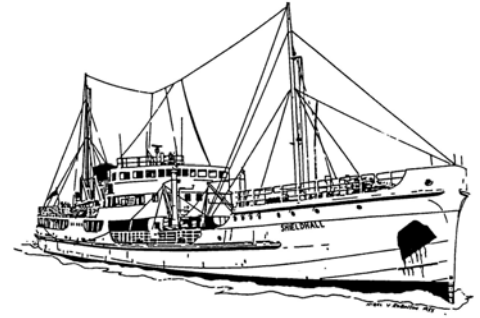


## Shieldhall Summer Diary



### Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> June

Following the Fleet Review, *Shieldhall* is booked to join over 250 other classic and traditional craft, large and small, at the International Festival of the Sea in Portsmouth. We sail at 1000 with a jolly crowd of passengers and pick up an Admiralty Pilot at Spithead at noon. On the way to our berth on the North Wall we pass all the tall ships and Captain Toot-toot lives up to his name as we announce our arrival in some style with a whoop-whoop-whoop on the steam whistle. The berth is well tucked away but the Pilot summons up a couple of Admiralty tugs and makes it all look very easy. He is very pleased to have had his go on the old steamship and has to be hauled out of the engine room when his boat comes alongside to take him to his next job. Most of the crew are staying on board for the weekend but I join the passengers for a coach trip back to Southampton. There is a light rain falling but it doesn't dampen the spirits of the crowds in the Dockyard, which is really humming with excitement. I manage to grab a plate of sea-food special and a pint from one of the many food outlets there before squeezing into a seat on a 1950's Royal Blue coach for the return journey. Nostalgia...maybe, comfort...no!

### Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July

My wife kindly drives me back to Portsmouth to join the ship for the return to Southampton. The Dockyard has been returned to RN security control and I do not have the required clearance to enter on foot. I just board the coach, not Royal Blue this time, in the public bus station and am bussed through to somewhere near the ship and then complete the journey on foot anyway! There are only four passengers for this leg and they will have to be returned to Pompey by coach. No profit in that for the ship but everyone has had a great time over the weekend and the ship has taken lots of donations from the visiting public. The same Pilot takes us out to the Outer Spit Buoy and we make for home in some very squally weather indeed. True to form the heavens open and the wind pipes up just as we approach the berth and I have to drop the offshore anchor and screw the stern off to make our controlled (?) collision with the quay as gentle as possible. Oh, for a couple of Admiralty tugs now! Ten minutes later, when we are putting the gangway out, the wind dies away and the sun re-appears.

(The *Shieldhall* returned to the Clyde from 11<sup>th</sup> July to 1<sup>st</sup> August for her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations but sadly I was unable to participate.)

### Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> August

It is Cowes Week and I am here with Reg Pretty for the first of two day trips cruising the Solent and giving our passengers a flavour of the racing. Some of the yachting fraternity object to our presence in "their" water and although I try not to interfere too much in their games sometimes I have no alternative, due to the number of small craft around me, but to stand on and claim "might is right". Nothing happens very fast on this ship, neither alterations of course nor changes in speed, and I think that perhaps they expect me to levitate out of their way. The last minute "Lee Ho's" and flapping of canvas all add to the excitement. It's another stiff on-berth breeze as we return and we are set down sharply inside the entrance of the Ocean Terminal. Amid much shouting and hollering, full asterns and what-have-yous we manage to extricate ourselves and make a reasonable second go of it.

### Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> August

An afternoon/early evening cruise today and it is advertised as a chance to view the Red Arrows off Cowes. Things have obviously changed since our programme was drawn up but nobody complains when they fail to appear. The wind is less tiresome today and the day passes without incident.

(Many Cachalots were among the full crowd of passengers who enjoyed the Fireworks cruise on the Friday, Capt. Ian Stirling in command. *Shieldhall* then went on her annual trip to Weymouth on 13th August)

### Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> August

A PEC holder is required for the trip back from Weymouth so I find myself on the platform at Southampton Central at 0830 waiting for a train that turns up 15mins late. That 15 mins is all that is allowed for the connection at Bournemouth but luckily they hold that train until we arrive and I manage to make it to the ship one minute before sailing time. It is a lovely day and Peter Tambling takes her in close to the beautiful Dorset coast, giving anybody on the coastal paths that shows an interest a friendly toot. Unfortunately the spring tide is against us and when we get up to the Needles we are down to three knots and it takes us an hour just to make it up to Hurst. As we pass the Bramble Bank it is right on low water and there are about three dozen small craft there and about one hundred people on the bank engaged in a game of cricket. We can't discern what rules they might be playing to or what the score is but they seem to be enjoying the occasion. It is not the lowest of spring tides but in my thirty five years up and down the Solent I have never seen so many people able to partake in this event. We are about an hour late alongside and some of the passengers, who have to return to Weymouth by coach, are getting a bit restive, but we've had a good day of it really.

### Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September

I miss the Club's curry lunch today because *Shieldhall* has been hired for a wedding celebration. Not an actual wedding, which has already taken place in Gretna Green or somewhere, but a blessing with all the trimmings for Mum and others of the family who missed the original. The bride is in white, there are two bridesmaids, the groom and his gang are in morning jackets and the ceremony is conducted on the fore-deck in the sunshine by the Revd Bill McCrea. There are about sixty in the wedding party and after the ceremony I give them a celebratory toot on the whistle and we set off for a cruise in the Solent. I pull off the berth by going astern on the starboard engine and as she starts to pull clear I come full astern on the port too. Looking astern I am

pleased with the swing that she is making but when I look ahead again I realise that she is not coming astern any more. A glance at the engine indicators in the wheelhouse reveals that we are actually going full ahead on the port, not full astern. I quickly ring double full astern port to wake them up but what do I get?.. yes.. double full ahead! Ring Stop, then double full astern again but by this time she is end on to the quay and brings up against it with a bump. Hopefully no damage done but my resolve of the day is to always go to stop before reversing the engines; my normal routine in fact, but something I overlooked in the heat of the moment. The rest of the day passes smoothly and everyone enjoys the happy occasion. We return to the berth at 1900 where the partying will continue alongside. I am pleased to be able to leave for home just as the disco starts.

### **Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October**

A short notice booking for a film job and it's an early 0700 start from the berth. They are filming for a programme called "Oceans" I think, on the Discovery channel. In 1929 there was a big underwater earthquake off the Newfoundland coast and the transatlantic cables were broken or damaged. *Shieldhall* is to play the part of a cable repair ship and although there are some bona-fide luvvies on board some of our crew are being dressed up in "period" gear and will act as extras. A couple of them don't need any costumes, they look the part already. The Director wants a clear horizon so we make our way out to the Nab and spend the day filming on the fo'c'sle, on the fore deck, over the side. They have made up this long length of pipe to represent the cable and filled it with gravel so that it appears to be heavy. When it is hauled up over the side it is draped with seaweed. Unfortunately, the fresh seaweed that they have brought along is bladderwrack, an inter-tidal species. Us idle onlookers can be terribly critical. Another thing they are trying to film is pieces of steaming pumice. I thought it was supposed to be a physical slump rather than a volcanic event but perhaps I am being picky again. They have fashioned chunks of polystyrene, painted grey, into the bottom of which they fit a can filled with dry-ice. As it floats past the ship it gives of lots of authentic looking "steam" but to get it on film takes many takes. I try to ease us back towards Southampton while all this filming from a RIB is going on, trying to maintain a decent lee for them, keep the vessel moving through the water, but not too fast. They are finally satisfied but it is nearly 2000 before we are back alongside. And to think that I forwent the pleasures of alcohol at last night's Trafalgar Dinner for this; things we get lumbered with in retirement!

Terry Clark