

Letter from Eileen Wise, a former pupil at Wheatley Secondary School, who emigrated to Australia c.1956

It is four years on March 7^h since I left England with my family on board the Strathnaver, feeling full of adventure and excitement at the thought of such a long journey, and of whatever future lay ahead for us all. It was a beautiful ship. Both Michael and I had cabins to ourselves and my youngest brother shared a cabin with my parents. We had telephones at the bedside which we could use for room service, and were treated as first class passengers.

Our first port of call was Malta where 400 Maltese passengers embarked for Australia also. We spent four most interesting hours ashore: it is known as the country of bells and smells, and I think that sums up Malta very well.

Our next stop was Port Said but we were unable to disembark there. We found Aden quite interesting. Around the dock area it was dirty with beggars and pedlars, and animals wandering in the streets. We were very fortunate that our parents took us on a coach trip, through much pleasant country. All watches, jewellery, cameras etc were very cheap because there is no tax.

Our next call was Colombo and once again we went on a tour. We visited a Buddhist temple where we all had to take our shoes off, but it was really beautiful, the colours of the sweet smelling flowers that were laid at the God's feet. We stopped at Mount Lavinia Hotel for afternoon tea - the same hotel in which the Duke of Edinburgh stayed. We saw the university buildings, the zoo, and everywhere the colours of the natives' costumes were a real pleasure to the eye.

Our next call was Perth where we first put our feet on Australian soil. Perth itself is a very fine town which seems to be built around the Swan River. After a few hours we sailed on to Adelaide. Our long journey had at last come to an end, a journey which I will always remember, of adventure into countries which, at school, I never thought it possible I should one day visit.

We were met at the harbour by immigration officials who welcomed us to Australia, and after going through the customs office, we were taken to the hostel which was to be our home for the next twelve months. There wasn't one of us who like it there at first, but I don't think anyone likes communal living. After a while we got used to it, and made many good friends, and I can really look back on our year at the hostel as being quite a happy one.

The first thing I had to do was to find employment, which was quite easy. I became a nurse to two lovely little girls in a doctor's home. I was very happy there, but after three years I decided I would like a change and for the last six months have been working in the laboratory of an electrical firm, and I must say I am really enjoying it. The work is so interesting, the time seems to pass so quickly, but I am afraid it would take too long to go into full details of this employment.

You have asked me to compare life here in Australia with England: I will do my best.

1. **Education.** The schools here are not so well planned or constructed as in England. The majority of pupils stay at school until they get their intermediate certificate at the age of 15 - 16 years and then usually go on for their leaving honours which is really necessary if they want to get a good job. Generally speaking it is almost impossible for boys to get an apprenticeship or for girls to do secretarial work without a school certificate. Parents have to buy all school books and other amenities for the child's use, except when one is transferred to high school, and then the government pays about one third of the cost.
2. **Medical.** There is no national health insurance here as in England. Most people belong to a medical association, which costs about 7s. a week, and covers most of your medical expenses, e.g. a visit to the dentist costs 15s., the association pays 12s. 6d. and you pay 2s. 6d.
3. **Life Here.** Most of the living accommodation is of the bungalow type - there are very few two-storey homes. The bungalows are very compact and easy to live in and keep clean. Most of them have very big gardens, with large lawns and flower beds because the climate is so hot that one spends most of the time out of doors, playing tennis, swimming, and at barbecues. Everyone is very friendly and so often one has friends popping in, or one gets invited to barbecues. We have long summers of months without rain, which makes the countryside very brown, such that you would just love to feel the rain fall: there are seven months without rain. One realises why Australia has so many great swimmers and tennis players, and no matter what nationality one is, money is no object. Promising youngsters are encouraged by great trainers, like Harry Gallagher for swimming, and the best teachers for tennis and cricket. The Australians are great lovers of sport, but at times very much one-sided. We certainly got ribbed last year when the tests were on. There are still great open spaces here, and a car is a necessity; one thinks nothing of travelling 100 miles there and back to have tea with a friend!

Of course this is just South Australia of which I write. Australia is made up of six states, each State having its own government, ours being a liberal one. Pubs close at 6 pm and are not open on Sundays, neither are there any cinemas open on Sundays, for generally speaking it is spent as a day of rest after a visit to Church, the remainder of the time is spent at the beautiful beaches, or boating on the Torrens River, or visiting friends.

I shall look forward very much to receiving the school magazine, it will be grand to get news of all my school friends. Both the family and myself enjoy our life here in Australia very much, but miss all our old friends and relations. I'm hoping in two year's time to return to England for a holiday to see you all once again.

Yours sincerely,

Eileen Wise, 167 Harvey Road, Elizabeth Grove, Adelaide.