



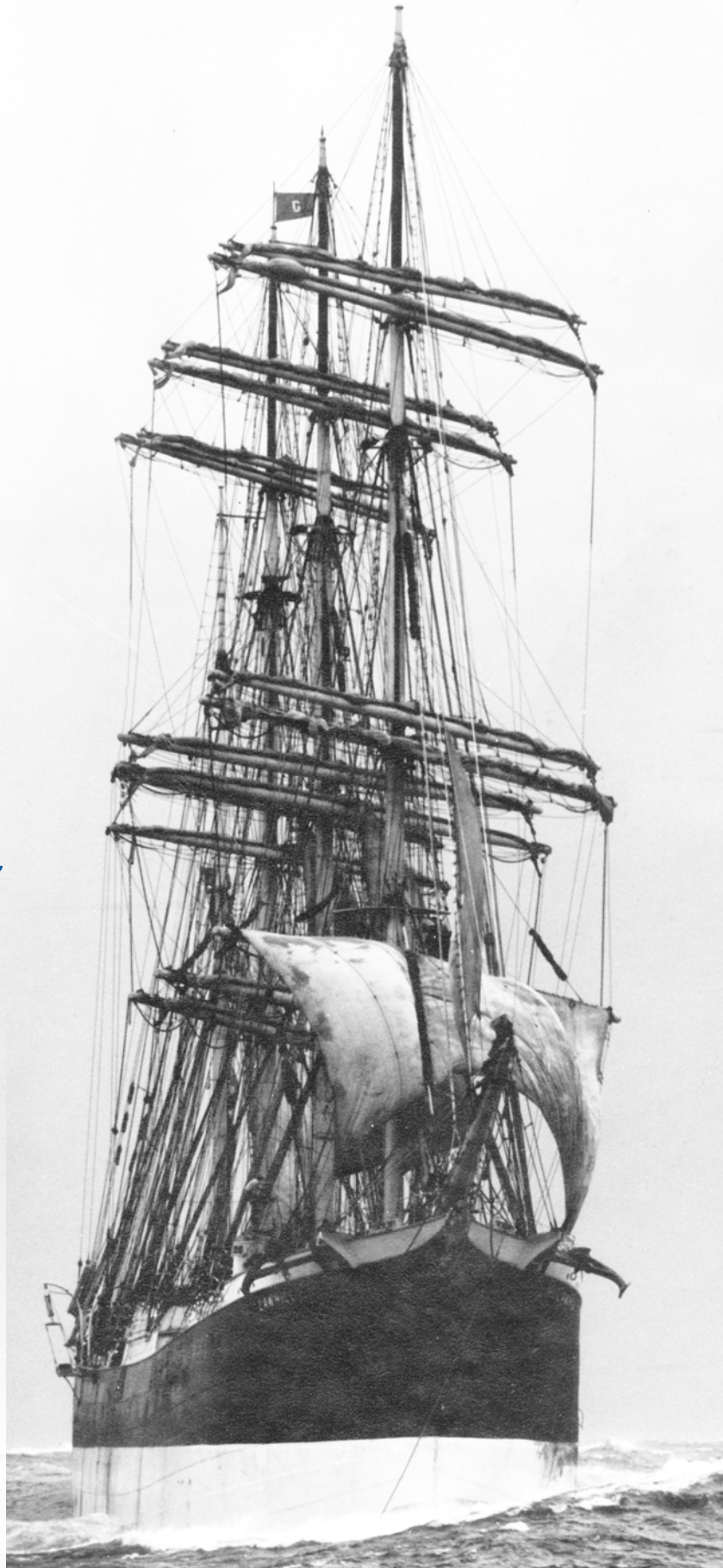
THE S.A.T.S. GENERAL BOTHA
OLD BOYS ASSOCIATION
BURSARY FUND



The Tale of Two Ships

This is A Tale of Two Ships built over a century ago; a tale of how these extraordinary ships became legendary icons whose stories have been passed on from generation to generation of mariners, inspiring hundreds of young South Africans to seek out the mysteries of the sea and the adventures of seafaring.

This is neither the place nor the time to write their stories in detail - that has been done elsewhere in several excellent books and films - but enough must be told for us to understand how they relate to us today.



SIMON'S TOWN SCHOOL
LAWHILL MARITIME CENTRE

Celebrating 20 years of operation in 2015

S.A.T.S. General Botha

HMS Thames was built in 1886; one of four new cruisers for the British Royal Navy. She served well for 33 years in many naval roles until she was put up for sale in 1919. It so happened that there was a great debate raging in Cape Town then about the future of the South African naval cadet corps. The man who acted was Captain T.B.F. Davis, a master mariner, yachtsman and businessman with a passion for building a South African merchant marine service. He bought HMS Thames, and sent 20 cadets and an RN sub-lieutenant, A.A. Porter, to England to sail her to South Africa to become a training ship for South African cadets for the merchant service. After an adventurous passage she arrived in Cape Town, was renamed SATS General Botha and took up her station moored in Simon's Bay, off the naval harbour in Simon's Town. She accepted her first intake of cadets in 1922. Between then and the outbreak of World War 2 the "Bothie", as she was known affectionately, had trained over 900 cadets for seafaring careers serving in every aspect of the maritime world, both locally and internationally. The two years spent aboard the Bothie was highly disciplined and robust, but it produced young men with basic seafaring competence, self-confidence and a value system rooted in the Ship's motto "Honour and Duty" that remained with them for a lifetime.

World War 2 changed almost everything. Many ex-

cadets served with distinction; many of them sacrificed their lives. The SATS General Botha was taken back into service by the Royal Navy and renamed HMS Thames. The cadets were moved ashore in 1942; first to Red Hill, then to Gordon's Bay and finally to Granger Bay. But through the various transitions from ship to college, from college to academy, the ethos of The Ship remained as hundreds of cadets passed through the Bothie experience until its final closure in 1987, moving on to serve the maritime industry with distinction worldwide.

HMS Thames was sunk by the Royal Navy in 1947 after 61 years of service. Today she is visited periodically by divers who ensure that her commemorative plaque remains clear and bright. Her resting place lies off the coastline over which the Swartkopberge stand watch.

She is never forgotten. The legend lives on through the many activities of the international network of the SATS General Botha Old Boys Association.

Lawhill

The Lawhill was a four-masted steel bargue built in Dundee, Scotland, in 1892. She was one of the largest of the windjammers of that era; one of the many of that class of sailing ship built to replace the clipper ships of earlier years and to compete with the steadily increasing number of steamships. She represented the ultimate in sailing ship design, exploiting every advantage that such ships had over steamers in that



period. She excelled at her business of earning sound profits for successive British and then Finnish owners.

Lawhill and her crews rounded the infamous Cape Horn many times during her voyages. She and they were true Cape Horners whose legends are immortalized for their courage and seamanship in Sara Vial's inscription on the Albatross Monument, Cape Horn:

"I am the albatross that awaits you at the end of the earth. I am the forgotten soul of the dead sailors from all the seas of the earth who rounded Cape Horn; they did not die in the fury of the waves, but fly today on my wings towards eternity in the cry of the Antarctic winds."

Always a lucky ship, Lawhill plied her trade right through the frights and hazards of World War 1 and the uncertain years up to 1939, surviving u-boat threats, typhoons and tempests, shifting ballast, internship by the French, crewing crises, beam-ending, and the ever-increasing dominance of steam propulsion. The outbreak of World War 2 forced her master, Captain Soderlund, to take her into the southern oceans to trade. Finland, faced with Russian invasion, entered the war as an ally of Germany in 1941. Captain Soderlund and his crew were en route to South Africa. They sailed voluntarily into East London where Lawhill was claimed as a prize of war. Taken into the small fleet of SAR-ships under the South African flag, she was sent back to her adventures at sea in 1943 under Captain Soderlund's command with an increasingly South African crew, including a significant number of ex-Bothie cadets, including Philip Nankin who progressed from a deck

boy to Chief Officer in just five years and went on to become Captain Superintendent of the General Botha Academy, Granger Bay. It was during the period from 1943 to 1948 in Lawhill, that many young South African seafarers mastered their trade, becoming intimately attuned to the great skies above and the powerful seas below, "and the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sails shaking".

Lawhill, however, was well past her prime by 1948. She was sold and never sailed again.

So those, in brief, are the stories of two ships. But for generations of young South African seafarers they were and remain much more than just stories, for woven into their fabric are the profound bonds between these two ships, the sea and the young men who came to know them so well; bonds that inspired their lifetime careers.

So it is unsurprising that when the Maritime Department of the Simon's Town High School was built with private funding and dedicated to the education of students in maritime studies it was named after Lawhill.

With so many commonalities evident in the legends of their Ships, it is equally unsurprising that when a group of SATS General Botha old boys visited Lawhill as part of their 50 year reunion, they recognised a centre of excellence striving to nurture in its students the same sense of sea fever and purpose that had thrilled them all that time ago. They decided to help. They established the General Botha Old Boys Association Bursary Fund.



It is here that the stories of the two ships, their legends and their heritage, blend together. Today the Bursary Fund provides and administers scholarships for deserving Lawhill students to enable them to prepare for fulfilling their dreams in the maritime industry. As important, the Fund's mentoring programme strives to excite them about searching out the secrets of the sea, and to equip them to meet and relish the challenge of its dangers.

But sadly South Africa has weakened as a maritime nation. Much has been done to

address this, but much more needs to be done to rebuild its capacity, to regain its status amongst seafaring nations and to attract enough young people into its merchant marine service. Only by sustaining the long tradition of private enterprise and the support of donors and sponsors can we ensure that we are sound trustees of the heritage left to us by those who sailed before us.

If we fail the legends will be lost and the seas will call out to our youth in vain.



***“Wouldst thou” – so the helmsman answered.
“learn the secret of the sea?
Only those who brave its dangers comprehend its mystery!”
Longfellow***

