

INTRODUCTION

This resource package has been developed to support the **SOUTHWARD BOUND** display at the South Australian Maritime Museum. The display includes simulated cabins from the 1840, 1910 and 1950 eras. Each of the cabins represents the lowest standard of accommodation from that particular era (steerage, economy, third class). This booklet deals with the 1840 period.

The package presents a simple overall view of migration to South Australia circa 1840. There were vast differences in the quality, conditions and duration of the voyages.

This package concentrates on the maritime aspects of migration, the ships and the voyage. The Migration Museum (82 Kintore Avenue, Adelaide) provides an insight into the factors that led to mass migration and the impact of that migration on South Australia hence completing the overall picture..

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the early nineteenth century many problems existed in the majority of British colonies that led a group of influential people in England becoming interested in new ideas about colonisation. One such person was Edward Gibbon Wakefield.



This is typical of the conditions endured by the poor in Europe in the early 19th century.

Wakefield strongly believed that land in new colonies should not be granted freely to settlers, but should be sold at a fixed price. The money raised by these sales should be used to bring out additional emigrants who could labour on the land. He also believed that the emigrants should not be convicts or paupers, but energetic people who would seize the opportunity to make a better life for themselves and their families in the new colony.

Wakefield's proposal was that:

- Land was to be sold at a sufficiently high price to keep newly arrived immigrants in the workforce (as labourers) before they could save enough to buy their own land.
- There should be no free grants of land.
- Revenue from land sales had to go towards bringing out more migrants to replace the workers who had purchased land.
- To keep the new settlement concentrated, land had to be surveyed by the Crown before it could be sold. Occupiers of unsurveyed land would have no security of tenure.
- There should be no convict labour. Existing convict settlements had shown that this was a deterrent to potential free settlers.

In 1834 British Parliament passed legislation enabling the colonisation of South Australia to proceed.

The British Government was determined that it should bear no financial burden from the colony and that it should not be responsible for the carrying out of the Wakefield Scheme. Much of the planning and actual emigration to South Australia was left in the hands of the Board of Commissioners, headed by Col. Robert Torrens.

Both the British Government and the Board of Commissioners were represented in the new colony. The British Government was represented by the Governor (John Hindmarsh) and a number of government officials. The Resident Commissioner (James Hurtle Fisher), the Surveyor General (Col. William Light), the emigration agent and several other officials represented the Board of Commissioners.

UNOFFICIAL SETTLEMENT

In 1804 an American sealer, the brig **Union** arrived on Kangaroo Island. The Americans remained at Kangaroo Island for several months and while there the crew built the 35-ton schooner **Independence** from native pine. The **Independence** was launched at what is now called American River.

It is estimated that the population of Kangaroo Island reached almost two hundred before the official settlement of South Australia in 1836. Most of the pre settlement population were outcasts many of them escaped convicts. A few had kidnapped Aboriginal 'wives' from the mainland.

The most famous of the pre settlement dwellers on Kangaroo Island was Henry Wallen or 'Governor Wallen', as the rest of the population knew him. Wallen lived with his two Aboriginal wives at Cygnet River. Soon after the arrival of the **Duke of York** the South Australian Company acquired his farm and Wallen moved to a new home near American River. Wallen had arrived on Kangaroo Island about 1818 and was buried there in 1856.

THE FIRST EMIGRANTS

The first emigrants bound for South Australia left England in February 1836 on board the South Australian Company's schooner **John Pirie**, laden with stock and provisions. Three other company ships followed, the whaling barques **Duke of York** and **Lady Mary Pelham** and the chartered brig **Emma**.

The second group of vessels to set out for South Australia were those of Colonel Light's surveying expedition. The **Cygnets** (with Harbour Master, Captain Thomas Lipson) departed at the end of March 1836 and the **Rapid** (with Colonel Light) at the beginning of May.

The barques **Africaine** and **Tam-O-Shanter** were chartered privately to take out emigrants and supplies.

H.M.S. Buffalo, with Governor Hindmarsh and his officials did not leave England until early August 1836, by this time the **Duke of York** was already at Kangaroo Island. The **Buffalo** anchored at Holdfast Bay on the 28th December 1836.

Altogether more than 500 emigrants made the voyage with the colonising fleet. There were a few deaths and a number of births during the voyage.

The first of the ships carrying further emigrants, **Coromandel**, arrived soon after the **Buffalo**. This extract from Ronald Parson's book **Southern Passages** gives an indication of the confusion in the early settlement:

*The emigrant ship **Coromandel** arrived in Holdfast Bay soon after the **Buffalo** and her passengers swelled the camp founded by the **Africaine**. The 'Glenelg Landing Place' was very busy for a time, but there does not seem to have been any effort*

to provide even a small jetty. Every type of cargo, from barrels of salt meat to household goods including Mrs Hindmarsh's piano, was landed by boat onto the beach. This must have been a difficult and tedious process, and the goods then had to be manhandled into the camp and then stacked among the tents and other shelters placed among the sand dunes.(page 22)

SUMMARY: SHIPS OF THE COLONISING FLEET

	NAME	CAPTAIN	SIZE AND TYPE	DEPARTED 1836 (LONDON/ LIVERPOOL)	ARRIVED 1836 (K.I)
Vessels of the S.A Company	John Pirie	G. Martin	106t 2 masted schooner	22.2.36	16.8.36
	Duke of York	R. C. Morgan	189t 3 masted ship rig	24.2.36	27.7.36
	Lady Mary Pelham	Robert Ross	184t 3 masted barque	30.3.36	30.7.36
	Emma		161t 2 masted brig	21.4.36	5.10.36
Vessels of the Colonisation commissions	Cygnets	John Rolls	256t 3 masted brig	.3.36	11.9.36
	Rapid	Col. Wm. Light	153t 2 masted brig	1.5.36	20.8.36
	H.M.S Buffalo	Captain J. Hindmarsh	589t 3 masted ship	4.8.36	28.12.36 6 Holdfast Bay
Vessels Privately Chartered	Africaine	J. F. Duff	316t 3 masted ship	28.6.36	3.11.36
	Tam-O-Shanter	W. Freeman	383t 3 masted barque	20.7.36	20.11.36

CONTINUED EMIGRATION

From 1836 to December 1840 more than 100 ships arrived in South Australia conveying passengers from the Northern Hemisphere.

Many early emigrants travelled to South Australia at the expense of the Land Fund, in ships provided by the Colonisation Commission. They described themselves as labourers or servants but many had no intentions of filling such positions on arrival. Some were planning to buy small farming blocks, while others were tradesmen intent on developing a business of their own in Adelaide.

A financial crisis in 1840 caused the suspension of all assisted passages. Although these were resumed in 1845, the system did not regain full momentum until 1849. During this time, there was a steady number of people arriving, particularly from Scotland. Some passengers were financed by private organizations; others paid their own fares.

The discovery, between 1842 and 1845, of reserves of copper in South Australia triggered an extensive canvassing in the German states for emigration to South Australia. By the end of the 1840's, the flow of new arrivals from all countries had become overwhelming and the arrival of four ships per week was not uncommon.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

Following the financial crisis of 1840, the British Government stepped in and emigration to South Australia was supervised by the Colonisation Commission, which was concerned with migration to all British colonies. Emigration to South Australia became a matter of government policy, rather than being based on the needs of the colony as had previously been the case.

In 1848 it was officially decided to foster the emigration of poverty stricken labourers, women and orphans to South Australia. The plan went ahead despite a huge public outcry.

With the British Government accepting emigration as their responsibility, systematic colonisation, as set out by Wakefield, passed from the scene. Emigration was now firmly controlled by the government. Some emigrants preferred to pay their own way, but free or assisted emigration now hinged, to a large extent on government planning. No longer were intending emigrants selected with the aim of assisting wealthy landowners.

By 1850 the carefully worked out theories that had set in motion the plans to form South Australia were completely abandoned.

REASONS FOR EMIGRATION

Many emigrants under sail endured extreme hardships, this was especially the case for couples travelling with children. What then was the motivation for undertaking such a hazardous journey?

Government inducement, squalid living conditions at home, the promise of a richer life, religious freedom, adventure, the prospect of gaining reasonable employment with a relatively fair wage, the chance of a better life for their children and later the lure of gold were the major motivating factors.

The Migration Museum offers the following reasons for emigration:

- to escape poverty, hunger and unemployment.
- to make a better life.
- to find religious freedom.
- chain migration (to follow families already in South Australia).

In the early years of settlement most emigrants to South Australia were in search of a better life. Life for the poor in Europe in the mid 1800's was extremely harsh, the Industrial Revolution had resulted in dramatic changes in lifestyle, unemployment was high, working conditions for the poor were atrocious and the laws were extremely harsh.



"A contrast in living conditions depicted in a way likely to appeal to literate and illiterate alike." from: **THE LONG FAREWELL**

N.B. Emigrants chose to come to South Australia, they were not compelled to do so as was the general case in the Eastern States, there were no convicts.

THE PROCESS

THE DECISION

To emigrate or to remain at home? This question, so final in its implications, was faced by all emigrants regardless of their financial or social standing.

The considerations were many:

- Parting from family and friends
- *The risk and the fear of unknown hardships on the journey.*
- *The remoteness of Australia. (Were they committing themselves to a lifetime of loneliness? Would they be able to adapt?).*

In the majority of cases the alternative (remaining in Europe) was equally depressing. The optimistic tried to persuade themselves and those they were leaving behind that they would soon make a fortune and return. Very few did.

PREPARATION

Once the decision to migrate had been taken the emigrant had much to arrange because the decision was virtually irrevocable.

For the poor the task was relatively simple, gather together the few possessions they owned and wait for the call to join a ship for the journey.

Wealthy emigrants could employ an agent to assist in arranging freight space, to assemble their equipment and to organise their luggage for transportation to the point of departure. In addition the agent undertook to oversee the loading and packing of equipment leaving the wealthy emigrant with relatively little to do in preparation for the journey.

For the middle classes (those with some equity in the form of land, equipment or stock) preparations for the journey were far more difficult.

-Unwanted or unneeded items had to be liquidated.

-Remaining possessions had to be transported to the point of departure.

-Organising the safe transfer of surplus funds to South Australia.

-Finding suitable accommodation while awaiting departure

(These were all major problems because support was extremely limited).

The ship was to provide provisions in accordance with the scale laid down under the current Passengers Act,(see following section "CONDITIONS") but the passengers had to provide everything else for their personal comfort during the voyage.

EMBARKATION AND DEPARTURE

Steerage passengers usually had to spend a few nights in one of the large emigrant depots at the port of departure. This introduced them to the lack of privacy that they would experience in the months ahead. Usually the stay in the depot lasted only a few days, but this was sometimes extended, owing to delays in fitting out the ship for the voyage. In these depots many emigrants, particularly children, contracted contagious diseases that brought tragic consequences at sea.



The emigration depot at Birkenhead, this was the departure point for many emigrants to South Australia.

Cabin passengers remained ashore in private accommodation until the last possible moment, often a day or two after the steerage passengers had been accommodated. Many of the cabin passengers arrived dressed for the grand entrance.

The master himself made the last and most impressive entrance. It was usual for him to delegate departure preparations to the First Officer, while he remained ashore.

As departure time drew near bands on docks and quays began playing popular songs.

The following extracts from Ronald Parsons' **MIGRANT SHIPS FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA 1836 -1860** gives some insight into the confusion during embarkation - particularly in steerage!

All the equipment and baggage that the migrant or the family required for immediate use on the trip had to be manhandled aboard by the migrant and his family or friends, and placed in a berth (or berths) of his own choosing. No doubt this system of first come first served was conducive to many a fine argument even before the ship left to quay (As boarding arrangements improved berths were allotted by authority - the Matron or a representative of the Surgeon -

Superintendent) However, in the prevailing uproar, when it was more than likely that the carpenters were still working on the accommodation and undoubtedly last minute cargo was being loaded, not to mention the stowing of the heavy baggage, the confusion, especially for a family from the country, must have been unbelievable.....

The newly engaged crew would be working on deck: stewards were not provided for the steerage passengers and in any case how could one or two people possibly deal with the worries of two to three hundred migrants?

The horror and or amazement of most to find that their world for at least the next three to four months was to comprise the area of the number of bunks allowed their family and a space at a rough trestle table along the centre of the quarters, is impossible to convey in print. The total area comprised the bunks and a few feet of space alongside one side of the bunks and the space under the lower berth - about as much as is allowed these days in economy class sleeping berths on long distance trains!

Here the migrant family was to exist on a voyage expected to take at best about 100 days! The suggestion is completely beyond the comprehension of most present day travellers.

THE SHIPS

Types

As iron and other metals were generally not used in ship building until after 1855, the early south Australian migrant ships were all made of wood and they were all sailing ships. The type of ship was determined by the arrangement of the masts and sails commonly called the rigging.

The four most common vessels were -

Barque: a sailing vessel with 3 masts, fore and main masts were square rigged and the mizzen mast was fore and aft rigged.

Brig: a two masted vessel square rigged on both fore and main masts.

Schooner: a sailing vessel with two or more masts fore and aft rigged on each mast. Originally a schooner carried square top sails on fore mast.

Ship (strict maritime usage): a vessel with a bow sprit and three masts each with a top mast and topgallant mast and square rigged on all three masts.

Terms:

The few total losses recorded for migrant ships despatched to South Australia suggests a high standard of vessel being used. However many ships which plied the route were unsuitable for a voyage which took them into the Southern Ocean and the *roaring forties* an area of winds which forced them on their sides and pushed them through mountainous seas often for days or weeks on end.

ACCOMMODATION

The standard of accommodation varied, depending on the size, age and structure of the ship. Most ships offered 3 standards (classes) of accommodation to emigrants CABIN : INTERMEDIATE : STEERAGE.

Poop

The best accommodation (cabin/saloon/first class) was located under the raised poop or quarter deck in the stern of the vessel. This accommodation was a world apart from the rest of the ship, being light and airy with the privacy of a cabin and a comfortable bed. Cabin passengers were these of a 'superior station in life' and as a matter of course paid their own expenses. The most desirable cabins were the two with stern windows, which were larger. The poop or quarter deck cabin space was also shared by the Captain, First Officer and Surgeon Superintendent. The poop deck was the promenading space for first class passengers.

Intermediate

For these who could not afford cabin accommodation, most ships offered intermediate (second class) accommodation. There seems to have been two styles of intermediate accommodation - depending on the type of ship:

- a. On the same level as cabin passengers, but much less space and limited access to the poop.
 - b. Between decks, in cabins in the stern (with steerage forward).
- Privacy was assured, with the passengers paying their own costs.

Cabin and intermediate passengers were required to provide their own furniture. Cabin and intermediate passengers did not usually regard themselves as emigrants. To them an emigrant was not one who paid to leave his or her own country to settle in another, but rather one who was financially assisted to do so. Passengers occupying first and second class accommodation represented only a small percentage of the total number of emigrants, yet most of the available accounts of life during the voyage came from this literate minority.

Between Decks (Steerage)

Most settlers were housed in the **steerage** section of the ship - between decks in dormitory style accommodation.

The following description, of a ship called *St Vincent* (which brought emigrants to Australia, but not to S.A.), is typical of steerage accommodation in emigrant ships of the time.

Length 124 feet

Breadth (Beam) 25 feet (at widest)

Height 6 feet 4 inches

Along both sides for the entire length, the space was occupied by a double tier of standing bed places, divided into:

- (a) bed place '6x3' for married people above and their children below. One bed place was shared by both husband and wife. (Some ships had boards/planks from top to bottom dividing the bunks, others had only raised boards or curtains for privacy.)
- (b) bed place '6x2' for single men and youths - they slept alone.
- (c) bed places '6x3' for single women, who slept two to a bed.

The spaces for the single men and single women were separated by the married quarters.

Tables ran the entire length of the ship, with fixed seats on each side. Water closets were provided for females and children, men were expected to go on deck.

(illustration)

CONDITIONS

THE INFORMATION CONTAINED WITHIN THIS SECTION RELATES MAINLY TO THE **STEERAGE ACCOMMODATION ON MIGRANT SHIPS.**

SPACE:

Imagine the scene below decks - great beams, ringbolts and the general bulk of the ship, emigrant berths and chests, bundles and barrels, heaps of miscellaneous baggage and the few square feet of space which was to be the emigrants home for months.

In an attempt to see that conditions were bearable, British Parliament passed several acts limiting the number of people who could be carried on each ship, setting out how much space each immigrant should be allowed and stating the amount of provisions each ship should carry. These acts stipulated how much space each migrant should have below deck, but there was no mention of deck space for exercise and relaxation.

Deck space for steerage passengers was often limited by:

- (a) masses of rigging
- (b) extra lifeboats, being loaded with cargo or, in the same cases fitted for fowls or ducks
- (c) livestock for fresh meat or milk during the journey
- (d) livestock (bound for S.A.)
- (e) fodder to feed the livestock during the journey.

Ventilation and Illumination

Except for the time spent on the deck, migrants lived, ate and slept in their quarters below the deck.

In the 1840s ventilating and illuminating the steerage was a constant problem. Though access hatches could be opened in calm seas, there was little hope of driving fresh air into the hold. When bad weather kept the hatches closed, ventilation was almost cut off and the illumination was from a smokey and foul smelling oil lamp.

On many ships, heavy glass lights or bullseyes were let into the deck to shed some light below, but these were often covered by cargo, etc. for most of the journey.

The main illumination therefore was the oil lamp, which fluttered and flickered to produce a faint glimmer and an evil-smelling vapour. The risk of fire prevented the use of candles. There were times when the emigrants were no doubt thankful for the dimness of the light - imagine the daily embarrassment of dressing in such cramped quarters.

Hygiene

(a) Toilets

Personal washing and toilet facilities were scant, although most ships installed some sort of water closet (w.c.toilet) in the steerage accommodation. The standard w.c. provided a chute to the sea and a protective flap for users.

The toilets were either flushed directly into the sea by salt water from a tank kept filled by a manually operated pump worked by a roster from among the migrants or flushed by a bucket of sea water. These toilets were generally reserved for the women and children. The men used the heads or lee side of the ship, as did the crew. (If the male passengers didn't know which was lee or sheltered side of the ship when they first joined, they found out quickly once the ship got to sea!)

The heads was usually situated in the bow of the ship and was an unsafe position in heavy weather and the scene of many an accident to the unwary.

It was found that few steerage passengers were familiar with the use of the water closets provided for them they threw rubbish (eg bones) down them, using their food dishes for 'other' purposes, especially at night.

(b) Bathing

For ordinary people soap was considered a luxury ashore, and if taken aboard ship would have been quickly attacked by rats. Most people managed with a salt water sponge bath for the entire duration of the voyage. For many this resulted, initially, in an outburst of irritating boils (not helped by the change of diet).

In the tropics some Surgeon Superintendents managed to have the crew rig a makeshift shower for the women. For the men and children, on warmer days, it was just a case of turning the fire house on them, the pumps being manned by a roster from amongst the male migrants.

(c) Washing and changing clothes

The fresh water on ship had to be conserved. The only opportunities passengers had to wash clothes were after heavy rains (such as in the tropics) when water was collected in canvas awnings.

In theory there was an arrangement where by on certain days the hold was opened and passengers could get to their baggage. However the problems

associated with this operation often meant that on some ships the luggage room or hold was not opened for the entire voyage.

The following extract from MIGRANT SHIPS FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA 1836-1860 explains further:

The problem inherent in allowing this privilege were great in so far as the captain was concerned; the weather had to be as reasonably fair so that all the access hatchways could be opened and labour spared to get into the stowage area and sort out the required baggage. The labour might mean at least one officer and one or two of the crew even through as many male migrants as may be thought necessary could be co-opted.

Then the baggage was always in the lower hold and that meant a lantern or light of some sort was required - a great risk; then once the process had commenced it was very difficult to give every one an opportunity to handle their gear on the same day, due to the large number of passengers. Further owing to the generally haphazard methods employed in stowing cargo at this period, it was often impossible to locate the required baggage. (pg 27)

(d) Health

Almost all migrant ships had a surgeon (SURGEON -General) on board. The term 'surgeon' was a general one for anyone with medical experience or training - not a surgeon in the modern sense. Some surgeons were so dedicated and well thought of that they received laudatory testimonials from the passengers on arrival in Adelaide. Other surgeons were incompetent, having taken the post to obtain a free passage and perhaps to escape pressing problems in England (often financial).

In many cases the surgeon could do little for much of the illness that appeared in a migrant vessel of this era. Medical knowledge and remedies concerning most diseases encountered aboard these ships was almost nil. The cause of most epidemic diseases was just not known. Dysentery was perhaps the most common cause of death and was often uncontrollable. Other common causes were typhus and measles.

Even if the surgeon knew the cause of the epidemic, it was beyond his powers to order a change in diet or obtain additional drugs to combat the outbreak.

Lousiness on board ship was scarcely to be avoided, even for cabin passengers. The lice were waiting in every crevice for fresh victims to embark!

Migrant ships (in most cases) had space set aside to be used as a hospital. This basically meant a place for the sick, not an isolated area for contagious cases. The hospital space had to be inspected by shore officials before migrants were taken aboard. Occasionally, penny pinching, money hungry captains were prone, once the officials had departed, to clear out the area and fit up the space as cabins for fare paying passengers.

(e) Food

(i) rations

Nothing led to discontent at sea more surely than poor rations or rations poorly prepared. Remember though, that some migrants from impoverished homes found themselves faring better than they had ever done before. The ships was to provide provisions in accordance with the scale laid down under the current PASSENGER ACT, but the passenger had to provide everything else for his/her comfort during the voyage.

In 1840 the scale called for the following to be supplied for each adult. Children between 7 and 15 years of age received 1/2 and those younger than 7 years 1/3 of the quantity:

a loaf of between 2-3 pounds of bread

1 pint oatmeal

1/2 pint of preserved cabbage or vinegar

1 pound of preserved meat (usually 1/2 lb twice a week)

1 pound of preserved (salt) park (in 2 equal lots on different days)

1 pound of salt beef (as above)

1/2 pound of pickled fish

3 pound of flour

6 ounces of suet

2/3 pint of peas (eg. lentils)

7 ounces of sugar

1 ounce of tea

1 1/2 ounces of coffee

a little mustard

Emigrants were able to bring supplementary provisions with them but some were too poor to do so and were often hungry throughout the journey. The quality of rations varied greatly from ship to ship.

Some of the variables/problems included:

the greed of some provisioning firms and ship- owners

the filching of supplies by unscrupulous officers at sea

inexperience of migrants in preparing dishes - especially some men

the frequent crankiness of cooks

rough weather at sea

Cabin passengers who sat at the captain's table had no need for private provisions as they were provided with fresh produce daily. Items such as meat, milk and eggs were generally provided fresh, daily. On some ships other classes were permitted to buy a little meat. Livestock carried could include cows, sheep, hogs, sucking pigs, fowls, ducks, geese or goats.

General rations were served out once a week, but meat twice per week. The rations were not taken singly but in messes of 6 - 10. Each mess elected its own captain to collect and distribute food - an onerous task! Many of the disputes that arose on a voyage stemmed from real or imagined bias on the part of the mess captain. On many ships, this responsibility was shared week about.

Any additional food items not laid down in the nation scale had to be brought on board by the traveller or purchased at sea. There was no regular shop on the ship, but some of the knowing ones (eg crew) often carried small quantities of tea and sugar (the most sought after items) which they offered at inflated prices. Sometimes the captain made a practice of selling luxuries at a very high price. This was perfectly normal and considered a natural means of increasing his income.

(ii) messing and dining

All food was cooked in a common galley, generally housed in a separated structure on deck. The fireplace was entirely enclosed in brickwork to reduce the danger of fire. The cook was nearly always assisted by a few migrants. In some ships through, the migrants prepared their own food - (either the mother in a family group or an elected or appointed person in a party) this was then taken up on deck to be cooked. Taking prepared dishes to be cooked was considered a man's job.

Single women were not permitted near the galley and so into the company of men. In the married quarters the task of preparing food fell mainly to the wives. The greatest range of botched dishes was undoubtedly produced by the single men.

In fair weather the food stood some chance of arriving at the mess table warm. On a heavily rolling ship, in the cold of a northern winter, it seems more than probable it was absolutely frigid before it arrived at the table.

Should the mess captain accidentally slip (for example) and lose his load (ie the food) overboard on the way back from the galley, everyone in that group would miss a meal. The ship only had to supply one issue of rations per meal. It was not the Captain's concern if the rations did not reach their destination.

(iii) water

As fresh water was extremely scarce and had to last an unknown period, the careful traveller went to considerable trouble to husband supplies. What was left of the a ration after the cook had taken a share for the galley, was often bottled for later use. In 1840 the scale called for 3 quarts (approx 3 litres) of water per adult daily.

After a week or two at sea the 'fresh' water often became so smelly that it could only be faced if diluted with a little wine or vinegar to kill the unpleasant odours.

A downpour of rain brought people running with tubs, etc to collect any run off from the sails or awnings. Although the water tasted of old canvas it was much preferred to the ship's drinking water.

Even with the water supply as it was, it is common to read of those who required less water selling a bottle or more to those not so careful or more thirsty.

SUMMARY:

A descriptive passage from Charlwood's THE LONG FAREWELL

Having heard the essentials of steerage accommodation we can visualise every peg with its smocks and coats and headgear hanging from it every shelf laden with such home food stuffs as the passengers were able to bring, the wide table strewn with metal mugs and plates and cutlery each bunk occupied by men women and children some sitting some lying then we can imagine the whole in motion rolling

from side to side timbers creaking loudly as seas rise children falling and crying and seeking comfort from parents who only want to lie down or to vomit - and where is there to vomit? As seas rise higher scuttlers must be screwed down by the ship's carpenter plunging the whole steerage into semi darkness while utensils are dashed into the long passageways.

Improbable as it may seem, most steerage passengers did adapt themselves to between decks conditions. Although the close confinement inevitably led to fighting, it led also to friendships and interdependence, with some groups sticking together in the new land.

Had the government not set standards for chartered ships, but left matters to owners and captains, steerage passengers would have been infinitely worse off than they were.

The following extract from Ronald Parsons **MIGRANT SHIPS FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA 1836 -1860 (page 32)** helps illustrate some of the difficulties of life aboard a migrant ship.

Under the 1849 Passenger Act passed by the British Parliament, which became the basis for subsequent improved legislation on the same subject, as years passed the following are some of the regulations that were to be observed in migrant ships.

All passengers who shall not be prevented by sickness or other sufficient cause to be determined by the surgeon or in ships with no surgeons, by the master, shall rise not later than 7 am, at which hour the fires shall be lighted.

It shall be the duty of the cook, appointed under the 26th section of the said Passenger Act to light the fires and to take care that they be kept alight during the day, and also to take care that each passenger, or family of passengers shall have the use of the fireplace, at the proper hours, in an order to be fixed by the master.

When the passengers are dressed their beds shall be rolled up. The decks including the space under the bottom of the berths, shall be swept before breakfast, and all dirt thrown overboard.

The breakfast hour shall be from eight to nine am (if all the preceding matters have been attended).

The deck shall further be swept after every meal, and after breakfast is concluded, shall be also holystoned or scraped. This duty as well as that of cleaning the ladders, hospitals, and round house, shall be performed by a party taken in rotation from the adult males above 14, in the proportion of five of every 100 migrants, who shall be considered sweepers for the day. But the single women shall perform this duty in their own compartment, where a separate compartment is allotted to them and the occupant of each berth shall see that his own berth is well brushed out.

Dinner shall commence at one o'clock and supper at six pm. The fire shall be extinguished by 7 p.m, migrants be in their berth by 10 p.m. Three safety lamps shall be lit at dusk and kept burning till 10 p.m after which hour two may be extinguished, but one must be kept burning at the main hatchway all night. No naked light shall be allowed at any time on any account.

The scuttles and sternports, if any, shall weather permitting, be opened at 7 a.m and kept open till 10 p.m, and the hatches shall be kept open whenever the weather permits. The copper and cooking utensils shall be cleaned every day. The beds shall be well shaken and aired on deck at least twice a week. The bottom boards of the berths, if not fixtures, shall be removed and dry scrubbed and taken on deck at least twice a week. A space of deck room shall be apportioned for a hospital, not less, for vessels carrying 100 passengers, than 48 superficial feet, with two or four bed berths erected therein; not less for vessels carrying 200 or more passengers, than 120 superficial feet with six bed-berths.

There were another ten paragraphs that dealt with washing days (two per week): a requirement that everyone should attend church service at 10 a.m. Sundays: no smoking between decks: no alcohol or gunpowder allowed to be taken aboard by migrants - if these items were discovered they were to be taken away and only returned at the end of the voyage: and a number of other routine matters. These regulations, in fact, set down in writing and gave official sanction to practices that most conscientious captains and owners had been observing the same years.

Under these 1849 regulations the system often employed to regulate the cooking of rations in the earlier ships, now became mandatory, and the use of alcohol could be more strictly controlled. Many migrant ships had been dry long before 1849. Some masters, of their own wish, did not permit any liquor aboard. Some ships, chartered by religious groups were only taken up on the express understanding that they would remain dry for the voyage. In the days of the colonisation commissioners they strongly recommended to captains that no spirituous liquor be taken aboard their ships.

At Sea

THE ROUTE:

Although there was no prescribed route for ships journeying to South Australia in the 1840's captains/navigators followed the Admiralty Route, which took about 120 days. This route recommended a call at Cape of Good Hope and that the parallel (latitude) of 39 South was the best upon which to run their eastings down. On a flat map this looks to be the shortest distance. However, because the earth is a sphere, the shortest distance between 2 points on it must be a curve. Using this theory, a route was devised which involved going as far south as ice would allow, It was found that south of the 40th parallel the winds were also much more favourable (the *roaring forties*).

In 1850 Captain Godfrey in the **Constance** ventured far south following this theory (called Great Circle Sailing). He reached Adelaide in a record of 77 days, but before the gold rush, no one dared follow. The gold rush of the 1850s made great

circle sailing more attractive, although many captains were still unwilling to risk it. The Great Circle Route became standard after 1857.

The following extract from Ronald Parson's **MIGRANT SHIPS TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA 1836 - 1860** will describes the journey and the route of emigrant ships:

There was no prescribed route for sailing ships heading toward Australia but it was to the benefit of the master; and owners to complete the trip as quickly as possible. The course steered depended to a great extent upon the slant of the wind so long as the vessel continued to make some southing the master would persevere no matter how wild the weather. Only the loss of a mast(s), a rudder much canvas or the appearance of a very bad leak would induce a decision to head for port. At the hight of a severe gale the master to save his ship from further damage, may heave to. This manoeuvre seldom offered any comfort to the passengers as the ship would still seem to them to be jumping about like a beast caught in a trap.

On average it seems to have taken something like four weeks to reach the vicinity of the Equator in a sailing ship of this era leaving in winter. By this time the migrants had gained their sea legs and were prepared for the change in the weather- so different to that left behind. The so called flying fish weather of the tropics was welcomed by all; it gave the sailors a respite from the handling of sails in foul weather: the officers some relaxation from the strains and tensions of navigating in bad weather - and most of all the migrants. The rules and regulations regarding their existence aboard ship might have been framed from this portion of the trip. It was a pleasure to get out of the stuffy quarters, get them aired, wash the deck, scrub and clean berths and wash clothing. The sea presented an entirely different appearance to the previous rolling, churning, foaming maelstrom intent upon overwhelming the ship.

Strange marine creatures could be seen quite clearly in the deep, iridescent water; flying fish often landed upon the deck, porpoise and dolphin frequently kept the ship company, sporting happily under the hull or rubbing themselves under the bow. Those who had not completely shaken off the effects of sea sickness now began to take an interest in life.

The uninspiring food suddenly became something to look forward to in pleasurable anticipation. The change aboard ship was almost magical - similar to a transformation scene at the theatre.

If the captain was fortunate and picked up a suitable trade wind, the next few weeks were the most pleasant part of the entire voyage. If he was unfortunate and the ship became enslaved by the doldrums - endless days and nights of heat, humidity and the listless rolling of the ship without a breath of wind to stir the sails - it became just as much of a nightmare as the earlier days of gales and rough seas. Impossible to find comfort below decks because of the steamy heat; impossible to find sufficient space in the shade above deck; impossible to find sufficient cool liquid to quench the thirst.

Boredom and unpleasant weather quickly led to arguments, flaring tempers and occasionally even fisticuffs. With deck space always at a premium, if the ship was caught in the doldrums, or when passing through the tropics, the surgeon often introduced a roster to permit everyone to have a turn on deck. On occasions the same idea was employed to ration the deck space for sleeping to make sure that everyone had some time on deck at night during the worst of the heat.

Unpleasant as it may have been for the passengers, it was alarming for the captain to find his ship delayed through lack of wind. If the hold up was prolonged a shortage of water could develop, and food supplies began to run short. This could mean a call at Rio De Janeiro or Cape Town. That was a costly matter and some of the crew could desert. Worse, a visit to Rio could result in the ship becoming contaminated with some epidemic disease as that port was notoriously unhealthy.

Apart from the cost of provisions or water, the call at the port meant the trip was prolonged and may result in a greater consumption of stores and the payment of the harbour and dock dues. All expensive and to be avoided if at all possible.

A visit to Rio either planned or forced upon the captain by the vagaries of the elements, was none to pleasant for most of the passengers as they most likely would have to remain aboard. The vessel would invariably anchor off and while some of the cabin, and perhaps some of the intermediate passengers, may obtain permission to visit the shore, it was most unlikely the privilege would be extended to those in steerage.

On the other hand, a visit to Cape Town, planned or not, normally meant that the migrants could take a short run ashore. If water became scarce when the ship was in the vicinity of South Africa it was more likely to find the captain heading for Tristan d' Achuna. Here water was free or could be obtained for a trivial outlay. The cost of water at a commercial port, combined with the almost inevitable loss of a few crew, plus the port charges, caused many a captain to reduce the water ration rather than try to obtain additional supplies. Such a step could, and sometimes did lead to trouble on arrival in Australia but to the majority of captains that seemed the lesser of the two evils.

Irrespective of a call at any port in the South Atlantic the ship always headed across that ocean from the "bulge" of North Africa to the region of Rio before making for a point well to the south of the Cape of Good Hope when the ship was turned to Australia. All captains sought the Roaring Forties of latitude to be found in that vicinity. These constantly blowing winds, although often producing uncomfortable conditions aboard the ship, materially shortened the trip. For this reason alone they were generally welcomed - even by the migrants. Fortunately by the time the ship reached those latitudes about three quarters of the time usually taken for a voyage had elapsed and the average traveller had become accustomed to shipboard life and was more able to withstand the rigours of the last lap. These low latitudes are nearly always cold and icebergs are frequently to be seen. If the wind, or poor navigation, put the ship too far south icebergs became a great danger and the frequently foggy, misty or hazy atmosphere made it difficult to discern navigational hazards at any distance, thus increasing the

chance of shipwreck. Calm seas are almost unknown in these latitudes and the ship was perpetually in a heavy swell.

Male migrants were always encouraged (if not ordered) to assist in the running of the ship and it was on the run in the *roaring forties* that they were likely to be of the greatest assistance. They may have assisted with the pulley-haul on ropes and braces to change the slant of the sails, but more often they helped with the manually operated pumps to keep the hold free of water. The high, following seas could cause stresses and strains in the timbers of a hull and permit water to find its way aboard in a variety of ways. This all had to be cleared by the almost ceaseless operation of the highly inefficient equipment, worked by the wheels situated upon deck. Turning those wheels was a boring task, but it was something that probably took the mind off the towering waves rushing alongside threatening to engulf the ship.

This part of the voyage was worse for the women and children who might be battened down below for anything up to two weeks with no chance of stepping on deck. It was also impossible to keep hatchways open to allow a draught of fresh air through the damp, fetid quarters. The accumulation of body heat created by such a large number in a confined space, possibly aided by a dripping deck-head or tow, resulted in an atmosphere so thick that when the hatches opened the fumes issued forth like a cloud of smoke.

THE ORIGINAL MARITIME ROUTE FROM BRITIAN TO AUSTRALIA

THE COMPOSITE GREAT CIRCLE ROUTE WHICH ALMOST HALVED TRAVELLING TIME.

“The course steered depended very much on the slant of the wind”.

The ship *Hartley* travelled to South Australia in 1837. The map shows the route it followed and a few of the events of the journey:

18/5/87 Left England
4/6/37 Sunday Service on deck
14/6/37 Becalmed
19/6/37 Jib shivered to pieces
11/7/37 Main ‘stensal’ boon carried away
16/7/36 Service in cuddy
20/7/37 Tremendous sea upset galley
2/8/37 Mrs Giles delivered fine son
5/8/37 Arrived Cape Town
31/8/37 Departed Cape Town
11/9/37 American whaler passed
24/9/37 St Paul hove to to fish
30/9/37 Captain upset about a lamp
15/10/37 Arrived Napean Bay (K.I.)
20/10/37 Arrived Holdfast Bay

PASTIMES /KEEPING BUSY:

In steerage, time was broadly structured for the passengers by the ship's routine - ie. their hour of rising was dictated, their hour of cleaning quarters and of inspection by the surgeon - superintendent and their hour of lights out.

Most steerage men took their turn at being mess captain; married woman, single woman and single men took turns preparing meals; both men and women took turns cleaning the communal table and floor after meals; the married men took turns in the role of 'constable' to patrol the married quarters at night as a safeguard against fire or theft.

Most migrants had sufficient to worry about in coping with their day to day routine to have much time to think about entertainment. However, many activities did occur on these ships (especially amongst cabin and intermediate passengers) which could qualify as entertainment, pastimes, hobbies, etc:

Where sufficient musical instruments could be assembled, and the weather permitted, a dance may have been organised upon the poop deck, but this was rare.

Anyone with real musical ability was a boon and greatly appreciated, especially if the instrument could be comfortably played (and listened to) in confined quarters. In a ship fortunate to have 2-3 good musicians, frequent concerts were arranged, particularly in fine weather.

In ships with a large number of children those who were able often formed classes to teach the basics - reading, writing and simple arithmetic. Many adult emigrants learned to read and write during their months at sea.

In ships carrying large groups of religiously motivated migrants daily bible classes were frequent.

Libraries were almost unknown although some books (usually of a religious nature) were occasionally provided. Those fortunate enough to own books found them a great solace. Reports of public readings from the more popular novelists appear from time to time.

In the days of the *flying fish* weather, fishing parties were frequently arranged although most passengers were happy to just bask in the warmth of the tropical sun.

Letter writing and diary keeping often filled in time at the commencement of the voyage but within a week or two, if the diary had not been completely dropped the remarks and entries fell off to a mere jotting of items that caught the attention of the writer. Many became simply a record of weather, deaths, births, marriages and complaints.

Advice to intending migrants nearly always made reference to the woman and girls profitably filling in their spare time by needlework.

On some ships newspapers were printed or hand - written on board each week.

An emigrant ship was very much a man's world. Women were not given the opportunity of sea-bathing, no matter how hot the weather. Nor was shooting a sport for women. Many of the gentlemen brought their guns with them and although kept by the master, they were readily released for sporting occasions - for the wanton shooting of sea birds or to shoot bottles suspended from yardarms.

Other pastimes recorded include:

- ** enjoying the song and dance of the crew
- ** knitting
- ** lotteries - eg. there was always one to allow passengers to estimate how long the voyage would be.
- ** auctions - the possessions of people who had died or who had gambled and lost.
- ** physical exercise, such as ball games, drilling, boxing, skipping, dancing.

One of the greatest pleasures at sea was meeting a homeward bound ship. The occasion was not only one of excitement, but offered the opportunity to send letters home.

By and large, free time aboard ship was passed much as it had been at home. Undoubtedly the chief pastime was endless yarning - about experiences, plans for the future and the recalling of past times. During the voyage, many people developed friendships that lasted for the rest of their lives.

HAZZARDS, PERILS AND PROBLEMS:

Every immigrant had in common an experience none could forget - a passage under sail lasting some months. On their voyage the emigrants lived in a state of limbo; out of touch with all but their shipmates; belonging to neither the old world nor to the new. Day by day they lived under conditions they could scarcely have imagined before their departure. Icebergs, fire, fever and storms were their greatest terrors.

FIRE:

The greatest fear of the Master Mariner in charge of a migrant ship in the days of sail was fire. It is thought that most ships which vanished without trace were most likely destroyed by burning rather than any other marine hazard. It may seem strange to mention a high fire risk in an area subject to water leaks and dampness, but it must be kept in mind that every fitting was of wood, mattresses were filled with straw and everything was in close proximity to inflammable material. Additionally, migrant accommodation (steerage) was directly above the cargo hold. Many of the goods loaded into passenger ships would now be prohibited for various reasons. The outbreak of fire from spontaneous combustion or the action of salt water upon one or more substances was not clearly understood then.

The means of extinguishing fires were primitive: buckets of seawater drawn by hand from over the side possibly being the most successful, although some pumps

were able to deliver a reasonable volume of water for a short period. In serious cases of fire one of the most successful methods of combating it was, at this time (and for some years to come), to batten down the holds and plug every opening, denying the fire air.

STORMS AND WEATHER:

The ship may have lay at anchor for 20 or more days awaiting a good slant of wind to begin the voyage.

The majority of ships left the northern hemisphere in winter, thereby arriving in South Australia during winter and giving the migrants time to acclimatise before summer. Unfortunately, departing at this time of year could mean an uncomfortable trip.

It is usual, in winter, to encounter a series of gales rolling up the Atlantic Ocean from the south west. These can cause a ship to bucket about unmercifully for days, sometimes weeks, on end. This meant the first days at sea for most migrants, packed into dark, cramped, frequently smelly quarters, were far from pleasant.

Aboard a sailing ship in heavy weather, it was impossible to keep the below decks dry. In poorly maintained vessels it veritably rained in the accommodation. Another source of wetness was the hatchways. It was not uncommon for water ankle deep to slosh about in the quarters - slushy, slimy water.

During a gale (which could last days) steerage emigrants were battened below. Secured 'for their own safety' steerage passengers struggled to walk, serve meals and attend to their toilet on heaving, crazily slanting decks. Ignorant of what was happening above, they could only hope that the continual creaking and groaning of the ship's timbers was a sign of mature strength and not weakness which would give way to swamp them in tons of water.

The sufferings of steerage passengers at such times was almost indescribable. Many cabin passengers from the relative safety of their airy compartments complained of 'the stench issuing from the between deck' when the hatches were finally opened.

SHIPWRECK:

Ships could be wrecked for a number of reasons:

- a. Fire.
- b. Storm - the Roaring 40s and the Howling 50s.
- c. Uncharted islands, reefs or sections of the mainland.
- d. Icebergs - if the ship travelled too far south.

A ship could be wrecked without people in Britain becoming aware of the loss for 6 months or more - its cause might never be known. A damaged ship might not be lost; it could be limping out under jury rig (having been dismasted) and would arrive weeks or months later.

When real disaster occurred, the life of the government assisted emigrant was of low priority. On some ships they were not allowed in the life boats. There were usually not enough life boats to accommodate all passengers and those who were able to find a space in one could well find it to be without either food or water.

THE CAPTAIN

A captain could make or break a voyage, he was in a unique position, a supreme commander whose word was law and whose mood could affect the life of all on board. It was difficult to tell in advance the character of the captain as they could assume a completely different appearance and manner on shore.

Many captains were sold a small share in the ship or tied to its interests by a small retainer and a percentage of the profit of the voyage. The owners believed that this would cause the captain to be more careful in his business transactions.

This system often worked to the detriment of the passengers. A few shipowner/masters were unscrupulous and either cut corners or entirely ignored many of the regulations - particularly in regard to the minimum requirement of food and water for each passenger. Unfortunately this minority were the cause of a mass of rumour and gossip which tended to indicate that all migrants suffered. This was far from the case, there were many safe, happy, contented voyages on migrant ships.

DISEASE AND EPIDEMICS:

Even on well conducted ships the death rate was sometimes high. It was an unusual voyage that had no deaths to record, especially amongst the child passengers.

Measles was one of the great scourges, but the diet, lack of liquids and cramped, damp accommodation all played a part in causing the high death rate among the younger travellers. But while the mortality rate was high at sea, it was also high in poverty-stricken Great Britain.

When there was a high death roll on one of these voyages the cause was usually cholera, dysentery, scarlet fever, typhoid or some other plague that could not be easily controlled on a ship many miles from land.

One example of how difficult an emigrant voyage often proved is that of the **Shackamaxon**, a large ship which left Liverpool on 4.10.1852 and arrived Adelaide 19.1.1853. There were 696 emigrants on board and 19 births occurred during the voyage. By the time the ship reached Adelaide however, 65 people had died, most of them children who had suffered from scarlet fever. This surgeon had neglected the cleaning of the ship and he and his assistant at one stage had come to blows.

CHILDBIRTH:

Childbirth was another grave risk on migrant ships of the era - for both mother and child.

Despite advice to the contrary many women joined ships knowing that they were likely to give birth while at sea.

In the period 1836-1860 (and after) the birth of a child ashore was a considerable risk to mother and child, on board a ship at sea the chances of safe delivery and survival of either were infinitely less.

SOCIAL INTERACTION:

For many steerage passengers lack of privacy and enforced familiarity became a nightmare.

Relationships between classes, sexes and families became strained and exaggerated, thrown together as the emigrants were and enduring the hazards and strictures of shipboard existence.

Passengers had little opportunity of absencing themselves from each other's company, except by retiring to their respective berths. Boisterous, quarrelsome passengers could upset the harmony for the entire voyage.

OTHER:

Loneliness - and/or boredom.

Seasickness - could begin 2 hours after sailing and last for weeks as the vessel made its way south towards the equator.

Panic - many of these people had never ventured beyond their homes in Britain. They were strangers to the sea and lived in a constant state of panic.

Rats, lice and other vermin were a constant problem aboard the often dirty and poorly ventilated migrant vessels.

THE NEW SHORE:

As the ship neared the Australian mainland, it took a more northerly bearing (out of the *roaring forties*) and conditions began to improve for the passengers. Now everyone began to anticipate the possible day of arrival. Many of the trials and tribulations of the voyage were dismissed or forgotten as discussions about the future, speculations about conditions to be encountered and promised opportunities, began to exclude most other topics.

Land, once sighted, caused excitement to reach fever pitch. It was usually Kangaroo Island that most people bound for South Australia first saw. Usually from K.I. it was only a matter of hours to Port Adelaide, after a voyage that was considered to have been performed in excellent time if it was under 100 days.

Imagine the emotions of the migrants:

- * For all its discomforts, the ship offered a degree of security - one had few decisions to make, there was no isolation, no need yet to force a way for oneself.
- * Among steerage passengers life was ordered - they were assured of beds, assured of food and assured of a degree of medical attention.
- * For everyone on board, shore life had been suspended. One had only to submit to shipboard authority - and for most submission had been an accepted way of life back home.

- * On the ship the emigrants still felt as though in 'Old England'. Now came the realisation that they were cut off from the motherland.
- * Some of the passengers may have noticed the signs of land, before actually sighting it - eg. the smell, a hawk or a butterfly.
- * On arrival certain procedures needed to be carried out:
 - Boarding by pilot.
 - Interrogation of surgeon-superintendent by the resident health officer.
 - Filing before the immigration officer.
 - Unloading.

Once disembarked the men tended to look first to the prospects the new land offered. The women particularly, felt the harshness of the new scene.

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