

Charles Wilton born 1856

The distance from England to Sydney, Australia, going by Cape of Good Hope, is 13,580 miles. Going by Suez Canal the distance is 12,065 miles. The Suez Canal route being thus 1,515 miles shorter.

The distances are made up as follows,

<u><i>Cape Route</i></u>	<u><i>Miles</i></u>
<i>Gravesend to Plymouth</i>	<i>296</i>
<i>Plymouth to Cape De Verd Is</i>	<i>2,252</i>
<i>Cape De Verd Is to Table Bay</i>	<i>3,990</i>
<i>Table bay to Adelaide</i>	<i>5,955</i>
<i>Adelaide to Melbourne</i>	<i>499</i>
<i>Melbourne to Sydney</i>	<u><i>588</i></u>
	<u><i>13,580</i></u>

Suez Route

<i>Sydney to Melbourne</i>	<i>588</i>
<i>Melbourne to Adelaide</i>	<i>499</i>
<i>Adelaide to Aden</i>	<i>6,158</i>
<i>Aden to Suez</i>	<i>1,310</i>
<i>Suez to Port Said</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>Port Said to Naples</i>	<i>1,112</i>
<i>Naples to Plymouth</i>	<i>2,009</i>
<i>Plymouth to Gravesend</i>	<u><i>296</i></u>
	<u><i>12,065</i></u>

December 23rd 1882

Experiences of my voyage from Australia to London via Suez Canal

Sailed from Port Jackson, Sydney, N.S.W. in the Orient S.S. of the Orient Steam Navigation Coy. on Dec 23.1882 at 3.40. P.M..

Besides a general cargo we had on board 234 passengers made up as follows: - 17 first saloon, 42 second saloon, and 175 third class.

We had fine weather leaving port although exceedingly hot, but this is not to be wondered at, it being the hot season. The distance from Sydney to Melbourne is 588 miles. We met in with nothing of unusual interest whilst doing the run, which we accomplished in a little less than two days.

On Monday about noon we made Port Philip Heads, took the Pilot aboard and after a somewhat circuitous route we reached Sandridge Bay, or Harbour, and dropped anchor about a couple of miles from the wharf.

This being Christmas day, Dec 25, there was nothing done in the way of taking in cargo or adding to our supply of coal for the voyage.

A tug, however, came off and took ashore passengers with their luggage for Melbourne, which by the way, is only some 4 or 5 miles from Sandridge. I went ashore next day and visited the principal places of note in Melbourne which city in my opinion and generally acknowledged to be a much superior one to that

Charles Wilton Diary

of Sydney, the buildings being finer, and the streets being broader and more uniform throughout.

Next day was a busy one, likewise a very hot one. Work in general had been resumed. Besides taking in more coal for steaming purposes an addition was made to our cargo. I might here observe that the Colonials as a rule are very fond of gaiety, and pleasure, and make it a point to have holidays as frequently as possible (if not oftener) for besides observing the Queens and Prince of Wales birthdays, they have the usual Christmas and New Year holidays, not to speak of the anniversary of the Eight hours movement, also the anniversary of the founding of the Colony and perhaps another another holiday or two out of respect to their own inclination.

During the time that we remained at Melbourne, it being as I have already mentioned the Christmas Holidays, pleasure excursions by steamboats seemed to be the order of the day, and which by their going up and down the harbour went not a little way towards amusing us, having bands of music on board. Rather a contrast from our Christmas at home.

Things being all right for a start we once more got under weigh about two o'clock on Thursday morning, having been in port about two days-and-a-half.

We reached the Heads in about four hours, I mean by the Heads the outlet to the open ocean. We were favoured throughout this day and the next with a continuance of fine weather and arrived in Adelaide S. Australia on the Friday

Charles Wilton Diary

afternoon having been fully a day and a half doing the distance between the two ports which is 499 miles.

The operation of coaling and adding to our cargo in the way of shipping bales of wool and bars of copper was carried on here.

We left Port Adelaide about one on Sunday morning Dec 31.

Throughout the day, the wind blowing stiff, and being against us, the ship tumbled about a great deal, evidently desirous of showing to us in a practical way that we were now fairly set out on our voyage, else it might be that the ship, not being a Good Templar, had been imbibing rather freely it being Hogmonay, and the fact of its not behaving any better on the day following - that is New Years day, it went pretty far to confirm this impression. Anyhow, this unpleasant behaviour on the part of the vessel had the effect of making the greatest part of us sea sick, and I must confess that this was the most unpleasant Hogmonay and New Year's day I have ever spent. But happy days will come again!

By the way I have not yet said anything about my location or surroundings aboard ship, and as we are now fairly entered upon the voyage a word or two just now regarding the same might not be out of place.

I am travelling Third Class not because I like Third Class better than First, or Second, but simply because I am not a millionaire literally or figuratively approximately. However, we have not much to complain of in the way of accomodation

Charles Wilton Diary

nor yet in the way we fare. We are berthed at the stern of the ship, the second saloon being amidships, and the first saloon forward.

There not being many of us and the ship being a roomy one we might have a good time of it were it not for the fact that two or three cockney passengers possessed of more money than sense indulge rather freely in strong drink which is only too easily obtained aboard ship, there being a public bar for each class. However, we hadn't such a bad time of it all things considered.

We saw the last of Australian land on Wednesday at 4 P.M. when we passed Cape Leuwin, till then we had strong winds and large magnificent dark blue billows, with white curling tops that knocked us about enough to make many of us feel very uncomfortable and meal tables very empty of guests.

Now we have passed into fair weather, with bright sky, and mild winds with an occasional roll from the west, so that all have settled down into a regular groove.

Each one seems now to have made up their mind to make the best of the situation. It becomes a question of considerable interest how to find suitable and amusing occupation. The amount of ingenuity displayed in practically answering this question is also considerable. Some gracefully subside into easy chairs after each meal (that is those who can conveniently do so) and inhale the balmy breezes of the Indian Ocean seaset. Likewise refresh their minds with soul-

inspiring ideas in Miss Braddon's novels and the Family Herald, or, gently dosing, allow the phantasies of dreamland to while away the hours till their energies are once more awakened into activity by the well known sound which calls them to the practical realities of life and the dinner table. Others of a more speculative and less dormant nature improve each shining hour at "Nap" in the absorbing excitement of which time flies on swiftest wings, whilst Chess and Draughts too have their notaries also quoits and cricket.

A few amusement committees have been organised, as a result of which we were favoured on Monday with the first of a series of concerts which are to be held. The concert was given by the Second Saloon passengers, but to their credit be it said, we of the Third Class were invited to be present not only to this one but to others of a similar nature which were held in the First Saloon. We returned the compliment when we happened to have an entertainment in our part of the ship, which our more favoured fellow travellers graciously acknowledged by favouring us with their presence.

The concert was quite refreshing in its way and comprised both vocal and instrumental music, there being besides the piano, a flautist and english concertinaist. We were favoured also with a similar entertainment on Wednesday but as it would make this narrative or yarn too long and perhaps uninteresting, I will withhold any criticism on these entertainments, suffice it

to say, as can well be imagined, they were quite a treat under the circumstances.

On Friday the 5th Jany, a death occurred in the First Saloon the deceased being an elderly gentleman whose remains were committed to the deep on the following morning in a quiet sort of way, this, I might here state was the only death during the passage.

Divine service was conducted in the First Saloon on Sabbath, by a passenger The Revd Mr Ward. I enjoyed the services (which were held weekly,) very much. They were conducted in what is termed the music hall which is a fine compartment with a piano at one end of the hall and an organ at the opposite end.

The music hall is on the quarter or maindeck.

The centre of the apartment being open displays to view the dining saloon below, which is very beautiful indeed.

A little incident occurred when about 3 or 4 hundred miles from Diego Garcia (our next port of call) which may not be unworthy a passing notice.

I had been forward with some others at the First Saloon listening to an address delivered by the Revd Mr Ward the subject being "Woman, her place in the world". The lecture over and coming aft to the region of my domicile I soon discovered that noise and disorder prevailed, the cause of which soon became apparent, and, as you might guess, strong drink was at the bottom of it.

Here, out on the ocean, where one might reasonably have expected to be free from its contaminating and demoralizing effects we are made to suffer, thus proving that the evils of strong drink affects not only the partaker but also extends to others in a variety of ways.

The nuisance spoken of subsided by and by. I went below but had no sooner done so than I became conscious of there being something of the nature of cloth on fire, I mentioned the matter to others who were present, they also smelt fire. I suggested that perhaps someone had put his pipe unextinguished into his pocket but upon examination such was found not to be the case. The locality of the fire, however, soon became apparent, as smoke was observed issuing from the lower deck which was packed with bales of wool. We informed the steward of the matter, he communicated with the Chief mate or officer, who, upon receiving word of the affair came aft with his men, the remainder of the crew being piped on deck to man the hose. After clearing away some lumber the cause of the ~~row~~ commotion was soon discovered in the shape of a _ _ _ _ no, not a bale of wool on fire but simply a piece of oily waste which was lying smoldering under the lower companionway, as to how it became ignited, the likelihood is that some careless individual after lighting his pipe before going up on deck, had thoughtlessly thrown down the burning match. This place was boarded over to prevent any future accident.

Next evening about half past four we sighted land, which was, as anticipated, that of Diego Garcia. I might here remark that the latitude and longitude and distance run during the past 24 hours being posted up on a notice board every day at noon, one can obtain a pretty correct idea of the ships whereabouts, should he be possessed of an atlas.

The group of islands just referred to, and commonly known amongst the sailors by the name of cocoanut islands, present rather a strange appearance from the deck of the approaching vessel.

The scene presented to the eye, looks to all appearance a bit off, like a kail yaird, there being nothing to be seen but an extensive patch of green foliage growing out of the surface of the ocean, and what adds to the strangeness of the scene is the fact of its being isolated so far away from, one might almost say land, and right in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

Diego Garcia, our port of call, and which was reached after a bit of careful piloting amongst coral reefs and cocoanut trees, is an island situated amongst the Chagos groupe of coral islands, and is situated in Lat $7^{\circ}14'$ S Long. $72^{\circ}23'$ E.

It is a British possession and is under Mauritius control. It is rented by a frenchman who pays rent to England for it in cocoanut oil.

The produce of the island per annum is 123,000 gallons of cocoanut oil, and 40,000 cocoanuts. There are 337

inhabitants, consisting of 206 adult males, 68 adult females and 33 male children, and 30 female children. The blacks are all employed in the cocoanut industry excepting when the Orient Coys. boats put in, when a good many are employed in the service of coaling. I may here remark that the time occupied doing the run between Adelaide and Diego Garcia was about 12 ½ days. The distance being close upon 4,000 miles. This was our longest run between ports, during the voyage.

Some of us entered into conversation with the blacks on Friday evening, after they got alongside of us with their coal hulk.

They are pretty lively creatures as a rule, not repulsive looking either, and for the most part naked, having only a piece of cloth girt about their loins.

One of them who could speak english fairly well told us that they were engaged for a certain length of time and received remuneration at the handsome ~~rate~~ scale of 6 rupees a month, equal to 12/- per month or 6d a day, and rationed ~~at~~ on the very liberal rate of two meals a day consisting of rice, (chinamans fare). When employed coaling, however, that is the lot chosen for the purpose, they fare somewhat better, being supplied by the ship with boiled salt pork, potatoes, and a little soup.

The island is exceedingly pretty, as seen from the ship. The foliage being a very ~~pretty~~ beautiful green and growing down

to the waters edge. The beach also is strewn with pretty shells and coral with which those who went ashore filled their pocket handkerchiefs. I also saw several come aboard with sackfuls of cocoanuts etc.

Another noticeable feature was that the passengers who were favoured in getting ashore were all wet to the skin. There being no proper landing place on the island they had to wade ashore, the gentlemen gallantly carrying the ladies in their arms.

Besides which the boats leaked badly as is usually the case with the small boats belonging to ocean going vessels when called into requisition. Not but that they are strongly enough built, but their continued exposure to the sun's rays causes the planking to shrink and thus unfit them for keeping out water. Next day was very busy one everything bustle and coal dust.

There are about 60 niggers busy at work putting coal into our ship. A fine row they kick up too, it reminds one of a scene in a pantomime. Our hands are busy discharging some timber for use on the island. Before nightfall a large steamer was noticed making her way up to where we lay which proved upon nearer approach to be the S.S. "Cuzes" belonging also to the Orient Line and said to be 26 days out from London. As she came up past us we gave her three hearty British cheers which was responded to by those on board, of whom there was evidently a large number. The Cruzes has put in here for the

same purpose as ourselves, this being a port of call for the special purpose namely that of coaling.

On Sunday morning Jany, 14 we left here about breakfast-time bound for Aden, our next port of call, having lain here about 38 hours. I may observe in passing, that the weather here is exceedingly warm. The fact of us being only 7 degrees south of the Equator is sufficient proof of this. We, here in Glasgow, who are about 56 degrees north of the Equator sometimes think it is hot enough, but we know nothing about heat here in our temperate climate.

Being British subjects, the customs of our country prevented us adopting the fashions our coloured neighbours observed with regard to their clothing. For my own part I quite disregarded the rules of etiquette whilst in these latitudes. and found that a thin cotton singlet, and a pair of unmentionables, served the requirements of the situation remarkably well. Whilst during sleeping hours, bedclothes were out of the question. In fact, upon the approach of bedtime, a few of us found our way to the quarter-deck each carrying a blanket or rug upon which to sleep soundly till awakened next morning by the seaman busy plying the hose and brush to the well-kept decks.

The decks aboard these steamers get a thorough scrubbing down every morning before the passengers get up. So that things being kept clean and tidy adds materially to ones comfort on sea as well as on land. I might mention too, that a

Charles Wilton Diary

canvass awning covers the vessel from stern to stern to protect the passengers from the suns fierce rays. The awning is of course taken down when cooler latitudes are reached. But this is by the way.

We left Diego Garcia as I said, on Sunday morning. On Wednesday we crossed the Line or Equator, and on Friday forenoon about $\frac{1}{2}$ past 10 sighted Cape Guarafui, which is where we passed later in the evening. This Cape which is the most easterly point in Africa (that is to say in reference to the mainland, as we had the island of Socrota (Socotra) on our right) is only about two days sail from Aden. The shore, or land, here didn't present a very inviting appearance and the thought of getting cast ashore at this place is enough to make one shudder.

It is still excessively hot as we are only some 12 degrees north of the Equator here.

In the evening we passed the S.S. Liguria of this company, bound for Australia, when signals were exchanged in the form of red and blue lights.

Early in the afternoon of Saturday we descried land in the distance, which, as we anticipated, was that of Aden, came up to it and got into the harbour about 9 P.M. The time occupied between ports being six days.

A favourite resort of mine when anything of interest was to be seen, was up on the crosstrees of the mizzen-mast. I spent about an hour there whilst approaching Port Aden and

although it was rather dark, the scene, as presented in the dim outline of mountain ranges, with the cluster of lights lower down in the township, combined with the merry hum that rose from the deck below, where groups of lighthearted merry-makers were busily engaged tripping the light fantastic to the familiar strains of a german constantscreamer, or rather concertina, was rather an enchanting one.

People are on sea pretty much the same as what they are on land. When the ship is making good runs, and everything going well the heart is light and joyous. But when the weather is stormy and the ship making poor progress then everything is wrong. The food especially is found fault with, there isn't an over generous allowance granted, and what is supplied is badly cooked.

Well, as I said, we got into Port Aden about 9 P.M. when some native boats came off to us amongst the occupants of which were the Medical Officer and Ship's Agent. The operation of coaling was soon after commenced by the natives, of whom I counted next morning, about 100 in one of the lighters alongside. They appear somewhat like the Mauritius blacks and like them were rather scantily furnished with clothing, ~~but of that they of course don't require much.~~

As day broke next morning (Sunday) we were ~~awoke~~ awakened by the clatter and noise of about a couple of dozen of the blacks in their canoes principally young men, who kept

singing out in chorus to those on board, Ave a dive, Ha! Ha!
Ave a dive. Ha! Ha!

This was kept on until someone threw a ~~silver~~ coin into the water (~~I believe it was contrary to their agreement to dive for coppers~~) when, as if by magic, the whole of them dived and were out of sight in an instant, not for long, however, as they soon again reappeared, one of their number having gained the prize. The coin doesn't reach the bottom, as a rule, but is caught when only a few feet under the surface of the water. The mouth of the lucky one has to supply the place of a purse, or pocket, the reason being obvious. It may be interesting to note that a few of the youthful divers had beautiful heads of wavy hair of a reddish fair, or auburn colour. This may seem rather remarkable in a black, but true nevertheless, and we had an opportunity of ~~seeing~~ learning the method by which this result is obtained. We observed one or two whose heads were undergoing this transforming process, their heads being covered over by a whitish sort of paste which proved to be lime.

The effect of the lime on the hair is, of course, apparent, as it burns, or bleaches, the colour out of it leaving it the colour already mentioned.

The canoes which the natives had were the real canoe in structure, being cut out of the solid wood. The paddle they use is single bladed, in shape, not unlike a cricket bat, but in respect to shape they are not at all particular as I noticed one

with the end of a small barrel nailed on to a piece of wood which seemed to serve the purpose remarkably well.

During the morning, and before we weighed anchor, a number of bumboats came off to us, when a brisk trade was carried on between the vendors, or small goods merchants, and the passengers.

Incident

There is a naval and military station at Aden, and the officers, soldiers, and sailors, and a few European Merchants are the only white people inhabiting this outlandish, yet to England very valuable, place.

The houses in Port Aden are not numerous, and consist mostly of Stores and Hotels, about 20 in number, besides there are a great number of small shanties occupied by Blacks, Arabs and Yahoudees (Polish Jews).

The district is almost rainless, but drinking water is procured by very extensive condensing machinery.

There is a great number of blacks to be seen about the quay, which forms the principal street, and in boats on the water.

These Black fellows (Sumalis) come mostly from the Coast of Africa, and are an intelligent, and a very amusing set of men, well built, and they can swim and dive like fish.

They seem to spend most of their early life in little canoes on the water, and surround the in-coming steamers in great numbers, and their cries of "ave a dive, ha, ha," which still ring in my ears, cause many generous passengers to throw

threepenny bits into the water, and after these, as I have already mentioned, they dive with great agility, and are sure to catch the coins before they reach the bottom. (*diver with one leg*)

(end of first part)

The Yahoudees are a set of human beings (~~reminding us of the very lowest types of Israelites~~), commonly known as Polish Jews. They come from Palestine, wear the Jewish curls just above the ears, which is also the custom of the Russian (Polish), and the lower German Jew, and they are the small businessmen and hawkers in Aden. Strangers have to beware of them as they cheat wherever they can. These hawkers established quite an imitation of Petticoat Lane on board the ship, and fleeced many of our passengers by selling many curios (English made), and very second class ostrich feathers. We think these pedlars get spoiled by the too great eagerness shown by passengers to obtain bargains.

We left Aden about 10 A.M. having lain only about 13 hours here, and, passing through the Straits of Babel Mandeb entered the Red Sea in the evening about 5.30. This is about the most dangerous part we have yet seen. The opening, or inlet is very narrow, and dangerous, which was sufficiently attested by the fact of there being two fine vessels ashore at this part. One of them had stranded evidently whilst making her way out of the Red Sea. The forward part of the vessel was high out of the water, whilst the after part was deeply immersed.

Charles Wilton Diary

The other vessel, however, seemed as if she were riding at anchor, close into the rocks, and right below a lighthouse which is placed on the rocks above, but by the aid of glasses we could see that she was firm and fast on the rocks, the sea breaking over her stern.

You might wonder, perhaps, why the owners of these vessels don't have them ~~taken~~ taken off, and floated again. but you must recollect that here they are far away from appliances, and facilities that would be useful for this purpose, and that the undertaking wouldn't pay.

Navigation in the Red Sea is attended with a good deal of danger. There have been within the last seven years about thirty steamers wrecked. Only two got off.

The coal line from where we first came in sight of it before coming into Aden, and right along the Red Sea, forms a very barren and desolate picture indeed.

On Monday we passed the Twelve Apostles which are twelve large rocks rising out of the sea like so many monuments.

Coming out from a concert which was being given in aid of Marine Charities by the ships stewards, on the evening of our fourth day in the Red Sea, the first sight that met the eye was a large tract of mountainous land, seemingly quite close to the ship, and as the moon is nearly full just now, its effect upon the sandy portions of the land was certainly very striking.

We are now in the locality where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, when pursued by Pharaoh and his host. As the

passage across is pretty lengthy, some seven or eight miles, perhaps, with nothing but sand and barren hills on either side, which were full of ruts and chasms suggesting the work of some volcanic agency, and not a vestige of vegetation of any description whatever to be seen, the miracle performed on that occasion was certainly a very wonderful one.

On Thursday about noon we arrived at Suez having been about 4 days coming through the Red Sea. The distance run being about 1,300 miles.

A slight change in the temperature of the air is now perceptible, not so much on account of the part we are now in, as we are still in a part which is unbearably hot during the summer months, and only fully 25° north of the Equator. But the fact of its being the 25th January and therefore the winter season here, readily accounts for this.

We passed numerous islands during the passage through the Red Sea. Besides the Twelve Apostles I have already mentioned, we passed a couple of small islands, named the Two Brothers, I suppose by reason of their similarity to each other. Altogether, the passage is one fraught with many dangers, and requires careful navigation to get along in safety.

Upon arriving at Port Suez we had to wait a couple of hours, or so, until two large steamers came out of the Canal. Meantime, the small goods merchants were off in their boats, and doing a pretty good trade amongst the passengers.

A rather amusing scene occurred as they began taking their departure from the vessel side. As it happened to be about the time when the overplus from dinner is thrown overboard, some of our lot thought to take advantage of the circumstance and began pelting the retreating vendors of smallgoods with potatoes much to their discomfort and annoyance.

One black in particular who was evidently of a more resentful spirit than the others showed fight by seizing some shells which he had with him for sale and throwing them with great determination at his assailants but seemingly to no purpose. Others again took the joke in better part and took shelter behind the sails of their boat, at the same time making off as fast as they could. But I think our party carried the game a little too far when one of them lifted up a kidful of soup and poured its contents over the top of a poor unfortunate below, who was rather slow in getting away from the side of the ship, well indeed might he vow vengeance but the best thing he could do and did do was to hurry away as quickly as possible beyond our reach and thus escape further persecution.

We entered the Suez Canal but had only gone a few miles when we had to make fast to the side of the Canal in order to let some half dozen vessels past, and it being near sundown we made fast for the night.

A moonlight trip to the town of Suez. As described by one of our 2nd Saloon passengers.

The "Orient" had stopped on January 25. at the first station, or gare, at the Suez end of the canal. Round us on every side are bare waste of sand, here and there some scanty grass and pools of shoal water, away in the distance are seen rocky and rugged hills, devoid of any trace of vegetation, and to the south west lies the town of Suez about six miles distant by road, less as the "crow flies".

The ship is moored within a few yards of the shore.

A few ragged Egyptians are gathered on the banks crying out for "biscuit" and "bucksheesh" (money). Bye-and-bye as the news circulates that the "Orient" is lying at the station for the night, donkeys and men hurry across from Suez, and by six o'clock the shore is lively with men, boys and donkeys, the loud hee-haw of the donkeys and the yells of the men and boys combine to make the night hideous. The donkey-men created roars of laughter by calling out the names of their respective donkeys. which were :- Mrs Langtry, Mrs Cornwallis West, Mr Parnell, Beaconsfield, Ned Kelly, Madam Rachael, Bishop of London, etc, etc. One of the ship's boats lay between the gangway ladder and the shore, where a crowd of natives are standing eager to carry passengers ashore through the shallow water and mud to their donkeys.

The Six o'clock bell takes most of us below, but not before we have arranged a party for Suez, and as the moon rises about 8. P.M. we promise ourselves a pleasant ride across the sandy plains in the bright cool moonlight.

The Start

Our party numbered eight, and having effected an arrangement with the proprietors of eight donkeys we descend the gangway for the shore.

In the boat we are seized by the active Egyptians, and carried to dry land without mishap, and with dry feet, except in the case of one of our party, who being a fleshy man of full habit, proves too great a weight for his bearer; the two tumble into the water. Mr. B rises in great wrath and walks ashore, using the face of the fallen Egyptian as a stepping-stone. Great clamour ensues only to be stopped by "bucksheesh". We get on our donkey at last.

"Donkey knows the way, sahib," we are assured, and off we scamper along the shore, over sand hills, through sand holes, dodging telegraph poles, until a sharp turn to the left brings us into the land of Egypt.

At first the way lies through pampas grass along a narrow path, (which only a surefooted donkey can pass safely) into an open plain, and then begins the journey.

Three out of the eight have lagged behind and we speculate as to whether we shall find them on our return, like "Moses" in the bullrushes.

The night is clear and cool; the donkeys are fresh; the drivers energetic; and the riders (albeit a little uncertain of their seats) are full of enthusiasm, and we go off at full speed, trusting to Providence and the donkeys (more to the donkeys, I

think) to reach Suez. But the way is deceitful and lumpy, with holes scattered about.

First one donkey and then another goes down and spills its rider.

Mr French our excellent purser takes "French" leave of his donkey, much to the donkey's relief.

The Doctor tries a little shooting over his animals head. Dr Smith enjoys the fun immensely, but suddenly disappears under his noble steed.

The other members of the party stick on well - donkey to donkey.

On we go, at a jolting pace, feeling as if our immortal soul was being shaken out of us. Half an hour brings us to Suez, and our first business is to go to the Agent and see if there are any letters for us.

Here we were hospitably received and entertained. We next proceeded to visit the town of Suez.

We first visited the "Bella Roma" Cafe Chantant Restaurant; our next is to a Tobacconist where we purchased some of the vilest tobacco that was ever manufactured for human mortals to smoke.

I do not wish to say anything disrespectful of Suez, or that would hurt the feelings of the most sensitive inhabitant, but I have a broad general impression that the sanitary state of the town is only to be improved ~~by blowing~~ by blowing the whole place up with gunpowder; and if all the inhabitants of the

Charles Wilton Diary

Bella Roma were carefully secured in the house before it was done, the moral atmosphere of the desert would be much improved.

In some respects the town is picturesque enough.

The young Arabs who run about the streets remind us of Aladdin before he found the wonderful lamp.

The narrow streets with the open shops and their contents spread out on a platform in front, the quaint Eastern dress of the people, the swarthy faces, the cries of the watchmen and others, remind us that we are in the land of good Haroun Abraschid, that Mahomet, here, is the "great prophet", and that we are Giaours or infidels to these people; but again we come to a Railway station, with carriages drawn up, and we recognise that European influence has a stronghold here, and we are conscious that a little more civilization is sorely wanted among these people.

The Return

Having exhausted all the sights of the town and having been exhausted by the smells, we get our party together and ride home again.

None of us will forget the pleasure of that ride in the cool, sharp, and exhilarating air, doubly delicious after the bad smells of Suez.

There were no incidents to record, but the trip was something to look back on with pleasure; the clear moon, the clear sky,

bright with thousands of stars, and the brisk air made life worth living.

We got to the canal at 1 A.M..

As we were proceeding along the bank, one of our party saw a sack on the beach. He kicked it; it promptly got up and shouted "Bucksheesh" and in spite of the coldness of the night air, seemed to enjoy the prospect of "Bucksheesh".

When he got on board someone asked us to "sit down". The answer was "no thanks, we have ridden to Suez and back". On the following day, Friday 26 January we made another start. The weather had now become very cold. We steamed a good few miles today, several vessels having to wait aside to let us past. We also passed through the Bitter Lakes and Lake Timsah today. The lakes here mentioned I may state, consist of a great sheet of water extending for a considerable distance over the desert. There are, of course, buoys, or marks forming a roadway, as it were, by which to direct the pilot through this portion of the canal.

We made fast tonight at a convenient landing-place, from which a good road led direct to the town of Ismahlia. We had no sooner got moored than the inevitable Arabs with their donkeys sprung up as if from amongst the sand. But as the roads here were good the hiring was slack.

I, along with several others went ashore, and made straight for the township, which we understood wasn't very far distant.

We had no sooner got on the road leading to Ismahlia, than we were accosted by a dark skinned gentleman who insisted on being employed to act as guide, to conduct us round the town. He wasn't, however, engaged, upon which he turned away uttering something incomprehensible to us but which, no doubt, was intended to ease his own mind. In due course we arrived at Ismahlia, which would, perhaps, be about two-and-a-half miles distant from the ship. The road we travelled was a good one, smooth and wide, and our surroundings were enhanced by trees growing on either side, thus forming a beautiful wide avenue, the principal trees being a species of palm and acacia. Walking along this road we met with the railroad which was constructed by the British Troops to Kassassin, and then with the Fresh Water Canal supplied with water from the Nile. Having taken a cursory survey of the town, which is of modern origin, and derives its name from the late Khedive Ismail Pasha, and about which there is nothing worthy of note either in the European quarter or Arab portion. We were somewhat leisurely retracing our steps when presently we became conscious of the fact that we had lost our way.

Having arrived at six intersecting roads we were wondering which one to take when as luck would have it we observed a soldier approaching who it afterwards turned out belonged to one of two companies of British soldiers (60th Rifles) who were stationed at Khedive's Palace as an occupation army. We enquired of him the way, when he told us that being going

Charles Wilton Diary

himself in the direction about which we made enquiry he would just show us it. He took us down through the principal part of the town which consisted of Cafes, Stores etc. mostly if not all owned by foreigners.

We entered a Cafe where refreshments were obtained and our military friend by way of entertaining us recounted some incidents pertaining to the Tel-el-Kebir war which took place in 1882 being the year previous to our passing this way. Our friend had taken active part in the encounter having been drafted here from Malta at the commencement of the campaign.

We soon resumed our journey and at our friends invitation paid a visit to the Khedive's Palace.

The building is of spacious dimensions with large airy apartments, lofty in the ceiling and richly panelled, the whole being painted in bright and attractive colours.

There is nothing very showy about the outside of the building which is plain enough. The grounds in connection with the Palace are finely laid out.

After having a look through some of the apartments while the soldiers were engaged in playing at cards, dominoes, etc., and it being now getting late we bade our soldier friends goodbye with warm wishes for each others welfare, and having our course once more pointed out to us we made tracks for our floating home and arrived there in due time all right having enjoyed our nights outing very much.

Next morning saw us up betimes, preparations were being made to get under weigh. During the night the ship had rested on the bank of the canal which made it somewhat difficult to get a start made. However, after some little delay we were once more steaming slowly along, going at regulation speed, which is, I think, about 7 miles an hour. A slow rate of movement no doubt, but as the Canal is cut through a sandy desert, and its banks being but indifferently protected it becomes highly necessary that a slow rate of movement should be observed, or the Canal would soon get filled up with sand. As it is the authorities require to keep a few dredges constantly at work.

On our way along we passed several gangs of Arabs engaged in the work and as the weather here just now is bitterly cold it being about the end of January the poor Arabs must feel its effects pretty keenly. There are some fantastic dresses amongst them. They are all bare-legged and barefooted and as I looked at some who were engaged facing up a portion of the embankment with stones and saw some of them using a large sprawling hammer to the no small danger of cutting their feet and legs with the splinters they knocked off. I thought to myself that their life wasn't a happy one anymore than that of a policeman's.

I noticed a lot of places in the sand along the banks of the Canal which appeared to have been hollowed out for some purpose, and ~~anxious~~ desirous to satisfy my curiosity on this point. I enquired of one of the Arabs to what use they were but

when he replied that Arabs use them to sleep in at night when working at Canal. I myself think if used for this purpose it must only be during the summer-time when the weather here is so fearfully hot. Going along the Canal, however, we passed several barges with houses built on them. They floated alongside the embankment and were, no doubt, used by the natives to sleep in during the cold season.

We passed a group of Arab travellers who had evidently been camping there over night and who had not yet resumed their journey it being still yet early morning.

They were lying huddled together amongst their camels and goatskins no doubt making themselves as comfortable as their circumstances would permit.

We hadn't proceeded above a couple of stations on our way when we had again to fasten up in order to let some vessels past. When all was right for another start it was found that the ship was firm and fast on the side of the canal and after breaking a couple of hausers in vainly trying to get her off the effort was abandoned and as the tide was down and wouldn't have risen before evening the Captain ~~made~~ resolved upon making fast for the night, it was yet early in the afternoon, and, being desirous of affording the passengers the opportunity to go on shore and stretch their legs a bit, and have a look through a small Arab village called Kantara situated on the opposite bank of the Canal from Ismalia, he caused one of the ships boats to be placed at our disposal. Most of the passengers

got ashore and had a stroll through the village while others entered engaged in to a game of rounders.

The village of Kantara is on the main road to Syria.

The houses here are mostly built of sand bricks and look rather primitive in appearance. Some have got wooden frames lathed over with a kind of reed or bulrush and plastered over with mud. But as a whole they look rather miserable and tumble-down-like. We had a look around at the shops or stores but saw nothing worth buying the principal articles for sale being in the hardware line such as urns and tobacco pipes made of red clay and some miscellaneous articles made of the same material which could only be of use to an Arab. There were also presented for sale goatskins, some cheap cloth, rice, beans, dates, sugarcane etc..

Whilst there we visited the village Mosque and school. In the former place, that is the Mosque or Church, we saw some of the male residents at worship who had been summoned there by a follower of Mahomet who got up into the Minaret, rather a ~~tumble-down~~ rickety looking edifice which was standing at something like 20° off the ~~plumb~~ perpendicular and who began to walk slowly round the erection with his hand at the side of his mouth wailing out the most doleful strains. This, I believe, is called Muezzin, or call to prayer.

No bells are used to call the people to worship, they, that is the Mohomedans, believing that a bell is the mention of the devil.

Before entering the Mosque all the worshippers washed their feet at a pool of dirty water, others again were busy cleaning their mouths whilst others were filling goat skins with this same water, which was afterwards handed round for the devout followers of Mahomet to drink.

We entered the building or rather stood in the doorway and had a peep at their style of worship. There would be perhaps about a dozen of worshippers standing in a row facing the priest who stood with his back to them. The priest went through a lot of manoeuvres gesticulating with his arms and repeating something, then prostrating himself on his hands and knees and so forth his audience imitating minutely his every act and utterance.

By and by the priest ascended a small pulpit and there began passing a few observations and as the ~~show~~ service seemed to be nearly over, we passed out.

We next visited a native school, and were much impressed by the method of teaching: if a pupil did not show himself apt or was in the least inattentive, he received several blows from a bamboo on his bare feet going down on his knees to receive the same, called the Bastinade.

I noticed the scholars used tin "slates". I also couldn't help noticing that a nice-looking young female stood in the doorway whilst we were there but as she kept her face almost hidden with her cloak we were denied the pleasure of viewing her features.

This, however, seems to be quite characteristic of Oriental females for, as we passed through the village every woman we chanced to meet had her face almost concealed by a black head and face dress, the head part coming down to the eyes, the lower part almost meeting, thus leaving just sufficient room for seeing purposes. The two being connected by a small rod of wood, brass or other suitable material. The lower part extends pretty far down the front of the body somewhat resembling a long black beard.

The face part of the dress is generally adorned with a number of coins which impart to it a somewhat ~~grotesque~~ picturesque appearance.

We visited what was said to be once the residence of Tewfik Bey, but which is now a refuge for the goats and conies. We also visited the graves of two British seamen who had died here last year having belonged to Her Majesty's ship "Tourmaline".

On the following morning we made another start, but had soon to make fast again to let vessels past.

The first of the lot and named the Habana gave us rather an unlooked-for salutation when passing. The vessel was under towage having broken down in her engines. When approaching us the tug done all in her power to keep the ship's head off our ship it being evident she would collide. They also hoisted a jib in the approaching vessel with the same object in view but all to no purpose she collided with us and carried

away the starboard gangway and a portion of the promenade deck railing.

This little incident created ~~a little~~ some stir on board our ship, which was quite refreshing in its way, of course we were lying quite comfortably on the side of the Canal, had we been at sea the case would have been different.

The case was brought up before the Port Said Court, damages. £500. We soon proceeded on our way, and without further stoppage, or mishap, we reached Port Said about 4 o'clock in the afternoon having passed ~~four~~ three nights in the Canal, which is only 93 miles long. The delay, however, was not regrettable, at least on my part, having had opportunity to see about me.

SS Orient

The ORIENT was built in 1879 by John Elder & Co, Glasgow and the first ship built for the Orient Steam Navigation Co.Ltd, she was also the first specifically designed for the Australian mail service and built to Admiralty armed merchant cruiser specification. She was a 5,386 gross ton ship, length 460ft (140,21m) x beam 46.3ft (14,12m) x depth 35ft (10,67m) and when registered in September 1879 was the largest ship in the World apart from the 20-year-old, 19,000-ton Great Eastern. She had two funnels, four masts (rigged for sail), iron construction, single screw and a speed of 15 knots. There was passenger accommodation for 120-1st, 130-2nd, 300 steerage class, or 1,500 troops. Launched on 5th June 1879, she sailed from London on her maiden voyage to Melbourne and Sydney via the Cape on 3rd Nov.1879 and returned via Suez. (until 1883 contract voyages went out via the Cape, home via Suez).



She was the biggest ship on the Australian route, and set a London/Adelaide record of 37 days 22 hours. On her second outward voyage in 1880 she set a Plymouth/Cape Town record of 17 days 21 hours which stood for 10 years. In 1881 she had refrigeration fitted

Charles Wilton Diary

and in 1882 was chartered as transport for the Egyptian campaign, then later in 1884 she had electric lights installed. In 1898 the Orient was modernised at Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Co, Wallsend-on-Tyne, rebuilt to 5,453 tons, and fitted with 7,000ihp triple expansion engines to give her a speed of 16½ knots. Her four masts and two funnels had been replaced by two pole masts and a single taller funnel, and a forecastle and turtleback poop had been added. In Nov.1899 she became a troopship for the Boer War and on 17th July 1903 resumed commercial services to Sydney. Her last sailing on this service commenced on 23rd July 1909 and in 1910 she was sold to Italian ship breakers and renamed ORIC for her final voyage to Italy where she was scrapped.

The Diary has been typed and presented as written by Charles.

Photograph of Charles from Richard Rawson's website.