

# *The Liverpool Nautical Research Society*

(Founded in 1938)

## THE BULLETIN

Volume 52, No. 1, June, 2008

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*Front Cover:*

The Pacific Steam Navigation Company's **Reina del Pacifico**  
alongside Princes Landing Stage, Liverpool (*see article on page 20*)



A summer's day at Princes Landing Stage, Liverpool in the late 1930s. In the foreground the Liverpool & North Wales Steamship Company's **St Tudno** loads for her daily sailing to Llandudno and Menai Bridge. Ahead of the **St Tudno** is the Bibby Line's **Somersetshire**, dressed overall.

*From 'Great Mersey Liners': see book review on page 44.*

# PROPOSED CIRCULAR FERRY FOR THE MERSEY

*by LNRS Member Gordon Bodey*

In 1861, John Elder, the Glasgow shipbuilder, introduced a general design for a flat-bottomed circular vessel. He said that such a vessel would have minimal draught, small freeboard, maximum stability and would roll very little in a seaway. He also thought that such a vessel would form a very stable gun platform for even the heaviest guns of the time, and that its stability would also make it an admirable pleasure yacht or ferry craft.

At this time the Mersey ferries were side-paddle driven, but the paddle boxes not only made it difficult to tie them up at the landing stage when the river was boisterous, but they also impeded the loading and unloading of a vast and ever-increasing number of passengers. Also, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board (M.D.H.B.) had plans to improve vehicular access to the landing stages in order to promote a sharp increase in vehicles using the ferries.

The conditions for passengers on board the ferries then were extremely unwholesome. In his report of 1862 Mr G. Harrison, the Birkenhead Ferries Committee Chairman, described the below-decks cabins as 'the most miserable places and no person will enter them unless obliged to do so'; and this when the Mersey ferries were carrying over ten million passengers a year. Clearly, more suitable and congenial vessels were long overdue.

By this time, screw propulsion was both proven and commonplace: in 1856 the Royal Navy had no fewer than 163 vessels specifically listed as screw-driven, compared to 108 listed as paddle-driven. This in itself was remarkable in view of the fact that Francis Pettit Smith had had great difficulty in persuading the Royal Navy to adopt screw propulsion only fifteen years before that date. By 1865 the figures had risen to 409 screw-driven (of which 125 were gunboats), and 99 paddle-driven vessels, the majority of the latter being tugs, tenders or store ships. However, conventionally designed vessels using screw propulsion do not seem to have been considered for the Mersey ferries at this time.

Instead, on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1863, the M.D.H.B. instructed its dock engineer G.F. Lyster to prepare a report into the feasibility of adopting the circular-vessel principle advocated by Elder to the Mersey river ferries. The possible use of circular vessels appears to have been seen as a viable alternative because: firstly, with much greater carrying capacity they would accommodate both passengers and vehicles – the passengers in relative comfort and with ample room for the vehicles; secondly, they could be moored in semi-circular bays in the landing stages allowing rapid discharging and loading by way of four passenger exits on each quarter and a central gangway for vehicles; and thirdly, in operation they would present minimum broadside and therefore least resistance to the almost ever-present strong tidal flows of the river.

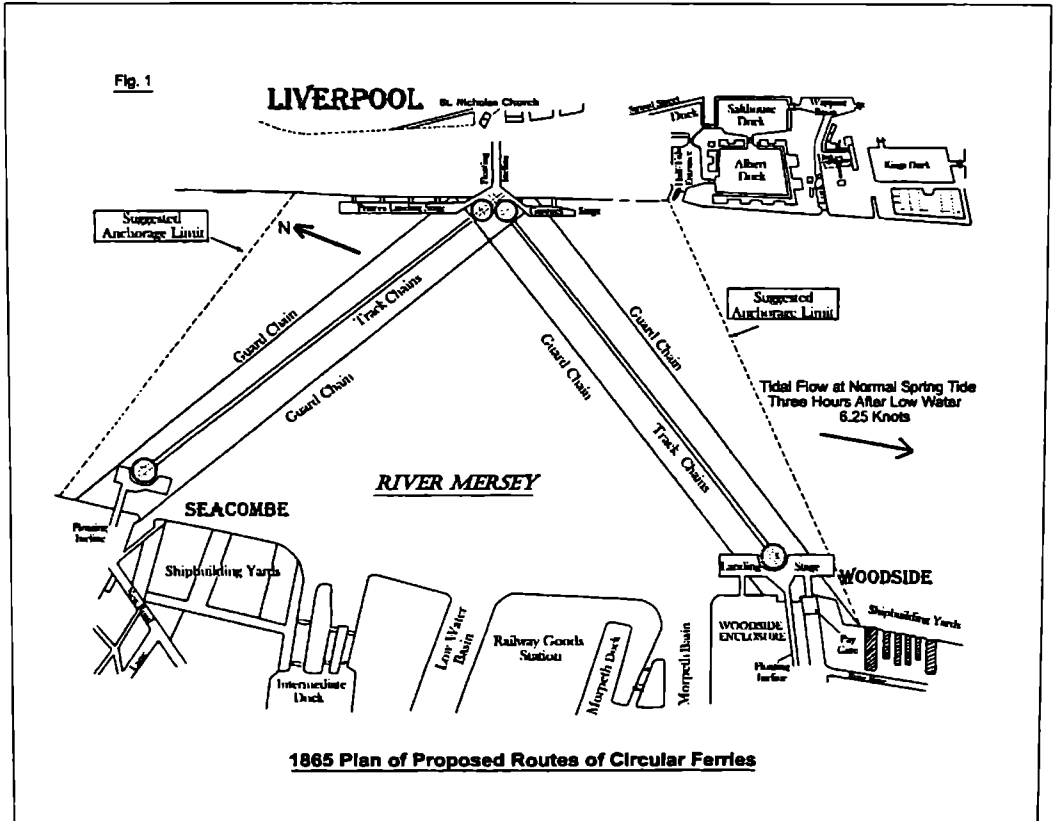
However, none of the Mersey ferries came under the authority of the M.D.H.B.; its control was restricted to the landing stages where the ferries berthed. The ferry service to Woodside was owned and administered by the Birkenhead Improvements Commission and had been since it took possession of all ferry property and rights on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1860. The Seacombe service had been acquired from private

ownership by the Wallasey Local Board on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1861. Both were municipal bodies. It might be supposed that the M.D.H.B. was considering seeking to acquire the ferry services and the scheme was being prepared ahead of a prospective takeover, but this is not known.

By 20<sup>th</sup> January 1865 Lyster had completed an elaborately-detailed and expensively-prepared set of plans for two such craft, one each for the services between Liverpool and Birkenhead Woodside, and Liverpool and Seacombe. Also, a plan of their routes and their peripheral safeguards was presented on another sheet. Each craft was to have a diameter of 101ft, a draught of 4ft and a freeboard of 8ft.

Lyster's circular ferry plan, however, was only part of a massive civil engineering project apparently being considered to restructure that section of the dock system between Waterloo Dock to the north and the Albert Dock to the south, and which would have affected an area half-a-mile long on either side of the ferry terminal at Liverpool (and whose main proposals were set out on the same plan). Only those parts of the plan concerning the circular ferry are shown and discussed here.

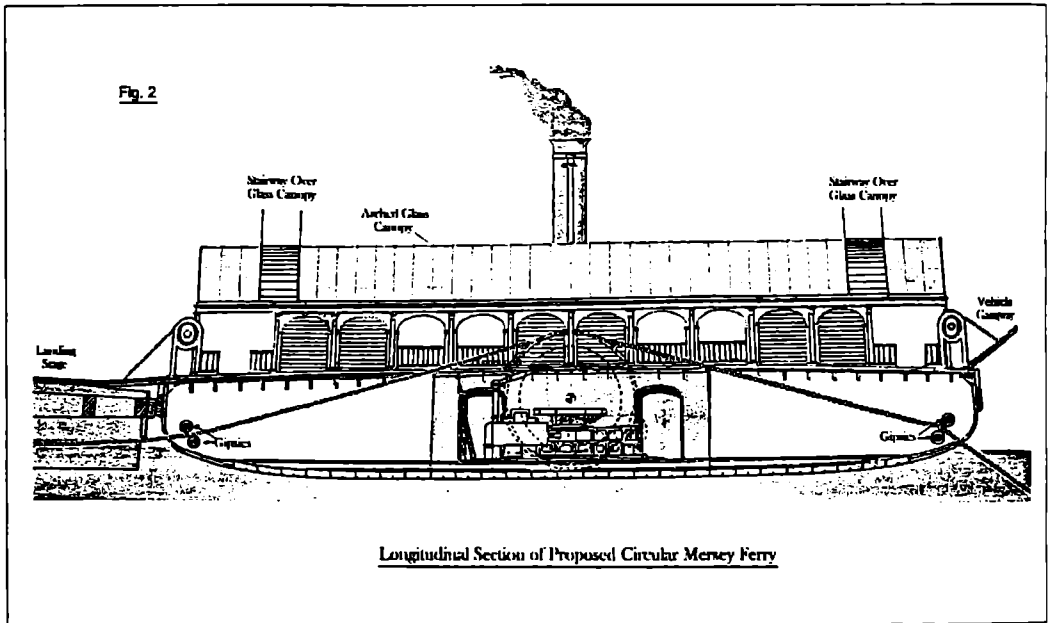
In the river plan for the circular ferries (Fig.1), Lyster proposed a propulsion system whereby they hauled themselves (by means of internal engines set athwartships) across the river along pairs of track chains<sup>1</sup> laid on the river bed and secured to the walls lining the river: one pair each from Liverpool to Woodside and Seacombe; each landing stage being 1,300 yards and 1,220 yards respectively from Liverpool Pier Head.



Because of the large tidal rise of up to 33ft and a strong tidal flow, which at that time at ordinary spring tides reached  $6\frac{1}{4}$  knots in mid-river at three hours after low water, the track chains at their middle points were expected to move from side to side by up to 40 yards. Their presence, let alone their unpredictable positions, was not favoured by the river pilots.

To safeguard the track chains there was to be a non-anchoring zone extending about half-a-mile outside each crossing in mid-river; there were also to be fixed guard chains on the river bed some 240ft outside each track chain to prevent fouling of the track chains should an anchored vessel drag its anchor.

Each vessel's two track chains would enter and leave the vessel 18ft either side of the adopted centre line, and pass through a set of guide pulleys fore and aft called 'gipsies' just inboard and just above the waterline (Fig.2). These would have rotated on shafts secured to side thrust blocks to take the pressure of the tidal current.

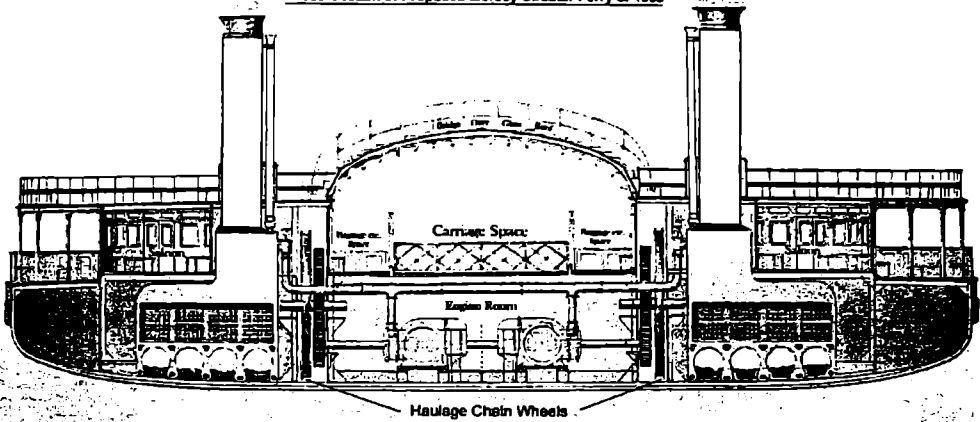


In passing through the vessel each chain would pass upward and over a large haulage wheel, with built-up rims forming a containing channel, in order for the vessel to literally haul itself across the river along the chains. However, the wheels as shown are smooth-surfaced with only a small section of each wheel being in contact with its chain and it is difficult to know if sufficient traction could have been obtained for the purpose, but it seems that Lyster thought so.

Each of the haulage wheels was to be fixed on its own small shaft at either extreme side of the engine compartment (Fig.3). These shafts would each turn as an inner adjacent large cog wheel on the shaft was driven round by a small pinion attached to each end of the main driving shaft of the engine. This was located some 10ft aft of, and 4ft lower than, the shafts holding the haulage wheels. The power to drive the mechanism would come from a horizontal twin-cylinder steam engine fitted athwartships.

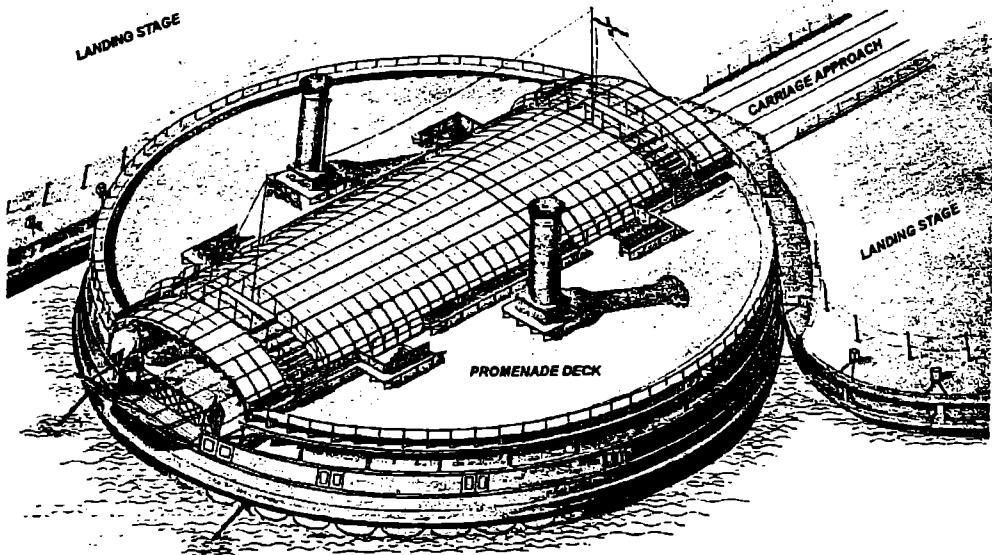
Fig. 3

Cross-Section of Proposed Mersey Circular Ferry of 1885



On board the ferries each form of traffic was to be segregated: all vehicular traffic would be accommodated in a central, 18ft-wide carriage space the full length of the vessel, and on each side of the carriage space would be a separate 5½ft-wide baggage and parcels space. The whole 29ft-wide central area was to be covered with an arched glass canopy whose centre was to be 14½ft above the main deck. The foot passengers were to occupy what were termed 'handsome saloons' arranged as half-moon structures either side of the central vehicle and goods area. Outside the saloons

ISOMETRIC VIEW OF PROPOSED FERRY-BOAT



and around the perimeter, except where the wheeled traffic exits were located, were to be spacious covered walkways. Above the main deck would be a promenade deck on either side of the glass canopy; each side being connected by two bridges over the canopy. Two companionways in each saloon provided access to the promenade deck. There is no indication on the plan for the provision of life-saving equipment.

In the event, neither the circular ferry nor that particular dock restructuring proceeded beyond the plans. No record of the original report or of any discussion of the plans as laid on the table (if, indeed, they ever were) has been found in the Minutes of the meetings of the Board, its Marine Committee or the Finance Committee. The Engineer's department records are un-catalogued as yet, and therefore not available.

Even assuming that the control of the ferries had eventually devolved to M.D.H.B., the project may have been abandoned when other possible problems were foreseen e.g. that 'slamming', the lifting of the hull clear of the water and its subsequent belly-flopping in boisterous conditions would have proved highly uncomfortable, alarming and possibly disastrous; it may have been that such craft could not have maintained the required frequency of services.

Of course, even if the proposal had been feasible from the operational and technical points of view, it may have been considered economically unviable in terms of capital outlay and operational costs. J.W.King, sometime Chief Engineer to the U.S. Navy said of the concept in 1879 – albeit speaking of a screw-propelled version – "*...the most serious objection to the circular form of vessels consists in the extraordinary steam power necessary to drive a vessel ..... through the water at a speed equal to that of the ordinary vessel of the same carrying capacity.*"

Oddly, screw-propulsion was not adopted in the ferries until 1879 with the introduction of the double twin-screw luggage boat **Oxton**. The last paddle steamer on the Birkenhead ferries, the **Birkenhead**, went into service in 1894 and operated until 1907. Then sold to the White Star Line, she was renamed **Galic** and used as a tender at Cherbourg until broken up at Garston on the Mersey in 1913. Wallasey Ferries' last paddle ferry, the **John Herron**, did not enter service until 1896, although by then screw-propelled vessels were also in service.█

### *Postscript*

Elder's circular design was briefly realised when it was adopted by Vice-Admiral Popov of the Imperial Russian Navy who had two such vessels built between 1871 and 1875. The **Novogrod**, 101ft diameter and 2,490 tons displacement, mounted two 11in. breech-loading guns. Driven by six propellers in line abreast she had an average operating speed of 7½ knots. A complement of 110 officers and men was carried.

The **Vice-Admiral Popov**, 120ft diameter and 3,500 tons displacement, mounted two 12in breech-loading guns and four small-calibre guns in the breastwork. She was also driven by six propellers in line abreast but was more powerfully engined and had a top speed of 9 knots. Her complement was 120 officers and men. The upper deck of both vessels was cambered from the breastwork to the gunwale, and both were twin-funnelled. Baird of St Petersburg built both vessels and they were for use in the Black Sea inshore waters where the limiting depth of water was some fourteen feet – too shallow for conventional ironclads.

The **Vice-Admiral Popov** was reportedly used on occasion as a 'yacht' by the Tsar.



Oddly, the use of such a craft as a yacht would have revealed a curious anomaly with regard to its registered tonnage. Thames Yacht Club Tonnage Rules at that time defined a vessel's tonnage as:

$$\text{Tonnage} = \frac{(L-B) B^2}{188} \text{ (where } L=\text{length and } B=\text{breadth)} = \frac{0 \times 0}{188} =$$

a conundrum as the rules of the Royal Yacht Squadron (of which the Tsar was a member) stipulated that a member's yacht must be of not less than ten tons register. However, the Committee does not seem to have been tested on that point!

A compromise design built for the Russian Navy by Elder's Fairfield Yard was the **Livadia**. She was built of steel and at 230ft x 153ft she had a displacement of 4,420 tons. The **Livadia** had three keels and was driven by three four-bladed propellers with the single rudder aft of the central propeller. On trials over a six hour run an average speed of 15 knots was achieved, and over a measured-mile run, 15.8 knots. However, she was not fitted out as a warship.

#### ***Endnote:***

<sup>1</sup> This method of cross-river haulage using steam engines was introduced by the eminent engineer James Meadows Rendel (1799-1856) in 1831. Between 1832 and 1834 he applied the principle to floating bridges across the River Dart at Dartmouth, and across the Tamar at Torpoint and at Saltash. Others were to be built across Poole Harbour, and a chain-haulage ferry (not circular) from Portsmouth to Gosport about 1835. At the present day such a ferry – the King Harry ferry – is still operating on the short crossing of the River Fal at Treliissick in Cornwall.

Interestingly, when not yet aged 20, as a surveyor working for Thomas Telford, he carried out a survey of the Mersey at Runcorn for the proposed erection there of an iron suspension bridge. In 1843 he devised plans for Birkenhead docks which he strenuously defended before parliamentary committees, and from 1850 to 1853 he oversaw the construction of the first dock at Garston on the Mersey. His achievements, other than the above, were both innovative and numerous, and included the survey at Heppens (then a fishing village) on Jade Bay, on the North Sea, in 1853/54 for the Prussian government, which resulted in the building of the German naval base of Wilhelmshaven. ■

#### ***Acknowledgements and Sources consulted:***

John Moore, Merseyside Maritime Museum Archive  
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Original Plans of proposed circular ferries by G.F.Lyster (1865)  
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#### **WEBSITES**

The Liverpool Nautical Research Society can now be found on the world-wide-web and has two sites as follows:

**[www.liverpool-nautical-research.org.uk](http://www.liverpool-nautical-research.org.uk)**

*This is our 'business' site and contains details of the Society, contact addresses, the programme of monthly meetings, details of 'The Bulletin' contents, a Notice Board, and a couple of representative articles from recent 'Bulletins'. Also, a page of links to other nautical websites.*

**[www.lnrs.co.uk](http://www.lnrs.co.uk)**

*The Society's archive of material about Liverpool's Last Passenger Liners, 1945 – 1972.  
Full details of 21 of these ships.*

## THE 'YAVARI' ON LAKE TITICACA

*A few months ago, LNRS Member Mr G. Dangerfield wrote to the Society enclosing a magazine article he had come across featuring the lake steamer Yavari. This short article details the amazing story of the Peruvian steamer Yavari which has spent her working life on Lake Titicaca, 3,810 metres or 12,500 feet above sea level.*

In 1861 the Peruvian government of Ramon Castilla ordered two small cargo-passenger 'gunboats' for service on Lake Titicaca. At that time Peru was enjoying the wealth from the guano industry on the coast, and the government looked to exploit the natural resources of the southern highlands or altiplano<sup>1</sup> region around Lake Titicaca.

Here lay the potential for trading Peruvian copper, silver, minerals, wool and timber, with manufactured goods from Europe. Through the agency of Anthony Gibbs and Sons, the Peruvian government commissioned the James Watt Foundry in Birmingham to build the ships that would collect goods from around Lake Titicaca. Without a rail link to the lake at that time, all cargo had to be carried up on mule back. Therefore the ships were built in kit form with no piece weighing more than 3½cwt, the maximum carrying capacity of a mule.

The Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company were sub-contracted to build the iron hulls of the Yavari and her sister, the Yapura, both named after Peruvian rivers. On 15<sup>th</sup> October 1862 the steamer Mayola docked at the Peruvian port of Arica and discharged the packing cases and pieces of the Yavari and the Yapura. The Peruvian Navy then faced the daunting task of getting the 2,766 cases and two crankshafts transported from sea level to Lake Titicaca at 12,500ft above sea level.

From Arica to Tacna the packing cases travelled the 40 miles by railway. At Tacna (550ft above sea level) the cases, weighing a total of 210 tons, were unloaded and arranged in the order in which they would be required to arrive at Puno on Lake Titicaca. Local muleteers and porters competed for the work. The route, although only 350 kilometres in length, crossed the driest desert in the world, the Atacama, mountain passes higher than the tallest European peaks and the sub-zero windswept wastes of the altiplano. Notwithstanding, a delivery date of six months was quoted, and buoyed by this prospect the British engineers who were to help to re-assemble the two ships went on ahead to build a jetty, slipway and machine shops in preparation.

Six months later the contractor, hopelessly defeated by the task, was dismissed, leaving pieces of ship scattered between Tacna and Puno. Outside events seemed to conspire against the project as grumbling muleteers, an earthquake and the threat of a second invasion of Peru by the Spanish, brought the expedition to a halt. Five years later it received fresh impetus and by January 1869 enough pieces had arrived for the keel of the Yavari to be laid. At 3pm on Christmas Day 1870 the Yavari was launched into the waters of Lake Titicaca.

<sup>1</sup> *Altiplano: a plateau in the Andes, covering two thirds of Bolivia and extending into southern Peru. Contains Lake Titicaca. Altitude: 10,000ft – 13,000ft.*

The **Yavari**, 100ft in length, was powered by a 60 horse-power two cylinder steam engine which, for want of more conventional fuel, was fired by dried llama dung. Every circumnavigation of Lake Titicaca required 1,400 sacks of llama droppings. She was also equipped as a two-masted sailer.

In 1890 the Peruvian Corporation was formed as a British company to operate the trains and the lake steamers. The **Yavari** continued her vital service providing transport for the region's exports and as a link between lakeside communities. The Peruvian Corporation extended the hull of the **Yavari** to increase cargo space and in 1914 replaced her steam engine with a Swedish 'Bolinder' 4-cylinder hot bulb semi-diesel developing 320bhp at 225rpm. The oldest and largest of its kind in the world, this engine has recently been restored.

The **Yavari** continued her circuits of Lake Titicaca until the late 1950s when work began on converting her into a tanker to carry oil to Bolivia. This stopped, however, when Bolivia discovered her own oil.

The Peruvian Corporation was nationalised in 1975 and the **Yavari** passed into the ownership of the Peruvian Navy, who, for lack of resources and preferring the **Yapura**, allowed her to lapse into disuse.



The **Yavari** in its current state, in the port of Puno.

In 1982 Meriel Larken discovered the **Yavari** slowly decaying in a corner of Puno port. Larken commissioned a Lloyd's Condition Survey which found that the **Yavari's** hull, having been lying in fresh water at high altitude, was in excellent condition and was deemed worthy of restoration. By 1987 the '**Yavari Project**' and '**La Asociación Yavari**' had been formed and on 17<sup>th</sup> February the **Yavari** was purchased from the Peruvian Navy.

At first progress was very slow due in part to Peru's political instability and economic decline, but in 1990 a change of government brought with it a rapid turnaround in the country's fortunes. Steady progress has since been made due entirely to the **Yavari's** many friends, sponsors and volunteers.

Meriel Larken comments: "*Despite public and financial endorsements from Prince Philip who saw the **Yavari** himself in 1962, and Michael Palin, who included the ship in one of his travel documentaries, £300,000 is still needed. If we had that money, then the **Yavari** could be carrying passengers within four months.*" ■

# THE WRECK OF THE 'MEXICO'

by Commander G.I. Mayes, RN

*On the night of 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1886, the German barque **Mexico**, bound from Liverpool to Guayaquil, Ecuador, with a general cargo, was wrecked in the Ribble estuary. Three lifeboats from Southport, St Annes and Lytham were launched to her assistance in atrocious conditions. Forty-four men set out to rescue the **Mexico**'s crew of eleven, and twenty-seven were lost. This disaster, the worst in R.N.L.I. history, was to have profound effects on the service and eventually lead to a new concept of fund raising.*

In the 1880s the Ribble estuary was a wild and desolate place. There were few navigation marks, the principal one being a wooden lighthouse at St Annes, and there was only one main channel to the wharves at Lytham and Preston. Three anchorages existed for local fishing fleets at Southport, already a well-established resort with a lifeboat station taken over by the RNLI in 1860. St Annes was a new township 'carved out of the sandhills' which had only had a lifeboat since 1881, whilst Lytham was the oldest town of the three, with a lifeboat station taken over by the RNLI in 1851. The Ribble estuary was littered with sandbanks, known only to the local shrimpers and cocklers, but the most notorious hazard was the Horse Bank on whose hard sands many wrecks had occurred.

The following account of the wreck of the **Mexico** has been compiled from contemporary newspaper accounts containing eye-witness reports and, more importantly, from the log of the **Mexico** and the testimony of her master. From these sources it has been possible to reconstruct the events that led up to her loss and the subsequent lifeboat tragedy.

The German barque **Mexico** of 492 tons was owned by Oetling Gebruder of Hamburg and was under the command of Captain Gustav Burmeister, a very experienced master. She carried a crew of eleven. The **Mexico** left Liverpool on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December 1886 with general cargo bound for Guayaquil, Ecuador. Weather conditions in the Irish Sea over the past few days had been poor, although the barometer was steady as the vessel cleared the Mersey.

It was Captain Burmeister's intention to beat out against the strong NNW wind on a long reach to clear Anglesey and then to head down the Irish Sea and out into the Atlantic. With the wind rising this proved to be difficult and with the ever-present threat of a lee shore he took on a sea pilot at the Bar lightship on the morning of Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December.

The pilot succeeded against the now much stronger wind to sail the vessel out of Liverpool Bay and at noon on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> December, when the **Mexico** was off Point Lynas on the north-east tip of Anglesey, he disembarked. It must have been assumed by both the pilot and Captain Burmeister that the **Mexico** was in a position to clear the headland, but with the wind now at severe gale force this was not achieved, and the vessel was forced to stand back into Liverpool Bay in order to gain sea room from the North Wales coast. Subsequently, at 22.00 on 7<sup>th</sup> December, after going about

many times, the recently installed lighthouse at Langness Point, Isle of Man, and that on Douglas Head, were sighted and recorded in the log.

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> December saw the gale increase to full storm force and it was becoming increasingly difficult to hold the **Mexico** on any course. Captain Burmeister's entry in the log records tersely 'sea tremendous' and it must have been obvious to him that his ship was in danger. Continuing to beat against the NNW storm, some of her canvas was blown away and her crew remained on deck all night, being constantly required to trim the remaining sails and set up the braces as the vessel tacked.



The **Mexico** in heavy weather in Liverpool Bay

*From an original painting by Edward D. Walker*

On the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> December the Great Ormes Head was sighted and the **Mexico** was put about in an attempt to clear the land with visibility reduced by hail and sleet. With much of her canvas now in shreds the ship paid off the wind and headed back into Liverpool Bay with Captain Burmeister now relying on the hand lead to try to determine his position in the appalling conditions. At noon on 9<sup>th</sup> December

the sounding showed 14 fathoms of water, but two hours later it was reduced to 10 fathoms.

With foresails blown away on her remaining canvas and rigging in disarray, Captain Burmeister observed during a break in the hail and sleet that he was heading into the Ribble estuary and was just past Formby Point. Realising that it was impossible to sail the ship off the coast, he ordered the fore and main masts with their damaged rigging, spars and canvas to be cut away and let go both anchors in about seven fathoms of water.

In the late afternoon of 9<sup>th</sup> December 1886, and after paying out over 105 fathoms of anchor warp, the **Mexico** steadied and rode to her anchors; at this time she was observed from Southport and appeared to the shore onlookers to be safely at anchor. However, in the early evening with no sign of the weather abating, it became obvious that the anchors were dragging and as the ship approached even shallower water first one and then the other warp parted.

Another anchor was prepared and let go but this failed to arrest the ship and soon the **Mexico** was in the breakers with water falling on deck and knocking the crew about like skittles. Captain Burmeister ordered distress rockets to be fired and instructed the crew to lash themselves to the mizzen rigging. At 21.30 on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> December the **Mexico** struck the sands and was driven high on to the notorious Horse Bank.

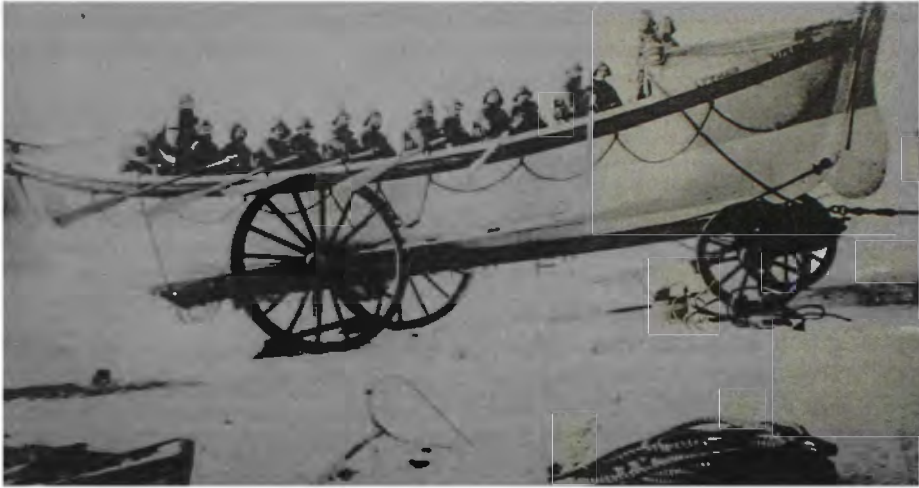
At Southport the **Mexico's** distress signals were seen and the maroons fired. A full crew speedily assembled but coxswain Charles Hodge decided that in view of the conditions he would take three extra crewmen and that the lifeboat **Eliza Fernley** should be taken on her carriage along the beach to launch to windward of the wreck. It took over an hour to accomplish this but just after 23.00 the lifeboat was launched successfully through the heavy breakers off the open beach.

After a lengthy struggle the **Eliza Fernley** was a little ahead of the wreck and on her starboard bow. An anchor was let go so that the lifeboat could be veered down onto the **Mexico** where a light still burned in the rigging. The time was later estimated to be about 1am, which if correct meant that the survivors had already been rescued, but while carrying out the manoeuvre the lifeboat capsized and failed to right. The upturned **Eliza Fernley** was swept shorewards in the darkness with her crew either trapped beneath or frantically clinging to the outside. Of the sixteen lifeboatmen, only two, Henry Robinson and John Jackson, survived.

The watchman at St Annes lighthouse also saw the **Mexico's** distress signals and fired the lifeboat gun to call the crew. They took some time to assemble as they all lived at scattered locations, and it was not until 10.25pm that the **Laura Janet** under the command of coxswain William Jackson and a crew of twelve was launched off the beach at St Annes. She was under oars for the first 500 yards and was then seen to set sail and fire a rocket and make across the banks towards the wreck. The **Laura Janet** capsized while still some distance from the wreck and failed to right. The upturned boat and most of her crew were found on Ainsdale Beach the next day.

At Lytham, shore watchers saw the **Mexico's** flares and summoned coxswain Thomas Clarkson to the boathouse. He decided to launch although the wreck was at least seven miles away on the south side of the estuary. The crew was assembled and the lifeboat **Charles Biggs** made ready. She was the second boat of that name to be

stationed at Lytham and had only been received ten days previously. She was the same size as the Southport and St Annes boats, but was fitted with four water ballast tanks to improve her trim – a vital difference on that terrible night.



The Lytham lifeboat **Charles Biggs** with her crew who went to the wreck of the **Mexico**. The photograph was taken two days after the disaster

At 10.05pm the **Charles Biggs** was launched by a crew of fifteen who rowed her down the estuary for the first 1½ miles. They then set sail and made their way across the banks towards the south side of the estuary. When within a quarter of a mile of the wreck the masts and sails were lowered and the oars put out again, but shortly afterwards, a heavy breaking sea accompanied by a fierce squall threw the boat on her port beam and broke three oars. The **Charles Biggs** righted herself and by 12.30am on 10<sup>th</sup> December she had let go her anchor and successfully veered down alongside the **Mexico** which was on her beam ends with huge waves sweeping over her.

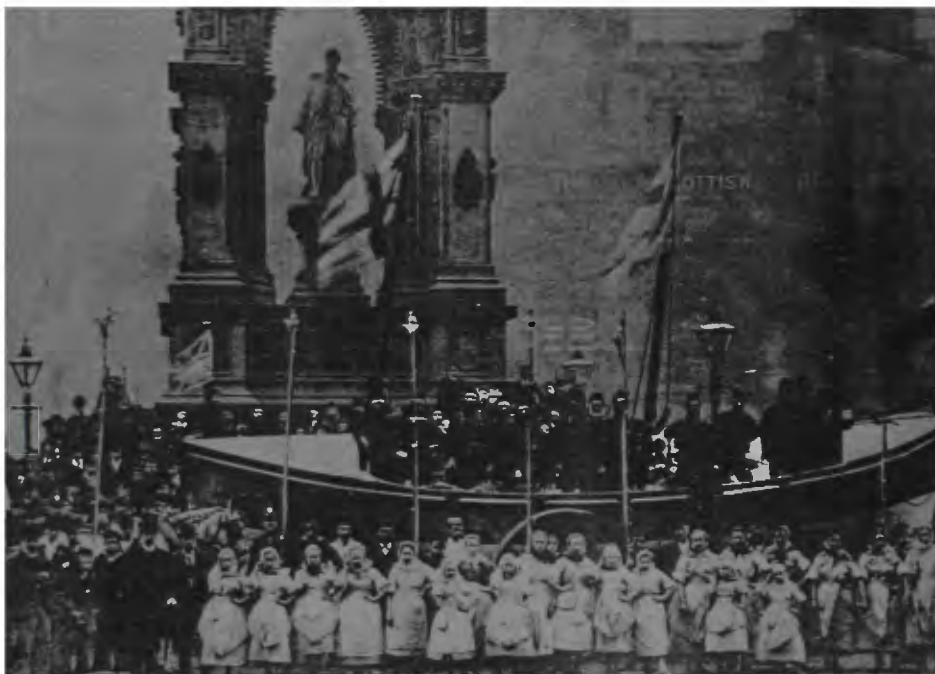
A rope was lowered from the **Mexico** to the plunging lifeboat, and although it broke twice and two of the **Mexico's** crew were injured, all were successfully taken off the wreck. Captain Burmeister was the last to leave his ship and calmly lowered himself into the **Charles Biggs**. Another oar was broken in pushing off, but the lifeboat was eventually worked clear and managed to claw herself away from the lee shore.

With the gale behind her the **Charles Biggs** retraced her course across the banks and regained the main channel, but only after most of the crew had waded her over the shallows as the tide was now falling, and under oars the lifeboat arrived at Lytham to a tumultuous welcome from a large crowd.

In 1886 communications were very sparse and it was not realised that all three lifeboats had been out that night. The Lytham crew was not aware until about 8am on the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> December that the St Annes boat had not returned and they were asked to launch yet again to search the Ribble estuary. Many of the Lytham men had relatives in the missing **Laura Janet** and so at 10.30am the same crew as had rescued the crew of the **Mexico** set out again.

During the search the Lytham boat went alongside Southport pier and it was learned that the **Eliza Fernley** and all but two of her crew had been lost. A lookout on the pier then spotted a white shape in the estuary and when the **Charles Biggs** reached the place it was found to be the upturned, partly stove-in hulk of the missing **Laura Janet** with three bodies trapped underneath. The bodies of the rest of the St Annes crew were subsequently found on Ainsdale beach.

At St Annes, as the night had progressed without any news, anxious relatives sent telegrams asking for information, one of which was sent to Blackpool Lifeboat Station and coxswain Bob Bickerstaffe decided to launch his boat, the **Samuel Fletcher**, which was exactly the same design as the two missing boats, and to join in the search for the missing St Annes boat. As the **Samuel Fletcher** was crossing the Crusader Bank to get into the Ribble estuary she was hit by a large breaking sea and coxswain Bickerstaffe was swept overboard. Fortunately the boat righted and he was successfully hauled back, but a third disaster had very nearly occurred. The Blackpool men carried on their search until dusk, but by then the full extent of the disaster was known at St. Annes.



The first 'Lifeboat Saturday' held in Manchester on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1891. The boat is the Southport lifeboat **Mary Anna** which replaced the unfortunate **Eliza Fernley**.

A disaster fund was immediately set up for the 16 widows and 50 orphans at St Annes and Southport. The fund was exceedingly well subscribed, but when local St Annes businessman Charles Macara looked into the financial affairs of the R.N.L.I., it was realised that all funding was dependent on a wealthy few. He resolved to bring the lifeboats to the notice of the 'man in the street', and in October 1891 he organised the first 'Lifeboat Saturday' in Manchester. The St Annes and Southport lifeboats were



towed through the streets and collectors used large purses on poles so that those watching from upstairs windows, or on the tops of tramcars did not escape! The Lifeboat Saturday movement spread throughout the British Isles and became the basis for future R.N.L.I. fund-raising efforts.

Mrs Macara also threw herself into the fund-raising and organised bands of ladies to assist with collections. They were formed into 'Ladies' Auxiliaries' and these later became the foundation of the Ladies' Lifeboat Guilds, a vital part of the fund-raising effort. They not only ran coffee mornings and jumble sales, but were the stalwarts who stood on chilly street corners with their collecting boxes on Lifeboat Flag Days

The disaster raised many questions on lifeboat design. Why had the Lytham boat survived, but not the other two boats? More stringent tests were carried out for self-righting, and all such boats were modified with ballast tanks, similar to those fitted in the Charles Biggs. A new design of Watson sailing lifeboat was also introduced and both St Annes and Southport received one.

In 1925 both the St Annes and the Southport lifeboat stations were closed, as the moorings at both these places had silted up due to a deep water channel being dredged to Preston Dock, with revetments being placed on each side of the new channel. Lytham remained open and became known as Lytham St Annes (the two towns were made into a borough in 1922). ■

### More about the 'Mexico'

The **Mexico** was launched as the **John Bull** in February 1860, having been built by T.R. Oswald & Co. at Sunderland. She was an iron barque of 484 tons, official number 28377; dimensions 150·1ft by 27·5ft by 17ft. Her first owners were Temperleys of London (later known as Temperley, Carter & Darke). In 1879 she was sold to H. Ellis & Sons of London who in 1881 sold her to Oetling Gebruder of Hamburg when she was renamed **Mexico**.

After the stranding the **Mexico** was refloated and taken to St Annes where she lay until 1888. In 1889 she was owned by L.T. Merrow & Sons of Glasgow (name retained); and in 1898 she was sold to A.P. Clausen of Nordby, Faro, Denmark (name again retained). In 1899 the vessel was sold, this time to Blom & Ohlsen of Fredrikshavn, Norway, who renamed her **Valhalla**. The old ship was finally wrecked between Tantallon and the Bass Rock on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1900 whilst on passage from Dundee to London. ■

### THE MONDAY FACILITY

*Members' access to the Archives and Library at the Merseyside Maritime Museum on Mondays continues as follows :*

JUNE: Mondays 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>  
JULY : Mondays 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>  
AUGUST : Mondays 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>  
SEPTEMBER : Mondays 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>

## FROM FINISTERRE TO FITZROY

*Sea area Finisterre was changed to sea area FitzRoy in the Shipping Forecast on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2002. The BBC Radio4 Shipping Forecast is held in such affection by millions of Radio4 listeners that the following Obituary appeared in that morning's edition of the 'Guardian' newspaper:*

### R.I.P. Finisterre

Finisterre shipping forecast sea area, a familiar friend taken away from us after a lifetime of service.

A renowned friend of sailors, Finisterre was one of a new breed of post-war sea areas to figure in every one of the Met. Office's four daily shipping forecasts.

Born in 1949 of Latin extraction (finis terre translates as 'end of the earth') and one of the biggest of the sea area family, she immediately took up station off the north-west shoulder of Galicia.

In finer times, colleagues remember her fondly as being both 'moderate' (visibility of two to five nautical miles) and 'good' (five nautical miles). However, in sadder times, Finisterre was occasionally 'poor' (with visibility down to 1,000 metres). Some have tried to explain this away as a result of the grief she felt at the loss of her brother Heligoland – who was lost in a battle with the Germans in 1956. Even the birth of German Bight – a precocious and popular new member of the sea area family – could not raise her spirits.

Ironically, Finisterre was to lose her fight for life in similar circumstances to Heligoland. She was rubbed out by international agreement, since one of Spain's meteorological areas confusingly bears the same name.

The funeral will be held at sea and will double as a christening for new sea area FitzRoy, named after the father of all shipping forecast areas, Meteorological Office founder and the captain of HMS *Beagle*, Admiral Robert FitzRoy,

Finisterre will be sadly missed, but it's not the end of the world!

## FITZROY

*by LNRS Member Charles Dawson*

One of the main reasons for renaming sea area Finisterre in the BBC shipping forecast was that the two 'ends of the earth', British and Spanish, differed in size from one another. The chance for change was welcomed by the Meteorological Office, whose very existence had come about through the efforts of Captain Robert FitzRoy, born in 1805, the year of Trafalgar. The name FitzRoy ('son of the king') stems from the time when kings named their illegitimate offspring thus. Captain Robert FitzRoy was the second son of the second son of the third Duke of Grafton, the first duke having been the illegitimate son of Charles II.

Robert FitzRoy's ancestors included a man described by Jonathon Swift as '*Grafton the deep, drunk or asleep*'; an admiral who instigated a sea battle against the French in the Caribbean on one of the rare historical occasions when Britain was not at war with France. Another Grafton became prime minister, although temporarily, against his will and apparently accidentally. An uncle managed to be a Member of Parliament for twenty-five years without ever rising to speak in the House of Commons.

So, studiously avoiding politics, Robert FitzRoy enrolled at the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth. He was an excellent student and it was not long before he was being sent out to the Mediterranean and South America as a midshipman. His rapid promotion led to him being given command of the surveying ship HMS **Beagle** at the age of twenty-three with the order to chart the coasts of South America. When FitzRoy boarded the **Beagle** for the first time and opened the log, he found the last entry made by the previous Captain Stokes, "*The soul of a man dies in him*", and heard that he had committed suicide.

The **Beagle's** surveying mission was a success, but an attempt at anthropological research, with the aid of four local Tierra del Fuegians, less so. FitzRoy determined to take a naturalist along on the next voyage. It is well known that it was Darwin who accepted the challenge, but it is not generally appreciated that a promising scientist by the name of Francis Beaufort (1774 – 1857) was also on board as the **Beagle's** hydrographer. It was Beaufort who devised the scale by which wind speed is measured and which is still in use today.



A lithographic portrait of the steam frigate **Arrogant**, one of the first screw-propelled major warships, to which Robert FitzRoy was appointed in 1849.

Despite the poor record of his family in politics, in 1841 FitzRoy accepted an invitation to stand for parliament as a candidate for Durham. The conduct of the election was questioned with the result that FitzRoy was challenged to a duel by the man he had defeated. Only protracted negotiations prevented bloodshed. FitzRoy introduced a bill for the improvement of conditions in the Merchant Navy, and although this was defeated, it was the means of bringing about the introduction of voluntary certificates for masters and mates by the Board of Trade in 1845. Two years later, in 1843, FitzRoy was appointed Governor of New Zealand, but his championing of the natives resulted in his recall in 1845. He was next appointed Superintendent of Woolwich Dockyard where he became an enthusiastic advocate of steam power, and

was appointed to one of the Royal Navy's early steam ships, HMS **Arrogant**, in 1849. A year later FitzRoy resigned, ostensibly on health grounds.

It was to be in his later years that FitzRoy made his most significant contributions to history. In 1853, a conference of the leading maritime powers discussed the importance of meteorology at sea, and the British Government allocated considerable funds for research into weather prediction. At the suggestion of the Royal Society, FitzRoy was placed in charge and took to the job with energy and enthusiasm. The Meteorological Office was founded with FitzRoy at its helm. He distributed new instruments to naval captains and collated their reports on humidity, wind, atmospheric pressure and temperature to compile charts of his own invention which he called 'wind stars', the prototype of isobars.

FitzRoy next turned his attention to fishermen and provided them with easy-to-understand barometers. He wrote rhyming couplets in the instruction manuals for easy memorizing. Following the loss of the **Royal Charter** in a storm off Anglesey with the loss of five hundred on board, FitzRoy established twenty-four weather stations around the British coast. These stations sent their data to London by the newly introduced Morse Code using the electric telegraph, and from this information FitzRoy drew up the very first synoptic charts, a method used to this day. These gave a fair estimate of the likely weather patterns for the following couple of days, and he issued them to newspapers, which published the first 'weather forecasts', a term invented by FitzRoy himself. In 1861 FitzRoy instituted the visible warning system of 'storm cones' at many ports and harbours to give advance notice of imminent gales.

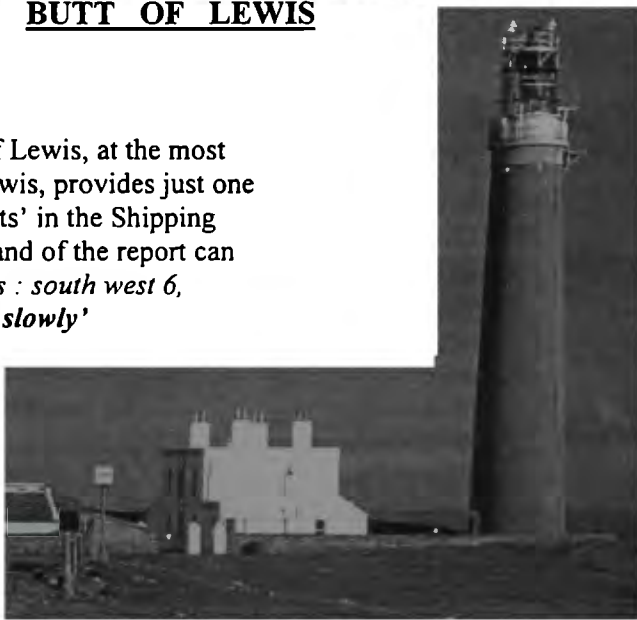
Despite all of FitzRoy's efforts, the early weather forecasts were not absolutely reliable, and his own health problems mounted. He lost his wife in 1852, and four years later his eldest daughter died at the age of sixteen. On 30<sup>th</sup> April 1865 Robert FitzRoy committed suicide as a result, it was said at the time, of an incorrect weather forecast.

## BUTT OF LEWIS

### ***FALLING SLOWLY !!!***

The lighthouse on the Butt of Lewis, at the most northerly tip of the Isle of Lewis, provides just one of the 'Coastal Station Reports' in the Shipping Forecast. The clipped shorthand of the report can read as follows *'Butt of Lewis : south west 6, continuous rain, 978, falling slowly'*

It is always a relief to hear on a subsequent forecast: *'Butt of Lewis, now rising'*, or even *'rising very rapidly' !!!*



## THE 'HUGELY READABLE' BULLETIN !!!

From: Lloyd's List, Monday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2008

### CITY OF MARITIME CULTURE

The New Year; and it is grand to welcome Liverpool as the City of Culture for the next twelve months. We hope that among all the Beatlemania and hair shirt wearing over its slaving past, there will be some remembrance over the huge and long-lasting contribution of this famous city to the maritime world. There is more to it all than museums, even though Liverpool has some of the finest.

This year is also notable in that it is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liverpool Nautical Research Society, which publishes a **hugely readable 'Bulletin'** and has done so since 1938, when some like-minded maritime folk got together on Merseyside to gather records and facts that might otherwise have gone missing.

With oil hitting \$100 a barrel, and the shipping industry agonizing about environmental consequences of filthy fuel, LNRS member James Pottinger writes in the current 'Bulletin' about the introduction, nearly 60 years ago, of heavy oil in diesel engines. We tend to think of this as a relatively recent development, but he recalls the two years of trials of a Werkspoor engine built by Hawthorn-Leslie in Newcastle, which was subsequently installed in Shell's **Auricula** in 1946. He also reminds us that at that time, diesels were relatively small stuff, with any ship requiring more than 5000bhp almost automatically having a steam turbine installed.

There were, even in those days when the cost of fuel was scarcely a major issue, substantial savings to be made; the **Auricula's** bunker bills being some \$7,000 cheaper per annum. Of course equipment like purifiers, clarifiers and heaters would be required, but the capital cost of these would soon be recovered. James Pottinger notes that eleven years after the **Auricula's** first voyage, all Shell's motor ships were burning 'boiler fuel'. Unsurprisingly, the environment and emissions did not feature in the calculations; the engineers of the day being much more concerned to find the heavy oil did not increase liner wear or deposits in injectors, while maintenance costs were not greatly increased.

Now, of course, we worry about the 'diesel death zone', and serious people are considering phasing out heavy oils altogether. It is probably but a half-way house on a way to a renaissance in commercial sail, just as long as we employ sustainable canvas.

**Whatever happens, the Liverpool Nautical Research Society will doubtless put it all into perspective. █**

Jim Pottinger's article '*The Introduction of Heavy Oil in Diesels*' appeared in 'The Bulletin', September, 2007, page 40.

## P.S.N.C. LINER 'REINA DEL PACIFICO' OF 1931

*Built by Harland & Wolff at Belfast in 1931. Yard No. 852*

*Official Number: 162339 Signal Letters: G M P S*

*Gross Tonnage: 17,872; Nett: 10,402. Length: 551-3ft, Breadth: 76-3ft*

*Owned by the Pacific Steam Navigation Co. Ltd., Liverpool*

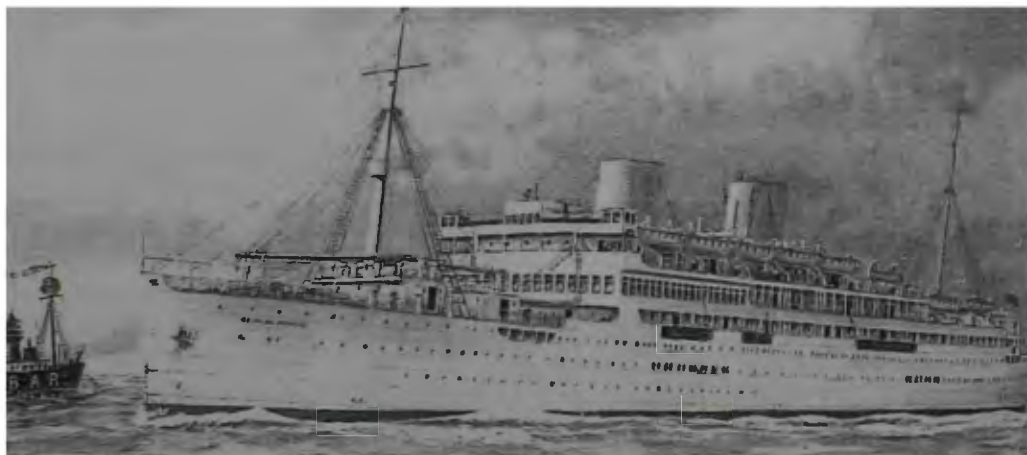
*Quadruple Screw Motor Vessel*

There was widespread regret on Merseyside at the end of 1958 with the news of the final disposal for demolition of the familiar **Reina del Pacifico**, although her later years were marred by a series of unfortunate incidents which brought her into the popular press with uncanny regularity.

Throughout her pre-war career she gave excellent service and the same could be said of her war role as a troopship.

Completed in 1931 by Harland & Wolff at Belfast, the **Reina del Pacifico** quickly made a great name for herself for comfort and reliability. On her completion she was of considerable interest through her method of propulsion as she had quadruple screws each driven by trunked piston, 12-cylinder oil engines working on the single-acting, 4-stroke principle. She had four auxiliary engines besides, each driving a dynamo and accommodated in a separate engine room, divided from the main one by a watertight door.

The **Reina del Pacifico** was launched on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1930 and she became the largest vessel to date in the fleet of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company. She was the first of the company's ships to be given a white hull, and the first of its passenger ships to be given a name that did not begin with 'O'. The new liner's two funnels added to her appearance, but the forward one was a dummy.



An artist's impression of the **Reina del Pacifico** passing the Mersey Bar lightship in the 1930s.

As far as the passenger accommodation was concerned, the **Reina del Pacifico** provided a new standard of luxury in the South American trade. On completion she could carry 800 passengers in first, second and third-class accommodation. The public rooms were decorated in Spanish designs of the Moresque and Colonial periods.

Before commencing her maiden voyage to South America, the new **Reina del Pacifico** made a three-day shakedown cruise to the North Sea with company guests on board. Her maiden voyage on her intended route left Liverpool on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1931 and she called at La Rochelle, Vigo, Bermuda, Bahamas, Havana, Jamaica, Panama Canal, Guayaquil, Callao (19 days), continuing to Antofagasta and Valparaiso (25½ days). On 19<sup>th</sup> January 1932 she commenced her first annual 'Round South America' voyage. Her record passage from Liverpool to Valparaiso of just under 25 days was made in 1936. In 1937 Mr Ramsay MacDonald died on board the **Reina del Pacifico** whilst on a holiday voyage to South America.

The **Reina del Pacifico** was taken up for trooping service just before the outbreak of the Second World War and her first voyage in this capacity was in the re-arrangement of overseas garrisons: she sailed from the Clyde for Singapore and afterwards brought the first Canadian troops to Britain.

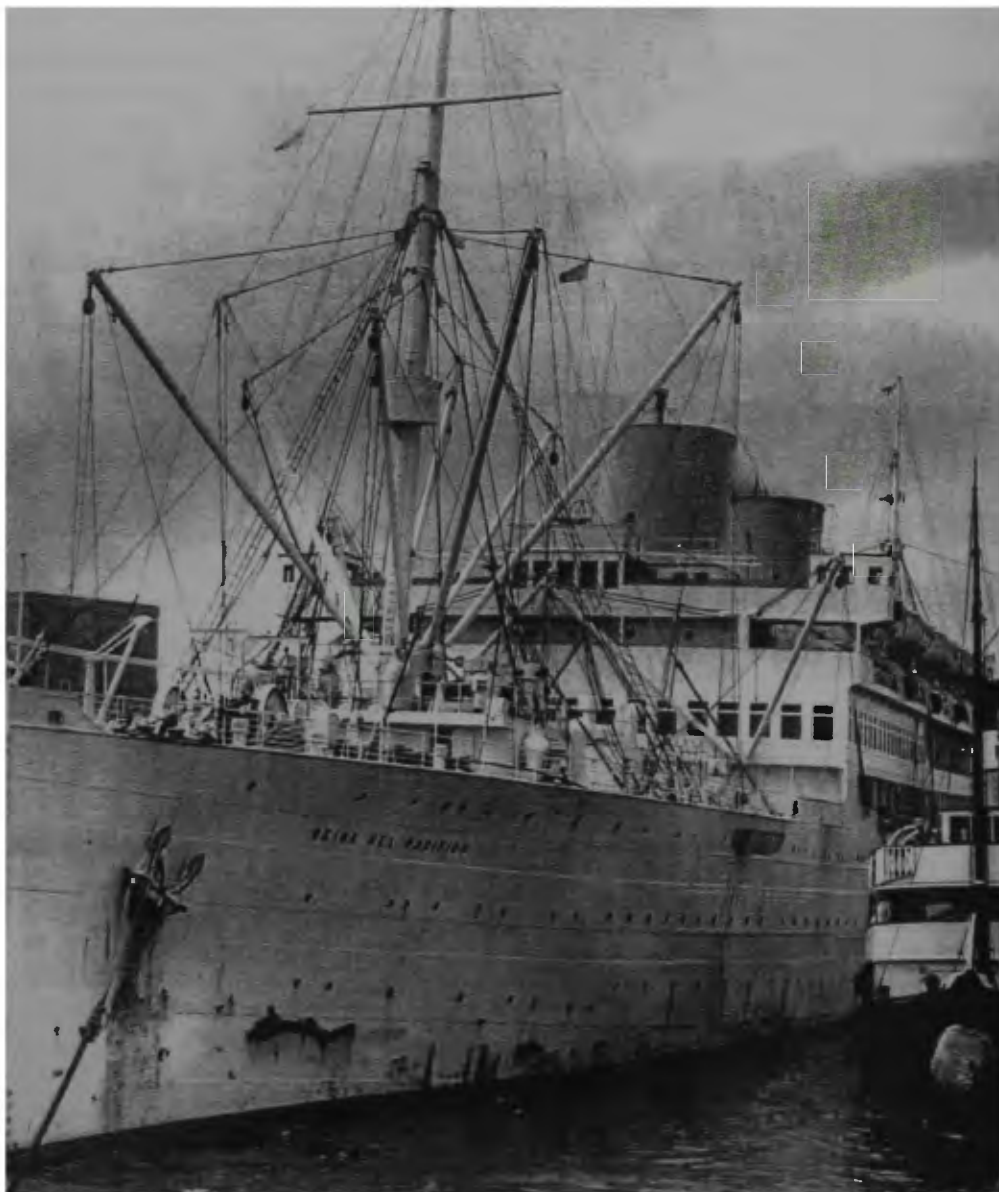
On more than one occasion the enemy claimed to have sunk her but these reports - like the premature report of Mark Twain's death - were greatly exaggerated and she continued her trooping service mainly on long distance routes. The **Reina del Pacifico** rushed troops to Norway in April, 1940, and just as quickly evacuated them a few weeks later. On her arrival at Bygden Fjord she steamed around at full speed in circles for two hours whilst the fjord was depth-charged by her escorts, HMS **Fearless** and HMS **Brazen**, who forced U49 to the surface.

After that she was employed mainly in the Middle East and escaped damage in the Red Sea when attacked by Italian aircraft. On occasions she averaged well over 20 knots for 24-hour periods. In 1941 the *Reina* was taking troops from Halifax, NS to Singapore by the westabout route, but the following year she was converted into an assault ship to take part in the French North African and Sicilian landings.

At one stage in her wartime career the **Reina del Pacifico** was at Avonmouth when that port was subjected to a heavy air attack. She was straddled with high explosive and incendiary bombs but she escaped without damage. On another occasion whilst lying at anchor in Walton Bay she was bombed and had a similar experience at Liverpool. A delayed-action missile exploded in the dock alongside, but her luck held and the only damage she suffered was to crockery.

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 1942 the **Reina del Pacifico** embarked troops for the 'Z' landing at Oran. She was flagship to the Senior Naval Officer Landing. The Algiers force had to be 24 hours ahead of the Oran force, so that at one stage the *Reina* had to steam back on her tracks for eight hours in order to pass through the Strait of Gibraltar in darkness. At 15.30 on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1942 the **Reina del Pacifico** met up with the equipment ships off Oran - she was on time to the minute, and at 07.00 the following morning her landing craft took her troops ashore. Later the ship berthed in Oran harbour.

In 1943 the liner was off Gibraltar when she was attacked by German aircraft on two successive days but no hits were scored. German radio reported that the *Reina* was '*torn to pieces and disappeared in a few seconds*'.



The **Reina del Pacifico** arriving in the Gladstone Lock at Liverpool on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1957 following her grounding at Bermuda. This photograph is taken from '*Great Mersey Liners*' and is reproduced here by kind permission of *Liverpool Daily Post* Senior Features Writer, Peter Elson. See review of page 46.

After the Sicily landings the **Reina del Pacifico** took King Peter of Yugoslavia and his staff to Port Said, and then the liner sailed on to Taranto with troops. Following the Italian campaign she was once more used on long distance hauls



carrying troops of all nationalities. The *Reina* was then placed on repatriation duties to and from the Middle East. The ship's astonishing good luck during her wartime voyaging might very well be said to have given the lie to the stories that went around in her final years that she was a 'hoodoo' ship.

The **Reina del Pacifico's** sinister record began in 1947 when she was the subject of serious crankcase explosion on 11<sup>th</sup> September whilst on trials off Copeland Island in the North Channel after being refitted at her builders' yard at Belfast before re-entering commercial service. This explosion caused the deaths of 28 members of her crew and the PSNC's technical staff. The vessel returned to Harland & Wolff's Belfast yard and was eventually put back on her peacetime service to the West Coast of South America about a year later. She opened the first British operated express liner service between Britain and Colombia by introducing regular calls at Cartagena into her schedule.

A Court of Inquiry was held at Belfast in April and May 1948 to investigate the cause of the explosion and published its findings on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1948. The primary cause was found to be the piston of No.2 port outer engine overheating and igniting an inflammable mixture present in the crank chamber of the said engine. It was stated that nine days prior to the explosion, a previous sea trial on 2<sup>nd</sup> September was abandoned because of serious overheating of the port outer cylinder liner.

There then followed a series of minor incidents – engine trouble and the like – which culminated in the grounding of the ship on Devil's Flat, Bermuda on 9th July 1957. With 400 Liverpool-bound passengers on board, the **Reina del Pacifico** was aground on sand, listing some twelve degrees to starboard. A spokesman for the PSNC said in Liverpool: "*We have received no message that would in any way suggest the ship is in danger. Captain E.C. Hicks has reported that the liner is not taking in any water. It is expected that the Reina del Pacifico will be refloated on the next high tide.*"

However this was not to be. The US Coastguard cutter **Castlerock** joined two local tugs in refloating attempts. The passengers were retained on board because it was considered too risky to land them ashore by tender, and because of difficulty in finding hotel accommodation for them.

Two days after the grounding cargo and fuel oil were being discharged from the stranded liner, and ground tackle was laid down to assist in a further refloating attempt. Over 22 tons of salvage equipment was air-freighted to Bermuda.

The **Reina del Pacifico** was successfully refloated in the early hours of 12<sup>th</sup> July. Steel hawsers were passed under the hull and attached to ballast tanks on either side of the vessel. The tanks were then filled with compressed air. The list had been reduced to just 4 degrees by the removal of cargo and fuel oil. Three lines attached to anchors were dropped near the stern and connected to capstans on the vessel's stern. Each of these lines, according to salvage experts, supplied leverage equal to the pulling power of four tugs. Heavy steel rollers, flown in from England, were placed on the reef. The local tugs **Justice** and **Bermuda** took the strain of pulling the **Reina del Pacifico** into deeper water.

After being successfully refloated, the *Reina* moved to an anchorage in Grassy Bay in the Great Sound at Bermuda so that 700 tons of cargo could be re-

loaded. The **Reina del Pacifico** resumed her passage to Liverpool on 14<sup>th</sup> July and arrived back in Liverpool on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1957.

On her next voyage after leaving Liverpool on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1957, the **Reina del Pacifico** had to put into Milford Haven with generator trouble and it soon became clear that she could not be repaired in time to complete the voyage which was cancelled. The *Reina* returned to Liverpool for major repairs to her generating plant.

On 10<sup>th</sup> November 1957 the **Reina del Pacifico** dropped her starboard inner propeller whilst manoeuvring in Havana harbour (Cuba). The liner continued her voyage at reduced speed on the remaining three propellers, calling at Kingston, La Guaira, Cartagena and Cristobal before passing through the Panama Canal where she was eventually drydocked at Balboa (Panama Canal Zone) to have a spare fitted. This spare had been shipped out to Panama in the motorship **Salinas**, another PSNC vessel.

At the end of March 1958 it became clear that when the **Reina del Pacifico** reached Liverpool at the completion of her voyage she would be withdrawn from service. At that stage it was not clear what was intended as far as the ship's future was concerned, although it was obvious that she would be offered for sale. The *Reina* arrived at Princes Landing Stage at the end of her final voyage on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1958 and the Pacific Steam Navigation Company's managing director, Mr H. Leslie Bowes, commented: "*This ship has been a great asset to the Company, and despite all these 'Jinx Ship' stories, has been exceedingly well liked*".

Whilst lying at Liverpool awaiting disposal, negotiations were taking place for the old ship's sale to Japanese shipbreakers, but this deal fell through and the **Reina del Pacifico** was eventually sold to the British Iron and Steel Corporation (Salvage) Ltd., London. When she left the Mersey for the last time, the *Reina* was bound for Newport, Mon., to be scrapped by the shipbreaking firm of John Cashmore Limited, the same company that had broken up her former consort, the **Orbita**, in 1950. ■

### THREE WEEKS TO COLOMBO IN 1945

*by LNRS Member Peter Clowes*

The war in Europe had only a few weeks to run when I joined the **Reina del Pacifico** at Liverpool. I was a humble writer in the Royal Navy at the time and I was in the habit of scribbling daily entries into a spiral-backed notebook that I kept in my kitbag.

With several hundred other officers and ratings I had travelled through the night from Devonport barracks by special train. As our coaches were shunted down to Riverside Station at about 10.30am, railway and dockside workers waved us 'farewell'. Then we saw our home for the next few weeks – the **Reina del Pacifico** looming over the landing stage, her hull painted a dull grey and streaked with rust after five years of war.

Our quarters, on the waterline, were rather overcrowded as the *Reina* was carrying 2,500 passengers this trip. There was little sign of the charming Spanish and Moorish interiors which had graced tourist travel in pre-war days.

At 7.45pm on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1945 we pulled away from the landing stage and then lay in mid-Mersey overnight. I joined in an informal football match on the after end of 'E'-deck before going below, queueing with a tin mug for a special ration of grog from the rum bosun, and then slinging my hammock over a linoleum-topped mess table.

There were 'emergency stations' the next morning, each man wearing a blue lifebelt and red safety light, and at 1pm we steamed down the Mersey with other ships, including several American tankers, before anchoring off New Brighton for another night.



LNRS Member Peter Clowes photographed on board the **Reina del Pacifico** in 1945

On 17<sup>th</sup> April the **Reina del Pacifico** hoisted pennants and steamed out of the Mersey, past the protruding masts of the **Ullapool** and the **Tacoma City** which had been sunk by mines earlier in the war. With us was a mixed batch of tankers, cargo steamers, troopships, a destroyer and two frigates, all proceeding in line ahead with the Rock lighthouse abeam, and then forming two columns when clear of the swept channel. Several more vessels were waiting to join us at the Mersey Bar.

The **Reina del Pacifico** formed part of convoy KMF43 which turned out to be one of the last escorted convoys to leave the shores of Britain in the Second World War. We were guarded by the destroyers **Escapade** and **Icarus**, the frigates **Loch Katrine** and **Ness** and the corvette **Oxford Castle**.

We steamed at about 13 knots. Morning mist was followed by afternoon sunshine. There was a long steady swell and I swiftly succumbed to a short, sharp bout of seasickness. I obtained a couple of tablets from the sick bay and retired early to my swinging hammock.

The fourteen ships being escorted towards the southern Irish coast, and then south to Gibraltar, were in columns with a gap of three cables between each ship. The **Reina del Pacifico** ploughed through calm seas, immediately astern of the **Capetown**

**Castle**, carrying 3,200 men to India. To starboard was the **Georgic** with 3,850 troops for Malta and Egypt, followed by the **Samaria** with 3,450 men for Italy and India. The third column was led by the **Alcantara** (3,700 troops and airmen for Algeria and Italy), and HMS **Princess Beatrix**, a former Harwich-Hook ferry and a veteran of the North African landings, astern. The convoy commodore, Sir Arthur J. Baxter, was on board the liner **Orion**.

On 19<sup>th</sup> April several of the ships in the convoy held a thirty minute exercise for their gun crews, the 40mm Bofors guns on the **Begum** providing the most impressive show. There was some excitement in the early hours of 22<sup>nd</sup> April when the 'River'-class frigate **Ness** dropped a pattern of depth charges at a suspected submarine contact.

The Clyde based **Escapade** and **Ness** were relieved by two escorts from Gibraltar on 20<sup>th</sup> April as our convoy neared the Mediterranean. When the Rock of Gibraltar hove into view throughout a blanket of haze, all the ships in the convoy steamed into the roadstead. After an exchange of signals, Captain J.V. Longford of the **Reina del Pacifico** ordered speed to be increased to 15 knots and we headed east, alone, through the Mediterranean.

Sun awnings and canvas air chutes for the engine room were erected. Many of the Navy passengers lolled in the sunshine on 'D'-deck, reading tattered books and magazines from the ship's limited library. We had a medical examination and then washed our uniforms with rubbery soap in buckets of sea water, and fitted white covers to our caps. I leaned over the bow to watch graceful porpoises keeping pace with the ship which was vibrating considerably as she increased speed.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April we passed the island of Pantelleria with its high cliffs. There was tombola on 'E'-Deck - £15 for a full house – but I was unsuccessful. A ship's concert was held in the evening.

Captain Longford steamed a smoke float the following morning and gave the RN gunners an hour's practice. The *Reina* zig-zagged to let the Bofors gunners aft have a fair share. Our biggest gun, in the stern, proved the most accurate, hitting the target several times at ranges of up to two miles. Then rocket-fired crimson parachutes floated in the blue sky as the midships Oerlikon cannons blazed away. Everyone on board was delighted, not least a party of Wrens leaning over the rails on the upper deck.

Later in the week I had to queue for a haircut from a leading stoker in the next mess. Another concert was held, but the noise of the **Reina's** overworked ventilation plant made it difficult to hear what was going on. The concert ended with the massed singing of *Just a Song at Twilight* as a silvery moon floated over the distant coast of Egypt.

There was a commotion on 27<sup>th</sup> April when fire broke out in the stern galley. Smoke and fumes spread for nearly an hour before everything was brought under control. When I went on deck the next morning we were steaming slowly past the waterfront at Port Said, taking our place in a convoy of vessels making its way through the Suez Canal. Water and fuel boats came alongside when we reached Suez. Egyptian feluccas with high lateen sails arrived to conduct business with fezzes, handbags, wallets and belts. Baskets were used to haul the goods to the *Reina's* decks and the lissom, brown merchants, climbed their masts to bargain with us. At 6pm we weighed

anchor and set off down the Red Sea. Blackout restrictions were lifted and everyone was ordered into white tropical rig. I was appointed mess cook and had to scrub the deck and scrape clean the garbage bins in the sweltering conditions below. There was more laundry work, using sea water not very successfully; but there were fresh oranges for supper and these made a welcome change from our almost unchanging diet of tinned pilchards.

We were soon in the Arabian Sea and had our first sight of flying fish skimming over the smooth water. I went to a 16mm film show on 'E'-Deck – seeing 'The Wicked Lady' for the third time – while the officers and Wrens danced on the floodlit boat deck.

There was another ship's concert on 7<sup>th</sup> May and at the end Captain Longford informed everyone to rousing cheers that the end of the war in Europe had just been announced. We sang *Land of Hope and Glory* lustily as the **Reina del Pacifico** sped on across the Indian Ocean.

I was scrubbing the messdeck when the *Reina* passed the breakwaters at the entrance to Colombo Harbour at 9am on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 'V.E.-Day'. The town of white, red-roofed buildings seemed to be celebrating. The officers, Wrens and Royal Marines disembarked but most of us were confined to the ship and bought pineapples and coconuts from the Sinhalese traders who came alongside in droves. A supply of beer – one bottle per man – was brought on board.

As darkness fell at 7.45pm, Winston Churchill's voice came over the loudspeakers. The **Reina del Pacifico's** deep siren joined the shrieks and screams of every other ship in the harbour. Throughout the night searchlights blazed, rockets were fired and flares ignited. The cruiser **Cleopatra**, moored close by, hoisted a mass of fairy lights across her forecastle.

I disembarked the following day and went to the Royal Navy's transit camp, HMS **Mayina**, which lay in dense forest a few miles outside Colombo. I never saw the **Reina del Pacifico** again, but her name cropped up in the news from time to time. Although the liner has now vanished from the seas, she still retains a place in my heart. I was only 18 when I sailed in her and it was the first time I had been to sea. My old tattered diary brought back many memories. █

### JUST FANCY THAT !!!



The photograph says it all

## THE KYLSANT CRASH

by *LNRS Member Tony Barratt*

The crash of the Kylsant Empire, 75 years ago, was perhaps the defining moment in the structure of the British Merchant Navy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The event was of such magnitude that the Government feared it would trigger a national collapse.

In 1902 the Directors of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company (RMSP) were looking for a buyer. The concern, which had been in the doldrums for the previous ten years, needed an injection of new blood. Discussions took place with Sir Christopher Furness, who had hopes of forming a group which would also embrace Cunard and Elder Dempster, designed to counter the American-owned International Mercantile Marine (IMM) combine, and it was suggested that the RMSP should be incorporated into the new grouping.

However, in 1903 the chairmanship of the RMSP passed to Owen Cosby Philipps, who set about founding a shipping empire which is now more remembered for the manner of its demise than for its many considerable achievements.

Philipps had entered the shipping world in 1889 when he founded the King Alfred Steamship Company, which later became the King Line. Interestingly, in 1905, Owen's brother founded the Court Line which was also to collapse in spectacular fashion in 1974. The King Line always remained outside the Royal Mail Group (RMG).



Lord Kylsant (Owen Cosby Philipps) in the uniform of Knight Commander of St Michael and St George, photographed in 1925

### *The Expansion*

A mark of Philipps' management was expansion by acquisition. The principal shipping companies taken over and their main services are set out in the Table which concludes this article.

The war losses of the expanded RMG totalled over 100 vessels. To restore the Group fleet to its former size, new ships were ordered and a batch of 137 war-built standard ships was jointly purchased by P&O and RMG. It had been hoped to resell many of these rather basic vessels to other British owners. However, a reluctance on the part of potential buyers meant that RMG companies had to absorb 77 of these ships into their own fleets and in the process ongoing financial losses were incurred.

In addition to the standard ship deal, nearly 100 other vessels were ordered. These included the RMSP **Lochkatrine** (1921/9,409gt) the company's first motorship and the liner **Asturias** (1925/22,048gt) which was the world's largest motorship when completed, along with her sister **Alcantara** (1926/22,181gt). PSNC ordered the **Reina del Pacifico** (1931/17,702gt) although she was not delivered until after the RMG collapse. Even more impressive would have been the White Star liner **Oceanic** which would have been the world's largest liner. Her keel was laid at Harland & Wolff's Belfast yard on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1928 but after a few days, work was suspended and then finally abandoned in July 1929.

Unfortunately, most of the post-war orders were financed using loans with repayment dates deferred for several years. The accumulation of these loans and the start of the repayments eventually contributed to the demise of the Group.

The companies acquired by the Group tended not to be absorbed but left to operate as individual units. This meant that there was duplication of costs and in some cases sister companies even competed on the same routes. Following the war, efforts were made to rationalize some of the operations. These changes included:

- MacAndrews taking over Royal Mail Moroccan services
- Glen Line taking over the Far East routes of the Shire Line
- Union Castle absorbing the Bullard and King South African services
- Coast Lines taking over most of the coastal services

At its peak in 1928 the Royal Mail Group had over 90 wholly-owned subsidiaries with share holdings in a similar number of other companies. Interests ranges over not only shipping, but including shipbuilding, hotels, finance, collieries and even photographic services. About this time the Group controlled 475 ships totaling 2.5 million gross tons, with a further 0.12 million tons under construction (representing about 15% of the total British merchant fleet). The portion of the workforce involved in the shipping operations totalled 59,000 out of a workforce of over 100,000.

The shipbuilding subsidiaries had over 40 building berths and included Caird & Company, A. & J. Inglis, Ardrossan Dockyard & Shipbuilding Co., D. & W. Henderson & Son and last, but not least, Harland & Wolff, of which Philipps became chairman after the death of Lord Pirrie in 1924.

Without doubt, the jewel in Philipps' crown was the White Star Line. He had long wished for a North Atlantic line within his Group and had started such a service

in 1921, using three surplus Pacific Steam Navigation Company vessels. This service ceased with the Group's purchase of the White Star Line in 1927.

### *The Collapse*

The financial world had always held the RMSP in high regard. However, from 1928 to 1930 matters became increasingly difficult with various loans coming up for repayment. Even with the use of 'creative' inter-company loans, these debts became ever more difficult to pay. Amidst these difficulties, Philipps (Lord Kylsant from 1923) purchased the Australian Commonwealth Line in 1928 with its famous 'Bay' boats and the shares it owned in Shaw Savill & Albion, even though he owned the majority of the shares of that company. As if this was not enough, he also placed orders with Harland & Wolff for over twenty ships between 1924 and 1930, although nine of these vessels were for the independent King Line.

In June 1930, Voting Trustees were appointed to avoid RMSP going into liquidation and the following year Philipps was charged with three offences under the Larceny Act. He was convicted on one charge of issuing a false prospectus associated with raising funds. Total liabilities of the Group exceeded £120 million, or over £3-billion at today's prices.

The Group's problems were made even worse with the loss of the Lamport and Holt liner *Vestris* (1912/10,494gt) in 1928 with the loss of 112 lives. On 12<sup>th</sup> November she foundered off Virginia Cape on passage from New York to South America, via Barbados. As many of the passengers originated in the United States the ensuing round of large legal claims brought the whole future of the Lamport and Holt Line into question. The demise of Lamport and Holt would have precipitated the collapse of the whole Group and so strenuous efforts had to be made to prevent this by drawing funds from other hard-pressed constituent companies.

Further problems arose from the reduction of coal cargoes, and therefore profit, due to the General Strike of 1926, which particularly affected Coast Lines. The decision of the American-owned International Mercantile Marine to end its agreement to build and refit all of its British registered ships at Harland & Wolff on a 'cost plus' basis added to the tale of woe. At the time Harland & Wolff had 26 slipways and the decline in orders led to the laying off of 14,000 workers.

Sir Frederick Lewis, the then chairman of Furness Withy, had for some time been concerned about the financial stability of the Royal Mail Group. In 1929 he had suggested that Cunard should take over the White Star Line, with Furness Withy taking over the rest of the Group, but excluding Harland & Wolff. Even earlier, in 1925, Sir Frederick had suggested that Cunard should take over the US controlled, British registered, IMM ships.

### *The Aftermath*

The task of sorting out the Group's finances took many years. Some assets were sold and companies placed into receivership and then reformed. The Moss Hutchison Line, the result of a merger between the Moss Line and J.P. Hutchison was sold to the General Steam Navigation Company which had made a rather higher bid than the United Baltic Corporation. The following year the position was reversed with the takeover of MacAndrew & Company by the United Baltic Corporation.



In 1935 the Royal Mail Realisation Company and the Elder Dempster Realisation Company were formed to allow the original companies with those names to be liquidated. The new Realisation Companies operated under the titles of Royal Mail Line and Elder Dempster Line respectively. The Royal Mail Line incorporated the former Nelson Line and David MacIver & Company.

Alfred Holt bought the Glen-Shire Line, again the product of an internal Group merger, in 1920. United Baltic was again the beaten bidder in this sale. United Baltic threatened to compete on the Far East services if the line was sold to Alfred Holt, but the threat never materialised.

Shaw Savill was purchased by Furness Withy. Shaw Savill had just jointly purchased, with P & O, the newly-created Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line.

The Union Castle Company gained complete independence in 1937 whilst in the midst of a massive fleet modernisation programme. This involved the rebuilding of three mail ships and four intermediate liners, in addition to building three new mail ships, six cargo ships and a coaster. During the reconstruction period an offer by the Clan Line to acquire Union Castle was rejected.

The Argentine Navigation Company was sold in 1930 with the proceeds being used to support Lamport and Holt, which was reconstituted in 1934, albeit in a much reduced size, due to the sale of 20 of the 41 vessels in its fleet.

As well as buying the Glen-Shire Line, Alfred Holt became managers of the reformed Elder Dempster Line for a period of seven years from 1936.

In 1937 Furness Withy obtained a share holding in the reconstituted Royal Mail Line, which was converted into full control in 1965. Furness Withy, by way of its interests in the Royal Mail Line went on, in 1938, to acquire a substantial stake in the newly independent Pacific Steam Navigation Company.

As far as the White Star Line was concerned, its future was bound up in the plans for Cunard's new liner **Queen Mary**. This ship received government finance on condition that the White Star Line was merged with Cunard. These negotiations were protracted and at one stage it was even suggested that the unfinished **Queen Mary** should be sold to the Admiralty for conversion to an aircraft carrier. Under this plan, the **Queen Mary** would have been replaced by three liners similar to the White Star liner **Britannic** (1930/27,666gt). Despite Cunard being reluctant to take over the **Britannic** and her sister the **Georgic**, both these ships were proving to be extremely profitable.

The salvaging of Harland & Wolff, which in 1925 had employed 40,000 workers, took a little longer; in fact it was 1944 before the shipbuilder finally gained independence from control by the trustees.

Thus ended a Group which had accidentally caused the restructuring of the British Merchant Fleet. The whole episode served to undermine the confidence of the British shipping industry which became fearful of incurring debt with the result that fleet renewal suffered and which, in turn, contributed to the overall decline of the British merchant fleet.

Owen Cosby Philipps (Lord Kysant) was imprisoned for twelve months and after his release he returned to his home at Coomb, Carmarthenshire, and lived quietly until his death in June 1937. ■

# THE ROYAL MAIL STEAM PACKET COMPANY

## ACQUISITION OF SHIPPING COMPANIES

<u>Year:</u>	<u>Company:</u>	<u>Services to:</u>
1906	Pacific Steam Navigation Company (part)	Australia
1907	Shire Line (part)	Far East
1907	Attempt to take over the Tyne SAS Co	
1908	Forwood Line	Morocco
1910	Elder Dempster <i>(Including African SS; British &amp; African SN; Imperial Direct Line; &amp; Elders &amp; Fyffes [part sold 1913]).</i>	West Africa/ West Indies
1910	Pacific Steam Navigation Company (rest)	West Coast South America
1911	Shire Line (rest)	
1911	Glen Line	Far East
1911	Lamport and Holt Line	East Coast South America
1912	Union Castle Line	South Africa
1913	Nelson Line	East Coast South America
1913/14	<i>Attempt to take over P&amp;O and Clan Line</i>	
1916	James Moss	Mediterranean
1916	MacAndrew Line	Iberia
1917	Argentine Navigation Co.	South America
1917	Coast Lines – formed from several coastal concerns	
1919	David MacIver	East Coast South Africa
1919	Bullard & King	South Africa
1919	J.P. Hutchison	France and Germany
1919	Tadcastle & McCormick	Irish Sea via Coast Lines
1919	City of Dublin Steam Packet Co	"
1919	Belfast Steamship Co	"
1919	Laird Line	"
1919	Ayr Steamship Co	"
1919	<i>Attempt to take over International Mercantile Marine British registered ships</i>	
1920	<i>Attempt to take over General Steam Navigation Company</i>	
1920	Burns Steamship Co	Coastal via Coast Lines
1920	Little Western Steamship Co	"
1923	<i>Attempt to take over White Star Line</i>	
1923	London Welsh Steamship Co	Coastal via Coast Lines
1925	British Motor Ship Company	"
1926	Dundalk & Newry Steam Packet Co	"
1926	Michael Murphy Ltd	"
1927	White Star Line	North Atlantic, along with a 40% share in Shaw Savill & Albion. Converted to a majority holding in 1928.
1928	Australian Commonwealth Line	Australia
1928	David MacBrayne (part)	West of Scotland services

## LIFE ABOARD TWO LATTER DAY CHESTER RIVER COASTERS

by Ken Davies, PhD, B.A., A.B.

### Part 2 – The ‘NORMANBY HALL’

It was the attraction of having a ship's cook to prepare my meals that led me to taking the ordinary seaman's berth aboard Coppack's flagship, the motor vessel **Normanby Hall**.<sup>1</sup> I left the **Hawarden Bridge** at Summers' Jetty and joined the **Normanby Hall** at Connah's Quay on the other side of the river, where she was loading basic slag (a bi-product of Summers' steel-making process) for Douglas, Isle of Man.

*From: Lloyd's Register, 1954-55:*

**NORMANBY HALL** (ex **Empire Rancher**, ex **Shelley**)

Official No: 169278 Signal Letters: M C P C

Gross Tonnage: 332, Nett: 158. Length: 141.7ft, Breadth: 21.7ft

Built by J.Harker Ltd., Knottingley in 1943

Owned by Coppack Bros. & Co. Registered at Chester

Oil engine built by Crossley Bros.

A local fisherman called Arthur Latham had berthed his boat alongside the **Hawarden Bridge** and come on board for a cup of tea. He offered me a lift with my gear and rowed across the Dee, berthing at a buoy a few yards from the beach. He had thigh-length waders and gathered my bags to carry them ashore. When he saw me rolling up my trousers he said, "*don't tha' worry – I'll come back and carry thee ashore*".<sup>2</sup> This he did, piggy-back, and he was at least seventy years of age at the time.

J.S. Jones of Rumford Street, Liverpool, furnished our cargoes and in many respects these were similar to those of the **Hawarden Bridge**, although we never carried pig-iron and had far fewer grain cargoes. We almost never visited the Chester River, but were a very frequent visitor to the North Wales quarries 'south of the Stack' in Caernarfon Bay. As Summers were not reliant on shipping for a living, and being proud of their ships, they always declined 'quarry work' as it was punishing to the vessels. Coppacks, of course, could not afford such a languid approach to ship owning and road stone was an important contributor to their profit margin.

The **Normanby Hall** carried about 400 tons at her summer marks, and her mainstay was the flour and cattle feed to Derry and Belfast; supplemented by quite frequent cargoes of coal to Dublin, Drogheda, Waterford and New Ross. We would invariably call for a load of road-stone from Carreg y Llam or Port Rivals on the return trip. The quarries were as punishing to the crew as to the vessel, and my first

<sup>1</sup> For an absorbing history of the company see Tom Coppack (1973) A Lifetime with Ships (C.V. & M.E.Waine, Eds.) T.Stephenson & Sons Ltd.

Also see R.S.Fenton (1989) Cambrian Coasters, World Ship Society, pp.65-87 for fleet details.

<sup>2</sup> Many of the older Connah's Quay men spoke an archaic form of English, replete with 'thou' and 'thee'.

experience was memorable. The master was Captain Gwenlyn Jones. A native of my home village, he was a tall man, popularly known as 'Big Bill'. Having a fine sense of fairness, he was held in high regard by his crews. He was not, however, noted for his fear of bad weather, and 'going wind-bound' was not a frequent occurrence aboard the **Normanby Hall**.

Having discharged our load of basic slag in October 1957, we made our way to Carreg y Llam. The wind freshened from the west and we were lucky to get a load. The jetty extended forlornly from a rocky coastline that had claimed many ships. We moored alongside and had a thoroughly uncomfortable time loading. The **Normanby Hall** had no bulwarks and by the time she was down to her marks, the foredeck was already awash. It was then a frantic dash to batten her down and back off the jetty. We were all soaked to the skin, being waist deep in water as we drove home the last wedges. This was a procedure carried out with great diligence as the lack of bulwarks, combined with a low freeboard, impressed us all with a strong sense of safety.

"Well, Kenny my lad," the skipper said to me, "you've had a grand christening at the quarries; you will never load in weather worse than that." Indeed, the wreck of the ss **Amy Summerfield**, by then a mere scattering of boiler and scrap metal on the beach at Port Rivals [see R.S.Fenton (1997) Mersey Rovers, pp 227, 276 and 300] bore grim testimony to the dangers of treating the quarries lightly.

The **Normanby Hall** ran hard and averaged three cargoes a week for the year from 1957-58. We would frequently get two cargoes of road-stone in between the flour or coal runs to Ireland. Our only respite was when there was a return cargo of potatoes. We once deviated from this routine to take a general cargo to Coleraine whilst one of Coe's ships was undergoing a survey. On that occasion we called at Portrush on the homeward trip – to load road-stone!

This pattern of short runs, working 'watch and watch', meant a hard life with little sleep. From the Mersey, it was usually eighteen hours to Belfast, twenty-four to Derry or Waterford and fourteen to Drogheda, Dublin or Dundalk. It was not unusual to make an overnight passage across to Ireland and arrive in time for an eight o'clock start, and finish cargo work to sail in the evening. This meant working watch and watch all night on the passage out, doing a full day's work, and then working watch and watch through the following night. Because all hands were required on deck at the quarries, one watch would also lose a watch below and our arrival at Carriers Dock, Liverpool, might be in the small hours. Discharge would be complete by mid-day, and we would often sail for another load at a quarry jetty the same evening.

The **Normanby Hall** was not a handsome ship, but she was popular with her crews and remarkably comfortable at sea. Having not bulwarks, she carried little water in bad weather and had an easy motion; only when taking a gale on the beam did she roll.

The crew of the **Normanby Hall** at the time I was there was a mix of Chester River, Irish, Ulster and Scouse. The mate was Peter Edwards of Connah's Quay, whose brother was master of the **Staley Bridge** (where my own father was chief engineer). Our chief engineer was Jim Crockett from somewhere near Derry (a descendent of the same family as the legendary 'Davey') who was noted for his expertise with marine diesels. In his charge was the five-cylinder Crossley engine, a generator built by Fowlers, and two Lister motor winches on deck. The windlass was

driven by a small motor under the forecandle head, but the name of the builder eludes me, as does that of a second, smaller generator below.

Motor deck gear was not popular with crews. The motors needed to be swung into life with a crank handle. The man performing this action would get a good motion going, with a companion ready to pull down a small lever to activate the compression. If the operation was successful first time, the handle would be quickly removed and the compression lever secured with a wedge. If, as was frequently the case she failed to fire, there would be curses all round. The gear lever was on the side of the winch and allowed for much less variation in operating speed than either hydraulic, electric or steam.

Jim's second engineer was Stanley James, a native of Manchester who lived in Gwespyr, overlooking the Point of Ayr. The two able seamen were pleasant, efficient and reliable; Joe Keane hailed from Cobh, and Tom 'Ginger' Halpin came from Liverpool. The cook, a master of the plain, nourishing food preferred by coasting sailors, was Kevin Duggan from Moville, County Donegal.

I returned to the **Normanby Hall** as A.B. in 1963, having spent some years deep-sea, punctuated by a spell in Monroe's **Kyle Queen**. The longer runs aboard the big coaster meant a less frantic life. Her sheer size (almost 3,000 tons deadweight) usually meant at least one night in port. Moreover, the longer runs, often to the continent, allowed for more rest. In good weather one might not turn-in for the third watch below, having caught up on lost sleep.

Some interesting changes had taken place aboard the **Normanby Hall**. The master was now Captain Fernleigh (Frank) Sweet, a jovial Devon man who had made his home on the Chester River, having been 'sold' to Coppacks with the ss **Hove**.

The mate was Jack Catherine, a native of Connah's Quay who had an interesting history. His father was a Guernsey man who had come to the river as master/owner of a ketch called the **Squirrel**. His tragic death is related by Tom Coppack in 'A Lifetime with Ships'. Jack was master at twenty-two years of age and had skippered a vessel supplying water to the Fleet during the war; whether it was in the Firth of Clyde or at Scapa Flow I do not recall. Subsequently he spent many years on the East coast as master in the 'gate' ships owned by Craggs and Jenkins of Hull.

The chief engineer, Jim Fitzgerald, was also a man of broad experience, including a long time in Australian and New Zealand ships and was in U.S. ships throughout the Pacific Campaign. He returned to Liverpool when sailing aboard Scandinavian vessels. He lived in Liverpool, as did his second engineer, John Lenton.

The other A.B. was Dyfed Williams of Port Dinorwic, another childhood friend from the 'Point' boats, who had sailed in all the great steam coasting fleets. Only the cook was an old face, being Tom 'Ginger' Halpin. He was as competent a cook as he was A.B.; perhaps he had picked the brains of his father who was a noted steward in the massive sand suction dredgers owned by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. Times had become tough for small ship owners and the ordinary seaman's post had disappeared as a consequence.

The **Normanby Hall** was a far slower ship than when I was previously a crew member. She had lost her propeller which had been replaced by one that was too large and heavy for her. As a consequence, life was far less hectic than in the 1950s. The main trade was in the flour and cattle-feed run, calling for road-stone on the return

passage. Whilst the old ship had previously made the run from Birkenhead to Belfast in eighteen hours, she now struggled to do it in twenty. We seldom arrived in time for an 8am start, so always spent a night in Belfast.

Throughout the summer of 1963 we were blessed with good weather, and the **Normanby Hall** took on some of the characteristics of a cargo liner. For weeks on end we arrived at Carriers Dock, Liverpool with our load of road-stone in the early hours of Sunday morning. I could get home in time for Sunday dinner and have a night at home. On Monday morning we would sweep the hatch clean, after which we would move across to Spillers' Creek at Birkenhead to start loading on Tuesday. Wednesday would see us finishing loading at UVECO before moving through the East Float and out on the afternoon/evening tide. We would get to Belfast in time for an afternoon start on Thursday, finish discharging on Friday and load at the quarries on the Saturday afternoon/evening tide to arrive back at Carriers Dock on Sunday morning. Two cargoes a week had become the norm, which must have made things quite tight for the owners.

We seldom deviated from this routine, and then only for the odd load of coal, but two deviations are of particular interest. The Point of Ayr colliery had not shipped out coal by sea for a few years, but decided to attempt an experimental re-opening. Coppacks' mv **Indorita** (Captain Gwenlyn Jones) took a load out successfully, despite the lack of either buoys or perches to guide the ship up the treacherous gutter. A short time later the **Normanby Hall** loaded at the Point of Ayr for Peel, Isle of Man. For whatever reason this project was then abandoned, leaving me able to say that I took the last cargo out of my home port of Point of Ayr.

The other interesting change involved a visit to the Chester River. Around October 1963 there was a load of bricks at Connah's Quay which Coppacks were anxious to get to Limerick before winter set in. I remember being surprised to see that the bricks were packed on pallets secured with polythene and steel bands. The loading was thus not the lengthy process associated with the careful handling required when stacking by hand. The trip was also interesting inasmuch as we sailed at night. This was not a common occurrence as the buoys are unlit. However, we would have been 'neaped' had we not sailed on that tide, and as the weather was clear and the night brightly moonlit, the pilot agreed to make an exception. The pilot was Sam Amos of Connah's Quay (my cousin's father-in-law), and I remember helping him to pick out the buoys with the aid of a flashlight.

It took us about four and a half days to get to Limerick. The weather was not favourable, and I vividly remember the sight of the great daunting headlands as we rounded the south-west corner of Ireland against an Atlantic westerly. We had one night in Limerick and then sailed down the Shannon to Kilmore to load ground kelp for Bridgewater. Kilmore had a tiny jetty barely long enough to accommodate the two hatches for working. We had one night in there, followed by a pretty gruesome passage to Bridgewater, punctuated by a spell at anchor in Brandon Bay. The west coast of Ireland is not a lee shore to be trifled with in an underpowered vessel. The Atlantic rollers looked truly formidable from our little ship, and she could be forgiven for breaking with custom to roll like a pendulum as we sailed across them. It took us around three days to make the passage and we got another night in port at Bridgewater

before making our way back down the Bristol Channel and across Cardigan Bay to the quarries of North Wales.

Coasting, whether in motor or steam, was never without its interesting incidents. The **Normanby Hall's** survey fell due, and we put her on one of the floating dry-docks at Ellesmere Port. When the work was completed, a week or so later, we made out way down the canal bound for Birkenhead for our customary load of flour and cattle-feed. Some years previously the **Normanby Hall** had had most of her bottom along the port side replaced. This had left her with a pronounced list to port and, as she was single-bottomed, concrete blocks had been laid in the bilge along the starboard side in order to compensate. This compensation was slightly overdone, and she always had a slight list to starboard as a consequence.

Shortly after leaving Eastham Locks we noticed that the list had become far more pronounced and I was sent to investigate. Removing a hatch board, I could see the starboard side of the hold rapidly filling with water. I grabbed a crowbar and a hammer and went down the hatch. When I lifted a ceiling board I could see that the water was coming in rapidly from the port side. A couple of boards on the port side were lifted, and water gushed forth like a fountain from an open rivet-hole.

The situation was dangerous, but the 'jury' repair was simple and effective: a length of broomstick was hammered into the hole and it soon swelled up and made the leak tight. In the meantime, the 'old man' had radioed ashore and as we approached the Alfred Locks at Birkenhead, we were refused entry. They didn't want a vessel sinking in the lock or in the Float! We were provided with an escort of two tugs and returned to dry-dock where a repair was effected. Somebody certainly went to bed with a flea in his ear that night, but our actions were commended.

Coasting men were a uniquely hardy breed, but their toughness was tempered by hearts of gold. This is exemplified by an interesting story about the ship's cat, a ginger tom who liked his occasional run ashore. We loaded coal in Acton Grange for Dublin's Spencer Dock, which is tidal and accessed via a lock. We arrived at about 9pm, about an hour early for the night tide. The **Normanby Hall** berthed on the North Wall which is a stone faced quay. It is pertinent to this story that the quay was fitted with vertical timber fendering.<sup>1</sup>

To continue the story, all hands popped across to the nearest pub for a couple of pints of Guinness to await the tide. As we returned we could hear the agonizing howls of a cat in distress, and found our ginger tom clinging to one of the upright timbers on the wall as the flood tide tried to sweep him up river. The flood had eased the **Normanby Hall's** stern off the quay, just as he was making his spring ashore to offer his services to the local tabbies. We dropped a line down to the water's edge (around ten feet down) and I then shinned down and handed the sodden beast up to someone lying on his stomach on the quay. Everyone then made off to attend to the cat's welfare, leaving me alone to struggle back up the rope, hindered by two or three pints of best porter. Down in the galley there was a scene worthy of Disney. The fire was low and the oven gently warm. In it lay the cat, wrapped in a towel, being spoon-

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Captain Brian Luke, late of the P&O, for helping me with this particular terminology. The length of the quay was punctuated by vertical baulks of timber, perhaps 18" (45cm) square, extending from below the low water mark to a point around three feet or a metre above the level of the quay.

fed Napoleon Brandy by a doting circle of hardened sailor men. I think this story sums of their real nature well, and I am proud to have had the privilege of sailing with them.

It is interesting to note that both the **Hawarden Bridge** and the **Normanby Hall** ended their days in disaster. The **Hawarden Bridge** was found abandoned in the Caribbean, and was sunk as an artificial fish reef off Miami.<sup>1</sup> The **Normanby Hall** sank under tow in Belfast Lough, having been aground near Tara Point.<sup>2</sup> †

<sup>1</sup> R.S.Fenton (1989) Cambrian Coasters. World Ship Society, pp 163 and 171

<sup>2</sup> R.S.Fenton (1989) Cambrian Coasters. World Ship Society, p 83.

## A NEW SEAFARERS' CENTRE FOR LIVERPOOL

Added together, the Mersey Mission to Seafarers and the Apostleship of the Sea, Liverpool, have been providing service for seafarers for over 230 years! The former has been in existence for 150 years and the latter was formed in 1920. Both Societies were the first in their field and, over the years, developed broadly similar facilities, available primarily for seafarers but also available to the wider seafaring community and its supporters.

As shipping has changed, so, too, have the Societies changed and responded to new challenges in their desire to ensure that seafarers' needs are fully met. In this period of change, closer co-operation started to develop – recognising that some duplication of provision existed and that it made sense to examine all aspects of each other's operation.

As a result of collaborative working between our two Christian Mission Societies, agreement has been reached to set up a new, not-for-profit, charity to provide welfare, comfort and shelter for seafarers visiting the Port of Liverpool and the berths on the banks of the River Mersey, to include Garston, Runcorn, Stanlow, Ellesmere Port, Eastham, Tranmere and Birkenhead.

The new charity is to be called the Liverpool Seafarers' Centre. Its sole object will be 'moral, social, material and spiritual welfare of all seafarers, past and present, their families and dependants, irrespective of race or creed'.

Together, we are committed to refurbishing the existing seafarers' centre which, when completed in August 2008, will provide modern facilities for the needs of the visiting seafarer and/or their dependants.

The cost of the refurbishment will be some £750,000. We are fortunate in having secured a grant of £250,000 from the International Transport Federation Seafarers' Trust. The remaining £500,000 has been underwritten equally by the two Societies from their limited resources.

On 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008 an historic moment for the welfare provision for seafarers on Merseyside occurred when the Trustees of both Societies met for their first formal meeting – firmly cementing the spirit of co-operation which has developed, as well as the formalities needed to implement it.



## THE 'EMPIRE ORWELL' / 'GUNUNG DJATI'

by Martin Young and Michael Houghton

*The Deutsche Ost-Afrika-Linie completed the **Pretoria** in December 1936. In 1939 she was requisitioned by the German Navy, and in May 1945 the vessel was taken over by the British Government. The **Pretoria** was refitted and renamed **Empire Doon**, and became the **Empire Orwell** in 1948. In 1959 the vessel was sold to Alfred Holt and converted into a pilgrim ship carrying the name **Gunung Djati**. In March 1962 Holts sold her to the Indonesian Government.*

*From: Lloyd's Register, 1954-55:*

EMPIRE ORWELL Official No: 180806 Signal Letters: G R C B  
Built by Blohm & Voss at Hamburg in 1936. Yard No. 506  
Gross Tonnage: 18,036, Nett: 9,937. Length: 550·0ft, Breadth: 72·4ft  
Owned by the Ministry of Transport (Orient Steam Nav. Co. – Managers)  
6 steam turbines, single reduction geared to twin-screws. Speed: 18 knots.

The two most impressive German liners ever built for service to Africa were the sister ships **Pretoria** and **Windhuk**. They were smaller than their Union-Castle rivals but had what has been described as a 'more magnificent profile'. The two ships were virtually identical and both became allied troopships, the **Windhuk** being acquired by the US Navy in 1942 and renamed **Lejeune**, and the **Pretoria** spending a large part of her career as a British post-war troopship.

Blohm and Voss of Hamburg launched the **Pretoria** on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1936 and completed her later in the same year on 12<sup>th</sup> December. She carried a crew of 250 and a complement of 500 passengers, in first and tourist classes.

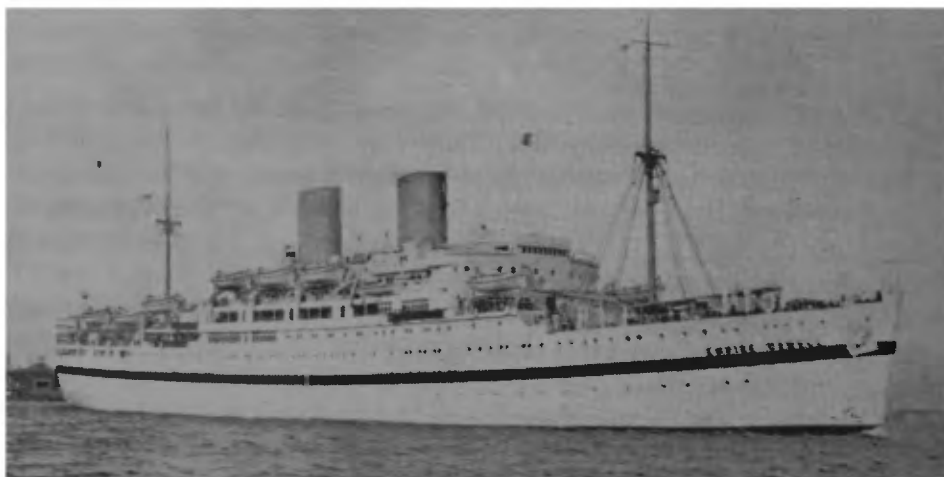
The interior design and layout of the public rooms and accommodation for both classes, intended for the hot climate of the tropics, was spacious and de luxe. The **Pretoria** began her maiden voyage on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1936 at Hamburg, the whole voyage having been planned as an extended pleasure cruise which would serve as a large scale international propaganda exercise. Ports of call were Antwerp, Southampton, Lisbon, Casablanca, Madeira, Las Palmas, Walvis Bay, Cape Town and Lourenço Marques. Passengers could leave the ship at Walvis Bay and be collected on the return voyage after a three-week stay in South West Africa during which it was hoped they would promote interest in things German as part of the Nazi dream that the territory might once again become German.

The maiden voyage seems to have been a success, although its beginnings were not too auspicious when the **Pretoria** ran aground on a mudflat while leaving Southampton on Christmas Eve 1936, and remained fast for 37½ hours before being released by seven tugs.

During the Second World War the **Pretoria** was employed initially as a naval accommodation ship and later as a hospital ship. In 1945 she was one of the vessels used by the Germans in their efforts to rescue people from the eastern territories before

the arrival of the Russians. In May 1945 the **Pretoria** was assigned to the United Kingdom by the Tripartite Commission and became a British war prize when she was captured at Hamburg. She was taken over by the Ministry of War Transport, converted somewhat hastily into a troopship at Newcastle-upon-Tyne and was at first managed by the British India Steam Navigation Company as H.M.T. **Empire Doon**. She developed engine trouble on her first trooping voyage and had to be towed back from Port Said, after which she was laid up off Southend.

Questions were raised in the House of Commons in May 1947 directed to the then Minister of Transport as to why the **Empire Doon** had lain idle for twelve months in the Thames estuary. The minister replied: "*The vessel needs new propelling machinery and there is a shortage of spare parts.*" Later the same month the vessel was towed to Southampton. The contract for the work was awarded to John I. Thornycroft & Co. Ltd. and the refit was to take two-and-a-half years and to cost some £2million.



The **Empire Orwell** as a Government transport, managed by the Orient Line

A temporary external change which caused some comment and confusion at the time was the removal of the ship's two funnels and their positioning on the after deck while access to the machinery spaces was required.

The original first-class dining room was enlarged and became the troops' mess hall, with a capacity of 323 men at one sitting. Meals were served on stainless steel trays using a cafeteria system. Fixed swivel chairs gave a modern appearance and had the advantage of not becoming scattered around the mess hall.

Unlike earlier troopship conversions, standee berths were fitted and there were additional recreation spaces with armchairs and card tables as well as a library. Sergeants and men slept on the troop decks but were allowed to spend all day with their families. Single 'other ranks' were provided with a 'men only' room. A total of

1,800 troops could be carried. In addition to troop accommodation, the ship could now carry 171 passengers in first class, 84 in second class and 98 in third class. There was a crew of 36 officers and 266 ratings.

Given that the original cause of the ship needing such an extensive refit had been engine problems, it is not surprising that major alterations were made to the machinery. The original Benson boilers were replaced by two water-tube Foster Wheeler boilers of modern design which were completed at Thorneycroft's Woolston works. The existing turbines were retained, having been removed for inspection, and then modified and reconditioned. Also retained were the original funnels and propellers.

Sea trials were run between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> January 1950. A speed of 17.65 knots was recorded, with one unofficial run of the Polperro measured mile attaining 18.25 knots. The ship was returned to service under Orient Line management with the new name of **Empire Orwell**. She was an instant success with her service passengers due to the high standards she offered and became known as one of the first 'super troopers'. Her employment was principally on the longest trooping runs out to the Far East and Japan, and she continued in this service until December 1957.

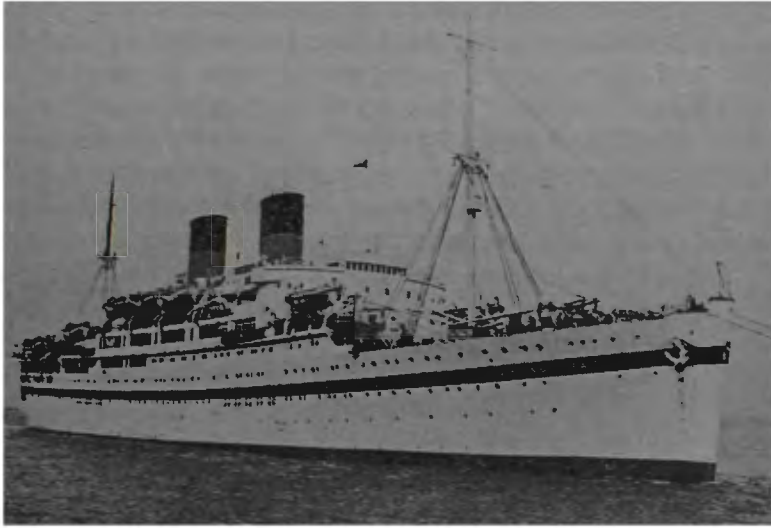
The **Empire Orwell's** first voyage left Southampton on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1950 with a full complement of 1,800 troops bound for Tobruk and Port Said. Before she sailed she was inspected by a delegation of senior government and War Office officials who expressed themselves as being well pleased with the standards provided. On 30<sup>th</sup> August the **Empire Orwell** sailed for Korea with the Royal Norfolk regiment on board. After the Korean war ended the ship continued with voyages out to the most far-flung garrisons of British troops until she was retired on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1957.

Early in 1958 the **Empire Orwell** was chartered to the Pan-Islamic Steamship Company for use on the Karachi-Jeddah pilgrim route. This charter was short-lived and in October 1958 she was laid up at Southampton. A month later the vessel was sold to the Ocean Steamship Company (Alfred Holt & Co. Ltd. - Managers) to become the largest vessel in its fleet. Ocean planned to use the ship in the Moslem pilgrim trade and had her refitted for that purpose by Barclay, Curle & Co. Ltd. on the Clyde. All the troop accommodation was removed and Indonesian-type beds installed, as used by pilgrims. The old **Pretoria** had another change of name. Whilst it was originally intended that she should be renamed **Dardanus**, a well-known Blue Funnel name, at the suggestion of the organisers of the pilgrimage she became the **Gunung Djati** and sported a white hull with a broad blue band whilst retaining the traditional blue and black funnel colouring. Gunung Djati was an early Moslem Hadji of humble origin who, after becoming a Sultan in West Java, dedicated himself to Islam. He established Mohammedanism in West Java and became a legendary figure in the Moslem world.

The newly refitted pilgrim ship could carry 106 passengers in first-class accommodation, and 2,000 pilgrims in lower grade quarters. She had an open air cinema and a mosque. The **Gunung Djati** visited the Mersey for a week after her refit and sailed on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1959 for Djakarta. There she joined the old **Tyndareus** of 1916 which had been employed in the pilgrim trade for several years.

The Blue Funnel Line ran the ship successfully until 1961 when she was laid up at Singapore where she was offered for sale. The reason for this was that the

Indonesian government was determined that Indonesian pilgrims should be carried in Indonesian vessels. The Indonesian deep-sea shipping corporation P.N. Djakarta-Lloyd took delivery of three cargo vessels with 'tween deck accommodation for pilgrims and it became clear that the **Gunung Djati's** days were numbered.



The **Gunung Djati**, *ex Empire Orwell*, *ex Empire Doon*, *ex Pretoria*

In 1962 the **Gunung Djati** was sold to the Indonesian government who retained her as a pilgrim carrier until selling her to P.T. Perusahaan Pelajarna 'Arafat' in 1964. The name was retained and the ship continued in service between Indonesia and Jeddah, being laid up in the 'off-season' between April and August each year.

The **Gunung Djati** gained a new lease of life on being re-engined and converted to a motorship by the Hong Kong United Dockyards in 1973. However P.T. Arafat defaulted on repayments for the work and after a prolonged dispute the dockyard had the ship arrested in Trincomalee Harbour in December 1977. The Indonesian government secured her release within a few days but the financial problems remained.

In February 1978 it was announced that for the 1978-79 season the monopoly of pilgrim carriage had been awarded to the Indonesian national airline Garuda. The **Gunung Djati** was laid up with no prospect of further employment and was eventually allocated to the Indonesian navy for use as a troopship. On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1979, a little more than 42 years since her maiden voyage as the **Pretoria**, the **Gunung Djati** entered the Indonesian navy under pennant No. 931 and was renamed **Tanjung Pandan**. She remained in this capacity until sold for scrap in Taiwan in 1987.

## FAREWELL TO THE MAROONS

by *LNRS Member James Scannell*

Until the advent of telephones and pagers, the traditional way to summon a lifeboat crew was to set off a series of maroons whose loud bangs would alert crew members to their call-out.

On Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007, the Dun Laoghaire lifeboat station on Ireland's east coast, eight miles south of Dublin, fired two maroons for the last time to mark the launch of the station's new website < [www.dunlaoghaire-lifeboat.ie](http://www.dunlaoghaire-lifeboat.ie) >. This comes complete with a 'virtual pager' developed by the RNLI which allows members of the public to download their own 'crew pager' to a computer, and which will alert them every time the lifeboat is launched.

After the maroons had gone off for the last time, walkers on Dun Laoghaire's East Pier were treated to a training exercise within the confines of the harbour, with the lifeboat being launched to carry out a mock rescue of a yacht. This had supposedly run into difficulties and fired red flares to signal its distress, after which the lifeboat crew was called out through their pagers.

Speaking about the changes in technology, the RNLI Operations Manager at Dun Laoghaire, Stephen Wynne said that the sound of the maroons being fired on a stormy night was known to indicate that the lifeboat was being called out. He continued by emphasizing that whilst the maroons will no longer be used to call out the lifeboat crew, one thing has not changed, and that is the fact that the crew will continue to be volunteers.

Currently there are two lifeboats stationed at Dun Laoghaire. There is the all-weather 'Trent'-class lifeboat **Anna Livia** manned by a crew of seven including the station doctor; and the smaller 'C'-class inshore boat **Tony Heard** named after its donor, which carries a crew of three.



## GREAT MERSEY LINERS

The *Liverpool Daily Post* and *Liverpool Echo* have recently published a fine new book to mark the completion of Liverpool's new landing stage and cruise terminal at the Pier Head.

Within its 90 pages, the book contains a selection of fine photographs from the heyday of the passenger liners which regularly used Liverpool. The book has been compiled by Peter Elson, Senior Features Writer at the *Liverpool Daily Post* and who is well-known to members of the Society

In his Foreword, Peter writes: "*With trade routes stretching across the world, Liverpool, by definition, was a world-class city. From Prince's Landing Stage the liners sailed for the Caribbean, Canada, the United States, India, the Far East, Madeira, Spain, Portugal and South America. The liners' names still romantically resonate: Accra, Apapa, Aureol, Reina del Mar, Britannic, Mauretania, Sylvania, Carinthia, Voltaire and Van Dyck. Liverpool's imperial family consisted of the white 'Empresses' of Britain, England, Canada, France and Scotland.*"

A small selection of the photographs from this book is included in this edition of *The Bulletin*. The frontispiece on page 1 shows the **St Tudno** alongside the landing stage loading for her daily summer run to Llandudno and Menai Bridge, with the Bibby Line's **Somersetshire** ahead, showing to advantage her four lofty masts and distinctively tall funnel.

On page 22 of *The Bulletin*, the **Reina del Pacifico** is seen arriving in the Gladstone Lock with Alexandra's tender **Flying Breeze** alongside.

For anyone who can recall those halcyon days when there was usually a passenger liner alongside Princes Landing Stage, this book will bring back many memories. On page 15 there is a fine photograph of Captain Angus Colquhoun, master of the Anchor Line's **Circassia**, on the bridge following the last Anchor Line passenger sailing. A few pages further on, there is a shot of members of the Liverpool Photographic Society at the top of the Liver Building, recording a busy Mersey scene for posterity. One of the members is perched on the building's parapet, with a sheer 200 foot drop beneath him, in order to get the best possible picture – a casual glance at this photograph induces a feeling of vertigo!

Many readers of *The Bulletin* may recall that I was Crew Purser of the **Carinthia** for almost four years in the early 1960s, and so perhaps my favourite photograph appears on page 46 and shows crew members 'signing-on' the **Empress of France** in 1959. The shipping master is in attendance, the Articles of Agreement are open, and there is a pile of Discharge Books on the table, with a dozen or so crew members waiting to sign. Memories are indeed made of this!

This is a great book and will, I'm sure, be appreciated by anyone who can remember Liverpool's passenger liners.

GREAT MERSEY LINERS : ISBN 9 781905 266548 *i.s.*

Published by Trinity Mirror North West & North Wales

A4 format : 90 pages : Price £3.99p



Two more photographs from '**Great Mersey Liners**', reproduced by kind permission of Peter Elson, Senior Features Writer at the *Liverpool Daily Post*.

*Above:* The **Mauretania** steaming down river on the occasion of her maiden voyage from Liverpool to New York on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1939. Note the white-painted Isle of Man steamer **Mona's Queen**, inward bound to Princes Landing Stage.

*Below:* The new **Mauretania** gathers way as she passes well-wishers on the beach at New Brighton.



## SALUTE TO A VETERAN – THE ‘CAIRNESK’ OF 1926

On 4<sup>th</sup> May 1957 Sir Ernest H. Murrant, chairman of the Cairn Line, paid tribute to a former unit of his company's fleet – the **Cairnesk** – a ship of 5,033 gross tons built at the Sunderland shipyard of William Pickersgill & Sons Ltd in 1926. In his statement to stockholders accompanying the annual report and accounts, Sir Ernest recalled that during the past year the **Cairnesk** had been sold after 30 years of continuous service, and after what he described as a record for a cargo ship employed in regular liner service.



The unique experience lay in the fact that the vessel had made all her voyages in the Canadian trade – 207 double-Atlantic crossings – involving approximately 1,250,000 miles steaming. All through the Second World War the **Cairnesk** continued in the Atlantic trade, and on no occasion did she miss a convoy. Only once during her long period of service to the company was the vessel stopped for a machinery failure, which in fact was due to an error on the part of a relieving engineer. At the end of her long service the **Cairnesk** was sold for a price very near to her original cost.

One incident in her seagoing career illustrates the solid worth of the **Cairnesk**. It took place in December 1955 when she was homeward bound from Canada with a cargo of grain. Under the command of Captain J. Hogg she cleared Montreal on 30<sup>th</sup> November and was scheduled to arrive at Leith on 15<sup>th</sup> December. Atlantic gales, however, took a hand in the voyage with the result that 15<sup>th</sup> December found her not snug in harbour, but 300 miles west of the Butt of Lewis – to the extent that hatch covers, spare wood and eventually part of the grain cargo was fed to the furnaces. A tug was ordered to proceed to the ship, but the **Cairnesk** sent a radio message to the effect that she was clear of the storm and ‘could carry on alone’. Eventually she put into Stormoway where she took on sufficient bunkers to enable her to complete her voyage.

This is but one recorded instance of the voyaging of this ship during her thirty busy years with the Cairn Line. And as with the **Cairnesk**, so too with countless other dry cargo ships which comprise the greater part of the British merchant fleet – ships which year in, year out, go about their normal occasions, for the most part unremarked, and whose contributions, not only to their owners, but to the general economy of the country, seldom receive the recognition they so well deserve.



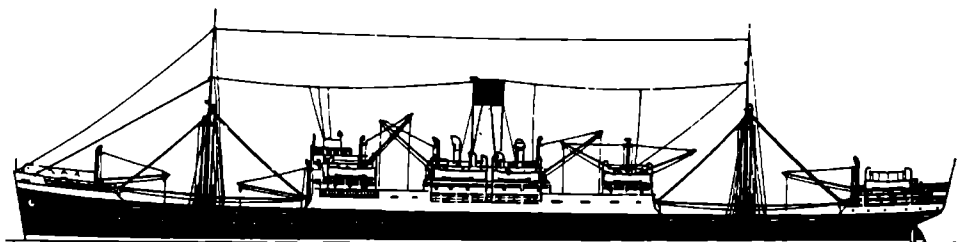
# *The Liverpool Nautical Research Society*

(Founded in 1938)

## THE BULLETIN

Volume 52, No. 2, September, 2008

*Editor : John Shepherd*



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### Front Cover:

The Blue Funnel Line's Ajax of 1931  
(see article on page 18)

*The Queen Elizabeth 2 will make her final visit to Liverpool on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> October.*



The **Queen Elizabeth 2** alongside the new landing stage and cruise liner terminal at Liverpool on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2007. Weather and other circumstances permitting, the **QE2** will make a farewell call at Liverpool in the first week of October, before being sold to Dubai.  
*Photo: courtesy Peter Elson at the 'Liverpool Daily Post'*

# THE THEFT OF THE 'FERRET'

## REMARKABLE HISTORY OF A GLASGOW STEAMER

by John Kennedy

*This article is a précis of Chapter XXII of Mr Kennedy's book 'A History of Steam Navigation', published in 1903.*

Decidedly the most dramatic incident ever recorded in the annals of steam navigation was the theft of the steamer **Ferret** and the piratical seizure and sale of her cargo of coffee.

The **Ferret** was a screw steamer measuring 170 feet 9 inches in length, 23 feet 2 inches beam and 12 feet 7 inches depth; builders' measurement 439 tons, with a probable carrying capacity of 400 tons dead-weight cargo, in addition to coal in bunkers. She had compound engines of 90 h.p. nominal, and her reputed speed was 12 knots. She was built on the Clyde in 1871, by the well-known firm of J. & G. Thomson, for Messrs. G. & J. Burns, of Glasgow, from whom the Highland Railway Company purchased her in 1873 for its mail and passenger service between Strome Ferry and Portree. The **Ferret** held a Board of Trade certificate for 200 passengers.



*The **Ferret** was built in 1871 for G. & J. Burns, of Glasgow*

The conspirators who succeeded in stealing this vessel laid their plans with great care and attention to detail, and carried them out with marvellous audacity. One of them took an office in Gracechurch Street, London, and obtained a supply of printed stationery, describing himself as 'Henderson & Co., Ship Brokers, &c'. He also opened a bank account in the name of 'Smith', taking care until his plans were perfected to keep a respectable balance to his credit.

Early in October, 1880, the plot had ripened, and one of the gang, representing himself to be 'Mr Walker, purser of the **Ferret** s.s.', called at the office of Douglas

& Co., Union Street, a leading ship-chandler's firm in Glasgow, and ordered a large quantity of expensive ship-stores. These stores were for the account of Mr Smith, who was referred to as a relation of Mr W.H. Smith, the late First Lord of the Admiralty.

Naturally references were required and were freely given. Mr Smith had chartered from the Highland Railway Company the steamer **Ferret** for a six months' cruise in the Mediterranean, his wife having been ordered by her doctor to take a long sea voyage. The **Ferret** was then in J. & G. Thomson's yard, being overhauled preparatory to the cruise. Both of these firms could be referred to, as well as Mr Smith's bankers, and Messrs. Henderson & Co., Ship Brokers, Gracechurch Street, London. The bankers were written to, and replied that Mr Smith had an account with their bank. Henderson & Co. were also applied to, and of course gave a very favourable account of Smith.

The merchants being satisfied with the result of their enquiries supplied the stores, which included an excellent selection of first-class wines specially brought from London. The account, which amounted to £1,490, was presented to Walker, who gave a bill at three months endorsed by Smith. It is to be presumed that the first half-month's charter was paid as customary in cash in advance, because the conspirators, having acquired the **Ferret**, were in no great hurry to get her out of British waters.

About the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1880, William Griffin joined the steamer at Greenock as chief engineer. Although Griffin was never placed on trial, it should be noted that he had a prior acquaintance with Walker, who had introduced him to Smith. It is also undeniable that without the assistance of Griffin and the ship's carpenter, the alterations which were made in the **Ferret** could not have been effected.

From Greenock, the **Ferret** sailed in charge of a crew of 'runners' to Cardiff, one Robert Wright, alias Carlyon (a confederate) being master, and Walker, alias Wallace, acting as purser. The steamer arrived at Cardiff on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October and remained there for three days, taking in a cargo of coals for ship's use; the coals, of course, being paid for by valueless bills on London. At Cardiff the 'runners' were discharged and a fresh crew, strangers to the **Ferret**, was shipped. Smith (otherwise Henderson) also embarked at Cardiff, accompanied by 'Mrs Smith'.

The **Ferret** sailed from Cardiff on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1880 and put into Milford Haven, probably from stress of weather, where she remained for about a week. She left on the 1<sup>st</sup> November, ostensibly for Marseille. In pursuance of this report, she passed through the Strait of Gibraltar on the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> November, and showing her number, asked to be reported.

Having steamed out of sight of the signalling station, the crew was set to work to change the colour of the funnel from white to black, and of the boats (with the exception of two) from blue to white, and at night, with her lights screened, the **Ferret** returned westwards through the strait. While passing through, the two boats that had not been altered, some empty casks, several life-belts and other articles, all having the steamer's name painted on them, were thrown overboard for the purpose of making it appear that the vessel had foundered. So evident did this seem that as a matter of fact the underwriters paid the Highland Railway Company its claim for the total loss of the steamer.

That same night all the crew were sent aft to the saloon, where Smith made a speech to them, in which he stated that he was a political refugee from the United

States; that he had purchased the **Ferret** to use partly as a yacht, and partly for trading; that after he had traded for some time he would sell the steamer, and make it worth the crew's while to keep his secret. On the other hand, if any of the crew disclosed anything they saw or heard on board, then he would blow their brains out! The crew, when eventually arrested, alleged that it was the fear of this threat which prevented them giving information, when in port, of what they knew to be suspicious actions.

Avoiding the Canary Islands, presumably as being much too frequented by British shipping, the conspirators kept away to the southward until they reached St Vincent, Cape Verde Islands. Entering the harbour, they anchored there for several days, during which they took on fresh water, and a supply of pigs, poultry, fruit and vegetables, paying for them in their usual manner by means of worthless bills.

'*The Times*' Sydney correspondent (23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1881) states that after leaving St Vincent the vessel's name was altered to **Benton**. But this seems most improbable, as it would then be apparent that the **Ferret** did not founder in the Mediterranean, and further it would have left a clue by which she could have easily have been traced. The truth probably is that the alteration was made immediately she got clear of the Strait of Gibraltar. Be that as it may, the **Benton** arrived at Santos on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1880.



The **FERRET** s.s. chartered by Henderson & Co.—Sails for the Mediterranean and disappears.—**BENTON** s.s. sails with a cargo of coffee from Santos, and also disappears.—Seizure of **INDIA** s.s. at Melbourne.—Proved to be missing steamer **FERRET, alias BENTON.**

At Santos, Smith went on shore and lost no time in opening negotiations with the local shipping agents, to whom he stated that the **Benton** was from Cape Town in ballast, bound for England. The negotiations resulted in the shipment of 3,992 bags of coffee, consigned to various consignees at Marseille. Having obtained this cargo, the **Benton** sailed from Santos on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1881, but instead of proceeding to Marseille she steamed direct to Cape Town.

While the **Benton** was steaming across the South Atlantic, the Glasgow holders of the bill for £1,490 for stores received some information which made them uneasy, and on presentation of the bill when due, it was dishonoured. The account had been closed and the balance withdrawn. The holders then applied to Henderson & Co., but the letter was returned - addressees '*gone, no address*'. They then wrote to the Highland Railway Company, and received a reply from the Secretary to the effect that the Company had already done all in its power to trace the **Ferret**, in its own interests, having received no charter money since the vessel sailed from the Clyde. The Secretary had been in communication with Lloyd's and the Board of Trade, and through British Consuls and Lloyd's agents, enquiries had been made all over the world. The Railway Company had heard that the **Ferret** had arrived at Malta, but on cabling there, it received a reply denying the report. It had sent a second cable, ordering the vessel to be seized in the event of its putting into Malta.

Meanwhile the **Benton** was nearing Cape Town, laden with the coffee shipped at Santos. During the voyage further changes had been effected in the appearance of the vessel, and the name **India** was substituted for **Benton**. The original name of **Ferret** had been filed off the ship's bell, and now, as a further precaution, the ship's official number on the main hatch coamings was altered to 77942. The **India** put into Cape Town on the 29<sup>th</sup> January and at once began to discharge her cargo.

The conspirators had provided themselves with a printing press, and had all necessaries on board, as well as Revenue Stamps of various nations, by which they were able to manufacture the vouchers and documents necessary to the success of their frauds. At Cape Town, Smith produced an invoice with a printed heading, purporting to be an invoice for 3,992 bags of coffee sold by coffee planters at the Venezuelan port of La Guaira to C.S. Henderson & Co., and with it a receipt for the amount duly stamped. He succeeded in selling the cargo, and realised by the sale of it about £11,000. He had to accept in part payment bills to the extent of £8,000, drawn on the Standard Bank, Clement's Lane, London, payable nine months after date.

It is satisfactory to know that the frauds were discovered before the bills matured, and payment of them was stopped. After the discharge of the cargo, Smith tried to sell the steamer, but not succeeding in his attempt, he shipped a quantity of coal, and sailed on 14<sup>th</sup> February for Mauritius, arriving on 1<sup>st</sup> March. After a short stay, the **India** was cleared for Guam.

The next port the **India** arrived at was Port Albany in Western Australia, from whence they steamed direct to Melbourne. Here Wright and Walker offered the steamer for sale, but received no offers. While the **India** was in Melbourne, several circumstances made the Customs officials and the Harbour Police suspect that there was something wrong about the vessel. It was observed that the fires were always banked so that steam could be raised at the shortest notice. Captain Wright never left the steamer and none of the crew (except Walker, the purser) was ever allowed shore leave. The Customs authorities instructed one of their officers to make a special investigation of the matter, and he reported that there was no steamer of the tonnage given registered at Lloyd's in the name of **India**, but that the particulars of tonnage and dimensions corresponded with the register of the missing **Ferret**.

Noting all these suspicious circumstances, the Customs authorities determined on prompt action. Requisitioning two crews of the Water Police, as it was

feared there might be violent opposition on the part of the steamer's crew, the Commissioner of Customs, on the 27<sup>th</sup> April, seized the vessel. Fortunately their anticipations as to resistance were not realised, the crew surrendering without opposition. Although the authorities had been extremely cautious in their enquiries, it is evident that the conspirators became aware of what was being done, for when the steamer was seized, Smith, 'Mrs Smith' and Captain Wright had fled. The previous day Smith and 'Mrs Smith' removed from their cabin a number of articles, amongst them two heavy iron-bound boxes which were never traced. Smith succeeded in getting away from Melbourne to a distant township, but was arrested. 'Mrs Smith', who disappeared for a time, when she heard of his arrest, reappeared and visited him in prison. The purpose of her visit may be surmised from the fact that shortly after her visit Smith tried to escape by filing through one of the bars of his prison window.

Captain Wright had found a retreat in a Melbourne sailors' lodging house, but having got drunk and quarrelled with his landlady, he was thrown out and arrested for being drunk and disorderly. When the charge was being booked at the police station, he was recognised as the missing master of the steamer for whom the police were searching.

Confirmation of the suspicions which induced the Commissioner of Customs to seize the steamer was speedily obtained. Traces of fraud were quickly found on the ship's hull and appointments, and in the ship's books and papers – some of the latter being found in very unusual places of deposit. Between the leaves of the log-book a seaman's 'advance note' was found with the name of 'Ferret' on it.

Among the papers seized was a card of a Dr. Bonefin. A swindler of this name – not a common one – shortly before the arrival of the **India**, was convicted for obtaining goods under false pretences from a number of Melbourne jewellers and was sentenced for a term of imprisonment in Pentridge Gaol. It seems extremely likely that Bonefin was one of the conspirators on shore.

A Cabinet Meeting of the Victorian Government was held on the 9<sup>th</sup> May, and on the following morning the opinion of the Attorney-General was published as follows:

- "The Government of Victoria seized the **Ferret**, which entered this port [Melbourne] as the **India**, in the interests of the rightful owners, domiciled apparently in Great Britain. At the present time no one in Victoria is in a position to show this Government such a title to the **Ferret** as would clear the Government from possible liability. It appears to me that the Hon. The Commissioner of Trade and Customs should hold the **Ferret** until the proper papers are produced in Melbourne by a legally authorised agent of the actual owners, whose title should be clearly proved by the needful papers from England. This being done, and delivery charges paid, the ship should be delivered. If it is deemed desirable to expedite delivery of the ship, this Government is entitled to require that the Board of Trade in London should give a certificate as to the owners. Such certificate, along with an indemnity to pay all costs, and an indemnity by the owners, should be deposited with the Agent-General for Victoria in London, who should telegraph any instructions the owners may wish to give as to the way they desire the ship to be dealt with, and this Government should then act accordingly. At the same time it



would be well to learn whether the Imperial Government wished to take proceedings against any of the offenders, and if so, what course it intended to take. All necessary documents and evidence should be transmitted without delay. The master, also the person who represents himself as the owner, and another person are charged here with forging the register of the ship, that offence having been committed with a view to a fraudulent sale."

Eventually, the three criminals were arrested: Smith (alias Henderson,); Wright (alias Carlyon) and Walker (alias Wallace) and were indicted on three counts:

1. Conspiracy to defraud the owners of the **Ferret**, the Highland Railway Co.
2. Conspiracy to defraud intending purchasers of the **Ferret** in Melbourne.
3. Conspiracy to deceive the Commissioner of Trade and Customs, by entering the vessel under a false name, and trying to obtain a certificate of sale under which the vessel could have been sold in that port.

All three were acquitted on the first count, but convicted on the second and third. Smith and Walker were each sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, and Wright to three and a half years. This result is most remarkable. No mention is made of the frauds perpetrated at Glasgow, Cardiff and St Vincent.

As for the unfortunate crew, who had received no wages, they obtained a temporary refuge in the Melbourne Sailors' Home.

The **Ferret** herself was purchased by the Adelaide Steamship Company in 1885 and ended her days on the Australian coasting service. She sailed on in this trade for another 35 years, being wrecked near Cape Spencer on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1920. ■



*The Ferret alongside the Adelaide Steamship Company's wharf.*

## H.M.S. 'CONWAY' – THE END OF AN ERA

*This article originally appeared in 'Ocean' – the journal of Ocean Transport & Trading Limited in 1975. There is no credited author.*

The concept of a school ship to further develop the training of young men as embryo ships' officers was developed by the Mercantile Marine Service Association (MMSO) headquartered in Liverpool and led to the introduction of the first Conway in 1859. The Admiralty had offered the use of HMS Conway, a coastguard ship at Devonport, which on its arrival in the Mersey was moored off Rock Ferry. The original Conway was replaced in 1861 by HMS Winchester, and in 1876 by HMS Nile. Both the replacement vessels were renamed Conway.

The MMSA remained the sole governing body until the 1960s and over the years the Ocean Group, formerly under the title of Alfred Holt & Co., or Blue Funnel, were leading supporters. Members of the Holt family gave very generous financial and other help during the lifetime of the Conway.

When, in 1953, the training ship Conway was swept away in the Menai Straits and broke her back on the Platters Ledge, many 'Old Conways' thought that this must be the end. They could not see the tremendous efforts that were to result in a new stone-frigate; in splendid buildings; in workshops and laboratories; in space and light – in all those things that the ship lacked.

So we Old Conways had to swallow our words of pessimism and recall afresh the theme of the Conway song to '*carry on, carry on, 'til the last day's gone*'. Now, in retrospect, it can be argued that we were right; that this was the beginning of the end and that Conway's decline dates from the loss of the ship in 1953, or even ten years earlier when, to avoid further enemy action, Conway exchanged her traditional home on the swirling commercial tides of the Mersey for the tranquility and green fields of Anglesey.

### *Home from the sea*

There was a fanciful tradition in the 1930s that the seagulls which spent so many idle hours on the masts and yards of the ship were the souls of Old Conways who had come home from the sea to rest on their wooden mother. When the gulls left the Conway it was believed that would mark the end for the ship. Not perhaps surprisingly, for there was always something incongruous in a Conway which had exchanged the Liverpool waterfront for the lawns of a country estate, and the tough old gulls of the Mersey for the Marquess of Anglesey's pheasants.

Conway, as the older generations knew her, was an integral part of the Mersey scene. She belonged among the liners, tramps and tankers which, on every Mersey tide, gave substance to a boy's dream of the sea. Young faces would peer out through the ports on the lower decks as the flood-tide carried the traffic up river.

Keen eyes would spot the ships of their future company and as they watched and dreamed of their own voyages-to-come, so they learned about tides and weather,

tugs and dredgers, signals, lights, rule of the road and all the busy commercial life of a busy seaport.

The seeds of their professionalism were sown on those Mersey tides.

### *An easier berth*

When the old ship was reluctantly dragged off her moorings in the Sloyne, off Rock Ferry, and taken to an easier and greener berth she left behind much of that which had given training. To go all too soon was the urgent shuttling backwards and forwards from ship to shore of the duty motor-boats and those splendid twelve-oared cutters in which hands were hardened and hearts were broken in the struggle against spring tides and westerly gales.

The **Conway's** final berth did not offer the same degree of challenge or demand so high a standard of seamanship. On the Mersey, for every man in the boats, a dozen more would be watching critically as the helmsman brought her alongside. Many and cutting were the gibes levelled at the coxswain who made a mess of it. Seamanship was learned by watching and by doing. Is there any adequate substitute?

In those days the classrooms were separated from one another by canvas screens suspended from the deckhead on both sides of the main deck and it was a feature of **Conway** education that you could hear three lecturers at the same time. This enabled one to concentrate on whichever lesson seemed most appropriate or, since all were equally audible, on all three at once. Perhaps this unusual ability explains why so many **Conway** boys obtained academic honours in later life!

Studies, unless they involved navigation or seamanship or something of equally obvious importance came fairly low down on the **Conway** cadet's list of priorities. Not so with sport and this, if we except rowing (which was so much a part of **Conway** daily life that it qualified more readily as a chore than as a sport) meant rugby football.

### *A ferocious pack*

Fearsome indeed was the reputation of **Conway's** first fifteen and it was not unheard of for local Merseyside teams to scratch their fixtures rather than face the ferocious attacks of the **Conway** pack. And on the touch-line the yelling supporters, revelling in freedom from shipboard restrictions, would chant their heart-chilling war cry: *'Pieces of eight : pieces of eight : pieces of nine and ten. We'll cut the throats of every man and sew them up again. Dead-men-tell-no-tales !!!'* And, in response, the pack would surge forward to do or to die in a style befitting a team that represented H.M.S. **Conway**.

Later, as the team returned to the ship, the clatter and chatter of Saturday tea on the main deck would be stilled as the motor-boat swung around the ship's stern, her steaming lights visible momentarily in the winter darkness as she rolled and pitched past the open ports. Then from the sternsheets would be heard the team captain's cry of victory: *'Three cheers for H.M.S. Conway ....'* and another win would thus be commemorated. If the boat came silently to the gangway then all hands would know that **Conway** had lost the match.

Another unusual custom which involved three cheers would take place towards the end of term when, at morning ablutions, the Chief Cadet Captain would

sing out '*Three cheers for going home three weeks today*'. Then two weeks: then seven days, six days, five days and so on until all hands cheered themselves hoarse on that incomparable morning when he called '*Three cheers for going home today*'. Channel fever? We knew all about that at Conway without ever crossing the Mersey Bar!

### *Judgement by shipmates*

Among the notable annual events was the vote for the Queen's Gold Medal to be awarded to the cadet who, in the judgement of his shipmates exhibited 'the qualities of the finest seaman'.

On the appointed day all hands would assemble on the main deck facing a blackboard on which were the names of five or six senior cadets short-listed by their officers. Each member of the ship's company would come forward in answer to his name and would indicate his choice privately to the judges. When the tally had been completed the name of the winner would be announced. Typical of Conway, however, was the oft-given reminder that at sea the most popular person does not always make the best officer. This was very characteristic of Conway attitudes which made more of the community than of the individual. It was influenced no doubt by a realisation that in the face of nature at sea, all man's self-assertion is vanity.

In the years of the shore based establishment until 1974, long after the ship had been lost and being far-distant from ships or commerce, Conway sought recognition as a sixth-form college and sought to find salvation in academic achievement. Such a policy would have been unthinkable at one time when nothing that did not bear upon the sea and ships was allowed to influence the training.

Had authority tried to introduce such extraneous material the cadets would have rejected it. Such may not have been education in the modern sense but in those days you did not join Conway for an education; you joined to fit yourself for the sea.

### *Start of a decline*

Had the Conway returned after the war to her proper place in a shipping environment, this simple fact of life might not have been forgotten. The Conway was a ship before she was a school and this order of priorities justified her existence and established her reputation for training. When, for whatever reasons, that order was reversed, Conway went into decline.

Two years of shared experience in a ship's company of boys built deep and lasting friendships. They created absolute loyalty to one's shipmates and a sympathetic responsibility for juniors when they, in their turn, faced the difficulties and the fears of growing-up in that rough and hard community.

On such foundations was Conway leadership established and for over one hundred years it was fed into the Merchant Navy, with what incalculable advantage can only be imagined.

Now only the memories of Old Conways remain and a lasting respect for their tradition.

The responsibility for producing seamen to support Britain's trade and defence has moved elsewhere and, for better or worse, has taken new forms. We

should look forward in hope to a new tradition but may perhaps be forgiven for the thought that it is indeed a poor country that cannot afford a training-ship.

And that being so, where shall we Old Conways find a spar on which to perch when our 'last day's gone?' ■

For further information, visit < [www.hmsconway.org](http://www.hmsconway.org) >



'Conway'—the sad end

### **A FOND FAREWELL TO LIVERPOOL'S LAST PASSENGER LINER**

Liverpool's last surviving passenger liner, the 1956-built **Empress of Britain**, was beached at Alang, India, on the 4<sup>th</sup> July. This was almost 52 years to the day since her maiden voyage from Liverpool in Canadian Pacific's service to Quebec and Montreal.

In recent years the old '*Empress*' had been on charter to the Japanese Peaceboat Organisation and carried the name **The Topaz**. A full account of the **Empress of Britain's** amazing career will be found in the September 2007 '*Bulletin*'.

It had been hoped to preserve the old ship. The 'Save the Classic Liners Campaign' had an agreement to buy the old '*Empress*' in 2009. The city of Belfast had agreed to provide a berth for her where she would become a hotel, maritime museum and tourist facility. However, Peaceboat abruptly terminated her charter in early 2008, citing high fuel costs as the reason. The owners of the ship, Kyma Shipping, sold the old '*Empress*' immediately as scrap metal prices were at an all-time 'high'.

So, they've all gone now. Canadian Pacific's **Empress of Britain, Empress of England and Empress of Canada**; Cunard's two Liverpool-based liners **Carinthia and Sylvania**; the Pacific Steam Navigation Company's **Reina del Mar** and Elder Dempster's **Accra, Apapa** and that most beautiful of ships – the **Aureol**. All were good to the last and they all arrived at the breakers' yard under their own steam. ■

## MERSEY FERRIES – THE IRISH CONNECTION

by *Malcolm McDonald*

*When the Mersey ferries have finished their useful lives on the River they are sometimes sold for breaking up. However, on many occasions they have been bought by other operators for service elsewhere. It is not perhaps surprising that more Mersey ferries have been sold to Irish owners than to any other group of buyers. The majority of the ex-Mersey ferries found a new lease of life as passenger tenders to the liners calling at Irish ports, where Cobh (formerly Queenstown) has always been the major Irish trans-Atlantic departure point.*

The very first sale to an Irish company was in 1845 when the Eastham ferry **William Stanley**, built in 1837, was sold to the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company. However, it is not certain that she ever crossed the Irish Sea; possibly her new owners used her at Liverpool. The **William Stanley** was re-sold to an owner in Chester in 1852 and converted into a sailing vessel in 1855. In this form she made ocean passages and was reported as having sunk in 1859 whilst returning to Britain from Cuba.

The earliest vessel which definitely migrated across the Irish Sea after being sold was the Wallasey vessel **Heather Bell** (1865). She was sold in 1891 to H.J.Ward & Co., who were Liverpool tug owners. They changed her name to **Erin's King** and based her at Dublin, from where she operated a programme of excursion sailings. She was broken up at Garston in 1900.

The only sister ships to be sold to Ireland were the Wallasey vessels **Rose** (1900) and **Lily** (1901). Both were sold to Palmer's of Dublin in 1927, taking the names **An Saorstat** and **Failte** respectively. They remained at Dublin until 1941 but probably had little business after the outbreak of war. Although neutral, Ireland's trade and commerce were badly disrupted during the war. Both ships were sold in 1941 to the British Iron and Steel Corporation. The **Rose/An Saorstat** was renamed **Biscosolve** and was broken up at Preston in 1951. The **Lily/Failte** was wrecked in 1941 and her remains broken up at Passage West in Cork harbour.

The first Birkenhead ferry to be sold to Ireland was the **Lancashire** (1899). Her sale in 1929 was to the Galway Harbour Commissioners who renamed her **Cathair-na-Gilleme**. Galway had made a few attempts to become a significant trans-Atlantic port during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although it was closer to America than any other British or Irish port, it suffered from an inability to attract much cargo. It seems that the former **Lancashire** was used as a tender for the occasional visiting liner and for local excursions. She was broken up at Cork in 1948.

The Wallasey ferry **Royal Iris** came to prominence in the Zeebrugge raid during the First World War. It was as a result of their service at Zeebrugge that she and her sister **Daffodil** were awarded their 'Royal' prefixes in 1919. When the **Royal Iris** finished her service on the Mersey in 1932, she followed her former consorts **Rose** and **Lily** into the Dublin fleet of Palmer's. However, unlike the earlier pair, she was

not renamed and in 1946 she was sold to the Cork Harbour Commissioners and renamed **Blarney**. She became the first of several former Mersey ferries to be stationed at Cork. The old **Royal Iris** survived at Cork until 1961 when, at the ripe old age of 55, she was broken up at Passage West.



**The Blarney (ex Royal Iris) at Cobh in 1956**

The next Wallasey ferry to sail to Ireland was the **John Joyce** (1910). She carried the name of a chairman of the Wallasey Ferries Committee, but she was originally launched as the **Bluebell**. She was bought by the Dublin firm of Palgrave, Murphy & Company, best known for its cargo services from Dublin to Northern Europe. Once again, she retained her Wallasey name and in 1946 followed the **Royal Iris** to Cork where the Harbour Commissioners took the view that they needed two tenders. At that time there was the prospect of a substantial post-war revival of the liner traffic to the United States. The liner traffic did develop as expected with regular calls by Cunard's Southampton-based **Mauretania** and its Liverpool-based **Britannic**, plus frequent calls by a variety of non-British liners. The **John Joyce** was renamed **Shandon** for her service at Cobh and lasted until 1953 when she was broken up at Passage West.

The final Wallasey ferry to serve in Ireland was the **Francis Storey** (1922). She went to Cork in 1951, apparently to replace the **John Joyce/Shandon**, and was renamed **Killarney**. The old **Francis Storey** served for nine years, being broken up at Cork in 1960. Surprisingly she was disposed of before the **Royal Iris/Blarney**, despite being sixteen years younger.

The Birkenhead ferries **Mountwood** (1960), **Woodchurch** (1960) and **Overchurch** (1962) were designed by the Liverpool naval architects Graham & Woolnough, who were contracted also by the Cork Harbour Commissioners to design two tenders to replace the **Royal Iris/Blarney** and the **Francis Storey/Killarney**. It was perhaps not surprising that the appearance of these tenders had many similarities to that of the three Birkenhead ferries. They were ordered from the Liffey Dockyard in Dublin.



The **Killarney** (*ex Francis Storey*) alongside at Cork

However, the **Francis Storey/Killarney** was apparently unlikely to last until the first of the new tenders was ready. Birkenhead Corporation had sold its oldest ferry, the **Hindertons** of 1925, after ordering the first two of its new ferries, but Graham & Woolnough knew that the remaining three old Birkenhead boats (the **Thurstaston** of 1930, the **Claughton** of 1930 and the **Bidston** of 1933) would be disposed of as the new replacements were delivered. Through their agency it was arranged that the **Bidston** should be chartered to the Cork Harbour Commissioners after the new **Mountwood** had entered service. In this way the **Bidston** made her way over to Cork in 1960, replacing the **Francis Storey/Killarney**. For her service at Cork she was fitted with two lifeboats, one on each side near the stern, replacing the single stern lifeboat which she had previously carried. The floatable seats and life rafts were cleared from the upper deck, leaving a mainly uncluttered deck space and the **Bidston's** funnel was repainted. Finally she was re-registered at Cork, leading to the unusual situation of a ship owned by a British public authority flying a foreign flag. Having been used to oil burning steamers, the engineers at Cork had to adjust to a



coal-fired vessel. Once the new tenders were in service at Cork the **Bidston** was no longer needed and she was sold for breaking up in 1962.

One further Mersey ferry which ended her days in Ireland was the Birkenhead vessel **Storeton** (1910). She had been sold to Leith owners in 1940 for use as a lifting vessel, and then to Cork owners in 1951. In view of the alterations needed to fit her for her role at Leith, it seems unlikely that she was used to carry passengers at Cork. In any case her time at Cork was very brief as she was broken up in January 1952.

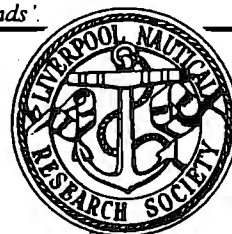


The **Bidston** of 1933 on charter to Cork Harbour Commissioners in 1961

Regular readers of *'The Bulletin'* may recall an article which appeared in 1998 which described visits to Dublin by two other Mersey ferries. The Birkenhead ferry **Oxton** (1897) was renamed **Old Oxton** in 1925 to free the name for a new boat. She was withdrawn from service and sold for breaking up in 1926. However, before being demolished she made two trips from Birkenhead docks to Dublin, carrying new railway cars for the Irish rail network.

Much more recently, the **Mountwood** (1960) crossed over to Dublin in 1996 to act as a tender for the visiting U.S. aircraft carrier **John F. Kennedy**. ■

*This Article originally appeared in the Friends of the Ferries Newsletter in November 2006 and is reproduced by kind permission of the 'Friends'.*



## THE 'WOODSIDE' AND BERMUDA

*The 120-mile passage from the Mersey to Dublin must have seemed a daunting proposition for the vessels that faced it, but one Mersey ferry made the 3,500-mile voyage from the Mersey to Bermuda.*

**WOODSIDE** : built 1903 by the Londonderry Shipbuilding Co. Ltd.  
Length: 150·0ft Breadth: 41·0ft. Gross Tonnage: 445.

After 27 years of plying back and forth across the Mersey, the old **Woodside** was sold in 1930 to a Bermuda firm to act as a tender for the ocean liners calling at the island. To take up her new duties, she first had to cross the Atlantic under her own steam.

Under her master, Captain P. Webster of Wavertree, the **Woodside** left Birkenhead on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1930 at the start of a 3,500 mile voyage with Liverpool pilot, first-class, Walter Curry on board. Her saloon windows were battened and her decks piled high with bags of fuel for the trip.

Mr Curry takes up the story:

*"There had been many delays because of the weather, but we proceeded down the Rock Channel in fairly reasonable conditions and approached Moelfre Bay to contact the pilot boat. During our approach to Moelfre a northerly gale sprang up and we had to beat up to windward to clear the lee shore.*

*"The next twenty-four hours were a frightful experience for the handful of us on board. Captain Webster and I were on the bridge continuously the whole time until, at long last, we managed to clear the North Anglesey coast and run with a heavy sea behind us into Holyhead for shelter.*

*"When we got there I went down into the engine room and thanked the engineers personally for their magnificent work in keeping the engines going under such dreadful conditions."*

The **Woodside** had to return to Birkenhead from Holyhead for repairs after her ordeal. Captain Webster's account of the affair was brief and 'salty':

*"She was standing on her head at times in the mountainous seas and kept dropping back into the troughs like a stone. Part of the bulwarks were torn away and we lost the anchor and fathoms of chain. For hours on end we were being tossed around like a piece of driftwood."*

A few days later the **Woodside** was off again and reached the Azores for fuelling without further trouble. She arrived at Bermuda on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1930 with five extra passengers. Five stowaways had somehow managed to hide aboard when she put into the Azores.

In October 1963 the **Woodside** finished her duties at Bermuda and it was decided that her final resting place would be the warm clear waters off Bermuda. A Liverpool exile, Mr Arthur W. Hughes of Pembroke, Bermuda, recalled:

*"The Woodside's services during her time in Bermuda were in high demand, both in peace and war. At the outbreak of the Second World War she was employed as a minesweeper. She was also used as a night patrol vessel, with small guns mounted*

on her. Another job was to transport all mail for censorship from ships that called at Bermuda, but which were too big to enter the harbour at Hamilton."

After the war the **Woodside** was stripped of all her superstructure and became an unrecognisable hulk in the dockyard. She was kept in commission as a water carrier and 'dumb-barge' until the decision was taken to scuttle her in 1963.

The **Woodside** was sunk in a position where she formed part of a breakwater, in place of an earlier scuttled vessel, which had broken up. The old Birkenhead ferry was loaded with a cargo of rusted, broken-down and derelict cars to give her weight.

Local fishermen were delighted for they knew that wherever she was sunk, the **Woodside** would attract fish which were known to like using scuttled vessels as their habitat. ■



*The sister ship of the **Woodside**, the Birkenhead ferry **Bidston** which was also built at Londonderry in 1903, went on to have a successful career after her sale by Birkenhead Corporation. In the **Bidston's** case she stayed nearer to home and was purchased by the Blackpool Steam Navigation Company to operate pleasure cruises from the resort under the name of **Minden** in the 1930s. But that's another story .....*

### WEBSITES

The Liverpool Nautical Research Society can now be found on the world-wide-web and has two sites as follows:

[www.liverpool-nautical-research.org.uk](http://www.liverpool-nautical-research.org.uk)

This is our 'business' site and contains details of the Society, the programme of monthly meetings, details of 'The Bulletin' contents, a Notice Board, and a couple of representative articles from recent 'Bulletins'. Also, a page of links to other nautical websites.

[www.lnrs.co.uk](http://www.lnrs.co.uk)

An archive of material about Liverpool's Last Passenger Liners, 1945 – 1972.  
Full details of 21 of these ships.

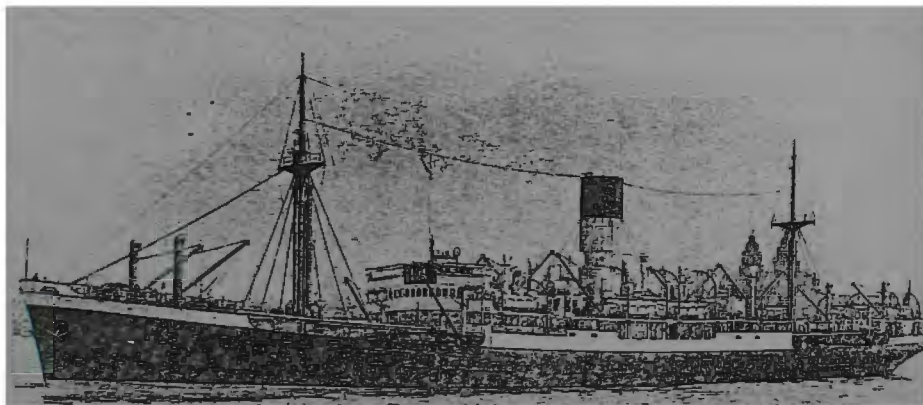
## PILGRIMS

*by Ian Jackson*

*In the June 'Bulletin', the story was told of the Blue Funnel Line's pilgrim carrier **Gunung Djati**. In this article Ian Jackson, who was Third Officer of Blue Funnel's **Ajax** in 1948, recalls a voyage carrying pilgrims from Singapore to Jeddah.*

Alfred Holt's **Ajax**, ten months into her year-long double circumnavigation, bowled up from Fremantle towards Singapore in glorious weather. It was May 1948 and she was cracking along at her usual 16 knots with lower holds loaded to the beams with wool and tinned fruit and the like; the exception being the refrigerated No.4 which was full of apples. Homeward bound at last, or nearly so, after one-and-a-half circuits on the New York – round-the-world service. She was a little rusty after ten months, but was due for paint on arrival in Singapore.

The 'tween decks of Nos. 1 and 2 holds, also Nos. 5 and 6, had been left clear but for a few small parcels of cargo for Singapore. This had been done deliberately as the **Ajax** was due to join the Hajj, and carry twelve hundred pilgrims from Singapore and Penang to Jeddah. The **Ajax**'s master Captain Whitehouse and Chief Officer Collet had experience of this, but for the rest of the officers it would be a new experience; one destined not to be oft repeated for in a very few years specialist ships and then the ubiquitous aeroplane took over the trade.



The Blue Funnel Line's **Ajax** of 1931 off Liverpool

The **Ajax** passed through the Sunda Strait and sighted Krakatoa on a clear moonlit night and then through the Gaspar Stait after breakfast the following morning before slowing down for a dawn arrival on the day after that. Once alongside the long wharf in Keppel Harbour, host to countless Blue Funnel ships over the years, the Singapore cargo was discharged and preparations for the pilgrims began.

First came lorryloads of extra lifeboats. The *Ajax* class of ship had extra-tall davits, so that another boat could be carried above the one in chocks. The bulwarks in the after well deck were pierced with holes, with matching sockets in the scuppers, to take additional pairs of davits; two pairs to port and two to starboard. With four boats so housed, and four more double decked on the boat deck, we joined the Hajj with an extra eight, making a total of sixteen including the motor boat and two dinghies. Hardly enough to accommodate all the souls which would be on board, but no doubt within the regulations. The *Ajax* was lying port side to, so the port side boats were hooked on to the falls and lifted straight off the quay and made fast to their gripping spars, while the starboard side boats had to be craned into the water and floated round, to be lifted quickly before they sank. Being wooden boats their seams were gaping wide after weeks of dry land storage in the sun!

After the additional boats were secure, crates of stores arrived for them. As third mate this was my responsibility but Mr Collet detailed the two apprentices to do the work which was a great relief as eight extra boats require a large amount of provisions.

Whilst all this was going on, the *Ajax's* hull was being given a fresh coat of shiny black paint. The engineers fitted a fresh water line, with standpipes with locks on them, to the fore and after well decks. Gangs of carpenters were building stairways to two corners in each of Nos 1, 2, 5 and 6 hatches, from the deck up to the coaming and thence down into the 'tweendeck. Additionally they were laying down row upon row of pallets upon which the pilgrims could lay their scant bedding.

The passage from Fremantle had cleared a number of double-bottom tanks of fuel oil, and the engineers flushed out these empty tanks with fresh water. The *Ajax's* normal fresh water capacity couldn't cope with an extra 1,200 passengers on board. We all hoped that the water in these tanks, which was slightly yellow looking, and which if left standing soon developed a skim of fuel oil, would be reserved for the pilgrims. In the event, we were all using it before we arrived at Jeddah. It wasn't very nice!

With no cargo work going on, the bosun and the deck crew were having a 'field day' of marlinspike seamanship, running jackstays between stanchions above the bulwarks and along the centreline over which to spread awnings above the well decks, and hanging wind chutes from the standing derricks to feed air into the 'tweendecks. The carpenter had turned farmer, building pens for the live goats and sheep which the pilgrims would bring with them to sustain them on the voyage.

The pilgrims themselves dealt with the company through brokers who bought space and sold it on to the pilgrims. These brokers were responsible for feeding their customers, so while all the shipboard preparations were going on, they were bringing their clients' stores on board, alive and dead! And in due course, when the *Ajax* was ready for them, the pilgrims turned up in lorries and were herded on board and shown their 'tweendeck home for the passage. The noise and confusion were beyond belief for the passengers were of all ages and both sexes, with a sprinkling of ladies who would multiply before arrival at Jeddah, and frail old people who would redress the balance.

With the Singapore complement of pilgrims on board, the apprentices set up signposts, one each on the fore and after well decks, pointing the way to Mecca. These

had to be tended with every alteration of the ship's course so that no-one should inadvertently pray in the wrong direction. With everything complete, the *Ajax* sailed for Penang.

The following morning, whilst the *Ajax* was in the Malacca Strait, the brokers sprung their first surprise. They informed Mr Collet, the mate, that their clients had not had their vaccinations, without which they wouldn't be allowed ashore at Jeddah. It was probable, said the brokers, that many of the pilgrims would have already have been immunised, but they couldn't say which or how many. Wireless messages flew and sufficient serum and syringes to jab the whole lot were ordered to await our arrival at Penang.

With a thousand pilgrims already on board, we were due to collect another two hundred at Penang. On arrival there the brokers suggested to Mr Collet that many of the Singapore pilgrims had relatives in Penang and would like to go ashore to visit them. With the benefit of hindsight, Mr Collet should have said 'no', but in the event a hastily concocted and inadequately controlled system of shore passes was set up which was heartily abused by pilgrims, relatives, friends, brokers and various assorted villains! What with the those legitimately coming and going while the *Ajax* was alongside at Penang, and those joining as passengers, plus the assorted mob who got on board as passes flew back and forth across the rail, we undoubtedly sailed from Penang with rather more pilgrims that had paid for their passage. One hopes that the brokers, who no doubt discovered the stowaways and charged them a fare, had allowed for this in providing the stores.

The *Ajax* left Penang in the evening and sailed for Aden where she had to take on bunkers, given that several fuel tanks now contained fresh water. The following morning the mate consulted the *Ajax*'s doctor, Dr Sperber, who explained that, with the best will in the world, he couldn't vaccinate twelve hundred plus passengers single-handed. And how was he expected to keep track of who had been jabbed and who hadn't? So, an action plan was drawn up. The pilgrims from the foredeck would be herded up onto the centrecastle and driven round No.3 hatch and back down to the foredeck on the other side. The after deck crowd would make a similar trip round No.4 hatch. With the exception of the quartermaster, every sailor on the ship would be involved in the herding, and every off-duty mate, apprentice, engineer and steward would be provided with the kit to vaccinate the whole complement of pilgrims. The whole operation, as far as we knew, worked a treat and all the pilgrims were immunised in the course of the day.

The *Ajax* could now settle into sea routine from Pulo Weh due west for Dondra Head. The watchkeepers had an extra hour's work on completion of their watch to go round the 'tweendecks to see that all was well. It was necessary to check that nobody was lighting fires below decks; to make sure there were no signs of illness or epidemic; to discover the corpse should anyone have died, or the child should a pregnant woman have given birth. To make sure that all the stand pipes were locked, for they were only open at certain limited times of the day, and tell your relief that all was apparently well, and then, and only then, to turn in for a few hours sleep.

Before Dondra Head we had our first birth and our first death. The latter was an old man whose chance of reaching Mecca was always slight, and we buried him at sea. The baby, a boy, thrived in the sea air despite the less than salubrious conditions

in the 'tweendecks. The flocks of sheep and goats dwindled as they were gruesomely, ritually slaughtered each morning. The pilgrims prayed twice daily, facing in the right direction, thanks to the apprentices. We drank our oily water and complained about it, but came to no harm.

As the *Ajax* rounded Ceylon and altered course a little northwards for Socotra, the south-west monsoon strengthened and water began to come aboard. One night heavy seas wrecked the foredeck awnings and we had to slow down to make the well decks and 'tweendecks livable. As we approached Socotra the seas moderated and the *Ajax* made fast to the Aden fuel buoy on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1948.

We remained at Aden with arrangements in place to repel any unauthorized persons attempting to come on board. Every hosepipe the ship possessed was connected to the mains, and piles of scrap dunnage located at strategic intervals. The deck crew had orders to drive off all bumboats to a safe distance to let no-one board except those entitled to come up the gangway. There was no shore leave. The *Ajax* took on bunkers and we proceeded to sea in the afternoon without incident and with the same number of passengers we had on board on our arrival. We were learning!

The tension in the ship, with Jeddah and the real start of the Hajj only two or three days away, was mounting. For some obscure reason the *Ajax* had to call at Kamaran, a small island off the coast of Yemen, to get clearance for Jeddah. At the time Kamaran was British and having obtained the necessary papers, the anchor was weighed and the *Ajax* sailed on the final portion of the pilgrim voyage, at about half speed so as to arrive off the reefs at Jeddah at first light.

Dawn arrived, and taking on board the pilot, the *Ajax* crept in through the coral to the anchorage. The anchor was let go and the decks were already crowded with the pilgrims, their possessions bundled up, ready for the shore. However our passengers had to await a fleet of dhows to ferry them ashore. There was strident haggling as the dhow masters did their best to deprive their fellow Muslims of as much of their Hajj money as possible. No pay, no go; cash up front! There were lurid tales, apocryphal tales, of dhow masters cutting the throats of their passengers, robbing them, ditching them and then returning to the ship for another load. No doubt it had happened but the *Ajax*'s pilgrims left throughout the day in an orderly manner. Their brokers, and what was left of the livestock, went with them and by evening we had the ship to ourselves again.

The following dawn the *Ajax* eased out through the reefs to begin the two day passage to Suez. All the pilgrims' gear was made ready for discharge. The awnings, jackstays and stanchions came down; the stairways were lifted out of the holds, the pallets brought up on deck and the extra lifeboats stripped of their stores. On arrival in Suez Bay, a lighter came alongside to be filled with the accoutrements of pilgrim carrying. The additional lifeboats were lowered into the water to be towed away. They promptly sank until they floated on their buoyancy tanks. Last over the side were the extra well-deck davits. All this paraphernalia would be picked up by the southbound ship which would return the pilgrims to Penang and Singapore.

At last the *Ajax* was ready for the Suez Canal transit. All in all, it had been a very interesting experience! ■

## THE CUNARD LINER 'ASCANIA' OF 1925

*by the Editor*

Built by Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. Ltd., Newcastle, 1925. Yard No: 971.

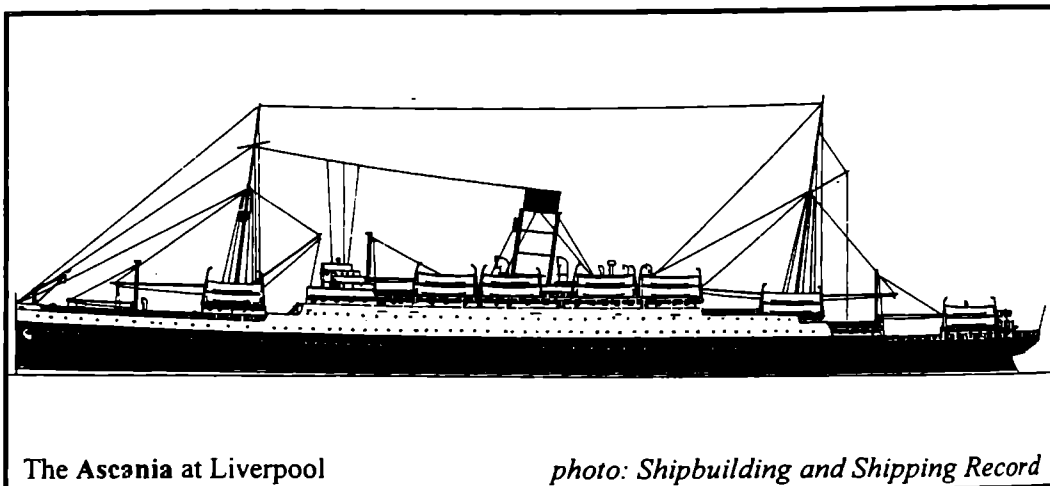
Official Number: 147307 Signal Letters: G K N J

Gross Tonnage: 14,440, Nett: 8,143. Length: 520ft, Breadth: 65.3ft.

Owned by the Cunard Steamship Co.Ltd. Registered at Liverpool.

Twin screws, 4 steam turbines, double reduction gearing. Speed: 15 knots.

By the end of the First World War, the Cunard Line had lost all of its 'A' class of liners operating on the Canadian service. These losses were the **Albania**, **Ausonia**, **Andania**, **Aurania** and **Ascania**. The Canadian trade was of ever growing importance and in the Company's vast replacement building programme of the early post-war years, six new 'A' class liners were constructed for the Canadian routes.



The *Ascania* at Liverpool

*photo: Shipbuilding and Shipping Record*

The new *Ascania* was launched on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1923, but her building was stopped for several months after that due to ever increasing costs and spiralling wage demands, and it was not until 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1925 that she was ready for her sea trials off the Tyne. These were successfully completed and she left for Southampton.

The original passenger numbers were 500 in cabin class, and 1,200 in third class, with a crew of 280. The *Ascania* left London on her maiden voyage on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1925 for Southampton, Quebec and Montreal. In 1927 the passenger accommodation was re-arranged with 520 in cabin class, and third class reduced to 928.

In 1928 the *Ascania* took one Anchor Line sailing from Glasgow to Canada and made one voyage from Liverpool. The depression of the 1930s made very little difference to the *Ascania* and she carried on with her work on the Canadian routes, with an occasional voyage on the New York run.



The year 1934 proved to be a memorable one for the **Ascania**. In October she was one of the ships which went to the assistance of the **Millpool** which was sinking in a violent storm in mid-Atlantic. After searching the area for 21 hours, no trace of the ship was found.

A few weeks later, on 14<sup>th</sup> December, the **Ascania** was diverted to assist the steamer **Usworth**, whose grain cargo had shifted in severe weather. The **Usworth** had been taken in tow by the Belgian ship **Jean Jadot**, but the towline had carried away. One of the **Jean Jadot's** lifeboats had managed to take off 14 men, but it was overturned by the mountainous seas and 12 of the rescued men were lost.

The sea state was really unfit for boat work, but on the **Ascania's** arrival her master, Captain L.C.P. Bisset, RNR, decided to make an attempt. After pumping out some fuel oil to leeward, he took the **Ascania** to within 100ft of the **Usworth's** stern and sent away a 30ft lifeboat, manned by one officer and ten ABs. The boat managed to reach the **Usworth** and take off the remaining nine crew members.

The **Ascania** was making twice the leeway of the swamped **Usworth** and had to make a wide circle of the sinking vessel to get into a position suitable for recovering the lifeboat. The boat made it back alongside the **Ascania** but was rising and falling twenty feet in the heavy seas, and getting the men back on board was an extremely hazardous operation, but eventually they all made it without loss.

This was one of the epic rescues of the North Atlantic and on the **Ascania's** return to the UK there were civic receptions, and the boat's crew and Captain Bisset were all presented with Lloyd's Silver Medal for gallantry at sea and for the remarkable handling of the ship.

In November 1935 the **Ascania** was struck amidships by the steamer **Norwegian** and had a hole torn in her side, and in 1938 she ran aground near Bic Harbour in the St Lawrence, some 150 miles from Quebec, but was refloated without much difficulty. At the time the **Ascania** was carrying \$3million worth of gold bullion to Canada.

The **Ascania** arrived at Liverpool on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, the day war was declared. She was immediately converted into an armed merchant cruiser at Birkenhead and was commissioned on 16<sup>th</sup> October. For the next three years she patrolled the Atlantic, covering 147,000 miles in the process.

In October 1942 the **Ascania** was converted into a troopship and the following year she was further altered to become a L.S.I.(L) – Landing Ship Infantry (Large). With landing craft replacing her lifeboats, she was present at the Sicilian and Anzio landings. In 1945 the ship was converted back to a troopship and operated as such until she was released in December 1947.

By this time she was the only one of the six 'A'-class liners left to the Cunard Line. All six had started the war as armed merchant cruisers, and the **Andania** had been torpedoed and sunk in 1940. The other four were all bought by the Admiralty and converted into repair ships.

Following a very quick partial refit, and still with austerity accommodation, the **Ascania** re-opened the Liverpool – Halifax service on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1947. She had accommodation for 257 first-class and 522 tourist-class passengers. At the end of 1949 the **Ascania** was sent to Alexander Stephen & Sons' yard at Linthouse for complete reconditioning. The **Ascania** returned to service on the Liverpool to Quebec



The *Ascania* leaving Princes Landing Stage, Liverpool, on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1954, bound for Quebec and Montreal. From 'Great Mersey Liners' – see review on page 44 of the June 'Bulletin'.

and Montreal service on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1950 carrying a full complement of 198 first-class passengers and 498 in tourist class, plus a crew of 367.

The *Ascania* remained very much a Liverpool based ship. In June 1952 she made a special call at Douglas, Isle of Man with a party of Manx people from Canada on a 'Homecoming' visit. Two years later the new *Saxonia*, followed shortly by the *Ivernia*, made their appearance on the Canadian route from Liverpool, and at the end of September 1955 the *Ascania* was transferred to Southampton. She lasted a year at the southern port and completed her last Cunard voyage on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1956.

The *Ascania* made two trooping voyages to Cyprus, sailing on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1956, finally returning to Southampton on 20<sup>th</sup> December. Ten days later she sailed to Newport, Mon., where she was broken up by John Cashmore. Thirty-two years old, the *Ascania* was still a smart, sturdy-looking ship, but she was quite outclassed by the new Cunard quartette of ships for the Canadian service. She had spent almost her entire working life on the North Atlantic, and had come through it with flying colours. ■

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### H.M. Armed Merchant Cruiser '*Ascania*'

*by Guy Stafford*

*This is the story of a Cunard liner that went to war as an armed merchant cruiser in 1939. H.M.S. Ascania, flying the White Ensign, played an important, if unspectacular, part in the early years of the war at sea.*

It was 8am on a Saturday morning in late September 1939. The war was in its third week and the twenty naval ratings waiting outside the drafting office at H.M.S. *Excellent* on Whale Island were wondering what the future held in store for them. Each had received a draft chit for A.M.C. (Armed Merchant Cruiser) C5. They knew they were due to join her that day, but as to the name of the ship and where she was berthed, they had yet to learn.

Thirteen-and-a-half weary hours later they arrived at a blacked out Woodside Station at Birkenhead. There was a lorry to meet them and after a short trip through the darkened streets it entered Cammell Laird's yard and pulled up alongside a steamer in the dry dock.

That she was a Cunarder was obvious from her colours, but it was not until after the white-coated stewards had shown them to their accommodation that they knew her as the 14,500-ton *Ascania*. The chief and petty officers were accommodated on 'B' deck, the remainder on 'C' deck, the cabins being an unheard of luxury to the naval men.

Three hectic weeks followed. Eight six-inch guns arrived on the quayside to be hoisted onboard and bolted down to the gun supports built in when the *Ascania* was constructed, four to port and four to starboard. A small director and range finder were fitted to the upper bridge and a height finder on a specially constructed platform abaft

the single funnel. Two three-inch high angle guns and twin Lewis guns on the wings of the bridge formed the anti-aircraft armament.

The magazines were constructed in the holds fore and aft. Small davits with electric winches served as shell and cordite hoists to each magazine. A coat of battleship grey was applied and the once-proud **Ascania** had become a warship.

During the busy three weeks at Cammell Lairds, a relationship had sprung up between the small naval party and those members of the merchant navy crew who were to remain with the ship on the T124 wartime Articles of Agreement. The initial prejudices quickly gave way to curiosity and interest in each other's jobs. Many lasting friendships were formed in those early days.

At the end of the three weeks the main body of the naval crew arrived. It was a motley collection comprising recalled pensioners, R.N.R., and R.N.V.R. ratings. The only active service ratings were the chief gunner's mate and the young ordnance artificer joining his first ship.

With the ship's company complete and under the command of Captain C.H. Ringrose-Wharton, R.N., H.M.S. **Ascania** went to sea for the first time – just for the day. Two days later, stored and ammunitioned, she sailed for an unknown destination. Rumour was rife, the best bet being Scapa Flow for duties on the Northern Patrol, but once clear of Anglesey the **Ascania** turned on to a southerly course and eventually steamed into Spithead. After some hours the ship entered Portsmouth Harbour and a unexpected weekend leave was granted to some of the crew. On Monday morning she sailed for Portland.

During the week that followed most days were spent at sea on gun trials. The six-inch Mk.VII guns dated from between 1898 and 1904 and some problems were experienced with these elderly pieces and a great deal of glass was shattered during the firing, particularly on the promenade deck. The three-inch guns were 1917 vintage and caused no problems other than the lack of training for the crews.

On the Thursday evening of the **Ascania's** week at Portland two members of the ship's company were in a pub discussing the possibility of weekend leave again, only to be told by the barmaid that *"if you're off that liner, you'll be on your way to Canada with a load of bullion come Saturday!"* The men laughed, but strangely enough, on the Friday afternoon, a small coaster came alongside and some strange looking boxes were loaded under armed guard and stowed down below.

Saturday morning dawned bleak, grey and very wet. H.M.S. **Ascania** left harbour with a two destroyer escort and for several hours steamed up Channel. Then, when well out of sight of land, she turned, left her escort, and headed out into the Atlantic.

The passage was rough and the weather still very wet when six days later Chebucto Head loomed out of the mist and the **Ascania** steamed into Halifax harbour and berthed at pier 22. The first ship of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle Squadron had arrived! Later she was joined by her sister Cunarders **Alaunia** and **Ausonia**, and later still by the **Jervis Bay**, **Montclare** and other A.M.Cs.

After a few days in harbour the **Ascania** sailed as escort for one of the first convoys to leave Halifax. The weather was calm but foggy and with the ships unused to sailing in company, the inevitable happened. The **Oropesa** and the **Manchester**

**Regiment** were in collision and the latter was reported sunk. This was the first of many such convoys: some fast but most desperately slow.

In January 1940 the pattern was altered. Up to then all the convoys had been handed over to the Local Escort Force off the coast of Ireland, but on this occasion the **Ascania** went all the way, right up the Clyde to refit in Glasgow. This gave the ship's company seven days' leave for each watch. It was during this refit that the ship was fitted with depth charge throwers, but unfortunately no asdic, so the depth charges were of doubtful value – they were certainly never used in anger. An early type of radar was fitted with the enclosed aerial mounted on a small tower forward of the funnel.

With the refit completed the **Ascania** went back on station to Halifax, on the way forming part of a chain of ships covering the first 'secret' voyage of the **Queen Elizabeth** to New York. There were changes in the routine for the A.M.Cs, with convoys to Bermuda and the West Indies where at least the weather was more kindly.

There was a not-so-welcome change in the routine for the Atlantic convoys. Where previously the handover to the local escort had meant a swift trip back to Halifax, the new idea was for the A.M.Cs to put into Reykjavik to refuel and then to carry out a 12-day patrol in the Denmark Strait.

It was during this period that the **Ascania** was to demonstrate that she bore a charmed life. She had just returned to Halifax from a convoy and had secured alongside pier 36, ahead of the **Jervis Bay**, when word went round that the stay in port was going to be very brief. The ship was quickly stored and fuelled to sail with another convoy the following morning. The **Jervis Bay** remained alongside with engine trouble. Our convoy was an 'over and back' job so it was not so bad after all. The local escort appeared right on the time and the **Ascania** headed back to Halifax.

On the evening of 5<sup>th</sup> November 1940, hands went to 'night action stations' as usual, checked all the equipment, and then reverted to 'cruising stations'. Half-an-hour later it was 'action stations' again and it was obvious that the **Ascania** had increased speed and was turning back. The word was quickly passed to all positions that the **Jervis Bay** was in action with a German pocket battleship and the **Ascania** was going to her assistance.

The ship's company prepared for the worst. Six-inch guns were no match for the eleven-inch guns of the **Admiral Scheer**. Two hours later the **Ascania** was ordered to resume her passage to Halifax and it was with very mixed feelings that this order was obeyed.

Meanwhile across the Western Ocean the drama was being played out. Against hopeless odds Captain Fogarty Fegen of the **Jervis Bay** turned his ship towards the enemy, her ancient guns blazing defiantly. For two hours the **Jervis Bay** fought on, giving valuable time for the convoy to scatter before she succumbed to her mighty opponent.

Much has been said about the ineffectiveness of armed merchant cruisers, particularly by those who served in them. Too big – too slow – poorly armed, all of which is true, but in those two short hours the **Jervis Bay** justified the existence of them all.

The crew of the **Ascania** learnt the full story of the **Jervis Bay** when the ship arrived back in Halifax, and the unanimous feeling was that they should have gone on

to assist their squadron mates. But orders, given by someone in a position to know the whole picture, are made to be obeyed, and so the **Ascania** survived to carry on her work.

The following April found the **Ascania** patrolling wearily in the Denmark Strait. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month her twelve days were up and she handed over the area to H.M.S. **Rajputana**. As the **Ascania** steamed into Reykjavik a signal was received to say that the **Rajputana** had been torpedoed and sunk.

A month later the **Ascania** was back patrolling the Strait. The weather had, for several days, been sparkingly clear with the mountains of Iceland and Greenland standing out on the horizon. On the 12<sup>th</sup> day, down came the fog. That afternoon, as she clawed her way through the murk, there was a sudden alarm – ‘Hands to action stations!’

A dark shape loomed out of the fog. An aldis lamp flashed – it was H.M.S. **Norfolk** shadowing the enemy. The **Ascania** was to remain on station while the scene was set for the coming battle. She might be needed, perhaps in a shadowing role if the enemy doubled-back, or perhaps even to sacrifice herself while the capital ships came up.

The following morning the **Ascania**’s captain broke the news to his ship’s company: the mighty **Hood** had blown up, the **Prince of Wales** was damaged and the **Bismarck** was on the loose somewhere in the Atlantic. It was a frightening prospect. The **Ascania** remained on patrol until the **Bismarck** was found and destroyed.

In September 1941 the **Ascania** returned to the Clyde, and a few days later was despatched to Southampton for ‘tropicalisation’. This entailed stripping out the cabins on ‘C’deck and the construction of proper messdecks. An addition was made to the armament with two rocket projectors situated abaft the bridge. These were considered more dangerous to the ship than to the enemy!

Leaving Southampton for the Clyde the **Ascania** joined a large convoy heading south for Freetown. From there she sailed alone to Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. In the aftermath of the fall of Singapore she sailed for Melbourne and a week later left for Auckland to be attached to the Royal New Zealand Navy. She made many trips as a troopship until June 1942 when she sailed for the UK.

The **Ascania** passed through the Panama Canal and joined a convoy bound for Key West. This suffered numerous U-boat attacks, but because of the **Ascania**’s lack of asdic equipment, her depth charges were not used. From Key West the **Ascania** sailed north to New York, and a week later proceeded to Halifax to join an eastbound convoy to the Clyde.

The **Ascania**’s final voyage under the White Ensign was to Southampton to pay off and become a troop transport. During her three year commission she rendered sterling service with very little glory. The combination of Royal Navy and Merchant Navy worked very well, given the circumstances. The Merchant Navy might not like the Navy ‘bull’, and the Royal Navy may dislike the easy going way of the Merchant Navy, but in the **Ascania** and other armed merchant cruisers, they proved that together they made a wonderful team. ■



## REFLECTIONS FROM THE NEW CHAIRMAN

The marking of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first meeting of the Liverpool Nautical Research Society on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1938 gives us an opportunity to reflect on its past, present and future. This is particularly in my own mind as your newly elected Chairman, who has realised that the conception of both the Society and himself occurred in that same auspicious year!

That the Society has survived and flourished for such a long period of time is an indication of the far-seeing vision of the founders, and all of those who have since followed. During that time the sea-going professions, and all of the shore-based support, have changed in a way which was unimaginable even in the mid 1960s; yet the Society still carries out its functions and holds regular well-supported meetings.

So, in a way I feel that I'm joining a new ship. I already know that she is happy and well-found, and with an experienced and highly proficient crew. My hope is that I can do justice to the position I now hold.

Where will the voyage take us? Clearly the support enjoyed from the Merseyside Maritime Museum is crucial to our endeavours and we trust that this will continue. Certainly the work we do in assisting with the Archives has much still waiting to be done, and our ability to provide an information service to the general public is likely to be a developing aspect. Our monthly meetings continue to attract regular attendance, and it does appear than an increasing level of public interest in the past, perhaps demonstrated by the number of television programmes devoted to such topics, will help in many ways.

As Liverpool celebrates being the European Capital of Culture in 2008, so we celebrate our own history and look forward to the next seventy years.

**Bill Ogle**, *Chairman, The Liverpool Nautical Research Society.*

June, 2008.





put to good use in the difficult business of stowage, for the **Wellington** was but a small craft and unaccustomed to having her innards crammed with stores and victuals to this extent. The fridges and freezers were full to capacity, as were the few dry stores lockers. Cases of 'Coke', '7-Up' and Tennents lager were stacked high in the cabins and sacks of vegetables overflowed along the alleyways. The potato locker abaft the wheelhouse was full and surrounded by bulging bags and sacks. Fuel and water tanks had been topped up, charts and navigational gear checked and finally, from Alexandra's dock office, a sextant, chronometer and azimuth mirror were taken from their shelf and placed on board with fitting reverence.



*The "Wellington" prepares for her long voyage in the Liverpool dock after which she was named.*

Thus all was set for the off. Captain George Dowell eased the **Wellington** into Gladstone Lock. A small group of superintendents stood in the rain and waved their forlorn farewells. Mersey Radio wished us 'bon voyage' and from the few river tugs in the offing came the traditional sailors' goodbye – three long blasts on the ship's whistle. The adventure had begun, and there was no doubt among the crew that it was to be an adventure.

In common with most of her kind, the **Wellington** was a sturdy and powerful-looking craft. A trifle top-heavy perhaps with her three decks; and what foredeck there was, maybe shorter than might have been wished. Of 315 gross tons, with an overall length of 98ft, a 30ft beam and a working draft of 16ft, she had been built by Richard Dunston's Hessle yard. Her two Ruston-Paxman engines, built at the Newton-le-Willows Vulcan works, gave a top speed of 13½ knots, although 10 knots was the usual cruising speed.

The **Wellington** lurched and rolled her way across the Bay of Biscay before a quartering sea and a force 6 WNW breeze and made an excellent landfall off Sisargas Island (off La Coruña) and a few hours later rounded Finisterre. Each familiar landmark and light was pointed out and described by the navigator to the bridge watch

who noted same and checked with the charts. Between Cape St Vincent and Cape Trafalgar each watch had something in the nature of a history lesson as the navigator unfolded tales of England's past glories and the exploits of Lord Nelson. It was almost possible to imagine the bleached bones and shattered oak timbers strewn fathoms beneath the **Wellington**.

In the clear sparkling dawn of 12<sup>th</sup> June the **Wellington** passed Tarifa Point and by noon was secure alongside the mole at Gibraltar. After five days the **Wellington's** crew felt the need for a brief respite from the buffetings and extremely close confines of their small craft. Even to stroll along the wharf and enjoy a quiet beer or two at the nearby Seamen's Mission, see a few different faces, simple enough in itself, was a pleasure indeed. In the early evening the **Wellington's** 'twin', the **Waterloo**, moored astern on the mole. She, too, was bound for the Gulf and a change of flag, and had in fact sailed from Sheerness within an hour of the **Wellington** leaving Liverpool.

The two tugs left Gibraltar shortly before noon the next day, 13<sup>th</sup> June. By day the Mediterranean was a dancing blue and the sun warm. At night the blue changed to a dark, serene velvet and the stars vied with a waxing moon for dominance of the sky. With westerly winds and a following sea, conditions were indeed idyllic, and perfect for the odd bits of 'tarting up' necessary after the passage through Biscay.

The **Wellington** steamed on an easterly course and one by one the familiar lights and capes rose over the horizon to greet them and point the way to the next one like the old friends they were. Algiers itself was a splendid loom as it drew abeam during a night watch. Cape Bon stood on its promontory guarding the ruins of Carthage on the surrounding plains. Next came the lonely island of Pantellaria and then the Malta Channel with its clearly-defined 100 fathom bank stretching northwards to Sicily. A clear run across to Gavdhos, a small island to the south of Crete and the most southerly place in Europe, and then a good landfall on Brulos light shortly after midnight on 20<sup>th</sup> June. The pilot cutter cruising off Port Said directed the **Wellington** to an anchorage to await instruction, followed of course by the inevitable demand for whisky and cigarettes. Many aspects of Port Said hadn't changed one bit, but a major improvement on the navigational side was the separate entrance to the Canal for supertankers and the like. The 'Port Said By-Pass' starts from an approach buoy some four miles NNE of the fairway buoy and runs arrow-straight until meeting up with the Canal proper farther to the south. This has the additional bonus so far as ships' crews are concerned in that they are entirely free from the attentions of the Port Said merchants who look upon every transient vessel as sent from Allah for their personal enrichment!

Instructions came in due course. They were to follow the **Waterloo**, which was already underway, and a pilot would board them in the channel. Past the base of the De Lesseps column from which he was so ignominiously torn down when Nasser proclaimed the Canal for his people. Finally the **Wellington** and the **Waterloo** were rafted alongside each other in a remote part of the harbour to await the next southbound convoy.

It was here that Captain George Dowell's ordeal began. He thought he had done when he got rid of the pilot, who left with bad grace clutching a carton of cigarettes. The relevant port papers had been prepared in duplicate, triplicate and

sometimes quadruplicate, and while Captain Dowell appreciated that there would be extra Canal forms, he had not realised the full implication of this.

The captain's cabin on the **Wellington** was relatively large, within the limitations of a tug, but within minutes of the port officials boarding, it was full to suffocation point. With ports screwed down against the heat and sand flies, which latter converge from nowhere like the plague, and with the air foul from cigarette smoke, the atmosphere was fast becoming unbearable, but it was under these conditions that the **Wellington's** general arrangement plans had to be unfolded, examined minutely and checks made against Canal regulations to show that the tug was going to be neither hazard nor hindrance should she be allowed to proceed on her lawful occasion. It was almost three hours later before a boat was summoned and the official boarding party took its leave.

It was half past five on the following day, when the relative cool of early evening was making itself felt, that the **Wellington** moved off, but not without further demands from the boatmen for beer, whisky and cigarettes. Darkness fell quickly and as they slipped quietly through the water the spell of the Canal was soon upon them. The **Wellington** passed through the broad expanse of Lake Timsah and the Great Bitter Lake and then it was back again between the confines of the banks. The pilot took his leave at Port Tewfik and the **Wellington** was on her own again for the 170-mile run down the narrow waters of the Gulf of Suez. Before the container revolution this was one of the world's busiest waterways and one which many shipmasters dreaded to the extent that they would scarce leave the bridge until Shadwan Island was well abaft the beam. Nowadays with the adoption of IMCO traffic lanes and separation zones, it is safer than it ever was.

The next few days were indeed trying ones for the crew of the **Wellington**. The air-conditioning plant had been overhauled and checked in Liverpool and the crew had had a foretaste of the things to come during the stop-over at Port Said. The wind, as always in the Gulf of Suez, was northerly and funnelled down the axis. Leaving Shadwan Island astern this just intensified and the **Wellington's** wheelhouse with its all-round windows and those in the slant of the deckhead became a hothouse. The crew struggled along, for 6,000 miles in a small vessel for men unused to long voyaging was proving to be very difficult at times.

The twin outposts of The Brothers and Daedalus Reef were passed, and with exactly 100 miles between them provided an excellent opportunity to check the patent log which was found to be ten per cent slow. An archaic instrument by the standards of today's modern equipment perhaps, but no less useful for all that.

St John's or Zagreb Island came next, and with that abaft the beam it was 577 miles to the next landfall, the solitary and arid island of Jabal Attair. A good landfall was made here around five in the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> June and the course was adjusted the necessary few degrees so as to parallel the chain of islands lying to the eastward known as the 'twelve apostles'. The wind freshened, creating a short, lumpy sea and the **Wellington** was throwing herself about in true tug fashion. The dog watches saw the **Wellington** pass through the narrow Abu Ail channel, past the frowning volcanic mass that was Zuqar Island. After the transit of the Strait of Bab Al Mandeb, the **Wellington** left the Red Sea and was in the open ocean again. Aden came abeam, a port that was but a memory to most shipping in the early 1980s. The heat and humidity

of the Red Sea had taken a very obvious toll on the crew of the **Wellington** and shipboard routine was pared down to watchkeeping and resting.

Tim Richardson and Alan Hodge were eager to absorb everything that the navigator could show them. Both had their sights set on the Department of Trade's tugmaster's certificate and had taken full advantage of the long sea passages where the sextant still proved its worth. They had both mastered the intricacies of the Traverse Table, unravelled the mystery of the azimuth and could cope with a forenoon sight and work up a meridian altitude. Indeed they had seen the awkward one at noon in the Red Sea when the altitude was  $89^{\circ}34'$ , where the **Wellington** could have been stopped and the way taken off her so as to trap the sun at its most capricious moment.

Now they were studying the charts of the desolate Yemen coast, and having some of the inherent dangers explained to them. 'Put your trust in God and British Admiralty Charts' was an old adage, but there were degrees of trust, and the original 19<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent hydrographers had insured themselves with various notes and cautions such as "*Dependent on Bombay Observatory being in such a longitude*", or "*These islands have been reported as lying 255 degrees,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  miles from charted position*" and "*Further determinations show the whole coast between this point and Ras Marbut to lie 5 miles further west than charted*". Thus the **Wellington** followed the coast with the cautions recommended and in due course came to the Strait of Hormuz where the Iranian tugmaster guided the Captain Dowell to an anchorage some three miles ESE of Bandar Abbas breakwater. They were there, and suddenly they didn't know what to do with themselves. Friday was the Moslem Sabbath, so they couldn't expect any port officials until the morning, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July. With the long hours of watchkeeping behind them, a sense of anti-climax prevailed.

There was a full gathering of the crew in the messroom that evening. A half-pint beer glass was set out before each man. Empty of course – for beer was a thing of the past – unless in spite of all the Ayatollah's edicts someone had managed to stash a case of Tennent's lager. The drink, when it came, was as much an anti-climax as the lying idle at anchor; a plastic container of ice-cold Liverpool water jealously hoarded by the chief engineer for just such a situation. It went down extremely well, especially as over the past few days the drinking water had tasted unusually brackish.

Immigration and Customs were out early the next morning and dealt efficiently and kindly with the **Wellington**. After the formalities had been completed, the **Wellington** weighed anchor and was directed to berth alongside two dredgers in a remote corner of the harbour.

Alexandra Towing's Liverpool and London superintendents were due at Bandar Abbas the following morning, and so Captain Dowell squared-off all the log books, handed out the Iran-UK flight tickets which had been in his safe since Liverpool, stamped the discharge books and signed everyone off the ship's articles.

The following day it became apparent that not all was quite as straightforward as it might have been. Travel on that day was out of the question as it was a religious holiday. Then the Iranian authorities wanted to run trials, notwithstanding the fact that their representatives had made the 6,000 mile passage from the UK. So, the **Wellington** had to put to sea and carry out a three-hour 'trial'. Then, despite prior arrangement having been reached in London, every item of spare gear had to be

sighted and re-checked. The air-conditioning was considered to be inadequate for the Iranian crews. And so it went on.

An impasse was reached. Until the agreement had been honoured and the money paid over, the Alexandra Towing superintendents weren't handing over the tugs. Until the perceived faults had been rectified at Alexandra expense, the Iranians weren't accepting the boats. Moreover, the crew couldn't fly home until the **Wellington** was released. Thus it continued day after day. Plans were made and scrapped, hopes raised and dashed until finally a day was set, and then it was that the Iranians spotted what everyone had known all along. The **Waterloo's** 'jollyboat' had an engine, the **Wellington's** didn't.

This seeming anomaly was simple enough. The former was a London-based tug and P.L.A. regulations decreed that a 'jollyboat' must have an engine. The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company made no such stipulation, but this was of no consequence to the Iranians. They were sister tugs, were they not, so let them be sisters in all respects.

Stores were running low. There had been no fresh fruit or vegetables since Port Said. The crew was enduring the situation stoically, with a typical 'scouse' sense of humour. They were virtual prisoners on their own boat, or more to the point, in their own accommodation. The air-conditioning had been fixed so that with everything battened down it was comfortably cool.



*Going home day at Bandar Abbas. "The Wellingtons", left to right: Tim Richardson, Tommy Quinn, Sid Bennet, Bradley Cummings, Eddie Paton, Alan Hodge, Steve Gilbertson.*

After almost a fortnight of lying alongside the dredger at Bandar Abbas, Captain Dowell was informed that half of his crew could return home. Lots were drawn and the lucky ones were taken ashore by launch forthwith. They spent two further days at Bandar Abbas before being put on a crowded flight to Teheran, where they spent a night at the Hilton Hotel and enjoyed their first good meal for several days. This was somewhat marred by the neat stitching of cannon shell holes along the north facing patios of several floors, and the grim face of the Ayatollah which glared down at them from every wall in the hotel. It was a stern reminder of the revolution and the fierce war which was still being waged along the banks of the Shatt-Al-Arab to the north.

After a pre-dawn call the next morning, there were more baggage searches, currency checks and then the embarrassment of having to find sufficient money between them to pay an unexpected 'airport tax'. Finally they were settled in the comparative comfort of a wide-bodied jet and could relax in the expectation of seeing Liverpool again in a few hours time. There was one final sting in the tail – the flight tickets had been changed from British Airways to Iran Airways, and so the long-awaited 'bevvy' had to be further postponed.

The remainder of the **Wellington's** crew arrived home a few days later, weary and resentful of all the searches and harassment they had undergone before their plane took off from Teheran. Captain Dowell almost found himself on a drugs charge as three loose 'Fisherman's Friend' lozenges had been found on his person!

The **Wellington** was renamed **Ghader**, and the **Waterloo** became the **Gorban** for service in Iranian waters, and if the Iranians looked after them and the Iraqis didn't sink them, they would both remain a credit to the long and proud traditions of their Humberside builders and the Alexandra houseflag. ■

*The Society's Vice-President, Captain Graeme Cubbin, comments :*

It was certainly a prodigious voyage to undertake in a small tug. Yes, it is more than 6,000 miles from Liverpool to Bandar Abbas – the standard distance breaks down thus:

Liverpool to Gibraltar	1,277 nautical miles
Gibraltar to Port Said	1,910 nautical miles
Port Said to Suez (Canal)	88 nautical miles
Suez to Aden	1,308 nautical miles
Aden to Bandar Abbas	1,497 nautical miles
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>6,080 nautical miles</u></b>

I can also confirm that the distance between the Red Sea landmarks, The Brothers and the Daedalus Reef is almost exactly 100 nautical miles, though I fail to see why this should be such a remarkable check on the log. Additionally, the captain would have had to turn round, run the distance in the reverse direction, and average the results of the two runs to achieve a more accurate check – not a common practice!

The cryptic remark about the 'awkward meridian altitude of 89°34'' refers to the practical difficulty of shooting the sun when it is almost vertically overhead, i.e. almost 90 degrees above the horizon. The image of the sun in the sextant horizon glass moves so rapidly from East to West across the meridian that it is almost impossible to pinpoint its altitude. Consequently, Latitudes obtained in such conditions are always suspect.

The following example illustrates the proximity of Latitude to the sun's Declination during high summer in the Red Sea, producing this mini-phenomenon:

True Altitude (after standard corrections)	89°34' S	
	<u>90 00</u>	
Zenith Distance	00 26 N	
Sun's Declination (say) 25 <sup>th</sup> June 1983	<u>23 24 N</u>	
	Latitude	<u>23°50' N</u> g.c.

**JUST FANCY THAT !!!**

**NEW CLAN LINER UPRIGHTED IN DOCK**



*The new Clan Line motorship "Clan Maciver," 10,000 tons gross, while fitting out in James Watt Dock, Greenock, became flooded and developed a dangerous list on September 25. Metal Industries (Salvage) Limited, commenced operations to stop the leak and upright her for entering dry dock, this work being completed by September 29*

*from Shipbuilding and Shipping Record, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1958.*

## CANON BOB EVANS, M.B.E.

*by John Shepherd*

**Canon Bob Evans was awarded the M.B.E. in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June 2008. I feel sure that his many thousands of friends on Merseyside and across the world will join with me in offering heartiest congratulations and best wishes to Bob for this much deserved Honour which recognises almost 50 years of unstinting work looking after the welfare of seafarers.**

*'They that go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters; these men see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.'*

Seafarers also see and feel the heights and depths of human emotion in the hazards that they face, through separation from their homes and families. They need a special sort of person to support them when they have problems or are feeling low. Bob Evans is that special sort of person.

Sick and destitute foreign seamen, often not understanding the English language, have contacted their families and found their way home with Bob's help. Many young midshipmen and officer trainees have received friendly and sensible advice through the Mersey Mission to Seafarers where Bob Evans was Chaplain Superintendent from 1962 to 1989.

Bob commenced his Ministry working in a South Wales mining valley; then on to a barren estate alongside the Dowlais Steel Works in Cardiff, and finally in Llandaff Cathedral. After that, and as he admits in complete ignorance of seafaring, he joined the Mersey Mission to Seamen (the name was changed to 'Seafarers' in 2000) as an Assistant Chaplain in 1961, only to find himself nine months later the Chaplain Superintendent. Bob reckons that no-one could have been more nervous than he when he set out to visit his first ship in Liverpool with his dog collar to the fore.

Bob Evans recalls organising dances in 1962 at the Mission, then based in Kingston House at the foot of James Street: 78rpm records, all 'strict tempo' and Victor Sylvester. He soon realised a live band was essential and the 'Hignet Quartet' was engaged three evenings a week from mid-March. What Bob had not realised was that around the corner from the Mission, in the basement of an old warehouse in Matthew Street, there was the start of a musical revolution that would turn the world up side down. Soon the 'Hignet Quartet' was replaced at the Mission by the Liverpool Police Band, four members from which played every night of the week. There was no need for bouncers – the Mersey Mission had the best music and the seafarers came in their thousands.

Every Thursday evening in the 1960s, Bob would visit the Blue Funnel Line Company Hostel, at Riversdale, south Liverpool, and eat dinner with seven of the newer cadets. After dinner they all adjourned to the library for coffee. As the cadets (or midshipmen as they were known in Blue Funnel) had no choice but to go along





Canon Bob Evans coming ashore following a Seamen's Service aboard the **Kaskelot** in Canning Dock, Liverpool in 1987.

with this, Bob unashamedly brainwashed them about the dangers of the seafaring life, especially booze, women and disease! He advised them on how to make the best use of the Flying Angel Clubs (the equivalent of the 'Missions to Seamen' in the UK) in ports abroad, and stressed the importance of writing home regularly.

In his autobiographical account of his time with the Mersey Mission to Seamen, 'A Dog Collar in the Docks', Bob Evans recalls his first trip on a Liverpool pilot cutter out to the Bar Station. Following lunch on the cutter, Bob was transferred, along with the Pilot to an inward-bound vessel – the **Octavia**. He recalls leaving the pilot cutter in the punt and heading across to the **Octavia** in choppy seas. That was the easy bit, recalls Bob. The punt came alongside the **Octavia**. Up went the pilot, and then Bob's case. The ship towered above the punt like a three-storey building and down its side dangled a rope ladder. Bob was encouraged to believe that there was no problem, although one apprentice did suggest that he should get it right first time! He waited until the punt was on the crest of a wave and then grabbed hold of the ladder. The punt dropped into a trough and Bob was stranded – so up he went. At the top were members of the **Octavia's** crew, somewhat surprised to see a Padre. Bob was hauled over the rail by the scruff of his neck. However, it proved to be an excellent way of introducing himself to a ship's company, one that he repeated many times in the ensuing years.

Boarding the **Octavia** on that first occasion stayed in Bob's subconscious. It seemed to sum up a valid approach to life. Boarding that ship, in that way, had required a positive decision which, once taken, prevented any retreat. You could not stand still on the ladder to work out the next move, because the next wave was coming along! There was only one choice. Having taken the decision to go for it, you had to go up the ladder. Then came the surprise – Bob felt welcome on board – faces looked down from the deck with smiles, and hands were stretched out to haul him on board. All that was required of Bob was the first step and he would then be accepted by the seafarer.

Just before Bob Evans retired from the Mersey Mission to Seamen in 1989, he was elected an Honorary Member of the Liverpool Pilots' Association and was afforded the additional honour of being presented with a Liverpool Pilotage Licence, First Class. This was only the second time that such an award had been made in the history of the Service.

When Bob first came to Liverpool in 1962 he noticed across 'The Strand' from his office in Kingston House, an old tank-landing craft called the **Landfall**, sitting on the mud in about two feet of water in Canning Dock. This was the home of the Liverpool Master Mariners' Club, and Bob was to spend many happy hours on board with various clubs and societies, enjoying dinners after which tales were told well into the small hours.

Bob Evans recalls a story which started with a telephone call from the Mission to Seamen Chaplain in Glasgow. He asked Bob to visit the Elder Dempster ship **Kabala**, which had just left the Clyde for Liverpool, to meet one of the Nigerian crew who was being prepared for confirmation. Before Bob began the lesson he asked the man for his full name: "*Fekeregha*" came the reply. When pressed for his Christian name, the seaman replied: "*I have no Christian name. Why should I? No-*

*one in my home is Christian – they are all Mohammedans.*” Before the **Kabala** left Liverpool, Bob Evans baptised Fekeregha, giving him the name of Peter.

Bob Evans never saw Peter Fekeregha again. Such is the life of a Mission Padre! Bob always felt that Peter was dead, given that civil war was raging in Nigeria at the time as the Muslim Hausas in the north of the country determined to eradicate the Christian Ibos of the east. Since baptising Peter Fekeregha, Bob could recall at least three seafarers who visited him, and they all made the same comment when asked why they had approached Bob to talk about the Christian faith: *“We have sailed with Peter Fekeregha.”*

Christmas at the Mersey Mission to Seamen always involved the Bar Lightship. It had become traditional for Alexandra Towing Company’s tender **Flying Breeze** to sail out to the Mersey Bar in the week before Christmas, carrying hampers for the men on the lightship, together with the choirboys from St Gabriel’s, Huyton Quarry. Following the retirement of the **Flying Breeze** in 1961, Alexandra Towing provided a tug each year to carry on the tradition.

One year the weather was bad and the tug rammed her way out of the river and into the Crosby Channel bound for the lightship. At each wave, her nose nuzzled into the water which splashed over the bridge, and she reared up to meet the next roller with a resounding smack. This was the life, recalls Bob! Unknown to all on board, the forward hatch had been dislodged and the tug had shipped about five feet of water into the lower cabin. Men moved quickly – it was dangerous. Crammed into the tug’s wheelhouse was the usual complement of Granada and BBC television camera crews, all totally unaware of the trauma and merely intent on holding on to their breakfasts. That evening the six o’clock BBC television news opened with the headline ... *‘The day that Father Christmas almost sank!’*

In the ten years that Bob Evans made the trip out to the Bar on only three occasions was he actually able to board the lightship, because of adverse weather. That was when Bob discovered the immense pride of the men in their work and in their care for the lightship. Every surface shone with polish. No automatic monitor could possibly replace them. Bob inspected their living quarters and drank scalding coffee. Over the sides of the lightship was an array of fishing lines and he was able to return home with chunks of the freshest of fish.

However, the days of a manned lightship at Liverpool Bar were drawing to a close, and Bob remembers the sad day in September 1972 when he was aboard the Mersey Docks & Harbour Company’s **Salvor** which towed the brand new, state-of-the-art **LANBY** (Large Automatic Navigation Buoy) out to the Bar, unhooked the lightship **Planet**, and left the automatic contraption to bleep away unaided.

Bob Evans recalls that the Bishop of Warrington, Laurie Brown, always accompanied the annual trip out to the lightship with the Christmas hampers. Bishop Brown always smoked a smelly pipe and regaled the company with amusing anecdotes. On arrival at the Bar the hampers were slung across on ropes in good nautical fashion, and everyone lined the sides of the tug whilst television cameras turned and the seas heaved. Facing the tug was the **Planet**, with all her crew assembled on deck. *“When we were up, they were down”*, recalls Bob. The tugmaster was dressed as Father Christmas and *‘Ho! Ho! Hoed!’* as the choirboys sang *‘O Come All Ye Faithful’*. In the midst of all this was the Bishop of Warrington, with his teeth out,



Dressed as Father Christmas, Captain Walter Roberts, master of Alexandra Towing's tender **Flying Breeze**, receives Christmas hampers for the crew of the Mersey Bar Lightship from the Mersey Mission to Seamen.

The choir boys from St Gabriel's Church, Huyton and members of the Liverpool Central Unit of Sea Cadets sing the carol 'O, Come All Ye Faithful' as the **Flying Breeze** prepares to sail from Princes Landing Stage on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1961.

*Photo by kind permission of Peter Elson, Senior Features Writer, Liverpool Daily Post*

parting with his breakfast over the side. One tugman quietly observed: "*We brought him along to raise the tone!*"

The tug then blew three long blasts on her whistle, the traditional 'Sailors' Farewell' and set course back to Liverpool. The lightship **Planet** receded into the distance, with her bell clanging and her crew waving oilskinned arms. The tug returned up the Queens and Crosby Channels with the marker buoys tilting and riding to the swell as she passed. Each outward-bound ship sounded a Christmas greeting to the tug as all aboard bade sad farewells to Liverpool and prepared for yet another Christmas at sea.

It always seemed calmer on the return passage and the whisky bottle appeared as if by magic, and by courtesy of Alexandra Towing. Suddenly all on board were starving. Sandwiches and pork pies were munched. On many occasions Bob Evans pieced together an article for the youngest of the reporters, as they returned from the dead, so that they could present a copy and tell a tale.

These were just some of the activities that made Liverpool so special. They are now just fond memories. All that can be done for the LANBY buoy at Christmastide is to give it a friendly squirt of oil, or maybe a mighty 'thwack' with a hammer! But only if the weather is kind. 'Mac' – the *Liverpool Echo's* cartoonist – spoke for everyone on the tug that choppy day... 'Sick Transit Gloria!'

Just before Bob Evans' retirement at the end of his Ministry with the Mersey Missions to Seamen in 1989, he set out to walk from West Kirby across the sands to Hilbre Island in the company of his Liverpool Pilot friend David Hopkinson. The sky was clear and blue with a strong Westerly breeze.

Bob was there for a special purpose. The reason was a small scrap of humanity, David's daughter, appropriately called Hilbre. Bob's pleasant task was to baptise her. It all took place in the open air. The table was a weather-worn carpenter's bench from the last century, and there was no need to point out the symbolism of such an altar. The font was an upturned ship's bell, filled with water which had come from off Cape Horn. The Baptism was perfect, with all the wonder of the 1662 Service. Bob Evans recalls: "*I felt that it was a splendid way to end my Ministry to seafarers on Merseyside*". ■

This article has been compiled from '[A Dog Collar in the Docks](#)', Canon Bob Evans' autobiographical account of the time he spent as Chaplain Superintendent to the Mersey Missions to Seamen from 1962 to 1989. It is a wonderful book, all 220 pages of it, brim-full of hugely readable anecdotes taken from this period. This short article has barely 'scratched the surface' of all that Bob's book contains. First published in 1995, '[A Dog Collar in the Docks](#)' was reprinted and updated in 2002. j.s.

**A DOG COLLAR IN THE DOCKS** - Canon Bob Evans

ISBN 0 907768 76 8 Price: £7. A5 format, 220 pages

Published by Countywise Limited at 14 Appin Road, Birkenhead, CH41 9HH

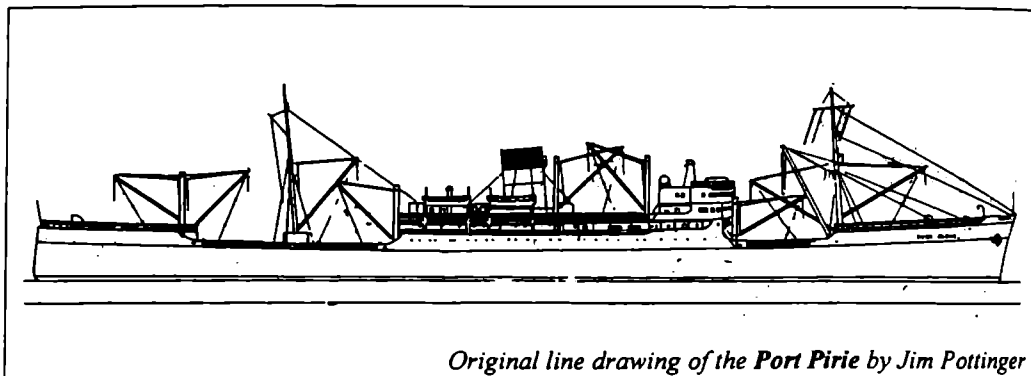
**To obtain a copy, phone Bob on 0151-727-3608 and he will organise a book for you.**

*Bob Evans was President of the Liverpool Nautical Research Society for several years in the 1970s and 1980s.*

## TSMV 'PORT PIRIE'

by LNRS Member James A. Pottinger

This ship was of a class and an era which perhaps epitomised the standards and dominance held by the British Merchant Navy immediately after the end of the Second World War, when shipowners were gradually building up their fleets to replace those lost in the conflict, confirming their intentions of continuing their trading patterns on the traditional routes to the Empire.



*Original line drawing of the Port Pirie by Jim Pottinger*

Thus the period from the late 1940s to the late 1960s could be termed an 'Indian Summer' as far as enjoying the fruits of winning the war were concerned. As it turned out, it was to be a false dawn. This was a remarkable renaissance when one considers that over 60% of the total pre-war merchant tonnage had been lost in the conflict. The introduction of the wartime standard 'Empire'-class ships, and the purchase or allocation of numerous 'Liberty' ships, coupled with an immediate post-war shipbuilding boom had allowed the British fleet to retain 27% of the world total in 1948. Up to 1960 ships tended to be built by the owners' favoured yards, much in the style of previous construction, albeit with improvements in accommodation and increased speed; but essentially cargo liners were built with the same operational characteristics as previously.

Whilst a return on capital was important, there was nevertheless still some pride in the appearance of ships and their distinctive liveries which displayed their proud ownership. With grey hulls and bright red funnels with black top and two black bands, the Port Line still proclaimed its presence on the sea routes to the Antipodes.

Prior to the end of the War, the Port Line had prepared designs for replacing the heavy losses of its valuable refrigerated cargo ships, and was thus able to place orders for five ships as early as the summer of 1945.

The **Port Pirie** was built by Swan Hunter & Wigham Richardson at Wallsend as Yard No. 1741 for the Port Line Limited, London. She was propelled by two 5-cylinder 2-stroke C.S.A. Doxford engines developing a total of 10,700bhp to give a service speed of 16 knots.

To give a measure of standardisation, a number of the Port Line ships had Doxford engines, and whilst these included five and six cylinder units, all had the same bore and stroke. The **Port Pirie** had a refrigerated capacity of 536,616 cubic feet,

and the accommodation was designed for twelve passengers, although when completed 24 passengers could be carried due to the shortage of passenger accommodation at the time.

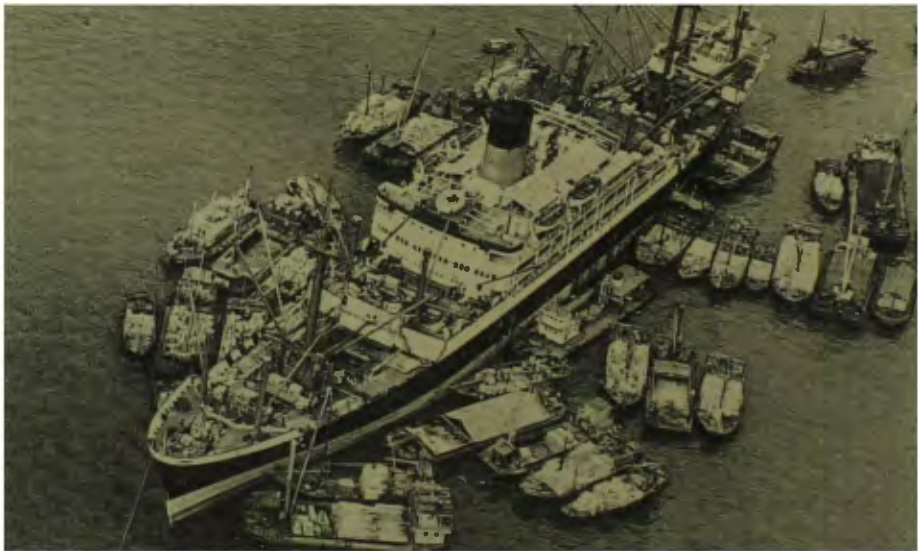
The **Port Pirie** was designed by the builders in collaboration with the owners' superintendent engineer Mr B.P. Arrowsmith and Messrs. J.E. Hall of the well-known refrigeration machinery manufacturers. She was laid down on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1945 and was launched on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1946. Having been completed on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1947 there was a slight delay as rough weather forced postponement of sea trials.

The accommodation provided for passengers, officers and crew was especially comfortable. The crew, including petty officers and stewards, had double and single-berth cabins with separate messrooms amidships on the upper deck. The passengers were accommodated on the boat deck with their own card room, writing room and lounge. The captain had a suite consisting of dayroom, bedroom and bathroom on the navigation bridge deck, just aft of the wheelhouse, whilst the chief engineer had similar appointments to the captain at the after end of the bridge deck. The deck and engineer officers also had their cabins on this deck.

The six cargo holds were served by 5, 7, 10 and 15-ton derricks, with a 60-ton derrick on the foremast above No.2 cargo hatch, all worked by 18 electric winches.

Captain W.J. Enright, OBE, and his crew joined the new ship in December 1946. Captain Enright flew his Blue Ensign, and it was believed that the **Port Pirie** was the first merchant ship to fly this since the end of the Second World War.

The **Port Pirie** had a successful career with the Port Line and lasted until 1972 when she arrived at Castellon in Spain for scrapping. ■



The 1949-built Blue Funnel liner **Peleus** works her break-bulk cargo in mid-stream during a call at Hong Kong in the early 1960s.

AND FINALLY .....

## DOCKERS TAKE BIRTH PILLS

Captain J. Paterson, the Clan Line's resident marine superintendent in Calcutta in the 1960s, submitted the following item from the 'Times of Ceylon' of 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1965. The story was that a gang of harbour workers broke open a consignment of birth control pills, and tucked into them in the belief that they were vitamin tablets.

Letter to the editor of the 'Times of Ceylon' 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1965:

"The news published in your issue of 2<sup>nd</sup> June should have opened the eyes of the public to the grave dangers to which we poor dock workers are exposed in the process of earning our rice and curry.

"We thought the pills were vitamins, and we took them not with any bad motive, but only to develop our muscles so that we may work harder for the nation. We gave them to our wives, too, because they must have health and strength and vim and vigour to look after us who look after the nation's main artery.

"Now look what is happening. As the well-known Kandy patriot said, we have become unbearable. And all because our Government does not take the trouble to see that goods are labelled in the national language.

"Not only that. What is the use of nailing down the packages that ships bring and we unload? It makes our job more difficult. Last Monday one of my colleagues got a bad injury trying to break open a case of whisky in the hold of ss Barleycorn, and he went to hospital with tetanus, and died. What will happen to his family?

"Your readers will also remember that a couple of months ago some of my poor co-workers, all members of our union, got very sick after drinking poison packed in bottles just like gin bottles. One poor toiler died as a result of this criminal hoax on the part of the shippers whose label was 'Wood Alcohol'. How can poor men like us know this is poison?

"This is no joke, so we are calling a mass meeting of all freedom-loving, progressive and patriotic cadres to protest to the Government that unless effective steps are taken to ensure the safety of the members of our union, next time we will vote for Dr N.M. Perera, the Sinhalese Buddhist patriot. I am sure he not doing things like this to his Giridara workers.

Yours faithfully, Samson A. Gonistes.

Honorary Secretary of the All-Ceylon Pilferage Union

*Fancy !!!*





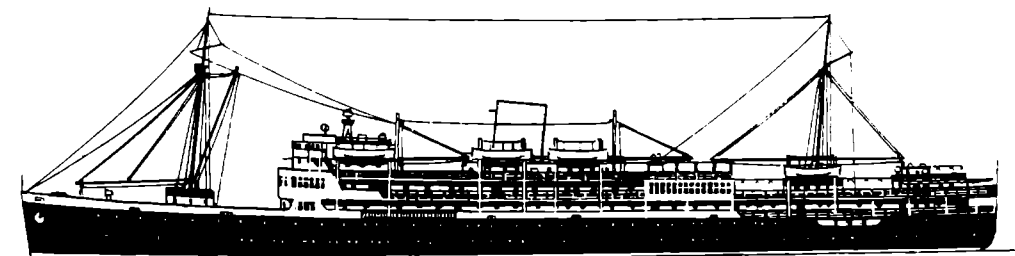
# *The Liverpool Nautical Research Society*

(Founded in 1938)

## THE BULLETIN

Volume 52, No. 3, December, 2008

*Editor : John Shepherd*



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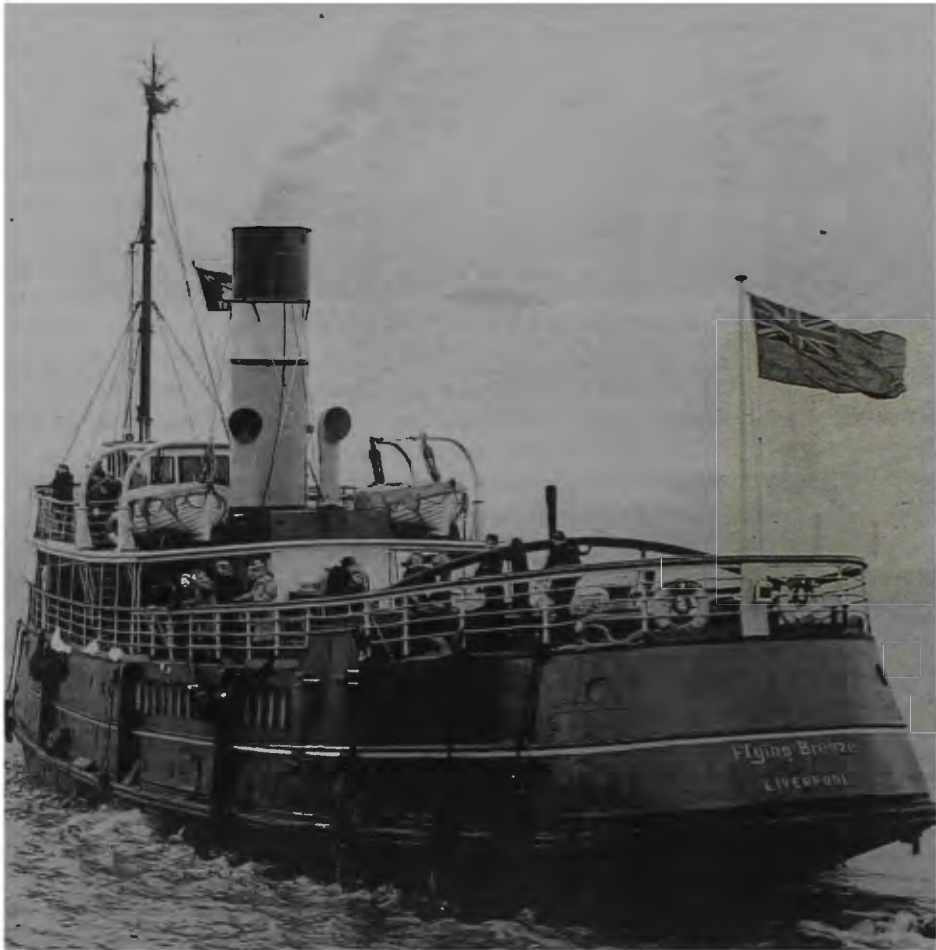
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### Front Cover:

The Elder Dempster liner **Accra** of 1947  
with her original black hull  
(see article on page 24)

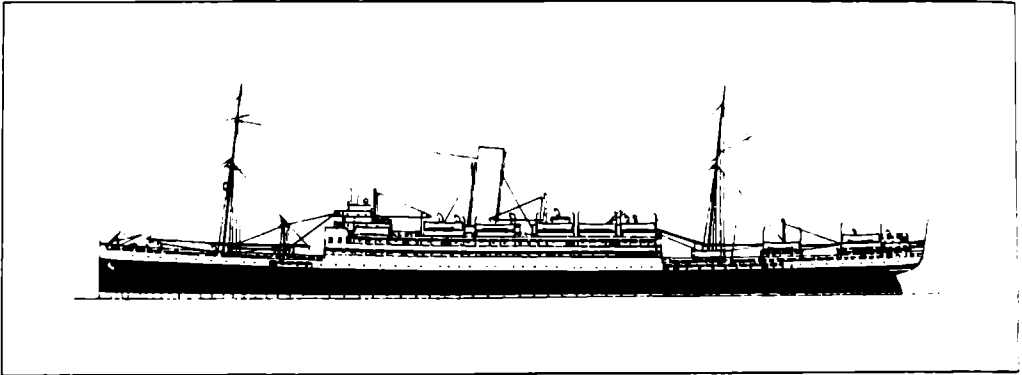


The Alexandra Towing Company's tender **Flying Breeze** leaving Liverpool with the Christmas hampers for the crew of the Bar Lightship on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1959. Note the Christmas tree at the masthead, and the Mersey Mission to Seamen's flag.

*The Chairman and Council of the Liverpool Nautical Research Society wish all Members a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year*

## CHRISTMAS ENCOUNTER

A Christmas 1940 encounter with the German cruiser **Hipper**  
by *J.H. Schofield*



In 1940, my attempt to join the army having been frustrated, I decided to follow the advice of my partner, a wireless operator of the Great War, to 'let the ship carry my pack'. Accordingly, I enrolled at the Manchester Radio College and, having obtained a P.M.G. Special Certificate in Wireless Telegraphy, I went to the Marconi office in Liverpool where I was welcomed with open arms. Firstly I signed up with the company and then went for a medical which anyone who could stand upright and cough could have passed. Next I was persuaded to join the radio officers' union before being sent home with instructions to assemble some kit and await a telegram. The summons came on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1940 whereupon I reported to Marconi's dingy Liverpool office once more and was instructed to join the Pacific Steam Navigation Company's **Orbita** forthwith.

A more uninviting venue than the quayside of Canada Dock in the drizzle of that December afternoon would have been hard to find. However, I humped my gear up the **Orbita's** gangway to find that there was virtually nobody on board, the deck was dirty and damp, and as darkness closed in, the strict blackout came into force. Eventually I found a steward who showed me to a cabin where I unpacked – only to find the next morning that it was the fourth officer's cabin. Soon after 8 o'clock that evening the guns opened up but it was only a desultory sort of raid, maybe a reconnaissance for the blitz to come. Cold and hungry, I couldn't settle down to read, so I turned in and fell asleep almost immediately.

The next morning the chief and second radio officers came on board. They were horrified to find that I had no tropical gear – nobody had thought fit to mention the tropics – so I was hastily sent off to the marine outfitters where I managed to pick up some essentials.

Later the same afternoon the troops started to embark, while I began to find my way around the ship. By then designated 'H.M.Transport', the **Orbita** had just completed her last trip on her regular run to the west coast of South America. Few alterations had been made other than the erection of concrete slabs around the bridge and radio shack. On 18<sup>th</sup> December the **Orbita** sailed and I stood my first radio watch as we crossed the Mersey Bar into the Irish Sea.

The following day, troop convoy WSSA formed up in cold, rough weather. The radio room was closed up and the radio officers proceeded to stand their watches on the bridge acting as auxiliary signalmen. This 'Winston Special' troop convoy consisted of a dozen semi-fast liners including the **Rangitiki**, **Anselm**, **Nea Hellas** (*ex-Tuscania*, and still commanded by Captain Bone) and the **City of London**, together with a sprinkling of freighters in the outer columns: P&O's **Bhutan**, **Harrisons' Settler** and a few 'Blue Flues'.

As we formed up with the Glasgow section of the convoy the weather worsened and by the 20<sup>th</sup> December we were battling against a full gale. The racing screws and violent pitching reduced the troop decks to chaos and only the sight of the escorting corvettes, literally topping the huge waves with half their hulls out of the water, gave any crumb of comfort to those on board the **Orbita**. The state of the 'tweendecks housing 2,000 sea-sick soldiers defied description as the convoy was dispersed by the atrocious North Atlantic weather. Two days later the storm abated somewhat and the convoy was able to reform and proceed, even though conditions were soon worsening again.

One ongoing annoyance was the army's posting of sentries at all entrances to the accommodation, but a far greater trial was the lack of fresh water. A one-gallon jug of hot water a day was my ration; after washing and shaving I would rinse my clothes in the residue! The troops living in communal dormitories fared even worse.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> December our escort was increased, and on the following day the sea had moderated somewhat. That night the troops celebrated Christmas Eve in style with duty-free drinks.

I came off watch at 4.am on Christmas morning and it seemed as if my head had hardly touched the pillow when I was awakened by a series of heavy thuds. The second radio officer, with whom I shared a first-class stateroom, leapt from his bed and pulled the clothes from mine. We grabbed our lifejackets and raced to the radio room as I hurriedly donned my bridgecoat – one slept on one's clothes in the danger area.

#### 7.30am Christmas Morning – *Christians Awake!*

The German heavy cruiser **Hipper** had unwittingly, in the prevailing mist off Cape Trafalgar, sailed into a troop convoy, surely an all-time error for raider of that calibre. This was where the 'Nelson touch' came in: "*Engage the enemy more closely!*"

The corvette **Clematis**, Commander York-Cleevs, immediately broke radio silence with the signal '*Am engaging unknown raider*'. Meanwhile the cruiser **Berwick**, followed by the ageing First World War **Dunedin** and the ack-ack ship **Bonaventure**, steamed full ahead to give support. Simultaneously the convoy scattered.

However, the **Hipper**, which far outclassed our escort, turned away after lobbing half a dozen shells into the convoy. Only the **Empire Trooper** was hit, and not that seriously. One shot went through the quarterdeck killing a naval rating and the quartermaster on watch, but missing some four hundred 8<sup>th</sup> Army gunners who were breakfasting less that two feet below.

During Christmas night I was on watch and received the code message for the convoy to reform, and by Boxing Day evening order was restored.

Despite Hitler the troops on the **Orbita** had a magnificent Christmas dinner, although we radio officers were too busy to get anything but the leftovers. The food was almost up to peacetime standards as the **Orbita** had provisioned in South America on her previous voyage. Our steward took it as a personal grievance that he could give us only one clean table napkin a day instead of the usual three!

As New Year's Day approached the **Orbita** was in the North East Trades and the weather was very pleasant. The Army fought the RAF on the after well deck, although the ship's roll made for some unconventional boxing. Our saloon passengers were made up of Air Force pilots en route to the Rhodesian training school. Official secrecy was strict and we were instructed not to give them G.M.T. in case they worked out the ship's position! To what end? In addition there were some middle-aged reservists from the Pay Corps, and a captain amongst them regularly took on a dozen would-be chess players simultaneously and always beat them all. One regular Major of the Hussars contracted the D.T.s and was put ashore when we reached Freetown. He had wandered round the ship searching for a lost copy of the Encyclopedia Britannica and it was this that finally convinced the M.O. that he was beyond curing. Three days after departure from Freetown the missing volume was found!

I recall that on one occasion I received a reprimand from the chief officer for having entered the dining saloon with a button of my uniform undone. Such procedure may be regarded as unfashionable 'bull', but it made for a happy ship, which the **Orbita** certainly was. We knew that Captain Large, the master, would support us through thick and thin.

At Port Elizabeth our RAF contingent disembarked and two days later we reached Durban. Thence we took the army to Kilindini and had the pleasure of returning light ship to Durban. There we embarked more troops for Suez, passing en route the island of Socotra which was reputed, in the Notice to Mariners, to be still peopled by cannibals. From Port Tewfiq we were ordered to Crete to evacuate the remaining forces. However, the Germans mined the Suez Canal that same night, and thus we escaped an almost certain sinking.

Following our return to Durban, the ship's company was put ashore for 36 hours whilst the vessel was fumigated. Following this we received a full complement of bedraggled Italian prisoners, plus the survivors from the **Illustrious** which had been badly damaged at Malta.

Our voyage back to the U.K. was uneventful and we sailed independently. We encountered bad weather round the Cape of Good Hope where the huge rollers from the South Atlantic tossed the **Orbita** about in fearsome style. Our primitive ack-ack defence consisted of the passengers armed only with rifles, supplemented by primitive kites which were alleged to deter enemy dive-bombers, but which in practice tangled with the rigging and brought down the wireless aerials.

The **Orbita** arrived safely in the Clyde, and was turned round so quickly that there was no time to discharge her cargo of scrap from the battlefields of North Africa. With only four days leave in prospect, I signed off after a memorable first trip.

The **Orbita** went on to give yeoman service, carrying troops to all theatres of the war, including the Salerno landing. After the war the old ship carried emigrants to the Antipodes, before being broken up in 1950. ■



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# THE SALVAGE OF THE “MARY P. COOPER”

by LNRS Member Percy Dunbavand

*When I was looking through some papers recently, I came across a booklet published by the Public Relations Department of the Manchester Ship Canal Company shortly after the salvage of the sand hopper **Mary P. Cooper** (ex **Owenabuee**), which was sunk when in collision with Monks' coaster **Foamville** on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1961. I was mate of the tug **Quest** at the time and we assisted in the moving of the **Mary P. Cooper** from where she was raised to her final resting place in the Arm near to Walton Lock. The booklet explains some of the problems encountered with the salvage work and a copy of it was put on board the **Quest**, possibly because we were involved in this work. I kept the booklet, and as it is now 47 years old and beginning to show a little wear, I thought it would be a good idea to copy it for posterity.*

## Booklet published by the Manchester Ship Canal Company describing the salvage of the “Mary P. Cooper”

This account of the accident and the complex salvage operations that followed will, we feel, be of interest to all whose lives are closely bound by the fortunes of the Company and will serve to record the fine job of salvage carried out by The Liverpool and Glasgow Salvage Association, ably backed by all those members of The Manchester Ship Canal Company, [the ‘Company’] especially the Engineering and Harbour Staff who were actively engaged in the operation.

### *The Accident*

It was 6.15 in the evening of Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March 1961 when the steam vessel **Mary P. Cooper**, 1,250dwt, made her way up the Canal with a full cargo of Mersey river sand, bound for Pomona Docks. Outward bound for Ireland with a cargo of cattle food was the coaster **Foamville**, 1,140dwt. As they passed two hundred yards upstream of the Northwich Road Swing Bridge, a collision occurred which resulted in the **Mary Cooper** sinking immediately, her crew making a timely escape.

The harbour master was informed quickly of the accident by Shipping Movements, who in turn had been alerted by Northwich Road Swing Bridge via Latchford Locks. Arrangements were at once made for all vessels on passage in the Canal to be halted, and within a very short time of the sinking there were eight outward and five inward-bound ships held up. Meanwhile arrangements were made for the **Foamville** to be towed back to Latchford Lower Layby by the M.S.C. tug **Arrow** for the damage to be assessed.

### *Preliminary Salvage Action*

Shipping Movements notified the Company's officials who immediately decided the **Mary Cooper** was outside the capabilities of the Company's plant for



removal, and that the Liverpool and Glasgow Salvage Association should be called in. The Association's manager was contacted, and very shortly afterwards the Principal Salvage Officer left Birkenhead for the site.



*The wreck of the **Mary P. Cooper** and the salvage vessel **Dispenser**. In the background is the Northwich Road Swing Bridge.*

Further action by the Company included the carrying out of a survey of the Canal at the site, and arranging for the attendance of the Company's divers for a preliminary examination and attachment of emergency mooring ropes to the wreck.

By 11.30pm on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March discussions were in progress between the Company's engineers and the salvage officer. Soon after midnight arrangements were made to bring the salvage vessel **Dispenser** into the Canal, and for Warrington Wharf to be kept free for any necessary preparations connected with the salvage. The **Dispenser** arrived at Warrington Wharf the following afternoon – 22<sup>nd</sup> March – and was in position on the south bank of the Canal immediately astern of the **Mary P. Cooper** by 11.45am the next day.

In the meantime work started on the provision of anchorages for the mooring wires in the south bank opposite the wreck. Fresh moorings had to be installed because dredgers do not normally work at this point and therefore no such moorings existed. The moorings were placed and tightened by 4am on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

The **Grab Hopper No.1** arrived on the scene on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and began grabbing to remove the cargo of sand from the **Mary P. Cooper**. The sand was very compact and grabbing underwater proved to be an extremely difficult task.

Before daylight a preliminary examination of the **Foamville** by our divers took place at Latchford Locks and it was found that there was extensive damage on the port bow. Fortunately, however, flooding was contained by the bulkhead. A later examination revealed the damage to extend below the waterline and it was therefore agreed that part of the cargo should be discharged to barge by dock workers from Manchester. This brought the damage clear of the water and it was possible to pump out the forepeak. After temporary patching the **Foamville** sailed for Manchester where she was fully discharged prior to dry-docking.

At about mid-day on 23<sup>rd</sup> March it was decided that certain small vessels which would normally proceed without the assistance of tugs could navigate without danger, and movements would resume at 7.am on the following morning. During the day a control point was established on the Canal bank opposite the wreck. The site office was provided with a telephone and became the headquarters of the Company's operations. An experiment was also tried with 'walkie-talkies', but they did not work well owing to the proximity of the bridges.

Sufficient information was quickly available to show that underwater repairs to the **Mary P. Cooper** were impossible, and thoughts were turned towards the possible employment of the 250-ton crane. This had to be abandoned as it readily became apparent that the crane's lifting wire would be too close to the bow and within the area of damage.

A request was made to the port of Liverpool for salvage pontoons, but these proved to be too large for use in the confined area of the wreck. Contact was therefore made with the Admiralty Salvage Department which fortunately could offer immediate help, and would send up four suitable pontoons from Pembroke Dock, accompanied by Admiralty tugs. These pontoons arrived during the afternoon of 26<sup>th</sup> March at the same time as other ancillary equipment reached the scene from Portsmouth.

Before describing the final and successful salvage plan it should be mentioned here that consideration was given in the early stages to breaking up the vessel by means of explosives. Owing to the proximity of houses and the difficulty of locating dispersed sections of the wreck, this plan was abandoned.

### *The Salvage Plan*

The final plan decided upon by the salvage officer entailed as a first step the sealing of the engine room together with the side buoyancy tanks which flooded when the vessel sank. The Admiralty salvage pontoons were then to be moored alongside, whilst the **Dispenser** would take the weight of the stern.

It was appreciated that the bows of the **Mary P. Cooper** would have to come up first owing to practically the whole of the damage being central there. It would then be necessary for the **Dispenser** to control any listing by attaching two 6-inch wires to the propeller shafts from her own winches. It should be borne in mind that the **Mary P. Cooper** had a ten degree list to port when she sank.

Next, two greenheart logs were placed vertically down the side of the **Dispenser** to prevent the side of the vessel from scraping the bank. A further stage of the plan involved the placing of lifting wires under the hull of the **Mary P. Cooper**, and this proved to be one of the most difficult and lengthy operations of the whole plan. It must be appreciated that the vessel was lying on a hard rock bottom, and the lifting pontoons had to be placed in exactly the right positions – two to port and two to starboard – to ensure that the head of the sunken vessel would come up first. Once the wires had been placed in position under the hull, the pontoons would be filled with water and sunk. Wires would then be attached to the pontoons by divers and finally, once the hull had been made watertight, compressed air would be blown into the pontoons which would rise to the surface with the vessel cradled on the lifting wires between them.

To seal off the holds and make them watertight, two prefabricated hatch covers, each in two sections weighing approximately 9 tons with dimensions 22ft x 20ft x 2ft were designed by the Company's engineers at head office and constructed in the mechanical engineer's workshops at Old Quay. These covers were made particularly robust as the **Mary P. Cooper** sank in thirty feet of water, which meant that they had to withstand considerable pressure. After fitting and sealing them, suction pumps would be used to clear the holds of water and so give additional buoyancy. The camber of the hatch coamings had to be measured under water by the Salvage Association's leading diver, and these measurements had to be precise in order to ensure perfect water sealing, a delicate and tricky operation.

### *Diving Operations*

As far as the Company's divers were concerned, they had the particularly unenviable task of clearing a way to both the forward and rear bulkheads so that the Salvage Association's divers could get at the buoyancy tanks to seal them. In the case of the forward bulkhead, it should be remembered that the principal damage had been sustained by the bows where the crew quarters were situated, and the divers had to force their way in full diving kit down a companion way which was normally a tight fit for anyone in ordinary clothing, and then rip apart bunks, wardrobes and other cabin furniture piece by piece; not to mention a thickness of wooden sheeting protecting the bulkhead itself. All this detritus had to be passed up to the top of the companion way, a formidable job when working by 'feel' alone under 15ft or so of inky black water.

The rear bulkhead, which was protected by the coal bunkers, could not be reached until all the coal had been removed. This amounted to 25 tons, all of which had to be smashed up into small pieces prior to being removed by suction pipes. Larger pieces of coal, which could not readily be broken up, were placed to one side away from the bulkhead. During the actual sealing operations, which involved the use of standard type burning equipment, several of the Salvage Association's divers suffered burns to their hands. The Company divers were frequently cutting their clothing while clearing away the debris and each time that this happened, the diver concerned had to make a rapid ascent to the surface for obvious reasons.

As the diving tasks became more numerous, the diving team had to be increased by the addition of two Admiralty divers from Rosyth. This made a total of ten divers, the team consisting of four from the Salvage Association, four from the Manchester Ship Canal Company and two from the Admiralty.

### *The Intervening Days*

During the days that followed there were many frustrations caused by the breaking of messenger wires attached to the lifting wires, and the continual emergence of fresh leaks in the **Mary P. Cooper**, each of which had to be plugged before the next stage of the operations could be commenced. Throughout this time vessels were allowed to pass the wreck at restricted periods. The most notable passage was that of the **Amfithia**, inward bound on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, with a beam of 57 feet and a draft of 18 feet, 8 inches. This was the largest vessel to proceed past the wreck for the channel, which was marked by beacons, was only 70 feet wide.

As time went on the surplus of dock workers at Manchester increased, and at one point reached 1,500. To a small extent this situation was relieved by additional work at Ellesmere Port which became a hive of industry through certain vessels discharging their Manchester cargo at that port. There was also one instance, the first time in its history, when the Queen Elizabeth II Oil Dock was used as a general discharging berth by the **Manchester Merchant**, her cargo being discharged into barges overside.

There were, however, no less than 24 known cases of vessels being diverted away from Manchester to other ports, the repercussions of which were felt for a very long time.

### *The final lifting*

On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> April at 5.20am the blowing of compressed air into the forward pontoons commenced. This was to ensure that the bows would be the first portion of the **Mary P. Cooper** to clear the water. By 7.05am a small section of the bows emerged; by 12.40pm two-thirds of the vessel was above the water line, and by 4.05pm the vessel was afloat.

It will be appreciated that there were many thousands of people throughout the country awaiting this moment, and advice was quickly made available by the Public Relations Department to both the BBC and ITV which resulted in pictures of the final raising being transmitted, accompanied by the news that the Canal would be clear the following morning.

During the remainder of 16<sup>th</sup> April the salvage officer stayed on the bridge of the **Dispenser** checking the list of the **Mary P. Cooper** and making corrections by taking the strain on the appropriate lifting wire when required. It is important to understand that the whole lifting operation was staged in periods of about twenty minutes, commencing with the bow and working gradually aft. At 5.05pm the salvage officer decided to move the wreck to Warrington Wharf at first light the following morning; meanwhile draining operations with the aid of pumps continued throughout the night.

For the whole of the time that the **Mary P. Cooper** lay in her somewhat inglorious state, she acted as a magnet to hundreds of thousands of people who were drawn from all over the country to view her. A local ice-cream vendor is reported to have said that he had never had it so good, and a lady from Winwick who took her four children to view the wreck each day, armed with a thermos flask and sandwiches, said that although it cost her half-a-crown in bus fares it was better than taking them to the park!



*The Mary P. Cooper was successfully raised on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1961*

### **The Removal**

Thick fog heralded the dawn of Monday 17<sup>th</sup> April and as a consequence the removal of the wreck was delayed. Soon after 10.am, however, it began to clear rapidly and by 10.30am two Ship Canal tugs, the **Onset** and **Quest**, arrived to take up positions at the bow and stern of the wreck. Meanwhile the **Dispenser** sailed for Latchford where she could turn prior to proceeding to Acton Grange Wharf. Finally, at 11.45am, amidst the clapping and cheering of onlookers, the **Mary P. Cooper** began her journey to Naylors Wharf, Warrington.

The Manchester Ship Canal was clear again after 27 days and nights of frustrating and heartbreaking work. The Ship Canal Company stated: "*As the ships sail freely again and the accident becomes but a distant memory, the grave and costly effects to both shipowners and ourselves, the Port Authority, will be felt for some time ahead.*" ■

LNRS Member Percy Dunbavand recalls some other incidents he was involved in during his working life aboard the tugs on the Manchester Ship Canal:

The first I remember was when I was a lad on the **Arrow**, and we worked with the 250-ton crane and the crane barge **Camel** in salvaging the barge **Edward** which had been sunk in collision with Crosfield's steam barge **Kinchasa** above Moore Lane dolphins on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1947. The **Edward** had been built by Brundritt at Runcorn in 1888 as a sailing flat for George Harrison Bolton, a chemical manufacturer of Widnes. He sold her in 1890-91 to the United Alkali / I.C.I., who in 1937 sold the **Edward** and the **John & William** to the Mersey, Weaver & Ship Canal Carrying Company, by which time they had been cut down to dumb barges.

The **Edward** was in tow of Abel's small tug **Littledale**, carrying a cargo of 80 tons of cotton seed, when at 6.10pm she was struck by the **Kinchasa** and sunk. She was raised on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1947 and beached at Stone Delph Quarry (Sandy Cove), and was later broken up. Little did I think at the time that within eighteen months I would be working as mate of the **John & William**.

By a coincidence the **Kinchasa** was also sunk when she met an outward-bound ship near the Dry Docks bend at Ellesmere Port and collided with the stern tug **Panther** which was pushing up on the ship, the tug's port propeller coming into contact with the **Kinchasa**, holing her in a number of places. This was in the early 1950s, the barge being salvaged and then cut down into a dumb barge.

Still in 1947, I was deckhand of the tug **Badger** when we were involved in a dead tow, from Eastham to Manchester, of the tanker **Empire Unity** which had been torpedoed by the German U.979 (Lt. Johannes Meermeier) on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1945, just two days before the European War ended. There was such a shortage of shipping after the war that she was salvaged from off Iceland and brought to Manchester where she was repaired (the torpedo hole was still in her starboard side), and then refitted. She was attended by four tugs, the **Badger** and the **Archer** towing, and I think the two tugs aft were of the *Mallard* class. We had to tie up the **Empire Unity** a number of times to let traffic pass, and I remember we stopped at Old Quay Lock, and then Moore Lane Dolphins, where the fireman of the **Badger** walked off, saying he had had enough!

I was mate of the **Quest** when we moved the **Mary P. Cooper** after she had been raised on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1961. The **Onset** was towing the **Mary P.** stern first with the **Quest** made fast, bow to bow, for the passage to Warrington Wharf.

I was still in the **Quest** two years later when, on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1963, the sand-hopper **Elizabeth Cooper** sank after being in collision with the sludge hopper **Mancunium** at Ince. She was raised by the 250-ton crane on 16<sup>th</sup> December and brought up the Canal to Weston Mersey Lock approach wall with the **Elizabeth**

**Cooper** slung broadside across the bow of the crane. The two head tugs were the **Tarn** and the **Talisman** which had to tow on either side of the crane, making it a tight squeeze going through Ince Cutting. The **Quest** acted as stern tug.

In 1969 I was mate of the **Sovereign** when the **Manchester Courage**, which was outward bound from Manchester to Montreal, entered Irlam Locks at about 11 pm on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> March. She then collided with and went through the lower lock gates and became wedged in the lock. (see *'The Bulletin', September 2007, page 10*).

This did not involve salvage work as such, but there were a number of attempts to free the **Manchester Courage** from the entrance. The **Sovereign** and the **Scimitar** were involved in one of these attempts. We had to lash the two tugs together and then using the tow ropes, we lashed them across so that when we placed our bows across the Liner's bow and put our engines full ahead, there was no danger of the ropes breaking.

The tugs pushed at full ahead; the **Manchester Courage** went full astern on her engines; a tractor on the quay also had a line aboard and was pulling; and the ship was heaving on the ropes with her winches – all to no avail as she was stuck hard and fast!

It was about five weeks before the Canal was fully re-opened to traffic which was the longest period of closure in its history.

There was just one more incident that I was involved in. On 19<sup>th</sup> October 1970 I was captain of the tug **Puma** and we were running down to Eastham that evening when we met the sand hopper **William Cooper** at Ince High Cutting. The **Puma** eased her engines to meet her but as the two vessels were nearing each other the **William Cooper** sheered to port and struck the **Puma** just abaft the galley. We were very close to the river bank and the collision pushed the **Puma** onto the wall from which we rebounded and the **William Cooper** collided again. We received a small split in the hull near the waterline and a fractured water pipe. We were unable to use our engines and the tug **Undine** towed us to Runcorn. My uncle was mate of the **William Cooper** at the time of the incident and told me that her steering gear had failed. He added that it was by no means the first time that this had happened! █



The **Queen Elizabeth 2** at Liverpool on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2008; her final visit before leaving for Dubai to become a 'hotel ship'. *Photo: John Shepherd*

# MONSTER WAVES

*by LNRS Member Charles Dawson*

For a long time dismissed as a nautical myth, monster (or extreme, giant, freak, rogue) waves, that can rise as high as 30 metres, have at last been accepted as a possible cause of the sinking of even large vessels. Modern oceanography, satellite tracking and complex computer models now help to build up a more realistic picture of these mountains of water.

These are not the waves that underwater seismic movements and other natural phenomena can generate in relatively shallow waters, of which tsunamis are the most well-known, but waves that can be generated in the open ocean. Just what creates a monster wave is now understood to be a highly complex interaction between wind, current and topography of the seabed. Mechanisms that have been considered as generating monster waves include:

Firstly, constructive interference, in which waves move from their point of generation in sets or 'trains'. This suggests that several different wave trains travelling roughly in the same direction meet at some point and build up on top of one another, resulting in a set of larger waves until finally one huge wave is created, embedded in the train. This wave will last only a short time as the different trains disentangle themselves and move in their own direction.

Secondly, standing waves. As kayakers well know, when strong wind-generated waves run into a current going in the opposite direction, dangerous standing waves can form. A rising sea-bed will further concentrate the energy in the currents. This hypothesis suggests that the energy contained in the waves smashing into the counter current can accumulate over time, forming greater waves. These are thought to be longer-lived than those developed by the constructive interference mechanism.

However, there are problems with these theories. Firstly, monster waves have been found in places like the North Sea where there are relatively few fast-flowing currents and the constructive interference theory cannot therefore entirely explain their frequency. An example of this occurred in January 1995 when the Draupner Oil Rig was struck by a wave whose height was measured by an onboard laser device at 26 metres.

Even complex computer models that attempt to simulate wave patterns predict that monster waves should be extremely rare. The reality is that other studies observing real-life wave patterns, such as those using radar and other techniques, show that monster waves can occur in some places much more frequently than has even been imagined.

The purely theoretical approach to monster waves has been that atmospheric variations in air pressure force air down, displacing surface water. As the wind moves laterally across the surface of the water along a pressure gradient, it drags or pushes the water with it. These two air movements, vertical or lateral ('shearing') dump energy into the water. The water particles do not actually move very much, but the wind-generated energy is transmitted through the water, sometimes at many hundreds of kilometres per hour. As wave height is determined by wind speed, wind duration



and 'fetch' (the distance the wind blows unobstructed over the sea surface), it would be logical to assume that a big wind blowing constantly over a large expanse of water such as the Pacific Ocean would produce monster waves. Generally in open water a wave of 1.86 times the significant wave height can be expected every 1,000 waves or so. But any resulting big waves would be expected to be toppled by winds at about 70 knots; and a 100 knot wind would flatten them, so a train of monster-sized waves could not theoretically form.

So much for the theory: results from the European Space Agency's satellites have helped to establish the widespread existence of monster waves, and the satellites are now being used to study their origins with the aim of being able to predict them. Given that severe weather has been responsible for the sinking of more than 200 supertankers and container ships exceeding 200 metres in length during the last two decades makes this increasingly more urgent. Monster waves are now believed to have been the major cause in many such cases, although detail ship design can be another contributory factor (as in the case of the foundering of mv **Derbyshire** – see the writer's article in the December 2006 '*Bulletin*').

Mariners who have survived encounters with monster waves in recent times have had remarkable stories to tell. In February 1995 the cruise-liner **Queen Elizabeth 2** met a 29-metre high wave during a hurricane in the North Atlantic. Captain Ronald Warwick described the wave as '*a great wall of water. It looked as if we were going into the White Cliffs of Dover*'. The latest Cunarders are fitted with wave-deflectors which it is hoped will help.

Within the space of a week between February and March 2001, two hardened cruise ships, the **Bremen** and the **Caledonian Star**, had their bridge windows smashed by 30-metre high waves in the South Atlantic and the former ship was left drifting without navigation or propulsion for a period of two hours. '*These incidents occurred less than 1,000 kilometres apart from each other*' reported Wolfgang Rosenthal, senior scientist with the GKSS Forschungszentrum GmbH Research Centre located at Geesthacht in Germany, who has been studying monster waves for two years. '*All the electronics cut out on the Bremen as she drifted parallel to the waves, and until they could be switched on again, the crew were thinking it could be their last day alive.*'

The same phenomenon could have sunk less lucky vessels; two large ships sink every week on average, but the cause is never studied in the same detail as an air crash; it is just too easy to blame bad weather.

Following the Draupner oil rig case mentioned earlier, the North Sea's Goma oilfield has recorded 466 monster wave encounters in twelve years, sufficient to convert previously sceptical scientists whose calculations up to then had predicted that such large deviations from the surrounding sea state should occur only once in every 10,000 years. The fact that monster waves actually occur much more frequently has of course major safety and economic implications since offshore platforms and ships are built to withstand maximum wave heights of only 15 metres.

Mariners have at times been able to measure fairly accurately a few monster waves, usually by watch officers triangulating wave crests against parts of their ship. Now it is marine radar, satellite instruments and wave buoys that are providing more positive information. Research is being applied on three main fronts. Firstly, oceanographic studies and computer models are being combined in the attempt to

develop a system of predicting where monster waves may form. This will eventually, it is hoped, enable marine authorities to provide an early warning system for ships and platforms. Research is also being applied in trials to programme marine radar systems to identify monster waves. Radar on board ships could be programmed with calculations used in models to identify an approaching wave and warn the ship, similar to the laser systems used in aircraft to detect wind shear. Land-based radar or satellites may eventually be used in tracking monster waves.

In December 2000 the European Union initiated a scientific project called MaxWave, headed by Rosenthal, to confirm the widespread occurrence of monster waves. Included in the project was a model of how the waves occur, and the implications for ship and offshore design criteria would be considered. As part of the project, which ran for three years collecting radar images of the surfaces of the oceans, data from radar satellites was first used to carry out a global monster wave census.

During an approximately three-week period, around the time of the **Bremen** and the **Caledonian Star's** encounters, over 30,000 images were collected. *'Without coverage from radar sensors we had no chance of finding anything,'* added Rosenthal, *'all we had to go on up till then was radar collected from oil platforms.'*

The European Union's twin spacecraft ERS 1 and 2, launched in July 1991 and April 1995 respectively, have Synthetic Aperture Radar as their main instrument. This works in several different modes; while over the ocean it works in wave mode, acquiring 10km x 5km 'imagenttes' of the sea surface every 200 kilometres. These small 'imagenttes' are then mathematically transformed into averaged-out breakdowns of wave energy and direction called ocean-wave spectra. Being publically available, they are useful for weather centres to improve the accuracy of their sea-forecast models.

Despite the relatively brief length of time the data covered, the MaxWave team identified more than ten individual monster wave around the globe of above 25 metres in height. Rosenthal commented: *'Having proved they exist in greater numbers than anyone expected, the next step was to analyse if they can be forecast. After the conclusion of MaxWave, two lines of work carried on from it; one to improve ship design by learning more about how ships are sunk, and the other is to examine more satellite data with a view to analysing if forecasting is possible.'*

A new research project called WaveAtlas will use two years' worth of ERS imagenttes to create a worldwide atlas of monster wave events and carry out statistical analysis. The principal investigator is Susanne Lehner, associate professor in the division of applied marine physics at the University of Miami, who also worked with Rosenthal as co-investigator on MaxWave. *'Looking through the imagenttes ends up feeling like flying, because you can follow the sea state along the track of a satellite,'* said Lehner. *'Other features, such as ice floes, oil slicks and ships are also visible on them, so there is a great interest in using them in additional fields of study. Only radar satellites can provide the truly global data sampling needed for statistical analysis of the oceans, because they can see through clouds and darkness, unlike their optical counterparts. In stormy weather radar images are thus the only relevant information available.'*

So far, some identifiable patterns have been observed. Monster waves are often associated with sites where ordinary waves encounter ocean currents and eddies.

The strength of the current concentrates the wave energy, forming even larger waves. This is especially true in the case of the notoriously dangerous Agulhas current off the south-east coast of Africa, but monster wave associations are also found with other currents such as the Gulf Stream in the North Atlantic, interacting with waves coming down from the Labrador Sea.

However the data also shows that monster waves also occur well away from currents, often occurring in the vicinity of weather fronts and lows. Sustained winds from long-lived storms exceeding twelve hours may enlarge waves moving at an optimum speed in synchronization with the wind.

Many of the computer models assume linear and predictable outcomes from variables (wind velocity, sea state, wind direction etc) fed into the model's algorithms. Scientists are well aware, in studying the predictability of monster waves, that they need to admit also that the sea must always be recognised as 'chaotic' and that the chaos theory needs to be introduced into their models. In other words, it may never be possible to predict precisely where a monster wave might be encountered, but it is sufficient at least to know that they can be allowed for in marine design in the future and they are no longer the stuff of ancient myths. ■



Monster waves photographed from the bridge of the Cunard liner **Carinthia** in position 47°58'N, 41°48'W in January 1965. *photo: John Shepherd*

## THE BELFAST STEAMSHIP COMPANY'S "ULSTER MONARCH" OF 1929

*by Malcolm McRonald*

*Malcolm McRonald is well-known to readers of 'The Bulletin', having contributed articles on a regular basis over the past ten years or so. Malcolm has recently published Volume 3 of his trilogy 'The Irish Boats' dealing with services from Liverpool to Belfast, and it is from this book that material for the following article has been taken. The earlier volumes dealt with services from Liverpool to Dublin (Volume 1), and to Cork and Waterford (Volume 2). All three volumes have been meticulously researched and are set to become the definitive work dealing with services from Liverpool to Ireland.*

From Lloyd's Register, 1954/55:

ULSTER MONARCH    Official Number: 148163    Signal Letters: G B X S

Built by Harland & Wolff at Belfast in 1929. Yard No: 635.

Owners: The Belfast Steamship Co. Ltd.

Length: 346.0 ft; Breadth: 46.2 ft.    Gross Tonnage: 3802; Nett: 1781.

2 oil engines. Twin screws. Speed: 18 knots.



**The Ulster Monarch** resplendent in the colours in which she entered service in 1929. *(Raymond Brandreth collection)*

The Liverpool to Belfast service suffered direct competition from the railway services from the north-west of England to Belfast. The railways were at an advantage since they could encourage those passengers travelling by train to join the steamer to use the railway companies' own shipping services. As a result, the quality of the overnight facilities on the Liverpool vessels was very important as a means of attracting passengers to that route.

In 1926 the London, Midland and Scottish Railway ordered three new coal-fired steam-turbine vessels from Dennys of Dumbarton for the Heysham-Belfast route. The new ships were well in advance of anything previously seen on the Irish Sea and posed a major threat to the now elderly vessels on the Liverpool-Belfast route. This threat had been foreseen by the Belfast Steamship Company which placed an order with Harland & Wolff at Belfast for three passenger-cargo ships. The keels of the three new ships were laid on 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1928, and a novel feature was that they were to have diesel engines. These engines needed only a single funnel, but in common with the diesel-engined liners of the Royal Mail Steam Packet group, the ships were equipped with two horizontal-topped funnels, the forward one being a dummy. This gave them a similar appearance to contemporary liners, such as the **Britannic** and the **Georgic**, also built at Belfast by Harland & Wolff.

It was decided that the new ships would introduce a new style of nomenclature for the Belfast Steamship Co, and their names would all commence with 'Ulster'. In readiness for the introduction of the new ships, the route had been renamed the 'Ulster Imperial Line' in January 1929. The first ship of the trio was launched as the **Ulster Monarch**, without any special ceremony, on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1929. The new **Ulster Monarch** first put to sea on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1929 when work on her was sufficiently far advanced for her to take a party of guests for a cruise in Belfast Lough. She made a trial run from Belfast to the Mersey Bar on 8<sup>th</sup> June and was delivered to the Belfast Steamship Co on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1929.

The **Ulster Monarch** could carry 419 first-class passengers in 101 single-berth cabins, 155 two-berth cabins and 4 'de luxe' cabins. The third-class accommodation was astern of the after cargo hold and housed 493 passengers in very limited quarters. The new ship introduced an innovative colour scheme with grey hull, red boot-topping and a white superstructure. However, the grey hull soon proved to be impractical in the harsh weather conditions prevailing in the Irish Sea, coupled with daily berthing operations, and was soon repainted black.

The **Ulster Monarch** departed from Liverpool at 10.pm with arrival at Belfast scheduled for 7.30am the following morning. In the reverse direction she sailed from Belfast at 9.pm with arrival at Liverpool timed for 6.30am. The advertised connecting train from London Euston did not arrive at Liverpool until 9.40pm and intending passengers were then transferred by bus to the ship. The 10.pm departure allowed little margin for delays to the train and was soon altered to 10.15pm.

At Liverpool the **Ulster Monarch** berthed in the Princes Dock, and in fact sailed from the dock if high water was around the departure time; otherwise she left the dock on the previous high tide and entered the Mersey through the Princes Half-Tide Dock and embarked passengers at Princes Landing Stage. Arrivals at Liverpool were advertised as using the landing stage, but there were occasions when the ship

went straight into dock to avoid missing a tide. This uncertain situation was resolved with the opening of the Waterloo River Entrance in 1950.

An early distinguished passenger on the **Ulster Monarch** was Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin when he crossed from Liverpool to Belfast on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1930. Following the introduction of its new ships, the Belfast Steamship Co was awarded a mail contract, so the service was advertised as 'The Royal Mail Route', and the ships flew the Royal Mail pennant. The **Ulster Monarch** had occasional deviations from her normal service and in June 1932 took a large party of guests from Liverpool to Belfast for the trials of the White Star liner **Georgic**. While there was normally no need for high speed on the service, fast passages were sometimes necessary to catch a tide at Liverpool, and in 1934 the **Ulster Monarch** logged a 'personal best' of 20 knots from Belfast to Liverpool to make a 5.am tide.

Following the outbreak of war the **Ulster Monarch** was requisitioned at Liverpool on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1939 after completing an overnight sailing from Belfast. She sailed under 'sealed orders' for Southampton and became one of the first ships to land troops of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France. By 11<sup>th</sup> September she was carrying troops from Southampton to Cherbourg and Le Havre and, from 24<sup>th</sup> September, she carried them from Avonmouth to St Nazaire. On 7<sup>th</sup> October the **Ulster Monarch** was released from Government service and resumed her Liverpool-Belfast service on 18<sup>th</sup> October. This was only short-lived and by 11<sup>th</sup> December she was back on troop voyages across the English Channel, which occupied her until 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1940.

The **Ulster Monarch** was next sent north to Scotland to assist in the later stages of the already failing Norwegian campaign. Although she embarked troops at Leith, her mission became one of evacuation, and after disembarking these troops at Scapa Flow the **Ulster Monarch** sailed in a convoy bound for Andalsnes in Norway, but such was the German attack that she was forced to withdraw before going alongside, and returned to Scapa Flow. The ship was ordered next to the Clyde, where troops, stores, ammunition and petrol were embarked for Harstad in northern Norway, returning with a full load of troops. On her next visit to Norway, the **Ulster Monarch** assisted in the evacuation following the total failure of the campaign and she became the last merchant vessel to leave Harstad.

On 14<sup>th</sup> June 1940 the **Ulster Monarch** sailed from the Clyde carrying French and Polish troops bound for Lorient, but her orders were changed and she made for Brest. The following day the **Ulster Monarch** was the final troopship to leave Brest, and she arrived at Falmouth on 18<sup>th</sup> June. She next carried French troops from the Clyde and Liverpool to Casablanca, and then sailed to Gibraltar to transport non-essential civilians to Madeira, before returning to Glasgow. A spell of trooping to the Faeroe Islands and to Iceland then followed.

The **Ulster Monarch** was requisitioned by the Royal Navy on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1940 and joined the newly formed Combined Operations Fleet under Sir Roger Keys. The ship's manoeuvrability was of great value. The **Ulster Monarch** was based at Inverary where she was used for commando training. She was also earmarked to take part in an occupation of the Canary Islands, due to commence on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1941, but diplomatic developments delayed the need for this invasion. A further spell of trooping took place, during which she was detailed to take part in another operation to capture

the harbour at La Luz in Grand Canary, if Gibraltar were lost. Towards the end of March 1942 the **Ulster Monarch** left the Azores and encountered extreme weather, resulting in her rolling to an angle of 45 degrees with her bulwark rails submerged. Her engines stopped as a result of the mixing of fuel oil and water, but fortunately she came round into the wind of her own accord and remained in that position until it was possible to restart her engines. She was back on the Clyde on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1942.

The **Ulster Monarch** lay at Liverpool between 15<sup>th</sup> May and 26<sup>th</sup> June 1942. During this time she was fitted-out to carry assault craft in place of her lifeboats and was designated an LSI[H] from August. This was an abbreviation for Landing Ship Infantry, Hand Hoisting. In this role the **Ulster Monarch** could carry six 35-man Landing Craft and 580 troops. She sailed in convoy from the Clyde on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1942 to take part in the first North African landings on 8<sup>th</sup> November at Arzeu. The following day the **Ulster Monarch** assisted in towing the stranded Canadian Pacific liner **Duchess of Bedford** (to become the **Empress of France**, post-war) off the beach. On 10<sup>th</sup> November the **Ulster Monarch** embarked survivors from HMS **Walney** and HMS **Hartland** at Oran and landed them at Gibraltar.

The **Ulster Monarch** sailed for the Clyde in convoy from Gibraltar on 14<sup>th</sup> November. At around 03.00 the following morning the convoy was attacked and the **Ulster Monarch** made an emergency turn to starboard which put the aircraft carrier HMS **Avenger** directly ahead of her. The **Avenger** was struck by a torpedo and sank in flames. The **Ulster Monarch** passed directly over the sinking **Avenger**, damaging her bottom plates, but fortunately her engines had been stopped so her propellers suffered no damage. She was not allowed to stop and so had to leave survivors in the water.

On 13<sup>th</sup> March 1943 the **Ulster Monarch** left the Clyde at the start of a voyage which took her round Africa and she reached Suez on 14<sup>th</sup> May. At Suez she embarked SAS troops for intensive training, which included a landing on the shores of the Gulf of Aquaba. The **Ulster Monarch** took her troops through the Suez Canal to join the Sicily invasion convoy and landed her troops at Syracuse on 10<sup>th</sup> July. She then ferried troops and supplies between Malta, North Africa and Sicily. On 19<sup>th</sup> August, when about six miles off Cape Bon, the **Ulster Monarch** was attacked by aircraft. One bomb penetrated her poop deck and ignited petrol supplies and the resulting fire endangered ammunition in the magazine. Three of the crew were killed in this attack. After the fire had been extinguished it was discovered that the steering gear was out of action, so the **Ulster Monarch** headed for Tripoli at 15 knots, steered only by her engines.

After further trooping, the **Ulster Monarch** left the Mediterranean early in November 1943 and returned to the Clyde for a refit. This was completed in February 1944 and she sailed for the south coast and D-Day training.

For the D-Day landings on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944 the **Ulster Monarch** took assault forces from the Solent to the Normandy beaches at Courseulles (Juno Beach). After the main landings she continued taking troops from various south coast ports to the beaches, and later to Cherbourg and Le Havre. From early 1945 the **Ulster Monarch** was based at Tilbury for troop crossings to Ostend. Her final troop sailing ended at Tilbury in early September 1945. By the end of her war service the **Ulster Monarch** had sailed over 100,000 miles and carried over 200,000 men.

Her war service over, the **Ulster Monarch** returned to Belfast on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1945 and required extensive re-conversion and engine repairs before she could resume commercial sailings. She made her first post-war sailing from Belfast to Liverpool on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1946. The Belfast service operated four nights per week only, as work on the new Waterloo River Entrance at Liverpool was incomplete. During the summer months a nightly service was provided by leaving the **Ulster Monarch** at anchor in the Mersey during the day and sailing without cargo.



**The Ulster Monarch** returning to Belfast on completion of her war service

Princess Elizabeth officially opened the Waterloo River Entrance on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1949. However, despite the opening, the lock was patently not ready and the **Ulster Prince** grounded on her first attempt to use it. It was to be another year before the new river entrance could be used by the Belfast and Dublin passenger vessels. The new lock was something of a mixed blessing as it required awkward manoeuvring from the Princes Dock berth, adding some thirty minutes to passage times.

During her winter overhaul in 1950, the **Ulster Monarch** had her funnels repainted in the traditional colours of the Belfast Steamship Company; namely scarlet with a black top. She also received various alterations designed to reduce her top weight. The **Ulster Monarch** had always had a tendency to roll, and this was now exacerbated by the fact that she no longer carried a full load of cargo because of shorter dock working hours at Belfast, and also by the weight of paint added to her over the years. The alterations involved cutting down the tops of her funnels, removing the mainmast from the after well and replacing it with a short mast at the after end of the sun deck, and cutting holes in her promenade deck bulwarks in which railings were placed. The alterations to the funnels at last removed their 'motorship' horizontal tops, so fashionable in the 1930s, and gave the ship a greatly improved appearance.

The **Ulster Monarch** was involved in a couple of incidents in the early 1950s. She lost an anchor in Waterloo Dock on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1951, but far more serious



was the occasion on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1952 when she collided with, and sank, the fishing vessel **Crusader** in Belfast Lough. The **Crusader's** crew of two men and two boys were in the water for around thirty minutes before being rescued by the **Ulster Monarch**.

In 1956 the nationalised British Railways built three new ships for its Heysham – Belfast passenger service. The **Ulster Monarch** had been designed to offer accommodation of a higher standard than the 1928-built railway vessels, but at the age of 27, she was now far below the standard of the new British Railways' vessels, especially for second-class passengers. It was decided that the **Ulster Monarch** would be given an extended refit at Belfast in the spring of 1957, with a view to prolonging her useful life for another ten years.

The question of a replacement for the **Ulster Monarch** was first raised at a Coast Lines board meeting in January 1962, when she was nearly 33 years old. It was decided to put her through a special survey which would extend her life for another four years.

In the early 1960s the demand for car space was growing rapidly. The **Ulster Monarch** could carry some cars which were loaded by crane into the hold, but the arrangements were not very convenient for motorists. In 1964 the cargo vessel **Ulster Spinner** was allocated to carry cars, with the car drivers and passengers travelling separately from their vehicles on the **Ulster Monarch** or **Ulster Prince**. Competition for cars came from the Atlantic Steam Navigation Company which, under the title of the 'Transport Ferry Service' operated very comfortable ro-ro ships from Preston to Larne and Belfast. This service suffered because of the difficult tidal conditions in the River Ribble, making operating to a fixed time-table impossible.

The year 1965 saw the start of changes that would transform the pattern of overnight services on the Irish Sea. On 1<sup>st</sup> January, Coast Lines sold its shareholding in the British & Irish Steam Packet Company to the Irish government for £3.6 million. This money enabled Coast Lines to order two new stern-loading car ferries for the Liverpool – Belfast service.

Pending the delivery of the new vessels the service carried on in the traditional way, although its finances were no longer sound, and it lost £70,000 in 1965. This was not helped the following year by the national seamen's strike which started at midnight on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1966. The **Ulster Monarch** was at Liverpool for the duration of the strike, and the service resumed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July after the strike ended.

The two new car ferries were due to enter service in the spring of 1967, and so it was decided to save money by withdrawing the **Ulster Monarch** in October 1966. This would avoid the cost the vessel's annual survey, and accordingly the **Ulster Monarch** made her final crossing from Belfast to Liverpool on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1966.

The **Ulster Monarch** was 37 years old and she was quickly sold for £46,000 to be broken up at Ghent by the Belgian shipbreakers Van Heyghen Frères. The old ship left Birkenhead under her own power on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1966 and arrived at Ghent on 8<sup>th</sup> December where completion of the sale took place immediately. ■

### **THE IRISH BOATS : Volume 3 : LIVERPOOL TO BELFAST**

**by Malcolm McRonald : ISBN 978 0 7524 4235 8**

**Published by Tempus Publishing, price £19.99p.**

## ELDER DEMPSTER'S 'ACCRA' OF 1947

Built by Vickers Armstrongs, Ltd. at Barrow in 1947. Yard No. 948  
Official Number: 181100 Signal Letters: G J S W  
Gross Tonnage: 11,600; Nett: 6,448. Length: 452.9ft; Breadth: 66.2ft  
Owned by Elder Dempster Lines, Ltd.  
2 Doxford diesel engines, twin screws. Speed: 15.5 knots.

The **Accra** was ordered in February 1945 as the first of Elder Dempster's new passenger ships to re-introduce the three-weekly passenger service from Liverpool to Lagos. The new **Accra** was launched at Barrow on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1947 by Mrs Creech-Jones. She left Liverpool on her maiden voyage on 24<sup>th</sup> September under the command of Captain C.C. Cave, and initially the ship carried a black hull.

Just over two years later, in November 1949, the **Accra** suffered a broken crank shaft and she arrived back at Liverpool on one engine, five days late. She was returned to her builders at Barrow for repairs and during this period she was repainted with the familiar grey hull and green boot topping. In 1960 much needed air-conditioning was installed in the passenger decks.



The **Accra** leaving Liverpool on her maiden voyage, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1947

*photo: Elder Dempster*

The **Accra's** service in the Elder Dempster fleet was brief and on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1967, having completed 171 voyages, she sailed from Liverpool for

Cartagena, Spain, where she was demolished by J. Navarro Frances. Disturbed conditions in West Africa, which affected Elder Dempster's traditional trade, played a part in the relatively short career of the *Accra*.

### **A Voyage to West Africa in the 'Accra'**

*by Fred Thompson*

Liverpool, on a grey September day in 1952 did not present a particularly auspicious start to life in Africa. I had travelled from Euston on the boat train that, on arrival at Liverpool, had snaked its way across the streets, under the overhead railway and alongside the Mersey to Riverside Station. I was allowed forty cubic feet of baggage as a newly appointed Colonial Education Officer and I had two large wooden crates of household goods, a tin trunk that was intended to deter the voracious insects of forest or desert, and suitcases for my cabin. Each piece carried the Elder Dempster logo and a big letter 'T', this being my initial to aid identification in the baggage hall. Customs and Immigration had to be cleared, currency regulations were strictly enforced and only ten pounds sterling could be taken out of the country in cash. Baggage handlers were busy trundling trolleys on to the ship and I walked along a gangway into the entrance hall on 'B' deck. My previous voyages to sea had been in the cramped quarters of wartime troopers, this was very different, and it was First Class!

Cabin stewards came to meet passengers and I was taken in hand by a stocky Liverpoolian who led me to 'D' deck where I was to share a two-berth cabin. It was quite basic; there was a wash basin, two chairs, a tall cupboard and storage space below two bunks, one of which was below a porthole. Bathrooms and toilets were situated nearby. My cabin mate was already installed; like me he was bound for Nigeria on first appointment as an Education Officer.

There was a little time to explore the *Accra*. The boat deck was damp and windswept. There was a generous allocation of space for public rooms which included a library, card room, smoke room and lounge. The entrance hall, still busy with embarking passengers, contained the purser's office, a shop and hairdressing salons for both ladies and gentlemen.

Passengers were directed to the first class dining saloon on 'E' deck to meet the Purser and make their table bookings for meals. The saloon was panelled in African hard woods and the floor was covered with thick linoleum that could easily be washed down if need be should spillages occur in rough weather. One end of the saloon was dominated by the captain's table, an elongated oval which seated nine guests. It was flanked by tables for senior officers. Crisp white table linen, sparkling cutlery and glassware shone in the subdued lighting. Tables seated four, six or eight passengers; senior colonial officers and company directors were guests at the captain's table and those of his senior officers. First-tour young men like myself were placed where the Purser thought fit, usually close to the doors to and from the galley.

Prior to departure all passengers had been asked to provide details of rank, title, decorations and branch of service or company to Elder Dempster. Each us received a passenger list and it was a formidable document. It included all the

hierarchy of the colonial service; company directors of banks or the United Africa Company and bishops of African dioceses. There was a fair number of nursing sisters, women education officers and a handful of unaccompanied wives travelling out to join their husbands. There were very few children on board as it was Government policy at that time to discourage parents from taking them to West Africa. Indeed, before the Second World War the reputation of the West Coast had been so bad that wives of colonial officers were allowed to accompany their husbands only with the greatest reluctance and had to pay their own passages. The development of anti-malarial prophylactics and the tremendous contribution made by wives in West Africa to the war effort had done much to relax the attitude of the British Government from the 1950s onward.

The second-class passengers were accommodated aft in four-berth cabins. They had their own lounge and dining saloon, as well as a small area of deck space. The list included missionary families and a few Africans returning home from studies in Britain.

As the *Accra* was tied up at the landing stage, dinner on the first night was informal. The ship's bars were closed and the open decks were deserted. Liverpool was wet, cold and dismal. However the dining saloon was warm and inviting and for those of us newly qualified from universities and used to the spartan diets of post-war Britain, the menu was staggering! Soup, hors d'oeuvres, fish, choice of entrée, sweets, cheese, biscuits and coffee were served deftly and efficiently by stewards immaculate in bow ties and white jackets.

After dinner I wandered up to the boat deck to find a force 10 gale howling up the Mersey. Departure was postponed for 24 hours. The bars remained closed and the crew was taking unexpected shore leave, but the passengers could not go ashore because of immigration restrictions. Worse too was the knowledge that Liverpool was playing at home, and our cabin steward went ashore to watch them.

The following morning, a Sunday, the *Accra's* engines were throbbing and she eased off the landing stage with the assistance of two tugs. At breakfast we could see the Irish Sea foaming past the portholes and there was a pronounced motion on the ship, dip and role, as the Welsh hills slipped past to port and the dining saloon emptied rapidly as many passengers suddenly felt an aversion to bacon and eggs or fresh grilled kippers. Fiddles were rigged and the stewards swayed sure-footed with laden trays.

The Bay of Biscay was quite benign after the Irish Sea and soon the dining saloon was full, the deck chairs were busy with passengers wrapped in rugs, whilst others were walking brisk circuits of the boat deck. The bars were open and everything was duty-free. Life was good!

Shipboard routine was quickly established. Early morning tea with heavy white china bearing the Elder Dempster crest came on a silver tray with a selection of fruit. Breakfast was available from 08.00 – 09.30. The menu was huge: fruit juices, all cereals known to man, fresh fruit, fish such as grilled sole, bacon, eggs, mushrooms and American hash with fried potatoes, bread in variety and Danish pastries.

Passengers staggered away to walk the deck, search out library books, plan deck games or just slump into deck chairs in sheltered corners. In the card room the bridge fanatics had established themselves. They played all morning, most afternoons

and every evening. The children on board were actively discouraged from entering the room and only the bar stewards were really welcome to replenish pink gins or brandy gingers at frequent intervals.

At around 10.30am hot bouillon was served; this would be replaced by ice cream once the *Accra* was in the tropics. At 11.30 the lounge bar and the smoke room bar opened; the beer was popular but seasoned colonial officers preferred a pink gin! Luncheon was served from 12.30.

After lunch was a quiet time; many passengers took a siesta either in their cabins or on deck where the weather was becoming ever warmer. At 3.30pm tea – cucumber and salmon sandwiches with cream cakes to follow – would be served by the stewards, or it was available on a ‘help yourself’ basis in the lounge.

Dinner was now a formal occasion for all on the captain’s table and those of the senior officers. The gentlemen wore stiff shirts, bow ties and mess jackets and the ladies were in long frocks, some with elbow length gloves.

The *Accra*’s first port of call was Las Palmas in the Canaries. This was anticipated with great excitement for, in 1952, it was a ‘free’ port. Goods not available on England or available but subject to heavy import duty were to be had virtually ‘at cost’ in Las Palmas. Our stay would be short because of late departure from Liverpool. Many local traders came on board and set out their wares on the boat deck.

As the passengers returned to the *Accra* for an evening departure, they found changes much in evidence. The swimming pool had been filled, the ship’s officers had exchanged blue serge for white drill shirts, shorts and long white socks. We were now only a few days from Africa and flying fish as well as dolphins reminded us that we were in tropical waters.

The *Accra*’s dawn arrival at Freetown evoked memories of my wartime visit some nine years earlier. On that occasion the harbour was filled with a southbound convoy and two frigates rushed out into the Atlantic to ambush a wolfpack that had shadowed us for much of the voyage. Then, as now, the bumboats came out to meet us. There was no deep-sea wharf at Freetown in 1952 so lighters came out for the cargo, and disembarking passengers went ashore by launch.

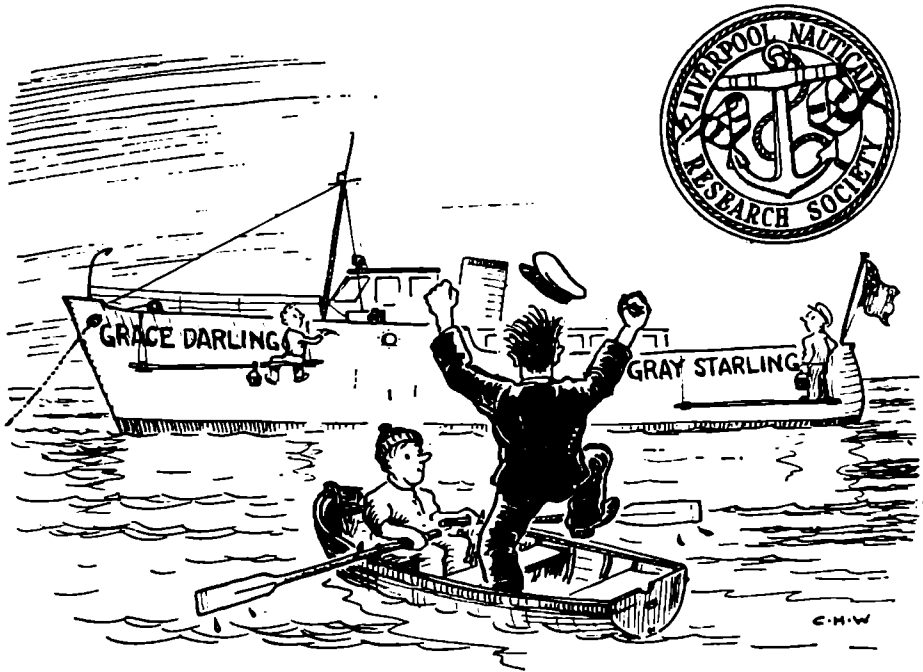
Once the *Accra* was underway again news came that the onward postings had been received. Colonial officers going to the Gold Coast or to Nigeria had to wait until the ship left Freetown to learn their final destinations. All postings were advised to the ship in Morse code and against my name I found ‘Kathina’. I looked at the map near the notice board and could not find it. An ‘old hand’ soon put me right: *“That should be Katsina, the radio officer got his Morse wrong and read four dots instead of three. I hope you play polo – the Emir is dead keen!”*

The voyage continued around the bulge of Africa and into the Bight of Benin. The *Accra* was never far off the land and by day the high cumulus could be seen building up over the coast, heralding the heavy rain of an equatorial afternoon. Takoradi was our next port – a new creation to serve what was then the Gold Coast, within a few years to be Ghana. Here there was a deep water quay with berths for six vessels; yet only a few years before Elder Dempster ships had anchored offshore and surf boats, paddled by Kroo boys, had carried passengers and cargo ashore through the surf. It was the Kroo boys’ proud boast that the passengers were safely landed without even a splash on their topees.

The *Accra* could carry 150 deck passengers and a large number boarded at Takoradi. Many were semi-itinerant labour seeking work in the boom city of Lagos. Some came with their families, laden with cooking pots, charcoal, yams and bedding rolls. The forward deck was a mass of busy, vociferous, colourful people; working space was restricted and this did little to improve the tempers of officers and deckhands working the ship.

The following day found the *Accra* steaming slowly into the harbour at Lagos. To starboard was Lagos Island, the old Colonial capital. Apapa wharf was on the port side where the *Accra* would berth. This was the end of the voyage with customs and immigration formalities to be cleared. In the early 1950s these presented no great problems although 'old hands' said that to wear a King's College Lagos tie ensured a speedy passage through as all the officers claimed to have relatives at K.C.!

It was all exciting; Lagos was noisy – and noisome – colourful, brash and already alive with nationalism although the goal was still nine years away. I spent one night in the house of the Inspector General of Education. My onward journey north was to be by train but the track had been washed out so I spent the next fortnight fuming at the Ikoyi Rest House – a former RAF camp that had little to recommend it. It was ill lit, damp, humid, infested with mosquitoes by night and lacking basic facilities. It was an inauspicious beginning to what became, in the end, five very happy years up country in Katsina where I never played polo, but enjoyed my cricket! ■



## “HERSCHEL” AND “CHARITY”: CORRECTIONS

by LNRS Member Roy Fenton

That an incorrect history of a ship appears in one book is unfortunate but understandable. When the mistake is perpetuated in at least five books involving five individual authors, correction seems a duty. This article attempts to put right the histories of two significant Liverpool-owned steamships built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The word ‘attempts’ is used advisedly because the present writer was so surprised that five authors were misled, that he began to doubt his own findings. In the interests of history, therefore, correction of his correction is invited.

The story begins with a query from Dr Alston Kennedy, who went to sea with Blue Funnel before taking up an academic career. His research into Captain Isaac Middleton, first master of Holt’s **Agamemnon** of 1866, revealed that Middleton’s previous ship was Lampport & Holt’s **Herschel**. No great surprise, given the close family association between the concerns. Further research in ‘Mitchell’s Steam Shipping Journal’ found that the **Herschel** had been wrecked in the River Plate not long after Middleton left her. What did surprise Alston was that neither edition of Paul Heaton’s books on Lampport & Holt had a reference to a **Herschel** being wrecked in 1865. A ship of that name is indeed listed, but given as built in 1853 as the **Charity**, and shown joining the fleet in 1865 and continuing in service until 1872. Duncan Haws’ ‘Merchant Fleets 34: Lampport & Holt and Booth’ has a similar story, with no mention of a casualty in 1865.

It soon became apparent that the **Herschel** which was wrecked in 1865 was a completely different ship from that listed by Heaton and Haws. The details below needed digging out from primary sources as this **Herschel** was never listed by ‘Lloyd’s Register’ (which did not attempt to be comprehensive in its listings until the late 1880s), nor – more surprisingly for a Liverpool ship – by the rival ‘Underwriters’ Register of Iron Vessels’ which had been set up in Liverpool as a reaction to ‘Lloyd’s Register’s’ apparent indifference to iron-hulled ships. The ‘Mercantile Navy List’ became a very reliable source for any registered British ship but in 1864 and 1865 it still only gave rudimentary details. The only printed source in which the **Herschel** can be found is the little-known but extremely useful Parliamentary paper known formally as ‘Returns of Registered Steam Vessels of the UK’. The 1865 edition lists a **Herschel** as being completed in 1864, and this allowed her to be located in the Liverpool registration documents for that year, held both in the Merseyside Maritime Museum and the National Archives in London (BT108/86). The details for the **Herschel** set out below are based on the registration papers and the casualty reports in ‘Mitchell’s Steam Shipping Journal’ for 19<sup>th</sup> January 1866.

<b>HERSCHEL</b>	1864 – 1865	Iron
O.N. 50472	1,543g 1,288n	275·7 x 33·1 x 23·1 feet
2. cyl.; 150 NHP		

21.7.1864: Launched by Andrew Leslie, Hebburn, Newcastle-on-Tyne (Yard No. 51)

6.9.1864: Registered in the ownership of William J. Lamport and George Holt, as **HERSCHEL**.

4.12.1865: Wrecked at Maldonado Harbour, River Plate, having previously struck a rock at Cape St Marys at the entrance to the river whilst on passage from Rio de Janeiro to Montevideo. The crew and passengers were rescued, and about 50 tons of cargo, including mails, was saved.

8.2.1866: Register closed.

But what about the **Herschel** listed by both Paul Heaton and Duncan Haws as being owned by Lamport & Holt from 1865 to 1872? They refer to her as being built in 1853 by Jonathan Laird as the **Charity** for the African Steamship Company, a company which later became part of the Elder Dempster story, so two books on this company were consulted, Duncan Haws' 'Merchant Fleets 30: Elder Dempster Lines' and James Cowden and John Duffy's 'The Elder Dempster Fleet History, 1852-1985'. Although there were some detail differences in the listed ownerships, both books gave essentially the same careers for the **Herschel**. One last book remained: surely N.R.P. Bonsor, with his meticulous research for 'North Atlantic Seaway' and (in the **Herschel's** case) 'South Atlantic Seaway' would not have confused the two and ignored a significant albeit short-lived Lamport & Holt ship? Well, it seems Bonsor has, like Homer, nodded: the **Herschel** is listed as being formerly the **Charity**.

A special investigator was called in on the case. Fred Hawks has an ongoing project to detail early British steamers, and he is using an impeccable primary source for these: registration documents in the National Archives at Kew. What he has on the career of the **Charity** is considerably at odds with what the five authors cited above have published. Fred's history, up until the time she was sold out of British ownership in February 1859, follows:

<b>CHARITY</b>	1853-1856	Iron
O.N. 14548	1,339g 1,007n	243·0 x 30·6 x 22·6 feet
2-cyl. by George Forrester and Company, Liverpool; 700 IHP.		
23.5.1853: Launched by Jonathan Laird, Birkenhead (Yard No. 92).		
3.9.1853: Registered in the ownership of the African Steamship Company, London, as <b>CHARITY</b> .		
16.1.1854: Re-registered in the ownership of Jonathan Laird, J. Carmichael, and W.L. Bailey, Liverpool.		
7.4.1854: Sold to T. Rigge, Liverpool		
10.1854: Sold to the Canadian Steam Navigation Company (McKean, McLarty and Lamont, managers), Liverpool		
9.2.1856: Resold to T. Rigge, Liverpool.		
24.1.1857: Sold to E. Cropper, E. Johnson and J. Carmichael, Liverpool.		
16.2.1859: Register closed on sale to foreign owners at Hamburg.		

Fred's details end when the **Charity** leaves UK registration in 1859. All the books referred to agree that on her sale from the British flag she went to a Spanish company (Heaton and Haws give its name as Lineas de Vapores Espanoles Transatlanticos and her service as being Cadiz to Cuba) and was renamed **La Cubana**



(**Cubana** in Haws' case), but list the sale date as 1856, not 1859. (Cowden and Duffy list a previous sale [in 1855] to the Fabre Line of Marseille who they claim renamed her **Pictavia**. No other author mentions this, and in a French history of Cyprien Fabre the only **Pictavia** listed is a much newer ship, although it was bought from Elder Dempster). All the books insist that **La Cubana** was sold by her Spanish owners to Lamport & Holt in 1865.

The **La Cubana**, formerly the **Charity** of 1853, is also referred to in Jurgen Meyer's masterly work 'Hamburg Segelschiffes'. Meyer has her bought at auction in Hamburg in 1865 by Robert Sloman of Hamburg, who converted the steamer into a four-masted barque which he renamed **Palmerston**. Heaton, Haws and Cowden and Duffy pick up this sale to Sloman, but list the sellers as Lamport & Holt and date it 1872 or 1874. From then on accounts of her career generally concur. The following details of her post-1859 life are largely those according to Meyer:

*1859*: Sold to Lineas de Vapores Correos Espanoles Transatlanticos, Cadiz, Spain and renamed **La Cubana**.

*1865*: Sold at auction in Hamburg to Robert Sloman, Hamburg, Germany; converted into a four-masted barque and renamed **Palmerston**.

*11.1894*: Sold by Bruckner & Albers, Hamburg to A. Princeti, Genoa, Italy and renamed **Frederico**.

*18.1.1899*: Put into Greenock with storm damage during a voyage from Pensacola to Genoa with a cargo of wood.

*3.1899*: Condemned and later broken up.

So, how did the legend of the 1853-built **Charity** joining Lamport & Holt arise? We can no longer ask the late Noel Bonsor, who appears to have begun this myth, but there is a striking coincidence. 'Hamburg Segelschiffes' notes that in 1865 Sloman bought another iron steamer which had been built at Birkenhead, this time in 1857 by Canada Iron Works as the **Edith Byrne**. She, too, was converted to a sailing ship and the name she was given may explain some of the confusion: the **Edith Byrne** became Sloman's **Herschel**. Meyer's account mentions **La Cubana / Charity** and **Edith Byrne / Herschel** in the same sentence. Just possibly, something was lost in translation, the two Birkenhead-built ships became muddled, and it was assumed that Sloman's **Herschel** was the Lamport & Holt ship of that name.

The aim of this short article is not to castigate the authors named for perpetuating errors, but to exemplify how useful it is to check the information given in even the most reputable works. Indeed, the present writer would be pleased to hear from anyone who can find holes in the above work. ■

#### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Bill Schell and Ian Buxton for data which helped to confirm the existence of the 1864-built **Herschel**, and to Fred Hawks for details of the **Charity's** actual British career.

## JUST FANCY THAT !!!

### CANADIAN PACIFIC'S NEW 'CORPORATE LIVERY'

At the end of 1968 the Canadian Pacific fleet was treated to a new 'corporate image'. The famous buff funnel with the red and white chequered houseflag disappeared to make way for a new funnel design made up of two shades of green depicted in curious 'shapes' on a white background. Canadian Pacific described the new corporate painting (graffiti?) as 'a triangle to represent motion, a circle for global operations, and a square for stability'!

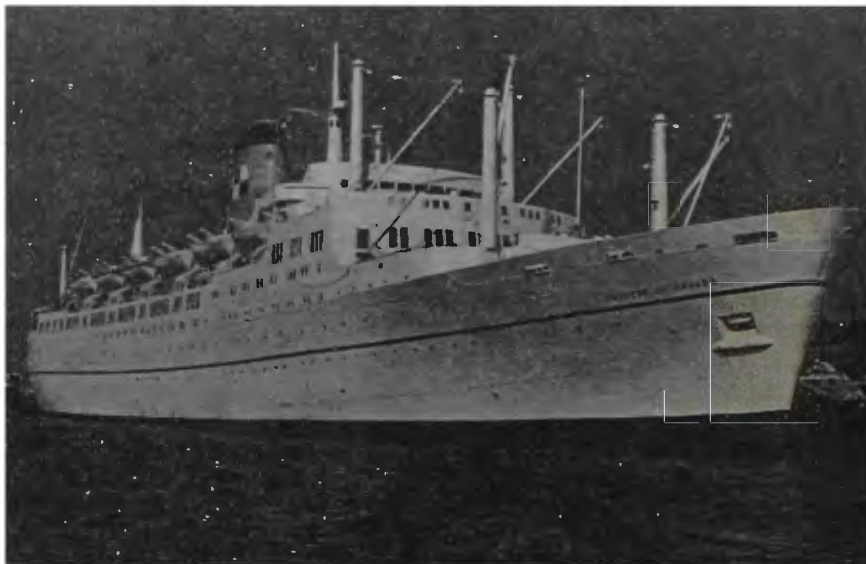
The narrow green sheer line on the hull was repainted in a much broader form, with the legend 'C P Ships' painted in large green letters amidships. Maybe the Canadian Pacific directors had been a little high on Lily the Pink's 'medicinal compound' when they authorised this atrocity which met with universal disapproval.

Canadian Pacific's Public Relations Representative, John D. MacGregor, commented: *"It would be a pity if we have given the impression that we have just slapped a new coat of paint in strange colours over our two ocean liners and left it at that. This has not been just an isolated 'paint job'. The entire Canadian Pacific transportation complex is undergoing a profound change to draw together under a unique symbol all the diverse entities that make up the whole. This major change affects not only our passenger liners, but the cargo fleet, international airline, railway system, hotels, trucking and express operations. The purpose of this mammoth task which will take up to five years to complete is to bring a clear and identifiable picture for all to see of this Company's worldwide activities."*

Fancy !!!

### COMPANY PILOT

The Canadian Pacific funnel colours, house-flag and distinctive names made its ships some of the most readily recognisable in Liverpool. Along with many other companies, Canadian Pacific retained the services of its own chosen Liverpool pilots by appropriation, but on one occasion neither of the company's two pilots was available, and the great liner was obliged to engage the services of a pilot from the general rota list. On reaching the bridge of the 'White Empress' Pilot Gordon Williams, a highly experienced man, was greeted by a master who was clearly less than happy at having a stranger on board. In somewhat superior tones the master demanded to know: *"Have you ever piloted a ship of this company before?"*, to which Pilot Williams replied: *"I'm not sure, Captain. Which company does she belong to?"*!!!



The Canadian Pacific liner "Empress of Canada" seen at Princes Landing Stage, Liverpool before her recent livery change

### ***Before and After***

Below the liner is seen at the same berth after the change had been carried out. Readers are left to judge for themselves which they prefer



## SAM CUNARD BEFORE FAME

*By LNRS Member Gordon Bodey*

A large number of accounts of the life and career of Sam Cunard begin in 1838 when the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty issued circulars seeking tenders for a steam packet service to carry H.M. mails across the Atlantic. At this time he was already fifty-one years old and known to all as Sam. Indeed, it was to be 1859, when he was seventy-two years old, that he formally became known as Samuel on being made a baronet. This article is a brief account of the man, his background, and some of his business activities before he achieved world-wide renown as a steamship owner.

Sam Cunard's ancestors were Quakers of Dutch stock who arrived in America in 1683; but whether directly from the Netherlands or, as otherwise reported, from Wales, is not known. However, what is known is that the family settled in an area adjacent to the Delaware River in territory that is now part of Pennsylvania. The head of the family was Thomas Cunard who had two or more sons.

Legend has it that the said Thomas and his sons, while clearing or tilling their land, unearthed a large cache of gold coins, thought to have been a pirate's hidden hoard; a not improbable occurrence given that the numerous rivers and creeks that drain into the Delaware had provided havens for such people for many years previously.

Whatever the origin of the literally new-found wealth – and it would be difficult to attribute it to any other source in those distant times in what was then a subsistence farming area – it was to prove sufficient to purchase a small ship in nearby Philadelphia (itself only founded in 1681 by the recent convert to the Quaker faith, William Penn the younger). Thus was the start of the Cunard family's pre-steamship shipping business.

By 1775, Thomas Cunard's descendants were ranked among the most respected and prosperous families of Philadelphia. The shipping business, founded almost a hundred years previously, was now being run by Robert Cunard and his son Abraham, and was trading successfully between the thirteen American colonies, Great Britain and the West Indies. However, the Cunard family were United Empire Loyalists, and after the revolution such loyalists were expelled from the fledgling United States of America.

Robert Cunard was eventually convicted of treasonable activity and banished from United States territory. He decided to depart with his family to the British colonies to the north-east of New England, having had his business, property and money confiscated. The Cunards sailed from New York in the spring of 1783 on board a small vessel carrying many other like-minded people. This was one of a fleet of twenty vessels which sailed that day, similarly loaded, heading for the colonies of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In all some 50,000 people were to follow the same route.

Robert's son Abraham, then aged twenty-seven, also left with his parents, and in their company was Thomas Murphy and his family, which included his daughter Margaret, then aged twenty-five. Her presence would prove fortuitous. Thomas

Murphy was a shipbuilder from Charleston, S.C., and in pre-revolutionary days had built vessels to the order of the Cunards.

The evacuees were landed at the mouth of the St John River, New Brunswick, and Robert Cunard took up a land grant near to St John. [The British Government, realising the potential value of the fleeing settlers' skills and experience, was to provide over a million pounds (a seemingly vast sum, but not so when averaged out) to feed, clothe and provide the migrants with land and lumber so that they could establish themselves quickly in their new refuges.] Thomas Murphy, meanwhile, decided to set up home at the new settlement of Rawdon, some thirty miles north of Halifax, N.S., whilst Abraham Cunard soon headed for Halifax.

Halifax had been established in 1749 and was already a thriving military and commercial centre, and was in the process of becoming one of the strongest naval and military bases outside Europe, and was to remain so until the main naval dockyard was run down and relocated to Bermuda in 1819.

Abraham arrived in Halifax as a very proficient carpenter and it was his skills as such that soon got him a job as a foreman artificer in the Royal Engineers' department at the Government lumber yard. His skills also enabled him to build his own house on a ten-acre land grant between the town and the naval base. On completion of the house he rode off to Rawdon to marry Margaret Murphy and then returned with her to Halifax. They were to have nine children: two daughters and seven sons.

Samuel Cunard was their second child and first son and was born on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1787. His only formal education consisted of three years spent at Halifax grammar school, although he apparently benefited from a good home-based education.

From quite early on Sam had a bent for the commercial life, which he soon used to turn to his financial advantage: small quantities of garden produce which he had grown himself he sold door-to-door, the profit realised then being used to purchase small parcels of items such as coffee and spices which were being auctioned off by merchants at the wharves, and which were also sold by him door-to-door.

Among his other qualities, Sam was noted as being extremely persevering, assiduous in his application to any task he took up, and meticulous in mastering even the smallest detail of any subject that interested him. He also took great pride from an early age in providing life's extras for himself by his own endeavours.

As a teenager Sam started his working life in the same lumber yard as his father and in 1804, at the age of seventeen, he was taken into his father's office for about a year; afterwards being sent to Boston to work in the office of a shipbroker friend of his father. He remained in Boston for three years, returning to Halifax just before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, first to become a trader, but soon entering into a shipping business with his father as Abraham Cunard & Son, trading to the Maritimes and U.S. east coast ports, and to the West Indies. On the death of his father in 1823, the business became known as S. Cunard & Co. (although his father had retired in 1820).

The earliest record to hand of Sam's shipping activities on his own account dates from 1814 when he was twenty-seven years old. He took on a contract at his own risk to deliver H.M. mails on a monthly schedule between Halifax and Bermuda. A year later he included Newfoundland and Boston in the run, and did so most successfully.

Within months of the start of this successful venture he married Miss Susan Duffus, the daughter of John Duffus, then a prominent Halifax businessman, on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1815 (his grandfather Robert was then in his eighties, but travelled from St John for the wedding). It is recorded that on Monday, two days later, his schooner **Margaret** arrived from Jamaica, and that Sam was at the wharf to superintend its discharge. Sadly, Sam was to become a widower with two sons and seven daughters to look after at the age of forty.

It is not known how many vessels in total Samuel Cunard had had a financial or commercial interest in before he gave himself over entirely to the British and North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. (the former title of the Cunard Steamship Company). He does not seem to have done this until at least 1853/54 – and then aged 67. However the following information has been derived from the \*Atlantic Canada Shipping Project, whose data lists 108 vessels as being registered in his name between 1821 and 1853, of which 106 were wholly owned by him; the remaining two being half-owned. [Five of the entries are thought to be duplicates, given that their place and year of build are the same, and that their dimensions are very similar]. From these records, the largest number of vessels in his ownership in any one year was twenty-seven, and between 1826 and 1834 inclusive, the average number was twenty-four.

The first vessels known to be wholly owned by Sam Cunard were registered to him as 'Merchant' in 1821. These were the **Desired**, a schooner of 76grt, built in 1811, and the **Mary Anne**, a brig of 98grt, built in 1819. These vessels traded for him for four and three years respectively, but half of the vessels bought by him subsequently were purchased to sell on – principally to British registration. Fifty-one such vessels were bought and retained for a year or less, three more were lost at sea, and one he had broken up. Thirty-seven of the vessels he owned in this category were either built to order, or bought off the stocks – eleven almost certainly from Lyle's shipyard at Dartmouth Cove across the bay from Halifax. Cunard's house-flag was a square sea-blue pennant with a large white star in the middle.

Of the fifty-one vessels apparently sold on, forty-five passed to U.K. registration, including fifteen each to Liverpool and London; the other six to Canadian ports. Nevertheless, many vessels bought by Sam Cunard traded in his ownership for considerable periods, including twenty-two for five years or more, fourteen of them for over eight years; and the **George**, a schooner of 114grt, traded in his name for twenty-two years until lost at sea in 1850.

Some vessels were engaged in failed whaling ventures. These had commenced under A. Cunard & Son, as early as the summer of 1817, with the brig **Rachel** which went aground and was lost on the coast near Belle Isle, Newfoundland. In January 1827, the newly-completed **Pacific** – a two-deck ship of 402grt – sailed for the whaling grounds in the South Pacific. She was away for three-and-a-half years but was not a success. Another of his vessels, the brig **Chebucto**, was employed in the 1820s under contract to the British Government as a fisheries protection vessel to keep American fishermen outside the three-mile zone.

S. Cunard & Co.'s longest serving vessel was the **Pluto**, a steamer built at New Glasgow, N.S., in 1850 and registered to him in the same year. Of the vessels under consideration, this was the only one that was registered to him as 'Shipping Co.' \*Atlantic Canada Shipping Project, *Ships and Seafarers of Atlantic Canada*, by kind permission of Memorial University of Newfoundland.

rather than 'merchant'. She is given as being of 37grt with dimensions of 90ft x 18ft x 10ft, and was retained in the company's service until broken up in 1876, eleven years after Samuel Cunard's death. The largest of the vessels owned on his own account was the **William Penn**, a ship of 826grt; again owned for only a year from when she was built at Pictou in 1847 before being transferred to London registration.

Sam Cunard's interest in the Canadian side of his shipping business continued long after his entry into the transatlantic trade [although its management devolved to his second son <sup>1</sup>William when Sam moved to reside permanently in London in 1847]: he was to purchase twenty-three of his vessels after 1843, the majority of which were for selling-on, with only five trading for the company for longer than three years. Significantly, no acquisitions are recorded between 1839 and 1843 – the period when he was wholly engaged in setting up the company (and struggling to ensure its viability) that was to become the Cunard Steamship Company.

Sam Cunard's earliest financial interest in steam propelled vessels occurred after a visit to England in 1831 where he made the journey from Liverpool to Manchester by the new steam train. He was thus already aware of the potential of steam propulsion when, in the same year, he and one or more of his <sup>2</sup>brothers invested some money [there were 144 subscribers in all] in the project to build the p.s. **Royal William** at Quebec. This vessel's principal operations were to have been on the Pictou, N.S. to Quebec run, but it was decided to send her to London instead to be sold. In September 1833 she crossed the Atlantic from Pictou to the Isle of Wight in 17 days (but only part-time under steam power), convincing Sam that the future would soon lie in steam-propelled vessels.

In the catalogue of vessels under consideration, apart from the **Pluto**, Sam Cunard owned three steam/sail vessels: **Albion** (37grt), built in 1835 at Pictou, purchased in 1845 and scrapped the same year; **Curlew** (321grt), built at Dumbarton, Scotland in 1853, purchased the same year and lost off Bermuda in 1856; thirdly **Ospray** (178grt), a two-deck vessel built at Port Glasgow, Scotland, in 1848, and purchased by S. Cunard & Co. in 1853, and which was to continue in company service until 1869 when she was transferred to St Johns, Newfoundland. In addition, and a seemingly anomalous purchase, there was the paddle steamer **Rose** (57grt), built at Blackwall, England in 1832. She was lost at sea in the year of purchase, 1853.

In his pre-transatlantic steamship days, besides running his Canadian shipping business, Sam Cunard also acted as colonial agent for several British companies, including the Honourable East India Company whose **Countess of Harcourt** (Captain Delafons, RN) arrived at Halifax on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1826 with 6,715 chests of tea from Canton, the first of many such shipments to the Cunard wharf. [It was the East India Co's Secretary, James Cyrus Melville, who would later introduce Cunard to Robert Napier, the builder of his first transatlantic steamships]. Just six weeks after this event his brig **Susan**, schooner **Henrietta**, and mail packet schooner **Lady Ogle** were engaged in exporting tea to the West Indies.

<sup>1</sup>Sam Cunard's eldest son, Edward, was the manager of the Company's New York office for many years before succeeding his father on the latter's death on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1865 at the age of seventy-eight.

<sup>2</sup> Five of Samuel Cunard's brothers were also involved in shipping, but to a much lesser degree: only Joseph was involved to any great extent (and he had to be rescued from financial ruin at one stage by brother Sam) and then as a trader of ships. Of eighty vessels bought and registered to him in the above period, seventy five were transferred to U.K. registration within a year.

Also, Sam Cunard had extensive farmland holdings on Prince Edward Island and a direct interest in the mining business; and, in company with one or more of his brothers (as Cunard Bros.), he held large tracts of forest around Chatham, N.B. on the Miramichi River for the felling and export of its lumber.

In the latter business (which, although doing an immense trade was badly managed), Cunard was competing with the strong and well-managed firm of Gilmour, Rankin & Co., based at Douglastown across the river from Chatham. It is not known how much business and politics were intertwined at the time but in the Northumberland County, N.B., elections of 1839, Cunard Bros. supported the opposition candidate Williston, while Gilmour, Rankin & Co. supported the winner J.A. Street. During the election period a deal of argument involving the use of axe handles ensued between partisan employees of the two firms which led to two companies of troops being sent from St John to restore order.

It was the looming demise of his lumber business that drove Cunard across the Atlantic in 1838 to seek a resurrection of his fortune in the prospective transatlantic steamship business. Rightly gauging that this was the way shipping was about to develop, Cunard staked his future on it. However, his eventual success in this venture has been well chronicled in many other accounts of his post-1838 life and will not be repeated here. What is not usually written about Sam Cunard's early years in the Atlantic steamship trade is how precarious was his toehold, and how close he and the fledgling company came to financial disaster.

Prior to the steamship company becoming established financially, its owner was virtually insolvent (although for many years before that he was a wealthy man; at one point being worth an estimated £200,000). In 1841 he was at Prescott's bank in London with regard to his financial predicament, and during his visit a process server arrived with a warrant for his arrest. It seems that his creditors, who had to this time been cooperative, had heard that he was about to abscond to America in order to reside outside the jurisdiction of the British courts and renege on repayment of his debts. They were alarmed enough to invoke the law.

Somehow Cunard became aware of his impending arrest and did literally escape by the back door. He made his way to Merseyside and persuaded James Gibbs to assist him to effect an escape to America (although not, as thought at the time, to escape his commitments). He was hidden at some place between Chester and Eastham and, on the night before departure, in a cottage at Shodwell near the river bank below Eastham [this was some 1½ miles north of Eastham and now long buried under the industrial area of Bromborough]. Gibbs' boatman rowed him well down river before the outward bound Cunard steamer slipped her moorings in mid-river. It was known that he would try to leave on this steamer and the writ servers stayed on board until all the moorings were off before disembarking. Ten minutes after getting underway, and while the writ servers were still heading for the Liverpool shore, the steamer slackened speed allowing Gibbs' boat to bring up on the port side and for Sam to scramble aboard. He reportedly had to effect a similar escape some time later – on this occasion off Holyhead.

How close the company came to dying in infancy can be judged from the following notice that appeared in the Halifax, N.S., press:



**APRIL 11<sup>th</sup> 1842. HALIFAX.**

'The Bank of Nova Scotia has saved businessman Samuel Cunard's empire<sup>1</sup>. The Resident Director and Manager of the General Mining Association has been losing money on his timber tracts, his Prince Edward island farmlands, and his new steamers. 'The Bank has approved Cunard's application for a sizeable loan, but everything he owns is mortgaged. Two "keepers of his person" have been assigned to make sure that Cunard does not leave Nova Scotia without the bank's knowledge.'

The bank's decision to rescue him, although no doubt based on sound business criteria, may have been weighted a fraction by Sam Cunard's earlier association with the establishment of Nova Scotia's first bank known as Cogswell's Bank, later as Collin's Bank, and then as the Halifax Banking Co.

Fortunately for British maritime commerce, its business acumen and judgement were amply vindicated. ■

<sup>1</sup>The General Mining Association was formed by the creditors of the Duke of York to run the Albion coal mine (six miles from Pictou), which had been given to the duke by his brother, George IV, to help him solve his chronic debt problems. Sam Cunard was appointed its agent in January 1827.

**Acknowledgements, Sources and References**

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*Life of Sir Samuel Cunard*, a paper by Abraham M. Payne read to the Nova Scotia Historical Society, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1905.

*Samuel Cunard, Pioneer of the Atlantic Steamship*, Kay Grant, 1967.

**ALEXANDRA TOWING COMPANY'S "EGERTON" OF 1911**



The Society has been approached for line drawings of Alexandra Towing's tender **Egerton**, built by J. Cran & Company of Leith in 1911. The **Egerton** was a familiar sight on the Mersey for 50 years, before being broken up at Mostyn in 1961.

Can we help – any information to the Editor, please.

## MERSEY FERRY MISCELLANY

*by the Editor*

### THE 'EGREMONT' – STILL GOING STRONG!

The **Egremont** was built by Philip & Son at Dartmouth in 1951 and launched on 10<sup>th</sup> December. She was a sister vessel to the **Leasowe** (launched seven months earlier), and the pair were intended for the Seacombe and New Brighton services, plus a limited amount of cruising. The **Egremont** could carry 1,472 passengers when on ferry services and 700 when cruising.

The **Egremont** ran her trials on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1952 and achieved 13.38 knots in rough conditions, with ten-foot waves reported. Philip & Son noted (with some satisfaction) that the foredeck remained dry throughout, despite the inclement weather. The **Egremont's** delivery voyage left Dartmouth at 19.00 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1952, and she was tied up alongside New Brighton landing stage at 05.30 on 2<sup>nd</sup> April.

The **Egremont** came in for some criticism in that there was no forward gangway door, and this hindered embarkation and disembarkation at peak periods, when all passengers had to use the sole gangway aft. Apart from her regular ferry duties, the **Egremont** made occasional cruises along the Manchester Ship Canal.

Wallasey Corporation was ever on the lookout for new opportunities, and at the end of 1968 it was approached by Menai Bridge Urban District Council who wished to provide a seasonal cruising service to Llandudno; the previous operator, P & A Campbell, having withdrawn the **St Trillo**. Wallasey Ferries made a detailed assessment and it was intended to use the **Egremont** which would have required minimum alterations. The master would have required a Board of Trade Home Trade Master's Certificate, and a Menai Strait's pilot's licence. However the scheme fell through because it was estimated that it would require a minimum of 50,000 passengers a year to break even, which seemed an unrealistic target.

The 1968 Transport Act stripped the Birkenhead and Wallasey Ferries of their autonomy and both became merged in a single authority. In the name of economy and rationalisation, the new joint service policy committee pronounced the **Leasowe** and **Egremont** as being surplus to requirements in the mid 1970s. The **Egremont** was withdrawn in 1975 and was laid up in Morpeth Dock for a year. During this time she sprang a leak causing serious flooding and much damage to her electrical circuits.

In November 1975 the **Egremont** was sold to Frederick Oldham of Liverpool who removed her machinery, prior to the vessel being sold on to the Island Cruising Club of Salcombe. The **Egremont** left the Mersey for the last time under tow on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1976 bound for Salcombe in Devon where the Island Cruising Club intended to use her as its headquarters ship. Apart being towed to Falmouth for bottom painting and maintenance, the old Mersey ferry has not moved over the last 32 years.

In its April 2008 'Newsletter' the *Friends of the Ferries* describes the **Egremont** as follows: 'Accommodation was built on the upper deck, and additional facilities were built into the engine room space, including a bar. A fully equipped

galley and dining room, also – more recently - offices, have been added to the engine room area. The **Egremont** now has sleeping accommodation for around 85 people. Over the last 32 years many thousands of visitors have stayed on the **Egremont** and learned to sail. In 2002 the **Egremont** was added to the National Register of Historic Vessels.



The **Egremont** at her anchorage at Salcombe. (photo: *Friends of the Ferries*)

In appearance the **Egremont** has changed very little and is instantly recognisable with many of her original features still in place. One little known fact which came to light recently is that the **Egremont** was built with fittings for a rear gun. A case of 'be prepared'!

The Island Cruising Club, the owners of the **Egremont**, is going from strength to strength, and have plans for a dry-dock survey for the old ship at the end of 2008. It is hoped that there will be sufficient funds to upgrade the accommodation.'

It is a very pleasant change to be able to report a real success story of ship preservation in the case of the former Wallasey ferry **Egremont**.

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### "ROYAL DAFFODIL II" LOST IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The *Friends of the Ferries* April 2008 'Newsletter' reports that the Wallasey Ferry **Royal Daffodil II**, which served on the Mersey from 1958 until 1977, sank in the Mediterranean on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2007. At the time of her loss she was sailing under the Turkish flag as the **Dolphin I**, a passenger ro-ro vessel on service between Mersin, Turkey and Famagusta, Cyprus. The vessel took on water during heavy weather and sustained steering gear failure, subsequently foundering about 20 miles off Cape Andreas. The master and the first mate were reported as missing, but the remaining eight crew members were rescued.

The **Royal Daffodil II** was built by James Lamont & Co. at Port Glasgow and was delivered to Wallasey County Borough Council in 1958. Just 19 years later the vessel was disposed of for £55,000 for further service in Greek waters. Renamed **Ioulis Keas II**, she was extensively rebuilt and became unrecognisable as the former Mersey ferry. ■

## THE 'LEASOWE' SAILS TO MOSTYN

*On the evening of Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 1953 the Wallasey Ferry **Leasowe** made a special excursion from Liverpool to the port of Mostyn, in the Dee estuary. This account has been compiled from the personal log of Raymond Brandreth, and from an article in the following evening's 'Liverpool Echo'.*

### MOSTYN 'FERRY' SAILS AGAIN SHOAL WATER FOILS DEE 'EXPLORERS' CIVIC SOCIETY'S MOSTYN CRUISE

For the first time in almost sixty years, a passenger ferry left Liverpool bound for Mostyn on Tuesday evening, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1953. The vessel was the Wallasey ferryboat **Leasowe** and on board were nearly 500 members of the Merseyside Civic Society and their guests, off for a five-hour 'voyage of exploration' into the River Dee.

The **Leasowe** left Liverpool landing stage at 6.10pm and proceeded down the Crosby and Queens Channels, passing the Crosby Light Float at 7.05pm. After passing the Bar Lightship the **Leasowe** proceeded towards the Point of Ayr and arrived off Mostyn breakwater at 8.45pm. The weather was very hazy with a moderate to fresh SE'ly breeze.



The **Leasowe** running her trials in Start Bay on 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1951

A disappointment awaited the passengers, however, as an announcement from the bridge revealed that there was neither enough water nor enough time to enter the port. After blowing three long blasts on her whistle, the **Leasowe** commenced the return passage to Liverpool.

There was one passenger on board the **Leasowe** who remembered the days when there was a regular passenger service between Liverpool and Mostyn. This was Mr H. Ferguson, the 73-year old Trinity House Sub-Commissioner for Dee Pilotage, who when in his teens, could remember the paddle steamer **Swiftsure** making the passage in two-and-a-half hours. Mr Ferguson commented: "*The trouble with running a service in those days was that the boats had to be run according to the tides in the Rock Channel, and not according to the times which were convenient to passengers.*"

Councillor Stanley Morris (chairman of Wallasey Corporation Ferries' Committee), who was on board, maintained that the River Dee was being 'wasted' as a thoroughfare for passengers and trade. He congratulated the Civic Society on 're-exploring' the old road to North Wales which had not been in use for more than sixty years.

The **Leasowe** returned to Liverpool via the Rock Channel and to guide the ferry through the treacherous sandbanks there were two Wallasey ferry captains on board – Captain E. Brindley (the regular master of the **Leasowe**) and Captain A. Peterkin – plus a Wallasey Corporation ferries' pilot, Mr D. Barber and Mr W. Gerrard, the senior Dee pilot.

Also on board was Marine Superintendent of the Wallasey Ferries, Captain G.H. Johnson, who had spent several days plotting the course for the trip, allowing for a ten-foot draft in his calculations – although the normal draft of the **Leasowe** was just eight feet.

During the voyage the **Leasowe** was continuously in touch with her sister the **Royal Iris** by means of 'walkie-talkie'. In addition there was contact with the Liverpool port radar system so that if the 'expedition' should encounter fog the ship could be guided home.

Among those on board were four apprentice Liverpool pilots, gaining experience of the Wirral and Dee aspects of Liverpool Bay.

Approaching New Brighton on the return passage, Captain Brindley and his assistants had their most difficult task: to negotiate a bend in the Rock Channel which has only nine feet of water at low tide. They were successful and the Civic Society passengers arrived safely back at Liverpool landing stage at 11.05pm. ■

*As a result of the merger of the Birkenhead and Wallasey ferries following the 1968 Transport Act, the **Leasowe** became the first vessel to be declared redundant. Early in 1974 the **Leasowe** was sold for £34,000 for further service in Greek waters and on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1974 she left the Mersey under her own power, renamed **Naias II** and registered at Panama. Her new owners completely rebuilt the former **Leasowe**, so as to make her unidentifiable as a former Mersey ferry.*

### THE MONDAY FACILITY

**Due to the annual stocktaking at the Archives and Library at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, the 'Monday Facility' will not be available to Members from mid-December 2008 until late January 2009.**

**The last Monday will be 15<sup>th</sup> December 2008, and the usual Monday arrangements will re-commence on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009.**

## DEMOLITION OF FORMER NORTH WALES STEAMER

*The **St Elian**, the last surviving ship of the Liverpool & North Wales Steamship Company, is being demolished at Salerno. Work began on breaking up the 89-year old vessel on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2008 after a long dispute between the owner and the local authority.*

Following the sale of the **St Trillo** in 1921, the Liverpool & North Wales Steamship Company replaced her with its first twin-screw steamer. She was the **Hörnnum**, a vessel originally built as a minesweeper for the German Navy, but not completed until after the war. J.C. Tecklenborg of Wesermünde completed the **Hörnnum** in 1919 and she went to the Hamburg-Amerika Line as a passenger tender, and also operated on the Hamburg to Heligoland service. When purchased by the North Wales Company in 1922, her name was changed to **St Elian** (2).

She looked a smart ship on the North Wales service, even if she could not disguise her obvious 'made in Germany' appearance. The **St Elian's** arrival in the fleet re-opened many old sailings, and for the first time in many years passengers were able to visit Bardsey Island. Frequent excursions were made to Blackpool and Holyhead. In fact the **St Elian** was a veritable 'maid of all work'. A surviving handbill announces the **St Elian** as taking a day excursion from Liverpool to Blackpool on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July 1923 at 2.45pm, allowing one and three-quarter hours ashore, at a return fare of 4/- (20p).



The **St Elian** in the Mersey approaching Liverpool

In 1926 the **St Elian** was laid up because of the coal shortage caused by the General Strike. Such supplies as the Company were able to obtain later in the season were allocated to the paddle steamers **St Elvies** and **Snowdon**. The **St Elian** resumed her North Wales sailings in 1927, making her last run for the Company on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September from Menai Bridge to Liverpool.

In December 1927 it was announced that the **St Elian** had been sold to the Societa Partenopea Anonima di Navigazione of Naples to operate to the islands of Capri and Ischia. She sailed from the Mersey for Italy on 26<sup>th</sup> December. The **St Elian** was renamed **Partenope** on her arrival in Naples in January 1928, survived the war, and her name was changed again to **Ischia** in October 1949. Following her withdrawal from passenger service in 1972, the former **St Elian** was beached at Salerno and renamed **Bucaniero**, where she became a restaurant/bar.

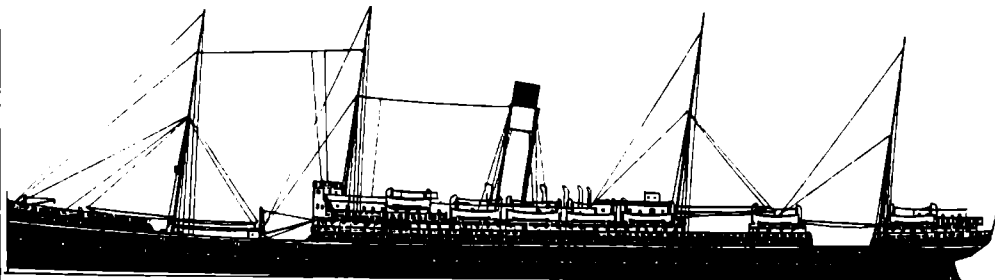
With the demolition of the old **St Elian**, the last surviving link with the Liverpool & North Wales Steamship Company has finally disappeared. ■

**CORRECTION**  
**DEFINITELY NOT THE 'SOMERSETSHIRE'**

*LNRS Member Geoff Holmes writes:*

The photo (frontispiece) of the June 2008 '*Bulletin*' is, most definitely, NOT the **Somersetshire**. I am almost certain that it is the **Oxfordshire** of 1912. The **Somersetshire** was a motor ship and had a short upright funnel and only two masts. Also, she spent most of her career trooping and was painted in MOT colours.

The presence of the **St Tudno** dates the photograph to later than 1926. Given that the **Oxfordshire** is dressed overall, I would suggest that the occasion was either the 1935 Silver Jubilee or King George VI's Coronation in 1937.



Bibby Line's **Oxfordshire** was built by Harland & Wolff at Belfast in 1912 and was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> June. On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1914 the **Oxfordshire** became the first British merchant ship to be requisitioned, two days prior to the declaration of war. She was converted into a hospital ship at Tilbury and commissioned on 11<sup>th</sup> August. The **Oxfordshire** was decommissioned on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1919, having made 235 voyages and carried 50,000 wounded (the highest total of any hospital ship in the war).

In 1920 the **Oxfordshire** was refurbished by her builders and converted to burn oil fuel before resuming her commercial service.

Just 19 years later the **Oxfordshire** was again converted into a hospital ship for the duration of the Second World War. After the defeat of Japan in 1945 she was involved with the repatriation of the wounded from Hong Kong. It was not until June 1948 that the **Oxfordshire** was decommissioned, after which Harland & Wolff at Liverpool reconditioned her.

After a spell of trooping duties, the old ship was sold in February 1951 to the Pan Islamic Steamship Company of Karachi and renamed **Safina-el-Arab**. She sailed on the Karachi - Jeddah Haj run between June and October each year before being broken up at Karachi in 1958 after 46 years of impeccable service. ■

## SANITARY INSPECTOR FLIES OVER MERSEY

*(from Shipbuilding and Shipping Record, 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1955)*

After a sanitary inspector had made a special aeroplane trip to find out where the Mersey's smoke pall was coming from, three Liverpool steamboat owners were fined by the Liverpool stipendiary magistrates for permitting their ships to emit excessive smoke.

They were involved with the first cases brought since the War, the summonses being issued under the Liverpool Corporation Acts of 1921 and 1936, which make it an offence for certain types of shipping to emit excessive smoke between the Rock Light, Gladstone Dock and Warrington.

William Cooper & Sons were fined £3 in respect of their dredger **James H. Cooper**; the Rea Towing Company was fined £3 in each instance concerning their tugs **Applegarth** and **Aysgarth**; and Harold Edwards, trading as the Liverpool Screw Towing Company, was fined £3 in respect of the tug **Holm Cock**.

The vessels were in the vicinity of Waterloo Dock, Liverpool. It was alleged that in each case the furnaces were so negligently used that the smoke was excessive.



*The Isle of Man Steam Packet Company's **Victoria** emits clouds of dense black smoke as she leaves Liverpool for Douglas. She was exempt from the Liverpool Corporation Acts controlling smoke emissions by ships on the Mersey!*

The court was told about a drive by Liverpool health authorities against smoke pollution from smaller vessels in the river. It was little use going ahead with a smokeless zone on land unless smoke from the Mersey could be stopped, said Mr A.J. Stocks, prosecuting. However, a transatlantic liner was not included in the Corporation Acts and could emit as much smoke as she liked, without being liable.

It was stated for William Cooper and Sons that they had spent a considerable amount on fitting a patent gadget to two of their ships which, it was claimed, would largely eliminate smoke, but it was found that the expected results had not followed. The Company's masters, engineers and firemen had been warned against the smoke problem.



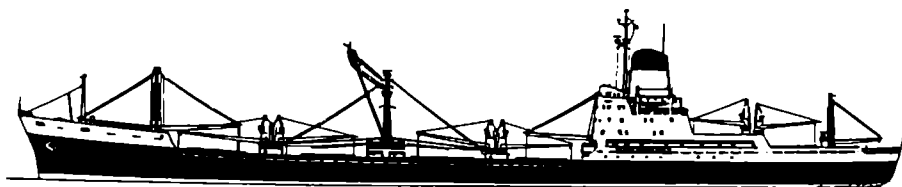
# *The Liverpool Nautical Research Society*

(Founded in 1938)

## THE BULLETIN

Volume 52, No. 4, March, 2009

*Editor : John Shepherd*



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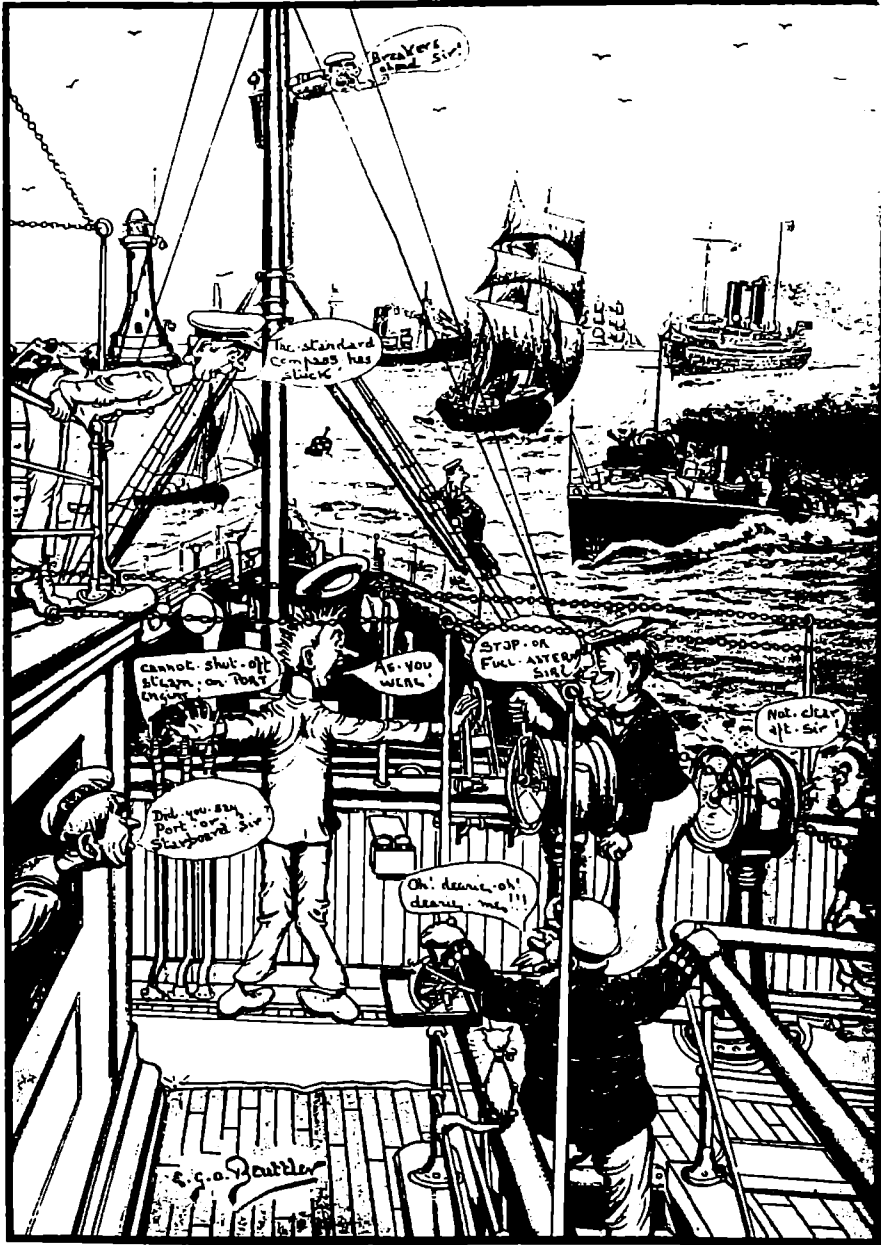
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*Front Cover:*

The Blue Funnel Liner **Priam** of 1966 (*see article on page 36*)

'The Liverpool Nautical Research Society publishes a hugely readable quarterly *Bulletin* and has done so since 1938, when some like-minded maritime folk got together on Merseyside to gather records and facts that might otherwise have gone missing. Whatever happens, the Liverpool Nautical Research Society will doubtless put it all into perspective' (*Lloyd's List, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2008*)



*Another Beuttler cartoon, from early in the 20th century entitled 'An officer at last - Impressions of his first watch.'*

## THE ELDER DEMPSTER LINER "ABA" OF 1920

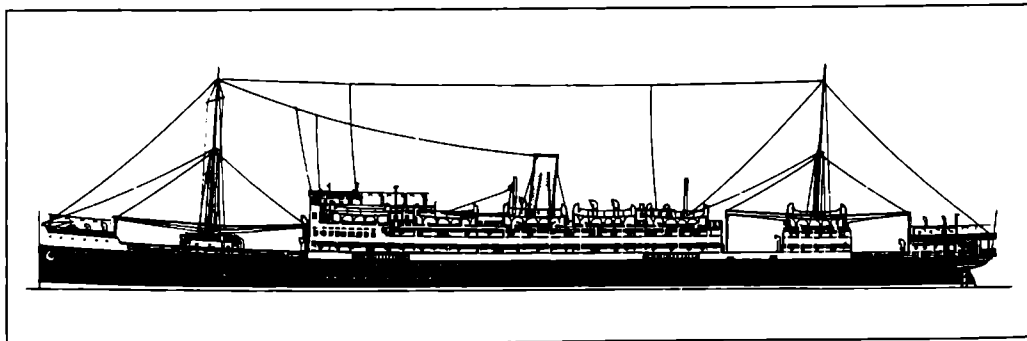
*by the Editor*

*Many service personnel who survived the Second World War had reason to be thankful for the magnificent non-combatant record of the hospital ship service.*

*With the war years now fast receding in memory, it is an appropriate time to recall the service of one particular hospital ship – the former Elder Dempster liner *Aba*; one of the few requisitioned hospital ships to survive the battles of the Mediterranean theatre of war.*

**ABA** : Official No: 141887 : Steel twin-screw motorship  
Built by Barclay, Curle & Co. at Glasgow, 1918. Yard No. 519  
Gross Tonnage: 7,937, Nett: 4,596. Length: 450.5ft, Breadth: 55.8ft.  
2 x B&W oil engines, built by Harland & Wolff at Glasgow. 14 knots on 20 tons/day

*Aba is an important trade centre in Owerri Province of Nigeria*



The **Aba** was laid down for the Imperial Russian Government in 1916. She was one of the earliest large motorships. Work was suspended in October 1917 following the Russian Revolution, and the vessel was taken over by the Shipping Controller. Almost a year later, in September 1918, the ship was completed as a four-masted, funnel-less cargo vessel for the Glen Line, named **Glenapp**.

Two years later, in 1920, the vessel was taken over by the British & African Steam Navigation Company. She was completely rebuilt as a passenger liner with accommodation for 225 first-class and 140 second and third-class passengers. Her original four masts were reduced to two and one traditional-type funnel fitted (*see line drawing above*). The vessel was renamed **Aba** and ran her trials on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1921 and commenced her first voyage three months later from Liverpool to West Africa. The **Aba** was the first diesel-engined passenger liner.

On 4<sup>th</sup> December 1929 the **Aba** left Liverpool for Lagos with 128 passengers and the Christmas mails. The following day she ran into severe weather conditions off Kinsale, County Cork, which badly damaged the steering gear and buckled the after

portion of the steering house. The manual steering gear was engaged, but successive pounding by the heavy seas damaged this, rendering the **Aba** almost helpless. A distress signal was sent out which was answered by Elder Dempster's **Apapa** and **Egba**. Later the salvage tug **Zwarte Zee** put a line aboard the **Aba** and towed her towards Queenstown where she was assisted into harbour by the local tug **Morsecock**.

On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1931 the **Aba** grounded off the Customs Wharf, Lagos lagoon. She was refloated with the assistance of Elder Dempster's **Barracoo** after the efforts of the Nigerian Marine tugs failed. In November 1931 the **Aba** was laid up at Dartmouth and remained idle until April 1933 when she was transferred to Elder Dempster Lines Ltd. In January 1939 she became the reserve mail steamer.

In September 1939 the **Aba** was requisitioned by the Admiralty and converted into a hospital ship with 484 berths, 83 medical staff and 115 crew. She was commissioned on 9<sup>th</sup> September and based at Scapa Flow. She was under the command of Captain W. Dennitts, who remained her master until April 1941 when Captain A.H. Crapper took over. On 14<sup>th</sup> October, the **Aba** assisted in rescuing survivors from the torpedoed battleship **Royal Oak**. The injured were landed at Kirkwall.

*The chief officer of the **Aba** from 1940 to 1943 was Mr G.W. Neely, and he wrote the following account of his time on board:*

“Early in 1940 the **Aba** was ordered to proceed to Liverpool to fit out as a fully equipped Military Hospital Ship, resulting in her being rated as the finest vessel in the Hospital Ship Service.

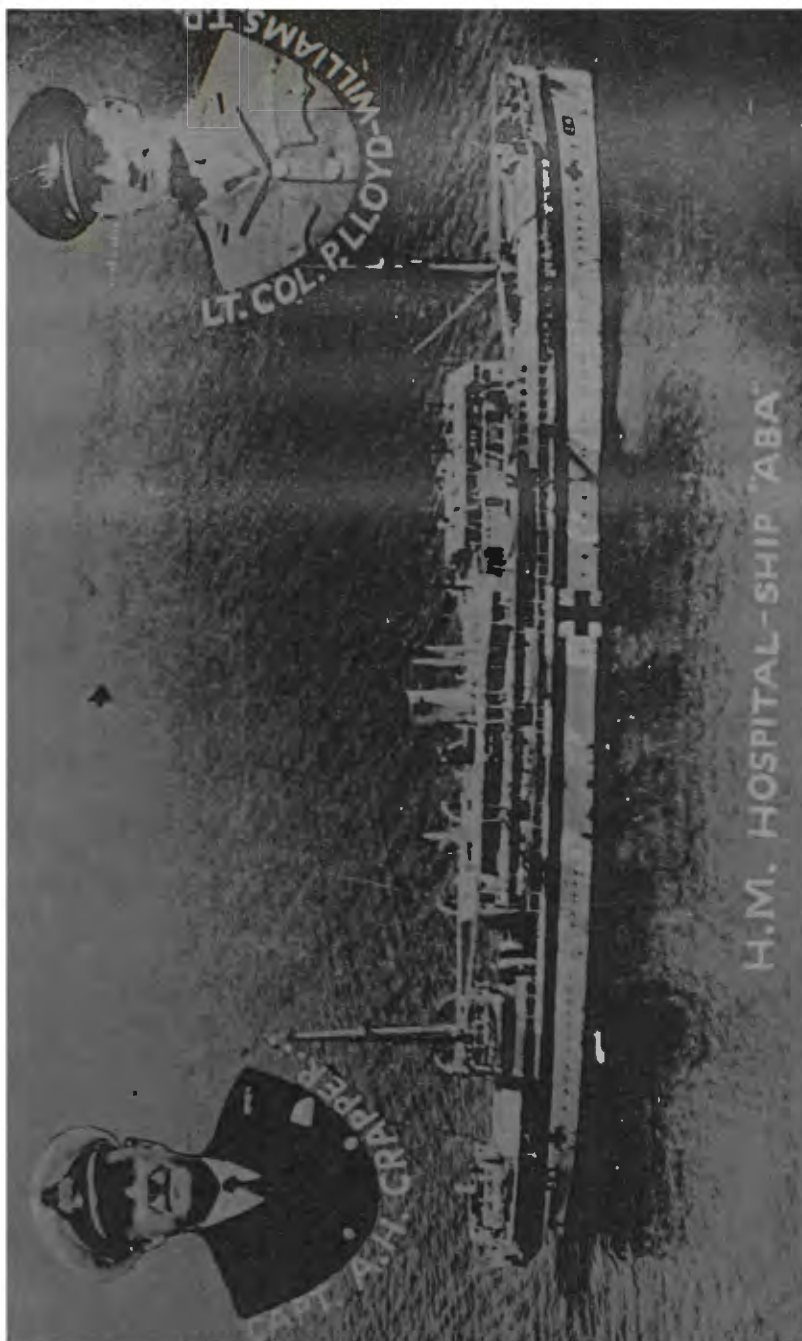
“Leaving for Norway during April 1940 she played her part in rendering merciful aid to the sick and wounded of that ill starred campaign, and worked there until the evacuation was completed; then, with a full load of patients, plus the Harstadt Medical Staffs, Doctors and Nurses, she returned to Liverpool.

“May 1940 was spent in improving the hospital fittings on the vessel, in the light of experience gained in Norway, most of this work being carried out whilst the vessel lay at anchor in the Mersey.

“On 5<sup>th</sup> July 1940 the **Aba** was ordered to the Middle East, her first stop being Gibraltar, where she had to await a Safe Conduct Permit from the Italian Government to proceed through the Mediterranean. This must at first have been granted, and then later rescinded, for we received our orders to sail for Alexandria, and were actually off Oran when we recalled by wireless and instructed to return to Gibraltar, from where we were routed to Egypt via the Cape and Red Sea route.

“On our arrival in Egypt, the **Aba** conveyed wounded from Solum, Mersa Matruh or Tobruk as the line of battle ebbed and flowed, taking patients to Alexandria or Haifa as required. The run from Alexandria to Tobruk was well named ‘*The Bomb Alley of the Middle East*’.

“Then Greece fell to the Nazis, and the **Aba** sailed to Piraeus to pick up the wounded. She was the last ship to leave that devastated port on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1941 and when she did so she brought away everyone and everything possible. Over 800 wounded were embarked, plus 150 nursing sisters. Captain Dennitts was mentioned in



*H.M. Hospital Ship ABA with her Captain and Senior Medical Officer*

dispatches. Dive bombers hurtled around wreaking great destruction wherever their bombs fell: apparently our own aircraft were in no position to cope with them.

“Next came the Battle of Crete and the **Aba** voyaged to Souda Bay, but fortunately she left Crete just before the storm broke. On passage to Alexandria from Crete she was heavily bombed twice in one day. At about noon on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1941, an Italian bomber rained down a stick of eight bombs, all scoring near misses, and at about 6.30pm we were very heavily attacked by twelve Stukas which would undoubtedly have sunk us but for the protection afforded by the cruisers **Coventry** and **Dido** and the seven destroyers which were accompanying them. German Radio stated that these attacks were made because we reputedly had the King of Greece on board, along with his entire suite. This was untrue.

“When Rommel pushed the Eighth Army to Alexandria and that port was vacated, the **Aba** was the last ship to steam out of the deserted harbour. When the tide of victory turned in our favour and General Montgomery drove the enemy back, the **Aba** was again ready and for these services the ship and her staff were cited in a Special Order of the Day by General Montgomery.

“Under strict adherence to the Laws of the Geneva Convention, little can be done for the protection of a hospital ship, for the one and sufficient reason that they should not require any form of protection at all. I felt that it would be in the company’s interests if I could view the ship from the air at various altitudes and so satisfy myself that her Red Cross markings were as efficient as possible, and visible at every angle of approach. At Aden, through the courtesy of the R.A.F., I was able to go up in a bomber and see how the ship appeared from the air for myself. We flew over at various altitudes, and I asked the pilot to make a mock bombing attack on the ship, but at all altitudes and under all conditions, the **Aba** could be very clearly identified as a hospital ship.

“Two suggestions I would like to make for the safety of hospital ships, and the **Aba** in particular, are:

1. In the first place, when a hospital ship is in a blacked-out port, and especially so on moonlight nights, she should be permitted to put to sea, and to switch on her lights when well clear of the port. Anyone will well realise that a white ship, on a moonlit sea or harbour is too good a mark to miss, and we have had this experience only far too often in various ports. The ship can return at daylight to complete the loading of the wounded in safety.
2. Secondly, and most important of all, is that the engines should be maintained in as near perfect order as possible, ready for any emergency. This can only be the case if time to carry out repairs and the necessary overhauls is granted to the engineers.

“During my three years aboard the **Aba** it was my experience that we were far too often, needlessly and casually, put on such short notice of readiness such as four or six hours; only on very rare occasions being granted a definite time of say several clear days in which the engineers could work on the repairs.

“These short notices of readiness were virtually useless to the engine room staff, and repairs that were urgently needed had to be postponed indefinitely. These conditions caused the engines to deteriorate seriously, culminating in repairs that took

many weeks and which must have been very expensive to the company; whereas if time had been allowed for us to effect these repairs before they became so urgent – a few days would have sufficed – the general running and efficiency of the machinery could have been improved.

“In conclusion, I would like to mention the very satisfactory relationship and co-operation that existed at all times between the ship’s personnel and the military staff.”

G.W. Neely,  
Chief Officer,  
mv **Aba**

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### H.M.S. “**COVENTRY**” AND THE “**ABA**”

Captain Crapper, when writing of the incident of the air attack on the **Aba** off Crete on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1941, is more specific than Mr Neely:

“We were deliberately attacked by eight enemy dive-bombers, and also machine-gunned. I was compelled to send out an SOS (*‘Am being attacked by enemy aircraft’*), having been attacked by a single bomber earlier in the day when sailing unescorted south of Crete. The **Aba**’s hull was badly holed in several places, all the starboard life-boats were holed, the life-boat rope falls cut by shrapnel. We had 630 patients on board, two of whom were killed in their beds, and several injured by shrapnel penetrating into the ship’s hull into the wards.”

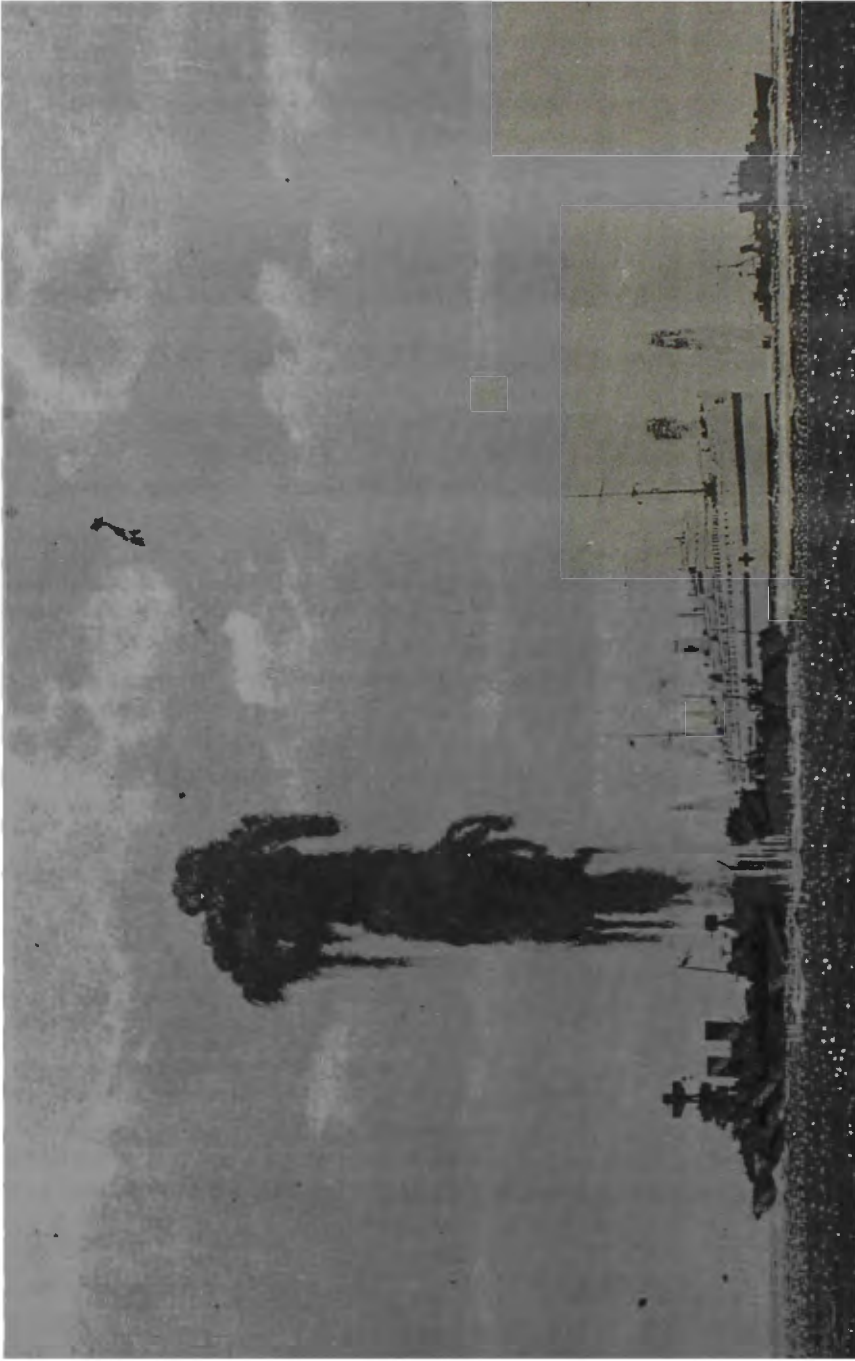
The anti-aircraft light cruiser H.M.S. **Coventry** received the **Aba**’s SOS shortly after 12 noon on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1941 and in company with the cruiser **Dido** and supporting destroyers steamed the 100 miles to the **Aba** at 23 knots in approximately 4½ hours. Lt. Comdr. Dalrymple-Hay, the acting commanding officer of the **Coventry** takes up the story:

“At mid-day on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1941 a signal was received from the hospital ship **Aba**, just clear of the Crete coast. Although conspicuously marked with red crosses according to international convention, she was being attacked by Stuka dive bombers. HMS **Coventry** and HMS **Dido**, with destroyers, set off at full speed to give protection.

“At about 5 pm we sighted the **Aba**, and almost at once we received a signal that all was well. We were getting quite close and there were thoughts of resuming patrol when R.D.F. reported enemy aircraft approaching. The lookouts caught the gleam of a high-flying aircraft, seemingly on reconnaissance. Seconds later came a warning shout that eight Stukas were approaching. All eyes and all guns turned to them.

“HMS **Coventry** dashed in to take up position close behind the **Aba**, where her eight-barrelled pom-pom would be most effective against the diving Stukas. A signal was sent to HMS **Dido** to keep clear, oblivious of the fact that she was the





*Impression by artist Charles Pears of the action involving the "Aba" and H.M.S. "Coventry"*  
*Keegan Institution of Commerce*

flagship of Admiral Glennie. The enemy aircraft closed in and circled before attacking in pairs, each from opposite directions. Diving steadily through the barrage, the Stukas levelled out at just above the height of the *Aba's* mainmast, and then swooped upwards as their bombs plummeted down.

"The attack was a very difficult one to break up, with the sun affording the Stukas excellent cover enabling them to dive almost unseen on to the *Aba*. In fact there was little or no time within which to fix a target, or get all the guns to bear given the difficult feat of loading with the guns almost perpendicular. There is one noteworthy aspect of the engagement – the excellent fire discipline.

"On HMS *Coventry's* gun deck, ready-use ammunition lockers were ablaze, and several gun crew members had been hit. Marine Provost and Lt. Hartnell, heedless of burns, snatched blazing cartridges from ammunition lockers set on fire and jettisoned them, whilst the wounded gunners, finding themselves not incapacitated, staunched the blood and kept their guns firing.

"When all the Stukas were flying away and no further enemy reported, 'cease fire' was ordered, followed by 'defence stations'. Now the sick bay staff could concentrate on helping the wounded. Admiral Glennie gave permission for HMS *Coventry* to return to Alexandria so that the two most seriously wounded men could be transferred to hospital.

"Petty Officer Alfred Sephton, in charge of the main top division, died during the passage to Alexandria, and Admiral Lord Cunningham of Hyndhope (C. in C. Mediterranean Fleet, 1940-43) noted later: "*Sephton's action may well have saved the Coventry and the Aba, and for his magnificent example he was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross*". Alfred Sephton was thirty years old when he died and was buried at sea."

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To:- O.C. Troops, H.M. Hospital Ship "*Aba*"

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY BY P.S. TOMLINSON, C.B., D.S.O., K.H.P.

*Major-General Commanding Royal Army Medical Corps & Army Dental Corps,  
Middle East Forces*

January, 1943

On the occasion of H.M. Hospital Ship *Aba* leaving the Mediterranean station, I should like to convey to all ranks my appreciation of the very hard work carried out by them over long hours during the past twenty-seven voyages

The work carried out by the *Aba* during the past seven months is a record unequalled by any Hospital Ship in the operation which culminated in the Eighth Army's great victory.

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CAPTAIN E. BROWN SUPERCEDES CAPTAIN A. CRAPPER AS MASTER

The *Aba* had been away from the United Kingdom for 3 years and 4 months, and Captain Brown proceeded by troopship to South Africa to join her, leaving the UK

on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1943. The **Aba** had indeed been at Port Elizabeth from 19<sup>th</sup> January until 20<sup>th</sup> May 1943, and then at Durban between 22<sup>nd</sup> May and 30<sup>th</sup> May. However by the time that Captain Brown arrived at Durban, the **Aba** was back in the Mediterranean.

Captain Brown was not the only one waiting at Durban to join the **Aba**. Seven junior engineers had been there for ten weeks waiting for instructions to join. Captain Brown immediately got in touch with the Shipping Transport Officer (STO). After seeing her three times, she eventually arranged for the party to join the **Strathmore** for passage to Suez. On arrival at Suez, the local STO had not reported the party's arrival to the C. in C., and it took considerable persuasion on Captain Brown's part to arrange for them to stay on the **Strathmore** for passage to Algiers.

On arrival at Algiers, Captain Brown was told that the **Aba** was working from Phillipville (now Skikda) As there was no train for 3 days, and it took 3 days to make the journey by rail, Captain Brown was able to arrange with the STO for a lorry convoy going to Constantine (north-east Algeria) to take them along, and he later received permission from Movement Control at Constantine to take one of the lorries to Phillipville, (Skikda) where they eventually arrived 48 hours after leaving Algiers. The journey was uncomfortable to say the least as it was necessary for them to sleep on their baggage in the lorry.

On arrival at Phillipville (Skikda) they were informed that the **Aba** was then working from Bizerta (on the north coast of Tunisia), but as there was no accommodation there it was necessary to proceed to Tunis, again by lorry, but this time an open lorry. The journey took 36 hours and they spent the nights at an Officers' Training Camp where meals were supplied. The party spent six days at Tunis, and again the **Aba's** orders were changed and she was sent to Phillipville, (Skikda), but as she would pass Bizerta it was arranged, on Captain Brown's suggestion, that she would call in for the party. And so it was, on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1943, that Captain Brown and seven junior engineers, joined the **Aba**.

Captain Brown stated that Captain Crapper gave him every assistance when taking over the ship, but there were only two hours available in which to do this. Later on, whilst going round the ship, the first problem encountered by Captain Brown was the condition of the lifeboats and the gear. The boats had been swung out and powsed to the deck for practically all of the four years the **Aba** had been a hospital ship. This had tended to push in the strakes. The davits were also in an unsatisfactory condition being very difficult to move.

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### H.M.H.S. "ABA", OCTOBER 1943 TO OCTOBER 1945

*A Report by Lt-Col P. Lloyd Williams, OBE*

Lt-Col Lloyd Williams joined the **Aba** at Tunis on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1943. The ship was then on a voyage from Phillipville (Skikda) in Algeria to Catania and Taranto. She had been on this run for two or three voyages, having previously taken part in the Salerno Landing, and other landings in Sicily and Italy.

The **Aba** was next ordered to Alexandria where she embarked 485 casualties for passage to Liverpool, arriving there on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1943. This was the first time

that the ship had been in a UK port for over three years, and she was given an extensive overhaul by Cammell Laird at Birkenhead.

The **Aba** left Cammell Laird's fitting out basin on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1944 and embarked 400 Italians at Liverpool Landing Stage. Due to engine defects she did not leave the Mersey until 27<sup>th</sup> February, bound for Gibraltar for water and oil. The **Aba** arrived at Bizerta for orders on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1944 and proceeded to Taranto where the Italians were landed, and 180 British patients were embarked. She next proceeded to Naples and anchored outside the breakwater on 13<sup>th</sup> March.

At 1.25am on 15<sup>th</sup> March the alert sounded. It was a bright moonlit night and the warships put up a very effective smoke screen, but it was some time before this covered the **Aba** and at 1.35am the ship received a direct hit from a dive bomber. The **Aba's** white paint must have stood out clearly in the bright moonlight, and the red crosses on the decks and upper structure should have been seen, but the 'Geneva Lights' were not exhibited when in harbour.

Some troopships had arrived at Naples on 14<sup>th</sup> March, and no doubt the raid took place on their account.

The bomb struck the **Aba** on the starboard side outside the third officer's cabin on 'A' deck, and passed through 'B' and 'C' decks before exploding on 'D' deck. Considerable damage was done – the shell plating was blown out and the deck depressed. Three fatal casualties were sustained: the RAMC orderly on duty on 'D' deck, one patient in the 'D' deck ward, and the **Aba's** quartermaster on duty at the 'C' deck gangway. The senior surgeon had both ankles broken, and about 20 patients were suffering from shock in various forms. All the patients were quickly evacuated from the forward wards, and reberthed in the after wards which were not damaged.

On the evening of 15<sup>th</sup> March the **Aba** was ordered to Castellammare at the south of Naples Bay for repairs. The patients remained on board, and although there were several alarms, no further raids took place.

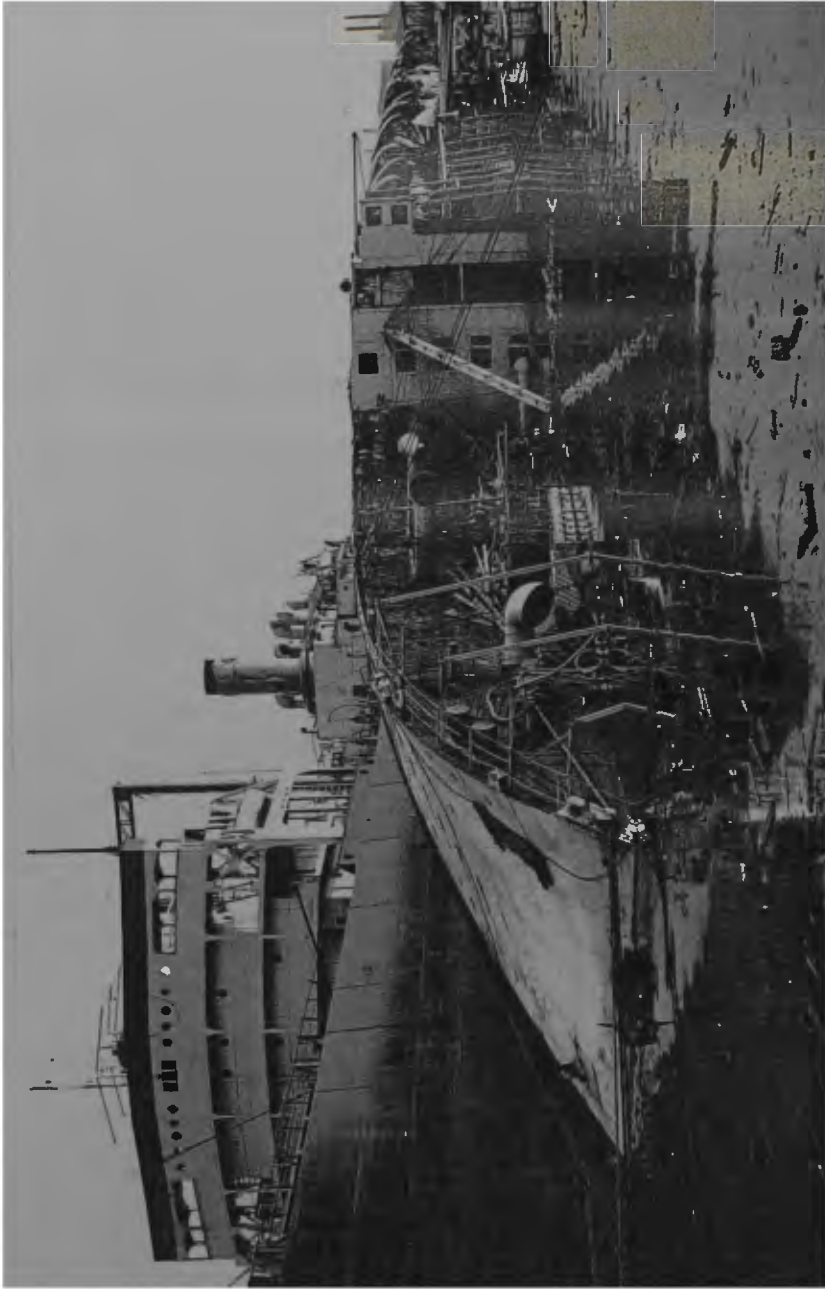
Mount Vesuvius started an eruption during the night and this continued during the stay at Castellammare. Whilst being a magnificent sight, the ash became a serious menace to the stability of the **Aba** and had to be cleared from the upper decks every few hours.

The **Aba** left Castellammare at 5.30am on 1<sup>st</sup> April and embarked patients at Naples, bringing the total on board in the undamaged wards to 400. After an uneventful passage, the **Aba** reached Avonmouth on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1944. The following day the **Aba** embarked 480 American wounded and sailed immediately for New York, following the hospital ship route on the 30<sup>th</sup> parallel, arriving on 26<sup>th</sup> May. The Americans were welcomed home with bands playing and flags flying.

After sailing coastwise to Halifax NS, the **Aba** embarked 409 members of the Canadian Army Medical Corps and sailed for Liverpool on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, arriving ten days later.

The **Aba** left Liverpool for Milford Haven on 25<sup>th</sup> June and was put on 24-hours notice to proceed to Cherbourg if and when required. In the event she was not needed as the wounded were being evacuated by aeroplane and LSTs.

On 12<sup>th</sup> September the **Aba** embarked a full complement of Canadian wounded at Avonmouth and sailed for Halifax, once again following the designated route along the 30<sup>th</sup> parallel, and then due north. Whilst at Halifax the **Aba** was



*The Matrona (ex Aba) capsized in Bidston Dock, Birkenhead, in November, 1947.*

drydocked, and then embarked 300 members of the Canadian Army Medical Corps for passage to the Clyde. It should be noted that hospital ships reported their position, course and speed to the Admiralty every day whilst in the Atlantic, and every four hours whilst in the Mediterranean.

On 27<sup>th</sup> October the **Aba** took another full complement of Canadian wounded to Halifax, NS, and after arriving back at Brunswick Dock, Liverpool on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, she remained in port for engine repairs until the end of January 1945. The **Aba** then spent three months on the Southampton – Cherbourg run, ferrying the wounded of all nationalities.

The **Aba** was in King George V Dock, Glasgow, on V.E. Day and a service was held on board, attended by all members of the ship's company. Then, on 12<sup>th</sup> July, she was off to Trondheim, where 300 Russian sick and wounded were embarked. The **Aba** proceeded to Tromso to pick up an escort for passage to Murmansk, arriving on 21<sup>st</sup> July. The Russians had been prisoners-of-war and were in a very low state and five died on the passage to Murmansk. Many of those landed were very near to death as a result of starvation.

The **Aba** left Murmansk on 22<sup>nd</sup> July and arrived back in Tromso two days later, where the ship was thoroughly fumigated, and all the wards, beds and bedding treated. British hospital personnel from the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> general hospitals were then embarked for passage to Gourock. Then it was off to the Belgian Congo where the **Aba** arrived at Matadi Wharf on 10<sup>th</sup> September. Some 400 Belgians – men, women and children – were embarked for passage to Antwerp, where they arrived on 6<sup>th</sup> October. The Belgian Minister for the Colonies entertained to lunch the **Aba**'s senior officers and the Royal Army Medical Corps.

November and December 1945 found the **Aba** back in the Mediterranean and in early 1946 she made another voyage to the Belgian Congo. She then made nine round voyages between Southampton and Hamburg which occupied her until 26<sup>th</sup> August. The **Aba** returned to the Mediterranean for one last voyage in September 1946 and was then laid up at Southampton until 16<sup>th</sup> December. Her final stint of service involved her carrying troops between Liverpool and Belfast between 18<sup>th</sup> December 1946 and 7<sup>th</sup> January 1947. After disembarking her troops at the landing stage the **Aba** entered the Bidston Dock at Birkenhead, and was redelivered from H.M. service to the Elder Dempster Line at 5 pm on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1947. ■

#### *Postscript*

The **Aba** was the only Elder Dempster passenger liner to survive the war. After much consideration the Company decided she was unfit to resume her pre-war sailings. The old ship was offered for sale and on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1947 she was sold to the Bawtry Steamship Company of Liverpool for £55,000 and renamed **Matrona**. It was intended to place the ship on an emigrant service to Australia and New Zealand.

Whilst undergoing refit in the Bidston Dock, Birkenhead, the **Matrona** fell on to her side when her pig iron ballast was being removed on 31<sup>st</sup> October. It was not until 8<sup>th</sup> June 1948 that the **Matrona** was righted, using a parbuckling method. She was beyond economic repair and arrived under tow at Barrow-in-Furness on 4<sup>th</sup> October to be broken up by Thos. W. Ward.

#### *Sources:*

The Elder Dempster Fleet History 1852-1985: James E. Cowden and John O.C. Duffy  
Sea Breezes, March 1975 : H.M.S. Coventry and the **Aba**

## WINTER SOLSTICE

This is the shortest day of the year in Northern latitudes, with Liverpool (53°25'N, 3°00'W) receiving just 7 hours and 29 minutes of daylight on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2008; sunrise being at 08.26 and sunset at 15.55, GMT. Solar Noon, i.e. the time at which the Sun is due South and crosses the meridian was at 12.11, when the Sun was 13.2 degrees above the horizon. The time of the solstice was at 12.04GMT, when the Sun was 23.5 degrees south of the equator, precisely above the Tropic of Capricorn. In other words, the Winter Solstice is when the North Pole is tilted 23.5 degrees away from the sun, and all places above 66.5 degrees North are in total darkness, whilst locations below 66.5 degrees South enjoy 24 hours of daylight.

However, for anyone observing the times of sunrise and sunset, it must seem odd that the time of sunrise continues to get later after the winter solstice, whilst the time of sunset has already started to get later before the winter solstice. In 2008 the time of sunset started getting later after 14<sup>th</sup> December, but the time of sunrise didn't start to get any earlier until 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2009. During the month of January, sunrise at Liverpool pulls back from 08.28GMT to 07.58 (30minutes), whilst the time of sunset advances from 16.04GMT on the 1<sup>st</sup> to 16.53GMT on the 31<sup>st</sup> (49minutes).

This asymmetry in the times of sunrise and sunset is due to the fact that the Sun does not cross the meridian at precisely noon every day. This is because not only is the Earth's axis inclined to the plane of its orbit around the Sun, but the orbit of the Earth is not circular, but an ellipse. The distance from the Earth to the Sun is usually given as 93 million miles, but on 3<sup>rd</sup> January (the Perihelion) the distance is just 91,500,000 miles, and on 4<sup>th</sup> July (the Aphelion) the distance is at its maximum of 94,500,000 miles.

The effects of the elliptical orbit and the tilt of the Earth's axis are particularly dominant in December and January, and cause the time at which the sun crosses the meridian at Liverpool (Solar Noon) to change by 24 minutes from 12.02GMT on 1<sup>st</sup> December to 12.26GMT on 31<sup>st</sup> January.

By the end of March, Solar Noon at 3°00' West (the longitude of Liverpool) is back to 12.16GMT, and by the end of April it is 12.09GMT. There is a less significant 'wobble' at the time of the Aphelion (4<sup>th</sup> July) when Solar Noon drifts to 12.19GMT. ■

*For further information, visit < [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com)*



## SHIPS, BARGES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

*A Summary of a Paper given to the Liverpool Nautical Research Society  
by Alan McClelland on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009.*

The aim of this paper is to present a brief overview of the situation with regard to the utilisation of water transport in and around the United Kingdom. Ever since the Second World War this subject has often been ignored by successive governments. From time to time reports have been produced and schemes devised, but the results have been limited in scope and piecemeal. In his paper *Europe's Forgotten Waterways* (Schiffahrt, Hafen, Bahn und Technik, Mai 2008), Dr David Hilling demonstrates that nevertheless considerable amounts of freight are carried along our major waterways, including the Manchester Ship Canal where Peel Ports have been vigorously promoting their Liverpool – Manchester shuttle service using large dumb barges and the pusher-tug **Daisy Dorado**. Research into ways into which UK coastal seaways and waterways could be used to move yet more cargo have been undertaken by Dr Merv Rowlinson (*Coast is clear for shipping growth*, NUMAST Telegraph, December, 2003).

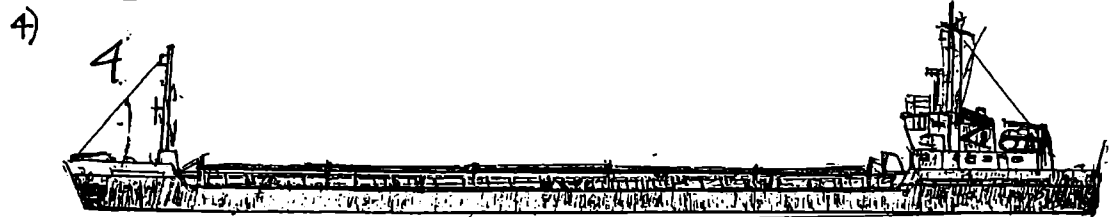
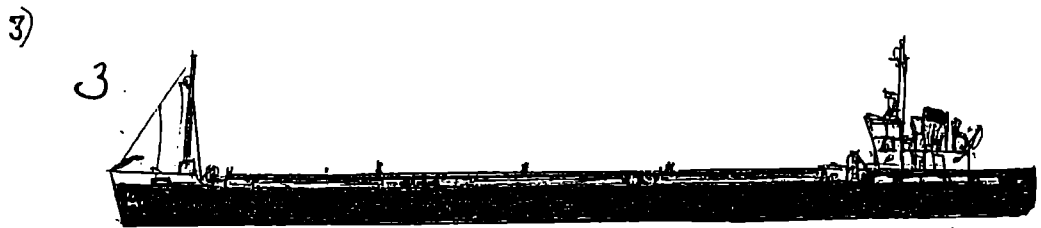
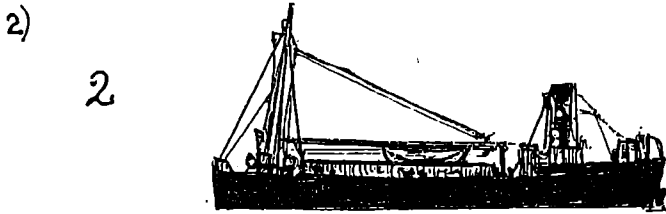
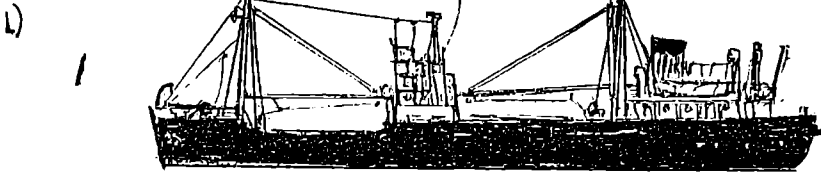
Vessels employed in the trades under consideration have become increasingly sophisticated in the years since 1945. Propulsion systems, manoeuvrability and hull forms have all undergone much development. In the post-war era coaster design reflected an evolution from earlier steam-powered types as depicted in Figure 1. With raised quarterdecks, vessels in this configuration varied in size from 140 to over 200 feet in length overall. Some were employed in foreign trade. Given the title of this paper, the **Somme** built in 1951 by Richard Dunston and Company of Hesse was an interesting small version. With low deck erections including wheelhouse and funnel she ran between this country and continental river ports, notably on the Seine, and made calls at Liverpool.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Ship Canal and the Weaver were used by many coasters and barges, some of the latter being towed and others self-propelled. Notable were the stout survivors of earlier times in the shapes of steam flats of 70 – 100 feet in length. Numbers had been built, many by Weaver shipyards, for the chemical industries. (*Shipbuilding on the River Weaver* A.Barratt, LNRS 'Bulletin', September 2003). The **Wincham**, berthed in the Albert Dock, is one of their post-war replacements, markedly different in appearance. Over the years larger and larger barges have been commissioned without cargo gear (Figure 3), including the **Mersey Trader** completed in 1977 for Bulk Cargo Handling Services. Some of these craft can load 1,000 tons or more of cargo. Their continental counterparts are often larger, and their further development led to the low air draft ship capable of both putting to sea and negotiating inland waterways. Some of these vessels have fixed wheelhouses (Figure 3), others have bridges which are capable of being raised and lowered. (*Rhine Sea Ships and River Ships*, C.Cheetham and M.Heinimann).

The operation of coasters is an arduous and at times hazardous business even with well-found tonnage (*Safety at Sea*, A.McClelland, LNRS 'Bulletin', Summer



# SHIPS, BARGES AND THE ENVIRONMENT



-and could it be?



A.M.C.  
'09

1990). With their large unobstructed holds and full-width hatchways, structural integrity is of paramount importance in all modern coasters, with particular attention to be given to the design and construction of hatch covers. Long box shaped holds must ideally be kept clear of exposed framing which could be awkward for cleaning and the safe operation of 'bobcats' and other discharging gear. Inevitably, given the frequency of their voyages, coasters often suffer both internal and external damage. Cargoes such as steel products and scrap metals present most problems. Externally contact damage both in berthing and to the bottoms of hulls is frequent, due to poorly prepared berths which dry out as tides ebb. In low air draft ships with telescoping fittings much care must be taken over maintenance and of the means of raising and lowering them. It is relevant to note that negotiation of inland waterways may involve a dozen or more adjustments on inwards and outward passages. Sea and water transport offers highly fuel efficient and environmentally friendly means of moving freight while easing road congestion. However a leaked report from the UN International Panel on Climate Change in February 2008 found that world shipping produces nearly three times more climate change emissions than previously thought. Much needs to be done but necessary work is already 'under way'. *Lloyd's List*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008, contained an account of British Petroleum's experiments with the barge *Victoria*. Using low emission fuel similar to that employed in diesel trucks, speed regulators were fitted to advise the skipper on optimal fuel efficiency. The *Victoria* has already given demonstrations in Belgium at a European policy-making meeting, seeking to accelerate the introduction of low emissions technology. And could it be that there is a role for sail or aerofoils? Last spring French wine producers shipped 600,000 bottles by barge from Languedoc to Bordeaux and onwards to Ireland aboard the barque *Belem* with the aim of publicising the case for low carbon emission.

There is much activity in improving the operational efficiency of water transport in all its forms. Hull form innovations such as the semi-catamaran and the Xbow have been incorporated in ships. Pusher tugs such as the *Daisy Dorado*, referred to earlier, have been given elevating wheelhouses to facilitate operations with dumb barges. One other feature of water transport requires attention and that is the human factor. The recruitment, training and working conditions of many people serving afloat need thorough investigation and remedial action as soon as possible. █

### *Sources and suggestions for further reading*

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### *Acknowledgements*

Chris Cheetham, John Hill, David Hilling, Merv Rowlinson and Norman West.

## THOUGHT PROVOKING CASUALTIES

by A.H. McClelland

(reprinted from 'The Bulletin', Volume 34, No.1, Summer 1990)

The recent losses of two short-sea traders with local connections have each in their own way emphasised the need for both the E.E.C. and individual governments to look closely at shipping policy and regulations.

On 9<sup>th</sup> December 1989 the Bahamas-registered **Marine** cleared Liverpool for Spain with a cargo of scrap metal. Nothing more has been heard of her. According to the National Union of Seamen, concern had been expressed about the vessel's seaworthiness and she was to be inspected at her port of discharge. Her loss with all six of her crew yet again called into question present-day manning and training policies for the crews of merchant ships, and the desirability of allowing European owners and operators to make use of flags of convenience. So far as the latter issue is concerned, Professor B.N. Metaxas in *Flags of Convenience* (Gower, 1985), pp 100-102, concludes: *'The expansion of the flag of convenience fleet has produced a net social disbenefit for the world community at large, rather than marginal benefits in the form of lower freight rates. .... We should mention that in addition to the main social cost areas described and analysed [earlier in the book] there are others, such as (1) detrimental effects to the image of the [shipping] industry, contributing to the further alienation of seafarers from their profession; (2) higher long-running economic costs, as a result of negligence in maintenance and repairs; (3) higher costs on terms of human capital resources and higher insurance club calls as a result of greater numbers of injuries and illnesses of crew; (4) delays in ports due to labour-management disputes; (5) economic transfers of training costs, managerial and technical skills; and finally (6) the cost to seamen and their families ....where working conditions are substandard.'* At the time of writing [Summer,1990] no formal enquiry had been ordered into the loss of the **Marine**.

Virtually a brand new ship, having been delivered by the Hugo Peters yard at Wewelsfleth (on the Elbe, 20km north-west of Hamburg) early last summer [1989], the **Arklow Victor** was bound for the Manchester Ship Canal with a cargo of maize, when she was apparently overwhelmed in the northern Bay of Biscay on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1989. Operated by a highly reputable company under the Irish flag, her loss is to be the subject of an official investigation by the Irish Marine Department which will presumably look closely at the conventions governing the design and loading of present-day merchant ships. With a large single box hold and an extensive trunked-up hatch, the **Arklow Victor** had a deadweight capacity of some 4,289 tons. She was designed with a restricted air-draught of 12metres to enable her to penetrate as far as possible along European waterway systems, and had a bridge/wheelhouse which could be raised or lowered by electro-hydraulic means.

Misgivings have been increasingly expressed in professional maritime circles in recent years about a number of issues in the design and operation of short-sea tonnage. The latest ships with long, straight-lined, slab-sided hulls and large hatches, inevitably rely heavily on sophisticated propulsion, control and manoeuvring systems for safe and efficient voyaging. The fate of the **Arklow Victor** may well indicate that yet more attention needs to be given to ensuring the reliability of back-up arrangements for use in the event of breakdown in the primary systems, and to the integrity and securing of hatch covers.

So far as low air draught short-sea traders are concerned, David Tinsley has it in *'Short-Sea Bulk Trades'* (Fairplay, 1984), p.73, *"Many operators of the river/sea-going types of coaster steer clear of going round Land's End during the winter months ..."* ■

## AN ATLANTIC STEERAGE PASSAGE IN 1907

*by Lieut.-Colonel Frank Bustard, O.B.E.*

*After five years' apprenticeship with the White Star Line at its head office in Liverpool, I was pitchforked in 1907 at the age of 21 into the position of chief assistant (largely unpaid) to the second- and third-class passenger manager.*

In my capacity as dogsbody to my chief there came through my hands the not infrequent complaints – and less frequent commendations – from the tens of thousands of passengers we carried every month. The criticisms were the usual unfavourable comments as to the food, the ship's stewards, the uncomfortable berths and notably the distaste of British and Irish passengers to being herded with a lot of 'foreign' emigrants.

The complaints we passed on to the ship's staff for their report and then on to the superintendents for their comments. This routine procedure was quite inconclusive and it just got us nowhere.

The fact then dawned on my young mind that in the whole of the White Star Line's vast organisation there was no one who had actually made a trip as a third-class passenger, living in the emigrant quarters. I therefore suggested to Mr (later Sir Arthur) Cauty that I should make a voyage to America as an emigrant passenger, living in the accommodation the whole of the time. It was, I might mention, customary in the company, for officials, when crossing in the first-class quarters, to pay an occasional visit with one of the ship's officers, to the second and third class at meal times, but that was an easy one as far as the chief steward was concerned.

To cross in one of our own ships would have been senseless as I was well-known to all the ship's people. The obvious course was, therefore, to make the trip in one of our competitor's vessels engaged in the same trade, as naturally they had just the same problems to contend with as ourselves.

The choice was Cunard's first **Mauretania**, then a brand-new ship operating between Liverpool, Queenstown and New York. Mr Cauty put the suggestion to the White Star Line chairman (Joseph Bruce Ismay), the handsome autocrat for whom I had the greatest admiration. J.B.I. turned the idea down flat, feeling that my trip would be regarded as 'spying' by our keen competitors, the Cunard Line.

### *Trip at own expense*

I then asked Mr Cauty whether there was any objection to my making the trip in my own holiday time and at my own expense. To this the company could not object but it refused point-blank to give me an extra week, over the customary fortnight, to visit some of our offices in America. The only thing I could get was the customary Saturday off prior to my vacation.

However, I discovered that by leaving with the fast **Mauretania** on the Saturday, I would be due in New York by late on the following Friday in time to catch

Hapag's **Deutschland**, and by disembarking at Plymouth I could be back in James Street, Liverpool, by first thing on Monday morning. That is how it worked out, fortunately.

While I was quite unknown to the **Mauretania's** officials, I was, of course, well-acquainted with many of the Cunard shore staff at Liverpool and my presence at the so-called clearance embarkation would have been readily detected, with disastrous consequences to my trip. So I hit on the simple expedient of leaving on the Friday evening train for Holyhead, then on to Kingstown and Queenstown, reaching there on early Saturday afternoon, in good time for the **Mauretania's** call on the Sunday morning.

### Guardsman's discarded coat

Before leaving Liverpool I had to equip myself for the trip, my outfit consisting of a guardsman's discarded blue greatcoat (minus the buttons) with a seaman's peaked cap and blue jersey, purchased in a marine store in Park Road for less than £2.

The journey cross-channel via Holyhead was interesting but uneventful. The experience stood me in good stead a year or two later when I had to organise, at a few hours notice, the movement of 800 Continental emigrants by the same route. They had been held up by bad weather in the North Sea, and missed the **Adriatic** by two hours at Liverpool. They connected at Queenstown without loss of time to the ship which was carrying His Majesty's mails.

I reached Queenstown in plenty of time to purchase my steerage ticket (£6 5s.), and to fill up the U.S. immigration declaration form. In those enlightened days there were no passports, no fingerprints, no vaccination, and, in fact, no medical examination except on the ship's gangway. I found accommodation in an emigrants' boarding house on Scott's Square, facing the harbour, and I paid, I think, 7s 6d for bed and early breakfast.

While I was unknown to the Cunard people at Queenstown, I kept well clear of the White Star agent (Mr James Scott) and his staff as they knew me and might have blown the gaff unwittingly. Scott's office was a single storey square building facing the harbour, with separate entrances on three sides. James Scott was the agent for White Star and the American Line, and also acted as American consul.

I embarked on the **Mauretania** very early on Sunday morning with about 300 Irish emigrants, unknown, and just one of about 1,000 steerage passengers on board.

Meanwhile, back at Liverpool, at precisely 9.am on Monday morning, Mr Ismay phoned Mr Cauty with the peremptory enquiry: "*What has happened to Bustard?*"

*"So far as I know, he left on Saturday by the **Mauretania**."*

*"Then you must go over right away to Cunard and tell them that he is on board as a steerage passenger on a private trip, and we would not wish them to imagine that we are spying on them."*

There was surprise in the Cunard general manager's office, with a brisk and cutting enquiry to the third-class department as to how it was possible for one so well known as Mr Bustard to pass unnoticed on board. Back came the reply that no such

person was on board as his name did not appear on the U.S. manifest. Of course, the Queenstown list had not reached the Cunard office in Liverpool by Monday morning and by that time I was many miles west of the Fastnet.

Before recounting my experiences on board the first **Mauretania**, I should like to make it quite clear that my comments are not in any way intended as a criticism of the Cunard company of 1907. I am satisfied that the conditions on board were the same as in all other big passenger liners of that day, and the impressions formed on the trip did much to eradicate similar conditions in the White Star ships. My best thanks and appreciation are, therefore, due to the Cunard Line.

### *Eyesight test*

On passing up the **Mauretania's** gangway at Queenstown, I was subjected to a cursory examination by the ship's surgeon for the eye disease of conjunctivitis (trachoma) prevalent amongst Eastern Europeans from wood-fuel smoke, and among the Irish people from the burning of peat fires. However, he found no red in my eye. Then came the long line passing the congested table of the third-class chief steward to receive a berthing card for where one would sleep for the next six nights.

Much as I like my fellow beings I prefer to sleep alone and a monetary consideration secured me the exclusive use of an inside four-berth room in what is usually described as the 'bowels of the ship'. I reported to the steward in charge of the section who told me as one Liverpool lad to another that he had a pal in the first-class galley and if I fancied a roast chicken at any time he could get me one for a quid. I resisted the temptation.

The meals throughout the voyage were unbelievably impossible. I was possessed at that time – and now – of the appetite of a horse and the digestion of an ostrich and if it had not been for the porridge at breakfast – first of three sittings at 7.am, and a bowl of gruel at 9.pm – I think I would have starved. It was more the cooking than the quality of the food that was at fault, although, at times, the quantity was bad enough. I was desperately hungry the whole time and sorely tempted to compromise with my principles by transferring to the second class and paying the difference. I am glad I did not.

### *Uncomfortable berth*

My sleeping quarters in what at that time was referred to as 'enclosed room accommodation' as distinct from the open steerage, was made tolerable by utilising the spare mattresses, pillows and blankets from the vacant berths in the room. Even so, the extremely narrow berth was most uncomfortable and created the conviction which later benefited many White Star Line travelers that two feet was the absolute minimum width for a berth, and 2ft 6ins was required for comfort.

My fellow passengers were naturally a very mixed crowd covering nearly every race in Europe from Norwegian sailors to Polish tailors and Bulgarian peasants. They quickly settled themselves into national groups. For my part, I palled up with a young Britisher in his early twenties who had discovered that nine months' hard work each year in the Canadian silver and nickel mines gave him enough money to spend

the remaining three months in Great Britain. We made friends with a couple of Irish girls and spent much of the long days on the forward deck in the eyes of the ship where, I am sure, we were not supposed to be.

Entertainment for the steerage passengers was completely non-existent – no cinema, no music, no dancing (no room), and if one wanted to sit on deck one sat *on the deck*. It was desperately cold on deck when we were off Cape Race and the passengers were at their wits end to keep warm.

Half way across we were all vaccinated for smallpox whether we liked it or not, and a further eye examination made for trachoma. The shipowner was not so much concerned with the health of the emigrant or keeping the United States immune from this troublesome eye disease, but he was conscious of the \$500 fine which could be levied by the U.S. Government on the shipowner for any passenger found on arrival at Ellis Island to be suffering from trachoma.

We arrived at New York late on Saturday night and were taken by tender early on Saturday morning over to Ellis Island, the scene of many heartaches. As I knew the ropes I was first past the examination barrier and then surprised the examiner by asking to see the Commissioner of Immigration himself. As I had previously met him in Liverpool when he was over in Europe visiting the ports of embarkation, he made me very welcome despite my appearance, and took me back to see things, as he said, *'from the other side of the fence'*.

By this time, the immigrants were streaming through, and I heard on of them remark, as he spotted me standing with the Commissioner: *"I knew that fellow was a 'tec"*. The general supposition on board among the British and Irish passengers had been that I was a deserter from H.M. peacetime forces – and good luck to me!

I got ashore by the first ferry to Bowling Green at the bottom of Broadway, arrayed now in a sporting cap and carrying my greatcoat. I reported to the nearby White Star Line office on Broadway and was received as someone who has explored the unknown.

There followed a quick turnround in town and I was, by that evening, delivered well-fed to the Hamburg-America express liner **Deutschland**, previous holder of the Atlantic record crossing. I had booked a second-class passage and was accommodated right aft over the propellers and only just above the water line. This meant that the side port was submerged as soon as the ship got underway and I was rather relieved that the room steward screwed down the deadlight each night *'just in case'*. The vibration from the propellers was well-nigh unbearable.

The difference in comfort and food in those days on the North Atlantic between the second and third classes was altogether too marked and the emigrant certainly got the least return from his money.

The impression that stands out most clearly of all of my homeward trip was a gorgeous meal of corned beef hash (German style). I recall that I and my table companions all had four helpings each!

### *J.B. Ismay inquisition*

I disembarked at Plymouth, took the boat-train to London and the night train to Liverpool and was at my desk by 8.30 on Monday morning, my usual time for many

years. At 8.30 precisely, the messenger came down to say that Mr Ismay wished to see me at once. I went up thinking: "This is it!" Then followed the inquisition.

"When did you get back?" "This morning, sir."

"Did you enjoy the trip?" "Well, at times, sir."

"When am I going to see your report?" "I haven't written one, sir."

"Well you had better do so, and let me have it this afternoon." "Very good."

There was never any suggestion then or at any later date that the White Star Line would cover my not inconsiderable travelling expenses; maybe they thought there was a question of principle involved.

Anyway, there was an unlooked-for increase in my modest salary at the end of the month. The whole trip was of inestimable value to me in the formative years to come, and the eventual development of the tourist movement. ■

*(This article first appeared in Shipbuilding and Shipping Record, 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1958)*

## **'THE BULLETIN' – A SHEER DELIGHT – LLOYD'S LIST**

From 'Lloyd's List', Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008

"With all this talk of hijacking and piracy, it was a sheer delight to discover that the Liverpool Nautical Research Society has, in its latest issue, an intriguing account of the theft of a small steamer by a gang of plausible conmen, who stole the ship from a shipbroker's office in London's Gracechurch Street and took it all the way to Australia, along with a cargo of coffee."

*There then follows a précis of the article 'The Theft of the Ferret' which appeared in the September, 2008 'Bulletin'.*

*Lloyd's List continued:*

"The Liverpool Nautical Research Society has unearthed the tale from John Kennedy's book A History of Steam Navigation, published in 1903. It makes a nice contrast to Kalashnikovs and rocket-propelled grenades, circa 2008."

*Many thanks to Captain Mike Feltham for spotting this and submitting it to the Editor.*





## BOOK REVIEW

### ALL HANDS AND THE COOK

*The Customs and Language of the British Merchant Seaman, 1875 – 1975*

by Captain Barry Thompson

*(reviewed by John Shepherd)*

Many books have covered nautical language and customs, but this is the first to explore the little-known language and customs of Britain's Merchant Navy, in regular use when Britain was a great maritime nation with ships trading to almost every port in the world.

This book is not just another list of nautical terms. Rather, it preserves the everyday vernacular – much of it unique to merchant seamen – and describes the social customs and institutions around the world that helped shape their working life.

Covering the hundred years from 1875 to 1975, the book is a work of fascinating social history as well as a source of reference for seafarers past and present, libraries, writers of fact and fiction, researchers of maritime history, etymologists – in fact anyone interested in the working language of those colourful men who spent their lives at sea during the heyday of British shipping.

I was fortunate enough to spend twenty years of my life at sea in the British Merchant Navy during the 1960s and 1970s, and reviewing this book has brought back so many memories of that period. The British Merchant Seaman is now an endangered species, and I wonder just how many of the terms which were in common use in 1975 are now still relevant, or indeed would be understood by, today's seafarers.

The language of the merchant seaman was born in the sailing ship era, and only slowly did engineers and catering staff influence it.

Following the end of the First World War, King George V saw fit to honour all British merchant seamen by introducing the collective title, The Merchant Navy, for all the many and diverse British shipping companies in which they served.

All Hands and the Cook is divided into 21 chapters ranging from the various shipboard departments to ship's working routines. Uniform and dress codes are included, as are watchkeeping and navigation: the coverage is comprehensive and covers 351 pages which contain over 2,000 individual entries.

There is much to amuse the reader: in the chapter 'Engineers and the Engine Room', the Prince of Darkness is defined as 'any engineer who successfully, and unpopularly, blacks out a vessel so that all the electrical power fails'. It's not always the engineer to blame – I recall that when sailing on Harrison's Arbitrator in 1969 the cabin boy switched on the galley toaster and a 'domino-effect' of electrical failures ensued, causing a total black-out and the ship to stop.

A few pages further on there is a reference to the Doxford house flag which was a name used sarcastically in ships fitted with Doxford diesel engines to refer to the 'Not Under Command' signal – the display of two black spheres in a vertical line on a

flag halyard, as required by the Collision Regulations to convey an inability to manoeuvre. Doxford engines did have a reputation for requiring to be shut-down at sea for urgent (usually minor) repairs on a regular basis.

In the 'Recreation and Social Behaviour' chapter, a reference is made to the Pig and Whistle. This is defined as the crew bar and recreation room in a passenger ship; often known simply as 'The Pig'. I was under the impression that the name originated from a bar in Singapore in late 1939 when the **Queen Mary** was being fitted out for troop carrying. The name 'the Pig and Whistle' so caught the imagination of the *Mary's* crew that they adopted it for their own use and over the course of time it became the name for the crew bar on all Cunard ships – I was not aware that it was in use on the passenger ships of other companies.

Even for a relatively experienced seafarer like myself, there is much to be learnt from this fine new book. For instance, I have gone through life (until now) not appreciating that RADAR is the acronym from 'Radio Aid Direction And Range'. I didn't know that 'the radio shack' dates from the very earliest days of radio at sea, when shipowners were unaware of what to make of the new-fangled equipment. As there was rarely a spare cabin available for the radio officer, a rough wooden lean-to was often hastily added at the after end of the boat deck. In many cases this was a combined radio room and sleeping cabin which, because of its match board construction, was christened 'The Shack', and the name stuck for many years.

In the chapter 'Shipping Companies and their Ships' Maggie Booths is defined as the Booth Line, a Liverpool-based company running to South America. The whole point of the nickname is missed here: the company was known as 'Maggie Booths', after a lady of the Booth family who took a kind and motherly interest in the crews of the Booth Line ships. She would visit wives when their husbands were away at sea ensuring that allotments were being sent home, and she became a much-loved figure in Birkenhead and Bootle, Merseyside.

Without wishing to appear pedantic, there are a few omissions in the text. In the short section dealing with nicknames of ships, Ellerman and Papayanni's **Flaminian** (the 'Flaming Onion' to all Merseyside seafarers) is not there; nor is Harrison's **Magician**, known as the 'Magic Can' or just 'The Can'. In her early days, I recall the **Reina del Mar** being referred to as the 'Curry and Rice' ship as her regular master was Captain G.H. Currie, and her chief engineer Mr A. Rice.

In a list of well-known seamen's pubs there is no mention of 'The Smugglers' in the Point area of Durban, although Joe Beefs at Montreal is featured. And surely the 'Market Diner' opposite Pier 90 at New York should be there, beloved of all Cunard crews, and now immortalised in the film 'The Cunard Yanks'. As far as Liverpool bars are concerned, I feel the 'Corn Market' should have had a mention, a pub well-known to Blue Funnel, Elder Dempster and Cunard crews.

One aspect that has been omitted entirely is the nicknames of some of the Company head officers. To mention just a few, Liverpool's Cunard Building was known as 'The Kremlin'; Harrison Line's headquarters at Mersey Chambers was known as 'Misery Chambers'; the 'House of Mirth' was the nickname given to Elder Dempster's head office in India Buildings, and last, but by no means least, the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company's building at Douglas named Imperial Building is known

to Steam Packet crews ('Steamies') and many, many disgruntled passengers as 'Impervious Palace'.

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading All Hands and the Cook. I spent almost twenty very happy years in the British Merchant Navy and those years constituted the best time of my life. The 350 pages of All Hands and the Cook have brought back so many memories. The text is well written and wonderfully accurate without any of the sloppiness of grammar, spelling and punctuation which bedevil so many new books in this age of 'anything goes'. All Hands and the Cook is a joy to read.

The British Merchant Navy disappeared almost overnight in the late 1970s. I suspect that this book will find its principal appeal amongst seamen who can still remember the halcyon days of the 1950s, '60s and early '70s, but I hope that many of today's Merchant Seamen will also find it a compelling read.

To quote the last line of Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby': '*And so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past*'. Well, All Hands and the Cook certainly took me back to a very happy past, the likes of which we shall never see again. █

### ALL HANDS AND THE COOK

*The Customs and Language of the British Merchant Seaman 1875-1975*

by Captain Barry Thompson

ISBN 0-908608-72-1

*Copies of this book are available from:*

Captain M.D.Rushan, 17 The Croft, Bishopstone, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 4DF

Price: £18-50p plus £3 postage and packing

i.s.

### JUST FANCY THAT !!!

From the Report of the Tynwald Select Committee on the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, November 2008

The Select Committee received a submission from an Isle of Man resident who wished to book 'online' for a car plus driver plus one passenger to travel from Douglas to Liverpool on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2007, returning to Douglas on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007. The gentleman inadvertently selected an option to sail Liverpool>Douglas>Liverpool, paying the advertised fare of £258. Upon realising his error, he immediately rebooked, only to find that the cost of his sailing Douglas>Liverpool>Douglas on the same dates was quoted as £408, an increase of £150.

This particular issue was raised by the Chairman of the Select Committee when he asked Mr Mark Woodward (Chief Executive of the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company) how such a variation could occur when the corrected booking is made within a matter of minutes.

Mr Woodward commented:

*"that can only be a function of time and availability of the system in real time, working through the tiers of discounts available".*

Fancy !!!

## THOS. & JAS. HARRISON – DOWN UNDER

*by LNRS Vice-President Captain Graeme Cubbin*

Once upon a time there lived in North Lancashire five brothers, sons of prosperous farmer James Harrison (1781-1862) of Batty Hill, Cockerham. There was also a brace of sisters in the family but the distaff side is seldom mentioned except when 'given in marriage', or 'brought to bed of a boy'. Richard, the eldest brother, left the farm to go to Liverpool where he built up a thriving bakery business manufacturing 'Hard Tack' (or 'Liverpool Pantiles') for the long-haul sailing ships based in that city. Thomas and James also left the farm to establish an enterprising shipping company, while Edward, the youngest, became a well-to-do Liverpool merchant. The remaining brother, John (1819-1867) was kept at home by their father to work the land, and eventually inherit the farm. John Harrison, with whose descendants this account is concerned, married a Miss Margaret Platt in 1854, and together they brought up six children.

James Harrison (1856-1917), the eldest son, having left school at an early age, eventually persuaded his mother (his father having died in 1867) to let him go to sea, preferably as an engineer. But first he had to serve a 7-year apprenticeship with a shore-based engineering firm before he could be accepted as a sea-going junior engineer. So, at the age of 17, James made his way to Merseyside to begin an apprenticeship with The Canada Iron Works of Birkenhead on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1874.

Two years later, a highly irregular situation arose, precipitated by young James' impatience to get out of the workshop and into a ship. Seven years seemed such an age! His indulgent uncles, Thomas and James Harrison, gave in to his repeated requests, and found him a berth as 4<sup>th</sup> Engineer in one of their ships. James resigned his apprenticeship on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1876, and signed-on the ss **Vanguard** (1,405/1873) on 1<sup>st</sup> March. He completed a 12-week voyage to Pernambuco (Recife), Brazil, signing-off at Liverpool on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1876. Someone must have pointed out to him that he must now come ashore and complete his apprenticeship, but no way could he go back to his former employers! Somehow, probably with the aid of his influential uncles, James was eventually taken on by the St George's Ironworks (John Jones & Company, Managers) of Liverpool.

No further interruptions occurred, and James completed his apprenticeship on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1881. He then made his way to his uncles' office, and work was found for him in the Superintendent Engineer's office. More than a year was to pass before he was appointed to a ship, however. This was the ss **Mediator** (2,011/1876) (Captain John Hannay), where he signed on as 4<sup>th</sup> Engineer on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1882. A voyage to New Orleans was followed by three voyages to the West Indies, and on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1883 young James (by now 3<sup>rd</sup> Engineer) left the **Mediator** to sit for his Board of Trade 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Certificate. He passed the examination on 28<sup>th</sup> February, but there is no record of his ever joining another ship to resume his career at sea. It would appear that he remained in his uncles' employ, working from the Company's Dock Office, assisting the Superintendent Engineer.

Meanwhile, his brother Thomas (1858-1917), who had emigrated to New Zealand in 1879, was reporting favourably on life in that far country. For some reason James decided to relinquish, or was persuaded to relinquish, his golden prospects of a glittering career in merchant shipping, to chance the unknown and join his brother in New Zealand. What his fond uncles thought of this scheme is not recorded, but they could not have been very happy about it. They had probably entertained hopes of their nephew becoming the next Superintendent Engineer, and eventually Technical Director and partner. But James' mind was made up. The home farm had been sold, the family dispersed, and their mother, Mrs Margaret Harrison, had sought retirement in Chester.

It was all settled, and in 1885 James took passage in ss *Tainui* to New Zealand where his brother welcomed him warmly. A formal partnership was soon drawn up and the brothers were in business. Thus we have the curious anomaly of two coexisting firms, a world apart, both geographically and commercially, with similar styles:

- Messrs Thos. & Jas. Harrison, Ship Owners of Liverpool, G.B., *and*
- Messrs Thos. & Jas. Harrison, Sheep Farmers of Canterbury, N.Z.

The brothers were ambitious, and together they bought the Clent Hills Estate (known to the Government Land Agency as "Run 115, with an area of 52,000 acres" from its current owner, Mr A.E. Peache, for £11,750, using funds from their share of the sale of Batty Hill Farm, and a joint mortgage. The property was leasehold, and the rent payable to the Government landowner was in the region of £600 per annum. The brothers prospered and in a few years had some 16,000 sheep roaming the green slopes.

In October 1888, James married Katherine (Kitty) Williams (1859-1957), and three years later his brother Thomas married Kitty's sister, Florence. So the brothers became brothers-in-law! However, James was soon to discover what his brother already knew: that sheep farming in New Zealand was fraught with problems. Sheep, being sheep, often tended to stray into neighbouring territories, leading to disputes about the number of strays on adjoining land, illicitly feasting on the neighbour's grass, at so many shillings per head per day. These disputes seldom became acrimonious – merely a business transaction – but strays were a nuisance, and keeping fences in order became a matter of priority. But fencing was an expensive commodity, and 52,000 acres would need about 32 miles of it, had that figure not been mitigated by the intervention of natural boundaries, such as rivers and streams. And sheep-dip: how many gallons, and how many hands would be needed to treat 16,000 reluctant sheep? As for the annual rituals of lambing and shearing, the mind simply cannot grasp the immensity of the task. Wool, of course, was the primary product of the industry, though lambs were slaughtered for local consumption, and livestock cargoes were not uncommon on the shorter sea routes. However, the lucrative overseas export trade in meat products was growing in importance as refrigerated ships became more sophisticated.

The weather, too, was a factor to be reckoned with. Capricious as the English climate, New Zealand farmers often had extreme conditions to deal with. The severe winter of 1895, for example, brought farmers to the brink of penury, James himself suffering the loss of over 7,000 sheep. James Harrison was now on his own, having

bought out his brother, and dissolving the partnership on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1894 when Thomas bought the Hackthorne Estate near Hinds. No explanation is offered as to why the partnership was ended, but the brothers remained devoted to each other for the rest of their lives.

Even before the 1895 disaster, James seemed quite desperate for money. Mortgaged to the hilt after buying out Thomas, he even approached his cousin Fred (Frederick James Harrison, then a director and partner in the Harrison Line) for a loan, explaining in a letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> January 1895 that:

*"The firm through whom I do all my business has just suspended payment ... and I shall have to make fresh arrangements. And some ready cash would be useful. Very unwillingly I ask if you could lend me ten or twelve hundred pounds ..? The run and stock are mortgaged to Thos. for £5,500 at 6½% to be paid off by annual instalments of £700.... If you decide to advance me any sum I shall be very grateful .... Wishing you all a Happy New Year, I am, You're (sic) affectionate cousin, Jas. Harrison."*

One would like to know how Cousin Fred responded to this appeal, but having just bought Maer Hall in Staffordshire, the auguries could not have been good.

On 4<sup>th</sup> August 1895, James wrote to his spinster sister Maggie (Margaret Harrison, 1865-1956), then living in Chester, in similar but more subtle terms. Apparently she had earlier expressed an interest in investing in sheep running and James, chastened by his recent devastating experience, felt bound to warn her:

*"I do not think that your trustees have the power to invest in such as a sheep station. Sheep farming is a very risky thing .... I don't expect to shear more than half the number of sheep at the next shearing .... It has been a terrible winter and the loss of sheep will be something frightful ..."*

However, James has another suggestion:

*"Suppose that you and Annie [another sister] were to take over the mortgage I gave to Thos. which amounts to £5,500 ... advance another £500 making £6,000 in all, but make the interest 6% which would improve your present income considerably ... Supposing I made default you would then get possession of Clent Hills at a very cheap (sic) rate .... The kids are all well and thriving ...."*

Although the price of wool fluctuated, it remained high, and good seasons prevailed over loss-making periods over the years, enabling farmers to clear debts before contracting new ones! There is little doubt that farming had become James Harrison's life and he persevered. Gone and forgotten were his early ambitions to be a marine engineer, perhaps technical director of a prestigious shipping company. He was a sheep farmer, first and foremost. Evidence of James' priorities is perhaps indicated unwittingly in a brief but urgent letter, dated 13<sup>th</sup> October 1894:

*"Please send me up a couple of lamb feeding bottles, also a little more of that acid, and a bottle of [indecipherable] and one of Ellermans Embrocation. Yours truly, Jas. Harrison"*

He adds a hasty postscript:

*"PS Also one largest size screw-top baby's feeding bottle. - J.H."*

It is clear where the anxious farmer's priorities lay! This particular item would be for the use of Master Arthur Downes Harrison (1894-1974), fated to be seriously wounded at Gallipoli in 1915.

Early in the new century, James felt prosperous and confident enough to plan a trip 'home' to England with his wife Kitty, and daughter Constance (1892-1974). Thus, in February 1904, passages were booked on the liner Ionic, which sailed from

Wellington on 1<sup>st</sup> April bound for Plymouth, a voyage which would take six weeks with calls at Rio de Janeiro and Tenerife.

Running the easting down to Cape Horn proved too much of an ordeal for poor Kitty and Connie, and they spent the first few days in bed. James took a lively interest in all that went on around him and wrote to his brother, Tom, approvingly of the accommodation, cuisine and facilities found on board. Nevertheless, by 7<sup>th</sup> May he is telling Tom: “ ... *I am sick of this boat ...*” !

Certainly, after six weeks at sea, they were all glad to step ashore at Plymouth on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1904. There they were met and welcomed by James’ brother, John Harrison (1867-1914), his wife Edith and sister Anne. They all came off to the *Ionic* in the tender *Cheshire*, a former Birkenhead paddle-ferry. Ashore at last, the party travelled to Chester by rail, where James and his family were to stay at ‘Brookside’, the home of his mother, Mrs Margaret Harrison, in Hoole Road. During the journey north, James had ample opportunity to study the rolling stock with the critical eye of an engineer. He was impressed, but confided to Tom that “*the engineers don’t choo-choo here like the New Zealand ones!*”

Chester meat market was a source of fascination to James, with the Wellington & Christchurch Meat Company’s carcasses hanging cheek by jowl with those from Argentina. “*You can tell English meat a mile off,*” he remarked to Thomas, “*by the superior appearance ... which may be due to artificial feeding. New Zealand lambs are labelled here as being ‘grass fed’*”

The family also spent some time at ‘South Lawn’, the home of brother John at Waterloo, and James, on several occasions, visited his old friends in Harrison’s office (probably the Dock Office). However, he professed himself disappointed to miss Mr Cadman, the Superintendent Engineer.

At the beginning of June the tourists spent a long weekend at Maer Hall, Staffordshire, the country retreat of his cousin, Frederick James Harrison, current chairman of the Harrison Line. “*He has a very nice place and the land is generally very good, but mostly grass ... he owns about 3,000 acres at Maer.*”

Little Constance must have made a good impression on Frederick James, for she left Maer Hall with an invitation to go to Newcastle-upon-Tyne in a few weeks’ time to launch the new Harrison Line vessel, the ss *Matador*, then building at the Wallsend yard of Swan Hunter & Wigham Richardson. James, unfortunately, has little to say about this event, merely remarking to Thomas “*I expect Kitty has told Florence all about the trip to Newcastle, so I have not much more to write about.*” One has to rely on local press reports, but it is easy to imagine the degree of excitement experienced by 11-year old Connie on that memorable day, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1904. An exquisite model of a galleon, fashioned in silver, still stands upon a mantelpiece in her old home in Christchurch, the gift of the shipyard for an auspicious service rendered! (Constance married a Mr Arthur Turnbull in 1914 and they had three sons and three daughters. She died in 1988, at the age of 95).

A visit ‘home’ could not be complete without a call at the old homestead in North Lancashire. James, accompanied by his brother John, travelled to Cockerham on August Bank Holiday. They walked to Batty Hill farmhouse, “*but could not get in, as Lupton (the present owner) was out*” complained James. Many old friends were either dead, or had left the district. “*Altogether, my visit was rather depressing.*” said James.

It all got rather too much for James who commented that he was: "*beginning to be homesick now, and there is still a month before we sail...*" Berths had been booked on the ss **Corinthic**, but she had suffered long delays and their arrival back in New Zealand could not be expected before late November.

Doubtless, after more than six months of absence, James found much to attend to on his return. Soon, however, the normal routine of life on a sheep station was resumed, but change was in the air. James sold the Clent Hills estate in 1908 to a Mr A.R.C. Killian for £27,500 and retired to St Albans, Christchurch, and then took his two eldest sons, John and Oliver, on a visit to England. His mother died in 1910, a sad prelude to the sad events which would afflict the family during the next decade.

The onset of the Great War in August 1914 found New Zealanders eager to go to the aid of the Mother Country. Four of James' sons, Oliver, Arthur, Gerald and Harold volunteered for service with the New Zealand Contingent, and Arthur was the first to go overseas. In May 1915 he was severely wounded at Anzac Cove, Gallipoli, and eventually evacuated to hospital in England. Months later, as he approached the convalescent stage, he began to worry about his kit which had been virtually destroyed and never replaced. He wrote to his father about his dilemma, and James responded with a blistering letter to the Director of Base Records at Army Headquarters, dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1916. He forcibly explained his son's situation, and how, despite many requests and complaints:

*"He could not get his uniform renewed ... and at last, at his own expense, had a tunic made. He was also wearing a pair of borrowed trousers which ... are not fit to be seen in respectable company. ... He cannot get in London any replacements which shows some mismanagement which is not a credit to New Zealand ... NZ troops are talked of in London as being among the worst-clothed among the Colonial troops ... I hope the Department will look into this as I am sure it can't desire to see its men going about in untidy condition ..."*

As if determined to give credit where credit was due, James added:

*"Except as to his clothes, he seems to have been very well looked after. And I have nothing but praise for the medical attentions he has received. Yours faithfully, Jas. Harrison."*

James appends a proud but sadly ironic (as events would prove) postscript:

*"PS. I should remark that I have two more sons at the Front in Egypt."*

Sadly, James was destined never to see his sons again, for he died at his home in Christchurch on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1917: his brother Thomas died on 11<sup>th</sup> June the same year at his home in Chester, England. This was distressing enough for the sisters, Kitty and Flo, but worse was to come. The two sons referred to in James' letter were no longer in Egypt, but in Flanders, where their unit was holding a section of that grim line of trenches known as the Western Front. Harold, aged 21, died of his wounds on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1917 and his brother Gerald, aged 22, suffered the same fate on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1917; and their cousin, Charles Harrison, was killed in the same year. One can scarcely imagine the anguish suffered by Kitty Harrison that fateful year – surely an *annus horribilis* from every point of view. Not even that gallant ship, the **Matador**, launched and sponsored by young Connie all those years ago, could escape the blight, for she was sunk by a torpedo fired from the U-boat UC31, 115 miles WNW from the Fastnet, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1917. Two seamen lost their lives.

Kitty became a matriarchal figure, advising her surviving children, and helping to bring up her numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren, until her death in September 1957, at the age of 98. Today, there is a considerable clan of



Harrison and Harrison-related citizens prospering in those remote, well-favoured islands.

Sources

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SIXTY YEARS AGO .....

SHIPBUILDING AND MARINE ENGINEERING RETURNS FOR 1949

(from 'Shipbuilding and Shipping Record', 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1950)

**BRITISH SHIPBUILDING**

**AILSA SHIPBUILDING COMPANY, TROON**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Graecian, ss. ...	C.	3,284	Liverpool
Hudson River, ss. ...	Cr.	3,128	London
Hudson Firth, ss. ...	Cr.	3,120	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>9,532</b>	

**ALDOUS (SUCCESSORS), BRIGHTLINGSEA**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Igbo, ms. ...	L	152	Lagos
Ibi, ms. ...	L	152	Lagos
Sundry small craft ...	—	431	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>735</b>	

**ARDROSSAN DOCKYARD**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Lurie, ms. ...	P. & C.	2,400	Lisbon
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,400</b>	

**J. S. P. AUSTIN & SON, SUNDERLAND**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Auk, ms. ...	C.	1,238	London
Elizabeth Nielsen, ss. ...	C.	2,441	Copenhagen
Goodwood, ss. ...	C.	2,487	London
Samuel Clegg, ms. ...	Cr.	1,775	London
Mendip, ss. ...	Cr.	1,366	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>9,307</b>	

**BARCLAY, CURLE & CO., GLASGOW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Chandpara, ms. ...	R.C.	5,095	London
Chantala, ms. ...	R.C.	9,105	London
Brasida, ms. ...	R.C.	7,850	Glasgow
<b>Total</b>		<b>26,050</b>	

**BARTRAM & SONS, SUNDERLAND**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Dagfred, ms. ...	C.	5,254	Olo
Laza Maersk, ms. ...	C.	5,720	Copenhagen
Hulda Maersk, ms. ...	C.	5,720	Copenhagen
<b>Total</b>		<b>16,694</b>	

**BLYTH DRY DOCKS & SHIPBUILDING COMPANY**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Vila do Porto, ms. ...	C.	2,591	Ponta Delgada
Wilhelm Terkildsen, ss. ...	—	2,458	—
Nally Maersk, ms. ...	T.	8,200	Fredericia
Bavo, ss. ...	F.	2,000	—
B.H.C. No. 3 ...	F.	—	Blyth
Pana, ss. ...	C.	2,459	Bergen
<b>Total</b>		<b>17,708</b>	

**BLYTHSWOOD SHIPBUILDING COMPANY, GLASGOW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Hamlet, ms. ...	T.	10,260	Drammen
Regent Leopard, ms. ...	T.	8,440	London
Huldra, ss. ...	T.	2,500	Bergen
Lancing, ms. ...	T.	11,800	Larvik
<b>Total</b>		<b>33,000</b>	

**JOHN BROWN & CO., CLYDEBANK**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Hinakura, ms. ...	C.	11,272	London
Raagitane, ms. ...	P. & C.	21,868	London
Vikland, ms. ...	T.	13,120	Panama City
Vikfoos, ms. ...	T.	13,120	Panama City
Nottingham, ms. ...	C.	7,600	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>66,380</b>	

**BURNTISLAND SHIPBUILDING COMPANY**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Thornale, ms. ...	C.	3,713	Sandwich
Elin Hava, ms. ...	C.	4,316	Bergen
Cyprian Prince, ms. ...	C.	2,358	London
Lochwood, ms. ...	C.	1,689	Glasgow
Torro, ms. ...	C.	4,750	Olo
Syamaru, ms. ...	C.	3,300	Liverpool
Spero, ms. ...	C.	4,750	Olo
Wandsworth, ms. ...	Cr.	1,890	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>26,766</b>	

**CALEDON SHIPBUILDING & ENGINEERING COMPANY, DUNDEE**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Pineleaf, ss. ...	T.C.	2,759	Leith
Wanstead, ms. ...	C.	5,664	London
Wandover, ms. ...	C.	5,664	London
Woodford, ms. ...	C.	5,664	London
Sands, ss. ...	Co.	990	Glasgow
<b>Total</b>		<b>20,741</b>	

**CAMMELL LAIRD & CO., BIRKENHEAD**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Achelcross, ms. ...	C.	11,149	Liverpool
Bittern, ss. ...	C.	1,542	Liverpool
City of Birkenhead, ss. ...	C.	7,200	Liverpool
Rio Baion, ms. ...	P. & C.	7,143	Buenos Aires
Rio Belgrano, ms. ...	P. & C.	7,143	Buenos Aires
British Triumph, ms. ...	T.	8,600	London
Persic, ss. ...	R.C.	12,594	Southampton
<b>Total</b>		<b>56,371</b>	

**CLELANDS (SUCCESSORS), WALLSEND**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Chindit, ms. ...	F.	150	Rangoon
Kingsgate, ms. ...	Co.	545	Hull
Halidunna, ms. ...	Co.	994	Rochester
Sundry small craft ...	—	440	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,129</b>	

**COCHRANE & SONS, SELBY**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Boynton Wyke, s.	Tr.	676	Hull
Milford Dunes, s.	Tr.	363	Milford
Milford Duchess, ms.	Tr.	363	Milford
Nethe, s.	Tg.	100	Antwerp
Sonne, s.	Tg.	100	Antwerp
Ratholm, s.	Tr.	351	Cardiff
Gatsholm, s.	Tr.	351	Cardiff
Andaens, s.	Tr.	700	Grimby
Newby Wyke, s.	Tr.	676	Hull
Northern Chief, s.	Tr.	700	Grimby
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,380</b>	

**CHARLES CONNELL & CO., GLASGOW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Carryonpark, ms.	C.	5,328	Greenock
Corona, ms.	C.	5,136	Haugesund
Bonaldar, s.	C.	7,869	Tonsberg
Tamsals, ms.	C.	6,500	Tonsberg
<b>Total</b>		<b>24,833</b>	

**COOK, WELTON & GEMMELL, BEVERLEY**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Bombardier, s.	Tr.	461	Grimby
Vindors, s.	Tr.	640	Grimby
Cayton Bay, s.	Tr.	580	Hull
Stavelis, s.	Tr.	684	Hull
Lancor, s.	Tr.	668	Grimby
Prince Charles, s.	Tr.	712	Hull
Redolf, s.	Tg.	181	Gochen-burg
Lifegard, s.	Tr.	668	Grimby
Northern Princess, s.	Tr.	676	Grimby
Northern Prince, s.	Tr.	676	Grimby
Northern Queen, s.	Tr.	676	Grimby
Kington Garnet, s.	Tr.	680	Hull
Kington Zircon, s.	Tr.	680	Hull
<b>Total</b>		<b>8,182</b>	

**WILLIAM DENNIT & BROS., DUMBARTON**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Queen of the Channel, ms.	P.	1,472	London
Mary Queen of Scots, ms.	F.	230	Gronon
Brigstone, s.	F.	2,730	Newhaven
Olinda, s.	C.	5,420	—
Lairds Ben, ms.	Co.	995	Glasgow
Martaban, s.	C.	5,809	Glasgow
Sundry small craft	—	2,190	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>19,046</b>	

**WILLIAM DOXFORD & SONS, SUNDERLAND**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Trelawny, ms.	C.	5,414	London
Trelawick, ms.	C.	5,386	London
Trelavan, ms.	C.	5,386	London
Dartmoor, ms.	C.	5,315	London
Potamhall, ms.	C.	5,500	Wux
Esmoor, ms.	C.	5,315	London
Trelaska, ms.	C.	5,386	London
La Sierra, ms.	C.	6,210	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>43,912</b>	

**RICHARD DUNSTON, THORNE, and associated company, HENRY SCARR, HESSLE**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Bowrybridge, ms.	Tr.	374	Fleetwood
St. Richard, ms.	Tr.	334	Hull
Yard No. S. 648	T.B.	200	Port Said
Yard No. S. 649	T.B.	200	Port Said
Yard No. S. 650	T.B.	200	Port Said
Sundry small craft	—	4,913	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>6,181</b>	

**FAIRFIELD SHIPBUILDING & ENGINEERING COMPANY, GOVAN**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Caion, s.	C.	5,700	London
Lancashire, s.	P. & C.	8,900	Liverpool
English Scar, ms.	A.C.	11,000	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>25,600</b>	

**FERGUSON BROS. (PORT GLASGOW)**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Mersey Engineer, s.	D.	750	Liverpool
Abigail XI, s.	Tg.	340	La Havre
Kvart, s.	W.	594	London
Abigail XII, s.	Tg.	340	La Havre
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,024</b>	

**FLEMING & FERGUSON, FAIRLEY**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Cocur, s.	D.	588	Working- sea
Sir James Mitchell, s.	D.	1,200	Freemantle
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,788</b>	

**FURNESS SHIPBUILDING COMPANY, HAVERTON HILL-ON-TEES**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
City of Philadelphia, s.	C.	7,591	Liverpool
C. J. Hambro, ms.	T.	15,773	Oslo
Ferncastle, ms.	T.	15,901	Oslo
Janus, ms.	T.	15,773	Sandefjord
Solar, ms.	T.	15,773	Oslo
British General, ms.	T.	8,844	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>79,655</b>	

**GOOLE SHIPBUILDING & REP. CO.**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Falster, ms.	C.	1,136	Kristian-hamm
Polythene, ms.	Co.	330	Liverpool
Munkfors, ms.	C.	916	Uddeholm
Stability, ms.	C.	1,486	London
Turks, ms.	C.	1,050	Stavanger
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,918</b>	

**GRANGEMOUTH DOCKYARD COMPANY**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Melrose, ms.	Co.	1,076	Leith
Sapphire, ms.	Co.	999	Glasgow
Hanfield, ms.	Co.	1,098	London
Thomas Hardie, ms.	Co.	1,750	London
Chaimite, s.	C.	1,400	Lisbon
<b>Total</b>		<b>6,323</b>	

**WILLIAM GRAY & CO., W. H'POOL**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Crystallina, ms.	C.	2,351	Bale
Fynderborg, s.	C.	2,343	Copen-hagen
Atlantic Express, ms.	C.	7,310	Monrovia
Irish Prince, s.	C.	5,627	Dublin
Irish Hazel, s.	C.	5,627	Dublin
Spjogerborg, ms.	C.	2,343	Copen-hagen
Valborg Nielsen, s.	C.	2,668	Copen-hagen
<b>Total</b>		<b>28,269</b>	

**GREENOCK DOCKYARD COMPANY**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Clan Mactavish, s.	C.	8,035	Glasgow
Clan Shaw, s.	C.	8,150	Glasgow
Clan Sinclair, s.	C.	8,150	Glasgow
<b>Total</b>		<b>24,335</b>	

**ALEXANDER HALL & CO., ABERDEEN**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Loch Lorn, s.	Tr.	670	Hull
Loch Doon, s.	Tr.	670	Hull
Boston Vampire, s.	Tr.	390	Fleetwood
Boston Meteor, s.	Tr.	390	Fleetwood
St. Hubert, s.	Tr.	690	West-Hardepool
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,810</b>	

**HALL, RUSSELL & CO., ABERDEEN**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Vikdal, ms.	C.	4,779	Panama-City
Adriatic Connet, ms.	Co.	1,050	Liverpool
Murdoch, ms.	Cr.	1,759	London
Borra, ms.	C.	1,029	Oslo
Nordpol, ms.	C.	4,728	Bergen
Bofe, ms.	C.	1,029	Oslo
Dame Carolina	—	—	—
Maslett, ms.	Cr.	1,759	London
Harry Richardson, ms.	Cr.	1,759	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>17,892</b>	

**WM. HAMILTON & CO., PORT GLASGOW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Bargillet, ms.	T.	8,994	Farsund
Makra, s.	C.	8,953	Liverpool
Nordbo, ms.	T.	9,063	Bergen
Tregilsson, s.	C.	6,400	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>33,410</b>	

**JOHN HARKER, KNOTTINGLEY**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Wheldale H, ms. ...	T.	250	Hull
Norhdale H, ms. ...	T.	180	Hull
Mossdale H, ms. ...	T.	154	Hull
Sundry small craft ...	—	410	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>994</b>	

**HARLAND & WOLFF**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Cazador, ms. ...	T.	6,441	Buenos Aires
Explorador, ms. ...	T.	6,478	Buenos Aires
Vestfoss, ms. ...	T.	8,250	Oslo
Champavac, ms. ...	P. & C.	1,288	Bombay
Amarna, ms. ...	C.	3,422	Liverpool
Rohidas, ms. ...	P. & C.	1,288	Bombay
Mafans, ms. ...	P. & C.	10,125	Liverpool
Aaslout, ms. ...	C.	3,422	Liverpool
Vikingen, ms. ...	T.	8,263	Panama
Hector, ms. ...	P. & C.	10,125	Liverpool
British Captain, ms. ...	T.	8,700	London
Bloemfontein Castle, ms. ...	P. & C.	17,680	London
Ternoy, ms. ...	T.	8,243	Arsenal
Runic, ms. ...	R.C.	13,900	Southampton
Kurdistan, ms. ...	T.	8,263	Newcastle-on-Tyne
British Commander, ms. ...	T.	8,700	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>124,616</b>	

**R. & W. HAWTHORN, LESLIE & CO., HEBBURN-UPON-TYNE**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Lactrus, ms. ...	T.	6,476	London
British Resource, ms. ...	T.	11,200	London
Delphic, ms. ...	R.C.	10,691	Southampton
Mid Tyne Ferry No. 3	F.	80	—
Aetheling, ms. ...	T.	11,200	Liverpool
Pathfinder, ms. ...	O.C.	6,650	Panama
<b>Total</b>		<b>46,297</b>	

**A. & J. INGLIS, GLASGOW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Settar IV, ms. ...	W.	586	London
Settar V, ms. ...	W.	586	London
Settar VI, ms. ...	W.	586	London
Ernst Larsen, ms. ...	W.	598	Durban
Arnt Karlson, ms. ...	W.	598	Durban
Africans II, ms. ...	F.R.V.	820	Cape Town
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,774</b>	

**SIR JAMES LAING & SONS, SUNDERLAND**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Bjorn Stange, ms. ...	T.	10,099	Oslo
Svalngrim Stange, ms. ...	T.	10,099	Oslo
British Alliance, ms. ...	T.	11,203	London
Waiotta, ms. ...	T.	10,094	Tonsberg
Dalsby, ms. ...	C.	4,800	Wex
			Hartlepool
<b>Total</b>		<b>46,295</b>	

**JAMES LAMONT & CO., GREENOCK**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Knut Jarl, ms. ...	C.	1,026	Trondheim
Eystein Jarl, ms. ...	C.	1,026	Trondheim
Theron, ms. ...	S.	750	Montreal
Yverdale, ms. ...	Co.	987	Glasgow
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,789</b>	

**JOHN LEWIS & SONS, ABERDEEN**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Cape Cleveland, ms. ...	Tr.	659	Hull
Cape Sparsel, ms. ...	Tr.	659	Hull
Laforey, ms. ...	Tr.	609	Grimby
Primalla, ms. ...	Tr.	666	Hull
Lincolnbrook, ms. ...	Co.	964	London
Lammarmulr, ms. ...	Tr.	700	Hull
Red Ross, ms. ...	Tr.	670	Fleetwood
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,927</b>	

**LITHGOWS LTD., PORT GLASGOW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Biographer, ms. ...	C.	6,925	Liverpool
Cape Grenville, ms. ...	C.	7,463	Glasgow
Isforn, ms. ...	T.	9,044	London
Blecoe, ms. ...	T.	9,363	London
British Patriot, ms. ...	T.	8,570	London
Solstad, ms. ...	T.	9,077	Oslo
Altnes, ms. ...	T.	9,274	Bergen
Rajah, ms. ...	C.	5,850	London
Ranea, ms. ...	C.	5,850	London
Kindat, ms. ...	C.	5,590	Glasgow
Glenville, ms. ...	C.	6,250	Oslo
<b>Total</b>		<b>83,006</b>	

**LOBNITZ & CO., RENFREW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Savick, ms. ...	D.	660	Preston
Campecha, ms. ...	D.	1,830	Vare Cruz
Haffer, ms. ...	D.	1,180	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,670</b>	

**PHILIP & SONS, DARTMOUTH**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Wimborne, ms. ...	Co.	368	Poolo
P.U.B. 1, ms. ...	P.B.	90	—
Sundry small craft ...	—	453	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>911</b>	

**WM. PICKERSGILL & SONS, SUNDERLAND**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Alfa, ms. ...	C.	2,808	Monrovia
Poolo Quay, ms. ...	Cr.	1,366	London
Poolo River, ms. ...	Cr.	1,366	London
Poolo Island, ms. ...	Cr.	1,366	London
Kypros, ms. ...	P. & C.	3,590	Liverpool
<b>Total</b>		<b>10,496</b>	

**JAMES POLLOCK, SONS & CO., FAVERSHAM**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Goldlyns, ms. ...	Co.	533	London
Sundry small craft ...	—	1,349	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,902</b>	

**JOHN READHEAD & SONS, SOUTH SHIELDS**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Irish Oak ...	C.	5,077	Dublin
Tregenna ...	C.	5,815	London
Tregothnan ...	C.	5,815	London
Goullistan ...	C.	8,500	London
Yangtzen ...	C.	7,200	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>32,407</b>	

**HENRY ROBB, LEITH**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Mombasa, ms. ...	P. & C.	2,050	London
Kalopol, ms. ...	C.	2,486	Wellington, N.Z.
Kamona, ms. ...	C.	1,785	Wellington, N.Z.
Mamaku, ms. ...	C.	927	Nelson, N.Z.
M.S.C. Grab Hopper No. 1, ms. ...	D.	480	Manchester
Mole, ms. ...	D.	311	Nigeria
Wanganul, ms. ...	D.	260	Wanganul, N.Z.
— ms. ...	D.	125	Scralt
M.S.C. Panther, ms. ...	Tg.	154	Manchesters
Hopper barge ...	Bg.	52	Manchester Leith
<b>Total</b>		<b>8,630</b>	

**ROWHEDGE IRONWORKS COMPANY, N. COLCHESTER**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Southern Africa, ms. ...	L.B.	—	R.N.L.I.
Delphin, ms. ...	Bg.	130	British
Umbria, ms. ...	T.	80	U.S.A.
Sundry small craft ...	—	1,008	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,218</b>	

**D. E. SCARR, HOWDEN**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Gertrud Kathrina, ms. ...	Co.	150	Seaby
No. 7 ...	Bg.	—	—
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	

**SCOTT & SONS, BOWLING**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Tane, ms. ...	Tg.	209	London
Taft, ms. ...	Tg.	209	London
Marino, ms. ...	Co.	549	Launceston
<b>Total</b>		<b>967</b>	

**SCOTT'S SHIPBUILDING & ENGINEERING COMPANY, GREENOCK**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Fort Avalon, ms. ...	C.	3,484	London
Talyuan, ms. ...	P. & C.	7,472	London
Anking, ms. ...	P. & C.	6,000	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>16,956</b>	

**SHORT BROTHERS, SUNDERLAND**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
George, ms. ...	C.	2,600	Panama
Oslo, ms. ...	C.	3,450	Copenhagen
Soya Christina, ms. ...	T.	7,400	Stockholm
<b>Total</b>		<b>13,450</b>	

**WM. SIMONS & CO., RENFREW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Jalengi, ss. ....	D.	4,300	Calcutta
Ibdan, ss. ....	D.	2,535	Lagos
M.O.P. 1283, d.s. ....	D.	3,437	Buenos Aires
<b>Total</b>		<b>10,272</b>	

**SMITH'S DOCK COMPANY, MIDDLESBROUGH**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Gastrana, ss. ....	T.	5,072	Curacao
Glesula, ss. ....	T.	5,072	Curacao
Gadina, ss. ....	T.	6,000	Curacao
Brutos, ss. ....	Tr.	727	Hull
Benvolio, ss. ....	Tr.	722	Hull
Amakura, ss. ....	C.	2,961	Liverpool
Southern Ranger, ss. ....	W.	438	Leith
Southern Rider, ss. ....	W.	438	Leith
Southern Rover, ss. ....	W.	438	Leith
Southern Runner, ss. ....	W.	438	Leith
Odd XI, ss. ....	W.	443	Sandefjord
Odd XII, ss. ....	W.	443	Sandefjord
Pol XIII, ss. ....	W.	442	Larvik
Globe XII, ss. ....	W.	442	Larvik
Pesca I, ss. ....	W.	442	Buenos Aires
Pesca 2, ss. ....	W.	442	Buenos Aires
<b>Total</b>		<b>24,960</b>	

**ALEX. STEPHEN & SONS, GLASGOW**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Fort Dauphin, ms. ....	F.R.	3,100	La Havre
Dorset, ss. ....	R.C.	10,000	London
Rio Bermejo, ms. ....	C.	7,050	Buenos Aires
<b>Total</b>		<b>22,150</b>	

**SWAN, HUNTER & WIGHAM RICHARDSON, WALLSEND and WALKER-UPON-TYNE**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
City of Coventry, ss. ....	C.	7,580	Liverpool
British Freedom, ms. ....	T.	10,995	London
H.M.S. Daring ....	F.R.	2,947	Admiralty
Vestfold, ms. ....	T.	8,762	Sandefjord
Isaac, ss. ....	C.	11,750	Liverpool
British Ardour, ms. ....	T.	8,616	London
Chindwara, ms. ....	C.	7,400	London
British Union, ms. ....	T.	8,700	London
<b>Total</b>		<b>66,950</b>	

**JOSEPH L. THOMPSON & SONS and subsidiary**

**JOHN CROWN & SONS, LTD. SUNDERLAND**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Ulysses, ss. ....	C.	8,461	Liverpool
Eastern Glory, ss. ....	C.	6,500	Hong Kong
Thorsleva, ms. ....	T.	10,200	Sandefjord
City of Manchester, ss. ....	C.	7,500	Glasgow
Gamma, ss. ....	T.	5,144	Williamstad
Peola Channel, ss. ....	Cr.	1,364	London
Peola Sound, ss. ....	Cr.	1,364	London
Falpan, ms. ....	T.	2,830	Gravenhage
<b>Total</b>		<b>41,389</b>	

**JOHN I. THORNYCROFT & CO., SOUTHAMPTON**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Balmoral, ms. ....	P.	688	Southampton
Atia, ms. ....	Ts.	193	London
Sundry small craft ....		110	
<b>Total</b>		<b>991</b>	

**VICKERS-ARMSTRONGS**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Launched at Barrow—			
Chusan, ss. ....	P. & C.	24,000	London
Eva Paron, ss. ....	P. & C.	12,500	Buenos Aires
Launched at Walker—			
Rangitoto, ms. ....	P. & C.	21,808	London
Laertes, ms. ....	P. & C.	8,270	Amsterdam
Patroclus, ss. ....	P. & C.	10,000	Liverpool
City of Chicago, ss. ....	P. & C.	7,500	Liverpool
Perseus, ss. ....	P. & C.	10,000	Liverpool
<b>Total</b>		<b>94,078</b>	

**J. S. WATSON (GAINSBOROUGH) 21 Barges and lighters Total 2,340 tons**

**J. SAMUEL WHITE & CO., COWES, I.O.W.**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Rio Santiago, ms. ....	R.C.	3,164	Buenos Aires
Ekst, ms. ....	F.	355	Calabar
Sundry small craft ....		257	
<b>Total</b>		<b>3,778</b>	

**YARROW & CO., SCOTSTOUN**

Name	Type	Tons displacement	Registry
H.M.S. Decoy, ss. ....		—	Admiralty
Kaedi, ms. ....	C.	200	French
Jala II, ms. ....	P. & C.	400	Nyasaland
Yamuna, ss. ....	P.S.	660	India
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,460</b>	

**W. J. YARWOOD & SONS, NORTHWICH**

Name	Type	Tons gross	Registry
Austus, ms. ....	S.T.	70	Liverpool
Guasindiba Shell, ms. ....	T.	273	Rio de Janeiro
Lifebmoy, ss. ....	T.	198	Liverpool
Sundry small craft ....		531	
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,072</b>	



Marianna VI (ex-Aureol) laid up at Eleusis in December 1998.

## MERSEY DOCK DEVELOPMENTS IN 1903

*compiled by LNRS Vice-President Harry Hignett from 'Lloyd's List'*

At the weekly meeting of the Mersey Docks & Harbour Board held in late November 1903, chairman Mr Robert Gladstone reviewed the work of the year, pointing out the construction of new docks and the extension of existing ones, in addition to the widening of dock entrances. These schemes were necessary owing to the expansion of trade in the port and the ever increasing size of the steamers. Mr Gladstone made reference to the fact that it was proposed to build steamers for the American trade up to 900ft in length, and of proportionate depth and breadth. He pointed out that such ships could enter the Sandon and Brunswick docks with the greatest facility, and there would be plenty of room for them inside. At the Brocklebank Dock, the South Carriers' Dock was being converted into a graving dock.

There had been expansion of the milling trade during the year both at Liverpool and Birkenhead, and the Board was considering overtures made by various firms with a view to the establishment of more flour mills. A river wall and graving docks were in the course of construction at Tranmere on the Birkenhead side of the Mersey, embracing an area of 62 acres, and when completed the site would be devoted to shipbuilding purposes. A quantity of land on the Liverpool side beyond the south docks would also perhaps be used for similar purposes. He hoped the day would come when Liverpool would regain its position as a great shipbuilding centre.

Since the commencement of dredging operations in 1890 some 75 million tons of sand had been removed from the Bar and the sea channels. There had been great pressure for berths for ships during the year. Since 1<sup>st</sup> July there had been an increase of 673,000 tons in the tonnage of ships using the port, as compared with 660,000 for the same period the previous year (1902). However, there had not been a proportionate increase in revenues derived from freights owing to the vessels not having full cargoes. The increase in dues for 1903 was about £50,000, compared with an increase of £25,000 for the previous year. The Board intended to promote a Bill in Parliament asking permission to restrict the reduction in nett tonnage to fifty per cent of the gross tonnage. The permission was granted the previous year by the House of Lords, but the House of Commons reduced it to forty per cent. Mr Gladstone said he had been amazed by some of the absurd figures in Lloyd's Register which were worked out in regard to nett registered tonnage. He could mention one steamer which was 800 tons gross, which claimed only 74 tons nett.

The point which Mr Gladstone thought should be emphasised was that the Board should look at the actual size of the vessel. It did not matter whether a steamer was a box full of engines or a box full of bales of cotton: the fact of the matter was that it required the same depth of water, the same breadth of lock gates, and the same facilities at the quay. He felt very strongly that the day must come when dock dues would be levied upon the measurement of ships – the gross size of ships – and not upon the nett register which did not apply to present conditions at all. The fifty per cent was a compromise which he heartily concurred with, and he hoped they would get it. ■

## ALFRED HOLT'S BLUE FUNNEL 'PRIAM' CLASS

by LNRs Member James A. Pottinger

Surely nothing epitomises the revolution wrought by the introduction of containerisation more than the truncated service enjoyed by what were possibly the most efficient and impressive general cargo ships ever to enter the Merchant Navy. They were the so-called PRIAM class of ships commissioned by Ocean Fleets.

The new class was ostensibly designed to replace the former 'P'-class ships, and as cargo handling costs had been given special attention in the earlier Glen Line **Glenlyon** ships, an even more critical assessment of design parameters was employed on this new venture in that *'all other requirements would take second place to those of economic stevedoring and strict care of cargo'*.



The **Prometheus** and the **Peisander** fitting out at the Vickers Yard at Walker-on-Tyne in August, 1966.

*Photo: Shipbuilding and Shipping Record*

In acceptance of the fact that maintenance costs would tend to increase over the years in service, a reasonable penalty would be accepted in first costs to obviate this inevitable escalation.

Given the initial critical parameters noted above, it behoved the designers to ensure that cargo spaces would be accessible, 'square' and as spacious as possible. To this end the most volumetric part of the hull was to be given over to cargo, and the

machinery space was to be situated as far aft as allowed; a contentious development was the positioning of the cargo tanks to take latex, palm oil etc., at the ends of the ship in order not to encroach on these holds. This resulted in higher stresses in the hull and required the necessary compensating scantlings.

To meet the strictures noted, the holds were squared off and to ensure that smooth bulkheads and hull sides were achieved, a double hull was adopted to ensure that all hull shell framing was encapsulated within this space, accepting the resultant reduction in volume.

The new class of ships had a mixture of derricks, including a heavy lift Stulcken derrick, and cranes. Externally, possibly the most radical transformation from the traditional and sacrosanct Holt appearance of the staid upright vertical appendage was a tapered funnel!

As a personal observation, this, together with the faceless bland frontage block of superstructure, compared unfavourably with the more interesting and traditional new GLEN ships.

New ships cannot be designed, contracted and built overnight, and with the designs of such complex ships having been under study from as far back as 1962, with tenders invited in 1964, the container revolution was even then encroaching on the field of conventional cargo liners.

The tendering process also possibly marked a watershed in the economics of building in the UK versus Japan; the quoted cost of some £3 million in UK shipyards was some 12-20% higher than that quoted in Japan. In the event eight ships were ordered: two to Mitsubishi in Japan, five at the Vickers Naval Yard at Walker-on-Tyne, and one with John Brown at Clydebank. It seems possible that the two UK yards underestimated costs and delivery constraints, even though they were well aware of Ocean Group's high standards, and subsequent events only hastened the fate of both concerns. It gives me no great pleasure to record that the first of the five Vickers-built ships was seven and a half months late, and the last was eleven and a half months late. The penalties extracted from the UK builders contributed in no small way to the inevitable decline and closure of these famous yards.

In fairness it has to be said that the Japanese builders were not altogether blameless in this respect and the **Phrontis** was delivered three months late by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries of Nagasaki.

A significant degree of automation was incorporated in the engine room, backed up by a comprehensive documentation package defining strict operating parameters, and maintenance schedules which confirmed overhaul and replacement timetables. It was estimated that the large degree of automation cost in the region of £100,000. This extended to a control system to expedite sequential bunkering. However the heavy viscosity of the boiler fuel soon played havoc with the transponders, thus rendering the system more or less inoperable.

The ships of the **Priam** class were designed to operate with a complement of 43 men, a reduction of 17 from the earlier **Glenlyon** class which had required 60. The engine watchkeeping system was planned on the basis of a seven-watch system with overlapping of the watches to ensure efficient change over routines. The machinery was designed to be operated by one Engineer Officer whilst at sea, and unmanned when in port.

It is interesting to note that the windlass had an additional centre gypsy to handle a separate cable for mooring to buoys as was common practice in the Far East, thus obviating the time consuming and laborious task of unshackling an anchor to release a cable.

In the end all the time and effort which was incorporated into the Priam class proved to be in vain, notwithstanding all the traditional Holt attention to in-house design, route requirements, planning and performance and construction qualities. These magnificent ships were soon outmoded and expensive to operate and their service with Ocean Fleets was short. Attempts were made to carry containers by shoehorning boxes in the holds or stowing them on deck, but this new cargo-carrying concept overtook the ships, and sadly all the Priam class entered the second-hand market.



**The Oriental Merchant, ex Prometheus**

*Photo: Ocean Fleets House Journal*

The **Priam** was launched in 1966, but succumbed to the march of containerisation and the entry of more economic vessels into the trade, and was sold only thirteen years later to C.Y. Tung of Hong Kong, along with her sisters **Peisander**, **Prometheus** and **Protesilaus**. The **Priam** was lengthened and converted into a full container ship, being renamed **Oriental Champion**. On 18<sup>th</sup> October 1985 she was struck aft by a missile during the Iran-Iraq war, later being towed to Bahrain where she was found to be beyond economic repair. Her final demise was at the graveyard of many ships at Kaohsiung in Taiwan. █

#### **PRIAM – PRINCIPAL PARTICULARS**

Length overall: 563ft 6in; Between perpendiculars: 521ft 0in.

Breadth moulded: 77ft 6in; Depth to upper deck: 44ft 0in.

Summer load draught: 30ft 0in. Gross Register: 13,600 tons

Machinery: Burmeister and Wain 984-VT2BF-180. Output: 18,900 bhp.

Engine Speed: 110 rev/min. Ship service speed: 21 knots

References: *Motor Ship* monthly journal, December 1966; 'There Go The Ships' (Marshall Meek)



## THE COLLINS LINER 'ADRIATIC' OF 1856

*By Frank C. Bowen*

(this article originally appeared in *Shipbuilding and Shipping Record*, 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1952)

*The New York and Liverpool United States Mail Steamship Company, popularly known as the Collins Line, was undoubtedly the most important of the early American-owned North Atlantic steamship lines. Edward Knight Collins was awarded the mail contract by the United States Postmaster General in March 1847 when he undertook to provide a fortnightly service of steamers between New York and Liverpool during eight months of the year, and a monthly service during the remainder at an annual subsidy of \$385,000 (£77,000).*

The **Adriatic**, designed and built by George Steers of New York for the American Collins line as a replacement for its lost steamer the **Arctic**, was the last and largest of the wooden paddle liners on the North Atlantic. This ship was regarded as the 'high-water' mark of her type, but she was behind the times and was never a financial success.



*The "Adriatic," built by George Steers of New York, with engines by the Novelty Ironworks*

Launched before the **Great Eastern**, the **Adriatic** could claim to be the largest steamer in the world. Dimensions of 354ft 8in by 50ft by 33ft 2in depth of hold made the ship nine feet longer than the crack U.S. frigate **Niagara**. Her tonnage was 5,888 by American measurement – roughly 3,700 by the British rule of that time – and she was therefore 700 tons more than the **Niagara**, 800 tons more than the Atlantic paddle steamer **Vanderbilt**, and 2,900 tons more than the earlier Collins liners.

When launched the **Adriatic** aroused the greatest enthusiasm among the Americans, who were quite sure that she would beat any ships which the British brought out to wrest the Blue Riband from the earlier Collins ships.

Completion of the ship was delayed for a considerable time because the Novelty Ironworks, who built her engines, repeatedly changed the details of the design, but she was finally fitted with two-cylinder oscillating engines with dimensions 100 x 120 inches. They were very complicated in their design and for the whole of the ship's career gave a great deal of trouble at sea, particularly with hot bearings. The indicated horse-power of these engines was 2,800 and at 17 r.p.m. they gave a speed of 13 knots. Steam was supplied at a pressure of 20 lb. per sq.in. by eight main boilers with six furnaces each, and two auxiliary boilers which could be linked up with the others when necessary. The bunkers on the orlop deck were built of iron, stowing 1,500 tons of coal which was burned at 90 tons a day on service.

The profile of the hull followed the Collins practice which had introduced the straight stem to the Atlantic, but in this instance it had a slight lip at the top through a gilt scroll which ran vertically down the side of the stem instead of more or less horizontally in imitation of the trail-boards in clipper-stemmed steamers. The **Adriatic** had beautiful lines which showed well forward, but her counter stern was cumbersome and rather ugly.

The deck was flush from end to end but had a long deckhouse from just before the taffrail to a few feet forward of the foremast. At the forward end and at the foot of the mast was a circular-fronted wheelhouse which could be used on foggy weather or while entering or leaving port. In all ordinary circumstances the ship was steered from the after end of the deckhouse.

Instead of the usual Collins rig of three masts with one funnel, the ship was originally brig-rigged, with lower and topsail yards only, having standing gaffs for fore-and-aft canvas, but for the greater part of her career the **Adriatic** sailed as a brigantine. The two tall and thin funnels were placed before and aft the paddle wheels.

The **Adriatic** was designed to carry over 300 passengers in first class, and 60 in second class, along with about 2,000 tons of cargo. The elaborate accommodation of the early Collins liners had aroused great enthusiasm, but the **Adriatic's** was on a more advanced scale.

The new ship was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1856, but the delays in the delivery of the machinery already mentioned held her up for over a year and a half. She was put under the command of Captain West, formerly master of the **Atlantic**. A large crew was carried, among them six 'superintendents of fires and boilers' and one 'hosekeeper-fireman'. The ship sailed from New York on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1857 and reached the Point Lynas pilot station on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. The master decided to shelter there on account of a gale which was raging, but his passage was regarded as equal to 10 days and 8 hours to Liverpool, had he steamed straight in. Only 37 passengers were carried on that maiden voyage.

The homeward run to New York took from 9<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> December 1857 owing to engine trouble, and the **Adriatic** had only 22 passengers and 200 tons of cargo. She was then laid up and soon afterwards the Collins Line went out of business owing to the sudden withdrawal of its United States mail subsidy.

In 1860 the **Adriatic** was sold to the North Atlantic Steamship Company for its service from New York to Le Havre via Southampton, and although she carried many more passengers than she had done on her brief Collins Line service, and most of the passages were completed in under 10 days, the service was not profitable. After just five round voyages the service was suspended for the winter and not revived.

Early in 1861 the **Adriatic** was chartered for an eastbound voyage by the Cunard Line in place of the **Australian**, and was then sold to the Galway Line. However she made only two voyages for her new owners before being laid up.

In December 1861, following the unhappy **Trent** affair<sup>1</sup>, the **Adriatic** was dispatched from Southampton to Halifax, NS with troops. She landed them at St John, New Brunswick early in January 1862, and was later laid up at Galway again. In 1864 whilst on passage from Galway to Liverpool in ballast there was a serious explosion in the engine room which killed one man and left the **Adriatic** helpless, and she had to be towed into port.

After another period of lay up the unfortunate **Adriatic** was purchased for use as a storage hulk at Bonny on the West African coast and remained in this capacity until 1885 when she was found to be leaking so badly that she had to be beached and she was subsequently found to be beyond repair. ■

<sup>1</sup> The **Trent** **Affair**, also known as the **Mason and Slidell** **Affair**, was an international diplomatic incident that occurred during the American Civil War. On 8<sup>th</sup> November 1861, the USS **San Jacinto**, commanded by Union Captain Charles Wilkes, intercepted the British mail packet **Trent** and removed two Confederate diplomats, James Mason and John Slidell. The envoys were bound for Great Britain and France to press the Confederacy's case for diplomatic recognition by Europe.

The initial reaction of the United States was enthusiastically in support of the capture, but many American leaders had doubts as to the wisdom and the legality of the act. In the Confederate States, the hope was that the incident would lead to a permanent rupture in Union-British relations, diplomatic recognition by Britain of the Confederacy, and ultimately, Southern independence. In Great Britain the public expressed outrage at this apparent insult to their national honour. The British Government demanded an apology and the release of the prisoners while it took steps to strengthen its military forces in Canada and in the Atlantic. Over 14,000 officers and men were sent to Canada.

After several weeks of tension during which the United States and the United Kingdom came dangerously close to war, the issue was resolved when the Lincoln administration released the envoys and disavowed Captain Wilkes' actions. No formal apology was issued. Mason and Slidell resumed their voyage to England but failed in their goal of achieving diplomatic recognition.



## POOLE TO BARBADOS – THE HARD WAY

### The delivery voyage of the **Oakdene**

by *Bill Rose*

The vessel was delivered to the West Indies by Pedder and Mylchreest of London, a well-known firm of ship delivery contractors in the 1960s. I joined the **Oakdene** as second engineer at Poole in October 1966. Captain F.B.L.Hales was the master. The **Oakdene** had left London some months prior to this with a part cargo of cement, but had been plagued with engine trouble. Both the ship and her engine (a six-cylinder Crossley of 300bhp) were wartime built and had seen better days. The principal fault was a tendency to low oil pressure.

The **Oakdene** had been at Poole for some time under repair when I joined her. After storing up and clearing customs, we proceeded out into Poole Bay for a trial run and were declared 'fit' by the shore engineers who promptly left in the pilot launch, no doubt glad to see the back of us. The first leg of the voyage down-Channel commenced, but after about six hours the old trouble returned – low oil pressure – so we put into Falmouth and anchored.

After consultation with the local shipyard representatives and the Lloyd's surveyor, it was decided that the old ship needed further attention to her machinery, so we made fast alongside for the night. The next morning we were all paid off to await the completion of repairs which, as things turned out, took just over fourteen days.

At the beginning of November 1966, I again made my way down to Falmouth and rejoined the **Oakdene**. By now we were without a chief engineer. After running trials alongside for about four hours we left the berth and spent the afternoon out in Falmouth Bay on trials, and were once more passed as fit by the 'powers that be'. The oil pressure was considerably higher this time and holding up, and we returned to harbour and berthed for the weekend.

The following day saw us getting underway, with a new chief engineer and an additional inflatable liferaft – the Board of Trade had insisted on this extra precaution – plus 12 forty-gallon oil drums lashed at various points around the deck. Four contained lubricating oil and the other eight fresh water.

The first part of the voyage was to the Azores, where we were to take on stores, bunkers and fresh water; as it turned out we were in for a much longer stay. Crossing the Bay of Biscay the weather worsened to a force eight westerly gale which caused us to reduce our speed to about six knots. This was further reduced when one of the main engine fuel pumps packed up and left us running on five cylinders.

The next event was a fracture of the main fuel line, from the daily service tank to the main engine. This we managed to repair with insulating tape, canvas, rope binding and jubilee clips, which lasted until we reached port. The final indignity occurred when we reached Ponta Delgada, for when entering the harbour the engine refused to turn over, either ahead or astern. Luckily the harbour tug was handy and we were soon alongside and tied up. By this time I had begun to wonder just what the next surprise would be!

In all the **Oakdene** spent eleven days in the Azores having further repairs carried out, and again, unfortunately, losing the chief engineer who was landed ashore sick. The agents tried unsuccessfully to obtain a replacement, both locally and in the UK. Finally, as it looked as if we would still be in Ponta Delgada for Christmas, I agreed to take the ship across the Atlantic as acting chief, with one of the deck lads standing the opposite watch, with strict instructions: *'If in doubt, stop her – pronto!'*

It was probably tempting fate to make such a remark for on average we were stopped for one fault or another at least once in every 24 hours. The most harrowing event occurred one morning. I had just come off the 3 till 8 watch, breakfasted and turned in for some sleep, when the main engine stopped.

Every seagoing engineer will know the feeling one gets at these times: one has visions of piles of white metal in the bottom of the sump. All this flashed through my mind, together with the fact that we were 1,000 miles from the nearest land. I got dressed and made for the engine room where I was given the glad tidings *'No oil pressure at all, so I stopped her!'* I clambered into an already filthy boiler suit and sorted out a good selection of spanners. The sump tank was very empty, so there could only be two places where the oil had got to – the bilge or the main engine sump.

A quick feel at the crankcase doors confirmed the latter to be the case, much the lesser of the two evils. The two after doors were removed and after an hour's pumping, the sump filter came into view, fairly clean. This pointed to the lubricating oil scavenge pump as the culprit and we stripped this down and found a lump of muck under the suction valve, which produced big sighs of relief all round!

After a thorough inspection of the crankcase and lub-oil piping, we boxed her up and got under way once more. I just about had time to eat my lunch before taking the afternoon watch from 12 till 5, which I spent cleaning black sump oil from my face, chest and back.

The rest of the voyage was fairly uneventful apart from the usual routine stops for oil changes, and we finally arrived in Bridgetown Roads, Barbados, after a passage of 13½ days from the Azores, thanks to the excellent navigation of Captain Hales.

The usual customs and port health formalities were gone through, the harbour pilot came aboard and berthed us in the Careenage. We moved ashore that night to a hotel arranged for us by the agent. I spent the evening wallowing under a shower, trying to remove the smell of oil from my person. For the first two or three nights I woke regularly, listening for the 'boomp, boomp' of the old Crossley. The **Oakdene** was handed over to her new owners who intended to place her on a run from Barbados to Trinidad and Guyana.

The delivery voyage crew finally left Barbados on a B.O.A.C. flight to London, via Bermuda. Despite her age we had managed to deliver the old **Oakdene**, a little late perhaps, but in one piece. ■

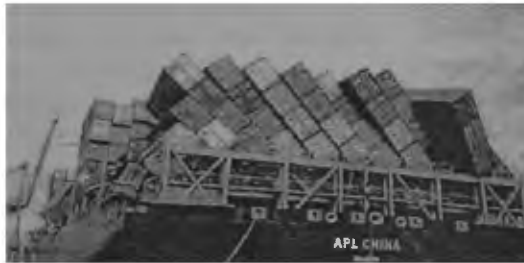
The **Oakdene** was built in 1942 as the **Empire Punch** :  
EMPIRE PUNCH built by Richards Ironworks Ltd, Lowestoft in 1942  
Official Number: 166691, Signal Letters: M A J C  
Gross Tonnage: 321, Nett: 145. Length: 131·5ft, Breadth: 24·6ft, Depth: 8·8ft.  
6 Cylinder Oil Engine by Crossley Bros. Ltd. Mch.  
Owned by Lovering and Sons; registered at Lowestoft.

## PARAMETRIC ROLLING IN HEAD SEAS

Compiled by LNRS Member Charles Dawson from a paper presented to the US Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers entitled 'An Investigation of Head-Sea Parametric Rolling and its Influence on Container Lashing Systems'

On a night in October 1998, the post-Panamax C11-class container ship **APL China** lost 406 of her deckload of 1,300 containers (with many others damaged, from a total of 5,316 on board) in the North Pacific typhoon *Babs*, whilst on passage from Kaohsiung to Seattle.

At the time there were all sorts of wise words written about the type of schedules containership masters were bound by, and how safety was being sacrificed to expediency in both the design and operation of a new generation of large containerships. The paper, as detailed in the title of this article, suggests that ships of this type and size may be particularly prone to the problems which caused such severe damage to the C11, and alerts the industry to a very worrying phenomenon indeed.



*The APL China in Seattle after the typhoon*

On the night the **APL China** was overtaken by typhoon *Babs*, her master did precisely what his experience and training prompted: reduced speed and brought his ship round to put the seas on the vessel's starboard bow. However the sea became more violent and confused and in the midst of this mayhem, with green seas running as high as the bridge and the foremast, the vessel became totally uncontrollable, pitching violently and rolling to 35-40 degrees. Container stacks collapsed, boxes disappeared over the side and a collapsing container corner-casting punctured the main deck over the steering gear compartment. Ship and crew were fortunate to avoid disaster.

That this had happened to one of the largest and most powerful cargo ships in the world was in itself remarkable, not least because these violent motions had occurred in head seas, with the vessel apparently riding out the storm. It is not unknown for container ships to be subject to heavy rolling in following seas. Indeed, the IMO has published advice on the phenomenon. But here was a ship following the correct procedure for riding out the typhoon and finding the motion even worse, with the rolling well beyond the design limits of the container lashings.

The investigation by the authors of the paper incorporated a detailed study of the weather and tank tests replicating the circumstances, and demonstrated that it is indeed possible for such a large vessel to experience 'parametric' rolling whilst

heading into the weather. It was also discovered that the very hull design of a typical post-Panamax containership, with its heavily flared bow and wide, flat stern lends itself to the phenomenon. In tank tests made to simulate the disaster, the model vessel was moving into head seas, pitching moderately and scarcely rolling. Then, perhaps induced by rudder motion, the vessel took a small roll to one side, and unexpectedly, roll angles hugely increased to more than 30 degrees in only five roll cycles, and this violent motion was then maintained.

The design of the vessel, the authors believe, is crucial in the vulnerability of a containership to this alarming behaviour, which occurs when the wave encounter period is about half the vessel's natural roll period. The design of the C11 provides for the greatest width at deck level to be provided for container storage but, unlike a full-bodied vessel, the bow flare and flared stern mean that, with the ship poised on the peak of a wave and the ends unsupported, alternating with a situation in which the bow and stern are supported, there are wide variations in stability. With the wave crest amidships, there is little forward and aft in the underwater extremities to right the vessel, the stability being greatly diminished. But, with the vessel pitching forward and rolling heavily to one side, the wide flared forecastle effectively flings the ship back in the other direction. Having established the existence of this alarming phenomenon, the authors made a number of recommendations, including *'that head sea parametric rolling must be considered in the design and operation of certain vessels'*.

It is suggested that parametric rolling is unlikely to be confined to large containerships and that modern cruise liners, with their high sides and flared bows and sterns, may be similarly affected. ■



**The end of the Carinthia. The China Sea Discovery, formerly Cunard's Carinthia of 1956, sits forlornly on the beach at Alang in November 2005, awaiting her fate.**

## AND FINALLY .....

### **A BOTTLE OF POLITICIAN'S WHISKY SELLS FOR £2,200 !**

When the ss **Politician** ran aground off Eriskay on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1941, she was carrying a cargo of 260,000 bottles of whisky. Islanders raced to get their hands on the booty and plundered up to 20,000 bottles, inspiring the book and the film *Whisky Galore!*

Customs and Excise Officers dynamited the **Politician** to destroy the whisky cargo, but there has been a series of salvage expeditions aimed at recovering surviving bottles, including one in 1987 when a South Uist man retrieved eight and sold them at auction for £4,000.

Auctions provide a tally of the bottles which remain. In 1993, fourteen were sold, including a bottle of Haig 'Dimple'. In 1997, a bottle of 'Black & White' whisky dug up by an Eriskay man outside his house sold for £1,600 in a charity auction, and in 2000 one of the 1987 bottles resold at auction for £3,500.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008 a lone bottle from one of the salvage attempts was sold by auctioneers in Lewes, East Sussex and realised £2,200. This bottle was from a group of six recovered in 1970 when a team of divers sponsored by a tabloid newspaper searched the remains of the **Politician**. Bob Pert, now 61, was one of that team and he was allowed by the Receiver of Wrecks to retain the bottle as a keepsake. Bob commented: *"When I brought it along, I didn't think many people would pay much for what is at the end of the day just a bottle of whisky, but people like the story behind it. A couple of inches of whisky have evaporated through the cork."* Bob Pert's bottle returned to Scotland when it was bought by a man from Dollar, Clackmannanshire.

More than 65 years since the **Politician** stranded on Eriskay, the chance of any new finds is growing slim. They would be hard to authenticate and the contents would probably be undrinkable anyway. However, there is speculation that bottles are still concealed all over the island, and in some of the lochs. Legend has it that many bottles were put in hessian sacks which were dumped in the lochs. With the passage of time, the hessian has rotted and the bottles are lying on the loch beds. A couple of bottles washed up on the shore in 2006, and it is impossible to tell how many are left.

Customs officials responded more forcefully than in the 1949 film – set on the fictional island of Today, and filmed on Barra. They searched for and seized pilfered whisky, with islanders fined and some jailed.

One factor in the **Politician** story still rankles. Most allegedly sensitive Government papers are released to the public after 30 years. This period has been extended to 75 years in the case of certain documents relating to the **Politician**. What can be the reason for such a drastic extension of the 30-year rule? This means that the full story of the **Politician's** voyage, her cargo, and subsequent stranding and salvage attempts will not be known until the year 2016, by which time a fascinating legend may well have become an epic saga.