

JOSEPH CONRAD - WRITER & SAILOR

Peter Bolton

In 1957 Poland issued two stamps commemorating the centenary of the birth of the writer Joseph Conrad (SG 1043/4) and in 2007 a single stamp (SG4-297) was issued for the 150th anniversary.

Both stamps show sailing ships to depict the fact that for twenty years Conrad (then JOZEF KORZENIOWSKI) was in the merchant navy and obtained his masters ticket - "Deepwater, square rigged any tonnage and these two stamps show different vessels in which he served.



OTAGO

Poland 2007. 3ZL. SG 429

I have enlarged the stamp to show a little detail of the ship

Conrad served in no less than nine different sailing ships and two steamers between 1874 and 1888 including a 22 month stint in the little Barquentine SKIMMER OF THE SEAS when she made no less than six round trips between Newcastle and Lowestoft carrying some 400 tons of coal each time.

The vessels on the stamps are actually out of date sequence regarding when Conrad served in them.

In July 1887 Conrad was injured by a falling spar while serving in the Barque HIGHLAND FOREST and was hospitalized in Singapore but he was soon well enough to sign on the small steamer VIDAR but he was only in her for a short time and was soon offered command of the Barque OTAGO (the vessel on the 2007 stamp) which was lying in Bangkok and already chartered for a voyage to Australia.



TORRENS

REPUBLIC du Benin 1996. 135f. SG1386

Otago had taken a cargo of coal from Newcastle NSW to Haiphong in China and then

sailed in ballast for Hong Kong when her master died in December 1887 and the mate decided to sail to Bangkok where he signed a charter to take teak logs to Australia hoping to be confirmed as master but the owners had other ideas and Conrad was offered the post at £14 a month. This was to be his first command and he immediately sailed for Singapore where with the help of a couple of elephants the cargo of logs was soon loaded. Built in Glasgow in 1865 OTAGO was only 147' long but was a beautifully proportion little Barque but unfortunately, a combination of a truculent mate, a crew decimated by sickness and an almost complete lack of wind forced Conrad to put into Singapore where three of the crew had to be hospitalized.

Eventually OTAGO made Sydney in 68 days where part of her cargo was discharged while the remainder was taken to Melbourne where 2750 bags of wheat were then loaded for Sydney after which she sailed to Mauritius for sugar. More short voyages were made in OTAGO before Conrad left the ship.



TORRENS

Poland 1957. 60/2.50ZL. SG1043/44

His next contract was a very strange departure for a deep water sailor - he was contracted to command a river boat in the Congo but this turned out to be a disaster for a number of reasons and Conrad returned to London in 1891 in very poor health suffering from fever and dysentery. He was unfit for work for some 8 months and was then offered a post as chief officer of the composite full rigger TORRENS (on the 1957 stamp) she was a fast passenger/cargo vessel running between London and Adelaide with an average passage time of 74 days - she once logged 336 miles in 24 hours.

Conrad stayed in TORRENS for two voyages and then left the sea to concentrate on his career a writer.

What Happened in July On...

Wednesday 28th 1588. Sir R Calder's action. 1805-21-30. Defeat of the Spanish Armada

Thursday 16th 1706. Captain Trollope in the GLATTON, 54, beat off a French squadron of five Frigates and two small craft.

Wednesday 1st 1809. ONYX captured MANLY (Dutch)

Friday 10th 1810. Banda-Neira (Spice Islands) Indonesia, under Dutch rule was captured by men landed from the CAROLINE and other ships.