BOOK REVIEW
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While reading this book I could imagine travelling between the United Kingdom and Australia, journeys on which the book focusses.

Covering the travel of free settlers between 1809 and 1883, details have been drawn from 33 of the 100 travellers' diaries and shipboard newspapers lodged at the National Library of Australia, some of which have been digitised.

The twelve chapters, which commence prior to sailing and end on arrival in Australia, are mainly the experiences of males recorded as ‘passenger’. There are also details from others, including the diaries of two clergymen, a surgeon, two crew, two wives of medical men, a prospector and a military man. Each chapter commences with a brief transcript of a diary then a clear image of that diary page. The book is attractively illustrated with over 130 images depicting the shipboard experiences of a mix of paying passengers and sponsored immigrants.

Social class determined the enjoyment of passengers, the rich travelling in style while the lower classes were subjected to the ships’ bilges. Yet, all were affected by encounters with other ships, storms, illness, rodents, violence, extremes of temperature, deaths and sea burials.

Monotony was lessened with the sighting of sea-living animals and birds and also shipboard entertainment, including deck games and dancing in the smoking-room, while many diaries were illustrated with images of activities or caricatures of other passengers. There was always the risk of injury and damage from candlelight and the open fires used for cooking on the timber ships.

The index and references are extensive, however, I would have preferred the names of each ship to be listed alphabetically under a heading of ‘Ships’ rather than throughout the index. Despite this, Roslyn is to be congratulated on a well-designed and beautifully illustrated book which can be easily picked up and read—a little or a lot at each sitting. I was engrossed in the personal stories and was disappointed the book ended rather abruptly, as I was keen to know what else happened to Mr W Barringer.

This book is recommended for anyone with an interest in travel in the 1800s as it brings this to life and aids in an understanding of the major voyage of many of our ancestors who helped change the ratio of convict and free settlers in Australia.

Source: Review copy courtesy of NLA Publishing Canberra.