



OUR ANCIENT MARINERS

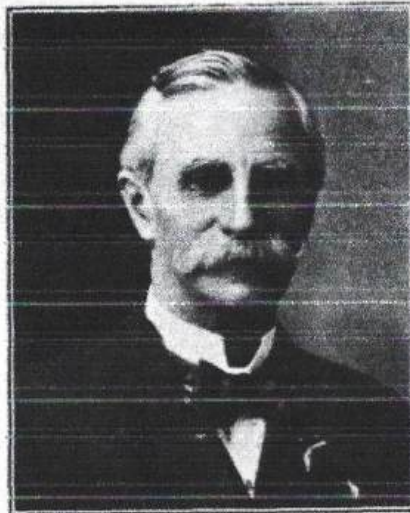
"The Mariner whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar"



CAPTAIN ROBERT CHEVIN GHEST.

Few of the members of The Ancient Mariners' League in Sydney have such a winning personality as Captain Robert Chevin Ghest, now one of the port's leading ship-brokers. Captain Ghest has had an honourable career at sea, and when he retired in 1887 he was generally respected by all who had sailed with him. That respect for him as a sailor and a man is still evidenced by his general popularity in nautical circles. Captain Ghest was born in Lincolnshire within the sound of "Great Tom," set in the tower of Lincoln Cathedral, in 1847, and was one of a family of five sons and five daughters. His father was a farmer of some standing in the county. Before young Ghest (for that is how we must describe him in looking back to those early days) was out of his teens, he had evinced a strong desire to get on salt-water as a budding officer of the mercantile marine. His father was quite agreeable to the lad fulfilling his ambition, and when he was thirteen years of age he entered him as a cadet on the famous training-ship "Conway," which had then just been commissioned. Ghest was one of her first cadets, and to-day he is the oldest member of the Conway Club, bar one, a Commander H. L. Wilson, R.N.R., who joined with him as a Conway cadet in 1866. The two lads put in their training period together, and in 1862 were drafted out into the mercantile marine as midshipmen aboard the iron sailing vessel "Cornwallis," 1300 tons, under a Captain Price. This vessel was on the berth for Sydney, N.S.W., with cargo and passengers, and leaving London early in the year, she made a good passage out here in 102 days. The voyage was quite uneventful, but young Ghest was by no means sorry when it ended, for throughout the whole trip he was a victim of mal-de-mer, though the weather was anything but tempestuous. Having landed her cargo, the "Cornwallis" loaded for Madras and Calcutta, via the Leeuwin, and ran into very heavy weather whilst going through Bass Straits. Curiously enough, young Ghest, as soon as the bad weather set in, lost all signs of sea-sickness, and from that day to this has never suffered from it. In the rough sea, great care had to be taken of a large number of horses, which had been shipped at Sydney; but the storm was weathered, and, in fact, the whole voyage finished without a horse being lost or injured. The trip to Madras occupied seventy days, and Calcutta having been duly reached, a cargo was taken aboard for London. Before departure, however, young Ghest had an opportunity of seeing the exquisite decorations and illuminations in the Indian capital in honour of the marriage of the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. Promotion, too, had been rapid for him, for before Calcutta was reached, he had been made acting third mate. This position became permanent, for the third mate, who had been ill, died before India was left behind, and when the "Cornwallis" again entered the

Thames, young Ghest was a seasoned officer aboard. This was the value of the training he was given aboard the "Conway" emphasised. Another voyage to Sydney followed, with a return via India, but this time the passage from Sydney was made via Torres Straits instead of via the Leeuwin. Again in London, and the ship was ordered out to Sydney, and this time she returned round The Horn. A further trip to Australia, and return via India, brought some praise for a remarkably fast passage done by the "Cornwallis" from Calcutta to London in eighty-six days. In all, Ghest served eleven years on the "Cornwallis," completing in her twelve or thirteen voyages. There was only one of these voyages which was full of incident. The ship was on the way home from Calcutta when she was struck by a terrific northerly gale just off The Azores. This was on Christmas Day, 1867. During the height of the disturbance, a man was washed overboard and lost, and Ghest narrowly escaped being carried away with him. So rough was the weather, that the Captain decided instead of going up the English Channel—the ship's destination was Dundee—to go up through the Pentland Firth and down the North Sea. The vessel had just passed The Hebrides when a tremendous westerly gale set in, followed by a sudden veering of the wind with hurricane force from the south. Eventually she shipped a sea when close reefed, which struck her on the starboard bow, and simply swallowed her. When she emerged from it, the whole of her boats were gone, the front of the poop had been smashed in, and the sails had been burst out by the deluge of water poured into them. New sails were rigged, after many difficulties, and the vessel just managed to drag herself along until she entered and cleared the Pentland Firth. Most of the provisions aboard had been swept away by the sea, and the crew were on starvation rations for some days until the Captain managed to get her into an anchorage off Aberdeen. He had just time to get some provisions aboard, however, when it came up to blow again, and the ship had to stand out from the coast. After a week or so battling with the elements, she was eventually got into Dundee, and there Ghest left her to visit his people. The ship was taken round to London, and had to be docked for repairs, and it was nearly three months before our young officer was called on to again take his place aboard for another voyage. This was his last voyage in the "Cornwallis," and it took him again to Sydney, and on to San Francisco and back to Liverpool. He was now second mate, and having a desire to go into steam, he left his old ship and signed on as third mate on the steamer "Gordon Castle" for a voyage to China. This vessel took him right up 1000 miles of the Yang-ste-Kiang to Hankow. Reaching home again, he signed on as third mate on a steamer in the Mediterranean trade, and for three years



CAPTAIN R. C. GHEST

remained aboard such vessels. Whilst in one of them in a rough sea in the Bay of Biscay one night, a huge wave tore the wheel on the bridge round as it banged against the rudder and threw the man at it over the bridge on to the iron deck below. Ghest then took the wheel, and precisely the same thing happened to him. He was unfortunate enough, however, to break his arm. The next morning a steward was dashed against an iron ladder by a heavy sea, and the ladder broke in half, the jagged iron tearing his arm down from the elbow to the wrist. The Skipper then put back to Falmouth, and Ghest and the steward were landed. Ghest was ashore for three months recuperating. On the expiry of his three years in the Mediterranean trade, he joined up on Fairfield Shipbuilding Co.'s steamer "Zealandia," which with the same company's

steamer "Australia," was destined, in company with the Pacific Mail Co.'s "City of New York," "City of Sydney," and "City of San Francisco," to carry on the mail service between Sydney and San Francisco. Ghest, who joined as third officer, was ten years on this vessel on the Pacific, and rose ultimately to the position of chief officer aboard. He was promoted as captain of the "Australia" in 1882, and for five years was her master, taking passengers and cargo across the Pacific. In 1887, having been five years married, he entered into the ship-broking business in Sydney. He has been established in this business ever since. Two of Captain Ghest's sons served at the war with distinction, but, unfortunately, "went west." He now resides at Chiswick with his wife and the remainder of his family.

The Western Australian Government's steamer, "Kwinana," which was lately burnt out at Carnarvon, is to be sold, as the cost of repairing her is deemed to be too great. It is proposed that the "Bumbra" and "Moira" shall in future serve the north-west coast, with the assistance of the oil steamer "Kangaroo." The Government is said to be intending to purchase another vessel.

Sir Kenneth Anderson and Mr. G. E. Geddes, of the Orient S.N. Coy., left Melbourne for London on 27th April, by the "Orvieto," after having completed an agreement with the Commonwealth Government for the new English mail contract.

The late Mr. Morgan Bevan John, brass founder, of Ballarat, who died in February, left £5575 real estate, and £42,388 personally to his widow and children.

The Minister of Railways and Harbours in South Africa seems a sensible sort of man. Replying to a suggestion made in the House of Assembly that the pernicious example of Australia should be followed in the establishment of a South African State fleet of merchant vessels, he said, if by such means a shipping monopoly were created in South Africa, freights would be trebled; adding that if the Commonwealth had made a profit on Government-owned ships, it was done in exceptional circumstances. Before forming a conclusion on that point, he would like to see accounts extending over some years.

The facilities for loading wheat at Portland, Victoria, are reported to have proved quite satisfactory. Several vessels of deep draught have loaded there. So far, 325,000 bags have been put aboard the various craft offering in quick time. No labour difficulty has so far occurred.

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