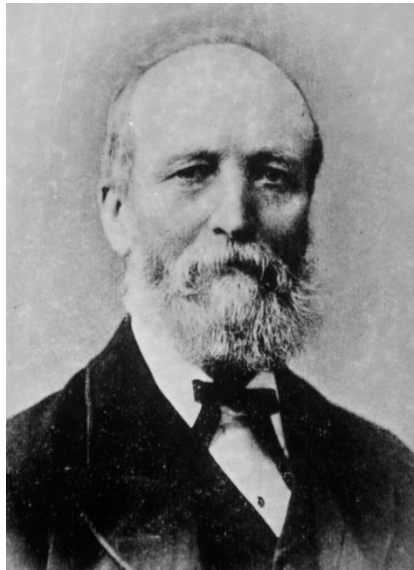


Captain John Melville Keay, 20.10.1828 – 22.03.1918



John Keay was born in East Green, the son of Captain Thomas Keay and his wife Margaret Lawson. John married Helen Dishington of Anstruther Wester in Anstruther East, in May 1852. Both of his grandfathers, John Keay and William Lawson, had been shipmasters in Pittenweem.

John Keay served his sea apprenticeship with his father and with Captain Robert Fowler of Cellardyke. He was quickly promoted and aged thirty, was employed by Captain Alexander Rodger of Cellardyke as master of the new clipper ship 'Ellen Rodger'. From her launch in 1858, Keay captained the ship until 1862. Unhappy with her performance against newer, faster ships and disappointed at not being offered command of Rodger's new ship the 'Min' which was given to John Smith, Keay left Roger's employment and became master of a rival tea clipper the 'Falcon' owned by Shaw, Maxton & Co. of London. In 1865, Keay became master of their new clipper 'Ariel' a three-masted clipper built by Robert Steel & Co. of Greenock. She was reckoned to be one of the most beautiful clippers ever built. She was 60m long and weighed 850 tons.

Captain Keay said of the 'Ariel':

"It was a pleasure to coach her. Very light airs gave her headway and I could trust her like a thing alive in all evolutions; in fact she could do anything short of speaking."

'Ariel' was lost at sea in 1872 en-route from London to Sydney under the command of Captain Cachevaille.

There was great rivalry amongst the clipper captains who all wanted to their ship to be the first to dock in London with their prize cargo of new season tea from China. The winning captain received a bonus prize of one hundred pounds.

The 'Ellen Rodger' took part in the 1859 tea race and won; she was second in 1860 and third in 1861, all with Captain John Keay at the helm. Rumour has it that after Keay defected to the Shaw Maxton Co. to take command of the 'Falcon', Captain Rodger gave his captains instructions to beat Keay at any cost. In the great race of 1866, Rodger's 'Taeping' won the race from 'Ariel' tying up in London twenty minutes before her. The voyage from Fuzhou took 99 days. As 'Ariel' unloaded her cargo first, 'Taeping' divided

her winnings of 10 shillings per ton with the crew of 'Ariel' and Captain McKinnon of 'Taeping' shared the captain's winnings with John Keay.

Winners of the races up to and including 1866 were determined by the first ship to dock in London regardless of the timing of departure from China. From 1867, the winner was the ship taking the shortest time on the passage from China. The tea races took place annually for about thirty years.

As a Master Mariner, Captain John Keay had a very distinguished career. He left the 'Ariel' in 1870 (around the same time as he took ownership of 'The Great Lodging', West Anstruther (then named 'Forthbank'), to captain a steamship before retiring from the sea to manage a steamship line in Liverpool. He died in his 90th year at 160 Anfield Road and was buried at Anfield Cemetery.