

After spending his first four voyages as a cadet on *Rakaia*, John Crowder returned as her Chief Officer in 1965. During a voyage that year, he found himself assisting with an appendectomy!

**A VOYAGE TO REMEMBER
BY
JOHN CROWDER**

It was July 1965 and we sailed from Opuā for Durban, not exactly the shortest sea passage. I was Chief Officer of *Rakaia*, and Fred Angus was in command. We had just passed through the Bass Strait in heavy seas and westerly gale conditions, and we were only making about four knots.

Rab Davidson, from Moniaive, was the Surgeon, and he told me that a Steward's Boy had complained of severe stomach pain. He feared that he would probably have to remove his appendix. At four knots it would have taken *Rakaia* about four or five days to reach either Melbourne or Adelaide. I reported to Fred Angus who asked me if I was used to blood and guts, I seem to remember.

Anyway the hospital was set up for the work in hand. Russell Birkinshaw, the Radio Officer, was the anaesthetist. He was to administer three parts of ether and two parts of chloroform (or the other way round) onto a pad covering the young fellow's face. Fairly basic, but it seemed to work. Speed was reduced and *Rakaia* was put onto her most comfortable course with the gale about four points on the starboard bow.

Rab Davidson was about sixty-five years of age who had been a medical student under McEwan in Glasgow, who in turn was a student of Lord Lister. He came up with the Lister Spray in the latter part of the nineteenth century, so we had a direct link to the very beginnings of anti-sepsis. It was no mean undertaking.

The operation was a success and the Steward's Boy survived, and we continued on our way to Durban. A very interesting voyage, not least being our Chief Engineer who climbed the main mast and refused to come down. He was paid off in Durban.

Apart from all this it was an interesting voyage as we had small parcels of dairy products for quite a few ports, such as Tema in Ghana. At this early stage New Zealand was preparing for the UK's entry to the Common Market. We arrived in London on the 3rd August 1965.

Here Rab Davidson announced that he had booked The Pinafore Room at the Savoy Hotel for a Dinner to commemorate the successful conclusion of the Appendix Operation. The Steward's Boy, and his parents from the East End of London, were all present for a most convivial evening.

The next voyage we had a return match at The Pinafore Room for Rab Davidson's retirement.