

All Our Tracks and Ways

Book Review by Dr Paul Roe

BOOK REVIEW

I'm full of admiration for James Fleming's meticulous tracking of his family's journey from settled rural England to venturing out as pioneers of one of the remotest parts of earth at Bourke.

His depth of research is nothing short of heroic and he has gifted the community of Bourke with a unique window into its past.

It has been said that global history begins at the parish pump. Local historian J.J. Alderson argued that macro-history is composed of a network of microhistories.

The writing of a national history is a good thing, but other histories are necessary

first. We must first have the lesser histories, histories of towns, districts, schools,

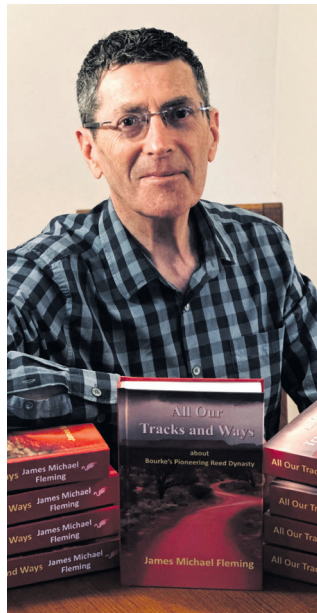
churches, even families. This study is the foundation upon which national and international histories rest.

If this is true, then the story of the Reed story told in *All Our Tracks and Ways* is a genuine response to Henry Lawson's bold assertion "If you know Bourke, you know Australia." Factors like fame, location, size and remoteness don't always determine importance.

As I read James' detailed account of the Reed family's journey from the tiny hamlet of Ash Green in Staffordshire, to carving a house and a living out of the bush around Fort Bourke on the Darling River, I realised I was involved in witnessing a minor epic. By painting the large backdrop of an English landscape rich with ancient castles, churches and villages England - James gives his family's frontier story depth-of-field.

In the end, it straddled two centuries and was woven into significant international developments as well as momentous events in Australia's growth to nationhood. Sketching his ancestors' military involvement in the great upheavals shaping Europe in the 18th century helps understand how Sgt James Reed's family launched on the dangerous journey half way round the world to serve with a regiment in charge of convicts in the colony of New South Wales.

He adds colour to the narrative by supplying snapshots of Army life, the dangers of emigrating on a convict ship, barracks life in burgeoning Sydney town, Windsor and Wollongong, road building over the Blue Mountains, the active contributions of the church, the



Author Jim Fleming. PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

ending of the convict era and the gold rushes.

By the close of the 1850's James and Frances and their 12 children had settled into life as Australians. But remarkably, when the Reed family's teenage sons drove bullock teams out to Wellington as part of the expansion of the Western frontier, the family up and left Sydney to follow them and to go even further.

It was this that provoked James to embark on his painstaking research. He asked himself, "Why would a middle-aged couple suddenly move their family 800 kilometres from a booming modern city life to a barely existent place on the settlement frontier?"

The narrative is honest in detailing the bloody collisions between settlers and the Aboriginal tribes in NSW and swings wide to include the aftermath of turmoil on the goldfields. In the early 1860's the Reeds began to look at possibilities of advancing their fortunes in the North West where riverboats had begun to turn the Darling River into a highway to markets in the South.

The story of the family's journey to the fledgling settlement of Fort Bourke in 1862 is an Australian version of Westward Ho! in its own right. The Reeds found a couple of bark huts, two pubs and a store sitting precariously on the flood plain - a lawless, rough and tough frontier town. It expands into the story of a growing clan co-operating to secure wealth.

The family steadily procured land in town but had to learn bush style building and business the hard way. The men first found hard physical work cutting timber and driving wagons and then opening a boarding house and a pub in Gongolgon and Mount Oxley along the main route to Sydney.

Dust storms, drought, dis-

ease, bushrangers, simply getting lost in the bush, tested family resolve. The Darling River invaded their new home in 1864 but within ten years, eight out of their ten children had joined them and set about building a life in the Bourke district.

James has combed the Bourke archives to create a picture of a growing rural economy and township - banks, hospital, doctors, wool and mining industries, newspapers, road, river and rail links. He is careful to explain customs, diseases, laws, business procedures, religious rites and drilling down to things like pound-keeping and writing wills.

The family became respected members of the community, being owners of a number of hotels. (James has an appendix giving a thorough history of pubs from Bourke to Gongolgon.) Among the men, George Reed helped petition the governor to declare Bourke a Municipality in 1878 and later James Murphy was cited as an Australian Man of Mark.

Frances typifies the humbler, but perhaps more important role of women - a faithful wife and mother known for her skills, hospitality, and maintaining the Reed's longstanding Christian faith as a staunch member of the Anglican church. In her memorandum, she expressed her hope of meeting the family again 'before Christ's throne.'

When matriarch Frances Reed died in 1895 after 36 years of marriage and patriarch James two years later, the clan had grown to 85 grand-children and 40 great-grandchildren many spread throughout the district. The author closes his long journey following the family's fortunes,

"...James' and Frances' life story is one of a devoted, resilient and resourceful couple whose initiative and enterprise helped forge a better life for their ten adult children and eighty-nine grandchildren. Prominent among the earliest pioneers who helped found the town of Bourke, they were honoured with a prominent memorial stone in the town cemetery and their memory is celebrated by thousands of descendants..." p 390

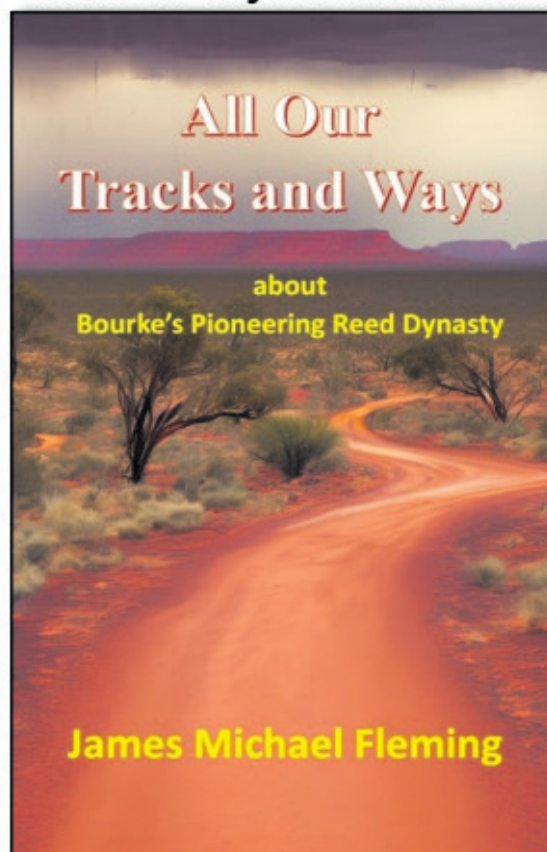
The prodigious effort of James Fleming has given a valuable resource not only to Bourke, but to anyone wanting to understand the making of modern Australia.

DR PAUL ROE
THE OUTBACK HISTORIAN

**BOURKE CEMETERY GRAVESTONE P 396

Bourke book release

Ideal for anyone interested in the town's history



The story of Bourke's earliest decades through the eyes of town pioneers, the Reed family.

An heirloom-quality hardback book of 612 pages that include 50 photographs 19 illustrations 11 maps 3 charts family group sheets and an appendix on Bourke hotels.

All Our Tracks and Ways Bourke's Pioneering Reed Dynasty

James Michael Fleming

Copies are just \$50 (including shipping) from the author's website at www.jmfwriter.net or email him at jmfwriter@outlook.com



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