

**The General Steam Navigation Company's motorship "Royal Sovereign" was popular with day trippers down the Thames in the 1950s. Here is a brief memory from those days from Past Captain GORDON RENSHAW (1987).**

This tale may have appeared previously in "Sea Breezes"

## "A Long Wait"

THE *Royal Sovereign* was three years old. A hot summer's day in 1952; the ship had left the buoys at East Lane Tier, near Tower Bridge at 0700 for embarking at Tower Pier in the Pool of London. Over 1,500 chanting Cockneys had come aboard for the traditional Summer trip, and they were off down river at 0930, to North Woolwich, Southend, Margate, perhaps the sea trip, and back. All were happy, some very happy, as the empties around the ship could testify, full of holiday snacks, all in all, content.

Now they were going ashore at Tower Pier, late evening, crowding down the two gangways, clutching souvenirs of the seaside, lettered rock, small bags of fresh cockles, and wearing the obligatory "Kiss Me Quick" hats. The ship's staff, eager to get back to the buoys, thence ashore in the boat for a pint, called, "Come along please, it's lovely outside."

The second mate at the gangways watched carefully to prevent accidents. An elderly lady, brought up from childhood to take the annual trip to "Sarfend", pressed a half-crown into the young officer's hand saying, "We've 'ad a lovely day, dear".

He protested; the crew were happy, he said, if the passengers had had a good day.

"No, no", she insisted, "you buy a pint when you finish, mind you, you 'aint 'arf lucky, being 'ere all the time".

"It's not always so nice as today, and we have a long day, get up at five to make the ship ready".

"Yes", the lady agreed, "it must be tiring, but you boys don't 'arf keep the ship nice and clean".

The captain approached on his way to the bridge and buoys. A long day for anyone near retirement, in a hot uniform, tight collar, 12 manoeuvres on and off piers, pushing his way to meals, the singing and "knees ups" outside his little cabin on the promenade deck, and the daily comic remarks, "Where's yer parrot, then" and "Ain't yer arm tired wiv all that gold". He was tired, and glanced crossly at the second mate.

"'oos that old bloke, then?" asked the lady.

"That's the captain".

"Will you ever be captain, duck?"

"Hope so, one day".

"'ow long's 'e been 'ere then?" was the next question.

"Since the ship came out".

Her Cockney eyes twinkled, and slowly she looked up at the yellow funnel, to the white General Steam Navigation Company badge with the red lettering. One of the initials in each corner, the world in the centre, with 1824 underneath.

"Well, love, you 'ain't got an 'ope of a chance, the way that old bleeder is 'anging on".

Deadpan, she made her careful departure.

I enjoyed that pint.

