

# AVE ATQUE VALE

"Hail and Farewell"

Memories of the Port of Hobart (1895—1930)  
by Sir William E.L.H. Crowther

In memory of all books which lay  
Their sure foundations in the heart of Man;  
Whether by native prose or numerous verse,  
That in the name of all inspired Souls,  
From Homer, the Great Thunderer; from the Voice  
Which roars along the bed of Jewish Song;  
And that, more varied and elaborate,  
Those trumpet-tones of harmony that shake  
Our shores in England; from those loftiest notes  
Down to the low and wren-like warblings, made  
For Cottagers and Spinners at the wheel,  
And weary Travellers when they rest themselves  
By the highways and hedges; ballad tunes,  
Food for the hungry ears of little Ones,  
And of old Men, who have surviv'd their joy...

William Wordsworth, The Prelude (1805)

The formative period of my life, and indeed almost all my life, from 1887 to the present date, has been in Macquarie Street, Hobart, as had been the lot of my great grandfather, grandfather, father and myself, since January 24th 1825. I vividly remember as a growing boy our ships, local and inter-Colonial, and overseas to the old world, which contributed to the revenue of the island, by the trade they fostered through whaling and sealing and through the carriage of wool, wattle bark, timber, and other Tasmanian products. Our principal asset, however, was being the terminal port for a large proportion of immigrants to Australasia, and for trade by whalers from the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The little town was exceptionally "Sea-Minded". Parents and grandparents had emigrated from the United Kingdom with their families, to say nothing of the Penal element, who "left their country, for their country's good". Again, for many decades, large numbers of our youth went to sea before the mast as apprentices to our locally built and owned ships.

It had already been the pattern of two generations of my family to travel to the United Kingdom, by slow sailing ships, in order to study Medicine, and in due course return to the Colony. It was the intention of my father that in due course, I should follow the same procedure. Thus in 1829, my grandfather, W.L. Crowther, later F.R.C.S. (Eng.) etc. etc., having served his apprenticeship to his father about 1832-1836, took over with confidence the position of ship's Surgeon to the barque EMU about to leave for London.

He took with him, a representative collection of live Tasmanian animals and birds, as well as a large number of skins of our varied and unique fauna. The majority of live specimens survived the journey of several months and, on arrival, the collection - alive and dead - was purchased in London by the then Lord Derby. The sum realized was sufficient to pay for my grandfather's two years in London, where he studied at Guys and St. Thomas' Hospitals, and passed his examinations, M.R.C.S.:L.R.C.P. - L.S.A. Not only this, but it allowed him also to study at the Paris Hospitals for a year as well.

My father, E.L. Crowther, M.D., M.R.C.S. in his turn went to the same hospitals, travelling as a passenger by the Blackwall Liner ALFRED, a full rigged ship. He qualified in 1840-42 as M.R.C.S., L.S.A. and then studied at Aberdeen University, and graduated M.B.Ch B. Aberdeen. He also worked at "Moorfields" for eye diseases, Birmingham for Obstetrics, and finished by marrying a distant cousin, Rosa Pearson. After Practicing in Lincolnshire for some 6 or 8 years, in the Penn areas, my grandfather wished him to come back to Tasmania. To do so, he shipped as Medical Officer to the famous SOBRAON, arriving home about the year 1870.

My father never wearied of answering my questions about ships, always with considerable emphasis on his father, W.L. Crowther, F.R.C.S. having owned a number of local ships in his career, including several whalers. My questions were usually concerned with the latter. We used to enjoy a most popular walk with our Father, or more with dear Sally Haigh, our Nurse; or again with my uncle Henry Lucas Crowther, Stipendary Magistrate stationed at Franklin, who came to Hobart every Friday, by the local coach and four, to take his Court at Kingston which then served the D'Entrecasteaux Channel area. When he was free on a weekend he would often take one or more of us children out for a walk.

He loved ships, and off we went round the wharves, at the foot of Murray Street, where the long extension of the "New" wharf Circa 1836 then was usually lined by sailing ships trading in and out of Hobart, from the United Kingdom and overseas.

At the town and south west corner of the port, adjacent to the local House of Assembly, was a very large wood yard, continually added to by the small ketches from the channel and Bruny Island that traded in firewood, the essential fuel of the citizens. At the New Wharf the first ships we came to were those from the United Kingdom with merchandise, namely the ETHEL, LUFRA, HARRIET MCGREGOR and others. Next in order were the locally owned barques and brigs, trading to the Australian Colonies and New Zealand. They occasionally moored in any vacant area to discharge and take on cargo for the return voyage.

The area alongside the Queensland ship delighted us with the array of pine-apples, bananas, etc., awaiting delivery to the markets and shops. Next in order were barques or brigs from Mauritius, the adjacent wharf piled with bags of sugar. Last of all were the sperm whaling ships, with barrels of oil lying on their sides on the wharf, which reeked with its rancid smell. All these we carefully inspected, our uncle answering all our questions with occasional help from the ship's crew, or the Master or Mate if on the ship. We were proud indeed of our locally-built ships, although the days of sail and wooden ships were already numbered. All too soon it was time to return home for our evening meal.

The elder three of our family had a very real contact with the London trader ETHEL, Captain Alfred Clunies Ross, whose daughter Isabel married my uncle Vere Hamilton. When the ETHEL had discharged her regular annual cargo and filled her holds with wool, a children's party was always arranged, and how we enjoyed them! Our refreshments including cordial and ship's fare, hard biscuits and dried fruits. As a schoolboy my seafaring commenced with several voyages from Hobart to Strahan in the small steamships of the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand.

In the 1900 period, the exploration of the Antarctic brought Hobart into the news with the visit of Captain Borchgrevink's expedition, and later those of Shackleton and Scott from the United Kingdom, and of Amundsen from Norway. Late in the year 1898 my father told me to be ready to walk down to the wharves with him that afternoon. At 3 p.m. we walked to one of the easterly piers, either Elizabeth or Argyle Street pier. We were to look over the SOUTHERN CROSS on which the Norwegian explorer, Borchgrevink, was planning to leave Hobart in December 1898 to go to the Antarctic, and winter in the Ross Sea.

In due course we boarded the ship, which was moored alongside the wharf, and were directed to join a group of people on the poop or after deck. Among them was a very old gentleman, whom I recognised as Sir James Agnew, a Physician, who lived a little above our home in Macquarie Street. My father removed his hat and saluted him, and then Sir James beckoned to me to join them. I crossed the deck and sat down beside the others. Sir James then said, "This is an historic occasion, but I can very well remember a former expedition to the Antarctic, about to start from Hobart." He then went on to speak of how, half a century before, he had a similar experience when Sir John Franklin, the Governor, was President, and he himself the Secretary of the Royal Society of Tasmania.

Sir James Agnew had close contact with the Captains Crozier and Ross whose ships H.M.S. EREBUS and TERROR were leaving to winter in the south, on the famous voyage when they discovered the Ross Sea, the Great Ice Barrier and Mount Erebus, a latent volcano. It was a landmark in my life, to hear him

speak of these famous men who, at Sir John's invitation, had formed an observatory in Government grounds, called "Ross Bank". Here a Base party made continuous magnetic observations, until the ships picked them up again on their return voyage and incorporated their findings in the final reports on the expedition. The area of "Ross Bank" is still to be seen in the grounds of Government House, but no trace of any specific building that may have constituted the work rooms of the little observatory.

In 1948 the Scott Polar Institute at Oxford most generously presented the Tasmanian Museum with a splendid oil painting of intense historic value. It is the only picture I know which shows so clearly the three great explorers of the Arctic and Antarctic regions, Sir John Franklin and Captains Ross and Crozier: a very noble, generous gift to the State of Tasmania.

Especially memorable was the visit of the FRAM. One morning I looked over the Derwent from our school ground, which occupied part of the old Military Barracks. I saw a strange vessel anchored which looked very like an exploration ship. Her Captain, Amundsen, landed and sent a wire to his base in Norway. Two days later we read the large headlines of the "Mercury", which told the news of Amundsen having attained his objective, and being the first to reach the South Pole.

The period from February 1905 to December 1910, I passed as a resident student of Ormond College at the University of Melbourne. During these five years I made a considerable number of passages from Launceston to Melbourne. This was a very important period as, during these years, there was in Europe and elsewhere a considerable awakening of interest in the Antarctic Continent and its exploration. Apart from Australia, Great Britain, New Zealand, the United States of America, France, Germany and the Scandinavian nations, especially Norway, were involved with the Argentine Republic also claiming ownership of certain areas by reason of historical sealing interests in that Continent.

My interests had to be satisfied with reading of these activities in the Melbourne "Argus" or "Age". Although M. Charcot, in the French ship POURGOUL EAS visited Port Melbourne or Williamstown, I had no means of seeing or visiting the ship. Her Master reported her progress, took on supplies, and left again to continue his quest and exploration. Thus for my knowledge of Shackleton and the fate of his ship, the ENDURANCE (crushed by an ice pack) and how, by great and gallant effort afterwards, her boats reached South Georgia and civilisation, I had to rely on the daily papers just mentioned. I have already attempted elsewhere to render my tribute to Captain R.F. Scott and his ship the DISCOVERY. Alas Scott himself and his gallant companions, after attaining the South Pole, perished of exhaustion, almost within sight of the huts of the expedition's base, and the DISCOVERY returned sadly to Australia and New Zealand.

My graduation came in 1910, and now it was my turn to follow the family tradition and go to the United Kingdom. So it was that in 1911 I went to Sydney to join the S.S. MORAVIAN of the Aberdeen White Star Line as ship's surgeon. The MORAVIAN was very old, of perhaps 6,000 tons, and her line carried emigrants and trade in freights between London, South Africa and Australasian ports. The first Australian port on the outward voyage was Hobart, and emigrants changed here for New Zealand and the Australian Colonies. This voyage lasted two months and was a fascinating experience for a young graduate, with the sole responsibility for Quarantine regulations. The responsibility weighed heavily on me as I had no individual practical training as a Resident House Surgeon or House Physician before this voyage. However, all went well, although I found I was continually in demand to young children who had stuffed a pea, bead or button, or other foreign body into the nose or ear, and I had to get it out.

I had a most interesting and happy voyage. The agreement with the Company was that, for my services, I had my keep, very good food and company in the small Officer's Mess, and a salary of two shillings a month. To be paid off, I went in due course to the Board of Trade in London with the rest of the crew, to claim my four shillings which I wanted to wrap up to bring back and give to my mother. They said that it was just an imaginary sum to legalise the agreement and that they never paid it. So I lost my two florins, and Aberdeen became the richer for all my efforts.

This was followed by a spell of six months as Assistant House Surgeon to the Bellinghroke Hospital at Wandsworth, S.W. London, working on Accident and Surgical Cases only. Six months later, my term up, I applied for a vacancy at the "Dreadnought Hospital", Greenwich, England. Although appointed, I was unable to take this excellent job, as my father wanted me home for urgent family reasons. So I returned as a 2nd class passenger on R.M.S. OMAHA of the Orient Line.

Back in Hobart in 1912, I was very soon elected to the Council of the Royal Society of Tasmania, which brought me in constant touch with the Australian, New Zealand and Great Britain Antarctic expeditions, notably Captain McKenzie, of the DISCOVERY. Captain J.K. Davis was not commanding on this occasion, but I knew him well later. Also I knew very well some of the scientific staff, notably Dr. A. Falla (now Sir Robert Falla) of New Zealand, a noted ornithologist with whom I had corresponded in regard to the birds of Macquarie Island. It is to be remembered that Macquarie Island has been and still remains a Dependency of Tasmania. Falla wrote an excellent volume on the "Ornithology of the Antarctic", in which he gave a full and detailed description of the birds observed by the expedition. He sent me a presentation volume which is now in my collection at the State Library of Tasmania, one of the star items among my books.

During the first World War I was "trooping" on HMT OSKOVA from Australia to Egypt, and by the KNIGHT TEMPLAR from Alexandria to Lemnos and Gallipoli. I made the return voyage in 1919 by HMT KARMALA, Captain Armitage, between Great Britain and Melbourne. Armitage himself had Antarctic experience, and Bennervaise, Assistant Adjutant, (who recently has written a book on the Antarctic) was also on the KARMALA.

In the early years of my Practice, about 1920-1946 at Hobart, I became owner of a share of the yawl CONELLA with my lifelong friends, Fowler, Richards, Thirkell and Duncan McCraw. I had previously gone cruising in the HERMIONE which, like the CONELLA, was yawl rigged and about thirty feet long. In the CONELLA we cruised our east coast and Maria Inland every Easter for several years. My obstetric appointments prevented me from undertaking any longer cruises. I had no personal experience of square-rigged sailing except by conversation with men among my patients who were professional sailors.

About 1929/1930 I saw much of Scott's famous ship, the DISCOVERY already made famous by her voyage to the Ross Sea, which Mawson made Hobart the base for the united expedition of Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand to the Antarctic. For many years Hobart was the port of departure for Antarctica, but gradually Christchurch, New Zealand, made itself indispensable to Antarctic explorers. I was also fortunate to meet again with Dr. Robert Falla (now Sir Robert). Some years before, I had reported to the Council of the Royal Australian Ornithological Union on the ornithology of Macquarie Island. Falla encouraged me to proceed with my idea to take action and move to preserve the native Fauna of Macquarie Island, thus primarily protecting from financial interests and extinction the sea elephants and penguins, especially the slaughter of the latter. At the annual meeting of the Royal Australian

Ornithological Union held at Adventure Bay, Tasmania about 1939-40, Mr. A. Sutler seconded my motion on the Agenda of the meeting to approach and request the Government of Tasmania to declare Macquarie Island a "Sanctuary" in regard to its native birds and animals. The resolution was passed, and the Chief Secretary duly reported to the Government our requests and reasons for acting. As a result, the island was Gazetted as a "Sanctuary" and even the fur bearing seal is building up its herds again, and the slaughter of the penguins for their oil has ceased.

Later as Vice President of the Royal Society of Tasmania, I met many of Australia's outstanding writers, scientists and explorers, notably Sir Edgeworth David, Sir Douglas Mawson and Professor Dakin. It was my good fortune to have had these splendid Australians as guests in my home. Sir Edgeworth David was a charming character, and stayed with me when he came to Hobart to receive the C.E. Lord Medal of the Royal Society. He had packed his own suitcase at Sydney, and on the night of the presentation, found he had left behind the trousers of his dress suit. We were much the same build, so I was able to resolve the difficulty, and he wore for the occasion my spare pair. Professor Dakin also used my whaling material, and paid my observations a much appreciated compliment in his text of "Whalemen Adventurers".

Other impressions of our harbour of Hobart and its ships remain in my memory from the early years of the century. For example, there were the annual visits of ships of the Australian Pacific Squadron of the Royal Navy. The annual visits of this fleet of Survey ships and small 2nd and 3rd Class cruisers were regularly associated with the months of January and February. They afforded the Squadron the opportunity to cool off after service in the tropical areas of the South West Pacific, where His Majesty's ships were keeping the "Pax Britannica" and surveying uncharted areas. The period of their stay coincided with the annual north and south Cup meetings and other Tasmanian horse racing events, regattas, and much entertainment for and by visitors from Melbourne and Sydney who were socially minded.

In regard to work, a Naval friend, Lt. Commander (Jacky) Jackson, from one of the Survey ships, M.M.S. TORCH (?), once invited me to see the Chart Makers at work in a very large, well-lighted room in Parliament House, where the charts were "made up". Also, the Squadron as a whole practised gunnery as well as manoeuvres and tactics around Bruny Island and Storm Bay from time to time. However, the social side was paramount. The ships were then always anchored in the stream, and in the six weeks of the season each ship gave a small dance on board, invitations to which were eagerly sought. In return, such functions as the Matron's Ball, the Girl's Ball etc. etc. were given. As a medical student, home from Melbourne, I joined in the fun whenever possible, and in my last year, at the termination of the long vacation, I went on from a dance in the Masonic Hall, to H.M.S. ENCOUNTER and she took me back to Melbourne and "Ormond College" and my University work. A most pleasant, and remarkable experience as the guest of Captain Gaunt.

To return to the routine traders to the various Australian Colonies and New Zealand: the passenger and cargo trade was very largely carried on by the Huddart Parker, Australia, and Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand - this Company having absorbed the local "Tasmanian Steam Navigation Company" about 1904. At that time we had at least a direct service to Sydney on Saturday mornings, and every second week the Melbourne, Hobart, Bluff run to New Zealand. Trade and passengers went also by the returning vessel from New Zealand. Then also we were able to travel interstate from Sydney via Hobart, or just Hobart to Melbourne, by the great Orient and P & O luxury liners. There was then no direct shipping link between Hobart and Western Australia.

So far, I have omitted our other great export, apples by refrigeration, carried by the Royal Mail, Orient and P & O Liners, splendid luxury Liners carrying 1st and 2nd class passengers and freight between London and Australian ports. These lovely ships with the profile of 2 funnels, not "raked" and 2 masts, averaged between 7,000 and 12,000 tons before the 1914-18 war. They carried interstate passengers as well as those for London and Europe. The liners then called at Hobart on the home run, alternating P & O one week, Orient the next, berthing at Kings or Ocean Pier. The waterside men were waiting ready to load the apples, which went on for many hours and all Saturday until 4 p.m. when, with their complement of apples and all passengers on board, the ship drew away from the wharf for Melbourne about 4.30 p.m. arriving there on Monday morning early. The balance of the apple crop went, in later years, in finely fitted ships, designed for cargo not passengers. The change was brought about by the passing of a new Navigation Act, that completely changed the interstate passenger trade and the out-ports, such as Port Huon have prospered as a result.

Also, the Navigation Act has reduced the trade of Hobart to a very marked degree. No longer can the smaller interstate steamers attract passengers - perhaps the air is responsible in part for that - nor can the P & O and Orient Liners, "take on" the apple trips that bought passengers from Sydney to Hobart, and carry Hobartian passengers to Melbourne, or from Sydney to Hobart. Then came the two World Wars, when our Liners became troop ships, and many fell victims to submarine attacks. Again, on resumption of trade after the 2nd World War, came "Container" ships, and Hobart has to be content to see the transferring of Containers without the ship berthing at Hobart. Looking now at the empty wharves of our wonderful harbour, one can only reflect on the glories of the past.

These events are commemorated by the Logs and Journals kept on the voyages, and by pictures, photographs, and the accounts of early incidents, by writings, printed and in manuscript, such as ship's Logs and Journals. Compared with those of the United States of America, our collections are scanty and scattered. The State Library of Tasmania collection, and particularly my section of it, compared to British and American is comparatively very lacking numerically in such materials, so essential for research. My collection of Logs in the State Archives, includes the actual ship's Logs, covering 68 separate voyages in 44 volumes.

A private collector Mr. Alfred Johnson (?) of Battery Point, has a very well known collection of photographs of the ships of Hobart Town which should be acquired for purposes of recording the growth of our trade. The splendid display of ships models etc. etc. in the Tasmanian Museum's Nautical section does most to keep alive the great traditions of this port, and is not matched in my opinion by any of the Museums in the South West Pacific area. So I send this narrative, with an expression of great interest in "The Great Circle" and its career, which should serve to preserve the great shipping traditions of our Race, "transported" to the then far-distant South West Pacific, to found, and develop the Great Discoveries of Australia and New Zealand.

About 1937, I attended a Scientific Congress at Auckland, New Zealand, and met many Scientists, and others, hitherto only known by repute and correspondence. Now, in my ninety-third year, I cannot undertake journeys beyond Tasmania, and have to content myself by recording my experiences. In the nature of things, my own "Call" should not be long delayed, and I hope to face the uncertain and difficult period ahead with trust and calm. So I draw this narrative to its close, Mr. Editor, expressing my most sincere goodwill and wishes to "The Great Circle", for its long and successful life of service to our community, and remain,

Mr. Editor, very truly yours, (Sir William Crowther)

Acknowledgments. I have to express my admiration for the forbearance and kindness of my Secretary, Mrs. K.A. Walker, who showed her endless patience in rendering my small and crabbed handwriting into her excellent typescript.

My librarian, Miss C. Wesley, has also been of very real assistance in recalling information for me that I was unable to remember.

References: 1937 A Naturalist's Voyage from Van Dieman's Land to England, Feb 24 to June 22, 1839

as printed in the "Emu" Vol XXXVII (Sill 519)  
(Gandevia 26)

and as reprinted 1938 in St. Thomas' Hospital Gazette  
pp 473-486

1960 Surgeon Apprentice and Naturalist, being incidents from the journal of William L. Crowther during the voyage of the barque EMU from Van Dieman's Land to London Dock Feb 24 to June 22 1839

as printed in the Medical Journal of Australia, 1960  
pp 446-452

Sir William Crowther's narrative was written at the age of 91 years and nine months, at a time when he was heavily committed to contributing to Mr. Stuart Sherman's International Appeal for whaling data, as a "salute and expression of goodwill to the .... journal for maritime history entitled THE GREAT CIRCLE. He stated that he was much gratified at being invited to contribute a paper, and felt that he "should make some small contribution to the venture, and chose this as his expression of greeting and goodwill".

The Editor and Executive Council of the Australian Association for Maritime History have decided that this paper should be published as a special supplement to the Association's journal, THE GREAT CIRCLE, so that it may reach a wider public. A paper by Caroline Wesley on Sir William's collection at the State Library and State Archives of Tasmania, including a full list and description of the logbooks, appears in Volume 1 Number 2 (October 1979) of THE GREAT CIRCLE, available from the Honorary Secretary, The Australian Association for Maritime History, at \$7.50 including postage.

The shortest distance between two places on earth is represented by "the great circle" that links them - a concept of the greatest importance for ocean navigation, particularly during the heyday of the sailing ship when masters would deviate as little as possible from these lines on long legs of their passage. THE GREAT CIRCLE, the journal of the Australian Association for Maritime History symbolises the significance of Australia's maritime links with overseas, and indicates our aim to promote the development of maritime history, and to encompass all individuals and groups interested in aspects of this fascinating subject. For details of membership please write to the Honorary Secretary, Vaughan Evans, c/- Box 4149 G.P.O., Sydney, N.S.W. 2001.

*The Australian Association for Maritime History*

*Publisher of 'The Great Circle'*