

## The voyage of the *Henry*

The *Henry* left England on 12 October 1824. Its cargo included the news that His Majesty George IV was in perfect health; that in Portugal, an expedition to Brazil was being fitted out; that someone had bought a Rafaele painting from a broker's shop for a few shillings and was now asking £10,000 for it; and that Mr Saddler, the celebrated aeronaut, was on his thirty-first balloon ascent thrown from his balloon to his death, 'after travelling beyond the usual limits of mortal daring'.

The passengers on the *Henry* had probably never heard of Mr Saddler, but they too must have felt that they were travelling beyond the usual limits of mortal daring. Few of them would have ever been in a ship before, and now they were being forced to cross the world, leaving behind everything they knew – or almost everything, since some were travelling with family members or friends.

The *Henry* carried 79 female convicts and ten of their children, as well as 25 free women with 23 children who were travelling at government expense to join convict husbands in the colony. There were also some cabin passengers such as the Rev. Garrard, but they play no part in the convicts' story.<sup>1</sup>

The captain was James Ferrier, who had already sailed a convict ship to Van Diemen's Land in 1823, and the surgeon-superintendent was also experienced. William Bell Carlyle was born in Scotland possibly in 1788, trained as a doctor and served as surgeon-superintendent on six convicts ship travelling to Australia between 1820 and 1830. He was planning to stay in the colonies, gaining a land grant near Brisbane in the 1820s. After his last convict trip in 1830 he settled down, and later moved to Port Macquarie, where he planted one of the first vineyards. He died in 1844. Carlyle was not only experienced, but conscientious and humane, obviously sympathizing with the sicker of his patients.<sup>2</sup>

The *Henry* in 1824 was Carlyle's third convict trip, so he was used to the problems and challenges. They started on shore, when he examined the convicts to make sure they were fit to travel. He would not have accepted 63-year-old Rosanna Keenan, an 'old emaciated creature', but she was so desperate to accompany her daughter, who was pregnant, that she claimed to be only 44, though she later admitted to Carlyle that she was 63. Carlyle let her on board – but then the daughter was seized with labour pains as she came on board, and was landed. Rosanna had to continue on to Van Diemen's Land. 'Since she came on board she has gradually become more and more debilitated and is now obliged to lie in bed a great part of the day.' She had no apparent disease, but was weak with a poor appetite. Carlyle ordered half a pint of wine daily, and 'as nutritious a diet as can be procured'. She was still on the sick list when they arrived in Hobart. What happened to her is unknown; the section of her convict record for Van Diemen's Land is blank. Her daughter was meant to be following her, but whether she did is unknown.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 11 February 1825.

<sup>2</sup> [http://colsec.records.nsw.gov.au/indexes/colsec/c/F09c\\_cab-car-14.htm](http://colsec.records.nsw.gov.au/indexes/colsec/c/F09c_cab-car-14.htm);  
[http://www.jenwilletts.com/william\\_carlylse.htm](http://www.jenwilletts.com/william_carlylse.htm).

<sup>3</sup> CON 40/1/5/K38, Rosanna Keenan.

Another woman who came on board with a pre-existing condition was twenty-three year old Charlotte Davies, who, Carlyle found, had had an inguinal hernia for some years. Fortunately they were still in the Thames when he discovered this, and he ordered her a truss from the victualling office.

Most of the women were aged in their twenties and thirties. Almost all had been convicted of some form of theft – from the person, dwelling houses, shops and in one case, from her mother. They picked pockets and received stolen goods. Items stolen ranged from money, gold earrings and a shawl, a watch, an umbrella, ducks, and three handkerchiefs, to 60 yards of crimson, 25 yards of black silk, 4 yards of muslin and 3 yards of nankeen. This last woman was sentenced to death, but the sentenced was commuted to transportation for life. One woman was transported for uttering, and Mary Horn for murder. She stated this offence as: ‘A woman who took to my Husband I hit her with a Stick She died in a month.’<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the (male) judge thought defending her husband was an extenuating circumstance, enough to prevent Mary from being sentenced to execution.

Some women were transported for their first offence, and others had one or more previous convictions. Gaolers described some in terrifying terms. Bridget Langham was ‘a notoriously infamous character in every respect, temper and disposition bad’, with two previous convictions; Jane Henrie was another notorious character whose mother had been transported; Mary Hughes was ‘an old Bawd, connexions of the worst description; Frances Phillips was a daring bold impudent girl. Sarah Warman ‘has led a most abandoned life these last four years trampling the Country with different men married husband a capital conviction. The worst character the Gaoler ever knew.’ She and Bridget Langham fulfilled this promise in Van Diemen’s Land, with long lists of offences.<sup>5</sup>

However, Ann Hart was convicted with a bad man who is supposed to have induced her to commit this Offence, her first. Fewer women had more positive gaol descriptions, but Ann Hoban was brought up at a clergyman’s though said she had followed no religion recently; Ann Gowland had ‘habits of loose description but appears penitent’, and Margaret Grant was described as ‘a clever active girl’. A few women had improved their behaviour while in gaol awaiting transportation: Ann Gibson had misbehaved early on but has behaved well since’. Negative descriptions did not always result in uncooperative behaviour on the ship; Mary Harper’s gaol report described her as having bad connexions and character, but Carlyle said she was the best behaved girl in the ship, and she had no offences in Van Diemen’s Land either.<sup>6</sup> Many of the brief descriptions indicate fractured family life: husbands already in gaol, husband left behind, stealing from her mother.

Some convicts had unusual backgrounds Charlotte Davies, who had stolen money and clothes, spoke Welsh and little English. She was the one who received the truss; fortunately the hernia would have been fairly obvious and needed no complicated Welsh explanations to be translated. At least she could chat with Jane Griffith, who also spoke only Welsh. Tithanner Lovell was a gipsy, also known as

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<sup>4</sup> CON 40/1/5/L39 Ann Lugg; CON 41/2/5/H77 Mary Horn.

<sup>5</sup> CON 40/1/5/L40 Bridget Langham; CON 401/5/H70 Jane Henrie; CON 40/1/5/H72 Mary Hughes; CON 40/1/7/P75 Frances Phillips; CON 40/1/9/W61 Sarah Warman.

<sup>6</sup> CON 40/1/5/H73; CON 40/1/H74 Ann Hoban; CON 40/1/3/G51 Ann Gowland; CON 40/1/3/G52 Margaret Grant; CON 40/1/3/G50 Ann Gibson; CON 40/1/5/H69 Mary Harper.

Dinah.<sup>7</sup> Some admitted to having been prostitutes. They were mostly English, but a few were Scottish and a handful Welsh. There were no Irish.

The worst problem facing Carlyle arose early on in the voyage, while they were still anchored at Woolwich. Ann Lugg from Exeter was the capital respite, and she one or more of her five children with her, and her five-year-old son William became feverish, a headache, an irritable stomach, hot dry skin and a flushed face.. Ann told the surgeon that smallpox had been prevalent in Exeter when they left it, and that William had never been vaccinated. Sure enough, the next day little red pimples appeared. Carlyle hurriedly vaccinated everyone who acknowledged that they had not had this treatment, four women and seven children, and isolated William as far as possible. He treated him by giving him cold barley water mixed with potassium tartrate, and let 'his person to be exposed to the cool air'. Later William was given opiates and senna to open his bowels. The treatment worked, and he gradually recovered completely, though the smallpox left his severely scarred.

Carlyle was worried about smallpox spreading, but the only person to catch it was fifteen-year-old Sarah Richie, one of the free passengers. She had been vaccinated, but still caught the disease, severely. Soon she 'has every appearance of being speedily removed from this sublimentary world', and died a week after being taken ill. She and all her belongings were immediately committed to the deep. Fortunately however, Carlyle managed to contain the outbreak otherwise. One child, 4-month-old Margaret Horn, was restless and uneasy as the vaccination took effect. 'I have merely directed that she should be left cool and as much out of the mother's arms as possible', wrote Carlyle. It seems a little harsh.

Some minor illnesses affected nearly everyone on board. Once out at sea the ship pitched unceasingly. 'The Ship has been rolling and pitching these two days and there is a very heavy sea running, consequently a good deal of sea sickness amongst the women', wrote Carlyle, and later, 'The greater part of the women are very sea sick today'. Most received no treatment, but Carlyle gave the worst affected 'effervescing draughts and anodynes' – painkillers, and 'one poor girl who has retained scarcely anything upon her stomach since we left the river had a blister applied to her precordia [chest] this morning.' A blister was made of acid, and painfully raised a blister in the affected area. Next day, wrote Carlyle, 'Blister has risen well and has not experienced the sickness so much since' – or at any rate, she did not complain about it. More kindly, Carlyle gave a woman still weak after childbirth and also seasick, sago and wine.

During the voyage most women became constipated at some time or another, and they were given laxatives, such as an infusion of senna, or magnesium sulphate. Many also suffered from diarrhoea or dysentery at some time, which Carlyle treated with bleeding, or saline cathartic mercurials if the pain was severe. The women then recovered perfectly, he wrote.

Another common complaint was bruising from falls, not surprising for women not used to the sea and the ship's lurching. 'Blowing a gale & many tumbles but no serious injury', wrote Carlyle cheerfully at one stage. However, there were two severe cases. On 24 September Margaret Horn, a thirty-year-old prisoner, fell down the main hatchway and broke her right ankle. Carlyle 'replaced the bones in their situations', and kept them in place with a wet bandage. On 10 October she could use her foot perfectly again. On 26 September Hannah Hiho, a 'very stout heavy' prisoners aged

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<sup>7</sup> CON 40/1/3/D50 Charlotte Davies; CON 40/1//3/G47 Jane Griffith; CON 40/1/5/L41 Tithanner Lovell.

twenty, had a more serious fall, backwards into the main hatchway, fortunately just when Carlyle was passing. He found her unconscious with her head bent down on her heart, and 'partial luxation of the second cervical vertebrae'. Carlyle immediately extended Hiho's head, and the bones regained their place with a loud noise after which the muscles of her face which had previously been contracted into an expression of extreme agony, resumed their usual composure'. Soon Hiho regained consciousness and was able to move her limbs. She complained of much pain in the back of her head and her neck. Within three days she was walking about 'with no other bad consequences from her fall than a little stiffness of the neck', and on 3 October she was free from all complaints. These two cases are rare examples of treatments of the period being possibly more effective than modern day treatment, where patients with broken bones would have to wait until their stomachs were empty before being given anaesthetics so that the bones could be set painlessly. Carlyle's method was more painful, but the immediate replacement of the bones probably led to a faster recovery.

As usual with female convict ships, there were several cases of childbirth on board. Most of these went smoothly, but on 8 October Bridget Urwin, a twenty-three year old prisoner who had to leave her husband behind in Northumberland after she was transported for stealing a gown, was 'taken in labour' with her first child. She was small and tin, noted Carlyle. The pains had only just begun when the membrane gave way, and the baby was still high up in the pelvis. After some hours the head had advanced to the middle of the pelvis, where it was wedged tight. The pains were very griping, recorded Carlyle, and the patient as much exhausted. He gave her some opium which produced a few hours sleep, but after this the pains became very quick. The baby was not advancing, and the mother became 'exceedingly low and faint with a feeble intermitting pulse and occasional delirium'. Carlyle could see no prospect of a natural birth, so he tried instruments Forceps failed to work, so he was reluctantly obliged to use the crotchet, which successfully drew out the baby. It had probably been dead for some time, he wrote, for it smelt intolerable. What this process was like for the unfortunate mother he did not venture to suggest, but without anaesthetic it was probably extremely painful. Carlyle gave her pain relief, and she slept a little, but when she woke was incoherent. But after a good night's sleep she was quite rational. Carlyle 'had her breasts drawn' – the milk expressed? – and let her drink freely of diluted wine. Seasickness did not help her recovery, but she gradually improved, and was given preserved meat to encourage this. She was fortunate to be attended by a surgeon at no cost to herself, which would have been impossible for a free woman in Britain. Carlyle's crotchet, though undoubtedly agonizing for Bridget, saved her life, since otherwise it would have been impossible for the baby to be born. She recovered completely, behaved in an exemplary way in Van Diemen's Land and received a pardon in 1836.<sup>8</sup>

Three other women gave birth, two passengers and another convict. They all had shorter, 'natural' labours, four hours in one case. One other child was stillborn, its mother Mary Harper attributing the child's death in the womb to a fall she experienced a fortnight earlier. One of the passenger's babies 'was last evening seized with convulsions and expired whist putting it into warm baths', so only one of the four children born on board survived to the end of the journey.

One dreaded disease on convict ships was scurvy, but there were no cases on the Henry. Carlyle started distributing daily doses of lime juice when the ship was off

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<sup>8</sup> CON 40/1/9/U1 Bridget Urwin.

Madeira, just entering the tropics, and at its only stop, St Jago at the Cape Verde Islands the ship took on fresh beef and vegetables – though no fruit. These dietary benefits were enough to keep scurvy at bay.

The remedies Carlyle gave his patients ranged from medicines considered dangerous today such as opiates, calomel, antimonial powder and mercury; proceedings such as bleeding and giving blisters; and foods such as barley water, wine, brandy, sago and preserved meat. Remedies could be tough. Poor Sarah Richie, dying from smallpox, ‘Fainted from the bleeding yesterday and did not seem to be in the least relieved by it.’ Sarah Wharmby, a convict aged twenty, despite being ‘A stout healthy looking woman of a sanguine temperament’, came down with erysipelas, with her whole scalp inflamed. Carlyle cut off her hair and coated her face and scalp with oatmeal, which relieved her. She gradually improved until her only complaint was debility, for which Carlyle prescribed half a pint of wine daily.

Most of the diseases Carlyle listed, the more serious ones, occurred in the first half of the trip, while women were still getting used to the sea, and during the northern autumn. In the tropics, and sailing along in the southern summer, there were far fewer cases of illness. However, Margaret Grant’s case was interesting.

Margaret, a 21-year-old ‘clever, active girl’ from Aberdeen, was one evening seized with tremors, headache, nausea, vomiting and a general soreness over the whole body, which, wrote Carlyle, ‘prevented her from closing an eye during the night’. Next day she tried to vomit, without success. He gave her ipecac, to encourage the vomiting, and an emetic, but she was little better, and to her symptoms was added ‘a general feeling of anxiety’ and a great thirst. Carlyle tried to bleed her but she fainted before she had lost a single ounce, and the same thing happened when he tried again. A purgative worked briefly and she improved slightly, but still had her excruciating headache. She was agitated, her face sunk and dejected. Carlyle administered a blister which, he said, relieved the headache, but the patient got no sleep.

After a few days Margaret was better, but she had ‘a peculiar wild expression about the eyes & at times these two days past has muttered a great deal of insolent nonsense tho when roused up a little she answers any questions put to her in a rational manner’. Carlyle tried another blister, but she tore it off as soon as he put it on. As for food, ‘she takes everything that is offered to her she instantly rejects it again by forcing her fingers into her thorax’. Carlyle shaved her head and applied a blister across her scalp. Margaret rubbed it off, and ‘keeps putting her fingers down her thorax whenever she catches the attendants eyes turned from her’. She was in this state when the *Henry* arrived in Hobart Town, and was sent to the hospital there. She died five days later, classified as insane.<sup>9</sup>

On the whole, this was a successful trip with little ill-health. Once the smallpox outbreak was contained, there was comparatively little serious illness. Carlyle did not give any description of the general voyage, however. They reached Hobart on 10 February after a voyage lasting 121 days, an average length for female convict ships (male ships averaged about fortnight less). In Hobart, 77 of the convicts and the passengers were landed, and the *Henry* continued to Sydney with the crew and the two remaining convicts. The free families presumably joined their husbands,

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<sup>9</sup> CON 40/1/3/G52 Margaret Grant.

All other information from the log of Surgeon-superintendent William Bell Carlyle of the *Henry*,

<http://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/images/pdfs/Henry1825SR.pdf>

and the 77 female convicts began their colonial careers by being assigned as domestic servants.