

I joined Macdonald Hamilton & Co (MH) in 1958 where I met Don Bienvenu who has also written of his experiences. MH was then a partnership and I was a junior accounts assistant with my responsibilities being to write up each afternoon, the leather cash receipts book with nib pen being careful not to blot, prepare the owners accounts for the A.U.S.N ships and because the telex machine was in the accounts department deliver telexes throughout the office this meant I was well informed on what was happening. Living close to Williamstown, I also enjoyed regular jaunts in the customs launch taking passengers mail out so it could be sorted by purser's staff before arrival. On my first sortie to join "Strathaird" I was assured the ship stops and the companion ladder is lowered. This of course never happened and the ship steamed ahead at 15 knots and it was a timely jump to the Jacobs ladder and a climb to the gun port. On the first occasion of doing this I managed to take two feet off the ladder at the same time but landed upright in the launch still holding the mail - that never happened again!

The trip out to join the ship was always good fun, trying to look important in the Purser's Bureau before adjourning for breakfast or dinner in the first class dining room and then if a morning arrival, catch the train back to the City.

The office was quite Spartan, although it was given a quick paint job by Ship Painters and Dockers on the eve of a visit by Lord Inchcape. Although Painters and Dockers had a notorious record, those who came to our office were nice blokes. 1958 was also before air-conditioning so the only summer cooling was to open the windows and some fans. Provided you weren't wearing braces it was permissible to remove your jacket once it got close to 90F. On Saturday mornings unless dealing with customers you were permitted to wear a reefer jacket instead of suit.

In 1959 I was seconded to the BI/P&O Freight Department as cashier for 6 months. In 1960 P&O decided to rationalize agency operations and purchased Macdonald Hamilton & Co Pty Ltd as it was then known from the Inchcape family and merged it with the Orient Line Branch Office to form P&O-Orient Lines of Australia Ltd. As part of the deal the name and certain assets were retained by Inchcape, this included the managing agency of the A.U.S.N coastal shipping line. I was informed I would join the new MH to undertake accounting duties and be groomed in ship management, my particular duties involved Travel Agency accounting, A.U.S.N owner accounts, internal audit of A.U.S.N freight receipts for which I was given a green pen, pays at the WWF pay office and crew disbursement and on one occasion witnessing the indentures of an A.U.S.N apprentice deck officer at the Mercantile Marine Office at the Rialto.

Unfortunately my ship management grooming was short lived with the A.U.S.N ceasing ship owning in early 1961. I went on to spend a further 29 years with Inchcape in Australia, 10 years at MH before joining Inchcape's insurance broking Arm, ceasing in 1990 as Group Company Secretary of the Bain Clarkson Pacific Limited Insurance Broking Group in Australia and Director of group subsidiaries. My time at MH was however not wasted when in 1971 and then secretary/accountant of the Southern Division of the Bain Dawes Group I was asked to act as Port Liaison for 2 small tankers owned by Inchcape's subsidiary Dilmun Navigation Co limited. So drawing on my former colleagues for guidance and my memories I successfully acted as Port liaison for "Pacific Trader" and "Pacific Mariner" arranging pilots, berth, towage, cash advances, discharge etc. Whilst accountants may have acted as liaison officers, few would have done so in their capacity as an accountant at an insurance broker, however probably fitting as the constituent parts forming Bain Dawes all had a shipping history.

Post the Inchcape Group I spent 14 years as Group Company Secretary of the Age and a director of a couple of rural newspaper investments. Starting as an Accountant in 1958, I finished as a lawyer in 2004 and now apply those skills at a Community Legal Centre and enjoy life with family and Friends.

With a former colleague Ian Byard now resident in the UK we are jointly writing the history of Inchcape (MH) in Australia and would welcome any nostalgic memories of people, ships and events. Email bruclyn@bigpond.com.