

Outward Bound

ON THE SS ASTURIAS

26th October - 28th November 1948



Thomas Wilkinson

Diary notes on the journey from Belfast, Northern Ireland, to Geelong, Victoria by the Wilkinson family (Tom, Millie, Gordon, Rosemary) on their voyage to Australia, October - November 1948.



Journey from Belfast via South Hampton to Melbourne, October-November, 1948.
(Pins mark approximate daily positions at midday. Numbers indicate selected dates)

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Week One



I think I had better start at the beginning of our journey and try and wade through it, just as the incidents happened.

Thursday 21st. October 1948

We got away to a good start, with the weather perfect and calm in the Irish sea, arriving Liverpool in the best of spirits. Had a lovely weekend seeing Liverpool and the Mersey Tunnel. Gordon was disappointed that our time went too quickly to allow us to take him through it, but with shopping, seeing people, &c., it was Monday evening all too soon.

Tuesday 26th

Tuesday morning we got away to an early start, catching the 8:15 to London. Had breakfast on the train and arrived about 1:00 pm. Had lunch at Waterloo, a look around the underground station with a ride up and down on the escalator, to Gordon's amusement and delight, and caught the 3:10 for Southampton arriving about 5:00 pm. at the Queen Mary Docks, through the embarkation, customs, &c. and up the gangway aboard ship.

It was quite a thrill to walk aboard up the gangway and a fitting climax to an exciting day's travel. We had just time to locate our berths when dinner was 'gonged', so off we went and really enjoyed it!

After dinner we had a look around for our gear. All the things sent in advance were stowed aboard before we arrived, and our cabin trunks in our cabins, so we had only to pick up the cases we were carrying to complete ourselves. Then after a quick look around, we turned in early.

6:05 am Awakened late. Rush for cup of tea, wash, dress and out.
 7:45 Taxi for station.
 8:15 Train for London. Breakfast on train.
 1:00 pm. Arrived London.
 1:30 Arrived Waterloo - lunch, wash up, visit escalator on Underground.
 3:15 Train for Southampton.
 5:10 Arrive Southampton. Embarkation, customs, &c. No trouble - just follow the crowd.
 6:00 On board. First setting dinner and we had had it!
 6:00-10:00 Looking her over, &c.
 10:00 Bed. And so ended a happy day, but dog tired.

Incidents on 26th

- Millie's trunk smashed.
- Thought we lost luggage at Waterloo.
- Met Jack and Beatrice.

Wednesday 27th

Next morning we had early breakfast and a more detailed look at the ship. The S.S. Asturias is 22,444 tons and all modern. The only accommodation that the passengers are not allowed in (is) the crew's quarters. There is plenty of open deck space for playing games, three large lounges, two dining saloons, reading room, cinema cum dance hall, children's play-room, and nice big airy cabins. The shop sells everything, from a needle to an anchor.



Gordon with Isle of Wight in the background. 27/10/48 a.m.



Millie with Isle of Wight receding, taken around mid-day. 27/10/48 noon.

We cast off at 10:00 am to the band playing over the loud speakers. Someone was selling cards on board just before sailing, so we rushed a few lines and got them posted by the pilot as he left the ship.

It wasn't long before we lost sight of Southampton and the Isle of Wight, and then the roll started, getting slightly worse as the day lengthened, although not bad enough to make

the passengers sick (or at least the hardy type, some were nearly sick as soon as they came aboard!) and we said goodbye to the English coast.



Isle of Wight. 27/10/48 noon.

Everyone was strange on board as there wasn't much doing, so we picked up Miriam's sister and husband and swapped experiences, also got to know our cabin mates. Millie and Rosemary have an eight-berth cabin on 'C' deck which has a promenade deck, with Tom and Gordon on 'D' deck which has portholes that open and swing sideways to catch the air. So we are well situated, although we could

have been a bit closer to each other. The weather was very cold, having been a white frost before we left.

7:00 Rise.

8:00 Breakfast.

10:00 Cast off. Sent P.C's. (*ed. Post cards*).

11:00 Boat Drill. Cold.

12:00 Lunch.

Afternoon, lazy day watching ship get clear of Isle of Wight, &c.

6:00 Dinner.

Evening. Walked around, put children to bed, had drink, tea, biscuits. Supper. Bed 11:00 pm.



Gordon in his blazer. 27/10/48 p.m.

So ended first day at sea. Weather cold, but much warmer than the 26th.

Incidents on 27th

- Took snap of Millie, and another of Gordon with Isle of Wight as background.
- Cigarettes, 50 for 2/6.
- Chocolates, sweets 1d dearer.
- 423 miles from home.



Gordon, Rosemary, Millie off Cape St Vincent, Portugal. 29/10/48.

Week Two



Thursday 28th

The second day out and we are in the Bay of Biscay. The weather is still rough, sea running high, and nearly everyone sick. Millie, Gordon, and Rosemary are all under the weather. R seemed to pick up before breakfast and had her cereals, egg and bacon, rolls, and asked for more. After that she was alright and never looked back. M and G had it more severe and took all day to get pulled round. Gordon stayed in bed most of the day. We had a dance in the evening and what a job to keep your feet, dancing uphill one moment and down the next. Still it lifted everyone and certainly made Millie forget her troubles. So we went to bed early and tired.



Gordon and friend.

7:00 am Early tea (first morning). Millie and children sick.

8:00 Rosemary able to eat breakfast, recovered sickness, had play in playroom. Gordon and M. sick at breakfast table and had to sit on Prom. deck. Located R's doll in baggage room. Gordon stayed in bed for morn and had to leave lunch table. G had lunch in cabin, recovered sufficiently to have light dinner.

Evening. First dance on board. M. and I had lot of trouble dancing in motion of ship.

Weather good until evening, showers later.

Incidents

- Had haircut and shampoo.
- Millie's hair combed.
- 446 miles from noon 27th to noon 28th. Air temp. 63 °F, sea 62 °F.

Friday 29th

The 29th started fair. The sea was a lot calmer, still a lot of people sick. M and I had a hair-do just to knock in some time. We sighted the coast of Portugal early morning and then the ship stayed fairly close to land the whole day. In the evening we went to the pictures and had a dance later.

Breakfast as usual. Everyone in good spirits, all ate a hearty breakfast. First sight of the coast of Portugal. Calm sea. Took snap M., G., & R., with Cape of St Vincent as background. Sat on deck in afternoon watching passing ships and Portugal coast. Nice lunch and dinner. Pictures in the evening and dance on the open deck. Tea for supper on the hatch. Weather warm, sea calm, visibility good. Passed Gibraltar in the night about 3.00 am.

Incidents

- St Vincent Is. 4.30 pm.
- Lisbon 10.00 am.
- Pictures 7.00 pm. Vice versa.
- 28th noon to 29th noon 453 miles. Temp. air 55 °F, sea 63 °F, depth 3600



Millie and Rosemary



Deck scenes.



Rosemary.



With friends.



Saturday 30th

The 30th, the first day in the Mediterranean Sea. The sea was calm, with sky cloudy and rain. We missed the Rock of Gibraltar as the ship passed it during the hours of darkness (about 3.00 am.). So far the Mediterranean is black, and no signs of the famous blue.

We can still see the Spanish coast and hills, the navigator reckons 54 miles (he should know), but owing to heavy mist nothing is very clear. We sighted the Empress of Australia early morning and are slowly passing her. She was just about level at noon. The air is colder than yesterday,

dropping from 62 °F to 55 °F, but that still feels warm to us hardy northerners. We saw some flying fish for the first time late at night, and had a game of Housey-Housey until bedtime.

6.50 am. Rise.

7.00 Bath. Breakfast as usual. Took R to playroom.

9.30 Sighted Spanish Mts. and Empress of Australia (3 funnel). Weather showery to noon. Clearing after noon. Sea calm. Showery afternoon. Teemed in afternoon. Played cards evening and Housey-Housey. R. awakened, had to walk around. First flying fish.

Empress of Australia sighted early morning, passed noon, receding into distance as afternoon passed. Noon. Lat 36.28 N., Long 01.45 W., 453 miles.



Gordon and Millie.

Sunday 31st

Sunday 31st began with very low cloud, but by 10.00 am. it had cleared and the sun began to appear. The temperature rose until at noon it was 67 °F and the sea was 73 °F. We could see the African coast quite clearly, and the town of Philipeville. The coast line is very rocky with high mountains rising immediately behind. We were passing the Gulf of Bone by 10.00 am. and due to pass Malta 6.00 am tomorrow morning, 1st.

First Sunday aboard ship. M. & G. going to church. Sighted Philipeville 9.00 am, Gulf of Bone, 12 noon. Weather warm, sun shining, clear view of African coast, rocky with high mountains in rear. Wet afternoon. Did some washing, played cards. Air 67 °F, 70 °F sea, Lat. 37.14:30 N., Long 67. 54 E., miles 465.

Monday 1st November

We got up about 5.30, had a bath, and got on deck about 6 am, to

see Malta. It was a lovely sight. We had heavy thunder and lightning but the weather cleared sufficiently to give us a good look at the bomb damage. You could see the skeletons of some lovely buildings. There were a lot of warships in the harbour, one of which looked like an American cruiser and aircraft-carrier. We cleared the island about 7.10 and had worked up a great appetite for breakfast.

After leaving Malta, we had all sea until we reached Suez. Nothing startling happened except that I developed lumbago and had to see the Dec. Got a rub and some tablets. These seem to take fairly immediate effect, so we are keeping our fingers crossed.

5.30 am. Thunder and lightning, heavy rain.

6.00 On deck to see Malta. Clear view of Valetta and bomb damaged buildings.

Aircraft carrier and cruisers in harbour.

Rough sea.

Breakfast as usual (ready for it).

G. got me two cups of early tea.

A good drying day.



Afternoon at sea. Children to pictures (Mickey Mouse).

Evening dance.

Lat 35.32 N., Long 16 18 E, miles 430.



Entering Suez.

3/11/48.

Tuesday 2nd

They held a 20-questions in the lounge, but we didn't go to hear it. They had a dance each evening.

Last posting surface mail. Developed lumbago. Saw Dec. and got rub and tablets. Afternoon at sea, temp. rising, sun shining but not too hot. Watched crew doing lifeboat, fire and first aid drill. 20 questions. Dance. Played cards.

Miles 401. Lat 33.36 N, Long 24.04 E, air 75 °F, depth 6400 ft.

De Lesseps statue, Suez.
3/11/48



Wednesday 3rd



De Lesseps
statue, Suez.
3/11/48

On the 3rd November, we entered Suez. As soon as the ship appeared in the Canal, the small boats were out waiting for us. As we entered, we saw the statue of de Lesseps who built the Canal. I tried a snap of it but the sun was in the wrong place.



Along the Suez
Canal. 3/11/48.

The whole afternoon was spent watching the "Bum" boats and the men arguing over the price of their wares. You could hear of people buying an article at as much as £7 10s. and another buying a similar one at £2 10s. M and I were too hard to please. We bought a dozen postcards at 3/- which was cheap, as the ones on board were 2/- ea. M got a Polish lad, who could speak Arabic, to bargain for a box of Turkish Delights for 6d. The ship took on water and supplies and while we were anchored, it was interesting to watch the traffic on the river.

The Canal was very busy with shipping. At the entrance to the Canal there are quite a few sunken wrecks. I suppose from the war days. The sun is getting really hot, although it is cool in the evening up on deck. We

got our first warning regarding sitting in the sun, from the ship's doctor. The field glasses are very handy to examine the features of the natives.

Early rise. Fore-morning as usual. Sighted Suez about 2 o'clock. Anchored Suez about 4 o'clock. Great fun watching peddlers in boat. 5.30 pm. Some came aboard. Bought suitcase and bag. After dinner watched river traffic and peddlers until supper time. Saw statue at entrance and took snap with Millie standing for'ard. Watched Port Said until late evening, early bed. Lat 31.42:30 N., Long 31.52 E., miles 409.

Entering the Suez Canal. 3/11/48.



Port Saïd. 3/11/48.



Week Three



Thursday 4th



Millie - in the Suez
canal. 4/11/48



Peddler boat at Port Said. 3/11/48.

We got up early on the 4th to watch going down the Canal. We cast off about 7.15 am. The natives were still selling from about 6.00 am. Port Said was fairly quiet and we were interested in the trees and shrubs along the bank. To our delight, a train passed by, also, men repairing the banks were nearly sunk by our wash. We saw our first camels near a village and **what up** to date houses, old sheets of rusty iron, old rugs, matting, &c. We passed some very nice allotments they were just watering, they certainly pour it on! Later we had to pull in to let 14 other ships pass (they were homewards bound) as the Canal was too narrow to pass. There were a lot of army trucks about and British soldiers. It must make the poor lads feel homesick to see us pass, stuck in a dump like that.



Pt Saïd, Millie
and Pineapple.
4/11/48.

We saw our first real sunset. You get all the colours from black, changing to deep red, up to light yellow and green to the deep blue of the sky. Especially made effective by the stars and moon. It's simply marvellous. We sat up to 12.00 midnight to see the ship out of the canal and enter Suez. It was a lovely sight. The ship carries a large searchlight on the bow

and we were sitting up in the fo'castle. There were hundreds of ships anchored in Suez harbour. We dropped anchor to have the S/L removed and pushed on again about 2.30 am.

Got up early to see ship leaving Port Said. Peddlers selling from 6.00 am. Breakfast as usual .

Ship cast off about 7.15. Saw first camels on the canal bank. Sun came out after misty morning. Really hot.

Ship pulled in for 3 hours to let 14 others pass. Got underway about 4.30 pm. Night drops very quickly. Watched marvellous sunset. All the colours grading from the deep black of the land at the horizon to red up to light yellow (nearly white) and finally to the deep blue of the sky above. Sat and watched the ship enter Suez about 12.00 midnight.

Friday 5th

In the morning we were in the Gulf of Suez by the time we got on deck, and entered the Red Sea about 10.00 am. The coast on either side is very rugged and reminds one of Tibet, although you can see the sand drifts in the valleys.

Well now we know the Red Sea is blue, blue as the Mediterranean, but very calm and peaceful. This is the first really hot day. The sun is shining right out of the blue. They have turned on the fire hydrants for the children to splash in and they do enjoy it! It's too hot to be on deck, so I just go to bed, and stay up later at night when one can enjoy it.



The Suez canal.
4/11/48.

They showed another picture, "A Man About the House", and a travel picture on Jamaica. It filled in an hour or so, and then finished the day with a dance.

First really hot day. We entered the Gulf of Suez early morning, arrived Red Sea about 10.00 am. Very hilly either side, sun shining, sea calm. Slept afternoon. Pictures evening,, dance later. G. attended children's hour in morning and afternoon. First day to turn on fire hydrants on deck for children.
Lat 27.22 N., Long 34.10 E., miles 240.

Saturday 6th

The next two days were rather monotonous. The first we had nothing to look at but sea. This was very calm and the sun hot.

Sun coming out early. Lazy day, sea all day. Sun getting very hot, sea like glass, small flying fish, water very salty. Watched sunset and new moon in the late evening. Appendix op., ship stopped. 393 (?) miles.

Sunday 7th

But on the second day the wind rose and the sea was very rough and choppy. We passed a rather large island about 2.00 pm. and a cluster of twelve at 4.00 pm. This lifts one's interest slightly. In the evening we sat and watched the moon and stars.

Another nice day. Strong head wind, rough choppy sea. Passed island about 2.00 pm and 12 islands at 4.00 pm. Sun hot but weather generally pleasant.
21.34 N., 37.58 E., 406 miles.



Spray on the foredeck.



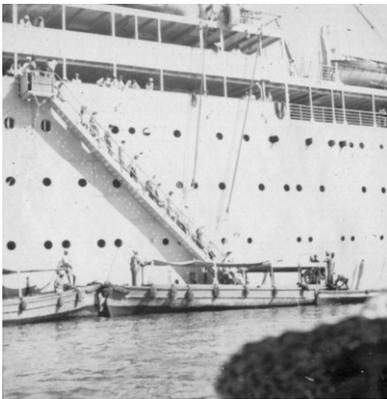
Listing in the swell .



Aden. Gordon
on Gangway.
8/11/48.

Monday 8th

We steamed into Aden on Monday 6th at 7 am. The surrounding hills are very rugged and weather-beaten, no vegetation whatever. They announced that passengers could go ashore immediately after breakfast and we were in the second heat. This was great fun as we picked a rowing boat and it wasn't very even on it's keel, especially if anyone shifted their weight. But we arrived at the jetty safe and sound.



Disembarking at Aden. 8/11/48 a.m.



Aden. Camel farm. 8/11/48 a.m.

We were immediately picked up by a taxi who took us on a 40 mile run up to an oasis in the dessert. Past the Civil aerodrome and through an Arab market for selling camels. All this interested the children very much. The water is pumped up from a deep well and is really hot. They have a lovely garden, 2 miles by 3 miles, and apart from the lovely flowers that grow, shall we say "wild" (as they are attended to), to vegetables of all kinds, including celery,



Aden. Camel farm. 8/11/48 a.m.



Our guide in Aden. 8/11/48 a.m.

carrots, vegetable marrow, also fruit trees such as coconut, banana &c.

We had a long walk round and thought we were lost, but the guide picked up the waiting taxi alright. This oasis was also filled up with lovely coloured birds. On leaving the market, the driver noticed Rosemary looking at the camels so he diverted us to the market



Aden, on shore. 8/11/48.

and then to a camel Corps who are stationed there for the purpose of guarding the camel supply route. But as these are Arabs they do not use them as regulars in any political trouble as they only shoot down Jews!

We then came back to the town of Aden and had a look at the shops, but only bought some biscuits Jacob's Custard Creams and Puffed Butter. Something we haven't seen for years. We were also lucky in seeing a street accident when a car knocked a woman down. And not a bit of wonder, as they wander all over the place.



Car accident, Aden.
8/11/48 a.m.



Aden. 8/11/48 a.m.

narrow and the car just got through. In the second one a car had just passed and the dust in the tunnel was worse than a London "Pea-Soup". We then returned to the Port, had a cup of tea and ices, had another look around, bought a toupee for me, whites for G. and called it a day. We were tired and R. wanted back to the ship although the guide carried her all the time we were walking.

On the roads we passed a lot of camels and carts. This amused G. and R. On the return journey we went through two tunnels through the mountains. These were very



Aden street scene.
8/11/48 a.m.



Tom and Gordon, leaving port
Aden. 8/11/48 p.m.

We got back on board just in time for lunch at 12 midday and spent the rest of the day fishing (caught nothing, although the Port swarmed with fish), and watched the general hub-bub of the boat traffic. We finished the day by watching the ship leave port and get under way. We spent the rest of the evening wandering around, dancing, &c. Wrote to Jack and Maisie.



Disembarking at
Aden. 8/11/48 a.m.

Arrived Aden at 7.00 am, allowed to go ashore after breakfast. Great fun going ashore in small boat. Got taxi around to oasis, aerodrome, Aden town, camel market. Weather cool for these parts, saw car accident in Aden. Returned to ship at 12.00 midday. Stayed on board as first information was ship leaving 16.00 hrs., passengers aboard 15.00 hrs. This was extended 2 hours and finally ship left 19.00 hrs. Watched anchor lifting and leaving harbour. At Aden 334 miles.

Tuesday 9th.

Day as usual at sea. Lat.12.14 N., Long.49.30 E., 272 miles.

Wednesday 10th

Rosemary sent to bed with bad chest. Cloudy sky very little sun. Cool. Sea rough. Nothing unusual, getting monotonous. Lat.11.15 N., Long.55.49 E., 377 miles.



Gordon at Aden, about to leave port. 8/11/48 p.m.

Week Four



Thursday 11th

Very heavy rain.

Friday 12th

Lat.08.53 N., Long.69.07 E., 392 miles.

Sunday 14th

We arrived in Colombo early in the morning, about 5.30 am., and after the Port Medical Officer had cleared the ship and we had had breakfast, we were allowed ashore at 8.30 am. Actually we didn't get an early place in the queue so it was 9.00 before we got away.



Millie, Rosemary,
Tom. 11/11/48.



Rosemary, Tom
and Millie at the
lifboats. 11/11/48.

We hired a taxi as it was Sunday and the European shops were closed, so sightseeing was the order of the day. The taxi drove us around the

residential area first, and the houses are most beautiful looking very cool with their tall coconut palms and banana trees. We then drove round the Town Hall, a lovely white building with a tower and dome, and on to the Museum where we saw some very old Dutch furniture made with local wood by the Dutch settlers, who were in Ceylon before the English.

Then some lovely ornaments of gold and precious stones, a lot of Buddhas and the Throne, Crown and Crown cover. The chair which is gold inlaid with rubies, diamonds, takes 6 men to lift; then the animals section which had a large whale skeleton, a wild man and woman, whom the guide told us still live in the forest and eat meat raw. Snakes, leopards, &c. Quite a collection. All the animals including human beings in the various stages of development, before birth of course, with the two children we couldn't tarry too long in this section. Then the moths, insects, &c., including some live ones. These were terrific in size and beautifully marked, even in the caterpillar stage.



Rosemary, Millie. 11/11/48

We then pushed on to a Buddhist Temple and the taxi driver was showing us 'round when the priest came along and took us all through it. It was built in 1838 by an Englishman in memory to his son. There was something about the mother having the child before she met the man but I wasn't sure if he was getting mixed up with our New Testament or what, as he was very hard to understand and just rambled on and on. We had to take off our shoes, hats, &c. before entering, and of course they don't like our taking snaps.



Colombo Town Hall.
14/11/48.

We saw a Moslem funeral on our way to a place called Mount Lavina where there is a large factory making all hand work, such as mats, lace, wood, ebony-carving, gold and silver work. The craftsmanship is marvellous, especially the lace, but all the items were very costly. They seem to have a large supply of lovely stones and they can work them in beautifully

in bracelets, earrings, &c. We hadn't time to walk around the factory as it was then getting on to 11.00 and we had to be on board by 12.00 noon. So we left there and went for a drive around the coast past some of their best hotels, the House of Parliament, President's Residence, Europeans and Native areas, &c.

The scenery is something hard to imagine as real. Actually we had our boat booked for going back at 11.30 but it was 11.45 before we got back to the jetty and we were 15 minutes late on board as she was lying 3/4 mile out and the wind was blowing hard against the shore.



Colombo Town Hall.
14/11/48.

The car we had was a brand new Yankee Pontiac at £2 10s for the four of us for three and a half hours, although we only got about three hours, wasn't too bad, as I simply couldn't have carried Rosemary who had already fallen asleep in the car and she also wanted back to the "big ship", although she liked the ride on the "wee boat".

The natives were very clean, especially the children. Our driver told us there was a lot of Dutch blood among the locals. He had a name for them (Kanakas). Their skin was much lighter in colour. They have some lovely boy and girl schools, academies, and colleges, all with large playing fields and they seem to look after the children very well.

The chap who rowed us to and from the shore told us that his partner was his father, 70 yrs old, so it was quite a row for him. They are all great swimmers and have a large open air bathing pool. Actually our stay was all too short. We could have done with a whole day and it being a Sunday as well made it very dead.



Millie and Rosemary.



Deck sports. 17/11/48 a.m.

Instead of the camels as in Aden, they use bullocks to draw their carts and a lot of rickshaws. We also saw Lipton's tea packing station but were advised not to buy any as they are blending anything for tourists coming in off ships. Some of the tea was 5d per lb. and you were not allowed to take too much back with you. I don't know the quantity, but you could see them stopping people with parcels and asking them what tea they had.



Gordon in the wheelbarrow race. 17/11/48 a.m.



Deck sports. 17/11/48 a.m.

Out of Colombo we could see the Island of Ceylon into the late afternoon, and that is the last land one sees until we reach Australia. Some ships evidently pass quite close to the Cocos Island, but we miss it by 50 miles.

Monday 15th , Tuesday 16th.

Monday and Tuesday were the usual days at sea, looking for sharks that are not there, spotting a flying fish or two, or watching the dolphins.



Millie with Rosemary in the girl's fancy-dress. 17/11/48 a.m.

Wednesday 17th November.

Wednesday was dedicated to the children. They started the day at 9.30 am. with sports - girls one side of the ship and boys the other - combining for the wheelbarrow race and finals. They split the ages in three groups, 5 to 7, 8 to 11, 12 to 14. Gordon got a few seconds in the heats, but didn't get as far as the final, but he did succeed in the wheelbarrow race winning both the heat and the final by a good margin.

The finals were run at 2.00 pm, and a fancy dress parade at 3.45. They had expected about 18 entrants but got over 300 and although they promised prizes it was impossible to judge, so they just gave each a bar of chocolate. This was followed by a party in the aft dining Saloon, where they had ice cream, trifle, mineral drinks, cakes, &c, so they finished a very tiring day for both children and parents very happy.



Gordon as Gandhi.

Week Five



Thursday 18th

Thursday has been dedicated as a day of rest to prepare for the farewell party on Friday.

Friday 19th November

The forenoon and afternoon of Friday was the same old routine but things began to liven up a bit towards dinner time. One could see the odd passenger trying out their fancy dress and so forth. After dinner the fun started with the Fancy Dress Parade. Of course they were not afraid of walking them too far like the children, so they paraded around three or four times before going into the hall for judging. There was one chap as a baby, crawling along on his hands and knees so I am sure his knees were sore.

The turn-out generally was excellent - there were some very exquisite dresses. Most of the men were humorous, such as Hawaiian Dancers, &c. After the parade we had a dance, and a few of the musical passengers made up a dance band which was a lot better than the usual records, especially as they played a lot of old fashioned tunes, such as the Valetta, Hands-Knees-and-Bumps-a-Daisy , &c. which livened things up a bit. This continued until 12 midnight and we all lost a lot of perspiration. We were simply soaked! It was a pity for those in heavy fancy dress, and you could see them disappearing one by one to change into something lighter.

Saturday 20th

Saturday, the passengers made up a concert party and ran two shows, one in the afternoon, and one at night. They had 20 items and were really good. It is marvellous to think how they got the talent together as they had only a few days' practice. The show lasted over two hours and there wasn't a dull moment the whole time. Actually the evening one lasted slightly longer as they got the audience (no children) to join in with a bit of community singing. We all turned in early as the

heavy winds make you sleepy, and we went to the show in the afternoon.

Sunday 21st

Sunday was spent as usual but everyone looking forward to landing at Fremantle and that general feeling of being pleased that the journey is nearing it's end.

Monday 22nd November

Monday we were all up early, looking for any sign of land, which was not sighted until about 9.30 am. I brought the wireless up late Sunday night and got a few stations, so we brought it up and listened to the programs. We heard the Asturias was docking at Fremantle at 12 noon carrying 1500 passengers. It did seem funny when we were on her. We gathered quite a crowd, all pleased at hearing the radio again.

We had lunch early at 11.45 to give time for our Medical and passport Examination. This over, we returned to deck to hear more radio and await the ship getting into dock about 2.00 pm. and after the Bankers came aboard to change our Sterling cash into Australian currency, we were free to go ashore.

The first impression was that of a Wild West town with the funny little railway engines with a very hoarse whistle. The veranda covering the sidewalk, the wooden buildings, mostly single story, &c. We boarded a bus for Perth, 12 miles (return fare 1/6) as we were told it was the better shopping centre and nicer town, and so it was. The buildings, the more modern streets, wide and straight, and lovely up-to-date stores. Our first run was into a cafe to get a cup of tea with fresh milk. It was lovely and quite a change from the powdered milk we get aboard. The children had an iced drink (called a spider in Australia) and some cream cakes. They both immediately said that they liked Australia. We then had a walk around the shops and R. got very tired as the sun was hot, so we returned to Fremantle in time to have dinner on board ship.

R. went to sleep on the bus, but awakened just before we came aboard, so we got her and G. to bed immediately after dinner. We returned to Fremantle again for a few hours, had a spider and a fruit ice each and returned to sit on deck listen to the radio, watch the town and see the ship reloading. One gets very tired wandering around and we didn't want to go to a show with the children in bed.

Tuesday 23rd Novemeber

We left Port again at 6.00 am. Tuesday 23rd November, and started the last hop to our destination. At Fremantle we took aboard

representatives of the Victorian Migration Authority, who assembled us in the Cinema Hail to give us our official reception to Australia.

**** End of the first volume of journal notes. *****

The Wilkinson family continued to Melbourne, arriving there on the morning of 28th November. After clearing customs and being welcomed by the Morrors were taken by car to Geelong where they arrived that same day, very late, very tired, yet elated to be commencing a new life and thankful they arrived in Australia safely.

Postnote

These notes were originally transcribed from the travel diary of Thomas Wilkinson and presented to him as a bound copy, shortly before his death in May 1989. There was minimal editing – even the grammar and spelling of the original have been retained (except for people and place names). This update added all known photos taken on the journey.

Tom's commentary was originally written in his travel diary in reverse direction, that is, from the back to the front, and the daily diary notes were entered in the front. Clearly Tom's commentary was compiled from his daily notes with little delay (there being much time on board for the activity). Aside from merging commentary and notes, which was done to preserve the chronology, the notes are essentially as Tom prepared them. The indented material following the day's commentary is his day notes, and the bulleted items are as he listed them.

The photos, inserted as near as possible to their actual location in the chronology, were scanned at 300 dpi. If the date of the photo is known it is given. The text is set in 12 pt Verdana font.

The name Asturias is derived from an Iberian people that lived on the peninsula before the Roman conquest (2d cent. B.C.). {Columbia Encyclopaedia, Sixth Edition. 2001}

S.S. Asturias

Notes provided by Stan Evans, 15 December, 2003.

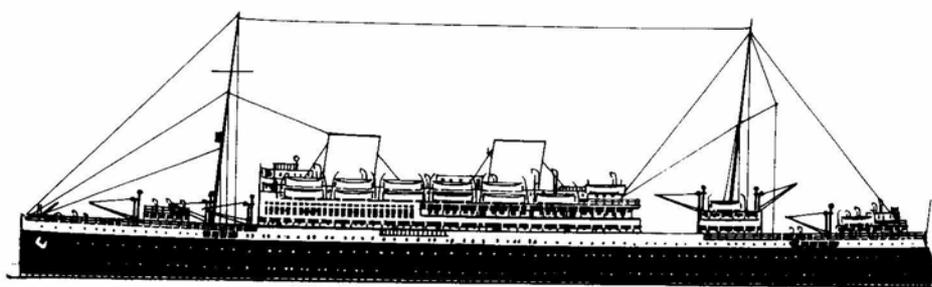
GENERAL

Traded to Australia with emigrants after WW2

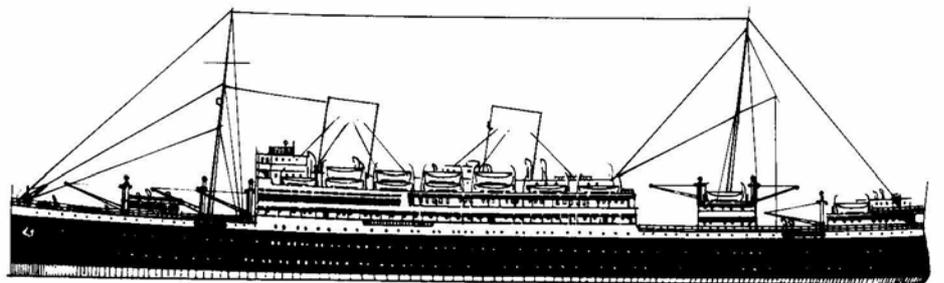
Built 1925; 22,071 gross tons.

For photograph and short history see "Honour for the Asturias" by Frank C. Bowen in Sea Breezes, October 1953, pp284-286

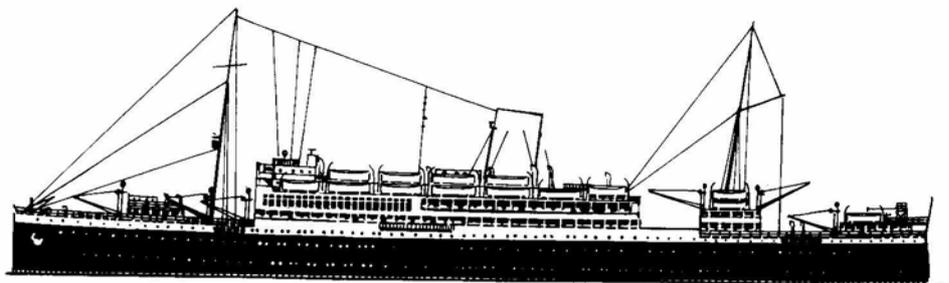
For short history see article "Commentary - Faded Beauties" by Stephen Tetlow in Sea Breezes, November 1957, pp3330-3331



ASTURIAS (II) and ALCANTARA



ASTURIAS (II) and ALCANTARA



ASTURIAS (II) and ALCANTARA

Fleet No. 200 ASTURIAS (II)

Built: 1925 Harland & Wolff, Belfast; Tonnage: 22,048 gross, 13,226 net, 13,000 deadweight.

Dimensions: 655 ft 9 in (199.87 m) oa, 630 ft 6in (192.1 m) x 78 ft 6in (23.93 m) x 40 ft 6in (12.34m).

Engines: Twin screw, oil; 4 stroke dbl acting with air blast injection; 8 cyls; 15,000 BHP; 10,000 1HP; 17 kts at 115 rpm and 70 tons of oil fuel per day; engines built by builder.

Hull: Steel, 4 decks; 6 hatches served by 1½ ton lift hydraulic cranes except No 2 hatch which had 2 x 5 ton cranes. Two CO₂ refrigeration plants electric drive.

Passengers: 432 1st class, 223 2nd, 453 3rd; Crew: 450.

1925 July 7: Launched by the Duchess of Abercorn. The first cruiser stern passenger ship for Royal Mail. The fore funnel was a dummy. Was at that time the largest motor ship in the world. Registered as owned by RMSP Meat Transports Ltd.

1926 Feb 26: Maiden voyage Southampton - River Plate. Captained by Commodore E. W. E. Morrison. Speed poor and bad vibration.

1927 Jan and Apr: Made voyages Southampton -New York.

1934 Re-engined, the work took five months with 2 Parsons single reduction geared turbines 20,000 SHP. The bow was re-shaped and lengthened by 10 ft (3.05 m). New propellers fitted 17 ft 6 in (5.33 m) diameter; 19 kts; Funnels heightened by 15 ft (4.57 m); 3 Johnson Boilers of 7 oil furnaces each. Pass: 331 1st, 220 2nd, 768 3rd; Crew: 425.

1935 Attended Silver Jubilee Naval Review at Spithead.

1939 Converted into an Armed Merchant Cruiser on the South Atlantic Patrol. Fore funnel and mainmast removed to improve the arc of fire of her anti-aircraft guns.

1943 July: Torpedoed in the South Atlantic, towed by *Zwarte Zee* 500 miles to Freetown. Lay for 2 years with the engine room flooded. Abandoned by Royal Mail and taken over by the Government.

1945 Towed to Gibraltar by *Zwarte Zee* and *Thames* with an escort of seven corvettes and patched up. Taken to Belfast for full repairs. Became a Government emigrant carrier. One funnel. Pass: 219 1st, 185 2nd, 462 3rd.

1953 Repatriated British troops from Korea.

1954 Further refurbishing. Emerged in regular peace time troopship colours; white hull, board blue band, yellow funnel.

1957 Sold for breaking up. But just prior to commencement the ship was used at Faslane to play the part of *Titanic* in the film "A Night to Remember". The filming was done in winter and at night to create the cold atmosphere. 400 ft (121.92 m) of the white hull was painted black for the task. (Haws, Duncan; Merchant Fleets – Royal Mail and Nelson Line; pp91-2)

Faded Beauties

By Stephen Tetlow

In recent weeks four more veterans have ended their careers after sale to the British *Ken*, *Alaunia* and *Empire Clyde*, Iron and Steel Corporation (Salvage), Ltd., London; they are the *Asturias*, *Empire Ken*, *Alaunia*, and *Empire Clyde*, all four having served the British Government, the *Alaunia* as an Admiralty depot ship, and the other three as transports.

Largest of the four vessels, the *Asturias* of 22,445 gross tons was built at Belfast by Harland and Wolff and was originally a twin screw motorship. At the time of her completion in 1925 she and her sister, the *Alcantara*, were the largest passenger motorships in the world. Eleven watertight compartments divided the hull, and she had a straight stem and a cruiser stern. The propelling machinery consisted of two double-acting, 4-stroke oil engines (by the builders) which developed 20,000 h.p. The ship which was 655ft. long and had a beam of 72ft., was designed to carry a total of about 1,800 passengers and crew.

In 1934 the *Asturias* and her sister were re-engined by the builders, and given steam turbines coupled to Johnson high pressure watertube boilers. The chief reason for the drastic substitution in machinery was the need for extra speed. Space was an important consideration and the only way in which additional power could be got without extending machinery space was by means of the most compact boiler installation it was possible to fit. This provided the first real opportunity to test the Johnson boiler, invented some years before by Mr. John Johnson, the engineering superintendent of the Canadian Pacific Company in London. Full value was thus derived from the invention, which had only hitherto been fitted into comparatively small ships or as a part installation.

In the *Asturias*, steam for over 24,000 i.h.p. was to be supplied by three 7-furnace Johnson boilers with a dry weight of only 67 tons each. Fitting the new machinery necessitated the removal of the passenger accommodation, so that the work involved was a welcome "shot-in-the-arm" to the Belfast shipbuilders. After the conversion of the *Asturias* was completed the *Alcantara* was taken out of service and similarly treated.

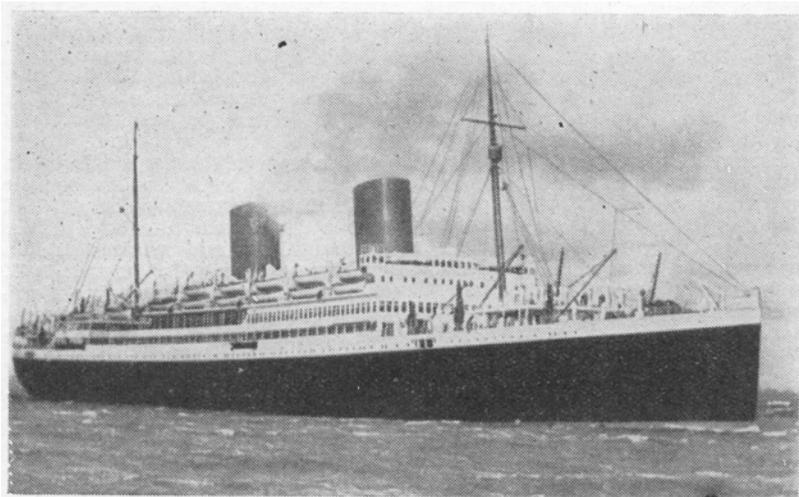
Soon after the completion of her conversion the *Asturias* made a long cruise in place of the Royal Mail's usual cruising liner *Atlantis*, owing, it was reported, to the number of bookings that had been forthcoming. The cruise lasted two months and covered about 22,000 miles beginning and ending at Southampton. It included the, run to the East Indies: out via the Mediterranean and back via the Cape with calls at many places of interest en route. This was not her only cruise for she returned to Southampton from another immediately before the outbreak of the

Second World War. She was then sent to Belfast to be fitted out as an armed merchant cruiser.

In July 1943 the *Asturias* was torpedoed off Freetown while escorting a floating dock at slow speed. Within a matter of minutes her engine-room was flooded to a depth of 30ft. Towed into Freetown by the well-known Dutch ocean-going tug *Zwarte Zee*, she was laid-up at that port for about 18 months afterwards with her midship section tidal. Early in 1945 she was taken to Gibraltar in tow and after temporary repairs steamed to Belfast. After the ship had been declared a constructive total loss she was bought by the Government and after a large-scale refit entered service as a troop transport under the management of her former owners.

Since then she has been in continuous service carrying thousands of troops and at times emigrants to Australia. In 1953 she brought home the first of the British prisoners released from captivity in Korea. The *Asturias* completed her last trooping voyage at Southampton and after removal of sea transport fittings she was sent to Faslane Dock, in the Gareloch, to be scrapped by Shipbreaking Industries Ltd.

(Sea Breezes, November 1957; pp330-331)



A veteran of 28 years, the "Asturias" is approaching the end of her career