

# "Ahoy Brother!" The Story of Shipboard Freemasonry: Part One

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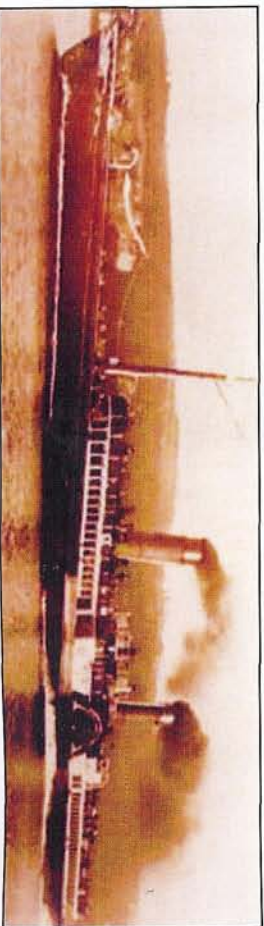
## Introduction

As early as 1749, minutes exist detailing that a lodge met twice on board a Royal Navy Man-of-War. This paper looks at lodges that met on board ships on an occasional basis and those that were warranted to meet on board Men-of-War. We must also document the existence of other shipboard lodge meetings and lodges of instruction that met and continue to meet. Additionally, masonic banquets aboard cruise liners will also be mentioned in this serialised article.

## Early Occasional Meetings

The early minutes of St Johns Lodge of Portsmouth No 1 of the Provincial Grand Lodge of New Hampshire (NH), US, which was constituted in 1736 by the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns) detail that the lodge met twice on board HMS *America*, a 44-gun Man-of-War (frigate) being built in a local shipyard for the Royal Navy, in Portsmouth NH. The first meeting was on Thursday 26 October 1749 and the second, on Monday 1 December 1749. From 1751 onwards, the lodge met ashore, in a local inn.

Royal Mail paddle steamer *Iona III*.



Between 1757 and 1758, seven newly admitted brethren of the third lodge in Sweden, Lodge Salomon a *trois serrures* at Gothenburg, employed by the Swedish East India Company, sought permission, in 1758, to hold meetings away from home. A warrant of constitution was issued enabling the seven brethren to hold meetings in the East Indies or 'whenever they came ashore.'

Named after a ship, the Prince Carl's Lodge, before the planned visit to Canton, the lodge met in Cadiz, where, four Swedish men on the naval ships berthed there, applied for initiation into the lodge and were duly balloted for. Minutes of two meetings exist, but none exist to confirm that meetings took place onboard the *Prince Carl*.

In 1811, records show that Admiral Brown held a lodge meeting on board an anchored HMS *Hercules*.

In 1922, the Knox Military Lodge of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts was consecrated on board the USS *Constitution*, moored in the Charleston Naval yard.

On 8 August 1942, an emergency meeting of Lodge Star-in-the-East 640 (SC) took place onboard the MS *Gripsholm*, an evacuation ship full of internees from Japan. The ship was en route to San

Above right: Lodge Star-in-the-East No 680 SC Shipboard meeting.

Right: Wei Hai Naval Base in 1906.

Francisco. The minute books were in the secretary's possession, Bro. C. Rodriguez-Jiminez. Among the passengers evacuated, besides the secretary, were the RWM and seven members. The RWM opened the meeting at 3.00pm on board the MS *Gripsholm*. Once the meeting had concluded the brethren decided that an affidavit was to be sworn by the brethren present to affirm the minutes of the meeting. This was done on 10 August 1942 in the US *Consulate* in Rio de Janeiro.

Lodge Sarawak 1452 (SC) was consecrated in Kuching, Sarawak on the island of Borneo on 25 January 1951. Preliminary meetings were often held aboard vessels alongside the wharves as the Government Shipping Master Bro. Matheson was involved in the inception of Freemasonry in Sarawak.

## Early Warranted meetings

Of the three sister or home constitutions, only the English Constitution warranted five regular lodges to meet on board Royal Navy Men-of-War. Called Blue Water Lodges, Bro. Thomas Dunkerley is thought to have been responsible for the three of



them. There is no evidence that Bro. Dunkerley was responsible for the instigation of the last two.

Thomas Dunkerley was 29 years old when he was initiated on 10 January 1754 into a lodge that met at the Three Turns Tavern at Portsmouth, Hants, UK. The lodge had many Naval Officers among its brethren, and Dunkerley was serving on board HMS *Tyger* at the time. Aged ten, he joined the Navy as a boy seaman, he later became a non-commissioned officer with the rank of Gunner and was a teacher of mathematics. He possessed a patent, from Grand Lodge authorising him 'to inspect the Craft wherever he might go.' Also he held a warrant number 254, dated 16 January 1760, permitting him to hold a Lodge on board HMS *Vanguard* and to make masons.

## Blue Water Lodges

These were on:

- (1) HMS *Vanguard* constituted in 1760.
- (2) HMS *Prince/HMS Guadaloupe* constituted in 1761.
- (3) HMS *Canceaux* constituted in 1768.
- (4) HMS *Bedford* constituted in 1762.