

TASMANIAN SEAFARERS' MEMORIAL ANNUAL SERVICE
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
TRIABUNNA SEAFARERS' MEMORIAL, SUNDAY 16 OCTOBER 2022

Good morning everyone. I am delighted to be here today. Thank you for inviting me to join with you for the annual Memorial Service to honour and remember those seafarers who have lost their lives in Tasmanian waters.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and connection to sea, land and culture. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

I would like to acknowledge among us:

- Mayor Robert Young, Glamorgan Spring Bay Council, and Mrs Celia Young;
- Ms Jenna Butler MP;
- Mr Alastair Douglas OAM and Mrs Douglas;
- Families of deceased seafarers;
- Other Distinguished Guests;
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

I was to have delivered this address in October last year, but due to a three-day lockdown due to Covid-19, the event was cancelled. Last year, I provided to your committee a copy of my proposed speech. I am pleased to have been asked to deliver that speech today.

It is now 25 years since the first plaques were unveiled at the Triabunna Seafarers' Memorial. This memorial is dedicated to all Tasmanian seafarers, both civilian and members of the armed services who lost their lives at sea, and to those seafarers, regardless of occupation or nationality, who lost their lives in Tasmanian waters. It also enables the commemoration of

Tasmanian Naval personnel lost during peacetime as well as during times of conflict.¹

Three plaques have been added to the memorial this year. They record the 44 lives that have been lost.

Christine, I express my deepest sympathy to you and your family for the loss of your husband Bruce. I understand that your loss has been felt far and wide throughout the community.

I am here to day to unveil the plaque that commemorates the *Lady Denison*, a barque lost on the West Coast of Tasmania, enroute from Port Adelaide to Hobart in 1850 under the command of Captain Edwin Hammond. She was carrying a total of 42 souls: 12 crew, 16 paying passengers, and 11 convicts under the control of three guards.

After leaving Port Adelaide, the *Lady Denison* failed to arrive in Hobart. A news article of the time reported that a sealer from Emu Bay had seen, and I quote “on shore, and bottom up, a longboat marked *Lady Denison*, and that this was at Church Rock on the west coast of Van Diemen’s Land. Several oars, articles of clothing, part of the cabin, one of the tops, the poop-ladder, and a variety of other things were scattered along the beach for miles.”

The article continues that “there was no longer any reason to doubt that the ill-fated barque met her untimely fate in one of the heavy gales which were noticed after her departure. That some of the crew or passengers may have survived is barely possible.”²

For land lovers among us, unfamiliar with the ferocity of the weather at sea, a passenger on another vessel offered a vivid depiction of the violent weather that he encountered on his voyage from Launceston to Sydney in 1862. In a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Mr W. Carr Boyd wrote that during a severe gale, a waterspout appeared – “like a gigantic hose let down from the clouds, communicating with a cauldron eighty yards wide, boiling madly and hurling its water aloft and about with inconceivable velocity, tracking their vessel’s path, when another spout of the same size appeared”. In total, nine spouts in

¹ <http://www.seafaresmemorial.org.au/> accessed 15/10/2021.

²The Hobart Guardian, 14 Aug 1850

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/173057867?searchTerm=the%20lady%20denison>

20 minutes, any of which he writes, and I quote “would in a moment have sent us to the bottom”.³ A vivid depiction indeed.

However, some people within the colony believed strongly that the convicts on the *Lady Denison* mutinied and murdered the other passengers before throwing recognisable parts of the ship overboard. This was done to give the appearance that the *Lady Denison* had foundered, but she had sailed on to San Francisco.

In truth, there is no way of knowing the ultimate fate of the *Lady Denison* and her 42 passengers. It is fitting that this memorial recognises those poor souls and gives them a fitting place to be remembered.

I would like to also acknowledge that our ability to commemorate these lost seafarers is due, in at least part, to the tireless efforts of Kath Fergusson. Kath, I understand that this is your last year organising this event. I have been informed that you were a driving force behind the instigation and installation of the memorial. Your dedication has ensured the continuation of this annual service that now gives the family and friends of those lost at sea a place to remember them. Thank you.

In conclusion, I pay my sincerest respects to those Tasmanian seafarers recognised and honoured today, and also to their family and friends; Don and I offer our deepest condolences to you.

Thank you.

³ Launceston *Examiner*, 8 May 1862

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/41453113?searchTerm=the%20lady%20denison>