

Basic Detail Report



ANMS1354[030]

Title

Photograph of a couple dancing at the Crossing the Line ceremony onboard SS STRATHEDEN

Date

1961

Medium

Photograph

Dimensions

Overall: 89 x 89 mm

Name

Photograph

History

Ronald Smith was born in England at the end of World War II. Ronald's mother placed him in the Barnardo's Babies Castle on Cranbrook Road in Hawkhurst, Kent in southeast England, when he was six months old. Opened in 1886 for the reception of babies (or in the words of Dr Thomas Barnardo "the waifs whom I find deserted and maimed on the very threshold of life"), Babies Castle became a mixed home for children under eight in 1908. Babies Castle housed thousands of infants for 79 years, until its closure in 1965. It was renamed Hawkhurst Castle and operated as a private nursing home for the elderly. The property was sold in 2005 for residential development. Ronald was later placed in Howard House on Cardington Road in Bedfordshire and then Meadows Memorial Home on London Road, Southborough, Kent. Meadows Memorial Home was established in 1939 for boys over 11 years of age with learning difficulties. Meadows Memorial still operates today, as a residential special school for children with learning difficulties. Ronald stayed at Meadows Memorial Home for about six years. There were around 60 boys at the home, and Ronald recalls volunteering for kitchen duty to avoid school. He helped with scrubbing, cleaning and peeling potatoes to earn pocket money. In 1961 Ronald remembers a Barnardo's representative coming to the home and asking if any of the children wanted to go to Australia. The children were attracted by stories of adventure, sunshine and freedom in the outback - as well as a six week voyage on a big ship. Ronald, aged 16, was amongst those who eagerly put up their hand to migrate. Barnardo was one of the pioneers of British child migration to the colonies, migrating some 30,000 children to Canada from 1882-1939 and 2,784 children to Australia from 1921-1967. Children were sent to Canada and Australia to relieve the population pressure in overcrowded British cities, to populate the empire with 'good British stock' and to give them a new start in the dominions. Ronald was one of three boys selected to feature in an English newspaper article titled 'Boys will start a new life 'down under'' (see file 2009.0956). The photograph accompanying the article shows the boys pointing to Australia on a globe, with the caption "Off to Australia

to become sheep farmers." There were about 17 children in Ronald's migration party, with two adult escorts, one male and one female. They were taken to Barnardo's Barkingside Village in northeast London, where they stayed for a few days before departing for Australia. The children were supplied with suitcases, clothing, underwear, footwear, a mackintosh, combs and brushes. Ronald also packed his prayer book and sporting trophies from Meadows Memorial School "because that's all I owned. I was proud of them and still am." The children boarded the P&O liner SS STRATHEDEN at Tilbury on 7 November 1961. STRATHEDEN was launched on 10 June 1937, with accommodation for 448 first and 563 tourist class passengers. It embarked on its maiden voyage from England to Australia on 24 December 1937. STRATHEDEN was requisitioned as a troopship during World War II and was involved in the North African landings. In 1946 STRATHEDEN became the first vessel to be returned to P&O after the war. It was refitted to accommodate 527 first and 453 tourist class passengers in 1947, before being converted into a one-class liner for 1,200 passengers. STRATHEDEN was sold to Greek ship owner John S Latsis and renamed HENRIETTA LATSI, and eventually broken up in Italy in 1969. Ronald arrived in Sydney on 17 December 1961 and was taken to the Barnardo's Tooloogan Vale training farm at Scone in the NSW Hunter Valley. Barnardo's had sold its Mowbray Park farm at Picton (opened 1929) in 1960 and purchased the Scone property to establish a farm training school for migrant boys of post-school age. After completing his farm training, Ronald stayed on at Tooloogan Vale for 12 months as an overseer. Ronald was then posted to a dairy farm in north Scone, where he remained for four years until gaining his truck driver's licence at the age of 21. He is still working as a truck driver today.