

The island of Juan Fernandez was reached on 8 April 1820. Its crags and precipices were ‘clothed with lofty woods interspersed with patches of luxuriant vegetation on which herds of Bullocks, Horses and Goats were seen feeding’. The vegetables and fish taken here gave a welcome change of diet.

Poynter writes well about the natural environment and shipboard life as it relates to the voyage itself, but makes few comments about the living conditions, diet, discipline, or personal trials on board the brig. His shipmates are mentioned only as companions for an excursion of discovery, or in some crisis – as when Dr Young executed a delicate piece of engineering on a scientific instrument, or a crew member had an arm lacerated by a sea elephant. An extra ration of grog and ‘a very tolerable scraper’ [fiddler] enhanced ‘the pleasures of the day’ on Christmas Day 1819, and the visits on shore were full of interest to the young men. However, later in the voyage, on 6 February, Poynter suggests in a mild complaint that the clothing ‘for our people’ could have been more suitable to the conditions ‘for, having been some time in a temperate climate they had contrived to get rid of their warm clothing for a lighter supply ...’.

During the four months at sea, the *Williams* encountered the weather that was to be expected in those latitudes, even in the summer – contrary winds, gales alternating with light breezes, overcast and cloudy days and contrary currents, besides the dangers of a rocky, iron-bound coast and the threat of floating ice and icebergs. There was fog on 15 days, making it impossible to take noon observations; there were five periods of 3-6 days without observations. To that extent, their dead reckoning course could not be laid down with precision. Courses were reckoned on 14 days in the two months, and bearings of the land were taken on 29 days in that time. Magnetic variation was observed, by amplitude and azimuth on only three days; but the results were consistent enough, and bearings and courses were good enough, when the weather was clear.

Latitude was easily obtained when it was a clear day. For longitude, Smith and Bransfield had only Smith’s chronometer. There is no information about the maker of the instrument, but it was said to be ‘an excellent chronometer’. A comparison of longitudes with the modern chart suggests that the rate was constant. In short, their account was as reliable as anybody, other than a hydrographic surveyor, could make of that unexplored land.

The brig *Williams* returned to Valparaiso on 16 April 1820 and the following month the charter ended and the officers and ratings rejoined their ships. Bransfield resumed his duties as Master of the *Andromache*, while Smith made preparations for another voyage ‘for the purpose of fishing for Whales and Seals’.<sup>11</sup> The careers of William Smith and Edward Bransfield have been described elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> Both were able men, working under extreme conditions, and both were to leave their names on the islands and coasts of New South Shetland.