Surgeon's Journals

This was the topic of the talk given at our June meeting. It was surprising how few of our members had actually transcribed the journal of the surgeon who was on board the convict ships on which their ancestors had travelled. Of course, not all journals have survived. If that was the case for the ship you are interested in, and you know little of the journey or the conditions on board, then reading surviving journals will give you a better understanding of what it may have been like on board, and how medical conditions were treated.

We began by looking at the basic books in the resource centre – Bateson’s The Convict Ships, the three volumes of Log of Logs, and other books relating to shipping arrivals. These all gave information about the ships. Then we looked at the SRNSW Guide to convict records which listed the surviving surgeons’ journals and the reference numbers to the AJCP microfilm reels. [These films are available on open access at the State Library.] We also consulted the AJCP Handbooks, Parts 7 and 8.

A voluminous printout of the surgeon’s journal for the Earl St Vincent (1826) showed the problems encountered in transcribing the contents. There is the handwriting and the condition of the journal to contend with firstly. Then there are the abbreviations used, and the spelling in general. Often Latin words were used to describe treatments for medical conditions. The internet offers many sites for further research. You may even find that someone has already transcribed the journal you are seeking and has put it on a web-site. A relatively recent project undertaken by the National Archives of the UK is called Surgeons at Sea. With a grant received in 2008, over a thousand journals had to be catalogued. The ADM 101 series of records contained journals and
diaries kept by Royal Navy surgeons and assistant surgeons between 1793 and 1880. The journals were not only from convict ships, but also from naval ships and emigrant ships.

We looked at a couple of 2010 newspaper reviews about the project, and learned that illustrations, sketches, maps and charts were found with the journals. Many of the surgeons were accomplished artists and illustrated not only medical complaints but also places and items of interest they noted during their journeys.

The Guardian reported that “It wasn't so much rum, sodomy and the lash the men had to fear in the navy 200 years ago, as the ship's surgeon heading towards them with a reassuring smile, a saw in one hand and a poison bottle in the other. Brandy enemas, a strychnine injection, a sulphuric acid gargle, ammonia rubbed on the lips, and three and a half pints of blood taken from a man with pneumonia are all recorded as attempted cures in a century of gruesome and fascinating Journals of Royal Navy ship surgeons revealed at the National Archives: all failed.”

Also in the review was mention of two convict ships to NSW – “On the convict ship Elizabeth, on 15 June 1825, the surgeon, P Power, had a problem with worms – or rather an unfortunate 12-year-old girl, Ellen McCarthy, whose complaints included "abdomen hard and swollen, picks her nose, starts in her sleep, bowels constipated, pirexia [fever], tongue foul, pulse quick, skin hot, great thirst". He gave her some medicine – his notes are so contracted that even the experts in the archives cannot decipher his prescription – and admitted her to the sick bay. The following day her mother brought Power a "lumbricus", a worm, 87 inches long which the patient vomited: the medicine operated well".

On the Juliana, surgeon Henry Kelsall worried about convicts lying in soaked bedding after the deck above leaked during fierce storms. It proved difficult to get the miserable prisoners to move so their quarters could be cleaned: the only way was "by closing the hatches and smoking them up with fumes of sulphur, cayenne pepper etc".

The Daily Mail reported that “Convicts on board the Albion heading to Australia in 1828 showed an 'animated eagerness' when they saw their future country, according to surgeon Thomas Logan, while on the Eliza a group of prisoners performed the play Rob Roy to entertain the officers. The locks on the same ship later had to be picked after the ship's second mate fell overboard and was lost at the sea with the keys in his hand, the logs reveal.”
Sources for Surgeon's Journals

[http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/surgeonsatsea/]

Other web-sites with information about surgeon’s journals include –

http://www.jenwilletts.com/surgeon_supervisors.htm
http://grthom.info/medjou.htm
http://members.pcug.org.au/~pdownes/sharp/surgeon.htm
http://www.freebookeez.com/convict-journal/
http://users.tpg.com.au/shammell/northamp.htm - This site has a partial transcription of the 1815 voyage of the Northampton (1815) from Rio de Janeiro to Sydney. Excerpts were read out by those who attended the meeting. Hopefully all were inspired to see if a journal survived for the ships on which their ancestors (convict and free) made the journey to Australia.

The Grangegorman Female Penitentiary.

This Dublin prison for females operated between 1836 and 1860. It was the first “exclusively female” prison in the British Isles. It had two classes of prisoners – those with sentences to be served in the prison, and those waiting to be transported. The latter were to receive training that would make them employable when they arrived in Australia. There was much debate about ending transportation to New South Wales, and
there were increasing demands by the authorities here that female convicts be fit to earn a living when they arrived.

Originally, the building had been the Richmond Penitentiary. It was built in 1816 and housed both male and female prisoners and children.

In 1832 a cholera epidemic resulted in over 50,000 deaths in Ireland with many occurring in Dublin. With the hospitals full, the prison became a temporary hospital. It was a dreadful disease, and death could occur quickly once it was contracted. In one five day period, over 600 patients were admitted to the Grangegorman Cholera Hospital. There were only prison beds inside. Doctors and nurses were stricken with the disease and before long there were fewer staff left to care for the sick. The nearby Sisters of Charity nuns were called on to help.

From 1836, when it housed only females, the records show that many of the inmates re-offended. It did not seem to implement a system which deterred offences.

As Ireland faced hard times before, during and after the great famine, it was not unusual for women to commit crimes on purpose so that they would either spend time in gaol or be transported.

The National Archives in Dublin have the Register for the prison from 11 July 1840 to 22 December 1853.

Closing up the Fleet after leaving Capetown

The picture on the front cover of our Convict Connections Chronicle is the third of six which featured on a 1987 John Sands promotional calendar depicting the journey of the First Fleet.

The last picture was the Fleet in Rio de Janeiro.
This one symbolises the ships of the fleet becoming separated after securing further supplies in South Africa.

Dropping anchor at Capetown after thirty-nine days, Phillip found supplies were not as readily available as he had hoped and only after long drawn-out negotiations with the Dutch Commodore were sufficient supplies obtained. To make matters worse strong winds around Table Bay pulled the ships from anchor and made loading of supplies and animals very difficult.

The Dutch Governor, van Graf, proved polite but unhelpful, explaining that the colony was short of provisions and thus not in a position to sell to the fleet what it required. Eventually they managed to get grain, hogs, cows, bullocks, sheep, horses, domestic animals and water, but not enough hay to keep the animals alive.

Leaving Capetown on November 13, the last leg of the voyage took longer than anticipated as they ran into the worst weather they had yet encountered. Twelve days out of Capetown, Phillip transferred to H.M.S Supply and, with the fastest ships, Scarborough, Alexander and Friendship, sailed on ahead. Captain John Hunter was placed in command of the remaining ships, and by the following evening, the two squadrons had lost sight of each other.

The weather now grew very stormy, but the runs made each day were good, and on January 5, Phillip’s squadron sighted the coast of Van Diemen’s Land. Two days later Hunter’s squadron sighted Van Diemen’s Land at Mewstone, then believed to be the most southerly point of the land. They made an attempt to go ashore to cut grass for the dying livestock, but bad weather and rocky shores drove them off.

With hatches battened down most of the time, the extreme cold of the southerly latitude, and the short rations, the wretchedness of all on board the ships was increased by an outbreak of dysentery. But due in the main to the seamanship and navigation of Captains Phillip and Hunter and to John White, the Chief Surgeon, all ships survived the ordeal with few accidents and loss of life.

On January 18, the Supply entered Botany Bay, the three transports sailing with her came in the following day, and the rest of the fleet followed on January 20.
JORGENSEN “The Convict King”

The following was presented as a power-point talk at our December gathering. While searching for articles relating to Tasmania’s convict past, I came across Jorgen Jorgensen, a native of Denmark. With so much information readily available about his fascinating life, I wondered why I had never heard of him. I was relieved to find that none of the Convict Connections members present on the day had heard of Jorgensen either.

Since putting together the power-point talk, I have discovered that you can visit the University of Sydney web-site and read the entire digitised version of “The Convict King” first published in 1835 and again in 1891. It is well worth reading as most of the biographical data available seems to be based on this, his autobiography. Go to http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au to access to the tale of Jorgen Jorgensen’s adventurous life. Indeed we find he is described as the Monarch of Iceland; a Naval Captain; a Revolutionist; a British Diplomatic Agent; an Author; a Dramatist; a Preacher; a Political Prisoner; a Gambler; a Hospital Dispenser; a Continental Traveller; an Explorer; an Editor; an Expatriated Exile; and a Colonial Constable! How can one man be all these things? More intriguingly, how did he become a convict transported to Van Diemen’s Land? I hope you will find this summarised account of his life interesting enough to want to read more about him!

We begin with his birth in Copenhagen in 1780. He was the second son of Jorgen Jorgensen, who was employed as a royal watch-maker. At 15 years of age, with an obviously adventurous spirit, young Jorgen was apprenticed to Captain Marwood who had a coal carrying hulk plying between Newcastle, UK, and the Baltic states. After serving four years he found he loved the adventure of being at sea, and, much to his father’s dismay, he found work on other vessels. When he was 19 he sailed to Cape Town, and the following year he gained passage as a crew member on the Harbinger which sailed down to Sydney.

While there, he joined the crew of the Lady Nelson under the name of John Johnson and arrived on the Derwent River with those who had
been sent to establish the first settlement at Risdon Cove. He claimed to have been the first to harpoon a whale in the Derwent River, and in 1804 he was sealing in New Zealand before joining a whaling ship. He returned to England in 1806 and the following year he was back in Denmark visiting his family.

His return to Denmark coincided with his homeland being at war with England, and Jorgensen, being of an age where he had to perform war service duty for his country, had been put in command of a small Danish ship. In 1808 he was taken prisoner-of-war and was taken to London. He was treated as a pirate and placed on parole. He soon convinced a British merchant that money could be made by taking supplies to Iceland as the people there were facing a critical food shortage. Jorgensen managed to join the voyage as an interpreter. It was not a successful trip and he made a second voyage to Iceland in 1809. Jorgensen and some of the crew members arrested the Governor and declared that Iceland was independent from Denmark and he made himself king or protector until the people could self-govern. Two months later the Danish Government was restored and Jorgensen was returned to England to be tried for breaking his parole while he was a prisoner-of-war. He was subsequently remanded until 1811.

Settling in London, Jorgensen lived the high life and before long he had problems with gambling and drinking. As a result of his lifestyle he amassed huge debts and was incarcerated for a time. In 1812 he went to Spain and Portugal and then Gibraltar - but he returned to England to find that he was still being sought by those he was indebted to.

Jorgensen wrote to the British Foreign Office and managed to get recruited into the intelligence service. In his new role he translated documents and became a British spy in France and Germany during the last stages of the Napoleonic Wars. Once back in London he resumed his accustomed way of life and we find that in 1820 he was accused of theft and was sent to Newgate Gaol. He was released and was supposed to leave England. He didn't - and he was returned to the Prison. He spent three years there before being transported in 1825. So in 1826 he returned to Van Diemen’s Land – but this time not by choice!
The voyage in the convict ship took five months. As Jorgensen could read and write he was assigned on arrival as a clerk to the Van Diemen’s Land Company.

In 1827 he helped prevent the circulation of forged treasury bills, and local merchants petitioned the Governor for Jorgensen to be granted a ticket-of-leave.

Ever the adventurer and the explorer, Jorgensen led several explorations into the interior of Tasmania while employed by the Van Diemen’s Land Council.

He became a constable in the Oatlands district, and he took part in Governor Arthur’s ‘Black Line’ aboriginal clearance exercise.

In 1835 he was granted a free pardon. He remained in Van Diemen’s Land and he had married an Irish convict, Norah Corbett, in 1831. Norah was a wild, drunken, illiterate, Irish lass who had been transported in 1827.

It seems they spent their married life in passionate misery having regular drunken brawls in public places.

A meagre income was derived from royalties from books he wrote and from writing newspaper articles.

In 1840 Nora died and a year later Jorgen was found sick, drunk and destitute in a Hobart gutter. He died a few days later on 20th January 1841.

Icelanders apparently refer to him as Jörundurhundadagakonungur. This translates as “Jørgen the dog-days King”.

[The reference is to the two summer months when the dog star (Sirius) is in the northern sky.]
In Tasmania, at the town of Ross, there is a convict-built bridge. Carved into it is an image of Jorgen Jorgensen.

He is shown wearing the crown as the King of Iceland.

In his 60 years he certainly had an eventful life! This has been a short account of that life and it is sad that it ended in miserable circumstances.

Apparently a book was written about Jorgensen in 2001 - "The Usurper" by Dan Sprod.

Compiled by V. Blomer

The Government Farm, Parramatta.

In March 2013 while Lyn and I were at Penrith for the annual Conference and Family History Fair, I took the opportunity to visit, for the first time, Old Government House and Domain at Parramatta.

I had several convict ancestors who lived at Parramatta and had previously been to the Church of England where two of my convicts had married, and I had been to Elizabeth Farm where another ancestor worked, but this was my first visit to the grand old historic house.

Had I arrived by car I would have missed the walk up to the House through the domain.

I caught the free bus and missed the first stop with a more direct walk to Old Government House, but by getting off at the following stop I was delighted to find there were informative signs along the path which would lead me across the bridge and up to the old residence.
This sign told me about the Government Farm - “Plentiful and luxuriant” was how Judge Advocate David Collins described the Government Farm on this site where, under the management of Henry Edward Dodd, the first successful crops were grown in the colony.

Dodd, Governor Phillip’s trusted retainer and one of the few experienced farmers in the colony, planted wheat and barley in June and July 1789, as well as corn, oats, and a small quantity of flax.

The first harvest was made in December 1789, and by June the following year, Captain WatkinTench estimated an area of about 200 acres was cleared and cultivated, and Governor Phillip again reported flourishing crops.

By the mid 1790s the focus of colonial agriculture had moved to private farms as the colony expanded to the west.

I was interested to find out more about Henry Edward Dodd. From the sign I knew he was the Governor’s servant and had some knowledge of farming.

The Dodd’s Farm sign told me about the Government Farm under Dodd’s management. In 1790, WatkinTench reported that 55 acres were “in wheat, barley and little oats”. Thirty acres were planted with maize. “Four inclosures (sic) of 20 acres each are planned for the reception of cattle, which may arrive in the colony, and two of these are already fenced in. In the centre of them is to be a house, for a person
who will be fixed upon to take care of the cattle. All these inclosures are supplied with water, and only a part of the trees which grew on them being cut down, gives to them a very park-like and beautiful appearance."

The Australian Dictionary of Biography does not give a year of birth for Henry Edward Dodd, but does inform us that he died on 28 January 1791.

According to the Fellowship of First Fleeters, Dodd had been born in Hodnet, Shropshire in 1748. He later became a farm labourer employed by Arthur Phillip who had a property in Hampshire. When Phillip was appointed to command a fleet of ships to Botany Bay and become Governor of the new colony, he asked Dodd to go with him as his personal servant.

I had been taught at school that James Ruse had sown the first crops in the colony. I had never heard of Mr Dodd! The clarification is that Ruse was granted land in 1790 and was the first to farm his own land. Henry Edward Dodd, the personal servant of Governor Phillip, however, first supervised the cultivation of land at Farm Cove, Sydney Harbour. The Governor declared that he trusted Dodd, and he was critical of the fact that the British Government had not sent an overseer to instruct in the art of farming with the First Fleet. The grain brought out to the colony had deteriorated and very little of it germinated when it was planted at Farm Cove. With stores running low, the Governor sent the ship Sirius to the Cape of Good Hope to procure supplies and more seed. Better farming land was in the interim found at Rose Hill (Parramatta), and Dodd was sent there to start another Government Farm.

The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate newspaper on 20 September 1899 published an article titled, The First Public Funeral in January 1791. It says that Dodd had been ailing for some time but that his death “was accelerated by exposing himself in his shirt for three or four hours during the night in search of some thieves who had been plundering his garden....He acquired an extraordinary ascendancy over the people by his quiet and attentive behaviour, which never aroused any feelings of hatred or hostility. He was buried in a large plot of ground, which had been closed or the preservation of stock, and is now the site of the present Church of England Cemetery....The deceased formed the first farm and garden in Australia at Sydney, and reaped the first harvest at Rose Hill.”

It seems that Ruse was working under Dodd’s supervision at Farm
Governor Phillip wrote to Britain complaining about the terrible condition of the spades and hoes sent with the First Fleet, so it seems incredible that any farming at all was achieved in the early months. It was in November 1788 that the Governor sent James Smith to supervise convicts to prepare land for farming at a newly established military outpost which was called Rose Hill. He was not suited to the position and was replaced by Dodd in March 1789.

Governor Phillip decided to build a house at Parramatta in 1790. While it was being built he lived with Dodd. When the original building collapsed, Governor Hunter replaced it with the Georgian structure in 1799. Governor Macquarie later added to it, so what was completed in 1818 is what remains today.

Phillip Gidley King made some interesting sketches of Parramatta in April 1790. The State Library of NSW has King’s diary in which the sketches can be found. To view the various sketches and early paintings showing Dodd’s house, see http://davidpovey.blogspot.com.au/2010/04/early-king-map-of-parramatta-april-1791.html

Another sign which caught my attention was this one referring to George Caley who had been sent to the colony in 1800 by Joseph Banks to collect and document plant, mineral and animal specimens to send to the Royal Gardens at Kew in London.

Governor King allowed Caley to live in a cottage on the Government Farm and also permitted him to use a room at Government House to dry his plant specimens. Caley recorded that he had established ‘extensive botanical gardens’ - but the location is not known. He returned to England in 1810.

Caley had been mentioned at the Penrith conference as one of the early explorers of the Blue Mountains.

He travelled to outer settlements, including Norfolk Island and Hobart in his role as botanist V. Blomer.