

# GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (Nov. 2005)

By Rob Upson

## P & O SHIPS

What does **Bendigo** have in common with **Ballarat**, **Balranald**, **Baradine** and **Barrabool**? Apart from them all beginning with 'B' and being towns in Victoria and N.S.W., they were the names given to sister ships of the P & O Line and built just after the 1<sup>st</sup> World War.

The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company was founded in 1836 with sailing routes from London to Spain, Portugal and the Mediterranean. The Company then began a service to Alexandria with an overland journey to Port Suez and then a sea connection to India. It became the P & O Line in 1840.

In 1845, P & O services were extended to Singapore and the Far East and in 1852 began a bi-monthly service from Singapore to Australia. No doubt this was to meet the demand from those seeking their fortune on the goldfields. Southampton – Cape town – Australia sailings began in 1853 and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 considerably shortened the travelling time to the antipodes.

In the 1890s, P & O steamers left London every Saturday for India and fortnightly to Australia. The first class fare to Australia was then £60 - £70 and the second class fare £35 - £40. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, acquisition of several other shipping companies gave P & O one of the world's largest fleets of passenger vessels.

Ship building companies, particularly in Great Britain, were thriving. One of these companies was Harland and Wolff, founded in 1861 in Belfast by an Englishman and a German. They later had shipyards on the River Clyde in Scotland, at Greenock in particular. Harland and Wolff still exist today as a heavy engineering company but shipbuilding is not one of their main activities.

Back to the five 'B' sisters. They were all built by Harland and Wolff, each about 13,000 tons, coal burning with twin screws and a speed of 13 to 14 knots. Each could accommodate about 500 third class passengers and about 750 steerage passengers and were primarily used on the U.K. to Australia run. (What, no 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> class? Couldn't have been a very comfortable voyage!!).

**Ballarat** was launched in 1920 at Greenock and her maiden voyage started in January 1922. She was sold for scrap in 1929. **Baradine** was launched in 1921 at Belfast and her last voyage to Sydney was in 1936 before being sold to the British Govt. and then resold for scrap. **Barrabool** was also launched in 1921 at Belfast and after her final voyage in 1936 was sold to the British Govt. as a troop ship and resold for scrap in the same year. **Bendigo** was launched in 1922 at Greenock and suffered a similar fate, being scrapped at Barrow-in-Furness in 1936. **Balranald** was launched at Greenock in 1922 and scrapped at Troon in 1936. So each vessel had a relatively short life. All five vessels had a major overhaul in 1929, being converted to fuel oil and increasing their speeds to 15 knots.

**Ballarat** was the third P & O vessel to be so named. The first was 4890 tons, built by Caird & Co. at Greenock in 1882. She accommodated 210 passengers on the Australia run before being broken up in Italy in 1904. The second was 11,100 tons, built by Caird & Co. at Greenock in 1911 with 1100 passengers. A German submarine sank her in 1917 while in service as an ambulance transport.

The second **Ballarat** had sister ships named **Beltana**, **Benalla**, **Berrima** and **Borda**, all built at Greenock by Caird & Co. As a matter of interest, the Titanic was built by Harland and Wolff at Belfast in 1911 and set off from Southampton on her ill-fated voyage on 10 April 1912.

The Royal Australian Navy also has a tradition of naming vessels after Australian cities and towns. The first **HMAS Bendigo** was a Bathurst Class minesweeper, more commonly known as a corvette. Of 650 tons and a speed of 15 knots, she was built by the Cockatoo Docks and Engineering Co. and launched in March 1941. She saw war service in the area to the north of Australia. The second **HMAS Bendigo** is a 220 tonnes Fremantle Class patrol boat and is currently based in Cairns and patrolling our northern coastline

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