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FROM DREAM TO REALITY

**A study of British migration to Western Australia in the 1960s, with special
emphasis on those who travelled on the SS *Castel Felice*.**

HILDA JUNE CAUNT

Presented as part of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
at the University of Notre Dame, Fremantle, Western Australia

2007

Declaration of Authorship

This thesis is my own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Hilda June Caunt

Date

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Abstract

This work is a unique contribution to the history of Western Australia. Over a million people left the British Isles to migrate to Australia during the 1960s. One hundred thousand migrants, not all of whom were British, came on the *Castel Felice*, one of the many ships travelling between Europe and Australia in the post-war movement of peoples. My thesis addresses the question of what motivated those who left Britain to do so at that time, for in Britain there were improving housing conditions, generally full employment, an impressive national social security system and the active social experience of the 'swinging 60s'. My thesis then questions whether the reality of life in Australia matched the better life they expected for their children and themselves. Often they became known as 'whingeing Poms'. Some of the participants in my study felt that information given to prospective migrants in the 1960s with regard to housing and employment was exaggerated. Many who had left Britain in this period gave up modern homes, friends and relatives to come to a country where it seemed that the insects were more welcoming than its people and where, to many, the housing appeared to be primitive, work difficult to find and the public transport system untenable. Was there a reason for the 'whingeing'? Finally, responses from migrants that have now returned to live in the United Kingdom are analysed.

There have been many books written on the migration phenomenon, and many which address the problems of assimilation to the Australian way of life by people from other nations. This thesis considers why in the 1960s British migrants made the decision to migrate, their experiences in the process of leaving, the voyage, the arrival, and why they eventually settled in Western Australia. It does so by assessing the responses of more than 100 people to a questionnaire: *A survey of migrants arriving in Western Australia during the 1960s*, and the information given by others who participated in an oral history interview. Some of the respondents had first migrated to one of the eastern states of Australia but later decided to settle in Western Australia. Interesting stories of the parting from home and the experiences on the voyage are followed by their memories of what happened to them on arrival in Western Australia, where they went, who they met and where they settled. Most of the participants stayed in the city and suburbs, but some went to the bush. In some cases they returned to live in the United Kingdom. Sherington estimates that 25% of all migrants who came to Australia in the 1960s returned to their homeland.¹

¹Geoffrey Sherington, *Australia's Immigrants 1788–1978*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1980, p. 148.

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Research was made easier by the cooperation of the staff at the St Theresa's Library, University of Notre Dame, other academic and public librarians and the staff of the National Archives and Western Australia State Records Office.

I acknowledge the help I received from the media, including the *West Australian*, *Fremantle Gazette*, and *West Australian Senior*, each of which published reports on the search for 1960s 'Ten Pound Poms' that encouraged many of the participants to contact me.

Michele Drouart, member of the Society of Editors, copy edited the textual content of the thesis. Finally I thank Carole Stabb who has been a constant support and corrected many of the typographical errors during the writing of this thesis.

Note on referencing

My thesis makes extensive use of the instrument, *A survey of migrants arriving in Western Australia during the 1960s*. The survey was completed for this study by over 100 migrants who came from all parts of the British Isles to Western Australia in the 1960s, many of whom did so aboard the SS *Castel Felice*. Oral history interviews were also conducted with some of these respondents.

A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix 1. Responses to this survey were returned by post to me over a period of nearly a year. Each survey included a consent form which was signed and dated by the respondent. Many of the respondents requested that their contributions remain anonymous. As a consequence their names have been withheld.

When each survey response was returned I allocated to it a consecutive number according to the date of receipt.

When citing the responses in this thesis I have given a name of the participant, the survey number and the date of arrival in Australia. For example, a survey's first citation is formatted as follows, wherever possible the month and year of arrival will be included:

John and Joan Baldwin, arr. May 1966, Survey 57.
Name withheld arr. Jan. 1966, Survey 15.

In further footnotes the 'name withheld' will be replaced by 'Anon'

Wherever possible in this work I have used the spelling, punctuation and grammar used by the respondents in their answers to the questions. In many cases the answers were in the form of notes and comments with little punctuation.

