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# MARITIME HERITAGE ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



*A Vertue-class yacht sailing in a fresh breeze*

*See article page 6*

- \* William Eric Nance, Part II
- \* George Forsyth's paintings
- \* An Heroic Action
- \* Old Steam



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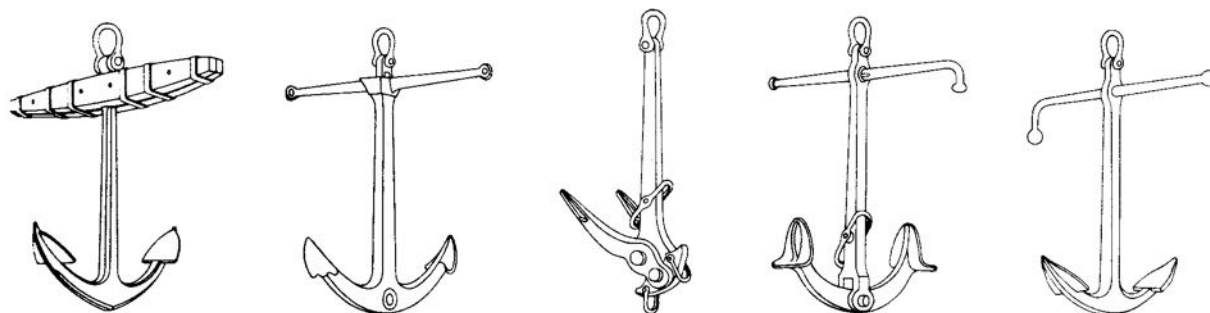
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## **A Message from your Non-Resident President**

Salutations and felicitations from far away and wintery Victoria. I hope all of you, esteemed MHA members, your families, and indeed all who read the *Journal* are keeping well and keeping safe in these unexpected and strange times ... times for which none of us can have intentionally prepared. Perhaps there is something in the experiences of seafarers that might help us. As Dr Johnson (Samuel, not Bob) almost remarked “No man would go to sea had he wit enough to get himself locked down at home in a virus crisis, for locked down he will have better food and company with less tedium and no risk of drowning.” He might have added “easier access to toilet paper”.

Normal service with an Annual General Meeting as an annual event will be resumed when possible. It would be heartening to predict that we might be reminiscing about the lock-down at this year's end of year get-together ... let us hope, let us hope.

Meanwhile, best wishes to everyone.



## **Correction**

In the article on William Eric Nance in the March 2020 journal I stated in my introduction to Murray Shaw's article that Nance was presented with the award on 29 July 2019. This is incorrect—although the announcement in the Government Gazette appeared on that date, the presentation was not until 29 August 2019.

# The Ditty Bag

An occasional collection of nautical trivia to inform, astound, amuse and inspire.

(The inspiration could take the form of contributions to this page!)

In February 1917 Lloyd's *Official List of Enemy Vessels taking shelter in Neutral Ports* reported that there were 89 German vessels held up in Chilean ports. These were almost exclusively nitrate carrying sailing ships.

In 1908 the 4-masted barque *Daylight* (3,756 tons), after a passage of 84 days from Macassar to Vizagapatam, India, and 145 days from that port to Philadelphia, had forty tons of barnacles scraped off her bottom. These barnacles averaged 4½ inches in length (Derby, W.L.A., 1937, *The Tall Ships Pass*, London & Lubbock, B., 1981, *Coolie Ships and Oil Sailers*, Glasgow.)

Mizzen, mizzen, or mison as it was formerly spelt, comes from the Arabic *mizan* or *misan*, meaning a balance. The original term denoted a sail at either bow or stern, since either position gave balance to the rig. In England it came to mean the after mast.

After each voyage Europe–Australia–Europe the 4-masted barque *Herzogin Cecilie* needed on average to replace approximately two tons of Manilla running rigging and one ton (nearly 1½ miles) of wire rope rigging. Ordinary wear and tear accounted for between 8,000 and 10,000 square feet of Scottish flax sail cloth.

Frank Arthur Worsley, captain of Ernest Shackleton's *Endeavour* and the man who navigated the famous voyage in the boat *James Caird* from Elephant Island to South Georgia, was born on 22 February 1872 at Arkaroa, New Zealand.

There are five steamship wrecks on Ningaloo Reef. They are the *Perth*, *Fin*, *Zuir*, *Mildura* and *Chofuku Maru*.

In Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 6 December 1917 a minor collision between two ships, the *Imo* and the *Mont Blanc*, resulted in the largest non-nuclear man-made explosion in history. The *Mont Blanc* had been carrying a cargo of 35 tons of benzene, 10 tons of gun cotton, 2,300 tons of picric acid, nearly 200 tons of TNT plus ammunition for its own guns. 1,600 citizens of Halifax were killed immediately and almost 10,000 injured.

The only pre-Dreadnought battleship left in the

world is the Japanese ship *Mikasa*. It was built for the Japanese Imperial Navy by Vickers at Barrow-in-Furness in 1899–1900 and completed in 1902. It is set in concrete as a museum ship at Yokosuka in Japan.

The vaults of Edinburgh Castle were used to house prisoners of war during the Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815). Among the prisoners held there was a drummer boy captured in 1805 at Trafalgar—he was five years old.

In 1911 King George V approved the designation Royal Australian Navy and the prefix HMAS.

The town of Cervantes north of Fremantle is named after the 231-ton American whaling barque *Cervantes* wreck there on 20 June 1844.

**Fiddlehead bow** — The stemhead of a vessel finished off with a scroll turning aft or inwards, as in the top of a violin.

The first iron tea clipper was the 770-ton ship *Lord of the Isles* built in 1853 at Greenock by Charles Scott. On 24 July 1862 it caught fire and sank while en route Greenock to Hong Kong. The crew got to Macau by boat.

The famous iron steamer *Great Britain* was officially registered as a schooner in 1844. The ship had six masts, and was probably the first 6-masted schooner built.

For a cyclone to be classed as Category 5 the central pressure must be 929 hectopascals (hPa) or less. Cyclone Tracy had a central pressure of 950 hPa. However, Australia's worst cyclone, Mahina, which struck the north Queensland coast on 4 March 1899 killing over 300, most of whom were pearl divers and pearling crews, had a central pressure variously recorded as either 914 hPa or 880 hPa.

*Cutty Sark's* best passage ever London–Sydney took 68 days. This occurred in 1877–78







## Sub Lieutenant Kenneth Briggs RANVR

In the December 2019 journal Lloyd Blake wrote about the exploits of Max Shean. In that article he mentioned that one of the tasks undertaken by Lt Commander Shean was to locate and cut the undersea cable off the coast of French Indo-China. Lloyd has followed up with the story of one of the divers who accomplished the mission.

Kenneth Briggs was born at Glen Innes (NSW) in 1923. Enlisting in the RANVR in 1941 and soon joined the many Australians attached to the British Royal Navy. Briggs first saw service in Gibraltar and Operation Torch against Rommel, a precursor to the D-Day invasion. On completion of further training Briggs volunteered for submarine duty which turned out to be X-craft. Ken Briggs was aboard *XE4* on July 31, 1945, with Max Shean, Engineer 'Ginger' Coles, Sub-Lt Ben Kelly RNVR and Sub-Lt Adam 'Jock' Bergius forming the *XE4* crew for 'Operation Sabre', the cutting of the submerged Japanese communications cable in the Pacific. Ken Briggs and Adam Bergius were divers for the mission. The divers were to be out of the submarine at operating depth for very short periods. This brought the complement of the submarine from the usual four to a very cramped five.

On that day, *XE4* and her crew were submerged off the mouth of the Mekong River in what was then French Indo-China, now Vietnam. They were dragging a grapnel across the seabed in an attempt to locate the vital telegraph cables. After several futile runs, described in Max Shean's book *Corvette and Submarine*, they finally located the southbound cable deep beneath the sand and silt. At 1229 Ken Briggs left *XE4*, found the cable and

cut it with the hydraulic cutters specially developed for the task and was back aboard by 1242, carrying a length of cable as evidence of his success. Adam Bergius RANVR then left the submarine at 1402 and managed to sever the northbound cable and return by 1452. Ken Briggs and Adam Bergius both received the Distinguished Service Cross for their work. The citation for Ken Briggs' medal read:

*For gallantry, perseverance and outstanding skill as a diver in HM submarine XE4, in successfully cutting the Singapore to Saigon cable, off St Jacques, French Indo-China on 31 July 1945. The operation was performed in water much deeper than expected and hampered by tide and rough weather.*

The cutting of the undersea cable forced the Japanese to use radio for their communications. The Americans had already cracked the Japanese radio codes and so were able to access information that had been unavailable when transmitted beneath the sea. *XE4*'s action that day provided information that was a factor in the decision to use nuclear bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. After the war, Ken married and lived in Brisbane, Queensland.



*An XE-class submarine underway. Note the small size for five men to live and work in.*



# William Eric Nance

## Part II of the *Cardinal Vertue* story

By Murray Shaw

On August 31, on completion of the repairs at the Royal Freshwater Yacht Club, the sloop was towed by a club boat down the Swan River to Fremantle Harbour. Nance with his brother Bob on board then sailed the sloop to Rottnest Island which was to be his departure point for the long voyage to Melbourne. On Saturday September 7 (after Bob had left the yacht to return to Melbourne by air) Bill sailed alone from Rottnest Island in flat calm seas. However, they were not to remain so for long.

### Lone sailor's boat capsizes

*The 25ft. sloop Cardinal Vertue limped into Albany Harbour yesterday afternoon after completely rolling over on a trip from Fremantle. The steering was smashed and planks were split and sprung.*

*Round-the-world yachtsman Bill Nance (25), dog-tired after his solo trip, said he had gone through the toughest time of his life since he left Rottnest last Saturday. Weather-beaten and salt-encrusted, he told how he set out in a dead calm but was caught in the teeth of a vicious gale about 100 miles south-east of Cape Leeuwin. "The wind steadily gathered strength during Sunday and Monday. On Tuesday I was really hammered", he said.*

### Big scare

*His first big scare came on Tuesday when a wave came over the stern and split the planks on the port bow. Then about noon another big*

*wave caught the boat aside-on, lifted and then broke, throwing the boat completely over. All the loose fittings in the cockpit rained about him.*

*The boat lost the mainsail and boom in the roll. Water from the bilge sprayed everywhere and two portholes were broken. "I was trying to get some sleep in my bunk in the cabin when all of a sudden there was a mighty crash and the boat rolled over," he said.*

*"I was thrown hard against the other side of the cabin, but escaped with a few bruises. Everything was filling with water. I managed to struggle to the cockpit and take the tiller. I was very worried. Six frames had been broken and another big wave would probably have finished her."*

*Mr Nance said it was his own fault that the boat rolled over because he had been running too fast before the storm. After the boat righted itself he trailed three heavy ropes from the stern to slow the craft and prevent its broaching again*

### Little sleep

*He had very little food or sleep on the journey. "I could not sleep after having rolled," he said. I just waited and listened for the waves, thinking the next might send me over again. I didn't have time to eat." For three days he carried on just concentrating on sailing the crippled boat with what sail he had remaining, not knowing whether he would make land. The boat was leaking fairly badly and needed to be pumped out regularly.*

*He was first sighted near Albany by a Cheynes Beach Whaling Company chaser early yesterday morning. About 2 pm he sailed through the channel into Port Royal Harbour. He was taken in tow by Princess Royal Sailing Club commodore Maurice O'Keefe and towed to the jetty.*

*Mr Nance hopes to slip the boat as*





soon as possible. "I've come 16,000 miles and I'm still very keen to go on, but I've had enough of storms," he said. He expected to stay here for some weeks repairing the vessel and deciding on his next cause of action (*West Australian*, 13 September 1963).

On October 11, after repairs to the sloop had been completed, Nance sailed from Albany on the last leg of his voyage (under his original plan) home to Melbourne. *Cardinal Vertue* sailed from Albany to Melbourne in 16 days, including daily runs of 120, 155 and 130 miles, arriving on 27 October 1963.

Bill Nance's stay in Melbourne is not well documented. It was, however, limited by Customs regulations which, had he overstayed his allotted time, cost him dearly in Customs Duty. However, his projected departure date was delayed by two weeks due to severe cuts to six of his fingers in an accident with a planing machine while making alterations to his yacht. He left Melbourne in early December and sailed to New Zealand where he worked earning money for the next leg of his voyage.

He departed Auckland on 1 December 1964 heading for Buenos Aires.

*On December 30, at 51°S, running before a gale under bare poles with thirty fathoms of warp astern, he reported "a sea bigger than any I have ever seen before," which crashed aboard, broke the tiller and rudder head, and forced him to lie ahull.*

*"I have no great faith in lying ahull," he said later, "and probably only survived because the weather eased and by the following day I was able to fit the spare tiller."*

*Near Cape Horn, the barometer dropped to 28.73. On January 7, a landfall was made on Diego Ramirez, and later the same day he ran close to the Horn in a rain squall, 38 days and 5,000 miles from New Zealand. He still had 1,600 miles to go to Buenos Aires, and a long struggle through the tide rips of Estrecho de la Maire [Le Maire Strait] (Holm, D., 1974, *The Circumnavigators*).*

*Cardinal Vertue* sailed on to the United States, covering 180 miles during one day's run, a record for the voyage. Subsequently Bill Nance settled in America, married there and became an American citizen. His interest in the sea did not diminish, and he became a boat builder in Port Townsend, Washington State, retiring in 1975.



Bill Nance arrived at Buenos Aires on 2 February 1965, and in doing so he set records:

He was the first Australian to sail solo round the world, and only the second solo sailor to have circumnavigated east about round the three capes (Cape of Good Hope, Cape Leeuwin and Cape Horn).

At that time *Cardinal Vertue* was the smallest yacht to have circumnavigated via the three capes.

He set a record for a yacht of only 21ft 6in waterline from Auckland to Cape Horn averaging 131 miles per day for 38 days. The remaining 1,600 miles to Buenos Aires, were completed at an average of 121 miles per day.

His circumnavigation was followed by such notables as Francis Chichester, Alec Rose and Robin Knox-Johnston, all of whom were subsequently knighted for their achievements and Naomi James who was made a Dame. Kay Cottee, who circumnavigated 23 years after Bill Nance, received the Order of Australia (OA) for her achievement, but Bill Nance is almost completely unknown in his country of birth.

Nance was a man who did not seek publicity, and were it not for interviews in Fremantle and Albany when journalists sought him out because of the near disasters which struck the yacht, even less would be known of this modest man.

In July 2015 MHA member Murray Shaw nominated William Eric Nance for an Australian award. He



heard nothing further, and in December 2018 contacted the Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat in Canberra. *This caused a mild stir and from this I was able to ascertain my nomination of Bill Nance for an award had been shelved. I had a fight on my hands.*

Murray persisted, resulting in the award to Bill Nance of an Honorary Medal of the Order of Australia.

Murray Shaw writes of himself:

*I retired in 1997 as a master of seismic survey and support vessels in the Australian offshore oil industry. I had worked around the Australian coast from Darwin to Bass Strait, and in SE Asia for the past 22 years on a five week on – five week off cycle.*

*However, I had begun my working life in 1952 as a deckhand with Alf E Tilley & Co which operated two old steam ferries from Perth down the Swan River to Fremantle and on to Rottnest & Garden Islands, and launches in Fremantle Harbour. In 1954 I switched to Prince Launch Service in Fremantle, first as a deckhand and then workboat skipper and primarily worked for them until 1966.*

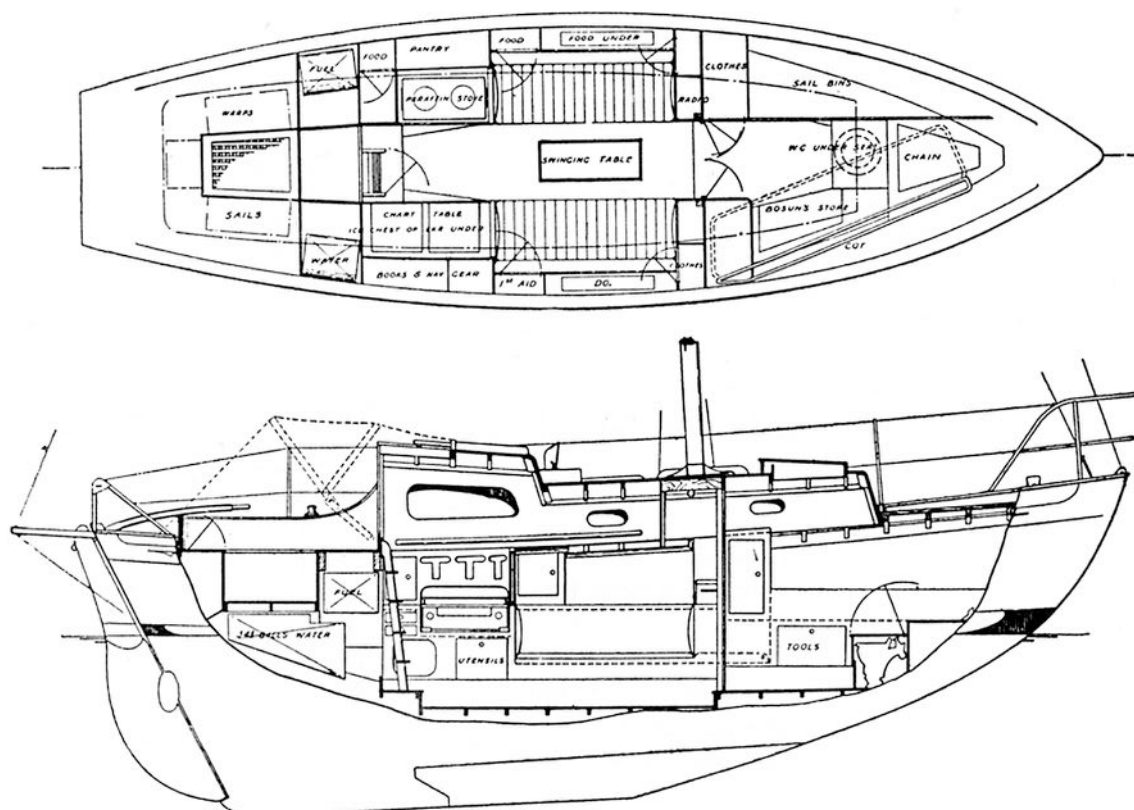
Editor's note:

**Cardinal Vertue**

Official No.	183341
Designer:	J. Laurent Giles
Builder:	E.F. Elkin and Company, Christchurch, UK
Year built:	1948
Length, overall:	25ft 3in
Length, waterline:	21ft 6in
Beam:	7ft 2in
Draft:	4ft 6in
Displacement:	4.5 tons

*Cardinal Vertue* was bought by Dr David Lewis in 1959, and sailed by him in the first Single-handed Transatlantic Race in 1960 from Plymouth to New York in which he came third. For the race it was fitted with self-steering gear and the cabin top had been reinforced. He subsequently sold the boat to Bill Nance.

In the early 1960s the Vertue design sparked my desire for a small, seaworthy cruising yacht. It remains one of my all time favourites.





# RECENTLY DISCOVERED COLONIAL PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS BY CAPTAIN GEORGE FORSYTH, FREMANTLE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA (1843-1894)

By Ian and Ron Forsyth

In undertaking research for our book on our great grandfather, George Andrew Duncan Forsyth, published in 2019 by the Maritime Heritage Association of Western Australia, we located, to our surprise, forty original paintings and drawings he had created in Western Australia and overseas. These included works in watercolour, gouache and ink, pastel and pencil.

Forsyth was an amateur artist of moderate talent and his works are of varying quality and state of preservation. Some are of considerable historical interest. Many of his smaller works were created in his much-travelled little workbook, which probably dates to the 1850s.

Our book includes an annex on his paintings and drawings and copies of 16 of his works. The book's cover features a photo of Forsyth in his service uniform and one of his watercolours of the harbour master's pilot boat at sea.

Since the launch of this book at Fremantle Ports in March last year, the curator of the City of Fremantle Art Collection, Andre Lipscombe, has curated an exhibition of some of Forsyth's works, titled *Pilot Painter*, at the Fremantle Arts Centre. The Governor of Western Australia, The Hon. Kim Beazley AC, opened the exhibition on 7 June 2019.

The book and exhibition provided the public the opportunity to appreciate, for the first time, a broader perspective of some of the legacy Forsyth has left through his artwork.

As a boy in London, Forsyth had had art lessons from his godfather, the renowned English caricaturist George Cruikshank.

He arrived in Fremantle in late 1863/early 1864 as a 21-year old sailor and his career in the colony included working as the Fremantle port pilot (1868–1873) and harbour master (1874–1885); the harbour master for the whole colony other than Albany and inaugural head of the WA Department of Harbour and Light (both 1879–1885); and as a sea captain sailing mainly to the north-west of the colony (1888–1894). His career offered him the rare opportunity to indulge his hob-

by of painting and sketching in the days before the prevalence of photography.

Forsyth's favourite subjects were the harbour master's boats at sea, of which we have located five in watercolour and gouache on paper, including the painting on the book's cover. The authors hold a similar scene of the same subject and one of the harbour master's boat (the original location of these paintings, with a descendant of one of George's friends, was drawn to our attention in 2018 by MHA member, the late Geoff Vickridge). The WA Maritime Museum and the National Trust (WA) each hold paintings of the harbour master's boat similar to the one on the book cover. The National Trust's painting can be seen at Samson House, Fremantle. Unfortunately the painting donated to the WA Maritime Museum is not on display, although a badly distorted picture of it is contained in the Museum's website.

We have not been able to locate another of his paintings of the harbour master's boat in a big sea with its sails reefed, which was featured in both the book *Rottnest: Its Tragedy and its Glory*, written in 1937 by E.J. Watson, and an article in the *West Australian* (date unknown). The article reports it had been in the possession of Geoffrey Sinclair, a former official with the Department of Harbour and Light in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Any assistance in locating the original of that painting would be greatly appreciated).

In an introduction to Forsyth's artwork in his notes for the exhibition *Pilot Painter*, Andres Lipscombe wrote: 'Forsyth had a stolid approach to illustrating his subjects and produced pictures with technical expertise. The strength of his pictures lays in their value as records of topographical details, colonial buildings, boat rigs, navigational equipment and in rendering the weather and conditions at sea. A number of the accomplished gouaches are a record, before the prevalence of photography, of pilot crews working their boats. His output sits within the bulk of colonial art in Western Australia that was produced by amateurs.'

Forsyth also produced a larger oil painting of the mouth of the Swan River, which was only discov-





ered in 2017 by Andre Lipscombe in a bottom drawer in an office in Fremantle.

This painting is quite unique. Although painted in 1893, it depicts the scene as it had been some 15 years earlier. It captures an oncoming north-wester storm with waves breaking on the 'Monkey Bar' which stretched across most of the mouth of the river. This was blasted away in order to develop the inner port in the estuary of the river, around the time the painting was made. The absence of a safe harbour on the colony's west coast and the prevalence of frequent violent storms provided great challenges for the harbour master's service, and this may well be one scene, as well as those of his paintings of the harbour master's boats, that he wished to record for posterity.

In preparing a report in 2018 on this painting for the City of Fremantle Art Collection, the Western Australian marine artist, State President of the Australian Society of Marine Artists and MHA member, Ross Shardlow, wrote: 'Though George's paintings might be considered naïve, he was certainly more than a 'pierhead artist'. His marine paintings are based on first-hand knowledge and personal experience. His paintings have become historical documents in their own right, recording details of our heritage that would otherwise be lost to us'.

Forsyth also produced 11 watercolours in oval format, painted in the late 1860s/early 1870s when he was the port pilot for Fremantle. Most are held by the City of Fremantle Art Collection, with several being held by his family. They are taken from his workbook, which measures 13x19 cm. Four of these works – of the governor's and pilot's residences on Rottnest, the harbour master's residence on Arthur Head, and of the main street of Geraldton – were included in the 1979 exhibition of Western Australian colonial art titled *The Colonial Eye: A topographical and artistic record of the life and landscape of Western Australia 1798–1914*. This was curated by the Art Gallery of Western Australia. We also discovered that lithographic copies of three of these were reproduced by an unknown artist, and were included in illustrated articles on the young West Australian colony in the second edition of the ground-breaking South Australia journal *The Pictorial Australian* dated 1 April 1885.

Forsyth also produced several larger watercolours, including one of the pearling schooner *Elisabeth* at sea and of Frederic Caesar's original

Richmond Hotel with the Swan River in the background (both held by the Western Australian Museum).

He also made a painting of the second Congregational Church in Fremantle for its pastor on the opening of the church in 1876, and watercolours titled *Sundown on the Swan* and *Morning on the Swan* (both 1888). We have not, though, been able to find the original of these three works.

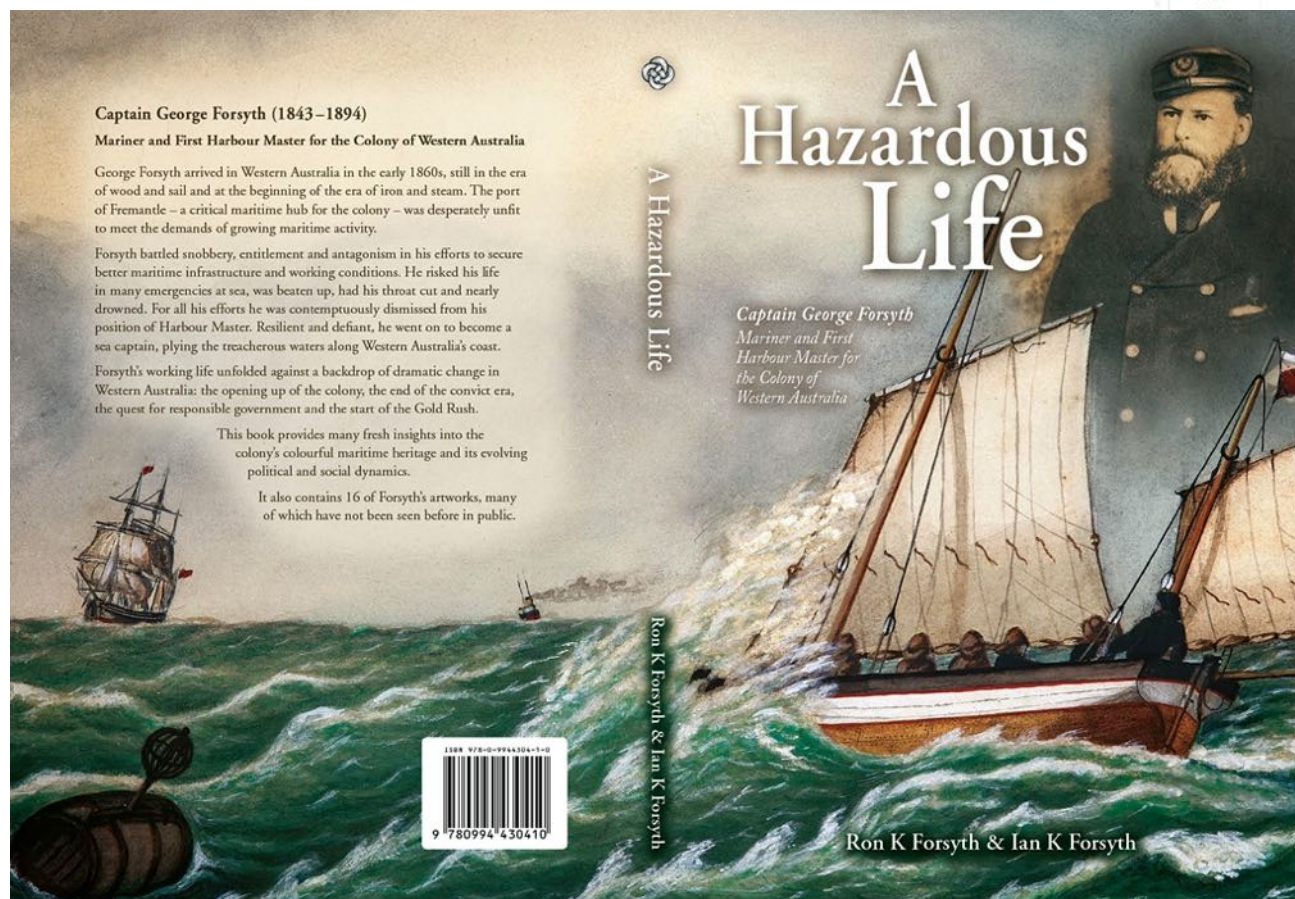
Forsyth also painted larger watercolours of scenes in England, including of *Highgate Ponds* (date unknown) and of a barge entering a river (1872). He also painted two satirical oil paintings of a foxhunt in England, titled '*A Wet Seat*' and '*A Drop Scene*' (1892). The two oil paintings are clearly influenced by the work of his godfather, George Cruikshank.

He also made several pencil sketches in his workbook of scenes in WA, most significantly: 1. of the '*Vasse Lighthouse West Australia*' (Busselton), which was constructed in 1873 and was known as 'the tub'. (We believe this is the only depiction of that structure); 2. of several landscapes off Cossack in the northwest of WA, including the Jarman Island lighthouse (probably drawn around 1888); 3. of two gnarled river gums; and 4. a sketch of a ship we believe to be the SS *Victoria*. None of these works is dated and they are in the family's possession.

His workbook also included several other pencil sketches of scenes overseas, probably drawn before 1864, including of the *Wolf Rock Lighthouse* off Lands End in Cornwall and of *Chiswick on Thames from Barnes*, the innovative *Maplin Sd Light House Thames Mouth* constructed in 1838, the revolutionary *The 81 Ton Gun At Shoeburyness, 1876*, and *The Rock of Gibraltar*, as well as of several unidentified cottages and river scenes. These works are not dated.

Finally, when he was harbour master in Fremantle he produced for the colonial administration boat plans and a basic plan for proposed quarters for the harbour master's crew in Fremantle. He also drew sketches of some vessels. Some of these works are held by the Colonial Records Office, Perth, WA.

We are currently cataloguing Forsyth's works and hope they can then be seen by a wider public than has been possible to date.

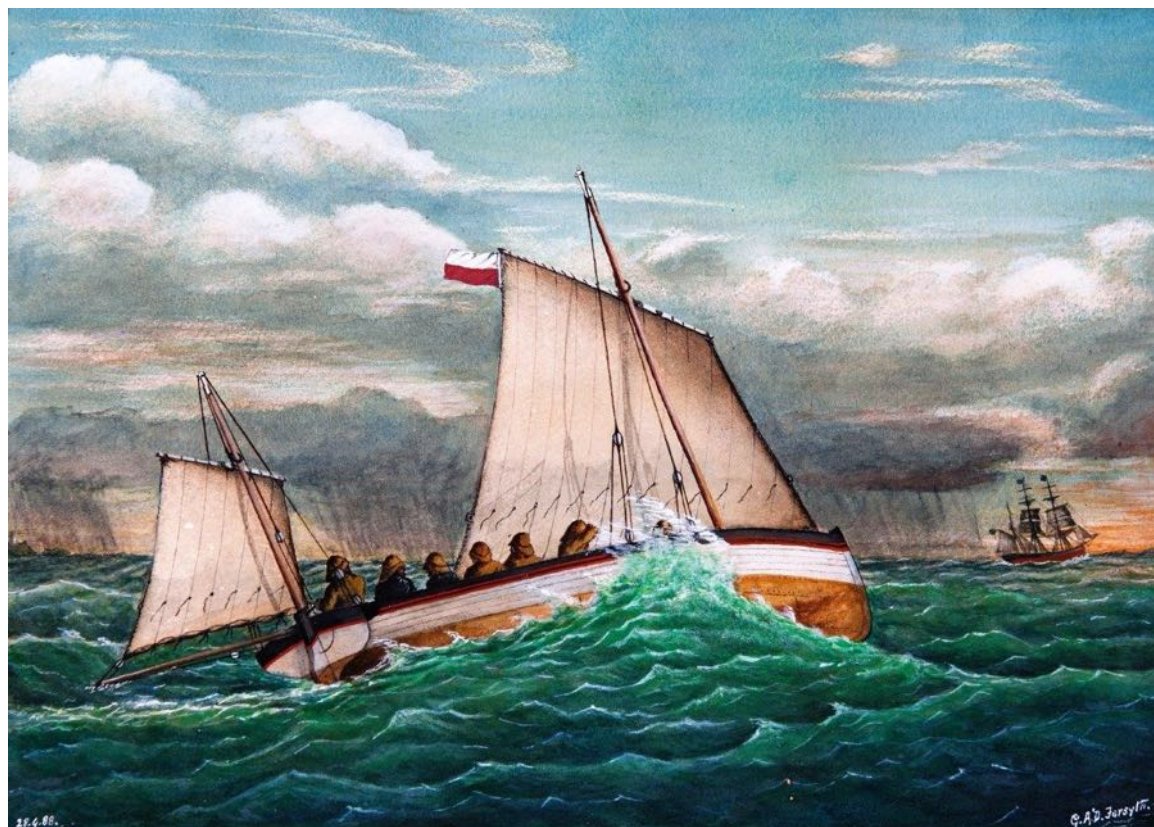


Cover of our book, featuring cropped copies of a photo of Forsyth in his service uniform and one of his paintings of the harbour master service's pilot boats or 'lugger'  
 Painting: National Trust (WA). Photo: Craig Forsyth



Oil painting of the mouth of the Swan River in the late 1870s by Forsyth, 33.4 x 53cm dated 3.1893.  
 Painting: City of Fremantle Art Collection (photographer: Bo Wong)





*Watercolour of the harbour master's pilot boat or 'lugger' at sea  
Painted in 1888, 27.5 x 45.7cm*

Painting: Forsyth family



*Watercolour of the harbour master's boat at sea in Gage Roads, with a steamship, the mouth  
of the Swan River and Arthur Head in the background and a buoy in the foreground  
Painted in 1888*

Painting: Forsyth family





*Watercolour of the  
harbour master's  
residence (left) and  
courthouse (right) on  
Arthur Head  
Painted 28 February  
1870  
13 x 19cm*

Painting: City of Fremantle Art Collection  
(Photograph: Bo Wong)



*Watercolour of Pilot  
House, Rottenest,  
with the pilot's boat  
shed (partial) in the  
foreground, c. 1870  
Extracted from his  
workbook  
13 x 19cm*

Painting: City of Fremantle Art Collection  
(Photo: Bo Wong)

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# A Winged Messenger

By Ron Forsyth

On a Sunday morning, September 11th of 1887, six boys left Perth around half past eight in the morning and headed to the beach looking for winkles. They walked for about three hours. In the vicinity of what is now City Beach they came upon a dead albatross just below high water mark. The bird appeared to have died the day before. In the words of Daniel McCarthy, one of the young adventurers:

*Round the neck of the bird was fastened a piece of tin about one and a half inches wide and nine inches in length, long enough to reach around the bird's neck and fasten. On the tin were some words punched in as if done with a nail. We could read the whole but could not understand it except the word Aout 4, 1887, and the word refugees.*

They skinned the bird and brought it along with the tag back to Perth. The inscription on the tag read *13 naufrages sont refugies sur les iles Crozet 4 Aout, 1887*. Great excitement ensued when the message was translated from French: '13 shipwrecked sailors are taking refuge on the Crozets, 4 August, 1887.' The Colonial Secretary was alerted to the message of distress who in turn communicated with the French government. Hasty calculations estimated that the albatross had covered about 3,200 miles (more than 5,000 kilometres) in 45 days. This equated to over 70 miles or 120 km per day. There were skeptics, but this was well within the great birds' capabilities.

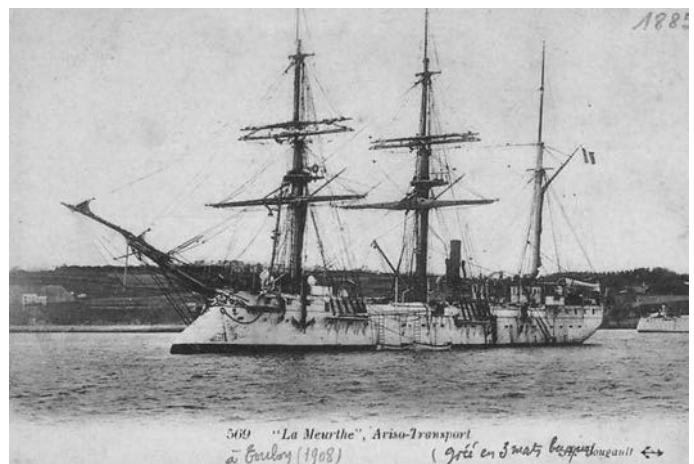
The treeless and desolate sub-Antarctic islands of Crozet lie in the southern Indian Ocean. Six lonely uninhabited islands, they are found in the middle of nowhere between Madagascar and Antarctica. They were named for Jules Crozet, French explorer who discovered and claimed them for France in 1772. Cook visited them on his third voyage after meeting Crozet at Cape Town in 1776. Sealers, whalers and shipwrecked sailors were their only human visitors.

Early in 1888 the s.s. *Australasian* on its run from London was requested to investigate the Crozet Islands. It was looking for any traces of the missing French seamen. Signals were fired at regular intervals. Captain Simpson steamed in close to the islands but saw no sign of life.

All skepticism was allayed when French authorities passed their own findings to Governor

Broome in Perth. The lieutenant commanding the transport *La Meurthe* had:

*....a letter signed 'Majou,' captain of the Tamaris, which I found at Hog Island on the 2nd December. The Tamaris, 3-masted iron ship from Bordeaux, during a thick mist, struck Penguin Island, on the 9th March, 1888, at two o'clock in the morning. The ship went down about three miles S.S.W. of the island. The crew, in two boats pulled in the direction of Hog Island, which they reached on the 11th March, having been unable to take with them from the ship anything more than a little water and 300 lbs. of biscuit. Hog Island presents as desolate an aspect as it is possible to imagine, and the joy, therefore, of the castaways must have been great when they perceived on that desert shore a hut, and in that hut provisions and clothes deposited there by the English man-o'-war Comus, in 1880. They remained at Hog Island from the 11th March to the 30th of September. It was from that island, on the 4th of August, that the albatross was despatched on the neck of which one of the crew had hung a tin plate bearing these words: '13 French shipwrecked sailors took refuge on the Crozet Islands, 4th August.' The albatross died on the shore at Fremantle (Australia), where it was found on the 22nd September, and almost at the same time as the existence of the castaways was being revealed in so surprising a manner, these unfortunates, having exhausted their means of subsistence on Hog Island, had decided to cross over to Possession Island.*



*La Meurthe*

Photo: Wikimedia



The lieutenant was hopeful for the rescue of the castaways as he knew there were provisions on Possession Island. On reaching that island, however, he found the supplies untouched. The men were all lost without trace.

The newspapers of the day made much of this story. Some writers romantically attributed almost human instincts to the albatross in its mission to deliver the castaways message and sacrificing its own life.

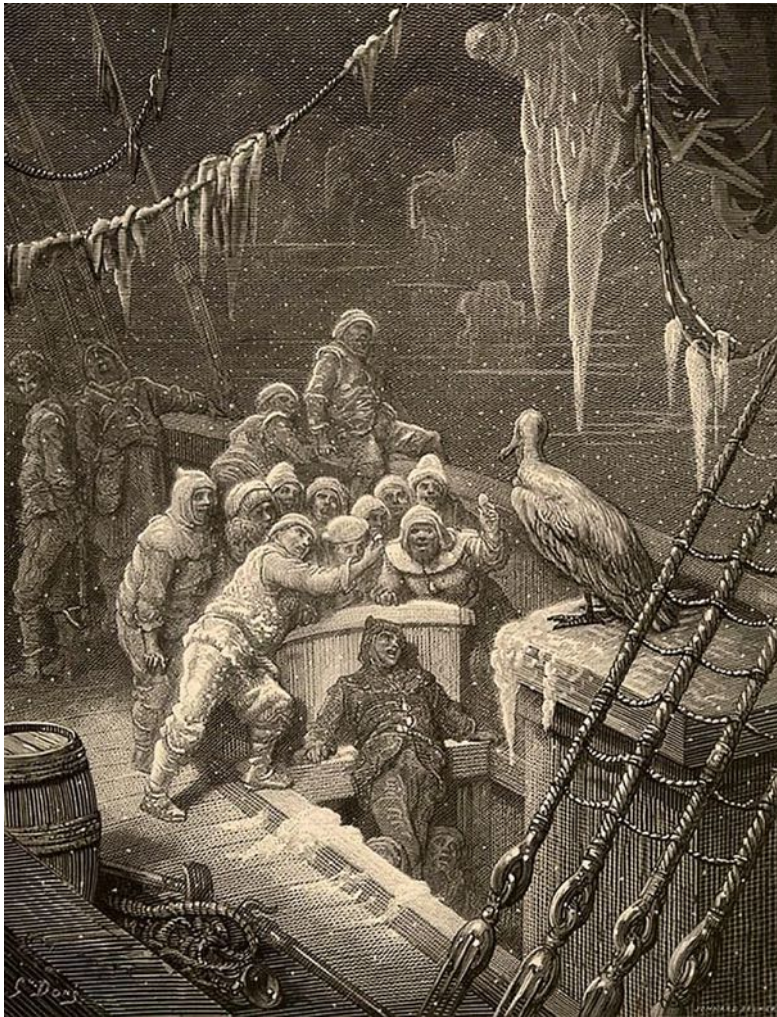
Superstitions about albatrosses were common amongst seamen. From the time of Coleridge's poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' it has been considered very unlucky to kill an albatross. [Not correct: during the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was a common practice of sailors on sailing ships to kill albatross and make tobacco pouches from their feet and pipe stems from the wing bones.] After shooting the albatross with a crossbow, the mari-

ner was blamed for the bad luck which struck the ship and forced to wear the dead bird around his neck.

Just the year previous to the *Tamaris* episode, the British ship *Duke of Argyle*, while rounding the horn was followed by a large albatross with something around its neck. The crew captured the bird and the object was found to be a pocket compass covered in verdigris. Inside was found a carefully wrapped piece of paper with the faded message: 'Caught May 1st. 1842 in latitude 38 deg. 5 min. S. 40 deg. 14 W., by Ambrose Cochran, of American ship 'Columbus'' The British skipper engraved the label off a wine decanter with details of his ship, date and position along with the previous captain's message. It was estimated that the bird could have been over fifty years old.

Sailors have always been fascinated by these great denizens of the southern latitudes. They envied their graceful and effective use of the wind. Many an emigrant to Australia with endless hours on their hands has been fascinated by the flight of the albatross. As one such observer, Mr J. A. Froude, in his book *Oceana*, of a voyage in 1884 portrayed it:

*He wheels in circles round and round, forever round the ship—now far behind, now sweeping past in a long, rapid curve, like a perfect skater on an untouched field of ice. There is no effort; watch as closely as you will, you rarely or never see a stroke of the mighty pinion. The flight is generally near the water, often close to it. You lose sight of the bird as he disappears in the hollow between the waves, and catch him again as he rises over the crest; but how he rises, and whence comes the propelling force is to the eyes inexplicable. He alters merely the angle at which the wings are inclined; usually they are parallel to the water and horizontal, but when he turns to ascend or make a change in his direction the wings then point at an angle, one to the sky and the other to the water. Given a power of resistance to the air, and the air itself will do the rest, just as a kite flies, but how without, exertion is the resistance caused? However it be, the albatross is a grand creature.*



Engraving by Gustave Doré for an 1876 edition of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Coleridge. Titled "The Albatross," it depicts 17 sailors on the deck of a wooden ship facing an albatross. Icicles hang from the rigging.

Froude was in fact describing what scientists now call dynamic soaring. The following is a descrip-





tion of an amazing product of evolution in the albatross:

*This bill is composed of several horny plates, and along the sides are the two 'tubes', long nostrils ... The tubes of all albatrosses are along the sides of the bill ... These tubes allow the albatrosses to measure the exact airspeed in flight; the nostrils are analogous to the pitot tubes in modern aircraft. The albatross needs accurate airspeed measurement in order to perform dynamic soaring.*

The crew of the *Tamaris* were not as fortunate as the survivors of *Princess of Wales* (1821), *L'Aventure* (1825), *Strathmore* (1875), and *Catherine* (1906). All were wrecked at the Crozets with amazing tales of survival. But that is another story.

### References

*The West Australian*, 29 April 1939: 11  
*Launceston Examiner*, 11 February 1888: 4  
*The Inquirer and Commercial News*, 7 September 1888: 5  
*Western Mail*, 28 January 1888: 18  
*Geelong Advertiser*, 7 June 1886: 4  
Lequette, B., Verheyden, C. & Jowentin, P., 1989, *Olfaction in Subantarctic seabirds: Its phylogenetic and ecological significance*: *The Condor*. **91**(3): 732–735. (PDF).



## QUIZ

### Answers to March

1. On 30 March 1772 at Turtle Bay on the north coast of Dirk Hartog Island Louis Aleno de St Alourn claimed the coast of Western Australia. He buried a bottle containing a parchment recording the annexation and sealed with a French coin under a lead seal. These were discovered in 1998.
2. The remains of Matthew Flinders were discovered under Euston Railway Station.
3. In 1688 William Dampier visited Western Australia in the *Cygnet* and in 1699 in the *Roe-buck*.

### Quiz

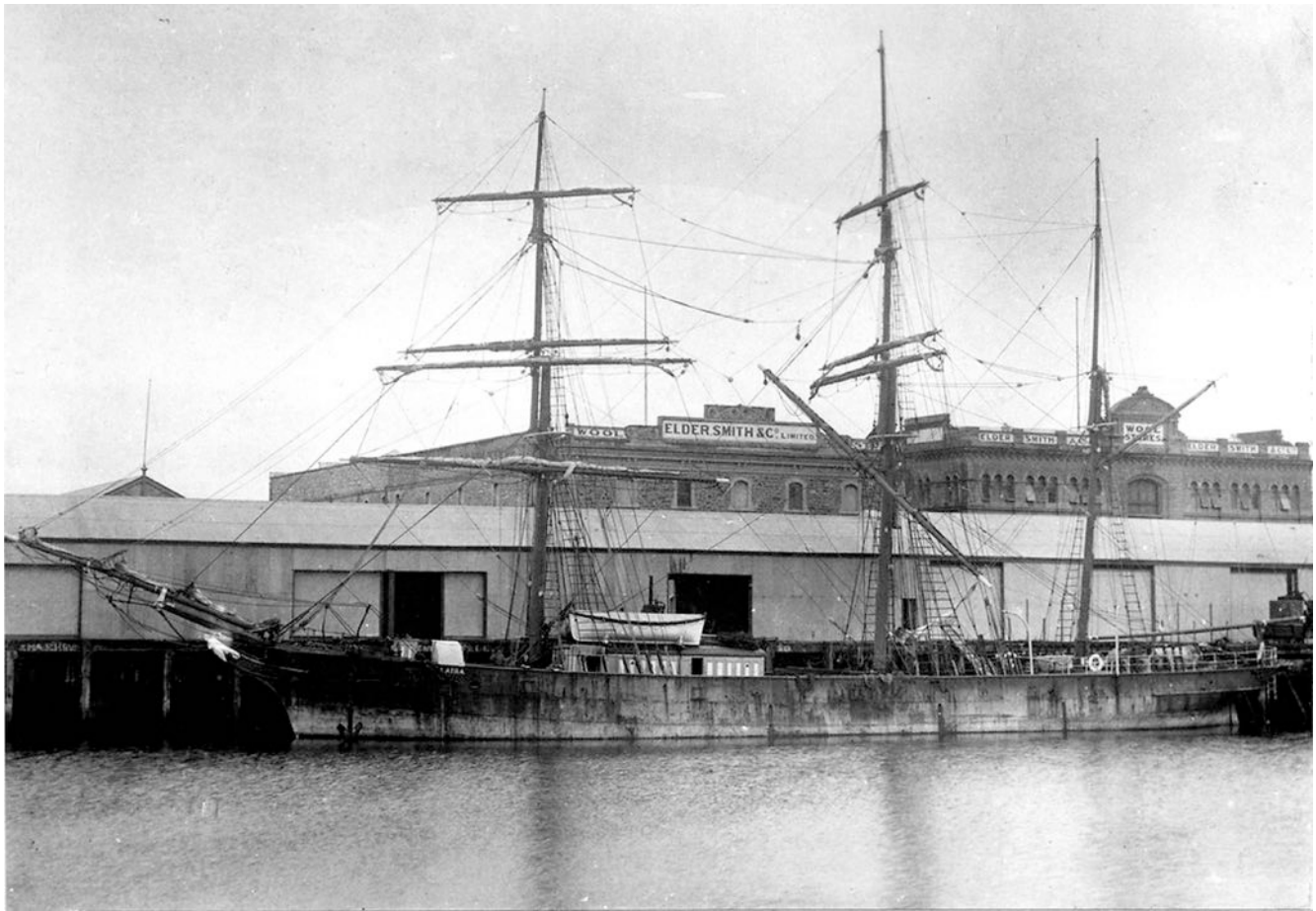
1. Who was the designer of the famous Canadian fishing schooner *Bluenose*?
2. Convicts were sent to Western Australia from 1850 to 1868. How many convict transports arrived during those years?
3. What was the name of the first ship to enter Fremantle's inner Harbour, and in what year?





# *Laira*

## The ship that became a tippie (or more)



Some readers of this journal, and certainly those members of the MHA Book Club, will be aware of wine bottles bearing the picture of a sailing vessel and the name 'Laira'. But few will know the history of the vessel after which the wine was named.

The 492-ton iron barque *Laira* (Official No. 62152) was built by William Pile and Company at Sunderland and launched in March 1870 for Richard Hill of Plymouth. The vessel had a length of 156.1ft, breadth 27.3ft, depth of 16.6ft and set royals over single topgallant and double topsails.

In June 1882 *Laira* was bought by C.B. Stone and registered in Auckland, New Zealand. In February 1889 Henry Guthrie bought *Laira* and the registration was changed to Dunedin. The next owner from 1893 was John Paterson, also of Dunedin, and he was the owner when on 2 April 1898 the *Laira* was rammed by the 1,797-ton Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand's steamer *Wakatipu*. *Laira* lay alongside Victoria

*Above: A photo of Laira at Port Adelaide. In this photo there are no royal yards.*

*Right: The Laira after being rammed by the Wakatipu at Dunedin.*

Wharf in Dunedin having just loaded a cargo of 1,100 bales of wool destined for London and valued at £15,000, when the *Wakatipu* failed to answer the helm, striking the barque which sank in six minutes. It was subsequently salvaged, refloated and repaired.

This was the start of many trans-Tasman voyages, and the barque became well-known on both sides of the Tasman, sailing mainly between New Zealand ports and South Australia with frequent calls at Sydney and Melbourne. Most of the cargo shipped from New Zealand was timber. In early 1904 E.J. Rogers acquired the *Laira* and it was registered at Hobart until purchased from him in 1910 by Huddart, Parker Limited. *Laira* was converted to a hulk by that company and based in Melbourne. In 1958 the 88 year old ves-





sel was broken up in Melbourne, a good age for a hard working vessel

In 1893 English Captain Henry Stentiford purchased a block of land in Coonawarra, South Australia, and set up a vineyard. He named the estate

after his favourite command, the barque *Laira*. The estate was later purchased by the Brand family who retained the 'Laira' name and introduced the illustration of Captain Stentiford's favourite command.



Notes: Some references state that the *Laira* was acquired by The Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand after salvage, and was stripped down and used as a hulk in Port Chalmers. This seems very doubtful, as from at least early February 1901 it was regularly carrying cargoes between New Zealand and Australian ports.

Another reference states that after salvage and repair the *Laira* was sold to the shipping firm J.J. Craig of Auckland and re-named *Constance* or 'Connie' Craig. This is definitely incorrect, as the *Constance Craig* was formerly the 527-ton barquentine *Margarita* built in 1893 at Sunderland. It was acquired in November 1899 by J.J. Craig and the rig altered to barque. It was re-named *Constance Craig* six years later. This barque was wrecked in mid-1907 with the loss of all on board.

Tracing the history of the *Laira* has taken many hours as there were two initially credible red herrings laid across the trail. Tracing the true history has been an interesting exercise.

Peter Worsley



## Did You Know?

At 11.00am on 16 January 1779 the *Resolution* under the command of James Cook anchored at Kealekakua Bay in Hawaii. He had failed to accomplish the major instruction from the Admiralty, to find the Northwest Passage, and wrote in his journal:

*To this disappointment we owed our having it in our power to revisit the Sandwich Islands, and to enrich our voyage with discovery which, though the last, seemed, in many respects, to be the most important that had hitherto been made by Europeans throughout the extent of the Pacific Ocean.*

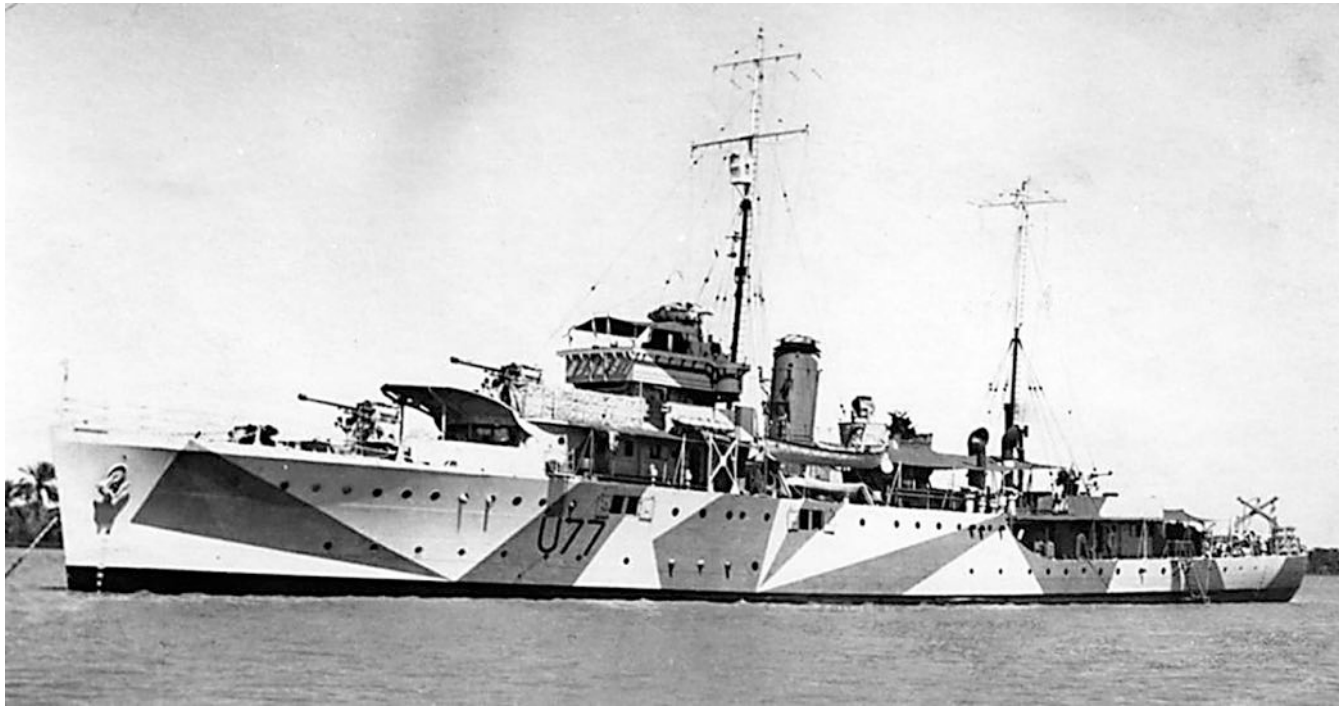
These were the last words that James Cook wrote in his journal. All later entries are by Lieutenant James King.

Reference:

Cook, J. & King, J., 1834, *The Voyages of Captain James Cook, Around the World; Comprehending a History of the South Sea Islands, &c. &c. In Two Volumes, Vol. II.* W. Wright, London.



# An Heroic Action – now almost forgotten



## HMAS *Yarra* (II)

In March 2014 the Governor-General of Australia, Quentin Bryce, presided over the award of a Unit Citation for Gallantry to the officers and crew of HMAS *Yarra* (II) sunk on 4 March 1942. This was one of only four Unit Citation for Gallantry awarded to the Australian Defence Force, and the only one to the Navy. The story is one of extreme bravery that was finally recognised long after the event.

HMAS *Yarra* (II), a Grimsby-class sloop, was built at the Cockatoo Island Dockyard in Sydney and launched on 28 March 1935. With a length of 266ft 3in, beam 36ft and draught of 10ft loaded, the 1,060-ton vessel was manned by 151 officers and sailors. *Yarra* was armed with three 4-inch quick-firing anti-aircraft guns, four 3-pounder guns, a quadruple .5in machine gun and depth charges. Its two steam turbines produced 2,000 SHP through twin screws giving a speed of 16.5 knots. Commissioned on 19 December 1935, *Yarra*'s first commander was Lieutenant-Commander W.H. Harrington who later rose to Vice-Admiral Sir Hastings Harrington, CBE, DSO, Chief of Naval Staff 1962–1965.

*Yarra* departed Australia in August 1940 for the Middle East where it was used on patrol and escort duties. During the first half of 1941 the sloop escorted a convoy from Bombay to the Persian Gulf, followed by service in the Mediterranean

later that year. *Yarra* left for Java when the war with Japan commenced, arriving in January 1942, and on arrival carried out escort and patrol duties. On 5 February *Yarra* took 1,800 survivors off the burning troopship *Empress of Asia*, bombed by Japanese aircraft just west of Singapore. On 11 February Lieutenant-Commander Harrington was replaced by Lieutenant-Commander Robert William Rankin.

A couple of weeks later orders were given to clear all remaining auxiliary vessels from Batavia (Jakarta), and *Yarra* along with the Indian sloop HMIS *Jumna* escorted a convoy to Tjilatjap on the south coast of Java. However, when the convoy arrived *Yarra* was ordered not to enter the harbour, but to escort the convoy on to Fremantle. The vessels in the convoy were the depot ship *Anking*, the minesweeper MMS 51 and the tanker *Francol*. *Jumna* was diverted to Colombo. The convoy headed south-east at 8.5 knots, and on the morning of 3 March sighted two lifeboats. *Yarra* rescued the men who were survivors of the Dutch merchantman *Parigi*, sunk by the Japanese on 1 March. The convoy continued until 6.30am on 4 March when a Japanese heavy cruiser squadron approached from the north-east. Three cruisers, *Atago*, *Maya* and *Takao*, were accompanied by two destroyers, *Arisha* and *Nowaki*. The 15,000-ton cruisers were each armed with ten 8in guns.

Rankin immediately ordered the convoy to scatter, then placed *Yarra* between the fleeing convoy



and the approaching cruisers. *Yarra* laid down smoke to try and hide the convoy and prepared to engage the Japanese. The small Australian sloop was vastly out-gunned and much slower than the enemy ships, but kept fighting despite these overwhelming odds. The convoy was decimated as the three ships were sunk before the *Yarra* finally also succumbed to numerous shell hits. Lieutenant-Commander Rankin was killed along with all but one of the bridge crew when an 8in salvo hit the bridge. Just before this he ordered the crew to abandon ship. All but one complied. The exception was Leading Seaman Ronald 'Buck' Taylor, captain of No. 2 gun. He told the gun crew to comply with the order to abandon ship, but he himself remained behind firing at the Japanese warships. He was killed shortly before the ship sank at 10.00am.

A Royal Navy officer from HMS *Stronghold* was a prisoner on one of the Japanese ships, and was taken on deck to view the unfolding tragedy. Later he was to report: *The Yarra was the only ship left and we could see flames and a great deal of smoke. The two destroyers were circling Yarra which appeared stationary and were pouring fire into her. She was still firing back as we could see the odd gun flashes. The three cruisers then formed a line ahead and steamed away from the scene. The last we saw of Yarra was a high column of smoke – but we were all visibly impressed by her fight.*

About 34 of *Yarra*'s crew escaped the sinking ship on two Carley life rafts. They drifted for the next five days, most dying of thirst, wounds and exposure. On 9 March the Dutch submarine *K XI* surfaced to charge batteries and unexpectedly found the 13 who had survived. Included in this number was Leading Signalman Bromilow, the sole survivor of the salvo of shells that had struck the bridge. He had been badly wounded at the time and blown into the sea by the explosion. None of the officers from HMAS *Yarra (II)* survived.

Apart from the normal service medals issued to all who took part in World War II, no medals were given to any of *Yarra*'s crew – it became just another incident during the war, forgotten by most people. Various newspaper articles and lobbying by individuals over succeeding years failed to obtain any recognition by the Government, though some emphasis was placed on Ron Taylor's heroic action. In 2012 his name was added to a Department of Defence Tribunal on possible awards. Arguments for the award of Victoria

Cross put forward by a number of submissions were rejected on the grounds that, despite his actions, Taylor had disobeyed a lawful order by not abandoning ship. The Tribunal did, however, recognise his act as one of gallantry, but their decision was influenced not only by the fact of his disobedience of an order, but also by the fact that no efforts had been made for any recognition until some years after World War II ended, and what evidence existed was badly handled at the time. The Tribunal was also constrained by the lack of any first hand evidence of Taylor's action. It therefore recommended that as the whole ship's company had acted with extraordinary gallantry they be recognised with a Unit Citation for Gallantry – which was duly done.

Note: The submarine *K XI* that rescued the survivors off HMAS *Yarra (II)* now lies in the ships' graveyard south-west of Rottnest, having been scuttled there on 6 September 1946.

Peter Worsley



*Leading Seaman Ron Taylor*

Photo: AWM



# Old Steam

MHA member Ian Fletcher sheds more light on a Ditty Bag item from last year.

The Ditty Bag page in MHA Journal 30: 4 included reference to a Penn's 1857 trunk engine that was still powering the paddle steamer *Diesbar* on the River Elbe in 1997.

This raised the question: what happened after 1997? A web-search suggested by the journal's editor revealed a different and rather complicated history of an (not 'the') engine, and of paddlers' names.

The Saxon Steamship Co. still operates a paddle steamer *Diesbar* on the Elbe, powered by a Penn and Sons oscillating engine built in 1841. After 178 years and several refurbishments the engine still drives a commercial vessel, and is still coal-fired. It is the world's oldest operational marine steam engine and the world's oldest operational oscillating steam engine

The 1841 engine first powered the wooden *Bohemia*, the first steamship in the Kingdom of Bohemia. The *Bohemia* was built at Karlín (now part of Prague) by the ex-pat Englishman Joseph Rushton, who would have been aware of the reputation of Penn and Sons and justified transporting this piece of emerging engineering so far. The engine was installed in the *Stadt Meissen* in 1857, after *Bohemia* was broken up. *Stadt Meissen* was

later re-named *Pillnitz*. In 1884 a second *Pillnitz* was commissioned, and the engine transferred to it. In 1927 *Pillnitz* became *Diesbar*.

Tracing this simple history is complicated by the re-use of names over time, probably relating to changing ownership and home docks (Pillnitz, Meissen, Diesbar are all place-names). Saxon Steamship Co. currently has a *Meissen* (1885) that had two previous names, and a third *Pillnitz* that was commissioned as *Queen Carola* in 1886, then became *Diesbar* (!) from 1919 to 1927, *Pillnitz* (third boat, third name!) from 1927 to 1952 and *World Peace* until 1993 when it reverted to *Pillnitz*.

There is a detailed record of the 1841 engine, including diagrams and photos, at:  
<https://www.asme.org/wwwasmeorg/media/resourcefiles/aboutasme/who%20we%20are/engineering%20history/landmarks/245-john-penn-sons-oscillating-steam-engine-18.pdf>

None of the current Saxon Steamship Co. vessels have trunk engines and none date from 1857. There may be some trunk engine history still to be uncovered.

