

## Introduction



On a spring day in 1865, the ship *Andacollo* weighed anchor and departed Callao, Peru, bound home for Liverpool. The vessel was under the command of Captain Wilfred Gilberry, who had spent a large part of his life at sea. Though still relatively young (Gilberry celebrated his fortieth birthday during *Andacollo*'s passage to South America), Gilberry had captained both sailing vessels and steamships on transatlantic voyages for more than a decade prior to taking command of *Andacollo*. An experienced sailor, Gilberry was well aware of the dangers of ocean travel. A decade previously, Gilberry, then in command of the *Governor*, had come across the Spanish ship *Nuestra Señora de Begona* sinking in the middle of the North Atlantic. Gilberry's crew successfully rescued all of the Spanish sailors before their vessel slipped beneath the waves.<sup>1</sup>

*Andacollo* itself was as new as her captain was experienced. Built in Liverpool in 1864, the brand-new clipper ship spent time at Glasgow, Scotland, outfitting for her voyage to the Pacific. Newspaper advertisements extolled the virtues of the "splendid new Liverpool-built Iron Clipper" and promised to provide "first rate conveyance" for freight and passengers destined for Lima, Peru.<sup>2</sup> *Andacollo* departed Glasgow on February 2, 1865, and arrived at Lima's port of Callao, called by one visitor "the largest, safest, and most beautiful of any in the South Seas," on April 23, after a relatively quick passage of two and a half months.<sup>3</sup> Entering the harbor, *Andacollo*'s crew would have seen "a busy looking place—flags of all nations, and vessels of all kinds" at anchor in the roadstead.<sup>4</sup> At Callao, *Andacollo* spent a month offloading goods and taking on new cargo in preparation for the return voyage to England. In contrast to its splendid harbor, the town of Callao itself was described by travelers as a "dreary, uninviting place" with a sky that, while appearing perpetually gray, never

seemed to produce a drop of rain.<sup>5</sup> Despite these shortcomings, *Andacollo*'s crew probably enjoyed their time ashore, mingling with local people and fellow sailors from around the world. It was to be their last.

On May 30, *Andacollo* left Callao behind, bound for Valparaiso, Chile, en route home to Liverpool. As it made its way down the coast of South America, *Andacollo* sailed out of history. The ship never arrived at Valparaiso, nor did it return to its home port in the British Isles. Back home in Liverpool, fears mounted throughout the summer of 1865 as no word came. By October, all hope had been lost.

MISSING VESSEL—A fine new Liverpool ship, the *Andacollo*, was posted yesterday at the Underwriters' Rooms as missing, nothing having been heard of her since she sailed from Callao for Valparaiso on the 30th of May last. All hope of her safety is now abandoned. She was a very fine iron clipper ship, of 864 tons register, built in the autumn of last year, by Messrs. T. Vernon and Son, for Messrs. Imrie and Tomlinson, and was under the command of Captain Gilberry.<sup>6</sup>

No trace of the vessel was ever found. The ship simply vanished at sea, as have so many others over the centuries. It is possible that it foundered in a storm, or wrecked on the rocky coast of South America. The crew might have survived for a time or plunged instantly to a watery grave. Most likely, no one will ever know. But they were not forgotten.

This book is about the ways that English and American seafarers remembered those who died, and, by extension, what this tells us about maritime peoples as a group. Although Gilberry and *Andacollo* disappeared, the tale of their loss remains; it is documented on a gravestone in St. James' Cemetery in Liverpool, England. The stone is no longer *in situ*, and is so badly weathered that one must kneel in front and examine it carefully in order to learn the story that it tells (figure 1.1). The full inscription reads:

IN SACRED REMEMBRANCE  
OF

WILFRED MOSSOP,

*Master Mariner of this Port.*

Born at Whitehaven December 7th, 1786

Departed this life December 12th, 1848

*"Therefore be ye also ready."*

HANNAH, his Daughter,  
 Died at Whitehaven December 31st 1854  
 Aged 23 Years  
 WILFRED GILBERRY,  
 his Nephew: Born 17th April 1825:  
 left Callao 30th May 1865, in command of  
 the ship "Andacollo" bound for Valparaiso  
 and has never since been heard of.  
 ISABELLA GILBERRY,  
 Wife of the above,  
 departed this life December 11th 1883  
 Aged 56 Years<sup>7</sup>

Gilberry's remembrance comprises a mere five lines, tucked into the middle of an unremarkable stone from one city cemetery. Originally, it would have been surrounded by nearly identical stones, making Gilberry's remembrance difficult to see, save by the most determined observers. Why,



Figure 1.1. Mossop/  
 Gilberry family  
 gravestone, recording  
 the loss of Wilfred  
 Gilberry and the  
*Andacollo*. St. James'  
 Cemetery, Liverpool,  
 U.K. Photo by author.

then, was he included at all, especially since his body had been lost on the far side of the world? Although they knew that his corpse would never rest in the grave, Gilberry's family nevertheless felt it necessary to put his story on the family gravestone. Thousands of similar memorials exist in churchyards and cemeteries throughout the world. These memorials represent an almost totally unexplored avenue into the study of maritime life. Collectively, they tell us about the beliefs of an occupational group whose sense of self and collective worldview was shaped by the deadly environment in which they lived and worked.

### **A Singularly Deadly Profession**

It would be hard to find an occupation that has been more romanticized than seafaring during the Age of Sail (for the purposes of this study, roughly the fifteenth through the early twentieth centuries). From the comfort of dry land, novelists and scholars alike weave tales about lusty jack tars living a life of adventure. Those who spent time on heaving decks, and their loved ones ashore, knew better. While the life of a sailor did have its adventurous moments, the reality was usually quite different than popular depictions would have one believe. Seafaring is hard, dirty, dangerous work. Today, commercial fishing consistently ranks as the world's deadliest occupation. In the United States, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that commercial fishers have an average occupational fatality rate of about 121 per 100,000 workers per year over the ten-year period from 1998 to 2007, a figure that ranks highest among all occupations (table 1.1).<sup>8</sup> During this same period, the average fatality rate for the U.S. workforce as a whole was just over four deaths per 100,000 workers. This means that fishers are thirty times more likely to die on the job compared to all other U.S. workers. Even occupations we think of as dangerous, such as police work and firefighting, do not have nearly the fatality rate of commercial fishing. Fishing is about four times as deadly as coal mining or truck driving. Fishers are almost eight times more likely to be killed on the job than police officers, and more than seven times as likely as firefighters. The only occupations that come close in terms of danger are logging, flight crew work, and high steel construction work. Logging actually has a higher fatality rate than fishing in some years, but when averaged over time, fishing is slightly more deadly. Pilots and high steel workers certainly face dangerous situations, but even so, fishing is