

AUGUSTA JESSIE SURGEON'S JOURNAL 1839-1840

General Remarks [ADM101-6-6 Folios 28-30]

The surgeon joined the ship at Deptford on 9 October 1839, the guard, under Captain Hill of the 96th Regiment, joined the following day and the ship sailed on the 12th, arriving in Kingstown Harbour [Dun Laoghaire] on 23 October 1839. On 28th 100 convicts were embarked from Kilmainham Jail and on the 30th the surgeon inspected a further 60, several of whom were rejected, being infected with ophthalmia, 2 with ill conditioned ulcers and 1 with pulmonic disease. On 6 November 1839, 45 more were sent on board and 3 were returned as unlikely to survive the voyage. Another 16 were received from a distant part of the country on 10 November 1839 and 3 were returned as remanded by the Government for further examination. On 11 November 1839 the Augusta Jessie sailed with a crew of 29, guard of 44 officers and privates, 6 women and 13 children, 155 male convicts, a Government passenger and the surgeon, a total of 209 on board.

The prisoners were at first placed in messes, with captains chosen by the surgeon, according to how they appeared on the jail list, after sailing they were allowed to form their own messes and elect captains. There were several non-commissioned officers and privates of the army among the prisoners and 8 were selected as a constabulary force, enforcing cleanliness and good order. The good feeling evident throughout the voyage indicates they exercised their authority with discretion. A code of [laws] and regulations supplied by Somerset House was read to the prisoners and hung up in the prison. There is some analysis of the figures abstracted from the sick list and a calculation of the total rations issued and average number of convicts sick, just under 3% daily. The surgeon observes that he has been 'guided strictly by the usages of a man of war' and that those listed as sick would have been unfit for duty in one of Her Majesty's Ships. The surgeon has no experience with which to compare, this being his first convict ship, but he assumes the Augusta Jessie to have been a remarkably healthy ship. He attributes this to a number of factors, including, a good height between decks, a good supply of water and rations, the good behaviour of the guard, the crew and their officers, the prisoners being well disposed and the good weather. Most of the entries in the sick list are at the start of the voyage, when the weather was cold and the prisoners suffered sea sickness. Between the limits of the North East and South East trade winds there was no calm weather and only one rain shower. To enforce cleanliness prizes were offered to the captains of the cleanest messes and for personal cleanliness, the surgeon saw this as essential to obviate the 'difficulty of obtaining this object among Irish prisoners'. The prizes consisted of books of amusement or instruction supplied by the Inspector General of Prisons for Ireland, the merits of the winning individual were recorded in the flyleaf of each. A volunteer washer man was selected from each mess to wash clothes and permanent volunteer parties cleaned the decks. There are further details of the routines for cleaning below decks and the beds. About 40 junior convicts attended a school for a hour and a half each morning and afternoon.

On 2 January 1840 the island of Tristan Da Cunha was sighted, there was some boisterous weather off the Cape of Good Hope and some water was shipped, rendering the lower deck uncomfortable. The thermometer did not fall below 56 in January. Flannel waistcoats were issued during the cold weather and an extra blanket to the invalids. Old canvas was nailed around the stanchions of the fore, main and after hatchways in an effort to keep below decks dry, charcoal swinging stoves were also kept burning. The remaining part of the voyage the weather was similar but although the ship reached 45th degree of South Latitude, the thermometer did not fall below 54. On 25 February 1840 they arrived in Port Jackson. Only one man was punished at the gangway during the voyage, for petty theft. The exemplary conduct of the military prisoners selected as police on the voyage was reported to the Governor, who ordered them all to be landed at Sydney to join the mounted police of the colony. The 4 sick convicts and the 23 junior prisoners were also landed. A new contract was negotiated with the master of the Augusta Jessie and 80 convicts were sent on board from the Woodbridge to be taken to Norfolk Island. With the remaining 120 originally embarked, this 200 were landed at Norfolk Island on 27 March 1840. The Augusta Jessie then returned to Sydney, on 9 April 1840, with a detachment of the 50th Regiment.

Signed, Thomas R Dunn, MD, Surgeon etc.