

# “Gone West”

## When *Taeping* won by Minutes

Captain Charles A. Watchlin has completed his last watch on deck. A prime seaman of the old school, he first went to sea as apprentice on the famous *Miles Barton*, in 1861. For over thirty years he sailed the deep waters in many well-known old-time clippers, among them being *Taeping*, *Sir Lancelot*, *Falcon*, *Glencairn*, and *Windhover*. He was commander of the first New Zealand Government steamer, the s.s. *Luna*, and for the past thirty years either owned or was in command of the best known vessels on the New Zealand coast.

Captain Watchlin was third mate of *Taeping* in 1866, when she had her famous race with *Ariel*, and no more interesting story could be told than his description of that memorable event.

### A Clipper Captain's Life.

Here are his words, just as he told the story to the writer years ago: “It was the greatest voyage I ever put in. McKinnon, of *Taeping*, thrashed the old ship unmercifully, and I do not remember any of *Taeping's* crew getting a moment's let up from the time we left Pagoda anchorage until we drew into the dock at London. Right down through the China Sea and Indian Ocean we had all the wind we wanted, and McKinnon was just the man who gloried in plenty of wind. We sighted several of our opponents during the voyage, and I was surprised that anything could have kept up with us. All the ships in the race were the pick of the clippers, and every master was a seaman of the highest skill.

“I do not exaggerate when I say that McKinnon never left the *Taeping's* poop throughout the voyage. I do not remember any square sails being furled, though plenty were blown to ribbons, and our mate was perpetually growling that he could get no one to paint ship, everyone was busily employed repairing and making new sails.

“I was the first to sight *Ariel*, off the entrance to the Channel, and McKinnon, who as usual had been on deck all night, at once called all hands and, despite the fact that it was blowing a whole gale from about Sou'West, had every stunsail, up to the royals, sheeted home. We staggered over to *Ariel* and, as soon as we made sure that it was she, every man-Jack on our ship required no encouragement to drive her along. Neither *Taeping* nor *Ariel* could be seen for a smother of foam. What speed were we making? I could not tell you, we were too busy driving the old clipper to pay attention to such work as heaving the log. Well, over seventeen, I should say.

### Something like a race.

“We raced neck and neck up Channel. The crews of all the ships we passed must have thought both skippers had gone crazy, for never before had such driving been seen. No one thought of going below; I am sure that if any of us had told the watch off duty to go below they would have refused.

“I remember sighting a big iron ship inside the Channel; she was making heavy weather of it, with close-reefed top'sls only, and we were out of sight ahead of her in about an hour. Neither skipper required the mad example of the other to drive the best out of his ship, the *Tea Bonus*

was going to be won by a matter of minutes; and as both McKinnon and Keay were canny Scots, they were both making sure of that bonus.

“From the Wight to the Foreland we had fair and variable strong winds, and averaged from eight to ten knots over the distance. We had only a lead of about a mile on passing Deal, and the folks must have known we were coming, for all the headlands were crowded with cheering throngs. We ran through the Downs, crowded with shipping sheltering from the recent gale, and the crew of each ship cheered us to the echo.

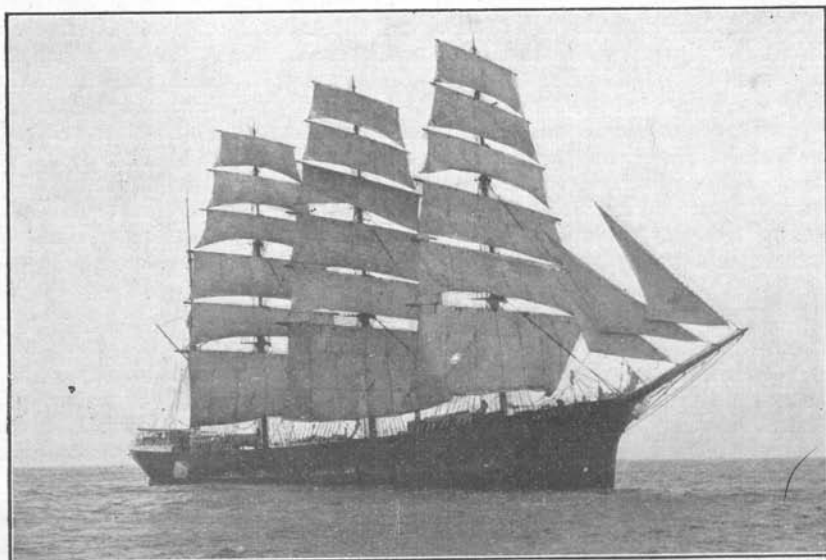
### ‘Well done *Taeping*.’

“When we poked our jibboom into the Thames everybody was waiting for us. Nearly every ship anchored at Gravesend and in Blackwall Reach had the signal hoisted, ‘Well done, *Taeping*,’ and I am sure that never did any ship get such a vociferous welcome from the cheering multitudes. Ours was a triumphal procession up the old river, whistles blowing, bells ringing, and we were quite hoarse returning the cheers. We docked at about 11 a.m. on the 6th of September, exactly half an hour ahead of *Ariel*, and as we had left Pagoda Anchorage half an hour after she did I still consider we won the race by exactly one hour. I got £50 as my share of the bonus, it should have been £100, but the two skippers agreed to divide so we were contented. It was a great race, and I think that the best ship won.”

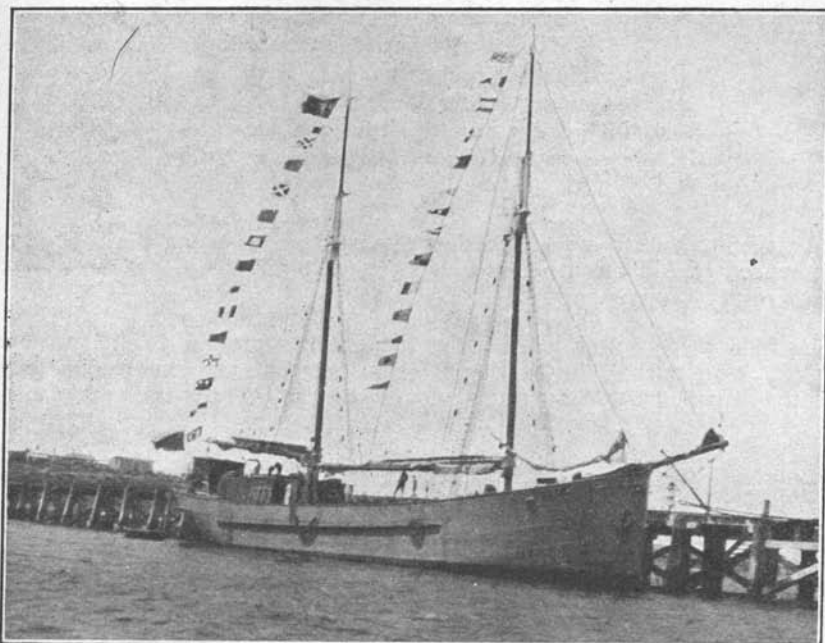
The late Captain Watchlin must be about the last of the old-time Tea Clipper men who took part in that great race. The writer sincerely appreciates that he had the honour to know him. He was indeed a wonderful man, a relic of a wonderful age, when ships were ships and men were *men*.

Captain Watchlin “went west” on the 12th June, 1927, at Auckland, New Zealand.

FORBES EADIE.



*Archibald Russell*, now on passage to Australia. She is a sister of *Hougomont*, which ship beat her, last May, by four days on the run home.



Motor schooner *Falie* alongside jetty at Port Victoria. Built in 1919, at Maasluis, she sailed from Norway to Australia in 1924, and is now engaged in coastwise trade there. Photo sent by A. D. Edwardes.

to R. Thomas & Co., and her name was changed to *Rhuddlan Castle*. She sailed under the flag of the latter firm until November, 1908, when she was abandoned in 41 S. 51 W. when bound from Barry to Iquique with coal.

BROWNING DICK, London.

### Relic of *Miles Barton*.

In your excellent little magazine for September I notice the ship *Miles Barton* mentioned, and the death of an old sailor in New Zealand who was an apprentice in this famous ship which my grandfather, Captain Wm. Kelly, sen., at one time commanded. I have lying before me a very finely-worked silver snuff box bearing the following inscription:—"Presented to Captain Wm. Kelly, of the ship *Miles Barton*, on the successful completion of his first voyage in that vessel, by Thomas Haig, Liverpool, 8th March, 1854."

My grandfather was a famous old skipper in days of sail, and he commanded, built and owned the *Merrie England*. He was in *The Express*, *Mary Carson*, and other fine ships.

I wonder if there is anyone alive to-day who remembers him, or anyone who can tell me what the end of the *Miles Barton* was?

Captain Kelly's two sons, Captains John and William Kelly, junr., were in sail and later in steam. They were all fine seamen, and the three of them have sailed on the last long voyage.

We used to have oil paintings of several fine ships in my old home in Ireland, but where they are now I cannot say. One of the *Miles Barton* in a heavy sea I remember well.

W. G. MOORE, Johannesburg, S.A.