

Death at Sea – Memoirs of Christina Anderson MACKNEY

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The following extract was written by my grandmother, Christina Anderson (née MUTCH) MACKNEY in June 1983.

I am Chris MACKNEY visiting Heather and Jim RAY at Libertyville. I live in Babinda, North Queensland, Australia and left home on 1 June 1983 to spend a month in the USA.

My mother was Isabella MacRAE and was born in Invergordon in the north of Scotland about 1872. My father was Peter MUTCH born in Udney near Aberdeen, Scotland in 1875. Both my parents migrated to South Africa about 1897 or 1898 and were married in Cape Town soon after. They lived in or near Johannesburg and dad worked on Cecil Rhodes building as a carpenter. Cecil RHODES was a diamond magnate.

When the Boer War broke out my father joined the forces and my mother had two small children by then, Ethel and myself, so dad sent us home to his people in Aberdeen, Scotland. After the war dad bought some land outside Cape Town and built a home; the area was called "The Flats". It was really a beautiful country and had a moderate climate, fruit of all kind was grown there. We lived there until 1908, when we lost our home in a fire. Building work was scarce so dad's people persuaded him to bring the family back to Scotland. By this time there were three more children in the family, Sonny (William), Isabel and Peter.

We left Cape Town for Scotland in August 1908 on a steamer called the *Marathon*. My father then decided to migrate to Australia and left after we were all settled in Aberdeen. He got work in and around Sydney, then moved to the west and later moved into Queensland and got work on sheep stations near Cloncurry in the west of Queensland.

My mother was then left with the five children to take care of, Dad's folk helped my mother. We had a very cold winter that year, I believe it was the coldest they had for nearly a century. My youngest brother Peter was about thirteen months old and caught a cold, which developed into pneumonia and died about Xmas eve. That was a very sad Xmas for us all. Then my mother became ill and had to go to hospital in Aberdeen, she had some trouble with one of her kidneys. While she was in hospital Sonny our oldest brother became sick. My aunt Margaret was looking after the family while my mother was in hospital, she was my mother's sister from Invergordon. However when my mother heard Sonny was ill she insisted on going home to nurse him. Sonny died with meningitis a few days later. My mother then had to go back to hospital and had a kidney removed. We then went up to Invergordon to stay with my mother's sisters for a few months until my mother grew stronger. Ethel and I attended school there for a time, then we returned to Aberdeen, and stayed there until 1911 when we left to join our father in Australia.

We had to come down by a small steamer to London then left by a large steamer called the *Ripplingham Grange*. This ship's name was later changed to the *Limerick*. We left London late in July and came through the Strait of Gibraltar, then through the Mediterranean Sea, the Gulf of Suez then through the Red Sea. It was very hot going through the Red Sea and a man on board died and was buried at sea. This was our first experience of a sea burial.

The death and burial of the unnamed man at sea was still vivid in her life's recollections 72 years later. In 2004 while re-reading her memoirs I wonder about the man who died at sea and I can only imagine what his hopes and dreams would have been. He, like my grandmother and her family, maybe had been coming to Australia to start a new life. Had he left loved ones behind or did they accompany him on that fateful voyage? What became of them? Did they settle in Australia? So many unanswered questions about the man buried at sea in 1911.

We then passed through the Gulf of Aden, then onto Colombo, where we stopped for a few hours to get supplies of food etc. From here we left for the north of Australia and arrived at Thursday Island, then onto Cairns where we anchored in the channel. Lots of young girl immigrants were taken off there to work as servants. We were six weeks on this voyage and really enjoyed the trip, as we made many friends too. Our

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voyage ended in Townsville and as dad had work in Mackay we joined a smaller steamer, and was met at Mackay by my father.

My adored grandmother became a schoolteacher, and then married Arthur Henry Mackney in Atherton, Queensland in 1926. They had one child, a son Colin born in 1931.

She led a full life until her death in 1991. But then again, that's another story.