When you have a big family (of nine as Caroline had between 1857 when she arrived and 1874 when they left for Wivenhoe near Camden where she had another two), you need lots of attention from doctors for measles, whooping cough, croup and so on. No matter what their ailment it seems they were given castor oil and magnesia. Leeches were popular too; for Caroline’s toothache applied to her gums and for the baby’s mumps applied to her face to reduce the swelling (p. 88). Before the discovery of antibiotics and the development of modern medicines, the three main remedies doctors had were to remove blood with leeches, induce diarrhoea (castor oil) and induce vomiting (ipecacuanha). Caroline mentions ipecac.

The diary is appealingly candid. For example: ‘Wednesday October 31st 1855… Herman dreadfully spooney’ (meaning: over-amorous). The diaries have an abundance of Caroline’s feelings and moods, including her great love for her dear Henry and for her darling children. She recorded her exasperation with suitors both in England and in Australia. She never pretends. There are entries about medicines and what meals they gave unexpected visitors, going on long rides, trips to Armidale and Rocky River goldfields, a bushfire, killing snakes, sheep being washed and shorn and lambs dying and wheat and hay being reaped. All history reminds us that things used to be different and could be better. This absorbing book reminds us that the mutual support in families was more common and necessary before there was social welfare for the needy. Often there was no one else to turn to in times of trouble. When James Husband, Caroline’s Solicitor father, was deep in debt in London he sponged from his relations for money to enable him to pay for the voyage to Sydney. He managed to pay and did emigrate with his family to Sydney.

Caroline does not agonise over any moral decisions, and has no lasting chagrin, even about her father’s disgraceful money dealings or the hinted at philanderings of her younger brother James (Jemmy in the diary). She is appealingly natural, plain thinking and direct. She knew and accepted her feelings and lived mostly untroubled by them. Anyone who has ever visited or volunteered at Saumarez, and many others too, will be much rewarded by this unguarded record of the ardours and endurances of an admirably devoted wife and mother.

Ian M. Johnstone


Arthur Bowes Smyth was chief surgeon on the Lady Penrhyn, one of the eleven ships of the First Fleet that carried exclusively female convicts. As well as writing a regular diary for the round journey to Australia and back from 1787 to 1789, he ensured the best health of the convicts and crew by a programme of meticulous cleanliness and good order. As he was not a regular employee of the Royal Navy, but on loan with the ship from the East India Company, he could express
independent views in his diary, though he kept several copies with his more acid
comments deleted from the ones most likely to be submitted to his superiors.

The first thing noticeable about this book is that it is beautifully produced,
with a wealth of coloured maps and graphics selected from a number of
contemporary artists and writers, as well as the diarist’s own paintings and
sketches. These illustrate the full journey of the First Fleet, plus Bowes Smyth’s
circuitous route home via China, with page boxes that illustrate the way of life not
only of the people who made up the First Fleet, but the peoples they meet on the
way. Numerous illustrated backstories also note the history of European
colonisation and exploration in the regions along the 40,000 km route. The whole
book represents a pleasant way of learning about the First Fleet and its context.
The diaries themselves contain little new information beyond that recorded by the
other First Fleet diarists, although there is some useful back-up, such as confirming
the debauchery of the first night the convict women were landed at Sydney Cove, a
story that has been contested by some. There is also an original account of the
newly discovered Lord Howe Island, the Lady Penrhyn’s first stop after finally
leaving Sydney, where Bowes Smyth plays the gentleman scientist with a valuable
description of the island in its pristine condition. It would have been interesting to
have more detail from the diary included in the book about similar undisturbed
landscapes around Sydney encountered in the numerous hunting expeditions that
are mentioned.

David Hill has lifted selected pages of the diary and presented them as
facsimiles, paraphrasing and commenting on this in succeeding pages. So in a
sense he is giving a discursive running history, using parts of the diary and much
other material. All of it is easy to read and presents a solid account of what the
expedition was all about. I was not particularly impressed by Bowes Smyth’s
‘independent’ thoughts about his superiors; much of it was in areas where he had
no expertise. For instance, it seemed a bit out of place for him to comment and
complain about Philip’s navigational abilities, given the remarkable success of the
journey and his own non-nautical background. However, part of that success was
due to the excellent medical care that the ships’ surgeons such as Bowes Smyth
were able to achieve. The convicts tended to remain healthy because they were
obliged to take their anti-scorbutics: it is significant that the only time scurvy broke
out on the Lady Penrhyn was on the return journey to Tahiti where the non-convict
crew were reluctant to take their medicine (sauerkraut in this case) and there was
little the surgeon could do to coerce them. The ships were all drastically
understocked with proper medical supplies, but it seemed the maintenance of
good order and hygiene contributed to the dramatically improved health of the
convicts, especially the women.

What is also of note is the grudging respect given to the convict women,
maybe for the first time in their lives. Flogging was eventually abandoned as a
means of punishing females on the Lady Penrhyn, and replaced with milder
punishments of humiliation, such as head shaving and in cases of non-stop abusive
language, gagging: ‘At first one or two were flogged with a Cat of nine tails on the
breech … but as there are certain seasons where such a mode of punishment could
not be inflicted with that degree of decency which every officer wished to adhere
to, it was totally laid aside – 10 December 1787’. What is more surprising than the sensitivity shown to the women’s menstrual cycles is the claim that the officers had a ‘degree of decency’ which they felt they must adhere to. For all the brutality one associates with this era, Bowes Smyth along with all the First Fleet diarists seemed to share a sensitivity that would not have been out of place if they were in the streets and pump houses of Bath, chatting to Jane Austin and other ladies. The fact that they could apply genuine sympathy of a kind to the less than ladylike female convicts is interesting. Despite this, Hill notes that no provision had been made for babies or children’s clothing nor for women’s menstrual cycles; however, sailor’s shirts had a habit of disappearing when given to the women to launder so maybe this balanced the score.

The trivia of everyday life is presented well: there is a useful and easy to make eighteenth century recipe for beer, the making of which was advisable in a shipboard situation where water was likely to be not so good, if not downright dangerous to drink. What plants were taken on board at Rio and Cape Town? Well, there are accurate illustrations of likely breeds, from which many of our garden types have descended, reminding us that our figs, quinces and grapes may have spent up to three hundred years acclimatising in the Southern Hemisphere gardens of the Portuguese and Dutch. The latter, according to Bowes Smyth, did everything in their power while the fleet was re-stocking at Cape Town to sabotage the British colonising expedition by supplying rotten provisions and diseased stock at excessive prices.

The Lady Penrhyn left Sydney in May 1788 and reached England in August 1789, via Lord Howe Island, Tahiti, Guam, China, Malaya, then back around southern Africa to St Helena, and finally Britain. The wonders of Tahiti or China probably made the struggling little colony of London thieves at Port Jackson seem trivial and shabby by comparison. Bowes Smith spent over two years recording it all, from the trivial to the grand, in diaries meant only ‘for the eye of my relations and most intimate friends’. Now thanks to the key diary reproductions and associated contextual material in this book, it is available to everyone. All the material used in the book is documented in the endnotes chapter by chapter, with web references including Bowes Smyth’s complete journal at <nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms4568>.

Robert Haworth


Was Edward Hammond Hargraves, known to Australians as ‘the discoverer of gold’ in fact pre-empted by an ex-convict Frenchman named Alexandre Duchene? Douglas Wilkie’s research demonstrates he was. Some years ago, Lynette Silver revealed the early gold discoveries by Reverend W. B. Clark. The role of the