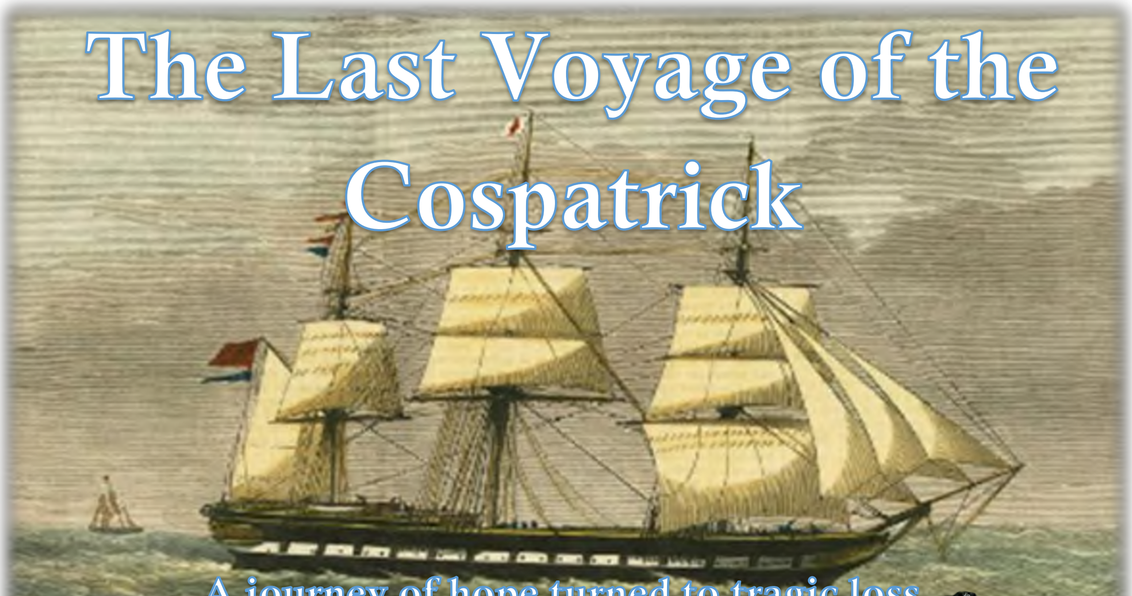
The Last Voyage of the Cospatrick

A journey of hope turned to tragic loss.

By John Stackhouse

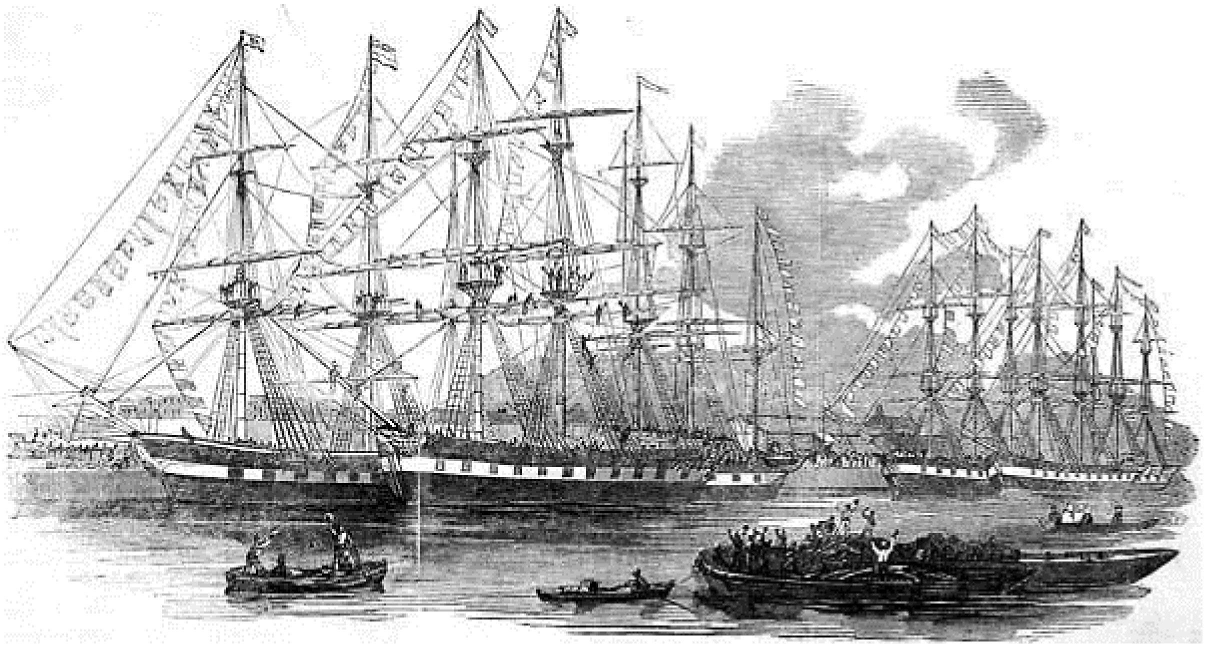


Illustrated London News issues of 9 January 1875

With a name meaning 'devotee of St Patrick', patron saint of migrants, those aboard the Cospatrick may have felt well protected as they sailed from England to New Zealand in September 1874. For the indomitable Jane Trevenna, following her eldest daughter Jane who had emigrated before her, the voyage seemed to be taking her to a land of opportunity. For the intrepid Wray family of Ireland, escape from the poverty cycle was their goal. The vast majority of the immigrants aboard were just seeking a better life. However, 700 kms southwest of the Cape of Good Hope, their hope turned to tragic loss.!

On the River Thames, west of central London, the port was abuzz with shipping on 11 September 1874. The river and its estuary hosted numerous ships at anchor awaiting a berth to disgorge their cargoes from all points of the globe and the British Empire. As was usual, the agent for the shipping line, Shaw Savill and Co., was eager to get the ship signed off for the voyage under the command of Captain Alexander Elmslie. With 433 passengers, including 125 women and 126 children, off to seek a better life in the colony of New Zealand, and a valuable cargo aboard, the voyage would prove a profitable one, all being well. After a series of financial crises, including the 'Long Depression' beginning in 1873, many aboard were seeking work and opportunity on the far side of the world, 429 of the passengers being assisted immigrants.

The *Cospatrick* was an elegant if aging sailing ship, a fully rigged three-master, similar in construction and lines to the famous 'Clippers'. She was named by her first owner, Duncan Dunbar, after an 11th century forebear, *Cospatrick*, Earl of Northumberland. She was of a type built between the 1830s and 1870s known as 'Blackwall Frigates'. Blackwall, an area of the Thames where a number of boatbuilders were located, was famous for building strong, fast sailing ships for both civilian and naval purposes. The *Cospatrick* was built of teak to the 'Blackwall Frigate' design at Moulmein (now Mawlamyine) in Burma and completed in 1856. The vessel was 58m long, had a beam of 10m and holds 7.2m deep. At 1199 GRT (Gross Registered Tonnage) and was deemed a large immigrant ship at the time. Owned by Smith, Fleming and Co, she was sailed to London for a full survey and adjudged A1 and ready for commercial use. In 1873 she became part of Shaw Savill and Co's fleet. This was at a time of transition to steam, but over 70% of vessels were still powered by sail.



Immigrant ships at the East India Docks, Blackwall on the Thames. (Illustrated London News, 1851)

The 44 crew were commanded by Captain Alexander Elmslie. He had been in command of the *Cospatrick* for seven years and had already completed one voyage to Otago, arriving in July 1873, with 37 passengers and cargo aboard. In previous years the ship had sailed between India and England, often carrying troops as well as cargo. She had also been employed, with other vessels, to lay a telegraph cable in the Persian Gulf and she had undertaken two immigrant voyages to Australia. The *Cospatrick* was a well-travelled vessel.

Hope for a brighter future

With her daughter's descriptions of New Zealand and life in New Plymouth vivid in her mind, Jane Trevena, from Redruth in Cornwall, mustered her mixed family of nine children and one step-son on the wharf at Blackwall and looked up at the ship that would be their 'home' for many weeks to come. Reassuring 32-year-old deaf and mute stepson William and making sure her own nine children were ready to go aboard was not an easy task. Jane was still recovering from the shock of the loss of her husband, William, who died suddenly in June 1874 from mackerel poisoning. This left her as a single mother, domestic servant, with responsibility for ten others. A very brave woman in charge of the biggest family group aboard.

Her oldest daughter, also Jane, was born illegitimately before her marriage to William Trevena. In abject poverty at the time, she gave birth in the Illogan Poor House, near Redruth in Cornwall. With the loss of his first wife, tin miner William Trevena married the then Jane Hollows on 6 December 1852. Jane was 20 years younger than him, an 'unmarried mother' with all the stigma that was attached to that label at the time. Jane now had the extra challenge to raise William's deaf and mute son from his first marriage as one of her family. She and William's brood of children grew in number but her first daughter, Jane, who had been raised by her grandparents, made the decision to leave England and emigrate to New Zealand around 1866. She married brewer George Smith in 1867 in New Plymouth.

The intrepid Wray family, of Ireland, also boarded with the hope in their hearts, aiming to escape the poverty cycle in their homeland. From rural County Down they travelled with their nine children to the great metropolis of London and then to dormitory accommodation in the crowded accommodation at the New Zealand Emigration Depot at Blackwall. William and Mary slept there in company with their youngest, Hugh (10), Daniel (8), Kitty (6), Thomas (3) and John aged just 9 months, All others over 11 years were accommodated as 'single' men and women, so Mary (14) with no occupation noted, William (18), James (16) and Frank (13), noted as farm labourers, were accommodated separate to their parents. How William and Mary felt being parted from four of their children, and how young Mary coped being on her own with a large group of single women, can only be imagined. Hopefully the Matron, 53 year old Charlotte Welch of Jersey, took Mary and the other six 12-15 year old single women under her wing. 14 of the 'single men' were also aged 12-15 years but there was no designated 'caregiver' for them. Other Irish from Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Cork, Derry, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Kerry and Kilkenny to name a few, feature in the passenger list.

The small village of Shipton-Under-Wychwood in Oxfordshire said sad farewells to two families who had made the brave decision to emigrate to New Zealand. The glowing reports of three previous Wychwood emigrants had spurred them to make their decision. 11 members of the extended Hedges family, the youngest just 3 months old, as well as seven members of the extended Townsend family, made their way to Blackwall with mixed feelings of loss at leaving their homes, fear of the journey ahead and hopes for a fresh beginning. Their departure was to have a significant impact on the village.

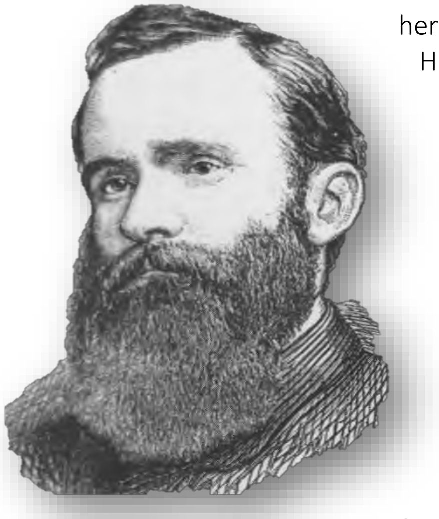
The youngest immigrant to go aboard that day was just three weeks old, Emma, with her brother George (9) and sisters Alice (7) and Elizabeth (5) with parents John (34) and Julia (32).,Tthey were the Stallard family from Gloucestershire.

Those from abroad included a French family from Normandy. Parents Margaret and Armand Henault with their children Gustave (19) a carpenter like his father, Theophile (15) a bronze worker and Isabella (14), had taken the brave step to emigrate in an English ship. Of all the single women aboard, French-speaking Isabella, alone in the single-women's section, must have felt particularly isolated. Also aboard were two single men from Strasburg in Germany and one from Switzerland.

There were only four paying passengers aboard on this trip, Edward Bickersteth (an engineer from Birkenhead), G. Mason, William Nelson and William Simister. Twenty of the immigrants were also noted as having been 'guaranteed' of support or employment by friends or family already in New Zealand, who eagerly awaited their arrival.

The *Cospatrick* crew

The crew members were a mixture of hardened seafarers and the inexperienced. The youngest was 14-year-old Ordinary Seaman Hubert Attwell, who in a letter posted as the *Cospatrick* paused briefly at the Isle of Wight, described to his parents his excitement at the prospect of being at sea. He was clearly set on making his future as a seafarer, sadly his career was a very short one, the letter he sent retained by his parents as a reminder of their lost son. Alfred Lopez had the title of 'Boy', but he was 16 years of age. His role was to undertake message deliveries and tasks for the officers aboard ship. 15-year-old William Harry Lane was shown as an apprentice. The oldest crewman aboard was the very experienced sail maker, John Smith aged 53, whose important task was to maintain the 'engine' of the ship, the sails which kept the ship moving. However, there was also a crewman with the title 'engine driver', a designation which conjures visions of a steam railway aboard or an engine to power the ship when becalmed. In fact, 24-year-old Alfred Bennet had the crucial task of running and maintaining the ship's distillation plant which supplied fresh water to crew and passengers.



Captain Elmslie (From, *The Graphic,* January, 1875)

The officers included those responsible for the command of the ship her Scottish Captain Alexander Elmslie, who also had his wife Henrietta and young son Alexander aboard, 1st, 2nd and 3rd mates and the ship's surgeon, Dr James F. Cadle. The position of surgeon was often filled by less than reliable medical practitioners with a questionable background. Many had a strong attachment to alcohol. However, in the case of Dr Cadle, he was a well-respected medical man and could be relied on to do a good job. He had already undertaken two voyages to New Zealand, he had a brother who had emigrated, so was experienced in his responsibilities. Once he returned to England after this voyage, he intended to set up a medical practice with the money earned from his travels. He had the additional responsibility of supervising the ship's school master, Irish immigrant Robert Fitzgerald, who had the task of teaching 5-14-year-olds four hours a day, except Sundays. On the Lord's Day he was to give two hours of religious instruction instead

The immigrant ships of the day had clear divisions within the crew: those responsible for the sailing of the ship day-to-day from the captain to the able-bodied seamen; the maintenance team to keep equipment running including carpenters, sailmaker and apprentices; those employed to provide the essentials of life such as food, water etc. including cooks and stewards; those immigrants designated to oversee the other immigrants aboard including the maintenance of acceptable behaviour, especially mainly petty crime, fire regulations and keeping the single men and women apart! A number of the immigrants were designated as 'constables', one of the most important tasks being the prevention of fire through the use of naked flame. The most interesting 'title' must go to the constable responsible for the toilets on board, perhaps the title of 'Closet Constable' might have been appropriate.

Seeking a brighter future

The immigrants on-board were lumped under the title of 'the agricultural poor' used by the press at the time. As such they were treated accordingly, conditions in the dormitories on-shore before departure, and on-board, being very basic. The shipping companies were determined to provide most of the necessaries to sustain life, but that was about all.

As agricultural labourers these families were hit hard. The opportunities advertised as being readily available in countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, plus the governments of those countries paying for a passage to travel there, were enticements hard to resist. Typical advertisements of the time were brief but highlighted that the government of New Zealand offered free passages and a list of the occupations most sought after was attached. At a time of great development, labour was short so married and single agricultural labourers, navvies, ploughmen, shepherds and mechanics were in high demand. For women the occupation list was brief domestic servants. This term included cooks, housemaids, nurses, general servants and dairy maids. The 'occupation' of 'future wife' was not listed, but in fact the New Zealand government was very aware and concerned about the gender imbalance and more women were needed to equal up the numbers.

A voyage not for the faint hearted

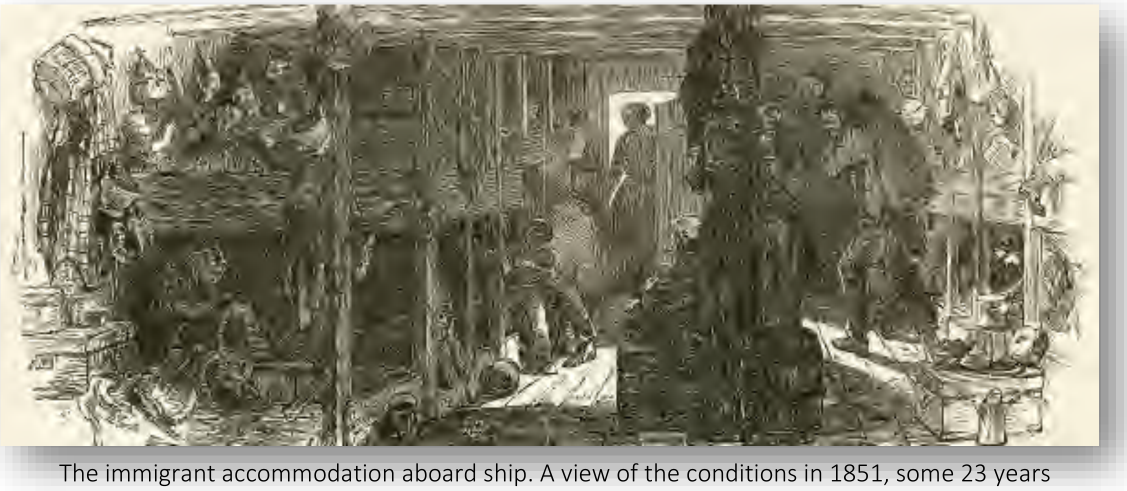
The *Cospatrick* faced three main perils on the voyage: wind, fire and water. The terrific winds which could catch a ship at any time and destroy it. The threat of fire on wooden sailing ships with combustible cargoes. The ever-present water, needed for a boat to sail on but deadly should the boat be swamped or sink. Occasionally when heading so far south, ice was encountered, so a fourth peril could float by.

Great Britain, although recognised as a skilled seafaring nation, had a woeful record of ship losses. Just around the coast of Great Britain there were over 800 vessels lost in the first six months of 1873. Between 1875 and 1883 official estimates put vessel losses at 10318 leading to 21224 seamen killed and 3392 passengers. Shipping safety precautions were poor, official regulations lax and monitoring of safety requirements piecemeal. Repeated loss of life, immigrant and passenger ship casualties often in the hundreds, shocked the British public but brought about little change.

Tightening of regulations was opposed by shipowners. It meant extra cost, less profitability. At the time that the *Cospatrick* left Gravesend on the Thames she was compliant with all safety regulations for lifeboats, fire-fighting equipment, planning to minimise fire risk and cargo carried. She had been inspected by Captain John Forster RN, Emigration Officer to the Board of Trade. Unfortunately, the compliance regarding life boats was determined in the *Passengers Act 1854* on tonnage of the vessel, not the number of people aboard it. Thus, *Cospatrick* had six boats capable of carrying 183 people, 13 more than the minimum compliance requirement, and yet there were 479 people aboard. There was no provision of flotation devices or collapsible boats, both available at the time as extra life-saving equipment, as these were not required for compliance. Fire-fighting was by two manually powered fire pumps and 14 fire buckets which tended to float on the water when lowered. Fire minimisation was mainly by way of strict fire rule enforcement by the ship's 'constables' including no use of naked flame or smoking below decks and only the use of special fire safety lanterns for lighting. Also, no entry was allowed into the hold, cargo pilfering was rife at this time and the pilferers often used naked flames to light the way. Fire prevention did not include any fire-proof walls or bulkheads in the hold where highly flammable cargo was stored in a highly flammable wooden ship.

On the *Cospatrick's* previous voyage to New Zealand, arriving 6 July 1873, an immigration officer at Port Chalmers expressed concern by stating: *"It is not desirable that a few immigrants, as in this case, should be sent in a heavily laden vessel, not subject to the provisions of the Passenger Act".* Flammable cargo and passengers should not mix. In this case the cargo was mainly 'general' in nature but also included explosives. However, Shaw Savill and Company was keen to promote their fine record as a passenger line, listing their ships, including the *Cospatrick*, and including the reassuring statement: *The abovenamed ships are all first-rate passenger packets, fitted and equipped upon plans founded upon long experience.* The writer of the statement does not elaborate as to whether the equipping was based on the ethos of maximum passenger safety or maximum company profit. As most of the immigrants were illiterate, or nearly so, this statement would not have been noticed.

With the signing off of ship safety compliance, passenger list and cargo manifest Captain Elmslie and his crew made final preparations to begin the long voyage. Depending on weather the sailing usually took between 75 and 120 days. As the *Cospatrick* drew away from the wharf, the immigrants stood on deck with mixed emotions as they left their homeland behind. Knowing they were embarking on a voyage across the globe, all the immigrants aboard would have been in turmoil, leaving friends and family behind but also embracing an opportunity to live a better life in New Zealand. As the ship left the Thames Estuary and sailed through the English Channel, they settled into their bunk area below deck, trying to make things as comfortable as possible in the three cramped, communal areas together the size of six small houses. Into this space were squeezed 430 people. To maximise profit on the previous voyage of the *Cospatrick,* on its return voyage to Englkand Shaw Savill managed to squeeze 481 Indian 'coolies' aboard for a voyage from Calcutta to the West Indies, 22 died.



The immigrant accommodation aboard ship. A view of the conditions in 1851, some 23 years earlier than the *Cospatrick's* disastrous voyage but only a few years before she was built. Cramped, lacking ventilation, dark, comfortless and austere. (Illustrated London News 10 May 1851).

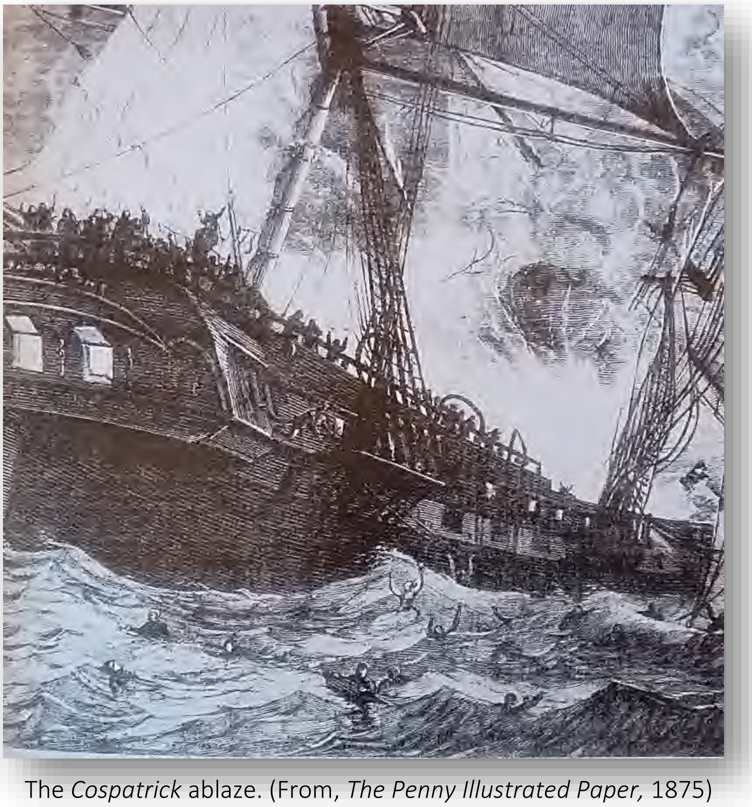
It was a slow passage down the Thames, avoiding the many ships and boats on the way, to the Thames Estuary then a pause at the Isle of Wight. The ship had been provisioned for a non-stop voyage. The voyage took what was called 'The Circle Route', through the English Channel, out into the mid-Atlantic and eventually to the deep south to catch the prevailing westerly wind, 'The Roaring Forties', which drove the ships towards Australia and New Zealand. There was no Suez or Panama Canal to cut travel time, and no engine to fall back on. The engines were the sails, the power to drive the ship was wind-dependent.

This voyage was said to be nothing out of the ordinary, by 19th century standards that is. By the time the ship had reached its southern-most point eight infants had died, a baby was stillborn and another baby had arrived safely. The previous year, when the ship tied up at Port Chalmers, Dunedin, the conditions aboard the *Cospatrick* were said to be good by comparison to many other ships, but there were only 37 adult immigrants aboard on that trip. This trip had over ten times more immigrants aboard and accommodation was primitive. Communal living below decks, close-packed bunks, very basic food and poor sanitation were standard challenges on all of these voyages. If there was a disease outbreak or the seas were rough, as they inevitably were, conditions could become horrendous.

Disaster strikes… fire at sea

The *Cospatrick* was becalmed in the tropics and gastro-intestinal illnesses tragically claimed the eight infants. Progress was slow and there had been no other vessels sighted until contact was made with the *Ben Nevis* off the coast of Brazil on 28 October. Soon after this progress improved and by 17 November the ship was 220 miles southwest of the Cape of Good Hope. The strong westerly winds of the Southern Ocean would quicken the pace, or so was the thinking. Instead, light winds prevailed and the ship rolled heavily in a strong sea swell. A dance organised on deck for entertainment was a challenge as participants lost their footing. At 9pm the surgeon sadly delivered a stillborn child to Mary Fitzgerald, wife of the schoolmaster and by 10pm the lights were put out and most of those aboard settled for the night.

The final checks were made at 11.45pm and all was found in order as the night watch changed at midnight. Only 45 minutes later the fateful cry went up, "Fire!", as the warning bell was vigorously rung. Late-night card players in the single men's section had first raised the alarm when smoke entered their quarters through a grill. The ship was almost stationary at the time due to the strong ocean swell. Coxswain Henry McDonald was ordered to investigate by Captain Elmslie and reaching the forecastle he saw smoke billowing out of it as 1st Mate Charles Romaine organised sailors to get a fire pump into action. They poured water down a shaft onto the fire but to no avail, flames erupting as the fire quickly took hold.


The *Cospatrick* ablaze. (From, *The Penny Illustrated Paper,* 1875)

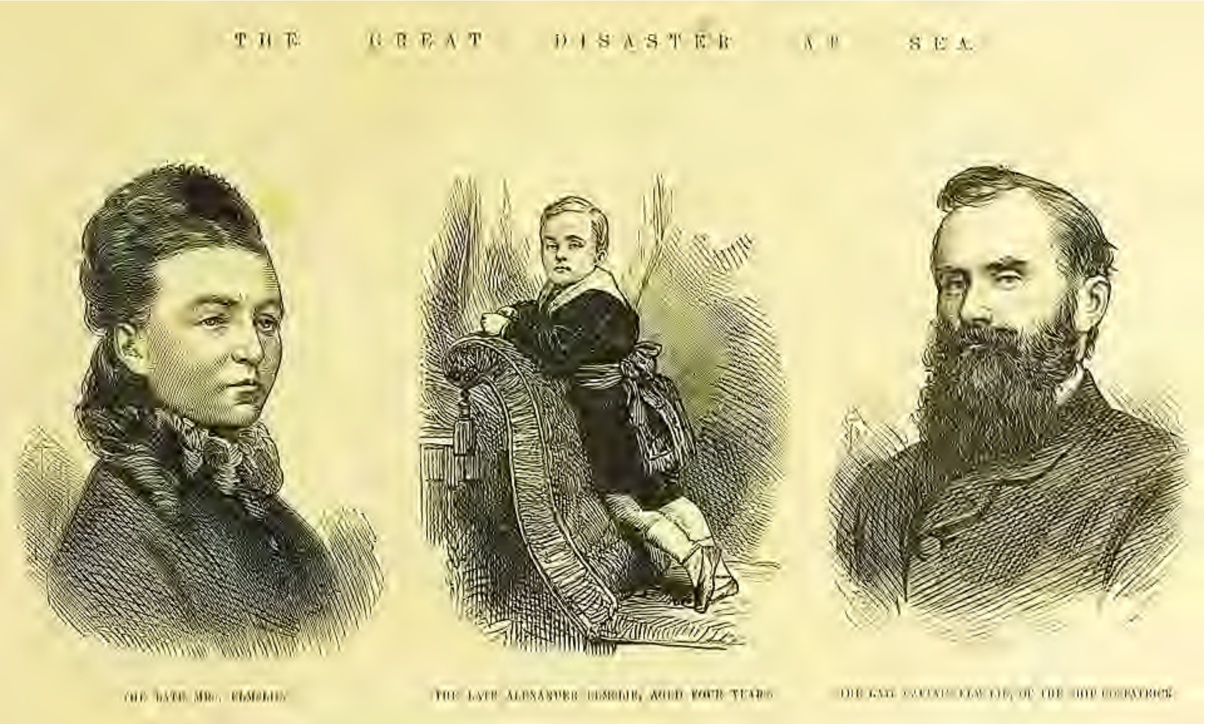
McDonald ran to Captain Elmslie to update him and to advise the ship be turned ‘before the wind’ so that the flames were blown away from the ship and her sails. However, with the ship making little progress at the time, she proved impossible to steer and the fire spread much more rapidly than the crew anticipated. After only 15 minutes the forward section was well alight, the deck was on fire and flames leapt into the night sky. The flames and heat led to the fire pump having to be abandoned. The abandonment of the pump, and the highly flammable timber ship and cargo were key aspects leading to the fire spreading rapidly, but it was the raising of sails to avoid them catching fire that meant the fate of the *Cospatrick* was sealed. No sails meant total loss of ability to manoeuvre to turn the ship ‘before the wind’ and so the flames engulfed her. With those aboard huddled on the poop deck the fire was now directed towards them.

Two of the ship’s boats were engulfed in flames, leaving four still serviceable. The immigrants used every fire bucket and container they could find in a desperate effort to fight the fire but it was a futile battle against an unrelenting enemy. The remaining mobile fire pump could make no headway against the fire at all and the failure to close the deck hatches promoted its spread. The flames now lit up the sea and frightened screams pierced the air as the fire raged. Smoke and burning fragments of canvas and rigging were blown back over everyone.

There was a rush for the lifeboats that remained, no thought for women and children first, a romantic myth as the statistics bear witness to women and children having the lowest survival rate in maritime disasters. Sailors beat those rushing the boats back but also showed compassion as Edward and Mary Whitehead, and their baby born 11 days earlier, were given seats in one boat. Only two boats got away from the *Cospatrick*, the vast majority of the immigrants drowning, having little option but to jump into the sea. Captain Elmslie’s last known order was, “Let every man look after himself.” Ironically the vast majority of those in the lifeboats were men, many of them crew. 350 people remained stranded on the poop deck.

The occupants of the two boats witnessed the horror as the main mast collapsed, killing many people. The hundreds still aboard had no option but to jump into the sea due to the intense fire. In the firelight parents were witnessed throwing their children overboard and then jumping in themselves. Few could swim so they soon drowned.

In the Otago Daily times of 15 March 1875, it was reported that McDonald, the 2nd Mate stated: *"After we backed off the scene was horrible – men throwing their wives overboard, and women their children. I saw one man throw 13 children overboard, and then jump himself. They were praying, yelling, crying…".* This was William Wray of County Down, a number of the children were his own. The fire could not be extinguished, instead hopes of the Wray family were. McDonald continued: *"I did not personally see the Captain and his wife jump overboard, but a man I picked up told me he saw them jump, and also saw Dr Cadle throw over his boy* (the Captain's son) *and follow himself*. Surgeon James Cadle jumped with the Elmslie's little boy in his arms. Cadle had stayed to the last to look after his patients, including one with a broken leg.


THE GREAT DISASTER AT SEA
THE LATE MRS. ELMSLIE
THE LATE ALEXANDER ELMSLIE, AGED FOUR YEARS
THE LATE CAPTAIN ELMSLIE, OF THE SHIP COSPATRICK

The Elmslie family, as illustrated in the *Illustrated London News*, 9 January 1875. Two daughters were attending boarding school in England and did not accompany their parents..

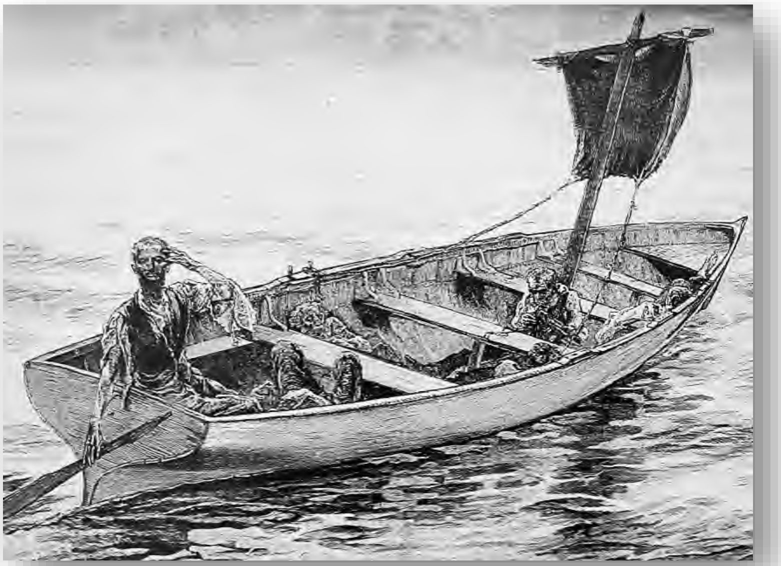
Soon afterward the fire reached the aft of the ship and the cargo of 40 tons of spirits exploded in a cloud of flaming vapour. The destruction of the *Cospatrick* had taken two hours, with 62 survivors in the two lifeboats and others clinging to wreckage. Of the Wray family, one son was known to have made it into a lifeboat, his name was not recalled by the three men who were to survive. The starboard lifeboat had capsized when lowered into the sea but miraculously it was eventually righted around dawn and 26 survivors clambered aboard.

The great ordeal

In the huge expanses of the Southern Ocean, a quick rescue of survivors was impossible. Without any form of communication no-one had any idea of what had befallen the *Cospatrick.* On 19 November the remains of the smouldering hulk sank and the fire and smoke that may have acted as a beacon for passing ships was extinguished. The two lifeboats initially drifted together but with increasing wind and rough seas they parted on 21 November, the boat commanded by 1st Mate Charles Romaine needing constant bailing to stay afloat. It was last observed at 9pm that evening and never seen again. With four days having passed without fresh water some now began to drink seawater and over the following 24 hours became disorientated and delirious. Some attempted to jump overboard and others slipped into a lethargic state.

Thomas Bentley, steering oarsman at the time, fell overboard in rough conditions and drowned. His son, also a survivor in the boat, hearing his father's calls for help could do nothing. Those who died were stripped of their clothing and their bodies placed into the sea. Five died on 23 November and the morale of the survivors plummeted. To survive, it was realised that cannibalism was the only option and so the 21 survivors in desperation drank the blood of the dead and ate slices of their liver, a gruesome necessity.

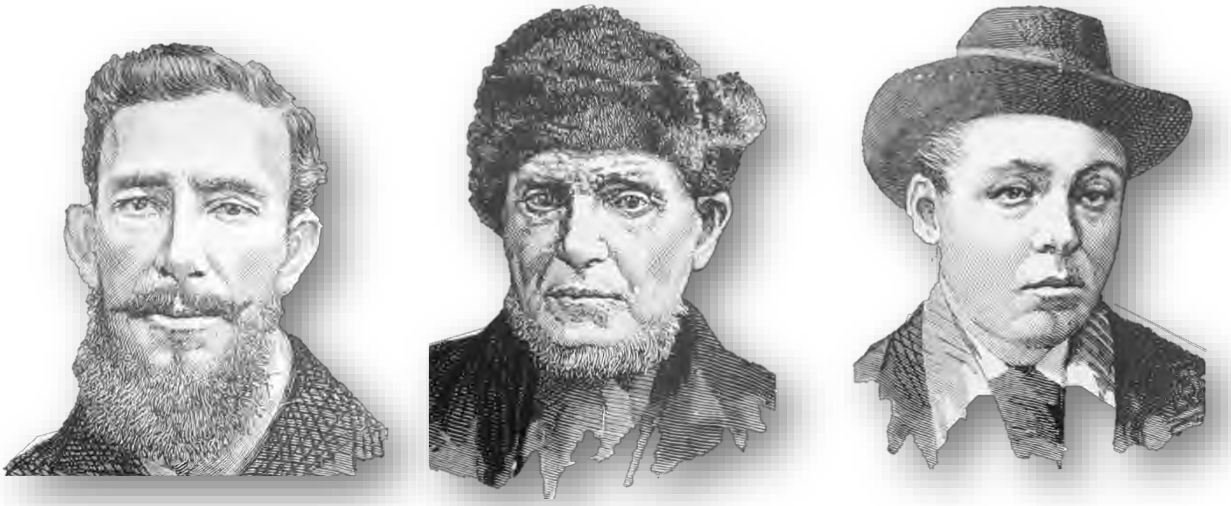
On 24 November a storm arose with heavy seas and there were six more deaths. There were seven deaths the following day, it being the eighth day without water. It was on the ninth day that a grey-hulled barque slid through the waves only 50 yards distant from the lifeboat, but it did not deviate in course and continued on its way, seemingly oblivious. The survivors were devastated. Soon after this another died, leaving only seven in the boat, four of these being seamen. Two immigrants died overnight on the 26th, John McBride and 11 year old Thomas Bentley, leaving only one of *Cospatrick's* immigrants alive, Irishman Jeremiah Leuchan.



An interpretation of the haunting sight of the survivors as viewed by the crew of the *British Sceptre.*(From, *The Graphic,* 1875)

Now five remained alive, Edward Cotter, Robert Hamilton, Thomas Lewis, Jeremiah Leuchan and Henry McDonald. Hamilton was almost comatose and Leuchan was delirious due to salt water intake. McDonald had been asleep but woke to find Leuchan gnawing his boot, it was then he saw a sailing ship emerging phantom-like from a rain shower. Having spotted fragments of wreckage from the *Cospatrick* earlier it had searched for survivors. The captain of the *British Sceptre*, William Jahnke, ordered the five survivors and one dead brought aboard. Despite great care and attention Jeremiah Leuchan died later that day and Hamilton on 2 December. McDonald, Lewis and Cotter now fought for their lives. Knowing he had limited facilities aboard, Jahnke headed for St Helena landing on 6 December. From there the news was sent by fast mail-steamer to Madeira, a cable being sent to Shaw Savill on Christmas Day, Friday, telling of the disaster. The cable remained unread until the following Monday. News broke in the London newspapers on 29 December. The reports of the disaster were greeted with utter disbelief as to its magnitude.

But more was to come. The fact that survivors resorted to cannibalism both shocked and intrigued the public. The Victorian fascination for such macabre events meant that not only did the size of the disaster draw attention, but the reason three crew were able to survive added more layers of intrigue. Archibald Forbes of the Daily Mail newspaper was put aboard the ship carrying the three survivors when it arrived in the English Channel, so he gained the 'scoop', especially from the account of Henry McDonald.



The three survivors L to R: 2nd Mate Henry McDonald, Thomas Lewis and Edward Cotter
(From *The Graphic,* 1875)

Consequences… the inquiry

James Temple of Shaw, Savill and Co., a managing owner of the *Cospatrick*, was soon interrogating the survivors and initially promoting the theory that crew had been plundering the cargo, which McDonald denied. However, in past ship fires, 90% were attributed to crew plundering cargo using naked flames as lighting. This idea was picked up at the subsequent inquiry but by then Temple changed his opinion, no longer agreeing that the fire originated in the hold nor that it was due to crew plunder of cargo. All to no avail, the inquiry determined that plundering of cargo resulted in the fire, a finding that upset many.

Shaw Savill's Mr Temple did assert strongly that, *"Shaw Savill and other companies engaged in like business had always done all that lay in their power to secure the safety of passengers carried by their vessels, and* [would] *accept any reasonable and practicable suggestion with a view to secure greater safety to emigrants".* This was contrary to the facts, there was little evidence shipping lines did all in their power, they in fact generally did the barest minimum to comply with the regulations.

Little was said about the highly flammable cargo. The final clearance from Gravesend noted no flammable cargo aboard. By law, the wood, turpentine, petroleum-based solvents, proof spirits, etc. were not designated as highly flammable. However, the managing stevedore overseeing the loading of the *Cospatrick* noted the cargo *"could not be better arranged to burn and would make a capital fire".* But because of liberal official interpretations as to what was a 'passenger' ship, the cargo was still seen as compliant. The regulations of the day favoured profit and commerce over passenger safety.

The inadequacy of the lifeboats aboard was covered but only lightly. The boats were not regularly checked for seaworthiness nor provisioned with food and water at the time, there were no lifeboat drills, the length of time and amount of manpower required to launch them was excessive even in calm weather and they were totally inadequate in number. But they complied under the passenger vessel legislation of the time. In fact, James Henry Patterson, the judge leading the inquiry, was heard to say *"Nobody doubts that the Cospatrick was a splendid vessel".* However, a recommendation was made not to store lifeboats hull upwards, this making it very difficult to utilise them quickly.

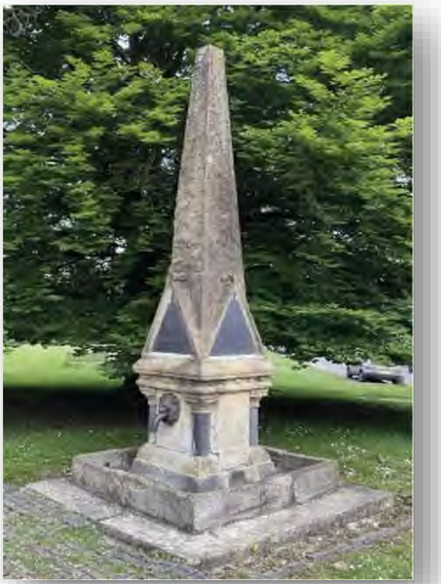
The one very significant and practical recommendation that came out of the inquiry was that all ships that carried passengers or emigrants should have, what we would term today, fire and boat drills, weekly, and that these should be logged as evidence they had been carried out. There was no political will to pass this into legislation and it took until 1906 for this to be enacted!

Regarding enough boats and flotation devices, still the tonnage rules remained. The loss of the 46380 ton White Star Line *Titanic* in 1912 was an example of appalling life wastage and yet the ship was safety compliant at the time. Modified requirements for vessels over 10000 tons were applied to the *Titanic*, meaning she carried lifeboat capacity for 962 people on a ship rated as capable of carrying up to 3300 including crew. It was after this disaster that finally the catch-cry *'Boats for All'* was taken up.

What of Shaw Savill's statement that it *had always done all that lay in their power to secure the safety of passengers?* Only six months after the loss of the *Cospatrick* the Shaw Savill barque *Lutterworth* carrying 35 passengers bound for Auckland caught fire, luckily the fire was extinguished. 'Luckily" is really an understatement, because included in her cargo were 40 tons of explosives and 30 tons of lucifer matches which would have blown the ship, and all on board, to pieces.

What changed regarding passenger safety from lessons learnt through the deaths of those aboard the *Cospatrick*? Sadly, very little it seems. Thousands more immigrants were to have their hopes turned to tragic loss.

Postscript: Cospatrick forgotten?



The Wychwood Cospatrick Memorial. (Source: Wychwoods Local History Society).

The only public memorial to the disaster was built in Shipton-under-Wychwood. It commemorates the 18 villagers who died that day. It remains as a tangible memorial to the eighteen but also is a reminder to those who see it of all those who perished that day. The story of the *Cospatrick* is woven into the family histories of thousands throughout the UK and into Europe. A 2024 booklet commemorates those lost in the disaster.

Forgotten in New Zealand? The story of the *Cospatrick* is little known. The disaster occurred a great distance from New Zealand and did not involve New Zealanders aboard, two factors which affect the knowledge of this event and its impact on New Zealand at the time.

One family associated with the Banks Peninsula town of Akaroa has not forgotten. Jessie Mould recalled that her forebears, Henry and Mary Ann Hayward and their two children, were booked to sail on the fateful *Cospatrick* voyage but were transferred to the *Lady Jocelyn* which delivered them to Lyttelton instead. (*Press* 15 January 1975). She has not forgotten the *Cospatrick.*

Many of the New Zealand descendants of friends and family who awaited with great anticipation the arrival of the ship in 1874, looking forward to being reunited with loved-ones, have the story of the *Cospatrick* woven into their family history.

Bibliography of main resources accessed:

Books:

Charles R. Clarke *Women and Children Last: The Burning of the Emigrant Ship Cospatrick* Otago University Press, 2006

Wychwoods Local History Society *The Cospatrick Tragedy: 150th anniversary reflections on a Wychwood story of hope and loss* 2024

Newspapers, Magazines and Periodicals

United Kingdom *Illustrated London News*, 9 January 1875
The Graphic issues from January 1875
The Penny Illustrated January 1875

New Zealand: *Otago Daily Times*, Dunedin, NZ 15 March 1875
Taranaki Herald 13 January 1875
The Press, Christchurch NZ 15 January 1975

On-line resources

Blog:
The Hollow Log Hollow Family Recalled Newsletter Issue 38 June 2011
chollow@netspace.net.au
Cornwall emigrants opc-cornwall.org/emigrants
Lloyds Register Foundation Heritage Education Centre hec.lrfoundation.org.uk
Old Mersey Times oldmerseytimes.co.uk/cospatrick.html
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