



Robbie with some of his tug crew when he was serving as a pilot in Gibraltar.

### **Captain William Robertson, FNI**

**Captain William Robertson**, known affectionately throughout the maritime world as Robbie, died in Oban, Scotland, on the morning of Monday 23rd May 2005. Some days earlier Robbie, together with his dear wife Jane, had driven north to attend the book launch of "*Ferry Tales*", written by his late friend and fellow Cachalot Walter Weyndling, (who predeceased him by three months).

Captain Robertson joined the Southampton Master Mariners' Club in 1983 and served as Harpooner in various committees before being appointed Club Captain in 1993. Robbie was a popular and enthusiastic Cachalot, always "doing the rounds" of each table to greet his friends and warmly welcome their ladies with an avuncular kiss before settling down to swing the lamp with colleagues. He rarely attended without Jane by his side and it was noted in 2003 they were honoured with a greeting from Her Majesty in recognition of 60 years of married bliss.

Robbie was buried in Tobermory, his beloved homeland on the Isle of Mull, on Thursday 26 May.

Sadly, the unexpected demise of Robbie, coupled with the difficulty of travelling to Tobermory, precluded members from attending the funeral but we were able to speak with and communicate our sincere condolences to Jane and her son Malcolm beforehand.

Jane told me that a memorial service will be arranged to be held in Southampton and details will be posted on the Club noticeboard.

Boatsteerer. 27 May 05

*When Robbie died, in May, the last edition of **The Cachalot** was just about to go to press and the Boatsteerer did a sterling job to provide an obituary at such short notice. Since then another has appeared in the Oban Times and in view of the affection and respect that Robbie commanded within the Club I make no apologies for repeating it here. I am sure that Robbie would have appreciated the fact that this cutting from that newspaper made its way back to Southampton on board the S.S. Shieldhall, the last working example of a merchant steam ship, when she returned from her 50th anniversary celebrations on the Clyde.*

CAPTAIN William Robertson FNI who died suddenly at Oban on 23 May 2005, aged 86, personified the widely respected type of Hebridean seafarer who sailed in British ships and so often rose to command them.

Willie was a Gaelic speaker from an old Mull family of fishermen and crofters and justly proud of his Highland heritage and values. On leaving school in Tobermory in 1933, he joined MacBraynes local agency as an office boy but the sea called and he soon secured a berth on deck, including some years in that school for 'blue water men' the famous *SS Hebrides*. It was only a step from there to deep-sea trading and experience in the prestigious Port Line to Australia and New Zealand, where the outbreak of World War Two found him in the *Port Nicholson*.

Qualifying as a Navigating Officer, Willie saw varied and distinguished war service at sea. As Third Officer of the *Empire Mordred* he survived the sinking of the vessel with heavy loss of life off North Africa. Later, he served for a lengthy and dangerous period as Rescue Officer in the *Copeland*, a dedicated rescue ship which supported convoys to Halifax Nova Scotia, Murmansk and Gibraltar at the height of the Battle of the Atlantic. Post-war, having obtained a Master's Certificate, he sailed in the Burns Laird services from the Clyde to Northern

Ireland and in the Robertsons of Glasgow line.

After a period of ill health in 1947, he secured employment in the Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service (RMAS) in which he was to serve until his retirement 37 years later.

The Service provides vessels in support of the Royal Navy and Willie rose to command a variety of RMAS ships, including the ammunition carrier *Kinterbury*.

During this period, he also served as Pilot for the Admiralty at Loch Ewe, Sheer-ness, Gibraltar, Rosyth and Portsmouth, gaining respect for his attention to detail and his considerable ship-handling ability. In 1977, he was awarded the Queens Jubilee Medal.

### **Enjoyable**

As Assistant Queen's Harbour Master at Portsmouth, he made his home in Fareham Hampshire, where he and his devoted wife, Jane, enjoyed many years of enjoyable retirement, near their son, Malcolm.

Robbie, as he was affectionately known in Royal Navy and Merchant Navy circles, continued his keen interest in Freemasonry and was a respected member of Southampton Master Mariners Club ('The Cachalots') where he served as Captain in 1983, supporting their business and social activities loyally as a Life Member till his death.

A Founder Member of the Solent Branch of the Nautical Institute, he was elected a Fellow of the Nautical Institute for his significant contribution to his profession.

### **Doughty**

He also served as Chairman of the Civil Service Pensioners Association Fareham Branch and was a doughty fighter in defence of his members.

Robbie did not suffer fools at all, but he was the kindest and most genial of men.

A true Highland gentleman, his loyalty and his approach to all won him friends in every walk of life. He is now at rest in his beloved Tobermory.

*A chuid de Pharras dha!*

JMM&HR

*Hamish Roberts, the HR above, tells me that the Gaelic can be translated as " May he enjoy his share of Paradise."* Ed.