

THE HISTORY OF TIREE IN 100 OBJECTS - no. 28

CHAIR FROM THE SS MALVE

This beautiful mahogany swivel chair was salvaged from the wreck of a Finnish cargo vessel in 1931 on the skerries of Belephestrish. The stranded sailors were put up in the Reading Room, so its donation to An Iodhlann is very appropriate!

The night of the 14th February 1931, with a gale and driving snow, was one to stay tucked up in bed. Little did islanders know that a large boat had gone aground on the dangerous Balephterish skerries *Na Sgeirean Mòra* and that three fishing boats were fighting the storm to stay within range.

The *SS Malve* was sailing from Tallin to Manchester with two hundred tons of wood pulp. In zero visibility a crunch alerted the crew to the fact that the ship had grounded. At first Captain Boxberg believed the boat was on the rocks off Coll, and put out a Mayday call to that effect. Three fishing boats, the *Armageddon*, *Caldew* and *River Clyde* responded to a call for assistance from Malin Head Radio and stood by. It was low water and after checking that the vessel seemed to be undamaged, the captain lightened the boat by pumping out the ballast water and moving a quarter of his cargo into the hold at the stern of the ship. As the tide rose, the ship re-floated and they were able to anchor in Balephterish Bay, meaning to assess the damage at first light. The fishing boats sailed off. However, the wind freshened again, the anchor dragged and the despite efforts to steam away, the boat was driven onto the rocks again. This time there was no escape. The captain put most of his crew ashore, remaining on board with two other men until the break-up of the vessel meant that they had no option but to get into the last lifeboat.

The ship was declared a total loss. Today there is little left in seven meters but the propellor shaft. Amazingly, a salvage vessel, the *SS Glenlyon* from Belfast, also went aground trying to transfer her cargo in September and was also declared a wreck.

The *Malve* had been built in Thunder bay, Ontario fourteen years before and launched as the *Star Fish*. After war service in the Atlantic she was sold to French owners and re-named the *Roubaix* and subsequently *Monique Vieljeux*. The year before the sinking she had been bought by the Swedish shipping company Nordjöfrakt and re-named for the fourth time. (So much for the superstition of not re-naming a boat).

The ship remained intact on the rocks throughout the summer of 1931, and naturally attracted the attention of curious islanders. Catriona Watt's grandparents lived in

Balephetrish and heard about her family's visit to the wreck. 'Access was by rope ladder, which the younger ones found terrifying. Sheila, the cousin, climbed it like a monkey, which took them by surprise as she was an elderly lady in her forties!'

A china serving-dish with the initials DV (after the owners at the time Delmas Vieljeux) was bought at a sale of small items from the vessel and is also in An Iodhlann. The chair, from the bridge and said to have been the captain's, was salvaged by Captain Charles Lamont (*Tèarlach Iseabail*), who lived at the *Coalree* in Kenovay. It was generously given to the museum by Mairi MacFarlane and restored beautifully by Alan Reid. So now you can sit in the seat of Captain Boxberg as he tried to reverse the boat off the rocks! Living history.

Dr John Holliday