



THE ROYAL INSTITUTION
OF NAVAL ARCHITECTS



RINA TASMANIAN SECTION – PUBLIC LECTURES

9th April 2024 – 17:30

The *Blythe Star* tragedy

Hobart
live

Launceston
live stream

The Tasmanian Section of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects welcomes you to an evening technical presentation. These seminars are intended to share technical expertise and historical events across maritime engineering and operational aspects, in the spirit of continuing professional development.

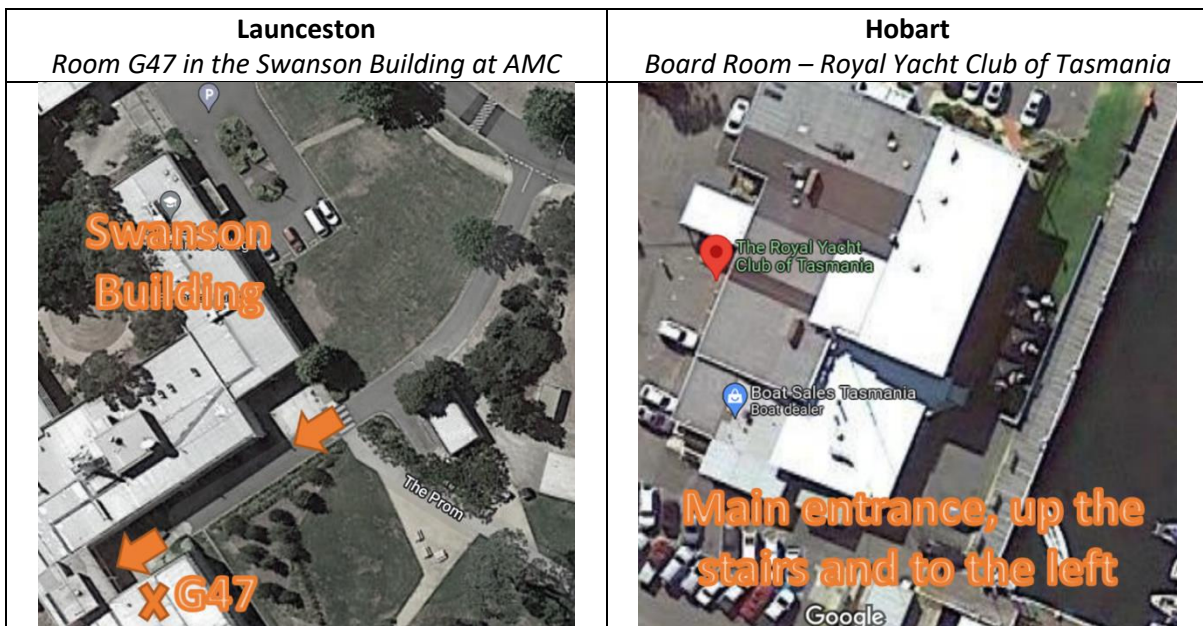
Refreshments at 17:30 with the presentation starting at 18:00, the April talk welcomes Michael Stoddart, author of “The Blythe Star Tragedy” speaking on the subject of: The Blythe Star Tragedy – see following page.

LOCATION: Tasmanian Section Technical Presentation are delivered alternately between the physical locations in Hobart or Launceston with a live stream between the two. The live stream is also made available for your convenience when joining from other locations, in Tasmania, Australia or International.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89408420059?pwd=UWVsaDM1ZS9TWVRRNDVmUG1nT3ZPd09>

Meeting ID: 894 0842 0059





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The *Blythe Star* tragedy.

Michael Stoddart

In October 1973 the freighter MV *Blythe Star* departed from Hobart for King Island with a cargo of fertiliser and beer. The hold was completely filled and outside, on top of the hatch covers, 54 tonnes of palletted fertiliser completed the 351 tonne cargo. Twelve hours after departure the ship was logged by Maatsuyker Island at 5.15 in the morning. Three hours later *Blythe Star* sank in good weather and a calm sea. The crew of ten made it into a life raft but were aghast to learn the Captain had neither sent out an SOS nor grabbed the portable radio before jumping into the life raft.

Nobody at home knew anything was amiss until 30 hours after the ship's ETA at Grassy had passed, at which time the Marine Operations Centre in Canberra started a search and rescue mission. The biggest such operation in Australian history failed to find any trace of the raft. After drifting around the Southern Ocean for eight days, and coming close to a fleet of fishing boats only to see them turn away, the raft was blown ashore at Deep Glen Bay on the Forestier Peninsula. A few days into their ordeal the second Engineer died and was buried at sea. Within a few hours of making landfall the Chief Engineer died, followed a few hours later by the Chief Officer.

After three days of attempted escapes from the Bay the three youngest crewmen knew that if they did not manage to climb the sheer rocky face and find help all seven remaining crew would die. Two days of climbing and bush-bashing were rewarded with the arrival of a logging truck which took them to Dunalley, from where the Hobart police were alerted. A helicopter rescued the four crewmen from Deep Glen Bay.

This talk describes the ship's last journey, its *laissez-faire* management, and the farcical Court of Marine Inquiry into the loss which ultimately arrived at a conclusion which satisfied no-one.

Michael Stoddart is a former Chief Scientist of Australia's Antarctic program, and is currently a researcher at the Maritime Museum of Tasmania.

