

Introduction

Here are accusations of sexual impropriety, murder, financial malpractice and other alarms, set against a backdrop of the British Empire, the Raj, and the Catholic revival in the nineteenth-century Church of England. Charles Plomer Hopkins, a Victorian church organist, called by circumstance to a seamen's chaplaincy on the Indian sub-continent, eventually achieved an unlikely apotheosis in his announcement and leadership of the first and, so far, only international seamen's strike. The reader will perceive immediately that this is not the usual career path of most Anglican, or indeed any, clergy. The extraordinary effect of Hopkins's ministry among seafarers on his own and other churches is only now beginning to be appreciated. His influence was profound. His troubles, often of his own manufacture, were great. It seemed apt to entitle his life story *Priest in Deep Water*, its ambiguity encapsulating both the general thrust of his ministry and the particular troubles by which it was dogged.

Charles Plomer Hopkins, referred to as CPH when it is necessary to avoid confusion with his father, also Charles Hopkins, was born in 1861 and died in 1922. He is a figure largely forgotten or ignored and seldom understood by historians who have sought to document the struggle by seamen to obtain union recognition from their employers. Most people who know his name have met it either as a footnote in such work or outside maritime literature altogether. Fortunately Hopkins has an entry in the latest edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which may improve his place in future studies. Some of the misunderstanding seems to have arisen from dependence on the Labour politician, Emmanuel Shinwell. Shinwell was a self-publicist who had been removed from office in

the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union by Hopkins shortly after the seamen's strike of 1911, which may account for Shinwell's tone in his memoirs, *Conflict Without Malice* (1955):

the 'Rev' Charles P Hopkins was in his own words as a witness at a later court hearing a volunteer 'sky pilot', who clad himself in a semi-clerical, semi-nautical garb consisting of a discreet black habit with a blue seamen's jersey and a gold crucifix. He was a newcomer, having become a trustee of the union that summer, though an old crony of Wilson's

Shinwell gives us little of use. When Hopkins wore his habit (full and Benedictine) on a platform, it was precisely because it was not discreet. Shinwell here combines it with Hopkins's more usual garb, which he was wearing when he met the seamen's leader, Havelock Wilson, around or before 1900, of seaman's jersey, clerical collar, pectoral cross (as Superior of the Order of St Paul), jacket and cheese cutter cap. It was the young Shinwell who was the newcomer to the movement. Those who follow Shinwell, such as Wailey and Clegg, failed to realise that Hopkins was genuinely a priest and a religious (that is, a member of a religious community, living under vows), with a fine record of service to seafarers.

To find Hopkins it is necessary to look elsewhere. Compton MacKenzie is a primary source and wrote with accuracy. Material from his books will appear in the text; suffice it to say here that his second *Octave* of autobiography gives his experience as a neighbour of life at Alton Abbey, while his novel *The Altar Steps* depicts Hopkins at some length, but as a priest serving the army. Hopkins also appears in a book by Shalimar who seems to have met Hopkins when Shalimar was a midshipman visiting Calcutta in the 1890s. Better known as a source, however, was Peter Anson, whose principal interest in Hopkins was in Hopkins's linking of the religious life (a life in a religious community in which members take traditional vows, usually of poverty, chastity and obedience) with the sea apostolate. Anson seems to have picked up Hopkins's name through the writing of Fr Goldie SJ who in the 1890s and 1900s was trying to promote Catholic work among merchant seamen and who had been impressed by what he had heard of Hopkins's Calcutta work. Equally, news of Hopkins's quasi-Benedictine community at Alton and its work elsewhere probably reached Anson whilst he was



Charles Hopkins in middle life (from his obituary in *The Seaman*, 3rd March, 1922).

a novice in the Benedictine community on Caldey Island. Anson wrote an obituary of Hopkins shortly after the latter's death, but strangely appeared to know nothing of his association with either the seamen's strike or Union, even managing to get Hopkins's name wrong. After the Second World War Anson compiled a major book on the religious communities of the Church of England, *The Call of the Cloister*, in which he included Hopkins and the Order of St Paul, using, uncritically, information supplied by Alton Abbey. I have dealt with his writing elsewhere.¹ We should be grateful to Anson for keeping Hopkins's name alive. Anson wrote extensively on the sea apostolate and is credited, with some justice, with reviving Catholic work among seafarers, so it is curious that he understood so little about Hopkins's very important contribution to that apostolate or to the strike. Largely because of their dependence upon Anson rather than upon primary sources, others who chronicle the development of the sea apostolate have little to say about Hopkins. Even the doyen of maritime missiologists, Roald Kverndal, provides him with only

the shortest of shrouds.²

If Hopkins is poorly served in religious or maritime titles, he fares little better in literature concerning the strike action. The fact that the 1911 strike, eventually, involved many larger groups than seamen has caused writers on contemporary industrial relations to neglect the seamen. In his book *John Burns* (1977), K.D. Brown blamed the strike on a specially hot summer. L.H. Powell, as a Federation official, wrote about the strike from the Federation's point of view in his book *The Shipping Federation* (1950) but mentioned Hopkins only in passing. An unusually balanced account is to be found in Barbara Tuchman's *The Proud Tower* (1962), which distinguishes the seamen from the other striking groups, examines why the political scene around 1910 made the strike imperative and places it against a background of anarchy, socialism and other contemporary movements. She makes no mention of Hopkins. The context she provides for Hopkins's bursts of socialist oratory makes them appear less extreme or odd than they would otherwise appear today.

Despite this neglect, it is possible to track Hopkins. The life that emerges effectively falls into three parts. His early years brought him into contact with merchant seamen and moulded his thinking. He came to see that seamen needed to be organised. The second part deals with his attempts to improve the lot of seamen, especially with regard to their organisation. The climax of this second period is his role in the 1911 strike. A third, post-climactic period followed with his occupation of a senior position in the Union's leadership in close association with its president, J. Havelock Wilson.

The story opens with Hopkins's American father, employed as a river pilot in Burma, sending the very young Charles from Burma to England aboard the *GEOLOGIST*, to be educated at his mother's Cornish home of Falmouth. Later CPH wrote in his book, *Altering Plimsoll's Mark*:

My personal introduction to the load-line controversy took place on board the sailing ship *GEOLOGIST* in or about 1870, on my passage from India to England to school. The sailors called her a 'death-trap' and she all but drowned me on the main deck

His father, familiar with visiting sailing ships, is unlikely to have consigned his eldest son to a coffin ship, though the *GEOLOGIST* was certainly a 'hard' ship. The concept of coffin ships is closely

associated with the campaign for greater safety at sea that was championed by Samuel Plimsoll, MP. The Plimsoll campaign spanned several decades and provided the background for Hopkins's own campaign. Its full impact will begin to appear in Chapter Two.

After his schooling in Falmouth, the young Hopkins went on to study music in London. In Chapter Two he then returns to Burma as the cathedral organist in Rangoon, and becomes increasingly involved with the local church's ministry to seafarers. Ordination and his appointment as Port Chaplain may appear uncontroversial but almost at once Hopkins is caught up in the case of a ship overloaded:

My next personal experience ... took place in Rangoon, Burma, in or about 1884, when the load-line disc of the sailing ship *CASSIOPE* was raised by the captain's orders to enable more cargo to be taken aboard. She was lost with all hands

Hopkins tried to intervene but found his efforts unwelcome. The subsequent furore was followed by his removal to the small, seasonal, rice port of Akyab. His time there was meant to be an interlude but is important enough to merit a separate chapter (Three) describing how, having started another seamen's club, his thoughts began to turn to the religious life as a means of providing a committed ministry among seamen. His time in Akyab was ended by a serious bout of malaria, its after-effects haunting him for the rest of his life, and forcing his return to England.

Hopkins's brief stay in London (Chapter Four), ostensibly on medical grounds, coincided with the growing unrest which would culminate in the Dock Strike of 1889, though he seems in no way to have been connected with this. He came to London under the influence of a colourful and remarkable clergyman, the Rev. A. Osborne Jay, founder of a small and ephemeral religious community in which Hopkins very soon made his profession. Jay was Vicar of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch, a very deprived London parish which responded well to its vicar's unusual methods, some of which Hopkins would adopt in his next appointment as Port Chaplain in Calcutta. Jay, and surrounding clergy who were Christian Socialists, cast a little light on the thinking he would have encountered in Shoreditch. Although Hopkins cannot be directly associated with Christian Socialism, it is part of the background against which he must be seen. Hopkins saw his few months in London as pivotal to what would follow.

The second phase of Hopkins's life begins in Calcutta (Chapter Five). Here he established his religious community, started his own quasi-union in the guise of a Seamen's Guild, fought some thirty cases involving seamen through the courts, and got involved with Havelock Wilson's seamen's Union, apparently to the extent of starting a local branch. The Calcutta period saw him return twice to tour England in pursuit of recruits and cash. The presence of two Jesuits among an 1893 Hastings audience which Hopkins was addressing on one of these tours contributed substantially, if indirectly, to the foundation of the modern ministry to seafarers of the Roman Catholic Church. This chapter, inevitably a long one, ends with his return to the United Kingdom in 1894 surrounded by considerable controversy, mainly resulting from rumours of sexual impropriety following a court case which seems to have been arranged to blacken his name.

The years following his return (Chapter Six) were spent consolidating the life of his community, which continued its maritime work through priories established in Barry and Greenwich. There is evidence to show that his brethren were aware of developments within the seamen's union but nothing to confirm contacts. Concurrently Hopkins fell seriously foul of Church authority. His lack of tact, combined with the requirements of the Colonial Clergy Act, placed him in a difficult position which prevented him exercising a public priestly ministry. His meeting with Havelock Wilson, the president of the seamen's Union, around 1900 seems to have afforded him an opening which the Church had failed to provide. The mystery here is why, when there is evidence to show him working for the NSFU in Calcutta, it should have taken him so long to meet its president.

There are years between meeting Havelock Wilson and the declaration of the strike in 1911 which are almost blank (Chapter Seven). Hopkins became secretary of the International Committee of Seamen's Unions in 1910, but his route to that position is only dimly lit. The role made him privy to the plans for an international strike which, in 1911, it was his privilege to announce, and then effectively bring to a reasonable conclusion. The 1911 strike (Chapter Eight) was prolonged by strikes of other workers associated with the industry, which largely fall outside the scope of this book. These two chapters are controversial and any interpretation of Hopkins's and also of Wilson's role, and the relationship subsequently of the

NSFU with the main body of trades unionism, depends as much upon who is viewing as on what is seen. It seems to me that neither wished to have much to do with the other. Seamen were scattered across the globe and could add little weight to the claims of other unions. The Shipping Federation Ltd, or more familiarly the Shipping Federation, records refer variously to the Humber District and the Hull District for what is also called the North East Steam Ship Owners Association (NESSOA). In the text, to avoid confusion, I use either NESSOA or the Humber District.

The period after the strike I describe as Hopkins's third phase. He became a trustee of the NSFU, an elected delegate, and increasingly involved in Union affairs (Chapter Nine). Union records now begin to appear and reveal his activities as trustee and delegate. The impact of the First World War on the Union was substantial. Wartime demands for increasing numbers of crews and the issues surrounding their recruitment became meat and drink to Hopkins. After the war he was awarded the CBE in recognition of his work in this respect, acting effectively as the Union's liaison officer with government. In 1917 the National Maritime Board was formed with Hopkins as its first secretary jointly with Cuthbert Laws, the secretary of the once-hated Shipping Federation; hated because, according to L.H. Powell, it had been founded in 1890 as a 'fighting machine' to counter the increasing power of the Union.

It is my hope that Hopkins will be restored to the public mind and his major contribution to the welfare of merchant seamen, to the development of the maritime apostolate in the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, and to the restoration of the religious life to the Church of England, be recognised. It is a sad fact that the decline of the British merchant navy, the rise of flags of convenience and the increase in third world crews, mean that there is a need in the world for another Hopkins figure to speak for the oppressed. It is a matter for thanksgiving that the Church societies at work amongst seafarers no longer hold back when welfare issues and seamen's rights need attention.

Before looking at Hopkins's life in detail, it is necessary to look at the background against which his ministry was set. Essentially this is formed by the Merchant Shipping Acts, the seamen's Union, and the Church of England. If one were considering clergy generally, those three would probably be in the reverse order, but the peculiar circumstances which will unfold explain why the order is as it is.

Hopkins and the Merchant Shipping Acts

It is necessary to see Hopkins and his work in the light of the various Merchant Shipping Acts. The latter half of the nineteenth century saw, amongst other lesser legislation, the passing of three great Merchant Shipping Acts by the British Parliament in 1854, 1876 and 1894, the latter consolidating the many smaller Acts preceding it. Although Hopkins had to familiarise himself with local variations in the Indian Merchant Shipping Acts, it is these three Acts which were of prime importance to him, to the Union and to the seaman. The Act of 1854, as those that followed, was fought through in the teeth of owner opposition as, for the first time, an attempt was made to regulate conditions under which men sailed.³ It dealt with ship registration, minimum provisions and training, and made a modest gesture towards safety. Steamships, especially passenger vessels, were subject to inspection and fines could be imposed if regulations were infringed. Seamen were now to be discharged with an indication of character and those discharged abroad for medical reasons were no longer simply to be cast adrift. Complaints could be made and further fines imposed for bad stores. The Act's failure to achieve much is evidenced by the need for Samuel Plimsoll's campaign and from the horror stories which Havelock Wilson would retell in his autobiography. To these will be added Hopkins's Rangoon experiences.

Of particular interest in the 1854 Act was the section on discipline. Any seaman deserting after signing-on was liable to a maximum of twelve weeks' imprisonment with hard labour and the forfeiture of his possessions left on board ship. After signing-on, neglect or refusal to join a ship within twenty-four hours of sailing attracted a maximum of ten weeks' imprisonment. Plimsoll was to bring these injustices to public attention in 1873, graphically illustrating his book *OUR SEAMEN – an Appeal* with photographs of overloaded or otherwise unseaworthy 'coffin ships', the crews of which could be imprisoned, owing to the provisions of this Act, for refusing to sail in them. That such severe penalties were thought necessary indicates that masters had difficulty obtaining crews, which in turn reflects the harshness of life at sea at this time. One of Plimsoll's strong points was to argue that if passenger ships could not put to sea without a certificate and with the remedy of trial by jury for loss of life or injury at sea, there was no good reason why such a system could not also be applied to

cargo ships. Owing much to Plimsoll's pressure, a Royal Commission reported in 1873 on unseaworthy ships.⁴ Its findings were mixed. Their impact can be measured in part by seeing what changes they brought about in the working conditions of the men. The government introduced the Unseaworthy Ships Act in 1875 which, through the pressure of shipowners, left the load line to be placed at the owner's discretion.

The 1854 Act was considerably altered by that of 1876 and more so in 1894, largely through Plimsoll's efforts. He was a West Country man who had been brought up to be familiar with the men who carried the cargoes of coal which were his father's business. He stood at Derby as a Liberal on the reform of the 1854 Act and was returned as its MP in 1868.⁵ He failed in his attempt to get a bill introduced at this time.⁶ To this end, he brought out a sensational book, *OUR SEAMEN – an Appeal*, in 1873, which pressed for a Royal Commission and highlighted a number of scandals, giving examples of ships overloaded, badly stowed or undermanned, none of which was covered by existing legislation. Plimsoll catalogued examples of deficient engine power, defective construction and improper lengthening, comparing the rules, or their lack, unfavourably with the abundance of regulations covering public safety in other industries. He blamed many evils on the growth of marine insurance during the nineteenth century. In earlier centuries owners had had to take care of their ships. Now, insured ships were underwritten by so many people that none stood to lose a large sum when a ship was lost. To get so many underwriters to unite in a prosecution of a shipowner was difficult, as it could cost each more in legal fees than any individual underwriter had



Samuel Plimsoll (1824-1898).

pledged and was bedeviled by the problem of collecting as witnesses a crew dispersed around the world which would, if collected, need to be kept together until a case came before the courts. In short, any hope of the insurance world uniting against a bad shipowner was all but impossible. Plimsoll also proposed legislation for the proper measurement and registration of ships, their inspection before putting to sea, and insurance, together with strict rules regarding loading in connection both with loose (e.g. grain) and deck (e.g. timber) cargoes. More particularly, though, in regard to what was to become his lasting memorial, Plimsoll suggested changes to the eponymous load line as well as the draught of every vessel which was to be clearly displayed at foot intervals on stem and stern of every ship. His publication had a remarkable influence and sold many copies. In the resulting parliamentary debate he withdrew his bill in favour of one sponsored by the government, produced in response to the depth of feeling in the country aroused by Plimsoll's book, which he thought would have better success.⁷ In the event it became the 1876 Act, emasculated in comparison with his own proposals. He was well aware of the influence of the shipowners in Parliament. Hopkins's later recording of injustice at sea shows how necessary Plimsoll's efforts had been, and how much remained to be done.

Discussion at the committee stage of the Act of 1876 illustrated very well some of the conditions under which the contemporary seaman laboured. Gorst, the MP for Chatham, for example, pressed for the removal of the clauses relating to imprisonment and forfeiture where breach of contract did not involve injury to ship or danger to life and also for arrest without warrant, in each case often the result of the system whereby men were signed-on before they had seen the ship on which they were to serve. Some of the discussion in the making of the Act tried to relate the position of seamen to recent legislation about masters and servants or to the safety of passengers or to the delay of the mails, all of which might at least give the seaman in regard to imprisonment parity with the gasworker. Although an Act forbidding the imprisonment of a workman for breach of contract had been passed nine years earlier, the committee was able to hear of an instance where two seamen had been imprisoned with hard labour through being counted absent while they slept in their bunks on board ship after a night of hard work! All other workmen were exempt from imprisonment (seamen at this time were not 'workmen'⁸ in law) for non-fulfillment of

contract, except in exceptional circumstances – only gas and water companies could deal with an employee in this way, and that was for the good of the public rather than the good of the employer. To justify these penalties by the need for discipline at sea was to forget that in each case the provision in the law affected only men ashore. Gorst denied that seamen were in need of special legislation through any peculiar recklessness or immaturity ('Poor Jack'). If a man refused to honour a contract it was either because he was a bad seaman or because the ship was bad; to insist on the former going to sea was against the interest of the owner and the latter case meant a choice between prison or drowning. Under the Act of 1854 a seaman needed the support of 25% of the crew, whom he may have met only at the point of sail, to be able to demand a survey of his ship. There is a parallel here with the railway where there were strict safety regulations, sometimes honoured in the breach, where a man could be fined or face dismissal for hesitating over taking a train which might be defective. Hopkins's Guild Rules would stress the importance of honouring contracts.

Another issue dealt with in committee concerned the abolition of advance notes, a system whereby some of a man's wages were advanced before the voyage, allowing the possibility of considerable abuse and imprisonment for debt for the man who failed to board his ship. Pay could be lost at the end of a voyage through the crimping system, where the crimp made his living by persuading men to desert ship before selling them on, often drugged or drunk, to other ships in need of crews. Some officers deliberately made life so unpleasant for a crew before entering port that the men would desert on arrival and so forfeit their accrued wages. This sordid business was intricately bound up with the operation of seamen's boarding houses and dockside taverns.

The 1876 Act dealt with the matter of unseaworthy ships. It permitted the positioning on each ship of Plimsoll's mark at the shipowner's discretion though its subsequent adjustment was forbidden.⁹ Hopkins later recorded hearing the master of the *CALLIOPE* proposing to move his mark so that more cargo could be taken. A recent commission had found that many ships were lost through unseaworthiness but more were lost through unseaworthy crews, a state of affairs which could be blamed upon existing law, for good shipowners found little difficulty in crewing with able men and seldom felt the need to exercise their full powers. Where ships

were found to be unseaworthy, this could, in many cases, be related to the increase in insurance of ships, and unseaworthy ships attracted poor crews.

A difficulty lay in defining what it meant to send a ship to sea 'wilfully' in a poor condition. Plimsoll argued that no ship should put to sea in an unseaworthy condition, wilfully or otherwise. There should be a system of inspection before departure: afterwards was too late. This need not mean that every ship should be inspected but only those which were unclassified at Lloyd's and similar registers. If a ship was to be detained, it cost the owners, for whom time was money. It was discussed whether crews could be protected by anonymity, like passengers, when reporting unseaworthiness. Plimsoll's experience had been to be sued for libel for naming a ship as unseaworthy and, since seamen could also be sued, the power to report unseaworthiness which had been adopted in 1871 had been withdrawn in 1873 as impractical.

The 1876 Act also dealt in detail with the matter of ships' provisions. Hopkins was to prosecute in a number of cases in Calcutta where poor provisions were involved. His own account of six-month-old pork in the cask, open in the tropics for weeks with only the brine being changed, will be given at the appropriate point. Plimsoll cited seven-year-old meat being returned to the naval dockyards at Gibraltar or Malta where it was sold off by the dockyards to parties who put it in fresh pickle before selling it on as stores to merchant ships. He threatened to buy some when it was next on sale at Plymouth or Portsmouth and send portions to every member of Her Majesty's Government, with a Benjamin's portion (i.e. the largest, from the Bible story) for the Prime Minister. He asked for the Board of Trade to check provisions.¹⁰ Plimsoll was to continue his fight for better conditions for many years. There is a story that on one occasion, an old seaman presented Plimsoll with his dinner of dried salt junk (meat), which had been carved to represent a sailing ship, complete in every detail (a skill practised by many men of the time on this staple of their diet). He was to use it when campaigning about scurvy and its source: salt meat and lack of vegetables.

The 1876 Act included many items on which Hopkins and Havelock Wilson were to continue the campaign. In it, sending an unseaworthy ship to sea became a misdemeanour not punishable on summary conviction, meaning that it had to go to the Crown Court rather than magistrates. A survey could be ordered by the Board of

Trade and business conducted in open court, with costs against a guilty owner ‘recoverable as salvage is recoverable’. It gave power to require of complainants security against frivolous complaints, but with no deposit required if a quarter of the crew (not less than three) complained. Owners’ losses in consequence could be recovered from the complainant. These regulations applied even to foreign ships in British waters. It takes little imagination to see that a seaman would still be in a peculiar position if he did complain and why he would need the support of people like Hopkins to stand by him in his complaint. There remained the danger of owners closing ranks when a man who had complained sought further employment.

The 1876 Act also dealt with cargoes. In particular, grain cargoes, so liable to shift, and timber were regulated. Bow and load lines were to show the level of the deck above water. In short, many improvements were included in the Act and a comparison with Plimsoll’s pamphlet reveals the measure of his success. He did not, however, stop campaigning, believing that the best protection for

Month	Railway servants	Miners	Factory & workshop operatives	Seamen
January	63	82	55	359
February	31	60	33	316
March	39	53	36	195
April	32	63	35	242
May	41	78	46	120
June	36	349	29	139

Industrial fatalities January-June 1894. Source: *Seamen’s Chronicle*, 25th August, 1894.

seamen lay in fair legislation. Havelock Wilson was to assist him in his later years, and, in part, assumed his parliamentary mantle.¹¹ Hopkins, too, was to play his part. Once Hopkins started printing his community magazine, *The Messenger*, more people were to discover that this legislation, improvement that it was, was far from satisfactory.

How successful was the legislation of 1854, 1876 and 1894? Certainly some regulations did not in practice have the effect they intended. For instance, the Act of 1854 required lime juice to be provided as part of a man's rations as its anti-scorbutic effect was in no doubt. The loss of man-hours aboard ship due to scurvy was considerable. Nevertheless, so many owners bought the lime juice required by this Act of such inferior quality or resorted to its watering-down so readily that another Merchant Shipping Act (1867) was necessary to require owners to buy lime juice from a bonded warehouse to ensure quality and efficacy.¹² Despite this further Act, the incidence of scurvy increased annually from 1873 because owners now reduced fresh provisions to offset the provision of lime juice.

The 1876 Act tied up many loose ends but, as shown by Hopkins's articles in *The Messenger* in 1893, it left work to be done. Its particular weakness in the matter of the men's protection, both ashore and at sea, has been illustrated. The seaman's financial position was little improved. As regards pay, a man setting out on a two-year voyage needed some means of getting money to his dependents during his time away. Similarly, at the end of such a voyage, after paying-off a man would be carrying a lot of money, making him an easy prey for land sharks. Voluntary and statutory provision to meet this problem has been presented in great detail by Kennerley.¹³ It is also powerfully demonstrated by comparing the seaman's industrial mortality rate with that of workmen in other industries. The physical conditions under which seamen laboured were always harsh. Some aspects of life at sea could not be altered, such as storm or ice; others could. *The Seamen's Chronicle* (25th August, 1894), the official organ of the National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union, gave these figures for industrial fatalities during the first six months of the year (chart on p. 23).¹⁴

That Hopkins's Order of St Paul was aware of the contents of the *Chronicle* at this time is evidenced by a letter published by the *Chronicle* from Brother Austin OSP on 10th November, 1894

(appealing for donations to help destitute sailors at Barry).

Two further areas affected by contemporary legislation need attention. The toughness of life at sea has been indicated, at least generally, above. That it affected all equally is only partly true; some were in a peculiar position: the apprentices. It will become apparent that Hopkins's ministry to sailors, at least in its early years and particularly in Rangoon, was especially to this group. They are also significant for the special legislation which related to them. The second area is connected and concerns the wider issue of training seafarers.¹⁵

Throughout the nineteenth century a debate had persisted whether government or owners should be responsible for training apprentices, young men training to be officers. In the early part of the century there was no requirement that an officer should be certificated. The government's interest in this came about because of the need of the Royal Navy to have access to a pool of trained men. The Merchant Navy needed its supply of officers to be constantly replenished too. An Act of 1835 required ships to carry apprentices in proportion to tonnage and, in 1849, compulsory apprenticeship was abolished. In 1845 there had been 15,704 apprentices but when the 1854 Act put the onus on owners, numbers of apprentices began to dwindle alarmingly: in 1894 there were only 2,164 according to the Registrar General's Returns. The 1876 Act required that apprentices be boys aged at least twelve and that they should be healthy and strong. A boy was to be bound to a master who 'is to be a proper person for the purpose', and must be brought before the master at the time of the crew's engagement. The boy's parents would usually pay £50 for his indentures. Of this, he would receive, as pay, £8 for the first year, £9 for the second, £10 for the third, and £13 for the final year. If his money restricted his activity, the indentures did so further. He could be required to do anything by the master whom he

faithfully shall serve, his Secrets keep, his lawful commands everywhere gladly do.... He shall not commit fornication nor contract Matrimony... he shall not play at Cards, Dice Tables or any other unlawful games, whereby his said master may have loss.

He might not buy or sell without permission, 'haunt Taverns, or Playhouses' and must furnish his own 'Sea Bedding, Wearing Apparel and other necessaries'.¹⁶ He was neither seaman nor officer.

His hours of work, his free time, his instruction, his welfare, all depended upon the master. In a less than gentle age, the poor ship's apprentice was often the subject of great brutality. His only escape would be a few hours ashore, again at the whim of the master, where he had no friends, and plenty of people willing to take the little money he had. Small wonder that Hopkins's Indian priories were full of apprentices glad of a haven.

With regard to training, the link between bad seamen and lost ships was obvious and the 1873 commission had already highlighted bad seamanship as a significant factor in the total losses. Owners seldom lost out as their ships were well insured, but it was hard to argue against the need for good crews. Hugh Falkus summarised the changes brought about by legislation during the century:

In the second half of the century a more rigorous approach was adopted towards the training of ship's officers. By 1888, for example, the Board of Trade standards required that a second mate be no younger than seventeen, but with four years at sea – so that sea-going at the age of thirteen was envisaged! The second mate, furthermore, had to be capable of finding his latitude from meridian altitude, and his longitude from sun sights and chronometer.¹⁷

In short, it will be seen that there was, behind Hopkins's efforts to better the lot of apprentices, a groundswell so that he is not to be seen as unique but rather as part of a general movement. His initial efforts seem to have been entirely independent of Plimsoll's campaign in Parliament, but Rangoon and Calcutta were well supplied with English newspapers, and both ports would have had ships with crews abuzz with news of those attempts at home to improve conditions of life at sea. Hopkins would surely have been encouraged, even prompted by this news. When it is discovered, as will be shown, that he initiated some thirty actions on behalf of seamen in the courts of Calcutta, the reader is only surprised that others were not doing the same. That, in spite of all the legislation, he could initiate thirty cases suggests that the denunciation of all shipowners by some Union activists was at least understandable. There were exceptional shipping owners, many of whom put by what they would have spent on insurance in order to spend it on their vessels, but for many, profit seems to have been the driving force.

The 1894 Merchant Shipping Act was a consolidation bill, an

amalgamation of all the many Acts of recent years into one tidier Act. It comprised 748 sections and twenty-two schedules, and absorbed the content of forty-eight statutes, which it repealed or amended.¹⁸ It was the subject of much discussion in Parliament through 1893 and into 1894. A quick look at the index in *Hansard* shows how many horror stories were brought forward even during its passage. One will suffice to illustrate the point that, despite the progress which had been made in the area of seamen's welfare since Plimsoll's original bill, much remained to be done. On 10th July, 1894 the House of Commons heard of the case of the *HELVETIA*, sadly by no means unusual. Three days earlier the Cardiff Stipendiary Magistrate had condemned the captain of the *HELVETIA* for prematurely abandoning his ship, suspended his certificate for two years and censured the *HELVETIA*'s owner. The ship, twenty-nine years old, had been bought for £5,000. After being laid up for twelve months she was insured for 'a sum much in excess of her cost and value' and then sent to sea without survey or repair. Within five days of sailing she was in great danger off Cornwall. She signalled for tugs. Her owner and agents were telegraphed and telegraphed again, both messages being ignored. Finally, after twelve hours she was towed into Cardiff with 15 feet of water in her hold. She was surveyed and repaired (superficially in the court's opinion) and her insurance increased. She put to sea again, only to be abandoned 'under suspicious circumstances' three days later and 'is supposed to have ultimately foundered', the evidence by now being at the bottom of the sea.

Hopkins, the Seamen's Union and the Shipping Federation

My references to the 'Union', capitalised to ensure it is not confused with another union, hide three successive manifestations of the same organisation that began as the National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland, founded at a public meeting on 18th August, 1887 and eventually became the National Union of Seamen. It started in the North East of England when Havelock Wilson, after a spell at sea, became very active within a Sunderland union which, due to contemporary attitudes and legislation, was more of a protection and benefit society than one which campaigned. Havelock Wilson extended the number of branches of this Sunderland union, trying to bring them and some of the other

few existing unions into one organisation.¹⁹ Local committees felt that this was going too far, so Havelock Wilson, determined that there should be a national union for seamen, founded one with the lengthy title given above. The Union's telegraphic address kept pace with these changes. Originally it was AGITATORS, LONDON but by 1910 it had modified to SEAROVING.LONDON.

The Union had from its earliest days been connected with individual clergy. At a general meeting on 26th September, 1887, an invitation from the local incumbent, The Rev. Edgar Lambert, to 'the Continued Harvest Thanksgiving on Wednesday night' was accepted and prayers were said in the Union reading rooms, which were sometimes sublet to Mr Lambert.²⁰ The North East was an area where Havelock Wilson was well known, and it is not without interest that it was to be in the North East that the North of England Steamship Owners' Association created the breakthrough in the 1911 strike. It may be significant that the Union was formed at just the time when Hopkins was being moved in Burma from Rangoon to Akyab because of his stormy relationship with the local shipowners. That is to say, his organisation and the Union were developing concurrently and it may have helped Hopkins in later years to appreciate what Havelock Wilson had achieved and how, and the necessity for his achievement.

The 1880s were a significant period in union development. Before 1871 there had been the legal freedom to organise but no corresponding freedom to pursue the objectives of trade unionism. 'The mere threat to strike was held to be "molestation", "intimidation" or "obstruction" of an employer engaged in his lawful business'.²¹ Now there was a rapid growth of 'New Unions' (a 'method of mutual insurance' as the Webbs called it²²) with a centralised and business-like financial administration and firm control by the executive over strikes and strike pay. Centralisation of control within the new unions also made greater co-ordination among them possible. In other words, new unionism, of which Havelock Wilson's foundation was a manifestation, was a foretaste of the type of unionism which is familiar today and ceased to be purely a benefit society.

Havelock Wilson's infant Union was beset by many difficulties which were – and are – peculiar to seamen. Others had found before him that men who were likely to disappear at any time and remain away, sometimes for years, were difficult to organise. There was also the problem of who could be a member in an hierarchical

industry: did all seamen include the officers? There was no right of membership conceded by the shipowners and it took a brave supporter to carry the Union message to his shipmates when his job might be lost for supporting the Union. If it was hard to recruit members, the exercise of control was harder yet. The seamen's Union was forced to rely more than any other union on the paid official. This meant a constant drain on its hard-to-collect finances. It was in the role of a local organiser that Hopkins had first been in touch with Havelock Wilson, writing from Calcutta. At their first meeting in London some five or six years later Havelock Wilson had hoped to recruit Hopkins as a local Union organiser before realising his identity and Hopkins seems at first to have adopted that role. G.D.H. Cole was to write,

it is reasonable to say that in or about 1889 Trade Unionism became, for the first time since the collapse of 1834, a movement open to every kind of manual worker, with a tendency to spread beyond manual trades into the field of blackcoat and professional employment.²³

That said, it is a fact that almost no ship's officers became members of the Union.

1889 was the year of the great Dock Strike. It was at this time that Ben Tillett, Tom Mann and Tom McCarthy came to the fore as organisers and Havelock Wilson gained their acquaintance in his support for the 1889 Dock Strike through money, men and oratory. He gained too the respect of Tom Mann, who disagreed with many of his ideas, but was to become a valued helper during the 1911 strike. The seamen's Union had started with a membership of a few thousand. Numbers were always difficult to give with accuracy. The paid-up membership was easy to define but failed to differentiate between those who were unable to pay because of absence at sea, sometimes for several years, and those whose membership had lapsed through a conscious but unrecorded decision to leave the Union. At the end of the Dock Strike the seamen's Union claimed 65,000 members. The figure varies according to the method of calculation but, even if short of the real figure, nevertheless suggests a remarkable growth.²⁴ Unfortunately, it was not a figure which the Union was able to maintain. The Dock Strike started in August 1889, having been preceded by more local and less successful actions.²⁵ There had been some 500 strikes in the preceding year in the United Kingdom and in the docks, particularly at Tilbury where there had been a

strike of some 500 men on 22nd October, 1888. Recent successes by seamen in a number of docks is thought to have given the strike impetus. In turn, the Dock Strike encouraged seamen to join their Union. Tillett, the strike leader, had been a merchant seaman and already knew Havelock Wilson. It is significant that Hopkins was present in the East End of London at this period of unrest which, although it included Will Thorne and his gas workers, revolved around that industry in which Hopkins was most involved.²⁶ On his return to Calcutta, Hopkins apparently wrote to Havelock Wilson about starting a Calcutta branch of the Union.²⁷

If the Union in 1889 stood alongside the other main unions of the period, Havelock Wilson's independent line ensured that that would not remain the case. As the labour movement associated itself increasingly with socialism, Havelock Wilson remained an unreconstructed Liberal. Nor was his Union's increased number of members maintained. As a direct result of the 1889 strike the owners formed the Shipping Federation on 2nd September, 1890 and began to bring very considerable pressure to bear upon the seamen's Union. Havelock Wilson was hard pressed to keep it intact in the face of this new opposition. The Federation pressed him financially by, for example, getting creditors to call in debts or by questioning the lack of accounts, a method which served the Federation well over the years.²⁸ It also used its influence throughout the docks and allied industries where it was the principal employer through its members. It was to bring in restrictive conditions, such as the requirement to sign-on at the Federation office and the introduction of Federation medical tests, which in 1911 would become negotiating points. It used its considerable weight in Parliament, where a number of its members had seats,²⁹ to influence legislation, giving Plimsoll a hard time in his fight to obtain improved conditions for seamen through the legislative process. It issued its own ticket, which became a powerful means of control, carrying with it various benefits to the man who sold, in the Union's view, himself to the Federation. It also imported where necessary large numbers of blacklegs to break up strikes and always retained the threat to employ cheap labour from abroad. It did not hesitate to take Havelock Wilson to court, his first appearance being in April 1889 for attempting to persuade two seamen to desert. In 1893 Havelock Wilson told Parliament that the Federation acted in an illegal manner, employing people to libel leaders of trade unions and to join workmen's organisations to create

dissension in the ranks. He accused the Federation of paying men to lie on oath at his trial in Cardiff in 1891 where he was accused of incitement to riot and unlawful assembly. That Havelock Wilson was of a litigious disposition is clear, for he initiated a number of cases and not always wisely. This was a serious drain on Union finances but, in his defence, in many of those cases he was a man sorely provoked. In this he was doing the same thing at the same time as Hopkins in Calcutta. There is no doubt that the Federation was out to 'get' Havelock Wilson.

Havelock Wilson's reluctance to publish accounts may have been as much to do with not wishing to reveal to the Federation his true membership figure as with their parlous condition. They were parlous, partly because of the shortage of money coming in but also because, it would seem, of poor bookkeeping. In young unions, short on leadership, what leadership there was often lacked financial expertise and made an easy target. In Havelock Wilson's case, he was working all hours just to keep the Union in existence. In danger of being sued by serious creditors in 1894, he suddenly placed the Union into voluntary liquidation to avoid giving the Federation the pleasure of doing it for him. Within a very short time he had reconstituted the Union, this time as the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland (NSFU). It was in this union that Hopkins would take his place. The Union's third change of name, to the National Union of Seamen, lay well beyond Hopkins's lifetime. Today it has been subsumed into a larger transport union.

The next two decades of trade union history were to bring significant changes to all unions, with adjustment first to the Taff Vale Judgment and then to the Osborne Judgment. However, by 1910 there were some two million trade union members nationally representing something like every fifth man involved in manual labour, though considerably fewer women. A number of trades had a much higher density of union membership than the seamen. Indeed, because the seamen's Union had such a scattered membership it was hard for it to find a place among the other, land-based, unions. An increasing militancy is detectable throughout the period, and is revealed also in the emergence of the Labour Party (1906).³⁰ In part it can be traced to the spread of syndicalism, which is associated with the name of Tom Mann. Where unions had attempted to build up strength through their reserves and through collective bargaining, syndicalism advocated direct action and the general strike, with unions organised to seize

power from the State. Though it is important to note the movement, it had little effect upon the seamen, except to distance the NSFU further from other unions, partly because of Havelock Wilson's style of leadership and partly because of the difficulty of organising a scattered membership. Hermann Jochade of the ITWF believed that syndicalism played no part in the NSFU and thought that it would find little wider recognition, arguing instead for centralism to meet the threat of the centrally organised shipowners.³¹ In later years Havelock Wilson was often accused of being in the shipowners' pocket, mainly because he consistently argued for collective bargaining rather than direct action. The conciliation board, which Havelock Wilson had campaigned for since the inception of the Union, was intended to be an important instrument for collective bargaining. It needs to be said, though, that whole-industry unionism was rendered impracticable amongst seamen because of the divisions between officers and men.

The effect of the 1911 strike upon the NSFU was dramatic. According to one source, NSFU membership rose from a doubtful 55,000 in June 1911 to 160,000 by the end of August and 220,000 by the spring of 1912. For a union which had limped along with a membership of thousands and with many of those members overdue in their payment of union dues because of absence abroad, this was success indeed.³² *The Seaman* (January 1912) quoted Edmund Cathery, general secretary, at the NSFU Annual Meeting as saying that the NSFU had added 77,000 new members in the whole of 1911 and that 'I am closing the year without any financial worry and with a substantial balance at our bankers'. Different sources give different totals of membership but all agree that the increase had been substantial. This was a novel situation for a union which had gone bankrupt in the 1890s and narrowly avoided liquidation on frequent and more recent occasions. Tupper claimed that when Havelock Wilson had recruited him just before the 1911 strike the Union had £6.13s in the bank.³³ Cathery's estimate of new members since the start of the strike on 14th June, 1911 is probably more reliable if less sensational and stands at 35,000, giving a weekly increase of income from £150 to over £1,000. He could also argue that sailors' wages had increased eight or ten pounds a month, a state of affairs which some would dispute and which failed to persist into 1912.³⁴

The demand for a conciliation board was not an original one. The railwaymen had fought long and hard to achieve one. Ernest Bevin in

Bristol in 1911, when his dockers' union was a year old, was able to tell his AGM in September 1911 that he had, within six months, got the employers and workers together to form a joint arbitration board for the carters; within the same year he managed a similar agreement for the warehousemen.³⁵ Seamen were familiar with dock politics and could see what ought to be possible. The NSFU's principal aim in being recognised was the establishment of such a conciliation board. The Federation was very keen not to grant one precisely because it would be tantamount to recognition of the NSFU. A united workforce was not to its liking. Havelock Wilson's earliest approach to the Federation for some sort of agreement seems to have been in early 1891, but the Federation's response is not recorded.³⁶ The Federation had been formed by a majority of the leading shipowners after the 1889 Dock Strike when the embryonic Union had flexed its muscles and owners had found that it had a certain strength. In the ensuing years the Federation had used every opportunity to discredit the Union and its founder. At one point, Havelock Wilson did spend six weeks in jail, but largely through his own litigation.³⁷ He also spent some months recruiting members in America in a successful attempt to avoid British creditors. Over the years the battle had been a hard one, not least in Parliament, where Havelock Wilson had become MP for Middlesbrough. By the time of Hopkins's death, a quasi-conciliation board had been achieved.

Hopkins and the Church of England

Hopkins is peculiar among significant religious figures in that little evidence of his religious upbringing survives. I have failed to trace details of his baptism. He never mentions a conversion experience, or a particular turning point. However, his continuation in the Church despite his experience of its official face speaks eloquently of his commitment. For a time he was in demand as a preacher, but little survives from his sermons. Apart from his involvement in the production of the OSP's *Prayer Book for Catholic Seamen*, which has to be assumed from his signature, it has to be admitted that we have more clues to indicate his political views than his religious ones. Frustrating as this is, it is necessary to remember that here was a man who could fill a church with sailors receiving Holy Communion; here too was a religious and the founder of a religious community.

It is quite clear that he was an advanced High Churchman. In Burma he ordered eucharistic vestments, introduced a *Missa Cantata* and encouraged the use of the confessional (perhaps a source of irritation to his bishop). It is tempting to source this churchmanship to his Cornish upbringing; Cornwall as a county tended towards Anglo-Catholicism, offset by a strong Methodist tradition. However, he could just as easily have discovered ritualism in London while at Trinity College. Perhaps his welcome on his return to London hints at this. His friendship with his archdeacon and with Dr John Marks, whose churchmanship was less advanced than his own but nevertheless highly developed, suggests that here was no narrowness. Marks translated the *Book of Common Prayer* into Burmese. Either or both were, like Hopkins, strongly attached to the *Book of Common Prayer*, though Hopkins was sometimes (unfairly, for there is not a shred of evidence) accused of Romanism. His *Prayer Book for Catholic Seamen* is very similar to one produced by Lord Halifax's circle, the *English Catholic Prayer Book*, perhaps the use of common material saving the re-invention of the wheel. That, too, pointed away from Rome.³⁸

Clergy of the Church of England in the colonies were less bound by the traditions and canons of the English church. Bishops were fewer to offend and at a greater distance. People abroad could not invoke the Public Worship Acts which limited in England what could be done with the liturgy. The Diocese of Rangoon received grants from the SPG, and Hopkins subsequently from the St Andrew's Waterside Mission, both of which organisations were in the Anglo-Catholic mould. Once he had established his community, his chapels would have been extra-diocesan, allowing freedom to follow the tradition of his choice.

As a founder of a religious order he falls within a Christian minority. The only answer to why he founded a religious order will be shown, initially, to have been expediency. None of the limited number of Anglican communities of the time, some of whom helped him in his work, provided the structure he sought. His time in Burma introduced him to a few Roman Catholic orders but in the most part his contacts were with Anglicans. He stayed with the (Anglican) Brotherhood of the Epiphany on his way back to England, in India he met the (Anglican) Cowley Fathers and the (Anglican) Clewer Sisters were responsible for the Calcutta hospital to which he was chaplain. The real puzzle is why he should make his profession

in one of the most obscure of Anglican orders, that of St Paul, a small and ephemeral parish brotherhood. Nor is it clear why for his own Rule he should turn to the Rule of St Benedict when more active models were available, for example, in the Franciscans and Dominicans and a wealth of nineteenth-century French foundations. The Benedictine tradition of hospitality can hardly be a sufficient explanation. A small clue might be his friendship with Fr Ignatius OSB of Llanthony, whom he was known to admire and who, like Marks, was something of an ecclesiastical gadfly, though much further from the establishment, having put himself beyond the pale by accepting Holy Orders from a 'wandering' bishop.

Hopkins, on arriving in Hampshire, was careful to obtain the diocesan bishop's approval in the correct way. As his local Bishop (later Archbishop) Randall Davidson sat on the Church of England's Commission charged with examining the religious life in preparation for the Lambeth Conference of 1897, he might be supposed to have been sympathetic. Such was not the case, and Davidson's response curtailed Hopkins's ministry and prevented the ordination of other OSP members. This the bishop was able to do under the Colonial Clergy Act. Many of Hopkins's troubles can be traced to this Act. It was intended to prevent men from going abroad to be ordained under conditions sometimes less than stringent and then returning home to a comfortable benefice in the gift of the family, without first fulfilling certain conditions. Anyone not having held an English curacy or other preferment required the written permission of either archbishop (Canterbury or York) to minister in England and Wales at all. Such permission was only granted if the minister in question assented to the Thirty-nine Articles and the *Book of Common Prayer*, the use of which was also a prerequisite. Any further preferment required the diocesan bishop's written approval and a previously held curacy or equivalent in England or Wales of at least two years: effectively a process of incardination. Failure to observe these conditions, for example by preaching in a church without episcopal approval, would attract fines on the preacher of £10 and on the incumbent of the church preached in £10. Where examples survive of the sums taken in collection when Hopkins was preaching, they often fail to reach the amount which would have been the fine. There was also the question of taking the Oath of Allegiance to the sovereign, but since Hopkins's recognition had not reached this point, the problem of American citizenship, which was still his, did not arise. Where

he had only been visiting England to raise funds and recruits his Letters Commendatory sufficed, requiring only the archbishop's signature for a limited period. The appropriate chapter details the consequences.

The revival of the religious life in the Church of England has been dealt with at length by Peter Anson.³⁹ Early communities picked their Rules from where they would, according to expediency. When Hopkins founded his order it was for practical reasons, whereas most of his contemporary founders, doing their founding in England, felt that they were restoring to the Church of England an essential part of its Catholicity which had been lost at the Reformation. Nevertheless he was part of a general movement: almost contemporary with his foundation were, among the orders for men, the Society of the Divine Compassion, founded in 1894 in the East End of London, and the Caldey (as they became after starting in London's Isle of Dogs) Benedictines of 1896. As male foundations went, Hopkins's was sixth in the revival.

SAMPLE