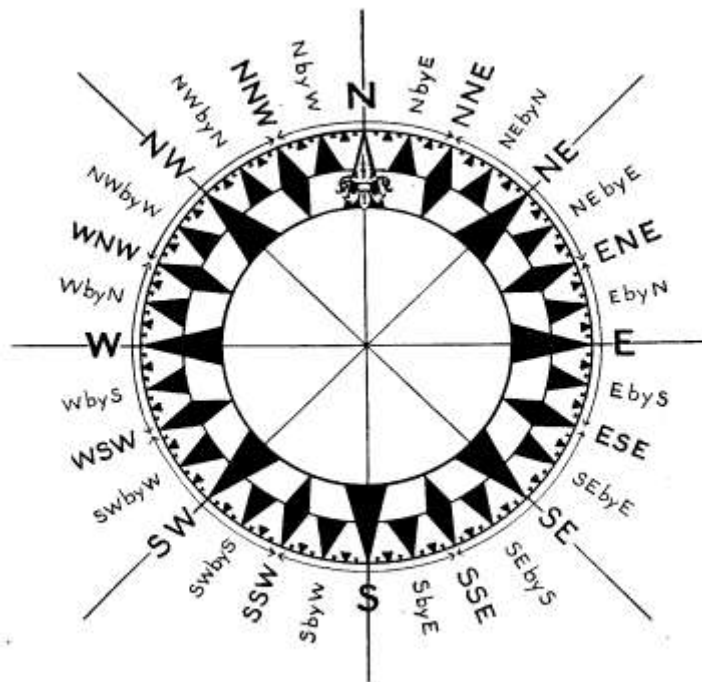




MAY 2010

ISSUE 62



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Editor's Note

Have you logged on to our new website sa.vindicatrix.com yet? If you would like to contribute anything please let Anne or one of us know.

With your permission we would like to put photos' of past and present SA Vindi boys with the year that they attended the training ship. If you object to your photo being on the website please let us know in the next **TWO** weeks.

Next Meeting Sunday 25th July 2010

Mick & Jill Surfleld

Skippers Report:

The sad part of my message is that our loyal Member and friend Eddie Nicholls passed away on the 21st of May 2010. He was well loved and a well respected man of many talents. It is a shame that we only get to know about people more and what they did in their lives with their funeral eulogies. Twelve of us from our Branch attended Eddie's funeral. It was a splendid ceremony. Our own Winston Kay did us proud and sang a beautiful song at the request of the family. Over 300 people filled the funeral home. He went off in grand style with the black hearse being pulled by two white horses. We were fortunate that Eddie was with us just a few weeks prior to his death at the Anzac Day march. He will be greatly missed.



Our May meeting was one of the best and our "market day" a great success. A **Big Thank You** to all concerned, you really all did us proud. We are truly lucky to have such a close friendly bunch of people. Your contribution came to \$400!! Wow!

The next meeting, which is on Sunday 25th July, will be our AGM. Hopefully as many of you as possible will attend. Following the meeting we will have our annual lunch at the Port Dock Hotel. Please ring Anne or myself on 8523 1655 if you are attending the lunch. Prices are very reasonable and of course for those with the Entertainment Book this voucher can be used. We have chosen a lunch again this year. Next year we shall be doing something different. Watch this space?!

We have heard on the grapevine that Eddie Burgess is settling down back in the Old Country and is very happy. Our best go to Eddie with the message he will always be welcomed back here in SA.

There have been a few of you who have suffered this horrid flu-type bug, including Anne and myself. Lets wish each other a speedy recovery. Also I know there are some Members who have had worse ailments than this and we hope you are on the road to recovery.

Finally remember Mick and Jill always need your input for the newsletter, the best in the country, and we always need raffle prizes.

See you in July, in the meantime, keep healthy safe and happy.

Tony

From the Almoner's desk:

It is with regret I report the passing of Wendy Hines in April. Wendy fought a courageous battle over twenty years with Parkinson's disease and the ongoing complications.

Keith and I had the privilege of attending Wendy's funeral and meeting her lovely family. Our sincere condolences are with the husband John and all the family.

We also recently lost esteemed member Eddie Nicholls. Due to failing health Eddie was unable to attend our meetings but enjoyed our newsletter and also managed to take part in the last Anzac March with his Vindi mates. Eddie's funeral was attended by twelve members of the SA Branch.

W.O.W. (Words of wisdom)

Don't forget that today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.

Discretion is when you are sure you are right, but still ask your wife.

Look after the old; they have come a long way. And look after the young; they have a long way to go.

Anne Withey

Anzac March 2010



This year fifteen of our Vindi boys took part in the Anzac march.

Mercy Mission to Pitcairn Island

Capt. David Kemp

In 1966 I was Chief Officer of the *Port New Plymouth* with Capt. Len (Sammy) Skales in command. We were homeward bound, fully loaded with meat, butter and wool from New Zealand in October of that year, and crossing the Pacific Ocean from Timaru to Panama. The great circle route takes the ship near to Pitcairn Island, but some distance to the south of it.

When we were some six days from the island, the Master received a message requesting medical assistance at Pitcairn Island. In those days we were required to check with Nandi Radio on Fiji, to check that the message was genuine, for we had been told that if no vessel had called at the island for some months, it was not unknown for the islanders to entice a vessel to call there under some pretext, so that they could trade their wares, their timber ornaments and rush mat baskets etc..

Seemingly this was a genuine case for medical assistance, for a young lad had fallen and badly broken his leg. As the island had only a nurse there, they required the services of a doctor.

The island is very isolated, being 1,350 miles east-south-east of Tahiti, and hundreds of miles from the nearest inhabited island, situated about half-way between New Zealand and Panama, and about 3,300 miles from each. It is two miles in length and one mile across, and one thousand feet high, steep to on all sides.

As we all know, it was uninhabited until Fletcher Christian and the other mutineers from *HMS Bounty* landed there in 1790. The current inhabitants still carry the names of the original mutineers, Christian, Adams, Young, McCoy, and Quintall.

Like most Port Line ships, we carried a doctor on board for the long ocean passages, as well as twelve passengers. The doctor on this particular voyage was fairly newly qualified, and returning to England after a holiday in New Zealand. We arrived off the island about 10 and as it is steep too, we could not anchor.

The Captain had given me instructions that I was to go ashore with the doctor, and that he wished to depart the island before sunset, so that I must not permit the islanders to delay the doctor unnecessarily. Many of the islanders suffered from a myopic disease, caused, I was told, due to their prevalent diet of fish and fruit with little red meat. The islanders were all fishermen and being situated in a sub-tropical location, can grow many kinds of fruit.

Three long boats came out to the *Port New Plymouth*, a large motorised boat towing two rowing boats, all of these boats having been built on the island were of very stout construction. The population of Pitcairn Island in 1966 was 83. Normally it is not permitted for people to land on the island except by special permission from the Headman, who at that time was Mr. Ben Christian. Permission was granted to the doctor and myself, the injured boy was his grandson, Stephen Christian.

The doctor and I boarded the launch and we proceeded in to Bounty Bay, a mere depression in the rocky coastline, on the northern side of the island, where a stone breakwater had been built to protect this one landing place.

The helmsman stopped the boat off the bay and with a big sweep oar as a rudder, watched the incoming swells. Suddenly we were surfing in through the small entrance and quickly grounded on a bamboo ramp, the boat fell over to starboard, and we all scrambled out. We had arrived on Pitcairn. We climbed up the steep mountain path to the home of the patient, near Adamstown the only township on the island. The young patient of 15 years of age was lying on his bed in some pain, having been in this condition for six days. He had fallen whilst climbing a tree, and broken the neck of the femur of his left leg. The island nurse, the wife of the Seventh Day Adventist Pastor, had done her best to make Stephen comfortable, but due to muscle contraction the left leg was now four inches shorter than his right leg, and the young man was suffering.

The Doctor explained to me that we would have to stretch the left leg to align with his right one, and that it must then be kept in traction. We were in the bedroom of this young man with no medical appliances to assist us in this operation. First we raised the foot of the bed higher than the head. Then I cut a deep V in a piece of timber, and nailed it on to the foot board of the bed. The Doctor then gave his patient a pain killing injection. I had some silk rope which I made into a sling on one end. We then stretched the left leg until the Doctor could feel the neck of the femur knot with the broken end. Young Stephen bore this stoically, though in obvious pain despite the injection.

We then strapped the silk rope with elastoplast on each side of the leg, and placed a stone into the sling. Thus we had a rather crude form of traction, with Stephen's right leg against the footboard of the bed. The poor lad had to remain in this position for weeks. The Doctor then gave the nurse instructions for the ongoing care of the patient, and we left the house. As soon as we were outside, there was, as anticipated, a queue of people "to see the doctor". I quickly reminded him of the Master's instructions, but being a doctor, he said he must do what he could for these islanders.

Eventually we made our way down to the little harbour, and proceeded to assist with the launching of the boat, and with a few heaves and grunts, the heavy longboat slid back into the water. We returned to the *Port New Plymouth* each with a beautiful gift of a walking stick presented to the Doctor and I by the mother of Stephen. We were both quite weary after our exertions.

The following voyage, once more homeward bound across the Pacific and about six months later, we enquired by radio how Stephen was fairing, and were delighted to learn that he was once again walking but with the aid of sticks. As a sequel to this story, I went on holiday to Norfolk Island in 1998. It may be remembered that all the Pitcairn

Islanders were transported to Norfolk Island in 1856, at their request. Norfolk Island having been a penal colony for New South Wales up to this time, so that there were established dwellings there. However sixteen people soon returned to Pitcairn, having become homesick for their remote island, and it is from these people that the present colony is descended.

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

Kindly submitted by Vince Vincent

A life at sea - the Nautical Training Ships



Gerry Brooke looks at new book about the ships that trained lads for a life at sea

I wonder how many readers recall the old National Nautical School at Portishead or the Vindicatrix, a training ship once moored at Sharpness?

In fact the River Severn and Bristol Channel were once as well known as the River Thames for training young lads for a life at sea.

Now a new, and very complete, history by Phil Carradice helps to put these training ships, some of which date back to the 1850s, into context.

Training for seamanship, says the author, dates much further back in time than this, to King Charles' II's day, in fact.

It was in 1672/3 that schools of navigation, with a little help from Samuel Pepys, then the Secretary to the Admiralty, were established in London.

Perhaps the most well known was Christ's Hospital School, founded in the capital in 1553

After completing their studies the boys, then aged 16 or so, would be bound as apprentices to a sea captain for some seven years.

Some of the lads, known as "Bluecoat Boys" after their school uniform, found placements on Royal Navy ships during the ongoing Dutch Wars.

Many others found berths on merchant vessels.

Another famous training school for boys going to sea was the Royal Hospital School at Greenwich, now the home of the National Maritime Museum.

Originally intended as a haven for aged and infirm sailors it ended up providing for, and training, so called "charity cases," boys whose sailor fathers' had died, but not necessarily at sea.

Yet another navigational training school, in fact the very first, was the Greencoat Collegiate school at Greenwich.

Despite this provision the majority of poor and needy youngsters ended up with Marine Society, founded in 1756 to get as many lads manning the King's ships as war broke out yet again.

It was a great success and the end of the Seven Years War over 5,000 men and 5,000 boys had been recruited.

By 1815, and the end of the Napoleonic Wars, a further 31,000 boys had, thanks to the Society's efforts, entered the Royal Navy.

It was in fact the Marine Society who, in 1786, instigated the very first SHIP based training establishment in the world, a 350 ton sloop called the Beatty, moored off Deptford in the River Thames.

Over the next 100 years the Society utilised many more old, wooden warships, often loaned by the Admiralty, a

system that other organisations would make use of in years to come.

As society industrialised and people flocked to the cities so orphans, especially young boys, started roaming the streets.

Criminal activity amongst them, as writer Charles Dickens recognised, became commonplace.

No one is sure how it originated, but around 1850 someone came up with the bright idea of putting reformatory schools on board ship.

Strict naval type discipline within the confines of a vessel was just what these lads – described as the “most vicious, troublesome and incorrigible in Great Britain” – needed.

Once brought into line the lads could join the Royal Navy and so live useful lives.

From 5am to 8pm (bedtime) it was certainly a tough life – scrubbing decks, making shoes, shredding old rope to make oakum, making sea chests and tailoring.

Deriving mostly from voluntary subscriptions finance was always a problem.

The boys’ staple diet consisted of Irish stew, potatoes and bread with very little butter, eggs, fruit or green vegetables.

Cocoa and milk were the only luxuries.

There was, in truth, a lot of discipline but very little education or training for a life at sea. By this time the Royal Navy was refusing to accept boys with criminal records which left most of them finding berths with the less fussy merchant or fishing fleets. Between 1856 and 1861 a series of Industrial School Acts sought to deal with the problem of destitute, homeless and disorderly children.

Alongside these schools, which grew up everywhere (there was one near the Mardyke on the Hotwell Road), came the idea of Industrial School ships, created and run by voluntary bodies aided by treasury grants.

Nine of these were set up around the country, including the Formidable, towed round from Sheerness and then moored 400 yards off Portishead Pier.

In 1869 this ship, opened by the writer Charles Kingsley, started taking youngsters sent to them by the courts.

Discipline was harsh but the ship clean and well run with the boys’ diet rather more extensive and filling than on the reformatory ships. During the Formidable’s first decade half of the 1,000 boys passing through joined either the Royal or Merchant Navies

But by 1901 this old wooden ship was leaking and, along with changing social attitudes, it was decided to build a new National Nautical School ashore, complete with dormitory bedrooms and extensive playing fields.

Closed in the 1980s the building has now been converted into flats and apartments known as Fedden Village.

Yet another training ship, a bit more up to date than the Formidable, ended up at Sharpness by chance.

In 1939, with war looming, it was felt that the boys of the Gravesend Sea School – most went on to join the Merchant Navy – would be safer away from the capital.

And so the Vindicatrix, as she was known, was towed from her moorings into the Bristol Channel and up the River Severn.

This remained her home until the 1960s when a newly built Sea Training school was completed in Gravesend.

The breaking up of the “Vindi” in 1967, a sad day, spelt the end of 100 years of preparing boys for a life at sea.

Nautical Training Ships by Phil Carradice is published by Amberley and costs £17.99

From the Bristol Evening Post March 30th 2010.

“GOOD HOPE CASTLE”

From the South Atlantic island of St Helena on 1st July, 1973, came a message that the ‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’, which should have arrived there the previous evening, had been in radio silence since leaving Ascension Island in the afternoon of 29th June. Neither could her sister ship ‘RMMV SOUTHAMPTON CASTLE’, which was in the vicinity, raise her on radio telephone, and anxiety increased as the ‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’ became more and more overdue.

Fears were confirmed in a later message from Ascension that the ship was ablaze and had been abandoned, burning and listing, but that everyone aboard was safe. The only tragedy was a little dog that was too frightened to come out from beneath the Old Man’s bed!

The fire had broken out on 29th June, when the ship was only thirty-five miles from Ascension and bound for Cape Town, via St Helena. A broken lubricating oil pipe to the starboard main engine turbo-blower sprayed oil onto an exhaust manifold, and before the resulting fire could be extinguished, it spread through the engine-room casing into the accommodation. The eighty-two passengers and crew took to the boats, spending some thirty-six hours in them before being taken on board the steam tanker, ‘GEORGE F GETTY’ and landed at Ascension, where the passengers were accommodated in Georgetown, and the crew quartered at the United States Air Base.

On the night of 1st -2nd July, the ‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’ was sighted by the ‘SOUTHAMPTON CASTLE’ some twenty-four miles off Portland Point, Ascension, with a thirty degree starboard list, but no sign of fire or smoke, and with the port propeller visible in the swell. Two days later, on 4th July. The motor ship ‘CLAN MALCOLM’, on a voyage to India arrived at the scene with the intentions of picking up part of the crew and putting them back aboard ‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’, the remainder to be repatriated to Britain in ‘SOUTHAMPTON CASTLE’. At dusk that evening, the ‘CLAN MALCOLM’ circled the ‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’, reporting evidence of further severe fires, with No 6 hatch covers glowing red, No 5 & 6 hatch deck cargo alight, flames on the portside of the accommodation and in the vicinity of No 4 hatch, and with the Bridge front collapsed.

Next day, the ‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’ was drifting in a near gale some 100 miles WNW of Ascension, still on fire. An afterdeck cargo of drums had exploded, mail in No 5 & 6 hatches was burning, the midship accommodation was gutted, but the hull beneath the weather-deck was still seemingly intact and in good condition.

At this time, the West German ocean salvage tug ‘ALBATROSS’ (871 grt. 1965) was called on for assistance, and on 7th July ‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’ was boarded by a Union-Castle Superintendent, albeit, briefly, to report that there were no flames or smoke, but that the deck was severely buckled and hot, with the Bridge and accommodation completely gutted.

Two days later, the tug was alongside, able to put pumps aboard, and prepare a towing connection.

‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’ was taken in tow for originally Dakar, at an average speed of 5 knots, with every indication that the fire ravaged areas were starting to cool down, and the list reduced to 5-7 degrees. Dakar was by-passed with intentions of calling at Las Palmas, but permission was refused to enter port, but stores taken on board. Antwerp was eventually arrived at safely on 18th August.

Immediate inspection revealed that fire had destroyed the entire midships structure, including the Bridge deck and Navigating bridge with only the funnel and internal uptakes intact. The weather deck and poop were buckled and cracked, and hatch covers deck machinery, masts and derricks and their housings were fire-damaged.

There was also distortion to the shell-plating in the way of the engine-room and ‘tween decks. Generally, the machinery spaces were found to be relatively undamaged, and a subsequent dry docking showed no twisting, hogging or sagging of the hull structure.

Tenders for repair were invited, a 1000tonnes of steel renewals being estimated as necessary.

On 28th September, ‘GOOD HOPE CASTLE’ departed Antwerp, under the tow of another Bugsier tug ‘HEROS’ (479grt 1964) bound for Bilbao and the ship repair yard as Astilleros Espanoles, SA arriving on the 9th October.

After extensive repairs, ‘RMMV GOOD HOPE CASTLE’ departed Bilbao on 19th May 1974 and arrived at Southampton to resume her position in the mail service to South Africa, departing Southampton on 31st May 1974.



I joined the Vindi on January 21st 1947, it happened to be the coldest winter for decades. I decided to take the catering course, because of my interest in cooking. I thought cooking would be a useful career, especially when returning back to shore.

Our 'Lifeboat Drill' was a dismal failure due to all the ropes being covered with ice. The canal was also frozen, but we were still instructed to lower the lifeboat onto the frozen canal, and then haul it back up again. As we were not allowed to wear gloves our hands were also frozen. I studied all the compass points and learnt (in theory) how to sail against the wind etc. I tried my best to achieve good marks in my tests. As it turned out I received two (2) stars to sew on my jacket. Subsequently I was promoted steward to Captain Angel. Captain Angel was a strict, but fair man. I learnt a lot about protocol being his steward.

One Saturday evening a group of us went to Dursley by train. This was forbidden because Dursley was outside the 15 mile limit. When we decided to return to the camp, the train was late due to the freezing weather. Consequently we were late back at camp and were reported by the Gate Keeper. This entailed a reprimand by Captain Angel. I was the last boy to be reprimanded. The Captain was astonished when I walked into his office. The look on his face made me feel that I had let him down. The look was worse than the seven days confined to the Vindi and scrubbing decks each evening.



A group of boys, including myself, had to have a medical check up by the resident 'Quack'. We were let into a room and were told to undress ready for a medical. Naturally boys being boys we were in animated conversation. The 'Quack' came to the door and told us to stop talking or he would open the front door and let the cold air in. Why we had to strip, I will never know, I think his ugly female assistant wanted to see how 'well hung' we all were. Upon 'graduating', on the 21st of March, I went home for a few days, then to London and reported to the Pool Office. My first job was 'Galley Boy' on the *SS Port Campbell*, sailing to New York, Panama, Australia, South Africa and the Canary Islands. England, with ration books still being used, I was amazed to see all the food available on board

ship. After spending two weeks crossing the Atlantic we arrived in New York. For a boy of seventeen, it was an amazing site, The Statue of Liberty and all the skyscrapers.

I became friendly with 'Chips' and we often went ashore together. One such outing we went into a pub to try out their cold beer. While sitting there minding our own business and enjoying our very cold beer, two ladies came in and sat down with us. One of them was wearing a man's hat and smoking a pipe. We were having a nice chat when one of them asked if we would like a sexual experience with a man. We said, 'No way, we are looking for ladies'. However, before they left they gave us the name of a nearby pub where we would find all these so called 'Men'. The pub was a French pub called 'Le Beau Duck'. Just for fun we decided to visit the pub. Well, we could not believe what we encountered. The guy behind the bar was wearing lipstick, as was many of the customers. After having a few FREE drinks, we left with a promise that we would return the next evening. Just for the record, we did NOT return. I realized that living in a small village in Sussex, one was isolated from what goes on in the real world.

Another trip to New York I decided to go and see the opera 'Rigoletto'. I'd not seen an opera before and thought it would be something different. I put on my best sports clothes, and off I went. Well, when I arrived at the Center Theater, (American) most of the men were wearing suits and dinner suits. The ladies were impeccably dressed. There was I, in my sports clothes. After I got over my embarrassment, I ventured my way to the ticket office. With my English accent asked for one ticket. To my surprise the staff treated me like the King of England. I thought I was the most important person in attendance. 'Ah the memories are wonderful'.

Leaving New York we sailed down the coast to Newport News, Virginia. Our last visit there was to load coal into the Bunkers. The *SS Port Campbell* being steam driven, coal was a dirty, but a necessary ingredient to generate steam. Newport News is situated on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. A very pretty city, so much like England with all the deciduous trees.

From Newport News we sailed to the Panama Canal and anchored off Cristobel. During the evening we went ashore. I bought some very beautiful silk cushion covers for my mother. On returning to the ship we heard gun shots, there on a busy street was the body of a man, laying there motionless. Needless to say we did not hang around.

After passing through the Canal, we set sail for Brisbane passing the Galapagos Islands. After nearly a month in the Pacific we were very low in water and showers were forbidden. Fortunately water was supplied as soon as we docked otherwise we would have been a bit 'smelly' walking around Brisbane. Brisbane was an interesting city, the river running through the centre and crossed by bridges and ferries. A mate and I went into a milkbar to get a drink. The girl behind the counter asked 'How's youse today?' I asked her to repeat what she said. I turned to my mate and said 'I thought Australians spoke English'.

Next stop was Sydney. I worked with an Australian lady back home, (she went to England for a holiday, as the war broke out she was unable to return home). Her brother and sister-in-law lived in Sydney, I met them several times. One such occasion, being a Sunday, they picked me up from the ship and drove me to the Blue Mountains. I was rapt; I immediately fell in love with Australia.

On the way to Melbourne, I went down two decks to the freezer. After taking meat that we required out of the freezer, my mate would pull it up with a rope and pulley. One piece of meat was a full side of pork weighing 70lbs. I hooked the hook into a cord attached to the hock. My mate then proceeded to haul the side of pork to the top, but, as it neared the top, he pulled too hard the top pulley severed the cord. The pork immediately dropped back down the two decks and knocked me unconscious. When I recovered, I was sitting in the officer's mess having my head bandaged by the ships doctor. The story went that the crew had a lot of trouble getting me to the top deck.

Another time I went down to the cooler to check on veggies required for the next meal. I lifted the heavy trap door and started to descend into the cooler, as my head came level with the trap door opening, I suddenly started gasping for air. I immediately held my breath and rushed up to the storm step and laid over the step gasping for air. With full breathing apparatus, the fridge engineer went to investigate the problem. He reported back. There was a serious leak of refrigerant gas; also, I was very lucky to be alive,

In Melbourne I met friends of the Sydney folk and spent a few enjoyable evenings wining, dining and tripping around the city.

Adelaide, I also met friends of friends. On one occasion I was driven to a farming property at Strathalbyn, where later on, I eventually settled. Arriving in Port Pirie we loaded 1000 tons of lead. The lead was stacked at the very bottom of the ship. The first tide was not high enough for the ship to sail out of the river. The next tide being a high tide, allowed us to set sail to Hobart via the West Coast of Tasmania. Just off the Tasmanian coast we struck a severe storm. The waves came right over the ship and put all the galley fires out. That day we made do with cold meals. The fridge engineer said he had been at sea for eighteen years, and that was the worst storm he had ever experienced.

My first trip to Hobart I made friends with Mr and Mrs Gibbons, a local couple. On Sunday 14th of March 1948, the Gibbons took me for a drive up to Mt. Wellington. When we arrived at the summit and started to admire the view, we noticed a huge fire on the waterfront. We raced back down only to find Ocean Pier was burnt to water level. Some ships were redirected to other ports for loading.

Victor N Marden Vindi Boy 1947



Your editor reading Vindi News 4000ft above the Barossa one very cold May morning.