

All at Sea

CHILDBIRTH ON NINETEENTH-CENTURY MIGRANT VOYAGES TO NEW ZEALAND



Sweet babe, my ocean-born,
How dear thou art to me;
May blessings be richly poured upon
God's gift upon the sea.

Heaven smiled upon thee at thy birth,
The troubled waves were still,
The winds were hush'd when thou wert given
A mother's love to fill.

So may thy life be smooth'd for thee,
Is thy parents' anxious prayer,
If God should in his mercy please
My little boy to spare.¹

IN 1856 AUCKLAND'S *SOUTHERN CROSS* noted that it did not often publish 'compositions which, under the designation of original poetry, are supplied to us in profusion'. But it willingly included two poems by Elizabeth Bowring because of 'the interesting circumstances under which they were penned'. Bowring and her husband Alfred had just arrived in Auckland from London aboard the *Gypsy* and she wrote these verses at sea. One poem referred to the arrival of their firstborn child, while the other expressed the migrants' joy on first seeing their new country.² Many colonial women would have felt a strong personal connection to Bowring's poem, for childbirth occurred frequently on migrant voyages. At the 1896 census 1322 New Zealand residents stated their birthplace was 'at sea'; they accounted for 0.5% of people who had been born outside New Zealand. This percentage had remained remarkably consistent in the census since the 1850s; around one in 200 of nineteenth-century migrants to this country was ocean born.³

Internationally, much ink has been spilt on the topic of death at sea, including mortality on migrant voyages to the Australian colonies; far less on birth at sea.⁴ Sexuality rarely features in this scholarship, yet childbirth

offers us a glimpse into the sexual world of the migrants. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall note that the English middle classes suppressed 'the open recognition of sexuality'. Among the respectable, 'male sexual passion was to be contained and hidden, women's to be ignored if not denied'.⁵ One outcome of sexual activity – the birth of a baby – was not so easily ignored. Elizabeth Bowring's willingness to celebrate in a particularly public way reflected her comfortable position as a woman who had married some 11 months earlier. For women who gave birth outside marriage, the mood was rather different, as several accounts in this article will show. In the United States in this period 'all sexuality that took place outside of the family generated deep concerns about social order', suggest John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman.⁶ Establishing their desired order was, naturally, a priority of the leaders of New Zealand's colonial settlements; it started with the selection of migrants. In Victorian Britain, source of many settlers, there were various 'social purity' campaigns; Jeffrey Weeks notes 'a deep belief that the roots of social stability lay in individual and public morality'.⁷

Life at sea was different from anything most migrants had experienced before; as Frances Steel notes, in the 'isolated and confined site' of a ship, 'social meaning was to a certain extent out of place, suspended and unsettled'.⁸ Foucault described a ship as the ultimate heterotopia, or counter-site, 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'. It is a place 'that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea'.⁹ In this temporary hiatus between their old and new worlds, migrants encountered new things, people, ideas and ways of life; they started to become familiar with the sorts of people they would live alongside in their new country. When women gave birth at sea they brought into the floating world of the ship their cultures of reproduction and reminded their shipmates that this was a world where sex mattered.

On a migrant ship, only the privileged had individual or family cabins, with most passengers crowded together in steerage quarters alongside others of varied ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. With so little privacy, it was difficult to keep sexual activity secret from shipmates, though people did not comment in their shipboard diaries on the sex lives of married couples. David Hastings notes there was even a reluctance to mention domestic violence, considered a private matter between husband and wife.¹⁰ Intimacy involving single women was a very different matter. In the clearly demarcated spaces of a migrant ship, steerage passengers were divided into families, single men and single women (the latter included widows or married women travelling without their husbands and the teenaged daughters of family groups). Their

separate and closely guarded quarters were intended to protect single women from intimate relations (consensual or otherwise) with the crew or male passengers; the separation also protected men from the temptations of female company. Any suggestion of familiarity – sexual or otherwise – between men and women not married to one another ensured gossip and scandal; if crew were involved they could expect punishment and perhaps dismissal.¹¹

Despite the silences in the textual archives, the birth of a child provided clear evidence of sexual activity. Most seaborne babes were conceived within marriage, but some were the children of unmarried women. Almost all of these mothers boarded the ship already pregnant, though a woman might conceive at sea and miscarry or give birth very prematurely on the long voyage. I have collected data on births aboard 499 migrant voyages from Europe to New Zealand (defining a ‘migrant’ voyage as one with at least 50 passengers) from the 1840s to the 1880s, using official reports, diaries and newspapers.¹² Some voyage reports counted stillbirths and the births of babies who did not survive the voyage, while others did not. These statistics, therefore, must be interpreted as estimates; the actual number of births would have been higher. The sample is heavily weighted to the 1870s, when the government reported on the large surge of migrants they assisted under the Vogel immigration scheme, but it does allow some impression of trends over time.

Table 1: Births on a sample of migrant voyages from Europe to New Zealand, 1840s–1880s

Period	Number of voyages in sample	Total births reported	Average number of births per voyage	Average number of passengers per voyage	Average duration of voyage (days)	Births per passenger day at sea (x 10,000)
1840s	17	85	5.0	199	126	2.00
1850s	54	149	2.8	204	109	1.27
1860s	105	270	2.5	220	101	1.17
1870s	238	705	3.0	296	95	1.07
1880s	85	86	1.0	234	67	0.67
Total	499	1295	2.6	256	94	1.10

Source: Compiled from voyage reports in newspapers, the AJHR and shipboard diaries.

As Table 1 reveals, there was an average of between two and three births per voyage; the average was significantly higher – five – in the small sample

of 1840s voyages and dropped to one in the 1880s. The final column of Table 1 gives birth rates with the confounding factors of the duration of the voyage and number of passengers removed; birth rates remained relatively stable from the 1850s to 1870s, but were higher in the 1840s and lower in the 1880s. Just 72 of these 499 voyages (14%) reported no births. At the other end of the scale, the *Lancashire Witch*, shipping 420 migrants from London to Lyttelton in 1863, boasted 12 births.¹³

Birth rates on migrant ships to New Zealand were among the highest in the oceanic world; average births on voyages to South Australia were a little higher, and for Queensland a little lower.¹⁴ The sea journey from Britain – the most common place of departure – to New Zealand covered around 24,000 kilometres and was notoriously the longest regular migrant passage of the era. Sailing vessels made the voyage non-stop, while steamers made only brief stops to replenish coal supplies. The speed of the voyage varied greatly and there was a clear link between its duration and the number of births. Eleven babies were born aboard the *Brother's Pride* on its voyage from London to Lyttelton in 1863. Three of these would have been born in New Zealand if their mothers had travelled on an average voyage of that period, but the journey was drawn out to 139 days because the ship was becalmed in the Atlantic and then forced to put into Cape Town for supplies.¹⁵ The decline in births at sea coincided with shorter travel periods. Once steam took over from wind as the dominant power of shipping in the 1880s, voyages of fewer than 50 days became the norm. In the 1840s, any woman five months or more into her pregnancy on embarkation was highly likely to give birth at sea, and those just three or four months along might experience the premature birth of a living babe. By the mid-1880s, a woman needed to be seven months pregnant on departure to give birth to a full-term baby on board; she was likely to delay a couple of months and take a later voyage. On the 42 voyages in my sample from 1885 to 1889 there were just 12 births.

Of course, the demographics of the migrant population also had a strong influence on birth rates. The long voyage – potentially perilous, or at least uncomfortable, and also expensive – placed New Zealand at a disadvantage in the race to recruit migrants. Colonization associations and government authorities devised schemes which paid all or part of migrants' fares in an effort to counter the attraction of shorter voyages to other destinations, targeting the most desirable migrants. Jock Phillips and Terry Hearn estimate that at least a third of long-term migrants from the United Kingdom to New Zealand were assisted by such schemes.¹⁶ Some schemes recruited single women, required to alleviate a shortage of domestic servants and counter a gender imbalance. Most desirable, though, were young married couples, who

were at their peak of strength and fitness and highly motivated to improve the future of their family. As an added bonus, they would bear children, boosting the population further.¹⁷ Fertile young women, some of them pregnant, were thus a significant group among the migrants.

Heaven may have smiled upon Charles Bowring's birth, but voyages were not so fortunate for all families, as another tale from the same period demonstrates. As they departed London aboard the good ship *Cashmere* in 1859, blacksmith Joseph King and his wife Jane must have been excited, and perhaps a little nervous, about their future. They had been selected as migrants for the Canterbury province, together with their one-year-old daughter Margaret; Jane was expecting another baby. The voyage proved tragic for the King family. Just three weeks out from London young Margaret died. A week later Jane King gave birth to another daughter, but succumbed to puerperal fever a week afterwards. Joseph named his new daughter Jane Lack King, a poignant reflection of his loss. Baby Jane only survived her mother for three days and Joseph King arrived at Lyttelton in October 1859 with neither wife nor child.¹⁸

The outcomes of the King and Bowring families' migrant voyages were very different, but neither was unusual; most women who gave birth at sea in the nineteenth century survived, but a fair few died. Of course, maternal mortality was also high by today's standards on land, in both Europe and the colonies. Statistics for non-Māori New Zealanders for the period 1872 to 1899 reveal that one mother died for every 195 births, and these figures were likely to be underestimates.¹⁹ Historian Irvine Loudon suggests a higher rate for London in 1890, with one maternal death for every 100 births.²⁰ Data on maternal deaths on the migrant voyages is very patchy: many reports gave the number of deaths at sea but not their causes. I have identified 26 deaths relating to childbirth or complications of pregnancy in my sample. That gives a maternal death rate of 2.0%, which is high for the period; major gaps in the data mean the actual rate would have been higher.

The experience of giving birth at sea differed for every woman concerned. Jessie Campbell, who travelled from Glasgow to Wellington on the *Blenheim* in 1840, suspected that childbirth was easier at sea. She did not have an opportunity to test this personally, but observed the experiences of six other women who gave birth on the voyage. The 'women do not seem to suffer as much as at home', she commented in her diary halfway through the long voyage. When a carpenter's wife from Skye gave birth just 12 days before they landed in Wellington, she was caught short by the speed of her labour. Campbell reported: 'this woman with all her former confinements had long and difficult labours, yesterday evening she did not feel herself very well,

the Dr desired her to go into the hospital, she thought she would have plenty of time to remove after she was taken ill, however matters came so quick upon her that the child was born before she could be removed'.²¹ Others did not share this optimism about childbirth at sea. 'I pity anyone who has to be confined in a ship, it is terrible work, so much noise and rolling, nothing nice or tempting to be had, it does seem hard', wrote Emily Summerhays after assisting a fellow passenger aboard the *Halcione*, bound from London to New Plymouth in 1875.²²

Although the motion of the ship may have sped the labours of some women, a sea voyage could be very uncomfortable during pregnancy. As the ship pitched and rolled, women in the earlier stages sometimes suffered a nasty combination of seasickness and morning sickness. Clambering up and down the steep ladders between levels was awkward for all aboard, but especially for any woman great with child. Two women suffered serious falls as the *Bombay* made its way from London to Nelson in 1842. On 29 October Margaret Ferme, eight months pregnant, fell from the ladder. Two days later ship's surgeon Samuel Hodgkinson, suspicious that her resulting back pain was early labour, admitted her to the hospital overnight. Her pains must have stopped, for she returned to her usual quarters the next day; two weeks later she gave birth to a healthy son. Sarah Wadsworth was less fortunate. Two days before the *Bombay* cast anchor at Nelson she went into labour just five months into her pregnancy and delivered a stillborn daughter. She had fallen two days earlier and Hodgkinson believed her miscarriage was probably caused by this accident.²³

Countering the discomfort and potential danger of pregnancy aboard ship was one great consolation: help was always at hand. Some migrants were destined for isolated rural communities, far from medical help and occasionally without other women nearby; on the voyage out they had the company, encouragement and practical assistance of other women. There was also the luxury of a doctor readily available, something many colonists could not afford once they arrived in their new country.²⁴ Ships' surgeons varied in quality but undoubtedly preserved the lives of some women and babies, occasionally taking extreme measures. A woman aboard the *Warwick*, which arrived in Auckland from London in 1873, ran into very serious difficulties during labour. The doctor, Martin Henry Payne, resorted to the unpleasant operation of craniotomy, thus saving her life, though the child was inevitably stillborn.²⁵ A more unusual incident took place on the 1842 voyage of the *Bombay*, when Dr Samuel Hodgkinson gave a blood transfusion to Charlotte Cooke, who was 'in a very precarious state' after giving birth to a premature son. This was heroic medicine, potentially fatal in an era when blood groups

had not been identified; few doctors were willing to risk transfusion and it did not become a common procedure until the 1930s. Hodgkinson rigged up a device using a funnel, some tubing and a feather quill, found two healthy volunteer donors among the passengers, and transfused half a pint of blood into Cooke. She immediately began to improve and she and her month-old son were both doing well when they arrived in Nelson.²⁶

Not all mothers could be saved by medical heroics. Twenty-four-year-old Nora Mulhern, migrating with her husband from Scotland to Nelson in 1876, died aboard the *Camperdown* of puerperal convulsions (eclampsia).²⁷ Likewise, Cornishwoman Amelia Trebilcock, also 24 years old, died of convulsions three days after giving birth as the *Hydaspes* made its way to Auckland in 1873; her baby also died.²⁸ These complications were likely to have been fatal wherever they occurred in that period; whether at sea or on land, doctors were unable to overcome some of the problems associated with childbirth.

Migrant ships had space set aside for hospitals, though these could become crowded. On the *Chile*, sailing to Napier in 1872 with a large party of migrants, the medical team was kept busy with an outbreak of measles on board. Anxious to keep birthing women away from the infection, surgeon Jameson John Macan surrendered his own cabin to one woman, and when another went into confinement at the same time she took the first officer's berth.²⁹ Berths on migrant vessels were narrow and this placed the lives of babies – who had to share their parents' bed – at risk. James Motherwell, surgeon superintendent on the *Birman*, bound from London to Wellington in 1841–1842, offered some suggestions for improving the 'comfort of all parties' on migrant voyages. 'In the female Hospital there were two small and one large Birth [sic]', he noted. 'I would much prefer having one other large Birth instead of the two small ones. I had two Midwifery cases at nearly the same time and one of the children was lost, by being "overlaid" by the Mother in one of those small Births.'³⁰ This was not an isolated case. To cite just one further example, in 1874, ten days after the *Carrick Castle* left Queenstown, County Cork, bound for Bluff, a child born in the few days between embarkation and sailing 'was overlaid and smothered by its mother during the night'.³¹ Accidental suffocation was not uncommon on land in this period either, but the risk was clearly higher at sea, where the ship's movement tossed sleepers about.

Overlying was just one of many dangers to babies born at sea. Like maternal mortality, infant mortality was high by today's standards in both Europe and its colonies in the nineteenth century. In New Zealand, three in every 100 non-Māori babies born alive in the period 1872 to 1899 did

not survive the first month of life.³² There were no official statistics kept of stillbirths, but the figures reported by two doctors who attended many births in New Zealand during the 1860s to 1890s included stillbirths at 3% to 5%.³³ Anecdotal evidence suggests that infant mortality – like child mortality – was especially high at sea, and a careful study by Haines and Shlomowitz of deaths of infants born on government-assisted voyages to South Australia revealed a neonatal mortality rate four times higher than occurred in the Australian colonies.³⁴ Around 10% of babies born at sea on voyages to Australia in the 1850s and 1860s also died at sea.³⁵ Of the 1295 ocean-born babies in my sample, I know that 26 were stillborn (2.0%), and 93 born alive did not survive the voyage (7.3%). As information on causes of and/or ages at death is not available for many voyages, these rates must be considered a serious underestimate.

The biggest single cause of neonatal mortality in late nineteenth-century New Zealand was prematurity, which accounted for nearly a third of deaths. In this period medical experts considered seven months of gestation the borderline of viability, with even a seven months' child extremely vulnerable. Babies born alive at five to six months generally only survived a short time.³⁶ Premature birth seems to have been unusually common aboard ship. This is hardly surprising. I have already mentioned cases where women sustained falls that could bring on labour. Others became severely debilitated by seasickness, which, even if it did not bring on an early birth, might lead to an undernourished and vulnerable baby. High stress was another risk factor for preterm labour, and the anxiety of migration or frightening storms at sea undoubtedly affected some women. A single sentence in a newspaper report on the arrival of the *Warrior Queen* in Port Chalmers in 1868 conveyed one family's tragedy: 'On the 19th November, Mrs Louisa Welsh, aged 40, died through premature confinement brought on by seasickness; her child also died.'³⁷ Annie Douglas kept a diary of the *Peter Denny's* maiden voyage from Glasgow to Otago in 1865, and described a severe storm in which waves washed over and flooded the passengers' quarters: 'at 10 p.m. another sea, not nearly so large, and at the same moment a cry for the Doctor to a woman who was about to be confined'. A week later she wrote this had been 'another birth on board prematurely, another unmarried woman, she had been terribly frightened the time of the storm, the child lived till next day, and the mate and Doctor sewed it in a pillowcase and threw it overboard after night, there was no ceremony'.³⁸

Women were generally supportive of one another during the trials of childbirth aboard ship, but one group was vulnerable to censure from their fellow passengers and the authorities: unmarried mothers. The comments

of Isabella Findlayson, who travelled from Scotland to Otago in the single women's quarters of the *Oamaru* in 1876, represented the attitude of the time: 'I am ashamed to tell you that one of our girls was confined of a daughter last night at half past 9 God knows what will become of her when she is well and landed', she recorded in her diary.³⁹ If young married couples were the most popular migrants, single mothers were among the least. Nevertheless, some women managed to hide their pregnancy from immigration agents and the cursory inspection of the ship's doctor prior to departure. In producing a baby they provided unquestionable evidence of sexual activity outside marriage, a danger to the conjugal family so idealized by systematic colonizers. This was a matter of morals, but also of economics. As Weeks notes, the 'popular masses', as well as the middle class, had various ways of shaming those who stepped outside their standards of sexual behaviour, but this was 'a *social* morality, in which the potential economic burden to the community of bastards mattered more than the "immorality" of pre-marital sex'. Premarital sex had long been accepted, provided a couple married if pregnancy resulted; but with industrialization, urbanization and increasing mobility, traditional social controls loosened and single women could find themselves pregnant and unsupported.⁴⁰

I have identified births to single women (sometimes more than one) on 18 migrant voyages to New Zealand; no doubt there were others not included in public reports. Three of the 88 single women among the 120 government-assisted migrants to Canterbury on the *Light Brigade* in 1868 gave birth on the voyage, and one died as a result.⁴¹ Charlotte Macdonald notes that births were common enough among single women that the British Ladies' Female Emigrant Society supplied items required for confinements in their shipboard kits for the single women's quarters.⁴² The official report of the Immigration Commissioners at Port Chalmers on the arrival of the *Timaru* from Glasgow in 1876 recommended that 'greater care should be exercised in the selection and inspection of the single girls. One of the latter on board gave birth to a child, and another is now near her confinement, and will have to be supported by the government for some time thereafter.'⁴³ When three single women arrived at Auckland 'far advanced in pregnancy' on the *Assaye* in 1874, the Agent General for New Zealand in London received a terse request from the Minister of Immigration 'that you will cause inquiry to be made as to the certificates upon which free passages were granted to these persons'.⁴⁴

Some of these women were escaping horrific prospects in their homeland. The young woman who gave birth upon the *Oamaru* was, explained Findlayson, an Irish farmer's daughter; 'had she not come away her father would have shot her'. She was not yet 19 and 'without much sense' and

attracted some sympathy for her plight from the doctor and her fellow passengers: 'it was unfeeling of them to banish her away amongst strangers', suggested Findlayson. When the baby was overlaid and died at just two days, the mother was 'in a sad state about it'.⁴⁵ By European standards, Ireland had very low rates of illegitimacy and there was much shame attached to an unmarried mother; migration must have seemed an appealing option to a young pregnant woman without support.⁴⁶ Of course, if a woman wanted to escape and start afresh in the relative anonymity of a new country, there was no place further away than New Zealand. In a country where domestic servants and prospective wives were in high demand, an employer or husband was perhaps more likely to accept an existing child, though the plight of the unmarried mother in New Zealand could also be a harsh one. Women's wages were very low and the cost of foster care could send a single mother into destitution unless she had family or friends willing to assist.⁴⁷ Harriet Lockley, a 23-year-old servant from Warwickshire, was one of the pregnant single women aboard the *Assaye*; she probably stayed at the women's refuge on her arrival in Auckland. She gave birth at the hospital, then a place for the destitute. A couple of years later Lockley was working as a servant for a well-known actress when she fell pregnant again. Shortly after giving birth she took Edward Sweeney to court for refusing maintenance: 'an intimacy had grown up between her and the defendant at Miss Anstead's, Symonds-street, where he was in the habit of visiting her fellow servant'. The case did not go well for Lockley. The magistrate brought up her past; Sweeney, while admitting the 'improper intimacy', denied paternity; and the case was dismissed. It is unclear what happened subsequently to Lockley or either of her children, but she probably married soon afterwards.⁴⁸

It was nigh on impossible to keep any shipboard birth a secret from fellow passengers, though some women tried. James Meston recorded in his diary the sad outcome of one case aboard the *Oamaru*, ten weeks out from Glasgow en route to Otago in 1878: 'A very sudden death took place amongst the single girls. One of them had made premature birth and concealed the fact until too late and was found dead in her berth'.⁴⁹ Both migrants and authorities sometimes colluded to keep births to unmarried women concealed from the general public. A newspaper report of the *Oamaru*'s voyage detailed the other births and deaths but not the case described by Meston.⁵⁰ Likewise, in 1875 Auckland's *Daily Southern Cross* gave a detailed report on the voyage of the *Alumbagh*, but this omitted the birth of twins to one of the young unmarried women aboard, revealed in the Immigration Commissioners' report.⁵¹ Was the surgeon protecting the privacy of this young mother or the reputation of the ship when he did not include her in the list he supplied to the press?

Just a month after the *Alumbagh*'s arrival, authorities failed to keep the news of births to unmarried women aboard another migrant ship, the *Friedeburg*, away from the public eye. The *Friedeburg* sailed from Hamburg to Napier with a large party of government-sponsored migrants, mostly Danes and Germans. A Napier reporter telegraphed the news of its safe arrival around the country, noting that 'two unforeseen [sic] juvenile "contingencies" made their appearance in the single girls' compartment, and had the voyage been much prolonged, the original 24 occupants of that compartment would probably have increased by 13 souls in all'.⁵² This report caused 'great indignation' in Napier for its 'very heartless slander' on the *Friedeburg*'s single women.⁵³ The ship's surgeon, Dr J. Temple, rushed to their defence. He admitted that two unmarried women had given birth during the voyage, but, 'with regard to the statement about the other girls being pregnant, I can most distinctly and authoritatively deny it. There is no truth in it whatever.'⁵⁴ This was a disingenuous response: there may not have been 13 pregnancies amongst the single women, but the Immigration Commissioners' report reveals that six – a quarter of the group – had been pregnant when the ship left Hamburg.⁵⁵ However, the two Danish women who bore children on the voyage were in established relationships, migrating on the same ship as their partners; it was only economics that prevented them marrying before departure. Temple explained that in Denmark they could not marry 'unless they could show proof of being able to maintain and educate a numerous progeny. That under such circumstances people are occasionally driven to irregular courses of life must be apparent, but it does not necessarily follow that the girl was a bad or dissolute woman.'⁵⁶ The Immigration Commissioners wasted no time in arranging for four of the *Friedeburg* women to marry before they left the Napier immigration barracks, thus ensuring they would no longer be a potential cost to the government or charitable aid as single mothers, but respectable family women who would contribute to the country's developing economy.⁵⁷

Similar barriers to marriage may have contributed to several other cases involving women migrating from continental Europe. My sample includes nine voyages bringing migrants to New Zealand direct from Hamburg or Christiania (now Oslo). In addition to the *Friedeburg*, births occurred among the single women on the 1873 voyage of the *Hovding* from Norway and the 1875 voyage of the *Lammershagen* from Germany. When the *Gutenberg* arrived in Wellington from Hamburg in 1876, with migrants from Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, the Immigration Commissioners reported that 'several people who were berthed amongst the married immigrants are not married, they having lived together before

applying to the Agent for a free passage'.⁵⁸ It also emerged that an immigration agent in Switzerland had induced an unmarried mother and a single man, previously unacquainted, to pose as a married couple for the purposes of obtaining a free passage. The young woman's parish had paid her to leave home.⁵⁹ These cases reflected patterns in the home countries of the migrants. The Nordic countries had consistently higher rates of illegitimacy than other parts of Europe, partly due to high societal expectations of economic independence prior to marriage. Couples often delayed marriage or did not marry at all, but were still sexually active.⁶⁰

It is clear, though, that most single women from Britain and Ireland who gave birth at sea had no support from their child's father. Some travelled alone but others were in family groups, including several among the supposedly upright Presbyterian settlers on early voyages to Otago. Margaret Shand, migrating from Aberdeenshire with her parents and siblings, gave birth aboard the *Maori* in 1852. On interrogation by the elders of First Church of Otago, Margaret 'declared that William Morris an unmarried man, and miller in Whitehaugh near Inverurie in Scotland had been guilty with her and was the father of her child'.⁶¹ The rural north-east and south-west of Scotland, where the living and working conditions of the rural working classes promoted social and sexual interaction, were known for their high illegitimacy rates.⁶² Occasionally such patterns of living continued in New Zealand. During the 1860s and 1870s the elders of Tokomairiro Presbyterian Church in South Otago kept busy disciplining parishioners for 'fornication' and 'antenuptial fornication'; new parents voluntarily came before them to be reprimanded and forgiven so they could have their children baptized. This was a strongly Scottish and Presbyterian district, essentially a community of rural Scots translated to the opposite side of the world with little interference from other traditions.⁶³ Unmarried mothers presumably found more support in Tokomairiro than they did in most other communities, where some took desperate measures. Margaret McPherson, whose case is discussed in Sarah Carr's article in this volume, was one of nearly a hundred people to appear before New Zealand courts charged with infanticide or concealment of birth between the 1860s and the turn of the century.⁶⁴

Charles Bowring, whose mother celebrated his birth in poetry, eventually acquired 11 younger siblings, but none of them could boast the privilege of being 'God's gift upon the sea'.⁶⁵ For better or for worse, hundreds of colonial women gave birth during the voyage to New Zealand. On the positive side, labour could be shorter at sea and there was experienced help at hand. On the negative, pregnancy could be especially uncomfortable aboard ship and premature labour was more common; both maternal and infant mortality were

higher than on land. Nevertheless, the great majority of these women survived to arrive in their new country with an extra colonist in their party. Babies born at sea would not remember the voyage, but many carried a mark of their birthplace through life in their name. Among numerous examples, Elizabeth Steadfast Miller was born on the *Steadfast* (1851), Alexander Young Oamaru Meston on the *Oamaru* (1878), and Mary Timaru Walker and David Timaru Lees aboard the *Timaru* (1879).⁶⁶ The long voyage was a period of transition for migrants to New Zealand. Babies born during this interlude between the old life and the new came to symbolize the aspirations of their parents, and all their fellow passengers, for a prosperous future.

The abundance of births en route to New Zealand made it clear that the colonists were a sexually active and fertile group. Migrants could refrain from sex during the voyage or undertake their activities furtively; there is very little evidence about this. However, birthing a baby could not be so easily hidden in the confined spaces of a ship. Most births were welcomed, but if the mother was unmarried her fellow passengers could react with considerable ambivalence, as when Isabella Findlayson expressed both shame and sympathy concerning a single shipmate who bore a child. Migrants brought with them varied sexual cultures from their homelands, revealed in the stories shared here. In parts of continental Europe difficulties meeting the economic prerequisites of marriage made sexual activity and childbearing among committed but unmarried couples relatively common. Meanwhile, in parts of Britain, and especially in Ireland, ‘illegitimacy’ was highly shameful; for some pregnant single women, migration represented an escape from condemnation and penury. Economics led the concerns of New Zealand migration authorities about the arrival of unmarried new or expectant mothers; in a country where women earned little, they seemed unlikely to achieve financial independence and the state had no desire to increase its meagre welfare provision. More broadly, women who had evidently indulged in sex outside marriage seemed a threat to the conjugal family, that institution so central to the colonization project.

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NOTES

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1 'Original Poetry', *Southern Cross* (Auckland), 24 October 1856. The poem included two further verses referring to the parents' hopes for their baby's future. Bowring was an enthusiastic poet destined to have many more of her works published: in old age she made a large donation to war funds from the sale of her patriotic verses. See 'Death of Old Colonist', *New Zealand Herald* (NZH), 8 February 1923.

2 'Original Poetry'.

3 *Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand, 1858–1896*. The number of births at sea was even higher than the census could reveal, for numerous babies died before reaching land.

4 Studies which include some discussion of birth as well as death at sea include Robin Haines, *Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The Passage to Australia*, Sydney, 2003, and Helen Woolcock's investigation of migrant voyages to Queensland, *Rights of Passage: Emigration to Australia in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1986. On migrant mortality at sea, see also Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Mortality and Migration: A Survey', in David Boyd-Haycock and Sally Archer, eds, *Health and Medicine at Sea 1700–1900*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2009, pp.128–42; Raymond Cohn, 'Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to New York, 1836–1853', *Journal of Economic History*, 44, 2 (1984), pp.289–300; Raymond Cohn, 'The Determinants of Individual Mortality on Sailing Ships, 1836–1853', *Explorations in Economic History*, 24 (1987), pp.371–91; Farley Grubb, 'Morbidity and Mortality on the North Atlantic Passage: Eighteenth-Century German Immigration', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17, 3 (1987), pp.565–85; John McDonald and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to Australia in the 19th Century', *Explorations in Economic History*, 27 (1990), pp.84–113; John McDonald and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Mortality on Chinese and Indian Voyages to the West Indies and South America 1847–1874', *Social and Economic Studies*, 41, 2, pp.203–40; and Robin Haines and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Causes of Death of British Emigrants on Voyages to South Australia, 1848–1885', *Social History of Medicine*, 16, 2 (2003), pp.193–208. There is also a large body of scholarly work on mortality at sea in the slave trade. The outstanding study of migrant voyages to New Zealand includes a vivid description of the birthing experiences of three women on one voyage: see David Hastings, *Over the Mountains of the Sea: Life on the Migrant Ships 1870–1885*, Auckland, 2006, pp.197–9, 207–11.

5 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850*, rev. ed., London, 2002, p.402.

6 John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed., Chicago, 2012, p.141.

7 Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, 3rd ed., Harlow, 2012, pp.113–14.

8 Frances Steel, *Oceania Under Steam: Sea Transport and the Cultures of Colonialism, c.1870–1914*, Manchester, 2011, p.145; Hastings, p.12.

9 Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16, 1 (1986), pp.22–27 (translated by Jay Miskowiec from a 1984 article in French, based on a lecture given in 1967).

10 Hastings, pp.131–3.

11 Hastings, pp.181–90. For a later period, see Steel, pp.140–6.

12 Many official reports of voyages were published in the *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, available at AtoJs Online (<http://atojs.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/atojs>), while others appeared in newspapers, some of them available on *Papers Past* (<http://paperspast>).

natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast). Other figures were obtained from shipboard diaries, both published and unpublished – I am grateful to Ben Maddison for referring me to some of these. The genealogy website ‘Immigrant Ships to New Zealand 1835–1910’ provided useful lists of migrant voyages: see freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~shipstonz/shipstonz.html

13 *Press* (Christchurch), 14 Oct 1863; Arthur Price diary, www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nzlscant/LANwitchdiary.htm and David Carr diary, www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nzlscant/lanwitchcarrdiary.htm. The newspaper report on the *Lancashire Witch* only mentioned nine births, but two shipboard diaries each recount 12 births. This under-reporting of births, possibly due to stillbirths or neonatal deaths, was common in voyage reports. Further research into shipboard diaries would no doubt add many more births to my statistics.

14 Haines, p.58; Woolcock, p.349. For a detailed study of fertility rates on voyages to Australia, see Ralph Shlomowitz and John McDonald, ‘Babies at Risk on Immigrant Voyages to Australia in the Nineteenth Century’, *Economic History Review*, 44, 1 (1991), pp.86–101.

15 *Lyttelton Times* (LT), 8 December 1863; *Press* (Christchurch), 10 December and 29 December 1863.

16 Jock Phillips and Terry Hearn, *Settlers: New Zealand Immigrants from England, Ireland and Scotland 1800–1945*, Auckland, 2008, pp.21–24.

17 Erik Olssen, ‘Families and the Gendering of European New Zealand in the Colonial Period, 1840–80’, in Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie, eds, *The Gendered Kiwi*, Auckland, 1999, pp.40–48.

18 LT, 12 October 1859; passenger list of *Cashmere*, Family Search website: familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.3.1/TH-266-11560-32303-7?cc=1609792

19 Statistics of causes of death were published each year in *Statistics of the Colony of New Zealand*. These statistics did not include Māori. For further discussion, see Alison Clarke, *Born to a Changing World: Childbirth in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand*, Wellington, 2012, pp.173–5.

20 Irvine Loudon, *Death in Childbirth: An International Study of Maternal Care and Maternal Mortality 1800–1950*, Oxford, 1992, p.164.

21 Jessie Campbell diary, 18 October and 15 December 1840, in Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard, *Women Under Sail: Letters and Journals Concerning Eight Women Travelling or Working in Sailing Vessels between 1829 and 1949*, Newton Abbot, 1970, pp.60, 69. Catherine Hadfield had a similar experience when she gave birth to her third child aboard the *Southern Cross* during a voyage from New Zealand to England; see Catherine Hadfield, ‘Letters written during voyage to England in 1858 in the *Southern Cross*’, pp.19–20, qMS-0894, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington. On similar expressions on the ease of childbirth at sea on voyages to Australia, see Haines, pp.64, 138–9.

22 Emily Summerhays diary, 8 June and 16–18 June 1875, www.yesteryears.co.nz/shipping/diaries/halcione1875.html

23 Samuel Hodgkinson, Journal on Ship *Bombay*, qMS HOD, Nelson Provincial Museum; Index of New Zealand Company passengers to Nelson, Nelson Provincial Museum.

24 Clarke, *Born to a Changing World*, pp.50–53.

25 Martin Henry Payne, General Summary of the Voyage of the *Warwick*, 9 February 1873, AJHR, 1873, D1, pp. 63–64. On craniotomy, an operation which involved crushing the unborn child’s skull so it could be delivered through a narrow pelvis, see Clarke, *Born to a Changing World*, p.91. This procedure was often favoured over Caesarean section in the nineteenth century because of the very high mortality of Caesarean for the mother.

26 Hodgkinson, Journal on ship *Bombay*. On the development of safer blood transfusion, see Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present*, London, 1997, pp. 590–2.

27 Commissioners’ Report on the Ship *Camperdown*, 13 July 1876, AJHR, 1877, D3, p.2;

Camperdown passenger list, Family Search website: familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.3.1/TH-267-11684-17968-80?cc=1609792

28 NZH, 21 October 1873; *Hydaspes* passenger list, Family Search website: familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.3.1/TH-267-11774-39388-91?cc=1609792

29 James John Macan, Report of Surgeon-Superintendent of Ship *Chile*, AJHR, 1873, D1, p.34.

30 Diary of Dr J.R. Motherwell, in Bruce Crowther, *Voyage of the Barque Birman, Gravesend 13 October 1841–Wellington 1 March 1842*, Te Awamutu, 1992, p.40.

31 ‘Shipping’, *Southland Times*, 17 July 1874.

32 *Statistics of New Zealand*, 1872–1899.

33 ‘Analysis of 2589 Cases of Midwifery Attended by the late Dr. W. Sealy, between April 17th, 1859, and December 31st, 1885’, read before N.Z. Medical Association by Jas. Hudson, M.B. (Lond.). *New Zealand Medical Journal* (NZMJ), 4, 4 (1891), pp.253–4; E.H. Alexander, ‘Mortality in Midwifery’, NZMJ, 7, 3 (1894), pp. 159–61.

34 Robin Haines and Ralph Shlomowitz, ‘Deaths of Babies Born on Government-Assisted Emigrant Voyages to South Australia in the Nineteenth Century’, *Health and History*, 6, 1 (2004), pp.113–24.

35 Haines, p.66.

36 Theophilus Parvin, *The Science and Art of Obstetrics*, 2nd ed., Edinburgh and London, 1891, p.149. This was a set text for students at Otago Medical School. For further discussion see Clarke, *Born to a Changing World*, pp.220–1.

37 ‘Shipping’, *Otago Daily Times* (ODT), 29 January 1868.

38 Annie Douglas diary, 22 and 29 August 1865, Misc-MS-2151, Hocken Collections (HC), Dunedin.

39 Isabella Findlayson diary, 7 December 1876, in Sarah Ell, ed., *The Adventures of Pioneer Women in New Zealand from their Letters, Diaries and Reminiscences*, Auckland, 1992, p.40 (original diary at ATL, Wellington). For discussion of this incident, see also Hastings, pp.190–1.

40 Weeks, pp.32, 77–78.

41 Charlotte Macdonald, *A Woman of Good Character*, Wellington, 1990, pp.94–95. Newspaper reports of the voyage of the *Light Brigade* made no mention of these births, identified by Macdonald from immigration department records for Canterbury. However, the three women concerned all appear on the published passenger list. See *Press* (Christchurch), 27 August 1868 and *Star* (Christchurch), 27 August 1868.

42 Macdonald, p.94.

43 Commissioners’ Report on the Ship *Timaru*, 23 October 1876, AJHR, 1877, D3, p.8.

44 Hon. H.A. Atkinson to Agent-General for New Zealand, 16 January 1875, AJHR, 1875, D3, p.39.

45 Findlayson diary, 7 and 9 December 1876.

46 Liam Kennedy, ‘Bastardy and the Great Famine: Ireland, 1845–1850’, *Continuity and Change*, 14, 3 (1999), pp. 429–52; Maria Luddy, ‘Unmarried Mothers in Ireland, 1880–1973’, *Women’s History Review*, 20, 1 (2011), pp.109–26.

47 Government assistance to unmarried mothers and their children in New Zealand was negligible, though some churches and other philanthropists provided temporary assistance for these women, often in ‘rescue’ homes. See Claire Wood, ‘Bastardy Made Easy? Unmarried Mothers and Illegitimate Children of Charitable Aid, Dunedin 1890–1910’, BA(Hons) dissertation, University of Otago, 1990; Andrée Lévesque, ‘Prescribers and Rebels: Attitudes to European Women’s Sexuality in New Zealand, 1860–1916’, in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant, eds, *Women in History: Essays on European Women in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1986, pp.1–12; Margaret Tennant, “‘Magdalens and Moral Imbeciles”:

Women's Homes in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 9, 5 (1986), pp.491–502; and Clarke, *Born to a Changing World*, pp.83–89, 108–10, 117–18.

48 The three pregnant single women were described by initials and location in Agent-General to Minister for Immigration, 19 March 1875, AJHR, 1875, D2, p.83. Harriet Lockley matches one of these descriptions: see *Assaye* passenger list, Family Search website: familysearch.org/pal:MM9.3.1/TH-266-11016-142455-1?cc=1609792. On the sending of pregnant migrants to the 'Old Women's Refuge', see ODT, 19 January 1875, p.2. For the court case, see NZH, 21 April 1877, p.3 and *Auckland Star*, 20 April 1877, p.3. There is no trace of the death of a Harriet Lockley in New Zealand, but two women of that name married in the late 1870s; another possibility is that she left the country.

49 William Richardson, ed., *Shipboard Dairy of James Meston on the Voyage from Glasgow, Scotland to Port Chalmers, Otago, New Zealand, 8 October 1878 to 10 January 1879*, Auckland, 1980, p.14.

50 'Arrival of the Oamaru', ODT, 11 January 1879. The death of Mary Jane Craig, 20 years, was listed with no further detail.

51 'Arrival of the Alumbagh, from London', *Daily Southern Cross* (DSC), 19 August 1875; Commissioners' Report on the Ship *Alumbagh*, 19 August 1875, AJHR, 1876, D3, pp.10–11.

52 DSC, 6 September 1875. The report also appeared in other New Zealand newspapers.

53 DSC, 25 September 1875.

54 J. Temple, letter to the editor, DSC, 9 September 1875.

55 Commissioners' Report on the Ship *Friedeburg*, 2 September 1875, AJHR, 1876, D3, p.12.

56 Temple, letter to the editor. The option of marrying in Hamburg before the ship left was ruled out by the prohibitive cost, which was 100 thalers – around £15 – for strangers.

57 Commissioners' Report on the Ship *Friedeburg*.

58 Commissioners' Report on Ship *Gutenberg*, 27 March 1876, AJHR, 1876, D3, pp.37–38.

59 Hon. H.A. Atkinson to Agent-General for New Zealand, 3 May 1876, AJHR, 1876, D1, pp.19–20.

60 John Rogers, 'Nordic Family History: Themes and Issues, Old and New', *Journal of Family History*, 18, 4 (1993), pp.291–314.

61 First Church of Otago Session Minutes, 3 January 1853, P19001 99/90, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand Archives Research Centre (PCANZARC), Dunedin. The minutes for 1 December 1856 reveal a very similar case: Margaret Greive gave birth aboard the *Strathmore* in 1856.

62 Christopher Smout, 'Aspects of Sexual Behaviour in Nineteenth-Century Scotland', in Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen and Richard M. Smith, eds, *Bastardy and its Comparative History: Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and Marital Nonconformism in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica and Japan*, London, 1980, pp.192–216; Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman, *Girls in Trouble: Sexuality and Social Control in Rural Scotland 1660–1780*, Edinburgh, 1998; Kenneth M. Boyd, *Scottish Church Attitudes to Sex, Marriage and the Family 1850–1914*, Edinburgh, 1980; Andrew Blaikie, 'Scottish Illegitimacy: Social Adjustment or Moral Economy?', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 29, 2 (1998), pp. 221–41.

63 Tokomairiro Presbyterian Church session minute books, PCANZARC. For further discussion, see Alison Clarke, 'Popular Piety, the Sacraments and Calvinism in Colonial New Zealand', in Murray Rae, Peter Matheson and Brett Knowles, eds, *Calvin: The Man and the Legacy*, Adelaide, 2014, pp.189–212.

64 Clarke, *Born to a Changing World*, pp. 230–40.

65 'Original Poetry'; 'Death of Old Colonist'.

66 'Voyage of the "Steadfast"', LT, 28 June 1851; *Shipboard Dairy of James Meston*, p.1; Christina MacDonald shipboard diary, *Timaru*, 12 October 1879, Misc-MS-0731, HC, Dunedin.