three siblings, Bridget, Patrick and Peter Carrucan emigrated from County Clare in the 1850s, followed in time by their mother.

Michael (b 1953) is the first of our Irish family to visit Australian Carrucans since Bridget, Patrick, Peter and their mother Bridget emigrated in the 1850-60s.

He now takes over his story.

As we were visiting a friend in New South Wales, we contacted Jim Martin, great grandson of John Coleman and Bridget née Carrucan, the first of the family to migrate, leaving Fanore in November 1853. I was enquiring as to where the Carrucans were buried and to see if it would be possible to meet some of the family members.

Our first encounter was with one of our distant cousins when we arrived at Melbourne airport. Tim Erickson - great grandson of Patrick Carrucan and Mary O'Brien, met us and took us to his home.

Our first impressions of Australia made us realize how brave the Carrucans had been to set off to an unknown land, not only the other side of the world but it would take months to reach, in very difficult conditions. The vastness of the country and the huge distances between places made us realise the momentous changes that they would have experienced.

Ours was an itinerary and schedule that took in as much as possible of Victoria's best scenery, covering over a thousand kilometres, while giving us the opportunity to meet many distant relatives. John Martin, Jim's brother, very kindly lent us his car which enabled us to achieve these goals.

Our first couple of nights were at Tim and Lois' home. They made us welcome and we had the opportunity to meet their sons and their families. The next day was spent at Eltham where the families first settled. We visited the museum and had a guided tour from the President of the Eltham Historical Society. We were also shown the school register with the names of the Carrucan family from the 1860s.

Visiting the Eltham cemetery had a profound effect especially when we saw the graves with "Michael Joseph Carrucan" (my name) and Kathleen Carrucan and Patrick Carrucan - the same family names as our family which currently lives in Ireland. We took many photos of the graves and original houses in Eltham. Seeing the actual place where the family had established itself and lived all those years ago made us feel very proud.

We travelled along the scenic Great Ocean Road to reach our next stop, Woodford, where we met Peter and Joy Carrucan. Peter is of the Peter Carrucan - Hannah née Woods line. It was fascinating to see their home that they had built up from nothing and the small cows that they keep. We also noticed a similarity in Peter's character and mannerisms to those of Patsy Carrucan in Fanore, although they had never met! Just shows how strong the Carrucan genes are!

Next stop was to see Frank and Kathy Carrucan who hosted us in Ballarat. Frank is a descendent in the Patrick line. Ballarat is a fine city, the fortune of which was built upon the gold rush of the mid nineteenth century. We enjoyed having coffee at the Olympic lake which had dried up due to a drought in the area.

The following day we travelled to Maldon to lunch with Peter Cuffley and his brother. Peter is the historian-genealogist of the Sweeney/Carrucan families. Peter's great grandfather Thomas Sweeney was a founding settler in Eltham and our families intermarried in the early days.

They had a lot of information on the area where we now live in Wandsworth London. Their family had owned a mill in the Wandle area, and they even knew the name of the road that runs parallel to ours in London! What a small world in which we live.

We travelled north to Echuca, a river port on the Murray River. This was one of the highlights of our trip, meeting Maureen Kelly, a Brigidine Sister. She and the fellow members of their community made us very welcome and Maureen showed us the delights of Echuca, including Michael making a new friend at the local zoo - a brightly coloured parakeet.

Unfortunately we were not able to meet everyone and missed Jim and Elizabeth McMahon in Kinglake. Jim sent us pictures and the news cuttings of their heroism in saving people when the bush fires hit their area a year later.

Finally at the end of our trip, Father Peter Carrucan came to the Ericksons' home to take us to Melbourne Airport for our homeward journey to London. This was the briefest of all our meetings. Luckily he subsequently came to visit us in London.

Our special thanks must go to Jim, Helen and John Martin (R.I.P). without whom this trip would not have been possible. God Bless you all in Australia.

And now to some photos



Gillian and Michael with Tim Erickson



Michael with Peter and Joy Carrucan in Woodford



Michael with Peter Cuffley and his brother in Maldon



Michael with Sister Maureen Kelly and other Brigidine Sisters in Echuca



Michael makes friends with the local wildlife



From left to right: Michael, John Martin, Mary Conheady, Jim and Helen Martin



At Melbourne Airport just about to fly home – Gillian with Father Peter Carrucan