

James RIDGEON (1839-1858)

James died at sea on the “Trade Wind” on 21 February 1858 – on the eve of arriving in Tasmania. He was aged 18, born about 1839 in Suffolk and sponsored by James Collis of Hobart Town.

It is likely James Ridgeon was the son of George, an agricultural labourer, born about 1801 and Mary nee Wright, born about 1796 in Lydgate, Suffolk. According to 1841 and 1851 England Census for Wheltnetham, Suffolk (Sickles Mere) his siblings were William (1822), Susan (1825), John (1827), Alice (1830), George (1832), Emma (1834), Benjamin (1836), James (1838), Sarah, (1842), Betsy (1846).

The following testimonies were made about the death of James Ridgen by witnesses on the ‘Trade Wind’ as well as by the Agent’s Report after his investigation:

The Immigration Agent’s Report on the Case of James Ridgeon:

Considering therefore the quantity put on board and the circumstances above mentioned it is evident that with regard to the medical comforts the Immigrants had just and great cause for the complaint they preferred. The belief has been expressed by Immigrants that James Ridgeon above referred to died for want of medical comforts and they state that the surgeon expressed himself to that effect. My enquiry addressed to the Reverend B Drake on his head through the Colonial Secretary is as follows: In the case of James Ridgeon who died 21 Feb can the Rev Mr Drake state whether he was properly supplied with nourishment and medical comforts. Was there to your knowledge any impression in the ship that he sank and died for want of proper quantities of such restoratives or that he might have recovered had he received them and to what extent did such impression (if any) exist and how far do you consider it well found if it existed.

The Rev Mr Drake’s reply was as follows:

I attended James Ridgeon as long as he was capable of receiving religious instruction. I never heard himself express as if he was neglected. If any impression existed in the ship it must have been limited to a very few. It did not come under my notice. My opinion is that he had too much of the medical comforts under the control of the Surgeon.

The statements of the surgeon himself do not accord with Mr Drake’s opinion. James Ridgeon died on the 21st of low fever (on another occasion the surgeon terms it common continued fever) having been 21 days ill so that he was taken ill on the 21st Feb. ...

Passenger on the ‘Trade Wind’, James (sic) Fuller¹ stated:

¹ This would have been John Fuller

I believe that most of the complaints were from starvation. The young man from my parish named James Ridgeon he lost his reason and wanted nourishment but got none rice, mutton, broth etc. little wine and porter etc. They said there was none but after that they could find some. I heard the Doctor say he had not nourishing things to give the people.

Passenger on the 'Trade Wind', John Burrows stated:

There was a very short supply of medical comforts and had there been a proper quantity of porter, port wine and so we should have had one man alive now James Ridgeon. The Doctor made this affirmation to me and Ann Kerridge and some others I do not remember that if he had had a porter to give James Ridgeon he would have been alive then. This was the Sunday as he lay dead just before we landed. I am quite certain that he said so would keep the book any day I could not speak with a degree of certainty as to what made the medical comforts run short only by heresay and so I won't say.

According to the surgeon on the 'Trade Wind' he said:

... [There were] cases of Typhus fever and common continued fever... in the case of James Ridgeon's death who was very delicate and not fit to come to sea took place on the 21st February ... [he] died just before arrival I cannot say positively that he would have died if he had had more medical comforts. He certainly might have recovered. If I had had more medical comforts I would have adopted a different mode of treatment which might have saved him. I gave him brandy up to the last ounce and then stopped as there might be a still more urgent case and the man died.