

A history of a founding member of the League

The history of the founding of The League of Ancient Mariners in 1903 can be found on other pages in this website. When a personal account of one of the early founders of the League becomes available it makes interesting reading.



Captain Charles Alfred McKinnon was born March 8, 1838 on the Isle of Tiree in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland. Joining the Scottish fishing fleet he began a career that eventually included almost every kind of sailing ship service. Upon his death on March 18, 1926, the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted –

With the death of Captain Charles McKinnon at North Sydney on Tuesday, there passed a sailor who played a prominent part in the days when sailing ships were still the pride of Empire.

Towards the end of the Franco-Prussian war (1871), the barque *Melrose*, the first iron vessel on the Australian register, ran the blockade at Mauritius with a cargo of 1200 tons of Newcastle coal, loaded sugar for Adelaide and set out on what provided a singularly ill-fated voyage.

Yellow fever broke out early and four sailors died. While many others were still convalescent the barque ran into one of the worst typhoons of deep-sea experience. Lashed to the wheel, the captain and a huge Highland A.B. fought for 48 hours to save the barque. The Highlander died of exhaustion but the Captain, Charles McKinnon, survived.

Voyages to North and South America gave Captain MacKinnon his first deep-sea training. In 1862 he shipped as a seaman on the *Bungaree* then beginning its first voyage to Australian ports. She made a six-month passage to Sydney. On the day after its arrival Captain McKinnon signed articles on the barque *Woodbine*. Four years later saw him her master and part-owner. His ownership of the *Melrose* followed. Soon after the memorable Mauritius voyage he experimented in trade with the South Sea Islands and still later engaged in the carriage of cedar from Lismore to Sydney.

Towards the end of 1882 Captain McKinnon left the sea on accepting an appointment as the first Foreman of Magazines, Middle Harbour, from which position he resigned in 1901 to visit Europe, the United States and later, Japan.

Captain McKinnon, a fluent Gaelic speaker, was one of the founders of the Highland Society of New South Wales. He was a prominent member of The League of Ancient Mariners.

Twice married, he is survived by a widow, an adult family and twenty grandchildren.

Sydney Morning Herald archives

Captain MacKinnon lived in Hunters Hill in Sydney in a street named Tiree Avenue commemorating the name of his home and his place of birth.