

The Bounty Ships Scheme to Australia

**Extract from an article by Gordon Dennes
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[transcription by Wayne Cameron]

The *British King*

The 8th government-chartered immigrant ship to sail from a Highland port in Scotland, was the barque *British King*. Her predecessors were the *William Nicol*, *Midlothian*, *Brilliant*, *St George*, *Boyne*, *James Moran* and *Lady McNaughton*. The *British King*'s registered tonnage was 673 tons and her burthen upwards of 1,000 tons. She had a regular frigate deck from stem to stern of 124 feet with a ceiling of 8½ feet, width 28½ feet with double tier of berths for 256 passengers, besides children. In addition, the male and female hospitals each contained 9 berths and were situated immediately beneath the Surgeon's cabin. The Surgeon thus had access at all hours to his patients from his own room by a hatchway, through which a wind sail could be put to the top of the poop, a matter of the greatest importance to the sick. Each adult was provided with a clothes bag, a bed and blankets, a knife, fork and spoon. The dining tables were affixed amidships and no chest was allowed to be taken to the hold. There was a wide promenade round the whole of the ship, which was rendered airy and agreeable by the provision of air ports on each side. According to the standard of accommodation for ships of those days, that of the *British King* was comfortable. The general outfitting was carried out probably at Greenock, under the supervision of Lieutenant Hermans, the Government Agent for the ship, whilst Mr. Andrew Crawford, joiner, fitted up in a superior manner the sleeping and dining accommodation.

Sufficient stores were taken aboard for a trip to last some 5 or 6 months. These consisted mainly of Arrowroot, Biscuits, Flour, Meat, Molasses, Oatmeal, Pork, Port Wine, Sago, Soap, Vegetables, Vinegar, Water and Medical Supplies etc. From the Clyde River, she sailed under the command of Captain William Paton with a crew of 4 officers and 30 marines, to the port of Tobermory, "The Well of Mary", so called from a spring of local celebrity, Isle of Mull. Up to the time of her departure, she was the largest ship that had ever sailed from the Clyde for Australia - but what a contrast she presents to the present day steamers! She was comparatively, a small ship but her name will long be commemorated with this trip.

Highland Emigrants

"Fogradh nan Gaidheal.
Thàinig soitheach 'g an iarraidh,
'S dh' fheum iad triall air an ànradh,
'G an giùlan thar fairge
Do gharbhlaich gun fhàrdaich."

At Tobermory the migrants embarked under the superintendence of Surgeon Alexander Arbuckle, (see *Medical Journal of Australia*, "V2 N.15, 13.10.1934) 128 adults and 204 children, a total of 332 passengers, belonging to the Caird (1), Cameron (17), Campbell (29), Fletcher (11), Henderson (5), Frazer (15), Keay (3), McArthur (1), McCallum (13), McDonald (146), McDougall (2),

McEachern (13), McFadyen (2), McFarlane (14), McKellar (1), McKillop (7), McKinnon (5), McLean (16), McCormick (7), McPherson (11), McNaughton (1), McNeil (1), Nicholson (1), Pender (7), Pierson (1), and Shaw (1) clans. The majority of them were natives of Argyllshire - the islands of Coll, Gometra, Tyree and Ulva and the district of Ardnamurchan; the remainder were from Invernesshire - Skye and Moidart; Dumbartonshire - Kilpatrick; Morayshire - Elgin and Aberdeenshire.

With her full complement of passengers aboard, the *British King* weighed anchor on October 28, 1838 and set sail on her long voyage of 13,000 miles direct for "down under". That day her gaelic speaking migrants bid adieu, probably for the last time, to their native heathered hills and glens and braved the storms and perils of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. Many of them, especially those from the Isles, had lived on the level of the sea. The menfolk were mostly farmer-sailors - equally at home in the furrow of the land as in the furrow of the sea.

Although a copy of the regulations observed aboard ship is not available, probably they were similar to those of the *Asia* from Cromarty, in which the Phemister family, descendants of whom reside at Copmanhurst, arrived at Sydney on May 10, 1839. These in the main were: -

1. Out of bed at seven.
2. Beds to be rolled up, and in fine weather carried on deck.
3. Breakfast at eight.
4. Clean decks at ten.
5. Dine at one.
6. Tea at six.
7. Four constables to be appointed.
8. A certain number of men to be on watch at night. One lantern to be kept burning at each hatchway.
9. Everybody under 15 years to be on deck at 10 a.m., weather permitting, to be inspected by the Surgeon or Teachers and seen to be clean. After inspection, school.
10. On every Sabbath, the people to assemble for Divine Service.
11. Washing days every Monday and Thursday. When not fine, others to be substituted as the Surgeon may direct.
12. No washing on any account to be suffered between decks and no drying of wet cloths there.
13. No spirits to be allowed.
14. When wine in issue, the Surgeon enjoined to refuse same to any person neglecting these regulations; and in the case of gross misconduct or violence same to be reported to the Governor on arrival.
15. The constables and teachers to be exempted from cleaning the decks.
16. Passengers to bear in mind that on arrival in the colony their conduct during the voyage will be known and that therefore not only is it essential to their health and perhaps their safety to attend to the rules agreed to for their well-being on the passage but that individuals who thwart them may feel the consequences seriously in their prospects afterwards.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew, and after a lengthy and tedious passage of 123 days, without calling at any intermediate port, the good ship *British King* on February 28, 1839, entered the safe and beautiful haven of Port Jackson.

Arrival Sydney

Dr. John Dobie, Health Officer and formerly of the Royal Navy, whose name is perpetuated in the name of a street in Grafton and is also linked with the early history of the Clarence River, conducted the medical examination of the passengers. All except 2 were found to be quite healthy. Dr. Dobie granted pratique and the *British King* dropped anchor in Neutral Bay. During the passage 7 minors died and 6 babies first saw the light of day.

On arrival, Surgeon Superintendent Arbuckle reported that Divine Service was kept every Sabbath since leaving Tobermory - 240 Protestants and 83 Roman Catholics attended. School was also established. Thirty-five scholars attended regularly, all of whom made great progress. One of the teachers was Mr. John McFarlane, father of Mr. Duncan McFarlane, well-known on the Clarence. For the preservation of the health of the passengers, they were made to appear on deck whenever the weather permitted and the greatest attention was always paid to cleanliness. Dancing and other amusements were encouraged to prevent idleness and to preserve contentment and cheerfulness among the passengers. Probably Duncan McDonald, a native of the Isle of Tyree, who was recorded on the passenger list as a "farmer and piper", provided the bagpipe music for the Highland dance.

Whilst at sea, the *British King* exchanged colours with the *Cassandra* bound for Bombay on December 5, with the *North Briton* from Sydney to Batavia on February 18, and she also spoke in Bass Strait on February 25, a brig supposed to be the *Black Joke* from Launceston to South Australia.

The Immigrants

The *British King* was hauled into Sydney Cove, where she landed her migrants on March 4, and commenced discharging her cargo of soap, vinegar, whisky, ale, geneva, bottles, wine and handspikes and stores. The immigrants were domiciled at the Immigration Building, Bent Street, until they met with engagements. These Highlanders and those who had landed before them, being hardy and frugal in their habits and in general of strict integrity and virtue, were eagerly sought after as employees by the colonists. The majority of them were farmers and shepherds. One of their number was a qualified Surgeon - Duncan McDonald, native of Mull.

In *The Australian* newspaper of March 23, 1839, the following letter of appreciation was published:

"To the Editor of *The Australian*,
Sir,

Requested by my fellow passengers to communicate through the medium of your valuable journal to the local Government and the public generally, the high estimation which Supt. Arbuckle, Capt. Paton and other officers of the *British King* are deservedly held by the whole of the passengers. I feel much pleasure in complying with such a creditable proposal.

It is admitted by all the gentlemen who have been on board that they never witnessed an immigrant ship enter the harbour of Port Jackson in superior condition as to general cleanliness and the consequent good health of its inmates than the *British King* and certainly none her equal, who made the passage without calling at any intermediate ports. The expenses generally incurred at the Cape of Good Hope, have been avoided and the health of the passengers preserved unimpaired.

We are indebted under the guidance of Providence for such a happy issue to our voyage, to the close and unremitting attention conjoined with the superior intelligence and experience of Dr. Arbuckle and Capt. Paton. These gentlemen are so affable in their manners that to obey their commands was a pleasure, and their natural dispositions are so benevolent as to render their orders easy and agreeable. The former's kindness and assiduity will never be obliterated from the hearts of those who emigrated from their native land under his charge and if ever any of them should return thither they will consider themselves more than fortunate by taking their passage under the command of a gentleman equally qualified with the latter.

Our thanks are likewise due to the first and second officers who invariably treated us with affability and kindness. The common sailors participated in a high degree in these benevolent feelings so prevalent among our seafaring countrymen, and our wives in particular are very grateful for their assiduous attention to children.

I am your obedient servant,
An Immigrant by the British King.”