AFT-FROM THE HAWSEHOLE

SIXTY-TWO YEARS OF SAILORS' EVOLUTION

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SIXTY-TWO YEARS OF SAILORS' EVOLUTION
By
Lieutenant-Commander
Henry D. Capper, O.B.E., R.N.
(Late 'The Man Behind the Gun')
With a Preface by
Admiral of the Fleet
Earl Jellicoe of Scapa
G.C.B., O.M., G.C.V.O, LL.D., etc.
L O N D O N

Faber & Gwyer

CHAPTER X
UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

And duty's exiles sundered from their shore
By leagues of heaving ocean,
May gain a meed of recompense in store,
From their devotion.'

ANON.

We sailed for Sydney in the P. & O. liner Oceana on 2 February, 1895, the whole of the rigging and upper deck gear being covered with ice, with stalactites hanging from tops and booms. Our party consisted of my wife and I, four children and a nurse. The voyage was as uneventful as are the majority of such passages, and but few incidents are outstanding in my memory.

Brindisi and the Australian ports were the only ones new to me, but from Gibraltar onward all was a new world to my wife and little ones. On passage we stayed long enough at Malta for me to land with my wife and show her some of the sights of that ancient home of the Knights of Jerusalem, the beauties of the great cathedral, etc., though as a fact I fancy the pertinacity of the numerous beggars made also a vivid impression.

At Port Said also we had a run on shore, and in spite of official warnings I was stupid enough to allow us both to be caught out beyond the squalid town when night fell. We hurried back, being (134) tracked by some suspicious characters, but fortunately reached the shelter of the town in safety.

At Colombo, too, we landed, and visited the Bazaar, the curiosity shops, and made a trip across to the Hotel Mount Lavinia on the far ocean beach, calling en route at the famous temple where is the supposed relic of Buddha, as well as a life-size figure under glass of that personage. The variety of vehicles, from the springless ox-cart to the jin-ricksha and carriages and pairs of horses of the wealthy, were a wonderful experience for my wife.

In the Bazaar she kissed a most attractive baby in its mother's arms, much to the terror of the mother; and what mysteries the child had subsequently to undergo to recover caste, I know not.

We had quite a number of young naval Lieutenants and Sub-Lieutenants on board, and the greater part of the fun was made by these. Among them was one rather portly youngster, and it was intensely amusing to see him attired as a child of two or three years, socks, petticoat, pink ties at the short sleeves, and a rubber soother - which last my family contributed-the winner of the prize at the inevitable fancy dress ball.

Sydney was reached in due course, and as that, ' the finest harbour in the world ', is so universally admired, there is no need to describe its beauties here. (135)

My post was resident officer on Spectacle Island, at the mouth of the Parramatta River, which was both a Magazine and an Ordnance Depot. There were four other families of the storekeeping staff, and a guard of twelve marines under a Lance-Sergeant, also resident. All of these had their boats for communication with the mainland, and for my convenience a service boat and an able seaman was also borne.

We quickly arranged to purchase a fine little sailing whaler, and in this my wife and I had joyous times throughout the five years of our residence in Sydney.

Our home was a bungalow built by convicts in the days when New South Wales was a penal colony: it was of stone, both exterior and interior walls being about two feet in thickness, thus ensuring a temperate atmosphere in even the hottest time of the year.

A wide veranda was built on three sides, the glorious views over the water to the surrounding land, over a mile distant, and up the Parramatta River, being quite unobstructed and delightful. A small garden on these three sides was bounded by palings and the huge hedges of geraniums which grow in this country; and outside these there stretched a flat, uncovered at low tide, on which a vast bed of oysters flourished, fed by the scour of (136) the river. It is seldom one can be stationed officially in such a fairyland and with such material luxuries as oyster beds in the front garden, yet this was our pleasant lot for five happy years. We initiated a plan for dispatching a bag of these bivalves to each officers' mess upon the arrival of the warships from sea, and they were an appreciated luxury.

About 1,000 yards distant is Cockatoo Island (Biloela of the aborigines), a high rock upon which was the original jail for unruly convicts (in our time used as a place of detention for short-sentence offenders). Around the central rock was a plateau, not much above high-water mark, with two excellent dry docks. The smaller of these, we were told, had been cut out of the solid rock by gangs of
convicts in chains, by chisel and hammer, in days before the introduction of blasting. Here was established the colonial dockyard.

Equidistant from these two was a tiny islet below the rocks of the mainland, Balmain, called Cat Island; we were told by some of the oldest residents that on many occasions they had in the old days come down at 8 a.m. to see some convicts receive floggings, seized up to frames on the islet.

Calling at Cockatoo was a service of steamers from Parramatta town to the main wharf at Sydney, and a journey in these was a constant delight, for the many bays and coves which bisect and inter- (137) sect the harbour are each more beautiful than the last.

My wife had a somewhat trying experience one night when she had been

visiting friends in the town, and returned by the last steamer. It was the custom of the Captain of the steamer, on disembarking passengers at Cockatoo for Spectacle Island, to give two blasts on the steam whistle as a signal for a boat. On this night he left the wharf and failed to give the signal. The sentry and I both noted there was none, so I came to the conclusion she had remained with our friends for the night, and returned to my reading, then finally went calmly to bed.

Meantime, my wife was ploughing her way around the eerie and wholly unlighted island in the hope of finding a house with a friendly light beaming from its windows, or some other sign of waking humanity, but in vain, nor could she make herself heard by calling to Spectacle Island because of the high wind. At last, after some two hours of unsuccessful peregrinations on the plateau, and almost deciding to try to sleep in the open waiting-shed, in spite of her fears she pluckily decided to climb up the rocky path toward the jail, and after some time found herself in familiar surroundings by the house of the dockmaster, whom we knew. On her knock at the door, that kindly functionary at length appeared (138) at his window in night attire, but quickly dressed, manned his boat, and sculled the weary partner of my joys to Spectacle, where she arrived somewhere about 3 a.m., to find her husband peacefully sleeping.

On the fourth side of our bungalow was a fine kitchen garden and large run for fowls and goats, so that many wants were provided for.

Living was phenomenally cheap. One could purchase a live sheep for six shillings (the pelt, horns and hoofs to be returned), or mutton, even the best parts, was but 1 1/2d. per pound, or 9d. for the whole hind quarter of lamb. Butter 5d. per pound, and so forth; but manufactured articles, clothing, etc., were correspondingly highly priced.

At various periods on the island the men had for pets a monkey, a dingo, and a wallaby. I am not sure which was the greatest nuisance: the monkey when loose would in an hour do more mischief than could be remedied in a week. The dingo one evening inside of five minutes killed forty hens, while the fright of finding a huge wallaby rushing through the house and settling on one's bed was not a happy experience, yet this happened several times. All the same, these animals when properly secured were the cause of much fun and amusement.

Almost from the first day of taking over charge, I was able to make many alterations from an old and (139)

traditional procedure which it had occurred to no one before to vary. For example, when a ship, or ships, returned to Sydney it had been customary to send in a demand for the munitions required for replacement. Then the Ordnance officer in charge requisitioned the vessels for an appropriate number of men to fill cartridges and shells with powder, etc., and the ships supplied these and waited until the quantity of stores required was ready. If more than one ship came in at one time there, was, of course, much congestion, but the principle was to distribute the labour, and therefore cost, of the establishment fairly over the ships in the Squadron.

What amazed me was the fact that all the reserves of ammunition for the fleet in magazines and storehouses lay in their constituent items; powder in barrels, empty shells, cartridge bags, and fuses in storehouses. Had war with a Great Power taken place the ammunition to replace that in the ships which last might easily have been fired away in one general engagement - would have occupied, by night and day labour, not less than three months' effort; and meantime disaster might have ensued. In order to terminate this critical situation, which seemed not to have been noticed by anyone, from the Commander-in-Chief down, I proposed to the senior naval officer the employment of a couple of officers and forty men to live on the island and

work con- (140) tinuously until every shell and cartridge was ready for immediate issue to the fleet. Captain W. McC. F. Castle at once saw the vital necessity of this operation, and made arrangements for the party asked for; and after six months' strenuous application to the task there was not an ounce of loose powder remaining in the magazines: while all subsequent receipts from England were filled as soon after arrival as possible.

Thereafter demands for ammunition were complied with within an hour, and the gratification of the Commander-in- Chief, the Captains and gunnery officers of the ships was full repayment for the extra efforts which had resulted in this preparedness.

It had been the custom for the residents on Spectacle Island to treat Sunday as an idle day, the only person properly dressed being the sentry on duty, while card-playing and similar recreations filled their time. My wife and I conferred on the matter and decided that without issuing any orders it would be well for me to give a strong lead to bring affairs into line with what was right, as well as usual, in the Service. To this end a large receiving store was cleared upon Saturday afternoons, arranged with seats and books, and our family harmonium taken there. Getting into touch with (Footnote1 Also we learned that at the nearest township (Balmain) the Marines from Spectacle Island had become a by-word.) (141) all the clergy and ministers of the surrounding townships it was arranged for a roster of these to come over in turn and conduct a service. Notice having been given of this the bell was rung at the proper time, and every soul on the island attended. This custom was observed throughout the five years of our stay, and at the request of the men themselves was extended to the evenings also, when they brought their friends with them, and we sometimes had a congregation of two hundred.

Arising also from this, and because the men expressed a wish to that effect, fortnightly entertainments, amateur theatricals and so forth were arranged in the same building. A hinged stage was built and scenes and drop provided, which made social matters most interesting for all of us, while the numbers of friends attending from the shore was evidence of the quality of these entertainments. The most useful end they served, however, was the good feeling engendered in our small community.

To keep to social matters. As the harbour is infested with sharks, a bathing-place was arranged by securing together several tarpaulins and stretching them from the outer corner of the main wharf to the shore, thus enclosing a triangular space we hoped was secure from these intruders. This had been generally availed of for some weeks, when one day, at a time when four or five of the men were (142) bathing, a shark rose and turned on its back to attack the Sergeant of Marines.

It being thus clear that the improvised arrangement was unsafe, I made an application to the Engineer-in- Chief of the New South Wales Government - to whom the island belongs-for the erection of a proper swimming-bath. As also there was on both sides of the island a considerable stretch of shallow water, I included a requisition for the reclamation of this, and the addition of several new buildings for storage of ammunition and stores.

The Engineer-in-Chief came to inspect the site, and I ventured to suggest to him that if a mason could be assigned to my, staff, it would be possible to arrange for the loan of lighters and men, the expense charged to the Imperial Government, when, utilizing the stone and soil then being raised at the Balmain Coal Mine only about a mile away, and which was being dumped below the rocks, the extension could be carried out.

All this was agreed to, and finally executed, and about an acre and a half of additional land recovered, faced with walls. Then there was a bathing-place also built, and to the dressing-huts put up close to it the

residents on the island (by means of funds obtained by the presentation of plays in several of the surrounding townships) raised an excellent little recreation-room, nicely furnished with papers, books, (143) piano, etc., which was a great boon both for themselves as well as the men of the fleet, who when working at the stores, carrying out torpedo practice, etc., used the island.

Several new buildings were also put up, and the total amount expended by the Colonial Government during my tenure of the post was close upon £20,000. With regard to these operations the naval authorities had nothing to do; and upon each succeeding visit of the Admiral, he used jocosely to remark, ' Well, Capper, how much new work have you got to show me?

One of the privileges offered by the New South Wales Government was the occasional grant of free passes over the railway for naval officers, and I secured one each for my wife and myself for a trip to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains (so called on account of the blue mist generally enveloping them) it was a very enjoyable change indeed.

We passed through Wagga-Wagga, and saw the identical butcher's shop in which the famous claimant to the Tichborne estate, Arthur Orton, was for long employed. While at Katoomba, and also at Rylstone, we had trips to points of interest, and from the last named my wife took a buggy ride of thirty miles with a clergyman who was visiting some squatters in a distant hamlet, thus experiencing the vicissitudes of life under which these pioneers of (144) Empire live, and also the regular-if exciting methods of ministering in spiritual things which backwoods clergymen have to carry out.

The wild views and splendid vacant spaces, such as is Govet's Leap near Katoomba, and various other preserved points of special beauty, are made accessible for tourists by steps and ladders arranged under Government supervision; while at camping spots facilities for ' boiling the billy ' are invariably provided: an amenity which British trippers at home would probably appreciate.

We went on another occasion to the Jenolan Caves, which are a magnificent freak of nature, and here the Government also takes control of transport, inspection of the caves, provision of guides, overalls, lights, and, as at least one night must be spent at the caves, of accommodation for sleeping.

Traversing these marvellous groves, avenues, halls, and cathedrals of stalactites and stalagmites, and more particularly when illuminated by coloured lights, one obtains a new conception of the wonders of the world we live in. Here at the caves we experienced the first snowstorm we had seen in Australia: many of our fellow-travellers seeing snow for the first time in their lives.

Young as the country is, there is still much of romance in the story of New South Wales, and sad as was its beginning as a penal colony, there were (145) some of the earliest settlers who made excellent careers from these most unpromising surroundings. For example, we learned that the origin of Garden Island, now the Imperial naval depot, situated about a mile inside the entrance to Port Jackson, and opposite its busiest entrepot, was as follows:
When the first settlers arrived and the Governor, Captain Phillips, had decided to locate the infant colony where Sydney now stands, they were met by potential starvation as the food-supply ship had been wrecked, and the stores were not sufficient to support them until the arrival of a second ship. One of the life convicts, however, was a man who understood agriculture, and he volunteered, if given the necessary assistance and the cereals and vegetables available, to raise a crop in time to avoid disaster.

He was given all he asked and chose the island as a garden. All his efforts

were successful, and within a couple of years he had fields of produce flourishing on the mainland, while he was appointed the principal farmer of the colony. When Governor Phillips was about to be relieved he sent for this man and, after expressing his gratitude, asked what he could do for him, but as his sentence was a life one there could be no manumission.

The farmer was a far-seeing man, and small as was the beginning then made he predicted the rise (146) of a great city where they stood, while on the opposite shore of the harbour would be the villadom of the well-to-do. So he asked permission to peg out a claim of two miles of the water front on the opposite bank and double that distance inland. This was given him, and is now covered with suburban houses, remains in his own family, and is probably worth a million pounds.

Fortunes were easily made and lost in earlier days of the colony, not least in what is designated as ' jumping claims '. A predecessor of mine in the post I held was in the habit of taking an evening walk in a township about a mile from the island. Here he saw erected on vacant lots of land official notices from the local municipality warning the owner that unless rates in arrears were paid by a stated date the land would be ' resumed ' (seized).

One such lot was in the main road, and opposite to it lived in a ' humpy '-that is, the original log hut of the settlement-an old squatter, with whom my friend had a nodding acquaintance, and an occasional pound of naval tobacco went into the squatter's pouch.

Interrogated one day as to when he had last seen the owner of the land, he replied: 'I ain't seen the feller as owns that lot on 'es land fer many a day.' (147)

' Perhaps he has gone to the diggings? ' suggested my friend.
Me'be, me'be.'

I've a good mind to pay the arrears and jump the claim myself,' said the other. 'I could put up a dozen good houses on that site.'

' Fine spot fer building!' said the squatter.

Briefly, my predecessor, having paid the arrears of rates due, set his two sons, who were builders, erecting a row of houses in pairs, letting each pair as they were completed. On the larger lot left, after twelve houses had been built, was a more palatial residence intended for himself. When the glazier had put in the windows of this house and it was nearing completion my friend received a letter from a solicitor representing the owner of the plot requesting an account of all rent received from his client's houses, and warning him not to trespass on his land in the future.

Correspondence and interviews followed, but it was some time before he could discover who was the person who owned the land. When he did he was exasperated to learn that his acquaintance the squatter was the artful owner for whom he had constructed thirteen houses for nothing, and incidentally squandered all his life savings in the transaction.

Another story was of a man who left Sydney (148) when there was a gold rush in South Australia. landed in Adelaide, lie found only one long street of wooden shanties, and spending the last night in a so-called hotel, found himself the only man of the party with a sovereign left in his purse, which incidentally was the price of a bottle of brandy.

Urged to stand treat with his last coin lie refused again and again. At last one man said, ' If you'll shout I'll transfer my lot here in Adelaide in exchange' forcing the certificate into his hand. So when the document was duly signed and witnessed he put it in his pocket and paid for the brandy.

The party left next morning, and it was two and a half years before the Sydney man returned: he then found that like Aladdin's palace the shanties had disappeared and where they stood is now the stately King William Street, the pride of the city. On the site of the hotel was a large building bearing the same name. Here he inquired for the trunk he had left in custody, and producing the receipt it was delivered to him. Quite penniless, he took out the best suit it contained with the purpose of raising enough money on it to procure a meal, and in the pocket discovered the certificate for the land, which he had entirely forgotten. With this he visited a solicitor and asked, ' Is it of any value? ' The lawyer traced the lot upon the city plan, and then informed his client that it represented a plot of (149) ground upon which the municipal authorities had erected a town hall, the Government the General Post Office, with other buildings, while the main part was laid out as a public park. He was assured that substantial compensation was recoverable, and in the end proceedings were withdrawn upon payment of a sum approximating to £100,000.

A personal experience was my meeting an amiable old gentleman who was decidedly prosperous, seeing he was in the habit of driving about the city in a coach driven by a coachman in livery, and with a footman similarly arrayed. He lived in a house situated in the best part of Sydney, and when he entertained me it was in the most unexceptionable way.

One of his peculiarities was that he invariably excused himself, no matter what was in progress, at 9 p.m.

Once I was in his company when we were seen by my friend the business manager of Messrs. Williamson & Musgrove, owners of the theatres in the principal Australian cities. Said my friend when next I met him: 'Do you know who that gentleman is I saw you with the other day? ' I mentioned his name and said he was an acquaintance.

Well, friend,' was the response, ' you ought to know that he is one of the last " lifers " we have left in the colony.' So I presume his nine o'clock (150) engagement was connected with his periodical report to the police.

Yet, in spite of the crime which resulted in his life sentence, he had managed to become one of the wealthiest men in the country. (151)

CHAPTER XI
THE QUARTER-DECK

'It is not art but heart that wins the wide world over.'
ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

My wife and I made a point of cultivating the social side for all the warrant officers on the station, and throughout our service there we held weekly reunions where, with civilian friends, the ladies predominating, these officers had a taste of home life. In these affairs we also had numbers of other officers joining us, and have since heard from time to time how much these social events were appreciated.

As we had associations with the proprietors and managers of the principal theatres, we were also often able to secure the loan of the vice-regal box and combine a dozen officers and their partners in this enjoyable method of spending an evening.

Early in my tenure of this important appointment, notification was received from home that cordite charges for all the ships' guns on the station were being dispatched per a sailing vessel on passage via Cape of Good Hope; and in the same vessel was a complete re-armament of small arms, .303-in. rifles, spare parts and ammunition to be issued in exchange for the .45-in.

Martini-Henry rifles then in use in the fleet. (152)

This was a large order, as my office staff consisted, besides myself, of one clerk and a pensioned N.C.O., R.M. The Admiral caused an additional marine writer to be lent, while a second most capable civilian clerk was entered from the city.

After looking into the matter of accommodation for these new supplies, I rang the Admiral up on the telephone and made suggestions to the effect that he should empower me to dispose of as many black powder charges, Martini-Henry rifles, and ammunition as possible to the then seven colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, and the Administrators of the South Sea Islands, so that on arrival of the ship with the new armament stores our magazines would be nearly empty for their reception. Also that as large a quantity as possible of the ammunition on board the ships should be disposed of by practice firing during the three or four months at our disposal.

The Commander-in-Chief thought the scheme a good one, and agreed.

Among the many friends we had made in the colony was William Hawtrey (elder brother of Charles of 'The Private Secretary ' fame). On the evening of the 2nd January, 1896, and while a merry party of ships' officers and our civilian friends were enjoying themselves in the new recreation-room, I was summoned to the telephone, and found Hawtrey (153) at the other end. Said he, ' Capper, have you heard of the German Emperor's telegram to the Boers? We had not heard of it, so he gave the details. We joined in a laugh at the Kaiser's cheek and I went back to our guests.

When, however, a couple of hours later, there was time to think out the implications, it occurred to me that there was considerable danger of an Anglo-German war, and I had deliberately depleted the ammunition reserves of the fleet, with supplies only obtainable at the other side of the world. At the moment no vessel had her full allowance of cartridges and shell and the depot was practically empty, while no notification of our supply ship having passed the Cape of Good Hope had been received.

We had no steamboat, nor was the senior naval officer at Garden Island get-at-able, and I paced the island that night in agony of mind because of what then appeared stupid advice to the Admiral. Early in the morning a steamboat was chartered, and the Captain in charge located on the North Shore, some miles inland at a friend's bungalow. Hearing my story, he consoled me with the view that in case of belligerency between Britain and Germany he would suggest to the Admiral to try me by court-martial as the Ordnance Officer who had caused the loss of the fleet - there were then four German warships in Eastern waters. (154)

When I put my plan before him he at once agreed. It was then the day on which the P. & O. or Orient liner sailed from London. As in Australia we were nine hours ahead of London time, I suggested a wire to Whitehall requesting that in that vessel should be at once embarked supplies of black-powder cartridges and .45-in. ammunition for replacements of our stocks.

This was done, and the next day came a cable to say supplies were en route as requested, the vessel having been delayed some hours for the purpose. There were several uneasy weeks before these arrived, and as a fact the supply ship with the new stores came in less than a fortnight after the steamer had discharged her supplementary cargo. But the earliest of my grey hairs appeared during this period!

(Later, in 1904, at Sheerness, where Admiral Pearson was the Commander-in-Chief at the Nore, and I again serving under him as Lieutenant of the Yard, we had many a laugh over this time of tension, and my chief admitted that

he, too, shared with me considerable anxiety as to our ammunition-less condition.)

When we had collected all the powder charges from the fleet a ship was chartered to convey these, together with the stock sent out, as above related through the Suez Canal to us, to England. We had (155) in addition some thousands of stands of .45-inch Martini-Henry rifles, bayonets, and spare parts. As the value of these either broken up on the spot or sent back to England would be less than the freightage charge, it was decided to take the whole lot to sea and throw them overboard. Many were quite new, but it was impossible to sell them to a potential enemy and the various Colonial Governments wanted the new rifle: so this (apparently costly) method was the cheapest in the end and was carried out.

One day we gave a garden party on the island to quite a large number of our friends, an event in which we included those also of the four families of the staff resident on the island; a band and dancing on the green being one among many amenities.

The landing-place was a sloping glacis alongside which the boats came. One of our guests, a well known planter, in stepping from the boat to the shore, unfortunately dropped his valuable gold watch, which he had held loose in his hand. As soon as this accident was made known I set one of the seamen to dive for the lost piece of jewellery, and after much effort, and quite half an hour subsequent to the loss, he recovered it. We then, to our great surprise and amusement, found it ticking cheerfully as though nothing had happened. It was then immersed in a basin of kerosene oil for a (156) further hour, taken out and drained, when it was taken away by its owner apparently nothing the worse for its bath.

We very naturally suggested to the planter that it should be designated a ' Waterbury '.

It was fortunate this accident had not taken place at the moment one of my mischievous children was experimenting with the ornamental piles of round shot placed around the landing-place.

These had been constantly disappearing, and no reason could be discovered for their diminution. When, however, the diver was searching for the lost watch he retrieved all the lost cannon balls, and then we learned that it was an amusement to detach these one by one and see them roll down the slope to splash into the sea.

At Sydney, as at every other place I served prior to the war, there was the inevitable German espionage under way, and that subject of the Kaiser, who thought he had wormed out all the secrets of our little establishment by social intercourse with myself and family, must have felt like kicking himself when fourteen years later he discovered in the war what a lot of useless information he had transmitted to his bureau and how completely he had been fooled.

During the third year of our stay in Sydney an officer, retired from the Royal Navy and employed (157) as Commandant of the Naval Forces of the (then) Colony of Queensland, Commander Walton Drake, R.N., was attached to my office for a month's course of instruction in Ordnance Stores.

We formed a friendship which resulted later in his suggesting that I should apply for appointment in his stead as he was securing another post under the same government. He also asked me to recruit for him a few suitable persons for posts as Gunners and Chief Gunners in his force.

After taking the Admiral's opinion, which was favourable to my candidature, I duly applied, and my claims were considered, the Commander-in Chief

recommending me. I understand the matter was referred to a Committee of five to select one from two applicants, the second being another retired naval officer then commanding a small cruiser of another colony. That officer took the trouble to pay a visit to Brisbane (which I did not), and bringing his personal influence to bear was appointed to the vacancy by vote of three of the five Committee men. He died recently with the rank of Admiral.

I did, however, supply some volunteers for the junior vacancies, one of whom - then a chief petty officer - subsequently rose to be a Commander in the Commonwealth Navy, and served afloat in that rank in the war. (158)

The five years spent at Sydney were full of interest. The post was a responsible one, but all the more appreciated because of the relatively important status given me by both the Admirals who in turn commanded the station. Both of them got into touch with me on my return home, and it is a pleasant recollection that each of these distinguished officers gave me his real friendship, and not the usual recognition between an Admiral and a Gunner.

I was sent to Sydney, not as a Gunner in charge of Stores, but specifically as Ordnance Officer, the difference being considerable both as to privileges on passage and status under the Ordnance Regulations which, at that time, governed the Naval Ordnance Depots. This was important, as on the station was one of the officers trained as Firemaster, whose duty it was to test all ammunition and examine all guns afloat and ashore. This officer - two such served in succession-had an office on the island and was more frequently there than on board the ships, but was not in executive charge of the island and its residents. The position was understood by each of these officers, and we never at any time had even the smallest friction. On the other hand, the various Captains in charge (there were four in succession) could not understand why the usual service rule, that the senior executive must be in (159) command, should not apply where there was a Lieutenant and a Gunner, and some friction with these, who would address my correspondence through the Lieutenant Gun Examiner, resulted, in which happily I was never personally involved, and at the end we parted in the happiest spirit.

My relief arrived in the early months of 1900, and in view of an expected interesting family event arrangements were made for our passage to England by a Blue Funnel vessel, s.s. Yarra-wonga (sister ship to the ill-fated Waratah), round the Cape, so as to avoid an accouchement in the Red Sea....(160)