

Among the many uses previously mentioned, the vessels were used for lightering stores, boom defence, examination ships, harbour patrol, defence surveys of the Sounds, cargo-carrying, hospital ships, and many other types of work. In all, the Department was responsible for the purchase of 138 vessels, with a value amounting to £484,175.

Chartered vessels numbered 53, with a total replacement value of £1,114,440.

After the vessels had finished their period of usefulness to the Navy in terms of the charter parties, it was necessary to bring them back to the condition in which they were delivered, less, of course, an allowance for fair wear-and-tear, with the result that the Department's officers were kept busily engaged in inspecting and evaluating work done and to be done.

Three very big jobs were carried out under the control of departmental officers as a result of charters, they being the "Breeze," on which repairs to the value of £31,854 were carried out, the "Gale" £28,371, and the "Futurist" £13,702.

The Marine Department's lighthouse tender vessel "Matai" was also loaned to the Navy, with the result that alterations and repairs to the value of £16,549 were necessary on her return to the Department.

Even the small launches used in harbour-patrol work required considerable sums of money to be spent on them before returning to their owners, and the efforts of the departmental officers resulted in sums considerably lower than those demanded by the owners being spent.

Although all the work involved in the valuation and supervision of alterations was additional to peacetime requirements, no additional staff was available and the work was carried out promptly and efficiently by the Chief Surveyor and his staff.

RECOVERY OF GOLD FROM "NIAGARA"

On 19th June, 1940, the Royal Mail Steamer "Niagara" struck a German mine and in one hour forty minutes had gone to the bottom of the ocean thirty miles from Bream Head, at the entrance to Whangarei Harbour. Although during the war many vessels struck mines and sank and many others were sunk by other enemy action, the sinking of the "Niagara" is noteworthy by reason of the fact that she had on board at the time £2,495,700 worth of gold bullion, and this fact was responsible for an epic of the sea in that £2,397,000 worth of bullion was salvaged from a depth of 436 ft. below the surface, a depth at which successful salvage had never before been carried out.

On 4th September, 1940, the Prime Minister of Australia requested the New Zealand Government to assist the accredited agents of the Commonwealth Bank in salvage operations which were to commence in the near future, and was assured by the Prime Minister of New Zealand that the desired co-operation would be given.

Captain J. P. Williams, managing director of the United Salvage Proprietary, Sydney, was accredited to the New Zealand Government as the controlling officer of the salvage operations, and in this capacity Captain Williams investigated the possibility of chartering a salvage vessel.

At this period lying in Auckland Harbour was the old s.s. "Claymore," which had been purchased by the Crown for the purpose of dismantling and retrieving such parts as would be useful in the construction of minesweepers. The "Claymore" had been on the coastal run in the North Island for some considerable time, and since she had been laid up for a lengthy period was in a very dilapidated condition. In fact, her condition was so bad that after salvage operations had been successfully concluded she had her hull entirely replated and was then used by the Navy in Auckland Harbour on boom-defence work.

However, the condition of the ship did not deter Captain Williams, and with the co-operation of the Marine Department he chartered the vessel for the sum of £250 for six months and then commenced the job of making her fit for the arduous task in hand. As the salvage operations were to be carried out in areas known to be mined,