

The Exiles' journey

After having been fitted out at Deptford (on the Thames), the "Joseph Somes" sailed to Woolwich on 6 May 1847, where the guard and 165 "exiles" embarked (from Millbank 81 and Pentonville 84). On 18 May 1847, the ship sailed for Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, where a further 84 boys from Parkhurst (a prison for juvenile males aged 9-19 years) embarked, giving a total of 249. A Royal Pardon was granted to the "exiles" on 25 or 28 May 1847 (unclear in the record of the nominal list of exiles, although Dearnley, 1993 suggests the 28th). On the 4 June 1847, the ship set sail for Port Phillip via Hobart Town.

The Surgeon Superintendent's Journal, under "General Remarks" contains a description of the voyage. He reports that after some "*nausea and inability to take food ...*" prior to departure, the early part of the voyage was calm and without incident. On reaching the Southern Ocean, "*a succession of gales and squalls with wretched wet weather and high sea running and frequently breaking over the ship*" resulted in the men being confined below deck. Nevertheless, the ship arrived in Hobart Town on 9 September 1847, with all but one of the men (John Little) "*perfectly healthy*" - John Little was removed to shore. There was little illness on the voyage, and most patients responded well to treatment. One man suffered a fractured femur in a fall, but after two months in a splint, the surgeon reported "*the bone had perfectly united*".

Newspaper reports (quoted by Dearnley, 1993) contain additional information on the arrival of the vessel and clearly indicate that within the colonial population many settlers had severe reservations about the arrival of the transportees, regardless of the fact that all had been granted a Royal Pardon. A report from the Geelong Advertiser of 24 September 1847 includes "*a large ship in sight this afternoon, supposed to be the 'Joseph Somes', from England via Hobart Town, with Exiles*". On 28 September 1847, the Melbourne Argus reported the arrival of the "*Joseph Someswith 249 Exiles under military guard*", and also "*....with a cargo of Pentonvillains, arrived at Geelong on Saturday*". On 28 September 1847, the Geelong Advertiser reported "*...exiles from the prisons of Pentonville, Parkhurst and Millbank, under a guard of 19 soldiers of the 90th Regiment and one Ensign*".

This cool reception for the 249 new settlers is further emphasised by remarks made by Lieutenant Addis, who boarded the vessel on 27 September. His briefing was reported by the Geelong Advertiser of 28 September as follows: "*Lieutenant Addis ... read the proclamation setting forth the tenure upon which their freedom will be held, informed them at some length of the nature of the country they had been sent to - of what would be required from them - and the consequences that would result from any infringement of the laws here. The Commissioner did not forget to mention that the characters that their predecessors had earned for themselves (presumably he said they were not good), and strongly advised all of the exiles to hire for the bush, and leave the town immediately on landing*".

Perhaps some of the exiles might have been hoping for a warmer reception, after their voyage of three months. After all, Queen Victoria herself had directed that the exiles be accepted as free men. She said: "*We are graciously pleased to extend our mercy and grace unto them and to grant them our pardon for which they stand*

convicted ... (and) ... this our pardon shall have the effect of a free pardon within our said Australian Territories".

Ian Wynd (1986) confirms that *"the exiles received a mixed reception at Port Phillip: the squatters were desperate for labour of any sort and welcomed them, but the inhabitants of Melbourne (and, presumably, Geelong) saw their introduction as the resumption of transportation ... (and) ... as the cause of a crime wave in their town."*

The "Nominal List of Exiles" contains the names of the exiles, their age, marital status, literacy skills, former trade, trade taught in prison, crime, sentence, when and where convicted, and when and where received. The exiles on the "Joseph Somes" were drawn from many of the English Counties, with a number from Scotland as well. Their most obvious characteristic was their youth. Sixty five of the exiles gave their age as 17, over half of the exiles (130) had ages listed in the range from 16 to 18, and about three-quarters of the exiles were in the range from 14 to 20. Of the remainder, a further 27 had ages from 21 to 23 and the rest ranged in ages up to the oldest at age 37. All had originally received severe sentences, from 7 to 15 years, with most having been sentenced to either 7 or 10 years.

The first task for the exiles was to find work. For many transportees this had been pre-arranged. The Geelong Advertiser of 28 September 1847 reported of the exiles: *"Many of them have been already hired at wages from 23 to 26 pounds, and those who are willing to hire will be readily engaged at that rate"*.

Colin Dearnley (1993) compiled a list of the names and addresses of the employers of the exiles, and states that the main occupations accepted by the exiles were: Hut Keeper, General Servant, Servant and Hut Keeper, Shepherd, and Butcher. Ian Wynd (1986) observes that despite the fact that *"all of the exiles had undergone instruction in a trade in prison and many were tradesmen before their incarceration ... only a few found employment in their trades, the bulk (being) employed by the squatters as shepherds or labourers"*. Wages offered were typically within the range from 18 to 26 pounds per annum and employment contracts varied from 1 month to 2 years, most having contracts for three, six or twelve months duration.

Ian Wynd (1986) states *"the figures available suggest that only a small number (of exiles) relapsed into their old ways"* and that *"it is easy enough to find evidence of the exile's criminal activities but more difficult to unearth the facts about those who settled down to become law abiding citizens"*. He quotes examples of exiles who became magistrates and others who became successful businessmen. Colin Dearnley (1993) also believes that *"the exiles certainly had their critics .. (but) .. probably too much notice was taken from so few"*. He notes that *"prominent squatters preferred to hire exiles rather than the locals"*. Les Pickering of the South Cheshire Studies Centre (see reference in Credits and Links), described 22 Cheshire Convicts granted pardons under the exile scheme. He remarked: *"I could not find any instance of a man returning to England after the term of his sentence expired, but most men were given a complete free pardon within four years of arrival in Australia"*.