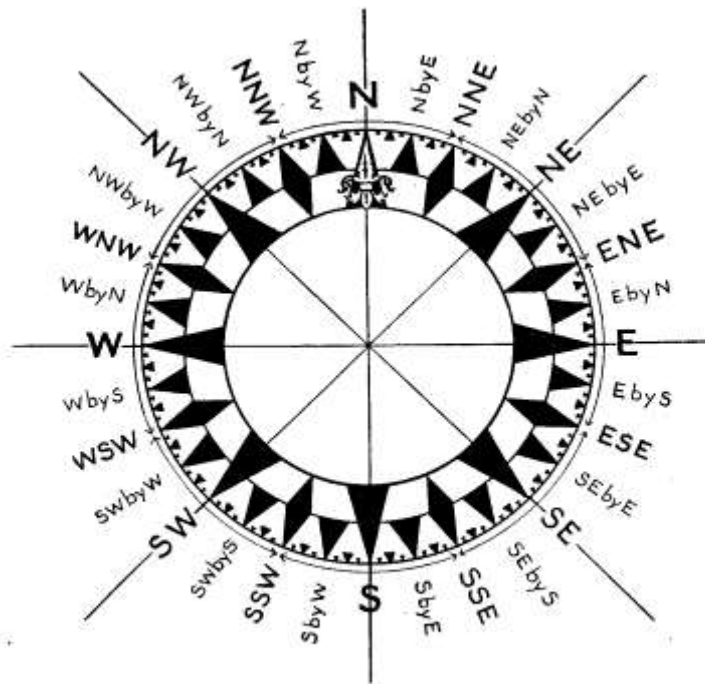




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SKIPPER/TREASURER:
SECRETARY/SOCIAL ORGANISER:
SUPPLY OFFICER:
ALMONER:
P.R.O.:
NEWSLETTER:
EMAIL:

TONY ILES 8523 1655
ANNE ILES 8523 1655
KEITH WITHEY 8278 7917
ANNE WITHEY 8278 7917
WINSTON KAY 8362 7027
MICK & JILL SURFIELD 8381 4500
surfield@adam.com.au

Editor's Note

Happy New Year to all our readers and once again we ask for your stories no matter how trivial you may think it is I am sure our members will find it interesting and perhaps jog their memory for a tale of their own.

Did you receive your November copy of the newsletter as some seem to have gone missing in the Christmas post.

Once again we thank Vince for his contribution from the UK.

Thankyou to Bill & Shirley Davis for their help in setting up the SA Vindicatrix website.

Mick & Jill

Next Meeting Sunday 28th March 2010

Skipper's Log

From The Skipper and Social Secretary.

A Happy 2010 to those of you we didn't see at the January Meeting.

ANZAC DAY

We shall meet again at the Frome Street point as we did last year. All those marching please be there by 9 a.m. We have our usual booking at the Cathedral Hotel for lunch. Please advise if you wish to attend by the March meeting.

The January meeting was a great success at our home, although the weather was very hot we managed to have a good group turn up with enough food for an army, or should I say Navy.

Our thanks go to everyone who helped out. As we have done this in January for the past couple of years it has been decided that next year, 2011, we shall have the January meeting at the Seafarers as in previous years and have the July meeting/annual lunch at our house as Christmas in July. The arrangements for this will be settled later on in the year.

Our March meeting will be "Market Day" as previously discussed. The date of the meeting is Sunday 28th March. We are always in need of raffle prizes so please if you have anything to give please bring along.

Our friend and Vindi Boy Eddie Burgess will soon be returning to the UK. We take this opportunity of wishing Eddie all the best and thank him for his great friendship and attendance at the Vindi. We hope he will return and see us one day but in the meantime to keep in touch. We shall miss you Eddie, you have been an important part of our group for a long time. Take care.

There have been a few of our Members who have suffered ill health over the past couple of months. We hope that all of you will have better health in the future. If any of you are sick please let Anne Withey know, as the Almoner she always wants to be kept up to date and she is always there with a kind word and offers of help.

Regarding the newsletters. As previously mentioned this is a very large time consuming task for Jill and Mick Surfield. They do an excellent job and we don't want them to stop, however if they don't have any input from you all there will be nothing to write about and we will be unable to have a newsletter and that will be a very sad day. So please write a story, any story, ladies as well of course. We must keep this newsletter going but whether it does or not is entirely up to our Members.

Our web site is on the way. Please let us know your email addresses.

We look forward to a great year together and if you have any suggestions as to how you would like the meeting run etc., ANYTHING, please let us know, we always need feedback.

Anne & Tony Iles

From the Almoner's desk

We have missed the company of Les Cook at several Vindi gatherings. Les, a founder member, has been battling illness and the side effects of treatment. We hope to catch up with you soon Les.

After enjoying a pretty good year health-wise, it is most concerning to learn that Vern Evans has recently undergone major surgery at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Our thoughts are very much with Vern, Eunice and family.

To any member who has been on the 'sick list' lately, take heart, we belong to a very special group who really care.

Anne Withey

January meeting 2010



Twenty two Vindi boys and girls gathered at Tony and Anne's for the January meeting, if only the Vindicatrix training ship had served up the quality and quantity of the food we all enjoyed.

It was good to see Ken and Margaret McTigue as they are unable to make it to the meetings at the Seafarers.

It was unusual for Mike Day not to put in an appearance, not the same without him and his diary.

My better half was, as usual, the chief cook, and he was a deck –hand.

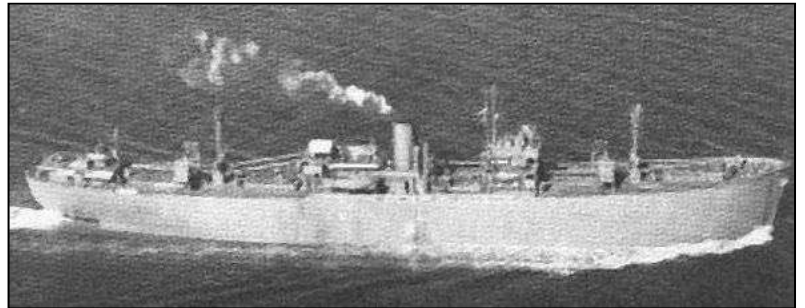
I felt like my body had gotten totally out of shape so got my doctor's permission to join a fitness club and start exercising. I decided to take an aerobics class for seniors. I bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down and perspired for an hour, but by the time I got my leotard on the class was over.

Life is short, so break the rules, forgive quickly, kiss slowly, love truly, laugh uncontrollably and never regret anything that made you smile

ALSO Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well preserved body, but rather skid in sideways, chocolate in one hand and champagne in the other totally worn out and screaming "Wooo Hoooo What a Ride!"

THE SS FORT STIKINE

The SS Fort Stikine was one of ninety Canadian-built wartime cargo vessels similar to the American Liberty ships. The Fort Stikine a coal-burner of 7142 tons was launched at Prince Rupert, British Columbia in July 1942 and chartered by the United Kingdom government under the Lend-Lease scheme and managed by Port line Ltd. She was named after a former outpost of the Hudson Bay Company. On her fourth trip, the Fort Stikine sailed from Birkenhead on 24th February 1944 under the command of



Captain Naismith and quickly joined a 50-ship convoy for part of her journey to Gibraltar, Port Said, and Karachi finally arriving in Bombay (now Mumbai) on 12th February and berthed on 14th February 1944. During the trip a stow-away, John O'Hare from Liverpool, had surrendered to Capt. Naismith and was put to work in the engine room and handed-over to the authorities in Port Taufiq. The cargo consisted of 1400 tons of explosives, including 248 tons of highly sensitive category "A" explosive, munitions, 1000 drums of oil, 12 Spitfires (which had been unloaded at Karachi) together with 124 gold bars each weighing 28 pounds and valued at well over £1 million, scrap iron and sundry other items, in fact, as one of the deck officers was heard to say "everything that would explode or burn" Once alongside the ship's engines were stripped-down for repair of a faulty slide-valve. The Fort Stikine was one of fourteen ships being unloaded in Victoria docks while a further ten ships were being unloaded in Princes docks nearby. Up to the beginning of the war ships carrying explosives were required to unload into lighters or barges in the harbour, but that regulation, together with the requirement to fly a red flag when carrying explosives, had been abandoned to speed-up the war effort. At about 1400 the crew were alerted to a fire burning somewhere in number two hold just forward of the bridge, but despite the assistance of shore fire-fighters and fire-boats, they were unable to extinguish it. There was insufficient water below her keel to flood the engine and boiler rooms in an attempt to quench the fire and because her engines were under repair, the ship could not be moved out of the docks without the assistance of tugs. At 1550 the order was given to abandon ship and sixteen minutes later there was a gigantic explosion which blew the ship in half and hurled her boiler a mile away; sank eleven other vessels, and set fire to surroundings in a 2500-foot arc around the ship. The explosion launched flaming cotton bales, burning oil drums, gold bars and shells distances of over a mile which, as they rained down, killed over 500 people outside the docks and set buildings and the shanty town on fire. Emergency personnel suffered heavy losses when a second explosion occurred at 1634 as 784 tons of munitions in the aft section of the ship detonated. It took three days to bring the fires under control and 8000 men laboured for seven months to remove about 800,000 tons of debris and get the docks working again. The official death-toll, not including the "Untouchables" who lived and worked in the area, was 740 including 476 military personnel, with about 1800 people injured. In-all 27 other vessels were either sunk or badly damaged. The Indian Government took full responsibility for the disaster and compensated people for loss and damage. As late as the 1970's normal harbour dredging operations were still bringing gold bars to the surface, which were returned to the UK Government. A memorial was built in Mumbai's Fire Brigade headquarters in memory of the fire-fighters who died in the incident. No trace was ever found of Capt. Naismith or Chief Office Henderson in an incident that damaged or destroyed over 50,000 tons of shipping. It is doubtful if sabotage was the cause of the fire because there were five civilian watchmen on board together with two DEMS gunners patrolling the ship, crew-members manning the gangway and two Pakistani policemen patrolling the dock. The real problem stemmed from lack of written information, regarding the non-stowage of raw cotton, oil and explosives adjacent to one-another, although those instructions were freely available to the American Merchant Navy in 1944.

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Vince

Cold Weather and its Results

Capt. David E Kemp

The first incident that comes to mind was whilst Graham Hay and I were Apprentices aboard the *Port Wyndham* in 1951-52 when we went to St John, New Brunswick, Canada to take a full load for New Zealand. It was January 1952 and intensely cold in St. John, with plenty of snow and ice. The ship had not experienced any really cold weather for many years, if ever, and there was around a quarter of an inch of paint on all surfaces of the ship. I well remember just how cold we were when the temperature in the cabin during the night was about 28° F and my hair froze to the bulkhead by my bunk. The ship was a warm weather ship and we did not have any way to heat our cabins except for the “light bulb” heaters which proved virtually useless. We survived the 14 days spent loading, even when we had to disconnect sections of sewerage waste pipes which had frozen in the ‘tween decks and thaw them out on deck with blowlamps, thus releasing the foul contents of the pipes. This went on day after day.

I recall that we used to trudge through the snow to Gar’s Diner to warm up around the potbellied stove in the place - we could generally only afford to buy a cup of coffee - and how good it tasted - then when warm we would go back to the ship and the misery of not being able to sleep properly due to the cold. We did not even have any proper warm gear to wear.

When we left St. John we ran into the tail of the Atlantic storm that sank the *Flying Enterprise* in the eastern Atlantic Ocean. We shipped a lot of water and when we were past Cape Hatteras into warmer weather we noticed the millions of cracks in all painted surfaces, and the rust started. We Apprentices spent the whole passage to New Zealand scaling the electric winches, the crew scaling deckhouses and deckheads etc. and huge sections of paint fell off the ship’s side, so that by the time we arrived in Auckland the shipside was largely bare rusted steel, and the Auckland paper side we were the dirtiest Port Line ship ever to enter the port of Auckland. These remarks and accompanying photograph must have sorely wounded the Master and Chief Officer. And she did look dreadful, so the Chief Officer “Dickie” Dunn had us apprentices scaling day after day, - no cargo work on the coast – just chipping hammers and scarpers in our hands for the rest of that thirteen month voyage on the MANZ line run.

I recall how we even made a wooden effigy of the Mate and stuck pins in it then burned it. But such witchcraft did not appear to do any harm to “Dickie” Dunn. I remember telling him about what pagan rights we had performed when I sailed with him, I as Chief Officer and he as Master in *Port New Plymouth* in 1967. He was very amused – didn’t hurt a bit, he said – a splendid man, and a fine shipmaster.

Printed with the permission of the Vintage Port Association facilitating the reunion of past and present Port Line employees.

The *Saxonia* was built in 1954 by John Brown & Co, Clydebank, Scotland and was launched on the 17th February by Lady Churchill. Completed she had a gross tonnage of 21,637tons and was 608ft 3inches long with a breadth of 80ft.

She was the first of four sister ships built for the Canadian trade operating between Southampton and Montreal in the summer and New York in the winter. Being the largest Cunard liner built for the Canadian service she was able to carry 125 First class and 800 Tourist class passengers in high comfort.



On the 23rd August 1954 she arrived in Liverpool in preparation for her maiden voyage which commenced on the 2nd September 1954 under the command of Captain Andrew McKellar. With a full compliment of passengers she arrived in Quebec on the 7th September and Montreal on the 8th where she remained until the 15th September.

She left Southampton on the 5th September 1962 for her final voyage under the name *Saxonia* returning on the 21st. In total she had made 116 round voyages across the Atlantic. (I was on two of those voyages)

In 1962 she went back to John Brown for refitting after which she was renamed the *Carmania* and returned to its North American run in 1963.

Carmania was withdrawn from service in October 1971 and offered for sale shortly after, the deal with a Japanese firm fell through. In May 1973 she was sold and renamed *Leonid Sobinov* and sailed under the Hammer and Sickle flag.

In April 1999 she was taken to Alang, India to be broken up.

Scouser

My name is William Robinson (Bill) I was born in Liverpool England. It was the tradition in my family that all the males went to sea, travelling to strange places and coming back with very exciting stories of people and countries to be told to the young lads that gave me the desire from a little boy to follow in their footsteps. I was the eldest and only male child in my family.

My father was a stoker in the merchant navy for Cunard White Star Shipping Company; this was the only profession he ever knew in England. His father was a merchant seaman and his father before him, so too were all my uncles and guess what, all the males in my mother's family were merchant seamen. When I was very young my father when he returned on leave from America would bring home children's air force uniforms, army suits and cowboy outfits for me and my earliest dreams formed wanting to see these places and meet Superman and Roy Rogers and Trigger.

I went to St Michaels Catholic School and lived in Everton, my earliest travel adventures were at the age of 11 when I joined the Scouts. This was very exciting as I was away most weekends on camps in England and Wales and learnt lots of useful skills. At 14 I joined the air training corp. in Liverpool; this sent me to different air bases in England including local weekend camps. I enjoyed learning Morse code, aircraft recognition, becoming a marksman and also the flights around Blackpool in the RAF aircraft.

My passion at 12 was long distant cycling into Wales where my friends and I would camp out, live off the land (pinching apples, potatoes, turnips) to give us the energy to cycle back home, as like me they had no money to buy anything. This continued until I bought my first motorbike at 16. I saved up for the bike by selling jam jars, rags and scavenging scrap metal and by making up my own bicycles from scrap and selling them on.

I left school at 15 after completing secondary school and just missing out on a college Scholarship. Reluctantly I ceased with the air training corp. as I did not have the financial backing for college. This led me to an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner as I had to be 16 for the merchant navy. My parents would not sign the papers for me to join the Royal Navy but I did not give up easily and brought lots of applications home which they threw in the fire every time as they did not want me to commit to the 12 year minimum sign up requirement.

As an apprentice fitter and turner I was on a maintenance team at the Liverpool public baths and wash houses. My weeks consisted of three nights schooling plus working from 8am to 5.00pm 7 days a week. I worked on the boilers and pipes that created steam heating for the baths and wash houses. The steam pipes were located underneath the baths and overhead in the wash houses, these pipes were huge and I had to crawl alongside them to repair steam leaks and repair valves. It was not until much later on that everyone realised the health risk we took as these pipes were covered in asbestos. Luckily I was only there for a couple of years, the decision and burning ambition to go to sea was much bigger than becoming a fitter and turner. The swimming baths were a huge success in England as the climate was too cold for beach swimming and bathing most of the year. Also there was the personal hygiene baths where you paid approximately 5c to have a beautiful steaming bath which was a great alternative as in Everton most people like our-selves did not have bathrooms in their houses. We had a big tin bath which was placed in the kitchen and copious amounts of water had to be boiled in a copper as there was no electricity only gas in the area

The wash houses were very popular as nobody had a laundry therefore they lugged all their washing to these places, using big old wicker baby prams or push chairs. Plenty of hot water, drying facilities and washing machines were the attraction plus the social chit chat, sometimes the ladies would sing the tunes of the day making light the chore of washing and escaping the inclement English weather.

My mother, who worked for the Elder Dempster shipping office spoke to her boss about me and he was kind enough to put my name forward to enter the Vindicatrix training school where I was accepted. I broke my apprenticeship and was on my way to realising my dream and big adventure. After breaking my apprenticeship I had to wait for the next Vindi intake, so I got myself a dream job in the maintenance section with the local beer bottling plant (yes boy's heaven) – I just looooooved this job, so much so it did not last long as I got caught sampling the products. Ah well all good things and hang over's have to come to an end.

Off to the job queues again - still awaiting the intake, this time, now wait for it, employment with The Liverpool Corporation (sounds a step up the ladder, finally falling on my feet - you think?) Now for the perks of the job, I was supplied with my own twin rubbish cart, a very impressive but slightly battered big broom and shovel, with my very own special patch – thank god on the other side of town. Yes it was official I had made it as a Street Sweeper. It was winter and my rubbish cart got snowed in nearly every day, it was freezing cold so I ended up on the salt truck as a snow clearer and of course stayed (on the brush) until at last I got that wonderful call up.

On the big day of my departure everyone at home went to work as normal and I was left with my suitcase to get the tram to Lime Street station. I stood on the platform by myself in the buzz of activity with crowds of people pushing and rushing all around me, but the difference being they all looked like they knew exactly where they were going. I had to get the train to Sharpness which, like everybody else I had not heard of, and was clueless to just where I was going. It is a very strange feeling standing alone on a platform at sixteen not knowing where or what I had let myself into.

Once on board the train I met a couple of Scousers around the same age (16) and to my relief they were all heading for Sharpness. The train seemed to take forever but finally we arrived in Sharpness where we met other boys arriving on trains from other parts England. A waiting naval officer herded us all off to the base. The first impression was one of isolation and being in the sticks with little chance of escape. We were taken to the camp assembly hall and greeted to Sharpness. During the greeting we were asked how many of us came from Liverpool, approximately 6 of us quickly and proudly raised our hands and got three days detention on the spot (Jankers). Oh! To be Scouse - we found out later that a group of Liverpool lads had sunk the naval officer's leisure boat and all Scouses would be paying the price for quite some time.

The next big excitement was being fitted for our uniforms. We paraded past the Q.M store and as we filed past we were handed a beret, battle dress and trousers (one size fits all). Then our visit to see Pop Eye the barber where we were given the choice of hair style (how nice) after hearing our movie star look alike requests we were all sheared exactly the same way zip, zip, zip – like shearing sheep. We were then marched through a long corridor, meeting along the way three medical staff who proceeded to jab us with very blunt needles (some young lads fainted and we were told to just step over them) arms out boys and continue walking.

We were assigned to our huts (I think there were approx 20) which consisted of approximately 20 beds with a locker each. The hut you were allocated was decided by whether you where to be on deck or catering. The huts were made of corrugated iron, with a cement floor and a pot belly stove in the middle with lines of double bunk beds. Another hut positioned outside in the middle of four huts was for the toilets, showers, plus clothes washing (dhobi) (ablution block). Two blankets each were issued and being winter and snowing it was freezing in those huts and even more so having to sprint across the grounds to the loo and showers.

The routine of the day was to be woken by the call of the bugle and be out of bed, dressed, bed made all in about ten minutes then out on the parade ground ready to file down to the Vindicatrix for breakfast. One morning I had the misfortune to sleep in; I was caught by the officer, chased out of bed and sent straight to the parade ground in nothing but my underpants. It had been snowing and having to run bare footed through the snow around the parade ground for several laps until I could not feel my feet, whilst my whole body was shaking taught me not to sleep in again. To add insult to injury by the time I got to breakfast there was only the dregs left.

Now talking about breakfast – on the Vindicatrix it was not a culinary delight. Breakfast consisted of two slices of bread and a serve of some sort of cereal and milk. On the first morning while pouring the milk on my cereal I could not believe what I saw, weevils swimming to the side of the plate. I was horrified but realising that there were at least ten sets of hungry eyes lusting after my cereal, black swimmers and all, I had to close my eyes, do as little chewing as possible and down the lot. Some of my fellow recruits could not stomach it, particularly as a group of seasoned trainees would point out the weevils and all the bad things about the food and sickness just so they could get more food to eat. A lot of new boys went very hungry for quite a few days before they too gave in and ate a hearty breakfast, and anything else that was put in front of them at all meal times. They had learnt a very powerful life lesson that hunger is a terrible thing.

Most of the time (three months) consisted of lectures, parades, inspections, life boat drills, and eventually becoming a gate watch guard after qualifying in seamanship. At this stage some of the boys were going home as the caterers had four weeks less training, and I really began to consider whether I had made the right choice to be a deckhand. But time passed and it was suddenly the end of the three months training and we were handed our sea books, vaccination certificates, and were at last ready to go to sea.

Back to the train station proudly dressed in my uniform (could not wait to show off to my friends) and looking forward to seeing Lime Street station and home. My Sharpness orders were to report next day to the seamen's pool in Liverpool so I did not have time to display my new status, as the pool told me being an Elder Dempster man they had a ship waiting for me – and I sailed two days later for Africa.

The big adventure begins; luckily I hadn't had time to unpack my kit so I was ready to go with the inclusion of some tropical gear being shorts and pumps (tennis shoes). After two nights sleeping in my own bed at home I caught the old tram to the Pier Head and then the overhead railway. The conductor on the train to the docks was a big Negro who, when

I asked could I have a one way ticket said 'You mean you don't want to come back Sarb' Oh what a big sailor I felt, puffing out my skinny little chest whilst holding my duffle bag and battered suitcase. I have never forgotten this encounter, probably the first time I felt important and my own man.

I had realised from a very early age 'If it was going to be, it was up to me' no tears and family to ever wave me off. When I got off the train I could see lots of ships docked on the many wharf's - this was busy bustling Liverpool a mighty port in the 50's the same one I had visited as a young lad and only dreamed of joining a ship to see the world. This was not only my dream but my father and grandfather's before me and I was truly sailing in their wake and following family tradition.

I struggled up the gang plank to my ship the M.V. Tarkwa an old general cargo boat. Nobody to meet or instruct me where to go, I found the crew quarters which were located in the bow of the boat. Looking around it was very crowded, six men to a cabin, double bunks with one tiny port hole to watch the world go by (so small - lucky to fit your head in the space) and a fan mounted on the wall (bulkhead) that did not work. Other men were settling in and I was the youngest (being the Peggy - the boy that runs the mess room - collecting meals from the galley, washing dishes, cleaning all the quarters and facilities) it was a hive of unorganised, frantic activity.



The mood and scene at the port was chaotic excitement with the sea gulls screaming, wharfies rushing backwards and forwards on the deck of the Tarkwa and likewise on the other boats moored each side and opposite. Horns on the harbour were competing with the sea gulls; it seemed like my whole world had gone mad - but how exciting. I had been told to settle in as there was no shore leave and we were to sail on the next tide.

Africa here I come I kept repeating to myself, as I watched the Liver Birds slowly disappear and held on tight waiting for the dreaded bump as the Mersey was left behind and we went over the bar (my first surprise was there was no bump and secondly to find that the water over the bar in The Irish Sea was a beautiful green colour - not the murky grey, polluted Mersey that I was used to. As we headed south sailing down the Welsh coast our escort of seagulls suddenly turned and headed for home and were replaced by small sparrows called Mother Kilie's Chickens, they were, I found out later to follow us (feeding on the food thrown overboard) until we returned to the bar (where the Mersey empties into the Irish Sea).

First night I slept easily, luckily I was well adjusted to sleeping with many in small places, firstly tenting with the scouts and then in the Vindi quarters, so it took more than five snoring men to keep me awake. Second day during dishwashing with the greasy water slapping from one side to the other in the mess room sink, a horrible sensation came over me, my stomach started to feel like it was slopping like the sink and I could smell and taste the sink grease in my mouth. Everyone was delighted as I turned green and had to hang on for dear life. The crew went to a great deal of trouble describing greasy food and mimicking vomiting, hoping to get me to throw up as they thought it would be even funnier to have to watch me clean it up. Bad luck boy's I was feeling very ill but would not give in and thus ruined everybody's fun. It took two days of steely determination and good old fashion pig headedness by me, but they finally gave up on me.

As we sailed through the Bay of Biscay the water was getting choppy, but I was grateful and surprised that it was not the ordeal that my shipmates had forecasted. The highlight was the amazingly beautiful sunsets and sunrises and the way the sky and sea would be lit up with an array of incredible colours. After sunset it was like a fairyland on the sea with masses of twinkling little lights bobbing up and down seemingly to the orchestra of the sea. These I found out were the fisherman from Portugal casting their nets for sardines throughout the night. I loved it all and fitted in really quickly to life at sea and even got used to washing the endless line of dishes and was proud of my newly found sea legs.

My down time was after clean up from tea, this was what I enjoyed the most, sitting on deck, enjoying the barmy nights and gentle breezes whilst listening to the tall stories of the older sailors trying to impress and scare me with their harrowing tales of misadventures and experiences in exotic ports, towns and countries, I now could not wait to set foot on a foreign land and create my own legends and mischief's.



HMS Worcester



HMS Worcester II

In 1851 competency examinations were introduced and it became clear that to become an officer in the Royal and Merchant Navy it was deemed necessary to receive the proper training. There was an existing training ship on the Mersey called the *Conway* but London merchant William Bullivant and Richard Green a shipbuilder decided there should be a similar vessel on the Thames.

The Admiralty agreed to loan the 1,473 ton 50 gun frigate *Worcester* to be used as a training ship in 1861. The following year 18 cadets attended the Thames Marine Officer Training School stationed at Blackwall Reach, she was later relocated to Erith and finally in 1871 to Greenhithe, Kent.

Although several vessels succeeded her they all retained the name *Worcester* and remained on the Kent shore.

A limited number of her cadets were given commissions in the Royal Navy.

The children had all been photographed, and the teacher was trying to persuade them each to buy a copy of the group picture. "Just think how nice it will be to look at it when you are all grown up and say, 'There's Jennifer, she's a lawyer,' or 'That's Michael, He's a doctor.' A small voice at the back of the room rang out, "And there's the teacher, she's dead."