

Eleanor's Odyssey - (excerpt from one commentary):

It was fortunate that an East Indiaman captain's wife was allowed to carry one ton of luggage, because Eleanor needed every ounce of it. On shore, she could expect to be entertained by local nabobs and affluent merchants, and visit palaces, castles, gardens, and waterfalls, and for this she would need walking gowns, visiting gowns, a dance dress, a mantle, a carriage dress, and a riding habit—and her own side-saddle, too.

While these might be packed away while she was at sea, she would still need an extensive shipboard wardrobe. Luckily, the current vogue was for high-waisted, ankle-length day gowns, so her hems did not drag on wet decks. Less elegant were the wooden clogs—pattens—she would have to wear over her dainty satin or velvet shoes, to protect them from mud and rough planks. However, it was common practice for even the most highborn women to wear pattens in the streets, to protect the ballet slipper-style footwear fashionable at the time.

Luckily, too, shady brims were also in style, this being an era when a porcelain complexion was greatly admired, but Eleanor would have needed long, narrow scarves to lash over her hat and tie under her chin when walking the breezy decks—and gloves, to make sure her hands did not



become freckled. Naturally, too, she would have shawls, probably lovely Cashmere shawls that Hugh had brought her from India. The wind would be chilly in the southern ocean, so one or two of the short jackets called spencers would come in handy, along with a serviceable cloak, and even a fur-lined pelisse. Luckily, corset stays were not in fashion, so she was not faced with the problem of keeping a sturdy whalebone-reinforced contraption clean. Instead, a simple linen shift was perfectly adequate for under-clothing, with perhaps a small bust enhancer. If there was a petticoat, it was a single one, made of a light fabric like fine muslin or lawn. And decent women did not wear drawers.

Obviously, the list of “articles of equipment necessary for the voyage” included many other items, such as paper for letter-writing (and list-making), and a journal for her daily diary. While Eleanor does not seem to have been a keen seamstress, she would certainly have carried a sewing kit. It was also sensible to carry small gifts for the people she would meet on shore. Merchant captains' wives often invested in knickknacks that could be traded for foreign curiosities. Eliza Underwood, who sailed with her husband on the *Kingsdown* in 1827, exchanged English bric-a-brac for tropical shells, which found a ready market back home.

While the *Friendship* carried a surgeon (the inept Dr Bryce), it was still advisable to pack a stock of medicines. Ether was the recommended remedy for both sunstroke and seasickness,

and Peruvian bark for “intermittent fever” – malaria. Lavender, laudanum, and smelling salts were used widely by women at the time, and so those would be carried, too. A whispered recommendation was to make sure to take “the sponge,” which was a finger-like sea-sponge encased in a silk net with a tassel for easy withdrawal, sold by all good apothecaries. Easily washed, it was an ideal menstrual tampon for shipboard use – and, when soaked in vinegar, for contraception, too, though disapproved of by male writers of marriage guides at the time.

Equally delicate was the hint that sea-life was very constipating. As Lady Anne Barnard revealed in her 1797 shipboard diary, many women endured the discomfort of stalled bowels “in silent modesty, because the remedy must be administered by another person.” The answer to this embarrassment was a self-administering enema syringe, with a conveniently bent nozzle, which had been introduced to England by a European sophisticate, Lady Christina Theresa Josepha Murray. Lady Christina was a refugee from her husband – she had married James Ogilvy, the seventh Earl of Findlater, when she was just twenty-four, and then found out that he was homosexual. To avoid exposure, he went back to Scotland, while she stayed with her parents in Luxembourg. In 1791, however, this comfortable arrangement had to be reversed, because of an inconvenient court case. Ogilvy disliked the beautiful and disreputable wife of Alexander, Duke of Gordon, and after a copper-sheathed ship named *Duchess of Gordon* was launched, he was overheard quipping, “I aye kent the Duchess had a brass neck and a brazen face, but I niver kent she had a copper arse.” The Duchess of Gordon consulted her lawyers, so James Ogilvy fled to Europe, where he introduced English landscape gardens, and Lady Christina fled to London, where she introduced the self-administering enema. As Lady Anne Barnard described, “she bestowed the pattern on a medical Protegé who in *gratitude* gave it her *Ladyships name*.” Though buying a “Lady Findlater” would cost Mrs Reid the enormous sum of two guineas and a half, Lady Anne’s recommendation would have been a strong one, “for the duty of suggesting a measure so valuable to future voyagers shall *supercede* all *delicacy*.”