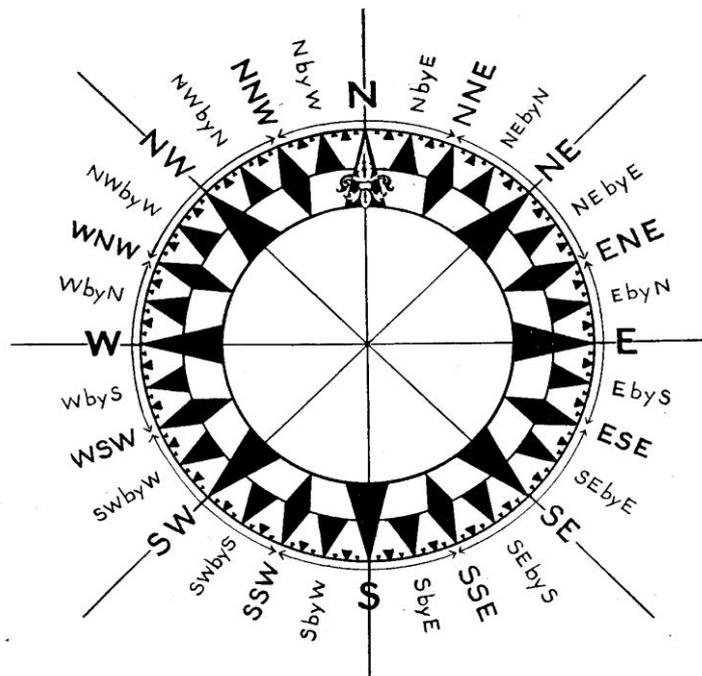




FEBRUARY 2012

ISSUE 69



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

**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](mailto:surfield@adam.com.au)  
[sa.vindicatrix.com](http://sa.vindicatrix.com)

## Editor's Note

As always we would be grateful for any stories you may like to share.

For those of you who were not at the January meeting the next reunion will be held in Tweed Heads Queensland on **October 30<sup>th</sup>, October 31<sup>st</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup> 2012**. Contact Tony or Anne for further information.

**Next Meeting Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

*Mick & Jill*

## Skipper's Log

Hello People of the SA Branch. I hope this news letter finds you all in a reasonable state of health.

Our last meeting was well attended and we spent an enjoyable lunch after the meeting at the Port Anchor. It is always good to see so many of you come to lunch as well. Even though it was a bit hot that day, if I remember.

We received our electricity bill this week it had jumped \$200 from last time. I mentioned this to a neighbor who remarked his had as well.

This made me think about solar panels. I know some of you have installed them with good returns but who do you choose. Every company we contacted had a different story. Some came out and had a look but most wouldn't. We have had the gentle approach with some and pressure selling from others. They all say they have the best quality, the best company blah blah blah. I would like to hear your solar stories.

The electricity charges as well as other charges completely erode people's pensions these days. Perhaps we ought to go back to the days of old, which a lot of us can remember, candles, smaller or no fridges, meagre rations and very little money. Yet we survived!

See you all at the next meeting.

Regards Tony



## From the Almoner's desk

Two special Vindi Ladies head this report: Margaret Maddocks and Shirley Kay. Such heartening news for both, Margaret is home after spending several weeks in hospital and rehab recovering from a broken hip. Shirley is doing fine after time in hospital with a heart problem. Our thoughts and best wishes are with them and indeed with all who are doing daily battle on the sick list.

### Just a thought for the day

A hundred years from now...It will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in or the kind of car I drove...but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.

### **Sunday May 27<sup>th</sup>. Meeting Change.**

Please note the May meeting will now be held at The Port Dock Brewery at 11.30am

This will be a short meeting followed by lunch at approximately 12.30pm

**IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE HAVE NUMBERS FOR THIS MEETING BEFOREHAND**

March meeting Seafarers Port Adelaide

March 25<sup>th</sup> 11.30am.

**May Meeting Port Dock Brewery (no stairs to climb)**

**May 27<sup>th</sup> 11.30 am**

July Meeting Seafarers Port Adelaide

July 29<sup>th</sup> 11.30 am.

(This will be our AGM followed by Annual lunch at the Birkenhead Tavern  
**DEFINATE NUMBERS NEEDED FOR THIS LUNCH AS WELL PLEASE)**

September Meeting Seafarers Port Adelaide

September 30<sup>th</sup> 11.30am.

PLEASE NOTE: November Meeting Date change:

We will still have our picnic in the park but the date will now be SUNDAY DECEMBER 2<sup>ND</sup> AT 11.A.M.  
If you receive the newsletter by email please let me know if you will be attending the meetings and lunches.



Please complete the attached form.

Thank you  
*Anne Iles*

### **Twenty-one gun salute has British naval ship origins**

The cannon salute is likely to have originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the maritime practice of demanding that a defeated enemy fire all of the ship's remaining ammunition out to sea, to show it was disarmed and indicate a cessation of hostilities.

Firing seven guns was a recognized naval salute in the British Empire, seven being the standard number of weapons on a vessel.

Gunpowder of that era was made from sodium nitrate and was easier to keep on dry land than at sea, enabling forts to fire three rounds for every one fired from sea: hence 21 shots. With the improvement of naval gunpowder, honours rendered at sea were later increased to 21 as well.

Beginning in its colonial period, the US fired one shot for each state in the Union. This was continued until 1841, when it was reduced from 26 to 21.

Although it had been in use for more than 30 years, the 21-gun salute was not formally adopted by the US until August 18th 1875.

This was at the suggestion of the British who proposed a 'Gun for Gun Return' to their own 21- gun salute.

### **Schooldays South of the Thames**

Time passed slowly at Keetons Road School and we were both fifteen and in our final year. One morning we arrived at school not knowing that it would be the beginning of what we hoped would be a great adventure for Tom and me.

'Hi Tom,' I said as we met up at the school gates which was our normal meeting place and walked in, ignoring the hostile stares of the bullies waiting there, looking for someone to pick on. I felt a strange tense atmosphere in the air that day. We all knew that we would be leaving school soon and were waiting to be told about it, although up till now none of the teachers had said anything. At the sound of the bell we walked straight through to the assembly hall where Mr O'Rourke the headmaster was waiting on stage, which was unusual as he only did that when he had an announcement to make or when someone had done something very wrong and was to be caned in front of the whole school. Mr O'Rourke was a small man, slightly built, with thin lips. He wore glasses and an austere look about him. I don't ever remember seeing him smile. He was much feared despite his size and ruled the school with a rod of iron, being very free and easy with his cane. On those occasions I mentioned, when he felt the offence was serious enough he caned the boys in public. He was not an unfair man and I don't believed he enjoyed doing it, but it worked, and

discipline was maintained at what was a difficult school, with many tough children. Most of the dockland boys were much taller than he was and he could hardly reach up to their outstretched hands and needed to stand on tiptoe to cane them, which looked very amusing. It was even funnier when the boy being caned took his hand away just as the cane came down which meant an extra stroke was added, but no one watching dared laugh, otherwise they too would be brought forward for a dose of the same medicine. But today was not about a public caning.

‘Listen up!’ said Mr O’Rourke, his firm, high-pitched voice rising above the din of the packed assembly hall – straight away there was a deathly hush. ‘For those pupils who will be leaving school this year I want you to be here in the Assembly Hall tomorrow morning at ten o’clock sharp. There you will meet Miss Pringle the Careers Adviser, any late comers will not be allowed to see her and will see me instead.’ The last part of his message was both threatening and clear – and we all knew what it meant. ‘Each pupil will have no more than five minutes with her and once you have been seen you are to move smartly away back to your classroom with no talking, shirking or hanging around – do you hear me?’ There were a few murmurs of reply from those boys closest to him. ‘Right then, go straight to your classes now and think about what you are going to ask Miss Pringle.’ He then turned neatly on his heels and marched back to his tiny office close to the stage.

‘Tom!’ I said excitedly, on our way back to our classroom, ‘We’ll soon be leaving school!’ I was so looking forward to independence and being treated like an adult, and having money of my own to spend, together with the freedom to go where and when I pleased, without my parents or any other adults criticising me and telling me what to do. I had dreamt of this for years and longed for that time to come. I wanted to leave Rotherhithe, where I lived, and feel the thrill of adventure, but Tom remained strangely silent. ‘I’m so pleased Tom, aren’t you?’ ‘Yes, I’m pleased too Col’ he said, in a surprisingly matter of fact way. I couldn’t understand why he wasn’t as thrilled as I was. ‘Are you really Tom?’ ‘Of course’ said Tom brightly, but now I wasn’t sure. ‘What are you going to ask the Careers Advisor Tom?’ Not sure myself what I would say. ‘I’ll have to think about it, but I’ll take any job I suppose, until you and me can get away,’ which was something we had often talked about. ‘I don’t know what to say to Miss Pringle either,’ I said, ‘they didn’t give us much time to think about it did they?’ ‘I think I’ll have to tell her the truth about what I really want to do,’ said Tom, breathing in a sigh of frustration. ‘Yes Tom,’ I think I’ll do the same’ and we hurried off to our classroom where Mr Francis was waiting. School was dragging on that day and I hardly heard anything he said, and was glad when the time came to go home. Tom was also deep in thought when I left him.

All that evening I found it difficult to keep still: my thoughts filled with the idea of leaving school and I went to bed early where I picked up a book Tom had lent me called ‘Man-Eaters of Kumaon’ which I began reading again for the umpteenth time and the next day I woke up early, still holding Tom’s book in my arms. I put it away, got dressed and went quietly downstairs. This was my big day, the careers advisor might be able to help us find the adventurous job Tom and I were hoping for, meanwhile I helped myself to a thick slice of bread and jam and shouted my goodbyes to mum from the bottom of the stairs and ran off, slamming the front door behind me, giving her no time to ask me why I was setting off for school so early. I arrived breathlessly at the school gates where Tom was waiting. Several other boys were early too looking very smart, but I just looked my normal scruffy self – I didn’t have any other clothes to put on. The bell sounded and we made our way to the classroom where Mr Francis waited. He wasted no time saying, ‘Hands up those who are to see the careers advisor,’ his moustache twitching rapidly which it sometimes did when he was nervous. Tom and I, together with about a dozen others raised our hands; still unsure what was going to happen or what to say when we met Miss Pringle. There followed a short pep talk from Mr Francis about the importance of good manners and that there should be no rudeness which might let the school down. ‘Right, off you go,’ he said, holding

the door open for us which he had never done before, leaving me with the impression he was glad to be getting rid of us.

Tom and I walked into the assembly hall together, where a long queue had formed in front of Miss Pringles desk. There she sat, a frumpy lady with thick woollen stockings and brown brogue shoes which poked out from under the school desk lent to her for the day. Her short wavy hair clung closely to her round head, matching perfectly her dark, horn-rimmed glasses, giving her an over-educated look. To me everything about the way she looked told me Tom and I were wasting our time. How could she understand the burning desire for adventure Tom and I held in our hearts? But maybe we would be pleasantly surprised even though she looked so out of place at our school – but I didn't hold out much hope, and thought she would be better off visiting the Central of Grammar schools in the area, rather than here at Keetons Road School. Here we were all destined for the unskilled labour market as none of us had been given the opportunity to sit for the exams, that may have helped us find a better job – but without qualifications we had no chance.

I watched as the queue in front of me shuffled nearer and nearer to Miss Pringle's desk, and how very little time was being given to each pupil – definitely not the full five minutes Mr O'Rourke told us we would get. A short time later we were at the front of the queue and Tom stepped forward first. I knew Tom could be troublesome and I listened carefully to what he had to say – hoping he would behave himself. 'Come and sit down,' she said, without looking up at him – which I thought was quite rude – but Tom did as he was told. 'Right,' she said, 'Name and address?' but still she looked down at some papers on her desk as Tom gave her the information she had asked for, which she scribbled down on an important-looking form. Tom waited patiently. 'Tell me Anthony White, what would you like to do when you leave school?' Looking briefly up at him and down again at the form she was completing and her pencil poised ready – it was as if she already knew what he was going to say. 'I want to be a big-game hunter,' said Tom seriously, without the hint of a smile. 'A what!' said Miss Pringle, looking up very quickly as though she had been stung and unable to believe her ears – I bet she hadn't heard that one before! I thought. 'I want to hunt man-eating tigers in India' answered Tom. 'You mean you want to kill animals,' she asked, trying to regain some composure, but obviously horrified, as witnessed by her pen dropping to the floor. 'Yes,' said Tom, undaunted by her reaction and his Anglo-Indian eyes now blazing. 'I want to kill man-eating tigers before they kill the local villagers.' 'I'm sorry,' she said, calming down and reaching under the desk to pick up her pencil, 'maybe you would prefer to be considered for a career in the army.' 'No thanks,' replied Tom. 'I'm sorry, I can't help you. Next!' she shouted, waving him away with a flick of her hand and frantically scribbling on a form with the other. Tom walked away looking really down in the dumps and now it was my turn.

'Name and address,' she said, still looking flustered and scribbling on a new form. I ignored her, still thinking it is bad manners not to look at the person you are talking to. 'Name and address,' she said again, this time more firmly, but still she didn't look up and still I didn't reply. I really resented her attitude, she was supposed to be helping us and I had been brought up to show respect to everyone, not just those in charge of things. But now Miss Pringle was getting annoyed and at last she looked up fiercely. 'Name and address please!' she said, loudly, looking directly at me. That's more like it, I thought, and gave her all the information she asked for as the queue behind me grew more and more restless. 'What would you like to do when you leave school?' she said coldly – looking up at me again. 'I want to be a fighter pilot,' I said quite sincerely – the memories of Spitfires and the Blitz still fresh in my mind and hoping she could get me on a flying course or into the RAF. 'A what?' she asked, a faint smile crossing her face, which she was unable to hide. 'How many GCE's do you have?' still unable to hide what was now a sardonic smile. 'GCE's – what

are they?’ I answered innocently, never having heard of them before. ‘Never mind – but if you cannot be a fighter pilot what would your second choice be?’ ‘A bus conductor,’ I said seriously – thinking it best to lower my sights. She smiled once more. ‘I shall see what I can do and will write a letter to you. Next!’ she shouted and began scribbling again. I moved away feeling as Tom did, angry and humiliated. And of course we never heard from the careers adviser again.

*Colin Crawley*

### **Living through the Blitz**

On reading the article in the November edition of the Vindi newsletter from Colin Crawley, “My friend Tom Tom” in which he refers to the Keaton Road School in Rotherhithe and the reference to the bombed building on site which was out of bounds to the pupils, I thought perhaps I could outline the circumstances as to what happened when the building was bombed in the early stages of the London Blitz.

My story begins in the 1940 – 1941 period of the Blitz when raids were in full flight. It was usually the case that most people spent nights and sometimes days in the “Anderson Shelter” if you had one, or went to the public shelters or perhaps the underground tube and bunkered down for the night.

I now come to the time of the raid that targeted Surrey Dock complex which was primarily the major recipient of timber imported from the Baltic countries and Russia amongst others. There were enormous stocks of these timbers stored in and around the dock area and this was obviously well know to the enemy.

The initial raid that began this traumatic event is well remembered by the writer who lived within a kilometre or so from the dock and just a couple of streets away from Keaton Road School. My memory of the raid is that it happened possibly on a Friday night and the family and I were in the Anderson Shelter and it seemed the raid would never stop. We became aware that the docks were alight and consequently the fires burnt for days out of control and we endured air raids constantly.

The aftermath of this traumatic occasion was the problem of where to accommodate the hundreds of families that lived in the dock area. They had to be relocated away from the area and this was a logistical nightmare for those responsible.

The Keaton Road School was selected as a safe haven for the time being and reports were that in excess of six hundred people, mainly women and children were settled in a multi floored building on the school grounds.

The air raids continued for some time and the fires were still burning so that the enemy planes had no problem in finding their target.

The final chapter of this story is to relate that during a night time raid a direct hit on the school building that was selected as a safe haven for these poor souls resulted in a death toll of over 400 victims.

My most vivid memory of the war was to walk past the school days after the event and to see a massive heap of walkers, dolls, toys, prams etc waiting to be disposed of. A memory I will never forget.

*George Hutchings - 44*

### **Arandora Star**

On a dead calm night on the 22nd of July 1940 Mickey O’Donnell and a crew of fishermen from Owey, (a small island off the north west coast of Donegal), were out drift netting for salmon four miles north of the island in a 24ft sailing yawl.

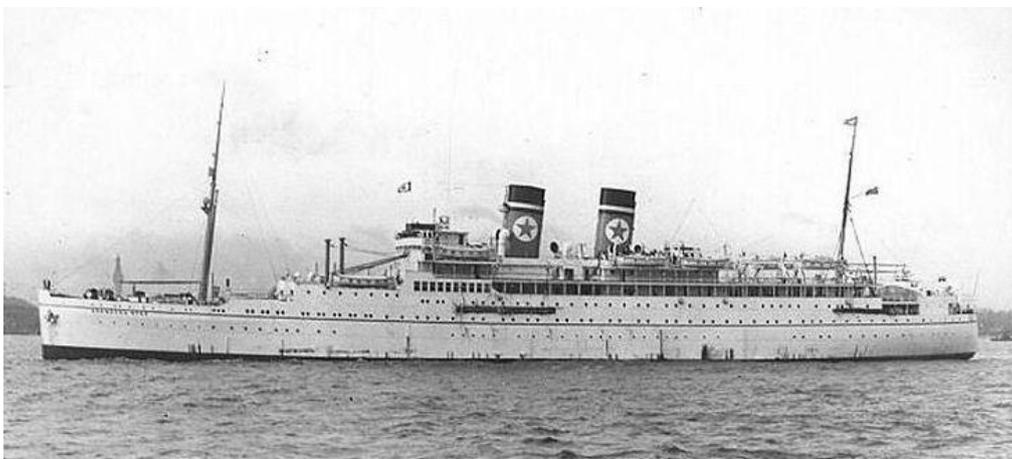
As the morning light began to show one of the crew spotted something floating in the water about a half a mile away. The men finished hauling the nets and went to investigate. As they approached the object they discovered that it was a lifeboat with its mast fully erect but sunk in the water, to the gunnels. Since the sea was so calm they tried to bail the

water out of the boat. Failing this the men tied a rope to the stem of the boat and towed it back to shore. This was no easy task as the boat was completely waterlogged making headway difficult.

The crew beached the boat in the Spink (landing place) on Owey Island. They then proceeded to bail the water out of the boat and in so doing discovered why it had been impossible before. The hull of the boat was shot through with bullet holes and on the deck there were handfuls of empty bullet shells. On further inspection of the boat it appeared as if someone had tried to prevent her sinking by putting pieces of cloth into the bullet holes. On some of the pieces of cloth there were traces of what seemed to be blood. The nameplate on the side of the boat read “Arandora Star”.

The boat was then hauled up onto the island and, when it was decided that it could not be repaired, the islanders put this newly acquired timber to good use. The main shell was turned upside down and used as the roof of a small shed. Some wood was also taken out of her and used to make two small boats called currachs. The people of Owey wondered how the lifeboat had come to be found off their island. They knew that there must have been a disaster aboard a large ship but had no way of verifying this. By the time the war had ended the islanders had discovered the full story of what had happened.

The Arandora Star was a 15,200 tonne ship, which belonged to the Blue Star Line, a London, based company. She was a leisure cruiser before the second world war and had journeyed to almost all the oceans of the world on her many cruises, but when the war started she was



taken over by the British War Ministry and used as a troop carrier and for the evacuation of civilians from Europe and the Mediterranean. In 1939 the Arandora Star evacuated a boatload of women and children from the island of Malta. She was also used to take Canadian troops to Britain to help with the war effort.

The Arandora Star was on her way to Canada during the second year of the war with 1,560 Italian prisoners of war, mostly shop owners, barbers, market salesmen and such like who had been arrested by the British as they were considered a threat once Italy had allied with Germany. The ship was also carrying 400 troops to guard the prisoners and some heavy machine guns for protection.

It was the 1st of July 1940, the Arandora Star’s third day at sea and the captain was unhappy with the weather as it was flat calm and they were clearly visible to enemy ships.

Meanwhile a German U-boat captain called Prien was on his way back to Germany and not very happy either. Prien was aged just 32 and was already a war hero, but one of his students, a captain Endrass, was set to receive an award for the highest tonnage of ships sunk within that month. This obviously did not sit well with his master’s ego. Prien was on his way home with seemingly no hope of beating Endrass, as he was 5,000 tonnes short of doing so and had no deck ammunition and only one torpedo. Then on July the 1st he spotted the Arandora Star and sank her with his

remaining torpedo. The Italians began clambering into the lifeboats to save themselves from drowning but the British shot holes in the lifeboats to stop them from escaping.

This all happened 400 miles west of Owey and three weeks before the lifeboat was discovered.

682 people perished including 200 soldiers. The surviving Italians were shipped back to Liverpool where they were transported to prison camps in Australia the following week.

To this day the remaining survivors of the Arandora Star gather at a small Italian church in London in remembrance of all those who died on the 1st of July 1940.

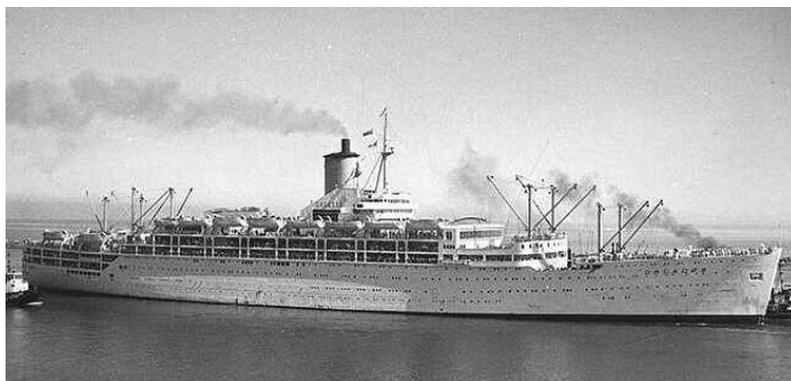
*WW2 Peoples War – Cormac McGinley*

### SS Orcades

The RMS Orcades, later to become SS Orcades, the first ship built for Orient Lines after the war, was a replacement for the five year old Orcades11 which was sunk during the war. Sharing her hull design with P&O Lines Himalaya but with a different superstructure and her bridge located amidships and crowned with a tripod mast and an upright funnel sitting directly aft of the mast.

Built by Vickers Armstrong Ltd in Barrow-in-Furness at Yard Number 950. Her gross tonnage was 28,164, length 706ft (216m), width 60ft (27.6m), Draft 30ft 5in. She was launched on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1947 and completed on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1948. With twin screws and steam geared turbines Orcades achieved 24.7 knots during her sea trials.

On completion she was handed over to her owners, Orient Steam Navigation Company (Orient Line) and departed on her maiden voyage on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1948 from London (Tilbury Docks), sailing to Australia and New Zealand via Gibraltar, Naples, Port Said, Aden, Colombo, Fremantle, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Auckland. The Orcades was the first new liner to reach Australia after the war. She continued on this service for the next six years. In August 1955, Orcades departed London for her first sailing to New Zealand and Australia via the Panama Canal and returning to the UK via the Suez Canal.



For two weeks in November 1956 the Orcades was berthed in Melbourne and used as a floating hotel during the Olympics.

She underwent a substantial refit at the Harland and Wolff shipyard in 1959 adding a new first class swimming pool, allocating the original to tourist class. Air conditioning was also put throughout the ship. First Class was now for 631 whilst Tourist Class was 734. In order to improve smoke dispersion a stove pipe was fitted to the top of the funnel making it even taller. Her tonnage increased to 28,396GRT. The following year Orient Line and P&O pooled their resources and became P&O Orient Lines.

1964 saw another refit turning her into a one class ship capable of carrying 1,635 passengers. The first class Grill Room made way for a cinema with a capacity of 157 seats. Her hull was painted white making her ready for a dual role as a passenger liner and cruising ship. Her departure as a one class liner was in May 1964 when she sailed from Tilbury Dock on her first voyage as a migrant ship.

She was originally a two class ship and provided accommodation for 773 First Class and 772 Tourist Class passengers.

In 1966 Orcades came under the ownership of P&O Line after they had taken over the remaining shares in Orient Line.

Whilst berthed in Hong Kong in April 1972 a fire broke out in the boiler room causing extensive damage. Fortunately

the Iberia was laid up in the UK and parts were flown out to facilitate repairs after which she returned to Australia, departing Sydney for the last time on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1972. Upon her return to Britain she commenced cruising for a while and was eventually taken out of service on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1972. She was laid up in Southampton for several months before being sold to Taiwanese breakers Nan Feng Steel Enterprises. Departing the UK for the last time and manned by a small crew she finally arrived at Kaoshiung on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1973 and was handed over to the breakers who commenced breaking her up on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1973.

*This holds fond memories for us as we had been married for only six weeks when we boarded her to come to Australia in May 1964.*

*Jill & Mick*

### **Lifeboat Rescue**

Whilst on escort duty in the Atlantic, the Canadian frigate Cheboque was torpedoed by German submarine U-1227, blowing 10 metres off the stern killing seven sailors. She was towed to Mumbles Roads and was anchored, awaiting docking in Swansea. During the night she began to drag her anchors after a strong wind blew up. She grounded on the bar off Port Talbot with a large section of the ship under water.

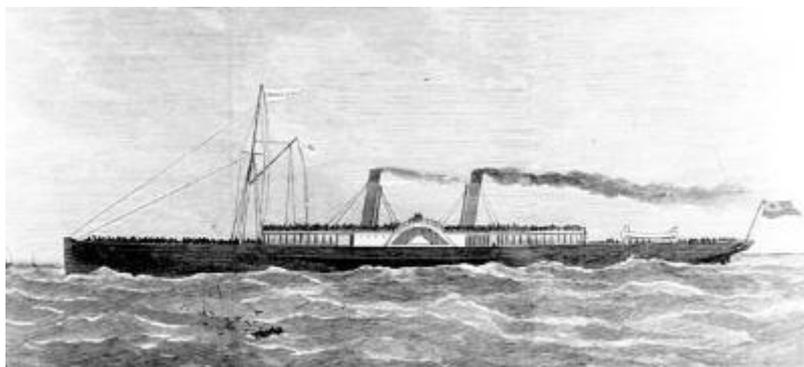
The Mumbles Lifeboat, under the command of Cox William Gammon arrived to take off the 42 crew members. It was not possible to remove the crew by the normal method so he decided to take the lifeboat through the surf, past the frigate into the gale to allow the crew to jump into the lifeboat. This maneuver had to be carried out over ten times which allowed only two or three men to board each time. This took place over an hour and a half to rescue the crew. One man fell into the sea between the two vessels and had to be pulled out quickly before he was crushed, another suffered a broken leg. Cox Gammon suffered serious bruising after a crew member fell on him during the rescue.

The RNLI Gold medal was awarded to William Gammon. Mechanic William Davies and Bowman Thomas Ace both received a bronze medal, whilst the remaining members of the crew received formal thanks on vellum of the RNLI. The crew included two 60 year olds and two 70 year olds.

### **The Princess Alice Disaster**

The SS Bute and the SS Kyle were paddle steamers built in 1865 by the Caird and Co shipbuilding company of Greenock in Scotland and owned by the Wemyss Railway Company. After a year serving the route between Wemyss and the Isle of Arran on the West coast of Scotland they were transferred to the River Thames.

In 1866 the Waterman's Steam Packet Company purchased the SS Bute and renamed her, the SS Princess Alice, after Queen Victoria's third daughter. She was a long, slim wooden vessel of 251 tons, carried only two lifeboats and twelve lifebuoys.



The steamer was to become a pleasure cruiser on the Thames for the next twelve years. SS Princess Alice was perhaps one of the most popular paddle steamers on the Thames, and for the sum of two shillings day trippers would sail from London Bridge to Gravesend and Sheerness, via Woolwich.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1878 The Princess Alice commanded by Captain William Robert Hattridge Grinstead left the Swan Pier near London Bridge at 10am and sailed for Sheerness via Gravesend. At approximately 7.40pm on the return trip with her decks full of day trippers, she entered a stretch of the Thames known as Gallions Reach, not far from Woolwich Town. In the other direction a collier, the 890 ton Bywell Castle also entered Gallions Reach. As the Princess Alice turned towards the north shore she appeared to be crossing the bow of the collier. To avoid a collision Bywell Castle's Captain Harrison instructed his pilot to head towards the south shore and so pass The Princess Alice's stern. There was some confusion aboard The Princess Alice and her captain also turned his vessel to the south, straight into the path of the oncoming collier. The collier reversed her engines but this was not enough to stop her slicing into The Princess Alice behind her starboard paddle wheel and the vessel was cut in two. In four minutes the stricken paddle steamer sank and her estimated 750 men, women and children went into the Thames. Their plight was added to by the

releasing upstream of thousands of gallons of raw sewage into the river. To make matters worse, the industrial plants in North Greenwich and Silvertown were allowed to empty their waste products directly into the river. The Reach was known to be one of the most polluted sections of river in the country.

It soon became clear that despite rescue attempts by the Bywell Castle's crew and river boatmen that this would be an operation to recover the dead rather than survivors. It is thought that some 600 people died that day in what could only be described as horrific conditions. Many of these were trapped inside the two halves when she sank and were recovered when the vessel was later raised to the surface. Due to being immersed in the sewage and chemical waste, many of the bodies could not be identified. Those unidentified were buried in a mass grave in Woolwich Old Cemetery commemorated by a large Celtic cross.

After several enquiries it was decided that both ships should share the blame. Confusion surrounding the disaster made it difficult to put the blame on one captain. Unlike ships at sea, vessels on inland waterways were not required to always pass each other on the port side.

After the disaster there were many safety measures put into place. The port to port rule was enforced on inland waterways, limits placed on passenger numbers to be carried, and in 1880 legislation was passed for there to be adequate lifebelts on ships. The sewage outlets were also moved much further downstream.



## **GOODBYE AFRICA**

### Chapter 8

Of course by now and the fact I had been brought all the gifts, but remember I could only keep the parrot which to me was good because in Accrington where I came from I had never seen a parrot and I envisioned myself proudly showing him off to all my friends and family. But this was not to be because later on one of our visits was to Shanghai and before they would allow us into the port we had to destroy all the ships pets including the Praying Mantis's, which the chaps kept to keep the cockroaches at bay, birds of many types including my cabin mate "Skipper" as I had named him and even the ships cat "Hook" all had to go. Why I'll never know but Shanghai was deeply communistic in those days so maybe that had something to do with it.

In South Africa in those days apartheid was at its very worst and although we made friends with some of the Zulus we couldn't walk down the street with them because every time we did the vigilantes would drive up and separate us and warn us not to mix with them, yet they were so friendly and helpful. We did however arrange to meet them at a certain address and we had many happy hours in there company. It was at one of these meetings I finally enquired what "Boomalakashakabono" meant, remembering that I was seventeen at the time and the lads that we were with were around the same age. The explanation I was given was that it was a form of sacred greeting that was not widely known outside the Zulu race yet I suspect every second person would probably know it today. I also like to believe that they were so young at that time they gave me a young person's view of its meaning but there could be more to it than that. Well after spending about eight or nine days in Durban with our new found Zulu friends we eventually sailed out of Durban harbor bound once again for England. We arrived home on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1958; just in time for Christmas and boy did I bore people around the Christmas dinner table with my tales of the sea. Lots of things happened before we reached England's green shores but if I continued to tell you I would do to you what I did to those poor people on Christmas day.

When I reported back to "The Pool" for my next ship I didn't know what I was in for. The sad part of signing off the Crystal Cube was that we had all become a family. My large friend Imshy was going home to Scotland to marry his long suffering girl friend Bridie. I never did see or hear of Imshy again but I will never forget that wonderful man and I hope his life was full of joy and happiness.

*Winston Kay*