

Whilst family activities ensured that Sid and Aggie were always fully occupied, the three months wait for the cruise to begin seemed interminable. Sid moaned "I'll be dead before we go", but he wasn't.

Eventually departure day arrived. The families assembled at Tullamarine Airport before flying to Sydney to embark on the Noordam a ship of 80,000 tonnes capable of carrying more than 1900 passengers.

Busses were waiting for them at Mascot Aerodrome to take the voyagers from Melbourne to the ship. Needless to say, the four siblings and their spouses treated Sid and Aggie as if they were invalids. "Let's make the most of this" Sid whispered to Aggie, "I like being pampered". Aggie concurred.

They arrived at the ship and checked in. "Where's our luggage", asked Sid. "Don't panic, it's already in your cabin" Ginny advised. She knew all about cruising. She and Leo had been on several in the past.

They were shown to their cabins and found their luggage already there. They started to unpack but were interrupted by a knock on the door. It was Sam. "Come on, I'll show you around the ship. You will be surprised at what's on offer." So off they went.

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All good things come to an end and it was time for Milly and Clarence to return to Melbourne. Apart from the usuals, a number of people turned up at Heathrow to see them depart including some Church dignitaries. She had certainly won some admirers.

Clarence hadn't been idle either. He had made himself known at the Bank and, by sensible questioning, had found out much about its workings. He had become friendly with some involved in personnel management and had been taken to several of the branches in and around London. The English staff were eager to find out what it was like working for the Bank on "the other side of the world."

"It's been wonderful having Milly and Clarence here but it will be nice to have the place to ourselves for a while. What with work and Netball, I'm worn-out by dinner time."

However, the peace didn't last for long. A continual stream of visitors imposed themselves on Sid and Jean. Rex and Meg were the next to arrive. Meg informed them that Mr and Mrs Wood had opened a new and bigger store and that she, Meg, was now the managing partner. Being a semester break, Rex had organised to visit some of Britain's most famous gardens, including Kew, Sissinghurst, Hidcote and the Royal Horticultural Society's Garden, Wisley.

Without exception the Head Gardeners were highly impressed by Rex's botanical knowledge, particular of Australian Native Flora. On the other hand, Rex and Meg were totally enchanted by the colour and diversity on display in these world-famous gardens. This research allowed Rex to discover species not yet available in Australia. A few judicious phone conversations with his employer and the Melbourne Botanical Garden soon saw an exchange of plants between Australia and England. Kew in particular was delighted to add to its Australian section. Rex soon decided that one day he would return to work in an English, or Scottish Garden.

Meg visited every hardware shop she could find. She did not think they were as good as those she worked in but she loved the musty quaintness of those in villages that were often several hundred years old. She had brought with her photos of her shops which she showed around. Some progressive shop owners vowed to bring their premises up to Twentieth Century standards. She also took close note of those products that were not available back home.

As was now the custom the two visitors were subjected to Bottomley-Brown hospitality.

Meg was taken shopping by Val and Elspeth, had lunch and afternoon tea in popular tea rooms and visited a couple of museums and galleries. Meg was also co-opted to help Jean with her netball ventures. The locals were amazed that these colonials could be so good.

They spent a weekend at “Keir Hardy” where, like the previous visitors, they marveled at how such wealthy people could be so humble and friendly. Rex, being from a farming background, spent a lot of time with Arthur Brown, discussing each other’s philosophies on farming practices. They became great friends.

Geoffrey Brown told Rex of his ambition to study agriculture and work in either Canada or Australia. A quick call to his father resulted in an invitation for Geoff to come and work for them before starting formal studies. A bonus was that Geoff was a keen tennis player and would get plenty of practise testing his game against Liz and Ruth. Bert, who seemed to be a semi-permanent fixture at the William’s, would also be a formidable opponent..

Rex and Meg had now been engaged for several years. They were clearly living together but they informed Sid and Jean that they planned to get married just before Christmas and they expected Sid and Jean to come home for it. When the BB’s heard of this they invited themselves, using the excuse that Gerry needed to catch up on bank business in Melbourne. Nobody argued with this.

Having created a great impression Rex and Meg headed back to Oz. Sid and Jean suspected that they would be regular visitors to “the old country”.

Having got rid of them the next arrivals, much to their amazement were Tom Watkins, Jean’s father and Jim Williams. Tom was greatly missing Jean and Jim wanted to talk to Geoff and Arthur Brown about Geoff’s proposed visit to their Northern Victorian farm.

Jean was delighted to see her over-protective father. She knew that if he had found any fault in Sid he would have made it very difficult for them. However, he really liked Sid and thought he had a very fine son-in law. Perhaps Sarah, who adored Sid, had a bit to do with that.

They, together with Gerry and Arthury, took Tom and Bill everywhere. to Ascot and Newmarket, to the Badminton Horse Trials, to livestock sales and Jim got to visit several dairies and milk processing factories. The British Dairy Industry was far more Government regulated, than in Victoria.

Of course, they had a few days at “Keir Hardy” and were greatly impressed by the progressive methods employed. Like most people they were in awe of Gerry until they realised just how “down-to-earth” and humble he really was.

Arrangements were made for Geoff to come to Australia for about six weeks. When Gerry found out about this he offered to pay for his travel but Arthur declined his offer considering it to be a family responsibility.

The two Australians from “the Outback” were simply amazed at the generosity and friendliness of their new English friends.

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