

## FRIGATES

**Journal of the Convict Ship Sir Robert Seppings**  
**Dr L T Cunningham – Surgeon Superintendent**  
**16 March to 16 July 1852**

### General Remarks

This ship has been employed in carrying 220 female convicts and their children from England to Hobart Town Van Diemen's Land. She is a fine vessel and well adapted for the particular duty in which she has been employed. She is about 620 tons built with good s? and large hatchways. A great improvement has been made in the fitting of one of them (to) the main hatchway. It has been fitted with iron bars instead of the large upright posts which tended much to stop the light and free ventilation. I think the iron bars infinitely superior to the original wooden ones and would strongly recommend that all the hatchways in Convict Ships be similarly fitted. One of the water closets for the prisoners was fitted on the top with an iron grating the invention I believe of the Honourable Captain Dundas it answered most admirably and I requested the master to have the opposite one fitted as far as in his power in a similar way which was done to the very great comfort of the prisoners. We were never annoyed with bad weather after the above was properly fitted.

When the women embarked the weather was extremely cold with a strong north east wind and frost. The thermometer ranging from 30° at night to about 40° in the day. This weather continued for several days until we got off ?ip when it changed, the wind drawing around to the south west and we encountered much bad weather. The thermometer rising up to 56° gradually. From the Cape we encountered the usual kind of weather in these latitudes the thermometer gradually falling from 60° to 44 with strong gales of wind and rain at times.

?? to the s? it will be found that the very large number of 337 cases were placed on the sick list of which number 320 were discharged aboard, six died from various diseases and those that were not quite recovered were discharged to the Colonial Hospital at this place. For the sake of arrangement I will speak of them as they are arranged and note briefly the deaths all of which cases will be found detailed at length in the journal.

Not one case of **Continued Fever** (*fever that does not vary more than one degree fahrenheit in 24 hours*) occurred during the whole voyage and which I in a great degree attribute to the very great attention that was paid to ventilation, drying and cleaning carried out through the whole voyage.

16 cases of **Phlogosis** (*inflammation*) were placed on the sick list many of them were rather severe cases but they all did well under the usual treatment.

One case of **Hepatitis** was added to the list, the subject, a young girl of 17 years of age. The disease was well marked and readily yielded to the free use of purgatives at first and getting the mouth under the influence of mercury, with the application of blisters to the seat of pain and antiphlogistic (*anti-inflammatory*) regimen of Sp?mation. These rather severe cases were placed on the list. They readily yielded to the use of purgatives and diaphoretics (*promotes perspiration*) with attention to diet.

One case of **Gastritis** (*inflammation of the stomach*) was placed on the list. It is detailed at length in the journal.

Two cases of **Otitis** (*inflammation of the ear*) they readily yielded to the use of aperients (*gentle purgative*) antiphlogistic (*anti-inflammatory*) regimen and the application of blisters behind the ear with frequent injections of warm water into the organ.

Two well marked cases of **matitis** were treated in the usual way and discharged cured.

Five cases of **Cyanche** (*severe sore throat*) were placed on the sick list. It yielded readily to the means employed.

One case of **y?ipulas** occurred in a woman who has at various periods of her life suffered much from the same disease. The last of the disease was in the head and neck and on two different occasions the swelling and redness left the surface and terrific constitutional symptoms improved but by great care and attention she became convalescent and when we arrived here she had so far recovered and to be able to sit up I had to open firstly a large abscess that formed at the outer angle of the left jaw and neck. She was sent to the Colonial Hospital, the only complaint at the time being great debility.

Three cases of **Hemorrhoids** were placed on the list, two were discharged cured by taking mild aperients (*gentle purgative*) and attention to diet, but the third, a woman who has been afflicted with the disease for years and a great sufferer from Diarrhea. She was often in the sick list and underwent a variety of treatment with but partial benefit. On our arrival here I discharged to the Colonial Hospital.

Of **Catarrh** (*inflammation of a mucous membrane*) the great number of 70 were placed on the list 68 of whom were discharged cured having taken purgatives, saline diaphoretic (*promotes perspiration*) medicines and occasional doses of the **Palo?** Ipecacuanha (*used as an expectorant agent*) Co at bed time with proper attention to diet.

One case of **Dysentery** was placed on the list. The case terminated fatally, it is detailed at length in the journal.

Two cases of **Dyspepsia** (*impairment of the power or function of digestion*) were treated both depending on suppression of the catamenial flow (*menstruation*). One of them got rapidly better on appearance of the monthly discharge and the other I had to send to the Colonial Hospital. This case is detailed at length in the journal.

Fifty four cases of **Diarrhea** were placed on the list, fifty-one of whom were discharged cured from the use of **?** in the first place and the use of the **? Comp c (with) ?**, **Opi?**, the use of **Palo?** Ipecacuanha (*used as an expectorant agent*) Co, one that had not quite recovered was sent to hospital on our arrival. Two children died. Their cases are detailed in the journal.

A well marked and very severe case of **Angina Pectoris** (*thoracic pain with feeling of suffocation and impending death*) was placed on the list. The subject of it, a woman aged 26 years of a robust make and phlegmatic (*dull and apathetic*) temperament had had several attacks of the same disease during the last four years. It yielded to the use of antispasmodics, **?ction** and the use of purgatives. She was on the list from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month when she was discharged apparently quite well.

One case of **Convulsive Hysteria** was at various times on the list. The woman would be for hours in violent convulsions and the body bent forward with a highly symptomatic state of the stomach and as the convulsions subsided she would evacuate large quantities of wind from the stomach. On the attack subsiding she would be very sore all over the body and very languid. She was treated with antispasmodics, purgatives and great attention to the Alimentary canal.

Two cases of **M? ruptured** at having died, they will both be found detailed in the journal.

One case of **Anasarca** (*generalised massive edema*) was placed on the list. It was that of a woman of middle age and who had for years before her conviction had a life of great intemperance. She was employed on board the vessel as hospital attendant and from the nature of her duties she was much below. She had been often ill with derangement of the stomach and bowels for which she took the usual remedies and with great benefit, but about fourteen days ere our arrival she just complained of swelling of the lower extremities and general debility. She had diuretic medicines administered with alternatives and she was quite convalescent, when she went to the Colonial Hospital, the principle complaint being debility – this case is detailed in the journal.

One case of secondary **Syphilis** was treated. It was well marked, there being sore throat and blotches of a copper colour over the body. It was treated effectively by the use of small doses of the Bichloride of Mercury, tonics and a course of nitric acid three times a day.

Four cases of **Scrophula** (*tuberculosis of lymphatic glands*) occurring in children were much benefited by a course of tonics and regimen. I am inclined to think that the frequent bathing of the children and the sea air with a generous diet tended much to bring them round.

Three cases of **Icterus** (*jaundice*) were placed on the list. One had a severe attack of the disease from which she recovered and was apparently well, but towards the end of the voyage the disease again made its appearance and she was treated up till the time of our arrival here when she as well as the others were discharged to the Colonial Hospital being nearly well, the only complaint being debility.

A case of **Porriago** (*spreading lesions*) in a child yielded to the use of alternatives, purgatives, shaving the head and the daily application of the unguentum (*ointment*) Hydrarg (*mercury*) Nitrates.

Seven cases of **Ophthalmia** (*severe inflammation of the eye*) were treated. Six of them yielded to the usual treatment, one of them in a Scrophulous (*tuberculosis*) elderly woman resisted every kind of treatment and I had to send her to the Colonial Hospital.

There were three cases of **Nyctalopia** (*night blindness*) treated. They all yielded to purgatives and the application of blisters.

Two cases of **Tinea Tarsi** (*ulcerous inflammation of the eyelids*) readily yielded to the application of ?Lapri sulphates Solut? ? nit were an occasional Aperient (*gentle purgative*) with attention to cleanliness and diet.

Four cases of **Gonorrhoea** were treated. They all yielded to the use of mixture Copaiba (*resinous juice of trees of tropical America*) with occasional aperients (*gentle purgative*) and the greatest degree of cleanliness with a lotion of the Sulph. Zinci.

Twelve cases of **Menorrhagia** (*excessive menstrual flow*) were placed on the list. They all, though some were violent cases, yielded to the use of cold applications, perfect rest, low diet aperients (*gentle purgative*), the use of acid drinks and infusion of S/P? Con? which I found to act most beneficially.

One case of **Dysmenorrhoea** (*painful menstruation*) was treated by perfect rest, the use of opium and Aperients (*gentle purgative*) to the woman, though she suffered much, soon got quite well.

The great number of 101 cases of **Obstipatis** (*constipation*) were treated, many of them very obstinate. But they all yielded to purgatives such as castor oil, P? Jalap (*dried root*) composit c (*with*) Hydrog Chlorid, magnes sulphate c (*with*) A? Tart? ? ? and the free use of enematas (*enemas*).

Thirteen cases of **Amenorrhoea** (*absence or abnormal stoppage of menstruation*) were placed on the list. They were treated with Aperients (*gentle purgative*), Pills of Pil?. Aloin (*from aloe, used as a purgative*) composite, moderate

exercise ? which answered effectually. Two cases under this head will be found detailed at length in the journal, one terminating in **Phthisis Pulmonalis** (*tuberculosis of the lungs*) and the other a subject of **Convulsive Hysteria** dependent evidently on derangement of the uterine system – both of whom I had to send to the Colonial Hospital.

One case of **Dysuria** (*painful or difficult urination*) was treated with the use of the warm bath, anodyne (*a medicine that relieves pain*), diuretics and aperients (*gentle purgative*), it did well.

A case of **Suppuss? Urina** was treated in the same way and soon recovered.

One case of **Chronic Tumour** of long standing situated under the median line of the lower jaw was nearly removed by the frequent application of blisters. It was at first brought to my notice as large as a good sized orange and by the time we arrived here it was not larger than a hen's egg.

Two cases of **Contusion** (*bruise*) from falls were treated by ?cation and occasionally cold applications. They were not of any great moment.

Three cases of **Ulcers** were cured by rest, uniform pressure by means of bandages. The use of the solution Argent (*silver*) ? and simple drying, with one case of inveterate (*long established and difficult to cure*) ulcer on the leg, the additional use of alternatives and tonics.

One case of labour occurred before our leaving when one of the women prisoners was prematurely confined with twins stillborn, and about three weeks before our arrival, another the woman was delivered safely of a male child.

One case of **Ambustis** (*burn or scald*) of a considerable extent was treated by the free use of oleasinous (*of the olive tree*) applications and afterwards by simple dressing and rest.

L. T. Cunningham M.D.  
Surgeon ??

Hobart Town Van Diemen's Land  
20<sup>th</sup> October 1852