

The island itself is of course not immune from cyclonic activity. This was demonstrated on 2 February 2011 when the eye of Cyclone Yasi moved directly overhead as a Category 5 tropical cyclone. Station staff had been evacuated the previous day but a wind gust speed of 185 km per hour was recorded by the weather station equipment before the anemometer failed. The barometric pressure fell to an exceptionally low 937.9 hectopascals and communication with the island was completely cut off.

Limited services were restored on 17 February 2011 and, following replacement of damaged equipment, the station returned to full operational status on 12 December 2011.

Willis Island and its work are now becoming more familiar to many Australians with passenger liners occasionally passing close to the island while on cruises in the region.

Is there a future for seafarer centres?

This was the question posed by Roger Harris, Executive Director of the International Seafarers Welfare Association Network (ISWAN) in an article in the December 2015 issue of their newsletter.

He looked at the future of seafarer centres and provided some thoughts about how they might survive and thrive.

The following is an edited version of his comments and, while some of his proposals are not 'one size fits all' options applicable to all seafarers' welfare stations, they will hopefully stimulate some interest and discussion.

"Seafarer centres have been around for a long time. There are now approximately 430 seafarer centres around the world, run mainly by the Christian seafarer missions and a small number are run by trade unions, governments, and NGOs. There is a view that the future of centres is limited because of increasing access to the Internet at sea, short turnaround times, restricted shore leave, lack of funding, and doubts about who will staff them in the future. It is timely, therefore, to look at whether there is future for centres, and to think about the welfare services being provided to seafarers in different ways.

Like many other sectors of the world economy, the maritime industry is experiencing fast technological change. Increasing automation may mean fewer but more highly trained seafarers. There is already closer monitoring of ships' operations by shore-side staff with some operational decisions being taken away from ships' masters and crews.

Another new development is the increasing access to credit cards for seafarers. How will this affect seafarers' welfare? Will the crew need to come ashore to top up their mobile phones or buy data? Will they need to come ashore to buy goods, or will they do this online – just as we do?

There is now increased access to the Internet at sea for seafarers. According to the recent Crew Connectivity survey, 58% of seafarers now have some form of access while at sea.

More and more Wi-Fi is being installed on ships that seafarers can access in either their cabins or common mess areas. We all know that access to the Internet for communicating back home is the number one concern of seafarers.

A new game changer is the growing use of smartphones by seafarers. The Crew Connectivity survey 2015 found that 77% of crew now take smartphones on board. It has taken over from the

laptop as the most popular communication device for seafarers. They are now able to use smartphones for web browsing, banking, Skype, and connection to other apps. Mobile data packages for smartphones are becoming cheaper. The increasing use of smartphones may be the biggest threat to the continued existence of seafarer centres because seafarers are able to shop and communicate on them cheaply and without the need to go to the traditional centres.

ISWAN is ready to facilitate bringing new ideas into the sector so that seafarer centres can have a relevant and bright future."

The complete article may be seen on the ISWAN website at www.seafarerswelfare.org.



Captain
F.M. Williamson

Obituary

The death occurred on 14 January at the age of 91 of Captain Frank Williamson, who served as a Councillor of the Sydney Sailors' Home from 1977 to 1987. The Society was represented at the funeral held at St James Anglican Church, Turramurra.

Captain Williamson was born in London in 1924. On leaving school in 1940 he was awarded a scholarship to attend the sea training ship HMS *Worcester* at Greenhithe in Kent where he excelled in his studies, graduating in 1942 as Chief Cadet Captain and King's Gold Medallist. He then joined the New Zealand Shipping Company (NZS) as a deck apprentice in my *Suffolk* and was destined to remain with the P&O group for his entire maritime career.

His wartime experiences luckily were mostly uneventful, although very interesting and often uncertain.

Post-war he sailed in various NZS passenger and cargo ships and obtained his Master's certificate in 1951. He also joined the Royal Naval Reserve and served for a time as a Lieutenant in HMS *Vanguard*.

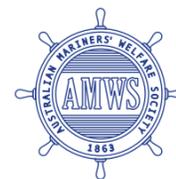
In 1955, after a period attached to the staff of the NZS Marine Superintendent in London, he was appointed to his first command, *Tekoa*, and later sailed as Master in *Tongariro*, *Paparoa* and *Wharanui*.

In 1961, he and his young family moved to Sydney on his appointment as Marine Superintendent in Australia for Federal/NZS Lines. Following the integration of various lines within the P&O Group, he transferred in 1967 to P&O Australia Ltd as Assistant Marine Superintendent, with appointment as Marine Superintendent coming two years later. In that role he was responsible for marine operations of the Australia-Japan Container Line (AJCL) vessels, as well as the E&A passenger liners *Cathay* and *Chitral* trading to the Philippines, Hong Kong and Japan. He also served from 1969 as Chairman of the Technical Committee of the Australian Chamber of Shipping.

Retirement from P&O Australia Ltd came in 1982 on the transfer of AJCL ship management responsibilities to Overseas Containers Australia Ltd but he later undertook a part-time consultancy role for that company. Subsequently he kept in close touch with former colleagues and friends at regular gatherings held in Sydney.

Condolences are again extended to Mrs Jean Williamson and the extended family in their loss.

[The assistance of Frank Williamson's brother Tony and son Andrew in the preparation of this obituary is gratefully acknowledged.]



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The Mariners' Lifeline

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN MARINERS' WELFARE SOCIETY
A division of the Sydney Sailors' Home
Volume 15 No 1 April 2016



Captain Alan Tait,
OAM – Chairman,
The Australian
Mariners' Welfare
Society

Chairman's report

Today's seafarer is wrestling with rapid changes which are also testing the industry as a whole. I would like to think those responsible are doing their best to embrace these challenges and keeping seafarers' welfare foremost in mind.

We read that the industry needs bigger ships and smaller crew numbers. As newer ships have increased container and bulk capacity, crew sizes have declined – and dramatically so. Not too many years ago the average container ship had a capacity to lift between 5,500-8,000 containers and operated with a crew of between 20 and 30.

However vessels' container capacities have been increasing rapidly. In 2013, ships carrying 18,000 containers were in service and within two years vessels with 20,000 capacity were being introduced. Notwithstanding the increase in the sizes of the ships, their crew complements remained between 19 and 30. I understand there are now plans for so-called 'Malacca Max' ships with 20.5m draft capable of carrying 27,000-30,000 containers and linked to greater shore side control, with consequently even smaller crew numbers.

Along with these changes we are seeing shipowners grappling with crippling freight rates that can only translate eventually into bankruptcy, tonnage scrapping, lay-ups and takeovers. Challenging times indeed but nothing new in a volatile industry carrying some 90% of world trade.

We as a Society have started the new year mindful of both of these problems and doing our bit, as modest as it may be, to assist the seafarer.

Scholarships have lately been granted to three Australian Maritime College students. Financial help has been pledged to the Mission to Seafarers stations at Port Pirie and Townsville for building renovations and air-conditioning. Apostleship of the Sea Sydney also received stipend assistance and special help for an international regional coordinators conference.

Jointly with the Rotary Club of Sydney Cove, we provided a scholarship for a young Sydney man from Stepping Stone House, a place for homeless teenagers, to spend 10 days as part of the youth crew of the sail training ship *Young Endeavour* on a voyage from Melbourne to Sydney. To listen to the young man telling his story at the end of the voyage was something very special; his excitement was infectious. A second scholarship has been awarded to a young Tribal Warrior Association indigenous girl for a voyage in May. Already it is a busy year for AMWS!

In concluding on a more personal but very pertinent note, I write with a sad heart!

Patrick Geraghty, a very well-known seafarer and someone who was to become a close friend of mine over many years, died in Sydney on 23 March 2016. Known and respected by many across the Australian maritime industry as

leader of his beloved Seamen's Union of Australia, he will be remembered as a legendary figure of his time. A good man who gained the respect of prime ministers, industry leaders and his union's membership through the 60's 70's and 80's, a period of immense growth and change. He was a strong and tireless advocate on behalf of his members but once he had given his word in a negotiation, no written confirmation was ever needed. It was my good fortune to sail with Pat, argue with him and, latterly when both of us had retired, to meet occasionally and reflect on the jobs we had both done. It was PG who instilled in me the passion to help those less fortunate than myself. He was a great Australian.

Alan Tait
Chairman.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Members are advised that the Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held at the offices of HWL Ebsworth, Level 14 Australia Square, 264-278 George Street, Sydney NSW on Tuesday 17 May 2016 commencing at 10.00 am.

Report on Society's support for families of maritime piracy victims

For some years, the Society has provided grants to assist the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Program (MPHRP) which supports victims of piracy on the high seas and their families. The program is administered by the International Seafarers Welfare Assistance Network in London (ISWAN).

We recently received a report from MPHRP giving details of how part of a recent grant we had made was utilised. The majority of the donation was disbursed quickly for relief of the immediate needs of the families of three Filipino seafarers. Each family received sufficient funding to cover costs for six months' living expenses, school fees and medical expenses. The seafarers concerned are still hostages in Somalia and have just passed their fourth anniversary in captivity while ongoing efforts by a partnership of organisations to release them continue.



Ms Jan Bowen

Award for SSH history author

Congratulations are extended to Ms Jan Bowen, author of the history of the Sydney Sailors' Home, on her appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the 2016 Australia Day Honours List in recognition of significant service to the performing arts, particularly to youth orchestral music performance, and to the community.

AOS International conference held in Sydney

Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) port chaplains, volunteers and administrators from all over the world converged on Sydney for their biennial regional coordinators meeting held from 6-13 March at the Mary MacKillop Conference Centre in North Sydney. This was the first time a venue in the Southern Hemisphere had been selected for this conference.



Bishop Joseph Kalathiparambil, right, and Father Bruno Ciceri.

Conference host was Sister Mary Leahy OAM, who apart from her role as Sydney port chaplain is also AOS Regional Coordinator for Oceania. In addition to representatives from AOS stations in Australia and New Zealand, delegates from UK/Europe, North America, Latin America, Caribbean, West Africa, the Middle East, India, South-East

Asia, Hong Kong and Japan attended.

Also present was a party from the Vatican led by Bishop Joseph Kalathiparambil, the international head of AOS and Father Bruno Ciceri, secretary.

Agenda items included briefings from shipping industry representatives discussing current trends in the shipping industry and the challenges facing those who work in agencies offering welfare, hospitality and counselling to visiting seafarers of all nationalities and faiths. The impact of the recently implemented Maritime Labour Convention, developed under the International Labour Organisation, which relates to the working and living conditions of seafarers was also studied. Australia is a signatory to the Convention.

During breaks in conference proceedings, delegates enjoyed a harbour cruise and a reception at the Australian National Maritime Museum.

"The generous assistance we received for the conference from the maritime industry in general is much appreciated and is recognition of the role our organisation plays in assisting mariners coming to our shores", said Sister Mary who also paid tribute to the large team of volunteers who assisted in planning and staging the meeting.

In addition to a grant from our Society, supporters of the



The Australian Mariners' Welfare Society

ABN 86 000 008 122

Founded as *The Sydney Sailors' Home*

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Mr S Moriarty

Conference included the Port Authority of New South Wales, the Australian National Maritime Museum, International Transport Federation, Maritime Union of Australia, *Lloyds List Australia* and the Sydney Seafarers Centre.

AMWS assists Mercy Ship volunteer

As reported in the previous newsletter, a scholarship grant was awarded recently to Kerry-Anne Evans of Bundaberg (Q) who was required to undertake a shipboard safety course prior to working as a volunteer for six months on board *Africa Mercy*, a ship dedicated to collaboration with host nations to help fill gaps in their health-care systems. Volunteers are required to arrange funding of their travel expenses and other costs associated with their deployment

Kerry-Anne successfully completed the safety course and travelled to Africa, joining *Africa Mercy* at Tamatave



Africa Mercy (16,572 grt), originally built as a rail ferry, was converted into a hospital ship in 2007.

Kerry-Anne Evans during the obligatory shipboard safety course she undertook in North Queensland prior to joining *Africa Mercy* for six months' duty as a volunteer. Her course fees were met by our Society. [Photo by courtesy Captain Chris Green].



and taking corrective action in any emergency situations that may arise, also coordinating the mustering of crew and maintaining ship's duty rosters.

There are approximately 470 crew comprising around 30 nationalities. The ship also employs around 100 Malagasy day crew who provide a range of duties including translators and patient transport drivers

Africa Mercy has eight decks, six operating theatres, a 78-bed hospital ward, an x-ray room, a CT scanner, pharmacy and a schoolroom accommodating up to 60 students.

When off duty there are lots of places to be useful – visiting patients in the wards or ashore at the local hospital. Part of the hospital was renovated by *Mercy Ships* to provide a suitable place for patients to be either 'built up' for surgery or for 'recovery' afterwards, thus freeing up the ship's hospital wards to allow more surgeries to be performed. On another occasion I visited a local orphanage where I assisted Toni (another Australian) with dental screening to ascertain which children might need dental treatment.

(Madagascar) on 3 January and she commenced duty on the reception desk next day. She recently reported back on her experiences so far, also expressing gratitude to the Society for its financial assistance:

My reception desk duties, worked over flexible day and night shifts, include assisting crew members, passengers, and guests with embarkation and disembarkation details, communicating ship's daily business and handling incoming calls, monitoring the ship's fire panel and CCTV systems

We wish Kerry-Anne well for the remainder of her tour of duty.

Willis Island – North Queensland's remote weather station

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology maintains a number of offshore island weather stations including those Cocos, Norfolk, Lord Howe and Macquarie in addition to those located at Casey, Davis and Mawson stations in the Antarctic.

However, possibly the least well-known is Willis Island located in the Coral Sea 280 miles (450km) east of Cairns which has been monitoring weather conditions and providing a cyclone early warning services for nearly 95 years.

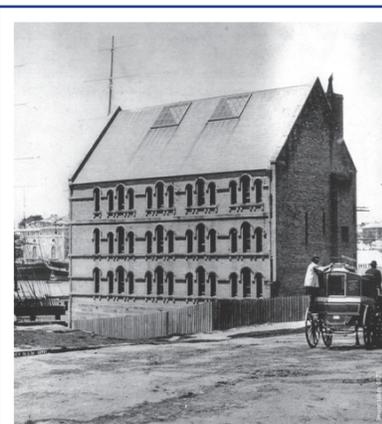
The station was established in 1921 by Captain John King Davis (1884-1967), then Commonwealth Director of Navigation and equipped with a radio transmitter to provide a cyclone early warning service for Queensland. Having previously sailed with Shackleton and Mawson on Antarctic expeditions between 1908 and 1914, Captain Davis was well aware of the importance of weather forecasting especially for those living and working in cyclone-prone regions.

The island measures approximately 450 m x 150 m in size and only takes a leisurely 15 minutes to walk around. It is staffed by three weather observers and an Engineering Technician who live and work on the island for six months at a time.

A typical day for staff on the island involves delivering synoptic and upper-air observations, supporting an integrated observation network by extending geographic coverage to improve weather monitoring and analysis in the Coral Sea. Weather balloons which transmit weather data to ground stations are released three times a day.



Interpreter plaque for Sydney Sailors' Home building



SYDNEY SAILORS' HOME

The Sailors' Home offered a place to sleep and meals to seafarers of all nationalities seeking relief after long voyages.

It also provided some security from the many pitfalls that awaited unwaried mariners in the narrow alleyways of The Rocks. Ruthless publicans and thieves abounded.

Mariners were often abducted by 'press gangs' and then sold to masters of departing ships as replacements for crew members who had deserted.

In 1979, the Home closed and the company was renamed The Australian Mariners' Welfare Society. Nowadays, it provides financial assistance to organisations that offer support to visiting seafarers in 30 ports around Australia.

For more information visit www.marinerswelfare.com.au

HOME AWAY FROM HOME 1865 - 1979



of the Home. Set in laminated glass, the plaque measures approximately 150cm (5ft) x 25cm (10"). The left hand panel includes a brief outline of the Home's history from 1865-1979. The other panel makes reference to the fund-raising picnic in aid of the Home held in 1868 at Clontarf Park

on Sydney Harbour where an unsuccessful attempt was made to assassinate HRH Prince Alfred, second son of Queen Victoria, who was making the first official visit to Australia by a member of the British Royal family. Similar plaques nearby in George Street are already in place, one at the Old Post

ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF PRINCE ALFRED

On 12 March 1868, a public picnic was held at Clontarf to raise money for the completion of the Sydney Sailors' Home. Queen Victoria's son Prince Alfred attended and presented a cheque for £50.

Minutes later he was shot in the back by Irish Nationalist Henry O'Farrell. The assassination attempt failed, however it unleashed a fury against Sydney's Irish and Catholic communities. It also created a passionate public response and great support for the Crown.

When the Prince returned to England, Queen Victoria remarked: "It was worth being shot to see how much one is loved."

For more information visit www.the.rocks.com.au



As reported in last issue of the newsletter, arrangements have been made with the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, as manager of the Sydney Sailors' Home building, for an interpretive plaque to be inlaid into the footpath adjacent to the main entrance giving a brief historical background

Office building and the other at the former ambulance station. Appreciation is extended to SHFA for their collaboration with us in this joint project.