

## 5. Poverty and Migration – John and Caroline Molteno’s descendants scattered

John Molteno was the second son of the original Anthony Molteno who had settled in London and become a prominent bookseller.<sup>1</sup> He was born on 11 February 1788 and baptised six weeks later in the Bavarian Embassy Chapel on 23 March.<sup>2</sup> He and his wife Caroline Bower are very important in the family’s history because their eldest son, John Charles Molteno, who emigrated to the Cape Colony, had fourteen children who survived into adulthood. These South African Moltenos resulted in by far the largest branch of Anthony’s descendants, and much of the rest of this book is about their lives.

### How John Molteno earned his living

We know very little about John. There was a portrait of him as a little child which the brother he was closest to, Charles Dominic, kept all his life. John’s granddaughter, Caroline Molteno (later Murray), commented years later when she saw it: ‘I think it a lovely face, such large beautiful eyes and long curly hair.... An Italian face. I think it looks so like those old Italian pictures of children. [I’m told by my mother that] artists used to say he would make a splendid model for a picture of St John. Papa, nor I think any of us, are much like him; we are more like the Bowers.’<sup>3</sup>

John was well educated, but on growing up had to find some way other than printselling to earn his living because his father’s business was going to be carried on by his elder brother, James Anthony. He decided to study law, perhaps with a view to practising as an attorney of the King’s Bench,<sup>4</sup> and indeed became the first member of the family to be a lawyer. Several of his grandsons at the Cape also chose the law towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in every generation of the South African branch of the family since then there have been lawyers. Whether John ever practised in the courts, we do not know. But he took advantage of a new employment opportunity that opened up in the

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<sup>1</sup> John signed himself John in his will. His father’s will had referred to him as John C. Molteno. Since John called his first-born son John Charles, it is reasonable to conclude that John’s own second name was also Charles.

<sup>2</sup> Transcription of the Bavarian Embassy Chapel record signed by his father, Anthony Molteno. John’s godparents were Mrs Anne Bryer and an Italian, Santo Topari.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Molteno’s Journal, 30.8.1870, UCT Special Collection. The likeness had been sent to her father, John Charles Molteno, by his sister in law whom Caroline called ‘old Aunt Charles Molteno’. This lady was Margaret Glass (nee Scott) who had married Charles Dominic Molteno after being widowed.

<sup>4</sup> The only source for this information is his grandson, Percy Molteno. See his biography of his father, *The Life and Times of Sir J. C. Molteno, K.C.M.G., First Premier of Cape Colony ...*, 2 vols., London, Smith, Elder, 1900. The King’s Bench was the highest court of common law in England and Wales, with both civil and criminal jurisdiction; it was finally merged into the High Court in 1875.

very early 19<sup>th</sup> century – working for the British government in what came to be called the Civil Service (civil as opposed to military service or the Royal Navy).

The times he was living in were a period of startling change. New technological inventions were transforming both the work people did (cotton mills and coal mines) as well as the country's infrastructure (canals, gas lighting, steam power). Economic growth year on year was becoming the norm, really for the first time in history. An apparently endless migration of country people to the new towns and cities was taking place. Britain's population doubled, and then doubled again, through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The modern world, built on science and engineering and a capitalist economy dominated by limited liability companies and market forces, was in the making.

Government in Britain in the early 1800s still did very little apart from defence and tax collection. The legal and judicial system largely ran itself. The Bank of England was a private bank. The empire in India had been wholly sub-contracted by Parliament to the 'Honourable' East India Company. Indeed the Company was the first institution to realize it had to take public administration seriously and, inspired by the Chinese imperial system of competitive examination, set up the East India Company College in 1806 to train its officials. But what we today would see as the main functions of government – managing the economy, being responsible for the wellbeing of the population (health, education, housing, pensions and social services) and taking action when market failures in the private sector occur – were almost totally non-existent in John's time. But the unprecedented growth in economic activity that had started, speed of social change (including urbanization) it involved, and complexity of issues facing society were just about to force governments to assume new roles and powers. What did affect John's life very soon, however, were the Napoleonic wars that had started when he was a boy. The British government now needed urgently to increase its revenues in order to finance the 20 years of war that took place.

This was what gave John an opportunity.<sup>5</sup> He got a job in the Legacy Duty Office.<sup>6</sup> This tax had been introduced in 1780 and was levied on any asset (excluding landed property) that a person inherited. How he obtained the post is not clear since civil service posts at that time could usually only be obtained by purchase or patronage, a situation that continued for a quarter of a century after his death.<sup>7</sup> It is possible, but no evidence has survived, that one of his father's aristocratic customers may have secured the post for him.

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<sup>5</sup> John was a beneficiary of the 1778 Catholic Relief Act which had enabled Catholics, in taking up a public post, for the first time to swear an oath of allegiance to the Crown *without* taking the Oath of Supremacy or denying the truth of transubstantiation. See earlier chapters. Catholic Record Society, Vol. XIX (London 1917), Miscellanea XI, p. 211.

<sup>6</sup> Percy Molteno asserts that his grandfather became Deputy Keeper of Legacy Duty, *The Life and Times of Sir John Molteno*, Vol. 1, p. 1. John in his will described himself as simply 'of the Legacy Duty Office, Somerset House, Gentleman'. Public Record Office/The National Archives, cat. ref. PROB 11/1724. And Nancy Bingle (nee Molteno)'s stepdaughter, Eliza Bingle, merely told Betty Molteno that he 'had an appointment at the Legacy Duty Office'.

<sup>7</sup> Appointment to government service on merit was only introduced by the Northcote-Trevelyan Report in 1854.

John worked in the newly completed Somerset House. This imposing edifice, built around a huge courtyard, still stands on the north bank of the Thames. You get a lovely view of it as you cross Waterloo Bridge and, if you are riding on the top deck of a bus and look to your right, you can see the stone inscription, Inland Revenue, high up on that section of the building. In view of the increasing demands on it, the government in the 1770s had decided to build one huge complex that could house most of the offices of state under one roof.<sup>8</sup> Construction started in 1776, and was finally finished in 1801. The Royal Navy took up most space. 'Each department ... was allotted a vertical slice' of the six-storey building which consisted of 'cellar, basement, ground floor, first floor, attic and garret'.<sup>9</sup> Heads of department had their living quarters and associated domestic staff in Somerset House too. John's Legacy Duty Office (which was part of Inland Revenue) was located in the northwest portion of the building. When newly appointed, he may well have started by having to work in the basement, where a critic of the time described how '[i]n these damp, black and comfortless recesses, the clerks of the nation grope about like moles, immersed in Tartarean gloom, where they stamp, sign, examine, indite, doze and swear...'

### **The Bower Family**

John met his future wife, Caroline Bower, when she was on a pleasure trip by boat to Margate with her parents and only sister, Alicia. She came from a family that had made good in the very earliest stages of the Industrial Revolution. Her grandfather had been born in Scotland in 1710. He moved south to Batley in Yorkshire and started a business collecting old woollen clothes, tearing them up and getting them re-woven into cloth. In 1750 he built a woollen mill which, given its early date, must have been water-powered, not steam-driven. He did well financially.<sup>10</sup>

His son, George Clifford Bower, moved to London and at the age of 27 was 'elected into the service' of the Bank of England as a clerk in 1787. This was a very desirable post to get because it meant security for life and a certain social standing. George celebrated by getting married the very next year at St Mary's Church, Newington. His wife was Jane Read, whose father was the Admiralty timber surveyor of the Deptford Dockyard – a responsible post in an age when all Royal Navy ships were still constructed of wood. George's father was so pleased at his son's success that he built him a substantial house in the village of Peckham (South Grove, Rye Lane was the address),<sup>11</sup> just outside London. This is where Caroline grew up, the second of nine children (two girls and the rest of them

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<sup>8</sup> At the time of John's death in 1827, the civil service-to-be comprised only 8,000 people; today it is over 400,000.

<sup>9</sup> [www.somersetshouse.org.uk](http://www.somersetshouse.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> His great grandson, H. R. Bower, to Percy Molteno, 2 Dec.1926.

<sup>11</sup> Index of List of Voters, 1833, St Giles, Peckham, lists George Bower as a local voter, the 'annual value' of his house being sufficient to qualify – £32.

boys), and the beginning of a Molteno family connection with that part of London that was to last well over a century.<sup>12</sup>

A portrait of Caroline's father, painted when he had been promoted to the post of Principal of the Power of Attorney Office, shows him in serious mood wearing a dark coat and white cravat – his nose prominent, eyes dark with pouches beneath, and his thick hair cut short and standing up stiffly.

The process of his getting the job at the Bank illustrates a world very different from today. He first became a candidate on 11 February 1786 on the recommendation of Edward Darrell, Deputy Governor of the Bank – something that must have required his father pulling a few strings. As for testing young George's abilities, this consisted of only two tests, one in writing (taking 23 minutes) and the second in adding (only 17 minutes)!<sup>13</sup>

His starting salary was very modest – £50 a year. He got an increment of £10 every few years. But even after 34 years of service, he was still only being paid £130 a year. Promotion required waiting for older members of staff to die. Towards the end of his career, however, he was eventually promoted to Deputy and finally (in 1830) to Principal of the Power of Attorney Office, and was then paid £290 a year. It is very difficult to be sure what this means in today's terms, except that it was a reasonably substantial salary.<sup>14</sup>

There seems to have been no notion of retirement. George continued in post as Principal for eight years until his death in 1838 at the age of 78.<sup>15</sup>

One unexpected advantage of his becoming an employee of the Bank of England was that in 1799 the Court of Directors decided that in future one-sixth of all new clerks would be drawn from the sons (no daughters need apply) of existing clerks with more than 15 years' service. Two of George's sons (Caroline Molteno's brothers) joined the Bank. In the next generation, three Bowers worked there. And in the fourth, two of them, of whom one was a woman. She, Ivy Lesley Bower, was a great granddaughter of George Bower, but was still forced to resign from her post on getting married in 1928. Altogether by that date, George's family had been associated with the Bank for 140 years and given 271 years of service.

### **John Molteno and Caroline Bower marry**

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<sup>12</sup> H. R. Bower to Percy Molteno, 26 Jul.1926. UCT Special Collection, BC601, Box 3. Also papers in BC330, Box 102 (on the Bower family).

<sup>13</sup> Bank of England: *Nomination of Clerks, Vol. 2*, Code No: M5/690 and H3/720; *Salary Books*; and W. Marston Acres, 'A Long Record', *The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street*, Vol. 4, No. 28, Dec. 1927.

<sup>14</sup> Using today's Retail Price Index, George Bower's annual salary would now be some £21,000. But when compared to average earnings at the time, it would be vastly more. This conclusion is based on the website, [www.measuringwealth.com](http://www.measuringwealth.com) which explains how complicated the calculation is, and how it all depends on what you are trying to value.

<sup>15</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 11, Jan-June 1839, p. 105. He died 1 December 1838.

When Caroline's mother, Mrs Bower, was once asked why she did not, like so many mothers, bend every effort to marry off her daughters, she replied phlegmatically: 'If they are to be married, they will be married right enough.'<sup>16</sup> The Bower family were not Catholic, but this does not seem to have been an obstacle in John Molteno's view since Caroline let their children be christened as Catholics. She and John were married in the Anglican church of St Mary Magdalene, Bermondsey, in the summer of 1813.<sup>17</sup> He was twenty-five and she three years younger. The witnesses from John's family included his brother, Charles Dominic, and his sister Mary who had married Charles Bristow. Their mother had already died three years before; but their father Anthony was still alive and may have been present. On the Bower side, Caroline's father George Bower was a witness, and present also were Alicia, and Robert Jackson who was soon to marry her.<sup>18</sup>

John and Caroline started a family right away. During their 14 years of marriage, they had seven children – four boys and three girls – of whom two died in infancy.

A sign of the family's firmly English identity in this third generation is that none of their children had Italian godparents; instead they were mainly John's brothers and sisters – Charles Dominic, Rose and Frank Molteno.<sup>19</sup>

Their eldest child, John Charles (who was called Charles as a boy, but came later to be known as John Molteno at the Cape),<sup>20</sup> was born on 5 June 1814, just two months after the Emperor Napoleon had abdicated following the collapse of the French forces in Paris. Old Anthony Molteno must have seen his little grandson being christened on the 20th of June in the same Bavarian Embassy Chapel where the boy's father had been. Present were his Uncle Charles Molteno and Aunt Rose Molteno. They were present again nearly ten years later when John Charles's much younger brother, Frederick James, was christened in the same chapel on 30 August 1823.<sup>21</sup> On neither occasion is there a record of any members of Caroline's family being present; perhaps as members of the Church of England, they preferred not to.

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<sup>16</sup> Notes made by Betty Molteno from information supplied by Eliza Bingle.

<sup>17</sup> 3 May 1813. International Genealogical Index (IGI) record.

<sup>18</sup> Robert and Alicia Jackson moved to France in 1826 in the wake of the deep economic depression that hit Britain following the Napoleonic wars, and remained there until Robert's death in 1839. Their sons, Arthur and Henry, emigrated to the Cape in 1846 at the invitation of their cousin, Caroline's son John Charles Molteno. They were followed by their younger brother Sidney (1822-1912) 14 years later. Today, getting on for two centuries later, there are still Jacksons farming in the Karoo not far from John Charles's original farm at Nelspoort.

<sup>19</sup> Bavarian Embassy Chapel records.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Glass (stepdaughter of Charles Dominic Molteno) to Percy Molteno, 28 Feb. 1899. She remembers that John Charles was called Charles in the family when he was a boy in England.

<sup>21</sup> Catholic Family History Society CDs of Bavarian Embassy Chapel Baptismal Records, consulted in the Catholic National Library.

The family lived at 11 Soho Square, Central London, which meant that John was only a few minutes' walk away from where he worked at Somerset House, and from where his family home in Pall Mall still was.

John and Caroline took the education of their children seriously, the girls as well as the boys. John Charles, the eldest, was sent off to a school run by a Dr Harcourt at the Old Rectory in the little Surrey village of Ewell near Epsom. There he was taught arithmetic and 'the usual stereotyped course of Latin grammar and recitation of Latin poetry.' For the rest of his life, he could quote the rules of grammar (in Latin!) and recite many passages from the Latin classics.<sup>22</sup> His younger sister Nancy once wrote a charming letter to their mother in excellent French thanking her for having provided her with the means to obtain 'une education liberale'.<sup>23</sup>

#### John Molteno and Caroline Bower's children<sup>24</sup>

Birth	Christian Names	Marriage	Spouse	Death
1814 Baptised 20 June	"John" Charles	1. 1843 2. 1851 3. 1875	Maria Hewitson (1815-45) Elizabeth "Maria" Jarvis (1830-74) Sobella "Minnie" Blenkins (1846-1926)	1886
1816	Charles "Frank" <sup>25</sup>	1. 18XX 2. 18YY	1. NAME TO COME 2. NAME TO COME	1869
1815 Born 16 Nov. <sup>26</sup>	Frances	--		Died very young
1820 Born 8 May	Nancy	1848	John E. Bingle	1892

<sup>22</sup> Percy A. Molteno, *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno....*, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Alicia Molteno to her mother, 5 Dec.1836.

<sup>24</sup> Quote marks indicate the name by which the child was known in the family.

<sup>25</sup> I have not been able to trace Frank's baptismal record and there were no official birth certificates at this time. But his tombstone records he was born on 16 November 1816.

<sup>26</sup> Bavarian Embassy Chapel records. Frances was born in November 1815 and baptised 8 January 1816.

1823 Baptised 28 Sept.	"Frederick" James <sup>27</sup>	1856	Laura Sheridan	1895
1825	Alicia	Abt. 1855	Arthur Hartley	1857
1827	Johnny	--		1831

### John Molteno's early death

John was ill for some time before his death in the bleakest part of winter, January 1827. He was only 39. The Catholic Church recorded his death in its Obituaries.<sup>28</sup> Only a few days before, he had written to his sister-in-law, Margaret (his brother, Charles Dominic Molteno's wife): 'I should have written to you, but my mind has been harassed and worried about many things and a severe cold caught under a debilitated state of body has laid me up with a violent bilious attack, which has pulled me down very much, rendering me very nervous and low spirited.'<sup>29</sup> He went on to send his love to his sister Mary (Charles Bristow's wife) and promised to 'take the earliest opportunity of going into the City, to receive her dividends and send it to her.' Whether deliberately or not, he ended his letter with an 'Adieu' – implying 'Farewell for ever'.

He seemed to know that death was approaching because he had drawn up his will a few days before sending this letter, and only weeks before he died. It is a sad, even bleak, document. He describes himself as of 'sound and disposing mind, but in ill-health'. And then sets out in a single stark sentence: 'My circumstances are such as not to permit of my making any provision specifically for my family.' He simply left whatever he had (but listed no property or possessions) to Caroline and appointed her and her father as his executors. At the formal proving of the will on 12 April 1827 George Bower and Caroline's brother Valentine were present.<sup>30</sup>

We do not know why John was so hard up. He made no reference in his will to any inheritance from his father's estate – which had been substantial and of which he had been appointed co-executor with his older brother James Anthony a decade before.

### Caroline Molteno in very difficult circumstances

<sup>27</sup> International Genealogical Index (IGI) record states 1824; but the Bavarian Embassy Chapel baptismal record states he was born on 30 August 1823.

<sup>28</sup> Catholic Records Society, Vol. XII, Obituaries (London, 1913), drawing from *The Laity's Directory Obituaries, 1773-1839*.

<sup>29</sup> John Molteno to Margaret Molteno, 15.1.1827.

<sup>30</sup> Public Record Office/The National Archives, catalogue ref. PROB 11/1724. The will is dated 11 January 1827.

Caroline was now in a very difficult situation. She was pregnant – her last child, Johnny, was born later that year, but died as a little boy in 1831. She had five children to support – John Charles was fourteen, and Frank a year younger, both still at school; Nancy seven; little Fred only four; and the youngest, Alicia, still almost a baby. Caroline herself was 37. At this age and with so many children in tow, her chances of remarriage were slight. She also had no experience of earning her own living and in those days there was no such thing as a widow's pension.<sup>31</sup> As for her Molteno relations, James Anthony was the only brother-in-law who was really well off and he went bankrupt, as we have seen, a few years after John's death.

Luckily Caroline's parents stood by her. She and the children moved to the village of Peckham where the Bowers were living and where she had grown up. Her father found her accommodation and the fact that, for the next 20 years, her mother Jane was just round the corner must have been of great practical help.<sup>32</sup>

Caroline had to pull the eldest boy, John Charles, out of school and he got a clerical job in the office of Mr T. Dennis, 'a ship and insurance broker of Langbourne Chambers, Fenchurch Street, next door to what subsequently became the offices of the great Victorian shipping company, the Castle Line.'<sup>33</sup> It is possible that his uncle Charles Dominic Molteno, who worked for the East India Docks, may have used his contacts to get him the job.

Money remained very short. On 23 June 1829, only two and a half years after her husband's death, the following advertisement appeared in *The Times*: 'To be let on lease a very convenient comfortable Family House on Peckham-rye Terrace. The situation is considered the most beautiful of any within a short distance, being little more than 4 miles from the metropolis. Mr Molteno, the current occupier, will allow the premise to be viewed by tickets that may be obtained at 67 St Pauls Churchyard. Possession will be given on Midsummer's Day.' This 'Mr Molteno' was presumably 15-year old John Charles having to take on adult responsibilities following his father's death and his mother Caroline being so hard up she needed the rent from the accommodation her father had acquired for her when she was widowed. She certainly was the owner of a property in Peckham for some years; the Sun Fire Insurance Company records that they were insuring her property at 3 South Street Terrace, Rye Lane, Peckham in 1836.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The concept of government paying old age pensions only came into existence in Britain following the landslide victory of the Liberal Party in 1906 (when, incidentally, Caroline's grandson, Percy Molteno, became an M.P. in the House of Commons). Even then, one had to be at least 70 years old and have an income of no more than £21 a year in order to receive a pension of just 25 pence a week (worth a bit over £20 in today's money)!

<sup>32</sup> Jane Bower only died in 1849, by which time Caroline herself was almost sixty.

<sup>33</sup> P. A. Molteno, *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno...*, op.cit., p. 7. The Castle Line, which was owned by Sir Donald Currie, Percy's father-in-law, played a prominent part in South African trade with Britain for nearly a century. See later chapters.

<sup>34</sup> Guildhall Library, Records of Sun Fire, Document Ref. No. 11936/552/1226434 dated 12 Jul. 1836.



At some point Caroline found a way of earning a modest living. She opened a tiny private school in her house at 2 Rye Lane.<sup>35</sup> The 1841 census<sup>36</sup> recorded her as the head of household and already 50 years of age. By this time both John Charles and Frank had gone overseas, but Nancy (20 years old), Fred (18), and Alicia were still living with her.<sup>37</sup> Her nephew, Henry Jackson (a son of her sister Alicia), aged ten, was also living with them.<sup>38</sup> The house was crowded with 11 other people, including six children, four women (two of whom were possibly servants) and a man. Whether Caroline had turned her home, following her father's death in 1838, into a boarding house where she took in a number of children, or it was also where the actual school was conducted, is unclear.

One decision Caroline had made, following John's death, was to bring the children up as Protestants despite their having been baptised as Catholics.<sup>39</sup> This reversion to the religious loyalties of her own family was exactly what Letitia Molteno did 20 years later when her husband, William Molteno (a nephew of John) died in Jamaica in 1846. The result was that both William's son Frederick (and his children in turn), and John and Caroline's offspring, grew up from then on as Protestants.

Caroline was clearly a courageous woman who tackled her difficult situation head on. Her mother, Jane Bowring, wrote in 1838 to 'my dear grandson', John Charles (now a young man and working in Cape Town), saying 'I wish you just behold your Mother and Sister. You could not fail to be delighted with their appearance.'<sup>40</sup>

### **Peckham – the village that became a London suburb**

Peckham was where Caroline spent the next 40 years of her life after 1827 and three generations of Moltenos would live much of their lives in the area – her youngest son Fred after his final return from overseas, his three daughters and son Albert, and a great grandson of Caroline's, Bill Molteno

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<sup>35</sup> The careful reader will see here various addresses in Peckham possibly associated with Caroline. I have not been able to clarify things further.

<sup>36</sup> This census entry, as I have found with so many early official records, is full of mistakes. Fred's age is mistakenly put down as 15 (the '8' having been entered as a '5'); and Alicia's name misspelt as Alisia.

<sup>37</sup> In a letter to his mother, dated 9 Oct. 1842, John Charles sends his love to 'his dear sisters and to Fred', but not to Frank because, I conclude, John Charles knew that Frank had already emigrated by this time.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Jackson, John Charles Molteno's young first cousin, was one of the Jackson brothers who emigrated to the Cape a few years after this (1846) and worked with John Charles on his sheep farms in the Karoo. The other brothers were the eldest, Arthur, and Sydney and Julius. Julius married Mme. Fromont of Geneva, but died quite young in 1865.

<sup>39</sup> Eliza Bingle is unequivocal on this point. 'Copy of Notes made by Betty Molteno ... concerning the Molteno family, the information supplied by Eliza Bingle ...'

<sup>40</sup> Mrs George Bowring to John Charles Molteno, 20 May 1838.

Durrant, who was to play a pivotal role in developing London's public transport system in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup>

Peckham has had quite a chequered history in terms of moving up and down the social scale over the past two centuries.<sup>42</sup> Forming part of the parish of St Giles in Camberwell, it lay just a few miles south-east of the City of London, and for centuries was a small village surrounded by fields, and peaceful because of its being cut off from the City by the Thames. So peaceful, in fact, that 'the guardians of the public peace were two or three old men with lanterns and staves, whose chief office consisted of looking up at the sky and listening to the church clock, and then waking up the peaceful inhabitants by bawling out the time in husky voice, and the information with it, that it was a fine or cloudy morning.'<sup>43</sup>

The population of London had started to grow rapidly in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it had more and more people to be fed. Peckham was surrounded by fertile land and its inhabitants took advantage of the opportunity and turned to market gardening.

When Caroline came back there to live in 1828, a directory described it as 'a populous hamlet ... containing many spacious and handsome houses and tasteful detached villas', its 'one principal street well lighted with gas [and] inhabited by very respectable persons'.<sup>44</sup> There was one possible note of warning – the village contained a huge 'asylum for decayed victuallers' that had been opened the year Caroline arrived. These retired brewers and publicans had 'decayed' perhaps, at least in part, because of habits of consumption they had developed during their working lives!

The village was the last on the old drovers' track up from Kent before the City could be reached. Here they would rest up with their sheep and cattle on the last day or two, grazing them on common land, before pushing on to Smithfield, the great London livestock market. The public houses on the High Street reflected their clientele with names like the Kentish Drovers, the Red Bull, and the Red Cow. And the route from there came to be called the Old Kent Road – famous later on the *Monopoly* board as the cheapest property one could buy in London, and with the lowest rents in return!

This 'down market' reputation of the Old Kent Road hints at the next transition Peckham went through. Like many villages in London's environs, it was swallowed up by the expanding city. Caroline lived in South Street (now Rye Lane) which led to Peckham Rye with its big common surrounded by a few large houses. She witnessed more and more of the fields being built over by developers; and by the time of her death in 1866, dozens of residential streets had been built on the arable land around the village. This endless sprawl of little suburban streets where her grandchildren lived in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Melford Road (first listed in the 1871 census), Friern, Lugard and Ivanhoe Roads (the 1881 census), and Arnott Road (the 1891 census) – had simply not

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<sup>41</sup> See later chapters.

<sup>42</sup> Much of what follows is drawn from John D. Beasley, *The Story of Peckham and Nunhead*, London Borough of Southwark, Neighbourhood History No.3.

<sup>43</sup> 'The History of Rye Chapel Lane, Part 1, 1818-1863.

<sup>44</sup> Pigot & Co.'s National and Provincial Commercial Directory (5<sup>th</sup> edn.) (1832-34).

existed when she first lived there. Builders, racing to meet the ever rising demand for housing so near the heart of London, were not constrained by planning requirements in those days, let alone aesthetic considerations. They packed in as much accommodation as possible. Space did not have to be left for schools or parks or sports fields; universal primary schooling provided at public expense did not come into existence until the Elementary Education Act of 1870, by which time Caroline had already died. Nor was there any notion of water-borne sewage; instead, each terraced house had a cesspit at the back, often only a few yards away from the wells where water was drawn for drinking and cooking. No wonder Caroline's little granddaughters, Betty and Caroline, over in England from the wide expanses of the Karoo in 1861 for the first time, were overwhelmed by the absence of any garden and tiny size of the rooms where their grandmother lived.

What the two girls were seeing was yet another transition Peckham was going through. 'By the 1870s North Peckham, which had begun life as a middle-class suburb but then became a poorer area,' was crowded not just with houses but factories, gas works, breweries and all the detritus of London's working class districts. Another century would pass before a new political phenomenon, Labour-controlled local councils, realized that Peckham was seriously deprived and in need of wholesale renovation.

Caroline lived through both the area's explosion in population and decline in the social scale. In 1835, a few years after she arrived, a local Board of Guardians of the Poor was appointed. One of its early reports spoke of the hundreds of 'idle and dissolute characters, their families ragged and starved, and their hovels filthy and wretched'.<sup>45</sup> By 1848, the number of people receiving poor relief in what was now no longer a village but an increasingly poverty-stricken part of Southeast London had risen to 4,584.

Another thing Caroline endured, almost impossible for us to imagine today, were periodic outbreaks of cholera. The area suffered repeatedly. In 1832, 107 people died in the parish of Camberwell, in which Peckham was located; in 1849 over 500; and a few years later even more. It must have been frightening to try and bring one's family safely through such epidemics. The only measure the Rye Lane Chapel could think of was 'weekly meetings [to] be devoted to solemn prayer and supplication to the Lord to implore Him to stay the prevailing and very alarming epidemic of cholera.'<sup>46</sup> It was years before the local council began to make more realistic efforts: only by 1871, some years after Caroline had died, were the 4,000 cesspits filled in and covered sewers introduced.

These conditions in Peckham during her life time are a forceful reminder that the improvements in health and material prosperity that the Industrial Revolution brought to modern urban life in Europe were much slower in coming, and more unevenly experienced as between working class families and the better off strata of society, than people today may realize.

Caroline never remarried. Although never destitute, she was always hard up, particularly in the 1840s after her father had died (in 1838) and before her son John Charles could afford to help her financially.

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Beasley, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> 'The History of Rye Chapel Lane, Part 1, 1818-1863, Church Meeting Minute, 2 Sept. 1849.

### Caroline's children emigrate

Four of her five children concluded that they had no prospect of making a decent living if they stayed in England, and like so many millions of Irish, Scottish and English people, emigrated. Their education had been cut short by their father's death. They could expect no inheritance to give them a start in life. And following their Uncle James Anthony's bankruptcy, they had no well off relations to give them a leg up in life into careers or marriages to well off spouses.

The process of their leaving started in the early 1830s with John Charles going to the Cape aged only 17 and Frank a little later to the Pacific. Then in the 1850s Alicia and Fred moved to Australia. With each departure, Caroline was left more alone. There was no question of her visiting them. She could not afford the fares to such distant places and in any case, this being the age of sail, the voyages took months. It was 20 years before John Charles was able to make a return visit to London. And Frank in Hawaii was never able to; the distance – either the dangerous passage round Cape Horn or via Australia – was just too great and could take up to half a year. He did, however, write occasional letters to both his mother and his sister Nancy, and was clearly a much loved figure in the family. Fred went to Australia but came back quite soon, married in London in 1856, and promptly emigrated again, not to return until after his mother's death. As for Alicia, she also emigrated to Australia in the mid 1850s, but died within a year in a carriage accident. So it was that Caroline was bereft of all but one of her children, Nancy.

She kept in touch particularly with John Charles, and towards the end of her life, took great pleasure in her correspondence with both her daughter-in-law, Maria, and her eldest granddaughters at the Cape when they became teenagers.<sup>47</sup> It is clear from the small number of her letters that have survived how important this contact with them was, even if John Charles himself didn't write as frequently, or reply as promptly, as she expected him to. For many years, he was also in no position to help support her and the younger children. In a letter dated 1842, more than ten years after he had left home, he tells her that he has not really been successful financially and cannot therefore visit her in England. 'You'd think that in this time I would have so far succeeded [financially] as to be able to see you all again, if still alive, but in this time I have been greatly disappointed. The chance of my returning home seems even more distant than ever.' He was still unmarried, the Cape wine export trade in which he had been making a living was collapsing, and he was trying a completely new line of business as a sheep farmer up-country. He apologised for writing infrequently and admitted candidly: 'I am often at a loss in writing private letters ... and it accounts perhaps for the brevity of my letters, my dear mother.' In another later the same year, he tells her that she has 'an inexhaustible fund of interesting matters to communicate to me' – including 'the very full accounts you give me relative to all your arrangements as well as of the [illegible] of the whole family' – 'while I have in return nothing to write about myself.'

John Charles' inability to help his mother financially seems to have lasted throughout the 1840s. In May 1849 he again says: 'Your letter has caused me much painful feeling. I must so far plead guilty to

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<sup>47</sup> A small file of her letters from the early 1860s exists and has been invaluable in writing this section.

having allowed an unusually long time to elapse without writing.’ But ‘You must not suppose that I forget you or that I am indifferent to your welfare. Nothing that I know of in this world could give me greater pleasure than to have it in my power to place you in a comfortable position.’ He went on: ‘I have hoped to be able to do this long ago, but alas, my dear Mother, I have had struggles and difficulties to contend with of which perhaps you have little idea.’ It is worth noting that this letter was not addressed to her at South Street Terrace, Rye Lane, where she had been living, but c/o Bower Esq. at the Bank of England (ie. one of Caroline’s brothers) – which suggests she may have had to give up living in Rye Lane and had moved into cheaper accommodation.

## The Bingles

Caroline did have the comfort of her daughter Nancy who, alone among the children who survived into adulthood, continued to live in England. Nancy lived with her mother until, at the age of 28 (quite late in those days), she married John Bingle, whom she had come to know when he was teaching at Caroline’s school.<sup>48</sup> The wedding took place in the local Anglican church of St. Giles, Camberwell, on 1 July 1848, after which the young couple moved away to Aylesbury for a number of years.

This little town, nestling at the foot of the Chilterns, lay about 40 miles northeast of the City and was not yet connected by rail. This meant that when, on the occasion of Nancy’s birthday in May 1858 a decade later, Caroline thought about visiting her, she would have had to travel across London and then get a coach to Aylesbury. She decided not to go because of ‘the great expense, not to mention the trouble both to you and to me’. What’s more, she felt that ‘the time slipping so fast as it does, [it] would seem as if I had no sooner come that I should have to go away again; and when after so brief a visit, I returned home, I should only feel the more to miss you, and the more dull at my loneliness; therefore, my dearest dear, this letter comes in my stead.’<sup>49</sup>

But Caroline schooled herself to accept what life gave in good heart. As she said in this same letter to Nancy: ‘How much both you and I have to be thankful for! While some poor wretches scarce can tell where they may lay their head, we have a home wherein to dwell and rest upon our bed. I think it is one most pleasing way of shewing our thankfulness and gratitude for all the blessings we enjoy, endeavouring always to have a cheerful countenance. It requires an effort, I know, and great watchfulness, but then it produces a double blessing, for in trying always to look cheerful, we must watch over our tempers, for a cross or bad temper is sure to banish cheerful and sunshiny looks. I think, my dear, there is nothing so winning in anybody as a sweet smiling face.’

Nancy and John Bingle were still living in Temple Square, Aylesbury at the time of the 1861 census.<sup>50</sup> But a few years before Caroline’s death, they returned to the outskirts of London and set up a school

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<sup>48</sup> John Edward Hartwell Bingle (1815-1888).

<sup>49</sup> Caroline Molteno to Nancy Bingle, 7 May 1858.

<sup>50</sup> 1861 Census. Other members of the household were Eliza Bingle, four boy scholars, and two servants.

of their own in Richmond. There they lived modestly, employing only one servant. And at last Caroline was able to see more of them, including going to them for Christmas. But even this journey a dozen miles across London was not easy because the suburban railway only reached Peckham in 1866, the year of her death.

The Bingles were married for 40 years. Mr Bingle only died in the summer of 1888 and Nancy four years later.<sup>51</sup> They never had children of their own although Mr Bingle had adopted his little niece, Eliza, known always in the family as Miss Bingle, who had been born in the same year he and Nancy were married. She became an enthusiastic member of the Molteno family at the Cape, in touch by letter, journeying out there on one occasion, and subscribing to *The Family Chronicle* (of which much more later). Nancy and her husband, throughout their lives, provided a modest but ever welcoming base for the South African branch of the family when her brother John Charles Molteno's grown up sons started coming to England for their university education. Percy was the first to arrive in 1881, and when he got off the boat, immediately caught the train to Richmond. Aunt Nancy was expecting him and had arranged lodgings for him next door to their home at No. 4 Friston Villas, Church Road.

### Other family connections

Caroline kept in touch with several members of her husband John's extended family following his death. Her brother-in-law, Charles Dominic Molteno, was particularly supportive. Many years later, Mr Bingle told Percy Molteno how Uncle Charles had been 'very kind to them' and was 'goodness itself'.<sup>52</sup> Even when he and Margaret moved up to Scotland after his retirement in 1851, they kept closely in touch with Caroline, sharing letters from the Cape, newspapers and so on.

Another circle of her John's relatives who were occasionally in touch were the Bristows. His sister Mary had married Charles Bristow years before. A couple of decades later, and with no contact in the meantime, the youngest boy, Robert, now grown up, came and had tea with Caroline in 1858. His two sisters, Mary and Rose Maria Bristow, both unmarried, had been in touch with him 'and they both sent their kind love' to Caroline who was rather surprised: 'After so many years, neither seeing or hearing anything of them, I am at a loss to account for so sudden a change; however I shall be very happy to see, and shew them any kindness, for he says they must come and see me in the holidays.'<sup>53</sup> In fact, one of them did and then went with her to Richmond for Christmas at the Bingles. This was Christmas 1863, by which time Caroline had moved from Peckham to some kind of boarding house in Brixton (4 Manor View – not a street that exists today). Caroline wrote: 'My niece Miss Bristow went with me to Richmond and we all spent a very happy 10 days, the weather lovely. ... My niece is staying here with me, Miss Field has let her have a bedroom.'<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Mr Bingle died on 13 June 1888, aged 73.

<sup>52</sup> Percy Molteno to his sister, Betty Molteno, 10 April 1881.

<sup>53</sup> Caroline Molteno to Nancy Bingle, 7 May 1858.

<sup>54</sup> Caroline ('Mrs John') Molteno to her daughter-in-law at the Cape, Maria ('Mrs J.C.') Molteno, 4 Jan.1864.

Caroline also saw something of her niece Letitia Molteno in the late 1840s and 50s. As we saw in the previous chapter, Letitia was the widow of William, the son of John Molteno's elder brother, James Anthony Molteno. She had returned from Jamaica in 1847 after the unexpected death of her husband.<sup>55</sup> By this time, Caroline had already been a widow for 20 years and brought up her children on her own. The two women, despite the gap in their ages, were in quite similar circumstances – both widowed at a young age as a result of the premature deaths of their husbands; both hard up; and both deciding to bring up their Catholic-christened children as Anglicans. Letitia's daughter, Kate Molteno, was a little girl at this time and remembered 'Mrs John Molteno' several times visiting her mother, who was very fond of her.

Kate also recollected Letitia telling her 'the story of how [one day] Mrs John Molteno was sitting over the fire feeling very sad when the door was opened quickly and a big bearded man rushed in and was going to embrace her. She began to scream and he said: "Mother, don't you know your own son, come over from Africa?"' This is the only detail we have of John Charles's first visit back to London after 20 years at the Cape. It was 1851, and before any mail contract had been arranged between the Cape and England,<sup>56</sup> and Caroline had had no idea he was coming. After her first fright, it must have been an occasion of great joy. And since John Charles had now established himself as a prosperous sheep farmer, he was hopefully able from then on to support his mother to some extent after more than 20 years of her having been in seriously straitened financial circumstances. The timing was all the more fortunate because Caroline's own mother, Jane Bower had died little more than a year before the visit.<sup>57</sup>

### **Caroline's last years**

Caroline was clearly a remarkable and courageous woman. Someone who had known her when she was about 70 told her grandson, Percy Molteno: 'I recollect her ... as a very beautiful old lady, erect and with a fine bearing, nothing old about her; very dainty in her dress; a delightful memory in every respect. She was devoted to the little ones, and seemed to be always welling over with love, and not to know how sufficiently to give expression to it.'<sup>58</sup>

At one stage, she had a companion, a Miss Draper, living with her.<sup>59</sup> Towards the end of her life, when she had moved into some kind of boarding house in Brixton, a cousin on her mother's side of

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>56</sup> The first contract to carry mail between England and the Cape was signed by the Union Line only in 1857. *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union-Castle\\_Line](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union-Castle_Line)

<sup>57</sup> Jane Bower's will, dated 24 December 1849, is in the National Archives.

<sup>58</sup> P. A Molteno, *The Life and Times of Sir John Charles Molteno...*, op.cit., p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Handwritten note by Dr R. F. M. Immelman on typescript of Caroline Molteno's letter to Nancy Bingle, 7 May 1858.

the family, Miss Read, came to live with her. Caroline wrote that she 'is a great comfort to me as she is always ready and willing to do little kindnesses for me'.<sup>60</sup>

In 1861, five years before her death, John Charles came over to England again, accompanied this time by his wife Maria and the oldest children, Betty and Caroline, who were able to see their grandmother and she them. They had brought with them a little dog called Punch whom they left with her as a keepsake.

Just weeks before her death, Caroline wrote to Maria, hoping to hear 'you are well, and that will be a great blessing', but going on to tell her 'I have not been at all well myself since I last wrote, having had another bad cold and cough, but I am thankful to say I am getting better.'<sup>61</sup> Nancy was worried and hurried over from Richmond to see how she was. In fact Caroline was mistaken about getting properly better. She died a fortnight on 28 March 1866 at the age of 76, having caught bronchitis again ten days earlier.<sup>62</sup>

### **Migration in the family – a reflection**

It is worth reflecting on just how much migration took place amongst Anthony Molteno's descendants. His daughter, Rose, landed up the United States in the early 1850s, hard up and single to the end of her days, and his son, Frank, spent time on the Continent in the 1820s, although he did return to England.

But it was his grandchildren who left the country in significant numbers. Mary Bristow's son, Whiston, whose father had disappeared, left England to work on a sugar plantation in Jamaica and moved later to America where he stayed and had children. Frank Molteno's daughter, Jane, lived most of her life in Switzerland, married and had a child there. James Anthony's eldest boy, William, following his father's bankruptcy, got a salaried job also in Jamaica, and died there. James Anthony's daughter, also called Rose Molteno, spent most of her life as a governess in Italy. And four of John and Caroline Molteno's children, as we have seen in this chapter, migrated to various far-flung parts of the world.

In each case, the decision to leave was driven, if not by poverty, at least by the lack of prospects in 'the old country'. None of these Molteno young men had a family business to go into. None was likely to inherit anything. As for the women, being a governess or teacher, unless one was running a private school of one's own, meant being so ill-paid as to make it difficult to maintain oneself in the middle classes. And their chances of marriage in England were slim because they had no independent means.

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<sup>60</sup> Caroline Molteno to her daughter-in-law, Maria Molteno, 9 Mar. 1866. Miss Read was probably a niece of Caroline's mother, Jane Read, and so a cousin of Caroline's.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Death certificate.



Emigration was the alternative. The existence of numerous English-speaking parts of the world – the United States of America and the growing number of British colonies – made the process easier. These new countries also held out other attractions. They were largely free of the entrenched British class system. One could buy land in what was still predominantly an agricultural age far more cheaply than one could do at home. And there were many opportunities to get into business even if one did not have significant capital. So it came about that many members of this third generation followed in their grandfather Anthony Molteno's footsteps and migrated in their turn to build new lives overseas.

These relocations led to the establishment of new branches of the Molteno family in South Africa, North America, Hawaii, Australia and at a later date (but without putting down permanent roots) India, Ceylon, Burma and one or two other parts of Asia. The gains in prosperity and social standing many of these Moltenos who emigrated made must not, however, let us forget the human cost involved, particularly for those left behind. Parents like Caroline Molteno were cut off from their offspring. Families were pulled apart by distance and the very different ways of living that migration so often precipitates. What's more, migration was no guarantee of success, as we will see in what happened to Fred Molteno in the next chapter.