

**Distinguished Speaker
at the
80th Anniversary Dinner**

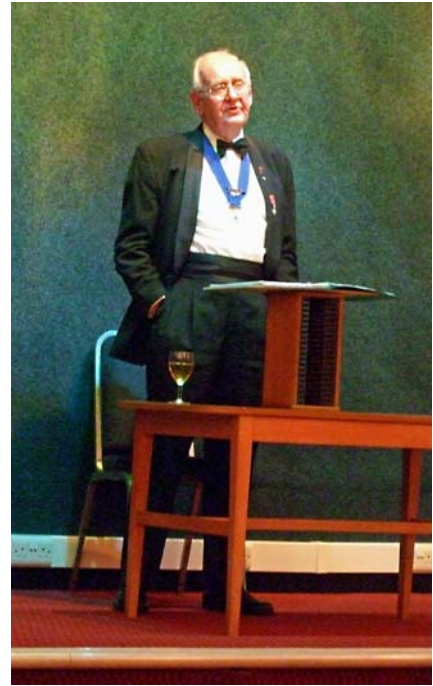
A most interesting history lesson was served up on the occasion of the Cub's 80th Anniversary Dinner at Brook House on Saturday 11th October, by Captain C.R. Kelso, MBE, Past Captain and Honorary Life Member.

After a splendid, but perhaps over-filling dinner, his offering

The History of the Cachalots

was well received and appreciated by those present.

Some regular attendees at such occasions were unable to attend so at popular request we bring you the full unexpurgated version over the next few pages.



HISTORY OF THE CLUB.

In 1928 Southampton docks was in the midst of the most ambitious scheme of dock extension ever contemplated in the history of the port – the provision of 7000 feet of deep water quays, a twelve hundred foot long graving dock and the requisite equipment, sheds and railway sidings.

It was of course – the early western docks development - and Cunard's "Mauretania" was the first ship to berth there in 1932.

Southampton was home port to many of the largest ships in the world – Aquitania, Majestic, Alcantara, Leviathan, Mauretania, Empress of Britain, Carnarvon Castle and host port for many others – Ile de France, Bremen, Nieuw Amsterdam.

And ships were getting bigger and bigger –hence the thinking behind the Chairman of Southern Railway's - Sir Herbert Walker's - plan for the western docks. The majority of these huge passenger vessels – irrespective of their flag – had something in common: to serve on them as a bridge watchkeeping officer in any capacity – even fifth officer - one had to hold a certificate of competency as Master of a foreign going ship – in sail or in steam, and that requirement persisted until the outbreak of the Second World War.

These large ships spent an average of 60 hours in Southampton and this afforded their crews ample opportunity to enjoy shore leave.

Invariably the officers chose their favourite watering hole – Cunard and Canadian Pacific favoured the Dolphin Hotel, P&O and Royal Mail - the Star Hotel, Union-Castle - the Red Lion and the Germans, Dutch and Americans used all three. The Royal Navy had clubs in London and Portsmouth – the mercantile marine had nothing locally, and so- in 1927 - many of the marine superintendents of the various shipping companies got together and decided that – as they had no recognised meeting place - they should organise occasional luncheon meetings on board available ships – and there were lots available. The cost of a shipboard luncheon with wine was about 12/6 - it worked well and each lunch had a speaker or discussion topic but to quote that great club historian – Commodore MacLean:

“Because so many of the shoreside office management attended, the unique camaraderie of the deep water sailorman failed to break surface”.

And so, in late January 1928 - before I was born – 21 master mariners – the majority being holders of certificates of competency as master of a sailing vessel – were invited to a meeting in the offices of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company in Terminus Terrace on February 15th.

On February 14th the following notice appeared in the London Gazette:

His Majesty the King has for some time been considering what steps can be taken to bring the British Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets into line with the other great services of the Empire, by having at their titular head some member of the Royal Family.

With this end in view, and in recognition of the splendid service which the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets have rendered to the Empire for many centuries, both in peace and in war, his Majesty, after taking Ministerial advice, has asked H.R.H. the Prince of Wales to assume the title of “Master of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets”

This appointment made the Prince the titular head of one third or more of the shipping of the world and was the first occasion that the term Merchant Navy was used (prior to that it was Mercantile Marine or Merchant Service) and in 1937 King George VI assumed the title and in 1953 it was conferred on Queen Elizabeth the Second.

And so, on February 15th –when I was a mere six days old —17 of the 21 invited square rigged master mariners attended the meeting in the Royal Mail offices. They did two things ; they sent a telegram of congratulations to HRH the Prince of Wales at Marlborough House offering their “loyal congratulations and keen appreciation of the honour His Majesty has conferred on the Merchant Navy by the Prince’s appointment” and then they elected to form a club exclusively for the holders of certificates of competency as Master of a foreign going ship.

The shipping correspondent of the Southern Evening Echo was invited to attend -- and at the end he was appointed the Honorary Recorder of the Club and, without a doubt, that was a vital decision that was to serve the Club well over many many years.

From the outset the Club was a resounding success and the Recorder saw to it that its activities were reported in very great detail by Lloyds list and the Journal of Commerce, together with the local – and often, the national –press.

Some time earlier the author and Master Mariner Frank T Bullen had been a guest speaker at a shipboard luncheon and his whaling stories had so impressed the others that they now decided to adopt whaling terminology, hence the origin of the name Cachalot – the whale that has the thickest skin, blows the hardest and spouts the most, as might be evident tonight.

And the various titles bestowed on club officers: Boatsteerer , Storekeeper etc.

The Club motto -In Omnia Paratus (in all respects ready) was chosen “Because so many were Marine Supts whose job it was to ensure the readiness for sea of their charges”.

This was the era when there were few families in Southampton and its environs without a relative or friend serving in one or other of the great liners and there was a great interest locally and nationally in shipping and each evening a large section of the local paper was devoted to shipping and invariably the Club got a mention.

It was established as a weekly luncheon club and the South Western Hotel became the Club’s venue. Luncheon days would be on alternate Mondays and Thursdays but there would always be a lunchtime table reserved for members to allow them to meet informally. There was always a speaker followed on most occasions by a discussion.

Various functional committees were formed –the General Committee, the Executive and Finance Committee and a Banqueting Committee to be followed later by the Church Committee who appointed the padre of the Southampton Missions to Seamen as the Club’s first Honorary Chaplain. The first Divine service was held in All Saints Church in Southampton on Trafalgar day October 21st 1928 and the Bishop of Winchester was the preacher. In 1931 the service was moved to Winchester Cathedral where it continues to the present day.

Some time later a Sports Committee was formed and this resulted in a highly successful golf section, unhappily long defunct and, more happily, a very active cricket section which played its first match at the County Ground in 1936 and today still carries our name to cricketing battlefields near and far.

Club membership was restricted to holders of Masters Certificates of Competency (of any nationality – with certain safeguards) with the addition of the two honorary officials- the Recorder and the Chaplain but - most importantly- there was provision for a membership category termed “Stowaway” for “persons whose national status or service to the country rendered it desirable that they be made honorary members” and I doubt if there are many clubs in the United Kingdom with such a distinguished and wide ranging roll of honorary members.

The Club’s first Stowaway was the Right Reverend F T Woods, Lord Bishop of Winchester and the second – in 1929 – was Admiral of the Fleet, the Lord Jellicoe of Scapa whose father was a Royal Mail shipmaster.

In fact, over the years – no fewer than six Admirals of the Fleet have been appointed Stowaways.

The annual subscription was ten shillings and as the Club grew in stature with an international membership in excess of 300, word of its creation spread throughout the maritime world and many in shore based management, locally and further afield, expressed a desire to be allowed to attend the luncheons so pressure grew for another grade of membership.

Indeed, almost from the Club’s earliest days discussions about eligibility for membership arose very frequently. I could spend the rest of the night dwelling on the discussions (many extremely heated) that finally brought us to the happy outcome arrived at a few years ago – a Masters Certificate is not a pre-requisite for membership and with the exception of Stowaways – today we are all Cachalots.

The title of Messmate was introduced in 1932 and it was ruled that they would be honorary members or temporary members for as long as the Committee saw fit. Access to functions was limited and Messmates could not serve on Committees but – for many years they paid no subscription.

Happily, pragmatism prevailed and those who were once classed as Messmates today make a very significant contribution to the Club.

In 1932 – shore based members paid 25/ , shipmasters paid one pound, and retired members 15/ annually and in addition to the weekly lunches an evening function called a “Hot Pot Supper” was introduced - the cost was 3 shillings -and this proved very popular as a discussion forum.

It is probably fair to say that – in 1928 – the Cachalot’s attitude towards women reflected the attitude of the day and ladies were not welcomed at luncheons or Hot Pot Suppers. Happily – this was to change – but slowly, and it was not until 1991 that Captain Wendy Maughan - with a Masters F G certificate in her hand – became a Cachalot in her own right.

Soon the Club membership exceeded 400. It was truly International and the weekly luncheons and suppers often attracted 100 diners with speakers from many backgrounds – not least the Royal Navy.

In 1928 there had been a crew mutiny aboard “Jervis Bay” and this gave rise to a luncheon discussion on “Discipline at sea”, then came:

“Women on the bridge” (64 present – voting was 2 for, 62 against ... how wrong they were)

“The earning capacity of ships”

“Problem of stowaways” (this was the era of great recession in the USA and many disillusioned Irish emigrants stowed away in droves on western ocean ships to end up in Winchester prison)

“The MN in war and its service to the Nation”

“The training of seamen”

“Is the steam whistle efficient in fog?”

“The practical value of the Club to the Merchant Navy” and last, but by no means least,

“Should sailors marry ?”

These discussions were all reported at length – almost word for word - in the Journal of Commerce, Lloyds List and the local papers – and most are still available in the clubs archives.

By now there was a Club badge (two shillings) a silver whale for evening wear (three shillings) and a Club tie and blazer from Tyrrell and Green or the Boatsteerer) and – of course, the Club flag.

By mid 1932 membership stood at 500 – and when the Royal Mail Officers Club on the second floor of the Royal Mail offices in Terminus Terrace became vacant – the SMMC moved in and remained there for many productive years before moving to Stella Maris in St. Michaels square.

Many shipping companies made gifts of shipboard furniture and carpets and soon the clubroom was up and running with its own bar and lunchtime catering. Initially cooking was done on two paraffin primus stoves until some years later the club was given a gift of a gas cooker.

Opening hours might best be described as generous and wives of that era must have been extremely long suffering and understanding.

The clubroom opened at 10 a.m Monday to Saturday and closed at 11.0 pm and, on Sunday, opening hours were 6.0pm until 10.30 pm.and this continued up until the outbreak of war.

Now – ladies could attend a maximum of six speaker luncheons in any one year and they could attend the Club (provided they were properly signed in) but... they had their own room and they were not welcomed in the long room. They sat and conversed and drank in their own room at the back of the Club. The Club Steward was assisted by two ladies who did the cooking and served the food and drinks. There is a famous story - probably apocryphal - about the wife of a titled Commodore of one of our best known shipping companies.

She and her husband arrived one Saturday morning and in keeping with tradition she was dispatched to the back room, served with a drink and the knight of the realm joined his friends at the bar in the long room. After some time she poked her head around the door and in a loud voice proclaimed, “Steward – tell the Commodore I would like another drink”.

The steward – the redoubtable Mr. Sleep – an ex Cunard chief bedroom steward who suffered from a complaint known as western ocean feet which meant that he plodded rather than walked - seemed to take some delight in announcing “ I would gladly do so my Lady but the Commodore and his friends left about twenty minutes ago – but I’ll buy you one ?”

A happy consequence of the membership rule changes was the creation of a pool of widespread expertise in most maritime matters. The membership now included experts in many and varied fields. Board of Trade surveyors of both disciplines together with the surveyors and naval architects from the principal classification societies –especially Lloyds – became members as did the managers of the local ship-repair firms and technical representatives from numerous electronic equipment suppliers. The majority Master Mariner membership represented scheduled passenger lines, refrigerated and dry cargo trades together with cruise ships, cable layers, ferries and oil tankers and, of course, Trinity House pilots.

Knowledge of this widespread expertise soon became known throughout the maritime world and the Club’s views on professional matters were sought and respected locally and nationally.

Southampton Water lacked a fog signal between Calshot Spit and the dockhead and – at the Club’s suggestion – almost certainly initiated by the Trinity House pilot members -one was fitted on Fawley Beacon.

The w/t direction finding beacon on the Nab tower was also the result of the Clubs intervention and David Logie Baird used the Club and its members as a sounding board for his inventions which contributed so much to television and radar.

The government sought the Club’s advice on the great debate that was raging about that time on changing helm orders to bring the United Kingdom into line with the rest of the world – and after long debate .the club finally recommended change which HMG described as “authoritative and compelling”. Much later – in 1963 – the Technical Committee at the request of the Ministry of Transport produced a report entitled “*The development of the Port of Southampton*” which was given widespread publicity locally and nationally – the government bought ten copies. The scheme envisaged the building of jetty-type berths at right angles to the shoreline on the western side of Southampton Water and projecting into deep-dredged water where very large bulk and general cargo carriers could be accommodated. Inshore of these would be built berths for shallower-draughted vessels which could off-load from the larger and then transport their cargoes coastwise as required, thus saving costly road and rail charges.

The plan was considered ingenious and geographically economical but as the concept of Containerisation had already begun to germinate it “withered on the vine”.

It is interesting that the concept of maritime motorways (sending goods around the coast by sea to get lorries off landbased motorways) is very much in the news today and throughout the Mediterranean they are used extensively and their use is expanding. The following year a very similar report was issued by the Trinity House pilots. I am told that both reports are in the Guildhall library.

In 1970 the Club submitted to the port authority a feasibility report "on the siting of the proposed computer-assisted harbour surveillance radar installation for the Port of Southampton which involved the use, for the first time, of micro-waves which beamed the radar picture picked up by the unmanned radar tower at Calshot through to a repeater station at Hythe and thence across the water to the newly-erected Port Control Centre at Dock Head (Berth 37)". By the Autumn of 1972 the Surveillance Radar Station was fully operational.

Time does not allow me to dwell too much longer on the historical background of our great club but I would like to share a few happy reminiscences with you.

I obtained my Masters certificate in 1956 but it was not until January 21st. 1957 that I returned to Southampton and the mail service.

The second thing Captain Storr Hodson did was to tell me of my duties on Edinburgh castle – the first was to whistle me round to the clubroom, buy me a drink and submit an application for Club membership.

In those days for a young man joining the Club almost everyone was Sir ...you did not call Captain Cooper "Percy" or Captain Farmiloe "Guy". Sir they were and Sir they remained for many years.

Undoubtedly they comprised some of the most interesting men I have ever met and - like today - in their midst were many characters.

In 1967 I took up a 3 year appointment as Asst. Marine Supt. for Union Castle in Southampton – and came to live in Bursledon - and that allowed me to attend the Club on a pretty regular basis.

Saturday morning was a normal working morning in the port. The rig of the day was sports coat and flannels and the majority of the marine, technical and cargo superintendents worked from 0900 until noon. First thing was a visit to whichever ships of the company were in port, then back to the office for a bit of paperwork and then – at 1200, up to the Master Mariners Club.

Saturday mornings were always busy and the Club was usually crowded until about 2.0 o'clock – and sometimes much much later, something to which captain O'Connor and I can testify.

I was starting to become accepted and that allowed me to talk with and get to know some of the characters.

Captain Charlie Watson was a founder member of the Club and he had been the choice pilot for Union-Castle and Canadian Pacific and one Saturday morning –when he was long retired and well into his 80's – he started to talk to us about his life.

He obtained his certificate of competency as a Master in sail in 1907 and was immediately appointed Master of a very famous racing yacht – but during the shipping depression – he had taken a job as second cook in a large steam yacht cruising the fjords. Before he joined his mother spent two nights showing him how to bake bread, know when potatoes were boiled and how to break an egg into a bowl without half the shell. His pay was 7 pounds a month.

At the age of 19 he had been an able seaman on King Edward the Seventh's yacht "Britannia" and when Her Majesty Queen Alexandra was embarked Charlie was responsible for her personal safety at all times when she was on deck. He said that he had been told that if anything happened to her he would end up in the tower.

He attributed his good health - and he lived well into his 90s – to the fact that he kept a ball of well tarred spunyarn by his bedside.

I never dared ask him where Mrs Watson slept.

Charlie Pearce was another Trinity House pilot - his daughter Betty still visits the Club today - used to tell a story about the shipowner – Sir Walter Runciman - and his schooner, Sunbeam 2.

Sir Walter invited about a dozen square rigged club members for a day sail around the island and Charlie was appointed Master. She was a big craft – and although she had electric winches for the sheets and halyards – Sir Walter preferred not to use them as they used fuel – so they all got blisters and strains pulling on the ropes.

About noon Sir Walter announced it was time for refreshment and he then produced two white enamel buckets of lime juice and water with the dreaded words "I never allow liquor on my yacht".

She tied up at the town quay about half past four and Charlie said "we had to wait nearly an hour for opening time but the Red Lion took pity on us and let us in the back door."

Commander Donald Macmillan had been the hydrographic surveyor for the Harbour Board. He was a deeply religious man –when he died he was pastor of a church just outside Southampton - but he was a man who did not mix easily in a crowd and whenever he saw someone on their own he would usually sit down beside them and start a conversation – and it was always an interesting one.

He wrote a book called "*TIDES*" which was highly acclaimed in nautical circles and he wrote another called "*WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT*" which was published after his death. This was an explanation of bible prophesies and there used to be a copy in the Club.

He was an authority on pyramid idology and was President of the British-Israel World Federation - a body that relates the linear measurements of the great pyramid in Egypt to biblical prophesy.

Indeedeven today some club members talk of little else.

Sometimes ...when I was on my own..... Commander Macmillan would join me –always carrying a small glass of lemonade – and he was always interesting and I enjoyed his company. One of his other talents was playing the bagpipes but I can never recall him starring at a Sea Pie Supper.

My first Sea Pie Supper , in 1968, was in the Polygon Hotel. Dress smart casual – again usually sports coat and flannels -and entertainment was provided by a singing group called, "the Vera Noyce Party". Captain Percy Cooper was the Boatsteerer so they were known as "Percy Coopers Canaries". They were mostly ladies of a certain age but – forty years ago – they could be quite daring.

The guest of honour on that occasion was *not* the Admiral of the Port, the Mayor – *because the Mayor was a lady and she had not been invited* – so we welcomed the Town Clerk – Mr Norman Schofield. The night went well and as was the custom – at the end Captain Cooper stood up to thank the singers. At that stage a Canary stepped forward, removed her hat and shawl and was immediately recognised as Mrs Katy Johnston – Admiral of the Port and Mayor of Southampton, in all her regalia. We all stood and cheered, Eddie Kirton the captain bought her a drink and thereafter ladies did attend the Sea Pie Supper.

I will leave you with a mystery –something to ponder over on the way home.

I was Captain of the Club in 1992 and the Sea Pie guest of honour was the First Sea Lord, Sir Julian Oswald and – as it was the year after the end of the Gulf war - the next most senior guest was General Sir Peter de la Billiere of SAS fame.

It was at the height of the IRA terrorist bombing campaign and there was a very heavy if discreet police presence and the Guildhall had been searched all afternoon by sniffer dogs seeking explosives.

After greeting Sir Julian - I met the General on the steps at 1900 exactly.

He was in an unmarked Morris Marina car with a driver in civilian clothes and it was agreed that the driver would pick him up at midnight.

Midnight approached and he said his farewells and we moved out to the steps by the west door to await his car - but no car was forthcoming.

By 1215 he was an angry man but by 1230 he was a worried man and he said, "That man has been with me for many years and he has never let me down..... where is there a telephone"?

I took him downstairs to the phone and he dialled - the telephone rang and rang. I am sure that that telephone was in his car.

It was now about ten to oneand the Police Superintendent asked what the problem was and when I told him the Generals car was adrift he immediately rushed off and very soon we could hear police sirens from various parts of the city and a lot of police activity in the street in front.

It was then I had one of those strokes of genius so familiar to many of you here tonight ...I said to the Police Superintendent, "I'll tell you whatwhy doesn't Sir Peter come home with me and when his car turns up you can collect him from there" - all in a broad Irish accent.

The Police Superintendent gave me a long hard look and then said – very slowly "the General is not going anywhere with you, Sirhe is now under our care". I got the message, said goodnight to a very worried Sir Peter and went to join the party at home.

That night I had a bad dream about me pouring Sir Peter a Guinness as the SAS came through the kitchen window on ropes.

Next morning – I rang the Civic Centre to be told that the General had been taken to the County border by a police car at 0240 and delivered to the care of another authority. He got home safely.

Three days later ...I had a letter of thanks from Sir Peter --- no mention of the missing car.

Six months later I was with him at a function on HMS Victory in Portsmouth – same Morris car, same driver. In his memoirs he mentions the SPS but no mention of the car. What happened to the General's car on that night?

Answers on a postcard please.

Captain Morris, Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Cachalots

Like on that historic meeting some 80 years ago - I would now like to do two things.

The first is to pay tribute to the late Commodore Donald MacLean whose book "Cachalots and Messmates" was a source of inspiration and information and also to Simon Daniels whose several books on the Club will fill you in on almost everything I have missed out and a great deal more to boot.

The second is to invite you all – to charge your glasses and join me in a toast to a club that over 51 years has given much more to me than I have ever given to it,

The toast is

The Southampton Master Mariners Club

crk 10/10/08

