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Our home on the oceanTM: Lady Brassey and the voyages of the *Sunbeam*, 1874–1887 ¹

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Abstract

Between 1874 and 1887 the exceptionally wealthy Brassey family embarked on a series of extensive cruises abroad on their private steam yacht the *Sunbeam*. Lady Annie Brassey's accounts of these worldwide journeys, notably her best-selling *A Voyage in the 'Sunbeam'TM: Our Home on the Ocean for Eleven Months* (1878), made her, her family and the *Sunbeam* household names in Victorian Britain and beyond. With a professional crew and domestic staff, the *Sunbeam* enabled the Brasseys to go wherever they pleased and provided Lady Brassey with a mobile home from which to compose her travel writings and collect souvenirs from around the world. This paper contributes to a broader historical geography of the sea by considering the contemporary appeal of Lady Brassey's popular accounts of sea travel and shipboard life. It explores how Lady Brassey's narratives of these grand oceanic tours surveyed and domesticated the world beyond England, and how they were shaped through the

construction of the *Sunbeam* as a "home" in which discourses of domesticity, gender and empire were played out.



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Keywords

Empire; Gender; Home; Ocean voyages; Sea; Ships; Travel writing

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