

FORD MOYNES

on the

MAIN STREET



**JUST A FERRY
BOAT RIDE TO
AUSTRALIA . . . !**

As related by Hugh Mooney
Daily Post Advertising Manager

Just A Ferry Boat Ride to A

If you sat down to table with fiddles on every side, you might find it a bit queer, or if the tablecloth was pulled off, soaked in a bucket of water, then spread back on, cups turned upside down without the saucers, sauce bottles etc. laid flat, you would begin to wonder what you had got into, yet these events were fairly common at one time to Hugh Mooney, our adman at "The Post".

At the time, Hugh was a saloon steward on a passenger liner sailing between Britain and Australia, and when rough weather was ahead these precautions were always taken.

Fiddles, incidentally, are wooden ledges along the edges of the tables that push up and lock in position. The idea being to stop your ham and eggs from sliding into your lap, if the ship gives a sudden lurch. This can happen if she should suddenly change course and pitch from stem to stern as well as roll from port to starboard.

Other measures that we landlubbers don't often hear of, are lifelines secured fore and aft in the saloon as well as the galley (kitchen). Every steward with tables near the bulwarks (outer walls) was responsible for fixing deadlights (iron discs) over portholes near him before an impending storm.

Once Hugh admits to neglecting his duty here and just

as his passengers were enjoying their soup, a great wave darkened the ports and crashed through on top of the table, washing soup, dishes, and bodies across the saloon deck. The chief steward was just a wee bit upset, not to mention the passengers' feelings, over that episode.

Hugh retains many vivid memories of those days and one of the things he enjoyed most was the jargon or slang aboard ship as well as the strange customs of the old salts. For instance, if your boss came up to you and said, "I can't find my tiger, steward, would you check the heads and send him topside if he's there." This would simply mean the skipper couldn't find his personal steward and he wanted you to check in the toilets for him and send him up to the promenade deck at once.

Or one might get the order from the Old Man (Skipper), "Your ducks look like they've been dhobied in bilge water, lad, get down to slops and rig-out." This means your tropical whites look like they've been washed in dirty water, get a new set from the ship's stores.

Many other terms could fill a book but customs and traditions were interesting and at times moving. When passing another ship at sea during the night, seeing her hundreds of portholes shining across the water, funnels and upper deck gleaming white in floodlight and seeing your own ship signal with morse lamp, "Greetings. Who are you and where are you bound?" Perhaps the answer would be "His Imperial

Majesty's Ship SS King Haakon, en route from Surabaya to Oslo. Who are you and where are you bound?" And you would feel so proud as your present home from home and proud ship would reply "Her Majesty's Royal Mail Ship Orion from Tilbury, England enroute to Sydney, Australia. Good night and fair sailing."

One met all kinds of people at sea, if only for short periods, stowaways being returned home, foreign seamen of many nationalities who had been signed on in ports along the way to meet crew requirements, well known celebrities travelling round the world for fun, or immigrant families

bound for a new life in Australia or New Zealand, rough deck hands covered in tattoos or philisophical seamen who had spent, perhaps 25 years on this very ship and maybe had not been ashore in years. So long as they had their ticklers (hand rolled cigarettes) and grog (rum) they were quite happy.

Stepping ashore in foreign ports for the first time was a thrilling experience. Crossing the equator, seeing palm fringed tropical islands after days on end of nothing but ocean, seeing the southern cross in the tropical skies and feeling the spray on your face from a thousand foot high water spout miles off, that could sink the ship if it came your way, were other unforgettable experiences.

Hugh remembers one incident when a passenger unwittingly rang a glass to make the shrill whistle one gets when this is done with your finger round the rim. There was a deathly hush in the saloon and many of the stewards downed tools at the eerie sound. It seems there is an old superstition among seamen that there will be a death on the voyage if this is done. Maybe it was just coincidence, but a few days later a body was buried in the deep.

Hugh brought back many souvenirs from his travels and still has a few around, all with a good yarn attached. Once in Ceylon a hungry native asked for food and Hugh fixed him up. In return the native gave him a couple of black ebony elephants he had carved, but not before scraping the soles of their feet to show the wood was black through and through and not just painted softwood like he sold to the tourists.

A thirty thousand mile trip lasting three months each time, touching on four continents and three oceans, and various seas and strange parts, yet Hugh was brought down to earth with a thud once when he remarked on these statistics to a seasoned old veteran who replied, "After all mate, it's only a big ferry boat to Aussie and back, you know."

Hugh finally dropped anchor right here in Lindsay and admits that of the many countries he visited, Canada has them all beat as the place to live and raise a family. His one big ambition is some day when they grow up and he has the resources and time, to plan an itinerary taking him round the world again by cargo freighter.