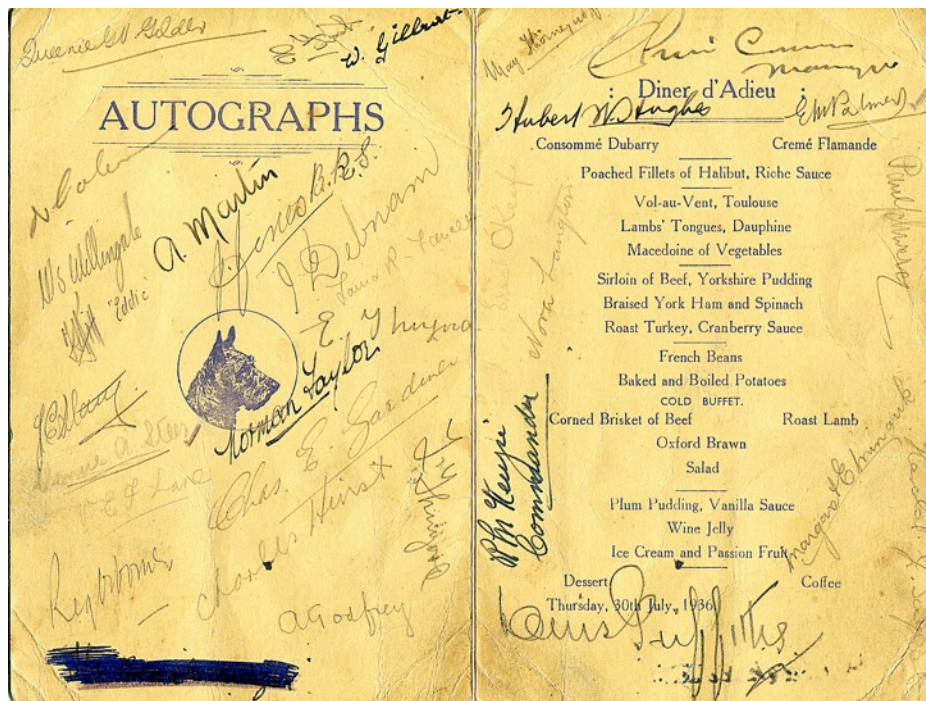


## A Pre-War Cruise

With the boom in the popularity of cruising and the ever increasing number – and size – of cruise ships, nowadays there are cruises available to suit every taste and pocket.

My own seafaring career did not include any experience of passenger or cruise ships and like many others I thought that the luxury of cruising was, until relatively recently, reserved for the wealthy.

I was intrigued then, when Cachalot Richard Olden sent me a memento of a pre-war cruise on the T.S.S. "Esperance Bay". It was in the form of a souvenir menu card of the farewell dinner on a cruise of the Atlantic Isles from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1936. It came from Richard's neighbour, Steve Mayall, and the passenger in question was Steve's Uncle Thomas.



The inside of the card displayed the menu and there was ample space for the autographs of Thomas's fellow passengers. And crew, for there is also the signature of the Commander, R. McKenzie. But why the determined obliteration of one at bottom left?

On the back was a page of printed memories and it was these that had sparked Richard's interest. They were obviously relevant to that particular voyage but were they Thomas's own words or a distillation of events as drawn up by the purser's team. Richard says, "It appears that the MEMORIES must have been those of Thomas, and each passenger's MEMORIES would have been on their individual Souvenir for the farewell dinner. It seems that, before the meal, the commander had signed each souvenir, and each passenger's name had been written at the bottom of the AUTOGRAPHS page. The heavily-inked erasure appears to be blotting out ".....

Mayall", presumably by Thomas, as it wasn't his signature. Having myself, for many years a navigating officer in Union-Castle passenger ships, been used to feeding last-minute info to ship's printers (each vessel had just one) for our farewell menus, I can visualise the task faced by the printer of "Esperance Bay". The voyage ended on 31st July, but the date of Thomas's last Memory was July 28th, and probably all passengers were given the same deadline, giving the printer a couple of days in which to print all the individual Memories."

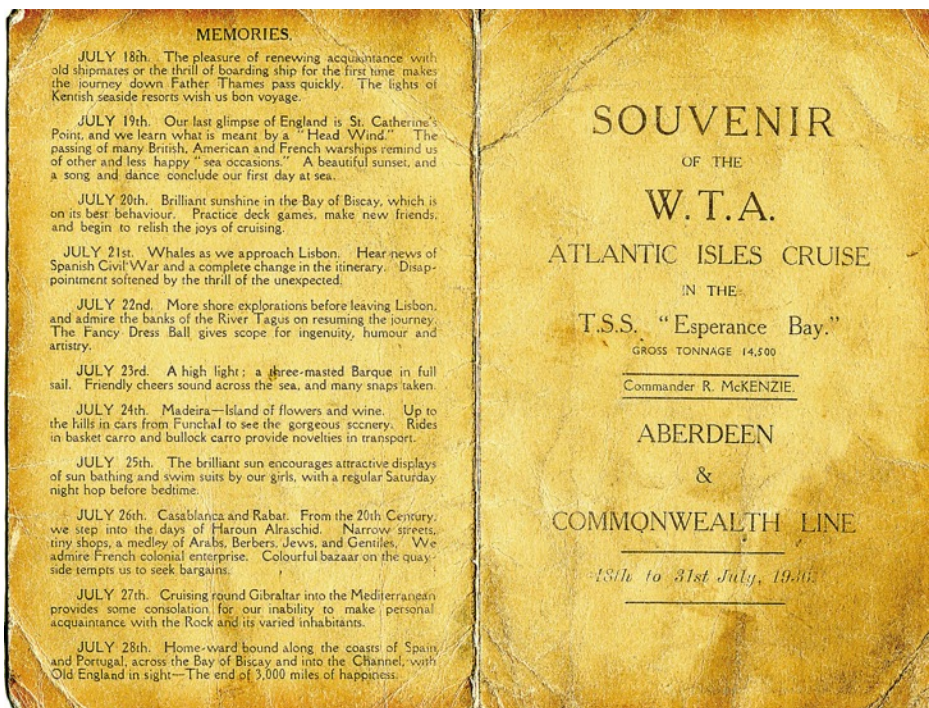
The front of the card threw up another intriguing question, that of who, why or what was the 'W.T.A.'

Having trawled through over 100 acronyms online (Womens Tennis Association, Wisconsin Telephone Association, and a lot worse) without success, Steve, who had also scoured the 'net, came to my aid with the following: "The Workers Travel Association (WTA) which was established in 1921 by Trade unions and the Co-operative Movement to offer organised,

affordable overseas travel to working class people. It became known as Galleon World Travel Association Ltd, but folded in the 1980's. The member of the association could make small regular payments into a fund which could be redeemed against travel, and I have two original payment books one of which starts in 1937."

Having determined my interest Steve forwarded me a couple of photographs and one of the Share books and these provided even more interesting questions. The picture of the barque, mentioned in the 'Memories', was taken by Thomas and was subsequently published in his local newspaper in Oldham, Lancs. I have been unable to identify the ship but perhaps some member with the time and inclination may be able to. Here are some pointers:

Picture taken on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1936, between Lisbon and Madeira.





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The number of people on board and the portholes along the length of the vessel would indicate a training ship.

Is that a Portuguese flag? The third of the flag at the hoist seems to be a different colour but that may be an optical delusion.

She is carrying a skysail at the top of the fore and main masts. This is unusual in that most of the sailing vessels that I came up with in my search, even in contemporary pictures, are rigged with five sails at most on each mast. However, sailing ships were frequently re-rigged to suit economic constraints so this may be another red herring, although a sail trainer with an abundance of hands might be expected to maintain a full rig.

The paying-in book also provides some interest to a saver and scrimper like me. It dates from late '37, after this particular voyage, and Thomas contributed a modest £1 a quarter until the war years. After the war he contributed a bit more but the average until March 51 was around £3 per year. He made no more payments until this particular book closed in Oct. '62 and the interest earned in those last 11 years was almost as much as the total that he had paid in during the previous 14. My calculator reveals interest rates from 3.7% to 4.95%. Those were the days! Depression, poverty, rickets, war and rationing but at least they had a half decent interest rate.

My trawl also revealed some information about Captain McKenzie. I had Googled 'Commander R McKenzie Esperence Bay' (go on, try it, or you can click [here](#) and [here](#)) and was quite pleased with what was revealed.

He had been in command of the *Esperence Bay* since she was built in 1922 and continued to be so until the war when she was requisitioned by the Ministry of War. He went to Australia to retire but accepted command of the *Commissaire Ramel*, a French cargo/passenger liner which had also been requisitioned and was managed by Shaw, Savill & Albion. This vessel was sunk in the Indian Ocean by a German raider and McKenzie ended up held for many months in Italian East Africa with 200 other allied seamen until the British gained control there in March '41 and they were released.

I'm afraid that my Googling has led me to meander somewhat from the original story but I hope that you find it as interesting as I did. *Editor*



**Can anyone identify this barque?**



Thomas Mayall, *pictured left, on the cruise*, spent most of his working life in the textile industry in the proud Lancashire cotton mill town of Oldham as a “time served sheet metal worker”. My Uncle started work at 14 and was always very proud that he was “time served” because it meant that he had been through the rigors of a five year apprenticeship giving him the title of a “skilled man” which came with a better wage packet at the end of the week. Uncle Thomas manufactured all manner of components for the textile industry from hoppers and chutes to carry raw cotton, to cylinders for carding machines used to comb out and straighten the cotton fibres, before spinning into yarn.

Thomas was one of the lucky few who managed to stay in employment throughout the difficult days of the 1920's and 30's, a benefit, he claimed, of being a “time served man” which enabled him to fund and take time out for a cruise. In 1936 this was both unusual and exotic for the ordinary person from Oldham to even contemplate. *Steve Mayall*



The *Esperance Bay*, and her sister ships, *Hobson's Bay*, *Jervis Bay*, *Largs Bay* and *Moreton Bay* were built for the Australian Commonwealth Line in 1921/2 and purchased by the White Star line in 1928. All were transferred to the Aberdeen & Commonwealth Line in 1933. They ran a one-class passenger service between the UK and Australia.

The Atlantic cruise was not just a one-off as, when trawling the 'net for images, I came across another such souvenir card, this time for a Fancy Dress Ball on a similar W.T.A. cruise in 1934.

Later in 1936 the *Esperance Bay* was transferred to the Shaw, Savill & Albion Line and renamed *Arawa*. *Hobson's Bay* took up her name.

The *Jervis Bay* was the only one of the sisters not to survive the war, being sunk in 1940 by the German cruiser ADMIRAL SCHEER while protecting a convoy as an Armed Merchant Cruiser. Her valiant action gave time for most of the convoy to disperse and earned her captain, Fogerty Fegan, a posthumous Victoria Cross. See <http://hmsjervisbay.com> The remaining ships were scrapped between 1955 and 1957.



**This particular class of Bay boats were twin screw ships of around 14,000grt and 531 ft long.**