

Surgeon's Report for *Blackfriar*
ADM 101/12
(AOT Reel 3189)

GENERAL REMARKS

The authorities in Dublin embarked on board the Blackfriar hired transport, on the 9th & 11th January 1851 Two hundred and sixty convicts, fifty-nine children belonging to the convicts and seven free settlers. I need scarcely add they were of all ages, and temperaments, and many of them whose constitutions were greatly impaired by privations, imprisonment and disease. A large proportion of the children had recently arrived from the provincial workhouses, and were miserable looking & dirty[?] than some were, could not easily be procured. A few were in the last stage of marasmus, others had lost one or both eyes from Purulent Ophthalmia and in other instances they were just recovering from the disease. One girl about fourteen years of age, the mother and sister being prisoners on board, a thought rejected by me, was embarked barely convalescent from acute ophthalmia, and in the confusion and bustle of arranging &c so many people was not observed for several days, the change of temperature and exposure brought on a relapse and although she recovered, the disease communicated itself to several of the others. By great attention to cleanliness, ventilation and the liberal use of the chloride of zinc the disease was checked and ultimately disappeared. A few cases of catarrhal ophthalmia presented themselves at the end of the voyage but were of no moment. The zinc was used twice a day in the morning with a mop to all parts of the prison and closets and in the evening the decks and closets were sprinkled with it, and so sensible were the prisoners of its utility in removing disagreeable odours that after a short time they were regular in their attendance and as anxious to get the sprinkling stuff as I was to supply it. At first it was no easy matter to persuade them that fine air or cleanliness was conducive to their health and comfort and when told to clean the prison and perform their morning ablutions were inclined to refuse. One woman when ordered to wash a dirty, squalid child, replied glory be to God she had reared nine of them and never put a drop of water on one of them.

All prisoners ought to have previous to their being clothed in the penitentiary for embarkation, a warm or tepid bath, as many are found after being on board a few days to be in a most filthy state. This and other sanitary measures are too frequently overlooked by the authorities employed in prisons. Another thing, all children and others ought to be at least one month under their charge, prior to embarkation. This would allow time for a slight improvement in their general health and if from any place where disease of a contagious nature prevailed it would in all probability become developed during that period. As the Surgeons Superintendent are now ordered not to reject any convict capable of undertaking the voyage to Australia, I would suggest the propriety of directing the Medical Officers of prisons not to bring forward for examination any individual recovering from or recently recovered from serious or contagious affections. Women in an advanced stage of pregnancy or immediately after their confinement, women who from disease or age have lost their teeth or those who have suffered from serious mental affections. One lunatic was in a lucid interval embarked on board the "Blackfriar", she continued in a quiet state until the night before the vessel left Kingstown, when she was reported to me to be in a very excited state. The Lord Lieutenants Warrant was on board, and as it would have caused considerable detention to have had her landed, I was compelled to place her under restraint and subsequently in a strait jacket, of(?) by any chains she could extricate herself she would attack the nurses, bite and otherwise molest them until secured. After she recovered from the sea sickness the noise she made at night not only disturbed the prisoners but every person in the ship. Some of the prisoners informed me that she was in the Infirmary belonging to the Penitentiary under treatment at the time the ship arrived at Kingstown. If this statement be correct the Medical Officer was much to blame for sending her to Van Diemen's Land, there being too many

of this and the old and useless class there already.

A great variety of cases came under treatment on the voyage but the prevailing diseases were constipation, ophthalmia and bowel complaints. The former were usually of some duration generally from eight to twelve and in one instance eighteen days without causing in the largest number anything more serious than loss of appetite &c. A strong purgative usually effected a cure.

Ophthalmia generally yielded to purgatives and the solution of the nitrate of silver but where the inflammation was very acute blisters were had recourse to. Calomel and opium[?] exhibited and in the ulcerative stage quinine was found useful. This class of people cannot stand general blood-letting. The bowel complaints I attributed to accumulation changes of diet, of climate and their using vinegar in their drink. This I was compelled to stop, soon after the ship left, in consequence of its producing cramps of the stomach, but at their urgent request and on them promising to use it with their food it was again supplied to them. They soon began again to drink it and the consequence was diarrhoea and in those who neglected themselves dysentery. The vinegar being again stopped the disease became less frequent and towards the end of the voyage had almost disappeared.

Under the head Hysterical Mania (Case 11) a case is given by no means uncommon in female convict ships and in the Penitentiary in the Colony, caused no doubt in nervous temperaments by the heat of climate, indolent life and last not least exciting the passions, requiring for its removal free purgation low diet and cold baths, nothing appeared to have a better effect than a shower bath or a few buckets of water thrown over them when first attacked.

The daily allowance of lime juice and sugar was at the request of the prisoners, reduced from one ounce to one half ounce, to which was added half a gill of wine. This was found sufficient to keep them in health, and with the exception of one woman who could not be induced to drink it and in whom there was a slight scorbutic tendency, I venture to state a healthier, cleaner or more orderly lot of women has not been landed at Hobart Town for many years.

Hobart Town
15th June 1851
John Moody
Surgeon Superintendent