

Views from the Pews: The Flying Angel



"Those who go down to the sea in ships and ply their trade on great waters, they have seen your works O Lord and the wonders you do in the deep." Psalm 107 v23/24.

Seafarers are one of the few professions that the Anglican Communion devotes remembrance to on a special Sunday. In this case Sea Sunday supports the work of the Mission to Seafarers, which is a Christian welfare charity serving merchant crews serving around the world. The Mission, originally the Mission to Seamen, operates in over 200 ports, in 120 of these the Mission has seafarers centres known as Flying Angel Centres or Clubs. These offer rest and relaxation areas and some accommodation and communication facilities.

The Mission has its roots in the work of an Anglican priest, John Ashley, who in 1835 was on the shore at the Bristol Channel with his son who asked how the people on the ships could go to church! He organised a mission cutter with a specially designed cabin which could be converted into a chapel for 100 people. In 1858 the many similar ministries which had developed were formerly organised into the Missions to Seamen and the Flying Angel adopted as its logo.

Today's larger Missions, such as the one in Melbourne, which has been in use for over 100 years have a chapel, a recreation area, canteen and a gymnasium. It lies next to the old port and the tram goes close by — worth a visit if you are visiting Melbourne. The architecture is fascinating, consisting of a long adobe building in dome shapes. The pulpit in the Chapel is in the form of the bow of a ship.

My Father was Chaplain there from 1929 to 1930. His visitors book records the names of many seamen who passed through the Mission including the crew of the SS Stiltonhall which was abandoned in the Indian Ocean when its cargo of coal caught fire. A typical example of the help provided by the Mission. He then moved on to the Mission at Newcastle NSW before returning to England in 1933.

David Bailey