

Julia Andrews

Julia Andrews worked as a stewardess for Elder Dempster lines in a career stretching from 1909 to 1935. She was even at sea in the war, which is how she came to lose one of her discharge books: her ship was torpedoed off Holyhead.

This story is based on my interview with her relatives, and further information from Julia's eldest granddaughter, Joan Hogan.¹

Born Julia Le Brun in St Helier, Jersey in 1864, Julia was the daughter of an AB, later a carpenter. And her brother was a shipwright, so she had sea connections.

By 1873 the family had moved to Liverpool. Julia was educated at Blackburne House, from 1874 Liverpool's first girls' school, at a time when female schooling was seen as unnecessary (they only got married).

In 1884 she married Leo Andrews, a dock labourer, when she was 20 and lived in Garston and Everton. After her marriage she worked, including as a shopkeeper and tannery worker.

Then her career as a stewardess began, in her mid-40s, probably around 1911. Why take to the sea? She had seven children to support and the marriage had broken down.

Many seafaring women had, like her, to leave their children: some with mums and grans, some in the Royal Liverpool Seamen's Orphanage (1876-1949). Julia left hers with her teenage daughter Mabel.

Stewardesses looked after women passengers in their cabins, which including supporting them when seasick and sometimes looking after the children. Typically they served women travelling without husbands. On that route that might have meant less than a score. Usual ratios were one stewardess to every 30 women passengers. First Class got more attention, of course.

It was normal for stewardesses to be the only woman crew member. The rare women in this floating technocratic world had to hold their own. And they were often wooed by shipmates; the further from home, the more assiduous the wooing. It is interesting that she did not marry again, after Leo died in 1926.

Her various ships included the *Appam*, *Accra*, *Adda*, *Takoradi*, *Elmina* and *Ebo*.

For 26 years Julia went on to work as an Elders stewardess. The usual career duration of stewardesses was between two and ten years, so she must have found the job suited her (at that time of high employment she would have had plenty of alternatives).

Stewardessing was a highly sought-after job. Shipping lines had waiting lists, but probably adventurous women fancied glamorous New York rather than Gold coast cargo ports.

¹ Arabella McIntyre-Brown and Fiona Shaw, *Connections: Liverpool Global Gateway*, Capsica, 2005.

Shipping companies' jobs usually went to the crew's family. One of Julia's sons worked as a chief steward for Elders. I haven't so far been able to track down his record, but I think this might have been Herbert, who died in 1910 aged 25.

Paternalistic shipping firms gave jobs to the relatives of deceased employees, as a form of compensation. That might be how Julia got in.

West Africa was known as the white man's grave because of the prevalent malaria. Like a number of Elders employees as well as passengers, Julia had malaria, in her case twice.

Sadly Julia's steward son died of Blackwater Fever, a complication of malaria. He was buried at that key port in Elders seafarers' lives: Freetown, then the capital of British West Africa.

During World War One Julia endured two shipwrecks, both caused by torpedoes.

More gloriously, Mrs Andrews was also present, on the *Accra*, for the celebratory opening of Accra's new harbour. She had her photo taken with various dignitaries then.

Part of the big infrastructural development, this event would have been connected with the 1923 building of the railway line to the cocoa-growing areas en route to Kumasi. (Cocoa became Ghana's biggest export the following year, and was a key Elder's' cargo.)

Julia's grandchildren recall that she had 'a fascinating personality'. They listened 'spellbound' to her stories of life at sea, and waited for her sea chest to arrive: 'It was like a magic box to use as she always brought us oranges, bananas, pineapples and any clothes left by passengers.' Stewardesses' children were often the best-dressed kids on the street because of the swanky hand-me-downs.

Julia's career at sea came to an end in 1935 when she was 71, several years older than the usual retirement age. Like many stewardesses she had given a convenient, rather than true, age when she started in order to get the job.

She was a senior stewardess by this time. Who knows how long she would have sailed if age were no barrier.