

Dad's fears saved family from death

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Daily News Reporter

MRS Marjorie Baillie's annual visit to Durban has a special significance this year. It's eighty years since 81-year-old Mrs Baillie, then a baby, missed the final tragic trip of the ill-fated passenger liner, the Waratah.

Her father, who was then with the Customs Department, decided against sending his family to England on the Waratah, which left Durban and sank without trace off the Transkei Coast in 1909.

Mrs Baillie, who now lives in Johannesburg, is on a visit to her younger brother Lyn (77). She recalled how her father, Thomas Roberts, took one look at the Waratah and cancelled his family's passage.

His wife Kate and their two children Jack (2) and Marjorie (1) were going for a holiday "home" to England.

But Mr Roberts — his

fears sadly soon to be proved correct — was worried about the seaworthiness of the ship. Just before she sailed he booked them on another ship, which Mrs Baillie thinks was the Union Castle line ship Dunluce Castle.

"My father said he felt the Waratah was top heavy. One of his friends who saw her come into Durban harbour told him that he did not like the way she moved," said Mrs Baillie.

She said passengers from the Waratah had complained that the ship jerked and moved awkwardly. Most passengers who got off in Durban were only too pleased that their trip was over.

"My father — who went on to become the shipping master at Durban Point — never stopped being grateful that he cancelled our tickets. Apparently my mother regretted the change because the Waratah was a fine, new ship. Over the years he often recalled how we missed the boat," said



MRS Marjorie Baillie — recalling her narrow escape 80 years ago.

Mrs Baillie.

She said that the weather was extremely bad and even the ship on which they travelled to Europe had a stormy passage.

They were at sea and unaware that the Waratah had gone down. "But my father was on duty in

Durban. He said the only inkling they had that she had sunk were the letters "...tah" which came over the radio.

Back from Britain, Mrs Baillie grew up in Durban and for 10 years worked in the offices of the old Payne Brothers department store.

Spirits of Waratah victims told story of their death

CAPE TOWN: The spirits of drowned passengers who sailed on the ill-fated Waratah were called up to reveal the mystery of their death shortly after the ship went missing.

Spiritualist and creator of Sherlock Holmes — Sir Arthur Conan Doyle — held a seance to consult the 211 dead soon after the Waratah vanished off the Transkei coast in 1909.

So says Pretoria author Geoffrey Jenkins, who spent three years researching the Waratah for his best-seller, *Scend of the Sea*.

Dead passengers apparently "told" Sir Conan that their ship had been hit by a massive wave, been flung upside down and had sunk.

Ghoulis tales about the Waratah abound, according to Mr Jenkins.

AN "aura of doom" clung to the Waratah from the moment she set out on her maiden voyage. So says author Geoffrey Jenkins, who spent three years researching the vessel for his international best-seller *Scend of the Sea*. Daily News correspondent **CLAIRWYN REILLY** reports.

One passenger, a Mr Sawyer, was spared a watery grave when a ghostly figure appeared to him in the dead of night while the Waratah was docked in Durban.

The apparition, wielding a sword in its right hand and a blood-stained rag in his left, warned Sawyer to get off the ship — or die. Sawyer sensibly took to his heels.

Far-fetched? No, says Mr Jenkins. Sawyer gave his account under

oath during the Caxton Hall inquiry into the Waratah's disappearance.

When the newly-built vessel was being shown off in the Sydney docks, one sailor announced he had "a feeling" about the ship and would not sail in her.

Another "authenticated" story — also from Sydney — is of a woman who walked up the Waratah's gangplank for that fateful voyage and then refused to board the ship.

Closer to home, a minister's wife in Cradock told her husband on the night the Waratah went missing that she had seen her brother Charlie — wearing dripping oilskins and a "drowned look".

"Maybe the impact of the tragedy — the loss of 211 lives at one time — sent off psychic waves," says Mr Jenkins.