**Migrating to Australia**

**Background information on the SS Great Britain’s Australia Voyages**

From 1770 Australia had been part of the British Empire and while to start with it had been used as a penal colony, by the 1850’s ships were bringing free immigrants to settle in the country. In 1852 the SS Great Britain made its first voyage to Australia carrying over 600 passengers, most of whom were emigrating to the country in search of a better life.

For much of the early 1850’s the main reason people chose to migrate to Australia was gold. It had been discovered in the country and this encouraged people to migrate from the UK in the hope of discovering some for themselves. However, towards the end of the 1850’s as gold was becoming rarer, the main reason for migrating changed and most people were moving for economic reasons. Life in the UK was difficult for many, and Australia offered more opportunities for people, with many going to work on farms and in emerging industries. The impact of so many new migrants settling in Australia was huge for the Aboriginal people who lived there, as they were forced off their lands and many died in conflict or from diseases brought over by the new arrivals.

On average the journey to Australia on the SS Great Britain took 60 days and while the combination of sail and steam engine made the journey times relatively reliable, it was still an ocean voyage through rough seas and weather. Letters, diaries, newspapers, and ship’s logs written by some of those onboard, give us an insight into what life was like. Carrying up to 675 passengers, across all classes from First to Steerage, it made a total of 32 voyages to and from Australia. While some passengers were only visiting friends or family, many thousands remained in the country permanently.

Further Information:

* Explore the voyages of the SS Great Britain using Global Stories: <https://globalstories.ssgreatbritain.org/>