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The food.

Ships included drinking water in the price of the ticket and some basic foodstuffs – but with no guarantee of quality and with nothing fancy, such as jam or fresh vegetables. In the 1800s the basics would be salted beef, fish or pork, dried peas, rice, preserved potatoes, raisins, treacle, suet, flour. In earlier times it would have been just salt meat and ships biscuit, and pray for a fast passage with enough stops to get more stores!



So what was it like to leave?...

Pretty much, if you were poor, you said your farewells in the expectation of never seeing friends or family ever again. On the other hand, if there was a job awaiting you with relatives that had gone on ahead, or if you were well off, then returning after some years was always a possibility. But the travelling was not comfortable and was neither quick nor safe. America was 6 weeks away, Australia and New Zealand at least 4 months. You and the other passengers were packed into the cramped accommodation decks – separate cabins were only for the rich. With you was only a small bag of your belongings and everything else was in a chest packed away in the hold until you got to where you were going. You had to provide your own mattress and bedding, suitable clothing, cups, bowls, plates and cutlery and do all your cleaning, laundry, and cooking (as a “mess” - a group of 8-10 people),. Oh, and don't forget your own chamber pot – with a tight fitting lid!

This leaflet is produced by Portaferry and Strangford Trust



Supported by
Ards and North Down
Borough Council

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Emigration and the Food at Sea

Leaving Ireland to try and find a better life has gone on for many hundreds of years, driven by weather, religious intolerances, politics, starvation or just a need for adventure. But during the period from around 1800 to 1900, almost half of the people born in Ireland ended up leaving, many to get work in the rest of the UK, but many travelled further, mostly to America and Canada, but also to southern Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand – meaning that people were at sea for weeks and months. A cheap ticket to Australia in the 1860s cost between £15 and £20, which would be a whole year's rent for a 20 acre farm. However, many tickets were subsidised by Governments – either because they wanted rid of you from the home country or because you were needed in the new. There were also charitable organisations and sponsors which would help with the costs, but usually only for steerage (3rd class).



Rations for a sea journey to Australia, 1864 after rules were brought in:

(if you were paying less for your ticket, not only were you more crowded, with no privacy at all, you had less food)!

Items provided from ship's stores <i>(and heaven help you if the journey took longer than planned)</i>	for an adult in second class: per week	for an adult in steerage: per week
preserved meats <i>(salted beef and pork, in anonymous lumps)</i>	1½ lbs	1 lb
soup and bouilli <i>(came in a tin: boiled beef & vegetables)</i>	½ lb	-
York ham <i>(a dry cured ham that keeps well)</i>	½ lb	-
fish <i>(fresh, dried & salted, smoked, or tinned)</i>	¼ lb	-
prime India beef <i>(good cuts of salt beef)</i>	1 ¼ lb	1 lb
Irish 'mess' pork <i>(good cuts of salt pork)</i>	1½ lb	1 lb
biscuit <i>(flour and water, baked dry, often nasty)</i>	4¼ lb	3½ lb
flour <i>(to make your own bread or even cake!)</i>	4 ¼ lb	3 lb
rice <i>(usually came with its own weevils)</i>	1 lb	½ lb
barley <i>(pearl barley, for adding to soup)</i>	½ lb	-
peas <i>(marrowfat type, to make soup or pease pudding)</i>	½ pint	½ pint
oatmeal <i>(to make porridge)</i>	½ pint	1 pint
sugar, raw <i>(brown, sticky and cheap)</i>	1 lb	1 lb
lime juice <i>(to prevent scurvy and your teeth falling out)</i>	6 oz	6 oz
tea <i>(loose, not in tea-bags, would be - used several times)</i>	1½ oz	1½ oz
coffee <i>(as beans, possibly not roasted)</i>	3 oz	2 oz
butter <i>(heavily salted, scooped from a wooden barrel)</i>	8 oz	6 oz
cheese <i>(very strong, hard, and dry; maybe with maggots)</i>	½ lb	-
currents or raisins <i>(to put in your rice pudding or cake)</i>	¼ or ½ lb	none or ½ lb
suet <i>(rendered beef fat for pastry, boiled puddings, dumplings)</i>	6 oz	6 oz
pickles <i>(probably chutney, to make boiled salt meat bearable)</i>	¼ oz	¼ oz
mustard	½ oz	½ oz
pepper	¼ oz	-
salt <i>(as if you'd need more!)</i>	2 oz	2 oz
potatoes fresh or preserved <i>(dried)</i>	3½ or ½ lb	2 or ½ lb
water for cooking <i>(washing would be in seawater)</i>	21 quarts	21 quarts

extras for the voyage to bring along if you could afford them and had the space in your berth:

washing soda, blue, starch	small bottle of yeast	6 lb composition candles to fit a lantern
bicarbonate of soda, tartaric acid, cream of tartar	4 lb marine soap <i>(for personal hygiene)</i>	castor oil, aperient pills, calomel powders, ipecacuhana powders
cheese	sardines in tins	loaf sugar
ham <i>(dry and on the bone)</i>	ground coffee	desiccated milk
red herrings <i>(heavily salted)</i>	tea	preserves
biscuits <i>(the sweet kind)</i>	sago <i>(for making milk puddings)</i>	eggs
toasted bread <i>(because it will keep)</i>	arrowroot <i>(for poorly tummies)</i>	spices
onions	pickles of all sorts	dried apples and other fruits

Recipe for ships biscuit:

If eating them from the ship's stores: – tap out the weevils first. The biscuits will need to soak in some soup before you can bite into them; don't worry about the wiggly grubs – they are just extra protein. Best to make your own and bring along as emergency rations



- ½ pound coarse, whole meal flour, mixed with enough pea flour and ground bones to make about 1 pound of dry stuff
- ¼ ounce coarse salt
- enough water to mix to a very stiff dough
- leave for a half hour while you do something useful, like scrub the decks or patch a sail
- roll out to a square about a half inch thick
- cut into 4 and prick all over the top side with a greased nail
- bake on a greased iron slab for 30 minutes in a hot oven – and don't burn them!
- cool them and pack into a tin chest to store on board ship