

State Heritage Areas of South Australia



Memories of Moonta Mines *submitted by Clemency McLeod*

Clemency McLeod's grandfather was John Rowe, and a photo of his home and six oldest children is on page 35 of Mandie Robinson's "Cap'n Hancock". Her mother was the next baby born in 1886, so that roughly dates the photo. Clemency was born in 1921. She and her family used to go to Moonta Mines regularly for holidays when they were growing up.

The Rowe family was made up of 16 pregnancies in 20 years, quite a feat! – two dying, but the rest mostly lived long lives.

Grandfather was in charge of the 'Pickey Boys' – apparently a table where they picked over the ore. He also taught some lads at night in his home if they wanted to improve themselves.

It must have been a very crowded home with eight girls and six boys, although the girls were put out to service as soon as they were old enough, to ease the load at home.

They seemed to be a fairly talented lot – musicians, violinists, singers, artist. They bought an organ from America and apparently had great evening gatherings. And I would think they would have been the mainstay of the East Moonta Methodist Church Choir. I think I was told this church is now on the heritage listing.

They were a well-known choir, as my mother-in-law, who lived at Hamley Bridge, remembers them coming to Adelaide by train and entertaining the locals on the way. Uncle Bert was the conductor, organist and wrote poetry.

When I was in East Moonta many years ago to see the old home, I was very saddened to see that most of the homes had been demolished, and wheat fields had taken their place.

"Going to the street" (ie the Moonta township) was either done by walking, or horse and sulky. Old Mr Hoskins (or Hosking) lived along the dusty road from grandpa's. His carriage was probably able to take six folk seated across from each other. It was covered with what I think would have been black varnished canvas, and entered from steps at the rear. It probably cost threepence or sixpence.

It was a very dusty place – dirt roads and dust continually coming off the dumps from the mine, which was just across the paddocks. I remember too a big underground tank, and everybody had to have a cellar to keep foods cool. The house always smelled old and musty, but it was a homely and comfortable smell.

Outings, apart from "going to the street" were taken at the Moonta Bay, where everybody settled under the jetty – no fancy shelters. Cornish pasties were the treat of the day.