**Britomart – Some history**

# **Described as a 242 ton brig/sloop** when commissioned into the Royal Navy when launched at Deptford, Kent in 1808, and as a barque when it was privately owned from 1819. It was a two deck ship, copper sheathed, and was able to carry armaments to defend itself in time of war, or from piracy at any time – indeed it was fitted with only a single canon when it came to Australia in 1834, this being a time when no military hostilities were in progress with Britain.

*[For the maritime minded – a* ***Brig*** *is a large sailing ship two masted with square rig sails on both masts and fore/aft jibs. A* ***Barque*** *is a three masted sailing ship with square rig sails on all three masts as well as jib sails fore and aft. In the Royal Navy (and US navy) a* ***Brig-Sloop*** *is a three masted ship, a man of war, with square rig and jib sails – so it is virtually in design the same as a Barque in the merchant navy. The Brig-Sloop name seems to be confined to naval warships of the 18th/19th centuries. Brig-Sloop man-of-war ships were typically equipped with 18 to 20 canons.]*

# **Britomart’s first voyage to Australia was in 1822** – it arrived Hobart February 4th, Captain Daniel Peach, having departed Deal, England September 9th 1821, via Cape of Good Hope. It carried passengers and general merchandise. It departed Hobart for Port Jackson, Feb.26, later sailing for Valparaiso, Chile, returning later to Port Jackson. It is unknown if William McDonald was a member of Britomart’s crew for these voyages.

En-route to Chile Peach ‘discovered’ what he named in his Log as Britomart Island – known as Hereheretue Island in the Western Tuamotus, within the Tahitian Group. Peach was most likely aware that the Tuamotus Archipelago Group had been ‘discovered’ in 1521 by Magellan (and by Polynesians about 700AD), although it may be that Hereheretue Atoll being on the most south eastern fringe of the Tuamotus had not been previously sighted by Magellan or others who came by later (Cook included). Although the Group was inhabited by the Polynesians, apparently not Hereheretue at that time, so Peach may have seen it in a never inhabited state.

# **Ownership** – Lloyds indicates Britomart was first purchased from the Royal Navy in 1819 by Parsons & Co (there is some indication that the MacDonald family was involved with Parsons), then in 1822 acquired by J D Moxn, followed in 1825 by Somes & Co, then in 1835 by Porter & Co, this latter Co. retaining ownership until 1838 when it was acquired by our Captain William McDonald. Thus William had Captained Britomart in its voyage to Australia in 1834 with his family, but did not own the ship until 1838. It sheds new light on the reasons William visited England 1836-1839.

# After its 1822 visit Britomart did not return to Australian waters until its arrival at Hobart in December 1834 from London via Tor Bay (Torquay), Captain McDonald, with 12 Cabin and 44 Steerage passengers aboard plus general merchandise cargo. Agnes Smith and daughter Agnes Eliza McDonald Smith were aboard with Captain McDonald. As referenced above William did not own the ship at this point, rather sailing it to Australia, and then between 1834 and 1836 sailing it in multiple coastal passenger, livestock and merchandise trading voyages around the east coast of Australia. During that period he was contracted as the ship’s commander.

# **Coastal voyages** (eleven) with William in command were made during 1835, and three further voyages with other Captains in command. One voyage was to Sydney, all others to Two Fold Bay the latter mostly carrying livestock, and some passengers.

# **Voyage to England 1836 to 1839** – Britomart, Captain William McDonald departed for England January 18 1836, enroute near Tasmania suffering serious damage during a severe storm forcing her to shelter at Port Arthur, return to Hobart for repairs. She again left for London via the Horn March 12, 1836, returning to Hobart via the Cape, and Swan River (in December 1838) where she remained for several weeks, and docking in Hobart January 23rd, 1839. Once again, she resumed coastal passenger/cargo voyages (eight) between Hobart and Georgetown, Launceston, Port Adelaide and Port Philip.

# **Disposal, and Loss** with all on board – William disposed of Britomart in Port Philip in September/October 1839. The new owner Captain Gluyass departed Port Philip December 15th for Hobart with 17 passengers – unfortunately the ship disappeared, under suspicious circumstances, and only a few items were later found washed up on Preservation and Clarke Islands, Bass Strait. Searches by several ships failed to find survivors.