



# Under the Clock

~ Patron: Doug Duxbury ~

Issue 67 – April 2010

## What is a “Seafarer”? Merchant Seaman

A Merchant Seaman is not born, he is made of left-overs! God built the world and the animals and then recycled the garbage to create this dastardly weapon. He took the left-over roar of a lion, the howl of a hyena, the clumsiness of an ox, the stubbornness of the mule, the slyness of a fox, the wildness of a bull and pride of a peacock – then added the filthy evil mind of the devil to satisfy his weird sense of humour.

A Merchant Seaman evolved into a crude and rude combination of Dillinger, Errol Flynn, Beau Brummell and Valentino – a swashbuckling, beer swilling, love making liar.

A Merchant Seaman likes girls, scotch whiskey, beer, fights, time ashore, darts, pool, sweeties, long weekends with his wife, girlfriend and or someone else’s! Pubs, gags, paying off, leave and his ticket home. He’ll hate the Master (Captain) the Chief Mate (Jimmy the One) or Chief Engineer, the Second Engineer (Deucer), inspections, extra work in port, being kind to the apprentices, the bucko mate, painting the top or over the side and the first trip Chef who can’t boil water without burning it, cold black pan grub and signing on again.

A Merchant Seaman comes in four colours, white, off white, dirty and filthy and all looking alike under a tan and a uniform. He is brave drinking beer, abusive playing cards, brutal defending his pride and passionate making love always. He can start a brawl, create a disaster, offend the law, desert his ship and make you lose your money, your temper and your mind. He can take your sister, your mother your aunt and when get caught, get his Captain to vouch for his integrity.

A Merchant Seaman is loved by all mothers, sisters, aunts and nieces. Hated by fathers, brothers, uncles and nephews. He has a girl in every port and a port in every girl. He breaks more hearts, causes more fights and begats more bastards than any other man and when he’s off to sea, wept over more than any man alive.

A Merchant Seaman is a mean, hard drinking, fast running mealy mouth son of a bitch, but when you’re in strife he’s a strong shoulder to lean on, with the wisdom of Solomon, the patients of Job, the sword of Damocles ever ready and a defender of faith and cause. He’d fight for a mate and die for his country without question or hesitation. He is after all a Merchant Seaman with a heart on his sleeve.....



With thanks  
Andy Squibb  
Kernow Bys Vikken

## From the Secretary

Our last Meeting in February was as usual successful and everyone enjoyed themselves with the lunch, the fun and the get-together.

Members were reminded about the Anzac Day march and to advise Gordon Cohen for those who are able to march. Roger and Kim have attended the Anzac Day final meeting of the South-East RSL in early February. All Members have been briefed about the changes for this year.

Bill Gould has requested that the Vindi group meet for a social activity at McLeay Island again sometime this year. Bill has unfortunately not been able to drive again due to his poor eye sight. We are planning for "Snow in July" at McLeay Island and we will advise the details when it comes closer to time.

Our Treasurer, Robert reported that the Brisbane City Council has given us a public grant of \$230.00. All small gifts are greatly received!!

Our President Roger said that due to important family business in the UK, he and Margaret will be away till early June. During this period, he said that Fred Joughin will take the chair as President.

An important issue in the life of Vindi Qld was made at this meeting. A while ago, Bill Davis had proposed to the Committee that Doug Duxbury be made a Life Member of the Association. As the Committee at the time was busy with the reunion, we decided that the matter be brought up to all members at February's meeting.

The Committee was not in favour of this position and nor were members who were present at this meeting. Vice President Fred proposed that Doug be elected the "First Patron" of Vindicatrix Qld. Adding that Doug started the Association and with a few others and the Association has grown to this present status today. Doug had been President and Vice President of the Association for many years.

In reply Doug stated that "he was a founder of the Association, he had been a guardian, a protector and supported the Association immensely." Doug advised that he refused both positions. However, he did not have a choice as all members present at this meeting felt that Fred's proposal was appropriate for Doug and was seconded by Gordon Cohen. It was received and adopted with acclamation. Doug Duxbury is now our first Patron of Vindicatrix Queensland. Congratulations Doug!

Fred is also organising to convert some of the VCR tapes mainly about ships into DVD which would be much better as most people today have DVD players.

We also welcome back our old time member Evan Lewis. Evan has been away for sometime and now lives in North Toowoomba.

We would also like to advise members that our next meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June is our AGM and urge all to attend if possible. All committee position will be declared open and elections held as well as yearly reports tabled as usual.

Kim Cohen, Secretary

***P.S. For those who do not have Internet, please note that my new address details are on the back of this Newsletter.***

## **An Uneasy Feeling**

The Story of a brief Coastal Trip

By Brian Chaplin.

It was the end of February 1959, I had just paid off the M.V.Valdes, I had reported to the Dock St. pool and was hoping for a ship that was trading elsewhere than the Mediterranean where my two previous ships had traded.

It wasn't my lucky day, I was sent to join a coaster, the M.V. Ocean Coast. The day was chilly and dismal with dark rain clouds threatening to unleash at any moment. I arrived at the dockside and took a look at the ship, her black hull was streaked with rust, the superstructure which was white at one time, was even rustier. I got that sort of feeling you get when you think things can't get any worse. I had a very uneasy feeling about this ship.



I reluctantly boarded her and was greeted by the chief steward who looked like he had been in the fuel bunkers. "Quick as you can" said the chief when you've stowed your gear come and help me and the cook in the freezer. I joined them and helped them to throw out all of the meat carcasses which were going rotten. The refrigeration pumps had broken down on the way down from Liverpool. The chief engineer had been unable to fix them as new parts were needed. We emptied out the "fridge" and the smell was almost unbearable. It must have been "On the Blink" well before Liverpool. We hosed out the freezer and then the cool room, we were then joined by the new galley boy and off loaded the rotting meat and quite a lot of vegetables and fruit into a waste bin on the dock.

I got half an hours time off to go and buy some sort of jacket or coat as I hadn't contemplated being on a coaster in winter and didn't have one in my kit bag. I can't remember exactly where we were either Shadwell or Wapping, I found a disposal store and bought a "duffle" coat. Not a suitably coloured navy one, not one in my size, but a sandy coloured one with a tartan lining. It got me a few choice remarks when got back.

A refrigeration engineer came on board and managed to get things working to about 85% capacity. In the mean time we discovered that the sewage system wasn't working so well either, the crew toilet had a stench that would kill a brown dog. The chief steward remarked "It's like all the crews for the last twelve months had diseased kidneys" It took a lot of work to get things bearable. A lot bleach, a lot of carbolic and a huge amount of caustic soda, courtesy of the bosun. At least we could go to the "heads" without a gasmask.

We sailed on the high tide that evening and headed for Cork in southern Ireland as we headed out of the Thames estuary

and turned to starboard the channel got decidedly choppy. The weather didn't get any better and to our dismay the galley boy and I discovered that our cabins were in a filthy state. We cleaned them up the best we could, an improvement but still decidedly grotty. We went to see the procurer of all things, the bosun and he found us some white paint and a couple of paint brushes and we set to, painting as much as we could. The paint was oil based and probably contained lead, we were almost overcome by the fumes before the job was done. With the low temperature it was going to be a long time until it dried. That night was terrible the paint fumes keeping us awake and feeling sick, it was a pleasure to turn to in the morning. The chief steward, a genuine good bloke, whose cabin was one up from mine was also affected by the fumes but told us we were doing a good job and not to worry about it as it would eventually dry.

We docked in Cork, I went ashore just to get off the ship if only for an hour. It was drizzling rain and almost as depressing as the ship. We sailed the next day for Liverpool.

The paint fumes were starting to diminish, the "heads" were losing their capacity to kill anything down wind and the "deckies", most of them "Scousers" were already packing their gear so as to be off as soon as they were paid. I don't know why because Liverpool in winter looked just as miserable as anywhere else but home is home I guess. The galley boy and I had already made up our minds, soon as the ship docked on London we were off too, straight round to the "pool" to get a ship heading anywhere as long as it was warm.

A few days later we were due to dock in London some time in the early hours of the morning. The night we were going to dock arrived, the light faded before we entered the Thames estuary and we turned in that night thinking in less than forty eight hours we would leave this nightmare and forget about it for all time.

How wrong we were! ... At approximately 02.30 hrs there was a tremendous noise like a muffled explosion followed by a loud screeching, scraping noise. At first I thought the "old man" had misjudged it and hit the dockside at quite a rate of knots, but then I could hear shouting and people running around. I got out of my bunk and pulled on a pair of jeans, at the same time the galley boy had opened my cabin door and said "What the xxxxx happened?" we stood there for a few moments listening and then we heard a muffled voice coming from the chiefs cabin. We opened his cabin door and saw him trapped by a large piece of timber jammed diagonally across his bunk. There was water pouring out of a ruptured pipe and steam hissing out of a large pipe running across the deckhead. We helped the chief out of the tangled mess and saw that the bulkhead behind the head of his bunk had been pushed in. He got semi dressed and told us to stay exactly where we were and he went forward.

When he returned he told us that we had been rammed but all the damage was above the waterline so there was no need to worry we were not in any danger of sinking and to go to the galley and start making tea for the crew and the cook would join us to organize a very early breakfast. Later that morning, at dawn we could see there was considerable damage to the cabin one up from the chief stewards, which was the third engineers cabin. The third engineer had only just come off watch and had just turned in. A steel plate pushed in by the bow of the other ship (The M.V. Beechmore) had acted like a giant tin snip and cut him in half! He was a young

Liverpudlian and had only been married for three months.

Convinced more than ever the ship was "Jinxed" I couldn't wait for the agent to come aboard with the pay so we could go. No such luck, there would have to be an enquiry, a television crew turned up fronted by Raymond Glendenning of the B.B.C., they watched as we did our best to act professionally. As I carried the blood stained mattress to the fo'c'sle the camera crew followed, it was extremely unnerving. Eventually they packed up and left and we were able to relax a bit. A couple of days later we were given the all clear and we took her into drydock. I told the chief I had to get off, he said he understood how I felt but would I stay until my replacement arrived, I agreed, as I said before he was a good bloke. He also said he was a company man but when the ship returned to Liverpool he would ask for a different ship.

My only piece of good luck apart from not being in the cabin that took the impact was that my replacement arrived less than two hours later. I had three days at home and then got my next ship the S.S. Hendi bound for north Africa, at last some thing to smile about. We were in the Mediterranean when the sparks said to me "you were on the Ocean Coast weren't you?, I've picked up a bit of "chatter" the ships been repaired and is back on the coast and it's been reported that the skipper, captain Clark, has had a heart attack and died at sea!"

That ship was definitely "jinxed"!

## Yorkshire Anthem

**Wheear 'ast ta bin sin' ah saw thee, ah saw thee?**

**On Ikla Moor baht 'at**

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**Tha's been a cooartin' Mary Jane**

**Tha's bahn' to catch thy deeach o' cowl**

**Then us'll ha' to bury thee**

**Then t'worms'll come an` eyt thee up**

**Then t'ducks'll come an` eyt up t'worms**

**Then us'll go an` eyt up t'ducks**

**Then us'll all ha' etten thee**

**That's wheear we get us ooan back**

The song tells of a lover courting the object of his affections, Mary Jane, on Ikley Moor without a hat (baht 'at). The singer chides the lover for his lack of headwear – for in the cold winds of Ikley Moor this will mean his death from exposure. This will in turn result in his burial, the eating of his corpse by worms, the eating of the worms by ducks and finally the eating of the ducks by the singers.

And eight more verses.....

EEE! BY GUM! – This Yorkshire phrase, can be used in a variety of ways but is mainly used to express awe at something. Similar to 'OH MY GOD!

If you love the phrase or know someone who uses it way too much! Then this could be guden for ya! The accent of yorkshire is often refered to as 'broad yorkshire' there is loads of variations in the yorkshire accents and dialects

# Maritime Disaster As Ship Disappears Without Trace!

## SS Waratah – Part 2



Early the following morning, near Port St. John's, the Waratah overtook the Clan MacIntyre which had also left Durban the previous day for England. Signals passed between the two ships, identifying each other's names and where they were bound. Although the Waratah was equipped with refrigeration and electricity, she was not yet equipped with wireless, but this modern communication was to be fitted on her arrival in London. The Waratah remained in sight of the Clan Macintyre for about three hours and at about 9.30am, approximately 12 miles off the Bashee River mouth, the Waratah was lost to view below the horizon.

Later that day, as is common in that area during winter, the weather deteriorated quickly and a south-westerly gale gusting to 50 knots (90 km/h) was driving against the south-running Mozambique Current of 4 knots, and combined with the tide, built swells up to 30ft (9m).

That evening, the Union Castle Liner Guelph, passed a ship and exchanged signals by lamp. However, due to the bad weather and poor visibility, they were only able to identify the last three letters of her name on the bow; "T-A-H."

Later that evening, 27 July 1909, at about six o'clock, Captain John Bruce, commanding the steamship Harlow, was making for Durban steering north-east into the swells. Just off Cape Hermes, approximately 51 miles south of Port St. Johns, he caught sight of a large steamer astern of his own ship, travelling south and working hard into the heavy seas. She was making a great deal of smoke, enough for Capt. Bruce to wonder if the steamer was on fire. The event was not entered into the log and only when the Captain learnt of the disappearance of the Waratah, did he think the events significant.

Back in Durban, awaiting his ship to London, Mr. Sawyer was once again plagued with a vision. "I dreamt," he said, "that I saw a ship in heavy seas and one big roller came over the bows and pressed down upon her. She rolled over on her side and disappeared. It seemed to be happening at a distance." Another man in Durban, Mr. R. Dives, also confessed that he had a presentiment that he would never see the Waratah again.

These recurring fears had started whilst Sawyer was sailing from Australia to Durban and he had mentioned the angle of the water in his bath to a fellow passenger, Mr. John Ebsworth, a solicitor, who had previously been in the Merchant Navy for over ten years. Together they had gone to look at the way the vessel was pitching from the forward end of the promenade deck. As big rollers came towards the ship, the Waratah took the first one and when she went down into the trough of the wave, she remained there and seemed to keep her nose into the next wave and simply plough through it. John Ebsworth said that in the whole of his experience, he had never seen a ship do that before. Although the voyage from Australia had been uneventful from the perspective of the Captain and Officers, Sawyer made no secret of the fact that he considered the Waratah unsafe. He sent his wife the following message, "*Thought Waratah top-heavy - landed Durban.*"

So strongly did he feel about his experience, the disturbing dreams and foreboding premonitions, that he had forfeited his onward passage money for London and waited for a berth on another vessel, eventually departing a week later on the Kildonan Castle.

The Waratah was expected off Cape Town on the morning of Thursday, 29 July 1909, and when she didn't arrive, it was at first presumed that she had met with heavy weather. As she had no radio communications and there was still no sign of her by Sunday, the local agents for the Blue Anchor Line contacted the port authorities, who sent the tug T. E. Fuller out to try and locate the ship in case she was suffering from engine trouble.

H.M.S. Forte left Durban to follow the coast as far as Algoa Bay and then turn southwards. H.M.S. Pandora was due to follow the Forte the next day. All lookout stations and ports were placed on alert.

The Illovo, one of Rennie's liners based in Durban, was about 24 hours overdue at Cape Town, having left Durban some 50 hours before the Waratah. The Illovo had met such heavy seas that her deck cargo had been completely swept overboard and when she began listing off Danger Point, had to jettison 30 tons of coal.

The searches continued and rumours began circulating of broken propeller shafts, coal gas explosions, she had been struck by lightning or steamed head-on into an enormous wave and had been buried by thousands of tons of water. Due to the absence of any wreckage whatsoever, it was deemed she was still afloat, influencing authorities to continue searching.

Durban Harbour had reported the arrival on Sunday, 1 August 1909, of a Norwegian steamer, Solveig, which had encountered extremely heavy seas off Algoa Bay on her way up the coast. Her decks had been swept clean by the storm and she was fortunate to reach Durban at all.

It wasn't until Monday, 2 August 1909, that the press carried reports about the Waratah being overdue. That was the beginning of an anxious time for relatives and friends, but there was no undue alarm. Speculation of a probable mechanical fault suggested that she would undoubtedly be towed into port by the T.E. Fuller in due course and the Waratah was known to be carrying

substantial provisions.

World attention was now focused on the Waratah and H.M.S. Hermes now joined the other warships in their search.

Hopes had been raised when news had been announced in the Australian parliament and other public places that the Waratah had been found. Unfortunately, this proved to be a false report, based on a cable from London that a Blue Anchor steamer had been sighted making slowly for London. The Captain of the Clan MacIntyre added to the deepening gloom by reporting that not long after losing sight of the Waratah, his ship had had to ride out a south-westerly gale and enormous seas. The Clan MacIntyre, too, had no wireless, so this report was only received on 31 August 1909, when the ship finally reached London.

Reports came in too from a family on a seaside holiday, 12 miles east of the Kei River, of a ship labouring in a raging gale in terribly rough and tempestuous seas; coming up bow first as if she were standing up on her stern, then her stern in the air and at times looked as if she went clear through the waves instead of riding over them.

After a month had passed without sign of the Waratah, a Union-Castle steamer the Sabine, was chartered to search the Southern Ocean for the missing ship. The Sabine left Cape Town on 11 September 1909, carrying towing apparatus, searchlights and medical supplies. She returned just short of three months later on 7 December 1909, having covered 14,000 miles within an area of 3,000 square miles, without seeing as much as a single piece of wreckage which could have come from the Waratah.

On 19 October 1909, The Daily Commercial News and Shipping List placed the following insert, 'Waratah, 9339, Ilbery, Sydney June 26 to South Africa and London via ports Melbourne July 1, Adelaide 7, Durban 26, missing.'

On 15 December 1909, the Waratah was officially posted as missing at Lloyds of London. The public was divided in their belief of the Waratah's fate; one school of thought was that the ship had sunk without trace; the other a firm belief that the Waratah was drifting helplessly on the oceans. This drift theory was based on the total lack of any wreckage and when coupled to the recollection of the Waikato incident, strengthened belief that this may have also befallen the Waratah. In June 1899, the Waikato was on her way from London to New Zealand when she broke her tail-shaft just south of Cape Agulhas. Having no radio communication, she drifted for three long months on the ocean currents, covering 4,000 miles before she was picked up by the Asloun and towed 3,000 miles into Fremantle, Australia.

On the strength of this past incident, sufficient funds had been raised to undertake a similar search for the Waratah, and the 4,000 ton Australian steamer Wakefield was chartered in February 1910 to follow the course of the Waikato, and make a thorough exploration of the Southern Ocean. The delay in the search would not have affected the welfare of the passengers and crew, as the huge cargo of provisions on the Waratah would have lasted for several months. The Wakefield searched over 18,000 miles of ocean on a zig-zag course south to the fringes of the Antarctic ice in the forlorn hope of finding the Waratah but without success, and returned to Melbourne on 24 June 1910.

It was now accepted that the Waratah was gone forever. Well after the loss of the Waratah, Captain S.A. Pidgeon, RNR, penned his account and provided an insight which centered

on the ship in Durban. Captain Pidgeon had joined W. Lund's service as a boy of nearly 15 years of age in the Catalina and remained in Lund's service for 21 years. He was given his first command before he was 30.

Before the Waratah left London for the last time, Captain Pidgeon almost had the misfortune to be in command of her on that fateful voyage. Captain Ilbery had been ill and the company looked for another Master to relieve him for the voyage. Captain Pidgeon, who had been Captain Ilbery's Chief Officer on the Narrung and Wakool when they were new ships, was the only Master available and held himself ready to take command. However, Captain Ilbery recovered and took command of his ship before she sailed.

Fifty years later, in 1959, Captain Pidgeon wrote, *'The Waratah had taken on a certain amount of frozen mutton to be discharged in Durban and whenever we had a cargo for Durban, it was the custom in Lund's ships to stow it in the square of No. 1 hold, sometimes right from deck level, to the bottom of the hold. Any cargo for London was stowed in the wings and at both ends. After the Durban cargo left the ship, the remaining slippery cargo of frozen carcasses had to be well shored-up, to prevent them from sliding everywhere. We usually lowered big skids into the empty space and at both ends. These were kept in place by heavy beams, 6 x 6, which were placed across the empty space left by the Durban cargo and were jammed by wedges, which were placed and hammered home by carpenter and crew.*

*If this operation was faithfully performed, the remaining cargo was quite secure and could not move into the empty space in the centre, no matter how great the pitching and rolling of the ship. Captain Ilbery trusted his executive officers implicitly and left daily inspection at sea to the Chief Officer, Surgeon and Purser, who did the rounds together.*

*The Chief Officer of the Waratah had been my Chief in Warrigal and was a very fine seaman. The Chief Officers in Lund's ships were always entirely responsible for placing the skids in No. 1 hold and seeing that they were securely in position. If they were forgotten, or if they were not made completely fast, the result in a tender ship like the Waratah would be disastrous.*

*It seems quite possible that the skids were forgotten on this occasion, or that the work was not adequately supervised. The weather was not good as the Waratah sailed, and on those coasts, there are seas and cross-seas which are a menace to a labouring ship.*

*It would all have happened in a matter of seconds. The Waratah caught in a heavy roll, would pause at the end of it. If a cross-sea dumped a huge wave on her forehatch, smashing it in, thousands of tons of water would rush down into the lower hold and find its level in the side of the ship held in the roll. With the cargo insecurely held back, thousands of carcasses would break loose from the wings and join the mass of water, adding to the enormous weight. Another huge sea breaking aboard would finish the ship and she would roll right over, never having had a chance to right herself.*

*Leaving Durban with the prospect of heavy weather, as they did, it would be unlikely that there would be much wreckage to come adrift. Any there was, would be swept with the current far out to sea and lost to sight forever.*

In December 1910, an official inquiry was begun at Caxton

Hall, London, with evidence being given by crew members who had previously served on her, as well as passengers who had travelled on her. Most mentioned, was the Waratah's ungainly method of rolling; Sawyer again gave his opinion on that point.

Expert witnesses all agreed that the Waratah was designed and built properly and sailed in good condition. She had passed numerous inspections, including those by her builders, her owners, the Board of Trade and two by Lloyds of London who gave her the classification '100 A1'. This is their top rating, granted only to ships which Lloyds had inspected and assessed throughout the design, construction, fitting out and sea trials, on top of the two valuations and inspections Lloyds had made of the completed Waratah.

However, for every witness of this positive opinion, another could be found who was of the opposite persuasion. Former passengers and crew members (ranking from stokers to a Deck Officer) said the Waratah was perfectly stable, with a comfortable, easy roll. Many said they felt she was especially stable. The ship's builders produced calculations to prove that even with a load of coal on her deck she was not top heavy (several witnesses claimed she had coal on the deck, but this was denied by Durban Harbour officials).

The Court of Inquiry in London sat for 14 months taking evidence in Britain, South Africa and Australia, finding that the Waratah, despite being in seaworthy condition, was lost on 28 July 1909 during a gale of exceptional violence, which was the first great storm that the vessel had encountered; she had probably capsized suddenly.

Still to this day, some believe that the SS Waratah is held fast in the Antarctic ice. As a direct result of the loss of the Waratah and the enormous amount of press publicity concerning the subsequent searches and Court Inquiry, the Blue Anchor Line lost its reputation. The P&O Line took over the fleet and dropped the Blue Anchor name, although the blue anchor painted onto the funnels was retained until 1912 and Lund's flag continued to be flown at the foremast for a year or two.

Many strange tales of shipwreck have been told by survivors - tales of horror, bravery, of endurance, of mystery. Yet there are even more and stranger tales we will never hear - the stories of ships that have disappeared, sunk with all hands, gone without trace. Their stories lie beneath the waves and the ocean guards her secrets well.

With no witness surviving the disappearance of the Waratah, we can only contemplate the combined effects of stability, design, high promenade deck, cargo loading, hold security and righting moments of the ship, all being confronted by the enormous seas along this notorious and treacherous stretch of South African coastline. Did fate concoct this unique and fatal formula that would commit the Waratah to a premature ocean grave? All we are left with, is to draw our own conclusions on what actually happened to the SS Waratah, Captain Ilbery, passengers and crew and where she lies today.

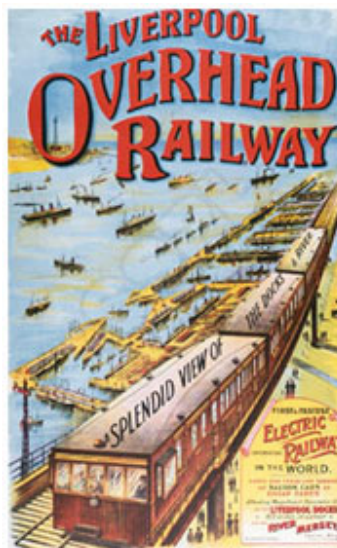
### **In Memoriam**

Let us pay our respects to this fine ship, her captain, passengers and crew, by keeping the memory alive of these unfortunate men, women and children, and passing this unique and tragic maritime history onto future generations.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the mystifying disappearance of the SS Waratah and all on-board. It is an

appropriate time to revisit the heartrending loss and pay our respects to those who perished at sea.

Suzanne-Jo Leff Patterson  
June 2009



Opened on 4 February 1893, the Liverpool Overhead Railway was built to ease congestion along the Dock Road following the completion of the dock network in the 1880's. It also provided shelter from the rain for the dockers walking beneath it, thus earning the nickname, the 'Docker's Umbrella'.

Building work commenced in October 1889 and took six years to complete. It was the first electrically powered overhead railway in the world. The original line stretched from Seaforth Carriage Shed to Herculaneum Dock. The railway was formally opened by British Prime Minister, the Marquis of Salisbury on Saturday 4 February 1893.

A decision was taken to extend the line south to Dingle and in order to do this, a half mile tunnel had to be bored high in the sandstone rock near Herculaneum station. Underneath this tunnel was a goods yard serving the Cheshire Lines railway system whose railway tunnel was next to and beneath the new railway excavation.

Extensive modernisation followed German bombings after the war, however, curved metal plates that supported the track were in a state of decay and needed urgent repair. At an estimated cost of two million pounds the repairs were considered beyond the financial resources of the company.

Liverpool City Council and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board were approached for financial assistance, without success. The railway was unable to continue without the essential repairs and after 63 years in operation, the Railway was closed down on 30th December 1956.

Several rescue attempts and public protests followed, but on 23 September 1957, dismantlers moved in. By January 1959 the Liverpool Overhead Railway had disappeared forever and with it another Liverpool institution was lost forever.

The only traces of the railway that remain today are the original metal supporting columns built into the dock wall behind Wapping Dock. Cleaned for the Garden Festival in 1984, the tunnel entrance to the Dingle is the most impressive sight of what now remains only a distant memory for those privileged enough to have travelled on the 'Ovie'.

*Editor: Having been evacuated as a baby to Blue Bell Lane Huyton near Liverpool in 1944 consider myself to have Scouse blood in me and of course sailed to and from Liverpool many times. The old Seaman's Mission often felt my weary bones with the prison like doors and suicide nets leaving one a tad sad. But strangely never in fact a prison.*

*The 'Ovie' sadly I have no memory.....*

## Two up the Mast and Craps

It was near the end of the war in Europe and we needed an AB for the Shell Tanker on which I was a JOS. I was pleased to find it was to be a Londoner even if he was in his forties. Mick and I hit it off right away. He had started his sea life in sail, during the war, in spite of his efforts to try to get back to sea the authorities refused to let him go. Mick, believe this, was employed wire splicing the controls of Hurricanes and Spitfires. No wonder we were always slow in production.

It was obvious Mick was now surplus to requirements and he was let go. I was only seventeen to Mick's going on fifty, after a few days out we were, jointly given the task of painting the foremast, starting with the crow's nest. Mick up one side, with me up the other. My paint pot was hooked onto the bosun's chair, and brush with loop around the wrist, I was hanging on tightly with my spare hand whilst wishing I had another two, with much trepidation I swung myself around the mast to see Mick, with pot in one hand and brush in the other, OUT of his chair kneeling on the guy wires, knees inside and feet outside the sloping wires. We were rolling quite a bit but it didn't seem to worry the old fellow. Talk about putting a seventeen year old in his place.

This trip, apart from the weather, was uneventful and we broke from the convoy near New York turning for Mississippi to berth at a little place some miles past New Orleans. I honestly can't remember the name. It only had a visit from an overseas ship occasionally and consisted of a few houses and a saloon with a craps parlour behind, plus the inevitable Sherriff's Office.

My cabin mate asked if he could borrow my sports jacket to wear on shore leave which I had no problem with, well not at that moment, from memory it was a week end, and most of the crew were off to catch the bus to New Orleans to visit the museums and take in the Churches. OK so you don't believe it either. Mick and I, later on, wandered off to the Craps Parlour. Mick had spent the depression years being a hobo in the South and was nearly an American. I knew nothing about "Craps" plus I have never seen the sense in gambling so I watched him at the table with about half a dozen or more players. I quickly picked up on Mick's signals, after all we were both Cockneys. Surreptitiously he slipped me a dozen or so Silver Dollars. This was the coinage still being used in gambling. On through the night it went, a few dollars every so often being slipped into my pockets, until I thought that if I fall in old Mississippi even that current wouldn't move me off the bottom.

Near midnight I thought I should go back on board to check the moorings and make the supper for us on duty. I was the night watchman, so I departed. Mick came some time later having lost a few dollars, then saying he was out of the game. He was still chuckling reminiscing how they couldn't understand who had been winning because it hadn't been them and Mick had precious little on him. Mick had actually cleaned up close to four hundred dollars which he used buying all manner of American goods, unavailable in England, such as nylon stockings. I didn't get a buck out of it.

The following morning we had a visit from the local Sherriff. The Skipper called all the crew up to the Smoking Room where the old Sherriff said, in that awful Southern dialect. "We `all don't have too many foreign ships a calling here but whenever we do we seem to have a mite of trouble. This time is no different. Now I really don't want to hold up any of you,

especially with this here war going on, so I'll be brief. I don't mind so much that someone took my car, I don't even really mind'em leaving it parked in a ditch, we got it out and it still goes, but my Sherriff's badge is missing, now that is a serious matter carrying a pretty heavy jail sentence. I'm willing to let it go if whoever has it just parks it here in this room, and no more will be said." With a few words from the Skipper we all dispersed.

As I said earlier I was night watchman so I was off to New Orleans for the day, after a quick shower I dressed and grabbed my returned sports jacket from my locker, which was now resplendent with one very prominent Sherriff's Badge on the lapel. Needless to say a few well chosen words were exchanged before the Law Officer eventually had his badge of office returned.

The trip home, once again up the American coast which was patrolled only by U S Navy Blimps, until we hooked up with the homeward bound convoy. It was into the Manchester shipping canal and the oil terminal, where I was paying off, but Mick was re joining. My cabin mate Brian, of the sports coat episode, had nearly forty pounds of plug tobacco at one end of his case. I thought it a bit ridiculous not distributing the weight more evenly. Along came the Customs Officer. Me and my big mouth. I asked the time, and added. "Oh heck we have to catch the train in an hour."... "In that case I'll check your baggage now." Brian's looks should have dropped me dead. The Officer put his hand to the bottom of the case riffling through the neatly stowed clothing. "OK away you go." The other end of the case would have been a different story. Poor old Mick, as he was in no hurry they had all the time in the world to check his lot. He told me later that he was glad he'd kept some dollars back he needed it to pay the damned Duty.

It was a little later on, whilst I was still between ships, that war was declared over in Europe, at the time I was actually in Piccadilly Circus. Every damned bloke in sight, with a uniform on, seemed to have at least one girl hanging on and kissing him. I missed out completely. How can a little badge compete with a whole uniform?

Tom Edgar

**John and Jim - two young Aussie back-packers** were bumming their way around Europe. They hitched a ride on the back of a truck to land up in Norway – stony-broke. Looking for somewhere to earn some money, they wandered onto the nearby wharf as the likeliest place to pick up a casual job. Their luck was out there as only Union-ticket men worked the ships cargoes.

The two 'never give up' young men spotted a sign on the gangway of a rusty old freighter that had seen better days: "Deck Hands Wanted". Neither of the two had any sea experience but the brash young pair went aboard – applied – and got the job. The ship was due to sail that day bound for the UK. Well out to sea, the grizzled old mate was patiently teaching John how to handle the helm. John was a quick learner and assimilated the ship-board language – Port and Starboard – in no time.

When the mate ordered: "Come starboard" pleased that he knew where starboard was; John left the helm and walked over to his Instructor. As the helm swung freely, the mate politely asked: "Would you mind bringing the ship with you?"

## Port Talbot



The town grew out of the original small port and market town of *Aberafan* (English name Aberavon), which belonged to the medieval Lords of Afan. The area of the parish of Margam lying on the west bank of the lower Afan became industrialised following the establishment of a copperworks in 1770. A dock was opened in

1839 and named for the Talbot family, local landowners who were related to the pioneer photographer, William Henry Fox Talbot. The Talbots were patrons of Margam Abbey, an ancient Cistercian foundation, and also built Margam Castle. Christopher Rice Mansel Talbot (1803-1890) (Liberal Member of Parliament for Glamorgan from 1830 until his death) saw the potential of his property as a site for an extensive ironworks, which opened in early 1831.

CRM Talbot's daughter Emily Charlotte Talbot (1840-1918) inherited her father's fortune and became just as notable in the development of ports and railways. With assistance from engineers Charles Meik and Patrick Meik, she set about creating a port and railway system to attract business away

from Cardiff and Swansea. The Port Talbot Railway and Docks Company opened a dock at Port Talbot and the Llyfni Railway in 1897, followed by the Ogmore Valley Extension and the South Wales Mineral Junction Railway (almost all these lines were closed as part of the Beeching Axe cuts in the mid 1960s, but some bridges and viaducts remain and many of these railway routes have re-emerged as recreational cycle tracks). By 1900, the dock was exporting over 500,000 tons of coal; it reached a peak of over three million tons in 1923. In the same year, the borough of Port Talbot was created, incorporating Margam, Cwmafan and the older town of Aberavon.

In 1952 the completion of the Abbey Works made Port Talbot the home of one of Europe's largest steelworks and (with 18,000 employees) the largest employer in Wales. This was followed by the establishment of a chemical plant at Baglan Bay by BP in the 1960s. In 1970 a new deep-water harbour was opened by Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, capable of discharging iron ore vessels of 100,000 deadweight, a tenfold improvement on the old dock.

By the early 21st century, due to further modification and dredging, the harbour is capable of harbouring vessels of over 170,000 deadweight. Following the demise of the West Glamorgan county council, the Port Talbot borough council was reorganised with Neath into the new unitary authority of Neath Port Talbot in 1996.

## Those 22 Spans of Ours



*In the last issue of "Under the Clock" was a story about the the Severn Railway Bridge at Sharpness, to follow on, this is what Terry Hales, NSW newsletter editor wrote in his last newsletter - with kind permission. (abridged)*

To the Victorians, the London to South Wales route was an important one - but a big obstacle got in the way: the Severn Estuary. In the 1860s, rail travelers on this route would have had to break their journey on reaching the Severn and take a ferry to rejoin a train on the other side. Unfortunately, the Severn Estuary is known for its treacherous tides and bad weather, making for an uncomfortable interlude on an otherwise pleasant journey. The Victorians produced some great engineers and they were prepared to accept the technical challenge of tunneling under the Severn - unaware of one hidden danger, the Great Spring! The project began in 1873 and six years later they hit the Great Spring. Only 152 metres separated each tunnel running from the English and the Welsh shore. Within 24 hours the tunnel was flooded to river level, thankfully without any loss of life. Huge pumps were brought in to try to pump out the water, but the spring was so big that they couldn't cope. A diver by the name of Lambert bravely entered the workings and managed, with considerable difficulty, to seal off the spring. But it wasn't until 1881 that the Great Spring was sealed off behind a giant headwall.

Since that day a massive pump has continued to pump out 50 million litres of water per day, which is now sold to a local water company. The Great Spring persisted to give problems throughout the remainder of the time spent in constructing the tunnel. As did the weather, and even a large tidal wave gave rise to flooding. But on December 1, 1886 a regular passenger service was opened, cutting the journey from London to South Wales by one hour. Work had begun two years earlier in 1875 on the construction of the Severn Railway Bridge, which crossed the river a little upstream of Lydney and Sharpness. There was to be a lot of jealousy during the period of construction between both the tunnel and bridge companies until the bridge was finally opened in 1879. Today, the tunnel has modern diesel express trains roaring through, but the maintenance of the workings is continuous. Every Sunday the tunnel is closed to allow teams of engineers in to carry out vital work to ensure the safety of the passengers that use it.

Our bridge was built by the Severn Bridge Railway company to transport coal from the Forest of Dean. Work began in 1875 and was completed in 1879. The cast-iron bridge, which was 4,162 feet long and 70 feet above high water, had 22 spans and had stone abutments made from local limestone. The span across the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal operated as a swing bridge. The bridge was single-track, and it took approximately 30 miles off the journey through Gloucester. The bridge predated the construction of the Severn Tunnel, a dozen miles or so downstream, by seven years. It was known by locals as 'The White Elephant' (Cheeky devils!). Until the Severn Road Bridge was opened in 1966, the Severn Railway Bridge was often referred to as the Severn Bridge.

In spring 1943 a flight of three Spitfires was being delivered by ATA pilots, including one woman, Ann Wood, from their Castle Bromwich factory to Whitchurch. As it was low tide, the lead pilot, Johnnie Jordan, decided to fly under the bridge. Some time later, Ann Wood repeated this underfly - without realising that this time it was high tide and there was 30 ft less headroom. This was not the only instance of pilots buzzing the bridge; it was seemingly so common at one time that a local policeman was tasked with recording serial numbers.

Tuesday 25th October 1960. That evening several river trade vessels departed downstream Severn ports for upstream destinations. The tankers concerned were the ARKENDALE H, loaded with 300 tons of black oil, bound from Swansea to Worcester and the WASTDALE H, loaded with 350 tons of petroleum spirit, bound from Avonmouth to Worcester, both operated by John Harker Limited. Several craft had left Avonmouth that evening including the WYESDALE H, tug ADDIE and tug ROBERT A bound for Lydney towing three lighters loaded with logs.

There was no sign of fog on leaving Avonmouth, and the craft proceeded steadily upstream towards Sharpness accompanied by vessels from Swansea. On reaching Berkeley Power Station about 10 p.m. the fog descended very quickly and the crews of the vessels were alerted to listen for the fog horn on Sharpness Pier. The ARKENDALE H was already swinging off Sharpness, stemming the tide waiting to enter the port when the tug ADDIE and tow came across the barge's bow, forcing skipper George Thompson to go full astern. A collision was avoided, but the tanker barge lost momentum against the tide and was drifting back towards the old dock entrance. George Thompson suddenly saw another vessel come out of the fog and brush against his barge. He hailed the other craft to ask if they knew where they were. The reply was no, they didn't know where they were. The other vessel was the WASTDALE H, her skipper was James Dew, who had only been on her for three days as his own barge, the BP MANUFACTURER, was in dry dock.

When the fog had first descended he had had a slight collision with the WYESDALE H and then decided to find the river bank until things quietened down, but on hearing the fog horn very plainly began to make for the piers at Sharpness. Unfortunately he went past Sharpness Piers and suddenly saw the White House located near to the old dock entrance, whereby he began to stem the flow of the tide and make back to the piers. Soon after he heard a vessel blowing and at the same time saw her lights and recognised her as the ARKENDALE H. The two vessels converged on one another, both skippers fighting with the wheel to bring them apart. Unknown to skipper George Thompson, crewmen of the WASTDALE H had secured a mooring rope to both barges, which made it impossible in the fierce current to steer the barges to the safety of Sharpness Piers. Soon the Severn Railway Bridge was upon them, so Jimmy Dew gave his barge everything it had in the way of engine revolutions, but then he found that the WASTDALE H's stern was going under the bridge.

The stern cleared the bridge columns, but the bow swung across at an angle hit a column with the port bow. At this time he put the vessel into full astern to cant the barge off the column when suddenly he was flung from the wheelhouse into the water. At this time a girder from the bridge dropped, falling on to the barge. He climbed back on to the WASTDALE H, which by now was on her side, when he

realised that she was also on fire. So he struggled to the starboard side and made a jump for the ARKENDALE H. But the ARKENDALE H had also been struck by a falling bridge girder, which had sliced through the barge just forward of the wheelhouse. Inside, George Thompson was struck by a flying object which caused him to lose consciousness for a short time. He revived and went to the stern of the vessel where he saw his mate and engineer. Knowing they couldn't swim, he gave them each a life ring and told them to jump into the river together. George jumped, but the other two held back and remained on the wrecked barge. On board, as he jumped from the WASTDALE H to the ARKENDALE H, James Dew found two men, the mate, Percy Simmonds, and engineer, Jack Cooper, deciding which was the best way to escape.

The ARKENDALE H's propeller was still turning, with the stern high out of the water. All three men decided to jump, but Jack Cooper as he jumped caught his back on the revolving propeller. The river was ablaze for two miles along the surface of the water and Jack decided he would rather drown than burn to death, so he discarded his life ring and sank below the surface of the Severn. But a vision of his family made him fight for his life. On reaching the surface not only did he find his life ring again, but a clear patch of water and was later rescued, a very exhausted man. Five other crewmen were not so lucky. Percy Simmonds drowned, so did the deckhand off the WASTDALE H, Malcolm Hart, mate Jack Dudfield, engineer Alex Bullock and 2nd engineer on the ARKENDALE H, Robert Nibblett, WASTDALE H skipper Jimmy Dew was rescued three hours later upriver from the bridge on the Lydney side. He was uninjured and was the only survivor from his vessel.

Skipper of the ARKENDALE H, George Thompson, thought he was going to die as he swam with all his strength from the flames which encircled the two barges. As he jumped from his barge over the flames into the thick black oily water he heard an explosion: the WASTDALE H was just one mass of flames. He eventually swam from one bank to the other, a distance of about one mile, and when he reached the bank on the Lydney side, just sat there hollering. A nearby farmer heard his cries for help and helped him back to the warmth of the farmhouse. The hero of the night was another tanker barge skipper, Tommy Carter, master of the SHELL TRAVELLER, safely tied up in Sharpness docks. He heard a great whoosh! as the tankers burst into flames and described a great glow in the sky. Attempts were made to contact the two tanker barges by radio, but received no reply. Tommy Carter and his crew went to the pier, found a small boat and loaded it on a lorry. It was taken to Purton and launched into the river from the marshy land. With Tommy Carter in the boat was a local carpenter, Mr Henderson, and both had to row in a zigzag fashion to avoid the flames. Jack Cooper was the first man they found, exhausted, hanging onto his life ring, grateful to be alive, and soon to be reunited with his family. Later at the public inquiry, Carter was praised on behalf of a Government minister for his leadership and courage shown that night.

Workers were strengthening the spans across the bridge on that particular night but they had retired to the signal box to watch Henry Cooper fighting in a heavyweight boxing match on TV. The Severn Railway Bridge was finally demolished in 1967, the iron girders being sold to Chile for a road viaduct.

*All very interesting, more so to a Vindi boy.....*

## ~ Suez the full Story ~

There seems to have always been an interest in linking the Mediterranean and Red Seas, because such a link would greatly shorten the time required for trade goods that would otherwise require a considerably longer sea voyage or shipment overland. Most of the early efforts were directed towards a link from the Nile to the Red Sea, thus indirectly linking the Red Sea to the Mediterranean through the Nile. Strabo and Pliny record that the earliest effort was directed by Senusret III, but no evidence that there was an actual canal built exists. The earliest efforts may have actually occurred at the command of Seti I or Ramesses II during the 13th century BC.



According to the Chronicle of the Pharaohs by Peter A. Clayton, under Necho II (610-595 BC) a canal was built between the Pelusian branch of the Nile and the northern end of the Bitter Lakes (which lies between the two seas) at a cost of, reportedly, 100,000 lives. However, over many years, the canal fell into disrepair, only to be extended, abandoned, and rebuilt again. After having been neglected, it was rebuilt by the Persian ruler, Darius I (522-486 BC), whose canal can still be seen along the Wadi Tumilat. According to Herodotus, his canal was wide enough that two triremes could pass each other with oars extended, and that it took four days to navigate. He commemorated the completion of his canal with a series of granite stelae set up along the Nile bank.

This canal is said to have been extended to the Red Sea by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 BC), abandoned during the early Roman rule, but rebuilt again by Trajan (98-117 AD). Over the next several centuries, it once again was abandoned and sometimes dredged by various rulers for various but limited purposes. Amr Ibn el-As rebuilt the canal after the Islamic takeover of Egypt creating a new supply line from Cairo, but in 767 AD, the Abbasid caliph El-Mansur closed the canal a final time to cut off supplies to insurgents located in the Delta. Of course, over time, ships grew in size and so the ancient attempts to connect the two seas would not have worked anyway today.

The first efforts to build a modern canal came from the Egypt expedition of Napoleon Bonaparte, who hoped the project would create a devastating trade problem for the English. Though this project was begun in 1799 by Charles Le Pere, a

miscalculation estimated that the levels between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea were too great (estimating that the Red Sea was some ten meters higher than that of the Mediterranean Sea) and work was quickly suspended.

Then, in 1833, a group of French intellectuals known as the Saint-Simoniens arrived in Cairo and they became very interested in the Suez project despite such problems as the difference in sea levels. Unfortunately, at that time Mohammed Ali had little interest in the project, and in 1835, the Saint-Simoniens were devastated by a plague epidemic. Most of the twenty or so engineers returned to France. They did leave behind several enthusiasts for the canal, including Ferdinand de Lesseps (who was then the French vice-consul in Alexandria) and Linant de Bellefonds.

In Paris, the Saint-Simoniens created an association in 1846 to study the possibility of the Suez Canal once again. In 1847, Bourdaloue confirmed that there was no real difference in the levels between the Mediterranean and Red Seas, and it was Linant de Bellefonds that drew up the technical report. Unfortunately, there was considerable British opposition to the project, and Mohammed Ali, who was ill by this time, was less than enthusiastic.

However, Pasha Said was very open to European influence, and in fact, was a childhood friend of Vicomte Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps, who ended up founding the La Campagne Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez (Universal Company of the Maritime Suez Canal) in 1858 to build the canal. This was a private company, which would build the canal under an agreement allowing it to operate the canal for 99 years, after which it would revert to Egyptian government ownership.

The pilot study estimated that a total of 2,613 million cubic feet of earth would have to be moved, including 600 million on land, and another 2,013 million dredged from water. The total original cost estimate was two hundred million francs.

When at first the company ran into financial problems, it was Pasha Said who purchased 44 percent of the company to keep it in operation. However, the British and Turks were concerned with the venture and managed to have work suspended for a short time, until the intervention of Napoleon III. Excavation of the canal actually began on April 25th, 1859, and between then and 1862, the first part of the canal was completed. However, after Ismail succeeded Pasha Said in 1863, the work was again suspended. After Ferdinand De Lesseps again appealed to Napoleon III, an international commission was formed in March of 1864. The commission resolved the problems and within three years, the canal was completed. On November 17, 1869 the barrage of the Suez plains reservoir was breached and waters of the Mediterranean flowed into the Red Sea. The total original cost of building the canal was about \$100 million, about twice its original estimated cost. However, about three times that sum was spent on later repairs and improvements.

The completion of the Suez Canal was a cause for considerable celebration. In Port Said, the extravaganza began with fireworks and a ball attended by six thousand people. They included many heads of state, including the Empress Eugenie, the Emperor of Austria, the Prince of Wales, the Prince of Prussia and the Prince of the Netherlands. Two convoys of ships entered the canal from its southern and northern points and met at Ismailia. Parties continued for weeks, and the celebration also marked the

opening of Ismail's old Opera House in Cairo, which is now gone.

Because of external debts, the British government purchased the shares owned by Egyptian interests, namely those of Said Pasha, in 1875, for some £400,000 pounds sterling. Yet France continued to have a majority interest. Under the terms of an international convention signed in 1888 (The Convention of Constantinople), the canal was opened to vessels of all nations without discrimination, in peace and war. Nevertheless, Britain considered the canal vital to the maintenance of its maritime power and colonial interests. Therefore, the provisions of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 allowed Britain to maintain a defensive force along the Suez Canal Zone. However, Egyptian nationalists demanded repeatedly that Britain evacuate the Suez Canal Zone, and in 1954 the two countries signed a seven-year agreement that superseded the 1936 treaty and provided for the gradual withdrawal of all British troops from the zone.

By June 1956, all British troops had departed and Egypt took over the British installations. Nevertheless, various conflicts caused the closure of the canal for intermittent periods. Unfortunately, between the Suez Crisis and later wars, the canal was damaged extensively and was not operated for several years after 1967. However, on June 5th, 1975, the canal was again opened, and since then has been updated and enlarged.

The canal stretches over 100 miles (163 kilometers) from Port Said and the Mediterranean Sea to Suez and the Red Sea and, along with other such projects, changed the face of maritime world trade. The famous canal (Translated from Arabic as Qana al-Suways) of the modern era is one of the greatest engineering feats of modern record. At its narrowest point, it is about 300 meters wide (197 feet) at the bottom. It is wide enough to allow ships having a maximum draft of 16 meters (53 feet). The canal can accommodate ships as large as 150,000 dead weight tons fully loaded.

The Canal is really not wide enough to allow two way passage of ships, but there are several passing bays, and areas where ships may pass each other in the Bitter Lakes and between Qantara and Ismailia. There is also a railway that runs the entire distance of the canal.

The Suez Canal has no locks, because the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Suez have roughly the same water level. Actually, the canal does not stretch continuously from one sea to the other. It really consists of two parts each flowing into the Bitter Lakes which lies between Port Said and Suez, and it also uses the waters of Lake Manzilah and Lake Timsah.

Three convoys transit the canal on a typical day, two southbound and one northbound. The first southbound convoy enters the canal in the early morning hours and proceeds to the Great Bitter Lake, where the ships anchor out of the fairway and await the passage of the northbound convoy. The northbound convoy passes the second southbound convoy, which moors to the canal bank in a by-pass, in the vicinity of El Qantara. Egypt's Suez Canal Authority (SCA) reported that in 2003 17,224 ships passed through the canal. The canal averages about 8% of the world shipping traffic. The passage takes between 11 and 16 hours at a speed of around 8 knots. The low speed helps prevent erosion of the canal banks by ship's wakes.

Improvements are planned to allow supertanker passage

though the canal by 2010. Presently, supertankers can offload part of their cargo onto a canal-owned boat and reload at the other end of the canal.

For tourists, the Canal Zone makes an interesting visit, though one need not, and really cannot traverse the whole of it except by ship. Outside of an ocean cruise, visiting the Canal is easiest at Suez. It can in fact be a very easy day tour, as Cairo is only about an hour and a half away.



In 1869, John Willis had the Cutty Sark built in Dumbarton with the intention of beating the clipper Thermopylae. In 1872 the ships had a very close race but only to the Cape of Good Hope where the Cutty Sark had the misfortune to lose her rudder but still managed to arrive in London only a week behind. Although constructed with a sharp-bodied hull and and capable of high speeds with a large spread of canvas the Cutty Sark never made the voyage from China in less than 100 days. The fast passages achieved by clippers were, in many respects, due to the temperament of the captain. Fast passages were attained through daring, nerve and the skill to push the clippers to their limits. Clipper captains could be bullies, hell-fire preachers, pious, or even strong and silent, but they could all drive ships.

When the Suez Canal opened in 1869 steamships could bring home the tea much quicker than clippers and therefore received higher freight rates. The races continued until 1875 but with freight rates as low as £1.50 to £2 per ton it was no longer economical and they were switched to other trades. The Cutty Sark, built too late for the tea trade, was switched to the Australian wool trade where, under the command of Captain Woodget, she was fast and virtually unbeatable.

## Vindicatrix South Australia

Please view, book-mark their new website  
and sign their Guest Book

[www.sa.vindicatrix.com](http://www.sa.vindicatrix.com)

To those viewers of the BILL on the ABC TV each Saturday night be advised after 27 years the BBC are shutting up shop later this year. The producers have mucked it around so much that it is losing viewers each week by the ship load and cannot be sustained they say.

## Down-under Reunion 2010 Fremantle, WA

Just a reminder to those wishing to attend the Fremantle Reunion this year that organiser are waiting to receive your nominations and as far as accommodation goes - "First in, best Dressed" as normal.



WA, President Tony Harben and his lads are working flat chat in making this a memorial event and can tell you that a red London double decker bus has been organised for transport, and the WA choir are in practice along with other surprise entertainment organised.

More info at: [www.wa.vindicatrix.com](http://www.wa.vindicatrix.com)



**There was a perfect man and a perfect woman.** They met each other at a perfect party. They dated for two perfect years. They had the perfect wedding and the perfect honeymoon. They had two perfect children.

One day the perfect man and the perfect woman were driving in their perfect car, they saw an elf by the side of the road, being the perfect people they were they picked him up. Well as the perfect man and the perfect woman were driving with the elf, somehow they got into an accident. Two people died and one lived.

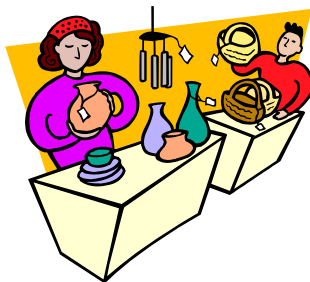
Who died and who lived?..... The perfect woman of course, because the perfect man and elves aren't real.

**A bloke is wandering through the desert.** Deprived of water for many days on end, he is dying of thirst. To his amazement, he stumbles across three market stalls set up in the middle of the sandy dunes. He crawls up to the first stall. "Water, water! Please give me water!" He begs.

"I'm sorry," says the first stallholder, "I sell nothing but jelly and custard." The bloke crawls up to the second stall. "Water, water! Give me water!" He cries.

"I'm sorry," says the second stallholder, "I sell nothing but cream and sponge." The man crawls up to the third stall. "Water, water! Please, please! Give me water!" He yells.

"I'm so sorry," says the third stallholder, "I sell nothing but hundreds and thousands." "I can't believe none of you has any water," gasps the bloke. "I know," says the third stallholder, "it is a trifle bazaar."



**Granddad was reminiscing** about the good old days...

"When I were a lad, me mother would send me down to t'corner shop wi' a shilling, and I'd come back wi' five pounds o' potatoes, two loaves o' bread, three pints o' milk, a pound o' cheese, a packet o' tea, an' 'alf a dozen eggs.

**Yer can't do that now. Too many bloody security cameras."**



**On a bitterly cold winter's day** on the Mt Cook Road at high altitude, a NZ Police Constable on patrol came across a motorcyclist, swathed in protective clothing and helmet, stalled by the roadside.

"What's the matter?" asked the constable. "Carburettor's frozen," was the terse reply. "Pee on it. That'll thaw it out." "Can't" was the reply. "OK, watch me and I will show you." The constable lubricated the carburettor, as promised. The bike started and the rider drove off, waving. A few days later, the Timaru Constabulary office received a note of thanks from the father of the motorbike rider. It began: "On behalf of my daughter, who recently was stranded ....."

**The family wheeled Grandma out on the lawn,** in her wheelchair, where the activities for her 100th birthday were taking place. Grandma couldn't speak very well, but she would write notes when she needed to communicate.

After a short time out on the lawn, Grandma started to lean to her right so the family stuffed pillows around her to keep her upright. Some time later, she started leaning off to her left, so again the family grabbed her and stuffed pillows on her left. Soon she started leaning forward, so the family members again grabbed her, and then tied a pillowcase around her waist to hold her up.

A nephew who arrived late came up to Grandma and said, "Hi, Grandma, you're looking good! How are they treating you?" Grandma took out her little notepad and slowly wrote a note to the nephew..... "*Bastards won't let me fart.*"



**A married couple in their early 60s** was celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary in a quiet, romantic little restaurant. Suddenly, a tiny yet beautiful fairy appeared on their table. She said, 'For being such an exemplary married couple and for being loving to each other for all this time, I will grant you each a wish.'

The wife answered, 'Oh, I want to travel around the world with my darling husband.' The fairy waved her magic wand and - poof! - two tickets for the Queen Mary II appeared in her hands. The husband thought for a moment: 'Well, this is all very romantic, but an opportunity like this will never come again. I'm sorry my love, but my wish is to have a wife 30 years younger than me.' The wife, and the fairy, were deeply disappointed, but a wish is a wish.

So the fairy waved her magic wand and poof!..the husband became 92 years old. The moral of this story: Men who are ungrateful rats should remember.... *fairies are female.*

**ALL MONIES, for whatever reason to be paid to the Treasurer**  
(Cheques & PO's made payable to Vindicatrix Association Queensland - ONLY)

President, Roger Wilson  
54 Hickey Way  
CARRARA QLD 4211  
Ph: 07 5594 3771  
rogmagwilson@optusnet.com.au

Vice President, Fred Joughin  
104/31 Kruger Parade  
REDBANK QLD 4301  
Ph: 07 3814 0293  
Email: badgerden@hotmail.com

Treasurer, Robert Buxton  
46 Arnold Street  
WULKURAKA QLD 4305  
Ph: 07 3282 7583  
Email: rjabbox@people.net.au

Secretary, Kim Cohen  
Ruby Gardens 222/225 Logan Street  
EAGLEBY QLD 4207  
Ph: 07 3287 5182  
Email: kimmy47@people.net.au

**Vindicatrix Queensland web site - [www.qld.vindicatrix.com](http://www.qld.vindicatrix.com)**