PAST TIMES

George Johnson of Lincoln Flatts
Seaton Ross, England and
Seaton Ross, Guildford, Western Australia
(1803 – 1879)

In the early years of the 19th century Britain was undergoing changing times – farming was facing decline and difficulties; the static political system left decisions in the hands of a few wealthy, landed gentry and urban unemployment had contributed to rising crime rates. Families with strong Methodist belief in God and a conviction that hard work, thrift and practical farming experience would reward them with success, the Swan River Colony in Western Australia presented a land of great opportunity. Settler's were encouraged with the offer of tempting land schemes to develop and eventually own outright after proving their worth. Such settler's included George Johnson of Seaton Ross.

George Johnson and his sister, formerly of Lincoln Flatts, Seaton Ross in the East Riding of Yorkshire, England, departed from Hull aboard the brig " Tranby" sailing at 12 noon on the 29th September 1829 bound for The Swan River, Western Australia. 37 people were on Tranby the journey took five months and they arrived in 1830. His sister married on the voyage out and was thus given 2 parcels of land. All aboard Tranby were Yorkshire farmers and given farmlets on The Maylands Peninsula (today Tranby House is a National Trust property situated on Johnson Road, Maylands and named after the brig Tranby).The first European bees were brought to Western Australia by George Johnson.

Around 1840, George returned to Seaton Ross, England and married Jane Ousten. In 1855 the family returned to Guildford, Western Australia, their daughter "Bielby" tragically and sadly died on the voyage. Their son William George survived.
In Guildford, Western Australia George purchased a parcel of land from Desmond, a shoemaker who had been indentured to Governor Sterling. George paid £50.00 for the property.
He built a 2 storey wooden house, a 3-storey flourmill, coach house for 3 horses and a mill manager's cottage in 1856 near Guildford (Ellen Street, named after governor Stirling's wife, later renamed Johnson Street). He became chairman of the first town trust and was a church leader and travelled to Guildford each Sunday to preach (a distance of 5 miles).
Following the death of George Johnson in 1879, his son, William George Johnson, took over the management of the flourmill, rebuilt the main house (called Seaton Ross) and moved his mother into the manager's cottage (Jane's cottage).
William George Johnson was the 2nd Mayor of Guildford, serving 17 years on the town council, church elder and president of the agricultural society. The street in Guildford was renamed Johnson Street in his honour and he married Elisabeth Hardey, daughter of the Rev. Hardey (another of the Tranby Folk) together they had major land and farm holdings in Beverley, York, Guildford and Perth (All Western Australia).
The buildings in recent years have been used as a private residence, a maternity hospital during the 1930's/1940's and for forty years since 1954 used as a home, museum and storage site for the precious Lew Whiteman collection of Australiana and antiques.
The property is now a restaurant known as Whiteman's abroad.

A remarkable and true story of pioneering history.

Malcolm Young