

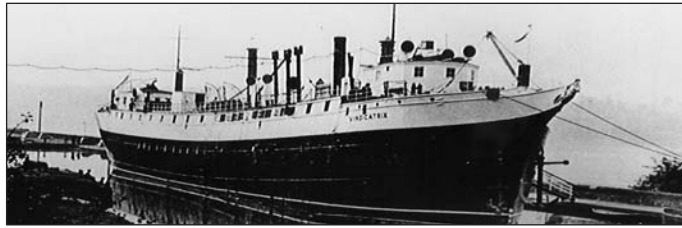


# T.S. VINDICATRIX ASSOCIATION NSW-ACT

*A part of the world wide Vindi family*



January 2010



Issue no. 71

Yet though her splendour may have ceased to be she played her sovereign part in making me.-John Masefield



The Movers & Shakers Mick and Mike



Welsh ladies Anne and Jacqui –sweetly singing  
“We’ll Keep a welcome in the Hillside”

## The 2009 Christmas Party

At the Occidental hotel was a great success the new venue with it’s easy access, a pleasant room, good service and above all a cool place to be on a hot December afternoon was appreciated by all,

Enough as you can see to get everyone into the singing mode.

Thanks again to Mike, Mick, Debbie and Norma for getting things moving so well, as they always do.

It was good to see Len Britton back on deck and say hello to Jim and Jennifer Fullerton from Walkerton in QLD who we discovered stay at this hotel most Decembers to visit family and do the Christmas shopping.

And to welcome Dan and Catriona Nicholson (Bottom left photo) Vindi people all the way from Inverness in Bonnie Scotland.



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BARBARA MAUREEN



KEVIN PAULINE



LINDA BILL



PETER CATRIONA



SAM



VERA



JACQUI



DEBBIE

Our SANTA, possibly the only Jewish Santa in captivity, as usual had a ball, he enjoys the perks of the job. Santa's helper, Mick, was muttering something early on in the proceedings about giving the job away next year but after Santa let him hug all the young talent he's coming back for more in 2010— when he gets his de-fibrillator recharged!



MICK



MICK



WHERE WAS YOU MICK



Carol singers extraordinaire— Once heard never forgotten!!



**CROSSED THE BAR**

**John Desmond Fisher MBE 21 May 1920 – 24 September 2009  
Gravesend Sea School 1936**



John Desmond Fisher was born in Brandon, Manitoba, on 21 May 1920, the eldest of three sons of Nesta and Thomas Fisher. His two brothers pre-deceased him; Robbie was an officer in the Merchant Navy, and the youngest brother, Gordon, a Pilot Officer in the Royal Air Force, was killed in a flying accident at the age of twenty-one.

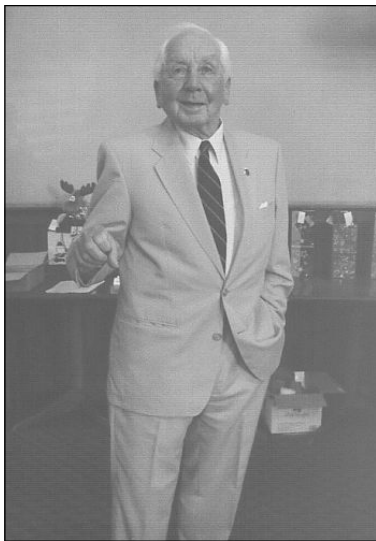
He was nine years of age when the Great Depression started, causing Nesta to take her three sons home to England. On leaving school in 1936, he joined the merchant navy as a deck boy, working his way up through the Hawsepape he obtained his second mates certificate, setting himself onto his lifetime career as a MN officer. Sailing from Southampton John's early ships were Union Castle Cunard, NZSC, Federal boats then when the Ministry of War Transport took over a stream of Empire boats.

In February 1942 on the NZSC 'OPAWA' he was 'discharged at sea' when she was torpedoed off Newfoundland. The crew took to three lifeboats, only one of which was to survive, and this was the boat in which the ship's captain had ordered John to join him.

After a week, they were picked up by a Dutch freighter, the cold, damp conditions had led John to contract the painful condition known as trench foot. Put ashore in New York, John was billeted with a certain Professor Parrott, and in later years, he was to recall having dinner with Albert Einstein when the great man came to visit.

After his recovery, John returned to sea, this time with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, engaged in the task of supplying the Navy. After the War, John remained with the RFA and back in England in 1947, he met a young lady named Gwendoline. they were married in Portsmouth on 2 July 1947.

The outbreak of the Korean War on 27 June 1950 saw John once again in a combat zone, this time on the hospital ship HMS Maine. John's years of dedicated service were rewarded when he was promoted to Captain in 1960. Postings followed in Malta, and then in Singapore, where he was Marine Superintendent. The sea was in John's blood,

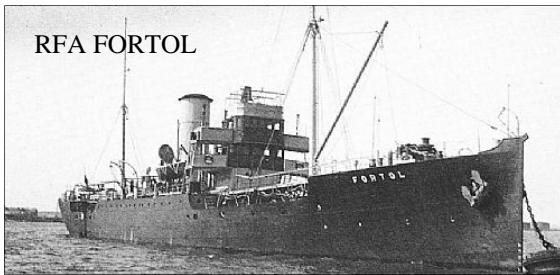


however, and he subsequently returned to seagoing service with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. His last command was HMS Apple Leaf, which was later transferred to the Royal Australian Navy as captain of the Westralia. John retired in 1980, and spent a great deal of the following ten years caring for his ageing mother and other close relatives. In his retirement year, a working lifetime of selfless service to his country was recognised with the award of the Order of Commander of the British Empire. The day of his investiture at Buckingham Palace by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother was one of the proudest days of his life.

John and Gwen's son, Nick, had moved to Australia in 1969, during the course of frequent visits they had come to know and love this country. They made the move to Australia in April 1991, and settled in Canberra. John loved family life, perhaps as only a seafarer who has perforce spent long periods away, can. His great granddaughter Isobel was the apple of his eye, and he loved watching her grow up week by week, in a way that he had not been able to watch the progress of his own son. His family remembers a calm man with a good sense of humour, who made friends very easily. As Gwen put it, he would "talk to anybody". One of his favourite sayings was "if you are nice to people, invariably they will be nice to you in return."

John loved his garden and planted trees named for members of his family, he enjoyed club life, and was active in the local Probus Club. John also loved to get away with Gwen to the beach house they owned at for a number of years at Narooma.

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RFA FORTOL

*John Mears was in touch with the family to express our condolences. What a career John Fisher had, a remarkable life from a start at Gravesend. He certainly had a remarkable knack of serving on some remarkable ships, each worth their own story, the 'RFA Fortol' built in 1916 and served in both world wars! The RFA hospital ship 'Maine' he was captain of in 1950 for the Korean war was built as the Italian liner 'Leonardo da Vinci' in 1924, captured by the British in 1941-became the 'Empire Clyde' serving as a hospital ship.*



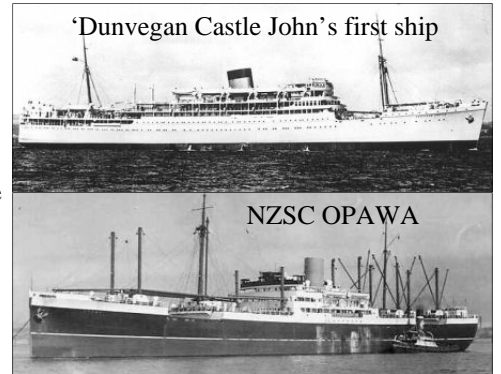
PACIFIC EXPORTER



Leonardo Da Vinci - RFA Maine



HMAS WESTRALIA



## America's Merchant Navy in WW2.

4



NSW Vindi member Don Jenkins (V45) of green Pt. NSW has a younger brother, John, living in Los Angeles who keeps him up to date on shipping topics and how American WWII merchant seamen are faring in their search for recognition for having served their country in a very dangerous occupation as civilian seamen. The US veterans are at present pushing for some monetary reward or pension to be awarded to them for not being included in the GI Bill of Rights that was awarded after WWII to its servicemen.

John also sent an interesting newspaper article written by John Bogert, an ex-US merchant seaman, in which he related the story of the SS Lane Victory, docked in San Pedro, the port area of LA. The ship is probably the only one of the 540 'Victory' class merchant ships still afloat that were built by American shipyards. They were larger than the Liberty ships, being designed as 11,000-tonners, as against the much better known mass-produced Liberty ships of 7,200 tons, of which nearly 1,700 came down the slipways during the war years. Alas, the long-time forecast for this ship to be kept, not only as a floating museum but also capable of going to sea with paying passengers on board, is not good. As with most ventures of this kind, instigated by enthusiasts who want to preserve mercantile history, particularly that of the 20th century, grants from government agencies are practically non-existent. Something like \$US750,000 may have to be found so that the ship can be dry docked to seek its next certificate, allowing it to get up steam and head out in to the Pacific with paying passengers. The volunteers that man her all have maritime certificates. They donate their services freely so that those on board can get the feel of what it was like at sea on one of these now ancient ships. Not only that, they want the passengers to know what the nation owes to the unsung civilian sailors of America's merchant navy, and the sacrifices they made during WWII. During July, August, and September paying passengers can book for short cruises for as little as \$US125.00 a day.

For that, they not only get well looked after, they also survive a mock air attack, realistically staged and recalling something of the worst of wartime days.

No one can doubt the patriotism the Americans displayed for getting things done. In less than a year after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour the tide of war had turned in the Allies' favour. The strivings of its citizens had really turned their country into the 'Arsenal of Democracy.' Something that Britain's Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in one of his inspiring wartime speeches in 1940, implored America to do. However, there was one area in which Germany still had the ascendancy:

German U-boats were sinking Allied merchant ships faster than they could be replaced. By June 1943, with the help of long-range, radar-equipped Liberator bombers and America's newly-built shipyards, where mass production methods were building Liberty ships in two weeks (an un-

dreamed of shipbuilding possibility in 1939), the U-boat menace had been overcome.

Not only were Allied shipyards now building ships faster than the enemy could sink them, U-boats were being destroyed faster than Germany could build them. The Battle of the Atlantic had been won against a tenacious enemy though at terrible cost, Britain's merchant seaman bearing the brunt of it. The personnel of the US, British and Canadian navies, protecting the allied convoys, had also

proved to be up to their task.

America's merchant fleet lost 1,614 ships of all sizes; the LA Roll of Honour lists 6,800 crewmen who perished serving their country in every theatre of the war. Like Britain's London Tower Hill Honour Roll, there are doubts that it is complete. Not enough attention had been devoted

during the war years to keeping merchant navy casualty lists accurate. American ships loaded to the gunwales in US East Coast ports were often in the majority in the Arctic convoys supplying the Russians, who were thrusting the German army back from their home soil. Even so, in spite of the Allies having command of the air and the sea lanes, it was not until D-Day, June 6, 1944, that a sufficient arsenal of arms had been built up in the UK, enabling an Allied army to be landed on the beaches of Normandy, with Germany capitulating on May 7, 1945.



The LA Merchant Marine memorial black marble walls engraved with the names of the dead.

The last American ship to be sunk by a German U-boat was the SS Black Point, torpedoed on the evening of May 5, 1945, twenty-four hours after Admiral Donitz had instructed his U-boat commanders to cease hostilities against all Allied shipping. Whether the veteran captain of U-853 ever received that order or chose to ignore it will never be known. The attack was made in the shallow waters off Rhode Island. The U-Boat Captain made little effort to escape the area and the U-boat was hunted down next day by

American anti-submarine warships.

There were no survivors.



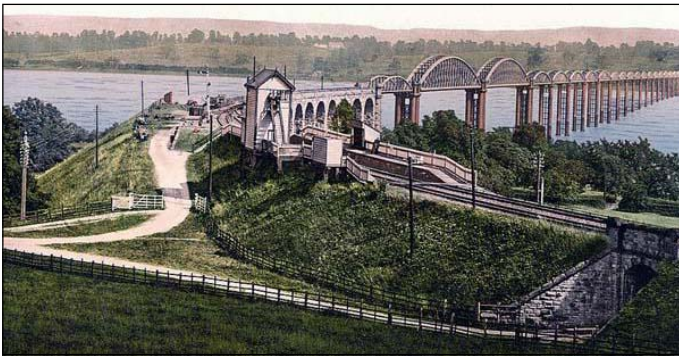
Centre piece statue at LA MN memorial, depicts men climbing from a raft up a ladder to a rescue ship.



SS Blackpoint

## THOSE 22 SPANS OF OURS

Fred Saunders, one of our Newcastle members, often sends me cuttings pertaining to things maritime and Vindi. Quite some years ago he sent me a cutting from the Forest & Wye Valley Review of October 27, 2000 which was the 40th anniversary of the collision by a tug and barges with OUR 22-span bridge. I promptly filed the article for later use, and four months ago I was compelled by a higher authority to shift my office from one bedroom to another. When the excavator had got the heavy out I spent some time sifting old papers and came across Fred's cutting and thought ah! here's a good story.



Above is a view of the bridge from the Lydney end when it was brand new. Those Victorian engineers and architects really excelled at making their creations graceful and beautiful.

Our bridge wasn't the start of the story though.

To the Victorians, the London to South Wales route was an important one - but a big obstacle got in the way: the Severn Estuary. In the 1860s, rail travellers on this route would have had to break their journey on reaching the Severn and take a ferry to rejoin a train on the other side. Unfortunately, the Severn Estuary is known for its treacherous tides and bad weather, making for an uncomfortable interlude on an otherwise pleasant journey.

The Victorians produced some great engineers and they were prepared to accept the technical challenge of tunnelling under the Severn - unaware of one hidden danger, the Great Spring! The project began in 1873 and six years later they hit the Great Spring. Only 152 metres separated each tunnel running from the English and the Welsh shore. Within 24 hours the tunnel was flooded to river level, thankfully without any loss of life.

Huge pumps were brought in to try to pump out the water, but the spring was so big that they couldn't cope. A diver by the name of Lambert bravely entered the workings and managed, with considerable difficulty, to seal off the spring. But it wasn't until 1881 that the Great Spring was sealed off behind a giant headwall.

Since that day a massive pump has continued to pump out 50 million litres of water per day, which is now sold to a local water company.

The Great Spring persisted to give problems throughout the remainder of the time spent in constructing the tunnel. As did the weather, and even a large tidal wave gave rise to flooding. But on December 1, 1886 a regular passenger service was opened, cutting the journey from London to South Wales by one hour.

Work had begun two years earlier in 1875 on the construction of the Severn Railway Bridge, which crossed the river a little upstream of Lydney and Sharpness. There was to be a lot of jealousy during the period of construction between both the tunnel and bridge companies until the bridge was finally opened in 1879. Today, the tunnel has modern diesel express trains roaring through, but the maintenance of the workings is continuous. Every Sunday the tunnel is closed to allow teams of engineers in to carry out vital work to ensure the safety of the passengers that use it.

Our bridge was built by the Severn Bridge Railway company to transport coal from the Forest of Dean. Work began in 1875 and was completed in 1879. The cast-iron bridge, which was 4,162 feet long and 70 feet above high water, had 22 spans and had stone abutments made from local limestone. The span across the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal operated as a swing bridge. The bridge was single-track, and it took approximately 30 miles off the journey through Gloucester.

The bridge predated the construction of the Severn Tunnel, a dozen miles or so downstream, by seven years. It was known by locals as 'The White Elephant' (*Cheeky devils!*). Until the Severn

Road Bridge was opened in 1966, the Severn Railway Bridge was often referred to as the Severn Bridge.

In spring 1943 a flight of three Spitfires was being delivered by ATA pilots, including one woman, Ann Wood, from their Castle Bromwich factory to Whitchurch. As it was low tide, the lead pilot, Johnnie Jordan, decided to fly under the bridge. Some time

later, Ann Wood repeated this underfly - without realising that

this time it was high tide and there was 30 ft less headroom. This was not the only instance of pilots buzzing the bridge; it was seemingly so common at one time that a local policeman was tasked with recording serial numbers.

### Tuesday 25th October 1960

That evening several river trade vessels departed downstream Severn ports for upstream destinations.

The tankers concerned were the ARKENDALE H, loaded with 300 tons of black oil, bound from Swansea to Worcester and the WASTDALE H, loaded with 350 tons of petroleum spirit, bound from Avonmouth to Worcester, both operated by John Harker Limited. Several craft had left Avonmouth that evening including the WYESDALE H, tug ADDIE and tug ROBERT A bound for Lydney towing three lighters loaded with logs.

There was no sign of fog on leaving Avonmouth, and the craft proceeded steadily upstream towards Sharpness accompanied by vessels from Swansea.





On reaching Berkeley Power Station about 10 p.m. the fog descended very quickly and the crews of the vessels were alerted to listen for the fog horn on Sharpness Pier.

The ARKENDALE H was already swinging off Sharpness, stemming the tide waiting to enter the port when the tug AD-DIE and tow came across the barge's bow, forcing skipper George Thompson to go full astern. A collision was avoided, but the tanker barge lost momentum against the tide and was drifting back towards the old dock entrance. George Thompson suddenly saw another vessel come out of the fog and brush against his barge. He hailed the other craft to ask if they knew where they were. The reply was no, they didn't know where they were. The other vessel was the WASTDALE H, her skipper was James Dew, who had only been on her for three days as his own barge, the BP MANUFACTURER, was in dry dock. When the fog had first descended he had had a slight collision with the WYESDALE H and then decided to find the river bank until things quietened down, but on hearing the fog horn very plainly began to make for the piers at Sharpness. Unfortunately he went past Sharpness Piers and suddenly saw the White House located near to the old dock entrance, whereby he began to stem the flow of the tide and make back to the piers. Soon after he heard a vessel blowing and at the same time saw her lights and recognised her as the ARKENDALE H. The two vessels converged on one another, both skippers fighting with the wheel to bring them apart. Unknown to skipper George Thompson, crewmen of the WASTDALE H had secured a mooring rope to both barges, which made it impossible in the fierce current to steer the barges to the safety of Sharpness Piers. Soon the Severn Railway Bridge was upon them, so Jimmy Dew gave his barge everything it had in the way of engine revolutions, but then he found that the WASTDALE H's stern was going under the bridge. The stern cleared the bridge columns, but the bow swung across at an angle hit a column with the port bow. At this time he put the vessel into full astern to cant the barge off the column when suddenly he was flung from the wheelhouse into the water. At this time a girder from the bridge dropped, falling on to the barge. He climbed back on to the WASTDALE H, which by now was on her side, when he realised that she was also on fire. So he struggled to the starboard side and made a jump for the ARKENDALE H. But the ARKENDALE H had also been struck by a falling bridge girder, which had sliced through the barge just forward of the wheelhouse.

Inside, George Thompson was struck by a flying object which caused him to lose consciousness for a short time. He revived and went to the stern of the vessel where he saw his mate and engineer. Knowing they couldn't swim, he gave them each a life ring and told them to jump into the river together. George jumped, but the other two held back and remained on the wrecked barge.

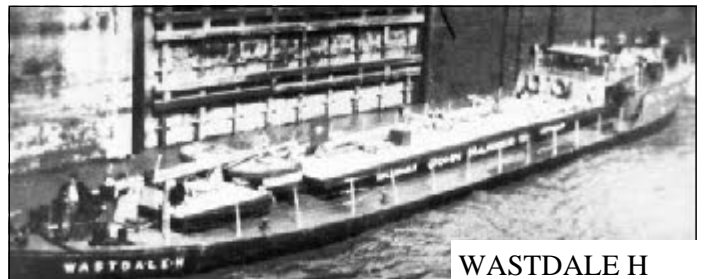
On board, as he jumped from the WASTDALE H to the ARKENDALE H, James Dew found two men, the mate, Percy Simmonds, and engineer, Jack Cooper, deciding which was the best way to escape. The ARKENDALE H's propeller was still turning, with the stern high out of the water. All three men decided to jump, but Jack Cooper as he jumped caught his back on the revolving propeller. The river was ablaze for two miles along the surface of the water and Jack decided he would rather drown than burn to death, so he discarded his life ring and sank below the surface of the Severn. But a vision of his family made him fight for his life. On reaching the surface not only did he find his life ring again, but a clear patch of water and was later rescued, a very exhausted man.

Five other crewmen were not so lucky. Percy Simmonds drowned, so did the deckhand off the WASTDALE H, Malcolm Hart, mate Jack Dudfield, engineer Alex Bullock and 2nd engineer on the ARKENDALE H, Robert Niblett, WASTDALE H skipper Jimmy Dew was rescued three hours later upriver from the bridge on the Lydney side. He was uninjured and was the only survivor from his vessel.

Skipper of the ARKENDALE H, George Thompson-Left, thought he was going to die as he swam with all his strength from the flames which encircled the two barges. As he jumped from his barge over the flames into the thick black oily water he heard an explosion: the WASTDALE H was just one mass of flames. He eventually swam from one bank to the other, a distance of about one mile, and when he reached the bank on the Lydney side, just sat there hollering. A nearby farmer heard his cries for help and helped him back to the warmth of the farmhouse.



ARKENDALE H



WASTDALE H

The hero of the night was another tanker barge skipper, Tommy Carter, master of the SHELL TRAVELLER, safely tied up in Sharpness docks. He heard a great whoosh! as the tankers burst into flames and described a great glow in the sky. Attempts were made to contact the two tanker barges by radio, but received no reply. Tommy Carter and his crew went to the pier, found a small boat and loaded it on a lorry. It was taken to Purton and launched into the river from the marshy land. With Tommy Carter in the boat was a local carpenter, Mr Henderson, and both had to row in a zigzag fashion to avoid the flames. Jack Cooper was the first man they found, exhausted, hanging onto his life ring, grateful to be alive, and soon to be reunited with his family. Later at the public inquiry, Carter was praised on behalf of a Government minister for his leadership and courage shown that night.

Workers were strengthening the spans across the bridge on that particular night but they had retired to the signal box to watch Henry Cooper fighting in a heavyweight boxing match on TV.

The Severn Railway Bridge was finally demolished in 1967, the iron girders being sold to Chile for a road viaduct.

All that remains today is the circular stone structure of the swing bridge on the side of the Canal.

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Looking down over the Vindi's old berth to the remains of the swing bridge. August 2006

**The River Severn** is always lovely to look at, but is often treacherous to sail on. Wikipedia gives this list of accidents for just the 1900s:

**1919-08-04:** On this Bank Holiday Monday pleasure boats were taking people on trips between Gloucester and Stourport. One boat, the May Queen, came downriver passing the Hampstall Ferry, (located between Stourport and Holt Fleet), at quite a speed. The ferryboat lurched, and all 17 passengers were tipped into the Severn. Some said the ferry was overloaded. That day nine people were drowned.

**1939-02-04:** The First Severn Bridge Disaster: three tanker barges overturned in the estuary off Sharpness. They were taken with the tide into the piers of the Severn Railway Bridge. Of the eight man crew, six men were killed

**1947-04-03:** A British ship, the 1,580-ton Stancliffe, went aground off Sharpness loaded with 3,000 tons of timber. Local shipyard engineer, Ivor Langford, managed to cut the vessel in two and sail both parts down to Cardiff Docks.

There the two halves were joined together and the ship sailed again under the new name of Gripfast.

*(An amazing story of skill and determination & a most fitting new name Ed.)*

**1951-03-23:** A 4,845-ton Egyptian ship, Ramses II, bound for Sharpness loaded with 7,000 tons of maize from Russia, ran aground on Lydney Sands. Unable to float her off her cargo had to be unloaded out in the estuary into smaller craft. Eventually she became a total loss and occasionally the wreck can be seen above the mud at low water.

**1960-10-25:** The Second Severn Bridge Disaster: related in this story.

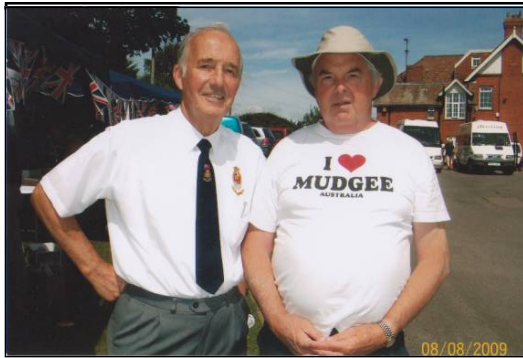
**1961-02-16:** The Loss of the BP Explorer: The BP Explorer was loaded and bound for Sharpness from Swansea. As the loaded tanker barge made her way up the Severn Estuary she suddenly turned over. It was not until the following day that the tanker barge was seen bouncing her way, upside down, through the wrecked Severn Railway Bridge. Her crew of five men were killed. The BP Explorer was salvaged and rebuilt as the BP Driver, but on January 31, 1962 she was driven aground at The Nash, although fortunately her crew were saved.

**1961-11-19:** During construction of the Severn Bridge three men fell into the Severn Estuary. The alarm was raised and a rescue boat crewed by two men set sail from Chepstow. Unknown to the crew of the rescue boat, the three men had been picked up safely by the last crossing of the day of one of the Aust to Beachley ferry boats, the Severn Princess. Two tanker barges were coming down empty from Sharpness, the Wyedale H and the Wharfedale H, tied together and both being steered from the Wyedale H. The rescue launch was not showing navigation lights and could not be seen, and suddenly both empty tanker barges collided with the launch. One man was saved, but the other crew member of the rescue launch was drowned.

**1990-09-04:** Three men were working in one of the gantries attached to the M48 Severn Bridge carrying out routine maintenance work. Suddenly with a loud bang the gantry gave way plunging the three men into the Severn. Painter Mark Seaton, 19, survived the 150ft drop, but Brian Phelps (44) and Eric Sullivan (46) were killed.

*Information for this story from Wikipedia, [bbc.co.uk/gloucestershire](http://bbc.co.uk/gloucestershire), and [www.severntales.co.uk/](http://www.severntales.co.uk/) the latter a website by Chris Witts, who has had a long career linked with the River Severn. At the time of the 1960 rail bridge disaster he was a 16 year-old Deck Boy with the same barge company. In 1966 he joined the Gloucester City Fire brigade, and on his retirement in 1995 he was offered a mate's job on the two grain barges working from the flour mill at Tewkesbury to Sharpness. Allied Mills Ltd began operating the CHACELEY and TIRLEY in the spring of 1993 following their being laid up for the previous eight years. Each grain barge carried 250 tonnes of grain and were crewed by two men. In 1995 the skipper, Lionel Langford, died (I think he was a Vindi Boy,) and Chris was offered the skipper's job. It was during this time that he began writing his numerous books about the River Severn. In 1998 the two grain barges were laid up again, but Chris found himself other work as skipper of the little mud hoppers which took dredged mud from Gloucester to the discharge plant at Purton. That work finally finished in 2000, Chris then became a local councilor, Sheriff & Deputy mayor of Gloucester and Webmaster of the popular [www.severntales](http://www.severntales)*

That bridge across the Severn was twenty two spans wide  
 And we used it as a counter, starting on the other side.  
 For a 'bridge boy' at the Vindi had twenty two days more  
 And he counted off those arches from Wales to England's shore.  
 When only seven spans remained he knew he'd stood the test,  
 He then became a 'pool boy', the envy of the rest.  
 For a 'pool boy' at the Vindi had seven days to go,  
 Seven spans to Gloucestershire, seven days so slow.  
 It's a pity that the engineers who built the famous bridge  
 Never knew the story of all those Vindi kids  
 Who used those spans and arches to wish away their days,  
 Time they'd gladly use again in many different ways.  
 That bridge is part of history now along with our old ship  
 But it lives in all our memories as part of that great trip  
 Along life's chequered highway that led us from the place  
 Where a bridge became a stepping-stone  
 At the start of life's long race.  
 David Partridge.



**VINDI TRAVELLERS**

The only NSW member to attend the Sharpness Vindi reunion in 2009 (as far as I know) was Cavan Murray who I'm sorry to say I haven't met as yet, from the T-shirt he is bravely sporting in the picture below with Roy Derham you can see he is from Mudgee and proud of it!  
 You can imagine the hundreds of times people at Sharpness must have said "were the bloody hell is Mudgee"  
 Mudgee is a lovely town and I think we should have a Vindi Weekend there.



Victoria Drummond outside Buckingham Palace following the presentation of her MBE

**Merchant Navy News –well news to me anyway**

Victoria Alexandrina Drummond MBE (14 October 1894–25 December 1980), was the first woman marine engineer in Britain and first woman member of Institute of Marine Engineers. She was born at Errol, the daughter of Capt. Malcolm Drummond, JP and Geraldine Margaret Tyssen-Amherst, **and a goddaughter of Queen Victoria**. She went to sea in the 1920s, initiating a career then thought unsuitable for a lady.  
 From 1916 to 1918 she served as apprentice at the Northern Garage in Perth and from 1918 to 1922 as apprentice at the Caledon Ship Works in Dundee. After completing her apprenticeship at the Caledon Shipyard, she joined the Blue Funnel Line's SS Anchises in 1922 as Tenth Engineer. In the ensuing 40 years she sailed on 49 voyages, which took her from her home in Megginch Castle in Scotland, to all around the world. She continued her career through hardship and discrimination, carrying out the physically gruelling work of

the engine room as well as supervising a sometimes reluctant and prejudiced work force.  
 Her courage during the Second World War was recognised when she was awarded the MBE and the Lloyd's War Medal for Bravery at Sea for single-handedly keeping the engines of the SS Bonita going during an attack by a German bomber.  
 She was the first British woman to serve as Chief Engineer, in 1959, and throughout her distinguished career she maintained her conviction that if you were good at something and could be of useful service, than you should be allowed to do your job. She retired in 1962,  
 Her biography, *The Remarkable Life Of Victoria Drummond - Marine Engineer*, was written by her niece, Cherry Drummond, 16th Baroness Strange. Available at online bookshops

**James Gardner 1925 – 2009 V1943**

*This letter and photos were sent to us by Jim's family*

It is with great sadness that we have to inform you Vindi Boy James Gardner passed away suddenly on September 6, 2009 at home.

Reflecting on his life as a Vindi Boy gave Jim a sense of achievement and an awareness of responsibility for others and the duty of command that he would carry all of his life.

Jim was born in Bermondsey, South London, on June 1, 1925 to Harry and Ellen.

The youngest of three children, Ellen Rose was the eldest followed by her brother Harry. Jim attended St Michaels Church of England School in Camden Town for 11 years and left taking up work as an apprentice tool-maker.

Life at this time was not easy – the Great Depression and the death of his sister, five year-old Ellen-Rose from meningitis. At 11 years of age Jim was called out from school and met by his older brother Harry. There, outside the school, the 14 year-old told the 11 year-old that their mother had died at home from a sudden heart attack.

At 18, Jim's brother Harry had joined the Merchant Navy and was on board the rescue ship "Zaafaren" which was sunk on the infamous PQ17 "Convoy to Hell". Harry survived this ordeal but not long after joined another rescue ship, the SS St Sunnivor, which capsized from ice accumulation in the North Atlantic and sank with all hands January 22, 1943

On February 15, 1943 Jim joined the Vindicatrix training ship based at Sharpness. Jim later served on the TSS Empress Queen – a troop carrier which was used in training for invasions.



Jim in his Sea Cadet days  
C 1935

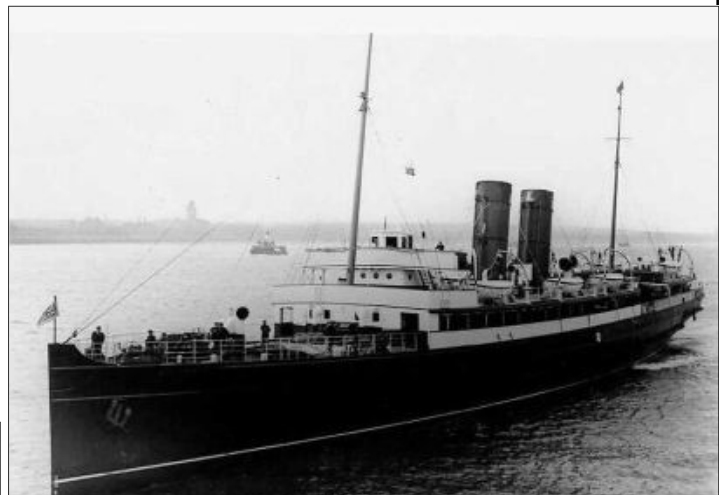


TSS Biarritz -peacetime paddle steamer wartime trooper

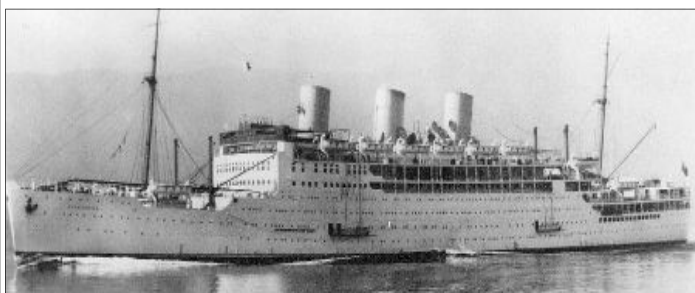


in Peacetime an IOM ferry

He then served on the landing ship Infantry TSS Biarritz making several cross-Channel trips with troops, which included the D- Day landings. Then he served on the SS Gurden Gates a 1700-ton Army supply ship to France and Belgium, and the Victoria another peacetime ferry used as a troop carrier. He was in the Suez Canal on the RMS Strathnaver, that was bringing troops home from India on Victory Europe Day June 8, 1946.



TSS Victoria -(1907-1957) South Eastern & Chatham Railway & later the Steam Packet Co. Jim was on her Oct/Nov 1945



STRATHNAVER

In 1947 Jim and a couple of his seagoing mates decided to try out the refurbished Orient liner "RMS Orion" sailing for Australia. The journey to Australia was uneventful and Jim spent 10 days' leave in Sydney

### Crossed the Bar—James Gardner -continued

The RMS Orion called at Melbourne to take on more passengers, amongst them an 18 year-old Aussie girl, Betty, who was travelling to England with her English mother. On this journey Jim and Betty struck up a friendship. Betty had also lost her brother Edward Bedford at sea on February 8, 1943, aboard the SS Iron Knight off the East Coast of Australia.

On reaching England Jim and Betty both kept in contact via correspondence.

Jim did four trips to Australia, two with RMS Orion and two with the SS Ormonde. Jim worked his passage back to Melbourne and was given permission to leave the Ormonde if he could find a replacement.

Jim successfully managed this. He later caught the train to Geelong from Melbourne. Betty met Jim at the Geelong train station. Jim worked at International Harvester as a tool maker. He

saved money for a motor bike and Jim and Betty travelled around rural Victoria. Two years later they were wed on November 24, 1951 in Geelong.

In 1954 Jim joined the Victorian Police Force. He spent most of his years as Sergeant in the Geelong & Coastal region until his retirement in 1980. He was a committed family man, and took great pleasure in raising his four children, and then grandchildren. Jim was the bridge that enabled his grandchildren to experience an age now past. Jim was a life member of the Military Historical and Re-enactment Society, Geelong Branch. He volunteered at the local CFA, was involved in numerous community activities and was an active committee member for 10 years at the Mission to Seafarers, Geelong.

Jim passed away suddenly at home on September 6, 2009 with Betty and his beloved family by his side.

A man who never stopped thinking of himself as a Vindi Boy.

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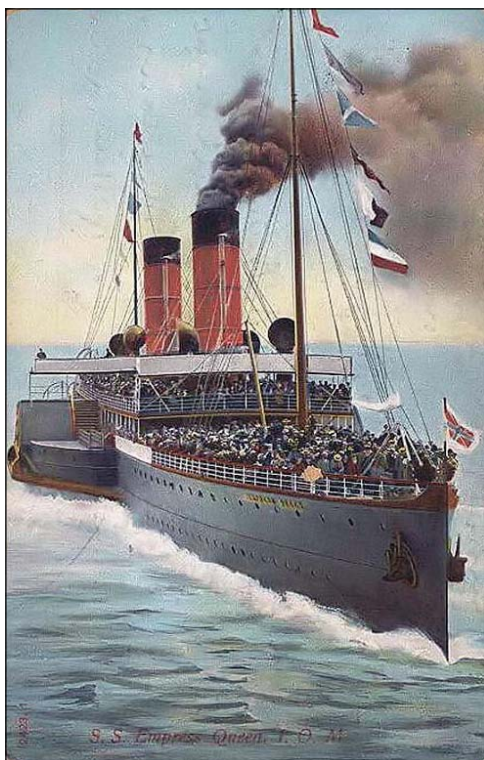
*Actually I'm a bit miffed with Jim, his letters to me were all handwritten 10-line masterpieces of abbreviation, must have been his police training. He described a trip around the world full of dramatic events – all in 10 lines, and now I find he had an e-mail address all this time! When I think of all the great stories I could have got out of him had I known. I expected to hear back from him after the article about his brother in our March 2009 newsletter and was hoping to get more stories from him, but it wasn't to be. I found out later from Betty that at that time he had been diagnosed with bowel cancer. He underwent a successful operation for this and was back home feeling good and happy when the heart attack took him suddenly.*



Orion



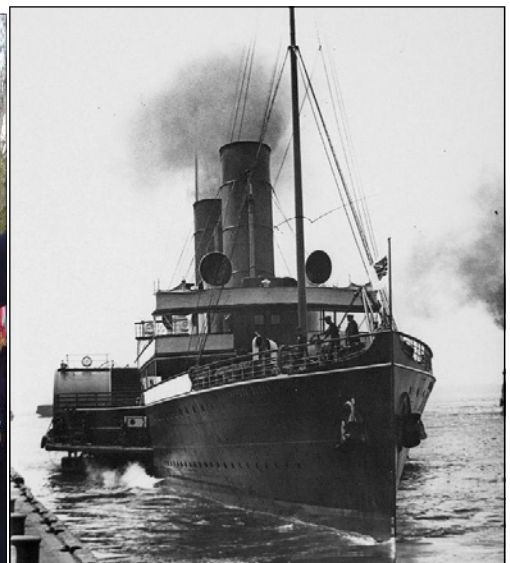
BHP's Iron Knight



A Beaut! postcard of the 'Empress Queen



Jim standing proud with the Red Ensign –Anzac Day 2009



A beaut! B&W pic of the Empress Queen, As an 11 year old kid I did a couple of trips on a paddle boat might have been this one, from Brighton to Eastbourne and back in 1948 I was fascinated by the steam engine and the big paddle cranks churning around.

Re the 2009 Merchant Navy day service held at Mosman last September.  
*On a suggestion from John Mears I sent a copy of our last newsletter which featured the 2009 MN day service to LCDR Woods who wrote the keynote speech for the service. Below is a copy of the letter he sent in reply.*

Dear Terry

*You might like to publish the following as a "Letter to the Editor"*


I am writing to thank you for your kindness in sending me your T.S *Vindicatrix* Association magazine with the reprint of the speech I wrote for CMDR Hickey to deliver at Mosman on Merchant Navy Day. I am delighted that you and your association members liked the speech. I wrote it with "old salts" in mind. I was so very pleased to see in the magazine the brave story of all the SS *San Emiliano's* crew which was researched as a separate item to my account of the heroism of Donald Clarke GC , the mortally wounded apprentice. They all deserve to be remembered.

The original speech I wrote for CMDR Hickey was considerably longer than the one he had time to deliver and you reproduced. He needed to edit it down to the correct length for a speech or you would all have needed a comfort stop! However the whole speech is to be printed as an article in the both Australian Warship magazine, issue 53, and in the March 10 edition of *Headmark*, the magazine of the Australian Naval Institute. Your members could purchase it in those forms if they wish to do so or if any of them would like an electronic copy of the article they can email me on: [desmond.woods@defence.gov.au](mailto:desmond.woods@defence.gov.au). and I will be happy to send it as an attachment.

I enclose a hard copy of the whole speech laid out as it will be in Australian Warship 53, with your own Ron Wylie's beautiful verse to conclude it. He is a fine poet.

Once again thank you for your kindness in sending me your excellent magazine.

Yours sincerely



Desmond Woods  
 LCDR, RAN

Australian Command and Staff College  
 Weston Creek  
 Canberra  
 ACT

They need no dirge, for time and tide fills all things, with tribute  
 unto them.

The warmth of a summer sun, the calm of a quiet sea,  
 the comforting arm of night,  
 the generous soul of nature and the power of a seabirds flight.

Blow golden trumpets blow, mournfully for all the golden youth  
 and shattered dreams that lie where God has lain his quiet dead  
 for all the world to see,  
 upon some alien ocean bed.

*Ron Wylie, Australian Merchant Seaman*

Our last branch meeting at Monty's (now pushed up as the Pymont Bridge Hotel) was well attended with 14 VBs plus some partners, it was a pleasure to welcome Mick & Lynne Kingcott of Tameit, Victoria to their first branch meeting, they were staying at the Lane Cove Caravan Park in their caravan on the way home from the recent Caloundra Vindicatrix reunion. On that reunion our only committee member to attend Peter Bearman said in his report that he thought it a very poor show that only four NSW/ACT branch members attended that reunion.

*(Alex & Pauline Dilworth unfortunately had to cancel because of illness)*

The 2009 MN day service was discussed at some length, everyone thought it was well done and an event we should support and offer some help in the organizing of future such events.

Inward mail included a Letter from VB Harry Hunwick of Tasmania enclosing a Christmas raffle prize of two nights accommodation in a fully self-contained cottage in Tasmania. And letters bearing sad news

Letter from Betty Gardiner of Lovely banks Vic. advising of the death of her husband, Jim V1943.

Letter received after the meeting from Gwen Fisher of Canberra advising of the death in September of her husband John a 1936 Gravesend Sea School boy.

Letter from Jim Crowhurst with a change of address, and his plans for travelling around Australia by caravan followed by a trip overseas. (Is he going to convert the caravan into a boat or an aeroplane ?)

Trying to cram everything in to the last newsletter I forgot to wish everyone a merry Christmas! We received a nice Christmas card from the UK Vindi committee and many lovely cards & email messages from Vindi boys in the UK with best wishes for Christmas and 2010 which I belatedly pass on to you, I will bring the cards to the next meeting.

**The next branch meeting –the AGM- will be held at 11am on Saturday March 13th. 2010**

**At the PINES CARAVAN PARK BELMONT NSW**

**The meeting will be part of a VINDI GET-TOGETHER WEEKEND at the park from Friday 12th. To Sunday 14th. March -Love to see you there –**

**BELMONT PINES 24 Paley Crescent Belmont South NSW 2280 Tel: +61 2 4945 4750**

Following this the next regular events on the MN calendar are:

Rookwood cemetery MN Memorial service-Sunday April 11th. At 10am

The Merchant Navy Fraternity luncheon at State Parliament House Thurs April 15th 12 noon.

Bookings & money \$60 per person by April 1st MNA PO Box 19 Gladesville, NSW 2111.

ANZAC DAY Sunday April 25th The dawn Service Martin Place followed by the Anzac March at 9am

**THE 2010 DOWNUNDER VINDICATRIX REUNION**

**Will be hosted by the West Australian Vindi boys**

**Dates - November 5,6 &7th.**

**Venue the Cockburn Sound Motor Boat Club Fremantle.**

**More details from <http://wa.vindicatrix.com/reunion-2010/index.htm>**

Also a loose leaf application form and info in this newsletter

**2010 NOMINATED THE YEAR OF THE SEAFARER**

**From - Fred Saunders** a Newcastle VB who often sends me cuttings of matters maritime.

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) at a meeting of it's 169 country state members declared to mark 2010 in this way to pay tribute throughout 2010 to the worlds 1.5 million seafarers for the contribution they make to society and for the risks they take in carrying out their duties.

And to concentrate on improving the lot of the Seafarer, especially in the areas of Piracy, unwarranted detention, and abandonment of crews by the shipowners going bankrupt and disappearing.

And to take immediate action to combat the looming worldwide shortage of ship's officers.

*(The virtual demise in the 70s of the UK MN and the massive move by all the European shipping nations to Asian crews dried up the supply of cadets training. The last of the officers of that era are now approaching retirement. The rest of the world was slow to set up their own training operations.)*

The IMO 2009 Bravery at Sea Awards go to Americans Maurice & Sophie Conti, their yacht OCEALYS when 60 miles from Suva was the only vessel to hear a distress call from the yacht TIMELLA reporting they had been driven aground in a storm onto a reef approximately 12 miles away. With their 4 and 6-year old children on board they achieved a daring rescue amidst the reefs with Sophie on the helm and Maurice in a towed rubber dingy to pluck the crew of two Aussies & one Kiwi from the wreck.

The second award went to Aviation Survival Technician Abram A. Heller a professional rescue swimmer with the United States Coast Guard. In the early hours of 23 March 2008, in arctic weather conditions, singlehanded he rescued eight crew members of the foundered F/V Alaska Ranger. Having plunged into the waters to rescue survivors, he then gave up his place in the rescue helicopter to enable five rescued crew to be taken to safety and waited on a liferaft for over one hour for the return of the helicopter, with three further rescued crew he had pulled into it. In so doing, he was deemed to have acted over and above the standard expected of a professional rescuer, particularly on his first deployment. *(I will put the full stories onto our website) (later)*