

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

JAMES WHITE

Narrative of a voyage to Australia, 1863

Reel M864

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

James Espie White (1846-1865), the son of a shopkeeper, was born in Edinburgh. He was educated at the Edinburgh Institution and Edinburgh University. In September 1862 he sailed to Australia to join his brother, John White, who was working as a government contractor on the construction of a breakwater at the mouth of the Clarence River. It seems that James White also spent some time in Queensland and in Melbourne, where he had other relatives. His health declined and he returned to Scotland in 1865. He died in September 1865.

This information was recorded in the manuscript by White's brother, Alexander White of Edinburgh, in January 1900.

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Narrative by James White of his journey from Edinburgh to Liverpool and his voyage to Melbourne on the sailing *ship Henry Fernie*, 11 September – 23 December 1862. (153pp + 11pp of appendices)
The narrative was written in Melbourne in March 1863.

In a dedication to his mother, White wrote that he was one of two passengers in his cabin who managed to keep a journal throughout the voyage. He subsequently used the journal to write his narrative, leaving out references to weather, the seas and the like in an effort to make it 'less dry and monotonous'. He largely omitted dates, so the resulting work is, strictly speaking, not a journal but a general account of life on the ship on the long voyage to Australia.

The narrative is in the form of a book, beginning with a humorous title page and imprint ('Published at S. Yarra, 1863'). There are four chapters:

- 1 Leaving home (p. 1)
- 2 First part of the voyage (p. 15)
- 3 Tropics (p. 64)
- 4 Last part of the voyage (p. 92)

There are a few sketches in the volume and a number of appendices.

The narrative opens with White's parting from his family in Edinburgh, the train journey to Liverpool, and his boarding the *Henry Fernie*. The account of the voyage does contain occasional references to storms, seas and the sighting of other ships, as in most ship journals. However, the bulk of the narrative deals with the life of the passengers, especially White and the four men who shared a cabin with him. In varying detail, he wrote about the organisation of the messes, daily routines, meals, sea sickness, flooding in the cabin, impressions of the sea and sky at various times of the day, church services, games, concerts, relations between male and female passengers, divisions among saloon passengers, relations with the predominantly Irish passengers in steerage, fighting and threatening behaviour on the part of steerage passengers, the influence of two Catholic priests and their objections to the singing of the *National Anthem* or *Rule Britannia*, the sighting of the Irish coast, Madeira and the Brazilian coast, the heat of the tropics, sightings of southern constellations and of sharks, a nautilus and an albatross, the death and funeral of a consumptive girl, a mock trial, speculations about the arrival in Melbourne, and the anecdotes of passengers. The work ends with the first sighting of the Australian coast (22 Dec. 1862), disembarkation at Melbourne, first

impressions of Melbourne including the number of Chinese in the streets, and White's meeting with his uncle. Throughout the narrative there are quotations or extracts from poems.

At the beginning of the narrative there is a map showing the route from Liverpool to Melbourne and two photographs of White, evidently inserted at a later date. One was taken before he left Edinburgh in 1862 and the other before he sailed home in 1865. The sketches are mostly unidentified, but include a profile of Madeira.

There are four appendices at the end of the volume:

- 1 Copy of a letter from White to Rev. Sheedy (?), 3 Oct. 1862, written on behalf of the intermediate passengers, protesting at any limitation on the right of passengers to express their loyalty to Queen Victoria.
- 2 Copy of a testimonial presented to Capt. George Brown and published in the *Argus*, 26 Dec. 1862.
- 3 Table showing daily longitudes and latitudes, 11 Sept. – 22 Dec. 1862
- 4 Notes on the deaths of two passengers and the destinations within Australia of White's four cabin mates, Frederick King, Arthur Hiddle, George Samuelson and James Hall.