

# THE FIRST SHIPS

## EARLY WELLINGTON THE COMING OF THE PIONEERS VOYAGES OF THE ORIENTAL, DUKE OF ROXBURGH, BENGAL MERCHANT

(By H. Fildes)

*Evening Post.*

SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 1920.

(Wellington – Evening Post – April 10, 1920, page 9.)

### III

#### A SQUALLY LANDING

The East India-built ship *Oriental* arrived at Port Nicholson after a passage of 138 days. After leaving Deal on the 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1839, she made the island of Santiago, one of the Cape Verde group, West Africa, and did not touch anywhere else on the voyage. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> January the harbour of Port Hardy was entered, where receiving the same instructions as the *Aurora*, sail was made for Port Nicholson. A strong wind was blowing into the harbour, and the vessel was three days getting out of Port Hardy and narrowly escaped destruction on the rocks known as Nelson's Monument. In the open Strait adverse winds were encountered, and these were responsible for a further delay of three days, and on the 29<sup>th</sup> when just off the entrance of Port Nicholson, the wind failed and so prevailed until 1 p.m. the following day, when a light breeze sprang up from the south and the ship bore onwards. Here the captain was somewhat perplexed at seeing a line of rocks stretching almost across the entrance. The cutter was lowered and the mate went forward to ascertain if there was a navigable passage, and in returning to the ship reported that there was a safe entrance. It was then 7 p.m., and the wind had again failed; thick rainy weather was experienced, while the ebbing tide was carrying the vessel out to sea, so the anchor was dropped. Just at this time she was boarded by the crew of a whale-boat belonging to the Queen Charlotte Sounds. On the following morning Colonel Wakefield went aboard from a ship's boat, bringing with him a pilot, and at 9 a.m. the anchor was lifted, and with the wind blowing strongly out of the harbour, the ship's boats being ahead towing the vessel, she beat in during the forenoon, and at 6.15 p.m. on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1840, dropped anchor off *Somes Island*, the *Cuba* and *Aurora* welcoming her with the thunders of an eleven-gun salute each, and replied to by the *Oriental*. It was then raining heavily, and continued so for the next two days, but this did not prevent a few of the cabin passengers proceeding ashore that evening in the ship's boat. At the same time the tide was ebbing, and when they wished to return they found their boats high and dry on the *Petone* beach, but, with the assistance of some Natives, she was soon launched and the ship regained. On the 1<sup>st</sup> February the *Oriental* was moored, and the longboat got out for disembarkation of the passengers and cargo, the former returning to the ship at the close of the day. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> there were heavy squalls, but the immigrants were again taken ashore, and again re-joined the ship at sunset. Fine weather then set in, and it was decided to place these settlers on the banks of the *River Hutt*, about one mile up, Captain Wilson despatched the long-boat to its mouth, to see if a loaded boat could cross the bar, and, being feasible two days later cargo commenced to be landed at the site chosen, the bulk of the settlers proceeded there on foot over a newly-made and somewhat rough track cut amidst the sand-hummocks and brushwood that were then abundant, carrying in their hands and on their backs a great variety of light-weighted personal possessions and utensils required for immediate use. These hardy people were the first settlers at the *Hutt*, on the 5<sup>th</sup>.February, 1840.

At 8 o'clock on the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> a sudden discharge of muskets was heard coming from the direction east of the mouth of the river, and it was reported that the Natives were fighting. Everybody armed themselves, the decks of the *Oriental* were cleared for refuge and defence, and assistance sent on shore to be at the disposal of Colonel Wakefield. This incident is related fully in *Jerningham Wakefield's* book, "Adventures in New Zealand," and need not be detailed here, beyond stating that

it resulted in the death of the chief Puakawa, who was killed by a raiding party from the Wairarapa. Mr. Elsdon Best has stated this chief's correct name is Te Pu-whakaawe, and the affray took place at the Wai-whetu. On Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> February, the whole of the cabin passengers, left the ship, took up their residence on the banks of the river, and by the 6<sup>th</sup> March the last of the London cargo was landed there. During the voyage of the Oriental, there was one death, that of a cabin passenger, Mr. Richard Hughes.

### **THE DUKE OF ROXBURGH**

The voyage of the Duke of Roxburgh unhappily ended in a distressing incident that cast a gloom over everyone. After a voyage of about 125 days she had entered Port Hardy and leaving for Port Nicholson some heavy weather was experienced. While Captain James Thomson was navigating the ship off Stephen's Island from the poop at about two o'clock in the afternoon, at the time steadying himself by holding on the ship's filter, a heavy sea striking the vessel made her lurch badly; he lost his hold and disappeared overboard, and every effort made to save him failed.

Port Nicholson was reached on the 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1840, the interest of the voyagers being further stimulated with the spectacle of a whale and its calf sporting in the harbour water lying between Somes Island and the eastern shore. On the following Sunday morning those of the immigrants who still remained on board proceeded ashore to attend Divine service. The jetty was then high and dry, while the ship's boat containing them was aground in shoal water far out. They were all dressed in their best clothes and perplexed what to do, when a number of Natives threw off their clothes, rushed into the sea, and convey them ashore dry-clad, much to the confusion of the ladies.

The Duke of Roxburgh's contingent would appear to have been located at Petone, then assuming quite an animated appearance. Along the sea beach were tents, raupo whares, and shanties of all descriptions. Many of the huts erected with hearty co-operation of the Natives were so well built that they lasted two or three years and were in use for that period. A preference was usually shown to have these dwellings on top of the many firm hummocks of sand then about. Outside all the habitations would be scattered the surplus belongings of the inmates and gave quite a busy and important aspect to the scene. The number of residential places was so numerous that owners commenced to distinguish their abodes with descriptive names and numbers, and one heard of Mr. So-and-So, Tent No. 9 the Beach. Mr George Duppa seems to have had a penchant for a striking address, and named his place "Hollingbourne" Tent, and when he later removed to Wellington and resided alone at the far end of Oriental Bay, he either gave or tolerated the name of "Castle Doleful" to his imported frame house. Later arrivals at Petone, like those who had arrived earlier, were at first hard put to find accommodation ashore; many of them piled boxes and barrels for support and over all stretched a sail-cloth as awning, and while the weather was fine this sufficed well enough until something better was provided.

### **THE BENGAL MERCHANT**

Judging by the name, the Bengal Merchant must have been one of those well-found vessels termed an "East India-man." She was commanded by Captain John Hemery, and left Greenock on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1839, having on board, as may well be supposed, quite a number of Scottish people, carrying altogether 161 passengers, amongst whom in the cabin were Mr Alex. Marjoribanks, of Marjoribanks Hall, Lanark, a noted traveller and author, who proposed settling here, but finding he could not get his land without delay, left for other world parts; Mr, Robert Strang, who drilled the passengers in martial exercises; and Mr. Ebenezer Hay, later known as the pioneer of Pigeon Bay, Canterbury. Also travelling in the cabin was the Rev. John McFarlane, of the Kirk of Scotland, a gentleman who on the voyage out would appear to have paid more spiritual attention to the broadcloth of the cabin than to the homespun of the steerage. Another voyager on this vessel was a lad of seven, travelling with his parents, who afterwards became known as the Hon. John Bryce.

After weighing anchor in the Clyde, this Scottish colony received the parting cheers of their countrymen as they sailed past Largs, in Ayrshire, and the vessel then followed a course to the north of Ireland, passing close to the Giant's Causeway, and in two days was out in the Atlantic, clear of land. With the exception of a gale in the Bay of Biscay, a very fine run was experienced. On the 16<sup>th</sup>

November the island of Madeira was decried, and four days later the tropics were entered, where a youth, about ten years of age, son of one of the emigrants, died of a sun-stroke, the solemn service for the Burial of the Dead at Sea being read. Christmas Day, 1839, was additionally observed by a wedding ceremony. A landowner, some fifty years of age and inclined to stoutness, hearing that one of his fair charges, a dairymaid was likely to be become engaged to a young fellow emigrant, and confronted with the prospect of not only losing her services in New Zealand, but also his money invested in her passage, decided to marry her himself, and the lady nothing loathe, consented. It is somewhat difficult now to refer to names with certainty, but the evidence seems to point to the aforesaid “notes traveller and author” and a Miss Ann Forbes.

After being at sea for 106 days, at midnight Captain Hemery ordered all hands to ‘bout ship, as he concluded from observations made the previous day he was nearing the coast of New Zealand. The vessel stood out until daylight, and then resumed her course. At noon on the 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1840, there was a shout of “Land O!” and soon high above the clouds could be seen the snowy tip of Mount Cook, sparkling in the sun. The coast was worked up for 100 miles, when the first land touched at was the island of D’Urville, in Cook’s Strait, where a stay of two hours was made, without finding any trace of the whaler MacLaren, with instructions. A canoe containing four Native men and three women came alongside, bringing a pig, fish, and potatoes and exchanged four baskets of potatoes for a shirt; the pig was bought by the steward with a counterpane, while the steerage passengers amused themselves by dressing the three Native women in gowns and big white saps, called by the Scots “mutches”. The Natives gave information that other ships had gone to Port Nicholson, so sail was set, and on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> the Bengal Merchant was steering for the entrance with a man at the mast-head to see if he could discern any signs of settlement, and soon reported that he saw some vessels at anchor, and a boat coming out. It took till evening to work up the harbour, and at dusk anchor was dropped off Petone. The following day being Sunday the decks were cleared for Divine worship, led by the Rev. John MacFarlane.

### **A WET LANDING**

The voyagers landed at Petone in high spirits, and though the weather that greeted them for several days proved unpleasantly wet, they still worked away with a will, erecting their temporary dwellings some distance up the Hutt River. Of them it has been written that they were seen turned into a flat-bottomed boat every morning every morning for three weeks, nearly up to their knees in water, in order that they might erect for themselves their future habitations in the wilderness of sandhills and scrub, and when the period of three weeks had elapsed, driven out of the ship like oxen upon a Saturday night, in the midst of a storm of wind and rain; many of them having no place to fly to for shelter, until the fury of the storm was past. A point in the foregoing harrowing narrative that needs elucidation is explained by stating that it was a stipulation in the charter of each ship that it was to remain at anchor in the principal settlement for a period of four weeks, so that the emigrants could, if they chose, remain on the ship until their homes were erected. However, apart from such hardships as exposure to the weather, and general primitive conditions that were to be expected, no very severe privations were experienced. The New Zealand Company had wisely sent out large quantities of stores and provisions, while the Natives supplied pigs, fish, and potatoes in abundance, and there were extensive importations of flour from Australia and America, while cattle and sheep were soon being introduced from Australia in ever-increasing numbers.