

The speaker for the meeting on 25th April was Gill Sykes from the Colton Historians group, whose topic was “From Staffordshire to the Outback”. It was a fascinating talk about Charles and Frederic Bonney who made the journey to Australia in the 19th century. Charles travelled over first in 1834, and Gill had traced his journey from Sandon, near Rugeley, to Sydney, at that time a bustling town. Although it is well known that convicts and poor people travelled to Australia, Charles went as a “free settler” to work as clerk to a judge in court. He then changed his job to driving sheep from Sydney to Melbourne (around 400 miles), later establishing a route to drive cattle from Sydney to Adelaide (a distance of 1400 miles). Charles’ nephew, Edward, then travelled to Australia, followed by his brother Frederic, leasing land to create the largest sheep station in New South Wales. Frederic was very keen on photography and took many photos of the sheep station and also of the Aborigines who worked there, taking notes of his conversations with the workers. On his return to Colton around 1880, Frederic continued taking photos of Colton village life and inhabitants. Both Charles and Frederic left a historical legacy: Charles established long-distance routes in Australia, which the main roads still follow, and Frederic produced the first records of settler and Aboriginal life in Australia, together with a photographic record of Colton life in the late 19th century.