

By **Graham Baines, Brisbane, Australia**



**Captain John Graham (1840-1916)
Carrickfergus to Cooktown, Australia**

It was the summer of 1862 and after sailing from London docks the barque "Agrippina" hove to off Terceira in the Portuguese Azores while her crew shovelled away the coal that had kept hidden the big naval guns in the hold. As First Officer on that voyage John Graham, 22 years old, and a native of Carrickfergus, oversaw the transfer of those guns, together with rifles, 100 barrels of gunpowder, uniforms and other supplies, to the newly launched Confederate warship, CSS Alabama. The Alabama then set off on a two year raiding spree of attacks on American shipping, for a time dramatically shifting the balance in the American Civil War. By the time she was engaged and sunk off Cherbourg, France, the crew of Alabama had captured and burned 55 ships and seized and bonded another 10.

Son of Carrickfergus-based Captain William Graham and Nancy/Agnes McEtamney (of Back Quarter, Carrickfergus), John Graham (born at Cork Hill, Carrickfergus) later joined the sailing ship "Sailor's Home" as Mate on a voyage to Chile. The Master of that ship died in Chile and after bringing the vessel back to England John Graham proceeded to wed the Captain's widow, Louisa, of Gloucestershire. John Graham's sisters married in Ulster into the Victor and Blackburne families. One of his three brothers, Edward, married a woman with the surname Innes.

John Graham travelled widely, to Mediterranean ports, to the Americas, to Shanghai and Batavia. He lost his ship "Rochester" off Patagonia near Cape Horn and spent months making his way overland to Buenos Aires.

After a stint as a ship assessor for Lloyds of London, and a brief period in the shipping business, in 1885 he assumed command of the barque "Maida" and took her to Australia with a cargo of sugar mill machinery. On arrival there in Bundaberg with his wife and three of her daughters aboard he was dismayed when a policeman came aboard to arrest the ship by nailing a warrant to the mast. The ship's Liverpool owners had been declared bankrupt and creditors had arranged for the ship's arrest and sale. Captain Graham and

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part of his family were stranded and, in this way became the beginnings of a line of Graham descendants 'down under'.

After some time as an officer on steamships plying the east coast of Australia he settled in Cooktown, far north Queensland, from where he worked as marine pilot guiding vessels as far as Burketown in the Gulf of Carpentaria. He was described in an early Queensland newspaper as *“One of the Strait Pilots, the only one who never anchors at night but steers his ships through the narrow channels amid coral reefs, in the badly marked and lighted waters of the Straits, in fine or storm ...”*

John Graham, staunch Protestant Scots-Irish seafarer, husband and father, died in Cooktown on the 20th March 1916 after a terminal illness of six months. His wife had predeceased him in 1911. Their six daughters survived them; of his one son, John, no information has been uncovered.

A protracted wrangle over who was to benefit from his will seemed almost to have been prophesied by Captain Graham who, preferring a quiet passing, had chosen as his epitaph, *“Let there be no moaning at the bar when I put out to sea.”* Sadly, his chosen epitaph does not appear on his tombstone in Cooktown Cemetery.