



# THE 'FLYING ANGEL' STORY

The History of The Mission to Seafarers



The Revd John Ashley 1835

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The history of The Mission to Seafarers dates back to 1835 when a young Anglican clergyman holidaying near the Bristol Channel, the Revd John Ashley, realised that the seafarers who manned the ships there had no one to minister to them. He decided to change his plans to join a parish immediately and become a chaplain for crews who sailed the merchant fleet.

## **The Missions to Seamen founded 1856**

Revd John Ashley's work, between its beginnings in 1835 and his retirement in 1850, inspired similar ministries in other ports and, in 1856, it was decided that these should be grouped together under the name The Mission to Seamen Afloat, at Home and Abroad. In 1858 the society was renamed The Missions to Seamen and adopted a flying angel as its symbol. By this time the society had expanded its work to 14 ports.

The change from sail to steam, which took place during the late 1800s and the early 1900s, meant that ships could now dock at quaysides because they no longer had to anchor at sea waiting for a favourable wind. This created a need for somewhere for the seafarers to go ashore. In response, the Mission gradually opened centres so that the men could be offered light refreshments, reading and games rooms, good cheap accommodation and, of course, a chapel. Where there were no such centres seafarers were left at the mercy of crimps.

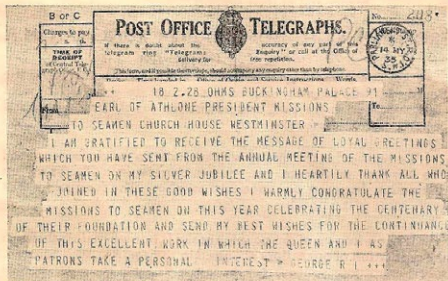
## **Abuse of seamen: the scandal of crimping gangs**

Crimping, involved the use of trickery, intimidation and violence by criminals, who were nicknamed crimps, and it flourished as a result of the way seafarers were paid. Instead of receiving their money on board ship, they were paid a few days later at their shipping company's offices. During those three or four days, crimps provided sailors with money, alcohol, food and lodgings, under the guise of hospitality. When payday arrived, the crimp presented his bill, which, in most cases, exhausted the seafarer's pay packet. Virtually penniless, he was forced to ship out again.

Stopping the crimps became a determined campaign of the Revd Robert Boyer, the first superintendent of The Missions to Seamen. Boyer fought passionately against crimping, and the pressure he put on the authorities to deal with it played a large part in the implementation of the Transmission of Wages Scheme (1880), whereby seafarers were supplied with a rail ticket and some money on leaving their ship, receiving the bulk of their wages at home via a money order.

THE MISSIONS  TO SEAMEN

A MESSAGE FROM HIS MAJESTY THE KING



FROM HIS GRACE THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF  
CANTERBURY

“THREE QUESTIONS I PROPOSE TO ADDRESS TO YOU

**FIRST** — OUGHT NOT THIS NATION TO BE READY  
TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE DEBT IT OWES TO  
ITS SEAFARING MEN?

Our merchant sailors, the men to whom we owe our  
very existence in this land.

There is no country in the world which owes more to  
its seafaring men than this country of ours.

**SECOND**— OUGHT NOT THE MOTHER CHURCH OF THIS  
SEA-GIRT ISLAND, AND OF THIS SEA-BORN  
RACE, TO BE FOREMOST IN SHOWING CARE  
FOR HER SAILOR CHILDREN?

It means everything that they should have in the Seamen's  
Church a place where they can be reminded of God.

But the Church is bound to care, not for the soul only  
but for the body of her seafaring children, therefore there  
are Insitutes.



## First World War

The outbreak of the First World War meant that some of the Mission's smaller stations were closed down. However, new ones opened: 27 in Britain and 24 overseas, to meet wartime demand. Several of these were shared with other welfare organisations. At Dunkerque for example, where a lot of work was done for Channel patrol vessels, a Mission chaplain shared a building with a Quaker ambulance unit.

With the First World War over, 1920 saw the start of the longest slump the British shipping industry had ever known. The pressure on the Mission was intense. For years, every evening there were queues of unemployed seamen outside Flying Angel clubs looking for food and accommodation. Few were ever turned away.



## Second World War

Gradually, however, as the British economy improved, seafarers found their conditions of work improving too. By the time the Second World War broke out the shipping industry was in a fairly stable condition.

The Mission's involvement in the war began on the very first day, following the torpedoing of the liner *Athenia*, off the Irish coast, with the loss of 112 lives. Survivors were visited in hospital by the Mission's Glasgow chaplain and from then on the Mission was in the thick of things. In response to the needs created by the convoy system used to keep countries and armies supplied, Mission stations opened

in places where the society had never worked before, such as Halifax, Nova Scotia. The work of the Belfast club was typical of the spirit with which the Mission responded to seafarers' needs during the Second World War. In canteens entirely staffed by volunteers, four and a half million meals were served, and although it was twice damaged by enemy action and once by fire, the canteens closed for only six days during the six years of war.

Recovery was slow after the war, both for the shipping industry and the Mission but gradually the society re-organised and by 1956, when the Mission celebrated its centenary, it had centres in 81 ports.



### Modernisation in the 1960s and 1980s

Shortly after that date, changes began to take place in the shipping industry which had enormous repercussions for both seafarers and for the Mission. Ships became larger and more specialised and containerisation became widespread. One result of these changes was much quicker turnaround times, which meant seafarers spent much less time in port and longer periods at sea. In response, the Mission closed some clubs, opened others in new ports, and moved yet others into smaller buildings nearer to where the ships docked and equipped them with the essentials for people with limited time ashore.

By the 1980s, changes in the world economy had brought a huge change in the nationalities of seafarers. While previously, the seafarers of the world's merchant navies had come predominantly from the Western world, two thirds of the world's seafarers now came from developing countries such as India and the Philippines. One reason was the increasing number of ships flying flags of convenience, as shipowners in traditional maritime nations reflagged their vessels in order to cut costs by





employing crews from low-wage developing countries. A significant number of these flag of convenience ships sailed with poorly trained crew members who were receiving inadequate wages and working in unsatisfactory, sometimes dangerous, conditions.

### **Working for justice and the Maritime Labour Convention (2006)**

The plight of seafarers continued to be the focus for Mission chaplains, who not only

worked hard to help with problems such as non-payment of wages and unsafe conditions, but started to campaign internationally at the highest levels for improved working conditions, just as their forebears had two centuries before. In 1985 the Mission appointed its first chaplain specifically to develop its work in the area of justice and welfare. In 2000, The Missions to Seamen changed its name to The Mission to Seafarers, the new name reflecting what the Mission had always been in reality – a society which cares for all who earn their living



at sea, regardless of belief, gender, nationality or rank.

The picture in the 21st century continues to be complex. The financial crisis and global downturn has caused a second great depression in shipping, and more misery for the world's seafarers, with the abandonment of vessels in 2009 doubling in that year alone. In 2000, there had been a glut of building new ships, which led to rates for the carriage of cargo falling and putting more financial pressures on ship owners and agents. This has led to more unscrupulous owners cutting corners with manning ships. Despite laudable improvements in health and safety, in 2012, more than 1,000 passengers and crew died at sea. Seafaring remains one of the world's most dangerous occupations.

In 2013 the Maritime Labour Convention came into force, which The Mission to Seafarers has tirelessly campaigned for in the last 10 years. Known as the 'bill of rights' for seafarers, it brings into being basic rights for crews, such as proper contracts and access to medical treatment and port-based welfare facilities. There is also a complaints system for seafarers, which Mission chaplains are

now key to helping with around the world. It is early days for the Convention, but we hope this will help our work by holding flag states and industry more accountable to seafarers in distress.

### **The challenge today**

The challenge The Mission to Seafarers faces, as it looks forward to celebrating its 160th anniversary in 2016, is how best to minister to people of many different cultures and faiths who are facing ever-increasing physical, cultural and social isolation. The Mission is now present in 260 ports in 71 countries, and ministering to over 1.3 million crewmen and women.

The shipping world continues to move and change and the Mission is always careful to review the places where it serves seafarers, and it is looking to the future with new ports planned in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam and Mumbai in India. Whatever the ways of working that The Mission to Seafarers develops in the future, the fundamentals will not change. Its mission is to be there for all crew men and women as a source of help, strength and hope to seafarers and their families.





# Thank you for your support!



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Please tick the box/es below and fill out the contact details overleaf to find out more about:

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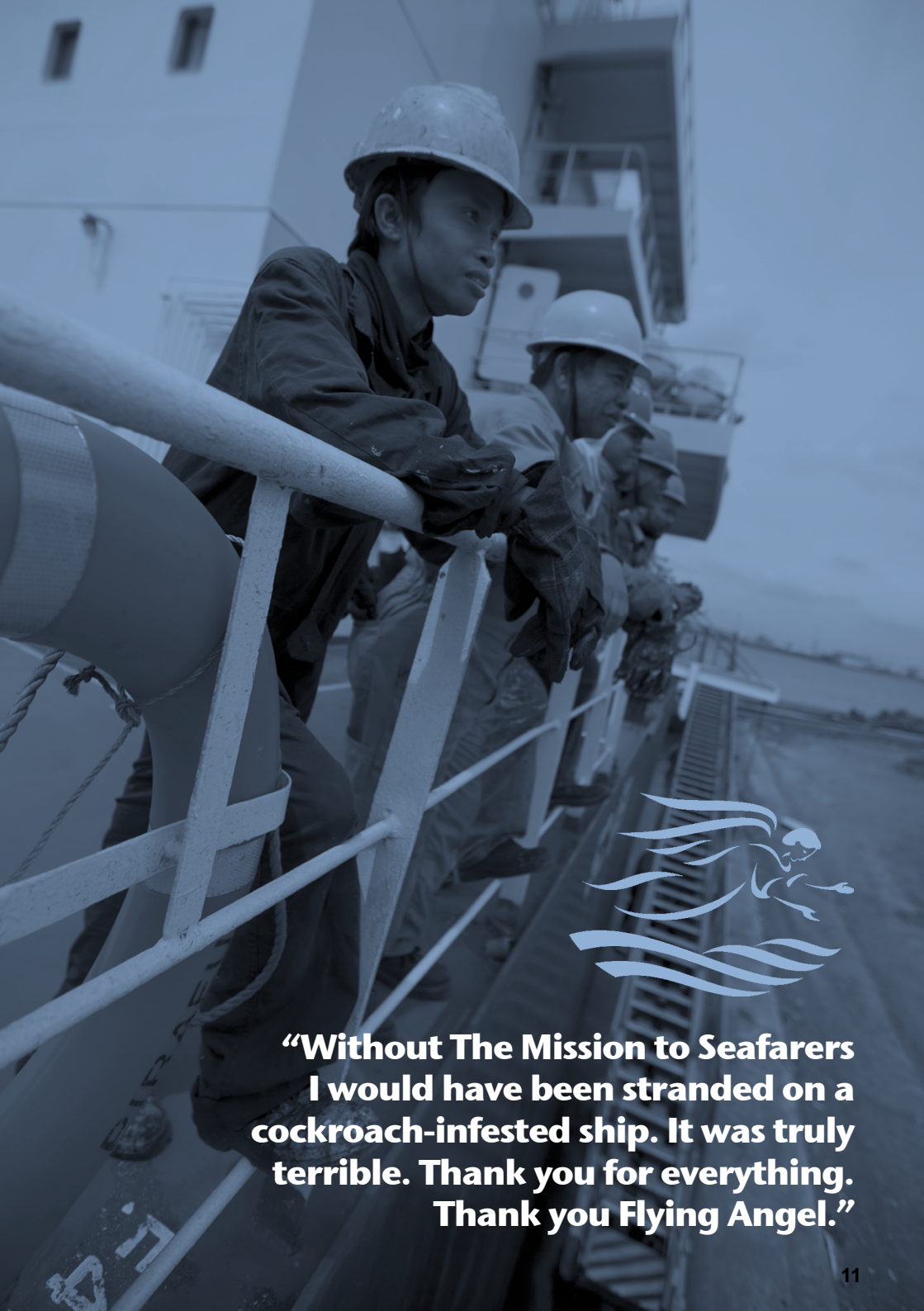
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FAS2014



**“Without The Mission to Seafarers  
I would have been stranded on a  
cockroach-infested ship. It was truly  
terrible. Thank you for everything.  
Thank you Flying Angel.”**



**Please help  
us support those  
who crew the  
world's merchant  
ships.**

A small donation can help provide emergency supplies as well as accommodation and transport for crews in need, or provide a phone card and internet access to contact a loved one back home.



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