

Editors Note

On our recent visit to New Zealand we came across the lighthouse at Akaroa. The volunteer on duty was able to give us a short history of the building and removal of the lighthouse.

Ideas for the newsletter are always welcome, so if there is anything you would like us to research that you think would be of interest to our members let us know.

Thankyou Peter and Ken for taking the time to complete our Member Profiles.

Next meeting Sunday 28th July 2013

Skippers Log

Hi Seafarers and all.

Just a quick note to you all so that Jill can implant it into the Newsletter, before she and Mick fly off into the sunset and the joys of the English Summer.

You know one of the things I sadly miss about my Homeland is the good old English Pub. If only I had a few million quid I would build one in the tradition of the comfortable surroundings with themes like horse brasses, barrels and snug atmosphere. I wouldn't care if it made a profit but would make it show that real life surrounds a good drinking hole. Come on X-Lotto give me the right numbers, but I guess it is dream on time!

A Kindly note to those who haven't yet paid, your Subs are due.

We had a good turnout for the Anzac March and quite a few of us had a memorable lunch at the Queens Head. The pipers entertained us throughout the afternoon and our own Piper, who attended our reunion in 2011, played for us again.

Our meeting at The Port Dock in May was very well attended and we were well looked after being set up for our meeting in the dining area, thus not having to climb the rickety stairs. Unfortunately our anticipated speaker from the Maritime Museum was unable to be there but has promised us a grand personal tour of the Museum and talk during the September meeting.



It was good to meet Phil Mason and his Family and Phil gave us a very interesting talk. We look forward to Phil being a very supportive Member of our Group.

Our July meeting will be of course the AGM. This will be held at our home, following which we will celebrate "Christmas in July". The small cost of \$6 per head will be good value for money and will be subsidized by our Vindi account. So come and enjoy yourselves, it is always a great pleasure for Anne and myself to be able to entertain our very dedicated loyal group in our own home every now and then. But of course it has to be said we need to know who is coming for catering purposes and no name no admission!! So please phone either Anne or myself early.

We wish Mick and Jill Surfield a safe trip to England and with our good wishes go those of thanks for producing the Newsletter so professionally, with sometimes very limited input even though it always looks full of information.

We look forward to seeing you all on Sunday July the 28th. You can wear your Christmas hat if you like.

Regards Anne & Tony.

From the Almoner's desk

We send our best wishes to Ron Matthews who has been undergoing treatment for Non Hodgkins Lymphoma. Ron recently finished chemotherapy treatments and is recovering slowly from that. Ann and Ron hope to catch up with members some time soon.

We send our greetings to Peter Moore who is recovering from a broken hip after a fall. . My Vindi boy Keith has had eye surgery. Also on our get well list is Betty Wheeldon.

Vern and Eunice are taking a two months holiday in Malta and Wales and the good news is that Vern has the all clear after winning his battle with cancer. They celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on 29th May.

We raise a glass for members with birthday celebrations.

APRIL. Anne Withey

MAY. Vern, Peter Moore, Evelyn Mack.

JUNE is a bumper month for birthdays

Tony, Roy, Les, Winston, John Hines and John Tamkin also Shirley and Barbara two of our Vindi ladies.



Footnote: Re my query about HMS MERCURY'S involvement with mine disposal work in WW2 mentioned in the book review 'ONE FLASE MOVE' in our February newsletter. It was interesting to read in the official newsletter from England about the history of the MERCURY training ship in Hampshire moored in the River Hamble. It seems she had a fearsome reputation.

Stay well and enjoy our autumnal weather.

Anne Withey

Peter Foster - A short history of my life

I was born in Horsham Sussex in 1937, I have a few recollections of the war, and I spent time with my grandparents in Plymouth and endured the constant air raids while there. My Grand Parents had one of the deepest civilian air raid shelters, which was well equipped and certainly needed in that area.



My uncle was a Royal Marine in the band, and I always wanted to be in the Royal Marines. I joined the Corp in 1952 as a Boy Musician and spent approximately a year training to be a bandsman. Unfortunately it was discovered that I was tone deaf and I was allowed to have my discharge. I then decided to join the Merchant Navy and I applied to become a steward. I was told to report to the Vindicatrix training ship, which was moored in Sharpness in Gloucestershire. I had to share a barrack room with a number of boys and it was pretty cold and bleak. The food was pretty poor and I remember being given a large slice of bread and dripping and revolting cocoa at night, there was also Sea Pie which was like cottage pie, but that was forgettable.

I had five weeks training on how to lay tables and laying out table silver and making beds etc. I also was supposed to learn the compass but was not good at that. The last week we moved to the 'Vindicatrix' itself to finish the course, and

I was pleased to leave. I came home on leave and I was thrilled to find that my parents had bought a thirteen-inch television, we were the first in the street to have one, and the neighbors could not keep away.

I was contacted by the Shipping Federation and told to report to the 'pool' (like an employment office) in Dock Street, Aldgate East. I went by train to London and was given a so-called medical by the Pool Doctor, and then went to Victoria Docks to the Royal Mail Lines Office. I was told to report to the *Ebro* a Cargo Passenger vessel lying in Victoria docks.

The *Ebro* was a cargo passenger ship, it was painted white upper decks and black below with, buff funnels, and it looked large to me at the time. The passenger accommodation was very luxurious, paneled walls, large rooms, and a saloon and the passenger complement was for 12 persons.

There were three boy ratings aboard sharing a cabin, and my job was galley boy. We sailed three days later and our destination was Hamilton Bermuda. It took approximately three weeks, as the seas were rough. On arrival I felt very excited, as this was my first port. I was given shore leave just in the afternoon, and I wandered around the area. I should have been more alert as I was held up by some young toughs and robbed; this was my introduction to foreign travel. Bermuda was very pretty but too expensive for galley boys. We left the next day for Nassau in the Bahamas, this was also very expensive. Our third port was Ciudad Trujillo and the baker had just cooked about twenty new loaves and put them on the bench to cool, he left the galley for a couple of minutes and they were all stolen. It was a very poor island. The baker had to cook more bread for the passengers, he was not amused.

My duties as a galley boy were to scrub out the large fridge rooms, the butchers block, do three strap ups a day. That means huge pots and pans in a sink that nearly swallowed me up. My hours were 06.00 to 14.00 and 16.00 to 21.00 a very long day seven days a week for two pounds ten shillings a week. I was the only white guy in the galley all the cooks were Jamaicans. They were pretty good to me, and when they cooked their own food such as green bananas etc. they wanted to share it with me. I preferred my own. One of my other duties was to peel one cwt. of potatoes by hand. I used to go to the poop deck and start on this tedious task. To make it easier I used to chuck overboard the very small ones and the skipper saw me, he called me to the bridge and accused me of destroying ships stores. I quickly replied that I was only throwing the bad ones over. He could not dispute that!

When we reached Kingston Jamaica, the stevedores had to load bulk brown sugar into the holds, this seemed to arouse every crawling and flying insects to our ship. I had the top bunk and the cockroaches used to march along the hot water pipes just above my head, I hoped they would not fall. We were in Kingston for three weeks and the heat was unbearable, the strange thing was that at 4.p.m. for about an hour or so a lovely cool wind used to come across the bay and it was called the 'Doctors Wind'. While in port the crew went berserk on cheap rum and the on board atmosphere was not good. When we went ashore we had to be in numbers due to the high crime rate on the island. On leaving the island we sailed around the coast to Salt River, the river area seemed a breeding ground for sharks. I was pleased when finally we sailed for London, but the homeward journey seemed endless. On arrival in the Thames the customs officers boarded us and found a bucket of waterproof watches in the steward's bathroom, of course no one knew who put them there.



A year or so later I moved to a Mac Andrews ship called the *Valdes*, this was also a 12-passenger cargo ship, all in white with buff funnels. I was promoted to Assistant Steward and my duties included waiting on the Captains table and it was full silver service. We had a Spanish chef, who had a fiery temper, one morning I decided to play joke on him. He hated cooking omelets; so I told the passengers that the chef made fantastic omelets. Twelve of them ordered omelets, I went to the galley door and shouted twelve omelets chef, he went crazy, throwing a plate at me, and I dodged it, but decided not to test his temper again. I also had to clean and make up twelve cabins after breakfast. The passengers were not too bad, I used to make the beds like an envelope, fold the sides and tuck in the bottom, this was quicker than tucking them all round. One day one of the passengers said "Peter I do not like the bed that way", so I quickly made up a story. "Madam I said" I can tuck you in all round, but the idea is that it is quicker to get out of bed in an emergency that's why it is made

that way” She said “I did not think of that, please carry on with your method”! On the Captains table, was seated a very demanding lady passenger who basically was keen to have amorous relations with him. He was not interested. I used to check with the Captain where he wanted his meals. “Is that woman coming in to dinner”? He asked, I told him “yes” “In that case tell her that due to heavy weather I am having my dinner on the bridge”. He was glad when we reached London and she would disembark.

Dinner Adieu

On the last night sailing up the English Channel, it was customary to have a special dinner for the passengers. The chef had prepared a large gâteau, and the second steward instructed me to present it to the passengers before he portioned it up. The ship was rolling heavily in rough seas and I had some difficulty. I entered the saloon with the gateaux balanced on one hand and the ship gave a heavy roll to port; I started to run to keep my balance, rapidly heading towards the bulkhead as I approached it and wanting to avoid a disaster, I swung round and started to run in the opposite direction. The passengers started to clap thinking this must be part of the festivities. I managed to reach the pantry and said to the second steward “Cut the blasted thing I am not taking any more chances”. I was pleased to be going up the Thames the next day.

On the following voyage, while in Gibraltar, I was serving lunch, when the second officer rushed into the saloon and said that all crew must assist in taking out cargo out of number two hold as number one hold had been set on fire. At the time there was very bad feeling between Spain and Gibraltar. We rushed down and with all the crew helping we saved the contents of number two hold. I was exhausted after that event.

I spent time on a Cunard Cargo passenger ship; we were travelling from London to New York. Part of our cargo was 100% proof whisky and it would have its alcohol content reduced in New York. Some of the sailors broached this cargo and men were pretty intoxicated in various parts of the ship. Broaching cargo is a Federal offence in the US. On arrival in New York we were raided by the FBI and bottles of the illicit cargo were thrown overboard as soon as the FBI boarded us. No one was caught but the crew had a close call. During the same voyage I was in Pensacola in Florida, when the Cuban crisis was getting serious. Of all the places to be one could not have been much closer to Cuba! Luckily it did not become war with Russia.

In conclusion, I left the Merchant Navy in 1962 and joined the British Prison Service as an officer stationed at Lewes Prison, Portsmouth Borstal, and Canterbury prison.

In 1966 I immigrated to Australia, travelling on the liner the *Fairstar*. My parents and I came to live in Adelaide, South Australia. We lived in quite a number of houses here, and when my mother passed on, I took a position as Union Official in Port Augusta for ten years. On return to Adelaide I became a Security Officer for some years. I retired in 2007 and now I do voluntary work for the Royal Society for the Blind and Red Cross.

Peter Foster

Akaroa Lighthouse

The lighthouse you see as you dock in the bay at Akaroa is its second home moving from Akaroa Heads in the late 1970's.

In 1875 the decision was made to build a lighthouse at Akaroa Heads some 80 metres above sea level. The site was marked out in 1877 but before construction could begin a road had to be constructed to allow the transport of materials required from ships landing in Haylocks Bay.

Engineer, John Blackett designed and developed the six sided wooden lighthouse and Black Brothers were the builders. The lens was made in France and the mechanism in Scotland.

With the pre-cut structure arriving from the UK construction began in March 1879.



The frame work was built halfway when it was demolished during a storm and on re building it was decided to build a double skin and partly fill it with ballast to give it more strength and stability.

On completion the lighthouse stood at 28ft and shone 270ft above sea level with a visibility of 23 miles.

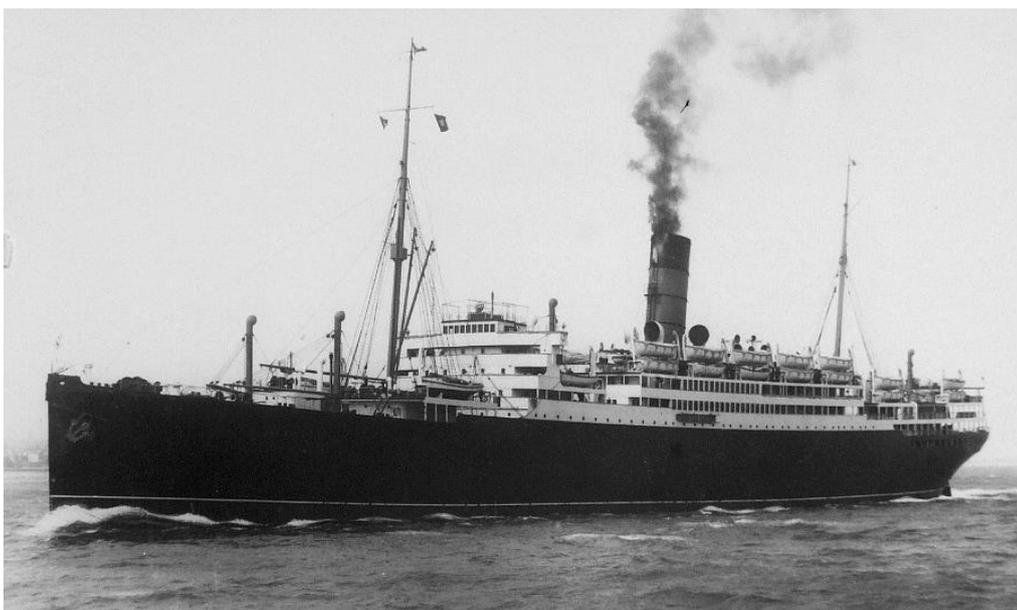
In 1977 the lighthouse was closed to make way for a new tower with a built in automatic light making the lighthouse keeper redundant.

With the formation of the Lighthouse Preservation Society the following year, the lighthouse was saved (purchased for \$1.00 we were told). The structure was cut into three sections and maneuvered along Lighthouse Road down to Akaroa, where it was re assembled on the waterfront at Cemetery Point. With the installation of the original lighting equipment the restoration was completed in October 1980.

AN ACT OF COMPASSION

The RMS *Laconia* was built for Cunard White Star Ltd by Swann-Hunter. She was launched in April 1921 and completed in January 1922 with her maiden voyage on the 25th May 1922.

On the 5th September 1939 the steam passenger liner was requisitioned by the Royal Navy, fitted with eight – six inch guns and two – three inch high angle guns and used as an armed cruiser. In October 1941 she was transferred to the Ministry of War to be used as a troop ship.



Late on the evening of September 12th 1942, under the command of Captain Sharp the *Laconia* was approximately 360 miles Northeast of Ascension Island when she was hit in the starboard side by two torpedoes. She was carrying military personal from the Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force and Merchant Navy, also Polish soldiers, Italian prisoners of war and civilians, a total of 2,732 passengers including the crew. The explosion in the hold from the first torpedo killed many of the Italian prisoners. With the order to abandon ship given, women, children and the injured were put into lifeboats. Of the 32 lifeboats many had been destroyed in the explosions.

U-156 commanded by KL Werner Hartenstein was on patrol in the South Atlantic when alerted from a look out that a ship could be seen on the distant horizon. A course was set and the submarine tracked the ship into the night. Learning that the ship was the armed troop carrier *Laconia*, she became a military target and he fired the first torpedo then the second. With the *Laconia* stopped and listing to starboard the submarine surfaced intending to capture military officers. Survivors could be seen in overcrowded lifeboats and in the water; the burning wreckage lit the sky and the carnage surrounding the ship. The cries from Italian prisoners could be heard by the commander as he approached the sinking ship. Taking on board a few survivors he soon discovered that the *Laconia* is in fact carrying passengers and not troops. With this realization he begins a rescue operation. He puts out a call stating his position and a request to any vessels in the area to come and help, including other U- boats, making a promise to cease hostilities while the rescue is underway.

To speed up the rescue three more U-boats were dispatched to assist Commander Hartenstein, two days later U-506 commanded by Eric Wurdeman and U-507 commanded by Harro Schacht arrived flying the Red Cross flag. They were later joined by the Italian submarine *Cappellini*.

On the morning of September 16th Lieutenant James Harden was on patrol in his American B-24 Liberator bomber when he spotted the U-boats. Seeing the Red Cross flags on their decks and survivors waving he called his base on Ascension Island asking for instructions. He was given the order to attack by Captain Robert Richardson. Returning to the massed U-Boats and survivors he dropped his bombs and depth charges, hundreds of the survivors from

the torpedo attack were killed. Diving to avoid being hit, the U-boats left the survivors who thought they had been rescued floundering in the sea. After a while U-506 and U-507 resurfaced to resume the rescue, U-156 had sustained damage in the attack.

With arrival of the Vichy French warships, Gloire, Annamite and Dumont d'Urville the surviving Italian prisoners were taken to Dakar and the allied survivors to Casablanca. 1,621 lost their lives and 1,111 survived.

Six months after the incident U-156 sunk with the loss of all hands.

The Sinking of the Laconia was made into a two part series for the BBC.

A SHIP OF MANY NAMES

Built for a Greek shipping magnate by Sumitomo Heavy Industries, Japan in 1979 this mighty Ultra Large Crude Carrier (ULCC) was to have many owners. Unfortunately the magnate did not have the funds to pay for her and she was sold to Orient Overseas Container Line founder CY Tung. However before taking delivery, her new owner set an unusual condition to increase her length several metres making her overall length 458 metres or 1504ft. This would increase her already 480,000 tonnes carrying capacity by 87,000 tonnes to 564,763 tonnes, which equates to approximately 41,000,000 barrels of oil. Making her the largest ship ever built.



On completion in 1981 she was named the *Seawise Giant*. With the Gulf War in full swing (1980-1988) and all oil tankers in the Persian Gulf prime targets, her first few years of life were spent plying her trade in the Gulf of Mexico. Eventually she was taken to the Persian Gulf where in 1988 she became the target of an Iraqi fighter jet whose pilot fired his Exocet missiles into her causing extensive damage and her eventual sinking in shallow waters in the Strait of Hormuz. Her owners declared her a total loss.

After the war the Norwegian company Norman International purchased the wreckage, refloating and towing it to Keppel shipyard in Singapore for repairs, at which time it was named *Happy Giant*.

It took two years to bring her back to the tanker she had once been. On completion in 1991 she was bought by Jorgen Jahre for a reported US\$39 million and once again she had a new name, the *Jahre Viking*, sailing under the Norwegian flag for the next 13 years. Being such a large tanker, and not the most manoeuvrable, there were places it couldn't navigate, the English Channel being one of them. Slowing down from her top speed of 16 knots was another drawback, taking over 5.5 miles to stop.

Transiting through the Suez Canal on 25th January 1995 must have been a real challenge for this mighty ship and her Captain, Surrinder Kumar Mohan. This was reported extensively in many Egyptian newspapers and televised to India. The captain received a plaque from the Governor of the Suez Canal. She was crewed by Indian officers and Filipino seamen, a total crew of 35, requiring only two lifeboats.

First Olsen Tankers bought *Jahre Viking* in 2004 to use as a floating storage and offloading unit (FSO). With conversions made including a helipad, and a new name of *Knock Nevis* she was moored in the Shaheen Oil Field in the Persian Gulf for the next five years.

In January 2010 flying under the Sierra Leone flag, the *Mont* as she was now known made her last journey, this time to India and the Alang ship breaking yard. It was estimated that it would take a year or more to dismantle this 1,504ft by 80.74ft behemoth.

Tonnage 260,941GT (214,793NT)

Length 458.45m (1,504.10ft)

Beam 68.8m (225.72ft)

Draught 24,611m (80.74ft)

Capacity 564,763DWT

Speed 16 knots(30km/h;18mp)

The 36 ton anchor from this mighty tanker was donated to the Hong Kong Maritime Museum.



Lifeboat Lousia

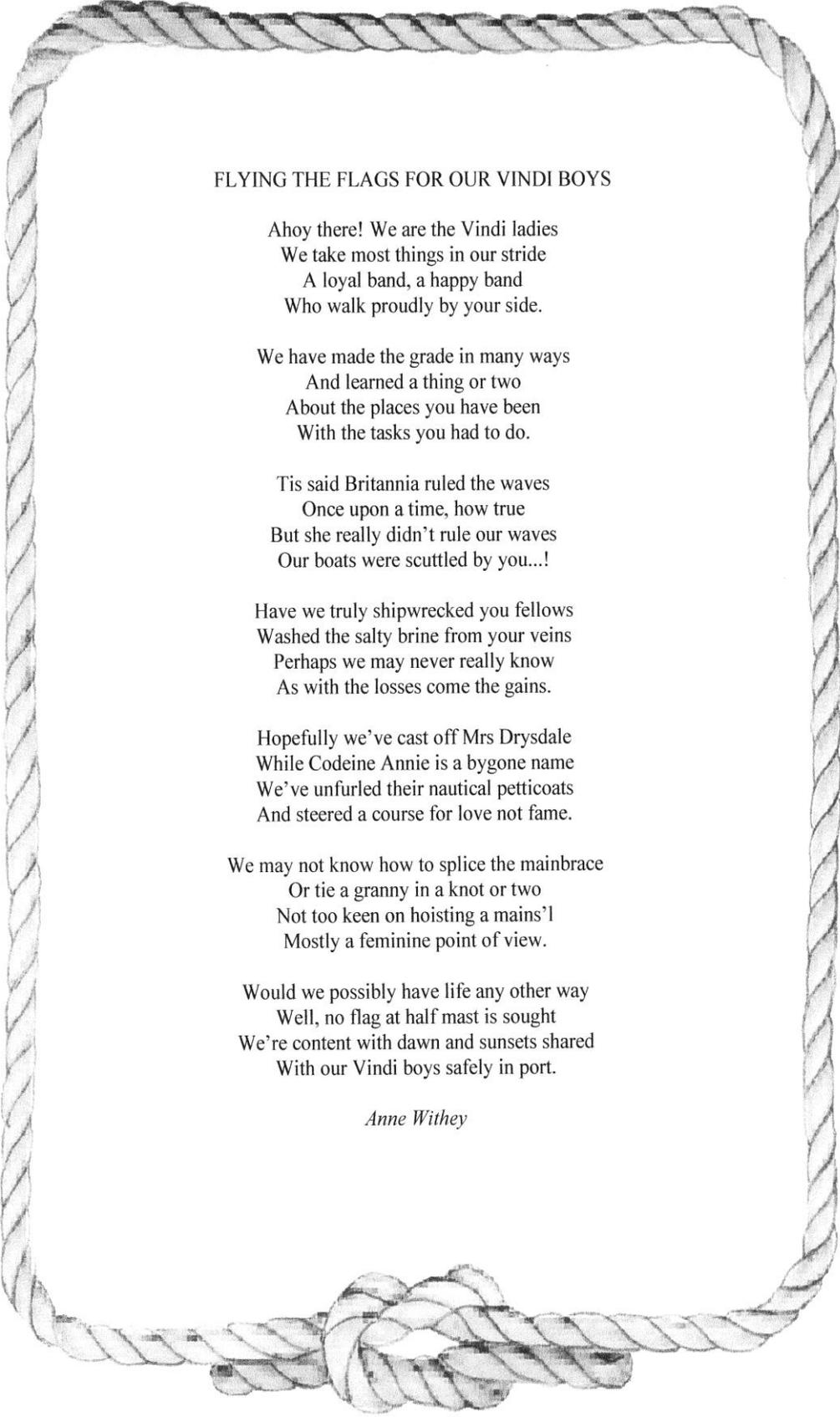
On the evening of 12 January 1899 the Rev Hockley, secretary of the Lynmouth Lifeboat (Louisa), received a telegram from the owner of the Anchor Hotel at Porlock, Somerset, reporting that there was a large sailing vessel in the bay that seemed to be in difficulties.

There was a very savage storm underway, with very heavy seas lashing the coast. The Lynmouth cox, Jack Crocombe, and his crew decided that they could not launch from Lynmouth and would have to take the lifeboat to Porlock, a distance of 12 miles over very difficult terrain, to launch it. Anyone knowing Lynmouth and Porlock would realize that this was going to entail hauling the boat up the very steep hill out of Lynmouth, along the cliffs, and then down the one in four gradient into Porlock! The weight of the boat was around three and a half tons and the weather conditions were terrible. Sixteen horses were provided to pull the carriage and men had to go on ahead to dig out the banks on the roadside to enable the carriage to pass. The journey started at about 8pm and most of the residents of Lynmouth joined in helping to get the boat on its carriage up Lynmouth Hill. At the top of the hill one of the carriage wheels came off and had to be replaced. The weather was now so bad that most of the helpers, other than the crew, turned back once the hill top had been reached.

Further along they had to remove a section of stone wall which was hindering the passage of the carriage. At County Gates the boat had to be removed from the carriage and placed on skids as the carriage was too wide to go through the lane, whilst the carriage was taken across fields to meet the lifeboat further on. From there the men needed all their remaining strength to hold back the carriage descending Porlock Hill. On arrival at Porlock they found that the sea wall had been washed away and they had to take a detour to get to the beach. They finally reached the sea at about 6am on the 13 January. Refusing to stop to eat, they immediately set about launching the boat. The eight oared lifeboat was then rowed into the gale to reach the struggling *Forrest Hall*, a 1900 ton Liverpool barque on its way from Belfast home. She had been under tow but the line had parted and the rudder had been taken off in the storm. She had dropped anchor in the hope of riding out the storm but had sent out distress signals as a precaution. Captain James Aliss was advised by the lifeboat cox to wait until daylight when it was hoped to get a line to the ship.

At dawn the tug *John Joliffe* from Liverpool arrived. The lifeboat crew got a line from the tug on board the *Forrest Hall* and the tug started for Barry Docks, with the lifeboat in attendance in case it was needed. The *Forrest Hall* began to drift towards Nash Sands but fortunately another Liverpool tug, the *Sarah Joliffe*, was at hand and the two tugs took her into Barry at 6pm on 13 January. The lifeboat also landed at Barry where they were royally received at a hotel and tended by the Shipwrecked Mariners Society. The following day the lifeboat returned to Lynmouth.

Author unknown



FLYING THE FLAGS FOR OUR VINDI BOYS

Ahoy there! We are the Vindi ladies
We take most things in our stride
A loyal band, a happy band
Who walk proudly by your side.

We have made the grade in many ways
And learned a thing or two
About the places you have been
With the tasks you had to do.

Tis said Britannia ruled the waves
Once upon a time, how true
But she really didn't rule our waves
Our boats were scuttled by you...!

Have we truly shipwrecked you fellows
Washed the salty brine from your veins
Perhaps we may never really know
As with the losses come the gains.

Hopefully we've cast off Mrs Drysdale
While Codeine Annie is a bygone name
We've unfurled their nautical petticoats
And steered a course for love not fame.

We may not know how to splice the mainbrace
Or tie a granny in a knot or two
Not too keen on hoisting a mains'l
Mostly a feminine point of view.

Would we possibly have life any other way
Well, no flag at half mast is sought
We're content with dawn and sunsets shared
With our Vindi boys safely in port.

Anne Withey