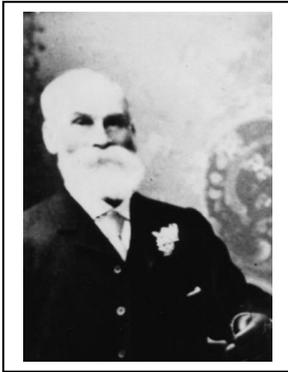




STEEPLE ASTON VILLAGE ARCHIVE TRUST

Steeple Aston sends its poor to Tasmania

In July 1852 Steeple Aston Vestry, the parish council of its day, decided by 9 votes to 6 to tackle poverty and under-employment in the village by sending a group of young men and women to start a new life in Tasmania. They would be escorted to their ship and given £3 each to equip them for their new life. The tenant farmers opposed the plan, claiming there was no surplus labour, but others including the landowners (the main ratepayers) argued that many young men were allowed to lie idle in the winter months. The Vestry seems to have been looking for young men with no full-time work but with steady girlfriends prepared to go out with them. So far we know a good deal about six of them: Joseph Elmore, William, John and Kezia Faulkner, and Eliza and Elizabeth Wilkins. The 1851 census shows Joseph Elmore's mother Hannah as a widow working as a charwoman; she was living in Cow Lane with a disabled daughter and a younger son. The three Faulknors were the oldest of nine children of John Faulkner, a labourer, and his wife Elizabeth. The family of eleven shared a cottage in Fir Lane (then called East Street). The Wilkins girls were already in domestic service – they were the older children of another labourer, Thomas Wilkins, and his wife Hannah, who lived in Harrisville with two younger daughters.



John Faulkner 1832-1921



Elizabeth Faulkner née Wilkins 1836-98

In September Rector Joseph Burrows married three couples on the same day: William Faulkner and Eliza Wilkins were followed by Joseph Elmore and Kezia Faulkner. Finally Rose Wells was married to Henry Markham, a labourer from Middle Aston. Rose was the daughter of George Wells, a sixty-year-old widower and farm labourer living near the church on Northside. It's not yet certain whether Henry and Rose Markham went to Tasmania, but there is no sign of them in Oxfordshire in 1861. On 23 November 1852 the *Northumberland* left Liverpool with a cargo of 274 migrants, among them at least five from Steeple Aston – Joseph and Kezia Elmore, William and Eliza Faulkner and Elizabeth Wilkins. They reached Launceston in February 1853, and began life there as farm-hands, cooks and housemaids. Sadly, Kezia died of heart disease in 1855, but Joseph later remarried, and his descendants are now prominent people in Tasmania. John Faulkner went out separately in 1854, sponsored by his elder brother, and married Elizabeth Wilkins in Launceston. William paid £80 to bring out his parents and six younger siblings – they arrived in January 1857. Gradually the Faulknors' fortunes improved and they were able to lease and then buy land, while raising big families. Several years ago a great-granddaughter of John and Elizabeth, Mrs Dorothy Fessey, contacted Oxfordshire genealogist Clare Abbott to discover her family origins. SAVA is grateful to Clare for bringing this story to our attention, and to Mrs Fessey for providing photographs and many further details.