

Captain James Goodridge and the Mail Packet “Wonder”

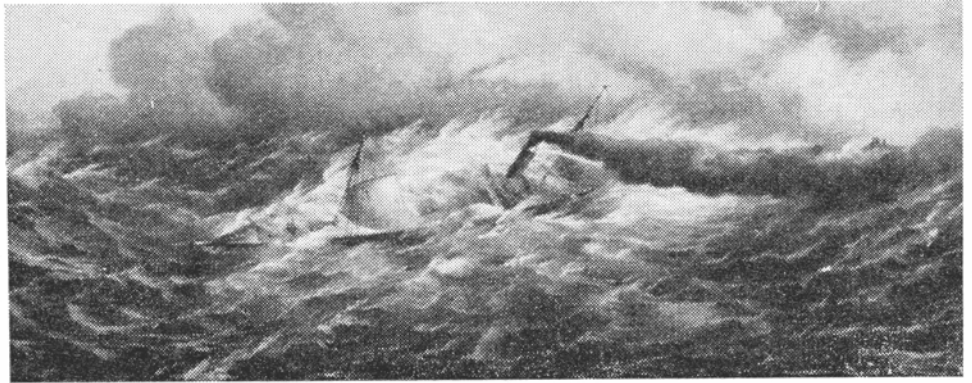
When The Southampton Master Mariners’ Club vacated the clubroom in the Stella Maris building in St.Michael’s Square the vast majority of its memorabilia and artefacts was boxed up and stored at various locations throughout the city and docks. Before packing, many of the items were photographed and all were catalogued.

Reading through this list recently I came across an item that awoke my curiosity.

It is described as “Silver megaphone with design and inscription - “Presented to Captain James Goodridge of the Mail Packet “Wonder” on the 1st. day of January 1847, in token of the high estimation in which his character for nautical duty, so eminently displayed throughout the fearful storm of Wednesday, the 21st October 1846, and his uniform devotion to the interest and comfort of the public, is held by the Inhabitants of Jersey”.

In addition to the megaphone there is a photograph of “Wonder” and a replica of a silver medallion presented to a Mr.Clements, Chief Officer of the vessel and who later was appointed to command her.

The paddle steamer “Wonder” was built on the Thames in 1844 for The South Western Steam Navigation Company. Her builders were the Blackwall company



South Western Steam Navigation Company’s packet vessel “Wonder ” depicted in the Channel gale described in this article

Ditchburn & Mare and she was engined by Seaward & Capel - both companies long since defunct.

Her Certificate of Build gives her a LOA of 158 feet, a beam of 20 feet 6 inches and a tonnage of 250. In those days steamers were few and far between and there was fierce rivalry between new ships in respect of speed. On trials in the Thames “Wonder” demonstrated that she was indeed a very fast ship and well suited for her intended trade between Southampton and the Channel Islands. She arrived in Southampton in October 1844 and records indicate that initially, under the command of Captain James Goodridge, she was engaged in the service to Le Havre until, in May 1845 she took up her appointed trade. On her first voyage she arrived in Guernsey some 15 hours late (due to a damaged paddle) but thereafter she soon established a reputation for punctuality

and her speed was the talk of maritime Southampton. Such, indeed, was her fame that she was chartered by the Duke of Devonshire (and later by the Board of Admiralty) in connection with a naval review in the Channel. It was reported that Her Majesty was so impressed by the speed of the ship that she “organised” a race in The Solent between “Wonder” and H.M.Yacht “Fairy”- a contest easily won by “Wonder”.

By all accounts the ship traded successfully between Southampton, Guernsey and Jersey without incident, until October 1846. On Tuesday, October 20th. Captain Goodridge left at his usual time of 1900. As he steamed down the Solent the wind freshened and as she cleared the Isle of Wight Captain Goodridge knew it was going to be an uncomfortable voyage for his passengers. Soon the ship was in the midst of a storm described later by her Captain as “the most boisterous transit I have ever made in countless cross Channel passages”. Off the Casquets “Wonder” broached to and Goodridge feared that she might overturn but his seamanship skills prevailed and she came upright with such violence that passengers were flung from their beds and her bulwarks stove in in several places. Finally, the terrified passengers were greeted by a cheering crowd as Captain Goodridge brought his battered command into Guernsey on the early afternoon of Wednesday, October 21st. Later that day he sailed to Jersey where he was accorded a hero’s welcome.



Above: The silver megaphone in the Club’s possession which dates back to 1847. On the right is a close-up of the inscription.

As the story of the storm - and the shipping losses incurred - unfolded, the local newspaper, the "Guernsey Star" organised a public subscription to recognise the heroism and professionalism of the Captain of the paddle steamer "Wonder" and this culminated in the presentation of the silver speaking trumpet.

The award was cherished by Captain Goodridge and his family and was handed down through the family until, in 1933, Captain James Goodridge, grandson of the Captain of "WONDER" and himself a Club member, presented the cherished trophy to The Cachalots "in memory of Dr. Woods, Bishop of Winchester and the first "Stowaway" member of The Southampton Master Mariners' Club".

The ship's home port - Southampton - chose to honour her in the "traditional" way but today few will recall the small public house called "The Wonder". Situated near to Northam Bridge the pub displayed a model of its namesake but the primary attraction comprised four leaded lights incorporated in the doors and windows with each portraying a picture of the ship and the tortuous weather conditions she endured.

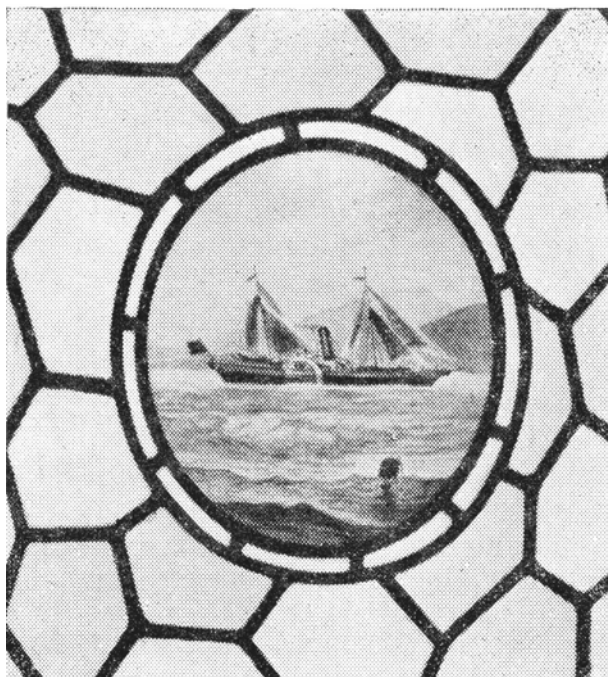
"The Wonder" closed in the late 1958 and the site was developed for accommodation.

What happened to the model and to the leaded lights has never been revealed but, hopefully, somebody, somewhere knows where they are. I was told recently that the leaded lights form part of the windows of St. Mary's Church - and one day I will go and look.

If the Club's present plans come to fruition then, perhaps very soon, the megaphone and other relics relating to yet another of Southampton's famous ships will once again be on display.

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*One of the leaded lights
from the
Wonder Inn*



The Wonder Inn, Northam, Southampton, demolished in October 1958