

## 2.4 THE VOYAGE AND CONDITIONS ON ARRIVAL<sup>1</sup>

The *Navarino* was a three masted barque, of 463 tons, that had been built in 1808 and rebuilt in 1835 so it was a relatively new ship. It sailed from Blackwall on 24 August via Gravesend, London on 26 August 1837 and it arrived in South Australia in December, initially at Nepean Bay, Kangaroo Island, on 30 November 1837 to drop off a few passengers and then finally to Adelaide on 6 December 1837. The ship was under the command of Captain Christopher Abel Warming and the voyage took 102 days indicating that it did not call into another port along the way. The ship carried 217 passengers of which 151 were adults and 66 were children.

The *Navarino* would have travelled the usual route for migrant ships to South Australia. This took the ship heading across the Atlantic Ocean from the “bulge” of North Africa to the region off Rio de Janeiro before making for a point well south of the Cape of Good Hope where the ship was turned towards Australia. All captains sought the *Roaring Forties* of latitude that could be found in that vicinity. These constantly blowing winds materially shortened the trip but produced uncomfortable conditions aboard. However, a shortening of the trip was welcomed by even the migrants.<sup>2</sup>

By the time the ship had reached these latitudes about three quarters of the voyage had elapsed and the migrants had become accustomed to ship life and could withstand the rigours of the last part of the journey. However, it was not pleasant and calm seas were almost unknown and the ship was perpetually in a heavy swell. At this stage of the voyage male migrants were encouraged to assist in the running of the ship. However, for women and children this part was worse because they might have been battered down below deck for anything up to two weeks with no chance of stepping out. As well, hatchways needed to be closed to prevent water entering and this meant little opportunity for fresh air. The atmosphere was not good.<sup>3</sup>

Adelaide was in its second year of settlement and in fact the Province of South Australia had been proclaimed as recently as 28 December 1836, less than twelve months earlier. The population was still very small and probably only about 3,000 when Samuel and his family arrived. There had been little time to give to development of the port with other activities such as roads and buildings getting priority.

There were complications with the early settlement especially in regard to the supply of fresh provisions. Eight hundred sheep were brought from Van Diemen’s Land and 5000 Pounds was voted for the purchase of supplies from Sydney. Vessels were also being chartered to bring in supplies of live stock from the Cape of Good Hope.

On 25 May 1837, the Governor proclaimed the harbour at Port Misery a legal port but for some time afterwards it was not used very much. At this early date, there was no wharf, pier, or jetty at either Holdfast Bay or at the harbour and considerable loss or damage was sustained as a consequence.

There is some conjecture as to whether the *Navarino* arrived at Port Misery or at Holdfast Bay. According to Hodder, up to 1839 nearly all large vessels arriving from England came to anchor at Holdfast Bay and here the immigrants were landed. There were many strange and exciting scenes there. As a matter of course the greater number of people landed had to be either carried ashore or to wade through the water.<sup>4</sup>

At Holdfast Bay heavily laden boats were sometimes in danger of being swamped and if the water was smooth they could not approach near enough to the shore for the goods to be landed dry without great care. As soon as vehicles were obtained the bullocks or horses were driven into the water as near as

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<sup>1</sup> Migrant Ships to Australia 1836-1860 Ronald Parsons Chapter 3

<sup>2</sup> Migrant Ships to Australia 1836-1860 Ronald Parsons Chapter 2

<sup>3</sup> Migrant Ships to Australia 1836-1860 Ronald Parsons Chapter 2

<sup>4</sup> The History of South Australia by Edwin Hodder p71

possible to the boats but even then a submerging of the package or case in course of arrival was not uncommon.<sup>5</sup>

In 1837 the alternative of the port was a very primitive landing place on the Port Creek (later Port Adelaide River), about two kilometres upstream from the present Birkenhead Bridge. Conditions for landing both goods and passengers at this original Port Adelaide were very poor and the site became known as Port Misery.

The first ship bringing migrants was the *John Renwick* which came up the Port creek on 21 February 1837. However it took from that day until 27 February to discharge the passengers and land them at *Creek Settlement*. The nearest a reasonably sized vessel could get to *Creek Settlement* was the stretch of water later named Gawler reach, which is presently spanned by the Birkenhead Bridge. The remaining distance, the Old Port reach, between the anchorage and the settlement had to be traversed by the ships' boats. It was found that the nearest point to dry land along the bank of the creek was on the eastern side of the Old Port reach, at the southern end. Here the swamp and mangroves were only two to three hundred yards wide between the water and some of the sand dunes.

The migrant having picked a way across the swamp had to scramble up over two sand hills to locate the end of the Port road which was in the vicinity of the end of the present Old Port Road just before it sweeps round to run along the water's edge to reach the bridge leading to Bower Road. This was the site of the *Creek Settlement*. At high tide boats were poled as far as possible across the shallows toward the landing and from there it was a case of landing ashore. In these circumstances, a migrant at the end of a long voyage of about 120 days must have wondered about how promising the future would be in this *Land of Promise*.

It soon became apparent that something better was necessary and it was suggested that a canal or cutting should be put through the swamp and mangroves to link the sand dunes with deep water. Work on this canal started about August 1837 and it was finished about February 1838 and an area of four acres at the end of the Old Port Road was declared a public wharf reserve. Unfortunately, **Samuel** and his family did not have the benefit of these improved landing conditions.

There was no accommodation for migrants at *Creek Settlement* but if a migrant did not take possession of his personal bags and baggage when it was first landed it was possible he would never get another chance. Everything discharged from the ship was dumped at the end of the canal, usually upon the embankment. Here things were at the mercy of the elements and could be washed into the swamp as the tide lapped up and over the top of the wall. As few packages were waterproof there was little chance of them landing in dry condition.

In view of these conditions and the need for development, it is more likely that the *Navarino* and other ships continued to land at Holdfast Bay. However, as mentioned earlier this location had its own difficulties. Our research colleagues from South Australia and particularly Bob Schmidt, support this conclusion

Bob advises:

*"Many ships unloaded at Glenelg, and since Samuel was an assisted passenger he would have been required to assist. The full fare paying passengers then proceeded through Black Forest to Adelaide. Many ships then sailed into the Port River and completed unloading at Pt Misery as it was a more protected anchorage. The "lesser" passengers disembarked there and proceeded to Adelaide via Pt Road."*

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<sup>5</sup> The History of South Australia by Edwin Hodder p70

Once the migrant obtained his baggage he began his walk to Adelaide. Few migrants had the funds to pay the teamsters the 3 pounds demanded to carry their goods and baggage from Port Adelaide to the new town. The long walk of about 11 kilometres was unavoidable.

After making the trip from the port to Adelaide it was usual for migrants to camp in Immigration Square while awaiting the clearance process with the South Australian Company. The arrival of large numbers of migrants made it necessary to have a depot to immediately accommodate them.

As described by Catherine Spence in 1890:

*"I lived with my family on West-terrace, close to the place where the Roman Catholic Church now stands. Just fronting our house, on the park lands, which, as you all probably know, surround the fair city of Adelaide to a depth of half-a-mile or more, there lay a square of small wooden houses known as Immigration-square. These houses were erected for the accommodation of newly-arrived immigrants, who, in those days, came in every ship that left Great Britain, their passages being paid for by the price of land in the young colony."*

*South Australia was founded on the Wakefield system, which fixed a comparatively high price for land, and spent the money in importing labour to make that land productive. The immigrants were provided with house-room in Immigration-square, and a fortnight's rations for themselves and their families. During that fortnight they were expected to find employment and lodgings, and they were then turned out to make room for fresh arrivals.*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine Helen Spence, Charity in South Australia, First Australasian Conference on Charity, 1890