

# The Master's Mariner

Summer 2009



Caring for seafarers  
around the world

## A Time For Sowing and a Time For Reaping



Chaplain Jack Starmans has been with us for just over 18 months. Here he shares a life-changing moment: *Recently I took 'Dan', a Filipino seafarer, back to his ship at Port Botany. He had joined a new ship as his previous vessel had just sailed its last voyage before being scrapped. As the conversation moved on to spiritual things I asked him, "If you were to die today, and stood before the Lord Jesus Christ, and he asked you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?', what would you say?" Dan thought about it and said, "That is a hard question to answer". He then said, "I have done good things". I explained that if he could be good enough to get into heaven, why did Jesus die on the cross? Dan quickly realised that Jesus had to die, in our*

*place, to take the punishment that we deserve, because no one can ever be good enough. After we arrived at the terminal we continued to talk. I gave him a copy of the booklet 'The Gift of God'. I mentioned to him about the prayer of commitment, in the back of the booklet (thinking that he would look at it on the ship). Dan found the prayer and prayed it then and there, in the bus. I then prayed for Dan and encouraged him to keep in contact via email. God's word is powerful. Usually we are sowers of His Word, but this time I was blessed to be a reaper."*

## New Seafarers' Computers



When seafarers arrive at our Mission centre, one of their first priorities is to make contact with home. Although the most common way to do this is by telephone, seafarers are also very keen to catch up on their emails and other news from home. New technology such as VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) allows seafarers to use a computer's internet connections as a telephone / video service. This means that, with a headset and camera, seafarers can simultaneously talk with and see (and be seen by) their loved ones at home. It's not the same as actually being there, but it's the closest alternative currently available!

Our old computers were not capable of providing this feature, and were increasingly prone to 'gremlins' that either slowed them

significantly or rendered them inoperable (until a technician came in to fix them!). Thanks to the Australian Mariners' Welfare Society, we have been able to replace the old 'dinosaurs' with 3 new Apple Macintosh computers, that are everything the old computers were not! We have also expanded the number of internet terminals from 4 to 8 as, increasingly, seafarers are bringing their own laptops to use. All this comes at a price – we have had to change our internet 'plan' from a 15Gb cap to a 50Gb cap in order to cope with the high cost of the extra internet traffic!

But what is the Australian Mariners' Welfare Society, who so generously funded the purchase of these new computers?

## ***The Australian Mariners' Welfare Society***



In the last issue I wrote, *'One of the questions I am most often asked when speaking to groups about our ministry is 'Where do you get your funding?'. As a missionary organization*

*within the Anglican Church of Australia, most people are very surprised to learn that MtS Sydney receives no funding at all from our Diocese. This is because we are not a Diocesan Organization, but an Anglican Organization coming under the 'umbrella' of the Australian Anglican Church, not individual Dioceses. Not that this improves our financial lot, as they don't give us any funding either!*

*Without the financial support of individuals such as yourselves, and organizations such as the Australian Mariners' Welfare Society (AMWS) and, most especially The Sydney Bethel Union (SBU), we would not be able to minister to the tens of thousands of seafarers who visit Sydney each year. You make our ministry possible, and for that we (and the seafarers) are immensely grateful!'*

Whereas the SBU operates on a more local basis (Newcastle, Sydney, Port Kembla) the AMWS operates nationally and is of immense benefit to the 23 MtS Centres around the Australian Coastline. In this issue I'd like to share with you their history and current work.

In 1859 a number of citizens of Sydney 'actuated by philanthropic motives, formed a committee for the purpose of establishing a sailors' home at Sydney where seamen could at reasonable cost obtain comfortable board and lodging and be generally looked after and cared for by persons having only the interests of the sailors using the home at heart.'

Thus began the Sydney Sailors' Home, which through the one hundred and forty plus years of its history has evolved to meet the changing circumstances and requirements of those involved in the maritime industries.

### **The old Sailors' Home**



The old Home stands at mid-point in the history of Sydney Cove. When the plan to build it was conceived, the convict era had ended just 20 years earlier. The formative stage at and around Sydney Cove could be said to have ended; now, during a time of more intensive development, the fledgling city itself sought maturity.

Seaborne trade increased her wealth and her growth. Whalers and sealers came and went between the 1790s and 1870s, anchoring off Dawes Pt to sell oil, buy provisions, and refit.

It has been speculated that the proximity of The Rocks must have been an influence in the decision to found such a Home. The Rocks area had long been notorious as the resort of drunken sailors - in fact since the 1790s, when whalers began calling.

In May 1860 the NSW Government promised the committee a site at Circular Quay. When

sufficient funds had been collected, the Home in George Street North was built. It opened for the use of sailors in 1864.

### **SCRA resumption**

The Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA) Act was passed in 1968. By notification in the New South Wales Government Gazette dated 18 December 1970, the SCRA resumed the land upon which the Home stood.

By this time, sailors coming to the Port of Sydney were no longer in need of the kind of accommodation the Home offered. Shipboard accommodation had vastly improved, to the point where, on many ships, separate cabins were provided for crew members. Also by that time, seamen were much better paid than they had been a decade earlier.

The Council of SSH then deliberated on how best to carry out their future activities. The conclusion was that it would be appropriate to establish accommodation for retired seafarers and their dependants, and other aged people.

### **Interim accommodation**

Following upon settlement between SSH and SCRA, SSH leased premises at 144 Victoria Street, Kings Cross, where low-cost accommodation was provided for those remaining occupants of the original Home at George Street North.

In 1980 the lease at Kings Cross was terminated; a small residential building was purchased at 294 South Dowling Street, Paddington, where the remaining former occupants of the old Home and some others were accommodated.

The Council then set about the task of examining how best to carry out the trusts upon which the resumption moneys were held. After a good deal of research and inquiry, the Council concluded that an appropriate application of the trust moneys would be the establishment of a hostel for retired seafarers and their dependants and other aged persons.

After a thorough investigation, a site at Woolloomooloo was identified and purchased from the NSW Land & Housing Commission. The location, close to wharves and the fleet base, was considered to be a very appropriate area for seafarers to spend their retirement.

### **Mariners' Court**

On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1990, Mariners' Court was opened by His Excellency Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair AO, Governor of NSW, before a distinguished gathering of guests.

The building offered accommodation for 40 residents in comfortable, fully-furnished, serviced single rooms with private facilities attached.

However, marketing campaigns to attract residents had only limited success.

The Council reached agreement with the Royal Australian Navy to utilise the services of Mariners' Court for officers and ratings requiring temporary accommodation.

Residents of the Paddington building, plus some more mariners recently retired, were transferred to Mariners' Court.

### **Horizon Towers**

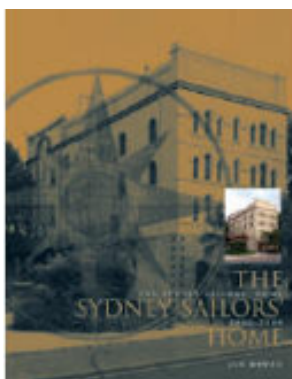
By 1998 only three ex-seafarers remained at Mariners' Court. In June 1998 Mariners' Court was sold, with the proceeds together with other assets held being used for the purpose of providing accommodation for retired seafarers of moderate or less than moderate means, and their dependants, and to assist such persons who may be residents of nursing homes or in other accommodation. The three ex-seafarers were catered for through the purchase of three single-bedroom self-care units at Horizon Towers, a new development at Hornsby. The balance of funds following purchase of the units was invested to support charitable objectives as defined the Sydney Sailors' Home Constitution.



It was further provided that financial assistance from income generated could be utilised to assist other charities involved with the needs and welfare of seafarers.

Permission was also granted for the establishment of educational scholarships for the children of seafarers or ex-seafarers of moderate means.

Consideration is presently being given to an expansion of the scholarship scheme and the ways by which Council might render assistance to other organisations engaged in caring for the needs of seafarers.



Recently, the story of The Sydney Sailors' Home / AMWS was put into book form by Jan Bowen. It tells of how the Home recast its role, re-emerging in the early years of the 21st century as—among other things—a generous provider

of ongoing financial assistance to organisations such as the Mission to Seafarers that open their doors to the hundreds of mariners whose work brings them to Australia's seaports every year.

Sensitively illustrated with historic and contemporary photographs, this book will be of interest to historians, librarians, seamen's charities, and indeed anyone interested in shipping, our early architecture and the stories of the seamen who have visited our shores.



The book was launched on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2009 by Her Excellency Dr Marie Bashir, Governor of NSW, who endorsed it wholeheartedly! An order form and further information may be found on <http://www.marinerswelfare.com.au>

## ***Hospital Hospitality***

Chaplain Jong Jo writes, *'Since 27<sup>th</sup> November to 11<sup>th</sup> December 2009, I have been looking after a crew member, Yashwant, who was in the hospital. This was the time when Christianity impacted him.'*



*Yashwant is a very strict Hindu as have his family been for generations. He told me that he is a vegetarian according to Hinduism. On one occasion my wife Sue and I bought a takeaway Indian food for lunch for him but it was rejected by him because of his religion.*

*While he was in the hospital I contacted him almost everyday by visiting him or calling him on the phone. He doesn't know anyone in Australia, so he was desperate for someone to visit him and take care of him. This situation allowed an opportunity to open Yashwant's*

*heart. So, at the end of our conversation on my first visit, I asked him if I could pray for him as a Christian chaplain. He accepted my offer and he said 'Yes, please. May your blessing heal my wound.' But he didn't know how to pray, so I told him to close his eyes and listen to me. That was the beginning of Yashwants' spiritual journey bit by bit. Every time it was a wonderful opportunity for God to minister to him.*

*He loved using my laptop to see pictures and download songs and pictures to his mobile from the laptop. And we sent his pictures to his family in India.*

*I gave him some reading materials and the Bible, which he read. Every visit I took something for him such as chips, drinks, lollies, prepaid phone card, combination lock. At the end Yashwant liked me as his father. He promised me that he would keep in touch with me after he got home in India. But I don't mind if he contacts me or not but I hope he finds the truth, in Jesus.*

*The last time we met was in front of his hotel, after he had been discharged from hospital. While we were saying goodbye he touched both of my knees and he said, 'It is my culture to do this to someone whom I respect'. I felt that I had successfully reflected Jesus' character to Yashwant.'*

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