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## Mysteries and Tragedies of the Docks

DOCKSIDE MEN WHO DISAPPEAR  
—WHAT BECAME OF LONG JOHN,  
THE BO'SUN'S MATE?—THE  
STORY OF "SCOTCH HARRY."

(By MUNRO BLAIR, in Liverpool  
Weekly Post.)

Sweetheart's Quest For Her Lover.  
Dockside men who disappear! This is a phrase quite familiar to the river-side police and to all whose business takes them down to the wharves and by the long sheds and warehouses down by the docks. Sometimes a mystery is solved; often it is not. Of the many instances of men who have vanished, all too many have this note attached to the official entry—"A case of disappearance; no explanation."

Or it may be that there is a terse entry in the captain's log: "Deserted ship, Port of London." This is the only memorial of many scores of poor sailor men who have returned from going down to the sea in ships, who taste the garish joys of land freedom—and vanish!

The Case of "Long John McKenna." Police records yield some very typical cases. Such a one is that labelled "The Vanishing of 'Long John McKenna,'" bosun's mate of the s. s. Messaba. "Long John" was a big, bluff Irishman with a touch of American blood in his veins and a real sailor to the tips of his fingers. His fate had been a sealed chapter for more than five years, and it is but one of many thousands of mysterious disappearances in that vast area known as the Docks.

A seasoned, tough seaman, McKenna had been on the regular Atlantic run between London and New York for many years. After discharging her cargo of live cattle at Deptford, the transport liner, of which he was bosun's mate, proceeded upstream and was finally berthed in the Royal Albert Dock.

On the same day that the vessel reached port, McKenna wrote to his sweetheart, a florist's assistant in the Midlands, telling her to expect him on the following day after the crew had been "paid off." He also mentioned that he had won a considerable sum of money at poker during the voyage from the cattlemen aboard the ship.

Had 2 100.

With the rest of the crew, McKenna received his wages and was known to have over £100 in his possession. He was last seen the same evening by a cattle foreman, named Carson, in a public house at Cannon Town in company with strangers. McKenna stood Carson several drinks and said he was shortly going on to St. Albans. From then all traces of him were lost.

A week passed, but still no news reached his anxious fiancée. His ship, meanwhile, had left port. Then the distracted girl began a quest for her sailor lover. She took a room in the East-end and from early morning till late at night she haunted the quays and public-houses in search of McKenna, but all in vain.

At last, fearful for her safety, relatives persuaded the unhappy girl to abandon her nightly expeditions to the dangerous districts of the East-end. Miss W. then made a journey to New York but the voyage proved fruitless. John McKenna, jovial messmate and bosun's mate of the s. s. Messaba, had disappeared from mortal ken.

Then came a sinister sequel. The Battered Body.  
In process of time, the body of a man who had evidently been wounded, was recovered from the River Thames at the entrance to Shadwell dock. He was evidently a sailor, and his injuries suggested that he had been stabbed from behind.

A statement issued by the police described the man as 5ft. in height, and of stout build. He was aged about 35. There was, according to medical evidence, one deep incision under his left ear, and his neck had been fractured, evidently with a blow from a knife. He was stripped to the waist, and had only a shilling in his possession. The body had been in the water approximately ten days.

The description tallied exactly with that of the missing John McKenna. But such was the condition of the corpse that no one could identify it positively.

A Sudden Stab!  
It was thought that he may have been the victim of landsharks, and that he had been partly stripped before being thrown into the water. No doubt he was marked down as having a big sum of money in his possession and was followed by the ruffian who meant to stab and rob him. His drink may have been "hocused"—a favourite pastime practised on sailor men in Docktown—and he may have been robbed. Or it may have been that he grew suspicious and showed fight; in that case a sudden stab and a heave into the docks would have ended his career.

We must not think the case of this unfortunate man very singular. Police records show that over a hundred bodies have been taken out of the Thames in twelve months. All were evidently seafaring men, and in many

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It may prove interesting.

Yours for quality and service,

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instances there was no evidence to show how they came into the water. But each was stripped to the shirt. Robbery was all too clearly the motive for the murder.

Baffled Searchers.

Great indeed are the difficulties confronting those who seek to unravel dockside mysteries and the cases of men who disappear! The population of dockland is necessarily shifting from day to day, rendering the task of the dock police an extremely difficult one. To a seaman knowing that his ship was on the point of sailing for a far-off destination, it would seem devoid of much risk to get rid of someone who was inconveniently alive. The Thames usually keeps its secrets for some days before giving them up.

There is another aspect of this matter, which shows with what obstacles the dock police have to cope. Ship-masters take a sailor's failure to rejoin his ship as part of the troubles of commanding a vessel. The missing man may be on the spree, or under the influence of Bacchus, or Venus, or both combined, or he may be in some sore of trouble which he prefers to keep to himself. Or he may have joined some other ship. Therefore, a missing man is very seldom reported to the police. Only when there are circumstances of very grave suspicion, when foul play may be assumed, are the police communicated with.

There are other reasons why captains of vessels are reluctant to come into contact with the authorities in suspicious cases. There would, of course, be a thorough and searching investigation, during which time the vessel would be detained in port. In the case of an inquest, the captain, and perhaps other officers, or ship-

mates of the dead man would probably be needed.

"Scotch Harry."

The story of "Scotch Harry" is still whispered among the dockside denizens. He was a sailor who hailed from Dundee, where his father was well known in that port as one of the old whaling men. The son was bred to the sea, and eventually became first mate on a steamer which plied between Barry and Spain with iron ore. He was a fine healthy man of about 40, jovial and happy-go-lucky, and very much liked by all who came in contact with him.

On the occasion of his last voyage he came up to London to see some pals down at Wapping. He was flush with money, for that last evening he was playing cards in a local public-house, and was heard to say that he had over ninety pounds with him. At eleven o'clock he went off with his friends. They parted in a friendly way and promised to meet again the next evening. From that day to this "Scotch Harry" has not been seen again. He has just—vanished. The police have searched for him; his friends have done the same. But all in vain. No doubt he was set upon, robbed, and cast into the dark waters of the docks, with perhaps an iron bar tied to his feet to keep him down in the oozy river bed. His case is just another mystery of the docks, while his mother in Dundee waits hopelessly for the return of her son. She has waited for nearly six years.

Wary Scoundrels.

The fact must be recognised that dockside swarms with crooks, both male and female, who batten upon the returned seafarer when his pockets are full of money. It is a case of "It's your money we want!" and drugged drink, assault, &c., is the prelude to robbery. Wary scoundrels, they know they run a risk—but the returns are high and they face possible imprisonment and the infliction of the dreaded "cat." Fear of capture renders them difficult customers to capture. To-day the dockside police are armed—and this fact is little relished by the law-breakers.

Sailors and firemen of the old days were tough, hard-drinking, hard-fighting men, yet the simplest of beings and easy game for the shark. Nowadays, the class of men who follow a seafaring life are not so gullible and have a wider knowledge of the world and its ways. Long voyages have given place to the short trips across the "Western Ocean," as sailors still term the Atlantic, while comfort and security are provided by "Jack's Palace," and scores of reputable, registered lodging-houses in each shipping district.

Ingratulating Strangers.

Frequent return to the same port also adds to the knowledge of spots it is wiser to avoid. Furthermore, sailors are advised to travel in company with their own shipmates rather than associate with ingratiating strangers who make it their business to ingratiate themselves around Board of Trade offices, seamen's homes, and other places where sailormen with money are likely to be found when crews have been paid off.

The result has been that the dockside crooks have become more artistic in their methods. They meet the sailors with stories of "soft berths" on shore, which may be secured by payment of "grat," and even back up their lies with printed matter setting forth particulars of non-existent jobs. No matter how vigorously the police keep watch, these confidence tricksters always do a certain amount of "business," and almost daily complaints are laid at the police offices by men who have been "done brown."

Open-aid education is being more widely adopted by the London County Council, which has now three day schools in the metropolitan area, and three residential schools—at Marnate, St. Leonards-on-Sea and Bushey Park—run on this principle.

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