

Quarantined Ships in the 1840s

Champion, 1840

The *Champion*, 785 tons, Captain Cochrane, left Liverpool on 8 May 1840 and arrived via Rio at Sydney on 5 October 1840 carrying 308 passengers [one source states 322]. The surgeon-superintendent was Dr Armstrong. Cabin passengers were: R and H Wynn, Mr Wall, Mr Smith, Mr Jajan and son, Mis Catherine Jajan.¹

The ship was placed in quarantine for sixteen days on account of a possible case of fever; a man wishing to engage workmen went aboard while the ship was briefly docked, and was placed in quarantine with the rest of them, a salutary lesson to those attempting to take labour before the muster was compiled.²

At the Water Police Court on 28 October, the ship's steward and cook were jailed for insubordination on the voyage.³

Foley states (p155) that two adults from the ship died in quarantine, and that nine adults and twelve children died on the voyage.

Ayrshire, 1841

The *Ayrshire*, Captain Charles Barker, left Liverpool on 10 July 1841, with 318 emigrants. The surgeon-superintendents on board were Dr Higgison Fayle and Dr Charles Carpenter. There were eight cabin passengers.⁴

There were 21 deaths on the voyage – 16 infants from teething, one adult from consumption and four from typhus.⁵

On arrival at Sydney on 25 October 1841 after 106 days' passage, she was placed into quarantine, owing to typhus having occurred. Only one patient was on the sick list from typhus when the ship was quarantined. The *New York Packet* was also in quarantine at the same time, leading to severe overcrowding.

John Sandon, the Station Superintendent, committed suicide during the quarantine of the *Ayrshire* and the *New York Packet*.

Foley (p132) notes that Elizabeth Ritson, 30, died 27 October and Alfred Speed, 19, were buried at a site above Store Beach some metres off the path leading from Store Beach to the Healthy Ground. Her book reproduces a sketch of the inscription on her headstone: "Memory of Eliz The Wife of Thos Ritson who died Oct 27 1841 Aged 30 Years." Her two children, John 7 and Anne 5 were sent to the Orphan School when her husband was unable to care for them.

The *Ayrshire* left Sydney on 12 December for Madras.

¹ *Sydney Herald* 6 October 1840, p2.

² *Sydney Gazette*, 8 October 1840, p2.

³ *Sydney Gazette* 31 October 1840.

⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* 26 October 1841, p2.

⁵ *Australasian Chronicle* 26 October 1841, p2.

Eleanor, 1841

The *Eleanor*, a barque of 430 tons [sources vary: Foley states 496 tons], Captain Holderness, sailed from Cork, Ireland on 18 April 1841. She carried 210 emigrants, as well as 13 cabin passengers and 10 intermediate passengers. Crossing the Bay of Biscay, she encountered a storm and the hatches were battened down. Fever broke out. The *Sydney Gazette* reported "the only deaths were of six adults and seven children" on the journey.⁶ The ship was completely out of provisions when she arrived in Sydney, the voyage having taken several days longer than anticipated. Two cases of fever were so severe that the ship was placed in quarantine on arrival.

Foley (p 155) states that there were 209 immigrants in quarantine, and that there were four adult and nine child deaths on the voyage. The ship was in quarantine for 18 days. One adult died in quarantine.

Margaret, 1841

More than one ship named *Margaret* visited Sydney in 1840-41. The convict ship *Margaret*, 364 tons, Captain Canney, left Dublin on 1 May 1840 and arrived at Sydney on 17 August. She carried 130 female prisoners, 17 free settlers and 23 children. There was one passenger, a Mr Swansea. The ship's surgeon-superintendent was Dr Colin A Browning, RN, and the ship's agents were Montefiore and Co. Dr Browning wrote an address to the women who disembarked, urging them to obey the Scriptures; the book was published in 1841.

The *Margaret* left Sydney on 4 October for Amboyne, and returned to Sydney early in 1841.

Foley (p155) refers to another *Margaret*, a barque of 568 tons [?268 tons], Captain Blythe. This ship left Liverpool on 23 October 1840, Cape of Good Hope on 29 January, and arriving at Sydney on 28 March 1841. There were 245 immigrants and 25 crew. There were two cabin passengers, H & J Mort.⁷ Six adults and 35 children died on the voyage, 24 from scarlatina.⁸ Dr Galloway was the ship's surgeon-superintendent. He stated that the ship's provisions were not the reason for the mortality as they were of superior quality. The ship arrived at Sydney on 28 March 1841 and was placed in quarantine for nine days.⁹ One adult died in quarantine of typhus fever.

New York Packet, 1841

The *New York Packet*, 685 tons, left Greenock, Scotland on 8 July 1841 under Captain Dorning/Downing/Dawning with 284 immigrants. There was one cabin passenger, a Miss Brodie, and 14 intermediate passengers. The ship arrived at Sydney on 23 October 1841, and was placed in quarantine on the discovery of smallpox on board.¹⁰ On the voyage she lost three passengers from smallpox and nine from other causes, and there was influenza on board

⁶ *Sydney Gazette* 24 August 1841, p2; see also *Sydney Monitor* 23 August 1841.

⁷ *Free Press* 31 March 1841, p2.

⁸ *Australasian Chronicle* 30 March 1841, p2.

⁹ *Sydney Gazette* 30 March 1841, p3.

¹⁰ *Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser*, 25 October 1841, p2.

at the time she was quarantined.¹¹ Typhus fever was reported to be raging with fatal violence among the quarantined passengers a few days later.¹² Sixty cases of smallpox were reported by 11 November.¹³ Those quarantined included a ship's pilot who boarded the vessel before the medical authorities had inspected it.

They were tended by naval surgeon T Russell Dunn. On 23 November, all the male passengers who had been released from quarantine to that point signed a testimonial to him.¹⁴

The *Sydney Gazette* stated that it had received a letter from a passenger who believed that the outbreak was due to inadequate cleanliness and ventilation during the voyage.¹⁵

Sydney Herald 30 November 1841 carried a list of the ship's cargo, which included five hogsheads of whisky.

The last of the immigrants were only released from quarantine on 18 December. The expense to the Colony was £800.¹⁶

During the quarantine of the *New York Packet*, the Station Superintendent, John Sandon, committed suicide.

The ship left Sydney for Bombay towards the end of December.

Foley states that eight adults and one child died in quarantine. She notes (p132) the following burials at the First Burial Ground:

Seaman W Adamson, 26 October

George Anderson, 37, 5 November

Mrs Elizabeth Kyle

Mrs Alice Moss

William Hosie, 37

Daniel McNeil

Baby Elder

Foley states:

"Events surrounding the quarantine of the bounty ship *New York Packet*, which arrived from Glasgow on 23 October 1841 with 244 immigrants on board, demonstrated the vulnerability of the immigrants to infectious diseases before the causes of diseases and the methods of transmission were discovered. Fifteen days from departure, a two-year-old child developed a mild case of smallpox. Although the ship's surgeon, Dr J Aitken, a licentiate of the College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, knew that smallpox was a contagious disease, he considered that the disease was not 'as likely to be caught from one slightly, as from one seriously affected' and so, in all but three cases, allowed his patients to remain in their berths amongst the other immigrants. As a result fifteen people became infected with smallpox, of whom three died.

When the vessel arrived in Port Jackson, Aitken reported that although smallpox had been prevalent early in the voyage, the passengers were totally free from disease with the exception of a few cases of influenza. As a precaution, the Port's Health Officer, Dr A Savage, quarantined the ship for cleansing.

Within three days, the reports of sickness on the Healthy Ground were so troubling that Naval Surgeon T R Dunn was sent from Sydney to investigate. He found the immigrants 'in a filthy and disgraceful state of discipline', and he observed with alarm that many people who were suffering from a disease of a 'well marked febrile character' were mixing freely with healthy

¹¹ *Colonial Observer* 28 October 1841.

¹² *Sydney Monitor* 3 November 1841, p3.

¹³ *Colonial Observer* 11 November 1841.

¹⁴ *Sydney Herald* 23 November 1841, p3.

¹⁵ *Sydney Gazette* 25 November 1841, p3.

¹⁶ *Sydney Gazette* 21 December 1841.

people. The disease, which he diagnosed as typhus fever, spread rapidly through the Station infecting more than 80 people and killing eight adults and one child.

Typhus fever is spread by lice, and both in this and some other quarantines it seemed puzzling that there should have been an outbreak of typhus fever on arrival at the Station, but not during the long voyage. In the opinion of a board of enquiry, the disease was present but undiagnosed during the voyage of the *New York Packet*. In a letter to Governor Gipps on 14 February 1842, Dr Aitken maintained that the Station's hospital was the source of infection since it had not been cleansed following the removal of the *Eleanor's* typhus fever cases some days earlier. However, his claim was rejected. His plea for payment for his services during the voyage was also rejected, throwing him into a state of penury.

One of the most potent weapons in the fight to improve conditions on the immigrant ships was the withholding of payment to ship masters who breached charter-party agreements, and to surgeon-superintendents whose performance was considered to be unsatisfactory. The board's report indicated that it was making an example of Aitken, whose moral conduct during the voyage was unimpeached but whose performance was judged to be inadequate, in order to draw attention to 'a most culpable want of care in the selection of surgeons-superintendent' on a number of immigrant ships.

In early November, Dr Ellis Bateman was sent from Sydney to take charge of the Station's hospital and Dr Aitken was relegated to the position of his assistant. Bateman was dismayed to find that the hospital offered little protection from the weather, and reported that 'the wind had full ingress thru several spaces so as to allow in severe or partial draughts of air on many of our sick'. To overcome this, he had brushwood and a ridge of earth placed around the building.

Bateman also informed the Health Officer that the hospital was in 'a cruelly crowded state – all the bedsteads in close apposition to each other and the only passage down the centre of the ward interrupted by beds placed on the ground in some of which were 3 or 4 children as well as adults promiscuously mixed'.

Neptune, 1844

The *Neptune*, 643 tons, Captain Ferris, left Cork on 26 October 1843 with 308 bounty immigrants. The ship's surgeon-superintendent was Mr Birtwhistle. Four adults and five children died on the voyage. Not long after leaving Cork, there was a case of smallpox on board. On arrival at Sydney on 11 February 1844, the ship was placed in quarantine for three days.¹⁷

On leaving quarantine, the immigrants were quickly engaged, the majority as agricultural labourers. The ship's imports were landed at Campbell's Wharf.¹⁸

Foley states that there were no deaths in quarantine from the *Neptune's* passengers.

Emigrant, 1849

The *Emigrant*, 753 tons, Captain Kemp, left Plymouth on 9 March 1849¹⁹. She carried 319 emigrants. Foley states that there were eleven deaths on the voyage, one adult and ten children, most from measles. Dr Halloway was the ship's surgeon-superintendent, and there

¹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 February 1844, p2.

¹⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 February 1844, p2 lists the contents.

¹⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 June 1849, p4.

were eight other cabin passengers. On arrival at Sydney on 8 June 1849, an 'excellent passage' of 90 days, the ship was sent to quarantine for nine days.

In 1849, the shortage of accommodation was acute, particularly when the *Emigrant* was quarantined in June 1849, and over 300 people had to be accommodated. In a letter to Dr Savage, the ship's surgeon reported that only the women and children could be housed in the buildings and that 'to sum all, we have so many women and children at a tender age, so little accommodation and such bad weather, I fear our prospects are very bad indeed.'

However, there were no deaths while the ship was in quarantine. 47 of the emigrants went on to Parramatta, 189 to Maitland, and 15 to Port Macquarie. The ship left Sydney for Callao.

See also file compiled by Natalie Hartog in 2002, in *Quarantine Station Oral History of descendants of internees*, Library Compactus.

Midlothian, 1849

The barque *Midlothian*, 414 tons, Captain Joseph Gibson, sailed from London in mid-December 1848 with 202 immigrants. There were nine deaths on the voyage, and 32 cases of measles; Foley states that eleven children died on the voyage²⁰. On arrival at Sydney on 8 April 1849, the ship was placed in quarantine for four days. There were no deaths during the period of quarantine. Around 35 of the immigrants were conveyed to Maitland by 18th April for hire. The ship returned to London with a cargo of wool, tallow and hides.

Steadfast (1849)

The *Steadfast*, Captain Spencer, was quarantined in 1849. The surgeon-superintendent on board was Dr Read, RN. There had been 192 sick on the voyage, from typhus, measles and scarlatina. However, no-one died during the ship's period of quarantine.²¹

²⁰ *Shipping Gazette* 14 April 1849, p93.

²¹ SMH 2 April 1849, p2, also 26 and 27 March 1849.