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# MARITIME HERITAGE ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



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### ***Odysseus and the Sirens***

*Painting by Herbert James Draper 1909*

*Maritime archaeologists have found a ships' graveyard in the Aegean Sea containing many ships from Greece's Classical period.*

*Is sailing in the Mediterranean still like this?*



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# **Annual General Meeting & 30 Year Celebration**

**Where: 12 Cleopatra Drive, Mandurah**

**When: 10.00am, Sunday 19 April 2020**

**There will be an exhibition of maritime art, wine label competition and a slide show of 30 years of Maritime Heritage Association photographs**

Weather permitting, Ross has also asked Jill to set up an exhibition of quilts she has made with a maritime theme

**Come for morning tea (provided) and stay for lunch. Please bring some savoury finger food to share for lunch, sweets will be provided**

**For catering purposes please RSVP to Jill or Peter at:**

**[mha.editor@gmail.com](mailto:mha.editor@gmail.com) or 9586 9003**



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# 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!)

"I'm a long ways over eighty and I'm only hanging on to wear these clothes out." Seaman Peter Erikson, of Greenwich:

When the Yarmouth herring season was at its height as many as six hundred million herring were caught by vessels from the port during the season between late August and Christmas. Now there are no drifters operating from the port.

Gustaf Erikson, whose famous fleet of sailing ships was one of the last to operate commercially, went to sea as a 'boy' when he was nine years of age, and was a sea-cook at age thirteen.

An emigrant from Lancashire, Thomas Sutcliffe Mort, established the world's first freezing plant in 1861 in Sydney, NSW. In 1876 he installed refrigeration in a sailing ship, but this was unsuccessful. Refrigeration was successfully used in a sailing ship in 1882 when the *Dunedin* arrived in the UK with its cargo still frozen. However, by then steamers were carrying most refrigerated cargoes.

In 1899 the famous *Samuel Plimsoll* caught fire in the River Thames. The ship was deliberately scuttled to put out the fire, then later raised and repaired. In 1902 en route Glasgow to New Zealand the *Samuel Plimsoll* was dismantled in a gale. Subsequently stripped to a hulk and painted red it was towed to Fremantle. On 17 June 1945 the *Samuel Plimsoll* sank in Fremantle harbour after a collision with a steamer. The hulk was cut up and the pieces removed to southwards of the South Mole.

The US Navy aircraft carrier USS *Wolverine* used for the advanced training of naval airmen had previously been the Great Lakes side-wheel paddle steamer *Seandbee* until acquired in August 1942 and converted. The *Seandbee* had been built in 1912, and required conversion to propeller drive (although the steam engine was retained) and installation of a flight deck 550ft long and 98ft wide.

The remains of Matthew Flinders found under a London Station are to be re-interred in his home town of Dorrington, Leicestershire, UK.

*There is a kind of kangaroo rat very common here, in size and appearance similar to the hare, but the head is like that of the common rat; they are very*

*good eating and easily taken* (Alfred Stone, 1 November 1829).

In the late 1790s davits for hoisting boats began to be fitted to Royal Navy ships. They replaced tackles attached to the fore and main yardarms.

The *Ariel*, famous for the 1966 Tea Race against the *Tapeing*, departed London on 31 January 1872 for Sydney but never arrived. Nothing is known of her fate. *Ariel* had been launched on 29 June 1865 from the yard of Robert Steele, Greenock, Scotland.

In the last half of the 18th century senior officers in the Royal Navy were entitled to have servants on board ship. An Admiral of the Fleet was allowed 50, while a captain was entitled to four servants per 100 men under his command.

When swept by large seas which filled the main deck from rail to rail, the 4-masted barque *Parma* (3,047 tons) could ship as much as 700 tons of water on deck. This weight of water reduced the freeboard by almost two feet. This happened on occasions when sailing during gales and storms in high latitudes. When fully loaded with an already low freeboard such an event became extremely dangerous for vessel and crew.

During the 1930s the allowance for fresh water on board the large windjammers on the Australian run was one ton per crew member for each of the outward and homeward voyages.

The only sea-going dingo in the Royal Navy was a dingo pup found by John Lort Stokes near the Swan River. He kept it aboard HMS *Beagle* for three years.

The *Preussen*, the only 5-masted full-rigged ship ever built, carried 45 sails totaling 59,000 square feet in area.

It has been calculated using tank testing that to drive the *Cutty Sark* at 16 knots when fully laden the sails produced the equivalent of 3,000 hp.





## Speed-Boat Whalers

In 1939 the last surviving whaling station in New Zealand operated from the northern shore of the South Island. The station, owned by J.A. Perano and Company, was considered 'state of the art' in the method it used for whaling. A lookout perched on a cliff 300ft above the sea spotted whales as they passed through Cook Strait, at this point only 16 miles wide.

The whale chasers were unique in that they were 35ft speed boats fitted with 300 hp petrol engines giving them a speed of 40 knots, and manned by only two men. One reference states that the engines were originally aircraft engines. Mounted in the bow was a small cannon with a bore of about two inches which fired a barbed harpoon. The harpoon had a light, strong rope attached and was fired into the whale at very close range.

Once attached to the animal another of the speed boats would come alongside to kill the whale us-

ing an explosive lance. The lance was thrown into the whale and the four plugs of gelignite and a detonator in the head of the lance were then fired via a wire to a battery on the chaser boat.

*Such is the size and vitality of a whale that one such bomb seldom suffices and two or three are frequently required to kill the great creature (Walkabout, 1 February 1939: 35).*

During the 1938 season a 93ft long, 90-ton blue whale (the biggest for that season) was caught. The whale towed the chaser for four hours and covered a distance of 20 miles before succumbing to fourteen lance bombs totalling 56 plugs of gelignite.

The company later 'graduated' to a large steam whale chaser, and caught the last whale taken in New Zealand just before Christmas 1964. Whaling was banned in New Zealand at the end of that year.



### **Michael 'Nipper' Reveley** **13 December 1937—13 December 2019**

It is with sadness and regret that the Maritime Heritage Association notes the passing of Mike 'Nipper' Reveley. Mike had been a member of MHA since early 1990, served on the Association's Committee and was deeply involved in the running of the Wooden Boat Works. Our condolences are extended to Ann and their family.



# QUIZ

## Answers to December

1. A sheer pole is a horizontal wood or metal bar fitted at the base of the shrouds that support a mast. It is used to prevent the dead-eyes or rigging screws from turning when the shrouds are being set up.
2. The *Trial* was wrecked in 1622.
3. Captain Fremantle was in command of HMS *Challenger*.

## Quiz

1. What was Louis Aleno de St Alouarn's part in Western Australia's history?
2. Under what London station were the remains of Matthew Flinders' body found last year?
3. William Dampier visited Western Australia twice. In which years and in which vessels did these visits occur?

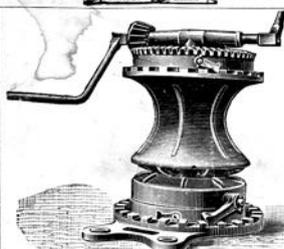
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Silver Medal, Cornwall Polytechnic, 1893.





# Lieutenant Commander Max Shean RANVR

## DSO & Bar, Bronze Star.

Born in Perth, Western Australia 1918, Lieutenant Commander Max Shean was studying engineering at the University of Western Australia when he joined the Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve. Introduced to anti-submarine warfare technology, training commenced in 1940 at HMAS *Cerberus* and then HMAS *Rushcutter*. On loan to the British Royal Navy, in 1941 Max joined corvette HMS *Bluebell*, escorting Atlantic convoys. After fourteen months of this dangerous work he volunteered for service in the experimental X-craft Submarines.

X-Craft submarine armament consisted of two x 2-ton cargoes of high explosive attached to the submarine by a threaded bolt. Cargo was released from inside the hull. The submerged X-craft would close in to the target, release the side cargoes then move away. It was also used for attaching limpet mines to enemy vessels.

X-Craft were fitted with a wet-dry compartment for the swimmer to exit and return. Surfaced, the X-Craft used diesel propulsion, and electric drive when submerged.

The X-Craft had a crew of four: commanding officer, first lieutenant, engineer and diver. Max was involved in the attack on the German battleship *Tirpitz* in 1943. He was in command of *X24*, raiding German shipping in Norwegian waters in April 1944. Known as 'Operation Guidance', the mission was to sink a floating dock in Bergen harbour. Due to poor intelligence and inaccurate charts, *X24* laid her charges under a large German merchantman, *Barenfels*. The ship was sunk and Shean was awarded a Distinguished Service Order.

In 1945 six *XE* craft were sent to Pearl Harbour to take part in the Pacific war. Admiral Nimitz of the United States Navy observed that they were 'suicide craft' and the Americans were reluctant to put them into operational roles until they discovered the X-craft had a much longer range than they

had assumed. The *XE* submarines went into training off the Queensland coast to prepare attacks on Japanese warships and underwater telecommunication cables. This would become known as 'Operation Sabre', a mission to cut the sea-bed cables linking Tokyo with Singapore, Saigon and Hong Kong – important communication channels for Japanese high command. Special tools and techniques had to be developed for this unprecedented operation. Training in Hervey Bay, during which period two divers, David Carey and Bruce Enzers were lost in accidents, Max Shean sailed in command of *XE4* to locate and cut the undersea cable off the coast of French Indo-China (Vietnam), on July 31, 1945. Three days later the X-craft returned to the depot ship *Bonaventure*, waiting for them at Brunei Bay. Max had a bar added to his DSO. The United States of America awarded him a Bronze Star for severing the Japanese undersea communications. The other members of the crew were also decorated.

Later Max Shean completed his studies and became a power station engineer, living in Claremont, Western Australia. Max remained in the RANR until 1956. A keen sailor, in 1978 he won the Open division of the Parmelia yacht race from Plymouth to Fremantle sailing single-handed in his yacht *Bluebell*, having already voyaged from Fremantle to reach the Plymouth start line. Max wrote of his Navy life and exploits in *Corvette and Submarine* (1992). Patron and much celebrated member of the Australian Submarine community, Max Shean died in June 2009.

Lloyd Blake OAM  
RAN Submarine Service Rtd

Editor's note: *X24* is on display at the Royal Navy Submarine Museum. The four crew had to live and work in this 51¼ft long, 5¾ft wide craft.

See photo of the interior of *X24* opposite.

## Apology

I must apologise for repeating the article *Imperial Japan's Last Floating Battleship* in the last journal. This article had already appeared in the December 2018 journal., but I failed to take it off my list of articles for future publication. *Mea culpa*.



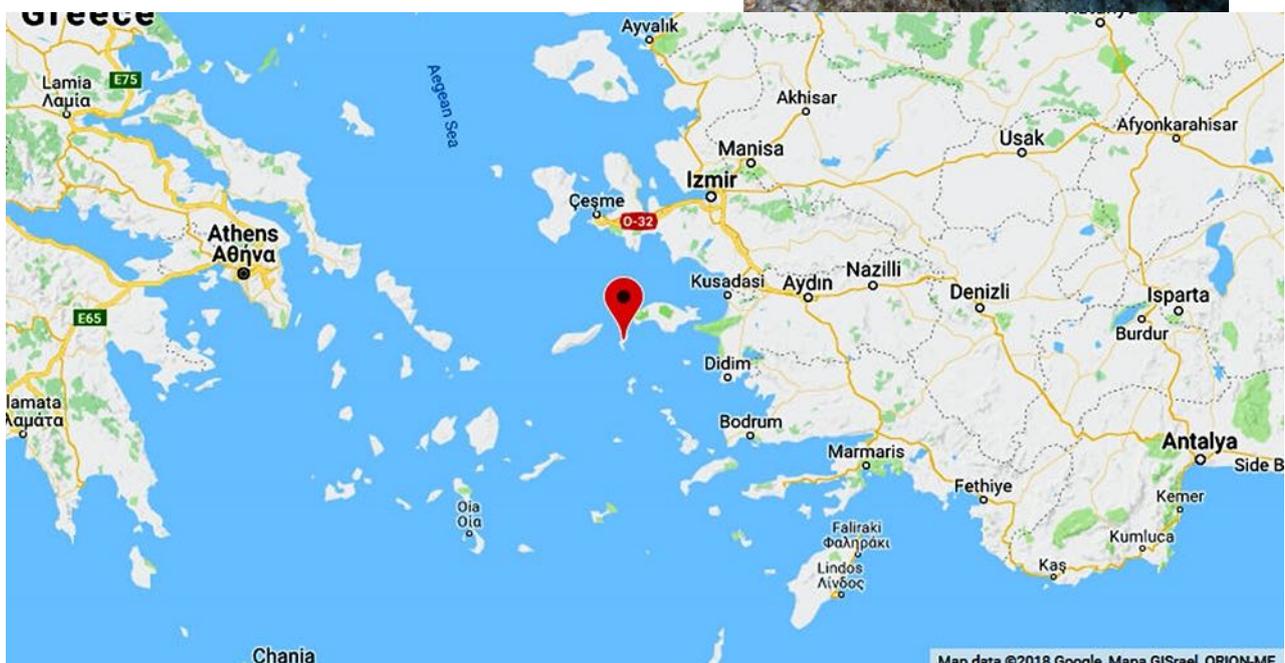


# New Discovery-Aegean Ships' Graveyard

While some evidence of wrecks had been known to locals, in 2015 an unprecedented discovery by maritime archaeologists of 22 ancient shipwrecks was made in one area in only 13 days. Since then 23 more wrecks were discovered in 22 days during 2016 and a further 13 have since been located. The ships' graveyard was discovered between the Greek islands of Samos and Icaria in the Aegean Sea. These islands are part of the Fourni Korseon (Fourni Archipelago) which lies on an ancient east-west trade route across the Aegean. Initial research indicates that the wrecks date from about 600BC to early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the majority being very old. The depth at which the wrecks lie varies from quite shallow to where deep diving equipment or remotely operated vehicles are required. The water is very clear, and the thousands of artefacts litter the sea bed. "Most of the wrecks crashed into cliff faces and there is a trail of artefacts from shallow down to the deep area where the bulk of the ships settled," Peter Campbell, a project director, says. "The conditions are beautiful, it is wonderful diving. Very clear waters, a lot of marine life, and the artefacts are easy to spot." By recovering samples of objects the archaeologists have been able to identify the origin and date of most wrecks, though because of the rocky bottom much organic material has been lost. The leader of the expeditions, George Koutsouflakis, stated: "The great diversity of cargo and the discovery of so many ships carrying non-Aegean loads seems to indicate that Fourni played a pivotal role in antiquity, far beyond the immediate region, as a mari-

time hub for commercial routes amid a wider trading network." Some of the amphora found originated in North Africa.

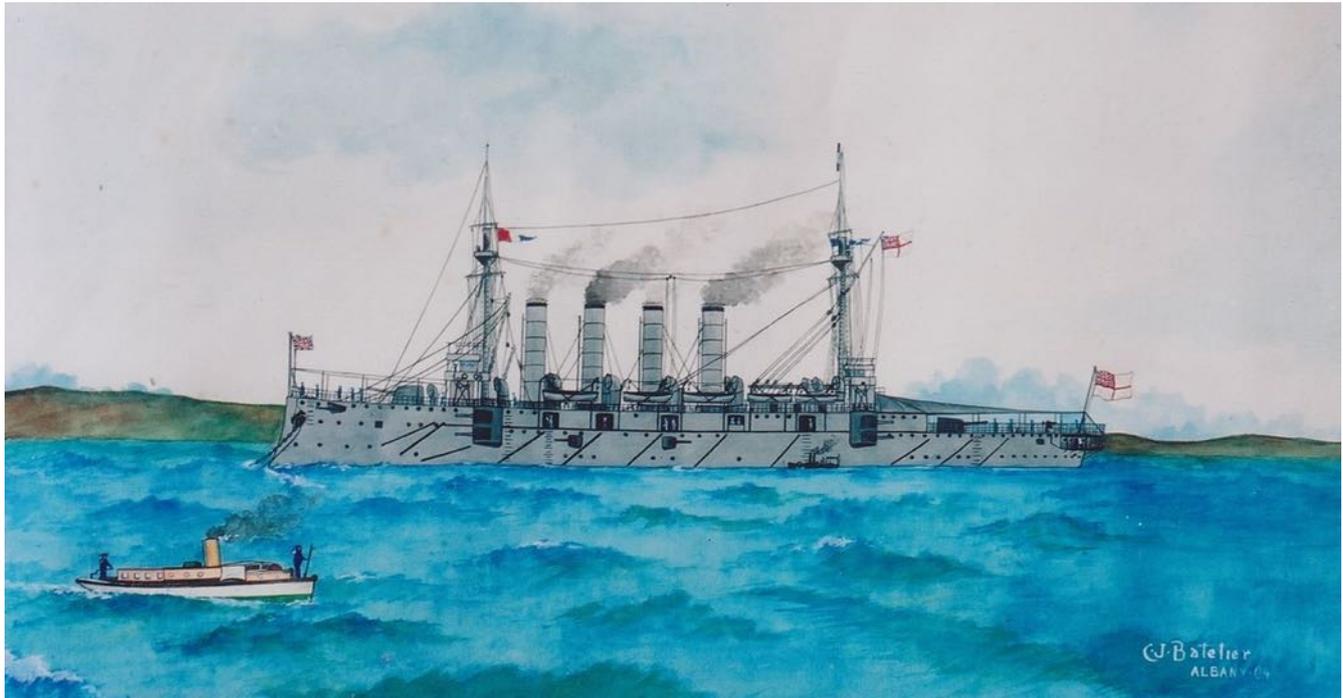
Several more sites for investigation have been indicated to the team by local fishermen and sponge divers. Associate Professor Dr Wendy van Duivenoerde of Flinders University says: "This discovery is great for the people of Fourni — they could turn this into an underwater park for tourists and divers. It has all the qualities of an underwater museum."





# Batelier's *Petrel* Comes to Light

by Barbara and Ross Shardlow FASMA



HMS Diadem 11,000 tons by C. J. Batelier, watercolour, 1904.

Albany Historical Society Collection. Photo: MHA Collection

No sooner had we published a previously unrecorded watercolour of the Government Steam Launch *Petrel* by Albany marine artist George Bourne (MHA Journal September 2019), than another watercolour of the same vessel came to light. The second work is also by an Albany marine artist – Claude James Batelier (1886-1971).

Claude's father, Georges Louis Batelier, came to Albany from Melbourne in 1897. In 1902 he returned to Melbourne to bring his wife Della and their two boys Victor George and Claude James to Albany. The Batelier family arrived in Albany on the S.S. *Kalgoorlie* on 15 December 1902. Georges and both his sons were accomplished artists and young Claude soon settled into marine art. In November 1903 he produced a finely detailed half-tone illustration of the first-class cruiser HMS *Diadem*, which arrived in Albany for bunkers on 23 November 1903. At 11,000 tons, *Diadem* was the largest British warship to call at Princess Royal Harbour up to that time. She and her consort HMS *Scylla*, which had arrived a day ahead of *Diadem*, departed Albany 26 November 1903 bound for Sydney. Claude's drawing, signed and dated 'C. J. Batelier 03', was published in *The Western Mail* on Saturday 2 January

1904. Depicted in the right-foreground of his drawing is the Albany Harbour Master's steam launch *Petrel*.

In 1904 Claude used his half-tone sketch to paint a watercolour of HMS *Diadem*. This work, titled 'HMS DIADEM 11,000 TONS' is signed and dated 'C. J. Batelier ALBANY 04'. In this composition Claude has shifted the *Petrel* to the left side of the painting.

The Steam Launch *Petrel* was built in England in 1895 and shipped to Albany aboard the S.S. *Cornwall* in 1897. She was 47ft overall x 10ft 6in beam, teak planked over oak frames and coppered below the waterline. She was variously employed as a Harbour Master's launch, pilot boat, tug and Customs launch. In 1912 she was fitted with a new oil engine at Fremantle before moving down to Bunbury where she served as a pilot boat and Harbour and Lights launch.

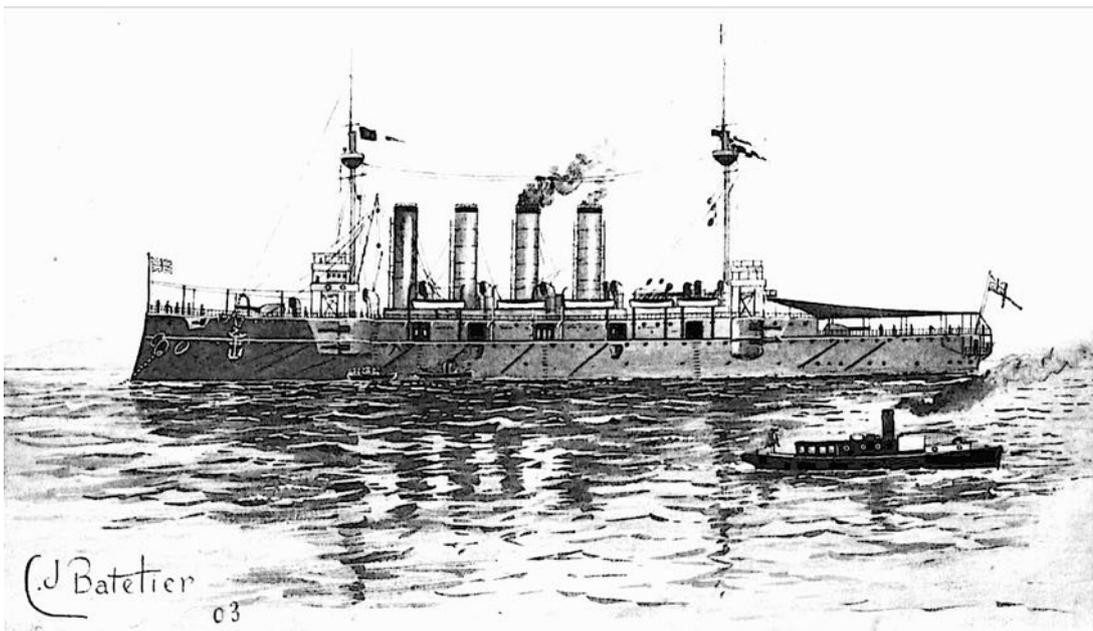
Claude was only 18-years old when he painted HMS *Diadem* and already an accomplished illustrator well versed with the printing trade. He and his brother Victor, who was four years his senior, worked together as commercial illustrators, designers and fine artists. Though Victor tended to



*Detail from HMS Diadem 11,000 tons by C. J. Batelier showing the Government Steam Launch Petrel.*

specialize in landscapes and Claude in marine subjects, several marine works are signed ‘V.G. & C. J. Batelier’, ‘Batelier Bros’ or simply ‘B.B.’. Though Claude painted all manner of watercraft, whether it was sail, steam, naval or merchant, he clearly had a penchant for painting battleships, preferably of the dreadnought class. Claude is

sometimes described as a ‘Pierhead Painter’, but like many of the naïve ship-portrait painters of that genre his work is accurate, charming, vibrant and colourful – an invaluable record of our maritime history recorded by someone who was actually there, a record that would otherwise be lost to us.



*Half-tone illustration of ‘HMS Diadem’ by C. J. Batelier, 1903. The illustration was reproduced in The Western Mail, Saturday 2 January 1904. The vessel to the right in the foreground is the Government Steam Launch Petrel.*



Claude James Theodore Batelier was born in Melbourne in 1886 and died in Albany in 1971 aged 85 years. In his later years Claude regularly 'held office' at a corner table of Edgar Green's 'Rainbow Milk Bar' in York Street, Albany. Penniless and alone, Claude asked Mr Green to donate his art works and those of his predeceased

brother Victor to the Albany Historical Society on his death. Of national significance, the Batelier marine art collection is now in the care of the Albany Historical Society. With generous assistance from marine historian Rod Dickson, the Albany Historical Society kindly bestowed photo prints of the Batelier collection to the MHA.



*Detail from half-tone illustration of 'HMS Diadem' by C. J. Batelier showing the Government Steam Launch Petrel*

**Maritime Heritage Association Inc.**  
**Membership Fees**

	<b>1 Year</b>	<b>3 Years</b>	<b>5 Years</b>
INSTITUTIONAL	\$110	\$300	\$480
FAMILY	\$45	\$120	\$200
ORDINARY	\$35	\$100	\$155

**Fees can be paid directly into MHA's account – BSB 306-048, Account No. 4177001**  
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**Did You Know?**

**A British bank financed Napoleon during France's war with Britain**

In 1803 Napoleon sold what was then called Louisiana to the USA for \$15million to raise money for his war on England. The Louisiana Purchase (at 828,000 square miles the largest land purchase in history) almost doubled the size of the USA at that time, but the country had insufficient funds to pay the cost of the purchase. \$3million was paid in gold as a down payment, the remaining \$12million was in an issue of bonds. The bonds were taken up by the merchant banking firms of Francis Baring & Company in partnership with Hope & Company. Alexander Baring from the senior bank actually delivered to Paris the gold paid for the banks' purchase of the bonds.



## A North–West Pearler’s Wife

The *Northern Times* of Carnarvon recorded the death of Mrs Martha Hilliard in 1944:

“With the death last Friday of Martha Ellen Hilliard, another link with the early history of pearling in West Australian waters has been broken.

It was as a girl hardly out of her teens that Mrs Hilliard first came to the coast and she is said to have been one of the first two white women in the North-West. She was married at Cossack (in 1884) to Henry Francis Hilliard, English Naval officer, who was in command of the brigantine *Annie Taylor*. The ship was her first home and on it, in the midst of a cyclone, her first child was born. For many years Mrs Hilliard made her home afloat, in schooner, barque and brigantine which cruised in search of shell off a coast where adventure and lawlessness were rife. Mrs Hilliard spent most of her life in the North-West. She watched the story of the pearling industry being written in the lives of men and ships, the birth and decay of towns.

In *The Great Australian Loneliness*, Ernestine Hill, who found in Mrs Hilliard a great store of information, writes: ‘...as a historian of the west coast her memories are invaluable - memories of the white-winged schooners, and the strange life she shared...that to the younger generation of Australians are now but a highly-coloured chapter of the past.’ ”

Ernestine Hill seems to have assumed that Martha was a victim of loneliness. In Ellen’s own words, however, “it was a lovely life on the pearling grounds. “ She and her husband worked the coast from the Ashburton to as far up as Wyndham. Far from being lonely she said:

“There were four or five wives on board other schooners, all her friends, including Mrs. James Clarke on the *Mavis*, Mrs. George Smith on the *Kitty Bell*, Mrs. Barter on the *Flowerdale*, and Mrs. Patterson on the *Florence*. Later on there were Mrs Rodriguez on the *Ivy*, Mrs. Frank Biddles on the *Alto*, Mrs. Owen on the *Antheous*, and Mrs. Percy on the *Gwendolin*.”

She raised six daughters and four sons in the North-West where “she had always been happy and healthy.” Her strong memories were of a terrible ‘willy-willy’ in 1887 when about 500 pearl-ers’ lives were lost and “Broome’s most tragic

day” when she lost so many friends when the S.S. *Koombana* went down in 1912.

Another vivid memory of hers was the race riot in December 1920 between Japanese and Malay pearl-ers. The Riot Act was read when 1000 Japanese were said to have banded together and clashed with rival Malay Koepangers.



*Captain Hilliard with his family and aboriginal domestic servants c.1910. Hilliard’s wife often stayed on her husband’s boats, bearing several children at sea. To evade government taxes he operated out of Koepang under the Dutch flag. [Courtesy Museum of Western Australia.]*



*“The lugger galley was no more than a kerosene tin on an open deck, nestled in a wind break.”*  
[Courtesy Museum of Western Australia.]

Ron Forsyth



# My Time on *Singa Betina*

## Episode 18 of Ted Whiteaker's tale:

The first monthly barge shipments back to Elcho Island went well, and we were kept busy with business. Within a few weeks of our arrival in Darwin we realised the volume of trade we were engaged in was not practical on board the boat – there simply was not enough room to handle all the goods we were dealing with, and the next few months passed by as we transitioned from our base on *Singa Betina*. We found a new base in a shared house in Kellaway Street, Fannie Bay, which had a yard we could use as a depot, and not long afterwards we moved in ourselves. I had sold my Sadgroves Creek mooring for much-needed funds before we had left for Indonesia three years earlier, and *Singa Betina* was shifted between several temporarily vacant moorings in the creek as they became available.

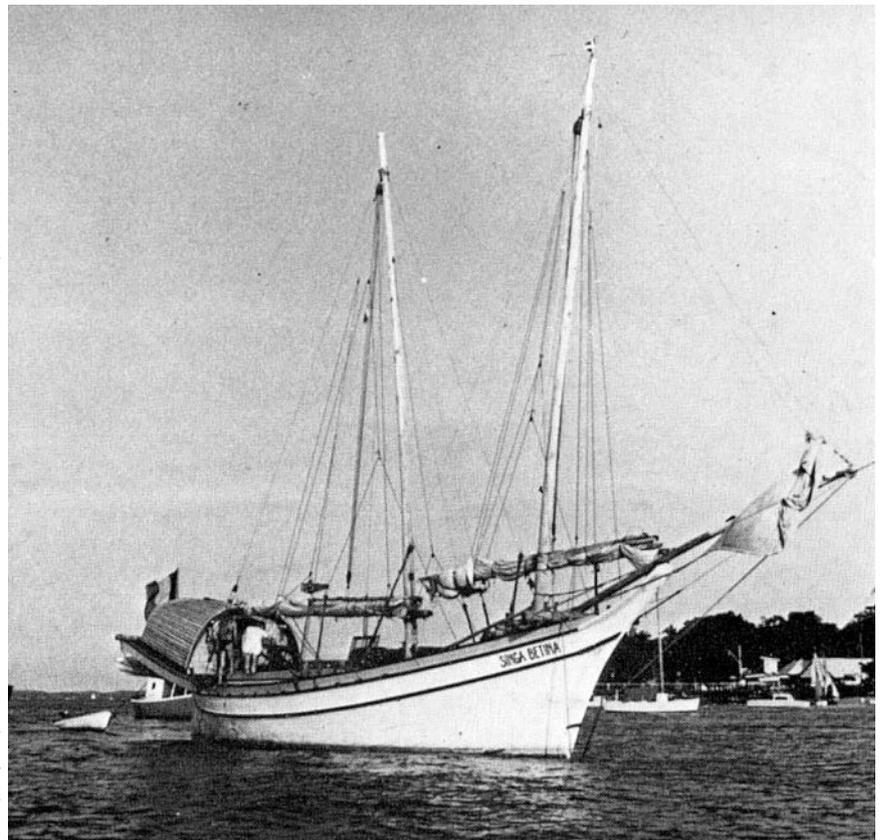
We were very busy as trade progressed with Elcho Island. I would spend three weeks in Darwin getting a cargo together, send it off on the monthly barge, and fly out to distribute the goods for a week. At Galiwin'ku, I stayed with David Harris, a teacher who let me doss down on the lounge in his one-bedroom hut. The Yolngu were happy to have a conduit into the world of consumerism, and business was good.

I kept up with essential maintenance on *Singa Betina*, and eventually reached a decision to sell the boat. We had moved from Kellaway Street to the original Darwin Harbourmaster's residence, now a white-ant eaten bungalow with cheap rent overlooking the yacht club and Fannie Bay. We shared the property with someone else in another shack in one corner of the back yard, and Rainier, who lived among the aerial roots under a large banyan tree in a bamboo and plastic tarpaulin shelter in another corner.

Then, in March 1985, I was away at Elcho when I got a radio-telephone call from Jude to say that *Singa Betina* had almost sunk on its mooring in Sadgroves Creek. With the help of friends, she

had got the boat ashore at Dinah Beach. I jumped on the first flight available out of the community and spent three hectic weeks before the next Elcho trip dealing with a quick rebuild of the Perkins engine, which had been submerged, and investigating the cause of the near-sinking. This turned out to be a pencil-sized hole bored through a waterline seam, which eventually took on enough water to do the damage. It was the legacy of the Indonesian soldier shooting at us in Babar nearly three years earlier.

*Singa Betina* was ship-shape again in early April. The oppressive heat and humidity of the Wet Season was dissipating, with a welcome drop in the daily temperatures. The waters off Fannie Bay



were clear and turquoise, ruffled by light winds as the Dry Season began to make its presence felt. I motored the boat from Dinah Beach around to Fannie Bay, where we could see her at anchor from the Harbourmaster's house.

The following evening there were media reports of a developing low-pressure system centred around 150nm to the north-east of Darwin, just



east of Croker Island. It seemed a low-key event, and I left early next morning on another trip to Elcho. That night, the low crossed over Coburg Peninsula on a bee-line for Darwin, intensifying to become Category 2 Cyclone Gretel in the Van Diemen Gulf, and beat the daylight out of Darwin the following morning. Short and sharp, Gretel swept by on a mission and the intensity was gone within hours, leaving estimated damages reported at \$3.5million.

I had fallen ill with a savage virus at Elcho shortly after arriving, and got another radio-telephone call from Jude to say that *Singa Betina* had disappeared from the anchorage in Fannie Bay. I was stunned by the news, but was in no condition to do anything about it. The virus was sapping all of my energy, and I was barely able to maintain myself in an upright condition. Over the next couple of days *Singa Betina* was found on the other side of the harbour, beached on a strip of sand between rock outcrops either side. The hull planking had been battered and she was full of water. Jude and a few friends pumped the boat out and got her towed across to Fannie Bay, where she was again beached for the interim.

A week later I had finally recovered enough to leave Elcho and go home to face the music. I was depressed by the situation, and grappled with the problem of what you do with a boat when you've finished with it. I had spent eight years with *Singa Betina*, and was firmly bonded to the soul of the old tub, which had seen me through some turbulent personal development, but there was a lurking sense of a great weight tightening around my neck. A wooden boat needs someone living on it to keep it alive, and I had moved on. It had almost sunk in the creek, requiring a lot of energy to get her back in shape, and now, a victim of Cyclone Gretel, she needed a lot more energy that I did not really have to give.

My flight from Elcho touched down at Darwin Airport in the early afternoon, and I went home to drop off my gear before driving out to see the boat. It was a beautiful day with balmy Dry Season weather, and a high neap tide. *Singa Betina* was tethered to anchors fore and aft, submerged to cabin level and sitting on the bottom with the mast rocking gently from side to side in a mild swell. It was a sad sight. I sat on the beach, pondering my options. I could fix the boat again, but I did not want to. Or I could tow it out into deep water and let her go – that would solve the problem, but it seemed a terrible waste. Or I could

give it away, if I could find someone who was willing to take it on.

Then Tattooed Tony turned up. A denizen of Dinah Beach, Tony had a little home-made plywood hard-chine yacht, about eighteen feet long which he was eternally rebuilding. He sat down and commiserated with me, asking what I was going to do about *Singa Betina*. I outlined my three options, and then asked him if he'd ever wanted a bigger boat, suggesting a swap – he could have *Singa Betina* in exchange for his little boat. He declined the offer, saying that I had just got back and was just disappointed, and could not be serious. I was disappointed alright, but only because he would not take it.

Next morning I was down the beach at low tide, picking at the flotsam inside the boat and assessing the prospects when Tony arrived again. I put the boat-swap proposition to him again, assuring him I was serious, and he agreed. I grabbed his hand and pumped it to seal the deal, and left him to it.

Tony had agreed to finish installing a lead keel to his little boat, and a few other things that needed doing. However, once he got cracking on *Singa Betina* he was fully occupied for weeks on end, belting in stainless nails to refasten the hull planking and attacking the cosmetics. After a while I asked him what was happening with the little boat repairs, and the question riled him. He was torn between his obligation to our agreement, and his new all-encompassing fixation on *Singa Betina*, and had difficulty keeping his composure. The issue was left unresolved until a week later, when a young bloke with dreams of blue seas and swaying palms, an acquaintance of Tony's, bought the little boat from me for \$5,000.

I was finally free of *Singa Betina*, in a material sense, and could begin to relax into the romantic nostalgia that develops in hindsight, when memories become uncluttered by the less pleasant realities of actual ownership. As the years have passed, so has my nostalgia for my time on *Singa Betina* grown, and I now look back on the years I spent on board as a rich and interesting experience that certainly fulfilled my original desire for an escape from the humdrum of a rather ordinary urban existence beforehand. We all have our dreams, and *Singa Betina* was one of mine.

Editor's note: Ted will be writing another article detailing the final days of *Singa Betina* which will appear in a future journal.



## William Eric Nance

This article about an Australian sailor who should be much more widely recognised, was suggested and co-written by MHA member Murray Shaw

On 29 July 2019 the *Government Gazette* announced the honorary award of the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) to an American citizen. On the same day the Australian Ambassador in Washington, Joe Hockey, presented the award in Seattle. What led to this award? The *Government Gazette* proclamation read:

### AWARDED AN HONORARY MEDAL (OAM)

### IN THE GENERAL DIVISION OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA

**Mr William Eric NANCE**, Washington,  
United States of America

For achievement as the first Australian to sail solo round the world during the period of September 1962 to February 1965.

Mr Nance was the first Australian, and 16th person, to sail solo round the world. At the time he was 23 years old and relatively inexperienced at sailing a yacht, particularly across oceans.

Mr Nance sailed a small ocean going yacht without modern means of electronic navigation, weather information, communication, or engine – he learned navigation by self-study, using Mary Blewitt's "Celestial Navigation for Yachtsmen", sailed with a number of charts, a sextant, log tables, and used a Navy surplus deck watch and transistor radio.

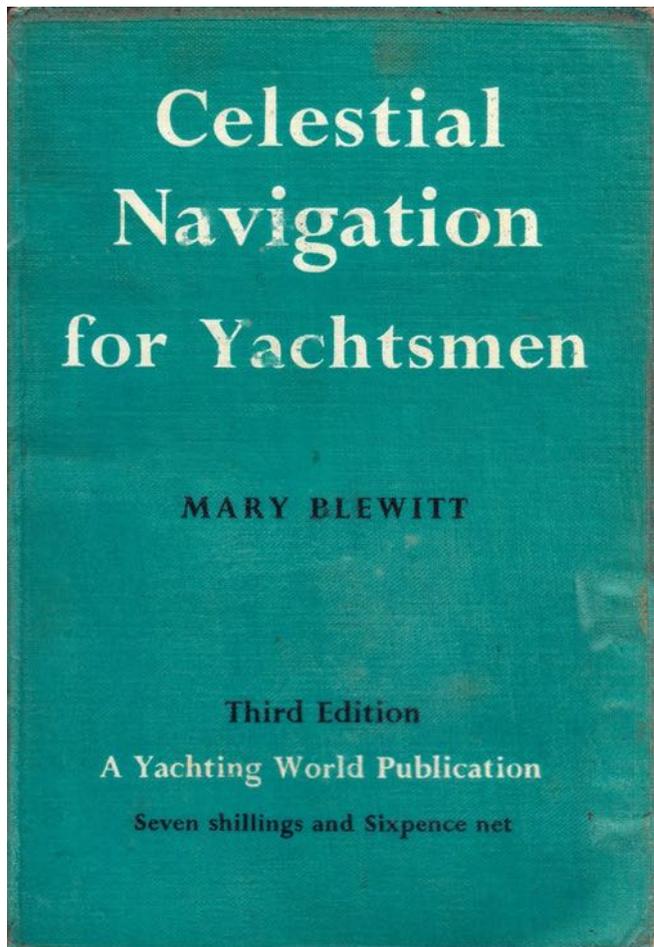
He departed England in September 1962 sailing to Fremantle, via Buenos Aires and Cape Town, then continued to Melbourne before eventually departing from Tasmania for New Zealand. He then crossed the Southern Ocean to Cape Horn and on to Buenos Aires, thus completing his circumnavigation.

Mr Nance was the youngest man to have sailed alone round Cape Horn and he achieved it in the smallest boat (a record which stood until 1973).

During his voyage he experienced frequent gales, storms and large seas. His ship was dis-masted, capsized, and he was washed

overboard. Despite these events, Mr Nance demonstrated determination, resolution and perseverance in completing his solo round the world voyage.

Bill Nance was born in 1938 at Wallaby Creek, Victoria, and in 1962 was in England on a working holiday. Knowing nothing about sailing or navigation he decided to sail home to Melbourne. He bought the small yacht *Cardinal Vertue* off Dr David Lewis, and departed Brixham in September 1962. He had purchased a book on navigation for 7/6 the day before he left, and studied this as he sailed down the English Channel. His lack of sailing knowledge resulted in him almost losing the yacht in a gale.



After carrying out repairs, the next leg Madeira to Buenos Aires, a distance of 5,000 miles, took 61 days. Nance was triumphant, "as happy as a sand-boy" on reaching Buenos Aires. He was: "learning the sea the hard way but so far I was doing so well it looked as if I'd be home in Mel-



bourne even sooner than I'd planned. The first legs of the journey had been so uneventful I had no forebodings of what the future might hold," he said.

The 3,995 miles from there to Cape Town was accomplished in only 39 days, a remarkable time for such a small yacht. *Cardinal Vertue* left Cape Town for Melbourne on 21 March 1963, and had problems almost from the start. Nance's chronometer broke down so that he was reliant on his wrist watch for navigation. On 30 March his enthusiasm for listening to the cricket on his transistor radio ran its batteries down.

On April 7 he was lying almost asleep when he was suddenly hurled out of his bunk and thrown up on top of the cabin table. Gear flew everywhere and on deck he found the mainsail was ripped in half. The port light board had been smashed in and everything was a shambles. He wanted to be sick but felt too tired and weak. He had been out of sight of land for two weeks and was still thousands of miles from home and very downhearted. In the storm he lost much of the ground he had covered during the previous few days and felt like turning back.

Over the next few days a Russian tanker and then a Russian whaler came close by to check he was alright, and although he couldn't speak with them due to the language barrier he felt a bit cheered by their company.

April 18 saw him suffer another blow when the wind speed indicator broke down and despite all efforts he couldn't fix it. He had to make a decision either to return to South Africa or keep going. Finally he decided to keep going. If he could not make Melbourne non-stop, he would head for Bunbury on the WA coast. The job then became heart-breaking. Mist was everywhere, and with no radio, only faint glimpses of the sky, and moving as slow as a tortoise across the never-ending waves he wondered about his family in Melbourne. He had two sisters he had never seen

and he tried to picture them at home. And his parents would worry if he didn't show up soon.



*Bill Nance on board Cardinal Vertue*

Bill Nance won't ever forget Monday, April 29 1962. His log entry for that day read:

*1800 hours: Wind NE. Force about eight or nine. Barometer 27.06 Stowed mainsail. The rain has now stopped but oh boy is the wind blowing. It's really screaming through the rigging.*

*1945 hours: Wind west at gale force, the barometer rising to 27.15. Never have I seen a wind like this. The surface of the sea is white and the flying spray like pebbles. It has become huge. I crawled along the deck as I didn't dare stand.*

At 3 am he found he had lost the mainmast. He was trying to make an inspection when there was a great hiss of water. The boat was submerged for an instant and he was washed into the sea.



Nance can remember cartwheeling around under the boat at the end of his safety line and wondering how much longer he could hold his breath. Then he surfaced, his legs felt as if they were broken but he scrambled on board again, grateful to be alive. "God, what a mess! The mast was in the water on the port side and the boom was on the deck on the starboard side. The staysail was ripped to shreds."

For almost 24 hours the seas continued their battering. Finally Nance made up a jury rig. It was like a pocket handkerchief compared to the amount of sail he should have carried, but it was the only way he could continue the trip. Western Australia was still more than 2000 miles away so he forgot all about Melbourne and trusted he would reach land – any land – safely.

Over the next few days the wind abated and he cleaned up the hurricane's mess. Everything below was drenched but he was too tired to care. The dangers seemed to have passed.

His log recorded:

*May 7, 1015 hours: Low cloud on horizon. Is there another depression on the way? How bad will this one be?*

*1130 hours: Hove-to under the trysail. The strain on the rigging is too severe. Wish the damn north-east wind would go somewhere else. I've crossed the last fold in my chart so, if nothing else, Australia is in view on paper.*

Under the jury rig *Cardinal Vertue* was stumbling all over the place. Nance was still trying to head north but a check on his bearings on May 9 showed he was still south of the 40th parallel. On May 10 he finally managed to get the boat on to self-steering and enjoyed a few hours of uninterrupted sleep. He calculated it would be at least another month at the rate he was moving before he could hope to reach Australia.

On May 13 he found the boat was almost exactly on course to Fremantle. The changing winds were causing trouble. He could not rely on self-steering to keep on course. He was still eating, sleeping in oilskins and praying for a hot bath. On May 23 *Cardinal Vertue* was still 700 miles out of Fremantle.

On May 27 Nance started to count the days instead of the weeks before he would be home once more. But not for another week did he sight the WA coastline. The first sighting was the Rottneest Island light. Bill's father had been stationed there during World War II. He reached Fremantle the

following morning, and this article appeared on the front page of a Perth newspaper:

### **Yachtsman Sails 6,800 Miles Alone**

*After a single-handed 6,800-mile voyage from Cape Town lasting 76 days, a yachtsman sailed a 32ft yawl [25ft sloop] into Fremantle Harbour yesterday morning.*

*He is William Nance (25) of Melbourne. His 3-ton boat, the Cardinal Vertue, carried only a transistor radio, which was out of action. Mr Nance said on arriving at Fremantle, that he had sailed the yawl from England.*

*He had not been in contact with a ship since he left Cape Town in March. After the boat was dismasted in a gale he sailed it under a jury rig for 40 days. Two days ago, the yawl was almost swamped in the worst weather he experienced during the trip.*

*He intended to spend the winter in Western Australia before sailing the Cardinal Vertue to Melbourne on the last stage of his voyage home (West Australian, 6 June 1963).*

Another front page story in the same newspaper read:

### **Winds Lash City, Delay Big Liner**

*Winds of 60 mph [118 kph] and driving rain prevented the liner Oriana from leaving Fremantle Harbour yesterday afternoon, lashed theatre crowds in Perth and brought down power lines in many parts of the metropolitan area. The 42,000-ton Oriana, bringing 2,000 passengers from Britain to Australia, is now expected to sail at 6.30 am today.*

*Blustery winds also delayed the ship for two hours when she arrived in Gage Roads yesterday morning. The liner was due to berth at 7.30 am but when she arrived in Gage Roads the signal station was recording gusts of 46 mph and it was considered too risky to manoeuvre the ship into the harbor. The Oriana eventually berthed during a lull in the storm. Soon after the ship berthed, the signal station recorded a gust of 58 mph.*

MHA member Murray Shaw recalls: One cold wintry afternoon in 1963 when it was howling a gale and Fremantle port had been closed to shipping for several days with the storm signal hoisted up at the Signal Station, a dis-



tressed yacht limped into the harbour under a jury rig. My employer told me its mast had broken halfway across from South Africa and its owner needed assistance as it was now being battered alongside the wharf at Victoria Quay. I could only think, as well, of what a ‘hammering’ he must have taken in those huge seas before making it into port. I, of course, knew well how rough it can get entering the harbor between the north and south moles (breakwaters) in adverse weather. He must have displayed fine seamanship to carry out this in his disabled boat with its small emergency fragment of sail.

I duly went down to Victoria Quay with a workboat and towed the small yacht across the harbour to North Wharf, dropping it in between two cargo ships where it was much better protected from the elements on this sheltered side.

After both boats were properly secured, I went aboard and had a chat with the skipper. A friendly unassuming fellow about my own age (25). He told me his name was Bill Nance and he had bought the boat in the UK to sail home to Melbourne. He said he had known nothing about sailing until he got into the Bay of Biscay and then he learned plenty in a hell of a hurry. I noted he had a sign at the entrance to the cabin that boldly proclaimed: WIND THE BLOODY CHRONOMETER!!

He told me his mast had broken in half in huge seas and how he had to set up a jury rig to continue. He seemed completely unfazed by his ordeal and in fact appeared ‘as cool as a cucumber’. Of course he was in a fairly exhausted state but he said a warm bath was what he craved most. So after taking the workboat (with Bill) back to its berth in the Swan River at the mouth of the harbour, I drove him to my parents’ State home in Hamilton Hill where I still lived. I was pretty embarrassed that our circumstances were poor; Dad was an invalid pensioner while I was one of eight children with four still living at home. Anyway we flashed up the old wood-chip heater, Bill luxuriated in a hot bath and then dear Mum made him a meal and we set him up in a bed for the night. The following morning I took Bill back to his yacht on my way to work.

The *Sunday Times* reported:

**Lone sailor tells of historic voyage**

**More daring than Bligh’s**

*Bill Nance, a red-haired 25-year-old yachtsman from Wallaby Creek, Victoria, is the first*

*man to sail alone from England to Australia via the Cape of Good Hope. He arrived in Perth this week after a voyage more daring and longer than Captain Bligh’s after the mutiny on the Bounty.*

*Nance survived being washed overboard in the Roaring Forties ... sailed more than 2500 miles under a jury rig after the main mast of his 25ft sloop, Cardinal Vertue snapped in two ... and arrived in Fremantle after 76 days in weather described as the worst in memory.*

**Will go on**

*Bill Nance caused one of the biggest commotions seen on the Fremantle waterfront when he appeared in the harbour on Wednesday night.*

*For the past week storms had lashed the coast. One overseas freighter had returned to port with two dead and five injured after being forced to heave to 500 miles out in the Indian Ocean as she made for South Africa.*

*An ocean tug failed to keep in tow a freighter being towed to Hong Kong and the ship is still being pounded into a watery grave on a reef north of Fremantle.*

*When local yachtsman heard of his epic voyage they turned up in force to give him a welcome and tow his boat to safe anchorage at the Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club.*

*Before he left Perth for Melbourne on Friday night [to see his family] Bill Nance said he was undaunted by his experiences. He planned to repair Cardinal Vertue and next spring get ready to sail to South America and up the River Plate. This would make him the first yachtsman ever to circulate the globe alone.*

Editor’s note: This last sentence is not correct. Bill Nance was in fact the 14th solo circumnavigator. Although Nance was the 15th to start, Harry Pidgeon circumnavigated twice, firstly in 1921–25 (the second solo circumnavigation after Joshua Slocum) and subsequently again in 1932–37.

To be continued.....



The vessel on the left in the editor's photo above is the steam trawler *Viola* abandoned at Grytviken on South Georgia. Built in Hull by Cook, Welton & Gremmell and launched on 17 January 1906, *Viola* is the oldest surviving steam trawler, and a group in Hull are seeking £1.75 million to get it back there.

*Viola* was built for the Hellyer Steam Fishing Company, and was requisitioned by the Admiralty in September 1914, soon after the outbreak of World War I. As HMT *Viola* it was armed with a 3-pounder gun and carried out anti-submarine duties around the Shetland Islands and Fair Isle. Later in the war it was transferred to the Tyne and re-armed with a 12-pounder gun and depth charges and also fitted with hydrophones. During service it was involved in the sinking of two German submarines, *UB-30* and *UB-115*.

In February 1916 *Viola* was released from Admiralty service, but the Hellyer family had suffered major losses during the war with 22 of their fleet of 45 having been sunk. In 1920 *Viola* was sold to Norwegian interests who renamed the trawler *Kapduen*, and later *Dias*. It was converted to a whale catcher with a harpoon platform being built in the bow, and the bridge moved forward of the

funnel. Whaling was carried out off the coast of Angola.

In 1927 *Dias* was sold to Compañía Argentina de Pesca SA and taken to Grytviken where it was used to hunt elephant seals. It was also used for expeditions and exploratory work by various organisations, including the British South Georgia Expedition of 1954–55 and the Bird Island Expedition in 1958. During 1956 the boiler was altered from coal-burning to being oil-fired.

The Argentinian owners transferred their whaling interests to the British company Albion Star in 1960 and *Dias* returned to operating under the British flag. When the whaling station at Grytviken closed in 1964 *Dias* was laid up together with another vessel, *Albatross*. A caretaker was left in charge, but he departed in 1971 and the two ships later sank.

A major environmental clean-up of the South Georgia whaling station in the late 1980s resulted in the two vessels being re-floated and dragged to their present position with their bows well up on the beach.

It is to be hoped that the money can be raised.