

Note by Robert Alexander Clifford Sinclair 30 June 2023

Having researched Joseph Ashwell in New Zealand I have found that he actually arrived in 1879, not 1878 as recorded by my mother.

Further research shows that the ship he travelled on was THOMAS STEPHENS.

Copy of letter written in 1878.

This letter, written in Diary form, by Joseph Ashwell, then aged 19, brings a lump to the throat.

The discomforts (and terrors) of the long voyage to N.Z. by sailing ship, must have been a fearful ordeal for a young man from a family that had been well off, but he never complains.

It is a pity that the Log he kept of latitudes and longitudes was not preserved, as it is impossible to guess whereabouts the storms struck the ship.

He never returned to his native London.

His three Sons, Leslie, Sidney and Roland came over with the Expeditionary Forces in the 1914-18 war, and spent their leaves with his Niece, Florence Ellen, in the Beckett home in New Eltham.

Leslie returned to N.Z. with terrible back injuries,

Sidney died of wounds on the Battle Field two or three weeks before the Armistice (German snipers prevented comrades from bringing in the wounded). Roland, I believe, went back to N.Z. unharmed.

N.Z. Nell (or maybe it was Aunt Delia at first) sent over wonderful cakes and parcels. In later years they sent wonderful glossy mags. of N.Z. and Maori scenes, and then beautiful bouquets per Interflora to Florence Ellen (UK Nell) every Birthday, until she died at the age of 92.

Note by Irene 2nd Daughter of Florence Ellen

July 1985.



The first night we anchored off Sheerness about 9 pm I could see the lights and heard the gun fired. I wondered if the dear people were thinking of me. I expect they were. We started at about 3.45 am and soon passed Ramsgate, Broadstairs, Margate, Deal and Dover - The ship was searched and 4 stowaways were discovered (3 men, 1 boy). The Captain kept the boy and one man and sent the other two men ashore at Dover in the pilot boat. The sails were set and the other tug left us at Beachy Head, then we went on by ourselves. On Monday there were a few people ill. We were becalmed most of the day.

On Tuesday the hatch was open, and we got our boxes up. I had been without mine until then. What a lot of trouble you people must have taken. Everything I opened was packed with such care. I have found my needles, thread and buttons - most useful.

I will tell you now how we pass our time, because there is very little variation. We eat, read, sleep, play touch, have dancing, singing, high jumping, long jumping, smoking, and we have a horizontal swingbar, and play cards and quoits, which is a great game. We were all acquainted and had concerts in the Wednesday (30th April 1878) was very quiet and rained most of the afternoon.

Thursday, 1st May. Passed three ships outward bound, and made very good time.

Friday 2nd The salt meal (meet?) was brought up at the fresh was finished, and we began to understand what life on a ship is like. Sighted a steamer and passed a sailing ship. Such a lovely starlit night, just right to think about home, which of course we did.

Saturday 3rd. One week passed away quickly and comfortably Sunday, 4th. Service in morning Sighted and came up with a ship which proved to be "BELLARE" 10 days from Liverpool, bound for Bombay. Brodie and Brough took all the slats but one from under Grant's berth, which is on top, so when he got in he fell through and stuck fast until he was helped out. Sung some hymns in the evening. I have found the book very useful. Very calm.

Weds. 5th. Still calm and very hot. 109 in the sun. One of the pigs had a fit and died in the night. Brodie & Brough salted Grant's bed and Bell's. There was an awful row. Language terrible. Captain had the cook put in irons for mutiny.

Tuesday 6th. Very hot. Turnbull, a 1st class passenger, bet Grant 15/- to 10/- that he could not divide 20/1 into a third, 4th, 5th and 6th without leaving a remainder. He was given until 2 O'clock next day. The Captain had done it and he was referee.

Weds, 7th. Grant could not do it so lost his money.

Thursday 8th. I used to think the blue of the ocean was exaggerated in pictures, but here it is most intense. At night lately the sea has been so calm. It is lovely after a glorious sunset, when all the stars come out, and a full moon rises over the water.. I like to go and stand at the forecandle head, and see the ship going steadily on her way, the moonlight streaming on her tremendous spread of canvas and the phosphorescence dashing from her bow. It is a grand sight not easily forgotten.

Friday, 9th. The Captain released the cook. Sighted a large vessel called "The ARTHUR STONE". They sent up some rockets at night when about h miles off, and we answered them. the effect was very pretty. Today about 4 mile off, we saw a whale, a thresher, and a swordfish fighting. They were trying to kill the whale. We could see it spouting.

There is a dove, some swallows and other small birds following the ship. The poor little beggars get so exhausted we can put our hands on them. Many of them have died -expect the rest Will soon.

Saturday, 10th The ARTHUR STONE was still in sight this morning. she has 306 passengers on board.

Another week.

Sunday, 11th. Service in the morning. we entered the Tropics at 12.5 pm, but as there is a nice breeze it is not so hot

Monday 12th. Today there was a pilot fish just in front of the prow for about 24 hours. It swims awfully fast. It is rather larger than a mackerel, brownish colour and with bands of darker colour running crosswise.

Tuesday, 13th. Saw a tremendous quantity of flying fish. They were just like a lot of swallows. Dance in the evening.

Weds. 14th. A lot more flying fish. I got one of the sailors to reef a sheet and a pair of trousers belonging to Mr. Grant and the result amply repaid me for the trouble.

Thurs. 15th. Weather decidedly tropical We are all going about in shirts & trousers, with straw hats and no socks It is too hot to sleep and all that anybody does is try to get cool.

Friday 16th. We have now 12 hours sun.. The darkness comes on very quickly after sunset.. The stars are splendidly thick and brilliant. The phosphorescence beautiful.

Saturday 17th. We have lately lost sight of the Great Bear and come in sight of the Southern Cross. he last is a very tinpot affair H small stars like ..

A sheep killed and as there are a good many farmers on board we had a sixpenny sweepstake

we had a sixpenny sweepstake for who could guess nearest its weight. My guess was 65 lbs. It was 68 lbs and my guess was nearest but one .

Sunday 18th Service in morning. Blazing hot.

Monday 19th. In the evening a tropical shower came on and lasted 2 hours. We had a door open and the place was flooded in 2 minutes. 4 of us went out on deck in a state of nudity and had a fresh water shower-bath.

Tuesday, 20th. Sighted two ships in distance.

Weds. 21st Saw a black fish among a school of porpoises. A great ugly beast.

Thurs. 22nd Drifted out of our course. They put the ship about in the afternoon. An exciting process, as the wind was strong

Friday 23rd. Ship barely moved. We dropped pieces of chalk and tin into the water and could see them many fathoms down, water so clear. Got up a sweepstake for when we should cross the Line. 12 of us took an hour each. I had from 12 to 1.

Sunday 25th. Service in morning. Crossed the Line at 11.10 am. So I Was within 1 as usual. we had not crossed more than 3 hours when the wind sprang up.

Monday 26th. We sighted 3 ships during day. Everyone remarked on the sunset this evening., the most beautiful that I have ever seen. Like a high dark wood on one side, high cliffs at the edge of the sea, above them a large common with gorse and heather, beside that a stretch of green grass, next to that fields of ripe corn, with a white country road winding thro' and disappearing over the hill. I did long to be in the country again.

Tuesday 27th. We have had plenty of wind since we crossed the line. We are tearing along until the ship lies over with the water running in at the scuppers. The weather has not been so hot as I expected in the tropics. Passed a homeward bound ship in the distance.

Weds. 28th. Sighted a fullrigged ship. Gained on her all day. Passed an outward bound ship, and met the "WILLIAM LEVITT" from Peru to England with guano.

Thurs 29th Sighted full rigged ship. Gained on her all day.

Friday 30th. Ship still in sight. Last sight of her in afternoon

Sat 31st. Saw a large bird called a Booby flying round the ship today.

We have seen lots of Nautilus sailing past the ship The men call them "Portuguese Men of War".

Sunday 1st June. we saw a whale not far from the ship. He was spouting to ' considerable height. It is now much cooler and we can manage to dress respectably again.

Monday, 2nd. As the water was nearly consumed they started condensing with the donkey engine. The ship brought out 3000 gallons of water. The engine can condense a gallon in 54 seconds but does generally 450 gallons a day The engine burns half a ton of coal per day It hauls up the yards, weighs anchor etc.

Tuesday, 3rd. There are now great quantities of birds following the ship, cape pigeons, cape hen, boobies, albatross, mutton birds and Hollyhawks. Everyday 3 or 4 passengers are trying to catch them with a line hooks and meats.

Weds. 4th. The ship rolled fearfully this morning. At night we were going over 16 knots like a railway train with the water flying From the bow in one vast sheet of foam

Thurs 5th. Doing well At breakfast time the weather door was left open and a large wave came into the cabin, completely filling up the doorway. There was a foot deep of water in the cabin Afterwards 5 of us Were sitting on a form when she gave a lurch and shot us, form and all into the scuppers.

Friday, 6th 3 Molly hawks, 2 mutton birds, and 2 Cape pigeons were caught one was let go with apiece of white rag round its neck. We have seen it many times since We have now lost sight of the stars known as the Great Bear

Sat. 7th. They killed a sheep and a pig.

Sunday 8th. trash pork. At 10.20 tonight we were in the same Meridian as Greenwich. Same time as at home.

Monday 9th. Second Mate drunk on duty. No liqueur to be sold in future without the doctors certificate. That Wont Worry me.

Tuesday, 10th. Not nearly as cold.

Weds. 11th In the evening a concert on the quarterdeck. Captain presided songs, readings, recitations. I recited King Francis and the Lions, which was very well received.

Thurs 12th.. Beastly cold. We are now indoors. We all spin yarns, but I should not like to Vouch for the truth of all of them.

Friday 13th. The crew got up a concert in the forecastle. It was very good altogether. I sung one song.

Sat. 14th. Going along well.

Sunday 15th. Contrary winds. Service at 7.30 in the saloon.

Monday 16th. Wind changed. We are going Well on our course.

Tues. 17th Further improvement. 13 knot breeze & rising sea.

Weds. 18th. Rough sea, waves appear 30 - 40 ft. high. There are lifelines stretched along

the deck.

Thurs 19th. Slight fall of snow in the morning. A moderate gale in the afternoon. Moderate gale in the afternoon. passed the island Croset, where the STRATHMORE was wrecked some years ago. We did not sight it.

Friday 20th. Sea still rough. One sea came over the cabin, such a smash.. Brodie was playing with his dog on the main hatch. A wave came and lifted him clean over the life line (4ft high) and banged him against the bulwarks, dog likewise. Suppose it had been poor little Gibby he would have wanted "to go to bed".

Sat 21<sup>st</sup> Nothing of importance, so will give you some particulars of the ship and Captain. The cargo amongst other things, consists of £370,000 of silks drugs jewellery, saddlary, matches etc. and £7 000 of candles. Largest manifest sent out for 13 years. Only 12 larger vessels at Lloyds.. She went to Australia in 65 days. Greatest number of miles in 24 hours win 367. The Captain is 52. He has had command of vessels since he was 19. He has made 170 voyages and rounded The Cape 96 times. He has never lost a ship or a mast. Once in a gale near here the cargo shifted and she lay on her beams ends for 18 hours. The Mate begged on his knees that the mast should be cut away, but he refused, and eventually righted her without losing a rope. Once he and on the Bridge a when a wave smashed it down, breaking both his wrists and then he stayed some time giving orders. Once when he had e fever he had his bed carried out on deck. That he give the orders. . He has never been to New Zealand before. He has buried 115 bodies. Made a post mortem examination, married several couples, and had two babies born under his care. He only intends making one more voyage. Is much trusted by the owners.

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>. Service in the evening. Yesterday was the shortest day. Very different from long summer days in England.

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup>. The wind is right aft. When that is the case everybody and everything is tumbled about all over the place. At meal times the cabin is regular pandemonium

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> Not as cold. Very pleased to see the new moon. Nights lately have been very dark.

Weds. 25<sup>th</sup>. Two whales were seen close to the ship. (that is 5 we have seen). In the evening the wind freshed so much that they her to take in the three 'royales'. The first time she has shortened sail since leaving London. The sailors do not remember such a fine passage as we have had..

Thurs 26<sup>th</sup>. Wind abating slightly. "Royales" set again

Friday 27<sup>th</sup>. Wind increased to a gale. Sails reduced to three lower topsails, and foretop mast stay sail. She was hove-to and rocked properly. Shipped some big seas. One spray wetted the main-lower-topsail.

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup>. During day the foresail was set and we made some progress, then hove-to again. Passed a very uncomfortable night. Everything about, in and on top of the cabin seemed to be moving.

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> . Stormy. The sea washed 3 men into the scuppers. A splendid sight to see the ship riding over the large waves, while sometimes the spray would hide half the vessel from sight. The night twice he bad or the last. The Captain said

We were just within the influence of a cyclone. The waves kept breaking over the cabin, and striking the vessel until she trembled from stem to stern. Things hanging on the walls stuck straight out. A shelf full of books tumbled onto on to my head although I was in the bottom bunk. We all had some difficulty in keeping to our beds at all.

Monday 30th. Still blowing hard. One sea knocked the Bo'swain onto the rail Another carried a midshipman up the steps and laid him on his back on the poop. A very useful structure on the maindeck was knocked over and broken up. At 7 pm we were going 9½ knots under 3 lower-topsails and fore topmast staysail.

Tuesday, 1st JULY. Much calmer. Nearly all sails set again.

Weds 2nd. Blowing hard again. About midday a wave came over which filled the main deck 3 ft deep and the bottom berths in the after cabin.

Thursday 3rd. Very pleasant day. Wind increased.

At night we were going railway speed. In the evening for the amusement of the passengers a "Holmes" Patent Inextinguishable Marine and Storm Lamp was lowered overboard. It ignites on touching the water and burns for one hour. Wind and water do not affect it. All Vessels are bound to carry a few.

Friday 4th. Beautiful morning. In the afternoon there were hundreds and hundreds of black fish round the ship playing in the foam under her bows, chasing each other by dozens and sometimes leaping clean out of the water. The last sheep was killed so we cannot be far from our destination

Saturday 5th. To-day we crossed the magnetic meridian, so the compass will behave itself for a little while . since we crossed the last it has varied as much as 3½ points

Sunday, 6th. Service in the Saloon.

Monday, 7th. Fine day, splendid breeze. We expect to be there in about a week. Doing well. 13 knots at 9 pm.

Weds. 9th. Cold day. Occasional snowstorm.

Thurs. 10th. Squally. Going well under reduced sail.

Fri. 11th Weather more favourable. strong wind in the right direction Most of the passengers are packing preparatory to going ashore.

Sat. 12th. A very strong wind all night with a rough sea. We averaged 15 knots, but in a squall we went over 17 for a little while the log line was carried away. At 7 o'clock we rolled until the sea dipped the mainsail two yards up. We are very near now. There is a man in the trunk on the outlook for land.

I am writing from DUNEDIN.

A change came o'er the spirit of our dream. We sighted land as expected, on the Sunday, and expected to go in, but the tides were low and we could not cross the bar, so were detained until Wednesday. So cheerful, expecting every hour we were going in, with everything packed up. Slept three nights in our clothes.

We got ashore Wednesday afternoon, and took a train to Dunedin

Those who were going straight to Christchurch Went on at once in a steamer. Brough and I had a look round Dunedin, which is a very nice place with good building. Got our letters, then went back to the ship, read our letters and slept on board.. I received three letters addressed by Will, 1 by Herbie and 1 by Nellie. I was pleased.

Today we got our luggage booked by train here, came up ourselves and went to the Shipping Office. They will let us stay a fortnight or under, and let us stay at any intermediate Station we wish. We intend starting for Christchurch on Saturday morning by the EXPRESS (25 miles an hour)

The country about here is all up and down hill. From the ship we could see the snow clad mountains. On Wednesday night nearly everybody went on the spree but US. Two of the crew and one of the Saloon passengers were run in for being drunk and disorderly.

To-day Brough went to see a Mr. Hodgkin. He invited us to dinner tomorrow. Then I went to see Mr. Ridley. He was very pleasant and invited us to dinner on Sunday, but I told him I was not going to stay so long. I am going to see him again tomorrow. He says that anything I want doing, he will be pleased to do.

We are staying at THE GLASGOW HOTEL, where three other second class passengers are staying. You can get as much of anything you like to eat for a shilling. I have had my haircut and a bath and now I feel comfortable. Tomorrow I shall make arrangements for the forwarding of my letters to Christchurch. Of course you know I could go on writing for a week, and then not tell you all I want to.

Anyway, I never really felt I was away from Home until now. But do not think for a moment I am downhearted. I know what I have to do, and will do it.

Things here are in a very bad state. Hundreds out of work. Many men emigrated to Newcastle, but they say it is worse in Canterbury, but "Nil desperandum". I have read all my letters two or three times over and know them by heart. I should like to answer them in detail but of course that is impossible. This letter must do for you all, and when this is sent, I shall begin another at once. I cannot afford too many. The less money I spend on anything the better. I have the latitudes, longitudes, and distance for every day of the passage, out unfortunately they are in the box. You shall have them next mail. Brough is writing home and keeps interrupting me to spell words for him. I will attend to all matters mentioned in the various letters recd.

Commented [SS1]: