

**The family of Thomas Wood in the 1880s and 90s:
from Romney Marsh, England, to South Australia.**

compiled by Pat Button (Australia) and Rupert Wood (England), 2001

This is an account of Thomas Wood, who was born in 1854 at Midley,
in the Romney Marsh, Kent, England.



When he was a boy, aged about four, the family moved to nearby Lydd, to live in a house at the far western end of the High Street. At the age of 22 Thomas left Lydd possibly after a disagreement with his father and emigrated to South Australia, He sailed on an emigrant ship, *Lochee*, a free passage for 500 emigrants funded by the South Australian government, from Portsmouth on 22 November 1876, arriving 2 February 1877 at Port Adelaide.⁽¹⁾ He did not contact the family back in England until the beginning of 1884. By that time he was married with a little daughter. In Australia ⁽²⁾ has survived the following three letters written to him from Lydd.

His mother Elizabeth wrote

My dearest son,
I received you affionate letter and was very thankful to receive it. Dear son I should very much like to see your dear face again before I die but thank god I am very well as when you left home. Your brothers and sisters are all very well - they are nearly all out now I have only got 3 at home now. Your Father was very much put out to think you did not mention his name in your letter. He says he has forgiven you freely dear son.

Your Father seems a different man altogether he his very stirdy now he his on the road working 2s 3d a day. Your Fathers best love to you he says he will write to you. we are all the same as when you left we still live in the same old house were you brought your little dog up stairs to the children. dear son I have such a lot of news to tell you if you get them all dear son I should like to have a Austria [sic] Paper if you cant not answer my letter directly. Paper in return if you can. I must just ask about my new daughter name and baby and hope you are comful. my baby is 6 year old now Charllotte. I must now end with your brothers and sisters love they all wish to be remember to you my son. We ar all alive and kicking still. They all say give my love to poor Tom. Harry has still got your scarf what you used to wear at the Lydd club he says he will never part with it as long as he lives. I feel as if I could write forty letter to night you my dear son but I must end now. good night from your ever loving and affionate mother Elizabeth Wood god bless you all



*from your ever loving and
affionate mother Elizabeth Wood
god bless you - all*

Thomas's younger sister Julia at Lydd added the following:

Dearest brother

Mother received your affectionate letter and was very glad to have some tidings off you. we were all very much surprised when we received your kind letter dearest brother you do not know how I should like to see your dear face again. I do hope and trust that I shall see it again some day dear. I feel as if I could come and find you. I am living at Miss Prescott very near to mother and mother still lives in the same old house as when you left. Elizabeth and Annie are both married brothers they live in London they have both got children Elizabeth has 2 children Annie had 3 one dead[.] Your brothers now[:] Tead [= Ted? = Edmund] {Oh shock} your dear {old?} brother he's in Rye he has married and got one child. Joe is married and got one child married Cary Bridnell, Alic he goes a fishing Harry he goes to work as usual[.] Kate at Missith Jordans[.] Eliza and Cary ar at Hasting. Dear brother I have written one letter before this one [.] if you get them I hope they will not get lost for I am sure you will be so glad to hear from all of us. Dear brother you must tell me my new sisters name and the childrens name and I hope to see them some day if god spares us, all from your loving sister god bless you all Julia - goodnight I am just going to bed now good night

[The passages placed between { } are not clearly decipherable on the manuscript letter, especially in view of Julia's concise style]

Thomas Wood (1854-1904)
and wife Louisa, née Kuehn
(1854-1940).

Louisa was Australian born,
her parents having
immigrated from Prussia in
1847.

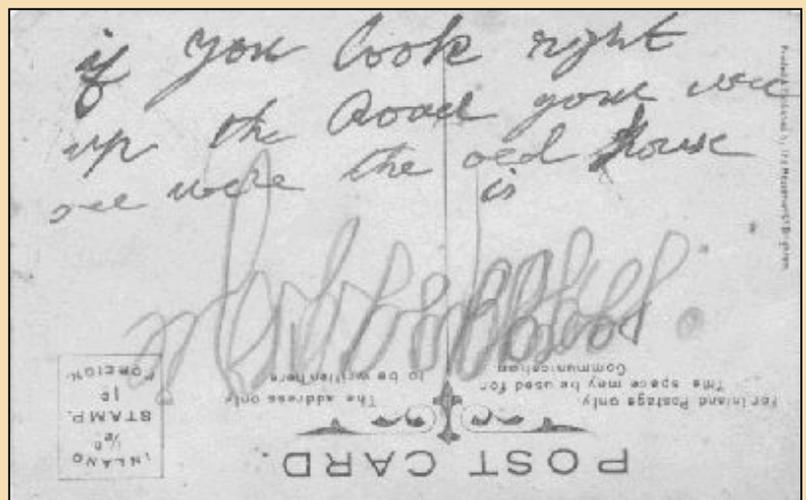
Photograph presumably
taken at the time of their
marriage at Laura, South
Australia, in January 1882.



May 1886 Your letter at hand on good friday morning.

Dear brother we received your kind letter was very glad to hear from you. So glad to have your photo and your dear little girl does look such a pretty little thing /she looks so small to be the eldest/. We have shown your photo to nearly all your dear friends. Some cannot see a likeness at all your brother Harry and we all think you have altered a good deal. Is it very warm out there. Alick thinks he shall come out there this summer when the shearing is over so has to have a few pounds to go about with. He says he wont take me with him he thinks he better come and see what its like first. Mother seems so put out to think he means going she said she would rather follow him to the grave She says she knows she wont see him again on this earth. Please could you tell us a little more about the country and send alick the fare, and what station would you see him would you name the place. Mother and brothers and sisters all send their kind love to you all. We will all send our photos in a time. Your poor o dog fly is still living your old sheepdog. Alick wants to know wether he should want to bring much with him. I must now end with love from your dear old brother and sisters and all your dear o friends. Mother hopes Alick wont come. Love from mother. XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Around the same time a postcard was sent to Thomas, showing (see next page) the west half of Lydd High Street. The old family home at the west end of the High Street, where his mother and father were still living, would have been reached on the left on walking to the far distance.





The family Thomas left behind on the Romney Marsh were all agricultural labourers and 'lookers' as shepherds were called there. It might be thought, coming from the Marsh famous for its breed of sheep, that Thomas would likely be involved with sheep in Australia. But no, he worked at a brewery and hotels, and he eventually became manager and owner of the hotel at Willowie, in South Australia about 175 miles north of Adelaide, The following account of the Hotel and Thomas at Willowie appeared on pages 113-5 of *Plains of Contrast*, being a history of Willowie, Amyton, and Booleroo in South Australia, published by a Willowie History Book Committee in 1975 to celebrate the centenary of those South Australia Hundreds. The text from the book has been provided by Patricia Button (née Barrie), who, through his daughter Alice, is a great-granddaughter of Thomas Wood of the Willowie Hotel.

The Willowie Hotel.

From *South Australia Chronicle*, "June 29, 1878, Willowie...a new public house is about to be started in this town." This announcement was followed in March 1879, by a sale notice from W. Wadham and Co. ... to sell by auction at their rooms, Waymouth Street, Adelaide. (amongst other northern hotels):-

"The Willowie Hotel containing 12 large rooms. bathroom, and pantry, rainwater tank of 11,000 gallons, capacious cellars, stabling etc., built in a most superior manner and only recently completed. This Hotel is situated on the main road from Orroroo to Wilmington, fronting the three chain road, and is let on lease for seven years from January last, at a rental to Messrs Filgate and Sabine (were partners in the Laura Brewery). Also the Pinda Hotel. This is situated on the Willochra Creek, eight miles from Wilmington and on the main road, and is in every respect similar to the Willowie Hotel. This is also let to Messrs. Filgate and Sabine at a rental of £5 per week for five years."

Previous to this the licence was first granted to M. Bills in 1878. In 1879 the hotel licence was taken over by P. McQuillan who held it for three years before moving to the Wauraltee Hotel.

Mr Barney Wood was the licensee of the Hotel for a short period in 1882-1883 and the licence then passed [on 12 June 1883] to Thomas Wood, who was not related to Barney.

Thomas was farewelled and went to Cradock in 1886-87 to help with the Hotel there, leaving Mr. Tucker to manage the Willowie Hotel until his return. The lease at that time still held by Filgate and Sabine of Laura.

Before the building of the hall in 1889 the Hotel was the scene of many early public meetings. District railway committee meetings were held in the long room in 1879, 1880, and 1881. An angry confrontation took place there in 1880 with the Railway Commission. The Agricultural Society inaugural meeting took place there, and public grievances were aired at a "Wants of Willowie" meeting in August 1882, when local people met to press for a water supply, declaration of a polling place and the opening of a day school
A 150 feet well was sunk on the property in 1879, and it gave a good supply of water. Stock were exhibited at the hotel yards at the early Agricultural Shows, and the first show dinners



were gay affairs held at the hotel. Stock sales were also held at the hotel yards, and the Rasheed Brothers, horse dealers, still brought horses for the Indian market (presumably for the Army) at the beginning of the century. A very good record of the life and style of these men is included in the book "Change on Change" by N. Robinson - a history of the Jamestown district.

The hotel stables, which are still partially standing, housed the changes of horses for the early mail contractors, Terry and Co., and Hill and Co. Teamsters and travellers were the main guests. The Teamsters watered their bullocks, horses or camels at the hotel yards while carting wheat, but usually slept with their teams on the plantation. They hired buggies and horse pairs from Rebder's Hotel to travel from Orroroo and Wilmington, with an overnight stay at Willowie. When visitors were expected at night, someone had to climb a ladder to place a lighted candle outside the Hotel (see following photograph).



Willowie Hotel - 1890's - Thomas Wood with Frank, Annie, Cousin Minnie, Martha, Janey Treloar, Emily Ferrier and Alice. Minnie & Emily worked at the hotel.

Willowie Hotel 1890s [1891?]. Family group. Left to Right. Thomas Wood with children Frank [Francis, born 1884], Annie [born 1887]. Cousin Minnie (Alwina Kuehn), Martha [born 1882], Janey Treloar, Emily Ferrier and Alice [born 1885]. Minnie Kuehn and Emily Ferrier worked at the hotel.

Personal reminiscences include the following: -

"Grandfather Wood was fond of animals, and kept a small menagerie... late last century. There were kangaroos, wallabies, colored rabbits, and an aviary of parrots and peacocks, as well as the usual domestic animals, mules, horses, a few cows, pigs and poultry. Wallabies were no longer welcome after one panicked and leapt through a window, landing on a guest's bed. Grandfather Wood kept a pair of handcuffs, and was authorised to use them on unruly intruders until the police arrived. He also acted as the local dentist. He kept a pair of forceps and drew teeth in the hotel bar when his services were required. Grandmother Wood kept a meat hatchet in her kitchen and a stock whip behind the kitchen door for protection against unruly intruders. The hotel also had a small armory of guns. A big affair at the local hall was the Barrie-Wood wedding [Thomas Wood's daughter Alice marriage to Robert Barrie] on September 9, 1908. The grandsons used to make sure they were available when one old gentleman was ready to leave for home, as he would give them 3d to get the horse in the cart for him. and the horse would then find the way home." The Bristow family would often come to the hotel and say they had come for a party, and merry times were had by all. The piano was much used at these events. There were travelling concert parties to be accommodated, and circuses pitched their tents between the hotel and Tuckwell's store. The bell-ringers for these events were the Barretts. Mr. Wood also kept greyhound's for coursing at the local meetings.

Meals at the time cost 2/- if served in the parlour tint and 1/- if served in the dining-room, Jugged hare was a favourite dish on the menu. The hotel also served oysters and fish at times, and these were sent by rail from Pt. Augusta to Hammond, and collected from there. The 'commercial' who stayed overnight paid 4/6 for teas, bed and breakfast. Otherwise it would be - Beds. single 1/-, double 1/6. Trading hours were long, from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. A dance liquor permit at Hammond at the time lasted until 3 a.m.

In the early days of the hotel the daughters would go with their father, in a dray, to Melrose for beer supplies from Jacka Brothers' brewery. and later were allowed to go on their own. Thomas Wood managed the hotel for over 21 years. He was born in Kent England, in 1874 [sic. this is a mistake in *Plains of Contrast* for 1854] and left home at an early age [of 22] to come to Australia. Most of his working life was spent working in hotels. He married Louisa Matilda Kuehn, and worked for Laura Brewers before he came to Willowie. Hotel business was relatively good for a few years and the 1890s were happy, but hard-working years, with all the children in the family helping with hotel chores, the stables full of horses, and many people coming and going.

However the poor seasons, Blue Ribbon Army [Temperance] pledges and the failing health of the proprietor took their toil, and shortly before the death [in 1904] of Thomas (just before the turn of the century) the licence was relinquished. The hotel continued to operate without a licence, providing accommodation and meals for a dwindling number of commercial travellers until the 1930s, when it was demolished. The stone from the former building was used to build the present house, which stands on the same site, and Louisa lived there, with a daughter [the youngest, Florence], until her death in 1940.

Certainly the Woods family helped to make Willowie what it then was - the centre of a busy farming population, and from the beginning of the town until now, many of the family and their descendants have been loyal "Willowie-ites".

Below is a photograph of all of Thomas and Louisa Wood's young family taken outside the hotel at Willowie in c.1899. From left to right are Bessie (1891-1970), Frank (1884-1952), Martha (1882-1968), Alice (1885-1981), Annie (1887-1963), with the youngest, Florence (1895-1975), sitting in front. There had been one other baby in 1889 but she had not lived more than three weeks. For more information set out in the family tree about these children, their own marriages when they grew up, and their children, see [Wood_desc.pdf](#)

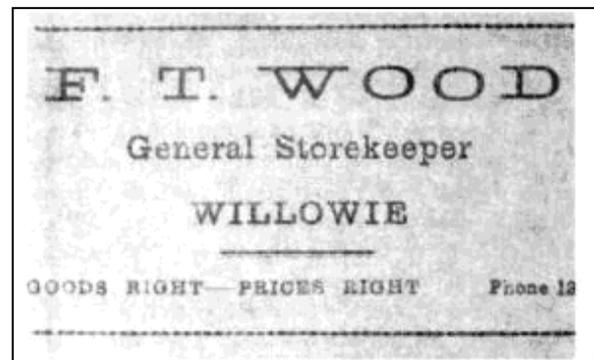


In [Jottings_PB.pdf](#), Pat Button supplies some notes about the later lives of these children, accompanied by more photographs. Also available is an album of their wedding photographs, see [Weddings_SA.pdf](#).

There was not a wide range of occupations that could be followed in Willowie. The picture here shows some of the most prominent men there around 1891, with Thomas Wood at the far right. In the family photograph above taken at the end of the decade it can be seen that Frank (or Francis as he was christened), the only boy in Thomas's family, had reached an age to leave school to start work. Thomas died at an early age of 50 in 1904, only five years after that family group was photographed. Frank had started work at the Willowie general store. He was, indeed, was on the way to eventually being the owner of that other well known business in Willowie, as we can learn from the following short account on page 112 of *Plains of Contrast*, published in 1975:



Mr Frank Wood, who spent all his working life at Willowie, married Miss Graham, a teacher at the Hundred of Willowie school, and lived in the home later to be known as Mountford's. On becoming manager and later owner of the store he moved to the manager's home at the store. Mr. Wood became the proprietor of the store in 1925, and for many years was the popular friend of young and old alike- helping many through the lean years and many of his sayings and stories are still related by the (today's [mid-1970s]) middle-aged group who were children during Mr. Wood's days at the store.



The drawing on the right, published in *Plains of Contrast* represents the Store at Willowie in the 1890s, when Frank was young.



Today it is even possible to add here a personal memory, for although Pat Button was only 8 years old when Frank Wood died at Willowie in 1952, she can just remember him in the store there: "I used to stay with my mother's parents (McCallum's) for holidays on their farm and we would sometimes go into Willowie to do a little shopping. I know the shop fascinated me - full of so many different items and the smells - especially the cheese. I did not realise in those days that he was my Grandmother [Alice] Barrie's brother." Bill Wood (grandson of Martha Wood) attended primary school at Willowie in the 1940's and he tells how he used to race down to the shop after school and if he was very lucky Frank would cut him a slice of cheese off the big round.

Louisa Wood, still at Willowie in the 1920s.

Yet not only is it possible to still (at the beginning of the 21st century) provide such a personal memory above of Thomas and Louisa Wood's son and daughter at Willowie, but even Louisa herself in her 70s can be recalled. For unlike her husband she lived to a ripe old age, until 1940. So now we can have memories of Louisa while in her 70s recollected by Pat's father, Jack Barrie and by his younger brother Kevin (sons of Alice Wood - second from the right in the children's photo above on previous page):

First, Jack recalls:

My schooldays started at the Willowie School in 1922. Because we lived over seven miles from the school we Barrie children stayed with our grandmother Wood from Sunday afternoon until Friday after school... Grandmother Wood kept a number of cows and we children had to get the cows in and help with the milking both in the morning and the evening. Mostly in the daytime the cows would be in the long paddocks - that is along the road. In those days the cows and horses could be depastured along the roads by paying the District Council a yearly fee per animal... (Granny Wood did have several acres of ground, but these blocks were mainly used for the cows at night)... This road or rather stock route was the favorite eating ground for Granny's cows but sometimes they would head south along the Booleroo road for 3 to 4 miles. If they went north they did not go so far - perhaps a kilometer. A farmer that lived up that road had his house close to the road and had a dog or dogs that would not allow any stock to go past his gate ... Occasionally big herds of cattle used to travel along this stock route and from one of these herds one wild station cow somehow got left behind and she palled up with granny's cows. This cow would charge anyone on sight and had everyone in Willowie frightened of her bar granny. Granny would go for the cow with a long handled shovel or broom and drive it off.

When granny Wood told us to do something it had to be done at once. If we grandchildren dawdled or did not do things correctly she would chase us and catch us then off would come one of her shoes - she wore men's tennis shoes and our backside would really feel the sole of her shoes.

For my last four years at Willowie School Mr Cliff Selway was my teacher. He and his wife arrived in Willowie some time before their furniture and so for the first two or three weeks they boarded with Granny Wood. Two or three weeks after they had settled into the school house it was very hot and we were all outside at Granny Wood's when there was a terrific crash and clouds of dust came out the bedroom they had been sleeping in at Granny Wood's house - the whole ceiling of the room had come down smashing the bedroom furniture. The ceiling was what was known as a lathe and plaster ceiling and with the accumulation of about fifty years of dust it would have been a great weight. The only way into the room after the event was through the window until the debris could be cleared away from the door. A large tomcat was found in the room after the crash and it was presumed that his weight must have triggered the ceiling to fall. Cats were able to get up into the ceiling of the old hotel, too. Thank God that no one was in the room when the crash happened.

Sometime in the middle 1920's granny Wood took ill and was taken to Adelaide to Dr. Bowman who diagnosed her case incurable and gave her at the most six months to live. When she came home she went straight back to the cow yard and milked at least one cow every morning right up to within a few days of her death in 1940. What Dr. Bowman thought her complaint to be I was never told. As long as I knew her and lived with her I never knew her to sit at the table and have a proper meal with the rest of us. Christmas

and other special events were the only exceptions to her eating habits that I remember. For the most part she lived on tea and an odd slice of bread and butter. Although the rest of us made tea in a teapot for our meals, granny always had a cup of tea stewing on the edge of the stove. Periodically throughout the day she would take her cup off the stove, pour the tea into a saucer to cool it and then drink it. When the cup was nearly empty of liquid she would add more tea leaves, fill with hot water and milk, and put it back on the edge of the stove until next time. She did this from early in the morning. She was usually the first up and only went to bed at 10 or 11 pm. Perhaps the tannin from the stewed tea made her immune to whatever illness she was supposed to have had. She always had sugar in her tea - perhaps this gave her energy, and she also had milk - fresh full cream milk.

Next, Kevin's memories of Willowie, his grandmother Wood and Aunt Florence:

In 1927 at the age of six, I started school at Willowie. Living over seven miles from town it was too far to travel each day, and we stayed with Granny Wood and Aunt Flo who resided in the old hotel, going home for weekends and school holidays. Aunt Flo [Thomas and Louisa (Granny) Wood's youngest daughter Florence, born 1895] helped her brother Frank in his store, including the bookwork and savings bank agency. She was meticulous in almost everything she did including handwriting, the opposite to Uncle Franks whose awkward backhand was a form of art in its self and to the untrained mostly illegible.

All the bedrooms except two in the old pub were unsafe to use, and I had no option for the early years at school but to share Aunt Flo's double bed, and in the same room with grandma. I was too young to suffer humiliation to any extent, but was more than pleased when Lance went to live at John Duffield's and only came occasionally, and so I could use his room.

Memories of my 6 years at Granny Wood's are not ones I can enthuse about, and the older I grow the less affection I can find for her. She was really a martinet and never knew the meaning of affection, leave alone love. Her idea of thanks for something done well was to say nothing. If displeased, her reward would be a cuff under the ears and sent to bed, or if it was too early, an extra turn with the axe to build up the wood supply. Didn't see very much of Aunt Flo, after helping with the preparation of a morning she would go over to the shop and it would be often 9 o'clock of an evening before she would come home unless she had to cook tea, or went back after tea to help Uncle Frank with egg packing and doing the books.

I knew where Gran kept a revolver, Grandpa Wood probably used to protect the bar at the pub ... I often wonder what happened to the old revolver, probably buried down the cellar with other items that would have been historical relics when the pub was demolished to make way for Aunt. Flos house built in the mid to late 1930's.

It was at Willowie I learned that the cow is the most despicable of all farm animals. Gran and Uncle Frank kept a number between them varying from about 4 to 8 and it was the job of the Woods girls and the Barries to milk them. During school days, it was also my job to either bring them in from the town blocks if there was any feed in them, or most of the time from the roads where they wandered in search of pickings. And wandered they did. Aunt Flo would tell me when I came out of school which road they started off on and it was then up to me to track them up. Usually they could be found on the flood flats south of the town or visible on the plains on the other three roads. Occasionally though they would really get the wanders, and one night I will never forget. It was mid winter and almost dark when I finally tracked them on a side road about 6 miles south west of the town in the vicinity of Jack Schmidts place. It was freezing cold and Queenie the pony I was riding was in as much of a hurry to get home as I was. To say that we walked the cows back would be a lie they were cantering rather than trotting much of the way and of course were to upset to produce much milk. Old Gran really went to town on me, but at the time I thought she was dam lucky to even have the cows, leave alone any milk. I had contemplated giving up searching for them altogether, and by next day they would probably have found their way to Wilmington or Melrose.

Morning milking was a bugbear. The cows would be kept in the yard over night and before going into the bails would have to be run around a bit to stop them urinating or plopping into the buckets while we were milking. Sometimes it worked, more often it didn't. Winter mornings were the worse when the water in the yard troughs were often frozen and our hands were sore and covered in chillblains. I often wonder if cows suffer from chillblains, on their teats, as they always seem to be harder to milk in the winter than in the summer, requiring leg roping in the bails. And many the smack in the eye we had from switching, spear grass seedy stinking tails. Who could love a cow!

Perhaps we did have an occasional spot of fun. Trying to ride the poddy calves around the yard was a bit of a giggle with no bridle or mane to hang onto as to a horse. The cows were too bony but were probably much quieter. Milk spurting fights were not uncommon but woe betide if Granny caught us. Glenda & Valerie Wood, and Jack White the postmaster's son were all around our age and sometimes we would have time after our jobs were done to get up to some form of mischief or a game of rounders.

Other memories of Willowie:

include travelling mobs of cattle coming in from the north and being watered and yarded overnight in blocks Gran owned on the Southern side of the town.

Of the dreaded spoonful of paraffin oil or castor oil dished out by Aunt Flo and Gran when we feeling indisposed. Would go through hell rather than be ill enough to suffer that treatment. Yet Gran used to have a spoonful every morning to keep fit.

Of turning the handle of the wrangle used to press the linen on washdays. How I hated the job.

Of Grans habit of pouring out endless cups of tea after breakfast each morning and storing them in the oven for consumption throughout the day. Whether she did drink them or not I don't know. I seem to recollect we tossed out cup after cup of brown stained cups of milk tea come wash up time of an evening.

Of Grans setting off with a lantern after dark and rounding up the broody chooks and feeding cows or poking about doing who knows what, and never going to bed much before midnight and of her hanging up chooks by the legs to stop them going clucky.

Of the Christmas dinners either at home or at Grans. When the full Brown, Bull and Barrie family, as well as Aunt Flo and Gran would assemble for the hot Xmas chook for lunch, regardless of the temperature.

Often wondered why we never went to Bull's or Browns, but now realise they had cars, but their kitchens were small and they had no dining table big enough to take us all. There would have been 16 or 17 of us to find seats for.

Footnotes

1. This is not the place to set out a detailed account and discussion of the emigration process in England and particulars of the voyage and passenger list of the *Lochee*, but the sources are *The Register* (Adelaide) 22 January 1877, pp. 5-6 being a report on the facilities provided both for emigrants at Portsmouth and on the *Lochee*; *The Register* (Adelaide), Saturday 3 February 1877, has a full passenger list of the ship on arrival at Port Adelaide with statistics about the range of occupations, and a cargo list; *The Register* (Adelaide), 7 February 1877 delivers a critical editorial on the South Australian Government's policy for providing free immigration with regard to the local "capitalist's standpoint" as "it would seem as though the funds of the colony are being spent in an experiment to relieve the English Poor Law of a portion of its burdens". That editorial (and an earlier one in *The Observer* (Adelaide) 3 February 1877, p. 4) also centres on the fact that 21 children and 5 adults died during the voyage of the *Lochee* (the doctor in charge reporting that "a number of immigrants came on board in a very weak state from insufficient food, as many of them had been for months out of employment"); *The Times* (London), 11 April 1877, pp. 5d-6a, printed a most interesting and very relevant long report by Henry Taylor, Emigration Commissioner of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union in England, who, at the time Thomas Wood arrived, had spent six months in South Australia investigating the conditions, prospects and problems there for emigrants.

2. The letters and postcard from Lydd, and most of the family photographs, passed first to Jean Barrie (daughter of Thomas's Alice (1885-1981)) and then to her daughter Judith Lloyd in Adelaide.
