

THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

STRATEGIC REVIEW

Background

1. The history of the Southampton Master Mariner's Club (SMMC) has been well charted and, as is so often the case, when considering strategies for the future of well known and loved institutions, guidance can be found and ideas formulated from within the pages of historical record. The publications:
 - * *Cachalots and Messmates – A Brief History of The Southampton Master Mariners Club*. By Commodore D.M.MacLean D.S.C., R.D, R.N.R, published in 1973, (Covering the period 1928 - 1973),
 - * *We Sail The Ocean Blue - Compiled by Simon Daniels and Edited by Dinah White for the 60th Jubilee, 1928– 1988,*
 - * *The Master Mariners of Southampton*. By Simon Daniels in 2003,provide from within their pages, a wealth of factual historical information and, due entirely to the skill of their authors, a clear and absorbing picture of the development and contribution made by so many master mariners, not only to the SMMC and The City of Southampton, but also to the British and International Shipping Industry.
2. In order to look to the future and review the position of the SMMC, the past cannot be ignored. HRH The Duke of Edinburgh K.G., Himself an honoured Club Stowaway, in his foreword to the second publication, observes that whilst mariners have lived through a 'radical revolution' during the period 1928 - 1988, the one thing that has not changed is the character of the men who go to sea. Quote, " There may be fewer British ships and seamen, but those who man the sophisticated ships of today continue to show the same talents in the management of their ships and the same resolve in the face of the unchanging elements", unquote.
3. The rate and volume of change from 1988 onwards has been no less radical. Advancing technology and 'Globalisation', to name but two change agents, have succeeded in changing, not only the face of the shipping industry, but also the culture and operational paradigms that are 'The Industry' today. It stands to reason therefore that Master Mariners and their position within today and tomorrow's shipping/maritime industry, is equally uncertain.
4. Some of our members are only too well aware of the situation within, and are dedicated, loyal and active members of the SMMC. Some have not darkened its doors for many a year, regardless of where those doors were situated. Whatever the degree of participation of members, it is the duty of the SMMC's Officers to provide, during their tenure, to the best of their ability, for the future as well as the present position of the SMMC, It is not an acceptable argument to say, "We had better not shake the SMMC boat today, because we may jeopardise its future for the next generation". A far more realistic argument is that if we do not do something today, then there may well not be a SMMC in ten years time and we will have, in no small way, contributed to the SMMC's inevitable demise. It is the duty of the SMMC's officers to administer and guide. Equally it is every SMMC member's right and yes, duty, to contribute to the future of their Club, This strategic review, together with its findings and recommendations is for all of you to consider and respond to. Without your contribution, your Officers cannot truly represent the wishes of the SMMC, or act upon your behalf. We also owe it to all those club members who have, through the years, so selflessly provided us with this proud heritage, to review once more the position and future direction of The Southampton Master Mariners Club within the maritime environs of Southampton,

Introduction

5. It was agreed at the General Committee on 24th May 2005 that George Angas (Staff Captain), Reg Kelso (Past Captain and Boatsteerer) and John Mileusnic (Past Sea Staff Captain) should form a working group to investigate the feasibility of the SMMC becoming involved in other facets of what is rapidly becoming known as the South Hampshire Maritime Cluster and also provide a contribution to the UK Chamber of Shipping initiative, "Sea Vision". It soon became apparent that whilst the above were relevant to developing the scope and therefore the profile of the SMMC, little would be gained without addressing some of the more fundamental issues that may currently be restricting activities within the SMMC. The working group agreed that the most sensible way to address these issues was not in isolation from each other, but to produce an objective, integrated and holistic review that would provide a clear picture of the current status of, and make recommendations for, the future development of the SMMC.
6. When undertaking any kind of review, there is a danger that the readers may see it as a criticism by the authors of what has gone before. Accordingly, the working group wish to state at the outset that this review is in no way intended to be negative or critical of the SMMC, its past Officers and supporters, without whose efforts and commitment there would not be a SMMC today.
7. The working group also recognises that an institution such as the SMMC is established as a facilitator within a particular industry niche, which in this case is to facilitate the professional and fraternal communications within the port and shipping industry of Southampton. This review will therefore take into account the changes within the industry when making recommendations for the future direction of the SMMC.

The current position

8. The "Management" structure, as laid down in the "Club Rules" comprises of six Honorary Officers (Captain, Staff Captain, Sea Staff Captain, Storekeeper, Boatsteerer and Functions Officer). The Boatsteerer has a paid assistant. The SMMC has approximately 433 members whose interests are administered by:-
 - * General Committee
 - * Executive and Finance Committee
 - * Entertainments Committee
 - * Church Committee
9. The management of the SMMC is vested in the General Committee (GC) and comprises of the six Officers, all Past Captains and elected committee members ("Harpooners") of the SMMC. The Executive and Finance Committee (E&FC) is established by the GC to act on its behalf in all executive and finance matters. The E&FC is made up of the Post Captain, the Officers and eight GC nominated Harpooners. The Entertainments Committee (EC) and the Church Committee (CC) are made up of Officers and Members who, (with the assistance of the Functions Officer) are responsible for the annual calendar of activities of the SMMC. Within this structure the SMMC contributes to a range of worthy causes and the members enjoy an active social life.

Current challenges

10. One aspect of the SMMC's 'object' namely, the 'fostering of professional comradeship' is currently limited to occasional technical events that are driven by individual members. Whilst this may be in accordance with member's wishes, the SMMC is unlikely to attract a younger member and unless this trend can be reversed the Club will need to be managed for decline and eventual closure.

11. The current premises whilst filling a gap caused by the closure of the BISS, itself a run down and unsuitable place for the SMMC, are too small and unsuitable for anything other than small groups of members who are prepared to accept the limited facilities and services that can be offered there. This is a serious restriction to the continued well-being of the SMMC. Over the years the Club has enjoyed a high degree of "charity" in respect of rental paid for its premises but this is unlikely to continue and economies must be introduced in order to fund the increased annual costs on a medium/long term basis.
12. The overall administration of the SMMC is top heavy and inefficient and the resulting clerical costs are high. Our administration is not effectively computerised e.g. The SMMC is not connected via a broadband link to the global internet and website networks. The SMMC operates, understandably, on a friendly and companionable basis. If we are to continue to be a respected institution within the industry that we aspire to serve/be a part of, then we are going to have to subject our administrative processes and procedures to the same rigorous discipline that the shipping industry has to.
13. The membership numbers are dropping and the age profile of current members is rising. Additionally, this is the first year for many that the SMMC annual accounts are showing a loss in excess of a thousand pounds. This is a classic institutional 'decline' profile. We reiterate, this working group is not being insulting or discriminatory, we are 'telling it as it is'. If the SMMC wishes to continue its proud tradition then we, today's SMMC Officers, have to recommend significant change, and the membership need to agree and implement an effective regeneration/change programme for the future. Unless changes are implemented the short-term survival of the SMMC is at risk and, even with the savings brought about by such changes the future of the Club is far from assured.

Recommendations

14. Obviously a three-member working group is not representative of the membership of the SMMC, however, the individuals members of that group have, between them, a wide experience of the current shipping/maritime industry, viz: shipbuilding and marine services, maritime education and training, maritime pilotage and a detailed knowledge of the workings of the SMMC. Our recommendations can therefore, at this stage, be only in outline, for dissemination amongst the membership. Depending upon the response from the members, the Officers will set up working groups to develop action plans including schedules and costs leading to the implementation of agreed actions. These recommendations include, without being limited to: -
 - Membership should be applied more broadly to professional people who are 'masters' of their particular employment/interest within the Southampton based maritime industry.
 - Review the SMMC administration, making the necessary changes to the Rules. Changes could include abolishing the post of Storekeeper and, in the fullness of time the Boatsteerer and the Boatsteerer's Assistant and replace these with a SMMC Administrative Officer. This post should have an appropriate job and person description together with properly drawn up terms and conditions of employment. Additionally involve members on a more casual basis to support the committee chairmen and the Functions Officer. Streamline the entire Management ("Committee") structure to simplify administration. Provide more assistance/involvement for the production of *The Cachalot* and consider seeking advertising therein and other suitable sponsorship.
 - Computerise, where appropriate, SMMC membership administration and record keeping, especially the financial accounts.
 - Provide assistance for the continuing development for the SMMC Web site.
 - Change the opening / working tunes of the club to: Thursday and Friday from 11.30 to 14.30hrs. Members desirous of meeting with fellow members on other days will be welcome to use the comfortable surroundings of the SSC.

- As a matter of urgency, seek to rent accommodation which will meet our requirements in respect of social gathering and administration and allow us to, once again, display our memorabilia and trophies.
- Engage in discussions with influential members of the Southampton based maritime industry to identify what would encourage them to join the SMMC.
- Encourage shore based and sea staff members to contribute articles for and present technical papers to *The Cachalot* and SMMC seminars respectively.
- Seek out and work more effectively with other maritime institutions, e.g. Nautical Institute, Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology, Southampton Oceanography Centre.
- Work with SCC to assist them to enhance the city's maritime profile, e.g. assist with the building and development of a maritime employment database or other such appropriate activities.
- Seek out potential and appropriate, i.e. within the SMMC member's field of competence, income-generating activities in order to maintain the SMMC cash reserves and support fund raising activities.
- Build upon the relationship that exists between the SMMC and the Southampton Seafarers Centre to their mutual benefit.

Summary

15. The working group, has identified a range of challenges that require solutions if our Club is not to be allowed to continue in decline and eventually close.
16. As this paper suggests, it contains a historical review of the SMMC's development to date, a strategic review of the situation that the SMMC now finds itself in as a more isolated, but nonetheless still integrated part of a much different maritime industry to that which existed only ten to twenty years ago and makes a series of strategic recommendations for the future development of the SMMC.
17. A summary of this review outlining our concerns together with, as a start, some recommendations relating to Club economies will be presented by the Chairman to The Executive and Finance Committee meeting on Tuesday, 3rd January 2006 (in the Royal British Legion) and to The General Committee on Thursday, 5th. January 2006 (in the Southampton Seafarers' Centre). Subject to the approval of the latter Committee the proposals will be put to the Annual General Meeting of the SMMC on Thursday 12th. January 2006 at the Royal British Legion.
- If there is a consensus that the proposed changes should be implemented then the modus operandi and timescale will be agreed upon.
- To facilitate a wider dissemination of the proposed changes an enclosure in the next edition of "The Cachalot" will outline them in some detail and comments invited.

Captain G.B.Angas. Chairman,
 Captain C.R.Kelso,
 Captain J. Mileusnic.

SMMC Working Group.
 3rd January 2006