



CHAPTER ONE

DREAMS OF A NEW COLONY

Gazing at the stunning backdrop of the Port Hills today, I often wonder how the earliest settlers to arrive in Canterbury felt when they first saw Lyttelton and the surrounding hills. Did they have any idea that for most of them, one of their first tasks would be to climb those hills and walk with what few possessions they had up the narrow winding track of the Bridle Path, over the Port Hills and down the other side to make their new home on the plains beyond? More affluent settlers were able to pay for their possessions to be taken by boat over the Sumner Bar and down the Avon. The passage over the bar was not without incident, though, and some lost all of their belongings when the boats sank.

My great-great-great-grandfather's brother, his wife and four children arrived on the *Cressy* in the summer of 1850, and his brother and wife (my great-great-great-grandparents) arrived nine months later. The brothers were close and purchased a farm together at Avonside, and also farmed out at Springston. My great-great-grandmother, as a young girl of 11, arrived a few years later with her father, brother and sister. Other ancestors arrived in the 1840s. By some strange quirk of fate, both sides of the family seemed to have all turned up in New Zealand within a decade or so either side of the First Four Ships. However, it was my great-great-grandmother Ursula's thoughts as a young girl that I often wondered about. What did she think of it? Was it all a grand adventure, or was she a little afraid, homesick, or some of all three?

Ursula's father, recently widowed, had brought three young children out with him on this daring adventure of a lifetime. The added responsibility of settling in a pioneer country with youngsters, and as a solo parent, must have weighed heavily on his mind. Yet it seems he was looking for a new beginning in a new land, and a better future for his children than what England offered.

The fate of all on board was sealed when they paid their fare and boarded the ship, leaving all that was familiar behind, and also knowing they would be very unlikely to see other beloved family members ever again. After a long, rough voyage in cramped quarters, it must have been such a relief to feel land under their feet once more. Combined with the possibly daunting sight of bare land for as far as the eye could see, the

Previous:

Hagley Park

Running along a sunlit path through trees in Hagley Park, Christchurch.

Opposite:

Port Lyttelton, Victoria Harbour

An etching by T Allom, from a drawing by Mary Townsend, showing the *Cressy* on the left. (Text has been cropped from this image.)