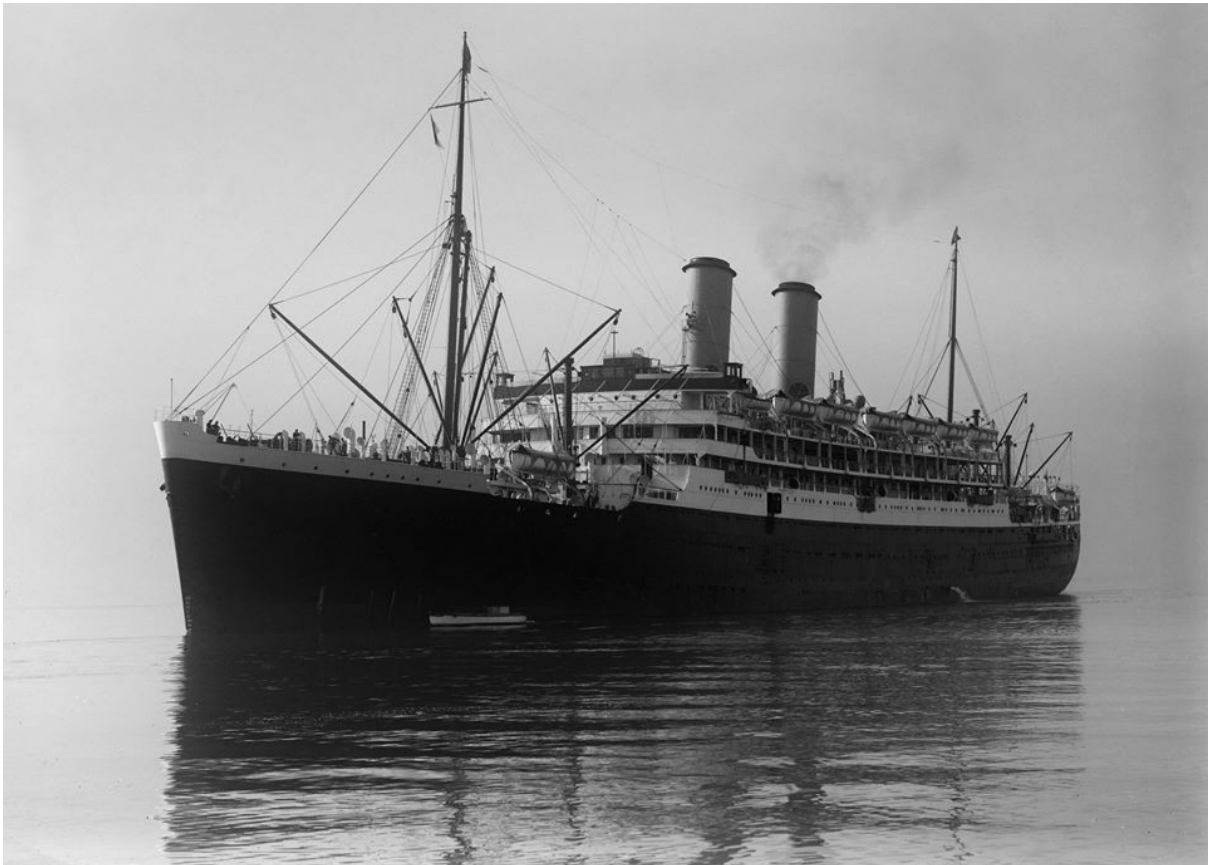


We Are Going to Australia Tomorrow

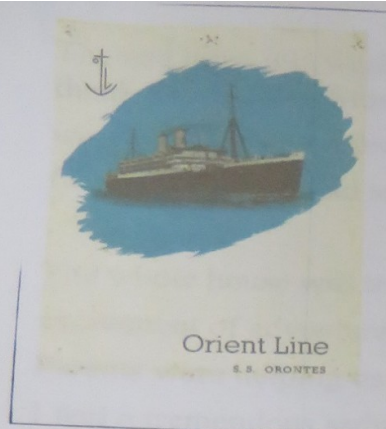
Recollections of a Youngster Leaving for Australia

Author: Lynn Chantler Cargill

SS Orontes



Courtesy of the Queensland Maritime Museum



WE ARE GOING TO AUSTRALIA TOMORROW

By Lynn Chantler Cargill



Leaving the land of one's birth can be quite a wrench. As a child aged eleven, I could not really comprehend the enormity of the step my parents were taking. This gamble on a new life in a new land. All I could understand or imagine, was the excitement of new horizons and a future in a warm and sunny land, Australia.

My Dad had been to Australia during World War II, when he was in the Royal Navy. His ship the "HMS Indomitable" Fleet Aircraft Carrier, came to Sydney for repairs after being torpedoed. Dad made friends with an Australian family and he was able to see that this would be a wonderful place to live.

Our parents made the application to emigrate in 1957. Dad was working in London in a furniture factory, and almost every day he would go to Australia House to see if our application was being processed. There were so many hopeful families wanting to start a new life in a land half way across the world. The horrors of war had left deep scars and the prospect of a fresh beginning was very enticing. So our family, like thousands of others would become "Ten Pound Poms".

That day in February 1958 I remember. Mum had just been to the opening of a new supermarket (a very new concept then) and had bought up quite a good stock of opening specials. In the meantime, however, Dad had gone to Australia House in London and had accepted the cancellation! Dad came home and announced the news "We are going to Australia tomorrow!"

Now, looking back at that time as an adult, I can only try to comprehend the great faith and courage my parents had in making, this possibly the biggest decision ever to face them.

Our house was a buzz. Neighbours were scurrying about helping with the final packing.

The bed linen was washed and dried and hung in front of heaters (no clothes dryers then). I remember Mum giving away the last few possessions to friends. And as we were only allowed a few 'tea chests' in which to put all our 'worldly goods' it meant my two-wheeler bike had to be left out. I gave it to my best friend.

The whole house was truly vibrating with emotion, chatter, tears, laughter and the excitement of adventure. But amidst all this frantic, busy activity, my dear Grand Parents were helping us. They had sorrow in their eyes, but I did not see it then. Now I feel a tremendous sadness. For those dearly loved ones were never to see us again. How my heart aches for them, as they faced losing their family.

The madcap hustle and bustle of accepting a twenty-four hour cancellation to go on a thirteen thousand mile sea voyage is out of the ordinary to say the very least. Yes Dad was a bit 'impulsive'. I think the pace at which everything raced from the time he announced the news gave little time for focusing on gloomy thoughts and heart-wrenching farewells. My Grandparents were spared a little, or they did not have enough time to dwell on the final separation that was imminent.

The day we left the docks at Tilbury, England was cold, grey and raining. The feeling of excitement filled the air. We were one little family, among hundreds of others who shared the same hopes and dreams - the start of a better life in Australia. Even as a child, I remember the atmosphere of exhilaration paired with tears and smiles, as the grand old steam ship SS Orontes slowly pulled away from the dock and the people waving on shore became small dots.

The voyage to Australia was fantastic. Six weeks full of fun, friendship and the shared excitement of the unknown. For many families this journey represented the only 'holiday' they had ever had.

The smell of diesel fuel and the sultry heat of the Port at Aden brought to me an inkling of the mystery of foreign places. Our stopover at Ceylon (Sri Lanka) provokes memories too. We had a whole day on the island, so Dad had hired a taxi to drive us about. We called into a temple where a baby was being baptized. The people were lovely, and even asked my very blonde Mum to hold the baby. Such a beautiful vision, the merging of two little families from different cultures, happily smiling for the photo. I can still see the hundreds of frangipani blossoms scattered on the cool marble floor, and the exquisite perfume even today takes me back to that time.

Shipboard life was great fun. We made a lot of friends and enjoyed the activities for the

the children. My little sisters, aged eight and five, and I went to the Fancy Dress Party. Mum made me a sailor's outfit out of white crepe paper and my sisters dressed up as hula dancers. With all the fun activities, we also attended Church and school. I remember as an end of 'school' treat, we were allowed to visit the ship's bridge. My youngest sister had fifth birthday on board, so there was a special birthday party for all the children - her name is printed on the list inside the menu.

Every day the children were given ice cream cones, this was a very special treat. We all enjoyed the swimming pools and I got a certificate as an honorary member of the Ancient Order of Salt Water Pollywogs because I learnt to swim on board.

Perth was the first port to see migrants leave Orontes. Then more people left at Adelaide and Melbourne. Our final stage of our wonderful voyage was Sydney. Entering the harbour I can still vividly remember seeing all the little red-tiled roofs of the houses and the leafy green trees. The sun was shining brightly on a warm March day, the brilliant vast blue sky overhead, and the water of the harbour sparkled. The city skyline and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, with its imposing magnificence welcomed us.

This was our new home land, Australia.

NEW LIFE

By Lynn Chantler Cargill

In 1958 we came
From far across the seas
We sailed in style and luxury
Aboard the SS Orontes

Ron, Joan and daughters three
Were looking for relaxation
As Ron, just 24 hours before
Had taken the cancellation

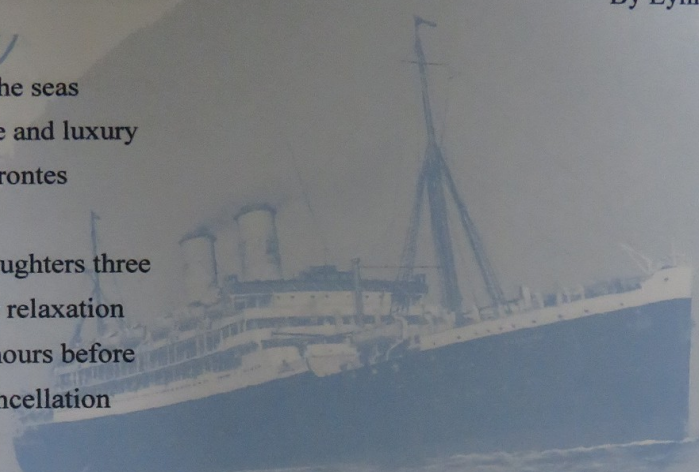
To board the ship and leave the land
Of birth and history
To take a chance upon a life
In a strange new country

Joan had heard about the place
That Ron saw in the War
She knew that it must be good
For Ron to go back for more

The land down under it is called
Australia, we all know
A place where opportunity knocks
If you're willing to have a go

The night before the neighbours rallied
Round to give a hand
To fold the linen and pack the things
To go to another land

Right through the night they all worked hard
And by morning it was done
And in true English style the rain came down
In the absence of the Sun



Orient Line

S. S. ORONTES

NEW LIFE (cont)

Nanny and grandad in the chaos
Hadn't time to think
Too much about the significance
Of the trip we were upon the brink

Perhaps it was just as well
So all of us could cope
Not get too sad or dwell
And sit around and mope

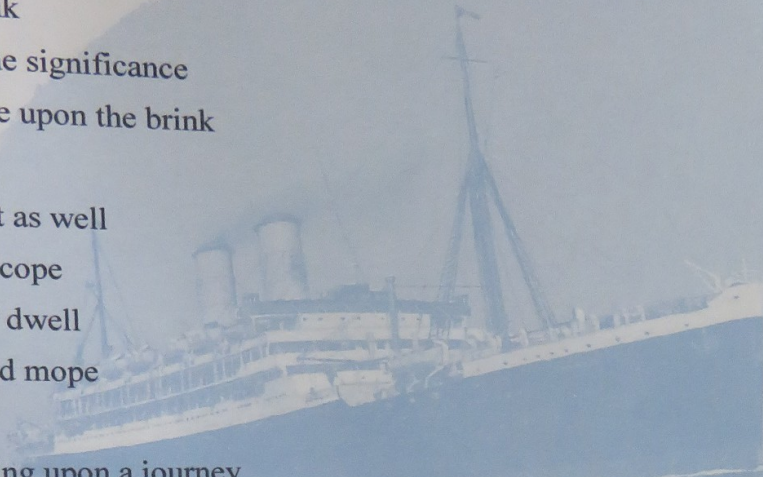
We were embarking upon a journey
To a place of many pleasures
A chance to have a good time
And enjoy lots of leisure

Though hard work was the name of the game
And at it Ron was good
He travelled many miles each day
To hammer on the wood

Joan kept the house spic and span
Our clothes were a delight
Cooking lovely meals each day
And kissing us goodnight

Many people got to know
The English family
Became good friends to the end
And share the memories

Life goes on
Each day ticks over
Every day a treasure
We are lucky to have had good parents
For example by which to measure



Orient Line
S. S. ORONTES