

# Wightman on Heavy Weather

Enjoyed the 'Mischief' article. Was much of the damage due to incompetent helmsmen? That seems the drift - or why the elimination of all but three, for heavy weather. But an insensitive helmsman is manifest in all weathers? Indeed, more, in coaxing a ship along in light weather.

A typical depression of those latitudes. I wish he had given the time-interval between heads of the swells when they were at their worst: thirty to fifty feet. He gives it earlier as twelve seconds when the weather was manageable. All so interesting.

I wonder if this is perhaps a final condemnation of the 'warp' creed which at present commands ocean-cruisers. I mean, shortening down soon, and trailing warps. A driven hull held up by miles of warp-bights is, 'theoretically', travelling backwards in terms of the general movement of all material bodies in that neighbourhood. Which is travelling against the Sea; as though she were fighting it stem-on. Stern-on, is the worse for the ship.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  knots 'forward' (his figure) is, really, 'opposition' to vast bodies of water travelling at from 30 to 50 knots. All right when it's only a vast undulation; but when, under pressure of wind, the undulation transforms itself into solidly-travelling water?

After all, 30-to-50-foot swells are lethal (and as much) to larger hulls. Yet the clippers manipulated that as their monthly currency in their runs to 'the Colonies'; and only the Back-Ball

Clippers were of a thousand tons. Scores of the early clippers were of less than 600 tons. 140 feet long? Swells of such height are deadlier to that length than to 40; for '40' tackles the approaching declivity in sections, so small is she (unless the thing is capping) the longer hull has to tackle it as - one complete threat - presented instantaneously. What I mean is, the clipper-creed was: 'Carry as much sail as the ship will stand, and keep ahead of the swells'. Keeping ahead of the swells is a figure of speech; what the creed means (I think) is; decrease, as much as you can, the discrepancy between your speed, and the speed of the swells.

I don't mean that damage relative to that sustained by 'Mischief' was unknown on those ships, but it was - in terms of their 'mileage' - incomparably less.

The way to refute this is to say: "'Mischief' ran into weather which would have sunk the whole colonial fleet". I doubt it. Fleets of sail-crowded ships went out to Australia and New Zealand for fifty years. There were many WEE things amongst them.

Are we back to one of the 'Recessions of History'? (In sail?) 'Cods head-and mackerel tail'; 'Hollow entrance and bluff run'; both ends fined away, and a bilge like a poisoned pup? ALL in an effort to give a clean 'delivery', which is your only retort of an encroaching 30-foot sea.

I wonder how they would have fared if they had hove-to. I admit the same discrepancy in speed; but the better end of the Ship presented to the onslaught.

Wish I could discuss this with you.

Frank