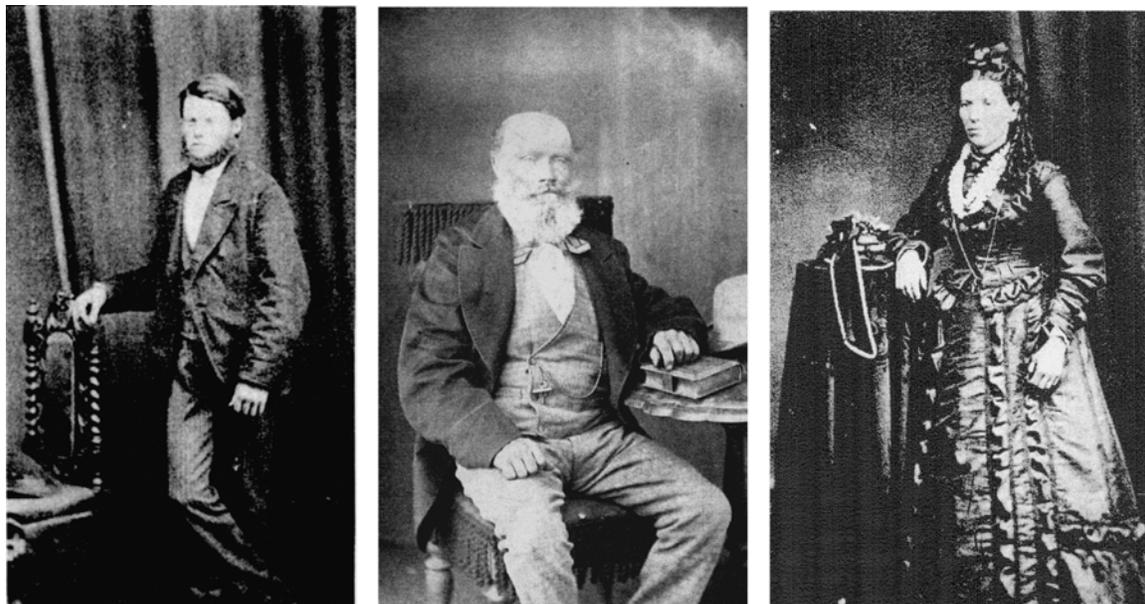


## The rise and fall of John Retallack (1821-1890)

by Michael L. Retallack, “Millamolong” via Mandurama, New South Wales, Australia.



A. John Retallack ca.1853

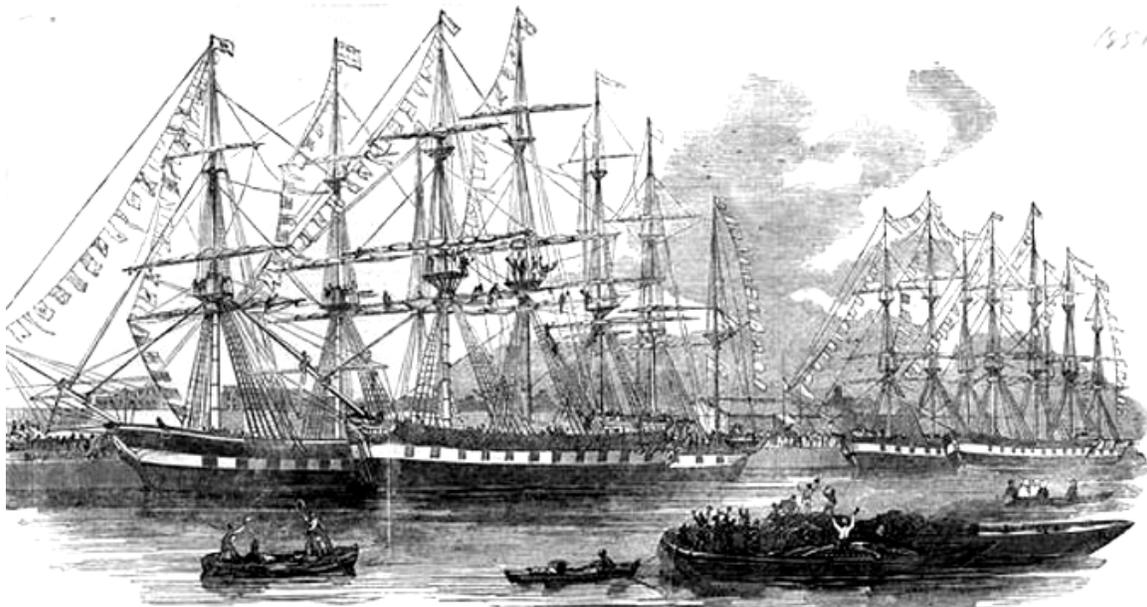
B. John Retallack ca.1870

C. Caroline Retallack ca.1853

Figure 1. Studio photos of John and Caroline Retallack (courtesy of Wendy Gollan).

The arrival of John Retallack (Fig. 1A-B) in Australia from Cornwall, has long been a mystery because there is no record of his passage on the 1849 voyage of the “Himalaya”<sup>1</sup>, nor on the 1851 voyage of the “Caucasian”<sup>2</sup>. John’s date of birth is also uncertain: 1828 is indicated by the age of 25 on his marriage license<sup>3</sup> of 1853, but 1821 by his death certificate<sup>4</sup> age of 69 in 1890, and 1812 by possible conviction records<sup>5</sup>. Finally his Cornish town is uncertain, and given as either Redruth<sup>1</sup> or Penzance<sup>6</sup>.

A reason to lie on his marriage certificate is that South Australian Company ships required settlers be “real labourers, going out to work for wages in the colony, of sound mind and body, not less than fifteen nor more than thirty years of age and married”<sup>7</sup>, so an 1821 or earlier birth date is more likely. By 1850 the marriage requirement had been dropped, but not the age requirement<sup>8</sup>. On the assumption that John Retallack was in Australia by 1850, the possibilities narrow to men with similar names and age between 13 and 29 in the British census of 1841, but missing from the age range 23-39 in 1851, or 33-49 in 1861 censuses<sup>9</sup>, or otherwise unaccounted. This eliminates three John Retallacks and one John Retallick born within the age range<sup>10-12</sup>. The most likely candidate was John Retalick (yet another different spelling), age 20 or 28 in 1841 (handwritten record is not clear), and living at Black Moor Tenancy, Parish of Ladock, with William and Ann Retalick (née Sobey, both age 70), Jane Waters (age 20), Cornelius Waters (age 1), Elizabeth Retalick (age 30), and Elizabeth Retalick (age 7). Elizabeth Rettallack (different spelling) is 40, born in Ladock, labourer and head of household, with her daughter Elizabeth (16), and father William (95) in Bissick Old Mill, Ladock in 1851, but by 1871, Elizabeth Retalick (61) lived alone at the same address. On the 1851 census the birthplace of this William Rettallack is given as St Columb Major, where the Retallacks



*Figure 2. The Canterbury Association ships “Bangalore”, “Dominion”, “Duke of Portland”, “Lady Nugent”, “Midlothian” and “Canterbury” on the East India docks, London, before sailing to Lyttleton, New Zealand.<sup>13</sup>*

have lived for centuries<sup>1</sup>. Jane Waters was no relation: she was 28 and a servant with son Cornelius then 10 and other children in Probus in 1851, but wife and age 61 with George Waters age 60 in Mousehole in 1881, and again age 70 with George 70 at Mousehole in 1891. John Retallick is missing from the 1851 Ladock household (that year spelled Rettalack), and there is no record of John’s death<sup>13</sup>. Mousehole is 5 km south of Penzance, but neither Mousehole nor Ladock are close to Redruth.

For Australia at this time transportation as a convict must be considered. On 9<sup>th</sup> April 1839 John Retallick age 27 (thus born 1812) was given a sentence of 6 months and 12 months successively for two counts of larceny<sup>5</sup>, so would have been released by the 1841 census. On 14<sup>th</sup> October 1845, John Retallick age 25 (thus born 1820, so someone else) was charged with riot and assault, and given a one month sentence with sureties at Bodmin Assizes, along with 4 other young men, who received sentences of only a fortnight and sureties. On the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1847, John Retallick, now age 34 (thus born about 1813), was charged with larceny and given a sentence of 7 years and transportation at Bodmin Quarter Sessions<sup>5</sup>. On the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1850, the convicted John Retallick was deported to Australia in a fleet carrying 2400 convicts. John was transported with 302 others, on the barque “Bangalore”<sup>14-15</sup> (Fig. 2). The “Bangalore” was one of 4 ships turned away from Port Philip, near Melbourne, after they accepted 9 other ships with 1720 convicts. The “Bangalore” proceeded to Sydney, but New South Wales had not accepted convicts since 1840 and officially abolished transportation 1<sup>st</sup> October 1850. So the “Bangalore” continued to Moreton Bay as the last convict ship accepted there<sup>16</sup>. On arrival in Brisbane on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1850, John Retallick was one of 297 convicts who had not died enroute and were granted their ticket of leave before disembarkation, because Brisbane had not been a penal colony since 1842. Technically then, John Retallick was an “exile”, rather than a “convict” in the usual Australian sense.

There was some expectation of drunken riots<sup>17</sup>, which had followed release of convict exiles in Brisbane from the “Mountstuart Elphinstone” in 1849, but the official report of Superintendent McLean<sup>18</sup> was complimentary, and is quoted here. “I inspected such portions of the ship as were occupied by prisoners, which I found in all respects to be both clean and wholesome; the men themselves presented a very orderly and creditable appearance, fully bearing out the very excellent character given of them by the surgeon-superintendent, and with whose treatment during the voyage they expressed themselves perfectly contented. One remarkable fact is worthy of notice – that not a single punishment of any prisoner occurred since their embarkation.”

“After the muster and personal description of the men were completed, persons were permitted to visit the ship, but only under a written order from the police magistrate, and in eight days from that period the whole number was engaged, with the exception of three, who, by concurrence of Captain Wickham, were landed at Brisbane and received into barracks: two of those men were clerks and the other a Jew, and were expected to be specially applied for.”

“The wages obtained by the labouring portion of the men ranged from 13/- to 16/- a-year, and to mechanics and domestic servants were given 18/- to 30/- per annum, in each case with the usual rations. The readiness with which these men were applied for, and from various sources of information derived in the district, it is evident that there is still a great demand for this description of labour in the surrounding districts of Moreton Bay, and I am fully persuaded that had another vessel arrived with the “Bangalore” having on board the same number of men, they would have been eagerly sought for, and speedily disposed of. I may perhaps be permitted to remark that one agent alone at Brisbane had instructions from various persons to obtain 180 men, but of course was not successful in hiring so large a proportion from one vessel.”

The demand is understandable, because these “wages” were very low, even for the time and including food and board. John Retallick found employment on Gowrie, now a village, but then the sheep station of Henry Hughes, northeast of Toowoomba, on the Darling Downs, 137 km west of Brisbane<sup>19-20</sup>. It is tempting to consider this John Retallick the one who founded the Retallick family name in Adelaide, although he was older than John Retallick’s marriage and death certificates there<sup>3-4</sup>. Shipping records of free settlers and convicts are now computerized, and several Retallicks-Retallicks arrived 31<sup>st</sup> August 1854 and later<sup>14,21</sup>, but there are no other records of Retallicks that could arrive in Adelaide in time to marry Caroline Rashleigh in 1853. Perhaps this John Retallick drove sheep or cattle from Queensland, because both John Retallick, and his sons Charles and James in 1894 were familiar with the stock route following the Warrego River down to the Darling River, then the Murray River to near Adelaide<sup>1</sup>. The various spellings of the name are a concern, but John Retallick was illiterate, as indicated by his later signature with an X on the birth certificate of his son Charles from 25<sup>th</sup> May 1868 in Angaston<sup>22</sup>.

However he got there, John Retallick was in Adelaide by around 1851, probably at least age 30, and met his future wife Caroline Rashleigh, who lived in Mitcham, 11 km south of Adelaide. The village of Mitcham, now a suburb of Adelaide, was a center of the Cornish community and the Christian Bible Church in Australia<sup>23</sup>. At this time there were many employment options because of persistent lack of labour in the new Colony and the departure of many men to the Victorian gold fields<sup>24</sup>.

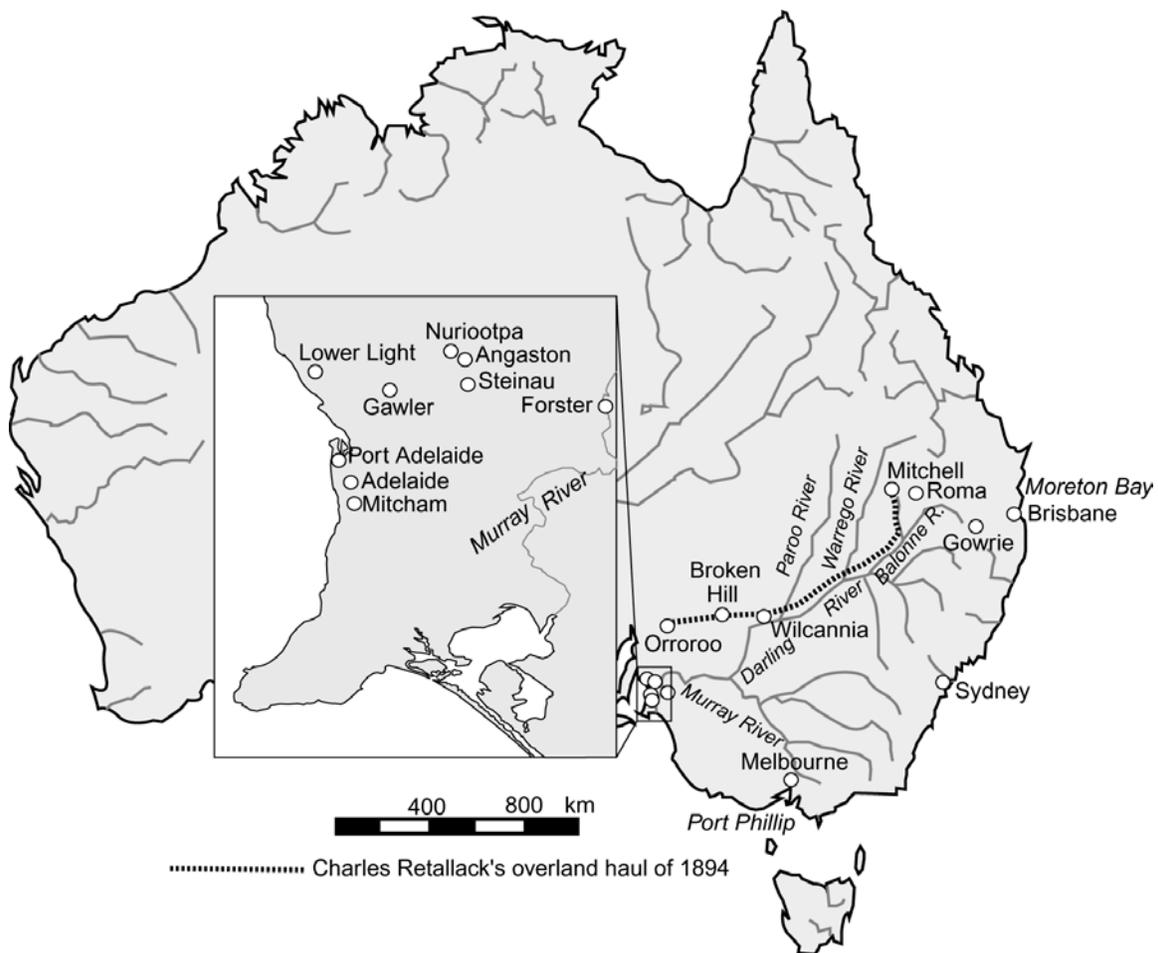


Figure 3. Major rivers, localities and overland routes of John and Caroline Retallack

The story of Caroline's family in the following paragraphs owes much to an account by Terry Moyle<sup>25</sup>. Her father was John Rashleigh, the son of John and Margaret Rashleigh (née Allen), born 13th September, 1795, and baptized at St Keverne, Cornwall on 15th, November, 1795. John Rashleigh married Phyllis Symons, the daughter of Robert Symons and Elizabeth (née Richards), in 1821. John was a yeoman farmer at Porthkerris a cove on the south Cornish coast between Porthallow and Porthoustock in St Keverne Parish. John and Phyllis had six children. Their first son was John (born 1822), then John James (1824), Elizabeth (1826 died young), William Richards (1827), Elizabeth Symons (1829), Caroline (1832), and Thomas Henry (1833). The family had strong ties to the Bible Christian chapel at Porthallow. Some of the children were baptized by the Bible Christian minister there, but others were baptized at St Keverne church. John Rashleigh was bed ridden for several years before he died but Phyllis Rashleigh managed the farm and developed business skills that stood her in good stead later in Australia. John died on 19th July, 1833, and was buried at Manaccan on 23rd July, 1833.

Caroline Rashleigh's stepfather, William Kinsman was born in Morenstow, north Cornwall, in 1799. He began his Bible Christian ministry in the Scilly Isles in 1825, and by 1833 he was preaching in Mevagissy, but then disappeared<sup>26</sup>. William may have left

the Methodist ministry, but continued to preach for the Bible Christian church. He appeared in St Keverne in 1833, and perhaps ministered to the ailing John Rashleigh at Porthkerris. On 14th August 1834, William Kinsman, bachelor of St Keverne, married Phyllis Rashleigh, widow, by licence at St Keverne church. Over the next ten years, Phyllis had six children with William Kinsman, five girls and a boy. Three of the children, Rosina, Grace and Phillippa, were baptized on 10th March 1843 at the family home at Porthkerris by the local Bible Christian minister. In both the 1841 and 1851 census returns, the Kinsman-Rashleigh family was at Porthkerris. Phyllis continued to manage the farm for fifteen years after marriage to William Kinsman. In the meantime, Phyllis's eldest daughter Elizabeth Symons Rashleigh had married her boyfriend Francis Rowe, and had emigrated to South Australia. Elizabeth had sent glowing letters home about life in Mitcham, South Australia. For some years the Kinsmans lost money because of potato blight, which also decimated Irish potato crops at the time<sup>26</sup>. As there was only a life left before the Porthkerris farm lease would end, they decided to emigrate to South Australia. On 11th November 1851, William and Phyllis together with their 6 children, plus William, Caroline and Thomas Rashleigh sailed from Plymouth on the 565 ton barque "Caucasian", under the command of Master Davidson<sup>21</sup>. The passage was sponsored by the South Australian Company, but William Kinsman was required to pay an excess fare of £37, because he had a large number of children and his daughter Phillippa was blind. William and Phyllis gave their ages as 30 for the passenger list of the Caucasian, when they were actually over 53 years old. This was due to a requirement of the South Australian Company that passengers be under 30 years of age<sup>18</sup>. Kinsman experience of farming was also important to meet the South Australia Company's occupation criterion. The Kinsman-Rashleighs arrived in Adelaide 8th February 1852.

The Rashleigh-Kinsman story in Australia can now be taken up from the memoirs of Thomas Playford<sup>23</sup>, who married Caroline's half-sister Mary Jane Kinsman in 1860. Thomas Playford was an orchardist and prominent politician: Member of South Australian Parliament for Onkaparinga 1868-1871, Premier of South Australia 1887-1889 and again in 1890-1892, and involved in planning the Federation of the Commonwealth of Australia, and drafting the Australian Constitution<sup>28</sup>. "I was most intimate with a family who came to Mitcham about the year 1852. For I married into that family. Some of the children were named Rashleigh and some Kinsman for Mrs Kinsman had been married twice. I heard the Rev. Kinsman preach twice in our little chapel, and thought he was good preacher. He was a tall, well built man with pleasing serious looking face much liked by his children. In the meantime, gold had been found in Victoria and the men in the colony were flocking there. Mr Kinsman resolved to go also and take William and John Rashleigh with him. He stayed long enough to see the rest of his family settled, then departed by ship for Melbourne. He and the two Rashleighs duly landed in Melbourne and acquired horses and carts to carry their luggage to the diggings near Bendigo. They made a late start and camped for the first night not far from Melbourne. Mr Kinsman was troubled with a bad attack of dysentery and told the boys that they were to go on, and that he would walk back to Melbourne and procure some medical advice and medicine, and that he would catch them up later. William and John Rashleigh went on but he never turned up, and that was the last time he was seen alive by anyone according to diligent enquiry made by Mrs Kinsman and others. Phyllis was informed that a man answering to



*Fig. 4. Phyllis Kinsman and the Mitcham-Adelaide bus<sup>29</sup> ca 1855.*

William Kinsman's description had boarded a vessel bound for Port Adelaide but that he had died before the vessel reached the heads and was taken ashore there to be buried. However there is no record of his death or burial. Poor Mrs Kinsman was thus left to fight her own way in life, mysteriously bereft of her husband. With the little money she had, she purchased some cows and sold milk and butter. She realized that there was an opening for a passenger conveyance to the city so she bought a cart and drove to town in the morning, returning in the evening 3 days a week. Later she obtained the mail contract in 1855. As the traffic increased she procured a bus and her son drove it. Mr James of the Norfolk Arms kindly gave her the use of his stables and despite competition from other buses the people of Mitcham supported her venture."

A bus in those days was a horse-drawn omnibus (Fig. 4). This story of a resourceful Adelaide pioneering woman coping with the loss of men and their misadventures in the Victorian gold fields shares numerous similarities with Catherine Helen Spence's famous novel of 1854: "Clara Morison: a tale of South Australia during the gold fever"<sup>24</sup>. Catherine Spence does not mention the Kinsmans, Rashleighs or Playfords in her autobiography<sup>30</sup>, but her novel is an enduring portrait of Adelaide colony in 1851-1852.

Playford continues<sup>23</sup>. "Soon after the Kinsman's arrival in Mitcham, I fell in love with Mary Jane, obtained her love, and we courted for seven years before we married. Mrs Kinsman died on Feb 21st, 1866, of gastric fever and was buried in Mitcham. I was one of the executors of her will together with William Rashleigh and Francis Rowe. We found that she was worth several thousand pounds which was divided up in equal shares among all her children except Phillipa, her blind daughter, who was left for life with the interest of 550 pounds to keep her. I was the acting executor and since then have invested

Phillipa's money, paying her board and giving her pocket money to purchase books for the blind. Her sister Mrs Williams boards her for 18 shillings a week. However of late the interest rate has been so low so I have been compelled to take some of the capital to meet expenses, and if she lives many more years, all the capital will be used up."

There is also an account of the Kinsmans arrival in Adelaide<sup>31</sup>. "On landing at Port Adelaide they reached the city by means of a bullock dray and slept the night in a shed in Hindley Street, before continuing the next day to Mitcham where the family settled." Mitcham was the centre of the Cornish community and the associated Christian Bible Nonconformist Church in Australia. A motivation for many Cornish immigrants was their desire to escape from organized religion. Bible Christian Church later evolved to become the Baptist Church, which is a group of affiliated free enterprise churches that are based on the firm belief that the King James version of the Bible is the word of God and is to be taken absolutely literally in every sense. Caroline's stepfather since the age of 5, William Kinsman, was a pastor of the Bible Christian Church<sup>25</sup>, so the family was presumably devout.

If John Retallack had been in Adelaide since 1851, perhaps his bullock dray delivered the Rashleigh-Kinsmans from Port Adelaide to Mitcham. His association with the Kinsman family started very soon after their arrival in South Australia, because he married Caroline about 20 months after her arrival on 7th November 1853, at St Michaels Church of England and Ireland, Mitcham, South Australia. On their marriage license<sup>3</sup>, John is listed as labourer and bachelor 25 years old, and Caroline as spinster 21 years old. This may have been a forced marriage because their first son Seth was born on 17th July 1854 in Mitcham, only 251 days after marriage (normal pregnancy term is 266 days, and 1854 was not a leap year). For the first 2 years, John and Caroline lived with Phyllis and the other Kinsmans.

Sometime between 1854 and 1857, John Retallack and his family moved to Angaston, in the Barossa Valley, 77 km northeast of Adelaide, as an employee of George Fife Angas<sup>2</sup>, founder of the South Australian Company<sup>7</sup>. George Fife Angas was a devout non-conformist Christian, and his stated ambition was to found a society free of established churches and convicts where its members could enjoy civil and religious freedom. One of the largest groups persuaded to emigrate were Silesian German Lutherans under Pastor August Kavel, eager to escape religious oppression by King Frederick William III of Prussia. George Angas personally advanced £8000 to the Germans for emigration, and thus established German traditions, including wine making to the Barossa Valley. By 1851, George Angas had moved to Adelaide with his wife and youngest son, to a substantial estate of 4000 acres, "Lindsay Park", with a spacious house, chapel, roads and bridges. Caroline and John Retallack would have fitted Angas's employment criteria, Caroline being the daughter of a deceased minister of the Bible Christian Church and John with his farming skills, but they would not have been hired if John had been known to be a convict<sup>7</sup>, because, unlike other Australian colonies, South Australia was designed by George Angas to be for free settlers only<sup>6</sup>.

At Angaston, son John, also known as Jack, was born to John and Caroline Retallack 19th April, 1857, and William a year later, 20th Aug 1858. Another son, Thomas was born 18th May, 1860, but he only lived 3 years and died at Angas Park<sup>1</sup>. On the 16th December, 1860, Caroline's half sister Mary Jane Kinsman married Thomas Playford. The Kinsman children and Playford had attended Thomas Muggs school, which

was operated from the Union Chapel. Thomas Playford was from a leading Adelaide family living in Mitcham (Playford, 1988), and the Rashleighs and Retallacks would have been socially elevated with such a marriage. Charles Retallack was born to Caroline and John in 1862, but only lived 15 months. Caroline's and John's first daughter was born at Nuriootpa, in the Barossa Valley on 4th April 1864, and christened Elizabeth. In 1865, they moved to Steinau, south of Angaston. Another son Thomas was born there in July 1866, followed by Charles on the 25th May 1868. In February 1866, both Caroline's mother Phyllis and her eldest sister Elizabeth Symons Rowe died, and Caroline and John inherited money from Phyllis's estate<sup>23</sup>.

In late 1869, John and Caroline and their family moved to Gawler, 44 km north of Adelaide. Small farms had become available for selection around Gawler, and flour milling, foundries and the railway from Adelaide were established in town. Bullock teams were employed in moving copper ore south from the Burra copper mines. On 13 September 1872, another son James Retallack was born at Gawler, but he only lived 3 months. The last child born to Caroline and John Retallack at Lower Light in 1873 was Francis Rowe Retallack 1873, named after Caroline's brother in law, who had been married to her eldest sister Elizabeth Symons Rowe (née Rashleigh), but following her death had remarried in 1867 to Amanda Box. Lower Light on the Samphire coast 52 km northeast of Adelaide, was the home of the Rowe family. Elizabeth had 6 children with Francis Rowe, who subsequently had a further 8 children with Amanda Box. Caroline was 41 and John 52 when the last of their 11 children was born after 21 years of marriage.

In the 1870s, John Retallack continued droving in Queensland, and knew the famous Bowen Downs cattle duffers<sup>35</sup>, Henry Arthur ("Harry") Readford (also "Redford"), George Dewdney (also "Doudney") and William Rooke. Readford was the model for Captain Starlight of Rolf Boldrewood's (1888) novel "Robbery Under Arms"<sup>32</sup>. Rolf Boldrewood was the pen name of Thomas Alexander Browne, a contemporary writer and acquaintance of Catherine Spence<sup>30</sup>. Realizing the difficulty of keeping track of cattle in this remote part of western Queensland near Longreach, Readford and his mates built yards at the back of Bowen Downs Station, mustering and drafting 1000 head of cattle, including a prize imported bull. They drove their mob through the Channel Country of the Barcoo River, Coopers Creek and Strezlecki Desert in March 1870, where only 9 years before Burke and Wills had perished<sup>33-34</sup>, finally selling the cattle at public auction at Blanchewater Station near Maree, South Australia. Months afterward, the manager of Bowen Downs noticed in an Adelaide Auctioneers Circular, the sale of a bull answering the description of their expensive imported sire<sup>36</sup>. The thieves were tried at Roma and the crime proven, but the droving feat so impressed the jury that they returned a verdict of not guilty. "Judge Blakeney was visibly staggered. He stared at the jury as if he had misheard the verdict. "Would you mind repeating your verdict gentlemen." "Not guilty." Those who were close enough to the judge saw the blood rush to his face and his hands tremble as he fought for self control. When he spoke he made no attempt to keep the bitterness from his voice. "I thank God", he said deliberately,"that the verdict is yours, gentlemen, not mine." His hard eyes raked the figure of [Harry] Redford standing in the dock. "The prisoner is discharged." And a cheering crowd led Big Harry to the nearest public house... Redford's trial was but one instance of how bushman sympathies were overwhelming justice in Roma at the time. On

5 April 1873 the governor of Queensland ordered the criminal jurisdiction of the District of Roma be withdrawn for two years<sup>37</sup>. The likely overland travel of John Retallack from Gowrie in Queensland to Adelaide in South Australia would have been a similarly remarkable feat for 1850. John Retallack was a mystery man, like so many others in Australia then, and it is understandable that the Darling-Warrrego route, known as the “Retallack Track” in our family, has no formal geographic recognition.

John and Caroline’s oldest son Seth Retallack was married 22nd December 1873 at the Wesleyan Parsonage, Norwood, South Australia to Sarah Constable. Another son John Retallack married Margaret McDonald 13th February 1883. Daughter Elizabeth married John Mannix, 14th July 1883 at Trinity Church Adelaide, and then moved to Western Australia. Son William married Amelia Edson 31st August 1887 at Norwood, South Australia. Son Charles hauled farm implements from Orroroo, South Australia, via the Warrego River to Mitchell, Queensland<sup>1</sup>, in 1894, perhaps following the route pioneered by his father. Charles married Margaret Jane Dobbin 19th March, 1893, in Brisbane, and raised a large family on Cocaigne Station near Mitchell, Queensland<sup>1</sup>. Most of his branch of the family still lives in Brisbane.

John Retallack died of heart disease and senile decay at the age of 69 in the Destitute Asylum, Adelaide, on 8th August, 1890, according to his death certificate<sup>4</sup>. He was buried in West Terrace Cemetery, then the pauper cemetery on the banks of the Torrens River, west of the South Australian Museum. His wife Caroline died of heart disease and dropsey on the 8th of June 1896 in Forster, on the banks of the Murray River, 163 km east of Adelaide, convenient to the Queensland carrier business. At the end of his life, John had become estranged and disowned by the family, which is the last remaining puzzle of his life. The most likely break with John was when Caroline moved from Gawler to her brother-in-laws’ house in Lower Light to deliver daughter Elizabeth in 1873. At this time John Retallack was still working as a carrier using bullock teams, and was away from home for long periods: central Queensland was a four week round trip. John Retallack was an alcoholic, and considered delusional because in his final years he told the family that he was the son of a Cornish squire, but too ill to travel home to reclaim his inheritance<sup>2</sup>. Also at this time his brother-in-law Thomas Playford was embarking on his political career<sup>28</sup> as South Australian Parliament Member for Onkaparinga in 1868, culminating in election to Premier of South Australia 1887-1889 and 1890-1892. In this role, Thomas or his staff may have checked the South Australian Company’s or other official records for immigration and realized that John Retallack’s story of immigration on the “Himalaya” in 1889 was a ruse. A convict past would have been an embarrassment to the family, especially in Adelaide, which prided itself on being a free colony.

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