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EXTRACTS FROM

"Otago Harbour and some of its Shipping"

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Until 1826 the harbour entrance remained uncharted and it was not until Captain Herd with the ship ROSANNA and the cutter LAMBTON arrived in May of that year that any attempt to undertake this work was commenced. Herd commanded a small enterprise which was on its way to form a settlement at the Thames, and his purpose in putting into the harbour, now known as Port Oxley, was to obtain water, fuel and rest for his passengers and crew. Herd's chart is in existence today and despite the relatively short time at his disposal it contained sufficient data to be of considerable value to the future users of the anchorage.

The first official surveys of the harbour were undertaken at the instigation of the New Zealand Company who desired to know more about the facilities of the locality and sent their surveyor-general, Captain M. Smith, from Wellington with the cutter THE BROTHERS to Otago in 1842. Upon completion of the survey Smith had the misfortune to lose all his charts when THE BROTHERS returning to Wellington, foundered in a sudden squall off Banks Peninsula. As the subsequent report had to be a verbal one, it is not surprising that the sailing directions arising from it contained inaccuracies.

A further and more comprehensive survey was carried out when a suitable site for the requirements of a settlement for the New Edinburgh Scheme became necessary. Frederick Tuckett, a surveyor, was sent from Wellington and he carried out a general survey of the Otago Block and the harbour. Then, as now, some difficulty was experienced with the sand banks and the DEBORAH made their acquaintance in stranding upon one, remaining there until the rising tide floated her off.

In February 1846 Charles Kettle arrived in the port from Wellington in the MARY CATHERINE. Kettle's main task was to survey as expeditiously as possible the Otago Block and to buoy the harbour from its entrance up to Koputai (now Port Chalmers), in readiness for the projected arrival of the settlers for the Free Church colony, who, after a protracted voyage, arrived in March 1848.

A vessel that played not an unimportant part in the early development of the port of Otago was the cutter MERCURY. She was built in 1844 by David Carey and Charles Roebuck, at Weller's whaling station. Native timber for her construction was felled in the upper reaches of the harbour, made into a raft, and floated down to the station on the ebbing tide. Iron work used in her was fashioned from what was available around the vicinity of the whaling station and harpoons and other iron articles took a shape far beyond that for which they had originally been designed. A difference of opinion between her two builders almost caused the cutter as she lay upon the stocks ready for launching to be destroyed, but the timely arrival upon the scene of Richard Driver settled the dispute and it was he who named her MERCURY. With a cargo of pigs she sailed on her maiden voyage to Moeraki in 1845. Owing to her peculiar movement and sailing qualities she became known as the "Jumping Jackass". This name appears to have been more popular or acceptable than MERCURY, for her recorded movements are not infrequently under the nickname. When the first emigrant ships arrived in the harbour the MERCURY was used in conveying ashore the heavier material of the cargoes for use in erection of buildings and other necessities.

Three years after the foundation of the Province there was built and launched at Dunedin the schooner ENDEAVOUR of 10 tons. James Adam, a prominent settler of that time who had had some experience in Aberdeen as a shipwright, was responsible for her construction. She sailed on her maiden voyage in April 1852, for Port Molyneux, having on board Mr. and Mrs. Mosley and their six children.

James Adam was also responsible for the design from which the STAR OF DUNEDIN was built in 1854. Of 50 tons register she closely resembled the famous Aberdeen clippers. James Macandrew, her owner, had plenty of trouble in trying to sign on a crew. In desperation he made rather the novel suggestion to the local Magistrate that consideration might be given to releasing some of the short-term prisoners to man the schooner and continue their sentence afloat. The presiding Magistrate of that time apparently did not applaud such an approach and we later hear of a suitable crew being found elsewhere. The schooner traded for many years in and out of the numerous infant ports of the South Island, and was a frequent visitor to Bluff with passengers. She also called at Picton and Nelson with goldminers as passengers and at Stewart

Island for timber. On one voyage she brought to Dunedin from the south 20,000 super feet of good building timber required by the growing needs of a town developing.

Behind the development of the large number of lighters and barges which were in use on the harbour about this time were two prominent factors, one the difficulty in taking deep draught vessels beyond Port Chalmers, the other the shortage of storage space. Prior to the opening of the Dunedin-Port Chalmers railway in 1873, these lighters formed practically the only means of transporting cargoes to the Upper Harbour. Even after the railway was operating there was still much which demanded the continued use of these craft for some years. Until 1861, when Gabriel Read discovered gold in Otago, the then existing wharf and stowage accommodation was sufficient to meet the needs of the port and the vessels using it. However, as soon as Read's discovery became known abroad, thousands of miners and others flocked to the province. The numerous ships that brought them taxed the limited facilities to such an extent that cargoes were left on the foreshore at the port. It soon became apparent that the immediate solution was to increase the fleet of lighters. In the true spirit of enterprise the pioneers were not slow in accepting this new challenge created by changing conditions. In 1864 seven lighters were built and others followed during the ensuing years. Some of these vessels were designed for short coastal voyages and were classed as good sea boats. Such lighters as BON ACCORD, 40 tons ; ADMIRAL, 40 tons ; TRUSTY, 56 tons ; THAMES, 80 tons, to mention but a few, were responsible for playing an important part in the growth of the port.

Amidst squalls of driving rain and forceful eloquence, the first steamer to be built in Otago was launched on 14th June, 1862. Named BETSY DOUGLAS, she was sent on her way with pomp and ceremony, and with the local band playing "See the Conquering Hero Comes" the steamer really did her best, but halfway down the slipway she stuck fast, and there remained until the spectators, having slaked their thirst, felt more qualified to throw their weight upon lever and tackle. With copious draughts of the amber ale to fortify their strength they at last got the steamer afloat. The BETSY DOUGLAS was a wooden steamer 70ft long, 121ft beam and 26 tons net register. Her imported engines which operated the side paddlewheels developed 16 Intended for the Dunedin-Waihola trade she made her maiden voyage on 25th July. At first charges for cargo were 30/- per ton, but during the gold rush this soon rose to 80/-. After twelve months in this service she was returned to the harbour for lightening purposes. Changing owners in 1865, she sailed for Lyttelton and traded to the various bays there. With the discovery of gold on the West Coast the engines and boiler were taken out and BETSY DOUGLAS was converted into a schooner, taking gold miners to the Coast. She was totally lost in 1871 through striking a rock when leaving Charleston.

Stimulated by the development of the trade which followed the gold discoveries, another steamer was built and launched a few months later from the same site. This was the iron steamer LADY OF THE LAKE. Like her predecessor, she also stuck upon the ways and it required considerable spiritual and physical effort to coax her into the water. With side paddle-wheels, schooner rigged, and with two funnels alongside each other, she was a regular trader between Dunedin, Taieri and Waikouaiti, until she left for Picton in 1865. Proceeding down the harbour on her way to the northern port, she had her two funnels suddenly removed when her master failed to observe a warp stretched between the hulk THOMAS and HENRY and the barque BENGAL. She entered the Greymouth-Hokitika trade after working out of Picton.

On 11th November 1867, the WALLACE was launched in the presence of several hundred spectators. As the young lady selected to christen the steamer swung the beribboned bottle of champagne towards the bows, the ribbon holding it broke and it fell to the ground unbroken. Two of the spectators quick of eye and fleet of foot secured the bottle and almost emptied it of its contents before the verbal protests from the officials developed into a more physical form of restraint. After running in the harbour service for a few months the WALLACE was placed in the Dunedin-Oamaru service, where she remained until 1872, when Messrs. N. Edwards & Co., of Nelson, acquired her for the West Coast trade. The Anchor Foundry Co. purchased her in 1883 and converted her to a screw steamer. She was lost at Greymouth in 1886.

For many years it had been recognised by the harbour authorities that better facilities would need to be provided if Otago was to maintain its reputation in the face of growing competition from the north, and it was believed that the construction of a dock at Port Chalmers would do much to maintain this supremacy. A graving dock was decided upon, but as some years would elapse

before this would be ready for use the construction of a floating dock was approved under certain terms between the promoters and the Provincial Council. Thus the first floating dock in New Zealand was built as a private venture. It was 170ft long, 42ft wide, and would accommodate vessels drawing up to 13ft. Of 500 tons deadweight and 3,400 tons displacement, the dock was built of red pine from Waikawa. The keel was of Oregon and the bottom covered with zinc sheeting. In August; 1868, the dock, christened ALPHA, was launched sideways into the water with the usual accompaniment of champagne, speeches, jollification and a thundering salute from the muzzle-loading guns of the Port Chalmers Naval Brigade. The barque ELEANOR, of 411 tons, was the first of many vessels to use the dock, until the opening of the graving dock in 1872 lessened the demands for her service. The dock was afterwards towed to Dunedin, but as no provision was made for its accommodation there she lay idle for some years. In a moment of generosity the Bluff Harbour Board offered f450 for the ALPHA delivered to the southern port, but this offer was declined. Back to Port Chalmers went the dock in tow of the small steamer KATE, but trouble developed when the dock went on one side of a channel pile and the KATE on the opposite warp securely attached to the protesting pile, which in giving up the contest allowed the KATE and her charge to proceed unmolested. The dock was completely out of commission by 1890 and afterwards was taken to Careys Bay and broken up. Remains of this structure are still visible today.

Originally built in 1871 for service on the Molyneux River, the stern paddle-wheel steamer CLYDE was later brought to Dunedin and converted into a sailing lighter after her engines and boiler were removed. The harbour authorities afterwards acquired her for conversion into a lightship. She was placed in Jackson Bros. floating dock at Dunedin for the required structural alterations. This small floating dock had originally been the ship WILLIAM HYDE. Upon completion of the work the CLYDE, now renamed No. 1 Lightship, was towed down the harbour and anchored over the Timaru Bank at the Maori Kaik. She was the first lightship to be used in New Zealand and continued in use until about 1900, when she was withdrawn from service. She was broken up at Lower Portobello about 1920. Notable for the fact that she was the first vessel rigged with wire rigging in the province was the ISABELLA ANDERSON, which was launched in 1874 at Port Chalmers. She was 92ft long, 19ft beam and 85 tons net register. Trading mostly on the West Coast of the South Island she had many accidents until disaster finally overtook her in 1883.

The ketch PALMERSTON which was built and launched at Port Chalmers, was the only vessel built in Otago on lines similar to that of the trading scows of Auckland. She was flat bottomed and had a large iron centreplate. Launched unnamed and without the usual pomp and ceremony, all kinds of unpleasant ends were predicted for her. She did, however, go missing in 1883 when on passage from Oamaru to Wanganui.

There was an amusing contretemps when the paddle steamer IRON AGE was launched. Having been built on the western side of the railway line to Port Chalmers, the steamer had to be dragged over the reclaimed land on a special cradle. When she reached the railway line, the critical point to be crossed, the cradle sank into the soft ground and the ship was left marooned plumb across the line. The early trains were delayed several hours while a loop line was constructed round the steamer so that they could proceed to Port Chalmers. The hull had to be raised to release the cradle before it could be taken over the line. Altogether the cost of the loop line and raising the vessel amounted to £2,000. The IRON AGE was used in the harbour for towing, lightering and carrying passengers and was eventually dismantled in Careys Bay.

Built at Dunedin for the Kakanui Steam Shipping Co., the steamer KAKANUI was launched in April, 1879. Intended for the Dunedin-Kakanui trade, she was never destined to enter the latter port owing to extensive damage done to the harbour works during a severe storm. For a short period she was used in various services on the harbour, but was afterwards placed in the Dunedin-Invercargill trade, occasionally running to Timaru. She went ashore at Fortrose in 1880 and a special cradle had to be built under her in order to get her afloat. Two years later when on Armour and Campbell's slip at Pelichet Bay, a portion of the slip gave way and went through the bottom of the vessel. The steamer was present at the wreck of the TARARUA in April, 1881, when that vessel became a total

loss at Waipapa Point. Mystery still surrounds the loss of the KAKANUI which went missing on passage to the Macquarie Islands in January 1891. Despite several searches made by the Government steamer HINEMOA, nothing was ever found that might have been useful in clearing up her disappearance.

One of the few steamers to be built in the colony for use outside New Zealand waters was the screw steamer PORT JACKSON, of 108 tons. Constructed at Dunedin by Sparrow & Co. for the Port Jackson Nay. Co., of Sydney, the vessel was 110ft long and had a beam of 17ft. Launched in July 1883, she underwent her trials a few weeks later, when she attained a speed of 12.5 knots. For 28 years the steamer operated in and out of Port Jackson and around the Australian coast, but she met her end in February 1910, when she went ashore five miles north of Norah Head Lighthouse, near Newcastle.

Built by Kincaid & McQueen of Dunedin, the INVERCARGILL was one of the most popular coastal steamers of her time. She was 127ft long and 20ft beam. The launching took place in October 1885. Her owners were the Dunedin Invercargill S.S. Co. and they maintained her in the coastal trade between Dunedin and Invercargill until 1917, when she was sold to Messrs. Johnston & Co., of Wellington, for £6,000. She was then placed on the Wellington-Wanganui run. In 1927 she passed into the hands of the Coastal Shipping Co. Ltd., of Wellington, but she was sold two years later to Cygnet Ltd., of Christchurch, and her name changed to KUHU. She was broken up at Lyttelton in 1937.

One of the finest cargo steamers built by Messrs. John McGregor & Co., of Dunedin, was the WAIPU to the order of the Northern Steamship Co. Ltd. Of 205 tons, she was 101ft long and 23ft beam. She was launched in August 1915, and sailed the following June for Auckland, where she traded to the many coastal ports in that area until 1935, when she was sold to the Eclipse Shipping Co. Her new owners replaced her steam engines with two heavy-duty Crossley Diesel engines and renamed her HOKITIKA. After this she was placed in the West Coast timber trade. In 1941 she was sold to the Anchor Shipping & Foundry Co. and used in the cement trade between Tarakohe and Wellington. In 1942 she was taken over by the U.S. Navy and after alterations and the mounting of small guns she was used in the area between Cairns and New Guinea. Returning to Auckland in 1944 she was purchased by the Aspden Shipping Co. and placed in the Auckland-Whangarei cement trade in which she is still employed.